

Flying in, over transparent waters, and lush green hills, one notices very few paved roads. I saw one main highway, which amounted to a two-lane blacktop: that was it. My seat-mate on the flight was an American businessman who provided a micro-cosmic look at inter-American trade. He runs a specialty-feather plant in the Dominican Republic; his employees dye, cut, and glue feathers, mainly for costumes in the U.S. Because of the country's infrastructure problems, this type of low-tech industry is representative of those American companies that set up shop here. There are advantages: top pay for a line worker is 75¢ an hour. Safety or pollution regulations? There are none at all. "We supply them with dust masks, but many don't use them," he said. This gentleman, who visits his plant every week or two, used to keep a two-bedroom apartment in Santo Domingo for about \$60 a month, but he gave it up, and now stays at hotels. "After a hot, sweaty day in that place," he said, "I wanted to be sure I could have a shower."



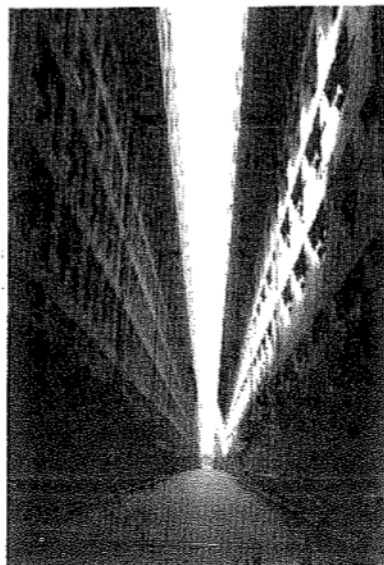
Show up at any beach where tourists gather, and meet the peddlers! At *Juan Dolio* I was offered the following goods and services: Jewelry. T-shirts. Sunglasses. Coconuts. Fresh shellfish. More Jewelry. Leather belts and sunvisors. Carved Dolls. More Jewelry. Fresh mangoes. To have my hair beaded and braided. Still more jewelry. Because there are so many people selling essentially the same goods, persistence must replace personability as a sales technique. But the peddlers I met were not without either charm or ethics, and on the whole rather seemed to enjoy the challenge of their work. There certainly are established protocols. The fresh shellfish guy interrupted the woman trying to sell me her hairstyling. She excused herself, and proceeded to dress the poor fellow down for interrupting. Accepting his error, the man apologized - to her - and went on his way.

## A VISIT TO



Although the quality of its housing is often appallingly poor, Santo Domingo has no homeless people sleeping in its streets. People can find enough lumber to nail together some sort of a shelter, squatting on marginal urban land. Electricity and running water are harder to come by, but the capital city is notorious for its unreliable public services anyway. Even though a considerable amount of repair work has been pushed through in preparation for this year's Columbus anniversary celebrations (and the travel brochures promise that water, electricity and roads are all up to snuff,) Santo Domingo rarely spends a full day without some large-scale power outage.

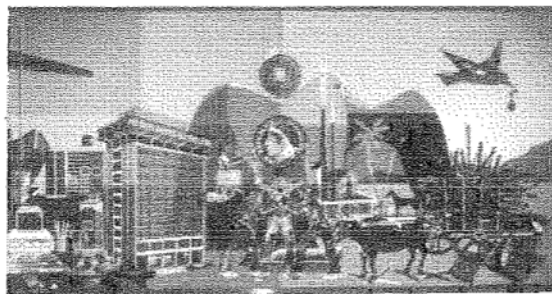
The "Columbus Lighthouse" cost over fifty million dollars; had it been built in a better-paid labor market it would have cost four or five times that. The government of Italy contributed a \$15 million solar-powered lighting array - to ensure that the lighthouse would be a perpetual beacon, without having to depend on the municipal power system. There are no parking lots around the monument. Then again, busloads of foreigners don't require parking lots, just paved strips for buses to unload on, which the monument does have. Apparently the designers do not expect great numbers of local visitors. The "Dominican Tourist Newspaper" notes that the Lighthouse "is in an area well-suited to tourist and recreational uses...right in the center of the *Mirador East Park*, the second-largest park in the city...." Local citizens can be seen using the park. Unfortunately there are no other park facilities, just a stand of evergreens. Many people were resting in the shade of those trees; I guess that qualifies as recreation.



# QUISQUEYA



In the poor *barrios*, hundreds of the knocked-together houses have become local taverns: all that is required to start such an enterprise are some bottles of liquor, some glasses and some stools. Obtaining a liquor license is not a problem. There seems to be a kind of informal, homespun democratic spirit at work in this country. The wealthy live in fortified luxury with their own generators, and drive well-appointed automobiles; but they are very few. The masses of people cram into their rattletrap cars (or ride the crowded, careening buses,) take inexpensive beer and plantains at local stands, and congregate on stoops with the entire neighborhood, listening to music on somebody's boom-box, exchanging news.



Georgists usually expect their conference lodging to be in a rather spartan dormitory. How ironic to find ourselves in an enclave of opulence: a five-star hotel with room service, nightclub, casino, mini-bars in the rooms, and olympic-size pool! It only costs a little more to go first-class - but the fact is that a five-star hotel was the only place we could have been housed in any semblance of comfort. Looking after a sizable group of foreign visitors, and moving them from place to place, is a herculean task. Whenever we rode a yellow schoolbus, an HGS volunteer came along in a car. This allowed a few Georgists to be spared the discomfort of the bus, but the real reason for the car became evident the morning our bus ran out of gas. Silvio was not really surprised when that happened. "Accomplishing a conference, here," he said, shaking his head, "is very precarious."



A military presence is evident in every public facility; including the airport. Uniformed soldiers stand guard at the doors of the cavernous room that houses the customs lines. Everyone (unless they have some sort of official status) waits outside, lining a guardrail for an eighth of a mile, waiting for their people to emerge, one by one, from the guarded doorway. It is difficult for a visitor to determine whether uniformed personnel belong to the army or the police. In any case, guards in fatigues, bearing rifles, also stand guard at the Library, at the Central Bank, and even in the street outside the hotel. Many are quite young. There doesn't appear to be much reaction to these military guards, pro or con - they are just always present.

PRACTICE RANDOM KINDNESS  
AND SENSELESS ACTS OF BEAUTY.



Toward the end of the conference week, Lucy Silfa got a call from the wife of one of her stalwarts, asking when she might be able to see her husband again. The Henry George School of Santo Domingo is fortified by a spirited, patient, dynamic and committed group of volunteers, and although no one is as indefatigable as Doña Lucy, much depends upon their work. Whether it was putting in a backbreaking day receiving incoming Georgists at the airport, running to get fuel for a stranded bus, chasing a last-minute P.A. system, or acquainting the souvenir-shop personnel with Georgist ideas while chauffeuring the visitors about, these folks were always there. It was truly a privilege to meet and work with Lucia Vasquez, Silvio Cabrera, Tirsia Castellanos, Andres Abreu, Ligia Pereyra, Fifi Dominguez, Wilson Diaz, Miladys Carvajal, Annamarina Mendez, and many others.

- Lindy Davies

