

# Henry George Newsletter



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## 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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## POLLUTION SOLUTIONS

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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.