

## WHY HENRY GEORGE FAILED (DID HE?)

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Henry George was a dreamer, a great social reformer, but also a very practical man. He moved easily from the realm of the daily news to the world of politics and almost was elected mayor of New York City. He travelled from the U.S. to many other countries trying to and in some cases succeeding in influencing their tax policies. With these points in mind and the burning message that he carried, why has it not been much more widely accepted?

### History

The situation in the U.S. at the time of George's work in the latter part of the 19th century included the fact that the U.S. was still considered the "land of opportunity." As we know today in the field of advertising and promotion, telling the public that something is "white" can often hide from many people the fact that it is "black"! Thus, in the U.S., although we had considerable exploitation of labor, a good portion of our labor force consisted of recent immigrants from other countries who often considered their wages here to be high compared to those of the homeland they had left. In addition, we had a significant rural population which either was, or considered itself to be, "self-sufficient" and not in need of any significant economic or social reform. Furthermore, as a nation, we simply had not developed a social conscience. That phenomenon is only occurring at the present time, having begun perhaps in the last ten years.

A look at the dates involved will show that Henry George and his writings actually preceded by many years the writings of John Muir which served as a catalyst to the conservation movement. In fact, the conservation movement did not actually reach any level of strength in this country before the 1960's, perhaps coinciding with the development of a "social consciousness" in this country. It is likely that had John Muir been a contemporary or better yet had preceded the writings of Henry George, the application of George's social reforms, ethics and tax reforms would have been an integral part of our conservation movement which would begin in the metropolitan areas. Instead, the consideration of the inner city is only a latter-day involvement of conservation organizations. For example, the Planning and Conservation League of California at their 1974 convention, considered "Inner City - Our Last Frontier." Even with that prestigious beginning, they did not include the topic of tax reform. In fact, the one question from the floor pointing out the relation of taxes to slums, etc. was disregarded by the moderator. In addition, only recently has the Sierra Club formed what they call the "urban environment committee" which hopefully will give much more attention to the question of the implications of tax reform to land use, conservation, pollution and ethical goals.

### Would Henry George Succeed Today?

I would choose to answer this question both ways:

YES. He might very well succeed in view of the fact that we have several factors that would aid him: 1, social consciousness has been developed to a significant extent; 2, we have a much better communication system and hopefully he would have some access to the public media such as T.V., radio and the newspapers, etc.; 3, education has become universal and young students as well as adult students have significant access to formal and informal education with the possibility that this type of subject matter could be better disseminated.

NO. 1, Government has increased tremendously in size and power in our so-called democracy of today in the U.S. Thus, any changes that we would like to bring about must overcome greater obstacles of the status quo. 2, Government at all levels

has become committed to inflation as a perpetuation of power and the obtaining of votes. The solving of this dilemma is yet to be found; even with an impending depression, the failure of government controls is simply looked upon as a need for more government controls!

In deciding the direction of efforts by those interested in taxation, the environment and social reforms, we must look at the past history of mistakes and/or failures and try not to repeat them. First, to return to Henry George, we would probably have to accept the fact that temporarily some compromise or modification is necessary for eventually reaching our full goals. In terms of politics, this means at least temporary and-or partial alliances. It also means joining specific organizations and infiltrating them, if you will, and thereby teaching them and actually picking up large blocks of not only supporters but people who will go out and as activists do at least some of our work. This then would include the conservation organizations of today, certain of the labor organizations, such as trade unions, teacher unions and some quasi-political organizations such as the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, People's Lobby, etc.

We would also have to adopt certain techniques that are presently being considered by the newly founded organization called LEAF. This would include actually organizing letter-writing groups and campaigns, petition campaigns directed primarily toward ballot issues and marketable slogans. An example of the latter would include "O.U.T." which would stand for "Operation Un-Tax." This represents something easily understandable by the multitudes, something that many existing organizations would flock to even before they understood the ramifications that we envision and even lends itself to the familiar phraseology.