

Henry George News

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West Coast News

by David Giesen

Alchemy, synergy, transformation. All three words have distinct connotations, though at base they signify alteration. In terms of our students, we of the Henry George Schools don't mean by "alteration" some action coercive in nature, but a "bringing out," or a "bringing forward." In fact, that is the etymological sense of the word "educate": to bring forward.

Our goal is not to replace the thoughts of our students for that would be an act of wasteful subtraction, a taking from us and an emplacing in them. Rather our object is to enable that wonderful embodiment that is a sentient human being to bring forth more of his potential.

The Henry George School is San Francisco is pioneering the amalgamation of sensual immersion education - teaching which stimulates all of the senses - with academic regimen. In not so redoubtable terms that means we aim to touch the spirit, what George Bernard Shaw called "the life force" of the man, as well as to guide his intellect. The human being is fundamentally a creature of desire. The discipline called Economics recognizes this for it is often described as "the study of the distribution of scarce resources." Put bluntly it is, "I want what you want; how shall we determine who gets it? The economist's reply is, "Whoever wants it most," that is, whoever will pay the highest price. We are beings of passion - born of it, moved by it to pursue a life's course. Take away passion and what is the human being but a creature we either find contemptibly listless or tragically broken in spirit. With this observation ever before us as we seek to create effective programming conveying the message of Henry George, we find it incumbent upon ourselves not to neglect the "life force" of humanity. A man may grasp the logic of Land Value Taxation, how it operates, what proper alignments it would establish, how neatly in conformity with natural law it behaves, but if LVT's bearing upon the fulfillment of his desires is not felt, why should we expect him to embrace it?

Our students have wants. Let us show them how their wants are stifled and plugged by the extortion of their passions as they seek natural opportunity for exercise.

Here in San Francisco we resort to live theater in striving to touch the quick of our students. Any of the arts might do,

but our resources lead us to theater in enrolling, matriculating and graduating the spirit of our students.

How? Though by no means fully satisfied with the following, it forms, nevertheless, the core of the non-academic aspect of our curriculum.

We utilize "living history" portrayals of four dynamic 19th century men to illustrate the fulfillment of a life's passion through access to the land. While maintaining scholarly integrity in these chautauqua performances, the central theme of access to the earth is brought out in discussion. John James Audubon, the greatest painter of bird life ever, would have atrophied had America's wilderness been denied him. The discoveries and observations of Charles Darwin were possible only through his firsthand experiences of the earth; indeed, his extraordinary imaginative powers which enabled him to write and reason so powerfully later in life were ignited by such experience. Henry George's passion for justice, and his insight into the nature of injustice were born in the upstart West, and particularly in burgeoning San Francisco, whose numbers swelled in forty years to make it (at one time) the third largest city in America. Progress & Poverty was written in a state mad with land speculation. And Theodore Roosevelt's intention to "make the body strong" and get the mind clear was achievable only where there was equality of natural opportunity. All that Roosevelt accomplished, every deed he essayed, legal or extralegal (e.g. the creation of the Panama Canal), stemmed from his passion for reaching potential through equality or opportunity. "Natural resources should be regarded as public utilities," he averred.

By no means does this use of theater/discussion/lecture mean that we have abandoned traditional class work; indeed we are expanding our course offerings to include Advanced Economics. But it does mean that in the past year and a half over 2,200 elementary, middle and high school students have been introduced to Henry George and to their birthright as citizens. It means that over 1,100 adults, including 64 Communications, Political Science and Economics professors at a conference at the George Bush School of Presidential Studies in College Station, Texas (Texas A&M) have been acquainted with the vision and curriculum of the HGS. And it means that schools, organizations and universities are seeking us out to present material that is not so appealing in other forms.

(continued on page six)

Nature's Worth *from page three*

Two economists from Columbia University, Dr. Graciela Chichilnisky and Dr. Geoffrey Heal, propose selling investment shares in a given ecosystem. In the case of the Catskills, investors would gain returns "either from a share of the costs saved by not having to build a treatment plant," where the taxpayer would be paying shareholders to keep the land out of use, or "by actually selling ecosystem services," meaning a private consortium would sell to the public its drinking water, once a free provision of nature. Left unexplored are the possible effects of profit motives in this plan, such as shareholders voting to sell off some of the preserved area for development, for a greater or more immediate return on their investment. Why should we start paying private investors for a normally free public service?

Absurdities aside, there is the option of the taxpayers sharing the cost of keeping this natural water filter undeveloped, or economically speaking, out of commercial use, for this would in fact be the best use of that land. The need for clean water for work and living cannot be overstated, economically or otherwise. What we have here is a broader application of what is traditionally meant by economics; or its expanded definition, to account for the total cost of putting a given area to economic use, including the potential ecological trade-offs. This is a fine example of the pattern of development one would find in a fully Georgist economy, where large areas of land, of different ecosystems, would be preserved for the necessary life-sustaining functions they serve - as opposed to the rampant and chaotic development pattern students sometimes picture accompanying the freeing-up of the land from speculation. What's interesting about the research is the evidently growing awareness of the role the land and natural resources play in economics.

"People make economic choices involving nature all the time...but they do so without taking all the costs into account," writes Stevens. Consider the value of a wetland's flood-protection and water cleansing abilities, lost to a shopping center built in its place. "If such costs were reflected in day-to-day transactions, these theorists say,



society would pay more attention to what is lost when land is 'developed.'" As a result, society would also become increasingly conscious of perfectly usable land, such as empty city lots, being left undeveloped. Putting those sites to use, and improving sites that are underused relative to their ecological "imprint", would make better sense to a society wary of wasting away its limited ecosystem services. Discouraging such disuse, i.e. speculation, would require the removal of the incentives to landowners to hold that land from use. What about Henry George's remedy?

With George's proposal, we know that the owner of land would pay its full value to the community in the form of a tax, LVT. This would require the owner to use the land as economically as possible. With all other taxes abolished, and man's right to the products of his labor restored, land owners will have an incentive to improve the land all they wished, while land decidedly necessary for the good of the community, like the Catskills watershed, could be kept undeveloped, thus preserved, in consideration of the society-wide role they serve. Any land designated for preservation will lessen the common stock of available sites for use or improvement, increasing the demand for those sites and raising their value. This in turn fuels the need to develop as productively and as environmentally sound as possible; a win-win situation.

If the estimate for the value of the world's natural resources, roughly \$33 trillion (at least twice the GNP of the entire planet), is even remotely in the ballpark, and the cost to supplant the services they provide far exceeds that figure, then the need to best use the finite amount of land available can't be stressed enough. The implications of not doing so could be disastrous. According to Dr. Robert Repetto, senior economist at the World Resources Institute, "In Indonesia...losses from soil erosion reduced the net value of crops by about 40% and the loss of value from deforestation was four times as high as the value of the timber extracted." From the same study it was estimated that Costa Rica suffered a 25 to 30% reduction of potential growth from depletion of its soils, forests and fisheries. An effort to introduce natural resource accounting in the U.S. calculation of economic worth was made in 1993, but Congress has since put the measure on hold pending a study of the soundness of the approach by the National Academy of Sciences. Stevens indicates that a report is due this year. Such a measure

would force the recognition of the need to put the land to its best economic and ecological use.

It's quite possible that through the increasing environmental threats globally, traditional economists will begin to understand the actual relation of the land to production. Likewise, ecologists and environmentalists will be forced to recognize the importance of framing their arguments in terms of costs other than moral and ethical. As ecologist Dr.

Stuart Pimm writes, "So often, people concerned with protecting the environment go up against these very highly detailed analyses and feel they don't have anything in

kind with which to respond." With total cost accounting of ecosystem services they now do, and the communication gap may be bridged by both sides through a shared interest in the economic role of the land. Proponents of Georgism and LVT couldn't wish for a better audience.



West Coast *from page two*

We are not suggesting that this immersion in the aura of passionate men is the end all, but insofar as it reaches the vital part of our students, and insofar as they feel their own passion at stake in the economic scheme of things and they appreciate the great loss incurred by thwarted opportunity, we feel that objectives of the Henry George Schools have been reached. What we recognize, here in San Francisco, is that the alchemy we wish to work in our students' lives is at work upon us too, drawing from us creative energies in fulfilling and renewing our purpose.

Conference *from page three*

(continued from page two) pointing out the sporadic bursts of development and speculation along the way. Coming downtown on Lexington Ave. we'll head to a somewhat regentrified Alphabet City, passing Tompkins Square enroute. Finishing with busy Houston St., we'll turn back North on Lafayette St. taking in Cooper Union, Astor Place, and Union Square. Attendees will be dropped off for the evening's events at St. Stephen's Church. The tour promises to be as interesting as it is fun. - M.P.