
Libertarian Outreach successful

by Paul E. Gagnon, Alexandria, VA

The Thomas Paine Caucus, a group of libertarian Georgists formed to provide outreach to libertarians who might be sympathetic to the Georgist movement, hosted a successful booth at the 1998 Libertarian Party Convention. The Convention was held July 2-5 and gave the Caucus an audience of 700 or more delegates from across the nation. Representing the Caucus were Jack Jones, Michael O'Mara, Josh Vincent, James McLaughlin, and Paul Gagnon.

The literature at the booth, specially designed by the Caucus to appeal to libertarians included: a) quotes from famous Libertarians on Land rights (T. Paine, J.S. Mill, Jefferson, Adam Smith, and Locke); b) the article from the Pragmatist: "Who Should Own the Land?" c) an essay on "Land Rights, Deed Fees, and the End of Taxation: A Proposal from the Thomas Paine Caucus"; and d) a brief history of land rights.

The Caucus used a two-fold strategy, an active measure and a passive lure. On Friday, a flyer with quotes from famous libertarians on land rights was put on the chair of every delegate to the convention. The flyer established land rights as part of a long libertarian tradition. The purpose of

the flyer was to get libertarians thinking about the issue and to get visitors to the booth. The booth was simple but above it was the provocative question "Who Owns The Land." There were probably more people visiting the booth this year than two years ago, even though the one two years ago was during an election year. Twenty seven new people signed up asking us to send them more information; a significant number of people coming up to our booth seemed open to our message, or at least agreed that it deserves further discussion. We are now familiar enough among libertarians that a lot of the people who came up to the booth said "Oh, you're Georgists, right?"

"The situation with libertarians is complicated by the fact that some are willing to accept a small amount of taxes (just enough to support a minimal government to protect life, liberty, and property), while others want to eventually replace all taxes, and have a system of voluntary association." Some libertarians are conservative, others are leftist. The Caucus provides a solution with a broad appeal to many libertarians, and does not violate the libertarian axiom of non-aggression (no coercion or fraud is to be used in social or economic relations). The Thomas Paine Caucus pointed out that, while some

Georgists advocate using all of the land rent to fund government services, libertarian Georgists advocate the goal that eventually, all or at least most of the land rent should be divided as a dividend.

Initially, the Caucus had hoped to get a major plank inserted into the Libertarian Party Platform. That effort was derailed when the platform committee decided to do a complete rewrite of the platform. Little time was left to discuss the land rights plank.

The Caucus realized the wording of the plank was too complicated to be digested at one sitting and will work on a shorter version. The Caucus plans to continue with follow-up, development of better arguments and literature, and new outlets such as the "Web." Members of the Caucus feel that many libertarians, in and out of the Libertarian Party, are open to discussion about the issue. A person does not have to be a member of the Libertarian Party (LP) to join the Thomas Paine Caucus (some Caucus participants are not LP members). The Thomas Paine Caucus also plans to do outreach to other organizations. Anyone wishing to join the Thomas Paine Caucus may contact Paul Gagnon at 74633.3520@compuserve.com or call 703\329-6857.