

Group fights tax revolt 'feudalism'



Emerald graphic

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: While large political groups with a great deal at stake fought feverishly against California's Proposition 13, small groups were almost forgotten. But that doesn't mean they don't have something to say. The American Indian Party (no connection to the American Indian Movement) tried to be heard in California. Now they are trying to be heard in Oregon, before it's too late.

The threat of a limitation on Oregon's property taxes seems to loom closer each day. But one group that suffered through California's Proposition 13 hopes people in this state will see the fight against the limitation measure as the moral equivalent of war.

The American Indian Party, a San Francisco-based organization with fewer than 50 members nationwide, sees the latest wave of tax revolt fever as a war that threatens the very basis of the country's democratic process.

The move by taxpayers — at the prodding of tax revolt guru Howard Jarvis — to cut state property taxes by nearly 40 percent in California, and similar moves in Oregon, Massachusetts and Michigan, is nothing more than a giant leap backwards into the age of feudalism, according to AIP Secretary Harold Govett.

The measure passed in California, which limits state property taxes to one percent above the 1975 assessed value of the property, will help the huge multinational corporations more than anyone else in the state, Govett says.

Those corporations, he says, have invested heavily in farm, residential and industrial lands that, when the tax limitation goes into effect, will be worth a great deal. And it will all be virtually tax-free, Govett complains.

"What's been set up here in California is a situation just like in Ireland in the last century," he says. "The British companies went in and bought up all the land and started growing products other than the food crops and people began to starve and the whole country was in a mess."

The multi-national corporations, acting as absentee landlords over their farm and residential lands, says Govett, will pay less taxes and make the greatest gains — just like feudalism.

The fact that many members of the California legislature supported the tax limitation measure is attributed to only one thing: money.

As far as Govett's group is concerned, the people with money (the multi-national corporations) are putting people in office who will vote their way. That, coupled

with the problem of less local control and huge lobbying efforts by special interest groups who want their share of what little money is left, may be eroding the democratic fiber of the nation.

And Govett thinks California may have seen the last of the "one man, one vote" principle with the passage of proposition 13.

"You can't say that these multi-national corporations don't influence our state congressmen, because they do," he says.

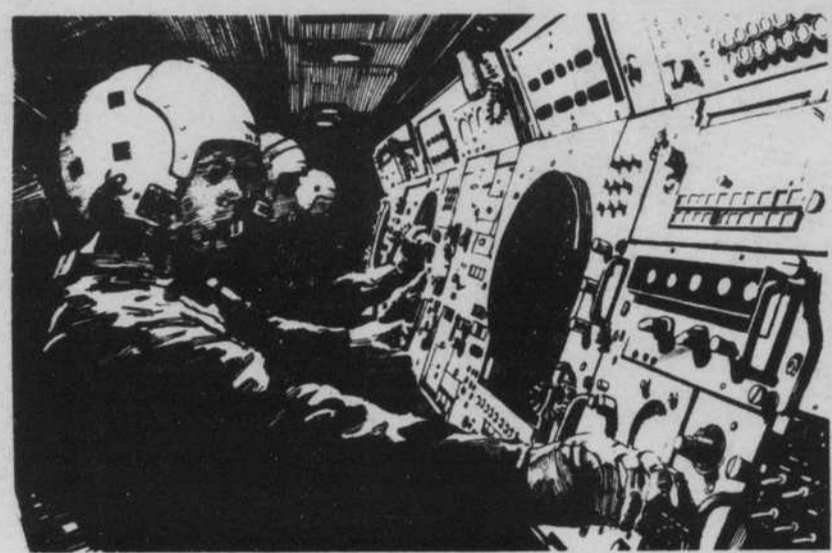
Besides all the fuss about who gets what, Govett and the AIP say the whole premise of proposition 13 is illegal. The measure's provision that it can only be reversed by a two-thirds majority of the voters, is against the constitution of the United States, Govett says.

"As far as we're concerned this is illegal," he says. "And the illegality of it is that only 51 percent of the people can decide what will happen to the tax money, but it will take 66 and two-thirds percent to repeal the limitation law."

That, he says, isn't right. If a two-thirds majority is needed to vote it out, a two-thirds majority should be needed to vote it in.

That's not the worst of it, Govett says. Besides eroding democracy, the tax limitation also destroys a very large part of the American Dream: owning a home.

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Whittenburg itemizes expenses

Tax petition statement filed

By KEVIN HARDEN
Of the Emerald

The suspense is over.

Jim Whittenburg, the father of Oregon's copycat tax revolt, has filed his financial statement with the secretary of state's office in Salem.

Whittenburg, a Portland lobbyist who originated the property tax limitation petition in Oregon after the overwhelming victory of California's Proposition 13 last month, filed the financial statement Tuesday.

The statement, required by law, details campaign expenditures and donations for the petition drive. It was handed to the secretary of state by Whittenburg's lawyer, Leo Young, of Eugene.

More than 150,000 state taxpayers signed the initiative petitions, more than enough to place the tax limitation measure on the Nov. 7 general election ballot. The signatures were twice the 65,000 needed to put the issue on the ballot.

But Whittenburg threatened to withhold the form last week until the Legislature could decide on a compromise measure. He asked Legislative leaders to call a special session to discuss the property tax problem, but to no avail.

Senate President Jason Boe and state Sen.

Vern Cook both warned against calling a special session of the Legislature two weeks ago, saying it would be foolish to take drastic action on one measure before the November general election.

"If this is a crisis, it's something that came into being awfully fast," Cook said last week. "It would be wrong to rush into a special session because of another supposed crisis."

The Legislature should stay out of the tax fight except to give information on the measure's effects, according to Boe. By fighting emotional rhetoric with tales of doomsday, the Legislature could only aggravate an already touchy situation, he suggested.

"Basically what we'll do now is try to learn from California's mistakes," he said. "Our highest priority will be to provide the people of this state with accurate information on this measure's effects."

Whittenburg, however, thought the legislators should have done more. Had the legislators called a special session and arranged a compromise measure giving taxpayers some relief, Whittenburg would have withheld the financial form.

However, Secretary of State Norma Paulus said she would file criminal charges against him if he took that action. The tax limitation measure couldn't have been placed on the November ballot without the form.

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