

The Henry George Connection

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In 1980 I began my association and involvement with what some of us lovingly refer to as the “Georgist Movement,” completing the courses on George’s works at the Philadelphia extension (“the birthplace”) of the Henry George School. Not long thereafter, George Collins invited me to become a member of the volunteer faculty, and some time afterward I made my first visit to the School’s headquarters at 5 East 44th Street in New York City to attend a Georgist conference. Among the long-time Georgists I met was this remarkable and stimulating character named Jack Schwartzman. I remember that when he spoke about Henry George there was reverence in his tone of voice, even when he argued that George’s great mistake was to campaign for political office.

What I heard from Georgists such as Jack was that the Henry George School was in something of a state of decline. I learned that funding had been taken away in the early 1970s when the Lincoln Foundation decided the School’s adult education program was not accomplishing much, that Bob Clancy had been discharged as director even before Lincoln pulled its financial support and that the School had subsequently closed down nearly all of its extensions and affiliate programs. In subsequent private conversations with Jack over the next few years, he did not withhold his contempt for the persons he held responsible for the decline of the School and, in particular, the treatment Bob Clancy received from the President of the school at the time. A decade later, those wounds were just beginning to heal.

In the interim years, Bob and others formed the Henry George Institute, offering correspondence courses based on George’s political economy to students all around the globe. The School had just moved into the headquarters at 5 East 44th Street and had invited the Institute to move its operation into the building. From this point on, many of the programs I attended in New York City were hosted by the Institute in the auditorium of the School. Jack, looking more and more like a robust Einstein, was ever-present and a frequent presenter. We found ample time to engage in conversation. He had a difficult time

understanding my almost uncritical admiration for the contributions to moral philosophy made by Mortimer J. Adler.

In 1982 I came up with a not particularly original idea for an Institute program. I compiled from their own writings a dialogue on “the land question” between eight or ten historic figures, including, of course, Henry George. Jack honored me by participating in the reading (although I do not recall which of the roles he played). My own commitment to the Georgist cause was now total; and, as one of the youngest in age, I was constantly invited to take on more of a leadership role. In 1984 I was elected to the boards of the Institute and the School. My trips to New York City became more frequent but my time there was absorbed by matters affecting the School. As a consequence, the time I was able to spend with Bob Clancy sadly diminished. Jack was only infrequently at the School on the days I showed up for board meetings, so I saw him less often as well. Still, we remained good friends and cemented our friendship each year at the annual conferences. In 1985 I delivered a paper on “Proudhon, Tolstoy and George” at an Institute symposium, and Jack had a number of nice things to say on my treatment of these three great thinkers.

One of my hopes when joining the board of the School was to help reestablish the School’s success in adult program, to return the School to its former leadership role within the Georgist movement. And so, in 1986, when Paul Nix informed me he wanted to step down as President and put my name in nomination, I agreed. Jack, Bob Clancy and others were encouraging but did not hold out much hope that the vision I had for the school would get very far with other board members.

The School’s financial situation had improved considerably since arriving at 5 East 44th Street; however, the location did not prove to be good for attracting students; so, there were few classes being held. Faced with this situation, Stan Rubenstein concentrated his efforts on development of materials that could be used by high school teachers teaching history or economics. During 1986 we made a decision to relocate to a more desirable part of Manhattan and began looking for a build-

ing that would be more promising from the standpoint of attracting students. Eventually, a building at 121 East 30th Street was selected and purchased. A Japanese firm paid the School around \$5 million for the existing building, which allowed us to make moderate renovations in the new building and add funds to the School’s asset base. And, then, surprising many people, students began to enroll in larger and larger numbers. The classrooms began to fill up every semester. Stan still wanted to concentrate on the high school program (which was also taking off nicely), so the board invited George Collins up from Philadelphia to become overall director of the School, with Stan taking on a subordinate role as director of the high school program.

Over the next few years as openings on the board became available, Jack’s name would be brought forward, usually by Oscar Johannsen, but he could never secure the votes. In private conversation, those who opposed his presence on the board thought he would be disruptive and too argumentative, which is ironic given the frequent heated exchanges that subsequently occurred during my years on the board. After a few more years, Jack was eventually elected as a trustee of the School. His presence was neither disruptive nor argumentative at the meetings. My life was becoming hectic, and I decided to step down as President at the end of 1996, then resigned from the board the following year. Jack continued to serve right up to the end of his days.

Jack would periodically encourage me to submit something for publication in *Fragments*, but I had entered that period of life many of us experience when there just does not seem to be enough time to do everything we would like to do. Finally, however, I wrote an essay that appeared in the Summer of 2001 edition of *Fragments*. I would have enjoyed knowing what Jack thought of the essay and whether he and I agreed on its sentiments and essential points. Wouldn’t it be great if there is, in fact, an afterlife, and that Jack is there now engaging in dialogue with Henry George, Henry David Thoreau and others whose words and ideas he treasured as beacon lights into a true age of reason? I would love to be in the audience.