

ANNUAL GEORGIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY - ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI - WED., JULY 17 - SUN., JULY 21, 1985

"The best Conference ever," said many. "But," said others, "that's only the way it should be, as we learn year by year." Be that as it may, the 1985 Conference, the fifth sponsored by the Council of Georgist Organizations, was a good, solid, interesting and enjoyable event. The host organization, Public Revenue Education Council, with Stanley Frederiksen and his colleagues, bent every effort to make it a memorable meeting, and it was. A special reason for having it in St. Louis was pending land value tax legislation in Missouri.

St. Louis is almost the geographical center of the U.S., and over 100 conferees were attracted from all over the country plus Canada. While we were there, the city did not live up to its reputation of being unbearably hot in the summer - it was bearably hot - and in any case our meeting and living space was completely air-conditioned for once. (We were disappointed on this score at previous Conferences.)

Our Conferences have previously begun on a Thursday evening. This time an extra day was provided; it began on Wednesday evening. No matter - the extra time was rapidly filled up. Prior to the Conference extra meeting time was allowed for the formation of a new organization:

Common Ground

Several Georgists met at pre-Conference sessions Wednesday morning and afternoon (July 17) to organize "Common Ground" which is conceived as a national activist group aiming at the collection by government of the rent of land and the removal of taxes on production. A Constitution and By-laws (prepared by Edward J. Dodson, with consultation) were adopted and a Board of Directors elected with the following officers: Steven Cord, President; Tom Sherrard, Executive Vice-President; Marion Sapiro, Secretary; Edward J. Dodson, Treasurer. A collaboration with the Georgist Registry, initiated by Betsy Dana, has been arranged. During the course of the Conference many conferees joined Common Ground, and it is hoped that non-Georgists can also be attracted by its general aims. Information may be obtained from Steven Cord, 580 W. 6th St., Indiana, PA 15701.

Reports from Far and Wide

On Wednesday evening the Conference began with welcomes from Robert Clancy and Stanley Frederiksen. A handsome Proclamation designating July 15-21 as Henry George Week in St. Louis by Mayor Vincent C. Schoemehl was presented by Jack Keane from the Mayor's office (see p. 8).

The meeting was devoted to reports on Georgist organizations and activities. It was chaired by George Collins who began with a report on Philadelphia, including the work of the Henry George School and the Henry George Birthplace (which has been designated a historic landmark). There is increasing favorable attention to the Georgist proposal, especially in the light of recent real estate developments in the area.

Many brief reports were offered, including: Oscar B. Johannsen, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation; Michael Gavaghan, New York Henry George School; Mitchell Chanelis, Center for Economic Justice, Boston; Charles Metalitz, Chicago Henry George School; James Frederiksen (son of Stanley) and John Kelly (of Peoria) on approaches to the Illinois state legislature on land value taxation; Michael Curtis on Arden, Delaware and classes in Delaware's Smyrna Prison; Robert Clancy, Henry George Institute; Walter Rybeck, Center for Public Dialogue, Washington, DC; Nadine Stoner, Wisconsin Property Owners League, Beloit chapter; John Burger on his activities as a member of the

Minnesota legislature; Mary Davis, Georgia League for Land Value Taxation, also the Georgist Registry; Earl Hanson on the recently formed Intermountain Single Tax Association (ISTA) covering western states; Floyd Morrow, Basic Economic Education; Stan Frederiksen, PREC; Steven Cord, Henry George Foundation of America; Mark A. Sullivan on the Henry George Research Library and American distribution of Land and Liberty; W.E. Pereira, Los Angeles Henry George School; Clay Berling, San Francisco Henry George School; Evelyn Friend, Sacramento Henry George School. These many reports revealed an impressive and exciting scope of activities and projects in the domains of education, the media, audio-visual materials, working with other groups, political action - a great deal of it on a voluntary basis.

Strategies and Projects

The Thursday morning session, chaired by Mark Sullivan, began with a talk by Colin Bonner of Calgary, Canada (in place of Morgan Harris who unfortunately could not attend). Mr. Bonner emphasized the power of public opinion and the importance of Georgists making use of modern technology, used so effectively by "plunder groups."

Jeffery J. Smith had just returned from a trip to Nicaragua with members of BEE and ecology groups, including Friends of the Land, of which he is president. He said that while the Sandinista government of Nicaragua is Marxist, they are still flexible, and Georgists are invited to return to Nicaragua to explore the possibility of a Georgist colony there (see p. 11).

Steven Cord presented a method of shifting the tax from buildings to land in a way that today's legislators under the present system can readily grasp and implement. Mr. Cord's presentation involved the percentage of shift each year so that it would be completed over five years.

The Thursday afternoon session was the annual business meeting of the Council of Georgist Organizations. Robert Clancy, chairman, reported as follows: The Council, with the cooperation of other groups, has received the acceptance of over 100 college professors and civic groups to get Land and Liberty. CGO applied for non-governmental membership in the United Nations, and although not accepted, a liaison has been established. Internationally, an Australian Georgist Council has been formed; in Korea, the Henry George Society has been re-activated; in South Africa, the Association for Incentive Revenue Research has been formed.

A proposal to send a message to President Reagan on tax reform was adopted and a draft was prepared. This was sent to the President by Mr. Frederiksen and was also used for publicity in Missouri. Earl Hanson has used it for publicity in Utah, and others are invited to do likewise. (See p.9.)

Robert Clancy and Edward J. Dodson were re-elected as CGO Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively, and Mark Sullivan continues as Secretary. The informal structure of CGO was approved for another year.

Mr. Dodson reported on the Common Ground deliberations. Lancaster Greene referred to offerings by the Schalkenbach Foundation and mentioned the special usefulness of The Power in the Land by Fred Harrison. John Burger spoke on the basis of effective action, using the formula MOST - Mission, Objective, Strategy, Tactics.

Economic Questions

On Thursday evening (chairman, Neal Frederiksen, another son of Stanley) speakers addressed economic questions. Speaking on "Self-Interest as the Programmer," Clay Berling said that he has observed that most people will make choices that are best for them. A simple observation confirming a known hypothesis, but one that has great con-

sequences for Georgists. Churches have difficulty accepting it. Georgists must keep it in mind in promoting our ideas.

Oscar Johannsen spoke on "Inflation and International Debt." The world debt, he said, amounts to \$750 billion, of crisis proportions. There is a feeling that inflation has been overcome, but it has not. Banking, like other businesses, should be free. The banking problem has its roots in the land question - with this solved, a sound banking system could more readily be adopted.

Michael Curtis discussed "The Origin and Law of Interest." The origin of interest is baffling and the discussion on the subject in Progress and Poverty (William and James, planes and planks) is difficult. Today's trade may be responsible for more increase than the "reproductive modes of production." The Ricardian law applies to capital as well as to labor.

Workshops and Recreation

Friday morning gave conferees the opportunity to sample the various audio-visual presentations. Don Hurford held a workshop on the use of such materials in education. Used right they can be effective tools. Amir Pirouzan spoke on and demonstrated the use of computers in education. Stanley Rubenstein showed a segment of the newly produced series on Applied Economics done by the Henry George School for educational television. There were showings of the films "A Tale of Five Cities" (about Pennsylvania) and "For the Land is Mine" (produced by BEE).

Friday afternoon was taken up with a bus tour of St. Louis. Places visited included the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and the Anheuser-Busch brewery, the nation's largest. The Jefferson monument is a large and striking arch by the Mississippi River. This was the spot where Lewis and Clark set out on their exploration of the Louisiana Territory which had recently been purchased by President Jefferson. A fascinating museum tells the story, and it was gratifying to see the words of Tecumseh, chief of the Shawnees, prominently displayed:

"What! Sell land! As well sell air and water. The Great Spirit gave them in common to all, the air to breathe, the water to drink and the land to live upon."

Following the bus tour, there were several small discussion groups: Jeff Smith on Nicaragua; Lawrence Clark on the Rand McNally survey of cities; Robert Jene on a Cook County (Illinois) tax study; James Dorenkott on the BEE program; and Craig Cringan with a film on a tax study of Peterborough, Ontario. There was also a report from Claude Arnold on continuing trouble from a small group of lessees of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation who want to dissolve the corporation (see p. 11).

Religion and Economics

The statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on economic problems was the subject of a panel discussion Friday evening, chaired by Joe Casey. Special guest was Monsignor John Shocklee of St. Louis, introduced by Don Killoren. Msgr. Shocklee had made a thorough study of the Bishops' statement and pointed out that this was not the first time the Bishops had spoken out on social questions, having previously issued less known statements on racism, rights, peace and justice. The recent statement starts with the theological premise that the earth is the Lord's and we are its stewards. All persons have rights in the economic sphere and society has a moral obligation to ensure that no one goes hungry, homeless or unemployed. Conservative critics of the statement are mistaken in considering it anti-capitalist; it is not, it simply wants to broaden the share of people in its benefits.

Walter Rybeck said that the central theme of Progress and Poverty is in the national dialogue. The Bishops' statement has aroused discussion and it is important

to keep the dialogue going with participation by Georgists. Fryda Ossias told of periodic meetings of religious leaders at the New York Henry George School, not only Catholic but from other Christian denominations and Jewish. This is one way of continuing the dialogue.

Michael Cavaghen mentioned Georgist reactions to the Bishops' statement, especially carefully worked out responses by Walter Rybeck, John Kelly (of Scranton) and Nadine Stoner. The Bishops' statement is close in spirit to the Georgist viewpoint in seeking to eliminate poverty with respect for human dignity.

Following this panel, David O'Brien reported on "A Pilgrimage to Rome" undertaken in April by seven Georgists - Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Sapiro, Mason Gaffney, Nicklaus Tideman and Robert Scrofani. The purpose was to make a presentation on the Georgist philosophy to the Peace and Justice Commission of the Superior Generals (of the various religious orders); also to the Pontifical Commission on Peace and Justice (appointed by the Vatican). The presentation quoted from Progress and Poverty and told of present-day applications and their beneficent effects. Acceptance would have led to world-wide distribution, but after deliberation the Commission did not accept the Georgist presentation, one reason being that it was not sufficiently pastoral. A future effort would be worthwhile but should be more pastoral and factual and the preparation should be multi-lingual.

The Farm Problem

Three Georgists who are or have been active in farm work and research outlined present farm problems. They were Charles E. Byrne of Missouri, Woodrow W. Williams of Ohio and Robert P. Willis of Iowa. Mr. Byrne said that farm debt has tripled. Non-farmers are buying farm land for investment and speculation, thus decreasing opportunities for working farmers. Government subsidies prop up land values but do not help the working farmer.

Mr. Williams said that most farm organizations in Ohio consist of landowning families and the operating farmer has no time to lobby. Younger farmers are finding it more difficult to get started.

Mr. Willis said there are big technological changes in farming. There are fewer working farmers but they are there and they have skills. They could cope with technology but not with land monopoly. Nearly half the land in Iowa is owned by non-working farmers. The major problem is to get land prices down.

Mr. Willis also made a presentation showing how a land value tax can permit abolition of other taxes. He prepared a chart showing statistics on land holdings in Iowa and pointed out how greatly the shift in taxes to land would lighten the burden on production and improvements. It is not just a theory but can be demonstrated.

Academic Deliberations

Saturday afternoon brought together four professors from the various campuses of the University of Missouri: Donald Phares (St. Louis); Walter Johnson and Edward Metzen (Columbia); and Robert Brazelton (Kansas City) - all sympathetic to the cause of land value taxation and all familiar with the work of the late Harry Gunnison Brown who included it in his teaching at the University of Missouri. (Prof. Brazelton was a speaker at the Cambridge Conference in 1984.) Moderator was Irene Hickman.

Prof. Phares spoke on evaluation of tax reform: Can the tax be collected? What is the effect on economic efficiency in the private sector? Do different levels compete? Is it certain? Is it fair? An empirical study of land value taxation with respect to these questions would help in future legislative efforts.

Prof. Johnson spoke of the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" dilemma in politics. Dr. Jekyll wants to do the right thing but Mr. Hyde wants to win. More effective education is needed on land value taxation so that textbooks will not dismiss it. The Georgist movement should be allied to other movements working in the right direction.

Prof. Brazelton complained of universities' "benign neglect" of Henry George. Histories of economic thought give short attention to George. Econometricians know more mathematics than economics. But Georgists should not neglect economists either. "Kick us!" he said.

Prof. Metzen reiterated the need for more empirical evidence in support of land value taxation. What is the effect on housing? on parks and playgrounds? What about sub-surface values? How is highest and best use determined?

Conference Banquet

This culminating and best attended Conference event, with Stanley Frederiksen as toastmaster, feature Missouri political leaders who are favorable to land value taxation. An invocation was given by Rev. W. Wylie Young. A plaque was presented by Steven Cord to Elizabeth Read Brown, wife of the late Prof. Harry Gunnison Brown, honoring her for her many years of service to the George cause. In addition, a Resolution was presented to her, passed unanimously by the Missouri House of Representatives and signed by Bob Griffin, Speaker of the House, applauding Mrs. Brown for her many contributions to the betterment of society.

Thomas B. Curtis, former U.S. Congressman from Missouri and former member of the Board of the Lincoln Foundation, spoke, criticizing the failure of the Federal government to solve the tax problem. We must have a government of laws, not of men and of special-interest lobbying. Fairness to all and setting our house in order involves proper real estate taxation.

Walt Mueller, Missouri State Representative, spoke next. He has been in the forefront introducing local option in taxation in the Missouri legislature. It came close to passing in the legislative session just ended than previously, and it will be reintroduced at the next session. The measure will require a constitutional amendment, so after passing the legislature, there will be a referendum on it. Mr. Mueller said a change of this sort is difficult, but we are making progress and must continue. A plaque was awarded to Mr. Mueller in recognition of his work.

John Poelker, former Mayor of St. Louis, said he became acquainted with Noah D. Alper, "and you can guess the rest." (The late Mr. Alper was the founder of PREC.) He said he has worked for land value taxation and we must keep trying. The job is to get people to know more about it.

Conclusion

At the final CGO session Sunday morning (Robert Clancy, chairman), the Conference was evaluated as outstanding. Plans for next year will involve coordination with the International Conference to be held in Vancouver, Canada, May 19-23. For 1987 an invitation was extended by the Georgists of San Diego to hold the Conference there. For 1988 another mid-western location is contemplated, and 1989 is already in place - Philadelphia on the 150th anniversary of Henry George's birth.

There followed a meeting of the Henry George Foundation, chaired by Steven Cord. An election of officers took place. A review of the past year's work included promotion of the film "A Tale of Five Cities," about land value taxation in cities of Pennsylvania; success in getting the city of Duquesne to make a shift toward land value taxation; securing a state marker for the Birthplace of Henry George in Phila-

delphia; many trips and consultations by Mr. Cord. One setback has been the issuance of an unfavorable report on land value taxation in Pittsburgh, to which a response is being planned. Other plans include advertising and servicing Common Ground.

Conference Highlights

To the report of this Conference it should be added that the audience was by no means passive! Each session had its questions and answers and animated discussion, with widespread participation.

Each evening following the sessions a convivial social hour was held, with libations, conversations and music, hosted by Neal Frederiksen and Joe Casey. Neal was also busy taking photographs throughout the Conference.

Available tables were loaded with literature, much of it free. The Schalkenbach Foundation had a display of its literature, serviced by Susan Klingenhoefer. Noting that this was a Mark Twain anniversary year, the Henry George Institute reprinted a satire by him, "The Story of Archimedes," showing the power of land monopoly.

There was advance press publicity and a good feature story appeared in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat by Charles E. Burgess (a contact of Alice Davis). There was also a leading story by journalist Jim Wolfe of Jefferson City about the Georgist movement and the Conference in the Kansas City Business Journal. Another bonus: a sign at the airport welcoming the CGO to St. Louis.

Previous Georgist Conferences were held in St. Louis in 1950 and 1966. It was a great idea to have it there again in 1985!

Proclamation

WHEREAS, the Council of Georgist Organizations, which fosters the economic principles of the great American economist, Henry George, and promotes real property tax reform in accordance with those principles, has chosen St. Louis, Missouri as the site of its July 17-21 national Joint Georgist Conference; and

WHEREAS, the participants of this Conference seek the economic means to address current real property taxation inequities, and to provide significant new options for deriving public revenue for the city of St. Louis and other jurisdictions throughout our state and nation; and

WHEREAS, the broad concepts and economic education emanating from this Conference will most certainly stimulate economic thinking, leading to greater liberty, more perfect justice and strong economic growth in our city, state and nation,

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Vincent C. Schoemehl, Jr., Mayor of the City of Saint Louis do hereby proclaim the week of July 15-21, 1985, as HENRY GEORGE WEEK in St. Louis.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the seal of the City of Saint Louis, this 15th day of July, A.D. 1985.

/s/ Vincent C. Schoemehl, Jr.
Mayor of the City of Saint Louis

(The original of this Proclamation is displayed at CGO Headquarters, New York.)