

Henry George in 1966

by SYDNEY MAYERS

IT WAS in 1879 that *Progress and Poverty* was first published. Because of the lapse of time since then, Henry George's teachings are nowadays somewhat superciliously dismissed on the ground that they are archaic, old-fashioned, obsolete, and inapplicable to current economic conditions. That this concept demonstrates a singular lack of logic seems not to occur to anyone other than George's loyal devotees.

If it is reasonable to by-pass George's proposals on the basis of their being eighty-seven years old, it should be just as sensible to bury and forget everything bequeathed to us by Socrates, Pythagoras, Galileo, Da Vinci and Shakespeare — all of whom antedated Henry George by centuries. If age is to constitute the criterion of merit, even the Bible should be suspect! But obviously, it is as irrational to declare George's theories valueless on the basis of their age as it would be to invalidate the mathematical theorems of Euclid because of their antiquity.

The fact is that George's works are as contemporary in 1966 as they were when they were written. George expounded two basic economic evils: the private appropriation of land-rent and the onerous burdens of taxation; and then pointed out the erosion of personal liberty that inevitably stems from these inequities. Now, in the current *Anno Domini*, the economically aware observer must say not only "How right he was," but "How right he is!"

It would be redundant to relate again the notorious rise in land-values

that has taken place throughout the civilized world. Thanks to excessive land prices, proper homes are beyond the reach of hundreds of thousands. Thanks to ever-growing rents, more and more of the wealth produced is seized for the right to occupy a place on the earth, leaving less and less to be enjoyed by its actual producers.

Meanwhile, taxation constantly rises, as new taxes are devised and old ones increased. Levies imposed by states and municipalities are becoming so burdensome that, reports *The Wall Street Journal*, a committee of Congress (itself no demure taxgatherer) is considering ways and means to save small business firms from "strangling in an ever-expanding web of tax systems being woven by revenue-hungry state and local governments." Concurrently, the restraints and controls with which every individual must contend are too distressingly evident to require description.

Clearly, despite the superficial changes in our social structure, our basic way of life remains the same. Poverty persists, and its cause in 1966 is exactly what it was in 1879. So the revelations of the Prophet of San Francisco are as cogent now as they were then. One can only hope that the trial-and-error economic system that has prevailed in our times, which thus far has led to "error," will lead sometime to an honest "trial" of the principles of Henry George. Truth is ageless. George's proposals would have worked a thousand years ago. They would work just as well today — and tomorrow.

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"The land is no man's inheritance; none shall possess it as property."
— Tertullian (180-230 AD)