

Henry George in Northern New South Wales

Newspaper Accounts of Two Lectures

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I. Introduction

In May 1890 Henry George delivered public lectures in the towns of Armidale, Hillgrove and Tamworth in northern New South Wales. Local newspaper reports of two of these lectures, those delivered in Armidale and Tamworth, are held on microfilm in the Dixon Library of the University of New England. This paper presents transcripts of the two reports, preceded by some background notes and commentary.

Henry George's visit to northern New South Wales was part of a three-month lecture tour of Australia. The tour was in response to an invitation that originated in a suggestion of the Lithgow Land Nationalisation League (Churchward 1952: 261n). It was not George's first time in Australia. He had been to Melbourne briefly in the 1850s as a teenage sailor on an East Indiaman. Now, he returned as a famous, if controversial, American political economist and social reformer to expound his theories of land taxation and free trade.

George had become known internationally for his advocacy of a 'single tax' on land to overcome the problems of poverty and an unjust distribution of wealth which he believed had persisted despite economic growth, and which he attributed to the private ownership of land. Underpinned by Ricardian rent theory, and with earlier antecedents in the Physiocrats' *impôt unique* and the work of John Locke (Groenewegen 1979: 8-9), the single tax proposal was designed to appropriate for the state the economic rent of land through a uniform *ad valorem* tax on unimproved land values. Revenue from this tax, George argued, would alone be sufficient to finance the operation of government and would enable the abolition of other forms of taxation, all of which were regarded by George as impediments to economic activity and violations of moral law. By opening up hoarded land and removing barriers to specialisation and exchange, the single tax would provide greater opportunities for the employment of labour and investment of capital, leading to an accelerated and more socially just form of economic development.

George's views on land taxation had already aroused considerable interest and some support in the Australian colonies where for several decades there had been concern in liberal and radical circles about the need to break up large estates, encourage closer settlement and achieve a more equitable distribution of land. A Sydney newspaper had serialised George's extraordinary best seller *Progress and Poverty* in 1879, the year it was first published in the United States. The Fifth Intercolonial Trade Union Congress, meeting in Brisbane in March 1888, had expressed a unanimous opinion in favour of the abolition of all taxation save that on land values. And in 1889 Single Tax Leagues had emerged in New South Wales and Queensland (Churchward 1952: 260-1).

Because a single tax on land precluded tariffs, 'free trade was an essential corollary of the single tax doctrine' (Clark 1979: 16). This corollary meant that the single tax proposal cut right across the fierce debate within the colonies between free traders and protectionists:

.... many free-traders viewed with approval a land tax for the revenue it would provide in place of customs duties and because of the sanction of revered classical economists. However, many influential free-traders were themselves large land-owners, and they could not help but look coldly on proposals for rent confiscation....

Protectionists might have accepted willingly the single tax on their platform as an additional expression of frustration with a staples-producing economy had not George condemned so explicitly their tariff program (Goodwin 1966: 116).

Yet, despite the publication of George's *Free Trade or Protection* in 1886, his support for free trade does not seem to have been widely understood in Australia at the start of his lecture tour. The newspapers of the time appeared at first to be uncertain about the position he would adopt on this issue (Jackman 1977a: 5). By the end of his visit George had ensured that all uncertainty had been removed.

In her account of George's visit, Margaret Jackman reports that when George left Australia he expressed regret that he had had so little time to see the colonies. Although he travelled extensively within all of the colonies except Tasmania and Western Australia, visiting rural areas as well as capital cities, a demanding speaking schedule meant that he 'saw more of the inside of the country halls than of the country itself' (Jackman 1977a: 7). The visit began in Sydney (with a civic reception at the Town Hall on 6 March 1890), but George did not lecture in northern New South Wales until the last week of May when he was on his way back to Sydney from Queensland, having delivered several lectures in Brisbane and others in towns as far north as Rockhampton (Jackman 1977b: 6).

George's lectures in northern New South Wales were delivered in a local political environment dominated by the issue of free trade versus protection. In this respect it was a microcosm of the nascent national political environment. The economy of the region was, of course, heavily dependent on primary production; but this did not ensure a general commitment to free trade. Certainly, the export-oriented pastoral industry, based on large land holdings, and the gold-mining town of Hillgrove generated substantial support for free trade; but it was a support constrained by the fact that '[a]s the revenue from the sale of Crown lands diminished the free traders were driven to look to a land tax to replenish the Treasury' (Walker 1966: 164). Moreover, there was also a large farming population that sought a livelihood from a struggling wheat-growing industry that disposed of its product locally in the face of increasing competition from imports of Adelaide flour, and was therefore strongly protectionist.

George spoke in Armidale on 26 May, in Hillgrove on 27 May, and in Tamworth on 28 May 1890 (Jackman 1977b: 6). We have been unable to find a report of his Hillgrove lecture, but his Armidale lecture was reported in the *Glen Innes Examiner* of 3 June and his Tamworth lecture in *The Tamworth Observer* of 31 May. In making the following comments on the two reported speeches we recognise that the journalists could obviously not have been expected to provide a full account of all that was said by George, and by the audience in question time. It is possible therefore that some material was omitted that could have been of interest to historians of economic thought. But we assume that what was reported was an accurate, even if incomplete, account of what transpired.

The Armidale report is relatively brief and devotes a considerable amount of space to depicting the local scene and bemoaning the lack of publicity given to the event. But when the reporter turns his attention to George's speech, he provides a coherent account of its two main themes - the single tax and free trade. He shows that George in his Armidale speech, as in his published writings, based the case for the single tax on his perception of its connection with the 'economic law of rent'. Whether this line of argument proved convincing to the gathered 'representatives of the intelligence and even the beauty of Armidale', or whether they even understood it, was not recorded. Any persuasive force in his Armidale speech probably arose

- as indeed in his other speeches and writings - from his 'unearned increment' argument - i.e. the normative argument that rent is created by the community, not by the individual landowner, and therefore 'the community ... should be the recipient of it' - although the term 'unearned increment', so prevalent in Georgist writings, was either not used by George in Armidale or not recorded by the reporter. This normative argument for a land value tax was then transformed into an argument for a single tax by asserting that the appropriation of economic rent as national revenue would 'supply a constantly sufficient fund for all the purposes of government', and would enable governments to sweep away all other taxes and to 'live upon the rent of the national estate'. He claimed that this 'sufficient fund' would enable the government to finance 'libraries, public baths, even free railways', and he intimated that it would lead to the abolition of poverty. Although such claims have been strenuously denied by critics, who argue that a land value tax could be a useful component of a taxation package but that it alone could not provide enough revenue to meet all the needs of modern governments, there is no doubt that the 'cargo cult' aspect of the single tax contributed to the popularity of George's ideas and the enthusiastic response of his audiences in Armidale, Tamworth and elsewhere.

The Armidale report provides evidence of George's support for free trade and his opposition to all forms of tariffs and customs duties, whether for protection or revenue purposes. However, at one point the Armidale speech, at first glance, may appear to be confused and contradictory. George is reported to have said that 'he has no more sympathy' for free trade than for protection - a statement which, taken out of context, would be inconsistent with his staunch advocacy of free trade. But a closer reading of the report removes any apparent inconsistency. In the context George seems to have been referring not to 'absolute freetrade', i.e. freedom from all customs and excise duties, but to 'English or Sydney freetrade' under which (despite the name 'freetrade') customs duties did exist, being levied for revenue purposes rather than protective purposes. The quotations from *Protection or Free Trade* inserted by the reporter show that George, at this point of the lecture, was objecting to indirect taxes in general, and was arguing that customs duties levied for revenue purposes under a regime of 'English or Sydney freetrade' were just as objectionable as customs duties levied for protective purposes.¹ Hence he could, without inconsistency, state that he had 'no more sympathy' for [English or Sydney] free trade than for protection.

Whereas the reporter of the Armidale speech gives only a brief summary, the Tamworth reporter provides a more informative, seemingly almost verbatim account. It contains themes additional to those reported from Armidale. They include: the inequitable distribution of wealth as a cause of depression; the right of every man to the full value of everything he produces; the injustice of taxation of things produced ('a violation of the rights of property'); the disincentive effects of taxes on improvements, and the incentive effects of taxes on the unimproved value of land; the exploitative power of landowners ('Give me the land; make me the owner of the land, and ... I am your master, and you are my slaves'); and the equal rights of all to land. Combining these themes with those of free trade and the single tax, George seems to have provided within this one Tamworth lecture a coherent and vivid account of the main elements of his theories and policies. In his concluding remarks in Tamworth he expresses the hope that he would soon learn by cable that local governments in New South Wales had been given the power to impose taxes on unimproved land values. He was not to be disappointed on this score, and the New South Wales system of local rates based on unimproved land values remains as a lasting tribute to his influence.²

These two newspaper reports are of interest, not only because of the substantive content of the speeches and not only because they convey a vivid impression of the atmosphere and circumstances of the places and times in which they were delivered, but also because of their description of George's personal appearance and his oratorical skills. The Armidale report

tells of a 'somewhat clumsy and insignificant figure', his 'rugged, homely face ... square cut brow and massive head', and his 'thin harsh voice'. But it confirms that he was a most accomplished and persuasive orator. He possessed great personal charisma ('magnetic influence'), a professional stage presence ('a certain art of posing the body in rhythm with the action of the arms and hands'), a skilful delivery ('a marvellous control over the modulations of his voice'), and a total command of the audience ('forced the listener to attend'). In the Tamworth report the frequent interpolations of 'Hear, hear', 'Applause', etc., create the impression of a spirited exchange between speaker and audience, and the interpolations of 'Laughter', 'Renewed laughter' and 'Loud laughter and cheers' show that he was able to mix humour with serious purpose, to entertain as well as instruct. But as might be expected from a speaker with such strong religious beliefs, he could also introduce a note of evangelical fervour by linking his political economy with the religious sensibilities of his audience ('Consider it in the light of Christianity'). His rhetorical skills are further evident in his use of the homely metaphor of the ranks of chairs in the Armidale Town Hall to explain the law of rent. In Tamworth he is reported as speaking in the first person plural - 'In New South Wales we ... compel people to stamp receipts' - rather than as an outside observer, thereby creating a sympathetic bond of unity with his audience. And his allusions in Tamworth to local problems (the land held idle by the absentee shareholders of the Peel River Company Estate, and the prospective developments of local government) show that he was able to adapt his speeches to local circumstances, and that he set out to convince his listeners that his ideas were not mere theoretical abstractions but had an immediate and practical relevance to their own lives.³

The two newspaper reports are reproduced in full below.

II. The Armidale Lecture

Glen Innes Examiner, 3 June 1890

The Contributor.

Henry George in New England

[BY X L.]

MONDAY, the 26th inst., was announced as the date of the great social reformer's visit to Armidale, but somehow his managers had contrived to make the least possible use of the occasion by neglecting to give publicity to the event by the ordinary means of advertisement throughout the district. Although the visit of Mr. Henry George was intended to serve as his personal introduction to the New England district - including Glen Innes, Walcha and Uralla; yet, so far as we know, no advertisement outside of Armidale was inserted in any other newspaper circulating in New England.

Arriving at the city by the northern train, we certainly expected to see the usually crowded platform filled with representatives of the intelligence and even the beauty of Armidale, to do honor to the arrival of a man who - whatever may be his faults as a practical politician - has succeeded by the mere power of his genius in stirring the intellectual faculty of his fellow man throughout the civilised world to a depth which has not been equalled since the "Contrat Social" came hot from the brain of Jean Jacques Rousseau [sic], and developed itself in living action during the next generation by means of the French Revolution. Whether "Progress and Poverty" will so fertilise the mind of the present generation as to produce in the next a peaceful political Reformation, which will banish the inequality of the conditions of life,

and save this fair country of ours from being swallowed up in the Stygian pool of landlordism; or whether its voice will be rather that of "one crying in the wilderness," a warning note only of sudden and sanguinary revolution to come; the fact remains that the author of this monumental work, so far as Armidale was concerned on Monday last, "came to his own and his own received him not." Had a couple of unambitious members of Parliament, aspiring nevertheless to be Cabinet Ministers *in futuro*, arrived at the cathedral city to do a bit of log-rolling about land offices or railways, the platform would doubtless have been crowded; but on Monday, although the city was so full that a bed could not be got for love or money, and a shakedown was a matter of favor, yet it was not the great solver of social problems who had drawn the crowd, but a programme of trotting matches, hurdleraces, and football which had filled the town with muscular Christians. From them the question, "Are you going to hear Henry George this evening?" brought the answer, "Perhaps I may look in after settling," so that having no anxiety about getting a seat we betook ourselves leisurely to the Town Hall in the evening without much fear of being trampled upon by a crowd of hungry truth-seekers. Yet the large hall was fairly filled, and when Mr. George appeared on the stage the applause was hearty and genuine enough. A somewhat clumsy and insignificant figure, clad Yankee-like in broadcloth trousers and double-breasted frock coat, whose cut Holly would not perhaps own to, with a presence that at first reminded one of a "meenister's," gave no promise of great magnetic influence. A somewhat thin and harsh voice gave no promise of what is called oratorical power; but when the footlights illuminated the rugged, homely face, and brought the square cut brow and massive head into bold relief against the darkness of the empty stage behind, the eye then rested on something that commanded attention and as the lecture proceeded a certain art of posing the body in rhythm with the action of the arms and hands, and a marvellous control over the modulations of his voice, forced the listener to attend, made him feel that he was in the presence of one of nature's kings, and impressed him all the more forcibly owing to the very absence of sensational adjuncts.

The lecture itself was short, little over an hour, and except that once the lecturer allowed himself to be betrayed for a few minutes into a rather tedious repetition, that hour sped swiftly. Of course it is impossible in an hour to do justice to all or even part of the topics discussed in Mr. George's writings; he therefore cleared a little space on the bed rock - the land question - which underlies all political enquiry, and there planted the seed which may fertilise hereafter in many a shrewd New England brain. Taking the land question as necessarily the fundamental question - the bed rock so to speak - of all political enquiry, Mr. George without preamble announced himself as about to give a reason for the doctrine of the Single Tax to which he stood pledged. In order to understand my doctrine, said he, you must understand the great economic law of rent. Economic rent has nothing whatever to do with rent as generally understood - *i.e.*, the rent of land inclusive of its improvements; it simply includes the unimproved value of the land in its natural state - which may be *nil* - together with the whole additional value conferred upon it by the increase of population, and consequent growth of civilisation. This is rent economically speaking, and he illustrated the increase of rent by the position of the ranks of chairs on which the audience were seated. Let the front rank represent land which produces 20 bushels of wheat, bags of potatoes, or anything else that is the best from its quality and position. Rank No. 2 produces 19, and is therefore second best, and so on till the last, which is the worst. The labor on each class of land being the same, it is obvious that No. 1 is 5, 10, or 20 times better than inferior land; or, in other words, a man could give 5, 10, or 20 pence, shillings, or pounds more in proportion for it, as a stand upon which to employ his labor. Hence rent - economic rent - arises as a necessary condition of things, and is therefore called the law of rent. This rent must go to someone, and as its increase is not caused by the improvements or labor of any individual, but by the growth of population and public improvements consequent on civilisation, it is just that the community,

whose increase in members and civilisation creates rent, should be the recipient of it. But when land comes into private ownership, the individual receives what he has not created, instead of the Commonwealth. Henry George proposes therefore to appropriate economic rent as national revenue, which increasing along with, and in consequence of the increase of population will thus supply a constantly sufficient fund for all the purposes of government, will enable Governments to sweep away the whole taxation through customs, and live upon the rent of the national estate, just as the landlords do now on the rent of their private estates.

By this means it is theoretically possible to establish Freetrade; by which Henry George means, not English or Sydney Freetrade, which levies duties through the custom [*sic*] houses for revenue purposes to the extent of one-fourth its whole income, and which he describes as spurious or German-silver freetrade - but absolute Freetrade - freedoms from customs as well as excise. At this point the lecturer descended from his high level to a little play to the "gallery," by tongue-flogging what he called "howling Protectionists," though later on he let it be again seen that the great theme does not touch the colonial or domestic dispute between Freetrade and Protection at all, as he has no more sympathy for the one than the other. [See "Protection or Freetrade," Chap. VIII., in which he declares "Protection is the only justification for a revenue tariff," and that "the advocate [*sic*] of a tariff revenue only, have no case."]]

Returning to the Law of Rent, the lecturer declared that it was as simple as the laws of nature; profound and all embracing as they are, unchangeable and beneficent as they are - for the profoundest things are also the simplest. This irresistible [*sic*] and unchangeable economic law of rent provides therefore a means of relieving labor and the products of labor, as well as capital - which is but labor accumulated or labor saved, labor in a latent condition - from all taxation. He traced some of the effects of the application of this doctrine, upon the actual conditions of life, leading to abolition of municipal rates, poor rates, customs and excise; the possibility of ennobling the national and individual [*sic*] life by creating libraries, public baths, even free railways, out of the rent of the public estate. Finally, its effect on poverty, that greatest of modern problems; illustrating the pressure of modern poverty by the declaration of an American judge that there were families to whom an increase of numbers among the proletarian classes of New York meant only "another boy for the penitentiary, another girl for the brothel."

At the close of his lecture the chairman invited questions, and Mr. G. spent over half an hour in good humoredly replying to some childlike queries asked with a mysterious assumptions [*sic*] of importance by the junior member for Glen Innes, who, having been told by someone that Henry George is a Freetrader, sought to "put him down" by asking if he thought the Single Tax would abolish the natural selfishness of mankind, and especially of the Sydney importor [*sic*]. Fortunately Sir Henry Parkes was not there, but as the audience clamored loudly against monopoly of the privilege of questioning the lecturer, place was given at the chairman's request to Mr. Cleghorn and some other questioners who received instructive replies. Mr. Henry George and the chairman occupied the stage alone, and though the effect was to make the lecturer's physique more striking when lit up by the footlights against the comparatively dark back ground, yet the loneliness of his position was to a stranger somewhat conspicuous, and suggestive of the position occupied by the prophets and truth seekers of all ages in the delivery of their messages, who have ever lived alone, worked alone, and died alone.

III. The Tamworth Lecture

The Tamworth Observer, 31 May 1890

THE SINGLE TAX & FREETRADE

ADDRESS BY HENRY GEORGE

In the Olympic Hall on Wednesday night the above famous lecturer addressed a fairly numerous audience on the principles of the Single Tax and Freetrade. Owing to the heavy rains that had fallen on the day and night previously and during Wednesday, many people who intended coming in to the lecture from Manilla, Nundle, Bowling Alley Point, and other places, were prevented. The attendance, had the weather proved more propitious, would no doubt have been much more numerous.

Mr. C.H. Veness, J.P. presided, in the unavoidable absence of the Mayor and in a few appropriate words introduced the lecturer.

Mr. George, on coming forward, met with a good reception. He said he thought a proposition to which every gentleman would agree, no matter what his opinion on taxation or other cognate matters might be, the distribution of wealth all the world over was neither fair nor equitable. Everywhere the powers of production were not only adequate but in excess. Many people attributed a depression that existed in all countries to overproduction and the phenomena of low wages and of unemployed labour to the same cause. Everywhere the forces of production are not fully utilised and all over the civilised world they would find a fringe of unemployed labour (Hear, hear.) Many [are] anxious to work but cannot find work, and all over the civilized world capital is found to be in abundance that can be called for an interest or rate which some years ago would have seemed ridiculously small. There are also great bodies of men who are merely consuming without producing, and everywhere production is checked - is held back by an abnormal distribution which seemed to pile up wealth in the hands of a few. In the older countries great bodies are working to gain a pitifully poor living. All over the world large numbers of people are trying to make an equitable distribution of wealth. Trade Unions for instance who organise each trade into a solid body to demand higher wages and shorter hours. Labour unions are coming into power everywhere, pulling together and joining their forces to obtain a just distribution of wealth. All combinations in order to accomplish this end must rely ultimately on force. Their methods are war, they organise men into bodies into which every worker must find his place. Such were the Socialists. In all civilised communities you find men calling themselves Protectionists, who seek the general prosperity of a country in which they hold the ballot in hand, and who aim at the increase of wages, at the providing of work, and in improving the working classes. They advocate restriction, thereby putting impediments in the way. The question he proposed to talk about that night was - the distribution of wealth, a question which lies at the bottom of every social and economic principle, and in this 19th century if progress is to go on and our civilization is to stand we must find some solution for this great question. (Applause). What is the proper distribution of wealth? What is the end it should seek? It is to give to everyone that which he earns. (Renewed applause) How are we going to accomplish that? By State legislation? If we seek an equitable distribution of wealth we must first seek to give to every man that which he fairly produces - that which he earns. All over the civilised world the State steps in to alter this natural distribution of wealth. They need go no further than their own city of Tamworth. What happens to a man who spends labour and capital in building a house, or, if by giving an equivalent to another man to build that house for him? One would naturally

think that that house should belong entirely to him; but what happens? Why, the rate assessor comes around (laughter) and fines him for building that house, and the larger the house, the better the house, and the more improvements he makes, the larger is the fine - for such it is, that is put upon him. So it is in Canada, in the United States, in Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and other countries. All through these countries is the same wrong perpetrated. If a man be thrifty and saving[,] down comes the state to take away from him the results of his thrift and industry. The natural distribution of wealth is that which gives to labour - to the man who produces - the full reward of his energy and skill. Then surely it ought to belong to him and, to him alone. (loud applause). The state has no right to take it from him. "Thou shalt not steal!" That is the law which is impressed upon human nature. It does not merely mean, thou shalt not pick pockets (laughter) or burglarise safes. It means thou shalt not take from another that which is his own. (Hear, hear.) There is such a thing as the rights of ownership. There are the rights of property - a sacred right. (Hear, hear.) Our civilisation depends upon the sacred observance of those rights and where those rights are so observed there you will find the field of capital and there will be the most prosperous community. (Applause). How selfish a man must be who acts otherwise. It is utterly impossible for a man to produce wealth without doing something for others beside [*sic*] himself, and it is impossible for any man to add to the common stock of wealth without doing some good to the community in which he lives. In New South Wales we do not only tax houses but we even go to the meanness (laughter) to compel people to stamp receipts. (Renewed laughter and cheers). If John Jones pays Tom Smith a sum of money over two pounds, and unless Tom Smith puts a postage stamp on the receipt he can still demand the money from John Jones. What are these things but a violation of the rights of property, an infringement of the law that gives to labour the rewards of labour and to thrift the reward of economy and industry? (Loud applause). When we send abroad for goods and pay for them in many cases they are stopped at our borders and seaports, and have what to all intents and purposes is a blackmail put upon them. (Applause). You are certainly not so bad in New South Wales as they are in the other colonies, but still you are bad enough. (Hear, hear, and laughter). In the great Republic of the United States we levy a good round tax on the Holy Scriptures that are brought into the country: in fact almost everything you can think of is taxed. People will say that taxes are necessary to support Governments. So they are, and Governments must have revenue. This necessity begins with the very beginning of civilization. If a municipality goes in for water works, electric works, or other improvements there becomes a need for larger public revenue. That is natural, it is in accordance with the scheme of things. If there be a natural need for public revenue there must be a natural supply (Hear, hear), and there is a natural supply without interfering with the just distribution of wealth (Applause), without checking production (Hear, hear), and without creating monopolies [*sic*] [(Renewed applause). Just as population grows there is one value which steadily rises, and that is the value of land. (Applause). Now, take the value of land, and by that he did not mean the value of fencing, planting, or filling [?] in. They are the results of human labour and have a value, but it is a value which belongs to the individual. In this city of Tamworth the land in the principal streets and in the centre of the town is much more valuable than it is on the outskirts; because the people are there. In Sydney where there is a larger population than here the land is more valuable still. In London the land is still more valuable than is the case in Sydney. But take away the population from London and put it on New Zealand or any of those colonies and see how the land would decrease in value in London and would rise in value here. It is the growth of a community that attaches to the value of land. In a new country where there are few people the value of the land is little, and it is not until there is a larger population that the value of the land increases. Take Tamworth in 10 years hence with a large population. By that time what will have increased in value? Not the buildings or

houses or anything of human production. On the contrary those things tend to decrease in value, as social growth and improvement have a constant tendency to decrease the cost of production. But the one thing that will increase in value is land. Every child born and improvement made adds to land value. It is a clear matter of justice if we would seek the proper distribution of wealth - the land should be taxed before one penny that belongs to the individual should be touched. (Applause.) He believed [?] that here was the natural and appointed way to raise public revenue, and here plainly and clearly was the natural and just mode of producing that revenue. Here is a source from which large revenues may be raised without checking enterprise or restricting production and without taking from industry or thrift that which is the natural reward. This is a value which must be taken for public uses if we would prevent speculations most disastrous, and social diseases, and if we would prevent the growth of civilisation leading to a more monstrous inequality than that which at present exists. (Applause.) All advancement in civilisation tends to increase the value of land. If the State goes to impose taxes on trade and exchange a temptation will be set up by which men will seek to get hold of land and reap where they do not sow (loud applause), and which will most assuredly lead to such a monopoly in land that must produce an artificial scarcity. It is perfectly clear that without land man cannot live. Land is his working place, his standing place and his storehouse. From the land he must draw for his products. What is all this but the union of labour with land? When we speak of labor as a creator we use the words in a loose sense. The whole race of mankind could not produce something out of nothing. Man is a producer not a creator. (Applause.) God alone creates. Labor is the only producer of wealth, but land always the natural or passive factor in production. (Hear, hear). Without land man is absolutely helpless. Without land man can accomplish nothing. (Applause). In a country where the few are the holders of the land, and the many the laborers, the owners of the land can simply increase in wealth, and labor must remain the poor thing it now is; and no matter how hard labor may toil it can only get a poor living. Land! Why the man who owns the land owns everything necessary to human life. (Applause). Give me the land; make me the owner of the land, (said Mr. George) and no matter what may be the political forms of the country, I am your master (loud applause), and you are my slaves (renewed applause). When pressure reaches that point I can extract from your labour everything that you produce save just as much as you can barely subsist upon. That is as clear as two and two make four and as true as that heat and light proceed from the sun. (Applause). At the bottom of all these perplexities lies one great cause, a primary wrong. It is a birthright which comes to all men to share in the bounty of their Creator and the equal right to apply their labor to the opportunity He has created. No matter what palliatives may be proposed or accept[ed?] or what may be done by charity or trades unions, there can be no remedy until the cause is touched (hear, hear, and applause), no solution until the great wrong is made right. (Renewed applause.) There must be - if this is a harmonious universe - some practicable way to a solution. That which is right is always practicable (applause), that which is wrong is im-practicable [sic]. (Renewed applause). We say there is a clear necessity in order to secure the best use of land to secure a right of possession, a fee simple, in making the land the property of man, subject to payment to the State for the use of it. We therefore propose to abolish all taxes that fall on labor and capital, and that in any way impair the right of property, and place restrictions on the industries of the people; to abolish these and resort to one only - to tax the value of the land irrespective of improvements. (Loud applause). That is the aim and method of what we call the Single Tax: not a tax on land but on land values. A tax on land means a tax on all lands - all used lands. A tax on land values is a tax on valuable land. All land is not valuable. In the natural state of things value is only attached to that in use, and the men with land on the outskirts ought not to pay anything for it. Here perhaps is a farmer who gets a piece of land, and what he gets from that land is simply the reward of his own labour and capital. We

propose to take the land for the community. The owner of land, as an owner, is an absolutely useless animal (laughter) and the proposition of the Single Taxers is simply to take that which leaves to labour, not the reward of labour, a perfect scheme of distribution. Here we find men going away beyond railway communication to make themselves homes. Look along the Peel River Company's estate. See the great bodies of rich land not used at all and some only partially used (loud applause); land lying idle that should be bearing homes instead of being a sheep walk. (Renewed applause). Just look round Tamworth and take the tax off buildings and put them on the land; and bear in mind the tax to be the same whether there is a building on the land or not; and then we would see how quickly buildings would spring up. (Applause). Go further from the heart of the city. If N.S.W. were to become a really free-trade colony and raise all its revenue from the land, how long would that Peel River land remain idle? It would compel those shareholders in the Peel River Company's Estate who are absentees to sell out very quickly to men who would use the land. (Applause). This craze of protection which has grown up, this barking up the wrong tree (laughter), in its very theory involves a degradation [sic] to labor (Hear, hear). Why should labor be protected? Monopoly needs protection but labor, the producer of wealth, only requires fair play. (Loud applause). The few may profit by restriction but the masses never can. (Renewed applause). What is protection but the making of trade with other countries more difficult. It is worse than the division made by wide seas, mountain chains, or sand bars. If the theory of protection is right - that it should prevent trade and exchange with other countries, why the hardest place you could get at would be the best place to establish a new colony. (Loud laughter and cheers). That would be an ideal site. (Renewed laughter.) According to the protectionists' theory all foreign labor is pauper labor. If we carry the theory of protection into practice why the proper place to build a city would be on some high mountain where it would be extremely difficult to carry goods, but very easy to roll them down. (Loud laughter and cheers.) The building of railways to facilitate communication with the other colonies we hail with delight. In order to have commerce with other lands we tunnel mountains and dredge rivers and seas, and yet the protectionists tell us that by the law of nature we must do the very opposite in order to make ourselves prosperous. Consider the absurdity of the thing. Protection! Protection, what from? (Laughter.) From Small-pox? (Renewed laughter.) From snakes? From mosquitoes? No! It protects us from goods (loud cheers) from good things - what we all want and what we are all trying to get (Renewed cheers.) It protects our wives from getting new shawls and new dresses. Protection! (Laughter.) Why the town of Hillgrove is a protected town. On one side of it there is a deep gorge of 1500 feet and on the other side is a great landowner of the name of Hargraves. (Laughter). He protects that side of Hillgrove by refusing to allow people to go across his land and in order to get to Hillgrove you have to go 4 miles round. Protection. That's Protection. On the same theory we ought to cut the throats of all the horses and make men and women drag carts. (Laughter). It is perfectly clear that no man wants work for the sake of work. (Loud laughter). We ain't in need of work. (Hear, hear). There is plenty of work to do; but it might be asked what are the people going to do? What and where are the means? Why it is everywhere apparent. Open the land. (Loud applause). Take the tax off the producer and put it on land values and to-morrow the land along the Peel river would be thrown open and you would find people pouring in from all parts of these colonies. (Applause). You protectionists! (Laughter). I hope some of you are here. I was once one myself (continued Mr. George). You protectionists! You who are bothering about protection, are barking up the wrong tree, are being led upon the wrong track. What is the result of the advocacy of protection? You want to put a tax on imports, thereby playing into the hands of the monopolists. You are leading labor to be handcuffed and shackled. (Loud applause). From the light of justice everyman has a right to work as he chooses. (Hear, hear). No man or body of men have the right to coerce [sic] others. All men have a right to employ

their labor as they will. Mr. George then went on to say that he could speak on the subject so long that if he went on he would be left speaking only to himself. (Cries of "go on"). There were so many phases that no man could go over them all in 2 or even 3 hours. He simply wished to start men thinking out this great question, and in order to meet any point that might be raised he would now be glad to answer any questions the audience might wish to put to him; or if anyone wished, as there might be some particular part on which they wanted a fuller explanation, he would be pleased to accommodate them. (Mr. George then resumed his seat and after waiting some time for questions, and there being none, he again proceeded amid applause.) After speaking for sometime on the different phases of the Single Tax, he said he hoped the N.S.W. people would lead the van in this, as they did in many other matters; and he hoped it would do honor to N.S.W. which is the only colony of the Australian group which has resisted successfully the cry of Protection. The other day he came from South Australia through Victoria, and as the train neared the border several persons proceeded to get ready their bags for inspection by officials. Guess their surprise when they found out they had come to a free country. (Applause.) But the Freetrade we have here is really miserable. (Hear, hear). It is certainly better than Protection - a little bit only; it is only one of degree. Why can't you have real Freetrade, and lead the world on the right track? (Loud applause). Abolish the custom [*sic*] houses and put the tax on land; and by such Freetrade we would compel the other colonies to adopt a [*sic*] freetrade policy. All along the river Murray they have protection, and the part that he saw, the river was no wider than the Peel and the bridge was no bigger than the bridge that goes over the Peel, but at both ends of that bridge there is a custom [*sic*] house which taxed the products of man's labor. Don't be afraid of Freedom (loud cheers), trust her and follow her and you will find that the moral sense is the most sensible guide. Protection is mean in the very essence. It appeals to the meanest and vilest prejudices. It sets nation against nation, colony against colony, and men of the same kindred and blood against each other. (Hear, hear). Test it by any moral test you will. Consider it in the light of Christianity. What does Christianity tell us? That we are brothers. (Applause). Does it anywhere tell us that we should set up hostile tariffs to prevent trade with our brethren? Could any Christian missionary going out among the heathen to preach the sublime truths of Christianity, the love of God and the brotherhood of man, tell them that our highest pride and our greatest profit lie in the welfare of our neighbours and that the true interests of man are harmonious, and then tell them in the next breath that in order to prosper, to develop infant industries and to protect their ships, it was necessary to put up tariffs, to prevent trade with their fellows? (Applause). Protection feeds on prejudices, it rouses hostile feelings. Labor only needs justice - not charity. Is labor such a weak thing as to need protection? Labor is the produce [*sic*] of all wealth. Give labor access to natural opportunity. Give labor freedom and it wants no protection. (Enthusiastic cheering). Give it simply fairplay. That is all. We in the United States know Protection does not develop industries. It develops trusts any [*sic*] combinations and monopolies, and does not raise wages. (Hear, hear). Look at the effects. Where is the American flag on the high seas to-day? 30 years ago America carried one third of the commerce of the world and there was only one nation ahead of her, but to-day her ships sail under foreign flags. (Hear, hear). They have by their policy protected the shipbuilding trade all but out of existence. The taxes that are imposed prevent us from building ships or running ships with other nations who have access to the materials. The American exports are mainly crude material. Americans are handicapped by the tariff. 30 years ago they used to talk of the universal Yankee but to-day we talk of the universal Englishman. (Hear, hear). But thank God the knell of that kind of thing has already sounded in the United States. At last, economic questions are being discussed, and all over the country men are rising up for that freetrade that would abolish all tariffs. By the time the next Presidential election will have taken place the people of the United States will have recorded their will in the destruction of

Protection. (Loud cheers). He should like this colony to go on further and carry freetrade to its grand culmination. (Mr. George then resumed his seat amid hearty applause).

The Rev. A. Armstrong proposed and Mr. W. F. Tribe seconded that a hearty vote of thanks be accorded Mr. George for his able and instructive address.

This was carried by acclamation.

Mr. George in returning thanks said that he was going away from N.S.Wales with the belief that the people were not satisfied with the present state of things, and that they were about to secure local government and local taxation. They were going to take a step for the abolition of the tariff, to obtain a local government bill which should give power to municipalities to impose taxes on unimproved land values, and he hoped to learn by cable that this grand work had been carried out. (Applause.) They would not be doing this merely for themselves, but for all the world. In this they would be doing something to lift up the down-trodden, taking part in the world-wide struggle for the emancipation of labor, breaking down the barriers that separate men in federation, disbanding standing armies, beginning a [sic] Christian civilization in which no one would want work. They had begun in America to look to the Australian colonies to lead the way in these great conflicts. The Australian system of voting by ballot would soon be adopted by the Americans. (Loud applause). Therein lie the remedies for the corruptions that stand as a blot on the fair fame of the Republic. (Renewed applause). (Mr. George then took final leave of his audience, who had listened with wrapt attention to every word he had uttered, by thanking them for their vote of thanks.)

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Notes

¹ The quotations were not entirely accurate. The original reads: 'All the objections which apply to indirect taxes in general apply to import duties. These protectionists are right who declare that protection is the only justification for a tariff, and the advocates of "a tariff for revenue only" have no case' (George 1962: 79).

² Taxation of the unimproved value of land in Australia began in South Australia in 1884, New South Wales 1895, Western Australia 1907, Tasmania 1910, Victoria 1910, and Queensland 1915. See Heaton (1925).

³ However, his reference in Tamworth to the evil-doings of a Hillgrove landowner named Hargraves would have been even more telling in Armidale. Hillgrove is only about 16 miles east of Armidale, but some 72 miles to the north east of Tamworth. George presumably heard of Hargraves when in Hillgrove on Tuesday, 27 May, the day after his Armidale speech, before proceeding to Tamworth for his speech of Wednesday, 28 May.

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