

Progress made at Libertarian Conference

by Michael O'Mara, Baltimore, MD

Common Ground-USA (CG-USA) and the Henry George Foundation of America (HGFA) co-sponsored a booth at the Libertarian Party convention in Washington, DC, from July 4-7. The outreach effort exceeded our expectations for promoting a dialogue within the Libertarian Party, over whether landownership should be treated differently than ownership of human-made products.

One of the reasons for targeting the Libertarian Party is because a significant fraction of libertarians is already familiar with Locke's argument that land is a different form of property than human-made products. Also, libertarians already support half of Henry George's message: free trade, free markets, no special privileges in trade, and no taxes on production.

Another reason for targeting libertarians is that they are a growing political movement. About 175 Libertarian Party members are currently in political office. Recent Gallup

polls show that about 20% of Americans are libertarian, which Gallup defines as wanting less government interference in the economy and in people's private lives. The

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Libertarian Party convention was televised on C-SPAN.

Sue Walton coordinated much of the planning for the booth. Volunteers for the booth included CG-USA and HGFA members and officers from Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania: Hanno Beck, Steve Cord, Tom Estrada-Palma, Paul Gagnon, Jack Jones, Mike O'Mara, Dan Sullivan, and Josh Vincent. Harold Kyriazi also contributed, by covering some of the expenses. All of the booth volunteers are libertarians, and most are also Libertarian Party members.

The response exceeded our expectations. Every day of the convention, we found some libertarians who had read Progress and Poverty. A significant fraction agreed that landownership should be treated differently than ownership of human-made goods. Hundreds of pieces of literature from CG-USA and HGFA were handed out, including essays about community land rent from a libertarian perspective (advocating a citizen dividend, rather than giving all the revenue to the government).

One highlight of the convention was finding that some former national officers and state chairs of the Libertarian Party generally agree with the views of Henry George and Thomas Paine. These include a former national director, former national secretary, and at least two former state chairs.

The founder of the Libertarian Party, David Nolan, advocates a land value tax as the least harmful tax, and had published an article about this in Libertarian Party News, which helped initiate a dialogue on the issue. We presented him with a "Chodorov-Nock award", for his efforts in the tradition of Frank Chodorov and Albert Jay Nock, who were libertarians and Georgists.

Another highlight of the convention was the platform committee meeting. Jack Jones had submitted a proposal for amending the Libertarian Party platform, to recognize that landownership should be treated differently than ownership of human-made goods. We assumed it would take at least a few years before any members of the platform committee would agree with the proposed amendment. But our first surprise was that two of the platform committee members generally agreed with it, even before the committee met.

Tom Estrada-Palma testified before the committee, and he, Jack Jones, and Mike O'Mara made themselves available for questions during breaks. To our surprise, four committee members then voted in favor of the proposal - enough for a minority report to be brought to the floor of the

convention. Another committee member said he had a copy of Progress and Poverty at home, and would read it. It turned out there wasn't time to bring the proposed amendment to the floor. But our expectations were exceeded by getting that far this year.

By being present at the convention, we raised the visibility of the land issue, found a number of people who are sympathetic, and increased the amount of dialogue. We plan to continue promoting the dialogue with libertarians, through such means as letters to libertarian publications, and discussions at libertarian meetings.

Editor's Note: One of the pieces of literature distributed from the booth at the Libertarian Party Convention was a legislative outreach brochure developed by Common Ground-USA and Michael O'Mara. A copy is inserted in this issue of GroundSwell.