

SINGLE TAX IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Our British Columbia correspondent draws our attention to an editorial that recently appeared in the Vancouver Daily World dealing with the Single Tax and its working in certain municipalities in our far western province. The editorial which is published below claims that the single or land tax system has proved a failure, at least so far as Greater Vancouver is concerned. And we might say that Vancouver's experience is not the only one that has proved the impracticability of limiting the taxes to land. Theoretically single tax is an equitable means of raising public income, provided the speculative element is cut out of real estate. But this is impossible, or even undesirable in a new country like Canada, so it follows that any municipality depending on its income from a single commodity like land, whose values are fluctuating from one extreme to the other every day, is bound to have much difficulty in arranging its finances. In the west generally, the effect of the single tax was that the municipal authorities were soon left with unproductive building lots on their hands, which could not even be sold, so that its advocates can hardly quote Canada as a successful example of the system. Of course this does not mean that the taxing of real estate should be cut down so fine that it has to be made up by taxing improved property. There is a medium in all things, and the system, now usually adopted in western municipal Canada, of the taxes on improved property being, in proportion to actual values, much less than on real estate, is sane administration. This is the system that is also in actual practice in eastern Canada, and so the British principle of compromise works out well every time.

Our correspondent's letter reads as follows:—

On March 30th last the Vancouver Daily World published an editorial definitely admitting that the single tax in Vancouver had failed. This is the more worthy of note as the Daily World was for year the champion of the single tax.

The editorial says that improvements were exempted from taxation in 1910 because buildings were badly needed, and this action undoubtedly stimulated to some extent their erection. But the city soon became over-built and an era of lavish expenditure on civic improvements also set in. "It was then that Vancouver obtained a large part of its mileage of paved streets and concrete sidewalks, paved streets which to-day carry little traffic but that of local tradesmen's delivery carts and concrete sidewalks now more weather beaten than foot worn."

In 1912 the building jobs were finished, and the people employed in building went away, the process continuing till the city had lost 25 per cent of its population, and two-thirds of the property owners had ceased to pay their taxes.

During the war came the orders for munitions and ships. The city began to fill up again, rents rose and passed the highest records of the halcyon days of 1911 and 1912. But though rents advanced and land became saleable again it did not return to anything like pre-war values. By 1918 it had been established that to increase the taxes on land simply meant so much more unimproved land being thrown back on the city's hands. That year improvements were taxed at the rate of 25 per cent. and they are now taxed at the rate of 50 per cent.

The above remarks refer to the city of Vancouver. Greater Vancouver, without the city, has an equal population and more than ten times the area. It includes two cities and six municipalities. South Vancouver, Richmond and to some extent New Westminster are now taxing improvements, while the other city and municipalities of Greater Vancouver still adhere to the single tax. A comparison of their tax rates for the present and preceding three years is instructive.

South Vancouver, having become unable to pay its debts as a single tax municipality began to tax improvements in 1918 at the rate of 33 1-3 per cent. This was increased in 1920 to 45 per cent, and this year it is 50 per cent, which is the full limit allowed by the provincial law outside Vancouver. South Vancouver has maintained its rate of 41.4 mills unaltered since 1917, paid off part of its debt, and regained its credit.

The Royal City of New Westminster still adheres to the single tax, except in respect of improvements on industrial sites owned by the municipality and leased to private owners. These leased properties are taxed 50 per cent on improvements and this special tax brings in about \$40,000 a year to the city treasury. The rate in New Westminster in 1918 was 32 mills. It is now 36 mills.

Richmond, which taxes improvements at the rate of 50 per cent has increased the rate from 18 to 22 mills in the four years. It has a population of about 4,000 in an area of 30,000 acres.

West Vancouver is a single tax district with 2,000 population and about 24,000 acres. In West Vancouver the tax has risen from 26 mills to 30 mills in the same period.

Burnaby, Point Grey, North Vancouver City and North Vancouver municipality all at present maintain the single tax. The tax rate in all these has increased considerably in the last four years. Burnaby has raised the rate from 24 to 33.50 mills, Point Grey and North Vancouver each from 28 to 36 mills, North Vancouver municipality from 20.6 to 31 mills. That is to say the tax rate has increased twice as quickly in the municipalities and city which have maintained the single tax.

For this reason, and because land values are rising little, if at all, even where population is rapidly increasing, there is developing in the single tax districts a strong feeling against continuing to exempt improvements."

TOWN PLANNING AND MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS.

Waves of enthusiasm in connection with town planning and housing have done a great deal of good by directing the attention of municipal engineers, surveyors, architects, builders and others, to the various problems connected with the proper planning and development of towns, and much has been done by conferences and lectures to broaden the view of public representatives on councils and committees.

The real spadework of town development will no doubt continue to devolve on the municipal engineer, whose duty it generally is to advise from day to day and to deal with the engineering problems which lie at the root of the satisfactory planning and replanning of town areas, and who usually has the intimate knowledge of all local matters likely to affect the proper treatment of the area coming under his control.—John Brodie, City Engineer of Liverpool, President of the Institution of Civil Engineers (England).