

PROGRESS IN NEW ZEALAND

FIVE VICTORIES

IN CONNECTION with the recent elections for the local authorities special polls were taken in two Counties, Makara and Hutt, and in three Boroughs, Levin, Matamata and Opunake, for the adoption of unimproved value as the basis of rating. In each case the poll was carried, so that the Counties of Makara and Hutt and the Boroughs of Levin, Matamata and Opunake go over to the land value rating system with complete exemption of buildings and improvements. These victories are reported in the *Wellington Evening Post*, 29th May. The general position in New Zealand now is that out of 127 Boroughs, 84 levy rates wholly or partly on land values and out of 129 Counties, 61 do so.

In the course of a letter, 10th June, reporting the arrival of a large consignment of books sent by the Henry George Foundation in London and referring to these recent polls, Mr. R. G. Varlow, secretary-treasurer of the New Zealand League for the Taxation of Land Values, wrote: "Mr. T. E. MacMillan (editor of the *Commonweal*) was the force behind the Matamata poll, which was carried by a majority of 99 votes. At the poll taken in 1941 the proposal was lost by 18 votes. Hutt and Makara Counties border Wellington, in fact, many workers reside there and come to work each day in Wellington—imagine the enormous saving to people who have bought and built a house being relieved of the tax on their homes. The reform was carried in Hutt County despite the fact that in that county, with its 4,820 ratepayers, there are 226 enjoying three votes each by virtue of a property franchise, large landowners of the sort who own land 'ripening' for closer settlement or to be parcelled out in small lots for potential farmers. While there is no plural voting in Boroughs, it is possible for a landowner in a county to exercise 36 votes—three in a riding, 12 ridings in a county, equals 36 votes; but there are not many that can do that now in New Zealand since the rating of unimproved land values came into our law. The recent successes close to Wellington (Hutt, Makara and Matamata) have been won since the League got busy in January last and have justified the League's existence. We are now out to get ready for a bunch of polls all up and down the country when the next Local Body Elections come along in three years time."

Mr. Varlow has sent a number of exhibits relating to the polls, the campaign leaflets: "Ten Good Reasons why you should Vote for Rating on Unimproved Values"; "Rating on Unimproved Values: How to get in your Local Body Area"; specimen of the voting paper used for the Matamata poll, with numerous actual examples of householders who would benefit by the change as compared with a typical vacant section paying less

than £34 at present, whereas under the land values system the payment would be £125 a year; also the instructive printed matter issued by the Matamata Unimproved Values Rating Association, of which Mr. W. M. Loveridge is chairman and Mr. T. E. McMillan is secretary. Copies of letters were enclosed from clerks of the Awatere and the Cheviot County Councils (where land value rating is in operation) testifying to the equity of the system and the approval of it by the general body of ratepayers.

LEAGUE'S MEETING

The annual meeting of the New Zealand League for the Taxation of Land Values (Inc.), held in Wellington, was reported in *Dominion* of 24th February. Officers elected for the ensuing year are: President, Dr. Rolland O'Regan; Vice-President, Mr. C. R. Lankshear; Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. R. G. Varlow; Assistant Secretary, Mr. R. A. Gosse; Committee, Messrs. A. Parlane, H. E. Greig, T. G. Fouhy, R. D. Smith and J. Bruton. The League is carefully watching an agitation on the part of landed interests to revert to the old system of levying rates on the annual value of the use to which land is put, a motion to that effect being on the agenda of the next Municipal Conference. Unanimously the League passed resolution: "That a letter be sent to the mayor of Wellington, pointing out that on every occasion when the ratepayers of Wellington have had the opportunity of voting on the question of rating, they had emphatically supported rating on the unimproved value. Accordingly, the delegates from the Wellington City Council to the Municipal Conference should be instructed to oppose the remit favouring the universal application of rating on the annual value."

MUNICIPAL PROFITS

The objections to using municipal profits to keep down local rates were stated by the League in an open letter published in *Invercargill*, 16th February. The question arose at an interview there with the Hon. Mr. Mason, when a member of the deputation urged municipal control of hotels for the reason that the profits could be utilized in the reduction of rates. The League wrote:—

"When a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act was in Committee of the House of Representatives in 1902, a certain Mr. Willis, who represented Wanganui, proposed a new clause, evidently drafted for him, to authorize municipalities to transfer the profits of gasworks to the general account, the obvious intention being to permit a reduction of rates. It is a striking commentary on the capacity of members of Parliament that the clause was added without discussion, and we need not be surprised, therefore, that amendments have been made since authorizing the transfer of the profits

of any trading business in which a municipality may be engaged—gas, electric lighting, tramways, milk supply; and on one occasion in this city the accident fund was raided. See now the Municipal Corporations Act, 1933, Section 129.

"Needless to say, the land speculator dislikes rates, and he is generally well represented on municipal councils. Accordingly it has come to pass that municipal councils have repeatedly availed themselves of the opportunity of giving the ratepayers, who are a minority of the electors, what amounts to a dividend without the obligation to pay calls.

"Nor has the Labour Party hesitated to soil its fingers by this pernicious practice. On two occasions at least—in Dunedin and later in Christchurch—when a Labour Council was in power the provision has been availed of; indeed we have heard it defended as an instalment of socialism! Nor can it be a matter of surprise that candidates for municipal honours have declared that rates might be abolished altogether and the municipal expenses defrayed entirely out of trading profits!

"We are not opposed to municipal trading, as such, but we maintain that all the profits of municipal trading should be applied in reduced prices. We regard it as a grave public scandal that ratepayers, who necessarily include the richest men in the community, should receive a reduction of rates at the expense of 'roomers' and rent-payers. We maintain that taxation should fall, not on persons, but on property, and we hold very strongly that citizens who depend solely on their labour for their daily bread should pay neither rates nor taxation. Accordingly we resent very strongly the suggestion that municipalities should set up hotels and apply the profits thereof in further bolstering up land monopoly, which is the scourge of human society."

WORD FROM DENMARK

Hans — writes in a letter, 22nd May, from Pasadena, California, to Mrs. Anna George de Mille that his brother, after having been under arrest for six weeks as a hostage, has been released. No reason for the arrest was given, and while it was a doubtful "honour," the family was somewhat worried for a while. The news had come from his mother, who said the family was well; she added: "Father and I are as busy as ever working for the good cause. I am just rewriting the older translation of *Thou Shalt Not Steal*, which is to come after the ninth edition of *The Condition of Labour*, now ready for the press. Work for the new day must go on in spite of the turmoil. One good thing is that nothing can explode right thinking. *In the beginning was the Word*. Everything that has ever been accomplished has had thought behind it. So we have just to go on, and at any rate that part of life which is lived in the spirit is never lost." Greetings are sent to friends in the United States and Great Britain.