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TAXES RUIN SEATTLE REAL ESTATE; TRIPLE HERE IN TEN YEARS

(The following clear-cut article pointing out what is the matter with our local taxation system and suggesting certain definite remedies, was prepared for The Star by Henry G. Runkel, secretary-treasurer of the Voters' Information League and a member of the Tax Reduction Council. Mr. Runkel is a real estate man.—Editor.)

BY HENRY G. RUNKEL
Will capital ever again invest in Seattle real estate, when over 34 per cent of the total taxation in the state of Washington is derived from real estate and personal property? In Seattle alone the taxes have increased in the past 10 years from \$6,536,000 to \$18,050,000, or nearly 200 per cent, while in the same period the assessed valuation has only increased from \$211,800,000 to \$245,800,000. The startling fact is, that capital has ceased to invest in real estate, because of our confiscatory tax rate.

Ten years ago Seattle's tax rate on real estate was about \$15 per \$1,000 of full valuation. Today it has increased to over \$36 per \$1,000 of full valuation, against a San Francisco tax rate of only \$15.50 per \$1,000 of full valuation and Los Angeles' tax rate of only \$20.05 per \$1,000 of full valuation. This means that an apartment house valued at \$100,000 in San Francisco would pay \$1,550 taxes, while in Seattle the same valued real estate would pay \$3,678, or a difference of over 2 per cent on the same investment.

A \$10,000 home in Los Angeles, rented so as to return a 7 per cent net to the owner, would have to be rented for \$167 more per year if located in Seattle, so as to produce the same 7 per cent net income to owner. This unjust tax rate not only retards building and industry throughout the state, but also prevents rents from being decreased. In fairness to Seattle, and every city in the state of Washington, this tax rate must be changed. How? VERY EASY.

FIRST.—Every tax payer and renter in this state, desirous of a reduction of our tax rate, should devote at least one hour per week to this subject, by taking an active interest in any one or more of the tax reduction leagues. Watch public expenditures. Don't vote for any thing that will increase our tax rate. Protest if you find that any department in the city, county or state exceeds its budget.

SECOND.—If you discover that our city charter is antiquated and will not permit of efficiency, investigate other charters, of cities that are getting more for less money. The National Municipal League of New York and Philadelphia, have for over 20 years investigated city charters, and have endorsed what is known as the "Model City Charter," approved by some of the ablest experts in the United States. Investigate for yourself, and become a better citizen.

THIRD.—Demand your legislators to pass a law, assessing all property in the state of Washington on full 100 per cent valuation. Every property owner in the state should be required to make a sworn statement as to the valuation of all property owned. A penalty for willful undervaluation, and a law compelling every county assessor to issue a booklet, printed on cheap news paper, showing every lot, block, addition and tract in the county, name of owner and the sworn valuation. In this way every interested taxpayer could procure a copy of this booklet at a nominal cost and make a comparison with other properties. In this way undervaluation would come to light and could be easily detected. Instead of having a tax rate of 73 mills based on 50 per cent valuation, which is confusing and misleading, we would have a tax rate of 23 mills based on full valuation. Many of the Eastern states are now assessing on full valuation.

FOURTH.—By adopting a new city charter, with a city manager and commission form, a consolidation of city and county, our present tax rate of 73 mills based on 50 per cent valuation, or 15 mills based on 100 per cent valuation, could easily be reduced, by eliminating duplication, to 30 mills or \$30 per \$1,000 of full valuation. To stimulate building and industry in the state of Washington, a \$30 per thousand valuation tax would be too high, compared with San Francisco's rate of \$15.50 per thousand and Los Angeles' rate of \$20.05 per thousand.

To remedy this we should demand our legislators to adopt and pass the New York state income tax law, whereby a low rate equitable tax would be placed on net incomes, derived from personal service and investments.

Exemptions in the state of New York are the same as in the federal income tax law, allowing \$1,000 for single, \$2,000 for married, and \$300 for each dependent. In this way the objectionable poll tax could be eliminated entirely.

A maximum real estate and personal property tax of \$15 per \$1,000 of valuation would give the state of Washington the lowest tax rate on the Pacific Coast, and would stimulate building and industry immediately.

The balance of the 15 mills would be collected by state income tax, as it is in New York, Wisconsin and other states, from the people according to their income and ability to pay. State income tax and federal income tax reports are made simultaneously, thereby eliminating additional work.

HENRY G. RUNKEL

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