



Strategy for Tax Reform: Convert the Chiefs

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An effective strategy for tax reform could be to seek to convert the chiefs of government. Send brief documents to the members of congress or parliament, the president or prime minister, the cabinet, and the chief justices.

Georgists or geoists have mostly been engaged in retail advocacy and education. For those who have not yet been introduced, Henry George was the economist associated with the explanation and advocacy of replacing all taxes with a single levy on land rent, which includes property taxes on land value or rent, tapping the economic rent of natural resources such as oil, and pollution taxes on the use of air and water as a dump. His followers and the policy of the public collection of rent, either for public goods or as cash distributions, are commonly called “Georgist” or, generically, “geoist”.

Some Georgists reject the term “tax,” because the public collection and equal distribution of land rent is not an arbitrary levy, but a proper initial distribution, which would provide many economic benefits, including a greater equality of income and an end to poverty. But in targeting government chiefs, it would be a distraction to insist on Georgically correct terminology.

Retail education provides instruction to ordinary individuals, and that does generate public awareness as well as new followers. Retail advocacy sends letters to officials on specific legislation. What has been missing, so far as I know, is a campaign to educate and convert those at the top of the political system.

Mass religious conversions have often taken place when the chief converts, as his prestige and power then swing the masses towards the new religion. A prime example is the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity.

Some reformist institutes do seek to directly influence the chiefs. For example, Cato Institute sends publications to the members of Congress. It has sent its Cato Handbook for Congress to all members of Congress and to journalists. Georgists should do the same.

Since the members of Congress, the President, and the Chief Justices are all busy, an effective strategy could be not to send them a thick book, but small pithy documents that can be read quickly. Long texts tend to be set aside for reading later, “when I have time,” but that time could be forever. Send them three documents, both as emails and on paper.

1. a one-page summary explanation of a prosperity tax shift and its social benefits;
2. a one-page legislative strategy for implementing the tax shift;
3. a one-page explanation of why the tax shift, and its advocacy, would be to the political advantage of the government official, despite any misguided opposition from lobbyists.

The one-pagers would provide web sites in which longer explanations are available, as well as email, fax, and postal addresses and numbers where questions may be directed.

Such could be sent to state, provincial, and local government officials as well, if there are organized sustainable campaigns.

Of course mailings to members of Congress or legislators first get handled by their staff. That's fine; they should be educated. The mailings should be followed by an inquiry to the representative's office as to whether the staff received it, whether they recall the contents, and what they did with it. If they don't have the documents handy, send them again.

Then keep inquiring as to whether the representative will introduce legislation towards a prosperity tax shift. Most may say that it is a good idea, but has no political support. Therefore ask, for the record, whether, if a majority sought to introduce such legislation, would the official add his support? If one can then get a majority to agree to such conditional support, then the official who introduces it would get historical glory.

Such a campaign would require funds and volunteers. The organization that would best conduct this campaign would probably be Common Ground