

POLITICAL EVIL IN CORPORATIONS. The investigation, instituted by the legislature of Nebraska, to inquire into the attempts alleged to have been made to "hold up" corporations by threatening them with unjust statutory requirements, cannot be too strongly commended. The charge has frequently been made that large corporations often seek to influence state legislatures and the decision of courts. The time is opportune to inquire into the truth of these charges and seek to locate the responsibility for the alleged corruption; to ascertain whether the corporations pay money to secure legislation favorable to their interests or use money to prevent legislation, admittedly oppressive and unjust, and originated for the express purpose of obtaining a price for its withdrawal. The latter practice has been not infrequent in legislative bodies.

In addition to this Professor Jenks of Cornell university in his discussion of the "trust problem," suggests another method frequently practiced to obtain money from corporations. He says:

Why Paid?

"It seems to be true at times that a bill which may be entirely proper and even beneficial to the public in its nature, but which also favors particularly the interests of some of the larger corporations, may be opposed by the party leaders or by individual representatives, until an amount of money has been paid either to party managers or to enough individual members of the legislature to secure the passage of the bill. Not long since a bill which was said to be entirely in the public interest, as well as in that of the large corporations, could be passed in the legislature of one of our larger states, it was reported, only by the payment of \$150,000 to the leader of the party in power. Some of the larger corporations, business men say, expect to set aside for such uses a considerable sum to be charged to business expenses.

But if we grant that corruption of the legislatures and even of the courts on the part of the

Who is Responsible?

large corporations is not infrequent, does it follow that the corporations should themselves be destroyed, or that they are chiefly to blame? The fault seems to be rather with the legislatures and the character of the men whom we, the public, send to them, or with our ethical and social standards, than with corporations as such. If the combinations have good features about them, it would certainly be unwise to attempt to destroy them because our legislators were dishonorable men. A much wiser as well as a much more certain and probably an equally practical measure, would be to endeavor in some way to improve the character of our legislators by better methods of election, or by general education, or to lessen the opportunities, through rules of our legislatures or otherwise, of those who are unscrupu-

lous enough either to blackmail a well-meaning corporation, or to take dishonest pay from a dishonorable corporation. That the political evil exists is beyond question. That its cause is mainly the trust and its only remedy the destruction of the trust by no means follows, although that seems to be a normal presumption by very many."

Professor Jenk's conclusion is sound and logical. The responsibility and blame for the corruption belongs primarily with those who act as public agents.

All corporations and industrial combinations must not be condemned because some of them use improper means to further their interests any more than all individuals should share in the opprobrium belonging to the few who are dishonest? Nor should these combinations be abolished because of the dishonesty of some legislators. Corporations and individuals who deal with the public must act in accord with the methods and regulations which the public, through its agents, may require.

The state now buys text books for the children in the public schools. If, as sometimes happens, those whom the people elect to make these purchases, before buying desirable school books, insist upon a financial consideration for themselves from the publishers, must we condemn the publisher and destroy his books? Ought we not rather denounce those who demanded and insisted upon the dishonest consideration? If county commissioners should demand a personal compensation of bridge companies before letting the contract for the building of bridges, ought the property of the bridge company to be confiscated? The offense of the book company and the bridge company is in a measure extenuated, in that it is their business to sell goods rather than impart instruction in ethics to county or state officers. In dealing with the public they only conform to the ethical standard of the public, and if this standard be somewhat below par and the people elect to have steals in bridge-building or book-buying, by choosing dishonest officials or agents, how can any part of the blame attach to the book or bridge concerns? The responsibility is indirectly the people's and directly their agents', and the punishment should be meted out to the dishonest officials rather than to the victimized corporations.

As it is in buying school books and building bridges, so it is in lawmaking.

Not Compulsory.

Nothing could be more illogical than for people to complain of the political evils of corporations which exist, if at all, only because of the dishonesty of the men whom the same people have chosen to represent them. Corporations, even if they so desire, have no way of compelling obstinate public servants to yield to un-

worthy inducements. Neither legislators nor judges could be corrupted if they were not willing to be corrupted.

Honest men do not hold up honest corporations, nor can they be bought by dishonest ones. Why, then, should men, who are honest, be afraid of being bought by corporations? Or why should people, if they select honest men to represent them, be alarmed lest somebody buy them? And if they do not select honest men whose fault is it?

These charges of political evil on the part of corporations reflect not so much upon corporations as they condemn our public servants. The remedy for these evils is quite simple. A higher standard of honesty and integrity on the part of public servants would make impossible political corruption by corporations.

Demagogues and political panderers preach hatred and malice toward all corporations, wealth producers, and wage payers.

Demagogues.

To denounce and damn corporate interests has become an easy and not infrequent way for men of mediocre intellects and moderate morals to attain political prominence and influence. The dishonest teachings of such men have created an unreasonable and unwarranted prejudice, on the part of many well-meaning people, to property in corporate form. It is not strange that dishonest and unscrupulous men should profit by this feeling and, posing as public benefactors, "hold up" and extort money from corporations. The public conscience needs to be educated into the proper appreciation of corporate rights and made to understand that property in this form should be held as sacred and as much entitled to the protection of the law as when owned by an individual. A denial of these rights to corporations is as dishonorable and dishonest as to steal from an individual or to disregard individual property rights.

The repeal by the legislature of all corporate legislation, founded upon prejudice rather than reason, and the punishment of hold-up statesmen and lobbyists would materially aid the development of a more just and rational sentiment toward corporate capital.

TROUBADOUR. The chronology of high-tariff protectionists is very

generally imperfect. But no deliverer of sophisms and sounding nothingness is more gifted in the art of misinformation and malchronology than our esteemed and admired troubadour, the Hon. John Mellifluence Thurston. This distinguished statesman, poet and poser, in a recent torrential after-dinner down-pour of words, attributed the panic of 1893 to the repeal of the McKinley tariff in 1894. "Oh Rose! White Rose! Will you lie?"