

1973 School Conference Held in Canada

Departing from its usual format, this year's Henry George School conference, which took place in Toronto July 4th through 7th at Glendon College of York University, was a dual event. Entitled "Conference on the Property Tax," the annual get-together presented not only the customary panel discussions and reports by directors and teachers, but also a seminar series for city and town officials. The seminars, sponsored by Toronto's School of Economic Science, were attended by thirty-two Ontario mayors, aldermen, planners, assessors, and other municipal officers, as well as a federal official, there as an interested observer.

Taking part were a number of academic and professional specialists, whose aim was to reveal to the governmental representatives the benefits of land value taxation. Among the specialists were Ted Gwartney, chief assessor of Hartford; Professor Arthur Becker of the University of Wisconsin, director of economic research of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation; Dean Dick Netzer of New York University; Professor C. Lowell Harriss of Columbia University; Professor Steven Cord of Indiana University; Judge Jim Clarkson of Southfield; Perry Prentice, president of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation; Eli Ophek of the Toronto School, and James Ramsey, director of the Calgary School. Officials and specialists met for two full days, simultaneously with the holding of the regular sessions on Henry George School activities.

The Reports

The School conference began with a session devoted to "Action Reports." The chairman was Arnold A. Weinstein, president of the Henry George School of Social Science in New York, who called upon representatives from various schools and cooperating organizations to tell of the work they were doing.

Malcolm McCarthy, as head of the host school, warmly welcomed those present to the annual gathering, and outlined its general theme. Among other comments, he urged the use of the term "site value

assessment" in place of "land value taxation," because of the frightening effect the word "taxation" frequently creates.

Stanley Rubenstein, director of the Long Island extension (and now acting director of the New York school), reported on the giving of mini-courses in economics classes at the senior high school level; on in-service courses for public school teachers seeking increment credit, and on radio programs he has been conducting on local stations.

Henry Tideman, of Chicago, reported that in addition to holding classes in his area, much valuable promotional work is being accomplished through various organizations, such as the Women's Club (which now admits males!), the Chicago Architects' Committee for Site Value Taxation, the Better Cities Committee of Illinois, and other groups. He also reported on the launching of *The Landmarker*, a quarterly edited by Rosalie Schultz, a Chicago HGS graduate and board member.

Robert Tideman, executive vice-president of the Northern California school, said that there concentration is on educational work, which is considered an end in itself, and reviewed the success realized from the give-and-take method used in the classes. He also reported on TV programs now being prepared.

James Ramsey, of Calgary, spoke of the 10-week and 28-week courses his school conducts, as well as a new 5 or 6-week mini-course now being compiled for high school social studies classes. He said new teachers have been added, that graduates and faculty members participate in organizations and political parties, and that open channels are maintained to people in all fields to promote the school and its work.

V.G. Peterson, secretary of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, discussed a new film to be produced, and spoke of the activities of TRED, an organization whose aim is to acquaint the academic community with land value taxation. She said last year a grant had been made to the University of Missouri, where the Foundation sponsored a conference on LVT under the direction of Professor Harry Gunnison Brown, and also mentioned conferences and round-

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table discussions at the National League of Cities in Washington, reports of which were published. Miss Peterson called attention to Max Ways' article, "Land: the Boom that Really Hurts," in the July *Fortune*; and disclosed that a study is being made of real estate in New York City.

John Nagy, editor of *California Homeowner*, spoke of the work being done through the Statewide Homeowners Association to get a land value taxation proposal on the state ballot.

George Collins, director of the Philadelphia school (located at Henry George's birthplace), told of the 10-week *Progress and Poverty* courses given for high school students, which include illustrative field trips. He also mentioned the special classes the school conducts at the University of Pennsylvania, Villanova, and Arden, Delaware.

Harry Pollard, president of the Los Angeles school, gave an enthusiastic report about the carefully-planned mini-courses being offered in the area's public high schools.

The Panels

The subject of research activities in the promotion of site value assessment was discussed at a panel moderated by John H. Fox, an engineer. Panel members included Eli Ophek, Craig Cringan, Godfrey Orleans, V.G. Peterson, A.R. Hendriks, chairman of the Port Credit Site Value Association, and Harry Wyman, director of a government research department in Buffalo. All presented reports of their personal and organizational work, and Mr. Ophek displayed meticulously prepared charts supporting his findings.

Another panel discussed teaching methods and educational aids in disseminating the principles of land value taxation. The moderator was Earl N. Patton, and the panel consisted of Len A. Swatridge, John Fisher, Tim Fielding, and Ian Evans, all educators in Ontario; also Harry Pollard and Stanley Rubenstein. Various means of instruction, with illustrative materials, were discussed.

Two unscheduled talks were added to the program, both well received by the conferees present. Louis Weitzman, of Massachusetts and Florida, spoke of his developing plans for a Henry George University, which is still in the budding stage, but which already has been granted a charter by the State of Florida. Noah Alper, of St. Louis, then told of the continuing efforts of the Public Revenue Council to publicize and promote economic and social justice through site value assessment.

New methods of assessing land values was the theme of the next panel. R.W. Hewison, of London, served as chairman, and the other participants in the exchange of views were Judge Jim Clarkson and Ted Gwartney. It was an interesting reunion, for when Jim was mayor of Southfield, Ted served as his assessor.

The closing panel was devoted to a review by the conference specialists of their seminar discussions with the Ontarian government officials. Taking part were Professors Arthur Becker, C. Lowell Harriss, and Steven Cord, and Chief Assessor Ted Gwartney, who outlined their discussions with the provincial mayors and other municipal officers. While no one was quoted, and no official pronouncement was implied, it appeared that although there was some acknowledgement of interest in land value taxation, and some understanding of its benefits, present consideration was deemed impractical in view of current urban problems. Apparently the major problem is increasing population and a resulting housing shortage which, it is alleged, can be solved only by public housing projects. The prevalent belief is that land value taxation would bring about redevelopment, urban sprawl, and high-rise building, all of which would cause further density, and create an increased demand for municipal services, which even now it is difficult to provide. However, the specialists felt they had made an impact on the officials, and had opened the door to further discussions with them.

The Social Scene

The mid-day repast on Thursday was a delightful Reeve's Luncheon. (A "reeve," in Canada, is the presiding officer of a village or town council, and generally the mayor's next-in-command.) The guest speaker at the luncheon was Hon. R. Williams, reeve of the Township of Chinguacousy, who was introduced by R. Walkinshaw, O.C.

Following the luncheon, many of the conferees went on a guided bus tour of Toronto and its environs, which included a special side trip to Port Credit, the site selected by Malcolm McCarthy and Eli Ophek for their research survey regarding the reassessment of land values and improvements. Upon returning to Toronto, the conference guests were royally regaled at a wine-and-cheese party, graciously tendered by Mr. & Mrs. Malcolm McCarthy and their Canadian colleagues, who were the hosts of the occasion.

Friday's lunch-time event was a special Mayor's Luncheon, at which the conference visitors were for-

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mally and very hospitably welcomed to the city. Jim Ramsey, acting as toastmaster, introduced the guest speaker, a deputized representative of the mayor.

That evening the out of town guests were cordially invited to visit the homes of various Toronto Georgists, where they enjoyed pleasant dinners and congenial conversation with their north-of-the-border friends. The hours spent "at home," whether with old or new acquaintances, were among the most agreeable experienced during the conference.

On Saturday, the last day of the conference, there was a showing of the widely acclaimed motion picture, "One Way to Better Cities," produced and distributed by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. Following the film presentation, Mal McCarthy projected a series of slides he had designed for use in teaching students the basics of political economy.

The next event on the convention program was the Opportunities Luncheon, at which the guest speaker was Perry Prentice, who was introduced by Robert Tideman. Mr. Prentice's theme was "What Can We Do About It?" He pointed out that, since most competent economists today are pretty well agreed that improvement values should be taxed much less and land values much more, property tax reform is hardly a current issue (even though land speculators try to make the voters think it is).

Mr. Prentice then proposed nine suggestions to follow, to encourage political action on property tax reform: talk less about the tax on land and more about the tax on improvements; take advantage of today's alarm over urban decay by urging immediate tax abatement or exemption for all improvements on existing buildings; help homeowners now clamoring for property tax relief see how many tax dollars they would save if improvements, the larger part of their assessment, were untaxed and the burden shifted to the land, the smaller end of their home assessment; enlist the help of state or local Homeowners Association to show homeowners that only the shifting of property taxes from improvements to land would benefit them tax-wise; do not waste time trying to persuade the state government to make the tax shift obligatory throughout the state; try to identify property tax reform with the self-interest of everyone,

including builders and real estate dealers; don't try to effect the shift faster than the market can adjust to it; urge prompt abolition of the common practice of assessing homes at a higher percentage of their value than acreage or vacant land; and show municipal authorities that land is the only taxable that cannot move away to escape a tax increase. That is why, concluded Mr. Prentice, New York's Deputy City Administrator is loudly proclaiming "It's time to mine the tax treasure underfoot!"

Saturday evening brought the final event on the convention program, the closing banquet. Malcolm McCarthy served as chairman and introduced the speakers of the evening, Reeve Frank Levers and Deputy Reeve Clara McLaughlin, representing the mayor of Port Credit. Both guest speakers were enthusiastic about land value taxation — or site value assessment, to use the term preferred by Canadian Georgists. Most of the discussion was devoted to the Port Credit survey on the reassessment of land and improvement values. It was easy to see that Mal McCarthy and Eli Ophek had made many friends at Port Credit during their intensive research, and had gained strong support for their property tax reform proposals. Mr. McCarthy then introduced Stanley Rubenstein to the assembled banquet guests, referring to him as "my new boss," an allusion to Mr. Rubenstein's recent appointment as acting director of the Henry George School in New York.

Award to Arnold Weinstein

The banquet concluded with the now traditional presentation of a silver tray to an outstanding Georgist for exemplary services during the preceding year. This year's award went to Arnold A. Weinstein, president of the Henry George School of Social Science in New York. The presentation was made by Lancaster M. Greene, vice-president of the school, in behalf of its Board of Trustees. Mr. Weinstein responded with a brief speech of acceptance of the beautiful memento. He then announced that no location had yet been set for next year's conference, but all would be notified when it had been selected.

Thus ended a successful and enjoyable gathering, and the 1973 Conference on the Property Tax, a joint activity of the Henry George Schools of Social Science and the Schools of Economic Science, came to a close.

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Directors and Trustees Meet

It should be noted that not all of the conferees at the Conference on the Property Tax were able to take the bus ride through urban and suburban Toronto. While the tour was in progress, the directors of the various Henry George Schools met with Arnold A. Weinstein, Lancaster M. Greene, and Mitchell S. Lurio, trustees of the Henry George School in New York. Progress reports were given by the directors, and a discussion was had of future plans and prospects.

Coming in HGN

In France they say (in French, of course) that "the more it changes, the more it remains the same." Thus it shall be with the Henry George News. With this issue, new hands commence to wield the blue pencil, so perhaps some slight change in style will become evident. However, there certainly will remain the same basic policy and platform: an effort to present a viewpoint reflecting the philosophy and principles which are the School's *raison d'être*.

HGN will continue to bring its readers "news and views." The news will concern the School and Georgist activities everywhere. The views will interpret the world's happenings in the light of an up-to-date application of George's works. Planned for coming issues are articles about noted Georgist organizations, profiles of eminent Georgists, and in-depth essays by outstanding economists, social students, and educators.

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The Conference: An Editorial

Hopefully the 1973 Conference on the Property Tax, to which most of these columns are devoted, will be more than a pleasant memory. Conferences and conventions (be they commercial or academic) often tend to wind up as primarily social events, but an air of serious purpose seemed to prevail at the Toronto meeting. This in no way is intended to decry the convivial aspects of the program; it's great to gather with friends to dine, and chat, and see the sights. But there should be a more productive conclusion than that "a good time was had by all."

Every so often there comes a time particularly propitious for the spreading of Georgist principles. George's own day was such a time; the depression period of the 1930's was another. While any time is a good time to disseminate "the central truth," can there be any doubt that *today* is especially favorable? The peoples of the world are confused and frightened, worriedly seeking solutions to their economic and social problems. Inflation makes a mockery of money — high prices prevent the satisfaction of even simple desires — mounting land values and rents condemn millions to dwelling in slums — increased taxation takes an ever bigger bite from wages. And with it all, revenue-hungry governments devise new taxes in frantic efforts to stave off bankruptcy.

The point seems very clear. The time is ripe and the soil is fertile. Let the Conference inspire renewed endeavors. Let us take advantage of a unique opportunity.

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