

## Noah Alper: Stalwart Georgist

In his characteristically quiet and unassuming way, Noah Alper, president of the Public Revenue Education Council, continues year after year to perform yeoman service in the cause of publicizing and promoting the economic and social policies proposed by Henry George. Among his Georgist colleagues, there is none without deep affection for him, thanks to his warm spirit and his friendly personality. But the calmness of his manner only emphasizes his unswerving determination and perseverance.

Noah Alper's devotion to Georgist principles began in St. Louis many years ago, when he met Erwin Kauffmann, who persuaded him to read George's *Social Problems*. Later Noah explained: "I found George gave interest and focus to a subject I had not found in high school or university courses in Economics. His presentation of the nature of wealth, the factors of production, and the avenues of distribution gave amazing clarity to definitions unperverted by economic custom and tradition. And I was profoundly impressed by his views on taxation."

Promptly embracing the philosophy of freedom, Noah enthusiastically went to work. Seeking a means of gaining publicity, he developed an economic questionnaire. (Interestingly, it later became part of Lesson I of the course based on *Progress and Poverty*, given at the Henry George School of Social Science.) Five hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed in offices and other business places, and to the local newspapers. The St. Louis *Star-Times* published the results in a news story that received wide attention, and sent copies to a number of professors of Economics, among them Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown of the University of Missouri.

While "growing up in the Georgist movement," Noah met John Monroe in Chicago. At the time, Judge Jackson H. Ralston (former attorney for Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor) was planning a "single tax" campaign in California, to repeal the recently enacted sales tax law and substitute land value taxation in that state.

John suggested to Judge Ralston that Noah might be willing to take part in the campaign, and soon after Noah went to San Francisco to serve as its director. Unfortunately, though two petitions to place the proposition on the ballot were successfully completed, a technical lawsuit brought by opposing forces so disrupted the campaign that the proposal received only slightly more than 25 per cent of the votes cast.

Although the result of the California "single tax" campaign was disappointing, a much happier development ensued. With the help of Judge Ralston, Noah and other Georgists started a Henry George School of Social Science in San Francisco. The first class, filled mostly by Georgists, provided teachers for future classes. Soon classes were formed and courses given in Oakland and Berkeley, and later in other places. Noah remained for some time, and on his return to St. Louis, the school was left in the capable hands of Edgar Pomeroy and others who had come there as students.

When he was again established in St. Louis, Noah was prevailed upon by the resident "Single Taxers" to start a school in that city. This he did, the year being 1938. The Henry George School of St. Louis was a success, and in fact prospered under Noah Alper's dedicated guidance, which he managed on a part-time basis. Then came World War II, and Noah willy-nilly was compelled to take a 38-month leave of absence to serve in the U.S. Army. (He was with the 69th Artillery, a unit which made the historic contact with the Russian troops on the bank of the River Elbe.) When the war ended, Noah returned to St. Louis, where he arranged to become the full-time director of the Henry George School. Once again, with his associates he worked energetically, and he is still proud that one year the graduating class numbered 179.

In 1949/50, Noah took another leave of absence, this time for a happier purpose, to spend a year at Columbia University, where he took several courses in Economics and a course in Public Relations Writing. When he returned to St. Louis, together with others he formed the Public Revenue Education Council, which was chartered as a non-profit Missouri corporation in 1952. For some years he continued to direct the St. Louis HGS, while supervising the activities of the PREC. The direction of the School was then turned over to Loral D. Swofford, and since that time Noah has devoted his time largely to the affairs of the Council, though he still teaches some classes at the School.

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