

Henry George Newsletter

VOLUME 53, Number 7

September, 1989

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: A DIALOGUE ON LAND & LIBERTY

Philadelphia—"City of Brotherly Love." University of Pennsylvania—founded by Benjamin Franklin. What better setting could there be for the Henry George Sesquicentennial Anniversary International Conference? From July 29th to August 6th, 1989, over 200 people from around the globe gathered to honor and expand the legacy of America's most popular political economist. This was the 18th Conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade based in London, and the 9th Annual Conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations based in New York. Participants came from Australia, Canada, Denmark, England, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Netherlands, South Africa, United States, and Wales, to be greeted and registered by Lu Cippoloni, Heather Remoff, Colin Bonner, and other volunteers behind tables of brochures, nametags, and souvenirs.

The international nature of the conference highlighted the theme set by I.U. President Richard Noyes: getting George into "the public dialogue"—or the historic dialectic—as the synthesis of the best features of Adam Smith/capitalism (thesis) and Karl Marx/socialism (antithesis). Perhaps this was a natural idea for a man whose name, as Dan Sullivan pointed out, unites No with Yes! Getting into the public dialogue means talking in the public language, not inventing a private one, as Mr. Noyes humorously illustrated by handing out badges with the acronym "AEON" on them, meaning "Absolutely Eschew Obfuscation Now" or "Abolish 'Em All Now." The point being that both slogans don't talk the public language: "Obfuscation" *causes* obfuscation(!) and "All" would have to be spelled with an "O" to fit the acronym. Clearly, an acronym outside the public dialogue won't change society because the theatre of social change *is* the public dialogue.

This theme was further elucidated by presentations that addressed the global dialogue including: Fred Harrison of England and Dr. Karoly Ravasz of Hungary on prospects for change in eastern Europe; Dr. Jason Chang of West Point on the Two Chinas; Professor Jim Busey on Latin America; Steve Cord on the U.S. deficit; Colin Bonner on economic cycles in world history; Herbert Meyer on George and the Russian Revolution; and the Land and World Order panel and strategy session organized by Alanna Hartzok with invited guests from related movements. Getting George into the public dialogue on more local issues was not neglected, as witnessed by sessions on affordable housing, land trusts, native land claims, Philadelphia's current debate over adopting a land value tax, and Roxbury's movement to secede from Boston and also adopt a land value tax. The dialogue between professional economists and Georgists was advanced by economists C. Lowell Harriss, Nicolaus Tideman, Frank Peddle, Fred Foldvary, Karsten Larsen, Jerome Heavey, Mason Gaffney, James Poterba, and Frank Genovese, new editor of *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*.

Another dialogue, synthesizing Georgian and ecological wisdom, was engaged in by David Richards of Wales, and Jeff Smith and Randy Prince of the U.S. Green movement. Sir Richard Body, of the British House of Commons, made an ecological case against agricultural protectionism which, by raising rents, forces farmers to grow more than the land naturally will yield, damaging the earth: "Thus, the more the natural flows of international trade are messed up by agents of state control, the more nature herself is messed up." The laissez-faire/single-tax Physiocrats, founders of classical political economy and champions of a natural order, could not have put it better.

[Continued on back page.]

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE [continued from front page.]

Getting a "neo-Georgist" synthesis (of the individual and society) into the public dialogue on the ecology of overpopulation was the theme of "A commons without tragedy" by Professor Robert V. Andelson: "The environment is fragile, and its carrying capacity finite. If Henry George were living now, I am convinced he would not deny it. If we refuse to admit it, we are being willfully blind, and cannot expect to be taken seriously. . . Paradoxical though it may seem, the Jeffersonian ideal of individualism requires for its realization the socialization of rent. Were rent socialized, the costs of negative externalities internalized, and the returns of private effort privatized, we and our posterity would prosper, at least roughly, according to our deserts, and healing come to our abused and wounded habitat, the earth." These were but a few of the many brilliant speakers among the eighty or so scheduled throughout this longer-than-usual conference.

By mid-conference we needed a break from the public dialogue of today — so we bussed downtown to Franklin Court, site of Ben's home, to enter the public dialogue of 200 years ago! Bob Scrofani kept things moving smoothly as Dr. Jack Schwartzman presented Franklin the Physiocrat; Stan Rubenstein, the Anti-Federalists; and Bob Clancy, the French Revolution. Somehow we did not escape; the dialogue *then* seemed all too relevant to the dialogue *now*. We wandered off to Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell: the former saved from demolition by Lafayette, and the latter sanctified by the Abolitionists. "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." This was the biblical inscription on the bell, and our very reason for being in Philadelphia.

We returned to the campus for more public dialogue — with Nick Dunbar, National Director of the Libertarian Party and local libertarians in the audience. C.G.O. Chairman Sam Venturella presided over the session, and Dr. Oscar B. Johannsen of Robert Schalkenbach Foundation shared the panel with Harry Pollard to present the ethical and economic case (respectively) for Georgism as real libertarianism. The dialogue continued at the social hour which followed. And as if to affirm that ours was the cause of liberty, we were treated to two "funk-rock" songs written and performed by the grandson of John Lawrence Monroe, Adam Monroe, Jr. "Land Tax Anthem" and "Tax This" were selections from a cassette-in-progress by his Single Tax Band that recasts the ageless dream of freedom into the idiom of today's — and tomorrow's — culture.

Tomorrow's culture, the next generation, seemed waiting in the wings at this conference. Pia Jorgensen, Pernille Møller Anderson, and Karsten Lynggaard from Denmark, and Mark Fisher from Ontario, made Ireland's Michael Horsman and New York's Susan Klingelhofer seem almost like Single Tax veterans — never mind the rest of us! And yet there was no generation gap but rather a dialogue between these younger folk and the older folk like Henry George Adams from England, Woodrow Wilson Williams from Ohio, and all the others too numerous to mention. . . It was quite a time we had in Philadelphia, all 200 of us — and it will not soon be forgotten.

—Mark Sullivan

ANNOUNCEMENT: *Classes for the 1989 Fall Term at the New York
Henry George School begin the week of September 12th.*

Henry George School of Social Science
121 East 30th Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

Address correction requested

Non-Profit Org. U.S. Postage PAID New York, N.Y. Permit No. 7759
--