

the Henry George News

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"Practising the Ideal"

"THIS coming week," James Clarkson, Mayor of Southfield, Michigan, announced at a New York meeting on May 24th, "property owners of Southfield are going to get their first tax bill since a revaluation was undertaken two years ago."

Mr. Clarkson was in New York for the Conference of Mayors and that gave the faculty and members of the Henry George School a first-hand opportunity to hear the Southfield story, as they crowded into the coffee shop on a hot Sunday evening. His pretty wife and two young sons were on hand, too, and very welcome.

Mr. Clarkson reviewed his campaigns in 1960 and 1962 (the mayor's term of office is two years), both of which he won. During his first term he was involved with his assessor and members of the City Council in disputes over his tax philosophy of lightening the burden on improvements and taxing land more heavily. After much "wheeling and dealing" he got authorization to call in expert appraisers to value the land according to the legal requirements. "All that trouble," he said, "just to follow the law as it is written!"

As predicted, the appraisal firm of Clemminshaw found land values to be higher than they had been assessed. In most cases, therefore, homeowners would gain by the revaluation, as their assessments were lowered; commercial

properties, especially vacant lots, found their assessments raised.

The land speculators promptly ganged up on Mayor Clarkson and tried to defeat him during the second campaign but the homeowners were solidly behind him and he was re-elected. "It's wonderful when the people support you. You can *feel it*," he said. "You can't relax too much though, because landowners never sleep." They challenged the new assessments before a Board of Review, and succeeded in getting them cut. Then support came from an unexpected quarter — the troublesome assessor who had fought him in the beginning became a convert and valuable ally. The State Tax Commission was consulted as a final arbiter and so, as of May, 1964, Mayor Clarkson could report that since the new assessments had been supported, the new tax bills *would go out*.

The long, exciting fight has made him a nervous wreck, he said, but it was worth it. Now, having done all he can as mayor of his home city, he has placed his name in nomination for a judgeship in his county.

Jim Clarkson is not quite through as a mayor, however. At the conference in New York he lost no time in proposing land value taxation as a subject to be discussed. (Later in the week a resolution was passed to study this proposal — the complete text fol-

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lows this article). "I could count on the fingers of one hand the people at the conference who know anything about land values," he said, "and that's where you come in. Your work of education is of the utmost importance. You must get the people to understand. And don't stop there. Work through your legislators. Get them to know what you want.

"Whether we work through education or politics," Mr. Clarkson concluded, "it requires dedication, the kind of hard work — yes, and suffering — that our Detroit director, Robert Benton, has put into it. Do something! If you know the great truths taught by Henry George, you owe it to yourself and the world not to sit idle but to go forth and work for it."

In announcing his candidacy for the Oakland County Circuit Court in

Michigan, James Clarkson, who has practiced law for twelve years, stressed the need for a judge to be experienced in dealing with charters and their interpretation, zoning and other ordinances, and all such vital issues. His experience as a former member of the Michigan House of Representatives and a member of its tax committee, not to mention his signal success in Southfield, make him eminently qualified to serve in this important office.

He was a graduate of the Henry George School in Detroit and for many years one of its instructors. After the conference in New York he was a guest speaker at a dinner meeting of the Henry George School in Detroit. On July 10th at 8 P.M. he will speak at a mass meeting in Chicago, organized by Wilbur Johnson at the Progressive Baptist Church, 3658 South Wentworth Avenue.

WHEREAS, property taxation is always of importance to cities; and

WHEREAS, property taxation has, in some areas, fallen into ill repute because of improper application; and

WHEREAS, land value taxation legislation is being studied in the states of Michigan, California, New York and Alaska, as a step towards more modern application of property taxation; and

WHEREAS, the state of Hawaii has recently adopted its Land Value Taxation bill, following in the footsteps of the state of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, the application of urban renewal and the eradication of slums in the cities of the United States is in need of modern methods to carry out this result and (the application of) land value taxation to the exclusion of taxes on improvements being such a valuable tool,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the U.S. Conference of Mayors go on record as supporting the staff study of the principles of land value taxation in the various states of our Union.

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