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What Must Be Done? (*A letter to my colleagues*) by Lindy Davies

I sometimes think of the early Christians — the really early Christians, now, perhaps one hundred years into the Christian movement. They, too, had an unshakable truth to give to the world. I am not, really, speaking theologically here — for secular history has shown that the Christian message had formidable strength. The early Christians started out with nothing but their determination to proclaim the truth, and their influence came to encompass the entire world in glorious and disastrous ways.

Many Georgists have become demoralized, feeling that the truth they have to offer has not been heard or accepted. But I don't think that is what happened. The *Georgist Remedy* has not been utilized — not very much, anyway — and the Georgist economic analysis has been stuffed, unrefuted, into a dark closet by the academic establishment. But the truth that George endeavored to make clear has been most spectacularly confirmed: by the history of every great fortune, by the clear link of land values with the financial industry, by the ubiquitousness of urban sprawl, by the depressing familiarity of the boom/bust cycle. No other interpretation has yet been advanced that more fully makes sense of all these phenomena than that of *Progress and Poverty*. The truth of George's analysis has been heard and accepted by today's agribusiness, pharmaceutical and all other multinational concerns. They have strategized, with great success, to keep for themselves the rapid increase of rent created by the economies of globalization. That hardly denies George's analysis — it resoundingly confirms it. We should remember that the evil forces powered by the Christian message have also, up to now, far outperformed the good ones.

Demoralization is understandable, but it is also insidious. It can lead us to make severe tactical errors. It can create a sense of desperation, a

feeling that we must do something! Now! Before it's too late! It seems to me that we must, if we are to sensibly respond to the challenges we face, resolve to examine our progress and our tactics over the long term. Look at our numbers, look at the utter firmness with which opposing views are entrenched in politics, academia and the media. We can make progress — and month by month, we do make progress. But the buyer of a lotto ticket cannot *expect* to make millions, and we cannot *expect* to change history all in one go.

We must avoid desperate moves. If we are frustrated that we have not, as yet, achieved the level of influence that could sustain a mass-circulation monthly magazine, will it avail us to spend a large portion of our resources creating one? If we are disheartened because our scholars don't get invited to speak in the finest symposia, should we spend tens of thousands inviting other scholars to deliver their messages to us? If the people who now do the work of our movement for little pay, or as volunteers, have not yet changed history, will a staff of expensively credentialed professionals succeed in changing it? If the movers and shakers won't listen to our message, should we tell them something they want to hear?

Such moves smack of desperation. They are all ways of squandering the salary we have earned, through years of careful work, on a pile of tickets for the ten mil jackpot.

There are two initiatives undertaken by georgists that have long-standing records of gradual progress. I submit that these two activities, together, form the basis of the georgist movement, and that, at our current level of obscurity, our movement's success utterly depends on them. I would even go so far as to recommend that we undertake no other initiatives, unless these two programs are pursued with the utmost vigor. They are:

- 1) Popular education in the fundamental principles of political economy, offered in the most accessible way to the widest possible audience, and

- 2) Activism in support of gradual implementation of the georgist remedy, at any and all levels that are feasible.

Let me be clear: I am not saying that books should not be published, academic research should not be done or coalitions should not be forged. All such activities are beneficial and, indeed, must be done at some point. But unless they have a base, they cannot be supported. Popular education finds new georgists, enlarging our movement. Activism gives those newly-educated georgists a tangible policy to work for, and supplies us with real data. Without those fundamentals on which to build, all those higher-level movement functions become mere chimera. (continued on page 30)

Letter to my Colleagues...

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Unfortunately, both of these foundations of georgist activism have come in for the sharpest criticism, in recent years, from many of our colleagues. The reason for this seems to be impatience with their incremental, long-term nature. By the time one has taught the Law of Rent 417 times, or presented the two-rate formulas to the 417th City Official, brilliant truths can begin to lose their shine, and there seems to be little worth saying about them at annual conferences. What then? Do we switch to a sexier message? No! If we're smart, we bring in this year's crop of well-trained rookies to keep the energy going! We need a strong bench! We need depth! Which is in itself a part of a long-term strategy — when one generation tires, another must be ready to build on what has been done.

Probably the biggest single blunder in the history of our movement was when the Henry George School turned its back, around 1970, on its thriving adult-education program, in search of some form of higher-profile, "academic" influence. Decades of work were squandered. Later, Georgists saw the void where the school's program had been, and began to think that popular education could no longer work. In fact, it had been working exceedingly well. It only withered when it was denied any nourishment whatever — and the school achieved very little success, until it returned to a popular education strategy in 1990. The school's withdrawal from its traditional role as provider of georgist education at the grassroots level severely weakened our movement; the effects are still being felt.

One might think that, having such quality material to work with, we might proffer it with more verve, more gusto, than, lately, we do.

Similarly, if we were to pull the rug out from under two-rate efforts, as some prominent georgists have been calling for recently, our movement would lose its most recognizable and accessible *thing to do*. Certainly two-rate isn't the only thing to do (and a pox on those who say that it is!), but it is a worthy activity with a track record of success that can be built upon. When the reform goes far enough to achieve visible results — as it certainly did in Harrisburg, for example — its value is great.

Critics of the two-rate program assert that revenue-neutral property tax reform is so timid a first step that it is not really worth taking. Some argue that it benefits land speculators. And it is true that in some circumstances, a two-rate shift can, by inducing a surge in construction, lead to greater profits for land speculators in the future. However, that would not be the fault of the tax shifters; it would simply show the need for careful follow-up. Just as tax reform can gradually collect more rent, sloppy assessments can gradually return more rent to the pockets of landowners. Had

we more studies, more personnel analyzing the effects of the LVT shift, we could more effectively consolidate the progress made and move forward. There is ample work for each new class of people educated by our teams of georgist educators!

Unfortunately, there has not been anywhere near enough cooperation between our educators and our activists. Too much time has been wasted in pointless wrangling between two-raters and educators, each insisting that the other's program is utterly worthless. What nonsense! Others, thank goodness, support creativity where they find it in our movement, keep their eyes on the prize, and, egos in check, move the action forward.

That's not easy to do. There are many ways in which poor morale can hamper our efforts. If one has been teaching the same lesson, making the same pitch, for years with very little positive feedback, it is easy to fall into a sort of "autopilot mode". No one is listening anyway, so why work to improve one's presentations, techniques or materials? Here is an area where those pounding the drum for "professionalism" ought to be listened to. We should insist on competence, and we should unsentimentally monitor and evaluate our efforts. As much as possible without giving up the truth of our message, we should address people in terms that they can understand. One way to move toward this is to make it fun! If there are people who enjoy doing certain aspects of georgist outreach and demonstrate a flair for the tasks they do, why not let them do those tasks — and maybe even give them a few dollars for doing them?

On one hand, we have the power of the georgist message: eternal truths, of the utmost relevance; the only political-economic program that really has any long-term chance of delivering what it promises. One might think that, having such quality material to work with, we might proffer it with more verve, more gusto, than, lately, we do. If the early Christians had, after one century of work, spent their time wrangling over the control of what little kitty they had managed to collect, or debating about changing the name of their sect, where would they be today? GJ

Privatization...

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lives of Africans. Africa has entered into another millenium, lame and hopeless. African leaders talk about ten-year plans, but they don't mean it. They have absolutely no plans to change; the "privatization" process has placed them in charge in the first place.

The people must see that there is a moral basis of ownership, as George described — that natural law dictates what truly belongs to the community and what must belong to individuals. Today's brand of "privatization" flies in the face of natural laws and it is doomed to fail. GJ