Long Island Georgist

VOLUME I No. I

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"I ask no one to accept my views. I ask him to think for himself." -- Henry George

FROM OUR EDITORIAL DESK

It seems appropriate in this, the first edition of the Long Island Georgist, to indicate to our readers that its purpose is to convey our message by relating it to the major social and economic issues of the day. We intend to offer critical evaluations of existing problems, suggesting as we do so, possible solutions.

We do not imply, of course, that we have the cure-all for every major dilemma, for no single answer will suffice in a world as complex as ours. No magic wand can be waved, nor can we accept the notion that astute political polemicists can permanently solve the social and economic malfunctions of our society. We do know, however, that before an intelligent solution can be offered to any problem, its fundamental cause must be explored and understood.

With this in mind, we add our small voices to the cacophony of journalism.

FALL CLASS SCHEDULE

All classes for the Fall term in "Economics Unlimited", the basic course, will be offered only in adult education programs throughout Nassau County. The course begins in all nine locations at 8:00 P.M. on the dates noted below. Registration will take place at that time. We hope that you will pass the schedule on to any of your interested friends.

Baldwin High School	Monday, Sept. 15
Bethpage High School	Wednesday, Oct. 1
East Meadow High School	Monday, Sept. 15
East Rockaway High School	Wednesday, Sept. 17
Lynbrook High School	Thursday, Sept. 18
Oceanside High School	Monday, Sept. 15
Plainview-Old Bethpage Jr. High	Thursday, Oct. 2
Rockville Center High School	Tuesday, Sept. 16
Syosset High School	Monday, Sept. 22

Of particular interest to teachers may be the fact that several teachers taking our course have received in-service credit.

C O N T E N T S

The LONG ISLAND GEORGIST is published quarterly by the L.I. Extension of the Henry George School of Social Science. Comments from our readers are welcome and will be included in future editions. Please address all mail to:

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On April 1, 1855, Henry George, cabin boy, sailed aboard the S.S. Hindoo, bound for Melbourne, Australia, and Calcutta, India. A year later, he wrote in the diary he scrupulously kept: "One year has passed since the Sunday when I took farewell of my friends--to me an eventful year; one that will have a great influence in determining my position in life; perhaps more so than I can at present see." Australia had turned out to be something less than a promised land for a man who was poor. Fabled Calcutta was a festering sore that fed on the squalor and misery of its people. Of the passage itself he wrote, "Oh, that I had it to do over again!"

It had been his father's hope that the year the boy was to spend at sea would satisfy his wanderlust, and that he would then content himself at home and settle down. But it didn't work that way. After little more than a year of apprenticeship as a typesetter, an occupation which, incidentally, contributed greatly to his storehouse of knowledge and heightened his appreciation of the written word, George set out once again to learn for himself the ways of the world. This time his destination was California, to follow from there the trail of the gold miners seeking their fortune in British Columbia.

George applied for employment on the U.S. Lighthouse Steamer Shubrick and was, to his delight, accepted as a Ship's steward, though he had to sign on for a year's service and not for the voyage to California alone. The ship touched at St. Thomas, Barbados, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janiero, then through the Straits of Magellan, and up the Pacific Coast, stopping at Valdivia, Valparaiso, Panama, and San Diego. On the 27th of May, 1858, the Shubrick anchored at San Francisco. From there, George worked his way as a seaman to Victoria, British Columbia, only to find that where he sought gold, nothing but mixtures of metals of little value could be found, and he returned, penniless, in despair, and with no prospect of employment, to San Francisco. He was then 19.

Two restless, unsettled years followed, years in which George often wondered if he should make the sea his calling. By chance, he had run into an old friend, David Bond, on

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MEET HENRY GEORGE

The Making of the Man

The early life of Henry George is a tale of adventure; the story of a young man's search for knowledge, truth, and his own destiny. The quest was a fruitful one, for in giving him purpose and insight into human qualities, it molded the man he was to become.

Born September 21, 1839 in a little brick house that stood in the heart of Philadelphia, Henry George soon had a nodding acquaintance with hardship. His father's venture into the book publishing business had been profitable, but only for a time. When it failed, the elder George returned to his former position of Custom House clerk. His yearly salary of $800 yielded little more than the barest of necessities for his family of 12.

At the age of 14, Henry George, prompted perhaps by a desire to ease the burden his father carried, dropped out of school and went to work, first as an errand boy in a crockery importing firm, then doing clerical work in the office of a marine adjuster. But even though the boy's formal schooling had ended, his real education suffered no interruption. Being of a naturally inquiring mind, he found interest in many subjects and read voraciously, supplementing his reading by attending scientific lectures regularly at the Franklin Institute. Here was the start of a lifelong habit of constantly amassing information and subjecting it to interpretation.

While not yet 16, Henry George left the shelter--and restrictions--of his home for the rigors of a seaman's life. His grandfather had been a ship's captain, and the boy had heard many tales of the wonder of the sea and the fascination of the exotic lands that lay beyond it. As a child, his favorite playground had been the wharf, where he had often climbed aboard the vessels that were docked there and befriended the sailors who manned them. All that he had heard and read stirred his imagination. And now, performing his humdrum duties in the marine adjuster's office, he yearned for the open sea.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

The Anti-rent Riots

One who lives by the soil is in a better position to comprehend the importance of land than one who earns a livelihood commercially or industrially. The farmer's rent (in the economic sense, not common usage) can be readily ascertained because the total produce is apparent and easily computable. Why, then, in eastern New York alone, did acts of violence occur between landlords and tenants during the years from 1839 to 1845?

New York was settled originally by the Dutch, and their influence caused the land history to develop differently from that in other colonies. As the patroonship evolved over several decades, parts of the manors in New York were being sold to small farmers. It was these manors, encompassing thousands of acres, mainly along the Hudson River, that contained the remnants of feudal Europe.

A system of leasing which had existed since the middle of the 17th century allowed a freeholder to buy land from the lord of the manor with a small down payment. The rental consisted of 10 to 20 bushels of wheat per hundred acres, or approximately ten percent of the yearly produce. In addition, the farmer contributed annually four fat hens (a feudal custom) and one day's service. At the time of sale of the property, one-third to one-quarter of the proceeds went to the landlord.

After the death of Stephen Van Rensselaer in 1839, a significant change occured on the Rensselaerswyck manor, which was the largest of its kind in the state. The sons, unlike their benevolent and charitable father, demanded of the freeholders that all obligations, including the payment of back rent, be adhered to. Armed conflicts soon raged all through Albany County and the Mohawk and Delaware valleys as a result of the fact that farmers had ignored writs of ejection based on their refusal to pay the rent. Local authorities attempted to enforce the writs, but were resisted by the farmers, sometimes disguised as Indians. Governor Seward also felt compelled to back up the law enforcement agencies although he favored the freeholders.

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ESSAYS ON THE GEORGIST PHILOSOPHY

How Sacred is Property?

A relevant philosophy is one that is applicable to yesterday, today, and will still be so tomorrow. It is not, therefore, reason enough to advocate the acceptance of a premise simply because it is a part of the past. Although we respect the philosophy of Henry George, it must still meet the criteria of timeliness and relevancy.

George, for example, had some poignant comments on the subject of "property", and we can follow his trend of thought in the following passage:

"What constitutes the rightful basis of property? What is it that enables a man justly to say of a thing, "It is mine!" From what springs the sentiment which acknowledges his exclusive right as against all the world? Is it not, primarily, the right of a man to himself, to the use of his own powers, to the enjoyment of the fruits of his own exertions? Is it not the individual right, which springs from and is testified to by the natural facts of an individual's organization--the fact that each particular pair of hands obey a particular brain and are related to a particular stomach; the fact that each man is a definite, coherent, independent whole--which alone justifies individual ownership? As a man belongs to himself, so his labor when put in concrete form belongs to him."

Stated simply, Henry George believed that the basis of property is labor, and that the laborer is entitled to the full fruits of his efforts--an idea that, being as applicable in the spage age as it was in the days of the colonial settler, has withstood the test of time.

Actually, George was not original in this labor theory of property. Two centuries before, John Locke, one of England's great political philosophers, stated the same theme: "The labor of a man's body and the work of his hands we may say are properly his. Whatsoever he removes out of the state that nature has provided and left it in, he has mixed his labor with and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby made it his property."

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TALKING ABOUT TAXES

Assessments

When a person receives a tax bill on his home, he may wonder how the amount was determined. Most of us never check with the assessor's office, assuming that no information would be forthcoming, that no mistakes have been made and that, even if there were, we would have no choice but to pay. So, we say, why bother? And yet, as concerned citizens-and taxpayers--we should know enough about assessments to enable us to decide if we are being given a fair shake and accorded our rights in this regard.

First, what is an assessment? An assessment is an evaluation of a piece of property for tax purposes. to determine the tax rate that will apply to all property, the assessing department divides the yearly budget by the assessed valuation of all the property in its assigned area. For example, if the budget is $1 million, and the assessed valuation of the property is $10 million, the tax rate is fixed at 10%.

To complicate what should be a simple matter, assessments are seldom made at full value, but at some fraction thereof--a half, a third, a fifth, or what-have-you. In Nassau County, the percentage is 1/3; in parts of Suffolk, it's 1/5. The purpose behind the use of fractions? None, really. For if the assessed valuation of all property is divided by 3, the tax rate must be multiplied by 3 to net the same revenue.

The fractional value of the piece of property having been determined, the tax rate is then applied. If a home is assessed at $5,000, its owner will pay $500 in taxes; if it is assessed at $10,000, he will pay $1000, etc.

According to the laws of our State, all property must be assessed equally. This means the land and the building that stands on it, since both are considered "property" in the eyes of the law. As Georgists, we would naturally like to see all taxes placed on the land, and none on the building. But knowing that a change of this

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Vietnam Ad Infinitum

Thousands upon thousands of Americans have died in the rice fields of Vietnam, and the dollar costs have soared well into the tens of billions. In addition, few can doubt the impact that this horrendous conflict has had upon the fabric of our society. Although time has a way of healing, life will never again be the same, for too many side-effects have been unleashed. To look ahead is a pre-requisite for stability, but, in the process, we ought not to deny past mistakes. Otherwise, the forward look will merely represent an inversion of the past.

Militarism will not bring permanent peace to this embattled nation, say many of our national leaders, only a political settlement can. But alas, does "political" include real economic advances? Have we not too often depended upon military or political solutions and failed to recognize the vitality and importance of the economic aspects? And how can economic improvements take place unless cognizance is taken of an equitable land reform program?

Until the middle of last year, the United States government had allocated approximately 21 million dollars toward land reform in general, in Vietnam. This amount covered the entire period since the evacuation of the French in 1954. Not to underplay this sum, it is still infinitesimal in the light of the cost of our involvement and the immensity of the problem. From Dien Bien Phu until 1960, about 12 millions were spent. From 1961 to 1965 no financial or technical assistance was allocated toward any type of land reform, and the only land advisor that we had there was withdrawn.

Since that period until recently, the balance of 9 million dollars was expended. This paucity of effort represents a lack of knowledge and a shallowness of understanding in our country concerning the paramount importance that land plays in the economy, whether it be in an industrial or an agricultural society. We are paying dearly for this ignorance as witnessed by our major foreign policy decisions in Vietnam.

However, the views expressed by the Director of the Agency for International Development suggest a possible shift in policy:

"We are much more sensitive today to the importance of land tenure matters, much more so than any of us, Americans and Vietnamese alike, were 15 years ago. We have learned. There are many things that one might have done in years gone by had we had the perception we now have."

Let us look forward and back at the same time. A land reform program is the single most sensible answer to South Vietnam's dilemma. Mere words will not hasten true peace here. That can only be accomplished by an equitable land reform program, and not one enmeshed in presenting only a facade of reform. It's been tried in the past, and it has failed.

According to the laws of the South Vietnamese government, all rice land where the owner had more than 247 acres was to be appropriated. This has proven to be an unrealistic figure in light of the land reform programs in Japan, with a maximum of 7 acres; in Taiwan, with a maximum of 10 acres; and in South Korea, with a maximum of 7 acres. These countries have had successful land reform programs. In Vietnam, even with respect to the rents that a landlord could charge, there has been negligence and non-compliance. Although the maximum is 25%, many peasants pay from 30 to 60 percent in rents.

Unless the Vietnamese government in the South, with the strong assistance of the United States, achieves an equitable land reform program, no pacification program can succeed. Its people will continue to have little loyalty or allegiance to a government that supports landlords at their expense. According to the reknown Stamford Research Institute, which has a background in this field, land reform is of major importance to the peasants, second only to security. The sooner action is finalized on this problem, the sooner permanent peace can reign in their country.

MEET HENRY GEORGE (cont. from page 4)

the streets of San Francisco, and with his help found work setting type in a printer's office. For a time, it seemed his troubles had ended. In writing home, he spoke optimistically of the future, telling of the "first rate living" he enjoyed on his salary of $16 a week. His optimism, however, was short-lived. Printers were undergoing hard times, and he was soon let go.

Next, George took a job as a weigher in a rice mill, the uninspiring monotony of which left his mind free to wander once again to the lure of gold, with only his good intentions keeping him steadily at work. When the mill closed, he started off almost at once in the direction of California's mining area, a destination he never reached. With virtually no money, on foot, working at labors beyond his physical capacity in order to keep alive, George made his way some distance, then turned back. Were it not for another chance meeting with David Bond, and an opportunity to work as a compositor on the weekly "Home Journal", he would probably have shipped out to sea again. As it was, the thought of a career at sea left him at this point, to return no more. Henry George had come of age, both chronologically and in spirit; a man to whom poverty and human suffering would never be mere abstractions, but very real indeed.
(to be continued in the next issue of the LIG)

ESSAYS ON THE GEORGIST PHILOSOPHY (cont. from page 6)

When George speaks of the "fruits of man's labor", he doesn't mean part of the fruits or more than a man has earned by his own physical or mental exertions. When local, state, and federal government taxes our income and the products of our labors over thirty percent--an all-time high--then the time is ripe to take stock. If the government owned thirty percent of our mind or body, who would not cry out in protest? And yet, what are our labor and its results if not extensions of our mind and body? To requisition them, even in part, is a retrogressive act--a return to the days of chattel slavery.

The concept of property rights is one long embedded in our history. But unless the true source of property is recognized, and given sanctity, we may well be hurrying along an economic road that leads nowhere.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING (cont. from page 5)

Associations and societies were formed by the tenant farmers, and conventions were held in Berne, New York, which became the unofficial capital of the anti-rent movement. The fierce unrest lost momentum only after several murders had aroused public indignation against the riots.

Because the anti-rent agitation influenced both major political parties, a constitutional convention was called in Berne in 1845. Wearied by years of bickering, the convention acted to correct some of the abuses. The feudal tenures, the inviolate ownership of property, and the twelve-year limit on leases of agricultural land were abolished. Many farmers were dissatisfied with these reforms because they applied to the future, but not to the past. Limited as the laws were in rectifying the powerful land system indigenous to New York, they nevertheless helped to dramatize domination by the aristocratic clique and brought into the open the iniquitous land monopoly in the Empire State.

TALKING ABOUT TAXES (cont. from page 7)

kind would require an amendment to the State Constitution, we realize the difficulty that would be involved. We would, however, be somewhat mollified if assessing authorities would at least carry out the law as it was written. Land is not being assessed at a 1:1 ratio with buildings, but at a 2/5:1 ratio and even less.

The net effect of imposing more taxes on a house that deteriorates with time, and less on the land that constantly rises in value, is that large landowners in Nassau County benefit at the expense of homeowners to the tune of $100,000,000 annually. If, on the other hand, the law were enforced, and land and buildings assessed at a 1:1 ratio, the tax burden of homeowners and business people would become less crushing.

The matter of assessments is an area ripe for the application of Henry George principles. The dissipation of any of the advantages now embodied in land speculation is in the interest of every taxpayer and the community in which he lives.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Another Radio Series

Social and economic problems are examined once again by members of the Henry George School over radio station WVHC (88.7 FM), which emanates from Hofstra University. A previous series was syndicated for national distribution by the National Education Radio Network. The new series begins Friday, September 5th, and will run for three months. The subjects to be covered are:

Inflation
Welfare Programs
Housing Shortage
Property Taxes
Federal Taxes
Government Spending
War on Poverty
Welfare State
Sanctity of Property
Slums and Ghettos
Privilege
Economic Liberty
The Unemployed

The name of the program? "CONVERSATION WITH GEORGISTS"
The time: 8:30 PM.

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