

TAXPAYERS ARE TURNED DOWN AT SCHOOL MEETING

(Continued from Page One.)

levy together with a \$150,000 bond issue for fireproof buildings.

Mr. Haak desired to present a set of resolutions which had been approved by the civic council. He declared last night that although he sought recognition from the chair at a time when no other business was before the meeting, he was not noticed, while a motion to adjourn was made and seconded informally after he had attempted to gain the floor; he was given speedy attention and vote. It was also stated by Mr. Haak that at least 75 per cent of the audience was composed of school teachers, principally women, and no evidence was given to show that they or any other person attending the meeting was a taxpayer.

Would Abolish Meeting. The civic council, said Mr. Haak, will lead a movement to abolish the so-called taxpayers' meeting and substitute a method of passing upon the school budget which shall bring it to the attention and vote of every taxpayer.

Increased salaries for teachers, cost of fireproofing new buildings and need for equipment were assigned by Mrs. L. W. Sitton, chairman of last night's meeting, as chief causes for increased school expenditures. The total of \$2,122,100 was to be raised by a levy of 6.3 mills on all assessable property in school district No. 1 to produce \$1,551,700, by \$115,000 from the county school fund, by \$75,000 from the state school fund, \$700 tuition fees, \$87,000 cash on hand and \$270,000 interest.

The levy which the board first announced would be laid was 6.7 mills. Following the discovery of Assistant Engineer that the board had overlooked the \$12,000,000 valuation on railroads and public service corporations which the state railroad commission is expected to report, the levy was reduced to the present figure.

Asks Greatest Increase. This levy, Mr. Sigler has pointed out, is the greatest increase every asked by the board, and is not in proportion with the growth of the city or the increase in school population. The levy is laid on the assessed valuation of about \$279,000,000 taxable property in school district No. 1.

The budget thus secured is to be apportioned as follows: Teachers' salaries, \$900,000; school building, \$550,000; repairs and sanitation, \$150,000; library, \$10,000; fuel, \$10,000; improvement of grounds, \$150,000; interest on bonds, \$45,000; street and sewers, \$25,000; remainder apportioned for various and miscellaneous expense of various nature.

The adoption of the report was moved by W. P. Olds and seconded by Judge J. P. Kavanaugh. An amendment moved by Herman Wittenberg to consider approval of the report and to adjourn was declared lost by Mrs. Sitton, as the original motion carried. Mrs. Sitton said following the meeting that she did not know who made the motion to adjourn which was recognized by her, nor did she know who seconded it.

Judge Northrup Made Motion. R. H. Thomas, school clerk, stated that the motion was made by Judge H. H. Northrup. The session was called together again by John H. Haak for the purpose of submitting resolutions, but the disorder in the room was so great that no definite action could be recorded. Mr. Haak said that he had been informed by a principal of the high school that instructions had been sent to the teachers, first to come early and pack last night's meeting if they desired to see the increase of salary carried; second, that the Fifteenth street door would be open for them at 6 o'clock. He said he confronted a member of the school board yesterday with this information, and it was not denied. The Lincoln high school auditorium was crowded at 7 o'clock, although the meeting was not called to convene until 8 o'clock.

J. N. Teal, A. H. Devers and Herman Wittenberg, with others, formed a questioning group around school board members after the meeting was over. While angry taxpayers over the room could be heard calling the meeting a "farce," Mr. Teal said that he had desired to inquire just why the school budget in five years had increased from \$500,000 to more than \$2,000,000. Mr. Teal said today:

"In an editorial in last evening's Journal headed 'A Public Duty,' citizens were urged to attend the school meeting where a budget for school buildings and expenditure of more than \$2,000,000 was to be submitted. The editorial said, speaking of taxpayers shifting their public responsibilities:

"This way to exercise an influence in having the money properly expended is to be at the meeting and there present his views and his vote."

Grim Sarcastic. "In view of what transpired this seems to be the grimmest kind of sarcasm. No taxpayer was given the opportunity to discuss anything, although there were some most important matters in the report and the meeting was called to consider the report of the directors," etc.

"According to the report submitted, in August last, the council passed an ordinance requiring every school building in the city to be of fireproof construction after January. The directors evidently did not favor this. It adds to the cost of one building alone as contemplated by the directors \$150,000.

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"Buildings of the class described may be best in certain sections, but I doubt very much if the taxpayers generally think it necessary to build every building of fireproof construction. I believe a discussion would have resulted in a resolution asking the council to amend this ordinance, and that the council would have given serious consideration to this request.

There were other matters of importance which could have no doubt been satisfactorily explained, and it would have been better for the schools and all concerned if they had been.

Comparison in Table. The special levy fixed this year is 6.3 mills. This alone is .3 of a mill more than is levied for all other municipal purposes. In addition to this the schools receive the proportion of the state tax and the directors recommend a bond issue of \$150,000 additional. According to the figures before me for 1909-10 the schools in 1906 for 13,880 pupils was about \$200,000. This year, with an attendance of 13,823 at the present time, the estimate is about \$2,122,000.

The following table shows the increase in the assessed valuation, levy, and amount of attendance for the years 1900 and 1911:

Table with 3 columns: Year, Ass. Val., Levy, Cost of Attendance. Shows data for 1900 and 1911.

There seems to be an idea somewhat prevalent that our schools are poorly equipped. This is not the case if official government figures have any value. According to the United States census bulletin of 1906, entitled 'Statistics of Cities Having a Population of Over 25,000,' General Table No. 22, Portland is in the percentage of the amount of money devoted to school out of the total municipal expenditure. Seattle was twelfth, Los Angeles thirtieth, Denver thirty-eighth and no other city on this coast in the list which I saw quoted the amount of 53 cents.

Everyone Feels Burden. "The burden of taxation is of course felt by everyone, but it is not the so-called 'heavy taxpayer' who should receive the most consideration. It is the people on whom the payment of taxes is a real burden, those whose purchasing power is really affected by every dollar they expend.

"It is certain that as well as others want to know where their money goes and how it is expended, and such people will not view with satisfaction meetings involving the expenditure of millions of dollars such as was held last evening. Personally, I have no more interest in the subject than any other person, but do take a decided interest in the preservation of the ordinary rights of every citizen to be heard as a right and not as a favor on any public question in which he is concerned.

All Should Be Heard. "Immediate adjournment was so necessary that a taxpayer was not even allowed the privilege of making the usual motion for the appointment of an auditing committee.

"It is hardly to be said that this method of treating public business is prudent, to say the least. I submit that at a meeting of this character taxpayers have a right to be heard and it is not a matter of grace and such action does not result in good results. When the taxpayers in March, 1911, find they have largely increased taxes to pay, it is not improbable that they will remember they were not even given an opportunity to suggest methods by which they might have been reduced."

Says Meeting Packed. A. H. Devers declared today that last night's meeting was "packed." He said indignantly:

"The school meeting last night was certainly a farce. If the object of the meeting was to discuss matters pertaining to the schools of the district and the taxes necessary to sustain them, the meeting was packed, and a taxpayer had absolutely no opportunity to say a word about anything. Evidently there was a fear that some taxpayers might object to the increase in salaries, but personally I don't think there was anybody there who objected to the increase in teachers' salaries, but there were some other vital and important things that should have been discussed at the meeting, but debate on these was absolutely and positively shut off and no opportunity given the actual taxpayers who took the trouble to attend the meeting to express their views on any subject whatever.

"This method of holding meetings is certainly antiquated and either the school directors should be given full power to levy a tax and be responsible to nobody, or, if the present school meeting is to be continued, an opportunity should be given to intelligently discuss matters that may be of interest to the tax paying public."

Taxpayers Ignored. "As a taxpayer and a citizen I am ashamed of the meeting last night," said Herman Wittenberg, former member of the school board, today.

"To think that, after a call for all taxpayers to attend, that they should have been left out without being given a chance to be heard is certainly to be regretted. I am satisfied, in so far as the directors were concerned, including the chairman, that this was not done intentionally, but in the first place, in my opinion, the meeting was packed by teachers and their friends, whose only object was to crowd through the increase in salary. That really being their only object of being at the meeting.

"When Mr. Olds put the motion which he has done each time that an increase has been taken up, whether by concerted action or not, I am not prepared to say, the motion was quickly seconded and an effort to divide the motion was unavailing.

Teachers Well Paid. "I am satisfied Mr. Olds felt that he was acting for the best interests of all concerned, but I believe that Mr. Olds would agree with me that were it a matter of his own private business he would not so quickly have granted the increase. I do not believe that there is an industry or a department store or any mercantile enterprise that has increased its salaries 30 per cent during the past five years. And if it cannot be done in private enterprises, why should it be done in public? Or should the good will of possibly 900 women teachers may be of great benefit to my mercantile institution who stands as their champion. Whether this is the reason or not I do not know. If so, it is a very selfish one.

"So far as teachers' salaries are concerned, I can state that these teach-

ers are now the best paid public school teachers in the world, taking into consideration the cost of living in Portland as against the cost of living in the cities where higher or similar salaries are paid.

Living Cheaper Here. "For instance, in Seattle the cost of living is fully 15 per cent greater than in Portland. In San Francisco, it is fully 25-30 per cent greater. An individual earning \$15 per month in Portland can make just as great a saving and live just as well as an individual in Seattle earning \$100 per month. This can be proven beyond a question of a doubt, as it has been thoroughly investigated.

I do not think it was in very good taste for teachers, who receive their salaries from the district, to pack the meeting and vote for the increase. I do not think it was in good taste for a parent, who had a teacher in the schools and who was interested in the salaries, to make a motion to adjourn to avoid a possible change.

"I am reliably informed that teachers were invited to pack the meeting and were told how they could get into the building after 6 o'clock in the evening.

Not All Were Voters. "I am satisfied that out of the crowd that voted for the passage of the report of the directors, less than 25 per cent were legal voters. This all going to prove that our method of taxpayers' meetings for the school district is nothing more or less than a farce. I am satisfied that had there been no request for an increase in salaries, there would not have been 50 people present at the taxpayers' meeting. So much for that part of the meeting.

The next item of interest, which was the reason for prominent taxpayers being present, was to try and pass a resolution to ask the city council to repeal the ordinance in so far as fireproof school buildings are concerned. In my opinion, the holding of fireproof school houses is unfair to taxpayers of the district for several reasons. The most important one being the excessive cost.

Opposes Fireproof Buildings. "If the ordinance that is now in effect were repealed and conditions were as they were before, the holding of fireproof buildings would be a saving of the 1.3 mill could be made to the taxpayers in the levy. In other words, five mills would take care of all the buildings and the increase in teachers' salaries and the entire tax would be paid by the taxpayers. And that is one of the important matters that it was intended to discuss at the meeting, but it was squelched.

"One strong argument against the building of fireproof schoolhouses is the great loss entailed to the taxpayers in districts where commercial business encroaches and there are no children to send to the school in that district. Take, for instance, the Stephens school. Business is gradually crowding around it to such an extent that the building will soon be empty in so far as the attendance of children is concerned.

Pupils Are Safe. "Supposing that this were a fireproof building, it would cost the district about \$150,000 more, and it would be absolutely worthless as an investment of any kind. Being that it is built of wood, the loss is not nearly so great and it can, possibly, be utilized finally for some other purpose even at a sacrifice, which would possibly compare with that of a fireproof structure.

"This is one of the strongest arguments against building fireproof schools, especially grammar schools in the district, viz., the changeable conditions, which would possibly wipe out the usefulness of the school building.

"Now let us say a word about the safety of the schools. During the life of the city of Portland and the school district, not a single accident has happened to a child attending school from fire causes. This covers a period of over 50 years. Is it not worth considering, as against wild protest of possible non-taxpayers, who are yelling for fireproof buildings without having carefully investigated the matter?

Action Too Hasty. "Why should not these same people take into consideration that they had better build their homes of fireproof material so that their children may avoid the possibility of being incinerated during the night, when they are sleeping and no one to guard them or awaken them? Are they not far more unsafe in their home building at night than in the present schoolhouses during the day time, where there is a principal and a corps of teachers and a janitor on duty at all times to watch over their welfare and where exits of escape are many, where fire drills are held every week and where, by weekly experience, it has been shown that the schools can be emptied in less than 60 seconds?

"Why should the taxpayers of this district be compelled to pay the money for a fad or a theory that can

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be proven as being unworthy of the expenditure? "These are some of the matters that it was hoped could be talked about in the taxpayers' meeting, and were shut out by too much haste and too little thought in the interest of the taxpayers.

Should Limit Levy. "I am not seriously criticizing the directors, I know their duties are many from my own experience; I know it is a thankless task; I know they are honorable and honest in all of their motives, and their only thought far above serve the interest of the taxpayers, and I am sure, as stated before, they have done so with the best of intentions. But, if they would consider that the district has now reached a point where over \$2,000,000 in annually expended, really as much as the expenses of the entire affairs of the city of Portland, I believe they would have given a little more consideration to the requests of the taxpayers to express an opinion before being asked to vote on their recommendation.

"I believe the time has come when it would be better to limit the amount of the levy for school purposes in this city, which in the same as is done with other levies in this city.

"I am a believer in good schools; the best in the world, if you please, with good salaries for our teachers. But I do not believe in making them the best paid, teachers their only thought far above that received by individuals in other walks of life; but that we should be beyond the limit of other cities, under similar conditions, is unfair and unjust to the taxpayers.

Recommend Law Changes. Resolutions submitted by the civic council last night are said to contain in substance the revision of school laws which will be asked of the legislature at its next meeting. The resolutions read:

"Be it resolved, by the legal voters of School District No. 1, Multnomah county, state of Oregon, in annual public meeting assembled, that we recommend a change of the school laws of this state in the following respects, to-wit:

"First—That this school district be independent of the county school system; and that the boundaries of the district be co-extensive with the city of Portland and extensions thereof.

"Second—That this district be governed by a board of education, consisting of 12 members to be elected from different sections of the city.

"Third—That such board be authorized to make the annual school levy and that the annual taxpayers' meetings be discontinued.

"Fourth—That members of the school board shall be elected annually, and such elections shall be held at the same time, in the same place, and in the same manner as city elections.

"Fifth—That plans and specifications for new school buildings be selected by competitive methods.

"Sixth—That the erection of buildings and additions and the purchase of supplies be awarded to the lowest responsible bidder. The plan has often been initiated but never successfully.

"Seventh—That a detailed financial and statistical statement be published annually at the end of the school year, giving full information of expenditures of money, and matters of interest to the general public.

"Eighth—That civil service rules be applied to teachers and principals of schools.

"Ninth—That stricter provisions be made against any member of the board, or officer, or employe being in anywise directly or indirectly interested in any school contract.

"Tenth—That the grand jury be given ample power to expert the accounts of public officers.

"Eleventh—That a budget of the needs of the board of education for the ensuing year be published at least two weeks before the tax levy is made."

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