

Henry George Newsletter

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AN OPINION: WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

Behind the problems of social life lies the problem of individual life. - Henry George

Imagine all the people sharing all the world. - John Lennon

As we converge on the College of Santa Fe for the Annual North American Conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations, I have been considering our announced theme. What is our message? How do we get it across? The principles underlying Henry George's message have not changed: Abolish all taxation save that upon land values. But... conditions in the world have changed. Did not Albert Einstein say that the introduction of the atom bomb changed everything except our way of thinking?

Wealth is still produced by labor exerting itself upon land using some wealth as capital -- that has not changed. But... scientists now know that land, the earth, is much more like an organism, of which we are a part. The Gaia hypothesis holds that Earth is much more than "raw materials" and "natural resources" to be exploited by humanity. It is ancient wisdom that the modern industrial world forgot: Earth is our mother, and fellow species our brothers and sisters. Seems to me our message must address this paradigm shift if we are to survive into the 21st century: the shift towards being interconnected, instead of being over and against, all that lives.

For centuries our "way of thinking" told us we had a mandate from The Man Upstairs (created by men in their own image) to increase, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth -- and to smite other tribes, cultures, peoples and species that got in our way. Now we wait as more and more nations, some of whom imagine a similar mandate from their "Man Upstairs", join (get?) the nuclear club.

Having once disposed of nature, the earth, as something "other" to be conquered and exploited, it is but a short step to regard fellow human beings as "other" -- also to be conquered and exploited. This "way of thinking" holds that Man (i.e., the white males of the human species) was given dominion over the earth and all therein; and that among Man, as within nature, only the strongest survive. Human history is a record of the consequences of this disastrous misperception: the caste system, the burning of witches and heretics, the slaughter of native peoples in the Americas and Africa, genocide against the Jews, atom bombs exploded in hundreds of "tests" to prove something to someone, the mindless destruction of animal and plant species, the glorification of male/male violence and persecution of male/male love, the drive to make "other" people "just like us" - or dead, the riot police sent in to evict squatters from public parks and empty buildings in New York City, the murder-by-neglect of homeless people dying of AIDS as outcasts and untouchables in "the land of the free"...

Hey! What about the Single Tax? Are we not in Santa Fe as guests of the Intermountain Single Tax Association? Yes, indeed! And is not the Single Tax the practice of justice? Is not justice the idea that no one should profit at the expense of an "other"? George's *Progress and Poverty* showed how cooperation benefits human survival, just as Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* showed how this is also true for other species in nature. "Social Darwinism" was shown to be a "way of thinking" that justified the established order.

A synthesis of George's Single Tax and what is called "deep ecology" offers a way out for our brutalized world, demonstrating how freedom, justice and compassion are not incompatible, but in fact depend upon each other. Georgists understand that freedom requires equal access to the use of the earth. Ecologists understand that survival of humanity depends upon giving room for other species to survive as well. In the past, western culture has regarded concern for other species as a luxury. Now we know, as our tribal ancestors knew: We are, with all other beings, both the weavers and the web of life, and what we do to the web we do to ourselves. Deep ecology, like Taoism, Buddhism, and Native American traditions, holds that we are not self-existent entities but that we are with all things living in a dynamic interdependence or "interbeing".

It is time to restore harmony and balance to the human community; and, further, to restore balance to the ecological community upon which we depend for our welfare. Does not the Single Tax prevent the cancer-like expansion of suburbia into the wilderness, in its flight from the rotten urban core? Restore the core to health, and the wilderness will thrive.

If we are saying, with George, we must make land common property, then we not only have a responsibility to socialize the rent of "domesticated" land for the benefit of the human community, but also to hold in trust the wild lands for the benefit of the larger community of all beings, all species, human and non-human. If we can extend our Single Tax message to embrace a Single Earth message, we may find the key to how we can get our message across--because we will be responding to the crisis of our time.

Even now, as the politics of the much-vaunted/much-dreaded "one world" becomes

POP GOES THE DREAD!

Southern California's Henry George School held its last two Final Friday dinners of the school year on May 25th and June 29th at the usual place, Michael's Restaurant in Hollywood. "Pop Dread! How to Scare the Masses" was the May theme, while "Solving Problems! Dealing with the Real Reality" was presented in June.

"Pop Dread!" was coined by LA-HGS Director Harry Pollard as a catch-all label for what he sees as an alarmist approach to today's ecological problems such as global warming, ozone-layer depletion, and deforestation. Bret Barker chaired the meeting and guest speakers were Mindy Lorenz and Jack Jennings. Mindy Lorenz is environmental activist and Green Party congressional candidate. She has also been a radio producer and, for twenty years, a college professor. Jack Jennings is a retired rocket scientist who was involved with the Saturn booster for the Apollo program. He is now a leading member of the Southern California Federation of Scientists and author of *Nuclear War in Los Angeles*. Harry Pollard joined Drs. Lorenz and Jennings in addressing the issues.

There was much disagreement which made for an "awfully good meeting," according to Harry. Designated hitters who opened the question period were David Byrnes, Professor Mason Gaffney, Michael Green, and Bob De Tolve (all known to readers of this Newsletter). Most participants, including the speakers, stayed for more than five hours, until after 11:30, even though Frank Tilton closed the meeting at 11.

"Solving Problems!" saw Mason Gaffney and Jack Jennings switch roles as speaker and designated hitter. Prof. Gaffney (who teaches economics at University of California in Riverside) was joined by two other speakers: Ted Gwartney and Jon Myhre. Gwartney has been described as "perhaps the foremost land appraiser in the country, with particular expertise in computerized assessment." He has served as assessor in Hartford, Connecticut, the Province of British Columbia, and (currently) Orange County, California. Jon Myhre is an iconoclastic landscape architect who has been involved with a variety of projects including the Van Norman Dam and Richard Nixon's Western White House. His second book looks ahead seventy-five years and asks "What if...?" Joining Dr. Jennings as designated hitters were Toni Churg, Michael Green, and John Vernon. Ms. Churg is a biologist and producer of a TV show on science and social science; Mr. Vernon is the former Chairman of the California Libertarian party.

How best to save the environment was the subject of the evening. The role of land speculation as the major factor causing premature development of rural land was examined, as well as the land value tax solution.

A special touch was added by the presence of Eduardo Cabral, who was on hand with his parents to receive a special \$500 award for his entry in the School's high school essay contest on Henry George's environmental policies. Mr. Cabral is fifteen years old and has just completed the ninth grade.

Next Final Friday will be in October, and will have politics as its theme.



Next Year In Jerusalem

March 18th to the 27th are the dates for the upcoming conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. Hebrew University's Maierdorf Faculty Club on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem will be the site of this conference, held one weekend before the Easter/Passover weekend. "War and Peace" will be the theme of what may prove to be a unique and very memorable international conference. Those interested in attending are urged to immediately contact the office of the International Union at 177 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EU, England.

THE MERCURY RISES AGAIN

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seeks to heal the split between the humanity and the earth, and to find the divine in nature (see Mark Sullivan's essay on page two).

"The relationship we have with land is a sacred one," Fox writes, "none of us created it, and all of us will return to it. And yet much land in America goes unused, abused or becomes reduced to the status of one more object possessed... A land tax would tax all land but not improvements... It would run the speculator and the absentee landlord out of town... George's... starting points are impressively compassionate." Rev. Fox's book is published by Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

The Mercury is edited by Bob Scrofani, who concludes this issue with a critical review of Frances Moore Lappe's book on *Rediscovering America's Values*. The book, he writes, "is a series of readable and animated dialogues in which Lappe speaks with two voices... the classical liberal who views government as a necessary evil, and her own voice... the modern liberal who sees the government's role as one that must serve all the people in society." To receive a copy of *The Mercury*, contact the San Francisco Henry George School.

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