

HENRY GEORGE NEWSLETTER

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SPECIAL EDITION:

ANNUAL GEORGIST CONFERENCE

The 1985 Annual Georgist Conference of North America was held July 17th - July 21st on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

The site was appropriate on several counts:

- having met in Goleta, California in 1983 and Pawling, New York in 1984, a midwestern location was "due";

- Missouri has been coming closer by the legislative session to adopting legislation supporting a land value tax referendum;

- this is a Mark Twain anniversary year (150th of his birth, 100th of his masterpiece, Huckleberry Finn, and 75th of his death). According to several scholars, Twain was supportive of George's theories.

More than 80 Georgists attended the conference, which was longer and, in the opinion of many participants, more productive than any in recent years.

"HENRY GEORGE WEEK IN ST. LOUIS"

The conference got underway with an official presentation designating the week of July 15 - 21 "Henry George Week" in St. Louis. George Collins (Henry George School of Philadelphia) chaired the first session, which consisted of progress reports from Georgist organizations throughout the U.S. and Canada. His keynote address derided the defeatist attitude which dogs much of the movement and, through the use of recent press accounts of Georgist accomplishments, refuted the notion that "nothing much is going on." The subsequent reports provided additional evidence.

STRATEGIES & QUESTIONS

Thursday consisted of a series of presentations which probed avenues of advance for Georgist activists. Taken together, they amounted to a marathon strategy session. Taken separately, they pointed out the extraordinary diversity of thought within the movement.

Colin Bonner (Prosperity Action Committee of Canada) spoke on the "Power of Public Opinion", pointing out that opinion polls show that people are far more concerned with unemployment than tax reform, and arguing that a sensible Georgist approach ought to emphasize that concern.

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STRATEGIES & QUESTIONS (Cont.)

Jeff Smith (Basic Economic Education) discussed "Geo-ists and Other Earth Groups", advocating Georgist outreach to environmental organizations and the international Green Movement. He also related his recent experiences in Nicaragua and suggested the formation of a Georgist delegation to visit that nation.

Steve Cord (Center for the Study of Economics and most other Georgist organizations) delivered what was advertised as an economics quiz, but what was actually a demonstration of the various approaches Georgists can take to convince public officials to try LVT.

Bob Clancy (Council of Georgist Organizations) moderated a discussion on planning a response to President Reagan's tax reform proposal.

John Burger (state representative from Minnesota) offered a list of Do's and Don't's for Georgists in the public arena.

Stan Rubenstein (NY Henry George School) presented a TV program from the new series "Issues and Alternatives", produced by the Henry George School and based on George's books *Social Problems* and *Protection or Free Trade*.

Lancaster M. Greene (Schalkenbach Foundation) proposed that Georgists make use of Fred Harrison's book *The Power in the Land* in seeking to explain the business cycle to professionals.

Ed Dodson (NY and Philadelphia HGS) reported that Common Ground, the new activist membership organization, got off the ground during pre-conference meetings and urged Georgists to join.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Thursday night was devoted to presentations marked by the depth of their analysis and insight -- they were intellectually challenging and forced conference participants to focus on basic questions of Georgist thought.

Clay Berling (Henry George School of Northern California) spoke on "Self-Interest as the Programmer". He argued that people always do what's best for themselves and their families, and that the challenge for Georgists is to convince people that a) the long-run is more important than short-term benefits, and b) Georgism is in their own best long-term interest.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS (Cont.)

Oscar Johannsen (Schalkenbach Foundation) gave an "Update on Inflation and International Debt". He explored the roots of the current world-wide debt crisis and derided the cycle of loans to pay interest on larger loans with no end in sight. He also debunked the "collapse scenarios" which surrounded all discussions of debtor-nation defaults and drew a line between land monopoly and the continued poverty of borrower countries.

Michael Curtis (Arden Activities, HGS) took on a thorny problem when he tackled "The Origin and Law of Interest". He "translated" Henry George's work on interest (perhaps the most difficult to grasp of all the sections of Progress and Poverty) critiqued those theories, and wrapped up with visual aids.

HIGH-TECH HENRY GEORGE

Friday's workshops featured two programs which brought traditional Georgist instruction further into the age of computers and mass communications. Amir Pirouzan (BEE) demonstrated a Henry George computer tutorial which presents a basic Georgist course on home computer. A student who belongs to a computer bulletin board network would opt for the introductory class, receive 80 percent of the information in a question-and-answer format, and have the balance of his lessons tailor-made based upon his performance. Don Hurford (Philadelphia HGS) made a presentation on the "Use of Media in Education". He used overhead projectors and video cassette recorders and players to demonstrate how to more effectively communicate information to students.

BUS TOUR OF ST. LOUIS

Friday's bus tour, planned by Joe Casey, combined the sites a traditional St. Louis tourist would take in with insights only Georgists would appreciate. The majestic Gateway Arch and the sprawling Budweiser brewery were the main attractions, but the tour also showed the inevitable mix of wealthy neighborhoods alongside impoverished ones (the speculator's mark), open-air parking lots in the midst of a vigorous downtown hotel boom.

OF GEORGISTS, BISHOPS AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Friday night's panel discussion was marked by the appearance of Monsignor John Shocklee, head of the Social Justice Committee of the St. Louis Archdiocese. Msgr. Shocklee put the controversial Pastoral Letter in historical perspective and offered Georgists advice on how to bring their message to religious groups. Sharing the panel were Walt Rybeck (Center for Public Dialogue) and Fryda Ossias and Michael Gavaghan (NY Henry George School). Joe Casey and Don Killoren (Public Revenue Education Council) were the moderators.

Dave O'Brien (Los Angeles HGS) reported on a recent "Pilgrimage to Rome" -- the effort by several U.S. Georgists to bring our message to the Vatican. He explained the ins and outs of dealing with the religious hierarchy there and proposed a more ambitious presentation to be undertaken next year.

THE FARM QUESTION...

...was the topic on Saturday morning. Chuck Byrne, Woodrow Williams and Robert Willis discussed the problems currently afflicting American farmers and revealed that the standard explanation -- falling land prices -- was an illusion.

Bob Willis added to the program with a graphic demonstration of the effects of a land value tax on other taxes. In addition, several members of the Fairhope Single Tax Advocates discussed the present situation involving court battles in the single tax town of Fairhope, Alabama.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Irene Hickman chaired the afternoon session which featured analysis of the land value tax from four University of Missouri professors: Robert Brazleton, Walter Johnson, Edward Metzen and Donald Phares. They carefully distinguished themselves as LVT supporters, not Georgists, but their insights were invaluable tools for Georgists to use in spreading the land tax concept.

THE ANNUAL BANQUET

Random notes from a successful affair...Host Stan Frederiksen was a congenial and dynamic m.c....The speakers included Missouri State Representative Walt Mueller (who sponsors the LVT bill every year), former Congressman Tom Curtis and former St. Louis Mayor John Poelker...Special guest was Elizabeth Read Brown...Awards went to Mrs. Brown and to several strong supporters of the Mueller bill in the Missouri legislature...We discovered through the generous social hours, enjoyable musical entertainment provided by Neal and Jim Frederiksen and warm good will of host Stan Frederiksen that the old saying is true -- Missouri loves company.

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