

GEORGIST JOURNAL - SUMMER 1986

INTERNATIONAL GEORGIST CONFERENCE

Vancouver, Canada

May 18-26, 1986

Longer than the usual 6-day International Conferences and the 4-day North American ones, this Conference was originally planned as two Conferences, an International to be followed by a North American. During the week, however, it was decided to combine the two into one Conference, jointly sponsored by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade and the Council of Georgist Organizations. However, we may consider that the Conference was in two phases.

Venue was the Conference Centre of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, a choice meeting place in an attractive environment. About 150 persons registered, from Canada, USA, UK, Ireland, Denmark, Holland, Australia, Korea and Japan.

Informative brochures distributed during the week gave information not only about the Conference but also about former Single Taxers of Canada, including J. W. Bengough, Sen. A. W. Roebuck, F. J. Dixon, L.D. Taylor - and Premier Wilfred Laurier. 1986 is also the 100th anniversary of Vancouver, the big event being Expo 86.

Phase One

A meeting of welcome and a social evening was held Sunday, May 18. The Conference proper started Monday morning, May 19, the first speaker being Robert Williams, member of the British Columbia legislature. He said that the Province had a small population but great resources. Forests are owned by the Province but resource rents are not collected. Revenues from forests are \$140 million, but they cost \$344 million to maintain, so it is a "give-away." There is uncollected rent in petroleum, coal, etc., as well as in urban areas.

Also on the program was Roy Douglas (Surrey University, England) who traced the rise and decline of Georgist influence in the UK. In the early days, Henry George was better known in Britain than Karl Marx and had a great influence on the Liberal Party. However, Single Taxers were divided on other issues and the cohesion was broken. It must come again because land is indispensable.

On Monday afternoon conferees heard Michael Horsman of Ireland who recounted how before knowing about Henry George concluded that labor should not be taxed but that land should bear the costs of public services. He has since maintained contact with the Georgist movement. There is a newly formed Christian Social Party in Ireland which is a Single Tax party.

Another speaker was Sinclair Ridsen, a valuation officer from Jamaica (West Indies). He said that a land value tax program had been started and was interrupted in 1960 due to politics, but after 17 years it was resumed. It yields only 5% of public revenue. There is an effort to get at the full economic rent of the bauxite industry which, however, has declined. Other economic problems are besetting Jamaica.

Colin Bonner (Alberta) spoke on "Social Justice for Women." It is mostly women who are below the poverty line. We must go to the many organizations and meetings of feminists and point out the need for reform. Identifying the cause of injustice to woman will help the Georgist reform.

Mal McCarthy (Ontario) told of a study on land value taxation being made for the city of Peterborough. In spite of opposition it is being promoted by the Mayor and by civic groups. Mr. McCarthy showed a videotape of a television program explaining land value taxation. A copy may be order for US\$15 from Mal McCarthy, 860 Kensington Drive, Peterborough, Ont., Canada K9J 6J9.

Land Reform

The Monday evening program featured Mason Gaffney (University of California, Riverside) who raised questions about the Georgist reform that should be studied: Should rent be distributed per capita or used to benefit all? Should rich regions share rent with poor regions? How is rent to be distributed to states and localities? How are rents from natural resources (oil, gas, forests, minerals, water) to be assessed and collected? Is continued growth, which is questioned today, the best appeal? Does absentee ownership make any difference? There was animated discussion on these and related questions both at this session and the morning session on Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday morning appeared Douglas Halverson (B.C. Minister for Native Affairs). There are one-half million natives (Indians, Eskimos) in Canada. Recognition of their civil rights dates from the 1950's when they were recognized as citizens. Native advisers have put the matter of rights to land as the first item on their agenda. Canada considers such lands as Crown lands rather than native lands. The sovereign power should say, We will respect your rights.

On Tuesday afternoon there were special interest meetings, of which one concerned plans for an augmented edition of Land and Liberty and ways and means of getting it more widely circulated.

On Tuesday evening, the guest was to have been Joshua Nkomo, opposition leader of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). But he was not allowed to leave his country. However, his wife and family were allowed to come on condition that they do not discuss politics. The main offering was a film, "The New Zimbabwe." The current leader is Robert Mugabe who enforces a one-party government and whose idea of land reform is to buy land and distribute it to peasants. Mr. Nkomo, on the other hand, proposes land value taxation.

Ben Metcalf, journalist, commented on the film. An article about Mrs. Nkomo's visit was featured in the Vancouver Sun.

Most of Wednesday was free for recreation. There was a boat and train ride to Squamish, which several took, and others visited Expo which featured the theme Transportation and Communication.

On Wednesday evening Roy Douglas reappeared, on the theme of free trade. Quoting Francis Sayre, he said, "If goods cannot cross international borders, armies will." The Great Depression gave rise to a clamor for tariffs, and the high tariffs that ensued, as well as bad land policies, deepened the depression. By 1939, armies were crossing borders.

International Union

Thursday morning was devoted to a business meeting of the International Union, with President Wilbur Freeland as chairman. Following regrets, greetings, reading of minutes by Barbara Sobrielo and treasurer's report by Jose Mernane, there was discussion on a change of wording of Objects of the Union, also on a change of name for the Union. Although there were not enough members present to vote on a constitutional amendment, the questions were put to get "the sense of the meeting." A slight change in Objects (proposed by Robert Clancy) received a majority vote. Proposed changes of name included the following: International Union of Georgists (Arthur Dowe), International Union for Land and Liberty (James Busey and Fred Foldvary), International Site Revenue Society (Cecil Stowasser), Georgist International Union (Graham Hart), Prosper (Jerry Stovin). The change that received the greatest number of votes was International Union for Land and Liberty. (This does not effectuate the change; it was an informal poll.) A new President, Richard Noyes, was elected, also Vice-Presidents and Executive Committee.

Georgist Activities

The Thursday afternoon session was conducted by the Council of Georgist Organizations and conferees heard reports of Georgist activities in various countries. Rev. Archer Torrey told of the Henry George Association of Korea of which he was the only member for many years. Now there are several members and literature has been published in Korean.

Barbara Sobrielo reported on work in the UK. Most of it is centered at London headquarters where the organizations include the International Union; its parent organization, the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values (Ron Banks, chairman); Land and Liberty Press Ltd. (which publishes literature) and Land and Liberty International Ltd. (which publishes the magazine); also ESSRA (Economic and Social Science Research Association, which publishes research papers and runs the School.

Henry Fågerli-Nielsen reported on Denmark. He is the new editor of Grundskyld, the Georgist quarterly. Besides the Henry George Society, the Justice Party still operates, although it has not had any members in Parliament for some time.

Siebe Sevenster spoke on Holland where there are 100 members of the Georgist organization Recht en Vrijheid. The organization gives information to officials on the right of the people to the value of land. The periodical Grondvest is published.

Arthur Dowe said that in Australia there is some organized Georgist activity in all seven states and Canberra. Two periodicals continue: Progress (Melbourne) and Good Government (Sydney). The editor of the latter, Richard Giles, was present at the Conference.

These reports were followed by a presentation on the new book, Total Tax Relief, by its author Raymond Abrams. The purpose is to show the injustice of the present income tax, about which Mr. Abrams cited much evidence, and to point to the rightful source of public revenue, which he calls L.O.V.E. (Lease Our Valuable Earth).

A report on the new Georgist organization Common Ground was given by its President, Steven Cord. Meetings in California have resulted in changes in its Constitution and a formulation of its program. One project currently being launched is a campaign to get a U.S. postage stamp issued in 1989, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Henry George.

A special interest workshop was held following this session, on Geolibertarianism, chaired by Fred Foldvary. The idea is to combine Georgist and libertarian interests and there was discussion on working with reform groups such as the Green movement, peace groups, feminists, etc.

For dinner, a salmon barbecue enabled conferees to sample the excellent piscatorial specialty of the Province.

Ron Burgess was the featured speaker on Thursday evening. He is an economic consultant from London and studied at the School of Economic Science. He is also Vice-President of the Free Trade League and noted that 1986 is the 100th anniversary of Protection or Free Trade. He said that any one producing should not be taxed, but that full play should be given to productive forces. Every one should be free to make, exchange, give, bequeathe. In Great Britain, politicians are worried about 15% unemployment and do not understand that they have created these conditions. The first step toward true free trade is to free the labor market and the emphasis should be on the abolition of taxes.

Harry Pollard also appeared on this program to discuss educational work in promoting the Georgist philosophy.

On Friday morning Mr. Burgess reappeared to resume discussion. "To change direction," he said, "you have to stop moving in one direction before turning around and moving in another direction." Thus there must be a stop to the imposition of taxes, tariffs and regulations before the right source of revenue is introduced.

Following Mr. Burgess, Douglas Herps from Australia appeared to represent Justice R. Else-Mitchell who was scheduled but could not be present. Mr. Herps is a land valuer from Sydney and is a consultant to the Commonwealth of Australia on land matters. As Chairman of a Commission looking into New South Wales, he supported land value rating and recommended that valuations be undertaken every two years instead of every seven years, as has been the case.

Mr. Herps presented Mr. Else-Mitchell's paper, which brought out the following: Constitutional questions must be considered. In Australia specific powers are granted to the central government, residual powers to the states; in Canada it is the reverse. There is a tendency for the governing body to yield to pressures but the interests of all must be retained.

Numerous questions were directed by conferees to Mr. Herps concerning assessments. He brought out that site value assessment has been going on in Australia for 70 years and there is no problem; assessment of improvements complicates the matter.

Plans and Prospects

There was a luncheon meeting of the Henry George Foundation of America on Friday, chaired by President Steven Cord. With the Foundation's move from Pennsylvania, there will be an effort to nationalize but to maintain a presence in Pennsylvania. Election of officers took place and Walter Rybeck was elected to replace John Weaver, deceased. The other members of the Board whose term expired were re-elected.

At the Friday afternoon session, various international reports were heard. Michael Paik, current Chairman of the Henry George Association of Korea, spoke on economic conditions in his country. There is an increase toward industrialization, farming now representing only 30% of the economy. The property tax is higher on buildings than on land, so efforts need to be made to change that. A new Korean edition of Progress and Poverty is planned.

George Morton of Edinburgh reported on activities in Scotland. The Green Party of Germany has had a considerable influence. Many members are Marxist but efforts are being made to introduce a Georgist influence.

Ole Lefmann described the land taxes already in effect in Denmark; they include both local and national taxes.

Walter Rybeck showed the film "A Tale of Five Cities" about Pennsylvania cities that have adopted a higher tax on land values. This film has proven to be a popular and effective way of promoting land value taxation.

In the evening the first phase of the Conference wound up with a social evening. Mary Rawson and her colleagues were commended for their work in mounting the Conference. Outgoing IU President Wilbur Freeland welcomed the incoming President, Richard Noyes, who commented on the tasks of the Georgist movement. Two teachers connected with Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia were introduced, Richard Braddock and Ron Riley. They assist in conducting a Henry George program under the Walsh bequest.

It had already been decided to hold the next International Conference in Philadelphia in 1989. For the Conference after that, Ireland was selected for 1991.

Phase Two

On Saturday, May 24, the second part of the Conference, arranged by the Council of Georgist Organizations began with a session in the morning devoted to Canada. CGO Chairman Robert Clancy welcomed the conferees and introduced Ted Gwartney, Assessment Commissioner of British Columbia. Mr. Gwartney told of his efforts since 1973 to improve the quality of assessments in the Province. There is no reason, he said, why land cannot be assessed properly - close to full value has been achieved. Officials from other countries have visited and learned from the method set up in B.C. At present about 20% of the economic rent is being collected.

Cyril Nelms spoke of the Commonweal Society for Economic Education, with several members, mostly on Vancouver Island, who meet periodically to discuss ways and means of promoting Georgist education.

Gerry Shaw explained the Alberta system of revenue from oil. This was a result of Georgist efforts in the early part of the century to get provincial title to sub-surface resources. Leases for exploration are sold on a bidding basis. After several successful years, there is now little exploration because of the decline in oil prices. However, an Alberta Heritage Fund has been established with 30% of the oil revenues put into it. It is estimated that 85% of the rent is being collected from oil.

Colin Bonner (Alberta) told of his organization called P.E.P. League of Voters. (P.E.P. stands for Prosperitas Est Pax, Prosperity is Peace.) An informal organization, it hopes to expand and influence public opinion.

Mal McCarthy reported on work being done in Ontario, with emphasis on Peterborough (reviewing the report given on Monday afternoon). Craig Cringan said that there will be a revival of the Ontario Henry George School with a new program of classes in the Fall.

Ben Sevack of Montreal told of the Oscar Boelens Foundation which funds the Canadian Research Committee on Taxation. Among its projects was the Peterborough study. A Site Value Association has also been formed. Research assistance will be given to any site value study in Canada.

Two other countries were also heard from at this session. Cecil Stowasser of Brisbane, Australia is Secretary of the Site Revenue Society. Queensland, he said, was one of the first Australian states to adopt site value rating. Work of the Society includes approaching City Council members, writing letters to editors, and placing newspaper advertisements with challenging headlines such as "Taxation is Theft." There is an effort to link up with young people in various reform movements.

Japan was represented by Alan Ridley, who teaches English in an accelerated program at a college in Nagoya, the fourth largest city in Japan. There is a shortage of housing and an increase in land prices; the futility of current land policies offers an opportunity to promote land value taxation.

The Saturday afternoon session featured reports from activist organizations in the U.S. The following were heard from:

Mary R. Davis is President of the Georgia League for LVT which is building up membership, holding meetings and participating in the national effort of Common Ground.

James L. Busey, President of ISTA (Intermountain Single Tax Association) said that membership is growing and is now at 70. While it is a "do it yourself" movement, it is hoped that an action program can be developed. Earl A. Hanson, ISTA's Secretary, said that opportunities exist for obtaining partial goals. Examples in Utah are: a proposal to abolish taxes on farm machinery, and a bill for taxing farm land.

Nadine Stoner is President of the Wisconsin Property Owners League (formerly of the Beloit Chapter; she now represents the State). She told of the introduction of a Senate bill for the study of land value taxation. It is necessary to reach labor, she said: "Land does not vote. Capital does not vote. Labor votes."

Charles B. Ingersoll, President of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, is a native Fairhopean. This colony in Alabama leases land and collects rents. But assessments fell too far behind and an effort to update them resulted in lawsuits by a group of dissidents who wanted to dissolve the colony and get the land deeded to them. The matter has been dragging on for years in the courts and in the legislature. It is still pending and is under appeal.

Felice Gruskin told of TRIP (Transit Riders in Pursuit) of which she is President. This New York organization seeks to direct the attention of public transit users toward land value taxation. She has testified in the City Council about it.

Oscar B. Johannsen reviewed the program of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, of which he is Executive Director. Besides publishing works by Henry George and others, the Foundation funds various projects, including Henry George programs at Pace University, St. John's University, Williams College and the University of Scranton. It has been found that the present generation of professors are not so much opposed to the Georgist philosophy as ignorant of it.

Mitchell Chanelis reported that he and his colleagues have started a group called Fairness in Taxation (FIT) and are trying to build up a political constituency. The movement should seek to mainstream the Georgist idea into the public dialogue.

Stan Frederiksen, Executive Director of PREC (Public Revenue Education Council) gave an update on the Missouri bill to enable a referendum on the two-rate property tax. In 1985 the bill passed the House but did not come to a vote in the Senate. This year it was again passed by the House but failed to get introduced into the Senate despite strong support. Efforts will continue.

Dan Sullivan of Pittsburgh reported on work in Pennsylvania. Advances in land value taxation were achieved in Duquesne and Scranton. Efforts to get Clairton to switch failed because of powerful opposition. From lessons learned, campaigns will continue.

Steven Cord, President of Common Ground (as well as of the Henry George Foundation of America) further reported on CG's efforts. Meetings held during the Conference have formulated large programs, including an advertising campaign, approaches to legislators, seeking grass roots support and forming chapters.

Canadian Celebrities

On Saturday evening Colin Bonner reappeared for a talk on "How to Get Rid of the Deficit." No one speaks today of paying off the national debt because it is numerically impossible. We can, however, liquidate the deficit and reduce the national debt, and also lower taxes on labor and capital. We should increase taxes on windfall profits on all speculative gains not the product of labor.

Jack Schwartzman paid tribute to the Canadian economist and humorist, Stephen Leacock. One of his sayings was, "Socialism would only work in heaven where they don't need it or in hell where they have it." Mr. Schwartzman gave a reading of one of Leacock's humorous pieces, "My Financial Career."

Robert Clancy spoke on two other Canadians: Robert Mundell, the economist who gave impetus to supply side ideas; and Robert Service, the poet, giving a recitation of Service's famous poem, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew." A plaque representing the

1986 Henry George Award was presented to Mr. Clancy by Mr. Rubenstein, as unanimously directed by the Board of Trustees of the New York Henry George School.

On Sunday morning, Fred Harrison, editor of Land and Liberty, discussed modern politics and the American Indian. The state today must change as it has reached its limit. Indians accept modern culture but say the white man is trying to wipe out his culture. They want self-determination and control of their land. Mr. Harrison told of a visit to Lisle Island where the Haida Indians live on a subsistence economy and are seeking to renew their culture. We have something to learn from them and they from us.

Later in the morning there were two workshops: One with Mr. Harrison on improving the contents and circulation of Land and Liberty. The other was with Michael Linton who has designed a local currency system called LET (Local Exchange Trading), about which he showed a film. This goes beyond barter and creates "green money" which can be used in a community to generate exchanges by means of computer cross-matching. Several communities have already adopted the system, which can be used in combination with standard currency.

Educational Work

Sunday afternoon again featured reports on U.S. organizations, mostly educational. Stanley Rubenstein, Director, spoke on the New York Henry George School. There is an effort to introduce land-oriented programs in high school social studies, with a packet of informational materials entitled "Land and Freedom." A recent high school contest on Protection or Free Trade yielded six winners in six states.

George L. Collins, HGS Director in Philadelphia. The three basic courses are being continued, but with difficulties in getting students, new methods are being sought.

Dionne Marx, HGS Secretary in San Francisco, said that there are efforts to revive the class work, to hold seminars and to make the media aware of the School. Evelyn Friend, Sacramento Director, said that morning classes have been tried. There are meetings and showings of "A Tale of Five Cities."

Stanley Sapiro, Los Angeles HGS President, reported that new efforts are being made to form adult classes. The main alumni activity is a series of monthly meetings.

Ernest Kahn, Boston HGS President, said that class experiments are being tried with a limited budget. The television series, "Understanding Economics" is being shown.

Walter Rybeck, Director of the Center for Public Dialogue, told of efforts to reach a wider audience. One activity is participation in relevant conferences, e.g., the recent White House Conference on Small Business. In speaking of the current situation, Mr. Rybeck said he was "pessimistic in the short run, optimistic in the long run."

Betsy Dana who conducts the Georgist Registry (in association with Common Ground) said she is aiming for a global perspective. The Annual Report of the Registry was available at the Conference. It contains reports on various Georgist organizations.

Floyd Morrow, President of BEE (Basic Economic Education), San Diego, pointed out that education and politics are not at odds but dovetail. BEE aids the Center for Public Economics at San Diego State University with scholarships. Mr. Morrow also reported on a proposal to look into the possibility of a Georgist University, which conferees endorsed. Jeffery J. Smith, BEE Educational Coordinator, reported on a poll of Georgists as to their ideas, which were diverse. He also mentioned the group visit to Nicaragua undertaken last year. A second visit did not materialize but is contemplated for the future.

The Windup

Sunday evening took care of Council business. There was discussion on the 1987 Annual Conference and conferees agreed on San Diego as its venue, probably in mid-July, with BEE as host. The current informal structure of the Council was agreed upon for another year. One change is that Edward Dodson stepped down as Deputy Chairman, and Jeffery J. Smith, nominated by Mark Sullivan, was elected to his post - an appropriate choice in view of the 1987 Conference.

The 1988 Conference was also discussed and it was felt to be a choice between Fairhope and Atlanta. The 1989 Conference has already been settled as a Conference to be held in Philadelphia in association with the International Union.

Following business, the rest of the evening was devoted to a Round Robin wherein all who wished might make brief remarks on any subject of their choosing. A great variety of interesting thoughts were expressed, mainly on the Georgist philosophy and its promotion.

The final Conference event - a welcome highlight - was a trip by bus and ferry on Monday to Vancouver Island. The City of Vancouver is on the mainland, but on the Island is Victoria, the capital of British Columbia and a charming city. Ted Gwartney and Barbara Cramer hosted the conferees on a tour of the city, including the beautiful and extensive Butchart Gardens. There was a stop at the B.C. assessment office where Mr. Gwartney and his colleagues explained and demonstrated the property assessment system, including computerization and printouts. Visits were also made by bus to typical properties. (After 13 years with the B.C. Assessment Commission, Mr. Gwartney has resigned in order to return to the U.S. where he hopes to engage in work that will combine his expertise and his Georgist interest.)

Thus ended a long and full Conference, with conferees departing to their various destinations until we meet again.