

**Landlords, 'Wobblers,' and the Labor Party,
Single Taxers in New South Wales; 1883-1898.**

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department
Of Modern History, Macquarie University,
Sydney, March 2003.

Alan Katen Dunstan
Master of Arts (Pass) Sydney,
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Sydney.

'Landlords, 'Wobblers,' and the Labour Movement.'



**HIGHER DEGREE THESIS
AUTHOR'S CONSENT
(DOCTORAL)**

This is to certify that I, ALAN KATEN DUNSTAN
being a candidate for the degree of Doctor of PHILOSOPHY
am aware of the policy of the University relating to the retention and use of
higher degree theses as contained in the University's Doctoral Rules
generally, and in particular Rule 7(10).

In the light of this policy and the policy of the above Rules, I agree to allow
a copy of my thesis to be deposited in the University Library for
consultation, loan and photocopying forthwith.

M. Harwood
Signature of Witness

Alan Katen Dunstan
Signature of Candidate

Dated this 18th day of April 192,000

The Academic Senate on 10 June 2003 resolved that the candidate
had satisfied requirements for admission to the degree of PhD.
This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

Dedicated to my mother and father,
‘Josie’ and ‘Snowy.’
‘May you be safe under the giant
wings of God’s mercy.’

‘Landlords, ‘Wobblers,’ and the Labour Movement.’

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	
Certificate	
Summary	i
Introduction	v
Chapter 1: Background: The Old Order Changes.	1
Chapter 2: John Farrell 1851-1904: The ‘Brewer-Cum-Poet.’	44
Chapter 3: The Struggle for Reform.	93
Chapter 4 Henry George in Australia.	139
Chapter 5: Strikes, Single Taxers, and the Labor Party.	179
Chapter 6: The City, Books, Land, and Land Settlements.	249
Chapter 7: “Georgism” and the “Utopians.”	300
Chapter 8: A Conclusion.	320
Appendix One	333
Appendix Two	350
Appendix Three	352
Bibliography.	354
Plates	

‘Landlords, ‘Wobblers,’ and the Labour Movement.’

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank G. N. Hawker PhD., School of History and Politics, Macquarie University, for his patience, assistance, and supervision. The author also wishes to express his gratitude to Stuart Piggin, Master of Robert Menzies College and Fellow in the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at Macquarie University; to Ann Cuddy, John Farrell's great grand-daughter; to the Medical Doctors Andrew Small, Theo Rothonis and Lyn Pressley; to Hendrikus Wong for his unstinting charity; to James Waldersee PhD., of happy memory who encouraged me, and most significantly, to Dr. Paul Stenhouse, MSC, for his formidable assistance, guidance, charity, and friendship.

‘Landlords, ‘Wobblers,’ and the Labour Movement.’

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other Degree or Diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Katen Dunstan". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Alan Katen Dunstan

March 2003.

‘Landlords, ‘Wobblers,’ and the Labour Movement.’

Summary

Lift your eyes and look in theirs who stand to bar
you from God's bounties,
You and others that you strive with in the bitterness
of need,
Ask them which among their ancestors made one of
England's counties –
Bid them show the Maker's signature or burn the
Title-deed!

---John Farrell.

Who holds the balance of the world? Who reigns...
Jew Rothschild, and his fellow Christian, Baring.

---Lord Byron.

The objective of this work is to explain, elaborate and discuss the philosophical, political and economic ideas of the Single Tax movement in New South Wales in the 1880s and 1890s as enunciated through John Farrell and a group of intellectuals, Frank Cotton, Vincent Lesina, W. E. Johnson, E. W. Foxall, Peter McNaught and Percy Meggy.

During the early stages of the movement, and before the term 'Single Tax' was adopted, an incongruous mixture of freetraders, socialists, freethinkers and protectionists, regularly met as a Land Nationalisation League; and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879) was accepted as the basis of the organization.

Progress was steady and solid until the late 1880s when, with the publicity generated by the proposed visit of Henry George, the movement began to demand serious and anxious notice from politicians of every grade and colour. And, recognizing in the taxation of land values a popular ticket for electioneering, political aspirants hurried to declare that they had always believed in a land tax. Yet a land tax was just what single taxers did not believe in; since a *land tax* is a tax on *all* land – an area or acreage tax - and single taxers believed a land tax would fall unjustly and produce the reverse of what they desired; i. e., the emancipation of the ‘poor.’

At that time, according to Timothy Coghlan the Government statistician, fewer than 700 persons owned about half of all the alienated land in New South Wales. The practice had been for big landowners to grab all the acres that they could; land then being the only form of property not subject to taxation, direct or indirect; and also the one form which increased in value proportionately with public activity and expenditure.

Implementation of the Single Tax, it was hoped, would force landowners, especially those who speculated in land, to employ labour so as to get the returns from which to pay the tax, or make them sell their land to those who wanted to use the land more productively. Either way it was suggested, wage-earners would benefit.

John Farrell, the poet, who was the leading advocate of land value taxation in New South Wales, is the main focus of this study, and his articles written for his own journals, or for the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney where he served as editor and leader writer, provide almost all the Single Tax perspective.

Farrell saw his role chiefly as an educator, and consequently never sought parliamentary office. And, in contrast to the many that did go into parliament preaching the emancipation of labour, he did not believe emancipation lay in the multiplication of restrictions, but in the sweeping away of restrictions and the abolition of monopolies. And the most important of all monopolies was that of the earth itself. Like all Georgists he argued that 'Free Land' meant 'free men,' and until they had the first the last was impossible.

In his various journals he never proposed that the struggles of party politics or the personal actions of party politicians should be noticed any more than was necessary; current affairs were dealt with as texts from which to preach economic truths. The special province of the *Single Tax* was to regard the prominent political occurrences and developments of each month from an ethical standpoint, and to indicate what was right and wrong in legislation.

The study begins with a look at the United States after the Civil War, when Henry George was a young man, and notices the growing discontent of

wage-earners which was linked to the ‘filching’ of public lands by foreign land syndicates, and to the massive free grants to railway companies.

The first section includes a short biographical sketch of George who wrote the only book on political economy that was read by millions; and a brief examination of conditions in Australia which, single taxers argued, fell a long way short of meeting expectations as a workers’ paradise. This is followed by a short biography of John Farrell.

In the second half we look at Single Tax attempts at reform; the great strikes; the first Single Tax conference; the visit by Henry George; the formation of the Labor Party, and the creation of labour settlements.

As a whole, this thesis is not a historical dissertation on the thoughts of Henry George or John Farrell. Rather it is more an exposition of the ideology of the Single Tax as it was shaped by the contributions and explanation of its leading adherents. The justification for the work is provided by the limited number of works on the subject; to lend legitimacy to a wage-earners’ organization that was not a political party nor a trade union; and by the practice of some labour historians to minimise the efforts of the single taxers, and notice only those reformers who were affiliated with the Trades and Labour Council.