

A Real Land Victory on Long Island

A REAL estate development company headed by Joseph Frankel and Benjamin Youkum the R.R. man, made application to the Town Board of Oyster Bay and Glen Cove City, L. I., N. Y., to lease public lands of about 650 acres off Ocean Beach Land known as Jones' Beach, and a strip of land 1,000 feet wide and 12,550 feet long across Great South Bay with a provision that the Long Island Railway Co. construct a railroad terminal upon said lands. This lease was to have been for a period of ninety-nine years. The rental to be \$38,500 for the first fourteen years (averaging about \$2,700 per year) after that the rent to be set at ten year periods by a committee appointed by the parties interested.

Adjoining this land are New York State Park lands and the State of New York is now building a causeway from Jones' Beach to connect with the mainland.

The matter came up for a referendum vote before the voters of Oyster Bay Township and Glen Cove City at the last election and was beaten five to one.

The forms of the proposition voted upon were known as Proposition No. 1 and Proposition No.2 which are as follows:

Proposition No. 1:

"Shall Oyster Bay Township and Glen Cove City convey to the Long Island Railroad Company the portion of common lands of said Town and City described in the petition presented by the Long Island Railroad Company, August 8th, 1928, consisting of approximately twenty-four (24) acres on Jones Beach and a strip one hundred (100) feet wide and approximately twelve thousand five hundred fifty (12,550) feet long across South Oyster Bay, upon condition that the Long Island Railroad Company construct a railroad upon said lands and comply with all conditions recited in said petition and resolutions submitting said proposition to vote?"

Proposition No. 2:

"Shall the Town of Oyster Bay and the City of Glen Cove lease to Joseph Frankel the common lands of said Town and City consisting of approximately one (1) square mile situate upon Jones Beach and a strip one thousand (1,000) feet wide and approximately twelve thousand five hundred fifty (12,550) feet long across South Oyster Bay, described in the petition therefor dated August 28, 1928, on file in the Clerk's office of said Town, upon the terms and conditions contained in said petition?"

The excitement caused by the referendum of these two propositions overshadowed the presidential election in the above localities, as one of the newspapers stated. Every club, civic organization, taxpayers association, etc., took part, among them were the Hicksville Chamber of Commerce, Hicksville Civic Association, Business Men's Association of Oyster Bay, Syosset Civic Association, Glenwood Landing Civic Association, Central Park Civic Association, Sea Cliff Civic Association.

Public meetings were held, house to house canvasses were made, walls, fences and trees were placarded with posters, "Save our Beaches." All the local newspapers printed extended accounts of the fight. Even the New York and Brooklyn newspapers became interested and published extended accounts of the affair. The N. Y. *Times* had nearly a column editorial against the lease. The N. Y. *Evening Post*, the *Evening Sun*, the N. Y. *World*, the *Brooklyn Eagle*, etc., gave the referendum election a great many front page notices.

Thousands of hand bills were distributed and the mail carried thousands of letters to the voters by the committee.

A committee of one thousand citizens was organized by Dr. Elwood A. Curtis and Charles Voigt, of Hicksville, to fight the proposed land grab. Dr. Curtis was made chairman. He did most of the work of organizing the opposition to the land grabbing scheme, and was mainly responsible for its defeat. He maintained that Jones Beach is worth \$15,000,000 and belongs to the people and to lease it at a nominal rental for a period of ninety-nine years was against public policy and would mean that the people were parting with the land practically in perpetuity for a grossly inadequate consideration.

The following are slogans from some of the literature circulated by the committee of One Thousand which will give some idea of the nature and extent of the fight made against the land grab:

"Remember the children and save our beaches."

"It is our beach and must be kept for our use and not be permitted to go under the control of the few."

"Do not give up our common lands for the promise of a quick development. We are poor citizens if we allow the things worth most to get in the hands of a few."—Theodore Roosevelt.

Here is a song sung at the public meetings to the tune of "Wait for the Wagon."

Jones' Beach is a garden spot,
Deny it, if they dare,
A few have planned a deep laid plot
To steal it unaware.

CHORUS: The Beach for the People,
The Beach for the People,
The Beach for the People,
Shall be our Battle Cry.

God made the Beach a garden spot,
And made it for all men,
Then why a few connive and plot,
Is far beyond our ken.

Repeat Chorus:

Arouse: Ye men of honest worth,
Allow your souls to leaven,
God gave the land at Nature's birth,
Like "Manna from the Heaven."

During the campaign the town seethed with excitement. The whole question of Human Rights versus Privilege was fought out in this local contest and the people won. We are wondering if some such local storm center may not on some occasion when circumstances are propitious propagate itself through the whole body politic, and the land question become a burning issue. In the meantime, congratulations to the people of Oyster Bay township and Glen Cove.

Frank Stephens on Democracy

THE *Forum* having started a symposium on the question "Is Democracy Breaking Down in America," addressed the inquiry to a number of men prominent as thinkers and publicists in the United States, among whom was Frank Stephens. Mr. Stephens' communication arrived too late for inclusion in the *Forum's* symposium and we are glad to give it space in these columns. Brother Stephens answered the inquiry as follows:

Democracy is not breaking down in the United States. I do not believe it will break down within any time we can foretell. Personally I am more and more impressed as social conditions become worse and worse with the marvellous accuracy with which our democracy functions in giving us an exactly representative government in spite of bitter social injustice among the governed and crass economic ignorance among those who presume to govern.

One can look with philosophic patience even at our National Congress and our State and Municipal law makers when he realizes how their privilege grabbing, their prohibition laws, their hundreds of millions for warships and war preparation, their faith in state police cossacks and sneaking detectives, exactly represent the venality, the hypocrisy, the boastfulness and the cowardice of our people as a whole, from the pow-wow doctors of Old York to the crazy financiers of New York.

That things go as disgracefully wrong with us as a nation is the best possible proof that democracy is working successfully, it is giving us as a nation exactly what we want. But the hope of democracy is the fact that there are more people concerned today in wanting something better than at any other stage of the world's history, and they are more and more coming to realize that the way out is through better understanding of the underlying principles of economics.

I do not believe that the common people have lost faith in democracy in the sense of believing there is some better working theory or practice, that Mussolini is after all a better leader than Mazzini or Thomas Fortune Ryan a better exemplar than Thomas Jefferson.

The people in this country who believe that democracy is breaking down are the class, few in numbers and weak in influence whose opinion my dear friend Dr. Will Durant voices, those in Tennysonian phrase for whom "knowledge comes but wisdom lingers," who having laboriously accumulated huge quantities of undigested and unrelated facts without knowledge of the simple economic truths by which these can be set in order and understood are afflicted with pangs, fears, nightmares and wailing beside which the indigestion of Mr. Polly in Mr. Wells' little tale was as the smiling slumber of infancy.

Let these literati but acquire so much knowledge of the relation of social well-being to social justice and social stability as may be gained by a week's honest study of the economics of Henry George, the realization that simple truths remain true and remain simple even in the most complex civilization, and they will realize that they need have no fear of the breakdown of democracy.

How To Improve the Property Tax

WRITING in the National Tax Association Bulletin, Prof. F. H. Swift of the University of California, says:

"The general property tax is recognized by all students of public taxation as the most unscientific and most unjust type of tax employed in the world today. It was shown, however, that despite its universal condemnation it is the tax most widely used in the United States as a means of providing state school revenues."

Commenting on this, Mr. John Harrington, formerly of the Wisconsin Tax Commission, writes as follows:

"The assertion that the general property tax is unscientific and unjust is either true or it is not true. The question is fundamental. The general property tax now produces two-thirds or more of all state and local taxes. To shift this amount of taxes to other forms of taxation will be a real revolution, and probably a huge mistake.

If assertions are of any value, I am willing to set up the counter-assertion that the general property tax is the most scientific and just tax now in general use in any state.

This is not to say that it is a perfect tax; far from it. But it can be made as nearly a perfect tax as human enactments can be made. The first step toward perfection is to exempt from the tax all ordinary personal property. The next step is to follow the so-called "Pittsburgh Plan," of gradual exemption of buildings and improvements.

This procedure would, of course, result in the greater part of all taxes being imposed on the value of land. And here the so-called "tax experts" will throw up their hands.

They do not seem able to grasp the rather simple proposition that the collector of ground rent makes no return to society for what he receives; that is to say, he is a pensioner on society, giving nothing back, and performing no service in return. This may be illustrated in a striking way by a case in this state where a certain two acre tract of land is worth \$4,000,000, and pays the owner \$200,000 a year net ground rent. Very clearly the \$200,000 is a drain on the income of the community, for which those who receive it give nothing back. The method we have outlined would absorb for taxes a considerable part of this \$200,000 annually. A like result would obtain as to all the lesser ground rent cases.

Actually the whole problem is a sort of underground contest as to whether taxes shall be chiefly borne by labor and productive enterprise and industry, or by the "something for nothing" incomes of monopoly. And I fear