

# Georgism *versus* Socialism

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**G**EORGISM is the very antithesis of socialism. However, unless one has a fairly sound grasp of the principles espoused by George, one can easily be swept along the tide to wel-farism, which is socialism on the installment plan.

That this is true is borne out by the sad fact that Henry George's work probably had more to do with the expansion of socialism, particularly in England, than anything else. George Bernard Shaw, the most famous of the Fabian Socialists, said that "five-sixths of those who like himself were swept into the great socialist revival of 1888 had been converted by Henry George."<sup>1</sup> Time and again he acknowledged his indebtedness. "I am glad to say," wrote Shaw, "that I have never denied or belittled our debt to Henry George. If we (Fabians) outgrew *Progress and Poverty* in many respects, so did George himself too, but nobody ever has got away, or ever will get away, from the truths that were the center of his propaganda—his errors anybody can get away from."<sup>2</sup>

If men like Shaw could see the truths expounded by George and still believe that he had not gone far enough—that is, to socialism—it can readily be seen how easily one can glide from Georgism into socialism.

Karl Marx, who was probably more perspicacious than the Fabians, recognized that *Progress and Poverty*, far from being a polemic for socialism, was actually a powerful defense of private enterprise for he sneered at it as "the capitalist's last ditch."<sup>3</sup>

Today, as the tide of socialism rises ever higher, there is danger that Georgists will unwittingly be engulfed by the same error of the Fabians and

advocate socialistic principles without realizing it.

Probably this is because George went too far. He stated, "it may be said generally that businesses which are in their nature monopolies are properly part of the functions of the State, and should be assumed by the State. There is the same reason why Government should carry telegraphic messages as that it should carry letters; that railroads should belong to the public as that common roads should."<sup>4</sup> He also maintained that the rent fund could be used to "establish public baths, museums, libraries, theaters, universities, technical schools, shooting galleries, play grounds, gymnasiums, etc."<sup>5</sup>

This was a serious inconsistency for it was not in harmony with the fundamental tenets of his philosophy. Sometimes it seems as though George builded better than he realized and that he, himself, was not cognizant of the full implications of his own philosophy. That, however, is not surprising since he was an innovator. Only after ideas, inventions, or philosophies are analyzed and tested for a long time do men begin to comprehend the ramifications of new concepts.

George made a great contribution to human thought when he merged the philosophy of individualism with sound economics. Individualism had its articulate and zealous champions in his time just as it has today. The individualistic philosophy espoused by the 19th Century liberal, as well as the 20th Century libertarian, is, in its main aspects, unexceptional. Their weak point has been that their economics, while sound in many respects, is not sound enough.

This bridge uniting individualism



to sound economics in Georgism is the implicit belief that man is fundamentally good and therefore no authority is needed to supervise him. If he follows sound economics, since he is good, the organizations he devises, no matter how complex, will work very well. No superior power is necessary to assure that any individual will be denied such important services as schools, post offices, or even roads. These belong in the domain of private enterprise.

While it is not difficult to envisage schools and post offices owned and operated by private individuals, it may be difficult for some to see how roads could be privately operated. History reveals, however, that many roads have been owned, and the famous turnpikes of the early Nineteenth Century were private roads which entrepreneurs built and maintained. Roads and telephones present typical problems which must be solved by the creation of ingenious private arrangements or they become the seeds from which sprout governmental operations encompassing ever more functions.

If schools, money and roads are responsibilities of government, why not such "natural" monopolies as public utilities and railroads? One needs, then, to take only a short jump to include industries which by virtue of their size appear to be monopolies. From this point on the process easily snowballs to the complete elimination of private property, that is, to socialism.

Georgists may protest that they have no such thoughts in mind, but if they assume that it is proper to use the rent fund for roads and schools there is, logically, no stopping point. It is

natural to acquiesce in the government operation of such functions because this has become an established custom. It does not follow, however, that road and school operations are properly functions of government. Rome was not built in a day. A society based upon the principles of justice will not be built overnight. Expedients will probably have to be adopted and tolerated, but they must be recognized as such and eliminated as soon as the need for them disappears.

A new student often treads nimbly on a tightrope between a type of individualism which seeks control of the government to obtain private monopolies for a few, and socialism which strives to make everything a monopoly of the State. The thoughtful Georgist is an individualist who opposes any and all monopolies. He wants freedom.

He is the only one who recognizes that the absolutely indispensable conditions of freedom are twofold; that man be free and that the universe he inhabits be free, that is, that access to it must be freely available to all men on terms which recognize their equal and unalienable rights to the earth.

Government is instituted to guarantee these rights under conditions of justice. To assume that government also has such functions as aiding the arts, controlling "natural" monopolies, or issuing money is to begin the slide to that abyss of tyranny—socialism—and away from the very pinnacle of freedom—Georgism.

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1 Anne Fremantle, *This Little Band of Prophets: The British Fabians*, p. 20.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

4 *Progress and Poverty*, p. 412.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 456.

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"Land is bought cheaply and sold dearly. The almighty dollar—not human intelligence—is shaping our metropolitan growth. The price we and our descendants will pay is appalling," said Senator Joseph S. Clark.

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