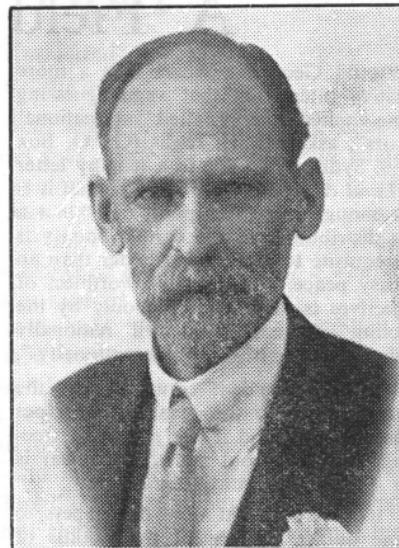


# Seventy Years A Georgeist

By A. G. HUIE

*Founder and (until 1954) editor of "The Standard" and secretary for more than half a century of the New South Wales Free Trade and Land Values League*



I WAS already a Free Trader when, in 1889, I read Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and learned how to free the land. The following year George came to Australia on a speaking tour but as I was then living in a remote country town, I did not hear him.

Four years later (1894) there was a State general election and I decided to contest the widely scattered Lachlan constituency. Travelling some 1,600 miles, mainly on one horse, I preached land-value taxation and free trade. But although I made an impression I was not elected.

On September 2, 1901, I attended a Henry George anniversary meeting in Sydney. As I had only recently moved to the city most of those present were personally unknown to me. Nevertheless, when it was proposed to form a new Sydney Single Tax League, somebody asked me to act as honorary secretary *pro tem*. I accepted and remained as Secretary for 52 years.

The League wanted to secure some practical results. Both political parties were then talking about the need for a new Local Government Act and so I arranged for a small deputation to wait on the newly appointed Leader of the Opposition, Hon. J. H. Carruthers. We asked that local rates should be imposed on land values. As his reply was favourable, we supported him and I did most of the literary work for his party. He won the General Election in 1904 and became Premier. Two years later his Local Government Act became law. This provided that the new Shires or rural councils should rate on land values only. The Act compelled existing municipalities to impose a rate on land values but left them free to propose an additional general rate on improved values. Therefore our next task was to get Councils elected that would put all rates on land values. For this purpose we formed a "Rating on Unimproved Values League," enlisting the support of many who were not Single Taxers. Mayors of suburban municipalities were asked to convene public meetings to consider the rating provisions of the new Act. In this way we got a good hearing at a nominal cost.

Most Councils were glad of the opportunity to rate land values only. A few proposed to put part of the rates on improved values. In such cases 100 ratepayers could demand a poll. We won them all.

For seven years in 1908 I was honorary secretary to the League. But I had to earn a living, usually in the building trade. As it was impossible to do justice to both, members at length subscribed a fund to open an office and pay me a small salary. It remained small.

The City of Sydney Council operated under its own Act. When it saw the success of rating on unimproved values in

the suburbs it also wanted power to rate on land values. That was conceded in 1909. But there was a serious disability. They could put part of the rates on land values but the greater part remained on A.A.V. (*i.e.* the assessed annual value of land and buildings).

Rates on the A.A.V. were payable on the Government properties but not on land values. Aldermen expressed sympathy but said that they could not afford to lose revenue from the Government properties. It took us seven years to overcome that difficulty. Twice I was a candidate but without success.

At last we formed a Sydney Rating on Unimproved Values League with an ex-Lord Mayor as chairman. The League raised £100 for expenses. I got out many particulars about the way city properties were rated. Some of the aldermen tried to stop me but others stood by me and I got all I needed. The reactionaries were routed. The Lord Mayor and the Chairman of the Finance Committee were defeated.

Ald. Hon. R. D. Meagher, M.L.A., Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, became Lord Mayor for 1916. He went to the Premier, Hon. A. Holman and got the rating disability removed. Our opponents crumpled up and did not attend the Council meeting when the flat rate in the £ for 1916 was imposed on land values. But I was there.

My friends then thought that my work should be recognised. So they subscribed and entertained me at a Dinner at Adams' Hotel. The Lord Mayor presided. Of all the Labour Party men he was the best from our point of view. He was a man of great ability, strength and understanding. He called me a human dynamo.

On behalf of those present he presented me with an illuminated address and a purse of sovereigns. The address was signed by the Lord Mayor, ex-Lord Mayor G. T. Clarke, Ald. J. R. Firth, Mayor of Strathfield, Ald. Charles Savage, Mayor of Concord, Ald. L. W. Robinson, Mayor of Woollahra, with G. H. Longmuir and A. R. Easton as honorary secretaries. Here are the terms of the address.