

CHAPTER 4

The Public's Reception of Henry George and Progress and Poverty

Progress and Poverty probably had the greatest circulation of any nonfiction book in the English language before 1900 except for the Bible. An official of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation of New York City (which keeps George's books and pamphlets in print) reports that seven to eight thousand copies of *Progress and Poverty* are still sold each year.

People of the most disparate views can be found among the supporters of George, and the same is true of his opponents. His supporters include conservatives who welcome his laissez-faire views that government should play a minimal role in regulating or controlling business. Some conservatives also are enthusiastic about his demand that there should be no taxes except on land. His defense of businessmen's profits rings sweetly in their ears. Many liberals and radicals also support George's ideas. They are opposed to landowners receiving the "unearned increment" of land values produced by society and appropriated by the owners. Rising rents and land prices contribute to the inequality of income that they deplore.

Many conservatives oppose George's ideas because of his attack on landed property. He would in effect have the state confiscate land without any compensation at all. Perhaps the frightening thought occurs to them that if a government can expropriate the landowners, what is to prevent it from going further and seizing industrial and commercial property without payment? Most radicals, especially socialists and communists, oppose George because he didn't go far enough. He was clearly against seizing the wealth of capitalists and

landlords other than the land itself. He would not regulate or tax the rents paid for apartments or business properties. He would not try to use taxes to reduce the income gap between capitalists and workers. He was a staunch defender of a reformed capitalism.

George was a world-famous and controversial figure, and the literature about him is too vast to survey thoroughly.¹ All we shall do here is to sample some of the support and opposition that he found in the public arena.

Public Support for Henry George and Progress and Poverty

Millions of people throughout the world read and agreed with *Progress and Poverty*. Tens of thousands listened to his speeches and applauded enthusiastically his six lecture tours in the British Isles, and in Australia, Canada, and throughout the United States. Sixty-eight thousand men in New York City voted for him for mayor in 1886. A hundred thousand or more people passed his bier, or tried to, in a final tribute to the man they loved.

Many famous people were influenced by George and endorsed his views. The most notable in Asia was Sun Yat-sen, the father of the Chinese republic, who said, "I intend to devote my future to the promotion of the welfare of the Chinese people as a people. The teachings of Henry George will be the basis of our program of reform."

One of George's most distinguished European converts was Count Leo Tolstoy, who challenged private property in land. He came across George's book and was converted. He read *Progress and Poverty* to his peasants, and he wrote to some of the members of the Russian government and to the Czar himself advocating the abolition of landownership and the institution of the single tax in Russia.

John A. Hobson, English liberal reformer and anti-imperialist, said in 1897 that George exercised a more directly formative and educative influence over British radicalism since 1882 than any other man.

Professor John Dewey said in 1927:

It would require less than the fingers of the two hands to enumerate those who, from Plato down, rank with Henry George among the

1. One of the best Henry George collections is at the New York Public Library. It was given to the library by his daughter, Anna George de Mille, in 1925.

world's social philosophers. . . . No man, no graduate of a higher educational institution, has a right to regard himself as an educated man in social thought unless he has some first-hand acquaintance with the theoretical contribution of this great American thinker.²

Professor Eric F. Goldman had this to say about George's major work:

For some years prior to 1952, I was working on a history of American reform and over and over again my research ran into this fact. An enormous number of men and women, strikingly different people, men and women who were to lead twentieth century America in a dozen fields of humane activity, wrote or told someone that their whole thinking had been redirected by reading *Progress and Poverty* in their formative years. In this respect no other book came anywhere near comparable influence, and I would like to add this word of tribute to a volume which magically catalyzed the best yearnings of our grandfathers and fathers.³

Tom L. Johnson, monopolist and social reformer, supported Henry George politically and financially with enthusiasm; he dedicated his autobiography, *My Story*, "To the Memory of Henry George." An inventor and entrepreneur, he acquired street railways in Cleveland, Indianapolis, Brooklyn, St. Louis, Detroit and other cities. In 1883 he came across *Social Problems* and *Progress and Poverty* and was immediately converted. Two years later he sought out George and told him he couldn't write or speak, but he could make money and devote it to publicize George's doctrines. Johnson bought several hundred copies of George's new book *Protection or Free Trade*, and sent one to every clergyman and lawyer in Cleveland.

George suggested that Johnson go into politics, which he did by winning a seat in the United States House of Representatives in 1890. During his two terms there he proclaimed that he was a monopolist and as long as he continued in business he would take advantage of all the class legislation enacted by Congress; but as a member of Congress he

2. Edward J. Rose, *Henry George* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 8.

3. Steven B. Cord, *Henry George: Dreamer or Realist?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 242.

would work, speak and vote against such class legislation. In opposing monopolies he was very much in the spirit of George.

Johnson together with five other congressmen had the entire 332 pages of George's *Protection or Free Trade* inserted in the *Congressional Record*. It was then reprinted for less than a cent a copy and mailed without a postage charge under the congressmen's franking privilege. A total of 1,200,000 copies were distributed in this way, and another 200,000 copies of a better, two-cent edition were also sent out; Johnson paid most of the printing costs. The total circulation of this book was almost two million copies in less than eight years.

During a tariff debate in Congress, George sat in the gallery of the House of Representatives and listened to his disciple Johnson—a steel rail manufacturer—make a fervent free trade speech and move to put steel rails on the free list. One protectionist Democratic representative called attention of the House to the master in the gallery and the pupil on the floor. Many of the free trade Democrats immediately streamed upstairs to shake hands with the man who held no political office but was an outstanding leader of the free trade forces.

Johnson was mayor of Cleveland from 1899 to 1909. He advocated votes for women and a more democratic system of government. He supported the legislative process known as the initiative, which permits the people to introduce or even enact laws. He favored the referendum, which means that measures passed by the legislative body must be submitted to the vote of the electorate for approval or rejection. The system of recall, which he advocated, means that a public official may be removed from office by a vote of the people. Johnson defended the municipal ownership of street railways. He supported George's tax policy by getting high assessments on land in Cleveland and low assessments on buildings. Antimonopoly laws, he said, were easy to evade; all legislation is futile if it doesn't strike privilege at its root which is the monopoly of land.

The Knights of Labor, a federation of unions organized in 1869, favored George's views. He had been a member of the Knights, and his ideas were included in their declaration of principles after 1884:

The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of all the people, and should not be subject to speculative traffic. Occupancy and use should be the only title to the possession of land.

Taxes should be levied upon its full value for use, exclusive of improvements, and should be sufficient to take for the community all unearned increment.⁴

Albert Jay Nock is an example of an extreme conservative who endorsed George's views. He referred to "our enemy, the state," and his attitude is similar to that of many right-wing supporters of George. Nock wrote:

George the philosopher of freedom, George the exponent of individualism as against Statism, George the very best friend the capitalist ever had, George the architect of a society based on voluntary cooperation rather than on enforced cooperation—this George, the truly great, the incomparable George, sank out of sight, leaving only George the economic innovator, the author of a new and untried method of laying taxes.⁵

George's opposition to government had an altogether different rationale from that of conservatives like Nock. His was rooted in a radical critique of the role of the state. This is brought out forcefully in a work published four years after *Progress and Poverty*:

It behooves us to look facts in the face. The experiment of popular government in the United States is clearly a failure. Not that it is a failure everywhere and in everything. An experiment of this kind does not have to be fully worked out to be proved a failure. But speaking generally of the whole country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Lakes to the Gulf, our government by the people has in large degree become, is in larger degree becoming, government by the strong and unscrupulous.

The people, of course, continue to vote; but the people are losing their power. Money and organization tell more and more in elections. In some sections bribery has become chronic, and numbers of voters expect regularly to sell their votes. In some sections large employers regularly bulldoze their hands into voting as *they* wish. In municipal, State and Federal politics the power of the "machine" is increasing. In many places it has become so strong that the ordinary citizen has no more influence in the government under which he lives than he would

4. Albert Jay Nock, *Henry George* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1939), p. 183.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

have in China. He is, in reality, not one of the governing classes, but one of the governed. He occasionally, in disgust, votes for "the other man," or "the other party;" but, generally, to find that he has effected only a change of masters, or secured the same masters under different names. And he is beginning to accept the situation, and to leave politics to politicians, as something with which an honest, self-respecting man cannot afford to meddle. . . .

In our National Senate, sovereign members of the Union are supposed to be represented; but what are more truly represented are railroad kings and great moneyed interests, though occasionally a mine jobber from Nevada or Colorado, not inimical to the ruling powers, is suffered to buy himself a seat for glory. And the Bench as well as the Senate is being filled with corporation henchmen. A railroad king makes his attorney a judge of last resort, as the great lord used to make his chaplain a bishop.⁶

George also differed from his conservative supporters by favoring government ownership and operation of monopolies such as railroads, telephone and telegraph systems, the supplying of gas, water, heat and electricity. Businesses that are in their nature monopolies, he said, are properly the functions of the state.

George's Conflict with Herbert Spencer

In *A Perplexed Philosopher* (his last book to be published during his lifetime) Henry George reviewed his conflict with Herbert Spencer, British philosopher and sociologist. In *Social Statics*, published in 1850 (29 years before *Progress and Poverty*), Spencer had condemned the private ownership of land. Existing titles to land are not legitimate, he declared, for they derive from violence, force, fraud and the claims of superior cunning. Sale or bequest do not generate a right to the present owners where it did not previously exist.

While Spencer did not take a clear stand on compensation for landowners, he firmly advocated the nationalization of the rental income from land:

"But to what does this doctrine, that men are equally entitled to the use of the earth, lead? Must we return to the times of uninclosed wilds,

⁶ Henry George, *Social Problems* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1966), pp. 16-18. [Originally published in 1883.]

and subsist on roots, berries, and game? Or are we to be left to the management of Messrs. Fourier, Owen, Louis Blanc, and Co.?"

Neither. Such a doctrine is consistent with the highest state of civilization; may be carried out without involving a community of goods; and need cause no very serious revolution in existing arrangements. The change required would simply be a change of landlords. Separate ownerships would merge into the joint-stock ownership of the public. Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body—Society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. Instead of paying his rent to the agent of Sir John or his Grace, he would pay it to an agent or deputy of the community. Stewards would be public officials instead of private ones; and tenancy the only land tenure.⁷

George alleged that between 1850 and 1882 nothing more was heard from Spencer on the land question. The first English edition of *Social Statics* was a small one, and it took ten years to sell all the books. The British landed interests could therefore overlook Spencer's attack, declared George:

But beyond the warnings that this was no way to success, which he doubtless received from friends, there is no reason to think that this revolutionary utterance of Mr. Spencer in "Social Statics" brought him the slightest unpleasant remonstrance at the time or for years after. If "Sir John and his Grace"—by which phrase Mr. Spencer had personified British landed interests—ever heard of the book, it was to snore, rather than to swear. So long as they feel secure, vested wrongs are tolerant of mere academic questioning; for those who profit by them, being the class of leisure and wealth, are also the class of liberal education and tastes, and often find a pleasing piquancy in radicalism that does not go beyond their own circles. A clever sophist might freely declaim in praise of liberty at the table of a Roman emperor. Voltaire, Rousseau and the encyclopedists were the fashionable fad in the drawing-rooms of the French aristocracy. And at the beginning of this century, and for years afterwards, a theoretical abolitionist, provided he did not talk in the hearing of the servants, might freely express his opinion of slavery among the cultured slaveholders of our Southern States. Thomas Jefferson declared his detestation of slavery, and, despite amendment, "writ large" his condemnation of it in the Declaration of Independence

7. Quoted in Henry George, *A Perplexed Philosopher* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1965), pp. 8-9. [Originally published in 1892.]

itself. Yet that declaration was signed by slaveholders and read annually by slaveholders, and Jefferson himself never became unpopular with slaveholders. But when the "underground railway" got into operation; when Garrison and his colleagues came with their demand for immediate, unconditional emancipation, then the feeling changed, and the climate of the South began to grow hot for any one even suspected of doubting the justice of the "peculiar institution."

So it was with private property in land for over thirty years after "Social Statics" was written. One of the first to congratulate me on "Progress and Poverty," when only an author's edition of a few hundred copies had been printed, and it seemed unlikely to those who knew the small demand for works on economic questions that there would ever be any more, was a very large landowner. He told me that he had been able freely to enjoy what he was pleased to term the clear logic and graceful style of my book, because he knew that it would be read only by a few philosophers, and could never reach the masses or "do any harm."

For a long time this was the fate of Mr. Spencer's declaration against private property in land. It doubtless did good work, finding here and there a mind where it bore fruit. But the question had not passed beyond, and Mr. Spencer's book did not bring it beyond the point of extremely limited academic discussion.⁸

Social Statics was reprinted in the United States, where it sold well as Spencer's reputation grew. But in 1882 he prohibited the further import into Great Britain of his United States edition, even though he continued to receive royalties on his book's sales in the United States. He repudiated his earlier position on land in a letter to a newspaper, in magazine articles, and finally in a revised and abridged edition of *Social Statics*, published in England in 1892. George alleged that the new edition eliminated everything that might "offend vested interests."

The Opposition of Prominent Economists

In London Arnold Toynbee delivered two lectures criticizing Henry George in January, 1883; they were published later that year by Kegan Paul, Trench & Company.

Toynbee used radical arguments to promote his conservative viewpoint. Large farms, he said, hurt the farm laborers, and George

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

would not touch the large-farm system. As Karl Marx and others pointed out, large businesses are stamping out small ones. Gradually capital is being accumulated in fewer and fewer hands, and some day we may have a handful of stupendous monopolists and a struggling mass of laborers at their feet. This, said Toynbee, is one great cause affecting the division of income; it is one great reason why wages have not risen in proportion to the increase in productive capacity.

What is the remedy? asked Toynbee. George offers none because he believes that once the state confiscates rent, individual interests will harmonize with the common interest; also competition, which we know is often baneful and destructive, will then become a beneficent force.

Toynbee argued that the age of government regulation has come. Factory acts do and should regulate the labor of men as well as women and children. The distribution of wealth can be improved by the state.

The confiscation of rent, said Toynbee, would produce a war between the classes and thereby divide the nation. Instead, we should support unions; cooperative production, especially in small scale trades; the right of farm laborers to buy houses, and to buy or rent a half acre of land; progressive taxation for both land and income. The British aristocracy is responsible and would respond to appeals to a sense of justice. There should be more social insurance through the "Friendly Societies" of the workers with a minimum of state aid. "The way we have got reforms carried in England is not by, as a rule, class war, but by class alliance."

Toynbee reported that he had two classes at his lectures, the poor and rich. Some workers, he said, interrupted him with revolutionary outcries.

Alfred Marshall, the world-famous marginalist or neoclassical economist, delivered three lectures on *Progress and Poverty* on February 19, 26, and March 5, 1883 in Bristol, England. These speeches were reported in the Bristol newspaper *Times and Mirror*.

Marshall criticized George for claiming that progress drives a wedge into the middle of society, raising those who are above it but lowering those who are below it. If the concept of a wedge is correct, most workers are above the wedge, for progress is pushing them upward, though unfortunately at a very slow rate. The lowest stratum, the

pauper class, is being pushed downward, and this is a disgrace to the age. But "*pauperism is the product of freedom.*" Slaves, like horses, are well fed, but free men may not be.

The division of income between capital and labor, said Marshall, depends on their relative scarcity. In new countries capital and labor are both scarce, and their earnings are high. As capital and labor grow more plentiful, their earnings fall. If population is plentiful and capital scarce, interest is high and wages low; the converse is also true.

People can go into business for themselves, and tens of thousands of working men had done so, many of them becoming employers. Large capitalists work for the smallest proportionate returns. They also have to get their best administrators from working men "because experience showed that business ability scarcely ever lasted three generations, and many fortunes were dissipated by the successors of those who made them."

If the original landholders had no good right to the land, Marshall argued, it would be wrong to punish the present owners, many of whom are descendants of workingmen who bought the land with the sweat of their brows. If rich men are prevented from investing in land, they will buy up railways and newspapers as they do in America; they would thereby "exercise a power which, if less conspicuous, might be far more injurious to the public interest than that of English landlords can possibly be."

Marshall was against the 100 percent tax on rent because it would ruin numberless poor widows and others who have invested their little all in land; society would be convulsed, with a danger of civil war; capital and business ability might be driven out of the country. If these things happened, the English working man, instead of being the best paid and the heartiest in Europe, might become almost the worst paid and the weakest.

How can the lowest classes be helped? asked Marshall, He had five proposals.

1. Workers should not marry so much earlier than the middle classes do, and they should save money before they marry. They should raise their children better. Emigration would help, and the State should educate the children.

2. Workers should put down the paupers who are lazy, vicious and deceptive. Public and private charity should be offered if necessary to upright, industrious and thrifty workers.

3. The government should increase the vigor of its factory and sanitary inspection. But hopefully before long the workers will be able to manage their own affairs with very little of such aid.

4. Workers should learn from the economists that it is selfish and wrong to curtail production in one trade, as through strikes, for it injures all other trades.

5. Workers should develop a higher sense of duty; this would save money and time spent in excessive drinking and crime.

Marshall's concern, as stated above, that George's proposal would ruin numberless poor widows, was also voiced by others. Exactly a year after the Marshall lectures, George spoke in Glasgow, on February 18, 1884. His speech, titled "Scotland and Scotsmen," was brilliant, and the audience received it with the greatest enthusiasm. During the question period, a man asked about the widows and orphans who receive interest on bonds secured by land. George's reply to that question may be considered a reply to Alfred Marshall:

Do not be deluded by this widow and orphan business. That is a matter that is always put to the front. When men talked about abolishing slavery in my country, the cry was raised about the widow and the orphan. It was said, "Here is a poor widow woman who has only two or three slaves to live upon; would you take them away?" It reminds me of the story of the little girl who was taken to see a picture of Daniel in the lions' den. She began to cry very bitterly, and her mother said, "Do not cry, do not cry; God will take care that no harm will befall him." To which she replied, "I ain't crying for him, but for the poor little lion in the back—he is so little I am afraid he won't get any." I propose to take care of the widows and the orphans. As I told those people in London whom I addressed recently, every widow, from the highest to the lowest, could be cared for. There need be no charity or degradation; every one of them could have an equal pension. It will only take twenty million pounds to give every widow in the three kingdoms a pension of £100. And in the state of society which would ensue from breaking up land monopoly, no one need fear that the helpless ones he left behind would come to want. This is not the case now.

Francis A. Walker was professor of political economy at Yale

University, later president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the first president of the American Economic Association. He wrote a popular textbook called *Political Economy* (3rd edition, 1888) in which he discussed George's theoretical views on rent. But of George's practical proposal to tax away all economic rent, Walker asserted: "I will not insult my readers by discussing a project so steeped in infamy."

A meeting to discuss the single tax was held at Saratoga, New York, on September 5, 1890. One of the addresses was by Professor Edwin R. A. Seligman of Columbia College, outstanding authority on taxation. He said that the desirability of the single tax should be tested against the three chief principles of good taxes: universality, equality and justice.

Many people, he said, would not be taxed in George's system, including the owners of corporate securities and business properties. It would therefore violate universality and equality. In addition, most landowners bought their land recently, and the whole preceding "unearned increment" has been capitalized into the swollen selling price of the land. Therefore existing owners should be compensated. "Any other plan would be sheer confiscation."

Justice, said Seligman, requires that ability to pay should be the basis of taxation. Land rent is no satisfactory index of this ability to pay.

Henry George attended this conference, and he made the following remarks:

Professor Seligman has said that the true principle is, not taxation according to benefits, but taxation according to ability,—meaning, I presume, ability to pay. To us it is as unjust and absurd to charge men with taxation in proportion to their ability to pay as it would be to charge them for postage-stamps in proportion to their ability to pay. If men get rich dishonestly, it is no remedy to tax them more. If they get rich honestly, it is a gross outrage. No one ought to be forced to pay more than another because he is more industrious or more talented, or has more foresight, or any other personal quality. All men ought to be put upon an equality of opportunity, letting whoso can work best and hardest take all the advantage that those qualities give. It is unjust to tax men according to their ability to pay. . . .

Professor Seligman said that the advocates of the single tax do not

understand the science of finance. Well, if some of the reasoning we have heard here be the result of understanding the science of finance, we single tax men are glad that we don't understand it. He has also said that the professors of political economy as a class are against us. Unfortunately, that is true. But is it astonishing? Given a great social wrong that affects the distribution of wealth, and it is in the nature of things that professors of political economy should either belong to or consciously or unconsciously be influenced by the very class who profit by the wrong, and who oppose, therefore, all means for its remedy. . . .

Let me say a direct word to you professors of political economy, you men of light and leading, who are fighting the single tax with evasions and quibbles and hair-splitting. We single tax men propose something that we believe will make the life of the masses easier, that will end the strife between capital and labor, and solve the darkening social problems of our time. If our remedy will not do, what is your remedy? It will not do to propose little goody-goody palliatives, that hurt no one, help no one, and go nowhere. You must choose between the single tax, with its recognition of the rights of the individual, with its recognition of the province of government, with its recognition of the rights of property, on the one hand, and socialism on the other. . . .

Modern society cannot stand still. All over the civilized world social conditions are becoming intolerable. If you reject the single tax, look to it, from what you turn and toward what you are going. We propose to respect to the full the rights of property. We propose to assure to each man his own, be it much or little. We would remove all restraints on production, all penalties on honest acquisition. We care not how rich any man may become, so long as he does not appropriate what belongs to others. We ask no class legislation, no favors or doles for any set of men. We would do away with all special privileges, abolish all monopolies, and put all men on the same level with regard to natural opportunities and before the law. We would simplify government, do away with its interferences in private affairs, and strike at the root of political corruption.⁹

The Opposition of The New York Times

Many editorials in *The New York Times* denounced George and his ideas, but sometimes grudging credit was given for his courage,

9. F. B. Sanborn (ed.), *The Single Tax Discussion Held at Saratoga September 5, 1890*, reported for the American Social Science Association (Concord, Mass.: October 1890), pp. 82, 84-86.

integrity, honesty and sincerity. Three editorials appearing in almost a quarter of a century are representative.

It cannot be denied that Mr. Henry George has the courage of his convictions, such as they are. At a meeting of Churchmen—of all others—held in London yesterday, he is reported to have declared that as a matter of abstract justice no compensation should be awarded to the present landowners when their land shall have been “nationalized.” . . . What he proposes is robbery out-and-out. . . . There is no right of property recognized in civilized communities which rests on a firmer foundation than that in land, and Mr. George must be a very dull observer if he does not see that there could be no form of robbery more gross and oppressive than that which would be perpetrated by the “Government” under pretense of serving “public purposes.”¹⁰

The following editorial appeared six months after George's powerful campaign for mayor of New York City:

Ever since society has been organized on an industrial basis it has been fairly well understood that the conditions of prosperity in the world were industry and frugality. Those grew rich above their neighbors who worked harder and denied themselves more sternly than their neighbors. The average condition has been that of living from hand to mouth, as the saying is, simply because the average man has refused to do more work than would supply his immediate needs, and has been incapable of the self-denial required to make provision for the future. Those who have fallen below the average and have become burdens upon the workers of the community have done so because they have been incapable of even the average of industry and self-denial. Whether they are disabled in mind or body from doing their share of the world's work, or willfully shirk it, the result is the same.

Of course there are exceptions. As there are men who are poor by unmerited calamity, so there are men who grow rich by fraud. But the truth that prosperity comes from hard work and self-denial and that poverty is the result of laziness and self-indulgence is none the less patent to every man and woman in the United States. It is a lesson which experience teaches them daily, and it is a most wholesome and useful lesson. It is the real explanation and the only explanation of “Progress and Poverty,” and it is recognized to be so by everybody who does not delude himself or is not deluded by others.

Nevertheless it is an explanation very distasteful to those who are

10. *The New York Times*, September 21, 1882, p. 4.

discontented with their lot and who find it bitter to admit that their fortunes correspond to their deserts. As these persons comprise almost all mankind, a man who offers another explanation by which prosperity is made irrelevant to merit, not as the exception, but as the rule, is sure of an eager hearing, even from those whose own experience emphatically contradicts his teachings. He appeals, in the first place, to that envy which is one of the meanest of human sentiments, and of which those who cherish it have generally the grace to feel ashamed. . . .

Upon educated persons who do not spend much of their time in envying those who are richer than themselves the panacea for poverty prescribed by Mr. Henry George has made no impression. They declare that his diagnosis of society is incorrect and his remedy preposterous; that the possession of even great riches by one man is neither on the face of it nor in fact an injury to another who does not possess them, and that inequality of fortune is not "wrong" in any sense in which inequality of intellect is not wrong, or a deluge or a drought or any other operation of nature.¹¹

In 1905 followers of Henry George celebrated the twenty-fifth birthday of *Progress and Poverty* at a banquet at Hotel Astor in New York City. Among the two hundred and fifty present and paying homage to the memory of George were William Jennings Bryan, Edwin Markham, William Lloyd Garrison, Hamlin Garland, Louis F. Post, Ernest Thompson Seton, Lincoln Steffens, Ida M. Tarbell and Samuel R. Seabury. *The Times* reported the meeting and editorialized as follows:

It was necessary and natural that much high-sounding solemn nonsense should be talked at the Henry George-Bryan dinner. If that component had been omitted, the occasion would have been destitute of the characteristic single-tax flavor.¹²

Socialist Criticisms of George

While most conservatives accused George of going too far in his proposal to confiscate all ground-rent, the socialists accused him of not going far enough.

11. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1887, p. 4.

12. *Ibid.*, January 26, 1905, p. 6.

In 1886, when George was nominated for mayor of New York, most socialists gave him their support. Daniel De Leon, a prominent socialist leader, spoke at the meeting which endorsed his nomination. But a year later, when George ran for secretary of state for New York, the socialists made their support conditional on their principles being included in the election campaign. They declared that the burning social question is not a land tax, but the abolition of all private property in the instruments of production. To this George replied that there could be no place for the socialists in the new party if they pressed their principles. When the convention met at Syracuse, New York, the socialist delegates from New York City did press their principles and were refused seats.

George further infuriated the anarchists, the socialists and other radicals when he refused to condemn the conviction and execution of the Chicago anarchists over the Haymarket affair of May 4, 1886.

Friedrich Engels, a founder along with Karl Marx of the modern communist movement, published a book in 1844 called *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. In a preface to the American edition of 1887 he wrote an evaluation of Henry George:

[I]t seems to me that the Henry George platform, in its present shape, is too narrow to form the basis for anything but a local movement, or at best for a short-lived phase of the general movement. To Henry George, the expropriation of the mass of the people from the land is the great and universal cause of the splitting up of the people into Rich and Poor. Now this is not quite correct historically. In Asiatic and classical antiquity, the predominant form of class oppression was slavery, that is to say, not so much the expropriation of the masses from the land as the appropriation of their persons. . . . In the middle ages, it was not the expropriation of the people *from*, but on the contrary, their appropriation to the land which became the source of feudal oppression. The peasant retained his land, but was attached to it as a serf or villein, and made liable to tribute to the lord in labor and in produce. It was only at the dawn of modern times, toward the end of the fifteenth century, that the expropriation of the peasantry on a large scale laid the foundation for the modern class of wage-workers who possess nothing but their labour-power and can live only by the selling of that labour-power to others. But if the expropriation from the land brought this class into existence, it was the development of capitalist production, of modern industry and agriculture on a large scale, which perpetuated it, increased it, and shaped it into a distinct class with

distinct interests and a distinct historical mission. . . . According to Marx, the cause of the present antagonism of the classes and of the social degradation of the working class is their expropriation from *all* means of production, in which the land is of course included.

If Henry George declares land-monopolization to be the sole cause of poverty and misery, he naturally finds the remedy in the resumption of the land by society at large. Now, the Socialists of the school of Marx, too, demand the resumption, by society, of the land, and not only of the land but all other means of production likewise. But even if we leave these out of the question, there is another difference. What is to be done with the land? Modern Socialists, as represented by Marx, demand that it should be held and worked in common and for common account, and the same with all other means of social production, mines, railways, factories, etc.; Henry George would confine himself to letting it out to individuals as at present, merely regulating its distribution and applying the rents for public, instead of, as at present, for private purposes. What the Socialists demand, implies a total revolution of the whole system of social production; what Henry George demands, leaves the present mode of social production untouched, and has, in fact, been anticipated by the extreme section of Ricardian bourgeois economists who, too, demanded the confiscation of the rent of land by the State.¹³

Another socialist comment on George was presented in a letter from George Bernard Shaw to the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of *Progress and Poverty* referred to in the previous section. Part of Shaw's letter, which was read at the meeting, follows:

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.

What George did not teach you, you are being taught now by your great trusts and combines, as to which I need only say that if you would take them over as National property as cheerfully as you took the copyrights of all my early books you would find them excellent institutions, quite in the path of progressive evolution, and by no means

13. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, translated and edited by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), pp. 355-356.

to be discouraged or left unregulated as if they were nobody's business but their own.¹⁴

We have already referred to other writing of Henry George where it related to *Progress and Poverty*. In the following chapter we shall take a closer look at his books and articles after *Progress and Poverty*.

14. *The New York Times*, January 25, 1905, p. 6.