

## Henry George Newsletter

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### Henry George School of Social Science

121 East 30th Street  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 889-8020

**Lancaster M. Greene**  
Publications Chairman

**George L. Collins**  
Director

**Mark A. Sullivan**  
Editor

### AFFILIATES

#### LONG ISLAND

**Stan Rubenstein, Director**  
P.O. Box 553  
Cutchogue, NY 11935  
(516) 734-7543

#### PHILADELPHIA

**Mike Curtis, Director**  
413 South 10th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19147  
(215) 922-4278

#### NEW ENGLAND

**Ernest Kahn, Director**  
114 Ames Street  
Sharon, MA 02067  
(617) 784-3086

#### CHICAGO

**Sam Venturella, Director**  
4536 N. Ravenswood Drive  
Chicago, IL 60640  
(312) 561-9660

#### CALIFORNIA

**E. Robert Scrofani, Director**  
1568 Schrader Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117  
(415) 661-6933  
**Harry Pollard, Director**  
Box 655  
Tujunga, CA 91042  
(818) 352-4141

#### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

**Lucy DeSilva, Director**  
Isabel La Catolica #212  
AP #758, Santo Domingo  
(809) 682-9361

#### CANADA

**School of Economic Science**  
**Craig Cringan, Director**  
2267 Westman Road  
Mississauga, Ontario L5K 1M7  
(416) 822-4694  
**Gaye/Garry Shaw, Co-Directors**  
3017 25th Street, S.W.  
Calgary, Alberta T3E 1Y2  
(403) 242-4291

## AN OPINION: Social Problems Through Every Window

The last two Georgist conferences have had one day set aside for sightseeing. Since participants come from all over the country, or the world, the sightseeing activity is usually a trip to some local place of cultural or historical interest. But, our culture being what it is, such spots are, alas, tourist traps.

Now, since we have worked all year long for our cause without thanks--and mostly without pay--such an excursion seems little enough to ask. It's fun!--and we deserve it. Fair enough, but there is something creepy about the process.

The fact that there are tourist traps at all is, I think, something that would trouble Henry George. I suspect that he would point to them as sure signs of the kind of social corruption which he fought to correct.

For one thing, a tourist trap is often a last-ditch effort to save a faltering economy. This is painfully evident at Taos Pueblo, where the Pueblo Indians, sequestered in tiny "sovereign" units lacking the land and resource bases of the larger tribes, literally depend on the tourist trade for survival. But it is also true in Philadelphia, where tourism is a desperate remedy for the business activity driven out by increasing sales and income taxes. What was proposed to save the nightmarish economy of Camden, New Jersey? An aquarium, to try and bring tourist dollars into a city from which virtually all businesses had fled.

Secondly, because tourist traps are primarily economic ventures, concern for the history and culture they are supposedly celebrating becomes a peripheral matter. Such things must be on display, because history and culture is, after all, the stock in trade. But the main concern is marketability, not authenticity. Just about everyone feels this, at some level. There is a weary sort of resignation in the air at a place like, say, Philadelphia's Independence Park (which was the outing at the 1989 International Conference). This is the best we can do? The place can't tell us anything about our history, but at least it can remind us that we are rumored to have a history. The fact is, though, that places like Independence Park or Taos Pueblo are designed to insulate visitors from any meaningful contact with history.

Tourist traps are only one aspect of this phenomenon, though. Our society is full of institutions that trivialize, or trample, our sense of place. Mega-malls plow down main street shopping districts. Fast-food eateries crowd out local diners. Huge consolidated schools replace time-honored community schools. People pray with televised preachers instead of attending their local churches. All of these things erode both our sense of place and our sense of human community. This is a spiritual matter, but it has economic roots.

As we urge society to adopt the Georgist Philosophy, the Single Tax, the two-rate property tax, or whatever, we would do well to stay in touch with the unquantifiable, subjective, human side of the ideas that guide us. No, Georgists shouldn't be begrudged an annual outing with old friends to some interesting spot. They deserve better than tourist traps. But they probably won't get it--not until the First Great Reform establishes the necessary economic base for sustainable, organic human communities. - *Lindy Davies*

## ENEMIES OR ALLIES? An Opinion

Most Georgists who attended the Santa Fe conference session on "How Georgists and Greens Can Increase and Deepen Their Cooperation and Effectiveness" will agree that, for now, the only thing that has increased and deepened between Georgists and Greens is a communication gap! However, I trust that this gap will decrease in the near future since some of our Green-Georgists will continue to participate in Green conferences.

The session in Santa Fe was expertly chaired by Hanno Beck of Common Ground USA, and speakers were Nelson Denman of the Santa Fe Greens; Chellis Glendinning, ecofeminist psychologist and author on the hazards of nuclear technology; Randy Prince, Oregon political activist and Green-Georgist; and Harry Pollard of the Southern California Henry George School.

Nelson Denman opened the session with information on the future of the Santa Fe Greens, saying they will be "living more in balance with the natural world." He stressed a need for urban planning for "ecological cities" so that they would be "life-enhancing and regenerative."

Following Nelson was Chellis Glendinning, with whom I had the pleasure of speaking prior to the discussion. She told me she has moved many times in the past to get away from nuclear waste sites. Her recent move to New Mexico was supposed to be a permanent one, but she has since learned that nuclear waste is being



*Chellis Glendinning*

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