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A CALL TO DUTY

When this government was first established, the people had their hands on its machinery, and it was under their control. Now the government machinery is in the hands of the corporations and the people are crowded away from it.

Corporate power has become so potent in politics that the public official is but a servant to corporate will.

In the western states corporation power is exerted chiefly through the railroads. In Nebraska, as in many other Trans-Mississippi states, railroad power is absolutely supreme.

We have here no government by the people. We have the form of representative government, but the power exerted over our public affairs is railroad power. This railroad power operating through the machinery of politics, controls the selection and election of our public officials.

As public service corporations, the railroads have certain rights and their business is entitled to all proper legal protection. But their right is the right to do business, to transport commodities and passengers from one point to another, not the right to manage politics and control government.

Under railroad rule hired lobbyists are quartered at the State Capitol, and these hired lobbyists exercise a controlling influence over our political conventions and our public officials.

Under such conditions only railroad supporters can be elected to office. Under such conditions the officials elected become railroad officials. The untrammelled citizen can hardly hope to secure an office. The people can hardly hope to secure faithful representatives.

The effect of all this, when computed in dollars, is extortion and discrimination in freight and passenger rates. It means in the end, also, high taxes and extravagance and corruption in public affairs.

The Nebraska people are now engaged in a struggle to get back into their own hands the power of self-government which was taken from them years ago. The same struggle is being waged in other states. There are many earnest men everywhere who have not yet surrendered and who never will surrender their rights as citizens.

Whatever we may believe about it the struggle is now on to determine whether the people or the corporations and trusts shall rule. So far as I am concerned I have cast my lot with the people and what little influence I have will be given to them, and this paper will champion their cause.

As I see it, before the people can have a chance again to really govern themselves, corporation influence must be driven out of politics. How to do this is the burning question of the hour. This influence is largely railroad influence in the states and the nation. In the cities it comes principally from railroads, street cars, lighting plants, water plants, etc.

How shall we go about it to destroy this influence? It can be accomplished only one way. The government must own the railroads and our cities must own their own street cars, lighting plants, water systems and all other public utilities.

With the railroads and these other public service corporations out of politics it will be easy to solve on an equitable basis all other problems. To solve the railroad question means a solution also of the trust question.

But until public ownership shall become an accomplished fact, the railroads must be regulated and controlled by law. This is the immediate struggle. The railroads in the states and nation and the public service corporations in the cities must be made the people's servants in the meantime.

I do not believe that we can make any headway in regulation and control of railroads or government ownership as long as the paid professional lobby and the free pass remain. The professional lobby, as it operates today, is a disgrace to civilization. The free pass is both unjust discrimination and a colossal bribe.

The lobby should be spurned by every public official and driven from every legislative hall.

The free pass official should be branded as a betrayer of his people, and never again permitted to go to any convention or hold any office of trust.

The railroad question is the question of the hour and around it will be fought the most memorable battle of this century.

To win this fight the country needs men. I would rather have a good man upon a bad platform than a bad man upon a good platform. All the corruption and graft we read about and all the betrayals of trust we know about comes largely from men and not parties or platforms.

The country needs honest, courageous and fearless men. Every state has them. Let them come forward. Your help is needed. To help in this struggle is the ambition of this paper.

GEORGE W. BERGE.

MEN BEFORE MEASURES.

Present conditions require a reversal of Goldsmith's famous conceit: "Measures, not men, have always been my mark." For good public service the public must look to good men before good measures.

Mr. Phelps, publicist of high repute and one time our ambassador

to the court of St. James, understood and strongly expressed the modern demand:

"It used to be an applauded political maxim which was expressed in the words, 'Measures, not men.' I venture to deny the soundness of this maxim, and to propose in its place its converse, 'Men, not measures.' I think the first need of good government, like the first need of a large business corporation, is the right men to administer it. Right in character, in ability, in patriotism, in disinterestedness. Better a hundred times an honest and capable administration of an erroneous policy than a corrupt and incapable administration of a good one."

The evils which elicited this spirited protest from a conservative statesman are far more acute than when he uttered it in 1889.

The English revolution in the seventeenth century and the American and French revolutions in the eighteenth, sought and accomplished the change from one man, or aristocratic forms of government to the popular or representative form. But the despotic, tyrannous spirit and power were not destroyed by this change; they were only temporarily displaced, and while the people slept in the fancied security of the new government, because it was republican in form, the old despotism, in a somewhat new guise, obtained possession of it. The new feudal system reigns almost as absolutely and tyrannously and corruptly in our so-called popular legislative halls as it did centuries ago in the feudal halls of European countries. The spirit of the old feudalism was largely sentimental and social; that of the new is sordidly commercial. Our commercial lords lack the chivalrous spirit of their ancestors, and they set a price upon all virtue which stands in the way of their own aggrandizement.

This return of feudalism is illustrated in countless ways. For many years the people have been asking for effective public control of railways and especially of railway rates; but the same people at the same time have stupidly permitted the choice of railway men for United States senators and for members of state legislatures, who brazenly balk their purpose.

All the resolution of a Roosevelt, backed by an overwhelming public sentiment, counts for nothing against the obstruction of our feudal house of lords.

The house of representatives in five or six successive congresses has resolved in favor of submitting an amendment to the constitution which would give to the people the direct power to elect United States senators, and the legislatures of more than half of the states have demanded such an amendment, but all without practical effect. With very few exceptions, corporation men instead of peoples' men have been chosen for senators this very year, and Nebraska is not one of the exceptions. This is because the people have chosen unfit men for members of the legislatures, and as they choose these unfit men by direct vote they are directly responsible for them and the resulting misgovernment.

In the states of Missouri, Wisconsin and Illinois three resolute and honest governors have used all their influence toward securing better government in ways indicated by the people, but many of the reforms which were demanded, and were promised before the elections, have been, or will be defeated because the people sent the wrong men to the legislatures. For the same reason regard or respect for the popular wish and welfare was conspicuously absent from the late legislature of Nebraska.

Some years ago Washington Gladden, a high-minded, but rather too theoretical champion of good government, sought to reform municipal governments by reformed city charters with elaborate provisions for securing honesty and efficiency, and some of the changes suggested have been adopted in many cities to some advantage. But the most skillfully drawn charters are of little avail against dishonest and incapable officers, as might have been foretold before the experiment in question was tried. But when public sentiment was directed against the "gray wolves" of the Chicago city council and men tried for integrity and capacity by the closest scrutiny were put in their places, substantial reform was accomplished even in that most difficult field. A single resolutely honest officer may revolutionize the political conditions of a whole state. Governor Folk's mere proclamation, backed by his reputation for confounding public corruptionists, drove from the capitol of Missouri last winter the vile and shameless set of railway and other lobbyists which had infested and corrupted the legislatures of that state for immemorial years.

Governor La Follette of Wisconsin has accomplished very important reforms, among them an advanced primary election system and a radical change in the system of taxation; and though he has been elected United States senator it is not likely that he will relinquish his hold on the state until he has won his desperate fight for a rate-making railway commission.

The career of these two governors illustrates the momentous results and therefore the primary importance of putting the right kind of men in public office.

Good government is the ultimate object of all endeavor for political