

## fresh thinking

# Just why are our movement's publications so ugly?

At this year's IU conference, Peter Gibb delivered an appeal to delegates to spend time on design

The international reform movement of which **Land&Liberty** is a part is, in many ways, its own worst enemy. We are often a *barrier* to the evolution of the new georgist paradigm and its common acceptance by the citizens of the world.

Personally I am confident that Henry George's insights will eventually come to be universally shared. *Eventually*. As the Sufi saying goes, "the earth has sworn unto the day of paradise that all truth comes to the light - sooner or later". Our truth will emerge without us.

But it is a bit of a shock to realise what is happening when one looks at how the world is changing today. In many respects the steady psycho-social unfolding towards Henry George's insight, in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the world, is happening often quite independently of those who count themselves the torchbearers. Indeed, in many, many ways and cases, it is happening actually *in spite* of our best intentions and most effective actions!

This movement for reform has many problems, many self-induced. None are substantial, but it is the most superficial which is proving most hindering: a disregard for presentation. We care not for the appearance of what we do and make and send out into the world. We spend no time on design: most of our books are pig ugly; most of our websites are worse.

Now of course you can by no means tell a book by its cover. But appearance is our first knowledge of substance. Appearance and presentation, in a very deep sense, are important to us as human beings. We use these things to distinguish, to select. In a world where we cannot know everything intimately, before deciding what to know intimately, appearance counts.

The ferocious-looking dog probably is indeed ferocious, and so we decide to keep away. Dully expressed art does not carry applause or return crowds. The uninterest-

ing, geeky, old-fashioned *looking* book probably is just that. In our everyday we don't waste time confirming the truth of our cursory judgement - instead are glad that our ability to be selective in our attentions has, once again, left us with more time to be with what we anticipate *will* interest us, and be relevant to our concerns. Whilst appearances can be deceptive, our experience is that usually they are not.

Judging appearances is an important behaviour which keeps us alive, and helps us learn. Those who ignore appearance do so at their peril. While you *cannot* judge a book by its cover, the first means by which we select those we *will* judge, is indeed the cover.

Our arrogance, as reformers, from the beautiful truth of our insight, makes us foolishly believe that all we have to do is lay that truth before the world. But the world has other more appealing things to think about.

The new georgist paradigm is on the tipping point of universal acceptance. How will the weights be selected to tip the balance? What will help or hinder the shifting of the balance? The Sufis tell us all truths do come to pass. But the question is, shall that truth - *by our hand* - come to pass the sooner or the later? On that balance, where is this movement of ours weighing in?

We must have the humility to recognise that being right and telling truth is not enough. We must recognise that although "all truth comes to the light - sooner or later" - *well-presented* truth emerges sooner and not later. Whilst never confusing appearance with substance, we must recognise that appearance counts and, as reformers, must set aside time for it. **L&L**

*This article has been condensed from a presentation made by the author to the 24<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation*

