
Who Pays Taxes?

by Eugene V. Debs

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In certain quarters the declaration is made that the few pay all the taxes and that the many escape taxation. As a result the few claim to be citizens par excellence, while the many are regarded as a species of paupers who have no right to be heard in shaping the policy of government from a township to a state. The *Chicago Times*, in a recent issue, discusses the subject and lets in a flood of light which ought not to escape attention. It says:

Who is a taxpayer? It is necessary to have a definition if we would understand any discussion whatever of economics. There is an assumption upon the part of many persons that unless a citizen is the owner of real estate or personality listed for taxation he cannot be regarded as a taxpayer. This is a fallacy. How great a fallacy it is will appear if a little thought is taken. Whence does the general government derive the bulk of its revenue? From the tariff and from internal revenue taxation. It collects the former in the first instance from the Importer, in the second from the manufacturer and the dealer. But do these men alone pay the tax? Not at all. They pass it along to the consumer. All consumers, however, are not taxpayers. A certain number of dependents have no means— children, for instance. But every producer, every head of a family, be the same man, woman or child, is a taxpayer. So much as to federal taxation. Now as to local taxation. Take the people at Pullman for illustration. No one there pays directly taxes on the real property occupied by him, the reason being that he is not an owner. The land and all the houses are owned by a company. But can it be said that the lessees, if their personal property is not listed, are not taxpayers? It can not truthfully be said. Why? When the company lets its houses it fixes the rent, and the rent is what? A return upon the investment plus the cost of taxes and insurance and repair. Every tenant of Pullman, though no tenant of Pullman goes personally either to town or county collector with the amount taxed against the tenement he

occupies, is a taxpayer. The taxes have been taken into account in determining his rent, and the fact that he is a rent payer makes him actually the taxpayer on the assessed premises. In one case his landlord is only his agent in paying personally for the taxes assessed against the premises. Every rent payer is a taxpayer. Every consumer who settles the obligations incurred by himself or persons dependent upon him is a taxpayer. In short, every person, no matter how poor, who is not a dependent or a pauper is a taxpayer. He pays local taxes, county taxes, state taxes, national taxes. The indirection in the process amounts to nothing. A tax falls on him.

More than this. The poor man who is a producer pays as a rule more taxes in proportion to his means than the rich man. The rich man has the best end of it. While he extends heavy taxes against tenantry he takes care that light taxes are extended as against himself. Indeed he profits by taxation, adding generally double what he pays to the tenant.

There ought not be any confusion on this important matter. Every occupant of a building who pays rent, every lodger paying for his bed, every man buying a coat, every citizen earning money and supporting himself or others is a taxpayer, a payer of local as well as national taxes.

In the foregoing it is shown in a way not to be successfully controverted that all classes of men who live in houses, regardless of ownership, pay taxes, help support the government and therefore are not to be classed with paupers, who do not pay taxes.

To give the matter special conspicuousness, we give an illustration, one of ten thousand instances, showing what a man pays who rents property, land and buildings, valued at say, \$1,500:

Annual Interest on Investment, \$1,500, at 6 percent	\$90.00
Insurance, say	20 00
Repairs, say	20 00
Taxes, say	20 00

Total	\$150.00
Rent, one year, at \$12.50 per month	\$150 00

In this, it is seen, that the tenant not only pays the taxes on the property rented, but insurance and repairs and interest on the in-

vestment. This being absolutely true, why should the landlord or others assume that because the tenant does not own the premises, therefore he does not pay taxes, and further, that he should keep silent when questions relating to the public welfare are up for discussion and action? The avowals that only owners pay taxes, have been so numerous and have been made with such emphasis and impudence that it is doubtful if there are not thousands of tenants who believe the debasing falsehood, and who begin to entertain doubts as to their rights to participate in public affairs. It suits the plutocratic class exactly, since to the extent that they can impose the heresy upon the minds of workingmen who live in rented houses that they pay no taxes, the more easily they can carry forward their debasing program and the more extensively perpetrate their robberies. This clamor about the rich supporting the government is one of the phases of paternalism which so many cranks are ceaselessly striving for, unable to comprehend that paternalism means that the government shall support the citizen rather than that the citizen shall support the government; forgetting that the government can have no revenues of any description that are not drawn from labor.

During the years of slavery in this country — a reign of paternalism — the slave was taken care of by his master, and the poor, degraded victim of paternalism never dreamed that he took care of his master, and that but for him his master would perish. And now, when it is asserted that tenants pay no taxes, the intention is to make it appear that only the rich support the government, in doing which they support all who live in rented houses.

The time is fully ripe to expose such vicious falsehoods and to check the growth of the degrading craze of paternalism and consign it to the limbo of vagaries.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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