

Henry George Newsletter



Volume 54, Number 4

April, 1990

NEW YORK SEMINAR TACKLES HOUSING ISSUES

The New York School's panel discussion on the tenth of March, *Housing and the Homeless*, presented its audience with two vital components of the debate on housing: the true severity of the situation, and the real potential for solutions that could eliminate the causes of the problem, not simply manage its effects. The three speakers were experienced in different phases of the housing crisis. Reverend George Kuhn, pastor of St Brigid's Church in Manhattan, became an activist because it was simply "unthinkable not to respond" to the situation outside his front door, namely the city's attempts to evict the homeless from a makeshift "tent city" in Tompkin's Square Park. Louis Atlas works for the beleaguered agency whose job is to serve the needs of New York's homeless population, the Bureau of Family Services. Walt Rybeck, President of the Center for Public Dialogue, has gone across the country promoting the kind of tax reform that would provide cities with both the incentives to build affordable housing, and the revenue to ensure a sufficient "safety net."

St. Brigid's Church faces Tompkins Square Park, and thus stands in a neighborhood in which contemporary urban problems are uniquely focused. Abandoned buildings are plentiful, and the depressed land values in the area provide opportunities both for gentrification and the establishment of land trusts and other creative housing ventures. In this chaotic environment, Father Kuhn has become a sort of unwilling celebrity; he was arrested for delivering food and drink to squatters whom the police were trying to evict. His presentation included a slide show of local posters and graffiti comparing police and the city policies to those of Naziism and Apartheid. Father Kuhn reported that many of the policemen who came three times to tear down the makeshift shelters in the park told him that they didn't like what they were doing, but "they were just following orders."

Father Kuhn cited the story of the Sunshine Community Center, where he was arrested, as a clear example of the absurdity of official responses to the housing crisis. An abandoned school building had been, for some years, a meeting place for prostitution and drug dealing. This was well-known in the community, and complaints were routinely made to the police, but the police made no headway. A small group of Tompkins Square tent-dwellers were not so powerless, however -- they went in and pushed the crack trade out, and began the huge task of cleaning the building and making it habitable. When that task was nearly completed, the police arrived to evict the squatters. The building remains unused.

Louis Atlas, who presented the seminar audience with an overview of services provided by the city to its poorest residents, said that he had been homeless himself for some two months, after a conversion forced him from his rental apartment. He said that the Bureau of Family Services is an umbrella organization under which many social services have been consolidated in recent years, in an effort to weed out redundant programs and use scarce funds efficiently. He listed an impressive array of services provided by the bureau, ranging from medical care, drug and employment counseling, to special holiday meals and festivities provided in shelters. He made it clear, however, that all of these programs are designed to provide services on a temporary basis. For example, city shelters are not supposed to allow people to stay for more than thirty days. To meet the needs of a seemingly permanent, and constantly growing, homeless class is well beyond the scope and the budget of the Bureau.



Reverend George Kuhn



Louis Atlas



Walt Rybeck

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POET-ACTIVIST CATHE SMELAND WANTS GEORGE IN MARKETPLACE

Cathe Smeland, an active San Francisco businesswoman, campaign director, sometime poet and peace worker has taken the reins as President of the Henry George School of Northern California. She has challenged her new Board "to be on the cutting edge of events." A supporter of the traditional educational programs of the School, Cathe is seeking ways to make us more credible in the community by participating with many other groups on "hot events." Under her aegis, the School is now a "host" of one of the major Earth Day activities.

The new Board President is a partner with her husband Jack Alter in a public relations firm called Alter Images. She has been an active Board member for a number of years, and a former Treasurer. An ardent spokeswoman for children, Cathe founded the National Children's Agenda in 1988. She was a founder of the Sacred Arts Community in 1986, and the World Peace Project in 1984. In 1987 she was a US peace delegate to the USSR, Poland and East Germany as part of a people-to-people peace work project. A candidate for public office herself in 1977, she has directed many campaigns including those of Congressman Panetta, Secretary of State March Fong and President Carter. Cathe is married and lives in San Francisco with her husband and their daughter Cendahl.

-- E. Robert Scrofani

POLLUTION SOLUTIONS -- IN L.A. OF ALL PLACES

"Final Friday" Dinner sponsored by The Alumni Group of the LA School was held on the third Friday in March -- but at the usual place, Michael's Restaurant in Hollywood. The house was packed, LA Director Harry Pollard told the Newsletter. Folks remained quite late, with the last ones trickling out at midnight.

This was the first in a series of dinners dealing with the theme of external pollution (the previous two dinners considered legal and illegal drugs -- internal pollution). Speakers on March 23rd were Gary Flo, Jeff Smith, Harry Pollard and Margil

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Henry George Newsletter

published by

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POLLUTION SOLUTIONS

(continued from first page)

Wadley. Mr. Flo, a former spacecraft designer, is founder of the San Diego Greens and now lives in Santa Barbara where he is associated with the Institute for Geonomic Transformation, a consultant for Eco-Home (a demonstration project teaching ecological lifestyles), and a founder of the California Green Party. Jeff Smith, who needs no introduction to readers of this Newsletter, worked several years for Basic Economic Education in San Diego, is now a Green activist, President of the Institute for Geonomic Transformation, and a Georgist (Geonomic) "ambassador", with economist Nic Tideman, to Eastern Europe (see our March issue). Mr. Pollard, in his previous life before coming to the US and heading the LA-HGS, was a Liberal Parliamentary Candidate and Chairman of London's Young Liberals. Mr. Wadley left Aero-space to join the Air Pollution Control Board as a principal chemist, and now runs the Laboratories at the Air Quality Management District (same organization, different name). He recently caused surprise by noting in a special report that there is more pollution in cars than outside them!

"Designated Hitters" (who open discussion with ruthless questions) were "Anarcho-Georgist" Michael Green and Samuel E. Konkin III, editor of New Libertarian and founding head of Agorist Institute, a free-market educational organization. One notable guest was John Zube from Australia. Mr. Zube runs the Libertarian Microfiche service that publishes on microfiche quite a lot of old and new freedom-oriented books, journals and essays, including works by Henry George and several Georgists. Mr. Zube opined that individuals at the dinner were taking the pollution issue too lightly. Indeed, one lighter moment was when Roy Begley and Stan

A heavy tax on land would make hoarding land expensive and unattractive. Underused city land would be developed or sold to someone who would develop it. Land prices would drop as supply increased. The city would develop in orderly fashion as needed. There would be no reason to trespass the flyways of the eagle and the hawk. People would be housed and would find work with least harm to the environment. We can expect cities to become compact and efficient. Suburbs would close in, nestling beneath the skirts of the central complex. Small farms would haunt the edge near their markets. Speculation in the hinterland would come virtually to an end.

--The Alumni Group

Sapiro delivered humorous poetry each had written (one at the expense of ecologists, the other at the expense of Mr. Pollard, who is known to take issue with many ecologists). On the heavier side, debate raged furiously over such issues as the current policy in the central valley of spraying malathion from helicopters to combat medflies.

Mr. Wadley stated that 70% of environmental pollution is caused by automobiles. The solution to this, offered by Mr. Pollard, is the Georgist city - where land-rent charges would replace all taxes and encourage optimal, compact cities well serviced by public transit, making the auto unnecessary, if not a definite hindrance. Land should be socially owned but privately controlled, said Mr. Pollard. Cities that he envisions would hire managers to plan the best ways to optimize land-rent, invest it, and fairly distribute the balance among the citizens. Cities would compete to offer the best mix of services and shares of the rental income. Managers would seek to enhance their income and reputation by doing the best job possible. By extension, the issue of deforestation needs to begin with the question: "Who owns the forests?" And so, most environmental solutions begin with asking: "Who owns the environment?"

"Final Friday" will resume its regular schedule in April, and will continue to look at ecological problems -- and solutions.



SPRING TERM IN CHICAGO

"Our classes are not for those who content with things as they are," reads the announcement in *The Illinois Georgist*. Spring classes begin the week of April 16th and include: *Fundamental Economics and Social Philosophy* on Monday and Tuesdays at 7 PM, and Fridays at 1 PM; *Applied Economics* on Wednesdays at 7 PM; *Role of Land in History and Economics* on Mondays at 1 PM and Saturdays at 1 PM. Classes meet once-a-week for ten weeks.

Tuition for classes is \$10 per course, and \$25 for *The Role of Land in History and Economics*. This advanced course examines the colonization, development and expansion of the United States, as well as the errors of classical economists, suggesting a hypothesis not considered by either Adam Smith or Karl Marx. Material published by the Henry George School, and Fred Harrison's book, *The Power In the Land*, are used in this class which has been developed and is being presented by Chicago director Sam Venturella.

AN APPEAL FROM DENMARK

Henry George Biblioteket (Library)
Lynghyvej 56 - A
2100 Copenhagen O
DK-- Denmark

To Henry George followers all over the world:

We must make an effort for world peace. Now! Soviet Russia and the countries in Eastern Europe are on their way -- but which way? They do not know themselves -- all they know is that neither communism nor the so-called non-socialist system is the solution.

The Henry George movement in Denmark wants to help Eastern Europe to understand freedom and to avoid monopolism. Eastern Europe has a great advantage over the capitalistic states, but their understanding of freedom and of property rights must be re-examined. For this purpose the Henry George movements all over the world will establish "a land and liberty institution" in Poland.

The expenses are estimated to be nearly half a million US dollars, which you can give (in part) as a loan without interest and repayment for five or ten years. We -- here in Denmark -- already have \$100,000 at our disposal for this purpose. We would like to hear from you immediately. Please write and/or send your money via your local post office to us. And please inform all Georgists about our action. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,
The Henry George Movement in Denmark (Signed) Henry Fagerli-Nielsen, Frede Christiansen, Ole Lefmann

LONG-ISLAND HGS TO REACH OUT TO EASTERN EUROPE

Long Island director Stan Rubenstein is heading a project to send a letter, containing a basic Georgist message and designed to spark interest in further dialogue with leaders of emerging democratic governments. Readers are requested to submit names of people in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, and the U.S.S.R., with whom they have close contact. The goal is to build a network of contacts that will eventually lead to people in leadership positions. The project also needs translators. Contact:

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(516) 734 - 7543

WILBUR JOHNSON PROMOTED TO GLORY

One day in 1942 a 5'4" cook walked into the Chicago office of the Henry George School and had a long chat with John Lawrence Monroe seeking answers to the problem of poverty he experienced first hand. He told of being hired as a busboy on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad where learned to cook. John gave him a copy of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* which he speedread within a few days. Here were his answers!

He found several small black neighborhood newspapers and proceeded to bombard them with articles attacking private landownership. He returned to B&O after unsuccessfully running a small lunchroom (to be near the Chicago School). He continued to write and talk with his diners on George's philosophy, some of whom were fascinated enough to take classes at the School.

Around 1950 Wilbur was seriously injured in a train wreck. He preached Henry George to hospital attendants while recovering, after which he retired on railroad disability, which gave him more time to write. He brought his published article to meetings of the Henry George Woman's Club, while Bob King helped to distribute them at work.

Born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, May 28, 1907 (he left school after one year in high school to work on the railroad), he was very pleased when Steve Cord's associates won New Castle over to a lower tax on buildings and higher tax on land values.

Saturday evening February 24th, he was brought to a local hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina, after a long period of being unable to even write letters. He passed away on Monday February 26th at age 82. His Chicago friends will hold a memorial celebration some time in April or May. Farewell, good friend.

-- Robert A. King

HUBERT DICKEY

With sadness we note the sudden death of Hubert Dickey on March 19 at age 37. Hubert was an outspoken Black student for the past two years at the New York school, where he brought to class his university background in anthropology. Although Hubert had told us of his heart condition, the news of his passing came as quite a blow -- we felt we had lost not only an excellent student, but a future teacher. The Director and staff of the Henry George School wish to extend their heartfelt sympathy to Hubert's family and friends.

-- Editor

NEW YORK SPRING: NEW SEMESTER & EVENTS

Special events this Spring include the inauguration of a series on *Land in the Movies* on Friday evening, April 27th, (7-9 PM). The series will feature films which depict the power of land ownership to exploit, distort and impoverish people. Films up for consideration include *The Good Earth* and *Batteries Not Included*. On Friday evening, on May 18th, there will be a *Poetry Night* with four poets reading their own work: Jamal Joseph (Director of Student Affairs at Touro College in Manhattan), Jane Isabel Springer (a local eurythmist who has used her verse in movement classes for many years), Sanjoy Bhattacharyya (physicist and aspiring filmmaker from India who currently lives in Delaware), and Lindy Davies (assistant director of the New York HGS).

This semester's first Saturday one-day seminar (1 to 4 PM) will be on May 5th. *Business Ethics*, with Marvin F. Roth, will use case studies and attitudinal surveys to discover ethical orientations to business, economics, and politics. All events are free and open to the public -- but, because space is limited, registration is required for Saturday seminars.

The New York HGS schedule of ten-week courses for spring is as follows:

Basic Courses

FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMICS:

Tuesdays - Lindy Davies - 6:00 - 8:00

Wednesdays - George Collins - 6:00 - 8:00

Thursdays - Lindy Davies - 6:30 - 8:30

PROGRESS AND POVERTY:

(Fundamental Economics in Spanish)

Wednesdays - Manuel Felix - 5:30 - 7:30

UNDERSTANDING ECONOMICS:

Wednesdays - Lindy Davies - 12:30 - 1:30

CLASSICAL ANALYSIS I

Tuesdays - Mark Sullivan - 6:30 - 8:30

Advanced Courses

APPLIED ECONOMICS:

Wednesdays - Sidney Mayers - 5:30 - 7:30

THIRD WORLD ISSUES:

(Applied Economics in Spanish)

Thursdays - Manuel Felix - 5:30 - 7:30

ECONOMIC SCIENCE:

Tuesdays - George Collins - 6:30 - 8:30

CLASSICAL ANALYSIS II

Tuesdays - Nan Braman - 6:30 - 8:30

GREAT DECISIONS '90

Wednesdays - Fryda Ossias - 6:00 - 8:00

MONEY AND BANKING

Thursdays - Richard Barbuto - 6:00 - 8:00

ILLINOIS GEORGIST RIDES AGAIN

Volume 3, Number 1 (Winter 1990) of *The Illinois Georgist* was published this March. Articles include a full-length interview with long-time Georgist Bob King conducted by Adam J. Monroe, Jr (grandson of the late John Lawrence Monroe).

According to King: "The battle over tax abatement for particular projects focuses public attention on the wrong issues. The important question is not whether a particular hotel, office building, or factory will benefit the community, but whether public squabbling (and whispered private deals) is really an efficient and fair way to promote development... Everyone wants abatements, but only the favored few get them. As more abatements are granted, those who do not obtain them may rightly feel that they will be left holding the bag... Moreover, it is likely that decisions to grant tax abatements will be influenced by politics... Better rules can be written. The defect in the present system is not tax abatements, but that they have to be granted as special favors."

Other articles in this issue include: *Reflections on Illinois Property Tax Statistics* by Bob Jene, *Cook County Assessor Demonstrates an Advantage of Site Value Taxation* by Chuck Metalitz, and *God Help the Poor -- God Help Us* by Sam Venturella. This last piece is a well-considered reply to one by David Frum in *The Wall Street Journal* (2/15/90) entitled: *Free to Beg, Free to Intimidate*. Mr. Frum had deplored a recent federal judge ruling which protects begging as "informative and persuasive speech." Mr. Venturella takes Mr. Frum to task for ignoring the problem that many who beg have been

denied access to opportunity due to our laws protecting land monopoly, citing homeless Mexican farmworkers who built shacks on vacant land which they did not own in San Diego, aided and abetted by local clergy and public officials. "Could it be," asks Sam in defense of the ruling, "that there are within our governments some humane persons who recognize that something is rotten in America?"

To obtain a copy of this very interesting issue of *The Illinois Georgist*, contact the Chicago Henry George School.

SACRAMENTO UPDATE

Bill Holden, author of *Sacramento: Excursions Into Its History and Natural World*, spoke about Sacramento's Two Sesquicentennials: 1989 and 1998 at a dinner sponsored by the Sacramento HGS extension on March 21st at the Old Spaghetti Factory in Sacramento. Extension Director Evelyn Friend also reports that a meeting with Common Ground was held with Bert Anderson speaking.

WHO ARE THE HOMELESS?

Recent studies by the National Coalition for the Homeless reveal the following rough portrait of the nation's homeless population, which is increasing at a rate of approximately 25% per year:

- About 40% are families with children
- About half are single men
- About 14% are single women
- About one quarter are employed
- About 30% are veterans

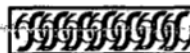
(from the Winter 1989 issue of *This Time*, published by Homeworkers Organized for More Employment, a land-trust group in Orland, Maine)

HOMELESSNESS

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Walt Rybeck's presentation offered a glimmer of hope. He focused on the Georgist reform that has the most immediate political viability: the two-rate, or graded property tax. Here is a way, he said, to meet three all-important challenges: to provide adequate revenue to meet the needs of the urban poor, and to provide incentives for the building of affordable housing, and to discourage land speculation. Mr. Rybeck pointed out the tremendous unused productive capacity of our cities. In the 106 largest cities in the United States, fully one-quarter of the land (excluding parks and publicly owned land) is currently idle. A tax on the value of that land would provide an incentive to put it to productive use. He cited studies on the effects of a proposed two-rate tax in Washington D.C., showing that under such a system, more than 80% of property owners would pay less tax than they do at present. Thus, Mr. Rybeck said, we have a reform that is not only effective, but one which can be sold.

It was generally agreed, however, that the problems of housing and homelessness go beyond technical fixes. "We are all squatters on the earth," Father Kuhn said, "And that is a fact that many people simply are not willing to face. This crisis is a symptom of a spiritual problem in our society." But Father Kuhn found encouragement in the fact that the movement for which Father Edward McGlynn risked his career in 1887 was still around, and addressing the same issues of social and economic justice.



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