

Commissioner Samis of Calgary

WE have received a copy of Report of the Proceedings of the 16th Annual Conference of the Union of Alberta Municipalities of a year ago. It is an interesting pamphlet. Not a few of the mayors of the cities of Alberta appear to have a realization of what is at the heart of municipal well-being.

A notable address was made by Commissioner A. J. Samis, of Calgary. Some of this has reference to what are purely local considerations, and to understand it, it would be necessary to be somewhat familiar with existing conditions in that city. After pointing out that there are 20,000 vacant lots in what now constitutes the available area of that city, Mr. Samis said:

Another proposition that the Public Utilities Board has in mind, and I fear this one also, is the question of unearned increment. The Council of the City of Calgary has said they want as large an unearned increment as we can get. I do not know that they have stated any particular percentage, but in any case they have asked for a very substantial portion of the unearned increment. I fear that the Public Utilities Board have not a very high percentage in their minds. I would like to say something with respect to that unearned increment. It seems to me to be logical to say this; that land is valuable in direct proportion to the number of people who want to use it. I made that statement the other night in Calgary and a gentleman there whose opinion I value very highly made a reply that was very good but I do not think was a complete answer. He said, "You say land is valuable in direct proportion to the number of people who want to use it. Suppose there is a lot nobody wants to use. It therefore would have no value?" Well, that sounded pretty good and I was pretty nearly stumped for the moment but I came back quickly. I said, "There are vacant lots on Eighth Avenue in Calgary. Would you suggest that those lots, which everybody admits are worth thousands, right close to the centre, would you suggest that because they are not built upon that they have no value?" He said, "No, I admit that it has a potential value." I would use another word, I would say site value, and I would say that out here there is a great big area of land there very close to the centre, as you see, within a mile of the post office, that has not been built upon, and at the present time our street railway, going away out here (south); wherever the street railway goes there the public utilities and public works must go also; that is practically a fact. Now, it seems to me that question of site value can be demonstrated by the fact not as to what land is being used for but what it should be used for, and it should be taxed for what it should be used for, and not for what it is used for, and therefore, if land is valuable in proportion to the number of people who want to use it, the fact that that land close in, splendid land right close to the centre of the city, is vacant and idle, it is not because people do not want to use it, it is because the owners have placed a prohibitive price upon it.

In conclusion Mr. Samis said:

I am going to finish with this one thought; you say we ought to sell that land out there and that it is none of our business what a man wants it for. I take issue on that statement. I say we have a right to ask what that man wants it for. If he wants it for speculation, if he wants it so that he can finance out of the city treasury, then think

we have a right to say, No. But if he wants it because it has value in itself, in itself under inherent right, if it has a value to him, then it has a value to the city, and if it has a value to the city it can be leased to him and on a perpetual lease and as those values rise and fall (values of land do not always fall, sometimes a city moves away from a certain locality, the values fall) the man who has a perpetual lease has a perfect right to have a reduction in the rental that he pays for the land on that leased basis even as he has a right to have it increased if, by virtue of community values having been created there he has had that increased value. If 75,000 people in Calgary, by reason of their activities, make that lot worth \$1000, if I happen to be an old timer there and to have obtained it for \$25, does it not stand to reason that as that land increased in value, not by my activities but those of the community, I should pay the community for the value they put in it? I say the thing is moral. It is perfectly equitable and it does away with the ridiculous spectacle we have in all cities—I know of no city that is not more or less ridiculous on account of this very situation—it does away with that situation and we should give these lands out on a perpetual lease. I do not want to go into a long discussion of the development and the objections, as it is late, that a man would not build on a perpetual lease. I will say this about it, that a perpetual lease is just as strong as a title, just as strong as the government that gave it. If the government is overturned both your lease and your title is overturned. If a man has a perpetual lease he has a tenure of security that is just as strong, the only difference being this, that under the title the individual takes the value which the community creates while under the perpetual lease the community retains it by a sliding scale of taxation in accordance with the assessed value, the value which the community itself creates. I think that is all I have to say at the present time; I think I have said enough. (Applause.)

A Progressive Chamber of Commerce

THE Parkersburg, Pa., Chamber of Commerce, at a regular meeting passed unanimously the following resolution:

"In view of the generally prevailing lack of employment, and seeing that we are suffering also from a scarcity of dwelling houses, this body would respectfully suggest that your organization give serious consideration to the expediency of alleviating both these troubles by the changing, at the next session of our Legislature, of our State's tax laws, so that the taxes which now fall on real estate (land values and improvements) may be concentrated on the communally made land values alone.

We do this believing that this change would be doubly beneficial; first—by the removing of the burden of taxes which now rests on those who improve their holdings, and secondly, by making land cheaper and more available for use through the checking of land speculation which would result from the increased taxes falling on land values."

IN the beginning God made the land for men and the children of men, now we pay the landlord for living on the Earth.—H. M. H.