

Review: Henry George, His Advocates and Adversaries: Together, Friend and Foe of His American Philosophy Helped to Develop Modern Economic Theory

Reviewed Work(s): Critics of Henry George by Robert V. Andelson

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Henry George, His Advocates and Adversaries:

Together, Friend and Foe of His American Philosophy Helped to Develop Modern Economic Theory (Review)

By BRUCE YANDLE*

WHEN AN IDEA that has survived a century of intense international criticism is combined with scholarly analysis of the highest order describing and discussing the best of the critics who sought to discredit the idea, one has the makings of a good book.

Robert V. Andelson's project *Critics of Henry George*¹ is such a book. It should be read and savored by economists, philosophers and others who either support, dislike or desire to know more about Henry George's prescription for social progress—the Single Tax.

Upon hearing of this volume, some people may relegate it to the status of cult literature—another polemic on Henry George. Those who do so will be mistaken in their judgment and losers by their own choosing.

Professor Andelson, himself a rigorous scholar and a lifelong student of Georgist writings, has gathered 27 separate papers, including several studies of his own, that describe dominant critics and criticisms of George. Some of the writers may be unpersuaded by George's ideas, as are the critics they discuss. Others are known supporters of George's theories and policy prescriptions.² One and all take great care to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the writers they report on. While apologies may come through at times, the strengths of each analysis go further than merely balancing an author's personal views.

Only the most devoted Henry George scholars will fail to encounter a writer new to the reader who took George to task at one time or another as they read the book. And only the most expert student of intellectual history or the history of economic thought will read this book without encountering a new and fascinating figure.

While readers from many disciplines should find the collection of value, economists will have a special appreciation for the coincident development of modern economics that unfolds as the Georgist debates are described. This observation is particularly true for the emergence of the American branch of economics. The best examples are found in the discussion of George's work

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by John Bates Clark, Francis A. Walker and Richard T. Ely, all noted for their contributions to economics.

In a way, the interplay between George and his economist critics seems to have inspired and spurred the development of modern economic theory.³ While there is undoubtedly more to the full explanation of J. B. Clark's devotion to the clarification and exposition of productivity analysis, it seems clear from the book that part of his effort was directed solely toward discrediting George's theories regarding land as a special factor of production.

Of equal interest, perhaps, are the discussions that arose from disciplines far afield from economics. Philosophers, churchmen, novelists, poets and essayists all found inspiration in the controversy that George generated. The pages of the book are filled with such interesting notes.

Andelson has organized this collection into two historical periods.

Following an introduction and other background, comes first an array of chapters on 19th century British and Continental critics. It is there that one encounters the familiar names of Alfred Marshall and Thomas Henry Huxley. There are also lesser known figures: Emile de Laveleye, William Harrell Mallock and Robert Scott Moffat, among others.

The second chronological section reports on 19th century American critics. There are found papers on the work of George Basil Dixwell, Francis A. Walker, J. B. Clark, Simon Nelson Patten, Edwin R. A. Seligman and other early political economists and essayists.

A last major section of the book reports the work of 20th century critics. There are seven papers on such figures as Herbert Joseph Davenport, R. T. Ely, Murray N. Rothbard and Jacob Oser. The book is concluded by Andelson's essay on Neogeorgism, a view on how the debate, criticisms and analyses of George's writings have evolved and a restatement of George's deeper conclusions.

Both this book and the power and prestige of the critics discussed and the authors assembled are testimony to the impact Henry George has had on the thinking of economists, other social scientists and policy makers.

And while the controversy George started has never seemed to end, the principle he espoused is still being applied. Indeed, as reported in the August 8, 1983, issue of *Fortune Magazine*, five cities in Pennsylvania have revised their property taxes following the Georgist formula.⁴

Ideas have power, and Andelson's book is powerfully good.

Notes

1. R. V. Andelson, ed., *Critics of Henry George: A Centenary Appraisal of Their Structures on 'Progress and Poverty'* (Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1979), 424 pp., index;

distributed by Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 5 East 44th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017, \$15 postpaid.

2. The collaborators in the project: R. V. Andelson, Ph.D., professor of philosophy, Auburn University; George Babilor, Ph.D., professor of economics and director of the Center for Public Economics, San Diego State University; James L. Busey, Ph.D., professor emeritus and chairman, department of political science, University of Colorado, Cragmore Campus; Charles F. Collier, Ph.D., assistant professor of economics, Hamilton College; Steven B. Cord, Ed.D., professor of history, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Roy Douglas, Ph.D., senior lecturer, University of Surrey; Aaron B. Fuller, Ph.D., consulting economist, Washington, D.C.; Mason Gaffney, Ph.D., professor of economics, University of California, Riverside; Fred Harrison, M.Sc., editor, *Land and Liberty*, London; C. Lowell Harriss, Ph.D., professor emeritus of economics, Columbia University, and executive director, Academy of Political Science, New York; Robert F. Hébert, Ph.D., professor of economics, Auburn University; Oscar B. Johannsen, Ph.D., executive director, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation; Jack Schwartzman, Ph.D., professor of English, State University of New York, Nassau; William B. Truehart, Ph.D., lecturer in economics, San Diego Community College District; Louis Wasserman, Ph.D., professor emeritus of philosophy and government, San Francisco State University.

3. Ernest Teilhac, who noted this (see his *Pioneers of American Economic Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by E. A. J. Johnson, New York: Macmillan, 1936), also argues that George projected into political economy a "social rationalism" and "a certain return to political rationalism" which "prepares the way" for "communism and socialism, and a reborn political economy." We, of course, with 20/20 hindsight, recognize that many other factors were operative in both instances. (Teilhac, p. 174.)

4. Gurney Breckenfeld, "Higher Taxes That Promote Development," *Fortune*, August 8, 1983, pp. 68–71. Other recent applications have taken place affecting the U.S. public lands and economic zone, the deep oceans, space, and several localities, including Alaska and sections of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The principle is used in the disposition of government concessions, contracts and other privileges by public auction, and in determining the basis on which the U.S. Government and collaborating private corporations launch satellites into space for other governments—cost. [Breckenfeld's former colleague, Perry I. Prentice (retired vice president of Time, Inc., and the one who interested him in the subject), is chairman of the Council for Property Tax Reform. Mr. Prentice has won bipartisan support for the recommendations of many fiscal economists for the improvement of real property taxation.]

A Candidate for Sainthood

IT IS SURPRISING that the Roman Catholics, the Episcopalians, the Anglicans or the Orthodox, who honor heroic piety, haven't yet canonized a Mexican, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. A parish priest, he led thousands of followers in a full scale revolt against Spanish rule in 1801, emancipating 10,000 Blacks held in slavery and instituting agrarian land reform. He died a martyr, executed by royalists in 1811.