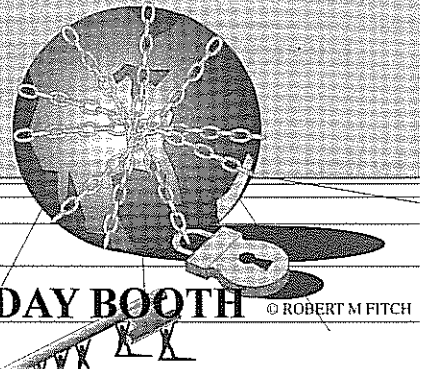


GROUND SWELL

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CG-NYC CHAPTER HOSTS EARTH DAY BOOTH

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by Scott Baker, New York, NY

The Common Ground-USA chapter had a great Earth Day turnout April 21 at Union Square. Members Halina Szwed, Ron Rubin, Eric Johnson, Ralph Rivera, Toby Lenihan, Pat Aller, Helen Breban, Rita Rowan, and chapter president Scott Baker helped at the booth. Banners by Eric and Halina really drew people to our table. Ralph's free-standing 4 foot trifolged board with most of our flyers pasted on it gave people a chance to read our message in depth without hovering at our often crowded table.

Out of thousands of people who passed our table, we handed out flyers (or they were taken by) to 600 (some of whom helped themselves to a dozen handouts and never discussed anything with us - these things are not exactly "free," to produce anyway, and special thanks must be given to Mark Sullivan and the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation for donating their time and resources to the cause. Of course, we gave out lots of RSF literature too, as well as HGS schedules for the upcoming month of classes).

We talked to 500, had significant conversations with 150, got signatures from about 60 for our mailing list (also the school's and RSF's), of which, optimistically, maybe 50 from all sources - flyers, signup, conversations - will be motivated to check out our websites, take a class, or commit to activism in the future from any of the possibilities in the flyers. I would say maybe 100 of those people walked away with any sense of the core issues - some people just "get it" after the first minute, some after 5 minutes. It drops way, way, down after that.

This event is not just for the public, it is for us as well. It gives us practice in making our "pitch" learning from the objections. All in all, it was a good experience and generated lots of interest, and a short video-taped interview by an ecological reporting team. Here are some of the things I heard in my conversations:

1. "Land Value Taxation will bring too much development to already-crowded NYC!" Well, yes, LVT will increase development. That's kind of the point. But what is too much? We have about 8 million people in NYC now, at least in the daytime, yet people still pay high rent to live here, so they don't think it's too much, yet. Of course, if we free up some of that 24 square miles of vacant land (update alert: our website still says 22.2 square miles, but Lindy's flier for this even updates that to 23.9 square miles, so even as Land is in more demand than ever. See this Crain's article: http://www.crainnewyork.com/article/20130416/REAL_ESTATE/130419901: Bullish developers set fire to NYC land prices. Land costs have soared by more than 25% in the last quarter despite lackluster conditions in the New York market as a whole. Near record lows for borrowing costs are helping drive prices higher.

2. "There will be no more room for parks!" I should have had a study on hand that shows parkland is actually in-

creased under LVT (and dig it up for anyone who is interested here). Apparently, the desirability of park land overrides the desire to develop every last square foot of land in a healthy community where the rent isn't being privatized by wealthy developers who may not even live there.

"You're leaving millions of dollars behind by not taxing buildings!" This angry retort, expended with not a small amount of spittle, came at the end of the day (setup at 9:00AM, tear down at 6:00PM), so I hope I wasn't too much off my game, but I kept to our talking points:

A. We WANT the better, more efficiently dense buildings that LVT will encourage, and don't want to discourage that by taxing it. Whatever we "lose" by not taxing these improvements we gain in higher taxes on better developed land overall. However, it was hard to convince this man, who fancied himself an expert on R.E. matters (always a dangerous sign when it comes to "getting" Georgism) that the examples of little Harrisburg and even Singapore and Hong Kong had much to say about NYC.

B. We want to tax the Land so people will be forced to develop it. He and another "expert" who "learned about Real Estate in school" thought land was useless and had no value until it was developed, despite my efforts to have them, well, look around them at Union Square (I couldn't spend a lot of time on this, as we were paying \$400 for our 8' X 3' table for the day, and other people wanted to talk too. Something about the location made it valuable, but I can't remember what that was right now...).

3. "How will this stop mega-development in my neighborhood of Queens/Brooklyn/The Bronx?" This is a tricky area, because the fact is (see above), development will increase, and it's hard to predict exactly which areas LVT will cause to be developed more, or less, if it's applied city-wide. Of course, you can tell people about the 24 square miles of undeveloped land, and even more of under-used land, but when they look around them, all they see is tall buildings, so... Maybe they should get together with the not-so-gentle men in #2B above? I do feel for people in rapidly developing neighborhoods though, and this became a little more personal yesterday when my local Community Board Land Use committee chair stopped by and, after getting caught up from when we last met, told me about the high-rises that will soon take away my river views in my neighborhood (and maybe make growing salad 9 months of the year in my little terrace-plot too solar-challenged to be possible). This is similar to the objection our local State Senator raised when she said LVT would work too well, and some of her long-time fixed income residents in 5-story walk-ups would be displaced by higher more efficient buildings. It's hard to argue that one's plan would not be that successful after all.

One argument I did not (continued on page 14)