

# Progress and Poverty Today

by ISAAC LAGNADO

THE recent riots that have menaced to turn America's cities into ashes, would seem at first glance to be an inevitable result of the Negro-white friction, and thus local in scope, "a la rigueur." It may be argued they marked the beginning of a social revolution led by the extremist "Black Power" group, of the anarchists vs establishment type.

If we examined the causes of this "active protest" more closely however, we would find that the present struggle is of an economic rather than a political or racial nature. The conflict is but one phase of the universal rich vs poor struggle that has existed ever since an unfair distribution of wealth occurred—that is, since a system of private land ownership started to deprive the laborer of his rightful share of the produce.

The Negro is rising to protest an injustice that has been done to him. The rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," granted by his Creator and guaranteed to him as a citizen by the Constitution, have been violated.

We require but the identification of the Negro with the laborer (which he is, in cities with a substantial Negro minority), and of the "honky" with the landowner, and we realize that the present conflict is but one of many manifestations of labor driven to and beyond the margin by land monopoly.

The Negro has been denied the right to earn a living, to secure his fair share of subsistence. He has been denied his common right to the land.

A Negro of the slums will perhaps never think of identifying himself with a French peasant of the "Old Regime" or a mujik of Czarist Russia. They have nevertheless all played the same role in history—that of the laborer protesting the right of another class, be it the French or Russian nobility, to enslave him by denying him a right to the land.

The Ezra Cohen Memorial prize of \$100 was awarded to Isaac Lagnado, who closed his essay with these personal reflections after giving an excellent summary of *Progress and Poverty*. Now a student in Tennessee at the Memphis State University, he says he has always held the Henry George School in great esteem, and finds George "in addition to being a good economist, to be a good man," whose crusading spirit deserves recognition.

The French peasant officially stopped living under a feudal agricultural system after Louis XI; and the mujik also had been emancipated for fifty years before he started his revolution. The Negro has been theoretically a free man for a century. In practice however he has never stopped being a victim of economic slavery.

What is political liberty under a system of private land ownership—merely the right of the laborer to compete with his fellows for the privilege of working on the land at marginal wages.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the American's knowledge of himself and his world has exceeded all the knowledge accumulated by man up to then. The arts and sciences have benefited from this intellectual and cultural revolution. Now his hunger for the new and the unknown has driven him to explore fields beyond his world. But at the height of his power and knowledge he has failed to eliminate a system which a foremost philosopher condemned—a system of private property in Land. And he has failed to disprove the laws of distribution which rule that under a system of private land tenure the greater part of the produce should go to a non-productive class, the land holders. "To whomsoever the soil at any time belongs, to him belongs the fruits of it . . ."

Technological advances have but increased the demand for land, thereby increasing the land holder's share of the produce. Worst of all, speculation in land has increased, resulting in land being held out of use, thus indirectly contributing to the present lockout of labor by landowners.

With the advance of progress we therefore see the growth of an unfair distribution of wealth and power. As one class was living in luxury another was stagnating in the sea of filth, ignorance and degradation that invariably accompanies poverty. The advance of progress has but increased the contrast between rich and poor, weak and powerful, black and white.

Progress has driven labor to the margin where it is now struggling to change its status through the artificial methods of trade-unionism. The margin is the slum of our cities. The margin is closed. We have hidden the sole witnesses of our socio-economic failure in ghettos in the heart of our cities and forgotten them there.

The law of human progress has been broken—men have negated association

in equality, and have trampled underfoot the law by which their civilization had advanced.

The hopeless, despairing and abused laborer has bred a generation of disillusioned, tough, cynical monsters, raised in the hate of the symbol of prosperity, the white man. Injustice and inequality have bred hate and violence. They loot, burn and kill, now they want "power." Their situation affords them no patience. If they must destroy the white man and his civilization to resume their rights they will do it.

"Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities and you may see even now, their gathering hordes."

Anarchy and chaos are everywhere a menace. The laborer's hunger for bread has changed to a hunger for blood. Will hate blind men into committing greater injustices? Has the struggle passed the point at which peaceful reform could be effective? George lived to prophesy the coming of this day; he did not live to see his remedy adopted.

The great wave of injustice has risen. Will it engulf us?

#### TEACHERS LOOK AT TAXES

At last a few American teachers are looking to the ideas of Henry George. The blight of cities, caused by that paradox of poverty alongside great wealth, which George explained and solved—deprives both teachers and students of their rightful opportunities.

Max Rafferty, school superintendent of the State of California, seized on a Statewide Homeowner's report by Roy Davidson some time back. It showed how education could acquire millions of dollars more if tax inequities were ironed out. Perhaps other educators were also getting the message.

It was gratifying when Harold Howe, III, U.S. Commissioner of Education, told business leaders that cities must be saved if the national educational process was to meet its needs. And he said the way to save the cities was to tax urban space in order to secure its highest and best use.

Another well known educator, Hubert Wheeler, State Commissioner of Education for Missouri, told a gathering of his state teachers' association in St. Louis it was time to "quit fooling around . . . equalized assessment of taxable property is needed throughout the state, within and among counties . . . if we could have equalized assessments of taxable property, it would make the expenditures of state funds more equitable for the taxpayers."

What Mr. Wheeler is proposing isn't the single tax, not by a long shot. But real equalized taxation for the nation's taxpayers would bring a lot more money into government coffers that could ease the heavy burden on poorer taxpayers. Teachers are forced to consider taxation as they never have before. The more they think this through the closer they must inevitably approach the advocacy of Henry George's philosophy.

— Clayton C. Bauer