

Fairhope Holds Centennial Conference

100 years ago, the Single Tax colony of Fairhope, Alabama was founded on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. The Council of Georgist Organizations held its 14th Annual Conference there, from Thursday, October 6th through Sunday, October 10th. George Gilmore of Fairhope and Sue and Scott Walton were conference organizers. Meetings were held in the Fairhope community center, and conferees were housed in the Ramada Inn, about 20 miles up the road on the "causeway" of Mobile Bay.

Pre-Conference meetings were held Tuesday and Wednesday by the Henry George Foundation of America, and Common Ground.

Mayor James P. Nix of Fairhope opened the Conference on Thursday with a speech at the Civic Center Auditorium. Charles Ingersoll, President of the Corporation, added his welcome.

The first session was addressed by Paul Gaston of the University of Virginia on "Fairhope, Past and Future." Prof. Gaston is author of a new book on the career of his ancestor, E. B. Gaston, one of Fairhope's founders. (The book, *Man and Mission: E. B. Gaston and the Origins of the Fairhope Single Tax Colony*, is available from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, along with Prof. Gaston's other study, *Women of Fair Hope*, which has been recently reprinted.)

Prof. Nicolaus Tideman led a late morning session on developments in Russia. Three of his Russian colleagues were on hand to share their insights: Tatiana Roskoshnaia and Tamara Chistiakova, from EKOGRAD in St. Petersburg, and Moscow city planner Yuri Bocharov, all of whom have attended previous CGO conferences. Arrangements were made to trans-

late Prof. Tideman's response to the letter, critical of the Georgists' proposals, which appeared in the Sept.-Oct. *HGN*.

On Friday morning there were reports on the continuing movement for two-rate property reform. Dr. Steven Cord updated the group on progress in cities of Pennsylvania. He also noted recent developments in Maryland, where enabling legislation for the two-rate system has been passed in the state legislature. Albert Hartheimer reported on developments in the city of Amsterdam, New York, where a two-rate system has already been approved. Francis Peddle told of efforts by the Canadian Research Committee on Taxation to promote the system in Ontario. Eugene Levin commented on efforts by the Washington State Georgist Association, which has successfully persuaded the state legislature to study the land value tax.

HGS President Ed Dodson presided over the theoretical forum, "Georgist Analysis of Laws of Production and Distribution as a Guide to Understanding the Modern Economy." Speakers included HGS Research Director Dr. Michael Hudson, Prof. Nicolaus Tideman and Ian Lambert of the Cayman Islands.

At the Annual Meeting of the Council of Georgist organizations on Friday, with the current Chair, Richard Noyes, presiding, elections were held. Titles were changed, from (continued on page six)

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(continued from front page) Chair to President, Deputy Chair to Vice-President; and two officers, Secretary and Treasurer, will now be elected, instead of one Secretary/Treasurer as has been done in the past. Drew Harris was elected President, Mark Sullivan Vice-President, Susan Klingelhofer Secretary and Jacob Himmelstein Treasurer. It was proposed that CGO be incorporated in Pennsylvania, where it would be simple to do so, and this was received favorably.

The Henry George School spent Saturday morning updating the conferees on its work in a panel chaired by Executive Director George Collins, who described the school's new curricular offerings. Extension activities were updated by Philadelphia Director Mike Curtis, Chicago Director Sam Venturella, and Sacramento President Ann Reeves. Michael Hudson outlined the new research department that has been launched by the school.

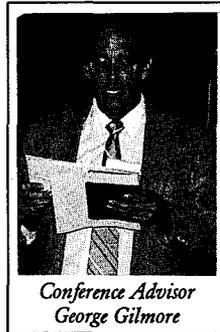
At Sunday's ecumenical service, the conferees observed a moment of silence remembering a stranger who was struck and killed, in a freak accident, by a conference tour bus. Readings were presented by Mark Sullivan, Susan Klingelhofer, Ian Lambert and Pat Levin.

Next came a panel on liberation theology as expounded by Robert Andelson and James Dawsey in their book *From Wasteland to Promised Land: Liberation Theology for a Post-Marxist World*. Participants were Lindy Davies, whose course based on the book has been offered at the NY-HGS, Prof. Michael Johnson, Ian Lambert and Dr. Andelson himself.

In many ways, the pivotal session of this year's conference was the Sunday afternoon session on Single Tax communities. The featured speakers were Gale Rowe from Fairhope and Mike Curtis from Arden. Mike Curtis pointed out that Arden still relies on land rent for revenue; it pays the taxes on improvements imposed by higher



Gail Rowe



Conference Advisor
George Gilmore



Ed Dodson, George Collins, Yuri Bocharov,
Dian and Claude Arnold

taxing bodies entirely out of the rent of its land. The definition of "full rental value" in Arden has long been disputed—for the town's charter stipulates that land-holders are to be charged rent on this basis. For years, Arden's board of assessors have defined full rental value simply as equal to the property tax liability imposed by the surrounding taxing jurisdictions. Georgists have argued that this definition is arbitrary and that a proper assessment should be made. Most of Arden's residents, however, are not familiar with Henry George's ideas, and are leery of any changes that might increase their tax bills, since other taxes are not abated in any case.

Mike's presentation highlighted the difficulty of sustaining an enclave of sensible taxation amid the powerfully distorting pressure of the larger economy. In the ensuing discussion on Fairhope, it became clear that in Fairhope, for now at least, the fight has been lost. Conferees learned that the Corporation, in addition to collecting land rent from its lessees, has imposed a tax on improvements to pay for such taxes imposed by higher taxing bodies. Except for a small additional fee on land to pay for expenses of the Corporation, the rental charged by the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation is identical to the property taxes levied outside its jurisdiction.

It was noted that, unlike Arden, Fairhope's holdings are not contiguous. They are scattered over a wide area, and even in the center of the town are interspersed with land parcels that are subject to conventional taxation. This odd mix led to a situation in which more residents stood to benefit from speculation than from the land-use incentives created by exempting improvements from taxation.

In the evening was held the Conference banquet at the Grand Victorian Hotel. The keynote speaker was Prof. Michael Johnson, Chair of the Business Department at Mobile's Spring Hill College. Dr. Johnson also conducts a course in Fundamental Economics for new members of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation. His remarks, on the theme of "What Will You Do If You Win?" cited Henry George as a well-intentioned visionary whose analysis is quaintly impracticable. A number of the conferees questioned the wisdom of inviting a keynote speaker who was so unreceptive to the economic philosophy his audience had traveled so far to study and refine.