

# Edinburgh 2001

Report by Ed Dodson

**O**n July 7 thru 14, 2001, at Edinburgh University, some sixty of our colleagues from the far-off corners of the globe came together to celebrate our survival as a unique community of people who share a vision of the just society. At the same time, a sadness was ever-present, a recognition of the great decline in membership over the last half century, of leaders no longer with us, and of so few younger people appearing to carry on the work. I, nevertheless, very much enjoyed this gathering and the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with people who have long carried the torch, so to speak.

Scotland was chosen as the location for this conference for a number of reasons, the most important of which is the current focus on land reform and the very real opportunity to influence the adoption of a land reform scheme consistent with the principles espoused by Scots who in the late 19th century found common cause with Henry George. Peter Gibb, Executive Director of Land Reform Scotland, brought together advocates of various proposals for a systematic discussion of Scottish political and economic challenges.

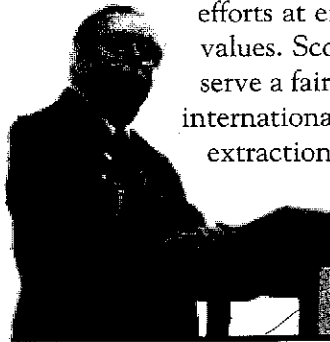


After arriving at Edinburgh's airport late Saturday morning, I purchased a bus ticket into Edinburgh and boarded the bus. Within a few seconds after taking a seat, I could not help but overhear a conversation underway between a man with a distinct Australian accent and a woman who sounded German. What were they discussing? The taxation of land values. I interrupted them to introduce myself and inquired whether they were headed for the International Union conference at Edinburgh University. This is how I met Neil Gilchrist, of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The object of Neil's attention was indeed a German woman (now living in Switzerland) who was to be a keynote speaker at another conference being held at the university, focused on the future of Europe. Their conversation continued along the same lines, with an occasional comment from me, until we reached the city and then together caught a taxi to the university. Our accommodations were not available to us until mid-afternoon, so the three of us found a quiet corner of the on-campus pub and continued to discuss philosophy, history, Nietzsche, and Henry George. An interesting beginning to the conference week, I thought.

The conference began late Sunday morning with a welcoming by Bob Andelson, President of the International Union. That afternoon Pat Aller (US) chaired an open-mike session, which generated discussion on a wide range of topics. I took the opportunity to encourage IU members to assist me in expanding the School of Cooperative Individualism project of creating a Biographical History of the Georgist Movement and was gratified with the positive response and willingness of a number of people to provide assistance.

Land Reform Scotland hosted the conference discussions on Monday (9 July), although the morning program focused on the situation in Russia. The keynote speaker for this first session was Dimitry Lvov, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who delivered a paper critical of the present privatization of the income flows from natural resources in Russia. He discussed his efforts (and those of others) to convince the government that public revenue should come from these income flows rather than from taxes on material assets and wages. Dr. Lvov stressed that the same challenges faced virtually all other countries and were not unique to Russia.

Then, presentations were addressed to the status of the land reform efforts in Scotland now that the people of Scotland have elected their own Parliament with the power to implement internal changes in law regarding land tenure and taxation. The great landowners of Scotland continue to be extremely powerful and have thus far successfully resisted efforts at either land redistribution or the taxation of land values. Scots are also deeply concerned about how to preserve a fair share of the sea's resources under European and international agreements that have permitted the sale of extraction licenses to owners of large fishing fleets under rules that have decimated the stock of many species of fish. Tuesday's program was devoted in large part to this discussion.

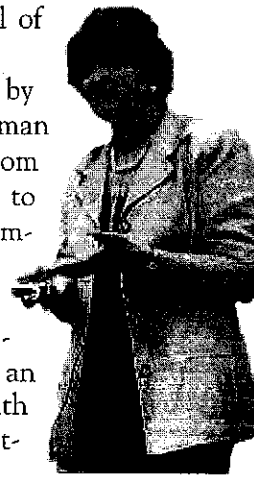


*Robert Andelson*

On Wednesday, most attendees signed on for a bus tour of Scotland with stops at a number of sites of historical and cultural importance. I took the opportunity to sleep in that morning, catch up on my reading, then go for a long run around the ancient volcano that is the area's most distinctive landmark. Rain fell all morning; then, in mid-afternoon, the sun appeared and warmed the air just enough to make my run a real joy. Such days are all too rare. That evening, after the conference attendees returned from their tour and had dinner, Bob Andelson delivered a very motivational and inspiring talk on Seeing the Cat. This I recorded and, as soon as I can have it transcribed, will make the text and

the discussion that followed available at the School of Cooperative Individualism website.

Thursday's sessions began with a presentation by Timothy Glazier (England) on how, in his view, human civilizations have fallen victim to the transition from community control over land and natural resources to that of individual ownership. Science provides the important insight that this may have a good deal to do with the difference between how men and women think generally and which sides of our brains are dominant. Fred Harrison later introduced Euan MacKie, an archeologist who has linked the physical evidence with an hypothesis that late Neolithic communities in Britain were cooperatively organized.



*Tatiana Roskoshnaya*

We heard from Karl Williams (Australia) regarding the struggles by indigenous peoples around the world to re-establish their sovereignty and obtain exclusive control over territory and natural resources. As Karl's presentation and the ensuing discussion confirmed, the remedies sought for past oppressions are seldom consistent with the moral principle that the earth is the birthright of all persons equally. We seem to be locked into the acknowledgement of limited claims to territory based on the right of first occupancy, or at least on some limited return of control over territory to those who controlled it prior to the arrival of European conquerors and settlers. One of the more difficult points of discussion is whether the survival of cultures not adapted to the modern era is important from a human rights perspective. Nic Tideman (US) added his own views on the subject with a paper titled, "Aboriginal Rights and Global Economic Justice".

The members of the International Union met on Thursday evening to consider changes to the organization's Declaration of Human Rights based on Equal Freedom first adopted in 1949 and amended several times over the years. Most of the changes adopted were for purposes of clarification, as well as modernization of language (*see page 40*).

Friday's program began with a presentation by Tatiana Roskoshnaya, who has since the beginning of the 1990s worked diligently to promote the adoption of reforms that would put Russia at the head of nations capturing land values as public revenue. Tatiana (Tanya to her friends) provided a thorough overview of the political situation and efforts to build support for the rent as revenue alternative. In the second morning session, the discussion shifted to a very pragmatic subject: demonstrating the connection between a thorough understanding of land markets and profitable investing. Phil Anderson (Australia) is principal of Economic Indicator

Services, and he has turned his study of the business cycle (including the 18-year property cycle described by Fred Harrison in his book *The Power in the Land*), market timing techniques developed by Wall Street analyst W.D. Gann and the economic studies of Russian economist Nikoali Kondratieff. Phil's presentation provoked a good deal of discussion and a strong challenge, from Karl Williams, over the validity of Phil's insights. I made the comment that in today's global investment market the number of variables that can affect the depth and duration of market disequilibriums have been reduced (e.g., the actions of the central banks are less and less able to influence the direction of domestic economies because of countermeasures taken by market participants).

The afternoon session on Friday focused on the money question. Alistar McConnachie (Scotland), editor of the monthly reform journal *Prosperity*, made the case for direct government issuance of legal tender, removing the central banks as intermediaries that issue legal tender in exchange for government bonds. The upside of this proposal is that governments avoid the challenge of having to raise taxes or borrow for the purpose of servicing a national debt. The fear, of course, is that history will repeat and repeat, meaning that governments will demonstrate their propensity to issue ever more currency in order to transfer purchasing power from savers to themselves.

My turn came next. The paper I prepared for the conference was titled "Promises to Pay Nothing in Particular: Monetary Diseases and a Proposal for their Cure" and proposes the chartering of banks of deposit that would (as did the Bank of Amsterdam in the 17th century) provide a real money supply — in the form of baskets of precious metals or other commodities, or even banks that would issue paper currency denominated in units of labor (most appropriate for small communities). Later, Fred Foldvary (US), a professor of economics at Santa Clara University in California, commented on the two earlier presentations and offered his own solution to the money question, advocating a return to free banking. Fred and I strongly agreed that the existing system represented an unwarranted governmental intervention in what are essentially private arrangements.

[At] the General Meeting of the International Georgist Union (as it is known 'for short!'), the words "Free Trade" came close to being dropped. An indicative vote on this showed a majority of 14 to 10 in favour of dropping the phrase that makes Georgists active in the Green Movement seem such pariahs. However this would not have been enough under the constitution to cause a formal name-change, even if that had been on the agenda — which it wasn't. What swung the vote for some was the realisation that Henry George himself admitted that Free Trade without *first* having Land Value Taxation was impossible, so that nobody need feel they are betraying his name by refusing to campaign actively for it in present global circumstances.

— Tony Vickers

The Constitution of the International Union specifies that officers shall be elected by members attending the conference. Bob Andelson announced that he would not be standing for re-election as IU President. Two dedicated IU members were nominated from the floor — Ole Lefmann (Denmark, now living in England) and Tatiana Roskoshnaya (Russia). Tatiana became the first woman and first Russian to be elected to serve as an IU President. Frank Peddle (Canada) was elected to serve as Deputy President. Their terms of office continue until the next IU conference (a date and venue for which have not yet been established).

One final issue was taken up by the members but without any final resolution. Members have reported over the last few years that the IU's position as an advocate of free trade is something of a negative when working with groups struggling to end monopoly in their countries and who see nothing to be gained and much to lose by opening domestic economies to the global system of commerce — dominated as it is by multinational corporations, institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. A proposal to change the name of the IU to the International Union for Land Value Taxation was discussed and a straw vote was taken to assess the level of support for a name change among those members in attendance. A majority supported the name change; however, a formal resolution was not submitted in advance for consideration. A vote on the matter will have to wait until the next meeting of members occurs.

The conference banquet took place Friday evening, with entertainment supplied by a Scottish piper and a group of dancers. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and then we wished each other well and prepared to depart the following morning.



*Barbara Sobrielo*

An important footnote to this conference is that the IU conferences have for many years been planned and the details handled by two volunteers, Jose Mernane (IU Treasurer) and Barbara Sobrielo (IU Secretary). These two dedicated Georgists advised the members that they could no longer handle these responsibilities as they have for so long. Age has caught up with them, they told us. The job of planning conferences needs to be picked up by younger IU members. So, the IU will be facing significant challenges in the coming years: an aging and declining membership, increasing costs associated with holding international conferences and the recruitment of new volunteers who are willing to take on the responsibilities of conference planning. (G)