

Frank Purdy Williams



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Thomas G. Shearman

INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

Frank Williams was a friend of Henry George in New York. Frank dedicated a book to George, attended dinner with HG, corresponded with him. Frank also knew Thomas Shearman. I presume he met him personally. Williams and Shearman were hanging around HG during the same period from 1880 until HG's death in 1897. Both lived in Brooklyn before the Brooklyn Bridge was completed. This means that they had ample opportunity to observe each other during a time when Brooklyn was more of an isolated community. Williams and Shearman had an interesting exchange in the New York Times letters page just a days before George died of an apparent stroke.

New York Times of October 25, 1897:

MR. GEORGE AND HIS FRIENDS

By Frank P. Williams

Montclair Man Thinks the Single Taxer Would make a Bad Mayor

To the Editor of The New York Times:

As some of your readers may or uncertain as to whether Seth Low or Henry George ought to have their votes, I would like the privilege of saying a few words in your columns that may help to clear up that uncertainty.

Intimately associated with Tom L. Johnson as Mr. George is, I do not think that he ought to be elected Mayor. For my part, I would far rather cast a vote for Seth Low the inflexible than for the good-natured friend of an arch-monopolist, who says that he believes in a better social order than the present and who at the same time declares that he means to work the existing social order for all that it is worth.

Everybody who has passed out of childhood knows that the President of the Nassau Railroad would not be the friend of the Mayor of Greater New York for nothing.

“But,” it will be said, “Mr. George declares that he is no man’s man.” I suppose that he does not fully believe just what he declares; but Mr. George’s greatness of intellect does not consist in an ability to discern between true and false friends when political matters are at stake – of that I am certain.

I was intimately associated with Mr. George for years. During his campaign of 1886 he selected for one of his chief managers a man whom he had already chosen for a bosom friend – a man who in his whole bearing showed himself to be a thoroughgoing self-seeker, and worse; a man, moreover, who, by common report, had been guilty of bribery, or attempted bribery, of public officials. This man’s character was understood by everybody except Mr. George, whose eyes were not opened until one day when he received a treacherous stab from the man he had so blindly trusted. I remember distinctly Mr. George’s mournful astonishment; I remember distinctly a letter that I wrote to him at that time, saying that the only wonder was that he had been so long finding out the man’s true character, and I remember distinctly Mr. George’s reply, that he wished I had informed him before.

History repeats itself; what has once happened can happen again. It would be a dark day, I fear, the day that would see New York City handing the reins of government to the close friend of Tom L. Johnson. What satisfaction would it be to me, Mr. Editor, or to any other owner of property in Greater New York, to be told by Mayor Henry George after the city entrusted to his care had been so enmeshed in monopoly’s deadly coil that even had he begun to see the danger – what satisfaction would it be to use then, I ask, to be told by Mayor Henry George that he wished he had been notified of Tom L. Johnson’s real character before?

I do not mean to say one word in disparagement of Mr. George’s character. No man realizes more fully that I his mighty achievements; few men have done more that I to win converts to his philosophy. But I truly believe that even the most unswerving single taxers will, if they

think this matter over carefully, come to the conclusion that Mr. George, mighty as he is in the domain of political economy, is not at all a man to be entrusted with the Mayoralty of Greater New York.

RESPONSE FROM THOMAS G. SHEARMAN

published: NY Times Oct 27, 1897:

MR. GEORGE NOT A SOCIALIST

So Writes Thomas G. Shearman Regarding the Single Taxer – Tom L. Johnson Defended

To the Editor of the New York Times:

It is with regret that I have notice the space you have given to attacks upon Henry George and Tom L. Johnson by pretended labor leaders and New Jersey cranks. Not a single criticism of either has proceeded from any genuine workingman; while, as to the gentleman who has last been honored with prominence in your columns on this theme, his own book, which he has vainly struggled to bring to public attention, shows that he believes all government to be wicked and think that it was a fearful mistake that the Union was not allowed to be dissolved entirely in 1861.

Such criticism, however, furnishes merely the occasion for the present letter. There has been a large amount of more sincere criticism, upon both Mr. George and Mr. Johnson, from other quarters. On the one hand, far too much has been said by respectable newspapers and respectable men as to Mr. George's supposed Anarchistic and Socialistic tendencies, while on the other hand gross injustice has been done to Mr. Johnson on the assumption that the owner of steel mills cannot possibly be a sincere free trader and the owner of street railways cannot be a sincere anti-monopolist.

Mr. Johnson is of a distinguished type of men, so rare that people of low and sordid minds cannot believe in their existence. Not only is he the only manufacturer or monopolist in the United States who ever went to Congress without voting and clamoring for the passage of bills which would put money directly into his own pocket, but he has uniformly voted for and urged measures which would directly tend to diminish his personal profits. The standard of political life among us is, unhappily, so low and venal, even among the most highly respectable and religious classes, that no Congressman, however high-toned or religious, with the single exception of

Mr. Johnson, has ever taken this manly course within the memory of the present generation. Before the war there were slaveholders who ardently supported every measure for the emancipation of their slaves without compensation to themselves. A very few of these obtained entrance into public life, and perhaps it is because Mr. Johnson was born in Kentucky – a State which furnished more of such men to public life than any other – that he has retained some of the noble traditions of Cassius M. Clay and Robert J. Breckinridge. It is lamentable that the groveling instincts of so many of our Northern people should be unable to comprehend even the existence of a man among us who is worthy to stand with these heroes of a past time.

With regard to Mr. George, the misunderstanding of his motives and political theories is simply ludicrous. Even Abram S., Hewitt seems to be filled with the delusion that Mr. George wants to seize and divide up private property; while many editors, who ought to know better, constantly speak of him as a Socialist. Mr. George is as far removed from being a Socialist as Mr. Low or Mr. Tracy. In fact, he is less of a Socialist than either of those gentlemen because both of them are in favor of some kind of protectionism, which is necessarily Socialism, only for the benefit of the rich.

It is good political tactics for Tammany Hall to represent Mr. George as a Socialist, but it is the greatest folly for any friends of Seth Low to do so. If Henry George does not receive, at the very least, 75,000 votes, it seems to be impossible that Seth Low could be elected. At the very least, three-fourths of all Mr. George's votes will be drawn from those who would otherwise vote for the Tammany ticket. If Mr. George receives 100,000 Mr. Low will be elected. If he does not receive more than 50,000 votes, Mr. Low will be defeated. Mr. George is not running for the purpose of electing Mr. Low; but Mr. Low's supporters ought to use some common sense in dealing with the problem before them. The Citizens' county ticket stands no earthly chance of success without the hearty support of Mr. George's followers.

The citizens of New York are therefore confronted with one or the other of two results. Either Tammany will acquire absolute control of this great city for the next four years, or else on the morning after election it will be telegraphed all over the world that Henry George has received about 100,000 votes in this city. If the present foolish misrepresentation of Mr. George's theories and attitude is continued, this result will create universal, and yet entirely causeless, alarm among business men everywhere.

It is therefore well worth while to make the fact clearly understood that, even if Henry George were elected Mayor of New York, and even if he had ten times the power which he would have if elected, the whole tendency of his administration would be to secure to every honest man all rights to property which he honestly owned. As mayor of New York his duties could only be

executive, and his bitterest enemies concede that Mr. George is, and would be in any such office, a thoroughly honest, upright, and incorruptible public servant. I shall not vote for him, because I sincerely believe that Seth Low is equally honest and incorruptible, and that by reason of long experience and study in the direction of executive work he will make a more efficient Mayor than would Mr. George. But it would be impossible to find a purer man in public and private life, or one who might more safely be trusted with respect to his own action and the action of all others, so far as he could control them, than is Mr. George.

But it will be said that the ideas of Mr. George, in matters not executive but purely legislative, are so dangerous that a large vote for him will indicate bad future results. This question proceeds upon an entire misapprehension of both the man and his theories. If his theories were carried out to the fullest extent, which is possible in the nature of things, every man who owns a house, a factory, a mill or shop, machinery merchandise, bonds, notes, bank stock, bank deposits, horses, cattle, fruit trees, and, in short, everything which is made by the human hand or grows from the soil, will be the absolute owner of these things, free from taxes, and without the possibility of their ever being taken from him by taxation. Whether this is desirable or not it is not necessary just now to inquire. It is sufficient that a man who holds such views is the very opposite of a Socialist or of an enemy to property. These ideas may be, as is often said, quite impracticable; but it is certain, in the first place, that Mr. George would not, if he had the power, adopt any substitute for these impracticable ideas, which would be injurious to this kind of property, and, in the second place, that, as Mayor of New York, he could only use his moral influence in favor of such ideas.

Meanwhile, the vote which may be cast for Mr. George will, in any event, be so large that it is of serious importance that no one should be misled into the belief that this vote represents, in any sense, either Socialism or Anarchy, or anything resembling either

Thomas G. Shearman
New York, Oct. 25, 1897