

Annual Report from Dan Sullivan, CGO President

December 8, 2020

Dear friends and colleagues;

Our situation is still precarious. Perhaps this is a feature, rather than a problem. Mahatma Gandhi wrote,

And now after considerable experience with the many public institutions which I have managed, it has become my firm conviction that it is not good to run public institutions on permanent funds. A permanent fund carries in itself the seed of the moral fall of the institution.... I have no doubt that the ideal is for public institutions to live, like nature, from day to day. The institution that fails to win public support has no right to exist as such. The subscriptions that an institution annually receives are a test of its popularity and the honesty of its management; and I am of opinion that every institution should submit to that test. [*An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Part 3, Chapter 4, "The Calm After the Storm"]

At the end of this report, I will once again be asking for subscriptions and donations, because we cannot continue without your support, and, according to Gandhi, we shouldn't.

Zoom Conferences, 2020 and 2021

The 2020 on-site Scranton conference was canceled due to the pandemic and lock-down, so we rolled our deposit over to 2021 and held a series of Zoom meetings and webinars instead. It turned out that we were still unable to safely insure an on-site conference for 2021, and we don't know whether we will get our deposit back or it will be rolled over to 2022. In 2017, Schalkenbach board members Gib Halverson and Lee Hatchadorian had suggested that Zoom would be a better platform than what we had been using, and they were correct.

We have purchased two Zoom accounts with capacity for one webinar at a time, and we use these for our meetings and webinar presentations, which are now spread throughout the year. We also make the accounts available for presentations by member organizations, with a small charge for administration and hosting. Those who make frequent presentations would still want to get their own accounts, but we gladly offer the use of our our accounts for those occasionally using the service.

What worked and what didn't

We experimented with Zoom meetings and webinars, learning as we went along. We announced the sessions publicly and, except for the annual business meeting, made them free to all interested people. Meetings worked better in some cases, but were cumbersome in others. In a meeting, everyone is a participant, is on camera, and can speak unless moderators mute them. If they are muted, a moderator must unmute them

and then they must then unmute themselves before they can speak. This had created confusion and disrupted the flow of the presentations. In the webinar format, only presenters and hosts can speak, and everyone else presents written questions. This makes for a cleaner presentation, but reduces audience participation. We have been experimenting with a mix of approaches, and would like to maximize participation by offering full participant access to webinar sponsors [below].

Using Zoom has helped us get better speakers because they don't have to travel to our conference sites. Richard Vague lives in Philadelphia and had been willing to travel to Scranton. However, Dominic Frisby is a popular British comedian who has made short videos in support of land value tax and has a book out called *Daylight Robbery*. He agreed to a Zoom interview, but would not have been available to speak at an on-site conference.

We will also have sessions on what Steve Cord used to call "real-world victories." We just had mayor Tom Kramer talking about how Millbourne, Pennsylvania has replaced its wage tax and building tax with land value tax, and explained his current battle with the Delaware County assessors. In January, Australians will discuss their success in getting a shift to land value tax in the Australian Capital Territory (metropolitan Canberra), which is about 14 times as large as Washington, DC. We can talk to anyone in the world if we are willing to adjust our hours.

Another advantage of Zoom sessions over traditional conference sessions is that we don't have to plan as far in advance. Our on-site conferences had a fixed number of slots, and we had to fill those slots and get brochures mailed out far enough in advance for people to make travel plans. We often got proposals for sessions well after the brochures had been sent to the printer. Now we are taking suggestions all year long, and we can create special events from time to time.

Although our on-site conferences were always in the summer, we found no advantage to concentrating Zoom presentations during those months. Also, it takes time to convert video recordings to MP4 format, edit them to remove the dead air and irrelevant sections, and then upload them to YouTube. I do this as a volunteer, but the job load got ahead of me. During 2021, we plan to have at least one presentation webinar and one general discussion meeting each month.

YouTube Outreach

Our YouTube videos will always be free to the public, except that business-meeting videos can only be seen by members. We regret that we had failed to properly record some of the videos, particularly the tribute to Sonny Rivera, Pat Aller, Steve Cord and Mason Gaffney.

While our on-site conferences were rarely attended by more than 60 people, some of our YouTube videos have had hundreds of views. Well-made, well-promoted videos could get even more. "The Politics of Reason" had 458 views in 2 years, "Richard Vague on

Credit Expansion” already has 409 views in only six months, and “The Myth of Corporate Efficiency” had 264 views in only two months. Schalkenbach board member and historian Matthew Downhour’s presentation on “The Homesteading Myth” already had 26 views in the first week it’s been on YouTube, and Polly Cleveland’s interview of Zephyr Teachout on “Antitrust Today” had 16 views in the same time amount of time.

Matthew Downhour, Jonah Dubin and I want to produce videos as well, and we will have Zoom sessions where we discuss those videos. Then we will have the original videos as well as videos plus discussion. Jonah Dubin is a student at Carnegie Mellon University.

We have been growing as a movement, and good video presentations can be a great tool to accelerate that growth.

Sponsoring Zoom Sessions

Making our Zoom sessions free has cost us money because we have to pay for the Zoom accounts and we still have administrative overhead costs apart from the costs of managing hotel sites. We were only able to afford the Zoom sessions because of support from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, Common Ground USA, Foundation for Economic Justice, Henry George Institute, Earth-Sharing Associates, and Public Revenue Educational Council, and individual donations from Nic Rosen, Polly Cleveland, Sue Honsl, Gib Halverson, Mark Sullivan and Osamu Uehara.

We still want to keep the webinars and meetings free, and we can do this if we get enough sponsors to cover our costs. Many of you were paying between \$350 and \$400 each to attend our on-site conferences, plus hotel charges and travel costs. If enough of you sponsor the conference by donating \$99 or more, we will be able to greatly improve our Zoom presentations.

To thank our sponsors, we will give their questions priority in webinars, and hold exclusive sessions just for sponsors where everyone gets to speak.

Website Upgrade

Ken Novak, who already maintains the website for Common Ground and the Henry George Institute, is now working to upgrade our website, cgocouncil.org, with emphasis on making it appeal to targeted audiences, and to make it a resource for both members and visitors. There are links to our YouTube page on the website, and a Georgist online calendar where members are encouraged to post online meetings and events.

Electing New Officers and Honoring Outstanding Georgists.

We currently have four officers: president, Dan Sullivan; vice president, Ted Gwartney; secretary, Nate Blair; and treasurer, Al Katzenberger. All of our three-year terms expire at

the end of **our upcoming business meeting Saturday, June 19**. I would like to rotate out of office for a while, and Ted Gwartney has offered to serve as President.

In early February, member organizations will get ballots for the election of officers. Anyone may also nominate candidates for the Economic Justice award and for the Unsung Hero. Unsung Heroes are people who work tirelessly behind the scenes so others can be more successful.

At the annual business meeting, organizational members also has elect three at-large members to the executive committee. Current members are Mark Sullivan, Nicholas Rosen, and Devpreet “Dave” Jassal. Those who might want to become officers in the future should serve first as at-large members and get a feel for what we do and how we do it.

Sloganeering

At last year’s business meeting, Alan Ridley proposed that we add the slogan, “A Coalition for Economic Justice” under our name. This was hastily adopted, and I believe it was a poor decision for several reasons, which I discussed with Alan.

First of all, a coalition is “a combination or alliance, especially a temporary one between persons, factions, states, etc.” We are not a coalition, which tries to mobilize support for an immediate objective, but a council that helps organizations reach their own objectives. While all of our goals our similar, our objectives are not. I also see coalitions as being created to exert power, and I see us as influencing people through reason.

Second, “economic justice” suggests too much and says too little. Someone at the meeting asked, “Well who’s *against* economic justice?” That’s exactly what I think the problem is. We have a particular analysis of what is economically just, and we know that many people who think they are for economic justice propose things that are unjust. If everyone is for economic justice, or at least thinks they are, then the slogan says nothing.

Third, the term implies a left-wing approach. I have always taken pains to avoid our being captured by a left-wing or right-wing mentality in favor of embracing the best and rejecting the worst of both. Those on the right are ideologically attracted by appeals to liberty and those on the left by appeals to justice. We know that liberty and justice go together, and that you can’t have one without the other.

Finally, many people who like our ideas are put off by ideology generally. They just want practical solutions that will lead to a prosperous, functional, successful society. Our appeal to them is that we have solutions that just work well. They are not *against* justice or liberty, but it’s not what they are looking for.

With that in mind, if we must have a slogan under our name, I suggest “Prosperity through Liberty and Justice.”

Public Revenue Education Council

The Public Revenue Education Council (PREC) has limited funds, but, in addition to staffing exhibit booths at the National Conference of State Legislatures, they are committed to supporting our educational efforts at the Council of Georgist Organizations. Those who wish to support our efforts with a tax deductible donation can donate to PREC, earmarked for CGO's educational purposes.

This year only, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allows you to deduct up to \$300 from your taxable income, even if you don't itemize your expenses, as long as you **donate to PREC by December 31**. Their EIN number is 43-6029486. If you make a donation to PREC, earmarked for our educational work, we will consider you to be a sponsor. However, membership dues to CGO must be paid directly to CGO.

PREC's mailing address is: 4075 Cheltonham Ct., Plainfield, IN 46168

Joining or Renewing as Members and Affiliates.

If you represent a CGO Member organization, we ask first that you renew your organization's \$50 dues. This gives your delegate a right to both speak and vote at the annual business meetings. As an individual, you may join as an Affiliate member for \$25 per year and speak at our business meetings. Organizational and Affiliate memberships are apart from sponsoring the Zoom sessions.

With your generous support, the Council of Georgist Organizations will be ready to meet new challenges and work for an exciting year ahead.

You can become a Sponsor or join the CGO or make a direct donation to us on our webpage: www.cgocouncil.org or you can mail the attached form.

Sincerely,