



Our Need of a Vigorous Journal

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Our Need of a Vigorous Journal

by Mason Gaffney

Almost every movement with vitality generates its periodicals. The Georgist movement has several in the world. It used to have Land and Freedom, 1901-44, in the United States, and The Freeman, 1937-42. It still has many local newsletters, but the lack of a major journal displays and perpetuates a low vitality.

I have faithfully slogged through most of the output, occasionally finding truth, wit and inspiration. The Inquirer of San Francisco is usually interesting and sometimes compelling. There have been high water marks and great writing. On the whole, however, our journalism has not been a credit to us nor much benefit to mankind. There is no perfect journalism and one could find fault with the more successful like The Atlantic, Harpers, The Progressive, The New Republic, The Nation, MS, The Sierra Club Bulletin, and so on. It is not my purpose to find fault, but to suggest how easy it would be to do better because the faults are so basic and transparent they are easily correctable. Some of the characteristic faults of Georgist journalism are the following. It is too often amateurish, peevish, cultist, preachy, ego-tripping, accommodating to patrons, incestuous, slanted, quarrelsome, dogmatic, cranky, scolding, narrow, nitpicking, self-righteous, arrogant, conceited, other-worldly, idolatrous, negative and bitter. The same writers repeat and repeat, narrowing the circle and boring the reader. There are frothy opinions without punch or substance. There is brash presumption ("We know - why are you so dumb?"). There are vain attacks on assorted innocents merely for ignoring us. There are selected quotations from big names who contradicted themselves the day after. There are too many cheap shots and easy debater's points; too little deep and hard research and analysis. (Is research dull? what was the best news story of 1973?) There are too many obituaries, too much in laudam

temporis acti. There is refusal to play in anyone else's ball-park - all issues must be redefined in our terms. It reminds one of William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, - and you remember what happened to him.

In a later incarnation we lose confidence and become apologetic, defensive, and status-seeking. We humbly petition for acceptance by those we have lashed for a generation, and seek to ape their mannerisms ... just as they are going out of style in the new reaction against the fulfillment of Parkinson's Law in academe, and academic journalism has become a laughing stock for its contrived dullness, sterile scholasticism, pretentious pedantry, irrelevance, and subversion to careerism.

What can a vigorous journal do? It can keep and spread the word, but that is only half. It must help the word evolve. Jackson Ralston said it well in Land and Freedom, November-December 1942. "... the public has come to regard the single tax as a narrow, and, shall I say, specialized reform measure ... What is the essence of the proposition for which we fight? ... We believe that all mankind has an equal right to enjoy access to the earth, ... To meet this condition taxation is but one means. ... opportunities to be equalized take several forms ... they may be special uses of the streets...wharves and docks and landing places.

"Turning to the country we may find ... the cultivator of great areas, ... extensive forests ... waterpowers ... coal or iron or copper ... Other varieties of what we call 'property' may be imagined and call for varied treatment.

"All these things present different problems, and their respective urgency will vary with the years. ... Special treatments have to be considered and devised. We have to understand our own problem. We must broaden our view. ...

we must open our eyes to all the world surrounding us, and be ready to push many things forward to which we have given little attention. ... we must accommodate ourselves to present currents of thought and take advantage of them.

"... We have been theoreticians. The world of study relating to practise is yet before us."

A vigorous, responsible and constructive journal would help achieve Judge Ralston's ends. It would make the movement more alive, more real, more interesting, more involved, and more successful.