

His Influence on Chamberlain

GEORGE HAD AROUSED THE BRITISH SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSCIENCE during the 1880's as no one else had done. Most of those influenced by him seem to have looked upon his proposed single tax as an impractical panacea, but they agreed enthusiastically with his catalogue of social injustices. The program of social reform they themselves fostered, through the growth of trades unions, through the Liberal Party after 1889, and through the growing Labour Party, was "practical," piecemeal reform, heading toward Statism. It was not at all the Georgian free-trade Utopia based wholly on the land tax. In his immediate influence, then, on British social, economic, and political affairs, George was not the architect of the future state, but an inspiration.

But political evolution, to say nothing of the enthusiasm of his English followers, made his influence felt in a more direct way. The Liberal and Labour parties adopted his taxation-of-land-values theory and tried to write it into the law of the land, though neither party openly adopted the principle that the single tax would eventually supersede all other taxes.

The Labour Party, from the beginning, was receptive to his proposal for a tax on land values, because the party's leaders regarded it as a form of land nationalization, an article of Labour Party belief. How the Liberals came to adopt the land tax goes back to the beginning of Joseph Chamberlain's Radical leadership.

When Chamberlain entered Parliament in 1876, he brought with him a reputation as a social reformer and a predilection for revolutionary views which the Whig leaders feared. During his mayoralty in Birmingham (1873-75), he had conceived the revolutionary

principle that "All monopolies which are sustained in any way by the State ought to be in the hands of the representatives of the people, by whom they should be administered, and to whom their profits should go."¹ Chamberlain persuaded the Birmingham city council to take over and operate the municipal gas and water systems, and to engage in a vast slum-clearance and rebuilding operation.

This example in municipal reform shocked urban vested interests throughout England, but even more revolutionary proposals were to follow. Chamberlain determined to apply his local principles on a national scale by introducing them into the Liberal Party program. He announced this intention in two articles in the *Fortnightly Review* for September, 1873, and October, 1874. The first of these, "The Liberal Party and its Leaders," charged that Gladstone and his colleagues were destroying the Liberal Party by refusing to recognize that the social question must dominate British politics in the future. The second article renewed this accusation, drew a shocking picture (in George's style) of the "condition of the people," and, in effect, warned the representatives of big business and industry that they must reform or be reformed.

Chamberlain made his threat bluntly: "If our middle class, and the press which panders to their prejudices, cannot reconcile themselves to the altered situation and devise some better means of settling trades disputes than the rough arbitrament of strikes and lock-outs, they may wake some day to find their terrors realized, and themselves in face of an organization whose numbers will be irresistible and whose settled principles will be hostility to capital and distrust of the middle class."²

Finally, before he entered Parliament, Chamberlain had come out unmistakably for land reform. The times provided him an occasion. In the spring of 1872, Joseph Arch founded his Agricultural Union, an almost wholly spontaneous protest by agricultural laborers against starvation wages and the system of land tenure. Ten days later, Chamberlain dramatized this revolt in a speech in Birmingham, in which the slogan "Free Land" rang out.³ Therefore, when Chamberlain entered national politics, he was thought of, much as George was to be thought of in the next decade, as a formidable critic of vested interests and of landlords.

✓ From 1876 until 1886, when Chamberlain bolted the party over the Home Rule issue, he pushed his aggressive policy so effectively that he became the recognized leader of the Radical faction of the Liberal Party. It was thought that his accession to the leadership

of the party waited only on the bowing out of Gladstone. In 1884, young Lloyd George wrote in his diary, "Mr. Chamberlain is unquestionably the future leader of the people,"⁴ a belief which La-bouchère echoed a year later when he wrote, "Mr. Chamberlain's advent to power may be regarded as certain."⁵

When George came to Great Britain, Chamberlain was the only politician with a national following and reputation who could compete with him in arousing enthusiasm for reform. It was therefore important for the political future of George's land tax that George was able to influence him. Chamberlain was moved by *Progress and Poverty's* "eloquent pictures of the contemporary contrasts . . . between the wealth of the few and the distress of the many."⁶ The book convinced him that the land question might become "the great thing" in British politics.⁷ This conviction accounts for the emphasis in his Radical program on a variety of land-reform devices for creating small holdings, breaking up big estates, for slum clearance, and the taxation of the unearned increment from urban property. As the Radical leader, Chamberlain added land reform to the Radical program and thus prepared the way for the later co-operation between the Radicals and the Georgists on the taxation of land values.

Chamberlain's view that land reform should rank high in the Liberal Party program also advanced the eventual alliance between George and the Radicals by widening the breach between Chamberlain and Gladstone and the Whig Liberals. Emulating George, Chamberlain preached his views on land reform in Glasgow and the Scottish Highlands, where he was received with immense enthusiasm.⁸ In contrast, Gladstone was utterly contemptuous of George's land views; when the Liberals in the House of Commons first moved to tax land values, Gladstone intervened with the remark: "There are persons who view the proposals of Mr. George as proposals of a very enlightened character, and who very much resent the use of hard words respecting them . . . I will say that, as far as my examination or knowledge of his proposals goes, I find it extremely difficult, and indeed for myself, altogether impossible, to exclude them or extricate them, from the category of those plans to which hard words are no doubt commonly applied."⁹

When Gladstone realized that Chamberlain was apparently adopting George's land-reform program, he fought the "heresy" along with Hartington and the Whigs. Chamberlain considered Gladstone's attitude "a slap in the face" to the Radicals,¹⁰ and in

September, 1885, he told John Morley that he would "sit below the gangway" if Gladstone did not accept his views on the compulsory acquisition of land for social purposes.¹¹

Chamberlain, early in the 1880's, entered upon a reform campaign which alienated the more conservative members of his party, but had important results for George's cause. It created, in the popular mind, the belief that Chamberlain and the Radicals had indeed been caught up in George's program, a belief not too far out of line with the facts, for, according to R. H. Gretton, George's theories "coloured the whole of the Radical programme" in 1884.¹² J. L. Garvin, Chamberlain's biographer, admitted that "Scottish Radicalism, especially in Glasgow and its region, was profoundly influenced by Henry George and the Irish agrarian movement."¹³ Garvin also credited Chamberlain with originating the main ideas in the program of the future Labour Party; a host of Socialists say George originated them. Both these claims are true; up to 1886 the influence of both men ran along gradually converging lines. These lines met when the Radicals engaged George to speak from their platform in 1889, and when the National Liberal Federation adopted, in December, 1889, A. C. Fyffe's resolution which declared that "in any reform of the land laws, a just and equitable taxation of land values is an essential condition."¹⁴

Chamberlain's agitation to force the Liberals to adopt his Radical program was crystallized in a series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1885, which appeared in book form as *The Radical Programme*, with an introduction by Chamberlain. The book repudiated George's proposal as too "drastic" and "alarming," and argued: "That the masses have not benefited, as it might be hoped they would, by the extraordinary prosperity of the last half century is true enough; but that the whole of the increase of wealth during this period has gone into the pockets of the land owners is conspicuously false."¹⁵

Specific statements in *The Radical Programme* on land and land taxation contained no grounds for reassurance to right-wing politicians, for they had a socialistic and therefore a Georgian air. The book announced that measures must be put through to bring the land "into the best use for the nation." Heretofore, it charged, the agricultural laborer had been regarded by political economists as a mere machine, "an instrument to be used for the creation of wealth, deposited in the hands of a few; not as a human being whose comfort, health and home are to be considered, and who has a claim to such benefits as were conferred by the Factory Acts

upon the labourers in towns." Measures to improve the welfare of the agricultural laborer might require the taxation of property; such measures would certainly "sound the death-knell of the *laissez-faire* system."¹⁶

Chamberlain also warned the owners of vacant land in towns that the land must bear taxation on its full value, not on its value for agricultural purposes.¹⁷ As for slum clearance, he was prepared to reach into the landowners' pockets to defray the cost. It was to be the Birmingham story on a national scale: ". . . the expense of making towns habitable for the toilers who dwell in them must be thrown on the land which their toil makes valuable, without any effort on the part of its owners."¹⁸

Chamberlain was a man of the hustings as well as a writer, and he knew that an aroused electorate was a more powerful argument than printed political manifestoes. Like George, he therefore carried his crusade directly to the voters; what he said about social conditions and the land made it even more apparent that the new radicalism was conceived in the spirit, if not in the letter, of *Progress and Poverty*.

The Radical leader, like George, contended that poverty was the cause, not the result, of social ills. He told a Hull audience in August, 1885, that "Ignorance, intemperance, immorality, and disease—these things are all interdependent and closely connected and although they are often the cause of poverty, they are still more frequently the consequence of destitution."¹⁹

In all his speeches he aroused the spirit of class consciousness. England, he said, has been called "the paradise of the rich"; and he urged the cheering crowd "no longer to allow it to be the purgatory of the poor."²⁰ He made his own phrase, "death-knell of the *laissez-faire* system," doubly clear by attacks, strikingly like those of George, on orthodox economists and what he called "the convenient cant of selfish wealth."

He attacked the landlord with righteous indignation. His views on the landowning aristocracy had been colored from the beginning by a strong republican bias; now, in defending the land-reform plan of the Radical program, he violently attacked the landowning class. The similarity of his thinking to that of George is remarkable. Before a Birmingham audience in March, 1883, he held up Lord Salisbury as a horrible example of the sins of landlords. This gentleman, he said, "constitutes himself the spokesman of a class—the class to which he himself belongs, who toil not neither do they spin; whose fortunes, as in his case, have originated in grants made

in times gone by for the services which courtiers rendered kings, and have since grown and increased while they have slept by levying an increased share on all that other men have done by toil and labour to add to the general wealth and prosperity of the country." ²¹ This general indictment contains the two points most frequently stressed by George: that large estates had been acquired as gifts and not created by labor, and that landlords were rich because for centuries they had been pocketing socially created wealth.

Chamberlain did not, like George, proscribe all landlords, but only "indolent and inefficient" ones. These "must be taught that their ownership is a trust . . . limited by the supreme necessities of the nation, and they must give place to others who will do full justice to the capabilities of the land." ²² Moreover, landlords could not be trusted to reform themselves. When a Royal Commission, packed with landowners, was sent into Scotland in 1883 to investigate the complaints of the crofters, George compared the procedure to setting a wolf to guard the sheep. Now Chamberlain echoed George's taunt at Hull in August, 1885, when he said that to return landlords to Parliament in the expectation that they would protect the interests of the farmer was like "setting the cat to guard the cream." ²³

Like George, again, he carried his land crusade into the north of Scotland. A survey of the topics he discoursed on reads like a digest of George's speeches: He "dwelt on seizures, clearances, exactions, evictions, deer-forests, and the effect of agrarian depopulation in creating the coagulated poverty in the towns." ²⁴ He told the Highlanders that their landlords practiced "extortion and exaction," referred to a belief in the virtue of private property in land as "this fetish," and deplored the fact that two thirds of the land of Scotland was held by three hundred and thirty proprietors. His speech at Inverness in September, 1885, was full of generalizations which seemed to have been straight out of *Progress and Poverty*, such as: "I have sometimes speculated upon what would have happened in this country if it had been possible to establish private property in air," or, in reference to the original source of titles to large estates, his belief that "theft" should not "be condoned because it escapes detection at the time." ²⁵

Naturally enough, his views on British social conditions, land, and landlords called forth furious attacks from the Conservative opposition group and sadly embarrassed the Liberal Government. But one expression used by him horrified the landlords, and did more than anything else to persuade them that he and George were of the same ilk.

The expression was "ransom," and he used it in a speech at a workmen's demonstration in Birmingham Town Hall in January, 1885. Two revolutionary claims he made in this speech set most of the Liberal and all the Conservative press by the ears, for they were exactly what George had been saying. First, he argued for natural rights, claiming that every Englishman was born into the world "with a right to share in the great inheritance of the community, with a right to a part in the land of his birth." But, he pointed out, the institution of private property had replaced the more communal social organization of the distant past, and he admitted it was virtually impossible to turn back the clock. Then came the devastating question, which opened up all sorts of dreadful prospects to the wealthy: "But then I ask what ransom will property pay for the security which it enjoys?"²⁶

Chamberlain's opponents seldom realized or acknowledged that behind these revolutionary statements was a relatively modest objective. In contrast to the single tax and land nationalization, Chamberlain wanted peasant proprietorship, which would produce "a new race of yeomen."²⁷ Or, as he put it to Balfour after his radical campaign had collapsed and he had left the Liberal Party: "My viewpoint about land has always been to municipalize it—a barbarous word, which, however, expresses my substitute for absurd schemes of land nationalization. I caused my municipality to purchase no less than £1,400,000 worth of land, and that is the system I wish to see extended."²⁸

In his antiaristocratic viewpoint, he exhibited one further striking similarity to George. On the occasion of John Bright's jubilee celebration in Birmingham (June 13, 1883), he made what was considered to be a very antimonarchist reference: "Your demonstration on Monday (cheers) lacked nearly all the elements which constituted the great pageant of the Russian coronation. (Hear, hear.) The pomp and the circumstance were wanting. No public money was expended. (Hear, hear.) No military display (Hear, hear) accompanied Mr. Bright. (Cheers.) The brilliant uniforms, the crowds of high officials, the representatives of Royalty—they were absent (loud laughter and cheers)—and nobody missed them (renewed laughter and cheering)."²⁹

Queen Victoria immediately took offense and informed Gladstone of her displeasure. Lord Salisbury labeled Chamberlain's statement "the Jacobin theory pure and simple," and he was quick to draw the parallel with George: "It is a new, a most sinister, a most terrible feature in our constitutional history. There is no reason so far as difference of opinion is concerned, why the present

Ministry should not receive into its sympathetic bosom Mr. Parnell and Mr. George." ³⁰

In the history of political ideas, what the people *think* a man or a group stands for, is often a more potent influence on the course of events than the sober truth. Conservatives and center and right-wing Liberals all reviled Chamberlain with the same derogatory epithets which were applied to George, accused him of hiring George to propagandize the Radical cause, and tried to convince the people by insinuation and example that the land-reform and social-reform items of the Radical program had been lifted from George's philosophy. Of course the people reacted. The effort to discredit Chamberlain and the Radicals by citing George is a compliment to the author of *Progress and Poverty*: either the Radicals had, in fact, adopted George's views, or George had become so powerful an influence that his name could be used to discredit left-wing reform proposals.

This propaganda of the Conservatives and Whiggish Liberals was thoroughgoing. According to Garvin, Chamberlain was "the most reviled of public men" in England.³¹ He advocated blackmail, confiscation, plunder, Communism. A vote for him was a vote for revolution, charged Salisbury, who declared that England, in 1884, governed as it was by Liberals, was "on an inclined plane leading from the position of Lord Hartington to that of Mr. Chamberlain and so on to the depths over which Mr. George reigns supreme." ³²

For advocating slum improvements at the expense of property owners, Chamberlain was called a State Socialist. So pervasive was popular belief in the socialistic implications of his program that the *Christian Socialist* cited his Birmingham and Ipswich speeches of January, 1885, as "a pretty accurate gauge of the advance which Socialism had made in this country." ³³

The *Times* opined that "Mr. Chamberlain's excerpts from the economic gospel of Henry George have produced no more than a passing excitement," ³⁴ but representative comments culled from the British press, linking George with Chamberlain and the Radicals, tell a different story. Even the statement of Henry George, Jr., that his father's name was coupled with Chamberlain's in 1885 as a result of the latter's speeches in behalf of the Radical program does not give the full truth.

George and Chamberlain figured as a team in the newspapers as early as January, 1884, at the beginning of George's first extended speaking tour of Great Britain. The *Aberdeen Journal*, which attacked George at every opportunity, developed the theory that his

extravagance was frightening even Chamberlain and the Radicals, "who might have been expected to support him most strongly," and "who were so fond of quoting his book." Chamberlain and the Radicals were now holding aloof, thought the *Journal*, because of the ruthlessness of George's doctrines.³⁵ The paper assured its readers that the really dangerous men of reform were not the Bradlaughs and the Georges but the Dilkes and the Chamberlains, educated men who had been taken in by the ideas in *Progress and Poverty*: George was therefore a blessing in disguise; by his extreme criticism he had succeeded in alarming even the Radicals.³⁶ Less than a week later the paper hailed what it considered an about-face by the Radicals, alleging, without due regard for literary accuracy, that "in Mr. George they have raised their Frankenstein, and they are frightened. They see in him the Red Spectre with an intensity of colour greater than that of the French Revolution of 1792."³⁷

The *Weekly Times* reported that the Cobden Club, the citadel of free traders, was shocked by Chamberlain's doubts as to the efficacy of free trade in land, so much so that the Club's stalwart, Thorold Rogers, feared "that the Georgian economics are finding their way into high quarters."³⁸ The *Manchester Courier* presented statistics to prove that the breaking up of large estates would increase rent, commenting ironically, "In all probability facts like these will render the work Messrs. Chamberlain and Henry George have set themselves far more difficult of accomplishment than they appear to imagine."³⁹

The *London Saturday Review* linked George, Chamberlain, and the proposed Franchise Bill, asserting that George "appeals to the same multitude which is about to be invested by Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain with supreme and irresponsible powers."⁴⁰ Chamberlain and George both believed, overoptimistically as it turned out, that the passage of the Franchise Bill would give control of Parliament to the Radicals and clear the way for their reforms.

The apparent harmony between Chamberlain and George even called forth lyrical outbursts, such as "Tit-Bits from Henry George," which appeared in the *Greenock Telegraph* on February 26, 1884:

When Chamberlain gets full command,
Woe to all spoilers of our land;
Then Britain's Isles, in breadth and length,
Free from all cords, strong in their strength,

By leaps and bounds will onward flourish,
 And sturdy sons and daughters nourish;
 Trade will extend from shore to shore,
 The wolf shall vanish from each door;

Sweet peace and comfort on all smile;
 From end to end of our loved isle:
 The lairds from troubling then shall cease,
 And wealth, not poverty, increase.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* sought to demonstrate Chamberlain's debt to George by quoting from speeches by both. On March 28, 1884, the following two passages appeared:

GEORGE

"You talk about plunder," said Mr. George. "Wherever I went I heard of plunder. Plunder the most shameful, most foul, kept up year after year and generation after generation, by the landlords. Plunder! Plunder of tenants; plunder of municipalities; plunder of men of business; plunder in all directions. There was not a place I visited that could not give me instances by the dozens of the most scandalous spoliation on the part of the landlords. They are stealing commons at this moment; stealing them wholesale without regard to the laws or the rights of the people. I hardly visited a town, I repeat, which would not point to a common lands that had been filched from the people by the common thief." "And yet we do not propose," continued Mr. George, with an air of virtuous magnanimity, "we do not propose to demand restitution from these plunderers. We are content if they simply give back that which is not their own, and restore to the nation its national inheritance."

CHAMBERLAIN

"What has happened in consequence of the agricultural labourers not having a voice in this house? They have been robbed of their rights in the commons. They have been robbed of their open spaces. . . It may be said that these proceedings, which I have not characterized in language a whit too strong, have now come to an end. They are going on still. The agricultural labourers are still being robbed. You cannot go into a single country lane in which you will not find that the landowners on each side of the road have already enclosed lands which for centuries belonged to the people, or that they are on the point of enclosing them. There is no protection against the steady absorption continually going on of open spaces which belong to the people, but which are being included in the estates of the land owners. That is not

all. It is not merely with reference to the land that this injurious operation is going on. It is going on also with respect to the endowments of the poor."

The *Gazette* commented: "This emphatic passage will probably clench Mr. George's conviction that, of all men now living, the President of the Board of Trade has the best chance of being the first President of the British Republic." The republic here referred to would follow as a matter of course, the *Gazette* implied, from the Redistribution and Franchise Bills.

Of all the newspapers that linked Chamberlain, George, and the Radicals in 1884, only the *Pall Mall Gazette* saw that Chamberlain and George represented a new current in politics. The social Radicalism of these two men was bound to have its day; it was therefore "perfectly futile for any politician with an eye to the future to ignore him [George] and his disciples."⁴¹

Chamberlain's 1885 campaign for the "unauthorized programme" of the Radicals made it seem more apparent that he was endorsing George's land confiscation program. After Chamberlain uttered the word "ransom," the *Aberdeen Journal* stated that his "communist" speech proved that he had joined the ranks of the land-reform agitators, and that joy now reigned in the "houses of George and Marx." Those men who had been preaching "subversive" land doctrines up and down the country had been adopted by Chamberlain's Radicals and were now "Birmingham Pets."⁴²

When the Scottish Land Restoration League circulated a pamphlet which urged voters to support Radical candidates who endorsed George's land-program, the *Aberdeen Journal* regretted that English Constitutional liberty protected those "rascals" from arrest, and it accused Radicals and land-law reformers of wanting to "bury freedom and the Ten Commandments as decayed idols of a superstitious age."⁴³ Chamberlain's land views had given George cause to exult "in the discovery that he had convinced a cabinet minister that it is worth-while to trim his sails to the Socialist breeze. He stretches out his hand to Mr. Chamberlain as a friend and brother, and invites the public to cry 'All Hail' to this new dual control."⁴⁴

When the *Pall Mall Gazette* printed a long interview with George in which he stated that he was pleased that Chamberlain had come out for a tax of four shillings in the pound on urban land values, it headed the article "Mr. Chamberlain Translated into Plain English."⁴⁵ George merely carried Chamberlain's beliefs on land reform to their logical conclusion, said the *Gazette*.

On at least two occasions in 1885, Chamberlain denied both the pro- and anti-George sympathies he had been accused of. Early in February, Chamberlain was charged with having "secured the services of an American demagogue to aid him in his outrageous attacks on Property and Land." When the London *Daily News* brought this accusation to Chamberlain's attention, his secretary replied: "In reply to your enquiry, Mr. Chamberlain desires me to say that he has no influence with Mr. Henry George, with many of whose opinions he entirely disagrees. One of Mr. Chamberlain's chief objects is the promotion of peasant proprietorships, and this object is utterly inconsistent with Mr. George's proposal for the nationalization of the Land."⁴⁶

Two months later Chamberlain denied anti-George sentiments attributed to him by a Cameron Corbett, the Liberal candidate for Hadeston, Glasgow. According to Corbett, Chamberlain had said that George's theories were wild and his principles dishonest.

On learning of Corbett's statement, J. Shaw Maxwell, one of the Radical candidates who had accepted support of the single taxers, wrote to Chamberlain, demanding that he either confirm or deny the anti-George sentiments attributed to him.

Instead of condemning George's theories, Chamberlain sent Maxwell an equivocal reply: "I have never used the language attributed to me, in reference to Mr. George. It is well known that I think him mistaken, and I don't agree with his conclusions, but I have no reason to doubt his perfect sincerity and honesty of intention."⁴⁷ As Chamberlain well knew, denunciation or repudiation of George in certain Scottish, as well as English, constituencies would have damaged the Radical cause.

These denials were more revealing in what Chamberlain did *not* say. He did *not* denounce the four-shillings-in-the-pound land tax, the proposal for slum clearance and rebuilding at the expense of property owners; he did not disagree with George's analysis of British social conditions, or with the idea that titles to large estates were originally acquired by plunder, or with the belief that rugged individualism and free enterprise were *not* part of the natural order of things in social matters, or with the principle that the masses should benefit from the enormous increase in wealth during the 19th century.

The denials pointed to two conclusions: that the Radical objectives in land and social reforms were virtually identical with George's, and that the Radicals planned to use other methods than the land tax alone to accomplish their objectives. Certainly "spoil-

tion" was as much the key to Chamberlain's program as it was to George's.

How, in the popular mind, George, Chamberlain, and the Radicals were one and indivisible is attested by a versified attack on both Radicals and Georgists. It shows how Conservatives abused their opponents by charging them with all the evils associated with radical political doctrines.

A RADICAL ROUNDELAY

Blow the bridge up; wreck the train!
Cheer CHARLES DILKE and CHAMBERLAIN!
Defly ply the dynamite
In crowded daytime, lonesome night;
Scare the infant, maim the strong,
And chorussing awhile this song
(Which time all Scotland Yard we bilk)
We'll cheer JOE CHAMBERLAIN and DILKE!

And HENRY GEORGE add to these twain
In cheering DILKE and CHAMBERLAIN;
Three Graces, Fates, or Furies—which?
All three'd fling England in the ditch;
All, English Apathy abuse,
Thus keeping fire the timeous fuse
Shall St. Paul's "Decoration" bilk—
So cheer GEORGE, CHAMBERLAIN, and DILKE.

Cheer CHAMBERLAIN and DILKE and GEORGE!
Force industry earned wealth disgorge;
Abolish titles—every one!—
But "Baronet" and—well—"Right Hon."
Throw mud on Royalty, save when
She says, "Arise! Not citizen
Alone, Sir Charles; nor Joseph plain—
Dine with us, DILKE and CHAMBERLAIN."

Cheered on by CHAMBERLAIN and DILKE!
By George!—and others of that ilk—
Dynamite (primest minister)
Shall agitate Westminster,
Upon the week's half-holiday,
And the town shall have a jolly day!
MORRIS shall hymn our latest joke
To please his favorites, "the folk"
And one more piece of paper stain
In praise of me, DILKE, CHAMBERLAIN.⁴⁸

Chamberlain's speeches during his campaign for the Radical program in the 1880's and the way the public reacted to him show that he was influenced by George and that his measures for social and land reform paralleled, if not actually coincided with those of George. George himself came to realize this harmony of belief and by 1885 considered Chamberlain to have joined the ranks of the land taxers in all but a formal sense.

In order to get a clear view of the relationship between Chamberlain and George, it is necessary to recapitulate some of these events from George's viewpoint. At the beginning of their relationship, George acknowledged Chamberlain's talents as a politician, but did not see him yet as a coadjutor. The first meeting between George and Chamberlain occurred at the Reform Club dinner in London, in April, 1882. The aging John Bright was present, and the two Birmingham politicians questioned George closely on conditions in Ireland. Next day George wrote to the *Irish World* that Bright was at the end of his tether, but Chamberlain, was "extremely bright," "unreserved" in conversation, and capable of "going further with the [Irish] land-bill and relieving the rigors of coercion."⁴⁹

1883 A year later, George's estimate of Chamberlain had risen considerably, though he did not yet realize how far Chamberlain had gone in the direction of radical land reform. From America, George wrote to Thomas F. Walker, of Birmingham, that Chamberlain seemed "a very able man, who had carried into politics keen business sense and power of combination, . . . an extremely ambitious man who would go as far toward democracy as was popular, but no farther," and who might become a great leader in British politics, if he did not succumb to the fascinations of the aristocracy.⁵⁰ This estimate underrated Chamberlain who, by this time, was as uncompromising in his attacks on the Peers as George. In the letter to Walker, George also saw in Chamberlain "nothing of the reformer," an opinion which, had it then been made public, would have astonished Gladstone and Hartington.

By February, 1884, however, George showed signs of a warmer appreciation of Chamberlain's co-operation in the cause of reform. George wrote to Walker from Dundee: "We are certainly getting the animals stirred up, and before the Liberals know it will have the Radical rank and file, no matter what may become of their leaders."⁵¹ Gretton and Garvin agree that 1884 was the year when George began to attract a Radical following for his land-restoration policy.

In the letter just cited, George extended a cautious hand to Chamberlain; he was happy that Bright and not Chamberlain had spoken against him, for this might have injured Chamberlain's future usefulness in politics. In April, 1884, George told reporters in the United States that "Chamberlain was the coming man in England, and while he has taken no decided stand on this land question, he has said enough to make me confident that as soon as the people are ready to follow in the reform movement he will be ready to lead."⁵² This statement, that Chamberlain was "the coming man," marked the tentative beginning of George's alliance with the Radicals.

When Chamberlain delivered his "ransom" speech, George was as delighted as Conservatives were horrified. Chamberlain had at last spoken the authentic language of land reform. George told a reporter for the *Pall Mall Gazette* that he came close to wishing he were an Englishman, so that he could remain in England and enjoy the agrarian millenium dawning there. Before returning to America, he assured a cheering crowd in Liverpool that Chamberlain was the man to follow because "he had raised the standard of the natural rights of man."⁵³

Clearly, conditions were ripe in 1885 for an alliance between British Radicals and George. It was believed that the new Franchise Bill would return enough Radicals at the next general election to force the Liberal Party to adopt the Radical program for social reform, land tax and all. This belief was the main reason why Chamberlain, in 1883, had forced the Cabinet to take up a reform of the franchise. The determined resistance of the House of Lords to the Franchise Bill enabled Chamberlain to arouse the working class. Chamberlain and the Radicals expected that, with the electorate doubled, their reform measures could be passed.

George's followers were equally optimistic. From the Birmingham branch of the Land Restoration League came a message calling on the masses to use the franchise to destroy the power of the "interested classes." "Now the masses have a commanding voice in the councils of the nation; now they are better able to read and reason for themselves; now they can advance *any* demands, the importance and justice of which they understand; now they can rely on the respectful attention of Parliamentary candidates. What, then, is the least that can be asked of such candidates? This—that they will pledge themselves to advocate and support a reassessment of the Land Tax at 4s. in the pound."⁵⁴

Just when Chamberlain's Radical program seemed assured of victory at the polls, Gladstone and Parnell intervened with their efforts to obtain Home Rule for Ireland. After the subsequent parliamentary conflict, Chamberlain left the party to form his Liberal-Unionist group, and the Conservatives were back in power. The consequences were serious for the land-reform program. After Chamberlain's defection, the Liberals were out of power for nearly twenty years, except for a three-year interval in the 1890's, and the Radicals were powerless to accomplish the reforms outlined in *The Radical Programme*.

The lost opportunity to implement the Radical program aided the Georgites. With Chamberlain unavailable, the Radicals allied themselves with George; in 1889 they sponsored his appearance on constituency platforms throughout Great Britain. This recognition was a victory for George and his program, for in 1884 and 1885 the Radicals had fought shy of appearing on the same platform with him. George himself described the people who sponsored his lectures in 1889 as "the local notables, the file leaders, the active workers . . . of the Radical wing of the Liberal party . . . Our ideas are in the air; men get them without knowing where they come from; men get them without thinking they are getting them, and men get them who still look upon us as cranks and visionaries."⁵⁵ This last sentence shows how George's doctrines on land ownership permeated the thinking of masses of Englishmen from 1889 onwards and even made it possible in 1909 to base a political campaign on the slogan, "The Land for the People."

The belief that, in 1889, British Radicals adopted George's land-tax plan as one plank in their program does not depend on George's word alone; it is supported by other evidence. Throughout his 1888 and 1889 visits, the Radical London *Star* reported all George's activities and speeches. George also made the two visits to Great Britain at the insistence of William Saunders, a member of the English Land Restoration League, a Radical Member of Parliament, president of the Central London News Agency, and a power in Radical circles.

Other indications of George's growing influence among Radicals were: the cordial reception the Liberal press gave him; his debate with the Liberal Whig, Samuel Smith,⁵⁶ at the National Liberal Club on June 4, 1889; his induction into the National Liberal Club as a temporary member;⁵⁷ and the report, widely circulated, that the Radicals had tried seriously to persuade him to take up residence in England and stand for a Scottish constituency.⁵⁸ The Lib-

eral Club would not have approved of the debate between George and Smith without a belief among many members in George's position on land reform.

An even more impressive sign of Radical esteem were the banquets given for George. The public men who attended them were, in effect, approving his campaign. Among those present at a banquet in his honor on December 1, 1888, were prominent Radical politicians, journalists, and party members.⁵⁹ At another such event on March 16, 1889, by the Radical Club as a send-off to his speaking tour was even more significant. The chairman hailed George as "one of the most powerful forces of the Anglo-Saxon race, for his doctrine was that whatever a human being could create, that human being had a right to enjoy."⁶⁰

Two days later George received the tacit endorsement of another famous Radical when he attended a private dinner in the company of Thorold Rogers, who, five years earlier, had seen cause for alarm in George's influence on Radicalism. In effect, this amity between George and Rogers was to ally the Cobden Club with the program for taxation of land values.

According to the Marxian Socialists, George had become "the favorite of the slave drivers" of Great Britain, meaning, of course, Radical capitalists. George did work hard for them; in virtually every one of his speeches in his 1889 campaign, he had the support of Liberal-Radical groups; the Financial Reform Association, Radical clubs and associations, constituency organizations, especially in workers' districts, and land-reform groups. George became adviser and field general in land-reform strategy.

George's influence on Radical thinking is evidenced in the activities of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values (one of the first organizations to use the Georgian phrase "Taxation of Ground Rents and Values" to define its purpose), which held its first annual meeting December 4, 1889, in London. A unanimous resolution identified the United Committee with George's doctrines. It stated "that no system of taxation can be equitable unless a direct assessment be imposed on the owners of ground rents and on the owners of increased values imparted to lands by building operations or other improvements . . ." ⁶¹ That the president extended a "hearty call" to George to address the meeting was an open acknowledgment of George's prestige.

George's connection with municipal reform in London was also indicative of his influence on the Radicals. On landing at Southampton, in 1889, he was met at the dockside by a delegation from

the London Municipal Reform League.⁶² Formed in 1880, this organization had, by 1888, adopted the "rating of ground rents and values" as a substitute for existing taxes and as a means of paying for civic improvements.⁶³

Passage of the Local Government Act in 1888 had given incentive to municipal reformers. One of the first acts of the new London County Council was to appoint a land-tax commission which recommended the taxation of land values as the soundest and most equitable means of raising money, and consulted George as a tax "authority."⁶⁴

The year 1889 marked an important transition in George's British influence. He was no longer a lone crusader, the apostle of confiscation and plunder, but an honorary member of a political party pledged to introduce land-value tax legislation, if and when the party was returned to power.

George's influence on Chamberlain brought about the political implementation of the taxation of land values. Before he left the Liberal Party, Chamberlain convinced the Radicals that they occupied common ground with George on land reform. Chamberlain and George agreed on the theory of unearned increment and the proposal to impose a land-values tax of four shillings in the pound. It was inevitable that, when Chamberlain bowed out, George should become the Radical philosopher.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

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3. *Ibid.*, I, p. 149.
4. *Ibid.*, II, p. 124.
5. *Truth*, October 1, 1885.
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7. *Ibid.*, I, p. 386.
8. *Ibid.*, II, p. 95.
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18. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
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20. H. H. Asquith, *Fifty Years of Parliament*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1926, I, p. 93.
21. Garvin, *op. cit.*, I, p. 392.
22. *Ibid.*, I, p. 396.
23. *Ibid.*, II, p. 61.
24. *Ibid.*, II, p. 68.
25. *Ibid.*, II, p. 69.
26. *Ibid.*, I, p. 549.
27. *Ibid.*, II, p. 79.
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29. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 394–95.
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32. *Ibid.*, I, p. 462.
33. *Christian Socialist*, February, 1885.
34. *London Times*, January 10, 1885.
35. *Aberdeen Journal*, January 18, 1885.
36. *Aberdeen Journal*, February 8, 1884.
37. *Aberdeen Journal*, February 13, 1884.
38. *Weekly Times*, February 1, 1884.
39. *Manchester Courier*, February 9, 1884.
40. *London Saturday Review*, April 25, 1884.
41. *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 20, 1884.
42. *Aberdeen Journal*, January 10, 1885.
43. *Aberdeen Journal*, January 23, 1885.
44. *Aberdeen Journal*, January 15, 1885.
45. *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 14, 1885.
46. *London Daily News*, February 7, 1885.
47. *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 13, 1885.
48. *Judy*, February 11, 1885.
49. Henry George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*. New York: The Schalkenbach Foundation, 1943, p. 371.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 414.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 431.
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55. George, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 516.
56. *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 28, 1889.
57. *London Star*, June 20, 1889.
58. *London Star*, June 24, 1889.
59. *London Star*, December 3, 1888. See also the *Pall Mall Gazette* for the same date.
60. *London Daily News*, March 18, 1889. See also the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *London Times*, and the *London Star* for the same date.
61. *London Star*, December 5, 1888. The name of Hobhouse's organization was later adopted as that of the British single-tax organization.

62. London *Daily News*, March 11, 1889.

63. London Municipal Reform League, *Seventh Annual Report*, March 6, 1888.

64. London *Daily News*, June 21, 1889; London *Star*, June 24, 1889.