

SITE-VALUE RATING

By E. B. DONOHUE

OPPOSITION ACTIVE

There is an evident concerting of action by those opposed to site-value rating to seek some modifications in their favor.

Mr. B. S. B. Cook, of Malvern, has had several letters in the "Age" and has apparently swayed his Malvern South Branch of the Liberal-Country Party to seek an investigation of the operation of site-value rating in Malvern. He disputes the claims of rating reformers that "about 75 per cent" of homes pay less under that basis. An attack in the name of this Branch but unsigned was published in "Malvern Advertiser," and answered by the General Council for Rating Reform, who pointed out that proportions benefiting under the change could be easily checked from the rolls which print both values and sought co-operation of this and other branches of political parties to make such a comprehensive survey.

This was followed up with direct invitations to the branches to appoint representatives for this purpose.

The Liberal-Country Party conference had several motions before it from branches relative to proposed amendments of the Local Government Act on site-value rating. These were referred to the Party Executive with power to act. The man who had most to say on these motions at the conference was Mr. B. S. B. Cook.

Comments and other information relative to the proposed amendments have been submitted by the General Council for Rating Reform to the Liberal-Country Party Executive and appear elsewhere in this issue.

In Broadmeadows the same clique of councillors who have opposed site-value rating for years are still doing their best to attack it. Cr. Rayner has tabled a motion seeking amendment of the Local Government Act to require petitions for polls to be presented to the Minister instead of councils; the Minister then to call for a survey how change would operate and then to have comparative statements and a poll if the Minister orders it.

Intimidation

Indicative that holders of vacant land are becoming apprehensive of the demand for site-value rating in Devonport (Tas.) is the following text of an unsigned and unstamped letter received by Cr. E. H. Churcher:

"Why don't you shut your big mouth on the site-rating issue because if you persist someone will plant a fist in your ugly dial and shut it for you. You are nothing but a fanatic and a skiter, so shut up before you get done over—and I mean done over!"

Rate Protest Meetings

Protest meetings have been held in many municipalities which have had revaluations over the last two years. Those which have been prominent in the press have included the following rating U.C.V.: Camberwell, Heidelberg, Brunswick, Moorabbin. Those rating buildings and improvements (N.A.V.) included

Lilydale, Keilor, Mulgrave, Malvern, Whittlesea, Dundas, Bet Bet.

Mr. Fagan, Municipal Association Secretary, was reported as saying that there were probably many times the number in country districts that didn't make headlines in the daily press like the metropolitan ones.

Malvern and Mulgrave have since changed to site-value rating and are free from rate protests while their councils have more funds available for works. Keilor is to take a poll next August.

The basic reason for intensification of complaint this year lies in discussion at the municipal association conference which suggested it was better for councils to go for a big increase in revenue when they revalued instead of smaller increases from year to year. The principle was to get all the complaints over in one year and have the extra revenue. The sponsors of this idea have evidently misjudged ratepayer-reaction.

Some of the protests are quite unfounded. Brunswick only increased its revenue 15 per cent, which is quite reasonable and at least one of the progress associations was reported as passing a motion that it considered the increase perfectly justified.

Camberwell and Heidelberg protest meetings were exclusively directed against the substantial increase in scale of proposed expenditure in one year without any criticism of the rating system. Nevertheless opponents in other places have cited the complaints as a product of the system.

They conveniently forget the more numerous protests in the districts rating upon improvements.

Wangaratta

"Wangaratta Chronicle" (13/3/57) reported that the Ratepayers' Protection League had issued instructions for a Supreme Court writ to prevent the Borough Council from collecting its rates under site-value. It claimed counsel had advised that the referendum conducted last August had not been carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Act consequently any rate based on the referendum was "ultra vires." It was indicated the League would meet that night to discuss the question.

The nature of the alleged breach was not given but reports of the meeting (understood to have been attended by five persons only comprising ex-Cr. Nolan and friends) suggest that it is claimed the results of the poll were not published in the Government Gazette.

If that is all we don't give them much prospect of success. The attempt to upset the 1947 poll in Heidelberg failed because (although irregularities were admitted) site-value supporters could not produce 17 persons in court deprived of their vote as would be needed to lead the magistrate to infer the result could have been affected.

In this case there is a 4-to-1 vote that has to be talked down. We will be surprised if that writ is actually lodged and will look forward to ex-Cr. Nolan footing a bill for costs as a fitting retribution to his obstruction to ratepayers' wishes over the last four years.