

Public Education as a Course of Social Action

By WILL LISSNER

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Actually, the whole substance of any reply to the confused is set forth above. But I can understand that, with no first-hand acquaintance of the School method, those who fail to understand what the School's course of action involves may be as badly off as ever, for they have no experience to which to relate these ideas. I will speak more plainly, much as I hesitate to do so lest the temperate facts of the matter appear in a sensational guise.

What the supporters of the School are engaged in is, in the novelist's useful expression, "an open conspiracy." On every hand they see evidence of the accelerating growth of the principle of meeting force with "decisive" force, of opposing authority with "decisive" authority. And on every hand they see evidence that the democratic way of life is meeting its greatest challenge. Reaction is on the march, in America as well as in Europe and Asia. George was no prophet when he warned of "the new barbarians"—he was a precise social analyst.

Whether a native communism or, as is more likely, a native fascism be the outcome of America's situation today matters little. What does matter is that for those who would preserve human values the time for action is short; they must expend their energies with the greatest efficiency. This means that one can no longer concentrate upon attempts to achieve the ghosts of legislative devices here and there in the hope that they will teach a lesson before the reactionaries get around to nullifying them; reaction today is alert and hyper-sensitive about the maintenance and extension of its privileges. It means one must challenge the whole structure of reaction by mobilizing all the progressive forces of society against it. This is precisely what the active supporters of the School are doing.

I say this is aptly called an "open conspiracy." The policy is best understood when it is contrasted with the Communists' and the Fascists' "boring from within" policy. The obvious contrast, that our policy is designed to promote an American doctrine, ethical democracy and its corollaries of equality of opportunity, the preservation of human individuality in the midst of societal integration, the safeguarding of individual rights in the face of social necessities, whereas theirs is designed to promote a foreign one, is most superficial and hardly apropos. For our doctrine claims to be, and we believe it is, one as capable of universal application as theirs claims to be. The province of humanity knows no frontiers.

But unlike the Communists and the Fascists, the followers of the School's course of action have from the outset publicly explained precisely what they were doing and what they intended doing in the simplest, clearest terms. At the Memphis Congress in 1932, with a representative of the nation's press present, Oscar Geiger, speaking through the lips of Joseph Dana Miller, said:

" . . . If we are to do our part in leading mankind out of its economic and spiritual darkness . . . it is for us to supply the vision, the leadership and, above all, the *teaching* that is lacking in our present day. . . .

"The farmer more than any man looks to some tomorrow for his rewards, yet his work is done when, *today*, he has prepared his ground and sown the seed destined to bear the desired fruit. Its growth is in *other hands*. For him it is but to do his work well *today*, assured that in the measure that he has done it well, its results will be good.

"And so must *we* prepare the ground and sow the seed. The seed we know is good; in the measure then that the ground we select is fertile, and in the measure that we do our planting well, we, too, can be assured that the results may be left in *other hands*. 'The stars in their courses still fight against Sisera.' If we will but understand *Nature* we will believe in her and trust her; and if we do her bidding she will work with and for us. . . .

"It is the aim and purpose of the Henry George School of Social Science to teach fundamental economics and social philosophy to those still learning; to those to whom study is still a habit. It is its purpose to send these forth into the world of life and living; into their chosen fields of labor, industry, politics and education, so fortified that error cannot prevail against them: so prepared that truth, *our truth*, will, *through them*, reflect itself in every field of their endeavor."

One could not want plainer language. No more authoritative statement could be desired—these are the words of the founder of the School, spoken for him by a collaborator in its board of trustees who was then, as he is now, editor of the movement's organ. The point has been iterated and reiterated countless times since and perhaps most recently by Dr. George Raymond Geiger, pupil and disciple of the founder as well as his son, author of two of the School's textbooks and one of its manuals, editorial councilor of its official organ and its benefactor in countless other ways.

Dr. Geiger set this forth as plainly as Oscar Geiger had done in an article in "The Social Frontier: a Journal of Educational Criticism and Reconstruction," organ of the John Dewey Society and spokesman for some 5,000 school administrators throughout the country, in 1938.

Here Dr. Geiger pointed out that there are two distinctly different approaches taken by the follower of Henry George on the land question. According to the first, a solution of the land question affords a compromise be-

tween "individualism" and "socialism," and a refuge for democratic capitalism from "fascism" or "communism." He goes on (*italics are in the original*):

"Since this 'compromise' between 'individualism' and 'socialism' seems so crucial, the efforts of one group of Georgeists are centered on forming an enlightened public opinion which can recognize and effect such a compromise position.

"The more pessimistic of this group, convinced that some type of right wing or left wing 'revolution' is inevitable, are attempting to develop, say, a hundred thousand or more intelligent and persuaded followers of Henry George, who can be relied upon as a nucleus to salvage the economic system after it has been overturned by political catastrophe.

"Already they feel that they might be able to point to Mexico, and even to Spain and Russia (not to mention land reform movements in democratic countries like Denmark) as examples of this historical process, i.e., the gradual abandonment of various forms of collectivism, with concentration upon the socialization of land."

Dr. Geiger continues by pointing out that the second approach of the land reformer "is more limited and concentrated. Here, he confines his efforts to tax reform. . . . So, this follower of Henry George works to increase the taxation of land values and to exempt taxes on improvements, buildings, industry, and the results of labor." Then he goes on:

"With both these national objectives, however, the specific methods of appeal (propaganda, if you will) have been chiefly in the educational field. Active independent participation in politics on the part of 'Single Taxers' has been diminishing ever since the New York City mayoralty campaign of Henry George.

"For a number of years there was a national party which backed local and national candidates and before the World War there were hectic state campaigns, particularly on the Pacific coast, supported by the Fels Fund.

"Also, at present, there are periodic political efforts, especially through initiative and referendum measures, to introduce some measure of Single Tax into state constitutions; recent activities have centered in California.

"But *this political emphasis is now definitely secondary to the educational one.* The educational center of the movement is the Henry George School of Social Science, with national headquarters in New York City. Although founded only five years ago, the School has achieved a spectacular success. . . . Georgeists look upon the School as the brightest promise for any future success in the movement."

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By the test of experience this course of action justifies itself. In the clubs, societies and associations which organize the cultural life of the community, in the trades, the businesses, the industries and their associations which

organize its economic life, in the churches and the schools which organize its moral life, in the parties and the committees and the associations which organize its civic life, in all the instruments of popular enlightenment, alumni of the School, acting as responsible individuals, are struggling as leaders of their communities to achieve a democratic order. It would gladden Oscar Geiger's heart to see how surely the things he had visioned had come to pass.

In New York, the city with which I am most familiar, alumni are active as Georgeists in the Harvard, City, Rambam, Ho-Hum—and a score of other clubs. They are active in the Young Men's Board of Trade, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the Legal Aid Society, the Y. M. C. A., the Big Brothers, the Little Businessmen's Council, in Rotaries, Chambers of Commerce, Community Councils, trade unions as variegated as the musicians' to the journalists—the list is long enough to be boring.

To be complete the list would have to include men's and women's clubs of churches, schools and colleges, fraternal, charitable and philanthropic groups; in almost every field of community life their wholesome influence is being felt. Nor are the alumni neglecting their civic responsibilities as citizens, charged with certain political tasks as citizens. In their political parties—New York alumni are active in all three of the New York parties, the Democratic, Republican and American Labor, and were in the center of the smoke-filled room struggle over the platform of one at the last election—they are applying the principles they have learned.

Because of experience and training, they gravitate not only to the platform subcommittees of their parties but to the role of advisers and councillors, and are active as constructive critics of the country's and their parties' economic policies and as advocates of improvement of these policies on sound lines.

But this is also done by the Communist and Fascist "borers from within." What distinguishes the activity of the Georgeist is that he is acting as a free individual, under the discipline of nothing but his ripened conscience. Naturally, he cooperates with fellow-Georgeists when he finds them to be following identical interests with him. But he does so of his own free will, because he recognizes that they are best equipped to cooperate and collaborate with him and most likely to give him unselfish support. The Georgeist, when he chooses a group for his activity, promotes by his work the best interest of his group, for it is to that group that his own interest has attracted him, and it is the whole group that he wishes to infuse with democratic principles. The Communist or the Fascist is concerned primarily with promoting the fortunes of the party that has him under discipline; high ideals frequently give way to party log-rolling, to patronage considerations, to efforts to obtain domination of the group by means of minority factionalism.

Since they act as individuals who owe no allegiance to an outside organization which has its own machine to maintain, the Georgeists can devote themselves to constructive activities which win them the respect and the attention of their circles. The Communists and the Fascists, whose activities are highly organized, coordinated to the nth degree of efficiency by organization, eventually degenerate from high ideals to destructive partisan activity which wins them the condemnation of the very same circles.

The contributions of these alumni to the parties and the political movements to which they ally themselves as individuals are recognized and valued highly by the leaders and rank and file of those groups. If only the selfless patriotism of these alumni, fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens with such intelligence and clarity of purpose, were general throughout the Nation, we would not need to worry about the future of democracy in America.

In all discussion of organization one finds one or two persons who say that a name should be taken, any old name, and an organization gotten up, any old form will pass, and an office should be opened. What this has always meant has been that in the office is placed an executive secretary and a small executive committee, and the total of group activity is performed by the secretary and this small group (but chiefly by the secretary) simply because they cannot, for one reason or another, get anyone else to engage in it.

This is what is known in the American language as a "letterhead organization"; the phone books are full of them. But anyone who comes into contact with these organizations daily, as I must, sees clearly that the practical accomplishments of these organizations are small; in most cases trivial. I say this in no criticism of our Georgeist "letterhead organization." In most cases their officers are men I regard highly and their secretaries devoted workers. But the facts of any situation must be faced.

This type of organization, however useful it might be in proving certain services of specific nature, could never replace the activity and influence of these alumni and it could never be employed as an integral unit of their course of action. For that course implies not a small group in activity, but an ever-growing fraction of the leaders of the whole community. The effectiveness of this course of action is a function of the numbers of community leaders who engage in it and the scope of their interests.

I do not mean to imply that these alumni will not find it useful to get together as a group to take counsel together and to benefit from the sharing of their experience. Far from it. But that is the function of the Henry George Congress and of the World Conferences of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, as organizations, and of Land and Freedom and Land and Liberty

as institutions. Those who believe that "it is later than you think" see no purpose in duplicating the work of existing and functioning enterprises.

Nor do I mean to imply that these alumni forswe cooperation with and even active support of the effort of those whom Dr. Geiger labeled "tax reformers." I can cite several cases in point. In the recent Ralston campaign in California, when our California colleague met with unequalled vituperation and misrepresentation from their home press, I and other alumni in New York acting as individuals, discovered that the campaign of misrepresentation was spreading to the east. We were not engaged in the thick of the fight in pointing out certain shortcomings of the Ralston campaigners, obvious though they were to us. We jumped into the fight—as individuals—and launched a counter-campaign which stopped the misrepresentation in the east as quickly as it had begun. That was not the least of the expression of our solidarity with our California colleagues—as individuals.

Or another case. In New York, after years of research Walter Fairchild, a noted attorney and authority on urban land problems, launched the Graded Tax Committee to obtain the enactment of a graded tax bill, the most progressive piece of legislation framed on the soundest economic principles. I have never been solicited to contribute a penny to the work of the committee or an hour's time; neither has anyone else I know of. As a matter of fact, what I know about the committee's work comes from newspapers I read and civic workers with whom I come in contact. But the bill has obtained the sponsorship of legislators representing the three New York parties and it is thus a non-partisan measure. I have been interested to read of the activities of alumni in behalf of the measure. I read that they have been delivering speeches about it before various political and social organizations and have obtained various endorsements of it. This activity, I would like to emphasize, is one in which the School as a collective entity has taken no part—one which was, as far as I know, unsolicited and was given voluntarily by each individual concerned.

The School, it is true, has certain routine tasks incidental to the conduct of an educational enterprise for which numbers of alumni and supporters are required as volunteers. These tasks include the secretarial work in the classroom, writing of letters to editors and others who control instruments of public opinion, arranging addresses to introduce the School to various groups; addressing mailings, carrying on research work, etc. It is quite true this voluntary activity needs to be organized.

But it is equally true that this voluntary activity is and always has been organized. At first it was organized as a council. This form proved incapable of expansion to encompass new tasks and a new one was adopted, complete formal organization. This form was found to be

ill-adapted to the situation; there was a pronounced tendency for the nominal members to leave the work which was the organization's sole purpose to the officers, and for the officers to shirk it because the members would not undertake it. So a new form was adopted by which specific tasks are given compact, cohesive groups, each group being responsible for the discharge of a set task, and now the work is being done.

I can speak intimately of this also, for I have been in at the founding of these groups under each of these forms from the beginning. We are no worshippers of form; it is the substance we seek. The faculty has been organized as a faculty from the beginning and meets regularly in New York—and no doubt this is also true of faculties elsewhere—to discuss its work. The age-old faculty form of organization, which has its roots in the medieval universities, has been found to be ideally suited for this group, so its members have no disposition to change it. When these forms no longer serve the purposes of the groups concerned, they may be depended upon to modify or scrap them.

Thus, if those who suggest organization of the alumni are concerned about the discharge of these tasks—writing, addressing, researching, teaching—one can only reply that the work is being done efficiently and it is highly organized and thoroughly coordinated.

If, however, what they really wish is to see the alumni organized into a national or local association to achieve certain tax reforms in one place or another, the supporters of the School have no objection. What the supporters will not do, however, is to bring pressure on the individual alumnus or alumna to join one organization as against another, to make financial contributions to one as against another, or to join any particular organization of this type.

Nor will they make it possible for others to bring this pressure by permitting the records of the School to be thrown open. The importance of the assurance given at the opening of the classes, that the School has nothing to sell, is attested at every registration by the understandable suspicion of the registrants that there must be the taint of commercialization lurking somewhere, that there must be a "catch" in the offer of free courses. This assurance is meant literally by each instructor who gives it. To turn it into hypocritical statement is to sacrifice some registrants, and they cannot be spared, and to change the attitudes of the others, which militate against the success of the educational process.

But this should be no bar to those organizations whose officers, constitutions, purposes and achievements are intrinsically attractive to those who are infused with Georgeist principles. The alumni are, as part of their training, introduced to the periodical literature of the Georgeist movement. These periodicals for the most part sell advertising space freely. Through advertise-

ments in these periodicals such associations can reach the alumni with whatever message they have to give them. (Advertising, incidentally, is cheaper than direct mail when reader coverage is highly concentrated.) Only their own limitations will hamstring these organizations if they should be hamstrung. If the type of activity offered is such as to appeal to the individual alumnus or alumna, he or she will respond. But he or she will do it of his or her own free will. And if, in these respects, the organizations are such as to attract alumni, the supporters of the School will not only have no objection but will be exceedingly glad.

If those who suggest organization for the alumni wish to see a group effected to bring the alumni together regularly for renewed inspiration in their work, the supporters of the School point to the prior existence of the Henry George Congress for this very purpose. It may be that the Congress ought to be held regionally as well as nationally, since most alumni cannot afford the time or the expense involved in travel. That is a matter for considerable discussion; regional congresses may detract from the service now rendered by the national ones.

Possibly such Congresses ought to be held oftener than once a year, but I doubt it—a little oratorical inspiration goes a long way; the movement's literature is also an agency which provides inspiration; and the alumni are busy both in their business or professional careers and in their activity as supporters of the School or—and often it is—as community leaders.

However, there is one point to which I should like to give the strongest emphasis. If those who suggest organization of the alumni have any thought that such an organization would be, or might develop to be, an organization to discipline or to influence—the difference is one of degree only—these alumni in their work of building an ethical, democratic social order as community leaders, the answer of the supporters of the School is an emphatic, unyielding no.

They will tolerate no subversive factionalism. They will countenance no efforts to hamstring these devoted citizens in the discharge of their responsibilities to humanity and their country.

The work of the alumni is going on with the highest efficiency, thanks to the course of action they follow. It shall go on, for the salvation of democracy, for the salvation of western civilization if need be, until its goals are achieved.

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All this is what Oscar Geiger knew; these concrete actions were those he expected from his work. He knew that a variety of interests integrated his students into the life of the nation. He knew that they would infuse the principles of an ethical, democratic social order into the life of the nation through those interests, the avenues they were best shod to tread their way upon. His notion,

like his ideas about educational technique, has stood the best test, the test of experience, the test of practise under widely varying conditions.

From the first, those who have been identified with the school have looked upon its reason for being as that of democracy's best and possibly last bulwark. The bulwark has held so far against the tide of barbarism; the task of every lover of liberty and every friend of humanity is to throw his shoulder against it so that the bulwark will hold.

Norman C. B. Fowles

THE passing of Norman Fowles leaves us with many thoughts concerning him. Always a great teacher, well able—and willing—to explain the great truth which he saw and to which he devoted a large part of his life, there are many left behind to whom he passed on the torch of understanding, and who will be ever grateful to him for knowing something of the answer to our economic ills.

As one of his students at the Henry George School of Social Science, the writer learned much—not only of economics—but also a great deal about how man is affected by the economics of the environment he lives in. No student of Mr. Fowles could leave his class with the slightest trace of bitterness toward anyone. By way of illustration, in the case of a man who closed down his mill in a town where everybody depended upon that mill for a livelihood, or a man who held large tracts of valuable, needed land out of use, and who refused to sell it or improve it except for a prohibitive price, so that great numbers of people in the slum areas suffered from poor housing, according to Norman Fowles, no blame could attach to such a man. He was merely the product of his environment and knew no better. He did not understand what he was doing because he had never learned the truth. If men had clear understanding of these problems, said Mr. Fowles, they would be solved. Therefore, he urged us to educate, and keep educating, and never to become discouraged. He always felt that some day a leader would arise from those who had been enlightened. He also warned against a reform put through suddenly, before the people understood it enough to want it, as such a reform would not be lasting, and the people would throw it off. Mr. Fowles believed that the immediate answer to solving our economic ills was to teach to the masses the great truth to which Henry George gave voice.

When Oscar Geiger, founder of the Henry George School of Social Science, passed on in 1934, Mr. Fowles took over the directorship. In the spring before Mr. Geiger died, he had said to Mr. Fowles and to Will Lissner, "I want you two to carry on if anything happens to me." At that time neither Mr. Lissner nor Mr. Fowles thought that the founder was ill; but when he passed on, they remembered and respected this request.

Among Mr. Fowles' writings for the Henry George movement are the words for several rally songs; a scenario for a photoplay entitled, "The Common"; also a series of "Dialogues" in the style of the Socratic method, expounding the economics of the Movement. Nor shall we ever forget the oration on "Liberty" he delivered a few years ago in New York City.

I have said nothing about Mr. Fowles' bright humor in the classroom and in his conversation. As I write, I remember how many a time we sat in class, chuckling at one of his jokes on the incongruity of something or other—likely as not on something in our economic system. I also remember being wet-eyed on occasion from contemplating the ideas he transmitted concerning the ills of mankind.

It seems appropriate, in summing up the life and character of the dear one who has passed from our sight, to quote the following lines from the Bible as best expressing the essence of the man who was Norman Fowles: PHILIPPIANS 4:8. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

ROMA B. HALPERN.

Another Glimpse

DR. HAROLD G. MOULTON, president of the Brookings Institute of Washington, in an address declared that "at the present time grave fears are entertained with respect to the future of the economic system in this country," and presented what he considered the fundamental requirements for sustained progress.

"In recent years," said Dr. Moulton, "the view has been widespread that we have had so much scientific and technological advancement that we are menaced with overproduction and that in consequence we must expect the rate of industrial progress to be severely curtailed.

"There must be constantly increasing efficiency in production on the part of both labor and capital. Only by everlastingly improving technical processes and lowering the costs of production can we obtain progressively higher standards of living. To try to accomplish this result in any other way means simply tugging in vain at our collective boot straps.

"As efficiency is increased, the benefits must be broadly disseminated among the masses by means of high wages, low prices, or a combination thereof."

Editor's note—So far, so good. But what about *land*, doctor?

PROTECTIONISTS do for us in time of *peace* what enemies *try* to do in time of war—block our ports.

HENRY GEORGE.