

EXTENSION OF REMARKS  
By DOMINIC R. MASSARO

SUMMER COMMENCEMENT  
HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCE  
SEPTEMBER 7, 1966

Despite the fact that most of us here this evening have just completed a study of Henry George's basic work, and in so doing should, therefore, be somewhat familiar with his life, I believe it necessary, every once in a while, to review the background which makes a man great, his thoughts endure down through generations of his fellows, before passing to an evaluation of his efforts on behalf of mankind.

And so, with your permission... Henry George was born in the early half of the last century in Philadelphia. His daughter was to write of him after his death as a man "small of stature and slight of build." But whatever George may have lacked in physique, his life was to more than amply compensate for in the depth of his mental agility. He was "a self educated man," she said, but his writings readily reveal, even to the most casual observer, that he had as his tutors some of the greatest minds that have ever lived -- the Greek and Roman mythologists, Shakespeare, Adams, Mill and the other contemporary economists, the biblical scholars of all great religions of the world -- teachers of all things and of all times.

George came to New York in 1869. Behind him were years at sea followed by an unsuccessful newspaper venture in San Francisco. In the even then thriving and troubled metropolis that is our city, he was appalled to see mansions side by side with hovels; vast riches side by side with destitution; the easy and good life side by side with a constant struggle for existence itself. It was there and then that he determined to devote his life to discovering the cause of "poverty in the midst of plenty," to borrow President Johnson's phrase in opening this nation's "War on Poverty" a century later.

Writing against the harsh background of the prolonged industrial depression of the 1870's, which was further complicated by increasing immigration, the problem he set out to solve was the selfsame problem which man has posed to himself down through the ages: why must poverty endure?

The answer put forth by George, contained in his profoundly beautiful and lasting book, *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, a book, incidentally, by far which has had more world-wide circulation than any other work on economics ever written, is found not in any material shortage of nature's cornucopia, nor in man's inadequacy to exploit her rich bounty, but rather in the stumbling blocks to cooperation as between labor and capital in the production and distribution of wealth.

*PROGRESS AND POVERTY* expounds a theory developed with superb logic. Its author followed the rules of writing which combine short sentences, small words, and few adjectives. While he avoided the use of "fine writing," as such, his book reflects a certain eloquence springing from deep conviction, and a talent for explanation by use of apt illustrations and references to common and everyday experiences. Above all, however, it is a masterful attack on a grave problem, a problem which even today remains largely unsolved. Perhaps the most important contribution of George's book, though, lies in the concrete remedy it recommends.

George observed that the worst pauperism, as well as the greatest riches, could be found in the oldest centers of industrialism — that is, where the most progress in power to multiply man's production by modern techniques had occurred. This was just the opposite of what one would expect. Why should the mass of humanity not benefit from the great gain of industrial productivity?

Examining the generally accepted doctrines of distribution, which he found unsatisfactory, he concluded that the poverty of labor is the result of the unjust distribution of wealth, not of any natural law governing wages or production.

Where, then, does distribution falter in respect to the wages paid a man for his labor? By a process of elimination, George arrived at the payment of rent, a factor of distribution, as the cause of this unequal distribution of wealth, and, consequently, of poverty; it is the landowner, he said, that prevents labor from benefiting fully by modern methods of production.

What really brings the most increase in value to land, George noted, is not the differential in fertility but the growth of population in the neighborhood and general increase in the productivity of society. To get rich, buy not the best farm land, but a tract which will turn out to be near the center of a growing city. It makes no difference whether this tract is covered with the most fertile loam or is solid granite. Who knows anything about the agricultural value of the corner lot at Broad and Wall Streets, New York City? And since it is the community, by its very presence and activity, which gives rental value to land, therefore, the rent of this land, in turn, rightfully belongs to it and not to the landowner.

George advocated the "single tax," by which would be appropriated for public use all rise in the value of land, or its "unearned increment." This unearned increment, he argued, once appropriated, would be great enough to allow for an end of the other forms of taxation for the running of the government. Not only would this encourage trade and industry, but it would lift from the worker the heavy burden of taxation on his production and consumption of wealth. Also, the fact that nobody could profit merely by holding land would force landowners to improve their property and so would increase the total production and stimulate competition. It would mean a full and steady employment, the abolition of slums, the steady rise of wages through more rapidly expanding demand for labor.

This, then, was to be the enduring quality of PROGRESS AND POVERTY. Its proposition solves a recurring problem, not sectional but world-wide in scope and nature. It outlines a remedy for the eradication of one of man's greatest

disease: poverty.

Now, a century later, we must pose to ourselves a question: was George right? Was this observant, logical, conscientious, and humane thinker correct in his analysis and thesis?

Any great social theory needs to be tested and re-tested by a comprehensive and accurate assessment of actual life situations. The scientific method is basic here as in the laws of physics.

We have knowledge of the limited application of George's plan which speaks to success in many parts of the world. Land value taxation, which goes to the very heart of the workings of George's scheme, has made for favorable results not only in these United States but elsewhere. We cannot help but wonder if a fuller application would bring even more favorable results. But why has this not been the case? But why has not a fuller application been allowed for? But why? But why? But why?

Alluding to the words of the Italian statesman and diplomat, Nicolo Machiavelli, who four centuries before George said "the most difficult task to undertake is the introduction of a new order of things," perhaps we can find the answer.

But is this generation of ours, so involved with social justice to a degree hitherto unknown, not going to accept George's challenge for a greater society, indeed, perhaps, the "Great Society."

Unemployment and misery still plague our way of life, as does the extreme inequality in the distribution of income. Our nation is now engaged in a great struggle, a War on Poverty. This "war," which has been declared to relieve mankind of the burden which comes from "unequal opportunity," affords us a tremendous chance to implement Georgist philosophy, for what more does George ask than "equal economic opportunity" for all.

There is much to be done to truly achieve a great society, and George opens for us a wide area for exploration toward possible achievement... an academic beginning for an accumulation of tested conclusions that cannot be blown away by the next wind of doctrine, yes, that has not been blown away these many decades.

The task of economic housekeeping, with its critical need for better guidance, may yet come to rest on verified knowledge as much as on blind habit and vested bias. But this will be so only if those in positions of influence and authority have the courage and conviction to check conclusions presented against experience that will attain for man the end mankind seeks to attain. In short, Georgist philosophy may not necessarily provide "the" answer, but it certainly provides "an" answer worthy of greater attention than it has heretofore received.

The words of the English writer, E. G. Taylor, should be read these opinion-makers and leaders that such courage and conviction be instilled, that such long overdue attention be afforded Henry George:

Why hesitate? Ye are a full bearded man,  
 With God-implanted will, and courage if  
 Ye dare but show it. Never yet was will  
 But found some way or means to work it out,  
 Nor er'e did Fortune frown on him who dared.  
 Shall we in the presence of this greivous wrong,  
 In this supremest moment of all time,  
 Stand trembling, cowering, when with one bold stroke  
 These groaning millions might be set free? --  
 And that one stroke so just, so greatly good,  
 So level with the happiness of man,  
 That the angels will applaud the deed.