Is LVT Catching On? Yes Indeed!

AMONG visitors to New York school headquarters in December was a professor from New Orleans recently exposed to Henry George's views and now enrolled in a Fundamental Economics correspondence course. "Is this thing really catching on?" he asked. For all who question this we wish we could give a full report on the many newspaper clippings that reach us confirming that it is indeed catching on.

However, since we maintain no clipping bureau and make no attempt to encourage these reports being sent, since we have so little space to comment on them, it is certain that we see only a very small sampling of the news items, editorials and letters to editors which are steadily making the principle of land value taxation more generally known.

Here, for instance, is a typical case, and it illustrates how quickly action was taken in St. Petersburg, Florida, after the executive vice president of the Chamber of Commerce spoke at a luncheon and said, "the ad valorem system is hitched up backwards. We put a premium on the sloth. If his building decays we reduce his taxes— we penalize the man who improves his property." He said the solution lies in a "land value tax" where the tax is the same on all lots regardless of the structure on them. His talk was reported in the St. Petersburg Times.

Two days later the same paper announced in its editorial column "the next big government impact seems sure to come from annual property tax bills— the first billing based on the 1961-62 general reassessment program, due in a few days. . . . Pinellas County has already taken a step, through its revaluation program, toward the goal described to the St. Petersburg Board of Realtors this week by Dudley Jewell of the Chamber of Commerce, a newcomer, who asked for a property tax system which will favor good land use."

Mr. Jewell has urged a graded tax plan like the one in Pittsburgh, but this has met opposition and would require a constitutional amendment. The revised assessments will not be as high as market prices, but holders of great expanses of land are pretty sure to find increases, in some cases, astronomical increases. Some homeowners however will find reductions in their new tax bills.

Frederick R. Barkley, who lives in St. Petersburg and who sent the above clippings, included another from the Times of November 15th, showing that the first letter on The Times Forum page was a lengthy one written by him. It referred to the system used in New Zealand and Australian cities, and noted that for those people unfamiliar with the idea proposed by the new Chamber of Commerce manager, the answer was simple.

"These land values are created by the spending of our population for food, clothing, shelter and public facilities, and not by the title holders. Without a general public paying for the roads, streets, schools, water, sewers, police, courts and administrators, this land would have no market value except in the hope that people and facilities were coming in the near future."

In a quite different vein, emphasizing supervision of slums, is an editorial in The Denver Catholic Register concerning the high cost of the Aid to Dependent Children program. An 11-point plan outlined by Monsignor Ebel starts off with Number One—a "crack-down on the slum landlords who charge first-class rents for fourth-class flats."