

GEORGIST  
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1978 JOINT GEORGIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA

BRYN MAWR, PENNSYLVANIA ----- JUNE 30 - JULY 4

This year's Conference had a good representation of Georgist organizations as co-sponsoring groups - Henry George Foundation of America, Henry George Institute, Henry George Schools, LEAF and Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. Well over 100 persons attended the full Conference, as well as many who came and went.

Packed with reports, talks and discussions, the Conference was an intense experience and the poor weather the last three days - including a full day of heavy rain on Monday - hardly dampened the spirits of the conferees as they plunged into the sessions.

The famous Bryn Mawr College was the scene of the Conference where the conferees lived and met. For the past several years, locations like this have been favored over city hotels as being more congenial as well as economical.

Politics and Philosophy

On Friday evening, June 30, an informal session was held and an impromptu and animated discussion took place, led off by Lou Weitzman, on the conduct of the Georgist movement, the need for more members and young people, whether the resources of the movement are used to best advantage, and the need for fuller inter-Georgist communication.

Saturday, July 1, the first full day of the Conference, was initiated with a welcome by Steven Cord (President, Henry George Foundation) who gave a brief history of Georgism in Pennsylvania; also an accounting of Georgist conferences from Henry George's day to the present, and he reckoned that this was the 57th national conference of Georgists in America.

Dr. Cord then introduced the keynote speaker, Albert Hydeman, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs. Mr. Hydeman said that Henry George's ideas make sense and that the mechanics of the single tax are simple and sensible. He said that the time is ripe to make George's ideas part of our country's policy. In Pennsylvania only 3 or 51 cities has shown interest in shifting the property tax from buildings to land, but the movement has begun and it must be kept up, community by community.

This was followed by a talk in the philosophic vein by Richard Noyes, editor of the Salem Observer (New Hampshire), in which he pointed to the importance of the "time horizon." This is a variable by which we can be classified according to our ability to imagine the future and the ability to sacrifice present for future satisfaction. A limited time horizon is prevalent among most people, and this is important for us to remember when we are promoting our ideas.

At a luncheon meeting, John Kelly (Scranton, Pa.) introduced Robert P. Casey, former Auditor General and State Senator, and a 3-time gubernatorial candidate in Pennsylvania. Mr. Casey said that he was fascinated by George, who was an intellectual, stood for justice, and ran for office. In his political campaigns, George came in second, "and so did I." His ideas have had a world-wide influence. Politicians, he said, will have to look anew at the whole property tax, after Proposition 13. Instead of catering to special privilege, it is high time they consider all the people.

## Economics

At the Saturday afternoon session there was a panel discussion on inflation. Paul Nix, President of the New York Henry George School, introduced Glenn Weeks, former HGS President, who presented a paper on "Inflation and its Impact on the Keynesian Wage Model." The Keynes model, he said, omits the key factor in inflation, land speculation, and that is why it does not work. The Georgist analysis is valid and can be explained using the analytical tools of today's economists. He demonstrated in his paper the type of charts and formulas used by economists for the production function, price and cost curves, money market functions, the investment/savings curve, etc. The effect of land speculation can be introduced into these calculations showing its cost-inflating effect and how this trouble can be defused by lowering land costs.

Gerald Shaw (Calgary, Alberta, Canada) also spoke on inflation and land speculation. Social Crediters, he said, find inflation strictly a monetary phenomenon. Georgists consider that land speculation is the chief culprit. There can be a synthesis of the two views by considering values from obligation. Money is borrowed from banks and is created. Where money is balanced with wealth production, there is equilibrium. Where the rent of land is capitalized and is borrowed against, there is no increase of wealth, and thus there is disequilibrium. The monetization of values from obligation creates inflation.

Benjamin Smith (Ada, Michigan), addressing himself to the same subject, offered a study of wages, land prices and inflation. He showed that from 1946 to 1961 there was a rise in real wages. After 1961, land values increased greatly and the share of real wages in the GNP declined. High wages are not a cause of inflation. To stop inflation, the two most important actions for the government to take are: 1, freeze the money measure (supply of money per capita); 2, impose a heavy national tax on land values.

Following this discussion, Mildred Loomis of the School of Living, York, Pa. (introduced by Wendell Fitzgerald, San Francisco) gave the story of the decentralist movement and a slide show illustrating one of the decentralist homesteads. Ralph Borsodi was influenced by Bolton Hall, a follower of Henry George. Borsodi also studied "the major problems of living" and late in life started the Community Land Trust, a movement that is still growing.

Jubal, also of the School of Living, pointed out that decentralism and the land trust movement are attracting considerable numbers, especially young people, and that Georgists should relate to such groups, which are seeking answers.

On Saturday evening, the Henry George School of Philadelphia gave a reception to the delegates, hosted by George and Geneva Collins and Lucia Cipolloni. Philadelphia officials were on hand to speak to the delegates, wine and cheese were served and entertainment was offered. Fortunately, the fine weather held out for this occasion which was held outdoors. The balance of the Conference experienced cloudy and rainy weather.

## Organizations

On Sunday morning, Rev. Wylie Young gave an interfaith service as he had done at the Lake Geneva Conference last year. Following this, the Henry George Foundation held a meeting of its Board of Trustees (to which other conferees were invited). A new set of By-laws was adopted. Three new trustees were elected: Penny Colgan (Arden, Del.), Dan Sullivan (Pittsburgh, Pa.) and Frank Nelson (Lugoff, S.C.) Activities for the past year were reviewed and a budget for the coming year approved.

Sunday afternoon was a free period, and many delegates, in spite of unpromising weather, went off on various excursions, mostly sight-seeing in nearby Philadelphia and Valley Forge.

In the evening the conferees reassembled for a demonstration by Michael Curtis and Penny Colgan of how they conduct classes in Progress and Poverty in Arden, Del. Definitions, the law of rent, etc., are illustrated with appropriate charts and "role playing", by which students work out answers.

Two more Board meetings were held, by LEAF (Land Equality and Freedom) and the New York Henry George School. At the LEAF meeting, a budget for the coming year was tentatively approved, and Terry Newland was reappointed as Director for 18 months rather than 12 months so as to overlap the period of next year's Conference. At the School meeting, trustees met with the extension directors to discuss the best ways of promoting School work.

### Proposition 13

Fortunately, Monday - the rainy day - called for indoor activities primarily. In the morning session there was a panel discussion on California's controversial Proposition 13 and its implications for the entire country. This proposition, presented to California voters and also known as the Jarvis-Gann amendment, and approved overwhelmingly by the voters, placed a limit of 1% tax on property at its assessed valuation, which was to be rolled back to its 1975 level. Other complications were included, such as the reassessment of property upon sale.

Philip Finkelstein (Director, New York Henry George School) opened the discussion by pointing out that Proposition 13 has been widely interpreted as a tax revolt and a protest against government spending, and it has spread rapidly around the country. There are serious flaws, however. Taxpayers have revolted against the wrong tax. But still we must join this movement and try to give it the right direction - i.e., cut taxes on housing but place them on land; and show that high income taxes drive away business.

Mr. Finkelstein then introduced Perry Prentice (President, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation), who is now living in Florida and has written several feature articles for the Miami Herald and other papers. One appeared under the caption, "Warning: we'd better get our house in order before getting into the California mess." Another was titled: "New Hampshire offers better example to Florida than California." In New Hampshire the property tax is the basis of public finance; taxpayers decide on the tax and it is spent at the local level.

Walter Rybeck of Washington, D.C. is editor of Search, published by the Urban Institute, and he will soon be urban consultant to the House Banking Committee under Congressman Reuss of Wisconsin. Re Proposition 13, Mr. Rybeck said that rather than immediately pointing out what is wrong with it, we would get further by recognizing what is good about it and go along with the present tidal wave. Let us then show that there are logical and tested ways to correct the defects in Proposition 13. The whole nation is on the "tax relief" wavelength. Let us get on this wavelength and then get people to consider our alternative.

William Filante, President of LEAF, is now a candidate for the California State Assembly. He said that although Proposition 13 won strongly, half of those who supported it knew it was bad, but left it up to the legislature to correct the situation. Mr. Filante has had numerous speaking engagements and he advises us to use phrases people want to hear. Get a proposal people will accept. This can be done by attacking unequal assessments and emphasizing lower taxes on improvements. This will attract business, which in turn will increase the tax take.

## Variety

A varied program was offered Monday afternoon. John Tetley (Woodbridge, N.J.), introduced Dr. John Toppen, author of the book, "Jonathan Livingstone Pigeon." He outlined the scientific method, which is basically the observation of events and their consequences. Academic economists dream up theories with little first-hand observation. Georgists need a scientifically valid exposition to show people and this will get results.

Nadine Stoner of Beloit, Wisconsin reported that the Wisconsin Property Owners League has introduced bills frequently since 1971 for local option in taxes. She speaks before groups with a slide demonstration, which she showed, giving examples of property and how they would be affected by a shift of taxes from improvements to land.

William W. Newcomb (Melbourne, Fla.) reported on the Media Foundation for Land Economics, recently formed for the purpose of planting articles widely throughout the media by means of newspaper-magazine syndication. There are now a set of guidelines, five to eight writers, and some seed money. The goal is to reach 30 million readers.

There followed a series of five-minute talks and reports, chaired by Harry Pollard (Los Angeles, Calif.), including the following:

- George Tideman (Illinois) - Efforts to publish and distribute suitable material.
- Jacob Himmelstein (Pennsylvania) - The need to get involved in public affairs.
- Julia Kramer (New York) - Appreciation for courses at the Henry George School.
- Robert Jene (Illinois) - Taking advantage of special opportunities.
- Robert Clancy (Illinois) - Report on the Henry George Institute.
- Vernon Saunders (New York) - Report on the Regional Committee in Rochester, N.Y.
- George Collins (Pennsylvania) - Message from Julian Hickok (a paper on economics).
- Philip Finkelstein (New York) - Report on New York Henry George School.
- Woodrow Williams (Ohio) - Assessment and taxation of farm land.
- Wendy Rockwell (Alabama) - Report on Fairhope Single Tax colony.
- Paul Nix (New Jersey) - Objectives of New York Henry George School.
- Gaye Shaw (Alberta) - Oil revenues in Alberta.
- Terry Flynn (Connecticut) - Contact groups with related goals, and minorities.
- Terry Newland (California) - Report on LEAF.

The Conference banquet was held Monday evening, the guest speaker being Benjamin Howells, Councilman from Allentown, Pa. He was introduced by Steven Cord, and he said that although he was not a Georgist, he felt there had to be a better alternative to our present tax system. He has tried to introduce land value taxation but found that people were not ready for it - not only do they not understand it but they don't know the present system. At present, 80% of the tax in Allentown is on improvements and 20% on land. The first objective is a modest shift to 70% on improvements and 30% on land. Mr. Howells is keeping the issue alive by talking to people about it, with the help of Steven Cord.

Two films were also shown at the banquet. One was sent by Ted Gwartney, who is Assessment Commissioner of British Columbia, Canada. The film was presented by Robert Clancy, who outlined Mr. Gwartney's assessment career in Sacramento, Calif., Southfield, Mich., and Hartford, Conn. The film, addressed to British Columbia taxpayers, explains clearly - and amusingly, with animated sequences - the basis of property assessment in the province. The film, due to its function, deals just with real property without emphasis on land - but land and building assessments are separate, and Mr. Gwartney reports that 60% of the tax revenue in British Columbia is from land.

Floyd Morrow (San Diego, Calif.) presented a film produced by LEAF, with the title "For This Land Is Mine", based on the quotation from Leviticus: "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me." The film illustrates the fundamental importance of land, the harm done by land speculation, the way Henry George analyzed the problem in Progress and Poverty and the remedy he proposed. Mr. Morrow announced that plans are now being made for a full-length movie on the life of Henry George.

#### Conference Wrap-up

The final session, Tuesday morning, July 4, was chaired by Robert Clancy and included conference evaluation and plans for next year. Several offered views on the Conference, and the following ideas emerged: This was an excellent and stimulating conference; a spirit of good will prevailed, better than has existed in the past several years; it was encouraging to see many young people present. Criticisms, which may be taken as suggestions for the future, were: The sessions were too tightly scheduled; there should be more free time; there were too many speeches and not enough conferring and discussing; small discussion groups should be planned. Other ideas were that young people should be encouraged to attend, with financial assistance; and that liaison might be made with related groups, such as ecologists and decentralists, who may be holding concurrent conferences.

There was also discussion on plans for the Conference in 1979, which will be the 100th anniversary of Progress and Poverty. By universal agreement it will be held in San Francisco, where Henry George wrote his classic. In addition to the present co-sponsoring groups plus the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, other U.S. and overseas groups will be asked to co-sponsor.

After some discussion it was agreed by majority vote that the 1979 Conference would be held the week of August 19-25. (The original idea of having it a week later ending on George's birthday, September 2, was found by too many to be inconvenient.)

A San Francisco Conference Committee was appointed, consisting of Terry Newland, William Filante, Wendell Fitzgerald, Robert Scrofani and Robert Tideman. The finding of a suitable location for the 1979 Conference was entrusted to this committee.

Mr. Clancy pointed out that we should think in terms of the entire centennial year and he distributed a letterhead of a "Progress and Poverty Centennial Committee" with Agnes de Mille as Honorary Chairman, which all Georgists are encouraged to use to promote the book on its centennial. Other plans are afoot, such as the publication of books, a new Schalkenbach edition of P&P, library exhibits, etc.

Thus ended the 1978 Joint Georgist Conference - a highlight in everybody's Georgist year. A follow-up activity was a visit by several to the Henry George Birthplace in Philadelphia, which houses an impressive collection of George memorabilia. Then we drifted off to our respective destinations to take up our work and start thinking about 1979.

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ALBERT J. HYDEMAN, JR., the Conference's keynote speaker, had a leading article in the York (Pa.) Daily Record of June 24, entitled "Pennsylvania Has an Alternative to the Property Tax", referring to the local option Pennsylvania cities have to institute land value taxation.

JOHN M. KELLY had two leading articles in the Scranton (Pa.) Times of May 8 and 9. The first was entitled "Property Tax System Harnesses the Profit Motive Backwards" and the second was "Market Value Pays Big Role." These articles were a carefully argued build-up to the exemption of improvements and the taxation of land values.