

# Louis F. Post: Defender of Human Rights

By V. G. PETERSON

(This is the second of a series of sketches of pioneers of the Georgist movement. Last month THE FREEMAN presented Alexander Greene, Chicago veteran, who told his own story of the early days of Georgism in the Middle West. In this month's instalment, Miss Peterson, who is compiling the series, writes of that gallant figure and close friend of Henry George, Louis F. Post.—The Editors.)

Louis Freeland Post is an outstanding example of the old-time American radical. Scholarly, pungent, concise, he won the admiration of all. Scion of three centuries of American stock, this truly great American gave more than lip-service to the preservation of American liberties. He once said he would fight for the right of the devil himself to give expression to his point of view. He meant it!

The subject of this sketch was born in Vienna, New Jersey, on November 15, 1849. He learned the printer's trade but soon abandoned it for law. His first public office was a one-year term as Assistant United States Attorney for New York. Later he won distinction as a newspaper man, serving on such militant journals as THE NEW YORK TRUTH, THE DAILY LEADER, THE STANDARD and THE CLEVELAND RECORDER. In later years, with Alice Thatcher Post, his second wife, he founded and edited THE PUBLIC, "A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy and A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making."

From 1913 to 1921 Mr. Post served as Assistant Secretary of Labor. A group of his friends had petitioned President Wilson to appoint him to the cabinet. He was given junior cabinet rank instead.

In Washington he had ample opportunity to prove his mettle. In those days deportation warrants were being issued like tickets for speeding on a summer Sunday. The public was seeing anarchy spooks. The uneasiness was not altogether baseless—sixteen bombs had been

intercepted in the mail—the homes of officials in various parts of the country had been dynamited. But, it is also true that the cases against the so-called "reds" had been conducted with a flagrant disregard for the constitutional rights of the accused. When, in December, 1919, "The Soviet Ark" put out to sea, carrying back "to the country whence they came," 249 men and women characterized by the press as "blasphemous creatures who not only rejected America's hospitality and assailed her institutions, but also sought by a campaign of assassination and terrorism to ruin her as a nation of free men," many aboard were innocent of the crime for which they were being deported.

Moorfield Story, commenting on the affair said, ". . . any true American must blush at what was done and at the indifference with which he and all but a handful of his countrymen tolerated it." Louis Post was one of the handful who did not tolerate it. He demanded for the accused the same protection he demanded for himself. Of the 2,500 warrants for deportation issued by Attorney General Mitchell Palmer which came before him, he signed only 562, including Emma Goldman's. His attitude caused the American Legion to demand his removal and resulted in an investigation by a Congressional Committee which, however, decided not to press impeachment proceedings.

This was not the only time an impeachment threat was made against the bushy-browed champion of human rights. While serving as a member of the Board of Education of Chicago, he unearthed, with the help of Cornelius Bey and others, evidence of such scandalous rent juggling in school property that two newspapers, occupying sites at ridiculously low rentals, suggested impeachment. But the bluff was never made good.

Louis Post met Henry George while he was on the staff of the

NEW YORK DAILY TRUTH. He did not take kindly to a friend's suggestion that he investigate the doctrines which this new seer from the west was preaching. Rather, he viewed the whole affair suspiciously. "Here," he said, "is another long-haired soap-boxer." It was only after repeated urging that he accepted a copy of THE IRISH LAND QUESTION. Glancing through the opening chapters, he was forced to the conclusion that the author was neither illiterate nor cranky. Drawn farther and farther into the body of the book, he fell captive to its common sense, its cogent reasoning, its attractive diction. Before he had finished it he tells us, "a new light flashed upon me."

Always temperamentally sympathetic with human suffering, Post saw his field for sympathy expanding. However, he did not at first understand how George's tactical plan for the collection of economic rent could accomplish its stated purpose. So positive were his convictions that he wrote what he described as a "knock-down" editorial about it. "To tax the land," the editorial stated, "could result in nothing but shifting the tax to tenants!" Post sent a copy of the editorial to Henry George with a request for his opinion. The reply neither criticized nor explained. In a brief, friendly letter, Mr. George suggested that the young editor read "Progress and Poverty," a copy of which accompanied his letter. Post did read the book: in two days he read it from cover to cover. George had made a convert!

In the years that followed, the now confirmed Georgist was always on the battle line. He became the personal friend of Henry George and one of his most respected advisors. He shared his joys and kept the vigil of sorrow with him. It was Post who, on the night of the election when Henry George was running for Secretary of State, New York, waited with him in the old Astor House

at the corner of Broadway and Vesey Street, while, across the way, the illuminated bulletin board of the New York Herald recorded, hour by hour, his friend's defeat. "George," said Louis Post, as, with heavy hearts they started for the hall where victory was to have been celebrated, "do you see the hand of God in this?" "No," said George, "but I know it is there." Defeat had no power to shake a noble faith.

Post attended the triumphant ten-dollar-a-plate dinner when one hundred and seventy-nine of New York's famous gathered at Delmonico's to fete George's return from Ireland. Algernon S. Sullivan, noted toastmaster and lawyer, presided. Henry Ward Beecher was there; so was Frederick Adams. The dinner hour arrived, but not the guest of honor. A full hour late, he finally appeared, attired in a funereal swallow-tail and low cut vest befitting the grand occasion. "How did you get them all to come," he demanded of Post in an amazed aside. Post had no answer. Later, a plausible explanation offered itself. The guests, having heard of Henry George as a British prisoner in Ireland, had leapt to the conclusion that he was an Irish patriot, and in 1882 when an Irish patriot came to

New York the whole town was his.

During the mayoralty campaign when George was opposed by Abram S. Roosevelt, Post was editor of the DAILY LEADER. The Labor Party was backing George with unprecedented enthusiasm. Post tells of one Saturday night when long columns of workers paraded under drenching skies shouting George! George! Henry George! It was the greatest turnout of Labor the City had ever known and there is little doubt that Tammany was badly frightened. On election day George was counted out!

Out of the mayoralty election came the United Labor Party, organized in 1886. Post presided at the Party's convention in Alhambra Hall, Syracuse, N. Y. in 1887. Henry George was the Convention's choice for Secretary of State. He did not want the nomination, and accepted it only after Father McGlynn, in a seconding speech, appealed to him to "rise to his duty." At the end of a hard campaign came defeat.

Post was one of the earliest if not the very first, to develop the idea of "classes," to study Progress and Poverty. Otto K. Dorn, trustee of the Henry George School in New York, is a product of his Cleveland group. He conducted other classes in Chicago. The charts illustrating the law

of rent, which the Henry George School uses today, were designed by Mr. Post, and appear in his book, "The Single Tax."

One of the original trustees named in the will of its founder, Louis Post served on the Board of The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation until the time of his death. Commissioned by the Foundation, he wrote "What Is The Single Tax?," a book which is still in print.

Viewing his crowded life, one wonders how this busy man found time for writing. Yet half a dozen or more volumes on varied subjects bear his name, among them being "The Ethical Principles of Marriage and Divorce," and a history of his experience in Washington which he called "The Deportation Delirium of 1920." One of his best known works, "The Prophet of San Francisco," is a collection of affectionate memories of his cherished friend, Henry George.

The death of Louis F. Post on January 9, 1928, ended a useful and honorable career. All over the nation people mourned his passing. The press united in paying tribute to his character and works, one great newspaper acclaiming him, "Defender of the rights of man, without distinction of race, creed, color or previous condition of servitude."