LIBERTARIANISM AND GEORGISM -- THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIP
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Libertarians are really not very different from most people except that they tend to be true to some basic principles. However, they haven't thought through their principles to the level of land. I see a philosophical relationship and practical relationship between Georgism and libertarianism. These two movements can help each other and work in a synergistic fashion.

In my book in the very first chapter I talk about three basic principles, and you can start with the right to life. Because we have the right to life, we have the right to three-dimensional space in which to exist, and we have the right to land on which to live and from which to make a living.

The dictionary definition of libertarian is someone who believes in freedom of thought and freedom of action. We are not going to concern ourselves today with freedom of thought. It is probably a little bit outdated, back to the time when religion was very authoritarian and oppressive. At that time the whole freedom of thought movement was a big deal.

We are going to focus on freedom of action. It is useful to break up the universe into three different categories. Us, fellow citizens, sentient beings. The second category is 3-dimensional space. A third category is matter, that is, the stuff of the universe besides us. Freedom of action can be thought of as freedom to interact with all three of these categories. If you and I interact with each other, that is called freedom of association. If we interact with 3-dimensional space by moving around, we call that the right to travel and we travel over public right of ways. That is an important part of freedom, that we have public right of ways.

The third category is interacting with matter. Here on earth we think of that as using the earth. This is where Georgism falls out of Libertarian philosophy. We believe in freedom of action, and part of that is the right to interact with the earth. That is where I see Georgism fitting, and of course there is the Georgist remedy of community collection of ground rent. We geo-libertarians really must avoid the word "tax" when we talk to libertarians. That is something the government levies with no real firm ties with what they are providing. Rent is something where you get what you pay for.

From this interaction of us with matter we generate the fourth category of things in the universe, and that is our stuff. We generate private property. Libertarians tend to get confused on this issue or argumentative because they think that land should be considered private property. They don't understand that land and all the other raw matter in the universe is something we all have a right to interact with. When we do that and create things that we all need to live, we create tools, that is what we really own, and that becomes part of us.

It is important to understand that there is a labor component to genuine property, and this goes back to John Locke and the labor based theory of property. This is not to be confused with Marx's labor theory of value.

The point here is that Georgism is a part of Libertarian philosophy.

The second point that I would like to make for the Georgists here is that the Libertarian Party and the libertarian movement are growing. This is not to say that we shouldn't also be working with others. It is not either or. There are a lot of people that we can work with. The Libertarian Party is growing. Right now we have over 30,000 dues paying members. From this we are able to support a staff of a dozen full time workers at the national office in Washington, DC.

One of our fortes is that the libertarian movement is growing at the local level. J.R. Graham is working in the San Diego area and making strides over there. The Pittsburgh group has been active for 10-11 years now. Libertarians are starting to run for office. A certain percent of those Libertarians are going to be persuadable or fairly easily persuadable that Georgism is a part of libertarian philosophy, that heretofore they have not really been true libertarians if they have been ignoring this important aspect of freedom.

Here in Pittsburgh, Dan Sullivan was the first one to start out in the early 1990s, and through his efforts of coming to our Libertarian Party meetings, he got some of us to go out and talk to property owners about how they would benefit from the shift of taxes off buildings and onto land. I listened to Dan and I thought, "Where is this coming from, what does the property tax have to do with Libertarianism?" It didn't sink in. But I think by talking about the principles of libertarianism, it can eventually sink in. Here in Pittsburgh, we went from one, Dan Sullivan, to about seven Georgist Libertarians.

Libertarians take principles very seriously. We call ourselves the Party of Principle. In the year 2000 we had over 1400 candidates nation-wide. Over half of the races for US House of Representatives were contested by Libertarians. In 1998, over 850 candidates were running. The point is we can reach a good percentage of libertarians, many of whom will run for office.

I ran for office a couple of times with land value tax as a major part of my platform. We are running and informing people about it. Ron Rosenberger ran for State Senate the same year that I ran, and the land value tax was also part of his platform. It is not really important that Libertarians win office any time soon, but we are running, and we are informing people about the land value tax. For example, when I ran for the City Council here in Pittsburgh in 1995, the man who won, Sala Udin became a supporter of land value tax. He shared several (continued on page 6)
LIBERTARIANISM AND GEORGISM

(continued from page 5)

forums with me during the candidacy where I talked about it. Maybe he picked some of it up, or maybe Josh Vincent's work with him and other members of the City Council had more to do with it than me. A lot of times, the key is hearing it repeatedly from a lot of different people. The Libertarian Party represents an ideal resource.

I didn't start out to write a book; I was just collecting quotations on the subject from classical liberalism. But it grew into a book, and with the help of Mark Sullivan and Dr. Robert Andelson, the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation did publish it. Initially I didn't have any aims like having other libertarians advancing Georgism in mind, but if we do have hundreds of Libertarian candidates eventually running on the land value tax theme, we are going to let the cat out of the bag. I think the cat will be out for good if we keep up the level of understanding and education.

Maybe why the Georgist movement faltered was because it wasn't built on a completely sound philosophical basis. Libertarians are very much grounded philosophically. Georgism is part of the overall libertarian philosophy, and by having us Georgist libertarians reach out to our fellow libertarians, maybe we can have them carry the Georgist movement further than it has been carried.

I think when Georgism becomes part of a Libertarian campaign it really helps the candidate "sell" the philosophy more than just plain libertarianism. I had been unable to talk to working people on a meaningful level. All the run-of-the-mill Libertarian can say is, well, we want to get government out of your pocketbook. The working man really feels he is being oppressed, and now I realize he is being oppressed. He is not perhaps being oppressed by the people he thinks he is being oppressed by; he doesn't see that the real villain in this case is the landlord as landlord. It really allows a Libertarian to make a much more effective campaign if he can say, "Yes, I understand you are having to struggle hard to survive." But government isn't the only problem, as most libertarians think. Working people tend to think of government as their friend and someone they need to help them.

Another way Georgism can help a Libertarian campaign is by saying we won't need big government as much when we have community collection of ground rent. If we institute Land Value Taxation it will free up land by ending the incentive for speculation in land. That will allow more efficient creation of wealth. We will have more competition for labor and with more competition for labor we will have higher wages. That is where the traditional Libertarian element comes in -- you will be able to keep all your wages. How will we pay for government? Well, that will come out of land rent that we collect. Georgism can help Libertarians run more effective campaigns.

To conclude, I think that Georgism and libertarianism are intimately related, in that Georgism derives from libertarian philosophy. I know the Georgist libertarians at this conference will be trying to influence our fellow libertarians to become fully libertarian and hopefully over the next few years will let the cat out of the bag and become part of a large movement to educate the masses. I agree with Henry George that we won't get fundamental change unless and until the masses understand.

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