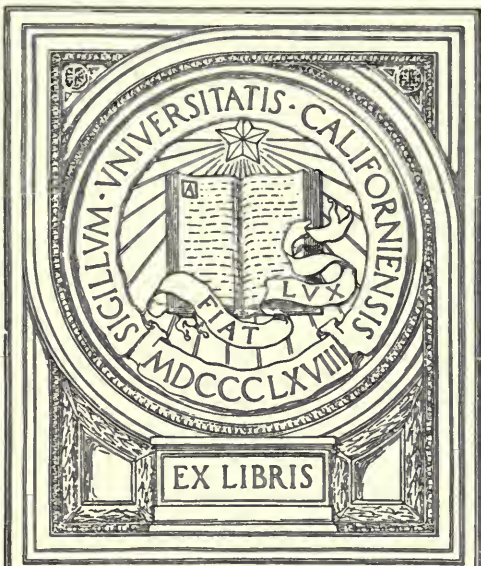


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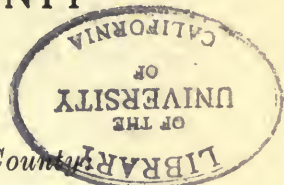




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A SECOND PROTEST AGAINST THE
PROPOSED NEW COUNTY
ROAD TAX



To the Voters and Taxpayers of Cook County

On February 28, the County Board passed its budget for 1922 and included therein the following item: "County Highway Tax, \$4,402,717.05." To produce this amount would require a tax rate of 25 cents. On April 1, the Chicago Bureau of Public Efficiency, in a communication to the Board, urged it to abandon its plan to levy this tax. The members of the County Board Committee on Roads and Bridges, at a meeting held April 19, informally approved a highway tax of 10 cents which, if levied, will produce about \$1,850,000. The objections raised by the Bureau to the larger amount apply also to a 10-cent tax.

In its former communication the Bureau stated explicitly that it recognized the need of building good roads and the importance of keeping them in repair after they are built. Public attention also was directed to the fact that none of the money from the proposed new tax would be used to repair concrete roads recently built, but that the County Board was planning to spend \$5,000 per mile for one year's repairs on 200 miles of unpaved dirt and gravel roads, most of which probably will be paved within the next two or three years.

Without the new highway tax now proposed, more than \$3,000,000 will be available for building hard roads

in Cook County during 1922—a sum ample for financing this year's construction program.

Extensive road building out of current taxes is bad financing. It imposes too heavy an immediate tax burden and offers no opportunity for effective popular control and check on the expenditures. When, as heretofore has been the practice, construction funds are provided through bond issues, the tax is spread over a period of years and is not so burdensome. Moreover, public confidence in the County's road building has resulted largely from the opportunity which the people have had to approve in advance, through referendum votes on bonds, not only the amount of money to be spent, but the designation of the roads to be built. There need be no delay in further road building if this sound policy of the past is adhered to in the future.

On the other hand, the plan to finance road building and the repair of unimproved dirt roads out of a special annual tax opens the door to extravagance, waste, spoils, and a long train of abuses that are likely to destroy public confidence and seriously injure the good roads movement.

The proposal to spend \$5,000 a mile on one year's repairs of 200 miles of unpaved dirt and gravel roads is clearly outrageous. Commissioner Goodnow in his public statements has said that the law imposes the obligation upon the Board. He is quoted in the public press also as saying that the Bureau is asking the Board to ignore the law. Nothing could be further from the fact.

The law in question requires the County Board to maintain these unpaved roads, but no standard of maintenance is established and no specified expenditure is required. Heretofore only comparatively small sums have been spent for this purpose. Commissioner Goodnow

himself, in a discussion of the subject at the City Club on April 19, said that the requirements of the law would be satisfied with an expenditure of \$15,000. Why then levy a tax of more than \$1,000,000 for this purpose, on the ground that the law requires it? Commissioner Goodnow argues that it will be more economical in the end to expend the larger amount. The Bureau believes that the alleged economies are fanciful and will not be realized.

The Bureau does not contend that no money should be spent on the upkeep of these unpaved roads. However, it believes that provision for this work can and should be made from the general funds of the County. A tax of two or three cents would produce an abundant amount for maintenance and other incidental road purposes. But there is no need for levying even that amount. Revenue of the general fund, estimated at approximately \$500,000, was omitted when this year's budget was prepared and passed. It should be possible to utilize this amount for road purposes.

The power to levy the proposed new road tax is derived from certain amendments to the county revenue law which were introduced and slipped through the Legislature during the closing hours of the 1921 session. Had the real nature and serious effects of these amendments been known they would have had little chance of passage. The County Board has no moral right to take advantage of the opportunity and power thus granted to burden unnecessarily the taxpaying public.

The issue raised by this proposal to levy a new highway tax is as plain as a pikestaff. Will the County Board abandon its plan to levy this special annual tax for both construction and maintenance purposes, adhering in the future, as in the past, to the sound financial policy of building roads from bond funds that have been voted

for by the people, and providing for essential road maintenance from its general funds? Or, will the Board take advantage of the power granted it by the "joker" legislation sneaked through the General Assembly during the closing hours of its last session and impose another unnecessary and indefensible tax upon the community?

Fine spun excuses and other camouflage should not blind the public to the real character of the County Board's proposed action.

CHICAGO BUREAU OF PUBLIC EFFICIENCY,
HARRIS S. KEELER,
Director.

April 22, 1922.

CHICAGO BUREAU
OF
PUBLIC EFFICIENCY

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