

30 Years a Georgist:

Lonely—But Not Alone

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As I LOOK BACK on it now, before reading Henry George I was what was commonly called then a "half-baked Socialist" who felt sort of blindly that Karl Marx was right. We were given a thorough exposition on Marx's ideas in college, but not a whisper about Henry George. By accident I happened to pick up a copy of *Progress and Poverty* in a branch library in Chicago where I was living. As a result of reading it my whole viewpoint was changed.

Since then I have followed the lonely path pointed out by Henry George. What has gone wrong? Why are we of the Henry George movement still lonely? Why have the overwhelming majority of intellectuals followed the path of big government? Why haven't Henry George's ideas found wider acceptance?

The first obvious answer is that most of them never heard of Henry George and what some of them did hear about him wasn't impressive enough to warrant attention. Why haven't George's ideas found wider acceptance? I believe to understand this we must look at the thought process that people are subjected to during their lifetime. The average person from the day he is born is taught to believe in authority. As a child he is taught to obey his parents, and respect the teachers. He leaves college ready to believe that an authority called government can take care of him. Very few of us can accept the idea of standing on our own feet after we have been taught all our lives to rely on others.

Nathan Hillman, an attorney and founder of the Hartford extension, said he heard of Henry George in 1930, after finishing law school. He wrote an article for a Chicago newspaper concerning—*Progress and Poverty*—that was read by John Monroe who invited him to a meeting of the Single Tax Club. In 1933 Leonard Recker of New York organized the first class of the Henry George School in Chicago which Mr. Hillman joined. The late Henry Tideman (father of Robert Tideman of San Francisco) was the instructor. In 1936 Mr. Hillman moved to Hartford and started the school there which has its present headquarters at 252 Asylum Street. This is a portion of his message following the conference banquet. All who observed the personable Mrs. Hillman were aware that the loneliness to which he referred was not a serious problem.

Therefore, we Georgists are rare who stand up to society and say that we can take care of ourselves. All we ask for is freedom and social justice. I think Henry George recognized the respect for authority in all of us when he reiterated time and again that "those things that cannot be done well by private interests, should be done by the public." He did not hesitate to welcome public ownership of the transportation systems, electricity, water and gas. All of you have been reading lately about the bankruptcy of the New Haven Railroad. Let me read a few words from a campaign speech by Henry George while he was running for mayor of New York presenting his solution for the operation of railroads back in 1888.

"We believe that the railroads of the city ought to be taken properly

and legally by the people and run for the benefit of the people of New York. Why should it not be so? Any individual putting up a large building puts in an elevator, but he does not put in that elevator a man to collect fares. He gains the advantage in the increased value of his building. So we would take the railroads and run them free of charge. Let everybody ride who would and we could pay for it out of the increased value of the people's property in consequence." We should treat our railroads like our highways . . . free to the public."

I have heard many Georgists speak against old age pensions, yet in that very same campaign, Henry George said the following:

"Today the most terrible weight upon the mind of every man is the question — What will become of my family if I die? — and here in civilized Christian society, as we call it, when such a man dies, his widow and his children have to take care of themselves the best they can. I would have the surplus fund of the community make provision for those of that kind. I would take this vast fund, which is created by the whole community; that grows with the growth of society; that is added to by every improvement; that belongs, therefore, to the whole people — I would take a portion of it for just such purposes as that so there would be no widow and no orphan in the whole community who would need to accept charity."

So you see, Henry George believed in authority and government control up to a point. The words "up to a point" are all-important. If we are to put Henry George's ideas into effect, we must work through government; but we Georgists believe the government is not all-inclusive. Here the Georgists part company with the Socialist, Communist and big government boys. We Georgists believe that there are two major evils in our so-

ciety that must be eradicated. The first is land monopoly; the second, our unjust taxation system.

We believe the government should protect the right of every child born into the world to live in it without being charged rent for the privilege. Land is the source of all wealth and the source of all jobs. Every one of us depends upon land for our food, clothing, shelter and our livelihood. When the land, which means all of our natural resources, is controlled by a few, economic injustice must exist. Therefore, we firmly believe that in order to establish a just social order, land monopoly must be abolished.

The second evil that must be abolished is our present tax system which punishes a man if he works hard and rewards the idle land speculator. Under our present system, the more you work, the more government will tax you on your income. Here in Hartford, if you beat your wife, you will be taken to police court and fined once; but if you build a beautiful home for your wife, you will be fined every year in the form of a tax—and the more beautiful the home, the higher the tax! Every time we buy something, we pay a tax. Every time we sell something, we pay a tax. Almost 40 per cent of our income is taken from us directly or indirectly in the form of taxation. We now work at least two days of the five-day week for the government in order to pay our taxes. This is a great economic waste!

If we were to collect into the public treasury the rent of land created by the community, we could support our government through this natural fund without having to levy all of the oppressive taxes that are now doing harm to our economy. By abolishing all of the taxes and collecting the ground rent into the community by a tax on land values, we would, with one stroke, break up the land monopoly

Col. E. C. Harwood, James A. McNally, Nathan Hillman and A. P. Christianson at the conference banquet in Hartford, July 15th.



and solve our tax problem, as a high tax on land values would make it difficult to hold for speculation and only those who want to use land would own it. At the same time, we would get rid of all the taxes that are discouraging production. There would no longer be any need of huge welfare departments, tax departments, and all the other departments and hundreds of bureaus now claimed necessary for economic welfare. The main function of government should be to make sure that there is an equal opportunity for all and special privilege for none.

People want more than security in life. You can get security in a jail—you can get three meals a day and a place to sleep; yet people fight to stay out of jail. It is quite evident people want security and freedom. We can accomplish this through the single tax.

What can you and I do to hasten the day when the single tax will be put into operation? First, do not underestimate your own power. It is surprising what influence you can ex-

ercise amongst your friends, relatives and neighbors. You can be very effective if you will make the effort. You can widen your influence by joining all sorts of organizations that are civic-minded and through positions of importance in these organizations you can spread the good word about Henry George. If you can write, write letters to the newspapers and magazines, or even articles. If you can speak, speak to various organizations who are all anxious to hear how we can solve our economic problems. You can recommend students to the Henry George School. You can organize your own class and teach.

Of course, the easiest way to help is to give some of your money to encourage those who are trying to accomplish something in our field, the Henry George School, and other worthwhile organizations. It is up to you to decide how much time or money you will devote. All I can say is that on your answer depends the future destiny of our movement and our nation!

M. Murray McCune, Commissioner of the Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority, discussing blight at the core of cities, wrote, in a letter published in The Wall Street Journal, "The only valid solution, in my opinion, for the decay, misuse and blight in our cities is an ad valorem tax system which assesses only the land, not the improvements, thereby rewarding the highest and best use, where the current system does just the opposite."

The City of Calgary, Alberta, was requested by one of its aldermen, to make a study of the single tax theory. As a result a firm of Appraisal and Real Estate Analysts and Consultants wrote to the Henry George School for information "bearing on the recent operations and extent thereof of the single tax."

From "The Friendly City," Cordova, Alaska, came a similar request following a suggestion from Bruce Evans of Fairhope, Alabama. "Very little has been done taxwise since statehood in Alaska," the letter stated, "and we are endeavoring to get as much information as possible in the hope that the best system may be adopted."