

In Japanese it's 'Tanzei'

IN the light of all we have heard recently from visitors to Japan, about the incredible 'traffic jams' and the high cost of dwellings, it was a surprise to learn from an address by Professor Yoshisaburo Yamasaki of Kobe University, that the social ideas of Henry George have been known and discussed there to some extent since the Meiji period, a few years after the publication of *Progress and Poverty*.

Dr. Yamasaki, one of the speakers at the conference of the Henry George School and Foundation in Pittsburgh last month, outlined in detail "Henry George's Influence in Japan." From 1887 to the present century his ideas seem to have been passed along from one to another of a long series of Japanese Socialists who appropriated some of George's social judgments but rejected the basic fiscal proposal.*

The speaker made it clear, however, that in this century Henry George's political economy has been studied by a number of Japanese economists, one of whom published a translation of the first half of *Progress and Poverty* in 1949; and the difference between Henry George's theories and socialism has now become clear. The speaker, who is now a most welcome visitor in the United States, ranks high among these learned economists, and has himself made a translation of *Progress and Poverty* into Japanese.

To those who thought Henry George's views were little known outside English speaking countries during his lifetime, it was interesting to learn the extent to which he was being

quoted in Japan as far back as the picturesque Meiji Restoration period when the government was attempting to abolish feudal systems and promote capitalism. In abolishing the feudalistic possession of land however, the government acknowledged private land ownership and permitted the sale, division, annexation, mortgage and tenancy of land. Consequently, said Dr. Yamasaki, private landed property fell into the hands of a small number of owners and became the sole means of capitalistic exploitation.

It was against this background that the earliest document relating to George appeared—a Japanese version of "The Rights of Man" from Chapter X of *Social Problems*. The translator did not mention the book title, but wrote that Henry George was a "famous Socialist" in the United States and that he had created a sensation in teaching equality and criticizing social abuses, such as the cleavage between rich and poor.

As Japan's economy expanded, the protection and aid of modern industries, and preparedness for war under pressure of higher capitalism in foreign nations, made it necessary to solidify the country's financial basis—and in 1873 the government revised the system of land taxation from the tax in kind (rice) in proportion to the annual yield, to a 3 per cent tax in money on the assessed value of land.

This revision, along with the rapid progress of a money-economy, and especially with the unbalanced progress between urban and rural communities, further facilitated the capitalization and concentration of land. A 5 per cent reduction in the land tax in 1877 and an abnormal rise in the price of rice owing to the inflation of currency,

*See The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, April 1962. "The Influence of Henry George's Ideas Upon Modern Japan" by Yoshisaburo Yamasaki.

also added to the profits of land-owners.

From the earliest reference to George in 1883 as a Socialist this label seems to have been applied to him without question for half a century. *The Science of Political Economy* was translated into Japanese, and several books either quoted George or paraphrased parts of his philosophy, but the socialist writers appear to have embraced him as a kindred soul owing mainly to his statement on common land ownership. One author called this an "indirect means, neither radical nor rough, and more skillful and advantageous than socialism or communism."

In 1891 the editor of a publication entitled *Liberty*, translated the first half of George's *Social Problems* into Japanese, and later that year *The Land Question* was translated.

As the capitalistic system was established and industries developed, the labor movement in urban communities progressed. Socialistic documents appeared in considerable number and various land-reform plans were proposed, many purporting to have been influenced by George's ideas. In an article on the "Rise and Decline of Nations" this summary appeared by an author who was not a supporter of the single tax but who favored state ownership of land:

"Human progress is attributed to the growth and accumulation of intellectual power inherent in mankind. To increase the intellectual power we should decrease the amount of the power necessary for the maintenance of existence, and leave the surplus power of intellect. And to realize the purpose we must cause men to receive the fruit of labor without the curtailment of their liberty. By the way, as material progress goes on, the difference between rich and poor becomes remarkable. If this tendency is not stopped, the great amount of intellectual power of mankind will be spent on the maintenance of existence, and

the surplus power of human progress will not be left, and finally the nations will begin to decline."

So many socialist writers and speakers were named as having been "influenced" by Henry George's books, that it would be helpful to know whether they were objective researchers who, having discovered George's views, were inclined toward socialism, or, as seems more likely, whether they were Socialists first who selected from his writings only those which could be made to substantiate their already firmly held opinions.

In an extensive gallery of such writers, Dr. Yamasaki enlivened his report with only one "off-beat character" whom he did not refer to as a Socialist, and who was (you guessed it), an American. Charles E. Garst, a Christian missionary to Japan, was born in Dayton, Ohio. On a sabbatical leave to the U.S. exposure to Henry George's doctrines had a permanent effect, and on his return to Japan in 1893 he began to serve two masters, with the scales no doubt tipped in favor of Henry George, since he adopted as a pen name "Tanzei Taro" (Single Tax John).

After his death a memorial book was compiled from his manuscripts, but the friend who edited the volume was careful to state in a preface that he could not approve the single tax, although his aim was the same as the single taxers' — "to increase the incomes of capitalists and laborers and improve the welfare of nations by means of the abolition of the monopoly of rent in the hands of land-owners."

In closing and leaving the colorful past, Dr. Yamasaki pointed out that the study of Henry George's ideas has the greatest possible importance for his country today. The abnormal rise of urban land prices owing to land speculation is seriously curtailing home building, highway construction and community development.