

## The Practical Way to Privatize Amtrak

By W. H. PITT (Victoria, Australia)

Lawrence D. Clark's advocacy (in GJ No. 58) of retention of public ownership of Amtrak should be supported, although we need to meld the Georgist thought with Georgist practicality.

If we own the thing, we should maintain - and constantly improve its installation and its buildings while leasing out the operations to individuals or groups at rentals set by the market. A franchise operation, so to speak.

I envisage some one reckoning that additional users would be attracted if a new station were constructed to serve the people of a "new" place of country along the line. That entrepreneur would put a proposal to the local Amtrak authority, suggest an appropriate rental - or percentage - and maybe himself supply the risk capital. Whatever was agreed would leave him with incentives to run the new service efficiently to seek new customers.

Even the track construction and maintenance operations could, with incentives for general improvement, be leased out and the operators of that side of the business might become "the local Amtrak authority" with whom the budding entrepreneur would negotiate.

We see this sort of thing today with coach terminals across our continents, do we not? Are not many of these in buildings where the owners, in effect, charge a site rental to the operators? The owners, of course, really "owe" a site rental to the rest of us for the value of the roads that our government provide to the users.

My belief is that we Georgists have been rather too academic in our past approaches and that a dash or two of commercialism in our propaganda would be mighty useful to our public image. In our commercialism, we who promote the concept of private enterprise in conjunction with social responsibility, have enormous things to offer. We must not be merely starry-eyed about that commercialism - we should take full advantage of it.

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THE PRESS CONFERENCE on housing sponsored by the Center for Public Dialogue (reported in the Autumn Georgist Journal) continued to have repercussions. There were further articles in the press, and Director Walter Rybeck received invitations to participate in a number of important conferences on the subject.

MILLY CLAPP of Mount Vernon, Iowa distributed copies of articles on ecology (including her own) which appeared in the Autumn Georgist Journal to several organizations and leaders, especially those in the ecology movement.

PREC (Public Revenue Education Council) distributed an impressive annual report for 1988. We are glad to hear that its Executive Secretary, Stan Frederiksen, is recovering satisfactorily from heart surgery.

T. A. ENDE had a letter in The Finsbury Parker (North London) pointing out that while typewriters have increased in price by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times in 25 years, house prices have increased by 6 times in 15 years. "Henry George propounded the enigma of our times: that manufacturing processes cheapen all the time, yet poverty marches with progress. The House of Commons is completely blind to the remedy he offered and has bequeathed to posterity a shocking burden of debt."