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Source: *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Oct., 1946), pp. 113-118

Published by: American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3483988>

Accessed: 14-02-2022 19:38 UTC

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Henry George: The Sullivan Controversy*

By ANNA GEORGE DE MILLE

HENRY GEORGE, in spite of his many worries and responsibilities as the leader of a movement for social reform, had not ceased to be the painstaking editor of *The Standard*. Louise Crane—who, in her middle 'teens, had acted as secretary to William T. Croasdale in the office of the weekly—speaks of the editor as she knew him:

I never heard in or around that office any word about Mr. George that was not a tribute to some one of his many noble qualities, save from the compositors. . . . It used to be common talk that Mr. George never sent back a proof without margins filled with his closely written script. They made a test one time, and by a herculean effort turned out a proof that was typographically perfect, yet it came back with filled margins like any other. "On second thought" he would mutter "perhaps this would be better." And then scratch, scratch, scratch. One day they threatened to cut the margins off, top, bottom and sides, but an inconsiderate foreman interfered. They might swear but they loved him, as we all did.¹

Louis F. Post, who helped George bear the burdens of editorship, was a man of infinite patience. An incident recounted by Mrs. Crane illustrates this quality in George's associate.

He had written an article for *The Standard* and had sent it to the office by a messenger, who had lost it en route. W. T. Croasdale, the managing editor, was furious. The door opened and a mite of a boy, with tear-stained face appeared. Followed a terrible ten seconds for the poor child, before the door opened once more, this time to admit the dignified figure of Henry George, champion of the weak. Putting a hand on the boy's shoulder he offered him a coin and pushing the sobbing wretch out of the room, he looked over at Mr. Post who had seated himself at the desk. Croasdale's eyes followed his and approvingly he said: "That's right Post—writing a complaint. Have the miserable whelp . . ."

"Complaint," answered the unperturbable Post, with a chuckle. "I'm re-writing the article."²

After the McGlynn sensation, the circulation of *The Standard* had dropped. It levelled off at about 25,000 but it brought the owner little money. The weekly had a comparatively large staff and, of course, it

* Copyright, 1946, by Anna George de Mille. A section of a previously unpublished study, "Citizen of the World"; see AM. JOUR. ECON. SOCIO., 1, 3 (April, 1942), p. 283n.

¹ From notes sent to writer by Mrs. Crane in 1938. See *Land and Freedom*, Jan.-Feb. 1940.

² *Loc. cit.*

could not hope to attract advertising. George, who was sanguine by nature and usually gay in manner, disclosed in a letter to von Gütschow in San Francisco, what a weight the paper laid upon him.

As to the paper, [George wrote] this has been constant anxiety, worry and hard work. But the election of last year was a blow between the eyes, and the circulation of *The Standard* began to steadily decline, while its advertising amounted to hardly anything. Then came the split with McGlynn and our withdrawal from third party politics. All this was absolutely unavoidable, except at the risk of a far worse disaster thereafter. But its effect was exceedingly depressing, it staggered and took the spirit out of many of our most earnest friends through the country and the momentous decline in circulation and income went on faster. I would have been unable to continue, but for the generous assistance of some friends—particularly of Tom L. Johnson of Cleveland.³

In a "fit of hopefulness" he had started *The Standard*, but within a few months of its founding he had contemplated giving it up.

The drag and worry have been indescribable, and though pressing myself to the very limit of my strength I have felt that my energies have been frittered away and that I was not doing my best work. The strain of the last two years has been very great and has made me much older. But I told these friends I would go through till this year, or at least this election was over. Now however, I feel very much better and very much more hopeful about it. Within the last couple of months the decline has stopped and *The Standard* has begun to pick up, and all the indications are that the tide was turned. And I have realized better than I did before how much influence for good the paper has exerted, and how much more it is capable of exerting. Perhaps after all it is the very best use I could have made of my time and energy. It has kept our friends in touch and has diverted the movement from serious dangers. About all of real value among our friends now recognize the wisdom of the course I took in opposing a separate nomination, and are with me firmer than ever. And hopefulness, and the consciousness of doing something, is succeeding the first dispirited feeling.⁴

Shortly after the presidential election in 1888, William Saunders, now a member of Parliament, came to America on business. He took Henry George back with him to England for a short holiday. It was four years since the American had visited Great Britain, and he found that much progress had been made in the advancement of the cause. His two weeks' visit was far from being a holiday; he spoke before assemblages of ministers of various denominations, before the Knights of Labor, the Council of the Financial Reform Association, and at several other important meetings.

³ Oct. 22, 1888, from 12 Union Square. In the private collection of the writer.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The effect of his brief tour, his fourth in Great Britain, was so important that his friends over there extracted from him a promise that he would return soon for an extended speaking campaign. Accordingly, after a few weeks in the United States, devoted to lecturing and to attending a tariff reform conference as a delegate from the New York Free Trade League, he departed in March, 1889, with his wife, his two daughters and a young friend, Mary Cranford, for England.

Beginning with the joyous greeting at Southampton from the large group who came on a tender to welcome them, the Americans had an unforgettable experience. They visited delightful homes and travelled about England and Scotland, the economist making speeches everywhere. One of the outstanding speeches of this campaign was "Thy Kingdom Come," delivered in the Glasgow City Hall⁵ under the auspices of the Henry George Institute. To quote a few passages from this sermon-like address:

Early Christianity did not mean, in its prayer for the coming of Christ's Kingdom, a kingdom in heaven, but a kingdom on earth. If Christ had simply preached of the other world, the high priests and the Pharisees would not have persecuted Him, the Roman soldiery would not have nailed His hands to the cross. Why was Christianity persecuted? Why were its first professors thrown to wild beasts, burned to light a tyrant's gardens, hounded, tortured, put to death by all the cruel devices that a devilish ingenuity could suggest? . . .

What was persecuted was a great movement for social reform—the Gospel of Justice—heard by common fishermen with gladness, carried by laborers and slaves into the Imperial City. The Christian revelation was the doctrine of human equality, of the fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of man. It struck at the very basis of that monstrous tyranny that then oppressed the civilized world; it struck at the fetters of the captive, at the bonds of the slave, at that monstrous injustice which allowed a class to revel on the proceeds of labor, while those who did the labor fared scantily. That is the reason why early Christianity was persecuted. And when they could no longer hold it down, then the privileged classes adopted and perverted the new faith, and it became, in its very triumph, not the pure Christianity of the early days, but a Christianity that, to a very great extent, was the servitor of the privileged classes. . . . There has been no failure of Christianity. The failure has been in the sort of Christianity that has been preached.

This tour through England and Scotland was trying and ceaseless work for the protagonist, as all but one of his lectures were extemporaneous. The exception was his "Moses," which he had delivered first in San Francisco,

⁵ April 28, 1889. Printed in tract form by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York, the speech continues in demand by students of George's ideas.

ten years before, and which he usually gave when addressing a Church congregation. The socialists did not make his path easy.

"I want to implore your forbearance," wrote Sidney Webb on March 8th, 1889. "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 will avoid accenting your differences with Socialists."⁶

George did not accentuate the differences between Georgism and Marxism at the debate he and H. M. Hyndman held at St. James' Hall, London,⁷ but spent most of the time assigned to him, in explaining his own social philosophy and economic ideas. He followed much the same tactics at the National Liberal Club in the debate he held with Samuel Smith, M.P., who defended established interests and attacked the Georgist program of land reform as immoral.

But partial surcease from work came for a time when George with his family, and a group of English, Scottish, Irish and American friends, went to Paris to attend the land reform conference called together by Michael Flürscheim, an ironmaster of Baden Baden, whose great works turned out everything from an ink well to a cannon. He had written George: "You have done more for humanity in these ten years than all the benevolent societies of the whole world."⁸

It was not a conference devoted to the socialization of rent by taxation, but George found an international audience of high mental calibre which gave him an enthusiastic welcome. The official report of the International Conference for Land and Social Reform was made originally only in French. George's opening speech, translated from his English into French, then into German and then back into English reads in part:

The land question, with which we are concerned, is the bottom question. It is the starting point for all reforms.

It is an error to believe that the land question relates only to agriculture. It concerns directly or indirectly all who have to pay rent, all who produce and exchange goods. It concerns the townsman as well as the countryman, industry and trade as much as agriculture.

Everything that man produces comes from the land. It is the site of all production, of all living, of all labor. Without the earth man can do nothing. . . .

⁶ From 27 Keppel Street, Russell Square, London, March 8, 1889. In the Henry George Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter abbreviated as HGC).

⁷ July 2, 1889.

⁸ Baden Baden, Oct. 19, 1888, HGC.

Land monopoly is the primary cause of poverty. On the other hand, land monopoly is the source of the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few. Through rents, royalties, tolls and tributes of all kinds which he takes under many different names, through the increase in value and the improvements of which alone he gets the advantage, whether they are the result of the labor of others or the natural effect of increase of population, the landowner acquires capital. This he then invests in the bank or in trade and industry, either in the form of loans, mortgages, stocks and shares, or in Government and municipal bonds. In course of time he builds up a tremendous financial concentration which presses heavily on the world of labor. It is from landed privileges that the great fortunes have sprung, which have become the means of oppression and exploitation. *The concentration of capital is the child of land monopoly.*⁹

His outstanding address, made at the Conference banquet,¹⁰ was on "True Free Trade." It was later translated and printed in French. There is no original English account.¹¹

This meeting in Paris was in the summer of 1889. The French capital was thronged with visitors drawn by the Exposition, and by the Eiffel Tower, just built. Hardly had the Georges arrived there before Jennie became dangerously ill with a combination of diphtheria and scarlet fever. At the first announcement of the physician's diagnosis, every other family in the crowded *pension* moved out, bag and baggage, leaving it to the Georges to meet the rent of the entire place. When due to the mother's nursing (she had a gentle little Sister of the Sacred Heart to assist her) the patient was out of danger, Mr. George, leaving the womenfolk to occupy the large apartment house, went to Holland for a brief and very successful trip.

Although the anxiety over Jennie's health had lifted, another worry came in the form of news of discord in *The Standard* office. For more than a year, young Henry George Jr. had acted as managing editor, but now while the real chief was away, two of the dominant personalities on the staff began to show disloyalty. In a weekly, *Twentieth Century*, just started by the Rev. Hugh O. Pentecost, T. L. McCready and J. W. Sullivan published an attack on the policy of *The Standard*. At the time, Sullivan was not only a paid member of *The Standard's* staff, but, with his wife, was living, during the absence of Mr. and Mrs. George in Europe, in their home. McCready left *The Standard* before the editor returned to the United States, but Sullivan remained until he was dismissed. A few months later Sullivan

⁹ Here given as it appeared in *Land and Liberty* (London) in September, 1934 and again in January, 1946. This is a translation from the German translation from the original French, published in *Der Jahrbuch der Bodenreform*, Berlin, August, 1934.

¹⁰ Hotel Continental, June 11, 1889.

¹¹ Translated from the French and published by the Joseph Fels Fund in 1913.

circulated a new attack in the Pentecost paper entitled "A Collapse of Henry George's Pretensions." It began with abuse, and ended with a statement that "Progress and Poverty" was founded upon Patrick Edward Dove's "The Theory of Human Progression."¹² This charge of plagiarism was so widely noticed, that George felt forced to make answer. In *The Standard* he reprinted the Sullivan attack, ignored the abuse and contended, in a twelve column article, that if similarity of thought and precedence in stating it proved that he had plagiarized from Patrick Edward Dove, so Dove must have plagiarized from Herbert Spencer, and Spencer from William Ogilvie and Ogilvie from Thomas Spence, to go back only as far as 1775. He ended his article and the controversy with the statement:

What we are struggling for is no new and before undreamed-of thing. It is the hope of the ages. . . . To free men, what we have to do is not to make new inventions, but simply to destroy the artificial restrictions that have been imposed, and to come back to the natural order.

When I first came to see what is the root of our social difficulties and how this fundamental wrong might be cured in the easiest way by concentrating taxes on land values, I had worked out the whole thing myself without conscious aid that I can remember, unless it might have been the light I got from Bissett's "Strength of Nations" as to the economic character of the feudal system. When I published "Our Land and Land Policy" I had not even heard of the Physiocrats and the *impot unique*. But I know if it was really a star I had seen, others must have seen it too. . . . And as I have heard of such men one after the other, I have felt that they gave but additional evidence that we were indeed on the true track, and still more clearly showed that though against us were ignorance and power, yet behind us were hope and faith and the wisdom of the ages—the deepest and clearest perceptions of man.¹³

It remained for later scholars to determine and set out George's unique contribution to this age-old tradition. George himself was more interested in spreading the doctrine than in identifying himself with it. Some time previously he had said in *The Standard*:

He who would urge on a great reform will rejoice when others take up its battle cry. And provided the victory be won, he will care but little who may claim it.¹⁴

¹² An abridged edition, omitting Dove's quaint attack on "Papistry," is published by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York.

¹³ Vol. VI, No. 16 (Oct. 19, 1889), p. 4. See Henry George Jr., "Life of Henry George," New York, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1942, p. 521.

¹⁴ Vol. II, No. 5 (Feb. 4, 1888).