

# The Georgist Remnant in Catalonia, Spain

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In the U.S.A., advocates of the single tax tend to forget, or never knew, that the first international Georgist conference was held in Ronda, Andalusia, southern Spain, during May 26-28, 1913. It was attended by delegations from eight other European countries, Argentina, Uruguay, and 27 provinces of Spain. On May 25, as the conferees poured off the trains, they were met by the alcalde (mayor) of the city; and the municipal band belted out the words of La Cancion de la Tierra (The Land Song), played then as now to the tune of "Marching through Georgia", of all things.

Since then the impuesto unico (single tax) movement in Spain has undergone a history not dissimilar to that in the United States. At one time fisicratas georgistas (Georgist physiocrats), as they were and are called, were to be found everywhere in Spain, especially in Andalusia in the south. More recently, a smaller Georgist group was held together under the dedicated and very able leadership of the late Emilio Lemos Ortega, an indefatigable writer and speaker in support of the single tax ideal. His home was in Seville, Andalusia. On one occasion he was visited by Robert Clancy; and on another, by this writer.

In its heyday, during the second and third decades of this century, the concepts of Henry George were as well known in Spain, and as widely debated, as in the United States. Progress and Poverty was soon translated into Spanish, first in 1893 by Martin Puig, of Barcelona, in Catalonia — the most recent translation, accompanied by masterful notes, bibliography, historical references and documentary materials, having been accomplished by Ana Maria Martin Uriz in Madrid in 1985. Books and periodicals were inspired by the Georgist idea, both for and against. Among the latter, was a formidable 383-page blast, written by Father Juan Alvarez from a Catholic, anti-Georgist point of view, and published in 1917.

Even during early decades in Andalusia, the movement was much dominated by people like Blas Infante

(executed by the Franco regime in 1936), who combined their Georgism with an even more heated passion for regional, i.e., Andalusian, autonomy from central control from Madrid. As time went on, the demands for autonomy tended to overwhelm the Georgist-physiocratic tendency. Today, with the recent death of Lemos Ortega, and despite some accomplishment of a degree of Andalusian autonomy, Georgism in Andalusia has been consumed by regionalist demands, and is seldom if ever mentioned in most of Spain today.

An exception is to be found in Barcelona, the economic power house of the autonomous region of Catalonia, in northeastern Spain. There, Josep Soler i Corrales leads a group of perhaps a half dozen Georgist physiocrats, as they call themselves, in a Center for Studies in Natural Political Economy — i.e., natural-law economics. Their primary activities include occasional lectures to public groups, and publications directed to people outside the Georgist fold. In other words, they don't just "preach" to the choir," for which many U.S. Georgists are criticized.

For example, a recent and attractive 182-page book by Soler, published in 1994, entitled Georgism: A Political Economy for the New Era, and written in Catalonia language, offers quite easily understandable lessons in basic Georgist economics, under such chapter titles, among others, as "Political or Social Economics", "Precursors of True Economics", "Supporters and Opponents of Georgist", "Evolution of Money", "Inflation", "Natural Laws of Distribution", "Speculation in Land", "Monopolies", "A New Civilization", and finally, "Georgist Strategy". This last chapter offers practical, non-theoretical advice for the advancement of Georgist thought.

This brings us to the four-page, 6" x 8" circulars that the Center - primarily Sr. Soler - has published during about the past decade. Their primary objective is to make contact with people outside Georgist circles; and Soler argues that such small leaflets are more likely than larger, less comprehensible publications, to be read

by hurried people outside the small groups of "converted" Georgists. The pamphlets' themes are expressed briefly, on topics that should be of general interest. In the past, these have included "Corruption", "Degradation", "Production and Solidarity", "Inflation", "The Problem of Housing", "Election Time", "The Need for Radical Change", "The Impact of Taxes", "Pacifism, for What?" and so on; and almost all wind up with a presentation on Georgist remedies. Recently, one took up the problem of the arms race, and before that, another featured the French atomic blasts in the South Pacific. These might not carry Georgist themes, but are likely to include an appealing quote from Henry George; and would have the merit of attracting people to the Center and its work. The circulars often include quite perceptive, often funny, cartoons to illustrate the Georgist message.

I don't know how much impact the Center's publications have had on public opinion around Barcelona or elsewhere. It is to be noted that, even more than Andalusians, Catalonians are very proud of their history and culture. Spanish is spoken in Andalusia; but the Catalanian language, though including elements similar to Spanish and French, is a distinct tongue, very widely spoken in Barcelona and its surrounding region. Catalonia is now a legally autonomous region, rather like a state, in the Spanish political system; but most of its inhabitants consider themselves to be Catalonia, not Spanish, and a sense of historical mission and pro-independence is not far beneath the surface of Catalonia life.

Soler i Corrales is, of course, thoroughly informed about the fate of Georgism in Andalusia. At the same time, he is 100% Catalanian, and cannot but wonder what will happen to this Georgist remnant when he is gone from the scene. There are Georgist leaders in the United States who have similar concerns about the future of the movement here.

Even without the mood of regional separatism that is so persistent in regions of Spain, there are lessons that Georgists in the U.S.A. might learn from the Spanish experience, including especially from Andalusia and Catalonia.