

NICARAGUA INSTITUTO HENRY GEORGE

Paul A. Martin, director of the Instituto Henry George in Managua, Nicaragua, traveled to Des Moines, IA, to be a presenter at the Sept. 2000 Council of Georgist Organizations conference. The IHG is funded in part by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and works in cooperation with the Henry George Institute of New York. Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America with the smallest population (4 to 5 million) and the most dynamic political environment for change in the region.

Paul Martin's North American hometown, Newton Mass., had a sister city relation with a Nicaraguan pueblo, and his University Spanish teacher drew his attention to Nicaragua during the controversial "Contra" war years in the late 1980's. As a result, Martin visited Nicaragua to do research for his undergraduate thesis on the Nicaraguan nationalist Sandino.

Shortly thereafter graduating from Boston College with a degree in Spanish, Martin returned to Nicaragua to do volunteer work for a humanitarian aid project. Like many naive leftist of the epoch, Martin lost interest in the Nicaraguan cause when the revolutionary party there was voted out of power by a reactionary coalition amenable to Nicaragua's rapid reintegration into the global economic system. He worked for some years as a career counselor and for a government reemployment project where he grew disillusioned with the futility of the band-aid approach to orthodox unemployment "solutions".

Acting on a business plan he had been developing since 1994, Martin returned to Nicaragua in 1997 to establish the Spanish language immersion industry there in order to create employment opportunities for Nicaraguans (then and now with a 50+% real unemployment rate). After a few years of successfully developing this project, all the time feeling the growing pressure of rent and taxes in the US and Nicaragua, Martin stumbled across the Henry George Institute's website "Understanding Economics" (operated by Lindy Davies) and the explanation of the law of rent. Enthralled but skeptical, Martin read *Progress and Poverty* and quickly saw the irrefutable truth of its, for him, liberating argument. From that moment on, Martin became an ardent Georgist advocate. He subsequently volunteered to translate the entire "Understanding Economics" website into Spanish for the HGI, NY, which he did during last half of 1999.

This April, Martin founded the Instituto Henry George in Managua, an organization dedicated to educating the entire Nicaraguan population about the Georgist economic analysis and remedy. Among its many activities, every two months, the IHG offers "Comprender la Economia" a 20-hour intensive course based upon the HGI, NY's "Understanding Economics" website course, and open to all Nicaraguans.

The IHG graduated its first class of 24 students in June 2000, and another class of 23 students in August. All of the higher level graduates expressed interest in doing volunteer work, and many are presently active participants in activities of the Instituto. At this moment another class of over 100 students is enrolling for the Instituto's third course.

The IHG has its own website (<http://ibw.com.ni/~ihg>) which offers volunteer work and information on the Instituto's projects. IHG has published and distributed "Progreso y Miseria" and "Comprender la Economia" texts for use in the Instituto's intensive course on Political Economy. The "Comprender la Economia" guide includes a new 12-page synopsis of the original P&M text. The IHG office currently has two computer stations with Internet access for research and space for 6 volunteers to be working at one time. The IHG will be seeking to annex itself to a Nicaraguan university in the future.

The IGH hand-out information, "What We Do" says: "El Instituto Henry George functions with financial support from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation of New York USA, the Henry George Institute of New York USA, and the Henry George Foundation of London England. Our personnel consists of Nicaraguan and international volunteers. Volunteer work includes: facilitating studies and opinion polls of various sectors of the economy and society; investigating, analyzing, tabulating, and interpreting studies, and correspondence; preparation of education and promotional materials (texts, charts, flyers, posters, graphics, cassettes, video); preparation of class and workshop curricula; contacting interested organizations and leaders; organizing and facilitating presentations lectures, workshops and classes; management of public relations campaigns; administrative and technical help, and more. Work tours can be up to 6 months. To participate in the activities of the Instituto Henry George as a volunteer, a candidate must first take and pass the course "Understanding Economics" either via the free internet course (<http://www.henrygeorge.org/>) offered by the Henry George Instituto de NY, or in person in Nicaragua through the Instituto.

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