



Newsletter

HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL

February
1976

REPORT ON NEW CLASSES

The New Year brought several changes to the Henry George School, especially in its class promotion. For one thing, a new class announcement was designed, using a newspaper format. This announcement included background information on Henry George, Progress & Poverty, and the School. It attempted to stress the benefits that students could derive from our course in Fundamental Economics. By including relevant and current items of economics news, we emphasized that the course makes what's happening today comprehensible.

The other big change was the decision to charge for all courses. We asked for \$15 from all students payable at the end of the first session. This charge included the copy of Progress & Poverty. Since this book is now priced at \$5 by the Schalkenbach Foundation, the 10 week course itself came out costing \$1 per night. It was hoped that this fee would not be a barrier to serious students.

All classes opened the week of Feb. 15. 35 students enrolled in 5 classes, which were taught by Terry Newland, Wendell Fitzgerald, Leo Baker, Laurie Hodges, Don Rivenes and Bob O'Donnell. The class locations were: 4 in S.F. including 1 at the Delaney St. Foundation; 1 in Berkeley and 1 in Marin. (Two additional classes did not start for lack of students. They were in Orinda and a 2nd class in Marin.) Of the 35 enrolled, 20 completed the course.

These numbers (both enrollees and graduates) are lower than those for previous winter terms when the course was free. On the other hand, we did, as anticipated, reduce the percentage of dropouts, which has helped the morale of both teachers and other students. There also seems to be an increasing sense of value being placed on the course itself, on the ideas, on the book, and on George as a great thinker. I had occasion to visit the Berkeley class (Rivenes) and thought it was one of the best I had ever seen. At Lesson 5 it appeared that not only had every student done all the reading so far, but they had grasped the more subtle parts of George's argument. This was most gratifying. It also helps to know that we did recoup some of the expenses in promoting the classes.

Upon reviewing the Winter term results, the Board decided to go full speed ahead with preparations for a Spring term. We would make slight changes in the announcement, but would keep the \$15 and everything else the same. A better evaluation should then be possible.

SHORT SEMINARS IN GEORGE

January also brought the beginning of a new venture at "one-day education" to reach those who may not be able to study with us for 10 weeks, but who nonetheless might be very interested in George's ideas.

The first seminar was held Saturday January 10 at the lovely upstairs meeting room in the Dawn Horse Book Store on Polk Street in S.F. This seminar was the brainchild of the S.F. Branch Council, who entitled it "The Economics of Abundance" in an attempt to counter some of the Malthusian "small is beautiful" thinking that seems so popular now. Panelists were Mike Trigg, Terry Newland, Joe Husar, and Cathy Covell, with Wendell Fitzgerald as moderator. The turnout was small with only 5-10 people attending.

But the S.F. Council immediately planned a repeat performance, this one on Sunday, Feb. 1 at the S.F. Jewish Community Center. It was called "Economic Justice." The JCC helped us publicize it, and the turnout was better (10-20). At both these seminars persons attended who became very interested in George and came by the office to get more literature or enrolled in a course. The seminars also helped new panelists practice their public-speaking skills.

NEW ADVANCED COURSE

The School offered a new advanced course this term entitled "Microeconomics -- Economics and Public Policy." The 12-week course was structured and taught by Polly Roberts, who is an economics graduate student at UC Berkeley. Using the text "The Economic Way of Thinking" by Paul Heyne, the course's purpose was to give our graduates and teachers an introduction to economics as taught in today's universities, and to show how currently-taught concepts do or do not tie in with George. The Wednesday night class at the School office has proven very popular, with lively (and often heated) discussions!

GEORGISTS AT BICENTENNIAL MEETING

A series of combined TV programs and town meetings entitled "We The People" were held throughout California beginning in January, sponsored by several groups including the League of Women Voters. The first meeting on January 15 dealt with economic problems, and Mark Schwier, Terry Newland and Cathy Covell attended the gathering at the Fireman's Fund Building in S.F. After a panel presentation the microphones were opened, and all speakers were filmed as well. We raised several land-related questions and suggested answers. Our remarks about fundamental economic justice and land ownership seemed to diverge somewhat from the planned topics, which were issues like "Growth vs. no-growth." However, at least some in the audience appreciated the direction of our thought, judging from the number who came over to us afterward. We also distributed literature outside the meeting.

TERRY NEWLAND SPEAKS AT ECOLOGY CENTER

Terry Newland (in case you haven't guessed, that's Terry Agnew with a new Georgist surname!) was invited to speak at the S.F. Ecology Center on Feb. 12 as part of its noontime discussion series. His topic was "Land and the Distribution of Wealth." At the conclusion he was invited to come back again.

TERRY JOINS RADIO PANEL

Terry was the Georgist member of a panel that included a Marxist and a college economics professor on a radio talk show on Sunday Feb. 22 over KJAZ-FM. The topic was "Causes and Remedies for Poverty." Representing the academic viewpoint was Dr. Marion Ross, Economics Dept. Chairman at Mills College, Oakland. It turned out that Dr. Ross was already familiar with Georgist economics, and quite favorable to the idea of taxing rent. She had studied with Dr. Glenn Hoover, who was himself Chairman of that same department at Mills for many years, and who strongly advocated land-value taxation.

POWER & LAND IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

On Sunday, February 29, Bob Colonna spoke in S.F. to a group of School graduates and members about his recent assessment survey of land in Santa Cruz. Colonna found that vacant and low-improvement land were dramatically underassessed compared to homes. He also told us of the political developments connected with his making the survey public. His talk was inspiring as well as educational.

CATHY COVELL JOINS LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PROPERTY TAX STUDY

The League of Women Voters is conducting a 2-year study on the property tax, and Cathy has joined the study group in S.F. The first year will evaluate the tax assuming that assessment practices are perfect; next year will concentrate on assessment reform itself. One of the reforms up for consideration is shifting to land-value taxation; another is the statewide property tax.

DEMONSTRATIONS PLANNED

As February drew to a close, the School was planning several educational demonstrations for March and April, to focus public attention on the land monopoly problem and to interest people in learning more about the Single Tax.

The first demonstration was to be a "Pay Your Rent Day" on March 1 outside S.F.'s City Hall. The literature being written tried to bring out the idea that part of what renters pay their landlords should be turned over to the city as public revenue; and since that is (largely) not being done, we would take our rent directly to City Hall. (We still had to figure out what we would do if they accepted it!)

Cathy Covell, Editor

COLUMNIST WRITES ABOUT DEMONSTRATION

In anticipation of our "Pay Your Rent Day" demonstration, S.F. Examiner columnist Guy Wright (and Mason medal winner) wrote this about the Georgists: (column of 2/27)

"If it ever struck you as a little looney that a man who improved his property is penalized with a tax hike, while the slumlord next door is rewarded with a tax break, you were on the verge of something big.

There is in this country a small but growing band of clear-thinkers who hold that the only sensible tax is a tax on land, just the land.

The single land tax theory is the brain-child of Henry George, an old-time S.F. editor and economist who has never received due recognition in his home town.

Georgist economics embodies more sophisticated thought than I can squeeze into one column -- I spent a whole year studying it in college. But to get a hook on it, keep asking yourself about the tax inequity between that slumlord and his improvement-minded neighbor and you will begin to see that correction lies in taxing both just for the ground their buildings sit on.

If the puzzle intrigues you, you might want to be present at noon Monday when Henry George's disciples will march from the Public Library to City Hall, where they will ask the city fathers to accept their "ground rent" as a breakthrough to sanity in taxation.

This affair isn't likely to get much media coverage. For one thing, no blood will flow. For another, it takes diligent skullboning to dig the Georgist concept. But it makes more sense than anything you have ever heard any politician say on the subject of tax reform."

IN MEMORY OF CARL FRECH

We are very sorry to report the sudden death of Carl Frech on February 15. Carl was on our Board of Directors and had been an active member and teacher in the School. He first took the P&P course from Ray Bergman in Concord in 1970, and from then became active organizing classes and seminars in the Mt. Diablo area, and serving for many years as President of our Mt. Diablo Branch.

Carl worked as a property tax appraiser in the Contra Costa County assessor's office. We very much valued his expertise in the field of property taxes, and his advocacy of land-value taxation carried consequently much weight. He read constantly to keep up in his field and frequently sent literature to our office as well. I like to remember him sitting at many a meeting of the Board (his seat was always right by the bookcase) smoking his pipe and reading "Land Value Rating in New Zealand" when the proceedings bored him. At the meeting's end he would fold down the chapter and return the book to the shelf, only to come back next month and pick up where he had left off! I think he got through the whole book that way!

We'll miss Carl at our future meetings and activities, and we extend sympathy to his wife Maria. We will carry on the educational work where Carl left off.

Editor's note: The following letters conclude the printing of responses to Cathy Covell's April, 1975 editorial, "Land Speculation by Georgists?" We thank all of you who took time to send in your views on this important subject. And special thanks to Harlan Trotter and Murray Davis, whose poetic efforts appropriately close this series.

Dear Cathy: Should Georgists speculate on land? Should Georgist institutions accept money from speculators? Do both questions: YES.

I have been a real estate broker for 20 years, and have brokered my share of land to and for speculators. I try to get a speculator to be a developer, but it seldom works.

For every tract of land that I brokered to or for a speculator, part of the commission was applied to a Georgist project.

One of the people who attended the recent IEAF meeting asked me if I had taken advantage of the astronomically high prices that could be gotten for land in Alameda County as a result of the Missile Space boom. I did to a minor degree, but not to the degree that I wish because I was unable to fully utilize the following truism made to me by the wife of a former local Chamber of Commerce manager: (1) Get to the area first, (2) Have money when nobody else has it, particularly the local townspeople, (3) Have a sixth sense of direction where the land value will rise, and (4) Have the courage to take the plunge.

A very good friend of mine who got his college education very late in life, came to Melbourne the same time I did -- 1947, with a few hundred dollars from carpentry work. He stayed here a few months, and then went to Ohio, where with a scholarship, he got a degree; went to Wyoming and holed up in a \$25 per month shack (Wyoming winters are cold) and wrote a book with a small subsidy. He came back here in 1974, hoping to get a teaching job, and hoping to build a house. He found that land he could have bought for \$100 per acre in 1947, was now \$4500 per acre. He would not speculate in 1947. If he had, he could have had a large tract for his house, which as a carpenter he would have built reasonably in 1974 -- and teach psychology, his specialty. He took his wife to Arkansas, bought land for less than \$500, is building his house and teaching there in a community college.

Sidney Evans speculated in California land -- and DRE and IEAF are now funded as a result. While John Lincoln's fortune came initially from the patents and development therefrom in his Cleveland electrical company, Lincoln was also a speculator in Arizona land -- and the Henry George Schools have derived benefit therefrom.

I have worked in marketing Georgism for 45 years. Whatever modest speculating I have done or commissions derived from brokering speculative lands has helped me send contributions to Georgist organizations.

William W. Newcomb

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Dear Ms. Covell: I just finished reading your recent editorial in the NEWSLETTER, and found myself diametrically opposed to almost everything you said except the invitation to respond.

My father was a Realtor and always told me that real estate (land) was the best investment possible. As a result, I have bought and sold many properties during my lifetime, without exception, have profited, ergo, I fall into the classification which you condemn to exile the Henry George Movement.

Just as I refuse to accept "Guilt" for being born in the U. S. rather than, say, India, I refuse to be held responsible for the prevailing political-economic system which has evolved in the U. S. You can't blame the individual investor for something that is considered to be perfectly legitimate by our society, any more than you can blame an individual cannibal for cannibalism -- he was brought up to believe this was the proper thing to do.

Although I have only recently been converted to "Georgism," I take a back seat to no one in my evangelistic zeal of the movement. I see nothing wrong with Georgists using profits from real estate, which everyone else is making, to further the single tax idea.

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Further, I disagree with your terminology "making land common property." I don't disagree with what you say, because I know how it is proposed to be done, but to the uninitiated, this means confiscation of the land and the overthrow of the system of land ownership. This may appeal to a small radical segment, but the majority of "solid citizens," who, if they understood single tax, would be all for it, are immediately turned off. As you well know, since Georges' day, many words and phrases have been adopted and bastardized by extremists of all persuasion, and, "making land common property" is very disquieting to the uninitiated homeowner.

It seems to me that our only chance to get single tax adopted is to gain the support of as many people as possible from all walks of life. Why alienate anyone when all you are sacrificing is some pet terminology?

If there is any one thing that I, as a relatively new Georgist, can see to criticize about the movement, it is the seemingly strong tendency toward factionalizing and bickering internally, which can only sap the energies which should be being used for evangelizing. I say, since seemingly most of us are intelligent, let's unite to spread the ideals of the single tax to as many people as possible, for the final analysis, this is our hope and further, the only hope of the world.

Henry George himself said in Progress and Poverty, Book VIII, Chapter 4, page 429, last paragraph, quote, "But if once the truth which I am trying to make clear is understood by the masses, it is easy to see how a union of political forces strong enough to carry it into practice becomes possible."

Yours truly,
Don Gooden

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Dear Friends, Enclosed is a check for my yearly School membership. I sincerely hope the School will adhere to its original purpose of a political educating in the field of economics, with primary emphasis on the philosophy of Henry George.

As a gratuitous comment to Cathy Covell's article - I am a land speculator in a very small way and would be in a larger way if opportunity presented. This in no way interferes with my belief and conviction of the rightness of land value taxation nor my efforts, however small, to further the understanding and adoption of it.

Idealism is a wonderful concept and certainly much needed as a goal toward which to strive. On the way there, though, (perhaps just to help pay the bills of the real world) let us in the Georgist movement not reject assistance without strings from whatever source offered be it from horrid land speculators, craven slum landlords, heartless corporations, dear little old ladies or honest merchants.

Of course if the tainted offering enclosed will cause any pangs of conscience in acceptance please feel free to return the check.

Best Wishes,
F. J. Stevenson

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It seems to me there are really two issues involved in your editorial -- (1) Should Georgists engage in land speculation? (2) Should the School accept money from speculators? -- and I'd like to answer each separately.

The idea that Georgists are justified in engaging in land speculation while preaching its abolition is the kind of thoughtless amorality that gets us into Vietnams, CIA assassinations, and Nixon presidencies. Hypocrisy is hypocrisy, no matter how "practical" it may be. If Henry George had been "practical" he might have ended up like J.P. Morgan, and there never would have been a Progress and Poverty -- and no need to worry about a carpet for the family's living room while the work was in progress. As has been pointed out time out of mind, as the golden rule has (another much-ignored truth that always works where it's tried) -- you cannot serve two masters. No one with any experiential wisdom, George included, ever claimed that the truth should make the rich, and the idea that land speculation is essential to the acquisition of power is shockingly cynical coming from the mind of a Georgist. Jesus was not rich, Abraham Lincoln was not rich. Tom Paine was not rich. Henry George was not rich. Furthermore, it's not necessary to speculate in land to become rich. What the Georgist movement needs most is not wealth anyway, but dedication, unity, courage, and integrity. Are a band of faithful volunteers less valuable, in any sense, than a salaried staff? Hardly.

The people of this country are not primarily stupid and selfish and contactable only on those levels by a patronizing intellectual elite who have "the people's best interests at heart," and who approach them from positions of power. The latest polls have shown that the majority of Americans are suspicious of power, and are willing to give up even more of their hard-earned wealth if it will bring order into the present confusion and result in a better quality of life, not only for themselves but for the world. To me,

this is not gullible, naive, and impractical -- It's the attitude of mind that lies behind all real progress in civilization, and is more respectable and noble than an attitude of "Well, if I can gain power by immoral (even if legal) means, then I can use that power for good." How naive. How many little Caesars in the history of world have gone down that same gilded path, and dissipated their integrity and true usefulness on the way. "He who is faithful in little things will also be faithful in greater things." The idea that it's O.K. to do "little wrongs" is what perpetuates the mediocrity of "little people." We should all accept our imperfections without burdening ourselves with guilt over them, but that doesn't mean that we can legitimately condone them, much less deliberately perpetuate them. Failure to make steady improvement in our characters is ultimately debilitating and destructive of our potential happiness and usefulness to our fellow men. We cannot have our cake and eat it too. We cannot be Georgists and truly feel right about robbing people of the results of their labor in order to show them that they're being robbed.

If everyone had the attitude, "I'll be moral when everyone else is," we might just as well push the little red button and get it over with, because our civilization would certainly never get anywhere. It would be like putting a "freeze," not on wages and prices, but on virtue and idealism. Idealism without wisdom is often destructive, of course, but sacrificing idealism to acquire power is far from wise.

Common sense dictates that you do things because they're right, not because they're legal, and you refrain from doing things because they're wrong, not because there is or isn't a law against them. Those who think land speculation is compatible with Georgism are missing the spirit of true reform, and are therefore, naturally, blind to the power of the truth, and think all power comes from money. Let these people speculate if they must, but they shouldn't expect to be trusted as well. If the true Georgist is to take speculative risks, let him speculate on the ultimate power of the truth, rather than on land values. He may not die rich that way, but he will die real.

As for question 2 -- sure, let the School accept money from speculators, but not solicit it, and not become dependent upon it, or first thing you know the School will be making the same kind of compromises with its principles that its "Georgist," land-speculating patrons are, and then its trustworthiness and usefulness will be seriously endangered by the disease of divided loyalty. If the School intends to condone privilege, it will be powerless to arouse idealism. It must decide which it feels is more important, because it can't do both. On the other hand, it shouldn't presume to pass judgement upon everyone who wants to contribute to it, either.

Sincerely,
Stan Hartman

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Before I forget, let me throw in my couple or four on "accepting" money which has come from land speculation, exploitation or whatever/wherever . . . "

It seems to me that we have the ages-old questions of good/bad, right/wrong, black/white, either/or inherent in the issue; and, the only thing I can think of which suits my feelings is oriental in origin . . . that is, taking the force of another (others) and turning it against them.

If memory serves, in ju-jitsu, one takes the force of an opponent, flows momentarily with it . . . then, redirects that force to suit ones desires, possibly, ones survival.

Put another way, one does not stop an "evil" force . . . with a wall; one bends it (the wise bamboo!) One uses it! And, if ones convictions are in the best interests of the many, as well as the individual, so-called evil forces should be redirected and better used.

My best,
Dean Meredith

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Dear Cathy Covell, I was intrigued with the Newsletter on school policy regarding land speculation in the Henry George School.

This reminds me of a faculty meeting when the Henry George School was at our building at 30 E. 29th St. One group seemed to desire to embarrass the trustees. It was a time when Henry Ford had made a statement in favor of land value taxation. Some people were accusing him of being antisemitic and therefore asked me what would the trustees do if Henry Ford offered us a sum of money. I asked them whether the questioners felt that Ford's money was tainted. They said this was the idea.

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"O.K. If you feel this way but I say his money is tainted because it tain't mine and tain't yours. But if he is willing to contribute it for our educational effort we shall gratefully accept every bit he would give."

This "spoke to the condition" of most of the faculty, as we say in Quaker meeting.

Lanc Green

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"TAINTED MONEY?"

Should School funds that seem sullied be sought
From Land Sharks - who may rue it or not?
 Hasn't history seen
 God was never so mean
As to ask how the money was got!

Harlan Trott

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THE IDEOLOGIES

Like giant tortoises in silent war They strain, immobile as the hour hand,
As big as worlds, whose courses both demand A line determined in a time before.
Conditioned in a sparse and grudging land To live and grow, it is not food they seek
But ugly brides - ascendancy; they speak But inwardly, where egos understand.

Great integrated organisms, blind To any purpose but their own, they go
As fast as armored muscle will allow; Or when they meet impediment, as now,
Their pace falls imperceptible: so slow Do frozen formulations formers bind.

If screaming creeds excite, and close-defined, Unproven precepts agitate the brain,
The trail of man is easy to explain: It is the spoor set by the reckless blind
For men to bleed on, careless of their pain As they are deaf to howling of their kind.
Through thorns, up cliffs, the traces wind And scorn the comforts of the pleasant plain.

An idol made of words directs the way, Its iron finger set for all of time,
Its brazen belly burning hot with hate; On him poor frantic men depends his fate,
And sees in his blind eye all that's sublime - Reflected there, all that the sages say.

The most misshapen body does demand Most praise; and this foul breath, harsh croak,
Need likening to petals all awoke To gentle birdsong where the tall trees stand;
The crassest passion will at first evoke The muses, subtle flattery, logic stern
To mask the smell, hide pit, or cool the burn, And thus deny what, since, its form bespoke.

The phantom seamstress cant can dress Destruction in a gown of gold and snow,
Or make cold cruelty seem instrument Of selfless love and future blessed content;
Beware the creeds that fueled with promise go And blame the past for present pained distress.

Like stealthy perfumes, new ideas assail Our calm and comfort, cause the blood to run
As bright, as hot, as any summer sun, And shake us to an alien rhythm's wail.
But when the fragrances has begun to fall And when essential oils to rancid stink
Return, it's time, within our trance, to blink And shrug, nor any lost romance bewail.

The flesh may be pursued, but his Is vapor only, not of flesh at all,
A mere word-ghost to which no things refer; And if we still persist, pursuing her,
We'll then be answering a soundless call And wasting on a conjured face a slavish kiss.

Murray Davis
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