



The "Practical" Approach

by ROBERT V. ANDELSON

WHEN Grover Cleveland argued for tariff reduction during the presidential campaign of 1888, some of his more timorous supporters sought to mollify protectionist voters by chanting:

**Don't, don't, don't be afraid —
Tariff reform is not free trade.**

This doggerel is brought to mind by a refrain we seem to have been hearing lately, which runs approximately as follows:

**Be reassured, relax, relax —
Incentive taxation is not the single tax.**

To be sure, incentive taxation is *not* the "single tax." It is merely the first, feeble step in that direction. Still, those of us whose hearts are ultimately set upon a much more thoroughgoing reform are backing it with all the strength at our disposal. For we know that politics has been aptly termed "the art of the possible," and at this juncture incentive taxation seems more possible of general acceptance than does the full-scale Georgist program. We furthermore realize that to gratuitously introduce terms and concepts such as "Henry George" and "single tax" into the campaign for incentive taxation would be to create for it unnecessary handicaps. The campaign can best be waged with pragmatic, common-sense arguments, and by steering clear of ideological entanglements and moralistic appeals. It will yield results in proportion to the number of non-

Georgists who can be enlisted, whatever their motives, in the fight to shift local property taxes on to sites, and off of buildings and improvements.

On this level and on this front, ostensible disassociation is the most strategic policy. However, the matter of disassociation can be carried to extremes. This is not the only level nor the only front. In their determination to be "practical," some of our people have been altogether too quick to concede the final struggle—too willing to relegate full-orbed Georgism to the realm of utopian fantasy.

To avoid inexpedient mention of George and his philosophy is one thing; to ignore, belittle, or seemingly repudiate them is quite another. And when the disassociation becomes insistent and obtrusive (as it sometimes has), prospective sympathizers turn away, convinced with Hamlet's mother that "the lady doth protest too much."

At this point, a brief digression concerning the term "single tax" may be in order: It is, admittedly, a misleading choice of words, for it suggests that we conceive the social collection of ground rent to be the only possible just source of public revenue, and that we assert dogmatically that this source would, under all circumstances, be sufficient to meet the legitimate needs of government. The latter contention is, of course, absurd, just as is its opposite, since any estimate either of the amount of ground rent

under a Georgist economy, or of the future needs of government, must of necessity be highly conjectural. As for ground rent being the only possible just source of public revenue, this is an oversimplification. Should it prove to be inadequate to pay for necessary protective social functions, I know of no Georgist who would oppose its being supplemented from another source. We would simply insist that the total ground rent be collected *first*.

There is, however, a sense in which the term "single tax" is accurately descriptive of a major element in George's thought—namely, the principle that *payment for benefits received* is the *single* ethical criterion for the imposition of a public levy. This is the real touchstone without which any system of taxation (and therefore any system of government) must, in the last analysis, be arbitrary. In this sense, therefore, let us champion the singleness of the "single tax," even though it may be tactically desirable to refrain from using the term outside our own circles.

Now for the appellation, "Georgist": Let's quit apologizing for Henry George. We have no wish to be mere memorializers, and there may indeed be times when his ideas can be presented most effectively unlabeled with his name, yet never did a social movement have a more appealing founder. From Mohammed to Marx, he suffers by comparison to none. Generally speaking, it will do his cause no harm to claim him, and frequently much good.

While we're being "practical," let's not miss the forest for the trees, or like the man with the muck-rake, concentrate on problems to the exclusion of opportunities. Discouraged by past defeats, many are now willing to settle for half a loaf. Remembering the many political failures sustained by the movement during George's lifetime, the debacle of the Single Tax party, the poor showing of the Commonwealth Land party, the sorry fate of

Luke North's 'Great Adventure,' etc., etc., it is understandable that they should lower their sights to goals more modest than a comprehensive application of the theory of land value taxation. I am not an "all-at-oncer." I well appreciate the necessity of gradualism in the implementation of George's "remedy." But we live today in apocalyptic times. National and world conditions cry for George as never before. While our attention is fixated upon local assessment practices, public opposition to the federal income tax is mounting. Throughout the world the fanatical Marxist dogma is winning acceptance, opposed only by weak and desiccated cliches. America desperately needs an ideology. The West needs an ideology. Georgism, as a fully articulated system, is that ideology.

It boils down to a question of survival. "True believers" may not be respectable in academic circles, but history is a record of their triumph. It is also a record of the downfall of the complacent, the undecided, and the coolly skeptical. Without a vital ideology the West is surely doomed.

Social Democracy is a bankrupt ideology; witness its repudiation in Germany and England, and the spirit of ennui which has overtaken Sweden. Traditional free enterprise is only half an ideology; where there is no equality, to prate of freedom is a mockery. Incentive taxation? Excellent, as far as it goes! But how many people willing to risk "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor" merely in order to shift taxes to sites from buildings and improvements? I know I wouldn't.

Only the complete philosophy of George possesses the interior dynamic which can produce final victory in the global struggle against Marxism. We may have reservations about it at minor points. We may not fully comprehend it at others. We may be quite willing to admit that there have been

major contributions to economic theory since George wrote. We may hesitate to present his doctrine as a panacea. But the Communists are not so hesitant about *their* doctrine. In the struggle for the minds of the masses, one panacea can only be driven out by another.

Shall we, then, bow to the defeatist notion that although George had a beautiful theory, it is useless to work for its adoption on a national and international scale? Shall we forfeit the opportunity afforded by a dissatisfaction with the federal tax structure so profound that even the Administra-

tion has expressed its recognition of the need for radical revision? Shall we resign ourselves to exclusive preoccupation with local and limited reform?

This, we are told, is the only "practical" approach. Perhaps so. But if we are going to be practical, we might as well be completely practical. If we are going to resign ourselves to this, we might as well resign ourselves to the prospect of a Soviet America and the end of Western Civilization. For the only thing which can avert such a nightmare is the doctrine for which we will have been too "practical" to strive.



STRETHEL WALTON "RETIRE" TO ACTIVE DUTY

The Montreal extension, long associated in our memory with Stretzel Walton, has recently installed as its new director, Raymond Perron, a young French Canadian, who had his first view of the Georgist family at the recent conference in Hartford, and has recently visited New York headquarters.

Stretzel Walton, though she will continue to live at her home 4278 Dorchester Street West, Montreal 6, which is also the address of the Henry George School, will still be available for consultation—so we are not losing her nor even saying goodbye. Instead we feel she will enter a new phase of living in which she will find more released energy for the work to which she has been devoted since becoming a director in 1939.

Mr. Perron has been actively associated with the movement three years—first as a student, a volunteer, then as a teacher, and now as director. The fully bilingual Montreal extension is offering, both in English and French, the basic ten-lesson course for \$15, and the longer 28-lesson course for \$25, with a reduction to YMCA members on those courses which are given at YMCA centers.

The alumni group is busy introducing property owners' leagues, chambers of commerce, industrial development commissions, etc. to the advantages that can result from a change to taxing land values and exempting improvements. In this program, in which an excellent beginning was made when members of the group appeared before the Canadian legislature, Miss Walton will remain as a wise and experienced leader.

NO HARD FEELINGS

Is it too late for a Hartford echo? Those who were still reading up to page 12 in the August HGN report may have noticed that we said Joseph Stockman presented a "humorous rebuttal" following Noah Alper's conference presentation. Apparently some readers misunderstood that word, rebuttal, and Joe got wind of it. He wrote at once in his inimitable style to say "we not want others to feel we two is at loggerheads."

Everyone who knows the Chinese sage of Philadelphia—his amusing but kind nonsense, and his humane philosophy—would understand that he could harbor no ill feeling for brother Noah (Ah-no). It would have been more correct to say that this was a confirmation in facetious vein by the director of the Philadelphia extension and curator of the Henry George Birthplace.