

"The Fruits of Their Labors"

MISS V. G. Peterson, executive secretary of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, who visited Australia and New Zealand in 1962, brought with her to the Henry George School conference pictorial evidence of the effects of land value taxation in the form of "before and after" scenes photographed near Melbourne, a beautiful city in the State of Victoria, Australia. This spectacular reform known to natives as "unimproved rating," is becoming increasingly studied around the world. It gained tremendous attention in the U.S. press recently through the interest aroused by the lecture tour of Dr. Roland O'Regan, which the Foundation sponsored.

The pictures showed in some cases lots formerly vacant which after the change to unimproved rating were transformed into car parks or used for display purposes since there was no immediate need for building on them. Other views showed how ancient shops had been smartly refurbished and improved. In some instances, completely new, modern buildings replaced shoddy, out-moded structures. All this was brought about in a relatively few years through the simple expedient of shifting the taxes from buildings to land.

This principle is well established "Down Under," and is spreading, Miss Peterson said. However, we must bear in mind that no effort is being made to collect the full economic rent. Local governments in Australia and New Zealand have fewer responsibilities than do those in our own country, and the tax rates are set according to the amount of money that must be raised. Despite this weakness, we can rejoice with good cause, that so much has been accomplished in so little time, and a lot of the credit for this must go to Georgist friends in Melbourne. At the slightest indication that a community

may be ready to consider changing its tax system, they move into the area to help organize, guide, and then put through the local polls which must decide the issue. Only property owners may vote in such polls. If the poll is successful (and they usually are) the Georgists stay until the new tax system is installed and working smoothly. This does not take long. Much publicity appears while these polls are in process and pictures were shown of newspaper clippings covering boards several feet high.

Miss Peterson spoke with feeling about her meeting with Mr. A. G. Huie of New South Wales, who, though well past his ninetieth year, still follows his lifelong practice of writing letters to newspaper editors who long ago learned to respect and fear his biting criticism.

When Henry George visited Australia in 1890, young Mr. Huie was one of those who welcomed him to Sydney and eagerly showed him the wonders of this city built on the new frontier. At his departure the group clustered around him for last farewells, and asked what their goal should be in the years ahead. The complete removal of all taxes from buildings, George replied, first in Sydney, and then throughout the state. Nothing less would do. It was a large task and a hard one, but they pledged it to him, and before his ship was out of sight they were making plans. There were setbacks, for opposition was strong and victory not easily won, but at last it was theirs—first in the city, and then throughout the state, as George had foreseen. And many of them were still alive to taste the fruits of their labors. Now, though, there are but two, the elder Mr. Firth, who lives nearby, and Mr. Huie who, as he told his story, lived again, the stirring days of his youth.