

Graded Tax Plan Makes Headway

A NUMBER of Pennsylvania cities are now actively interested in the possible benefits they may derive under the new Act No. 299, approved by Governor John S. Fine on August 17, 1951. Several of the most important cities are now qualified by the separate assessment of land and improvements to adopt differential tax rates at any time their councils may so decide.

In the forefront at this time are the cities of Clairton and Easton, the former in the Pittsburgh area and the latter in northeastern Pennsylvania. In Clairton, Mayor John J. Mullen, who is also the newly-elected president of the League of Cities of the Third Class, is definitely committed to the early adoption of the Graded Tax Plan for his city and is advocating a substantially lower tax rate on improvements for the year 1952, official action having to await the completion of a revised assessment to conform more closely with actual values and to show separate totals for land and buildings.

Several of the larger and more important cities have already adopted the separate assessment of land and buildings and have reported separate totals. These include Erie, Harrisburg, Allentown, Altoona, Wilkes-Barre, York, Williamsport and Easton.

The campaign in Easton, where a new city administration has just taken office, is being led by George F. Hellick, prominent business man and scientific farmer, with the cooperation of Lafayette College. Harold S. Buttenheim, editor of *The American City*, addressed a recent meeting of civic leaders at Lafayette College and found a keen interest in the new tax legislation. Secretary Percy R. Williams of the Henry George Foundation spoke at another citizens' meeting at the college early in March.

The initial victory in Pennsylvania has created a widespread interest in the idea of utilizing home rule to shift local taxes from improvements to land values.

The unanimous endorsement of the Maryland Municipal League at its recent convention where Mr. Buttenheim spoke, is a definite indication of the growing popularity of this plan. Enlightening and friendly newspaper editorials appearing recently in the *Bridgeport (Conn.) Post* and the *Sacramento (Calif.) Union* both stress especially the value of improvement exemption as an incentive to new industries, and refer to the almost unanimous vote by which the Pennsylvania Legislature adopted the McGinnis enabling act at the recent session.

In the State of Massachusetts, Joseph L. Richard of Brookline, James B. Ellery of Gloucester, and R. H. Zwicker of Arlington are among the most active workers in behalf of tax legislation along Georgist lines. Mr. Richards has drafted several bills for introduction in the legislature and is distributing printed copies, including one that is identical with Pennsylvania Act No. 299, and another intended to amend the state constitution so as to remove any doubt of the constitutionality of the plan.