CONFERENCE OF GEORGISTS

In the USA, a National Conference of Georgists, sponsored by the Henry George Foundation of America, was held in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania from Thursday, July 17 to Sunday, July 20. Over 70 conferees met at the Harcum Junior College, and there were representatives from Alabama, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Canada. Good weather and good spirits prevailed, and an impressive panel of speakers was supplemented by animated discussion from the audience.

The opening session on Thursday evening was chaired by Percy R. Williams, Executive Secretary of the Henry George Foundation, who reminded conferees that at the Consultation of the Henry George Groups in Pittsburgh last year, the Foundation was requested to undertake this year's meeting, which it has done. (Unfortunately, the initiator of the Groups, John T. Tetley, could not attend this conference.)

Gaston Haxo of St. Petersburg, Fla. was introduced, and he told of his recently formed Free Land League, following the publication of his booklet, "America at the Crossroads." The League emphasizes the rights of all to the land rather than land value taxation. Mr. Haxo is hopeful that the idea will catch on.

Next was Louis Weitzman (of Massachusetts and Florida) who stressed the need for reaching leaders. He proposed greater use of the mails with an organized letter-writing campaign.

On Friday morning, Robert Clancy (who also chaired this session) spoke on "What's Right and What's Wrong with the Georgist Movement." He said that Georgists are durable, they have survived whereas many other movements have collapsed, and they plead for the general good instead of for special interests. However, they tend to be individualists, making organized effort difficult. He expressed the hope that better cooperation in the Georgist movement could be achieved.

"Julian Hickok of Philadelphia spoke on "Inflation out of Control." Inflation is an excess of money in relation to goods. The causes are liberal government spending plus speculation in land. Land value taxation would destroy land speculation and minimize the pressures that lead to government spending. (Mr. Hickok recently ran for the City Council in Philadelphia. Although not endorsed by his party, he got 38% of the votes.)

M.S. Lurio (Boston, Mass.) discussed aspects of the real estate business. We tend to think of big owners, he said, but there are many small ones. Government has become a pervasive factor in real estate today and hardly a move is made without government involvement. Urban real estate today is in bad shape and we need to understand the problems in presenting our ideas.

John Kelly (Scranton, Pa.) delivered an eloquent paper on "National Use Planning." This dealt with the fallacies involved in the drive for land use planning. A great build-up is going on leading to more planning. Mr. Kelly stated that land use planning was no more than zoning in disguise and would bring the same bureaucracy, waste and governmental bungling that we have had so far.

An unexpected visitor was David Hapgood, author of the best-seller, "The Screwing of the Average Man." He was impressed by letters from two Georgists (William Newcomb and Cathy Covell) and came to this conference to learn more. He is preparing another book that will offer answers to the problems outlined in his first book and appealed to Georgists for help and information.

Friday afternoon was chaired by Mina Olson who also reported on work done by the Henry George School and the Henry George Club of Chicago. George Collins told

of the formation of the Friends of the Henry George Birthplace to plan for the role of this Philadelphia landmark during the Bicentennial celebrations in 1976.

Perry Prentice spoke on his activities as President of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, which includes a projected appearance at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with the aim of getting Negro support in Georgia. Ms. V.G. Peterson, Executive Secretary of the Foundation, told of a campaign to get a commemorative U.S. postage stamp on the 100th anniversary of Progress and Poverty in 1979.

Woodrow Williams, who farms in Ohio, spoke of his efforts to show that farmers would benefit from land value taxation, including letters to the Prairie Farmer.

William O. Ranky, chairman of the Better Cities Committee of Illinois, reported that the film "One Way to Better Cities" has been shown to 127 groups. Reaction to land value taxation is improving.

Richard Noyes, editor of the Salem Observer, New Hampshire, told of his and other Georgists' efforts in his state. He was a delegate to the New Hampshire Constitutional Convention; another Georgist, William Bittenbender, is chairman of the State Board of Education; and the governor, Melville Thompson, has been influenced.

On Friday evening the conferees took a break to go to a summer theatre where George Collins was starring in the title role of Shakespeare's "Othello." It was a performance praised by newspapers and greatly enjoyed by audiences.

Saturday morning was business again, when John Weaver assembled Pennsylvanians at one table, the "speakers bench." He appealed to all to send to the Henry George Foundation information about Georgist political activities for Equal Rights.

Steven Cord reviewed his work with his publication now called Incentive Taxation, formerly Tax Free New Towns. Dr. Cord recently attended the Conference of the Pennsylvania League of Cities where the Mayor of Bethlehem showed interest in the graded tax. Harrisburg has already started a graded tax and now has 23 mills on land and 17 mills on buildings; it may go further.

Raymond Richman, Professor of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh, told of difficulties of the assessor in assessing real estate; for instance, determining maximum use. Many in the audience disagreed that it was difficult, stating that current market value is a reliable guide.

Gladys Lindes informed the group of the growing "land trust" movement, where a tract of land that is still cheap is bought, held in trust and leased to homesteaders. Information is in the book, "The Community Land Trust - a Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America" published by the International Independence Institute.

The Saturday afternoon session, chaired by Weld S. Carter, heard Rhoda Hellman of New York on "George and the Ability-to-Pay Tax Theory." She pointed out that most people consider the income tax to be tolerably just as a means of counteracting inequalities in income. Land is not the only monopoly, which George recognized, but his proposal was to abolish privilege at the source. If his ideas were fully realized, there would most likely be less drive for ability-to-pay taxes.

Rev. Wylie Young of Swarthmore, Pa. told of his "desperate" efforts to explain the very simple principles of single tax. He as asked educated people: 1, Are all taxes passed on? 2, Is any tax not passed on? 3, Do taxes make an item more or less dear? 4, Is there anything that becomes less dear when taxed? Not a single person has been able to answer correctly.

Mildred Loomis of the School of Living, Freeland, Md., was concerned about getting Georgist principles into Bicentennial activities. She urged that Georgists get together with libertarian groups to work out a program.

Claude Arnold told of the current situation in the single tax colony of Fairhope, Alabama. More revenue is coming in as a result of reassessment, but some residents are challenging the Fairhope system. They were turned down twice by Alabama courts but are carrying on their propaganda in the media. Better publicity and education are needed by the single taxers.

Weld Carter reported on his efforts in discovering and enhancing the interest of college professors in land value taxation. a project initiated by Schalkenbach. The outcome was TRED (Committee on Taxation, Resources and Economic Development). There have been 13 conferences, with 7 reports published as books, and there are now 12 members. The 1975 conference will focus on employment.

On Saturday evening, Steven Cord told of a conference recently held in California by the group LEAF (Land, Equality and Freedom). With headquarters in San Diego, it is an activist group but not political. Chapters have been formed and funds are available for special projects. A paper, The New Leaf, is published.

Russel Conklin of Great Falls, Montana, said he was a "professional politician," having run for office 14 times and been elected 9 times (as mayor, state representative and county assessor). Montana now has legislation favorable to land value taxation and is ripe for action. He urged more Georgists to get into politics.

Frank Nelson reviewed his activities in Wilmington, Delaware (see page 2). After a series of changes of names and ups and downs, the work is moving again.

Samuel Scheck of Long Island pointed to the recent New York State Supreme Court decision calling for 100% real property assessment. But we have not yet won anything until we keep after assessors. He called for organized effort.

Saturday evening concluded with a showing of a film on Arden, presented by Mike Curtis. This year marks the 75th anniversary of this single tax colony.

The final session of the Conference on Sunday morning was conducted by Percy Williams. Geoffrey Esty told of New Jersey developments. There was a New Jersey Tax Policy Committee which studied the property tax and called in Prof. Dick Netzer for consultation. New Jersey is now at the crossroads with respect to taxes.

Len Huckabone of Detroit told of his Committee for Better Cities. A letter with informative enclosures has been sent to all Michigan state legislators and a follu-up is planned. Mr. Huckabone appealed to conferees to send him ideas.

Mr. Williams remarked that the time is always ripe for political action but the problem is to be effective. At present we lack strong support. We need an effective demonstration. We must continue to campaign aggressively.

At the conclusion of this meeting, Mr. Clancy conducted an evaluation session. There was a general feeling of appreciation for this conference, which produced much information and inspiration. Julian Hickok proposed that the Henry George Foundation be asked again to initiate next year's conference, and this was unanimously approved. It was proposed that the next conference be held in the Chicago area in July 1976. Mrs. Olson indicated that Chicago Georgists could undertake this if the responsibility were shared by a national Georgist Conference Committee to be formed during the year. Suggestions and ideas are to be sent to Mrs. Mina Olson, 4027 N. Francisco St., Chicago, Ill. 60618.

The Conference was then adjourned. Following this final session, about two dozen conferees proceeded to a trip to Arden, at the invitation of Mr. Curtis, where they were taken on a guided tour of the colony. And so ended a most pleasant and productive conference.