

International Union: Three Years as an NGO

by Pat Aller

The International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade has been an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) at the United Nations since January, 1993, when Pat Aller and Alanna Hartzok were appointed as representatives by Richard Noyes, IU President then.

What have these three and a half years meant to the IU? The organization has become known at UN headquarters, with Hartzok and Aller speaking, writing, and distributing material about economic justice; attending weekly briefings and other meetings; taking part in preparatory conference sessions; cooperating



Alanna Hartzok and Pat Aller

with other NGOs in editing documents for world officials to debate later; attending two UN world conferences — Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995 (Aller) and Habitat II, Istanbul, 1996 (Hartzok); and working with follow-up commissions of three world conferences — Social Development, Environment, (Rio, 1992) and Women (Beijing, 1995).

IU is now a member of the NGO Committee on Community and Shelter, the group at UN headquarters most involved with land issues. Aller also joined the Women, Homes and Community Super Coalition and was asked to write a guide for NGOs on activities at the Habitat II official and NGO conferences, including Super Coalition goals and background. Hartzok (now main representative after Aller stepped down to alternate) interacts with NGO and UN officials both personally and by computer. In Istanbul, financed by the IU and other Georgist groups, she held six workshops and seminars, staffed an information booth and distributed materials with six other Georgists, and attended other NGO meetings. Danish Georgists Svend Dinsen, Jorn Jensen (assessor), and Winnie and Fred Christensen also represented the IU at the booth and meetings. A slide show on LVT, by Georgists Mary Rose Kaczorowski (Common Ground USA) and Judith Vidaver (Sierra Club), was an ongoing display in the IU booth. Hartzok has also spoken at NGO and other meetings in the United States, including some attended by

UN delegates or agency heads. She is scheduled to speak at the annual NGO conference at the UN in September, attended by all major UN officials.

Habitat II was Dinsen's second UN conference. Along with Aller, he, and fellow Danes Per Moller Andersen, Axel Bjork, and Ole Lefmann took part in the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, February, 1995. The Danes rented a booth, displayed and sold many publications, and held three lectures, one by Ron Banks, English IU speaker. The Danish Justice Party, advocating Georgist economics, staffed a table.

An exciting result of IU membership in the UN is the recommendation in the Habitat II Agenda (principles and global plan of action) to consider land value taxation as a way to increase housing, at lower cost, by recapturing for the community the rise in land values it has created

and simultaneously curbing land speculation. Although IU cannot claim full credit (a similar proposal was made at Habitat I in 1976), Georgists have distributed thousands of pieces of literature to UN delegates and NGO representatives since the IU became an NGO. Aller has been unable to learn which nation(s) made the proposal, but a Turkish delegate told her he thought it was due to Georgist literature. At the February meeting which preceded the Istanbul conference, Aller wrote two news releases, which she and Hartzok handed to del-

legates (speaking Spanish or French, where necessary), urging them to retain the recapture of land value gains in the Habitat II document. Although the term "land value taxation," which Aller was able to get into NGO proposals at Istanbul, was voted down, the substance remains in the document.

The year 1996 was named (rather ambitiously) by the UN as the "International Year for the Eradication of Poverty." As part of that effort, the UN published the following sobering facts:

- ◇ Over one billion of the world's people... subsist on less than \$1 a day each.
- ◇ The top 20 per cent of the world's population receives 83% of global income.
- ◇ Developing countries increased per capita food production during the 1980s by 18%.
- ◇ Eight hundred million people, 200 million of them children, are chronically undernourished and at risk from unsafe water.
- ◇ Income disparities between the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent of the world's population have doubled between 1960 and 1991.



Networking with representatives from more than 1500 other NGOs, as well as many others who attend UN meetings and conferences, is a major benefit of UN affiliation. Alliances can be made with groups also working for economic justice, poverty alleviation, environment, affordable housing, human rights, indigenous peoples, women, and others. During the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, March 1996, Aller arranged indoctrination for those who had attended the Beijing world conference on women but were not formal NGOs and needed to know more about non-summit meetings. NGO representatives who learn about land value taxation are often impressed with its economic logic and feasibility.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UN, the Henry George School arranged a program addressed by several NGOs, including an officer of the United Nations Association of the United States, an activist in UN reform movements, and an architect member of the NGO Committee on Community and Shelter.

Getting an ear, of course, is just a first step. Another advantage to being an NGO is learning what other groups are doing, how, and where. Hartzok and Aller have databases, as well as files of materials and publications, for hundreds of NGOs. Hartzok, who has worked with UN groups for more than a decade, spends much time following up and reinforcing support worldwide, while Aller focuses on New York contacts. Now that the UN has endorsed land value taxation, Hartzok and Aller will collaborate in persuading other NGOs of LVT's benefits.

Aller also works with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), whose US co-chair is former Congresswoman Bella Abzug. Guided by Abzug and other women leaders worldwide, the Women's Caucus formed at each summit, starting at Rio, has strengthened all NGOs in their demands for better human and environmental conditions. This caucus has trained NGOs to lobby more effectively, helping them to sharpen their analysis of documents which official delegates will later debate, strengthening NGO positions with one unified paper representing many of them, and outlining expectations and strategy for each conference day's official sessions. As a result, the UN has expanded NGO participation at conferences, allowing a few oral NGO statements and even opening some previously closed sessions to them.

For more than a decade, some NGOs have urged a Peoples Assembly, parallel to the General Assembly, meeting when it does, but addressing issues from a grassroots rather than bureaucratic level. With the NGO advances cited above, such a possibility is closer. Every UN

agency head has praised NGOS, for their work in the field (especially as UN budgets are cut) and at conferences, stating that they are increasingly essential to a peaceful world.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, speaking at the 1995 NGO conference in New York, said, "I want you to consider this your home. Until recently, these words might have caused astonishment. The United Nations was considered to be a forum for sovereign states alone. Within the space of a few short years, this attitude has changed. Non-governmental organizations are now considered full participants in international life."

The IU has joined the UN at a time when people the world over, after debating in conference after conference, are face to face with the issues of progress and poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor. Habitat II makes inequitable land tenure a paramount issue of the 21st century, and introduces a remedy, ready for the nations of the world to adopt. With its amplified voice as an NGO, the Georgist movement can broadcast to the world that the wedge driving rich and poor apart is abuse of access to land and that the remedy is right under our feet. Georgists must be ready with timely materials, good speakers, and NGO representation.



There was a time when "Henry George" was enough of a household name that it was used to sell cigars. The late Earl Hanson sent this photo to Susan Klingelhofer in 1994, along with this tale: "Dorothy and I were returning from Grand Junction, Colorado, on Monday and left highway I-70 to go through Richfield, Utah for lunch when we saw, not only the sign on the side of a building advertising the Henry George cigar, but a painter in the process of restoring the sign. The townspeople are apparently anxious to have the sign restored because of the history it brings back." Earl promptly sent a copy of *Progress and Poverty* to the editor of the *Richfield Reaper*, in which this photo appeared.