

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY FUND

Dear Mr.—: I have your solicitation of my contribution to the Community Fund. I am familiar with the urgency of the various needs that are to be supplied by the Fund. They are all worthy. If, therefore, I feel impelled to withhold my own support, I ought at least to offer you the reasons which seem to me to require that I do so.

The Community Fund, for the most part, is devoted to providing essential benefits for those who are too poor to pay for them. So long as poverty exists it will be necessary, in a community which calls itself civilized, to provide these benefits by some such means. But I am convinced that such poverty is not necessary, that most of the people who now receive aid of one sort or another through the Fund can become self-supporting. I think you will agree with me that such a condition would be vastly superior to the present, not because contributors to the Fund would be relieved of the need for contributing, for that is a comparatively small matter, but because the independence which comes from self-support is vastly superior to dependence upon charity. Besides, self-support can provide much more than the Fund can provide.

This is not, perhaps, the place to expound my conviction at length and in detail. Suffice it to say here that I believe the twin phenomena of unemployment and poverty on the one hand, and idle valuable land on the other, arise from the same cause. I am convinced that if the community would collect the rent of land instead of allowing it to be retained (as it is for the larger part) by the landowners, and would abandon the burdensome taxation which now crushes business, idle valuable land would come into use, all industry would become more profitable and would so expand as to absorb all unemployment; wages would rise, business would prosper and such poverty

as calls for Community Funds would vanish.

I have reached this conviction during some thirty years of study of economics and am more firmly convinced of its soundness today than ever.

Popular understanding of the matter is being spread by the Henry George School of Social Science, which was organized six years ago in New York. The School is rapidly growing and has established branches in many cities, including ours. But it is very much in need of financial support. Its program is fundamental and very difficult, being no less than the education of great numbers of people in a subject which is not easy to understand. But the success which the School is attaining is no less remarkable than it is encouraging to its supporters. And it is the chief hope, perhaps the only hope, for a permanent solution of the most serious economic problems which confront the peoples of the world. The achievement of its task would make that of the Community Fund much easier, if it did not indeed make the Fund quite unnecessary.

Now it is a fact that while thousands will support temporary relief of visible distress, comparatively few will support a long-range program to be rid of the cause of the distress. But the long-range program, it seems to me, is far the more important of the two. I am giving to it all that my strength and slender means will allow. Under the circumstances I think you will agree that I cannot let any part of this support be diverted to mere alleviation of distress. However, in recognition of the current Community Fund appeal, I am sending today an additional small contribution, all I could possibly otherwise spare to the Fund, to the Henry George School.

JOHN R. NICHOLS.