

His Widening Influence

✓ **W**HEN GEORGE RETURNED HOME, HE WAS NOT FORGOTTEN IN England. He had started a movement which, within three years, was to grow into a vigorous agitation for land and social reform. Other Englishmen were beginning to share the *Times* view that George was a man to be taken seriously.

Although fatally ill, Arnold Toynbee warned against George's influence. In two lectures delivered in London in January, 1883, Toynbee pointed out that George, with all his "warm and fierce sympathy" for human misery, was a "fundamentally dangerous" man. The danger lay in George's belief in the "economic harmonies," that is, the belief that, if private property be abolished, "individual interests will harmonize with common interests, and competition, which we know is often now a baneful and destructive force, will then become a beneficent one." If this dangerous belief were generally accepted, said Toynbee, it would check the development of unionism, the "extension of the protection of the State," and the scientific study of national problems.¹

✓ Another indication that George was being taken seriously in England came from property owners, both large and small. They were determined to fight and banded together in the Liberty and Property Defense League.² The League defined its position in the slogan, "Self-Help vs. State-Help." Its prospectus stated the organization's purpose: "For resisting over-legislation, for maintaining freedom of contract, and for advocating individualism as opposed to socialism, entirely irrespective of political party politics." By the end of its first year the League could boast of ten branches in England, one in Scotland, and yet another in Ireland,

and of a parliamentary committee consisting of some decidedly eminent, influential, and wealthy men.³

Possibly to disguise its true character, the League set its minimum annual membership fee at one shilling, a nominal sum which did not account for the more than £1,000 subscribed during the first few weeks of its existence.⁴ The press took note of the organization and the *Echo* analyzed the League's origin and membership as follows: "Landlords, alarmed by the circulation of 'Progress and Poverty,' seem to have started the company, but they were quickly joined by railway directors, ship owners, pawnbrokers, publicans, and music hall proprietors."⁵ To dispel any doubt about the landed nature of the organization, the same article in *Echo* pointed out that twenty-one League members owned 2,105,401 acres of land in Great Britain.

For twenty years the League opposed George and his theories; it represented the beginning of that uncompromising attitude of the landowners and aristocracy toward a reform of land tenure which reached a climax in the Lords' rejection of Lloyd George's Budget in 1909. Lord Bramwell's reply to an invitation to debate the land question with a member of George's organization illustrated the intransigence of their opposition to land reform: "Sir, Your letter is so courteously written that it precludes my saying what I think of the question you propose to discuss, except this—that I should be sorry to do anything which showed I thought it worth discussion. I therefore decline your invitation."⁶

George was attacked not only by state planners and landlords, but by the Radical, Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain had read *Progress and Poverty* some time before 1882, and he had been "electrified." He believed that the land question might be the most important question in the Radical program, which he had begun to sketch in his *Fortnightly* articles. He attacked George's views on landlordism as a combination of "truth and error," "fallacy and fact," and George's remedy as "drastic" and "alarming." He hoped to use "Georgism" to force from Gladstone Liberals the measures which he himself was advocating in his Radical program.⁷ He threatened: "If something is not quickly done to meet the growing necessities of the case . . . we may live to see theories as wild as those suggested by the American economist adopted as the creed of no inconsiderable portion of the electorate."⁸

These various attacks showed that George's ideas were spreading. *Progress and Poverty* was widely circulated in England; no

wonder politicians felt and feared popular opinion. And the more George was used to rally the forces of conservatism or to extort concessions from Whiggish Liberals, the more his British friends desired his return. Even before his departure, he had been urged to remain in England and carry on the fight.

He had hardly disembarked in New York when he received an offer of an editorship of a London newspaper. He refused, but it was becoming evident that enthusiasm for his return to England was increasing.

In March, 1883, Henry M. Hyndman wrote to him: "I hear from Joynes that you are coming over here to lecture on Land Nationalization . . . I cannot possibly think the mere expropriation of competitive rents would benefit our country. In fact I know it would not. But we English are always readier to hear a foreigner than our own people. I look forward cordially to seeing you again, for whatever our differences may be economically I recognize to the fullest extent your noble character."⁹

Then R. P. B. Frost, secretary of the newly formed Land Reform Union, formally invited George to lecture in Great Britain under the Union's auspices.

The formation of this Land Reform Union demonstrates the fame and influence that George achieved during his first visit. Members of Wallace's Land Nationalization Society, which existed for the sole purpose of reforming the land laws, and the Social Democrats, who gave land nationalization a prominent place in their program, banded together in the Land Reform Union. George disagreed in principle with both groups. Unlike the Land Nationalization Society, he refused even to consider the possibility of compensation for landlords whose land was taken over by the State; and he refused to go along with Social Democrats in their proposal to nationalize the means of production and distribution as well as land. Yet, in spite of these basic differences, members of both organizations sought George's services in their land campaign. The reason for this strange fellowship was George's appeal to "people with a social conscience."¹⁰

The Land Reform Union grew out of a series of informal meetings to discuss *Progress and Poverty*. In June, 1883, the organization held its first general meeting in London. A constitution, flexible enough to include supporters of Hyndman, Wallace, and George—in fact, anyone interested in land nationalization—was adopted. Issues such as wages and interest and the relation of

land to capital were recognized as important, but were set aside until the fundamental issue of land reform was settled. Enthusiastic references to Davitt and George studded the minutes of the meeting. Dr. G. B. Clark, later the founder of the Highland Land Law Reform League and for many years a member for Scotland in Parliament, moved the main resolution: "That bearing in mind the facts that resolutions in favor of land nationalization have been passed at meetings all over the kingdom, and that the Trades Union Congress passed a similar resolution in September last, this meeting believes that public opinion is ready for an active agitation to secure the restitution of land for the people."¹¹ This was a weak resolution, but represented the only common ground on which the members of the Union could stand.

The Union, in 1883, had a membership of seventy and a cash balance of thirty-five pounds—little enough indeed from which to launch an attack on the vested land interests. In London, and in the country, members of the Union lectured to local Liberal associations and literary societies on *Progress and Poverty* and land nationalization. Copies of the sixpenny edition of *Progress and Poverty* were placed in the hands of the ward committees of the Liberal Association. Henry Rose, editor of the *Hull Express*, printed several leading articles on George and land nationalization. Pamphlets were written and distributed: "A Catechism on the Land Question," "The Right to the Use of the Earth," "Land Common Property," "A Review of 'Progress and Poverty.'" Local trades union conferences were showered with both literature and requests that resolutions be passed supporting land nationalization.¹²

In the beginning, the members of the Union were not completely committed to George's views; they merely endorsed the main conclusions of *Progress and Poverty*: "that to nationalize the land is absolutely just and necessary."¹³ Helen Taylor, for instance, frankly declared: "I am a Land Nationalizer, but I am also proud to proclaim myself a Socialist."¹⁴

The Land Nationalization Society wanted George to "be as mild as possible"¹⁵ on his no-compensation policy. According to Henry Rose, editor of the *Hull Express* and a fervent convert to George's principles, "Professor Wallace had asserted the pious opinion that Mr. George, by his attitude on the compensation question, had thrown the land-reform movement back."¹⁶ George never compromised, though there was much to be said for Wallace's criticism. The word "confiscation"¹⁷ undoubtedly repelled many persons who might otherwise have supported George's land crusade.

The divisions within the Land Reform Union gave it a provisional structure that was bound to change. The organization lasted for little more than a year, from April, 1883, until May, 1884; then George's followers seized control and adopted the name, The English Land Restoration League. Yet, in spite of the uneasy alliance among Socialists, land nationalizers, and Georgites, the Union accomplished necessary results in preparing the ground for George's campaign. Its objective was to bring land nationalization within the range of practical politics in Great Britain, and George had been invited to spearhead the drive because the circulation of *Progress and Poverty* had shown that he had a far greater potential appeal to the electorate than any homebred land reformer. This fact far outweighed the serious reservations which many Union members had about the details of George's program.¹⁸ Thus was born an organization which, under various names and with varying degrees of success, has agitated for the land tax in Great Britain down to this day.

George arrived in December, 1883, to begin his first real campaign for British land reform. When he docked at Liverpool, he was, next to Gladstone, the most discussed man in England. He could be grateful to Conservatives and Whiggish Liberals, who had attacked and admonished him; to landowners, who had proclaimed that he was a menace to private property; and to the Land Reform Union, which had been publicizing his forthcoming campaign. But, most of all, his popularity resulted from the enormous success of *Progress and Poverty*.

Estimates of the number of copies sold in Great Britain vary. Henry George, Jr., estimated the sale of the sixpenny edition by December, 1883, at 40,000 copies;¹⁹ Beer claimed for it a "circulation of about 100,000 copies in the United Kingdom";²⁰ and the records of Kegan Paul show that 66,469 copies of their edition had been sold by January 1, 1884. Since both William Reeve and J. C. Durant had also published cheap editions, Beer's figure of 100,000 is probably not far wrong.

The Land Reform Union arranged a reception on George's arrival. Though George was in London by January 3, he formally "arrived" at Euston Station on Sunday, January 6, to be acclaimed by a large crowd. George addressed his followers from the roof of a four-wheeled cab, then drove off to the hotel where he had been a guest for the past three days.

His schedule on his 1884 and 1885 visits was strenuous. He visited forty-four cities in the British Isles: thirty in Scotland, twelve in England, and two in Ireland. He made seventy-five speeches with about the same geographical distribution: fifty in Scotland, twenty-three in England, and two in Ireland. The Land Reform Union had carefully selected areas where he was likely to make his greatest appeal. Ireland was now only a subordinate factor in land-tax agitation; not only was George in conflict with Parnell's followers, but the Irish had now turned their attention to the issue of Home Rule. George was therefore scheduled to address audiences in areas in England and Scotland where unemployment and poverty were concentrated.

His first address for 1884 was scheduled for January 9 in London. John Ruskin, old and ill, was asked to preside, but sent his regrets, wishing George "all success in his efforts, and an understanding audience."²¹ Ruskin had been in the habit of describing himself as the only true Conservative in England; the *Pall Mall Gazette* made the wry comment on his message that "In this respect, at any rate, there probably is no other Conservative ready to stand at Mr. Ruskin's side."²² Certainly Henry Labouchère, who substituted for Ruskin as chairman, was no Conservative. He made one positive contribution to George's campaign by introducing him as "George the Fifth," a title which was adopted by the press.

Even the *Pall Mall Gazette* was forced to admit that the land-reform campaign got off to a good start with the London speech. The *Gazette's* article began: "George the Fifth scored a brilliant success last night."²³ When George went forward to speak, resounding cheers came from all parts of the audience except the reserved sections, an indication, according to the *Gazette*, of the strong republican feeling in the hall. Frequent interruptions, which looked suspiciously like organized opposition, occurred as the program began, but died out quickly.

During 1884 and 1885 any reference to George was sure to attract attention. Professor Max Müller, lecturing on religion in India before the Millard Institute in Birmingham, referred to George's land policy; this passing reference was featured in the London *Daily News* under the headline "Professor Max Müller on Henry George."²⁴ Other references to George were probably even more significant indications of his prominence. This item from the New York *Tribune* was widely quoted: "The late Duke of Buchleuch died with a hearty contempt for Mr. Henry George's wild

schemes of disorder and confiscation, and in his will arranged for the management of his estates for 1300 years to come.”²⁵ An advertisement in the *Lady's Pictorial* of February 21, 1884, offered flower seeds to all who obtained land under the George scheme. When the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a contest to name the ten greatest living Englishmen, George received a number of nominations as “Greatest Humbug.”²⁶

Many more serious incidents illustrate his notoriety and emphasize the bitter feelings he aroused. The *Northern Ensign* carried a letter which denounced him for “trampling on the moral law of God” by holding a public reception at the Euston Station on a Sunday. Because his name was associated with Davitt's, the same letter accused him of supporting “assassination, murder, and boycotting.”²⁷ The Junior Reform Club of Liverpool took alarm at the menacing tone of his first speech, and hastened to rescind a resolution inviting him to a dinner in his honor.²⁸

Despite his views on land tenure and his outspoken manner, he met little overt opposition from audiences and from civic authorities. At only two meetings was there any organized disorder, at Oxford University and at Peterhead, Scotland. The Oxford meeting broke up in confusion; at Peterhead, George became so incensed that he referred to his hecklers as “buffoons and inebriates.”²⁹

Opposition to him occasionally resulted in his being denied the use of a meeting place. So sensational was his 1884 campaign that on his return to London at the end of his tour he was boycotted by the principal hall owners. According to Henry Rose, “St. James's Hall was not available; Exeter Hall, Memorial Hall, and others were refused.”³⁰ Consequently, George could deliver only one public speech—in Shoreditch, in the East End—before returning to the United States.

On his return in 1885 he was four times refused the use of meeting places. Three of these refusals occurred at Uig, Glendale, and Portree, on the Isle of Skye. Later, in London, when he petitioned for the use of the Guildhall, to address a meeting of the unemployed, his petition was refused by the Lord Mayor, and he was compelled to speak from the steps of the Royal Exchange.

The most enduring accomplishment of George's campaign in 1884 and 1885 was the founding of the Scottish and English Land Restoration Leagues. The immediate importance of the Leagues was that they consolidated popular support for George's doctrines. The elements of the Land Reform Union could unite only on the issue of land reform; the Land Restoration Leagues adopted

George's analysis of the land problem and his remedy *in toto*. What was lost by dissolving the close co-operation with the Land Nationalization Society and with the Social Democratic Federation was gained in a sharper definition of objectives. Furthermore, by separating themselves from Socialism, George's followers laid the foundation for their eventual co-operation, beginning in 1889, with the Liberal Party.

The first Land Restoration group was established in Glasgow in February, 1884, after an address by George; eighteen hundred members of the audience joined the new organization before leaving the hall.³¹

Three events in 1884 and 1885 are particularly indicative of George's part in British social reform. The April, 1884, number of the *Nineteenth Century* contained "The Prophet of San Francisco," by the Duke of Argyll, in which he attempted to crush George by stigmatizing him as a "Preacher of Unrighteousness." In February, 1885, the *Nineteenth Century* published "Socialism and Rent Appropriation: A Dialogue," a stenographic report of a discussion between Hyndman and George, in which George seemed to agree with the Socialist program. Both these events showed the growing strength of George's influence; nothing less than a real danger to the landed interests would have induced Argyll to attack him, and with equal certainty Hyndman hoped to make George an ally of the Social Democrats. The third event was the Industrial Remuneration Conference on January 28-30, 1885, in London. Representatives of capital and labor, from ninety-seven British organizations and societies, listened to and discussed aspects of the then current industrial depression; the bearing of the conference on George's influence can be seen both in its general theme and in the subjects and proposals discussed.

The stated purpose of the conference reads like a digest of the problem prepared by George himself. The steering committee directed that the delegates inquire into the question: "Is the present system or manner whereby the products of industry are distributed between the various persons and classes of the community satisfactory?"³² The objective of the first day's discussion was even closer to George's theme: "Has the increase of the products of industry within the last hundred years tended most to the benefit of capitalists and employers, or to that of the working classes, whether artisans, labourers, or others; and in what relative proportions in any given period?" Finally, the third day was given over to the

question: "Would the more general distribution of capital or land, or the state management of capital or land, promote or impair the production of wealth and welfare of the community?"³³

To claim that the Industrial Remuneration Conference was constituted *solely* as a result of George's agitation would be absurd. Yet it certainly may be claimed that the general objectives of the conference and the discussion topics for two of the three days were identical with the issues George had raised. Because it is generally acknowledged that George was then the ablest agitator of these issues, more credit must be given to him than to any other person for raising the issues to a level of general interest and immediate importance. George's analysis of British social conditions, the remedies he proposed, the public reaction to his agitation, and his effect on other reforming groups and agencies provide ample justification for this assertion.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. *Progress and Poverty: A Criticism of Henry George*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, 1883, p. 42.
2. The League was founded before George's departure for America. In "Liberty and Property Defense League," in the *London Times*, September 5, 1882, the organization was referred to as "newly founded."
3. The committee included Lord Bramwell, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, Earl Fortesque, the Earl of Pembroke, H. C. Stephens, and the Earl of Wemyss.
4. "Liberty and Property Defense League," *London Times*, September 5, 1882.
5. Quoted in *Christian Socialist*, October, 1883.
6. *Christian Socialist*, June, 1885.
7. For details of this program, see Chapter 8.
8. "Labourers' and Artisans' Dwellings," *Fortnightly Review*, February, 1883.
9. Henry George Collection, New York Public Library. The date, 1882, given in the Collection is incorrect.
10. Frederick Verinder, "After Twenty-one Years," *Land Values*, March, 1906.
11. "The Land Reform Union," *Christian Socialist*, July, 1883, Supplement, i-iv.
12. *Christian Socialist*, October, 1883.
13. *Christian Socialist*, June, 1883.
14. "Land Restoration League," *Justice*, April 5, 1884.
15. Henry Rose, *Henry George*. London: William Reeves, 1884, p. 72.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
17. George, asked many years later if, supposing he were to write *Progress and Poverty* again, he would use "confiscation," replied: "I don't know

what I should do today; but when I wrote the book I was not in the humor to have much consideration for anybody's feelings." Henry George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*. New York: The Schalkenbach Foundation, 1943, p. 423n.

18. *Christian Socialist*, June, 1883.
19. Henry George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 419.
20. Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism*. London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1948, II, pp. 242-43.
21. *London Times*, January 2, 1884.
22. *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 2, 1884.
23. *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 10, 1884.
24. *London Daily News*, January 23, 1884.
25. Henry George Collection, *op. cit.*, February 15, 1884.
26. Henry George Collection, *op. cit.*, February 12, 1884. This item appeared in the *Christian Union*.
27. *Ibid.*, January, 1884.
28. *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 11, 1884.
29. *Aberdeen Journal*, December 15, 1884.
30. Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
32. Industrial Remuneration Conference, *The Report of the Proceedings and Papers*. London: Cassell and Company, 1885, p. i.
33. *Ibid.*, p. xi.