

THE GREAT AMERICAN PARADOX:
TOM L. JOHNSON AND THE CONTROVERSY
SURROUNDING HIS ROLE IN HISTORY

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

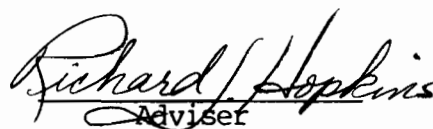
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PREFACE

Having grown up in Toledo, it would be convenient to assume that my initiation to the Civic Revival came from residing in that city. Yet, while I can vaguely remember my grandfather mentioning "Golden Rule" Jones, my first real interest in the period and its leaders undoubtedly developed much later. As an undergraduate in Cleveland there were many occasions to visit the downtown public library. Along the bus route one passed Newton D. Baker Hall at Case Western Reserve University and Tom L. Johnson's statue on Public Square. Older riders sometimes remarked about the city during its golden years and the newspapers left on the seats occasionally featured nostalgic pieces about the "City on the Hill." At the time, however, other subjects seemed more compelling and it was not until graduate school that a subconscious interest, of necessity, became concrete.

This work grew out of a series of seminar papers in urban and social history at The Ohio State University. Discussions with several persons there and elsewhere pointed out the fascinating aspects of working with the Progressive era and provided some initial suggestions and encouragement. Among the individuals who were very solicitous toward an aspiring graduate student were professors John Burnham, Warren Van Tine, Austin Kerr and Robert Bremner, of the OSU History Department. Equally helpful were Professor Melvin G. Holli, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and Dr. Michael S. Pap, John Carroll University, Cleveland. Without the support of these

scholars, undertaking this thesis and seeing its completion would have been much more difficult tasks.

Of course, there were many other who aided in the course of preparing this work. Because of the large number and the variety of their help the names of these persons are respectfully included in the accompanying Bibliographical Essay. I would, however, like to single out the invaluable services of my advisor, Professor Richard J. Hopkins, who provided not only constant intellectual stimulation, but unflagging morale suport as well. Miss Kathleen Shea, Ms. Eileen Keeler, and Mrs. Karen Keller who typed the final draft, also deserve very special thanks for meeting all of the requirements imposed by the Ohio State Graduate School and this anxious author. Additionally, my family in Toledo and Cleveland were most kind in putting me up and putting up with me during frequent research trips to those cities. And, finally, to one person who shared all the frustrations, discomforts, and hopes encountered in this project, and for whom the effort truly was a labor of love, this thesis is dedicated: to my wife, Gina Marie Lewandowski.

INTRODUCTION

Tom Loftin Johnson (1854-1911) is a notable figure in late 19th/early 20th century American history. During his lifetime he was widely known for his many talents and accomplishments. He began his career as an inventor and ultimately received over thirty patents for devices which helped revolutionize the street railway industry. He was known throughout the industry as a dynamic businessman whose roads, at various times, operated in six different states. Johnson was also a successful manufacturer. As such, he supplied both rails and specialized machinery to a growing transportation market. Moreover, by locating his factories in Johnstown, Pennsylvania and South Lorain, Ohio, he did much to promote the development and, in the former case, the reconstruction of the two cities. Based on his business affairs alone, many considered him representative of the typical Horatio Alger success story. His fortune at the turn of the century was reputed to exceed ten million dollars - despite the fact that he had had only one year of formal schooling.

Johnson's notoriety did not stop at business, but extended to politics as well. In fact, it is for his activities in this field that he is most often remembered. Although he downplayed the notion that politics ran in his family, Tom Johnson came from a long line of distinguished politicians - including an American Vice President. During his street railway promotions he learned the connection between business and politics firsthand from men like William English,

a national political figure, and Marcus A. Hanna, "the man who made a president." Under the tutelage of social philosopher Henry George he studied the "Social Gospel" in theory and took part in the practical side of big city electioneering. Imbued with this background he ran for Congress four times and served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. There he made himself known as a maverick Democrat whose tactics were novel, if unorthodox. Following his service in Washington, Johnson returned to business, but within six years relinquished control of his business holdings. He then ran for the Cleveland mayoralty and was elected in 1901.

Johnson occupied Cleveland City Hall for an unprecedented four terms. During his tenure he gathered together a cadre of dedicated individuals and attempted a series of "progressive" reforms. Among these were municipal ownership of utilities, tax equalization, home rule for cities, social welfare for the elderly, an enlightened penal system, and, most prominently, a three-cent street railway fare. Moreover for a time he was a major political force in the state. In 1902 he ran successfully for the Ohio governorship and thereafter managed to influence a number of Democratic state party platforms. Defeated at the polls in November, 1909, Johnson nevertheless retained the title "best mayor of the best governed city in America." He died in 1911.

While he was alive Tom Johnson established an international reputation as a businessman, politician, and reformer. His wealth and interests further brought him into contact with many leading figures of the day. For these reasons, plus his colorful personality, he was the

subject of many contemporary magazine and newspaper articles and at least one early newsreel. Yet, perhaps the most salient indicator of his public stature was the fact that he was periodically mentioned as a possible presidential candidate.

In the nearly seventy years since his death, Tom Johnson has also aroused considerable historical interest and debate. To date, four dissertations, three theses, two monographs, and numerous articles have either wholly or in part examined his life and role in the Progressive Civic Revival. Despite this intense scrutiny, however, there still is no consensus regarding Johnson's radical shift from business to urban reform politics. In fact, one recent assessment of his character and possible motivation, formulated by Professor Melvin G. Holli, actually diverges quite sharply from the general trends of previous research. The fact remains that, until a uniformly accepted interpretation of Johnson's behavior is established, he will remain in history what he was in life, an enigma. And insofar as he was a central figure in the Civic Revival, it may be argued that the exact nature of the movement also remains open to question.

The historiographical controversy surrounding Tom Johnson is in many respects a revival of contemporary charges of his consistency. While he lived, not only his opponents but also a significant number of friends and neutral parties alike spoke of his incongruous nature. Associates were often hard pressed to explain why a wealthy businessman would attack the very system that had brought him wealth. On the other hand, opponents usually dismissed him as a hypocrite or radical. And successive biographers have found him an intriguing subject,

although it is probably not inaccurate to suggest that each one subconsciously has hoped to find the key to his puzzling make-up or, at least, an illuminating character flaw.

For those who have attempted to unravel "the Great American Paradox," a number of obstacles have hindered research. Over and above Johnson's inherent complexity, initially there was a problem of temporal proximity. Tom Johnson generated passions in his day that, as the Toledo Blade in its obituary of him predicated, would require ten years to cool.¹ Yet, by the end of the decade the problem, rather than disappearing, had transformed itself instead; Johnson meanwhile had become a legend. This was especially true in Cleveland, the city so closely allied with his business and political careers, where the people came to regard him as a folk hero. Methodological problems complicated the investigation as well. For a long while his biographers lacked primary source materials. Painstaking research has eased the situation somewhat, but Johnson's own papers and those of his model, Henry George, are largely unenlightening. In addition, most surviving sources tend to reflect some measure of positive or negative bias. Then, too, previous attempts at interpreting Johnson, although scholarly, have not integrated all the diverse periods of his life. Consequently, there still is no comprehensive biography of Tom Johnson.

Considering the amount of research already done on Johnson's

¹The Toledo Blade, 11 April 1911, quoted in Louis F. Post, The Public, XIV (July 21, 1911), p. 750.

life, it now appears unlikely that any new revelations will emerge from undiscovered sources. Barring the discovery of new material, historians now must realize that:

It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence. . . . The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact - of absolute, undeniable fact - from the embellishments of theorists and reporters. Then, having established ourselves upon this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn, and which are the special points upon which the whole mystery turns.²

Owing to the limited scope of a thesis, this counsel is more easily enunciated than implemented. But there are a variety of reasons for at last confronting the problem. First, the only scholarly biography of Tom Johnson was written nearly thirty years ago. Although a good deal of revealing new information has surfaced since then, it has not appeared in one work. Nor has anyone critically examined Johnson's celebrated relationship with Henry George. In addition, the conjecture and historical controversy surrounding Johnson's principles and practices continue to obscure the "framework of fact" upon which a truly penetrating appraisal of Tom Johnson may be undertaken.

The goals and format of this thesis are aimed at correcting these deficiencies. While obviously not a full-fledged biography, Chapter One provides a chronological outline of Tom Johnson's life incorporating the most recent scholarship. By introducing new material, e.g. the Henry George correspondence, Chapter Two tries to address the need

²Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of Silver Blaze," The Strand Magazine (December 1892), reprinted in The Complete Original Illustrated Sherlock Holmes (Secaucus, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1976), p. 185.

for an up-to-date, concise examination of the philosophical, social, financial, and political connections between George and Johnson. Taken together, these chapters provide a solid reference point from which a study of the critical literature may proceed. Chapter Three is devoted to this task. After studying the conflicting charges of Johnson's enigmatic character, it should then be possible to discern which arguments best describe the patterns of his behavior.

Please note that this thesis does not claim to "interpret" Tom L. Johnson. Various considerations, both technical and intellectual, limit this work to an historiographical examination and an attempt synthesis of prevailing arguments. While this exercise cannot be termed a psycho-historical study, the hope here is that, by reviewing the bases of the controversy surrounding Tom Johnson, new insights may be gained which ultimately will lead to a generally accepted interpretation of his role in history.

CHAPTER I

A LIFE'S REVIEW

Background and Early Years: 1854-1876

Business and Politics: 1876-1901

The Mayoralty and After: 1901-1911

Tom Loftin Johnson [sometimes erroneously referred to as "Thomas"] was born July 18, 1854 at Blue Spring plantation in Scott County, Kentucky. His parents, Albert William and Helen (Loftin) Johnson, met while she attended Georgetown Female Seminary, a girl's finishing school, and he a nearby military academy. A mutual friend, James G. Blaine, later Secretary of State and an unsuccessful Republican presidential candidate (1884), introduced them. They were married August 4, 1853 in Georgetown, Kentucky. After Tom, the first-born, two other sons followed within seven years: William L. and Albert L. Johnson, both of whom survived to adulthood.¹

Genealogical records trace the Johnson's ancestry to a William Johnson who arrived in Orange County, Virginia in 1714. Over the next century and a half the family acquired wealth and social recognition through such prominent representatives as: Benjamin Cave, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses; Robert Adams (Robin) Johnson of

¹Tom Loftin Johnson, My Story, edited by Elizabeth J. Hauser (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1913), p. 1. Hereafter cited as Johnson, My Story. See also Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), pp. 646-647; Thomas B. Hanley, The New York Times Illustrated Magazine, October 31, 1897.

Boonesborough, a delegate to two Kentucky state constitutional conventions and a member of the state legislature;² his brother Cave Johnson, a widely known pioneer and Indian fighter; John T. Johnson of the Kentucky Supreme Court; Lieutenant Colonel James Johnson, another state legislator, presidential elector, and U. S. Congressman; his son General William Johnson; and Richard Mentor Johnson, Vice President of the United States (1837-1841), called "Tecumseh" after purportedly killing the Indian chief at the Battle of the Thames (1813).

Blood and kinship, moreover, linked the Blue Spring branch with "all the Kentucky Johnsons, some of the Johnstons, the Paynes and the Flournoys, the Bufords, the Colemans, the Popes and the Clays, as well as the Standefords and the Breckinridges." Less closely related yet considered "friends of our family" were Alfred Victor and Antoine Bidermann du Pont, grandsons of Pierre Samuel du Pont, a French emigre and founder of the E. I. du Pont de Nemours gunpowder works in Delaware. Then, too, Arthur J. Moxham, Tom Johnson's business associate in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, was related by marriage. And another cousin, Congressman Ben T. Cable of Illinois, sat with Johnson in the Fifty-Second Congress. This network of interfamilial relations extended throughout Kentucky, Arkansas, Virginia, Mississippi, several northern states, and England.³

²Not to be confused with his namesake Colonel Robert A. Johnson, C.S.A., Tom Johnson's father-in-law.

³Johnson, *My Story*, p. 9; Louis F. Post, *The Public*, VIII (January 6, 1906), pp. 646-647; See also Leland Winfield Meyer, "The Life and Times of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1932), chapter I *passim*; Michael Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson, Engineer-Entrepreneur (1869-1900)" (Ph.D. disser-

From the mid-1850's to the outbreak of the Civil War the family lived alternately at Blue Spring and its cotton plantation at Beaver Bayou, twelve miles south of Helena, Arkansas. They also owned about one hundred slaves at this time. Soon after Fort Sumter Captain Albert Johnson organized and commanded a Confederate military company from Helena. By mid-1861 he was promoted a brigade colonel under General Thomas C. Hindman. A few months later, after a quarrel with General Hindman over orders to court-martial some soldiers charged with desertion, Colonel Johnson resigned from Hindman's command at Little Rock to join General John C. Breckinridge around Atlanta, Georgia. Because Helen Johnson decided early to accompany her husband throughout his military service, the family and some servants left Arkansas in late 1861, crossed into Mississippi at the river town of Napoleon, stopped at Yazoo City, traversed Alabama, and arrived in Atlanta by December 25, 1861.

Somewhat later, when Colonel Johnson accepted a staff position under General Jubal A. Early, Mrs. Johnson and the boys moved to Milledgeville, Georgia where they lived with the McAdoo family from early 1862 to late 1863. During their stay Tom Johnson later recalled holding the day-old William Gibbs McAdoo, later Secretary of the Treasury and U. S. Senator. Shortly thereafter the family left Georgia, going north through the Carolinas, to Coyner Springs and later to Wytheville, Virginia. In Spring 1864 they were in Natural Bridge,

tation, Case Western Reserve University, 1970), p. 6 and note. Hereafter cited as Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson."

Virginia where they stayed until March or April 1864, moving to Staunton by war's end.⁴

After Lee's surrender the family was together in Staunton, but they were far from their Kentucky and Arkansas properties and without financial resources. As a result, when a friendly conductor on the only train running into Staunton offered eleven-year-old Tom Johnson a monopoly on newspaper sales, he immediately accepted. In five weeks, charging an exorbitant fifteen cents for dailies and twenty-five cents for pictorials, this arrangement netted him eighty-eight silver dollars.⁵

With this, "the first good money our family had seen since the beginning of the war," the Johnsons were able to travel to Louisville, Kentucky in late Summer 1865. There, Albert W. Johnson, "already heavily in debt" and "hoping to make a new start in life among his friends and relatives . . . borrowed enough capital to operate his Arkansas cotton plantation." Consequently, in early Summer 1866 the family moved back to Beaver Bayou.

For almost a year Colonel Johnson tried to revitalize the Arkansas plantation by introducing free labor. The experiment failed, however, owing to a "disastrous flood" and other unrecorded factors. Following this attempt, the family moved again, to Evansville, Indiana, where the Colonel made further attempts at business.

⁴Johnson, My Story, pp. 1-5; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 647.

⁵Johnson, My Story, pp.5-6.

Tom Johnson lived with his family in Evansville from Fall 1867 through Summer 1868 and received his only formal schooling there. That year he completed three grades and planned to enter high school in the autumn. Meanwhile, however, his father had once more experienced financial difficulties and the family proceeded to Gap-in-the-Knob, Kentucky, a farm about eighteen miles south of Louisville belonging to Jillson P. Johnson, the Colonel's brother.

While on the farm Johnson remembered that the family was "extremely poor." Resultingly at this time, i.e. during Fall/Winter 1868, Tom Johnson, then fourteen, worked odd-jobs in Louisville such as sweeping an office for five dollars a month and supervising "a gang of laborers in the street." This changed in January 1869 when Helen Johnson, through a relative, secured for him an office job at a local rolling mill. During this period it was also arranged for him to live with another uncle, Captain Thomas Coleman, and his large family in Louisville.

Johnson began working at the mill February 1, 1869. Out of personal interest, however, he gradually spent more time in the mechanical department than in the office. Some four months later he quit the mill and accepted an office position in the Louisville Central Passenger Street Railway Company.⁶ Alfred V. and A. B. du Pont had recently

⁶Ibid., pp. 6-10; Louis F. Post, The Public, VII (January 6, 1906), pp. 647-648; Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," p. 6 and note; Orison Swett Marden, editor, Little Visits With Great Americans or Succes, Ideals, and How to Obtain Them (New York: The Success Company, 1903), pp. 235-236.

acquired this firm which was otherwise called "the Fourth and Walnut Street Lines."

In June 1869 Tom Johnson started working at seven dollars a week as a change counter for the firm, but soon assumed "entire charge of the office as bookkeeper and cashier." Here he learned cost accounting within a month and by late Fall was promoted to company secretary. The following summer the du Ponts appointed his father superintendent of the road. In 1873, when Colonel Johnson became Louisville's police chief, the nineteen-year-old company secretary succeeded him as superintendent.

The year before, on October 29th, Tom Johnson patented an improved streetcar farebox, the first of some thirty patents he ultimately held. This design was revised and patented October 14, 1873 as a new improved farebox. Johnson subsequently established the Improved Farebox Company in Louisville to market the device. Although the company apparently terminated in 1876 his invention was still being produced nine years later. Also about this time, on October 8, 1874, he married Margaret (Johnson) Johnson, a fourth cousin.⁷

By July 1876 profits from the new improved farebox totalled between twenty and thirty thousand dollars. That month, returning from St. Joseph, Missouri where he had attempted to sell the box to local businessmen, Johnson stopped in Indianapolis, Indiana to interest

⁷Johnson, *My Story*, pp. 9-13; Louis F. Post, *The Public*, VII (January 6, 1906), pp. 648-649; Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," pp. 33-37, 142; See also Eugene Converse Murdock, "Life of Tom L. Johnson" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1952), pp. 26-27. Hereafter cited as Murdock, "Life."

Mr. William H. English⁸ in the product. Instead of selling, Johnson purchased controlling interest in the Citizens' Street Railway Company there. A ten percent down payment was met using the farebox royalties plus a no-collateral thirty thousand dollar advance from Biderman du Pont. The remainder was to be paid to Mr. English with ten-year annual notes.

Early in 1877 Albert W. Johnson joined his eldest son in Indianapolis as president of the road. Tom Johnson, although nominally treasurer, actually instituted policy. Shortly thereafter, the new management experienced serious disagreements with Mr. English over company procedures. At one point Tom Johnson initiated a lawsuit to obtain the company's books through his attorney Albert G. Porter, later Governor of Indiana. Finally he allied with Indianapolis banker F. M. Churchman and others to buy out the remaining notes, thereby eliminating English from direct contact with the company.

Johnson retained control of the Citizens' Street Railway Company until 1888 when other partners balked at his plans to electrify the road. He then sold his interests to a group of Chicago bankers who assumed the bonded indebtedness for eight hundred thousand dollars. Half of this went to him as profit, the rest reverted to Albert W. Johnson and other stockholders.⁹

⁸William Hayden English (1822-1896), Indianapolis businessman, banker, and politician; unsuccessful Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1880.

⁹Johnson, My Story, pp. 13-16; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 648; Cleveland Plain Dealer, 28 May 1901; Murdock, "Life," p. 15.

Three years after purchasing the Indianapolis line Tom Johnson first arrived in Cleveland, Ohio to bid for the Lorain Avenue/West 25th Street railway franchise grant.¹⁰ His offer, six tickets for twenty-five cents, was countered by the West Side Street Railway Company partnership of Marcus A. Hanna and Captain Elias Simms.¹¹ They obtained the grant on a technicality, viz. as an extension to their existing lines at a five-cent fare. He, in turn, bought the west side Pearl Street line in Summer 1879. This acquisition, based on the same ordinance, gave him the right to obtain subsequent grants as extensions to this line. Actual possession was delayed, however, as the Pearl Street line at the time of purchase was under lease to the Hanna-Simms company.¹²

Between late 1879 and 1880 Johnson meanwhile established an omnibus line to bypass Hanna-Simms tracks which blocked through traffic

¹⁰In this context a franchise is a municipal grant empowering a utility to operate in a given area usually for a given period of time. Street railway franchises during the late 19th/early 20th centuries were generally granted by city council vote, subject to mayoral approval.

¹¹Marcus Alonzo Hanna (1837-1904), Cleveland industrialist, politician, and businessman; U. S. Senator, 1897-1904; he successfully promoted the 1896 presidential candidacy of William McKinley. Captain Elias Simms (1813-1885), Cleveland steamboat master, dredging contractor and street railway manager; sometime partner of Marcus A. Hanna; he was the president of the West Side Street Railway Company of which Hanna was a director.

¹²Johnson, *My Story*, pp. 17-19. Carl Lorenz reports that Tom Johnson came to Cleveland in 1880 with "a half million dollars in his pocket" to bid on the above mentioned grant. Other sources, however, have definitely established the time as Spring 1879 although the amount of investment capital he brought has not been corroborated. Carl Lorenz, *Tom L. Johnson* (New York: A. S. Barnes Company, 1911), pp. 5-6. Hereafter cited as Lorenz, *Tom L. Johnson*.

from the West Side Market House to Public Square. He also purchased the Jennings Avenue line running from the west side through the central industrial area known as the "Flats." His control then extended to two of Cleveland's eight street railways. From this base Johnson planned to build the city's first single fare/free transfer through-lines connecting the east and west sides. To this end he entered into litigation with the West Side Street Railway Company for the right to cross its tracks and there gain access to downtown.¹³

After putting his brother Albert in charge of operations sometime in 1880, Tom Johnson assumed direct possession of the Pearl Street line the following year. He then purchased the Brooklyn (Ohio) Street Railway Company. This unimproved and seemingly unprofitable line running southwest from Cleveland's west side to the village of Brooklyn cost him eight thousand dollars. Finally, on May 16, 1881, he received legal permission to extend the west side lines over Hanna-Simms tracks.¹⁴

During the next twenty-two months Johnson tried to get City Council approval for a crosstown throughline extension. Other street railway promoters, among them Marcus Hanna and Henry A. Everett, the manager of a rival company, opposed this local innovation. Johnson consulted Elias Simms, recently bought out by Hanna after a quarrel

¹³Johnson, My Story, pp. 19-22.

¹⁴William R. Hopkins, "The Street Railway Problem in Cleveland," American Economic Association Economic Studies, I (New York: Swan, Sonnenschein Company, 1896), Appendix C. passim; Murdock, "Life," p. 18 note. Obituary of Albert L. Johnson, Cleveland Plain Dealer, 3 May 1901.

arising from their previously unfavorable right-of-way decision, on how to obtain the grant. In his book My Story Johnson charges that the opposition used questionable tactics to block the extension. Nevertheless, on March 12, 1883, having unaccountably secured the votes of two councilmen formerly favorable to the other street railways, Johnson received nineteen votes in Council—just enough to guarantee the extension. He soon purchased the South Side Street Railway Company on Cleveland's near west side as well.¹⁵

Over the next several years Tom Johnson expanded the number and scope of his railway operations. From April to July 1883 the Index to Deeds for Cuyahoga County, Ohio shows him involved in land parcel purchases for an ostensible build-up of the Brooklyn Street Railway Company. That same October he published a little-known second book, Street Railway Construction, for the American Street Railway Association's second convention. Thirteen months later he obtained a considerable extension to the Brooklyn Company's east side holdings. And on January 26, 1885 the company received a 25-year renewal franchise.¹⁶ Further, between 1885 and 1900 he was one of a group of men who owned the Southern Railway Company, St. Louis, Missouri, which later included the Sixth Street line and was electrified in 1890.

¹⁵Johnson, My Story, pp. 22-24; his book Johnson also implies that Simms, seeking revenge against Hanna, bribed the two councilmen to assure the grant for Johnson; Murdock, "Life," p. 19.

¹⁶Index to Deeds for Cuyahoga County, Ohio (Cleveland, Ohio: n.p., 1883), 348, p. 424; Ibid., 355, p. 209; Ibid., 356, pp. 189, 264; See also corresponding deed descriptions in Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Deed Records (Cleveland, Ohio: n.p., 1883); Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," p. 46; Murdock, "Life," p. 20.

Finally, after two years of designing and patenting various cable traction devices, in 1886 Johnson joined his brother Albert and Alexis Irene du Pont as a major stockholder in the Brooklyn (New York) Cable Company. By 1887, however, rapid advances in electrical technology rendered cable traction obsolete in all but a few instances. These developments brought into question the company's continued viability and it remained a non-operating entity until 1893.¹⁷

From 1883 to 1898 manufacturing enterprises paralleled Johnson's street railway concerns. On February 20, 1883 he patented a street railway rail at the same time as Arthur J. Moxham, a resident Briton, was developing a rolling process for it. Later that year, following negotiations with Daniel J. Morrell, president of the Cambria Iron Company of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the two men contracted Cambria to manufacture the rail. Johnson and Moxham then formed the Johnson Steel Street Railway Company, later shortened to the Johnson Company, to market it, as well as to produce specialized rails based on subsequent patents.

As with his Indianapolis and Cleveland business interests, Tom Johnson managed the company's finances while another, in this case Moxham, assumed administrative duties. Former employer Alfred V. du Pont also became one of the firm's leading investors.¹⁸ Chiefly

¹⁷Johnson, *My Story*, p. 34; Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," 15; Murdock, "Life," p. 15.

¹⁸Johnson, *My Story*, pp. 33; Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," p. 143. The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce Membership List, for the period 10 April 1895 to 10 April 1896, records Member #204 (Hon.) Tom L. Johnson as Vice President, The Johnson Company, Mfs. Rails, etc.

due to their concerted efforts the company opened six regional offices by 1887 (Boston, New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Chicago) in addition to the home office in Johnstown. Moreover, by Winter 1887-88 sales of Johnson Company rails increased to the point where the front office decided to withdraw from the Cambria arrangement and establish its own rolling mill. Construction was completed ✓ at the new suburb of Moxham n the Stoney Creek, one mile south of Johnstown, May 7, 1888, by which time regional offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had also been added.

Just over a year later, on May 31, 1889, the Johnstown flood occurred. Although the city was devastated, Johnson Company works remained intact because the new mill stood on high ground. Meanwhile, the firm, which had constructed a steam railroad from Moxham to Johnstown "and for some time had been trying to get possession of the city's street railways too," found the owners willing to sell their flood-damaged property. The Johnson Company thereupon purchased the Johnstown Passenger Street Railway Company and ran the line free of charge for almost three months after the flood. Johnson and Moxham also aided in relief efforts, the latter actually governing as elected dictator for a brief period.

Over the next two years the city gradually recovered and the Johnson Company entered its most productive phase. This entailed expanding current operations and constructing new works. Early in 1893 the company undertook the construction of its own steel mill as well as an integrated plant to perform all steps of steel rail and track ✓ manufacture and sale. Then in 1893, despite Alfred V. du Pont's death

and a shortage of investment capital owing to a depressed economy, the directors chose four thousand acres west of Cleveland for the site of the new factory. Construction proceeded throughout 1894 and by Spring 1895 the plant, officially the Lorain Foundry Company, was in operation. Meanwhile, the parent company opened its ninth regional office in San Francisco and founded the Johnson Electric Company in Cleveland. In 1896 this plant moved to Johnstown as part of a consolidation effort and changed its name to the Johnson Steel Motor Company.

For three more years the Johnson Company and its subsidiaries remained committed to industrial expansion. The town of South Lorain, Ohio grew up around the Lorain Foundry works. And in 1895 the company built the Lorain and Elyria Street Railway Company, an electric line ten miles long connecting the two cities. In 1897 the firm opened a European office, the Elektrizitaets-Gesellschaft Wandruszka & Cie. in Berlin and sold orders for twenty thousand tons of electric road steel rails to the United Kingdom. This transaction was "probably the largest order of steel rails for electric railway purposes ever shipped out of the United States." The following year, Johnson Company representatives also installed an entire electrical trolley system at Alexandria Park, north of London. None the less, for various business and economic reasons the Johnson Company sold out in 1898 to the Federal Steel Company, subsequently the United States Steel Corporation. The Lorain and Elyria line, both the land and the railroad, was retained, however, until 1905.¹⁹

¹⁹Johnson, My Story, pp. 33, 90-91; Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," pp. 172-173, 171-189.

From 1879 to 1883 Tom Johnson resided in Indianapolis where his two surviving children, Loftin Edwards and Elizabeth Flourney Johnson, were born in 1880 and 1882, respectively. An earlier child died in infancy. In mid-1883 the family transferred to Cleveland, living at 1529 Superior Avenue until their Euclid Avenue mansion was purchased, in Margaret Johnson's name, twelve years later. Prior to the Cleveland move, however, Tom Johnson frequently commuted on business between the two cities.

A number of incidents relate to this fact. First, following the Pearl Street right-of-way decision Marcus Hanna telegraphed him in Indianapolis proposing a partnership. Johnson wired his refusal and later, at a Union Club meeting in Cleveland, personally explained his reluctance to combine. Next, during the crosstown extension maneuverings Henry Everett allegedly went to Indianapolis in an unsuccessful attempt to divert Johnson's attention from "the Cleveland situation." A third incident, his reading of Henry George's Social Problems, occurred sometime in 1883 on a train between Indianapolis and Cleveland. This marked Johnson's first indirect exposure to the his theories of his later social and political associate.²⁰

From a business perspective, aside from the transactions already mentioned, Tom Johnson's career circa 1883-1894 was primarily devoted to capitalization, invention, and promotion. At least until 1888 his political convictions were neutral, and his relationship with Henry George, although personalized at a Brooklyn, New York meeting in 1885,

²⁰Johnson, My Story, pp. 23-25, 49; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 649; Murdock, "Life," p. 27.

remained social and avocational. Suddenly, then, on Monday, October 1, 1888 Democrats of the Ohio 21st Congressional district nominated him for the seat recently vacated by Representative Martin A. Foran. Running as a free-tradeer in a predominantly protectionist district he was defeated by Theodore E. Burton, 20,086 votes to 19,470. Two years later, after campaigning on his own initiative, he won a Democratic primary over local politician and newspaper editor Major William W. Armstrong. In the congressional election of November 4, 1890 he again ran against Burton and this time won by a 3,390 vote plurality.

Tom Johnson subsequently served two terms in the House of Representatives during the Fifty-second and Fifty-third Congresses. He was re-elected in 1892 over former Ohio House Speaker Colonel Orlando J. Hodge and two other candidates.²¹ In Congress he served on the eleven member Committee on the District of Columbia and presided over the smaller Select Committee on Tax Assessment in the District. Under Johnson's chairmanship this subcommittee investigated the District's existing tax assessment policies. The result was a series of recommendations on tax equalization which the entire committee presented as House Resolution (H.R.) 9371. Although on July 11, 1892 he defended the bill before the House, H.R. 9371 was shelved following an abortive debate.²²

²¹Johnson, My Story, pp. 51, 60-63; See also Ohio, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor of the State of Ohio, 1888, p. 189; Ibid., 1890, p. 251; Ibid., 1892, p. 202; Cleveland Plain Dealer, 7 November 1888; Ibid., 5 November 1890; Ibid., 9 November 1892.

²²Johnson, My Story, pp. 65-66; See also Gordon Robert

Prior to this Johnson had initiated his congressional activities with and unorthodox procedure. In the first three months of the Fifty-second Congress he persuaded five fellow representatives to join him in using their "leave to print" privilege on sections of Henry George's "Protection or Free Trade." This enabled two hundred thousand copies to be printed piecemeal in the Congressional Record between March 11 and April 8, 1892, reassembled as a public document, and posted under government frank. This so-called "St. George Edition" went through two printings with over a million copies distributed in 1892.²³

Tom Johnson occupied his remaining time in the first session referring correspondence, usually constituents' bills, petitions, and requests, to appropriate committees. He also helped draft a revenue tariff plank for the 1892 Democratic Convention platform which opposed the then-current McKinley Tariff. Following his November re-election to the Fifty-third Congress he returned from Cleveland to complete his original term.²⁴ During this session, when a District of Columbia

Rawlinson, "Tom Johnson and His Congressional Years" (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1958), pp. 51-63. Hereafter cited as Rawlinson, "Congressional Years"; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), pp. 650-651.

²³Johnson, My Story, pp. 68-70; Rawlinson, "Congressional Years," pp. 66-68.

²⁴Prior to the Twentieth (or "Lame Duck") Amendment)1933, newly elected representatives did not take office until March 4th following their election. Even so, their legislative duties did not begin until they were sworn in at the opening session of the new congress, often a year away. this explains the disjointed chronology of Tom Johnson's congressional career.

appropriations bill was introduced, he again called for a revision of existing tax assessment policies. This amendment was also defeated. Finally, on February 27, 1893 he introduced H.R. 10614 "to reduce the interest on the public debt, provide for a flexible currency and stop the purchase of silver." At the close of the Fifty-second Congress this bill died in the Ways and Means Committee.²⁵

On August 7, 1893 a special session of Congress convened at the request of President Grover Cleveland. Its purpose was to debate the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act (1890). Cleveland held that the continuance of this Act would dangerously deplete federal gold reserves and further aggravate the nation's depressed economic conditions. Some two weeks later Tom Johnson supported the repeal while arguing for comprehensive fiscal revision.

The special session closed in November with a compromise amendment replacing the Sherman Act.²⁶ A month later tariff revision was the Fifty-third Congress' opening consideration. On January 10, 1894 Johnson outlined his tariff views for the House and introduced a sample free trade bill. Debate over what commodities were to be placed on the general bill, called the Wilson Tariff, was conducted in January. Midway through this discussion Representative John Dalzell of Pennsylvania questioned Johnson's motives for placing steel rails outside the tariff's protection. Johnson responded the next day (January 19) by detailing his contention that the Johnson Company could

²⁵Johnson, My Story, pp. 70-72; Rawlinson, "Congressional Years," p. 80.

²⁶Rawlinson, "Congressional Years," pp. 82-88 passim.

profit from steel rails without a tariff. Notwithstanding, steel rails were placed under the tariff's jurisdiction and, on February 1, 1894, Johnson voted with the House majority for passage. Although in principle deprecating the idea of a tax on personal income, he also supported a two percent tax on all incomes over \$4,000. He further supported a largely token bill, the Maguire "Single Tax Amendment," imposing "a direct tax of \$41,311,125" on all non-government owned land values, exclusive of improvements, and at a rate assessed at full market value. This was defeated 180 to 6.

From February to July the Wilson bill, as passed by the House, underwent Senate scrutiny. During this period a group of unemployed workers, led by Jacob S. Coxey of Massillon, Ohio, marched on Washington. Their "petition in boots" was intended to enlist Congressional support for free silver and a government-sponsored public works project. On May 1, 1894, however, Coxey and a few followers were arrested for trespassing while Capitol police dispersed the rest. Tom Johnson called for a House investigation of the police actions, noting his displeasure with their behavior in the Congressional Record.

The radically altered tariff bill returned for House approval July 6. With 600 new amendments the Gorman Tariff, as it became known in the Senate, was billed as compromise legislation. Yet, throughout July the House repeatedly voted its non-concurrence with the Senate. Then, in early August, William L. Wilson, the bill's House sponsor, effected an agreement with Senate leaders and the Wilson-Gorman Tariff was passed 176-97. On August 13, 1894 Tom Johnson, who had voted with the minority, delivered a speech entitled "The Demo-

cratic Surrender." In it he catalogued his complaints against the bill and its sponsors, ending "we will not have to wait long to feel the indignant repudiation of the people."²⁷

The Fifty-third Congress' first session adjourned August 28th. Just over two months later Tom Johnson was defeated for re-election. On November 6, 1894 Theodore Burton received 17,926 votes to Johnson's 13,260. Johnson returned to Congress December 3rd as a "lame duck" member. His activities in the second session revolved around the House Banking and Currency Committee, with which he associated himself after earlier leaving the District Committee. During the time remaining he introduced H.R. 8408, a currency bill promoting a national banking system, which remained in committee. He left the House at the end of his term on March 2, 1895.²⁸

Temporarily retired from public office, Johnson sold his Cleveland street railway properties between 1894 and 1896. This completed a process already begun in April 1889 when, as president of the Brooklyn (Ohio) Street Railway, he had transferred over one-half of the company's holdings to Albert L. Johnson's South Side Street Railway. The transfer took place in two installments, one for fifteen thousand dollars and the other for "one dollar and other [unspecified] considerations." He thus divested himself of the bulk of his Cleveland

²⁷Johnson, My Story, pp. 74-78; Rawlinson, "Congressional Years," pp. 89-107 passim; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 652. Congressional Record, XXVI, August 14, 1894, p. 1229.

²⁸Rawlinson, "Congressional Years," pp. 109-115; Ohio, Annual Report of the Secretary of State to the Governor of the State of Ohio, 1894, p. 263; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 652.

interests. Still, before withdrawing from the local scene entirely, Johnson, his brother Albert, and the Henry Everett-Horace Andrews-John Stanley syndicate combined to form the Cleveland Electric Railway Company. Local papers called this concern the "Big Consolidated."²⁹ Until he left the "Big Con," Tom Johnson chaired its board of directors and Albert L. Johnson was a member. Horace Andrews was the company president.³⁰

The Cleveland transactions did not mark the end of Johnson's involvement with streetcar lines in other cities, however. In 1894 Albert L. Johnson and New York financier Richard T. Wilson purchased the Detroit Citizens' Street Railway Company. The following year Tom Johnson accepted an offer to become its president. Even prior to these developments, Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree had been trying unsuccessfully to obtain lower fares on all transit lines within the city. Two obstacles blocked his path: (1) the intransigence of the Citizens' Company's former owners, and (2) Michigan laws proscribing municipal ownership of utilities. He alternatively planned to increase competition among Detroit's street railways, thereby hoping to force down fares. To this end he introduced Johnson's erstwhile rival and associate, Henry Everett, and Michigan lumbermen Albert and Greene Pack to purchase the new Detroit Railway Company.

²⁹The "Big Con" controlled 60% of the city's traction interests while Marcus Hanna's Cleveland City Railway, or "Little Con," operated the remaining 40%. In 1903 the two merged to form the "Concon."

³⁰Johnson, My Story, pp. 86-88; Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Deed Records (Cleveland, Ohio: n.p., 1889), dates of transfer: 2 April 1889, 25 April 1889.

With Pingree's knowledge and approval Everett and the Pack brothers introduced a three cent fare on Detroit Railway lines. They also tried to obtain joint use of central terminal facilities, at that time held exclusively by the Citizens' Company. This arrangement would have opened the way for Pack-Everett expansion into downtown. An enabling bill was sent to the Michigan legislature whose authorization first was necessary to secure the measure. It did not pass.

Tom Johnson meanwhile initiated an ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit charging that the Detroit Company had violated Citizens' Street Railway charter rights. He alternatively set Citizens' fares at six tickets for twenty-five cents while marking time for capital improvements. And, when the Mayor was temporarily out of town, Johnson coaxed a number of side street grants from the Detroit Common Council. This was in exchange for a promise to maintain the six for a quarter fare.

The Citizens' Company underwent extensive modernization during the second half of 1895. In time, with \$6,000,000 advanced by A. B. du Pont,³¹ the improvements, including electrification, were completed. On November 19th the firm announced its renewed five-cent fare and the elimination of universal transfers. The Mayor, supported by many of Detroit's commuters, then led a successful boycott against the company. Tom Johnson replied by presenting Council with a three-cent fare ordinance containing several "experimental" provisions. The

³¹This was the son of Antoine Bidermann du Pont of Louisville, Tom Johnson's former employer and backer.

ordinance passed but not before a widely reported debate and not without one Detroit councilman accusing Johnson of coercion. Undoubtedly because of this publicity, Pingree's veto of the bill was not overridden.

At this point the Citizens' Street Railway voluntarily instituted a three-cent fare. Some six months later, in July 1896, the independent suburban Fort Wayne line followed suit. That Fall, having ostensibly gained his low fare objective, Pingree ran for governor. Backed by Albert Pack, he was elected in November. Three months earlier, unknown to Pingree, the Pack-Everett syndicate sold its property to a holding company organized by Johnson. A provision in the Michigan constitution prohibiting mergers of competing or parallel lines was thus circumvented. ✓

Through the holding company Wilson and the Johnsons controlled all of Detroit's municipal lines. Although the Detroit Railway was bound by franchise to charge three cents, the Citizens' Company revived its former five-cent fare. The following year, 1897, Johnson purchased the Fort Wayne line, thereby creating a monopoly of Detroit's municipal and suburban transit. The system of dual rates nevertheless continued through 1899.

For two years after the consolidation Tom Johnson unsuccessfully lobbied for a thirty-year franchise renewal for the Citizens' Street Railway similar to one already granted to the Detroit Railway in 1894. Without the grant the company was unable to market its securities at par value. In addition, Mayor (later Governor) Pingree continued to advocate a comprehensive three-cent fare.

Because of Johnson's and Pingree's intransigence neither side initially was able to obtain its objectives. Finally, in 1899, Governor Pingree proposed a plan which raised the possibility of clearing the impasse. Under its proposals the Common Council would have set up a type of holding company with trustees serving on a municipal Street Railway Commission. The Citizens' Company would then have sold out to the Commission for a mutually agreeable price. The result would have been quasi-public transit system open to a three-cent fare and would have allowed its current owners to recoup their investments.

Based on this plan negotiations over the sale price took place during the first half of 1899. Although various prices were alternatively submitted, a series of technicalities slowed the proceedings. Then in July the Michigan Supreme Court struck down the McCleod Act which had created the Commission. The same month, faced with seemingly insurmountable political opposition in Detroit, the Citizens' Company withdrew its offer. Tom Johnson, the company's chief negotiator, subsequently liquidated his Detroit assets in 1901.³²

In April 1894, soon after acquiring the Citizens' Company, Albert L. Johnson and Richard Wilson also obtained title to the Nassau street railway lines in Brooklyn, New York. And again, as in Detroit, Tom Johnson joined the management. The franchise was not completed binding at first, however, owing to charges of alleged political impropri-

³²Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics, The Urban Life in American Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 101-120 passim. An interesting comparison is found in Johnson, My Story, pp. 91-97. The conflict between Johnson's version of the Detroit episode and Melvin Holli's appraisal is given detailed treatment in Chapter III.

eties when issued. The partners immediately retained "the most skillful legal talent available," Samuel B. Clark, Elihu Root, and Joseph H. Choate, to secure the grant.

Despite the litigation Tom Johnson advised unrestrained investment in the Nassau Electric Railroad Company. Its line were electrified that same year and, after court proceedings which lasted until mid-1896, the case was dropped. Then between 1894 and 1898 the company undertook massive expansion. By joining the Atlantic Avenue line with the rest of the company's holdings a throughline connecting the Brooklyn Bridge and Coney Island was created. Paying a five-cent fare, as opposed to a former twenty-five cents, increasing numbers of patrons frequented the park.

Prior to 1897 a municipally-owned traction company was the only standard street railway connecting Brooklyn and New York proper. While the system was small, one and a half miles long, the fare was only two and a half cents. As Tom Johnson observed, "This was the first case of municipal ownership in this country and was the most efficient so far as the public was concerned of any line in existence before or since."³³ Despite its size, moreover, the company's control of Brooklyn Bridge traffic made it a profitable concern.

In 1897 the four major private lines operating in New York and Brooklyn tried to negotiate the same transit rights enjoyed by the municipal company. Tom Johnson represented them in franchise talks with city authorities. When the officials refused to issue any long-

³³Johnson, My Story, p. 99.

term grants Johnson on his own initiative, accepted a "ten minute franchise." This meant that the arrangement was open to almost instant termination. The other companies, although parties to this plan, retreated from its implementation. The Nassau Company alone, on Johnson's insistence, began track construction across the Bridge late in the year. On December 31, 1897 Albert L. Johnson ran the first car over, just before a restraining order sought by the other companies arrived. Not long afterward the municipal company folded--its limited facilities unable to compete with the Nassau lines.

During 1898 Edward H. Harriman, a New York financier and steam railroad magnate, wanted to combine the Nassau firm with his larger Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company. Once more Tom Johnson handled the negotiations. Eventually the transaction took place with the aid of an intermediary, A. L. Vorhees. In payment for the Nassau securities Tom Johnson "received a handful of certified checks of one hundred thousand dollars each in denomination." Having concluded the transaction, Johnson recalled:

Banks and trust companies remained open long after midnight to recieve our deposits and lock up our important papers. The transfer was now complete. Some of us know what effect the transaction would have on certain stocks and improved our opportunities by judicious stock purchases the minute the stock exchange opened in the morning.

He also reckoned that the combined property at the time of transfer was worth thirty million dollars.³⁴

³⁴Johnson, My Story, pp. 98-105; Nine years later William M. Ivins, a New York Public Service Commissioner then investigating the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, charged that at the time of the sale Tom Johnson had watered \$6,500,000 in Nassau Company Stocks. Ivins estimated that the company's construction and equipment cost

By Summer 1900 most of Johnson's business concerns had passed out of his direct control and he and his brother Albert went vacationing to Europe with their families. Tom Johnson returned home on August 28th to attend the Democratic National Convention in Kansas City to which he was a delegate. For almost five months thereafter little is recorded about his activities.

On January 8, 1901, however, he spoke to Democrats at a Jackson Day dinner in Cleveland. There he announced his intention to take up non-elective political affairs as his primary career. Six weeks later, having been nominated February 19th, he ran unopposed in a Democratic primary for the Cleveland mayoralty. His Republican opponent, William J. Akers, was nominated February 21st.

Throughout the campaign Johnson promoted tax equalization and a three-cent fare on Cleveland street railroads, and opposed renewal of

\$17,000,000 while the accounts of outstanding securities read nearly \$23,000,000.

This charge itself is not beyond question, however. It may have been a belated attempt to disparage Johnson's important 1907 reelection by one who had indirectly opposed him twenty one years earlier. As will be seen in Chapter II, Tom Johnson heavily supported Henry George in 1886 for the New York mayoralty. George was ultimately unsuccessful, but his bid posed a potentially serious threat to the Democratic candidate. Prior to the election, Ivins, then Chamberlain of New York City and a member of Tammany Hall, had attempted to bribe George with an uncontested Congressional seat in exchange for George's non-candidacy. The plan backfired and George, who up to that point had been undecided about running, subsequently conducted a vigorous campaign.

However, another curious point is that in 1889 Ivins accompanied George and Johnson on an unofficial fact finding tour to Boston where the Australian ballot system, a reform highly regarded by George, was being tested for the first time. Cleveland Plain Dealer, 23 November 1907; Charles Albrow Barker, Henry George (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 541. Henry George, Jr. The Life of Henry George (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1960), p. 463.

a Cleveland Electric Railway franchise. Two days before the election Johnson sued the Cleveland Leader, a pro-Republican newspaper, for libel based on a story charging him with misuse of campaign funds. Despite the article's timing Tom Johnson was elected Mayor April 1, 1901 by a vote of 35,791 to 29,758. As a sidelight on June 17th a Cleveland grand jury refused to sustain the libel charges and the case was dismissed.

Immediately after the vote count was certified, Tom Johnson assumed office at 10:00 a.m., April 4, 1901. Two days before, he had been granted a restraining order to prevent the city from transferring a segment of lakefront property to several steam railroads. Outgoing Mayor John H. Farley was scheduled to sign the ordinance enacting the transfer at 11:00 on the morning Johnson took office. Because of Johnson's early inauguration the ordinance never was signed and the railroads were forced to pursue legal action until 1914 to decide the issue. In the end the city retained the land.³⁵

Eight days later Johnson appointed a Board of Directors, as the mayor's cabinet was known, to oversee municipal operations. Its members consisted of: Charles P. Salen, Johnson's political manager, as the Public Works Director; Reverend Harris R. Cooley of the Cedar Avenue Disciples' Church, Johnson's pastor and friend, Charities and Corrections; James P. Madigan, Charles W. Lapp, and General William Meyer, local Democratic political leaders, to Accounts, Police, and

³⁵Johnson, My Story, pp. 108-120; New York Times, 30 August 1900; Ibid., 18 June 1901; Cleveland Plain Dealer, 9 January 1901; Ibid., 20 February 1901; Ibid., 22 February 1901; Ibid., 29 March 1901; Ibid., 2 April 1901; Plain Dealer, 7 February 1901.

Law, respectively; also participating were Peter Witt, City Clerk, and Professor Edward W. Bemis, an expert on the valuation of public service corporations, Waterworks Superintendent. These last two offices, while not officially part of the Board, were considered key posts by the Mayor.

Tom Johnson's first mayoral term witnessed a number of changes in municipal operations. Almost immediately policemen were stationed at saloons, gambling establishments, and brothels to scrutinize the clientele. In June 1901 a ban on slot machines was imposed. A general sanitation effort also was undertaken to remove billboards and other eyesores. Recreational activities were encouraged in public parks. And the Law Department was directed to research franchise agreements to determine expiration of dates.³⁶

During this time, too, Peter Witt, a former Populist orator, assisted by Newton D. Baker, later City Solicitor, Mayor, and U. S. Secretary of War, inaugurated a Tax School. This body, a quasi-official department, investigated personal property assessments and publicized its findings in a city-wide circular. These innovative procedures, however, crossed into the jurisdiction of the official tax board, or board of equalization. On October 8, 1902 a suit was filed enjoining the City Council from subsidizing the School and, after twenty months in operation, it disbanded.³⁷

³⁶Johnson, My Story, pp. 122-123; Cleveland Plain Dealer, 20 June 1901; see also; Brand Whitlock, Forty Years of It (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1914), p. 281. Hereafter cited as Whitlock, Forty Years.

³⁷Johnson, My Story, pp. 125-130.

Three months earlier Johnson signed a natural gas ordinance which authorized the transport of natural gas from West Virginia into the city for municipal use. On January 5, 1903 service began in Cleveland, thereby eliminating the city's exclusive dependence on high cost coal and artificial gas.³⁸

In May 1901 Johnson also commissioner Edward Bemis to begin independent appraisals of steam railroad tax valuations. When Johnson and Bemis determined that the county auditors' board was appraising railroad properties at only fifteen percent of face value, they took the matter to the State Board of Equalization. At the same time the city Board of Equalization, whose members were appointed by the Mayor, was enjoined by a common pleas court order from raising the property tax valuations of local public service corporations. Although State officials declined to revise the railroad evaluations, on January 4, 1902 the State Board sustained the revaluation of public service corporate taxes in the amount of 20 million dollars.³⁹

The first steps toward introducing a three-cent street railway in Cleveland began in late 1901. On March 17, 1902 City Council granted the Mayor's former Indianapolis associate John B. Hoefgen a new street railway franchise. Frederic C. Howe, then a Republican councilman and later an Ohio state senator and Woodrow Wilson's Commissioner of Immigration in New York, proposed the bill. Still, the grant was provisional in that Hoefgen first had to design a route and

³⁸Cleveland Plain Dealer, 3 July 1902; Ibid., 6 January 1903.

³⁹Johnson, My Story, pp. 132-144.

secure permission from property owners along it before building.

Tom Johnson and another friend and former business associate, August Lewis, worked closely with Hoefgen in outlining the double-track route. As planned, it would have covered a substantial west side tract and crossed both Cleveland Electric and Cleveland City Railway tracks. Fulton Avenue comprised one section on the route and property owners along this thoroughfare agreed to the promotion. But the Big and Little Consolidateds allegedly paid certain owners on three smaller streets adjoining Fulton to withhold their consents. Without a consenting majority on each street the grant could not be tendered. Council, on Johnson's suggestion, changed the three street names to Fulton, thus redistributing the votes so that the grant could take effect.

This maneuver and a franchise clause providing for ultimate municipal ownership led to the Hoefgen grant's invalidation by the Circuit Court. Council immediately tried rewriting the grant to conform with the Court's ruling. Within a week, however, the state Supreme Court decided that the Cleveland city charter violated the state constitution's proscription against special legislation. This ruling, which invalidated the city charter, also delayed Council's consideration of an alternative plan proposed by Johnson and Hoefgen for low fare bids, as well as enjoined the Council from granting any franchises until a new charter was approved.

Between June 1902 and May 4, 1903, when the new city charter took effect, the low fare issue was held in abeyance. As soon as the new charter was in place Johnson presented Council with his alterna-

tive to the Hoefgen grant: eleven short routes versus one long one. In this way, if even one short route should receive a franchise, the rest could be obtained as extensions to it. Accordingly, on September 9, 1903 Albert Green, who had succeeded Hoefgen, received a grant to operate the Forest City Railway Company along a section of Dennison Avenue. The Cleveland Electric and Cleveland City Railways, which had consolidated that summer, then began applying for and receiving a series of injunctions to prevent the Dennison Avenue extensions.

While this maneuvering was taking place Johnson became involved in a lawsuit over low cost street paving contracts which the Ohio Supreme Court ultimately ruled in his favor. At the same time he also began intensive lobbying for an ordinance aimed at creating a municipal light plant. And, having been re-elected mayor over Republican Harvey Goulder on April 7, 1903, he ran for governor. His campaign themes included tax equalization and home rule, i.e. non-intervention from state government in internal municipal affairs, but opposed "government by injunction," the issue stalling the Dennison Avenue extensions. State Republican leaders countered by issuing a pamphlet questioning his public policies and personal affairs.⁴⁰ The outcome

⁴⁰This pamphlet, Open Letters Addressed to Honorable Tom L. Johnson by Charles Dick, Chairman Ohio Republican State Executive Committee in the Campaign of 1902 (Columbus, Ohio: n.p., 1902), Letters dated: 13 October 1902, 14 October 1902, 23 October 1902, pp. 6-9, 38-39, raised the question of Johnson's alleged tax evasion. It determined that, based on personal property tax return totals from 1893-1899, Johnson paid \$33,900 in taxes for those years. Dick charged, however, that in a Cuyahoga County Auditor's report covering the same years the actual amount Johnson should have paid was over \$433,000. Although the report was supposedly filed in 1898 and Johnson was to have appeared, under legal notice, before the Auditor

saw Cleveland business figure Colonel Myron T. Herrick, later Ambassador to France, elected with 135,132 votes to Johnson's 20,476—the largest winning plurality in any Ohio gubernatorial election up to that time.

in September 1899, as of 1902 he had not appeared, but had handled the case through his attorneys. There is no mention of the charges in My Story and any county records possible bearing on the case were destroyed in the 1950's.

Shortly after the 1902 Ohio gubernatorial election a related article appeared in the New York Times. It stated that on November 6, 1902 Cuyahoga County Democratic tax officials voted in secret to revoke County Tax Inquisitor Henry Mergenthaler's contract. As quoted:

"In 1899 Mergenthaler and his brother, who is now dead, reported to the [Cuyahoga County] Auditor that Tom L. Johnson, who was then living in Brooklyn, N.Y., but who retained a voting residence in Cleveland, had evaded the payment of taxes on several million dollars worth of property, mainly stock in the corporations of other States, taxable under Ohio laws. The taxes on this property, together with penalties, amounted to \$450,000.

"The Auditor certified the property to the County Treasurer for collection, it is said, after he had tried to induce Mr. Johnson to appear and show why it should not be put upon the tax duplicate. Then Mr. Johnson went into the United States Circuit Court and obtained a temporary restraining order to prevent the collection of the taxes by the Treasurer.

"The penalties have been accumulating until Mr. Johnson is now charged with something like a half million dollars on the books of the Treasurer, and the injunction still stands.

"When Mr. Johnson was a candidate for Mayor [in 1901] he was accused of being a tax dodger, and in the campaign that has just ended the charge was repeated. In answer Mr. Johnson said that he did not owe the taxes which he declared had been asked about for political purposes, though Mergenthaler made the return to the County Auditor at least two years before Mr. Johnson came back to Cleveland to run for Mayor. The Republicans said Mr. Johnson could prove in court, if he chose, whether or not he owed the taxes" (New York Times, 7 November 1902).

Four and a half years later, according to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, a court decision on the alleged tax evasion was handed down which found Johnson liable for \$4,400 in back taxes. Johnson paid the sum although he continued to profess this disagreement with the ruling. Cleveland Plain Dealer, 2 May 1907.

Throughout 1904 and 1905 the Mayor's attention again turned to the acquisition of a municipal light plant and the low fare street railroad. In 1903 City Council had defeated an ordinance which would have created a municipal light plant to compete with the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company. Later that same year a special bond issue election to raise funds for the project also failed to pass. Then in 1904 Cleveland voters approved a bill annexing the village of South Brooklyn which already possessed an operating light and power plant. Still, Council refused to pass the annexation ordinance until December 11, 1905 — a month after a Democratic landslide in City Council elections. Thus, Cleveland acquired the small South Brooklyn plant which was later merged, after a similar annexation, to one in the east side the Village of Collinwood.

About the same time, on November 10, 1905, Tom Johnson was reelected to a third mayoral term. The Republican candidate, William H. Boyd, received 29,438 votes to the Mayor's 41,652. Within a year Johnson revived the Cleveland traction issue which once more began to generate widespread interest.

During 1906 Albert Green leased his Forest City Railway Company to the Municipal Traction Company. Tom Johnson and his Detroit backer, A. B. du Pont, earlier had organized the latter firm as a holding company. Its two principal investors, together channeling nearly seven hundred thousand dollars into the company, were Tom Johnson and his cousin, former Congressman Ben T. Cable of Illinois. Despite repeated injunctions filed by the Cleveland Electric Railway, Forest City ran its first car on November 1st. By virtue of his four

hundred thousand dollar investment the Mayor acted as motorman on the run. His investment, however, was also the basis for another restraining order obtained by the Cleveland Electric Company which temporarily halted Forest City operations.

In keeping with the previously described alternate plan, on January 2, 1907 another Johnson-backed firm, the Low Fare Company, began laying tracks. It, too, was leased by Municipal Traction. This was followed by two additional roads, the Neutral Street Railway and the Bridge & Madison line. Because established Cleveland banks were reluctant to finance these low fare ventures, the Depositors Savings and Trust Company opened on October 24, 1906 at 312 Superior Avenue. Overseeing its three hundred thousand dollar assets, raised largely from the small subscriptions, were: Tom Johnson, president; Leopold Einstein, vice president; J. P. Kraus, treasurer; and E. W. Doty, secretary.

Meanwhile, various Cleveland Electric franchises were expiring and its stocks were dropping. Then, on November 20, 1907, Johnson was re-elected to a fourth mayoral term over Republican Congressman Theodore E. Burton. His plurality was 9,326 votes. Facing sustained losses if it did not negotiate, Cleveland Electric reluctantly agreed to consolidate its lines with the Municipal Traction and other low fare companies. This compromise settlement was arranged by attorney Frederic H. Goff, representing the Concon, and Mayor Johnson.

The Johnson-Goff Settlement essentially created a holding company, the Cleveland Railway Company, which Council recognized by granting a special franchise, or security grant. The Cleveland Rail-

way in turn leased its paper holdings to Municipal Traction for actual operation with the understanding that the latter company would pay Cleveland Electric shareholders a six percent dividend and charge a three-cent fare. However, if at any time these terms were not met, the grant empowered the City to step in and regulate service. This settlement took effect on April 27, 1908.

The Cleveland Railway Company operated six and a half months under a policy of retrenchment. A few schedules were cut, certain lines were rerouted, and some unexpected difficulties in making change arose. Then, on May 16, a contingent of street railway employees, almost exclusively former Cleveland Electric personnel, called a strike. The action allegedly came as a result of the Cleveland Railway's failure to meet wage increases previously promised by the Cleveland Electric management. Two days after it started cars were dynamited and widespread vandalism was reported. Still, non-union motormen, guarded by Cleveland police, maintained services throughout the strike which lasted a week.

For a month afterward, disagreements persisted over the strikers' reinstatement and patrons increasingly complained of poor service. A referendum petition was circulated against the Johnson-Goff grant and on October 22nd voters rejected the settlement. Three weeks later the holding company went into receivership. Federal Judge Robert E. Tayler presided over the action.

The receivership lasted until March 1, 1910. On February 1, 1909 some former Cleveland Electric lines were allowed to resume five cent fares. Meanwhile, Judge Tayler, John G. White, representing the

old Cleveland Electric management, and Tom Johnson held conferences aimed at settling the traction issue. After May 18, Council, having already passed thirteen contingency ordinances favorable to low fare companies, granted a new franchise to Cleveland businessman Herman Schmidt. On August 3rd, however, another special referendum election was held and the Schmidt grant, which Mayor Johnson supported, did not pass. Exactly three months later County Recorder Herman C. Baehr was elected mayor over Johnson who received 37,709 votes, 3,713 fewer than Baehr.

On December 19th, once again a "lame duck," Johnson signed an ordinance based on a compromise plan submitted by Judge Tayler. Although the Tayler grant plan directed the Cleveland Electric Railway to assume control of the defunct Municipal Traction Company, it also provided for "service at cost," i.e. a three-cent fare, a watchdog City Traction Commission, and ultimate municipal ownership which occurred in 1942. The three-cent fare remained until 1917. Cleveland voters approved the grant at yet another referendum election April 1910. But by that time Tom Johnson had been out of office for three months, leaving on January 1, 1910.⁴¹

For almost two years pressing family matters had aggravated the

⁴¹Information dealing with Mr. Johnson's mayoral career was condensed from three major sources: Johnson, My Story, pp. 121-292; Robert H. Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio: The Fight Against Privilege in Cleveland and Toledo, 1899-1912" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1943), pp. 167-235; and Harry Christiansen, Trolley Trails Through Greater Cleveland and Northern Ohio From the Beginning Until 1910, Volume II, The Ohio Series (Cleveland, Ohio: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1975), pp. 216-225.

Mayor's already questionable health. In 1908 his daughter Elizabeth abruptly ended a month-long marriage to Italian playboy Frederic Mariani, by whom she had a daughter, Margaret Evelyn Mariani. In 1910 his son Loftin contracted appendicitis, which nearly proved fatal. Then, on November 19, 1908, one month after the Johnson-Goff referendum defeat, several newspapers reported the loss of Johnsons's personal fortune. This announcement also occurred about the same time as the Depositors Savings and Trust was dissolving.⁴²

Johnson's illness, variously described as nervous exhaustion and cirrhosis of the liver, continued with some improvement throughout 1909. Worse during the winter of 1909-10, it did not prevent him from making a six-week tour of Europe that Spring. Over the next year he travelled periodically between New York and Cleveland, spoke briefly at a number of public meetings, and dictated a magazine article for Hampton's Magazine. On November 8, 1910 he began dictating his book My Story to Elizabeth J. Hauser of Girard, Ohio. Portions were completed by March 14, 1911 when he took ill with acute nephritis. Losing consciousness on April 9th, Tom Johnson died at 8:47 p.m. the following day. Death was ascribed to biliary cirrhosis.

⁴²Albert L. Johnson died on July 2, 1901 in New York. At his death he allegedly owned substantial amounts of stock in the Lehigh Valley Company of Allentown, Pennsylvania. This road, an inter-urban venture, was planned to ultimately link New York and Philadelphia. It had in fact already secured transit rights from over sixty towns and villages along the way. According to Albert L. Johnson's will, Tom Johnson received one quarter of the estate, excluding real estate, and was named trustee for another third left to Kate M. Johnson, Albert's widow, and their four children. Contemporary newspapers also reported that Tom Johnson would continue his brother's Pennsylvania extension scheme.

On April 12th a funeral procession, witnessed by a large crowd in Cleveland, accompanied his body to the Union Station. From there it was taken to New York for burial in Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn, on April 13, 1911. He is buried in the Johnson family plot adjacent to the grave of Henry George.⁴³

Four years later the Lehigh Company reorganized after a property foreclosure and by mid-1907 its stock had dropped significantly. Then in November 1908, one week after Cleveland's Municipal Traction Company had passed into receivership, headlines in the New York Times datelined Cleveland read: "Mayor Tom Johnson Loses His Fortune in Fight For Low Fares in Cleveland and Efforts to Save His Brother's Estate." The accompanying articles reiterated this statement but did not explain it. And neither Kate Johnson, who later remarried, nor Lehigh Company officials could substantiate the claim. New York Times, 19 November 1908.

On January 14, 1920 a letter from the Superintendent of Banks, Ohio Department of Banks, to a Mr. Phelps Crum, attorney-at-law of Cleveland stated that the last report of condition of the Depositors Savings and Trust Company of Cleveland was filed August 18, 1908. It concluded: "The records further show that the bank was liquidated on November 16, 1909."

In A History of Cleveland, Ohio, Samuel Orth reports that, following the liquidation, the First National Bank and the Cleveland Trust Company took over Depositors' accounts. Samuel P. Orth, A History of Cleveland, Ohio, Volume I (Chicago/Cleveland: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1910), pp. 654-655.

Accordingly to Ms. Myrna K. Parrish of the Ohio Department of Merce, Division of Banks, records pertaining to the liquidation of the Depositors Savings and Trust Company were apparently destroyed in 1972. Other Depositors Savings' records that may have provided information regarding the bank's charter and organization were periodically destroyed in compliance with law as part of routine Division of Banks policy between 1920 and 1972. Interview with Ms. Myrna K. Parrish, 10 April 1979. Copy of letter and articles of incorporation in author's possession.

⁴³Johnson, My Story, pp. 295-313; Louis F. Post, The Public, XIV (April 14, 1911), p. 345; Ibid., (April 21, 1901), pp. 365-366; Lorenz, Tom L. Johnson, pp. 169-203 passim; Copy of State of Ohio, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death #2554, filed April 12, 1911. In author's possession.

Although Tom L. Johnson died intestate, his widow Margaret J. Johnson on May 20, 1911 filed an application for Letters of Administration in Cuyahoga County, Ohio Probate Court. This application certifies that all debts applied to the estate, in the amount of \$19,287.47, were met at the time of application. Copy of Application in author's possession.

CHAPTER II

TOM JOHNSON AND HENRY GEORGE

Henry George: Life and Thought The Johnson-George Relationship Johnson's Interpretation of Georgist Ideals

Henry George, widely considered Tom Johnson's intellectual model, was born September 2, 1839 in Philadelphia. The eldest son of an impoverished church publisher, he left school with a rudimentary education in 1853. After working two years for a local import firm, George went to sea in 1855. The voyage to India, Australia and New Zealand lasted fourteen months, during which he experienced the rigors of ocean sailing and the inequities of maritime law. Upon returning, George spent the next year in Philadelphia learning typesetting, but again set sail in 1857 on a voyage to San Francisco. There, in June 1858, he learned of a gold strike on the Frazer River in Canada and jumped ship. The strike proved relatively small, however, and in November 1858, he returned "dead broke" to San Francisco.

Resuming the printing trade, Henry George lived in California until 1880. On December 3, 1861 he married Annie Corsina Fox and over the next twenty years they raised four children. He also participated in local Democratic politics and began the San Francisco Daily Evening Post, the first one-cent newspaper west of the Rockies. Founded in 1871 with capital from a California congressman, the paper experienced financial problems in 1875 and George resigned the editor-

ship. Soon after, Democratic Governor William S. Irwin appointed him State Inspector of Gas Meters in return for George's earlier editorial endorsement.

Already in 1871 Irwin, then Secretary of the State Board of Equalization, supplied George with statistical information on prevailing land taxation. That same year, after having previously studied John Stuart Mill's political economic theories, George produced a forty-eight-page pamphlet, "Our Land and Land Policy." The piece, which favored "the taxation of land values to the exclusion of all other things," brought George widespread recognition. Various other pamphlets, articles in the Daily Evening Post, and sundry lectures increased his popular exposure. Thus, George's reputation in California was well-established when he left the paper.

From 1876 to 1880, subsidized by his Gas Inspector's salary, Henry George continued writing and lecturing. In 1877 he was strongly considered for a proposed chair in political economy at the University of California, Berkeley. On March 9, 1877, however, he delivered a trial lecture there called "The Study of Political Economy." It was well-received by the students, but the faculty and regents considered it too radical and the post was never offered. Four months later he again spoke, this time at a July Fourth gathering in San Francisco. In the address, "The American Republic," his attack upon the concentration of wealth as exhibited by such men as Leland Stanford once more created a stir. These two speeches formed the basis for his pivotal work, Progress and Poverty.

After eighteen months of reading, writing and revising, Henry

George completed Progress and Poverty in March 1879. Finding a publisher was difficult at first and having lost his California patronage post to a change of governors, George decided to move to New York. Because the family's finances precluded a wholesale transfer he travelled alone, arriving there in August 1880. Over six months passed before the family was again together, but afterward, except for occasional lecture tours, they remained together permanently.

Meanwhile, a New York publishing firm, Appleton & Company, ultimately accepted the proofs of Progress and Poverty. Publication proceeded and by January 1881 George could write:

The book is a success. The sale seems now to have commenced in good earnest, and orders are coming from all parts of the country -- in ones, two and tens and twenties . . . And the German notices are way up. It has at last got a show in Europe.¹

Over the next seventeen years George travelled extensively on the American and British lecture circuit. he continued writing as well, producing several books and major articles: "The Irish Land Question" (1881); Social Problems (1883); "Protection or Free Trade" (1885); "The Condition of Labour" (1891); "A Perplexed Philosopher" (1892); and The Science of Political Economy (1898).

In July 1886 a committee of New York labor leaders urged George to run for mayor of the city. Accepting the nomination of the Central Labor Union, he opposed both the Tammany candidate, Congressman Abram

¹Letter to Edward R. Taylor, January 21, 1881, quoted in George, Jr., Life, p. 343.

S. Hewitt,² and Republican Theodore Roosevelt. Following a hard-fought campaign, the first of its kind for a labor organization, on November 2 George lost to Hewitt, 90,552 votes to 68,110; Roosevelt received 60,435.

Henry George thereupon resumed writing and lecturing. In January 1887 he founded a weekly newspaper, The Standard. This paper received its first notoriety by defending Dr. Edward McGlynn, a Catholic priest and political supporter of George, against ecclesiastical charges. These charges stemmed from McGlynn's propagation of Georgist theories. That August George also ran for Secretary of New York State on the United Labor Party ticket, but again he was defeated. The following year George also supported Grover Cleveland in the latter's unsuccessful bid for the presidency.

Accompanied by his wife, George devoted most of 1890 to an around-the-world lecture tour. Returning home in December, he suffered an attack of aphasia which temporarily paralyzed him. When he had recovered somewhat, he proceeded to Bermuda for further cence. Back in New York within two months, George again took up his work. on May 15, 1891 Pope Leo XIII's social encyclical Rerum Novarum appeared. George, regarding it as a personal challenge, drafted a hundred-page reply, The Condition of Labor, An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII. Although extensively reported, it had little impact on the Church.

²Ironically, it was Hewitt who induced W. H. Appleton to publish Progress and Poverty in 1880. Afterward Hewitt and George had a falling out over Hewitt's refusal to compensate George for a congressional report he had commissioned George to write. George, Jr., Life, p. 472.

Henry George devoted the remaining six years to organizing and composing a work to surpass Progress and Poverty. Entitled The Science of Political Economy, it was published posthumously. The Standard, which had always had a limited reception, meanwhile failed in August 1892. Then, on October 5, 1897, Henry George decided to run again for the New York mayoralty. His party, "The Democracy of Thomas Jefferson," was an amalgam of labor, Georgist supporters, and assorted other social and political activists. On October 28th, having made thirty speeches in two weeks, his health failed once more. He died the following morning and was buried November 1, 1897 in Greenwood Cemetary, Brooklyn.³

During his lifetime, George was more successful as a social critic than as a political activist. At different times he aroused the interest of several prominent intellectuals namely, George Bernard Shaw, Leo Tolstoy, Daniel De Leon, Hamlin Garland, Robertson James, the brother of William and Henry James, playwright James A. Herne and his wife, actress Katherine Corcoran, Clarence Darrow, Lincoln Steffens, William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., son of the abolitionist, Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones and Brand Whitlock of Toledo, and, briefly, Henry Adams and William Dean Howells. Yet one might argue that the most colorful advocate of George's theories was Tom L.

³Material on George's life was taken from the above Life of Henry George, as well as Anna George de Mille, Henry George, Citizen of the World, edited by Don C. Shoemaker with an Introduction by Agnes de Mille (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950), hereafter cited as de Mille, Henry George, Citizen; and Charles Albro Barker, Henry George (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), hereafter cited as Barker, Henry George.

Johnson⁴

Historians have observed that Johnson allied himself, both in theory and in practice, to Henry George. Three factors underlie this contention. Examined separately, each should shed some light on Johnson's reported commitment to George. First of all, surviving sources indicate that a close personal relationship grew up between the two men. Then, too, Johnson and George collaborated on various projects of interest to one, the other, or both. Above all, Johnson and George professed the same belief in the efficacy of applying George's theories to American society.

The theories in question hinge on two major propositions: the elimination of "Privilege" and the institution of a "Single Tax" on land. These are found in George's Social Problems and Progress and Poverty. It is doubtless significant that Tom Johnson read the works in that order, for although it appeared four years after Progress and Poverty, Social Problems provides a captivating introduction to its forerunner. And, at least in Johnson's case, it fulfilled the objective of arousing his conscience to social issues. To understand fully Henry George's appeal to Tom Johnson, therefore, George's ideas must first be examined.

In Social Problems George posited that evolution characterizes

⁴Barker, Henry George, pp. 376-377, 590, 591-592, 597-599; See also George Raymond Geiger, The Philosophy of Henry George, Introduction by John Dewey (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), pp. 462-464, hereafter cited as Geiger, Philosophy; Frederic C. Howe, The Confessions of a Reformer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 129, hereafter cited as Howe, Confessions.

natural development. Although the human species is supreme in the natural hierarchy, it continues to evolve through successive stages of civilization. As part of this process individuals and ultimately societies develop increasingly complex yet delicate relationships to survive. These social relationships, in turn, generate social problems that challenge continued development. Civilization advances when humans apply their intelligence and overcome the problems.

George asserted that unredressed social problems retard the civilizing process and threaten to destroy non-progressive societies. He further believed that 19th-century society faced such a threat in the concentration of wealth. Two factors caused this predicament. One was hereditary land ownership. The other emerged when technological innovations began to create wealth without allowing for its equitable distribution.

Both factors existed to varying degrees in the United States and Europe. Still, George held that, just as both represented different facets of the same problem, their ramifications also applied equally. In essence, concentrated wealth gave rise to class divisions. A relative few acquired vast holdings while the majority attained considerably less. Gradually members of the wealthy or "privileged" class secured enough power to manipulate a society's governing institutions, irrespective of popular desires. In doing so they weakened the natural social balance which these institutions afforded. This invited discord and paved the way for possible social disintegration.

George thus believed that the land monopoly of British landlords in Ireland was essentially similar to the concentrated wealth of

American industrialists. Both systems were responsible for widespread poverty throughout the lower classes. And both systems contrived excuses, such as "overproduction" or "business stagnation," to describe depressed economic periods in order to draw attention away from inequitable distribution and massive unemployment. Mechanization, often regarded as a labor-saving panacea, was actually the means by which monopolists maintained low wages among the workers. Inefficient government and an oversized military also perpetuated mass repression because those institutions required public debts and indirect taxation to operate on behalf of Privilege. In sum, this meant that existing conditions reduced a theoretically free population to actual economic slavery.

George maintained that the American variety of exploitation made the country especially vulnerable to collapse. Economic growth, he observed, continued to concentrate wealth. Plutocratically controlled institutions refused to address class disparity. Unchecked immigration only served to aggravate already strained social relationships. And, above all, American land policies evinced every indication of following the same path as European hereditary land ownership. In George's eyes, this example of social injustice, more than anything, upset the natural order and violated the rights of man.⁵ Compared to the recently outlawed system of chattel slavery in the U.S., he concluded that:

Of the two systems of slavery, I think there can be no

⁵Henry George, Social Problems (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke & Company, 1883).

doubt that upon the same moral level, that which makes property of persons is more humane than that which results from making private property of land. The cruelties which are perpetrated under the system of chattel slavery are more striking and arouse more indignation because they are the conscious acts of individuals. But for the suffering of the poor under the more refined system no one in particular seems responsible.⁶

On the whole, Social Problems is a didactic work, more manifesto than monograph. It describes George's impassioned views on the causes of economic misery and calls for their eradication. Understandably, then, Social Problems only broadly presents his remedy: to reorder society so as to guarantee "that which gives wealth to him that makes it, and secures wealth to him that saves it."⁷ Conversely, Progress and Poverty is a closely reasoned, highly articulate treatise outlining the "scientific" grounding and solution to Social Problems.

An economic best seller, Progress and Poverty had a large, if narrow, reception. George devoted almost the entire first half of this complex, technical work to redefining the classic economic definitions of wealth and value, production and distribution. The dynamics of his argument, occupying the remaining pages, however, revolve around these last two concepts applied to land, rent and profit.

George's point of departure was that land itself has little intrinsic value. But when it is put to use, for example when farmed, land derives its value from that which is produced on it. Throughout the

⁶Ibid., pp. 218-219.

⁷Ibid., p. 119.

nineteenth century American comprised vast areas of virgin land which early investors could, and did, purchase at relatively low cost. While some land was farmed, the bulk of it remained unused. And although American reserves were large, the supply eventually became limited.

After 1850, immigration increased the demand both for arable land and potential urban sites. Consequently, landowners often rented prime unused property to farmers and, especially, urban booster-promoters. In return they received land rents which increased proportionately with demand. Such rents were called "unearned land increments," since landlords profited immensely from property developed by others. ✓

George perceived that unearned increments underlined the exploitation of labor and capital by idle landowners. To eliminate this cardinal inequity he proposed that the government should institute a "single tax" on all unearned increments and use the income from this tax for public works.⁸

Modern economists Richard G. Lipsey and Peter O. Steiner explain the fundamental economic rationale for the single tax on land in this way:

⁸Henry George, Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depressions, and of Increase of Want With Increase of Wealth: The Remedy, Fourth Edition (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1882), N.B. pp. 357-508, hereafter cited as George, Progress and Poverty; See also Richard G. Lipsey and Peter O. Steiner, Economics, Third Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 344-345, hereafter cited as Lipsey & Steiner, Economics; Paul A. Samuelson, Economics, Ninth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 562; Encyclopedia Britannica, Fifteenth Edition, s.v. "George, Henry"; Geiger, Philosophy, pp. 79-161.

Suppose there was a tax on the economic rent of land. if the same tax is applied to all uses of land the relative profitability of different uses will be unaffected, and thus landlords will not be tempted to change the allocation of land among uses. Land will not be forced out of use, because land that is very unprofitable will command little rent and so pay little tax. Thus, there will be no change in the supply of goods that are produced with the aid of land, and, because there is no change of supply, there can be no change in prices. Furthermore, the tax cannot be passed on to consumers . . . Agricultural prices and rents will be unchanged, and the whole of the tax will be borne by the landlord. The net rents earned by landlords will fall by the full amount of the tax. Therefore, a tax on those land rents that are truly economic rents falls solely on landowners and is not passed on to the users of land or the consumers of the produce of land.⁹

The social and demographic ramifications of the single tax, according to George, would radically transform American society:

The destruction of speculative land values would tend to diffuse population where it is too dense and to concentrate it where it is too sparse; to substitute for the tenement house, homes surrounded by gardens, and to fully settle agricultural districts before people were driven for from neighbors to look for land. The people of the cities would thus get more of the pure air and sunshine of the country, the people of the country more of the economics and social life of the city. If, as is doubtless the case, the application of machinery trends to large fields, agricultural population will assume the primitive form and cluster in villages.¹⁰

In other words, class exploitation would cease because the basis for the concentration of wealth, inequitable distribution, would disappear.

Finally, George's thoughts on protection versus free trade, one of the great late nineteenth century debates, must be mentioned.

⁹Lipsey & Steiner, Economics, p. 344.

¹⁰George, Progress and Poverty, p. 405.

Philosophically, although these occupied only a small portion of his beliefs, they would have a direct impact on the Georgist movement and Tom Johnson.

Henry George was firmly opposed to protectionism, i.e. the concept of raising national tariff barriers against imported goods to protect domestic production. From his viewpoint, tariffs existed solely to maintain the privileged class in power. Free trade, on the other hand, provided for unimpeded commerce and theoretically weakened privilege. George defended free trade in his aptly titled pamphlet "Protection or Free Trade," (1885) but felt that, without a change in the distribution process, free trade represented merely a tactical gain in the larger war against "Privilege."¹¹

While George's ideas gained some recognition in the early 1880's this recognition came primarily from those who had read Progress and Poverty and Social Problems. On the other hand, George's own reputation was limited to a certain notoriety he had received as a lecturer in California. Many years would pass before the propaganda movement, later styled the Georgist or "Single Tax" crusade came into vogue. Thus, it appears plausible that Tom Johnson, as he claimed, never heard of Henry George or his ideas before 1883 and that his introduction to them came purely by accident.

¹¹Geiger, Philosophy, p. 125; See also Henry George, "Protection or Free Trade, An Examination of the Tariff Question with Especial Regard to the Interests of labor" (New York: Henry George & Company, 1886), reprinted in The Complete Works of Henry George, Library Edition, III (Garden City, N.Y.: Fels Fund, 1906-1911).

Through 1883, Tom Johnson's business affairs necessitated his frequent commuting between Indianapolis and Cleveland. On one such trip, a magazine vendor offered him Social Problems to pass the time. Thinking it dealt with prostitution, Johnson initially demurred, saying that he was "fed up on sex stuff." The conductor, overhearing the remark, interposed, "Isn't that kind of book . . . It deals with your kind of business--with street railroads, steam railroads, and the land question." He then promised to refund Johnson's half dollar if the material proved uninteresting.

After reading it Johnson collected all of Henry George's other works in print at the time. Then, in Johnstown, he gave Social Problems to Arthur J. Moxham, saying, "Arthur, you know more about books than I do. I haven't read much. But if this book is right, then your business and mine are all wrong." Meanwhile he read Progress and Poverty, reportedly thinking:

"If this book is really true, I shall have to give up business. It isn't right for me to make money out of protected industries, out of street railway franchises, out of land speculation. I must get out of business or prove that this book is wrong."

In Cleveland he paid attorney L. A. Russell five hundred dollars to critique Progress and Poverty, remarking, "You made a free trader out of me; now I want you to read this book and point out its errors to me and save me from becoming an advocate of the system of taxation it describes.

Over the next two years, Johnson, Russell and Moxham dissected Progress and Poverty. The lawyer was determined "to demolish this will-o'-the-wisp," and Moxham apparently read the work twice,

always marking questionable passages. Finally he told Johnson, "Tom, I've read that book for the third time and I have rubbed out every damn mark." Johnson recounts in My Story: "Long before this I had become convinced that Mr. George had found a great truth and a practical solution for the most vexing of social problems." Russell, however, remained adamant until late 1885 when he, Johnson, Moxham, and Ermon du Pont of Delaware met on business in New York. There the four spent an evening in Johnson's hotel rooms debating Russell's objections. Johnson related: "The effect of all this upon me was to make every chapter of that book almost as familiar to me as one of my own mechanical inventions." He went on to describe how, at length, "Russell threw up his hands and said: 'I have to admit that I was wrong. The book is sound. This man Henry George, whoever he is, is a wonderful philosopher.'" Years later Johnson told Frederic Howe, "All four of us were content with the decision. We were converted to an unnamed philosophy, by an unknown prophet, an obscure man of whom we had never before heard."¹²

The next day Tom Johnson visited Henry George in Brooklyn. Afterward, on several occasions, Johnson retold what had happened. Together these recollections form Johnson's version of the conversation. Finding George in his study, Johnson "told him who I was and how I had come to read his books, how I had proved it [George's philosophy] to myself and to my friends."¹³ In retrospect Johnson recalled

¹²Johnson, My Story, pp. 49-51; See also Howe, Confessions, pp. 95-97; de Mille, Henry George, Citizen, pp. 139-140.

¹³Howe, Confessions, p. 97.

that:

I had looked forward with more intense interest to the meeting than I was aware of, for when I tried to speak in a manly way of what was in my heart, I was conscious of much emotion. I said that I should rather have it to say to my children that I had met Henry George and had entertained him under my own roof as my guest than to be able to transmit to them any worldly blessing.

I did not want to talk about myself. I did not go there for that. I went to talk to Mr. George about his cause; and I wanted in some way to call it my cause, too. But he stretched out on a lounge and I sat in a chair and I found myself telling him the story of my life.¹⁴

Then, I said: 'Mr. George, I see that no one has a right to make money the way I have out of special privilege. But making money is the easiest thing in the world for me. I can make millions, but I can't write and I can't make a speech. What am I to do?'¹⁵

Can a man help who can just make money?

He assured me that money could be used in many helpful ways to promote the cause, but said that I couldn't tell whether I could speak or write until I had tried; that it was quite probable that the same qualities which had made me successful in business would make me successful in a broader field. He evidently preferred to talk about these possibilities to dwelling on my talent for money-making.¹⁶

Still, Johnson persisted, suggesting that he quit business. To this George responded:

Don't do it, Tom. Some day the cause will need you more than it does now, and then you will know the necessity of having means to carry on the fight. Stay in business. Make all the money you can, even if you do not believe in the methods of getting riches; for in your case these same riches taken from the people by laws giving special privileges will be used for the common good, in

¹⁴George, Jr., Life, p. 457.

¹⁵Howe, Confessions, p. 97.

¹⁶Johnson, My Story, p. 51.

overthrowing these same laws.¹⁷

Mr. George said: 'You go on and make money, but you can learn to speak. You can speak if you have something to say that you believe in. You can go into politics. The land question is politics. Only through politics can we bring the single tax to pass.'¹⁸

Nevertheless, Johnson remained in doubt:

. . . This seemed quite without the range of the possible to me, and I put it aside, but said that I would go ahead and make money and devote the profits to helping spread his doctrines if he would let me.¹⁹

Meeting Henry George was undeniably a memorable experience for Tom Johnson. Already impressed by the man's ideas, having spent two years studying and debating them, he was overwhelmed by George's personality.²⁰ Their interview also marked the beginning of a social and intellectual relationship that affected both men's careers. Yet, it would be premature to assess George's possible influence on Johnson without first investigating their twelve-year association and Johnson's interpretation of George's theories.

The 1885 Brooklyn meeting coincided with the initial publication of "Protection or Free Trade." Johnson immediately sent two hundred copies to Cleveland lawyers and clergymen. Over the next year it is possible that he also guaranteed the financing of Henry George & Company, a publishing firm set up to reprint Progress and

¹⁷The Wilmington (Delaware) Justice, quoted in Louis F. Post, The Public, V (May 17, 1902), p. 91.

¹⁸Howe, Confessions, p. 97.

¹⁹Johnson, My Story, p. 51.

²⁰Johnson, My Story, pp. 52-55; George, Jr., Life, p. 457.

Poverty. And it is probable that Johnson entertained George in Cleveland during the philosopher's Ohio speaking tour in Spring 1886.²¹ He certainly took part in a Georgist strategy meeting in New York that August, along with George, Edward McGlynn, Daniel De Leon, Louis F. Post and others.²²

This meeting, and one a little later, were devoted to planning the publication of an independent Georgist newspaper in New York. However, George's unexpected nomination for mayor disrupted the deliberations. When it did begin in January 1887, it was dubbed The Standard but George, again, refrained from full-time participation during his candidacy for Secretary of New York State later that year. Louis Post reported that Tom Johnson quietly but liberally contributed "money, advice and personal service" to both political ventures.²³

Defeated in two elections in as many years, George gravitated away from direct political involvement. Still, this did not signal a wholesale break with political activity. Indeed, such a break was hardly possible in 1888. That year Democrats renominated Grover Cleveland for President. His major issue, which distressed many moderate party members, was tariff reform.

²¹Barker asserts that George actually did stay with Johnson at this time, although neither Henry George, Jr. nor Anna George de Mille mention this visit. Barker, Henry George, p. 446.

²²Johnson, My Story, p. 52; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 649.

²³Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 650; George, Jr., Life, p. 459, 460, 471; de Mille, Henry George, Citizen, pp. 142-154, 160-161.

This position delighted Henry George who viewed its possible implementation as a step toward the redistribution of wealth. Consequently, his lectures, pamphlets, and editorials in The Standard took on more political overtones. He also organized and conducted massive free trade meetings at Cooper Union in New York which closely resembled political rallies. Tom Johnson was a different speaker at one of these early gatherings where he delivered what Louis Post called "the worst speech he had ever heard in all his days." Johnson, nevertheless, continued to address free trade audiences drawn by Henry George. In doing so, he began to develop a ten-minute delivery coupled with questions and answers from the audiences.²⁴

Johnson further refined this style during his campaign for the Ohio Twenty First Congressional seat later that year. Cuyahoga County Democrats nominated him, allegedly because party leaders thought he "would be a good spender." In My Story Johnson intimates that, as an untried candidate, he was reluctant to accept. Still, with George's encouragement, he ran on a free trade platform but was not elected. Two years later he actively pursued the Democratic nomination and, having procured it, was elected. During the interim he turned most of his attention back to business while George, Johnson and New York lawyer Thomas G. Shearman appeared together before an Ohio legislative tax reform committee in early 1889.²⁵

²⁴Johnson, My Story, p. 53; Louis F. Post, The Public, VIII (January 6, 1906), p. 650.

²⁵Johnson, My Story, p. 54; George Jr., Life, p. 515.

The preceding chapter details Tom Johnson's congressional career between 1891 and 1895. Thus, only a few points regarding his relationship with Henry George during this period require comment.

While in Congress, Johnson was one of six members loosely regarded as the radical single tax wing.²⁶ Four or five others were also largely sympathetic to George's theories. Out of this group, Johnson, "Sockless Jerry" Simpson of Kansas, William J. Stone of Kentucky, Joseph E. Washington of Tennessee, John W. Fithian of Illinois, and Thomas Bowman of Iowa contrived to reprint George's "Protection or Free Trade" in the Congressional Record in 1891. The original idea was Johnson's.

The "leave to print" privilege, as applied by Johnson and his colleagues, was unorthodox but not illegal. Shortly thereafter, House Republicans used it themselves on a book by economist George Gunton which defended monopolies. The "St. George" edition of "Protection or Free Trade" completely outstripped circulation of the Gunton book, however, due largely to George's and Johnson's combined efforts.

Although the Congressional Record had a limited issue, George and Johnson used the galleys to reproduce 1,200,000 copies at five-eighths of a cent per copy. Once these had been distributed to an enthusiastic audience, 200,000 more copies of better quality (and costing two cents each) were run off. George directed the printing in New York and Johnson handled it in Washington. Then Johnson, who

²⁶Johnson, My Story, p. 54; George, Jr., Life, p. 515.

had a special stamp made with his signature on it, authorized franked copies distributed nationwide.²⁷

Considering Johnson's otherwise ineffectual legislative record, this publication must stand at the pinnacle of his congressional career. It also marked the closest political collaboration between Johnson and George during this time. The Johnson-George correspondence attests to George's close interest in Johnson's legislative effort. And, at least on one occasion, George personally observed his "Pupil's" performance in the House. Still, Frederic Howe's unsubstantiated claim that George lived with Johnson in Washington seems inaccurate. At most, Johnson apparently entertained Henry George and his family over brief stretches when they were in the city.²⁸

²⁷George, Jr., *Life*, pp. 571-574; Johnson, *My Story*, pp. 68-69; Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 600-602; Various letters in the *Henry George Correspondence* also contain information on printing costs, franking and distribution. See letters: Henry George to Tom Johnson, 6 January 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 30 March 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, March 1892; J. H. Polkenhorn, Printer to Tom Johnson, 25 May 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 7 June 1892; Henry George to Thomas Walker, 11 November 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 6 March 1894; *Henry George Correspondence*, Boxes 6, 7 & 8, 1890-1897 & N.D., Microfilm in The Ohio State University Library.

²⁸*Henry George Correspondence*, letter, Henry George to Tom Johnson, 8 August 1891; telegram, Henry George to Tom Johnson, 13 April 1892; letters: Henry George to Tom Johnson, 30 July 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 9 September 1892; Henry George to Thomas Shearman, 9 September 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 7 November 1892; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 10 October 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 31 October 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 9 November 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 16 January 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 4 February 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 5 February 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 11 September 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 24 October 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 6 November 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 7 November 1894; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 31 March 1895; See also Howe, *Confessions*, pp. 88, 129.

Between 1887 and 1895, however, both George and Johnson shared professional interests outside Congress. During the "Panic of 1893," George devised a profit sharing plan to see the Johnson Company through a serious cash flow problem. Johnson, on the other hand, repeatedly bolstered The Standard's flagging operations until 1892.²⁹

At first the paper was quite successful, owing to its coverage of the sensational McGlynn case and the aftermath of the Haymarket affair. Once these ended, its popularity stabilized at about 25,000 subscriptions. Considered a radical organ, its capacity to draw advertising was low and, coupled with high publishing costs, The Standard's viability became tenuous. By October 1888 the situation was already such that George wrote: "I would have been unable to continue [the paper] but for the generous assistance of some friends--particularly Tom L. Johnson of Cleveland." Whatever the impact of Johnson's assistance, other problems, notably dissension on the editorial staff, made The Standard a losing proposition.³⁰

George's presence during 1890 might have preserved administrative harmony, but he was abroad lecturing for most of the year. His influence thus remained marginal. It diminished further after he surrendered his nominal editorship to William Croasdale and transferred proprietary rights in December 1890. He hoped this move

²⁹Johnson, My Story, pp. 45-46; George, Jr., Life, p. 557-558; Henry George Correspondence, letter, Henry George to Tom Johnson, 10 November 1893.

³⁰de Mille, Henry George, Citizen, pp. 155, 162-172, 181.

would allow him more time for other pursuits. Then, in early 1891, following his stroke and Bermuda convalescence, Tom Johnson and New York businessman August Lewis persuaded him to retire from The Standard entirely. George did so in April 1891. Sixteen months later Louis Post, who meanwhile had assumed the editorship upon Croasdale's death, closed down the paper.³¹

Exact figures on the amount of financial support which Tom Johnson rendered the Georgist movement are vague. George's biographer, Charles A. Barker, noted that Johnson spent \$500 to circulate The Standard during his 1890 congressional campaign. This was in addition to an annual \$7,000 or \$8,000 which he and Thomas Shearman had jointly donated to the paper. Barker also held that Johnson may have backed various lecture trips for Louis Post. Henry George, Jr., moreover, cited Johnson as the chief financial promoter of "Protection or Free Trade" in 1891. After The Standard folded, Louis Post went to Cleveland, on George's suggestion, and began The Recorder in 1895. Johnson later estimated that he had invested \$100,000 in this paper over three years. When Johnson withdrew his support in 1898 because of personal business reverses, it, too, ceased operating as a Georgist organ. Post then proceeded to Chicago where he founded a weekly called The Public. Johnson also claimed to have aided in its publication. Finally, according to Anna George de Mille, Johnson and August

³¹Barker, Henry George, pp. 534-535.

Lewis shouldered the greatest expense for George's fateful 1897 mayoral campaign.³²

It is noteworthy that Tom Johnson provided for Henry George's personal comfort and security as well. When George took ill in 1890 Johnson and Lewis paid for his recuperative stay in Bermuda. After George had recovered, Johnson and Lewis assumed his debts for a year, thereby buying time for him to begin The Science of Political Economy. About the same time Johnson unobtrusively provided for Mrs. George in the event of her husband's death. And, in late 1891, at George's request, Johnson used his family influence to secure a patronage appointment for George's younger brother, Morris. Five years later Mr. and Mrs. George moved to Fort Hamilton, New York on the Hudson River. There they lived at the Stanton Cottage across the road from Colonel Albert W. Johnson, another personal friend. The Cottage belonged to Tom Johnson, as did an adjoining strip of land. In early 1897 Johnson gave the adjacent property to George, who built a house on it with a \$14,000 legacy from England.³³

Throughout their twelve year association Johnson and George also maintained close social ties. Curiously, George used Johnson's first

³²Information on Tom Johnson's financial support for the Georgist movement is found in: Johnson, My Story, pp. 54-55; George, Jr., Life, pp. 563, 571-575; de Mille, Henry George, Citizen, pp. 147, 212-214, 230; Barker, Henry George, pp. 535, 569, 589, 615.

³³George, Jr., Life, pp. 542, 558-559; de Mille, Henry George, Citizen, pp. 182, 216, 2-2; Barker, Henry George, pp. 570, 590-591; For information on the Morris George appointment see also: Henry George Correspondence. letters: Henry George to Tom Johnson, 21 October 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 24 October 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 5 November 1893; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 10 November 1893.

name from the start, while Johnson always called the philosopher "Mr. George." Perhaps the fifteen year age difference explains the fact. Or perhaps, as Johnson recounted, ". . . from the very first our relations were those of teacher and pupil."³⁴ Together they bicycled in New York, swam at Fort Hamilton, and entertained in Washington and New York. And, upon completing his last major work, *The Science of Political Economy*, George dedicated it to Johnson and Lewis.³⁵ Likewise, when George collapsed in New York five days before the 1897 election, messengers were immediately sent to the two men. Upon delivering the news, Frank Stephens, one of the messengers, remembered that Johnson "murmured in a grief-drowned voice 'My God!' and writhed . . . 'as one writhes who has been pierced by a sword.'" Present at George's passing, Johnson left the death room, and according to James R. Brown, another associate, "walked through the corridor, tears streaming down his face."³⁶

Possibly the most poignant testimonial to their relationship is the fact that, over thirteen years later, Tom Johnson was buried, at his own request, next to Henry George.

During their twelve year association, as has been seen, Tom Johnson and Henry George established close social and professional ties. In reviewing their respective biographies, however, there

³⁴Johnson, *My Story*, pp. 52, 55-56; de Mille, *Henry George*, Citiaen, pp. 183-184, 193, 216-217; George, Jr., *Life*, pp. 542, 563-564; *Henry George Correspondence*, letters; Henry George to Tom Johnson, 31 March 1892, Henry George to Tom Johnson, 26 September 1892.

³⁵George, Jr., *Life*, p. 564.

³⁶de Mille, *Henry George*, *Citizen*, pp. 234-236.

appears to be little enough common ground to warrant the convergence of lifestyles. Still, this relationship did occur and only shared philosophy would seem to explain it. Having already surveyed Henry George's theories, Tom Johnson's interpretation of them still requires comment.

Of Henry George's ideas, "privilege" was the one most captivating, yet appalling, to Johnson. He defined it in My Story as "the advantage conferred on one by law of denying the competition of others." Then, by way of clarification, he continued: "It matters not whether the advantage be bestowed upon a single individual, upon a partnership, or upon an aggregation or partnerships, a trust--the essence of the evil is just the same."³⁷

In Johnson's mind, privilege was the central corrupting force behind all of society's ills. Just as disease ravages and ultimately destroys biological organisms, privilege has a corresponding effect on society. Different diseases attack a body in different ways. Privilege, too, exists in different forms. Johnson arranged them hierarchically: land monopolies, taxation monopolies, transportation monopolies, municipal monopolies, and patent monopolies.³⁸ Each monopoly has its own characteristic way of debilitating the body politic. The overall result is nevertheless predictable, i.e. social disintegration.

Johnson believed that, since privilege was a social problem, human beings could eradicate it. This could not be accomplished

³⁷Johnson, My Story, p. xxxv.

³⁸Ibid.

without a struggle, however. On one side ranged the forces of privilege, while "the people" provided the counterweight. This competition represented the natural order to Johnson. Whereas monopoly is like a regenerating cancer, bent on exploiting the status quo, competition ensures healthy growth. Indeed, competition is the means by which social problems can be overcome. Johnson held this to be a self-evident proposition:

If we will seek out and remove the social wrong which is at the bottom of every social problem, the problem will vanish. Nothing could be simpler. If, on the other hand, the cause is not eradicated the problem will persist, multiply itself and all the evils that go with it, until one day that particular catastrophe which goes under the dreadful name--revolution--occurs.³⁹ (*Italics Johnson's*)

In simpler terms, to be sure, Tom Johnson's views on the causes of social problems appear to echo Henry George. George's "solution" addressed itself to land and taxation. Tom Johnson also placed land monopolies at the top of his list of abuses originating with privilege. In My Story Johnson reconstructed the argument that tyranny is based on the control of land. If, he extrapolated, the people could grasp this theoretical truth, they would discover the means to abolish tyranny. The method needed to accomplish this was George's single tax. Johnson's explication followed the Georgist line implicitly:

The single tax proposes the abolition of all forms of taxation except a tax upon land values. It would eliminate taxes upon industry, personal property, buildings and all improvements. It would tax land values, including the value of all franchises and public utilities operated for private benefit. It is the community which creates land values and franchise values, therefore these values belong to the community and the community should take them in taxation.

³⁹Ibid., p. 45.

To abolish taxes on industry would be to reduce friction in making things and trading things. It would stimulate business and be a blow to a tyranny, both economic and political. The effect of a tax upon land values would be to force all needed land into immediate use, and circumstances would be created under which anybody could get profitable work who wanted it. This would be because the demand for labor would always exceed the supply. Any many competent to do business could find profitable business to do because the effective demand for goods would always exceed the output. There could be no oppressive organization of capital, because capital would have no privileges. There could be no coercive labor unions because every worker would be his own all-sufficient union. And there would be no tyrannical government because all the people would be economically free, a condition that makes tyranny, either economic or political, impossible.⁴⁰

Johnson first articulated this position during his 1888 congressional campaign. Twenty two years later he included it verbatim in his book. Similarly, the views on protection which he and Henry George promulgated during the Fifty-Second and Fifty-Third Congresses remained unchanged when My Story was published.⁴¹

So far as can be determined, Henry George and Tom Johnson did, in fact, enjoy a complex personal, professional and intellectual relationship. This apparently began by accident in 1883 and continued, at least in spirit, until Johnson's death in 1911. When he alluded to it, Johnson always related the phenomenon in terms of a conversion experience. He consistently referred to George's theories as "teachings" and to their author as his "teacher." The application of George's theories, moreover, amounted to: "the Cause," "the Movement," "the Struggle," or "the Fight."

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 60-71081. See also Cleveland Plain Dealer 3 October 1888.

But Tom Johnson's association with George also corresponded with a career largely divorced from, and alien to, its ideological nexus. This duality in Johnson's personality has raised confusion and controversy regarding his true motivation. Hopefully, by examining each tendency in light of Johnson's entire life, patterns will appear to help clarify this historical engima.

CHAPTER III

PROBING THE PARADOX

Over the years Tom L. Johnson has generated considerable interest and debate. While he was alive, his business, political, and social reform activities brought him widespread notoriety. Since his death a significant number of scholars have sought to assess his role in history -- without much agreement. Both his contemporaries and historians have catalogued his actions and speculated about his motivation. But despite this intense scrutiny Tom Johnson remains a complex and enigmatic figure.

There are several reasons for the continuing controversy surrounding Johnson. Beyond the historiographical problems which will be discussed later, the major challenge to interpreting Tom Johnson remains his credibility. As historian Eugene Murdock has stated:

The enigma of Johnson, that is, the matter of how a wealthy capitalist came to oppose his own class and defend the rights of the 'common man' still baffles some observers. [For instance] William R. Hopkins [a contemporary of Johnson's] remarked that 'no man can be like that and be believed.'¹

Johnson's incongruous devotion to Henry George and the degree to which George's ideals motivated his actions are additional points of contention. Still another vexing issue is the problem posed by

¹ Murdock, "Life," pp. 450-451.

his seemingly inconsistent behavior. In other words, if Tom Johnson's behavior indeed may be attributed to Henry George's influence, how does one account for those of his actions which seem to contradict his commitment to George? And if George's influence was the primary factor motivating his actions, how does one reconcile other, more plausible interpretations? Moreover, how much importance should historians attach to such cryptic Johnsonian remarks as:

I understood pretty thoroughly the lessons which Privilege teaches before I took up the question on the other side [i.e., in municipal politics]; I had some idea of what the fight would cost me, but I embarked in this new field from purely selfish motives. I was seeking happiness and I chose the line of least resistance. All my public doings are to be accounted for in this way.²

Johnson's public image during his lifetime and after his death also has hindered the formulation of a generally accepted interpretation of his place in history. Because he was a political figure, Johnson received a good deal of purely partisan support. By the same token political opponents often took it for granted that he was fair game for their criticisms. Still, many people simply found it difficult to understand or accept his actions and professed intentions during the Cleveland mayoralty in light of his earlier "robber baron" image. Among objective observers this confusion persists down to the present day.

Then, too, after Johnson died there was a period when custom dictated observance of the maxim "About the dead say nothing but

² Johnson, My Story, p. 107.

good." As time passed, circumstances changed and politicians, the press, and the general public, especially in Cleveland -- the city so closely associated with his variegated career -- found reasons to revere his memory. By erecting a statue to him on Public Square, writing laudatory Sunday "Magazine" articles, and delivering eulogistic speeches on appropriate holidays, they gradually elevated Johnson's reputation to legendary proportions -- and simultaneously made a "warts and all" interpretation that much harder to construct.

For historians, the passage of time has contributed to substantial methodological problems as well. In the decades since his death many of Johnson's contemporaries died and survivors' memories faded. The Cleveland street railway industry and Johnson's former companies passed out of existence, as did most documents relating to them. Public records, too, were lost or routinely destroyed by persons who did not appreciate their historical significance. For these reasons, even some historians came to question their ability to accurately interpret Tom Johnson. One concluded:

Unfortunately, not much can be learned about his switch to reform from the sparse record of Johnson as a businessman. It is difficult to guess at the processes that turned him from acquisition to service. Henry George's works, of course, are given as the cause of his change, but what thought and observations prepared him to accept George will probably never be known.³

Fortunately, this assessment did not hamper subsequent scholarly

³ Robert L. Briggs, "The Progressive Era in Cleveland, Ohio: Tom L. Johnson's Administration, 1901-1909," [Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1962], p. 3.

efforts aimed at increasing the store of information on Tom Johnson. The discovery of long buried materials relating to his political career, his early business affairs, and his involvement in the Detroit street railway industry at length opened several new avenues of investigation. Ironically, the persistent research also revived some of the same questions about Johnson's motivation which had initially surfaced during his lifetime.

Having related the fact that Tom Johnson's fellow citizens regarded him with mixed emotions, and having enumerated the problems facing historians, it is now appropriate to examine the ongoing "Johnson controversy" in greater detail. Hopefully this inquiry will make it possible to discern which arguments best describe the patterns of his behavior.

There does not appear to be any compelling need to delve into the mass of contemporary literature uncritically biased in Johnson's favor. Not only has this kind of material survived in abundance, the bulk of it tends to follow the same apologetic vein set forth in his autobiographical My Story. Rather more provocative are those works which veer away from a consensus and which perpetuate Johnson's enigmatic label. Among these are writings by his political opponents, neutral parties who knew him, supporters who at some time felt reservations about him, and scholarly works treating him at chronological arm's length.

One example of a politically motivated attack on Tom Johnson is found in a pair of articles in Gunton's Magazine. These articles, published just prior to Johnson's defeat in the Ohio gubernatorial

election of 1903, took a dim view of his proposed social and economic policies.⁴ The magazine itself was owned and edited by George Gunton, a conservative economist whose defense of monopolies had appeared in the Congressional Record nearly ten years before. At that time, House Republicans sponsored its inclusion shortly after, and as a rebuttal to, Johnson's "leave to print" edition of Henry George's "Protection or Free Trade."

Another example of politically inspired opposition to Johnson was a widely circulated article in The Outlook. This piece, which the editors "recommend to all those who are interested in improving government in American cities," was written by Paul Leland Haworth, Ph.D., "a resident of Cleveland and . . . a student of and authority on political history and civics." Entitled "Mayor Johnson of Cleveland: A Study of Mismanaged Political Reform," it too appeared at a critical juncture in Johnson's career -- two weeks before the 1907 Cleveland mayoral election -- amid a hotly contested campaign with his old rival, Congressman Theodore E. Burton.⁵

Still another specimen of political invective against Johnson appeared in a New York Times editorial on September 5, 1902. The date is significant because only the day before, Ohio Congressman Charles H. Grosvenor had mentioned Johnson as a possible Democratic

⁴ "Johnsonism in Ohio," Gunton's Magazine, Volume 25, October 1903, pp. 283-294; "Johnson's Appeal to the Farmers," Gunton's Magazine, Volume 26, November 1903, pp. 392-395.


⁵ Paul Leland Haworth, "Mayor Johnson of Cleveland: A Study of Mismanaged Political Reform," The Outlook, Volume 93, 23 October 1907, pp. 469-474.

presidential candidate in 1904. Because its cynical tone is typical of other partisan assaults on his career a portion is worth relating:

Mr. Tom L. Johnson's principles are not all set forth in his State platform or in his speech [inaugurating his gubernatorial campaign]. What he stands for and what he is may be best understood by recalling some facts of his private and public career. Having become very rich by owning and operating street railways which charged five-cent fares, he has retired from the street railway business and become a vociferous advocate of three-cent fares. Having enjoyed without protest or complaint the benefits of a protective tariff which added largely to his fortune, he became a free trader and a railer against Dingleyism, the trusts, and the monopolies. His own great wealth, amassed under laws which gave something more than a living chance to the incorporated industries from which it was derived, being now secure against the assaults of agitators, Mr. Johnson stuffs his platform with all sorts of demands for the revision of the taxation and assessment laws affecting corporations.

Mr. Johnson was chief among the supporters of Mr. Henry George and perhaps the most influential advocate of his theories. He is a single-taxer, he goes in for the municipal ownership of public utilities, he is a Bryanite in about everything except 16 to 1, a policy from the blight and destruction of which not even the Johnson fortune is secure.

It is an old, old story, a very old story, that about the rat and the cheese. Having grown gray and prosperous in the practice of predatory arts, the old rodent, gnawing his way into the heart of a great cheese, sent out to his less fortunate companions, who knew not his place of concealment, pious exhortations to renounce gross and carnal pursuits and give themselves up to holy meditation in some humble retreat. This is the measure, the length, breadth, and thickness of Mr. Tom L. Johnson's economic and political principles. It will be millions of years before human nature will not call into question the sincerity of five-cent millionaires who have gone out of the business and turned three-cent agitators.⁶



If the occasions to question Johnson's motives were limited to a few such excerpts of political mud-slinging there would be no real need to reexamine his record. As a public figure in America Johnson, of course, could be expected to have had his faithful detractors. However, the fact that neutral parties and even some of his own

⁶ The New York Times, 5 September 1902.

supporters occasionally found him hard to fathom deserves closer inspection.

Perhaps the earliest unbiased reference to Tom Johnson's ambivalent nature appeared in a New York Times Illustrated Magazine sketch written in October 1897. Its author, Thomas B. Hanly, related "An acquaintance [of Johnson's] the other day described him as 'The Great American Paradox.' 'Do as I say, not as I do,' appears to sum up the man's whole life." Hanly went on to observe that although Johnson was engaged in steel rail manufacturing, a business which, according to his competitors, "demands the highest protection from foreign importations . . . he is an uncompromising free trader." Moreover, the article stated that Johnson had gained the title "the Trolley King" by securing monopolies but that he "is a labor agitator" and "has bitterly arraigned monopolists." It also claimed that Johnson owned much real estate but was "the most powerful supporter of Henry George's Single Tax Movement." And although Johnson was known as a "sound money man," he nevertheless endorsed William Jennings Bryant for president in 1896. Finally, it reported that Johnson, while technically an Ohio citizen, actually resided in Brooklyn, New York. But having catalogued these inconsistencies, Hanly apparently felt the need to temporize his remarks, concluding:

Mr. Johnson's friends deny that he is inconsistent. They say rather that it is the fault of society, not his. 'He finds a certain state of things in society,' one said the other day, 'and believes another would be better for humanity. He advocates the other state, but at the same time because of that he need not stand by and lose any

opportunity that presents itself. And he generally doesn't.⁷

The Hanly piece gives the impression that long-standing friends placed their unreserved trust in Tom Johnson. However, various associates, some of whom later became quite close to him as Mayor, at first exhibited a degree of uncertainty about his motivation. One such individual was Frederic C. Howe. Not yet counted among Johnson's supporters, Howe spent an evening in 1901 listening to him speak. Afterward he recalled, "I walked home that night pondering on the enigma of Tom Johnson's personality, as I was to ponder it for weeks to come." Actually it seems that attempting to analyze Johnson became something of a mild obsession for Howe. A decade after the Mayor's death Howe included a chapter on him in his memoirs, The Confessions of a Reformer. What is more, he devoted the chapter immediately following to a comparative study of the personalities and methods of Johnson and Marcus A. Hanna. Surprisingly, Howe concluded that in many ways "Mark Hanna and Tom Johnson were strangely alike."⁸

Other friends and co-workers apparently shared at least the initial uncertainty about Johnson to which Howe admitted. Sometimes the reaction was more closely akin to skepticism, even hostility. Lincoln Steffens, the man who dubbed Johnson "the best major of the best governed city in America," at first was sarcastic about "the

⁷ Thomas B. Hanly, "Tom Johnson," The New York Times Illustrated Magazine, 31 October 1897. Another "neutral" reference to Johnson's enigmatic personality is The Palladium (New Haven, Connecticut), 13 April 1911, quoted in Louis F. Post, The Public, XIV (21 July 1911), p. 704.

⁸ Howe, Confessions, pp. 90, 146.

loud, laughing mayor of Cleveland." To Steffens, "There was nothing heroic about him. There was no doubt that he, a big business man in politics, was a demagogue and a dangerous man," whom Steffens "meant to expose."⁹ This did not happen. After some preliminary investigating he and Johnson became good friends. However, considering the brief amount of time Steffens spent in Cleveland, there is some question as to how incisive an appraisal he could have formulated on Tom Johnson in any event. Likewise, Peter Witt, a man later included in the Mayor's inner circle, whose reputation for bluntness had earned him "the blacklist of the criminal right and the distrust of the ignorant poor," at the outset regarded Johnson with what only can be termed "undisguised animosity."¹⁰

The foregoing observations are included here not to prejudge Tom Johnson but to suggest that persons who knew him, and who had no ostensible reason to disparage him, at times felt constrained to question his motives. Johnson himself held that anyone who doubted his sincerity simply did not understand him or his philosophy. As he related in My Story, "my . . . activities were as greatly misunderstood by some of the doctrinaires of the George school, as by my political enemies. [consequently] I 'got it' both going and coming."¹¹ Yet, to uncritically accept Johnson's own interpretation of why he aroused so much suspicion is to ignore several incongruous

⁹ Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1931), p. 470.

¹⁰ Johnson, My Story, pp. 84-86.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

aspects of his behavior.

Tom Johnson's transition from business to reform politics is perhaps the major obstacle to understanding his motives. The orthodox interpretation of Johnson's behavior in this respect is the one he cultivated in My Story. This is the famous "social conversion" theory which attributes the transition and his later actions to what urban historian Melvin G. Holli calls "a rather dramatic and Biblical conversion to the ideas of Henry George in 1883."¹² Because it is a central point in the Johnson controversy, the "social conversion" merits further examination.

The steps leading up to and encompassing the alleged conversion are described in the preceding chapter. Many Johnson supporters, past and present, have faithfully adhered to his version and have attempted to analytically "explain" it. However, their exegeses frequently raise more doubts than they dispel.¹³ For example, Eugene Murdock

¹² Melvin G. Holli, Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics, The Urban Life in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 242 fn; hereafter cited as "Holli, Pingree."

¹³ For other views supporting the theory of Johnson's "social conversion," see: Brand Whitlock, Forty Years of It (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1914), p. 155; Robert H. Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio, The Fight Against Privilege in Cleveland and Toledo, 1899-1912," (Ph.D. dissertation, the Ohio State University, 1943), pp. 3, 41; and especially Hoyt L. Warner, Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917 (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press for the Ohio Historical Society, 1964); hereafter cited as "Warner, Progressivism." Warner believed that Johnson embraced George's philosophy because "his alert, inquiring mind . . . was capable of responding to the challenge of broad social questions," and because George "struck a responsive chord of humanitarianism that the younger man scarcely knew he possessed and because George's message, though buttressed with erudition, was simple and direct." Warner further held that Johnson's "conversion" was natural, even easy for him to undergo, and that George's personality reinforced Johnson's loyalty to the older man's ideals. (The preceding statements and quotations are taken from Warner, Progressivism, pp. 59-60.)

accepted the "social conversion," but set forth the additional question of how Johnson was able to reconcile his continuation in business while honoring George's admonitions against Privilege.

Murdock and many others believed that because Henry George personally had approved of Johnson's staying in business, the latter with a clear conscience could continue "in my business with as much zest as ever [although] my point of view was no longer that of a man whose chief goal in life is getting rich." ¹⁴ If true, this would help explain the fact that Johnson made the bulk of his fortune after he had met Henry George. The difficulty with this argument is that it makes Henry George, who obviously acted at least partially out of utilitarian considerations, appear to have manipulated an ingenuous Tom Johnson into subsidizing the Georgist movement on a grand scale. Considering Johnson's acknowledged business acumen, the likelihood of George manipulating him in this manner is improbable.

Another difficulty with the "social conversion" is the willingness of Johnson apologists to differentiate between a "pre-Georgian" and a "post-Georgian" Johnson. Building on an observation originally made by Brand Whitlock, Murdock posited that "They were two different people. Before he met George, Johnson thought only of making money After their friendship ripened, he thought only of remaking society."¹⁵

Unfortunately, the "zest" with which Johnson pursued business appears to have represented his true feelings more accurately than

¹⁴ Johnson, My Story, p. 51.

¹⁵ Murdock, "Life," pp. 302-303.

did his adherence to any code of Georgist ethics. In other words, the "pre-Georgian/post-Georgian" model developed to explain Johnson's alleged conversion does not conform to either his own statements or behavior.

In actuality, after having met Henry George, Johnson never acted in any way that could be construed as showing signs of remorse or embarrassment over his continuation in business. Rather, he repeatedly justified his actions and even boasted about his methods. The New York Times reported that in an address during George's last mayoral campaign Johnson stated:

As long as you [the Public] make laws that give franchises away, I think you will find men as well as myself to take them. . . . As long as you put steel rails on the dutiable list you will find that the steel rail manufacturer will raise the price of his rails. (Author's emphasis).¹⁶

On another occasion he delivered his "recipe" for acquiring and running street railways:

I never asked for a franchise or begged leave from a Council to occupy streets. I always looked for a city where there was a street railway, bought it from the owners and reduced the fare. I always bought my properties from men who didn't know the value of the property they had to sell. I went fishing for suckers and caught them. I never bought a road that didn't make money and I made enough to get out of the business altogether. That, gentlemen, is my street railway recipe in a nutshell. (Author's emphasis).¹⁷

And once he obtained a railway, as Murdock pointed out, he would reorganize it, build it up, pour quantities of water into its

¹⁶ The New York Times, 21 October 1897.

¹⁷ "Fishing for Suckers," Street Railway Journal, XIX (12 April 1902), p. 451, quoted in Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," pp. 94-95; see also Johnson My Story, p. 18.

capitalization and then sell it for more than its true worth."¹⁸ Sometimes his methods bordered on the illegal. Detroit newspapers, it will be remembered, accused him of attempting to bribe a Common Council member in 1895.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Johnson repeated his views so often that the possibility of his being misquoted or misconstrued cannot be entertained.

Keeping in mind Johnson's consistent mode of operations brings another traditional argument into question as well. Murdock held that Tom Johnson was "receptive soil" for George's teachings because he possessed an innate humanitarianism. As evidence, Murdock stated that Johnson already was "an enlightened employer" who treated his workers equitably because "He simply felt he would secure better results [in business] with a well-paid, happy personnel."²⁰ There is ample indication that Johnson promoted an administrative philosophy which was indeed novel for its day. But it is illogical to infer a special love of humanity from what essentially was an expedient business policy.

In many cases, too, the difficulty in understanding Tom Johnson grows out of the apparent double standard he applied when justifying

¹⁸ Murdock, "Life," p. 15; see also Howe, Confessions, p. 87.

¹⁹ According to Hoyt L. Warner, "Johnson never resorted to bribery, yet whenever he wanted favors from the [Cleveland City] Council, he contributed to the campaign funds of both parties, a form of indirect corruption against which he later inveighed." Warner, Progressivism, pp. 57-58.

²⁰ Murdock, "Life," pp. 450-451; For Johnson's views on efficiency in business and labor relations, see Tom L. Johnson, "Discussion on Stables and Care of Horses," Street Railway Journal, I, March 1885; Warner, Progressivism, p. 59.

his positions. For example, Murdock quotes him on one occasion as saying, "If the laws of this country permit a man to overcapitalize his stock and sell out, I will do that and make money, although I know it is immoral."²¹ Or, in the campaign address mentioned above, after denying a charge that Marcus Hanna contributed to George's campaign -- ostensibly to discredit the candidate -- Johnson stated that even if Hanna had contributed, the money nonetheless would have been accepted "for the same purpose that we'd take it from the devil."²² Not surprisingly, many people found it difficult to trust him. Even Johnson's contemporary biographer Carl Lorenz noted:

. . . strange as it may seem, this vivacious, smiling and well-liked street railway magnate incurred the distrust of many of his friends in the business world. He had such a way of 'putting things' that his word was not considered as good as his signature. This fact is significant and often, later on, influenced his public career.²³

What is surprising is that Tom Johnson apparently never understood why he had earned such distrust:

When I said quite frankly that I was a monopolist and that so long as I continued in business I should take advantage of all the class legislation enacted by Congress, but that as a member of Congress I should work, speak and vote against such class legislation [sic] I was accused of insincerity.²⁴

²¹ Johnson, quoted in Murdock, "Life," p. 16.

²² The New York Times, 21 October 1897.

²³ Lorenz, Tom L. Johnson, p. 10. Although Carl Lorenz generally tends to overdramatize, in this instance his observation appears quite accurate. Johnson himself admitted that his business methods carried over into municipal politics (Johnson, My Story, pp. xx, 162); and Colonel Orlando J. Hodge, the man Johnson defeated for Congress in 1892, reported that Johnson was not above "ward heeling" when it suited his aims. Orlando J. Hodge, Reminiscences (Cleveland, Ohio: The Imperial Press, 1902), pp. 209-210.

²⁴ Johnson, My Story, p. 75.

According to Frederic Howe, the reason for Johnson's bewilderment was that Johnson, as well as Marcus Hanna, ascribed to their own brand of morality:

Both men were lawless. They respected neither the law nor the courts. They knew how laws were made. They had used political power in the city council and in State legislatures to tighten their grip on the community. They had made judges, and they knew that the judges they made would come to them again for support. They were lawless by temperament; they felt themselves above the law. That was part of their power. They had no reverence. They had supreme confidence in themselves.²⁵

Revealing as these observations are, still another incongruity persists regarding the chronology of Johnson's "conversion." George reportedly told him in 1885 that his business activities were justified because the resulting funds inevitably would be used to propagate "the fight." Johnson did subsidize Henry George's movement while the philosopher was alive. However, when George died in 1897 there is no indication that Johnson immediately considered leaving business to carry on George's work. Apparently not until after a meeting with Richard T. Wilson, probably occurring in 1898 or 1899, did he seriously ponder this course of action.

The meeting took place after Wilson had become depressed over his own future in business. Like an addict, dependent on yet repelled by his vocation, Wilson turned to Johnson for advice. Johnson told him that if he felt he could not continue in business, Wilson simply should "quit it." Later, faced with the same anxiety, Johnson related:

That incident wet me to thinking seriously of my half-formed resolution to give up business. I asked myself whether it was possible if I continued in it that I should come to be possessed

²⁵ Howe, Confessions, p. 146.

with the insanity of it as this unhappy old man [Wilson] was. Would it become a habit with me, like a drug? Would I find myself powerless to give it up, as the gambler is powerless to stay away from his games? I was young and strong and I dearly loved the stimulation that went with the fight. But I decided that I must get that stimulation some other way. I knew that I was 'as other men' and I foresaw that in the end business would control my destiny; that I should not rule it, but that it would rule me. No, much as I enjoyed the game, I wasn't willing to take the thumps, and, having reached this decision I threw all my energies into my efforts to get out of the various things I was engaged in. This sounds easier than it was, and I never did get out entirely, but from the night of that old financier's visit I never lost sight of the fact that I must give up the money-making game.²⁶

By his own account, Johnson did not withdraw from business then for the expressed purpose of carrying on the Georgist crusade, although this now was possible. Yet, neither can this move be attributed to his personal inclination alone. Factors beyond Johnson's control undoubtedly precipitated his decision. But what were these factors?

Accordingly to Michael Massouh, whose doctoral dissertation dealt with Johnson's business-technological career, there were at least three. First, Tom Johnson was accustomed to change. Between 1876 and 1900 he had interests in fifteen major companies or their subsidiaries. As might be expected, some of these ventures prospered while others stagnated for various reasons. When a company faltered, Johnson more often than not divested himself of it. Indeed, five such turnovers occurred while Henry George was still alive. Second, technological changes completely transformed the street railway industry during the same period. While Johnson was associated with the industry, and largely through his inventions, street rail transpor-

²⁶Johnson, My Story, pp. 106-107.

tation developed from a crude mechanistic phase into a burgeoning technology. From this Massouh deduced that:

as long as the industry was basically mechanical, Johnson contributed a number of inventions. After the industry became electrical in nature, Johnson transferred the emphasis of his engineer-entrepreneurial talents from invention to management.²⁷

However, management never held an overriding interest for Tom Johnson. Once he built up a company he turned it over to someone else to manage while he looked for another company to build.

A third compelling reason for him to leave business dealt with its changing organizational structure. Throughout the third quarter of the nineteenth century, many expanding businesses practiced horizontal combination or vertical integration to achieve a monopoly in their fields. The decade between 1895 and 1905 witnessed the peak period of this development. A wave of consolidation swept the business community at this time during which, according to business historian Glenn Porter, over three hundred companies each year succumbed to mergers.²⁸ The Johnson Company, for all its growth, was unable to compete with the larger Federal Steel Company. Resultingly, in 1898, the Johnson Company lost its identity to J. P. Morgan's holding company which, in turn, became the United States Steel Corporation.

Ironically, Johnson promoted consolidation when it was in his interest to do so. A careful study of his business career actually

²⁷Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," pp. 69-70

²⁸Glenn Porter, The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1910 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973), pp. 71-84. For Johnson's description of the Johnson Company's fate, see: Johnson, My Story, pp. 90-91.

shows him in the forefront of consolidation efforts in both Cleveland and Detroit. Again according to Massouh:

Johnson was not opposed to large scale business organization brought about by individual effort nor to combinations of small manufacturing and service units called for by technological considerations such as greater efficiency and service. He was opposed, however, to those trusts which existed by reason of non-technological factors, such as special laws and financial manipulation. He wished to restore the fullest opportunity for competition. . . through what he called "Honest" forms of capital.²⁹

If one accepts the above contentions about Johnson's transition from business to reform, the arguments favoring the "social conversion" appear strikingly weak by comparison. On the other hand, by discarding Johnson's alleged conversion, there still is the question, "If not Henry George's influence, then what did motivate Tom Johnson's actions during the Mayoral years?"

One possible explanation hinges on the conduct of the renowned "Great Traction War" in Cleveland which many quickly equate with Johnson's mayoral tenure. After reviewing the evidence, this popular association seems to reflect more of a popular misconception than the actual state of affairs. Why is this so? First, as Michael Massouh emphasized, "Tom L. Johnson was first and foremost a street railway man. From the time he served his apprenticeship in the industry until his death, he engaged in street railway activities."³⁰ Bearing this in mind, it is not at all difficult to construct the argument that Johnson, squeezed out of the market place by economic

²⁹Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," p. 201; see also: Johnson, My Story, pp. 213-214; The Cleveland Plain Dealer, 24 March 1902, 6 May 1902.

³⁰Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson," pp. 3-4.

forces beyond his control, saw the political side of the street railway issue as an outlet for his frustrated business talents.

In addition, Johnson consistently referred to his dealings with other Cleveland traction magnates in terms of conflict or struggle. In My Story he goes so far as to say, "That street railroad fight begun in Cleveland in 1879 was no mere battle but the beginning of a thirty years' war, though certainly none of us then engaged in it had the slightest idea of what was to come."³¹ This statement is significant because it implies that Johnson conditioned himself to view his Cleveland business affairs as individual battles in a long term war of attrition. Only a little less significant is the fact that this "war" began four years before he had even heard of Henry George, six years before he first met him, and over two decades before he engaged in the actual political struggle so vividly linked in the popular mind with his mayoralty.

A third notable factor in the Great Traction War was that during the thirty year conflict most of the protagonists remained the same. Mark Hanna, Henry Everett, Horace Andrews, and Tom Johnson were as prominent in Cleveland street railway circles in 1901 as when Johnson recorded that in 1880 "Mr. Hanna and all the other street railroad interests in the city were lined up solidly against [his through-line/single fare] proposition." Over the years the issues and methods changed little, but the antagonism of the principals steadily

³¹Johnson, My Story, p. 24. In point of fact, the entire third chapter of this work contains numerous references to the "struggle" theme in Johnson's career.

grew in intensity. Henry Everett, for one, locked horns with Johnson several times during this period: in Indianapolis; in Detroit, where he "allied" with Mayor Pingree and the Pack brothers; and in the Cleveland board rooms of the Big Consolidated during the uneasy alliance after its creation in 1894.³²

The Great Traction War is also a prime example of how public opinion has influenced historical opinion on Tom Johnson. The traction issue affected nearly everyone in early twentieth century Cleveland, and by extension everyone living in American cities at that time.³³ Because the stakes were large and the lines of battle, which closely followed class lines, were clearly defined, Tom Johnson's colorful role in the conflict made him appear as a champion of the people. Moreover, his lingering illness and untimely death in 1911, shortly after the Tayler grant referendum, confirmed his public image as a martyr. Yet, when the "war" is seen as the culmination of an ongoing, thirty year power struggle among Cleveland traction magnates, Johnson's overall behavior devolves into less heroic proportions.

Did Johnson's continuing involvement in the Great Traction War totally exclude the proposition that Henry George's influence was somehow responsible for the Mayor's actions? Historical opinion is sharply divided on this question. Hoyt L. Warner in his book Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917 unquestioningly asserts that Johnson's

³²Ibid., pp. 22, 86-88 respectively.

³³For further support of this contention, see the George Catlin and William Lovett quotations in Holli, Pingree, p. 123.

"enemies always suspected his sincerity. Yet his political career is a testament to the genuineness of his new faith. The man responsible for his conversion was Henry George."³⁴ Warner further believed that:

Johnson was successful in public life not only because of his remarkable talent as an organizer and leader of men, but also because of the simplicity and directness of his goal . . . he was steadfastly faithful to the beliefs of his mentor, Henry George. There was one social wrong, the inequality of opportunity; one social remedy, to restore equality of opportunity and secure for each worker the product of his labor by eliminating monopoly and special privilege.³⁵

From Warner's standpoint, it was eminently logical for Johnson to engage the Cleveland traction interests. The Cleveland street railway environment was familiar ground to him and thus the arena best suited to a successful assault against Privilege. In addition, Warner observed that Johnson already had had considerable experience attacking entrenched business and political opposition in Detroit -- as an ally of Mayor Hazen S. Pingree.³⁶

Conversely, Melvin G. Holli, widely known as the author of Reform in Detroit, Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics, comments "In his autobiography, Johnson claimed to have been influenced by Henry George in 1883, but none of it was evident during Johnson's years as a traction magnate."³⁷ Holli also takes the stand that "there is

³⁴Warner, *Progressivism*, pp. 58-59.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁷Warner, *Progressivism*, pp. 58-59.

little in Johnson's career as a traction magnate in Detroit or in his actions as a reform mayor of Cleveland that suggest the influence of Henry George. On the other hand, his Cleveland administrations do resemble those of Pingree in Detroit."³⁸

At first glance these two views of Henry George's influence (or lack of it) on Tom Johnson seem mutually exclusive. Closer examination reveals that there may be more room for agreement than originally thought. Both Warner and Holli agree that Hazen Pingree activated the municipal traction issue, first brought it to national attention, and that only later did Tom Johnson take it up as his own in Cleveland. However, this is not what is at issue here. The disparity between the Warner and Holli accounts centers on Johnson's relationship with Pingree, their philosophical beliefs, and Johnson's subsequent actions in Cleveland compared to his actions and association with Henry George.

The record shows that Hazen Pingree originated the ideas of a three-cent fare and increased competition among Detroit's street railways. According to Holli, Pingree's reasoning was that these policies, if adopted, would improve transit service and thereby address a public need. Mayor Pingree's friends said that his actions proceed from his "pragmatic humanism," although his political opponents called this "political opportunism."³⁹ But if Pingree, a shoemaker turned politician saw the issue as part of a political contest with

³⁸Ibid., p. 242 fn.

³⁹Ibid., p. 101.

social ramifications, Tom Johnson, a street railway man, initially viewed it in business terms.

As an elected official, Pingree was responsible for what he discerned to be the voters' best interests. Similarly, Johnson's primary accountability was to the stockholders of his companies. Before the Detroit street railways were consolidated, the two men were at odds professionally owing to their separate responsibilities to different constituencies. After the consolidation, circumstances dictated that it was to their mutual benefit to work together. Without a street railway issue, Pingree lost political mileage. And Johnson, because he had been unable to secure franchises for his consolidated properties, needed Pingree's support to extricate himself from a potentially serious financial loss. At that point, improved service at lower cost for Detroit citizens only provided additional, though subsidiary, incentive for creating an otherwise strange alliance. Once they became allies, each man altered his position as well. Pingree surrendered his notion of maintaining competition while Johnson conceded private ownership in favor of the quasi-public holding company plan.

Although the holding company arrangement failed to materialize and Johnson ultimately sold his interests, both Holli and Warner concur that Johnson left Detroit convinced of the plan's feasibility. From this standpoint, Professor Holli's argument that Pingree was instrumental in altering Johnson's attitude appears sound. What is more, the fact that Johnson used many of Pingree's methods in Cleveland also attests to Pingree's impact on Johnson.

But what of George's influence? To say that George alone directly guided Johnson's actions ignores the lack of supporting evidence for this contention. This position becomes even more untenable in light of Pingree's documented effect on Johnson's mayoralty. Yet, both suggestions viewing Johnson's actions as the exclusive result of either George's or Pingree's outside influence discount the fact that Johnson could act independently. One might additionally posit that although George provided the "spiritual" guidance for Tom Johnson, Hazen Pingree directed his practical footsteps.

Without mentioning Pingree, Harry Luft, in his 1966 master's thesis, does consider Tom Johnson a free agent:

Despite Johnson's devotion to George's economic philosophy, he had his own original variations. Instead of concentrating on the problems of distribution of land, groundrents, or land improvements, Johnson because of his business background, expanded the idea of 'unearned increments' to a larger concept called privilege.⁴⁰

Luft obviously did not have the benefit of Holli's research when he wrote this passage. Still, if one modifies the claim of Johnson's originality and allows "business background" to include Hazen Pingree's influence, the orthodox view of Henry George as Johnson's mentor continues to hold some validity. Moreover, it is difficult to categorically deny the possibility of George's influence when one considers Johnson's proven commitment to Henry George while the philosopher was living.

Perhaps the most incisive "explanation" of Johnson's complex behavior comes from Robert H. Bremner. In his pioneering work, "The Civic Revival in Ohio, The Fight Against Privilege in Cleveland and

Johnson was unique in one respect: his ability to combine principle with expediency. His goal was the abolition of privilege and poverty through the use of the single tax, free trade, municipal ownership of all public utilities, home rule for cities, and direct legislation. He kept this goal squarely before him and never pretended that he was or would be satisfied with any accomplishment less than its achievement. But to obtain it he would use any weapon at hand. To get closer to it he would work for any immediately attainable reforms. If he could not at first get the single tax adopted he would take tax revision; if state laws denied the city the right to own its utilities he would take municipal control of utilities until the laws had been changed. Meantime he would work for home rule which would enable the city not only to devise its own form of taxation but also to own its street railways, electric light and power stations, and gas plants. Johnson did not look upon these expedients as compromises. Neither were they victories. They were simply steps forward towards the end he had in view. He was more interested in definite accomplishment (not for himself, but for the cause he served) than in consistency of dogma. Johnson's resiliency, his ability to take advantage of the current situation to make such gains as were immediately possible without once losing sight of his ultimate object is what makes him the leading spirit in the Civic Revival and . . . one of the foremost political leaders in the Progressive period.⁴¹

Despite the incongruities, inconsistencies, doubts, accusations, speculation, and claims, scholars generally acquiesce in Bremner's appraisal of Tom L. Johnson's historical importance. Because one of the goals of this thesis is to help formulate a clearer picture of why he deserves consideration in history, an overview of various random observations relating to Johnson's historical position still remains.

Raymond Moley, who had known and studied a good many leaders in American politics, believed that Tom L. Johnson was part of a continuing liberal tradition that began with Progressivism and blossomed

⁴¹Robert H. Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio, The Fight Against Privilege in Cleveland and Toledo, 1899-1912," (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1943), pp. 61-62.

during the New Deal.⁴² His opinion brings to mind a statement by Charles A. Otis, who also knew Johnson and Franklin D. Roosevelt and who saw common elements in both: "You couldn't know them without liking them. Of course . . . they were both politicians and liars, but they were regular fellows."⁴³ These two diverse yet curiously similar attitudes hint at the idea that background, personality, and politics are vital elements in any assessment of leaders in the American liberal tradition. The question is, "How does Tom Johnson immediately fit the patterns of Progressivism?"

Historians who have examined Progressive figures note many common denominators. Tom Johnson was not the only millionaire to have applied himself to reform. Hazen Pingree and "Golden Rule" Jones, for example, were both successful manufacturers before entering municipal politics. Historian George Mowry noted in Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement that "few reform movements in American history have had the support of more wealthy men."⁴⁴

On closer examination other likenesses are to be found among Progressive leaders. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. used a comparative approach to isolate parallel trends within the movement. His method was to study the backgrounds of 260 Progressive Party leaders in the hope of discovering a common pattern to their behavior. These 260

⁴²Raymond Moley, Twenty Seven Masters of Politics (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company for Newsweek magazine, 1949), pp. 9-10.

⁴³Interview with Charles A. Otis, 11 August 1949, quoted in Murdock, "Life," p. 97.

⁴⁴George Mowry, Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1946), p. 10.

individuals, he found, to a great degree exhibited urban, middle-class backgrounds. They were almost exclusively native-born, American Protestants with either business or professional training. The businessmen among them, however, were predominantly self-made men who owned relatively large holdings. They were, for the most part, highly individualistic and self-supporting. White collar executives, salaried technocrats, and labor organizers did not count among them.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, Tom Johnson's background agrees with this description remarkably well.

Chandler's study was further refined in George Mowry's The California Progressives. This study noted that Progressives in that state were also mostly community business leaders, members of local Chambers of Commerce, financially secure, and "opposed to the impersonal, concentrated, and supposedly privileged property represented by the behemoth corporations."⁴⁶ Both Chandler and Mowry believed that these individuals, with certain exceptions, held values that were reminiscent of an earlier period in American history; they "sought to recapture and reaffirm the older, individualistic values in all the strata of political, economic, and social life."⁴⁷ Again, Johnson's views on monopolies and labor seem to match Chandler and Mowry's findings quite closely.

⁴⁵Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., "The Origins of Progressive Leadership," quoted in Elting Morrison, editor, The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, VIII (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 1462-1465.

⁴⁶George Mowry, The California Progressives (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1951), p. 145.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 89.

Using these studies as a point of departure, Richard Hofstadter in the The Age of Reform posited that many Progressives, notably Tom Johnson and Joseph Fels of New York, were indeed Horatio Alger types "who had been 'declassed' for a time and had recouped their fortunes."⁴⁸ Hofstadter also observed that a widespread Progressive trait was to distinguish between "responsible" and "irresponsible" wealth. He maintained that the former group, coming from a tradition of established means, was prone to spend money discriminately on selected reforms. The second category represented the newly rich who "were rioting with newfound means."⁴⁹ If Johnson's accidental introduction to Henry George's theories represents an indiscriminate choice of reforms, his opulent lifestyle,⁵⁰ generous patronage of George and his movement, and his reckless free-spending in the Mayor's office certainly place him in the ranks of the nouveaux riches.

Hofstadter singled out an older source, Walter Weyl's The New Democracy, to help bolster this distinction. Weyl, a contemporary of the Progressives, concluded that class differences based on the nature and age of accumulated wealth motivated the actions of Progressive leaders. And if one momentarily recalls Tom Johnson's comments on the snobbery of his more well-to-do relatives, a phrase Weyl used to emphasize his conclusion becomes extraordinarily apt. "The cultured descendants of cotton manufacturers resent the advent into

⁴⁸Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, From Bryan to Roosevelt (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 145.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 146.

their society of the man who has made his 'pile' in the recent buying and selling of franchises."⁵¹ Weyl went on to note that while divisions existed within the privileged class, or plutocracy, that same plutocracy was also the object of broad-based popular antagonism. What is more, because the plutocracy had not yet solidified, it should not seem incongruous to have certain elements within it "break ranks," as it were, and join the populace.

Still another historian, Robert H. Wiebe, argued that, owing to the prevailing attitudes of middle class America, those plutocrats who did bolt their class could find acceptance in the middle ground. Wiebe stated that middle class American values at the turn of the century in fact were not so far removed from "the social theory of the business community" as to preclude common efforts by the two classes. The theory to which Wiebe alluded postulated "a restricted definition of the people, a belief in a leadership elite, a denial of classes, and a faith in individualism," each of which Johnson espoused.

Even after he had 'lost his fortune,' the Cleveland newspapers noted that he was forced to move into a nine-room "flat" with a garage and dispose of all but one car. And, after he died, his estate totalled nearly a half million dollars. At its peak various estimates placed it over \$10,000,000. This was in an era when a good business suit cost twenty dollars and a municipal clerk's annual salary was around \$1,500. For information on Johnson's lifestyle and fortune, see: Johnson, My Story, pp. 297, 299; The Cleveland Plain Dealer, 20 March 1901; The New York Times, 20 November 1908, 20 January 1914; Murdock, "Life," chapter entitled "Tragedy."

⁵¹Walter E. Weyl, The New Democracy: An Essay on Certain Political and Economic Tendencies in the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), pp. 243-244; see also Johnson, My Story, p.7.

According to Wiebe, only the elite businessman's "tone" separated him from the middle class reformer. This tone could be "patronizing or harsh toward 'people' who opposed him," while

an insistence upon business leadership, an obsession with class attacks, and plaintive defenses of economic individualism distinguished the articulate businessman from the prominent leaders of reform, who combined optimism with a sense of destiny when they talked about the people, its leaders, and limitations on individualism to prevent class strife. The one dogmatized and warned, the other explained and envisioned; the one preserved his ideology regardless of daily contradictions, the other felt his way toward an adjustment of the traditional to the new.⁵²

Wiebe's exposition differentiated between the "businessman-turned-reformer" and the "reformer born of the middle class."

Johnson's own aristocratic heritage, "declassed" though it was, and his success in business undeniably mark him as one of the former type, essentially different from a "pure" middle class reformer such as his associate, Frederic Howe.

Until fairly recently, according to John D. Buenker, one other related issue occupied urban and social historians of this period. It is the question of how businessmen-reformers were able to ingratiate themselves to the middle class. Buenker credits A. Theodore Brown and Charles N. Glaab with "solving" this conflict. Their research

⁵²Robert H. Wiebe, Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 204-205; in his later work, The Search for Order, 1877-1920, The Making of America Series (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), Robert Wiebe portrays Johnson, not in a dynamic light, but as a magnet drawing "reformers of the old school" and "zealous and well-trained young men" to his administration. He also posits that although Johnson had experience in street railways, it was actually his associates who provided most of the innovations in the Mayor's administration.

indicated that the middle class may have accepted the business-reformers but, as Bunker stated, their support came primarily from the "urban masses." He pointed to recent demographic studies which show how voting patterns of ethnic, working-class immigrants maintained men like Pingree or Jones in power.⁵³ Unfortunately, no such study has been done on Cleveland which can statistically link Tom Johnson to this pattern. The fact that Johnson's administration bore the marks of an urban reform "machine" similar, if not identical, to those in Detroit and Toledo would nevertheless seem to favor such a correlation.⁵⁴

This thesis has touched upon many different aspects of Tom Johnson's life and role in history. Still, one observation should stand out from everything else that has been written here: Johnson's motivation derived from a highly complicated mixture of inherently complex elements. He was personally very dynamic and self-possessed, and he capitalized on these traits both in business and in politics. Yet many factors beyond his control inescapably left their mark on his behavior. And his jovial personality, combined with a studied disregard for what others thought about him, often-times clouded his underlying motivations. This frequently made him

⁵³John Bunker, Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 204; see also A. Theodore Brown and Charles N. Glaab, A History of Urban America, 2nd edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1976), pp. 187-208.

⁵⁴For information on Tom Johnson's political relationship with Cleveland's ethnic communities, see Wellington G. Fordyce, "Nationality Groups in Cleveland Politics," The Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Quarterly, XLVI, 1937.

times clouded his underlying motivations. This frequently made him appear insincere or enigmatic to observers, but did not deter his actions as long as he was personally content. Johnson liked to relate that one of his own guiding principles shielded him from other people's opinions, "Take your bumps on the bias."⁵⁵

Anyone who has studied his life will readily see why he was called "The Great American Paradox." More often than not they will also admit to sharing Frederic Howe's personal experience, recorded many years ago: "I walked home that night pondering on the enigma of Tom Johnson's personality, as I was to ponder it for weeks to come." Such was the measure of the man, Tom Loftin Johnson.

⁵⁵Howe, *Confessions*, p. 139.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

In keeping with the goals of this thesis, I initially decided to review existing primary sources and, if possible, to uncover any new material bearing on Johnson's behavior and motivation. This approach often proved difficult to implement. Two factors account for the difficulty. Elizabeth J. Hauser, who edited his autobiographical My Story (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1911), noted in her introduction that Johnson "was not introspective, seldom reminiscent." Still, considering Johnson's business and political activities in Ohio, as well as his permanent residence there, materials relating to his behavior were, nevertheless, thought to exist in archival collections throughout the state. However, as inroads were made into various aspects of his life, the assumption that resources abounded needed revision.

Because of its personal bias and polemical overtones, My Story required cautious treatment. Therefore, various archives were approached for additional primary information. In Columbus, Ohio, Frankl Levstick and Gary Arnold of the Ohio Historical Society responded by granting access to the Tom L. Johnson Papers (Microfilm edition: 8 rolls of correspondence, legal papers, proclamations & miscellaneous items from the years 1901-1910; originals in the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio). However, the Johnson Papers comprised mostly incoming correspondence from Johnson's mayoral

constituents, sprinkled with his marginal notes and short memoranda dealing with routine administrative matters. There was virtually no personal material in them. As a result, the Samuel M. Jones Papers (Microfilm edition: 15 rolls of letterbooks, correspondence, speeches, etc. from the years 1896-1904; original in the Toledo/Lucas County Public Library, Toledo, Ohio) appeared as a possibly valuable alternate source. "Golden Rule" Jones, Mayor of Toledo and a contemporary of Johnson, reportedly shared similar beliefs with his colleague in Cleveland. The Jones Papers, as opposed to the Johnson Papers, largely represented outgoing items. Messrs. Levstick and Arnold then suggested the Annual Reports of the Secretary of State to the Governor of the State of Ohio, 1888, 1890 & 1892 (Columbus, Ohio: Fred J. Heer, State Printer), commonly called Ohio Statistics, for vote totals from Johnson's congressional campaigns. They also reported that the Ohio Historical Society housed secondary sources which might prove helpful. Among these were: the Cleveland Leader and the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Republican and Democratic newspapers, respectively, which were examined for the years 1879-1911. Both papers were on microfilm. In addition, the Society's card catalogue listed various articles on Johnson which were consulted at intervals for corroborating information. Finally, a pamphlet, Open Letters Addressed to Honorable Tom L. Johnson by Charles Dick, Chairman Ohio Republican State Executive Committee in the Campaign of 1902 (Columbus, Ohio: n.p., 1902) outlined Republican objections to Johnson's 1902 Ohio gubernatorial campaign platform, including the widely reported charges

of his tax evasion.

Other Columbus sources were: microfilm copies of the Articles of Incorporation of the Lorain Steel Company and the Cleveland Electric Railway Company, both in the Office of the Secretary of the State of Ohio; and liquidation records pertaining to the Depositors Savings and Trust Company, in the Ohio Department of Commerce, Division of Banks. Although Johnson had been associated with all of these ventures, the Articles and liquidation records were of little help in isolating either his behavior or motivation. However, some insight into early Ohio banking laws and practices came from an interview with Ms. Myrna K. Parrish, Ohio Commerce Department, Division of Banks, on 10 April 1979.

In Cleveland, Ohio a good deal of effort was spent searching for Johnson's personal records among the general holdings of various public and private repositories. Dr. Dennis Harrison and Mr. Daniel Kraska of the Western Reserve Historical Society suggested a number of leads and made several telephone calls on my behalf. Dr. Harrison, who had supervised the Society's acquisition of the original Tom L. Johnson Papers, also reconstructed the Papers checkered history after 1911. He additionally called my attention to Western Reserves's collection of Cleveland Chamber of Commerce Minutes of its Executive and Special Committee Meetings, as well as to the Cleveland City Directory (Cleveland Directory Company, 1878-1914). Both sources were consulted. The Chamber Minutes suggested the existence of more detailed stenographic records concerning Johnson's role in the Cleveland "Street Railway Issue" circa 1905-1910. Subsequent

inquiries led to Ms. Anne K. Butler, Assistant Director for Research and Planning of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association (Chamber of Commerce) who posited that these records had been routinely destroyed some years earlier. Conversations with Regional Transit Authority officials and Mr. Harry Christiansen, a chronicler of Cleveland's street railways apparently have been lost. Fortunately, a contemporary source, William R. Hopkins' "The Street Railway Problem in Cleveland," American Economic Association Economic Studies, I, New York: Swann, Sonnenschein Company, (December 1896), pp. 283-376, though hostile, fills in much of the background of Johnson's early street railway affairs. Then, too, the Index to Deeds for Cuyahoga County, Ohio (7 December 1878 - 1 January 1912) and its companion, Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Deed Records, corresponding to the same period, added a little more information on property transfers. Both were found in the Cuyahoga County Auditor's Office, Property Records Division.

Regarding Johnson's alleged tax evasion, Mr. Scott Feigenbaum, Deputy Archivist, Cuyahoga County Auditor's Office, arranged for me to search through the County's uncatalogued Personal Property tax records. After two days of hunting through back records, which were stored in a Huron Road warehouse, it became apparent that, again owing to periodic clean-up operations, all files relating to Johnson's personal fortune had been destroyed; probably before 1950. Mr. John Busher, Microfilm Department, Cuyahoga County Clerk of Court's Office, subsequently helped me research court warrant records for any possible legal action taken against Johnson in the matter. None were found. The Cleveland papers and the New York Times (on microfilm in

The Ohio State University Library), which was also consulted repeatedly on Johnson's activities between 1879 and 1914, occasionally ran articles on the charges. Lacking further documentation, however, it seems that either the charges were dropped or the claim was settled out of court.

Attempts to relate Johnson's conversion experience to his manufacturing career initially proved elusive as well. Letters were sent to the United States Steel Corporation archivist and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh for information on the Johnson Company. Neither institution knew the whereabouts of Company records or could confirm their existence. The impasse was relieved somewhat when I stumbled upon Michael Massouh, "Tom Loftin Johnson, Engineer-Entrepreneur (1869-1900)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1970). This study, prepared by an historian of technology, is the most thorough examination of Johnson's business and technological careers. While it did not discover any new memoirs, Massouh's research was nonetheless valuable in its presentation of Johnson's patterns of business behavior. It also confirmed the existence of Johnson Company records - in the Case Western Reserve University Engineering Department Library; supplied information on his patents; and unearthed observations on Johnson's career and personality in contemporary street railway publications. Time and distance limited me to examining those sources listed in Massouh's bibliography which were judged to be the most germane to this thesis. Conclusions drawn from this examination are found through the thesis' text and are cited in accompanying footnotes.

Information on Tom Johnson's death and financial legacy came from the City of Cleveland, Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Cuyahoga County Probate Court. The former office supplied me with a copy of Johnson's Death Certificate, #2554, filed with the State of Ohio, Bureau of Vital Statistics on 12 April 1911. And, as Johnson died intestate, copies of the Letters of Administration, applied for by his widow on 20 May 1911, were made available through the Probate Court Office. Supplemental material on his posthumous New York holdings are also found in The New York Times, dated 20 January 1914.

Much has been written on Johnson's celebrated relationship with Henry George. George and Johnson met regularly when they were in the same locale, whether Cleveland, Washington, Fort Hamilton or New York. However, this occurred most frequently when Johnson was in New York on business for extended periods between 1885 and 1890. Later, while Johnson was in Congress and George toured the lecture circuit, they were usually only able to communicate by post. It therefore seemed imperative to read The Henry George Correspondence (Microfilm edition: Boxes 6, 7 & 8, 1890-1897 & N.D.; originals in the New York Public Library). Professor Jack Balcer of the Ohio State University History Department and Ms. Gay Henderson of the Ohio State University Library deserve special thanks for their help in obtaining the microfilm copies of the above portion of the George Correspondence which is now in The Ohio State University Library, Special Collections Department. Johnson's reluctance to commit himself on paper is born out in The Henry George Correspondence which includes only one major letter from Johnson to Louis F. Post, dated 31 March 1891. However, numerous

short letters and telegrams to and from Johnson attest to his financial commitment to the Georgist movement in general and to George himself.

I also tried to discover other references to and from Tom Johnson which may have existed in The Manhattan Single Tax Club archives. Letters requesting information on their present location resultingly were sent to: the New York State Historical Association, Albany, N.Y.; the New York (City) Public Library; and the New York (City) Historical Society. Replies from these organizations indicate that no records of the famous Club appear to have survived. The New York Times periodically carried summaries of Tom Johnson's speeches to the group between 1890 and 1900; these were also consulted. Personal accounts of Johnson's relations with Henry George, Jr., The Life of Henry George (New York: n.p., 1900; reprint ed., New York: The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1960); Anna George de Mille, Henry George, Citizen of the World, edited by Don C. Shoemaker with an Introduction by Agnes de Mille (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950); and in selected issues of Louis F. Post, The Public, which are cited in various footnotes. The Public, a weekly magazine, is itself an excellent source with almost weekly commentaries on Johnson's mayoral activities.

Gordon R. Rawlinson, "Tom Johnson and His Congressional Years," (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1958) is the only comprehensive study of Tom Johnson's congressional career. I reviewed all government publications and official records containing Johnson's speeches and legislative undertakings which Rawlinson listed on page

116 of his bibliography. Especially relevant were: The Congressional Record, 1890-1895, Volumes XXIII, XXIV, XXV & XXVI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 52nd & 53rd Congresses); Reports by the Committee on the District of Columbia, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 52nd Congress), Nos. 516, 517 & 518; and Report by the Select Committee on Tax Assessments in the District of Columbia, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 52nd Congress), Nos. 1469 & 1679.

Another useful academic work on Johnson and his role in the Civic Revival in Ohio is Robert H. Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio; The Fight Against Privilege in Cleveland and Toledo, 1899-1912," (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1943). For the purposes of this thesis, Section III, Chapters 1 & 2 of Bremner's dissertation, i.e. those dealing with the Cleveland Street Railway Controversy and Taxation in Cleveland, proved the most enlightening.

I also hoped to find letters from Tom Johnson to certain of his social and political associates, excluding Samuel M. Jones, in the Brand Whitlock Papers and the Lincoln Steffens Papers. A request for further information on the Whitlock Papers was sent to The Library of Congress. Mr. John C. Broderick, Chief of the Manuscript Division, responded with a photocopy of one letter from Johnson to Brand Whitlock. This letter was, in fact, an invitation to attend a conference of Ohio mayors in 1905. A similar request was sent to Kenneth A. Lohf, Librarian for Rare Books & Manuscripts, The Butler Library, Columbia University, regarding the Steffens Papers. Mr. Lohf acknowledged the

existence of outgoing correspondence related to Tom Johnson. This was requested through interlibrary loan services but did not arrive in time for use in this thesis. Considering the nature of Steffens' correspondence, it would undoubtedly have been of marginal value. On the other hand, three secondary works by these men were employed to ascertain first, their impressions of the Civic Revival and, second, their recollections of Tom L. Johnson. These are: Brand Whitlock, Forty Years of It (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1914) and The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock, 2 volumes, edited by Allan Nevins with an Introduction by Newton D. Baker (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936); and Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1931).

Finally, I attempted to trace Tom Johnson's genealogy in hopes of uncovering new material on the conversion experience which may have been passed down to his family. Johnson's background was reconstructed using a number of sources. An older, though still helpful, work is: Leland Winfield Meyer, "The Life and Times of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1932). However, Meyer's study does not progress much beyond the scope of its title. The Public, VIII (6 January 1906), pp. 646-647 & 649, carries Johnson's immediate family history through 1883. It also includes the names and approximate ages of Johnson's wife and children. After his death in 1911, his widow, Margaret "Maggie" Johnson, apparently lived in New York for a time. There she stayed with her daughter, Elizabeth "Bessie" Mariani. Mrs. Mariani divorced her husband of one month in 1908, but had a daughter by him later that year or in 1909. The

daughter, Margaret Evelyn Mariani, subsequently married one James E. Clinton of New York City. Johnson's widow and daughter ultimately moved to Los Angeles where "Maggie" Johnson died in July 1934.

"Bessie" Mariani died in New York two years later. Sketchy references in the Cleveland papers report that the Johnsons' son, Loftin Edwards Johnson, married and had two children, but this is not certain. At any rate, neither he nor his children appear as survivors in the obituaries of "Maggie" Johnson or "Bessie" Mariani. Mrs. James E. Clinton apparently was the sole surviving heiress. Obituary notices in the New York Times, 9 July 1934 for "Maggie" Johnson, and 5 May 1936 for "Bessie" Mariani, as well as corresponding references in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, provide no further information on Margaret E. Mariani Clinton. It is possible that, if she is still alive as of this writing, other unpublished papers and memorabilia of Tom Johnson remain in her possession. Yet, this has not been determined from existing information.

In addition to the above sources, other materials, some of which are included in footnote references, are:

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