the values resulting solely from the growth of the community. In order to remedy this evil we would gradually favor the reduction of assessments on such improvements at the rate of 10 per cent a year for a period of five years, thereby reducing taxes on all improved real estate and somewhat increasing them on land held out of use. Such a policy would tend to reduce rents and to cause the improving of unused land, to the great benefit of all the people.

✤ ✤

Progress of Singletax Sentiment.

An editorial in the San Francisco Chronicle of August 6th is one of many indications that a boom is setting in for the Singletax. The San Francisco Chronicle was more likely, perhaps, to be the last rather than the first of the leading newspapers of the far-western metropolis to declare that "the exemption of personal property which cannot possibly be located and equitably assessed and of structures which are constantly deteriorating and may burn before the tax is paid," is a "matter well worth considering, whatever the conclusion may be;" that "land is in sight and cannot get away;" that "its value is more easily determined than that of any other class of property;" that "the upward tendency of rentals" would "be checked by the desire of owners of taxed land to derive revenue from it by the erection thereon of untaxed buildings;" that "it would discourage speculation in land and secure to the public more of the increment not 'unearned,' but earned by the public and not by any individual;" and that it might to that extent "reduce taxation of those not owners of land not put to beneficial use." Editorial comment or any kind of notice by the press of Singletax progress has been remarkable for its absence. The time is here, however, when those newspapers which continue to ignore it will be considered as not up to date by readers who wish to be enlightened on what is doing. It is to be hoped that Singletaxers of California may have printed in large type copies of the leading points of this editorial for distribution.

✤ ✤

A Singletax Anniversary.

The next issue of The Public will bear the date of September 1, 1911, precisely twenty-one years after the opening of the First National Singletax Conference, which met at New York. We intend, therefore, to make a special anniversary number of that issue. One feature will be a supplement portrait of Henry George as he appeared at that period. Another will be a medallion portrait by Hinton of William T. Croasdale (organizer of the Conference), photographed by Cox. A section of the group picture of delegates will be given, and this will be supplemented with a similar section of the delegates to the Conference at Chicago three years later. Reminiscences of the first Conference, by the chairman, and an editorial on Croasdale, by Edward N. Vallandigham, together with portions of the recent Singletax speech in Congress by Henry George, Jr. (a member of the first Conference), will be among the other features.

✤ ✤ ✤

ARCHAIC RHODE ISLAND AWAKES.*

The foundation period of Rhode Island, the age of Roger Williams, of John Clarke and Samuel Gorton, was an age of liberty, religious and political, of democracy, of toleration, of manly independence, of character, of radicalism, of idealism. Yet a government less popular than that of Massachusetts developed in Rhode Island.

The explanation is a paradox. The Massachusetts and Plymouth colonies were founded upon principles of orthodoxy in religious faith, while Rhode Island was founded upon the principle of religious freedom. In Massachusetts and Plymouth, church membership was everything; in Rhode Island it was nothing, so far as civil rights and political power were concerned. In early Massachusetts, church membership was the sole qualification for voting. But with the growth of liberal ideas, Massachusetts ceased to have a state church, and passed easily and naturally from a theocratic to a democratic commonwealth. Republican Massachusetts based suffrage on manhood. Rhode Island, on the other hand, was driven by her religious freedom to have a property test for the suffrage, if she had any.

The Royal charter of 1663 did not specify the suffrage qualifications. The charter gave full power in this matter to the General Assembly, and the Assembly voted to admit as freemen those of "competent estates." An authoritative historian says: "Solvency has at all times held the same place in Rhode Island which Puritan orthodoxy once held in Massachusetts." The acquisition of property was regarded as the test of virtue and intelligence.

The General Assembly, in colonial times, conferred the suffrage on landholders and their eldest sons only. The landholding qualification gradually stripped the majority of the people of the right to

*This informative and stirring editorial is by a Senator of the Rhode Island legislature, who is a lawyer by profession and occupation. No question of his democracy and competency will occur to any reader of the editorial.

vote. In 1840, sixty-four years after Rhode Island had joined with the other Colonies in promulgating the sublime doctrines of the Declaration of Independence, fully two-thirds of the native born adult males of Rhode Island were without the right to vote. The Royal charter gave to each town a fixed representation in the Assembly, which must remain the same whatever the changes in population; and the land holding oligarchy prevented the adoption of a Constitution until 1842, the charter granted by King Charles in 1663 remaining the organic law for generations after America had become independent and republican.

✦

Yet nowhere in America were the *principles* of democratic government more intelligently and tenaciously held than in Rhode Island.

Ruled by an oligarchy whose control of the State rested securely upon a landed suffrage-qualification and an apportionment utterly regardless of population, the people from time to time demanded a Constitutional convention and manhood suffrage, but demanded in vain. In 1841, the Constitutional agitation culminated in a revolution.

Under the lead of Thomas Wilson Dorr, the people held a Constitutional convention and adopted a republican Constitution, with all attention to due and regular procedure, but without the authority of the government of the oligarchy under the Royal charter. Peacefully the people's government was organized, with Dorr as Governor, the great majority of the people having voted for the Constitution. But upon the request of the charter legislature, President Tyler assured to the old government the support of Federal troops, and immediately the revolutionary government melted away and the bloodless revolution, known in Rhode Island history as the Dorr War, was ended by the submission of the majority to the will of the minority.

Dorr was tried for treason, by a packed jury, and on June 22, 1844, sentenced to imprisonment for life.

On receiving sentence, he said, at the bar of the court: "The sentence which you will pronounce, to the extent of the power of influence which this court can exert, is a condemnation of the doctrines of '76 and a reversal of the great principles which sustain and give vitality to our democratic Republic, and which are regarded by the great body of our fellow-citizens as a portion of the birthright of a free people. From this sentence of the Court I appeal to the people of our State and of our country. They shall decide between us. I commit myself, without distrust, to their final award."

Dorr was imprisoned at hard labor for just a year. Then he was unconditionally released by a special act of the legislature, without the form of pardon, in obedience to the voice of the people. Broken in health, he died aften ten years of painful illness, the result of his imprisonment.

Shortly before his death the legislature passed an extraordinary act declaring his conviction unconstitutional, null and void, but this act of justice was a little later repealed.

So the tragedy closed.

Dorr is the noblest and grandest character in all the history of a State whose foundations were laid in high idealism and whose annals are full of glory. Among the founders of American commonwealths, Roger Williams and John Clarke are incomparably great. Among the soldiers of the Revolution, Nathaniel Greene, alone stands by the side of Washington. Among statesmen of the period of constitutional development in America, Thomas Wilson Dorr is destined to occupy a place of unique distinction and unrivaled honor; because, being called upon to deal with questions the most fundamental in human government, he was not only equal in ability and integrity to the greatest and purest in his country's career, but suffered more than any other.

He walked no flowery path, he was crowned with no laurel wreath; instead, he drank the bitter draught from the hemlock cup, he accepted a strenuous, difficult, almost hopeless task as a duty to the people from which he must not shrink. Rarely endowed and disciplined for the high walks of the statesman's life, of calm and dignified character, not easily moved by the impulses of passion, he turned from the easy path of social and political success in which his feet were set by the favoring fortune of birth and rearing and environment, and sacrificed and suffered for the cause of the people.

✦

While the Dorr War was in progress, the charter legislature called a Constitutional convention. Martial law had been declared, but it was suspended during the election of the delegates. Hundreds of the democratic citizens of Rhode Island were, however, in jail under martial law for participation in the Dorr movement, when the delegates were elected. The convention framed the present Constitution of the State and it was adopted by the people in December, 1842, on a

very light vote, the Dorrites abstaining from voting.

This Constitution gave the suffrage in elections for general offices and members of the legislature to the native male citizens, but imposed the old landed qualification upon naturalized citizens. It established a Senate in which each city or town should have one Senator and no more, and it limited the representation of any city or town (meaning Providence, the chief city) to one-sixth of the whole number of the House, to be elected on a general ticket. It gave no veto power to the Governor, and no power of appointment. Under it the judiciary, both the higher and inferior courts, is chosen by the legislature in joint session of both Houses. The sheriffs and many other important officers are chosen in the same manner. The legislature has by statute conferred upon the Governor a power to nominate some officers to the Senate for their confirmation, but with the extraordinary provision, unexampled in the history of free government, that if confirmation does not follow within a few days, the Senate shall proceed to fill the office by election. So that the Senate, the worst rotten borough chamber in the world, has practically all the power of appointment—and on secret ballot—which is not in the hands of both Houses in joint assembly, and also on secret ballot.

In 1888 the landed qualification required of naturalized citizens was abolished by Constitutional amendment, the Republican party perceiving that a considerable proportion of the newer immigrant citizens were not indisposed to the national policies of the Republicans.

Agitation for another Constitutional convention had gone on, but in 1882 the judges of the Supreme Court gave an advisory opinion that it was not Constitutionally possible for Rhode Island to have a Constitutional convention because the Constitution of 1842 contained no provision for such a convention and did provide for amendment on the proposal of the legislature. This opinion is opposed to the well established American doctrine, and is violative of the letter and spirit of the first section of the Constitution of Rhode Island, which is in these words: "In the words of the Father of his Country, we declare that 'the basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and alter their constitutions of government,' but that the constitution which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all."

That was not a judicial decision, however, but merely an advisory opinion. It is well-settled, even by the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, that such advisory opinions have not the binding force of judicial decisions. Given in 1882, this opinion was before the dangers of judicial usurpation of power were so generally recognized as they are now, but it was deplored and condemned as unsound by some of the best Constitutional lawyers in the country. When the people of Rhode Island get ready to hold a Constitutional convention, they will not be deterred from so doing by this anomalous opinion.

✤

Believing that this advisory opinion had prevented a convention, the Republican party soon deemed it good party policy to submit an amendment abolishing the landed qualification required of naturalized citizens, and it was submitted and adopted by the requisite three-fifths vote.

With this suffrage extension, however, was coupled a disfranchisement clause. The Constitution required a property (real or personal) qualification for voting for the City Council in Providence and on financial questions in town meetings. Providence was then the only city. In 1888, there were three cities, and now there are six. The suffrage amendment of 1888 extended this property qualification to all cities. The Republicans would not concede the suffrage to foreign born citizens, except upon condition of taking away the full vote from non property-owning citizens in cities; and sons of foreign born fathers voted to ratify the amendment, thus depriving themselves in part of the suffrage in order to put their fathers on an equality with natives.

In 1905, I made a study of the Council vote in Providence for the purpose of seeing how many men in certain skilled trades were disfranchised for lack of the taxpaying qualification. I found that out of a total of 1,609 carpenters, only 359, or 22 per cent were Council voters. Out of 2,299 machinists, only 390, or 17 per cent were Council voters. Out of 252 printers, only 51, or 20 per cent. were Council voters. A large majority of the clergymen were not qualified to vote for the Council. That property qualification remains to this day, and in several cities distinctly contributes to corrupt municipal government.

I have called the Rhode Island Senate the worst rotten borough chamber in the world. The Constitution provides: "The Senate shall consist of the Lieutenant-Governor and of one Senator from each town or city in the State." The population of Providence is 225,000. The town of West Greenwich has less than 500 people, yet is equal in the Senate to Providence. There are 38 towns in the

State. The 20 smallest towns, with their 20 Senators, a majority of the Senate, have less than 8 per cent of the population of the State. The other 18 towns, with more than 92 per cent of the population, have only 18 senators. Of course, the temptation to use bribery, or what is the same thing, a distribution of money among the voters relying upon their good will thus induced, is very great and the practice has become habitual in many of the small towns.

✣

The House, under the Constitution of 1842, was composed of 72 members. Each town has at least one member, and it was provided that no town should have more than one-sixth of the whole, thus limiting Providence to 12 members, although having more than a third of the population of the State. The members of the House were to be elected on a general ticket, and with the growth of democratic sentiment in Providence and the other large places, it was possible for the popular party to carry the House, although it has seldom happened.

The Republicans have nearly always had a majority in the House, although of late years the Democrats frequently elected the 12 members in Providence. The time was approaching when the Democrats would have been able to carry the House steadily, and possibly a majority on joint ballot. To avert this danger, the Republican legislature submitted a Constitutional amendment, increasing the House to 100 members, giving Providence 25 members, and dividing Providence and every town and city having more than one member into as many districts as it may have members. The representative districts of the Rhode Island cities are now the smallest city districts in the United States—petty compared with all others.

This ultra oligarchic change was adopted in 1909, the Democrats offering a listless opposition, opposing but not fully awake to the nature of the change. Close students of representative government understand the advantage which the small district system gives to the monied party.

At the first election under the district system, in 1910, the Republicans had 66 and the Democrats 34 in the House, and in the Senate the Republicans 27 and the Democrats 11. The Democrats are not without hope, however, of increasing their representation, and even of carrying the House.

It remains to mention the manner in which the Constitution may be amended.

An amendment must be submitted by two successive legislatures, a majority of all the members elected to each house concurring, and then must be ratified by the people, three-fifths of all the electors voting thereon voting therefor. If a Constitutional convention could be had, a *new* Constitution could of course be adopted by a majority vote. The power to hold a convention is denied. Yet it exists. The government of Rhode Island is, therefore, a government by the minority. It is an oligarchy, and governs after the manner of oligarchies.

✣

Entrenched though the oligarchy is, it will be overthrown. But it is necessary, in the first place, to have an aroused and determined public opinion in the State. The people of Rhode Island have been long apathetic, politically. The registration laws throw every obstacle in the way of a full registration, and the registration is always small. It is increasing, and may soon swell to large proportions.

The Initiative and Referendum would soon put Rhode Island in the control of her people. An agitation for the Constitutional initiative has been going on for some years, under the lead of Ex-Gov. Garvin; and in the session of 1911, I introduced in the Senate a Constitutional amendment providing for the full popular Initiative, on Constitution and statutes, after the Oregon model.

The movement is popular and is supported by the Democratic party, although in the next election the intense feeling aroused over the question of the abolition of the property qualification for full suffrage, is likely to prevent the issue from coming squarely on Direct Legislation.

That issue will, however, come rapidly forward; and with the rest of the Union showing the way, the ultra conservatism of Rhode Island may be swept away by the rising tide of public opinion.

There is the other way of a Constitutional convention.

A sagacious opportunism must determine which way will finally be the way of escape. A right public opinion is the first requisite. The remedy will then be found. Where there is a will there is a way. Rhode Island, when free, will better than any commonwealth in America, even in the world, illustrate the glorious possibilities of popular government by an intelligent population almost entirely urban and industrial.

In her present hard case, she is entitled to the sympathy and aid of the friends of popular government throughout the country.

EDWIN C. PIERCE.

✣ ✣ ✣

Public improvements increase the value of land, and land only. Then why should not taxes on the value of land pay for public improvements?