

good turn. Let us hope that the practice will increase, and that newspapers will continue to be receptive and liberal in welcoming such contributions. As a rule the writers of these letters have given thought to the matters of which they write, and have opinions worthy of consideration. They appeal too to the best class of readers, those who have the democratic mind, and judge and value thoughts in themselves and not as coming from this or that person of some rank or notoriety.

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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

Washington, D. C., June 15, 1914.

Ever since 1878, when the so-called Organic Act was passed by Congress, the District of Columbia has been one of the strongholds of plutocracy. This act left the District disfranchised and established the famous "half-and-half system" of raising District revenues, Uncle Sam undertaking to appropriate 50 per cent of the amount of all estimates approved by Congress. As a result of this Federal subsidy, the rate of taxation on real estate has been comparatively low. Low taxes have, in turn, helped to produce high land values and high rentals. This Federal District has been a gold mine for land speculators and real estate operators.

As far back as 1892, gross discriminations in the assessment of Washington real estate were revealed in the report of a congressional committee whose chairman was Tom L. Johnson of Ohio. Twenty years later (in 1912) another congressional committee, whose chairman was Henry George, Jr., after a thorough investigation of the assessment and taxation of real estate in the District, published a report in which it was shown that there is "heavy discrimination against the small home in comparison with the better house and the business property, while the large suburban, speculative area bears less than a third of its proper burden." Mr. Herbert J. Browne, a local expert in realty values, prepared the technical data for the George report.

To carry out some of the practical recommendations contained in this report, Mr. George introduced a bill last February which provided for the annual assessment of real estate at its true value, the rate of taxation to be fixed annually by the District Commissioners, and for an increase in the number of assistant assessors. This bill contained no single-tax features. It merely provided the necessary machinery for raising local revenues and securing equitable assessments. Mr. George was assured that this bill would receive the favorable endorsement of the House District Committee, and it probably would have passed both the House and the Senate with very little opposition if it had not been for certain unfortunate amendments which were proposed by Representative S. F. Prouty of Iowa, and supported by Representative Ben Johnson of Kentucky, chairman of the House Committee, which so

completely changed the scope and character of the bill that Mr. George was compelled to go upon the floor of the House and oppose the so-called George bill.

Briefly stated, these amendments provided for an increase of 50 per cent in the tax rate of the District, and made this enhanced rate apply to all personal and intangible property as well as real estate. Judge Prouty, who honestly believes that the half-and-half system should be abolished, made no secret of the fact that his amendments were designed to make the District pay all of its own expenses without any contribution from the Federal treasury.

The business interests of Washington became alarmed. The cry was raised that the half-and-half system was in danger, and that our local taxes would be doubled. A Committee of One Hundred was hurriedly formed and members of Congress were bombarded with arguments against the Prouty amendments. The aid of the Washington newspapers and of several national organizations was enlisted. The fact that a large proportion of District property, especially land values, now evades taxation, was skillfully concealed. Among the plutocratic "defenders" of the District, not a voice was raised in favor of the original George bill. The result was that the House not only voted down the Prouty amendments by a small majority, but also defeated the original George bill by a viva voce vote.

In spite of this temporary setback, the disfranchised residents of the District owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. George for his able leadership in the local fight for tax reform. The fight will go on. Victory is only a question of time.



There are many "signs of promise" in District affairs. The two civilian Commissioners, Messrs. O. P. Newman and F. L. Siddons, who were appointed by President Wilson in June, 1913, are men of democratic and progressive principles, who have made a special study of municipal problems. They are entirely free from entangling alliances with real estate or corporate interests. The privileged interests are doing all in their power to embarrass the new District regime. An attempt is being made in the courts to disqualify Mr. Newman from holding the office of Commissioner on the plea that he is not a legal resident of the District. Mr. Newman's defense is being ably handled by Mr. Jackson H. Ralston.

Another hopeful "sign of the times" is the Crosser bill for the public ownership of the street railroads of Washington, on which a favorable report was recently made by the House District Committee. Mr. Crosser deserves great credit for his excellent work in connection with this bill. Robert Crosser of Cleveland, Ohio, is a true follower of that "happy warrior" of municipal progress, Tom L. Johnson. On Decoration Day the writer was present at the hearing on this bill, and heard the three District Commissioners testify in its favor. The Commissioners presented masterly arguments in behalf of public ownership. Whatever may be the outcome of the Crosser bill, these hearings were of more than local significance.

WM. DUNCAN MACKENZIE.