

50 Years in the Georgist Movement

by GASTON HAXO

MY association with the Georgist movement began under fortuitous circumstances in New York City one July night in 1912. Having recently immigrated to the U.S. from France, I was on my way home, earlier than usual, about 9 P.M., walking east on 125th Street. As I crossed Seventh Avenue, I noticed a meeting was being held and as I was in no hurry I decided to see what it was about.

"The Earth For All," said the banner dangling from a pole attached to a small platform. The speaker was answering questions. "How do you propose to raise wages?" The answer astounded me. The only way I knew to get higher wages was to ask the boss for a raise, failing which, to look for a better job—but to *tax land!* Who would have thought of that? Yet it made sense once you heard it explained; and so did his other answers bearing on rents and the cost of living.

When the meeting broke up I went home with a distinct feeling that something had happened to me and I wanted to hear more. The following week I was there early and learned a lot more; the pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place and the overall picture began to appear. Only one point remained to be cleared up; would one have to buy the land and then pay rent instead of taxes? I was afraid to ask the question, but before leaving I bought the five cent pamphlet which an old lady was passing around, "The Story of my Dictatorship."



Back in my room I began reading and after a few pages I had my answer: The land would have no selling value, it would all be free. That did it, I had discovered a new world. The few hours left of the night when I finally let go of that pamphlet and went to bed, were devoted mostly to propounding my new philosophy to imaginary audiences until, like the dictator in the story, I dozed off. How I ever got to work on time that day is beyond me. The following Wednesday I joined the Land Value Tax party.

The first thing I had learned was that another group of single taxers held meetings at the same spot Friday nights. They have no use for the party, I was told; they preach the single tax throughout the year, but on election day, their only chance to vote for it, they vote for something else. I was shocked, nevertheless, my curiosity being aroused, Friday night found me at the corner to have a look at those Tammany Hall single taxers. It was a splendid meeting and I was thrilled. Whatever antagonism I might have developed towards them vanished completely, out of party loyalty. At the close of the meeting I spoke to a young man who sold me a copy of *Progress and Poverty* urging me to attend their Sunday evening meetings at their 42nd Street headquarters. I did, and became a member of the

Manhattan Single Tax Club. Now I had my feet firmly planted in the two camps, I wasn't going to miss anything. A few weeks later the club held a banquet at Brighton Beach to honor Francis Neilson, then a member of the British Parliament. The large hall filled with enthusiastic guests, plus the wonderful speeches, gave me my biggest thrill.

About this time the presidential campaign got under way—the big three: Wilson for the Democrats; Taft for the Republicans; Teddy Roosevelt for the Progressives (Bull Moose Party) and in the minor league; Socialist, Socialist Labor, and last but not least the Land Value Tax party. Since we were not on the official ballot our circulars, with platform and candidates, urged the voters to write in the names.

As is usually the case in such organizations, as ours, all the tedious work rested on the shoulders of a few. When Jerome C. Reis, our most active member, went back to Philadelphia and when the founder and leader, Joseph F. Darling, died, the party died with him.

But the idea was not dead by any means. Back in his home town, Jerry Reis contacted all the single taxers in and around Philadelphia and the Single Tax party of Pennsylvania was organized. In the 1915 mayoralty election they got on the ballot by petition with a full ticket. The returns were good, much better than expected. When the news reached New York, Antonio Bastida suggested to me that we visit them some Sunday. We did and were given a grand reception at their headquarters. What we saw and heard that day positively electrified us. A meeting was called soon afterward—if Philadelphia could do this, so could we. With headquarters on 14th Street near Eighth Avenue the land party of New York was launched.

While we were busy building our

Georgists are known for being long-lived, but not many today can boast of fifty years in the movement as can the redoubtable Gaston Haxo. This, his golden anniversary survey, modestly refrains from mentioning that he is the author of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, published in 1941. This book has been described as the best summation of *Progress and Poverty* ever done, and it is hoped that it will be republished soon. Mr. Haxo is celebrating his 75th birthday on December 2nd.

new party in the summer of 1916, the California single taxers, led by Luke North, started their "Great Adventure" campaign and succeeded in placing a Single Tax amendment on the ballot by initiative petition. The real estate interests all over California were scared stiff and put up a terrific and costly battle. They beat the amendment but the vote in favor was 260,000. In the spring of 1917 Luke North came East and a "Great Adventure" conference was held in Atlantic City on April 13-15. The Philadelphia delegation was there with bells on. We of New York hoped to recruit members for our party. It was a memorable event. Tony Bastida made his appeal at one of the sessions, I made mine at the banquet.

The Manhattan Single Tax Club was having internal troubles. The night James R. Brown was elected President after a very stormy session, the opposition resigned in a body and walked out; as a result the party enrolled some new members.

In May, 1916 we began to make our plans for the coming mayoralty election. Jim Robinson and Jerry Reis who had come from Philadelphia to give us a hand, prevailed upon us to change our name to conform to theirs. Several thousand signatures were required to get on the ballot by petition. All summer we held outdoor meetings and canvassed for signatures. We did a lot of talking and walking, but we got them. The Single Tax party

of New York was on the ballot. It was the first time a single taxer had run for Mayor in New York City since Henry George himself had run for that office twenty years before. To commemorate the event we all assembled at Greenwood cemetery where, with appropriate ceremony, George Wallace our mayoralty candidate laid a wreath on Henry George's grave.

I do not recall that we ever found out how many votes we received, but to us the important thing was the propaganda value of the campaign and the satisfaction of being able to vote for the single tax. It was for me a momentous occasion; not only was I the candidate for the office of President of the Borough of Manhattan, but I had become a U.S. citizen and this was my first vote anywhere.

The following year a state convention was held at Albany in July. About twenty of us went up on the Hudson River night boat. We gathered on the poop deck for an impromptu meeting, and needless to say we had an audience. Joe Newman was engaged in conversation on the deck by a passenger who asked: "Is this your entire party?" It being dark Joe did not have to keep a straight face as he replied, "No, just the committee on arrangements." The nominees were Joseph Dana Miller and Antonio Bastida for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, respectively.

On our next campaign in 1919 we ran Joseph Dana Miller for President of the Board of Aldermen. He polled 3016 votes, not enough to elect him but enough to throw the election to La Guardia.

In 1920 the National Single Tax party held its convention in Chicago and picked Robert Macauley of Pennsylvania and R. C. Barnum of Ohio to head the ticket. I was now a resident of New Jersey and ran for the State Senate in Monmouth County.

Before the presidential election in

1924 our convention was held at our New York headquarters. The name was changed to The Commonwealth Land party and the standard bearers were William J. Wallace of New Jersey and John C. Lincoln of Ohio. In New Jersey George White and I ran for members of the Assembly for Monmouth County. This 1924 campaign was the last notable achievement of the party. It struggled along until the crash of 1929.

Having again taken up residence in New York in 1928, I was on hand to participate in the founding of the Henry George School in 1932 and to help keep it going when Oscar Geiger died in 1934. When Frank Chodorov became director in 1937 I gave up my Wall Street job to join the staff as bookkeeper, cashier and head of the newly organized correspondence course, as well as class teacher whenever needed. I was most happy in my work and it was with great reluctance that I gave it up to go overseas after Pearl Harbor in 1941. Upon my return to the United States I went back to Wall Street until I retired in 1958 to settle in Florida.

I have often wondered how different my life might have been had not fate brought me to 125th Street and that Land Value Tax party meeting in 1912. I might be richer today in worldly goods, but when I think how the truth has enriched my soul; and when I think of the many wonderful friends I made and the joy of working with them for the greatest of causes; I bless that little inner voice which on that July night counselled me and listen to Jerry Reis telling how to raise wages and reduce rents.

My only regret is that our party movement did not survive, but I hope that some day it may be revived in some form, for only through political action can the principles of Henry George ever be enacted into law and it will never be too soon to begin.