

FOREWORD

The aim of this book is to investigate the puzzling status of the theory of Henry George, the economic philosopher who held *land* to be the key to the just distribution of wealth. Today, a century after its appearance in his book *Progress and Poverty*, his doctrine exists in a kind of lively limbo, ignored by most people yet still actively pressed for by many—neither a success nor a failure.

Part I, *Henry George*, is biographical, accepting those portions of George's life and personality most relevant to the genesis of his theory and to his influence on his followers. The section is narrative in treatment, with only occasional comments or interpretations.

Part II, *History of the Movement*, continues this predominantly descriptive approach.

Part III, *Why The Land Tax Concept Has Been Disregarded*, is almost entirely analytic and evaluative. Here I have examined not only the validity of George's thesis in itself, but even more, the suitability of the form in which it was clothed, the reason it was presented this way, and the result this has had on its acceptability.

To a certain extent I have relied on previous literature on these issues, but there is not nearly as much of it as might be supposed. Economic historians for the most part have discussed George's concepts only by taking them at their face value, without seeking any hidden implications behind them, nor studying the activities of the organized movement. While some of the conclusions I have come to harmonize with accepted opinion, the book as a whole tends to a picture of George's

theory somewhat different from the standard accounts. For, in the end I have questioned the adequacy with which he stated his own chief thought; and I have portrayed a major change, made by others, to the direction of his reform.

This study deals almost exclusively with the Georgist movement in the United States, the land of George's birth and the seat of the widest activity. Though differing developments have been sponsored in various other countries, the basic beliefs and aims of the international movement are sufficiently similar to those of the American as not to invalidate the conclusions reached in this book.