

the Henry George News

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Individual Freedom Is the Answer

ARE the ideas of Henry George still relevant today?" That question was asked in a 45-minute radio program presented last month on FM subscribers' radio stations owned by the Pacifica Foundation, including WBAI in New York, KPFA in San Francisco and KPFK, Los Angeles. Agnes de Mille, choreographer and author; and William Hall, professor of economics at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York; were interviewed by Roy Finch, professor of philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College.

Miss de Mille, granddaughter of Henry George, believed his philosophy is pertinent now, in fact crucial, especially in Latin America. Advertisements placed in newspapers in Central and South America by the Henry George School produced over 10,000 returns. The whole situation in Cuba may have wakened us up sharply to the extreme peril we live in. In South America the educated people realize there is imminent danger, but many of the people are illiterate, and you can't talk to them about abstractions like freedom. She said 500 owners in Argentina hold 18 per cent of farm land; in Chile one per cent controls 43 per cent of land; and

in Bolivia 6.3 per cent own 91.9 per cent of the area total.

"What would Henry George say to these people?" asked Professor Finch.

"Under George's system the landlords would be taxed into giving up hunks of great territories, and tenants would get enough crop back so they could eat," replied Miss de Mille.

"Then this is redistribution of land?"

"It amounts to that," Professor Hall concurred, "except that it's not redistribution in the sense of taking the land titles from the great landholders and splitting them into smaller divisions, creating a large class of small landholders—this simply aggravates the evil and does not solve the basic problem. George's proposal would open the land to those who could use it best, and the size of the individual productive unit would be determined by the free interchange of the market place. When you permit land monopoly in a land tenure system such as ours, you interfere necessarily with the free operation of the market place so that no one really knows what the optimum size of an enterprise is. Taxing natural resources according to their value

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INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

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would eliminate this individual monopoly of resources."

Mr. Finch wondered if there would not be some value in limiting the size of such holdings.

Mr. Hall thought not, because "limitation of the size might well lead to a limitation of efficiency and of production—and production is the thing we need—production and a just distribution."

"And," added Miss de Mille, "just does not mean *equal*."

Professor Hall, in his opening statement, said he believed Henry George's principal message was that "the way of individual freedom is the way to the salvation of mankind." He said Henry George denied once and for all that capitalism and free enterprise were failures—they had, in fact, never had a fair trial. This he called "one of the basic concepts that must some day percolate down to people who are at the moment, it seems, bemused with the notion that the solution lies in some form of state control or socialism."

Miss de Mille objected strongly to the straight paternalism in the socialist dictum, "from each according to his ability to each according to his wants, or needs," and thought George would have said: "from each according to his uses to the whole people—according to his rights." He believed that the individual was entitled to everything he made or earned "completely and wholly, and this was good, because it gave him an incentive to work. On the other hand, what the community owns—and that is God's earth, the air and the water—which we cannot live without—no individual must pre-empt for his own uses."

Professor Finch still wanted to know why both proponents seemed to feel George's ideas were superior to those of Karl Marx.



Recently Agnes de Mille (above) supervised a special performance of "Brigadoon" at the White House for the President and the King of Morocco.

Miss de Mille said George believed the individual was happier, more fruitful and more effective if he had freedom of choice and decision, provided he never exploited his neighbor—whereas Marx believed there should be paternal government to make decisions, and the communists believe in implementing that with force.

Professor Hall discussed the "fantastic productivity" of some land sites as compared with others and explained the function of land value taxation, pointing out clearly that community expenditures should be met out of values created by the presence of people.

Mr. Finch could not readily see, if it was wrong to hold a few acres out of use for 20 years, awaiting an increase, how that was different from holding stock shares under similar circumstances.

Miss de Mille offered as an analogy the purchase of a theater seat. "You don't buy the wood or the steel frame, but your ticket is inviolate for that date. You cannot however, decide to hold it ten years and charge others for the use of it."

"Would the title to land be with the government, then?"

Professor Hall said, "preferably the titles should be left in private hands as they are now, to give people a greater sense of security in their improvements. The rental value is paid to the community in lieu of a tax on improvements."

Miss de Mille emphasized, among the benefits George claimed for this method, the fact that it would do away with all land speculation. Around 1911, she said, single taxers in Alberta, Canada had written into the constitution the guarantee that if any mineral deposits were found they would belong to the government. Much later oil was discovered, and now Alberta is extremely rich—they have all the highways, schools and hospitals they need—and for two successive years have declared a bonus of \$20 to every living Albertan.

As a conjecture as to why George hasn't been heard of much, Miss de Mille recalled that "during his lifetime he was apparently one of the most

persuasive speakers alive, and because of his personal magnetism he drew a great deal of attention to himself. Some followers understood him thoroughly and some didn't. He was also a highly controversial political figure. His death occurring a few days before the election night in New York was one of the most dramatic episodes in the end of the century. The general public remembered that he'd been defeated—and the impression was that his theory had been tried and failed—it never *had* been. Where it's been tried partially—in Denmark, New Zealand, Australia and certain of the Canadian territories—it has succeeded to the extent that it's been tried, and with beneficial results, always.

In introducing this program, John Dewey was quoted as saying that "Henry George stands almost alone in our history as a man who . . . left an indelible impression on not only his own generation, but on the world and the future."

William Marion Reedy, "Apostle" of Single Tax

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circulated in the second Presidential struggle between Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, when the tariff question was the main issue."

Reedy then stated that the Fels Fund Commission would print a new edition of *Protection or Free Trade* charging 2½ cents a copy to cover the cost of printing. It hoped to sell a million copies. Each book would be enclosed in a sealed franked envelope. "If you're 'agin the Tariff' here's a way to make converts to your side. Circulate this book," urged Reedy.

Since the tariff was the main issue in the Presidential election, Reedy was no doubt boosting the sales of his literary journal throughout the country. That

he was himself a thoroughgoing Georgist there can be no question. He has said, "Henry George is the last word on economics."

Mr. Putzel tells us that Reedy "ridiculed Henry George even as the old campaigner lay on his death bed, then turned suddenly into an eloquent apostle of the single tax." How greatly is this "eloquent apostle" needed today!

[Anna George de Mille, daughter of Henry George, once told of William Marion Reedy's visits to her home in California. Her endurance on the subject of single tax was greater than that of her husband, who retired for the night and left the two to go on discussing it enthusiastically.]