

# DEMOCRACY, EARTH RIGHTS AND ECOTAXATION

(Printed below is the report of Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA, who organized and conducted the Democracy, Earth Rights and Ecotaxation Seminar at the Congress of the Federation of African Green Parties, March 2002)

On March 7, 2002, an educational seminar entitled Democracy, Earth Rights and Ecotaxation was held immediately preceding the Congress of the Federation of African Green Parties in Dakar, Senegal. The seminar was a grand opportunity for American and African Georgist movement colleagues to meet and work together in person for the first time.

The Earth Rights Seminar speakers included Anne Goeke (USA), Sunny Akuopha (Mali), Gordon Abiama (Nigeria), Alanna Hartzok (USA) and Papa Meissa Dieng (Senegal).

The invitation to conduct the seminar came from African Green Party leaders Adamou Garba, in his capacity as Secretary General of the Federation, and Dr. Papa Meissa Dieng, an environmental law professor and Green Party leader from Senegal. Garba and Dieng met with Hartzok and Goeke in Pennsylvania to initiate plans for the seminar on December 23, 2002. Goeke is a U.S. and global Green Party leader, and Hartzok is U.N. NGO Representative for the International Union for Land Value Taxation. They are co-founders of a new NGO - Earth Rights Institute.

Representatives of the following African Green Parties participated in the seminar: South Africa, Burkina Faso, Benin, Central Africa, Congo Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Guinee Conakry, Guinee Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tchad, and Zambia. Green Party leaders from Europe and Mexico also participated.

Alanna Hartzok introduced the theme of the seminar. She explained that the terms "Earth Rights" and "Ecotaxation" have several meanings.

"By Earth Rights we mean that democracy needs to include the human right to land and resources and also that the earth has the right to maintain ecological health and integrity," she said, "And we are connecting these subjects of earth rights and democracy with taxation, with public finance policy."

"We are using the term 'ecotaxation' also in two ways. One is 'economic justice taxation' specifically, economic justice in land and resources. The other meaning of ecotaxation, green taxation, refers to the payment of fees and polluter taxes for the use of land, air and water resources."

Hartzok said that many goals of the Green Party can be strongly met within the framework of sustainable development by getting a handle on how we finance governance. The proper source of finance for government is very important for sustainable development, she said. The emerging Green Tax movement provides guidelines for financing development based on the threefold bottom line: (1) social and economic justice, (2) environmental protection and restoration, and (3) strong and sustainable economy.

Anne de la Bouillerie Goeke was the next speaker. She has

been a leader in the green movement on local, state, national and international levels since 1989. Twice elected to Co-Chair the Steering Committee for the Association of State Green Parties in the United States, she is now Co-Chair of the International Committee for the newly formed Green Party of the United States. Goeke is also the elected "English speaking" spokesperson for the Federation of Green Parties of the Americas and as a delegate for the Global Green Coordination helped organize the Global Greens 2001 Conference in Canberra, Australia. She co-founded both the Lancaster Greens and the Green Party of Pennsylvania where she ran as a statewide candidate for the Auditor General seat in 2000, and is co-author of the book "Fire Up Your Brilliance."

Goeke spoke about Green Politics and the Economics of Sustainable Development. She said that the theme of rights to the earth and green taxation policy was very important for the Green movement worldwide and urged those assembled to "pay close attention to what will be presented here today."

"Globalization has confronted us with a whole new set of development problems - problems which keep compounding as we continue down this path," she said. "This form of globalization has increased our capacities to destroy much of our planet whether it be through the environment or through the widening spread of conflicts leading us to a possible world war."

Pointing out that many development projects worldwide have essentially complicated the economic problems that previously existed, Goeke said that there needs to be a new concerted policy effort to find an alternative developmental framework that "gives rise to a new hopeful foundation for Africa to be a full participant in the 21st century."

"Now is the time for us to become experts to promote an alternative economic system which supports our green initiatives, policies and agendas," said Goeke. "The time has come for us to create a partnership with organizations that have been focused on how we can shift the economy towards supporting an ecologically based society. Let us as Greens develop our own skills and widen our knowledge so that we are prepared to bring about a culture of peace, to make our communities healthy and to ensure that each person on this planet is given a fair share, a decent life with shelter, food and work."

Hartzok then began the formal part of her presentation, explaining that the Earth Rights seminar will present "a framework of how we can move beyond the neoliberal economic model to a model that we might call Geoclassical Economics, or 'earth centered economics.'"

She continued with a brief introduction of the work of Henry George and how his work was an extension of classical economics which focused on solving the problem of the rich/poor gap. She touched on how the science of political economy was corrupted and how neoliberal economics came to replace classical economics. Hartzok explained it this way: "In classical economics there are (continued on page 7)



## DEMOCRACY, EARTH RIGHTS, AND ECOTAXATION (from page 2)

three factors of production - land, labor and capital. The neo-liberal system put land, meaning all the resources of the earth, under the category of capital. They collapsed the primary factors of land, labor and capital into just two factors - labor and capital. We have been under neoliberal economics for the past one hundred years, causing a lot of problems by making the earth a commodity for selling, for profit."

She pointed to basic principles: (1) we are all human beings; (2) we have an equal right to exist; and (3) to exist, to survive, we need land and resources. This is common sense. These are basic principles. With equal rights to exist and needs for natural resources, we extend this reasoning now and declare that we must have equal rights to the earth.

"The problem is, democracy has not given us rights to the earth," she continued. "We have no birthright to the planet. And so now very few people own and control a vast amount of the earth's land and resources," she said, pointing out that the gap of rich to poor is growing and that now less than 300 multi-billionaires have more wealth than half the people on earth.

Hartzok said this problem was a primary cause of war and conflict worldwide and called the lack of democratic rights to the earth "The crack in the Liberty Bell." She gave examples to show that "without land rights, any of us can become homeless overnight."

Then she explained how a properly structured public finance system can secure democratic rights to the earth and also encourage environmental restoration and protection.

"We can use the mechanism of public finance, of taxation policy, and change it, based on the principle of 'pay for what you take, not what you make.' If you are taking more than a fair share of land and resources, you pay to the rest of us a higher tax fee for the land and resources which you take. This can create a land reform. And you pay for polluting the water, or the air or the land. You pay full costs to pollute so you are encouraged to stop polluting."

Hartzok then distributed a paper showing the estimation that worldwide, 93% of taxes fall on labor while only 3% of taxes are on environmental damage and only 4% are for land and resource rent.

"We want to reverse this," she said in ending her speech. "So that people can keep the full capacity of what they work for, take taxes off of labor and shift the tax base onto land and resource use to prevent land speculation, land monopoly and land profiteering and to inhibit environmental damage."

Sunny Akuopha from Mali spoke next on this theme: Towards a New Political, Social and Economic Structure for Africa. Akuopha is a member of the Henry George Institute and is coordinating efforts to bring Georgist education to French speaking Africans. He is also the Coordinator of The African Agency for Communal Development, an institutional member of The Society for International Development where he is working for sustainable livelihoods along with the Network on Food Security. He is a former trade unionist and President of The Nigerian Community in Mali for two terms (1992 - 2001),

a former Editor of a Malian weekly "Le Mali Aujourd'hui" and has written several poems that won him the French Literature prize in Mali in 1994.

Akuopha began his lecture with a sweeping and poetic overview of African history. He noted that in ancient times, "the people lived on the land and gave back happily a portion of their produce from land to all those that led them in conviviality." But in colonial times, "rhythms we could not dance to were played for our people."

The post-colonial independence fathers "ushered in rhythms that were all a cacophony, leaving no ideological order that could sustain a political, social and economic development, they took over the villas of the colonial masters and operated constitutions that were doctored by the departing colonial masters." Next came "the khaki boys who just wasted every aspect of our public life, using the arms bought by the people's money to maraud this same people and held public conscience hostage for over two decades."

The current era is struggling to define democracy, says Akuopha, and there are many questions to be asked concerning democratic culture. He then pointed to the land problem, stating that the most essential initial task of government is "how to govern the usage of this land for the benefit of all. ... Real republics shall emerge in Africa once they return back to Land." Akuopha then asked how Africans can justify their payment of taxes, stating that taxes are "binding for the citizens to pay (yet) it is not binding on the authorities to do anything corresponding to the value they have taken." He then explained how a Land Government can bring genuine democracy to Africa, with decentralization and participatory governance with transparency in public revenue collection which will "reduce corruption to zero."

Land Government "shall bring about learning and innovation for positive changes that can usher in a real social contract for the development of a stable political, social and economic order ... ending ethnic conflicts (which are now) caused mostly by a struggle for the control of natural resources."

A Land Government would abolish the "Rob the People Governments" and derive its revenue from Land Value Taxation instead of taxes on labor and production. "Land Government will bring a conscious commitment and dedication on the part of every individual," said Akuopha. To give an example of Land Government, he compared Alodia, an imaginary nation used as a teaching construct by the Henry George Institute, to the current situation in Mali. In Alodia, land value taxation has given access to land resources so free trade can benefit the many rather than the few. Foreign debts have been unilaterally canceled, taxes on workers abolished, and public revenue is collected at the local level with a portion passed up to state and national levels. The real-life country of Mali, in contrast, suffers (continued on page 8)



## DEMOCRACY, EARTH RIGHTS, AND ECOTAXATION (from page 7)

from high import duties, onerous regulations on investment and production, unfair labor taxes, corrupt officials and heavy foreign debt repayments.

Urging all assembled to read the book "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George, Akuopha quoted an essential principle of geoclassical economics - "Association in equality is the law of progress."

Akuopha ended his speech with a vision of how Land Government would be brought in as a "velvet (bloodless) revolution, with the present and future African leaders seizing this initiative, calling and holding national conferences and deciding through political referendum of the people of the existing republics, to sincerely evaluate the states and justify their well being or existence in them."

Addressing the "endless vain struggles for national unity that is eternally elusive", he envisions that the people would opt for "new nations according to their ethnic, religious or regional affinity" with the possibility of the emergence of confederations of states "according to the solemn will of the people.... This new dispensation shall end recurrent ethnic crisis, civil wars and stagnating national plans that cannot be fully executed for want of national unity."

Akuopha appealed to the assembled Green Party leaders to become thoroughly versed in geoclassical economics and the principles set forth in the writings of Henry George and to encourage these principles to be taught to school children and to workers. Armed with this understanding he said that their "quest for public office should not be for power, but for the assurance of public trust, therefore African ecologists and others elsewhere must work ceaselessly in gaining public trust and confidence so that their election to public office should be a sign of this trust and confidence."

The next speaker, Gordon Abiama, is a Nigerian journalist currently working as the Information Officer of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, a state in Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta region which has witnessed much bloodshed over royalties from oil extraction. Formerly editor of PROFILES Magazine, Gordon Abiama has written for the radio and numerous publications both locally and internationally.

As a crusader of social and economic justice in the world, Gordon is a member of the Henry George Institute in America and other financing for development groups. Gordon is also the Communications Director of a local NGO—Ethical Alliance - whose main objective is to effect social and economic justice through public ethical orientation programs. One of such programs is a weekly Radio Discussion Show on Bayelsa State Radio titled Ethical Spotlight.

Abiama's theme was The Challenges of Democracy and Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Development. He explored the wealth distribution problem in Africa, reasons for the gross resource mismanagement by African leaders and impediments against enthroning equity in democratic mandates. He put forth possible strategies to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor with a particular focus on the Alaska Perma-

nent Fund as a model of oil and mineral resource royalty distribution that could be replicated in Africa.

"We live in an age when the accumulation of wealth is greatest, and by a few people while the majority of the world's population is mired in abject poverty," said Abiama. "In the course of the struggle to earn a living, the worst cynical form of hard-heartedness - 'every man for himself' - has become the watchword, thus throwing to the winds the age-long African tradition of being 'your brother's keeper.'"

Abiama said that neoliberal economists and philosophers do not go to the root of the problem and thus current mainstream development methods and strategies have not achieved sustainable development, but rather have exacerbated the maldistribution of wealth. He agreed with the analysis of Henry George in refuting the Malthus doctrine which regards overpopulation as a root cause of the economic problem, pulling this quote from Progress and Poverty:

"The great cause of the triumph of this (Malthusian) theory is that instead of menacing any vested right or antagonizing any powerful interest, it is eminently soothing and reassuring to the classes who, wielding the power of wealth, largely dominate thought .. it came to the rescue of the special privileges by which a few monopolize so much of the good things of this world, proclaiming a natural cause for the want and misery which, if attributed to political institutions, must condemn every government under which they exist."

Abiama pointed out the flaws in communism and capitalism as well as middle-of-the-road "mixed economy" systems which make "insufficient distinction between earned and unearned incomes, and do not carefully define the proper spheres of society and the individual."

Geoclassical economics is "different from all these ideologies in that it makes a distinction between the unearned income of land (rent) and the earned incomes of labor and capital (wages and interest). Rent goes to society, wages and interest to the individuals who earned them." Equality in rights to land is "the bedrock of the Georgist philosophy," he said.

This fundamental tax reform will greatly help to alleviate conflicts "surrounding the exploitation and control of natural resources ranging from fishery, oil extraction, minerals mining and even use of grazing, farming and allocation of surface lands in choice locations in the cities."

Abiama went on to describe the current situation in his homeland of Nigeria where the Land Use Act authorizes the public collection of land rent which exempts the improvements on the land from taxation. In practice, however, the revenues mostly end up lining the pockets of corrupt officials and finding their way into private foreign banks.

He told us that residents of the oil bearing states of the Niger Delta region rightly (continued on page 9)



## **DEMOCRACY, EARTH RIGHTS, AND ECOTAXATION** (from page 8)

feel cheated of the resources around them and are now agitating for full control. Expressing its displeasure over such agitation, the Federal Government recently set up a 24 man Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas with logistics provided by the American government to ensure the oil keeps flowing. The committee is made up of the armed forces.

Youths in the Niger Delta region, in their bid to enforce the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed between the oil companies and their local communities, have been mowed down by bullets from security agents manning the oil installations. The destruction of Odi in Bayelsa State has come to represent a symbol of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta region.

Abiama then told this story: "I recall a few years ago in Jesse Town, in Nigeria's Delta State, over 4000 perished in an inferno while scooping up fuel from burst pipes to sell for a living. They were quite oblivious of the explosive danger that surrounded them in their desperation to make a living. The reaction of the military rulers was most infuriating. Instead of rushing relief materials to aid the victims, the head of state publicly called them thieves and declared that no compensation would be paid to their families as a result. Many died later for lack of medical attention by staying away from hospitals for fear that government authorities would get them arrested and jailed for 'stealing fuel'".

"Nigeria is currently engulfed in political violence," said Abiama. "So democracy in this context has become a game of personal interests."

Having detailed the problem, he went on to say that a potential solution can be found by establishing African resource royalty funds similar to the Alaska Permanent Fund, which is a "case study in a new concept of the role of government - that of agent to equitably distribute resource rents to the people, thereby securing democratic common heritage rights to land and natural resources. In the year 2000, each citizen of Alaska received a dividend check for nearly \$2000." Details of the Alaska Permanent Fund can be located on its website ([www.apfc.org](http://www.apfc.org)).

In Nigeria, oil resources do not belong to the individual states but the Federal Government which has initiated a revenue sharing formula based on the principle of revenue derivation. The formula states that 13% of total revenue from on-shore oil extraction in each state belong to it.

"This 13% would be more result oriented and help ensure at least regional equity if the Alaska Permanent Fund model were replicated," said Abiama.

"Not only that, we can go a step further to structure an institution that would provide a source of no or low interest loan funds in addition to the direct citizens dividend."

Apparently concerned about incessant conflicts in several nations, the United Nations recently expressed its desire to expand its "Peace-keeping missions" in a bid to resolve such conflicts. Abiama ended his speech with an additional suggestion taken from Professor Heather Remoff of the

Henry George Institute, who has proposed that the United Nations develop "Resource-keeping missions (which) would guarantee that the natural resource royalties that accrue to oil, clean water, pure air, land, virgin timber, minerals, the airways, and all other common heritage resources belong by right to the public, not the private sector."

"Resource-keeping missions could defuse ethnic conflict before it reaches the point of combustion," concluded Abiama. "The Alaska Permanent Fund may be a good model for such a mission."

Concluding the Democracy, Earth Rights and Ecotaxation Seminar was Dr. Papa Meissa Dieng, Professor of Environmental Law at the University Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis, Senegal. Dieng is also an African Green Party leader and international activist. His theme was Environmental Justice, Sustainable Development and the Politics of Public Finance.

Dieng said that the ideas presented by the seminar speakers were very important for the ecological movements in the Third World. He said that geoclassical economic policy would give Green Parties and green organizations a clear alternative to neoliberal economics.

"I think here we have a tool to make justice in terms of environmental issues," said Dieng. "It is also an opportunity for us to change the way taxes are now and to make alternative propositions as a political party. In Africa we have the possibility to justify this tax information because tax policies in our countries are inherited from the colonial powers."

"This would be a peaceful revolution but a radical revolution that all Green Parties could join," continued Dieng. "Actually to change the way the environment is being taxed so far is a real revolutionary policy that I and my colleagues from other countries here can see. ... It would be an opportunity to make a land government. A land government allows you to fight against corruption. We think that here we have an opportunity to implement what we call environmental justice."

The remainder of Dr. Dieng's comments are as follows:

"In accordance with Henry George philosophy we know that to put in practice those rights is to propose that the rent of the land be a decision that the community has to take and all labor taxes be abolished. This is the revolution to say NO to the neoliberal system. And it is actually the neoliberal system that we are fighting.

"Liberty in the philosophy of Henry George means justice and justice is the natural law, a natural right. Environmental justice is a questioning of the current order that favors the few.

"We think that the ideology of political ecology is a peaceful ideology of revolution. I say it again, that it is a revolution based on intelligence, where we have the mind that is taking the place of arms.

"I think that our friends have brought us the tools to come to this environmental justice revolution. This would be an opportunity for us (continued on page 10)



## **DEMOCRACY, EARTH RIGHTS AND ECOTAXATION** (from page 9)

to stop squabbling and to get together and unite because we have on the continent problems that we need to solve. If we do not do what we have to do then we give the opportunity for those who are leading us to keep on exploiting the poor."

The Democracy, Earth Rights and Ecotaxation Seminar continued into the evening with further comments and discussion by conference participants and questions and answers to the speakers. The following day Hartzok gave a summary of the seminar and Abiama described plans for a conference in Nigeria in February, 2003, which will focus on the proposal for a Niger Delta Fund for the distribution of oil royalties and a sustainable development plan for the region. Akuopha will be launching an African Center for Land and Taxation Policy in Mali. Subsequent to the seminar, several university students have reported their intentions to form a study group and establish a geoclassical economics training center in Senegal.

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(Also see related Jan.-Feb. 2001 GroundSwell articles, "Alaska's Oil Dividends" and "Into Africa—Progress, Poverty and Oil." Also see the Sept.-Oct. 1999 GroundSwell article, "Smith and Hartzok Participate in Green Millennium Conference.") □