

The Answer

"What Must We Do To Improve the Health and Well-Being of the American People?" Such was the question broadcast on the "Town Hall of the Air" program a few months ago. Listeners were invited to write in their answers, the winning papers to be given due recognition and be printed. The following article, by GEORGE L. RUSBY, was one of the proposals submitted in the contest. Needless to say, it was NOT one of the winners; it was far too simple and too sensible.

George L. Rusby is one of the most distinguished of the "elder statesmen" of Georgism today. His activities in behalf of economic freedom date back to the 'nineties, when Henry George was still alive. He was one of the early members of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, a supporter of the National Single Tax League, of the Fels Fund, the Manhattan Single Tax Club, the Henry George Lecture Bureau, the Robert Schalkenback Foundation and numerous similar organizations. His booklet, "Smaller Profits, Reduced Salaries and Lower Wages; The Condition, The Cause, The Cure," published in 1900, has been translated into several languages. More than 100,000 copies have been sold. He is the co-author, with his wife, Dr. Elizabeth Bowen, of the current number one work of its kind, "Economics Simplified." Likewise with Dr. Bowen, he was the founder of the New Jersey Branch of the Henry George School of Social Science.

Mr. Rusby makes his home in Towaco, N. J.

★ THE ANSWER to our question depends on the intent back of the question. Is the inquiry intended to centre about the temporary well-being of our people, or their ultimate and permanent interests?

Tolstoy describes the inadequate heating accommodations provided for Czarist political prisoners on their long march to Siberia in sub-zero weather. If the question had been proposed "What must be done to improve the welfare" of those unfortunates, innumerable would have been the recommendations, varying from portable stoves to prayer. The thoughtful few, dubbed as impractical dreamers by press and pulpit, would have denounced as superficial palliatives these efforts, however well intended, to lighten the discom-

forts of the journey, and would have addressed themselves to the problem of supplanting the Czarist regime by one under which the citizen could express his views freely without becoming a political criminal, and under which there would no longer be those cruel and disgraceful processions of political exiles to Siberia.

Of course, this is not intended as an endorsement of the particular *kind* of a regime which actually did supplant the Czarist.

So, our answer to the question now proposed must depend on whether the aim is to temporarily alleviate a deplorable condition while leaving the cause of the condition in operation, or to eliminate the cause and thus eliminate an otherwise continuing need for palliatives. The first of these alternatives means an effort akin to that of Mrs. Partington, to sweep back the waves of the ocean with a broom; it means, as Paul says, to "fight as one who beateth the air."

It will therefore be assumed that the question is intended to elicit discussion and argument dealing with basic principles rather than superficialities, and it is on this assumption that this reply is based.

The question itself pre-supposes a condition of our people that demands that something be done for their "well-being"—an obvious fact. But "how come?" with a population so sparse (42 to the sq. mile, as compared with, for illustration, 750 in England, 200 in France, 350 in Germany) that our national resources have scarcely begun to be exploited; with invention that has made it possible to produce wealth at a rate undreamed of a century ago; with unlimited and intelligent human energy always ready to use these inventions in the production of wealth; and with a citizenry demanding a standard of living that would make use of all the wealth possible of production by capital and labor—why, why should the crying question of the day be that which is the subject of our present discussion: "What must be done for the health and well-being of our people?" In view of the situation as just described, shouldn't "our people" be competent to protect and advance their own "well-being"? The answer most emphatically is "yes, if—"; if *what*? Answer: if it were not for certain man-made laws and institutions that most effectively prevent.

We hear much these days about "democracy" as a cure for our ills. Democracy is a purely political conception, the conception of the rule of the people by themselves, with the power to make their own laws. America and England have come as near to the realization of this conception as any nation; and yet, we have slowly but inevitably drawn nearer to the day when the paramount question demanding an answer is, "What must we do for the well-being of our people?"

In our answer, let us not lay ourselves open to the charge of dealing, as is the all too common practice, in "glittering generalities," too "general" to be of value. Let us be specific:

1. All wealth is produced from land, by labor, usually using capital.
2. Capital and labor have for division between them, what is left of product, after they have paid the landowner what must be paid for the privilege of exerting their activities on the only thing that can yield wealth—what they pay for this privilege being termed “rent.”
3. Basic wages are fixed, not by man-made laws, nor labor unions, or so-called “employers,” but by the productivity of the best available free land.

These are basic facts, obvious to any student of natural economic laws. And what are the logical deductions to be drawn from these basic facts—deductions relevant to the question before us? Here are some of the important ones:

- A. That since the land is the sole source of all wealth, it is a denial of equal rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to deny the equal right of all to access to the land.
- B. That any law or institution that denies to all the equal right of access to natural resources must result in inequity and injustice in the production and distribution of wealth.
- C. That for Government to permit the private appropriation of ground-rent is to permit the private appropriation of that which belongs equally to all.
- D. That for Government to permit the private appro-

priation of ground-rent inevitably leads to the holding, unused or but partially used, of our natural resources (land in its various forms) of greater productivity, thereby forcing producers, Capital and Labor, to apply themselves to opportunities that yield a bare and uncertain subsistence.

- E. That for Government to permit the private appropriation of ground-rent inevitably leads to speculation in land, whereby, through the land being withheld from use, opportunities of employment for both Capital and Labor are artificially restricted, wages are forced to a minimum, a condition of “more men than jobs” (using that word “job” to include all the activities of Capital and Labor) arises, and we are face to face with the vital question now before us.

If, recognizing that not to answer this question adequately is to leave in operation a cause that must destroy our civilization as it has destroyed all civilizations of the past, we are ready to give the question the serious consideration that it merits, we must make such changes in our taxation methods as will make it unprofitable to hold land out of use. This would result in opening unlimited opportunities to Capital and Labor, and would automatically bring about a condition in which never again would the question be forced on us—“What must we do for the well-being of our people?”