

Henry George Newsletter

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The mayoral election in New York this November brings an end to one of the city's most memorable political eras and may well set the stage for another. After twelve years of the administration headed by Mayor Ed Koch, whose now jocular, now acerbic personality was felt to have contributed to inflamed racial tension and which draws to a close amid charges of corruption and cronyism, many New Yorkers are anticipating a new set of standards and priorities from City Hall.

Whether the man on the hotseat becomes former Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, the first black to come within reach of the office, or Federal Prosecutor Rudolph Giuliani, the task will be daunting. Drugs, crime, and racially motivated violence have overshadowed the campaign, and people are expecting strong action on these fronts. They are looking for a tone of social healing from city hall, strong anti-crime measures, and an unrelenting war against the drug trade.

What are the prospects that any meaningful improvements can be achieved before an understandably cynical populace gives up on the new mayor? The records of other cities and other mayors faced with similar conditions offer no encouragement. All have failed to achieve real fundamental change. And New York's problems are not unique. They are the ones plaguing all major cities. Crime, homelessness, drug abuse, job dislocation, poor educational levels, lack of affordable housing and deteriorating infrastructure head the long list of human, social and structural deficiencies they all share.

Gentrification, depleted housing stock due to deterioration, and insufficient low and moderate income housing are pointed to as just the tip of the iceberg of New York's housing crisis. Not even the city's best efforts can come close to addressing the condition of the poorest. Mean income in the city is defined as \$10,948. But in East Harlem, the mean income \$6,623, not nearly enough for its residents to afford housing provided by the city based on its own standard. Among other things the Community Board in the district recommends is the elimination of land and housing speculation to preserve the character of the neighborhood.

Add to this the plight of the more than 90,000 homeless people in the city. Shelters are inadequate. Stories of subway riders stepping over naked men as they rush to the trains, and of young mothers offering babies for sale, are more than isolated occurrences. But the social and economic problems of the city are not new. While a decade ago, or a century ago, they did not seem to pervade the city as they do today, they did nevertheless exist. More rigidly confined to particular sections of the city, they appeared less virulent, but the seeds of social disaster were clearly perceived.

Henry George ran for mayor of New York in 1886 and again in 1897. The conditions of squalor, hunger and joblessness described in those campaigns were the festering cankers that have now erupted into full-blown sores,
[Continued on page four.]



Cartoon from 1897 showing Henry George wrestling with the Serpent of "Corruption, Monopoly, Rings, Deals, Spoils..."

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disfiguring the city that once was, and could again become, the world's greatest metropolis.

Although it is believed that George would have won the 1897 election had he lived, there is very serious doubt, if not sure knowledge, that he would not have been able to institute his land reform. In 1886, replying to a reporter's question on what his election would do to put his theories into practice, George said candidly, "My election will forward those ideas simply by increasing the discussion of them. They cannot be carried into effect until the great majority of people wish them to be carried into effect. . ." And the issue, for George, was far greater than any mayoral election: "The single tax is not a party or an organization. It is a perception of a great truth."

The reorganization which would create Greater New York with its five boroughs, on January 1, 1898, would still not have given George the power to enact his great reform, had he lived and achieved victory in the election of November 2, 1897. His candidacy was not aimed merely at providing good government but at promoting natural rights. He mounted the platform to inform and to educate the public, as he had done in his books.

While some mention is made of the need to deal with the underlying structural imbalances and dislocations, today's mayoral hopefuls, who can do more than George could have, are locked into actions that are purely expedient: public housing, drug, alcohol and AIDS programs, educational remediation schemes, more prisons and a host of other measures that treat the symptoms and not the underlying causes. It is not in the interest of today's candidate to probe, or to educate.

In a real sense, the New York Henry George School is the successor to the endeavor of Henry George's mayoral candidacy. It is uniquely placed to carry out that function in the unbiased, non-political atmosphere of the classroom. If we do our work with proper concentration and consistency it should lay a groundwork of favorable disposition to real reform among the people.

A cadre of well-trained adherents to Henry George's philosophy is essential to its propagation, whatever medium is used to transmit them. Accordingly, great emphasis is being placed at the school on a thorough program of classroom study covering George's major works. The program, *Principles of Political Economy*, is structured as a 30-week study presented in three independent 10-week segments. *Fundamental Economics*, based on *Progress and Poverty*, is part one and is prerequisite for parts two and three. *Applied Economics* is based on *Protection or Free Trade* and *Social Problems*, and *Economic Science* is based on *The Science of Political Economy*.

This basic direction is by no means the only path to follow in our endeavor to educate and inform. Other classes, lectures, seminars, workshops, films and videos can all be employed. Speakers and instructors can address audiences on areas outside of our specialty, as well. Many people respond more readily to programs that deal with specific issues. Topics with broad general appeal, such as the stock market, U.S. foreign policy, income tax, banking, writing, and logical thinking should attract a more varied audience to the school.

Reorganization and promotion of the Henry George Research Library also promises to be of great value in attracting scholars and students. With our convenient location off Park Avenue South, a variety of Georgist and other programs, and our unique tuition-free policy, we expect the school to become identified as a center for economic studies. Here can be found a variety of stimulating educational experiences on topical subjects as well as long-term remedies for social problems.

Perhaps then another candidate for mayor of New York will be bold enough to say, as Henry George did in 1886, "There is one great fact that stares in the face of anyone who chooses to look at it. That fact is that the vast majority of men and women and children in New York have no legal right to live here at all. Most of us—ninety nine per cent at the least—must pay the other one per cent by the week or month or quarter for the privilege of staying here and working like slaves. . . But what do we propose to do about it? We propose, in the first place. . . to make the buildings cheaper by taking the tax off buildings. We propose to put that tax on land exclusive of improvements. . . In that way we propose to drive out the dog in the manger."

—George L. Collins

ANNOUNCEMENT: *The New York Henry George School invites its friends and students to attend the FALL TERM GRADUATION & HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES at the School on Friday, December 8th beginning 7:30 PM.*

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