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"SEX & THE SINGLE TAX"

- A Conversation With Heather Remoff

Newly-elected HGS board member Heather Remoff is an anthropologist and author from Eagle's Mere, Pennsylvania. She has been active with HGS in Philadelphia for some years, and she co-chaired the strategy session on educational priorities at the 1991 Georgist Conference at Lafayette College. She has also been instrumental in forging connections between American geocrats and reform-minded economists in Russia. Lindy Davies caught up with her early in the new year for this conversation.

HGN: How did you get involved with the Henry George School?

HR: It must be a bit more than five years now. I was working on a book about reproductive strategies, and I became convinced in doing the research that economic behavior and reproductive behavior were closely entwined. It became clearer and clearer to me that reproductive behavior is essentially economic behavior - and this is a vital connection which has not received enough attention.

But I started taking courses at the school by sheer fortuitous chance. I came across the flyer, right by the checkout counter in the Philadelphia library. I felt like it was destiny grabbing me by the hair - because I had already concluded that a better understanding of economic principles had become vital for my research.



HGN: Tell us a little more about the explorations that led to your book, *Sexual Choice* (published in 1985 by E.P. Dutton).

HR: I have always been fascinated with the area of how people deal with sexual and reproductive choices. Of course, reproductive behavior starts with individuals. It translates into societal trends as well, but I'm convinced that as we come to understand the personal, psychological aspects of reproductive behavior, we become better able to grasp the societal trends.

For example, in researching the book, I surveyed women about contraceptive behavior. The assumption had been that women were careless contraceptors with men who they felt would make good fathers - but research proves the opposite to be true. Then, I began looking at population statistics, and realized that birth rates tend to drop, once people have fairly predictable control of resources.

I'm anti-Malthus, so Henry George and I immediately had a bond when I read *Progress and Poverty*. But I was up against Darwinian theory. Charles Darwin had always been a hero of mine. My only quarrels with Darwin stem from his agreement with Malthus.

HGN: What convinced you so strongly against Malthusianism?

HR: My own research into how women choose mates. According to Darwin, the pressure to survive shapes behavior. However, Darwin himself was troubled about

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human reproductive behavior--I discovered he was wrong about humans, because our economic behavior doesn't fit neatly into his model. I'm convinced that in humans it is functional for us to limit the number of offspring when we have control of resources. What Darwin left out of his equation was economic behavior - which didn't hurt his theory with any species except humans! Human economic behavior is really what sets us apart as a species - which has been neglected by most biologists.

I consider it a mission to make people understand the relationship between sex & economics. So, it's no surprise that the working title of the book I am writing with Fred Harrison is *Sex & the Single Tax*. (I didn't like the title at first, but it has grown on me; that is, after all, what I'm talking about!) My goal to finish by this summer--tying economic understanding to my earlier research.

But I keep getting knocked off the track by the Russians, whom I dearly love.

HGN: You have been forging some strong connections with Russian economists. How did that come about?

HR: My husband, Gene, was invited in October of 1990 by the Conference Board in New York, along with nine executives of American corporations, hosted in the (then) Soviet Union by the Institute of World Economics and International Relations. The conference was a joint undertaking by these two groups. Gene & the other American executives were invited because they were leading American businessmen, and they were talking about free market conversion.

I sat in on some sessions, but the women were not too involved. Wives were not allowed to attend one session that took place in the Kremlin. But we were there in Moscow, spending quite a bit of time touring the city. I quickly wrote up a little paper about land value taxation, which I gave to anyone who would take it, and we were captive on a bus with many members of this institute--so I was stumping for LVT.

I must confess I did a little black-market spending -everything is so under-priced; pricing nowhere near reflects the cost of production. This is still a big problem. To get competition in there is an awesome undertaking, and very frightening to people. The big challenge to us and others is to get in there and help, quickly. And - if it fails, it'll be because the economy hasn't come around quickly enough

- if it does not, I believe the political push toward freedom will fail.

But, as a result of contacts made there, we were visited this fall by Dr. Alexi Slepukhin, economist with the Institute of World Economic & International Relations, who specializes in the American economy and banking system. Alex was here for three weeks. My article was published in a Soviet newspaper, and Alex translated it and published it also in his own newspaper.

HGN: And we hear that these connections are providing new opportunities...

HR: Yes, they are! 20 to 25 economists from that institute are being invited to come to the New York school to take classes in political economy. We hope this will be happening in early March.

The Institute of World Economics and International Relations is a very prestigious group - Gorbachev and Yeltsin have drawn many of their advisors from it!

HGN: How do you assess the school's educational program now?

HR: The initiative to the former Soviet Union is very important, I'm thrilled about that. As far as the school's program, the courses already offered are good--we should keep doing it. My experiences in Russia, among other things, have taught me that we never know where something will take root.

As a new board member, I want to get a sense of things before I make any evaluations. I feel privileged, though, to serve on the board of trustees. These folks really care about humanity; they are not in this endeavor for personal gain.

I do have one curricular suggestion,

however. I would like to see the school offer a course in US tax policy. I, and many others, I guess, have lots of questions in this area: how much revenue is collected at each level, and where does it go? What kind of legislative changes are required to make a broad application of land value taxation in the US, how could federal taxes be reduced or eliminated by LVT?

HGN: Any final thoughts?

HR: I feel serene since I became a Georgist - my life has been enriched.