

What Shall We Do To Be Saved?

By FRANK STEPHENS

THE invitation of the Henry George Foundation to its Conference of 1934 announced: "Ways and means for further advances will be discussed." The first on the list of prospective topics was: "Economic Problems." Among those following were: "What Price Economic Ignorance?" "The Problem of Ownership Income," "If Henry George Were Writing Today," "The Henry George School of Social Science," "Economics and Politics," "The Single Tax and Its Relation to Other Reforms." Surely these were enough to warrant the belief that in the discussion of: "ways and means for further advances" one might bring up questions relating to the science of economics as presented in "Progress and Poverty," especially if these questions arose in relation to immediate and pressing economic problems.

So believing I came to the Conference seeking knowledge, plainly within the scope of economic science, as taught by Henry George, which is of vital importance to those of us who are now living our religion in the Enclaves of Single Tax and to the whole movement as soon as the time comes for which we are all striving when we shall have succeeded in making our economics and philosophy matters of general consideration.

It is one of many debts owing to the Enclaves by our whole movement that in their management such questions have arisen of which there has been no recognition as being matters of great, practical importance before the Enclaves were forced to consider them. My hope was that among our leaders gathered together from far-off parts of this country and Canada would be found some to answer what we and our neighbors thus far cannot.

To my surprise I found not only complete ignorance as to the matters in question on the part of all present but an almost complete and for the most part indignant refusal even to permit their discussion. To attempt it without interference with the announced programme of speeches, I obtained from the management, leave to announce two meetings for such discussion, from 8 a. m. to the scheduled openings of the morning sessions at 9:30. The first of these brought together seven delegates, one for a few moments only, the second brought together two.

I thereupon asked that through the courtesy of LAND AND FREEDOM I might express some opinions as to the matters where no one would be compelled even to listen to them to whom the process of thinking on economics is over-difficult or repellent. Forty years ago, in the Henry George Club of Philadelphia, such subjects were discussed and debated to a general agreement with an earnestness, honesty and intelligence which is today unknown in our

movement so far as that movement is known to me. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that this may account for the living faith of those days as contrasted with the dreary uncertainty and pessimism so sadly run to nothingness in the Conference address of Mr. Clarence Darrow.

In the matter of "further advances" we are all agreed that our present advance is too slow for the feverish haste in which our entire civilization is dashing into despotism and chaos. We are all in disagreement as to the cause of that fatal slowness. In my opinion it is because advocates of the Single Tax know so little about it and are so especially ignorant of the economic truths on which our philosophy is built up as "a house founded upon a rock." So general is this ignorance that all which now saves us from being overwhelmed and forgotten as a school of belief is that the ignorance of those who oppose us, socialists, communists and reactionaries alike, is even greater.

In this opinion I quote the agreement of our gifted, learned and devoted fellow-worker, George L. Rusby, "I share your view that nearly all of our so-called Single Taxers are without knowledge of the basic principles underlying the proposition. Clear perception of the vital differences is lacking. It is this incomplete knowledge of the fundamentals of the George teachings among Georgists themselves that is largely responsible for our present drifting towards communism and disaster."

I do not believe that the cause of our deplorable slowness is, as so often urged at the Conference, that we have had so little political success and that so few of our people have been elected or appointed to political office. As we proved by the failure of the Delaware campaign of 1895-6 the rivalry and trading of our own people for election to local offices is fatal. Office holding is always dangerous to principles. Tom L. Johnson, after his congressional experience, told me no man could hold political office in Washington and not be the worse for it. So it was surely with two men whom I knew first as earnest and self-sacrificing reformers and who ended as disappointed and disillusioned office seekers, Champ Clark and Wm. J. Bryan. Everyone knows what Ramsey MacDonald once was and what he is now. It is conceivable that even Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson and Newton Baker were once honest and truthful men. Henry George said the business of the politician is to minimize resistance. Usually this is done by compromise and deceit, if not by saying what one does not believe, at best by saying only so much of what one believes as is acceptable to the majority. And the majority is always cowardly and reactionary. Further there is no necessary relation between ability to get votes and ability to legislate justice.

This is no reflection upon our friend McNair. He may prove to be the exception. But in the first place there are not many McNairs, and, in the second, hindsight, though less valuable than foresight, is apt to be more accurate.

Nor is our advance, as so often claimed in conference

speeches, so slow because we must await a great leader. We have had that leader in life and in inspiration as great a leader as ever lived. Confucionism, Buddhism, Moham-medanism, Christianity, these did not have to wait for the coming of a second great leader. They succeeded because of the wisdom and will with which their apostles preached the gospel of their first leader. So it must be with us and the swiftness or slowness of the advance of our cause depends upon our acceptance of Henry George as a teacher of social science and human brotherhood and the wisdom and will with which we preach his gospel.

It is in this connection I assert that willing as his fol-lowers may be to work for his truth, "suffer for it and if need be die for it," they have not knowledge enough of the science of which he is the greatest of all masters to advance his cause other than slowly and haltingly. John Dewey said the philosophers since Plato's day worthy to be classed with Henry George can be counted on the fingers of the two hands. He might have added that those of George's followers competent today to plead his cause with George's logical exactness can be counted upon the fingers of one hand.

The pleas at this Conference, the purposes of all the ingenious plans for organization and propaganda, were that we must educate as to George's teachings. Those whom we should educate first of all as to those teachings, their tremendous possibilities, and the economic science from which they are drawn, are ourselves.

All depends upon our attitude toward the teacher. I speak as one who believes he was as wise a man as ever taught and his book the greatest and most needed that was ever written. But it is too much to demand that a man writing a scientific text book, along lines in which he was to a great extent a pioneer, should make no state-ment that would be proven wrong by the studies and experiences of the succeeding half century. Could that be asked of those who then wrote as authorities in the science of astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, even apart from their relations to the marvelous other sciences, radio transmission and the like, of whose very existence our scientific grandfathers knew nothing?

To follow in the footsteps of a great leader one need not lie down and roll in the mud where he made a mis-step. What is necessary is to move forward along the paths he opened with the guidance of his motives and methods. It is not necessary to declare that one will never press farther along than he attained. This is the plain meaning of those words of Henry George which his followers so disregard, that he did not want men to accept his opinions but wanted them to think for themselves. Loyalty to his memory does not consist in repeating words, even his wonderful words, like a Thibetan-praying machine, but in carrying on his studies in the light of the last half-century's added experience and with the method by which he so triumphantly succeeded.

As to his method of research he leaves no doubt, and

his followers have failed in the first and fundamental one, which he enforced by the precept of Socrates: "The beginning of wisdom is in the definition of terms," and by that of Marcus Aurelius which is printed before the the title page of "Progress and Poverty:" "Make to thy-self a definition or description of the thing that is pre-sented to thee."

Our failure here is almost unbelievable. The five men who with myself accepted the invitation to a conference discussion of economics are prominent enough in our movement to be known by name to practically all our fellow workers. Yet not one of us could give a definition which the majority of us would accept of any of the fol-lowing familiar economic terms—Wealth, Money In-terest, Utility, Value. Most of those present believed Value to be a thing, an object. And we are those who propose to educate the world in the science of economics in a crisis when the world is dashing to destruction through ignorance of that science.

Further proof of our incompetence is given by our refusal as Single Tax advocates to discuss the money question and the interest question in our conferences and public meetings. Our spokesmen push their heads into the sand, or rather into the mud, gurgling forth: "If you had all the money in the world and I had all the land what would you do if I ordered you to get off my land?" and then we plume ourselves on having silenced all ques-tioners as to money and interest, the two topics about which questions are most earnestly asked today through-out the civilized world.

Senator Harrison in his excellent address at the Con-ference Banquet pleaded for more cooperation with re-formers of other schools and asked why it cannot be. The chief reason is that all other groups of reformers, socialists, communists, anarchists, liberals generally, be-lieve the money question to be of tremendous importance and are united against what they consider the fatal exactions of interest. Our little few alone among so-called reformers refuse to talk about money and attempt to defend interest by those arguments of Henry George thereon which were ridiculed and thoroughly refuted forty years ago by the Philosophic Anarchists led by Tucker and Yarros, and are not now accepted by any considerable number of Georgists.

It is not that we ought to accept the opinions of other reformers as to the relative importance of questions of money and interest, but we ought to educate ourselves on these subjects as to which "Progress and Poverty" has not taught us, or has not taught us correctly. We should be ashamed of our cowardly evasion: "We will not debate these questions with you but if you will debate the land question we can beat you." This is too much like the reply of state socialists when we ask how they, believing as we do in the common right to the use of the earth, think it can be made of effect by communal collection of economic rent and they reply: "We'll cross

that bridge when we come to it." We ought to know enough to meet them in debate on their chosen topics, money and interest, fight them to a finish there, and so give them respect enough for our knowledge of economics to lead them to listen to our arguments on the land question.

Of like cowardice and absurdity was the assertion of the gifted orator from Cleveland who twice so thrilled us with his eloquence when in admitting he is not able to answer the question Arden so earnestly asks: "How shall we assess the rental value of land when collection of economic rent has ended selling values?" he shuffled out by saying: "Let us be elected first and we'll find out what to do about it afterwards." The cheapest ward politician would not insult his constituents by such a quibble.

This is the question brought up as vital to the existence of the enclaves, a question I have asked year after year at these Conferences only to be told not to press it then and not to bring it up thereafter. Sometimes one or two delegates would rise and say they could answer it, but on following up all, either by interview or letter, I found in every case that they did not know about it enough even to understand the question.

Our fellow workers in New Zealand and Australia have gone fartherst in this inquiry. Those in England, as I know from letters of the high authority appointed to assess land values in England before MacDonald's wretched failure had ruined what Snowden had tried to do, cannot answer it. The ablest man of my acquaintance along these lines, a professional expert in land appraisal, has not answered it to my understanding, nor have the experts of the Somers System nor those two of our Single Tax editors who are best versed in the knowledge of Georgian economics.

There were present in the Conference the leaders of the various educational and propaganda groups of our movement, one in particular of international reputation, also officials and assessors of the cities of whose advances in tax reform we boast the most, and there were there also the best known leaders of the enclavial movement, but all I could secure from them was a request to take my question away unanswered and not trouble future Conferences with it.

If by an unlooked-for happening in these mad, present day conditions where anything may happen unlooked-for, President Roosevelt and his advisors should turn to one of our belief for council and should be told our faith in the results that would follow ending land speculation and land monopoly by the collection of economic rent, this is the question they would first ask if they understood our plan. Is there no one of us who could answer it?

I must not ask space to develop the related thesis that the vast majority of so-called Single Taxers are not Single Taxers at all but state socialists who favor land

value taxation. Their opinion of Henry George is in reality about that so quaintly set forth by a Chicago newspaper when first reviewing: "Progress and Poverty:" "The author appears to be a kind of communist, yet he means well"—not a profound judgment perhaps but at least better than that taken by *The Nation* in its review and consistently maintained to this day: "We have to consider Mr. George's position essentially unsound."

Yet our exhorters are right, we must educate, poorly as we have thus far fitted ourselves to be teachers, but with more vivid realization of what is likely to be the goal of the blind led by the blind. We must educate, and the time between this and the chaos of the next Dark Ages is lessening fast. Probably the so-much deplored failure to draw more young people into our movement is due to the fact that they look upon the past, the shameful record of social outrages perpetrated or tolerated by us their elders both before, during and after the World War, as an open book which everybody has read. Therefore they very sensibly have no respect for our opinions. As to the present they see that our society is without leaders or principles, in the guidance of no one.

Yes—we must educate. The Past is everybody's, the Present is nobody's but the Future—if there is to be a Future—must be ours.

Comment on Frank Stephen's Article

By JOHN LUXTON

MR. STEPHENS takes a very gloomy view of the situation as far as Single Taxers are concerned. The idea that the science of economics as expressed in "Progress and Poverty" is not fully adequate in solving whatever problems may arise now, or in the future, so far as man's economic welfare is concerned, is not to be tolerated for an instant by those who understand the Single Tax. But one must be sure that such are legitimate problems and not just fears entertained by those unable to use the tools at their disposal.

The author of the article asks: "How shall we assess the rental value of land when the collection of economic rent has ended selling value?" This question has bothered him for years and he says that Conference after Conference has avoided answering it. He claims that the existence of enclaves depends upon it.

Since selling value depends upon the economic rent the solution of the problem is simple. Destroying the selling value does not wipe out economic rent, but wiping out economic rent does destroy selling value. We are well acquainted with the latter phenomenon. The diversion of traffic from lower Fulton Street, in Brooklyn, due to the erection of the Brooklyn Bridge, caused a fall