

HENRY GEORGE AND IRELAND

It was exactly at the start of the Fenian Land War that Henry George in America published his economic treatise "*Progress and Poverty*". (An enquiry into the cause of industrial depressions and of increase of want with increase of wealth—The Remedy.) In this book, George advocated the socialisation of ground-rent and set alight a fuse that is still burning to this day. George made an historic intervention in the Land League campaign when he was despatched to Ireland by the editor of the New York newspaper "*The Irish World*" to cover the Land Leaguers.

Two days before Henry George sailed on 15th October, 1881, Parnell, Dillon and O'Kelly had been sent to prison under the Coercion Act. From that moment until the end of 1882, Henry George endeavoured to hold Michael Davitt to the old war cry of "The land for the people!". He failed but was fair enough to say of Michael Davitt: "He is a noble character and by far the best of the lot."

While Henry George had tried to rally Michael Davitt to the pure truth of the single tax on the site value of land, Davitt demurred and made his peace with the Parnellites and parliamentary reform. Once again, the course of justice was set back by the cowardice of a "great Irish leader".

While unable to convert Parnell or Chamberlain or, indeed, keep Michael Davitt steadfast, Henry George went on to gain acclaim not only from many Irish like Bishop Nulty of Meath and Fr. Edward McGlynn (the priest excommunicated by the Pope for holding that the land belonged to the people) but made converts world-wide as diverse as Leo Tolstoy, Sun Yat Sen, Frank Lloyd-Wright and Milton Friedman. As Henry George foresaw in the moving words from his greatest work which are now inscribed on his tombstone in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn:—

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; those who will suffer for it; if need be die for it. This is the power of truth."

The truth which both in Ireland and throughout the world Henry George had tried to make clear, both in his life and his works, was once again recently ignored in Ireland by Fianna Fail when the then Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, carelessly and catastrophically abolished rates, causing, as Henry George would have been the first to point out, an inevitable resultant economic collapse of the country which has inexorably ensued.

But Irish politicians are not the only dullards in existence. The British Prime Minister is about to abolish rates in Britain. Michael Davitt was not the only lost leader and politician to ignore the truth for the expediency of what appeared to be at the time overwhelming political advantage.—H. I. Meyer (B.Arch.), "*The Irish Post*", 15/2/86.