

LET GEORGE DO IT, TAX CRITICS URGE

Disciples of 19th Century
Thinker Convene Here

By EDWARD C. BURKS

There's a bombshell of an idea smoldering on 57th Street this week with a fuse 85 years long.

On hand at the Henry Hudson Hotel to fan the spark are 250 international "revolutionaries" from the United States and 26 foreign countries.

Their main idea, if carried out, would cause a revolution in land use and in everyday living. They propose junking the present widespread system of taxing real estate and the improvements on the land. Instead they would tax only the land, regardless of its improvements.

The idea would be to put pressure on landowners to make maximum improvements to obtain the fullest possible use of the land. Practical effects would be an end to slumlords and real estate speculators, according to the advocates.

Poverty Fought

They are all disciples of Henry George, a 19th century Philadelphia-born economic thinker, who set forth his ideas in a half-dozen books. He also ran unsuccessfully twice for Mayor of New York.

His key book, "Progress and Poverty," appeared 85 years ago. It was an inquiry into industrial depressions, and it maintained that increases in productive power are accompanied by low wages. Thus, according to George, poverty accompanies wealth in a vicious circle, and

the extremes of poverty are greatest in the richest cities.

George's theories have been criticized by some modern scholars as an oversimplification of complex problems. He advocated, for example, abolition of all taxes except the tax on land values.

Today's advocates of Georgian doctrine concentrate on trying to end taxes on buildings and other property improvements and on trying to get a system of equal assessments of land values. The overthrow of that monster, the income tax, has not been broached in this week's sessions.

A Double Conference

A double conference is underway. For the last three days members of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, with headquarters in London, have held forth. Starting today representatives of the 31 Henry George Schools of Social Science in the United States, Canada and eight foreign countries will meet.

Mayor Wagner has proclaimed this week Henry George Week in New York.

Joseph S. Thompson of San Francisco, president of the international union and of the Henry George School, emphasized a basic Georgian principle: that every inhabitant is an equal owner of the nation's land.

The idea is not to nationalize the land. Instead the Government would protect everyone's equal stake in the nation's land by insisting on equitable taxation based on the land's true value. This, it is argued, would force maximum improvement of unused plots or slum sites, which have extremely low and unrealistic tax assessments now. And the improvements would not be taxed.

Mr. Thompson, chairman of the board of the Federal Pacific Electric Company, was re-elected president of the union.