

INTRODUCTORY
to *Progress And Poverty* by Henry George
(Abridged)

The utilization of steam and electricity, of improved processes and labor-saving machinery, the greater subdivision and grander scale of production, the wonderful facility of exchanges, have multiplied enormously the effectiveness of labor.

It was natural to expect, and it was expected, that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the worker; that the enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past.

Could Benjamin Franklin have seen, in a vision of the future, the steamship taking the place of the sailing vessel, the railway train of the wagon, the reaping machine of the scythe; could he have heard the throb of engines that in obedience to human will, and for the satisfaction of human desire, exert a power greater than that of all the men and all the beasts of burden of the earth combined; could he have seen the forest tree transformed into finished lumber with hardly the touch of a human hand; the great workshops where boots and shoes are turned out by the case with less labor than the old-fashioned cobbler needed to put on a sole; the factories where, cotton becomes cloth faster than hundreds of weavers could have turned it out with their hand looms; could he have seen steam hammers shaping mammoth shafts and mighty anchors, and delicate machinery making tiny watches; the diamond drill cutting through the heart of rocks, and coal oil sparing the whale; could he have realized the enormous saving of labor resulting from improved facilities of exchange and communication—sheep killed in Australia, eaten fresh in England, and the order given by the London banker in the afternoon, executed in San Francisco in the morning of the same day; could he have conceived of the hundred thousand improvements which these only suggest, what would he have inferred as to the social condition of mankind?

He would have seen those muscles of iron and sinews of steel making the poorest worker's life a holiday, in which every high quality and noble impulse could have scope to grow.

How could the vice, the crime, the ignorance, the brutality, that spring from poverty and the fear of poverty, exist where poverty had vanished?

It is true that disappointment has followed disappointment. Invention after invention have neither lessened the toil, nor brought plenty to the poor. But there have been so many things to which it seemed this failure could be attributed, that up to our time the new faith has hardly weakened. Now, however, there can be no mistaking. From all parts of the civilized world come complaints of labor condemned to involuntary idleness; of capital massed and wasting; of pecuniary distress among business men; of want and suffering and anxiety among the working classes.

There is distress where large standing armies are maintained, but there is also distress where standing armies are nominal; there is distress where protective tariffs are applied, but there is also distress where trade is nearly free; there is distress where autocratic government yet prevails, but there is also distress where political power is

wholly in the hands of the people; in countries where paper is money, and in countries where gold and silver are the only currency. Evidently, beneath all such things as these, we must infer a common cause.

And that it is either what we call material progress or something closely connected with material progress, becomes more than an inference when it is noted that industrial depressions are but intensification's which show themselves more clearly and strongly as material progress goes on.

Some get an infinitely better and easier living, but others find it hard to get a living at all. The tramp comes with the locomotive, and alms-houses and prisons are as surely the marks of material progress as are costly dwellings, and magnificent churches.

Upon streets lighted with gas and patrolled by uniformed policeman, beggars wait for the passer-by and in the shadow of college and library are gathering, the more hideous Huns and fiercer Vandals.

It is true that wealth has been greatly increased, and that the average of comfort, leisure, and refinement has been raised; but these gains are not general. In them the lowest class do not share. I do not mean that the condition of the lowest class has nowhere nor in anything been improved; but that there is nowhere any improvement which can be credited to increased productive power.

It is as though an immense wedge were being forced, not underneath society, but through society. Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below --- are crushed down.

This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact that perplexes the world, and with which statesmanship and philanthropy and education grapple in vain.

It is the riddle that the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, which not to answer is to be destroyed. So long as all the increased wealth which modern progress brings, goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. To educate men who are condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive.

The ideas that there is a necessary conflict between capital and labor, that machinery is an evil, that competition must be restrained and interest abolished, that wealth may be created by the issue of money, that it is the duty of government to furnish capital or to furnish work, are rapidly making way among the great body of the people who keenly feel a hurt and are sharply conscious of a wrong. Such ideas, which bring great masses of men, the repositories of ultimate political power, under the leadership of charlatans and demagogues, are fraught with danger; but they cannot be successfully combated until Political Economy shall give some answer to the great question which shall be consistent with all her teachings and shall commend itself to the perceptions of the great masses of men.

I propose to solve by the methods of political economy, the law which associates poverty

with progress, and increases want with advancing wealth; and in the explanation of this paradox we shall find the explanation of those recurring seasons of industrial and commercial paralysis which viewed independently seem so inexplicable.

That Political Economy, as at present taught, does not explain the persistence of poverty amid advancing wealth in a manner that accords with the deep-seated perceptions of men; that the unquestionable truths that it does teach are unrelated and disjointed; that it has failed to make progress in popular thought; that on the contrary, after a century of cultivation, during which it has engrossed the attention of some of the most subtle and powerful intellects, it should be spurned by the statesman, and relegated, in the opinion of many educated and thinking men, to the rank of a pseudo science --- must be due not to any inability of the science when properly pursued, but to some false step in its premises.

And as such mistakes are generally concealed by the respect paid to authority. I propose in this inquiry to take nothing for granted. I propose to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow truth wherever it may lead. If the conclusions that we reach run counter to our prejudices, let us not flinch; if they challenge institutions that have long been deemed wise and natural, let us not turn back. []

Progress and Poverty covers a wide range of economic and philosophical questions in the public dialogue today. Among them are:

1. What is the known limit of human desires?
2. Are periods of recession and unemployment unavoidable in a free market economy?
3. The difference between profits from producing and those from monopolizing.
4. Does automation cause unemployment?
5. Can the Earth's resources support an increasing population?
6. Should taxes be levied according to "ability to pay" or "benefits received"?
7. Would reduced taxes help workers?
8. Should the government place limits on a person's earnings?
9. Long-term unemployment is due to laziness, incompetence, lack of skill, or economic maladjustment's over which the individual has little control?
10. Should governments insure everyone a living, or an opportunity to make a living?