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Railways Seek Substitutes For Effective Legislation

In Columbus, O., they have settled the entire railway question without recourse to government intervention. Everything is now satisfactory to all concerned and those who have been wasting long and weary hours trying to solve the railway problem can return to more useful occupations serenely confident that all is well.

The railways and shippers have agreed to settle their differences in a friendly spirit. Details of their plan have not yet been worked out, but the main idea has been approved. All disputes will be referred to a joint committee representing railways and shippers, instead of being taken up directly between railway officials and shippers. Even the dullest of anarchists and agitators can see that the plan will solve every evil in the domain of railway transportation. Rebates, extortionate charges, discriminations in service, private car abuses and all other abuses must vanish before the magic of this plan. At all events, that is the opinion of those who have approved the plan.

But there are doubters who will see great obstacles in the way. In the first place the shippers who have entered into the agreement are the big shippers. They are members of commercial clubs. They are such men as were taken from Nebraska to Washington on free transportation to testify before the committee on interstate commerce that there was no "deep-seated demand in Nebraska for lower rates." They are such men as went from Nebraska a few days ago to pack a convention called for the purpose of ratifying President Roosevelt's railway policy. On that occasion their plot proved a dismal failure. So apparent was their design that they were not allowed to sit in the regular convention and were forced to hold a convention of their own, at which they indorsed the railway substitute for the president's plan.

Why is it, the uninitiated will ask, that the big shippers do not care whether rates are high or low? The big shippers are the men who have benefited by rebates. That is why they are big shippers. If they had received the rates granted to ordinary shippers they would not be big shippers. Their business would not have thrived and they would now be loud in their complaints against rebates and extortionate charges. Having received preferential rates and treatment for many years they are now "captains of industry," and can advertise to the world that their success has been due to uncompromising honesty and to superior brains, industry and thrift. In secret, however, they are cowardly serfs who must dance whenever their railway masters say the word. If they refuse to work and talk

for the railways in any crisis they need expect no further favors and the withdrawal of preferential treatment means that their business will be ruined. Consequently they are in for any dirty work the railways may require them to do. Every move that they make therefore must be regarded with suspicion by those who honestly desire a settlement of the railway question.

The Columbus plan would serve simply to conceal the real facts in any dispute. If the little shipper were so foolish as to refer some complaint to the arbitration board he would find the jury packed against him. The board would not dare to give him justice, for the members of the board being railway employes and such shippers as have for years flourished by means of discrimination would strive to satisfy the railways in every case.

The public will not be misled by railway substitutes for effective legislation. Any legislation that does not provide for the remedies approved by President Roosevelt will be condemned by public opinion. All who have studied the railway question must realize how difficult it is to deal adequately with the rebate evil and will endorse the president's suggestion that the government be given full power to examine the books of the railway companies. Even this power will prove an insufficient remedy if criminal penalties for the violation of law are not enforced. The Independent has frequently pointed out the necessity of treating as felons those who break laws designed for the protection of the general public.

President Stickney of the Great Western said not long ago that the latest method of granting rebates was of such a character as to defy any law against rebates. Months after rebates have been granted an agent leaves New York, calls on the favored shippers, leaves packages of money and departs without explanation on his part or on the part of the shippers. Records of such transactions, of course, must be kept, but such records would be like the "non-ledger accounts" of the insurance companies. They would not appear on the regular books and could be destroyed at convenient times. It is always possible to break a law and to escape punishment, but that does not make the profession of burglary profitable for any considerable length of time. Exposures are bound to be made. The thieves can not always agree and when thieves fall out just men receive their dues. If stringent laws are passed against the giving and receiving of rebates much good may be accomplished. In the long run, however, the people will decide that the many and varied abuses in transportation must be corrected by government ownership of the railway monopoly.

Significance of the Elections

Friends of reform cannot but feel encouraged and inspired by the election results. The wave of reform, which began in the west more than a decade ago, and which has momentarily subsided at its point of origin, is now sweeping through the east.

The most pronounced triumph of the independent reform forces against the forces of bossism and corruption was won in Philadelphia, where the republican machine was smashed by an alliance of republicans and democrats and voters owning allegiance neither to the democratic nor the republican party.

In New York the wonderful vote cast for Hearst and the power displayed by Jerome in spite of disheartening handicaps, show that the revolt against narrow partisanship has spread to the metropolis. Mr. Hearst boldly defied the bossism of Tammany and took a

pronounced stand against corporation tyranny. Mr. Jerome's candidacy was an avowed protest against boss rule.

In Ohio the bossism of Cox was stingingly rebuked. The issues in Ohio were largely of a local nature, but were directly or indirectly involved in the evil of boss domination.

In all these contests national issues were in abeyance but there was a strong undercurrent of hostility to corporation rule and therefore to that power which opposes President Roosevelt in his demand for a square deal. This is really the great national issue at the present time. The demand for regulation of railways and trusts is only a phase of the main issue.

The result in Nebraska was expected. While the majority for Judge Letton was not up to republican ante-election hopes, his elec-