

ALBANY.: An Unwise, Unscientific Law."

From The Knickerbocker Press.

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Press Comment on Publicity for Income Tax Returns

ALBANY.

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press draws to a close and a fundamental deterrent to misbehavior is eliminated from public affairs.

The law is an unwise one and thoroughly unscientific. It should not have been passed in the first place; it should be repealed as soon as possible.

The idea of opening income tax figures to public inspection is unsound in principle and opposed to the safeguards supposed to be thrown around the individual's right to pursue his own affairs in privacy, so long as he does not infringe upon the rights of others. Public intrusion by unnecessary official instruments is contrawise to the best American precedents, but unfortunately is quite in accord with the increasing tendency that seeks to regulate the personal and private affairs of the individual, again in violation of implied, if not actually expressed, constitutional guarantees.

It would be a dangerous thing for press or public to admit that both the prohibitory statute and the new law are right, for such admission would overthrow the primary principle that public documents are open to publication. Let that well-established rule, bulwarked by court decisions, once be subverted and there would ensue hurrying and a scurrying of countless petty officials to cover public transactions by petty rulings against the publication of certain or many documents, which are and should be public property.

Much of the power of the American press to protect the public from graft and sly doings in public office would be killed off by the admission of any such theory. It would mean the beginning of a campaign in press-muzzling of which the possible ultimate would be gravely doubtful. Unless the people and the press of the United States hold squarely to the principle that any public document, and public departmental record, is public property and therefore open to publication, the era of a free