Georgist Mayors
By Dr. Mason Gaffney

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GEORGIST MAYORS

by Dr. Mason Gaffney, Riverside, CA

We are indebted to Mary Rawson for the history of Louis Denison ("Single-tax") Taylor, eight times Mayor of Vancouver. The "silent treatment" that academic economists accord to Georgist ideas has its counterpart in the silence of historians about applied Georgism. There is a vacuum for Georgist historians to fill.

It is a happy mnemonic * coincidence that another Georgist mayor was also named Taylor: Edward Robeson (E.R.)Taylor, Mayor of San Francisco, 1907-10. E.R. Taylor was not only a Georgist, he helped George write Progress and Poverty. Charles A. Barker, George's premier biographer, credits Taylor more than any other with improving George's style. Taylor, a Renaissance man, was, among other things, a poet, whose work adorns Book IX of P&P. (* assisting the memory)

San Francisco was levelled and burned in 1906; Taylor took office shortly thereafter, and San Francisco was renewed in a short time. With buildings gone, and most taxes based on property, and a Georgist mayor, what do you suppose the City used for its tax base? Could that explain the instant recovery? O, Historians, please get busy, before I have to scoop you.

Is it just a coincidence that Vancouver and San Francisco are two of the most livable and beautiful cities in the world? Not likely, but that only begins the story. Many, many cities got Georgist fever in this era, from coast to coast and, to some degree, around the world. It was the Golden Age of U.S. and Canadian cities, 1890-1930. New York, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Chicago, Houston, San Diego, Milwaukee, Edmonton, Calgary -- we know they all moved in the Georgist direction in this period, and they grew like fury. There is so much more we do not know - even little Minot, ND, for example, and Sioux City, IA, had Georgist mayors. How could urban historians have overlooked such a powerful force? I'm not sure, but they have -- let's move in and fill the gap.

Dr. Mason Gaffney is an Economics Professor and author of numerous scholarly articles and books, including The Corruption of Economics (Shepheard-Walwyn, 1994) which is available from The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, http://www.progress.org/books.

(editor's note: For more information on Edward R. Taylor, see Ed Dodson's web site, http://www.geocities.com/athens/acropolis/5148/georgists_22.html

For an article written by a more recent Georgist mayor, read "The Great Adventure" by former Southfield, MI Mayor James Clarkson in this issue of GroundSwell.)