

## Memorandum on the Henry George School

by Robert Clancy

*Bob Clancy founded the Henry George Institute in 1971. This memorandum was written in February 1972 following his dismissal as Director of the Henry George School in New York.*

The following is a personal account of some of my experiences with the Henry George School. It is prompted by my long association with the School, my sudden dismissal as Director in July 1968, and the bewilderment of many over the situation. I feel I am far enough from these events to be fairly objective about them (although I realize this is being presented from my own point of view). Also, I wish to state that, although I am critical about some things, this is not to be construed as personal, but rather as lessons to be learned for the future of the Georgist movement.

I was associated with the Henry George School of Social Science almost from its founding early in 1932. I studied under the founder, Oscar H. Geiger, learned the philosophy of Henry George from him, and shared his enthusiasm for the educational work of the School. Soon after Geiger's death in 1934 I began working for the School, organized its library, later taught classes. I also worked for a while for the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and the Georgist periodical Land and Freedom. After a stint in the Army during World War II, I was offered a job at the School in December 1945 as Office Manager. (By that time the School in New York was already located at 50 East 69th Street.)



50 East 69th Street today

At that time Margaret Bateman was Director of the School. She resigned some six months later and I found myself *de facto* in charge of the School. After a while I was given the title Acting Director, then Executive Director and finally, Director. This last was prompted by John C. Lincoln, the School's President and largest contributor, and the Board of Trustees accepted his judgment.

Mr. Lincoln had been contributing to the School as an individual. However, because of various upsets at the School (about which he would receive complaints from different factions) he decided to form a foundation through which his contributions would be channeled. He thereupon started the Lincoln Foundation in 1946.

Mr. Lincoln seemed rather satisfied with my administration of the School. He commented that this was the first time he had not been receiving a stream of complaints. He invited me to serve on his Board of Directors. Later, Mr. Lincoln engaged Raymond Moley as adviser. One of the first things Mr. Moley did was to get me off the Lincoln Board on the grounds that the School, and therefore, I was benefiting from Foundation contributions.

In 1954 Mr. Lincoln engaged a Professor of Education, Samuel Burkhard, to make a survey of the School. Prof. Burkhard spent several months at the School, attended classes, looked into records, visited extensions, and rendered an extensive and favorable report on the School to the Foundation. This was rejected by Mr. Moley on the grounds that a Professor of Education was not qualified to survey a school of economics.

When John Lincoln died in 1959, Mr. Moley's influence increased. John's son David became President of the Lincoln Foundation and wanted to do a conscientious job, but he relied heavily on Mr. Moley. The Foundation Board began to be filled up with Mr. Moley's choices, and through his initiative, a "Lincoln School" was begun at Claremont College in California.

Later, Prof. Arch Woodruff came on the Board of the Foundation. He was connected with the University of Hartford and before long there was a "Lincoln Institute" there. Later Prof. Woodruff became head of this University. He was also instrumental in getting a "school for land reform" started on Taiwan, where large estates have been split up into small holdings (a reform that is explicitly criticized by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty*).

Prof. Woodruff and two other members of the Lincoln Board, Lowell Harriss (of Columbia University) and Douglas Eldridge (of the National Bureau of Economic Research) were appointed by the Foundation as a special academic committee to look into the Henry George School. I looked forward to their consultation, as a closer

connection with the academic world had long been one of our aims. Such connections were evolving from our various contacts — professor friends (many of them former Henry George School graduates), speaking engagements we had with various colleges, papers and theses written by college students, etc.

After a long delay, Prof. Woodruff and Mr. Eldridge visited the School in the Spring of 1966, with a small panel of our people. They spent about an hour with us and it was soon evident that they were not trying either to learn about the School or to help it, but to discredit it. They asked such questions as, “Why do you bother having a Henry George School?” and “What qualifications do your teachers have to teach economics?”

This session was followed about a week later by a 10-minute visit from Prof. Harriss, a completely non-committal encounter. The committee rendered an unfavorable report on the School to the Foundation. Soon afterwards David Lincoln sent a brisk letter to Arnold Weinstein (Secretary of the School’s Board of Trustees) about the matter. He acknowledged it and I offered to answer it further at some length, which I did in a letter to David Lincoln. In it I justified the work of the School, the program of teaching the full Georgist philosophy, and I pointed to the influence our educational work was having. I read this letter to Mr. Weinstein and he approved. I received a fairly friendly and conciliatory reply from David. (I sent copies of my letter to all School trustees and all Foundation directors, but heard from no one else.)

In the Fall of 1966, the School trustees started to hold meetings without me. These were prompted by one of the trustees, E. C. Harwood (the most domineering member of the Board) who called them “executive sessions.” The Board held its meetings with me present as usual, then at a certain point Mr. Harwood (or “Colonel” Harwood) would announce that the “executive session” should now take place and this meant I was supposed to leave the room.

I had known Arnold Weinstein a long time and was in frequent touch with him about affairs of the School. But between the Spring of 1966 when he agreed with me, and the Fall of 1966 when these sessions started, his attitude changed, and he lost his candor with me from then on. I began to feel a plot building up.

This development weighed heavily on me but I tried to carry on the work of the School as well as I could. Classes, correspondence courses, international work, extensions, lectures, etc., kept going. Since “academic upgrading” was in the wind, in the Spring of 1968, with the consent of the trustees (given reluctantly, as they had by now proceeded far with other plans), I engaged Prof. Norma Mewmark whom I knew

from the New York Adult Education Council, for a 3-month period. Many useful contacts with economics departments of various colleges were built up in this short period, showing signs of opening new fields for us. Other interesting developments were taking place, such as the approval of our correspondence courses by the US State Department for their overseas personnel.

However, the trustees had already moved too far in another direction. Mysterious trips around the country were being taken by Arnold Weinstein, the purpose and nature of which were not confided to me, although previously all this had been left mostly to me.

By June of 1968 the atmosphere was getting thick. I had the feeling I was being hit at in the dark. The trustees were evidently trying to provoke me into resigning. (I still do not know why they did not explain to me what changes they were contemplating and why they rather chose this secretive method.) After a series of petty harassments, I told Mr. Weinstein, "If you are trying to get rid of me, you'll have to fire me, I won't quit."

The School's annual conference that year was held in Miami in July. On that occasion Mr. Weinstein steered clear of me and hustled around getting extension directors into corners for private conversations. Then at the conference banquet it was announced that Arnold Weinstein was now President of the School. I had not been officially informed of this in advance.

On the way back to New York I realized that things had gone too far and I resolved to get on better terms with the Board. It was too late.

At a Board meeting on July 11, a few days after the Miami conference, the trustees informed that me that I was to be placed on a two-year sabbatical leave effective immediately. No explanation was given. None of my questions were answered and they refused to discuss the matter with me. They simply said that they decided it was "best for the School" and told me the Director serves "at the pleasure of the Board." They refused to reconsider their decision. There was a strong inference I was through with the School but it was not stated. (I asked: "At least tell me why you will not explain anything to me," and was told, "Because you would have an answer for everything.")

Staff and extension directors were taken aback at the news. It was a well-guarded secret, executed more like a coup-d'etat than a businesslike decision. People seemed too stunned even to ask questions. Some friends accepted that it was indeed a

sabbatical and that I would return after two years. But an atmosphere was quickly created in which Robert Clancy never existed — or if he did exist he was no longer to be mentioned. All this was done rather vaguely but effectively. Nobody was informed of what was going on, except for general statements about “upgrading” the School.

Thereafter most of the program of the School that had taken so many years to build up was dismantled bit by bit or allowed to perish from neglect. A few recognizable things remained and some School people still came around, although more and more dropped off, feeling out of place and unwelcome. Eventually, correspondence courses were entirely discontinued, as well as foreign language programs, most extensions were closed, and activities such as neighborhood classes, Speakers Bureau, annual dinners, annual reports, members’ activities, etc., were dropped, and the *Henry George News* became a shadow of its former self. (However, fund appeals were still sent to Georgists.) Most of the staff were dismissed and a new cast of characters came in, most of them knowing little or nothing of the Georgist philosophy or of the background of the School. The emphasis was to be “academic” with something about “urban renewal” including “a little more land value taxation” rather than the full Georgist philosophy. It seemed as though almost anything and anybody that had a “Ph.D.” label were latched onto.

Meanwhile, during my sabbatical, I maintained contact with the Georgist movement, chiefly via the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade whose Newsletter I edited (also writing for ). Contact with the School was minimal and discouraged, and I was removed from its mailing list. I also prepared and issued, during this period, a draft of a manual, “The Application of Land Value Taxation.” At the end of my sabbatical, I secured a (non-Georgist) job and devoted spare time to Georgist work. Gathering together with some colleagues who shared my views we took steps to form a new organization that would continue and develop a straight Georgist program. We started the Henry George Institute to this end.

The Henry George School made a great contribution in developing Georgist education. But there are certain weaknesses and omissions in the School setup which should be corrected in further Georgist efforts. Among them are:

A self-perpetuating Board of Trustees: This enabled a small group of people who knew little of the workings of the School to have absolute power forever over the School. The Georgist movement should not be run thus but needs a more democratic structure.

No protection against subversion: This is in effect what happened when the trustees depended too much on one source of funds, the Lincoln foundation, and capitulated to them when pressured.

Emphasis on the wrong things: Instead of devoting attention to the main purpose for which the School was founded, emphasis was placed by the Board on money and prestige. This has resulted in the School becoming a second-rate academic showcase instead of a first-rate center of the Georgist movement.

Little follow-up on educational work: This has been a long-standing problem which the School — being a school — never got around to really handling. A continuing program of action is needed.

Many of these weaknesses existed from the founding of the School. I repeat this is not a personal criticism of the Henry George School trustees who are by and large sincere and capable persons. Indeed, though I revere the founder of the School, Oscar Geiger, I recognize that new efforts will have to avoid the built-in flaws and oversights of the School's structure. Further, they are flaws which are rather common in many public service organizations.

I also wish to reiterate that, although critical, I am not “bitter” or “resentful” as some assume — perhaps because that is the reaction to be expected. I very early resolved not to be so. I do not feel committed to a particular building or organization but rather to an idea — the Georgist philosophy — and I want to work for it to the best of my ability.

I feel that the job ahead is to rebuild the Georgist movement on a firmer foundation so that the philosophy of Henry George can make greater progress.