

# THE RIDDLE OF MODERN SOCIETY

By Carl Marfels

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CARL MARFELS.

Wherever we may look among civilized countries we find the same paradoxical conditions; on the one hand highly-developed scientific and technical knowledge, which makes it possible to produce the necessities of life and luxuries in excess of the needs of humanity; on the other hand poverty among the great mass of the people which cries aloud to Heaven for redress. It is true that in the past there have been periods in which mankind suffered temporarily from

want and privation, but it was then usually a case of bad harvests which, owing to the backward state of transport, could not be counteracted by importing supplies from lands with good harvests. Sometimes it was a case of objects in daily use not being manufactured on account of poorly developed mechanical knowledge. In other words: in earlier days mankind suffered want because enough could not be produced; to-day they suffer want whilst too much can be produced.

The most preposterous thing, however, is that widespread unemployment should obtain. Last winter the number of unemployed in Germany alone was not less than 2½ millions, without taking into account the large number of workers on short time. At the same time, poverty—that is to say, lack of the products of work—also prevails. In other words: there are millions of people who need housing accommodation and the necessities of life, whilst these same millions would willingly produce all such things, but find no opportunity to do so. Why cannot demand and supply be brought into touch with each other?

The answer to this question is of extraordinary urgency, as the discontent among the masses in all civilized countries is assuming alarming proportions; and not only in the ranks of wage-workers, but also in the ranks of self-supporting manufacturers, tradesmen and merchants.

If one watches the efforts of statesmen to remedy these evils, one must be astonished at the absolutely useless measures and ineffective remedies proposed in order to combat the danger. It might well be understood that the two great problems of our day have not yet been solved, viz.: Why, notwithstanding the gigantic technical progress which has been made in the last hundred years, and despite the resultant increase in wealth-producing power, the wages of workers have not only not risen, but have, calculated on the basis of real comforts, even fallen; and how it happens that millions of men who are willing to work can find no work to do, when "work" means—apart from a few negligible exceptions—the production of food and the necessities of life? With such widespread poverty and

misery a great task faces every sincere reformer. With the exception of the English and Danish Parliaments, and the local councils in such countries as Australia, so far as I am aware, the teachings of Henry George are ignored. In *Progress and Poverty* Henry George has given a concise and clear answer to all the foregoing queries. But he is hardly ever mentioned. Are his teachings not known in other countries, or have people not the courage to acknowledge such teachings? Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that, when choosing the nation's representatives, the people lay no emphasis on that quality which should in reality form the main and centre point, viz.: the candidate's knowledge of matters of political economy. Indeed, people appear to attach no importance whatever to the politico-economic knowledge of the candidate to be elected. Otherwise it is incomprehensible why legislative bodies should show such a complete lack of understanding and such helplessness in the face of unemployment and poverty. Technical resources are so numerous that if full use were made of our mechanical power a sufficient supply of the necessities of life could be produced so that every man might have a superfluity. And yet there is widespread want. In the year 1900 the political economist, Theodor Hertzka of Vienna, calculated that with full use of our machinery we were in a position to produce so much wealth every year in the shape of houses, food supplies, clothes and other objects of use, that their values would represent £450 (English pounds) per head of the population, or for a family of four, not less than £1,800.

In any case, the following idea forces itself upon the unbiased observer: If it were a case of solving a problem, involving difficult bridge construction, for instance, then decidedly a skilled expert, and not a layman, would be called into advise. And so it should be with all important problems. Only in the most important task of the nation, that of choosing national representatives who have to make decisions of vital economic importance, is there no question asked whether the candidate possesses the most elementary knowledge of his subject, namely, the science of political economy! The results are as might be expected! Fifty years ago Henry George published his great work, *Progress and Poverty*, and almost as early he wrote his equally masterly book, *Protection or Free Trade*. Yet it is still being debated in Parliaments which is better for a country—protection or free trade!

Even to-day we can hear from politicians the view that it is desirable for a country to export more than it imports. Even to-day one can often hear superficial suggestions to the effect that present-day distress arises from over-population, from over-production, or too rapid increase of machinery. In the meantime, the distress becomes more acute. The nations cut themselves off from each other by high duties; the struggle for existence becomes increasingly sharper; large undertakings combine with still larger ones, without regard to the best interests of humanity; poverty becomes intensified.

If only a serious effort could be made to discover the reasons why, in spite of the fact that the earth can produce many times its present yield, millions must go hungry; why, although more houses could be built than there is any need for, yet there are millions who cannot find a house; and that, in spite of the fact that more clothes and other necessities of life could be produced than are required, yet millions are suffering for want of these.

Then it would have to be acknowledged that the underlying reason for the threatening phenomena of our times is rooted in the present-day monopoly of land, and that it is nonsense to proclaim "Freedom

\* (The author passed away on 11th October last. In an obituary in our November issue we remarked that this paper by Carl Marfels was highly appreciated and generously noticed in the Press.—EDITOR, *Land & Liberty*.)

and Equality of Mankind" as the basic principles of Democracy when at the same time mighty capitalist groups possess unlimited power over the sources of all the raw materials and most of the property. Is it not indeed an untenable position for one group to possess all the coalfields; another all the petroleum wells; a third the ore deposits; a fourth the diamond and gold fields; a fifth (as in the U.S.A.) gigantic forests; and for the surface of the earth to be owned by a minority who grant the liberty to live and work on it under conditions of ever-increasing tribute, which leave to the users of the land only the minimum necessary to maintain existence? Henry George, one of the greatest thinkers of all time, has shown in the already mentioned unparalleled book, *Progress and Poverty*, that even without expropriation or division of the land and without resorting to Nationalization, a basic reform of the present evils could be effected, which would bring benefit to all classes. Then it must not be overlooked that the millionaires of to-day cannot enjoy their lives free of care; they feel that we are dancing on a volcano, and unless some alteration is effected the worst is to be feared. The example which disinherited Russia has given us must always be for us "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*," which it is impossible to take too seriously. Moreover, Bolshevism, in spite of the educated people who support it, cannot bring a solution of the social problem any nearer because, instead of freedom, which must remain for its supporters a political ideal, it has created a rigid and coercive economic entity which cannot endure.

The Edinburgh Conference promoted by The International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade has as one of its objects the important mission of informing the world that neither the niggardliness of Mother Earth, her alleged over-population, the presumed over-production, or the world war, are to blame for the ever-increasing misery of our time and the dangerous situation into which the civilized world has drifted; but that it is due solely and wholly to land monopoly. Material progress has not raised the wages of the workers while millions of those willing to work cannot find employment. Private ownership of land—which by all the laws of God and right should belong to all—is alone the reason why innumerable people live in want and misery. Our "culture," which stands so high in the branches of physical science and technical knowledge, but in regard to economics is still in the infant school, is leading us towards an ugly state of chaos.

But the Edinburgh Conference will probably express itself very emphatically in regard to another point of the utmost importance, viz.: The fact that the origin of the horrible war of our time was closely allied to the land question. Land monopoly led to unemployment and to the present misery of the masses, and this to a desperate economic struggle which, in its turn, resulted in higher protective tariffs. In this way a poisonous atmosphere was created between the nations; the one regarding with envy the rich storehouses of the other—its mineral and coal fields, its petroleum wells, its potash deposits, and so on—and simply waiting for an opportunity to obtain possession of them for itself. These tendencies were increased by the short-sighted and false egoism of the countries that think of themselves only, and believe that if they segregate themselves by high tariffs, they will enrich themselves at the cost of other countries. If the sources of supply were not in private hands, but belonged to the community, it would be much easier for countries to come to an agreement as to the quantity of raw material needed by them, and the present inflammatory conditions would be eliminated from the world. *Videant consules.*

## DANIEL O'CONNELL ON THE CRIME OF FOOD TAXES

To the Editor

An old Dundee friend found in his father's archives a book published in Glasgow by W. R. M'Phun, 86, Trongate, in the year 1835, which contains "A full report of the proceedings during the visit of Daniel O'Connell, Esq., M.P., to Edinburgh, Glasgow, etc., etc., in September, 1835."

Here is an extract from the speech delivered by the "Irish Liberator" in Greenock after he received an address:—

"As to the phraseology of one part of the address he differed in opinion from them. It was said that working classes were made to pay an undue share of the public taxes. Now, the question was not as to the share they paid, but whether they should pay any at all. The taxes should be levied only on property, and as the working classes had no property but their labour, they should have no tax upon it, or the materials of their labour, or on the means of their subsistence. Neither malt nor corn should be taxed. It was a deep crime, and a monstrous injustice to tax corn. To tax it was to deprive the mother of the loaf which she might have had to give to her famished children, to make the landlords rich, at the expense of the starvation of the working classes."

This extract may be interesting to the readers of *Land & Liberty*.

Yours, etc.,

J. O'D. DERRICK.

When the world was shocked by the assassination of President Lincoln, 15th April, 1865, an unknown printer, Henry George, wrote a letter to a San Francisco newspaper, which read in part:—

"In the hearts of a people, whose numbers shall be as the sands of the sea, his memory will be cherished with that of Washington. And to the ends of the earth, from the frozen seas of the North to the icefields of the South, in every land on which the sun in his circuit shall look down, whenever the standard shall be raised against a hoary wrong, his name shall be a watchword and an inspiration.

"And when, on plains and uplands where now the elephant and springbok roam, farms shall be tilled and homes arise; and on great lakes and rivers, now the haunts of the hippopotamus—a thousand paddles shall beat, the mothers of nations yet unborn shall teach their children to call him blessed."

And no one familiar with Henry George's life and works can find words which can be more fittingly applied to Henry George himself.—(From an Address by Will Atkinson at the recent Henry George Foundation Conference in Pittsburgh.)

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