GEORGISTS AT ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS CONFERENCE

by Dr. William Batt, Albany, NY

The US Society of Ecological Economics held its third biennial conference in Saratoga Springs, NY (www.ussee.org/conference) on May 22-24, 2003 with an enthusiastic record attendance of roughly 200 people. Many were graduate students in affiliated programs in the Boston, Amherst, Burlington, Canada, and New York State region, but the conference drew others from as far away as Australia and New Zealand, and several also from Europe, South Asia, and Latin America. This is telling, given there will be a conference of the International Association next year (2004) in Montreal (www.ecologicaleconomics.org/). It was a rich and vibrant affair, with never less than five concurrent panels going on during each of the two and a half days. Knowing the conference chair quite well, I was able to propose a panel on Georgist ideas, which was quickly accepted.

With all the competition for attention to the myriad subjects and issues, it was reassuring that the panel introducing the attendees to Georgist approaches attracted as many of the audience as it did. There were three of us, stalwarts in the Georgist movement, that promoted our approaches: myself, Bill Batt from close by in Albany, and Jeff Smith who flew in from Portland, and Alanna Hartzok who drove up from Pennsylvania. With everyone using the digital projectors provided, we could not be left behind by using overhead glossies or other archaic material. We did our best with PowerPoint, digital graphics, and slide photos to make a quantum leap in our own prowess. With only twenty minutes each to get our points across, leaving time for questions, it was surely a challenge.

I began with graphics to illustrate the concept of land rent, relying upon many online graphics from Lindy Davies' course, some other designs of his own, and more GIS (geographical information system) maps of land value. My title was "The Compatibility of Georgist Economics and Ecological Economics." Jeff honed in on the incentives to foster ecologically responsible behavior, and to argue for "Geonomics and the Double Dividend." Alanna showed how a "Green Tax Policy" would have protected the small Pacific island of Nauru against the ravages of exploitation chronicled in the book, "Paradise for Sale". She chose this book, written jointly by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute professors - biologist Carl McDaniel and economist John Gowdy, now serving as president of the society - to show how closely Georgism can be allied with ecological economics. She also explored the dimensions of economic justice that a Georgist approach is able to address. It was telling that there were three other panels with presentations focused on matters of economic justice, a dimension not as evidently explored in the written literature of the field. Jeff had the good fortune of being on a second panel to talk about "Natural Designs in a Sustainable Economy," which was perhaps only fair because he is among the forty or so founders of this society on the West Coast a decade

and a half ago. Jeff, more than any of us, was particularly excited and effective at conference, as it united all his concerns and interests at once. He shows special talent at selling our approach in one-on-one exchanges in the corridors.

It was gratifying to see the interest and acceptance of our approach, and we can name at least three new members that will if asked reveal themselves to be avowed Georgists: Brian Czech, a US Forest Service biologist and author of "Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train", Jaroen van den Bergh from the Free University of Amsterdam, and John Polimeni from Rensselaer Politech. Several others - including another prominent society founder and writer, Bob Costanza - affirmed that they were in favor of collecting economic rents, even before we mentioned that the leading light of the movement, Herman Daly has now endorsed the idea (see www.earthrights.net/docs/daly.html). The closeness they showed to Georgist approaches was also evident in their choice of dinner speakers - Juliet Schor, Harvard professor of economics and author of the widely accepted book "The Overworked American", and James Kunstler, Saratoga resident, past speaker at our Ottawa CGO conference, and author of "Home From Nowhere" that has a chapter on site value taxation.

Staying for the business meeting at the end was particularly valuable to Jeff Smith and me, as we were then able to learn a bit more about how the US Society of Ecological Economics hopes to grow. With conferences on a biennial basis, they have yet to select a site for 2005, and revealed considerable concern about whether some regions of the country where they might like to be could easily attract attendees from a distance. It was intriguing therefore to learn that they would be quite interested in the possibility of a joint conference with a closely allied organization. It is a prospect to be explored. This offers a real opportunity given that three groups that Jeff and I have been participants in during the past year will all be looking for a conference site for 2005 at about the same time and perhaps in the same region. Each of them is very attracted to our Georgist thinking. The organizations are the US Ecological Economists, we Georgists, and the Environmental Taxation Global conferees, a new group only four years old (their first year in Cleveland; their second in Vancouver; last year in Woodstock, VT; this year in Sydney, AU; and next year in Pavia, Italy- see www.law.mq.edu.au/eti/).

Alanna Hartzok was gone by 4:00 am Saturday morning to talk with an audience in Wilkes Barre, PA. On Sunday, May 25th, I dropped Jeff at the airport to go off to Sydney, where he will be purveying Georgist Economics and Green Taxes to the Environmental Taxation audience, then to be hosted by the Aussies for three (continued on p. 5)

weeks to spread the good word there. And for the community of Georgists to better understand the potential cross fertilization that can arise from better exchanges, my paper has been placed on line at www.schalkenbach.org/library/SaratogaBatt.pdf.

(postscript: The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation assisted Bill Batt, Jeff Smith, and Alanna Hartzok by paying their conference registration fees.)