

From the book:

**The Foundations of Freedom: The Land and the People / 1912**

## HENRY GEORGE AND SOCIALISM.

By Louis F. Post

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“The ideal of Socialism is grand and noble; and it is, I am convinced, possible of realisation. But such a state of society cannot be manufactured—it must grow.”  
Henry George.

Sometimes by Socialists, sometimes by Anarchists, sometimes by Single Taxers, and not infrequently by persons who know not what they are or what they would like to be, I am asked to state or to explain Henry George’s views on Socialism. What better answer to this question than the answer of Henry George himself? It may be found in his writings without aid from me, but possibly I may make helpful selections.

Henry George’s first recorded declaration on the subject of Socialism was made in 1879. It appears in his “Progress and Poverty” under the fifth subdivision of Chapter I, in Book VI. Discussing there the insufficiency of “governmental direction and interference” as a remedy for poverty in the midst of progress, he says: “As to the truths that are involved in Socialistic ideas, I shall have something to say hereafter; but it is evident that whatever savours of regulation and restriction is in itself bad, and should not be resorted to if any other mode of accomplishing the same end presents itself.” To those words he adds the following in the final paragraph of the same subdivision: “The ideal of Socialism is  
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grand and noble; and it is, I am convinced, possible of realization. But such a state of society cannot be manufactured—it must grow. Society is an organism, not a machine. It can only live by the individual life of its parts. And in the free and natural development of all the parts will be secured the harmony of the whole. All that is necessary to social regeneration is included in the motto of those Russian patriots sometimes called Nihilists —‘Land and Liberty!’ ”

When the author of “Progress and Poverty” came in that book to

develop the social effects of his proposed fiscal reform, he resorted to Socialism in no unfriendly way. Explaining the effect of the Single Tax upon the production of wealth, he told in Chapter I of Book IX of "the advantages which would be gained by substituting for the numerous taxes by which the public revenues are now raised, a Single Tax levied upon the value of land," declaring that they "will appear more and more important the more they are considered." He then directed attention to the greater ease of accomplishing, and the better security for a continuance of Socialistic objects, if that substitution of taxes were made. "Released," he says, "from the difficulties which attend the collection of revenue in a way that begets corruption and renders legislation the tool of special interests, society could assume functions which the increasing complexity of life makes it desirable to assume, but which the prospect of political demoralization under the present system now leads thoughtful men to shrink from." The same idea is expanded near the close of that chapter, where the author urges conscientious thought upon the subject in these terms: "Consider the effect of such a change upon the labour market. Competition would no longer be one-sided as now. Instead of labourers competing with each other for employment, and in their competition cutting down wages to the point of bare subsistence, employers would everywhere be competing for labourers, and wages would rise to the fair earnings of labour." One of the effects of such a change as he prophesies farther on in "Progress and Poverty," Chapter IV, of Book IX, would be, resuming the quotation, that "society would thus approach the ideal of Jeffersonian democracy, the promised land of Herbert Spencer, the abolition of government; but of government only as a directing and repressive power. It would at the same time, and in the same degree, become possible for it to . . . reach the ideal of the Socialist, but not through governmental repression. Government would change its character, and would become the administration of a great co-operative society. It would become merely the agency by which the common property was administered for the common benefit."

While Socialistic lines were still indefinite in practical politics. Henry George wrote "Social Problems," and here he gave further attention to Socialism. Although still vague in practical politics, Socialism had by that time come to be a subject of general discussion, not as a doctrine or set of doctrines, but as a social

reform having many shades of meaning. In the quotations from "Social Problems" which I am about to make, Mr. George considers Socialism not as a social philosophy nor as a class movement, but as a problem in the mechanism of government. "It is the more necessary to simplify government as much as possible and to improve, as much as may be, what may be called the mechanics of government," he begins in the earlier part of Chapter XVII in "Social Problems," "because, with the progress of society, the functions which government must assume steadily increase. It is only in the infancy of society that the functions of government can be properly confined to providing for the common defence and protecting the weak against the physical power of the strong. As society develops in obedience to that law of integration and increasing complexity of which I spoke in the first of these chapters, it becomes necessary in order to secure equality that other regulations should be made and enforced; and upon the primary and restrictive functions of government are superimposed what may be called co-operative functions, the refusal to assume which leads, in many cases, to the disregard of individual rights as surely as does the assumption of directive and restrictive functions not properly belonging to government."

The thought is emphasized in the next paragraph but one: "As civilization progresses and industrial development goes on, the concentration which results from the utilization of larger powers and improved processes operates more and more to the restriction and exclusion of competition and the establishment of complete monopolies." In the paragraph immediately following the one just quoted from, the thought is thus explained: "The primary purpose and end of government being to secure the natural rights and equal liberty of each, all businesses that involve monopoly are within the necessary province of governmental regulation, and businesses that are in their nature complete monopolies become properly functions of the State. As society develops, the State must assume these functions, in their nature cooperative, in order to secure the equal rights and liberty of all."

It may be inferred that Henry George was opposed to a Socialism that would socialize all businesses, but was in accord with the Socialism that would socialize monopolies. That is true, and here is his argument on the point, addressed of course to public opinion in general and not especially to Socialists: "Businesses

that are in their nature monopolies are properly functions of the State. The State must control or assume them, in self-defence, and for the protection of the equal rights of citizens. But beyond this, the field in which the State may operate beneficially as the executive of the great co-operative association, into which it is the tendency of true civilization to blend society, will widen with the improvement of government and the growth of public spirit."

Becoming more explicit with reference to Socialism, when drawing near to the close of the chapter of "Social Problems" just quoted from, the author said: "The natural progress of social development is unmistakably toward co-operation, or, if the word be preferred, toward Socialism, though I dislike to use a word to which such various and vague meanings are attached;" but he emphasizes here, as always in writing and in speaking, his foundation principle that "the first step toward a natural and healthy organization of society is to secure to all men their natural, equal, and Inalienable rights in the material universe."

That "this is not to do everything that may be necessary," he agreed; but he insisted that doing this "is to make all else easier," and that "unless we do this nothing else will avail."

Henry George's subsequent expressions on Socialism, in so far as they appear in his books, were made after he had come into more intimate relations with doctrinaire Socialists. First among these is what he wrote in "Protection or Free Trade," a book which went first to the printer in 1885, and in which he devoted a chapter to Free Trade and Socialism. In that chapter he points out in Socialism as distinguished from Individualism "an unquestionable truth" to which "too little attention has been paid," this being his explanation: "Man is primarily an individual—a separate entity, differing from his fellows in desires and powers, and requiring for the exercise of those powers and the gratification of those desires individual play and freedom. But he is also a social being, having desires that harmonize with those of his fellows, and powers that can be brought out only in concerted action. There is thus a domain of individual action and a domain of social action— some things which can best be done when society acts for all its members. And the natural tendency of advancing civilization is to make social conditions relatively more important, and more and more to enlarge the domain of social action." But in the same

chapter, a page or two beyond, the author reminds the communistic type of Socialist that “while there is a truth in Socialism which Individualists forget, there is a school of Socialists who in like manner ignore the truth there is in Individualism, and whose propositions for the improvement of social conditions belong to the class” he has “called ‘super-adequate.’ ” He then describes “the line at which the State should come in” as “that where free competition becomes impossible.”

In a foot note to this chapter in “Protection or Free Trade” Henry George gives his reason for writing of Socialism as a loosely used term: “The term ‘Socialism’ is used so loosely that it is hard to attach to it a definite meaning. I myself am classed as a Socialist by those who denounce Socialism, while those who profess themselves Socialists declare me not to be one. For my own part I neither claim nor repudiate the name, and realizing as I do the correlative truth of both principles can no more call myself an Individualist or a Socialist than one who considers the forces by which the planets are held to their orbits could call himself a centrifugalist or a centripetalist.”

In his “Open Letter to Pope Leo” on “The Condition of Labour,” Henry George again draws the line between the individualizing on one hand, and the socializing on the other, of all businesses and all kinds of property, stating that men who believe with him regard these two policies as “erring in opposite directions—the one in ignoring the social nature of man, the other in ignoring his individual nature.” He adds, however, that “with the Socialists we have some points of agreement, for we recognize fully the social nature of man and believe that all monopolies should be held and governed by the State,” and also “where the general health, knowledge, comfort, and convenience might be improved.”

His criticism of Socialism in all its degrees is that it is not radical, does not go to the root; and while he honours thorough-going Socialists for fidelity to their convictions, he regards them as “Jumping to conclusions without effort to discover causes,” as failing “to see that oppression does not come from the nature of capital, but from the wrong that robs labour of capital by divorcing it from land, and that creates a fictitious capital that is really capitalized monopoly.”

In harmony with the foregoing quotations is Henry George's discussion of the principles of production in the "Science of Political Economy," which did not go to the printer until after his death, in 1897. Considering in that work what was called "scientific Socialism" at the time he wrote, he criticized this as having "a tendency to confuse the idea of science with that of something purely conventional or political," as taking "no account of natural laws, neither seeking them nor striving to be governed by them," as being without religion and in tendency atheistic, and as having "no system of individual rights whereby it can define the extent to which the individual is entitled to liberty or to which the State may go in restraining it" Many Socialists of the present time in my country resent the imputation of an atheistic tendency in Socialism; but there were few in Henry George's life time who would have done so. It is surely difficult to reconcile certain doctrines which prevailed with Socialists in George's day, whether now or not, with any but an atheistic tendency, be that tendency to the credit of Socialism or to its discredit. And is not so good a Socialist as Edward Bernstein, citizen of Germany, but of international fame and influence, on record as describing the Socialism at which George's imputation was directed as "Calvinism with God left out?" Henry George implied no more.

The quotations I have here made from Henry George leave nothing to be explained. I may therefore merely summarize. He saw Socialism clearly enough, both in its creed as a scientific philosophy and in its loose and varied expressions of a vague feeling for social reform. Writing of the former phase as it expressed itself when he wrote, he cannot be fairly criticized for not anticipating the alterations it has undergone since that time. Of the latter phases, he was cautious always to distinguish between individual and social functions in civilized life. And of Socialists of all types except as they are drawing closer in these days to that recognition of the principles of natural law upon which he insisted, his criticism that they lack in radicalism cannot be convincingly gainsaid. Whether he be called Socialist or Individualist, whether he be regarded as an open enemy of Socialism obstructing its progress, or as a candid friend guiding its course, he has left no room for the intelligent to question what he believed.

He believed that there are individual functions and social

functions; that with reference to the former the individual must be free, and with reference to the latter the State must be dominant; that there is a natural tendency toward a larger and larger absorption of industrial functions into the social field, and therefore toward an extension of the activities of the State into industrial fields; that this must be by evolutionary growth and not by revolutionary decree; that the first necessary and effective step is to abolish land monopoly; that the best method for doing this is through exemption of industry from taxation, and the concentration of taxes upon Land Values. When this is done, all will not yet have been done. Much will remain to do. But until this is done, nothing else can be done effectively; whereas, when this is done, everything else that is necessary will be easier to do, and when done will be secure.