

THE CAMPAIGN IN CALIFORNIA

THERE is going on in California—with every sign of increasing severity—a fight for the restoration of the rights of the people to free opportunity to live and produce, which has been without equal in an electoral way for the past sixty or many more years. Thus Mr Jackson H. Ralston writes in the April-May *Land and Freedom*.

The effort is to present through the initiative a constitutional amendment which will at once abolish the sales tax in California and at the end of nine years all taxation on improvements and tangible personal property. To obtain a place on the ballot it is necessary to secure the signatures of a little more than 186,000 registered voters, whose qualifications have to be passed upon by the registrars of voters of the several counties. To this day the reports to the Secretary of State cover around 171,000 names, leaving so far about 15,000 names short.

Entirely without precedent has been the opposition work of the real estate boards and the chamber of commerce. Never before has there been a continuous and persistent effort to prevent a measure from being initiated. This time canvassers have been spied upon in entering and leaving the offices of those having in charge the solicitation of names, have been followed in their work through the cities, signers have been told falsities as to the effect of their action in signing and urged to have their names withdrawn. Canvassers have been threatened with loss of other occupation unless they abandoned the work, and there seems ample reason to believe that lists they had obtained have sometimes been bought from them.

Frantic full column warnings have been published as advertisements in the papers, usually of the following tenour: "Voters, Beware! Read before you sign. Initiative petitions now being circulated (the solicitors may so soon seek your signature) are in support of The Single Tax Masquerading as a Sales Tax Repeal Act. This vicious proposal is an exorbitant land tax—a tax on your home, your rent, your farm, your business. Why Tax Yourself? California Association Against Single Tax. Denunciations and withdrawal slips have been circulated broadcast."

Why this determined fight to prevent the people from voting? One can only regard it as the outcome of a certain fear of the result. While chanting loudly that it is too bad that the repose of the people should be disturbed when they have six times overwhelmingly rejected the Single Tax, they seem pallid with fear lest the history of the past would not be that of the future. For instance, in a circular letter addressed by a committee of the San Jose chamber of commerce to follow members through Santa Clara county, calling for individual contributions of \$50, the committee says: "This is one of the most dangerous and misleading measures ever presented to voters. Its innocent looking phrases, repealing sales taxes and exempting homes and improvements, appeal to the immediate self-interest of great masses of people. Wording of the measure gives no warning that the old Single Tax panacea of taxing land out of private ownership is the real objective. . . . Appeal to voters will be to repeal the Sales Tax and to exempt their homes or personal property from taxation. Anyone can understand that. That is why our fight is going to be so difficult. . . . The very foundations of our state and local governments are in jeopardy. The threat is real. . . . We find it will take many thousands of dollars to do the work."

"The sincerest and best help we are receiving," Mr

Ralston says, "is from the labour organizations. The American Federation of Labour has in convention five times endorsed the plan. At Santa Barbara the Executive Council of the State A. F. of L. instructed its officers to throw their whole weight into the fight. The best part of this is that the officers and council know perfectly well the importance to labour of the proposition and are determined that the rank and file shall as well understand the situation. In addition the State Railway Brotherhoods are endorsing the amendment and there is no reason to doubt that the C. I. O. will be of the same mind. These constitute a potential force of probably not less than 400,000 voters. Those who should be our friends and supporters throughout the Union are strangely silent, while the few of us, with Labour's assistance, are carrying on a gigantic fight with very strong chances of success. As you have seen our opponents attest this by their actions and utterances."

The latest news from California is that the number of names recorded in favour of the measure is now only 6,000 short of the number required, and that the remainder will certainly be obtained in time to ensure that it will be on the ballot. This is in spite of the desperate efforts of the real estate interests to obstruct the activities of those who have been canvassing for signatures. These activities have been revealed in correspondence that has fallen into the hands of those organizing the initiative petition. In one letter the San Francisco Real Estate Board says that it is making a strenuous fight to prevent the securing of the necessary number of names as this "will save a long and expensive campaign prior to the November election." A letter from another organization says: "We would also thank you to check with the various newspapers and ascertain if an advertisement is placed for petition circulators. If so, please telegraph us immediately and we will send our wrecking crew and move them out of town." It also appears that money has been offered to canvassers to dissuade them from securing signatures.

The extreme and illegal methods adopted by the vested interests are at least a testimony to the importance which they attach to the proposal.

NEW JERSEY

The lower house of the New Jersey legislature has passed by 31 votes to 23 a Bill introduced by Mrs Sanford enabling municipalities to reduce the taxation on improvements and personal property and increase the amount levied on land values. The Bill has yet to go before the Senate. The creation of opinion favourable to this measure is largely the work of the Progressive League of New Jersey of which Mr John H. Allen is president. Mr Allen is also president of the Jersey City Chamber of Commerce.

The Bill is an optional measure allowing, but not compelling municipalities to reduce the taxes on buildings by 20 per cent each year over a period of five years. They would thus be able, if they pleased, to raise all the revenue by a tax on land values, after the expiration of that period.

CANADA

The thirteenth annual congress of the Henry George Foundation of the United States will this year be held at Toronto on 7th, 8th and 9th September, in co-operation with the Single Tax Association of Canada. The tentative programme covers a wide range of topics which will be handled by prominent speakers from both countries.