

## The Critics Criticized

By JACOB SCHWARTZMAN

### VII

**I**N a long essay bristling with insult and sarcasm, entitled "Socialism and the Church," Rev. Willibald Hackner of the Roman Catholic Church savagely attacks Henry George. The essay was written in 1887, but the years have not dimmed the fierce style of this anti-Georgeist classic. Today it may still be regarded as typical of the arguments used by some Catholic thinkers against George.

The following are Dr. Hackner's objections:

1—George is a Socialist, and his arguments are full of sophistry and false statements. But he does not follow the other Socialists who make no distinction between land and the products of labor (which is, at least, to their credit), and who wish to do away with all property. George ridiculously distinguishes between the two, and wishes to abolish property in land only. The real reason for this is that he does not wish to give too much poison to the people at once.

2—St. Thomas Aquinas claims that all substances are composed of matter and form. Matter is the substratum of things existing, a something undetermined; whilst the form narrows down the matter to species. Let us apply this to land property. We then have property material and property formal. The former consists of all nature, and is given by God to all mankind. Now to this material property which comes directly from God is added formal property which comes directly from man, who unites the two so that one goes with the other. Man's labor gives form to the material property or land lying outside of man's scope, so that he then has a perfect right to own the land.

3—If we may only claim that which we produce, (a) how can parents claim children, the souls of whom are created by God? Yet children belong to parents. And (b) how can even *all* men claim the earth? Did all men produce it?

4—Ancient history may prove, as George claims, that land was jointly owned. But Caesar tells us that while the cheese-eating Germans did own the land in common, only leasing their properties for a year's duration, at the end of which time all families had to shift to another part of the land, they did so because they wanted to preserve their war-like qualities, and to prevent cupidity and the seizing of land by the stronger. Too bad that George could not be a cheese-eating German, and tell Caesar *his* reason for public ownership of land.

5—Early Church fathers practiced Socialism by expediency, which means that they did so for themselves only, in order to obtain life eternal. This is different from

Socialism by necessity, preached by George and his fellow-Socialists, supposedly to be adopted by all men.

6—George quotes the Bible to show that God stated, "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine." The Lord also declared, however, "Mine is the gold and mine is the silver," and later on claimed everything that the Hebrews created. Thus the Bible contradicts George, by failing to distinguish between land and produce. As a matter of fact, the Bible distinctly tells us that land was bought and sold freely.

7—Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine opposed Socialism, and analysis can prove that both were in favor of private ownership of land.

8—George wishes the state to own land. How large must such a Socialistic state be? Must it have fifty million inhabitants? Why not ten? And if ten, why not one million? And if one million, why not a thousand? And if a thousand, why not a hundred? And if a hundred, why not one individual? Therefore, it can be reduced to the point where one individual may be the state; therefore, if the state may own land, any one individual may own it.

9—If *all* men own the earth, how can a nation own it? Would not foreigners try to claim American soil? As a matter of fact, Socialism leads to internationalism.

10—How would land be divided? Some would get the better, and some the poorer, land. But even if rent-collecting were attempted, it would not be much better, because land would always have to be reassessed, and the result would be fraud, bribery, perjury, and corruption.

11—It is not land ownership, but rather speculation in commodities, such as wheat, cotton, etc., that has given rise to present multimillionaires.

12—The root of all evil is not land monopoly, but, as St. Paul puts it, cupidity. It is man himself, with his greed and envy, who brings about suffering. The poor we will always have with us. All we can do, in order to avoid extremes of poverty, misery, and other social evils, is to practice the six virtues. The rich should possess justice and piety; the poor should have patience and meekness; and both the rich and the poor should have faith and charity. Then, even though this life would be miserable, the poor would have great hopes for an eternal life in heaven.

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My answers follow:

(1)

Throughout the essay the author calls George a Socialist and confuses his proposals with those of the Socialists. It has already been shown in previous articles that George is not a Socialist, so there is no need for further refutation. The matter of the difference between land and wealth has also been covered. In his name-calling, the reverend author is guilty of *argumentum ad hominem* throughout.

(2)

George indeed claims that man is entitled to what he produces—that is, to the form that he brings forth from natural materials. But outside the scope of man's products lies land, which is part of the universe. Land is the reservoir, the "substratum," from which he takes the materials to form wealth, which is legitimate property. But for all his labor he cannot lay claim to the unformed substance of the universe itself. Perhaps Rev. Hackner would consider the act of discovering a piece of land a performance of labor that confers ownership. It is interesting that he should try to apply this "labor" argument to land when in the preceding objection he ridicules the distinction between land and the products of labor.

(3)

(a) The author is guilty of sophistry here. Parents cannot claim or own children. There may be love and affection, but no one belongs to another. It is this dangerous theory which, in the long run, sanctions slavery, and destroys the freedom of man. A paternalistic system eventually results in totalitarianism.

(b) All men do not own the earth, and George never claimed they did. They may use it, and may appropriate only the social value—or rent—which alone belongs to all men. No mortal or combination of mortals can ever own God's earth.

(4)

If the reverend author dispensed with his undignified sarcasms long enough, he might come to perceive that the ancient Germans' fear of land being seized by the stronger was a very legitimate reason for their system of communal ownership. At any rate, the Georgeist proposal is not that of shifting people about from year to year. We, too, believe that security is essential to progress and production. The Georgeist remedy does guarantee such security.

(5)

One becomes tired of denying that Georgeism is Socialism. The learned author is splitting hairs. If Socialism were good, it would be better to adopt it as a universal necessity than as an individual expediency.

(6)

Whether the Bible does or does not differentiate between land and produce, it does contain severe attacks on big landed estates. (See my "Thus Spake the Prophets," LAND AND FREEDOM, September-October, 1940.) The fact that the Hebrews of the Bible bought and sold land is no justification for such acts; as a matter of fact, it was these land hoardings that resulted in such bitter protestations on the part of the prophets.

(7)

Both Augustine and Aquinas opposed Socialism, as did George. However, it is only by gross distortion of facts that Rev. Hackner reads arguments for land ownership into their writings. It is well-known that the Church fathers denounced the great landowners of their age.

(8)

This objection is a fine bit of philosophism. George's proposal was to make land accessible to all men, not transfer its ownership to a state which by some neo-Platonic hocus-pocus could reduce itself to one man.

(9)

The previous answer disposes of the assumption that a nation may own its own land. All men of the earth have a right to the use of any part thereof. A "foreigner," upon paying the rent of land to the society in which he is seeking access to the land, has as much right to use that land, in the Georgeist view, as a native.

It is strange that an objection to internationalism should come from a Catholic. Does not the Church extend its jurisdiction to millions of people in many nations throughout the world? As a matter of fact, isn't internationalism a step toward the brotherhood of man as envisioned by Jesus?

(10)

Land would not be divided, since such division never solves any problem of inequality. Rent-collection is the most just of all remedies. As to possible fraud, what about the actual bribery, fraud, perjury, and arrogance which exist today? Or should criticism be applied only to possibilities under proposed plans, leaving the positive evils of the *status quo* alone?

(11)

What has seemed like speculation in produce, in the making of fortunes, has in reality been speculation in land. Speculation in wheat, for instance, can only succeed when the speculator has a monopoly of wheat land. Else, competition from other wheat sellers would soon force down his profits. (See Gustavus Meyers' "History of the Great American Fortunes" for proof of land monopoly as the origin of most fortunes.)

(12)

It may be true that cupidity is the moving force of all evil, but it must have a vehicle in which to be led to evil-doing. Such a vehicle is monopoly; especially land monopoly, which is the basic wrong of our day. As a matter of fact, cupidity itself is the outgrowth of conditions brought about by such land monopoly. Man is not born evil. He acts merely to satisfy his desires with the least exertion. Where land is

monopolized and opportunities shut off, the effort to satisfy his desires leads to actions that make him appear evil.

The six virtues prescribed may be beautiful in themselves, but they can only reform man internally, without taking into consideration outside conditions. Virtue without proper environment is like a flower without water; both die without the proper nourishment. Give man an opportunity to make a living, and he will not have to be catalogued into a caste with its own appropriate ethics.

To claim that poverty will always exist; that the poor will have life eternal *after* being doomed to a lifetime of misery here, is not a great service on behalf of the Creator from one who claims to be a servant of God. Is it not more worthy that a servant of God should strive for the abolition of poverty and the attainment of the kingdom of heaven *on earth*?

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