

A Word With You

WHY did Masaniello go mad? It was in Naples, in the 17th Century. The people were groaning under the oppression of a foreign ruler, Count d'Arcos, and his latest injury was a high tax on fruit, the daily food of the poor. This provoked a revolt, led by the fisherman Masaniello. So successful was the rebellion that the Count had to flee his palace, and Masaniello found himself in charge.

Through an intermediary, the Count and Masaniello were brought together to confer, and the Count agreed to certain reforms, including the abolition of the most repressive of the taxes. He even offered to associate Masaniello with himself in governing Naples. But the simple fisherman, like a true people's hero, decided to go back to his trade.

But then Masaniello started behaving irrationally. He treated some of his own followers cruelly, and spoke to the people tempestuously. After a few days of this, the Count had Masaniello murdered, and the people were glad to be rid of their former champion!

Which brings us to our first question: Why did Masaniello go out of his mind just as he was gaining what he had fought for? Let us see if we can reconstruct that moment when he lost his senses. Here was a capable leader with a just protest, and the people were behind him. In fact, the revolt was

spreading and it did indeed seem to be a propitious time for a change. At the same moment in England, the people were successfully rebelling against their ruler whom they rightly or wrongly blamed for their troubles.

Perhaps if Masaniello had been less honest he might have seized the opportunity to share in the government, and use that as a new stepping-stone. But, after having gone as far as he did, he found himself face to face with the power to rule. We may imagine that it was to him a terrifying sight. "Government" in that age meant only oppression. It is one thing to protest and revolt, it is another thing to govern. Masaniello had successfully revolted—but what then? Is the only alternative to being oppressed being the oppressor? There was nothing in the experience of his time and place to show that anything else could be done. Faced with this intolerable choice, Masaniello went mad.

In this is a lesson for our day. Negative protest is not enough. The mischief inflicted by today's governments is filling a vacuum, a felt need, that must somehow be filled. Those who rail against this oppression may be right—but unless they can offer a positive program, beneficial in its effects, mere protest is useless. A never-ending roundelay of oppressions and protests, new oppression and new protests—that way madness lies.

—Robert Clancy

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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.

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