

Simplistic, full of errors,  
especially if names.

**THE HENRY GEORGE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT  
OF THE PAST SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS.**

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## **THE SINGLE TAX MOVEMENT**

### **LOOKING BACKWARD**

Why is it that notwithstanding the presentation of the Henry George Single Tax Plan during the past seventy-five years, it has not yet been accepted and adopted by any government?

There are several good reasons for this failure. Instead of its being considered by colleges and universities, these institutions had practically discarded the science of political economy, in reality the most important of all sciences in relation to human welfare, as being no science at all and of little consequence anyway. As a rule the colleges and universities rejected the philosophy of Henry George. History repeats itself, for in like manner the wise men of their day rejected the discoveries of Galileo in astronomy. The leading antagonist of Henry George among educators was General Francis A. Walker, President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He stated that while Henry George had much to say about unearned increment it was noticeable that he had little or nothing to say about unrequited decrement. Henry George's response to this was that it was irksome to have to contend with a man who spoke of unrequited decrement, a thing which had no original value.

It is only fair to state that while our colleges and universities were doing magnificent educational work in all the other sciences, progress has been steadily made in acceptance of the philosophy of Henry George.

A very important reason why the Henry George plan was not quickly accepted was the rapidly increasing operations of institutional charities. Seventy-five years ago the plight of the unemployed was very desperate. The wages for common labor were totally inadequate for family expenses. The only available recourse for the old and unfortunate members of

society was the dreaded poor house, which many regarded as worse than death itself. There was nothing in those days comparable to the ~~colossal~~ ~~colossal~~ colossal activities of institutional charity of later days. Every important city has its annual drive for the community chest, which in turn provides the funds for thirty or forty separate charities. These charities are supplemented by philanthropic foundations, the ministrations of fraternal societies and to greater or less extent by every church in the land, and what is often overlooked, the immense service that is given to unfortunate individuals by their more fortunate relatives. Then the multitude of foundations, colleges, and other institutions provide many thousands of scholarships, all of which mean a great saving of expense to individual citizens.

These operations of institutional charity have been supplemented by the socialistic activities of the federal government in an effort to provide "freedom from fear and want," the fear which, incidentally, is the main spring or incentive for industrial progress. These measures of the federal government included unemployment compensation, artificially high prices under price support, price and rent regulation, and most important of all the protection of a large percentage of the population with monthly pensions under the department of social security. The effects of all these gratuities provided to citizens have acted as a sop to quiet the demands of justice, a sacrifice to slow down the single tax movement.

Then the opposition of those who hold vested interests must be considered. The most extensive of the vested interests which would suffer by the introduction of the single tax are those of land monopoly and land speculation. A Wichita man, J. Hudson McKnight, stated to me that he had paid \$7500 for a tract of land in Wichita on which the East High School is now located. Then he waited a few years while the

city grew up around that property until it came to have a value of over \$300,000. Every city in the United States has similar instances of what is called "romances in real estate," and of course this means that there are millions of individuals in the country who have enjoyed and are now receiving large profits from having invested in inside property at the right time. Over one-half the territory of every American city is said to consist of vacant lots held by speculators for a rise in values. It is easy to see that the opposition to reform of these speculators with that of their relatives and friends is very great indeed, provided they understood the situation. It is natural that they should regard these investments as vested rights, and that they should resent losing them as an injustice. This is hardship but not injustice.

The lobbyists at Washington are said to receive salaries and other payments amounting to millions of dollars annually for their services in securing special privileges from Congress for their clients. This is an indication of the enormous values of special privileges which are provided by Congress. A powerful influence against the single tax movement is that of manufacturers who are protected by the customs tariff, their relatives, friends, and employees. This special privilege also has the sanction of long usage, and it is therefore deep rooted. Protected manufacturers have been a most important group in contributing toward campaign expenses of political parties, so of course the loss of that revenue by politicians constitutes important opposition to the single tax movement.

The First and the Second World Wars and the preparations for war have acted to produce a long period of synthetic prosperity. During this period there has been comparatively little unemployment, and wages have been exceptionally high as a result of urgent government

orders for quick delivery of war supplies regardless of expense. The result of all this has been to withdraw many millions of men and women from ordinary occupations, either putting them into uniform or into war industry. This has resulted in higher wages for all industries, and labor unions have taken advantage of the situation by striking frequently for additional hourly wages.

It has been asserted that the poverty which inspired Henry George to write Progress and Poverty does not exist at the present time. But if we take dependence upon others, either entire or partial, as a criterion, there is much more poverty under the welfare regime of today than there was under the rugged individualism and greater self-reliance of seventy-five years ago.

An important force which has interfered with the acceptance of the Henry George plan has been misunderstanding of the single tax. My own introduction to the single tax was a review of Progress and Poverty by the minister of a Unitarian Church in Troy, New York, in a Sunday service in the year 1882. I was with an uncle of mine, a banker and a manufacturer, who said to me after the church service, "Socialism is all wrong. If wealth were divided equally among everyone, it would quickly gravitate back into the hands of the thrifty." I readily agreed to this. We had both of us misjudged Henry George, the individualist. We were but two of many millions who thoughtlessly condemned the single tax as socialism. A common mistake has been to assume that the single tax was a tax on land and consequently upon farmers who were already overtaxed. In reality the single tax is a tax not on land but on land values which are great where population is dense but comparatively negligible where population is sparse. My friend Elmer Soderstrom of Wichita was threatened with bodily violence by farmers in Missouri when he was speaking at a single tax meeting--before he had opportunity to

correct their mistaken impression. On another occasion a college professor stated to me that "Henry George was a demagogue of the first water." He had come across the word "confiscation" in Progress and Poverty and had incorrectly assumed that the idea was to confiscate personal property as is now done by our income tax. Of course what Mr. George would confiscate was economic rent created by the people and which therefore belonged to the people. These are some of the many misconceptions of the real character of the Henry George single tax idea which in the aggregate have had a powerful effect.

Finally there is the objection of unthinking conservatism on the part of a large percentage of the people who abide by the principle of "let well enough alone," and "whatever is, is right." This conservatism is sometimes fortunate in preventing the adoption of fantastic and bad propositions, such as the communism of Karl Marx, the impractical utopia of Edward Bellamy, or that plan of the California dentists to create prosperity by providing federal pensions for everybody. But it is also a serious force against real reform which has to be reckoned with. The Henry George proposition, however, was based on the discovery of an important natural law in harmony with all other economic laws with "justice as its object; taxation the means." To my mind there is a certain analogy between it and a time bomb which develops at some time in the future and which cannot be generally appreciated until it has developed.

While the single tax movement is not generally regarded as having achieved any remarkable results during the past seventy-five years, nevertheless there has been a great deal of individual effort put into it, and these efforts have undoubtedly had the effect on public opinion of making the reform much easier of acceptance today than has been the case in the past.

Soon after the publication of Progress and Poverty in 1879, Henry George took to the lecture field, his weekly paper The Standard was inaugurated, and the sentiment created was crystallized in the formation of single tax clubs with large memberships in every principle city. These clubs were listed in the weekly Standard. *check name*

Frederick H. Monroe organized the Henry George Lecture Association which kept a staff of able lecturers in the field for twenty-five years, among these were John Z. White, Henry Hutchins Hardinge, Henry George, Jr., Grace Isabel Colbron, Ernest Howard Crosby, John W. Bengough the cartoonist, Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow, Belton Hall, and Charles Frederick Adams. The Foundation which was established by an endowment by Robert Schalkenbach, well managed from the first, has rendered great service of an educational nature by the publication and distribution of books and literature. *This preceded establishment of Schalkenbach Fdn, was circa 1909-13*

Joseph Fels supplemented this work by a large endowment to the Fels Fund. Louis F. Post, author of "The Prophet of San Francisco," the publisher of "The Public" a Chicago weekly for a long term of years, and who lectured by the use of colored charts which he had originated, was of great service in the movement. He was ably assisted in his work by Mrs. Post. He was assistant Secretary of Labor under Wilson. Joseph Dana Hill<sup>c</sup> was the able editor of the Single Tax Review for many years, and his work was followed the the excellent services of Frank Chodorov, C. O. Steel, and others. Tom L. Johnson, <sup>U.S.</sup> congressman and mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, gave generously of his wealth to the movement and became a warm personal friend of Henry George. In Congress he made this famous retort: "Yes, I am a monopolist. I take advantage of all the bad laws which you have enacted but which I am trying to repeal!"

There was Frank Vieth who published the single tax monthly Why; H. S. Julian, President of the Kansas City Single Tax Club who when introducing Henry George to the club in 1890 referred to the three great democrats, Jesus, Jefferson, and George; George Hughes, son of Sir Thomas Hughes, who joined a Topeka labor union in order to introduce the single tax to working men; P. B. Hamlin of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, who was said to have converted an entire community to the single tax; and Father Malone editor of the Colorado Catholic, whose lectures on the single tax were models of clear thinking and good English.

There was Jerry Simpson who was brought into the movement by reading The Standard, and who was the democratic leader in the House of Representatives and who with Tom L. Johnson and other single tax congressmen succeeded in the publication of over three million copies of the Congressional edition of Protection or Free Trade; J. C. McGuire, Congressman, who gave us the phrase "Have you seen the cat", with reference to the cat in the branches of the tree of a puzzle picture, meaning do you understand all the implications of the single tax, and who in the year 1892, with the other single tax congressmen presented Congress with a mammoth single tax petition in an oak cabinet made for that purpose.

There was Dr. Edward McGlynn pastor of St. Stephens Catholic Church of New York City who was excommunicated from the Church by Archbishop Corrigan because of his loyalty to the single tax movement, but who was promptly reinstated after investigation, and who during his suspension lectured on the single tax; and Rabbi Stephen F. Wise of New York City. <sup>(6 years later)</sup> <sup>tax</sup> <sup>[Stover?]</sup> of the "Free" synagogue which now bears his name, W. 68<sup>(3)</sup> St, NYC, he was pall bearer at H G funeral.

There was J. G. Shearman, one of the "limited" single taxers who believed that ground rents would be greatly in excess of governmental



expenses, and the author of "Natural Taxation" and who lectured on the subject; W. T. Croasdale, editor of the Standard, who defined a single taxer as one who did something for the single tax; Boston Hall, lawyer, writer, and author of The Disease of Charity, that charity which covers a multitude of economic sins; Dan Beard, the Boy Scout leader and artist, who illustrated "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," and to whom Mark Twain good-naturedly complained that he had made that volume a single tax handbook.

There was Billy Radcliff, who divided his time under the lamplight in village streets between amusing the crowds, selling patent medicine, and explaining the single tax, and who was present at the 1890 conference of single taxers in New York City when he amused the delegates with an illustration of his method; and H. Martin Williams, the Missouri leader in the movement, and who was immediately inquired about by Henry George when I called upon him in New York in 1891.

There also was Robert T. Snediker, proprietor of the Kansas City Stock Yards Hotel, who had the single tax programs printed on the back of all his envelopes; William Lloyd Garrison II, who wrote to Henry George that he had accepted his philosophy but didn't think that it would cure all the ills of society. "Nor do I," responded Mr. George, "but freedom will"; Herbert Quick, editor and author, who in One Man's Life described his experiences in receiving "a great light;" and Mary Austin of Sante Fe, who said that her father refused to admit that the Bible was a more important book than Progress and Poverty.

There was James A. Herne, playwright and actor who said to me that "the single taxers are the salt of the earth;" H. F. Ring, author of The Case Plainly Stated; Professor Harry Gunnison Brown, Missouri State University, one of our most valued pioneers; George Washington Goethals, Chief Engineer of the Panama Canal and a member of the Hall

of Fame; W. H. McNair, Mayor of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; W. W. Rose, Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas; Lucius Garvin, Governor of Rhode Island; Charles H. Ingersol, whose radio broadcasts were very effective; Count Leo Tolstoy, who many considered the greatest man of his time; Stoughton Cooley, editor of the Public; Dr. Robert Conover, editor of the Kansas magazine, who spoke for many when he said to me, "I am a disciple but not an evangelist!"

There was Mrs. Signe Bionner, of Copenhagen, whose lectures brought encouragement from Denmark; Gilbert Tucker, author of the "Road to Prosperity"; Ellen Winsor and Rebecca Winsor Evans, authors of Land Labor and Wealth; Agnes George de Mille, who gave generously to the movement; Lawson Purdy, president of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation; and Mrs. Henry George, who when I asked her for her favorite quotation gave me the following from a speech by Henry George in Sydney, Australia, March 1890:

"If I go this night where I may over the civilized world, I would find men who would gladly clasp hands with me--if it has been given to me to help forward a great movement--it is through no merit of mine; it is not from my energy; it is not from my learning; it is not from my ability--it is from the simple fact that, seeing a great truth, I swore to follow it."

Also there were the following:

Willis J. Abbot, Will Atkinson, L. D. Beckwith, Stephen Bell, Herbert A. Berens, Peckney Bigelow, E. H. Bock, George E. Briggs, W. E. Brokaw, James R. Brown, J. W. Bucklin, C. J. Bull, Edmund J. Burke, Harold S. Bittenheim, C. E. Cartwright, E. Yancey Cohen, Dr. Solomon Selis Cohen, Grace Isabel Colbron, Ernest Crosby, Otto Callman, Samuel Denziger, G. W. Darby, Dr. James H. Dillard, O. K. Down, Alfred A. Drew,

Francis I. Du Pont, Charles R. Eckert, C. J. Ewing, Walter Fairchild, Mary Fels, Charles J. Finger, Sir George Fowlds, James G. Fuller, Hamlin Garland, C. A. Gaston, J. E. Gaston, Oscar H. Geiger, Alexander Greene, H. H. Hardinge, Byron W. Holt, Frederic C. Howe, Rt. Rev. J. O. Huntington, Father Huntington, Emil O. Jorgensen, Antoninette Kaufmann, Dr. C. J. Lavery, August Lewis, A. W. Madsen (London), Francis Neilson, J. J. Pastoriza, Violette G. Peterson, Hon. Edward Polak, Alice Thatcher Post, Jackson H. Ralston, John C. Rose, Vernon J. Rose, A. E. Schalkenbach, P. W. Schwander, Samuel Seabury, Elmer E. Soderstrom, Western Starr, Lincoln Steffens, Frank Stephens, S. A. Stockwell, Harold Sudell, Alva Sweezey, Schuyler C. Sweezey, E. B. Swinney E. P. E. Troy, Hon. W. S. U'Ren, Frederick Verinder, Fiske Warren, Hon. J. C. Wedgewood M P, Edward White, P. R. Williams, Paul Winsor, and Peter Witt.

The Single Tax Movement took shape with remarkable spontaneity in all parts of the country soon after Progress and Poverty was published in 1879. Quite naturally the progress of the movement has been desultory in its earlier years from lack of organization and guidance. But with the establishment of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, the International Union for <sup>Land Value Taxation and</sup> ~~Free Trade and the Taxation of Ground Rent~~, the Henry George School for Social Science in New York with branches in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and St. Louis, the movement has been greatly benefited by the education of a large number of graduates and the distribution of Progress and Poverty and other literature.

The ordinary crusade for a charitable object has the approval of everybody and the opposition of no one. Santa Claus is the most popular of all personalities. It is entirely different with the Single Tax Movement, which is in a class by itself, being based on justice. Justice is blind; justice has no favorites. "Every credit has a debit."

Whenever justice makes a decision favorable to one group, the same decision is necessarily unfavorable to another and usually a much larger group. Expediency has no place in the decrees of justice.

Henry George knew that the greatest opposition to the single tax would come from those who have special privileges which, by the sanctity of time, have come to be regarded as vested rights, and in consequence of that knowledge, he took pains to state that the change should be made gradually, one step at a time.

Incidentally this is the right method of procedure in political economy. In his History of Civilization Buckle states the case as follows: "Every great reform which has been effected has consisted not in doing something new, but in undoing something old. The most valuable additions made to legislation have been enactments destructive of previous legislation; and the best laws which have been passed have been those by which some former laws have been repealed."

Fortunately, the movement now has the advantage of many experiments in tax reform, each one of which, although limited by the absence of free trade, has proved the validity of claims made for the practical application of the single tax, such experiments, for example, as those made in Arden, Delaware; Harvard, Massachusetts; by the Pittsburg Plan in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; New Westminster and other cities of British Columbia. Other successful experiments have taken place in Australia and New Zealand, while in Denmark the movement has been conspicuous in the national legislature where the Justice Party has been of great influence. And most important of all, the single tax colony of Fairhope, Alabama, across the bay from Mobile.

The recent critics of Henry George are inclined to minimize the single tax and the single tax movement as unimportant, a remnant of a mistaken fad of former days. They do not realize that the steadily

rising fame of Henry George has resulted from the good work accomplished by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and the other educational units of the single tax movement. Of course, this attitude of present day critics is due entirely to the fact that they do not understand the full significance of the single tax idea. Henry George is regarded by these critics as a conventional, middle of the road, liberal of many interests without being devoted to any special one, whereas his one great passion was a desire to hasten the time when the natural economic law discovered by him should be made a living reality by the adoption of the single tax. Anna George de Mille, his devoted daughter, shared that passion. The importance of her service in the Henry George movement was second to none, and continued during her lifetime. Henry George, as a normal man, was of course interested as well in other movements for the good of society. He was, for example, the first to advocate our adoption of the Australian secret ballot. But these other interests did not divert him from his great purpose.

With exceptional foresight Henry George fully understood the character which the single tax program was to have many years before the movement was started, and he expressed this knowledge in Progress and Poverty in the following prophetic words:

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends--those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be die for it. This is the power of Truth."