TAXPAYERS MEET WITH COMMISSION

Citizens of Clatsop and Columbia Meet with Tax Commission—State Boards Attacked and Income Tax Levy is Favored.

(Continued From Page One)

state commission are like the fifth wheel on a coach, and most of them were created because some one was out of a job. He suggested a poll or head tax on every person over 21 years of age. The drawback he saw to an income tax was that people always dodge it and it is an endless job to collect it. He added that taxes on farms in Columbia county are more than the rental value and the same is true of residence property in St. Helens. Walter Pierce of the committee said that is the worst condition the committee has found in any section of the state.

Demands Income Tax

J. L. Foote, district attorney of Columbia county, said that the state commissions should be consolidated so as to lessen the number of salaried employes. Road and school taxes are voted by the people of the respective districts and this cannot be remedied. But there is some property that escapes taxation and there should be a cut in the state expenses.

He favored an income tax, but it is cumbersome and expensive to collect and would entail the establishment of another state department. Mr. Pierce replied that it cost only 5 per cent to collect the state income tax in Wisconsin. "If it can be done for that," said Mr. Foote, "or for 50 per cent, I am in favor of it."

Timber Man Speaks

O. J. Evenson of the Benson Timber company said it is an error to say the people are to blame for the existing conditions, but the one at fault is the man who sugar-coats the schemes which are submitted to the people. He said some of the expensive frills must be cut off and as a means of raising revenue he advocated a flat income tax that will apply to everyone. Every person should pay his portion of maintaining the state government, but when he pays a property tax that should be deducted from the income tax and no one should be allowed to vote on taxation without having on income tax receipt.

Mr. Pierce replied that he considered an income tax the most fair way to raise revenue, for he said, "if you make the income, you pay, if you don't make it you don't pay, but I fear you would have a hard time in changing the qualifications of the voters."

"If you are afraid of that," answered Mr. Evenson, "you are lost."

Assessor Is Heard

C. W. Blakesley, assessor of Columbia county, said the great cry was that the burden of taxation is not equally distributed, adding that schools and roads are where the greatest amount of money is spent. He said he did not assess notes and accounts, as there were seven banks in his county from which more taxes were received than could be obtained from notes and accounts and if he assessed the latter there would be no banks. In answer to a question he said he favored a state body to equalize assessments for state purpose, but he thought the tax commission had that authority.

W. J. Fullerton, commissioner of Columbia county, said his county's portion of the state tax had increased from $44,144.54 in 1916 to $112,624.02 this year, while the county levy had not advanced although there had been an increase in the school and municipal levies.

Officers Pay No Taxes

"There are many public officers who don't pay a cent of taxes," he averred, "and taxes are now so high no one will purchase land, because the income from it is not sufficient to pay the taxation. I favor a graduated income tax according to the amount of the income. Real property needs relief and I think the taxpayers of our county will stand behind a proposition to limit taxation, but can't tell how the people would vote as four of five voters are not taxpayers. I also think the filing fees should be increased so as to cover the expense of the work entailed."

W. D. Evenson said that the men in office instead of seeking new forms of raising revenue should try to save expenses. He said his school district at Clatskanie has cut expenses by eliminating transportation and improvement of grounds. He added that a reduction of 6 per cent a year in taxes will save real property from confiscation.

Astorians Report

J. H. Smith, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce committee, consisting of himself, A. W. Norblad, J. S. Dellinger, G. C. Fulton, J. J. A. Bowlby, Norris Staples, O. I. Peterson and A. Osburn presented the report of the committee with four recommendations as a means of relieving the tax situation.

The first was the establishment of a state cabinet form of government to take the place of the commissions, each member being the head of a department of the state government. He said this plan had also proven successful with the national government and was also satisfactory in Idaho.

Would Divide Session

The second recommendation was legislation requiring a reduction in taxes of six per cent each year for five years and the requiring of a majority of two-thirds vote of the people to change this. Such a plan, Mr. Smith explained, would bring the basis of taxation back to where it was before the 6 per cent increase was permitted.

The third recommendation was for a divided session of the legislature. In explaining this, the speaker said that all bills would be introduced at the first session and at the second one the measures would be acted upon. In the meantime he said the bills would be printed, legislators and the people would have an opportunity to examine them and the result would be the elimination of many undesirable laws.

Abolish School Taxes

The fourth and last recommendation was the repeal of the millage tax for higher educational institutions. "This would not mean," Mr. Smith remarked, "that those institutions would be without the necessary funds, but it would place them more under the supervision of the state cabinet and would thus be a means of cutting out many forms of extravagance."

For Graduated Income Tax

Beginning the afternoon session at 1:30, John H. Smith spoke for a half hour in favor of a graduated income tax as a correct and equitable measure for relieving property owners of the big burden they are now carrying. He expressed the opinion that a comparatively simple income tax could be devised in the state and that it would reach the men with incomes who are now escaping their fair share of taxes.

He declared that this county is paying nearly $2,000,000 annually in taxes whereas in 1914 the total tax was only about $600,000. The per capita indebtedness of this county, he averred, was greater than that of Germany. He blamed the high taxes to a considerable extent upon business men who, he said, were deriving their incomes from the community but who did not own property and consequently were escaping their share of the taxes. "The property owners are simply outvoted," he said.

Mrs. Kinney Talks

Mrs. W. S. Kinney, representative from this county, was the second speaker of the afternoon and she too, favored an income tax provided it were properly drawn and not merely an attempt by one class of people to transwer their burdens to another class. She declared the responsibilities for the present situation rests upon everybody but the property owners. The non-taxpayers, she said, outnumber the taxpayers and outvote them. She also placed some of the responsibility on the legislature and took occasion to rap sharply practices of the ways and means committee of the house. Incidentally, she commended the legislature for refusing to vote for a property tax to finance the 1925 fair. The first remedy for high taxes, she said, is retrenchment and the best way to retrench is to stop spending money. "Father's shoes must come before sister's party dress," she said, "and if there isn't money enough for both sister must go without the party dress."

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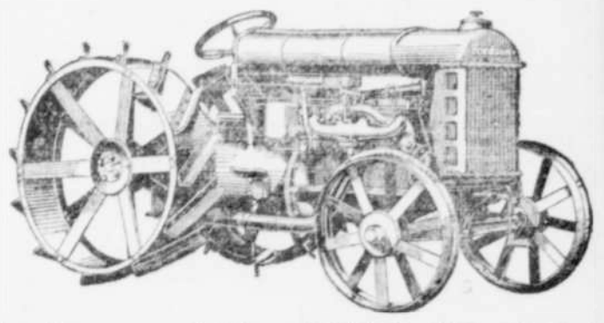

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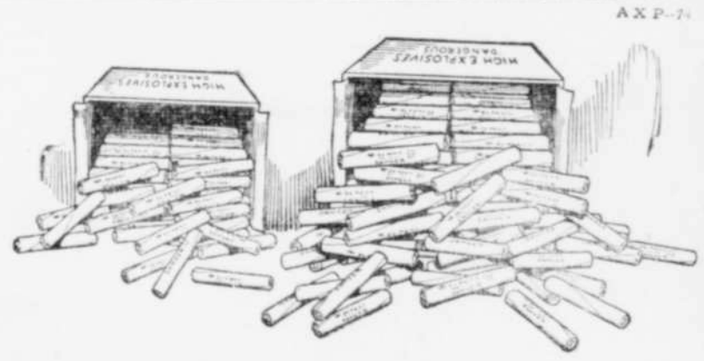

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