Henry George and Europe:

Precursors of Land Reform in Germany; Marx and the Land Question; the Beginnings of the Georgist Movement in the Empire

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ABSTRACT. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* was translated into German and published in Germany in 1881, a little more than a year after its publication in America. But it was not through George's own words that his ideas first became known there. Germany already had *land reformers,* organized in small societies. They made his teachings known. However, unlike the case in Britain, Germany's leftists did not welcome George's land reform ideas. True, *Karl Marx* recognized and wrote about the role the land question played in the exploitation of labor and in his third volume of *Capital* took basic positions parallel to George's; it was published long after *Progress and Poverty.* The hostility of *Wilhelm Liebknecht* toward land reform reflected the German public's disinterest in the land question and may explain why Marx concentrated on appealing to the urban industrial worker.

I

Arnd, Gossen, Stamm and Other Precursors

THE DISSEMINATION of Henry George's ideas in Wilhelmian Germany took a less stormy course, and their effects a totally different direction, than in Victorian and Edwardian England. In contrast to Great Britain, where the study of *Progress and Poverty* strongly influenced the Liberal and Leftist circles, in Germany the teachings of the American social philosopher had only an indirect influence—via the organized land reformers. These publicists at first banded together in small, more or less short-lived societies.

In 1898, Adolf Damaschke founded the Union of German Land Reformers and eventually developed it into the largest land reform association in the world. Damaschke, similar to the leaders of the German land reform movement before 1898, was a keen student of George's social philosophy. The Georgist doctrine, though altered and diluted, was to influence in no small measure, thanks to

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Damaschke's Union's proddings, legislators and administrators in both the German Empire and the Weimar Republic.

The differing reception of George's works in Germany from that in Great Britain was due, first of all, to quite different economic situations. In 1876, Bismarck had initiated in the German Empire a change from free trade to a regime of national protectionism.[1] He thereby avoided the bloodletting among agriculturalists such as had taken place in the British Isles. This period in Germany was marked too by the beginnings of the "first great socio-political formation of the modern industrial-capitalistic society."[2]

Just as important as the economic differences, however, were the divergent ideo-historical assumptions in both countries. Unlike in Great Britain, when the first translation of *Progress and Poverty* appeared in Germany in 1881 there already existed a well-organized, ideologically established Left—the Socialist Workers Party. But land reform ideas did not play a role in its development, as will be shown subsequently, since its ideology ascribed no particular importance to land.

Before discussing this point further, however, we shall comment briefly on Henry George's German "precursors."

German authors who had published proposals for land value taxation (such as Karl Arnd[3]) or for land nationalization (such as Hermann Heinrich Gossen[4]) elicited no response from the public.

The only forerunner of Henry George who is of some significance is the physician August Theodor Stamm (1822–1892). To be sure, he had no practical influence on the development of the German land reform movement; yet through shocking accusations of plagiarism against George, he caused the latter to take a position which cleared up the question of George's own originality. Besides, his attempt—though unsuccessful—to win the Socialists' support for land reform goals is interesting for the history of land reform ideas in Germany.

In 1871, Stamm had published a book with the title (translated), *The Salvation for Needy Mankind.*[5] In it, he called, *inter alia,* for the nationalization of land.[6] (He also took up in great detail such matters as control of epidemics,[7] limitation of the variety of languages[8] and the fight against the "greed of the churches for property."[9])

For the propagation of the objectives stated in his book, among them that of land reform, he founded in 1874 a Society for Humanism. But it was dissolved four years later, since, as Stamm himself stated, "it simply could not have succeeded for the time being."[10]

In the preface to the third, revised and expanded edition of his book issued in 1884, Stamm made the following assertion about George's *Progress and Poverty:*

"*Progress and Poverty* was published . . . as a result of the previously initiated movement [i.e., through the Society for Humanism founded in 1874]. The main conclusions of *The Salvation for Needy Mankind,* published already in 1870/71, and of the resultant theses of the Society for Humanism are rendered here in the terminology of the old school of political economy."[11]

To imply that George had merely repeated Stamm's own conclusions, with which he was supposed to have become acquainted through the propaganda of the Society for Humanism, is absurd on the face of it. Firstly, according to Heinrich Freese, land reform leader and author of a history of the movement, the activities of this "modest Society . . . were known only to the inner circle of the membership."[12] Secondly, George already had published his first treatise, *Our Land and Land Policy,* three years before the founding of the Society.[13]

But beyond that, a comparison of the two books shows that the authors have little in common. In Stamm's case, the land reform ideas are intermingled with a series of philanthropic and socialistic goals, such as the previously mentioned epidemic control and a demand for the creation of "national industries."[14]

The symbiosis of natural law and economics, in other words, the core of George's tenets, is completely lacking in the theories of the German physician. *The Salvation for Needy Mankind* is not grounded in natural law, nor does the author make any effort to introduce, where necessary, a politico-economic perspective.

At the same time, when Stamm does describe facts related to political economy—without, throughout, defining his terms—he enmeshes himself in contradictions.[15]

Stamm's insinuations against Henry George in the preface of the third edition of *The Salvation for Needy Mankind* can be explained only by his idea, one that must be called pathological, that he was being plagiarized by other land reformers. To this point, Stamm did, in fact, suggest in the same preface that Alfred Russel Wallace[16] was indebted to him for his work about land reform.[17] Furthermore, he carried on a fight lasting many years, which even went through the courts,[18] with the founder of the German land reform movement, Michael Flürscheim, about the question of priority of authorship.

In 1887, George responded to the physician's accusations with an open letter to the German land reformers. This letter was published the same year in the land reform periodical *Deutsch Land* (German Land) in a "rather awkward" translation. [The text is here translated back into English with no effort to follow the supposedly "awkward" rendering—tr.]

"At the time when I wrote *Progress and Poverty* (and in fact until quite recently), I had never heard of Dr. Stamm; but I am ready to grant Dr. Stamm the honor of having gone into battle before me. When I spoke in Oxford, England,

Mr. Marshall, the Professor of Economics, declared that there was nothing in *Progress and Poverty* that was both new and true. I replied that I was quite willing to accept this characterization of my book, since what is true cannot be new. And that which gives me the certainty that the conclusions I have reached are essentially true is the fact that so many persons have independently reached the same ones."[19]

II

German Marxists and Land Reform

AUGUST THEODOR STAMM is of interest for the history of land reform in Germany, not because of his writings, but because of his activities among the Social Democrats, since, as mentioned earlier, he tried to convince the socialists of the paramount importance of land nationalization. For this purpose, he joined the Social Democratic Workers Party,[20] in whose Sixth Party Congress in Coburg, in 1874, he participated as delegate. There, he moved that the following sentence be placed at the end of the party platform decided upon in 1869, in Eisenach, a platform which, incidentally, made no mention whatsoever of the land reform question[21]: "A very significant part of unearned income is derived from private real property; we therefore demand the total abolition of private landownership through a just process of expropriation."[22] By a vote of 49 to four, the party conference refused to even discuss this motion.[23]

The Marxist, Wilhelm Liebknecht, who had founded the Social Democrats in 1869, commented as follows at the Congress on the proposed motion: "Stamm's proposals . . . are based on a fundamentally false view. The land does not have any economic value without human labor. To make human labor free, that is the goal of Social Democracy. When labor is free, land will also be free."[24]

In the following year, 1875, at the merger convention at Gotha, the Socialist Workers Party (as it called itself now, dropping the qualifier "Democratic") passed a new program which, despite some concessions to the undogmatic Lassalleans, carried the imprint of the "Eisenachers" and was composed largely by Liebknecht.[25] At the beginning of the program one finds again his emphasis of the previous year on the central position of labor: "Labor is the source of all wealth and of all culture,"[26] and the statement continues: "In today's society, the means of production are monopolized by the capitalist class; the consequent dependence of the working class is the cause of all misery and of slavery in every form."[27] The motion put forward by a few delegates from Leipzig, to expand this sentence to include the word "landowners" to those monopolizing the means of production, was defeated.[28]

In the explanation of the causes of economic poverty, which became part of the Gotha program, there is no word about the importance of private land monopoly for the capitalistic system. This may well be because this program was tailored quite deliberately for the urban workers. It sought to explain "misery and slavery" of only the industrial proletariat, and in fact in the cities the land-ownership question did not, at first glance, play a decisive role. In the foreground here was the confrontation between the working class and industrial capital. It was for this reason that Liebknecht failed to realize that the dependence of the working class was brought about at least equally by the monopolistic position of the landowners.

In contrast to Liebknecht, Karl Marx was thoroughly convinced of the special significance of land for production, and of land-ownership conditions for the capitalistic economic order. In his "Margin Notes to the Program of the German Workers Party,"[29] a critique of the Gotha program, he wrote as follows about Liebknecht's thesis that labor was the sole source of wealth and culture:

"Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is equally the source of commodities (which is, after all, what actual wealth consists of!) as labor, which is itself but the manifestation of a force of nature."[30] Marx here held a view similar to Henry George, who entitled one chapter of *Progress and Poverty* "The Enslavement of Laborers the Ultimate Result of Private Property in Land."[31]

It followed for Marx, according to his critique of the first sentence of the Gotha program, "from the natural exigence of labor that the man who has no other property than his working power will have to be the slave of other men who have made themselves owners of the objective working conditions,"[32] first and foremost the slave of landowners.[33]

Marx, furthermore, sees in the monopoly of landowners, the foundation of the capitalistic monopoly. He comments thus on the statement in the Gotha program that the monopoly over the means of production lies in the hands of the capitalistic class:

"In today's society, the means of production are monopolized by landowners (the monopoly of landed property is actually the basis of the capitalistic monopoly) and of the capitalists."[33]

Equally critical of the statement regarding capitalistic monopoly, Friedrich Engels wrote in a letter in 1875 to August Bebel, co-founder of the Social Democrats in 1869, about the Gotha program: "The whole matter is utterly disorganized, confused, incoherent, illogical, and disgraceful. If there were, among the bourgeois press, even a single critical mind, he would have gone through this program sentence by sentence, examined each one for its real content, exposed all the nonsense to the light of day, developed the contradictions and economic blunders (for example: that the means of labor are today under 'the

monopoly of the capitalistic class,' as if there were no landowners; that talk about 'liberation of work,' rather than of the working-class—actually, work is, on the contrary, much too free today!), and would have made our Party horribly ridiculous."[34]

With regard to the "Margin Notes to the Program of the German Workers Party," these were not thoughts developed *ad hoc.* (These "glosses" were labeled as the sum total of Marx's entire work by the publishers of the edition cited here.)[35] Marx's views about the significance of landownership conditions are also detailed in *Capital:*

The 24th chapter of the first volume, entitled "The So-Called Original Accumulation," is taken up, to a large extent, by the land question. The author writes about the origin of the capitalistic class: "The expropriation of the rural producer, the farmer, from the land is the foundation of the whole process."[36] In the third volume, Marx speaks no longer only of the expropriation of the farmer, but also of the "expropriation of the great mass of the people from the land" as the prior condition for capitalistic production. He stresses, moreover, that the monopoly of landownership is not merely a "historical" presupposition, for it "remains the continual foundation of the capitalistic production method as well as of all previous production methods which rest on the exploitation of the masses."[37]

Similar to George, Marx also sees the difference between capitalist and landowner as lying in their different relationships to the production process. In the third volume of the *Capital,* he says: "To the same degree to which [the production of value added and product added] develops, the capacity of real property develops so as to snatch away an ever-increasing part of this value added by means of its monopoly over land. . . . The capitalist at least is an independent functionary in the development of such value added and product added. But the landowner has merely to take possession, without any effort on his part, of this incremental share of the value added and product added."[38]

No doubt Franz Oppenheimer had in mind these comments by Marx regarding the nature and effects of the landowner's monopolistic position when he wrote: "Marxists scoff at Henry George and all other 'land reformers' because they indict the monopoly of the soil alone. They are pained when I quote certain sentences of their own master, proving him to be one of us heretics."[39]

This analysis of the social ills[40] would have led one to expect that the mature Marx would have placed, among the first items in his catalog of demands, the expropriation of the landowners. But in actuality, Marx's position closely resembled the Gotha program of 1875 in practical terms. His fight, too, was directed primarily against industrial capital, while in his work as a whole the subject of

land monopoly, which he recognized as playing a special role in capitalistic exploitation, receded far into the background.[41]

The Anglo-American historian Francis Neilson tried to give a psychological explanation for this fact: Marx had come to the realization only after completion of 700 pages of his chief work, and he did not have the strength to start over again.[42]

In reality, Marx, already at the beginning of writing *Capital,* saw in the land the "universal means of labor," the "*locus standi,*" the "area of operations" for the workers.[43] If he did not draw the expected conclusions from these observations, it may have been because of the consideration that tenant farmers and agricultural laborers, who felt the burden of land monopoly most directly, were hardly accessible to his ideas.[44] For a revolutionary movement one could win over only an urban proletariat; this seemed capable of being mobilized against industrial capital, but hardly against landed property.

But the fact is that, aside from such tactical considerations, Marx was thoroughly in agreement with Henry George regarding the theoretical assessment of the production factor, land. The teachings of both see the private monopoly of land as the ultimate cause of the virtual enslavement of the workers and demand (according to the formulation of the Communist Manifesto) the "utilization of land rent for national expenditures."[45]

Still, George wanted only land values to be confiscated; Marx and his followers espoused the nationalization of capital as well as of land. In their propaganda, capital played, as already discussed, the leading role, indeed for Liebknecht the only one. George regarded land rent as the only legitimate source of revenue for the State; capital wealth and interest as well as wages were to remain untaxed private property. The socialist program, in contrast, saw "in the private property arrangements no limits whatsoever for the objectives of taxation policy . . . but rather [viewed] the diminution of private property as a path toward the desired form of 'Economic democracy.' " (Johannes Messner[46]).

To achieve this goal, German socialism advocated the imposition of a tax, the source of which was to be the yield from the land *and* from capital *and* from labor, namely the "total product of the production processes in the state."[47] In the Gotha program of 1875, as had been the case in the 1869 Eisenach program,[48] a "single, progressive income tax for state and communities instead of all prevailing . . . taxes"[49] is called for, a tax which had only its singleness in common with Henry George's "Single Tax."[50]

Notes

1. Wilhelm Treue, *Deutsche Geschichte von 1806 bis 1890* (Berlin, 1961), p. 113.
2. *Op. cit.,* p. 115*ff.*

3. Karl Arnd (1788–1877; on the biography *cf.* Peter Fuchs, "Arnd, Karl," *Neue Deutsche Biographie,* (NDB) I (Berlin, 1953), p. 357, and Louise Sommer, "Arnd, Karl," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences,* II (New York, 1953), p. 218). He proposed in his book *Die naturgemässe Steuer* (Frankfurt, 1852) a single land tax (*passim*). But, unlike George, he believed such a tax would result in maintaining a low wage level (*op. cit.,* p. 321).

4. Hermann Heinrich Gossen (1810–1877; on his biography see Alexander Mahr, "Gossen, Hermann Heinrich," NDB VI (Berlin, 1964), p. 649*ff,* and Friedrich A. Hayek, "Gossen, Hermann Heinrich," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences,* VII (New York, 1953), p. 3)), in his work *Entwicklung der Gesetze des menschlichen Verkehrs und der daraus fliessenden Regeln für menschliches Handeln* (Braunschweig, 1854), Gossen also demanded the nationalization of land with compensation of the owners (p. 250ff.)

5. August Theodor Stamm, *Die Erlösung der darbenden Menschheit* (Zurich, 1871); in 1873, a second edition appeared there which was enlarged by an appendix, but was otherwise unchanged.

6. *Op. cit.,* p. 128ff.

7. *Op. cit.,* p. 190ff.

8. *Op. cit.,* p. 258ff.

9. *Op. cit.,* p. 50ff.

10. August Theodor Stamm, *Die Erlösung der Darbenden Menschheit* [sic], 3rd rev. and enlarged edition (Stuttgart, 1884), p. XXVI.

11. *Op. cit.,* p. xxvii; *cf.* also Stamm, *Die sozial-politische Bedeutung der Bodenreform* (Minden, 1885), p. 11.

12. Heinrich Freese, *Die Bodenreform* (Berlin, 1918), p. 46.

13. *Cf.* Silagi, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology,* 45 (1986), p. 207.

14. Stamm, *Die Erlösung . . .,* 1st ed., p. 167*ff.*

15. Two examples of contradictions in the *Erlösung der darbenden Menschheit:* 1) Stamm disputes that capital is "accumulated labor," and this because its acquisition rests largely on "unpaid surplus labor" (1st ed., p. 110) and thus on an unjust basis; as if unpaid ("surplus") labor were not also some kind of labor. 2) Stamm writes: "Individual property is a blessing. . . . The goods which man acquires through labor he may keep as his property as far as he wishes." (*op. cit.,* p. 133). Accordingly, the individual should also, if he wished, be permitted to keep the interest-bearing portion of the goods produced by him. But precisely that the author denies a few pages later, where he condemns "interest created without labor by the capital owner" (*op. cit.,* p. 136).

16. *Cf.* Silagi, AJES, 48 (1989), p. 116*ff.*

17. Stamm, *Die Erlösung . . .,* 3rd ed., p. XXIX f.

18. *Cf.* [Michael Flürscheim], "Wer ist der erste deutsche Vorkämpfer für die Bodenreform?" *Deutsch Land,* II (Bubenheim, 1888), pp. 51–55.

19. "Ein Brief von Henry George," *Deutsch Land,* I, 1887, p. 68 f.

20. Adolf Damaschke, *Geschichte der Nationalökonomie,* II, 13th ed. (Jena, 1922), p. 410.

21. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Allgemeinen Deutschen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterkongresses zu Eisenach am 7., 8. und 9. August 1869* (Leipzig, 1869), *passim.*

22. *Protokoll über den sechsten Congress der Sozial-demokrati-schen Arbeiterpartei abgehalten zu Coburg am 18., 19., 20. und 21. Juli 1874* (Leipzig, 1874), p. 76; the original, longer form of Stamm's proposal can be found in the same work, p. 6f.

23. *Op. cit.,* p. 80.

24. *Op. cit.,* p. 79.

25. *Cf.* Ludwig Bergsträsser, *Geschichte der politischen Parteien in Deutschland,* 8/9th ed. (Munich, 1955), p. 170.

26. "Protokoll des Vereinigungs-Kongresses der Sozialdemokraten Deutschlands, abgehalten zu Gotha, vom 22. bis 27. Mai 1875," in *Die ersten deutschen Sozialisten-Kongresse* (Frankfurt, 1906), pp. 68–148.

27. *Loc. cit.*

28. *Op. cit.,* p. 74.

29. Karl Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der Deutschen Arbeiterpartei," *Kritik des Gothaer Programms,* 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1946), pp. 14–34 (initially published incomplete under the title "Zur Kritik des sozialdemokratischen Parteiprogramms" in *Die Neue Zeit,* IX, 1, 1890–91, pp. 561–575.

30. "Randglossen . . .," p. 14.

31. *Progress and Poverty,* p. 345.

32. "Randglossen . . .," p. 15.

33. For Marx, the "objective working conditions" are not the "things which mediate between the effect of labor and its object" (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* I, Vol. 23, of the Marx-Engels joint edition, published, Inst. für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, 7th ed. (Berlin, 1972, p. 195)). Thus, they are not the "means of production" but the "objective conditions which are required for the [labor] process to take place. They do not enter into this process directly, but without them it cannot go on, or only incompletely. The general means of labor of this kind is . . . the land itself, for it gives the worker his *locus standi* and to his process the field of employment. Means of labor of this sort which are mediated through work are, *e.g.,* edifices of labor, canals, streets etc." (*Loc. cit.*) The concept of the objective working conditions, therefore, stands for the classical production factor, land, and Marx here includes the improvements with land, rather than with capital, the "means of production." "Owners of the objective working conditions"—consequently—are for Marx in foremost place the landowners.

34. "Randglossen . . .," p. 17.

35. The letter is reprinted by August Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben,* II (Stuttgart, 1911), p. 277 f. (278).

36. *Kritik des Gothaer Programms,* p. 3.

37. *Das Kapital,* I, p. 741*ff.*

38. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital,* III, Vol. 25, of the Marx-Engels Joint Edition, publ., Inst. für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, 4th ed. (Berlin, 1970), p. 630.

39. *Op. cit.,* p. 651.

40. Franz Oppenheimer, "Communism and the World Crisis, IV," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology,* II, 1942–43, p. 61.

41. On similar statements by other socialists *cf.* Max Hirsch, *Democracy versus Socialism,* 2nd ed. (Leeds, 1924), p. 452*ff.*

42. "Marx focuses his attention primarily on the factory, and only incidentally and accidentally on the land on which the factory was built." (John Haynes Holmes, "Henry George and Karl Marx," *American Journal of Econ. and Sociology,* VI, 1946–47, p. 162.

43. "When Marx and Engels became conscious of this phenomenon it is difficult to say. But no one that I have read has explained why Marx put the cart before the horse in the first seven parts of his work. Not until the chapter on 'The So-called Primitive Accumulation' does he give the reader the full story of the expropriation of the tillers of the soil and, consequently, the congestion of labor in towns. How different his work would have been if he had dealt with the cause of the evil conditions before he touched the effect. It seemed as if he was suddenly struck—after writing more than 700 pages—by the fallacy of his own creation, for he says: 'The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process.' Surely it is amazing that our authors did not see the significance of the historical evidence

they turned up about primitive communities. . . . It seems to me that they learned the cause of the trouble too late and they had not the wit or courage to reconstruct the work upon a sound economic basis." (Francis Neilson, "The Twilight of Marx," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology,* VIII, 1948–49, pp. 13–15.

44. *Das Kapital,* I, p. 195; *cf.* note 33, above.

45. *Cf.* Hans Georg Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie.* (Tübingen, 1970), p. 1*ff.*, espec. p. 7.

46. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (Berlin, 1948), p. 32; see also Oscar J. Hammen, "Marx and the Agrarian Question," *American Historical Review,* 77, 1972, pp. 679–704, *passim,* and p. 683: "From a theoretical point of view Marx and Engels always felt that the peasant, farm tenant, and agricultural worker were subjected to the same nightmare of exploitation by the bourgeois, capitalist society as were the proletariat, even if in a less apparent, direct, and massive manner."

47. Johannes Messner, *Das Naturrecht,* 5th ed. (Innsbruck, 1966), p. 906.

48. Arno Auerswald, *Beiträge zur Lehre von der einzigen Steuer* (Greifswald, 1922), p. 87.

49. "Protokoll . . . Eisenach . . .," p. 37.

50. "Protokoll des Vereinigungskongresses . . . zu Gotha," p. 69.

51. On this problem *cf.* Adolf Damaschke, *Marxismus und Bodenreform* (Jena, 1922), *passim,* and Frank McEachran, *Henry George and Karl Marx* (New York, 1936), *passim.*

April 23d Public Lecture at St. John's University

THE 1992 HENRY GEORGE LECTURE at St. John's University will be presented by Professor Gary S. Becker on April 23d in the early afternoon from 12.45 to 2.10 at Bent Hall Auditorium at the University's Queen's campus in Jamaica. His topic is "Education, Labor Force Quality, and the Economy." The public is invited.

Dr. Becker, University Professor of Economics and Sociology at the University of Chicago, is considered by many economists to be the world's foremost authority on human resource development. In applying economic analysis to such decisions as marriage, child-bearing, the education of children, and divorce, he has lead the way towards an immense enlargement of its scope. His column in *Business Week* extends his expertise and originality over current issues such as education and health care.

He is a Distinguished Fellow and past president of the American Economic Association and has received many other honors and several honorary degrees. He outranks all other contemporary economists in the number of his journal citations. He was on the Columbia University faculty from 1957 to 1969.

The series of lectures is supported by the Robert Schalkenback Foundation which fosters knowledge of the contributions to economic thought and policy of Henry George.

F. C. G.