

Georgists Missionaries to Cuba

by Dr. Kris Feder, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

According to my letter of invitation from Dr. Roberto Verrier Castro, Vice President of AEALC and President of ANEC, "The purpose of the Meeting is to promote discussions on current tendencies in World Economy in the context of Globalization, from the most diverse theoretical and analytical point of view, essential require-

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

ment in creating alternatives that contribute in solving existing problems. We are inviting to this International Meeting the most distinguished personalities in the whole world in the field of Economic Science, and 50 papers will be presented, including those from International Organizations." (sic.) While delegates were present from 51 countries, most participants were, not surprisingly, Latin American.

It seemed to me that there was less diversity of opinion expressed than the rhetoric of Roberto Castro (and of Fidel Castro as well) suggests. Michael Hudson and Ted Gwartney gave their talks on Tuesday, the second day of the conference, going together to the podium. Well! What a stir they created! Their talk stood out among the rest, for several reasons. Of course, as US citizens, they had first of all to prove that Cuba's mighty enemy did not commission us to infiltrate the conference. At this they succeeded, on account of both the content and style of their message. Their ideas plainly resonated with the audience. Their mood was upbeat and passionate, their arguments were clear and straightforward, and their credentials were evident to all.

Hudson's close knowledge of Latin American issues and of the writings of Cuban national hero Jose Marti (a follower of George), as well as his socialist roots, gave him terrific credibility. Gwartney's explanation of the remarkable initiative in Russia riveted everyone's attention, too. Listeners must have gotten the impression that RSF missionaries are experienced, activist, practical, and respected

in high places. And it must have been apparent that the Georgist philosophy is at cross-purposes with the Dominant Neoliberal Ideology.

Most importantly, while other speakers reiterated a dreary litany of complaints about the evils of "neoliberalism" and the painful consequences of globalization for the Third World, Gwartney and Hudson offered a concrete solution—one that addressed all the main dimensions of the crisis under the guidance of a single principle; one that could be implemented by national governments with or without the blessing of the international community.

It seemed to me that most listeners were able to follow the main arguments promoting land value taxation, particularly with reference to the problems of debt, dependency, and maldistribution that were the focus of the conference.

In a comment from the floor during the subsequent discussion period, Professor Molinas of Cuba said, "I highly assess this proposal," not only for Cuba (which is attempting to build socialism despite the economic blockade), but also for all Third World countries. He noted that Marti had admired Henry George and called him the most important social scientist. He mentioned the Physiocratic proposal to tax rent, and urged a study of how to implement it today. Molinas said that, though it is true that the market would play a fundamental role under a land tax system, the tax would be progressive, and we need not fear the market with the Georgist system.

Unfortunately, Fidel was not in attendance that day, distracted as he was by the Elian Gonzales mess.

After they spoke, Ted and Michael were deluged with requests for copies of their papers and other information about our ideas. They collected names and contact information from many interested economists and students. Ted gave out RSF business cards and website addresses.

Michael gave a television interview on Wednesday, with Ted present. It was fairly impromptu, and I missed it.

continued on page 6

March-April 2000, GroundSwell, Page 5

Georgists Missionaries to Cuba

continued from page 5

I was listening to the talks in the conference room and didn't realize what was happening out in the hall.

On Thursday, I observed an interview with Ted and Michael by reporters from the Cuban periodical "Bohemia—Magazine of the Cuban Family." We were assured that it is the Cuban equivalent of Time magazine, and that Fidel Castro is a regular reader.

Also on Thursday, we had a breakfast meeting with four economists who would like us to join an email discussion group, with the intention of convening an international meeting in Argentina to discuss our views. Our translator was Miguel J. Alfonso Martinez, Cuba's Minister of External Relations. He hopes to arrange a meeting for Michael and associates with Cuban officials. The most talkative member of the group, Dr. Orlando Caputo of Universidad Arcis, Chile, enjoyed a fascinating conversation with Hudson, who just happened to have had extensive experience with the Chilean economy. The two others were from Mexico and Chile, respectively. Hudson was also invited to come to the University of Havana to hold seminars with their professors and to relate our ideas.

Whether our message sinks deeper or is forgotten depends largely on how vigorously these opportunities are pursued.

AEALC officers Robert Verrier Castro and Esther Aguilera Morato had opened the conference. With Fidel in attendance, Robert Verrier Castro stated the intention to continue the work of the conference with an annual forum. He set a tone that was to be continued almost without interruption: World economic policy is at a dead end. Dollarization and all so-called "neoliberal" policies are tools for the annexation of developing countries by Western capitalist imperialists. The Elian Gonzales incident was a talking point for many participants.

Esther Aguilera Morato, Secretary General of AEALC and Director of Cuba's Economic Planning Institute, was next to address the conference (and moderator of the first session). She said that the goal of the conference was to identify trends in the world economy. It was Esther who, in July 1999, had invited Hudson, Gwartney, and Ramsey Clark to present their ideas at the January conference. Gwartney's report on that first trip to meet government leaders in Cuba says that Esther was "eager for us to describe how a land-charge system could serve to protect the nation's natural resources from being relinquished to foreigners."

During the conference, the evidence of oppression and maldistribution mounted high. Many speakers dwelled on the details of the economic situations faced historically and currently by their respective countries. There was a great deal of chest-pounding and anti-US rhetoric. Lofty goals for a better future were enumerated and elaborated.

There was less in the way of useful analysis. Still less in the way of practical policy recommendations. Most prescriptions were vague and referred to institutions and

policies over which a small Third World nation has little control: more democratic international financial institutions; internationally recognized minimum labor standards; regional cooperation and multilateralism; Latin American integration.

Here are some of the other ideas expressed by various conference speakers:

* The distribution of the world's resources and population is vastly unequal. There is a dual society: The privileged, and the excluded.

* Powerful, private industrial groups from Europe, Japan, and especially the US are seeking to dominate the world, aided by powerful information technology. They aim to plunder the natural resources of weaker nations. They are assisted by large banks that are recycling huge sums of money.