

**WHY THE GEORGIST MOVEMENT HAS NOT SUCCEEDED:  
A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION RAISED BY WARREN J. SAMUELS**

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As President of the Council of Georgist Organizations, an umbrella covering more than thirty organizations of various sizes, but usually small and informal, my interest in the Georgist movement is somewhat personal and goes back many years. I was introduced to Georgist ideas by Mildred Jensen Loomis of The School Of Living, a pioneer decentralist institution of the mid-Twentieth Century that had been founded by Ralph Borsodi, an early Twentieth Century Single Taxer and money reformer. I went on to learn Georgist history from Robert Clancy, by then a Georgist "elder statesman" who had headed up many of the leading Georgist organizations at one time or another, including the Henry George School, Henry George Institute, Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade, and Council of Georgist Organizations. Clancy got his Georgist training under Oscar Geiger, founder of the Henry George School in 1932.

Oscar Geiger was a personal friend of Henry George and one of the last survivors of the first generation of Single Taxers. By the end of his life, he put his hopes in popular education to revive the Single Tax political movement -- an obvious response to the fact that the movement had not yet succeeded. Now, after seventy years of activity on the part of the School and other Georgist organizations including the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, we are again asking the question of why the movement has not succeeded.

There is little if anything I would disagree with in Warren J. Samuels' paper, "Why the Georgist Movement Has Not Succeeded: A Speculative Memorandum". Indeed, Dr. Samuels has covered most of the bases, and I am impressed with how much he was able to cover in a relatively short article. As for the question it addresses: Even in the absence of agreement as to what would constitute Georgist "success", I don't know anyone who would say the movement has succeeded. But it has survived. While we may appreciate this fact, let us also learn from it.

Georgist success, it seems to me, would be the achievement of the mission proclaimed in *Progress and Poverty*: To “Remedy” “the cause of industrial depressions and... increase of want with increase of wealth” (*subtitle*). That Remedy being proclaimed thus: “*We must make land common property*” (p. 328); with the strategy being: “*To abolish all taxation save that upon land values.*” (p. 406) Clearly, by George’s own standards, we Georgists have not succeeded anywhere. However, there may be other measures of success, such as having one’s theoretical paradigm adopted by the academic community. Yet even here, Georgism as a school of political economy, like the Single Tax as a political movement, has not met with success. In contrast, have any other political-economic movements met with success?

Perhaps it is Marxism that has met with the most academic success, as it has been adopted by professors and theorists in many disciplines from anthropology to feminist studies to philosophy to urban sociology, in spite of the reversals it has suffered as a political movement. Indeed, the apparent successes of state socialism in the Twentieth Century were denounced by most Marxists and other Leftists as corruptions of Marxism in particular and the social movement in general.

The so-called triumph of libertarianism in the 1980s and 90s was, of course, no such thing. Swollen military budgets, the vicious war on drugs, the propping-up of dictatorships and oil monopolists — these dominant features of the late Twentieth Century had little to do with real libertarianism (which has always been anti-war, not just pro-market). But in order to finance such government excess, real public services and the social safety-net were deviously attacked (by Reaganites and Thatcherites) using sound-bites of libertarian rhetoric. The resultant and current New World Disorder or “globalization” can hardly be called a ringing victory for any coherent academic paradigm or political movement. Rather it is an ugly grafting of libertarian theories of privatization onto the realities of imperial militarism. Our brave new world is perhaps a victory and a success for oil monopolists, global-polluters, phoney free-traders, and other multinational financial interests — but it is an ever worsening defeat and failure for billions of ordinary people around the world, as well as for other species, ecosystems, and Mother Earth as a whole.

In certain respects the new globalization looks a lot like the old Nineteenth Century Social Darwinism, an academic and political policy agenda that Henry George and others like Leo Tolstoy, Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman, strove vigorously to refute. In light of this heritage, Georgists should have a lot to offer by way of a real alternative to this mess we are in. But the Georgist voice is rarely heard and the Georgist paradigm barely understood.

When Henry George rose to fame on the wings of *Progress and Poverty* (first published in 1879), he spoke the language of a nineteenth century that was soon to pass away. Indeed,

George Bernard Shaw remarked that George's language and concepts, rooted as they were in Biblical tradition, already seemed outdated to him. As his critique (*A Perplexed Philosopher*, 1893) of the mature Herbert Spencer indicate, George was not able to expand his thinking in light of the new theory of evolution. His approach to natural law and moral order did not allow for evolution, which he equated with Social Darwinism, as Spencer himself seemed to do. Perhaps this was a limitation in both Spencer's and George's respective visions, rather than in natural law itself, that neither could reconcile natural law with evolution. Instead, they took up sides. But a synthesis may have been possible. We have today the example of Noam Chomsky who has wedded a universal theory of language (a kind of natural law independent of culture) with a radical state-of-the-art political critique. Libertarian philosophers also continue to study and refine theories of natural law. We also have the example of Marxism.

Marxism was more than compatible with evolution, in fact, it was in essence a theory of social evolution. In the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries it attracted many of the best and the brightest to its banner. Through a process of criticism and self-criticism, it presented and even now continues to develop dynamic paradigms and strategies of social change. This may be why, regardless of its mixed if not tragic historical record as a political movement, Marxism continues to influence the world. Georgism and the Single Tax, on the other hand, did not move beyond a static model of the good society (albeit one that did not seek to change, but rather accepted "human nature"), and so did not develop a dynamic path to its realization.

A factor in the decline of Georgism in the Twentieth Century may have been the failure of Single Taxers and Georgists (with of course a few exceptions) to recast the philosophy of the master — and its politico-esthetic *style* (the *way* it is presented to the world) — and develop it into a critical analysis of modern and post-modern social issues. Had this happened, college professors, social activists, and alternative publishers during the 1960s, we can imagine, would have advanced Georgist analyses of the military-industrial complex, the war in Vietnam, the "war on poverty", racism, civil rights, ecology, and perhaps even the sexual revolution — and students would have taken up the Georgist cause. And the students in later decades would have gone into public office remembering the Georgist idealism of their youth. Alas, this was not to be!

Henry George's insight into the co-dependency of progress and poverty undermined the Nineteenth Century belief in the uninterrupted progress of Western civilization. Yet George and his followers did not seem to fully appreciate this fact. In spite of George's dire vision of "the new barbarians", George and his Single Taxers had strong faith in an ultimate progress *without* poverty, in the creation of the good society with equal opportunity for all.

This immediacy of this vision, a strong appeal of the Single Tax movement in the Nineteenth Century, seemed less attainable, more remote, particularly to the skeptical academic community, by the middle of the Twentieth. Indeed, one could say that the Single Tax philosophy and movement, along with the overconfident Western *Weltanschauung* of the Nineteenth Century, symbolized by the “unsinkable” Titanic, was fatally struck by the iceberg that was the First World War. All Single Tax progress was halted by the Great War and its aftermath, Marxist-Leninist revolution and the Red Scare that followed.

George’s contemporary and anarchist rival, Benjamin R. Tucker (1854-1939) of Boston and New York, editor of the journal *Liberty* from 1881 to 1908, had a somewhat similar vision of the free and fair society — the abolition of all monopolies and of the state as an oppressive power. Tucker was a self-proclaimed disciple of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the great French anarchist and socialist rival of Karl Marx. Following up Proudhon’s declaration “Property is theft” Tucker declared that “there are at bottom but two classes, — the Socialists and the Thieves. Socialism, practically, is war upon usury in all its forms, the great Anti-Theft Movement of the nineteenth century.” (*Liberty*, May 17, 1884; *Instead of a Book*, 1893, p. 362) Tucker took Proudhon’s mutualist anarchism, including his Bank of the People, into a characteristically American direction, synthesizing European socialism with frontier-style individual sovereignty. Similarly, George prefaced *Progress and Poverty* with his own mission of synthesis: “...to unite the truth perceived by the school of Smith and Ricardo to the truth perceived by the schools of Proudhon and Lasalle; to show that *laissez faire* (in its full true meaning) opens the way to a realization of the noble dreams of socialism...” (p. xxx) In this, Tucker and George, the Anarchist and the Single Taxer, were in agreement — their respective positions can be seen as variations of libertarian socialism or, to borrow a label from Peter Valentyne and Hillel Steiner, Left-Libertarianism.

Tucker was a scathing critic, and George’s ideas and politics were among his regular targets. When George reversed his position on the Haymarket case in favor of the verdict, when nearly every other reformer around the world came to the opposite conclusion, Tucker branded George a “Traitor” to the working class. The furor over Haymarket marked the first Red Scare in US history. It also marked a turning point for George (and set a pattern for later Georgists) who from then on lost most of support he had in the labor movement.

But there were others, such as George’s associate Bolton Hall, who considered themselves “Single Tax Anarchists”! This is an indication of the fact that, around the turn of the century, many anarchists, socialists, progressives, and Single Taxers (other than George himself, of course), along with civil libertarians, Freethinkers, radical Christians, and social reformers in general, were fellow-travelers. For example, Bolton Hall was known to share the platform with Emma Goldman on behalf of birth control and free speech, and against

war and the military draft. In addition to heading up various Single Tax efforts, Hall occasionally contributed to Tucker's *Liberty*.

As I see it, while taking a more radical political path, Tucker's attention to the problem of exploitation of labor by "usury", especially interest on capital, as well as his critique of the state itself, complements George's analysis of economic rent and land monopoly. It was Mildred Loomis who brought this to my attention, and introduced me to Tucker's last direct "disciple", Laurance Labadie, before he died in 1975. Let me suggest, as Loomis did, such a synthesis of Tucker and George.

Real wealth deteriorates and (with the exception of "collectibles") depreciates over time. In the face of this fact, and in the absence of state-supported monopoly claims (to landed property, information and laws of nature, absentee corporate ownership, and the creation of money) that otherwise would offset it, there would be economic pressure to loan wealth at low or no interest. If the value of real wealth and services could be monetized by the labor that creates them, via socially-responsible "Mutual Banks", and if land belonged to the community, with land tenure based on the payment of the economic rent (George) or conditional upon personal occupancy-and-use (Proudhon and Tucker), then the accumulation of vast amounts of surplus wealth would be discouraged by its own maintenance costs and therefore sold off or loaned at cost (not interest) — capital would be redistributed back to labor, in effect, via free and fair market transactions. In the absence of monopoly privileges, the role of time in the production of wealth is offset, balanced, or canceled-out by the role of time in the deterioration of wealth, which eventually returns all wealth back to the land. Like rent, interest is the offspring of state-supported monopoly privilege, not of liberty or community.

George wanted to use democratic means to simplify and purify government of all oppressive features, making it "merely the agency by which the common property was administered for the common benefit." (*Progress and Poverty*, pp. 456-7) Tucker wanted people to unite to abolish the state by non-violent acts of non-cooperation. Both devoted some thought to social strategy, but not enough. In the end, strategy depended upon intellectual conversion to a creed, to a model. When the symbol and fruit of the industrial revolution and technological progress of the nineteenth century, the Titanic, went down in the North Atlantic, Tucker had already retired to France and declared the monopolists, especially the finance capitalists, too strong to be defeated by the peaceful means and ideas he had devoted his life to advocating. In 1911, he predicted that revolutionary state socialism would have to be tried (and found wanting) before his own nineteenth-century vision of a free and fair society could be realized.

Tucker, who refused to ride in automobiles, later declared, in 1930, "The monster, Mechanism is devouring mankind." (*Letter to Clarence Lee Schwartz, July 22, 1930, quoted in A Way Out, October 1967, pp. 50-51, School Of Living*) Technology would eventually destroy civilization, and it was only a matter of time. Tucker lingered on and died in 1939, in the principality of Monaco of all places, on the eve of the Second World War, the war that would usher in the age of atomic terrorism — his prophecy, like George's "new barbarians", waiting in the wings to be realized. Meanwhile, technology has been captured by corporate monopolists who seek to patent the gene pool and all other bases of human and biological life on the planet— the greatest enclosure and theft of the commons in history. If George's critique of land monopoly and Tucker's critique of money and patent monopolies, as well as of the State and "Mechanism", were to be updated, we would be able to offer the world a theoretical basis for the "great Anti-Theft Movement" of the twenty-first century — the radical social movement that today is growing stronger every day.

But let us return to the end of the nineteenth century. Discussions with Peter Lamborn Wilson (author of *Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays*, 1998, Autonomedia) led me to the notion that the nineteenth century — meaning its *Weltanschauung* — lasted until the start of World War I. The sinking of the unsinkable Titanic was the prophetic warning. Around the same time, the political triumph of progressive liberalism in the US — most notably the administration of Woodrow Wilson — included the closest thing the Single Tax ever came to political triumph in the United States. Indeed, many Single Taxers, like Louis F. Post, were given a place in Wilson's administration (but some might say they were co-opted). Alas, it was the triumph of progressivism that also helped defeat the Single Tax. With anti-trust legislation, Federal Reserve bank reformation, and the income tax levied upon huge unearned incomes, there now seemed little need for the Single Tax! On top of that, the Single Tax movement, like other social movements, was divided over US entry into the First World War. That war, like all wars, was "the health of the state" as Randolph Bourne declared — and not the health of those who opposed the war, the state, or the vested interests it protected. Single Taxers were no exception.

At the risk of oversimplifying history, here's how I see it: World War I stopped the land-value tax legislation that had been put before the British parliament. The War enabled Lenin to take possession of the new Russian republic, derailing Karensky's intentions to institute Single Tax-style reform as once championed by Leo Tolstoy, and leading ultimately to the rise of Stalin. The political reaction to the triumph of Marxist-Leninism derailed Sun Yat-Sen, who had been in favor of Single Tax and other democratic reforms in China. It unleashed a new Red Scare in the United States, in which the government

persecuted and deported many radicals while it intimidated the ranks moderate socialists and reformers that included many Single Taxers. And it led to the rise of fascism on the one hand, and totalitarian communism on the other, in Asia as well as Europe, setting the stage for the Second World War.

Shortly after the First World War one change that occurred in what was left of the Single Tax movement was a change of name — well, two, to be exact: the unifying term “Single Tax” was replaced with “Georgism” by philosophical advocates and “land-value taxation” or “LVT” (and many other variations) by political advocates. Partly this was due to the local nature of the property tax in the United States. Even if a land-value tax replaced all other local taxes, it would not be a real single tax given the Federal income tax. In any case, a debilitating bifurcation had begun, partly due to the movement reorganizing itself along the lines of tax-exempt educational organizations on the one hand and non-profit political organizations on the other. Meanwhile, on the margins of the movement, disenchanted radical Single Taxers and unreformed anarcho-Spencerians, such as William Owen and members of the British Commonwealth Land Party (and contributors to its organ *Commonweal*, published in the 1920s), went to the other extreme, and demanded the full rent of land restored to the people immediately — or at least “By Noon, tomorrow!” Having been a participant in the Mexican revolution and correspondent to Emma Goldman’s journal *Mother Earth*, Owen imported the battle cry “Land and Liberty” back to England. This slogan, which George in *Progress and Poverty* had approvingly quoted from Russian Nihilists, also replaced the name of the (now oldest surviving) Single Tax journal, formerly called *Land Values*. It was perhaps one of the few name changes for the better. *Land and Liberty* is now the longest-lived Georgist project in history, but still it struggles to gain the attention of an unheeding world.

The ultimate consequences of the divorce between the Single Tax (now LVT) political movement and the Single Tax (now Georgist) philosophical movement was made personally clear to me in 1984. That year, at the annual Council of Georgist Organizations conference, an invited local political speaker referred to the two-rate property tax (a sort of preliminary version of LVT that taxes land *and* buildings) as “the double-tax.” This ignorance on the part of public official and the public about the nature of the Georgist program led, in 2001, to the city of Pittsburgh abolishing its “double-tax”. This was the end result, it seemed to me, of the change-of-name game and the hopes that a more moderate tax reform would earn more support. While a case can be made that the “double-tax” has gotten more support than a land-value-only-tax, has it moved society in the noble direction urged by Henry George? While the two-rate property tax made some moderate gains in one US state, Pennsylvania, in recent decades labor in the US has suffered a falling standard of living and ever-increasing tax burdens. The promise of the once-famous Single Tax was

forgotten by the public at large — at least in part because many Georgists, instead of doing research to demonstrate the viability of the Single Tax model, caved-in to its critics, dropped the “Single” or the “Tax” and busied themselves in a fruitless search for a better name. So much for rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

With the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and before the triumph of television, there was a resurgence of interest in the Single Tax, or rather in Georgism and LVT. The progressive solutions enacted just before the First World War had proven inadequate. To prevent Marxist revolution in the US, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal was instituted — again beating radical Georgist tax reform to the punch. In 1941 and the years that followed, scholars and journalists, including Franz Oppenheimer, John Dewey, George Geiger (son of Oscar), and Will Lissner, birthed and nurtured *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*. It was a bold attempt to develop Georgist social theory and economic analysis in a direction George himself had attempted: as a synthesis of the social sciences. As such, the Journal has remained independent and apart from the Georgist political movement and the Georgist popular education movement.

During the “cold war” era of the 1950s and early 60s, Georgism was presented more as an antidote to communism and urban sprawl than an alternative to monopoly and poverty — more a local tax reform than a solution to widespread economic injustice. And it was a reform of a local tax that was becoming increasingly unpopular to the rising middle class of privileged homeowners with their tax deductions that are born more and more by the propertyless tenant class. As economist Dick Netzer remarked at Pace University seminar sponsored by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation in the mid 1980s: The American home-owning and voting public is not in favor of taxing unrealized capital gains. The decline of property, corporate, and capital gains taxation has shifted the tax burden of the US military-industrial complex onto the working class — further rewarding privilege at the expense of labor.

When the radical social movements of 1968 took off, Georgists (at least *as* Georgists) were by and large not prepared to climb aboard and so were left behind. This was in spite of the significant talent and effort that was marshaled by various Georgist organizations and advocates between World War II and the current day. This is not to say their efforts have been in vain, but they haven’t been enough to turn the tide.

These advocates of Georgist philosophy and land-value taxation have fought lonely battles against overwhelming odds, including an academic establishment that has been at odds with George, and vice versa, from the beginning. Georgists are today in the unenviable position of trying to get a hearing for *a solution to a problem the public does not know it has*. Today, crime is considered a social problem, but not the poverty that creates it. Poverty is

considered a *personal* problem of the poor, of losers, that's all — not the social problem George and his contemporaries knew it was. But even in the tide of opinion against the inequities of the Federal income tax, a social problem the majority *knows* it has, the Georgist alternative has been rarely mentioned. Like it or not, Georgists have become what Albert Jay Nock predicted, and considered the best they could hope for — a “Remnant”.

Today, will the downing of the World Trade Center, our own Titanic, be a warning that more dramatic world-changing events are in the offing? In fact, some of the causes underlying this brutal act of fundamentalism and terrorism — two isms that seem to be on the rise today — can be directly linked back through the twentieth century to World War I, in which the Western powers carved up the defeated Ottoman Empire regardless of the wishes of the inhabitants. The resurgence of militant fundamentalist Islam, perhaps looking back to the former days of a united Ottoman territory, could well be taken as a symbolic resurrection of, or return to, the nineteenth century, but on a more urgent level. The inequities that George sought to remedy are with us now more than ever, and we ignore the suffering and despair of others at our peril.

So, what is to be done? While the subject of this seminar does not ask this question, it seems a pertinent one to ask of anyone who thinks they know why the Georgist movement has not succeeded. What, after all, would have succeeded? Or rather, to be more useful, what *now* would succeed? In this paper I have bypassed themes I expect other panelists to address, and focused on angles I expect would otherwise have been overlooked. More could be said, but I will leave that to my colleagues. Likewise, I will make only a few suggestions, ones that I expect may not be made by many others.

Henry George defined rent in his speech “the Land for the People” (1889) as follows:

I said that rent is a natural thing. So it is. Where one man, all rights being equal, has a piece of land of better quality than another man, it is only fair to all that he should pay the difference. Where one man has a piece of land and others have none, it gives him a special advantage; it is only fair that he should pay into the common fund the value of that special privilege granted him by the community. That is what is called economic rent.... But over and above the economic rent there is the power that comes by monopoly, there is the power to extract a rent which may be called monopoly rent.... The power to exact that monopoly rent comes from the power to hold land idle — comes from the power to keep labor off the land.

George expected his Single Tax to abolish monopoly rent and socialize “natural” economic rent. His premise is “all rights being equal.” But we know, and non-Georgist know, that all rights, in practice, are not equal. Those with greater disposable income, and institutions

enjoying financial privileges, have the power to outbid and jack-up the value of land and so dispossess the others who cannot afford to pay the inflated price. In an advanced market economy, rent does not necessarily represent “the highest and best use” of a natural site or resource, but the amount of money those with the *highest disposable income* are willing to pay to monopolize that site or resource. Money talks, money rules. The poor in urban centers, who see their tenement buildings and community gardens torn down to make way for luxury high-rise apartments, can understandably doubt what difference it makes if developers pay the city treasury rather than private title-holders for the legal rights to dispossess them. Nor can they be expected to appreciate George’s distinction between “natural” economic rent and socially sanctioned monopoly rent. Nor, for that matter, can they be expected to appreciate the Georgist distinction between paying taxes and paying rents — both come out of their wages in the end.

Georgists, in my opinion, need to see beyond George’s nineteenth-century categories and terminology. We need to see that economic systems do not exist outside of larger socio-political systems. Can we really say that rent is “natural”? There are societies in which the practice of *sharing* access to land was the custom, and rent did not exist. Rent is a relationship, not an essence or a thing. Rent-relationships arise when societies create and observe certain customs and laws regarding exclusive land tenure. What we know of tribal societies, including some Native American ones, suggests this. So also does one feature of modern life in Cuba, where people occupy-and-use their apartments rent-free. But such examples of radically different social relationships have, of course, been put down by military might as well as by covert operations all during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After all, this was how the West was won.

The Single Tax has been numbered among other nineteenth century social panaceas. But even George warned that collecting the Single Tax alone would not be enough to end poverty. If the tax money were to be wasted on militarism or other forms of what Ralph Borsodi called “illth” in contrast to wealth, then the poor would remain oppressed. How the Single Tax funds are spent is rarely addressed by Georgists, which gives the impression that we Georgists are enthralled by a panacea and are ignorant of the importance of how public revenue is spent.. George himself urged spending the Single Tax on all sorts of community-improvement projects, like free libraries, museums, baths, water, and electricity (*Progress and Poverty*, p. 456) — and even to finance “*a pension to everybody*” (*Protection or Free Trade*, 1886, p.312).

Following this last suggestion, which itself harks back to the old British radicals Thomas Spence and Tom Paine, a few Geonomists today, like Jeffery Smith, advocate a citizen’s dividend — a regular equal share of the rent fund to be paid to each citizen (regardless of age, I might add). The promise of such a direct redistribution of land values or rent may

make voting in favor of a tax shift from wages and sales to land values in the interest of average parents, homeowners, and tenants. Meanwhile, there is a need for research, along the lines proposed by Michael Hudson, Fred Harrison, and others, to determine if land values would be adequate to fund public services including citizens' dividends. If the research proves favorable, then its publication and dissemination could put the Georgist paradigm back on the map.

The anti-globalization movement today is becoming the context of social change in our new century. These are the new anti-monopolists, as the Single Taxers, anarchists, socialists, and progressives were a century ago. Georgist participation in this movement just might make Georgism vital again — if Georgists are open to a revaluation and re-radicalization of their paradigm. This new Green radicalism is taking on the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, as well the various governments that protect these institutions, including the United States government itself. History has demonstrated time and again that the US government will ignore world opinion, United Nations resolutions, its own purported belief in human rights, and use overwhelmingly brutal military might to achieve its objectives.

The new “war on terrorism” is already being used against the critics and opponents of global-monopolization. It is perhaps our fourth Red Scare (and first “Green Scare”) with its attendant centralization of government power, erosion of civil liberties, and broadcast of propaganda disguised as information. With each successive Red Scare in US history (1887, 1920s, 1950s) the Georgist movement seemed intimidated to break ranks with the social movement, and to appear to adopt a stance of promoting Georgism as a way to save the system from reformers more radical than themselves. In recent decades, attempts at Georgist conferences to address burning social and political issues, or critically examine traditional Georgist positions, are more often than not discouraged, as I know from direct experience. Now I wonder: Will the new Red Scare be the one that intimidates the Georgist movement to the point of total irrelevance and silence? We are approaching a crisis, which we know also means an opportunity.

The opportunity is for Georgists to join the intellectual and activist movement against this newest “*ordo seclorum*”. The current war of terrorism is to make the world safe for oil monopolists — some of whom occupy high political office and even royal estate — as well as finance monopolists represented by the WTO, World Bank, and IMF. Indeed, it is a Georgist issue that could well be addressed as such by Georgists. But it may take some courage. Should any country resist the global corporate interests and listen to Georgists enough to implement a Georgist system, they would be threatened with ostracism by the global finance and corporate interests, as occurred in Russia. If that were to fail, perhaps

the US government would label the country a rogue state that harbors terrorists, and then drop bombs, send in death squads, and/or declare economic sanctions that slowly murder the population until such time as it could install a puppet regime. Look at what was done in Nicaragua to undermine the “threat” of a viable alternative to domination by corporate monopoly capitalism.

The ultimate implications of globalization — which is nothing but the final privatization of the planetary commons — is that we can no longer afford to treat land (including the water supply, the gene pool, the electromagnetic spectrum) as a commodity. The land belongs equally to all, even if not especially to those without financial power who cannot afford to pay a rent or tax for it. The socialization of land values must be complemented by the socialization of the land itself. Indeed, “*We must make land common property.*” Some land must be held off the market for ecological reasons. Other species must be protected in their occupancy and use of their habitats. Ultimately, we must see the planet as Mother Earth once more. We must return to humanity’s ancient wisdom before it was overshadowed by those patriarchal institutions: the military state, land privatization, and debt servitude. Our Mother is not for sale, nor is she for hire. In spite of our abuse she gives of herself unstintingly. In the future — if we have a future — the payment of land rent for the private use of the Earth would be seen as an indemnification paid to the community in recognition of the damage and violation done to the Mother of all.

Mainstream economists have done their best to obfuscate and hide an open secret: *the production of wealth requires the destruction of nature.* Georgist economists needs to engage with this truth, rather ignore it and simply regard land as an inanimate “factor of production”. As Hazel Henderson, Murray Bookchin and others have pointed out, we have reached the end of economics. We have entered the age of ecology, including social ecology. The development of a Georgist social ecology is most needed, not only to save Georgism, but perhaps also to save the biosphere.

If land, labor, and capital are seen as primarily factors of production, then both labor and land are *seen as commodities.* And the distinction between land and capital, and labor and capital, are blurred. Both land and labor become *treated as capital.* One example of this trend: What were once called “services” are now increasingly being marketed as “products”. This is particularly noticeable with financial services (but perhaps “financial services” is itself a misnomer). In any case, this should come as no surprise, since financial interests, as far as I can see, are the ones driving humanity down the road of commodification and dehumanization — of economic slavery and ecological destruction.

Now is the time to reform and revitalize the Georgist philosophy and movement. In recent

discussions at the Libertarian Book Club in New York on the subject, Peter Lamborn Wilson ironically suggested that the nineteenth century (surprise!) never died. In an essay written in 1996, he wrote:

In a sense the 20<sup>th</sup> century was just a re-run of the 19<sup>th</sup>: — same industrial squalor, colonial-imperialism, commodification, alienation, ravaging of the material world, rule of money, class war, etc., etc. The various chief ideologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century melted and combined into two opposing camps, “Democracy” and “Communism”, corrupt caricatures of the great ideal of the Revolution. The 20<sup>th</sup> century consisted simply of the struggle between these two 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas. On the one hand Capital, on the other hand the Social: — the Punch and Judy show of titanic modernism — the “Spectacle”. (*“Marx and Proudhon Escape from the Nineteenth Century”, in Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays, 1998, Autonomedia, p. 38*)

The end of world — or world view — of the twentieth century, was signaled by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Persian Gulf War in 1990. The Hunger Project did not end hunger by 1997, an idea whose time was supposed to have come. Welfare was “reformed” in the United States and still the jobless and homeless sleep and die on the streets of New York City, many of them victims of forces beyond their control as much as those who died in the Twin Towers. The end of the twentieth century has brought us full circle back to the nineteenth and all its unresolved issues and forces, monsters that seem to have grown stronger in their sleep — in *our* sleep. Is it not time for humanity (including Georgists!) to understand — instead of to blindly repeat (perhaps for one last time) — history?



The author would like to thank the many Georgists who over the years, and especially recently, have discussed these issues with him. His views are tentative and open to revision in light of further discussion and evidence — and in any case are not to be taken personally.

**Dedicated to Peter Lamborn Wilson, friend and independent scholar.**

**Presented in memory of Mildred Jensen Loomis, teacher, advocate, and activist.**

**And submitted to The American Journal of Economics and Sociology  
in memory of its founding editor, Dr. Will Lissner,  
who long ago had urged me to contribute an essay on George and Tucker.**

**In hopes for an end to political, economic, ecological, and religious terror  
around the world.**