

Hunger and a Sustainable Society

by David Giesen, San Francisco, CA
(an abridged article from David Giesen's report)

TOES is the one place where the radical lesson which nature's economy shows us has a chance for deliberation. As a matter of fact, even at TOES gritty, fundamental economics often gets short shrift. In the anthology's Introduction, one reads: We are not primarily trying to create an alternative economics, as a new variation of economic rationalism that will improve market decision-making. We want to bring together the mosaic of successful alternatives that form the basis for working alternatives to economic globalization. Here is a repudiation of the economics that obtains in nature, the very nature which time and again throughout the anthology is extolled as the basis of our well-being! What else is evolution but market decision-making? What else is the ecology of nature but a free-market exchange of energy predicated on pay-per-use of habitat? Certainly, founded on fundamental land justice there is a mosaic of solutions to economic and social challenges.

The sharp lines dividing the haves and have nots which TOES ostensibly decries will wane and wax another year, and neither the G-8 nor TOES will engage fundamental economic principles in their press releases. The G-8 will talk of reducing restrictions on access to capital and labor wherever it is situated, and most TOES participants will talk of restricting capital from accessing low-wage areas. But neither camp will assert the distinction between Land and Capital in a comprehensible way.

Oxfam sponsored a Hunger Banquet the first full evening of the TOES weekend. The format was designed to impress participants with the severity of disparity between classes of earth residents. Each diner paid \$10, then took a lottery ticket (disguised in a basket) which directed him to a specific place in the dining hall. Some ten percent drew a purple ticket, entitling them to a seat at a table, with service and plenty and variety of food. Thirty percent drew red tickets earning them a chair but no table. When supper was announced these folk were permitted to go to tables behind them and serve themselves rice and dahl (an East Indian bean dish). All the rest had to settle on burlap sacks arranged on the floor. Their green ticket procured them nothing but rice and water.

As chance would have it, two of the Georgist triad had drawn royal status. The evening's host explained the purpose and design of the evening, to wit, to impress upon us the meanness of life for so many. However, tasty bread, and much of it, ornamented the tables. The Georgists shared it with all in the room. Then supper was announced. The empurpled crowd watched as drink and salad arrived. The rattlemen queued for dahl. The scum (green) of the earth waited and waited for bowls of ... rice.

But up jump the Georgists. They poll their fellows at the tables. There is puzzled acquiescence. The Georgists are rearranging the tables. They line them up end to end and combine the separate salad plates into bowls. One takes the microphone and announces that all are welcome to the buffet. Serve yourselves, there is plenty.

One of our number polls the red ticketed to ascertain if the dahl may be eaten by all. More puzzled looks. Some are in favor. Some say no. One of those originally consigned to the burlap takes to the microphone and denounces the privileged dogooders. He urges the green and red to disdain the proffered nourishment, and derides our generosity as but a sop. But back to the microphone we go and declare that the kitchen belongs to us.

What ensues delineates the perverse effects of so much of Education. Many a green and red stuck by her allotted portion. Some purples never conjoined their delivered bounty with the common service dishes. Some reds took seats at the tables and welcomed delivered service, hoarding this meal erstwhile denied them.

The point is that there is an almost unspeakable resistance to altering received circumstances. We are born to the purple, how should it be different? We are born green and we accept the classification. To assert our own humanity is a great thing, it seems.

Good God, as George himself exclaimed, To say that the bounty of that little child's heavenly father is become the property of but a few. No, no, no! We must ask ourselves, do we emphatically endorse the unqualified nature of every human being to exist and sustain herself on this planet.

We must ask ourselves this question for it is fundamental to the thought and coherence explicit in Henry George's writings. Having, undoubtedly, answered in the affirmative we cannot then compro-

mise an elemental attribute of humanity without de-naturing that humanity. We Georgists at the TOES conference did not compromise this matter, and at the same time we expanded the dialogue of all with whom we conversed to acknowledge this prerequisite to creating a just and sustainable society.