

HENRY GEORGE NEWS

VOL. X—No. 5

MARCH, 1947

10¢ A COPY—\$1.00 A YEAR



YOU Are Here for a Purpose!

By FRANCIS NEILSON

THE AGONY that Europe is suffering today is greater than ever before in history. Now in the depth of winter, thousands of persons are dying from cold and starvation, and are beset by demoralization and general turmoil.

Meanwhile the United Nations hold meetings in various parts of the world, and discuss in committees what can be done to ameliorate conditions. But they get no further than discussion; they rarely get to the point of action because they do not understand that the great need, first and foremost, is for justice. Politicians do not know the meaning of this word, nor can we hope for light to be thrown on the subject by this group. It is not in their interest to comprehend its meaning, because if justice were understood, the politicians would be out of a job. Even in academic circles today the ignorance of economic terms is bewildering.

So, if we would learn for ourselves the true meaning of justice, we must go to the philosophers of ancient times and follow down through the ages the thought of all the great ones who recognized this wise law. The concept embodies the difference between "things created" and "things produced." When we have made this vital distinction, we are on the way to understanding the meaning of justice.

History itself abounds with illustrations of the practice of economic justice. According to the story in the Bible, many efforts were made to settle the Jewish people on the land in justice. The predominant command throughout the Pentateuch is: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark." To violate this law was to be guilty of injustice. The landmark was sacred as the outward sign of the equal right to the use of the earth. And objects such as stones or trees with a certain mark on the bark were used to designate landmarks. In Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Professor Edward Hull tells of the practice regarding the landmark in Egypt: "The land had to be remeasured and allotted after each inundation of the Nile, and boundary-stones placed at the junction of two properties."

If we today wish to go in quest of justice, it is essential that we know the difference between land and wealth. Land is that which is created; wealth being that which is produced. Land is in a category by itself because man never yet made a grain of sand. Land comes from the Creator. If man cannot make sand, if land was made by the Creator alone, how is it that individuals can own a part of creation? When we reach this point in our questioning, we are getting close to an understanding of what justice is.

Henry George always couples natural law

with justice, which shows clearly that he based his economic thought upon bedrock. For this tradition has its roots in ancient Egypt, India, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and Saxon England. In my historical studies for *The Eleventh Commandment*, I came upon numerous explanations of justice in the dialogues of Plato. And from the sayings of Socrates, I drew up the following composite definition of the word:

"Justice is the institution of a natural order in which a man can produce food, buildings, and clothing for himself, removing not a neighbour's landmark, practising one thing only, the thing to which his nature is best adapted, doing his own business, not being a busybody, not taking what is another's, nor being deprived of what is his own, having what is his own, and belongs to him, interfering not with another, so that he may set in order his own inner life, and be his own master, his own law, and at peace with himself."

Cicero's description of justice is in the same tradition, and he stresses the relationship between justice and natural law:

"Of all these things about which learned men dispute there is none more important than clearly to understand that we are born for justice, and that right is founded not in opinion but in nature. There is indeed a true law, right reason, agreeing with nature and diffused among all, unchanging, everlasting, which calls to duty by commanding, deters from wrong by forbidding. . . . It is not allowable to alter this law nor to deviate from it. Nor can it be abrogated. Nor can we be released from this law either by the senate or by the people. Nor is any person required to explain or interpret it. Nor is it one law at Rome and another at Athens, one law today and another hereafter; but the same law, everlasting and unchangeable, will bind all nations and all times; and there will be one common lord and ruler of all, even God, the framer and proposer of this law."

My own definition of justice is an abbreviation of these: "Justice is the law of Providence inherent in Nature." We might say that *Progress and Poverty* was based upon the law of Cicero. And in all of his other writings and speeches Henry George carried forward this fundamental idea. In *A Perplexed Philosopher* he proves himself the superior opponent of the man who was considered the greatest philosopher of the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, by setting forth the true meaning and full implications of economic justice. George never lost sight of the end he had in mind—justice—but unfortunately many of his followers have missed this direction and look only to the means—taxation.

When I am asked; "How is it that the Georgist movement makes so little progress?" I reply, "Because, unhappily, many who have read their George have tried to grapple with the means before they understood the object." If one has convinced himself he is right, if he is confirmed in his spirit, if he has studied a thing and knows he is right in the judgment he has formed, no one can shake him. Our great weakness in the movement has been that those who call themselves "single taxers" have considered *Progress and Poverty* merely from the standpoint of relieving improvements from the burden of taxation and levying it on land value. If the object is clearly held in mind, the term is not used in that connection. "Rent" is the economic word rather than "land value." The object is justice; taxation is merely the means. When we understand what rent really is and make up our minds that it is just to take it in the interests of the community, from whose presence it arises, then we shall see that it would be no difficult fiscal matter to relieve labor and capital of the impositions that fall upon them today.

We live in hope of a better state of things. Everybody desires this. Throughout my long life, spent in Europe and in this country, I have met many men, and I have not lost hope. For I believe that deep down in the hearts and souls of men and women—if we could speak to them directly, over the blaring cacophony of the radio, the newspapers, and the movies—there is something that urges them to think about these matters.

Man today has greater opportunities to reveal his worth than at any time in the history of the world, because the obstacles that confront him now are more terrible than at any other time. But what man must do today must be something on the order of what he had to do years ago. He must find time in this whirling world to meditate, to think things over, if he wishes the opportunity to present itself of seeing hope through the chaos. If he desires to take action with knowledge for betterment, he must take time to fit himself spiritually and mentally for the task.

You were put here for a purpose, but it is for each one to make a purpose for himself. You must find it in communion with yourself. Once you let justice enter into your own soul you will then find you will be able to move mountains. There never was a great work—a symphony, a book on philosophy, a painting or a poem—that did not spring from hours of meditation in which the author communed with himself. For man has a soul, which is the driving force for all enduring achievements.