

This time we passed the frigate, saluting, but not stopping, and entered the port. It was war time; on the Pampas some phase of the interminable quarrels of this Southern federation was being fought out, and the harbour was crowded with men-of-war. Nearly all the Brazilian navy was there, watching the progress of events; and besides these, and the numerous merchantmen, the ensign of almost every nation was displayed above some armed vessel. By direction of the officer who boarded us, we proceeded past them all, to the farther side of the harbour, where we were ordered to lie in quarantine seven days before being allowed to coal.

The new scene, the various objects of interest around and the duties of clearing up, conspired to make us forget the events of the morning, but the sun was yet some distance above the western horizon when a startling circumstance occurred to recall them to our minds.

Nearly all hands were busily engaged below, only two or three loitering around the deck, when the quartermaster, sweeping the harbour with his glass, noticed something floating in, which riveted his attention. Again and again he looked at it; then, with surprise and dismay in his face, called the officer of the deck. The whisper spread through the ship, and in a few minutes all were watching in silence the object that seemed drifting towards us. Onward it came, through all the vessels that lay beyond us — now lost to our view, now coming in sight again — turning and tacking as though piloted by life, and

steadily holding its course for our steamer. It passed the last ship, and came straight for us. It came closer, and every doubt was dispelled — it was, indeed, the coffin! A thrill of awe passed through every heart as the fact became assured.

**Right under our bows came the box; it touched our side; halted a moment, as if claiming recognition, and then drifted slowly past us towards the shore.**

**There was an excited murmur forward, a whispered consultation in the knot of officers aft; then one advanced — ‘Man the quarter boat, boys: take pick and spades; tow the coffin ashore, and bury the body!’**

It was the work of a moment — the boat shot like an arrow from our side, the ashen oars bending with the energy of the stroke. Reverently and gently they secured the box, and with slow, solemn strokes, towed it to the foot of the desolate looking hill that skirts the bay. There, breaking it open, they bore the corpse, covered with the flag, a little distance up the hillside, and making in the twilight a grave among the chaparral, laid it to rest, marking the spot with a rude cross, which, concealed from observation by the bushes, would yet serve as a mark of recognition, and secure the grave, should it be noticed, from the intrusion of vandal hands.

And so, in spite of all, that dying wish was gratified, and the body which the waters refused to receive was laid to rest in its mother earth.

## HOW ‘STRATEGY’ RUNS THE GEORGIST MOVEMENT

by Richard Giles

We have a new term ‘Geoism’. It seems to have replaced Georgism and it seems to announce a new direction for the movement. But what does it mean? Someone said it is “knowledge of the earth” but, entomologically, it does not mean that. And, if it did is that Georgism?

**One correspondent says the “new tack” is “bringing Georgism to politically active people who are unfamiliar with Georgist views by using topics they are interested in rather than putting out our own line . . .” So, by going in to battle for other causes, Georgists hope to gain followers.**

From observation Geoism seems to stand for the “new tack”. It is a word which more describes a strategy than a doctrine. I wish to raise two issues regarding this amorphous Geoism. The first is that, after we have had Geoism for a time, will we still have Georgism?

The second issue is whether this “new tack” is the

right strategy? These are related issues since we do not want a strategy which works at the expense of the doctrine. Without a grasp of first principles the movement can easily lose its way. Geoism seems to give the freedom to do this.

After George’s death in 1897 his son, vaguely uneasy about what had already become known as the ‘single tax movement’, wrote “Mr George never regarded the term (single tax) as describing his philosophy, but rather as indicating the method he would take to apply it”. That is, already by 1900 Georgism had become more of a tax reform than a philosophy. The strategy, ‘the single tax’, was already dangerously near to excluding the principles of the Henry George philosophy.

### **‘GOVERNMENT ALONE PRODUCES RENT’**

**The relative absence of first principles soon carried the movement into what can be regarded as error. It began to be assumed that Government alone creates rent.**

This view was good for strategy. Promoters of Georgism were anti-tax and took as an aim 'small government' with a small revenue. The 'single tax' provided that revenue. From here it was a small step to the idea that Government produced this revenue by the infrastructure and services it provides. And the conclusion was then that Government alone produces *rent*.

Most only implied this without specifying it as doctrine. Clearly, it was not doctrine since as doctrine it had some problems. For example, do not institutions other than Government produce rent? Has not the community a claim to have a part in rent creation? And what happens after privatisation has taken away most public utilities from Government? And, could not rent arise without Government?

Finally, hasn't this view ignored the very *rent* paradigm used by Ricardo: those farms that have differential production due, not to Government, but to varying fertility?

**In other words, the strategy had produced a problem in doctrine. Let us assume that the theory could overcome the problems so far mentioned, there was still however the problem of overcoming the first principles of Geogist philosophy.**

Rent is a surplus return for the same exertion — surplus that is to the return on some marginal site. We are forced to look for something that will account for this surplus. In our corrupt society it can be government legislation (that creates a monopoly or gives some privileged group a tax break). That is quasi-rent. However, in truth the 'something' is either some aspect of *nature* or of *human cooperation*. They separately or together account for rent.

Yet this means that true *rent* is a natural phenomenon (rent can arise because humans by nature are gregarious and given to cooperation as a way of saving effort). Rent belongs to a realm *beyond* Government or any other institution. They are but forms which human cooperation can take. Strategy had led to false doctrine.

#### **'THERE IS NO RENT ON HOME SITES'**

**Some time ago it was vigorously argued that no rent occurs on vacant land and on home sites. Rent could only occur in the 'economy'. Homes were not part of this economy. Vacant land was not part of this economy.**

Its proponents added that Georgists (and George himself) had always explained rent in terms of production; but there was no production on home sites or vacant land.

Whether intended or not the view did have some advantages as a promotional strategy. The hardest nut to crack had always been the home owner. Now, the 'single tax' need not be levied against homes. Vacant land however was still a problem since

promotion always stressed the evil of land speculation and vacant land was the most obvious way this speculation manifested itself.

Like the first theory this one presented doctrinal difficulties. For instance, how is residential land value or the value of vacant land to be explained? It had to be explained by drawing in another concept altogether. Some said that was a "ransom" from those who need land to those who have it.

But rather than pursue this, let us once again turn to first principles. In fact, let us turn to the same first principle as before. *Rent* is a part of nature. Thus, it must have as little to do with the market economy as it has with Government. The market economy is an institution, just one form in which rent manifests. *Rent* arises wherever differences in nature or in human cooperation lends special advantages to some land and to some landholders.

In the well-known teaching example of the beginnings of settlement on a plain found next to a river no market economy is involved but there is still rent. Due to varying fertility the yields of the farms differ. That is it. It would be the same if we had been dealing with domestic vegetable gardens.

Finally, let us visit a new housing subdivision. It was once a farm overlooking the sea. As yet no houses have been built. As one goes up the hill and gets closer to the best vantage point (from which the sea is most fully able to be seen), the value of lots increases. Thus, due to a variation in nature (similar to a variation in fertility) those on the better sites receiving a surplus return for the same exertion. That is *rent*.

#### **'GEOISTS SHOULD SUPPORT ECO-TAXES AND CONGESTION CHARGES'**

**Some say we should adopt various eco-taxes and congestion charges. As a way of promoting the movement 'initiatives' like eco-taxes and congestion charges seem to have merit. We would then join the in-crowd and not look like "dinosaurs" (as one *Geoist* puts it). There is even the hint here to play down the revered 'single tax'.**

Previously we looked at congestion charges (eg beach fees) showing, I think, that those charges (which arise from the concept of joint rights in land) are inconsistent with the basic principle of equal rights in land. It could be added that the joint ownership of land is also inconsistent with the principle that nature is given not produced. (The Association is producing the relevant Chapter from George's *A Perplexed Philosopher* which may be ordered from the Association.)

Now let us turn to eco-taxes. Eco and other taxes recommended by some Geoists are meant to discourage certain harmful activities — harmful that is in the perception of those who want them!

George was a devotee of Jeffersonian democracy. That, when one thinks about it, is less a theory of democracy and more a theory of natural rights. Human nature encompasses certain basic desires. In the *Declaration of Independence* Thomas Jefferson enumerates them as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

**Natural rights are those rights which allow human beings to express or fulfill their nature. George believed in a society which achieved happiness and fulfilment through the provision of those rights.**

Now eco-taxes and other behaviour management regimes — called social engineering — are a far cry from this. They work from an entirely different basis. They work 'from above' and not 'from below'. Here the happiness of society comes from ever more extensive social control. The clever and inventive devices of experts (eco-taxes, tradable rights, etc) rest upon an appeal to selfishness not to unselfishness.

Such an approach is not Georgist. One is again reminded about the joke from Stalinist Russia in the 1930s of someone who is told about all the delights of life under the Five Year Plans. He agrees it will be paradise but says he would not want to live there! We are fast approaching that situation in the West.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Without a painstaking absorption of first principles alien ideas enter more easily. The current renaming of the movement as *Geoism* can help to take it

farther away and faster than ever from its first principles.

But this leads us to ask why not make the first principles of Georgism the strategy? Certainly Georgists have to be aware of them. When Georgism first appeared the best way of defeating it was, as Tolstoy suggests, to ignore it. How much worse is it when Georgists ignore Henry George? If asked when they had last read a work of Henry George, his biography or an authoritative study of his philosophy, almost all Georgists would have to say decades ago, or never!

But why not give the tax case a bit of a rest and give some attention to the basic principles of Georgism? After all, most opponents of Georgism are opponents not because they cannot accept land value taxation, but because they reject its underlying principles. Plying the tax case gives opponents an opportunity to conceal what they are really rejecting.

Do most social problems come from our claim to own land? Is this claim wrong? Then why not say so? After all, slavery was not removed by talk of its "externalities". It was wrong in principle and abolitionists said so!

**While ever teaching is subsumed under some promotional strategy we are going to have Georgists who are not in touch with basic principles — and who may in fact not accept them. How easy it is for such people to end up running the movement!**

## **LIONEL BOORMAN'S PASSING**

It is still hard to accept that one of our closest associates, Lionel Boorman, has passed on. Lionel died on 4 March, 2003, aged 92. The son of a country school teacher, he joined the Georgist movement in 1939 while working as an intelligence officer (Warrant Officer) at the Cowra POW camp.

As well as advising those who made a television mini-series *The Cowra Outbreak* — the largest in history — his close connection with events drew military historians to his doorstep. It might be said that, by virtue of playing chess with some of the Italian inmates, he became aware of the impending outbreak and informed the camp commandant. Unfortunately, beyond bringing in much-needed equipment the warning was disregarded.

Lionel was admitted as a solicitor in 1938 and was a life member of the Law Society. He became a partner in the city law firm of Booth and Boorman after the War and served as honorary solicitor to both the Association for Good Government and the NSW Henry George Foundation Ltd for over 50 years until his retirement in the early 1990s. Lionel also served as honorary solicitor to the Eastwood Bowling Club for 27 years. Lionel was also a long time member of

Amnesty International. Lionel passionately believed and was a keen advocate of the philosophy of Henry George, principally writing letters overseas to colleagues and to the newspapers. He supported Fred Harrison's Russian campaign and, recently, land reform through the Scottish Parliament, sending much information to Scotland about our rating system.

Lionel contributed a long Affidavit to the NSW Attorney General regarding the origins of the NSW Henry George Foundation Ltd and was interested in the outcome of the Carr Trust case. The judgement in favour of the charitable status of that trust owes much to Lionel's efforts.

Lionel loved music, his favourite composer was Beethoven. He also composed music — one of his pieces was played at his funeral. Lionel had a full and happy life though the loss of his wife May and of his daughter Nancy at a relatively early age were blows which struck him hard. Throughout his life he valued a sense of humour and once told me that he was always a little wary of someone who had no sense of humour.

I am indebted for much of the information above to