

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF GEORGISTS

Approximately 60 friends gathered at the pleasant campus of Kendall College in Evanston, Illinois (just north of Chicago) from Thursday, July 15 to Sunday, July 18 for a national Georgist conference. This was sponsored by the Henry George Foundation of America (as requested at last year's conference in Bryn Mawr, Pa.), with the help of the Chicago Georgist groups. States represented included Alabama, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Good weather and good spirits prevailed throughout the Conference, where numerous encouraging reports were heard, as well as a variety of ideas - some controversial, but all in friendly encounter.

At the opening session on Thursday evening, Henry Tideman, President of the Henry George School of Illinois, welcomed the delegates and spoke on "The Chicago Assessor and Chicago Construction." Cook County (in which Chicago is situated) attempted a reform of assessments in 1969-70. However, those who did not like their new assessments could file an "Objection No. 1", as it was called. There were 5000 such cases and deals were made. When this was exposed, a "reform" was instituted which is very much like the old system except that "Objection No. 1" is now called "Certificate of Error."

Also at the opening session, M.S. Lurio (President, Boston Henry George School) spoke on the difficulties of putting across our basic ideas, even to people who would benefit. He asked a prominent business man about this and the reply was, "We are captives of the present system." So the attitude is "Don't rock the boat." Mr. Lurio also told of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, recently established in Cambridge, Mass. and funded by the Lincoln Foundation.

Reports of Campaigns

At the Friday morning session, Robert Clancy (President, Henry George Institute) whose topic was "How to Make Our Movement More Effective", said this should be a question, and should be the theme of all our conferences as an on-going discussion. He told of the work of the Henry George Institute, and then read a paper submitted by Dr. James L. Busey (Colorado Springs, Color.) about a recent campaign to exempt improvements from taxation. (This paper is summarized at the end of the Conference report.) Much discussion followed, bringing out ideas on education, publicity and politics.

Next speaker was Gaston Haxo (St. Petersburg, Fla.) who spoke on "Reforming the Georgist Movement." The movement has made a mistake, he contended, in stressing "taxation." He proposed that it be emphasized that all land is our common property and that the rent of land is for all. The rent should be distributed in equal shares to all the people and public services should be paid by the people as a "tax" in proportion to their demand for services.

Noah D. Alper (St. Louis, Mo.) reported on the work of the Public Revenue Education Council, now in its 25th year, which sends large mailings to businessmen, economists and other leaders. Mr. Alper emphasized that the tax is a pump that can only draw from two basic sources, wages and rent, and we want to switch it to drawing from rent.

At the Friday afternoon session, William W. Newcomb (Melbourne, Fla.) speculated on what he would do if he had the combined resources of the Georgist organizations of America. His program included the following;

1. Creativity: production of popular items such as comic books.
2. A Latin and Black division to reach these important minorities.
3. Bore from within: get into influential organizations, start a lobby.
4. Create chairs for land value taxation in colleges, conduct seminars.
5. Litigation: pursue the inequities of our current system in the courts.
6. Church work: become active in the social service programs of churches.
7. One-state program: start a crash program to get legislation in one state.

The above program is to be sustained by a national coordinator and a national visible spokesman.

Louis I. Weitzman (Tyrringham, Mass.) proposed a mass mailing to "Who's Who" types of persons, offering various services and information, including correspondence courses.

Theodore Swain, Deputy Chief Assessor of Chicago, spoke next on the role of the assessor. Illinois law requires land and improvements to be assessed separately, but the courts only recognize the total property. Assessment levels are different with different classes of property - e.g., commercial property is higher than residential property; the justification is that homeowners bear the tax cost but businesses shift it.

Nadine Stoner (President, Beloit chapter, Wisconsin Property Owners League) told of a campaign for land value taxation in Wisconsin. It was found in 1969 that there were great variations in assessments and the League filed two lawsuits. Assistance was obtained from the International Union for Land Value Taxation. In 1971 and 1973 optional site value legislation was introduced but postponed. Though approved by the legislature, the bill was never sent for a hearing. The League intends to continue waiting for the next legislative opportunity.

Activities in Nebraska were reviewed. Everett Gross (Crete, Nebr.) is now studying for a master's degree in economics at the University of Nebraska (not the University of North Dakota as erroneously reported in the last GJ). Gary Carlson (Housing and Community Development Department, Omaha, Nebr.) told of a report he prepared on the impact of a graded property tax in Nebraska. As this aroused difficulties in the state's 93 counties, another study was made limited to Douglas County and its largest city, Omaha, where population of the state is concentrated. A recommendation was made for land value taxation. An amendment will be introduced in 1978, permitting a tax rate on land no higher than the current rate on land and improvements. Dr. Ralph Scott of the University of Nebraska was also present and said that he observed the failure of so many programs, including federal funding and land give-aways, that he was attracted to the reform of the property tax as a self-correcting growth policy.

On Friday evening, Perry Prentice (President, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation) spoke on what Schalkenbach is doing to promote property tax reform. A Regional Committee has been formed consisting of persons working in various parts of the country for site value taxation, and Schalkenbach works closely with them, offering whatever help is feasible in consultations, literature, etc. Mr. Prentice mentioned the imminent retirement of Ms. V.G. Peterson as Executive Secretary of Schalkenbach, a position she has filled with distinction for many years.

Floyd Morrow (San Diego, Calif.) told of the activities of LEAF (Land, Equality And Freedom), which has been set up as an action organization in California to serve Georgist ideals. Meetings have been held with Governor Brown and other officials. A conference was recently held in San Francisco, in conjunction with the Henry George Schools.

Idaho was represented at the Conference by Bill Orweiler, a member of the State legislature, who presented a slide program on Ada County (which includes Boise) that he has been showing to groups in Idaho. It shows the amount of under-used property and builds up to a proposal for site value taxation. The International Union has assisted Mr. Orweiler.

Russel Conklin (en route from New York where he was a Montana delegate at the Democratic Convention) advocated a crash program for Montana since this state now has the legislative means to introduce land value taxation. Montana is the only state that has statewide assessment. There may be enough support in Montana to put through a permissive bill, but it would need professional lobbying and political organization.

Activities and Ideas

A full Friday was followed by a full Saturday. At the morning session, John Weaver (Henry George Foundation trustee) reviewed the Georgist movement in Pennsylvania, noting that two former Pittsburgh mayors, William McNair and Cornelius D. Scully, were members of the Henry George Foundation. Steven Cord is active in promoting a graded tax in various cities of Pennsylvania. Harrisburg has already taken the first step. Meadville has shown a favorable response and other cities are being approached. The Department of Public Affairs of Pennsylvania has written laws for cities that want to switch to land value taxation.

Woodrow W. Williams, an Ohio farmer, spoke of the difficulty in convincing farmers of the benefits of land value taxation; they do not appreciate how they would gain by the abolition of other taxes. Mr. Williams has corresponded with Ohio's Lieutenant-Governor Celeste and has contacted the Farmers Union.

Benjamin F. Smith (Ada, Mich.) presented a thesis on "Negative Land Values" illustrated with charts. He said that land value reflects everything, "malefits" as well as benefits. He gave examples of land in his community where conditions were so bad that the combined value of land and improvements is less than the value of the improvement - an illustration of negative land value.

Leonard Huckabone (Detroit, Mich.) spoke of Georgist efforts in Michigan. The Committee for Better Cities has sponsored mailings to legislators. A resolution has been adopted by the Unitarian-Universalist Church petitioning Congress to study land value taxation.

Robert A. King (Chicago, Ill.) spoke of his journalistic work, including a newspaper column entitled "King's Row."

In the absence of Bolivar Rodriguez, Robert Clancy reported on the work of the Institute of Christian Economics. This was formerly the Spanish Division of the Henry George Institute. Well attended classes are held in the Xavier High School, and five courses are given all based on Henry George, with a Christian emphasis.

At the Saturday afternoon session, Claude Arnold (Fairhope, Ala.) told of recent developments in the Fairhope Single Tax colony. Reassessments have been undertaken, and though they have been objective, protests and legal actions have resulted. So far the colony has sustained all these difficulties and has also found that the single tax has more friends than was previously supposed.

Percy R. Williams (Executive Secretary, Henry George Foundation) highlighted 50 years of Foundation history. It was begun in 1926 in Philadelphia when the Birthplace of Henry George was acquired (later sold to the Henry George School). Headquarters are in Pittsburgh and Presidents have been George Evans, Hon. Charles

Eckert, Judge John R. Fuchs and William E. Schoyer. Many distinguished Georgists have served on the Board of Trustees. Annual conferences were initiated and continued to 1941. There were also conferences in 1949, 1951, 1958 and 1962. The Georgist Groups turned over the conference program to the Henry George Foundation at the Pittsburgh Conference in 1974, Bryn Mawr in 1975 and Evanston in 1976. Mr. Williams concluded that the movement is "alive and well."

Julian Hickock (Philadelphia, Pa.) spoke on "Henry George and Free Enterprise" and showed how mistaken it is to confuse Georgism with socialism. George wanted to abolish "boom and bust" cycles, but in a free enterprise atmosphere.

William O. Ranky (Chicago, Ill.) spoke on "The Persistent Problem of Inflation." He cited German and Hungarian inflations which were used as political weapons, and quoted Lenin that the surest way to overthrow capitalism is to debase the currency. Money that is "recurrent" (i.e., issued to pay taxes and federal notes) is not inflationary. Money that is "non-recurrent" (issued over the above purposes) is inflationary. To stop inflation the Federal budget must be balanced.

Messages were read from friends who could not be present: Judge S. James Clarkson (Southfield, Mich.), John T. Tetley (Woodbridge, N.J.) and Glenn Weeks (newly elected President of the New York Henry George School). There was also read a Proclamation by the Mayor of Evanston declaring the days of the Conference to be Henry George days in Evanston. (This is appended to this report.) (Another fringe benefit: your reporter encountered the President of Kendall College, Dr. Cochran and found that he was greatly sympathetic toward Henry George.)

First Sunday speaker was Richard Noyes (Salem, N.H.), who said that New Hampshire is the only state that has no sales or income tax and that the word "proportional" in the state constitution has helped keep it this way. A recent Constitutional Convention failed to get in a Georgist amendment but it is hoped that another effort can be made next time. Mr. Noyes is particularly interested in constitutions, state and federal, and is engaged in a study on the subject.

Wayne Berry (Spring Hill, Fla.) told of the Free Land League founded by Gaston Haxo and invited all present to become members - there are no dues. Keep up the work, said Mr. Berry, never give up no matter what.

A Conference evaluation was conducted by Mina Olson (Director, Chicago Henry George School). Most agreed that the Conferences "charge batteries." Eugene Damon (Meridian, Miss.) suggested that next time chairmen should be appointed who are not speakers on the program. George Tideman (Chicago, Ill.) thought it would be useful to have a recording and transcript of the proceedings. Robert Clancy said that the different individuals and groups conferred harmoniously and that we should consider ourselves as the Georgist Movement in America, without sacrificing our respective identities, and build up more communications among ourselves.

Plans for 1977 were discussed. Floyd Morrow proposed that next year's conference be jointly sponsored by LEAF and the Henry George Foundation, and if possible, the Henry George School. The delegates assented to this. A location and tentative date were set: Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, around the Fourth of July. Mr. Morrow agreed to be Conference coordinator, and Nadine Stoner agreed to assist with Conference arrangements.

Thanks were extended to the Henry George Foundation and to the Chicago Henry George School - which provided a welcome interlude of entertainment on Saturday evening by a family of folk singers. And so ended the 1977 Conference!

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Henry George has had significant influence on economic thought for many years, and

WHEREAS, it is important to examine from time to time his incisive views as set forth in his classic book Progress and Poverty, and

WHEREAS, this bicentennial year is an appropriate time for reexamining the economic principles which will enable this country to progress in the future, and

WHEREAS, the Henry George Foundation is holding its 1976 National Conference at Kendall College in Evanston on July 15-18, 1976;

NOW, THEREFORE, as Mayor of the City of Evanston, I hereby proclaim the period of July 15-18 as Henry George Days in Evanston and welcome all participants at this Conference and urge all citizens to reexamine the teachings of Henry George.

Dated this 21st day of June, 1976.

Edgar Vanneman

LESSONS FROM THE COLORADO CAMPAIGN

Summarized from the Conference paper by JAMES L. BUSEY

While a furor about the property tax was building up in Colorado, the Taxpayers of El Paso County, Inc. (TEPC), a large taxpayer association in the second largest county of Colorado, voted on March 25, 1976 to support a petition campaign to get a question on the November ballot which would have the effect of exempting all improvements from taxation. This would be a constitutional amendment and it would be on the ballot if TEPC could raise 63,040 signatures. Despite strenuous efforts, we only got 12,000. But we learned valuable lessons, summarized here:

1. We should have started much earlier. The law permitted us six months for our petition drive, but we only allowed ourselves two.
2. We started from too small a base. Before beginning the actual petition campaign we should have developed strong multi-organizational support in the Denver area and elsewhere in Colorado.
3. Paid advertising was useless. Readers' letters engendered some interest; but paid advertising in the newspapers did no apparent good at all.
4. We got more signatures where there were more people. The best places to circulate our petitions were in busy shopping centers and downtown streets.
5. We needed more help. We did not have enough people to carry petitions, and this was a consequence of our late start and our small base.
6. Certain organizations were our natural supporters. Our best support came from realtors not involved in land speculation, people in the construction industry, citizens' taxpayers organizations and politically minded individuals.
7. We found no Georgists but made some. Despite Georgist classes here from time to time, we never encountered a person who had previous contact with the idea, but potential signers who asked questions became quickly educated.
8. We had a terrifically appealing idea. Our simple idea proved to be hugely popular with almost every one who came in contact with it.
9. We will do it again. All of us are enthusiastic and positive about starting the campaign afresh in preparation for the election of November 1978. We will propose the same question but will revise the format of our campaign to accommodate itself to the lessons we have learned.