

A Word With You

DO you remember "The Peterkin Papers?" It was about the simple-minded Peterkin family, and it was a lot of delightful nonsense spiced with good sense. In one episode, Mrs. P. makes a cup of coffee but puts salt in instead of sugar. So they call the chemist to see if he can rectify the damage. He puts in one chemical after another, but it only gets worse and worse. Then they call the herb-woman who tries her repertory of spices in the coffee, with no better results. Finally, they consult their friend, the wise lady from Philadelphia. "Why not make a new cup of coffee?" she suggests. Pleased with this bright idea, they comply.

Our tax system is like Mrs. Peterkin's cup of coffee. It took a bad turn when they put in the income tax. They are now trying to sweeten it, lighten it and moderate it with all sorts of amendments, revisions and reforms, but they're only succeeding in making it worse and worse. It is now such a hellish brew, so complicated, inquisitorial and oppressive, that the only remedy is to throw it away and start all over again. There's even a wise man from Philadelphia to help out with a better system (Henry George, as if you didn't know). If it were only as easy to con-

vince our officials as it was to convince the Peterkins!

Nor is our tax system the only brew that has been ruined. The way the entire field of economics has been developing is beginning to look more and more like Mrs. Peterkin's cup of coffee. When economists abandoned principles in favor of description, they started spoiling it. Now one potion after another is being added to the muddled cup. Curves, matrixes, co-efficients, multi-sectored models, elasticities, reversely lagged types, function analyses, factor substitutions, linear systems, non-linear systems, simultaneous equations—all these and more are being thrown into the witch's brew.

Mathematics is an indispensable tool in any science. But instead of being used as a tool to further economic inquiry, to build up to new conclusions, it is being used by too many economists today as an end in itself, as a cover-up for confusion, as a substitution for purpose. "Interesting," as a member of the Peterkin family said, "but it doesn't taste like coffee."

In this regard, the wise man from Philadelphia is on hand to help out, too.

Anyway, he's *my* cup of coffee.

—Robert Clancy

Vol. 26, No. 10

September, 1963

The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y., supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

Publication committee: William S. O'Connor, Arnold A. Weinstein and Lancaster M. Greene, chairman. Editor: Alice Elizabeth Davis. Subscriptions \$2 a year; single copies 20c. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y.