

Berkeley Mayor J. Stitt Wilson: Christian Socialist, Georgist, Feminist

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ABSTRACT. J. Stitt Wilson (1868–1942) was a leading American Christian Socialist. When he was elected Mayor of the City of Berkeley in 1911 he had to shift focus from the broad moral and economic case for socialism to the specifics of municipal reform. He drew on the ideas of Henry George, feminist urban reformers in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the settlement house movement, and progressive and socialist mayors who preceded him. He became a leader in both the Socialist Party and the single-tax movement in California from 1911 to 1917, working with the shared belief that society, as a society, creates tremendous value that should be used for public benefit rather than taken as private profit. His story illustrates the creativity that can result when people are active in and learn from multiple social movements as well as the difficulties that can result from the tensions within and between movements. It illustrates, as well, some of the varied strands of the urban reform movement that helped create modern city government in America.

J. Stitt Wilson was a leader in the American Christian Socialist Movement who evangelized for socialism throughout the midwestern and western regions of the United States as well as in Great Britain between 1897 and 1910. Elected Mayor of the City of Berkeley in 1911 he had to shift focus from the broad moral and economic case for socialism to the specifics of

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municipal reform. To do so he drew on the ideas of Henry George, feminist urban reformers in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the settlement house movement, and the progressive and socialist mayors who preceded him. He became a leader in both the Socialist Party and the single-tax movement in California from 1911 to 1917, drawing on the shared belief that society, as a society, creates tremendous value that should be used for public benefit rather than taken as private profit.

Henry George's biographers have recounted his opposition to socialism, his brief and uneasy coalition with socialists during his campaign for mayor of New York in 1888, his debates with various socialists, and his increasing hostility to socialism up until his death in 1897. Little has been written on the relationship between the broader single-tax and socialist movements in the United States.¹

Stitt Wilson's story illustrates the creativity that can result when people learn from and are active in multiple social movements as well as the difficulties that result from the tensions between these movements. It illustrates, as well, some of the varied, but now-forgotten, strands of the urban reform movement that helped create modern city government in America.

Jackson Stitt Wilson was born on the Canadian side of Lake Huron in 1868 and died in Berkeley, California in 1942. In 1890 he moved to Evanston, Illinois to study for the Methodist ministry at Garrett Biblical Institute and then from 1893–1897 studied for a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University while also working as a pastor in a poor working-class district in Chicago.

Wilson tried to understand what he witnessed during his pastoral work: desperate poverty despite Chicago's rapid growth, remarkable wealth and progress displayed in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the accompanying hardships exacerbated by the worst depression in U.S. history up to that point. Wilson described these trying years when he wrote, "I have buried children who did not have enough rags to cover them in their coffins. I have slept with men to keep them from committing suicide. I have seen the great armies of the unemployed live worse than animals, hungry in the streets, when the masters of business could no longer profit from their labors" (Wilson 1922: 2). He came to the conclusion that to have a Christian society there must be a different economic system

based on Christian values, the basic message of what is now called the Social Gospel.

In 1895 he opened his church to a series of meetings on “the labor question,” explaining, “I hope to bring together on common ground all classes, trade unionists, socialists, single taxers, laborers” (*Daily Inter Ocean* 1895b). He expressed admiration for Eugene Victor Debs, head of the American Railway Union, who was jailed for his role in the Pullman Strike of 1894. He also supported striking garment workers and called on workers to organize and buy only union-made garments.

He read the works of Rev. George Herron, a leader in the “Kingdom movement,” named after the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Herron was famous for his sermon “The Message of Jesus to the Men of Wealth,” which he followed with a series of books arguing that the teachings of Jesus could only be realized in a socialist economy, the “Cooperative Commonwealth,” rather than in a society based on competition and selfishness. Wilson invited Herron to speak at his church and consulted with him regularly (Wilson 1901: 13–17).

He read the works of Henry George and joined the Single Tax Club of Chicago, where he delivered an address on “The Gospel of Reform” (*Daily Inter Ocean* 1895a). George’s argument that God had provided the land for all his people was well-received in Social Gospel circles. Single taxers proposed that land value taxation should replace all or most other forms of taxation, with the revenue used to provide government services to the people. In addition, they generally proposed to replace private monopoly ownership of utilities and railroads with public ownership.

Wilson developed close ties with Hull House and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Hull House founder Jane Addams and many of the staff were allied with the labor and women’s suffrage movements and several were socialists. Wilson’s home was in Evanston, Illinois, the national headquarters of the WCTU, America’s largest women’s organization and the home of its internationally famous leader, Frances Willard, until her death in 1898. Willard’s belief in temperance, women’s suffrage, labor rights, and Christian Socialism was a combination that Wilson came to share. He often described Willard as one of the

“great women” who headed one of “the greatest moral movements of the last half century” (Wilson 1916). He would retain a lifelong allegiance to the Social Gospel, the labor movement, the cooperative commonwealth, land value taxation, temperance, and equal rights for women.

In 1897 Stitt Wilson graduated with a B.A. from Northwestern University and received full ordination as a minister in the Methodist Church. He then left the ministry to found the Social Crusade, a group of ministers based in Chicago who evangelized for socialism throughout the Midwest. Wilson and other Social Crusaders also made two visits to England where they developed ties with the newly formed Independent Labor Party and spoke on Christian Socialism. From 1898 to 1901 they published a monthly magazine, *Social Crusader*. Its second issue featured a reading list including four books by George Herron and five by Henry George. The January 1901 issue of *Social Crusader* announced that Rev. George Herron himself had joined the Social Crusade as its new leader, but a few months later, Herron divorced his wife and remarried. This destroyed the credibility of the Social Crusade as a religious movement in the Midwest.

In June 1901 Stitt Wilson moved to the West with what remained of the Social Crusade and the next year settled in Berkeley, California. The Social Crusade dissolved shortly thereafter and Wilson and some of the other Social Crusaders lectured on behalf of the newly formed Socialist Party. In 1907 he moved to England for two years, lecturing on Christian Socialism, making strong connections with the new Labor Party, and returning to Berkeley at the end of 1909. His timing was good, since the “revolutionary” wing of the Socialist Party in California had only recently lost control to the “evolutionary” Socialists, among whom Wilson was numbered.

The Socialist Party was the scene of perpetual conflict between “evolutionary” and “revolutionary” socialists (Kipnis 1952). The two wings were held together, tenuously, by their shared belief that the working class provided the essential basis for social transformation, their support for the labor movement, particularly for industrial unions, and support for government ownership of large corporations. Both wings agreed that just as unions were the expression of

the economic interests of the working class, the Socialist Party was the expression of its political interests.

The revolutionaries believed that piecemeal reforms were of little use and that only a full transition to socialism could improve the condition of the working class. This economic transformation would come either through election of a socialist national government or through industrial action, culminating in a general strike and working-class seizure of power, in response to capitalists' refusal to accept the results of the democratic process. For the revolutionaries, running for public office at the municipal level was at best a means to publicize the virtues of socialism and, if elected, reduce use of the police to break strikes. In their view, municipal reforms, such as public ownership of utilities, had no value for the workers until establishment of a socialist government because capitalist politicians would simply use them to benefit the property-owning classes.

The evolutionary socialists argued that the economy could be transformed piece by piece. Victor Berger, leader of the Milwaukee socialists and the first socialist elected to Congress, argued that social democracy was a process, not a specific end state to be reached (Kipnis 1952: 118–119). The “constructive” socialists believed that if a socialist local government could effectively deliver a wide range of public services and operate natural monopolies efficiently under public ownership for the benefit of all citizens, this would demonstrate the practicality of socialism and increase public support for government ownership of industry. The municipal socialists were significantly more pro-labor than most other progressive urban reformers but, unlike the revolutionaries, they also appealed for votes from the middle class. Like most American reformers they had a deep faith in democracy and the ability of democratic governments to make changes, once the right people were elected and held accountable by the people who elected them.

Wilson described himself as an “evolutionary socialist,” although his two pamphlets entitled *The Impending Social Revolution* suggest that he hoped for fairly rapid change. In 1910 he was chosen as the Socialist Party candidate for governor of California and in November received 12 percent of the vote, the highest ever received by a

Socialist Party candidate. A few months later he ran for mayor of Berkeley and was elected by a majority vote on April 1, 1911.

As a candidate for mayor, Wilson had to change his focus from general socialist evangelism to supporting specific reforms in state and local government intended to help build a cooperative commonwealth. The program Wilson called “constructive municipal socialism” drew directly from Henry George, Hull House, and the experience of several previous social reform mayors.

Georgism, Feminism, and Progressive Mayors

George was one of the first major American reformers to see the immense value of cities and proposed to strengthen them, rather than call for a return to the supposedly greater virtues of rural and small-town life. He had spent the years from 1857 to 1879 in San Francisco observing the explosive growth of that metropolis in its early years and he understood the productive role of urban density and its effect on urban land values. Explaining the distinctive role of the urban center (which he refers to as “here” and “this land” in the following passage), George ([1879] 1992: 240–241) wrote:

Production is here carried on upon a great scale, with the best machinery and the most favorable facilities; the division of labor becomes extremely minute, wonderfully multiplying efficiency; exchanges are of such volume and rapidity that they are made with the minimum of friction and loss. . . . Here intellectual activity is gathered into a focus, and here springs that stimulus which is born of the collision of mind with mind. . . . All these advantages attach to the land; it is on this land and no other that they can be utilized, for here is the center of population—the focus of exchanges, the market place and workshop of the highest forms of industry. . . . And rent, which measures the difference between this added productiveness and that of the least productive land in use, has increased accordingly.

George argued in *Progress and Poverty* that land value taxation was both the fairest and most economically efficient tax system. It was fair because land values were created by society rather than by the enterprise of the landowner. Land value taxation was economically efficient because it taxed the “unearned increment” in land value that landowners and other “monopolists” siphoned off and supported the

operations of government without taxing work, consumption, or productive investment.² He proposed to replace all forms of taxation with a “single tax” on the full rental value of land. This tax, George maintained, would discourage holding land for speculative purposes, strengthen the bargaining power of labor by making more land available for workers to start small farms and small businesses, and fund provision of bountiful public services.

George wrote eloquently about the value of the market as a means of facilitating the production of complex goods. Having once sailed before the mast, he argued that while a sailing ship needed a captain to direct its operations, production of all the materials and equipment needed for construction of that ship was too complex for one enterprise and required a market from which the many needed products could be drawn together (George 1898: 382–396). Inherent in his view of the market as a form of social cooperation, as well as of competition, was the idea that market exchange took place among fully equal people, without any subordination of one person to another.

George recognized that there were natural monopolies and argued that these should be publicly owned to reduce the corrupting effect of private monopolies in a democratic society. He suggested that public ownership should be extended from the post office to the telegraph system and from ownership of the roads to ownership of the railroads. George ([1879] 1992: 456–457) argued that the revenue from land value taxation could be used for

the common benefit . . . to establish public baths, museums, libraries, gardens, lecture rooms, music and dancing halls, theaters, universities, technical schools, shooting galleries, play grounds, gymnasiums, etc. Heat, light and motive power as well as water might be conducted through our streets at public expense; our roads be lined with fruit trees; discoverers and inventors rewarded, scientific investigations supported.

An important, but little-noted, implication of his proposals for use of the revenue from land rent is that investment in universities, technical schools, scientific investigations, and the like would result in economic growth that would in turn increase the socially created value of the land and increase revenue from taxation of land value.

George argued that the study of political economy had an inherently moral aspect and appealed to the Christian beliefs of the vast majority of those who heard him speak or read his books. God had created the earth for humanity, and therefore all people were entitled to their fair share of the land and its fruits. God was beneficent and had provided a sufficiency for all people, so that poverty could be ended and was not a simple fact of nature.

In his campaign for mayor of New York in 1886, George argued that land value taxation would improve housing conditions by bringing into use vacant land being held for speculation. He called for public ownership of the commuter railways and the use of revenue from land value taxation to provide a wide range of public services, including free commuter transportation so that workers could afford to live in lower density neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city, where the less expensive land would reduce the cost of housing. Additionally, although George was dismissive of the ability of unions to raise the working-class standard of living, he promised that, after his election, the police would no longer be used to beat up dissenters and break strikes.

George opposed socialism, with its focus on the extraction of surplus value in the workplace and its solution of public ownership of the means of production. With the single tax, George argued: "We should reach the ideal of the socialist, but not through governmental repression. Government would change its character and would become the administration of a great co-operative society. It would become merely the agency by which the common property was administered for the common benefit" (George [1879] 1992: 456).

Like most American social reformers of his time, George held a deep belief in democracy and democratic government as the vehicle for social change. In his view, all that was standing in the way of true democracy was a small group of monopolists who held large tracts of land for speculation and used political privileges to gain control of land, railroads, and municipal transportation and utility systems. Once the mass of the people came to understand this, they would elect representatives who would pass laws that would sweep away the class privileges of the monopolists and allow progress to end poverty.

Frederic C. Howe's 1906 overview of the progressive urban reform movement observed that "back of the settlement, the small park, the

kindergarten, the crèche, the juvenile court, the schools, the libraries . . . back of many a movement for betterment of the conditions of life in home, shop or factory is the influence of woman," who "sees the city in light of the home" while "to man the city is primarily a centre of industry" (Howe 1906: 175). Women's organizations played a major role in supporting "social reform" efforts to "secure a common welfare" for all who made the city their home, in contrast with middle-class male reformers' frequent focus on simply making the city a good place to conduct business through efficiency and honest government (Flanagan 2002, 2007).

The dominant view of women in this period relegated them to a separate sphere, the domestic life of the home, in which women were expected to provide their families with the self-sacrificing care and moral example that was essential for the continuation of a civilized society. Feminists of the time typically drew on this ethic to argue that a successful family and home required extension of the ethic of care and cooperation into all aspects of society that affected the home. This view legitimated the extension of government services, regulation, and enterprise far into the domain then occupied by the market.

As president of the WCTU from 1879 until her death in 1898, Frances Willard built it into the largest women's organization in the United States. Willard argued that women needed to be involved in politics for "Home Protection" (Epstein 1981). Initially this simply meant protection of the home from the effects of alcoholism on the man of the house, but over time the concept of the home broadened to encompass the surrounding city and home protection broadened to include a demand for the right to vote. In 1898, Willard wrote that "[m]en have made a dead failure of municipal government, just about as they would of housekeeping, and government is only housekeeping on the broadest scale" (Kraditor 1965: 68).

She came to the conclusion that while alcoholism was a major cause of poverty, poverty was a major cause of alcoholism and looked at ways to end both. She developed close ties with the Knights of Labor and in the late 1880s, influenced by Edward Bellamy, she declared herself a Christian Socialist.

Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago and of the settlement house movement in America, was another major proponent of

the idea that women should have the right to vote because they could not fulfill their traditional housekeeping function within the home without the support of a local government engaged in “municipal housekeeping,” such as ensuring that milk and food were kept pure and free of disease and that refuse was properly disposed of (Addams 1908, 1910).

Many socialists, including many Socialist Party women, argued that, since women could only achieve equality under socialism, the struggle for socialism should take priority over the struggle for women’s rights. Some feminists developed an alternative theory that it was womanly virtue that would provide the necessary basis for the moral reconstruction of society (Buhl 1983: 49–103). Elizabeth Cady Stanton developed a synthesis of these views late in her life, arguing both that replacing competition with cooperation was essential to enable women to develop their human potential and that femininity provided the essential basis for a cooperative society. As Stanton (1899: 12) wrote: “Before we can realize the dream of socialism we must establish the equilibrium of the masculine and feminine elements in humanity.”

The idea that women are essential agents of change and women’s equality is essential to social transformation pervades many of Stitt Wilson’s speeches. He believed women were both equal and different, that women generally carried a maternal ethic of care that would naturally incline women to support a more humane, socialist society and would make voting women into agents of change, providing “reinforcements in the great struggle toward the triumph of humanity, or human compassion” (*Berkeley Daily Gazette* 1911b). Socialist feminists, including Wilson, hoped that women’s suffrage would lead to a coalition of the women’s movement and the labor movement and create majority support for the “cooperative commonwealth” (Katz 1991).

A series of progressive reform mayors in major cities drew heavily on the urban reform programs of Henry George and the women’s movement. Hazen Pingree, mayor of Detroit from 1889–1897 and governor of Michigan from 1897–1901, Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones, mayor of Toledo from 1897–1904, and Tom Johnson, mayor of Cleveland from 1901–1909, were all successful businessmen who

had converted to the cause of reform. Pingree owned a successful shoe and boot company. Johnson had originally made his fortune in the street railway business. Jones had founded an oil company, invented and patented a new method of extracting oil from deep wells, and built a successful oil equipment manufacturing company. Pingree was a Republican, Johnson a Democrat, and Jones was an independent Christian socialist who was opposed to political parties.

What united these mayors was the belief that citizens were exploited by the privately owned utility companies that provided street railways, water and sewer service, gas, electricity and, later, telephone service, and that private ownership of utilities resulted in corruption of the government officials charged with their oversight. These evils could only be overcome with public ownership. They supported active local government that provided forms of "collective consumption," including public parks, gardens, and youth recreation programs, and supported public education through kindergartens, public schools, and libraries. They also maintained good relations with unions and kept the police neutral in strikes.

Stitt Wilson was familiar with Pingree's record, having carried on his Social Crusade in Michigan during Pingree's term as governor. Wilson moved to California before Johnson was elected mayor of Cleveland, but he was able to learn about it from Johnson's aide, Howe (1906), who gave a systematic statement of their experience and programs. This lucid presentation of the urban, middle-class social reform program included strong support for women's suffrage and land value taxation although it avoided any mention of unions.

Stitt Wilson knew "Golden Rule" Jones personally. They corresponded and referred to each other as "my dear brother" and "my dear friend" and supported each other's work. In 1899 Wilson and his fellow Social Crusaders campaigned extensively for Jones during his campaign for governor of Ohio, and Wilson gave warm-up speeches and introduced Jones at several of his campaign meetings. Over the following several years Jones contributed financially to the Social Crusade and spoke at a Social Crusade meeting in Battle Creek, while Wilson spoke at Jones's company picnic and later lectured on Christian Socialism at Golden Rule Hall, staying with Jones at his home in Toledo. In 1902, after Wilson moved to California, Jones traveled there

to visit Wilson and other friends, although his visit was interrupted by serious illness. They remained in contact until Jones's death in 1904.

The 1912 Socialist Party Convention adopted a program for municipal and state candidates that drew primarily on the experience of Milwaukee, where the voters had elected Socialist Mayor Emil Seidel and given the city council a Socialist majority in 1910. It called for Socialist local governments to improve conditions for government workers, use their regulatory powers to support private-sector workers, create publicly owned utilities and municipal markets, engage in city planning, carry out extensive public health programs, provide parks and playgrounds, and support public education and kindergartens. Reflecting the dissension between the revolutionary and evolutionary wings of the Party, the program was characterized as a set of suggestions rather than an official Party position.

Wilson's Synthesis of Socialism, Georgism, and Feminism

As mayor of Berkeley, J. Stitt Wilson worked for most of the urban reforms promoted by the Georgists, feminists, social progressives, and municipal socialists. He and his allies on the city council improved safety in the commuter railway system, established municipal health inspections for meat and milk, created a municipal employment bureau, expanded and improved the city's parks, persuaded the voters to pass a sewer bond, improved garbage disposal by building a municipal incinerator, and strengthened the city's ability to deliver public safety and public works. He also persuaded the city to lease a house in the center of town to provide a place for the homeless to sleep, operated by the Berkeley Charity Commission. During a strike at the Pacific Gas & Electric Company, Wilson used the city's regulatory powers to pressure the company to settle and had the police keep a close watch on the company's armed strikebreakers in Berkeley, but he was unsuccessful in his efforts to establish a municipal electric plant. He called for regional cooperation between the cities of Berkeley, Oakland, Alameda, and San Francisco to convert water and telephone service to public ownership but neither effort was successful. Wilson campaigned to amend the California Constitution to give women the right to vote, which passed in October 1911, and he began

a campaign to amend the California Constitution to allow local governments to implement land value taxation.

The socialists agreed with Henry George that land value reflected the collective contribution of society. In their view, however, there were other forms of socially created value and other ways in which capitalists took these values for their private benefit. “Golden Rule” Jones (1899) had made the case:

Land is not the only property which is in its very nature social and not individual. . . . Is not machinery a social product, the result of centuries of experiment and invention? In short, is not our whole civilization essentially a social product? Back of every inventor stands a thousand others who made his invention possible. Back of every enterprising capitalist stands the entire nation, without which not one of his schemes could succeed. . . . No man can point to his pile of gold and say “Alone I earned it.” What is called Socialism is not a visionary plan for remodeling society; it is a present fact, which is not yet recognized in the distribution of wealth. (Jones 1899)

Commenting in a socialist journal, Pottenger (1913: 205), a member of the Socialist Party, had made a similar point, distancing himself and other socialists from proponents of a single tax:

We do not accept the Georgian position that only (land and natural resources) should be socialized, leaving all other value to the exploitation of the individual. Knowledge in general, inventions, institutions, etc. are values social in nature and these values should be exploited by and for the collectivity.

Many socialists supported land value taxation, seeing it as a useful reform and a step towards public ownership of land. The Socialist Party platform called for “[t]he collective ownership of land wherever practicable, and in cases where such ownership is impractical, the appropriation by taxation of the annual rental value of all the land held for speculation and exploitation” (Socialist Party of America 1912). In this, it followed the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, which called for “[a]bolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes” (Tucker 1972). Members of the Socialist Party were generally not single taxers, however. The Socialist program called for an income tax, an inheritance tax, and taxes on corporations.

Stitt Wilson did describe himself as a single taxer. In May 1913, while serving as the Acting President of the California League for Home Rule in Taxation, he was elected to a two-year term on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party. Speaking to the Single Tax Club of Manhattan, where his address was “more enthusiastically applauded than anyone who has spoken at a single tax dinner since Tom Johnson,” his views were summarized by McRoy (1914: 53), as follows:

He said he was both a Socialist and a Single Taxer, believing the monopoly of land to be the worst curse of our present social system. In California there were whole counties that could furnish work to every man in the State, stagnating under the blight of land speculation. But even under Single Tax he thought that spoliation would continue. He said, however, that he was willing to go our way and work for our way and when we got there, he would continue on his road.

Land value taxation was an important part of the 1911 program of mayoral candidate Wilson and the Berkeley Chapter of the Socialist Party:

In our campaign we shall unceasingly place before the electors that the most sure, most scientific and most just source of city revenue, viz., the measured increment of land values in its two forms of (1) site values and (2) [public utility] franchise values . . . There is a veritable gold mine ever increasing under the city . . . in that continually unsleeping increase which the normal growth of the city adds (1) to all the land values over which it stands and (2) to all the public [utility] franchises within its limits.

No individual creates these values by labor, foresight, capital or skill. They are socially created by the presence and activities of the whole community. . . . Taxation of the unearned increment of land values and the socialization of public utilities is the secret of a full treasury, collected from the city's own socially created values and providing abundant revenue for every needed municipal enterprise without robbing the poor and the working classes . . . (*Berkeley Daily Gazette* 1911a)

Mayor Wilson showed the depth of his feelings on the issue when the Berkeley Real Estate Exchange asked the city council to repeal the city's real estate license requirement, thus exempting them from

the city's business license tax. Wilson's response included the comment that "[a] laundryman is more valuable to the community than a real estate man." Real estate man George H. deKay responded, "I personally resent the Mayor's statement. If I didn't think I was more valuable than the Chinese or Jap who does laundry I would move out of Berkeley." Wilson answered, "I welcome the resentment. I believe in taxing real estate, not the real estate man. But I do say that a laundryman is more useful and more of a necessity, an element of the community that you cannot get along without. . . . I do not believe in any of the taxes on business, but to remove this tax on the real estate agent and let the grocery man and merchant go taxed would be unjust discrimination" (*Berkeley Independent* 1913).

The socialists believed, as Stitt Wilson (1902) argued, that the capitalist economy had a tendency towards concentration, so that "trusts" and cartels would soon monopolize virtually all forms of production. As a result, public ownership and democratic control of the large corporations would be necessary to preserve democracy from the growing power of plutocracy. Wilson argued that it was the rise of the trusts that destroyed small businesses and threatened ownership of private property by ordinary people and that socialism would ensure adequate property for all.

Evolutionary socialists did not necessarily disagree with Henry George's view that the market could be a form of cooperation as well as competition. Rather, they considered it obsolete in light of the growth of the large corporation and the greater efficiency in production of goods that resulted from major capital investment in machinery. In practice, many Socialists were friendly to small businesses and individual enterprise and the leadership of the Socialist Party in Berkeley included several small businessmen. Wilson was accompanied on the Berkeley City Council by one other Socialist, John A. Wilson (no relation), who owned a bicycle sales and repair shop and had the Eagle motorcycle franchise for Berkeley. Socialists on the school board included Herman I. Stern, Frank B. Heywood, and Elvina S. Beals. Stern was a former minister from the Midwest who worked as a real estate agent and also campaigned for the single tax after he moved to Berkeley. Frank B. Heywood was the Vice President of the West Berkeley Lumber Company.

Beals was a housewife married to a successful attorney and journalist.

Stitt Wilson and the Berkeley Socialist Party chapter endorsed land value taxation not only as a fair means of supporting municipal services but also as a way to encourage enterprise. As Wilson explained:

Our present method of real estate taxation and dealing with franchise values is unjust and disastrous. It punishes the man who improves real estate and rewards the owner of land kept vacant. It leaves the value which the city creates to fall into private hands which never earned it, while it collects taxes out of the people's earning and values which the city did not create. (*Berkeley Daily Gazette* 1911a)

Mayor Wilson campaigned strenuously for the women's suffrage amendment to the California Constitution (Barton 2014). This was passed by the voters on October 10, 1911 along with the initiative and referendum procedure, which meant that not only could organized citizens gather signatures to bring legislation directly to a vote of the people, but the people now included new women voters.

Proponents of the single tax immediately began a campaign to amend the California Constitution to remove the requirement for uniform taxation of all real property and allow land value taxation. Indeed, given how quickly they moved, they undoubtedly had prepared in advance. Their approach was not to mandate a statewide change, but rather to allow local governments the power to reduce or eliminate taxes on the value of improvements and increase or solely rely on taxes on land value. They were encouraged in this approach by success in Oregon the previous year, where the voters had passed a measure that combined abolition of the poll tax with language empowering local governments to choose their form of taxation.

The campaign for Home Rule in Taxation was endorsed by the California Federation of Labor at its annual convention on October 17, 1911. On October 19 and 20, New York Congressman Henry George Jr. spoke on the single tax at mass meetings in San Francisco and Berkeley. He was accompanied by many local notables, including J. Stitt Wilson, who also spoke briefly. The following week

Wilson attended the annual meeting of the League of California Municipalities in Santa Barbara, where he asked the League to support a ballot measure on Home Rule Taxation and made the main speech in favor of the measure. The League of Municipalities gave the tax measure strong support and Wilson and other representatives lobbied the legislature to place it on the ballot.

The legislative effort was unsuccessful, so proponents organized the California League for Home Rule in Taxation and began an initiative campaign. Former congressman J. G. Maguire, a prominent Democrat and friend of Henry George, served as president of the League and J. Stitt Wilson as vice-president. The campaign received major support from the Joseph Fels Fund, Fels being a major financial supporter of the single-tax movement nationally, and from the California Federation of Labor and the San Francisco Building Trades Council. The campaign manager was a leader of the West Coast Cigarmakers' Union who had been a friend of Henry George. The measure was endorsed by the California League of Cities, the Assessors Association, the California Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, and the Commonwealth Club, an organization of middle-class progressives.

In Wilson's speech to the League of Municipalities, he described the use of land value taxation in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, particularly Vancouver, to show that this was a practical reform, but his main focus was on the theoretical and moral justification for taxing land values. As he explained:

As the community grows, site values and land values increase. This increase in site values is not made by the industry, skill, labor or forethought of any individual. It is an increase in value arising from the association or coming together of men. It is an outgrowth of his life as a public or social or communal being in competition or association with his fellows. . . .

The wealth the individual creates should go to the individual. The values which are created by the social body by its very sociality should go to the social body. That social body is as much a reality as the individual person. It is the city or the state. And the city or the state has great public needs which must be supplied. If we should personify the city or state we would say that this Social Mother, in whose household we all live, needs streets and sewers for us all; schools for all our children; peace officers

and fire fighters; and social administrators of all these affairs. She, the city, provides or ought to provide social necessities, public utilities, communal enjoyments and civic equipment for all the people. And to do these things she must have money. She must have her own purse. That purse must fill and refill from her own earnings. She is well able to take care of herself. She has no need to be a pauper, or a beggar, or a thief. The social body, the city or state, should pay its own bills out of that wealth which it has itself socially created. Let the values she herself socially creates fall into her own treasury, and from this, her own treasure, let her pay her own bills ... living on her own legitimate earnings ... [from] taxation on land values. (Wilson 1911: 154–156)

Clearly influenced by his intense participation in the equal suffrage campaign that had concluded only two weeks earlier, in this speech J. Stitt Wilson combined the insights of George on the social nature of land values with municipal socialism and the feminist view of city government as a “municipal household.” For Wilson, a city government that embodied the maternal ethic of care, a “Social Mother” that provided wide ranging services to all of the people, provided a model for what a socialist government should be like.

George’s analysis of urban land value had the potential to bridge a significant gap between socialism and feminism. The standard socialist economic theory of the time focused on the exploitation of wage workers and the resulting class conflict. In this view, women as mothers and homemakers had only the indirect role of supporting male family members unless the women were also working in factories and shops and could join unions. George had shown that the city, as a community of both men and women, created economic value that was taken by private land owners. This implied that women had a significant role in the urban economy and that they were exploited through the private appropriation of the land values they helped create. They therefore had a direct interest in supporting land value taxation and a city government that provided “social necessities” and “communal enjoyments” to its people.

But after winning the vote in 1911, California’s newly enfranchised women did not flock to the banners of either socialism or the single tax. In November 1912, Stitt Wilson ran for Congress as a Socialist but was defeated by the Republican incumbent, receiving

40 percent of the vote. California voters statewide gave Home Rule in Taxation 41 percent of the vote. Tragedy struck Wilson and his family a few days later, when his wife and youngest son came down with diphtheria. His son died, and a grieving Wilson decided not to run for reelection as mayor of Berkeley.

Wilson finished out his term in June 1913 and launched into a statewide speaking tour, leaving behind day-to-day administration in favor of once again evangelizing for socialism. He also continued to work for tax reform, serving as the Acting President of the California League for Home Rule in Taxation in 1913 and early 1914. Helped by its strong showing in 1912, the League persuaded the state legislature to place the measure on the November 1914 ballot. It failed again, this time with 42 percent of the vote.

The Coalition Falls Apart

After the second failure the single-tax movement split, with “local option” and “statewide single-tax” groups each gathering signatures for 1916. Wilson convened meetings to try to find a compromise, but the effort was unsuccessful. Single-tax volunteers were more interested in gathering signatures for the single tax itself than in the local option and only the statewide single-tax forces, calling themselves the “Great Adventure,” were successful in qualifying for the ballot. While described as a “single tax” measure, it did allow use of income and inheritance taxes to fund “old age pensions, mothers’ endowments and workingmen’s disemployment and disability insurance” in order to win support from labor and the Socialist Party. In November 1916, the “Land Taxation” initiative failed with 31 percent of the vote. This was the best statewide showing ever made by a single-tax measure and it made “Luke North,” the pen name of James H. Griffes, the leader of the Great Adventure, famous throughout the single-tax movement (Miller 1916a, 1916b, 1916c, 1916d).

In December 1916 and January 1917 Stitt Wilson again convened conferences of the local option and statewide single-tax factions to try to gain agreement on a process to decide which route to take for a 1918 ballot measure. Those present agreed on a compromise measure that would switch city and county governments to land value

taxation, while leaving the state to be funded through the inheritance tax and the gross receipts tax on railroads, utilities, and financial corporations. Passed by the voters in 1910, the corporation tax was regarded by many as an important progressive reform. Defenders of the compromise argued that it was appropriate to tax railroads and utilities until they were brought under public ownership, since as natural monopolies they would exact monopoly rents from the public. The conference formed a new Equity Tax League of California, with Stitt Wilson as chair and campaign manager (Miller 1917a, 1917b; *The Public* 1917a, 1917b, 1917c).

Luke North refused to attend the January conference or to support the compromise measure. He proposed an alternative measure (the Great Adventure) that would shift all forms of government in California entirely to land value taxation. North argued that “single tax is not an evolutionary drift, but the Bed Rock of Freedom” and characterized Stitt Wilson and the Equity Tax League as “designing politicians and job hunters,” language that mirrored the revolutionary socialist critique of the evolutionary Socialists (North 1918). North and his supporters appealed for assistance from California single taxers and from the nationwide single-tax movement. Once again, the volunteers turned out for the more comprehensive single-tax measure. Wilson and other leaders in the Equity Tax League lobbied the legislature to place their measure on the ballot but were unsuccessful and toward the end of 1917 the Equity Tax League effort collapsed.

Great Adventure leaders gathered enough signatures to get on the ballot in November 1918, but failed to receive support from labor or the Socialist Party and received 24 percent of the vote. After North's death in 1919 his supporters continued with the identical language and approach in 1920 (25 percent) and 1922 (19 percent), after which they no longer had enough support to get on the ballot.

Stitt Wilson had only minor involvement in the single-tax movement after the failure of the Tax Equity League effort. He joined an advisory committee to a proposed single-tax initiative campaign in 1934, an effort that culminated in 1938 when the final initiative measure for land value taxation appeared on the California ballot and received 17 percent of the vote (*Land and Freedom* 1934: 27–28; Echols 1979: 256–263).

In late January 1917 Wilson left the Socialist Party to support American entry into World War I on the side of Great Britain and France, believing it was necessary to “make the world safe for democracy.” After the war he returned to the Methodist Church and from 1919 to 1931 was a traveling lecturer for the YMCA, preaching the Social Gospel at colleges and universities around the United States and traveling to England for extended periods to campaign for the Labor Party. When the Depression began, Wilson returned to the Socialist Party, but, in 1934, he followed Upton Sinclair into the Democratic Party to support his End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign for governor of California. In 1936 and 1940 he supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt, declaring that FDR was the only viable alternative to fascism. He died in 1942 at his home in Berkeley.

Conclusion

By the time of J. Stitt Wilson’s death in 1942 the municipal reform movement had achieved substantial success, as cities provided an increasingly wide range of public services and engaged in extensive regulation of private enterprise in the public interest. Socialism, the single-tax crusade, and the women’s movement, the social movements that he had hoped would transform society, had largely withered away.

Municipal government today provides most of the services fought for by progressive era urban social reformers, but the city is not funded by land value taxation. People cared more about the services than about the source of the money used to provide them. Nor is the city considered an example of practical socialism. The public broadly supports local government activities that protect and provide services to the home and neighborhood, but it shows little interest in government involvement in the workplace and industry. The idea of local government as a form of “home protection,” with a physical basis in residential suburbs, and zoning that separates residences from workplaces, may have helped compartmentalize public thinking about the role of government. When feminism revived again in the 1960s its main focus was equality in the workplace rather than protection of the home. The idea held in common by

the socialists and the Georgists, that society, as a society, creates tremendous value that should be used for public benefit, rather than taken as private profit, remains as radical a break with the dominant ideology today as it was over a century ago.

Notes

1. There is, however, significant work on the relationship of the Georgist and socialist movements in Great Britain. See, for example, Gehrke (2006), Jones (1988), and Wagner (2005, 2006).

2. Like Adam Smith, Henry George used the term “monopoly” to describe any beneficiary of imperfect competition.

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