BELIEF
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Name: Richard Giles

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Place: Redfern

Interviewer: Sue Andersen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SA:** **This is Sue Anderson interviewing Richard Giles in Redfern on the 17th of March 2011 for the City of Sydney's Oral History Project, Belief.**

So, thank you, Richard, for doing the interview today. I'm wondering whether we could first begin by you saying your full name and when you were born?

RG: Richard _____ Giles. I was born on the _____ 1937.

SA: **And where were you born?**

RG: I was born in Sydney, actually in Petersham.

SA: **Right, O.K. And did you grow up in Petersham?**

RG: No, I think Petersham was too nice a suburb for us. I was actually brought up in Leichhardt when it was a working man's suburb and my

father was a warehouseman or storeman and he worked in the city in one of the big stores in the city. We lived in a tenement house and I went to Leichhardt Central [School]. I was fortunate enough at the end of primary school to qualify to go to high school and I went to Sydney Tech [Technical] High which was in Paddington, which was quite a long journey for me by tram, a couple of trams; I was always late for school. And it wasn't the sort of school I was interested in anyway. It was focused on physics and chemistry and mathematics 1, mathematics 2; it was a school for engineers and architects and I wasn't very interested in those things. I was lucky enough to be able to do history in my fourth year and then qualified and went to University and did a Bachelor of Arts course.

2.03 **SA: Right. So history's always been a bit of a - - -**

RG: Yes. I came out of university and fortunate enough to get a job as a history master.

SA: Fantastic, yes. So did you work as a history teacher?

RG: Yes. No, I started at Catholic schools in around about 1968/9 and a couple of years I was invited to be the coordinator of history and I remained like that in that job until I retired in 1990, the end of 1990 when I took up an opportunity to become secretary or actually continue as secretary of this organisation.

SA: Right, O.K. Can I just ask you – you don't have to answer this at all but were you brought up a Catholic?

RG: No, no, I was brought up an atheist and a friend of mine at school introduced me to the Methodist church. Going to a boys' school didn't have much of a social life so he introduced me to the Methodists at Five Dock and a middle class group - and I've always been a little class conscious – difficult for me but I sort of got into the group there and subsequently I married a Catholic, of course, and had to take a little bit of education in Catholicism which was compulsory in those days if you married a Catholic.

SA: Yes, that's right.

RG: You had to, yes, I had a couple of sessions with the priest; they were quite entertaining sessions.

SA: O.K, so you just alluded to the association that you belong to. Could you tell me what this organisation is and what's the name of it for a start?

4.08 RG: Well, the organisation has had many names but since 1965 it's been known as the Association for Good Government and it is really part of the Henry George Movement throughout the world and it is a branch

that operates in New South Wales - other branches are in other states. The aim of the organisation, I suppose, could be put into three headings. I suppose the first heading would be: the equal right to land would be at the philosophical basis of Georgism, the study of economics, the study in particular of economic rent which is the means by which equal rights are given or can be given and then the single tax, so-called by Henry George, the single tax, actually a charge for the value of the environment which one has when one occupies any piece of land; the land value is actually the value of the environment of that piece of land and by collecting that as a single tax or in fact having no other tax but that charge for access to a particular environment, that is at the basis of the fiscal policy of the Association.

SA: Right, O.K. I think it's quite a difficult one to kind of get around. I've got a few questions that I want to explore that further but maybe can I just ask you – so you initially became secretary in - - -

6.01 RG: 1988.

SA: 1988. And was that the first contact that you'd had? No, you must have been …… ……. …..

RG: I learnt about Georgism in the School of Philosophy and I lectured there, and when I left the School of Philosophy 'round about 1975 I had nothing more to do with the School of Philosophy and it was in 1980 I attended a lecture by David Clarke from the University of New South Wales, and on my way out of that lecture the secretary of the Association – I had had no contact with the Association – the secretary came up and asked me whether I would like to edit the magazine. Well, I knew of the magazine; I didn't know that the editor had just died and they couldn't replace him. So he said "You don't have to answer now" and I thought "Well, I can answer now. I would be interested in doing it" and he said "Well, you don't have to attend any meetings. You can just edit the magazine" and I thought to myself "Well, being fair I don't know the organisation, I'll attend meetings". So that was in October 1980 and for the next eight years I served a kind of an apprenticeship in the organisation, learning what its ethos was, the way they went about things and when the opportunity arose – the secretary used to say "I don't want to really continue but really I'll have to" – on one of those occasions I said "Oh, you don't have to continue. I'll take over if you don't". He was a bit miffed by that but still that was when he retired and I – he had been secretary since 1979 and then I took over in 1988 and for most of the time after that I've been the secretary.

8.04 **SA: So you had by that stage, after going along for eight years editing the magazine, by that stage you'd become quite committed to the Georgist sort of philosophy?**

RG: Well, I became committed probably in the second year after I started to know what it was all about and that would go back to about 1971; I became committed to the philosophy of social justice that George preached. Yes, it took a couple of years but then it takes everybody a little while to become familiar with what it's about and think through it, weight it up against what you already believe in and come to a decision. And that was my decision: that I could drop the communist and socialistic sort of ideas that I had and take up another set of ideas.

SA: O.K, so you did have some communist and socialist feelings?

RG: Well, I was a pretty confirmed – I was a confirmed socialist before I became a Georgist, I believed thoroughly in it. I used to argue in debates for socialism and so on but the simplicity and the elegance and the justice sort of caught hold of me and that was it.

SA: Yes. O.K, and then you weren't actually formally in the Association at that stage?

9.46 RG: I was in the School of Philosophy and the School of Philosophy was largely a religious organisation but it did have economics as an alternative on one of the nights and I used to go along to that economics night and must have impressed somebody because I then took over. The actual leader of the school didn't want to continue to take over the economics, so he gave me the economics to do and I did that for five years, after which I thought I knew everything about the subject but then I found out that I didn't know everything about it; there's a lot to know about it, there's so much.

SA: Because when I've been reading through the material and the principles that Henry George kind of went by, it is very kind of aligned with socialism, it appears. Could you tell me your ……

RG: Well, it differs from socialism in that it differentiates between public property and private property. Private property is anything produced by labour and public property is the environment, the value of the environment, of any piece of land that is public property. The community creates the environment, good or bad, and it's valued and there's a market in land values and those land values are public property. Now, to that extent we'd be in agreement with socialists about the socialisation of rent or economic rent but when it comes to private property George was adamant that you shouldn't touch private property at all. In other words, a single tax; another way of putting the single tax is to destroy taxation, is to abolish taxation, there is no taxation, there is only the collection of economic rent of land, by which he meant the whole universe, the whole universe in which we live, the value of that universe is public property and economic rent is created naturally.

12.21 I mean, the advantages of land leads to the next stage where someone will bid in order to get exclusive use of some portion of the earth's surface and that market creates a value in land. But the mistake people make, they think it's the value of their land. It is not the value of their land at all, it's the value of what surrounds their land that is land value but people don't want to understand that, they want to claim that land value for themselves and it's often the biggest value they've got.

SA: Can you explain that? Because you gave me a really good explanation of that the other day about, you know, it depends on where it is and the amenities around it and …….

RG: Yes, I mean I gave a talk on Sunday in which we took a totally identical house and land and we put one of them in Vaucluse and we put the other one in Shalvey, which is a far western suburb. Now, if a tax was actually on the land and the house, the tax should be the same because the house is the same and the land is the same, they're just located in different places; one is located in Vaucluse and the other is located in Shalvey. The difference would be astronomical between the value of a plot of land in Vaucluse and the value of a plot of land in Shalvey. Now, it's all to do with the environment of those two pieces of land.

14.07 There is no such thing. Land tax doesn't really tax the family home at all, it taxes what surrounds the family home, it's a charge on access to what surrounds the family home. It is, as I've said, it's just – does that sort of make it clearer?

SA: It does. And what you were saying the other day was that it actually – like because a house at Vaucluse would have access, you know - - -

RG: Oh, yes, yes.

SA: - - - to the beach and to the - - -

RG: Yes, central business district. It meets both requirements for a very valuable piece of land: it's near the eastern seaboard and is also minutes away from the central business district.

SA: Right. And so then that's where the value lies?

RG: That's where the most valuable land in Australia is. And if you go to Perth you'll find the most valuable suburb in Perth is exactly the same location as the most valuable suburbs in Sydney: it lies between the central business district and the beaches.

SA: So the Georgist principle would be there would be one single tax and it would be a land tax?

RG: M'mm. But the purpose is not to raise revenue, the purpose is to give equal rights in land because if my land is worth more than your land, the only way to make us equal in relation to the land which we've got is to take away the land value. When you've taken away the land value we are then placed in a position of equality in regard to land which we wish to exclusively use and in a technical sense we would all have the marginal advantages of land – of course we'd be paying for the rest.

16.06 George thought that the real problem in society was private property and land and what it led to, all the externalities that occur because of this institution of private property and land. He didn't really want to stop people having exclusive use of land but what he wanted – he agreed that that was necessary in our society, that's what we all want but what we're claiming is something that doesn't belong to us, we're claiming the value of the land. And the land itself – actually, when land is valued by the Valuer General it's considered to be vacant; the only thing that's valued is the environment of that particular piece of land, which shows you that it's the community, good or bad. I mean, in Shalvey it's unfortunately not a very nice place to live and the values of land are pretty low but when you get to Vaucluse it's a pretty nice place to live and the values are quite high. But that's really a very simple thing, really, it's quite elegant.

SA: And so he believed in private property?

RG: Oh, he thought the only way to establish private property – the only way not to confuse private property was to get rid of the idea that land values were private property; that confused the idea of private property. The only thing that's private property is what you've really produced yourself or the market value of what you've produced; that is private property.

SA: Like what would you produce, though?

17.52 RG: Well, the good or service, as a teacher or as a carpenter; whatever economic role you play you add value one way or another and it has a market price, doesn't it, and that market price is – hopefully, that market price after your wage gives you the opportunity to obtain from society the same value as you've produced for society but unfortunately due to private property and land people are exploited and they don't get the value of their own labour, so they can't buy the value that their actual labour has produced. You know, this is one of the things – it all occurs because land is held out of use and therefore gets a value, gets a scarcity value that doesn't really belong to it, gets a scarcity value and also it gets a land price, as I mentioned last time. You know, you're able to sell something, you're selling this land value and when you sell it you sell so many years of rent. So it makes it very, very difficult for people to get land because if you had this

particular what's called single tax on land it would mean that you were unable, you would be – I've just lost the train of thought. The selling price is obtained because you are considered to be the owner of that land value and therefore you sell it. If the government took that land value, you wouldn't have anything to sell. If the government year by year on an annual basis, like rating system, it took the value of land there wouldn't be a selling price for land and it'd be very, very easy – and also there'd be no reason to hold land out of use and watch it grow in value and keep it away from other people, which tens of thousands of people are doing right now all over Australia, they're holding land out of use.

20.15 I know someone who's got five acres at Bundanoon; he hasn't touched it for thirty years. He hates land tax - even though he proofread this book – he doesn't like it because he regards that land value – he wouldn't pay it, you know, he's totally selfish. Why? Because he's holding it for his family; you know, it's his chief investment for his family; he's hoping he's going to pass that value on. All right, fair enough. You see, George discriminated between political economy and individual economy. According to the individual economy, what this person is doing is quite O.K, that's fine according to the individual economy but according to political economy, which is the economy of the whole of society it's totally the wrong thing to do and ends up in all sorts of problems which we're suffering from.

SA: So in a way it's like a rent. So the government would administer the land and someone would – it's almost like a rent that they would pay.

RG: Well, yes.

SA: And they're depending on the ……..

RG: No, the idea in Georgism is nobody owns land because they didn't produce it, it can't be claimed as private property because it wasn't produced by any individual, they only produce the improvements that are on the land. So nobody owns the land and he was not really in favour of land nationalisation because the only reason why you should administer land – well, one of the big reasons is so that there might be equal rights in land.

22.11 That's the job of the government, to maintain equal rights in every sphere, and in the sphere of land the way to do it is through this – well, sometimes it's called land value tax. The word "rent" doesn't really mean the rent of golf clubs or a house - - -

SA: No.

RG: - - - rent is the value of a location and that comes down to the value of the advantages that, say, this piece of land has over a piece of land in Shalvey or somewhere even further, where it's got hardly any or no value. See, right on the margin of society without amenities land should have no value. The reason why it has value is that people have monopolised it, they've taken land that is really of no use except that the city will have to expand into that land and that's a favourite piece of speculation, to take up land in the outlying parts of the city and just watch the community, you know, grow into that area and then realise the profits. That sort of thing, of enclosing land which you don't want actually puts the price, it makes a scarcity price which inflates the price of all land. So this is the beginning and of course, you know, the depression which we're going through or which some countries are going through at the moment, is to a large extent due to the subprime mortgage, which is pretty much Henry George, really: it's just people investing in land and then the banks of course getting in and making bonds out of the mortgages and selling those bonds and then the whole system collapsing because people can't pay off the mortgages because interest rates are rising.

24.13 Of course, the more you invest in land, the more the interest rates rise. Now that in the end starts to cripple even people who could've afforded a house. This is a terrible thing we're suffering from but it's carefully hidden.

SA: So George's theory would be that you didn't – yes, so it was a single tax and that tax would be the only tax - - -

RG: That's right.

SA: - - - in the system and that would pay for infrastructure and - - -

RG: Because once you put a bit of infrastructure in, it more than pays for itself. If you put in a great railway line, it more than pays for itself, you put in a highway, I mean it much more than pays for itself. It's the externalities for land values of putting through a great highway or a railway are enormous. So in other words you don't have to worry about there not being enough revenue. You know, when the Sydney Harbour Bridge was created, that enormously enlarged values on both sides, in North Sydney and in the central business district, and they had the idea that one third of the Bridge should be paid for out of rates, out of rates of North Sydney and the central business district but, of course, it wasn't long before they amended that act so that it was paid out of general taxation so that the great rise in land values went to the land owners while the general taxpayer paid for the bridge.

25.58 And of course the toll was in place as well so they told the – in the Georgist side there'd be no tolls. It'd be like a big club where you pay to belong to it, you pay to the community the value of your exclusive use of land and the rest of it is just opened up to you, the parks, the

playgrounds, the swimming pools, maybe even the Sydney concerts, you know.

SA: Wouldn't it still be, though, that people who can afford to pay those high taxes, land taxes, wouldn't they still be the same people who - - -

RG: Not really.

SA: No?

RG: They wouldn't be. I mean, they would be those people whose market value of their exertions allowed them to do it. I mean, for example a nuclear physicist or a brain surgeon or a great lawyer or somebody would be able to, of course. In a just society it's merit that's rewarded, isn't it? I mean, there are so many fools – like, you take James Packer: He's not very brainy and yet he's inherited a vast fortune. And Henry George said that vast fortunes are inevitably lost, so it was no good in being rich because not many generations away the whole riches'll be dissipated; it's better to have a society that's a nice society to live in, rather than simply going all out for your own welfare.

SA: So that idea then supports kind of like equality?

27.52 RG: Yes, equality of opportunity is what. When we talk about equal rights we really mean equality of opportunity. Now, some are going to make more out of that opportunity than others; others may not want to make much out of the opportunity. I myself never really wanted to be very rich but I know people who do. Now, I don't blame them at all because they're useful people; they get out there as an entrepreneur and they do all sorts of things in all sorts of spheres of life. Well, good on them but I'm not interested in it and I know a hell of a lot of people who aren't interested in it either; all they want is to be able to live an ordinary life. You know, the people who really suffer when things start to go wrong are particularly the poor, the really poor, they begin to suffer more than anybody else. I mean, others can suffer relatively more. I mean, if you lose a million dollars you're suffering more than someone who loses a hundred dollars but the person who's only got a hundred dollars you must say has suffered more. And George said the test of a society was the welfare of just the ordinary person, you know, just the ordinary working class. The thing that amazed him is that invariably the working class, the people who actually produced everything lived in the poorest suburbs and in the poorest houses; he wondered why. You know, his quest began when he saw the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, destitution and enormous wealth and that was when he went from the frontier town of San Francisco to the metropolis of New York and there he saw things that he didn't see. Everyone was pretty badly off in San Francisco but here in New York there were people living in five star hotels and outside there were destitute people begging in order to live, so.

30.00 **SA: Just if we put this in a bit of a timeframe. Like, was this in the 1800s?**

RG: M'mm. He went to New York in about 1869 and that's where he made a vow to himself to look more deeply into the distribution of wealth and see why there was great want amongst great wealth. And the outcome of that was his book ten years later, the 'Progress and Poverty'. Progress was inevitable because men gathering together and cooperating produced much more than they would separately and so we've got a world economy now, obviously extremely abundant, but poverty is also inevitable as soon as you lay down a basic institution of private property and land which was just about the most basic of our institutions in regard to property. That inevitably brought poverty: poverty of spirit, mental poverty and material poverty.

SA: Yes. And so when you're saying "private property", you also mean private production, like someone's skills – is that right?

RG: People call land private property. You know, there are many signs you'll go past "Trespassers will be prosecuted", private property'll have "Trespassers will be prosecuted". Well, it's not private property in a sense, it's held exclusively by somebody, usually deserted, vacant, that's why they have signs up to keep you out: "I'm not using it, so you can't use it". It's not really private property but we call it the institution of private property and land and that was what he opposed.

31.55 He didn't oppose exclusive use of land, he opposed the taking of the rent, economic rent of land, the value of the advantages of that land which didn't belong to that person and it became a great movement in England just prior to WWI. I mean, [Sir Henry] Campbell-Bannerman in 1905, he was the Prime Minister, he was a Georgist and as I said last time [Winston] Churchill was a Georgist. You wouldn't believe it but at least he advocated – in a speech in Edinburgh in 1909 he advocated taxation of land values and gave a very good speech in favour of it, you know, showing that if you took away – there was a bridge across a certain river, it cost a penny to get across, the workers had to go across it so they had to pay the penny. Take the penny away and it became rent, it was translated into – it was a gain which they could afford to pay, the penny they could afford, they could afford to pay a penny so it was surplus. And soon, as soon as the landowners knew that the penny had been taken off the toll, the penny went into the rent. Now, that's a very good kind of example that Churchill used to – I think he gave more than one speech, by the way, in favour of land value.

SA: Did he see himself as a Georgist?

RG: I don't think he saw himself as a Georgist. He saw himself as somebody who could get political capital out of a good idea; the good idea was land value taxation. They weren't hoping to make it into a

single tax. What they were hoping to do was to at least have a very small land value tax and that was what brought about the constitutional crisis in Britain which lasted for more than two years and it was only the threat by Lloyd George to create four hundred peers that caused the peers to say "Yes, all right, we'll back down, we'll allow this land tax to go through" and it's only a penny in the pound - well, it was the thin edge of the wedge and they knew that.

34.24 **SA: And so Henry George also came to Australia, is that right?**

RG: Yes, Henry George came to Australia in 1890. He landed – I think he landed first in Sydney. He'd been to New Zealand and the Governor of New Zealand at that time was a Georgist, Sir George Grey, he'd had conversations with Sir George Grey, the Governor. Then he came across to Sydney and he gave four lectures at least in Sydney which were called the Anti-Poverty Lectures. His travels took him as far, almost as far north as Cairns in Queensland by train. He went out to Forbes in western New South Wales where there was a land national – the connection between land nationalisation and Georgists was very close at that time so he went out to Forbes and then he went as far – then of course he was in Melbourne – went across to Adelaide. Every time the train stopped he made a speech, so he might have made two or three speeches every day.

SA: So was there much of a following of him at that particular period here in Australia?

35.47 RG: Oh, yes, he was a world figure by the time he came to Sydney or to Australia, he was a world figure; he'd met everybody that mattered. In England he'd met [Prime Minister William] Gladstone - and in fact Gladstone's daughter was a Georgist – he'd met the family of [British Philosopher John Stuart] Mill and Mill's daughter, might have been stepdaughter was a Georgist. I mean, there were a lot of people that were very impressed with him. Your question was – he was a world figure, yes.

SA: And there was quite a following in Australia?

RG: One can't estimate the number, I mean you just can't estimate because the Georgists has been a rather diffuse organisation; they've never kept books of who was a member and who wasn't. Until a few years ago you were a Georgist because you said you were a Georgist; there was no application, you just came along to a meeting and you said "I'm a Georgist". And this actually caused a bit of trouble because you can stack meetings, can't you, that way and as society has declined that way of doing things has been found not the best way of doing things and now we have applications and acceptances and all this sort of thing, so it was very hard to say how many Georgists there were. I think to start this organisation in

Sydney there were a hundred and fifty people who donated money sufficient to provide an office for a secretary.

SA: O.K. So did we actually say when the organisation - - -

RG: No. The organisation, as far as I know, was formed in 1901 in September, in September, the 23rd.

SA: In Sydney?

RG: In Sydney, yes, in Darlington. Apparently, there was a single tax – there were single tax organisations all over Sydney. As we said last time, Billy Hughes was a member of the Balmain Single Tax League. The Premier of New South Wales, Joseph Carruthers, was a member – in 1907 he became Premier – he was a member at that time, he was a member of the Rockdale Single Tax Club.

38.13 And I think what happened was they attempted to fuse together these organisations into the Sydney Single Tax Club which they did in – as far as I know, the organisation was called the Sydney Single Tax League.

SA: And that was in 19 -?

RG: 01 and it's been a continuous organisation ever since.

SA: O.K. And it changed its name to -?

RG: Well, in 1913 it changed its name to the Free Trade and Land Values League, then in 1929 it changed its name to the New South Wales Henry George League, then in 1957 it changed its name again to the Henry George Union for Social Justice and then in 1965 it became the Association for Good Government.

SA: And why were those ……. …… …….

RG: Well, the emphasis in the very early part – the emphases have changed a little over time. There was a definite – you can see the single tax: that was the original – well, now, it wasn't really the original. When one has to be practical, then one talks about a tax or something like that. The philosophy of Henry George was always the beginning of the movement but soon, when they had to give it a name, someone came up with a name – ten years after 'Progress and Poverty' someone came up with the name 'Single Tax', "It's the Single Tax Movement", they said.

40.07 Now, George didn't like it, really, because it put the emphasis on the wrong end of everything, on the practical end, and his emphasis was more on the moral beginnings of the whole thing but he accepted single tax, and in fact being a little bit of an ego, having a bit of an

ego he said “Well, I've mentioned single tax twice in Progress and Poverty”. So, you know men, they're bit of egoists. So the thing is single tax was the very beginning of the whole thing or after the philosophy, then you had single tax. Then you had the great move for free trade versus protection and Henry George wrote, in 1886 he wrote a book ‘Protection or Free Trade’. That became an issue, O.K. so that’s the reason why we have free trade; you know, Georgism is essentially free trade, that’s what it essentially is: nobody with any privileges at all. So that emphasis. Then the emphasis went away from single tax. When it was realised that no one was going to come over to a single tax, then they came up with the words “land value taxation”, in other words, land value taxation could be one tax, you know, and they argued for that. And then that didn’t seem to work very much though in Australia it did, of course, and the federal government in 1910, I think, got a federal land tax and it was a defining platform of the Labor Party when it was first formed and Clyde Cameron [former federal labor politician] wrote a book ‘How Labor lost its way’, he wrote a long pamphlet, and there Clyde points out that in 1959 somebody took the land tax plank out of the Labor Party and he probably knew who it was but he didn’t say who it was.

42.15 So it’s changed over time. Its lack of success has – and it’s attempting to accommodate change. You know, like nowadays they're all about the environment and they’ve got the idea – I won’t go into that because I think it’s sheer madness, it’s the loss of the elegance. This is a very elegant system and [Theoretical physicist Albert] Einstein was a Georgist in the sense that in 1929 before he left Germany apparently a lady Georgist from America wrote to him – and we’ve got the letters by the way too – and he wrote back that he had read ‘Progress and Poverty’ and he made some beautiful comments about Henry George. And he picked on the weaknesses too of this, which most people agree are the weaknesses, he spotted those too, which was remarkable. But those letters have been translated from German into English and used, of course. Aldous Huxley, in the ‘Brave New World’ in the preface, if you read the preface he said “If I wrote this book again I would make my economics decentralist and Henry Georgian”; you'll read that in the preface to ‘Brave New World’.

SA: Right.

RG: Many great people have – [Russian novelist Leo] Tolstoy was a disciple of Henry George and the great misfortune was that he never met him. They arranged to meet but George couldn’t make the visit – Tolstoy was going to Berlin, I think, but his son, George’s son, visited Tolstoy.

44.07 Tolstoy died in 1910 but George had died in 1897 and in ‘The Times’ there’s a remarkable piece called ‘A Great Iniquity – Private Property and Land’, a great iniquity and it’s an enormous thing, it’s about forty

pages long, was printed in 'The Times' and Tolstoy devotes a whole section of that to praising Henry George.

SA: So worldwide he was quite influential?

RG: Well, it was said that he was the third easiest, most recognisable name in the United States in the 1880s. The only two that were ahead of him were Thomas Edison [American inventor] and Mark Twain [American author and humourist]; he was the third most. When I went to America – and I was only there for a couple of days – I was in Seattle and I was looking over old photos in the museum and, good God, one whole side of a wall had Henry George smoking a cigar and it says "A five dollar" or whatever, one dollar, whatever the price was, because Henry George loved cigars, so he was a figure that you could have sold cigars on the basis of his reputation.

SA: Yes. Can I just ask you, why then did you make that name change to the Association for Good Government?

RG: I think it came gradually. I didn't know it when I first talked to you but I've read a bit more about it. Remember that the magazine which started in 1905 was called the 'Standard' because that was George's name for his magazine in New York and it had a long subtitle and in 1957 they simplified the subtitle of the magazine just to this: 'A Journal for Good Government', O.K, they subtitled that.

46.17 Then when Mr Dowe took over - and he was the great educator of this branch – when he took over as editor of the Association for Government – I'm sorry, when he took over, yes, when it was renamed the Association for Good Government in 1965 he thought of changing the name of the magazine and at first he called it 'The Standard for Good Government' and that was only one issue and then after that it became just 'Good Government' became the magazine. But the 'Association for Good Government', why it replaced the 'Henry George Union for Social Justice' I don't know but it obviously occurred because of this subtitle to the magazine.

SA: That's interesting. Can you tell me - when I was doing a little bit of research it seemed like there were a few different Georgist principles or strands of thought.

RG: Stands of interest, yes, yes. When it was a great movement it took up more than just one cause. For example, it took up the cause of the secret ballot. George was a great advocate of the secret ballot because employers used to force their employees to vote a certain way, landlords used to force their tenants to vote a certain way, so he was a great advocate of the secret ballot for example. Votes for women, he was an advocate of that; he was certainly anti-militarist, he was definitely against standing armies.

47.58 But the chief thing, proportional representation, was taken very seriously by the Georgists and we had a decades-long close association with the New South Wales Proportional Representation Society; in fact, it was full of Georgists. You know, but now with the movement not as strong as it used to be things like that have sort of gone by the way and we're just trying to come back to the roots, come back to the philosophical roots and the moral roots of the subject and educate people into those and get enthusiasts, some enthusiasm back into the movement.

SA: Yes, because I was going to ask you about membership. So just say in the early years of the Association - - -

RG: Yes.

SA: - - - or the movement here in Sydney, what was the membership like and how did it …….

RG: We don't know much about the membership because there was no membership book.

SA: Of course, yes.

RG: But we do know that for many, many years four thousand, five hundred copies of 'The Standard' were produced, which indicated that, you know, there could have been – I don't know, maybe five hundred very, sort of pretty dedicated Georgists. I mean, our movement now is about a hundred and thirty and we're very glad to have a hundred and thirty. I mean, maybe ten years ago when you didn't have to apply and we had a bit of trouble in the movement we were supposed to have seventy eight; whether they were Georgists or not, I don't know, but now we've got a hundred and thirty members but it's certainly nowhere near what it used to be.

50.07 There's been a great – hundreds – well, reading through the history which we've got, hundreds of people have been active in our movement over time, hundreds.

SA: And so you were telling me last time it's not a political movement, is that right?

RG: No, it has charitable status as an educational movement and that status has been upheld in two or three major court decisions when it's been challenged.

SA: And has it always been an educational movement or has there been times where it's been more political and active politically?

RG: It was very common – when the movement was very, say, flourishing as it did, say up till WWI it flourished – WWI broke it – and in the

1930s it flourished to some extent in a quiet way, some of the leading Georgists tried to get into parliament but they tried not as members of the Henry George League but they tried as members of such parties as the New Social Order Party, the Freedom Party. And the secretary – remember the secretary, we had a secretary fifty three years – Alexander Gordon Huie, secretary for fifty three years – he was always very careful to say, "Well, look, if you're interested in this party, go to Mr Dowe and say you're interested because, you know, that's separate, we're not having anything to do with it".

51.57 Georgists are great ones for having different hats but that's how – see, George himself was the first one to challenge. What happened was way back in 1889 one man wanted to leave ten thousand dollars – in those days that's a lot of money – ten thousand dollars for the production and dissemination of George's books. This was challenged by his family; they didn't want him to give that amount of money away to the Georgist movement.

SA: Surprise.

RG: In the first court their challenge was upheld, in the second court, in the Court of Appeal in New Jersey, it was turned down and Georgism was said – this is 1889, I think – was said to be an educational movement. Then it was challenged again in 1939 over the Walsh bequest. Again the family challenged because Walsh gave eighty thousand dollars toward the setting up of a university college as part of the Australian National University. The family again didn't like it, and his wife actually lived on and on, so what they did was they suspended the case until the wife died. The wife died in 1968 and that's when the court case hotted up and the Supreme Court in New South Wales found that the Georgist movement was educational, gave it. Then it was challenged again, after 1996 it was challenged and that came to the Supreme Court in 2002 and Justice Young, the head of the Supreme Court, he found, the Chief Justice found that Georgism was educational – it is educational.

54.09 We've got people from both sides of politics. Remember Sir Allen Fairhall, the Liberal Minister for Defence was a Georgist, Clyde Cameron, the Minister in the Labor Party for Employment, he was a Georgist. So we're not too interested and we have no faith in political action anyway, really. In fact, have a look at this one - isn't that relevant to today? – and it's decades. I'm afraid these are the only ones we've got.

SA: You might like to actually just - - -

RG: Describe it?

SA: - - - describe it.

RG: Well, it's a fishmonger trying to sell two fish to a housewife and the housewife's got her hand up to her nose because the fish stink and one of the fish which is stinking is called Labor and the other one is called National – Nationalists, I suppose it was, the [then] National Party, which is now the Liberal Party. And she's saying "No, thank you. I must have fresh fish" and the political fish hawker says "But we can't have any other, mum, these are all I've got". And it's true, isn't it? You might as well not vote at all.

SA: So what is it that you do here then, what have you done?

RG: Well, we carry on all kinds of educational activities. Sometimes we speak to outside groups. I mean, I've spoken dozens of times to Rotary Clubs, I've spoken to political parties when there has been someone sympathetic to our movement in a political party – and that was particularly with the Democrats; I spoke to their national convention.

56.16 We produce this journal called 'Good Government', we have courses which are different levels; as you go through and you know more, we have different courses available.

SA: What kind of courses?

RG: Well, we start with an elementary course which is not easy. It's the elements of Georgism, the philosophical, the moral elements of Georgism, to properly understand it. The difficulty in Georgism is it's too simple for clever people in a way.

SA: I think it's quite complex.

RG: Yes, it appears to be complex but it's actually very simple, actually it's very simple, it's obvious. I always remember the story that I read at school, a Father Brown story, and there's someone dead, lying on the ground and they're pondering around, the police are pondering around, looking for instruments that might have been used to kill him because, you know, he's quite badly damaged, this corpse, and then Father Brown comes along and he looks up and he says "But hasn't he fallen off the cliff?" You know, looking for complications when it was so simple, he fell off the cliff. No, there is a simplicity about Georgism, an elegance, you know, simple but profound.

SA: So you do these courses?

RG: We do the course – that was the elements – and then we move on into an intermediate course which is focused on economic rent, it's focused on the economics and the practical tax, fiscal side of Georgism.

58.08 Then we have seminars in which we take up issues that are prominent issues of the time, you know, burning questions of the day and discuss them. Sometimes we have lectures that are more focused on issues that are within the Georgist movement, we have a conference once a year, we at the moment have a national education project going, where we're going to send our teachers – we have five or six teachers – we're sending those teachers out to other states to hold courses and to try to interest these smaller organisations in education because education, it's the heart of it and soul of it, you know. Activism, you can go wrong with activism because you start accommodating what you've – it's like you begin to sell things when you're an activist and you change things around to make them more saleable and in changing them around to make them more saleable you totally confuse and get everything wrong that's the heart and soul. Get the heart and soul of it right and then that should be enough to interest the right-minded people, you know.

SA: And how have you in the past and how do you sort of put the Association out there?

59.40 RG: Well, when it was flourishing, they often had debates with socialists, Douglas Credit during the Depression and one report here says six hundred people were in the hall to listen to a debate between the Georgists and the Douglas Credit organisation and similar crowds, I imagine, attended the Socialists because there was continuing debate going on between Georgists and they went on country visits and they used to speak in the Domain - we don't do that any more.

SA: So they were - - -

RG: They went down to the Domain, Arthur Dowe was a constant speaker down at the Domain and he'd speak on street corners. At times of election he would just take things that wouldn't even be allowed these days, you know. Like Railway Square, that was once used for people who wanted to get up on soapboxes and sprout; there was a lot of that going on, you know. Yes, that's what they used to do and of course George himself became a political candidate a couple of times but he did it in order that discussion of the major issues that he wanted discussed could be thrown out to the public a little bit more than it was at the time; it's a great way of bringing those issues out for public discussion. He had no hope of being elected and that was what I think my predecessors were on about, not trying to win a place in parliament. I mean, we've had a place in parliament; I mean, Morrie Williams was a Liberal, he's also president of one of our foundations, he was in parliament for a hell of a long while but didn't do much good. And one of our friends often had breakfast with John Howard and at one stage John Howard said "Well, look, I'll buy it but I can't sell it". So, yes, there've been a lot of things. We have essay competitions going at the moment; we're organising with Sydney University to have an essay competition.

62.01 We had a petition circulated through the community radio stations – not us but the Melbourne group and we cooperated with the Melbourne group and we had this petition and we set up a website so that people could vote and we sent the results in to parliament. Of course nothing happened. There was about three hundred people signed the petition – rather poor result, really.

SA: I'm just really interested about your passion and your commitment to George's principles and I'm wondering, you know, given that there has been a decline in the membership and so on, how do you stay passionate and committed - - -

RG:

SA: - - - to the beliefs of the organisation?

RG: Well, I'm in love with the truth, I think. You know, I don't care that people – you know, what they say is you just present it. It's up to people – you know, it's beautiful just to be there teaching it is wonderful, just to teach it because it's such commonsense; you know, you get rid of all the rubbish and, you know, you speak the truth and you hold out hope for people and you are able to explain why things aren't going as well as they might go. All of these things make you interested but I think it's deep down I love justice and, you know, I've always done that ever since I've been a child. So I think that is the core of it, that's the kernel of it, but, yes, the intellectual enjoyment of it, the social, getting together with people that are in the movement on a social basis.

64.03 I mean, we had twenty five members here – they were all members, there might have been one person from the public was here but there were twenty five of our members here on Sunday. Oh, we had a great time, you know, it's a get-together in that sense. In fact, the organisation when it was at its height was in three parts: you had a promotional or activist part of the movement, writing letters to the press, holding those debates, conferences and things, you had an educational part under Mr Dowe called the Australian School of Social Science which was always teaching. Arthur would have taught for about forty years. He joined the movement around about 1931 after reading Progress and Poverty, became an enthusiast, started this Lakemba branch from which other branches started and some great people became members who lasted right up – and men and women - I mean, Mrs Ackroyd, Mrs Ivy Ackroyd was a great member of our organisation. I had the honour to drive her – she was ninety five or something – most Georgists in those days they lived on and on. The movement went on and on like that from the education; it was education that gave the promotional side its actual members. Then there was the social side. Those that were interested in the social get-togethers and not too interested in the ideas or promotion, they

had their own organisation. It was our social club and I can remember listening to a bloke talk about lighthouses and I remember giving a talk on travelling through Indonesia; there were the three sides to the movement. Now it's just one, just the educational part of the movement.

66.03 **SA: Well, that's really interesting. And so you were saying before that in the early years you were in Darlington.**

RG: Yep.

SA: And then you - - -

RG: Yes, from Darlington – I traced it through the history that has been written from Darlington. They were in a cardboard box factory run by a very prominent Georgist and it burnt down and all the records were burnt down for the Darlington Single Tax Club but apparently we were there too, the Sydney Single Tax Club. Then they moved to Elizabeth Street, they had two addresses in Elizabeth Street. Around about, I don't know, 1916 or something they went to Hunter Street – no, they went to Hunter Street a little later than that from Elizabeth Street. Then when Mr Dowe had his city offices they worked through 92 Elizabeth Street in addition to the office they had in the city. Then they moved to Daking House, from Hunter Street they moved to Daking House.

SA: Which is where?

RG: Which was near Central. Daking House, after Daking-Smith who was a Georgist who was a member of our committee - they were there for decades. Then they went to George Street near Wilmot Street. From there, around about the mid '70s they moved to Lawson Street and in the mid '90s they moved here to Redfern in Little Eveleigh Street. So always we've been in the city.

SA: And why do you think that is, why have you always been in the city, do you think?

67.48 RG: Well, it's central, I imagine. We've been mainly a city organisation, too small to actually decentralise, too small to – they did, that's the first thing they did when they were big enough was to decentralise. For example, as I said, there was the Rockdale branch early on, there was the Balmain branch and there were other branches and there was also this branch in Forbes [regional NSW town], by the way, then Newcastle [NSW] there was a branch. But when we become smaller we can't, there's just not the people involved; you've got to centralise.

SA: And have you mainly owned the buildings that you've - - -

RG: No, we've mainly tenanted buildings and looked for a home and Mr Dowe gave almost a hundred thousand dollars towards – this was bought during the Depression, the last Depression, a fire sale by the Bank of New South Wales, I think; we were able to get this building cheaply.

SA: This is in Little Eveleigh Street.

RG: This street, yes, this one. Mr Dowe gave almost a hundred thousand dollars towards this building.

SA: And that doesn't compromise the Association, does it?

RG: Well, as I explained before, we've got to live somehow and foundations which we're supported from usually by law almost hold their property in land and buildings, that's how property's held. And also it's because our New South Wales organisation, foundation, was started by somebody who owned a building, giving the building to the organisation, which up till then was supported almost totally by subscriptions and by grants from Melbourne. This enabled, by the mid '80s, that and another property which the same man gave to the organisation; he gave two big properties, reasonably big, to the organisation.

70.06 That allowed us to be independent in the 1980s, and as I say, I mean, I think we're an educational organisation; we've got charitable status under the great Charitable Act of 1601. As far as I'm concerned we're tax free. If there was a single tax I'd argue that we'd be tax free because we're an organisation like a church. We're carrying on work which is for the good of community and we're not aiming for our own good, we're as disinterested as any clergyman might be – and in fact lots of clergymen have been Georgists but the point being that we hold property but we use the income from those properties to further our educational work and of course administration which is so bound up with red tape it's not funny these days. So, you know, I justify it, as I would justify a church holding property, you know, income in order to propagate religion, I'm totally in favour of that, but other Georgists may not be but I am.

SA: And also too, given the era that Henry George was actually living in, I mean, do you think that Georgist beliefs translate in a contemporary setting? I mean, obviously you do but it would just be interesting because of the society, you know, that George was living in and - - -

RG: Yes. A lot of people say "Oh, yes, George was living in a society" – for example, you know "that didn't know a thing about the environmental problems".

72.00 Well, if you go back to the 1880s and 1890s, you see arguments developing about smoking in carriages, for example, and a whole chapter in [British philosopher] Herbert Spencer's book is devoted to this one issue of smoking in carriages. You hear of George talking about overcrowding in New York and how one whole half of Long Island in New York is totally deserted and giving over to the great estates of the wealthy and the rest are concentrated, so concentrated that there are more people to the square mile in New York than there is in London. He was aware of these problems. He talked about sealing, the culling of seals in Alaska and how it might properly be carried out and there's a part in Progress and Poverty which looks into that. It was through him that the National Parks movement in the United States – it is generally conceded that Theodore Roosevelt got the idea from Henry George because Henry George was saying "Look, all our land is just simply going. We've got no land left, it's all been taken. It may not look like it's used but it's owned and there'll soon be no land at all" and so the government stepped in and created Yellowstone Park in the 1880s when George was at his highest, his reputation was at his highest. So George was aware of these problems. But the great thing about George is, I mean, it simplifies life, it greatly simplifies life because when things don't go wrong, when there are no complications that have to be dealt with and when you deal with a complication you almost always deal with it in order to make it more complicated.

74.00 So governments move and just stagger from one non-solution to the next non-solution, creating problems as they go but they're good enough to, you know, get them – like the little joke in one of the books here about politicians. I don't know whether it's this one – it's not that one. It says "Politicians" - something that's rather like the running board of a tram - you might remember the trams that had running boards - O.K, "Politicians don't stand on them; they use them to get in". They don't stand on promises; they use, you know, what they stand on to get in to parliament. And isn't it true?

SA: Yes.

RG: That's what politics is like. But, no, it's highly relevant to today. For example, the Great Depression that we're going through, the world, global, that they call a financial crisis, it's not a financial crisis, it's a crisis caused by not solving the land question; by allowing people to appropriate the land values, they create a market. The great thing about land is you don't have to do anything yourself to make a profit out of it. You don't have to be a butcher, you don't have to be an entrepreneur of any kind at all; all you'd have to do is hold onto property and watch the community give it value or find out when a railway's going to be built and where it's going and buy land around the stations; like the airport, you make money out of nothing. So it's got a fascination like gold, you get valuable land.

75.59 So it's the cause of the global financial crisis and the way they've gone about solving the matter, by not addressing the land question has simply made it worse, it's made it into a political crisis, hasn't it, it's made it into a political crisis. It'll soon become a political crisis in the United States. They can't keep recapitalising the banks without enormously increasing the national dept. Henry George made a good point: he said "If you want to get money, why don't you just print currency? Why do you have to buy bonds? Because as soon as you buy bonds the whole country becomes indebted to rich bond holders and you keep paying interest year after year. Why don't you just release more currency? It has its own effect. You just simply release more currency rather than" – if you have to do it, I don't know whether he's in favour of it – but why do you go to the bond holder? Eight hundred billion dollars in the United States has just been issued in bonds from the Reserve Bank. That's eight hundred billion dollars of debt that the United States has inherited and George never believed in future generations being beholden to the present generation. He quoted Jefferson, saying that "All debt should cease after thirty years"; one generation should not be beholden to another generation. You know, we're paying off debts - things that really annoyed him were provisions made by people who'd been dead for donkey's years, like Charles I or something had said about a certain square in New York that it had to be closed by six o'clock and it was closed by six o'clock; you know, things like that he hated. The present generation should solve their own problems.

78.04 **SA: Yes, that's a really interesting concept, really. It'd be quite a different society that we live in if that were the case.**

RG: Yes, but the main thing is that it simplifies life. I mean, it takes away the great need for trade unions. If you make your bargaining position of your worker equal to that of your employer, then you create new industrial relations. There have been times in Australia's history when there has been that equality. They've been brief times but they have existed. For example, the time of the gold rush there was an equality between – and that's why they were trying to drive the workers off the goldfields with the licenses. See, the balance was being upset: the workers were getting, you know – I mean, they had an eight hour day back in the 1850s. Why did they have it? Because they had a strong bargaining position. How did they lose if like they've lost it now? Because they're in a weak bargaining position and they're so weak now they can't even create unions that will stand up against the employer; that's how weak they are; they're in trouble and they can't even create an organisation to represent their interests. Incredible. Yes, so that's what I think: it's totally relevant.

SA: O.K. And lastly, it just sounds very like a socialist sort of perspective and last time you said in fact that you feel that it's quite a right wing – or you've been accused of it being quite a right wing organisation.

RG: It has normally been classified as a right wing organisation.

SA: Can you explain that? Because I don't get it, I don't get that.

80.01 RG: No, I ponder that question and came up with an answer and I can't think of it at the moment. Why it's considered a right wing organisation is because essentially it is. Essentially it's a free market organisation and that's what makes it right wing. It is not a command economy, it's wedded to free trade but wedded to free trade by – you see, George liked to quote the motto that was announced, apparently announced before there was a joust, which amounted to this: we know this term laissez faire and we regard it as a right wing idea, "Let things be". What was said before the joust was "Remove the obstacles and let things be". That's the full, that's the full French mediaeval French statement that was made before a joust: "Remove the obstacles and then let things be". We're all in favour of letting things be but there's a great obstacle and that is the private property in land or, as we say, "the land question", it hasn't been solved and until it's solved letting things be is just a way to chaos, it's a way to unbridled greed because you can make so much money. The richest people, as I said to you, seven out of the ten richest people in Australia are simply – of course they're very able people, I'm not saying they're not but they're primarily very rich because they own either valuable property in the city or they own natural – not own, they've got lease to valuable natural resources and the wealth of those natural resources are said to be their wealth.

82.13 So Gina Reinhart is the richest person in Australia and they can go up and down with the price of these commodities.

SA: Yes, we were talking about the right wing.

RG: Yes, we're talking about the right wing and saying that essentially we are but this obstacle of private property in land, George said if it's not solved will lead to a new barbarism.

SA: Also too we've been talking a little bit about Arthur - - -

RG: Arthur Dowe, yes.

SA: - - - Arthur Dowe and he's kind of like one of the granddaddies of the organisation, I guess you could - - -

RG: Oh, yes. I only met Arthur when he was in his late seventies and when he'd really – he wanted to do things even then but he was a gentleman and he wanted to step aside and let others, you know, do things.

SA: But he also set the library up here – is that right?

RG: It was called the W Dowe Library in honour of him. No, he didn't set it up. Ivy Ackroyd was the lady who with others set the library up and a man called Brannigan gave three hundred volumes of his private library – and others have done that in time. Apparently it's got over two thousand volumes in that library and it's a valuable library, with first editions and so forth. No, Arthur in 1931 started a study group and in America in the 1930s when the movement had almost died out they started schools which they called Schools of Social Science.

84.05 And Arthur in 1936 changed the name to be Study Group to the Australian School of Social Science and he took up the same kind of mission that the Americans had taken up.

SA: Through the organisation?

RG: Yes. He didn't take it up through – the thing was, he created his own material but it was largely, from what I can see, largely modelled on what the Americans were doing - you know, not the approach I would take but it was an approach which tried to get the terms right to start off with and I don't really think that's the approach I'd take myself; I take the moral argument first and then the terms come later. And Arthur created a branch – see, Mr Huie, the secretary of fifty years was really a land taxer, that's all he – he was an activist but he was a land taxer. I don't think he had much grasp of the philosophical basis of the whole movement; I could be wrong but at least he didn't accentuate it, he didn't give it attention. And right from the start Arthur could see, probably, that his way of doing things was not Huie's way of doing things, so he set up his own branch, the Lakemba branch of the movement, where he, you know, had much more freedom of action because Huie was a bit of a – he was a Scotsman and he was a pretty fiery one and he laid down the law for everybody; I get that impression about Huie.

SA: Is that right?

RG: Oh, yes. Anyone who lives to ninety seven like he did must have a bit of something going for him.

SA: Yes.

85.57 RG: I think he was a pretty fiery customer. Arthur was a rather soft customer, didn't like fights, didn't like – he always tried to reduce tension, he wouldn't take sides and a lot of people thought "Well, at certain times, Arthur, you should have taken sides because there are big issues involved here", you know, but Arthur was that type, he didn't really come out strongly. And yet when it came to doctrine he was very, very strict in what he thought was right, you know, and being a solicitor he'd argue over a meaning of a word and he'd make you use a different word. Well, I think that's right, you know, to get

the terminology right because for George terminology was so important. If you had one word and two meanings, well, you were in trouble because you can slip from one meaning to the other without telling anybody and when you do that you create confusion. And that was where he criticised Mill, John Stuart Mill, from slipping from one meaning of land to other: land as the pure surface of the earth, which is our common meaning, to the economic meaning of the land as the whole universe, physical universe. Now, we could be gathering our revenue from frequency waves, you know, we could be gathering our revenue, as I've said, before from fish quotas. You know, as George said with the sealing, where a lease was given out under strict conditions for the culling of seals, he thought that was the way to do things. But the lease was three hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year to give to one company a monopoly but under strict supervision of the government this task of killing seals, you see. So, I mean, we're not into killing seals but at least he thought that the killing should be done humanely and there should be a limited number; he was into sustainability: the culling should not interfere with the growth of the seal population, for example.

88.06 So he was – I'm wandering, aren't I?
88.07

SA: No, no, no, that's fine.

RG: You know, these problems, like this one here, these problems are age-old problems and the land question – as George said, "The primary relationship we have is with land". There is no more primary relationship than with the universe that we come into, so this is our primary relationship and we've got to get it right.

SA: I'm just also thinking too when we were on the subject about kind of notable characters - - -

RG: Yep.

SA: - - - within the movement.

RG: There have been many.

SA: What about women? Were there any of those?

RG: Oh, yes, women played a very big part in the movement; they had their own organisation within the league. They were always out, getting people to subscribe to the journal, increasing the subscriptions to the journal. One of the most prominent members, as I've said, was Ivy Ackroyd, a brilliant woman, so easy to get along with. She died – I think she was ninety five or six. She took up ice skating at sixty six, she was a lovely woman. At ninety six she was doing her yoga exercises and she pulled a bookcase down on top of her, unfortunately, and broke her hip. Then she went into hospital

and lasted no time and died. She was heading towards a hundred, you know, nothing would have stopped her, but, yes.

89.55 Then Jessie Street, you know, she was a famous lady. When she went to America I think she met most of the notable, many of the notable people like President's wife - and President of the United States I'm talking about – she was a foremost member of the women's movement in Australia. Reports of her movement are in The Standard, they had their own reports. Women have played a very prominent part but it's been a largely men's organisation. Women have spoken quite early; even in the early 1900s, women speakers were there but it's been largely a men's organisation, it's a dreamer's organisation. You know, as someone said, "It's our favourite hobby". We philosophise, you don't have to do anything, you just have to - - -

SA: So are the backgrounds of people who have been with the organisation - - -

RG: Well, yes.

SA: - - - is it mainly kind of intellectuals, academics or is it just a broad - - -

RG: Well, for a long while, you know, [Architect Walter] Burley Griffin was a member of the Chicago, which was the biggest Single Tax Club in America, he was member of that. Came to Australia in 1913 to look over the plans for Canberra, spoke in Sydney, went to Melbourne, formed a club, the Henry George Club, that finances buildings, buys buildings for branches. We had the Professor of Architecture at Sydney University – his name was Professor [Leslie] Wilkinson, Canon Hammond – remember down in Broadway [church?] Hammond - he was a Georgist and he gave possibly the best speech ever given at a conference or at a annual general meeting, I think, 1936; it's in The Standard, it's a brilliant speech.

92.06 We've had lots of teachers, lots of clergymen, carpenters, printers, small businessmen of all kinds.

SA: So you couldn't put a label on it?

RG: No. We've had tonnes of politicians too, ones who've got into parliament, there are dozens of them. No, it encompasses the whole range and I think the oldest one we've got at the moment, Les Taylor, joined the movement in 1934 in Lakemba – he still lives in Lakemba – I think he was a labourer. So, you know, we've got the whole - - -

SA: What's his name?

RG: Les Taylor. He was seventeen years old when he joined in 1934, so he's born in 1917 - he's coming around to a hundred. He's not well but - - -

SA: That's amazing.

RG: - - - he's an amazing man. He's been a continuous member but, I mean, Arthur was teacher – he was in the movement for sixty five years. And look at Huie: he was in the movement from late 1800s right to his death in 1964 at the age of ninety seven. We've got a hundred year old person. Well, we did have – I don't know whether he's still alive - Donohue, he was a fiery old character. Oh, God, you always knew what Bernie wanted, yes.

SA: So it was very lively meetings by the sounds of it.

RG: Yes, they argue over anything. When I first came into the organisation the journal was simply full of arguments that would never cease over, you know, "Do we call it a tax or a rent?" you know, and they're arguing.

94.00 So what I did was I created a Georgist quarterly and I hoped to put that type of discussion into the Georgist quarterly where it needn't be shared by the average reader that might read it and be – because they got personal, they got very personal, and a lot of fiery people belong to this movement and they let fly to each other.

SA: So where to for the organisation now?

RG: Well, it has to come around to the idea that the Georgist movement began with a great educator, it began with Henry George. Of course, we can't – you know, he was a special person but it began with education; it needs to begin again and it can only begin with people who are thoroughly knowledgeable about what it is because if you're not you're going to go off track. It's so easy to go off track; you get something wrong, there are lots of people with rather wrong ideas in our movement and they're propagating them and they're being funded by our foundation. The idea of activism has crept into the movement and it's held sway for a donkey's ages ever since Arthur began to get, you know, too old to carry on his classes - and radio broadcasts too, Arthur did a lot of radio broadcasts over 2KY and over Sir Allen Fairhall's station, 2KO in Newcastle. But, you know, there's been this hiatus and, as I say, when I walked into the movement I was invited to be editor because there just wasn't anybody and when I attended the first meeting that I went to there were five very old men sitting at a long table and there was Arthur and a young man sitting with him and there was me, that was it, that was what it was.

96.13 It had descended because, you know, everyone dies, no one lives forever and, you know, very, very useful people. This journal is full of people, there are hundreds of people listed in our journal who have died so it needs to begin again and it needs to begin slowly. You must be patient. People aren't patient, you know, they're talking "We want a salesman". Well, you've got to have a teacher before you have a salesman. I'm not against salesmen – they're terrific if you want a salesman. I know a couple of good ones but mainly they're conmen, they are, you couldn't believe a word they say. Unfortunately. I mean, you've got to have the enthusiasm and the sincerity and the message and that's my idea, Sue, it's got to be a patient beginning again. O.K, you know, Henry George created a book which some people think was the greatest book of non fiction in the nineteenth century, was said to be that by the co-founder of the Evolutionary Movement. What was his name – [Alfred Russell] Wallace? Anyway, in 1882 he said "It's the greatest work of non fiction in the nineteenth century". So it began with a great book and that meant that George was asked to speak and he was asked to write and he unconsciously began a movement, he didn't consciously begin a movement, and disciples came to him. You know, they're called disciples, one of them being Tom Johnson who was Mayor of Cleveland for ten years and who aimed to make public transport free in Cleveland.

98.08 He ran up against the tram car monopolists and they killed him. They had more money than even the Cleveland Council did and by continually taking him to court they killed him physically.

SA: So that's what you're saying here is about getting back to the real roots?

RG: Root. It's rather like the Protestant movement when the Catholic Church had gone so much astray that they had to get back to basics again.

SA: And so what about this building? Is this going to continue to be your home?

RG: As far as I know. We have refused an offer from a tenant to take over the whole building. We think that this is a home. I've gone along with the idea – it's other people's ideas, I go along with it. It's nice to come here, it's a very pleasant place and it's got lots of advantages: it's near the most central city station in Sydney, you can come from anywhere to this building from that station, so it's fortunate.

SA: Now, I've gone through all of my questions, really, that I was going to ask but is there something that you feel that it's necessary to say or to finish off with? Don't feel pressured that you need to.

RG: No. Well, I'll say that since I've been secretary, we've come a long way from, you know, the five very elderly and rather eccentric gentlemen that I saw when I came into the room; There were no activities, there was only an annual conference.

100.07 Some organisations in Georgism think they're doing something if they have monthly meetings and that was the fault that our organisation had: we had monthly meetings but nothing ever happened; I mean we just had another monthly meeting after that one where we might plan ahead for months for a conference, which we had. So, we didn't have any courses; Arthur had sort of burnt out and he was too old and nobody else was taking it on. What I've done is to create courses and educate people in those courses and interest people to the extent that we've now got five or six people who are quite able to teach. We lack the money to go further. We'd have a lot more classes if we had a lot more money but we haven't. It's run from Melbourne, the source of money is Melbourne.

SA: So is there a big community of Georgists in Melbourne?

RG: A little bit smaller than us but they hold the – you see, when the foundation in Melbourne was started in 1928, twenty thousand pounds was donated – that's a lot of money, twenty thousand pounds – it's more than millions of dollars now – and that foundation was created and two thirds of that creation came from Melbourne. And unfortunately – I don't want to say too much but they've had the majority of the money and it's quite a big foundation; ours is tiny compared to it.

102.00 It's only as big as the Henry George Club, which is a rather small organisation in Melbourne but it's about that size, our foundation, so we just lack the money. We like to give things free: we think that the truth is a common, it's there for everybody, you don't charge for the truth. It's like a religion: you don't charge to teach the bible or spread religion. Well, you don't charge to – we hope that we don't charge for propagating the teaching of Henry George, we make everything as free as possible. We give these CDs away, the magazine – well, we support with the magazine – membership's two dollars and it comes and we have to pay eighteen dollars. Eighteen dollars doesn't pay for our magazine, I can assure you. We try to make things – and that's our motto these days, to make things as free as possible. Yes, I'd close on what my contribution has been. I've got my failings but everybody's got failings. I'm not Henry George but I like to think that I've tried to emulate his – there's enough in Henry George to indicate the direction in which we should be going and I think I've absorbed that direction and I think I'm true to what Henry George, to the direction that he laid down. Because he went a long way. He went from a single master teacher to a person who was known all over the world and who had organisations all over the world and study groups all over the world. So he faced these political questions about where

to go and with him it was always education, it was never politics, so I've followed that.

104.01 **SA:** **O.K. Well, look, thank you very much for sharing your obvious passion for Georgism and the history of the organisation as well, thank you.**

RG: Thanks, Sue.

Interview ends