

"Overwhelmed by Friendliness"

by WILL LISSNER

ALL my life I have earned my daily bread in the salt mines of journalism. My experience of college teaching is limited to the part-time variety, and I have found that teaching is hard work. But Henry George didn't think so. He had a powerful hankering to be professor of economics at the University of California, and he made a bid for the job. He was very disappointed when he didn't get it.

George claimed he wanted the job only because he thought it would win a readier hearing for his ideas, his attack upon privilege, his attempt to recover for all the people their birthright, the land and natural resources of the country, his program for assuring equality of economic opportunity for all men and women. That, we know with the wisdom of hindsight, was a mistaken judgment. John Dewey espoused George's ideas and gave them the greatest measure of authority any system of ideas ever has received in our country—the authority of a world-renowned scholar in social thought as well as philosophy. So did another former honorary president of the Henry George School, the sociologist Eduard C. Lindemann. Still the public remained properly skeptical and I am sure that George himself would have fared no better.

Very likely George's real reason was that he knew he would enjoy teaching. Certainly he was a marvelous teacher, and he won a wide hearing outside the academic groves, especially for his central thesis, equality of economic opportunity.

Equally revolutionary ideas, however, that would go a long way toward solving many of our social problems, still press for adoption. For example,

an idea as obvious as George's contention that we ought to take into account the economic and social effects of taxation and choose as our tax instruments those which have the least harmful effects. Or the equally far-reaching idea that in the last analysis the land and other natural resources of the country belong by ancient right to all the people of the country, should make the maximum contribution to their well-being, and should not be monopolized for the benefit and the aggrandizement of the few who have titles to those resources.

If the democratic principles of Henry George had prevailed very likely the rich would get poorer in a relative sense. The poor have indeed got richer in our country in spite of privilege and monopoly and if George's views had all prevailed they would now be very much richer in a relative as well as an absolute sense. But the overriding advantage from greater equality in economic opportunity would come from the era of continuing economic expansion it would usher in. This would help to assure that, if we also followed expansionary but not inflationary monetary and credit policy, we would be able to avoid serious economic contractions in the future.

But privilege and monopoly die hard. Back in 1940 we made an effort to get the professors of economics, sociology and the other behavioral sciences to undertake research in these problems. The effort failed; such research was not self-generating. I made a study of the situation and came to the conclusion that this kind of fundamental research had to be promoted. The best way to promote it, it seemed to me, was to set up a scientific jour-

nal which would publish the best original research in the field and win for it the attention of the scientific community all over the world.

I sold the then director of the Henry George School, Frank Chodorov, on the idea and he sold it to the executive secretary of the foundation, my collaborator, V. G. Peterson. Between them they sold it to the majority of the directors of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation over the opposition of a small group of directors convinced that the effort would bankrupt the struggling foundation.

The first issue of the American Journal of Economics and Sociology was published in the fall of 1941 and we are now issuing the 24th volume. So far 94 numbers have been turned out and we have plans already made for the numbers of the next several years. The Journal is read by pioneering research workers in the behavioral sciences in 63 countries. How was this achieved? At the outset I assembled a formidable group of founders, headed by John Dewey and Franz Oppenheimer, George Geiger, Harry Gunnison Brown and Adolph Lowe. It was joined on the publication of the first number by the distinguished scholar who was to become my mentor in serious journalism, Francis Neilson.

The Schalkenbach directors were mainly business men, but a rare breed of business men. They were scholars and men of social vision as well. In the early days we needed scholarly manpower more than money and to get it we raided the board of the Schalkenbach Foundation. Their members pitched in as heartily as did our scholarly founders.

For 24 years the basic work on the Journal has been done by three of us; Miss Peterson, her loyal and indefatigable assistant, Frances Soriero, and myself. But every issue involves the cooperation of dozens of others, all serving without pay to advance the

social sciences, to help solve the problems that threaten the very existence of our civilization. The cooperators include some of the most distinguished scholars here and abroad. Whenever someone raises a shibboleth about "the treason of the clerks," the failure of the intellectuals to take responsibility for the course of our society, I like to think of the professorial record of cooperation with our Journal.

In 24 years we have piled up, year by year, factual material which eventually will make the case for a social order founded on justice and liberty compelling. We are demonstrating the value of an approach George proposed and which John Dewey developed for the analysis and solution of social problems. This is an approach which employs the cooperation of the social sciences and the humanistic disciplines while we are engaged in integrating the sciences so that, one day, by constructive synthesis in the social sciences, we can have a unified science which will enable us to comprehend problems as we encounter them. Indeed, the approach has already been accepted by the scholars; now we have the problem of making them see that its methodology has been worked out so far only in a very elementary way.

If we have succeeded far beyond our dreams of a quarter of a century ago, it is because we never anticipated the warm manifestations of friendliness we received from the scholars. Our Journal has in fact been overwhelmed by friendliness, even from those whose studies have made them critics of our position. Certainly the readiness of the American scholarly community to examine new ideas helps to explain its vitality and growth in the last generation. In fostering pioneering research the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation has earned a share in the credit for that vitality, so important to the future of our country in this period of rapid technological change.