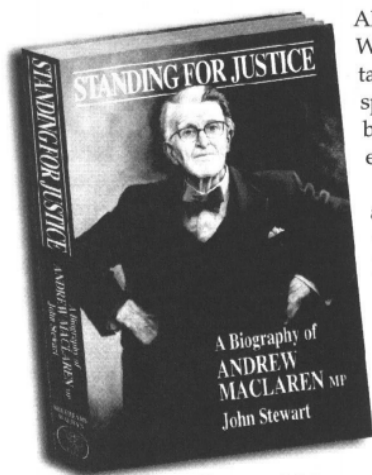


Books

Elementary passion

Standing for Justice: A biography of Andrew McLaren MP
John Stewart
Shepherd-Walwyn
£18.95 hardback



ANDREW MCLAREN WAS equipped with a talent for public speaking and fired by a passion for education and the arts.

As he stepped from a platform in 1908 he was commended for his oratory but was advised that his content was less than convincing. It was suggested that McLaren read Henry George's *Progress and*

Poverty. McLaren accepted George's diagnosis of the cause of poverty, his conclusions and, unlike Winston Churchill, never departed from them in his 92 years of life, of which two decades between the World Wars were spent in the House of Commons.

McLaren disapproved with pained distaste of any description of himself as a politician. Yet he was a proud constitutionalist throughout his two decades as an MP. His role in the House was as the lightning conductor – and sometimes the thunder – that brought down political humbug. He was a tireless teacher who opposed confused

thinking by returning to the beginning of political thought: man needed "air, sunshine, water and land" to sustain life.

There are some faults in this biography. Most importantly, the author does not highlight or fully explain his subject's political principles. McLaren constantly stressed that history was concerned not with events or personages, but with ideas which changed cultures and civilisations. He owed much of the greater part of his political thought to *Progress and Poverty*.

Stewart omits McLaren's moment of conversion, which set him to venture beyond his parish in Glasgow and find his way into Parliament. McLaren owed the greater part of his political thought to George's book.

The style is ponderous and the political reflections are over-simplified. Many quotations are too long to convey the essence of a character as immediate as McLaren's.

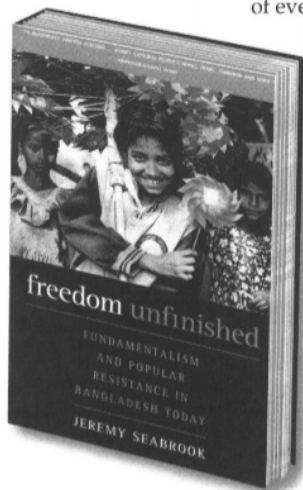
Politics is a fast flowing river. The



To build a strong bastion

Freedom Unfinished, Fundamentalism and Popular Resistance in Bangladesh Today
Jeremy Seabrook
Zed Books

£14.95 paperback, £45 hardback



THE BEST AND the worst of Bangladesh is explored in *Freedom Unfinished*. As a nation divided by a struggle over land rights, Bangladesh may see the landless seek refuge in religious fundamentalism.

In his book, Jeremy Seabrook seeks economic liberation achieved by giving the poor access to land. His account finds the tide

of events moving strongly in the other direction, with the poor struggling against land enclosure and ruthless exploitation.

The story of a group of landless people fighting for their statutory rights illustrates the general problem. As ever, the legislation is there but it is not implemented without a struggle against enormous resistance.

The Samata movement was

set up in the Pabna district to secure a hold on *khas* land, officially designated by the Bangladesh Government as land for redistribution among the poor.

The statistics are striking. Landlords have occupied most of the *khas* land, with Bangladesh's landless population increasing from 31 per cent of the people to 67 per cent. Moreover, 80 per cent of Bangladesh's people work in agriculture, but they own only five per cent of the country's resources.

The Samata movement identified some 12,000 acres of *khas* land in its working area and distributed 1,705 of them at a place called Ghugudah Bheel.

Freedom Unfinished describes what happened next from the point of view of the chairman of the Landless Welfare Society. He describes the struggle that arose from the landless being used to clear the land in partnership with the local elite (former landlords of the defunct feudal system), in return for title to the land.

The local elite tried to evict the landless with hired thugs (known as *mastaans*), though not before many landless people had registered their name to the land, and bought

changing events and the needs of the hour make it appear that the essential quality needed is flexibility and pragmatism. As Turgot remarked, the pragmatist reflects every image in front of him as faithfully as a pane of glass, but he retains nothing. Rather than concentrate on the structure of society, McLaren followed in George's footsteps by focusing on its foundation – the base of political architecture.

This biography offers a warm and well-researched portrait of this teacher of political thought.

Malcolm Hill is the author of *Enemy of Injustice*, Othila, 1998, £7.95



Andrew McLaren was also an enthusiastic artist as well as political thinker

it using the few possessions they owned. The local elite ignored these titles and started selling the land.

With persistence, many of the formerly landless people in that area have managed to obtain title to small parcels of land, equivalent to around one acre. But that one acre gives people independence and subsistence, room to build a house and earnings to send their children to school.

Coupled with the efforts of organisations such as Proshika and the Grameen Bank, much of the countryside has been saved from economic devastation. The remarkable thing about all these efforts is that it doesn't take much to turn things around, apart from a massive and united effort among the deprived to establish their rights.

Seabrook's book is a beautifully written account of the complex struggles over livelihood, identity and politics in Bangladesh. This is a nation that deserves more attention as a country where a strong bastion against the advance of fundamentalism could be built.

John D Allen is a journalist and editor

Buy the bestseller

"One cannot imagine a more beautiful combination of intellectual keenness, artistic form, and fervent love of justice" Albert Einstein

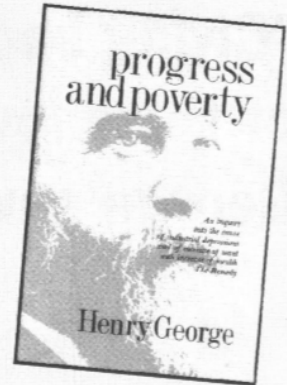
Although *Progress and Poverty* was written in 1879, it is still causing ripples. It is an inspiring masterpiece drawn from Henry George's life and observation of San Francisco's rise from a collection of tents into a thriving metropolis. George's thinking was profound and lucid. His book became a bestseller around the globe and necessary reading for such luminaries as Einstein, Tolstoy and Friedman.

Progress and Poverty was written at a time when American society was becoming industrialised with resultant unemployment and social injustice. In today's climate of acute awareness of finite land resources, the book offers a solution to problems

ranging across issues political, social and environmental.

Its economic thinking is experiencing a resurgence with the falling off of free-market economic models. George's granddaughter wrote in her preface to the centenary edition: "Henry George was a lucid voice... that pointed out basic truths, which cut through the confusion that developed like rot."

The HGF offers a choice of three editions of *Progress and Poverty*.

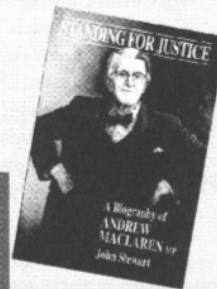


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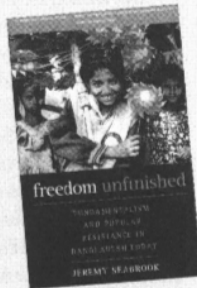
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