

## Progress Or Poverty

In a report for the Conference on Economic Progress (Washington, D.C., Dec. 1964), Leon H. Keyserling wrote in *Progress Or Poverty*, "more than 66 million people, or about 35½ per cent of our population, lived either in poverty or deprivation in 1963."

"Families with incomes under \$3,000 a year, and unattached individuals with incomes under \$1,500 a year," he writes, "live in poverty. For these ceilings are enormously below the average 'modest but adequate' budget."

The author distinguishes between the deprived and the poor. "Families with incomes below \$5,000 but above the poverty level, and unattached individuals with incomes below \$2,500 but above the poverty level, are living in deprivation; especially as the average income of these people falls very far below \$5,000 and \$2,500 respectively." The deprived get by but any adverse turn will pull them down to poverty. It is pointed out that these people "live under special psychological, social and moral pressures." Low income is stressed as the one universal characteristic of all the poor and "only programs which increase their incomes can reduce poverty."

Unfortunately the proposals he advances to increase income or real purchasing power have one fatal flaw — they don't work. Some of them are: increased federal spending, income tax breaks for people in the lower third, more liberal expansion of the money supply, urban renewal, minimum wage laws (\$2 an hour is proposed), education, training and retraining programs, "medicare," workmen's compensation and others. The report offers two basic ways to reduce poverty, i.e., by increasing the nationwide per capita production of goods and services so that average levels of living rise enough to help the poor as well as others, and/or by improving the nationwide distribu-

tion of goods and services so that a fair though not equal share is received by those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder. None of these proposals do anything to eliminate privilege, and poverty, being a relative term, cannot exist without privilege. The biggest privilege of all, private collection of land rent, is not mentioned.

Along with others who have written about poverty within the last hundred years, Dr. Keyserling states that "an American, Henry George, brought forth *Progress and Poverty* in 1879. We might even now draw a lesson from the fact — bearing upon the feasibility of developing popular interest in the subject — that this book, although hard to read by current standards, was translated into many languages and ran through more than two million copies within a quarter century following its advent.

"Henry George was not a follower of the 'school of scientific socialism' headed by a German, Karl Marx. George's thinking grew out of the American environment. Yet there were some aspects of Marxism in his thesis that the march of progress for the few was accompanied by, and indeed generated, the deepening poverty of the many. And there was much to justify this thesis in the arrogant splendors of 'the Gilded Age,' in contrast with the miserable level of most working people."

It is ironic that the remainder of Dr. Keyserling's *Progress Or Poverty* proves that times have changed very little since George wrote *Progress and Poverty*. In fact a strong case can be made to show that it is even more difficult to make a decent living today than in 1879. This report shows the "what" of poverty but fails in answering the "why" as have so many others.

—Peter Patsakos