

ECONOMICS FOR UPPER GRADES

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Economics for Upper Grades by Charles F. Dole

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CHARLES F. DOLE

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BY

CHARLES F. DOLE

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

ALBERT SHIELS

RECENTLY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

THE war has stirred mightily the hearts of men. Exaltation, sacrifice, and service have suffered their inevitable reaction. The development of industry has brought new alignments, and though these would have confronted us in any case, yet now, in the reaction from a great emotion, the world that meets them is a troubled, a hesitant, a disappointed world. Old conceptions, some of them as old as the nation, which were once accepted as we accept the sunrise or the rule of three, are called upon to prove their own validity. Democracy is no longer a question of a constitution or a code of laws; it is enmeshed in problems of wages and costs and distribution. We cannot understand our politics unless we study our economics. Perhaps it is as well that Americans are being compelled to analyze the truth of principles they so long have taken for granted, if for no other reason than that they have accepted them too casually, and too indolently. The political heritage of a people will not endure neglect. Such things as representative government, the rule of the majority, the liberty of opinion, obedience to law, were gained by painful effort, and only painful effort will retain them.

These ideas and others akin to them are the sacred things of the Republic. In the Egypt of the ancients, it was the duty of a priesthood to preserve the traditions of the people. Education and those engaged in education are the priesthood of the modern time.

They it is who must keep the torch alight and through the children pass it to succeeding generations. And because

at this time not only the defects of our democracy, but its principles as well, are being subjected to criticism, and to assault, because any intelligent discussion of these questions must hinge on economic as well as on political principles, the schools are charged, as no other institution is, with the mission of imparting sound knowledge and right guidance.

Governments, like other human institutions, are modified from time to time, as are the conditions that influence them. New policies are adopted, new duties undertaken. But, as in every evolution, principles continue, and only their applications change. If these principles of our people are misunderstood, or if some of them are attacked through ignorance or passion or lust of gain, then imperatively must they be recognized and reestablished, not for themselves, — for they are imperishable — but for the safety of society. As in other ages, so now education must reflect the needs of the period.

In popular conception, economics is a dry, even a depressing science. Sometimes, alas, writers develop an infinite capacity to make interesting things forbidding. For there are very useful and very fundamental truths of economics, as of politics, that as they touch the life of every citizen in a very realistic fashion, are, for that reason, of peculiar interest to him. Such truths lend themselves to a wealth of illustration familiar even to the very young. A boy or girl need not wait for the high school to know the difference between money and wealth, the absurdity of trying to create by legislation things that can be produced only by good hard work, the difference between liberty and license, the need of the expert worker in the expert's job, the inherent fairness of keeping faith on a contract freely made, — which is only a demand of decency that a man keep his promise, — the reasons both ethical and prudential why a citizen should consider the public welfare, the need of tolerance, the folly of

hysterical suspicion and wild accusation against any one not of his race or nation. These are not things that need really be learned, for their truth and justice even the wayfarer knows, — rather they are to be related to the life of the people in this nation and at this time. Especially must our pupils feel deeply, as well as understand, the wickedness of any type of rule which would compel the tyranny of a minority, whether of birth or of wealth, or of a proletariat, or of any group whatever.

A teacher who will use this text not as an added "subject" but rather as a comment and a method of adjustment of present conditions made vivid by direct local references, who will apply some of it to the life in the classroom and the school, will find a ready means of enriching the composition, the arithmetical problem, the reading period, the discussion of current events.

An appreciation of history, and in some degree of geography, can be facilitated by the use of this text material; for training in ethics and civics, the value of political and economic reference is obvious.

Economics as a science has infinite applications, some of them exceedingly complex, and not a few of the subject disagreements among economists themselves. But it is only with simpler relations that our children need be concerned. As they learn the fundamental principles and become accustomed to apply them not only to school problems, but to those that are now demanding the attention of all of us, they will begin to interpret the republic not as document or a declaration, but as a place where men and women may live safely and happily only as they are willing to work together and to give some of their own thought and effort to welfare. For a society like ours cannot indefinitely continue to survive in an atmosphere of suspicion, of doubt, of class antagonism, and of individual aggrandizement.

It is possible to conceive that the schools of an autocracy might be indifferent to matters political, social, or economic. This cannot hold true of a democracy. For the life of a democracy depends upon intelligent teamwork. A man's first business cannot be to feather his own nest, or to take care of his own health, or to provide for the enjoyment of his own leisure. These are all proper purposes in the educational scheme, and all useful for the making of better citizens. But they do not in themselves insure good citizenship. The first business of the public school is to give to pupils that knowledge and understanding, and to inspire them with those motives which will make good citizens. A pupil cannot be a good citizen unless he believes that he must seek his own welfare only through the welfare of the group of which he is a part, and unless he acts upon his belief. It is not wholly a matter of good will: it requires understanding. To repeat, the important business of the school is to make the good citizen. This first, and all other things may come after.

ALBERT SHIELS.

May, 1920.

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