

Shall The People Rule?

By JOHN TEMPLE GRAVES.

(Sunday, April 16, 1905)

Well, the democracy of Chicago has sounded a bugle note, and unfurled an economic banner which will ring and wave throughout the country.

Nothing more important and nothing more significant than this Chicago election has stirred municipal and economic politics in the generation in which we live. It officially sets in motion a force which will clamor at the American ballot box until it has a definite and satisfactory answer.

The second city and the real metropolis of the greater part of the Republic has, by an overwhelming majority, committed itself to a trial of the mighty principle of municipal ownership. The incident is worthy of the vital interest and attention of every American who thinks and votes.

There never was an issue more clearly made. The selfish capitalists owning the franchises of the Chicago street railway system have for forty years abused the confidence and liberality of the people. Graft, greed and watered stock at enormous profits have swallowed up all consideration of public service, and the corporations enjoying the public franchise have compelled the great city of Chicago to submit to the most execrable street railway service in America. The selfishness and greed of the corporations have been the instruments of their own undoing, and the outraged sense of the people thundered in the ballots of the 4th of April.

A majority of about 25,000 citizens emphatically declared; First, against granting any more franchises to the corporation, and, second, in favor of the immediate establishment by legal means of municipal ownership of the great street railway system of Chicago.

There has been much squirming by republican and corporation organs over the result, and some rather frenzied haste in proffering explanations of this remarkable vote outside of the great issue upon which it was cast. With due regard to these partisan protests, and with the trivial and inconsequential swept away, several great central facts loom definite and clear.

First—Chicago went republican in the last national election by nearly 116,000 majority.

Second—Carter Harrison, personally the most popular democrat that Chicago has known in twenty years, carried the last municipal election against a comparatively weak republican competitor by only 7,600 votes.

Third—That in this campaign the republican party had in John Maynard Harlan the most picturesque, popular and powerful municipal candidate that it has presented in this generation; and,

Fourth—That, in the face of these conditions the democratic party, after a thoroughly discussed and deliberate campaign, has just carried the city of Chicago distinctly and purely upon the issue of municipal ownership by a sweeping majority of 25,000 votes!

There can be but one explanation of this result under these conditions, and that is that the people, speaking in the majesty and might of majorities, are determined to give the great principle of public ownership of utilities a free, fair and practical trial.

And the democracy of Chicago have scored a great and far-reaching triumph in making this issue and in carrying it to the honest test of experiment.

Now, if this experiment of municipal ownership is successful in this great city of Chicago—if, after intelligent application and a reasonable probation, it works well to the betterment of the public service, and to the comfort, convenience and economy of the people—it is simply a matter of common sense to see that the movement inaugurated by the Chicago democracy—and to be credited as a democratic movement—will sweep the country and solve the problem that involves both cities and states in scandal and injustice.

That this experiment will be successful no man of reasonable intelligence will permit himself to doubt. It has been splendidly successful in some of the greater cities of Europe, where conditions are exactly similar. The principle is sound, practical and founded upon fundamental principles of popular government.

Public ownership removes the motive for misuse of public utilities, as when the motive goes the evil will go. As long as selfish-

ness and greed get the chance to gratify themselves at the public expense just so long will they do it. And nowhere on earth has there ever been a strike when the principle of government ownership was in operation. Public ownership will do for the railroads what it does for the post office, the police department and the fire department.

The republican and corporate antagonists of this movement are already sounding the false alarm that it will cost Chicago \$100,000,000 to buy the Chicago street railways and \$50,000,000 to re-equip them. Judge Dunne put that statement to rest the morning after his election by showing that under the shrinkage in the quoted stocks, and under the necessity of buying only the tangible properties, the cost would not be more than \$30,000,000 for everything.

Moreover, it may be set down that Judge Dunne, the new democratic municipal ownership mayor of Chicago, is a man of iron will, great civic courage, balanced judgment and a long and ample experience in great affairs. He will summon to counsel and construction the great experts of Glasgow, Scotland, in which this great principle was born, and where for 20 years it has been in nobly successful operation, and he will consecrate to the experiment all the brains, industry, purpose and determination of a man who feels that he is living and acting for the leading and enlightenment and benefit of millions of his fellow-countrymen, living or yet unborn. He lives in an age of great achievement among a people of world-famous and resistless energy, and his friends and the thousands of his followers do not permit themselves to doubt for a moment that municipal ownership of public utilities will be as conspicuous and beneficent a success in Chicago as it has long been in the world's model city of Glasgow.

The people—the great body of the people—are to be congratulated upon the inauguration of an experiment in which their interests are so vital, and they are invited now to see it succeed and to help it to national application along wise, firm and yet definite lines.

The people's case has received a mighty and an irresistible impetus from the democracy of Chicago.

One other thing in this momentous campaign is significant and worthy of note as an index to the spirit and temper of the people toward the economic problems of the time.

Scared into comprehension by the clear presentation of democratic publicists and by the resolute attitude of the people toward the issue, and stung by the insolent indifference of the street car magnates, the republicans of Chicago, eager for success and pandering to the popular wave, were forced to adopt some sort of platform favorable to municipal reform. But they did so half-heartedly, uncertainly, so unsatisfactorily, and with such evident insincerity, that the voters of Chicago laughed them to scorn. They were not going to take any chances with any half-hearted advocacy of the principle in which they had come to believe. They were not going to trust the execution of a vital reform to milk-and-water enthusiasts or to timid conservatives who were likely to kill it with temporizing and delay. They took the party that was definite and positive. They followed the organization that knew what it wanted and promised to go right after it.

John Maynard Harlan and his republican organization were for municipal ownership day after tomorrow or next week. Edward F. Dunne and the Chicago democracy were for municipal ownership tomorrow!

And the people followed the definite rather than the indefinite, the certain rather than the hesitating.

And so will the people always follow definite men and certain policies in preference to shifting leaders and ambiguous platforms.

If the democracy means to win and wants to win in 1908 it must be as clear as day this time in the ringing enunciation of its creeds, and as definite as honesty in the presentation of its candidates.

Clear principles, short sentences and a leader whose views are known to all men is the demand of the people.

I have been preaching incessantly in these letters the necessity for individual thought and activity by individual democrats, as the supreme necessity for every democrat to attend every massmeeting and primary and to make known there without hesitation by voice and by ballot his views of the issues on which the party must go to the country.

I note that in the last Commoner Mr. Bryan has also adopted this idea and is preaching the gospel

of activity in the primaries. In my next letter I will have something to say in the discussion of the plan which he proposes.

The people must make the next platform and choose the next candidate.

It is gratifying to note that the Chicago victory was a great vindication of William Randolph Hearst. For years he has been advocating municipal ownership. He organized the Municipal Ownership League of Chicago. Judge Dunne was declared by enemies to be "a Hearst man." John M. Harlan, during the three weeks preceding the election, declared that Dunne's victory would be Hearst's victory, that a vote for Dunne would be a vote for Hearst, that Hearst's political future in the Middle West depended on Dunne's success, that Hearst's papers were "assassins," that Hearst represented, not the majority, but an unsafe minority. Mr. Harlan discussed and denounced Mr. Hearst during every speech during the last twenty days of the campaign, Hearst, so far as Harlan could do it, was made the issue.

The result: A republican victory of 107,000 last November was turned into a democratic victory of 25,000—a truly remarkable change.

Hearst's papers were the only ones to support Dunne. Hearst was in Chicago directing the fight.

There are some of us who have contended that Mr. Hearst is strong, not only in Chicago, but in all populous centres. We have been vindicated, as well as Hearst.

And when Dunne went to New York and addressed seething multitudes attending the Municipal Ownership League's meeting, which Mr. Hearst organized in the metropolis, the mayor-elect of Chicago gave public notice of his high estimation of Mr. Hearst and his works. The meeting, I am told, was so unexpectedly tremendous that the oldest politicians sat up and blinked rapidly.

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W. E. Hite, assisted by G. E. Tracewell, will conduct the Mullen sale, and G. E. Tracewell the other three sales on the 7th, 10th and 12th of July.