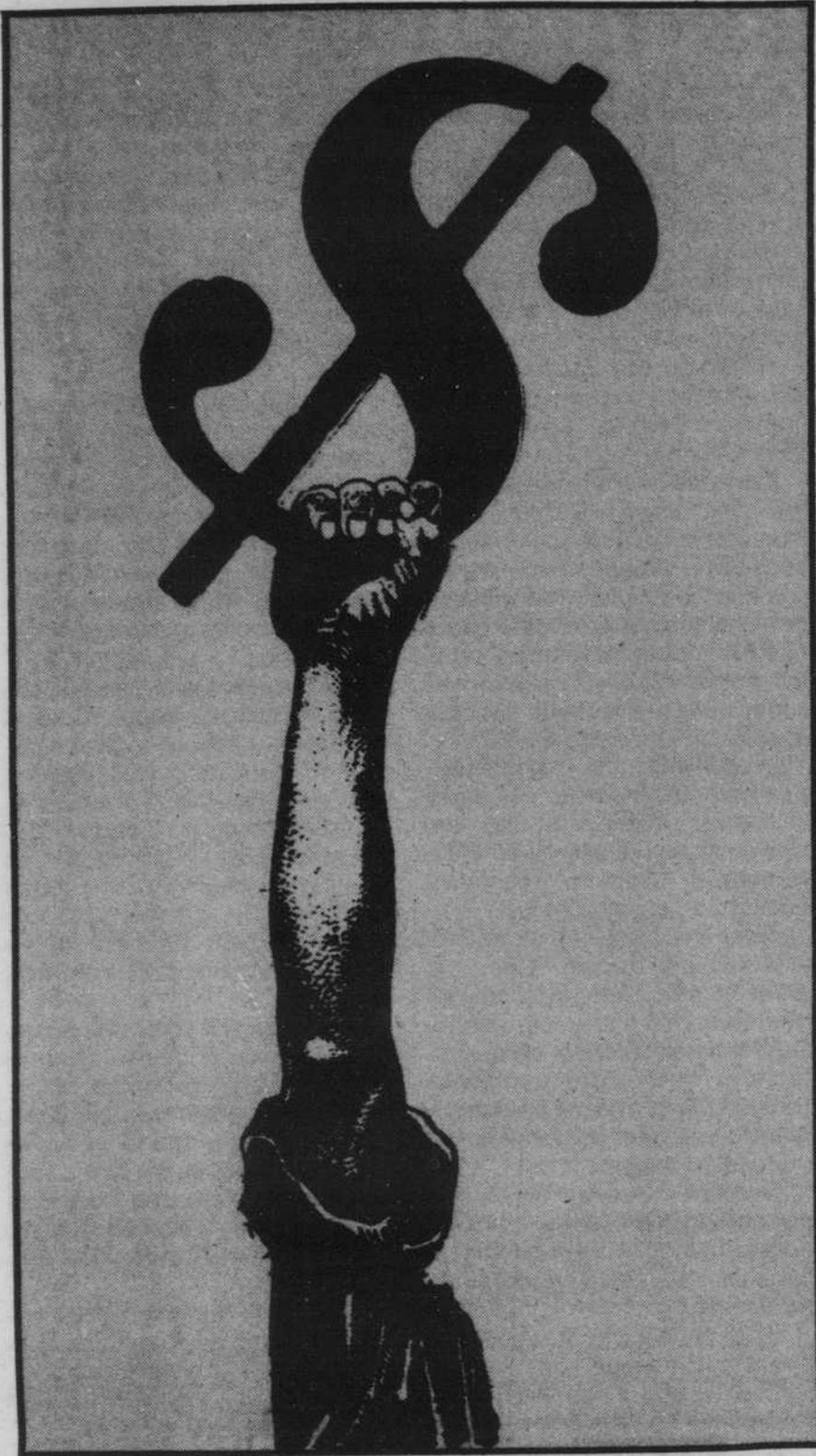


Tax revolt



Petitioners trucking lists for Friday's deadline

Stories by KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

Today is the last active day for the Oregon tax limitation initiative petitions and supporters of the California-style tax revolt are wasting no time filing their many grievances with the Secretary of State's office in Salem.

They're bringing the petitions — literally — by the truckload. One load of petitions, bearing nearly 200,000 signatures of irate voters, was taken to Salem last Friday where the limitation supporters held a rally on the Capitol steps to further voice their anger at the tax situation in Oregon.

The life of the Oregon property taxpayer has hardly been easy in the face of rising inflation and excessive government spending that has characterized the past few years.

Now, those taxpayers are standing up and shouting "Enough!" two leaders of the statewide petition drive say. Those taxpayers are finished with the government wantonly spending their tax dollars and have chosen the state property tax limitation petition to be their Bunker Hill hoping to send some state and federal politicians to their Waterloo.

According to Ray Phillips of Portland, the coordinator of the petition drive for the Northern half of the state, those heading the drive are having a hard time keeping the angry petition signers in line. Some signers are unsatisfied with the limits set by the tax limitation petition, he says. They want to go "all the way to the top."

"People are very unhappy with the way things are right now; that's

stating it mildly," Phillips says. "They want to change the whole structure of taxes, clear up to the top."

Phillips and his workers have tried to calm some of the angry taxpayers down, but to no avail.

"I've tried to keep it within the whole realm of the property tax situation, but they're saying why don't we go federal," he says. "I believe we could go federal very soon. But for right now we have to keep a lid on this thing."

Most of those who want to attack the entire system of taxes would not be considered activist taxpayers, or even activist voters. They range in ages from 18 to 80, says Ed Sparks of Roseburg, who is coordinating the petition drive for the Southern half of the state.

"All we know is that they're registered voters," Sparks says. "Most of our support is coming from every kind of person."

"The general feeling I get from the people who support this petition is 'let's go!' They're anywhere from young people who will vote for the first time to people in wheelchairs," he says.

The tax limitation proposition in Oregon is a carbon copy of a similar measure approved by California voters last month. That measure limits the state and local government's power to levy property taxes to one and one-half percent of the property's value assessed during the 1975-76 fiscal year.

If passed, that measure could take as much as \$400 million from state tax revenues, which could mean a reduction of civic services or other vital programs now funded through property tax money.

Without that money, says Noel

Klein of the League of Oregon Cities, the numerous small cities around the state could suffer more of a loss than the large cities.

Because the average Oregon city draws about 30 percent of its operating budget from local property taxes, small cities could be hit with either a substantial cut in services or a loss of revenue, he says.

The state school system could also suffer if such a tax limitation were approved, says Esther Loy, chair of the League of Women Voters' state tax committee.

Without the added funds from local property taxes, schools all over the state would be faced with the choice of levying a local income tax in addition to the state income tax, or be forced to close their doors, says.

But these and other "horror stories" about what could happen if the tax limitation measure passes in November don't frighten Phillips or his supporters at all.

"No, I do not believe them," Phillips says. "And I think Mr. Goldschmidt (Portland's mayor, who predicted a major loss of civic services if the tax limitation went into effect) overreacted just a bit. But we've got some answers for people like that."

Those answers, Phillips says, will come in the form of an overwhelming victory for the tax limitation measure on the November ballot.

Phillips, who toured California with tax limitation guru Howard Jarvis a few weeks ago, says one special answer will go to city officials who grant special tax privileges to large corporations or urban renewal projects that are now under construction in Portland.

Support numbers balloon

When Oregon's tax revolt began just six weeks ago, there was one leader and several followers. Nearly two months and 200,000 petition signatures later, there are four separate committees leading the fight against high property taxes.

At the beginning, Jim Whittenburg, a Portland lobbyist, filed the first initiative petition for the tax limitation and fired the first shot in the state's tax revolt. That first petition filed with the Secretary of State's office was nothing more than a Xeroxed copy of the infamous proposition 13 overwhelmingly approved by California voters last month.

Since that original filing, support for the tax revolt has grown to such proportions that it now takes at least four committees to handle the petitions. From Portland to Pendleton, and Salem to Klamath Falls, the committees are spreading the petitions as far and as wide as their members will allow.

As if part of some tax revolt score card, the committees range

in name from the United Organization for Taxpayers and Do Care Committee to The Lobby for Social Concerns and the Demands Tax Limitation Committee.

Whittenburg, who has had his share of trouble with the law since starting the tax limitation drive because of two bad checks he passed in Lane County, quit the original petition drive one day after it had reached the goal of 65,000 signatures needed to put the measure on the November ballot.

Seven days after he quit, Whittenburg returned with another committee of his own to push the petitions over the 200,000 signature mark.

While it may seem confusing to most people, the unusual number of committees supporting the measure are just part of the whole fight for tax limitation, says Ed Sparks of Roseburg who heads the Do Care Committee.

"It's just a lot of roots," Sparks says. "There are roots all over the state that are connected to the

original purpose."

The only thing that seems to be standing in the way of the petitions right now is the state's newspapers, Sparks charges.

They haven't got the message to the people," he says. "But, the more the people hear about the petitions, the more they call the office and want to do something to help."

Oregon's taxpayers may have just a bit more anger than their California counterparts, Sparks says. According to two unscientific opinion surveys conducted by a Portland newspaper and radio station, about 80 percent of the voters would approve the tax limitation measure if it were on the ballot tomorrow.

"Comparatively speaking, we've done just fine gathering the signatures," Sparks says. "California had several months to get theirs, but we've just had about five weeks."

So far, he says, only one person out of 500 has refused to sign the tax limitation petitions.

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