

the Henry George News

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LEX SCHRAG of Toronto says:

"There Are No Caribou Left In Ungava"

OUR entire culture is doomed. There is nothing new in this statement. You've heard it over and over again without getting the least bit excited. You are students of economics. You must surely know how the human race is squandering irreplaceable resources as sacrifices to that golden calf of modern days, the Gross National Product.

So far as the actual production of necessary goods is concerned we could get along very comfortably on a two-day work week if all the miracles of modern technology were applied to production. But we are advised by the economists that to maintain our standards of progress and prosperity we must achieve a constant increase of five per cent per annum in our Gross National Product.

A rebellious New Englander, Henry David Thoreau, declared in 1854 that "men have become the tools of their tools." Economics, in my antisocial opinion, is one of the major tools by which the human race is hopelessly enslaved. I feel, as Thoreau did, that one of the most important elements of true wealth is leisure.

It is becoming the custom among the self-appointed intelligentsia to

declare there is no sense in giving the masses leisure because they wouldn't know what to do with it. We are being kidded, too, that retirement is dangerous—that unless we are prepared for the dreadful shock of not having to punch a time clock we'll go nuts. I am inclined to think this propaganda was inspired by all the fuss and worry over that five per cent annual increase in the Gross National Product. For myself, I will continue to regard leisure as an essential end of wealth. Indeed, I am much more greedy for leisure—for the right to do what I want with my time—than I am for yachts, booze or a 10-roomed, air-conditioned split level ranch house.

It would appear the trade unions are obtaining the enjoyment of this form of wealth for us by demanding more wages for shorter work weeks—but I am not so sure they are succeeding in this ostensible aim. When I went into the newspaper business 40 years ago, a reporter had no stated hours. He was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Yet it seems to me I had more real leisure then than I have now on a 40-hour week—and I kept all my pay instead of contribut-

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ing to the support of another level of non-productive administration.

As students of economics there are two aspects of trade unionism you might examine: first, while we are being given more wages as a result of union contracts, prices are keeping pace with our wages, and each wage increase means that our governments take a larger slice of our earnings in taxes. Secondly, union contracts seem to me to embody a sort of economic schizophrenia. In the old days I could loaf with a clear conscience when there was nothing to do. Now, I feel I am defrauding my employer if I sit idle—but sit there I must.

For one thing, I am the tool of my tools. Although my wife and I have a very modest home, it is equipped with almost every known device, dingus, gilguy and gadget for doing electrically what I could do with my own two hands at less expense and, very often, more quickly. An alarming percentage of my income is devoted to keeping these flimsy robots in working order.

Our various governments are the greatest obstacles in the path of efficient production and the enjoyment of leisure. The civil services are packed with paper-passers and no political leader I have known in the past 20 years has had the temerity to suggest that any of them should return to private life. These civil servants complain that they are underpaid, and yet they are reluctant to relinquish the security that government employment provides for them. The old adage that the government which governs least governs best seems to be as dead as the dodo.

I suggest to you our entire culture is sick with this sort of frustration. You might extend your studies to the investigation of what proportions of our respective populations devote their lives to such unproductive efforts, as

compared with those who are usefully employed. I would add, further, that although automation is the only apparent means by which we can realize the wealth of leisure, one of its most important social effects to date has been to take the pride of craftsmanship from many of the trades.

Urged on, then, by those economists who demand an annual increase in the Gross National Product, we must do more unproductive work in order to consume more nonessential goods. In effect, the productive citizens of our culture are being asked to provide goods for increasing proportions of non-productive consumers. In all too many instances, the productive citizens are being victimized by the non-productive paper manipulators. Let me urgently recommend to you the most chilling horror story I have ever read, *Buy Now, Pay Later*, by Hillel Black.

This volume describes the growth of consumer credit in the United States. Since the Canadian economy is a rather pale shadow of its weightier — and sometimes more demented — model to the south, the book has alarming implications for Canada, too. A recent *Globe and Mail* report gave our consumer debt as \$5 billions, roughly the same, per capita, as that in the United States.

Mr. Black made the statement that personal debt in the United States—as distinct from governmental or corporate obligations—stood at \$231 billions in the beginning of 1962. Of this sum, \$175 billions was mortgage debt and \$56 billions was consumer debt. He added that in several lines of trade, including the automobile business, the sale of debt had become much more profitable than the sale of the products for which the debt was incurred.

I was raised to pay cash or do without. Hence, figures such as those I have cited fill me with dismay. Yet I believe the real tragedy they represent

is not the stress they impose on the consumer who must pay heavy interest on the purchase of articles he all too often does not need, but the appalling waste of resources and manpower. If we are to have the wealth of leisure I propose as a human objective, consumption as well as production must be efficient.

Money, bonds, debentures, all paper representations of wealth, have no intrinsic value. To tear ores and fuels from the soil to make assorted forms of junk for the prime purpose of increasing the circulation of paper is criminal folly. To put men and women in cells where they fiddle about with useless bits of paper five days a week when they would be better employed restoring the fertility of a globe that is being raped of its top soil, is idiocy.

The Slaughter

The world is divided in three camps: the western powers headed by the United States; the communist block and the so-far uncommitted nations.

I assure you I have no admiration whatever for the forms of totalitarian socialism practiced in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or Red China. Yet it is my unhappy conviction that communism will inevitably be the victor in any prolonged economic struggle with the United States.

My reasoning is this: the United States is committed to three courses of action. First, the production of consumer goods designed for maximum annual obsolescence; second, the establishment and maintenance of military supremacy; third, the recruitment of support among the uncommitted nations by the provision of material and technical aid. All of these commitments are costly in terms of manpower and resources.

The communists, by comparison, have subordinated the production of consumer goods to their military ambitions. They have, if William J.

Lederer and Eugene Burdick have told us the truth, been more effective and economical in their approaches to the uncommitted nations than has the United States.

This argument brings me back to one of my earlier statements: There are no caribou in Ungava.

For visitors from across the line, I should explain that Ungava is a peninsula of Quebec which forms the northeastern corner of Canada. Much of it lies north of the tree line. At one time it supported great herds of caribou which, in turn, helped to support the Eskimo population.

The Eskimo is a praiseworthy person, but he is, alas, even less provident than you and I. He dearly loves to live it up, and to heck with the mortgage on his igloo. If game is plentiful, he will slaughter all of it within range regardless of whether he can use it or not. Before the white man introduced him to whisky, tuberculosis and firearms he was unable, with his harpoon and bow and arrow, to kill very much more meat than he and his community could eat. But the white man traded the Eskimo repeating rifles for his furs. There are now no more caribou in Ungava. How closely, I wonder, are we treading on the heels of the Eskimo?

Luckily for us, we live in a much more favorable environment than the Eskimo. We are far less dependent upon the whims of nature for our food. Nevertheless, we, too, are slaughtering our caribou. The scientists have assured us, for instance, that all of our fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas—will be exhausted by the year 2200. I have read that our easily recoverable reserves of petroleum will be gone by the end of this century. Yet we are advised that we must produce more and consume more each year so that the GNP can be increased by another five per cent.

What will we do after the fossil

fuels are gone? I have talked to an internationally prominent physicist and he is quite confident some other form of energy will be found to replace the hydrocarbons. At the moment, nuclear power stations are producing electrical energy on both sides of the border. Further on, far beyond the fission process, is the possibility of the controlled fusion of hydrogen, which would appear to be a much more permanent answer to the power problem, since the hydrogen isotope required exists in almost unlimited quantity.

These forms of energy, you should remember, demand a much higher level of technology for their production than is the case with coal, oil and gas. It would seem likely that fewer men at much higher wages will be used to build the plants and operate them. If this is so, then a new and awkward factor will be introduced in our economies. The new forms of energy will cost the consumer more—fewer workers will be employed in producing them.

In Ontario we already have the handwriting on the wall. Our Provincial Hydro-Electric Commission is

trying to persuade potential owners of new homes to demand electrical heating in their brand new, three-mortgage bungalows.

Now I hope my rambling remarks have given you at least a hint of the problems I believe must be solved if humanity is to survive, and that you will try to find solutions for them. If you undertake such a difficult task and succeed in it, your names will outshine even that of the illustrious Henry George.

The common man, I must admit, is not easily aroused. He is slow to recognize threats unless they tramp heavily upon his toes. Once set in motion, though, he constitutes an irresistible force. Who is to set him in motion? Well, what are you doing here, unless you are preparing to lead the common man to a better way of life.

I have been dashing about in the pursuit of my nefarious trade, snapping at the heels of the masses. Once or twice I have managed to budge them perhaps an inch or so. I suggest you should get into the game. We must keep hope alive in our hearts, if only for the reason that it is not yet taxable.

Greetings to you and all our friends. By law of nature there is a vast difference between personal property which comes and goes and land which runs on forever. We will have no economic justice until governments recognize this basic fact.

Message to the conference from
Judge John R. Fuchs of Texas

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