

THE ONTARIO ELECTIONS.*

Toronto, Ont., Dec. 16.

The Provincial elections are over and the Conservatives have again secured a large majority.

No sooner had Sir James Whitney announced that a new election would take place than some of the Conservative papers proclaimed their belief that, in consequence of his opposition to local option in taxation, it would be well for the country to have a stronger Opposition. At the same time the Liberal party came out unequivocally in favor of this local option; and the leader of that party, Mr. N. W. Rowell, in his opening meeting gave his approval to the proposal and was heartily applauded for it by the audience.

To those who have had to fight the politicians, often with very little encouragement, thus to see one political party and some of the members and papers of the other political party endorsing this all important measure has been a cause of great rejoicing.

The two Conservative candidates for the city of Ottawa, I presume under the influence of the Southam brothers of the Ottawa Citizen, pledged themselves publicly to support a measure for local option in taxation, so that in spite of the opposition of Sir James Whitney, the leader of their party, a bill to grant power to municipalities to remove taxes from improvements will be introduced in our next Parliament.

During the election Sir James was induced at last to notice the criticism of some of his own supporters, and in a communication to the press, he assumed a case in which two men bought farms for \$4,000 each, on which one man erected a home worth \$1,000 and the other a home worth \$16,000. "Now," he said, "the proposal is made to give the one man an exemption of \$16,000 and the other an exemption of only \$1,000." Then he continued: "I shall not argue this point at all, but will say that when the farmers of Ontario make it clear that they desire the imposition on themselves of such a rank and manifest injustice, no government will stand in their way."

In making this assumption, he very carefully avoided the case of the man who, by holding a single acre in any of our commercial centers, without spending an hour in the production of anything, can secure the crops of a hundred farms every year.

In this same communication he promised that there would be a special committee to deal with assessments at the close of the next session of the local Parliament. The question has now obtained so strong a hold on the minds of the people, and has received such hearty support from a large portion of the press of both parties, that it will not down.

Twenty-one years ago the Parliament of Manitoba, in consequence of the representations of the farmers, who saw the speculators reaping the benefit of their pioneer work, amended the assessment act with the following words: "All land in rural municipalities, used for farming or gardening purposes, shall be assessed as it would be assessed if it were unimproved." Shortly after that the Province of British Columbia passed a measure which allowed the taxation of improvements to the amount of only

half the value, and as much less as the municipalities might choose. Saskatchewan and Alberta followed with similar legislation, while the Province of Ontario, which prided and boasted itself as the most progressive, populous and wealthy of the Provinces, has been clinging blindly and stupidly to an antiquated and unjust method, which aroused, often to a white heat, the spirit of speculation, and time and again brought on financial cataclysms that swept the country, in spite of its fertility and the skill and industry of its people, with epidemics of bankruptcy.

W. A. DOUGLASS.

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AUSTRALASIA.

Corowa, N. S. W., Australia, Oct. 27.

Mr. George Fowlds has resigned his position as the Minister of Education in New Zealand, as he considers Sir Joseph Ward's ministry not sufficiently progressive. He found that as a Minister he was hampered in the expression of his views, and he felt he could serve the people better as a private member. He will advocate that the tax on land values be increased by a penny in the pound, and that customs duties on the necessaries of life be remitted.

A general State election was held in Western Australia last month, when the Labor party was returned by a large majority. At present, there is in force in this State a land value tax of one penny in the pound, with exemptions. The Wilson ministry, which was defeated, had proposed to abolish this tax, and to increase the income tax. The Labor party supports a land value tax without exemptions. It is much sounder on land value taxation than the State Labor parties of Victoria and New South Wales.

The budget of last year, submitted to the State parliament of South Australia by the Verran (Labor) ministry, was passed by the lower house, but defeated in the Legislative Council. [See *The Public*, current volume, p. 79.] The Ministry is trying to pass a veto bill, somewhat similar to that recently enacted in England. This year's budget was lately presented by the Treasurer, Mr. Crawford Vaughn. Like that of last year, it is on Singletax lines, the increased land value tax being in substitution for existing taxes. It is proposed to increase the tax on land values by one-half penny in the pound. Against this, railway freights are to be reduced, the income tax exemption raised from £200 to £300, and stamp duties on receipts abolished.

In Victoria, local government taxation is levied on the annual rental value of land and improvements. The State Ministry has introduced a bill making it optional for municipalities to tax land values instead, and providing that if a Council does not adopt this method, a poll of taxpayers may be taken to decide the question. But the conditions laid down in the bill will make it very difficult to obtain the holding of a poll, and plural voting is not abolished, so the bill is a very disappointing measure. As a general State election is to be held in November, it is doubtful if the bill will be proceeded with this session. At this election, a system of preferential voting will be used for the first time. The State is divided into 65 constituencies, each return-

*See *Public* of December 15, page 1267.