

All Occupants of the Same House

by EDITH SIEBENMANN

THE Chicago Henry George Woman's Club essay contest, on the application of George's principles today, was won by Richard D. Ward, a student at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, with an essay entitled "The Old Premise and a New Promise."

"The past and the ideas it spawned are not often relevant. Somehow they seem cold, distant and even fossilized to a generation that measures life not in terms of abstract thought, but in sonic speeds and megatons," Mr. Ward stated by way of introduction.

"This generation, as no other, has had a rendezvous with progress. Modern civilization, progressing in technic terms, and its own genius to which alone it answers, embracing the Baal, progress, may yet make an offering, the ultimate offering — civilization. There is no greater poverty, nothing more dismal than contemplating what man thinks he has achieved and the pottage he holds. This generation suffers nonpossession of many things, especially all that might liberate it. But as long as ideas can speak to us and we can commune with them, some will know that all we behold we have not mastered; then there is an outside chance of achieving true civilization.

"I consider *Progress and Poverty* to offer such an outside chance. As modern, as pertinent as the last headline, as related to contemporary living as the next international crisis, the theory and the total humanity of the ideas of the 'single tax' embrace, quite literally, the underlying nature of human discontent-inequity.

"My idea here was to communicate not primarily to those already conversant with Henry George, but to those who, with me, are just discovering him; and especially those who

question his relationship to this age and hour.

"Henry George as a vital person and a crusader believed so deeply that he ultimately felt compelled to place his life on the altar of his beliefs. More, he was an intellect that sought combat with life, and in his being personified something very rare — the capability of giving stature and added dignity to the species called man.

"This is offered then, in the hope that Mr. George's ideas released again and again may enable man one day to be worthy of himself. But you and I know such a day can come only when man fulfills the capacity of his promise."

The twenty-page essay shows remarkably good comprehension of *Progress and Poverty*, which was required reading according to the contest rules. On automation the winning contestant wrote: "At the present time we need 75 million jobs and at least a million and a half new ones each year. They will come, but adjustment will be required. Great industrial potential, which previously absorbed many kinds of skilled and semi-skilled classifications of labor, has entered upon what some have called the second industrial revolution.

"Scarcely a clear term, since what really has happened is in the nature of an evolution. Nothing sudden, swift, or violent, nor unforeseen or unexpected has occurred. What will happen is what took place in the electronics industry. Prior to 1940, the field was small and limited. With mechanization and the attendant expansion, it created a service industry of distributors, jobbers, dealers, servicemen and others with a gross volume of more than 4 billions annually. General Motors, as far back as 1961, said that it

had 200,000 more employees in spite of all the new and modern equipment that it had installed over the years. A president of the C.I.O. once said that the industrial revolution in the United States had, in some 25 years, brought into the employment field an additional 20 million people. Even the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and the Pacific Maritime Association have agreed upon a \$5 million a year slush fund to retire men and speed automation.

"Industry is not afraid, and from the long view neither should labor fear new technic advantages. Paradoxically, the technic-age requires more of man, but less of him too."

Regarding taxation generally, Mr. Ward believed a new system should be considered, since 185 years of taxing the products of labor had produced "more difficult and complicated tax structures, which increasingly lead to cycles of dislocation one upon the other. With a deficit of an estimated \$18.4 billion, we need either to add more tax rates to the twenty four now in our graduated system; or raise taxes more. Perhaps the government might confiscate the 50 per cent it leaves to some brackets, and thus decrease investment further. The system now in use is, on the face of it, driving itself out of business.

"The nature of the system encourages fraud and graft at all levels, from those who pay to those who collect. In short, the whole tax system has nothing to recommend it. It has no basis of stability and is at the mercy of its own constant drain upon the national real income.

Alexis C. Ferm of Fairhope, Alabama, is a 94-year-old Georgist. He lives on an income of only \$16 a week, and yet he recently made a \$10 contribution to the Henry George School. He has also contributed to the land value tax campaign in Erie, Pennsylvania, and manages to assist civil rights and share-cropper causes! Writes Mr. Ferm: "There are so many people who live in unnecessary luxury and so few who understand the land question. These folks go to church to praise God for his blessings. Is it understandable?"

It is almost as hard to understand Mr. Ferm's generosity, but he is, after all, being religious in the sense spoken of by Swedenborg: "The life of religion is to do good."

— R.C.

"Our Constitution is organized with injunctions in the first ten amendments against abridging property rights and the enjoyment thereof; but we are not pleading the cause of the removal of all property, only that which infringes upon the rights of other men. There is no quarrel with the rights of men to enjoy the fruits of their labor. But in property rights we have a pernicious form that contends with one class as against the other. Labor must pay for the right of another not to produce, and not to contribute, and worse, he must contribute to his own impoverishment and that of his nation. That is immoral. The very rent he pays is a fee given for something no human really labored to produce. . . .

"No good, intelligent reason remains for the institution of rights in property (in land). No man has a clearer title to it than any other; and all men, in order to avoid the problems previously noted, should hold and share the earth in common trust forever.

"There is nothing much that man can own anyway, not even his own soul. All life, like the earth, is a gift, a loan, a sort of interest bearing note, due and payable upon demand. So, though the means and modes of men may vary, the real needs of men require some universal way to add cubits to their stature. The world requires some way to be one, some way for all to eat from the same table as it were, since we all really occupy the house."

Similar contests are offered for high school students in New York City and Fairhope, Alabama.