

THE VANCOUVER CONFERENCE, MAY 1986

As many readers of *Good Government* will already know, the most recent conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade was held this year in Canada. The conference was organised by a Canadian Committee chaired by myself and the venue was the campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver during the week of May 18-24.

This was the seventeenth such conference. The first international conference of the International Union was held in Ronda, Spain. Joseph Fels, the 'sugar daddy' of several manifestations of the Georgist movement in those days, was without doubt the moving spirit of the Union. It is said that Fels coined the term 'Single Tax' so it is at least plausible that he did not support the unwieldy title of IULVT&FT. But Fels was ever the man of action and accomplishment so it is not likely that he would have spent much time arguing for a 'change of name' either.

In any event, an international gathering has been mounted by the IULVT&FT on average every 4½ years ever since. The conference venues have presented variety in content and some flavour unique to the host country as well. Having myself attended five such conferences before — Scotland (1955), New York (1964), Wales (1968), San Francisco (1979) and Holland (1982) — I reckon the Vancouver experience to be somewhere between the extremes, between the bustling, crowded, humid, hot New York hotel and the cool, leisurely measured days beside St Andrew's famous golf course in Scotland. In speculating about Union conferences to come I would like to offer a few comments that I hope will be perceived as helpful.

Given the fact that very few of us could afford a lengthy trip abroad every

4 or 5 years, we in Vancouver were determined to achieve several specific ends. We desired to avoid stale speakers. We desired to impart a Canadian flavour, if only by means of a salmon barbecue! We wanted to derail the tiresome topic of a name change. We were determined to spread out a feast stimulating to the intellect, inviting of comradeship between regions, and friendly to outsiders. We deliberately made free spaces in the program (and jealously guarded them) to provide opportunities for rest and recreation, in the belief too that such spaces in the program would provide opportunities to build, build, build friends for Henry George no matter where they be or what they call themselves.

It was not easy to achieve all these things. We faced the problem apparently perennial and ubiquitous to organisations — not just to Georgist ones of course! Non-cooperation, stalling, pettiness over picayune matters. We did quite well in one or two departments, e.g. morning seminars. We failed miserably in one or two others e.g. publicity.

The format of the conference was essentially this: (1) an evening public address by a top-notch well-informed individual of Georgist sympathies followed in the morning by a seminar of conference attendees with the same person. (2) One whole day in the middle of the week, and two afternoons on either side of it *free time* for rest, field trips, fraternisation, sight-seeing, or other activities of choice. (3) Ten slots of approximately one hour each assigned for papers by specialists, the showing of films, or reports by members. These slots were concentrated on Monday and Friday. (4) Business meetings of the IULVT&FT, as well as of the Council of

Georgist Organisations, and others occurred as well.

Our Canadian Committee was able to keep control of the International Union conference agenda by insisting from the start, that the Council of Georgists (CGO) run its own conference, choose its own dates, for example, and location etc. etc. This was probably the single most important decision we took. A local group *must* have control of the general conference program, the specific venue, and dozens of organisational decisions. The further the site is away from the headquarters of the IULVT&FT in London, England, the more necessary is the local capability and prime responsibility. By keeping firm control in our *local* committee we were able to take note of other groups' plans, and to accommodate their wishes to a degree, but we were not over-ridden by them or made responsible for

their debts, non-performance or other failures. We had enough of our own in any case!

The second piece of useful advice we have is, 'hang loose'! Keep options open, and be primed to deal with emergencies -- such as, for us, the non-arrival of Dr Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe, one of our advertised evening speakers. (Dr Nkomo was detained by his government.) No one format will suit every Union conference, and we would neither expect it nor want it.

I, for one, look forward to the day we meet in the Antipodes, to hearing new speakers, and to the experience of yet another unique style of life and way of doing things in the cause of reform.

MARY RAWSON
