

# the Henry George News

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## ROBERT C. BOWERS

**B**OTH the Henry George School and the Henry George Foundation have sustained a great loss in the passing of Robert C. Bowers, who died October 27th after a very brief illness. It is, indeed, a shock to his many friends and admirers and especially to those in his home city of Pittsburgh, with whom he had worked so closely and so effectively for so many years in seeking to advance the cause of freedom and justice, in theory and in practice.

A native of York, Pennsylvania, where for a short time he was engaged as a newspaper reporter, he came to Pittsburgh for studies at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and upon graduation, took up the profession of architecture. He was the senior member of the firm of Bowers and Barbalat; a member of the American Institute of Architects and also of the Pennsylvania Society of Architects; and of other civic and fraternal organizations.

It was nearly thirty years ago that Bob Bowers became interested in the philosophy of Henry George by reading *Progress and Poverty* in the days of the great depression, and just about the time of the founding of the Henry George School of Social Science in

New York. And when the Pittsburgh extension was organized in 1934, he at once became active and ever since had been one of the principal members of the faculty. In the period between 1934 and 1936 the Henry George School in Pittsburgh achieved strong momentum under his leadership, and enrolled many students. The graduates of his classes included a number who have remained very loyal and influential workers in the cause.

In the municipal election of 1933, Mr. Bowers was among those who identified themselves with William N. McNair, the Democratic nominee for Mayor, and when the latter assumed the office of Mayor, he served consecutively as a member of the City Board of Assessors and later as Director of Supplies until the Mayor's resignation.

Bob Bowers was always an ardent crusader and gave unstintingly of himself as a volunteer teacher and director of the Pittsburgh extension, and also in the support of the campaign in Pennsylvania for the practical application of land value taxation. At the Philadelphia conference of the Henry George Foundation in September, 1949, he was elected a member of the Board of Trustees and later

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Unfortunately, vested interests exist in and out of government and few have the courage to espouse correct but unpopular and nonconforming courses of action—for they are largely captive to their vested interests.

The real obstacles to our achieving a better economic system emanate from those influential forces in business, labor and politics which are not interested in what is best for all but in what appears at the moment to be best for them.

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was chosen to serve as chairman of its executive committee.

He enjoyed the association with his fellow Georgists and was a stimulating leader in many informal discussions and debates, at various national conferences of the Henry George School and of the Henry George Foundation. When Pittsburgh was fortu-

nately but rather unexpectedly chosen as the site of the 1962 joint conference held at Chatham College in July, he gave this project his energetic and enthusiastic direction and its success was a fitting climax to his long career of devotion to the Georgist cause.

A memorial meeting was held in Pittsburgh on November 12th.

—Percy R. Williams



### CREATIVE THINKING IN TAXATION POLICY

"The man who thinks becomes a light and a power" and the thoughts also become a power which continue to emerge here and there no matter how much opposing powers may try to reject or ignore them.

In an important magazine, the *Engineering News Record*, published by McGraw-Hill in New York, an editorial which came to our attention via P. I. Prentice, publisher of *House & Home Magazine*, concludes, "it deserves a try in the United States." What deserves a try? "The land-tax system (that) has worked well in New Zealand and Australia."

An amendment that proposed allowing municipalities to increase the proportion of property tax on land in California was recently rejected in the Assembly, and thereby, states the editorial, "California missed an opportunity for creative use of tax policy." This would have made it more expensive for speculators to hold land idle, and "such a policy," according to ENR, "stimulates efficient use of land. Moreover, it encourages building, repair of deteriorating structures and other property improvements, since they are not penalized by additional taxes."

Today the price of far-out land is higher in proportion to centrally located land than it was ten years ago. To combat this deterrent to homebuilding, a proposed state constitution amendment in California suggests a seven-year safeguard against speculation on close-in agricultural land which would require a farmer, in selling his land, to pay the difference between the lower agricultural tax rate and the regular tax rate on subdivision land for seven retroactive years.

But opponents claim, and rightly, according to ENR, that this provision is insufficient and that "if a community wishes to reserve open space for future needs there are more certain ways of accomplishing it"—meaning, but not mentioning by name, land value taxation.