

How to Reduce Overcrowding in New York City

The problem presented by the current overcrowding of the population of the City of New York is usually viewed as a development beginning with the increased immigration to this country in 1846 as a result of the Irish famine, and thereafter intensified by the surge of immigration from Central Europe. It should be pointed out that this over-crowding is not a problem which necessarily arises only with the concentration of great masses of people.

Relating this problem to the present, it could reasonably be supposed that if the population were reduced to a point where but 1,000 persons remained on the island, there would be no over-crowding. It is not necessary to conjure with this thought by way of suppositions, since an investigation of the situation on Manhattan Island at a time when the population numbered 1,000 persons can readily be made. It will be recalled that Manhattan was purchased from the Indians in 1626, at which time the Dutch Colony consisted of less than 200 persons. Forty-two years later, the population had increased to a point where the colonists numbered about a thousand people. Despite this small population the Dutch were confronted with the problem of overcrowding. This situation is amazing when it is considered that the Dutch were settled at the very gateway to the vast reaches of the New World frontier. What is most illuminating, however, is the method adopted by the Dutch to combat the problem. The Governing Council of New Amsterdam adopted an astonishingly simple and direct method for dealing with the situation. The Council ordered all owners of vacant lands either to improve them, pay a special tax to retain them unimproved, or surrender them to the city for public sale (Records of New Amsterdam 36-37).

That current methods, though highly purposed, are inadequate to solve the problem of over-crowding is manifest from the fact that the condition is not only still evident but is becoming increasingly acute. Unfortunately, the Dutch legislation was not long in effect, since a few years later saw the colony surrendered to the British. It would seem that the present Governing Council of the City of New York might very well revive this legisla-

Insight . . .

WQXR, the radio station of the New York Times, presents a program titled "Insight," in which Associate Editor Clifton Daniel talks with the far-flung reporters of the Times. Daniel seeks the extra morsel of information, the special perspective of the reported on the scene. Then, with perspicacity and wit, he comments on the news.

"The Last Word" is the part of the show where Daniel leaves the listener with something to ponder. On January 21st he choose the following:

People of my age will probably remember the single tax. We learned about it in school. It originated with Henry George in 1879. He proposed to concentrate all taxation on land values—hence the term "single tax."

I thought of it yesterday when President Nixon informed Congress that, later this year, he would make proposals "for relieving the burden of property taxes (which have more than doubled since 1960) and providing both fair and adequate financing for our children's education."

As the President noted, recent court decisions in New Jersey, California, Texas and Minnesota have held that the financing of schools through local property taxes is discriminatory and unconstitutional.

In the latest of these decisions, Judge Theodore Botter of New Jersey said: "The system discriminates against pupils in districts with low real property wealth, and it discriminates against taxpayers by imposing unequal burdens for a common state purpose."

The court held that education in New Jersey is clearly unequal because children in well-to-do suburbs attend good schools while children in the impoverished cities attend poor schools. For example, Milburn in Essex County can afford to spend

tion as a most effective weapon in the present situation. All other proposed remedies have not solved the problem.

(Ed. note: Leafing through back copies of the NEWS, we came across the above item. With crowding and inefficient land use so much in the newspapers today, the problems of old New Amsterdam seemed to have a particular relevancy. The author of the piece, which appeared in the January 1952 issue, is the School's present president, Arnold A. Weinstein.)

\$1,454 a year on each pupil; Jersey City can afford less than \$900.

There are various proposals to remedy that kind of inequity. One is to have a uniform, state-wide property tax, the proceeds of which would be shared equally by all public school pupils.

President Nixon is presumably thinking of an alternative to the property tax—perhaps the value-added tax, a kind of Federal sales tax, and a much greater Federal contribution to public education.

This is part of a trend to concentrate the collection of taxes in the powerful hands of the Federal government, and to share the resulting revenues with the states and localities.

We will not come to anything like a single tax for all purposes. That's too simplistic. But let's hope we are moving toward a simplification, rationalization and equalization of our present complex and wasteful tax structure.

Letters

Dear Sir:

Let me congratulate you on the new format of the News. It is very professional-looking and readable, and I enjoy your commentaries on current news. I would like to read more information about the new courses at the School, however. The environment course in particular sounds very interesting and also relevant to the goal of educating the public to see the necessity of land-value taxation. Is it possible to print more details about this course in the News?

Sincerely,
Carl Sanders

Mr. Leonard Rubin, the instructor of "The Environment: Problems and Solutions," has agreed to provide the News with articles about his course. The first installment will appear next month and cover the first two lectures.

Ed.

Good Old Tom Johnson

The Ohio Yearbook for 1972, published by the Ohioana Library Association, 1109 Ohio Department Building, Columbus, Ohio 43215, titled "Heroes of Ohio," carries two full pages (127-28) on the story of Tom Loftin Johnson (1854-1911) and his interest in Henry George. The book sells for \$1.75 plus 8¢ tax and 28¢ postage.