

MUNICIPAL IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE: A Graphic summary of Land Value Taxation in Australia and New Zealand, by H. Bronson Cowan. Published by Harper & Brothers. 50 pp. \$3

Reviewed by JAMES MURPHY

At last we have photographic evidence of the power of land value taxation to effect the transformation of slums, eyesores and unimproved or vacant lots. This badly needed and most valuable addition to the arsenal of proof of the feasibility and efficacy of Henry George's proposal, points up the truth of the old Chinese saying, one picture worth thousand words. A series of carefully chosen and highly illustrative photographs forms the main body of the testimony in favor of the land value tax. Supporting and corroborative evidence in the form of an interesting and fact-loaded narrative rounds out the overwhelming case in favor of collecting ground rents instead of interest on capital.

The author, R. Bronson Cowan, has done a valuable job in assembling his photographic evidence in such a way as to make the argument for the rating of site values self-evident, and anyone who remains unconvinced after seeing this evidence is intellectually blind, even if his vision is 20-20. This very timely survey was made by Mr. Cowan under the auspices of the International Research Committee on Real Estate Taxation, with the assistance of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation of New York. Most of

his illustrations were obtained under difficult circumstances during World War II, with its rationing of photographic film and supplies in addition to other war-imposed handicaps, yet the result is as free from the spirit of rationing and restriction as it could possibly be. Throughout its all-too-few pages one sees the blighting effects of land speculation fading under the influence of land value taxation, with fine homes, productive factories and impressive business areas blooming in former slum areas.

The photographic evidence covers a wide range of important cities of the world, like Sydney, Australia; Wellington, New Zealand; Regina, Canada; Johannesburg, South Africa; and New Westminster, B. C. It shows in unanswerable detail how the cities with land value taxation have solved many of the vexing problems of slums, depressed areas and congested neighborhoods, while those who have not adopted this measure continue to be plagued by these evils.

This survey is likely to be used over and over in classrooms to answer the sceptical student's question, "but is it practical?" not with theory but with pictorial proof. I personally would recommend that a copy of this work be sent to the real estate assessors and mayors of all our American cities, if only to make them envious. Let us hope that this is only a prelude to the sort of work that will be done in this country. A similar survey of some of our American Cities is a must if we are to have serious consideration of George's proposals. Any volunteers?