THE HGS-DOMENICAN REPUBLIC COMMEMORATES
34 YEARS OF CLASSES

by Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA

Due to the stalwart dedication of Lucy Silfa and her work of 34 plus years, we now have a tremendous opportunity for LVT in the Dominican Republic. We will be running neck-to-neck, however, with the World Bank and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) plans for national sales tax.

The following report covers Sept. 28 to Oct. 3, when Hartzok was in Santo Domingo with Lucy Silfa, Director of the George School of Social Science of the Dominican Republic (Republica Dominicana - RD). Report outline with day-to-day details following:

Monday, October 2

Helen Zapata arrives and takes us to Najayo, a federal prison 30 minutes drive west of Santo Domingo. Lucy has been teaching classes there for two years and has graduated 345 persons in courses in Fundamental Economics, Protection and Free Trade, Science of Political Economy, and Urban and Rural Tax and Land Reform. Today there were around 60 men and women - fewer than the 200 expected for the special program today because the authorities had brought in 92 new prisoners last evening who had to be removed from the processing room.

Lucy gave them highlights of all the work we have done together the past several days. She says they were delighted to hear of this, because they have been urging her to do this sort of connecting. The prisoners are telling their friends and relatives about the economic understanding they are gaining. One woman hopes to be released soon and wants to start an Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George in Columbia, her home country. Another prisoner told me in very clear English that he was from a large landholding family whose roots go back to the conquistadores (original colonizers from time of Spain). He said his strong intention is to work for the land value tax policy (impuesto al valor de la tierra) and model it on his family lands. (This could be interesting. He will receive a copy of Land for People, Not for Profit, pronto!)

Next, at the Asociacion Nacional de Profesionales Agropecuarios (National Association of Professional Agronomists), a man sitting on the sofa in the waiting room warmly greeted Lucy, saying that she was an historical figure in the country. We met with Geovanny Arias, Secretario General of the Asociacion, who took the class from Lucy in 1986, and Jose Vasquez, Secretary of Organizations. This very productive meeting resulted in an agreement of collaboration between the two organizations for educational seminars all over the country. At the end of our meeting the man who had been sitting on the sofa took official photographs, after which he said to me regarding Lucy, "You are walking around with one of the most prestigious people in the country." Upon leaving this office, we were greeted by Cesar Cuevas, another former student of Lucy's, who is now Sociologist with the Professional Agriculture Association.

After a challenging drive through the chaotic freedom (read, no one obeys traffic signs) of this capital city, we met up with Fermin Acosta, who had arranged an appointment with Julio A. Ramon, Sub-director General for the Secretary of State for Finance, in the Direccion General de Impuestos Internos (like IRS) and Zeneida Bautista de Delgado, also Sub-directora General. They were very impressed with our message and wanted to learn more. They agreed with us that what is being done today, taxing industry and commerce and personal wages, is not a helpful approach. Their work is to control tax evasion and they see that this is quite difficult. They asked for some materials and expect to meet with us again in order to gain a deeper understanding of our taxation proposals.

Next we visited the National Budget Director, Luis Ernesto Perez Cuevas, who had learned about LVT in Taiwan. He has been in contact with the school and Lucy wanted me to meet him. While we were at his office the Minister of Finance, Fernando Alvarez Bogaert appeared and took part in the conversation. Lucy explained the reason for my visit to the Dominican Republic. Alvarez stated that he knew that Henry George was a very famous man and he had learned about him while in New York when he was attending Columbia University. He seemed pleased with our presence. While exiting the front door of this government office building, Lucy was greeted with a warm hug by Angel Lockward, the Secretary of Industry and Commerce, who said "Lucy is a good friend of mine."

Sunday, October 1

A productive strategy and planning meeting with a core group of ten associates of Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George. We reviewed the activities of the week with the intention to follow-up on the opportunities presented. We developed and agreed to a strategy for the implementation of land value tax in the Republica Dominicana. Each member of the planning group committed to specific responsibilities and tasks for the next steps for the movement here. (Lucy says that my visit was an incentive for them to be more active in the work here.)

After working on the computer with Maria Acevedo, she urges me to read Voice of the Planet by Michael Tobias and loans me her copy.

Saturday, September 30, 2000

Lucy has been teaching a Georgist education class at Instituto Dominicano de Periodismo (Dominican Institute of Journalism) and this morning she arranged for a special seminar with me. Some of the students reported viewing scenes on television this morning from Lucy's 34th anniversary and graduation program for the Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George. Approximately 60 students, many from all over RD, listened closely for an hour and then asked questions

(continued on page 4)
concerning globalization and Georgist economics, how to work in the political realm and practical implementation of land value taxation.

One young man asked how more young people could get involved, so we suggested that he form an economic justice/land rights organization for youth. He is bright, bilingual, and has Internet access so we think he will be a good leader. He has invited Lucy to give talks in his city of La Romana. One of the students in this class is an excellent artist. After seeing his paintings after the class, I made an agreement with him that I would promote them on <www.earthrights.net> website in exchange for his donation of a percentage of his painting sales back to the land rights/tax shift movement in RD.

After the class we went across the plaza to visit Santo Domingo Cathedral, the first cathedral in America, built in the early 1500s. Sure enough, another one of Lucy's students was in the cathedral. He is with a newspaper, El Caribe, and promised to help her with publications.

Next stop was to the location of Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George. It is a humble, modest building. The terrific work Lucy has been doing here deserves much better facilities, but she has been making do as best she can considering she has been running the School out of her own pocket with no outside funding for the past three years. A former student, now a lawyer, has been kind enough to give this space for the School without rent payments.

In the afternoon, Fermín Acosta, an accountant who has an import business, picked us up in his jeep and we went out to the barrios. We traveled through sandy dirt lanes among tin roofed shanties where people were living crowded together in one or two little rooms. Jammed between the hills and the polluted river, some of the shanties experience frequent floodings. Such a contrast, these terrible shacks with some traces of modern life—little TVs, boom boxes, old refrigerators—crammed inside. Sprinkled here and there were little stores selling food and household items. In open drains flowed water contaminated with human waste and everything else.

Out of a city of three million people, it is estimated that about half the population of Santo Domingo, the capital city, live in such conditions. The second largest city is Santiago with a population of over a million. The remainder of the people in this country, total population of eight million, live in smaller towns. Lucy tells me that most of the rural land of the country is vacant.

This we know is a typical pattern throughout Latin America and much of the world. Neoliberal economic policies and social forces have resulted in concentrations of large populations on small amounts of land. Disease runs rampant, along with violence, crime, drugs and sexual abuse including incest as children, teenagers and adults sleep in the same little room.

Lucy told me of visiting a barrio previously. She was invited for coffee where there were swarms of flies all around and she accidentally swallowed one. When she left she had to walk through such heavy and deep mud that her leg sank down and when she pulled it up her shoe was lost forever.

Because of the miserable living conditions, many of these people are sick everyday and some wait for days at the hospital for treatment. Some children die in the arms of their mothers before they see the doctor. Lucy says there is a big effort being made to help the situation and that it is getting a little better.

After a walk in the park across from Lucy's apartment, we came back to rest and do other work in her office. Lucy did not rest long before receiving a phone call from a television producer inviting her to be on a program.

Friday, September 29

First off this morning, we met with Hector Perez Mirambeaux, Director General of the National Cadastre (Direccion General del Catastro Nacional).

(We met this man yesterday while waiting to see the Vice President - a "meaningful coincidence" as we had intended to contact him.)

We discussed the situation in RD regarding the record keeping for land and property evaluation. Perez informed us that the records are in some disarray and disorder from past administrations, and that they have just begun the work of improving the management of this department of government. He was quite friendly and open and seemed in full understanding of the importance of proper assessments in order to implement land value taxation. It is our impression that he would welcome suggestions, assistance, or collaboration with assessment experts and others in our movement.

Next stop was a visit to the Instituto Cartografico Militar for a meeting with the Director, Colonel Eugenio A. Matos Rodriguez. This building was guarded at the entrance by a soldier with a rifle and a friendly smile. We explained our reason in wanting detailed maps of RD, and so after a cordial chat over tea, he gave us five large maps with topographical and geographical details of the entire country. This can help us gain an overall perspective on land values as they might be expected to concentrate in various areas.

We proceeded to our scheduled meeting at the United Nations offices in RD. First off, we met briefly with a former student of Lucy's, Adolfo Marti Gutierrez who is now Oficial de Programa para Asuntos de Coordinacion y Aspectos Economicos. We gave Adolfo a copy of the UN Habitat II Land Access Action Agenda, my article which is published on the UNCHS website - "Land for People, Not for Profit" and the Green Tax brochure. Adolfo will be giving Lucy various articles on the UN Development Program for RD and we will be able to compare and advise regarding their approach.

Adolfo was most interested to connect with our associate Dr. Hector Sandler, Director of the Instituto de Capacitacion Economica in Argentina so we gave him Hector's email address.

(continued on page 5)
Next at the UN campus we met with Dr. Francisco Roberto Arias Milla, Representante de la FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) en Republica Dominicana. We met with him for about an hour and exchanged detailed information concerning his work and the potential for application of land value taxation. He was quite open and asked a number of specific questions which we were able to answer.

Currently their main project is to give cash grants to the poorest of the poor in order to buy agricultural land, seeds and farming equipment. They will give technical and educational support in order to maximize the success of these new farming operations. I mentioned to him the successful example in Russia where farmers gave the government ten percent of their crop as a type of resource rental fee. The government then sold this for cash. Dr. Tatiana Roskosnaya, Director of the Land and Public Welfare Foundation in St. Petersburg, Russia, wrote about this in a recent edition of Land and Liberty which I promised to send to him.

This evening was the special program for the celebration of the 34th anniversary of the Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George. We arrived early at the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library). By 7:30 more than 100 people had filled the meeting room and several TV and newspaper reporters had interviewed Lucy.

Fermin Acosta opened the program as Master of Ceremonies. After a short talk by Adriano de La Cruz, the first student to register for the school (1966), Lucy presented 137 graduation certificates.

Then a delegation from NAJAYO, a prison in San Cristobal, presented Lucy with a Special Certificate of Recognition for the work she has been doing there teaching the Henry George Progress and Poverty (Progreso y Miseria) class.

After this, Dr. Cesar Bido, a Santo Domingo City Council member and also a former student of Lucy's, gave a heartfelt speech and presented me with a beautiful certificate - a Resolution to Declare Alanna Hartzok a Distinguished Guest of the City of Santo Domingo, the First City of America. What a wonderful honor! Dr. Bido said it was remarkable that the City Council had agreed to this proclamation unanimously, as unity of any sort is extremely rare because the council members represent six different political parties and there are usually big fights over most issues. The mayor of Santo Domingo was also a student of Lucy's. It is to her credit that our movement received this high recognition from the City Council via this proclamation of welcome to me. Lucy is held in high esteem everywhere in this country.

Next was my speech. Fifi Dominguez, who works for the American Embassy, did an excellent job of translating. The middle section of the speech contained direct quotes from two of George's lectures - Moses, the Apostle of Liberty and Thou Shalt Not Steal.

The program ended with the beautiful music of singer/guitarist Rafaela Baez and refreshments.

Thursday, September 28

Last evening the program that Lucy organized to celebrate the 34th anniversary of the Henry George School here was announced on the television show Punto y Punto. The program has also been announced in several newspapers.

Today began with a meeting with Milagros Ortiz Bosch, the new Vice President of Republica Dominicana (RD) who is also Minister of Education. She was serving as President today because Hipolito Mejia is now in Guatemala signing a new free trade agreement for the region. Lucy encouraged Milagros to include Georgist economic education in the school system. The next step is for Lucy to write a letter detailing her proposal.

Everywhere that Lucy goes she meets people who have taken her courses at the Escuela de Ciencias Sociales Henry George. Or if they have not yet taken the course she organizes one for them! For instance, while waiting to meet with Milagros, former students of Lucy greeted her. She also spoke with a military General and after a few minutes it was decided that Lucy would give a special class for a group of high level military officials.

Our next stop was to lunch at the Congress with several legislators, two of which had taken her classes -- Eulogia Familia and Elias Wessin. Eulogia is working closely with a coalition of labor union leaders. Elias is Secretary General of a political party (POD - Partido Quisqueyano Democratico). After a very stimulating discussion, it was decided that Eulogia would arrange for Lucy to conduct a seminar with the labor union leaders in conjunction with a selected group of legislators. We might mention that the Senate is now working on proposals to bring in a national sales tax to replace funds which will be lost when the country removes some of its tariffs, as called for by the WTO. So the time is ripe to present LVT as an alternative to sales tax.

Next we met with Hector Romero Ramos, Director del Deppto. de Economia, Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo and two other professors, one of whom, Nelson Pena, had taken the course from Lucy in 1968. This university was founded in 1538, just 46 years after Columbus landed upon these shores, thinking he had made it to India. (They have built a huge monumental museum on the spot where he landed.) It is the oldest university in the Western Hemisphere and has 80,000 students in six campuses. Our meeting here resulted in a plan to have Lucy present a seminar for the economics department faculty on October 11. We also met Valentin Guerrero at the university, another of Lucy's students.

Accompanying us throughout the day were two associates of Lucy who had graduated from her school quite a while ago. Fermin Acosta is now an accountant, businessman and head of the Henry George Foundation here. He had arranged for our meeting with the Vice President and is interested in working on the research for practical planning for implementation of land value tax in RD.

(continued on page 10)
Cesar Peralta is a law student and arranged for our meeting at the University.

Afterwards we had dinner at a nearby restaurant and again, Lucy greets former students of hers. I feel like I am traveling around with the Queen Mother. Having taught Henry George classes here for 34 years, the seeds of Georgist ideas have been well planted in the brains of many thousands of people. With a bit more sunshine and water, we should be able to harvest a crop of values-oriented, economically enlightened leaders to build the political force for implementing land value tax in RD (Republica Dominicana).

I want to note the special contribution made by Fermin Acosta, a professional accountant, businessman, and President of the Henry George Foundation of the Dominican Republic. Lucy and I greatly appreciate the responsibilities that he took upon himself, at personal sacrifice of his business work, to schedule and participate in many of the important meetings which were held this week throughout the capital city of Santo Domingo.