

Georgists on the Move in Russia

a letter from Prof. Nicolaus Tideman

In the past five years I have made 15 trips to Russia to explain the virtues of public collection of rent (land value taxation). I have appeared on radio and television many times, been interviewed for newspaper stories, spoken at conferences, talked with hundreds of government officials, politicians, professors, businessmen and ordinary Russians. This is my annual report and invitation to participate.

In my trips, I have supported a number of activities that promote Russian understanding of the virtues of public collection of rent. Here are the principal continuing ones:

Radi Kushnerovich's Documentary Film

Radi Kushnerovich is a film maker who learned about Henry George's ideas when he read about them in the works of Leo Tolstoy. He has been working for some time on funding and production arrangements for a documentary on taxation. He now has an invitation for a month-long stay in Taiwan, that might lead to shooting the documentary there. Also the owner of a good video studio in Switzerland was impressed with the project and offered to provide Radi with free editing.

Radi is also planning a trip for me to Kazan, the capital of the Tatarstan Autonomous Republic. On past visits there, I have met with the highest officials of the region, who have expressed interest in allowing some area of Tatarstan to experiment with shifting taxes from labor and capital to land. To communicate with me by e-mail, Radi obtained the help of his friend Elena Schachter, who is on the faculty at the Russian State Humanities University. Upon learning of my impending visit to Moscow, she suggested that I might give a talk or two at her university.

Ekograd

In St. Petersburg, city planners Tatiana Roskoshnaia and Tamara Chistiakova learned about the virtue of land as a source of public revenue from a talk I gave on my first visit in 1990. They formed the consulting firm Ekograd (ecological city), which explains to city officials the advantages of land as a source of revenue. They have the strong support of the leader of the city of Novgorod for implementing public collection of rent there. But he has decided to postpone any effort to implement the idea until he can include regional taxes as well, and he is running for the position of leader of the region in elections that will be held on

December 17. Tatiana and Tamara have also worked on the possibility of implementing public collection of rent in a number of other places, particularly Furgut in Western Siberia, Sayanagorsk in the Hakacia region in Southeast Siberia, and Solikamsk in Northeast Russia. A fiscal reform that will greatly increase local self-government is working its way through the Russian Parliament. Tatiana and Tamara hope that passage of this measure will substantially improve the prospects for public collection of rent.

Henry George Association of Moscow

The Henry George Association of Moscow was formed as a result of conversations I had with Andrei Pavlov when he was studying at Moscow University. This Association publicizes the idea of using land for public revenue among politicians and political activists. It also works to build a network of individuals throughout Russia who are interested in studying the ideas of Henry George and implementing George's remedy to the greatest possible extent. Andrei Pavlov serves as the Association's unpaid President while working for the Kaeros Trading Company, which provides them with office space. The Association publishes a newsletter on an occasional basis and contributes articles to a variety of publications. The Association is planning to call a conference in the near future, to which it would invite supporters of public collection of rent from throughout the former Soviet Union — but funding is critical.

Kaliningrad

For a while, Andrei Pavlov worked for a Moscow radio station. That led to my meeting Eugene Alioshin, who owns a radio station in Kaliningrad (formerly Koenigsberg in East Prussia). The translator for my visits to Kaliningrad, Marina Fedorova, has become an activist for public collection of the rental value of land there. She has arranged many visits for me to public officials and interviews in the media. In the past year she has published articles in local newspapers and has had many meetings with political leaders and public officials. For my visit to Kaliningrad, Marina has arranged radio and television appearances, interviews with newspaper reporters, a meeting with the head of the Regional Land Commission, and meetings with local leaders of the Russia's

Choice and House of Russia political parties. Thus far Marina's efforts have been at her own expense.

Yuri Bocharov

Yuri Bocharov is an architect and city planner whom I met on my first visit. Whenever I go to Moscow, I stay at his apartment. He has traveled widely in the U.S. and elsewhere. After spending many months in the U.S. following his participation in the Fairhope conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations, Yuri is back in Moscow, working on a book-length review of the land question in Russia, commissioned by Si Winters for the

Social Science Forum of the HGS. Si and Yuri both hope that the booklet can eventually be expanded into a full book. Yuri also informed me that one of the people who participated in a short course in Public Finance that I gave at Moscow University has recently been appointed to head the Russian State

Bank. He offered to try to arrange a meeting with him for me. If Yuri had \$500, he could buy a computer with which to work on his review of the land question in Russia. I have a commitment of \$200 toward the cost of such a computer.

Moscow Assessment Experiment

The Administration of the Moscow Region and the Moscow Region Land Committee propose to collaborate on the subject, 'Mass assessment of land in the Moscow Region for the purpose of land taxation,' through their Land Institute (Dr. Victor Tsheglov) in 1996-98 and to undertake an experiment in one of the districts of the Moscow region. From their American colleagues, they seek: consultations, methods of assessment, financial aid and training of specialists. They propose to discuss the subject in more detail during my December 1995 visit to Moscow.

With all of these things occurring, I continue to find it worthwhile to put my own efforts and money into promoting public collection of rent in Russia. If you would like to join me by making a contribution, please send it to: Nicolaus Tideman, Economics Department, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg VA 24061-0316. Please note if you wish to earmark your contribution toward one of the projects described above.



Nic Tideman