

Why So Much Apologizing For Henry George?

NOT FOR PUBLICATION—Just to let off steam. A safety valve keeps the boiler from exploding.

Dear Miss Davis;

(Editor Henry George News, N. Y. City)

I had thought of writing you before this, when I saw an article by Will Lissner in "The Christian Century" for Sept. 29, 1948. It was a very apologetic article entitled, "How Much Truth In Henry George?" It is too bad everybody has to apologize for Henry George. (And on the side may I say it looks to me to be mostly because George was not a "college-bred" man.) Can you beat this: "About a score of scholars laid the foundation. . . ." Etc. "George's ideas revised. . . ." Etc. (p.1007). Fact is that the Single Taxers of sixty years ago discarded the original "Single-Taxism" of George and the movement became a movement for "the taxation of land values." The moral issues were discarded. Thus was George "revised." I don't see how these "scholars" could revise Henry George. We have what he wrote in Progress and Poverty and elsewhere. It seems that the "scholars" can't comprehend exactly what George did teach, so they make up a so-called revision, and fit that "into a framework of democratic aspirations and welded into a coherent system of social thought." Poor Henry George evidently didn't weld a coherent system, didn't have any modern knowledge and didn't know much about democratic aspirations. Poor Henry George! No wonder he needs these "scholars" to apologize for him. No wonder the "American Journal of Economics and Sociology" was such a disappointment!!

Now you have an article of the same title in latest (Dec.1948) issue of the Henry George News. Too bad you don't have the authority to tell a writer to revise his article and bring it into line. I would suggest that you protect yourself by the formal statement with each article that the ideas expressed are the author's own, and do not reflect the editor's opinions. Make these people stand on their own, and don't give them your support. Without such statement you undermine your own position.

Lissner in the Christian Century article says, "Carved over the grave of Henry George is one of his prophecies: 'The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance.'" Then Lissner plunges into the Land Question. But what was it that George tried to make clear? What is it that has been missed since 1887? (Since May 28th, to be exact); since Thomas G. Shearman (prominent lawyer) wrote his article titled "The Single Tax"? (Note: this was without a hyphen and meant "taxation-of-land-values," as opposed to the term "Single-Tax" [with hyphen] meaning the original "Abolish-Poverty," "New Abolition" idea. As W. Stanley Jevons sagely remarked, "A word with two distinct meanings is really two words."—Primer of Logic.)

Men like Lissner could get a hint of George's fundamental idea by considering the title of his great classic "Progress and Poverty"—increase of wealth and the accompanying decrease of wages or income (through the medium of prices) and resultant poverty and actual want—demanding "relief" legislation.

In the introductory chapter of Progress and Poverty one will find a statement, not on the Land Question but on the Wages Question. It goes something like this: Why, in spite of the workers producing more and more goods (with the aid of capital, which is really stored-up labor) do wages tend to buy less and less, so that men have to act (lacking knowledge of true Political Economy—not Economics) to form Labor Unions in order to keep their wages up? George's statement of the Problem is one of the few italicized paragraphs of the book. But this has been systematically ignored since George's death (and covertly ignored from '87 to his death). Then, if these "scholars" would like to follow George's thought let them turn to Progress and Poverty, Bk.3; ch.3;par.3; "Inasmuch as the discovery of the [natural] law of wages is the ultimate purpose of our inquiry. . . ." This is a very broad hint that George was trying to find "in science" the "Natural Law" of wages. This inference concerning the law of wages appears in same book, Ch.6;par.18,—another italicized portion.

You have brought out the central purpose of all the writings of Henry George in clearer focus than I have ever seen it explained, in such few words. Please send me 500 copies.—J. Rupert Mason, San Francisco, Cal.

Why do wages (purchasing power) constantly fall? See Bk.5. The second paragraph is another of the few italicized parts: . . . the forcing down of wages. Now turn to Bk.7;ch.2; these first five paragraphs are the first I committed to memory when I was but a lad. Here was the answer as to why I had to work like a slave in National City Bank on Wall Street. Here was the answer to Socialism, Communism, Trade Unionism, etc. I used these paragraphs quite often in my Progress and Poverty Lecture Bureau lectures in 1929-30.

The ordinary "man on the street" or the "scholar" would have said, "Nationalize the land. But Henry George, the super-genius (who needs none of the apologists) was the first to perceive (as Galileo was a first perceiver) that the rise of Monopoly rent,—and piled upon that Speculative rent,—was the cause of falling wages. (Bk.5;ch.2;par.4-8-Bk.9;ch.2;par.8.) The weight of Monopoly rent kept Ireland the "poor spot" in Western Europe—absentee landlordism; and Speculative rent is the straw that breaks the camel's back; this is the cause of the periodic "depressions". (See title page of P&F.)

George admits that "Land Nationalization" would accomplish what he proposes to be alone with a new and strange philosophy." I have had some correspondence with Henry George Pearce of Australia and he seems to be a 100% "Political"-Economist (the sense used in George's Science of Political Economy). But there are so few of us. I did seem very much alone when I started the Single-Tax (hyphen) News in 1915. The 200,000 Single Taxers dropped to perhaps 100 Single-Taxers. (Note hyphen.)

Don't publish this or you will lose your job. Sincerely yours, C. LeBaron Coeller (Signed:)

(Some steam let off—and boiler saved.) * We were strongly urged to print this letter for wide circulation so we have reversed the "Not For Publication" in the interests of the Cause.—C.C.

The NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY (the economics of mankind), by C. LeBaron Coeller. With diagrams, 24 pp. and cover. 25c a copy.

72—Henry George Trust Society, Endwell, N. Y.—Printed in U.S.A.

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It seems a shame that "George" money should be spent for such a "modern" magazine as the "American Journal of Economics and Sociology" (75¢ the copy), for George was not an "Economist", but a Political Economist. (See his Science of Political Economy, pages 205 to 208.) George's modern critics are good writers and good enough "Economists" (which is the economics of business) but I have yet to hear a prominent name of a true "Political Economist", a scientific investigator like George himself. (And by the way, there is no Social "Science". I tried to tell Oscar Geiger that. See Humanizing of Knowledge, James Harvey Robinson [Pub. Doran, N.Y.] page 62). Our late friend Charles H. Ingelsoll wrote me about 1936, "You seem to be alone with a new and strange philosophy." I have had some correspondence with Henry George Pearce of Australia and he seems to be a 100% "Political"-Economist (the sense used in George's Science of Political Economy). But there are so few of us. I did seem very much alone when I started the Single-Tax (hyphen) News in 1915. The 200,000 Single Taxers dropped to perhaps 100 Single-Taxers. (Note hyphen.)

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George admits that 'Land Nationalization' would accomplish what he proposes —increase of wages. (Bk.8:ch.2;par.4.) But George, being the super-genius (of the caliber of Galileo, Newton, et al.) had a true 'inspiration' (which is not confined to the Bible). He said that in order to raise wages it was 'not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate RENT. (Italics.) Further down the page (in italics) 'don.' Simple; is it? Well, hardly. It seems about as hard for people to grasp this as for those same people (I don't know how many hundreds of millions) to grasp even the elements of the proposition of the, or a, fourth dimension of space-time. George's proposition seems so difficult to understand (or was it too religious-spiritual?) that it was discarded, as I said, in 1887, and attention was turned to tax-reform, and later to land-reform, without telling people that the whole proposition was about WAGES. Mr. George made his position very clear in his speech before the Boston Typographical

Union (Feb. 22, 1889) where he said in part, "Of all subjects the matter of wages seems to me the most important," and "I have not a word to say against Unions, except that there is a better way [of raising wages]. If I went back to my old business again [journeyman printer], my first step would be to join one. They have raised wages, but only to a small extent." (When I continued this theme in my lecturing in 1929-30 the prominent Single Taxers [no hyphen] turned me down.)

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