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THE CORE OF ECONOMICS AND THE BIRTH OF AMERICAN LABOUR

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When Henry George was born in 1839, the city of his birth, Philadelphia, was not yet an industrializing seaport. The city had lost its dominant position as a commercial center to New York City. The seats of the state and federal governments had departed, and the city slowly adapted. The embargo on foreign trade imposed by Thomas Jefferson, and the economic impact of the War of 1812, hurt Philadelphia's shipping industry but stimulated the growth of domestic textile factories and other industries. One result was a growing work force competing with one another for employment and wages. In 1835, rising tensions between the industrialists and their workers resulted in the first general labor strike in North America. The collective action of some 20,000 workers won increases in wages and adoption of the ten-hour workday.

Philadelphia was just one of the major economic centers on the Eastern coast of the United States that was rapidly moving away from the Jeffersonian vision of a republic dominated by nearly-self-sufficient freeholders. By the time Henry George left his formal schooling behind in 1855, the economic situation in Philadelphia was beginning to change even more significantly. Mechanization was displacing manual labor. One Philadelphia firm was by 1850 the nation's leading manufacturer of improved cotton mill machinery. Many others excelled in the production of tools and hardware. The entire state of Pennsylvania, with Pittsburgh in the west, emerged as the nation's primary producer of iron and steel. The situation is summarized by one historian as follows:

By 1850, the pattern of industrial location had been rather clearly established. [...] Erie, Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, and the Johnstown-Altoona districts were not as yet major industrial centers but well started in that direction. Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton-Reading and the Schuylkill Valley, Lancaster-York-Harrisburg, and the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and their environs were well advanced industrially by 1850. (Sylvester K. Stevens. "A Century of Industry in Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania History, 1955, p.56)

Sixteen year old Henry George was not ready to accept whatever work might be available to him in Philadelphia. He sought adventure and joined the crew of a ship sailing to Australia and India. He spent fifteen months at sea. A journal entry he made regarding conditions in India conveys just how different life was for most people in parts of the world where the very dignity of human existence was overwhelmed by deeply entrenched privilege and a large and rapidly increasing population:

One feature which is peculiar to Calcutta was the number of dead bodies floating down in all stages of decomposition, covered by crows who were actively engaged in picking them to pieces. The first one I saw filled me with horror and disgust, but like the natives, you soon cease to pay any attention to them. (Henry George, Jr. Life of Henry George (NY: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900. Chelsea House edition, 1981, p.35)

Upon his return home months passed before George secured work as a printer's apprentice. An older printer observed to him in conversation that in old and settled countries workers are paid low wages, but that in new countries workers are paid much higher wages. Some years later, Henry would investigate this issue and offer an explanation for why this was so.

Two individuals who were destined to form an alliance of opportunity with Henry George during 1886, were just beginning their own lives.

Terence V. Powderly was born in 1849 to Irish parents who had come to the United States in 1827, as so many other Irish families had done during this period. Samuel Gompers was born in 1850 in London. His family immigrated to the United States in 1863, establishing residence in New York City. As a young man, Powderly first found work with the railroad, eventually becoming a machinist. Gompers worked at home in the family's cigar business, eventually going to work in 1873 for a cigar company where, to his benefit in important ways, the workers were unionized. Many of his co-workers were German immigrants who introduced him to socialist principles and the economics of Karl Marx. Gompers became friends with Karl Laurrell, the former secretary of the International Workingmen's Association, who convinced Gompers that the objective of socialists should be to create an organized economic movement of trade unions rather than a socialist political movement. In 1871 Terence Powderly joined the Machinists and Blacksmiths International Union, was the next year elected its secretary and eventually its president.

Henry George was again drawn to the sea, and by the sea made his way to California with some hope of making his way to the gold fields. By the early 1870s, he had been living in California for longer than a decade. He had tried and failed at different ways to establish himself, married and began a family, and slowly found his way to significant insights into the causes of the economic crises that had had such a threatening impact on his own fortunes. His skill as a typesetter, his insatiable curiosity and his growing mastery of language finally set him on his career path, first as reporter, then editor, then newspaper publisher.

What Henry George had learned, what he had come to understand with increasingly clarity, was expressed in his article, *What the Railroad Will Bring Us* appearing in *the Overland Monthly* IV 1868:

For years the high rate of interest and high rate of wages prevailing in California have been special subjects for the lamentation of a certain school of local political economists, who could not see that high wages and high interest were indications that the natural wealth of the country was not yet monopolized, that great opportunities were open to all – who did not know that these were evidences of social health, ...

What Henry George was referring to when he used the term "interest" was not the cost of borrowing from banks or other creditors. Interest, as used in political economy, referred to that portion of production rightfully returned to those who employ tools, machinery, other forms of capital goods, and the workers who utilized them. The agent of theft of wages and interest from those who produced wealth, George concluded, was monopoly privilege – and the monopoly control over nature, particularly.

A significant development in Henry George's analysis appeared in 1871, in a small book titled *Our Land and Land Policy*. Although he still had much to learn from a reading of the works of Paine, Jefferson and leading political economists who had grappled with many of the same issues, what Henry George accomplished was significant. Its importance is captured by George biographer Charles Albro Barker. Acknowledging Henry's remaining weaknesses, Barker adds:

Yet makers of history are not often writers of it, and George in Our Land and Land Policy was arriving as an original thinker. As a critic, as an editor and writer informed on public affairs, as an influence in the Democratic party, as a tractarian he had arrived. (Albro Barker, p.154)

The California to which Henry George arrived as a very young man, a new land where opportunity seemed to be unlimited, quickly changed. He had come to see first-hand the power of monopoly in the form of the railroad. His fellow Californians responded by calling for reforms. A People's Independent Party emerged in 1873 to fight the railroads, and monopoly and legislative corruption, managing to win a majority in the state legislature. (David B. Griffiths. "Anti-Monopoly Movement in California," Southern California Quarterly, Vol.52, No. 2 (June 1980), p.93) In 1866, an article by Henry George in support of a bill mandating an eight-hour work day appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Union*. His position is captured in this brief excerpt:

The civilization which we now enjoy, the wonderful development of the modern Western nations, is due to the mind — it is brain not muscle, thought not sweat, that gives its superiority to that of Egypt or Peru, India or China, and the intelligence of the great mass of any nation is the exact measure of its power, wealth and comfort. In the adaptation of means to ends — in the boundless fields of discovery and invention, the increase of leisure, and consequently of intelligence, would be felt, and the stimulus which would be given to production and the accumulation of wealth, would be greater than any other which could possibly be applied. (Henry George (Proletarian). "The Eight-Hour Bill," Sacramento Daily Union, Vol.30, No. 4648, 14 February, 1866)

A few years before Henry George died, a young historian named Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a paper titled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" at a meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago. His essay, his assertions and conclusions, sparked decades of debate among historians over the role played by life on the frontier in the shaping of cultural norms and political institutions in the United States. As Alexandra Lough related to me upon review of an early draft of this paper: "For several decades thereafter, Turner's thesis was widely accepted and greatly contributed to the belief in American exceptionalism." The decades to follow brought increasing skepticism and criticism of Turner and his defenders. In a volume edited by historians Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* (NY: Basic Books, 1968), one historian after another presents evidence countering the assertion that access to free or very cheap land served as an effective safety valve to absorb excess population from the East and help to prevent the wages of industrial workers from falling to subsistence. A brief observation by one of the contributors to this volume captures the complex reality of the conditions that existed:

The industrial labor troubles of the 1870's and 1880's, when this potential safety value was supposed to be working, were among the most violent ever experienced in the nation's history. Steam escaped by explosion and not through a safety valve of free land. On the other hand, down to 1890 the flow of excess farmers to the industrial centers was incessant and accelerated. (Fred A. Shannon, "A Post-Mortem on the Labor-Safety-Value Theory," Chapter 10. In Hofstadter and Lipset, p.184)

Detailed analysis of census data and other available statistics revealed that most of the farms started on the frontier as the frontier moved westward were started by existing farmers who sold land in the East to acquire larger, more fertile lands. Wealthy individuals acquired land for speculation, leasing the land to tenant farmers who did not have the ability to purchase land outright. A large portion of those who moved to the frontier farms did so as hired laborers, then eventually moved into the growing towns to seek work, as many farmers fell into debt during periods of economic crisis or natural disaster. The result was that cities became the places where skilled craftsmen formed craft unions to establish themselves and set prices for their work, in defense against competition from foreign migrants. The model for such organization was established in 1827 in Philadelphia with the formation of the Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations. However, not until the 1860s did the effort to unite workers extend to those employed in the nation's factories.

The National Labor Union was formed in 1866, followed in 1869 by the Knights of Labor, organized in Philadelphia by Uriah S. Stephens. By 1878 the Knights of Labor grew to 50,000 members. By 1886 it had 700,000 members nationally. Within the trades union movement there were many individuals committed to socialist doctrines of one type or another. Their sentiments were reflected in language inserted in the constitution of the Central Labor Union, which stated:

[...] there can be no harmony between capital and labor under the present industrial system, for the simple reason that capital, in its modern character, consists very largely of rent, interest, and profits wrongfully extorted from the producer.

The progress of the trades union movement suffered a serious setback when the Panic of 1873 led to five years of depressed economic conditions. That year, Terence Powderly was dismissed

from his job because as head of the union it was feared he would cause trouble. He found work in Canada for a while, then returned in 1874 to settle in Oil City, Pennsylvania. There, he joined the local union and was selected a delegate to regional and general conventions. In 1879, he was elected Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, succeeding Uriah Smith Stephens, and remaining in this office until 1893. Powderly's biographers note that he was influenced by the Greenback ideology of producerism rather than by socialism, and so regarded most employers as "producers" with whom the union must work while standing up for workers' rights.

As recession deepened into the depression of the 1870s, the company Powderly worked for closed its doors. In 1878 he became the candidate of the Greenback-Labor Party for the office of Mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania and was elected to the first of three two-year terms. During the campaign he proposed financing public works projects through low interest government loans as a means of providing work for the many unemployed. After assuming office, he immediately reorganized the labor force and enacted moderate reforms, including the creation of a board of health, a sewage system, street paving, a new police force and fire department, and an investigation of municipal corruption (resulting in more efficient tax collection).

The rise of Samuel Gompers in the trades union movement began with his election in 1875 to the office of President of the Cigar Makers' International Union Local 144. It was in 1881 that Gompers and other union leaders established the loose organization of unions that eventually became the American Federation of Labor in competition with the Knights of Labor.

The paths of Henry George and these two giants of organized labor were about to become entangled. A small "Author's Proof Edition" of *Progress and Poverty* was sold during 1879 while Henry remained in California. In New York, the publisher D. Appleton & Co. agreed to use the plates and bring out the book. By a remarkable circumstance, a recent immigrant from Germany, C.D.F. von Gutschow, read a copy of the Author's Proof Edition and contacted Henry George requesting permission to translate *Progress and Poverty* into German. Slowly at first, the book found serious reviewers. At the urging of and with a small amount of financial assistance from John Russell Young, Henry George boarded a train for New York in August of 1880 to promote the book.

Henry George's first opportunities to engage the public in New York were on the tariff question, although Democratic party officials quickly realized that his *free trade* principles were far more radical than the party's timid call for tariff reform. Congressman Abram S. Hewitt then engaged him to prepare a report on labor conditions, earning Henry a small sum. As 1880 became 1881 the sales of *Progress and Poverty* began to increase. Over 1,000 copies of an inexpensive edition sold, as well as the first printing of the hardback edition. The German language edition was also selling well in Europe and in the United States. Alexandra Lough adds that *Progress and Poverty* also began to appear on the shelves of Knights of Labor libraries.

Henry George next took up the issues of land monopoly plaguing the people of Ireland, producing a pamphlet, *The Irish Land Question: What It Involves, and How Alone It can be Settled.*

First published by D. Appleton & Co., the pamphlet was reprinted by publishers in London, Manchester and Glasgow. George was now earning enough money from lectures to ease his financial stress. The Central Labor Union invited him to speak at a meeting held in support of Irish tenants. George also became a member of the Knights of Labor, and Powderly stepped forward and "made a personal declaration on the [land] question and helped Mr. George, who had joined the order, to get *Progress and Poverty* and *The Land Question* into the local assemblies." (Henry George, Jr. Life of Henry George, p.406] Henry wrote to Powderly:

I believe that the promulgation by you of those views marks an epoch in the labor movement. They will powerfully aid in bringing about, among the working classes, that discussion of fundamental principles so much needed, and without which nothing else can be accomplished. (Barker, p.433)

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Terence Powderly himself derived from Irish origins, and so also did great numbers of the Knights of Labor; and Michael Davitt had become a knight while in the United States, [...] As Davitt had done, in 1882, Terence Powderly now said things which half-promised that he would become a follower of Henry George. (Barker, p.433)

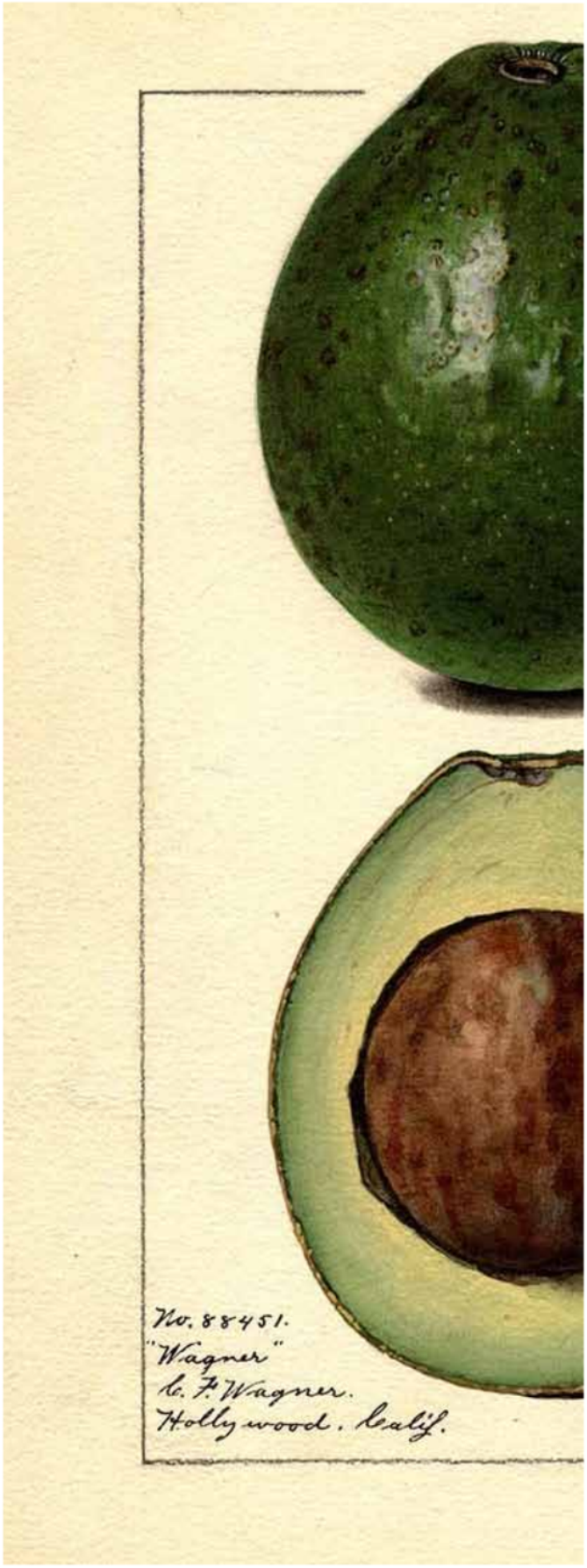
Among the rank and file members of the Knights of Labor, George did not command a strong and lasting loyalty among New York members. Marxists had been suspended from the Knights for organizing an unsanctioned boycott of a local company, and new leaders emerged who embraced anarchism. Many Knights also had strong protectionist views. What Henry George sought was to set in motion unstoppable momentum for the systemic reforms he knew were essential to change the course of history. The Labor movement in the United States recognized Henry George as a person whose reputation for honesty, integrity and commitment to service could serve as a spark to put Labor on the map.

Upon learning of Henry George's death late in 1897, Michael Davitt responded with a heartfelt remembrance appearing in the December issue of *The Single Tax*:

No other reformer of this century has held so unique a position as George has occupied in the English-speaking world. Greater man there have been, of course, within the circumscribed bounds of nations as political leaders and statesmen. But George was neither a statesman nor a politician, and yet not alone in his own country but here in Great Britain and in Ireland and away at the Antipodes, he evoked an enthusiasm for the great principle he stood for such as no other man of the century has called into existence without the accessories of party machinery or the platform of a Parliament.

Davitt added that Henry was "one of my dearest friends."

Disaster struck the Knights of Labor with the Haymarket Square



Riot in Chicago on May 4, 1886. Anarchists were blamed, and two of them were Knights. Membership plunged overnight as a result of false rumors linking the Knights to anarchism and terrorism. However the disorganization of the group and its record of losing strike after strike also disillusioned many members. Bitter factionalism divided the union, and its forays into electoral politics failed because Powderly forbade its members from engaging in political activity or fielding candidates.

At the same time, the personal relationship between Henry George and Terence Powderly had been growing for several years. In August of 1883, George had spoken at a Knights of Labor picnic in Baltimore, urging that working men and the women of their families must get into politics. Late in December of that year, George left for a lecture tour of the British Isles, a tour financed by Patrick Ford, editor of the largest Irish-American newspaper in the nation. "George's reports in the Irish World," notes Alexandra Lough, "certainly helped New York workers become familiar with his name and teachings." Upon his return, he was honored by a mass meeting at Cooper Union, even as most of those who enjoyed the benefits of entrenched privilege began to recognize the threat his ideas held and drew away. An increasing degree of support for Henry George's particular perspectives was now coming from professionals and members of the business community. When Henry George wrote in the Standard that he agreed with the Illinois Supreme Court that the evidence supported conviction of those accused of the Haymarket bombing, labor activists ignored his message that the enemy was corruption and the right response was "our duty as citizens to address ourselves to the adjustment of social wrongs." (Louis F. Post and Fred C. Leubuscher, An Account of the George-Hewitt Campaign in the New York Municipal Elections of 1886 (NY: John W. Lovell Co., 1887) p.29)

Samuel Gompers, as head of the newly-formed American Federal of Labor perceived George's view that closed union shops were a form of protectionism as basically anti-labor, and noted: "The Political movement was in inception a trade union movement. It was inaugurated by trade unions and conducted by trade unions." (Samuel Gompers, Seventy Years of Life and Labor, vol.2 (NY: August M. Kelley, 1967), p.313) The American Federation of Labor was formed to organize labor along occupational lines and by a concentration on job-conscious goals. Although the A.F. of L. declared its intent to represent the interests of all workers, the national units had created an organization comprised only of the skilled trades. Samuel Gompers accepted the practice of "trade autonomy" which recognized each national union's right to regulate its own internal affairs.

Meanwhile, the Socialist Labor Party called a mass meeting on July 7th at Cooper Union in New York City, at which members expressed sentiment for taking political action. On July 11th a motion was passed to establish an independent Labor Party and a newspaper, and in August, 402 delegates attended a conference where an overwhelming majority voted in favor of forming a political party.

Charles Albro Barker repeats the details of how the Central Labor Union decided to approach Henry George and ask him to accept their nomination to run for the office of Mayor of New York City. The idea was supposedly put to "a group of trades-union men" by Joseph Jackson, a reporter for the *New York Herald*. Asked on August 20th if he would accept the party's nomination to run for Mayor, George agreed on condition that 30,000 people would sign a document assuring him of their support. George then rewrote the party platform; the main plank was to be the single tax on land values, with other labor demands included. George was uncompromising on his commitment to taking on landed privilege. In a letter to Edward Taylor, Henry revealed his true reasons for accepting:

It is by no means impossible that I shall be elected. But the one thing sure is that if I do go into the fight the campaign will bring the land question into practical politics and do more to popularize its discussion than years of writing will do. This is the only temptation to me. (Henry George, Jr., pp.463-464)

Frank Genovese, a professor of economics at Babson College and for many years editor of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* concluded that "[Henry George] felt that the union effort was fundamentally directed against capital, which should be its ally against the landlord. Furthermore, he felt the ability of landlords to combine and hold out in a strike exceeded such ability by capital and by labor." (Henry George and Organized Labor: The19th Century Economist and Social Philosopher Championed Labor's Cause, But Used Its Candidacy for Propaganda," AJES, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January, 1991), p.115) Thus, one of George's hopes was that he could get labor leaders such as Powderly and Gompers to embrace the mission of destroying monopoly privilege and landed privilege, in particular, from the American System. Henry George respected those who earned what they obtained. For those who obtained wealth without offering anything in exchange, he felt not contempt but a deep sorrow. In an address he delivered in 1884, he put it this way:

A man may toil from early manhood to hoary age to increase his gains, he may in the struggle for wealth wear out his body, distort his mind, warp his instincts, and lose his soul, and yet be not a working man, his struggle being merely to take – not to make!
("Is our Civilization Just to Working Men?" spoken at the Ninth Church Congress of the Episcopal Church at Detroit, 8 October)

Despite heroic efforts, Henry George was not elected Mayor of New York City. He came in second to Abram Hewitt but ahead of Theodore Roosevelt. Henry thought the defeat a setback only. "We have lit a fire that will never go out," he told supporters. There was reason for optimism, as the campaign had generated political activity in many other parts of the nation. However, after the election Terence Powderly "declined membership in any continuing labor party and said that he would make no more partisan speeches." Moreover, he declared that the Knights of Labor should now revert to the old principle of staying out of politics altogether. Charles Albro Barker suggests that Powderly had no desire to challenge the directives of Catholic hierarchy. Samuel Gompers, who was Jewish, "seceded from labor-party politics, for life." (Barker, 497) In 1888, Gompers responded to a fellow labor activist that: "The reading of Henry George can do you no harm. Read the works but keep a level head. They are enchantingly written, but – I have no time to enter into an economic discussion in a letter." (Barker, 497)

Henry George and the labor movement had reached the high point of collaboration. Only when the nation plunged into deep and prolonged economic crisis during the 1930s did organized

labor regain its lost momentum. George moved forward with his plan to establish a newspaper of his own. The first issue of the *Standard* appeared on the 8th of January 1887. He was now fully committed to the promotion of the Single Tax and free trade. Others, including father Edward McGlynn, took charge of organizing the United Labor Party, which already faced challenges from the socialists who were purged from the Party. To Henry George, the socialist program sought the elimination of private property in the "instruments of production," that is, in capital goods. His principles prevented him from any alliance with socialist leaders. In the upcoming election, the office of Governor of New York State was not in play. However, pushed by Edward McGlynn, George agreed to run for the office of Secretary of State. The United Labor Party suffered a strong defeat from which the party could not recover. As described by historian Steven Ross:

The pressures that brought about the party's collapse were not purely internal. George's organization faced the combined opposition of mainstream parties, clergy, and capitalists. Democrats and Republicans, in New York and elsewhere, responded to the threat of a new third party by pooling their forces to defeat ULP candidates and moving to co-opt party leaders and moderate party demands into their own organizations. (Steven J. Ross. "The Culture of Political Economy: Henry George and the American Working Class," Southern California Quarterly, Vol.65, No.2 (Summer 1983), p.160)

Henry George then stunned McGlynn and other United Labor Party leaders by backing the re-election of Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, for the Presidency. A primary objective of the United Labor Party was to drive the Tammany Hall Democrats from power. In the *Standard*, Henry George made tariff reform the paper's main issue in the coming campaign. He had reached the conclusion that rather than embarking on independent politics, "the real work of emancipating labor and bringing about reform is the work of education". (Henry George. The *Standard*, 4 February, 1888, p.1) Soon thereafter, the twenty-third assembly district organization of the United Labor Party formally expelled Henry George for "abandoning the greater principle of the single tax for the lesser one of free trade, for having spoken of the party as a paper organization, and for supporting President Cleveland upon inspiration from Washington". (The *Standard*, 2 June, 1888, p.1)

Henry George sought solutions to the problems of all working people, including those who owned businesses and employed others. Labor leaders sought to control the supply of labor and use collective bargaining to negotiate a fair level of wages and safe working conditions. Samuel Gompers was in the vanguard of several generations of labor leaders who wanted nothing more than to lift the economic well-being of workers into an expanding middle class. As Bernard Mandel explained in 1956:

The transformation of Gompers from a militant and radical agitator to a conservative labor bureaucrat was symptomatic of a general trend among the skilled workers in the 1890's and early 1900's. While the masses were becoming more radical under the impact of the growing power of the trusts and their subversion of governments to their tools, while they were moving toward industrial unionism and independent political action and Populism, the conservative leaders of the craft unions were, like the steel union, yielding to the monopolies, entering into a period of trade agreements and protocols, joining the National Civic Federation, avoiding clashes with the trusts and the government, buying a limited security and higher wages for their members at the expense of the unskilled workers and the consumers. They made the A.F. of L. the representative of the aristocracy of labor, and Gompers agreed to be their spokesman and defender. (Bernard Mandel, "Samuel Gompers and the Establishment of American Federation of Labor Policies," Social Science, Vol.31, No.3 (June, 1956), p.175)

By the beginning of 1897, Henry George was feeling rather older than a man of fifty-eight might. Yet, he did his best to focus his energy on completion of *The Science of Political Economy*, the book he hoped would serve to overcome all objections raised to his analysis. He would then put aside this work to accept the call to run as an independent candidate for the office of Mayor of New York City. He was true to his principles to the very end. Speaking five days before the election he told the audience of mostly working men:

I have never claimed to be a special friend of labor. Let us have done with this call for special privileges for labour. Labour does not want special privileges. I have never advocated nor asked for special rights or special sympathy for working men! What I stand for is the equal rights of all men! (Henry George, Jr., p.605)

He died the following morning and the world mourned the loss of this sincere, caring man. I have found no record of either Samuel Gompers or Terence Powderly commenting on the death of Henry George. The nation's labor unions and their leaders abandoned any support or mention of Henry George's systemic reforms, or even the restructuring of local property taxation to generate most of the public revenue from the taxation of land values rather than buildings.

From almost the very beginning of Henry George's campaign for systemic reform, one of his most stalwart supporters was Louis F. Post. A prominent New York attorney, Post served as editor of the *Standard* during its short life. In 1913 he was appointed by Woodrow Wilson to the cabinet office of Assistant Secretary of Labor. In his 1916 Labour Day Address delivered in Topeka, Kansas, he challenged "wage workers" to embrace a mission beyond the "struggle to keep up wages." Post pointed to the fundamental cause of the economic struggles faced by so many:

Our government has given away to corporations millions upon millions of acres of our common lands. What we have not given away has been monopolised by purchase. So that now more than half our people are tenants and there is hardly any more public land left. Of the other half of our people, a very few own nearly all the land of the country.

Shall these conditions continue? They need not. [...] You all know what land value is. It is the price that is given to localities by growing populations, by general improvement and by good government in those localities. Land value is the financial measure of social progress. In justice it belongs not to the land owner, but to the community. In justice it should be taken for common use. If that be not done, the common fund will go into private pockets. This will encourage speculation in land, and speculation in land discourages the use of land. Speculation narrows opportunities for employment by keeping land out of use. In that way speculation in land ... values makes wage workers dependent. It forces them into labour organisations and it puts even labor organisations at a disadvantage in the struggle with highly privileged employers. (Land Values, January 1917, pp. 241-242)

Fast forward to the year 2019. Would a current Assistant Secretary of Labor have the understanding or the courage to call for an end to the private taking of the value of the nation's land and natural resources as key to the liberation of labor? Will the leaders of the modern labor movement come to recognize and embrace Henry George's program of systemic reform as key to the liberation of labor?