

EDITORIAL:

The centennial celebrations are over, at least the big ones in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New York. Each city lent its own distinction to the events, from the week-long festivities by the bay, to the historic sites in Philadelphia, to the excitement of a New York gala. Yet, in all their varied ways, the celebrations had much in common as well.

There was, alongside the festivity, a realistic appraisal of a world with little to celebrate. Many noted sadly that the century since publication of **Progress & Poverty** produced hardly any of the reforms George advocates. At the same time, the pervasive mood among Georgists everywhere was more hopeful than despairing. Perhaps that is simply a characteristic of followers of a positive and hopeful philosophy, rather than the tragic gloom that inspires so much radical despair. It could also be that there are genuine signs of greater receptivity to our ideas in the independent actions of individual citizens and groups as well as within the councils of the politically powerful.

Whatever the reason, it was clear that Georgists are ready to end their isolation, both from each other, and from everybody else. There was the desire, made explicit in the call for a unified organization, and a national headquarters: to find the broad common ground on which Georgists of different stripes might agree. There was a desire, implicit in the range of participants and their views, to reach out to the

wider world of thought and action, for amplification of our influence and relevance. We will no longer be content to talk to ourselves or listen to our own stars. We would also be happy to be identified with the author whose masterwork we celebrate. Call us Georgists, or as some would prefer, neo-Georgists, but we will not hide our views behind another banner.

It is on the basis of these strongly felt and fundamentally positive sentiments that we have determined to renew publications of our own organ under our own name. If the "Henry George News" has not been as distinguished a publication as we would like, we will try to make it so, but we won't change its name. The people and organizations who work with us desire and need this organ in which to report their activities, express their views, exchange information and news, and exercise all the vital functions of communication. There are significant developments at the local, state, national, and international levels, and we want to report on them. There are exciting personalities, both newcomers and veterans in our organizations, and we'd like you to meet them through our pages. There are new ideas as well as some old ones newly applied—ideas about how to get the message across in the classroom, in the media, in public policy areas, and in any other forum that counts.

The next hundred years begin now.

Philip Finkelstein

Anne G. Witte, Editor — **People and Taxes**
(Public Citizen's Tax Ref. Res. Group)

Anne Witte's disquisitions on Henry George and the land tax, on pages six and seven of the June issue, could have benefited from some of the insights of the imaginary professor she interviews on pages four and five of the same issue. The piece on Henry George raises almost every objection defenders of the status quo have traditionally raised. What a surprise it is to read these objections in an organ presumably devoted to tax reform.

First of all, Georgists do not view a world shaped entirely by taxes. Tax issues are only one small part of the George thesis. Nor, as you correctly note, is the "single tax" the issue for Georgists, although the strident call for taxes on all personal property often makes "People and Taxes" sound like single taxers of a different sort.

The fact is we now do have taxation of land values as a part of the property tax, but it is inadequate, inequitable,

and mostly stupid in its economic application and consequences. Land value taxers are not for "unbridled development"; in fact, good land taxation requires sound land use and would help reinforce it. Speculation goes hand in hand with undertaxation and poor land use. Of course, taxes alone will not solve problems of underdevelopment or environmental preservation, but sound tax policy can help us towards those goals while the current property tax works against them.

As for the problem of assessments, that is one strictly of the assessor's own making. Income is not a standard for land value, as the professor properly notes on the previous page: "There is no intrinsic cost of land — its price is set strictly by supply and demand". The problem with assessment is that most assessors simply don't bother with the current land markets in their jurisdictions. Finally you castigate the tax on land as failing to tax wealth, when only a page before the "professor" points out that "in absolute terms very wealthy individuals still control more real

estate wealth than less wealthy individuals. So to throw out the real estate tax is, as we put it, throwing out the baby with the bath water".

Will the real Anne Witte and the real tax reformers please stand up?

Sincerely,
Philip Finkelstein

Land Assessment: Key to a Better Property Tax

(excerpted from the keynote address delivered by Philip Finkelstein to the annual conference of the New York State Assessor's Association at Grosinger's Hotel, on Sept. 17th, 1979)

It would be a major advance in equity, economy, efficiency, and effective tax reform if we simply reversed the incidence of the property tax from its preponderant reliance on improvements to a tax that was based mostly on the value of the land itself.

The poor, and even the middle class, own very little valuable land. Most of

(cont'd on Page Eight)