Shall the Railroads Run Virginia?

"SHALL THE RAILROADS CONTROL VIRGINIA"

Democratic primaries will be held in Virginia September 7. Every democrat should go to the polls.

Senator A. F. Thomas, speaking under the auspices of the Virginia Democratic league, addressed the voters of Bedford City, Va.

Mr. Thomas plunged into an analysis of the political situation. He said that our difficulties were largely economic, and at no time in the world's history had anything analogous to the present situation been seen. "We are traveling untrodden paths," said he, "along which no people have ever gone before. Business, especially here in the United States, is going under full steam toward a condition of private monopoly—the result of which none can safely foretell. The immense profits of railroads, steel, oil, tobacco, beef, leather, power and other trusts, conservatively stated, would perhaps amount to two billions per year. This immense sum must seek re-investment and each new trust acquired but increases the momentum of the movement. It looks now," said the speaker, "as though in a short period every avenue of human effort susceptible of organization, will be owned and controlled by private monopoly. Private monopoly has the power to name the price for its services, thus imposing upon the masses whatever tax it may please. This must mean, in the last analysis, control for the few who own the instruments of manufacture and distribution and servitude for the masses, unless some method of curbing greed is found.

"This unbridled power in the hands of the few is now manifesting itself in the control and corruption of government. It is known that it pays hundreds of thousands to put its Lorimers across, but how much of its villainy is hidden, God alone can tell.

"Government under such conditions ceases to be the servant of the people, but becomes the instrumentality by which special privilege takes from the people an unjust share of the products of their labors. This dangerous power, derived from its ability to levy tribute, now dominates commerce, makes times good or bad as its interests may dictate, gives the people work or turns them out to starve as it pleases, gives prosperity or panic as it chooses, makes and unmakes parties and presidents and shapes legislation. So far-reaching has its control of industry become, that even the courts are compelled to change laws, lest the effect of enforcement of such laws as congress has made be too destructive to the industrial fabric.

"We seem rapidly approaching the time when the world will become so dependent upon the money power owning the instrumentalities of manufacture and distribution, that a radical departure in public policy, whether wise or unwise, if it seriously affects monopoly, will produce great public distress. We have been forging ahead under a policy that sought by special privilege to build up the few at the expense of the many, and have raised a brood of octopi which now threaten to swallow us all.

"Never before was there greater need for wise leadership. Not even in the formative period of this government were there such tremendous problems as these to solve, requiring, as they do, the highest order of constructive statesmanship, and the most profound devotion to the common weal.

"On every side some interest is seeking to put its hand in the pockets of the people, to get by unjust and discriminating laws some pecuniary advantage of the toilers of the land. The world seems to have gone daft in the mad rush to acquire wealth. Sense of public duty, social obligation, and even the public conscience, seem to be dormant. What a terrible reckoning there must be some time! When I think that there is a just God, I shudder at the consequences that must come to us, if our course is not changed.

"We elect men to office, and, in a few years' working for the public at small salaries, they accumulate fortunes. I do not charge, or even insinuate personal dishonesty, but I do mean to say that this type of man is attending to business, but not your business. I do wish to be understood as expressing the opinion that it would be wise in the people to have such public servants tell them where and how they got it, in order that the voters might judge whether the interests of the people and those of the public servant were sufficiently identical to warrant continuing him in the capacity of a trusted representative.

"I charge that the most of our woes today are attributable to the doctrine that government had a moral right to take from the mass and bestow upon the individual. It always was and always will be robbery. This damnable doctrine has eaten like a cancer into our body politic, it has permeated into our social existence and has poisoned and beclouded the consciences of our people. It has spread beyond the republican party, where it started, and contaminated the democratic party. It is the curse of the age, and we can never hope to restore our country to its place as a land of equal right and opportunity, until we utterly destroy this immoral premise. Like a thief in the night, special privilege creeps into everything and manifests itself in a thousand ways. Even in old Virginia, it is safely enthroned, and you are made to pay tribute.

"Party government is necessary in a democracy; party organization is indispensable, but its true function is to carry out in a fair and impartial way, the mandates of the party as expressed by the party convention. When this organization is seized by the ambitious and selfish, and used to accomplish special purposes, it becomes a machine.

"It is generally charged that there is a political machine in Virginia. After a faithful study and careful analysis of the situation, I wish to enter a general denial and assert that the charge is untrue. The state democratic executive committee has been composed of Thomas F. Ryan, democrat in Virginia, and reputed contributor to republican campaign funds in New York; Alfred Thom, counsel general of the Southern railroads; Henry T. Wickham, vice-president of the Chesapeake & Ohio railroad, and other lesser railroad lights. The organization which they dominate, is a railroad machine masquerading under the name of a democratic party machine. The same money power which is laying tribute on the people through the monopolies and trusts is the owner of the railroads, and through them special privilege seeks to take from you an undue share of the products of your labor.

"In answer to the Keezell resolution, the state corporation commission reported that the railroads of the state were capitalized at something more than four hundred and twenty millions—they were assessed for taxation at about ninety-six millions, something like twenty-two and a half per cent. Assuming the other property of the state to have been assessed at 50 per cent of its value, the people were paying double the taxes on the actual value that the railroads were paying. In this case, the railroads were escaping taxation on more than one hundred millions, which, at an average tax on one and a half per cent, state and local, would amount to one million and a half dollars per year that the railroads of this state are taking from you and me.

"The state owes about twenty-five millions of dollars spent in building railroads and canals. We have the debt—the corporations have the improvements, with the exception that the state still owns a small minority interest in the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac railroad. So far as I am advised, the state received nothing for this vast expenditure.

"The auditor's report shows that the state paid interest on this debt last year amounting to eight hundred and fory-five thousand dollars. The total sum paid into the state treasury last year by the railroads amounted to $821,997.74. In other words, the entire state tax of the railroads is not enough to pay interest on the improvements for which the debt was contracted, and which these roads got for nothing.

"To illustrate: Virginia taxes the Norfolk & Western Railroad company on twenty and thirty thousand dollars per mile for its single and double tracks respectively. When this road crosses into West Virginia, its side tracks are assessed at thirty-six thousand dollars per mile, and its main line at seventy-six thousand dollars per mile.

"In Virginia the Chesapeake & Ohio is assessed twenty and thirty thousand dollars per mile on single and double tracks respectively. When it crosses into West Virginia, it is assessed thirty-six thousand per mile on side tracks, and sixty-four thousand per mile on its main line. This enormous difference is not due to differences of value in the roads in the two states, but it is due to the high efficiency of the Virginia railroad machine now disguised as the democratic party machine, whose titular head and boss is Senator Thomas S. Martin.

The pocketing each year of a million and a half dollars of the people's money by the railroads on account of failure to fairly assess their property, is not all of the shameful story. Years ago, railroad attorneys whom the people unwisely elected to the general assembly engrafted on our system of taxation license taxes which were against the spirit, if not actually against the letter of the constitution. Constantly these privilege taxes have been increased, until last year there was collected $1,200,000 in this way. Every conceivable thing, from keeping store to keeping a jackass, was brought in and made to pay. The lawyer, the doctor, the barber and the undertaker are made to pay. Whether you are being born or buried, you must pay the arbitrary exaction in order that the railroads may escape the greater share of the public burden, for every dollar raised in this way comes out of the people and not out of the railroads.

"Whatever one may think of Governor Swanson's administration, this fact stands out—that he found a full treasury and left an empty one. He left the finances of the state in a condition that necessitated the increase of the amount levied upon the people at least a million and a half dollars per year to meet the demand for public needs. It is true that the tax rate was not raised, but it is equally true that the assessments were raised on the personal and real property, $93,071,576.00; and on timber lands, $2,885,574.00; on railroads, $8,528,814, making a total of $104,485,964.00.

"This sum, at an average rate for state and local tax of one and one half per cent, will yield something more than one and a half million dollars taxes per year. If the general assembly had honestly and frankly raised the tax rate, it would have been fairer, because all interests would have been compelled to pay their share, but the assessments were not equitably raised. The railroads were raised something over 8 per cent, while other property was raised over 14 per cent—thus compelling the people to pay about double the proportion of the additional tax that the railroads are required to pay.

"It has been generally known that the railroads have been paying the campaign expenses of the democratic party, and they could well afford to do so, since they have robbed us each year of taxes enough to pay the campaign expenses of the party for fifty years.

"The great mass of the supporters of this railroad machine, called the democratic party organization, have no conception of what it actually means. They are under the impression that it is a political alliance between the 'ins' to keep out the 'outs.' They find it the easy way to get along in a political way—they little dream that they are being used as tools by a remorseless money power to maintain control of the public policies of the state, by manipulation of which it is putting its hand in the pocket of every person in the state and extracting at least one and a half million dollars each year.

"This machine needs a boss and all the minor offices, as far as possible, are filled with those who will follow his lead. When these followers come to realize the real purposes behind it all, it is inconceivable to me that they will continue to follow. I believe, as patriotic citizens, they will desert this pirate ship and help rescue our state from the hands of the spoilers.

"Do Senators Martin and Swanson know about these things? Is it possible to believe that they have been the leading spirits in the democratic party machine so long, and the beneficiaries of its favors in such marked degree, and yet are still ignorant of these things? If they know, they have never penned a line or spoken a word, so far as I know, to correct these things. If they don't know, they are entirely too innocent to be out by themselves, and should be recalled as watchmen on the tower, and sent to some political foundling asylum, where they might be kept out of harm's way. I must conclude that they do know, and that they are willing that special privilege may prey upon you and me.

"Believing Senator Martin to be in sympathy with the special interests in Virginia, I am not surprised that he should vote with stand-pat republicans who represent these interests in the senate. I am not surprised that Bailey, the Standard Oil senator, should head the list in making Senator Martin the minority leader. I am not even surprised that Senator Martin was made the minority leader in the democratic caucus by practically the same votes which gave a majority in favor of the bribe-giving Republi-