

PROGRESS

An Australian Journal to Advocate the Rights of the People in the Land

POLICY: 1. APPROPRIATION OF LAND VALUES OR GROUND RENT AS PUBLIC REVENUE.
2. THE ABOLITION OF TAXES NOW IMPOSED UPON LABOR AND LABOR PRODUCTS.
3. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION FOR ALL ELECTIONS.

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TASMANIANS MOVE FOR MUNICIPAL JUSTICE

Bitter Struggle for S.V. Rating

Tasmania lags the rest of the Commonwealth in the struggle for site-value rating. Citizens have not power to demand rating polls as in other States. Since 1952 councils have been empowered to change to site-value by their own resolution but none have done so yet. But the demand has been long standing though repressed repeatedly.

Launceston

Over the years the demand for change has been strong here. There have been two polls taken, first about 1924 and the last in 1947. Both were carried — the last by 3,864 votes to 2,706. Councils were not compelled to give effect to the result and did not do so. The only remedy was a piecemeal one over a three year period to replace councillors opposed to the change. It is difficult to sustain organisation of site-value supporters at full blast over such a period. Nor is it always possible to confine council elections to this issue. Again, the multiple voting system used for elections is worse than in other States. Large ratepayers can have up to our votes in each Ward and by joint-ownership can multiply this again by three. Opponents have relied on these factors and reckon that if they succeed in stalling off the initial drive they will be safe.

These have been the tactics in Burnie, Devonport, and Hobart as well where demand has arisen for change.

Devonport

The matter has again come to the fore in Devonport where Cr. Churcher was elected two years ago on this issue. He has kept the matter strongly before both councillors and ratepayers. Last year two candidates favorable to change were elected and one against. The balance was still against. We have only fragmentary reports but it appears it will again be an issue in the elections at end of April. Great press activity is noted with letters in the "Advocate" from Messrs. Churcher (3), G. Forster (3), A. G. Huie (2), L. W. Brown, A. R. Hutchinson for site-value. Against

there has been a succession of letters from Messrs. A. C. Day, W. Layton, V. Thomas. These are a self-constituted association to foster the interests of vacant land holders against those of houseowners.

Clarence

The main struggle is in Clarence adjoining Hobart and here those opposed to site-value rating have gone to almost unbelievable lengths to block the reform.

The Council had commissioned the Land Values Research Group to make a report on how the change would affect the municipality. Before this was presented they passed a resolution to adopt site-value so that it could be effective with the next rate which needed six months notice. This decision was not taken by a full meeting of council and was rescinded at the last meeting. However this rescinding could not be confirmed before the municipal elections hence will have no binding effect on the new council.

Since our last issue the following developments have happened. The majority in council carried a motion "that the State Government be asked to institute an immediate enquiry into the basis of municipal rating in Tasmania with particular reference to the problems of the Municipality of Clarence and similar municipalities and that the issue of the supplementary assessment notices to ratepayers be deferred pending the outcome of such Government inquiry and that further action or discussion by this council be withheld until the result is advised officially." (The notices are the comparisons of rate payments under the two alternative systems. But many of them had already been posted before this resolution was carried).

An action brought by Mrs. K. M. Eltham (wife of the councillor leading opposition to site-value) seeking a declaration and an injunction against the council concerning rating on unimproved values of property is reported in "Mercury," 3/4/57.

Opponents fearing that the results of the muni-

cial elections will be against them and site-value then instituted by the new council have taken the unprecedented step of seeking to have the council disbanded and a Commission to take over the running of the municipality. They required a petition signed by one-third of the ratepayers seeking a poll on such a proposal. (These signatures have been obtained and a poll will be taken on June 1 on this issue).

Launching this petition a 10 column-inch public notice appeared in "Mercury" (6/4/57) under signatures of 22 ratepayers including five ex-councillors.

In reply a 12 column-inch public notice to "Electors of the Municipality of Clarence" appeared in "Mercury" (9/4/57) under signatures of 24 Clarence ratepayers as follows:

"We, the undersigned ratepayers of the Municipality of Clarence firmly believe that the large majority of the signatories to the statements in the "Mercury" of Saturday, 6th April, represent large landholders who would under site-value rating be called upon to pay a fair and just share rates and certain ex-Councillors who have been rejected by the people.

Under site-value rating, 82 per cent. of normal householders in town areas would benefit by an average reduction in rates of £10 per annum. All progressive farmers would receive a reduction in rates. We are convinced that the endeavour to set up a Commission in Clarence is to prevent the introduction of site-value rating. Opponents of site-value rating have adopted extreme tactics in order to stop ratepayers from expressing their opinion by means of a referendum.

The adoption of a commission would deny ratepayers the opportunity of electing Councillors who support the system of rating adopted by 3-5ths of Australia and which the New Zealand Local Government Commission is convinced is the most ethical, equitable and expedient method of rating — UNIMPROVED SITE VALUE.

If, as suggested, Councillors have no longer the confidence of ratepayers, electors themselves may change the personnel of the council at the elections which will be held on the 27th April, 1957.

If a commission was appointed in Clarence, ratepayers would be saddled with further costs and would have no say whatsoever in the management of municipal affairs."

These various public notices (added to previous publicity given to Clarence affairs) cannot fail to widen the interest in and demand for site-value rating in the territory covered by this paper. It is no longer a matter of interest only to one municipality.

The culminating event in this amazing sequence was at the final council meeting before the elections after the council discussed a letter from the Premier (Mr. Cosgrove) refusing an inquiry into municipal rating. He offered to make available the secretary of Local Government (Mr. R. Clark) and Senior Valuer (Mr. W. Caldwell) to assist the council to consider various rating systems.

He indicated he would have inquiries made regarding the New Zealand report. He also enclosed a letter from a firm of Collier and Madge claiming to have offices in both Sydney (rating site-value) and Melbourne (rating Annual Value) and offering their assistance in honorary capacity.

Crs. Frawley, Cashman and Parish opposed the motion to accept this assistance the latter declaring it to be "irresponsible," the group of men as "laughable" and the whole matter "in indecent haste because of Saturday's municipal election." However those opposed to site value had the numbers and the motion was carried. The ratepayers verdict is awaited with interest.

COMING EVENTS CAST SHADOWS

"Since the Clarence Council published its special resolution changing the method of rating from annual rental values to site valuation for the year 1957-58, beneficial effects already have become evident.

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 unimproved site-value demands.

Architects are interesting clients in homes and flats for rental purposes. Industrialists are looking for building sites.

Demanding that vacant block holders, people with sub-standard and temporary homes, a few farmers with large holdings (usually poorly developed) should pay their fair share of rates, would result in a reduction of excessive rates which are now being charged to 75 per cent. of the people in the municipality.

As vacant and poorly improved holdings are improved they, too, would enjoy the beneficial rate reduction brought about by a change to site-value rating.

The site-value survey proves conclusively that the Clarence Municipality is ideally suited and would benefit greatly from a change to this method of rating and I am appalled at the endeavours to rescind the motion.

(The above is portion of a letter from Cr. D. E. Parish in "Mercury." The same issue contained two good letters from Messrs. P. Wright and S. Mulcahy on the same subject. The experience noted in Clarence repeats that found here. The acceleration in development begins the year before the actual change. As soon as it appears likely to come some speculators unload enabling genuine users to get sites cheaper than otherwise).

STOP PRESS

Telephone advice has been received that Councillor Parish was re-elected and two other candidates favoring site-value displaced sitting councillors in other wards. Only in one ward was an annual value councillor returned. The balance is now 7 to 5 in favour of site-value.