

## Amos Pinchot on Municipal Reform

**I**N the Summer of 1913 Mr. Amos Pinchot wrote "A Letter to the County Chairman and Other Chairmen," a pamphlet of twenty pages. Every word of it applies to the situation today. The evils whose existence he deplors are still with us; the futile remedies and suggestions for reform that were heard then are heard today.

We offer no apologies for making these liberal extracts from this "Letter" of Mr. Pinchot's. His words are full of the fighting spirit; they are as instinct with inspiration as when they were written.

### REFORM MOVEMENTS SHORT-LIVED

An East Side gangster in a storybook once remarked: "These reform movements are like queen hornets. They sting once—and die."

Unfortunately, history compels us to admit that this is true. After every decade or so of Tammany misrule, Reform comes to life for a while, blazons the motto: "Kick Out the Wicked" on its banners, buzzes around busily, stings once and dies incontinently, unhonored and unwept, leaving the Tammany tiger smiling on the stricken field.

We political reformers do not like to look back, or to think of "the lost chances, the past days, of the service due and not rendered." And yet, as we review the history of New York we see that the forces of reform, virtue, fusion, or whatever we choose to call ourselves, have generally left the plow sticking in the unfinished furrow, and have accomplished little or nothing, either toward cleaning up the government of New York, or helping the people of the city in their daily life; for these, after all, have, we hope, been the objects and justification of all our efforts, wise and unwise.

A municipal election is just ahead of us, and we are planning once more to kick out the wicked and save the city. It is time, therefore, to ask ourselves some simple questions and answer them if we can.

Why has political reform failed and become discredited in New York? And why has Tammany flourished like a green bay tree?

You and I know the answers to these questions, and it seems to me that we may as well state them now—even at the risk of seriously offending other people—and perhaps ourselves.

Reform has failed mainly because it deserved to fail. And we have deserved to fail because we have generally lacked the virility and courage to stand for the things which we know are right and necessary for the people of the city.

In the midst of great and real issues we have chosen little, false issues. We have beaten around the bush, advocated easy ways to do hard things, adopted a get-good-quick policy, and rarely, if ever, claimed the confidence of the community by fighting for measures or policies which, if accomplished, would make a real difference to the men, women and children within our gates.

Moreover, we reformers have made the fatal mistake of

standing for men instead of measures. "Let us throw out the bad men and put in good men (i. e., ourselves), and all will be well," is our eternal appeal to incredulous New York. Thus we have grossly exaggerated the importance of personality and of men's names—and foolishly underestimated the irresistible power which sound ideas have when set loose among the people, especially if they are endorsed in a platform and backed by candidates pledged to carry them out.

### HOW TO ABOLISH PRIVATE MONOPOLY

We can abolish private monopoly in New York. We can lift the immense economic burden which it imposes on the public. We can destroy the power of Wall street, Tammany and the old Republican ring. But we must begin by conscious determination to do this thing.

It will be a long, hard fight. But it must and will be undertaken and won. And let us remember that private monopoly is entrenching itself for the conflict and each delay will increase the difficulty of victory in almost geometric ratio.

What we reformers need at this moment is a little vision and a little courage. Put a courageous and determined Mayor in office who sees the situation clearly, and he will soon have private monopoly on the defensive. He will make the attack through the courts and through taxation, by denying privileges, reducing rates and squeezing out inflated values and assailing defective franchises. And above all he will go to the legislature with the people behind him, and demand the things that are necessary to make the city free. Such a fight cannot be won by merely putting respectable men in office unless these good men are irrevocably pledged to carry on the fight.

### INNOCUOUS RESPECTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT

Immense pressure is now being brought to bear upon the more progressive and human element in the anti-Tammany group to make this municipal campaign merely another of those edifying but purposeless spasms of outraged respectability which we are all familiar with.

For all who feel that political reform means something larger than party politics and more vital than pleas for special privilege disguised in the jargon of social betterment, there is now just one chance of any success that is worth having. And that is to present a programme to the people which, if put into practice, will do something for the people. Unless we do this—unless we go beyond a mere list of respectable candidates and an empty and meaningless platitudes, such as the fusion camp has already sketched, it will matter little so far as the welfare of the average family is concerned—whether Tammany sweeps the city or not.

Indeed, I can imagine nothing more harmful to real reform and surer in the end to strengthen the hold of Tammany on New York, than a successful fusion campaign based upon no constructive propositions, and side-stepping the real issues and the fundamental reforms. Victory in such a case would simply mean the coming back of Tam-

many on a tidal wave four years hence, with the reform element more discredited than ever. If Fusion won this Fall with such a programme, we would no doubt have, as in the Low and Strong administrations, a few years of innocuous respectability in government, a little better policing perhaps, a possible retrenchment through petty economies and a good deal of civic virtue talk. But on the other hand, the underlying sources of graft and corruption would not be affected, Tammany's power would be unscathed, and the conditions of existence of millions of men, women and children of this city would remain unchanged; while the forces of reform, having been given another opportunity to make good and having signally failed, would again be cast into the discard. And we would remain, as of yore, associated in the public's mind only with the lost chances and the services due and not rendered.

#### INCREASE IN LAND VALUE GOING TO THE LAND SPECULATOR

The average man in New York is, in fact, a poor man. What he and his wife and children care about is neither that "political uplift" with which we are so anxious to furnish them, nor that improved machinery of government, which is necessary in a democracy, but after all only a means to an end. Nor yet is it respectability in the city hall, with the added concealment and suavity in graft and corruption which reform administrations have been able to insure. What men want is economic rather than political improvement. What they need is more prosperity—a little more ability to obtain for themselves the things which they must buy in order to live. Give them these, give them an increased purchasing power for their wage or salary, a lower charge for some of the necessaries of life, such as rent, fuel, light or transportation; give them, in fact, some slight relief from economic pressure and an easing up in the grinding struggle of poverty, and half the battle of political reform and good citizenship has been won.

I marvel at the courage and patience of reformers. I cannot conceive how they have been able to summon the fortitude to go on year after year dressing the wounds and diseases of our poor city without once trying to prevent those wounds and diseases. With their eternal mottoes: "Kick out the Wicked" and "Anything to Destroy Tammany," ever before them, it is hard to understand why they do not attack the sources instead of the symptoms of Tammany's power, so that "the wicked" will not forever need to be kicked out and Tammany will not have to be "destroyed" rhythmically through the years. But above all it is difficult for the mind to compass why the reformer, who must surely be a brother of the poor and of all frail clay, does not ask himself if it is not possible to do something for the poor beyond the excellent but, we know, inadequate function of occasionally putting a few other reformers in office, to be themselves kicked out, discredited because they have failed to really reform anything, and have merely bored everybody.

Today seven hundred and fifty million dollars a year is paid in greater New York for rent, and one quarter of the average families' income is spent for rent. If the imagination of the reformer is to extend beyond police reform and respectability in office, the fight for lower rents through taxing land values more and buildings less is always at hand to be undertaken if one has the stomach for it.

Whatever Mr. Allan Robinson and the Allied Real Estate Interests may say, an unduly large proportion of the average man's income goes for rent and an unduly large proportion of the increase in land values, which are caused by the labor and industry of the community, goes to the land speculator who holds his property unimproved, and thus increase rents by keeping down the supply of tenable buildings.

Our Wall street Tammany promoters are today building additional subways for New York. What will be the effect of these new subways upon the congestion problem which our reformers are so deeply interested in? Will they make land more available for homes and tenements for the average family and reduce rents? By no means.

#### FORCING THE WORKINGMAN FURTHER FROM HIS PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

Already the land along the new subway routes has been bought up by realty companies and private speculators. This land will generally be held until it can be sold at higher prices to home-seekers of considerable means, or builders of more or less expensive apartment houses. The result will simply be that those who want to build tenements or cheap individual dwellings, such as the average citizen can afford, will have to go five or ten miles further in the country to localities so remote that the working man or woman will find great difficulty in going to and from the place of employment. For this reason it is extremely doubtful whether, under our present system of assessment, the new subways will have any appreciable effect on congestion or on rents. But if we tax vacant land higher and buildings lower, the speculator will either have to build on his land or sell it to someone who will build.

Up to now reform in New York has made the unfortunate error of basing its hope of helping humanity on a false proposition. It has said to the people: "We are going to improve conditions in this city; we will help you—the people. But we are going to do it in such a way as not to interfere with our own interests. We will remember the poor, but we will not curtail the privileges of the rich or interfere with their opportunities to keep wealth concentrated in their own hands."

#### SAY THE THINGS WE WANT TO SAY—MAKE THE FIGHT FOR THE THINGS WE BELIEVE IN

Through political action we cannot materially increase the opportunities of the poor to make a competence without at the same time decreasing the opportunities of the rich to make large fortunes. It is simply a case of inflexible economic laws. Never in the world's history has a general or permanent improvement of the condition of the majority been made through political action except at the expense

of the privileged minority. In economics and politics alike you cannot serve two masters or ride two horses. You cannot be for the people and for the property interests. You cannot pay Paul, in any currency worth having, except by borrowing from Peter; and in this case Paul is the average man and Peter is the rich man, and the sooner we face this fact the easier it will be for everybody.

The average citizen, I mean the man who needs reforms but does not talk much about them, has developed a distinct genius for telling the difference between a man who is trying to do something useful and a man who is talking through his hat.

And speaking somewhat personally, it seems to me that life is too short and human strength too transient to continue playing around the edge of real things and merely flirting with fundamentals. We all get old or tired before the day's work is done. So why not say what we want to say, and make the fight for the things we believe in before Time has made old men of us, obstructing and protesting, as most of us probably will, against the progress of younger generations?

I am perfectly well aware that if we make real things the fighting issues of our campaign—cheaper necessities of existence, transportation, communication, light, heat and power and rents—we will array against us a majority of the wealthy and respectable citizens of New York, whom we have been taught to regard as the high priests of civic virtues, and who stand for privilege and preferred rights. We will have the solid opposition of the real estate interests, who are now so ably represented in the ranks of fusion. We will, of course, have Tammany against us. We will have the money power against us and many of the newspapers. In fact, we will have practically everybody but the people against us. But whether we win or lose, we will at least know that we have stood for what was sound and right and what must inevitably come in the future; that we have for once refused to "nail our banner to the fence;" that we have struck a real blow to relieve the average man from extortion and oppression; that we have at last attacked the source and stronghold of Tammany's power; that we have won for ourselves the confidence and respect of the majority, and that we have begun the fight along the lines that are certain to win. AMOS PINCHOT.

#### BASED ON HONESTY

I am a radical in taxation for I believe in Single Tax as the only system which is based on honesty and not robbery and crooked reasoning.—DR. FRANK CRANE.

THE distinguished scientist, Mme. Curie, who is paying us the honor of a visit, announces that she cannot understand the difference between Democrat and Republican in our political party divisions. She evidently has the true scientific mind. But she would make a poor citizen. For every four years every man and woman in the nation is expected to get wildly excited over the difference.

## What the Single Tax Would Do

(From an address by J. W. Bengough, Toronto.)

AFTER dealing with the fiscal aspect of the question and showing that as a reform in taxation the Single Tax system would be superior in simplicity, practicability, economy and morality, Mr. Bengough proceeded as follows:

It is not, however, the consideration that the Single Tax would be an immense improvement upon the present system—that it would be the nearest conceivable approach to perfection as a reform in our municipal methods, that makes the Single Taxer an enthusiast. Nor is it this consideration which has brought back into the Christian ranks many who, in perplexity and despair, had thrown off the teaching of their youth in the presence of the black and lowering problems of our day, for which the Church seemed to have no practical solution, and in which indeed it seemed to have very little practical interest. It was when the ethical significance of this apparently simple reform in the taxation system dawned upon the minds of these anxious lovers of their race that they recognized the Single Tax as a newly revealed truth of God, and the necessary complement of the Gospel of Christ. And I have no doubt it is the ethical side of it that will appeal most strongly to you.

I address especially those of you who are preachers of Christ's Gospel. So far as that Gospel has to do with things of the present world, your hearts are often heavy no doubt when you see how very slowly the Kingdom advances. Notwithstanding all your labor, I know that you are prepared for the obstacle of man's depravity by nature, but every minister who looks beyond the individual to the environment in which that individual moves, must see plainly that there are institutions in our social system which vastly reinforce the natural depravity of man, and militate against the Christian virtues. Man's proneness to strong drink, for example, was evidenced even in Noah's day. How much harder is the fight against that weakness in the presence of the modern saloon—an institution which until lately was as legitimate in our communities as a schoolhouse or a church?

Perhaps the very root of man's depravity is selfishness. And yet how many of our laws and institutions put an enormous premium on this vice! We cry, let the Gospel have free course and be glorified, but it cannot have free course with these man-made and man-supported obstacles across its path. You, as preachers, call upon men to love one another; to prefer others to self; to live out the Golden Rule. I believe the average man would like to obey your injunction, and if nothing stood in his way but his own natural selfishness he would do it in some good measure. But his natural selfishness is buttressed and inflamed by the whole social system in which he stands. Greed, grasp, get, these are the watchwords of the civilization all about