

WEAVING THE GEO TAPESTRY

by Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA

This report covers several events that I and several other Georgists participated in during September and October of this year.

"Earth Rights and the Global Ecovillage Movement" was the title of a 90 minute lecture I gave on September 25th to more than 200 students and faculty at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. The lecture was sponsored by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the four part fall lecture series was entitled "Creative Visions: A Lecture Series for the Globally Responsible, Spiritually Inspired, Aesthetically/Technologically Inquisitive Human Being." The invitation to give the lecture came from Dr. Julie Gutmann who had attended the panel at the US Society for Ecological Economics last spring which was organized by Bill Batt who had invited Jeff Smith and myself to participate. Julie wanted me to come to RPI to "inspire the students." (Jeff was also invited to give lectures elsewhere after the Eco Economics conference.)

During the lecture I showed a short videotape on the global ecovillage movement, then went through a series of transparencies on the principles and policies of Georgist economics and green tax shifting. The connection between the ecovillage and tax shift portions of the lecture was that the land tenure and tax policy approach provided a suitable macroeconomic framework to encourage sustainable development. RPI students are very thoughtful and interested in tangible solutions. In the days following the lecture I received several emails from students with their comments and additional questions.

Earlier that day I gave another 90 minute lecture - this one called "Globalization, Environment and Human Rights" - for two classes combined at Russell Sage College at the invitation of Dr. Adeline Apena, another colleague of Bill Batt. Dr. Apena recently emailed me to tell me that "Students were fascinated by you and still are...this body of knowledge is invaluable. Let us keep in touch. I have a lot to learn from you." (She is Nigerian and has now joined our Niger Delta Fund Initiative which was launched 15 months ago.) (See Nov.-Dec. 2002 Groundswell)

Two days before the RPI lecture I was interviewed by Steve Breyman for the 60 minutes "On The Barricades" program of WRPI radio. "On The Barricades" is a weekly progressive public affairs show which is a Pacifica affiliate that "acts as a voice for the progressive community in the New York and western New England area." (Bill Batt recorded the show on audiotape for anyone who would like a copy.)

I left the Albany area on train to New York City for an evening think tank and Chinese dinner with Pat Aller and George Collins to discuss our UN NGO work. Next day I went home for two days before flying to Boulder, Colorado for "Sustainable Resources: Solutions to World Poverty." This founding conference was designed around the Millennium Development Goals selected by the UN in 2000 and created a "meeting of the minds" and a platform for multidisciplinary exchange among the 750 participants who represented NGOs, philanthropists,

funding agencies, humanitarian organizations, academics, engineers, business people and students.

The conference literature urged us to imagine a world with safe drinking water for the 1.2 billion without it, shelter for the 1.2 billion who are homeless, light for the 1.7 billion living in darkness, education for the 4.2 billion who can't read, food for the 1.1 billion who go hungry, and economic opportunity for all.

This was one of the very best conferences I have ever attended! Everyone (yes, all 750 people there) was dynamically proactive and pioneering ways to build a world that works for everyone. Conference themes included water for life, reinventing education for a sustainable world, new economic paradigms, learning from native cultures, infrastructure and shelter alternatives, feeding the world, and ecotourism.

There were more than 100 interesting and very informative exhibits and over 150 presentations. Featured speakers included Matthew Fox, Paul Hawken, Hunter Lovins, Paolo Lugari, and Bernard Amadei, founder of Engineers Without Borders. One memorable two-hour intensive conversation I had was with a rocket scientist who was now involved with sustainable community development. It was a real Rocky Mountain high that he listened deeply to what I had to say about Georgist economics and the land problem.

I was on a panel chaired by Fritz Kramer of International Development Enterprises. My theme was "Financing and Developing Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities." The session, attended by about 60 people, turned out to be an excellent way to bridge between the growing global ecovillage movement and Georgist economic ideas. Kramer has had a 30-year career in international development and he immediately saw the importance of tax shifting. He wants to continue the discussion in future.

My partner Rob Wheeler had arranged for a Chinese delegation of six, which included several businessmen and the Minister of Forestry for 30% of China, to come to this event. They gave a 30 minute evening program to the entire conference body which was well received as they are launching an effort to "green" a massive amount of China that is now desert. I am also happy to report that a Nigerian sustainable development expert (now based in Oakland, California) that I met at the conference will be joining our Niger Delta Fund Initiative project.

The conference ended with a fantastic Saturday evening international music and culture program with many performers, the last of which had hundreds of us dancing wildly to African tribal drums for more than an hour. You can order audiotapes and cds of all the conference keynotes, workshops and sessions at www.sustainableresources.org.

Flying home from Colorado to Pennsylvania on Sunday, I had all of that evening and the next morning to prepare to take off again for Dublin, Ireland. I arrived at the Tara Towers Hotel with plenty of time to rest up and prepare to participate in "Land: The (continued on p. 5)

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Claim of the Community," a two-day conference organized by Feasta - the Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability and the Henry George Foundation of UK. This terrific event brought together 22 speakers from Ireland, England, Scotland and the US for the purpose of addressing "the core issues of land ownership, to review initiatives abroad and to suggest workable mechanisms for delivering social cohesion and sustainable development in Ireland."

Since joining the European Union Ireland has been experiencing a period of heightened development and consequently an intense escalation in land prices pushing exorbitantly high housing costs and sprawl development. The time was ripe for such a conference and the organizers promoted it to political officials, development boards and organizations, tenant rights, homeless and anti-poverty groups, architects, planners, building societies and banks, environmental and sustainability organizations.

The conference promotional material was very professional and attractive and brought more than 100 people to the event.

The first day session chairs were John Jopling and Rob Gibson and included these speakers and topics: Fred Harrison: Keynote on Land - the Claim of the Community; Vincent Salafia: Land Tenure under the Ancient Brehon Laws; Patrick Duffy: Land and Rural Housing from 17th century - Alternative Histories; Paul McNulty: Recent Experience - The Emergency of the Affordability Gap; Michael Punch & Declan Redmond: Critical Perspectives on Housing, Land and Social Need; Emer O'Siochru: The Tragedy of Freehold and the Irish Village; Tom Dunn: Development Levy - The Case for Charging for Value; Richard Douthwaite: The Holy Trinity of Economics - Money, Debt and Land; Albert Catterall: Business Problems - The Case for Land and Tax Reform; Alanna Hartzok: Land, Resources and Ecological Justice and Case Study on Resource Rents in the Niger Delta and Alaska.

The second day chairs were Dave Wetzel and Antonia Swinson and speakers were: Josh Vincent: Keynote on Paths to Reform; Kevill Cahill: Space and the Future Community; Pat Conaty: A Solution for Permanently Affordable Housing; William McCluskey: The Problem of Funding the Public Sector; Dave Wetzel: Transport - Congestion Charging in London; Joshua Vincent: Urban Space - Tax Shifting in Philadelphia; Peter Gibb: Marginal Communities - Community Land Tenure; Pat Conaty: Housing - Community Land Trusts in London; Fred Harrison: The Consequences of Failing to Secure the Community's Claim; Dave Wetzel: Realizing the Claim of the Community; Peter Gibb: Staking Our Claim.

The break-out sessions themes were transport, international development, housing, energy, marginal communities and urban renaissance. The conference ended with a discussion on The Way Forward - Land Reform Ireland?

The "Land: Claim of the Community" conference was an impressive event. It assuredly marked the beginning of a strong movement for land value tax shift in Ireland. Because Ireland had eliminated all property taxes on land and buildings during past decades, the approach taken probably will be one of shifting taxes off of labor and production and onto land values and other resource rents.

Feasta, the main organizer of the conference, is a fairly new organization, founded in 1998, and is therefore deserving a more thorough introduction to Groundswell readers. The Gaelic word "feasta" means "going forward" or "in the future" and is taken from the Irish poem "Kilcass" that lamented the twin destruction of the Gaelic culture and oak forests of 17th century Ireland. Feasta's mission is to identify the characteristics (economic, cultural and environmental) of a truly sustainable society, articulate how the necessary transition can be effected and promote the implementation of the measures required for this purpose.

In the few years since its founding Feasta has organized numerous public events and produced several publications "to engage with mainstream society and educate public and private sector decision makers, professionals and academics, producers and consumers alike."

The conference was enriching to me personally as it was the first time that I met our inspiring Scottish Georgist colleague Peter Gibbs in person. Joe Glynn kindly hosted me the first evening after I arrived by touring me around the sights and sounds of downtown Dublin. Joe is a long-time leading Georgist advocate who deserves much credit for keeping the land rights flame burning in Ireland.

I will always remember the pleasant walk and talk along the beach next afternoon with one of the main Feasta founders, John Jopling, author of a new book called Gaian Democracies. John gathered handfuls of wild edible greens while I picked up cockle and muscle shells, singing in Dublin's fair city, alive, alive-o. I was also very pleased to have had some good talks with Feasta leader and conference co-ordinator Emer O'Siochru, an outstanding organizer and articulate spokesperson for all things good and sustainable. She is an emerging guiding light of Ireland.

My only regret was that I had to leave Ireland a day early to make it back to Philadelphia in time to meet with Hazel Henderson at the Office of the City Controller. Hazel is a world renowned futurist, consultant on sustainable development and author of Beyond Globalization and seven other books. Her editorials appear in 27 languages and more than 400 newspapers syndicated by InterPress Service and her articles have appeared in over 250 journals. This year she has been called upon by the new government in Brazil to consult with them about a transformative new direction beyond neoliberal economics.

Hazel was in town for only a short time as she was to be the featured speaker at the Earth Charter Summit on October 11th. The day before was my window of opportunity to get her briefed on the progress of land value taxation. The nearly 90 minute meeting with City Controller Jonathan Saidel, Hazel, and about 10 other Georgist supporters went exactly as I hoped. Hazel was impressed. She said (something like), "Wow, the land value tax work is much further along than I had thought!" She discussed with Jonathan the possibility of having him on her upcoming globally syndicated television (continued on page 13)

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show, Ethical Marketplace. Thank you to Bruno Moser, an Assistant City Controller and our "in-house Georgist" for making the arrangements for this meeting. Hazel mentioned our meeting and the importance of land value tax for Philadelphia the next day during her talk at the Earth Charter Summit.

This was the third annual Earth Charter Summit held in Philadelphia. These summits take place simultaneously in many other cities around the world. The Earth Charter is the result of a global grassroots drafting process that involved thousands of people (including this writer) over the course of 12 years and was launched at the Hague Peace Palace in June, 2000. It is an inspired and inspiring document that sets forth principles and policies for a building a world of peace, justice and environmental harmony.

Dan Sullivan and I gave workshops at this year's Summit. Dan conducted a morning session on "American Indian Land Tenure: comparisons to Saxon common law and other early systems and connections to the American Revolution and to classical liberalism." His afternoon session was on "The Myth of Corporate Efficiency: how preoccupation with labor efficiency has obscured the inefficient use of land and resources."

My session, which was webcast live, was called "Land Value Taxation: An Earth Rights and Economic Justice Policy for Philadelphia." I drew from several sections of the Earth Charter to clarify how land value taxation can support and further the rights to shelter, education, sustainable livelihoods, the equitable distribution of wealth, and development without debt. I also discussed how to support the efforts of the Office of the City Controller to implement land value taxation.

Dan's and my workshops were well received. At the end of the afternoon I was sitting beside someone who had attended all three of our sessions. He leaned over to tell me that what he had learned had changed his life.

Thus you have a detailed glimpse of the complex and richly textured weave of a portion of the tapestry of worldwide Georgist networking and movement building.

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