

# Coordinating and Promoting the Georgeist Movement

By WILLIAM W. NEWCOMB

## I. The Need for Public Relations

NO current program of economic reform suffers so much from the opprobrium of being dated as does the single tax. No program has had so much money spent on it fruitlessly; and yet no movement has had to rely so much on volunteer workers, as has the Georgeist movement. And probably no movement has had so many individual units working, not only uncooperatively, but actually against one another.

It will be the purpose of this series of articles to seek some common ground on which the various Georgeist enterprises in the United States can work together; and to discover the best professional promotional means by which each individual unit can make more headway.

Single tax writers speak constantly of the possibilities of economic cooperation in a free economy and of the abundant flow of goods in a free market. But the single tax movement itself maintains an air of snobbery and is conspicuously lacking in the art of selling its doctrines in the open market of ideas.

Before me are two large folders containing pamphlets and propaganda of various groups. One folder I have labelled "Ism Groups" and the other "Pro-Democracy Groups." (Perhaps some Georgeists would have placed some of my selections for the latter into the former category. But I believe I have based my choice on Henry George's conception of democracy.)

In the "Ism" folder can be found the voices of destruction to a free society—the Winrods, the Pelleys, the Huey Longs, the America Firsters, the Hearsts, the Albert Jay Nocks, the Ku Klux Klans, the Protestant Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Father Coughlins, the George Seldes, the Deatherages, the Dillings, and the Reynolds—and the super-patriots of the "Buy United States" variety. These are my "Ism" choices—those who would divide and conquer with Hitler in Europe and the Farmers' Viligantes in America. They are clever publicists. They get, and maintain, huge memberships for their movements through their rabble-rousing press.

In the "Pro-Democracy" folder are such agencies as the Council for Democracy, Friends of Democracy, Freedom House, Twentieth Century Fund, Council Against Intolerance in America, the Consumer Cooperative movement, and many grant-in-aid foundations.

I don't propose to spend much time on the "ism" groups. The Department of Justice, in the capable hands of Biddle and

Arnold—different men from the witch-hunting Palmer of World War I days—is wisely letting the "Isms" hang themselves with their own rope. What I propose is to show how effectively the pro-democracy groups, many of them with far less resources than the Georgeist movement, have been able to marshal members and workers, simply because their leadership was intelligent enough to use highly developed modern methods of communication and demand professional talent.

The first World War enhanced a propaganda business used for war purposes that was to become an influence on our material way of life in the twenties. Stuart Chase, in "The Road We Are Traveling" (Twentieth Century Fund, 1942), says: "Out of propaganda techniques, designed to confound the enemy and bolster the faithful, was to come much of the high-pressure advertising of the 1920's." And this enlarged field of advertising became so important to our economy that men and women were offered complete four-year courses in the subject in our leading universities. The opening of new media of communication and entertainment offered new resources for public relations. The printed word did not lose its effectiveness, but now that it had the competition of radio and motion pictures, those in its employ had to sharpen their wits.

This sudden expansion of communication and advertising boomed commerce. But non-commercial institutions did not remain unaware of the trend. The new order of public relations was utilized by foundations, colleges, schools. Great publicity agencies sprang up, devoted to handling only the promotional needs of non-commercial organizations.

Thus, social service on a wide scale not only became known to the public, but was in a position, through the huge funds collected by scientifically promoted campaigns, to render unusual aid to mankind. Sustained public relations, some of them costly, but paid for by millions of contributors, have made effective the work of hundreds of social agencies. Through this work, mortality from tuberculosis, for instance, has taken a great drop, despite the increased tension of urban living; sufferers of infantile paralysis get more intelligent care; huge youth organizations—the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the 4-H Clubs—have contributed remarkably to responsible American citizenship; the Birth Control Federation of America has taught planned parenthood to a large segment of the people.

A brief examination of Georgeist literature reveals the fact that we have not learned to use the techniques of public relations that now dominate the field.

My files yield a copious quantity of Georgeist literature. A scrapbook that is over thirty-five years old brings back the nostalgia of single tax political campaigns. The generous expenditures of Joseph Fels are represented in the Ohio, Oregon and other state-wide campaigns of yore.

Gradually there is a simmering off. The political campaigns quiet down. Henry George's books disappear from the stores as they run out of print. Then Robert Schalkenbach's bequest is made, and the Foundation established in his name publishes George's works again, circularizes bookstores, libraries and educational institutions. Then Oscar Geiger, seeking to hold the sustained interest and enthusiasm of men of good will, founds the Henry George School of Social Science.

With the coming of the depression, intelligent people realized that our country could not continue on its doddering economic way, and they turned to a study of the social scene. Colleges and schools reported a higher enrollment in social science courses than at any other previous period—and new courses in government, economics, finance, etc., were offered. Young men and women wanted to see what made the social structure work.

As more and more became aware of their responsibility in governmental and social affairs, only a few were drawn to the Georgeist philosophy through our schools and organizations. We were not "in the swim."

Opportunities constantly present themselves that the Georgeist movement could make use of through experienced and professional public relations. At the recent Carnival of Democracy at Grand Central Palace in New York, many progressive and democratic groups were represented—but no Georgeist group. In the panorama of world progress presented at the World's Fair in 1939 and 1940 a comparatively small investment would have brought our movement before millions of people—but we were not there. There will be more such opportunities in the future. Will a coordinated Georgeist movement take advantage of them? Or will small uncoordinated groups be content to busy themselves with "all they can handle?"

Radio is the greatest medium for sustained salesmanship known to man. One or two Georgeist attempts were made—poorly prepared, badly received programs. The motion picture is the most dynamic means of spot salesmanship known. The Georgeist movement has not welcomed this medium. The professional lecturer is more popular than ever—but we have practically none. We do have plenty of pamphlets, but these are of value only when backed up by sustained public relations. In short, the whole field of professional public relations is practically unknown to the Georgeist movement.

Hitler applied American promotional techniques to his own purposes, assigning Goebbels to the task. He knew that America had perfected the field of promotion and public relations. Do the Georgeists realize as much?