

Straws in the Wind

HERE is impressive evidence of a new and growing trend toward recognition of the principles proposed by Henry George in his book, *Progress and Poverty*.

It is significant that the boldest and clearest expositions are coming, not from economists or professors, but from members of George's profession—the press. On September 14th, for instance, Robert C. Albrook writing in *The Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, "On Using Taxes to Battle the Slums," quoted Dr. Rolland O'Regan, recent Georgist visitor from Wellington, New Zealand, showing how land value taxation works under the New Zealand system. This item was thoughtfully clipped for us by V. H. Daniel of Washington.

Regarding property reassessment in the District of Columbia, Mr. Albrook writes, "Low taxes on a well-located, potentially very valuable piece of land presently 'improved' with a rotting old slum dwelling help to make it very profitable for the owner to risk fines and endure endless official harassment to continue renting slums.

"But suppose such property were assessed on the basis of its potential 'best use' under city plans and zoning regulations designed to create a slumless, more attractive and livable city?

"If this were done, the realty tax would become a new weapon in the city's anti-slum arsenal, giving property owners an economic incentive to prevent decay and to rebuild without the need for sweeping official action."

Mention of the New Zealand system as outlined by Dr. O'Regan was also featured in the *American Muni-*

pal News published in Washington, D.C.

Another Washington paper — a national weekly — *Labor*, has repeatedly editorialized on the importance of a tax reform and on August 16th we find editorial mention of a round-table discussion in Pittsburgh as reported in *House & Home*. In full agreement with the Pittsburgh proposal to reduce the price of land by putting heavier taxes on it, the editor concludes, "Labor, which has often told its readers about this same proposed remedy for land speculation, slums and the high cost of housing, congratulates the conservative Luce publication for 'seeing the light.'"

As a further note on the Capitol city the *Labor* editor states, "If Congress does not act immediately to provide \$2 million to buy the land for the George Washington Memorial Parkway extension near the nation's capital, 'it may cost 10 times as much next year,' mainly because of skyrocketing land prices. That warning was given to the Senate Appropriations Committee by Horace White, president of an association which is supporting the Parkway project.

"The significance of the warning goes far beyond this one land deal. It applies also to slum clearance and other public improvement projects all over the country, and to the private home-building industry."

Another eastern editorial in another vein but in the same direction, is reproduced on page nine. These "straws in the wind" coming from widely scattered papers in the United States and Canada, are heartening, and there are undoubtedly many periodicals which carry articles and

letters to editors that never come to the attention of Georgist students. Readers are invited to clip these and send them in if they wish, or to hand them to a class instructor or anyone in the vicinity who can make immediate and direct use of them as examples.

From Texas, for instance, comes a clipping of a letter to the editor of the New Braunfels Herald by Judge J. R. Fuchs. Here is a sample: "To comply with the Constitution and the statutes we must tax all property as required. This includes every bank account, all household goods, all jewelry, etc. . . . And then treat, as the Constitution requires land and the buildings thereon just the same, even though there is a vast difference."

The particular area we are excited about just now is California, where Henry George first planted his seed. *Could* he have foreseen the fact that a water shortage would, after much trial and error, arouse among influential people, the desire to search for a basic and constructive solution? It may be that truth always prevails in the end—the only unpredictable factor being the time it takes. A falsehood, like an outworn custom, persists because of inertia and habit. Always those who are leaders know that no reform can be pushed through until the mass mind is ready to be aroused. Those who sense this willingness to change, and who use it as a campaign issue, have been credited with great wisdom and honored with statues.

When the final story is written, undoubtedly it will be said that the example set in California by the irrigation districts was a factor in turning the attention of a vast public toward a consideration of tax reform.

J. Rupert Mason of San Francisco, long an able leader in the Henry George movement, has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the

land value formula in the large irrigation districts in California and the tremendous success of the plan where it was tried. He also has frequently emphasized the fact that the United States Constitution and the Supreme Court decisions provide ample leeway within which the land value formula could work anywhere.

In the August issue of *Western Water News* sent by Mr. Mason, is an item about the "Wright Act" in which we read that reprints of an article by Harlan Trott entitled "Doing it the Wright Way" are available upon request. This "plan to finance water development" appeared originally in *Frontier* two years ago, but it is still a masterpiece of lucidity in exposing the injustice of the old tax system. For your reprint write to Water Economics Committee, 945 Pacific Building, San Francisco 3, California.

Quoting Assemblyman Vernon Kilpatrick (see September HGN 1958) Harlan Trott, San Francisco correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor* says "speculators will make the cost of a brand new Cadillac for each and every acre they own and we'll be paying for it" unless the \$1.5 billion Feather River Project is properly and fairly financed.

Straws in the wind? That's what Noah Alper calls them, and he himself, like other directors of Henry George extensions, is making one-man progress in the vicinity of St. Louis probably beyond anything he realizes or would be willing to admit. Let's have more of these straws—more of the well-written, brief but clear letters to the editors, a little more courage on the part of those who are now writing for magazines and newspapers but who feel they must be cautious, and a little more honest self confidence on the part of all, but without the over zealousness which sometimes hinders worthwhile efforts.