

Henry George's Lecture Tour of Australia in 1890

by

John Pullen

Abstract

Standard biographies of Henry George give brief accounts of his lecture tour of Australia in 1890, based mainly on the reports he sent back from Australia for publication in his New York newspaper, *The Standard*. This study supplements previous accounts with further details of the 49 lectures and 7 Sunday sermons he gave in 38 towns and cities during his 98-day stay in Australia, based on contemporary Australian newspaper reports. With an obvious proviso about the accuracy of the reporting, the Australian lectures are a valuable source of additional information on George and his policies.

Henry George's Lecture Tour of Australia in 1890:

by

John Pullen*

An account of Henry George's lecture tour of Australia in 1890 was given in the five letters he sent from Australia for publication in his newspaper, *The Standard*, in New York. *The Standard* also published extracts from reports of the tour in Australian newspapers that had been sent from Australia. Standard biographies of George also refer, although all too briefly, to the events of the tour. George's pocket diary of 1890, now held in the Henry George Archive at New York Public Library, contains brief notes on the places he visited, and on some of the people he met. A previous study of the tour has been made by Margery Jackman (1977a, 1977b).

The aim of this paper is to supplement the above sources with details available in the reports, many in great detail, of George's lectures in contemporary Australian newspapers.¹

The paper is in three sections. Section I is a brief day resumé of the itinerary. Section II contains some general observations on the events of the tour. Section III is a commentary on selected themes of the reported speeches, and on some of the principal questions and criticisms from the audiences, to see whether they throw any new light on George's policies.

* School of Economics, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia 2350. Email: jpullen@metz.une.edu.au.

This study has received generous financial support from the Walsh Bequest, Macquarie University. Administrative support from Sean Turnell, convenor of the Walsh Bequest Committee, has also been very helpful. Additional financial support has been provided by the Henry George Foundation of Australia. I am particularly indebted to Alan Dunstan for assistance in obtaining copies of newspaper reports and for invaluable background information on many aspects of Henry George's tour; and to Richard Giles, Secretary, Association for Good Government, for advice and support. The following have contributed ideas and suggestions, but are not to be blamed for any errors and omissions: Geoff Foster, Syd Gilchrist, Betsy Harris, Graydon Henning, Bryan Kavanagh, Bill Pitt, David Smiley, David Spain and Kenneth Wenzel.

¹ Previous accounts of the tour have been published by Jackman 1997a, 1997b, and Treadgold and Pullen 1995.

I The Itinerary: A Brief Resumé

George and his wife arrived by ship in Sydney on March 6, 1890, having departed from San Francisco on February 8. They were met by a cheering crowd at Circular Quay, who marched in procession, with a brass band, and the Georges in “a drag”, to the Town Hall, where the Lord Mayor made an official speech of welcome, and George responded. That evening they attended a banquet in his honour at the Town Hall. Processions, formal welcomes, and banquets were to become frequent features of his tour.

His first formal lecture in Australia was delivered at the Protestant Hall in Sydney on Saturday evening, March 8, on the topic “The Land for the People”. He spoke for two hours, without notes, and at the end “received a recognition that was magnificent in its spontaneity and heartiness” (*Echo*, March 8). It was the first of six public lectures he was to deliver in Sydney. The following day, Sunday, March 9, he preached in the Pitt Street Congregational Church on the theme “Thy Kingdom Come” – the first of seven Sunday sermons given in Australia in Protestant churches. Three more public lectures followed in Sydney on successive days – Monday to Wednesday, March 10, 11, 12 – on the themes “The Single Tax”, “Labour and Tariffs”, and “The Unemployed”.

From Thursday, March 13, to Tuesday, March 18, the Georges made a tour of five country towns to the west and north of Sydney, with lectures at Lithgow (March 13), Orange (March 14), Bathurst (March 15), and with a sermon on Sunday, March 16, at the Bathurst School of Arts (the Congregational Church being too small for the expected congregation). Returning to Sydney on Monday, March 17, they proceeded north to Newcastle, where George lectured that evening, followed by a lecture on “The Single Tax” at Maitland on March 18, returning to Sydney by the midnight train. He had thus given public lectures on ten of the thirteen days (6-18 March) since his arrival, and spoken publicly (replies to addresses of welcome or a sermon) on the other days. His first day of rest was March 19, spent writing a report of his visit so far for his New York newspaper, *The Standard*.

On Thursday, March 20, George set out with his wife by train for Melbourne, stopping and lecturing at four inland towns² en route – Goulburn (March 20), Cootamundra (March 21), Wagga Wagga (March 22), and Albury (March 24).³ On Tuesday, March 25, they travelled on to Melbourne where George gave three lectures (March 25, 26, 27) sponsored by the Land Nationalization Society of Victoria. His protectionist views were not as well received in Victoria as in the other states. In his second report to *The Standard*, he wrote

In Victoria my reception was not as warm as in New South Wales, for there protection has been worshipped as ardently and has reigned in public opinion and expression as unquestioned as ever in Pennsylvania (*The Standard*, Vol. II, No. 21, p.2).

On Saturday, 29 March, he lectured in Bendigo,⁴ north-west of Melbourne, and preached on the Sunday at the Congregational Church. Then followed further lectures in the western districts of Victoria – at Echuca (April 1), Ballarat (April 3), and Geelong (April 5) – returning to Melbourne on Easter Monday, April 7, to engage in a public debate with William Trenwith, a leading advocate of protectionism.

On Tuesday, April 8, they returned to Sydney, giving an interview on the way in Albury. The next four days involved a lecture tour of five inland towns of New South Wales⁵ - Blayney (April 10), Carcoar (April 11), Cowra (April 11), Grenfell (April 12) and Forbes (April 14). They left Forbes at 6 a.m. on April 15 to return to Sydney, travelling all day by coach and all night by train.

The following day, Wednesday, April 16, was spent composing a second report for *The Standard*. On Thursday evening, April 17, he and his wife set out for South Australia via Melbourne, arriving in Adelaide in the morning of Saturday, April 19. They were met, as usual, at the train station by a deputation of supporters, and on this occasion by the American consul. Despite the long journey, George took the

² A fifth town, Picton, is mentioned in his diary but no record of a lecture at Picton has so far been traced.

³ Sunday, March 23, was spent travelling.

⁴ Then known as Sandhurst.

⁵ On this four-day tour, his wife remained in Sydney, “as the journey, at the rate we were to push through it, would be too hard for her” (*Standard*, May 21).

opportunity of an election day in South Australia to tour the polling places and see an Australian election in progress. He was very impressed with the Australian system of secret ballots, and particularly noted the relative absence of accusations of corruption. The people of Australia, he said, “seem to thoroughly believe in the purity of their government and public men” (*Standard*, June 11). That afternoon they were given a formal welcome and a “beautifully illuminated address” to which George made a lengthy speech in reply.

Sunday, April 20, appears to have been a day of rest. No record has been located of any sermon, or other activity. His first lecture in Adelaide occurred on Monday evening, April 21, at the Adelaide Town Hall, on “The Land for the People”. Those in attendance included the Premier of South Australia, the Chief Justice, and the Commissioner of Crown Lands.

There was a “rest” day on Tuesday, April 22, during which he wrote a third report for the *Standard* and had dinner with the Premier. He gave his second Adelaide lecture on Wednesday, April 23, again in the Town Hall.

This was followed by a series of lectures in country towns of South Australia. On Thursday, April 24, he lectured at Moonta and on Friday, April 25, at Gawler. He returned to Adelaide on Saturday, April 26, gave a sermon on “Moses” at the Flinders Street Baptist Church – “crowded to its utmost capacity” (*Adelaide Advertiser*, April 28); lectured at Port Adelaide on Monday, April 28 on “Labour and Tariffs”; and travelled the next day from Adelaide to Terowie where he stayed overnight before moving on to lecture at Port Pirie on Wednesday, April 30, and at Kapunda on Thursday, May 1. (A lecture at Burra had also been scheduled, but was cancelled owing to lack of time. A proposed lecture at Broken Hill also had to be cancelled). On Friday, May 2, he returned from Kapunda to Adelaide, and left Adelaide to return to Sydney, via Melbourne.

They spent the night of Saturday, May 3, at Albury, and George preached in the Albury Congregational Church on the theme “Thy Kingdom Come” on Sunday morning, May 4, before departing for Sydney in the afternoon, arriving there on Monday morning, May 5. No further details of May 5 have been found; it was presumably a hard-earned day of rest and recuperation.

But the rest and recuperation did not last long. A fifth Sydney lecture was given on Tuesday, May 6, in the Protestant Hall. On Wednesday, May 7, he went to

the New South Wales Parliament, and listened to a speech by the Premier, Sir Henry Parkes.

On Thursday, May 8, they set out for Brisbane, a journey of about 36 hours, arriving there on the afternoon of Saturday, May 10. A procession of several hundred people, headed by the Georges in an open carriage, moved from the train station to the city, where they were greeted by the mayor, and an address of welcome was read. At 8 p.m. he gave a lecture entitled "The Problem of the Age" at the Opera House with the mayor presiding. The meeting began and concluded with "loud and prolonged cheering" from the enthusiastic audience.

On Sunday morning, May 11, he preached on "Moses, the Lawgiver"; on Monday, May 12, he gave his second Brisbane lecture at the Opera House; and on Tuesday, May 13, they boarded a ship for Rockhampton, arriving there on Thursday, May 15. He lectured at the Theatre Royal in Rockhampton that evening, with the mayor presiding. About 300 people were present, and he was "very heartily received". His portrait had been hung in shop windows in the preceding days. Roars of approval from the audience greeted his comment: "What earthly benefit is the landowner, who is simply a landowner and no more ... He is more destructive than the rabbit or the kangaroo. He merely eats and gives nothing in return" (*Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, May 16).

The next day (Friday, May 16) they travelled south by ship to Maryborough, arriving on Saturday, May 17. The ship could not cross a sandbank at the entrance of the river (Maryborough being some miles inland from the coast), and it was necessary to transfer the George party to a smaller vessel, rather than wait for a rising tide, in order to arrive in time for his lecture that evening. The lecture took place at the Town Hall, with the mayor presiding. There were many empty seats but he received "great applause" (*Maryborough Chronicle*, May 19).

On Sunday, May 18, he preached a "splendid sermon" at the Presbyterian Church. In the evening they were guests of the mayor.

The next day, Monday, May 19, George travelled by train to Gympie, received the customary address of welcome, lunched at the mayor's home, and lectured in the evening at the Olympic Hall, which was "fairly well filled though not crowded". He was listened to "with rapt attention", although at one point a member of the audience who kept interrupting "with annoying objections" was "ultimately persuaded by an address of the Lord to leave" (*Gympie Times*, May 20).

He returned to Maryborough on Tuesday, March 20, where he agreed with some reluctance to present medals and speak at the grammar schools: “I had never made a speech to school children before, but there was no getting out of it” (*Standard*, July 16). After lunch with the mayor, he gave his second public lecture in Maryborough.

A shipping delay necessitated a day’s wait in Maryborough on Wednesday, May 21 – no doubt, a welcome respite. They boarded a ship on Thursday, May 22, to return to Brisbane, arriving on the morning of Friday, May 23, in time for George to give his third and final Brisbane lecture in the evening.

On Saturday, May 24, he had his photo taken, called on the governor of Queensland (Sir Samuel Griffith), and lectured in the evening in the Town Hall at Ipswich. On Sunday morning, May 25, he delivered at the Wickham Street Presbyterian Church an address entitled “Our Father Which Art in Heaven”, in which he pursued the theme that all of mankind have equal rights to the land and “all the material things of God’s creation”. In the evening they left Brisbane by train to return to Sydney, this time breaking the journey to lecture at country towns in northern New South Wales. The first stop was at Armidale, where they arrived on Monday, May 26. It was a holiday for the Queen’s Birthday, and practically the whole town had gone to the races, so that those gathered to welcome the Georges at the train station were not numerous. George remarked: “The Australians seem to be the most holiday-loving people who speak the English tongue ... But despite the birthday and the races and the football, we had a fine meeting in the evening”.

The next day, Tuesday, May 27, they were driven to Hillgrove – a mining town north-east of Armidale – and lectured there in the evening. The reception at Hillgrove must have been one of the most memorable of his Australian tour:

On the outskirts of the town we were met by a brass band and escorted to the hotel, passing, to the tune of “Yankee Doodle,” under a handsome arch thrown across the main street, and which, garlanded with evergreens and flowers, and ornamented with the flags of all nations – among which the American flag held a conspicuous place – bore the inscription in letters of red on a ground of white:

“Hillgrove welcomes Henry George, the world’s champion of labor and freedom” (*Standard*, July 16).

On Wednesday, May 28, they were driven back to Armidale, and caught the train for Tamworth, where George lectured that night at the Olympic Hall. He noted that the Tamworth meeting was the only one so far in his tour that had been held under the auspices of a free trade association.

They left Tamworth on Thursday, May 29, and arrived back in Sydney on Friday, May 30. On Saturday, May 31, they were taken on an excursion on Sydney harbour, in company with local dignitaries, in the private vessel of the mayor, and in the evening George gave his sixth and final Sydney lecture at the Protestant Hall.

They spent Sunday, June 1, packing and on Monday, June 2, attended a farewell dinner where they were honoured with speeches, toasts and gifts.

On Tuesday, June 3, they took the train for Melbourne, stopping briefly and being interviewed in Albury, and arriving in Melbourne on Wednesday, June 4. George attended the Victorian Parliament on Thursday, June 5, and gave his farewell Melbourne lecture on Friday, June 6. They boarded the S.S. Valetta in Melbourne on Saturday, June 7, and sailed to Adelaide, where they arrived in the morning of Monday, June 9. That evening they were guests at a special banquet, attended by the American consul and leading South Australian politicians.

George gave his final lecture in Australia in Adelaide on Tuesday, June 10. They left Australia for London on the Valetta on Wednesday, June 11. They disembarked at Brindisi and travelled on to London, visiting Naples, Pompeii, Venice, Rome and Paris.

II Some General Observations on George and the Australian Lecture Tour

A feat of endurance

The most obvious comment to be made on George's 1890 lecture tour of Australia, one that would have to be admitted by foes as well as friends, is that it was a remarkable feat of physical and mental endurance. During his 98 days in Australia, he gave 48 formal lectures, 7 Sunday sermons, numerous responses to addresses of welcome and farewell, and numerous interviews with reporters.⁶ In doing so, he

⁶ The days on which there are no public engagements were often spent in writing reports of his activities for *The Standard*. There appear to have been only two of the 98 days that were completely free of speaking, travelling, and writing duties.

visited four states (or colonies, as they then were) – New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria – spoke in 38 different cities and towns, and travelled by train, ship and coach within Australia over 7000 miles, or about as far as from Sydney to Delhi, or nearly as far as he travelled from San Francisco to Sydney. Many of his train trips were overnight,⁷ some in mail trains involving frequent stops, at a time when train travel, though improving,⁸ must have been quite tiring.

The manner of his lecturing would have contributed to the strain. He always spoke without notes. And although the lectures all dealt with either one or both of only two main themes (land-value tax and free trade), and although the *titles* of the lectures were frequently repeated,⁹ the *contents* of the lectures (even those bearing the same title) were generally quite different, often incorporating references to local circumstances and problems familiar to the particular audience.

The contemporary reports did not always note the duration of the lectures, but when the duration was noted, it was usually two hours or longer and included responses to questions from the audience. When the sizes of the audiences were reported, they ranged from a few hundred to about two thousand. Larger audiences would obviously be more likely to occur in the larger cities and towns. There were several instances, however, where attendances were reported to have been surprisingly and unexpectedly small. These included Geelong, where there was a “very small” audience – but that was thought to be due, at least to some extent, to incorrect information in a local newspaper. At Port Adelaide and Gawler in South Australia, the attendance being moderate and scattered throughout the hall, he invited all to come to the front. As one commentator said (*Bunyip*, May 8, 1890), there would

⁷ As noted above, when returning from Forbes to Sydney on April 15 and April 16, he travelled all day by coach and all night by train.

⁸ A visitor to Australia in 1888 found that the sleeping accommodation on the Melbourne to Adelaide route was the most comfortable he had ever experienced in railway travel (Henning 1980, p.25).

⁹ Only eight different lecture titles have been identified – viz. The Land for the People (also, The Land and Its People); Labour and Tariffs (also, Labour and the Tariff); The Unemployed; The Problem of the Age; The Single Tax (also, Single Tax on Land Values); The Fallacy of Protection (also, The Fallacies of Protection, or Protection a Fallacy); The World-Wide Struggle; and Labour and Capital. The newspaper reports often omitted to give the formal title.

doubtless have been a larger audience if admission had been free. Although his oratory was adequate to the task, the strain of maintaining the attention of the larger audiences for two hours must have been considerable.

The Australian lectures appear to have been conducted in an orderly fashion. Interruptions from the audience were generally favourable to the speaker – cheers, shouts of “Hear, hear”, and supporting laughter. On one occasion in Sydney, a member of the audience insisted on speaking after the meeting had been formally closed, arguing that he had not been able to make himself heard during question time. On another occasion in Sydney, the chairman had to urge the audience to distinguish between asking a question and making a speech. And in Gympie, as noted above, an interjector had to be removed by the police. But otherwise the meetings appear to have been quite orderly.

The travel and speaking arrangements for his Australian tour do not appear to have been designed for his comfort and convenience. They involved an incredible amount of unnecessary journeys, requiring that he retrace the same routes several times. He arrived at and departed from Sydney no fewer than eight times; and was at Brisbane twice, Melbourne three times, and Adelaide twice. It would have been far simpler if, after an initial reception and/or lecture in Sydney, he could have sailed to his northernmost point (Rockhampton) and then travelled south in one arc through Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, departing from Adelaide for Europe. He himself complained about the unnecessary and tiresome criss-crossing and back-tracking, and also about the amount of time and effort involved in visiting small country towns, when in the limited time available he could have reached a wider audience by more lectures in the larger towns and cities. His schedule of lectures appears not to have been arranged fully in advance, but to have been adjusted as the tour progressed with some lectures being added (notably, the debate with William Trenwith) and some being cancelled.

Were it not for engagements in England and America, his Australian tour would probably have been even longer. His New South Wales sponsors wanted him to undertake a further tour of the northern part of the colony. He had to cancel a lecture scheduled for Burra in South Australia, to forgo a visit to Broken Hill, and to turn down a strong invitation to tour Tasmania. He also had to decline an invitation to lecture to New Zealand, where he had met the governor, Sir George Grey, on the

He appears to have survived the Australian ordeal remarkably well. Of the newspaper reports investigated, only two refer to any ill-effects. At Port Pirie on April 30 he was “very much indisposed” (*Port Pirie Advertiser*, April 29, 1890) and at Kapunda on May 1 he suffered from “a severe cold, which interfered very much with his speaking” (*Kapunda Herald*, May 6, 1890). The sea voyage from Australia and the days spent touring Italy and France might have afforded rest and recuperation, but the strain of the Australian tour could well have contributed to the mild stroke, resulting in temporary aphasia, suffered later that year.

Oratory and rhetoric

The contemporary newspapers, even those opposed to George’s policies, almost entirely agreed in paying tribute to his remarkable oratory and formidable rhetorical skills. The *Adelaide Advertiser*, for example, was not at all sympathetic to George’s ideas – “We doubt whether his visit here will leave behind it any deep impression” (April 24, 1890) – but was unstinting in its praise of his eloquence, declaring that his lecture in Adelaide on April 21 was “one of the most brilliant displays of platform eloquence to which a South Australian audience was ever treated” (*Adelaide Advertiser*, April 24, 1890).

In the public debate with William Trenwith in Melbourne on April 7, George was said to have spoken “with an eloquence that is rarely heard in these platform discussions. Scornful and appealing by turns, his declamation held even the people who might not follow his arguments”. His rhetorical and debating skills were altogether too much for Trenwith, who at one stage began “to fume”, and accused George of unfairness, of perverting his words, and of the “tricks of the platform” (*Australasian*, April 12, 1890).

George ably exploited an ability to summarise his arguments in short, dramatic statements that raised cheers and shouts of approval from his audiences. In Maitland he said: “What did protective duties protect [the workers] from? It protected them from what they wanted” (*Maitland Mercury*, March 20, 1890); in Melbourne: “labour never wanted anybody’s protection. What labour wanted ... was justice” (*Argus*, March 27, 1890); in Gawler: “if a man who did not work got an income, then people who did work, did not get all they earned” (*Bunyip*, May 2, 1890); and in Adelaide: “The landowner [is] a perfectly useless animal” (*Adelaide Observer*, May 3, 1890).

However, one aspect of his delivery that did not appeal to reporters was his American accent. Some complimented him on having only a slight American accent; others were less forgiving, saying that if he wished to address “English-speaking” audiences, he should at least learn to speak with a proper English accent.

A feature of his lectures, frequently acknowledged by the newspapers, was his humour and wit, with the protectionists as the most common target. He made fun of the Victorians who staunchly advocate protectionism, but go to Sydney to shop, and return to Victoria with as many new clothes as they can, sometimes wearing two suits to avoid customs duties (*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 11, 1890). He mocked a system in which customs duties were levied on the lunches of children who crossed the Murray river separating Echuca in Victoria from Moama in New South Wales for a Sunday School picnic. He called the customs officers on the Murray, “licensed highwaymen” (*Riverine Herald*, April 2, 1890). He “caused merriment” when he noted that Victorians put an export *duty* on scrap iron and an export *bounty* on butter and concluded that therefore Victorians must like scrap iron better than butter (*Bendigo Advertiser*, April 1, 1890). Laughter also greeted his comment, replying to an argument for protection for infant industries, that infant industries grow old and “rickety”, and that “the older they grew, the more they wanted the bottle” (*Albury Border Post*, March 25, 1890). When a protectionist objector argued that after protection was introduced in Victoria the area of land under cultivation had doubled, George amused his audience by replying that the amount of rain had also doubled (*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 12, 1890).

A favourite literary technique of his published works, and one that was used most effectively in his Australian lectures, was the homely and humorous metaphor, applied particularly to support the principle of equal rights to land, and to reject priority of occupation as a justification for exclusive private property in land. The metaphors included

- the dinner party, where the first to arrive occupies more than one chair and claims more than one dinner, either consuming the food intended for others or selling it to them;
- the compartment of a railway carriage, where the first to enter occupies all the seats;
- the oasis in the desert, where thirsty travellers are easily exploited;

- the cabbage farm and the pot of gold, where subdivision is the pot of gold;
- the manna in the desert, where the Israelites would have had to buy for the manna if the desert had been private property;¹⁰
- property rights in heaven.¹¹

In his publications and lectures, George showed that he was a skilled practitioner of the art of Metaphorical Economics. He would have envied the coiners and users of our modern anti-protectionist metaphors such as “the level playing field” and “picking winners”. He was aware that the metaphor is the message, and lingers on when the formal arguments are long forgotten or refuted.

George’s lecturing style could fairly be described as forthright. The audiences were left in doubt about his double message of the single tax and free trade. His lectures were not academic seminars where the advantages and disadvantages were laid out and the listeners left to decide. The opposing views of protection and unlimited untaxed land ownership were mentioned, but only to be dismissed, usually with scorn, derision and sharp wit.

George did not seek to avoid criticism or to circumvent opposition by adapting his lecture material to the expected views of each audience. For example, in strongly-protectionist Victoria he did not choose to emphasise his land tax argument in preference to his anti-protectionist argument, but on the contrary accepted the challenge of a public debate with a leading protectionist. And although he expressed admiration for some Australian institutions – notably, the secret ballot and Torrens Title – he was not loathe to express his disapproval of others. For example, in Adelaide on April 26 he was quoted as saying:

in the colonies [of Australia] I have been through, the curse of land monopoly and land speculation is over everything. I don’t know of any new country where more striking instances of the absurdity and injustice of our present treatment of land is to be seen (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890).

¹⁰ “Though God were to rain wealth from heaven or cause it to burst up from the earth, to whom would the wealth belong? Nay, if the land had been property when the Israelites were in the desert, to whom would the manna have belonged?” (*Bunyip*, May 2, 1890).

¹¹ “if the first people [to enter heaven] were to parcel out heaven as men parcelled out this world, would there not be poverty in heaven itself?” (*Bunvip*, May 2, 1890).

His forthrightness was also evident in that he was even prepared to criticise publicly some of the ideas of his supporters. In Adelaide, for example, he disagreed with a proposal made by the South Australian Single Tax League to exempt from land-value tax any sums previously paid to the state to acquire land. He also disagreed with a proposal of the supportive *South Australian Register* to tax only the *increases* in land value – as J.S. Mill had proposed. And although he praised the South Australian Premier for introducing a tax on the unimproved value of land, he publicly criticised the Premier’s proposal to charge a higher rate of tax on larger properties (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890). His blunt and forthright manner was also evident in Wagga Wagga on March 22 when he commenced his lecture with some very disparaging remarks about the British monarchy, remarks that must have offended some of his audience. They were not a response to a specific question, nor in any way essential to the argument he was about to develop:

Mr. GEORGE, on coming forward, was received with great applause. He said in the dining-room or the drawing-room of the hotel in which he was staying in their town there was on the mantelpiece a figure of Queen Elizabeth in a fearful and wonderful dress, an utterly absurd dress. He had not the highest opinion of Queen Elizabeth, but she was a good deal better than the man who succeeded her, and the man who succeeded him. They were all a bad lot (*Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, March 25, 1890).

Similar anti-monarchist tendencies were implied in the following exchange in his third Sydney lecture of March 11:

Q. Is it not an historical fact that no country has ever become great as a manufacturing country except under the influence of protection?

A. Is it not also true that no country arrived at its greatest as a manufacturing country unless it had monarchy and an established church? (Loud cheers) (*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 12, 1890).

– implying that neither monarchy nor an established church nor protection is in any way conducive to manufacturing greatness.

George and the churches

Another interesting feature of George's Australian tour was its connection with non-conformist Protestant churches. His seven sermons were preached in Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist churches. Two of his six Sydney lectures were delivered in the Protestant Hall in Pitt Street. In a number of his public lectures, non-conformist ministers either chaired the meetings, or were present on the platform, or moved the vote of thanks,¹² and on one occasion, a public meeting began and ended with a prayer from the ministerial chairman. George is known to have been deeply religious, and it is not surprising therefore that in his lectures, and of course in his sermons, he frequently alluded to religious themes.

It is interesting to speculate on the reason for the absence of a similar connection during the Australian tour with the Catholic and Anglican churches. He does not appear to have had any sectarian bias against Catholics and Anglicans. His wife was a Catholic; his wife's sister was a Catholic nun; he and his wife appear to have had a close and warm friendship with a Catholic priest in Ireland. He frequently cited with approval the views of Bishop Nulty, Catholic bishop of Meath in Ireland, and for a time he was strongly supported in America by Father McGlynn. His disagreement with the Pope did not occur until 1891 (*The Condition of Labour. An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*).

The fact that Catholic and Anglican churches, unlike the non-conformist churches, did not have the tradition or custom of lay preachers could explain why his sermons were given only in the latter, but it does not explain why representatives of the former did not offer public support in other ways.¹³

¹² At Albury, three ministers of religion were present on the platform, one of whom (from the Congregational Church) moved the vote of thanks.

¹³ An exception occurred at Wagga Wagga on March 22, where Archdeacon Pownall was amongst those present on the platform.

Migration policy

The issue of Chinese migration and Chinese imports was being vigorously debated in Australia in 1890, because of the fear that Chinese migrants and the import of cheaper goods from lower-wage countries like China might aggravate the serious unemployment situation. George addressed the question in some of his lectures and in replies to questions from audiences. In keeping with his free-trade and anti-protection policy, he did not oppose the importation of Chinese products; but he opposed Chinese immigration on sociological grounds – views that could be interpreted as racial discrimination, and be an embarrassment to his disciples today.

Asked in Goulburn on March 20 whether he would keep out the Chinese, he is reported to have replied: “If it were my country I would keep them out. In our present state I would exclude any race out of harmony with our conditions” (*Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, March 22, 1890). And in Cootamundra on March 21, asked how did he reconcile his views on the universal brotherhood of mankind with the exclusion of the Chinese, he replied that the Chinese “were not assimilable and would not mix readily with our people”, adding that he would also exclude the French, the Germans, or people from any other country if they formed colonies of their own and retained their own language and traditions (*Cootamundra Herald*, March 26, 1890). A similar view was expressed in Melbourne on March 26: “I would not allow the Chinese to come here, for one good reason. They do not assimilate, and consequently would be a source of danger and weakness” (*Argus*, March 27, 1890). This sociological argument was supported by an economic argument: “When labour is forced into cut-throat competition with labourers used to a lower standard of comfort, it may tend to hasten the decline of wages” (*Argus*, March 27, 1890); but he did not appear to see any contradiction between that argument and his argument that the unrestricted import of goods from low-wage countries would *not* adversely affect wages and employment in the importing country.

III A Commentary on the Lectures

Compensation

A major objection to the introduction of a land-value tax – an objection frequently raised in question time following his lectures – was that of compensation for existing owners who might have purchased land at a price which reflects its expected future

value, and which would be either reduced or entirely wiped out by a land-value tax. In his published works he resolutely refused to countenance compensation in such cases, and in general he held to this view in his Australian lectures. For example, in his first lecture in Adelaide, on April 21, he was reported to have said:

if they took away land values they took away nothing which a man had had in the past, but merely took away what he might have in the future. They were not confiscating; they were stopping confiscation. (Cheers.) He was sure they in South Australia would consider compensation in such cases preposterous. (Cheers and “Oh.”) The request for compensation was that if their privilege was taken away in the form of rent it should be given back in the form of interest. (Laughter.) The thing only had to be looked at to appear preposterous. (Cheers.) The compensation, if any, ought to be made to those that had suffered – (loud cheers) – to those whom the cursed system had overweighed – those whose frames it had distorted, and those whose mind it had darkened, not those who had profited by it (Cheers.) (*Adelaide Advertiser*, April 22, 1890).

In reply to those who said that the introduction of a land-value tax without compensation is confiscation, he argued that the existing system which allows landowners to absorb the increases in land value without taxation is confiscation:

Take a mere landowner who is deriving an income from land – he produces nothing. When by mere ownership he gets the proceeds of labor, is not that confiscation of labor? (*Bunyip*, May 2, 1890)

An additional argument used to support his stand against compensation was that his reform was only a taxation measure, and it had never been the practice to compensate people for any disadvantages suffered by taxation changes. South Australia had just introduced a land tax of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the £ without paying compensation.

But the compensation issue seems to have caused him some concern. He admitted that he himself had at first proposed an exemption of 1000 dollars. The objection might have been at least partially satisfied if he had followed J.S. Mill in applying the tax only to *increments* in land value after a base date nominated in the legislation. But this was another issue that threatened the simplicity and integrity of the single-tax solution

The compensation issue, and other administrative and technical details of a land-value tax, appear to have bothered and annoyed George. He asked his Adelaide audience on April 21 “not to fiddle with little questions, but to say to themselves, ‘is this just or right’”. Failure to resolve “little questions” has been a major reason for the failure of later attempts to impose land-value taxes or betterment taxes, such as the U.K. Land Commission Act, 1967, or the N.S.W. Land Development Contribution Act, 1970.

Political decentralisation

The Australian lectures support the view that, although George advocated state ownership in some circumstances, he was a strong decentralist, a believer in the devolution of powers from central to local government. He argued that the revenue from a land-value tax “belongs to the people who live in the locality and should be used in that locality”. It is a “great injustice” for it to be taken by the central government and divided out in subsidies for municipalities. He believed that some portion of the revenue should go to the support of the central government, but the greater part should be collected and used by each locality. He was generally full of praise for Australia and Australians, but on occasion he could not refrain from admonishing us for our lack of local initiative. In his lecture at Goulburn on March 21, 1890, he said:

It seems to me preposterous that the central government should build waterworks for towns and give subsidies in aid of planting parks and furnishing trees for people to plant. You’re away ahead in many things, but if you will allow me to say so I think you’re behind in some. Your towns need more trees. I can see no reason why you haven’t splendid trees, except you’re waiting for the general government to furnish them. (Laughter.) That paternal spirit is the spirit of protection. The principle of freetrade is leaving everything concerning the town to the people of the town, everything concerning the county to the people of the county, and everything concerning the whole to the head government (*Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, March 22, 1890).

The idea was repeated the following day at Cootamundra:

He considered the taxation raised in any particular locality should be spent in it and for its benefit. (Cheers.) We ought not to go to the central government for everything, but by a system of local government take into our own hands the management of our own affairs and the spending of the taxation raised locally (*Cootamundra Herald*, March 26, 1890).

And at Albury he was reported to have said that the land-tax revenue should be devoted “in a large degree to the municipalities”, and that the municipalities “should carry out many works which were now done by the central government”, while reserving a portion for the purpose of the central government (*Albury Border Post*, March 25, 1890).

He does not appear to have considered the possibility that, if municipalities are each free to set the percentage for the tax, the percentages could vary widely. This could result in wide differences in the proportion of land value collected, and would mean that the goal of an equal sharing of land value would not be realised. Nor does he appear to have considered the question of whether or how the land-tax revenue should be redistributed from local government areas where land values are high to areas where they are low.

Geographical decentralisation

Although George clearly favoured a decentralised political system, his view on the effect of the Single Tax on geographical decentralisation is not so clear. In one lecture (Albury, March 24), in reviewing the advantages of a tax on the unimproved value of land, he declared that one effect would be “to settle people more together” (*Albury Border Post*, March 25, 1890) – presumably because it would discourage the withholding of land from urban development and would encourage full development of sites – but elsewhere he suggested that it would encourage geographical decentralisation, because businesses and residents would tend to move out of the cities where land values and land-value taxes were high.

George thus seems to have argued that the land-value tax would set in motion forces acting in opposite directions, without indicating which would be the dominant force. This dilemma persists amongst modern Georgists.

The “Single Tax” title

A question was raised in Adelaide concerning the appropriateness of the title “Single Tax”. The *South Australian Register* supported George’s policy of a land-value tax, but held that the title “Single Tax” was not a good one. George’s response was interesting. He surprisingly admitted “Perhaps it was not [a good title]” – which implies that he was not entirely satisfied with the title – but justified it on several grounds – (a) he could not think of a better, (b) it clearly expressed their methods, and (c) it dispelled the false notion that they proposed to divide up the land (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890). In retrospect, the choice of the “Single Tax” title appears to have been a grave error of political judgement. In the short run, it attracted wide support amongst non-landowners, for it held out the prospect of their having to pay zero taxes. But, in the long run, faced with the ever-increasing expenditure of the welfare state, government countercyclical budgeting, defence, etc., it brought disrepute and even ridicule upon the Single Tax and upon associated Georgist themes – such as the principle of equal rights to land – that are worthy of serious consideration.

Inadequacy of the Single-Tax revenue

The inadequacy of the revenue from the Single Tax has been one of the main criticisms brought forward in modern times. It is argued that George was mistaken in thinking that the revenue would be sufficient to meet the costs of government. It comes as a surprise for the modern reader to find in these lectures that George believed the revenue would not merely be sufficient, but would in fact *exceed* government requirements. The problem that concerned the Single Taxers at the time was not whether the revenue would be adequate, but whether to be a “limited Single Taxer” or an “unlimited Single Taxer”, i.e. whether to take by taxation only enough land value to meet the needs of government; or whether to take the entire land value. The latter case would give rise to the further problem of what to do with the surplus. The following remarks at Wagga on March 22 convey George’s position:

In reply to a question as to what would be done with the proceeds of the land tax when it exceeded the cost of Government, Mr. GEORGE said that there might be no anxiety on that head. Many ways would be found of spending it advantageously to the community. They could expend it partly for educational

purposes, for increasing the useful public works of the colony in the provision of parks, museums, public libraries, art galleries, in improving the sanitation of towns and dwellings, and in a hundred different directions which were not now attended to. Furthermore, they could make provision for the widow, the orphan, and the helpless, not doled out to them as charity, but given to them in virtue of their citizenship (*Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, March 25, 1890).

George also believed that it “would be possible when the [Single Tax] system was in full working order, to reduce fares and freights on the railways by one-half, or to such an extent as would just cover the working expenses” (*Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, March 25, 1890). In other contexts he suggested that railway services could be free.

It is interesting to note that he regarded welfare payments to “the widow, the orphan, and the helpless” as a right of citizenship, not a charity, but that his perception of the cost of government did not include welfare payments for the unemployed. It is also interesting that his suggestions for disposing of the revenue surplus did not include direct *per capita* grants.¹⁴

This clearly indicates that George’s perception of the role and cost of government was much narrower than is commonly perceived today. His claim that the land-tax revenue would be adequate to meet the narrowly-perceived cost of government was therefore much less contentious than it is today. However, the claim that the land-value tax would not only meet the narrowly-perceived cost of government but also provide a surplus for the extra public services mentioned above remains somewhat contentious, especially if the tax were imposed not on the existing land-value but on the increments in land value from a base date nominated in the legislation. Another criticism of the land-value tax – a criticism often put to Georgists today – was that, although one purpose of the tax is to raise revenue, another purpose is to reduce land prices. Success in the latter would limit success in the former. A critic in Gawler expressed the problem thus:

But is it not likely that the tax they [the single tax people] will impose will so lower the value of land that there will be no unearned increment? It is not likely ...

¹⁴ The distribution of the land-tax revenue in the form of *per capita* grants is discussed in more detail in Pullen (forthcoming).

when freehold land is taxed at a heavy rental, that anyone will care to buy it, except at a very low price. Then where will the revenue come in? (*Bunyip*, May 9, 1890).

Trade unions

Given George's intense opposition to monopoly,¹⁵ particularly in land, his audiences might have expected him to have some harsh words to say against trade unions. But his attitude to unions was quite supportive. He recognized that trade unionism was "only a palliative" and that "there was danger in going too far in that direction", but he stated (without any hint of regret) that he had always been a member of a union when he was working at his trade. In his Brisbane lecture of May 23, he stated that he was "glad to know" that the Queensland shearers had won their point in a recent dispute (*Queenslander*, May 31, 1890). But, if his fundamental reforms (free trade and land rights) were implemented, he believed that trade unions would no longer be necessary.

Free trade and land rights

In George's mind, the argument for free trade and the argument for land rights were closely and logically linked. Most if not all of his lectures referred to both, even though the title of any given lecture might have referred to only one. He maintained that the singleness of the Single Tax logically precluded all other taxes, including customs duties, and therefore logically precluded protection.¹⁶ If the Single Tax raises all the revenue needed by government, it renders a protective tariff unnecessary for revenue raising, as well as reducing the benefits to be derived from competition. He saw both free trade and equal rights to land as manifestations of the one principle – the principle of economic and political freedom. Equal rights to land would bring freedom from the power and exploitation exercised by landlords.

For George, full development of the potential of individuals and societies requires both free trade and equal rights to land. Both are necessary, but neither alone

¹⁵ He opposed protectionism, not merely or mainly because it raised prices and limited choice, but also because of its tendency to foster monopolies and to weaken competition in the protected country.

¹⁶ This is not strictly correct. Protection by means of a quota is not logically inconsistent with a Single Tax.

is sufficient. He regarded monopolies as the great enemy of progress, whether it be monopolies stimulated by protectionism or monopolies created by the unequal ownership of land and other natural resources.

By linking his argument for free trade with his argument for equal land rights, George was able to deploy either or both arguments to meet objections. For example, in Melbourne on March 26 when it was alleged that protection had encouraged economic growth in Germany, he responded by arguing that German wages were low and working conditions were poor, and that this was due to the protectionism. But when it was alleged that wages were low in free-trade England, he responded by arguing that this was due not to free trade, but to land monopoly. The dual arguments for land rights and free trade enabled him to select the appropriate causal connection and thus dismiss any observed correlation that appeared to contradict his position.

State ownership versus private ownership

One of the principles behind George's policy of land-value taxation was the *a priori* perception that the land belongs to the people, or that the people have equal rights to land. This has been interpreted as a policy of land nationalization. He was often referred to as an advocate of land nationalization and his supporters sometimes gathered in "Land Nationalization" societies.

Questions raised at the Goulburn meeting on March 20 elicited some interesting responses on state ownership. Asked "Wouldn't it be best if the state were the sole landlord ...?", George's reported reply was "I have no objections to make the state the sole landlord". He recognised that if land were rented out by the state, the effect would be the same as if a single tax applied.¹⁷ But he added that the single tax would be simpler, easier, with less opportunities for corruption and evasion; and therefore "I don't think it would be a good thing to make the state formally the sole landlord" (*Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, March 22, 1890).

A similar view on land nationalization was expressed in an interview at Adelaide: "I am not a land nationalizer in the narrow meaning of the term. That is to say, I don't think it wise for a community to hold land formally and lease it out again

¹⁷ The negative phrase "I have no objections ..." is much less forceful than the declaration "We must make land common property" (George 1956, p. 328), and suggests a subtle evolution of his thinking on this question.

to tenants” (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890). This suggests that, for George, land-value taxation was a second-best pragmatic alternative to a first-best preference for the politically-difficult policy of land nationalization.

George was nevertheless unequivocally and emphatically in favour of state ownership of the railways. He complimented Australia for being ahead of America in this regard.¹⁸ This view appears to have been based not on an *a priori* or ideological preference for state ownership over private ownership, but on a pragmatic assessment of the economic consequences of private ownership of natural monopolies:

I think the line between the State and the individual is perfectly clear. Wherever competition is possible, the State ought not to interfere. Where competition becomes impossible, and a thing becomes in its nature a monopoly, it passes into the functions of the State (Lecture at Goulburn, March 20; *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, March 22, 1890).

He praised the people of South Australia for running their railways not as “the property of the monopolists” (as in America), but as “the property of the whole people” (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890). He was also in favour of state ownership of the telegraph system (Lecture at Cootamundra, March 21; *Cootamundra Herald*, March 26, 1890).

But in situations not involving either land or natural monopolies, his clear preference was for private enterprise and private ownership. He did not advocate a direct Keynesian-style public works programme to cure unemployment, instead preferring state-sponsored measures that would boost trade, and thereby encourage employers to employ.¹⁹

¹⁸ He also thought Australia was superior to America in land speculation: “The Americans were speculative people, but the Australians were ahead of them in the matter of land booms” (*Cootamundra Herald*, March 26, 1890). This was probably not intended as a compliment.

¹⁹ Cf. “He held that the question was not one of finding work for the unemployed, but of making trade brisk so that employers would be glad to obtain all the labour that was available” (Report of lecture in Brisbane on May 23, in *Queenslander*, May 31, 1890).

George in his published works had argued that private *ownership* of land should be replaced by private *possession* (with security of tenure). He believed that the essential characteristic of private ownership of land is the ownership of the land's value, and that by taxing the land value, private ownership would be converted into private possession, thus avoiding the need for, and expense of, formal nationalization of land. However, in Geelong he was reported as saying that the single tax men "would leave the ownership of the land as it was at present" (*Geelong Advertiser*, April 7, 1890), and in an interview in Adelaide on April 26 he was reported to have made the following interesting but confusing comment:

The form of ownership that seems best is that of fee-simple, with a reservation of course to the community of the right to take in taxation all value which attaches to the land by reason of the growth and progress of the community ... (*Adelaide Observer*, April 26, 1890).

Unfortunately, the interviewer did not ask him to clarify his distinction between private ownership and ownership in fee-simple. As argued elsewhere (Pullen 2001), his reform might have had wider appeal if it had been described as a system of fee-simple, or private property, with reservation of land value increments; rather than the abolition of private property.

Bibliography

Contemporary Newspapers Consulted

Newspaper	City/Town	State
Adelaide Advertiser	Adelaide	South Australia
Adelaide Observer	Adelaide	South Australia
Albury Banner	Albury	New South Wales
Albury Border Post	Albury	New South Wales
Argus	Melbourne	Victoria
Australasian	Melbourne	Victoria
Ballarat Star	Ballarat	Victoria
Bendigo Advertiser	Bendigo	Victoria
Brisbane Courier	Brisbane	Queensland
Bulletin	Sydney	New South Wales
Bunyip	Gawler	South Australia
Burra Record	Burra	South Australia
Cootamundra Herald	Cootamundra	New South Wales

Newspaper	City/Town	State
Daily Telegraph	Sydney	New South Wales
Echo	Sydney	New South Wales
Express and Telegraph	Adelaide	South Australia
Geelong Advertiser	Geelong	Victoria
Glen Innes Examiner	Glen Innes	New South Wales
Goulburn Evening Penny Post	Goulburn	New South Wales
Goulburn Herald	Goulburn	New South Wales
Gympie Times	Gympie	Queensland
Illustrated Sydney News	Sydney	New South Wales
Maitland Mercury	Maitland	New South Wales
Maryborough Chronicle	Maryborough	Queensland
Morning Bulletin	Rockhampton	Queensland
Newcastle Morning Herald	Newcastle	New South Wales
Port Adelaide News	Port Adelaide	South Australia
Queenslander	Brisbane	Queensland
Riverine Herald	Echuca	Victoria
South Australian Register	Adelaide	South Australia
Sydney Morning Herald	Sydney	New South Wales
Tamworth Observer	Tamworth	New South Wales
Wagga Wagga Advertiser	Wagga Wagga	New South Wales

Other References

- George, H. 1890. Manuscript diary kept during the Australian tour, Henry George Archives, New York Public Library.
- George, H. [1879] 1956. *Progress and Poverty*, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation: New York.
- George, H. 1997. *An Anthology of Henry George's Thought*, ed. Kenneth Wenzel (Vol. I of the Henry George Centennial Trilogy). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Henning, G.R. 1980. "By Sea or Rail in the 1880s", *Studies in Transport and the Murray River*, pp.20-32, Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society.
- Jackman, M. 1977a. "The Visit of Henry George to Australia, March-June 1890", *Progress*, April, pp.5-8.
- Jackman, M. 1977b. 'Henry George's Itinerary in Australia', *Progress*, July, p.6.
- Pullen, J. 2001. "Henry George's Land Reform: The Distinction between Private Ownership and Private Possession", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp.547-56.

Pullen, J. Forthcoming. "Henry George on Property Rights in Land and Land Value", in Aspromourgos, T. and Lodewijks, J., eds, *History and Political Economy: Essays in Honour of P.D. Groenewegen*, London: Routledge.

The Standard (newspaper), Henry George Archives, New York Public Library.

Treadgold, M. and Pullen, J. 1995. "Henry George in Northern New South Wales: Newspaper Accounts of Two Lectures", *History of Economics Review*, No. 23, pp.83-94.

Worrall, A. 1978. *The New Crusade: The Origins, Activities and Influences of the Australian Single Tax Leagues, 1889-1895*, M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne.