

REPORT ON THE 2013 CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION

By Bill Batt, Albany, New York,
with revisions by Dave Wetzel and Alanna Hartzok.

The 2013 conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation was held at the School of Economic Science, London, UK, July 24th -28th.

For several reasons, the 28th conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation – www.theIU.org – will be remembered as among the best in living memory by the roughly fifty-five people that were in attendance. There were some seventy people initially registered, but many could not make it at the last minute due to health issues, visa problems, and other conflicts. Those coming to London from beyond the UK represented almost half of those present, together representing seventeen countries. All this made for some interesting and even compelling exchanges. The theme was Economics for Conscious Evolution, subtitled A Geo-Justice Conference, and all aspects of this title were fully evident with some thirty-seven speakers from every country represented.

Conference session topics included:

- * Land and Geo-Justice
- * Land Rights Prospects and Realities in Africa
- * Sharing the Commons: Land, Land Rent and Money
- * Critique of Current Financial Policies
- * Claiming Water, Fish & Oil Commons
- * Why Socializing Rent & Untaxing Production is Good for Labour
- * Case Study: Argentina – From Public Debt to Abundance for All
- * The Socialist Case for Supporting an Annual Land Value Tax
- * Climate Change and New Economics
- * Inequality: Cause and Cure
- * Land Trusts & Eco-villages

Saturday, July 27, David Triggs organized an informative and fun river and bus tour of London's high points as related to matters of economic justice. Not least were visits to the revitalized Docklands, the British Museum holding a copy of the Magna Carta, and the Guildhall, the home of the London's Corporate seat for some 800 years. The day-long tour finished at the notable Hyde Park "Speakers Corner," with the few drops of rain not dampening the attention of attendees and passers-by in any significant way as speakers representing many countries supported the 1949 IU Declaration for Human Rights including the right to share land wealth.

The meeting was held at Mandeville Place, the home of the School of Economic Science – www.schooleconomicsscience.org. The building is a gorgeously appointed structure with space fully adequate for the conference sessions, coffee and lunch breaks, and book displays. While our conference was in session, other activities were continuing without interruption.

No account here can be complete given the number of sessions. Besides the listing above, one might mention the possible legal challenge to South Africa's Constitution that is now July-August 2013 GroundSwell, page 2

looming, suggestion of airport landing slot rent collection as a solution to the growing congestion at Heathrow, Gatwick and other London Airports, the growing power of a rejuvenated Georgist movement in Australia, the utility of computers and the internet in our movement, and the appeal of Georgism to all dimensions of the political spectrum.

The whole conference, including the Saturday tour, was filmed by Joni Smith and Noel Jamie, and for the first time, it was possible to provide live video streaming to those who wanted to follow the proceedings from afar, thanks to the talents of Jacob Schwartz-Lucas (USA) and a young British Georgist, Daniel Syddall. The entire program is available for viewing at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/the-iu-conference-2013>. Dan has also created graphics online that explain how land value taxation works in dynamic format. These can be viewed at <http://www.geogebraTube.org/material/show/id/12785>, and other sites linked from here. They are powerful explications of the relationship between land rent, labor and taxation. Dan was also able to impart much of this technological skill to others at the conference so that we can expect to see its wider application soon elsewhere.

Indeed, our conference made more use of visual materials than ever before. Most presenters had PowerPoint presentations, maps, diagrams, statistical graphics, YouTube segments, and photographs. The presentations of this conference have been collected and will shortly be online and downloadable in addition to the video-streamed presentations. Records of all the other conference programs going back to its founding in 1926, will also soon be available on the IU website (www.theIU.org), and last year's 2012 Buenos Aires conference is now available on: http://www.asap.org.ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2182&Itemid=62

Every conference shows an improvement, and the biennial conference being discussed for the year 2015, perhaps in Seoul Korea, will offer a still wider array of material than even this meeting had.

A sideline feature of this conference was the number of newly available books written by members of the Georgist movement. Alanna Hartzok's collection of published articles, *The Earth Belongs to Everyone*, was available at the registration desk, as was the DVD of the film, *The End of Poverty*, sponsored by the Schalkenbach Foundation three years ago. The exhibit table also carried a reprinted edition of Leon MacLaren's *The Science of Economics*. Along with his father Andrew, MacLaren was the Founder of London's School of Economic Science in 1937. One needs also to note Fred Harrison's several books, including his newest, *The Traumatized Society*. The conference speaker and Irish author of *The Fair Tax*, Emer O'Siochru, had her book on the table for the first time as well. John (continued on page 15)

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Stewart, who portrays his Georgist philosophy through fictionalized accounts, had not only all his books present but was honored by the conference for his long involvement in the movement. We are fortunate to have a close working relationship with the Shephard-Walwyn publishing house and its director Anthony Werner. Anthony had the books in its ethical economics series on the exhibit table for the full conference.

The conference acknowledged the outstanding contributions promoting LVT and working with TheIU over many years by awarding trophies to Ole Lefmann (UK/Denmark), Fernando Scornik Gerstein (Spain) and Hector Raul Sandler (Argentina).

A few other items are worthy of note. Shortly before the conference, the news of the second revolution in Egypt was broadcast. The interim Prime Minister appointed by the intervening military was a venerable elder-statesman and well-known liberal economist. Hazem Beblawi, who had earlier served as vice-prime minister and minister of finance, was now head of the provisional coalition. His past writing shows a very clear understanding of rentier states, and edited a book in 1987 titled *The Rentier State*. A letter was drafted and signed by all the attending members of the IU urging Mr. Beblawi to press the new leadership to tax resource rents as a way to revitalize the Egyptian economy. This letter is now available on the IU website.

The IU business meeting addressed still other matters, in due course. The election of officers began by thanking Fernando Scornik-Gerstein for his service as president for the past seven years, and the election of Dave Wetzel as the new president. Vice presidents for some twenty other nations were chosen as well. It was also formally agreed that the IU should aim to have a conference every second year.

The most contentious measure involved whether to change the name of the organization by deleting reference to "Free Trade." From its inception, the name has been 'The International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade,' even though it is widely understood that the words "Free Trade," have today become linked to an economic philosophy of neoliberalism essentially opposite to that in 1926. Free trade advocacy for Georgists has always been premised on the assumption of the universal institution of taxation of land rents, which would then provide greater efficiency, equity, and a harmonized level playing field among nations. For this reason, and the fact that current usage of free trade in our title acts as a barrier when discussing LVT within the UN and other places, a majority of those present and voting argued for the elimination

of the words "and Free Trade." But altering the IU constitution requires a 2/3 majority, and the vote fell just one short of that number. As a result the informal agreement arrived at was to explore other wording for a special General Business Meeting early next year.

Lastly, no conference report can be complete without mention of the role that Alanna Hartzok (continued on pg. 16)

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played as the newly-engaged General Secretary for the IU. She performed not only as the pivotal person in the conference management but also kept discussion of the executive committee on track in its many prior Skype conference calls and email exchanges. The organization now faces the task of generating a budget that will allow the operations of the IU to continue at the new level of accomplishment and success it has now reached.

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