

Henry George: Dreamer or Realist? By Steven B. Cord. (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1984, Original hardcover edition by University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965. Pp. 272. \$5.00 paper.)

Since prophets can expect little recognition on their home soil, it is not surprising that the principles enunciated by Henry George were adopted by Alexander Kerensky and Sun Yat-sen at the same time they were languishing in the United States; or that Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada provided George with his most enthusiastic audiences. The theme of honor escaping a prophet coupled with the notion of the prophet's writings being misunderstood are at the heart of Steven Cord's analysis. (Henry George's connection to Pennsylvania resides in having been born in Philadelphia, and in the application of his land tax ideas to Pittsburgh and Scranton.)

Cord's first chapter explains George's alienation from the academic community that grew out of a strident belief that academic economists were simply apologists for vested interests. This outlook cost George a chair at Berkeley. The later emergence of the American Economic Association in 1885 with its emphasis on professional training sealed George's fate as an outsider.

A chapter on George and the Progressives claims that myriad reformers had not only read *Progress and Poverty*, but indeed drew their initial inspiration from the book. For example, sociologist Edwin A. Ross who attended a "small-town midwestern college" noted that, "Our text in political economy was beneath all contempt, but George's *Progress and Poverty* was bootlegged among us and swept me off my feet" (p. 38). A chapter covering the period 1917-1933

underscores the extent to which the intellectual climate shifted in the 1920s and was hostile to "that frail flower that was the single tax movement" (p. 119).

The coming of the great depression offered a truly opportune time for "a mild renaissance of interest in the movement." Yet, the theory failed to have great influence because it remained an abstraction in a textbook for most at a time when Americans sought "specific remedies that could promise immediate relief" (p. 145).

A chapter on "George and Modern Historians" analyzes interpretations rendered by Ralph Gabriel, Eric Goldman, Charles and Mary Beard, Merle Curti, Daniel Aaron, and even Perry Miller. A final chapter argues that George suffered from the same problem that plagued other nineteenth-century thinkers: he "believed too much in an economic interpretation of history" (p. 227).

Beyond the extensive analysis of scholarly reaction to Henry George and his ideas, Steven Cord asserts that the land tax concept, when applied today, contributes to urban renewal. This is, standard taxation practices penalize those who improve existing buildings whereas a land tax provides no such disincentive.

Professor Cord has rendered a valuable service in keeping the work of an important dissenter before us. The reviewer's complaints are few. First, readers should be reminded of George's financial struggles as they influenced his thinking. Second, as the number of scholars who misread George are legion, it is reasonable to suspect *George* of being opaque. Third, the title of the book is journalistic, and has little to do with the contents. Beyond these objections, this is a highly readable account of an American reformer that is unlikely to find the audience it deserves.

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