

# Mickey Mouse and the Status Quo

WHILE the California Supreme Court was declaring the constitution unconstitutional regarding the assessment of property values at 100 percent, Oregon was calmly voting into law the 100 percent assessment on all properties in the state. And when this controversial court in Los Angeles ruled against the controversial assessor in Sacramento, Irene Hickman, directing her to set the tax rate at between 20 and 25 percent of market value, she quietly decided on 23.8 percent. This, being a shade under the expected 25 percent, surprised the opposition.

Among her critics—and they are numerous—are some who admit this 23.8 percent will not hit the taxpayers too hard, and some 30,000 owners of lower valued homes will benefit. This makes Irene the friend of small homeowners instead of the officials, and, as one editor noted, "that's where the votes are."

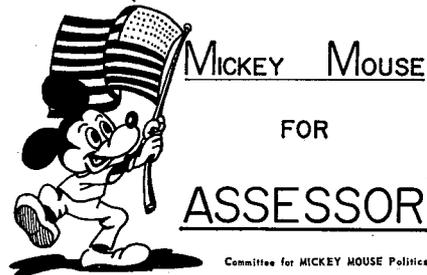
Another editorial (Chico Enterprise-Record) criticized the California court action. While not defending Mrs. Hickman's proposed assessment rate, the view was taken that "if something in the constitution runs counter to propriety it should be changed by the legal procedures established for that purpose, not merely circumvented by fancy judicial opinions or, as so often in federal matters, by capricious executive orders . . . To this extent, Dr. Hickman has performed an illuminating public service, though few will give her credit."

Not many would give her credit either, for having already somewhat changed the business climate of Sacramento, which was in a decline before she took office. The policy of reducing assessments on buildings and improvements may be a spur to development as it has been elsewhere. She cam-

paigned and was elected on a platform of placing a larger value on land than buildings, and she tried to carry out her campaign promises. In recent months the sale of homes was up 34 percent over the first quarter, and there was an increase in retail sales for five consecutive months. The Sacramento Economic Council, reporting that most segments of the local economy were picking up momentum, predicted a strong second half of the year.

On this evidence Editor Reinhart Knudsen of the San Jose Sun concluded: "Although we did not support Irene when she was elected, we would be hard-pressed right now to think of a valid reason for recalling her except that she is disturbing the status quo. And progress, after all, comes from disturbing the status quo."

The move to recall Dr. Hickman, mentioned last month by Ted Gwartney (page 5), was met by her with characteristic humor and a "Mickey Mouse for Assessor" card.



Irene, as she is now popularly called—the original and only woman assessor—is unique in other ways too. She finds time, despite the duties and complexities of her role as assessor, to teach a Henry George class in Sacramento. A large color photo of Henry George is on display in her office—the gift of a Liverpool, New York Geologist, Jeremiah F. Enright.