

Maurice William, Sun Yat-sen and Henry George

IN THE November 3rd issue of the newsletter, Human Events, appeared an article about Dr. Maurice William, a New York dentist who wrote a book which changed the views of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, father of the Chinese Republic, and thereby changed the course of Chinese history.

The book, which appeared in 1921, was *The Social Interpretation of History*, a refutation of the Marxian economic interpretation of history. Briefly, Dr. William's thesis was that "Marxian principles can be applied only through a class movement of producers, whereas democratic principles are the agency of a social movement of consumers... The social interpretation of history is based upon the theory that man's effort to solve his problem of existence is the propelling motive force in history. This is primarily a consumer problem." The "final, historic test to which all social systems are submitted" is this: "Do its productive forces register an advance in the direction toward a solution to the problem of existence?"

This book reached Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who was at that time a Marxist. Apparently it converted him from pro-Marxist to pro-democratic and pro-capitalistic views. Before retiring as President, he enunciated these new principles, which envisioned China as a democratic rather than a communistic society. Twenty-five years later, China did fall to the Communists anyway, but at least it was staved off, and constructive work was done meanwhile.

Several readers of both HGN and Human Events, recalling that Sun Yat-sen favored Henry George's principles, have inquired whether Dr. William had anything to do with this aspect of Dr. Sun's conversion.

It does not appear that Dr. William directly converted Dr. Sun to Georg-

ism, as *The Social Interpretation of History* does not speak of George. However, William's analysis is congenial to Georgist thought. (George posed the matter in equivalent terms when he spoke of the central economic problem as being not the production but the distribution of wealth, which he solved in a non-Socialist, free-market way.) It may very well be that Dr. Sun discovered George around the same period and fitted the pieces together, for, at the time of his retirement, when he was announcing the new democratic principles, he also told the following to American reporters.

"I intend to devote my future to the promotion of the welfare of the Chinese people as a people. The teachings of your single taxer, Henry George, will be the basis of our program of reform. The land tax as the only means of supporting the government is an infinitely just, reasonable, and equitably distributed tax, and on it we will found our new system. The centuries of heavy and irregular taxation for the benefit of the Manchus have shown China the injustice of any other system of taxation.

"A single reasonable tax on the land will supply all the funds necessary to put China among the first of the civilized nations in political and economic advancement. We will embrace all of the teachings of Henry George and will include the ownership by the national government of all natural monopolies. No private interest will be allowed to tax and exploit the people through control of any material or service which is a necessity to life and happiness.

"These reforms China is certain to adopt, and under them we will grow into an industrious, peace-loving, prosperous people."

The Chinese Republic did actually

adopt the Georgist reform in its new Constitution of 1946. But three years later the Republic went down before the Communists in one of the great disasters of history.

On Formosa, Chiang Kai-shek seeks to continue the principles of Sun Yat-sen. Land reforms have been instituted there, though they are unfortunately not so clear-cut in their Georgism as the 1946 constitution specified.

As for Dr. William, in view of his services, he was made an honorary member of the Chinese Republic's Kuomintang, the only American so honored. He expressed high regard for Henry George, and the copy of his book in the Henry George School library is inscribed "To my good friend Mrs. Anna George de Mille, a worthy daughter of an immortal father, with the warm appreciation of Maurice William." (There is also a book in our library, *Maurice William and Sun Yat-sen* by Maurice Zolotow, which tells the story of the influence.)

Dr. William spoke at the Annual Conference of the Henry George School in New York in 1949, just before the fall of China. He agreed that Sun Yat-sen's conversion to his own views and to those of Henry George went hand in hand. And he

made a desperate last-minute plea for Americans to come to the aid of Republican China.

Too late! But history hasn't recorded the last word yet, and if indeed the social interpretation of history be true, Chinese communism must certainly fail the test of being "a solution to the problem of existence." Nobody likes perpetual famine.

—R. C.



Land-Value Rating by Lord Douglas of Barloch, is a small, useful book, published in London, which explains concisely the principles of local land value taxation, and describes how land values could be assessed and how a tax on them could be collected. This practical book includes, as a working model, a map of a section of the city of Copenhagen.

Taxation's New Frontier, by Joseph S. Thompson, president of the Henry George School, is meeting a popular demand, and readers are enthusiastic in their praise of this new book which represents the philosophy that has made Mr. Thompson a leader and successful business man in San Francisco.

BOTH BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE AT \$1 A COPY FROM THE HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL, 50 EAST 69th ST., NEW YORK 21, N.Y.