

Introduction.

Tax the Land! Oh, God in heaven
How the bare proposal hurts;
Cast the thought from out your system;
Clap another tax on shirts.
Stick another tax on something,
Sugar, bar-iron, trousers, tea;
Leave untaxed your country's acres
(Most of which belongs to me).

---John Farrell, 1896.

In the early 1890s there would have been few people in New South Wales who had not heard of Henry George's proposals, and grown to associate them with the term Single Tax. Many, however, would not have given these proposals such consideration as to determine their precise character. They were known vaguely as 'confiscation,' 'revolutionary,' or 'extreme,' by the many. Those who comprehended what was written in George's book, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), and who realised the great social reform that could immediately be brought about if others also understood, had no worse enemy than the ignorance that had never looked between its covers.

This was the enemy with which John Farrell had to grapple. And in his journals, the ablest advocates of land value taxation were asked to contribute on subjects of current political interest. Answers to readers' questions were

published, and articles supplied, directing popular attention to various phases of social wrong, and the remedy for each.

John Farrell and his colleagues, who had come to be called 'single taxers,' wished to stop the confiscation of public property that private ownership of land allowed, at the same time as the robbery of individuals by state taxes on production. This was to be done by taking the full value of all lands for communal use, if that were possible. Farrell believed it was not. But it was possible for a teacher (what Farrell called himself), to adhere to principles. And, while accepting reform by instalments, show the insufficiency of each, and the necessity for further advances.

In Australia, the progress of the Single Tax idea was solid. In every colony there was a parliamentary element that saw more than a fiscal reform in the substitution of a tax on land values for other kinds of taxation. This element was strongest in New Zealand, but in South Australia, an alliance with the Single Tax League (STL) secured the return of Labor Party members. In New South Wales, in 1893, the rejection of the freehold clause of the Menindee Irrigation Bill showed how an understanding of Single Tax ideas had spread.

Among the early single taxers who owed their start in politics to Farrell were Joseph Cook, Frank Cotton, William Morris Hughes, William Holman, George S. Beeby, Walter E. Johnson, George Black, John Haynes, Leslie Thomas

Hollis, V. B. Lesina and William Affleck. All were foundation members of the Labor Party, as were numbers of other single taxers, who, like Farrell, never entered parliament. Cook and Hughes were to become Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth; Walter Elliott [sic] Johnson would be a member of the first Commonwealth Parliament; and Holman would be Premier of New South Wales.

Hughes, Holman and Beeby were won over to the Single Tax during Henry George's barnstorming tour in 1890. And Hughes, along with Cotton, Holman and Beeby, was a member of the Balmain Single Tax League and his first published work was a long letter to the Editor of the *Democrat* when Farrell was editing it.¹

But before he was a political writer, Farrell was a poet, and his popularity among 'plain' people stemmed from his espousal of their cause, often in verse, in language that they could understand and laugh at. Moreover, he never abandoned his dedication to the fight for justice for the 'poor' and landless: 'For abolition of taxes (other than on land) and oppressive rents; for a just wage, an eight-hour day, and for the entry of working men and women to parliament (through payment of members).'²

In 1893, Farrell wrote a lengthy series of articles for the *Brisbane Worker*, questioning the wisdom of William Lane's 'Paraguayan' solution to the problems of the 'ordinary' people. Of the articles, the editor 'E. B' (Ernest Blackwell)

wrote: 'They are by far the most valuable contribution to the progressive thought of Queensland that has found its way into the columns of the *Worker* or any other place since I came to the colony.' He also stressed Farrell's theory: that the private ownership of land was the economic 'evil' upon which all other economic evils rested; and pointed out 'that on the margin of the western billabongs and amidst the bustle of northern sheds there is a silent army of thoughtful men eager to discover how far one well qualified to speak can make good his claim that the State ownership of land will solve the vexed problems of the age.'³

But while the *Brisbane Worker* had confidence in Farrell, the *Australian Workman* (then edited by the poet, E. J. Brady, and E. W. O'Sullivan), claimed the Single Tax movement in the United States was opposed to trade unionism, this implied a criticism of the organization in Australia. The *Workman* was, however, a protectionist organ and vigorously opposed to freetrade, a cornerstone of Georgist theory. Eugene V. Debs⁴ dealt with this charge best when he wrote: 'If we would discover and apply... a permanent solution to industrial problems, we must educate ourselves... to the causes which periodically produces... depressions and starvation... I want to advise every member of the union and every working man to go immediately and invest in a book called *Progress and Poverty*, the greatest book of the century, written by Henry George, the acknowledged prophet of the Labour movement the world over. Take it home,

read it, study it, and you will find there the solution of the difficulty in the Single Tax.’⁵

It is important to notice Brady’s false charge against the STL; since it was ‘payback’ for Farrell’s attacks on the Labor Party for abandoning its advertised position and voting with George Dibbs on protection in December 1891.

It may be difficult for some to understand how disagreements and bickering among those espousing the same aims could arise at all; just as non-Christians fail to understand why there should be such strong disagreement between Catholics and Protestants when both of them allegedly preached the same Gospel.

But when the platform of the Labor Electoral League (LEL) was drawn up and agreed to, it was clearly seen as being against protection. And it was clear that all Labor members of parliament were bound to support and vote for the proposal to raise revenue from the taxation of land values – a proposal that enraged protectionists.

What persuasion was strong enough to induce those who voted for Dibbs to ignore their platform and pledges, and act treacherously toward the LEL that had secured their election, was not known.⁶ What they did show however, was ‘how little faith is to be put in electioneering promises, and how weak a “platform” is against other considerations.’⁷

Reflections.

In the 1870s Sydney saw the permanent departure of British soldiers from Australian territory and doubtless while there were some who saw the departure as an approaching severance from England, this was not so. Native-born Australians in their thousands continued to embark every year for the United Kingdom (including Henry Lawson, the 'great' Australian nationalist, in 1900).

The troops may have departed, but Englishness reigned. In 1891 only ten of the thirty-six Labor members elected to parliament were born in Australia, half the number that were born in England. Similarly in the arts, key members of the Heidelberg School were English, viz; Louis Abrahams, Julian Howard and Julian Rossi Ashton, Aby Alston, Walter Withers and Tom Roberts. And, as Humphrey McQueen has said, this school was not a 'bush' school: 'Its members painted city beaches and picnic places; never the far outback, and rarely even the inland.'⁸ Moreover when they painted urban scenes, they were invariably softened. Streeton's 'The Railway Station, Redfern (1893) merely 'continued J. M. W. Turner's 'Rain, Steam, Speed' and other works that dissolved the industrial realities.'⁹ Moreover, nor was the style particularly modern since Turner had died in 1851.

Notwithstanding, Australians loved the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ford Madox Brown's 'Chaucer at the Court of Edward III' (1845-1852) for

example, and large historical narratives such as John Lucas Seymour's 'The Armada in sight 1588' (purchased in 1880), and Edward John Poynter's 'The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon,' purchased in 1892.

These, and other works, Keeley Halswelle's 'Non Angli, sed angeli,' bought by the Gallery in 1880 after Sydneysiders had been beguiled with it during the International Exhibition in 1879; and Luke Fildes' 'The Widower,' purchased in 1883,¹⁰ were seen then as virtually part of the fabric of Australian life. As was *The Bulletin*, however, whilst there was much to admire in its writers and poets, its chief cartoonists, Phil May and 'Hop,' have been greatly over-rated, especially when compared with Claude Marquet at *The Worker*. Nor did *The Bulletin* reproduce Australian paintings, as did *The Illustrated Sydney News*, which has largely been ignored by historians.

But to speak of an all pervasive English culture would not be accurate; Scottish and Irish influences were far too vigorous for that.¹¹ Certainly the Celtic poets were widely known, as Celts were in business and commerce; and the cause of Home Rule was vigorously debated, and visits by Irish political figures¹² kept Ireland to the fore. So when Farrell spoke about the land hungry, or when William H. McNamara condemned absentee landlords, both knew that they were writing for many who understood the problems first-hand.

But the Highland ‘clearances’ and Ireland’s ‘land problem’ were being replicated in Australia. In New South Wales, fewer than 650 persons held more than 17,000,000 acres. And since it took about 1,900,000 acres to make a farm one mile in width stretching 3,000 miles, or from Sydney to Perth, it was not difficult to see why, in 1890, ‘one-third of the population was located within a radius of 15 miles of Sydney.’¹³

However, while the presence in Australian politics of men of Irish background is too well-known to need qualification here, it is perhaps less well-known that one of the Dalton men at Orange became a member of the House of Commons *via* Parnell and the Irish Party in the late 1880s. The idea of Labor parliamentarians signing pledges of loyalty to the Party, also came from this source.

The conflict between the single taxers and the Labor Party in December 1891 resulted in an impasse in which it was difficult to apportion blame and in which each side had its supporters. The reduction in the Labor vote in 1894 owed something to this, although it took another year or so before the ‘split’ was complete.

Other Writers.

In a long work like a thesis, considering the complexity of the subject, there will almost inevitably be omissions and over-simplifications; this is true of

any historical work. However, any criticisms, doubtlessly deserved, will be gratefully accepted. And it is with these thoughts in mind that I notice the flaws in others. In his book on William Lane, ¹⁴ Lloyd Ross gives the year of Henry George's visit to Australia as 1889, a mistake repeated by Ray Markey ¹⁵ and A. G. Austin. ¹⁶ In Bruce Scates' highly regarded work, ¹⁷ W. H. McNamara who was born at Taradale in the goldfields of Victoria, is described as a recent immigrant from London! Moreover, in a well-received work by Stuart Svensen, ¹⁸ it was perplexing to find the 'Hard Cash' of his book's title had nothing to do with the famous 1890s publication of that name, and that neither it nor its author Arthur Desmond rated a mention.

There has long been a tendency within Australian labour history to see the Labor Party and the labour movement as the same thing. This is not an intelligent view. Simply by sheer weight of numbers, if wage-earners had always voted Labor, the Labor Party would never have been out of office. Trade unionism, too, had always been invested with a degree of something approaching divinity, the union leaders being the working man's secular representative of the saints on earth. And since most of the single taxers were wage-earners and since they had long ago stopped supporting Labor, I wanted to know more about the path they had chosen. I soon noticed that Henry George was usually dismissed as a 'utopian' (whatever that meant),

and only rarely mentioned in labour histories, and so set out to explore his connection to Australia.

Georgists as ‘faddists.’

Sadly it seems, it had been the fate of Single Tax theory to be designated as a ‘fad’ more persistently than possibly any other social reform of modern times; thus Georgists all over the English-speaking world had to meet, virtually without relief, the constant charge that they were ‘fanatics.’

Farrell, however, thought it was only ‘natural’ for land nationalists to be stigmatised as fanatical by the vested interests and ‘rationalists’ of the 1890s, when materialism was such a ‘cult,’ and disregard of principle in political matters was one of the marked characteristics of the age.¹⁹ Single Tax attacks on self-interest groups were such, that those involved in opposing George, caring little for the justice of the theory, and seeing that workers were becoming affected by the sheer eloquence of *Progress and Poverty*, began their chorus of fanatic in the hope of drumming land nationalisation of the political stage. But as this did not immediately discourage Farrell and his co-workers, every economist with a bent for sophistry was enlisted by the monopolists to prove that the single tax would ruin the country²⁰ since it was an unscientific, impractical ‘utopian’ dream (the worst charge that a rationalist could bring).

In practical terms, however, it must be admitted that one of the reasons why the Single Tax failed, was perhaps that it was too slow a vehicle for reform (others might say this was its strength). But more than that, it was too closely tied to freetrade which was rarely understood. The objection to freetrade was the result of the alienation people across all classes felt, who feared unlimited competition, not only from the other colonies, but from outside Australia. Such people also tended to believe the disinformation dished out by the *Australian Star*, and the *Liberty*, who generally painted single taxers as ‘Socialists and Anarchists, as the enemies of law and order.’²¹

In this quest to understand single taxers in New South Wales, there was nothing remotely scientific about my explorations, much of it is drawn from Farrell’s own words, and since these have largely lain unread for more than one hundred years, I make no apologies. But as I re-read this work I am aware that more could have been said on every point and person I mention; in particular Rose Scott, Mary Gilmore, Murray Frazer, and John Grant, and on those whom I have left out, such as John Longmuir. I have probably placed too much emphasis on some aspects and failed to cover others adequately; elements were sometimes treated with a mixture of brevity and impressionism. All of this is unavoidable in a work ranging over ten years of one of the most turbulent periods in our history. My admiration for Farrell is sometimes difficult to justify otherwise than by

instinct, but what was asked of Henry George might equally be asked of him:

‘The great wheels turn, the world moves on... but who will fill your place?’²²

REFERENCES

- ¹ 5 December 1891, quoted by Paul Stenhouse, ‘Pegasus Impounded the Life and Times of John Farrell (1851-1904) Poet, Journalist, Social Reformer,’ MA Thesis, University of New England, 1986, hereafter referred to as *Pegasus*, p. 243.
- ² *Ibidem*.
- ³ John Farrell, ‘For Those Who Remain,’ *Brisbane Worker*, 15 April 1893.
- ⁴ Eugene V. Debs, secretary-treasurer of the Firemen’s Brotherhood in the 1880s, and president of the militant American Railway Union in the 1890s.
- ⁵ Republished by John Farrell, ‘Eugene V. Debs,’ *Single Tax*, 20 August 1894.
- ⁶ John Farrell, ‘The End of the Labor Party,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 1891.
- ⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ⁸ Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass*, Sydney, Alternative Publishing, 1979, hereafter referred to as *Black Swan*, p. 113.
- ⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ¹⁰ For names and dates of paintings see Renee Free, *Art Gallery of New South Wales Catalogue of British Paintings*, AGNSW, n. d., circa 1982.
- ¹¹ Especially in Business and Commerce, the arts, and politics, to say nothing of their sheer weight of numbers.
- ¹² The Redmond brothers John and William came first in 1883 and several times thereafter; between visits they married the Dalton sisters; John Dillon, a key man in the Land League toured Australia in 1889, and Michael Davitt came in 1895.
- ¹³ *The Bulletin*, 22 March 1890.
- ¹⁴ Lloyd Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, n. d., hereafter referred to as *William Lane*, p. 56.
- ¹⁵ Raymond Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1800-1900*, NSWUP, 1988, hereafter referred to as *The Making*, p. 298.
- ¹⁶ A.G. Austin (editor), *The Webbs’ Australian Diary 1898*, Melbourne, Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1965.
- ¹⁷ Bruce Scates, *A New Australia Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, hereafter referred to as *A New*, p. 23.
- ¹⁸ Stuart Svensen, *The Sinews of War and Hard Cash and the 1890 Maritime Strike*, NSWUP, 1995, hereafter referred to as *Sinews*.
- ¹⁹ *Single Tax*, 20 June 1896.
- ²⁰ *Ibidem*.
- ²¹ Stenhouse, ‘Pegasus,’ p. 269.

²² Austin South in the *Queenslander*, 12 November 1897, on the death of Henry George, republished in the *Single Tax*, 6 December 1897.

1. BACKGROUND: The Old Order Changes, 1865-1887.

‘There is a poor blind Sampson in this land,
Shorn of his strength, and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
And shake the pillars of the Commonwealth.’ - Longfellow.

The Land Nationalisation movement, which became the Single Tax movement, originating in San Francisco and soon to spread with remarkable rapidity, first in the United States of America, and then throughout the English-speaking world, was a product - one might even say a typical product - of the Reconstruction period of North America, those years between the end of the Civil War in 1865, and the so-called ‘Great Uprising of Labour’ in 1886. Typical, because this was also the period of a great gathering of fraternal and utopian forces in the United States; vigorously encouraged by combinations such as the “Knights of Labor” (KoL), whose purpose, since they thought of themselves as a brotherhood, was not merely to acquire a larger slice of the economic pie, but to bring also the entire redemption of labour, and the reconciliation of Labour and Capital.¹ Other groups with similar aims included the Patrons of Husbandry, the Grange, the Wheel, the Union and United Labour Parties, the Tariff Reformers, the Farmers’ Alliance, the Free Soil Party, the Anti-Poverty Society, and the Greenback Labor Party.²

In the 1860s and 1870s, labour was for the most part poorly organized. Nonetheless, some of those who gave the movement its early shape were outstanding individuals. These included, among others, the pacifist Elihu Burritt; William H. Sylvester of the Foundry Workers' Union; Ezra Heywood, of the New England Non-Resistance Society; William Lloyd Garrison of the same society, and his son, also called William Garrison, who held high office in the land nationalisation movement.³

While the ideological foundations were largely laid by Henry David Thoreau and his supporters Josiah Warren and Benjamin Tucker, many important ideas could also be traced to Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger Movement,⁴ and to Saint Thomas Aquinas.⁵ Other contributors included the Fourierists, Robert Owen's Utopians, the Icarian Communities, and George Henry Evans, whose so-called, 'new agrarianism,' in a much-diluted form, became the Homestead Act.⁶ In the upheavals of the preceding quarter of a century, as a result of which the price of land kept steadily rising, there was also a growing impatience with contemporary political structures and deteriorating conditions. The intensity at which factory work was carried out too, was increased when, in a tribute to the production methods used during the war by the armory at Springfield, heavy industry adopted so-called 'armoury

practices' as the norm. In these circumstances, the foundations for a permanent class of wage-workers were laid.⁷

At the end of the war there were about two million unemployed in America. This included the demobilised soldiers from the North who had been so poorly paid as to be thoroughly ill-prepared to return to civilian life, and soldiers from the South who had served for little more than their keep.⁸ Heywood reacted in 1867 by establishing the Worcester Labor Reform League which, by 1871, had become the American Labor Reform League whose agenda embraced such questions as the eight-hour day, equal pay for women, trade unionism, co-operation, the currency and national debt questions, and the swindling of the people in the rapid absorption of the public lands.⁹ Likewise a number of trade unions with a similar reforming zeal sprang up and flourished briefly. Two of the most important were the Knights of Saint Crispin (1867-73) the boot and shoe-makers' union, and the similarly short-lived National Labor Union.¹⁰

The most effective of the groups was the previously mentioned Knights of Labor, or Noble Order of the Knights of Labor of America, to give them their full name. The organization was formed in Philadelphia in November 1869 by Uriah S. Stephens (1821-82) and six associates, all garment-cutters who enjoyed ritual and secrecy. In this period Freemasonry flourished, and the KoL benefited by borrowing many of their ideas. As did other quasi-Masonic secret societies such

as the Mystic Shrine, Riders of the Red Robe, Buffaloes, Knights of Pythias, Ku Klux Klan, the Elks, and the Oddfellows, all of whom had wide support.¹¹

Other influences came from Stephens' association with radicals, in particular the German refugees of '1848' from whom he acquired a kind of socialism that fitted well with his own vague humanistic ideals.¹² These influences are seen in the Principles set down by Grand Master Workman Stephens, for such was his title, in the secret ritual:

The alarming development and aggressiveness of the powers of monopoly under the present industrial system will inevitably lead to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses. It is imperative, if we desire to enjoy the full blessings of life, that this power for evil shall be prevented. This much-desired object can be accomplished only by the united efforts of those who obey the divine injunction: "In the sweat of your face shalt you eat bread." Therefore we have formed the Knights of Labor for the purpose of organizing, educating and directing the power of the industrial masses.¹³

Freemasonry and the secret societies had, however, been condemned by Pope Clement XII in his Bull *In Eminentii*, (1738) [see Appendices] and twice by Pope Clement XIII; in *Ut Primum*, (1759) and again in *Chrisianae Republicae Salus* (1766). It was also said that the French Revolution was prepared in the lodges of Freemasons, and that the whole plan for overturning France was found

in a document published in 1789, viz., *Croquis ou Projet de Revolution de Monsieur de Mirabeau*.¹⁴ Such claims were confirmed by Abbé Augustin Barruel,¹⁵ and John Robison¹⁶ a Scottish Professor of Philosophy and Secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Unperturbed, Stephens, in attempting to impress the solemnity of their undertakings upon the minds of largely ignorant workers, continued the practice – from the earliest days of trade unionism – to introduce Masonic features into the rituals and ceremonies of the KoL. Thus their meeting places were called ‘lodges,’ and their members called ‘brothers,’ as indeed union members are to this very day.

Obligations were in the nature of oaths (Powderly insisted they were pledges), and were taken with all solemnity upon the Bible. Members were sworn in the strictest secrecy, even the name of the Order was never divulged under pain of some terrible retribution; the effigy of a skeleton was adopted as a reminder against breaking faith (see plates).

Thus in the name of secrecy, the KoL was for a long time referred to in circulars, reports, and conversations, simply as Five Stars; this being an allusion to the symmetrical pentagon used in their Seal to denote Justice, Wisdom, Truth, Industry and Economy, and the five elements of life, namely, Salt, Milk, Honey, Bread, and Fruit.¹⁷

The KoL is perhaps best understood in the instructions read to initiates during the ceremony of admission:

Labor is noble and holy. To defend it from degradation; to divest it of the evils to body, mind and estate which ignorance and greed have imposed, to rescue the toiler from the grasp of the selfish - is a work worthy of the best and noblest of our race...We mean no conflict with legitimate enterprise, no antagonism to necessary capital; but men...blinded by self-interests, overlook the interests of others; [Thus] we mean to uphold the dignity of labor...we shall, with all our strength, support laws made to harmonize the interests of labor and capital, and all those laws which tend to lighten the exhaustiveness of toil. To pause in his toil, to gather a knowledge of commerce, to unite, combine, and co-operate in the great army of peace and industry, to nourish...the temple he lives in...is the highest duty of man to himself...his fellows, and to his Creator.¹⁸

In the first ten years of its existence, membership of the KoL was limited to 'ordinary' wage-earners. Bankers, lawyers, and doctors, and those who sold liquor were excluded; as were professional gamblers and stockbrokers.¹⁹

With these exclusions, and with the time spent in vetting applicants, growth was slow; Stephens nevertheless was unwilling to allow any change, especially to the Old Testament pantomime that went on inside the lodges. Consequently, at the General Assembly of the Knights in September 1879,

Stephens was voted out of office and Terence V. Powderly (1849-1924) elected to replace him.²⁰

Powderly, who led the Knights through their most influential period in the 1880s, was born in Carbondale Pennsylvania, on 22 January 1849, the youngest of nine children. At thirteen he started work as a machinist. At nineteen, he moved to Scranton where, after joining the union, took a similar position with a railroad company. During the depression of 1873, he was suspended for his union activities and soon found himself tramping through the western states and Canada looking for work and taking any 'unskilled' job he could to survive. In 1874 he joined the Industrial Brotherhood [forerunner to the KoL], and later that same year, joined the Knights and began working as an activist for the Greenback Labor Party. For his services he secured the party's nomination for mayor of Scranton in 1877, an election he won, and won again in 1878. Shortly thereafter, he was nominated for Lieutenant-Governor of Pennsylvania on the party's national ticket, but refused the offer. He was also offered the nomination for mayor of Scranton a third time but, being then General Master Workman, found the duties of that office far too arduous to admit of his holding any other any other, and declined.

When Powderly entered the KoL he found it a close, oath-bound body; and in 1881, urged the abolition of oaths and the removal of the obligation of

secrecy. In so doing he did away with the chief objection that the Catholic clergy had made to it.²¹

Powderly, became perhaps the best-known figure in the KoL. In Australia this distinction is shared between W.G.Spence, William Holman, George Beeby, Arthur Rae, George Black, Frank Cotton, William and Ernie Lane, Conrad Von Hagen, Billy Hughes, Larry Petrie, Fred Flowers, Henry Lawson; and, not least, John Farrell. The movement began in Australia in 1888, when Brother W.W. Lyght, a Canadian, arrived with a commission as organizer and succeeded in establishing the first local assembly in the antipodes, at Melbourne, in May 1889.

Ideologically, it seems that throughout his tenure as leader, Powderly remained convinced of the power inherent in a just cause, and relied on this notion rather than any 'class' argument to accomplish his ends. Consequently the Knights advocated co-operatives and voluntary arbitration and by 1886, the Order operated 140 co-ops, and had conciliated more than 300 disputes in New York City alone.²²

Further analysis shows that they were opposed to strikes, except when such action was a last resort, and then the least that was expected was that members maintain discipline and resist the use of force. But above all they stressed solidarity. As the historian Norman Ware puts it: 'The solidarity of labor was fast becoming an economic reality if not a psychological fact. [thus] The

Order tried to teach the American wage-earner that he was a wage-earner first and a... carpenter, miner, shoemaker...Catholic, Protestant, Jew, white, black, Democrat or Republican after.’²³

The Order’s motto, ‘An injury to one is the concern of all,’ captured the popular imagination²⁴ and membership of the KoL gave wage-earners a sense of power and unity they had rarely experienced. As a major indirect result of the organizational efforts, a number of States began passing labour reform legislation; such laws established boards of arbitration, regulated child labour, and reduced the number of hours in the official working day. Through over-zealousness, however, or poor drafting, much of the early legislation had little effect, yet despite the shortcomings, these early attempts at reform laid the foundation for better laws to follow.

In the name of creating a more just society, they demanded the State introduce graduated taxation and set up Bureaux of Labor. Other demands included the recognition by incorporation of trades-unions; the adoption of measures providing for health and safety; laws to compel corporations to pay workers weekly; abolition of the contract system; a prohibition both on the hiring out of convict labour, and the importation of foreign labour under contract; and for the government to set-up a people’s bank. Other demands were for equal pay for the sexes. Finally, to complete the vision; ‘They demanded the government

take over all telegraphs, telephones, and railroads, and thereafter; issue no charter or license to any corporation for construction or operation of any means of transporting intelligence, passengers, or freight.’²⁵

Throughout his period in office the one social problem that Powderly desperately wanted to solve and which he had described in the 1870s as the all-absorbing question of the hour, namely the “land question,” remained unsolved. It was his greatest failure. One short poem written at the time, succinctly expressed the feelings of his landless supporters:

These millions of acres, belong to man
And his claim is that he needs
And his title is sealed by the hand of God -
...You may not heed it, you haughty men,
whose hearts as rocks are cold...
But the time will come when the *fiat* of God
in thunder shall be told:
For the voice of the great I Am has said
that the land shall not be sold.²⁶

The Land Question: Towards a Solution?

The regulation of the public lands of the United States has always been a matter of intense interest, not simply for Americans, but for millions of

prospective immigrants. In the first half of the 19th century the reason for this was plain. The easy access to land made it relatively easy for most men to get a living, and demand, buoyed by a constant stream of newcomers, ensured wages were higher than in Europe. Indeed, in that period, so many people had simply settled wherever they fancied, that it became necessary to pass legislation securing title for settlers who had made a permanent home in the wilderness. This Bill was called the Pre-Emption Act, and gave preferential purchase rights to persons living beyond the Ohio-River, in the region then known as the North-West territories.

The Act remained unchanged until 1852 when the granting of free homes again became a national issue. On 11 August that year, a small group of working-class men calling themselves the Free-Soil Democracy Party met in Pittsburgh to nominate candidates for the Presidency; and this being done, adopted the following extraordinary pronouncement on which they intended going to the people:

The public lands of the United States belong to the people and should not be sold to individuals, but should be held as a sacred trust for the benefit of the people, and should be granted in limited quantities, free of cost to landless settlers.²⁷

Ten years later on 20 May 1862, with the 'march of the Western settlers' underway, Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law which, not unlike Robertson's Act of 1861 in New South Wales, confined families to small holdings with actual occupancy, improvements, and cultivation, as requisites for taking possession.²⁸

However, in the real world - as distinct from some semi rural idyll - the distant rumble of thunder began to be heard, metaphorically speaking, as, almost at the same instant, the first significant system of granting land to the railways, or railroads as they were called in America, also came into law. In July 1862, Congress gave permission to the Union Pacific Railroad to build a railway line and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean.

In the widest analysis, the grants of public lands to the railways were as significant as the grants made to the pastoral companies in colonial Australia. Moreover, they mimicked the conditions that led to the Crofters' War (1882-1888) in Scotland, various land wars in Ireland around the same time, and the 'enclosures' in Britain in earlier times.

If one were seeking the causes of the dramatic changes that came over the Republic from that point, namely; the extraordinary inequality in the distribution of wealth; the rise of militant trade-unionism; the corruption of

government, the use of soldiers against wage-earners in strikes and so forth, land nationalists would have argued there are few better places to begin than with the monopoly of natural opportunities that accompanied the granting of free land to the railways.

To a modern generation, or this writer at least, the prodigality of the grants seem scarcely credible. And in addition to land upon which the trains would actually run, governments granted continuous strips on either side for rights of way with additional land for stations, yards and sidings. The Northern Pacific Company, for example, received land consisting of alternative sections 200 miles wide running from the Western boundary of Minnesota to Puget Sound and the Columbia River: An area equal to the combined areas of the United Kingdom and France of more than 200,000,000 acres.²⁹

It is regrettable, too, that by a mixture of chicanery, naivety and political influence, most of the land was handed over not as a reward for building the system for the government - or for the people - but for the railroad companies building the system for themselves. And since theoretically, just 1,618,000 acres were required to create a property one mile in width extending from New York to Los Angeles³⁰ (or from Sydney to Perth), it is easy to see how the settler's lot had worsened and how those able and willing to take-up land and work for themselves were prevented from so doing.

In terms of political theory, the building of the railway lines was, according to one historian, 'the greatest Liberal epic in American history.'³¹ 'The transcontinental lines especially, were promoted mainly with the purpose of profit from their construction. It is not too much to say that they were intended to be profitable ventures if they never carried a passenger or a bag of wheat...The typical procedure was for the directors of the railway to form a construction company to build the proposed railroad. To it they paid exorbitant sums for the work done. Thus the investors in the railway were 'milked' by the directors, and when the railway approached bankruptcy federal and local governments and interested citizens poured more capital into the fund to finish the life line on which the district's future prosperity depended.' Thus, the notorious Credit Mobiler Company, in 1873, was found to have charged over 93 million dollars for work that was worth only half that amount.³² In the wake of this scandal President Grant, and his political opponents Horace Greeley and Grantz Brown, among others, were all shown to have been corrupt.³³

The railway mileage of the United States expanded from 93,239 miles to 163,579 in the decade 1880-1890.³⁴ And in an age wherein State, county, and municipal government, competed to secure lines that would give them prosperity while their neighbours withered and disappeared, land grants were the bedrock for the fortunes of Jay Gould, James J. Hill and William Vanderbilt, who between

them in 1900, owned most of the 200,000 miles of railway lines that by then were in operation.

Self-Help and the Survival of the Fittest

Large portions of the population, however, rarely concerned themselves with other people's wealth. Such being the case, it should also be pointed out that certain American writers had long glorified the 'great' men of industry and commerce, and apotheosized these men in words strikingly reminiscent of Richard Cobden (1804-65).

Freeman Hunt, in his *Worth and Wealth*, (1856) claimed the 'sons of Commerce...consulting their own interests, advance the cause of Humanity and Peace.'³⁵ Thirty years later William Graham Sumner's book, *The Forgotten Man and Other Essays*, (1883) climaxes the apotheosis of the self-reliant middle-class. Around his construction of a simple, honest, hard-working labourer, Sumner clustered all the Spencerian theories of individualism, harmful charity, and hurtful State action. This is the man you rob when you have the State take his bread in taxes and give it in charity to 'a worthless member of society.'³⁶

Despite the best efforts of the KoL and the Anti-Poverty Society, the received political wisdom was to ignore the land question and argue that prosperity depended wholly on having 'good' people in Congress and a sound economy based on 'hard' money. Given these basics - so it was argued - with

abundant natural resources and ample capital any encumbrances experienced by some sections of the population from time to time would be ameliorated by the rising standard of living.

Americans even had their own version of the Englishman Samuel Smiles, the well-known advocate of self-help. This was J.G. Holland, the author of *Plain Talks on Familiar Subject* (1885).³⁷

The cult of self-help is one of the distinguishing marks of the age. William T. Harris, the educator spoke of it glowingly and tirelessly. The McGuffey Readers, perhaps the most influential single set of texts in American history, glorified the virtue in story and example.³⁸ Doubtless this contributed to the widespread resistance of the American masses to welfare action by the State when it was strongly suggested in the latter decades of the 19th century. Such liberal views were endorsed by the economic 'experts' who almost always took their lead from Wall-street and argued that poverty and unemployment were due, amongst other things, to the pernicious effects of deficit spending, or the adoption of silver as legal tender.

These were not views shared by Powderly who, in 1882, when the results of land policy were clear, took the opportunity to sketch a picture on the political realities of the times for the membership:

The eight-hour law, the prohibition of child labor and the currency question are all of weighty moment...But high above them stands the land question. Give me the land and you may frame as many eight-hour laws as you please...Prohibit child labor if you will, but give me the land and your children will be my slaves. Make your currency of what material you choose, but, if I own the land you cannot base your currency upon the wealth of the nation, for that wealth is in the land. You may make the laws and own the currency, but give me the land and I will absorb your wealth and render your legislation null and void. ³⁹

The Reverend Father Edward McGlynn, New York's so-called 'rebel priest,' and President of the Anti-Poverty Society was of similar mind to Powderly. He said:

Free land means free men, and until we have the first the last is impossible. This is a law of nature, universal and everlasting. No matter what the condition of man may be, he is governed by that law, and is free only in proportion as the land is to him free. The savage would die if denied access to the land... It is the same with the civilized man. ⁴⁰

Rather less concerned with such matters were the 50,000 persons contented with society as it was. These were the relative few who owned 50 per cent of the country's wealth. At the top of the economic pyramid were ten families drawn exclusively from monopolists, each of whom was in possession of

at least \$100,000,000. The descendants of Joseph Astor, the German Jew who made his fortune from real estate, led the way.⁴¹ Another close to the top was Asa Packer, an eccentric who made his fortune out of coal mining. Packer lived in a castle in Mauch Chunk, a small town near his mines in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, from where the Molly Maguires, a secret society of Irish-American miners concerned with the welfare of its members and the punishment of its enemies, usually achieved those ends by criminal means.⁴²

Jay Gould, the American 'Wizard of Wall-street' was another near the top. As the owner of a number of railway companies - and Western Union - he was perhaps the most despised of all the 'robber barons.'⁴³ Others similarly placed were Cornelius Vanderbilt who inherited his father's vast railway fortune and John Rockefeller whose Standard Oil Company had control of the whole oil trade of America. On a descending scale came Moses Taylor, Charles Crocker, Hetty Green, Mary Hopkins, S.V. Harkness, A.J. Drexall, and Governor Fairbanks, each of whom was worth between \$25 million and \$100 million.⁴⁴

In the 1880s, the increasing tendency to centre wealth in fewer hands ran in tandem with the accelerating growth of corporations. Such was the growth that the John Moody's Investment Company⁴⁵ estimated that the twenty-four Board members of the United States Steel Corporation, directly, or indirectly,

represented one-twelfth of the entire wealth of the United States. Given such abundance at the top, it was scarcely surprising that conditions at the grass-roots were in decline. In 1880 three-quarters of farms were tilled by their owners, but ten years later this figure had fallen to two-thirds, whilst in the same period the proportion of farms for hire rose from twenty-five per cent to thirty-four per cent. The fault causing this massive shift went far beyond rural America. In the cities, the comparative number of homeowners declined in direct proportion to the city's size. Thus New York, the largest city, had only six per cent of its families living in homes they themselves owned. The picture was much the same for other eastern cities but was better further west. In Chicago for example, 29 per cent of families either owned their own homes or were paying them off.⁴⁶

Since something like thirty million migrants took up residence in the United States between 1860 and 1920, and there had been millions before that, it is safe to suggest that many came from parts of the world where the social order operated mainly in the interests of the privileged few. And while the unjust and artificial conditions of land ownership in Europe pointed to some enormous, underlying error, and with every opportunity of avoiding the same mistakes, Americans nonetheless steadily entrenched landlordism until what Powderly called the 'prime iniquity' of the Old World, was laid deep in their own ground. Thus, large numbers of immigrants who had been forced off the land in the

United Kingdom and Ireland by a landlording nobility, now faced the same nobles in the United States often with fewer protections, and equally malicious local monopolists.

William Scully, one of the best-known of Ireland's notorious rack-renters, was one such noble. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that whilst his tenants were required to doff their hats whenever they entered his estate office, the houses in which they lived were shanties consisting usually of a room-and-a-half. And while the land upon which they lived had cost only 75 cents an acre, Scully himself was living in luxury in London drawing \$400,000 a year from his American estates alone.

Viscount Scully to give him his short title, was with Lord Brassey, a future governor of the Colony of Victoria, two of the best-known leaders of the British land syndicates in the United States. Disconcerting – to some Australians at least - was the knowledge that Scully and Brassey, along with Viscount Cross and Sir Henry Thurstan Holland, large landholders themselves in America, were, in 1887, all involved with the Jubilee Exhibition in South Australia.⁴⁷

Membership of the Texas Land Syndicate, with 3,000,000 acres, included Baroness Burdett-Coutts, of Coutts Bank; the Dukes, Rutland, Beaufort, Beresford, and Beaudon, and the Earl of Cadogan, whose wife was a maid-in-waiting to the Queen. Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, of 'New' Poor Laws fame,

was also a member. Persons of note in Sir Edward Reid's syndicate which held 2,000,000 acres in Florida, were Lady Lister Kaye, the Duchess of Marlborough, and the American-born millionairess Lady Randolph Churchill, née Jerome. The innocuously titled Syndicate 4 holding over 4,000,000 acres in Mississippi, had within its ranks the Marquis of Dalhousie, Viscount Cholmondeley, and Ladies Gordon, Biddulph and Cross. The Marquis of Tweeddale also headed one very large ring, and of two others, one was operating wholly in the interests of widowed peeresses while the other had none but peers on their books. Simply put, in the 1880s the British gentry owned almost 21, 000,000 acres of the United States.⁴⁸

In these circumstances the theme of the descent from self-employed yeoman to proletariat, redolent with loss, was noted. The American dream of national unity and prosperity was becoming a nightmare of divisiveness. Powderly believed the change in the ethos owed much to the introduction of machinery, and large manufacturing establishments turning out, through mass production, articles previously made by hand. Prices were lowered, and those who worked by hand found themselves competing with machines that required only a little oil and maintenance. Blacksmithing, roadside shoe shops and other small businesses, were abandoned and the men who once ran them had little choice but to make their way to the cities where the large factories were. But in

these hives of industry many employees became alienated, and began to think in terms of retaliation against employers and develop a blind anger at the prevailing social distress.⁴⁹

In such places it was scarcely surprising that wage-earners were coming to see themselves as wage-slaves. And, since many were increasingly reliant on the directive energy of others to provide them with work, it was little wonder that many felt desperate and restive when times were hard and no one would hire them.

These facts alone ensured the creation of more aggressive combinations of workers. One such group was led by F.A. Sorge, who came to prominence arguing the line of Karl Marx (real name Moses Mordechai Levi) (1818-83), a Freemason⁵⁰ who taught that the workers' lot could only be improved by the forcible overthrow of existing conditions.⁵¹

The Marxist organizations were generally small societies composed almost exclusively of German socialists styling themselves 'sections' of the International. The first, in New York, was initiated at a meeting held in the Germania Assembly Rooms in the Bowery in January, 1868.⁵² It was there that the Communistic Social Party of New York and Vicinity was formed. Its founder was Misca Hilkowicz, a Russian Jew who had assumed the name 'Morris Hillquit.'⁵³

Despite the preponderance of Germans, the organization was not racially based, as might be seen in the warm reception given by socialists to O'Donovan Rossa, the Fenian leader, which won them the sympathies of his supporters in America and influenced a number of the Irish to join them. Similarly, the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, drove some radical Frenchmen to the United States and into the socialist camp.⁵⁴

But generally speaking, American workmen looked with suspicion upon socialists and anarchists, whom they tended to lump together. They were suspicious of them first because they were atheists,⁵⁵ and second, because many were foreign born and because both groups talked tirelessly of their dissatisfaction with American society. Nevertheless, those who doubted the *penchant* of these groups for destruction and division, to have their doubts dispelled, needed only to read the *Communist Manifesto* (1847), or Johann Most's *Beast of Property*, a pamphlet published by the New Haven Group of the International Workingmen's Association:

The system will be abolished in the most rapid and thorough manner if its supports - *the beast of property* and hordes of its adherents – are annihilated. The case standing thus: If the people do not crush them they will crush the people, drown the revolution in the blood of the best, and rivet the chains of slavery more firmly than ever. Kill

or be killed is the alternative. Therefore, massacres of the people's enemies must be instituted... Revolutionary communes must incite rebellion... The war cannot terminate until the enemy (*the beast of property*) has been pursued to its last lurking place and totally destroyed.

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Nor was America's fear of anarchism lessened by events in Russia where there was an attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II in September 1879, led by the anarchists Sophie Perovskaia and Leo Hartmann.⁵⁷ The grand legacy of Alexander's reign, which was in great measure his own deed, was the emancipation of the serfs – 23 million souls – in 1861. Moreover, the Emperor, with a newly appointed minister, Count Loris Melikoff, was working on new Constitution and a plan of reform that might have regenerated the country. But Alexander and a number of Cossack guards were murdered by bomb-throwing assassins in 1881, and on the night that he died from the wounds he received in the attack, certain of his court advisors saw that the drafts of the Constitution were torn up.

So ended for the moment hope of further reforms, and an almost inevitable reaction followed. The conspirators – Scheliaboff, Ryssakoff, Sophie Perovshaia, and two others – were put to death, it is said with fearful cruelty.⁵⁸

In this environment, it came as no surprise when the journal of the KoL blamed anarchists for the 'Haymarket' bombing in Chicago on 4 May 1886, when a bomb was thrown at a column of police killing eleven men and wounding 110 more.⁵⁹ The journal denounced the anarchist leaders as 'cowards' and their followers as 'fools.'⁶⁰ Others kept the public fully informed of the non-American birth or extraction of the 'bombers.' This was clearly indicated by the names of those who were ultimately charged with the murders: Rudolph Schnaubelt, August Spies, Michael Schwab, Samuel Fielden, George Engel, Louis Lingg, Oscar Neebe, William Seliger, Adolph Fischer, and one other, the only American-born person indicted, Albert R. Parsons (1848-1887), an ex-Confederate from Alabama.

On 11 November, 1887, Spies, Fischer, Engels and Parsons were hanged. 'Let the voice of the people be heard!'⁶¹ Parsons was said to have demanded, seconds before his own voice was stilled. Of the others, Schnaubelt escaped from custody and never went to trial, Seliger turned State's evidence and was granted immunity; Lingg committed suicide whilst awaiting execution (by exploding a dynamite cap in his mouth) and the death sentences on Neebe, Fielden and Schwabb, were commuted to life imprisonment.⁶²

Powderly opposed any expression of support for the men, including Parsons who was a Knight in good standing, and condemned their deeds and

beliefs publicly. 'Anarchist,' he wrote: 'are no more part of the part of the labor movement than the man who sits up nights to work his way into a bank vault so that he may enrich himself from the earnings of others.' ⁶³

The use of violence as a political strategy has a very ancient history, one scarcely limited to anarchists. Its chief exponents in the United States in the 1870s were the Molly Maguires, a secret organization developed to fight coal owners.

Membership of the Mollies, as they were affectionately known, was limited to Irishmen, or men of Irish descent. It was also necessary to be a Catholic.⁶⁴ But the Church opposed them as she did all secret societies, and every member lived under the terrible threat of excommunication. ⁶⁵

Between 1862 and 1875, as well as repeated acts of sabotage; there were 142 unsolved murders and 212 felonious assaults in Schuylkill County.⁶⁶ Many of the victims were supervisors, mining superintendents, and colliery foremen. But were the Mollies just convenient scapegoats? Perhaps, since it seems little odium ever attached to their rivals, the mainly Welsh-born Modocs, who were also miners. ⁶⁷

But the Mollies were first and foremost a benefit society that ran lodges where for a few cents a week, members received benefits if they were ill, and could pay for their funerals in advance. That is until Franklin Benjamin Gowen,

the coal magnate, began his attempts to destroy them.

Gowen was thorough, and within only a few years the last of twenty men sentenced to die by hanging was executed on 9 October 1879. Many more were imprisoned for long terms, mainly on the word of one James McPharlan, alias McKenna, a Pinkerton detective working undercover who, in a number of cases was the only witness against them. Thirty years later, Eugene V. Debs (1855-1926), a spokesman for labour and socialism, wrote:

They all protested their innocence and all died game...Not one of them was a murderer at heart. All were ignorant, rough and uncouth, born of poverty and buffeted by the merciless tides of fate and chance...To resist the wrongs of which they and their fellow workers were victims and to protect themselves against the brutality of the bosses, according to their own crude notions was the prime object of the organization of the Molly Maguires...It is true that methods were drastic, but it must be remembered that their lot was hard and brutalizing; that they were neglected children of poverty...The men who perished upon the scaffold as felons were labor leaders, the first martyrs to the class struggle in the United States. ⁶⁸

Judged by many, though not all, of those who apparently know best, the free market economy [or the counterfeit that passed as one] was the superior method of delivering high wages and conditions for the citizenry. This proposition was to be sorely tested in the 1870s, or 'Gilded Age,' as Mark

Twain⁶⁹ so loosely described it, not only in the United States and Great Britain but in prosperous “Sunny Australia,” ‘the land of the property shark and land-speculator.’⁷⁰

The Old Order in Australia

John Farrell, writing in 1893, reported that distress and destitution was so widespread he feared the country must be ‘cursed.’ The poverty was, besides its myriad other forms, manifested in ‘barefooted’ and ‘ragged’ children daily begging on the city’s streets ‘for bread’ and unemployed men knocking at their neighbour’s door for a feed.⁷¹ Yet Australia was only ‘sparsely populated’ and its resources ‘barely scratched.’ There was something wrong somewhere.

But poverty had been a feature of Australian life, off and on, since the days of the First Fleet when almost every one was living off the Government stores.⁷² Occasional floods and droughts did not help, nor did ‘convictism,’ nor the lack of industry. The problems that would manifest themselves later on were laid at the beginning of settlement when

reformatory was scrapped in favour of an antipodean Virginia, a community of comparatively aristocratic pastoralists, whose reasonable demands for labour could be easily met by importations of convicts. The free element would be constituted of “really respectable settlers – Men of real Capital – not needy adventurers. They should have estates of at least

10,000 acres.” So Macquarie’s little river-flat farms and all his and Lord’s schemes for fostering small independent industries went into oblivion, and the whole colony devoted itself for the next seventy years to exporting wool in sufficient quantities to pay for the import of everything else.’⁷³

The chief beneficiaries of these policies initially were big individual landholders like Macarthur, and later, by corporate landholders such as the Australian Agricultural Company (AA Co). In those far off days, however, the fecundity of cattle and sheep was such that mutton and beef were often only worth their fat.⁷⁴ Nonetheless wool was a very convenient product that could be carried easily to distant markets, and wages for shearing were low.

But it was mining that was responsible for most of the wealth of Australia. Gold discoveries quintupled the population in twenty years, and brought sheep and bullocks to a market; brought mouths to be filled, and so made farming worthwhile.⁷⁵

As in most ‘new’ countries ‘progress’ was linked to the colony’s primary resources. Settlement grew by a process of intensification. Usually, some opportunity arose and capital followed the opportunity. A nucleus of development was created. Gradually the fruits of the labours of the agencies that created it were, according to theory, dispersed into more and more hands by a

natural process of alienation, in accordance with the growing capacity of the land to provide.⁷⁶

How well it all worked might, for example, best be judged by reading the report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly entitled *Condition of the Working Classes of the Metropolis* (1860).⁷⁷ Which says in part: ‘As might be expected in so large a city as Sydney... there are many persons of better education and social habits, who are reduced to much suffering for want of any kind of employment for which they are fitted, and who make their distress the more severe by their struggles to conceal it... Since the discovery of gold, the “unsettled courses of many working men, and their frequent absences from home, seeking their fortunes at the diggings, have left numbers of women and families in Sydney without protection or any means of subsistence, and the consequence is a large amount of destitution and misery.”

The Report also gave, among others, the following examples of workers’ housing: A den of two rooms occupied by seven men and seven women; Seventy human beings found herded together in a common lodging-house of six rooms; and no fewer than 315 Chinamen lodged in one building.⁷⁸

But the almost standard historical view of Australia, or at least of New South Wales, is that the years between the gold rushes and 1890 were prosperous with high growth. This is supported by large increases in both the sheep and

immigrant populations. The credibility of the view is also enhanced by the construction of a number of very fine buildings. In Sydney these included Adam's Hotel (1873), the Land's Department (1877), the Colonial Secretary's Office (1878) Newington College (1881), Saint Patrick's Seminary (1885), and, not least, Saint Mary's Cathedral (1883).

With such strong visual support the glories of 'Old Sydney Town' were widely proclaimed, with their numerous elegant mansions and vigorous building industries, these cities were held up as the epitome of colonial advancement. Here in 'Sunny Australia,' so it was said, a new breed of self-made men were building an egalitarian society free of poverty, quite unlike class-ridden Europe.

In response to this view, our thesis, among other things, challenges the notion of a 'long boom' for wage-earners and the almost axiomatic assumption that wage-earners benefited substantially from the growth of trade-unionism, economic expansion, and the creation in 1890 of the Labor Party. The work is following paths indicated by a heterogeneous collection of single taxers in the 1880s and 1890s and, in more recent times by historians such as Max Kelly ⁷⁹ and Shirley Fitzgerald ⁸⁰ whose works show that behind the façade of the prosperous city, lurking ever present was grinding poverty.

Indeed, one of the heterogeneous witnesses was William H. McNamara, co-founder of the Australian Socialist League (ASL), he painted a very gloomy

picture when he reported in 1888 that ‘thousands’ of men were tramping the streets of Sydney looking for work and ‘hundreds’ of families were ‘starving.’ And in a phrase so heavily laden with meaning that it was almost incapable of misinterpretation, he added: ‘This colony will be another Ireland before long.’⁸¹

Another witness was Francis Adams (1862-93), the young writer arrived in Australia in 1884 as an immigrant seeking a cure for tuberculosis. In Australia he busied himself in educational, literary, and political work, and was on the staff of the *Bulletin* where he met and became friends with John Farrell. In 1890 he returned to England ‘mind-sick of Australia’ and enfeebled by poor health. His last two winters were spent in Egypt and on the Riviera; he died, like Adam Lindsay Gordon in 1870 and Barcroft Boake in 1892, by his own hand, at Margate in 1893.

His best-known work, *Songs of the Army of the Night* (1887), was the showcase for the remarkable *Mass of Christ* which contained poems dedicated to Charles Stewart Parnell, Henry George, John Farrell, and among others, Karl Marx. His poetry also appeared occasionally in the *Australian Standard*, and later in the *Single Tax* when Farrell was editing both journals. He was only in the country for six years ‘but his verse and prose writing supported the growing radicalism of Australian politics, as they supported the fight by the poor and

landless for justice and democracy.’⁸² In his dedication of *Songs*, - which every writer pre-disposed to using terms like ‘long boom’ should read, he writes:

I give this book to you, - man or woman, girl or boy, labourer, mechanic, clerk, house-servant, whoever you might be, whose wages are not the worth of your work, - no, nor a fraction of it, - whose wages are the minimum which you and those like you, pressed by the desire for life in the dreadful struggle of ‘Competition,’ will consent to take from your Employer who, thanks to it, are able thus to rob you...I give it to you in the hope that you will see how you are being robbed, - how Capital that is won by paying you your competition wages is plunder, - how Rent that is won by the increased value of land that is owing to the industry of us all, is plunder, - how the Capitalist and Landowner who over-ride you, how the Master or Mistress who work you from morning to night, who domineer over you as are the men and women whose sole title to this is, that they have the audacity and skill to plunder you, and you the simplicity and folly not to see it and submit to it.⁸³

It would be possible to go on listing examples of poverty in New South Wales without ever looking at soup-kitchens, ‘sweating,’⁸⁴ destitute children, intemperance, homelessness or life in the mining towns. Such places as Sunny Corner where miners suffered irreparable damage to heart and lungs from the effects of sulphur and other chemicals associated with smelting.⁸⁵ It may even be

argued with accuracy that conditions worsened with the distance travelled from Sydney. In Broken Hill, where many buildings were made of timber ⁸⁶ (see plates), and about a third of the town lived in tents and paper-lined huts made of hessian and canvas, beside the ever present threat of fire there were also problems with fresh water ⁸⁷ and in one quarter of 1888, 21 adults and 33 babies died from typhoid fever.

Nevertheless, in earlier times it had been the boast of many Australians that they were the 'freest people under the sun.' In glowing terms they referred to the opportunities which Australia presented to the wage-earner, as evidenced by the many instances in which men from the lower ranks in the old world, had, as colonists, risen in a short time to positions of affluence and power. By the 1880s the situation had changed, and in the 1890s Farrell could write: 'The brightness of former days has given place to gloom – we are already on a level with pauper Europe... we have made millionaires and slums... We have paid emigration agents to boom the "Land of the Golden Fleece," and are now driving the pick of our colonists away to a New Australia.' ⁸⁸ Farrell saw the solution to these problems in the writings of Henry George, and his theories, developed in the 1870s and 1880s, on land nationalisation and the single tax.

Henry George's Life and Work.

Of all the economists and 'thinkers,' in the 19th century, and there had been no lack of them, there were few who attracted as much worldwide attention as Henry George. So far as is known there was nothing auspicious about his birth or early youth. He was born into a comfortable, middle-class family in Philadelphia on 2 September 1839; the second child, and the eldest son of ten – two of whom died as children. His father, Richard George, was a Christian who built his life and business around selling Sunday School books and literature for the Episcopalian Church.⁸⁹ The young George attended public schools until he was 14, when he left to start work. Not liking the job particularly, he got himself work as a compositor, a job he quickly gave up for the opportunity to go to sea.

Henry George set out as a *voyageur* to form his opinions from personal contact with the wider world, and like many before and since, had mixed success. In April 1855 he shipped from New York as foremast boy aboard the *Hindoo*, bound for Calcutta by way of South Africa with a detour to Melbourne with a cargo of timber for the building boom. In 1858, he sailed to California by way of Cape Horn on his way to the gold diggings along the Fraser River in British Columbia. He no doubt, in his mature years, considered the experiences thus

gained very valuable, and presumably in some directions his writings were influenced by them.

The trip to Canada was a financial disaster, and with borrowed money he returned to San Francisco where he again took work as a compositor. For about eight years he followed his trade, contributing a number of anonymous letters and articles to the paper for which he was type-setting. Subsequently, in 1866, he joined the staff of the *San Francisco Times* as reporter, and later went on to become editor at the *San Francisco Post*. After working for the press for ten years he retired from it and occupied himself with two State appointments of no great importance. The positions were inspector of gas meters for California, and trustee of the San Francisco Free Public Library, which he held until 1880. It was in this period that he worked up *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879, the year preceding the abandonment of his official positions, and was an immediate success.

In *Progress and Poverty*, he undertook to prove that in order that the people should receive that from the land to which they are entitled, all land should be the inalienable property of the State.⁹⁰ He traced the source of poverty to the accumulation of large private estates, and, delving deeply into the subject, dealt with it in a new and unique manner. He argued that the land of a country belongs to the people of that country, and that no human law could rightly create

an individual title; that every child that is born has by that very fact a right to its share in the land; that the basis of property lies in human effort, and that what is not the product of human effort can never rightfully be made human property.⁹¹ Or more plainly, that which God has made and given for the use of all should belong in common to all. His *magnum opus* was dedicated 'to those who, seeing the vice and misery that springs from the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege, feel the possibility of a higher social state and would strive for its attainment.'

In the latter half of 1880 he went to New York, and subsequently to Great Britain to lecture. On one such tour he had the unpleasant experience of being arrested as an Irish suspect under Forster's Coercion Act, although he was quickly released. He lectured in Great Britain 1881-89, and between making speeches in the principal cities and towns on behalf of organizations such as the Land Reform Union of England, and the Scottish Land Restoration League, he kept American readers informed through articles he wrote for the American paper *Irish World*.

In 1881, an English edition of *Progress and Poverty* was published. A six-penny edition followed and had an extraordinary sale, whereupon the London *Times* came out with a review, saying that George's book, hitherto unnoticed by the English press, could no longer be ignored.

But the Duke of Argyll attacked George in an article entitled *The Phrophet of San Francisco* published in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1884 and George replied with *The Reduction to Iniquity*, published in the same review. These articles were republished later the same year as a pamphlet entitled *Property in Land. Protection or Freetrade* followed in 1886, which many considered his finest work. In this he argued for freetrade, claiming it better served the interests of labour. By the action of some freetraders in Congress the book was printed as part of the Congressional Record, and over one million copies were circulated in the Presidential campaign of 1892. *The Condition of Labour*, an open letter to Pope Leo XIII, replying to the Pope's Encyclical on labour, *Rerem Novarum*, was published in 1891, and *A Perplexed Philosopher*, his bitter commentary on Herbert Spencer's various writings, in 1893.

In 1881 *The Irish Land Question* was published, in 1883 *Social Problems*, in 1884 the *Land Question*. Thus, not surprisingly, in 1886 the United Labor Party [of America] ran George for the job as mayor of New York. The democratic nominee was Abraham Hewitt and the republican Theodore Roosevelt [who later became President]. Hewitt won the election with 90,000 votes; George finished second, and Roosevelt, a distant third. The *Standard*, a weekly newspaper established by George in New York in 1887, was edited by him until through ill-health he gave it over to William Thomas Croasdale, a

journalist of reformist sentiment who ran it until it ceased publication in 1891.

George, accompanied by Powderly, also took a prominent part in the conference of land reformers held in Paris in 1889.

There was another tour of Great Britain in 1889, and in 1890 he made a tour of Australia by way of San Francisco, which city of his early struggle rose to greet him. However throughout his career he regularly saw the single tax ridiculed as a 'panacea,' and himself derided as a 'utopian.'

For arguing essentially (as Spencer once did), that to deprive people of their right to the use of the earth was to commit a crime, inferior only in wickedness to the crime of taking away their lives or personal liberties.

And, in a world apparently moving ever closer towards 'secularism' and 'modernism' the notion that God made the land or anything else was increasingly seen as infantile. Notwithstanding, in the light of the conflicts in the coal fields that had been chronic since the Civil War; the rise of nihilism; and the violence between wage-earners and police, even in Australia, George was also asking what it seems few others were asking: How was it possible without absolute anarchy, for reformers to proceed, except by taxation? ⁹²

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2. John Farrell 1851- 1904: The ‘Brewer-Cum-Poet.’

And greater dreams! Oh Englishmen,
Be sure the safest time of all
For even the mightiest State is when
Not even the least desires its fall!
Make England stand supreme for aye,
Because for peace and good,
Warned well by wrecks of yesterday
That strongest feet may slip in blood!
--- John Farrell.

In the early stages of the Single Tax movement in New South Wales, an incongruous mixture of Freetraders, Fairtraders, Free-thinkers and Protectionists regularly assembled together as the Land Nationalisation League; and although Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* was adopted as their founding ideal, it soon became evident that the Protectionist element would prove a serious menace to the success of the movement, and ‘improvements’ on Henry George were suggested from the start by that section of the membership. In order, therefore, to prevent the complete under mining of the League, and with a view of effectively guarding against the interference of political adventurers, the title Single Tax League (STL), (already adopted in America) was substituted for Land Nationalisation League.¹

The change provoked a howl of disapprobation from ‘friends,’ many of whom went on to become the league’s bitterest opponents. Nonetheless, progress

was made until, by 1890, the movement had become formidable enough to demand serious notice from politicians of every persuasion. The result, as predicted, was that political aspirants on all sides, recognizing in land value taxation a popular vehicle for electioneering purposes, hurried to declare themselves in favour of a 'land tax.' But a land tax was just what single taxers did not believe in. A land tax is a tax on all land – an area or acreage tax. The incidence of such a tax as Georgists saw it would fall unjustly and produce results exactly the reverse of those intended. Under a uniform land tax, land worth little would be taxed equally with land of the highest value, and an acre of land in the city would pay no more than an acre of farming land in the back blocks. Under a uniform tax on land values, which is what land nationalists favoured, the incidence of taxation would be more equitable, falling mainly on the large landholders.

Thus single taxers were warned about lending credence to those talking about 'graduated' taxes and 'progressive' taxes on land or land values, and of 'exemptions,' all of which were snares to catch the unwary laid by wealthy land monopolists who only desired a loophole to escape payment of their share of land value taxation. ²

William Winspear, a sympathiser who published the *Radical* or *Australian Radical* on behalf of the Australian Socialist League (ASL),

showed his understanding of George when he argued that large landholders were opposed to his ideas because they undermined Protection, and because it amounted to 'free' land for the landless. 'Free labour needs no protecting' he wrote: 'Give the people equal opportunities and they can... satisfy their own wants from the soil.' ³

Other publishers saw the matter less clearly. In 1890 the *Bulletin* suggested that only 'unreasonable' men could fail to see that the nationalisation of land had been made 'politically impossible' by the prominence given to the single tax method. It warned that the 'landed classes' were already 'furious and terrified' and that the whole array of conservatism was 'sympathetically affected.' ⁴ Similarly, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'the organ of the rich,' rarely deigned to discuss the land nationalists until the late 1880s. Up to that time the publishers believed Georgism was aimed mainly at protection. But with the public interest stirred up by Henry George's proposed visit in 1890, on noticing that his chief attacks were against property, diplomacy was abandoned. The *Herald* repudiated George and all his works and followers. Its attitude was not unforeseen; and it indicated the attitude of that very influential section in the community who had supported Freetrade simply out of an instinct for conservatism. Henceforth they learned that freetrade might also be connected with 'confiscation.'

On another occasion the *Bulletin* suggested that the Single Tax owed its importance to the ‘fanaticism’ of four men viz., E. W. Foxall, Percy Meggy, Frank Cotton and John Farrell. They came to this conclusion after purposely excluding the only two Single Tax members in parliament - John Plumb and C. L. Garland - whose zeal compared with the others ‘was as ginger-pop to Mackay rum.’⁵ None of the four, according to the *Bulletin*, ‘if we bar Farrell’s admirable verses,’ had done anything to ‘justify their emergence from obscurity.’ They also claimed that the fame of the quartet was due almost entirely to Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph*, which ‘had done more for the “Georgites” than all the other journals of Australia put together.’⁶ What the *Bulletin* failed to mention, however, was that in 1890, John Farrell was not just a poet, he was the editor and leader writer for the *Daily Telegraph*.

Humble Beginnings

John Farrell was born on 18 December 1851, in that part of the old Spanish Empire known today as Argentina.⁷ His family were Irish-born, and his parents, Andrew and Mary Farrell both came from well-to-do Dublin families. Young John never knew his grand-parents, both of whom died of cholera when his father was a child. Well-educated by guardians, Andrew was trained as a chemist. After a few years in the profession he married Mary Farley in Dublin, and three of their children – Andrew, Matthew and Kate – were born there. In

1847 he took his family to South America where he set himself up in business, and since he ran the only chemist shop in Buenos Aires where English was spoken, he appears to have prospered.

Some short time after John was born, according to Bertram Stevens, a family friend, Andrew, stirred by the glowing reports of the gold discoveries in Australia and the fortunes to be made there, sold his business and in 1852, with baby John and the family, sailed to England in order to get a ship which would take them to the diggings. Paying their own passage on the *Henry Gillespie*, a ship of 397 tons, the Farrells along with 239 other passengers, took four months and nine days to reach their destination, Port Phillip Bay. 'They reached Port Melbourne, then known as Sandridge, on 23 December, 1852, with the smoke from bush fires filling the bay as they cast anchor.'⁸

After finding a place for the family to live, Andrew Senior left Mary with the younger children and took off with Andrew, his eldest son then aged 10, for the diggings at Ballarat. For those remaining in the city, conditions in Sandridge were primitive and prices on food and various out-goings were very high. Medical treatment was also expensive and difficult to obtain, and there were no sanitary arrangements. In the circumstances it was not surprising that young John became ill and almost died.⁹

Father and son, in the meantime, did poorly at Ballarat and subsequently rejoined the others to try their luck in Bendigo, where Andrew was more fortunate. But with each passing year surface gold was becoming increasingly difficult to find. And in the late 1850s, after a longish stint on the fields at Whroo (Rushworth), Andrew gave up and bought horses and a wagon and took to supplying goods to miners, 'a profitable venture in the days before any railway line reached that far west of Melbourne.'

His new business did well enough for the family to purchase a 40-acre farm at Baringup, on the Loddon River, not far from the present town of Maldon (Victoria). Andrew lived at Baringup until his death on 17 February, 1894, aged 74. Mary, his wife, had died more than thirty years before, in 1862, after a long illness.

An investigation into John Farrell's early life reveals a number of inaccuracies. For example, the manifest of the *Henry Gillespie* describes his family as 'English,' not 'Irish,' and his father's occupation is listed as 'labourer' – perhaps reflecting Andrew and Mary's determination to make a fresh start in their new country, and Andrew's belief that there was more money to be made in digging for gold than in running a chemist's shop. If, however, they were seeking to set aside their Irishness this proved futile, as John, the least Irish of anyone in the family, spoke with a pronounced brogue all his life.¹⁰

John's love of books, which led to him becoming a writer, and whatever education he received, was acquired mainly through his parents. For it was not until the family had lived in Australia for eight years that the children received any formal education, and when their mother died they received no further schooling beyond what their father could provide. In the circumstances it is interesting to read an Englishman's contemporary review of John Farrell's poetry:

Take an imaginative bushranger; fire his ambition with a copy of the works of Bret Harte; tone him up (or down depending on your point of view) with a stray copy of Mr. Robert Browning; polish him in the school of James Thompson; and Mr. John Farrell of Sydney, will have a rival. He handles his lines with some rough force, occasionally showing both humour and eloquence; the morality of his tales smacks of that taste for indignation meetings and lynching so strongly developed in our pioneers of civilization. It springs, no doubt, from a hatred of evil; but the love of good which might be expected at the root of its frequently obscured by an addiction to whisky drinking, summary pistolling, and horseplay... Irrational ethics and somewhat sanguinary sentimentality apart, Mr. Farrell's undeniably striking work has considerable interest and merit.¹¹

This review looks very like one of those pieces of criticism designed to show the smartness of the critic rather than the value of the work criticized. If anyone were to read *How He Died* (1883) and then try and apply this critique, they would find the puzzle difficult indeed. Farrell did, however, have a fondness for Bret Harte, Shakespeare, Burns and Byron whom he read as a boy. And, as with many youngsters, numerous readings of *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Scalp Hunters* led him to the conclusion that Sir Walter Scott and Captain Mayne Reid were, in that order, the world's greatest novelists – or words to that effect.¹²

In those far-off days, the Farrell boys spent long periods roaming the bush, 'fishing and hunting,' or talking to the hands in the sheep and cattle runs near their home. Matthew conjectured the character of 'Nabbage' in *How He Died* was drawn directly from John's memories of the old sheds and the bushworkers he met there.¹³

John was then aged about 11, and eager to meet new people and listen to the stories they had to tell. Undoubtedly the rich mixture of fortune-hunters and adventurers lured to Victoria by the gold discoveries would have provided him with second-hand experiences that he never forgot;¹⁴ and would have added to an already rich vocabulary a seam of convict, bush, cockney and American slang, which Farrell would mine with profit all his life.¹⁵

If these early years helped lay the foundations of Farrell's future career as a writer, as they did, it is also true that they helped mould him as a land theorist. And without taking the matter too far, it might be argued that Sir Charles Gavan Duffy was a major early influence on Farrell, and one not previously recognised.

Although his views are mainly outside the ambit of this thesis, certain points concerning Duffy should be made. After all, it was as a political theorist (the role Farrell adopted) more than as a practical politician, that Duffy was significant. In the United Kingdom his two political initiatives, the repeal of the Act of Union and the parliamentary reform of the Irish land tenure system, both ended in failure. Even his one major legislative achievement, his Victorian land act of 1862, was in its intention of providing agricultural settlement only a partial success. Yet it was not his failure, but rather was it his attempt to establish his fellow Irish exiles upon the land that is of interest. Any examination of Duffy's land legislation in Victoria will show that it was his previous experiences in Ireland that determined his vision in Australia.

One other important point needs to be made; by accepting Duffy's act the squatters reluctantly showed that they were prepared to make concessions, and in the process defuse potential anarchy. Thus the passage of his act (with much help from O'Shanassy, the Premier), signalled a victory for democracy in Victoria.

While some might say (unkindly) that Farrell saw the land question through the eyes of an American, his writings in the early 1890s also worked to diffuse anarchy, and he was undoubtedly familiar with the Irish vision. A few examples should suffice. In the early 1880s while living in Albury, he renewed the acquaintance of Mary Cameron's father whom he had first met at Benalla some years earlier; he also met the Redmonds there, John and William, who were seeking support for the Irish Land League.¹⁶

In 'Our Warning,' published in the *Bulletin* in June 1886, Farrell recalled the visit of the Irish patriots:

When the Redmonds came here, ours alone was the
voice,
Which in trumpet tones bade them go on and
rejoice
While a hundred poor, cowering rags, at the
time,
Sought to brand them as Phoenix Park agents
of crime.

The Irish Land League was started in the home of Bee Walshe's father (Bee Walshe was one of Charles Stewart Parnell's secretaries). Mary Cameron

met Bee, and her brother James who was a travelling speaker for the League, whilst they were guests in John Farrell's [Sydney] home.

Echoes of Duffy also appear from time to time as fragments in a series written by Farrell when he was energetically opposing William Lane's proposed Utopian Socialist community in Paraguay, in 1893. For example, in the articles, on behalf of the *Brisbane Worker*, Farrell writes:

Lately I have made special enquiries into the condition of a district of Victoria which I know well, and in which for a dozen years I followed the plough and grubbed trees for two bob each, big and little, finally reaching the altitude of feeder of a threshing machine – or 'Thrasher' as it was called. Then there was a large number of farmers within the circle of my acquaintance, all neighbours in an area of a few miles, living fairly well and looking forward to living better some day. Now there are a few – certainly not half as many. Three great estates, chiefly pastoral, have absorbed the bulk of the farms. The owners of these estates may be all right or may be mortgage-slaves for the banks. But there is not one-third of the people employed in the district that there once was, and those who are employed are worse off than they were twenty years ago. Most of the young fellows I knew then have drifted away to Melbourne, to swell the half-employed multitude who there keep offices, and work land and mining swindles or try to sell sewing machines.¹⁷

James Fintan Lalor too (the brother of Peter Lalor of 'Eureka' fame), himself a vigorous protagonist of Land Reform, is a central figure in Ireland's intellectual history and it should be remembered that he was a major influence on Duffy, as he was on Michael Davitt,¹⁸ and James Connolly,¹⁹ the Irish socialist. At the ideological level, it should also be noted that in the diggings in Victoria, the largest foreign-born group was the Irish; and when the Farrells first arrived in Melbourne, about 16% of Victoria's citizens were Irish-born.

It might also be helpful to know that in January 1899 Farrell went to Tasmania – mainly to visit the home of Duffy's old colleague John Mitchel [sic], author of *The Jail Journal*, the best history ever written in Australia (in the opinion of this writer at least). It was said that Mitchel had been betrayed by Duffy during the uprising in Ireland in 1848, and as a result was transported to Van Diemen's Land. But this aspect aside, the result of Farrell's visit to Tasmania was an extremely popular series that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* in February and March 1899.

Thirty years beforehand, an understanding of politics lay in the future, and it might be said that Farrell's education of the wider world really only began in 1870 when he left the farm for a job as a general hand in Jackson's brewery at Sandhurst. However, after working there for two years the brewery changed hands, and not wishing to return to farming, John decided to go to Queensland.

According to Bertram Stevens, Farrell went north with friends, although he himself says nothing of this. More importantly, the trip would raise ‘the bogy of the dragon in paradise’ (James Waldersee’s term); which would become a recurring theme in Australian history.

The Palmer River gold excitement was at its height in the 1870s, and thousands of Chinese poured into the area, virtually taking it over. By 1877, there were over seventeen thousand Chinese on the fields, and they outnumbered the white miners by more than ten to one. Overall, they amounted to more than ten per cent of Queensland’s total population. As the Queensland government saw the matter, there were additional complications. Chinese merchants were becoming established in Cooktown and prospering mightily. Would the Californian experience be repeated? Would the great unoccupied tracts of Queensland be over-run by Asiatics? Ironically enough, the situation had blown up at the very time when the government was contemplating the introduction of Chinese coolie labour for the cane-fields, to replace the discredited Kanaka system that was giving the colony such a bad name.

An act was introduced in 1876, imposing heavier taxes on the Chinese working on the gold-fields, but the governor refused to approve it. The British Government, with imperial and trade interests at heart, upheld his veto, on the grounds that it was blatantly racial discrimination. In the Colony, the terms of the

dispute widened so that colonists began to ask, what powers did an apparently self-governing colony really possess? Was the British and imperial connection worthwhile? The Queensland dilemma was solved by a change of wording that yielded the shadow to keep the substance, but the question of Britain's role in the question of Chinese immigration to the Australian colonies was one that would be raised over and over again in the years prior to federation.²⁰

Farrell found no gold in North Queensland, and in order to survive, took work timber-getting and driving horses, mainly at Charters Towers and Port Douglas. Thereafter, his life would change dramatically. He fell seriously ill with gulf fever and nearly died. The after-effects of the sickness were to afflict him all of his life. Not surprisingly therefore, after a brief convalescence and, virtually without funds, he turned and headed south back to Baringhup.

Returning home – somewhat disappointed – and seeing few alternatives, John worked his father's land with Matthew for the next two years, during which time, as a diversion from the day-to-day monotony, they began growing grapes, and surprisingly, won prizes with the wine they made in the London Exhibition and also at Paris.²¹

Aged 23, John intended taking up wine making professionally, but in 1875 he received an offer to return to brewing beer. Jackson, his old employer, had established a brewery in Camperdown, in the western district of Victoria, and

wanted John to join him. He accepted the offer, and for the next two years worked as a brewer in Camperdown. It was there too, that he met the 21 year-old Elizabeth Watts, whom he married on 16 November, 1876, at the Registrar General's in Melbourne.

Farrell's first verses were also published in Camperdown. His earliest known poem 'Fallen,' was about a 'fallen woman,' and this work and seven others were published in the *Hampden Guardian*, the town's local newspaper, in the twelve months up to November, 1876.²²

After his marriage, Farrell decided to try farming on his own account, and with Elizabeth selected some crown land at a place called Major Plains, near the site of the future Dookie Agricultural College.²³ Developing a farm and home in the wilderness requires hard work and patience; which both John and Elizabeth were prepared for. But any financial return was a long way off, and since their little enterprise had been established with almost no capital, it soon became necessary for John to find other better paying work.

And so he abandoned the farm, and took a job in a cordial factory in Benalla before returning to Melbourne where he found work as a 'rouseabout' with a brewery in Lonsdale Street. He lived there for about six months in a state of slavish misery on 35 shillings a week, or 28 'bob' a week after paying the rent. Thus, on a pittance, he kept his wife and one child in two rooms in what was best

described as a slum. In the poverty itself lay the seeds of much of his best works, and nothing illustrates so tellingly the aims of the political cause he would later embrace. 'The recollection of those days,' he wrote, 'makes me shiver.'²⁴

While in Melbourne, Farrell was offered a position with a firm of Albury brewers – O'Keefe and Manning – and he left for Albury in 1878, taking with him scars that were to be reflected in his future writing. From that point on, however, he lived almost uninterrupted in New South Wales.

Shortly after arriving in town Farrell met the Gulson brothers, Luke, Tom and Frank, who would remain friends (and single taxers) for life. And through them he found comfortable and inexpensive accommodation at the colourfully-named 'Turk's Head Hotel,' where Luke was the licensee.

He made 4 pounds a week as a brewer,²⁵ besides what he earned writing verses for the *Albury Banner* and *Border Post*. But his good luck did not continue, and after about a year, a sickness related to his Gulf Fever struck him and he found himself in hospital, 'in the shadow of the grave and penniless.' Despite the illness leaving his memory impaired,²⁶ Farrell forced himself to get working again; writing a pamphlet²⁷ in which he libeled most of the town's oldest inhabitants. In this period he also wrote the opening instalment of 'Jenny' which was to establish him as a *Bulletin* poet until his death.

It was also in Albury that three of Farrell's six daughters were born – Alice (1879), Annie (1880), and Olivia (1883). Naturally he was anxious to leave poverty behind him, and decided to leave his job and persuaded Tom Gulson to go into partnership with him in a brewery at Goulburn. It was always going to be hard to make a good living from the venture, and the business failed in the late 1880s when drought caused the Wollondilly River, the brewery's only source of water, to dry up and their weir to stop running. By the time the drought was over, Farrell and Gulson were almost bankrupt, and they had to sell the property and go their separate ways.

Long before the drought, however, some early success prompted the partners to open another brewery in Queanbeyan; and in September 1884, Farrell and his family moved there. At this stage politically, Farrell was a Protectionist, and when Edward W. O'Sullivan, a Sydney journalist, announced in 1885 that he would contest Queanbeyan in the coming election against the Freetraders (there were four), he did so with Farrell's support.²⁸

The support came chiefly in the form of vigorous attacks in the local press against Sir Henry Parkes, the old word-juggler who, whilst in town supporting a certain George Tompsitt, described the Queanbeyan electors as 'yokels.'²⁹

The poet Victor Daley was another O'Sullivan supporter at that time, and through their contributions he and Farrell made the *Queanbeyan Times* a paper

that was read with interest. By this time, the pair had been friends for several years. They met for the first time in Goulburn, and the circumstances of that meeting were, for sensitive men, incongruous.

In 1879, Daley, carrying his 'swag,' had drifted into town looking for work, but all he could get was the terrible job of turning over hides in a pit at the local tannery. Daley came across Farrell when he was digging the foundations for the brewery he was to subsequently manage. From such humble beginnings the two became 'mates' (Farrell's term), and Farrell named his second surviving son, born 14 July 1886, Victor Daley John Farrell out of affection for his gentle Irish friend.

In 1887 John's first volume of verse appeared. The volume, consisting of 178 pages, demy 8vo, was entitled *How He Died and Other Poems*, and was published in Sydney by Turner and Henderson and sold for 10s. 6d. The work was dedicated to an old supporter, William Bede Dalley, who had first encouraged Farrell to keep writing sometime in 1881.

William Bede Dalley (1831-1888) was born in Sydney, near the Argyle Cut, in Lower George Street. His father John Dalley, was born in England, of Irish parents, and his mother was an Irish woman. He received his education partly at old Sydney College and partly at Saint Mary's Seminary, his studies at Saint Mary's bringing him under the fatherly care of the venerable Archbishop

Polding. At the age when most boys were reading books of perhaps, little worth, he studied the classic and medieval masters, and delighted in Dante and Wordsworth. His love of literature eventually leading him to the editor's chair of *Freeman's Journal*. He also contributed to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in which journal he wrote "Roundabout Papers," reviews of books, biographies, and occasional leading articles; he was also well-known as one of the most entertaining contributors to *Sydney Punch*.

Farrell understood what he owed Dalley without supporting him politically, especially his actions, when acting Premier, in ordering Australian troops into the Sudan in 1885.

Dalley was widely accused of sending the men away in a bid for imperial honours, but his motives were more honourable than that and the charge had no validity. Writing to Cardinal Moran on this very matter Dalley writes: 'It is gall and wormwood to the bigots and holy water to the Orangemen... that the first men from Australia to serve the Queen on the battlefield were sent by a Paddy and a Holy Roman.'³⁰ In the dedication Farrell said:

I, holding to the truth that sudden swords
Uplifted at a word to harvest lives
Of unknown brethren are murders' knives
In sight of God, and all the brave rewards

With blood stuck on the breast of War's loud lords
For fettering hands that wrought them not with gyves
When later Day with lordier light arrives
Shall show to men as foul as Judas-hoards:
Yet knowing him, who past the blue sweet bay
Hides in a home with love and laurel crowned,
Most honoured by high nations far away,
Most loved by those who, standing closest around,
See all his life, 'mid kinglier tribute lay,
This book of mine before him on the ground.

Dalley himself reviewed *How He Died* for the *SMH*, 22 January 1887.

The book was reviewed, too, by J. Brunton Stephens, another of Farrell's friends, for the *Brisbane Courier* and *Freeman's Journal*. It was also favourably reviewed in other city and country papers, and in journals overseas.³¹ Dalley noticed some similarities in style with Bret Harte; others found likenesses to Byron, John Hays, A. L. Gordon, G. R. Sims and Joaquin Miller.

Lord Tennyson, in England, also courteously received a copy of *How He Died and Other Poems* for review. Tennyson read two of the poems, and reflecting on the matter he put in a letter to Farrell: 'I thank you for your volume of poems which has just reached me. I have only read two – *How He Died* and *No*. The first is very spirited, and with the other I entirely sympathize. It is not much that I can read, for I have entirely lost the use of my right eye, as far as

reading goes, and the left is slowly darkening... I may add... that the praise of your Australian critics, to which you allude so modestly, seems to me, from the little I have read, not unmerited.’³²

Fred Bloomfield, writing in the *Bulletin* several years after these reviews, strongly expressed the widespread appreciation of Farrell’s contribution to Australian writing, declaring that *How He Died* marked an epoch in Australian letters. Bloomfield writes:

In those distant days Daley [Victor] was known as only an occasional contributor to the *Bulletin*. Harpur whom it takes a stretch of quaint imagination to regard as a poet in any but a restricted and crabbed sense as a remote copyist of Wordsworth, was dead. Kendall [who was lying in a pauper’s grave] and Gordon were dead. Brunton Stephens was working...as a Government servant up in Brisbane. The younger generation were practically unknown. Ogilvie, Roderic Quinn, Arthur Adams and Hebblewhite were all waiting annunciation. Farrell came as a flamboyant and unexpected bloom and took all by surprise. That was a period wherein an assertive manhood had to doff no beaver to mercantile Magnificence.³³

‘An Auto-da-Fe’ was Farrell’s first contribution to the *Bulletin*, and was unsigned. John ‘Mudgee’ Haynes, who in 1880 with J. F. Archibald started that journal, recalled receiving in those early days contributions from ‘J. F.’ and made

it his business to go to Albury and hunt up the reticent contributor. Haynes found Farrell, and was impressed by his 'knowledge of the political humbug of the time.' He said 'he was brewing for bread, but preferred writing,' and an arrangement was soon made under which he became a regular contributor to the *Bulletin*.³⁴

Shortly thereafter, again with the support of Haynes, Farrell began writing 'Jenny – An Australian Story,' which was to run almost without interruption in the *Bulletin*, from 14 October 1882, till 31 March 1883. At the time, 'Jenny' was considered one of the most ambitious enterprises ever undertaken by an Australian journal.

The relationship that began with 'An Auto-da-Fe' and 'Jenny,' proved to be long and fruitful, and from 1 January 1883 until his death in 1904, Farrell had over ninety poems published in the *Bulletin*.³⁵

The early 1880s would also prove a watershed politically. The cause to which Farrell was drawn (building on Duffy) was that of the Land League; which was neither the first nor the last of the movements by which the Irish sought to break the links that bound them to Britain. The movement was unique in its aims and in its methods. When it began in 1880 it seemed for a time very close to success; and there existed side by side in Ireland two rival and violently antagonistic authorities. The legal Government, the Anglo-Irish administration of

Dublin and Westminster, found itself engaged in a losing battle with the nebulous, ill-defined, but very real power of the Land League, whose own harsh and revolutionary code of law could hardly be challenged in the rural counties.

But in 1881 there came a change of course as the leaders of both sides, at the risk of conflict with their more short sighted colleagues, rethought their aims and sought to move from futile confrontation towards compromise. And for a period in the spring of 1882 it seemed as though the conflict might indeed be resolved as there emerged a partnership between Parnell and Gladstone, two men of genius, who had in common a desire to solve the so-called 'Irish problem' on moderate and realistic terms. At that moment Ireland was perhaps nearer to the goal of self-government and unity than at any time previous.³⁶ The fanatics of both revolution and reaction were to be displaced by the practical politics of these able and clear-sighted men of the centre.

The vision was shattered almost at the moment of its inception by the action of splinter group within the Fenian movement known as the Invincibles. Their action - one of the worst acts of violence - occurred in Dublin on 6 May 1882 (whilst Henry George was touring Ireland with Michael Davitt). On that day the new Irish Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, Gladstone's nephew, and Thomas Burke, Cavendish's Under-Secretary, were stabbed to death with long

surgical knives by the Invincibles in Phoenix Park while the pair were taking an evening stroll.

Following the conviction of those responsible for the murders, it was learned that the authorities wanted to settle one of the gang in Australia as a reward for turning Queen's evidence. It was an idea that Farrell could only meet with revulsion. He writes:

Full-faced to England we speak our thought,
As brethren of sons of those who stood,
And writing 'Waterloo' with English blood
Paid a large wage when liberty was bought,
We too, are English, of an equal heart...

God set our land in summer seas asleep,
Till His fair morning for her awakening came.
He hid her where the rage of Old World wars
Might never break upon her virgin rest;
He gave His softest winds to fan her breasts,
And canopied her night with low-hung stars...

About twenty-five stanzas later he concluded:

We want no echo from blackened years
Of old oppression shut behind the foam...

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

And vex with strife our unaccustomed ears,
Take thine assassin back! Thus unto thee
We speak, in words that cannot be misread
And blush that this disgraceful thing is said
By thy more English sons beyond the sea.³⁷

At this point, may this writer suggest that Farrell's poem reflected the views of most Australians, and that only rarely have such views been put more eloquently.

In the light of such attacks Queen Victoria told the Home Secretary: 'We are engaged in a mortal struggle with an army of assassins.'³⁸ This came about when Irish nationalism allowed itself to be aligned with the random bombing of civilians and the murder of innocents: 'In January 1881 one person was killed and three others injured in an incident at Salford Barracks; In March a bomb was found in Mansion House shortly before the Lord Mayor's banquet was due to begin, and in May 1882 another at the same place failed to explode. By this time the Queen was thoroughly alarmed and insisted that the railway line between Osborne and Balmoral be patrolled before her journey to Scotland. In January 1883 a bomb blew up a gasometer in Glasgow, and in March another at the premises of the *Times* was abortive; but a third at Government offices in Whitehall achieved its objective, and in October there were two explosions in the

London Underground, one of them causing seventy-two casualties. In February 1884 bombs were found at four London main-line stations, of which one went off without loss of life, and in May there were three detonations in London's West End, including one at Scotland Yard. Three conspirators were blown up by their own device at London Bridge in December 1884; several travellers on the Underground were hurt on 25 January 1885, - one day after there were simultaneous explosions at the Tower of London, Westminster Hall, and the House of Commons injuring several people. Later, in a raid at Clerkenwell, a secret service unit uncovered bayonets, 400 rifles, 60 revolvers and 80,000 rounds of ammunition.³⁹

These events, and others like them, coupled with the Irish Party's interminable filibustering in the House, more than amply soured public opinion against any kind of radical reform in Ireland or anywhere else. But George, blinded by his newly won fame could not see it, and he continued to associate with Michael Davitt, who in the British public's mind at least, represented all that was wrong with the land movement.

It should also be noted, in the strongest terms, that George's association with one of the hard men of the Land League cost the Single Tax movement dearly. The widespread perception of violence that could arise from the mere mention of Davitt's name, created an hostility that was the real reason, though it

was never admitted, that the innocently-sounding ‘Single Tax’ name was substituted for ‘Land Nationalisation’ even though that name expressed precisely what the Georgists were hoping to achieve.

The Fenians, as has been noted, spoke only for the few in Ireland. And their violence aside, it was difficult to argue against the call for ‘Home Rule,’ or self-government, which was all that the moderates ever wanted.

Farrell made it clear where he stood on the matter when in 1887, in *The Bulletin to the Universe*, he and the *Bulletin* declare defiantly:

We’re for Home Rule – you hear us say we’re for it,
And Ireland yet will have it come to be –
That wretched Isle that has played Little Dorritt
To England’s Father of the Marshalsea;
A selfless serf. It shall have Home Rule. Nor it
Alone, but in Times’s lordlier fullness we
Will knit our millions in a shining nation
A later, manlier, free Federation!⁴⁰

As to the politics of the Single Tax, it might be said that this influence began sometime in the early 1880s when Farrell discovered *Progress and Poverty*.

In his *magnum opus* George confirms essentially, that the landowners' capacity to privately appropriate site rents lies at the root of most social and economic problems. Farrell was intrigued but it took a few years for him to be convinced, and it wasn't until he read *Protection or Freetrade* (1885) that he was finally won over. In the light of this new knowledge, in October 1887, he wrote a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* declaring himself a Freetrader (which must have surprised Henry Parkes), and, launching an attack on Protection described it as 'a scheme of salvation through destruction.'⁴¹

Working at brewing in Queanbeyan until May 1887, and scarcely making a living, Farrell wrote to his friend Philip Holdsworth, a member of the Sydney literary circle and one of the founder of the Athenaeum Club; lamenting the fact that he was nearly 'broke' and could not raise 'a hundred pounds.' Consequently, he was thinking of moving to Sydney and trying for something in the Civil Service 'tempered by some journalism.'

A brief taste of journalism in the country and the publication of a number of poems in the *Albury Banner*, *Border Post*, *Bulletin* and *Freeman's Journal*, even before leaving Goulburn for Queanbeyan, and the fact that his short story, *One Christmas Day*, published in the *Bulletin* in December 1884, was the first serious story to appear in that journal⁴² led him to think, quite rightly, his future lay in writing.

There was a newspaper for sale in the mining town of Lithgow at the time, and as Farrell was suffering yet another bout of neuritis, it seemed, with its clear air and invigorating climate, a good place to settle. With the help of friends he made the purchase, the recently established *Lithgow Enterprise*, and soon became mates with his journals' main opposition - J. P. T. Caulfield ('The Boy Politician') editor of the *Lithgow Mercury*.

Caulfield, in spite of his nick-name, must have appeared a formidable rival. Especially since the new arrival could not hope to match him in self-promotion or public debate where Farrell, according to his friend Hebblewhite, 'was as dumb as an oyster.'⁴³

Caulfield on the other hand, according to Henry Parkes, was a 'fearsome' debater, and in his recollections decided that although George Reid was one of the finest speakers he had ever heard, "Caulfield would have won any race for fluency with Reid by twenty lengths."⁴⁴

Hebblewhite, though, saw little to admire in Caulfield, despite the fact that a leadership role was widely predicted for him in Protectionist politics. Reflecting on these matters in 1913, Hebblewhite writes: 'With all his torrential verbosity hardly an idea that Caulfield ever gave expression to, at the rate of two hundred and fifty words a minute, has survived. They are all as dead as the man

himself except for such few as are enshrined, like flies, in the precious amber of Farrell's humour.'⁴⁵

Farrell, despite a fluent pen, shunned speaking in public and found his own reticence 'insurmountable.' In 1896 he told Rose Scott, an old admirer, that he could not make speeches for her... 'As regards public speaking,' he wrote; 'I have never addressed a dozen words to any meeting in my life. That is the only obstacle, but it is great.'⁴⁶

The first issue of the *Enterprise* with John Farrell as the editor was only the eleventh number of that journal, and came out on 16 July 1887. An early important connection, too, was made when he discovered that Hebblewhite, editor of the *Goulburn Penny Post*, was a disciple of Henry George and sent him an invitation (accepted) to visit him in Lithgow. Subsequently the two men became friends.

A young Henry Lawson was another writer with whom Farrell became friendly in those days at the *Enterprise*. It is edifying to read what he had to say about the 'brewer-cum-poet':

I, as a lad, worshipped him, even more than I did Gordon...I remember writing some early sketches and verse...to his country paper...That was long before I met him. And when I did meet him I was not disappointed. He was I think, the first editor to send me a cheque for a

guinea – certainly the first country one. The living poet hero of my unhappy boyhood became the good strengthening and comforting friend of later, and not brighter, years... I owed him much in many ways.⁴⁷

George Essex Evans, William Goodge, and Sydney Jephcott, to name only a few of the best known writers, likewise benefited from knowing Farrell.⁴⁸

Farrell's most enduring friendship was made with Frank Cotton (1858-1942), a grocer's son who was educated privately at Adelaide's prestigious Prince Alfred College where, in his two years at the school he did particularly well in German, Latin, and English, and topped the class in History.⁴⁹ Cotton worked on a cattle station at Port Lincoln for a short time, and at 17 he moved to western New South Wales, becoming a shearer, a farmer, a drover and a Methodist lay preacher. On 1 January 1883 at Forbes he married Evangeline Mary Geake Lane, who was born at Bathurst.⁵⁰ At Forbes, in January 1887, with Ignatius Bell, a self-employed boot-maker, and William Dickinson, who delivered parcels for a living, he helped found the first branch in New South Wales of the Land Nationalisation League. By August of that year Cotton, who had been appointed as a sort of itinerant lecturer, had, John Wesley like, succeeded in founding branches in seven electorates and signing up agents for the league in forty towns. It was through these activities that he became friends with

Farrell, and the two men shortly thereafter became co-editors of the *Democrat*, *Australian Standard*, and *Single Tax* journals.

As a journalist just beginning his career at Lithgow, it soon became evident, to Farrell at least, that Australians were living in the midst of some particularly vigorous sectarianism. And it was not long before Caulfield and Farrell attracted the attention of one Dr. Zachary Barry, editor of the *Protestant Standard*, and sworn enemy of ‘Popery’ and Irish nationalism.

Farrell knew Barry from his time at Queanbeyan when he had attacked voters for electing E. W. O’Sullivan, a Catholic. The ill-considered heading in the *Protestant Standard* on that occasion read: ‘Queanbeyan in the Quicksand.’⁵¹ On another occasion the paper described Caulfield as ‘a bigoted Roman [sic] Catholic... [who]... does not hide his religious sentiments.’ Barry likewise dismissed the *Mercury* as ‘incapable of making unbiased reports of Orange celebrations.’⁵² The good doctor’s folly was such, however, that it could lead him to discount men without a scintilla of evidence and, in an article aimed at Farrell he wrote: “Look at the name,” as if that settled anything.

As so often happens in such cases, the truth was otherwise. Farrell’s religious views were in no way reflected by his Irish name. As a writer he attacked ‘parsons, priests, and prelates with equal force,’ although he always called himself a Catholic, and was buried in the Catholic section at Rookwood

cemetery; coincidentally, close to where his old comrade Vincent Lesina, who was also called 'Boy,' or 'Joe,' lies in an unmarked grave. Farrell was as unconventional in his understanding of Catholicism as he was of many other beliefs. Close friends considered that he 'never made any... profession of any formal religious creed.'⁵³ And, *a propos* of simply getting it right, we should point out that at Farrell's funeral, because Cotton was overcome with grief and could not, the Rev. W. H. Beale, ex-president of the Methodist Conference, who attended as a friend, led the prayers at graveside.⁵⁴

Farrell in Lithgow, as elsewhere, commented on citizens and events in his usual manful way. He made the 'Rum and Cloves' column (a jibe at Orange and Temperance men) a feature which many looked upon with apprehension, few were spared, certainly not Sir Henry Parkes, as in the 'Great Kiam:'

Many days' sail by steamer is the island known as Flam
Which is governed by a Premier Who is called the Great
Kiam...Dwarfed by him are these, as Brahmas
Dwarf the smallest bantam fowl;
Low to him do they salaam, as he confronts
Them with a scowl!
Great the Island known as Flam is
Greater still the Great Kiam is,
He alone is truly great!...

He alone was the great Caesar
And he also had a Ghost.⁵⁵

While it does not come within the scope of this work to deal adequately with all of Farrell's associates, it should be pointed out that while the 'Great Kiam' is typical of his humorous pieces written to delight the gallery, it may also be seen as a rejoinder to Parkes on behalf of William Bede Dalley. The pair had not been friends since the attempt on the life of the Duke of Edinburgh at Clontarf in 1868. An intense and mutual distrust had developed from then on; on the one hand because Dalley represented O'Farrell, the accused in court, and on the other, because of Parkes' use, before and after the trial, of the sectarian card (see plates).

Not surprisingly, there were many at Lithgow who did not appreciate Farrell's jibes or his humour. The paper started to lose subscribers and advertisers, and eventually had to close after little more than 12 months. He was as unfitted to manage a newspaper as he had been to run a brewery; he could not bring himself to consider 'small' issues like policy, and local interest.

In the end, friends formed a new company with a capital of 2,000 pounds and purchased the *Lithgow Mercury* from Caulfield, and amalgamated with the *Enterprise*. A manager was appointed, and Farrell was asked to be editor of the

new paper called the *Australian Land Nationaliser*. This was the first official organ in New South Wales of the Land Nationalisers. And while the journal did good work in gathering the scattered forces of the Single Tax party, and informed people about matters of economic concern, it proved a disaster as a small-town newspaper. Advertisers in Lithgow and nearby Sunny Corner ‘fell away,’⁵⁶ and once again Farrell faced failure. The Directors sold out at a heavy loss, but gamely decided to establish a Single Tax paper in Sydney, with Farrell again its editor.

Writing in this new paper the *Australian Standard*, two years later in Sydney,⁵⁷ Farrell could only wonder why the *Enterprise* had not come to grief earlier. ‘Lithgow is a town peculiarly limited and afflicted by landlordism, and one in which the burden is borne very patiently.’ He went on to deplore the fact that Lithgow’s being a mining town, meant that every other night saw some meeting being held with labour delegates attending, and generally creating the impression that they were holding their own, despite the fact that each year saw more men being sacked, and conditions worsening. Farrell writes:

We gave small attention to the meetings, and less to the achievements of that overestimated fraud “our distinguished townsman.” We showed week after week, with merciless iteration, that certain owners of land were squeezing the town dry, and levying toll upon the work of its inhabitants;

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

and that no miners' union could help labour get a fair share of its produce, until land values were taxed away, and all men admitted on terms of absolute equality to natural opportunities of production... The result of all this was loud discontent amongst most of the local readers. The big land owners promptly stopped the paper, and miners wanted to know why the exciting orations delivered on the subject of screenings at their last sachel were not fully reported...⁵⁸

The first issue of the *Australian Standard*, which cost 3d, appeared on 9 March 1889. For three months it ran as a weekly, but Farrell soon found advertising revenues elusive. As he wrote on 29 June,

So far, its history, involving as it has done three important Transactions, first the purchase of the *Lithgow Enterprise*, Next, that of the *Lithgow Mercury*, and finally the change of the base of operations to Sydney, is one chiefly of expenditure. Nearly two thousand pounds have been expended up to the present, and although those who provided this sum did so, almost to a man, philanthropically, and without any desire for pecuniary profit, yet it is due to them and to the movement to take steps to ensure the stability of the company...

In the early days at the *Standard* Farrell did most of the writing. Cotton, on the other hand, would have been making speeches in the city or the suburbs, or lecturing at Sackville Reach and other Hawkesbury settlements around Windsor,

or in the bush making speeches on behalf of C. L. Garland and other single taxers.

The paper ran from March to the end of June as a weekly, and for the next quarter, as a monthly, or until the issue of 7 September when his recurring illness forced Farrell to take his first holiday in years. He went to New Zealand, and the paper temporarily ceased publication.⁵⁹

However, whilst the *Standard* was being produced and with its main focus on the condition of society, Farrell nevertheless included some high-class poetry by Francis Adams, Tennyson, James Jeffrey Roche, James Russell Lowe and Mary Riley Smith, among others. A short story by Michael Flurscheim, entitled 'Hans and His Cakes,' translated from the German by L. H. Berens, a Georgist from South Australia, was also included.

Besides publication of the *Standard*, one other notable event in 1889 was the passing of O'Connor's Allowance to Members Act, during Parkes' administration. Members of parliament became salaried employees for the first time; and social reform was in the air. Whilst single taxers might not have been numerous, their influence was greater than their numbers. Yet despite the reluctance of advertisers to commit themselves to the *Standard*, the prospect of Henry George coming to Australia was 'news,' and 'the newspapers opened their columns to discussion of the Single Tax.'⁶⁰

With increasing interest from the press, Farrell was invited to write a series of articles on George and his tax for the *Daily Telegraph*, the first of which appeared on 24 October 1889, the remainder appearing irregularly, the tenth and last on 8 February 1890. Before the series was concluded, Farrell was offered a position on the staff as a leader writer. He accepted, and promptly handed the editorship of the *Australian Standard* wholly to Cotton. Farrell took up his position at the *Telegraph* in February 1890, about one month before Henry George was due to arrive in Australia.

The first issue to be produced with Cotton as editor came out in January 1890, the price had increased to 5d. by 1 July, or about one month after George's departure from Australia, Cotton gravely announced that the 'systematic theft' of letters addressed to the *Standard* had led to the paper incurring a serious loss.⁶¹ And although he announced that the offender had been caught, and that he felt that the paper could survive, it was soon found that the effects of the theft were such that the *Standard* could not continue and in August 1890, the paper was forced to close permanently.

The wounds upon the *Standard* were inflicted by one John Edward Anderton, who with William McNamara, once served as joint secretaries of the ASL.⁶² It seems that Anderton was 'occasionally' employed to 'distribute handbills for the Henry George campaign executive,' and this gave him the

opportunity to steal incoming registered mail from the League's office. He stole notes, and stamps and cheques, which he promptly converted in to cash and gambled; he was actually arrested on the Randwick racecourse. Considering the damage done to the cause and to the investors who had backed the paper in very difficult financial times, Anderton was treated lightly by the court; he received only three months' imprisonment with hard labour for robbing the STL.⁶³

Two month's before the *Standard's* demise, however, one F. W. Ward,⁶⁴ resigned as the *Telegraph's* editor; and Farrell was offered his job out of eighty candidates for the post. Farrell accepted and Cotton was delighted. He wrote: 'In John Farrell's appointment to the editorial chair of the *Daily Telegraph*, the best journalist that wields a pen in this colony, and the whitest man who ever scrawled copy in this or any other country, has received the recognition and promotion that his real merit deserved.'⁶⁵ Not surprisingly Henry George also agreed with the appointment, and in a letter to his own *Standard* in New York, dated 30 July 1890, he expressed his delight.

The gloomiest reaction to Farrell's elevation came some years later from the *Liberty*, the paper of the National Association, which had this to say on the matter: 'The *Daily Telegraph* was the first major newspaper to take a distinct side and become a press advocating the interests purely of a class. In other words it became a labour paper. Under the dominating influence of John Farrell, a single

tax theorist, the *Telegraph* has published numerous articles discussing land value taxation, and under its influence, George Reid adopted it as part of his free trade program.’⁶⁶

For reasons that are not clearly understood Farrell resigned the editorship of the *Telegraph* in September 1890, although he stayed on the editorial staff until June 1903.

Shortly after Farrell resigned, Henry George, in 1891, produced his reply to Pope Leo XIII’s Encyclical on the *Condition of Labour*. By courtesy of the author the *Telegraph* received advanced proofs of the work, a review and condensation of which by Farrell was commenced in the issue of 24 December, and was continued weekly until its completion. The book, which till then had not been published anywhere in the world, was scheduled to appear simultaneously in Italy, France, Germany, England and the United States shortly after Farrell’s first extracts were published. In the work George sought to challenge the Pope’s pronouncement in favour of absolute private ownership of land. *Daily Telegraph* readers thus were enabled, in advance of the public in other countries, to weigh the opposite views of two eminent authorities on a subject, and decide for themselves which was right.

One other work written around the same time, an epic poem, concerned incidents during the protracted shearers’ strike at ‘Coreena Station’ in western

Queensland. It seems that in a clash between unionists, mounted troopers and 'free labourers,' the Riot Act was read out, and seven men were brought back to Brisbane handcuffed to their horses.⁶⁷

During his long stint at the *Telegraph* when much was written without a bye-line, Farrell most notably contributed to the popular 'Notes of the Day' column under the pen-names 'Outis' or 'Niemand.'⁶⁸

In 1903 Ward returned to Sydney to take up the editorial reins at the *Telegraph* again after a long spell at the *Argus* in Melbourne. He soon made it clear, to Farrell at least, that he would not be presenting a balanced view of events. In Farrell's estimation, Ward was developing an anti-labour bias. No fair-minded journalist holding the views that he held could continue under such conditions and so, after being in the *Telegraph's* employ for nearly fifteen years, Farrell resigned.

Concurrently with his work at the *Telegraph*, he continued the work of the league, and on 25 July 1893 the *Single Tax* journal appeared. In the best tradition of the KoL, the first line at the top of page one carried the motto: 'An injury to one is the concern of all.' True to this code, Farrell had no time for those agitators advising wage-earners to wage unceasing warfare against capital. And throughout the strikes and bedlam of the 1890s, continued to argue that the fight

was against monopoly and privilege, and that the battle could easily be won through the ballot-box.

Apart from some superficial styling changes, the *Single Tax* looked much like the *Standard*; except that its pages were brightened by an occasional cartoon by John McDonald, an artist from South Australia. Farrell himself, however, still did most of the writing, mainly under the pen-names 'Quidam,' 'Veritas,' and 'Peter Pickle.'

The Single Tax League's other star Frank Cotton, was again prominent, as were 'Joe' Lesina, T. J. Hebblewhite and W. E. Johnson; other stalwarts, most notably, were C.T. Renshaw, John King, Percy Meggy, C.L. Garland, Hessel Hall, Alex Riddell, A.G. Huie, Henry Smith, T.J. O'Reilly and James Ashton. The paper ran from July 1893, to April 1898, or for about six months after the death of Henry George in October 1897.

In the last difficult year of the *Single Tax*, Farrell fought hard to educate the readers to the weaknesses inherent in the Federation proposals, in particular the financial part of the question, which was the one on which there was the greatest diversity of opinion and the greatest ignorance. It was proposed by some that New South Wales hand over the railways, the debts, customs and excise, posts, telegraphs, banking and currency; arguing that a Federal Government could manage these more cheaply than the separate colonies.⁶⁹

Farrell warned that it was dangerous to give this new Government almost unlimited powers of taxation, which would certainly be used to raise large amounts of Customs revenue. Large enough to meet the necessary expenditure, and enable the Government to avoid the taxation of land values and incomes, or abolish the land and income taxes already existing.⁷⁰

This fight around Federation was one of his last; although in his retirement he continued to contribute items to the *Daily Telegraph*, and *Freeman's Journal*, and various journals around the country. Of this period Paul Stenhouse writes:

His name had been persistently associated with the editorial chair of a proposed new labour daily.⁷¹ He was offered editorial positions in other colonies which he did not care to accept, as he felt it would be too hard to sever all his ties with Sydney.⁷² One of the offers that tempted him was from "Westralia"⁷³ and he was seriously considering accepting the editorship of the *Australian Review of Reviews* when he died of heart failure resulting from Bright's disease, after a few day's illness, on 8 January 1904, aged 53...

On some final points Victor Daley writes: 'One evening I went to Goulburn at the invitation of Hugh Mahon, Senator. Mr. Mahon was then merely an editor. I arrived late at night and met Farrell who was going to Queanbeyan.

‘Come with me,’ he said. It was cold, blue, early morning with point-lace clouds on the horizon and an intoxicated driver whooping at the horses and jig-jagging the coach over the sides of the precipices – and the hotel ten miles away. Farrell and I were sitting in the box seat. The off wheel hung over an abyss for a moment, I was horribly afraid and looked at Farrell. He said nothing but smiled grimly. When we came to a better road he laughed. “Death is not what it is cracked up to be, he said.”⁷⁴ Daley, seeing his old friend clearly in his mind’s eyes as if it were yesterday, concluded:

They told me suddenly that Farrell was dead. The first defensive impulse is not to believe anything that hurts you...I would as soon believed that I myself was dead...I remember how Farrell laughed, not so very long ago, when a person who seemed to have been wiping his pen on his coat, and his eyes and mouth upon his sleeve, met us in King-street and told us he was collecting subscriptions towards the cost of building a coffin for tomorrow. “Wisest lunatic I ever met” said Farrell. And then, with the large utterance of the early gods, he said, “Oysters. When in doubt – eat,” was one of his axioms.⁷⁵

‘But responsibility ruined him,’ Daley wrote,⁷⁶ ‘as it ruins every man who is at heart a dweller in the “Tents of Shem.”

While he lived Farrell enjoyed considerable recognition, most particularly from the early *Bulletin* writers and members of the nascent labor party. After his death, and down to our time, this recognition has been reduced to the point, where, as a philosopher and poet, Farrell is to most people – educated and uneducated alike – virtually unknown.

Nevertheless, his achievements were considerable, even down to writing the lyrics for the anthem, ‘Hymn of the Commonwealth,’ which was sung by a chorus of one thousand persons on Inauguration Day, in Sydney, in January 1901.⁷⁷

The question of whether or not John Farrell should be credited with being the prime player in the STL in New South Wales may today seem a petty one, but it was quite evident that this was so in his own lifetime, when, for a time, it seemed the League might become the third force in Australian politics.

Perhaps the most appropriate last words come from another gifted writer, Sydney Jephcott. Jephcott, in a few lines touched the core of the essential Farrell in the lines chiselled on the grey, marble tablet that now sits on the stone slab that covers his friend’s grave:

Sleep heart of gold, ‘twas not in vain
You loved the struggling and the poor

And taught in sweet yet strenuous strain
 To battle and endure.
 The lust of wealth, the pride of place,
 Were not a light to guide your feet,
 But larger hopes and wider space,
 For heart to beat.

Requiescant In Pace.

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¹ W. E. Johnson, 'Bogus Friends,' *Single Tax*, 25 July, 1893.

² *Ibidem.*

³ William Winspear, *Australian Radical*, 26 May, 1888.

⁴ *Bulletin*, Sydney, 22 March, 1890.

⁵ *Bulletin*, 12 April, 1890.

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ Farrell himself did not know, and no official record is available. See Bertram Stevens, 'Memoir,' in *How He Died and other Poems*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1905, pp. xi-xiv, hereafter referred to as *Memoir*, p.xi. In his letter to P. J. Holdsworth from Queanbeyan, dated 23 April 1887, Astley Collection, ML MSS A72 (in the card index of the ML = Aa9), hereafter referred to as Holdsworth, Farrell says, p. 7, 'I came to Australia (having been born in Buenos Ayres, La Plata, S A.) at two years of age.' This would put his birth in 1850.

⁸ Matthew Farrell in a letter from Corowa to Bertram Stevens, John Farrell / Press Contributions, ML Uncat MSS 277, hereafter referred to as *Letter*, dated 24 February, 1904, p. 2.

⁹ *Letter*, p. 3.

¹⁰ T. J. Hebblewhite, 'John Farrell, Some Recollections,' *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, 8 parts, from 22 February to 12 April, 1913, hereafter referred to as *Penny Post*.

¹¹ 'The Poems of John Farrell,' *Echo*, Sydney, 12 August, 1887.

¹² John Farrell, 'What An Unread Australian Should Read,' *New Idea*, 5 December, 1903, p. 517.

¹³ Matthew Farrell, *Letter*, p. 7.

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- ¹⁴ See, e.g. *Australian Standard*, 9 March, 1889, p. 7 and *passim* throughout Farrell's verse and prose writing.
- ¹⁵ Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' p. 6.
- ¹⁶ Cf. annotation by Dame Mary on pp. xviii and xxii of the 1905 edition of *How He Died*, in the possession of Ann Cuddy, Bexley, New South Wales.
- ¹⁷ John Farrell, 'For Those Who Remain,' *Brisbane Worker*, 8 April, 1893.
- ¹⁸ T.W. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish Revolution, 1846-1882*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 36-37, pp. 233-234; Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Fuedalism in Ireland, or the Story of the Land League Revolution*, London, 1904, pp. 55-65.
- ¹⁹ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *James Connolly*, Dublin, 1981, p. 21; James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History*, Dublin, 1910, pp. 185-190.
- ²⁰ James Waldersee, 'The Chinese Problem,' *Annals*, Sydney, Chevalier Press, March 1971, p. 27.
- ²¹ D. Thomas, *The Early History of Baringhup*, Bendigo, Cambridge Press, 1950, hereafter referred to as *Baringhup*, p. 23. Thomas worked 'on and off' for Andrew Farrell Snr in the vineyard until the latter's death.
- ²² 'Fallen' was published on 17 November, 1875.
- ²³ See Bertram Stevens, 'Memoir,' in *How He Died and Other Poems*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1905, pp. xi-xlv, hereafter referred to as *Memoir*, p. xviii.
- ²⁴ In his letter to P. J. Holdsworth from Queanbeyan, dated 1 April, 1887, Astley Collection, ML MSS A72 (in the card index of the ML =Aa9, hereafter referred to as *Holdsworth*, p. 10.
- ²⁵ *Ibidem*,
- ²⁶ *Ididem*,
- ²⁷ *Ephemera – an Illiad of Albury*. By J. O'Farrell [sic!], *Border Post Office*, Albury, 1878.
- ²⁸ One of the Freetraders was William Afflick, who shortly after the elections became friends with Farrell and, as a consequence, Afflick, too, became a Georgist. See also Errol Lea-Scarlett, *Queanbeyan, District and People*, Queanbeyan Municipal Council, 1968. The other Freetrade candidates were; P. C. Hodgkinson, W.G. O'Neil and J.J. Wright.
- ²⁹ Bertram Stevens, *Memoir*, p. xxiv.
- ³⁰ J. T. D., 'William Bede Dalley,' *Austral Light*, Melbourne, August 1897, p. 433.
- ³¹ Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' p. 25.
- ³² Bertram Stevens, *Memoir*, p. xxx.
- ³³ See Fred Broomfield, 'John Farrell and W. B. Dalley,' *The Bulletin*, 28 January, 1904, hereafter referred to as *Dalley*.
- ³⁴ Cf. ML MSS 1522/2 item 6.
- ³⁵ Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' p. 89.
- ³⁶ Tom Corfe, *The Phoenix Park Murders*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, p. 11.
- ³⁷ John Farrell, *No, Bulletin*, 18 August 1883.
- ³⁸ Colin Ford and Brian Harrison, 'Regional Loyalties,' *A Hundred Years Ago*, London, Penguin, 1983, p. 178-179.
- ³⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ⁴⁰ *The Bulletin*, 24 December 1887.
- ⁴¹ Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' p. 27.
- ⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 29.
- ⁴³ T. J. Hebblewhite, *Penny Post*, 2 February 1913.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ Rose Scott Family Papers, ML MSS 38/20, item 177, 'John Farrell to Rose Scott,' from the *Daily Telegraph* Office, 7 December 1896.

⁴⁷ Lawson's emphasis. ML Uncat MSS 184/3 - Quoted from Colin Roderick, 'Formative Years of Henry Lawson (1883-1893),' RAHS, *Journal and Proceedings* Vol. 45, Pt.3, November 1959, p. 125.

⁴⁸ See 'Farrell and His School,' 'Pegasus,' p p. 282-361.

⁴⁹ Information on Cotton came from Mr. Brian Baldwin the archivist of Prince Alfred College, with the assistance of Mr. Craig Dunstan (a PAC old-boy and nephew of the author) in April 1990.

⁵⁰ Bede Nairn, 'Francis Cotton,' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Carlton: MUP, v. 8, 1981, 119-20.

⁵¹ *Protestant Standard*, 12 March 1887, hereafter referred to as *PS*. The *PS* was the journal of the Orange Society. For a neutral view, see the work of a well-known Protestant journalist W. T. Stead in his, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, 1890, p p. 356-357. See also Rev. H. W. Cleary, *The Orange Society*, London, Catholic Truth, 1899; this work deals with Orange Lodges in Victoria, Australia.

⁵² *Protestant Standard*, 9 October 1886.

⁵³ In his introduction to *Ephemera*, Farrell had declared in 1878; 'I have a deep and abiding faith in Christianity apart from al sectarian difference.' He would defend victims of bigotry wherever he found it. Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' note 110, p. 52.

⁵⁴ In those days a train brought mourners from Sydney, and upon its arrival at Rookwood, a flag was supposed to be raised to signal to the officiating priests or ministers that their party had arrived. On this occasion however, the signal, if it was ever raised went unseen. Cotton tried to lead the prayers for Farrell but could not. Hence the prayers were led by Beale. This was not the final word. According to the family tradition, as told to Ann Cuddy of Bexley, Farrell's great-grand daughter, at the end of the day the priest who was meant to conduct the funeral, realizing it had gone on without him, held his own service for Farrell at the graveside alone at Sunset.

⁵⁵ The "Kiama Ghost" came from the time of the treason-felony scare in 1868. The ghost was nearly always depicted as a wide-eyed Fenian complete with hat, clay pipe, knife and gun. Numerous examples of the stereotype abound in the *SMH* and *Bulletin*.

⁵⁶ Bertram Stevens, *Memoir*, p. xxxiii.

⁵⁷ *Australian Standard*, 7 September 1889.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Stenhouse, 'Pegasus,' p. 41.

⁶⁰ Bertram Stevens, *Memoir*, p. xxxiii.

⁶¹ *Australian Standard*, July 1890.

⁶² *Australian Radical*, 10 March 1888.

⁶³ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 7 June 1890.

⁶⁴ F. W. Ward (1847-1934). Australian journalist. Migrated from New Zealand as a young man, entered journalism and built a good reputation as an editor in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. See A. G. Austin (editor), *The Webbs' Australian Diary 1898*, Melbourne, Sir Isaac Pitman, 1965, p. 134.

⁶⁵ *The Bulletin*, 14 June 1890.

⁶⁶ *Liberty*, 22 July 1895.

⁶⁷ 'The Weakness of Mr. King - A Ballad of Coreena,' *Bulletin*, 30 May 1891.

⁶⁸ Price Warung, (William Astley) 'Death of Mr. John Farrell, A Great Journalist Gone,' *Daily Free Press*, 9 January 1904, hereafter referred to as "Warung".

⁶⁹ John Farrell, 'The Federal Convention Elections,' *Single Tax*, 20 February 1897.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ See 'The Inky Way,' Farrell Papers ML MSS 1522/2 item 7, hereafter referred to as 'Inky.' Stenhouse conjectures that the author of this claim was Mary Cameron-Gilmore. See 'Pegasus,' p. 53, note 128.

⁷² Bertram Stevens, *Memoir*, p. xxxvi.

⁷³ Inky.

⁷⁴ Victor J. Daley, 'John Farrell,' *The Bulletin*, 14 January 1904.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ See 'Introduction' to 'Pegasus,' pp. IV – VIII.