

Serve Truth and Fear Naught

By Hon. A. W. ROEBUCK, Q.C.

Senator Roebuck was born in Canada in 1878, the great, great grandson of the founder of the Carron Iron Works, Boness, Scotland, and grand nephew of the noted radical Liberal of the Gladstone era, Rt. Hon. John Arthur Roebuck. He was called to the Bar before he was 40. In 1934 he became Attorney-General of Ontario, Minister of Labour and Commissioner of the great Ontario Hydro-Electric system. He entered Parliament in 1940 and has been an active member of the Senate since 1945. For many years he was secretary then president of the Toronto Single Tax Association and editor of the "Canadian Single Taxer," now "The Square Deal." He is also a Vice-President of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade.



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DOES it pay to be a reformer? How often in my long life have I heard that question asked and how frequently has it been answered in the negative! I am a lawyer, and I once read an article by a prominent member of my own profession in which he advised young graduates of the Law School not to take up with the radicals. If you do, he said, you will serve only the poorest of clients. If you would make money, he concluded, you must go where money goes.

My colleague was telling the boys to be servants of the House of Have if they wished to dine on caviar. Now I am not prepared to agree with my colleague that all reformers, radicals he calls them, are poor, nor indeed that all poor are reformers. All well-to-do are not necessarily sycophants and surely all sycophants are not well-to-do. The problem of success, monetary and otherwise, is not that simple. Luck is the biggest factor in material success in this cockeyed world, and next comes an ability which is indefinable; it may be shrewdness, or call it cunning, nor should we overlook entirely the element of hard work and dedication to the chosen objective.

Speaking to students of Henry George who are concerned about their future, as all young people must be, I would say be yourselves, boldly, though not necessarily too aggressively, and the sound understanding which comes to you through a mastery of the economic philosophy of the "Prophet of San Francisco" will more than compensate for what you may lose, if anything, by the disfavour of privilege and big business.

Personally, I had no opportunity to consider the question seriously, and I take no credit for having since early youth outspokenly advocated the principles which I learned first in "Protection or Free Trade," and later in "Progress and Poverty," for I think that I was born to independence of thought. It's in the family.

Well, if heredity does not account for it, environment certainly does. It was hammered into me. When I was ten years old my father decided to try farming as a means of making a living. I acknowledge that he had his faults as a farm manager, but this was in the late 'eighties and

early 'nineties, and I know from my own experience how difficult a false economy had made the life of the Ontario farm workers of that period.

In the very early days in North America when the English King assumed to run our show, every effort was made by the ruling classes to channel our trade into English ports. That was in the British interest, but not in ours and Americans of both Canada and the New England States did not like it. In consequence, we in America were free traders.

But by the time of which I speak, the New England States had been free of the trade yoke of England for the past one hundred years and Canadians under the British North America Act had gained jurisdiction over our external trade for some thirty years. People's memories are sometimes short and by this time protectionist thought was dominant. Canada's preference in the British market for her agricultural products was lost when Great Britain embarked upon her free trade policy, but in 1854, Lord Elgin, one of the best of the Canadian Governors-General, negotiated a reciprocity agreement with Washington which had the effect of admitting Canadian farm products to the American market. When this agreement expired in 1866, Washington refused its renewal, and entered upon a policy of protection against Canadian farm products. The American market was not completely closed, however, until the enactment of the brutal McKinley tariff of 1890.

While Canadians continued to press for a renewal of the reciprocity agreement, Canadian Statesmen were guilty of a similar sour protectionist thought, and Canada embarked on what our first Prime Minister after confederation in 1867 called his National Policy. By the simple expedient of destroying our own ability to buy abroad, we were to build tall, smoking, brick chimneys at every crossroads. Thus not only would we become a manufacturing community with consequent employment and rosy profits, but we could at the same time slap the faces of the Americans.

From my own personal experience I can tell you how that worked. Canada's market for foodstuffs was destroyed. Our beef cattle and dairy products, our lambs

and pork and coarse grains became a drug on the market. We were poor, downright poor. A dollar to an Ontario farmer in those hard years seemed as big as a cartwheel. Eggs exchanged at the general store at a half a cent a piece, and we boys bought straw hats at five cents each. We owed a little over one hundred dollars annually on our farm mortgage and we did not always make it.

School teachers sometimes fail to realise how far their casual words may travel. The principal of our school was a liberal who simply could not conceal it. He remarked one day that if protection was a good thing for the Country, why not for the County or the Town. That set me thinking, and somehow there came into my hands a paper covered copy of Henry George's "Protection or Free Trade." What a book! I was captivated by the story of the bull which had wound his tether around his peg until he became a close prisoner of his own stupidity and lack of understanding. I read the book all through. I tried to tell others about it, but it did not seem to do any good and the arguments were bewildering.

After six years of education in the University of Hard Knocks, we gave it up. We got what we could for the farm and moved to the city, where I got a job in a wholesale dry-goods house at one dollar per week. Ah well, we were never really hungry.

Then I came across "Looking Backward" by Bellamy, a charming fantasy of the socialist philosophy. I lived in that story, much as I had in "Robinson Crusoe" but I yearned for more of the solid stuff such as I had found in "Protection or Free Trade." I found a paper covered edition of "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George in a second-hand book store, and I remember as though it were yesterday when, far into the early morning hours, I read the impassioned words of the last chapter:

"It will not find easy acceptance. If that could be it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be it would never have been obscured, but it will find friends..."

Well, it found a friend in me from that time on, and that was more than half a century ago. The book had unravelled for me the riddle of the sphynx, which not to answer is to be destroyed. It had taught me with vivid clarity why poverty persists in the presence of plenty; and I knew something about poverty or at least about being hard up. Why, I thought, should we expect anything else in a society which allows the value which it creates in its lands both urban and rural to flow in large measure into private pockets, while its governments struggle to meet the cost of public works, education, welfare and national defence by exactions piled upon industry?

I lived at the time in the midst of natural resources held by owners for more than their value in use, and so were unused, while men walked the streets looking for work. We were then slowly emerging from a terrible depression, the inevitable aftermath of a land boom. Here was the key to the way out—out of the gloom of depression into the sunshine of economic justice and equality.

An intensive reading of Henry George's great book "Progress and Poverty" is an education in economics, for it clarifies the basic principles of communal living, such for instance as the law of rent and of wages. I saw how it was possible for us all to be so much more secure, and so much better off. There I could see, was the City Beautiful which is built upon a hill. Some people can choose whether or not to be reformers, but not me; I had to go along. So I know whether it pays to be a reformer. Of course it does. When I studied "Progress and Poverty" I was a low-paid clerk in a dry-goods house. The Henry George philosophy gave me the entrée to the company of much older men. I saw that clerking was not the life for me, and with a mighty effort I became enrolled as a student-at-law. That opened the way to a job on a newspaper and I became a journalist and then editor of my own weekly and then (you can guess it) I ran for Parliament.

Finally, I sold the newspaper for enough to get me through law school, from which I graduated seventeen years after I had entered. In another seventeen years I was Attorney General of my Province. I resigned my seat in the Legislature to enter the Federal House of Commons, and since 1945 I have been in the Canadian Senate.

What fun I have had. When I was a school boy, William Jennings Bryan, the great American Orator, advised boys to be as obliging and co-operative as possible, with one exception—never consent to shut up. During the ups and downs of a long career, I have persistently never shut up. I have been a free trader and single taxpayer in what has been known as "Tory Toronto," and I have carried a Toronto constituency by two votes to one. That smacks of boasting doesn't it, but it isn't. I am only illustrating what I would tell you—that I could not have lived that much fun, had that much fun, together with a bit of success, had I smothered my light, suppressed my personality and pandered to the mighty.

As I look back to-day down a long road that is straight but with many ups and downs, I thank Henry George for his model of good writing, for the knowledge which he gave me and the inspiration.

Does it pay to be a reformer? I'll say it does, if you have the courage to advocate public causes that are sound in principle, but from which you cannot possibly profit—that is, not directly.

ONE QUESTION — THREE ANSWERS

Members of the B.B.C.'s "Any Questions?" programme December 12, were asked what they would tax if people stopped smoking. Mr. Dingle Foot, Labour M.P. for Ipswich, replied: "Bachelors!" Mr. T. L. Iremonger, Conservative M.P. for North Ilford, ducked. In the complementary "Any Answers" programme, December 18, a splendid L.V.T. letter from Mr. David K. Mills was read. Mr. Mills (see "Shornells," p.8) is prospective Liberal candidate for North Ilford.