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A STUDY IN VOLUNTARY SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:

The Henry George School of Social Science

by

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I

Introduction

The apprentice student is embarrassed by the unlimited number and variety of social phenomena that beg his attention. The very curiosity which impels him to investigate is also a handicap until he learns to control and direct his investigation. However, the exigencies of life act as a controlling factor; and, the limitations of time and money act directly to influence choice in the field of investigation.

Implicit in all social science study is the study of social organization. For, unless we are concerned with the habits of a hermit or recluse, we cannot study man save in his relationships to his fellows.

But, social organization is of itself a vast field covering the whole range of human organizations from the family to the nation, and even the world by reason of the bonds of communication which tie it together. It would be a physical impossibility for a single investigator to carry on an independent study of the world social organization. At best teams of investigators can devote their attention to only one phase or aspect of world social organizations.

Thus the solitary investigator faces the problem of making his choice within five limitations: spatial, temporal, financial, interest and personal capacity. By virtue of his voluntary choice of a department it may be presumed that the interests of the student are the same as those of the department. The scholars with whom this writer is asso-

ciated hold as their primary interest voluntary social organizations; i. e., those organizations or groups which an individual joins of his own volition in the belief that the actions of the group will bring about some change or improvement in the conditions of life.

Within the area of interest there are organizations of many complexions, functions and aims. Again, lacking a professorially directed choice, the student finds an embarrassingly rich field. Shall he study a small neighborhood group, a nation-wide organization, an international organization? Shall he study political parties? Garden clubs? Crime prevention groups? Trade or Labor unions? Neighborhood uplift societies? The volition of the student is guided by bias.

My own bias is that the lay members of a social action group ought to have some fundamental knowledge of economics and social philosophy. I believe that the man who wishes to improve the conditions of his community can be more effective if consequent with his social action activities he takes part in a group devoted to the study of the theoretical contributions of social philosophers. Such groups exist throughout the literate world. I doubt that there is a social philosophy which is not studied avocationally by groups meeting outside the sacred precincts of a formal university.

The particular group I have selected for this study is the Henry George School of Social Science. Since the Henry George School is international in scope, and I am subject to the limitations mentioned above, the focal point of the study shall be the School in Chicago.

Every inquiry has a purpose or motive. And, when the prime mo-

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tivation is curiosity, that curiosity must be rationalized. The purpose of this inquiry, then, is to study the nature of a voluntary organization; what stimulates the men who form it, and what goal is envisaged? Yet, it is more than mere satiation of curiosity; it is also to give the student of human society a first hand acquaintance with it.

For, unless he participates in society, how can he know it?

II

Origin of the School

The Henry George School of Social Science is named after Henry George (1839-1897), one of the most colorful and influential figures of the nineteenth century. His influence was felt by such men as Leo Tolstoy in Russia, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen in China, and here at home by such luminaries as Dr. John Dewey, Nicholas Murray Butler, Clarence Darrow. The full extent of George's influence would require a doctoral thesis to be appreciated, although the thesis of Dr. George R. Geiger (The Philosophy of Henry George, MacMillan Co., N. Y., 1933) gives fair indication of the nature of the influence.

In 1879 Henry George completed the manuscript of Progress and Poverty, which was published by D. Appleton & Co., N. Y. in 1880. Progress and Poverty had a popularity unprecedented by books on economics and sociology. In the cheap paper-bound editions it outsold the popular novels of the day. Henry George, Jr. estimates (The Life of Henry George, Robt. Schalkenburg Foundation, N. Y., 1945) that about two million copies were sold by the time of George's death in 1897.

The era which received Progress and Poverty, and the subsequent works of Henry George, was characterized by social unrest and industrial upheavals. It was the day of the Irish Revolution abroad, and the Grange and Knights of Labor at home. Here was a man who spoke not in vague generalities, but one who defined justice and showed the specific means

by which it is denied.

The works of Henry George culminated, during his lifetime, in political and social movements throughout the world. Descriptions of these movements can be found in Arthur Nichols Young, The Single Tax Movement in the United States (Princeton University Press, 1916).

Today, with the exception of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, it is doubtful whether any "Single Tax" political movement exists in the U. S., while in England, Australia, Denmark and a few other countries there are yet political parties based on the fiscal reforms recommended by Henry George.

Even during the lifetime of Henry George, it was felt that political action could not accomplish the aims of the philosophy. And, in the concluding chapter of Social Problems, Henry George states, "Social reform is not to be secured by noise and shouting; by complaints and denunciations; by the formation of parties, or the making of revolutions; but by the awakening of thought and the progress of ideas.....What oppresses the masses is their own ignorance, their own short-sightedness." It is education, not politics, that is the hope of mankind. But man is an irrational, emotional animal, and having found the panacea to cure his social ills he seeks to administer the remedy through the exercise of power -- the political means.

The glamor of the political arena is so fascinating that few men are able to see beyond the moment; but, these few do exist. They existed then -- the visionaries, the 'impractical dreamers'. And what dreams?

There were those who dreamt of lecture halls and study groups where the whole philosophy of George would be taught. And, there were those who considered the Georgeist system of thought the foundation of a science of society and would build a university devoted to inquiry into social problems.

One of these dreamers was Oscar H. Geiger, a New York fur trader and philosophical inquirer. As early as 1896, Geiger, who was then 23 years old, attempted to make the dream a reality. He called this excursion "The Progress Club". At its height there were 155 students, but, lacking financial support, it soon collapsed. After that, Geiger's activities in the movement were mainly lecturing and writing. But whether he lectured in a hall or on a street corner, there were no visible results. Consequently he delivered a paper before the New York State Single Tax League conference in Buffalo in September 1914, urging the formation of "Reading Circles" as the only way to spread the teaching of Henry George. The paper is included in the biographical sketch of Oscar H. Geiger, A Seed Was Sown, by Robert Clancy (Henry George School of Social Science; N. Y., 1952).

In 1931 the dream was more persistent. Joseph Dana Miller, editor of Land and Freedom (New York), offered to Geiger the use of his office as a headquarters. From here the School was launched. Robert Clancy gives January 1, 1932 as the founding date of the Henry George School of Social Science. The first class was announced by mail and held in January, 1932. At the beginning of 1933, eighty-four students enrolled for the basic course using Progress and Poverty as a text.

On April 15, 1932, an Advisory Committee of prominent Georgeists met, and steps were taken to incorporate the School. A board of trustees was elected. And, on September 15, 1932 the School was granted a provisional charter "to maintain schools and lecture forums for the purpose of teaching fundamental economics and social philosophy" by the University of the State of New York. Five years later an Absolute Charter was granted.

Oscar H. Geiger passed away on June 29, 1934; but the school he had established did not pass with him. The students who had come to Oscar Geiger to learn became the teachers who carried on the work he had begun. From a simple beginning in New York, the School soon spread to many of the major cities of the world.

"Outside of New York," wrote Frank Chodorov (Educating for a Free Society, Scribner's Commentator, Feb., 1941), "the educational fever spread to old-timers who, finding the propagandist and political methods a forlorn hope, had quit completely. It was hard to learn the new way. For many years the followers of George were recognized by their boring sincerity; one could almost recognize the "Ancient Mariner" look in their eyes as they proceeded to expound to innocent bystanders. Now they were expected calmly and objectively to lead their quizzical students step by step from definitions of terms to irrefutable economic laws to consequent conclusions. It was hard work. But many took to it, and trained new teachers."

III

The School in Chicago

The Henry George Foundation of America held a convention in Chicago in 1934. At this convention Leonard T. Recker, executive vice-president of John S. Swift Co., approached Henry L. T. Tideman and urged him to conduct a class in political economy under the direction of the Henry George School of Social Science.¹

To open and teach the School's first class in Chicago in 1934, with no advance publicity, took a great deal of faith in the public's zeal for knowledge. And to open it amidst cloudy countenances and malcontent mutterings took courage. But Henry L. T. Tideman kept the discussion lively enough to bring the crowd back for more. The task ahead appeared no easier when he learned that the long faces were worn by depression era employees of the man who had organized the class by waving the wand of the fear of want over the heads of the hapless "slaves." But the future dean of the Chicago extension carried on and won friends as well as a nuclear teaching staff.

Thus begins the lead article of the October, 1948, issue of the Henry George News reporting the proceedings of the national conference of the Henry George School in Chicago in July 1948. In the same issue Henry L. T. Tideman embarked upon a new career, that of a columnist in this national publication.

During the first two years, the headquarters of the School was where ever Henry L. T. Tideman happened to be. It is noteworthy, however, that classes were held each quarterly term since Fall 1934. The promotional work during this time, and until its dissolution, was carried on by the Henry George Fellowship, an alumni association.

1. Corporate records.

On September 22, 1936, a letter signed by Henry L. T. Tideman, Extension Secretary, and Nathan Hillman, President, Chicago Chapter of the Henry George Fellowship was sent to Mr. Crossman, Donald Mann, Gustave K. Carus, Otto Cullman, Miss Margaret Haley, Wiley Wright Mills, Nathan Hillman, Judge William H. Holly, Max M. Korshak, Francis Neilson, Col. Victor A. Rule, George M. Strachan, J. E. Truelove, Maurice E. Welty, Henry L. T. Tideman, Howard Vincent O'Brien, William H. Stuart, and Hiram B. Loomis, calling a meeting on Tuesday, September 29, 6:15 P. M. at dinner in Henrici's Restaurant, 71 W. Randolph St., to discuss incorporating the School. At this meeting the following proposals were unanimously agreed upon:²

1. That a corporation be formed not-for-profit, under the laws of Illinois to carry on the work of the School, to have the name: The Henry George School of Social Science, Chicago Extension.
2. That this corporation have 15 trustees.
3. That the following officers be elected:

President.....	Hiram B. Loomis
Vice President.....	Wiley Wright Mills
Secretary.....	Gustave K. Carus
Treasurer.....	Max M. Korshak

A charter was issued by the Secretary of the State of Illinois on October 15, 1936 incorporating the School not-for-profit "to maintain schools and lecture forums for the purpose of teaching fundamental economics and social philosophy."

At a meeting held on October 10, 1936, the trustees considered and accepted the offer of the Consumer's Recovery League, the Single Tax League, and the Henry George Fellowship to contribute \$25.00 per month each to cover rent for a headquarters for the School, on the stipulation

that each of these organizations share the quarters with the Henry George School.³ Thus two years after Henry L. T. Tideman conducted Chicago's first class in political economy the School became an established reality -- a corporation charter and a home were acquired.

A baby must be nurtured; but the day comes when the fledgling must test its own wings. And so it was that on January 9, 1939 the awareness of existence expressed itself in a letter to the Board of Trustees of the School: "...we instructors take this opportunity to express our belief that our work as teachers of the School can be best promoted by having the School's headquarters entirely dissociated from any and all political and propaganda organizations and activities." The letter precipitated a storm of protest as the proponents of politics and propaganda saw in this move the end of organized activities in these fields. But the weight of sentiment and reason were on the side of the educational movement, and on January 27, 1939 the Board of Trustees voted to lease quarters for the School independent of other organizations.⁴

The increasing number of enrollments made necessary the employment of a part-time registrar to maintain the School's records. With the exception of this detailed work, the bulk of the School's activities were carried on by volunteers -- teaching, addressing announcements, securing class locations, promoting classes, speaking, placing posters, and winning friends.

By 1944 the city and suburbs had been divided into ten regions, each with a sponsoring chairman responsible for co-ordinating the activities of his co-workers in the regional area to secure class locations, speak-

3, 4. Corporate records

ing dates, lists for local circularizing, newspaper publicity. Other groups were formed for specialized activities and study such as advertising, research and writing, speakers, publicity, finance, and the monthly newspaper "On the Campus" from which this information comes.

The only salaries at this time were for the director, registrar, and assistant. The registrar still being a part-time employee. The proposed budget for the 1944-45 school year was \$17,464.00. Of this, \$5,720.00 was for salaries, \$1,474.00 for rent, light and phone, \$800.00 for office supplies. The balance was allocated for promotional and advertising activities.

From the beginning all funds were donated by graduates and friends of the School. The students, teachers, workers came from all walks of life. There have been no racial or religious barriers. Banker and janitor work side by side in a common endeavor -- to bring an understanding of basic economic principles and a concept of justice to their brothers.

At the tenth anniversary banquet of the School at the Bismark Hotel, May 22, 1944, Henry L. T. Tideman, dean, reported, "Since 1934, we have conducted 623 classes in fundamental economics and social philosophy. During this period, 8,106 people have come to these classes and asked, what did we have to give them?.....Now of these, 3,756 people have completed this course in fundamentals.....The records show that exclusive of the teachers in the present term, 177 men and women, most of them our own graduates, have served as instructors. There was a time when if you could get 177 people who knew that there was such a book as Progress

and Poverty into one room, I would have fainted."

In 1946, John Monroe, director of the Chicago extension, compiled the following figures for a graphic demonstration of the School's growth:

Comparison of graduates in opening term of each school year since the first class in 1934:

1934	'35	'36	'37	'38	'39	'40
23	21	91	58	129	208	193
1941	'42	'43	'44	'45		
205	202	207	254	307		

And for the opening (Fall) term of 1946, 710 students enrolled in 114 classes in Chicago and suburbs.

No student was ever charged a fee to take any of the courses offered by the School; and, all teaching was done by volunteers serving without pay. In addition, all class locations were donated. Classes were held in Park Field houses, YMCAs, churches, libraries, offices, homes.

IV

An Active Member

Louis La Fortune is typical in many respects of the active members of the Henry George School. The nature of the present study does not warrant a statistical index. Within the framework of this study, my choice of a typical active member is a shrewd guess after acute observation.

Mr. La Fortune is in his early forties. His college days at the University of Cincinnati were during the depression. And as so many others in those days he worked to help out at home, and to pay his way thru college. Louis La Fortune took his degree in Chemical Engineering.

During the latter '30s Mr. La Fortune worked as chemist for John Lucas & Co., paint manufacturers, Gibsboro, N. J. There he became interested in the coöperative movement thru an Episcopalian minister. And with the factory superintendent he organized a consumers coöp for the town of some 600 population. The coöp store was operated two or three evenings and Saturday each week with volunteer help. But demands from the members that the store be operated full business hours resulted in dissolving the coöp because it could not pay wages to a clerk and remain solvent.

During the 1940's Mr. La Fortune operated a dry cleaning plant in Chicago. And it was in a drug store window near his shop that Louis La Fortune saw a poster announcing a class in fundamental economics to be held in Columbus Park Field House. This was in the Fall of 1949, and the slogan that term was "Be Your Own Economist." Here was an op-

portunity to study something that was missed in College. Mrs. La Fortune saw a similar poster in another neighborhood store. Mr. & Mrs. decided to take the course together.

Curiosity compelled the decision to look into this offer of a free course in economics. But not the vague undefined curiosity of the sensation seeker. It was rather the curiosity of one who seeks to understand and know. The coöperative adventure, business experience, and the reflections of a thoughtful person were the stimulating ingredients that directed curiosity toward a study of fundamental economics and social philosophy.

The course in fundamental economics provided stimulus to further study, and in the Winter of 1950, it was followed by a study of the Science of Political Economy at Austin Town Hall. In the Spring Mr. La Fortune conducted a class in principles of international trade, and social problems.

During the three terms of study, Mr. and Mrs. La Fortune became personal friends with Miss Cecil Cowherd, the instructoress of the courses in fundamental economics, and science of political economy. Mr. La Fortune also visited the School headquarters at 236 N. Clark St. to become acquainted with John Monroe, director, and Mrs. Jessie Matteson, then registrar of the School.

After the Spring term, Mr. La Fortune was inactive for a bout a year. He then resumed visiting the School headquarters. And soon he found himself devoting his mornings to making calls with John Monroe on prospects for the programs in the Commerce and Industry Division. In the Fall of 1952, Mr. Monroe asked Louis La Fortune to make these

calls on a full time bases as Field Director of the School. There was no prospect of compensation at this time -- the School was in financial straits. But Mr. La Fortune accepted the proposition, and after several weeks financial conditions improved enough to place Mr. La Fortune on the paid staff.

The work day is from 9:00 to 5:00 o'clock; but after supper, Mr. La Fortune volunteers to conducted two or three courses each week. It was the class at Mr. La Fortune's home that I attended during this study.

V

Conclusion

The Henry George School of Social Science is a free association of men and women who believe that many of our social ills can be cured by open discussion of economic principles and ethics. It attracts to its orbit only those people who understand that Justice is not something to receive but something to give.

Historically there has been a transition from political action to proseletizing thru study of the works of Henry George to the present methods of inquiries into the nature of economics and ethics. During the entire history of the associations which have culminated into the society known as the Henry George School one enigma has pursued those who are active, "Why does a discussion of ethics cause a violent reaction."

It would seem somehow that some persons are congenitally unable to consider any positive program involving justice, while others consider all things in terms of their concepts of justice. The concept of justice held by the Henry George School is that of the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament. But justice does not admit compelling anyone to conform to a particular mode of action or thinking; and it is this that many reject. It is those who would follow a positive program of justice that the School seeks.

Henry George proposed social reform by education. In dissociating itself from political action groups, the Henry George School follows the aims and methods of the man whose name it bears. The man who seeks a power base would find himself in a treadmill in this society that believes every man is capable of thinking and acting for himself.

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