

The Danger of Freedom

A MAN in Boston who expressed misgivings after his first session in a Henry George School class, said he thought the ideas were socialistic and radical and that the HGS was not fully aware of the implications of Henry George's social philosophy. At that time (1949) Archie Matteson wrote this reply which is equally apropos today:

"Having studied a good deal of economics in college, I was not much impressed with the Henry George School idea when I took the course back in 1938. I was too blasé to bother to look up any refutations until I had completed the second course—the one based on *Protection or Free Trade*. When I did get into the refutations they failed to satisfy me. I have been looking for the definitive refutation ever since. In the meantime I have become thoroughly sold on Henry George's social philosophy, to the point where I regard it as the only reasonable basis for a just social order.

"This is an unusual school. Believe it or not, it is a school of thought and nothing else. Nobody, as far as I know—and I have been acquainted with the school and its sponsorship now for over ten years—has succeeded in using it to grind any political axes, or in any nefarious way. It is as close to being chemically pure as any aggregation of human beings can be.

"I agree with you that George's doctrine is radical. Any man who unhesitatingly denounces the whole idea of taxation must be so regarded; any man who attacks the institution of public debt as immoral, is an enemy

of the ideas which stem from this primary means of state aggrandizement. George felt that a man belonged to himself, hence the product of his labor belonged to him and could not rightfully be taken from him. This view is so completely at variance with what goes on every day that I suppose radical is as good a term as any to describe it.

"If you believe, however, that George's ideas are socialistic, I suggest that you think them over and decide just what you mean by that. To me socialism means state ownership and control of the means of production.

"The present situation contains a large amount of socialism, particularly where control enters in. Perhaps you have another definition. My impression of what George stands for is: true private property in the products of human effort, and the collection by the community of the values created by the community.

"There may be implications in this that I do not see. Perhaps I am so dazzled by the potentialities for good that I'm blinded to the dangers. What are they? I know that freedom is always dangerous, that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty—but just in what way could the application of George's ideas to our society increase the dangers?

"In short, if you know something about this that we haven't properly considered, isn't it your duty morally to set us straight or to have us set straight? We'd regard it as a very great favor."

"The man who tries to do what he can, be it ever so little, will surely find his power grow. . . . Do not be impatient to see results; do not be disheartened if you do not see them. No one can ever tell how much he may do. Thought set in motion goes on perpetuating its impulse in ever-widening circles."

—Henry George