

Georgism Becomes Issue In Beloit Mayor vs Manager Referendum

by Nadine Stoner, Beloit, WI

GroundSwell readers are aware that the usually prompt GroundSwell is a couple of weeks late. GroundSwell editor/publisher Nadine Stoner has been really busy with chairing a Beloit change of government referendum Com.

While Stoner avoided making her other involvements part of the local referendum process, the Beloiters for Council-Manager Com. and the League of Women Voters of Beloit injected that early on.

When the Beloiters for Council-Manager group met Feb. 11, Stoner

found out that among items distributed at their meeting were copies of a download from the web page of Common Ground-USA. The printed-out download included the following: Welcome to Common Ground-U.S.A.!, What's New at Common Ground-USA; Message from the President of Common Ground-USA, Nadine W. Stoner; Jan.-Feb. 1998 GroundSwell column from Write On, "Petition to United Methodist General Conference, 1996, by Nadine Stoner.

Stoner thought to herself, if that is the only personal attack they can make

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on me, what is the problem?

When Wisconsin Property Owners League-Beloit (of which Stoner is president) held their annual City Council and School Board candidates forum Feb. 23, WPOL deliberately avoided asking candidates whether they favored the status quo of contracted City Manager and at-large council or an elected Mayor and aldermanic council. The feeling was that since Stoner was president of WPOL and since Stoner was chairing the Mayor 2000 committee (so named because of an ordinance phase-in so that the mayor would be elected in the year 2000), the question should not be asked.

However, the League of Women Voters-Beloit interjected the Georgist issue again during the last week before the April 7 referendum. The Mayor 2000 committee announced in a Beloit Daily News April 2 news brief that "Mayor Group Schedules Rally", at which U.W. Oshkosh Political Science Professor James Simmons would be guest speaker. LWV-Beloit board member Gretchen Roy faxed Prof. Simmons on April 3 as follows:

"I am faxing 8 total pages to you. These are newspaper clippings and other info re the upcoming referendum in Beloit.

"We feel that you should be aware of the background and potential consequences of this referendum. We feel that you may not be aware of the numerous legal and administrative and economic problems which it poses. We would like you to consider

the implications of the connection between Beloit's Mayor 2000 group and the Georgist Organization.

"One may be a mayoral government advocate but one must be very wary of this particular proposed government because of its inherent problems. One must also be cognizant of Beloit's situation. A big shake-up could prove disastrous..."

Faxed with the cover letter was an unpublished letter to the editor:

"In the Beloit Daily News 'Pioneers' yearbook, the article about the Wisconsin Property Owners League says they are networking with the Council of Georgist Organizations. The Property Owners League is headed by Nadine Stoner, who also heads the Mayor 2000 referendum committee. Charles Fietz is the Vice President of both the referendum committee and the Property Owners League.

"The article also says that the national Council of Georgist Organizations is 'concerned with land value taxation matters'. It sounds like they have done a lot of work documenting land use changes in Beloit, but not boosting housing quality as the title says.

"I have some questions: Just what are the goals of the national Council of Georgist Organizations? Where are they headquartered? What other organizations are included under their 'umbrella group'? And most important of all—What is the relationship between the Georgist Organizations and the referendum committee?

"It seems to me there is a possibility that the goals of the Georgist Organizations may be related to the work of the Mayor 2000 group, but we don't know anything about what those goals could be. Is it possible that the referendum is more about 'land value taxation matters' than it is about the council-manager form of government? What is really going on here? Jean Woertz Jackson"

Stoner shrugged it off. After all, they downloaded information from the Internet, so if they wanted answers, all they had to do was to pursue "Links we Like". Clearly Stoner was not doing anything secretive, and Stoner had avoided interjecting into Mayor 2000 activities anything related to her other activities.

The evening of Sat., April 4, when Prof. Simmons came to Beloit to speak, the LWV-Beloit members stood at the entrance to Beloit Memorial High School (where the rally was held) and distributed a half-sheet hand-out, deriding Prof. Simmons on one side of the half-sheet because of his previous involvement in a mayor referendum in Oshkosh, and deriding Stoner on the other side. Attack on Stoner is reprinted below:

"In the Beloit Daily News 'Pioneers' yearbook, the article about the Wisconsin Property Owners League (page 35) says that they are networking with the Council of Georgist Organizations. The Property Owners League is headed by Nadine Stoner, who also heads the Mayor 2000 refer-

endum committee. Charles Fietz is the Vice President of both the referendum committee and the Property Owners League.

"The 'Pioneers' article says that the national Council of Georgist Organizations is 'concerned with land value taxation matters.' According to their Web page, they believe in 'an increase of local taxes on land value with a corresponding decrease of taxes on buildings, improvements, and other sources of revenue.'

"According to the Georgist Education Association (GEA), the Georgist philosophy is to eliminate income taxes, sales taxes, and almost every tax except a property tax on the market value of land—the same tax for your house as for the gas station next door. ("Georgist Economic Policy", GEA)

"Shifting all taxes to this 'assessed land value' tax ignores issues such as the ability to pay and distinctions between corporations and home-owners.

"The Georgists intend to cover this loss of revenue by abolishing most government functions. They oppose all public assistance, including unemployment, welfare, Medicaid, and Medicare. They oppose using government funds for public education, regulation of commerce, and all public health other than epidemic control. ("Pattern for a Better World." GEA)

"With such strong linkage in leadership between the Mayor 2000 committee, the Wisconsin Property Owners League, and their ties to the Georgist groups,

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we wonder how the goals of the groups are related. Is it possible that the referendum is more about 'land value taxation matters' than it is about the council-manager form of government? (from a letter to the editor (unpublished) submitted by Darrah and Peggy Chavey)."

Stoner would like to inform you, dear readers, that this is the fourth mayor-alderman referendum she has been involved in since 1984, but her first time serving as referendum chairman. The Georgist issue has not come up before, so it seems clear that it was launched this time to try to shake support for the referendum. For the record, Mr. Fietz is an appraiser who travels extensively and was not actively involved in the mayor-alderman referendum.

In the April 7 referendum voting the mayor-alderman referendum carried inner city wards, but the upper income southeast quadrant of the city, which customarily elects the majority of the at-large councilors, put the manager/at-large system over the top.

If any reader knows who or what the Georgist Education Association is, Stoner would like to know. (See editorial page for Stoner's address.) She especially would like to know where GEA got the fabricated "information" that Georgists propose to abolish government functions.

(Stoner's footnote: The B.D.N. Pioneers article, captioned "Property Owners Group boosts Housing Quality," refers to:

"...At the national Council of Georgist Organizations level, WPOL shared with directors of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, based in New York City, the extensive assessments research done by WPOL in 1989. The CGO is a national umbrella group of organizations concerned with land value taxation matters...."