

Ding-Dong Battle in Tasmania

Site-Value Rating Protagonists Temporarily Defeated—But Many More Rounds to Go

TASMANIA is the only Australian State without any councils using site-value rating. Past attempts to end this sorry state of affairs have been repeatedly frustrated. They have been made in Launceston, Devonport, Burnie and Hobart, the state capital. One obstacle is that ratepayers' polls are not binding on councils. Another is the system of multiple voting which enables large ratepayers up to four votes in each ward, and up to twelve votes in the case of joint ownership.

There is now a new determination to force the issue by those who believe that buildings should not and need not be taxed, and that municipal revenues should be derived from a "civic single tax" on land values. They are encountering relentless opposition—mainly from the absentee owners of vacant land who have shown that they will stop at nothing in order to defend their privileges—but already they have won some notable gains and present indications are that in time our friends are going to win.

It is twenty-three years since a majority of the ratepayers in the city of Launceston who voted on this issue gave their decision in favour of site-value rating. The council calmly ignored their democratically expressed wishes. It did so again in 1947 when a new generation gave the same decision at a ratepayers' poll by 3,864 to 2,706.

75% WOULD BENEFIT

In November, 1956, however, in Clarence Municipality it was the council itself which took the initiative. As this town adjoins Hobart, reports of its activities receive wide attention in Tasmania. By resolution the council decided to change to site-value rating ("unimproved capital value" rating—U.C.V.). In so doing it sparked off a chain of minor explosions which promise eventually to blow to limbo the present crazy system of punishing the useful members of the community and rewarding the land sharks. Under Tasmanian law, six months' notice of the intended change had to be given, a provision turned to their temporary advantage by opponents. Meanwhile the council invited the Land Values Research Group (of Melbourne, Victoria; honorary director, A. R. Hutchinson, B.Sc.) to prepare a survey showing the overall effects of the proposed change. The Research Group's survey revealed that 75 per cent of all developed properties would benefit. Of 4,678 dwelling assessments, 3,523 would carry lower rates under the site-value system. 112 of the 204 businesses, etc. would gain. But the 1397 vacant land holdings (which at present pay local taxation on 4 per cent of their assessed site value) would pay more than £1,200 extra in rates.

Many notices to ratepayers comparing what their rates would be under the old and the proposed new system had been posted when, in April, opponents on the council

carried a resolution calling on the state government to institute an immediate enquiry into rating in Tasmania generally and in Clarence in particular, and deferring the despatch of these notices. The wife of one of the hostile councillors also brought an action seeking a declaration and an injunction against the council. As a further precaution, opponents took the unprecedented step of seeking to have the council disbanded. This was because municipal elections were in the offing, and they feared lest advocates of site value rating would displace opponents.

ANOTHER S.V.R. TRIUMPH

The council elections were held on April 27. Six site-value rating candidates (one a retiring member of the council) were returned with a total 4,653 votes, while the three returned opponents polled only 1,871. As a result the balance on the council swung in favour of our policy, by 7 to 5. *Once again in yet one more place ordinary ratepayers had shown that given the choice between local taxes levied on their buildings or on the value of the land they occupy, they prefer the latter system.*

BELOW THE BELT

The land speculators are equally certain that their interests are best served by throwing the bulk of taxation on houses, shops, and other buildings. The writ for an injunction to prevent the council from proceeding was pressed, and the court upheld the contention that the original council resolution was technically invalid because the requisite number of days notice had not been given. As a result, rates could not be levied on site values for a year. *That decision saved opponents some £12,000 extra in rates.* But they knew that with a majority of the council now in favour of site-value rating, more than that was necessary to preserve their privileges. They therefore resolved to take an extreme measure. To this end they created an atmosphere of hostility towards councillors in general. One defeated council candidate lodged writs challenging the elections on grounds of unsatisfactory rolls and charges suggesting corruption against certain councillors. The public became so sickened and confused by these charges and counter-charges that they were stampeded into voting by a substantial majority at a special poll (held in June) for the council to be disbanded and replaced by a paid three-member commission which will hold office for the next three years. Until then the landed interests in Clarence are safe.

We cannot think that our friends who have fought so hard and so well in Clarence will be content to sit idle at home for three years. Nor can we think that they are unique among Tasmanians. We expect to see a Tasmanian Rating Reform League (similar to the one in Victoria)

Land & Liberty

established, and for the next round to be fought in some other district while the news of Clarence is still fresh in the public's memory.

SCARED SPECULATORS SELL OUT

Meanwhile it is some satisfaction to be able to report that even the publication of the Council's first resolution sufficed to reduce the selling price of land in Clarence. In a letter to the *Mercury* last April, Councillor D. E. Parish pointed out that it had had the following effects :—



"Vacant business sites have changed hands. The astute speculator who was holding building blocks out of use, waiting for the ratepayers to provide services and amenities around his blocks which would enable him to demand high prices, has now placed his blocks on the market, rather than pay his share of the cost of development around his blocks which site-value rating demands. Architects are interesting clients in homes and flats for rental purposes. Industrialists are looking for building sites . . ."

FOR THOSE WHO DARE TO THINK

HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

18 New Term Classes Opening this Month

Readers are cordially invited to attend and to tell their friends about these Study Discussion classes. They are offered free (there is a small charge for textbook) and last for ten weeks. Attendance is on the same evening each week. No previous economic knowledge is necessary. The services of Tutors, Organisers and Clerical Workers are given to the School gratis. Fully descriptive prospectus will be sent on request to 4 Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1. ABBey 6665.

In the table below, the following abbreviations are used:—

Basic—Basic Economics and Social Philosophy.

I.T.—International Trade.

S.P.E.—Science of Political Economy.

C.E.T.—Current Economic Theories.

Centre	Course	Tutor	Evening	Begins
Westminster	Basic	V. G. Saldji	Tues.	Jan. 21
Westminster	Basic	V. H. Blundell	Thurs.	Jan. 23
Westminster	I.T.	A. L. Roberts	Tues.	Jan. 21
Westminster	I.T.	R. A. Ward	Thurs.	Jan. 23

7 p.m. at 4 Great Smith Street, S.W.1.

GREATER LONDON

Beckenham	I.T.	P. R. Stubbings	Wed.	Jan. 22
8 p.m. at Public Library, Beckenham Road (Clock House).				
Eltham	Basic	T. Maxwell	Mon.	Jan. 20
Eltham	I.T.	S. Martin	Mon.	Jan. 20
7.45 p.m. and 8 p.m. at Public Library, High Street, Eltham.				
Ilford	C.E.T.	J. Bennett	Thurs.	Jan. 23
8 p.m. at Gants Hill Public Library.				
Welling	I.T.	R. H. H. Jones	Wed.	Jan. 22
8 p.m. at Welling Public Library.				
West Ham	Basic	O. French	Alt. Mon.	Jan. 20
8 p.m. at 16 Dundee Road, Plaistow, E.13.				
West Ham	I.T.	O. French	Alt. Mon.	Jan. 13
8 p.m. at 179 Manor Road, West Ham.				
West Wickham	Basic	B. W. Brookes	Wed.	Jan. 22
8 p.m. at Branch Public Library, Glebe Way, W. Wickham.				

PROVINCIAL CENTRES

Cardiff	I.T.	Dr. F. Jones and E. S. Buck	Thurs.	Jan. 16
Central Y.M.C.A.				
Liverpool	Basic	F. R. Jones	Wed.	Jan. 15
Liverpool	S.P.E.	J. H. Eastwood	Wed.	Jan. 15
7.30 p.m. at Free Church Hall, 33 Tarleton Street.				

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SCOTLAND

Dundee	Basic	J. L. Geddes	Fri.	Jan. 17
Dundee	I.T.	J. McMurchie	Fri.	Jan. 17
7.15 p.m. at York Room, Greens Playhouse, Dundee.				
Glasgow	S.P.E.	N. W. Hopkins	Fri.	Jan. 10
7.30 p.m. at the Christian Institute, Bothwell Street, C.2.				

Wednesdays at Welling

8 p.m. in the Public Library

Organised by the N.W. Kent Branch of the Land-Value Taxation League.

January 8

The Year ahead—discussion of Branch activities for 1958.

January 15

A speaker from the People's League for the Defence of Freedom.

January 22

Your help, please! Finalising arrangements for special Public Meeting.

January 29

PUBLIC MEETING

ON THE

SITE VALUE RATING PETITION

February 5

Comment and discussion on "AIMS AND TASKS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM" the declaration of the Socialist International. Mr. Bowler.

February 12

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

MISS J. HAYWARD, B.A., of the United Nations Association.

February 19

PUBLICITY—MR. STEPHEN MARTIN.

February 26

A speaker from the Kenya Students' Association.