

No Thanks, Uncle Sam!

A BATTLE has been going on in Great Falls, Montana, over a proposed \$6 million urban renewal subsidy, and Russel Conklin has used it steadily as an opportunity to point out a "better way." The following letter to the newspaper by Mr. Conklin some time ago, states his point of view:

"Evidently the plan is to get about \$4 million from Uncle Sam, put up another \$2 million ourselves, and 'pay off' the landowners on the lower South Side who have let their property deteriorate, as a reward for creating this blight. Meanwhile those who have maintained their homes and other buildings and have made improvements, are penalized by higher taxes.

"There must be something radically wrong about our whole system of real property taxation. An incentive tax based on land values only, with all improvements exempt, would stimulate urban redevelopment through private initiative at no cost to the taxpayers. Why not get at the cause of urban blight instead of just treating the symptoms?

"Six million dollars (even if most of it is federal aid) is a terrible price to pay for getting rid of old buildings and moving some 600 families. The landowners who are to be so richly rewarded for creating the slums need only to take their ill gotten gains to some other section of town, create a new slum area, and wait for old UR to come around again."

About two years ago a committee

was organized to see what could be done to improve the blighted downtown section of Great Falls. Their recommendation, bolstered by a \$140,000 study, was to make a bid for a \$10 million federal program all "free" money.

The scheme aroused many people, some of whom had taken one of Russel Conklin's basic economic classes. Although the planning committee, with strong support from the City Council and press, was all ready to vote in the urban renewal program, a few in both major parties began to see the light and cast about for a means of delaying this action.

A conservative taxpayers group drew up a petition to get the proposition on the ballot for a vote by residents, instead of leaving sole authority with the Council. Russel Conklin's son, a lawyer, was retained by that group for the purpose. This bipartisan company has worked to avoid the outside intervention of federal aid and urges instead a reduction of taxes on buildings and a shift of the tax burden to the value of land.

Requests continue to come in from schools and service groups for talks by Russel Conklin, and he believes more people in Great Falls are aware of land value taxation than before. He has given away 50 copies of the English condensation of *Progress and Poverty*. These go only to persons who ask for further information, and they were generously supplied by E. W. Walthall of Pensacola, Florida.

New and newsy was the Northern California Economist in October, eight pages of cheerful information and pictures from the Henry George School at 833 Market Street, San Francisco, California.

A Newsletter expositing "Free land, Free trade, Free men," also made its debut in October, from the International Union for LVT and Free Trade. This originates at the Henry George School, 177 Vauxhall Road, London, but is specifically the voice of the International Union.