

Report from Dr. C. Lowell Harriss
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The twenty-first biennial conference of the International Union of Land Value Taxation and Free Trade met in Roskilde, Denmark (20+ miles from Copenhagen) July 22 through July 28, 1995. The facilities were generally good (but no air conditioning), and our hosts did all needed to make us welcome and to assure good operations. Per Moller Anderson, in particular, was outstanding in his efforts to see that every request and necessity was met.

Attendance disappointed many. I do not have a complete count. Rarely did a session have more than 50 or so, over the week perhaps as many as 65 had some participation. All speaking was in English or with immediate translation from Russian.

A theme was selected -- The Missing Clause in the Bill of Rights, "The Land for the People." The Danish Henry George Society distributed sets of pamphlets, representing the conference theme and the speeches of participants. They published a "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and Bent Straarup contributed a talk on the "United Nations and Missing Human Rights." Some speakers made reference to the theme, but in my opinion there was no serious effort to define or explain it, or to propose methods of achievement.

Reports on developments in Russia were moderately encouraging; in Novgorod some concrete "preparations" have been made. There have been accomplishments in education in a few places in Russia and persuasion has been cultivated. But obstacles must be faced, notably, uncertainty about land and its role in Russia's economy. The Mayor of Novgorad has directed efforts to make implementation real on a limited scale. Difficulties are real but not insuperable. In the same session with a (translated) speech from the Mayor Alexander Korsunov was a talk given by Minister A. S. Itimu of Malawi, Central Africa. Assisted by his principal secretary, the Minister of Lands and Valuation read his outstanding paper on "Land Policy Review and Reform Programme in Malawi." Minister Itimu said he had read Godfrey Dunkley's book, *That All May Live*, and found in it ideas very similar to ones he had developed and hopes to persuade his country to put into practice. The representatives from Malawi asked the audience, "What advice would you give us?" A sea of hands was raised to offer "advice," resulting in a lively discussion--the best the conference offered us.

During the opening day of conference proceedings, Fred Harrison made a brief but forceful statement: The contacts he has made in recent years, he says, want continuing help, e.g., in preparing a draft land law. He knows what can be of help and has the names of qualified persons (by no means limited to himself). Now is the time to be effective. He pleads for money.

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ECOGRAD efforts (not restricted to the St. Petersburg region) proceed and could be enhanced fruitfully in an environment still in flux. Taxes in Russia are extremely high now, a condition to which we heard many references.

One of the most impassioned and surprising talks of the conference was given "off the cuff" by a young Georgist from Scotland, Peter Gibb. He spoke eloquently about his country as it is represented in film today, and in contrast, about the Scotland he knew years ago, a Scotland that was rich in natural resources and beauty. He talked as a member of The Scottish Ogilvie Society whose sole premise is to republish *Birthright in Land*, William Ogilvie's seminal work written 100 years before George wrote *Progress and Poverty*.

Prepared papers and floor comments by persons from various countries made clear the fact that conditions regarding land and its rents differ very greatly indeed. Henry George was correct in asserting the desirability of channeling (much) more of the yield of land into government accounts so that (at least in some places) present taxes can go down. Is this a question of "rights?" Not, it seems to me, in the sense that some things are rights, e.g. voting by adults. The implication, or assertion, that present titles to land are not morally justified because present owners did not create the land, overlooks too much of reality. Today we, and our children tomorrow, benefit from what our predecessors have done, e.g., huge capital accumulation and technical knowledge. What one hears in Georgist meetings is that defects in the ownership of land require clearer examination and sophistication in proposed remedy, as distinguished from George's remedy (if put into effect more gradually than precipitously).

Dick Noyes's paper, "Property Rights: A Common-Sensism," deserves thoughtful consideration by us all. He shows problems that arise from the complexity of the term "property" and doubts about the role of the state. Dick draws upon extensive reading and practical legislative experience to remind us of the need for doubt, questioning, and continuing thought.

My paper on who should support Georgism and why concludes that virtually everyone would benefit by living in better communities, a vision valid but perhaps too elusive to spark much popular support. Some owners would get direct benefits in lower tax bills, but the typical amounts would probably not seem large enough to warrant much individual political effort. Civic leadership is called for.

Repeatedly we heard, "How can 'we' get more young people interested?" What would we offer them? Frankly, I wonder. The quality of the economics so often suffers from oversimplification. (And from lack of evidence, even apparent concern about whether magnitudes are 13X or 2X or more or less.) Professional economists should, and I believe that most would, support the two-tier type of proposal. But not many may be inclined to devote much effort to this as a

competitor for attention and the use of time. Claims for more sweeping benefits such as major reduction of unemployment or poverty, etc., as some Georgists seem to expect, would, in my estimation, tend to discredit the advocacy.

Frankly, this last week would not have been time well spent for most young economists or other professionals or scholars. But that is my viewpoint.

After much discussion, no agreement was reached on a suitable name change for the hosting organization. The 1997 meeting will be in Brighton, England.

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