Municipal Ownership.

Municipal ownership sentiment is making headway. As a stepping stone to the single tax system it may be one of the most potent factors in our national development, and it becomes of greater importance as the population of the country gathers in an increasing proportion in cities and towns.

Three-cent fares may be a step to municipal ownership, and municipal ownership, by putting an end to municipal monopolies, will bring nearer the era of the single tax system, with its remedy for all the evils of monopolies and special privileges.

Municipal monopolies consist of rights and special privileges in the public streets and highways which, in the nature of the case, cannot be possessed by all the people and can only be enjoyed by a few. A constant struggle goes on to obtain such privileges, with the result of checking and retarding for a long time necessary public improvements. Rival claimants not strong enough to obtain what they want often succeed in checkmating each other at the expense of denying to the public needed advantages.

Only a very slight observation of, and reflection upon the needs of people crowded together in a city, as to facility of moving about, as to communication, as to supply of water, as to supply of artificial light, is needed to satisfy any candid man that such businesses are in their nature monopolistic. In other words, they can be best carried on, with the best results to the public, under a single management and with a single consistent policy.

Where competition prevails in such businesses, almost invariably the public service is inefficient and defective. Wherever there is unity, the condition of things is much better.

My proposition is to enlarge the functions of municipalities so that the means of transportation and communication and the supply of water and light shall be furnished by public authority and not by private enterprise, and extend this principle to its logical result of taking under public administration all businesses which require the grant of any special right or privilege.

We have already started on this road, and made considerable progress. In many cities the water supply is a public business; in some cities gas and electric light are manufactured and furnished by public authority; in many cities of Europe and Australia street railroads are owned and operated by the public. Why not go on in this direction till there shall be no more private property in special grants or franchises, and till all business requiring such grants shall be carried on by the municipalities?

Under present conditions the adoption of this policy would require the taking over by the public only of the water, gas, electric light and power supply, the telephone and street railroads. The evils which a great many timid people fear, as likely to arise from enlarging the scope of the functions of municipalities, are trivial in comparison with the evils which are inseparable from the present system.

As long as the great rewards which these monopolies offer to private enterprise are possible, your industries will be hampered, your politics will be corrupted by bribery and fraud, and your people will have to pay unnecessarily high prices for these kinds of service, and they will be subjected to daily and hourly inconvenience and vexation, owing to the poor quality of the service.

I would not advocate any disregard of existing rights, or any confiscation of existing property. It would be no violation of existing rights for cities to erect their own plants and to compete for the business as they could readily and successfully do with the present private owners.

It would be no violation of existing rights for cities to use their tax power so as to compel the present private owners to bear the same proportion of public burdens, according to the value of their property, including franchises, which owners of other kinds of private property have to bear.

It would be no violation of existing rights, where the power has not been bartered away, for the cities or the states to regulate fares and rates of compensation, so as to make them yield only a fair return on the actual investment made, rather than upon a fictitious capitalization, based mainly upon franchises or special privilege values.

In short, municipalities ought not to hesitate to do what private persons in business do as a matter of course. They should respect the grants which they have made according to their true limits, but, doing this, they should take advantage of every right that is left to themselves to get rid of the present system and substitute therefor a regime of public ownership and operation. When this has been done the first long step will have been taken toward progress in taxation, for there will be an object lesson in the abolishment of special privileges.

Out of municipal ownership may come free street cars. There is no fundamental reason why the cars should not be a part of the streets that are furnished free for the use of all if the municipality can afford it. With property paying its just taxes the municipality can afford it.

Street cars may be considered in their relation to the municipality to resemble the elevators in a modern building, free to all who have occasion to use them because they are the property of the municipality and in the nature of an improvement in the sidewalk, just as the elevator is an improvement on the stairway. It is in its relation to the single tax system that I see the greatest good in municipal ownership, holding, as it does, the promise of a firm and vigorous step to that goal.—Tom L. Johnson in Chicago Record-Herald.

Just Tickled to Death.

All the administration lawyers engaged in the recent colonial cases brought on through the custom house officers of New York city, are "tickled to death" at the outcome of the contest before the supreme court. Ex-Attorney General Griggs considers the results so satisfactory that he declares that "the decision scores a victory for the administration in the first and third, which are the all-important cases," and further says:

"It is a splendid victory for the administration on the vital principle of expansion. It is unnecessary for me to say that I am thoroughly satisfied with the result. It is a clear-cut victory for the government on the only really important point involved.

"The court decides that the Foraker act is constitutional; that this country has the legal right to govern its new possessions as territories, to make special laws for them and to tax their products. This has been the contention of the administration from the very start. It was the principal issue in the last campaign for president. Our Porto Rican legislation was selected by Mr. Bryan as the main point of attack in his Indianapolis speech. The decision puts a quietus upon that sort of thing and takes the matter out of politics for all time."

And then Senator Foraker himself, who is as much tickled over the results as ex-Attorney General Griggs, has this to say:

"The decision is a complete vindication of the position held by the republican party with respect to the power of congress to legislate for Porto Rico and the Philippines and settles it once for all that the United States is the equal in sovereign power of any other independent government.

"The supreme court goes even farther and says that if there were no constitutional provisions investing congress with this power, it would nevertheless 'ex necessitate' have this power, since the states acting in their statal capacity could not provide the necessary legislation and political sovereignty can be exercised only by the political department of the government."

Who would imagine for a moment that two prominent men like Griggs and Foraker would permit themselves to "gush" over the outcome of a case, the results of which had been obtained by the closest majority by which a decision of the court can be made?

When Griggs rails at Bryan one would suppose the doctrine advanced to be so thoroughly primitive and fundamental that even "nine ordinary judges" would agree to the opinion without hesitation. But what are the real facts?

The real brains of the supreme court as recognized by the highest legal authority of the land, opposed this opinion, and stood with Bryan in its condemnation.

While to be sure this judgment is the law of the land—and will continue to be the law of the land until there be a change in the supreme court—when the new judge appointed happening to agree with the chief justice or with Justice Brewer or either one of the other four judges who dissented from the opinion—merely on motion, and for no considerable expense, this opinion could be sent to the burial ground of "lost causes," and an entirely contrary opinion could be obtained.

Men who rejoice over victories won under such circumstances would be pleased with any sort of a new toy, and their opinions are not worth considering.

The constitution of the United States ought to be revised. No constitutional question ought to be decided by less than a two-thirds vote of all the judges—and a three-fourths vote would be much safer for the country. Had such a rule prevailed, it would have taken at least six judges, and possibly seven, to have rendered this constitutional opinion, and of course it goes without saying that five men out of the nine could not have placed upon the statute books of the country such a decision.

However, the battle has been fought out, the administration has won, and hereafter the great republic of North America can hold its territorial acquisitions, obtained either by purchase or by conquest, as "colonies"—precisely as if the United States were a kingdom or an empire—and the doctrine of "imperialism," as promulgated by the republican party in the campaign of 1900, has become an American principle legally and properly affirmed by the supreme court of the United States. —Seattle Times.

Resents Militarism.

The Boston Post Prints the following letter:

"The announcement made in the Post that 'Stub' Carter had been released from the New Haven jail, where he had been confined for twenty-one months for refusing to pay a military tax of $1 to the state of Connecticut, shows what power there is in passive resistance to defeat a tyrannical measure.

"Carter is a man who does not believe in war—at least, wars of invasion—so when the good old town of Ansonia, Conn., assessed a military tax of $1 on him he simply said that it was against his principle to pay it and that he would go to jail before he would pay it. Result, twenty-one months in New Haven jail, at an expense of $2.50 per week to the town that sent him there, or, say a total cost of $227.50 added to the tax levy of Ansonia, as the cost of trying to force a man to pay $1 for a purpose that he did not believe in. And, like Mark Twain in his controversy with the missionaries, the fact that the tax was such a 'little one' had no weight with Mr. Carter, who evidently believes that 'all just governments rest on the consent of the governed,' and that numbers have nothing to do with principles. Suppose a million men in the United States had said with Carter that 'we will go to jail before we will pay a military tax,' is it conceivable that McKinley could have secured $200,000,000 to wage an aggressive war against our brown brothers 10,000 miles away? Speed the day when millions of men will prefer going to jail rather than spend their time in producing wealth to be used in murdering their fellow men on the field of battle.

"Some day the people may become sane enough to remember, with feelings of gratitude, the man who was willing to lie in prison for twenty-one months rather than give a single dollar to aid the work of our American barbarians."

J. T. SMALL.

Provincetown, Mass.