

## Trip to Eastern Europe to Promote Land Value Taxation

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As a result of a suggestion from Jeff Smith and funding from the Robert Schalkenbach foundation, I traveled through Eastern Europe from April 22 to May 31, promoting land value taxation. I visited Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and East Germany. My contacts were primarily with environmental activists and members of Green parties, except in Hungary, where Charles Ravasz put me in touch with members of a Georgist fellowship of long standing.

The contacts with environmentalists were a consequence of Jeff Smith's work as an environmental activist. It was expected that environmentalists would be particularly receptive to the idea that the earth belongs inherently to everyone. And indeed, when I expressed this idea I encountered a response of "of course" 60 or 70 per cent of the time. But there were others whose response was that such a notion seemed too much like the communism they were trying to shed.

While I talked to only a few people in each country, the flavor of the responses differed noticeably from one country to another. The people I talked with in Czechoslovakia and Hungary were the most responsive to the ideas I offered. I am planning to return to Czechoslovakia and Romania in July, and to Czechoslovakia and Poland in October. I have planted seeds, and now they deserve some cultivation. In what follows I give a brief sketch of my activities in each country that I visited.

Bulgaria: My first contact in Bulgaria was Lyubomir Ivanov, a professor of mathematics at Sofia University and the principal organizer of the Green Party there. I also had conversations with Lozan Temelkov, a systems control engineer, Ivan Karamihailov, a computer specialist, and two economists whose

names did not get into my records. While these persons had some interest in my ideas about economic justice, they were more interested in what I had to say about the economics of pollution control. As I had worked on that topic, I was able to offer them ideas that they found very interesting. I have agreed to provide them with answers to further specific questions in this area.

Poland: My principal contact in Poland was Zygmund Fura, the person who persuaded Jeff Smith to make the trip to Eastern Europe. In Poland I traveled first to the mountain resort community of Szklarska Poreba, where Greens from a number of countries were gathering to hammer out a policy statement for a European conference. But before the conference started, Zygmund arranged for me to give a lecture at the Academy of Economics in Jelenia Gora.

At the conference, English was the language in which the participants communicated, and I was the only native speaker of English. Thus I was able to help the group find the words in which to express their ideas. At the conference I met Leopold Tanner, who hosted Jeff and me in Prague, and George and Georgia Pale, who hosted my visit to Bucharest.

After the conference Zygmund and I traveled to Krakow, Zygmund's home town, where we linked up with Jeff Smith. In Krakow, Zygmund arranged for us to give talks, sponsored by Krakow Greens, at a local jazz club. We also had an interesting discussion with the mayor of Krakow, who is a member of the Green party, and with officials at the Economic Academy of Krakow. When we returned to Krakow several weeks later, Jeff and I gave a joint seminar at the Academy. During the later visit I also met Prof. Guy Rysiak, who teaches International Law at the Jagellonian University of Krakow. Prof. Rysiak agreed to co-author a paper I have been working on, that needs input from a

lawyer, on the topic of the just nullification of a nation's debts. He also asked me to return to give a seminar at his University. I hope to do that in October.

Czechoslovakia: In Czechoslovakia, Jeff and I made contact with environmentalists at a meeting of "The Green Circle," a forum in which environmental groups exchange ideas. At the meeting we met Vaclav Klinkera and Jitka Lablerova, who were active in an environmental movement called Brontosaurus, and were kind enough to allow us to use the apartment of Jitka's mother, who was out of town at the time. I provided Vaclav with an economic analysis of rapid transit fares, which are a controversial issue in Prague now.

Two days later Jeff and I linked up with Leopold Tanner, who was very enthusiastic about our visit and invited us into his home. Through Leopold we met Jaroslav Hofer, from Radio Prague, Jaroslav Stoklasa, an economist with the Environmental Commission of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Mikulas Tomin from the Green party, and Rene Lastovka an economist. Leopold and Rene have agreed to publicize lectures I will give in Prague in July, and have asked me to return for a major conference in October. I left Czechoslovakia before Jeff, because he was spending the whole summer in Eastern Europe, while I was there for only 5 ½ weeks.

Hungary: My host in Hungary was Charles Ravasz, who has been very active in the Georgist movement for many years. In the 1950's when he was living in Australia, he edited *The Standard* there. In Hungary there has been a continuing group of Georgists since the early days of this century. In 1920, Budapest adopted a tax on land alone, but subsequent hyperinflation and a lack of reassessment effectively nullified the tax.

Charles arranged for me to meet a group of Hungarian Georgists. For most of them, it was the first time they had seen a non-Hungarian Georgist, so my visit bolstered their spirits. Charles also helped me arrange meetings with two local environmental activists, and with a group of about six government officials concerned with tax policy and the environment. They were enthusiastic about the possibility of substituting a tax on agricultural land for at least part of the current tax on agricultural profits.

Romania: My hostess in Romania, Georgia Pale, was elected while I was there to the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, as a representative of the Green Party. She arranged for me to give a seminar at a technical institute in Ploesti, and George Pale arranged for me to speak with some of his colleagues in the Romanian bureaucracy. They also asked me to return in July, after my talks in Czechoslovakia, when they might provide a forum where, with better advance notice, my talks might be more influential.

East Germany: In East Germany I contacted Gunther Pakenius, an environmental economist in the East German bureaucracy, who put me in touch with Reinfried Musch, another economist, and with members of the Green Party there. I also met with Prof. Hunstock, of the Economics University in East Berlin. While the East Germans expressed some interest in the ideas I offered, they explained that it had been decided that East Germany was to be incorporated into West Germany, with the result that there would be no rethinking of the fundamental constitution of the country.

While there are some in Eastern Europe who desire nothing more than full private ownership of land, I encountered considerably more openness than in U.S. to the idea that land is the heritage of everyone in all generations. Especially in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, I found interest of a degree that

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deserves further cultivation.