

Difficulties of County System Seen by Delinquent Tax List

(What went wrong in the tax department? How could such a long — and long overdue — list of delinquent personal property taxes build up? Members of the Jackson County Home Rule Committee say, "It's the system." (Since voters of the county will choose May 18 between continuing the present form of county government and adopting the proposed Home Rule Charter, the Mail Tribune asked members of the home rule

committee to review the weaknesses of the present system as they apply to the problem of delinquent personal property taxes and to explain how such a problem could be handled under the charter.

(That article follows.)

Newspaper publication of an eight-page list of delinquent personal property taxes and the explanation that followed was to many voters of Jackson county a startling illustration of the difficulties under which honest and able officials are trying to handle county problems.

The county has been fortunate indeed in the type of men who serve it in elective positions, and it would be grossly unfair to blame present office holders for the inefficiency of the system under which they serve.

The fact that unpaid personal property taxes in Jackson county could reach a total of almost one-half million dollars before the matter came to public attention is in itself a staggering indictment of the system of county government that has allowed this situation to develop.

Must Pay More

When personal property taxes go uncollected, those who do pay must pay more than their share to make up for the uncollected portion in order that cities, school districts, and other taxing units may have funds with which to operate.

And the longer any unse-

cured bill goes unpaid, the less chance there is of collecting it — as any business or credit bureau can testify. It has been estimated that as much as \$100,000 of the long-unpaid personal property taxes will now be uncollectable, due to property owners dying or moving away, and to property declining in value or being sold.

Delay in the collection of delinquent personal property taxes is thus a matter of major concern to the residents of Jackson county. What, in the present system, has allowed this situation to develop? Responsibility Not Clear

First — and most important — the conflicting statements of officials involved demonstrate clearly that in the county government at present there is no clear delineation of responsibility and authority.

After days of interviewing elected officials and of checking Oregon statutes, no one has yet been able to say clearly and concisely where the responsibility lies for the uncollected taxes. Nor can one find, without a lengthy and possibly fruitless search of the records of several offices, tangible evidence of the sequence of events that resulted in publication of the delinquency list in lieu of service of warrants by deputy.

Facts that should be readily available to any interested citizen are virtually unobtainable, even to a reporter trained in the art of ferreting out information.

The fault for the present tax situation, resulting in loss of money to the county and extra expense to the taxpayers, cannot be assigned to the sheriff, the county clerk, the district attorney, or the auditors — all of whom have had some share in responsibility for tax collection over the years that the delinquency list has built up.

Rather, the fault must be assigned to the system, in which responsibility for collection of taxes is not clearly defined.

When several officials are

jointly responsible for getting a job done, and yet no one of those officials has any authority over the others involved, they cannot be expected to perform efficiently — and it is the public that suffers.

Far more important than the question of who is to be blamed is the fact that the voters do not know — and cannot seem to find out — who should be held responsible. Authority and responsibility are scattered so widely among so many elected officials, each independent of the other, that there is no final authority, no final responsibility for administration of county affairs.

It is these weaknesses and inadequacies of the present system that gave rise to the organizational changes embodied in the Home Rule Charter.

Under the charter responsibility for administration of county affairs is fixed firmly and clearly in the hands of seven elected commissioners. They would have the authority, as the county court does not, to require of the tax collector a monthly report of his efforts to collect delinquent taxes. If taxes went uncollected, they would be to blame — and the voters could hold them accountable.

Under the charter the function of tax collection would be in the treasurer's office, in the hands of a man accustomed to handling financial matters. Now it lies with the sheriff, who must divide his

time between tax collection and law enforcement — two fields or diverse that no official could be expected to be competent in both.

As important as the fixing of responsibility in local government is the necessity for responsiveness and candor where the public is concerned.

Under the present system matters of interest and importance to the public may never be brought to public attention. Until the delinquent tax list was published, residents of the county — and the newsmen who try to keep them informed — were not aware that anything was amiss in the collection of taxes.

Again, this is the fault of the system, not of the officials. At present the county court meets two days a week. Unless newspaper, radio, and television newsmen are notified in advance of some important program or project to be discussed at the meeting, they cannot afford the time involved to adequately report the proceedings of the court.

Records Made, Accepted

As a result, reports can be made and accepted, bills paid, and decisions made with no one present but the court members and the court secretary. Records of the proceedings go into the court journal and are, as far as the public is concerned, lost to view.

While the minutes are open to the public, few citizens

have the time or temerity to examine the files for information on the conduct of public business.

Under the charter, voters would have a much clearer picture of the functioning of public officials and of how affairs of the county are being handled. Bills would be paid and reports made at two stated monthly meetings open to the public and fully reported by the press, which has long complained of the impossibility of adequately reporting county affairs under the present system.

It would be easier, too, for private citizens to discover policies and procedures of the county. All major decisions, to have legal effect, would have to be made in the form of ordinances, which are more easily researched than minutes.

Procedures Unpredictable

Consistency of procedure in the handling of public affairs is a protection for the public and for its officials, but the present court (or sheriff) cannot prescribe procedures to be followed by the next sheriff (or court).

With discretionary authority parcelled out among several independently elected officials, procedure cannot be predicted. Whether or not to publish the delinquent personal property tax list in the future is a decision that must be made annually by some as yet undetermined combination of elected officials.

From conflicting interpretations of the statutes by officials interviewed, it appears that the court (or the sheriff) can decide that publication of the delinquent personal property tax list will not be made (as has been the case heretofore), and the sheriff (or the court) can decide that personal service of warrants by deputy is the preferable method for collection.

Since the court has no authority over other elected officials and no authority to pass ordinances, it is incapable of long-range planning.

Under the charter, the board of commissioners could pass an ordinance establishing either publication or personal service of warrants as the method for collecting delinquent personal property taxes. The tax collector would have no choice but to comply — and the public would know what to expect.

Little Coordination Possible

Another drawback of the present system pointed out by the problem in tax collection is the fact that there is little communication and coordination between the administrative departments of the county. Except for annual reports and annual budget conferences, there is no regular meeting of elected officials to discuss common problems, to pool information, and to check on progress of various programs.

When each official is independently elected, no official has the right to call or to require attendance at such a meeting.

As a result officials tend to

go off in all directions and to get out of touch with each other. After the budget committee had, in 1959, authorized in the sheriff's budget a car and a deputy to be used in serving warrants, the county court had no authority for inquiring into the progress of tax collection. They had no further report of unpaid personal property taxes until June of 1960.

Under the charter the board of commissioners could require regular meetings with department heads and could inquire into the progress of work in various departments. Department heads would be appointed by and thus accountable to the commissioners who would, by elec-

tion, be accountable to the voters for efficient and economical administration of county business.

Tax collection is but one of many phases of county government in which procedure is ill-defined and authority is

scattered among many officials independent of one another.

And it is but one of many phases of county government on which the voter has little information, little say — and much at stake.



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May 18th

Pd. Ad. Lattie for Commissioner Comm.
Dick Gray, Chmn., RFD-3, Medford

Vo-Ag Activities At Crater Noted

Central Point — Six boys representing Crater, Phoenix and Eagle Point FFA chapters will clerk at an open house at Albers Feed and Farm store in Medford.

The chapters will divide 10 per cent of gross receipts allowed them on all items sold that day except feed and fertilizers. The money will be used to support various chapter projects.

In other activities in the Crater FFA chapter, two Agriculture III shop students, Tony Shope and Lyle Houston, are assisting two new Wick baled hay loaders for Hubbard-Wray Farm Machinery and Implement company. The assembling is designed to teach students the working principles of each machine.

The vocational agriculture students have been seeding grain in the school property at Jewett and the city property by the ball park.

Five vo-ag students, Roger Kirkham, Garry Niedermeyer, Joe Hulin, Charles Young and Mike Lounsbury, recently attended a two-day sheep shearing school conducted by the Jackson county extension service.

Individuals Not to Blame

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jointly responsible for getting a job done, and yet no one of those officials has any authority over the others involved, they cannot be expected to perform efficiently — and it is the public that suffers.

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answer questions from the audience of scientists, U. S. and Soviet officials, and foreign journalists.

TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS, 12:30 p.m. Sunday KMD-TV. Winners of the 29 major PGA tournaments this year compete at the Desert Inn Country Club, Las Vegas.

WALT DISNEY PRESENTS, 6:30 p.m. Sunday KMD-TV. Conclusion of "Treasure Island."

G.E. THEATRE, 8 p.m. Sunday KMD-TV. Lee J. Cobb stars in "The Unstoppable Gray Fox." An original TV play by William Saroyan. A charming gentleman rises above a barrage of difficulties including his own dismissal from the U. S. State Department.

STARLIGHT CONCERT, 8 p.m. Sunday KBOY-FM radio. Music of American composers is featured tonight: Samuel Barber's "Sonnets for Billy Holiday," Op. 28; Virgil Thompson's orchestral suite, "The Plow That Broke the Plains"; and Aaron Copeland's "Rodeo."

DU PONT SHOW, 9 p.m. Sunday KMD-TV. Conclusion of "The World's Greatest Robbery" shows the search and eventual capture of the Brinks bandits.

NEWS SPECIAL, 9 p.m. Tuesday KMD-TV. "Viet Nam: Last Chance." An NBC news team spent two months filming and interviewing people in South Viet Nam, Laos and Thailand to determine the extent and implications of the United States involvement in these countries.

Interviewed will be Frederick Nolting, United States ambassador to South Viet Nam; Gen. Paul L. Harkins, commander of the U. S. Military Assistance Command; Gen. Phoumi Nosavan, defense minister of the royal government of Laos; the Rev. William Bolin, Redemptorist missionary in Northeast Thailand, and Col. Pham Ngoc Thao, province chief of Keim Hoa province in South Viet Nam.

CIRCLE THEATRE, 9 p.m. Wednesday KMD-TV. "Anatomy of Betrayal: Dateline Cuba," a documentary composite of the experience of Cuban newspapermen who fled the Batista regime, returning with high hopes to Cuba only to find the Castro regime equally intolerable.

DAVID BRINKLEY'S JOURNAL, 9:30 p.m. Wednesday KMD-TV. Many of our best national magazines will be faced with possible financial failure if the proposed increase in postal rates materializes. Brinkley interviews editors from "Harpers," "Atlantic," and "Saturday Review."

YVES MONTAND ON BROADWAY, 7:30 p.m. Friday KMD-TV. The repeat of better-than-average musical variety show headed by the talented French entertainer Yves Montand assisted by Polly Bergen, John Raitt, Helen Gallagher and Bobby Van.

DINAH SHORE SHOW, 8:30 p.m. Friday KMD-TV. An all-Italian show with Rossano Brazzi, Domenico "Volare" Modugno, the Trovati Jazz Group and young conductor Joey Alfidi.

On the Air

By ELEANOR WIESE

Tuning in the moon on our TV sets seems a remote possibility but we will be able to tune in Paris and London soon. This summer Telstar, a communications satellite, is scheduled for orbit which will make possible instantaneous world-wide television transmission.

Today's program, "The Satellite That Talks," on "Twentieth Century" at 5 p.m. on KBES-TV studies the complexities of the satellite itself and the problems of international cooperation necessary to make global television a reality.

At Goshilly Down in Cornwall, England, a transmitter is being readied for this summer's initial transatlantic Telstar experiments. Films show this installation and one near Folkestone, England, where TV broadcasts from the continent via the Eurovision System are unscrambled for Britain's sets.

Newton N. Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, is interviewed by Walter Cronkite, as well as other men instrumental in the satellite program.

Potential international cooperation in another field — space research — will be discussed by astronaut John H. Glenn Jr. and cosmonaut Gherman S. Titov on "The Nation's Future" at 5:30 p.m. on KMD-TV.

Marine Lieutenant Colonel Glenn and Major Titov will express their views on the challenge of space exploration in a live broadcast from Washington, D. C., where each man is a member of his country's delegation at the Third International Space Science Symposium.

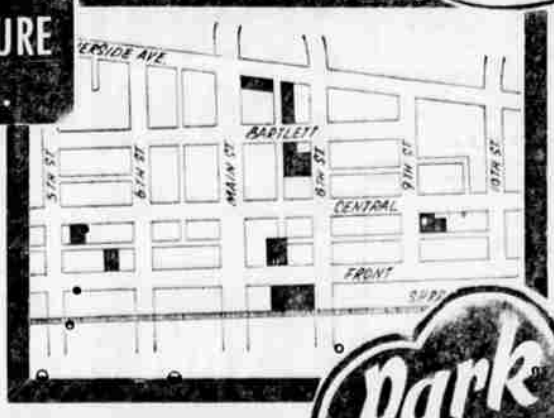
After the speakers have compared their experiences and traded views, they will



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