

Geonomic Proposals Get a Lot of Airplay

THE BROAD, LEAFY avenues and fresh mountain air of Australia's capital city of Canberra was an appropriate setting for the landmark Global Greens Conference in April. The fact that Canberra had been purposely founded in the 1920s as a Georgist enclave and, furthermore, had been imaginatively designed by the American Georgist sympathiser, Walter Burley Griffin, was an auspicious omen for the six Australian Georgists taking part in the conference. An accurate omen, indeed!

In the face of all the diversity of 800 or so attendants from 70 countries, there was much in common – the desire to form an international network of concerned activists dedicated to healing the Earth, to alleviate alarming social problems, to inject economic sanity into our political decision-making, and to make these and other changes from the grass roots and in a peaceful way.

The Greens' star is on the rise worldwide, and this was an historic gathering aimed at refining the Global Greens Charter and to form an electronic meeting place to enable delegates to effect rapid change. With an ever-increasing appeal to the youth of this planet, the flourishing of the Greens seems certain. Geonomists in Australia increasingly see ourselves in the position of being "the hand on the Greens tiller"

ONE OF THE KEY issues was the role of the WTO, IMF and World Bank (with bold resolutions passed to seek their complete replacement unless radical reforms are made), highlighting the broad concern with globalisation. Free trade without Geonomic reforms in place is not fair trade – the all-powerful transnationals currently ripping off the economic rent don't give a damn about freedom!

The concern with genetic engineering was also centre stage, with the Precautionary Principle a wise article of faith in such circumstances where the planet's ecological integrity might be forever damaged by short-sighted practices.

It was also pleasing to see that the Tobin Tax on (largely-speculative) foreign exchange transactions is almost universally endorsed nowadays in Greens circles. Other important themes concerned organic agriculture, electoral reform, the forthcoming Rio +10 Conference, forests (of course!), and a whole range of social justice issues (particularly concerning indigenous peoples and oppressed minorities).

One of the most topical subjects concerned President Bush's lamentable ripping up of the USA's undertaking to reduce greenhouse gases according to the Kyoto protocol. Such a move,



Karl Williams reports from Canberra

which has basically meant that Kyoto is dead in the water, was fiercely condemned. I, for one, will be following the Greens' call to boycott US oil companies – the main pressure group behind President Shrub's decision.

THE UNIFORM which the six attending Georgists wore was a T-shirt featuring the Earth as seen from space, with the caption "The Earth Belongs to Us All". It was an appropriate theme with which to run, as there were many such sentiments expressed at the conference such as "Every human has an equal entitlement to the use of the atmosphere". For many Greens, it won't be long before they realise that the very land on which they're standing should their birthright – instead we find ourselves "born on to a planet where all the seats are taken"!

Two workshops were conducted on the topics "Eco-taxes" and "Sharing the Earth", which were great successes. Never before have I run a workshop where the audience (totalling about 70) was so receptive, asked so many intelligent questions, and were so keen to receive further literature. Many were already realising some of the downside consequences of renting, not owning, land – particularly the environmental and social justice implications.

The Greens used to be (perhaps justifiably) criticised for being a party with lots of motherhood statements but few policies. That is no longer the case. It seemed all were aware of the need to translate these ideals into detailed policies – and this includes the very unsexy area of economics. The Greens are looking at everything within reason, and Geonomics is starting to get a good hearing. Amazingly, more than half the people to whom I spoke had already heard of Henry George and most of those had already formed somewhat favourable opinions.

WHY ARE WE suddenly being taken so seriously? There's a new term that has taken root amongst Greens – "the Global Commons". By leading our discussions along the lines that land should certainly be part of the Global Commons, we already were well on the way to selling our message.

It has to be said that the whole atmosphere of the conference was inspirational. The spirit of openness, respect and tolerance carried the conference through countless sticky areas, with barely a hint of resentment or animosity when delegates failed to have their own pet resolutions passed. It is impossible to imagine mainstream political organisations conducting themselves in such an enlightened manner. I've always held back from joining any political party, but now the Greens have won me over.

It was this spirit of camaraderie that enabled so many potentially-divisive issues to be openly discussed and resolved, in the face of so many different needs and cultural perspectives. Along the way there was lots of good humour, plenty of groovy music and solid friendships formed. As it was remarked by one delegate, "I don't want your revolution if I can't dance."



■ Canberra: Georgist enclave?