

SHAMELESS ST. LOUIS

A City Robbed of Fifty Million Dollars for Lack of Majority Rule

So long as the corporations and the political "boss," through the party machine, rule, the cities will be plundered by the monopolies, and the people's representatives will degenerate into bands of thieves who will wax fat through bribery. We have had many startling impressive illustrations of this character during the last few years, notably in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and St. Louis.

In the latter city, for example, according to a prominent St. Louis banker quoted by Mr. Lincoln Steffens in his excellent article in McClure's Magazine, on "The Shamelessness of St. Louis," "fifty million dollars' worth of franchises and municipal assets" have been given to corporations by the people's representatives, who individually received large bribes in consideration of thus handing over to a few individuals enormously valuable franchises that, if operated by the people or sold or leased at a reasonable figure, would have reduced the taxes to a minimum or have supplied the treasury of the city with enormous sums for schools, museums, libraries, and parks.

Had the people the right of initiative and referendum, this carnival of corruption and robbery could not have prevailed. We know of no instance where the people, when they have had the opportunity to vote directly on a question involving dispossessing themselves of valuable property without compensation, have not overwhelmingly refused to entertain the corporations' plans.

The fifty million dollars lost to the people of St. Louis through the bribery of city officials by the corporations is typical of the vast sums that our present system of legislation is costing the public, while it also affords an equally impressive illustration of the demoralization and corrupting effect of corporation and ring rule, or representative rule instead of government through direct legislation.

The corporations' tools and apologists are in the habit of objecting to giving the people the right to initiate and to veto legislation on the pretext of the expense that the extra elections would involve. As a matter of fact, instead of direct legislation proving a great additional expense to the public, it is safe to say that it would result in saving the people many millions of dollars that are now annually given away by legislators and municipal authorities to corporations and special class interests.

There are three reasons that make the campaign for majority rule supremely important:

1. It is imperatively demanded in order to preserve the fundamental principles of free government. Without it the people are not the real governors or rulers. The masters are the corporations that rule the party "bosses" and political machines and that dictate the persons who shall make and execute the laws.
2. On considerations of public economy these strictly republican measures are urgently demanded. The carnival of loot that has made multimillionaires of scores of persons, who by bribery, direct or indirect, have gained and are gaining for nothing inestimably valuable special privileges, must be stopped. The hope of relief for the people from the tyranny and oppression of the trusts and monopolies lies in the prompt enactment of majority rule legislation, which is thoroughly feasible through the Winnetka method of procedure.

3. The corruption of the people's representatives will rapidly spread and the virus most deadly to national integrity and perpetuity will quickly permeate society, unless the people promptly assert the fundamental demand underlying all true republics or free governments—that of the sovereign right of the people to initiate and to pass such legislation as changing conditions and the good of the state demand. Freedom cannot live in the midst of general official corruption, and human rights will be brutally ignored unless the people have the direct and ultimate vote on measures of importance.

The amazing revelations of corruption in St. Louis and other great American municipalities are typical and warn the friends of republican institutions that they have slept overlong and that only by resolute and wise action can the splendid heritage of our fathers be restored and maintained. Through majority rule the citizens of the republic will become, as they are in Switzerland, the real rulers, and the power of the corporations will be destroyed.

Mr. Folk, the noble and incorruptible state's attorney for St. Louis, who has not only unmasked the wholesale bribery of the "boss," the city legislators, and the corporations in that

city, but who has convicted a large number of the guilty parties, gives it as his conviction that "ninety-nine per cent of the people are honest; only one per cent are dishonest." Mr. Folk has convicted every man he has tried before a jury. He is convinced that the people as yet are sound, but they lack leadership. They have been under the rule of the "boss" and the party machine, and have no leaders, organizers, or patriotic apostles of justice and freedom to enthuse them with the old-time spirit and arouse in them a passion for those great fundamental verities that made our revolutionary era one of the most inspiring moments in the world's history.

But it is a noticeable fact that, wherever the people have been allowed directly to vote on any issue that has been clearly presented, they have evinced soundness of judgment. A notable example of this kind was seen in the city of Boston, when the street railway corporation made one of the most desperate fights it has ever attempted in order to secure the right to relay tracks on certain streets. All the press of the city, with one exception—and that exception a journal not enjoying a very great circulation—became special pleaders for the corporations. A small band of patriotic citizens, with comparatively small funds at their command, attempted to enlighten the electorate by sending to all voters a Socratic discussion covering the main points involved. The result was that the electorate voted against the corporation's program by almost a two-to-one vote.

Majority rule is the blade that will strike down the upas tree of political corruption and corporate domination. It will avert from our republic the greatest dangers that have menaced free government since the foundation of this nation, and will open the way for continuous progress through peaceful education.

B. O. FLOWER,
Editor, The Arena.

Populist Duty

Editor Independent: Perhaps it may be considered an intrusion for me to "butt in" regarding the future of the people's party, since you requested only the members of the national committee to speak, and I am not honored with being such. But I must say that I so appreciate the tenor of the replies you have published from Elmer Thomas, Gerry Brown and Governor Poynter and the rest, that I desire only to express a thought here.

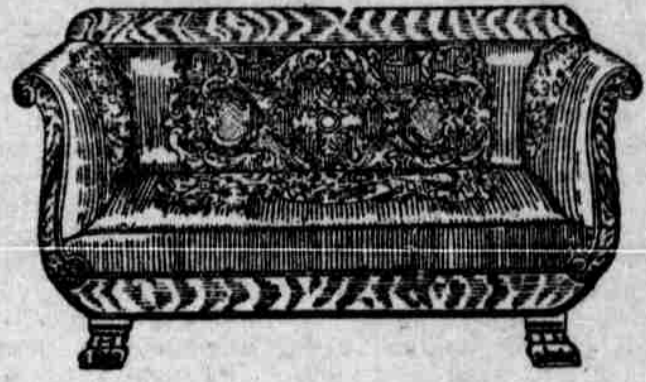
I believe that the people's party today occupies the only rational ground between the outrages imposed by the republican and gold democratic parties and the insanity of the socialist party. When the people's party came into existence it came as the cry of the farmer, and thousands of industrialists in the cities, recognizing the important sympathies between themselves and the farmers, joined with the movement. Since that time things have somewhat changed. The farmer today is comparatively more prosperous than is the industrialist in the city. The same issues that formerly appealed to the farmer and the wage-earner, though still as important as ever, cannot now be used to rally either of these classes of producers. Because both of these classes have advanced beyond that stage. We need a platform of constructive issues.

The farmers of this country have been systematically lied to by plutocracy regarding the issues involved in the land question. They have been told, for instance, that the single taxers proposed to levy a tax upon land, and as they had most of the land, they would have to pay most of the taxes. Many of them believed this, notwithstanding that they were already paying 68 per cent of all the taxes raised while only owning about 20 per cent of the nation's wealth. They are now beginning to see that, as the single tax would exempt their implements, stock and improvements from taxation and levy all assessments against land values (not land) which are mostly in the centres of population, it is an issue which they can heartily support. While, on the other hand, the industrialist in the city, already bereft of his home, sees in the single tax a proposition that would force idle speculative land into use, thereby furnishing more employment at advancing wages and decreasing rents.

Now, the industrialists in the city are rapidly going to the socialist party, not because they are socialists, but because the other parties have not presented to them any definite plan for economic emancipation. They are going to the socialists as a protest against glittering generalities. We populists ourselves have been shamelessly ambiguous upon this land question. It will not do to say that the land is "the heritage of all the people." The rankest plutocratic party can say that just as honestly as we can, because it does not mean any-

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thing. We have got to tell the people how they can regain this natural heritage, and if there is now or ever has been any proposition presented by anybody that would as readily restore to the people their natural heritage in the land as would the proposition of Henry George, I have yet to see it. There are today conservatively speaking at least three million single taxers in the United States. These will never remain with the reorganizing democracy. They will not go to the socialists. Is not our duty plain?

The single tax is the only common ground for the people. We have got to speak. Let it be in no ambiguous terms. We will not only thereby retain the farmer vote, but we will secure and hold the municipal industrialists.
L. J. QUINBY.
Omaha, Neb.

Turn the Rascals Out

Editor Independent: My subscription has about expired, and not caring to miss a number of The Independent, I remit for renewal and offer a few words as to the cause and the remedy for monopoly and the trusts. Doubtless class legislation in the granting of special privileges to the banks and to the railroads; the working of a robber tariff, which compels the producer and consumer to bear the burden of the rich and privileged classes, have been the great and enduring first causes of all present economical disturbances.

The fault inheres with the government itself as formulated and operated by the republican party almost incessantly for nearly fifty years. Until the people retake and possess the government now in possession of the combines, I fear government ownership would prove a delusion. The first thing to do and the only sure shot to existing villainy is to form a voters' trust at the ballot box, by the millions of fleeced voters for the purpose of creating a world power, not for criminal aggression and the marauding of other people, but a power that will protect the American people from the encroachments of concentrated greed, securing to them their homes and their first share in productive labor.

Once turn the rascals out, then human rights may be restored. Can this be done? Will it be done in 1904? If not, the American people will have proven themselves the most servile of any people pretending to liberty and popular government on the face of the globe.

The railroad manipulators have become highway robbers indeed. The Independent is a host within itself. Populism is all right. Her demands bear the imprint of truth, justice and righteousness, which the captains of plutocracy have not been able to efface.
W. L. MORGAN.
Williamport, O.

The class struggle—see Karl Marx Edition, July 23, 1903.

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