

HENRY George significantly altered the social thinking of his contemporaries and those that followed him, particularly in his native land. No longer could the existence of poverty be disregarded. He had helped make people realize that much of it was due to social injustice which it was the government's clear duty to combat as effectively as possible.

After George died, the United States experienced a period of reform known as the Progressive Era, many of whose leaders acknowledge George as one of their prime sources of inspiration. Historian Eric Goldman reports that "an enormous number of men and women, strikingly different people, men and women who were to lead 20th century America in a dozen fields of human activity, wrote or told someone that their whole thinking had been redirected by reading *Progress and Poverty* in their formative years."

George's followers, both in America and abroad, coalesced into various organizations and engaged furiously in propaganda and politics. Early in 1909, Joseph Fels, manufacturer of Fels-Naptha soap, established the Fels Commission to finance single tax propaganda and politics both in the United States and abroad, particularly England.

*Men like Henry George are rare, unfortunately. One cannot imagine a more beautiful combination of intellectual keenness, artistic form, and fervent love of justice.*

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

During those years a number of single tax mayors were elected to office, including Tom L. Johnson, Frederic C. Howe, and Newton D. Baker in Cleveland; Samuel H. "Golden Rule" Jones and Brand Whitlock in Toledo; Mark M. Fagan and George L. Record in Jersey City; Hazen S. Pingree in Detroit; and J.J. Pastoriza in Houston. Try as they might, none of them could implant the land value tax in their cities.

However, the Single Tax Party was formed to

# PROGRESSIVE INF



## STEVEN CORD charts the colourful history of the Georgist Movement

contest the Presidential elections of 1920. The results were not encouraging, and were even less encouraging in 1924, despite a change of name to the Commonwealth Land Party. Here and there in the cities throughout the nation, little groups of single taxers would periodically meet to discuss their common philosophy, but the groups grew fewer and their size smaller with the passage of the years.

The Henry George School was founded in New York City by Oscar H. Geiger, a scholar who saw the need for a wider popular understanding of economics. It was chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York in 1932 and has since established branches throughout North America.

John Dewey became the school's first honorary president during George's time. John C. Lincoln, the Vice-Presidential candidate in 1924 of the Commonwealth Land Party, provided substantial financial support; he was an inventor of arc-welding equipment and a successful businessman.

Since the 1930s, the school has grown and expanded to have branches in, among other states, Philadelphia (George's birthplace), San Francisco, Los Angeles, Long Island, Virginia, the Carolinas and New England. The school continues to offer free courses in economics to the public. State coordinators have been added to the Georgist network, disseminating the Georgist philosophy in new areas.

The Georgist movement was by no means confined to the land of George's birth. An International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade was established which holds periodic international conferences. Henry George Leagues sprang up in many countries, but outside the British Empire, only in Denmark did they take permanent and extensive root.

Francisco Madero, first leader of the Mexican Revolution (1911), was a single taxer; he was soon assassinated. In Russia, Alexander Kerensky actually wrote a single tax provision into the new democratic constitution; the communists soon drove him into exile. In China, Sun Yat-Sen's single tax interest has already been mentioned; it has borne some fruit in the tax policies of the government on Taiwan. George's ideas had a scattered impact on some other countries as well.

But it was in Great Britain that the biggest battle was to be fought. Henry George's lecture tours had firmly planted a movement there. Public sentiment for a higher tax on land values to remedy extreme maldistribution of land was so substantial that no fewer than three Liberal Party Prime Ministers campaigned for the idea: Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, and Lloyd George, not to mention Winston Churchill, then a Liberal leader but later a Conservative Prime Minister.

An active land tax movement in Australia and New

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form the monopoly. Corporation after corporation was swallowed up by Standard Oil as it became a giant monopoly and trust.

This new form of organization, the trust, was a legal means to control an industry. The trust absorbed other corporations by making corporate leaders trustees in the newly formed trust.

Along with this enormous concentration of wealth (one per cent of the population controlled more than 99 per cent of the nation's wealth) came the prevalence of poverty. As the rural-urban relationship changed, its

effects could be witnessed in the major cities as slums, crime and personal degradation increased.

An increase in the number of farmers added to urban congestion. Farmers accumulated significant debts and were squeezed economically by the high rates of railroad owners. The indebted agricultural community had become heavily dependent upon the railroad magnates for their livelihoods. And the city workers had seen their pay checks cut as they tried to compete with the new managerial class.

IT WAS a time for reform. Presi-

dents Hays, Garfield and Arthur took action to make certain structural reforms. But hopes reached a high water mark and change permeated the political climate when Cleveland was elected a reform candidate in 1884.

With the passage of the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, "control" and "regulation" entered the lexicon of American politics. Railroads were ordered to establish "reasonable and just rates". Several years later, the Sherman Antitrust Act prohibited monopolies, stating, "Every contract, combination in the

form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy in restraint of trade or commerce . . . is hereby declared illegal." The era of governmental regulation had begun.

Socialism, the ownership and regulation of industry, was advocated by Daniel DeLeon, as he garnered support from thousands of city workers, especially those working in sweatshops. Many Americans, however, felt that socialism was a European import, and therefore contrary to American values.

Socialism became Americanized when Eugene Debs emerged from the Pullman Strike in 1894

as a national labor leader. Although this type of economic reform had its adherents, it was by no means the only advocated route to reform. Various types of socialism permeated the spirit of reformers as they interpreted conditions according to their own specific backgrounds and experiences. Three such reformers stand out as having significant impact on the reform movement in our history.

Following in the footsteps of Utopian writers like Plato and Sir Thomas Moore, Edward Bellamy

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