

“Was Anybody Listening?”

THAT was the headline in bold type on an editorial in the Wilmington Evening Journal, after Edwin P. Neilan, in a talk to the Greater Wilmington Board of Realtors, said “placing the tax emphasis on ground would be a natural stimulus to property owners to make improvements on the land.”

Somebody on the Journal staff who remembered Arden, Delaware and its founder, a Georgist, Frank Stephens; said, “new thinking, and new approaches to old problems should be always welcome—and this one appears to make sense.” Furthermore, as pointed out, it is being studied more and more by such authorities as the American Institute for Economic Research in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

Readers of the Detroit Free Press also will not be able to say much longer that they never heard of the *Progress and Poverty* author. An editorial on April 28th titled “A Small Dose of George” revealed similarities and dissimilarities between George’s view and what engineer Benjamin F. Smith of Grand Rapids is asking for (more taxes on land and less from the buildings). Smith’s proposal is called “Henry George with a difference . . . emphasis on a larger land tax, not a ‘single tax.’” It was noted that this “is getting wider attention from sound and sensible corners including favorable treatment in the voice of the business establishment, Fortune magazine.”

Mr. Smith’s persistence in writing letters to editors and speaking at public meetings has brought his views to the attention of Commissioner Leonard W. Anderson, who thinks the plan has

great merit, “not necessarily as a revenue-producing method, but as one that shows true property values, and has the additional merit of inhibiting or slowing down the creation of slum areas.” The Detroit Free Press has reported freely on these views, and also on the success of Southfield’s reassessment policy introduced by the Georgist Mayor, James Clarkson. In the words of the editor, “If Smith and Clarkson are right, tax assessment policies could become useful tools in the improvement of Michigan’s cities. It may be that a small dose of Henry George isn’t so bizarre after all.”

According to the Michigan Constitution all property must be assessed equitably at not more than 50 per cent of market value, but opinions differ as to whether this is the case. Mayor Clarkson says land used to be assessed at 15 to 20 per cent of market value in Southfield and buildings at 80 to 90 per cent. This pattern still exists in Detroit, he says, and that is why Detroit has so many vacant lots and slums in the central business district.

A new \$25 million building project will soon be moving into Southfield because acreage there could be bought for \$5 million. Detroit prices would have been much higher. Southfield has appraised all land values as close as possible to market value. This forces speculators and absentee owners to release land. Clarkson calls this reform “the great adventure,” and shows that homeowners received a reduction in both city and school taxes. Buildings are depreciated 1 per cent a year of their life, and all land assessments have been increased.

One candidate in this year’s New York Mayoralty campaign was I. D. Robins, who sought a fusion nomination. He advocates a shift in the burden of taxation from improvements to land, according to press and radio interviews. He has now yielded in favor of John Lindsay, and we can only hope that Lindsay will get the message.