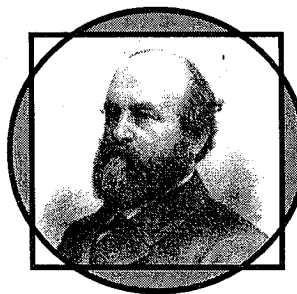


# The Georgist Journal



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## Comment: Magic Words

*by Lindy Davies*

**A** number of Georgists in this issue make some rather passionate claims about how we communicate our message. There is a right and a wrong way to present the rent thesis, they contend — and the failure to avoid a particular off-putting characterization is the main reason for our lack of influence. Could it really all come down to a matter of wording? Perhaps. The debate is joined, in any case, on page 5.

Georgists have been pre-occupied with this rhetorical question for a very long time. But it may be unanswerable. Is there any one best way of presenting Henry George's insights? Certainly there is universality in George's grounding in natural law and universally observable relationships. His logic is inescapable; his remedy is applicable to virtually every social problem that exists. One must simply start with the basic economic definitions of land, labor and capital. Clear logic will carry through to the Georgist remedy and the law of human progress — in any language, at any time, from any side of the political field.

But our listeners, alas, are not always able or willing to apply clear logic to such basic questions of ownership and livelihood. How frustrating! We Georgists offer sound, consistent explanations, and we wonder why people are unmoved by what we say.

I think that one big reason for this is that we tend to make an assumption that seems preposterous to our audience. We postulate that clear statements can be made, and definite conclusions drawn, out of the dismalness that people vaguely call "economics".

For example: Georgists take for granted that a relationship exists between one's labor and one's wages — Georgists believe, in

other words, in the producer's right to what he or she produces. That argument seems so basic and self-evident; we tend to forget that it is utterly foreign to most people's experience. No, today's most widely-held economic model is that of the casino: Pure Luck, and Getting Yours. People work hard for years, but cannot manage to build up a nest egg — it's all taxed away, and their only chance for "savings" is the gamble that the lot under their house will appreciate in value! Others get richer and richer without lifting a finger. So everybody plays the lottery. Is it any wonder that an epidemic of gambling is sweeping the US just now?

The notion that there is a "natural" source of public revenue seems quaint to people who must deal with the complexity and arbitrariness of modern tax systems. Things are Just Not That Simple. The experts roll their eyes at endearing notions like clarity and consistency. The political and academic establishments share a vested interest in promoting impenetrability in the study of political economy.

Georgists, on the other hand, promote clarity and accessibility! So if there is any "magic word" — any surefire way for us to become more persuasive — I think it must be by offering people empowerment.

We need to give people something that they actually want. One thing they certainly **don't** want is another pipe dream or get-rich-quick scheme; they've got lotteries and racetracks for that. However, many people want a property tax system that won't drive business away. We can offer that! And another thing that lots of people want — perhaps without even realizing it — is a way to cut through all the fog and obfuscation surrounding "the science of how people make a living."

It's a mistake to think that Most People Out There are apathetic. One thing they surely are, though, is busy. Who has time to decipher what passes for economic news — news that never addresses the questions people really want answered? Who even knows where to go, or who to ask, about unemployment and wages, foreign competition, regulations, or tax policy? Yet these are things that affect everyone — and that fact engenders great uneasiness. Folks are told to leave economic policy to the experts, but who can tell us which experts to trust?

And it is exactly this need that Georgist educators are avid — and able — to fill. A recent classified ad for the HGI's correspondence course proclaims, "You CAN understand economics!"

That's the first — and, I submit, the most challenging — bit of persuading that Georgists need to do. **GJ**