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The Simple Truth

by Everett W. Gross

A stalwart Georgist, Everett Gross of Crete, NE, died March 5, 2008. He was 88. Everett and his wife Mildred were honored at the 2000 Council of Georgist Organizations conference in Des Moines, which their son Damon co-hosted. They had become Georgists in the 1940s after reading Progress and Poverty through a book club they had joined. A newspaper ad brought them to a Georgist conference in 1950, and they went to about three-fourths of the Georgist conferences after that. Everett had been an Army officer. He received his Masters degree in Physics and was a professor at Doane College (where Mildred was also a professor). Mildred died in April 2007. They raised three children, Damon, Donna Jaffe, and Daniel who are all accomplished Georgists. Everett had been active in ISTA, as was his sister Elaine Coons. I recall a glimpse that Everett gave us of his upbringing, commenting that you can take the boy out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the boy. For many years, Everett wrote newspaper columns for two Nebraska newspapers, and replied to all manner of mail solicitations with a polite solicitation of his own to consider how the problem of poverty might be solved. – Nadine Stoner

Those of us who have heard of Henry George's analysis, and have been convinced, are often accused of offering only one solution to all problems, and are therefore being "simplistic." We are accused of being communistic when in fact we consider ourselves quite the opposite. The "conservatives" consider us too liberal and the "liberals" consider us too conservative. In fact it is not possible to classify us on that scale. As to whether we are on the political "left" or "right" we only recall that those terms originally applied to the French Parliament — in which place the people who wanted change sat on the left side, and the people opposed to change sat on the right. We really do not know which side we should be sitting on, since we want to change those things which need to be changed in order not to destroy the good parts which need to be kept. For all I know, the French may have changed sides for each issue being discussed.

Now in my old age, when someone asks me what my religion is, I consider it a hard question. I mostly have to answer that I haven't named it yet. Identifying my church is easy, but it doesn't really identify my religion. If I had to name my religion right now, I would say I am an economic pacifist, but not of the same thought package

as some others who have used that name. My own meaning is that war is an economic phenomenon with economic causes. Many economic causes have their roots in customs which grow out of mass beliefs which become established in legislation. People vote for candidates whose ideas sample mass opinion. Probably dominant in almost everyone's opinion package is some explanation he holds about why his pocketbook is hurting. I would venture to say that it is impossible to keep those mass opinions from dominating both the churches' teachings and the legislative processes. Many of those mass opinions are nonsense, but most governments are based on them. And the economic results produce great material hardship. And war results.
War will not be abolished by changing human nature. Human nature already has every attribute needed to abolish war. Human nature is already capable of learning true rather than false causes of economic problems. — Everett Gross

Now, are we "simplistic" and advocate only one solution for all problems? Not at all! Mainly, we want to remove the reason why your solution is not working.

I am aware of a great many problems which I do not address here — because I have not studied them enough to offer a solution. But I do know that they'd all be easier to solve in a decently functioning economy than in the troubled one which this country is trying to patch and juggle.

As for the many problems to which I am accused of applying only one simple remedy, I do not admit that they are many problems. I see them as several facets of only one problem, and not a very complex one at that. The only problem I have cared to bother about is poverty: just plain old poverty. It shows up in many ways which seem to defy solutions. It is a dismal list. Farmers are going broke. The schools at all levels are struggling and cutting programs. State finances are sick. Too many families are not making ends meet. Even skilled people hunt in vain for jobs. The social security problem is not being solved. The list goes on.

Some people find it handy to resist thinking about it by digging that excuse (out of context) from the Bible about having the poor always with us. Some feel safe in their total faith that alms or government subsidies will solve the problem if only we can get the other guy to shell out more. Alms and subsidies have not succeeded yet! How long will it take us to see that they never will?

My "simple" remedy is simply to stop the massive crippling of the total economy by tax formulas which penalize useful functions and reward harmful ones. It can be done as gradually and piecemeal as anyone wishes. It can make concessions for hardship cases. It can open more investment opportunities than it closes. But it depends on

large numbers of people learning the difference between a useful function and a harmful one.

I am sometimes told that I should take the idea to the legislature. Yes, but will any legislator beat the drum for an idea that will get him kicked out of office? That is why, Dear Reader, I have brought my idea to you. If it makes sense to you, please pass it on.