

DREAMS OF COMMON GROUND

by Ed Dodson, Cherry Hill, NJ

As something of a departure from my normal contribution to Groundswell, I want to raise a number of questions for readers to contemplate and hopefully respond to with your own thoughts. When some of us meet this summer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, perhaps these questions and your responses will serve as the basis for a strategic discussion about the future.

Common Ground was created with the hope of building a membership organization with chapters around the United States (and elsewhere, potentially). We were optimistic at the outset, but the original plan has never materialized. Our numbers were even then too few and scattered across the continent. Moreover, the Common Ground membership has never grown to include even the majority of people in the U.S. who look for the writings and ideas of Henry George for philosophical and public policy guidance. Thanks to a few significant bequests and a handful of very engaged people over the years, Common Ground has survived. Our relatively small asset base has been guarded and preserved, channeling some funding in support of the efforts of our activist colleagues. In recent years, the spark that has kept Common Ground functioning has come from our President, Nadine Stoner, who has served with tireless energy and dedication. We can go on as we have, of course - at least for as long as Nadine is willing and able to perform the duties she has graciously undertaken. (cont'd on p. 8)

And, perhaps we will be fortunate when the time comes to have someone else step forward to similarly perform the same responsibilities. After several rather tumultuous years, we have enjoyed a positive period of stability and a spirit of collaboration. These are things upon which to build. If Common Ground is to develop into a force for constructive change, we need to enlarge our membership and expand our reach.

I am the first to admit that I do not have the strategies by which the above objectives can be achieved. I do believe we need to discuss these issues and come to a strategic plan that can be adopted and implemented. A first step, I suggest, is to survey the wider Georgist community to find out from those who have chosen not to become members of Common Ground why and ask them what changes they would want to see occur in order to attract their support.

The social movement Henry George helped to forge is no more. The thousands of "Single-Taxers" who campaigned with George and in the first two decades of the 20th century are gone. We are the remnant. By reaching out and engaging other change agents and activists, the fact that there is still an unresolved "land question" at the core of our socio-political arrangements and institutions continues to be heard. One day there may again be a Georgist-based social movement. Today, thankfully, there is still something of a Georgist community. And, within our community are some truly talented, dedicated people. A major challenge we continue to have is finding the financial resources to support the

work of our activists. And, as has been a topic of recent discussion on the Land-Theory Discussion list, we need to have a serious discussion about what success looks like and to hold ourselves accountable. Ongoing self-examination is a good thing.

Some readers will remember the effort by John Burger to get the Georgist community to focus on what success would look like. John brought us together to evaluate our Mission, our Objectives, our Strategies, and our Tactics - the M.O.S.T. system he used effectively in the private sector. Perhaps in Albuquerque we ought to resurrect John's method of self-evaluation as a tool for helping us plan for the future. What do you think is our Mission, our Objectives, and our Strategies and Tactics for success?

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(Editor's Footnote: Ideas for membership recruitment may also be shared with the Common Ground-USA Exec. Com., c/o NadStoner@aol.com. Dues paid members receive the minutes of the CG-USA annual Board meeting and thus are aware of previous outreach efforts, including discussion meetings on membership, chapter development, our national legislative project, media outreach, revamping our web site (www.progress.org/cg) and fund raising. A session on marketing is planned at this year's meeting of the Board. <<