

# the Henry George News

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## *Frontiers— New and Old*

by

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FROM the title of my remarks you will have surmised that I propose to comment on the political philosophy now prevalent in Washington. Our most revered statesmen are those who aspired to win for our country an abiding place in the memory and affections of future generations, both at home and abroad. Such an honored place in history will not be given us because of our size, our power or our affluence. After a few short years, who will know or care how we fared in the prestige games we are now playing in outer space? The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome do not rest on the standard of living they achieved or the battles that were won. They rest rather, on the ideals and strength of character developed by these ancient people and

the contributions they made to the culture and civilization of the Western world. So will it be with us, and those now in high places should never forget it.

The most obvious difference between the old frontier and the new has to do with the role of government.

Few, if any, of the old frontiersmen believed that the government, at any level, should provide for those who could not provide for themselves. It is well to recall that with few exceptions our whole apparatus of social security, unemployment insurance, public assistance for the aged, the blind, the needy children etc., has been established in the lifetime of many of us here. This is not to say

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that our ancestors were more hard-hearted than we, or less charitable. The fact that they were not disposed to share their wealth with the distant and little known peoples of Asia and Africa does not prove that they were indifferent to the plight of their fellows who, for any reason, were unable to support themselves and their families.

For all who lived in that era, the rights and duties of citizens, viz-a-viz their national government, were well expressed by President Cleveland in a brief message he sent to the Congress in 1887. There had been a drought in certain regions in the State of Texas, and Congress had passed "An Act to enable the Commissioner of Agriculture to make a special distribution of seeds in the drought-stricken counties of Texas, and making an appropriation (\$10,000) therefore."

President Cleveland returned this Act, without his approval. The following is extracted from his brief message:

"...I am willing to believe that, notwithstanding the aid already furnished, a donation of seed grain to the farmers located in this region, to enable them to put in new crops, would serve to avert a continuance or return of an unfortunate blight.

"And yet I feel obliged to withhold my approval of the plan, as proposed by this bill, to indulge a benevolent and charitable sentiment through the appropriation of public funds for that purpose.

"I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution, and I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public

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service or benefit. A prevalent tendency to disregard the limited mission of this power and duty should, I think, be steadfastly resisted, to the end that the lesson should be constantly enforced that **THOUGH THE PEOPLE SHOULD SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT SUPPORT THE PEOPLE.**" (caps. supplied)

This Presidential message of 1887 spotlights the contrast between the old frontier and the new. We have grown so accustomed to our welfare state that it is hard to believe that this was written by a popular President, the leader of the Democratic party. The new frontiersmen may speak with some nostalgia of the old frontier, but the political philosophies are poles apart.

Certain notions about economic justice have existed in every society of which we have knowledge. Everywhere, with few exceptions, any man who produced something could enjoy the exclusive possession of it. Where wealth is individually produced, property rights are seldom in dispute. It is only when, as in our industrial societies, nearly all wealth is socially produced, that workers, managers and owners of the capital goods involved, contest with each other for the share of the joint product that each is to receive.

Justice in trading is generally recog-

nized to be as important as the just sharing of jointly created products. It is also in the name of justice that reformers have demanded that the socially created value of land be taken by society for socially useful purposes. This demand is based on the fact that land (natural resources) is distinct from all other things in that it is not a product of labor. Its value grows from population increase, private and public investment in the surrounding community, etc., and not from any labor that has been applied to it by its owners, present or past. All land values are in the same class as "wind-falls," or treasure washed up by the sea. If there is a better source from which to derive public revenue it will have to be found in outer space. There is none on this earth.

Recently we have been told that economic justice can be secured only, by governmental programs designed to reduce or eliminate the unequal distribution of wealth and income. Heretofore we believed that justice required only that wealth should be justly earned. Now it is said that even if it is justly earned, it should be so redistributed that the gap between the rich and the poor shall be narrowed. Our foreign aid programs too are often defended on the ground that a redistribution of wealth between the richer and the poorer countries is essential if economic justice is to be attained.

In many states, including my own, the pressure is strong to have the state provide substantially free education for all who wish to go to college for either undergraduate or postgraduate work. Somewhat the same notion is developing in regard to medical care; and public housing is made available at less than cost to those with small incomes, large families or both. Once governments begin to eliminate economic inequality it is difficult to find a stopping place.

### The Welfare State and Socialism

We are so blinded by the passions generated by the cold war that we fail to see how much the regime of a welfare state resembles a socialist regime. Both accept the premise that the state is responsible for the welfare of its people, and in both we can observe a decline in the self-reliance of the individual. The regimes may differ in the methods used to shift responsibility from the individual to the government, but the effect on the self-reliance of the individual is the same.

We should know more than we do about this weakness in a socialist regime because our founding fathers in Massachusetts began with a socialist regime as complete as any to be found among the present communes of China. For their first two years they produced collectively, and their crops were put into a common storehouse and rationed according to need. In Governor Bradford's history of the Plymouth Bay Colony we read that the results were so deplorable that the colonists complained that they were too weak to work. Although they were deeply religious, they began to steal from each other. "It appeared," wrote the Governor, "that famine must still ensue the next year also, if not some way prevented."

The colonists, he continued, "began to thinke how they might raise as much corne as they could, and obtaine a better crop than they had done, that they might not still languish in miserie. At length (1623) after much debate of things, the Gov. (with the advice of the cheefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corne every man for his owne perticuler, and in that regard trust of themselves And so assigned to every family a parcell of land...."

"This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so much as more corn was planted than otherwise would have bene by any

means the Gov. or any other could use, and saved him a great deall of trouble, and gave far better contente."

The happy results of having each man "set (plant) corn for his own perticuler" were apparent in the fall of that year. The Governor wrote: "By this time harvest was come, and instead of famine, now God gave them plentie, and the face of things was changed, to the rejoysing of the hearts of many, for which they blessed God. And the effect of their particular (individual) planting was well seene, for all had, one way and another, pretty well to bring the year aboute, and some of the abler sorte and more industrious had to spare, and sell to others, so

as any generall wante or famine hath not been amongst them since to this day."

To me, these few paragraphs from the history of the Plymouth Bay Colony show the essential weakness of any regime in which free men rely on the government rather than themselves. This account of one of the first of the old frontiers should serve as a warning to our leaders in Washington. Any extension of our governmental welfare programs will weaken that self-reliance which was the key to our success in the era of the old frontier. Without that self-reliance in our individual citizens, no amount of vigor in our leaders can accomplish much.

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Reprints of "We need Henry George" by Harry L. Golden, publisher of The Carolina Israelite, are now available from the Henry George School. In this amusing article, Mr. Golden recalls that Henry George suggested if the price of dog tags was raised to \$150 the chances of new puppies in a community would be remote. He makes a comparison with the subsidizing of public housing, and says "land is the answer."

"Of course the taxing of idle land is not the whole story," he concludes. "We still have rather stupid laws covering costs of title search, and other vast expenses and the difficulty in getting mortgages; but the big problem is to get that fellow with his lots at the edge of town who takes all the cream off the top.

"If we suddenly decided to fill our city with puppy dogs the Charlotte City Council could do this overnight—by imposing a tax of \$150 on anyone who does *not* own a dog."

Joseph S. Thompson of San Francisco, president of the Henry George School, author of *Taxation's New Frontier* to be published this month by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York, will be the honored guest at a dinner on September 26th at 6 p.m., for members of the Henry George School, at 50 East 69th Street, New York.