

the CONFERENCE: A Personal View

by Mark Sullivan

From the quiet mansion on New York's opulent Upper East Side, the Henry George School has moved into a six-storey renovated brick structure on 44th Street between Grand Central Station and Fifth Avenue. "No longer sheltered, but at the heart of this international city," I think as I stand outside the school on Friday morning waiting for the Conference to begin.

A large window displays the attractive new editions of *Progress and Poverty* and *Protection of Free Trade* as well as news items on land value taxation. Beyond the display I can see a large number of people inside the reception area. I note with satisfaction that my window browsing has attracted several passers by to do likewise. There had been no window display at the old building, nor were there as many people walking by . . . Henry George taking advantage of better site value in Manhattan.

Inside, there are a few familiar faces who introduce me to other interesting people—there are no uninteresting Georgists I am to discover this weekend. Conversations at first revolve around how one reached "Georgism"—there is no one "Georgism," I am to discover also. The variety among Georgists, from free market individualists to liberal socialists, impresses me with the appeal George has among those whose concern is the good society rather than partisan politics.

The proceedings begin with an introduction by the School's director. The topic, tax reform, starts the conference on the solid ground of the world outside our circle of a hundred or so participants. Methods of getting land value taxation increased and other taxes reduced (and the success achieved thus far) present to me the essence of a Georgist movement about which I had had only the vaguest notions.

Unlike my classes at the old building, these lively discussions at the new location are well grounded in a common cause and perspective. I find myself engaged in a four-day juggling act as I attempt to attend as many sessions as possible and talk to as many old Georgist friends as I can.

My favorite session is the one on "Neo-Georgism" in which all four panelists, Robert Andelson, Charles Collier, Jack Schwartzman and Bernard Bellush, disagree in their interpretations of Georgism, Neo-Georgism and Neo-neo-Georgism. As those around me react with excitement, I realize that Georgism is a living movement and not a dead orthodoxy. Is the rent fund a natural check against the growth of government spending and militarism, or should we condone taxation of labor products in addition to full land value taxation to maintain a strong defense? Do all taxes ultimately come out of rent, and is all land value speculation harmful?

Early Monday morning, I walk across Central Park to the summary meeting, chaired by Bob Clancy. Bob had just been elected chairman of the new Council of Georgist Organizations, so it was fitting for us to discuss the pros and cons of this conference and to make suggestions for next year's. After the meeting, a group of us walk to the Henry George Tree in Central Park.

For the first time, I see the plaque before the large tree that I had passed countless times, even that morning on my way across the park. The inscription reads:

"Henry George (1839-1897,
Philosopher and Economist,
Author of *Progress and Poverty*."

We all gather at the tree and the camera fans click their shutters. Lancaster Greene and Clancy recall the day the tree was planted in 1946 and the strong, beautiful voice of George Collins sings ". . . only God can make a tree."

I talk to a few interested observers and decide that I will return to this tree many times to reflect on the past and to tell people about the present and to hope for a better future.

Building

from page 1

Silfa, director of the HGS in Santo Domingo and Dr. Harry Fornari of the NY faculty, were featured panelists. Another panelist, Robert Scofani, director of the HGS in San Francisco, reported on developments in Latin America and hunger in those countries as discussed in a UN Special Session he had just attended.

Dr. Albert Alexander, head of the New York City Council on Economic Education presided over a discussion of *Fundamental Economics*, in which Stan Rubenstein, Fryda Ossias, Michael Curtis and Harry Pollard presented their respective slants on teaching the basics of George's philosophy.

Rubenstein and Ossias recently revised the syllabus for the course, allowing for greater teaching flexibility and the introduction of contemporary materials.

Michael Curtis, of Arden, Del., and Claude Arnold of Fairhope, Ala., spoke about their respective land trust communities during a session led by real estate developer Leonardo Lassiter, whose rousing presentation won a standing ovation.

John McConnell, founder of Earth Day in 1970, addressed issues concerning ecology and the environment. He was joined by Mildred Loomis of the School of Living in York, Pa., and Seymour Rauch, of Buffalo, NY.

Dr. Robert Andelson of Auburn University and author of *Critics of Henry George* (reviewed in the