

Profile: John Daniels

This is the first in a series of features, introducing personalities active in the Henry George Schools. This profile was written by Louise Pulini from an interview taped by Richard Biddle at the School in Philadelphia.

John (Jack) Daniels, Deputy Commissioner of the Dept. of Streets, part of the Public Works Program in Camden, New Jersey, took a course in *Progress and Poverty* three years ago, and is now one of the most active members of the school in Philadelphia, also the birthplace of Henry George.

Daniels was born in 1939, on May 29th, "the same day as John Kennedy and John Wayne." He lived in Akron, Ohio until he was two, and then moved to Camden, to live with his aunt and uncle, when he was orphaned. His uncle, now in his 80's, is halfway through *Progress and Poverty*, and Daniels says he is enjoying it, as it explains why the present system is so corrupt. Fifteen years in the Air Force took Daniels to many places, but his most provocative assignment was at Andrews Air Force Base, where he was part of the team that transported the President, members of the Cabinet, and other government officials, during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

Daniels soon learned that "five per cent of the people in this country control ninety-five per cent of the wealth," and was dismayed by the "laziness and greed" he saw in Washington and elsewhere. He saw too many "robots" and not enough "thinking people." He decided to strengthen his own study skills, by answering an ad in a Philadelphia newspaper, and thus began his association with the Henry George School. He reflects that his class had only four people in it, but now he is pleased to see classes of twenty or more, and reports that the school is "bursting at the seams," as more people are discovering the relevance and currency of Henry George.

"Had Henry George lived through his second mayoralty campaign, and had he been elected Mayor of New York City, would (New York City) be in the shape it is in today?", Daniels asks. He worries that "there is no practical application of George's single-tax ideas." Although he applauds the efforts of those in Arden, Delaware, and Fairhope, Alabama, he feels that these people are too isolated from other surrounding communities.

He cautions against "losing the advantage of good ideas," if the lines of communication between Georgist organizations are not kept open. Participation in school activities, such as films and lectures is encouraged, so that "new voices can be heard." Daniels reported on his experiences at the Centennial Convention in San Francisco in August, 1979, when he spoke at a recent day-long program, held at the school, in Philadelphia. He was impressed by the large group of intelligent, informed people, who freely traded ideas, and presented their plans of action, both political, and educational.

Daniels feels that land value taxation methods that George advocated would only serve to benefit urban

areas like Camden, which is changing from a primarily industrial city, with isolated ghettos, to one where low-income housing is being integrated into commercial areas; an example being a development built in the shadow of the Campbell's Soup plant, only blocks away from Center City. A gentrification process, still in its infancy, is bringing new residents into the city. This rebuilding will require a greater need for municipal services, which calls for strengthening of the tax base. A land tax increase, rather than a wage tax increase, would be to the advantage of taxpayers, whose property taxes have not been raised in seven years.

When asked about some of the people he has met or been influenced by, Daniels singled out John Kennedy, whom he found "inquisitive, never afraid to ask questions; he always wanted to know what was going on around him." He described Lyndon Johnson as "competent." He also feels that George and Geneva Collins, of the school in Philadelphia, have been responsible for keeping his interest in the school alive, as they are both "charming and enthusiastic."

Daniels finds that people are interested in his reactions to Henry George in terms of racism, as George's mother was pro-slavery. Daniels remarks that George voiced his opposition to slavery as a young man, but never imposed his opinions upon his parents, by forcing them to see his point of view. Above all, Daniels is most impressed by the "poetic justice" of George's views, as well as interpreters of George; Wylie Young, foremost among them, whose book, *Antidote for Madness*, he calls, "Henry George simplified."

As for the future of the Georgist movement, Daniels would like to see the physical expansion of the George birthplace and school in Philadelphia, and exposure of more students, including his own daughter, to *Progress and Poverty*, and the vision of Henry George.

Director

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Protecting the homeowner is of paramount political purposes, but homeowners of different and even the same jurisdictions bear tax burdens with no relation to each other, to economic and political reality, property value, or ability to pay. A better way to protect the homeowner besides classification, would be an outright homestead exemption, depending on how generous the legislature wants to be with which class of homeowner taxpayer.

Assessing land at full-value is the key to both tax relief and tax reform for both city and state. It is the key to equity, with valuable central locations paying the most, and residential neighborhoods paying least; with slumlords penalized for milking bad buildings on good land, and investors rewarded by not taxing their new improvements.