

Henry George — A Social Anthropologist

by JOSEPH F. CONNOLLY II

FOR one with a background in sociology, I think that the most important point in this whole [HGS correspondence] course is that the problem of poverty is economic at its basis and can be solved by economists rather than social workers. Heretofore I, like most of my associates, had considered poverty as a natural but unfortunate state at the base of the social pyramid, occurring with the advance of civilization and the stratification of society. As a social problem, poverty was to be "treated" through social welfare channels.

Henry George guides the reader along page after page, example after example, until he finally "discovers" the cause of poverty to be a breakdown in the fundamental economic law of distribution. Everything after that is anti-climactic. Naturally anyone presenting a problem in this manner has a solution and Henry George's solution makes sense, and more than sense, it makes good social justice. I have always looked on the income tax with a jaundiced eye. It separates low and middle income workers from their wages while higher income executives, able to afford the counsel of attorneys or tax specialists, are able to retain the benefits of the taxable income, if not the income itself, through any one of many tax dodges. Thus the "democratic" method of taxation serves as a means of social and economic repression.

The further one reflects on George's

solution the more one realizes the tremendous possibilities it presents. Simplification of government is by no means the least of these. In the long run it would probably be the most wide-reaching. The United States has more lawyers per capita than any other country in the world. Our government grows more complex every day. Collection of the economic rent would throw literally thousands of legislative and case-made laws right out the window along with not a small chunk of governmental and judicial workload. Millions of dollars wasted in governmental bureaucracy and red tape could be returned to the taxpayer in the form of services and assistance. The idea of "government by the people and for the people" could finally become a reality.

Second only to the proposed solution of the problem of poverty is George's telescope-view of man and his social change. He is more of a social anthropologist than most of those who make that claim. His capsuled description and explanation of the rise and decline of civilization is outstanding. "Modern man" looks at himself as absolutely unique in the history of man. Henry George puts us in our place. I think it would be extremely beneficial if someone were to make a synopsis of George's writings along this line and publish it as a separate volume.

Dr. Connolly, a student by correspondence, is a sociologist who is currently working with drug abusers in the Washington, D.C. area.

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