
Progress and Poverty

by Eugene V. Debs

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Recently Henry George has written a work with the above title. Every laborer in the land should read and study it well. There is much thought in it and much melancholy truth. Some of the pictures drawn by this master mind are very dark indeed, but before he quits his task he points out a remedy. He says:

From all parts of the civilized world come complaints of industrial depression; of labor condemned to involuntary idleness; of capital massed and wasting; of pecuniary distress among business men; of want and suffering and anxiety among working classes. All the dull, deadening pain, all the keen, maddening anguish, that to great masses of men are involved in the words "hard times" afflict the world today.

Where population is densest, wealth greatest, and the machinery of production and exchange most highly developed, we find the deepest poverty, the sharpest struggle for existence, and the most enforced idleness.

And unpleasant as it may be to admit it, it is at last becoming evident that the enormous increase in productive power which has marked the present century and is still going on with accelerating ratio, has no tendency to extirpate poverty or to lighten the burden of those compelled to toil. It simply widens the gulf between Dives and Lazarus, and makes the struggle for existence more intense. The march of invention has clothed mankind with powers of which a century ago the boldest imagination could not have dreamed. But in factories where labor saving machinery has reached its most wonderful development, little children are at work; wherever the new forces are anything like fully utilized, large classes are maintained by charity or live on the verge of recourse to it; amid the greatest accumulations of wealth, men die of starvation, and puny infants suckle dry breasts; while everywhere the greed of gain, the worship of wealth, shows the force of the fear of want. The promised land dies before us like

the mirage. The fruits of the tree of knowledge turn as we grasp them to apples of Sodom that crumble at the touch.

This is the picture Mr. George draws of civilized countries under our present progress. He concludes after a careful survey of the field of human effort that poverty is the associate of what has been called modern progress. Why this is so Mr. George undertakes to answer in his work. He shows why it is that the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer; why it is that the laboring man finds it such hard work to live in a land where a few men grow enormously wealthy.

Mr. George is earnest in his efforts to get at the bottom of our social difficulties and he says in his opening chapter:

I propose to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow the truth wherever it may lead. Upon us is the responsibility of seeking the law, for in the very heart of our civilization to-day women faint and little children moan. But what that law may be is not Our affair. 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.

These words breathe the spirit of the enthusiast and the fearless reformer, and Mr. George has fully maintained himself in both characters. His recent visit to England, Ireland and Scotland, and his lectures there have done more to awaken interest in the laboring men of those countries and their condition than anything that has occurred this century. We will present to our readers from time to time some of Mr. George's ideas on current labor topics, knowing that profit will come from their study.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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