

PACE UNIVERSITY LEFT FORUM PANEL

(from p. 11)

by year decreasing the productiveness of our soil, and virtually lessening the area of land available for the support of increasing millions.” – p. 234, *Social Problems*.

So, George, writing in 1886, when the American population was about 1/6th of what it is today, and our resource usage an even smaller fraction, was already concerned about wasteful effluence (at a time before commercial fertilizers) in the cities, and about destructive soil erosion on farms. George was worried about the exact thing that Hudson claims he was not worried about! Further, this hardly sounds like the anti-environmentalist Hudson paints George as.

George remains ahead of his time in so many unappreciated ways. We are still catching up.

The argument returned to Hudson’s take on George’s views of slavery, but his claim that George worked with slave-owners is demonstrably false: George was not even politically active when slavery was abolished by Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation in 1863, and George was just 24 years old, and learning about the world through his travels (Perhaps this is a good time to point out that Henry George’s life would be the good basis for a dramatic movie; a thought which has crossed the mind of at least one film-maker, Charles Ashira, http://backhomepictures.com/#section_development). So, George could not have been pro-slave-owner, as there were no such people to support, later on. Hehner also reminded Hudson of one of George’s earlier writings in which he came out against slavery.

The record is clear on this.

Furthermore, as Toby Lenihan noted above, the Democratic Party and newly formed Republican Party underwent radical changes during Reconstruction, and the Republicans had already started to adopt the pro-business policies that they continue to espouse today. George then, would have been left with little choice but to promote the interests of the working-man in the Democratic Party, or to form a party of his own... which he did, in New York, running twice for NYC Mayor in 1886 and 1897. There is not enough space here to delve into George’s mayoral campaign, but the reader is invited to decide for him/herself whether he supported the Establishment and Big Business, or the common man, perhaps by reading his acceptance speech for the first Mayoral run here:

[Throwing His Hat in the Ring: Henry George Runs for Mayor](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5321/): <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5321/>.

A free-ranging, even raucous, Q&A session followed the main presentation for about half an hour, much of which would be nearly impossible to summarize here. I even contributed to it myself, when the issue of Public Banking came up, since I am the New York Coordinator for the Public Banking Institute. Hudson added that Marx had expected banking to become a public utility as well. This is why China cannot have a banking collapse, despite high debt – it can simply be forgiv-

en.

During Q&A, Hudson stressed further the point that the current version of capitalism emphasizes profiting from debt, not production, and is actually responsible for de-industrializing America. Mazzone challenged the audience further to answer why someone who had wealth and power wouldn’t continue to operate along such lines, especially when any failures would be propped up with freshly printed money from the government (technically, this is freshly issued money from the Federal Reserve, created to pay for “toxic assets” of the banks, and George would have almost certainly been opposed to this, as he believed money creation was too important to be left to private banks). “Failure pays today in that kind of world,” Mazzone argued. He agreed with a questioner that austerity – also the thematic challenge in the title of the seminar – was a symptom of the current system. Added Mazzone, the arbitragers don’t care about America; they just move their money offshore and into protected accounts (the Tax Justice Network calculates this may be as high as \$32 trillion: http://www.taxjustice.net/cms/front_content.php?idcat=148). Hudson said this is a form of short-term looting via bonuses and high salaries and that the Federal Reserve gave “cash for crash” money to the TBTF banks.

Later, Hudson said that the Tea Party is pulling both parties to the Right, since the Democrats move to the Right in order to reclaim the vacant center the Republicans have now abandoned.

A questioner asked about the Trans-Pacific Partnership and how that would wreck economies (by driving labor and environmental laws to their lowest common denominator). Mazzone said, “It’s a (President) Clinton world.” I added that TPP negotiators have said they want to get rid of state institutions, including public banks.

Ending on a reconciliatory note, Hehner said that though reactionaries may have infiltrated the Georgist movement, they are in no way representative of the movement or of George’s views. Hehner, who was born and brought up in Germany, brought up the example of his own ancestors as pro-labor, and who believed in worker’s rights. George was first and foremost pro-labor and for taxing the surplus of the land, said Hehner. Whether you are a neo-Marxist or a neo-Georgist, Hehner said, taxing surplus, funny money, and the idle gain of people who get something for nothing, is something all the panel should agree on. Hudson smiled and conceded, “these guys are OK, it’s the Georgists I was talking about.”

It’s puzzling to hear Hudson denounce Henry George to the extent he did at the Left Forum. The fact is, Hudson has been the first to promote the Georgist ideal of collecting the economic rent, especially on Land, whenever applicable, even sharing the advice with the government of China – which is in the middle of an enormous land bubble and in desperate need of land value taxation (Fred Harrison (continued on pg. 13)