

Henry George Newsletter

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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.

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THE HENRY GEORGE SESQUICENTENNIAL— MORE THAN JUST HISTORY

The figure of Henry George himself was a strong presence at this conference. His face was ubiquitous: on name tags, mailing labels, ties, coffee mugs, and the conference banner. This event commemorated the sesquicentennial of his birth; and it was hosted by the Philadelphia School which is housed in the building where George was born. One sensed that George was less a historical figure, that week, than a participant—his spirit urging us to think, holding in check our urges to be parochial or combative.

The conference began on Sunday with the dedication of the beautifully restored birth place. Among other things, it represented a triumph for George Collins and his crew over a host of last-minute glitches. The building has been restored to its original configurations, and has thus become an authentic—and rare—example of a working-class home, circa 1830. Agnes George DeMille, who contributed many priceless pieces of memorabilia including the bed in which Henry George was born, was on hand, as were Ed Dodson, president of the Henry George School, Richard Tyler, director of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, and other officials. A group photo was taken, showing conferees in front of the birthplace, copies of which are available, along with the other souvenirs, from the Philadelphia School.

Sunday evening's opening dinner was a perfect example of the conference's synthesis of past, present, and future Georgist concerns. Prof. Arthur Dudden from Bryn Mawr College spoke on Joseph Fels, inventor, industrialist and prominent early single taxer. Councilman James Tayoun, an ardent supporter of the land value tax in Philadelphia, discussed the opportunity for this great but troubled city to adopt this Georgist reform. Robert Scrofani lightened the proceedings by presenting gifts to Barbara Sobrielo and Jose Mernane from the International Union office in London. Finally, Agnes DeMille's keynote speech was a rousing call to action, a reminder that the world needs George's remedy more than ever, and that Georgists must get that message out.

The presentations on Monday afternoon and evening were directly concerned with that message in the here-and-now of state politics. Officials from the Pennsylvania cities of Washington, McKeesport, and Scranton spoke on the merits of the two-rate property tax in their home cities. In the evening the focus turned to Philadelphia's struggle. The panel, packed with weighty Philadelphia educators and city officials, was split on the LVT issue—but Councilman Tayoun solidly expressed his belief that the only real question is how long it will take Philadelphia to enact the LVT it so obviously needs. The overall consensus was that LVT gained ground, that evening, in the Philly debate.

The Henry George Schools are not living in the past, either, as could be seen in Tuesday afternoon's program on teaching strategies. A wide variety of 90's style methods are being used across the country. Mark Sullivan demonstrated the highly successful "Classical Analysis" technique. Bret Barker discussed a version of classical analysis, called "Interstudent", modified to fit the needs of high school students. Ted

Gwartney revealed his methods for recruiting adult students. Alanna Hartzok outlined her one-day intensive seminars which have been stimulating Georgist dialogue in large numbers. Sam Venturella shared his experience in getting students to read George's books in this age of low attention spans, and Mike Curtis described an innovative way to fix definitions of terms in people's minds. Finally, William Ranky suggested the analogy between land rent and parking fees – and anyone who has not heard that particular brilliant tidbit should write to Mr. Ranky in Chicago.

There were also two detailed presentations of teaching strategies on Thursday. Stan Rubenstein demonstrated his new video series, *American Heritage – the Story of the Land*, which the School is providing, along with lesson plans and supplementary activities, free of charge to high school teachers. The video, narrated by George Collins, was produced on location and offers the variety needed to capture high school students' attention. Harry Pollard's presentation, called "It Ain't Necessarily So!" was a freewheeling demonstration of his classroom methods. It certainly got the participants thinking. Faced with a bunch of (seemingly) absurd and (apparently) offensive statements, Pollard's audience was compelled to examine prejudices and crank up rusty brains. Disagreement was rampant, but then honest thought was the goal, not agreement.

Of course, the final confirmation that the spirit of Henry George was among us that week came in the form of the play, *Henry George, World Citizen*, presented on Friday evening by Douglas Broyles. The one-man show was based on the biography of George by Henry George, Jr., and tells Henry George's life story in his own words (as conceived by Broyles). The play was presented as a "work in progress" – so it was performed with book in hand and without the aid of proper stage effects. Nevertheless, Broyles delivered a powerful script. We were there with young Henry George, who, able-bodied and experienced, was so unable to find honest work that he was reduced to begging. We felt the earth sifting through Henry George's fingers, and shared his joy, when he was struck by the great flash of insight that became the thesis of *Progress and Poverty*. The Henry George of this play was a plain, unassuming man, stubbornly disposed to think things through and to act on his conclusions without reservation. And he was a family man whose love for his wife and children was evidenced throughout. The play should get the careful staging it deserves – but even in this preliminary form it was a stirring experience.

The conferees got a welcome dose of fresh air and greenery on Saturday, first with a tour of Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, and then with a visit to Arden, Delaware. The Arden Land Trust was founded in 1900 along Single Tax principles: collecting economic rent, and circumventing the tax on buildings by paying all local taxes out of the rent fund. The Arden Henry George School extension has long been under the directorship of Saturday's host, Mike Curtis. After a walking tour of the village, the guests gathered in the lovely, rustic, open-air theatre. There, a group of presenters including William Press of Arden, Charles Ingersoll from Fairhope, Alabama, and George Jukes from Canberra, Australia spoke not of future plans or past glories but the often sobering present. In a sense, the stories of Arden, Fairhope, and the Australian land lease experiments are ones of continual frustration and compromise, showing the difficulty of maintaining just taxation policies in one area while the greater economy refuses to address the vital role of land. Still, Arden is a beautiful town; its hospitable residents offered us a swim, a chat, and a peaceful stroll, and a great time was had by all.

A great deal happened at this conference. In fact, there was a broader variety of presentations that many longstanding Georgists might have wished. But that stands to reason, for this was a conference that paid attention to the past, present, and future – and I say that the spirit of Henry George was with us that week in Philly, and he approved.

–Lindy Davies

Editor's note: Lindy Davies, an associate of the Arden Henry George School, has recently moved from Delaware to the Big Apple, to work as Assistant Director of the New York School.

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.***

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