

## It Couldn't Be Done — So a Woman Did It



SHE ran for office as county assessor when it was an impossible dream. She was unknown, had no previous experience in political life, and to make matters worse she admitted she was a teacher and supporter of Henry George's views, but she won. Irene Hickman of Sacramento recently won *again* with a vote of confidence after her enemies, with entrenched wealth and political power, tried to recall her.

Three years ago Henry B. Cramer of San Diego, who was active in the Homeowners, changed the course of her life when he asked her to do some research on assessment practices. She was startled at what she found, and after all other methods failed to produce the needed reform, she reluctantly sought the office.

It has been commonly believed, even by the women themselves, that economics, and tax matters especially, are abstruse and unwomanly. Irene did what came naturally—she made appearances at groups of all kinds with homemade sketches of lots that were inequitably assessed. She credits a large part of her success to the fact that women of the county came out and worked for a candidate who told them simply what was wrong with current assessment methods. They could see that they were paying disproportionately high taxes for their well improved property, whereas many owners of vacant or badly-used lots were paying ridiculously low rates.

Few men have been courageous enough to use the name of Henry George in their campaigns for office, but Hickman blundered innocently into

an unashamed confession that she was a Georgist! She is an osteopathic physician and surgeon and mother of three children. There is no evidence that she and her husband are in the lofty tax brackets—but she has returned to her friends every cent they contributed to the meager campaign fund two years ago. The recent "recall" campaign, which was reported enthusiastically by Los Angeles and other California newspapers, cost over \$14,000. She will also refund contributions to that fund or turn them over to charity.

She said at the outset that she would not expect to run for re-election so she could say what she liked but would not be drawn into campaign invectives. She kept her promises and raised the assessments which were too low, hence the attempted recall. Now the challenges are becoming so stimulating that the lady assessor may try to join the State Board of Equalization at the close of her present term of office. By candidly dropping the warning now she is allowing two years for adversaries to roll out the big artillery.

These will be years in which Irene will have a chance to set up Sacramento County as a valuable test case. First she should find a way to win a measure of support from the 41 percent who voted to recall her. Solidly on her side will be a considerable number of homeowners who have received lower tax bills — opposed are the far more powerful landholders who are destined to find their taxes increased on idle and undervalued land.

Encouraged by what the news media calls her "sweet victory" she will get on with the county appraisals, some of which are eight and ten years old and are not fair to anybody. She is beginning the inventory of 150,000 resi-

dences to be placed on punch cards in their appropriate categories so the computer can adjust their values up or down with changing market conditions.

County building permits which have dropped markedly for the last five years are showing an increase—they are up 27 percent in volume and 33 per-

cent in value for the first five months of 1968. The blonde office holder, who has become a popular speaker, continues to emphasize the need for *real* tax reform that will remove the discouraging burden from the producers and give all owners of land the incentive to use it fully and properly.



#### PRESSURE FOR LVT GROWS IN COLOMBIA

Hernan Sanin-Vermont, director of the HGS in Cali, Colombia, sends word that the influential Colombian Association of Agricultores (farm landowners) had made an urgent suggestion to the Commission on Fiscal Reform. They requested that the government should adopt a "single tax" system based on land tenure to replace the taxes on sales, improvements and incomes — revenues from his tax to be equitably distributed between the local and national governments. A study has already been made of 78 percent of the agricultural land showing market assessment, annual rent and potential rent. Association members see no valid reason for not accepting and establishing the proposed system which they say will not only remedy the fiscal structure of the country but will serve as an incentive for improving agricultural and capital investment methods. The reform is needed if Colombia is to become a fully developed economic nation.

The power of an idea is dramatically demonstrated here. Since the establishment of Mr. Sanin's extension in Cali two other groups with impressive influence, the National Association of Cattle Growers and the National Federation of Coffee Growers, have pressed for land value taxation. The agricultural association is the third group of landlord producers with lobbying power to petition the government for adoption of LVT.

#### THE QUALITY OF LIVING

George Collins, Philadelphia HGS director, recently visited Jamaica, W. I., his homeland, and told a group that the key to the Island's development lay in "Trade, Incentive Taxation, and Land Use." He said the economic progress in Jamaica, if measured against the sharp rise in retail prices, restriction of imports and services, and the fantastic rise in land prices, was negligible, and reduced the quality of living there.

To extend the benefits to the majority instead of only to a privileged few he urged full adoption of land value taxation, especially in the "corporate area." He claimed it was the only tool that would stimulate increased productivity, create more jobs with higher wages, assure the best use of land and, at the same time, end burdensome taxes on labor and capital and excessive government spending.

Citing Henry George as his authority and advising Jamaicans to learn all they could about this vitally important measure, he especially urged extension of the work of the Land Valuation Department in Kingston and St. Andrew.

"Paying its annual rent on taxation compensates the rest of the community for the disadvantage of its unavailability," said Mr. Collins, "and provides a source of revenue for the government that will grow as the country's productive activity grows."