

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

October 8 1992

Dear Friend,

I have just returned from Russia, where I co-organised a seminar in St. Petersburg with the Town Planning Research Institute. In Moscow, I interviewed politicians and the civil servants involved in the privatisation process.

I flew back to London with an acute feeling that history was poised in favour of Georgism.

The Russian people are filled with anxiety about their future. I am more optimistic. For I acquired a clear sense that, when it comes to land, Russians do not want to alienate their communal rights. President Yeltsin is being pushed by the IMF and western investors (and the bosses of the vast land-rich military/industrial factories, which are to be privatised) into recommending freehold ownership of land.

Russia's fate will be sealed in the next three to 12 months, and I strongly believe that the appropriate action now could make an historic difference to the outcome.

There is an enormous groundswell in favour of retaining land in public ownership, and renting it to individuals and firms under lease. The federal land reform committees which I met favour

the lease/rent solution; as does a strong "centrist" bloc in Parliament. This approach, if adopted, would turn Russia in the direction of a Single Tax society – the first in modern history!

So I am setting aside my other commitments, to throw whatever resources we can muster into helping Russia.

My finances in London, alas, are puny. But I believe you would want to help us to try and turn a beautiful vision into a reality. Hence this appeal for money: we need lots of it, to finance the translation of books and cover the expense of sending our own experts to Russia to (quite simply) educate the relevant people. We need the flexibility to respond to whatever opportunity presents itself over the next 12 months, which is why we need your help . . .

Let there be no misunderstanding: the groundswell determination to keep land in public ownership – but used privately in return for payment of rent to the public coffers – is a gut Russian phenomenon. This fact provides us with the biggest hope for success. Even so, the Georgist philosophy has already made a measurable impact. Let me tell you how.

In the summer of 1990 I proposed a conference so that western economists could meet Russian academics. London could not finance such an event, but the Schalkenbach Foundation rose magnificently to the occasion and underwrote the costs . . . this attracted Russians to New York, invitations to Georgists to visit Russia, and seminars in St. Petersburg . . . The town of Sasnovy Bor sent Victor Baroff to listen to the Georgist message; he briefed his council, which decided to reverse its intention to sell the town's land: Sasnovy Bor now proclaims itself Georgist, its revenue to come from rents . . . from a seed germinated in London there is glowering a Georgist city on the Gulf of Finland! (The full story will appear in the next *Land & Liberty*).