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THE RESURGENCE OF HENRY GEORGE

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The crucial thing about George's teaching is, of course, the rent of land. And once it is out in the open, the rent of land can be as embarrassing as was Banquo's ghost to Macbeth. It is of no account folks say, but will strenuously scotch any talk of taking all of it in taxation. Communists hate the idea because it spoils the lure of "giving land to the peasants" (i.e., collective farms). Planners of all sorts hate it because it spoils their blueprints; landowners hate it because it cuts the Gordian knot of their incomprehensible jargon. The George philosophy cuts at an awkward angle across almost every modern way of doing and thinking about things.

So, for one reason or another, Henry George is pushed out of sight - but he just refuses to stay pushed ! Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret. You can expel nature with a pitchfork but she will always come back on you. And Henry George, or his philosophy, is a sort of force of nature - it keeps coming back.

Every so often there is a flurry of interest in Henry George - a spate of articles in the press, a mention or two in halls of learning and legislation - but it hasn't yet "taken hold". Every so often Henry George gets rediscovered - but he doesn't quite "stay discovered", as Mark Twain said of pre-Columbian discoveries of America. Last year and this year (1954-55) we have witnessed such a period of "resurgence". Another recent period was 1939-1941). Will it stick

this time? Hard to say. But let me give you an idea of what I have seen from where I sit.

Last year was the 75th anniversary of "Progress and Poverty", and it received a pretty good amount of attention. There were articles and re-appraisals in the press; there were special exhibits and programmes at the New York and San Francisco Public Libraries and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This last was particularly welcome recognition. Georgeist-sponsored events like our annual conference, 75th anniversary banquet and Dr. Viggo Starcke's American lecture tour, attracted wide attention. The Schalkenbach Foundation's new edition of "Progress and Poverty" was a book that many libraries were proud to add to their collection. There was a large programme at the Cooper Union - the first Georgeist event in that great institution, I believe, since the days of Henry George.

There was a widespread effort to persuade the Postmaster General to issue a special anniversary postage stamp. Although such a stamp was not issued, the extent of co-operation on this project was amazing. The quantity of letters from all over the world from Georgeists and their friends - some very highly placed - did impress the Postmaster, and the effort may well tell in a future effort.

This year is a Hall of Fame election year. (The Hall of Fame, sponsored by New York University, holds quinquennial elections to select great Americans who are honoured by having their busts placed in the colonnaded Hall, and this constitutes important recognition). An effort is being made to get George elected this year.

The publication this year, by Oxford University Press, of a truly great biography of Henry George by Professor Charles Albro Barker was a more concrete event. We held a dinner in New York to help launch this book, assisted by Oxford officials, Professor Broadus Mitchell, Barker himself, Agnos de Mille and Raymond Moley; and at least one college president, as well as other personages, were present. Press reviews were mostly favourable, although the influential

New York Times gave it the "ho-hum" treatment; the reviewer also gave a nip at our building renaissance by saying: "Despite the efforts of a well-organised band of disciples, Henry George is nearly forgotten". Yes, they're still saying it - and it is up to us to make that sort of remark look increasingly ridiculous!

One other event worth noting was a splendid half-hour television show over one of New York's biggest stations, WRCA, honouring Henry George as "The Man of the Year" (1879). (The person in charge of this programme was a former Henry George School graduate).

And besides Henry George, what about the current reception of his rent-of-land philosophy? After all, "love me, love my dog". There have been appreciations of Henry George by famous people without acceptance of his philosophy. Raymond Moley has been friendly to Henry George but still felt constrained to begin his praise of Barker's book with the statement "I am not a Georgeist". Dwight D. Eisenhower voted for Henry George for the Hall of Fame in 1950, but an official statement had to come from the White House that this "implies no endorsement, etc."

On the positive side - our friends in the press, in politics, in colleges, etc. - are slowly increasing and are directing attention to land value taxation. Harlan Trott has been writing excellent articles on the subject in the Christian Science Monitor, and one of these was read into the Congressional Record by the Hon. E.C. Gathings of Arkansas and distributed widely. To be fair to the New York Times I must note that they had a good feature article praising the Fairhope Single Tax experiment. A recent news item in the Times quoted Admiral Spruance, retiring U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, as recommending land value taxation as the solution to their land problem. (Wonderful - but why do they wait until they quit public life?)

A Henry George School graduate who has held extension classes has recently been elected mayor of his city - Great Falls, Montana (population about 50,000) - and will now teach classes in City Hall! Other graduates are moving up the ladder in the world of politics.

As to our traditional immovable body, the academic world, there are ripples of motion here and there. A professor of education, Samuel Burkhard, was engaged by the Lincoln Foundation for the school year 1954-1955 to do a survey of the Henry George School. Part of his job was to see what kind of link-up could be made between George and the colleges. His reception by college personages was most cordial and attentive and shows that the job is not impossible. It just requires friends who fit right inside the framework. The immovable body cannot be budged from the outside. This sort of thing is happening as School graduates and friends move on up into key positions. Today we hear from people who graduated a dozen years ago, who have matured into leadership, and are accomplishing something in their own fields.

So far, my story deals mostly with the United States. Within the past year we have seen an astonishing burst of interest internationally. Again, I speak "from where I sit" - that is, from the work conducted at our U.S. Henry George School. The gratifying Georgeist work of long standing in Great Britain, Denmark, Australia, etc., is familiar to us. Recently we made little forays elsewhere by advertising our correspondence courses internationally. We barely scratched the surface and were literally flooded with responses. Discounting the doubtful cases, we still found a surprising percentage of sincere and intelligent seekers, many of them quite "solid citizens" of their respective countries. The outstanding case is Formosa, where Dr. Hengtse Tu has integrated our courses with his new Free China Extension University and has enrolled hundreds of students in our basic course. Dr. Tu has just translated and printed a digest of "Progress and Poverty" in Chinese. All this work he has done on his own, without any financial assistance from us.

The international work has grown within the year to the point where we now have a full-time International Secretary, Norman S. Casserley. After the St. Andrews conference Mr. Casserley will proceed on a tour across Europe and Asia and back to the U.S., looking first-hand into the recent contacts and developments made.

I cannot begin to tell in this paper of the many more things that are happening. Little has been said of our regular school work - suffice it to say that we keep at the grind, and hold our classes and turn out graduates. This work, done with a rhythm almost as regular as breathing, I conceive to be still the most important thing to concentrate on at the present time.

The tides of interest in Henry George ebb and flow. Our enthusiasm must be tempered by a realistic recognition of how very little it still adds up to, even during a "flow" period. Looking at the world and then at our accomplishments, we may well stand aghast at the disparity. And, taking the long view, we cannot ignore the question: "Is the progress we are making enough? Are we going too slowly? Will the world seize hold of other ways of doing things that will sweep aside our way?"

After all, this has happened before. The Land-Value Taxation movement in Britain reached a crest and then was swept aside in the catastrophe of 1914-1918. In Russia, the movement was strong and getting stronger and then was destroyed in the Bolshevik holocaust. Going further back, the Physiocrats had attained a very high influence, but could not stem the French Revolution. And, in the remote past, we may even read the same lesson in the attempted land reform of the Gracchi, the one thing that could have saved the Roman Republic but which was swept aside, leading to chaos and then despotism.

We can always console ourselves with the recognition that the truth must ultimately prevail - and that is not sheer poppycock. But some hard thinking on the matter is also called for. What is truth? What truth prevailed in the case of ancient Rome? That, having transgressed, she fell. What truth will prevail in modern times? That, transgressing, we too will fall?

If we keep at it, land value taxation proposals will again get a hearing. How can we prevent them from being swept aside again?

There is one thing particularly that we must keep

in mind. However far we got with a resurgence of the Georgeist philosophy, there would be powerful forces to hinder it. There would be hostility; there would be apathy; there would be the never-ending intricacies, complications and cross-currents of politics. There would be compromise proposals and watering down; there would be talk of the "realistic needs of the moment". There would be the non-comprehension of masses of people to whom something concrete and visible held before them would have a clearer meaning than the invisible magic of freedom and opportunity. There would be millions of land-hungry peasants to whom a little slice of land would mean more than the entire rent of land.

Something more would then be needed than a band of idealists. The Physiocrats, the Liberals, the Nihilists were such, and were swept away. The survival of the idea would depend on a thorough understanding of the extent of the terrific world-forces uncoiling. It would have to develop a flexibility and durability, a caninness and a compassion, a profound spiritual strength in order to meet and cope with all the fearful forces and to triumph over them.

As I see the Georgeist movement, and watch it grow, I sometimes wonder if it is "a movement". We are, traditionally, individualists. I wonder, could we ever all get together and agree on a programme and unite in carrying it out? Or is it our mission, rather, as "Georgeists", to be bearers of a great idea to mankind? And will the execution of this idea be in the hands of others will skills different from ours? When I behold the marvellous performance of our teaching and propagating on the one hand, and the endless involvements of our deliberations in our councils on the other, I sometimes see ourselves as playing a role not unlike that of the ancient Greeks, or the modern French. They were the teachers of mankind, but couldn't organise a government! They thought too much! Their ideas however, gave form and direction to others who had the necessary organising skills. This is not a bad role to play - it is a great role! This is all speculation, for the face of the future is hidden from us.