

Percy Williams

AGGRESSIVE ACTION ESSENTIAL FOR VICTORY

1. Victory is our goal, and despite all obstacles we have encountered, we still believe that victory for Georgism is possible. But we feel that it is only possible through aggressive action.

2. By action we mean any activity to promote the spread of our cause. That is our broad concept of Georgist action.

3. Our movement is essentially of a political nature. In the broader sense, the time is always ripe for political action. Whether the time is yet ripe for any truly great victory is a debatable question.

4. We might as well realize, if we do not already, that we are not now on the road to any quick or easy victory. Obviously because we still lack the strong support that is required to achieve any major social reform.

5. In a democracy such as ours, it may be assumed that on most controversial issues, majority support is necessary to obtain the desired legislation or to defeat undesirable legislative proposals, and consequently opposition or indifference must somehow be overcome if we are to attain success in any issue of fundamental importance.

6. What is the best strategy to adopt in seeking to promote political action? We have no sure answer to this question as yet. Through the years Georgist leaders have tried many approaches and have won some minor victories. But this question is thus far unresolved -- because no particular strategy has as yet met with extraordinary success. Conditions differ in our many states and cities and may require different methods of approach.

7. Georgism is unique in character. There is perhaps no type of social, economic or fiscal reform that presents greater problems or difficulties. Ours is truly a hard nut to crack; hence the need for the strongest possible organized support.

8. From the earliest days, though there has always been at least two schools of thought, a policy of gradualism or partial application has tended to dominate the Georgist movement. And this is still true, perhaps more so than ever, as now exemplified in the property tax reform strategy so strongly stressed. But this is just the latest idea. It logically follows the Pennsylvania Graded Tax plan which has been featured in our propaganda ever since 1913, when the Pittsburgh law was enacted.

9. There are different theories related to the problem of organizing for political action. One reason for geographical concentration is that we are obviously not strong enough, either numerically or financially, to attempt to sweep the whole nation. Another logical reason appears to be a conviction that the most vital need is an actual demonstration of the value of land value taxation in operation somewhere. Concentration has long been advocated and pursued. It began in the United States with the Delaware campaign of 1896 in which Henry George personally participated. Georgists have always been confident that any adequate demonstration would produce such good results as to prove its efficacy and thus vastly increase popular support, and also lessen opposition.

10. There is another theory that may be of equal or even greater validity. This may be recommended especially where there now exist constitutional or legislative obstacles to achieving any local demonstration of a home rule nature. In any such situation, the option exists of simply attempting to enlist public support for the Georgist cause by raising any issue that may lend itself to political campaigning. Many believe that a more radical or fundamental approach is best in the long run, and furthermore that popular support can more readily be enlisted for basic reform than for the more timid approaches employed by many "step-by-steppers." Perhaps the State of California is the best example of the more radical approach that has been pursued in several appeals for a popular vote because the initiative and referendum has long prevailed in that state.

11. But Georgists are not restricted from engaging in political activity anywhere where free elections are available to all qualified citizens. They may, if deemed necessary or desirable, organize or affiliate with an independent political party of their own choosing. In the days of Henry George most Georgists of political persuasion were affiliated with the Democratic party and George himself actively campaigned for several Democratic candidates for President. But during the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, separate Single Tax parties were organized and placed local and national candidates on the ballot. Perhaps the most notable incident was the campaign of the Commonwealth Land Party in 1928 under whose banners William J. Wallace of New Jersey and John C. Lincoln of Ohio were actually nominated for the exalted offices of President and Vice President of the United States, respectively.

12. But it seems obvious that it is neither necessary or desirable to organize or to emply an independent Single Tax Party. In the United States we have two great national parties, Republican and Democratic. Most citizens are affiliated with one or the other, or choose between the two in voting for candidates from time to time. Perhaps the most significant fact is that the open primaries provided by the parties, provide an opportunity for Georgists to help nominate Georgists or sympathizers to the various political offices, or to enter themselves as candidates. As most of us are probably aware, this approach has been employed widely through the years, with the result that at least Georgists have been nominated and frequently elected to positions as Governors, Senators, Congressman, Legislators, Mayors and Councilmen.

13. The actual election of Georgist candidates may be difficult to achieve but nonetheless political campaigning can have great value as an educational exercise, to help popularize Single Tax proposals or ideas. We may continue to be a minority but quite often it will be found that the minority on any issue is more nearly right than the prevailing majority. The one great essential is to promote campaigning in one way or another, and the more aggressive, the better.

- - Percy R. Williams