

Symptom of What Is to Come

by MAURICE P. CURRAN

WE cannot help but be impressed with Henry George's view of history, as we pause to comment on the man who wrote *Progress and Poverty* in 1879 and who had much to offer all of us in the approach to solving complex modern problems. I am thankful to the Henry George School for introducing me to him.

George confronts us with a universal rule that every civilization has had its period of vigorous growth, followed by arrest, stagnation, decline and fall. "It is the barbarians of one epoch who have been the civilized men of the next; to be in their turn succeeded by fresh barbarians," wrote Henry George. So every civilization that has been overwhelmed by barbarians has really perished from internal decay.

Can any parallels be drawn from this? Are we civilized? Unquestionably! We are the envy of the world. Our technology and mores are exported to the far corners of the earth. Whole nations and races imitate us. To ask another question—are there barbarians on the prowl today?

What about the death by starvation of at least two million Ukrainians? What do we call the burning of millions in the incinerators? What of the slaughtering of Hungarian youths as they cried "liberty," and what motivation made possible the building of the Berlin wall? Can we call these anything other than the acts of barbarians?

But we learned from George that an important contributing factor is internal decay. And did not the highly developed civilized people of the world, until they were challenged themselves, permit barbaric acts such as the starving and burning of millions upon millions of men, women and

In the summer term completion program at New York headquarters Maurice P. Curran, who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, was the spokesman for his class taught by Peter Patsakos. His reflections on the philosophy of Henry George were applauded, as were the brief talks by all other class speakers in this unusually high-caliber display of talent and insight. Several were economics majors and will continue intensive study of this subject. The summer schedule included two classes limited to high school students, and these will be eligible to compete in the annual essay contest for the \$100 Ezra Cohen Memorial prize.

children? Were those who stood by and watched an 18-year old youth moan and call for help for one hour while he slowly bled to death, civilized? Is this an insignificant event—or is it a symptom?

Recognized political and economic leaders maintain that the United States has reached a high-level plateau of stagnation. According to George's prophecy stagnation is followed by decline and fall. What has brought this about? George mentions what he considers to be an obvious truth—that the obstacles which finally bring the progress of a civilization to a halt are raised during the course of that progress.

For instance today our society recognizes the important role that labor unions have made toward progress. At the same time we are engaged in a competitive race for a position in space exploration because we are afraid that once more the unyielding barbarians are on the move. Yet some of our labor unions have cost us over 200,000 lost hours in the space program, in petty disputes. To mention only one, some of the missile components are pre-assembled at the factory

and shipped to the missile site. Since these were pre-assembled the engineers could easily check out completed circuits. The plumbers' union protested however that the pre-assembled method deprived them of work which was rightfully theirs. They demanded, under threat of a work stoppage, that these pre-assembled units be dismantled and reassembled by them.

The fact that many man-hours and dollars could have been saved by the

more efficient pre-assembly technique did not interest them at all, even though there was sufficient work remaining for them. The issue was resolved in their favor. Is this an insignificant event or is it, too, a symptom?

While this is merely a thumbnail sketch of Henry George's views, can we not say that these are obstacles caused by progress showing the internal decay which precedes arrival of the barbarians?

YES, IT WOULD BE ENOUGH!

MANY of us know of cases here in New York City where the landholder locks the cash register at night. That is, his take is a percentage of the gross, and in many instances this percentage is more than a hundred per cent of the profits. This is attested to by the stores which are forced to close because the rent was too high.

For those who want to see definite statistics, "Bayou Mystery" in The Wall Street Journal of February 20, 1953 is an interesting example. It tells of a trapper with 138 muskrat skins and 3 mink skins stacked at his feet, taken from 150 steel traps during three days in the marshes. Eight buyers bid for the lot, which went for \$176.65. The trapper got about \$114. The rest,

slightly over 35 per cent, went to pay the owner of the land. And this is one of the least desirable ways of making a living. These men furnish their own capital in the form of traps, clubs and knives. They take all the risks to be met with in swamps—yet the landholders take more than a third of the total.

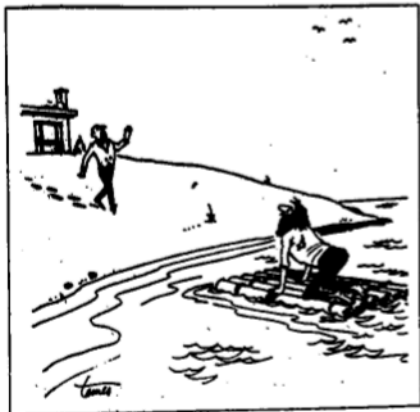
As to what constitutes a profit, "Victory in the Dustbowl" by Ira Wolfert in the August 1959 Reader's Digest is helpful.

"There was plenty of land that year" (1925), we read. "The nomads, known locally as suitcase farmers, didn't come in the dry years, and you could rent their fields for a quarter of whatever crop you raised on them."

Look at that closely: 25 per cent is considered very cheap. We know that the total cost of county, state and federal expenses is not over 150 billion dollars, and our gross national production is said to be over 500 billion dollars. We may say then, that if a man at the lowest level of production has to give up more than 35 per cent of his product, the rest of us can expect that to be the minimum for all.

Collecting all government expenses through a land value tax would make government costs a great deal less. This should convince anyone that 30 per cent of our gross national product would more than pay all government costs.

—Robert Sage



"Sorry sir—this is a private beach!"
—from The National Observer