

Look, We're Doing It!

GERALD SCHLEICHER, a former Democratic committeeman, is a teacher of Fundamental Economics and a civic leader in Nassau, Long Island. He spoke with enthusiasm which swept through the audience at the June banquet, especially when he confessed that he sees "land value maps floating through his head when he goes to sleep." And he was cheerfully applauded when he closed by saying "we feel confident, and soon we'll have something important to tell you."

In 1935 he moved out to Long Island and watched land values skyrocket. In 1946 a 500-acre dairy farm "with some cows on it" was offered for sale for \$60,000. It wasn't sold until 1953 when it brought \$7.5 million, as reported in The New York Times. The assessment was probably about \$2,000, because improved land had not been reassessed since 1937.

In 1964 the Nassau County Executive, Eugene H. Nickerson, did something that shook up a lot of people — he decided to reassess vacant land. A court battle followed and the court decided it was legal; furthermore, the state law says all land should be assessed at full value. Does that mean, pondered Mr. Schleicher, that my land should be assessed at full value and 500 acres somewhere shouldn't be?

Mr. Schleicher and a good friend, Dr. Samuel Scheck, decided they had to do something to show people what really was happening. You can sit back and quote figures and shock people but they shrug their shoulders and go to sleep. Perhaps they could put this in picture form showing just who paid taxes, and how much—and if it proved that some are not paying their fair share and that the small homeowner is carrying the full brunt, maybe it would create an awakening.

Meanwhile, there were 100 acres of

land in the vicinity that the county and the town were thinking about making into a golf course. He went to the assessment office in Mineola and found out that the Shattuck estate, owned formerly by the founder of Schraffts, had about 100 acres assessed at \$1,000 an acre. Mr. Schleicher has a quarter-acre not far away with an assessment of \$1,250. It didn't add up. He telephoned the assessor's office and spoke of this.

"Impossible," said the assessor.

"Why don't you check it, you're right there."

"Hold on . . . You know, *you're right*," said the assessor apologetically.

"Don't apologize, just increase the assessment," said Mr. S.

"I will," was the answer.

"Do you mean you're going to do it?"

"Yes. By May 10th, which is the next closing of the books, we're going to double the assessment from \$1,000 to \$2,000."

This nearly threw our hero — it was so simple. In just the time it took for one telephone call an extra \$17,000 in annual revenue was gained for the town.

So the two Georgist friends decided they would make a tax map. They couldn't get the county to do it because it was considered political suicide by both parties to ask for a reassessment of improved property. They therefore picked a spot with a conglomeration of stores, movie houses and everything that could be used as examples, and planned surreptitiously, to take photographs if necessary, to prove their point.

Would they be able to get the assessment figures they wanted? The first surprise came when they found they could buy from the assessor's office a small photostat copy of sub-

urban maps for 50 cents with all the lots plainly marked. Next they were not only permitted to look at the assessment books, but the clerks in the office brought them out and asked politely what other books they wanted to see.

Said Mr. Schleicher, "I had a thrill when I read *Progress and Poverty*, my second greatest thrill was *this* — I couldn't believe it. After so many years of trying to figure out what to do *here we were doing it.*"

Now they will enlarge the maps and put them up on a board for all to see. They will show the present assessment, the taxes based on figures from real estate people as to the true value, what the assessment should be, and what the taxes should be, and they'll make a package of it. They intend go-

ing to civic associations and, not talking Henry George, but talking dollars. The people in Nassau County have been pushed so far on school taxes, for instance, that they're ready for something like this. They've tried everything else, there's no other place to go.

Where is all this leading? The speaker had already gotten three invitations to talk to groups just on the basis that he made \$17,000 in extra land taxes for the town. That is something people can grasp immediately.

Georgists often read, talk, and urge people to take the course — but what next? Often they are shell-shocked, imagining they can't do this or that, and yet this thing that happened in Nassau County couldn't have been simpler.



Protection and Paternalism

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AROUND THE WORLD, and particularly in the Far East, seeing how the people of other countries exist one becomes more and more impressed with the artificial nature of the British economy.

In contrast with Hong Kong, where trading of all kinds flourishes, Britain in all its trading elements appears highly restrictionist. Indeed she is.

The British people are losing their freedom without being conscious of any loss at all. Other people have consciously lost their freedom and have not realized its immense value until they lost it. When they have lost it that freedom has become extremely precious to them.

But to talk to most Britons today of freedom means very little. Indeed, many of them are now afraid of freedom. So much is done for them by the State that they have lost initiative.

They regard the suggestion that they should accept their personal responsibilities for their livelihood and their family welfare as impossible and something which should not be expected of them. They have become accustomed to what is called free education and free hospital and other services, little realizing that enormous cost which has to be paid ultimately for those services by themselves as taxpayers. . . .

If there is to be a break with the past forty years there must be a break with the burden of cross subsidization which is the key instrument of state control and patronage and the heaviest fundamental burden on our overseas trade. The key element of this is the system of protection.

There is, in fact, no way out of Britain's dilemma resulting from fifty years of protectionism but by a reversal of policy. . . .