

Neither Anarchism - Communism

By Frederic Cyrus Leubuscher

Two books have just been published, almost simultaneously. One, by H. G. Wells, is entitled "The Fate of Homo Sapiens." The other, by Albert Jay Nock, is entitled "Henry George."* Wells believes that practically everything should be owned and directed by the State. Nock believes that practically nothing should be owned and directed by the State. Well's only gleam of hope for civilization is the spread of Russian Sovietism and Roosevelt's New Deal. Nock does not seem to have any hope. He once thought that acceptance of the Georgean philosophy would be mankind's salvation; but he now says, in effect, that Henry George and his followers dragged it into politics and it is no longer considered seriously as a philosophy.

I cannot discuss the Wells book, for it has not yet appeared in this country, and all I know about it is derived from English cable accounts. "Henry George," however, is in the bookshops and is recommended to students of the Henry George School. It therefore demands the serious consideration of one who, for over a half century, has advocated the Georgean philosophy with tongue and pen. After a careful perusal I have come to these conclusions: 1st. Its style is Addisonian; and any young person who desires to become a writer could not do better than make it his text book. 2nd. Its statement of the Georgean philosophy is profound and clearly expressed. 3rd. To avoid the common error of biographers—fulsome praise and the glossing over of faults—the author stands up so straight that he leans backwards. He magnifies the human errors of his subject and cites so many alleged mistakes of judgment that he has blurred the beautiful serene features of the "Prophet," especially in the eyes of a young student. Necessarily, the acceptance of the philosophy is greatly retarded.

Nock says of George: "He was one of the grandest of philosophers, and

the spontaneous concurring voice of all his contemporaries acclaimed him as one of the best of men." This great and good man he assails for taking part in "filthy and scurrilous" political campaigns; for defending his eloquent disciple Father McGlynn when the latter was excommunicated for taking part in the Irish Land League fight; for giving popular lectures in Great Britain and Australia; for showing up, in "The Perplexed Philosopher", the inconsistency of Herbert Spencer; for answering the Pope's Encyclical in "The Condition of Labor", for his proneness to become a "joiner," etc.

There is, of course, a happy medium between fulsomeness and savage pin-pricking criticisms. Nock could have legitimately supported the thesis that George's place was in the philosopher's cell, and that he damaged his reputation among the intelligentsia by descending into the maelstrom of politics and public debate. Having made his point, why was it necessary to keep harping on the subject? It so happens that, while I took part in the 1888 campaign I felt, and so stated, that George made a mistake in running for office; but if so, it was only an error of judgment.

George would not have been the red-blooded man he was had he deserted Father McGlynn after his excommunication. George knew that by so doing he alienated the great body of Catholics; but he was a brave and grateful friend. Some six years later both he and McGlynn were vindicated, for the excommunication was withdrawn.

Nock admits that George was right in his criticism of Spencer's inconsistency on the land question, but savagely attacks George for imputing a selfish motive to the turncoat. Per-

haps it would have been more graceful if the readers had been allowed to draw that conclusion. But why was it necessary to enlarge on this alleged bad taste? Nock says that Spencer "makes George out to be a collectivist, that he never read George's works, for George was one of the most formidable anti-collectivists who ever lived. His work leaves not a shred of plausibility attaching to any of the Protean forms of collectivism now rampant in the world, whether Marxist, Hitlerian, totalitarian, Fabian, Christian or what-you-will." Nock adds however, that George "did, unfortunately, advocate the State-socialization of economic rent, as Spencer himself had done in Social Statics; it is the only weak spot in George's social scheme, easily amended and therefore unimportant." Of course "State-socialism" sounds collectivist but is otherwise harmless. Nowhere does Nock state who should be the collector of the economic rent. His hatred of the "State" is such that he frequently denounces the idea of its having anything to do with ground rent. We can infer only that he expects the municipalities to do the collecting and then divvying with the "State." After all, the collection of ground rent is urged for two reasons: 1st, because it belongs to the people. 2nd, that thereby all taxation, local, state and national, can be repealed.

Nock sneers at George's desire to "educate the masses." Surely the masses need education more than the classes, otherwise they would not have been called by an English politician "them asses." We must not forget that George was one of the masses. The director of the Henry George School states that twenty-five percent of the students enter the advanced classes. If only one of the thousands of graduates becomes a great missionary for the cause the School will have been worth while.

Now really, Mr. Nock, was it necessary to call this great and good man "a labor skate"? Was it necessary (to use the exclamation of a charac-

ter in one of the early English novels) to dissimulate your love for this great and good man by kicking him down-stairs?

Nock criticizes George for declaring his belief in the guilt of the Chicago anarchists. Doesn't he realize the courage it took to thus alienate "them asses" and the "labor skates"?

Was the following paragraph written to enhance the glory that is Henry George or to incline young students to study his philosophy? "After George's death an increasing number of these (cranks) pervaded what was known as the single tax movement and did their full share to discredit it in the eyes of those who were informed about George's actual proposals ***. An idea like an individual, is largely judged by the company it keeps; and it was no recommendation of George's philosophy to hear it advocated by a professing single-taxer who was also a Bahaite, an interpreter of dreams and visions, a free silverite, and who had theories concerning a nut diet and the mystical number seven." Although I was president of the Manhattan Single Tax Club many years and for a half century attended gatherings of Georgists in this country and in Europe, I never happened to meet this Bahaite, but I did meet many Georgists who were also Catholics, Protestants, Jews or Freethinkers. Although Dr. Townsend of the famous Townsend plan may thus indulge in a nut diet, my admiration for other physicians is thereby not lessened.

Nock properly denounces those who regard George's fiscal plans as an end-in-itself and not as a means to an end. I do not agree, however, that "this is the best that is made of him (George) today, save by a few." He should take a course in the Henry George School and find, what thousands of graduates have found, that the ethical side of George's teachings is to the fore.

The author ends on this pessimistic note: "It is clear now *** that this realization (of George's philosophy) is to all appearances impracticable under a quasi-republican organization of society, and the closer the approach to true republicanism, the worse the outlook. This, however,

does not make against its practicability under some other scheme of social organization." As he is against both Marxism and republicanism "some other scheme" must mean anarchism. George believed, and all his followers (except Nock) believe, that democracies are peculiarly the fields in which to work. There is no propaganda for this philosophy in dictatorship of either the right or the left. Try to imagine a Henry George centenary celebration in Russia, Germany and Italy.

Philosophical anarchism is an iridescent dream. Perhaps, after all governments have adopted Georgism and have lived in an atmosphere of freedom for a thousand years, men and women will have become so angelic that they will no longer require even a government whose sole function is that of a policeman. But Henry George himself said that his philosophy is not a cure-all and that even after a man's rights to the use of the earth have been universally recognized, the strong will try to oppress the weak.

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Since writing the above I have read Editor Chodorov's brilliant leading editorial in the September Freeman—"Taxes and Rent." The last paragraph confirms my conviction that the State would be neither anarchistic nor communistic after the adoption of Georgism. It reads: "The socialization of rent would destroy taxes. The State (as we know it) would disappear; and such government as we would have would be always subject to the economic instrument of rent."

Monroe's clever cartoon, facing this editorial, shows a massive dam, labelled "The Literature of Freedom," holding back flood waters labelled

"Dictatorship." The stones composing the dam have such labels as "Declaration of Independence," "Progress and Poverty," "Mill and Milton on Liberty," "Dove's Theory of Human Progression," "Thomas Paine's Rights of Man." Not one of these advocates either anarchism or communism.

* "Henry George," by Albert Jay Nock, \$1.00, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 32 E. 29th St., New York.