

## 1977 JOINT GEORGIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA

One of the best-attended Georgist conferences in many years took place this year at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (USA), Friday, July 1 to Tuesday, July 5. This Joint Georgist Conference was co-sponsored by LEAF (Land Equality and Freedom), the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, the Henry George Foundation of America, Henry George Schools and other educational groups. (In the past few years there had been two separate annual conferences by different groupings of organizations and they all came together this year.)

There were 148 registered delegates plus several others who came and went (not to count the numerous children who came with families). From all parts of the USA and Canada they came to this beautiful rural resort and pronounced it ideal for our purposes. Most sessions were held in the Nichols Chapel in the center of the resort. Weather was fine except for one rainy morning and one hot humid day. A good spirit of fellowship prevailed.

Conference Coordinator was Floyd Morrow of San Diego, California; Regional Coordinator was Nadine Stoner of Beloit, Wisconsin. Harry Pollard (Los Angeles) supervised conference mailings and Sam Venturella (Chicago) took care of registrations with the able assistance of Mina Olson and other Chicago Georgists.

### Conference Opening

The delegates assembled on Friday evening, July 1, to be welcomed by Nadine Stoner who reported that Marvin Schreiber, Acting Governor of Wisconsin, issued a proclamation setting aside July 1-5 as Henry George Days in Wisconsin, because of the conference and because "one name stands out in the 19th century - Henry George."

Floyd Morrow gave the keynote speech. There is a basic difference, he said, between what men create and what men cannot create. We can express this through the land value tax reform, but it is much deeper. It is a matter of justice and we must not let that go.

Mr. Morrow also announced that a Georgist film is in the making, based on the illustration in George's Protection or Free Trade of a bull on a rope who has wound himself around a post and does not know how to free himself. This film will be released December 6.

After the meeting the delegates were regaled with folk music and singing by a group called the Wabash Cannonballers, in an outdoor amphitheatre.

### Analysis and Action

The Saturday morning meeting, chaired by Perry Prentice (Schalkenbach President) featured speakers on economic analysis and activist work of the Georgist movement.

Prof. Lowell Harriss of Columbia University and the Tax Foundation pointed out that today government subsidy and investment play a much larger role in the economy than in George's day. Land value taxation is relevant to this development because it bears a closer relation to the effects of government activity than do other taxes, and it makes possible the mitigation of taxes on capital.

Prof. Arthur Becker of the University of Wisconsin presented a paper he gave at the National Tax Association last November. He said the real producers of wealth are labor and capital; land is essential but passive. The goal should be to give producers enough incentives so that they will voluntarily decide to produce. The disincentives in our society draining economic income include the private appropri-

ation of economic rent, other monopolies, waste in both private and public sectors, and crime. A tax policy should be adopted consistent with the goal, and land value taxation fits this requirement. (Prof. Becker's paper has been recommended for publication in a future issue of the American Journal for Economics and Sociology.)

Richard Noyes of New Hampshire said that in his paper, the Salem Observer, he has been featuring land value taxation, especially with respect to the homeowner. He had a banner headline when Perry Prentice spoke in New Hampshire - "Prentice: Homeowners Overtaxed." The Observer has printed specific examples of properties that would be affected by the switch to site value taxation and which homeowners would benefit. Mr. Noyes had expected a flood of responses but only got a trickle and he wondered why. He concluded that most people do not act until a leader acts, much the way an "alpha fish" leads a school of fish. We must seek out the "alpha fish."

On Saturday afternoon, Bill Onweiler of Boise, Idaho reported that a recent assessment in his state found property values three times that of the 1939 level. The prospects are good for a land value tax local option bill in Idaho.

Gary Carlson of Omaha, Nebraska reported that State Senator Simon has already introduced a local option bill for Nebraska. It is important to get knowledge of our ideas out to the people.

#### Organizational Work

A panel representing LEAF dealt with various aspects of that organization. John D'Alfonso, Executive Director, told of a recent drive that has increased the membership. William Filante, President, proposed affiliation with other groups (such as conservation groups), the production of written material, and a tangible goal, e.g., a bill for which to lobby. Terry Newland, Deputy Director, reflected that there is no easy way but we must "hit all bases." He mentioned door-to-door campaigns, speaking engagements, appearances on radio, etc. Earl A. Hanson, branch Director in Utah, told of his work in setting up a LEAF booth at a national convention of municipalities in Denver where much literature was distributed.

Following this panel there was a meeting of LEAF members at which it was reported that results of a recent election to the Board of Directors were set aside due to late mailing of some ballots, and a new election will be held soon.

Benjamin F. Smith (Grand Rapids, Michigan) showed, via charts, the history of the land tax, demonstrating that in the Orient (China and Japan) as well as the Occident, periods of prosperity are associated with the application of a land tax.

Saturday evening was free time for delegates. One activity was a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Henry George Foundation. It was regretted that the Executive Secretary, Percy R. Williams, could not attend, and a message of greetings to him was drafted. Steven Cord, President, chaired the meeting. Activities of the past year were reviewed, including the work of the affiliated Graded Tax League. A successful campaign has induced Harrisburg (capital of Pennsylvania) to lower the tax on improvement and increase the tax on land; the ratio is now 16-29 mills.

David Hapgood, author of "The Screwing of the Average Man" and "The Average Man Fights Back" is now at work on a book dealing more directly with the Georgist philosophy. It was proposed that the Foundation offer him assistance, and this was agreed to in principle, the matter to be further explored. It was also agreed to finance a booth at the fair in Arden, Delaware this year.

## Problems and Projects

On Sunday morning Rev. Wylie Young conducted an "ecumenical" service in the Chapel with psalms and readings that emphasized the bounty of the Creator and the fellowship of man.

Following this, Steven Cord put some discussion questions to the group, including these: Are corporate and union monopolies more important than the non-taxation of land values? Can LVT be a single tax or is it just for local revenue? Should anti-trust legislation be pursued? Should the government provide welfare? Are all taxes ultimately paid by the landowner? Have wages gone down (as a quantity-as a proportion) since 1879? Is moral truth a matter of personal opinion only? The animation of the discussion was just what you might imagine.

John Weaver (Pittsburgh, Pa.) reviewed the work of the Graded Tax League and said that Pittsburgh is now showing interest in going beyond the 2-1 ratio of tax on land and buildings. A Georgist, Harry A. Eigenrauch, is running as a Republican for the Pittsburgh City Council on a single tax issue. The atmosphere in Pennsylvania generally seems to indicate that more things are going to happen.

Sunday afternoon was left free and several went on a boat ride around Lake Geneva. Some hardy souls continued a discussion with Steven Cord on more questions in the vein of those discussed in the morning.

At the evening session, Dr. Cord reappeared to tell the group about his paper Incentive Taxation, which appears eight times a year. It is being circulated to many interested officials and was instrumental in making the gains in Harrisburg. He appealed for subscriptions.

Wylie Young also reappeared to talk on the necessity of more practical work in our movement. He urged visits to assessors who have an important work to do but don't understand it. As we progress and get near our goal, he warned, the opposition closes in. We have to build up our forces. (Wylie Young is author of the recent book, "Antidote for Madness.")

James L. Busey (University of Colorado) told of his recently ended sabbatical leave from his teaching duties, during which he travelled and visited Georgists far and wide. In New Zealand he spoke with Georgists and noted their difficulties even though the country has a measure of LVT. In Spain he visited Emilio Lemos Ortega of Seville, a Georgist in his 70's who after 40 years of the Franco regime is again speaking out for the Georgist philosophy. In Britain Prof. Busey visited Ashley Mitchell, now deceased. Mr. Mitchell told him, "We must stay organized and be ready for the opportunity when it comes."

Everett Gross (Crete, Nebraska), now studying for a master's degree at the University of Nebraska, delivered "Some Reflections on Poverty Relief and its Financing." Designed as a term paper, it was an attempt to recast financing. Mr. Gross showed with a series of mathematical charts on price and cost how the producer seeks to maximize his returns. The landowner, guided by the same motive, raises land prices by building in the expectation of future increases, cutting down on earned income. The solution is to tax land values. To handle the welfare burden we must cut down poverty and increase revenue.

Following this session, Mitchell S. Lurio (Boston, Mass.) invited interested persons to a special meeting to discuss classes and correspondence courses. This meeting was chaired by Robert Tideman (San Francisco, Calif.). Most of those associated with educational groups attended and exchanged views and experiences on getting students, charging for the course, keeping up with changing times, etc.

## Educational Work

At the Monday morning session, Harry Pollard gave a demonstration of the Interstudent Mini-course program being given widely to high school students in Southern California. Some of the questions that are given to these students were circulated to the delegates who were broken down into groups to deal with them. Answers were collected and graded and the performance of groups was compared. Questions are based on "the classical approach" and cover much of the ground of Henry George's books.

At the next session, chaired by Charles Byrne (Kansas City, Mo.) it was noted that the Interstudent program has attracted wide attention as a way of getting into schools. Mr. Pollard has been invited to other areas to demonstrate his program. Gaye Shw related the instance of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) where social studies teachers were exposed to the demonstration. Three have already adopted the program and it is hoped that more will go along.

Robert Clancy was called on to introduce Paul Nix, new President of the New York Henry George School. Mr. Nix stated that there has been disagreement among Trustees of the School as to which direction to take - continue the educational program or Promote research. The issue has been resolved by deciding to do both. It is proposed to conduct Georgist classes, and to revive Teachers Training and other activities, as well as to promote research.

Mr. Nix introduced the new Director of the New York School, Phil Finkelstein, who has been conducting research in the School-sponsored Center for Local Tax Research. Mr. Finkelstein said that plans are under way for offering Georgist classes to adults; also courses geared to college and graduate students, and an arrangement has been made with Hunter College to offer credit for these courses.

Following this session, the Board of Directors of LEAF had a separate meeting, during which time the general delegates heard reports from various groups, with Morgan Harris (Los Angeles) serving as chairman. Mr. Harris began by urging the movement to be more aware of public relations and to engage competent professional help. (He is author of the book "How to Make News and Influence People.") He said we have what people want and should sell it to them - freedom from taxation. He offered a three-point program: 1, Guild Ariadne - a group with the aim of reaching syndicated columnists and media commentators. 2, Establish Sept. 2nd (Henry George's Birthday) as a national day; it will appear in Chase's Calendar of Events as "Good Society Day." 3, Get a prominent actor like Hal Holbrook to do an impersonation of Henry George as he has done with Mark Twain and Will Rogers.

The following persons then made brief reports:

Harry Valasek (Los Angeles) is producing the film of which Mr. Morrow spoke and said it would have impact.

Harry Tideman (Chicago) told of efforts to reach international conferences on housing with reports pointing to land value taxation.

Mildred Loomis (Pennsylvania and Maryland) spoke on various ideas inspired by Ralph Borsodi. These include world goals, such as a World Authority to control all armaments, and a World Trust to collect rents. Another representative of the School of Living, Jubal, reported on its work and said the Georgist philosophy is an integral part of it.

Robert Clancy (New York) told of the Henry George Institute, its democratic structure and its work in holding meetings, classes, correspondence courses, distributing literature, special projects and the Georgist Journal.

William O. Ranky (Chicago) read a letter from Weld Carter which told of an Illinois representative, Cal Skinner, who is sponsoring a state constitutional amendment for home rule on site value taxation.

Tim Fielding has concluded one year as Director of the School of Economic Science in Toronto (Ontario, Canada) and has initiated the quarterly, Economic Incentives. The School is now without a full time Director but is strong enough to continue being run by its Board. Top officials are getting interested.

Gerald Shaw spoke of the work of the School of Economic Science in Calgary and pointed out that Alberta collects more rent and has lower taxes than any other area in North America and is also the fastest growing area in North America.

Wendell Fitzgerald, new Director of the Henry George School of San Francisco said he is still finding his way. He sees opportunity in contacting other groups and was impressed by a recent book, "Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity" by Frances Moore Lappé.

Len Huckabone (Detroit, Mich.) read from the final report of the Michigan Governor's Task Force on Property Taxation wherein it was recommended that funds be made available for a study on site value taxation.

Julain Hickok (Philadelphia, Pa.) pointed out that taxes in the U.S. were direct taxes until the 16th amendment which permitted income taxes, paving the way for the increase of socialism. We have a choice before us: Henry George and free enterprise or Karl Marx and socialism. Which shall it be?

Noah D. Alper (St. Louis, Mo.) told of the work of PREC (Public Revenue Education Council) which teaches that taxes are like pumps and the source has to be wages or rent. We are the only ones who can preserve the free market system.

### The Finale

On Monday evening, after a social hour and the conference dinner, a meeting was held in the outdoor amphitheatre. Harry Tideman introduced Miss V. G. Peterson, retired Executive Secretary of Schalkenbach, who read an excerpt from "The Central Truth" of Progress and Poverty - which was taken from a Fourth of July oration made by George 100 years ago to the day.

Floyd Morrow then introduced Walt Rybeck, President of the League for Urban Land Conservation, Washington, D.C., who said that although Washington is not on the verge of the single tax, it has made strides. Assessments have increased and 40% of the revenue for the Capital city is now from land values. Congress has given Washington local option and so it could move to pure site value taxation. Last Fall Congressman Royce held hearings on the renewal of cities. Lowell Harriss, Arthur Becker and Phil Finkelstein testified. More people are seeing the problem that speculators are holding prime land and developers can't get at it.

On Tuesday morning an evaluation session was held conducted by Mr. Morrow and it was the consensus that this was an outstanding conference with a renewed sense of cooperation. Plans for next year's conference were discussed and it was decided that it would be held in eastern Pennsylvania at a location and date to be settled later. It was also noted that in 1979 the Conference - which will also be the Conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade - will be held in San Francisco on the 100th anniversary of Progress and Poverty.

The abundance of ideas, literature and projects at this Conference could not be reported in more detail. But if readers are interested in any of the items reported, they are invited to write for further information.