

# The Critics Criticized

By JACOB SCHWARTZMAN

[This is the third of a series of articles by the same author, dealing with the objections of noted economists to the doctrine of Henry George, and the refutation of such objections. The first in the series, published in the November-December 1940 issue, answered the objections of Prof. F. W. Taussig. The second was published in the January-February 1941 issue and answered those of Prof. H. R. Seager—Ed.]

**T**HIS article will rebut a unique attack on Henry George. It was published during the Hewitt-George campaign of 1886, and was presented as a combined series of four addresses delivered before the Young Men's Democratic Club of New York. The book is "Progress and Robbery, and Progress and Justice; an Answer to Henry George, the Demi-Communist", by J. Bleeker Miller (Baker & Taylor). I recommend this book only as a classic of asinine hostility. I consider the work worthwhile refuting, firstly because it is one of very few books devoted to the sole purpose of demolishing Henry George's philosophy; and secondly, because the arguments are so typical of modern critics (who have not modernized their criticisms of George!).

The first address is known as "A Property Owner's Answer", and roughly contains the following objections:

1—No distinction exists between real and personal property.

(a) There is no reason for the division between personal and real property, on the ground that the former is the product of man, and the latter created by God. God created personal property as certainly as he did real.

(b) Labor exerted on land requires compensation in the form of the finished product, which includes land. Otherwise, a lapidary who has cut and polished a diamond would not be entitled to the diamond itself but only to the value given by such exertion.

(c) George admits that there are improvements which in time become indistinguishable from the land itself. Therefore, compensation would not be paid to labor for digging ditches, roads, bridges, etc., while compensation would be paid to labor for building houses, barns, etc. Would that be fair or honest?

(d) Who would pay for such improvements? Would it not be the landlords, whose appropriated rent would pay for the improvements of other landlords? Literally, his greatest advance towards compensating landowners consists in robbing Peter to pay Paul.

2—Justice requires landowners keeping their land. Where was Henry George and his friends, or their ancestors, when the ancestors of the present owners fought the cold, Indians, British, etc.?

3—There are historical reasons for private ownership of land.

(a) The critic's ancestor financed his tenants while they helped clear his land. It was his capital that went into such clearing, and helped the tenants to exist.

(b) If we examine the history of landownership in England, we will see that George's theory of an original cultivation of land by a community of independent farmers is a myth, and that the new land was then also settled by some man of means, advancing to dependents the subsistence and implements required during the hard struggle of rendering land arable.

(c) Landowners of New York State were the only ones who could vote originally. It was these landowners who helped win the Revolutionary War by supplying the Continental Congress with equipment—the only one of the thirteen States of which that can be said. Still, these owners were very kind, and were indulgent to universal suffrage in New York.

(d) Washington, Franklin, Madison, Jackson, and probably every name which Americans have been taught to revere were landowners.

4—George seeks to confiscate property.

(a) Even though he says only rent will be collected, he is really attempting to do away with the private ownership of land.

(b) "Taking property" has a bad name in civilized countries; even professed criminals prefer to avoid it, and to speak of dividing the stuff, the boodle, or the swag.

5—George is a communist, demi-communist, or socialist.

(a) George says, in answering critics of Free Trade, ". . . If this is Socialism, then it is true that Free Trade leads to Socialism." This shows George's mind to be that of an illogical, unpractical, and dangerous fanatic.

(b) George is a pupil of Proudhon and Considerant, the two French communists. George practically copied Considerant's teachings, and yet people think that George was original.

The second address is known as "A Business Man's Answer:"

6—Land speculators are entitled to their profit.

(a) If investors and builders do not come to a neighborhood, can the unfortunate speculator call upon the city to take his land at what he paid for it, with fair interest? If not, why should he be obliged to surrender the profit which he has acquired by his superior foresight?

(b) Speculators do actual work in anticipating the trend of popular demand.

(c) There is no difference between the foresight of a land speculator and that of a storekeeper.

(d) A land speculator exercises better judgment in determining what land should be used than would the community as a whole.

7—To prohibit real estate profits would lead to an eventual prohibition of personal property profits. Why, George himself already mentions doing away with patent profits!

8—There are ethical arguments to justify private ownership of land:

(a) Title to all real estate could be traced to the Crown, which represents the community, and which sold it to the landlords for good consideration.

(b) Landlords had to fight to obtain and keep the land.

9—It is impossible to tax land values without taking improvements into consideration.

The third address is "A Workingman's Answer":

10—The adoption of George's Utopia would lead to a lowering of rents and an increase in improvements for the workers, which would immediately cause the employers to reduce salaries.

11—Any attempt to adopt the communistic doctrines of Henry George would cause infinite harm to the workers. It would antagonize the powers-that-be. On the other hand, if the workers were to adopt the theories of Lassalle or Karl Marx, which, all must recognize, have a certain amount of justice, the workingmen's lot would immediately improve. Henry George even opposes trade unions.

The last address is known as "Progress and Justice; or, The Work for Federalism", wherein the writer endorses the theories of Lassalle and Marx, and advocates meliorative measures, such as laws which would tend to regulate to some extent the condition, wages, and health of the workingman.

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I will now endeavor to refute the above criticisms, point by point.

(1)

(a) It is true that everything in this universe owes its origin to what philosophers call the One. However, for practical purposes, we can, and should, make distinctions between land: i.e., something which lies outside of man and his products, and is untouched by human hand; and the products of man, i.e., visible, material creations upon which human labor has been expended. Land as such still remains outside of man, though man is surrounded by it, just as a deep-sea diver, who plunges through the water in search of pearls, leaves the ocean intact.

(b) The lapidary who has cut and polished a diamond certainly is *not* entitled to anything more than the value

given by such exertion. It is ridiculous to suppose otherwise. If I give my shoes to be repaired, I don't expect the shoemaker to lay claim to the shoes because of his labor. The only time the lapidary could lay claim to the diamond is when he owned it outright. But such a principle is not applicable in the case of the universe. Just imagine an aeroplane pilot claiming the cloud because he passed through it!

(c) Most improvements can be differentiated from land. If some clearing or other similar work is done upon the land, however, the tendency in time would be for the results of such labor to become blended with land itself. A man who sweeps the floor cannot presume to claim the building.

(2)

The fact that Miller's ancestors fought adverse conditions, while George's ancestors (supposedly) comfortably waited for the result before immigrating, does not essentially differentiate Miller and George. Were it otherwise, we might all lay claim to Paradise, because Adam, our common ancestor, once lived there. Nevertheless, we ourselves must prove worthy to enter Paradise!

Secondly, the contest is not between Miller and George, but between a number of landowners and the rest of the community, to the whole of which the land rightfully belongs.

Thirdly, Miller proves nothing when he speaks of these battles with hardships. Merely the fact that perhaps *my* ancestors also battled them (incidentally preserving their own lives) thereby permitting *my* existence here, is no reason why *I* should claim the earth.

I will answer in a later refutation (see 8) the contention that the owners are entitled to the land because they fought the Indians, British, etc.

(3)

(a) The fact that Miller's ancestor financed the tenants while they cleared the land is no argument. There were millions who had no capital when they came here, and who still managed to get a living from the land, and who survived without any financial help. Would the tenants need any "help" if they were free men, working on free land, and receiving all they produced?

(b) If we examine history, as is suggested, we will see that it is Miller, not George, who is advancing a myth. In primitive communities, the people worked the land jointly, and the land was owned by the community, not by any one man. But even if it were possible to find private landownership in early society, that would in no way destroy the truth of our theory.

(c) By admitting that the New York landowners were the only landowners who supported the Revolution, Miller fouls his case. Landlords as a class opposed the Revolution because they were afraid that it would result in a reversion

of land to the people. They were reassured only when the Constitution guaranteed their titles. Allowing New York landlords to keep their land merely because they supported the Revolution is like saying that some slave-owners should have kept their slaves because they supported the North, which fought for abolition of slavery.

The fact that the owners were "kind", and "allowed" suffrage is tantamount to saying we should venerate a king because he is kind, etc. This is to admit that the king could, (properly?) decide to be unkind, and forbid people to do what they want. History shows, however, that the landlords, as well as our rulers, were forced to grant universal suffrage because of popular clamor.

(d) To the example that some of our great men owned land, we can add that Washington and Jefferson owned slaves, which in no way would justify slavery. That great men often share the errors of their day is well known—but it is no justification for those errors.

(4)

(a) George never denied the motive our critic thinks he has discovered—to do away with private landownership. In fact, he makes that the solution of his problem. Even Miller could have read it if he were so minded.

(b) Land is not property; it is not something which could be owned. As a matter of fact, we could apply the epithet "taking property" to the landlords. They are the ones who "divided the boodle".

(5)

(a) Name-calling is the lowest form of debate. George in effect says, "I don't care what you call it, so long as you accept it." Taking a passage out of its context, for one's own purpose, is a familiar device and a cheap one.

(b) To call George a pupil of Proudhon is sheer nonsense. Proudhon favored confiscation of land and property; not only what man cannot own, but what man creates. George opposed Socialism; he believed in private ownership of the fruits of labor. Proudhon and other Socialists believed in a State-controlled society; George opposed State control, except insofar as the collection and administration of rent required it. Proudhon bewailed the conditions existing because of the supposed exploitation of the workers by capital; George shows that the conflict exists between landlords on the one hand, and laborers and capitalists on the other. Proudhon was the forerunner of Marx, who was a believer in totalitarianism; George was the apostle of freedom, believing in free men, free land, free trade, free initiative.

If George followed Considerant (who, according to Miller, advocated public ownership of land, but not public ownership of personal property), that is completely immaterial as far as the truth of the arguments is concerned. Spinoza followed Descartes' theories, yet his greatness is not thereby diminished. On the contrary, he is famed for coordinating

the latter's principles. Nothing in this world is new. George indeed acknowledges his indebtedness to the Physiocrats, who preceded Considerant.

(As a matter of fact, even though Considerant did distinguish between real and personal property, he was a pupil of Fourier, who believed in the cooperative phalanges, which were nothing but socialistic communities, such as the one which Considerant established in San Antonio, Texas.)

(6)

(a) This argument could have been used by the murderous Dillinger. "If I freeze outside a bank," he might have said, "and get nothing for my troubles, would the Government pay me for my pains in procuring this blackjack? If not, why should I be obliged to surrender my loot, which I have acquired by my superior foresight?"

(b) This really is the same as above. No amount of "work" by any speculator could enable him to claim something which is not his.

(c) The difference between a speculator of land and a speculator of goods (storekeeper) is in the title. A storekeeper can trace his goods to some one who had the right to pass them; but *who* owned *land* originally?

(d) This argument might be used by a kidnapper. He might claim that the parents did not know how to bring up the kidnapped child, while he did. As a matter of fact, the speculators prevent the use of the land whenever needed by members of the community. In a free society, each person may determine for himself to what use to put any object he may purchase, so long as he pays the price.

(7)

The assumption that social ownership of land would lead to social ownership of the products of labor is wholly unwarranted. The philosophy of Henry George upholds private ownership of the fruits of labor.

To do away with patent profits is not to confiscate personal property, but merely to destroy a monopoly which is a cancer upon production. As George puts it: "Every one has a moral right to think what I think, or to perceive what I perceive, or to do what I do—no matter whether he gets the hint from me or independently of me. Discovery can give no right of ownership, for whatever is discovered must have been already here to be discovered. If a man make a wheelbarrow, or a book, or a picture, he has a moral right to that particular wheelbarrow, or book, or picture, but no right to ask that others be prevented from making similar things. Such a prohibition, though given for the purpose of stimulating discovery and invention, really in the long run operates as a check upon them."

(8)

(a) The fact that one could trace title of land to a grant by the Crown would be no justification for such ownership. Firstly, the Crown represented not the community but some

pampered and tyrannical ruler whose whim could decide to whom such stolen land could go. Secondly, even the community as such cannot alienate land. It belongs to all men at all times. As George says, if the community were to deed away all the land to one individual, an infant born the next moment would have a right to a share of the rent.

(b) The fact that landlords—or their ancestors—had to fight to obtain and keep the land, is not an argument for them, but against them. It clearly traces all land to force and conquest. What was won by bloody might could not morally be passed on to future generations. Fighting, and undergoing hardships, alone, are not sufficient to lay claim to land. A robber has no right to his loot merely because he underwent considerable difficulty in killing a policeman.

(9)

It is true that land as such cannot, in political economy, be considered apart from the process of production. And it is true that the demand for land is always based upon the supposed profit to be gained from some improvement upon the land. But irrespective of how the demand for land arises, it will be a demand for the land itself, not for any improvement upon the land, and it will be that demand that determines the value of the lot. In this way, it is possible to tax land values, as distinguished from improvements upon land.

(10)

An increase in the improvements would not lower wages, but on the contrary, raise them. Miller evidently fails to understand where wages come from, but, like the little boy, imagines that food comes from the grocery. The employers as well as the employees would receive improvements, and, looking at it from Miller's point of view, we may with equal validity say that the workers would then demand higher wages because of the higher profits of their employers. However, wages do not come from capital.

Wages would rise for the following reasons: (a) Vanishing of land speculation would throw land open to use, thus raising the margin of production, thus raising wages; (b) abolition of taxation of the products of human labor would mean that much more to be distributed as wages; (c) the increased opportunities would result in a greater division of labor, and increased production, which in turn would lead to higher wages. Is it not clear that if employers were to pay employees less than the wages which they could obtain for themselves at the margin, it would pay the employees to go to work for themselves? With opportunities free, that's what they would do unless they were satisfied with their salaries.

Miller is wrong in assuming that rents would be reduced under the single-tax plan of Henry George. The greater demand for land, due to increased production and better opportunities, would raise rents throughout the world. How-

ever, since rents would be distributed in public benefits, this would be a boon to the populace instead of a curse, as it is today.

(11)

The possibility that Truth might engender a conflict between its followers and those who oppose it, is scarcely an argument against it. It is the honeyed argument of the king to his slaves that they be docile, or else they might arouse his wrath, so that he would no longer throw them crumbs.

Therefore does Miller advocate meliorative remedies, palliatives designed to take the minds of the people off the problem which really confronts them, and the solution that even "he who runs may read". The kingly crumbs shall not satisfy those who want bread. Trade unions have done nothing but perpetrate certain monopolies which thrive in our diseased community. They are organizations which breed force, which demand higher wages without stopping to consider where wages come from. In following the lanes of obstruction, they create great harm, since they prevent us from seeing the real avenue of progress.

A piece of classical irony is the final statement by Miller that George is a Communist, a fanatic, etc., one whose theories will destroy our order, and that therefore the workers should follow the theories of Karl Marx! Can it be that the powers-that-be see less danger to their privileges in Marx than in George?

## The Poor Children

By VICTOR HUGO

TAKE heed of this small child of earth;  
He is great; he hath in him God most high.  
Children before their fleshly birth  
Are lights alive in the blue sky.

In our light bitter world of wrong  
They come; God gives us them awhile.  
His speech is in their stammering tongue,  
And his forgiveness in their smile.

Their sweet light rests upon our eyes.  
Alas! their right to joy is plain.  
If they are hungry Paradise  
Weeps, and, if cold, Heaven thrills with pain.

The want that saps their sinless flower  
Speaks judgment on sin's ministers,  
Man holds an angel in his power.  
Ah! deep in Heaven what thunder stirs,

When God seeks out these tender things  
Whom in the shadow where we sleep  
He sends us clothed about with wings,  
And finds them ragged babes that weep!