

## Peddlers' Licenses.

Mayor Johnson's recent outspoken words in opposition to hucksters' licenses leads us to give the following examination to a somewhat neglected subject. It is true that peddlers' licenses are among the small tyrannies of taxation, but they are tyranny none the less.

*Octroi* duties—the system of taxes between cities—is a kind of taxation which has almost wholly disappeared from the face of modern Europe, and survives, we believe, in France and Italy alone. The Magna Charta called these taxes “evil tolls.” Our own constitution forbids them. But in the system of peddlers' licenses are the *octroi* duties, masked and hidden in the forms of municipal ordinances.

The object of peddlers' licenses is not revenue; for the revenue derived is inconsiderable, and could, at all events, be raised in a less expensive way, and in larger measure. Such licenses are disguised in the forms of revenue measures, but their scarcely concealed object is to drive out of business the competitors of retail store-keepers, all of whom will admit that competition is the life of trade in every business except their own.

One cannot be blind to the trials and hardships of the retail merchants. Many of them are hard pressed to pay rents, and at the same time keep the wolf from the door. Most, if not all of them, are victims of our stupid and indefensible tax system, more especially of the tax upon personal property and merchandise. But while merchants and small store-keepers are sorely pressed by circumstances and conditions, the special legislation against peddlers does not materially help them; and what is of more importance is against the interests of the poor.

As a matter of fact it is only now and then that the peddler really competes with the store-keeper at all; and then only in certain commodities at periods when the market is falling. The store-keeper's objection that he is being undersold at such time is no valid objection to the people who buy things, and who are also engaged in paying rent and taxes. It is the hawker who gives to the consumer the advantages of a falling market. The tendency, therefore, of restriction by licenses is to the increase of price without really benefiting the retail merchants as a class.

It seems to be assumed that our retail merchants are the exclusive tax-payers. It is the masses of the people who pay the city's taxes. It is the poor in this city, as in all cities, who pay the bulk of the taxes, not only because the masses of men are everywhere poor, but because taxes are so levied as to tax the poor largely in excess of the rich. Then, too, out of the product of the labor of the community, out of their savings from their daily needs and from amounts saved from their daily consumption, taxes are paid. By increasing the savings from such purchases is increased the ease with which taxes may be raised, but by increasing the expenditure necessary for daily needs is diminished the sum total disposable for purposes of revenue.

Think of the poor housewife, whose only thought is to harvest her little fund in her daily purchases for her children's and husband's mouths, and to whom the “good morning” of the peddler, saving so many weary steps, is as welcome as the sunshine. What she saves in this way goes ultimately in avenues which will increase the traffic of the city. Every peddler's license is an attempt to deprive the housewife of this privilege, and should, therefore, be called “a measure designed to rob poor women of their pennies.”

But the conclusive argument against such taxes, whose operation tends to restriction, is this: if street-hawking is not an evil, it should not be visited with penalties of this unusual nature; but if it is an evil, it should be suppressed. This may be done in a much more direct and effective way by simply prohibiting it. To license it is to tolerate it, and not to destroy it, scarcely even to

diminish it; and the entire system is therefore absurd and illogical, like all systems designed to accomplish one object under the pretense of effecting quite another.

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### Signs of Progress.

The *Post* can be sure of one thing, that when the country gets ready to adopt the tenets of Henry George, his disciples will look to the Republicans and not to the Democrats for help. Henry George himself was a Republican.—*Houston Daily Times*, May 18.

(New Bedford (Mass.) *Mercury*.)

The single tax advocates have a foothold in Colorado, and those who have witnessed their persistence under discouraging conditions may be assured that they will not rest until the theory is in actual practice in the State. The Legislature, which has just adjourned, adopted an amendment to the State constitution permitting the application of single tax on land, with the right to exempt all personal property and land improvements from taxation. The people will vote on the amendment next fall, and the single tax advocates throughout the country will concentrate their efforts upon this field until the time of election, for they expect to make the State a Utopian commonwealth which will demonstrate the adaptability of the single tax idea to a State of affairs which is one of the chief sources of perplexity.

(New York *Journal of Commerce*, May 27.)

The rate of interest is more if the mortgagee pays the tax; less if he gets rid of it. The mortgagor can pay the tax or he can pay more for his loan. In any case the borrower pays the cost of the loan regardless of the effort of the Legislature to determine the terms of the bargain between the two. This is not all; the universal result of legislative efforts to regulate the terms of loans has been experienced in the withdrawal of capital from the State. Let the State fix the rate of interest on loans at less than the market rate, and if any effort is made to enforce the law capital will retire from the State, and what remains will get a scarcity price for itself, together with an insurance on the risk it runs in violating a State law. In spite of the failure of California to attain what it aimed at its device was lately copied by Missouri with the result of preventing the taxation of mortgages as personal property, but the mortgagor pays the tax. The State cannot tax a loan without imposing the burden on the borrower.

(Lake City (Mich.) *Dealer*, May 15th.)

Residents of other States who really seek a just method of taxation will hope Colorado may see her way clear to try the plan. If it does in practice what its advocates claim for it in theory, we would all be glad to know it, but many regard it with suspicion. The ideal plan of taxation which will be just to all has not yet been put in operation anywhere, although it has been long sought.

(Houston (Tex.) *Daily Post*, May 7th.)

In Houston at this time there is less excuse for vacant lots than in possibly any city in Texas. The demand for houses here is steady and growing. Rents are at a figure that pays handsomely on the investment. Hundreds of new houses at fairly remunerative rent would be speedily occupied were they here to occupy. The majority of the owners of the lots are amply able to put improvements on them.