

Ian Sillars (10th June 1941 - February 2nd 2020)¹

I have known Ian ever since my first term as a student in Glasgow in 1963, aged 18. At that time Ian was a teacher of technical subjects at Allan Glen's School in Glasgow, having previously served an apprenticeship at the Singer sewing machine factory at Clydebank and then studying electrical engineering at Strathclyde University.

Ian had been attending evening classes in Economic and Social Philosophy at the old Christian Institute on Bothwell Street, Glasgow. I got to know him when I joined those same classes.

The main lecturer was Dr William Good, a reader in Chemistry at Strathclyde University whose father-in-law personally knew Henry George, an inspirational American economist whose land reform campaigns attracted a world-wide following. 3000 people came to hear him speak at Glasgow's City Halls in 1888. Subsequently, Glasgow had an important influence on the history of UK land reform, notably in connection with Lloyd George's attempts, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to introduce land value taxation in his famous 'People's Budget' of 1909. This was blocked by the House of Lords who saw their landed interests threatened. This led to the abolition in 1911 of their power to interfere with finance bills.

But the main point today is that both Ian and I were inspired to join the Georgist campaign for a radical type of fiscal reform that calls for the taxation of land values since these are essentially **unearned** by their individual urban and rural landowners. Instead, land values are socially created. So the consequential idea is to finance state spending mainly through the collection of annual land rents. These could then replace destructive taxes on incomes that are actually **earned** through productive work and enterprise. Its advocates claim this would stimulate a more dynamic economy and produce greater social justice.

Ian joined the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values in 1964 and eventually became its stalwart Secretary and Treasurer. He worked selflessly to further its aims, mainly by manning stalls at various political conferences and public meetings throughout Scotland. There he would distribute or sell the League's literature and engage with politicians and the general public. He also helped produce pamphlets and leaflets in a form more accessible than academic books and journals. He himself had the ability and gift of conveying basic principles in a down-to earth way that ordinary folk could connect with. He always travelled in the most economical and austere manner possible, claiming only minimal expenses.

¹ A tribute delivered by Roger Sandilands at Ian's funeral in Clydebank, 12 February 2020.

Ian was self-effacing and shy, but very willing to chat on an individual level with anyone; and with them to discuss the principles he so firmly held. But he would never speak in public. However, I did once persuade him to speak to camera, effectively and with great sincerity, for a DVD video on the true meaning of democracy and justice. I have brought a few copies of the DVD for his family.

Ian was not only interested in land in the abstract. He was also a keen gardener. He gave his friends valuable advice on what to grow, where and how. His own small garden was bountiful. So, whenever he visited friends, he would come laden with gifts of fresh fruit and vegetables, including rhubarb, apples, pears, even figs. He often helped me with my garden, including the cutting down of a tree with his own well-oiled saw or axe - and with much elbow grease.

He also possessed a good knowledge of Scottish history, with special understanding of the causes of the disintegration of the traditional clan system with its community spirit. This spirit included a sense of noblesse oblige on the part of clan chiefs before they left for life in Edinburgh or London. This rich life was often financed with rents previously used for the support of the whole clan community. The other clan members who migrated to the cities mainly migrated to crowded slums rather than posh town houses. And they now paid rents to absentee landlords.

Ian was a fluent Gallic speaker. One of our fellow committee members, Alexandra Hardie, recalls a Green Party conference at which she had taken a short break from manning the League's stall. When she returned she found Ian coaching her brother in Gaelic.

Another committee member, John Digney, recalls that when Ian visited him in Aberfoyle he came by car, bringing gifts of home-grown fruit and vegetables (of course), but also bringing his bike so he could go bike-riding while there. (Ian used his bike whenever he could.) When John told him the places he had visited and which mountains he had been climbing, Ian would dissect the elaborate Gaelic place names and translate them.

One of the Scottish League's great supporters is Fred Harrison, director of the Land Research Trust in London and author of many films and books. Ian and I first met Fred at a conference near London in 1970. We went with Ronald Rennie, another of our old Glasgow evening-class teachers whom Ian would surely wish also to be remembered today. When Fred Harrison learned of Ian's demise, he sadly wrote: "My contemporary Georgists are departing so thick and fast that it really does rub home the fragility of one's existence."

But I say that we can at least treasure a strong **memory** of those who lived as honestly and well as did well-loved Ian Sillars.