

The Georgist Journal

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COMMENT - WORKING FOR THE GEORGIST PHILOSOPHY

I felt my ideas on Georgist "education and patience" and "the long-term view" challenged recently by two interesting visits to New York - one from Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Shaw of Calgary, Canada, and one from Graham Hart of Perth, Australia.

The Shaws asked how and when I expected the single tax to come about just by waiting for some dim future. And Mr. Hart said he noticed a "martyr complex" developing amongst Georgists who felt that practical prospects have slipped away and the only thing to do was suffer and wait.

I admit the plausibility of these criticisms and I realize it is possible to fall into such an attitude. (See Mary Hutchinson's advice to find the balance between unreal optimism and despair, in the Spring 1978 GJ.)

The fact remains that we have found it difficult to "put it across." Proposition 13 did arouse taxpayers. It has an immediate gut appeal - "pay less in taxes to the wasteful politicians." Then we come and say, a distinction must be made between taxes on land and taxes on improvements - but people's eyes glaze over at that; it sounds too uncomfortably factious and subtle, as simple as it seems to us.

We speak loudly - we speak softly - we make impressive research reports - we quote authorities - we propose to one another a thousand alternative approaches and phrases - we even get an occasional Georgist in public office... and with all that, nothing seems to happen.

It isn't quite as bad as that. There are people who listen; influential persons are talking about LVT, perhaps more than formerly; converts are made; and occasionally a community is willing to study making a small step in our direction.

But we want a lot more than that. We want the Georgist philosophy to catch on - and this is what I think will take time. We are not likely to get our reform adopted widely until people change their attitude toward property in land. Nowadays most cannot see any alternative to absolute private property in land on the one hand, and absolute state ownership and control on the other. To get our third alternative accepted is much to ask. But it can come about through persistent education plus persistent bad experiences with currently entrenched privileges and opinions - plus perhaps events and opportunities we may not even guess about today.

This would be my justification for a long-range approach.

- R.C.