



Know Your Representative and Offer Your Help, Urges Representative Clarkson

THERE was a new, refreshing and urgent commingling of viewpoints at various times during the recent conference, on political and educational approaches to the land value tax reform. At last there was evidence among representatives of the Henry George School that we could consider political action without losing our birthright, so long, of course, as we remember that the sole function of the school is to offer instruction.

This was dramatically keyed by S. James Clarkson, Michigan State Representative, who asked for a show of hands from those who knew their representative's name. The audience seemed about evenly divided between those who knew and those who did not, and the latter, having been made aware of their omission, were certainly inspired to rectify it.

It soon became evident from Mr. Clarkson's address, following an introduction by Melvin C. Bergen, that politicians *do* work hard for the people back home. Voters show a most ungrateful attitude when they are guilty of such indifference as to ignore elections on the local level—the place (and some believe the only place) where they can make their influence felt. "Why should your representative knock himself out to represent you if you don't even know him," asked the young legislator. Try calling him up on the telephone some time, he suggested, he isn't too busy to talk and he'll be gratified to know you are interested in politics. At least, he'll say to himself, "there's *one* who isn't

against me." And one against you, especially if it's a woman, said the speaker, can be ruinous. At campaign time, he added, ask him if there's anything you can do to help him.

While education is a necessary adjunct to carrying-out the principle of land value taxation, the approach in politics is in terms of expediency, practicability and "will it get any votes." In other words, "politically Henry George is dead—all names are dead, save our own, and as the trite expression goes, 'we don't care what you call us, but be sure you spell the name right.'"

The game of politics is rough, the audience was told, and many have missed the fact that in trying to outdo each other on an intellectual level they have lost sight of the main objective of land value taxation. I will never forget, the speaker remarked, the time when Bob Benton was in a competitive letter writing contest with another erudite economist. Each was trying to prove to the other some farfetched point that continued to get progressively worse until it became a semantic mire. Finally Bob wondered whether he should go on. I gave him my honest opinion, "you have wasted six months of your time already." Believe it or not, the correspondent was so insistent that he wanted to pay Bob to continue the debate. "Now how intellectual can you Georgists get?"

There are certain obstacles that must be overcome before any politician can carry out any principle to which he is committed, but the first step toward

instituting the principle of land value taxation is to elect legislators that are sympathetic to your views. That's why business puts money into campaign coffers for certain individuals, why the unions have a Political Action Committee and give financial support to certain official candidates, and why, if you really mean what you have been preaching the past fifty years—if you really mean it—you, or at least the Henry George Foundation (whose work is not restricted), must have a similar committee. It doesn't follow, that you necessarily have to elect a large number of politicians. A relative handful will do the wheeling and dealing to carry out the ideals you are teaching.

Following passage of House Bill No. 505 in the Michigan Legislature, a

committee was appointed to "investigate the effects of a higher differential rate of taxation on land values as compared to improved values of real property." The five members of this committee "took testimony" for two days following the Henry George School conference in Detroit, and conference visitors who appeared before the committee were: Russel Conklin of Montana; Joseph S. Thompson and Glenn E. Hoover of California; Judge John R. Fuchs of Texas; and Urquhart Adams of Alberta.

The four men who, with "Jim" Clarkson, compose the above committee, will in Mr. Clarkson's words, "be around a long time, they're young, they'll be re-elected—they'll remember what they're told."



GOVERNOR ENDORSES GRADED TAX

I AM HAPPY to provide the following information on the Pittsburgh Graded Tax Law. These observations come from my dual role as a life long citizen of Pittsburgh and as a former mayor. The law was made possible by the State Legislature back in 1913 and I am satisfied that since then it has proven to be a success.

The city tax rates for the year 1959 are \$37.00 per \$1,000 valuation on land and \$18.50 per \$1,000 on buildings. Under this law the City Council each year must fix a building tax rate just half that which is levied on land. It has been on this ratio since 1925.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Graded Tax Law has been a good thing for Pittsburgh. It has discouraged the holding of vacant land for speculation and provides an incentive for building improvements. In the distribution of the tax burden it is particularly beneficial to the home owners.

Pittsburgh is now in the midst of a very extensive urban redevelopment program, and it is a matter of record that the owners of many of the fine office buildings, hotels, apartments and industrial plants that have been built in recent years are paying substantially lower taxes than they otherwise would pay because of the Pittsburgh tax plan which encourages all private improvements on real estate by the lower tax rate on buildings.

The law is generally accepted in the community and there is no significant support for its repeal or modification; in fact many citizens believe that it should be extended and in 1951 the Pennsylvania Legislature enacted legislation giving our forty-seven third class cities the option to adopt similar Graded Tax measures if the city council saw fit to do so.

(Signed) David L. Lawrence

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