

The Return of the Cat

by Mark A. Sullivan

At the golden dawn of the twenty-first century, we in the Georgist movement are faced with two big challenges:

- 1) to respond effectively to the urgent socioeconomic needs of our time, and
- 2) to proclaim faithfully the vision of Henry George that inspires us.

We Georgists must be both passionately concerned with the welfare of the world we live in and passionately true to the principles we believe in.

Poverty and hunger are as extreme now as twenty years ago, when efforts such as the Hunger Project proclaimed the possibility of the end of world hunger by 1997. Homelessness shocked us in the United States when it made its appearance as a byproduct of Reaganomics — but we have become used to the sight of the desperate and homeless on our streets. Among the most obvious victims are mothers and children, upon whom the future depends. Yet our public policies favor more jails to hold these children and less programs to house, feed, clothe, and educate them. And our borders are sealed to keep oppressed Latin Americans in poverty.

Wars between countries and within countries, violence, whether at the hands of "terrorists" or of national governments, and the unsolved problem of nuclear weapons all continue to threaten life on the planet. The issues of national sovereignty, and of sharing the use of the earth instead of fighting over it, are paramount, as in the Middle East countries, the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, Northern Ireland, and Tibet.

Ecological breakdown is possibly the single most serious threat to life on earth. Recognizing the necessity of sharing the planet with all species of plants and animals is the beginning of the solution, and an extension of the original Georgist (and pre-Georgist) vision of equal right of every person to the use of the earth.

Most forms of prejudice can be traced to economic hardship and the sociological phenomenon of scapegoating, by which a group defines and unifies those who are "in" by attacking those who are "out." The universal right to the use of the earth, if put into practice, would help to alleviate the socioeconomic pressures — which are rampant in rich and poor societies alike — to enslave and to scapegoat groups within society.

Most industrialized societies are a tense battleground between the bureaucracies and the monopolies. Using all stick and no carrot,

regulatory agencies, often set up to prevent the abuse of monopoly privileges, are taken over by the interests they are supposed to keep in check. Tax revenues are often squandered on the privileged few, leaving little for real social needs. Some of these problems are linked to an economy that became addicted to military spending during World War II. Government debt mounts with no fair and workable solution in sight — except the Georgist one.

The Georgist message addresses all of these issues. We know that a climate of socioeconomic freedom, justice, opportunity and peace would remove the pressures that lead to these problems. How do we get that message heard?

I urge that we no longer kowtow to the supposed repudiation of the Single Tax. According to my own study of Georgist history, it was the gradual betrayal of the Single Tax that undermined our success. Faced with slow progress, and objections that a warfare/welfare State has an insatiable appetite, Single-Taxers became "Georgists." Now the search is on for yet another name since "Georgist" means little to outsiders.

"To abolish all taxation save that upon land values." Let's see who our allies are if we forthrightly proclaim this program.

At one time almost everyone in the United States knew about the "Single Tax." Then the Georgists buried it. The political wing of the Georgist movement dropped the "Single" and went in for something called land value taxation, which quietly eliminated the abolition of all other taxes from the agenda. The educational wing dropped the "Tax," condemning any political action as useless outside of the utopia of universal education. Between the two extremes, it became difficult to "see the cat": to see how we could end poverty and bring social justice to a hurting world by means of a local property tax reform — or a grand social vision with no strategy for implementation. The political wing hid the cat under a bushel; the educational wing put it on display, in a cage.

We should start where Henry George left off: "To abolish all taxation save that upon land values." Let's see who our allies are if we forthrightly proclaim this program. By all means, let us do the research that will back up the Single Tax theory, which predated and transcends George, but which George developed and popularized.

Opposition must always be expected — but let us frame the debate around opposition to the economics of the Single Tax, not to

Henry George or any other personality. Then we may see that the facts are not there to back up the opposition. However, the burden of proof is always on the new hypothesis, the new theory, the new paradigm. For example: the Single Tax paradigm asserts that if taxes are abolished on labor and capital, and public funds are wisely invested in infrastructure, etc., land values will rise. The synergetic effects of a Single Tax system are ignored by its critics.

Happily there are new efforts, publications and symposia, that are beginning to address, and strengthen, the case for the Single Tax. The cat is being set free. Activists are taking the cat from under the bushel and making our case on the global as well as local levels. And internet efforts are uncaging the cat, sending it around the world in the spirit of Henry George, who also sent the cat around the world using the best technology of his day.

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