

The Gist of Henry George

by Sydney Mayers

SINCE his writings and teachings consistently express his views without equivocation, Henry George can in no sense be "all things to all men." Yet among the many who subscribe to George's economic and social philosophy (even among those who understand it), there is wide divergence of opinion as to what the essence of George actually is. Were a dozen Georgists asked to specify the one element signifying the substance of George's principles, twelve different elements might be offered as the "essential" ones. Each could be a valid statement of a basic Georgist tenet, but possibly none would truly answer the question.

George's books, articles and speeches reflect an amazing depth and breadth of logical thinking. Being unbound by narrow preconceptions, his approach was comprehensive; he not only saw the forest, but he diligently examined every tree in it. With intellectual courage, he faced every obstacle and objection he could find. As a result, the material George bequeathed to mankind contains such an abundance of facts, ideas, arguments, conclusions and proposals that almost any of them is sufficient to support a complete school of thought. Regrettably, many "Georgists," going so far and no further, grasp but one of the many facets of George's philosophy, making that one aspect their view of the whole.

For example, to the proponents of the single tax, George seems to mean a fiscal reform, merely serving the good purpose of removing the burden of general taxation. Then there are those who see evil in the private appropriation of land rent; this they

would abolish by the public collection of land values. Others look to George to eliminate speculation in land, to prevent industrial depressions, or to arrest the decline of civilization as we know it. To others George offers the antidote to communism or the salvation of "capitalism." Some believe George's free trade policies to be the remedy for the world's ills, while some rationalistically find the "money question" the root of these troubles.

Again, there is no quarrel here with any single Georgist principle; the objection is to circumscribing what should be enlarged. One should dig deeply and seek to find the thread that ties *all* the elements into the over-all philosophy of Henry George. Upon investigation, this thread becomes more and more evident, and the superficial aspects fade as the truly essential message emerges. One discovers that Georgism is not a mundane philosophy, but a spiritual one, based upon immutable truths. George's proposals are not merely logical and expedient; their validity lies in their being just and righteous. The spiritual concept that inspires and pervades all of George is that man is born free and shall not be divested of his integrity.

This is the gist of Henry George. that neither the spirit, the mind or the body of man can rightfully be enchained, whether socially, politically or economically. It is truly a philosophy of freedom. Its strength lies in its inner force, not in its outward power. And if it seems a rather weak force to stand in a world where apparently might alone prevails, let the promise be remembered that "the meek shall inherit the earth."