

Political Headway with the Liberal Party

UP TO 1889 GEORGE'S INFLUENCE WAS MAINLY PERSONAL; AFTER his final campaign of 1889 it was political. After this campaign, Liberal and Radical politicians took up the single-tax principle under the name of the "taxation of land values." Most Liberals who supported the taxation of land values were not, and never became, single taxers.

To George's followers, such as Wedgwood, the "taxation of land values" still meant "single tax"; they believed that the goal to be reached in the future was a tax of twenty shillings in the pound on the value of all land. As the incidence of the land tax increased, all other taxes, direct and indirect, would disappear; in the end Britain would be a Utopia of free trade, flourishing industry, and abundance, for all.

But many Liberal politicians, such as Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, the taxation of land values was merely another means of raising revenue, important as a political issue because it appealed to the newly enfranchised "have-nots." Consequently, George's doctrine was compromised increasingly by political expediency.

Serious land reformers were not in complete agreement, and wide differences existed between the beliefs of the single taxers and those of political parties and organizations which pressed for the adoption of a land tax. In addition to the Radicals, miscellaneous land-tax groups, numerically larger than the single taxers, included a variety of organizations such as the Cobdenite free traders in the

Financial Reform Association, John Stuart Mill's Land Tenure Reform Association, the Land Nationalization Society, Socialists of all persuasions, and trades unions. All these joined the single taxers in demanding the taxation of land values, but none subscribed to *all* the details of George's program. Compensation to landlords, the amount of tax to be levied, state ownership of land, the right of municipalities to acquire land for social purposes—these were the controversial issues on which the land reformers were in conflict. Though the followers of George and of other land reformers ultimately presented a united front in their demand for the taxation of land values, they were never able to agree on a single formula.

The first stage in the political history of the taxation of land values ran from 1889 to 1906, a period when the Conservatives were in power for most of the time. At the turn of the century the British were preoccupied with the Boer War to the exclusion of social issues. Gladstone, the Liberal leader until his retirement in 1895, was still determined to make Irish Home Rule the main policy of the party. Under such circumstances, Radicals had little opportunity to apply, on the parliamentary level, the principles of land reform they had imbibed from Chamberlain and George. During these years they preached social reform and free trade and waited for a return to power.

After George's final campaign in 1889, and especially after his death in 1897, the burden of agitating for the land tax fell on single taxers, or members of the English and Scottish Land Restoration Leagues. Inspired and encouraged by the Radical support of George in 1889, the Leagues attained national influence during the next fifteen years. (To broaden their appeal and to identify themselves more clearly in name with the political agitation for land reform, the English group later became the English League for the Taxation of Land Values, with the Scottish group adopting a similar title. Finally, the two groups merged into the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, with headquarters in London.)

These organizations established a monthly paper, *The Single Tax*, the only publication devoted exclusively to the struggle for the taxation of land values. The first number, issued by the Scottish group in 1894, had a wide circulation in England and Scotland. It appealed "with confidence to our members, to land reformers, and to all sympathetic political and social reformers to spread *The Single Tax* in every direction and so help us to bring to a speedy end this primary inequality—Private Property in land."¹

By February, 1896, *The Single Tax* had an average circulation of five thousand copies. In time, the leaders of the Land Restoration Leagues recognized that "Single Tax" no longer accurately defined their position. Accordingly, a reorganization took place; in January, 1902, *The Single Tax* was moved from Glasgow to London, and in June it appeared as *Land Values*. The editors explained: "We have pleaded and argued as politicians, not for 20s. in the pound, but for a beginning, for the Taxation of Land Values, and that is how the question is coming along. The name 'Single Tax' does not quite convey to those who have a listening ear for this 'expedient, necessary, and too-long-delayed measure of justice', that the paper is specially devoted to the Taxation of Land Values."² But reading between the lines one could still detect the Georgian single-tax philosophy: What the organization wanted was the single tax by installment.

From 1889 onward, then, single taxers agitated for the milder taxation of land values, and were successful out of all proportion to their numbers. The annual reports of the English Land Restoration League began with the year 1891-92, a fact which helps establish the beginning date of the propaganda activities of the single-tax organizations. The general committee of the English group seemed designed to present a cross section of land-reform sentiment, for its members represented, in 1891, all shades of political radicalism rather than the single-tax plan alone. Among them were Dr. G. B. Clark, the most aggressive champion in Parliament of Scottish land reform and leader of the influential Highland Land Law Reform League; Helen Taylor; Radical-Socialists such as R. B. Cunninghame-Graham and J. Shaw Maxwell; Christian Socialists represented by Frederick Verinder, the general secretary of the League; the Reverend S. D. Headlam; and influential Radicals such as T. F. Walker of Birmingham and John Wilson, M. P. for Durham.

Tom Mann was on the general committee from 1892 to 1897, and Sidney Webb, from 1892 to 1898. The interest taken in the taxation of land values by municipal reform groups is indicated by numerous members of the London County Council (L. C. C.) on the general committee.³ Certainly not all of them subscribed in full to George's program; on the other hand, their presence did not mean that the expression of an orthodox single-tax doctrine was completely stifled.

During the 1889-1906 period, the Land Restoration Leagues saw that the success of the land-tax agitation depended on arousing

the electorate and not in merely proselyting a few leading statesmen. Consequently, they concentrated their efforts on public activities. From 1894 to 1900, for example, 2,835 public meetings and lectures were held under the auspices of either the English or the Scottish group. Affiliations were sought with workingmen's clubs, Radical clubs, Liberal associations, co-operatives, and trades unions.

Every outlet was exploited by the circulation of printed propaganda. In 1890-91 leaflets were mailed to workingmen's clubs in England and Wales, to co-operative societies in the south and east of England, to editors of newspapers with an agricultural circulation, and to several thousand persons who had signed League petitions. In addition, lecturers and organizers of the Dockers and General Labourers' Union agreed to distribute League propaganda.⁴ In Glasgow and London the Leagues were able to excite enthusiasm for the land tax, so much so that, by 1897, sixty-two assessing authorities in Scotland and seventy local authorities in England and Wales were petitioning Parliament in favor of making land valuation the basis of local taxation.⁵ Beginning with 1902 the Leagues sponsored annual conferences in London on the taxation of land values.⁶

How persistently the Leagues tried to foster an agricultural movement in favor of the taxation of land values is shown by the Red Vans campaign.⁷ From 1891 to 1898 Red Vans were sent into the agricultural districts of southern England to preach social revolution, and, incidentally, the doctrine of the land tax, to rural workers. This was a new departure in Land Restoration propaganda. Paradoxically, George's agitation for land reform had, from the beginning, appealed mainly to urban workers; though in 1885 the English League could boast that it enjoyed "the support of tens of thousands of organized workers throughout the country," it had to admit its failure to establish branches in rural districts.⁸ Now it sought to remedy this by its agricultural campaign. The Yellow Vans of the Land Nationalization Society were in the field, too.

The Red Van technique was simple. The van would be halted on an open spot in a village where notices of the meeting had been posted two days earlier. When a crowd had collected in the evening, the lecturers discussed, not social reform broadly, but the problems of the agricultural workers: living conditions, wages, rent, the tyranny of the landlord. They avoided making the taxation of land values the main issue, nor did they attempt to form branches of the Land Restoration League. The chief objective of the campaign was

to arouse agricultural workers to the necessity of political action and to persuade them to organize into unions.

The passage of the Local Government Act of 1894, known as the Parish Councils Bill, shifted the emphasis of the Red Vans campaign. The Act, among other things, advanced the freedom of village politics by giving the councils a wider representation of tradesmen and workers. The vans now tried to show the workers how they could "capture" authority, somewhat in the manner of the famous Birmingham caucus method, and thus take "the management of local affairs out of the hands of the landlords, and of the parsons whom they appoint, and of the farmers whom they dominate."⁹ The Labourers' Union, which had been supported by the Leagues' Red Vans lecturers, sampled the results, in Warwickshire, of the first election held under the Local Government Act, in December, 1894. Candidates supported by the Union, and theoretically favorable to the taxation of land values, captured sixty-five percent of the places on Parish Councils and fifty percent on District Councils.¹⁰ Presuming these figures to be reasonably accurate, the Land Restoration Leagues certainly had cause for rejoicing.

Another sign of the efficacy of the land-tax propaganda was the opposition met by the Red Vans. An account of the second campaign in the summer of 1892 began with the jubilant claim: "Judging by the complaints of landlords and their sympathizers, in the country press and elsewhere, the success of the vans, in arousing the labourers to a sense of the injustice of landlordism, has been very great."¹¹

In February, 1892, Lord Salisbury warned rural electors in Exeter against people "speaking from a van" who promised "no end of profits to the voters if they would vote Radical."¹² The Liberty and Property Defense League sent out Liberty Platform lecturers in 1894 and 1895 to "counteract the influence of the Red Van agitation."¹³ In two articles in the *Liberty Review*, June 8 and June 22, 1895, the Leagues' doctrines were branded "land nationalization and single tax" and agricultural workers were praised as having "a good deal more common sense than the Red Van mountebanks credit them with."¹⁴ Rural newspapers made a concerted effort to ridicule the Red Van agitation. Under the headline, "Radical Land Grabbers Invasion," two lecturers were called "a couple of paid—well paid, no doubt, for the dirty work they have to do—representatives of the modern political organization of land grabbers." The van itself had "the appearance of a derelict

cheap-jack," and the speech was contemptuously dismissed with "then Bombaster Furioso began with cant and rant to exterminate all the bloated landlords, and exalt the down-trodden labourer."¹⁵

The reaction of local squires to the Red Van meetings followed a predictable pattern. Varieties of blue laws were invoked to prevent public meetings in the villages. Lecturers were threatened with prosecution for holding meetings in open spaces. Summonses were issued for obstruction of the highways. The Essex County Council submitted to the Home Secretary, for his approval, a draft of by-laws ostensibly designed to regulate the activities of gypsies, but which could have been used to prevent open-air political meetings. The use of National Schools was often refused to lecturers. Local land agents quietly warned village innkeepers and shopkeepers not to permit the vans to occupy their property. A typical example of how the gentry fought the Red Vans occurred at Aylesbury on May 8, 1896. Two lecturers had gone to sleep in a van drawn up in the market square. Before midnight a band of unidentified roughs attacked the vehicle, pushed it down a slope, broke windows, and lunged at the passengers with hammers and sticks. The police constable who should have been on duty in the market square had left before the attack and did not return until the mob had dispersed.¹⁶ Such tactics played into the hands of the Leagues, for they could argue that the suppression of free speech was added proof of the justice of the taxation of land values.

At this stage of George's political influence, British single taxers expected miracles to be accomplished from the operation of the land tax. The government, they claimed, would be able to remove the hated "household taxes" from bread, sugar, and tea; it could reduce the rates on houses, cheapen building land, stimulate the mining industry, and bring to market cheaper coal, iron, steel, and stone; increase the demand for labor and raise wages, assure a more equitable division of wealth, and establish economic justice and freedom.¹⁷ These expected miracles show the extent to which the single taxers had altered their program to suit the Liberals.

Liberalism was currently supporting free trade, and opposing the protectionist policies of Chamberlain. To combat Chamberlain's protection views and prove that taxation of land values would make free trade possible, the single taxers, in 1905, published a special edition of George's *Protection or Free Trade*. Thirty thousand copies at sixpence each sold rapidly, and an undisclosed number were sold at a reduced price for distribution by Liberal parliamentary candidates.¹⁸

The agitation by the Land Leagues was more intensive and better organized after 1889 than before, but the theory was still substantially that expounded by George. What really counted after 1889 was the success of the propaganda as shown by concrete results. One of the most cheering was the nationwide agitation for *local* taxation of land values. The movement began almost simultaneously in Glasgow and London and rapidly spread throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. The ostensible object was to persuade Parliament to pass an act permitting local authorities to raise at least part of the rates by a tax on land values. Actually, there was little hope of obtaining a local land-values tax bill from a Conservative Government, but the gradually increasing number of petitions to Parliament in favor of this form of taxation gave a popular character to the movement which Liberal politicians could not ignore.

The idea of applying the taxation of land values locally was first broached in the Glasgow City Council in 1889, but it was not effectively followed up until July, 1895, when, by a vote of twenty-five to twenty-four, the Glasgow Police Commissioners accepted a motion to petition Parliament in favor of a local land tax and at the same time to enlist the aid of all assessing bodies in Scotland in pushing this demand.¹⁹ The Scottish Land Restoration League was, of course, a prime mover in this resolution, having achieved the election to local offices of candidates supporting the League program. Indirectly, the Glasgow action may have been stimulated by the first national conference on the taxation of land values in London, May 23, 1895. Delegates and resolutions supporting the land tax, it was claimed, represented "upwards of 1,000,000 organized workers and earnest land reformers."²⁰

Within two years the movement in Glasgow reached effective proportions. In the municipal elections of 1896, sixty-eight of the candidates endorsed the taxation of land values, and of the candidates returned, seventy-five in all, forty-nine were in favor of the tax.²¹ On March 8, 1897, the land-value taxers on the Council were able to pass a resolution favoring the preparation of a bill to be introduced into Parliament. The bill, as drafted, was known as the "Glasgow Bill." It was first introduced in 1899, and then again in 1905; in the Liberal Parliament after 1906, as the Land Values (Scotland) Bill, it was once rejected, and once mutilated by the Lords.²² The bill, when introduced in Parliament, had little success, but the Glasgow movement for shifting the burden of local rates to land values was responsible for spearheading the movement in Parliament for the taxation of land values.

Land reformers in London were not far behind those of Glasgow;

this was to be expected, for the General Committees of the English Land Restoration League for the 1890's included more than a dozen members of the London County Council. The name of Sidney Webb alone was a guaranty that the taxation of land values would take a prominent place in London municipal politics. Because of the agitation of Fabians and single-tax men in London, the London County Council was pledged, almost from the moment of its creation in 1889, to the local taxation of land values. By 1894 a committee existed for the taxation of ground rents; it became known as the London Electoral Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, devoted to agitation for a local land tax.²³ During 1894 the London County Council again went on record as approving of the taxation of land values, a sentiment endorsed by Lord Rosebery with the declaration that the L. C. C. had "laid down some principles which will not be allowed to die until they have been carried into effect." The first principle mentioned by Rosebery was the taxation of land values.²⁴

In 1897 a bill was unsuccessfully introduced into Parliament, on behalf of the L. C. C., to provide for local taxation of land values throughout England; in the following year the Council instructed its Local Government and Parliamentary Committee to prepare a new bill on the subject. Prepared and approved in December, 1900, this bill met with the same lack of success as the "Glasgow Bill."²⁵

The Glasgow and London movements for local land tax sparked a movement which spread throughout the country. Enthusiasm for the land tax was widespread and conferences to encourage the municipal taxation of land were held throughout the country. This local movement seems to have crystallized with the first national conference, already referred to, in London on May 23, 1895. From that time on, annual conferences met, resolutions were made, and hundreds of petitions flowed into London from local authorities. The value of these conferences in making the taxation of land values a national political issue cannot be overestimated, for they represented not merely single-tax sentiment but a broad front of political opinion.

By 1905 the pressure for local taxation of land values seemed to be sweeping all before it. Conferences in favor of the principle culminated in a mass demonstration in London for the Land Values Assessment and Rating Bill, which was approaching a vote in Parliament. There were delegates from Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Aberdeen; the county boroughs of Bolton, Bury, and Salford; the boroughs of Eccles and Sunderland; the London County Council;

the Town Council of Dunfermline; and the Gateshead Poor Law Union. Enough influence was exerted by these groups to cause the Liberal Party to issue a special whip, warning Members of Parliament to be in their seats and support the measure.²⁶ George's message, amplified by this clamor for the local taxation of land values, had at last caught the ear of official Liberalism. The *Daily Graphic* sourly quipped: ". . . the new electioneering cry of the Liberal party is to be 'down with the landowner and up with the skyscraper!'"²⁷

The municipal movement for the taxation of land values, which by 1906 had gained the support of 518 local authorities,²⁸ was instrumental in bringing the issue to the forefront of British politics and including it in the Liberal reform program. Socialists, with the exception of Hyndman's Social Democrats, supported the taxation of land values as a matter of course, for they interpreted a tax on the unearned increment in land as a form of nationalization. The Independent Labour Party, organized in 1893, had begun to seek the support of the farm laborer through *Clarion* Scouts and Field Clubs. It circulated a rural news sheet called *The Scout*, to supplement the "good work done by those in charge of the Yellow Vans of the Land Nationalization Society and the Red Vans of the Land Restoration League."²⁹ From the beginning the program of the Independent Labour Party was "Land values, urban and rural, to be treated as public property."³⁰ And Robert Blatchford, editor of the *Clarion*, began his *Clarion Tract* on land nationalization by recommending *Progress and Poverty* and Wallace's *Land Nationalization* as necessary to the understanding of the subject.³¹ At its annual conference in April, 1904, the Independent Labour Party came out unequivocally for the measure.³²

The Trades Union members were likewise committed to the taxation of land values, or land nationalization, as they called it. In fact, as the Webbs pointed out, George's earliest influence in England was with the unions. An amendment in favor of land nationalization was first presented at the 1878 Trades Union Congress, but it was not until ten years later that the Trades Union Congress adopted the policy of land nationalization and instructed the Parliamentary Committee to bring the proposal before the House of Commons.³³ During the next fifteen years, congresses reiterated their support yearly; if legislation could have been passed through Parliament by resolution, George's single-tax principle would have become law at any time during this period.

It became clear that the parliamentary success of the taxation of

land values depended on obtaining the support of the Liberal Party. The Radical element in the party began working toward this end after 1889 and, when the leadership changed hands in 1895, Liberals of all persuasions veered toward the land tax. Party leaders spoke in favor of the tax. John Morley told the electors of Brechin, Scotland, in February, 1896, that "some means must be devised for intercepting some portion at all events of that unearned increment, some means by which the land should be rated at its full, real, and capital value." He reminded his listeners that he had supported a motion by Robert Reid in the House in 1890 to give municipalities the power to acquire land by agreement or compulsion, and he mentioned four percent as a possible tax, but did not commit himself.³⁴ *Single Tax* applauded Morley's statement as "the most important pronouncement favorable to the single tax of any living British statesman."³⁵

A year later Morley again addressed a Scottish audience on the land tax, and his words were prophetic. He alluded favorably to the action of the Glasgow City Council which was to result in the "Glasgow Bill," and came out flatly for the taxation of land values as containing a principle "which must make quicker and quicker way into the minds and opinions of the people of this island." Unearned increment from land was, he thought, "intolerable." He predicted that it would be "vigorously, powerfully, persistently, and successfully attacked," at which the audience burst into loud cheers. In a manner reminiscent of Chamberlain's and George's earlier attacks on the peerage, Morley said: "Now, that is the kind of question which will no doubt try the House of Lords very hard, and when that question arises we shall see whether they will evade these proposals for sweeping them away by wisely bowing to the will of the people."³⁶

It might be argued that, because Morley belonged to an older generation of Radicals, his influence was not at this time weighty. Such a charge cannot be made against Campbell-Bannerman, who became the leader of the Liberal Party in 1899, and eventually Prime Minister. Campbell-Bannerman was especially impressed by the municipal agitation for the taxation of land values. His first steps in helping the land-tax movement were in 1896, when he offered to assist the Dunfermline Council and other assessing bodies in Scotland to secure necessary powers from Parliament to make land values contribute to local taxation.³⁷ Like George, Campbell-Bannerman justified the land tax as a social measure, believing that "nothing short . . . of the taxation of land values will suffice to

get at the root of urban over-crowding.”³⁸ He denied that the tax was sought for questions of fiscal expediency; rather it was designed to “increase the supply of houses and improve their quality, and to reduce the rents, which in many cases are artificially high . . .”³⁹ In his comments can be found the first clear statement of the distinction between the views of the single taxers and of the Liberals as to the extent the proposed land tax was to be applied. The single taxers wanted the tax to begin at some minimum figure and rise to twenty shillings in the pound at a future date; they were also opposed to municipal land-purchase schemes. On the other hand, Campbell-Bannerman desired only a “moderate application of the principle of site value taxation” and he wanted municipalities to receive the power “to acquire land on honest terms.”⁴⁰ The two views were never reconciled.

While party leaders were weaving the land tax into Liberalism, the man most responsible for molding the land-reform issue into law began his parliamentary career as the result of a Welsh by-election. Lloyd George was a political unknown when he first entered the House in 1890. Some of the worst abuses of landlordism were in his native Wales, and he had had, in Chamberlain and Davitt, able tutors in the iniquity of the system.

Chamberlain, in 1885, had been Lloyd George's hero, and he campaigned in favor of the Radical leader's agricultural program in the general election of that year. On February 12, 1886, he came under the influence of Henry George's friend and coadjutor, Michael Davitt, when Davitt addressed a meeting in North Wales in support of the Welsh Land League. The youthful Lloyd George had been chosen to move a vote of thanks, and his remarks on that occasion showed that he had already learned the language and attitude of Henry George, Chamberlain, and Davitt: “There was the greatest misery existing in the country. Workingmen were starving. The aristocracy were squandering money earned by the sweat of the workingman's brow. Whilst workingmen were starving the aristocracy were feeding their game with food that ought to go to the people! The bread of the children is given to the dogs! (Loud applause.) The people only wanted union . . . When a Land League was started for Wales he hoped they would all join it.”⁴¹ Though Lloyd George was no single taxer, his policy as Chancellor of the Exchequer for the taxation of land values was not mere political expediency. He was the equal of Henry George in his hatred of landlordism.

But to return to the views of Morley and Campbell-Bannerman on the taxation of land values; these were evidently reflections of a gradual movement toward the principle by most Liberal Party members. As already seen, A. C. Fyffe's Radical resolution in favor of a land tax was accepted by the National Liberal Federation in 1889. From that year until 1906, every meeting of the Federation endorsed the taxation of land values, though often evasively. For example, the 1903 gathering declared that "it is urgently necessary that the owners of land values should be placed under the obligation of directly contributing their fair share towards the ever increasing costs of local administration." By such means, the Liberal Party supported taxation of land values without committing itself to any definite tax.

Single-tax organizations tried in vain to get an unequivocal statement on fiscal policy from Liberal headquarters, as, for example, their wholehearted approval of the policy advocated by the Metropolitan Radical Federation for the Liberal Budget: payment of members and election expenses, abolition of breakfast-table duties, old-age pensions, and the taxation of land values.⁴²

As the 1906 election approached, leaflets broadcast to the voters left no doubt as to where the Liberal Party stood on the land tax. One publication contained two series of statements: the first led to the conclusion that "the Taxation of Land Values would cause land to be offered for use at lower prices"; the second asserted that the tax would enable the Liberal Government to "reduce, and eventually to abolish, the tax on buildings." It carried this slogan in bold-face type: "Support the Liberal Party and the Taxation of Land Values."⁴³

Another leaflet noted the tremendous demand from municipalities for the taxation of land values and alleged that the land tax "would increase the spending power of the home consumer by at once relieving him of part of the burden of the present house tax, which we know as the local rates."⁴⁴ It also stated the connection between the taxation of land values and the free-trade policy of Liberalism. If duties on imports were reduced or dropped, then the land tax would supply the fiscal deficiency.

Just before the 1906 election, the Liberal Brougham Villiers reviewed the reasons why the party should press for a land tax.⁴⁵ Liberalism was endangered, he argued, not so much by Conservatives as by Socialists; it must maintain its power by satisfying the demands of the rural and urban laborer. These demands could be satisfied by what he called the "co-operative development" of the

land: public ownership, socialization of the capital required to work the land, and socialization of housing and of the instruments of production. Villiers favored taxation of land values not because of any "natural right" which people had in the land, but for entirely practical reasons. Landlords blocked the way of co-operative development; the taxation of land values would establish a fair price for the purchase by the State of all necessary land. This argument was later embodied in what was called the "Tax and Buy" proposal.

Even more revealing were Villiers' claims for the popular support of the tax. It was a form of tax "to which all progressive parties and groups are more or less committed." Moreover, it was "the one really important reform the next Liberal Government can certainly carry."⁴⁶ Villiers' optimism came from his belief that the taxation of land values would have to be passed as a Budget measure, and the Lords would never dare to reject a Budget Bill. His position was that of the Liberals after 1906; it explains why the land tax, a measure fathered by George and endorsed by single taxers, enjoyed such enthusiastic Liberal support; it explains further why the single taxers were constantly at loggerheads with the Liberal Party.

The growing belief in the taxation of land values from 1889 to 1906 was bound to be reflected in parliamentary action. By 1906 fourteen bills and resolutions embodying George's land-values tax had been placed before the House. The first of these was introduced on February 27, 1891, and lost by fifty-one votes; the last, on May 19, 1905, passed by twenty votes. None of these bills ever reached a third reading; they were either defeated on a second reading or were killed in committee. The parliamentary record, however, offers a fair picture of the increasing popularity of the issue.

It is worth noting, however, that, in all the support for the land tax during this period, neither George nor the single tax was mentioned by a Liberal leader. The name of George was associated with confiscation, an ugly word which the Liberals did not want applied to the taxation of land values. The Liberals knew that George's work in the eighties had created the popularity of the land tax, but with few exceptions—Wedgwood was one—they were not single taxers but wished to benefit by the land-values tax enthusiasm without accepting the ultimate extremes.

Conservatives had no interest in keeping silent about George and the single tax. Denouncing Georgism had been one of their chief delights in 1884 and 1885. However, they were strangely mute between 1889 and 1906, the year of the Liberal landslide. The *Times*

seemed bored with the issue. Provand's motion to tax land, brought forward February 27, 1891, called forth the smug editorial reflection that "its introduction has served to show that the questions about which it deals are far from being as simple and easy as they have not seldom been assumed to be."⁴⁷ When an urban site-rating motion was made in 1902, the *Times* let off its Liberal supporters with a single reproof, describing their "real aim and object" as "repudiation of contracts, spoliation [*sic*] of minorities, and general chaos."⁴⁸ In 1903 it defined the object of the local land tax as the thin entering wedge of "confiscation," because the proposed penny-in-the-pound tax could be increased at will.⁴⁹ In 1905 the attitude of the *Times* toward this legislation was one of impatience. On April 15 its summary of the preceding day in the House, devoted entirely to the debate on C. P. Trevelyan's Urban Site Rating Bill, opened with "The House has given another illustration of the customary character of its proceedings on Friday afternoon, by once more seriously debating, and by reading a second time, a Bill for the assessment of land values . . ."

This apathy of the Conservatives seemed generally prevalent. References to George as the real villain of the land-tax movement were few. Of course the Liberty and Property Defense League actively attacked the propaganda of the Land Restoration Leagues, and George's name occasionally was bracketed with the taxation of land values by Conservative members of Parliament opposing land taxation.⁵⁰ If newspapers generally had attacked the taxation of land values as a Georgite plot, the single taxers would have announced the fact proudly, as a sign of their success. Rare indeed, however, were editorial comments like that in the *Dundee Advertiser*: "The unqualified adherents of the late Mr. Henry George furnish the motive power behind the movement for what is vaguely called 'the Taxation of Land Values.' But, if the official organizations of the Liberal Party allow themselves to be captured by the strenuous advocates of Georgism, they will have done the party a worse turn than they did it by suffering capture at the hands of special propagandists in the past."⁵¹

Only one political writer, and a Liberal at that, came out with a detailed attack on George. He was Harold Cox, and his *Land Nationalization*, published in 1892 (and revised in 1906), attacked the taxation of land values as class legislation and recommended the income tax as the fairest means of extracting unearned increment. The passages written in 1892 are a further indication of the moment at which George's influence began to be felt in politics.

Cox correctly saw that George's theories were making their way because they appealed to "radicals, Socialists, and other disturbers of the peace" who, "captivated by the simplicity of Mr. Henry George's theories, or painfully seeking for some definite aid to labourer and to farmer, turned their eyes hopefully to the suggestion that the nation should possess the soil." ⁵²

Cox condemned the single-tax idea for two reasons: It was unfair to single out landowners to bear the entire tax burden—Cox took the Georgites at their word in the matter of twenty shillings in the pound—and the appeal to natural law was an absurd anachronism; he also held that the claims made for the effect of the single tax were as absurd as those printed on a patent medicine label. Calculating that the single tax would take in sixty million pounds a year, Cox appealed to sanity: "In return he promises us the abolition of crime and poverty, of dirt and disease, of vice and misery; of every ill, in fact, that flesh till now has been heir to. Truly Mr. George's millenium is cheap at the money! Sixty millions a year is less than half of our public national expenditure. Can any sane man believe that the reign of heaven on earth will begin in these isles when the burden of meeting one-half of the public expenditure of the kingdom is transferred from the general taxpayer to the owners of a particular species of property?" ⁵³

Thus, without much serious opposition from either Conservatives or from dissentient Liberals, the taxation of land values by 1906 became an overriding political issue. The chief reason for lack of opposition was the nonpartisan character of the support for the taxation of land values. As the single taxers themselves boasted, the pressure for a land tax was coming from all directions—political associations, trades unions, co-operative congresses, Socialists, local rating councils. Conservatives might well consider that, as a party, to oppose blindly the proposal might drive voters into the Liberal camp. After 1906, when the Liberal Party had a majority in Parliament, the opposition began.

Before 1906 single taxers treated the taxation of land values as a nonpartisan issue and, like the Fabians of the period, were inclined to adopt the tactics of infiltration. They drew a distinction between those who supported the taxation of land values "because land values, as such, are at present exempt from taxation," and those who did so "on Single Tax principles." ⁵⁴ No matter which party was in power, they vowed to continue to work for the single tax. ⁵⁵

The difficulty which beset this policy lay in the single taxers

themselves. It was not enough that Socialists, trades unionists, and Liberals support the principle of the land tax; they must cease to support other reform measures as well. When the Glasgow Trades Council outlined a Socialist-Labour program, the single taxers were indignant because it included the eight-hour day, old-age pensions, and a graduated income tax, as well as land nationalization. It represented "belated, stick-in-the-mud ideas," such as Conservatives could support; "a mere set of platitudes signifying nothing."⁵⁶ They attacked Keir Hardie's suggestion of the use of government funds to relieve unemployment,⁵⁷ and John Burns's support of the eight-hour day.⁵⁸ They never tired of insisting that the "Socialistic doctrine of land purchase [of the Land Nationalization Society] must not be confused with the freer philosophy of the single tax."⁵⁹ On principle, they denounced the "imperialistic and reactionary spirit that looks to Governments, State Aid, and Legislation to grant palliatives . . ."⁶⁰

There was a slight suggestion of schizophrenia in the June, 1895, issue of *Single Tax* when page one carried the declaration: "We are with the Liberal Party as a means to the application of this principle [single tax], but not being much enamoured with the Labour-Socialist purchasing swindle"; page six announced that "true Democrats can no longer put faith in the leaders of the Liberal party." Single taxers never resolved their problem, and though the Liberal strength swept the taxation of land values to a temporary triumph, the Liberals never endorsed the principle of the single tax.

From 1889 to 1906, then, popular support for the land tax came in the main from urban centers. When the Radicals obtained party control after Gladstone's resignation in 1895, the Liberal Party embodied the taxation of land values in its reform program without any intention of following the single-tax policy of twenty shillings in the pound. The land tax became an effective Liberal weapon precisely because of the implied threat of the single tax. The possibility that, once valuation had occurred and a moderate tax established, it could be raised to the level of confiscation, accounts for the fierce battle over Lloyd George's 1909 Budget and the crisis in the House of Lords.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. "Our Mission," *Single Tax*, June, 1894.
2. "To Our Readers," *Single Tax*, May, 1902.

3. See English Land Restoration League, *Annual Reports*, 1892-1898.
4. English Land Restoration League, *Annual Report*, May 8, 1891.
5. "Progress," *Single Tax*, September, 1897.
6. *Land Values*, May, 1905.
7. English Land Restoration League, *Special Reports*, 1892-1898, carry a full account of these campaigns.
8. "English Land Restoration League," *Christian Socialist*, July, 1885.
9. English Land Restoration League, *Special Report*, 1896.
10. *Ibid.*, *Annual Report*, 1895.
11. *Ibid.*, *Special Report*, 1893.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 1895.
14. See also Gertrude Blake, "In the Wake of the Red Van," *National Review*, May, 1892.
15. *Stroud News*, July 17, 1896.
16. *London Morning Leader*, May 11, 1896; *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 11, 1896; *Truth*, May 21, 1896.
17. "The Taxation of Land Values," *Land Values*, December, 1902.
18. *Land Values*, March, 1905.
19. *Single Tax*, July, 1895.
20. "Conference on the Taxation of Land Values," *Single Tax*, June, 1895.
21. *Single Tax*, December, 1896.
22. A. W. Madsen, *Land Value Taxation in Great Britain*. London: International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, 1952, p. 3.
23. *Single Tax*, July, 1894.
24. *London Times*, June 25, 1909.
25. Frederick Verinder, "The L. C. C. and the Taxation of Land Values," *Single Tax*, January, 1901.
26. "Political Notes," *London Times*, April 13, 1905.
27. *Land Values*, June, 1905.
28. Madsen, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
29. Tom Mann, *The Programme of the I. L. P. and the Unemployed*, Clarion Tracts, 1895.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Robert Blatchford, *Land Nationalization*. London: Clarion Newspaper Company, Limited, 1898.
32. "I. L. P. and Fiscal Policy," *Land Values*, May, 1904.
33. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*. London: Longmans Green and Company, 1950, pp. 389-90.
34. *London Times*, February 6, 1896.
35. *Single Tax*, March, 1896.
36. "Mr. Morley at Forfar," *London Times*, October 7, 1897.
37. *Single Tax*, March, 1896.
38. *Land Values*, January, 1903.
39. *Glasgow Daily Record and Mail*, January 28, 1904.
40. *Ibid.*, November 29, 1905.
41. Malcolm Thomson, *David Lloyd George*. London: Hutchinson and Company, 1948, pp. 76-77.
42. "A Liberal Programme," *Single Tax*, July, 1897.
43. Liberal Publication Department, *The Liberal Party and the Land Question*, Leaflet No. 2041, 1905.

44. Liberal Publication Department, *Land Taxation and Protection*, Leaflet No. 2037, 1905.
45. *The Opportunity of Liberalism*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
47. *London Times*, February 28, 1891.
48. *London Times*, February 20, 1902.
49. *London Times*, March 28, 1903.
50. For Conservative references to George in connection with debates on the taxation of land values see the parliamentary reports in the *London Times*, February 28, 1891, March 9, 1895, and April 15, 1905.
51. "The Rosebery Section and the Taxation of Land Values," *Single Tax*, January, 1900.
52. Harold Cox, *Land Nationalization and Land Taxation*. London: Methuen and Company, 1906, p. 1.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.
54. "Co-operators and the Taxation of Land Values," *Single Tax*, July, 1900.
55. *Land Values*, April, 1903.
56. "A Labour-Socialist Programme," *Single Tax*, August, 1899.
57. "The Problem of the Unemployed," *Single Tax*, February, 1895.
58. "An Eight Hour Day and the Unemployed," *Single Tax*, June, 1895.
59. "The Land Nationalization Society and Land Values," *Single Tax*, April, 1899.
60. "The Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party," *Single Tax*, May, 1895.