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**POLITICAL ECONOMY.  
The Framework of Political Science.  
Brains, Not Muscle, Rule the World**

[Written expressly for the *Christmas Bee*, by Henry George, author of "Progress and Poverty. "]

New York, Dec. 12, 1880.

You asked me when I was leaving California for the East to write, for the *Christmas Bee*, something upon the general character and importance of political economy, but I see that you have announced the title of my article as "Political Science."

Political science is a wider term than political economy. It includes political economy; but it also includes in its scope some things with which political economy does not directly deal other than as they affect the production and distribution of wealth — such as the character and structure of governments and institutions, the machinery and methods of legislation, administration and adjudication, and the relations between states or nations. Yet, if political economy is not the whole of political science, it is certainly the largest and most important part. For just as food, clothing and shelter are the prime necessities of human life, without which it cannot exist; and just as the getting of a living for himself and his family is the first and most pressing concern of the individual, so is it clear that political economy, which deals with the conditions that render these things easy or difficult, must be the fundamental and most important part of political science. And, as the material condition of a people affects most powerfully, if it does not absolutely fix, the physical, mental and moral condition, and thus affects and determines the character and workings of all social and political institutions; and as the questions raised and the conclusions arrived at in political economy pass necessarily into those domains of political science which are not primarily included in political economy, so does the study of political economy not only lead to and throw light upon other branches of political science, but in effect covers the whole or nearly the whole ground.

As the erection of a building properly begins with the foundation and not with the roof, so does the study of political science properly begin with political economy. As it would be hopeless to attempt the erection of the upper stories before putting up the lower, so is it hopeless to attempt to work out the problems of political science without first working out the problems of political economy.

Yet this is what we are constantly trying to do. Men who have never mastered the first principles of political economy think themselves fit — and, what is a good deal worse, their constituents think them fit — to sit in State Legislatures and in Congress, discussing questions which cannot be intelligently discussed, and making laws which cannot be intelligently framed, without some knowledge of political economy. The Constitutional Convention which sat in your city two years ago was undoubtedly more than a fair representation of the average intelligence of the State, but, as a body, as is proved by its work, knew nothing of the very first principles of political economy. The same thing is constantly shown in newspaper discussions, in the speeches in political campaigns and the debates that go on in the clubs, where meet the men who are bent upon reforming society, but who will not stop to learn to crawl before they try to walk.

#### NECESSITY FOR THE STUDY OF THIS SCIENCE

Now, the structure of society is like that of an infinitely delicate machine — or rather, great is its delicacy and so complicated its parts that it can hardly be compared to a machine, but more resembles an organism — a living body which no human ingenuity of construction can dream of rivaling. And when we set to altering or dosing it, men who have not taken the trouble to study the character of its parts and their relations with each other, we may get just about such results as we might expect were we to send our watches to a blacksmith to be regulated or employ a wood carver to perform a delicate operation upon the eye.

Now this prevailing neglect of knowledge which is necessary to intelligent political action ought not to be, and especially ought it not to be on the part of those who have to get their living by their labor. The rich and the fortunate, who think things are about right as they go, may be indisposed to take any trouble to find out how improvement can be made. But those who feel that there is room for improvement in social conditions — those who feel that they have to work harder than there is real need for, and get less for it than they ought to — and this is a very general and growing feeling — have the strongest reasons for turning to the study of political economy.

For, consider what political economy is. It is the science which seeks the laws of the production and distribution of wealth — that is to say, it is the science which will enable us to discover how, under any given conditions, the individual members of a community may get the best living with the least work.

Now, to endeavor to discover how to get the best living with the least work, is only a low and mean motive when we endeavor to throw our proper share of work upon others, and to get our living at their expense. But when, without injury to others, we endeavor to get a better living with less work, this object is a very just and laudable one. And when we endeavor to discover how not only we ourselves, but all of the toiling masses who now work so hard and obtain so little may get a better living with less work, the object becomes a very high and noble one — perhaps, and so it seems to me, the very highest and the very noblest that any one can set before himself.

For consider how hard, long, monotonous work, such as the vast majority of mankind, even in the most highly civilized nations, now have to devote themselves to in order to get a living, uses up the time and energy that might go to the development of the higher faculties — consider how poverty is the fruitful mother, not only of ignorance, but of vice and crime, and it will be clear that there is no object which is so high and noble as that of finding out how the toiling masses can get a better living with less work.

#### RELATION OF LABOR TO SCIENCE AND LIBERTY.

Surely, when we think of the importance and beneficence of its objects, political economy stands first of all the sciences. Very grand and very noble are the sciences which trace out the laws of the physical universe, but what are they to me if I must worry about my dinner, or am consumed with anxiety lest I cannot provide for my children? Marvelous are the powers with which other sciences have clothed mankind, but what is the benefit to those who, in the very centers of productive power and amid the most wonderful developments of inventive skill, have to strive and strain and stint to get a bare living? That is the science of all the sciences which will tell us how to alter these conditions; which will tell us how to obtain for the masses of mankind the leisure and the means which are necessary for the pursuit and enjoyment of the other sciences. For it is only as men are relieved from the necessity of devoting all their energies to the making of a living that the higher faculties can develop and exert themselves. Science only begins when there exists at least a class possessing leisure and secure in a livelihood. It is only as this class becomes comparatively large that science can be diffused or its gains secured.

The fellahs of Egypt, the agricultural laborers of England, the rack-rented cottiers of Ireland, can they do anything for science, or can

science, with all its beauties and harmonies and elevating influences, do anything for them, so long as it does not alleviate their toil and improve their material condition?

Wherever labor is most poorly paid, and its hours are the longest, there will you find ignorance and superstition and mental stagnation. Wherever labor is best paid, and it is easiest to get a living, there is discovery the most rapid, and inventiveness the most acute, there exists the greatest intellectual activity and the largest capacity for the reception of new ideas. The reason that we of the United States are ahead of all other nations in invention and the adoption of inventions is simply because here labor has been better paid. This is the reason why the slave countries, and the countries where labor is reduced to the wages of slavery, never bring forth inventions or adopt them when made; this is the reason why the civilizations of the East, or of classical antiquity, never hit on the locomotive or the telegraph; this is the reason why the Chinese still print with blocks and transport goods on men's shoulders.

And so with political organization. Where wages are low, Liberty cannot exist. No improvement in the machinery of government, no checks and balances, can maintain purity where a few are enormously rich and the many only get with toil and difficulty a scanty living. When in this country wages shall have come down to the standard of what Henry Ward Beecher thinks a workingman ought to be able to maintain a family upon, we may still go through the form of holding our elections, but the Republic will be dead.

Self-interest, sympathy, patriotism, the proper regard we have for ourselves, the proper regard we should have for others, continue to urge us to seek out the methods and discover the conditions which will enable the laboring masses to get the best living for the least work.

To do this we must turn to political economy, we must seek out the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth. For through the social as through the material universe, all things are bound together by law. If we trace these laws out, and work with them, there seems no limit to what we can accomplish. If we seek our ends by means which run counter to them, Nature laughs at our efforts.

What I wish to do in this paper is to show, if I can, the importance of the study of political economy, and not merely its importance generally, but its supreme importance to that class who, whether

they work with their hands or their heads, whether they are mechanics, or laborers, or farmers, or shopkeepers, depend upon their daily exertions for their daily bread, that class to which, in sympathy and in fact I myself belong, and which the BEE so well represents.

### MIND, NOT MUSCLE, RULES THE WORLD.

It always irritates me to hear demagogues talking of the nobility of labor, and attempting to flatter workingmen by calling them "the sturdy sons of toil."

Sturdy sons of ignorance rather. For it is only ignorance that imposes the necessity of such toil. Nobility of labor! It is mind, not muscle that rules the world, and always must rule it.

Is it the men who strain their muscles longest and hardest and most monotonously who enjoy the good things of life? If labor is so noble, why is its nobility not practically recognized? Nice nobles are they who must work from 7 in the morning to 6 in the evening, for six days in the week, and be in misery when they cannot get the opportunity.

I would not have the workingmen of the United States satisfied with their condition. I would have them dissatisfied. I would have them feel, as all over the United States they are beginning to feel, that they ought to be able to get a better living with less work. But this feeling will do them no good if it spends itself merely in growling and complaining in cheering those who flatter and promise them, and voting as demagogues dictate. It can do no good unless it arouses an intelligent determination to find out the why and the wherefore. On the contrary it is likely to do harm — to make worse the conditions of which they complain, just as an animal tangled in a stake rope binds itself the tighter by the very plunges it makes for freedom.

That the masses of men are robbed of their fair earnings — that they have to work much harder than they ought to work, for a very much poorer living than they ought to get, is, to my mind, clear. But I dislike to hear those who constantly talk of the oppressed masses. It is true that the masses are oppressed, and for long ages have been oppressed, but by whom?

By their own ignorance. The people have always in their hands the power to rule. It is not true merely of representative government, but of all governments that they rest ultimately upon the consent of the people. The power by which the people have been oppressed

— the power with which tyrants have enslaved and butchered and tortured, has always been the power of the people themselves. For these tyrants what were they? Mere men like other men; by nature not a whit stronger than any average man of the masses they held in awe.

#### THE PEOPLE ARE THEMSELVES TO BE BLAMED.

And, so, when men talk of the oppressions of greedy capitalists or of the rascality of politicians, what is the real thing that is condemned? Is it not the ignorance of the people? How do our laws run, "*Be it enacted by the people.*" And this is true in fact, as well as in form. Even unpopular laws are in reality the enactments of the people. Those rich men of California whom I have heard so frequently denounced — the Stanfords and the Floods, the Tevises, and Luxes and Millers, or those men of still more overgrown fortunes, the Goulds and the Vanderbilts — to me they seem like fools to strain and worry and make slaves of themselves in gathering and keeping more than they can use in this world; and what they cannot take to the next, like chickens who run around with a piece of meat too big to swallow, while all the rest are chasing them; like men who in a shipwreck load themselves with gold. But if this is their taste who shall blame them? The fault is not with the men, but in the conditions, and it is but waste of breath to denounce the possessors of such large fortunes while we make no attempt to alter the conditions which permit — nay, compel — such concentrations of wealth. And so with the denunciations of politicians. "A bad workman always quarrels with his tools." The people can have the best service if they but will. But to get it, they must do more than choose at every election between the sets of men whom nominating politicians present to them. They must study politics in their highest sense. And, as I have said, political economy is the beginning of political science.

Within the province of political economy fall all those questions which are really the most important questions of the day — which are discussed in newspapers, debated in legislative bodies, and enter into the controversies of parties. All that relates to the wages of labor and the earnings of capital, to tariffs and to trade regulations, to taxation and currency and finance, and land tenures — in short, all that can in any way affect the amount of wealth produced or the manner in which it is distributed come within the domain of political economy.

#### THE CONCENTRATION OF TRADE.

Not only does political economy include the most important

questions of the present time, but its relative importance is constantly increasing. In a community of a single individual or a single family there is no political economy and no need for it. But just as society develops, just does political economy arise, and become more and more important, for just as society develops and the industrial and social organizations become more and more complex so does the condition of individuals depend less and less upon themselves and more and more upon general conditions. This seems to be but an expression of a general law which, so far as we can see, runs through all nature, and exhibits itself in the developments of animal and of vegetable life, of human societies and of solar systems.

The operations of this law are to be clearly seen in California; they are to be just as clearly seen here in the East — they are observable everywhere, that the tendencies of modern civilization are making themselves felt. The effect of all the inventions and improvements that are succeeding each other with such increasing rapidity is to organize production and exchange and transportation upon a larger and larger scale. The small farm is giving way to the large one, the great business house is underselling and eating up the smaller ones, the independent producer, who is his own employer, is steadily being turned into the factory hand. Not only is the importance of the great corporations increasing, but they are rapidly combining and concentrating. One such corporation already controls the output of the anthracite fields, another the oil business; I am told by a gentleman who, on such subjects, is very high authority that in five years sugar refining in the whole United States will be in the hands of three houses, while it is clearly evident that we will not have to wait very long to see the whole railroad system of the country controlled by three or four combinations. How the wholesale trade is being concentrated in the same way, one realizes if he comes to New York, goes into such a house as that of Thusba & Co.; how the retail trade is feeling the same influence, he may see in such stores as those of Lord & Taylor, of this city, or that of John Wanamaker, in Philadelphia.

Now the effect of all this is to make the masses of mankind more and more dependent, less and less able individually to control their own conditions. Take one of these factory operatives of Lowell or of Newark. Whether he shall have work, or not, what shall be his hours and what his pay, are matters over which individually he has but little if any control, while those great fluctuations of business which are of such vital interest to him are as much beyond his power to as are the winds or the tides.

POLITICAL ECONOMY A NEEDED STUDY

On the far-reaching influences of this tendency — which is the most momentous fact modern civilization has to confront — I do not wish to dwell. What I wish to point out, if I can, is the personal interest which all who work for a living have in the subjects embraced by political economy. To illustrate my meaning: What sort of a living a compositor can get, will get, will depend in some measure upon his swiftness and correctness, and other personal qualities. But these constitute only one factor. It will also depend upon things which relate not merely to himself but to all in the trade — the rate of wages paid, the demand for work, etc.; and these again will be affected by influences which affect all branches of business. And so, in whichever direction one looks, he may see that those general conditions with which political economy deals are of the greatest direct importance to the individual, and in the natural progress of society are constantly becoming more important. The integration of society is compelling us to think of others if we would look out for ourselves.

And there are other reasons which make it peculiarly important that political economy should be made a popular study.

In the first place political economy differs from all the other sciences in dealing with subjects that affect selfish interests. Astronomy may announce her discoveries as to the motions of the heavenly bodies or the wonders of the star depths, and now that theological prejudices have been overcome, there is no one to object. Geology and paleontology may set forth the most astounding conclusions as to long past eras of the world's history, or comparative philology may show that we are really of one blood with races that we thought most diverse, and there is no opposition. But if in the name of political economy it be asserted that a protective tariff is but an absurdity and delusion, straightway rise up all the protected interests to object and to denounce, if it be asserted, as in the name of political economy I do assert, that private property in land is a denial of natural right, an impediment to progress, and the great cause of the monstrous inequalities of wealth and power which have destroyed all previous civilizations and are rapidly developing themselves in this, then straightway the timid ones shut their ears, and those who are interested or think themselves interested in property in land, call me what to them are names of very bad repute — an "agrarian" or a "communist." And so at every step in the science of political economy are these special interests met, for no matter what be the regulation which affects the production or distribution of wealth, some special interest necessarily becomes enlisted in its support.



Now, this makes it necessary that the masses of the people should form correct ideas on these subjects for themselves, for they cannot find and cannot hope to find any such consensus of opinion in political economy as in other sciences, while to carry into effect any of the charges which political economy may show to be expedient and necessary will require the demand of the great masses of the people.

Of all departments of inquiry, political economy is the one which cannot be safely left to the rich and their dependents. This is the reason that it has made so little progress and exerted so little influence.

### A STUDY FOR THE MASSES

And it is not merely true that political economy is peculiarly a study which should not be left to specialists, but should engage the attention of the masses; it is also true that it is, of all sciences, that which can be most easily studied. No special learning, no costly apparatus is necessary. The phenomena with which it deals are constantly before us, the problems which it presents are constantly forcing themselves upon our notice.

As a matter of fact there are no general subjects which are so much thought about and talked about as those which come within the province of political economy. They are thought about and talked about by people who have never read the first page of a politico-economic treatise and who would be puzzled to say what political economy meant. Why times are good or bad, why wages rise or fall, whether Chinese immigration is or is not an injury, how the railroads have affected and how the Panama Canal will affect California, whether coin or paper is the best money, whether mortgages should be taxed or not, how and why land increases or decreases in value, why some things can be produced cheaper in one place and some things in another, whether we should or should not have a protective tariff, whether taxes can or cannot be so levied that their weight will fall on the rich and not on the poor, whether subsidies are or are not a good thing, why interest is falling, what is the effect of machinery, why so many idle men congregate in San Francisco in the Winter and what can be done for them, what will be the effects of increasing population, why is it so hard for a boy to learn a trade, how it is that rich men grow richer so rapidly, are but samples of questions which in all places where men meet, are constantly being talked about. These and a hundred others are all questions of political economy.

Now there is little need to urge people to think and talk of such things — they are constantly doing it. What I want to urge is that they should think and talk of such things in the only way in which they can come to clear and certain conclusions — that is to say, in a scientific manner.

### GO TO THE ROOT.

Nor, in urging this, am I urging anything beyond the power even of the most unlettered. For a scientific manner means nothing more nor less than a careful manner. The essence of the scientific method is in making sure of one step before taking another. Go to the root; make your foundations sure; do not jump to conclusions — that is the key-note of the scientific method, and whoever can think at all can do that.

If anyone were to ask you, “Which is the biggest, a piece of quartz or a piece of coal?” you would at once say, “That is a question that cannot be answered till you say how big the piece of quartz is and how big the piece of coal is.” And if he were to answer, “The piece of quartz is as big as a horse and the piece of coal is as big as a cow,” you would want to know how big a horse he meant and how big a cow. Or if he were to say, “The piece of quartz measures so many cubic feet and the piece of coal weighs so many pounds, you would want to find out what kind of coal it was, and how much that kind of coal weighs to the foot.

Yet upon such subjects as I have been speaking of, you will find men constantly debating questions put in just such vague form; and when pressed to be more definite, you will find them citing just such answers as I have supposed. Hence, diverse and varying opinions. Hence, disputes which settle nothing.

But if we wish to form clear opinions, the very first step is to define the words we use, to settle clearly the things we mean by them, and to separate that in our minds from other things, so that when we think of a word, or talk about it, we may have always in mind one and the same thing. This is the first essential of correct thought. For when we come to analyze thought we find that it is a process of comparison. We think by calling up certain pictures or symbols which stand with us for things, or bundles of things, or attributes of things, and note their likeness or unlikeness — their resemblances or their differences. And whoever will try to observe how he thinks, will see that we use language not merely in speaking but in thinking. Words are not simply the means by which we communicate our thoughts to each other; they are, to a very large extent, the instruments and materials of our thought.

## THOUGHT A PROCESS OF COMPARISON.

It is because thought is thus a process of comparison — of identification and separation by resemblances and differences, that it is so necessary when we wish to trace out the laws which govern things that we should have a much more definite idea of what we mean by our words than is necessary in the ordinary affairs of life or in common discourse. For instance, everyone knows what the word "fish" means, and can readily define it quite well enough for all ordinary purposes, yet when you come to base a general proposition upon that sense of the word, you would, in most cases, find, on examination, that the proposition would not hold, since though good enough for ordinary purposes, the vagueness of the idea would, on the one side, exclude some animals that are properly fishes, and on the other, include some animals that are not.

So with the word "ships". In one sense it is used to denote all vessels of any size used for purposes of navigation, and in another sense too distinguish other a class of vessels which have a peculiar rig. And thus, unless they come to an understanding as to the sense which was to be attached to the word, two men might go on insisting with equal confidence the one that there were lots of ships with but two masts and the other that there were none.

Here is the cause of so much confused thought and contradictory opinion; here is the lurking ground of fallacies and the foundation of false theories. Men go on thinking and talking and writing about such things as wealth, capital, land, labor, money, interest, property, etc. without ever having clearly defined, even to themselves, what they mean by these words.

And I can give no better advice to anyone who would pursue the study of political economy — who would form clear and certain conclusions as to the source of social difficulties, and what may be done to enable the masses of men to get a better living with less work than that he should be careful to define the words he uses in his thought as in his speech — to see in what the class of things which he uses a word to denote differ from other classes of things, to see of what sub-classes this class of things is composed, what is the quality that unites them, and in what they differ among themselves.

Whoever will do this needs no further advice. And whoever will not do this has no right to be thrusting his crude and half-formed notions either into speech or into print. There is an immense

amount of absurdity talked and written in the name of conservatism. There is also an immense amount of absurdity talked and written in the name of reform. Go into the labor clubs or take up the reform papers, and you will find time or space largely taken up by men who have never stopped to form any clear idea of the words they use so glibly, and who presume to instruct others before they have instructed themselves. And of the two classes the illogical reformers are much more dangerous than the illogical conservatives. For they not only darken counsel and divide forces that, to accomplish anything at all, must be united, but they bring all the propositions for reform into contempt.

There is no remedy for this, however, save that the men who listen and the men who read should think for themselves. If they form the habit of attaching definite meanings to the words they use they will soon demand that those who presume to talk to them, or write for them, should do the same things.

#### THE REALLY DANGEROUS MEN

The men of whom I am most afraid are not the men who think the existing state of things all right, and set their faces against any change. It is the men who want to proceed to action as soon as they get an idea half-way into their heads; the men who jump to conclusions without making sure of the intermediate steps; the men who, feeling that something is wrong, are for "anything for a change." These are the men who lost to California the grand opportunity presented to the Constitutional Convention; the men who may bring the Irish land agitation to some lame and impotent conclusion; the men who, throughout the United States, may make the great movement which is on the verge of beginning one which, for a time at least, will be but from the frying pan into the fire.

For that our politics are for the future going to turn upon social and industrial questions rather than upon the questions that have so long occupied us is clear. Even if they retain their names and organizations, which is doubtful, the two old parties will not again front each other on the old issues. And whoever would take intelligent part in the contests that are approaching must begin to think of the questions to which I have been trying to call attention.

And here in the East I find that such questions are beginning to attract much attention, and more more intelligent attention, than shows on the surface. Everywhere I find thoughtful men who are thinking about them. This is a most hopeful sign.

A while ago I wrote a book going over these questions, of which you have said many kind things. When it was first published a gentleman, who owns two hundred thousand acres of land, told me that he had read it with a great deal of pleasure, for though he considered it the most pernicious book ever printed, he was able to enjoy in comfort what he was pleased to call its magnificent style, because he knew that the men for whom I intended it would never read it. I am not so sure about that, nor is he, I fancy, so sure, now that it has already gone into a cheap edition. But in this he was right — that until the masses of the people come to interest themselves in such questions the present unjust inequality in the distribution of wealth must continue. For that the few get so much while they do so little, while the many get so little while they do so much, is solely because the many do not think. The great majority of us can read and write, and we boast of what we call popular intelligence. But what would the birds think of us if they could think? Just about what we would think of the birds if we saw one crow sitting amid more grain than he could eat in a thousand years, while a lot of half-starved ones were slaving themselves to death to add to his pile.

But equalization does not necessarily mean a leveling down. The true equalization of social conditions will be a leveling up. The state of society that would ensue if wealth were distributed in anything like normal equality would give far more comfort and enjoyment and freedom than the possession of great riches in this. Is it better to be the possessor of a bottle of water when those around you are parched and maddened with thirst, or to rest where never failing fountains flow, and no one is concerned about getting water?

It may seem a wild dream to those who have never thought of the enormous wastes which the present constitution of society entails, but to those who have thought of them, it seems but a sober fact that there is no reason in the nature of things why we should not all be rich and all have leisure; no reason why any one should refrain from marrying for fear that he would not be able to support a family or have the slightest fear that that family could not get an easy living if he were taken away, no reason why every woman should not have a piano and time to play it, and every man a library and time to read it; no reason why even the poorest should not live in as good houses and have all the comforts and

conveniences and elegancies that only the richest have now.

Who would do the work? The forces of Nature would do the work. We have just begun to utilize them, yet even if invention were to no further go, all this would be possible.

And the same faculty which has enabled man to realize, in so many respects, more than the most daring imagination dreamed, will, if he but use it, also enable him to realize that dream of a Golden Age which has always haunted him.