



Let's turn to the young

Sir, We must explore another avenue in order to educate the public in the ideas of Henry George, an avenue lined with younger trees more likely to bear fruit. Education begins with youth. Adult response, as we toilers know, results in the response, "Henry George? Who's he?" or "No, not him!"

Despite its history in attempting to place LVT on the statue-book in the first two decades of the 21st century, the Liberal Party will not include it as a policy today.

At a small meeting, I once asked David Steel, "Do you believe in land value taxation?" "Yes, I do," he said.

"Then why don't we ever hear you proposing it?" I responded angrily.

He replied, "It's all very well for you to criticise from the comfort of your armchair."

I was left speechless. "The comfort of my armchair", in those days when I was a Liberal Prospect Parliamentary Candidate, was to leave my armchair, in what would otherwise be spare time, and spread the word from door to door and in newsletters.

Simon Hughes is a devout Christian and a member of the Progressive Forum. He never says a word in favour of LVT.

Perhaps I obtained a clue about Lib-Dem silence at a recent meeting at which Charles Kennedy was a speaker. In the question-and answer session, I referred to the Liberal Party's historical record in LVT and asked why the Lib-Dems do not incorporate it in their manifesto. He replied "I represent a farming area in the south west country".

It confirmed what I had long suspected. Several Lib-Dems represent areas in the south-west and fear losing parliamentary seats by what farmers would regard as an imposition on their land.

In such question-and-answer sessions, one is not given the opportunity to reply by pointing out that (a) any tax change might be disadvantageous to a minority, but steps can always be taken to remedy this; and (b) that farmers would benefit by the consequent reduction in income tax and VAT.

But let us return to youth, my youth to start with, in the apartheid era in South Africa.

During my schooldays, one or two matters started to make me wonder about white dominance. The big change came at the University

of the Witwatersrand in 1943-1947. Anti-apartheid demonstrations were held amongst students, several organised by the Communist Party.

The academic staff was not pro-Communist, yet strongly anti-apartheid. So were the staffs of other English-speaking universities such as Cape Town and Natal. They were training the future leaders in education, business, the professions, etc. to be anti-apartheid.

An important factor occurred in the early 1950s when the theological faculty of the University of Stellenbosch, an Afrikaner University, turned against apartheid. Given the hold the Dutch Reformed Church had on Afrikaners, this was a major factor.

The point is - students attend university in order to learn. Their minds are not yet set, but are open. I suggest that this is where we can find converts to Georgism.

In the current list of Progressive Forum Founder members there are seven actually or closely connected with economics. I suggest that we ask each to promote an essay competition in their institution, offering a prize of £50 (or £30 and £20 for 2nd prize) at a cost of £5 per essay (to cover the cost of the prize). The essay could be on a subject such as "Henry George shared an idea for taxation with Adam Smith and the Physiocrats: what was it, and what did he do to propagate it?" or perhaps better, "Henry George's proposed tax became popular in Britain but never became law. Why not?" Doubtless others can think of better subjects for the essay.

Please propose them.

There should not be so many essays as to impose a strain on each academic leader who, I suggest, should mark the essays and award the prize money in any institution.

As regards other universities/colleges, I suggest that heads of the relevant faculties be approached, one at a time, essays being returned to the HGF where someone could judge and award prizes. This would avoid a mass of work to be judged at one time. Each entry form should contain an invitation to join the HGF.

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JOHN HATHERLEY wrote this Letter to the Editor a few days before his death on November 13. His own words are the best tribute we could publish to celebrate his life-long dedication to the pursuit of justice.

Who's the criminal?

Sir, "Abuse by Taxation" highlighted the unfairness of income tax (L&L, Autumn 99, p.4). A measure of the lengths to which collectors of income tax need to go can be seen in the regulations which require tax payers to disclose information

In criminal law it is a fundamental tenet that an accused person is innocent until proven guilty. A murderer is allowed the right of silence and if there is no evidence it is impossible for guilt to be proven. The onus is on the prosecution to prove guilt. The taxpayer, however, is presumed guilty and is required to prove innocence. Silence or the lack of evidence are no defence against accusation.

There are many, mostly economic, reasons for seeking a better way to fund public services but even if there were none, surely the infringement of basic human rights should provide sufficient motivation?

More than 100 years ago Henry George said "to confiscate what a man has legitimately earned is robbery, even if it is called income tax and is levied in the name of the state". That is still true today. Who are the true criminals, those who seek to collect income tax or those who avoid paying it? How can anyone try to justify a system of taxation which requires suspension of the European Code of Human Rights?

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Goal of Georgists?

Sir, I read with interest the latest issue of L&L, and that makes me ask a question. On page 5 you present a table about the Pennsylvania Property Tax Shift. I am now interested to learn from which values those percentages (e.g. Land tax of Washington 19.1%) are calculated. The main alternatives are: 1) Market value, 2) Assessed value, or 3) Annual yield. Maybe there exists still more?

If those land taxes are calculated from market value or some assessed value near to it, then those biggest percentages seem to be confiscatory, which cannot be the goal of Georgists, I suppose.

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