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THE EARTH IS THE BIRTHRIGHT OF ALL.

International Union Conference, Scotland

by Ed Dodson

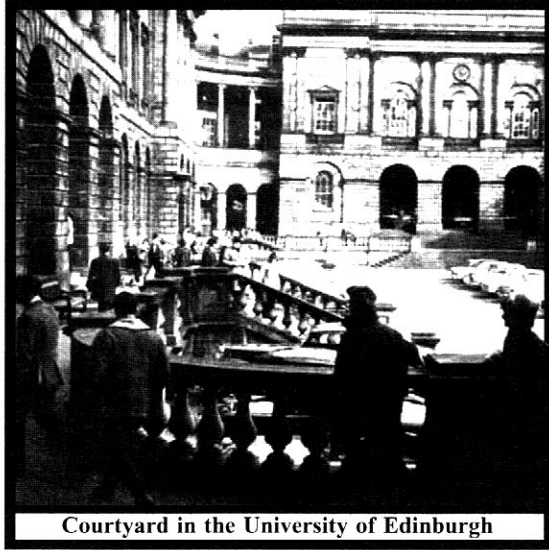
I am returned from Scotland and the 2001 conference of members of the *International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade*, held at Edinburgh University. Some sixty of our colleagues from the far-off corners of the globe came together to celebrate our survival as a unique community of people who share the same vision of the just society.

Scotland was chosen as the location for this conference for a number of reasons, the most important of which is the current focus on "land reform" and the very real opportunity to influence the adoption of a land reform scheme consistent with the principles espoused by Scots who in the late 19th century found common cause with Henry George. Peter Gibb, Executive Director of *Land Reform Scotland*, brought together advocates of various proposals for a systematic discussion of Scottish political and economic challenges.

After arriving at Edinburgh's airport late Saturday morning and securing my luggage, I purchased a bus ticket into Edinburgh and boarded the bus. Within a few seconds after taking a seat, I could not help but overhear a conversation underway between a man with a distinct Australian accent and a woman who sounded Ger-

man. What were they discussing? The taxation of land values. I interrupted them to introduce myself and inquired whether they were headed for the *International Union* conference at Edinburgh University. This is

how I met Neil Gilchrist, of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The object of Neil's attention was indeed a German woman (now living in Switzerland) who was to be a keynote speaker at another conference being held at the



Courtyard in the University of Edinburgh

University, focusing on the future of Europe. Their conversation continued along the same lines, with an occasional comment from me, until we reached the city and then together caught a taxi to the University. Our accommodations were not available to us until mid-afternoon, so the three of us found a quiet corner of the on-campus pub and continued to discuss philosophy, history, Nietzsche and Henry George. An interesting beginning to the conference week, I thought.

The conference began late Sunday morning with a welcoming by Bob Andelson, President of the *International Union*. That afternoon Pat Aller (U.S.) chaired an open-

Continued on p. 7

Continued from p. 1

mike session, which generated discussion on a wide range of topics. I took the opportunity to encourage IU members to assist me in expanding the *School of Cooperative Individualism's* project of creating a *Biographical History of the Georgist Movement* and was gratified with the positive response and willingness of a number of people to provide assistance.

Land Reform Scotland hosted the conference discussions on Monday, although the morning program focused on the situation in Russia. The keynote speaker for this first session was Dimitry Lvov, head of the *Russian Academy of Sciences*, who delivered a paper critical of the present privatization of the income flows from natural resources in Russia. He discussed his efforts (and those of others) to convince the government that public revenue should come from these income flows rather than from taxes on material assets and wages. Dr. Lvov stressed that the same challenges faced virtually all other countries and were not unique to Russia. This session was followed by presentations and discussions on the status of the land reform efforts in Scotland now that the people of Scotland have elected their own Parliament with the power to implement internal changes in law regarding land tenure and taxation. The great landowners of Scotland continue to be extremely powerful and have thus far successfully resisted efforts at either land redistribution or the taxation of land values.

Thursday's sessions began with a presentation by Timothy Glazier (England) on how, in his view, human civilizations have fallen victim to the transition from community control over land and natural resources to that of individual ownership. Fred Harrison later introduced Euan MacKie, an archeologist who has linked archeological evidence with an hypothesis that late Neolithic communities in Britain were cooperatively organized. We then heard from Karl Williams (Australia) regarding the struggles by indigenous peoples around the world to re-establish their sovereignty and obtain exclusive control over territory and natural resources. As Karl's presentation and the discussion that ensued confirmed, the remedies sought after for past oppressions are seldom consistent with the moral principle that the earth is the birthright of all persons equally.

One of the more difficult points of discus-

sion is whether the survival of cultures not adapted to the modern era is important from a human rights perspective. Nic Tideman (U.S.) added his own views on the subject with a paper titled, *Aboriginal Rights and Global Economic Justice*.

Friday's program began with a presentation by Tatiana Roskoshnaya, who has since the beginning of the 1990s worked diligently to promote the adop-

tion of reforms that would put Russia at the head of nations capturing land values as public revenue. Tatiana (Tanya to her friends) provided a thorough overview of the political situation and efforts to build support for the "rent as revenue" alternative.

My turn came next. The paper I prepared for the conference was titled *Promises to Pay Nothing in Particular: Monetary Diseases and a Proposal for their Cure* and had been distributed in advance so that my session would be one of discussion rather than a reading of the paper. I spent about fifteen minutes outlining the most important points, and a lively discussion followed. What I proposed is the chartering of banks of deposit that would (as did the Bank of Amsterdam in the 17th century) provide a real money supply - in the form of baskets of precious metals or other com-

modities, or even banks that would issue paper currency denominated in units of labor (most appropriate for small communities).

One final issue was taken up by the members but without any final resolution. Members have reported over the last few years that the IU's position as an advocate of "free trade" is some-

thing of a negative when working with groups struggling to end monopoly in their coun-

tries and who see nothing to be gained and much to lose by opening domestic economies to the global system of commerce - dominated as it is by multinational corporations, institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. A proposal to change the name the *International Union for Land Value Taxation* was discussed and a straw vote was taken to assess the level of support for this. A majority supported the name change, to be voted on formally next time.

The conference banquet took place Friday evening, with entertainment supplied by a Scottish piper and a group of dancers. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and then we wished each other well and prepared to depart the following morning.

Ed Dodson is a former President of the Henry George School of New York.

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