

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

speak out at union meetings. Even the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (90 percent female), with 129,000 members in 1918, had only one woman on its board of directors between 1900 and 1920. Activist women workers dropped out in frustration. Meanwhile, middle- and upper-class feminist organizers alienated tradition-minded immigrants by preaching assertiveness. Their meetings resembled tea parties and made lower-class women feel out of place.

Eventually, the feminists gave up and turned their attention almost exclusively to suffrage. As historian Alice Kessler-Harris notes, immigrant women laborers were left "between a trade union movement hostile to women . . . and a women's movement whose participants did not work for wages."

Raising Gas Taxes

"Gasoline Taxation in Selected OECD Countries, 1970-79" by Alan A. Tait and David R. Morgan, in *IMF Staff Papers* (June 1980), Publications Section, IMF Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20431.

Fearing that high prices at the gas station would heat up inflation, stall economic growth, and victimize the poor, the industrial democracies of Western Europe, North America, and Japan have actually reduced their gasoline taxes since OPEC raised its prices dramatically in 1973-74. As a result, assert Tait and Morgan, economists at the International Monetary Fund, real prices at the pump have risen only slightly—and oil conservation has fallen short of potential.

The real price of crude oil, adjusted for inflation, quintupled from 1970 to 1979. But gasoline tax rates dropped from 44.2 percent (the tax per gallon divided by the before tax price) to 18.2 percent in the United States; from 263.5 percent to 125.7 percent in West Germany; and from 141.8 percent to 72 percent in Japan, between 1970 and 1979. (The real price of retail gasoline actually *fell* in Japan through 1978.) Gas tax revenues as a share of the total tax pie declined in all Western industrialized countries except Italy.

Throughout most of the West, the authors argue, the burden of an increased gasoline tax would fall mainly on the affluent, who own most of the automobiles. But even in the United States, where rich and poor alike own cars, low-income motorists would not be penalized excessively. They currently spend only 6.5 percent of their earnings on fuel.

Initiating steep gasoline taxes is not likely to send inflation out of control, since gas purchases represent less than 5 percent of private consumption in the West. Indeed, it would give governments greater opportunities to foster both conservation and growth. A recent study conducted in the United States suggests that a 10 percent increase in gasoline prices would reduce individuals' purchases of gasoline between 7 and 14 percent. Assuming that citizens continued to spend at the pumps as before, a higher percentage of their cash would be kept in

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the country, funneled back to the government to shore up the trade balance or pay for programs such as highway maintenance.

Stiff gasoline taxes—especially levies designed to catch up to the sharp July 1979 OPEC oil price hikes—would surely inconvenience some drivers, particularly in North America. But, say the authors, the oil cartel's latest 1980 price hikes are reminders that heretofore low gasoline taxes helped make such increases bearable and possible.

SOCIETY

*The Chinese
in America*

"Chinese in the United States: A Century of Occupational Transition" by Haitung King and Frances B. Locke, in *International Migration Review* (Spring 1980), Center for Migration Studies, 209 Flagg Pl., Staten Island, N.Y. 10304.

During America's frontier boom from 1850 to 1880, the sight of pig-tailed Chinese men panning northern California's streams for gold became common. Yet, beginning in the 1870s, opportunities for immigrant Chinese in the New World narrowed, and their descendants are still underrepresented in some white-collar occupations.

*During recessions,
anti-Chinese feeling in
America grew.
California magazines
such as The Wasp
urged immigration
bans during the 1880s.*



The Oakland Museum