

The paper by the above title, with later supplements (S-1, 2, and 3) and reprints of news from other cities, represents an attempt to bring Pittsburgh leaders up to date on the growing national and world appreciation of what ought to be famous as a Pittsburgh Idea.

After an extraordinary "detour" in the 1930's--which should be analyzed when history is written--local educational effort has been directed toward spreading the Idea to other Pennsylvania cities, since, in this state, Pittsburgh precedent has settled the constitutionality of separate taxes on land and buildings. Sponsored by Senator Bernard B. McGinnis, two acts were passed by the Legislature giving third-class cities the option of moving in the same direction as Pittsburgh, or farther. There was almost no opposition, since the measures were purely "home rule." Two cities began action, but political changes brought postponement.

However, workers for this principle, frustrated in other states, were attracted by the news from Pennsylvania, and after occasional lecture tours, two of the best qualified experts have, within the past two years, made their homes here; studied the situation quietly and tactfully in several cities, and results are beginning to appear.

A Tree Grows In Erie

The news from Erie is typified by one of the enclosures, and, as our Graded Tax League adviser would wish it, gives no prominence to his name, because the Idea has taken deep root, and the movement is genuinely an Erie growth. But one of his published articles deserves wide quotation.

An Extract from WHY TAX THE LAND AND NOT THE BUILDINGS?

by W. Wylie Young

"A Subversive Policy"

Because almost every suggestion to improve on our economy is suspect these days we occasionally find people wondering if there may not be something "subversive" about this approach, the word subversive having become a sort of catch-all for any notion that is not conventional. If you will look the word subversive up in the dictionary you will find that it means "to destroy." Our economic philosophers have come to use the term to brand certain kinds of principles which tend to destroy the basic rights and liberties of our people, or that tend to cripple initiative or diminish incentive. Self styled conservatives are insisting that many of the policies that have been adopted by our government in the past thirty years are destructive of basic rights and liberties, and so, subversive. Such criticisms may be just but it is our conviction that such laws would never have been demanded in the first place if our so-called free enterprise system had not operated for years on a tax policy that is a violation of the whole idea of free enterprise. This deeply rooted custom of taxing buildings is and always has been destructive of those factors in our lives that make for freedom of action or which tend to energize an economy. Our policy of taxing land and buildings alike is sickeningly subversive. What we need and want are more and better buildings but because we persist in taxing a vitally needed labor product we destroy the power to produce that product freely and without restraint. To tax labor products is subversive because it tends to cripple the power to produce at all. If this is so the American people had better come to their senses, for most of the vast accumulation of federal taxes are levied against production.