

# The Future of Georgism

## ... A Program for Action

"THE LIGHT SHINETH in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." In this vein spoke Clayton J. Ewing, of Mobile, Alabama, Vice President of the Henry George Foundation, at the congress held on September 16 and 17 in Philadelphia.

Mr. Ewing, a determined optimist with droll and penetrating humor began with an illustration about a man who fell from the twentieth story window of a building and who shouted at each floor as he passed, all's well so far. Below, on the street, there were some men with a life net. If they were lucky they would be able to get it under the man before he reached the pavement.

Civilization, said Mr. Ewing, is on the way down. We have the life net. Will we be able to get it under the victim? If we don't succeed the victim will go *kerplunk*. But we must at least preserve the life net, because archaeologists may find the net a few centuries hence and say let's use this and see if we can make it work. The life net is Georgism!

"Every wrong way will have to be tried and most of them have been so we must be near to trying the right one," said the speaker. "Don't expect people to try the right way until all the wrong ones have been tried." We've got a million people who understand the land question, as against 4000 in the time of the Physiocrats, and a mere handful in Bible times. So *that's* a cause for optimism too, but, Mr. Ewing continued, "stop wasting time. My concrete suggestion is: get 2,000 that will give \$5,000 a year to the Henry George Foundation. Then you'll *have* a movement. You can maintain an office, with a secretary, and a man in the field." (Remember John Z. White?)

### Take a City

Gilbert M. Tucker, author of *The Self Supporting City* and other valuable books in this field, discussed the matter of urban land values. "In seventy years," he said, "we have not won an American city although we have accomplished a great deal.



We have an excellent program but it does not lead to any action, and anything which stimulates the emotions and does not furnish any outlet is almost worse than nothing.

"I am convinced," he continued, "that the most promising line of approach is the reform of city taxation because the contrast in land values is greater there. I should like to pick

one American City—Pittsburgh, Albany or Washington. Then I would make a thorough study, conduct a campaign of education, and finally attempt to show the rent payer that he would be paying lower taxes under our proposal.

Mr. Tucker made the first public announcement that the Association for Economic Justice had been formed to work with the foundation and other Georgist groups. This organization arose out of the desire to establish a membership corporation to enlist aid, support and cooperation from as many as possible in order to mobilize strength. The first aim is to build up membership and a mailing list including all who are in sympathy with the following aims:

1) To organize for positive action specifically to make a study of the practicability of meeting the problems of housing and slums through a modification of our system of real estate taxation, on the lines which have proved successful in Denmark and Australia.

2) To encourage better and sounder teaching of economics in our schools and colleges, with particular emphasis on the maintenance of American ideals and established freedom.

3) To seek a greater freedom in domestic and international trade, doing away with taxes which depress the standard of living, foment international ill will and lead to conflict and war.

No announcement was made of the names of the officers of The Association for Economic Justice but blanks circulated for those wishing to join included them. Fees for membership run from \$2 annually to \$1,000 with the larger number present signing up for active membership at \$5 annually. Those listed as organizers, incorporators and present directors are: Alson A. Booth, Seattle, Wash.; Walter R. Demmler, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Harry C. Maguire, New York City (Vice President); Gilbert M. Tucker, Albany, N. Y. (President); Philip H. Cornick, Yonkers, N. Y.; George Dana Linn, Seattle, Wash.; Willis A. Snyder, Hudson, N. Y. (Treasurer); and W. Wylie Young, Batavia, N. Y. (Secretary). Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown of the University of Missouri will act as Consultant.

### Introduce More Bills

The Hon. George H. Duncan, former member of the New Hampshire Tax Commission, Jaffrey, New Hampshire, was the second speaker on Friday afternoon. "Nothing definite can be accomplished for the single tax," he said, "without legislation being enacted, and any

pending legislation looking to that end should be supported by Georgists, while legislation of a hostile nature should be opposed."

The Henry George School, he believed, should not be a party to such activities but there should be an organization nation-wide in scope, acting as a clearing house to accumulate and disseminate information regarding pending legislation and candidates. "The Henry George Foundation," he said, "should be that organization."

Since the foundation already has for a nucleus, a sizeable list of known Georgists, the speaker proposed that to that list should be added the names and addresses of each group of graduates along with notations as to which of these is showing the most active interest. Other Georgist groups should also be invited to send in the names of those who would benefit from receiving this type of information.

So far as possible, the foundation should acquaint all the persons on this combined list with the aims of the foundation as stated above, with the purpose of making a catalogue of such a nature as to indicate what and how much each person is in a position to do.

"With the development of this catalogue," said Mr. Duncan, "the procedure should be as follows:

- 1) "When any Georgist becomes a candidate for political office the foundation should be advised of the fact, so that every Georgist listed within his political district could be notified and the suggestion made that all possible aid be given.

- 2) "When any legislation favorable or hostile to the single tax is contemplated or pending, the foundation should be advised of the fact and should then alert all Georgists. At the same time suggestions should be made as to appropriate procedures. These might include

letters to the press, appearance before a committee, appeal personally or by letter to the person's known Legislator."

The former Tax Commissioner showed how, if they had not, year after year, had a bill in every session of the New Hampshire Legislature they would certainly not have achieved the many favorable tax laws which they now have. Since 1923 Mr. Duncan has continually introduced or sponsored bills bearing upon the philosophy of Henry George. One of these was given the name of the Duncan Highway Bill. For all this he has earned the reputation of knowing more about taxation than anyone else in the state.

#### War Between the States

A somewhat less technical but more startling section of Mr. Duncan's address bore on the restrictions between states—not tariffs, you understand—but the effect is the same. And just as tariffs promote strife between countries, so, it was pointed out, there is a war going on right now between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and over such things as cigarettes and whiskey transported over state borders by purchasers eager to take advantage of the lowest tax rate.

"Isn't it time," asked the Legislator, "that we got into the minds of the people some of these ridiculous things that are going on? People have no idea what incidence of taxation is, and the City of Washington is the place to start because it is governed by Congress. Have some of our friends introduce a bill into Congress," he urged, "similar to the Pittsburgh Plan." Members of the audience present at this session must have been amazed at how much actual progress has been made single-handedly by Mr. Duncan and also by the succeeding speaker, the Hon. Walter R. Demmler who was recently given another tremendous vote of approval by his citizenry as member of the City Council of Pittsburgh.

#### Keep Problems Simple

It was during grade school days that Mr. Demmler became interested in civic affairs and municipal matters, and it was at a young peoples' church convention at Canton, Ohio in 1906, that the late William N. McNair aroused his interest in the principle we advocate.

The speaker related that on one occasion John Z. White called on him and he mentioned the fact that it was hard to understand all about the problems of taxation, whereupon Mr. White said, "Walter, consider and reduce any problem to its simplest terms and keep any problem to its plainest facts." This he has always tried to do.

The Councilman told how he had thought when he was elected in 1933 that he might be compelled to change his views on taxation when faced with this problem as a member of the Council. The past sixteen years have however strengthened his conviction in the single tax principle.

"Pittsburgh until 1948 received most of its needed city revenue from the millage placed on the assessed value of land and buildings," said Mr. Demmler. "The millage placed on buildings is one half of that placed on land. At present the millage placed on the land assessment is 28 mills (\$28 per \$1,000) and 14 mills (\$14 per \$1,000) on the building assessment.

"For 1948," he continued, "the City of Pittsburgh placed three new taxes: a 14 per cent

amusement tax, a 2 mill retail, and a 1 mill wholesale mercantile tax, plus a 2 mill personal property tax. The total estimated receipts from these taxes for 1949 is \$4,625,000. To have raised this amount of revenue from our tax on land and buildings would have required an increase of the millage to 35 mills (\$35 per \$1,000) on land and 17.5 mills (\$17.50 per \$1,000) on buildings."

Mr. Demmler concluded his talk with reading from the September Henry George News, the final paragraphs of "A Teacher Writes From the Heart" by Andrew P. Christianson. (It was pleasant to observe that a busy city official finds time to read the school's paper.)

The question period brought out the fact that the financial condition of Pittsburgh is very good—several manufacturing plants are expanding and they certainly would not stay in Pittsburgh at all if the taxes were too high.

### A Veteran Speaks

There was plenty of humor in this session especially when Charles Johnson Post of New York gave a dead-pan account of his early campaign activities, first as an Assistant District Captain under Tammany and later with the Woodrow Wilson campaign in critical California. He insisted that his Tammany district was very clean and upright as not over thirty or forty were paid for their votes and seldom more than \$2.



Mr. Post emphatically emphasized that ours is a tax problem and not a sociological one. "The philosophy of Henry George needs political action," he stresses. "No one knew that better than Henry George himself, as made clear in Chapter 19 of *Social Problems*. And George left a specific program as to how this should be brought about." Here he quoted from *Protection or Free Trade*: "The zeal of the propagandist needs to be supplemented by the skill of the politician . . . The political art . . . consists in massing the greatest force against the point of least resistance."

"What is this strategic point of least resistance?" asked Mr. Post. "It is that point in which the greatest number of our people find interest and agreement. Boy meets girl; boy gets girl; both have a dream—a lifelong dream—the home. The home—and its house—has a vital interest to every man, woman and sheltered child. Touch the home and you touch every sensitive nerve of our national life. It is the first law in nature—self preservation. But when that home is threatened it is but natural that homes join together for self preservation—that is the law by which society works—as George himself has shown. And the home is the point that is most threatened and despoiled by our present unscientific tax methods."

A second but equally important point of least resistance is the business world upon which the nation depends for production of wealth. "In my Borough of Queens" he continued, "there was a sale recently for tax arrears. One property on the main thoroughfare had paid no taxes in 23 years. Ten, twelve and fifteen year lapses were common. These were properties assessed up in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and they were vacant. This

means that one can own property if rightly placed, and pay no taxes until it is sold—maybe 23 years later. It is impossible to find out how much New York tax money is delinquent however. The land value tax map which was published as a public document for all to see, in the time of Lawson Purdy, then president of the tax board, was discontinued ten years ago."

"You and I are not the only intelligent people in the world," said Mr. Post. "There are other intelligences—millions of them. Education is the lever by which we enter people's minds. You show a man prosperity and security, and profit through industry, and he will listen and think. He will be sensitive to taxation and to its abuse. Mass public feeling at such a strategic point and legislative action can result. Political action does *not* mean a political party, but activity in politics can mean a great deal of legislative result. And I know of no way in which scientific taxation can come to our statute books except through political channels and legislative action."

### Unite for Action

"Our task is to embody the single tax in concrete form and present it in practical politics," Sidney J. Abelson agreed, "and already we have sound precedent for that procedure. In the City of Pittsburgh, particularly this principle has long been a matter of discussion, and the experiment provides what Henry George called 'the thin edge of the wedge.'"

"In his excellent book *The Self-Supporting City*," we were reminded, "Gilbert Tucker sums up the significance of the Pittsburgh experiment in these words: 'This beginning has proved the value of the plan and the soundness of the principle.' Mr. Tucker shows concretely how the Graded Tax Plan can be adapted to various cities. I see in his program a fertile field for activity—an opportunity to work hard, advocate necessary legislation, win over politicians and gain favorable public opinion."

"Through the nation-wide educational efforts of the Henry George School thousands of men and women are becoming familiar with the name and teachings of Henry George," said Mr. Abelson. "I see a great opportunity to organize those students into Henry George clubs or similar groups, whose objective would be to agitate for enactment of the legislation proposed by Gilbert Tucker . . . 'Social progress,' our founder said, 'is by steps, and the step to which we should address ourselves is always the next step.' I humbly propose that we take Henry George's advice."

### Importance of the School

The Hon. Charles R. Eckert, former Congressman from Beaver, Pennsylvania and President of the Henry George Foundation, said that the Henry George School ought to be encouraged and extended so its influence could be felt throughout the community. He estimated that if there are 50,000 graduates of the school, there might be at least ten per cent of those who would want to do something concrete.

"Everyone is interested," he said, "Everyone wants political action. Without it Georgism can be of no avail. It can be brought about only by the enactment of laws. Henry George himself never had any doubt about the importance of political activity. He believed campaigns were the way of educating people and he practised this right up to his death."

This speaker strongly urged cooperation with other movements that are interested in the land, such as The Friends of the Land. He said there were various programs in the public thought with which we could associate ourselves and get acquainted. This would take us into the field of scientific farming and the conservation of soil, oil, coal, timber, minerals and the development and proper administration of our water resources—problems that have come into the picture since the days of Henry George.

Percy R. Williams, former Chief City Assessor of Pittsburgh and Executive Secretary of the Henry George Foundation, pointed out that for twelve successive years the office of Mayor has been occupied by an active Georgist, and the present Mayor is at least a nominal member of the Henry George Foundation. He also said that the City Department of Assessors was largely directed by single taxers for eight years, and that single taxers have also served in Congress of the United States and as members of both houses of the Legislature. Needless to say ~~these men were not put into office by votes of~~ single taxers, nor were they elected with a mandate to enact or promote single tax measures.

"Experience proves that some types of political campaigning may wisely be avoided as futile or actually harmful to our aims, but it is a free country," said Mr. Williams, "and anyone may run for office. Obviously, if we are to hope to win, we should seek the line of least resistance, as Henry George advised.

#### All Sessions Well Attended

Other speakers who were much enjoyed by all present were the much beloved friend of our movement, Harold Sudell of the Manufacturers Appraisal Company, Philadelphia, whose letters to the press never fail to display gem-like clarity; Mrs. Helena Mitchell McEvoy of Washington, D. C. who said we were out to collect the ground rent, *not* the single tax; Frank Chodorov, Editor of *Analysis*, *Taxation is Robbery* etc., who said we were not out to collect anything but to *receive*; and John S. Codman of Boston who also objects to the use of the phrases including the word "tax" since he insists that land ownership is a privilege and should be paid for voluntarily.

Also, Mark L. Rowley of Detroit; Robert D. Towne of Ambler, Pennsylvania; Herbert S. Bigelow a former Councilman and Congressman from Cincinnati; W. Wylie Young, Batavia, New York who said the Christian religion is the only one with moral and ethical content going back to a time when men lived in equality; and Harold S. Buttenheim whose excellent talk mainly on housing, followed the lines of one briefly reported in *The Henry George News* of August, 1949.

Also Miss V. G. Peterson, Lancaster M. Greene and Robert Clancy of New York; Joseph A. Stockman of Philadelphia; John T. Tetley of Newark; Richard Howe of Pittsburgh, and Noah D. Alper of St. Louis [See Page Five], all actively engaged in education.

The Fairhope Single Tax Association was pleasantly represented in the person of Paul Gaston presently attending Swarthmore University. His father, C. A. Gaston, is secretary of the association and Paul Gaston is fully versed in the principles of land value taxation and an enthusiast for the method as it operates in Fairhope. He is a welcome contradiction to the current rumor that no one in Fairhope knows anything about Henry George.

Dr. Henry George III speaking on "The Geography of Crime," at the Henry George Foundation banquet, brought into focus by virtue of his own experience working with delinquents, the almost terrifying need for every Georgist to fight for his fellow man. "Henry George saw suffering and he struck at it and did what he could," he said, and urged that we begin where we are and work from that point. "How many of us have gone out among people in the prisons, for instance, trying to understand the problems?" "There is the beast in a great many," he said, "and there is an element called greed, but Georgists can leaven the mass if they are willing to be a part of society rather than a cloistered priesthood."

As a definite proposal, Dr. George suggested that we take a city block, any block, and get familiar with police records there. It will develop after study that there are certain areas where one can expect crime. Tell the police about this — and show that a playground is needed there or a community center. "In every such contact," he said, "you will make your influence felt. You can't prosecute misappropriation of funds belonging to the community yet, because that isn't a violation of a dictum, but you can go after the other criminals who are victims of circumstance."

At the end of his address Dr. Henry George III did an unforgettable thing. He presented to the Henry George School the following prized heirlooms:

Henry George's Bible, probably the one he took with him when he went to sea; his New Testament; the pen with which he wrote *The Science of Political Economy* and a much used blotter with a metal handle. The pen was left by Henry George to Henry George Jr., who gave it to Charles O'Connor Hennessy. He gave it to John Paul, a British economist and writer, who left it to Henry George III. He would have bequeathed it to his children, but for the fact that they, in agreement with their parents, preferred that it be in the possession of the Henry George School — the institution that was most truly carrying on the work of Henry George. These mementos were gratefully accepted by Lancaster M. Greene, a trustee and faculty member, as links between generations of students and the great economist.