

Radical Four-letter Words: Land and Rent

A bearded American visited Ireland in 1881 bent on supporting radicalization. He was sent as correspondent of *The Irish World*, and his arrival was anticipated because a few years earlier he had written in *Progress and Poverty*, "if chattel slavery is unjust, then private property in land is unjust."

An estimated 15,000 military constables and 40,000 neatly uniformed troops were on duty in the small country when the Georges arrived. As soon as possible Henry George went to the Kilmainham jail to visit Parnell, Davitt and other leaders of the Land League. A three-day delay ensued before he could confer with his friends, and any mention of political issues was forbidden.

The League was at that time planning retaliatory action and was calling on agricultural tenants to pay no rent until the government retracted the coercion act under which these and some 500 other political prisoners were being held. As soon as the No-Rent Manifesto was issued the government suppressed all action by the League, but the women promptly assumed control. The Misses Anna Parnell and especially Helen Taylor, a step-daughter of John Stuart Mill, won the admiration of Mr. and Mrs. George to the extent that Mrs. George, though reticent, consented to preside over a business meeting held by the Ladies' Land League. It was attended by officials empowered to arrest the leaders but they had escaped to London.

Henry George's first lecture in Dublin aroused such excitement that crowds tried to untie his horse and draw the carriage themselves as he left the hall. George dismissed this custom as one savoring too much of the subservience to which they had become accustomed.

The next year, at age 43, when he lectured in Dublin again, the tension had eased. After seven depressing years the prisoners had been released and a much less militant League relaxed in its efforts and demands. Only Davitt retained the fighting spirit and continued to speak out for "land nationalization." His plan was to compensate the landlords but at only half the marked valuation. Henry George had never favored compensation, but he said in support of Davitt, "I don't care what plan anyone proposes, so that he gets on the right line."

George's second speech in Dublin was on *The Irish Land Question*, and it is still being read in pamphlet form as *The Land Question*. By that time many who had greeted him with fervor on the earlier visit turned against him coolly for his efforts which were regarded as "outside interference." Also there was growing pressure from ecclesiastical authorities.

Henry George was still thinking in terms of "revolution" but this took the form of well planned addresses, courteous letters and published writings in fine English prose. His manner, being controlled, was effective, and doubly so when challenged by hecklers, for he had power in reserve and his energy and logical reasoning were impressive. Along with most League members he disavowed crime and violence as being the acts of "small men lifted into importance."

Though he was poor in money he was rich in decorum, principles, fealty and friends. A gift of \$300 received just at that time made it possible to order copies of *Progress and Poverty* in a shortened form to be distributed throughout England. Some 2,000 were sent free to all newspapers and members of Parliament and 10,000 were sold at 6 pence each. Another large edition was soon to come with 1300 copies going to Australia and 300 to New Zealand. At the same time 5,000 copies of *The Irish Land Question* were released in Britain at 3 pence each.

Progress and Poverty, which had met with early rebuffs from publishers, was becoming world famous. A record three million volumes were sold in a few years, and it was translated into German, French, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Hungarian, Russian and Chinese. The author's name became synonymous with land and remains so to the present.



THE CAUSE OF INFLATION

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kg of sugar for that money. But if the government puts a 33 percent tax on it the worker can buy only 0.75 kg. So 0.25 kg of sugar is left over. We call this overproduction but it is a lack of consumption through taxes.

Now in accordance with the Keynesian view more money is released and overproduction is thought to be eliminated. Governments, though knowing quite well that it is not the right way, print still more money. There is no realistic measure and no terminal point.

Keynes is seen to be quite wrong on his issue that people are buying too little and leaving too much for investment. People cannot buy as much as they wish to and ought to according to their "righteousness share" of the production because the tax they have to pay is a reduction of their wages. The decision of a government to circulate more money than is realistic in relation to available goods and services is called "sticking to inflation." But while money is a medium of exchange it is also a medium of economic manipulation.