

OPEN FORUM

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ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE

THERE IS a useful analogy to be drawn between a Georgist and a diamond cutter. The common factor grows out of what seems to me an evident principle: all matter is mind. The immediate effect is that all phenomena are structured around ideas.

Out of this arises a natural order, built on ideas, for all things - for all amalgamations, groupings, associations. Such an order is there to be found, if we can but find it.

One advantage of the Georgist/diamond cutter analogy is to get this essay out of philosophical swampland. A diamond cutter knows that his raw stone, found in nature, is essentially an isometric crystal: defined by a mathematical idea. Its natural order is determinable. Once he has determined it, all the cutter has to do is to tap the stone with mallet and chisel correctly and the facets appear.

A mineral structure is simpler than a social one, but my premise here is that both exist, and that it is no less important for a Georgist to understand the idea or ideas around which his social environment is structured.

American author Thomas Sowell helps me with this premise in his new book, *Race and Culture: A World View*, in which he maintains that "group cultural patterns" are discrete and discernible, and that they have more to do with social and economic behaviour than race.

MY SOCIAL milieu these days is New Hampshire's legislature, or "General Court", especially its House of Representatives, which is unique in several ways.

* It is the third largest parliament in the English speaking world, made up of me (as Clerk of its policy committee on Municipal and County Government) and 399 other members.

* It is the "most nearly Georgist" parliament in the 50 United States, too, in that it stands guard over the first of Henry George's prescriptions: "...we must abolish taxes on labor and industry".

* New Hampshire's total state/local taxes take a smaller bite out of its average citizen's per capita income than does that of any other state. We have neither a general sales nor a personal income tax, and are not about to get one.

The author, RICHARD NOYES, is an elected Representative to New Hampshire's parliament, the General Court. For 35 years he was editor and publisher of a newspaper in Salem, NH. He was president of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade from 1986 to 1993, and chairman of the US Council of Georgist Organizations for three years until 1994.

* New Hampshire is the property tax state, in that it depends much more heavily than any of the other 49 states on that fiscal device. There have been (what we here call) "broad base taxers" for as long as I can remember, but the people of the state want no part of such taxes on economic activity and have said

so at the polls time and again. New Hampshire still does not understand, I am sorry to have to admit, that the property tax is really two levies, one a tax on labour and industry, the other a payment for the privilege of holding title to land. Which brings me to why I propose this analogy between Georgists and diamond cutters.

AS A LEGISLATOR, I do not want to and do not intend to tap my 399 colleagues with mallet and chisel unless and until I have studied them long and hard enough to know where.

There is an individuality to the natural order of any particular social group. Sowell's book supports me in that claim. I do not here maintain that what is true of the New Hampshire legislature is equally true of every milieu.

Having just finished reading all the excellent chapters in the recent book, *The Corruption of Economics*, I am convinced the authors are correct. The seeds sown by Frank Knight, Seth Low, John Bates Clark and others have grown into major obstacles for us. We had one of their neo-classical offshoots on the staff of the State Senate in the 1993-94 session. He tried to convince me the famine in Ireland in the 1840s happened because they ran out of land. But he had little effect upon legislators' thinking, and since the election in November 1994 he is gone.

The rational impediment that keeps New Hampshire from taking the critical last step into Georgism is not neo-classical foolishness, but a misunderstanding which runs much deeper in the natural order of western culture.

It is the failure to understand *property*, with all its ramifications: what really belongs to whom, and why. I am convinced that, once we have rooted out all the neo-classical economists we will still have to deal with this fundamental confusion over property that goes back to John Locke and George Washington.