

Letters from the People

Robert Barclay, Effingham, Ill.—In your editorial page March 15, it is stated that the net press muzzling law secured by former Governor Pennypacker has been wiped from the Pennsylvania statute books. Will you kindly state in your query box what this law was?

(This law, in brief, prohibited the cartooning of public officials and provided for the signing of the name of all writers of editorials and special articles. The law was so drastic that it defeated itself.)

Ernest M. Plummer, 1334 Palmer street, Philadelphia, Pa.—It is earnestly hoped that the movement for election of United States senators by popular vote will grow apace. There are those who believe the senate in its latter day constitution and with its present tendencies, to be a menace to the very life of popular government.

In the writer's home city, Philadelphia, what little agitation ever existed in favor of the movement referred to seems to have died of inanition.

W. J. Farriss, Stratford, I. T.—I see that congress, before it adjourned, passed the bill giving the national banks power to contract their currency \$9,000,000 per month. Of course they will have contracted it in the space of twelve months to the extent of \$108,000,000. Now according to the wording of this bill where is the monthly contraction to stop? If there is no limit to the months during which it is to continue their power is absolute to create a financial panic. In your next issue please let us know how this is and much oblige a reader of The Commoner.

(Applications by banks for the privilege of retiring notes, must be approved first by the comptroller of the currency and later by the secretary of the treasury. One of the first acts of George B. Cortelyou, as secretary of the treasury, was to approve requests for permission to retire notes for the first month, aggregating \$9,000,000.)

A. M. Dalrymple, Salem, Ore.—Pardon me for "butting in" on a busy day, but I want to ask a question and venture a suggestion: Can not arrangements be made whereby The Commoner may be sent by democratic subscribers to republican friends for a period of four months for 25 cents? My idea is that if a man in the habit of voting the republican ticket straight, will read The Commoner for four months he will begin to think along (to him) new lines. Thinking will lead him to investigating; after that he will be all right. Now if each subscriber to The Commoner, or half of them would pay one or two four months subscriptions to a like number of republican friends, just see what a "killing" would be made. I think most any of us could afford to invest 25 or 50 cents in this proposition with the satisfaction of knowing it was money well spent. Prevailing conditions justify the belief that the next presidential campaign will be one of the greatest in the history of the nation; and while we can not all take the stump, we can spend a few cents in the circulation of good literature and the sooner we "get into our collars" and go to work, the more certain are we of favorable results in the next presidential contest.

Albin M. Richards, Boston, Mass.—Having read your public letter to Mr. Whitney of March 25, and having given the subject matter some thought, I would like to suggest to you what I believe to be new: That regulation of railroads is impossible. The public and the courts are deceived by the railroads who keep their books always so fixed and padded that the legitimate profits are not shown. That, in case the public take a railroad—the public should pay the structural value only, irrespective of stock outstanding. To do other than this would be as unfair as it would for you to put the ownership of your private residence into a stock company and issue ten times its value in stock and expect in case of a public "taking" to recover its stock value. In paying for private property taken by the public, the mortgages on the property are not considered. The railroads believe they own certain vested interests that should not be interfered with, but I have yet to hear them claim to be the heirs of all the natural growth of the needs of the United States. This natural growth should be provided for by the government. It might fairly be allowed that 10,000 miles of new track should be laid each year by the national government. This would gradually work out the citizens' salvation and would be better than the endless litigation that would attend the purchase of railroads with the added certainty "that the voters would be

fleece." Let the United States lay a double track across the country from ocean to ocean east and west from Frisco to Boston in a straight line along a parallel of latitude and between the railroads as far as practical, so as to open up new country. Call it a mail route, or a military railroad, or any suitable name. Connect this railroad with nearby cities and towns that interested themselves and not buy or annoy the existing railroads with their watered stock but leave them to gamble out their own salvation, etc., etc. This latter idea I have not heard mentioned.

R. H. Dykus, Waynesville, N. C.—I have lately been considering the government ownership of the railroads. Sitting quietly in these old mountains I have reflected over the matter—and in all my conclusions in life I try to approach as near as I can to the great laws of nature—I see the natural rivers and lakes teeming with the loaded lines of all kinds of craft, carrying the results of labor from one end of the country to the other. I notice the freedom that accompanies such movements—the general welfare that results from the traffic competition, and I ask myself why can not this ease and freedom be applied to our other lines of communication throughout the country; why can not the railroad ways be turned into natural highways, by belonging to the general government, as the rivers and lakes are, and allow any one who so desires to put rolling stock on them, and create wholesome competition, just as boats are put on rivers and lakes, and vie with each other for the trade? The government prescribes the navigation laws, so could the government regulate the running of cars on the railroads. In my mind there would be instituted a freedom and personal independence all over the land, that is fast becoming necessary to relieve us of the tightening bands that are throttling the individual endeavor everywhere. Let the general government own and keep in order all the railroad lines. Let the people use them to run their cars on.

John Crane, Logansport, Ind.—In the sixties when gold had fled from the United States and Mr. Lincoln was pressed for funds to pay the boys in blue congress came to his aid and issued the greenback (\$60,000,000, I think). They were legal tender. You could buy a dollar's worth of anything with a greenback dollar and Oh how glad the "boys in blue" were to get them, but they were fighting an honest, honorable foe in their front. No one looked for the foe that threatened them in the rear, but the next issue was stabbed in the back by men more dangerous than the ones that we were fighting in our front—the exception clause was inserted. And I am told that Mr. Lincoln said, as he affixed his name to the bill, that he gave his consent as he would to the death of a near friend, i. e., as a case of absolute necessity. Grand old patriot, it was the best he could do, it was that or nothing. After the war was fought to a successful close we found the money that had paid us for five years of exposure and hardships had depreciated till it took \$2.85 of it to buy \$1 worth of goods, but it had saved the union where gold had turned traitor and left the country or hidden. But now they want to foist this asset currency on the people. Will congress do it? No, a thousand times, no. It is worse than any fiatist could dream of; the fiat money would at least be issued by the government in which we all had an interest but the only way I can get a correct idea of this asset currency is to shut my eyes and think of nothing in space.

"Traveler," On The Road.—There is a phase in the question of government ownership of railroads, telegraphs, etc., which has not been touched upon, to my knowledge, by any one of the speakers or writers on the subject, but which, it has occurred to me if advocated, would place the issue on much stronger grounds than it occupies at present, and would go far toward insuring success of the movement when the people are ready for the submission of the question to them. My proposition is to provide for the joint ownership of these utilities by the national and state governments. The idea of state ownership, while logically correct, is subject to the grave objection of cumbersomeness in the handling of interstate commerce. With the national government a holder of a majority interest in the properties, responsibility would be a fixed one, and uniform management would be secured. It should be admitted that the states are entitled to the right to participate in the purchase of these properties, if only from the fact that ownership by the national government alone would deprive the states of one of its chief sources of revenue which is now derived from taxation. This plan would divide the task

of providing the necessary capital, thus increasing its practicability. My suggestions would be, in a general way: First, national government to be allowed to take, on account of the burden of management, something more than a bare majority interest, say 60 per cent of the whole. Second, states to divide the 40 per cent on a basis of state expenditures (or state taxes) per capita, or on any other equitable basis. Third, each party in interest to provide its proportion of capital, with guarantee of state bonds by the national government. Fourth, if any state or states decline to participate in the purchase of these properties, the interest falling to them to be divided prorata between the other states. Have been inclined to oppose government ownership of railroads, in the past, but recent developments have caused me to change my views. I believe the insurance and other grafts that have, within comparatively recent times, been exposed, would prove to be very unimportant disclosures compared with the colossal robberies of the railroads, could they ever be brought to light. The only remedy appears to be a turning over of these properties to the people. "Regulation" may regulate for a time, but it will doubtless become a dead letter when the people become tired of keeping watch over the manipulators. I have given this question of dual ownership considerable thought, and its practicability and feasibility has steadily grown upon me, and I have finally decided to submit my ideas, although but roughly, to you with the hope that you may be able to resolve them into a plan that may bring the country nearer to a solution of this important question.

A Subscriber, Janesville, Wis.—The Chicago Record-Herald, in a recent issue says: "For stealing three dozen doughnuts valued at 30 cents, from a bakery, Albert Dorsey today was sentenced by Judge Fifield to one year in the state's prison at Wausau." Now the problem is, how many dozen doughnuts would Albert Dorsey have to steal to be sentenced to be postmaster general of the United States? If the agent of the candidate for president has to receive \$150,000 of stolen policyholders money from life insurance companies before his master can be sentenced to the White House or himself to be postmaster general then I ask is the man who receives stolen (policyholders) money as guilty as Albert Dorsey who stole the doughnuts? And then figuring the other way, how many years would the postmaster general have to serve in the pen at the rate of one year for every 30 cents of this \$150,000 stolen from the policyholders of the three life insurance companies? This is, according to Judge Fifield's idea of justice. Get the Wisconsin judge after them, by all means.

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