

American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.

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Source: *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 473-491

Published by: [American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3486564>

Accessed: 20/12/2013 16:11

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Henry George and British Socialism

By PETER D'A. JONES*

ABSTRACT. *Henry George*, the American social reformer and *Single Tax* advocate, had a decisive impact on native *British socialism* considered apart from the *Marxist* and *revolutionary* types imported from the continent. *Karl Marx* and *Frederick Engels* were hostile critics but the typically English *Fabian Society* was influenced by George's seminal ideas. The Fabians were especially attracted to two notions: the conception that George gave to the thought of his time, that *poverty* was an evil preventable by *political intervention*—by *State action*; and that the disparity in *incomes* could be explained by the theory of *unearned increment*. In turn *Sydney Olivier*, *George Bernard Shaw*, *Sidney Webb*, *Annie Besant*, *H. G. Wells* and *E. R. Pease* came under the influence of George. Soon to affect the Fabians, however, was the development of the economist, *P. H. Wicksteed*, beyond George to *Jevons* and *Marginalism*. Key figures in the *Parliamentary* and *Independent Labour parties* almost achieved *land value taxation*.

I

THE FABIAN SOCIETY, as is well known, was independently established on January 4, 1884; it was a more radical off-shoot of Professor Thomas Davidson's ethical sect, the *Fellowship of the New Life*.¹ The administrative "father" of Fabianism, however, was not Davidson but E. R. Pease² who was invited to the last of Davidson's London meetings. There he was introduced to Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* by Frank Podmore.³ The splinter group had held a preliminary meeting October, 1883, at Pease's home, Champion and Joynes (representing the Georgist Land Reform Union) and Havelock Ellis among them. The second official meeting of the Fabian Society (January 25, 1884) was much taken up with a discussion of George's lectures, it being the peak year of George's British campaign. In the following year many prominent Georgists joined the Fabians, including Sydney Olivier and George Bernard Shaw.⁴

Olivier⁵ was drawn to the Christian Socialism of the Maurice-Kingsley type while at Oxford, and when *Progress and Poverty* appeared it suited his reformist

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American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Vol. 47, No. 4 (October, 1988).
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temperament very well. On moving to London in 1882 he immediately joined Alfred Russell Wallace's Land Nationalisation Society. From this he seceded, along with Joynes, Champion, Frost and the others, to form the Land Reform Union on Georgist lines, and became a contributor to the *Christian Socialist*. Before 1883 Olivier was also a member of Hyndman's group—which well illustrates the blissfully undifferentiated nature of the British socialist revival in its early stages.⁶ It seems likely that Olivier sided with Champion, Frost and Bernard Shaw in their demand to Henry George to widen the work of the L.R.U. in January, 1884, for by 1888 (when he wrote *Capital and Land*) Olivier had come to feel that the position of the land reformers was "so absurd" that⁷

. . . it seems almost certain that (they) will go as far as the Socialists, as soon as they understand that Socialists admit that labour has contributed to capital and that labour gives some claim to ownership.

A year later in his *Moral Basis of Socialism* Olivier went further, declared himself a Positivist, and severely criticized George's apparent "familiarity with the intentions of the Creator and the natural rights of man."⁸

When Bernard Shaw was an unknown and struggling young novelist in London, he heard Henry George's first speech in England (September 6, 1882). On at least eight occasions afterwards he recorded the effects of that speech.

I went one night, quite casually, into a hall in London; and there I heard a man deliver a speech which changed the whole current of my life. That man was an American, Henry George,

he told a New York audience in April, 1933.⁹ George spoke of "Liberty, Justice, Truth, Natural Law, and other strange eighteenth-century superstitions and . . . explained with great simplicity the view of the Creator, who had gone completely out of fashion in London in the previous decade."¹⁰ Despite this, Shaw wrote, "he struck me dumb, and shunted me from barren agnostic controversy to economics." Later Shaw described himself, before the meeting with George, as "a young man not much past twenty-five . . . full of Darwin and Tyndall, of Shelley and De Quincey, of Michael Angelo and Beethoven and never having in my life studied social questions." In an autobiographical sketch in 1949 he declared:¹¹

The result of my hearing that speech and buying . . . at the meeting a copy of *Progress and Poverty* for sixpence . . . was that I plunged into a course of economic study and at a very early stage of it became a Socialist. When I was thus swept into the great Socialist revival of 1883, I found that five-sixths of those who were swept in with me had been converted by Henry George. This fact would have been far more widely acknowledged had it not been that it was not possible for us to stop where Henry George stopped . . . I never denied or belittled our debt to Henry George. If we outgrew *Progress and Poverty* in many respects so did he himself too.

Almost immediately, Bernard Shaw joined the Land Reform Union, and was elected to its executive committee. He resigned when the request to broaden the agenda was refused. The very first lecture Shaw himself gave as a fledgling agitator was purely Georgist, judging from his own description of it (to a Woolwich Radical Club). At the L.R.U. he made many “fruitful friendships,” with Joynes, Champion, Olivier, Stewart Headlam and other Christian socialists (Professor the Rev. J. E. Symes, Rev. G. Sarson and Rev. H. C. Shuttleworth). Passing from the L.R.U. to Hyndman’s group, Shaw advocated there “a rally round Henry George”—and was promptly told to read Karl Marx. This was the final step in his evolution from “a Bohemian author” into a socialist, but his education in economics still had a long way to go.

Perhaps the best guide to Shaw’s ‘education’ is provided by his contribution to the *Fabian Essays*. There he begins with an attack on *laissez-faire* economists for their empirical ignorance (of the true condition of the masses), but praises them for good abstract scientific work. In fact, he claims, their “most cherished institutions and doctrines succumbed one by one” to their own economic analysis.

“With one law alone—the law of rent—they destroyed the whole series of assumptions upon which private property is based.” Developing the concept of *unearned increment* involved in the law of rent, he continues: “Ever since Mr. Henry George’s book reached the English radicals, there has been a growing disposition to impose a tax of twenty shillings in the pound on obviously unearned incomes: that is, to dump 450 million a year down on the Exchequer counter; and then retire with three cheers for the restoration of the land to the people.” In this anticlimax “we have checkmate to Henry Georgeism . . . In practical earnest the State has no right to take five farthings of capital from the Duke or anybody else until it is ready to invest them in productive enterprise.” The substance of Shaw’s argument then follows:¹²

The consequences of withdrawing Capital from private hands merely to lock it up unproductively in the treasury would be so swift and ruinous that no statesman . . . could persist in it . . . In spite of democrats and land nationalizers, rent cannot be touched unless some pressure from quite another quarter forces productive enterprise on the State.

In this way Shaw was led to the non-Marxian socialist analysis of the economics of maldistribution.

One cannot credit Henry George as the sole, or even as the main economic educator of Bernard Shaw. In the evolution of Shaw’s thought (and that of the Fabian Society as a whole) another link appeared—the marginal utility economics of W. S. Jevons as transmitted through Rev. Philip H. Wicksteed (1844–1928).¹³ Wicksteed did in turn owe something to George. *Progress and Poverty*, he

wrote personally to George, "has given me the light I vainly sought for myself; . . . has made 'a Heaven and a new Earth.'" And later: "I felt a kind of necessity to put myself into communication with you, as I was in a state little short of delirium."¹⁴ The two men became friends on George's subsequent visit to England, and Wicksteed took an executive role in Single Tax societies, speaking and presiding at land reform meetings.¹⁵

II

WICKSTEED WAS THE MOST remarkable product of Victorian Unitarianism, a great Dante scholar and (like George and Marx) a leading (self-taught) economist. Wicksteed's *Commonsense of Political Economy* (a famous textbook, still in print) provided for many decades the most comprehensive exposition of the new school of marginal economics. In his evolution from the status of a broad-minded clergyman-scholar with a social conscience, into that of a great economist of the new school with socialist leanings, Henry George played a major part.

Wicksteed's development beyond George to Jevons and marginalism was soon to affect the Fabians. At a lecture on Karl Marx, Wicksteed brought Bernard Shaw "to a standstill" by criticizing Marxist economics and the Labour Theory of Value in marginalist terms. "This was the first appearance in socialist controversy of the value-theory of Jevons," wrote Shaw.

G.B.S. consented to rebuff Wicksteed in *Today*, and later commented characteristically on his own attempts: "My reply, which was not bad for a fake, . . . elicited only a brief rejoinder; but the upshot was that I put myself in Mr. Wicksteed's hands and became a convinced Jevonian. . . . Accordingly, the abstract economics of the *Fabian Essays* are, as regards Value, the economics of Jevons."¹⁶

Unlike Shaw or Wicksteed, Sydney Webb was not directly influenced by Henry George, but he clearly grasped the historical relationship of George to British socialism. It was Webb who, with Shaw, built up the Fabian theory of economic policy on the basis of a generalized concept of economic rent.

In March, 1889, when George made his fifth visit to Britain, Webb wrote to welcome him and to mitigate the bitterness of Marxian hostility. He assured George that a large body of "Radical Socialists" supported him still. The same idea recurs in Webb's history, *Socialism in England*, published in the following year, in which much use is made of the phrase "Radical Socialism" to emphasize the links between moderate collectivists, Georgists, municipal reformers and the like.

In the logic of history all reforms, Webb argued, seem to tend in a socialist direction.¹⁷ Of course, for Webb, "Socialism" meant collectivist State Socialism.

If the Fabians had stood for genuine producer-controlled cooperative associations or for worker-controlled factories and “functional” voting, as did the later Guild Socialists and an important section of the Christian Socialists, this “historical” argument would have been less useful. Deliberately confusing “socialism” with the “collectivism” of say, A. V. Dicey’s definition, Webb sought to claim for the Fabian socialist tradition almost all the reform legislation of the past century whether enacted by Tory or by Liberal governments.

Webb’s blurring of the lines between Liberal Radicalism and socialism was politically useful to the Fabian purpose of “permeation.” Ironically Joseph Chamberlain, the contemporary spokesman of the Radical tradition (and a frequent dinnerguest of the Webbs) was adopting precisely the same maneuver from the other side—claiming socialism as part of the historic Radical movement: “the path of legislative progress in England has been for years, and must continue to be, distinctly socialist,” he announced.¹⁸ In truth, in the early years of Fabian history it was difficult to discover precisely who was permeating whom. Henry George was a link between the Fabians and Chamberlainites; the link was often personal and direct, and George exerted great influence on both groups.¹⁹

Webb’s letter to George opens by reminding the American of their conversation in New York in 1886, moves on to an analysis of the English political situation and urges George to concentrate on converting the middle-classes, especially Nonconformist ministers.²⁰

I am afraid that you will be denounced and attacked by the wilder kind of Socialist. Headlam, Pease and others besides myself are doing all we can to induce them to keep quiet, *as it would be fatal to arouse an antagonism between the Radical and Socialist parties.* (Sic) Many of us have been working for years to keep the peace between them, and to bring them into line on practical politics. Neither the Socialist nor any other party is [the same?] here as in America, and the real force of the Socialist movement works in lines which you do not at all disapprove. . . . Now I want to implore your forbearance. When you are denounced as a traitor and what not, by Socialist newspapers; and ‘heckled’ by Socialist questioners, or abused by Socialist orators, it will be difficult not to denounce Socialism in return. But do not do so. They will be only the noisy fringe of the Socialist party who will do this, and it will be better for the cause which we both have at heart, if you can avoid accentuating your differences with Socialists.

You may safely lay much more stress on the nationalisation or “municipalisation” of all monopolies here than in America. Our Civil Service and municipal government is much better fitted to bear the strain, and the people are quite ready.

To expedite this policy of cooperation Webb had himself written a tract for the Georgist *English Land Restoration League* on “London’s Unearned Increment.” Later he added another, for what was now called the *United Committee for Taxation of Ground Rents and Values*, entitled “A Plea for the Taxation of Ground Rents.”²¹

In Fabian Tract No. 172 (July 1913) *What About the Rates?*, Webb advocated taxation of ground rents in order to increase the independent finance of local authorities and facilitate municipal autonomy. But later as the Fabian socialist stand became differentiated from Liberal-Radicalism, the Webbs tended to relegate taxation of land values to a minor place in their program. By 1921 their position on the Single Tax had changed: "The attempt to put into force any such crude universal measure—which, it may be explained, is very far from being what is contemplated by the Labor Party— would inevitably jeopardise the very substance of the nation."²² This was a far cry from the letter to Henry George of 1889.

III

LONG BEFORE 1921 in fact, George's "ecstatic vision" had been reduced to the status of a prosaic demand by local authorities for increased financial independence. Meanwhile the Fabians had themselves become more clearly the spokesmen (the "Jesuits" as they were once called) of the Labour Party.

The policy of conscious cooperation between land-reformers and socialists was also supported by Annie Besant who was later to become a founder of the Theosophist movement. Writing on the "Socialist Movement" in the *Westminster Review* she said that although the land-reformer would disown the title of socialist, "his attitude to the land is . . . an important factor in the Socialist movement, as it familiarizes the national mind with the idea of the State absorbing the functions hitherto belonging to a class."²³ Another Fabian, R. Wherry Anderson, who was Henry George's secretary in 1889, left the SDF for the Fabians in 1888 (fairly late) because he too favored a policy of cooperation, at least temporarily, with collectivist radicals.²⁴

W. S. De Mattos, a Fabian who for years advocated an independent labor party, was a Georgist who remained behind after the secession of Shaw, Olivier and the rest from the L.R.U. to organize the English Land Restoration League and the first "Red Van" tours in Berkshire. As a leading "itinerant Fabian" De Mattos gave over 500 lectures in two years to local groups.²⁵ John Edwards, a prominent Liverpool Fabian, was "converted" by hearing George lecture in Liverpool in 1882 and by reading *Progress and Poverty*. From the Christian socialists he moved to the Liverpool Socialist Society and then became president of the Liverpool Fabians in 1892, a member of the ILP and a leading trade unionist. His career is typical of many local Fabians—the provincial leaders who later put pressure on the London Fabians.

It is impossible to give more than a sample of the type of people for whom

George's propaganda was decisive in the 1880s and 90s. The Fabian political scientist Graham Wallas, for instance, thought rent-appropriation by taxation would be a transitional measure of great value and H. G. Wells admitted:

Oddly enough I cannot recall having thought at all about Socialism until I read Henry George.

For Wells, *Progress and Poverty* was "like a laboratory demonstration to revivify a general theory . . . It was like working kindred mathematical problems of progressive complexity under a common Rule. It was quite easy to pass from the insistence of Henry George upon the inalienable claim of the whole community to share in the benefit of the land, to the simpler aspects of interest and monetary appreciation."²⁶

The first of the two chief lessons that Henry George impressed upon the Fabians was that the real solution of the social problem was through political channels. Indeed the general contribution of American radicalism as a whole to the intellectual history of the period was this reaffirmation of a kind of "Progressive" (in the American sense) faith in political democracy. In the opinion of E. R. Pease: "George . . . was not at all times a fanatical Georgite; . . . the great conception he contributed to the thought of the 'eighties was that poverty was an evil *preventable by State action*." George went far beyond mere philanthropy or charity; he "proposed to redress the wrongs suffered by the working class as a whole." How was he to achieve this 'tremendous revolution'? ". . . By a political method, applicable by a majority of the voters, and capable of being drafted by any competent lawyer." A method thoroughly Fabian, and gratefully acknowledged by the authentic mouthpiece of the Society:

To George belongs the extraordinary merit of recognizing the right way to social salvation.

George suggested neither segregated communities nor "voluntary associations," neither physical nor moral coercion. In harmony with the Anglo-American democratic faith in majority rule and representative, responsible government, he taught the Fabians "to associate the new gospel with the old political method."²⁷

The second of George's lessons was the theory of unearned increment, which served the same purpose for the Fabians, J. A. Hobson, and the Labour Party, as the doctrine of "Surplus Value" did for Marx. Unearned increment was derived, of course, from Ricardo and the Classical school, but its great currency in the 80s arose almost chiefly from the popular propaganda of Henry George. Above all, as a doctrine it was more likely to appeal on ethical grounds than was surplus value. This, together with George's oratory, accounts for its acceptability to the Christian Socialists, many of whom were also ILP-men and Fabians in the 80s and 90s, and Guild Socialists after 1906.

IV

HENRY GEORGE'S INFLUENCE on the Christian socialist revival of the 1880s and 1890s was very considerable; but it is also true that those late-Victorian reformers who adopted the style "Christian Socialists" had much deeper roots than this.²⁸ The Christian socialists of the 1850s led by F. D. Maurice, J. W. Ludlow, and the novelist Charles Kingsley, drew their inspiration from France (especially from Buchez and to a lesser degree from Lamennais) and their moral philosophy from Maurice.

The men of the revival period 30 years later could work on this previous basis. The central idea of Buchez and Ludlow, however, producers' cooperative associations, was somehow lost in the early stages of Christian socialist revival.

Stewart Headlam's Anglo-Catholic *Guild of St. Matthew* took as its immediate program the social policy of Henry George, and throughout his long career as a Fabian, Headlam remained fundamentally a Georgist. There were odd *communitarian* examples of the producers' cooperation ideal in the 90s, but it was not until 1906 and the creation in the North of England of the *Church Socialist League*, which eventually became Guild-Socialist in character, that the producers'—or workers'—control concept, the basic theme of what is distinctively "Christian-Socialist" in the history of socialist thought, reappeared.²⁹

It is certainly true in the early 80s, during that same period of confusion when Fabians, Marxists, Radical-Liberals, Anarchists and so on, had not yet sorted themselves out, when the S.D.F. was still the "Democratic Federation" and the Fabians were still feeling their way towards collectivism with the inevitability, no doubt, of gradualness, that the Christian socialists and the Single-Taxers were also difficult to tell apart. They interchanged organization and personnel. They jointly owned a newspaper, with the somewhat misleading title *Christian Socialist*, and they espoused for a while, many of the same attitudes and ideas.

But it would be wrong to assume that this close relationship between Georgists and Christian socialists was a lasting one. Some Christian socialists did remain Georgists all their lives—like Stewart Headlam; but the *Christian Socialist* itself was to publish penetrating attacks on George, and to give big publicity to the writings of George's principal American socialist opponent, Laurence Gronlund.

Older than any existing socialist group in England at that time, the *Guild of St. Matthew* was founded on St. Peter's Day, 1877, by grateful parishioners of the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam.³⁰ Besides his heavy parish duties (when employed), Headlam found time in a full life of social service to become a leading Single Taxer, editor of the *Church Reformer* from 1884 to 1895, member of the L.R.U. from its inception in 1885, executive member of the Fabian Society (which he

joined in December 1886) in 1890–1891 and 1901–1911, and conscientious London local councillor. His guiding economic aim was simple: to enact the ideas of his friend and teacher, Henry George.

Although Headlam served on the original committee of fifteen that drew up the “Basis” of the Fabian Society, wrote an important Fabian *Tract* and often presided at Fabian meetings, there can be little doubt that he found the atmosphere more congenial in the L.R.U. and the later English Land Restoration League which he helped Frederick Verinder to found.³¹

Frederick Verinder, who emerged as the virtual leader of the English Single Tax movement at the moment he was elected general secretary of the E.L.R.L., was a man of great administrative ability.³² He had done the bulk of the preparatory work in establishing the Guild of St. Matthews and he united the two movements in his person. The Guild derived its theology from the Oxford Movement and Maurice, and its social policy from Henry George—combining Tractarian sacramentalism and political radicalism in a manner not entirely without precedent.³³ Its aim, “to justify God to the people,” was the aim and achievement of Henry George too, insofar as he destroyed Malthusian fatalism and restored faith in perfectibility and social action. When Headlam bought the *Church Reformer* in 1884 he immediately began to use it as a platform for George.

In the same year an Anglican Conference at Reading gave Headlam and Verinder an excellent opportunity. They set up a bookstall to sell *Progress and Poverty* and Headlam pressed the book on everyone he met. He discovered that the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. A. C. Tait) had read it, and that the future Primate (Dr. Randall Davidson) had passed the book on to Queen Victoria herself. There seems to be no record of her reaction.

During 1884 the land reform work of the Guild of St. Matthew expanded rapidly. Headlam’s address (“A Priest’s Political Programme”) was thoroughly Georgist; indeed like George, he was inclined to believe that “the restoration of the value of the land to the People” would lead to a decline in urban immorality, drunkenness and prostitution.³⁴ Presiding at George’s farewell banquet in April 1884, Headlam maintained that private property in land was opposed not only to the Ten Commandments but to the very teaching and life of Jesus Christ.³⁵ In October the Guild held a Single Tax meeting *en plein air* in Trafalgar Square, and throughout 1885 “spread the Gospel” to places as far apart as Abercarn, Folkestone, Liverpool, Northampton, Oldham, Plymouth, Preston and Wellingborough. On January 23rd Headlam took part in George’s meeting of the unemployed outside the Royal Exchange. His Fabian Tract No. 42 (*Christian Socialism*) of January 8, 1892 announced:³⁶

The main plank in the platform of the Christian Socialist, the chief political reform at which he aims . . . is summed up in the resolution moved by the English Land Restoration League in Trafalgar Square; after which the authorities, being Conservative authorities, wisely settled that no more should be said there for the present.

He concluded that without the Single Tax, morality was impossible.

As late as 1908 Headlam reminded the Fabians of their debt to Henry George in a lecture called *Fabianism and Land Values*. Any attempt to socialize industrial capital *before* land values was doomed to failure, he claimed.³⁷ "The first part of our 'Basis' is in fact saturated with the teaching of Henry George . . . The Fabians of the present generation would do well, if they want to understand the first principles on which their Society is founded, to read *Progress and Poverty*." What was not clear, and what was never fully clear about Headlam, is how far he was prepared to socialize capital even *after* the taxation of land values.

The Headlamite-Georgist group did not manage to keep control of the *Christian Socialist* for very long, despite the fact that one of Headlam's leading colleagues, Rev. C. L. Marson, was the paper's editor from 1884 to 1887. In fact it was from January 1884 that the *Christian Socialist* clearly abandoned George's Single Tax as the panacea of social reform. The journal had been founded, six months earlier (June 1883), as an intended Georgist organ, edited by a committee of the Land Reform Union (Champion, Joynes and Frost). Its first contributors included Headlam, Olivier, J. Bruce Wallace, Rev. H. C. Shuttleworth and Henry George himself. The creation by the S.D.F. of *Justice* (January 1884) cut heavily into the *Christian Socialist's* circulation and this may have spurred its editors towards their rapid desertion of the Single Tax and early demand for the socialization of capital as well as of land.

Under Rev. C. L. Marson's editorship the *Christian Socialist* became very 'radical' in language (he was a master of invective),³⁸ and began denouncing, in addition to the capitalist system, such things as the Irish Union ("the union of thumb and thumbscrew"), the Pall Mall club members who incited the labor demonstrators of 1886 by jeering from West End windows ("low-minded and over-pampered scoundrels"), the "booby police," Sunday Observance, Anglican Bishops ("Rt. Rev. Creepy Crawleys," "a flock of aged sheep," "the old ladies of Convocation") and the Established Church ("an interesting piece of archaeology" condemned alike by "political sanitation and moral health").³⁹ Besides providing this cathartic outlet, which was no doubt eufunctional for society at large, the journal led to the creation of the *Christian Socialist Society* (1886–1892).⁴⁰ Though Marson had encouraged the creation of the new Christian Socialist Society his influence on the *Christian Socialist* declined fairly quickly

once the Society got under way.⁴¹ The Society, led principally by W. H. Paul Campbell, B.D., stood for a simple, Christ-centered socialism, friendly to Christians of all creeds and types.

Campbell came to socialism *via* Carlyle and Ruskin. He had joined Hyndman's S.D.F. in 1884 and was an early contributor to *Justice*. His well-known pamphlet, *The Robbery of the Poor*, was in fact an S.D.F. Tract for 1884. He took over the editorship of the *Christian Socialist* from Marson in 1884 and held it until 1890. When the Christian Socialist Society disbanded in 1892, Campbell became a Fabian, and was also a founder-member of the London Labour Church (with J. Bruce Wallace, Rev. P. H. Wicksteed and others). By 1895, however, Campbell's flirtation with Christian socialism was over; he had "disclaimed the prefix 'Christian,'" although he "retained sympathy" with the religious side of socialism. Campbell reverted to his earlier, S.D.F. position on religion. He became thereafter treasurer of the London I.L.P. for some years.⁴² From the outset Campbell regarded the Single Tax as inadequate; there is no record of his ever having been a George disciple. Both land and capital must be confiscated, he believed, without compensation too, if need be.⁴³

Other members of the Christian Socialist Society were or had been Georgists. Rev. Alexander Webster (1840–1918), was one. He was the leader of Scots Unitarians, a prolific pamphleteer, friend of Michael Davitt and the Irish Nationalists, close for forty years to Richard McGhee, the Single Tax M.P., and president of the Kilmarnock I.L.P. in the 1890s. A less ardent Georgist perhaps, the Rev. J. Bruce Wallace (1853–1939), was a Congregational socialist and editor of the journal *Brotherhood* from 1887–1931 (a rich source of socialist information). Rev. Wallace later became vice-president of Rev. John Clifford's Christian Socialist League (1894–1898), was also a follower of George—at least, until he became converted to the more "advanced" ideas of another American, Gronlund. Yet the most prolific member of the Society, Rev. John C. Kenworthy, like its leader Campbell, did not take his economics from Henry George but from Edward Bellamy, Ruskin and Tolstoy. With Bruce Wallace, Kenworthy revived the producer's cooperatives aspect of Christian socialism, in a communitarian setting.⁴⁴

In the fall of 1886 the newly-established Christian Socialist Society had begun holding public meetings in Bloomsbury at which Single-Taxers like Headlam were included among the speakers, along with W. H. P. Campbell, the Fabian ethicalist Percival Chubb and others. But in the new year of 1887, the Society took over the *Christian Socialist* as its official mouthpiece. The new editors, Campbell and his helpmeet Alfred Howard (a lay Christian member of the Fabian Society), began an aggressive propaganda policy. They gave space to the Danish-American socialist, Laurence Gronlund, whose denunciation of Henry George

played a large role in the deterioration of George's image among English socialists in general.

Gronlund was in Europe during the years 1885–1887 and worked for a while with William Morris's *Socialist League*. He apparently cast a spell over Campbell and Howard, and some members of the Christian Socialist Society complained of this S.D.F.-Socialist League kind of influence within it. Gronlund's own articles on economic socialism appeared in the *Christian Socialist* in February, March and April of 1887—the crucial months of Henry George's increasing alienation from many of his former British supporters—and Gronlund addressed the Christian Socialist Society in person during February and March. A long series of detailed review articles on his *Cooperative Commonwealth* followed, in the 1887–1888 issues of the *Christian Socialist*. The influence of Henry George and his followers among this particular group of Christian Socialists was by now quite dead.

V

IT WOULD BE an unrewarding task to deal individually with the leading trade unionists of the 1880s and 90s to examine the impact that Henry George made on their lives. Enough has been revealed about the Marxists, Fabians and Christian socialists for us to hazard a generalization that many, and perhaps most union leaders were Georgists before they became socialists. Three leaders, Mann, Burns, and Quelch have been mentioned already. Their colleagues were not slow to acknowledge George: G. N. Barnes, general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers from November 1896; Richard McGhee, M.P., the founder of the Liverpool Dockers' Union and Henry George's chief Single Tax organizer in Scotland; James Sexton, the "dockers' M.P.," later knighted and for many years a most ardent Georgist, and Will Thorne, the founder of the Gas Workers' Union (August 1889).

More generally the effects of George's propaganda on trade unionism can be measured by the Reports of the Trade Union Congress in favor of land nationalization (1882, 1888, 1895) and in the close cooperation between the miner's unions and the land-reformers in the "Yellow Van" campaigns of 1897 in Durham and Northumberland. George himself never had any serious differences with the trade unionists; he was a union member, and indeed, the very last article he ever wrote—in the midst of the New York mayoralty campaign of 1897 in which he died—was an impassioned defense of trade union rights against "aggregations of large masses of capital and the destructive power thereby developed."⁴⁵

When he returned to Britain on his fourth and fifth visits in 1888–1889, George

discovered that the mental climate had changed since the opening of the decade. His once-powerful appeal to the masses had been the bane of all conservatives and the rallying-point of many social reformers. But now, with the advancing years, it had begun to lose momentum. In stimulating wider social forces, Georgism lost its own direction. Without the drive of its creator, no longer embodied in George's broad, energetic humanitarianism, what did it become? A minor fiscal measure in the overloaded programs of Fabians, Liberals and 'Radical Socialists.' "Georgism" became the "taxation of land values"; it was taken over by the municipalists, the "gas and water" socialists, and passed finally into the Liberal-Radical camp. There, but for the special circumstances of the early eighties and the power of George's oratory, it would long before have found its home.

In 1887 the E.L.R.L. joined with the "Municipal Reform League" to establish the "United Committee for the Taxation of Ground Rents and Values." After 1890 the United Committee broadened its propaganda to include rural areas. In 1891 it launched its first "Red Van" campaign (April 17 to October 22, Suffolk) in collaboration with the "Eastern Counties Labour Federation."⁴⁶ The result was an addition of 82 new branches and over 5,000 new members to the Eastern Counties group: a direct Georgist victory for labor unions. In 1892 five new Vans visited Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Hereford, Sommerset and Kent, widely disseminating knowledge and often meeting with hired violence. Three years later, Federick Verinder wrote that the Red Van Committee acted regularly as the convener of conferences of independent laborers' unions in London. About 70 Labour, Radical and Liberal Clubs were affiliated to the E.L.R.L., which had held 2,050 meetings since 1891.⁴⁷

The Liberal Party itself was coming round to the taxation of land values in the late eighties. The National Liberal Federation annual conference held in Manchester in 1889 passed Georgist resolutions, and in October of that year a considerable sensation was caused in official Liberal ranks by the election of Seymour Key as M.P. for Elgin and Nairn on a Single Tax platform. The 1889 resolutions were repeated in Sheffield in 1890 and became part of the famous "Newcastle Programme" in 1891. The ultimate outcome of all this Liberal interest in the taxation of land values was, of course, the Lloyd George Budget of 1909.

Efforts in Parliament by the Georgist group were encouraged by progress made among local authorities, especially the London County Council and Glasgow Corporation. By 1890 Webb estimated that some two-thirds of the L.C.C. supported the United Committee's policy. Costelloe, the L.C.C. representative on the Royal Commission on Local Taxation of 1896, made strong appeals for the enactment of land value taxation. Meanwhile Glasgow had in 1890 appointed

a special committee to report on land values. Six years later came its report—that 62 Scottish “Assessing Authorities” (including seven town councils) favored taxation of land values. A petition was sent to Parliament. The Royal Commission minority report was Georgist, and in 1902 a Bill based on it was presented in the Commons by C. O. Trevelyan, only to be defeated on its second reading. Next year Dr. McNamara’s Bill also failed, despite the support of John Burns and Lloyd George. Two further Bills, Trevelyan’s second Bill (based on a large municipal conference of 1902) and Sir John Brunner’s Bill, were shelved indefinitely in 1904 and 1905 respectively.

On February 27, 1906, after a change of government, over 500 petitions were presented to the new ministers. The way was well prepared for the Budget of 1909. Meanwhile, in the national political sphere, the Single Taxers held the support of the emerging Labour Party.

VI

WHEN KEIR HARDIE established the *Scottish Labour Party* his task was certainly made easier by the existence of a strong land reform organization originally founded in Scotland by Henry George himself. Hardie approached socialism through the Liberal-Radical tradition, passing through the kirk, the temperance movement, cooperation, official Liberalism and Georgism. He owed nothing to Marx and much to Carlyle, Ruskin, Robert Burns and Henry George. His socialism was opportunist and non-doctrinaire, based on sentiment and hard experience, not Hegelian dialectic and research in out-dated Blue Books. Under Hardie’s leadership the I.L.P. signified, in his own words; “a revolt against the assumption that working people are in any sense inferior, either mentally or morally, to any other section of the community.”⁴⁸ Hardie wrote to George in 1884:⁴⁹

I have read your *Progress and Poverty* twice over and am now reading *Social Problems* and I cannot fully express my gratitude to you for the light your writings have thrown on problems which have filled my mind since ever I could think. I began life as a miner when little over ten years of age, and am still engaged in that industry . . . I am afraid that even you, Sir, with your large and sympathetic heart cannot realize the terrible state we are in at this moment. To see the pale, worn-out looks, the premature aged appearance, the physically distorted forms and the ominous hollow sounding cough of the men . . . All this while our miserable newspaper writers and our statesmen are boasting of our progress and our civilisation. Oh Heavens—when will men look facts in the face!

In that year George made his stump-tour throughout Scotland and met Hardie in Lanarkshire. The two men lived together for two or three days, visiting mining villages. “In reality Hardie was then a Socialist in all but name,” wrote Bruce Glasier,⁵⁰ who was himself an early Scottish Georgist and member of the Scottish

Labour Party. When Hardie contested Mid-Lanark in the bye-election of March-April 1888, he was helped not only by Champion but also by Cunninghame Graham, Michael Davitt and the Scottish Land Restoration League under Richard McGhee and John Ferguson. Cunninghame Graham became president of the Scottish Labour Party and John Ferguson, vice-president. Other S.L.R.L. members in the new Party were Shaw Maxwell and John Murdoch.

Four years later Hardie stood for West Ham on the direct invitation of a Committee formed by the E.L.R.L. in collaboration with Radical socialists. Keir Hardie had been one of Henry George's first recruits and the message of *Progress and Poverty* remained "an abiding influence" in his life.

Typical of the early Georgist-I.L.P. men were James Shaw Maxwell, Frank Smith and the much-neglected but very prolific writer J. Morrison Davidson. Shaw Maxwell, a lithographic designer from Saltmarket near Glasgow, entered the I.L.P. from the secretaryship of the Glasgow Sunday School Society, the Irish Land League (which he joined in 1880) and the S.L.R.L. He never relinquished his position in the last and became one of the Georgist group of M.P.s. In 1884 he was candidate for a Glasgow seat as an "Independent and Labour" man. At Bradford he became the first secretary of the I.L.P. in 1893, and in London founded the *People's Press*. Maxwell was a prominent Red Van lecturer throughout the nineties, as was Frank Smith.

Smith, an upholsterer by trade, was secretary of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values. He had joined the Salvation Army in 1879 and developed its social wing. On returning from the U.S.A. and Canada, Smith established *The Workers' Cry* and became a London County Councillor. His close friend J. Morrison Davidson, was of course an E.L.R.L. pamphleteer and writer who became a Labour M.P.⁵¹

As far as the 'official' I.L.P. attitude to George can be elicited from a study of the *I.L.P. News*—which did not get under way properly until April 1897—it was very little different from that of the Fabian Society. That is, the Single Tax was not accepted as the basis of all necessary social legislation, but George's general political approach to social problems was highly praised as his personal efforts in the cause were frequently applauded.⁵² Like the *Clarion*, the I.L.P. journal was markedly in favor of George's anti-corruption speeches in his second mayoralty campaign, and its obituary article on November 1897 stated:

Henry George was far more to us than the champion of municipal reform. He was one of the great men of our time. His *Progress and Poverty* made a new era in the aspirations of democracy. By its publication, and by the author's speeches was first set aflame the social enthusiasm that today inspires the propaganda of the Socialists as well as the land reformers of Britain, America and the colonies.

The Labour Governments of 1923–1924 and 1929–1931 would by no means have repudiated this eulogy. Ramsay MacDonald had himself been “disposed towards insurgent politics,” as he put it, by reading Henry George. Authur Henderson and Philip Snowden were both enthusiastic supporters of the Georgist movement. Henderson was the very epitome of that Labour group whose roots lay in Nonconformity, Radicalism and trade unionism. He maintained that land value taxation was not simply a plan for gaining increased revenue, but that it “opened the way to the national resources from which all wealth springs.”⁵³ Snowden, who had hardly ever heard of socialism and never possessed an idea on social policy until he heard George lecture to a crowded audience in the Aberdeen Music Hall, presented in his famous Budget of 1931 a land value taxation plan for which high hopes were held by Georgists. Snowden wrote the preface to an abridged edition of Henry George’s *Protection or Free Trade* in 1929, and to Josiah Wedgwood’s *Henry George for Socialists*.

In 1934 the Conservatives repealed the land-tax clauses of Snowden’s budget. An intensive campaign began in the Labour Party led by Herbert Morrison; but the years wore on, and World War II temporarily ended the hopes of nationalizers and Single Taxers alike.

VII

IN THE 1880s the American Henry George made a revolutionary attack on the problem of poverty in industrial society. *Progress and Poverty* was an assault on monopolistic capitalism, or so it seemed. William Morris puts it very well in *Commonweal*, in 1887:

So long as George used Socialist sentiments and semi-Socialist arguments, he was simply recruiting for the Socialist movement.

Once it was ‘clear’ what ‘George’s plan’ was—tax reform, abolition of all taxes save on land values, the Single Tax panacea—the relationship between Henry George and British socialism was an evanescent, transitory affair. To Morris the “Socialist argument” of Henry George “embraces nearly everything” but his proposal, the Single Tax, “includes only a few things.” Viewing George from a *Socialist League* perspective, William Morris hoped that the “people will take his arguments and make their own proposals.”

What “people” Morris is talking about here, is to be questioned.⁵⁴ The fact is that Henry George remains a force, even when the *Socialist League* had founded. “He was one of the great men of our time,” as the *I.L.P. News* reminds us, and his appeal lay in his style, personality and rhetoric, not in his Single Tax on Land Values.

Notes

1. The Fellowship was contemplative, but Davidson himself did not oppose social action at that time. He was greatly influenced by Henry George and as late as October 1886 was still speaking in George's favor in the U.S.A. By 1890 he had rejected both Single Tax and socialism, and his views were printed in the Fellowship's journal *Seedtime* (April 1891, No. 8) which continued publication in England long after the Fabian secession and down to 1898. It had the support of several Fabians, including Bland, Olivier, Carpenter, Salt and Clarke. Thomas Davidson, 1840–1900, graduate of Aberdeen University (1860); emigrated to Canada and then to U.S.A.; associated with Concord school of philosophy.

2. E. R. Pease, 1857–1955; born in Bristol of Quaker stock; educated privately; "George's *Progress and Poverty* first led him to Socialism" (*Labour Annual*, 1895, p. 184). Executive committee, Fabian Society, 1885–1886 and 1890–1915. Visited U.S.A.; Married a Fabian, Margery Davidson (1889). His *History of the Fabian Society* (London, 1916) is the standard account; but see Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The First Fabians* (London, 1977).

3. Frank Podmore, 1856–1910; M.A., Pembroke College, Oxford. Held a G.P.O. clerkship. Wrote standard life of Robert Owen (1906) and books on spiritualism and psychic research. Podmore and Pease discussed *Progress and Poverty* while awaiting a ghost in a haunted house at Notting Hill. (See E. R. Pease: *History of the Fabian Society*, London, 1916, p. 28). Executive committee, Fabian Society, 1884 and 1886–1888.

4. A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884–1918* (Cambridge, 1962), gives somewhat supercilious image of George among the Fabians.

5. Sydney Olivier, 1859–1943; son of an Anglican clergyman; educated Corpus Christi, Oxford, and became a Georgist. Entered Colonial Office, 1882 and there met Sydney Webb. Executive Committee, Fabian Society, 1887–1899; Hon. Sec., 1887–1899. Contributor to *Today*, *Fabian Essays*, and *Seedtime*. Colonial Secretary for Jamaica, 1889–1904. Acting Governor on three occasions. Governor of Jamaica, 1907; K.C.M.G., 1907, becoming Lord Olivier.

6. The turning point came about 1884—a crucial year in which groups began to divide in support of various constellation ideas. In Ireland, Davitt came out openly for land-nationalization and socialism; in England in the same year George rejected socialization of capital; the Fabians broke away from the Fellowship of the New Life; the Democratic Federation became the S.D.F., and later the Socialist League broke away under Morris; Stewart Headlam's Anglo-Catholic Guild of St. Matthew declared itself for socialist principles. Olivier himself broke his relations with the S.D.F. in 1885 and joined the Fabians.

7. *Fabian Tract*, No. 7, approved by the Society in April 1888.

8. *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London, 1948 ed., pp. 96–120 (first published 1889)).

9. G. Bernard Shaw, *The Political Madhouse in America and Nearer Home* (London, 1933), p. 61.

10. Shaw to Hamlin Garland, December 29, 1904, in G. R. Geiger: *The Philosophy of Henry George* (Grand Forks, N. Dakota 1931), pp. 191–92.

11. G. Bernard Shaw, *Sixteen Self-Sketches* (London, 1949), p. 58.

12. *Fabian Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 165. He adds: "Such pressure is already forthcoming." See also Shaw's letter to the London *Star* (June 7, 1889, p. 4) settling a controversy between George and Cunninghamham Graham.

13. The economic theory of Fabian socialism has recently been exhaustively described in A. M. McBriar's *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884–1918*, (Cambridge, England, 1962), Chapter Two.

14. P. H. Wicksteed to Henry George, October 26, 1882, and February 4, 1883, HGC.
15. It was at Wicksteed's personal request that Arnold Toynbee gave the lectures on *Progress and Poverty* which initial lectures proved to be the last work of his brief life. At the inauguration of the Land Reform Union (June 5, 1883) Wicksteed said that Henry George had "drawn to a focus the scattered rays of the converging thoughts which, when once revealed to him, were to be found everywhere in economic writings." *Christian Socialist*, No. 2 July 1883, Supp. pp. ii-iii.
16. E. R. Pease: *History of the Fabian Society*, (London 1916), Appendix I, pp. 260-61.
17. See especially pp. 116-17, *Socialism in England* (London 1890).
18. Quoted in G. D. H. Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*, Vol. II: *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-90* (London 1957), pp. 388-89.
19. For George's relationship with the Chamberlain group see Elwood P. Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957), Ch. 8.
20. Webb to George, March 8, 1889, Henry George Collection, New York Public Library.
21. E.L.R.L. Tract No. 14 (undated); S. Webb: *The London Programme* (London 1891), p. 149n.
22. S. and B. Webb, *A Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain* (London 1920); *The Consumers' Cooperative Movement* (London 1921), pp. 421-22.
23. Published in *Essays in Socialism* (London 1887), p. 12.
24. R. Wherry Anderson, born in 1865; matriculated in London University 1882, taking no degree. Founder of the Socialist Supper Club (1894) and one-time assistant editor of *Reynold's News*, the organ of the *Rochdale Cooperative Movement*.
25. W. S. DeMattos, born in Canada, 1861, and educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, reading mathematics. Fabian Executive and Lecture Secretary.
26. H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (London, 1934), Vol. 1, p. 168.
27. T. Kirkup, *History of Socialism* (5th ed., largely rewritten by E. R. Pease, London, 1913), pp. 369-70 and E. R. Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, pp. 19-21.
28. E. P. Lawrence, has tended to equate Christian socialism with Henry Georgism in this period, mainly because he confuses the Headlam *Guild of St. Matthew* group with the whole Christian socialist movement. Peter d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival* (Princeton, N.J., 1968) and cp. Lawrence's *Henry George in the British Isles*, op. cit.
29. Jones, *passim*.
30. Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924. Son of a Liverpool businessman. Educated at Eton (his tutor being J. L. Joynes' father). At Cambridge he came under the personal sway of F. D. Maurice. Ordained 1872, despite difficulties over his ritualism; held four curacies but forced to leave three. He gained more practical experience of London social conditions than any other reformer except Charles Booth and the Webbs. A constant friend of the theater, he founded the Church and Stage Guild (May 1879) and the London Shakespeare League. Served on the London School Board, 1888-1904 and on the London County Council from 1907. Jones, Ch. 5. Also see Edward Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), Ch. 6.
31. For the first history of the Guild of St. Matthew see Jones, *ibid*.
32. Frederick Verinder, born at Bethnal Green, October 1858. Son of a Wiltshire laborer. Studied science in London but outside activities cut short his degree. Assistant Grammar school-master, 1878-1883. Subeditor of the *Church Reformer* and editor of the *Democrat* during its last two years of existence until it amalgamated with Michael Davitt's *Labour World*. Organizer of the E.L.R.L. "Red Vans," ultimately copied by the Land Nationalisation Society ("Yellow Vans") and by Robert Blatchford's Clarion movement in the North. Popular figure throughout the labour movement. See *Labour Annual*, 1895, p. 191; Jones, p. 128 n. 70.

33. The High Church bent explains, among other things, Headlam's otherwise illogical refusal to marry Parnell to Mrs. O'Shea.
34. *Church Reformer* (Vol. III, p. 217 and Vol. IV, pp. 76, 125 and 177).
35. *The Times*, April 7, 1884, p. 6.
36. *Justice*, 24 January 1885, pp. 1, 6; *Fabian Tracts*, 1884–1905, (London, 1905), No. 42, p. 11.
37. S. D. Headlam, *Fabianism and Land Values* (London, 1908), *passim*.
38. See Jones, pp 148ff.
39. *Christian Socialist*, Vol. III, No. 36, May 1886, p. 190; No. 37, June 1886, pp. 194, 201–2; Vol. IX, No. 103, December 1891, pp. 129–30.
40. Jones, pp. 308–30.
41. Though a determined High Churchman, C. L. Marson displayed greater tolerance towards the unbaptized than did Headlam.
42. *Labour Annual*, 1895, p. 167; *Labour Prophet*, Vol. I, No. 3, April 1892, p. 27; *Christian Socialist*, No. 10, March 1884, pp. 147–48 and No. 12, May 1884, pp. 182–83; *Brotherhood*, Vol. VI, No. 10, May 1892, p. 223.
43. W. H. P. Campbell, *The Robbery of the Poor* (London, 1884), *passim*; *Christian Socialist*, No. 10, March 1884, pp. 147–48; No. 12, May 1884, pp. 182–83.
44. For detailed references see Jones, *ibid*.
45. *Labour Annual*, 1897, pp. 125–28 (“The Great Battle of Labour,” reprinted from the *New York Journal*).
46. Three years later the first Clarion Van set out in Liverpool (1894), and on June 18, 1896 the first Clarion Women's Van, begun by Julia Dawson. It is easy to confuse Georgist Red Vans and these Clarion Vans. Blatchford himself was in any case strongly influenced by George and devised a complex scheme for periodically equalizing wealth, based on the Single Tax.
47. *Labour Annual*, 1895, p. 127.
48. J. K. Hardie, *After Twenty Years* (London, 1913), p. 11.
49. February 10, 1884, HGC. The second half of the letter and signature is missing. Details and style point to Hardie: it is addressed “Hamilton” and states that the author no longer works in the pit. Hardie, who began work in 1866 when he was just over 10, was at this time Secretary of the Hamilton Miners' Union.
50. J. B. Glasier, *Keir Hardie: The Man and His Message*, (London, 1919), p. 5.
51. See for instance his *Concerning Four Precursors of Henry George and the Single Tax* (London, 1899) and *Land for the Landless* (written with Verinder, undated).
52. See *ILP News*, Vol. I, Nos. 2 (May, 1897), 3 (June, 1897), and 7 (October, 1897).
53. Speech to the International Conference on the Taxation of Land Values, Oxford, August 16, 1923.
54. The Single Tax Panacea, of course, was partly forced on George by his more religious followers. In the United States, people did take his arguments and developed a program which helped to produce the Progressive Era and policies that included the progressive income tax and anti-trust legislation.

Ethical Neutrality and the Distribution of Income

JOAN ROBINSON ONCE SAID that the ‘second crisis of economic theory’ has occurred because “we have not got a theory of distribution.” She added, “We have nothing