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# Henry George and Organized Labor:

## *The 19th Century Economist and Social Philosopher Championed Labor's Cause, But Used Its Candidacy for Propaganda*

By FRANK C. GENOVESE\*

ABSTRACT. *Henry George* supported *labor unions* and was proud of his membership in the *Printers' Union*. But he did not regard them as the final solution of labor *exploitation*. He championed *labor* as one of the *producing classes*. His foray into *politics* as the candidate of organized labor's *third party* was characteristic; he had had much involvement in politics earlier. Although he supported labor's immediate demands, he sought mainly to use his candidacy to build a constituency for the *single tax*. *Samuel Gompers*, then head of the *American Federation of Labor*, at first worked for George's election but came to the belief that the unions alone should direct and control their political efforts. This view prevailed, though he and George remained good friends. But it is now a question whether Gompers' policy, at this time, serves labor's best interests.

### I

#### Henry George's Relationship to Labor Unions

THE AIM of this paper is to assess the applicability of Henry George's thoughts to the world of the present and the future. The question thus expands into several questions: Are his ideas applicable as he stated them in the last century? Do some or all of them need some modification and if they do, what modification? How might they (perhaps as amended) be better promulgated and implemented? Are there particular publics, or groups, to which they should be particularly appealing? It was towards this last point that my interest was particularly attracted.

George dealt intimately with the labor leaders of his day. He had close associations with Terence V. Powderly, the head of the Knights of Labor, and

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Samuel Gompers, who came to lead the American Federation of Labor. His audiences and readers were far too numerous to include only leaders of thought about the world, although the list of leaders whom he influenced is substantial. The audience was mainly the ordinary people, certainly not the landlords of his day.

It was the former whom he sought to help. Although they were not all members of labor organizations, it was organized labor that in the main sought him as their candidate for Mayor of New York in 1886 and furnished his main support in this campaign.

His was a mass appeal elicited by statements such as:

Give labor a free field and its full earnings; take for the benefit of the whole community that fund which the growth of the community creates, and want and the fear of want would be gone. The springs of production would be set free, and the enormous increase of wealth would give the poorest ample comfort.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that George was concerned with the miserable condition of labor, organized and unorganized, but *he felt the remedy was in his proposal to tax away land rent and other monopoly income rather than in trade unionism*. Indeed, while sympathetic to the goals of the unions, he tended to associate them with socialism and protectionism, both of which he felt were inimical to the free functioning of a democratic and competitive order. He regarded as laudable, however, the aim of many socialists to alleviate social ills, the most important of which was poverty.

In *Progress and Poverty*, George went to some pains to defeat the notions of Malthusianism and the wages-fund doctrine but, under the heading of "Insufficiency of Remedies Currently Advocated," he explicitly dismissed the "remedy from combinations of workmen for the advance of wages." He did, however, accept the idea that, once rent of land emerged, wages were set (at the margin) "at which the poorest paid class will be just able to live and reproduce, and thus wages are forced to a minimum fixed by what is called the standard of comfort—that is, the amount of necessaries and comforts which habit leads the working classes to demand as the lowest on which they will consent to maintain their numbers." One might wonder why the wage would be sufficient to maintain their numbers but, to leave this aside, it is worthwhile here to point out that this notion of conventional standards of living was the basis for his position on Chinese immigration. He stated, "If, under existing conditions, American mechanics would come down to the Chinese standard of living, they would ultimately have to come down to the Chinese standard of wages."<sup>2</sup>

George insisted that political economy demonstrated that if combinations were possible, wages could be raised "and this not at the expense of other workmen . . . nor yet at the expense of capital." Other conclusions, he said,

“are ideas that spring from the erroneous notion that wages are drawn from capital.”<sup>3</sup> But, and it is an important “but,” he strongly argued that such combinations were not possible; “so great are the difficulties in the way of effective combinations of laborers, that the good that can be accomplished by them is extremely limited, while there are inherent disadvantages in the process.”<sup>4</sup>

He 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. He also understood that strikes were “necessarily destructive” and argued that to be effective in a strike a union must be “tyrannical.” Thus, despite, one is convinced, his sincere statement, “I speak without prejudice, for I am still an honorary member of the union which, while working at my trade, I always loyally supported,” it is hard to assume union members and leaders would find any ringing endorsement for unionism in his statement:

These combinations are, therefore, necessarily destructive of the very things which workmen seek to gain through them—wealth and freedom.<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing brief review of George’s views on wages and unionism was presented so that the rest of this paper may be made more applicable to today’s issues.

## II

### **George’s Bid for Organized Labor’s Support**

THE “PRACTICAL IDEALISM” of George, to use Dewey’s phrase, was always a cry for legislative action and, in the United States, for a constitutional amendment. Local governments, state legislatures, and central governments would be required to act if the single-tax idea were to be implemented. In democratic countries the idea had to be introduced through the political process so that legislative action could be taken.<sup>6</sup>

And George had direct involvement with the political process. As a reporter and editor he covered and commented upon political questions, tariff, immigration, the Australian ballot, *etc.* The newspaper he started in 1879 was called *The State*. He was involved personally, as a correspondent, with the troubles in Ireland. While in California he held a political appointment as inspector of gas meters. He also was a delegate to the convention to amend the California state constitution. Charles Nordhoff asked him to run for Congress in 1883. Twice he ran for Mayor of New York City and once for Secretary of State of New York. On the basis of incomplete information, he even wrote a “law and order” piece concerning the Haymarket riots. This occurred when he was in the thick of attempting to build a permanent party and, thus, served to alienate some erstwhile

supporters. On the other hand, it may have reassured others who worried about the possibility that his movement was anarchistic. Obviously, he was no stranger to politics.

Yet, when he was swept up into the promising race for Mayor in 1886, and in the later attempts to form a durable party, he may have lost an opportunity given to few people. The significance of this opportunity is indicated in the final vote tally (in which George believed he was counted out). Hewitt received 91,215, George 68,242, and Roosevelt 60,597.<sup>7</sup>

In his classic book, Professor Selig Perlman set forth the thesis that when labor is relatively free it tends to select its own leaders from its own ranks and to concentrate upon workday matters of immediate concern, *e.g.*, wages, hours, safety, and the like. But when labor is not free to organize and bargain for its betterment, it tends to become radicalized and to be led by intellectuals from outside its ranks who seek to capture or overthrow government. In the one case, the workers tend to form open organizations, while in the other the organizations tend to be clandestine.

Henry George was the one intellectual whose influence on the labor movement, though short-lived, can be at all described in European terms. When he ran for mayor of New York . . . he may be said to have held the labor movement in the palm of his hand. But he never really understood trade unionism which to him was altogether 'narrow' and a mere palliative.<sup>8</sup>

While the U.S. unions did not have to fight free from intellectuals as they had to do in Europe, they had a problem in overcoming both the abundance of opportunity concept and a tendency toward individualism. There was a strong inclination to attribute the problems which existed as the outcome of "monopoly." Since he naturally looked to a political solution, George sought to use his selection as the candidate of the unions in 1886 as the basis for advancing his own program, to the exclusion of theirs. Perlman comments with some sympathy for George:

Henry George's philosophy never was official philosophy of the American labor movement, except during a brief episode in the eighties, and even then mostly by the sheerest of accidents. But no other American 'anti-monopoly' philosophy was so fortunate as to have for chief expounder a person with a theoretical acumen and capacity for lucid statement of Henry George.<sup>9</sup>

This "most representative ideologist" had started his career as a printer but, while he supported many labor causes, he was not a product of the unions. Indeed, he had become an employer. Peter Alexander Speek, in his seminal monograph, points out that:

Although he was for many years a wage-earner . . . (George) never considered himself as belonging to the wage-earner class, of the existence of which as a feature of our industrial system he seemed unconscious. To be a wage-earner seemed to him, and perhaps to the

majority of the American wage-earners of that time, only a temporary necessity, a stepping stone towards an opportunity to start an independent enterprise which would lead to fortune.<sup>10</sup>

What was the “sheerest of accidents” that delivered labor into “the palm of his hand” in 1886? Some history must be reviewed to answer this question. A panic in 1873 led to five years of very depressed economic conditions. In 1877 Reconstruction ended and troops put down railroad strikes.

But the strikes of 1877 and the brutality with which they were crushed produced a determination in the labor movement to elect officials who would defend the workers' rights. These parties soon formed an alliance with the Greenbackers, and early in 1878 the National Greenback-Labor party was launched. Blaming the depression on legislative dictation by the moneylenders, bankers, and bondholders, the party's platform emphasized currency reform, but also demanded legislation to reduce the hours of labor, the establishment of state bureaus of labor statistics, the prohibition of convict labor, and the end to the importation of ‘servile labor’.<sup>11</sup>

While workers all over the country had great cause for discontent because of unemployment and had tried political action, it was events abroad which precipitated their formation of a strong organization in New York City. The events abroad concerned the maltreatment of Irish peasants. Terrorism arose in Ireland in 1882, following their eviction from the land by English landlords. The Central Labor Union (CLU) sprang up out of a sympathy meeting in 1881 for the Irish tenants. Henry George was one of the “popular speakers” at this meeting.<sup>12</sup>

The CLU had real purpose and impressive numbers. It attempted to settle jurisdictional battles between unions and to arbitrate labor-management disputes and to help striking unions where it had sanctioned the strike. It tolerated all philosophies that had sympathy for labor and its causes. One hundred and twenty unions were members by July, 1886. In that year its constituent organizations probably embraced about 50,000 members.<sup>13</sup>

An important part of George's support came from the Knights of Labor (K of L). They had been set up as a secret organization in December, 1869, in Philadelphia by Uriah S. Stephens. After the abandonment of secrecy in 1878, they grew rapidly to 50,000 members. The depression of 1883 increased their numbers, and in 1886, they had nearly 700,000 members nationally, with perhaps 68,000 in New York City.

But then there was a sudden political success in Milwaukee, although the Greenback movement had almost disappeared by 1880. The success followed economic disturbances in 1886, some disastrous strikes, convictions of union members, hostile labor legislation, the Haymarket bombing, and public fears that the K of L and the unions were anarchists. With many non-unionists included within the K of L membership, the situation arose that they could use only the polls for their economic betterment.<sup>14</sup>

Since the socialists were an important part of the membership, the CLU issued a radical declaration that remained unchanged until the end of the 1880s. It said in part:

. . . there can be no harmony between capital and labour 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.<sup>15</sup>

Although labor's political efforts in 1882 failed, the boycotts they subsequently tried were successful. They faced the question: Should they try to gain and hold the balance of power or form their own party? While 1882 was a bad business year, the 1886 Haymarket bombing had hurt their eight-hour-day campaign.

But, in response to their successes, the unions were being attacked by police and their pickets jailed for conspiracy. Extortion was charged in connection with the boycotting and picketing related to the Theiss Dance Hall case and several pickets were jailed as felons. Included was George Harris, who later became a vice president of the soon-to-be-formed American Federation of Labor. Judge Barrett sentenced the boycotters on July 2, 1886. This set off a swift parade of events.

Delegates from several unions and the Socialist Labor Party called a mass meeting on July 7th at Cooper Union, where a strong sentiment for political action emerged. Another meeting was called and the Central Labor Union became involved. At a meeting on July 11th, a motion was passed to plan the establishment of an independent Labor Party and a newspaper. Delegates were selected to attend an August 5th conference at Clarendon Hall.

The organization talked to all groups. It included unions, the K of L, Greenbackers, Socialist-Labor, Land-Reformers, and Anti-Monopolist. The socialists were prominent in these efforts. The conference on August 5th included 402 delegates from 165 labor organizations with a membership of 50,000. They voted overwhelmingly "yes" to forming a political party.

Another meeting of the Conference (as it was called) on August 19th of 508 delegates, from 115 trade organizations, was held for the purpose of forming the Independent Labor Party. A platform was outlined:

. . . the 'free soil' idea was advocated; a demand was made that the laborers should share in the products of labor. Among other things asked for were a law forbidding the employment of children under fourteen years of age, the enforcement of the eight hour law, the abolition of the convict labor system, equal pay for equal work, the repeal of the conspiracy and tramp laws, a law declaring speculation in food products a criminal act; the abolition of the property qualification for jurors, and the abolition of tenement-house cigarmaking.<sup>16</sup>

### III

#### **George Enters Politics**

GEORGE WAS ASKED ON August 20th if he would accept the party's nomination to run for Mayor of New York and at an August 26th meeting of the Conference

his reply was read. George, knowingly or unknowingly, had made a masterful political stroke in specifying that he would only accept the nomination if 30,000 people would sign a document assuring him of their support. This gave the organizers an immediate task and brought attention to his candidacy. If the signatures were secured the new party would be a force to be reckoned with.

On September 2nd, a speech in his favor was enthusiastically received and \$1 was assessed from each delegate and 25 cents from each labor union member.

The next meeting of the Conference on September 23rd at Clarendon Hall nominated George for Mayor and accepted the platform as rewritten by him with the consultation of the committee on the platform of the Conference. Its main plank was the single tax, but certain labor demands of labor unions, and the K of L, and other labor organizations were included. The Socialists accepted the labor demands and public appropriation of public utilities and land values. The Greenbackers agreed to its tone. It was a compromise platform.

The fact that there was great general dissatisfaction with governmental corruption furnished the labor movement with additional supporters and backers. On October 1st radical members of the middle class met at Chickering Hall and endorsed George. Some 2,300 people were present. There was a great deal of irritation with Tammany Hall and its corruption. In addition, a splinter group of anti-Tammany Democrats, the Irving Hall Democrats, also supported George.

At George's formal acceptance of the nomination, which took place on October 5th at Cooper Union, some 34,000 signatures had been collected and more were still coming in. The CLU held the first Labor Day on the first Monday in September. George reviewed the parade.

Besides union contributions, funds were obtained from gifts and by passing the hat and from friends of George such as Thomas G. Shearman and Tom L. Johnson. A daily newspaper, *The Leader*, was created with labor-union contributions. It had 30 to 50 thousand circulation. He received support from the *Irish World* and the *Volkeszeitung*, but both lacked the influence of several other dailies which supported the Democrats and Republicans. These attacked the movement with phony charges of anarchism and ignored George's denials. Actually, an anarchists' paper rejected him.

The Democrats were so frightened by George as the Labor candidate, that the Tammany and non-Tammany factions got together under the term "United Democracy" and choose a candidate from the non-Tammany group, Abram S. Hewitt, a congressman. They invited the Republicans to join them against George. They also sought to secure his withdrawal by offering him a congressional seat.

Hewitt (of Hewitt & Company, an iron manufacturer) in his acceptance speech said, "It behooves the people of ths (sic) city to pass sentence of condemnation



in no uncertain tones upon the effort to array class against class and to unsettle the foundations upon which its business and security rest."<sup>17</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt, the Republican candidate, did not wage a vigorous campaign but spoke of the labor theories as "crude, vicious and un-American." He denied the existence of classes in America and that things were as bad for the workers as Labor claimed. However, despite of these statements, George probably picked up 25,000 normally Republican votes.

The strong and important support for George lead by Father Edward McGlynn frightened the Democrats. So they sought the help of Thomas S. Preston, the Roman Catholic Vicar-General. He stated in a widely circulated letter of October 25th that, "The great majority of the Catholic clergy in this city are opposed to the candidacy of Mr. George. They think his principles unsound and unsafe, and contrary to the teachings of the church. . . . His principles . . . would prove the ruin of the workingman he professes to befriend."

Election day was November 2nd. In a few short months, a campaign which could have won had been put together. While George's 68,000 against Hewitt's 90,000 and Roosevelt's 60,000 were remarkable in New York City, the campaign had national ramifications. The United Labor Party in Illinois elected one state senator and seven representatives. It also did well in Chicago and Cincinnati.<sup>18</sup>

This "unique" campaign was largely a class campaign of Labor although it had some outside support from liberal professionals and reformers and a small number of radical merchants and manufacturers. It united people of widely different cultures and varying ideologies behind a popular leader and this in spite of the opposition of the Catholic Church.

On another basis the results were also impressive:

If one compares the spirit and purpose of the labor laws enacted in the previous four or five years with the spirit and the purpose enacted in 1887, one finds marked difference. While the former laws meant a 'grand legal roundup' of labor, the laws of 1887 were, though vaguely, directly to protect labor.<sup>19</sup>

So, though Labor lost, the workers won some protection under the law.

During this time the strategic emphasis of the labor movement was shifting from the industrial-political involvement of the K of L to the craft-business unionism of the American Federation of Labor. Before long, this shift toward business unionism led the Carpenters and Joiners Union to close their hiring halls not only to non-members of the international union, but to non-members of the local union also.

Samuel Gompers, as head of the newly formed American Federation of Labor (A.F. of L.), perceived George's views that closed union shops were a form of protectionism as basically anti-labor, and he noted, "The political movement

was in inception a trade union movement. It was inaugurated by trade unions and conducted by trade unions."<sup>20</sup>

And Gompers' basic hostility to political party involvement by unions, which rested on prior experience and, perhaps, a desire to make unions the be-all and end-all for worker aspiration, was again made clear in 1887 after the election when dissent arose between the single taxers and the Socialists.

I suggested then that both parties give over the campaign to the trade unions, for I believe then as now that no separate organization was necessary for labor to advance any phase of its interests.<sup>21</sup>

His comments on Marx serve to corroborate his attitude. He said, ". . . Marx did not beguile himself into thinking the ballot was all powerful."

On the basis of his experience he cited his concern:

The dissention that can be created by the introduction of partisan politics in a labor organization was demonstrated in the heated discussion that occurred on the proposal to endorse a policy of protection for the United States industries.<sup>22</sup>

Gompers did not come to this conclusion regarding the uselessness and even danger to a union movement's involvement with political parties lightly. Beside the incident recounted above, he earlier had seen and voted for the Greenback party which ran presidential candidates in 1876, 1880, and 1884, and polled only 1 percent, 3.3 percent, and 1.7 percent of the popular vote, respectively. He was opposed to the formation of the Labor Party in New York City in 1886, but others pushed him to support it, which eventually he did energetically and loyally. He commented, however, that, "This curious determination to disregard experience prevailed."<sup>23</sup>

Gompers' own account of his involvement with the campaign is instructive.

The first time I actively participated in a political party contest was in the Henry George campaign. Going in under the direction of the trade union movement, I gave the best service of which I was capable.<sup>24</sup>

Gompers and Powderly, as experienced long-term labor leaders, recognized that when an overwhelming portion of their memberships wanted something, it behooved the leader, if he was to remain the leader, to strive for this objective regardless of his personal feelings. A leader may lead toward ends he selects but must also lead toward those selected by his constituency in order to remain head of that constituency. How unfortunate it is that George was so unbending in his policy objectives and thus lost his case rather completely. Although the movement accomplished something for labor, the legislative concessions that followed in 1877 were less than generous and much less than what could have been attained had a strong political presence been established. Rather than being the laggard that it is in social progress, the United States might have been

up with the leaders in the democratic world. Such an international posture might also have served to better enlighten our international policies.

In "Conclusions from Past Experimentation," from *History of Labor*, Selig Perlman and Philip Taft state that labor had learned that it was a minority and "under no circumstances could (it) afford to arouse the fears of the public for the safety of private property as a basic institution." It had also learned that it could form no successful political parties and to shun intellectuals who sought to lead it.<sup>25</sup>

#### IV

#### **George and Labor After 1886**

THE A. F. OF L., during its founding convention, which was held a few days after the election, proudly cited the remarkable near victory and stated that it was time labor united for political action. And it urged "generous support" for such efforts.

But Gompers did not give 'generous support,' or any support at all, to labor's independent political movement. . . . He was apprehensive of the intense interest that labor was showing in the new party, and wanted the whole campaign turned over to the trade unions, resenting any organization that attempted to advance labor's interest in other ways or through other agencies.<sup>26</sup>

And, true to his beliefs, Gompers never again urged political support for George even though they became good friends.

In spite of some desire to avoid splitting the movement and the continued support of the CLU, the socialists, understanding better than other elements George's relative indifference to the demands of labor, came to be separated from those who stayed with George. For his part George was quite uncompromising. Two rival parties, and papers supporting each of them, emerged. In the next campaign, in which George ran for Secretary of State, they both suffered. In this contest he polled only 37,000 votes in New York City and 72,000 statewide. The major issue again was the single tax, with only token attention to labor's demands. None of the five candidates who ran were wage-earners.

The single taxers and labor groups supported Henry George in his 1897 mayoralty campaign under the Jeffersonian Democratic banner in a three-way race; unfortunately, he did not live to see this campaign through. However, some of his supporters pushed on with the fervent aims of improving conditions for the people of the city and of clearing up political corruption. Years later the Fusion ticket of Fiorello H. LaGuardia is one of their monuments.<sup>27</sup>

Georgists were prominent among the supporters of Theodore Roosevelt and his progressivism as expressed in the Bull Moose campaign against Taft. Wood-

row Wilson put Georgists (William Jennings Bryan among them) in important positions in his administration. So too did Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the best known and most influential of whom was Rexford Guy Tugwell.

It is hard to deal with the assertion that George did not understand the labor movement. Perhaps he ignored the trend toward self-help, which seems to be a characteristic it carried over as part of the evolution from the original idea of the craft obligations of the old guilds. Craftspeople had made and sold their own products and had pride in their craft.

Masters could think in terms of individualism, even though, with the advent of the industrial system, there was a loss of status in becoming a directed worker. In terms of their previous experience, rather than remaining as artisans, they were becoming peasants. They were being pushed into an inferior status. (My own ancestors had pride in being artisans rather than share-cropping farmers.) As artisans they looked for leadership among their own ranks and rejected any outsider who they felt might wish to use them. There was always the peasant suspicion, the eternal question of "what's in it for him?" Attitudes which were remnants of a previous civilization may have supported the position advocated by Gompers.

George Geiger, in discussing the ends sought by socialists, including Marxists, felt they should not be "sworn enemies" and concluded that:

It would seem . . . that there is enough misery and oppression to engage all the efforts of social liberals and leave nothing to be dissipated in intramural wrangling. If, because of their differing concepts, the two movements can cooperate only in smaller details, anyway let there be cooperation. They can remain, at least, amicable antagonists; as George wrote, they can agree to disagree—but disagree peacefully.<sup>28</sup>

## V

### George and the Extreme Left

BUT GEORGE ALSO WROTE of his deep antagonism to communism and socialism. It is my firm belief, substantiated by much experience, that cooperation with communists is not in labor's best interest. The communists are considered to be untrustworthy allies who always attempt to take over labor movements for their own purposes. They are the kiss of death to free labor and its aspirations, since any presence of communists leads the rest of society to resist all its legitimate complaints and to unite against it.

But there should be little reason for labor to reject outright any similarity of purpose with Georgists. Intellectuals of a Georgist stripe can be allies in improving the lot of the masses of the country. This cooperation would have to be based, however, not on any attempt to take over the labor movement, but upon seeking to add the land tax to its agenda.

It is in a similar vein that Geiger cited books of Norman Thomas as presenting a socialism which is "as 'American,' as 'democratic,' and as 'common sense' as any hard-headed capitalist could demand." But Thomas was a democratic socialist, not a Marxist. There is a difference.

I agree that, within reason, we should take our allies where we can find them and cooperate where we can. We should stress our commonalities rather than our differences. Progress must be a step at a time. We must be cooperative, pragmatic, existential, inductive, and experimental. We must make friends and avoid making enemies. Rather than global "solutions" for all problems present, past, and future, we must concentrate on the problems at hand. This, I hope, is an intelligent posture and I would suggest it for Georgists.

And so far as labor is concerned, let us not assume we have the "solution" to the "labor problem." George himself saw that the single tax would not solve all problems. He actively wrote about other matters of concern contemporary to his time, many of which are still in evidence. Thus, racial equality, equal rights, universal suffrage, free trade, and other matters concerned him. There are many labor problems now and there will be more in the future. There will be many ways to handle them which we do not now even contemplate. However, we should understand that the labor movement is representative of a great deal of the public.

Single tax proposals will not solve problems of noxious chemicals for the worker nor for the consumer. The apparent suppression of information concerning the dangers of asbestos is a very clear case in point. Also, in a Victorian age there was little attention paid to sexual harassment, which has finally been acknowledged as a problem in the workplace and is a situation which both society as a whole, and labor as a major part of the society, must curb.

Georgists today should not oppose labor generally, but should seek its cooperation where they can, and insert their ideas where they will be useful. They have made an excellent beginning in advancing their basic principles under the term "Incentive Taxation" to Republicans and Democrats alike. They can also secure the support of the labor movement, which will be pleased with the employment opportunities that will follow its implementation.

There may be opportunities for some application of one of the basic propositions of George, which states that workers and capitalists are natural allies. The advent of worker-owned companies in the form of Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOP's), and the policy of co-determination of German industry, in which labor has representatives on the boards of corporations, may represent the wave of the future and, at least, the partial fulfillment of George's basic aim: to have progress abolish poverty rather than being its companion.

When terms such as “supply-side economics” and “industrial policy” and “re-industrialization” are in the air, opportunities to implement the ideas of Henry George are abundant. While the general conclusion of the parties to the 1886 campaign was that labor should stick to the economic field, single taxers to education, and the socialists to their own political party, this did not imply that single taxers should ignore labor in their educational pursuits.

## VI

**The Georgists and Third Party Movements**

GEIGER RELATES that when, late in the summer of 1886, the mayoral nomination was offered to George, “He did not consider the nomination for several weeks, but finally the opportunity to bring the land question before the public in an important election convinced him that his candidacy was a necessary method of propaganda.”<sup>29</sup> In a letter to a friend, George expressed this consideration, “If I do get 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. That is the only temptation to me.”<sup>30</sup>

It should not have been “his only temptation.” There were substantial practical questions for labor involved. Not to be willing to fully represent them was, to a degree, an unwitting betrayal of his trusting supporters. To be so positive of one’s own position, to the exclusion of those of all others, is unreasonable. Can anyone thoughtfully question why labor has learned to shun “intellectuals?”

There is no question of the sincerity of George’s acceptance, but there is a substantial question about his singlemindedness. Moreover the failure of the movement in the 1880s may be cited as one of the reasons no labor party has ever been successfully established in the United States. But this is not the case in other democracies. The British Fabians were probably more influenced by George than by Marx, and they managed to unite with labor rather permanently. American democratic socialists too have been influenced by George. It may be that George’s ideas, in the hands of leaders truly representative of workers, had more influence than they could have when he served as their somewhat unrepresentative leader.

In actuality, it was more the conflict between George and the socialists that destroyed the movement than any conflict between his position and that of other labor leaders. The conflict may be regarded, to some extent, as the rival attempts of two ideologies to take over the labor movement.

One might wonder whether Gompers’ attitude in 1886 is truly appropriate for labor in the United States for all time, even if it is granted that it made great sense then. The A. F. of L. was being formed and had many problems in 1886.

It did not need or want to have the fight between the single taxers and socialists fought out within its ranks. It did not have the stability of the British unions.

Experience shows that workers in the U.S. frequently ignore political advice from their leaders and want to make their own decisions on grounds other than purely economic ones. The two party system has been very stable partly because of its ability to adapt and make concessions in the face of insistent demand, and partly because the old parties will unite against interlopers.

The matter of appropriate leadership has already been addressed. But the matter of the control of the media in the U.S. then and now, and consequently what they told the public, as contrasted with their nature and role in other countries, might furnish some clue as to the differences in the success of third parties. So, too, do the countries differ in terms of the nature of their publics. It may be easier to divide and rule where the population is more diverse in origin, religion, and background. In a country with an aristocratic background there may be less tendency to emphasize corruption in politics and, where progress toward democracy has been substantial, to distrust government almost instinctively.

The overriding and pervasive commercial character of U.S. society may have led our labor leaders to "businessize" themselves in the sense of wishing to live, dress, and think like their opposite numbers at the bargaining table. This is in contrast to the famous Keynesian remark on the tendency of big business "to socialize itself." Keynes could speak on the basis of his experience as a director of a British company.

Many North American workers have fled from exploitative non-democratic countries whose governments they distrusted. Their natural bent has been to avoid government or to want to capture and revolutionize it. The Canadian experience with British immigrants, on the surface at least, shows their greater willingness to want to enter politics rather peacefully. Apparently, Canadian immigrants since World War II feel government can do them some good and thus the New Democratic Party has become a force there.

In a future economic downturn, especially in the absence of strong militarism in the U.S., there might be occasion for another substantial reordering of the political process. Indeed, the thought cannot be entirely rejected that one of the forces behind militancy may be precisely the idea that such a stand tends to unite us and to protect and preserve the domestic economic *status quo*.

#### Notes

1. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1926), 459.
2. *Ibid.*, 297-98, 302-04.

3. *Ibid.*, 308.
4. *Ibid.*, 310.
5. *Ibid.*, 311–14.
6. George R. Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), ix.
7. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, Vol. 2, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), 311–26.
8. *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1949), 178–79.
9. *Ibid.*, 187.
10. Peter Alexander Speek, "The Singletax and the Labor Movement," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, No. 878, Economics and Political Science Series, Vol. 8, No. 3, 247–428.
11. Bernard Mandel, *Samuel Gompers* (Yellow Springs: The Antioch Press, 1963), 82.
12. Edward J. Rose, *Henry George* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), 119.
13. *Ibid.*, 272–75.
14. Selig Perlman, "The Great Upheaval," in John R. Commons et al., ed., *History of Labor in the United States, 1896–1932*, Vol. II, Pt. VI (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 44.
15. *Ibid.*, 442 (Quote from Central Labor Union *Constitution*).
16. Speek, *op. cit.*, 310.
17. *Ibid.*, 324.
18. William M. Dick, *Labor and Socialism in America* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1972), 29–30. "Henry George's opponents were formidable. The press for the most part was firmly against him and made a great deal of his Anglophilia and alleged un-Americanism. The Catholic hierarchy, particularly influential among Irish and Italian voters, was savagely anti-George, though a strong body of Irish led by Father McGlynn, who was finally excommunicated for his efforts, supported him. . . . At least one paper maintained that had Powderly lent support earlier, the results might have been different. Once Powderly changed his mind, however, he stuck by his decision and was still advocating political action in 1890. Finally, corruption probably played a large part in George's defeat." *Ibid.*, 29. After a trial the ideas of George and McGlynn were declared not heretical and the priest was reinstated but moved out of the city.
19. Speek, *op. cit.*, 334.
20. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 2 (New York: August M. Kelley, 1967), 313.
21. *Ibid.*, 322.
22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 227.
23. Gompers, *op. cit.*, 312.
24. *Ibid.*, 82.
25. Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, "Conclusions from Past Experimentation," in John R. Commons et al., ed., *History of Labor in the United States, 1896–1932*, Vol. IV, Pt. I, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 5.
26. Mandel, *op. cit.*, 86.
27. Herbert Mitgang, *The Man Who Rode the Tiger, The Life and Times of Judge Samuel Seabury* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1963), 33–4.
28. Geiger, *op. cit.*, 284.
29. *Ibid.*, 67.
30. *Ibid.*