

POSTBAG

RENT IS REDUNDANT?

Sir, It is now many years since I gave up trying to persuade Georgists to bring their message into the twentieth century. If I write now, it is only because of the juxtaposition of the article on Ronald Burgess and Dr Loveless "What shall we do to succeed?" in *Land and Liberty* (Summer 1995).

Dr Burgess avoids the use of the word Rent as he does Land because these words have long since ceased to have the meaning they conveyed to both economists and the ordinary man on the west coast of America in the late nineteenth century. Ricardo's so-called Law of Rent and its fervent espousal by John Stuart Mill (not to mention Marx) has long been consigned to redundant economic history by economists: to the ordinary man rent is a dead loss he must pay to a landlord. He would, in the UK at least, rather "own" his house. Politicians listen seriously only to their electorate and economic advisers.

You may not like this state of affairs, you may think it a deplorable ignorance of the obvious, but it has been this way for decades and so long as Georgists cling to an outmoded vocabulary it is they who will be ignored: it is they who will appear "obscurantist".

Dr Burgess has made a brave effort to reformulate the ideas of Henry George in a way which is comprehensible today. One might argue about how well he has succeeded in this endeavour but that is another matter.

Georgists can cling to redundant language understandable only to them or they can appear to offer relevant solutions to the economic ills of today. They cannot do both. Dr Loveless

should be considering which words to discard rather than thinking up new ones.

M.J.Gilbert
Barnet,
England

TIME TO GET REAL

Sir, Listen to what Henry George thought about procrastination. On the abolition of tariffs he said: "[This] plea for delay...will not bear examination". And "If protection be unjust...then anything short of its complete and immediate abolition involves a continuance of injustice." There is more, much, much more in *Protection or Free Trade* (Ch.20).

But these quotes relate only to "protection". How much more so do they apply to the underlying evil of private land (rent) ownership, without reform of which tariff removal is ineffective?

Recently I read a report in a Sydney newspaper of the homeless women, who spend their nights living in bus shelters because there are insufficient welfare beds available. They clutch their plastic bags and avoid eye contact, in the hope they won't be noticed or mugged.

Why should we be concerned for the present landowners who have "acquired land according to laws long established"? I ask you: is it any wonder that ageing Georgists are frequently heard to say: "It won't happen in MY time!" Sometimes I wonder if they really believe it will happen at all!

And is it any wonder that the young, so impatient and energetic, find little to hold them to our cause? I mean, let's *get real*, man!

Frederick J. Auld,
Hobart,
Tasmania.

CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

The Danish conference was honoured to have amongst its participants Malawi's Chief Minister of Land and Valuation, the Hon Alhaji Shaibu Itimu, and Mr Alexander Korsunov, the Mayor of Novgorod, Russia. They contributed talks and were present at most of the sessions.

At the conclusion of the Conference the following statement was agreed by the members of the Conference and subsequently translated into Russian and Danish for the benefit of those participants;

"The 21st Conference of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade in Roskilde, Denmark, from 22nd to 28th July 1995, confirmed that the principles of Henry George, as propounded more than 100 years ago, are even more pertinent to the world today. These indeed offer the best way out of the impasse in which much of the world finds itself as the result of ignoring the basic truths of political economy and their underlying ethics.

The Conference, the theme of which was "The Missing Clause in the Bill of Rights: Land for the People," established that National Constitutions and Declarations of Human Rights and the United Nations' Charter of Human Rights, have overlooked the right of the people to their land. This has allowed the rent of the land — that land on which present and future generations must live — to be appropriated and become the source of unearned income and wealth, necessitating heavy taxation of labour and capital to the extent of discouraging production. These factors are a basic cause of unemployment and poverty."