

Death of the System

A FRENCH NOVEL ABOUT THE HENRY GEORGE MOVEMENT by Pierre-Valentin Berthier, 280 pgs., paper bound, available from The Henry George News at \$1.

Reviewed by EDGAR TRIER

WHAT did not happen in the United States in fifty years has happened in France—a novel has incorporated the ideas of Henry George.

The youthful octogenarian editor of *Terre et Liberté*, A. Daudé-Bancel, announced a prize of 15,000 francs (about \$300) for the best novel about Henry George and the cooperative movement, and it was awarded to Pierre Valentin Berthier for *On a tué M. Système!* (Mr. System has been killed).

This book, published by *L'amitié par le livre* describes life in a French provincial town in the nineteenth-fifties, before the institution of the de Gaulle government. It reflects the discontent of the middle classes, especially hatred of the burdensome taxes and the way they are levied. Mr. Cordier, called "Mr. System," is the leader of the anti-tax movement and makes the "system" (which means the present type of government) responsible for all that is wrong, that is why his companions call him Mr. System. These malcontented people believe that Poujade, who led a demagogic movement against taxes without any constructive ideas, can help them. But it is Marc Charpentier, the hero, who shows them the way out by advocating the application of the ideas of Henry George, together with replacement of capitalistic enterprises by cooperative business.

We Georgists know that the ideas of Henry George can be applied in a capitalistic system and that there

is no need of a cooperative movement to sustain it. However, it is also true that Henry George was sympathetic toward cooperatives and that many Georgists have been active in both movements. We find in the novel a number of passages about Henry George and the Henry George School. Charpentier is introduced as a graduate of the correspondence course. Since this course was started only two years ago it is quite an achievement to find it already a part of French literature. The Henry George School is described as an American institution founded by the pupils of the economist, Henry George, who wrote a book against the taxes levied in his time. Georgism is described as a fiscal system which tries to replace all existing taxes gradually by taking the rent of land. The author makes fun of the fact that Henry George is unknown in France. The police chief, on finding a quotation by George in the house where Mr. System has been murdered, suspects him as the possible assassin. So the police record is checked and the following information is given: Henry George, American citizen, born 1839; died in 1897; clearly subversive political influence shown by the publication of a book in 1879; has no criminal record.

We recommend Mr. Berthier's book to all who can read French. As stated before, we do not think it is necessary to connect the Henry George movement with the cooperative movement, but the book is a remarkable achievement nevertheless. Readers will certainly enjoy it, and the murder of Mr. System will not upset them too much.

(Mr. Trier teaches the Henry George School's correspondence course in Fundamental Economics to French students).