

1988 ANNUAL NORTH AMERICAN GEORGIST CONFERENCE

This, the 8th Annual Conference sponsored by the Council of Georgist Organizations, was held at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia, from Wednesday, July 27 to Sunday, July 31. To our knowledge, this is the first such Conference held in the Peach State. Host organization was the Atlanta chapter of Common Ground, Mary R. Davis, President.

Although this was the year preceding the important Sesquicentennial next year, it was by no means a minor event, but held its own with the best of Conferences, with a good program and good attendance.

How was the weather in Atlanta? Hot - but it was hot everywhere this past Summer - and many areas up north were actually worse. Our Conference was held the week after the National Democratic Convention. However, we think our deliberations may have been of more long-range import than either of the political Conventions.

Preliminaries.

Many conferees arrived for a pre-Conference day on Tuesday, July 26. There were meetings of various groups, including Common Ground. Many attended a well-done performance of William Shakespear's play "The Winter's Tale" by a local group.

On Wednesday there were further organizational meetings, including the Henry George Foundation of America. Hanno T. Beck, a Henry George Institute graduate, was engaged as an Executive Assistant to Steven Cord. There was also a talk by Colin Bonner of Alberta, Canada. He proposed that our focus should be on reducing those taxes which fall on earned income and increasing those taxes already in place which fall on unearned incomes such as capital gains, real estate sales taxes, etc. In this way, much of the rent of land can be recouped.

In the evening was a Festive Reception at which the term "southern hospitality" earned its name. A friendly welcome and refreshments were followed by a sing-along led by Stan Frederiksen with new Georgist lyrics to old-time songs composed by his son Neal.

Education - Housing

The first solid day of conferring was on Thursday, beginning with a morning session on education reports, with Sam Venturella as chairman. Mr. Venturella, as Director of the Chicago Henry George School told of renewed efforts there with the acquisition of a rented headquarters, classes being started and a newsletter published. Stan Rubenstein, Director of the New York Henry George School, reported on the growing program of reaching high schools. There are study outlines for economics and other social studies, notably the "Land and Freedom" series. 2500 teachers in 30 states have requested materials.

Others reporting educational work were: George Collins, Philadelphia HGS; Michael K. Curtis, Arden HGS; Hal Sager and Walt Rybeck, the Washington area; Gale Rowe, Fairhope; Robert Scrofani, San Francisco; Floyd Morrow and Jim Dorenkott, San Diego; Harry Pollard, Los Angeles; Oscar Johannsen, Schalkenbach Foundation; Tom Greco, School of Living; Robert Clancy, Henry George Institute.

An afternoon session dealt with "Progress Against Poverty", particularly in the South, with Bob Scrofani as chairman. Jerry Hardt of the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, spoke of the struggle of homeowners against coal mine owners, mostly absentees, who are favored tax-wise and legally. Some progress is being made, but there is still poverty.

Dr. Sneh Veena told of Voorhees College (Denmark, South Carolina) where she is Director of Social Studies. It was founded in 1897 by a black woman for poor black students. Harold Voorhees, whose uncle funded the College, has expanded the program and introduced a Henry George program, including a prize essay contest. One of the prize winners was present, King Morris Singleton, Jr. (as well as his father, who also attended Voorhees), whose paper was "How Henry George's Theories Could Recharge America." He spoke briefly.

On the program was Craig Taylor of the South Atlanta Land Trust. The project began by acquiring and fixing up old houses for the benefit of poor people. But neighborhoods then became "gentrified" and land values rose, frustrating the effort, until the Land Trust was formed, acquiring land, selling improvements but not the land, which is held in trust. This is more successful.

After this session there were two workshops. One was a discussion of the book Buying into America by M. and S. Tolchin, led by George Collins and Don Hurford. Foreign capital in the U.S. is widely perceived as a threat, but it need not be, since it offers wider choices for Americans. The other workshop was led by Harry Pollard who also touched on foreign investment in the U.S. The American fear of foreigners offers an opportune way to introduce Georgist ideas by bringing out the real causes of the troubles.

The evening session was on "Solving the Housing Crisis," (John Burger, Chairman). Edward J. Dodson, mortgage officer at Fannie Mae, pointed to the affordability (or lack of it) of housing as the key problem. More and more people are finding it impossible to acquire a home. All that is being done to help is a drop in the bucket. The Georgist "wedge" of the high price of land is becoming more conspicuous, but people are still puzzled. Enlightening them is a job to be done.

Walter Rybeck of the Center for Public Dialogue asserted that the goal is decent homes in good neighborhoods for all; and that land speculation is at the core of the problem. He announced a national press conference to be held in Washington on September 27 to which officials and leaders in housing are invited to hear expert testimony on the subject. (See p. 7.)

At the social evening following this session, conferees saw films on Taiwan and "Our Common Future," concerning global resources.

Action and Proposals

The morning session on Friday (chaired by Jeffery J. Smith, BEE) was devoted to reports from groups involved in various phases of Georgist action - and there was much to report. Jeff Smith told of rapport between the Green and Georgist movements. Elaine Coons, representing ISTA, spoke of increased interest in Phoenix in LVT, and mentioned the coming ISTA meeting in Las Vegas. John Burger told of the pamphlet he has produced to reach legislators concerning LVT. Nadine Stoner reported on a campaign to reach leaders of the United Methodist Church. Stan Frederiksen updated news on the proposed Missouri legislation permitting LVT: the House keeps passing it and the Senate keeps turning it down. Sam Venturella reported that John Kelly continues to work for a two-rate property tax in Peoria, Illinois.

John Fisher told of a feasibility study on LVT being undertaken for Peterborough, Ontario, with the support of the Kiwanis Club. Dan Sullivan said a Fair Tax Coalition has been formed in Pennsylvania, and he favored more training for community action. Betsy Dana explained the Georgist Registry. Jim Dorenkott told of the campaign of Floyd Morrow for Mayor of San Diego. Frank Nelson, commenting on our "glacial progress," said he has gained respect for glaciers since observing them. They work slowly but surely and have lasting effects upon the earth.

Steven Cord reported on the combined work of the Henry George Foundation, the Center for the Study of Economics, and Common Ground. Felice Gruskin updated the news on TRIP (Transit Riders in Pursuit) which has increased its membership. Al Hartheimer mentioned the effort to get LVT adopted in Rome, New York; it is supported by the Mayor, Carl Eilenberg. The campaign to get LVT adopted in Philadelphia was reported by George Collins. (More on this was heard Saturday morning.)

An unprogrammed surprise was the appearance of Fred Harrison, editor of Land and Liberty. A meeting was improvised early Friday afternoon for him to speak on "The Crash of 1992." With the housing crisis and the high price of land in Britain, he calculated 1992 as the year of the "bust." He hopes to influence Parliament. This was perhaps the best attended meeting of the Conference.

Following this there was the scheduled session on the Single Tax enclaves of Fairhope and Arden. Paul Gaston, Professor at the University of Virginia, is related to the founders of Fairhope; he gave some history of the colony and praised its efforts to create a model community. Charles H. Ingersoll, President of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, told of continuing efforts to solve practical problems, to deal with dissidents and to revise rent assessments.

Mike Curtis stated that a Single Tax colony cannot be a complete demonstration of the principles since it does not raise wages; but it can prevent the speculative rise of land values. Arden is a good demonstration of a "bedroom community."

After this session there were again separate workshops. Jacquelin McKean showed a film on Fairhope. Tom Greedo led a discussion on the national deficit, including a critique of the current monetary system, and the question of balancing the budget. Harry Pollard held a session going over the question of whether "natural rights" are really natural.

Friday evening featured a session on Marxism and Liberation Theology (Richard Noyes, chairman). Robert Clancy gave a talk on the relative influence of Karl Marx and Henry George. He contended that the influence of Marx has been overrated and the influence of George has been underrated. "Marxism" has left Marx behind, but George continues to exert influence and the influence is increasing.

Robert Andelson (Auburn University) spoke on Liberation Theology which he said has been disparaged. But following a trip to Latin America he believes it to be a genuine movement of the people and not intrinsically Marxist, though some of its proponents are Marxist. Dr. James Dawsey, who also teaches at Auburn, confirmed that Liberation Theology comes out of the experience of the people being oppressed. A new approach is needed, emphasizing land. Drs. Dawsey and Andelson are collaborating on a book about Liberation Theology.

The social evenings were full of programs, and the one on Friday featured the performance of a reading play by Douglas Broyle, "The I's Have It," concerning a young married couple musing over their problems, and being surprised by the appearance of George Bernard Shaw and Henry George, explaining respectively Socialism and the Single Tax.

Looking Forward

On Saturday morning the Philadelphia story was featured (Steven Cord, chairman). James J. Tayoun, Councilman, gave the background of current efforts to get LVT adopted there. It had been introduced previously and now has the support of the present Mayor, Wilson Goode, as well as the Finance Director, Betsy Reveal. The measure did not pass the Council this year and the campaign will be renewed next year.

Another guest at this session was Scott Smith, Councilman of Lockhaven, Pennsylvania. A young man and a recent convert to LVT, he spoke of the difficulty of explaining it to fellow legislators as well as to voters. But he will persist.

There were meetings during the Conference looking forward to the 1989 Conference, and suggestions were offered for the program, which will be coordinated by Mr. Collins. Common Ground also held several meetings and elected the following officers: Ted Gwartney, President; Dave O'Brien, Vice-President; Mary Davis, Secretary; Joe Casey, Treasurer.

After solid conferring, conferees took a break Saturday afternoon, many going on a sightseeing bus tour of Atlanta. The highlight of this trip was a visit to the impressive Cyclorama, a three-dimensional reconstruction of the Battle of Atlanta during the Civil War (which is known in the South as the War Between the States - or simply "the War"). Other Atlanta points of interest, visited by several, were the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violence and the Jimmy Carter Library.

The climax of the Conference was the Saturday evening banquet, chaired by Mary Davis. An unscheduled event was the offering of appreciative awards to various persons, humorously presented by Bob Scrofani. One scheduled award was a plaque presented to our hostess, Mary Davis, who responded graciously. Speaker of the evening was Robert Andelson, who told the story of his conversion to the Georgist philosophy, his introduction to the movement, and his disappointment at the scale of the effort, smaller than he had anticipated. But this was temporary, and he soon realized that the job is big, all efforts help and all are worthwhile.

The final session Sunday morning began with an ecumenical service led by Dr. Dawsey, and followed by a meeting of the Council of Georgist Organizations. The outgoing Chairman, Robert Clancy, welcomed the new Chairman, Sam Venturella. Other officers are Richard Noyes, Deputy Chairman, and Mark A. Sullivan, Secretary-Treasurer. George Collins was selected for the Advisory Committee for the coming year, and Don Hurford was elected for the same period. Mr. Clancy joins Clay Berling as retired Chairmen to serve on the Advisory Committee.

Wait Till Next Year!

1989 will be the Sesquicentennial of Henry George's birth in Philadelphia in 1839. There will be an International Conference in the City of Brotherly Love from July 29 to August 5. It will be held at the University of Pennsylvania, one of the top universities in the country. It was impossible to obtain these facilities for a period overlapping September 2, George's actual birthday, which will be observed in other ways.

Coinciding with this event is the restoring of the Henry George Birthplace. It has already been renovated considerably and is being used by the Philadelphia Henry George School. The current ambitious plan is to restore the building to its appearance at the time George was born. When that is done, the Birthplace will be an official and imperishable landmark in a city of landmarks.

Of top significance will be the renewal of the campaign to get Land Value Taxation adopted in Philadelphia in 1989. Plans are under way, with important support at high levels - and it is a goal within reach.

So - it looks like Philly gets the Triple Crown next year. Of course, information will be disseminated. Meanwhile, re any phase of the above, communicate with George L. Collins, Conference Coordinator, Henry George School, 413 S. 10th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147, USA.