

The Disappearing Frontier

by GEORGE MARAVELAS

KNOWLEDGE has multiplied to such an extent and modern technology has become so complex, that specialization now seems to be essential for success. Nevertheless it can have its pitfalls. Students of economics and sociology, for instance, should not forget the importance of general world history, and the fact that it can throw light on present-day problems as well as on the past. Most teachers of Henry George's economic and social philosophy have found that historical incidents emphasize and clarify the material in the textbooks.

I was reminded of this recently when reading a new edition of Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History*.¹ There is much in this volume to bolster the case for land-value taxation and our almost forgotten free-enterprise system. The increase of land values with growth of population is clearly implied and indicated even though the author may be unaware of the development of certain economic values.

This is a collection of essays and lectures which first appeared in book form in 1920. The first chapter, based on a paper read at a meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893 entitled, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," attracted the attention of Woodrow Wilson, then a professor at Princeton University. In 1890 the Census Bureau had announced that the frontier no longer existed. Up to and including 1880 the frontier was an arbitrary border of settlement. Beyond that border was supposed to be an unsettled area of vast tracts of sparsely populated land. This area had been

broken up by isolated groups of miners, sheep and cattle ranchers and a few hardy farmers.

Immediately after the Civil War the Union Pacific Railroad, having reached the Pacific, became the first transcontinental railroad in the country. By 1885 there were two other transcontinental railroads linking east and west and the days of the open range were numbered. Turner was a keen observer and though most of his life was spent in an academic environment, he had a talent for brushing aside speculative and secondary information and going to bedrock for his sources. As a result his book is a classic, 40 years after publication, while 75 per cent of the history written during the same period has been forgotten or is worthless.

The author seems to have reached the same general conclusions as Henry George did with respect to the future social and economic history of the United States and the conquest of the wilderness. "That great supply of free lands which year after year has served to reinforce the democratic influences in the United States is exhausted," he wrote, "contemporaneously with this there has been such a concentration of capital in the control of fundamental industries as to make a new epoch in the economic development of the United States. The iron, the coal, and the cattle of the country have all fallen under the domination of a few great corporations with allied interests."

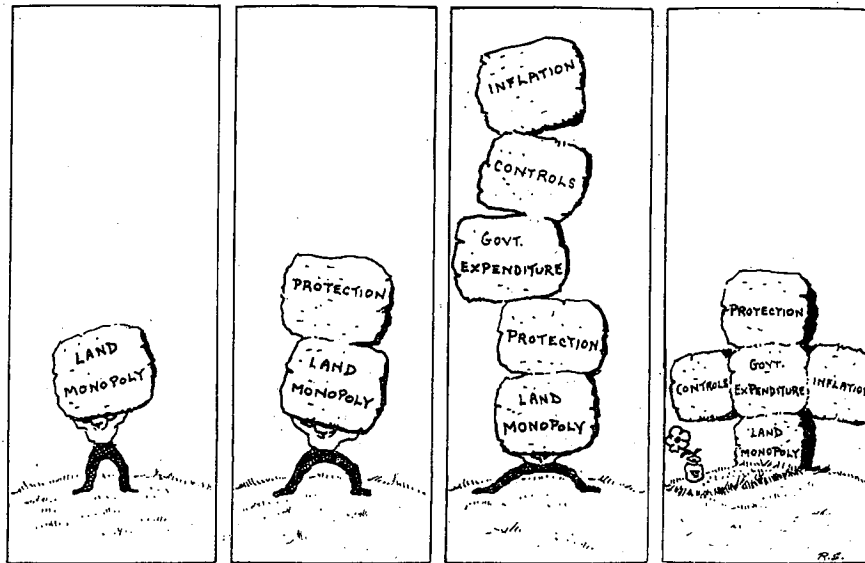
That was written in 1915, but Turner was one of the few of his day who recognized the social and economic significance of the growth of land monopoly. He realized, early in the twentieth century that an economic era

such as the world had never seen, was in the making, and that it would bring with it social problems that the founding fathers never dreamed of and an economic dilemma that would rival in intensity the slavery question of the nineteenth century.²

1. Henry Holt and Co. Inc., New York.
 2. Charles Albro Barker, in his biography of *Henry George*, notes that Turner heard George speak in 1887 at the University of Wisconsin, when he was a candidate for the master's degree in history. Later, when he was a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, he took part in a seminar discussion of *Progress and Poverty*. This would seem to indicate that Professor Turner was, if not directly influenced, certainly interested in and aware of, Henry George's ideas.

California's New 75,000

Like so many other governors, California's Governor Brown is concerned about the need for more revenue, chiefly because 75,000 new residents have entered the state since the election. Fred W. Workman, an informed resident of Pacific Grove (and HGN reader), has tried through letters to newspaper editors, to point out that each new citizen's need for a home and livelihood increases land values by \$1,000. Here, he says, is a ready-made source for new money . . . if the state doesn't tax the land and get a part of the value, it all goes to landowners who charge more for their land. Also both new and old residents will have to pay increased taxes on incomes and necessities to meet the state's needs. "Land is the sacred cow which our taxing bodies have been avoiding," states Mr. Workman. "Our land prices have been rising, not 10 or 20 per cent like wages, but in many cases 100 to 500 per cent, all an undeserved bonus to landowners for no service rendered."



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