# The men who sought et

*"I have twice read, with admiration and approval, Henry George's book, Progress and Poverty."*[1]

*– Albert Einstein*

*"Men like Henry George are rare, unfortunately. One cannot imagine a more beautiful combination of intellectual keenness, artistic form, and fervent love of justice."*[2]

*– Albert Einstein*

**1879 GAVE birth to Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and to Albert Einstein. In this centennial year, it is of interest to note certain similarities in the ideas of the author of the book and the propounder of the theories of relativity.**

**Both George and Einstein championed "individualism" and attacked "the state." Both were world-famous at the time of their respective deaths. However, neither man fully achieved his goal:that of seeing his theories completely realized and accepted.**

**Both thinkers stressed the law of cause and effect. George traced all causes eventually to the First Cause, which he named the "Great Spirit, or Creator, or God." (*Science of Political Economy,* 1968 edition, p. 54) Einstein, in a *New York Times* interview of April 25, 1929, declared: "I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists . . ." Over and over again, he repeated: "God does not play dice with the universe."**

**Einstein startled the world with his sensational theories of relativity. The (London) *Times,* of November 15, 1919, succinctly summarized his thought: "Space is merely a relation between two sets of data, and an infinite number of times may coexist. Here and there, past and present, are relative not absolute." Likewise, George, years before, had introduced a similar idea: "Space and time . . . are conceptions, not of things in themselves existing, but of relations . . . space being a relation . . . between . . . far or near, hither or thither; and time being a relation . . . between, before or after, now and then." (*Science* pp. 341-2)**

**Even though, in their own lifetimes, the two men witnessed the adherents of the "new" economics and the "new" physics abandon the rule of certainty for the "law" of probability and statistics, both George and Einstein firmly (and grimly) stuck to their common belief in the existence of natural laws.**

## By Jack Schwartzman

**All his life, Einstein was seeking the one (mathematical) formula that would make the processes of science intelligible and unified. He attacked the quantum theory because it led to indeterminacy and chance. He contended that he could not envision "the Good Lord" creating a world where there were no natural laws. Writing to Max Born, Einstein remarked that his younger colleagues would interpret his search for a "unified field theory" merely as "a consequence of senility." Born, eulogizing Einstein after the latter's death in 1955, sadly observed: "Current physics has not followed him; it has continued to accumulate empirical facts and to interpret them in a way which Einstein thoroughly disliked."**

**All his life, George was seeking the one (social) formula that would prompt individuals to adhere to the eternal justice of the Golden Rule. He assailed**

# *Progress & Pove*

**1879** . . . the year Henry George wrote *Progress and Poverty* . . .

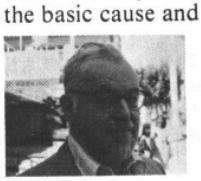
America had entered upon her Gilded Age, England was in the middle of the Victorian era, France had begun *la belle époque,* Germany was in the *Biedermeier* period. These characterizations bespoke a comfortable way of life, the triumph of bourgeois values, a vista of wealth and progress.

The Industrial Revolution was in full swing, European colonialism was carrying the "white man's burden" around the globe (and bringing home handsome recompense), belief in progress was strong, "social Darwinism" justified the rewards of the rich and powerful, and the making of enormous fortunes in America went on unbridled.

Yet there were rumblings. Reformers – and revolutionaries – were beginning to raise their voices, working-class protests and demonstrations were starting to appear. In Britain, disenchantment with free trade was setting in and protectionism was gaining ground. The business cycle with its sudden depressions startled people, especially in industrial countries. Poverty and unemployment were serious problems. Native peoples of Africa and Asia were becoming less than satisfied with the glories of imperialism. Nationalism was raising its head with the recent unification of Germany and Italy and was growing in other countries – with an armaments race in the making.

But belief in progress and the evolutionary uplift of society was strong and the prevalent notion was that the future was onward and upward.

In the frontier land of California where a new civilization was arising, the printer and journalist Henry George studied the situation and wrote his book which in its title summarized the paradox of the age – *Progress and Poverty.* He warned that the impressive progress being made was bringing problems in its wake, especially poverty, which unless solved would destroy civilization. He pointed to land monopoly as the basic cause and urged a remedy – the full taxation of land



**BOB CLANCY writes from NEW YORK**

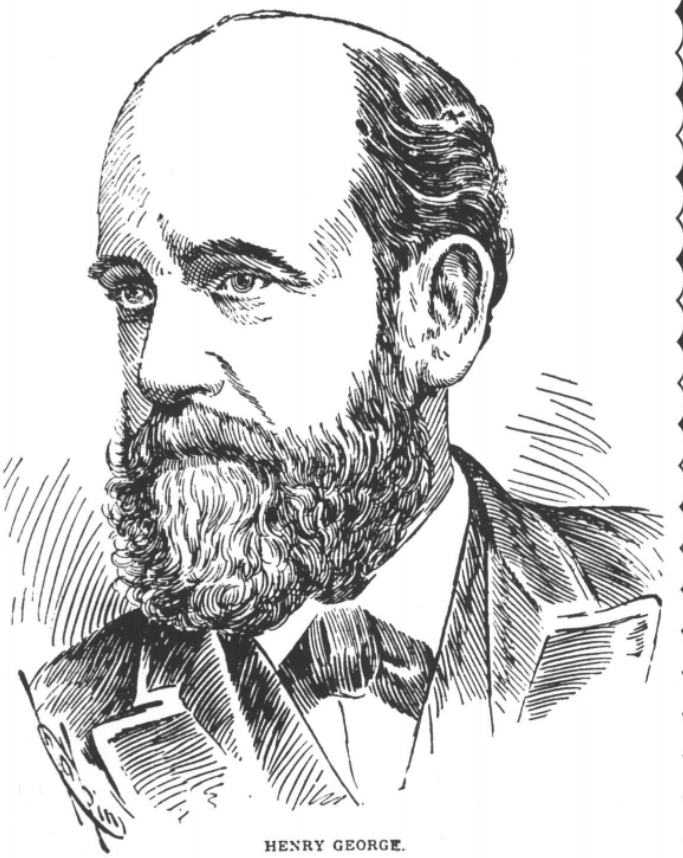
# rnal laws. . .

the "new" study of economics because it taught that there were "no eternally valid natural laws." (*Science,* p. 207) The professional economists ignored him. Recalling the frozen silence with which *Progress and Poverty* was greeted by them, George bitterly wrote:" The majority preferred . . . to treat as beneath contempt a book circulating by thousands . . . and translated into all the important modern languages." (*Science,* p. 204)

Einstein once mentioned to Hans Reichenbach that he had arrived at his theories of relativity because he was "so firmly convinced of the harmony of the universe." George, too, stated that the laws of the universe were "harmonious." (*Progress and Poverty,* 1979 edition, p. 329). A final quotation will aptly summarize the overall views of two of the greatest thinkers of the modern age. "Compared with the solar system," George exclaimed, "our earth is but an indistinguishable speck; and the solar system itself shrivels into nothingness when gauged with the star depth. Shall we say that what passes from *our* sight passes into oblivion? No; not into oblivion. Far, far beyond our ken the eternal laws must hold their sway." (*Progress and Poverty,* p. 329)

[1]***Translation of: "Das Buch von Henry George 'Progress and Poverty' habe ich zweimal mit Bewunderung und Zustimmung gelesen..." This passage, from a letter by Albert Einstein to Mr. E. Paul DuPont, December 13, 1935, is printed here with the permission of Dr. Otto Nathan, Trustee of the Estate of Albert Einstein.***

[2]***An oft-quoted testimonial, recently reprinted, with other famous tributes to Henry George, by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, in a circular announcing the 1979 republication of 'Progress and Poverty'.***



HENRY GEORGE.

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# *rty* – and the next 100 years

values – that would conserve freedom, abolish poverty and unfetter progress.

One hundred years later, the world had passed through a series of convulsions, springing from the unsolved contradictions of the earlier period. Nationalism erupted in the cataclysm of World War I, world-wide depression led to the even greater catastrophe of World War II. Communist revolutions and assorted dictatorships were spawned in much of the world, setting back the cause of democracy. European colonialism was shaken off as the "Third World" asserted itself and a changed attitude appeared in Europe and America. The "wretched of the earth" became more vocal and more active.

The role of government everywhere – even where "laissez-faire" was dominant – increased, taxes went up, the "welfare state" entrenched itself.

And yet – the monopoly conditions against which Henry George levelled persisted. Unconscionable fortunes were still being made in 1979, poverty and unemployment were still serious problems – and in addition there emerged the menace of inflation, the energy crisis. Nationalism has also persisted and armaments have become deadlier than ever. Belief in progress has waned considerably and most people no longer look forward optimistically to the future. Some groups think that "zero growth" is the best that can be attained.

Technological marvels continue – but every advance seems to produce a backlash. Improved automation brings strikes and threats of strikes. Computerization brings threats to privacy. And mastery of the atom brings an insane arms race that threatens all mankind.

And so it is a quite different world 100 years later. A great many of the myths and moralities of a century ago are scorned, with some justification. But today we are in a period of instability and uncertainty, of doubts and disorder, and we have not yet found new standards to abide by.

With all the changes, today's problems can still be summed up in capsule form in the title of George's book – *Progress and Poverty.* His analysis and warnings hit on the head the condition of the world today. It is high time to pay heed to his message. Perhaps within the next 100 years . . .