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Henry George and Henry M. Hyndman, II:

The Erosion of the Radical-Socialist Coalition, 1884-89

By BERNARD NEWTON

ABSTRACT. *Henry George*, the American land reformer and economist, an individualist, and *Henry M. Hyndman*, the English Marxist and democratic publicist, a collectivist, supported each other's efforts until the development of their movements made clear the sharp differences in their respective ideologies. George's establishment of the Land Restoration League and his separation from the Socialists in New York, and Hyndman's pushing the Democratic Federation in a Marxist direction divided the two leaders. Their relation ultimately was climaxed and terminated by two personal politico-economic debates which highlighted their ever-increasing positional differences, particularly on the issue of *capitalism* versus *socialism*.

I

AN ALLIANCE UNDER A STRAIN, 1884-85

DURING 1884, Henry George, the American land and tax reformer, visited the British Isles twice. In December of 1883, after a 14-month absence, George happily sailed for England, under the auspices of the Land Reform Union (1). George, only second to Gladstone, was most talked about in Great Britain (2). As for Hyndman, his Democratic Federation began a socialist newspaper, *Justice*, in January, 1884—just as George was beginning his British speaking tour. Hyndman soon became the editor of *Justice* (3), and the paper gave George support "warmly and consistently" during his speaking tour (4). This, despite the fact that the American had made clear to two officers of the Land Reform Union, who were also important members of the Democratic Federation, that he would not support the nationalization of capital (5).

George's most enduring achievement during this trip was the founding of the successful Land Restoration League, which spread throughout Scotland and England. The diverse constituents of the Land Reform Union, which included the Democratic Federation, could only form an unstable coalescence on the issue of land reform, but the Land Restoration Leagues had a membership that was dedicated exclusively both to George's analytical diagnosis of the land problem and to his particular land rent remedy for that problem (6). This move separated many of George's adherents from an alliance with socialists (7), and underscored the in-

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evitable forces leading to the weakening of ties and to the dissolution of the alliance between George and Hyndman.

George made a temporary return to the United States in April, but before departing in a very busy week, he called on his friend Hyndman (8). Back in America, George wrote Hyndman a long letter after "a careful reading" of the latter's *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England*. George expresses respect for the book, but he cannot understand Hyndman's admiration of Marx, who lacks "analytical and logical habits of thought," and is "a most superficial thinker entangled in an inexact and various terminology." George finds the theory of "surplus value" misleading and not a theory. George affirms what Hyndman had stated in print a number of times, namely, that while Hyndman believes that the control of capital is the basis of the problem, he (George) holds that the monopolization of land is the root cause of the problem. George concludes on a note of commonality by stating that "we both see the evils produced by the competition for employment of men deprived of the natural means of employing themselves" (9). George was not being merely polite in expressing respect for Hyndman's work, for immediately after, he writes a British friend about his reading of Hyndman's book, and says that "it is a pity to see a man of such force following so blindly such a superficial thinker as Carl (sic) Marx" (10).

Despite George's praise for Hyndman, the man, George's growing antagonism to Marx and Socialism was straining the tie. Thus, on his return to America, George wrote to a Scottish leader of the Henry George movement:

I am glad to see the feeling that is being aroused against the Lords and in favor of the suffrage. How foolish Hyndman and his Socialists are to try to throw cold water on it (11).

During the same period George also wrote:

I think I will have to write something about these socialist doctrines—I mean as to those points in which they differ from us. They can be easily torn to pieces, yet are doing harm by confusing counsel (12).

And then, too, George further explained that:

It will be some time before I can do anything about socialism, perhaps a year or more. I appreciate their intense earnestness and energy as you do and would be quite willing to work along with them and agree to disagree, but their intolerance is both provoking and I think injurious. . . . Their ideal is all right (13).

George accepted the invitation of the Land Restoration League to engage in a second series of lectures, and sailed in November. Contact

with Hyndman and his followers occurred on the very last week abroad at the end of January, 1885. First, the American spoke before a mass meeting out-of-doors, in London; and the socialist followers of Hyndman held their own meeting nearby. Their object was not to compete, but to augment the size of the demonstration, and they scheduled their speakers for a different time (14). Second, at the very conclusion of George's third stay in Britain, the two leaders engaged in a hurriedly arranged dialogue in the dining room of Hyndman's house which was recorded in shorthand for the purpose of publication (15). This debate signaled the termination of their eroded alliance.

The dialogue began with a discussion of the central practical issue between them, the impact of the nationalization of land upon the workers and the masses.

From his Marxian perspective, Hyndman accuses George of expecting too much from land nationalization. Nationalizing land will still leave the workers the victims of the capitalist class. Hyndman maintains that in order to understand what will occur, it is necessary to examine the social relations extant with the capitalist system. These relations make land subordinate to capital and the landlords an appendage of the capitalists. They establish that production and exchange are carried on for the benefit of the capitalists rather than for the workers, who are the real producers. If land alone were nationalized none of this would change. Workers would still have to compete against workers for their subsistence wage. In order to change the social relations in a desirable way, both land and the instruments of production must become collective property.

In his response to this, Henry George affirms that all citizens have equal natural rights to the land. He further maintains that regardless of changing social relations, capital remains secondary to land, for land is the basis of production. The beneficial consequence of nationalizing land is that it will make land valuable only to the user, and therefore the monopoly holdings of huge tracts of idle land will be eliminated. Thus workers will be free to leave the labor force when wages are depressed, and to utilize the land. This would reduce the labor force and result in higher wages.

Unlike George, Hyndman claims that most modern workers are un-knowledgeable and helpless on the land, but that even when they are not, they will be defeated by the greater efficiency of those with large capital. Thus even with land nationalization, wages will tend to subsistence. The economy will still succumb to overproduction and crises. George,

on the other hand, asserts that monopoly of the land—and of capital—is the source of the difficulty, and not capitalism. Substitute a tax on land rent for the prevailing tax burden on business capital, and the stimulus to production will provide prosperity and jobs. Hyndman affirms the need for immediate socialism which can easily be attained by shifting control of the large firms from private hands to the State. Those who work for the private companies at all levels would automatically become State employees. George, in contrast, believes that governmental control should occur only in the case of “natural” monopolies like telegraphs and railroads, and that where free competition is possible, the public good is much better served by leaving matters to private enterprise. He then dramatically proclaims:

I can understand how a society must at some time become possible in which all production and exchange should be carried on under public supervision and for the public benefit, but I do not think it possible to attain that state at one leap, or to attain it now. In the meantime, people are suffering and are starving because the element which is indispensable to existence, and to which all have the naturally equal rights, has been monopolized by some. Destroy this monopoly, and the present state of things would at the very least be enormously improved. If it were then found expedient to go further on the lines of Socialism, we could do so . . . (16).

Upon sensing that the debate was coming to a conclusion, Hyndman suggested that they should focus upon their points of agreement, and he speaks of their mutual desire to bring about greater freedom and happiness for mankind, especially since the danger of a “furious anarchy . . . threatens to overwhelm the civilized world” (17). George agrees and admits that the Socialists are playing a positive role.

Although this debate ended on a most amicable note, it seems to have marked a recognition of their irreconcilable differences. Certainly, it is improbable that either reformer proposed any ideas that the other had not already heard. They had had many discussions in private, but probably never such a sustained, formal and direct confrontation of the issues. They had often presented their respective positions in print. They knew of one another’s public political activities and positions. Hyndman, in fact, had written of his essential differences with George, although George had never done the same. Furthermore, when Hyndman steered the Democratic Federation into a Marxist direction in mid-1883, land nationalization became a secondary matter, and the nationalization of the means of production and distribution primary. Likewise, the formation of the Land Restoration League, with its clear Georgian program, marked

George's increasing separation from the Socialists. As we have seen, although George liked the ideals of the socialists, he found their arguments vulnerable and their intolerance provoking. This dialogue apparently symbolized and crystallized the separate programmatic and philosophical pathways of these two reformers. For the first time, the positions of these two activist-thinkers were presented in direct opposition to one another in a published forum.

II

THE POSTSCRIPT TO THE ALLIANCE

THERE WAS NO FORMAL SIGN of any split between these two reformers until two and one-half years later in the middle of 1887. There is no evidence of any contact between the two men in the interim. After their debate, each man pursued his calling in separate directions. As for George, he ran as a labor candidate in an unsuccessful race for the mayoralty of New York—a campaign in which he received Socialist support. In the meanwhile, in Britain, George was regarded by many as the outstanding American champion of Socialism (18). As for Hyndman, he steadfastly crusaded for a democratically-conceived Marxian socialism through the medium of his sometimes splintered Social Democratic Federation. What alienated Hyndman, and many other British Socialists, was George's acceptance of the exclusion of the Socialist Party in his newly formed United Labor Party in New York (19). Later, in his newspaper, *The Standard*, George attacked the Socialists in a front page editorial (20). Hyndman was angered by the fact that Socialist delegates were refused status at a United Labor Party Congress, and that George had written that the Social Democrats (Hyndman's party was the only English one with the title Social Democratic) were illogical, advocated wild schemes, made unwarranted assumptions, etc. (21). The Englishman asserts that George had never studied either Marx or political economy deeply at all, and that the American demonstrated that he did not understand the functioning of modern capitalism in the discussion they had had for publication in *Nineteenth Century* in 1885 (22).

The next and final contact between the two former confederates was dramatized by a two-hour public debate in London, in July, 1889, at the conclusion of George's fifth trip to the British Isles. George was not now happily received by British Socialists as an apostle on behalf of the workers, but rather more as an ally of the British Constitutional Radicals, who were the middle-class, left-wing members of the Liberal Party (23). George was roundly attacked as a capitalist lackey by *Justice*, the organ of

Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation (24). While the 1885 exchange was largely viewed by the two men as an amicable discussion between two friends with different programmatic and philosophic perspectives, the 1889 debate was a public confrontation between two vigorous politico-economic reformers, with irreconcilable positions, who represented different political factions and ideologies. George now termed himself a "Single Tax" man (25), and no longer associated himself with the term land nationalization. Hyndman now called himself a "Social Democrat," which had a more particular political connotation than the more general term Socialist (26). The conflict was underscored by the responses of the followers of the two men in the audience continually cheering, shouting "hear-hear," and applauding. The debate was chaired and each man was given a number of alternate blocks of time.

In this debate, although each opened his discussion with the points of agreement between them, there was much less of a mood for reconciliation and mitigation of differences. Hyndman asserted, "I say that Mr. George as he stands on this platform is a reactionary and not a revolutionist" (27). George no longer praised the ideals of the socialists, but proclaimed that the program of the Social Democrats was simply one of "a benevolent tyranny" of a few which would "inevitably result in the worst system of slavery" (28). Many of the same issues arose as in the former confrontation. Most particularly, they once again centered much of their argument upon the question of whether all of the means of production needed to become common property, or just land, in order to benefit the workers. However, this time there was give and take on the procedures for the proposed socialist takeover of the means of production, and on the operation of the proposed socialist society. Hyndman focused upon democratic State control of economic activity by the entire industrial community, which owns the means of production; while George concentrated upon questioning the extent of the proposed socialization, and upon underscoring the tyranny inherent in Socialism. In his positive assertions, George emphasized the importance of individualism; the spur to progress inherent in competition; the undesirability of monopoly; the filip to employment and growth inherent in his single tax scheme; and the importance of human natural rights and freedom. Hyndman affirmatively stressed the value of human cooperation; the benefits of common ownership of the means of production; and the desirability of democratic State control of economic activity.

An article on the debate in Hyndman's *Justice* demonstrates that now George was clearly viewed as an enemy of Socialism. The article states

that those who proposed that the Social Democratic Federation view George with a friendly neutrality, if not active sympathy, received a shock when George demonstrated that he did not have "Socialistic leanings" (29). On the other hand, Henry George's perspective was reflected in his newspaper, *The Standard*, which maintained that the audience was hostile, for it consisted of a far larger number of Socialists than Single Taxers. It asserted that George was never "in better form," with the consequence that George was actually cheered by the Socialists at the conclusion (30). Many years later, Hyndman wrote retrospectively of his response to George during that debate that: "I never fully understood the religious turn of his mind," until then (31). It should be noted that in neither of the two debates did George evoke any ill will, for as Hyndman wrote in an obituary article on George, the American "exhibited the same charming temper that he did in private life" during both debates (32).

The second debate eradicated any remaining vestiges of the former alliance and represented their final personal contact. The last evidence of the American's recollection of Hyndman is found in his posthumously published text, *The Science of Political Economy* (begun in 1891), in which George succinctly mentions that Hyndman discovered Thomas Spence's famous lecture in the British Museum (33). As for Hyndman, he wrote retrospectively about George on several occasions. In 1897, upon George's tragic death, the English Socialist wrote in his obituary article that the American has "been almost forgotten." Hyndman deemed it strange that George had achieved such enormous popularity on the basis of such errors (34). Hyndman did not directly touch upon what had formerly been the central issue of debate, namely, whether or not the entire means of production had to be made common property in order to aid the masses. From the perspective of the English Socialist, the issue had so receded into history, that he merely commented on George's limited scheme to tax landlords out of existence (35). Hyndman would not classify George as either an economist or a Socialist, and believed that, although George was personally incorruptible, he became increasingly subject to the influence of capitalists (36). It is perhaps ironic that although the English Socialist wrote this obituary article as if George's Single Tax Scheme were an historical relic, 15 years later he felt called upon to attack the "resurrection of the Single Tax nostrum . . . of the well-meaning but ignorant prophet of the San Francisco sand lots" (37).

III

CONCLUSION

HENRY GEORGE and Henry Hyndman formed a temporary, tenuous and untenable alliance for approximately three years. The Irish Land question and the matter of the common ownership of land were the binding issues. Particularly in 1882 and 1883, both men were seeking to establish a common front with men of good will who would agree on these key issues, even if they disagreed otherwise. At this time, both men were gradualists, willing to proceed on a step by step basis, and eschewing violence. George was somewhat attracted to the ideals of Socialism, and he tended to put off his concern for Socialism as a reality. He believed that the implementation of his scheme would solve many economic problems; and then society could decide whether or not it wished to proceed on towards Socialism. Hyndman, on the other hand, had played the most prominent role in establishing the Democratic Federation, which had non-socialists within it, and which was not a Socialist party until its transformation in mid-1883. An alliance with George was consistent with his approach to party politics at that time. Each was so convinced of the rightness of his respective cause, that each believed that he could convert the other.

A number of forces helped to maintain the unstable alliance beyond its initial few months. First, both men were greatly outnumbered and attacked by opponents, and therefore desired allies. Second, their movements were new, and positions hadn't hardened, nor had animosities developed among adherents to their respective causes. Third, George affirmed his support for land nationalization, although strictly speaking he actually advocated a tax designed to confiscate land rent. However, since George believed that his scheme was the equivalent in its effect to that of land nationalization, he did not disassociate himself from the latter idea until the late 1880s. It seems to this writer that the two men could not have joined forces for long if George had adopted the slogan of "the Single Tax" in the early 1880s because an emphasis upon "the Single Tax" makes the fact that the government does not actually take title to the land more obvious. Fourth, Hyndman believed that George was the source of new membership for his movement. The Socialist reformer held that, although George's conception was essentially erroneous, his highly persuasive style would at first induce people to accept his position; and that in the course of time they would almost inevitably take the next logical step in the direction of Socialism. In fact, some of the new leaders of the Democratic Federation were first attracted to that movement after being influenced by a reading of *Progress and Pov-*

erty. Fifth, there was a bond of real friendship, sometimes grudging admiration, and sense of obligation between these two dedicated reformers.

The collaboration could not be sustained for long once the formative period of their respective causes had unfolded. The Democratic Federation, under Hyndman's persuasion, became the Social Democratic Federation in mid-1883 when it accepted a Socialist position. Land nationalization became a secondary issue, although tactically it still retained force. A strong tension developed between the followers of George and Hyndman Social Democrats in their alliance on land tenure reform within the framework of the Land Reform Union. When the adherents of George's land reform solution formed the Land Restoration Leagues in 1884, the separation between the two groups was crystallizing; and this marked the end of the formative period. Furthermore, the Irish Land Tenure issue, which was the issue that originally attracted Hyndman and George to one another, had receded as a public rallying point. Then, too, the American economist was developing an increasing distaste for Socialist tactics during 1884 and the years following. In addition, George's activity in American politics brought him into increasing conflict with American Socialists, and this reflected on the attitudes that George and Hyndman had towards one another. In Britain, too, a weakening of ties was engendered by the politics of the Social Democratic Federation beginning in 1883-84, wherein for a number of years the organization developed a militant semi-revolutionary stance (38). George never wavered in abhorring violence.

The first debate in January, 1885, was friendly, and both men seemed conciliatory. The friendship between the two men prevented any abrupt or dramatic rupture in the alliance, which *de facto* had terminated by the time of the debate. The personal relationship between the two men was not renewed afterwards. Apparently, their next, and final personal contact, occurred at the second debate in July, 1889. This confrontation was much more dramatic in tone and setting. Recollections from the time of their alliance were reflected in their initial points of agreement. But the remainder of the debate represented a crystallization of an ongoing competition between the Single Taxers and the Social Democrats for the support of the populace (39).

Henry George and Henry Hyndman joined forces at a watershed period in British history, when the movements for land reform and for Socialism simultaneously burgeoned and coalesced. George's intention was to implement his social scheme for land reform in which a single tax would be placed upon land rent, which would give productive workers access to the land as the common property of all. Hyndman's purpose was to

create a democratic Socialist society in which the workers would control the means of production which would be common property. Each reformer fervently believed that his particular scheme would substantially benefit the mass of workers both economically and socially. Each was firm in his conviction, dedicated to his cause, and perpetually optimistic about the inevitability of success.

Hyndman sometimes appeared inappropriate to his role, for he behaved and dressed like the patrician that he was, and he invested in capitalist enterprises. But he was fundamentally true to his ideals of socialism and to his belief in the inevitability of the Marxian dialectic of history.

George was of the people, and he was even careless about his appearance. George had a sense of religious righteousness in his message, and he could sway audiences with oratorical power.

George's writings had a great persuasive and moving style. Although it was not George's intention, he gave the Socialist movement of Britain its greatest filip in the early 1880s, although he also affected the movement for land reform.

Current scholars remember Hyndman for his pioneering role in British Socialist politics, for it was he who presented Marx to the English masses, and formed the first viable Socialist party. Current scholars remember George for the filip that he gave to British Socialism in the 1880s, for his Single Tax scheme, and as an American economist who has affected thinking about land utilization and land taxation, as well as about monopoly, privilege and equality of opportunity, to the present day.

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1. Charles Albro Barker, *Henry George* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), p. 378; Elwood P. Lawrence, *Henry George in the British Isles* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 34-35.

2. Lawrence, *ibid.*, p. 34.

3. Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 52.

4. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

5. Anna George de Mille, *Henry George* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1950), p. 126, and Henry George Jr., *Life of Henry George* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930), pp. 422-23. The two men were R. B. P. Frost and H. H. Champion (*ibid.*).

6. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

8. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

9. Henry George to Henry M. Hyndman, June 22, 1884, Henry George Collection, New York Public Library (HGC).

10. Henry George to Thomas F. Walker, June 26, 1884, HGC.

11. Henry George to Richard McGhee, August 15, 1884, HGC.

12. George to Walker, *loc. cit.*

13. Henry George to Thomas F. Walker, September 9, 1884, HGC.

14. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 411–12.
15. Henry George and Henry M. Hyndman, "Socialism and Rent Appropriation. A Dialogue," *The Nineteenth Century* (London), 17 (February, 1885), pp. 369–80.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 377–78.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
18. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
19. Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 497–98.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 497.
21. Henry M. Hyndman, *Justice* (London), August 20, 1887.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Henry George and H. M. Hyndman, *The Single Tax v. Social Democracy*. Verbatim Report of the Debate in St. James's Hall, July 2, 1889 (London: Pamphlet Printed and Published at the Justice Printery, 1899), p. 2.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and 27.
29. Henry Quelch, "Henry George's Fallacies," *Justice* (July 13, 1889).
30. *Standard* (New York), No. 132 (July 13, 1889), p. 3. The transcript indicates that George received "great applause" (George and Hyndman, "The Single Tax v. Social Democracy," p. 27).
31. Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), p. 267.
32. Henry M. Hyndman, "Henry George," *The Saturday Review* (London), 6 (November, 1897), pp. 485–86.
33. Henry George, *The Science of Political Economy* (New York: Doubleday & McClure, 1898), p. 185.
34. Hyndman, "Henry George," *loc. cit.*, p. 485.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Henry M. Hyndman, *Further Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 532–33.
38. Tsuzuki, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
39. Some English Socialists, particularly Fabians, retained a reservoir of respect for and good will towards George at this time. See Sidney Webb to Henry George, March 8, 1889, HGC.

Is the U.S. Northeast in Decline?

THE NORTHEASTERN SECTION of the United States is far from "dying" but its sluggish economic growth in recent years is reason for concern, according to a Conference Board analysis.

Personal income growth in the Northeast's metropolitan areas was considerably under the national average between 1969 and 1974. Their share of U.S. personal income declined from 25.9 percent to 24.2 during this period. If present trends continue, this share will tumble to 20.1 percent by 1990.

Real personal income in the New York metropolitan area, the Northeast's longtime pacesetter, has barely grown in recent years. It rose only 0.1 percent between 1969 and 1974, compared with a 12 percent gain for the nation as a whole. The main cause for New York's skimpy income growth: a sharp slowdown in productivity gains and the loss