

ANNUAL JOINT GEORGIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA

RINDGE, NEW HAMPSHIRE * * * THURSDAY, JULY 9 - SUNDAY, JULY 12, 1981

It was the first time a nation-wide Georgist conference was held in New Hampshire and the results suggest that it should not be the last time. The locale was Franklin Pierce College, an agreeable venue in pleasant surroundings with a helpful staff. A recent college, founded in 1962, its motto was appropriate for our conference - "Ex Umbris ad Lucem" (From Darkness to Light). Well over 100 persons attended from many parts of the USA and Canada.

New Hampshire Evening

The Conference began on Thursday evening with a special session on New Hampshire's tax problems, organized and chaired by Richard Noyes, editor of the Salem Observer. A greeting to conferees was extended by Councilman Bernard Streeter, a member of the Governor's Council. Mr. Streeter said that New Hampshire has not yet got "tax insanity" and may be the last bastion where there are better ways of funding than sales or income taxes.

Heman Chase, long-time New Hampshire Georgist, spoke of two jobs needed on a leaky boat - pumping ship and stopping leaks. Georgists are trying to stop the leaks, but need not fight the others. Each team should respect the other.

There is now a proposal to introduce an income tax in New Hampshire. Speaking for this proposal were State Senator Cleason Blaisdell and Representative Frederick Ahrens. Against it were Senator Robert Monier and Prof. Daniel Holland of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (and a member of the Committee on Taxation, Resources and Economic Development - TRED). Moderator in the debate was Prof. John Menge, also of MIT. From the floor, conferees opposed the income tax and urged New Hampshire legislators to look into land value taxation. About 30 persons from the state attended this session in addition to the Georgist conferees.

Later the same evening, Jack Schwartzman (editor of Fragments) gave a talk on Henry Thoreau and Henry George. First pointing to the differences between them - for instance Thoreau deplored the constant drive toward material improvement whereas George accepted it - Mr. Schwartzman showed similarities between them such as respect for the individual and opposition to unjust taxation. (Mr. Schwartzman gave this same address shortly afterwards to a meeting of the Thoreau Society in Concord, Mass.)

Reagonomics

A panel on President Reagan's economic program and supply-side economics opened the session Friday morning. David Asman, editor of Manhattan Report, organ of the International Center for Economic Policy Studies (ICEPS), argued that massive spending has not solved our problems and that a decrease in taxes will accomplish more because there will be more investment in productive enterprise. Don't try to eliminate poverty by the redistribution of wealth, he said, but by spreading opportunities.

John Burger, management consultant from Minnesota (formerly with General Mills), said that human resources constitute our greatest waste, and after that, natural resources. Though sympathetic with the Reagan administration's aims, Mr. Burger said that if we don't solve the land question, it will all "go down the drain." (Mr. Burger in coming East also planned to attend a seminar at the Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York).

Edward J. Dodson (Deputy Chairman, Council of Georgist Organizations) said that land value taxation is the best way to get supply-side economics working, and he pointed to results in Pittsburgh with its building and production boom following an increase in the land value tax.

Following this panel, Hamlet Hilpert of Centralia, Washington, presented a slide show entitled "The Right Tax to Curb Urban Sprawl and Generate Urban Renewal." Pictorial examples were taken from his area but he pointed out that the same script could be used for pictures from other local areas.

Money and Land

On Friday afternoon a panel discussed aspects of the money question. Robert Swann of the E.F. Schumacher Society posed the question of how to get the Federal government out of controlling money. Only producers can create money, he said, referring to Ralph Borsodi's advocacy of a non-inflationary currency based on a commodity. Trees might be used for this purpose as a "store of value."

George Machen of the American Institute of Economic Research noted that warehouse receipts for gold were used as money and wondered whether we might call currency based on trees "Weyerhaeuser receipts." He proposed free banking and a redeemable currency.

Oscar B. Johannsen (Director, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation) defined inflation as the creation of too much money and disagreed with those who described inflation as a general rise in prices. He said that nearly everybody today has a vested interest in inflation and therefore it will be difficult to deal with until we reach a crisis where the dollar becomes worthless.

Following this there was a session on the land question chaired by Mark Sullivan (Secretary, Council of Georgist Organizations). Slides were shown by Alanna Hartzok (San Francisco) illustrating the "sagebrush rebellion". The Federal government owns about one-third of the land area of the USA, most of it in the western states. States are laying claim to these lands and mining and cattle interests have their eyes on them. Some far-seeing people see the need for conserving land in the public interest.

Gerald Shaw (Alberta, Canada) pointed to the system of Alberta as a good example of natural resource management along Georgist lines. Mineral rights are reserved to the province which resulted in a great increase in public revenue when oil was discovered in 1947. Anticipating the eventual exhaustion of this resource, Alberta is setting aside 30% of its oil revenue in a Heritage Trust Fund for the benefit of future generations; the fund now has \$8.7 billions.

Mildred J. Loomis (School of Living) spoke on the need for getting land reform and other reform groups to work together and she referred to the Land Trust movement as a significant way of approaching land reform.

Property Taxation

A solid session of reports on developments in property taxation was held Friday evening, chaired by Philip Finkelstein (Director, New York Henry George School). He referred to the New York City property tax as poorly administered and spoke of work being done to set land value assessments at full value. Mr. Finkelstein also mentioned work done to advance land value taxation in the Dominican Republic where Lucy de Silva (Director of the Henry George School there) is conducting educational and contact work.

Mitchell Chanelis (Director, Boston Henry George School) reported on Proposition 2½ (the Massachusetts equivalent of California's Proposition 13) which went into effect July 1. The property tax is now not to exceed 2½% of assessed value; any tax over \$25 of \$1000 of value must be revised downward. This new law represents a challenge and an opportunity to Georgists.

Prof. Arch Woodruff of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy told of Connecticut where there is pressure for a state income tax which must be resisted and where there are possibilities for a state land value tax.

Steven Cord (President, Henry George Foundation) said that the emphasis should be on getting more public revenue from land values, even if only a few mills here and there. He urged personal visits to legislators, which was an important instrument in advancing land value taxation in Pennsylvania.

William Lucey, President of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, told of the origins and development of the Fairhope colony on Mobile Bay in Alabama, and mentioned some of the present problems caused by a group of dissidents. But there has also emerged strong support for the colony and the Single Tax Advocates has been formed which is supportive of the colony.

Craig Cringan (Director, Toronto School of Economic Science) said that property taxes are not high enough to discourage improvements, nor high enough to discourage speculation, but at least Toronto is not a slum.

Malcolm McCarthy of Peterborough, Ontario, referred to an earlier study he worked on for Port Credit as a demonstration town for land value taxation. But Port Credit merged with Mississauga rendering the report useless. Now Mr. McCarthy is engaged on a similar study for his town of Peterborough, as a result of interest by the Kiwanis Club, which appointed a committee for the purpose.

Ted Gwartney, Commissioner of the Assessment Authority of British Columbia, said that his administration has undertaken an improvement in assessments, that a good system has evolved which serves as a model for others. He has made a submission to the British Columbia government on land value taxation. There is land price inflation, but the government is also getting more revenue from land, so it is not a question they are willing to look at now.

Following this session, another slide show was presented by Alanna Hartzok, this one on "New Hope for Global Crisis", in which today's critical conditions were illustrated, and an appeal made for a new outlook and constructive effort.

Education

Saturday morning was devoted to reports and discussion on education in Georgist fundamentals. Robert Clancy (President, Henry George Institute), serving as chairman, contended that Henry George's Progress and Poverty does a job of convincing and motivating people better than any other single method that has been evolved, and that the Institute's correspondence course based on the book is producing results.

Various Directors of the Henry George School reported on their programs:

George Collins (Philadelphia) said that publicity for the course in Fundamental Economics brings out current economic issues and philosophies (such as supply side).

Harry Pollard (Los Angeles) reported that an adult course has been developed based on the high school course in Classical Analysis which draws from Henry George's major works and is being taught in many schools.

Stanley Rubenstein (Long Island) spoke of a revised and abridged course that has been developed and is being used with the aim of reaching a wider audience.

Mitchell Chanellis (Boston) told of the initiation of public forums to attract attention. The first one, on Proposition 2½, aroused much interest and more are being planned.

Fryda Ossias (trustee, New York) referred to recent programs undertaken in New York, including a training course taught by Mr. Rubenstein, and a noonday luncheon forum on current events.

Alanna Hartzok (San Francisco) reported on a successful all-day seminar at the end of which participants were given lessons for the entire course in Fundamental Economics to take home.

Gerald Shaw (Calgary) said that his school can now set up its own courses within the public adult education system.

Craig Cringan (Toronto) who has succeeded Tim Fielding as Director, spoke of a continuing effort to reach out. (In Canada the School is known as the School of Economic Science.)

A special program has been developed in Washington, D.C. Walter Rybeck, active in Georgist work, was formerly aide to Congressman Henry S. Reuss and now to Congressman Bill Coyne; he has been retained full-time for contacts with other legislators and officials and for liaison on the national level.

Following the education session, Richard Barbuto spoke of his organization, Bread for the World, whose first aim is to feed the people, but it emphasizes land use. Along with this is the Green Pastures project which seeks to orient people toward peace and justice. The movement is also known as "Folks on the Move."

Georgist Organizations

After the Saturday morning session there was an enjoyable picnic by the lake adjoining the college which allowed time for recreation - boating, swimming and a musical interlude provided by Tilman and Eva Schaefer with a mandolin and a guitar.

Following this there was a meeting of the Henry George Foundation of America with Steven Cord as chairman. One opening on the Board of Trustees was filled by Edward J. Dodson. Budget was discussed and it was agreed to set aside \$5000 for special publicity. Formation of the Center for the Study of Economics was reported.

Next was a meeting of the Council of Georgist Organizations, chaired by Robert Clancy. First, some organizations reported on their work: Stanley Frederiksen for PREC (Public Revenue Education Council), with a greeting from former President Noah D. Alper; Richard Biddle and Frank E. Nelson for the Delaware Valley Incentive Tax League; Marvin Morris for the Rochester League; and Mr. Clancy spoke briefly on the Henry George Institute. George Collins told of progress being made on the restoration of the Henry George Birthplace, with research on the original building plans.

A report of the activities of the Council of Georgist Organizations during the past year - including the planning of this year's Conference, the Council's first - was presented, and questions pertaining to its future were discussed. It was agreed that the present staff of the Council be continued for another year - Robert Clancy, Chairman; Edward J. Dodson, Deputy Chairman; Mark Sullivan, Secretary - with a view to getting the Council on a more permanent basis, possibly incorporating. Among proposed projects were the development of an introductory brochure, the building up of a mailing list and the initiation of a periodical suitable for outside distribution, perhaps along the lines of the now discontinued New Leaf edited by Tony Meis. While there were differing opinions on the role of the Council, it was the consensus that it should keep going and that further counselling and exchange of ideas and information should be pursued.

Following a champagne reception, the Conference banquet was held Saturday evening. New Hampshire host Richard Noyes was toastmaster. John Kelly (Scranton, Pa.) spoke on the pervasiveness of the Georgist philosophy and said he cannot read the newspapers without being reminded of Henry George. He said freedom was the "penultimate goal" of the Georgist philosophy, with justice as the final goal.

Special guest speaker was Robert Wood, former Secretary of the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (and one of the trustees of the Boston Henry George School). He referred to a study made in 1950 for President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals, undertaken by William McGill of Columbia University and his associates. At that time there was a prevalent feeling that the U.S. could do anything it wanted, it was only a question of deciding. Since then the attitude has changed. After several reversals, Americans are no longer so certain of themselves. We cannot do everything. The Reagan administration expresses the current feeling that we have hard choices and must be concerned with what we can do. With the reduction of federal government, the locale of controversy will be shifted to the state and local scene. This represents an opportunity for Georgists. Land values have grown to the point where they are conspicuous and it is time to do something about it at home since people will no longer be running so much to Washington.

Following this well-received talk, Lancaster M. Greene, President of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, presented copies of new editions of Henry George's works published by Schalkenbach, to Franklin Pierce College. They included Progress and Poverty, Protection or Free Trade, Social Problems and The Science of Political Economy.

Jack Schwartzman then paid tribute to those who had planned this successful conference: Richard Noyes, genial New Hampshire host, who had recommended Franklin Pierce College; Mitchell Chanellis who performed useful liaison between Boston and New Hampshire; Mark Sullivan who ran Conference registration smoothly and served as contact between conferees and college personnel; and Robert Clancy who did the over-all planning. Special mention was made of Louise Pulini and the staff of the Henry George School for their cooperation. And a vote of thanks was given for the college personnel who had been very helpful.

Final Sessions

Sunday morning featured a special program, including Slow Turtle (John Peters), Commissioner of Indian Affairs for Massachusetts, who called attention to the traditions of the American Indian - a sense of freedom, a democratic government, a feeling for nature. A film was next presented by Mitchell Chanellis on Guatemala, emphasizing the inequality and poverty there, but pointing to revolution rather than reform. Conferees felt a better answer needs to be given for the problems portrayed.

The final official meeting was the Evaluation Session chaired by Robert Clancy. Conferees were unanimous in favoring this type of Conference, including a rural college or conference location rather than a city hotel. While they wanted sessions which all could attend rather than splitting them up, it was felt that a method ought to be worked out for fuller participation.

Attention was called to the International Conference to be held next year in Holland, July 24-31, and it was agreed that the timing of the American Conference ought to be coordinated with it so that those who wish could attend both. It was also agreed that it should be held somewhere in the East. Some locations were suggested - Maine, Pittsburgh, North Carolina, Miami - but no decision made. Consultations will continue and announcements made as soon as possible. For 1983, Harry Pollard extended an invitation for the Conference to be held in Southern California.

With the Conference officially ended, there were still some post-Conference activities. Slow Turtle led the conferees in an inspiring outdoor Indian prayer ceremony. A large number of people, with Richard Noyes as guide, visited the nearby Cathedral of the Pines, a unique outdoor place of worship. George Collins presented to the Cathedral a brick from the Birthplace of Henry George to be inserted in an altar composed of stones contributed from far and wide.

Still another activity was a walk up Mount Monadnock, a favorite haunt of Thoreau, with a few hardy souls climbing to the top.

And so home, to meet again next year!

Publicity and Publications

The Conference, especially the Thursday evening session on New Hampshire, was extensively reported in the New Hampshire press, thanks to the publicity efforts of Richard Noyes. There was also some radio reporting.

Much literature was displayed at the Conference representing the various groups which participated - some free and some for sale. Special notice should be taken of the considerable amount and variety of literature displayed by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation with the courteously helpful Pat Aller on hand to take care of sales and free distribution.

A special item making its debut at this Conference was an attractive new illustrated brochure on "Pittsburgh's Land Value Tax." It was prepared by Dan Sullivan, Director of the Incentive Tax League of Pennsylvania. It graphically outlines the principles of land value taxation with special reference to its application in Pittsburgh. For information about this booklet, write to Dan Sullivan, 3243 Parkview Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213.

* * * * *

Frequently expressed at the Rindge Conference was gratification at the constructive attitude and cooperative spirit prevailing. It seems likely that this "togetherness" was enhanced by the work of the Council of Georgist Organizations during the past year in maintaining communication among Georgist groups and individuals. One of the tasks of the Council is the planning of the Annual Conferences. We hope the positive outlook can be built upon. Toward this end, any counsel from readers will be welcome, either about next year's Conference or about the work in general. Write to the Council of Georgist Organizations, 5 E. 44th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.