

## **How to Help the Unemployed**

**BY HENRY GEORGE.**

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AN EPIDEMIC of what passes for charity is sweeping over the land. From New York, where the new and massive United Charities Building, the million-dollar gift of one philanthropist, gives stately evidence that the battle against actual starvation has permanently transcended the powers of a municipality that appropriates to it millions annually and of the unorganized giving of greater millions; and from Chicago, where the corridors of the City Hall and the doors of churches have been thrown open for the shelter of those so poor as to welcome such a bed, to Seattle, on Puget Sound, or Tampa, on the Mexican Gulf, -- all who have anything to give are being asked to give. Municipalities, churches, boards of trade, real-estate associations, labor unions and merchants' organizations are giving and asking for charity funds. Officials are surrendering a percentage on their salaries, policemen, railroad operatives, the employees of large business establishments, factory hands, and even day laborers, are docking themselves of part of their pay, and trades dinners being given up to swell charity subscriptions. There are charity balls, charity parties, charity entertainments, and charity funds of all sorts. One great paper in New York is raising an old-clothes fund, and another great paper a bread fund, and in Ashland, Wis., they have made a charity mincepie twenty-two feet in circumference and a quarter of a ton in weight. The politicians are always large givers of alms, politicians of the Tammany type especially; but even Tammany has special relief committees at work. One of the chiefs of New York's "400" calls on each pupil of the public schools for a daily contribution of a cold potato and a slice of bread for the organized feeding of the hungry; and to complete the parallel with the "bread and circuses" of the dying Roman republic, he also asks that the churches be opened and their organs played every afternoon, so that to free food may be added free music!

Yet there has been no disaster of fire or flood, no convulsion of nature, no destruction by public enemies. The seasons have kept their order, we have had the former and the latter rain, and the earth has not refused her increase. Granaries are filled to overflowing, and commodities, even these we have tried to make dear by tariff, were never before so cheap.

The scarcity that is distressing and frightening the whole country is a scarcity of employment. It is the unemployed for whom charity is asked: not those who cannot or will not work, but those able to work and anxious to work, who, through no fault of their own, cannot find work. So clear, indeed, is it that of the great masses who are suffering in this country today, by far the greater part are honest, sober, and industrious, that the pharisees who preach that poverty is due to laziness and thriftlessness, and the fanatics who attribute it to drink, are for the moment silent.

Yet why is it that men able to work and willing to work cannot find work? It is not strange that the failure to work should bring want, for it is only by work that human wants are satisfied. But to say that widespread distress comes from widespread inability to find employment no more explains the distress than to say that the man died from want of breath explains a sudden death. The pressing question, the real question, is, What causes the want of employment?

This, however, is the question that the men of light and leading, the preachers, teachers, philanthropists, business men and editors of great newspapers, who all over the country are speaking and writing about the distress and raising funds for the unemployed, show no anxiety to discover. Indeed, they seem averse to such inquiry. "The cause of the want of employment," they say, tacitly or openly, "is not to be considered now. The present duty is to keep people from starving and freezing, or being driven to break in and steal. This is no time for theories. It is a time for alms."

This attitude, if one considers it, seems something more than strange. If in any village a traveler found the leading men clustered about the body of one who had clearly come to untimely death, yet anxious only to get it buried; making no inquiry into the cause of death, and even discouraging inquiry, would he not suspect them of knowing more of that cause than they cared to admit? Now, this army of unemployed is as unnatural as is death in the prime of life and vigor of every organ and faculty. Nay, it involves presumption of wrong as clearly as cut throat or shattered skull.

What more unnatural than that alms should be asked, not for the maimed, the halt and the blind, the helpless widow and the tender orphan, but for grown men, strong men, skilful men, men able to work and anxious to work! What more unnatural than that labor -- the producer of all food, all clothing, all shelter -- should not be exchangeable for its full equivalent in food, clothing, and shelter; that while the things it produces have value, labor, the giver of all value, should seem valueless!

Here are men, having the natural wants of man, having the natural powers of man -- powers adapted and intended and more than sufficient to supply those wants. To say that they are willing to use their powers for the satisfaction of their wants, yet cannot do so, is to say that there is a wrong. If it is not their fault, whose fault is it? Wrong somewhere there must be.

Of old it was said, "If any would not work, neither should he eat." Men able to work, and willing to work, who could not find work, were not dreamed of. External nature is the same; the constitution of man has not changed. How, then, is it that we now hear, "He who cannot find work shall be fed by charity"? Those who say this do not say, "He who does not work shall be fed by charity." These pseudo-philanthropists know the penalty of such an attempt to boldly annul the natural law that by his toil man shall be fed. By skimping the dole to what will just prevent actual starvation, and by the tests and inquiries and degrading conditions of organized charity, they try to draw the line between those who cannot find work and those who do not want to. But this line it is impossible to draw, for no such clear line exists. Organize charity as we may, men who cannot find work go hungry, and men who do not want to find work are fed, and men willing to work are converted into men unwilling to work.

For willingness to work depends on what can be had by work and what can be had without work, and the personal and social estimate of the relation. Work is in itself painful and repellent. No human being ever worked for the sake of working. I write this article that it may be published in THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, and that I may get the pay for it, and communicate my thought to others. But the work of writing it is as irksome to me as sawing wood. So with all work. In a ruder stage men looked upon the necessity of work as the curse of an offended creator. We who may now see to what marvelous advances it has led, and recognize in it the motor of all human progress, may behold in it, not a curse, but a blessing. But its irksomeness remains. What keeps any of us at work are our desires and hopes -- our wants and our pride. Kill hope and lessen desire by crucifying the feeling of personal independence and accustoming your man to a life maintained by alms, and you will make of the most industrious a tramp. For the law of our being is that we seek the gratification of our desires with the least exertion.

Why should charity be offered the unemployed? It is not alms they ask. They are insulted and embittered and degraded by being forced to accept as paupers what they would gladly earn as workers. What they ask is not charity, but the opportunity to use their own labor in satisfying their own wants. Why can they not have that? It is their natural right. He who made food and clothing and shelter necessary to man's life has also given to man, in the power of labor, the means of maintaining that life; and when, without fault of their own, men cannot exert that power, there is somewhere a wrong of the same kind as denial of the right of property and denial of the right of life -- a wrong equivalent to robbery and murder on the grandest scale.

Charity can only palliate present suffering a little at the risk of fatal disease. For charity cannot right a wrong; only justice can do that. Charity is false, futile, and poisonous when offered as a substitute for justice. This is the fatal taint that runs through all the efforts of the rich and influential to aid the unemployed, with which our newspapers now are full. Like the gatherings of clergymen called in Chicago by Editor Stead -- blinded leader of the wilfully blind -- their spirit is that of men pretending to look for what they are determined not to find; of men, like those of Moscow of whom Tolstoi tells, willing to do anything whatever to help the poor -- except to get off their backs.

Yet this is to be expected. For the question of the unemployed is but a more than usually acute phase of the great labor question -- a question of the distribution of wealth. Now, given any wrong, no matter what, that affects the distribution of wealth, and it follows that the leading class must be averse to any examination or question of it. For, since wealth is power, the leading class is necessarily dominated by those who profit or imagine they profit by injustice in the distribution of wealth. Hence, the very indisposition to ask the cause of evils so great as to arouse and startle the whole community is but proof that they spring from some wide and deep injustice.

What that injustice is may be seen by whoever will really look. We have only to ask to find.

What do we mean when we say that it is scarcity of employment from which the masses are suffering? Not what we mean when we say of the idle rich that they suffer from want of employment. There is no scarcity of the need for work when so many are suffering for the want of things that work produces, when all of us would like more, and all but a very few of us could advantageously use more, of those things. Nor do we mean that there is scarcity of ability to work or willingness to work. Nor yet do we mean that there is scarcity of the natural materials and forces necessary for work. 'They are as abundant as they ever were or ever will be until the energy radiated by the sun upon our globe loses its intensity. What we really mean by "scarcity of employment" is such scarcity as would be brought about were an ice sheet continued into the summer to shut out the farmer from the fertile field he was anxious to cultivate; such a scarcity as was brought about in Lancashire when our blockade of the Southern ports raised suddenly and enormously the price of the staple that English operatives were anxious to turn into cloth.

What answers to the ice sheet or the blockade? Need we ask? May it not be seen, from our greatest cities to our newest territories, in the speculation which has everywhere been driving up the price of land -- that is to say, the toll that the active factor in all production must pay for permission to use the indispensable passive factor. Across the street from the City Hall of Chicago, where 1,400 men, "the great majority Americans by birth and almost all of them voters," have been this winter sleeping in the stone corridors, stands the Chamber of Commerce Building, thirteen stories high. This great building cost \$800,000. The lot which it covers is worth over \$1,000,000! A few blocks from where the New York World is today distributing free bread, land has been sold since the bread distribution began at the rate of over \$12,000,000 an acre! As for the remotest outskirts, who has not heard of the mad rush for the Cherokee Strip?

If there are any who do not see the relation of these facts, it is because they have become accustomed to think of labor as deriving employment from capital, instead of, which is the true and natural relation, capital being the product and tool of labor. The very term "scarcity of employment," and its opposite, "scarcity of labor," come to us from a state of society in which the idea of labor employing itself directly on land had been forgotten. The primary suggestion of "scarcity of employment" is that the supply of labor for hire is in excess of the demand for its purchase. But the intervention of an employer by no means alters the relation between labor and land. As the price that labor must pay for land increases, the more difficult it becomes for laborers to employ themselves, and the less of the products of their labor can they retain; hence the larger the proportion of laborers forced to seek the wages of an employer, and the lower the wages to which their competition with each other drives them. While, on the other hand, the demand for labor by employers -- those at least who hire labor in order to sell its products, -- is determined in largest part by the demands of those who draw their purchasing power from what they get by their labor, since they are and always must be the great majority of any people. Thus the same increase in the price that labor must pay for land, which increases the supply of labor offered for hire, and decreases the wages it can ask, lessens also the demand of employers for such labor and the wages they can pay. So that, whether we begin at the right or the wrong end, any analysis brings us at last to the conclusion that the opportunities of finding employment and the rate of all wages depend ultimately upon the freedom of access to land; the price that labor must pay for its use.

"Scarcity of employment" is a comparatively new complaint in the United States. In our earlier times it was never heard of or thought of. There was "scarcity of employment" in Europe, but on this side of the Atlantic the trouble -- so it was deemed by a certain class -- was "scarcity of labor." It was because of this "scarcity of labor" that negroes were imported from Africa and indentured apprentices from the Old Country, that men who could not pay their passage sold their labor for a term of years to get here, and that that great stream of immigration from the Old World that has done so much to settle this continent set in. Now, why was there "scarcity of employment" on one side of the Atlantic and "scarcity of labor" on the other? What was the cause of this difference, of which all other social and political differences were but consequences? Adam Smith saw it, and in his "Wealth of Nations" states it, but it did not need an Adam Smith for that, as everyone who knew anything of the two countries knew it. It was, that in this country land was cheap and easy to get, while in Europe land was dear and hard to get. Land has been steadily growing dear in the United States, and as a consequence we hear no longer of "scarcity of labor." We hear now of "scarcity of employment."

In the first quarter of this century an educated and thoughtful Englishman, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, visited this country. He saw its great resources, and noted the differences between the English-speaking society growing up here and that to which he had been used. Viewing everything from the standpoint of a class accustomed to look on the rest of mankind as created for their benefit, 'what he deemed the great social and economic disadvantage of the United States was "the scarcity of labor." It was to this he traced the rudeness of even what he styled the upper class, its want of those refinements, enjoyments, and delicacies of life common to the aristocracy of England. How could an English gentleman emigrate to a country where labor was so dear that he might actually have to black his own boots; so dear that even the capitalist might have to work, and no one could count on a constant supply ready to accept as a boon any opportunity to perform the most menial, degrading, and repulsive services? Mr. Wakefield was not a man to note facts without seeking their connection. He saw that this "scarcity of labor" came from the cheapness of land where the vast area of the public domain was open for settlement at nominal prices. A man of his class and time, without the slightest question that land was made to be owned by landlords, and laborers were made to furnish a supply of labor for the upper classes, he was yet a man of imagination. He saw the future before the English-speaking race in building up new nations in what were yet the waste spaces of the earth. But he wished those new nations to be socially, politically, and economically newer

Englands; not to be settled as the United States had been, from the "lower classes" alone, but to contain from the first a proper proportion of the "upper classes" as well. He saw that "scarcity of employment" would in time succeed "scarcity of labor" even in countries like the United States by the growth of speculation in land; but he did not want to wait for that in the newer Britains which his imagination pictured. He proposed at once to produce such salutary "scarcity of employment" in new colonies as would give cheap and abundant labor, by a governmental refusal to sell public land, save at a price so high as to prevent the poorer from getting land, thus compelling them to offer their labor for hire.

This was the essential part of what was once well known as the Wakefield plan of colonization. It is founded on a correct theory. In any country, however new and vast, it would be possible to change "scarcity of labor" into "scarcity of employment" by increasing the price put on the use of land. If three families settled a virgin continent, one family could command the services of the others as laborers for hire just as fully as though they were its chattel slaves, if it was accorded the ownership of the land and could put its own price on its use. Wakefield proposed only that land should be held at what he called "a sufficient price" -- that is, a price high enough to keep wages in new colonies only a little higher than wages in the mother-country, and to produce not actual inability to get employment on the part of laborers, but only such difficulty as would keep them tractable, and ready to accept what from his standpoint were reasonable wages. Yet it is evident that it would only require a somewhat greater increase in the price of land to go beyond this point and to bring about in the midst of abundant natural opportunities for the employment of labor, the phenomena of laborers vainly seeking employment. Now, in the United States we have not attempted to create "scarcity of employment" by Wakefield's plan. But we have made haste by sale and gift to put the public domain in the hands of private owners, and thus allowed speculation to bring about more quickly and effectually than he could have anticipated, more than Wakefield aimed at. The public domain is now practically gone; land is rising to European prices, and we are at last face to face with social difficulties which in the youth of men of my time we were wont to associate with "the effete monarchies of the Old World." Today, as the last census reports show, the majority of American farmers are rack-rented tenants, or hold under mortgage, the first form of tenancy; and the great majority of our people are landless men, without right to employ their own labor and without stake in the land they still foolishly speak of as their country. This is the reason why the army of the unemployed has appeared among us, why by pauperism has already become chronic, and why in the tramp we have in more dangerous type the proletarian of ancient Rome.

These recurring spasms of business stagnation; these long-drawn periods of industrial depression, common to the civilized world, do not come from our treatment of money; are not caused and are not to be cured by changes of tariffs. Protection is a robbery of labor, and what is called free trade would give some temporary relief, but speculation in land would only set in the stronger, and at last labor and capital would again resist, by partial cessation, the blackmail demanded for their employment in production, and the same round would be run again. There is but one remedy, and that is what is now known as the single-tax -- the abolition of all taxes upon labor and capital, and of all taxes upon their processes and products, and the taking of economic rent, the unearned increment which now goes to the mere appropriator, for the payment of public expenses. Charity can merely demoralize and pauperize, while that indirect form of charity, the attempt to artificially "make work" by increasing public expenses and by charity woodyards and sewing-rooms, is still more dangerous. If, in this sense, work is to be made, it can be made more quickly by dynamite and kerosene.

But there is no need for charity; no need for "making work." All that is needed is to remove the restrictions that prevent the natural demand for the products of work from availing itself of the natural supply. Remove them today, and every unemployed man in the country could find for himself employment tomorrow, and his "effective demand" for the things he desires would infuse new life into every subdivision of business and industry, even that of the dentist, the preacher, the magazine writer, or the actor.

The country is suffering from "scarcity of employment." But let anyone today attempt to employ his own labor or that of others, whether in making two blades of grass grow where one grew before, or in erecting a factory, and he will at once meet the speculator to demand of him an unnatural price for the land he must use, and the tax-gatherer to fine him for his act in employing labor as if he had committed a crime. The common-sense way to cure "scarcity of employment" is to take taxes off the products and processes of employment and to impose in their stead the tax that would end speculation in land.

But, it will be said, this is not quick enough. On the contrary, it is quicker than anything else. Even the public recognition of its need, by but a part of the intelligence and influence that is now devoted to charity appeals and schemes, would have such an effect upon the speculative price of land as to at once set labor and capital to work.

This is not "mere theory." It is theory to which all experience testifies. New Zealand is today the one country which enjoys anything like prosperity in the midst of a universal depression. While population is leaving New South Wales and Victoria, and, in the search for cheap land, people are even emigrating to Paraguay, more than six thousand families have settled in New Zealand since the passage of the Ballance Act, a partial application of the single-tax principle.

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