

# HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Geoff Forster

In 1891 Henry George visited Australia and made a huge impact. "Single Tax" leagues proliferated throughout Australia. **Progress** was established in 1904. The outbreak of World War I curbed the strong growth of the Georgist movement; it has never since been quite the same. Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the War, Site Value Rating was universal for both Queensland and New South Wales.

After World War I the Georgist movement in Victoria acquired a permanent home at George Parade in the heart of Melbourne, thanks to a group that included Walter Burley Griffin, architect of Canberra.

Victoria obtained the option of rating systems in 1920, by council resolution or rate payer polls. Since then Site Value Rating has gradually extended to cover half the population of Victoria. However, in recent years reversion moves have occurred in some areas owing to vested interests or sheer shortsightedness.

After the Great Depression of the thirties and World War II (1939-1945), the growth of the welfare state inhibited the growth of Georgism. While the welfare state did alleviate distress caused by economic injustice, it did virtually nothing to tackle the root causes of it.

In 1943 the Melbourne-based Land Values Research Group was formed. For over 40 years its studies with Allan Hutchinson as research director proliferated and provided solid empirical evidence for the advantages of Site Value Rating. The group's recent rejuvenation under Bryan Kavanagh has yielded a most impressive document clearly demonstrating how rising land prices have precipitated the current 'recession'.

Also, after World War II the General Council for Rating Reform was in operation, to establish and strengthen local groups in obtaining and/or defending Site Value Rating.

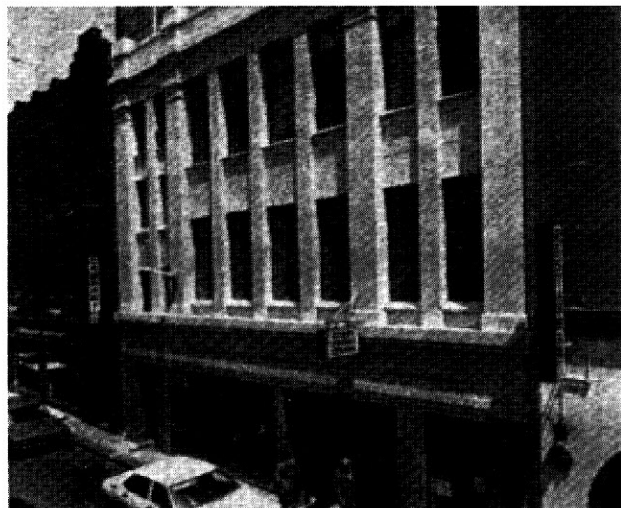
Early in the century, Federal land tax was introduced ostensibly to break up large estates. In 1952 it was abolished, purportedly to give the states this source of revenue. In Victoria, as in other states, the State land tax has been marred by exemptions and gradations.

In the 1950s a political party was formed, independent of the education body (Henry George League). Elections were contested, unsuccessfully; however, useful publicity was achieved.

Publicity through the media has been attempted mainly through letters to and articles for the press. There have also been incursions into radio. A regular session was held over 3DB throughout the fifties and most of the sixties, followed by involvement in 3ZZ during the mid-

70s (half hour programs), and weekly half hour sessions on 3INR throughout 1991-2. There have also been three major exposures on television; a 10 minute segment on Channel 2, Channel 9's Midday Show, and an interview on a country TV station.

In 1971 our Victorian headquarters were transferred to 56 Hardware Street, and shortly afterwards a change took place to the present address of 31 Hardware Street.



31 Hardware Street in 1983

Other activities over the years have included advertising campaigns, classes in Social Science and Basic Economics, conferences and public meetings, and liaison with other organisations.

During the years, meetings of organisations have been addressed, and whilst this has decreased a little recently, there are moves afoot to renew this activity with fresh promotion.

In 1989 our own Georgist video was produced, and has been used for monthly screenings and discussion at Hardware Street.

A major achievement has been the maintenance of **Progress** for almost a century, in a period when various similar publications have folded.

The journal has played a major role in spreading and keeping alive the Georgist message. Its future role in this computer age remains to be seen.

History proceeds by steady development and by sudden jumps; be ready for both. We have had some obstacles to our advance (vested interests, academic limitations, "good idea, but too hard to implement", and so on). Despite the frustrations and disappointments we must maintain the vision!