

of May 22nd in connection with a pending election on six Initiative and Referendum questions to be voted upon the following week. Under large and lucid headlines, each was succinctly stated and explained in good newspaper type after this manner:

The fourth question is on the ballot because the Los Angeles railway and the Pacific Electric railway procured a referendum on it. They oppose it because it seeks to investigate their books and accounts, appraise their physical property and fix and regulate rates. The ordinance was proposed by the Municipal League, but the only argument on the question sent out with the sample ballots is one against the measure, in red ink, by the traction companies and bearing their signatures.

This measure, by the way, was overwhelmingly carried on the 28th. Whether or not the Los Angeles News justifies Professor Ross's ideal of an endowed general newspaper, it justifies the municipal experiment in Los Angeles sufficiently to make it the duty of other municipalities to take the question of "following suit" into early and serious consideration.



James A. Rose.

Citizens who have had occasion to do business in recent years with the office of Secretary of State of Illinois will be reminded by the death of James A. Rose, who had held the office a long time, of a public office efficiently, conscientiously and courteously administered.



SWAMPLAND RECLAMATION.

One of the latest as well as most promising schemes for boosting Federal expenditures, is the swamp land reclamation project, as set forth by the National Drainage Congress at its recent meeting in New Orleans.

It was an enthusiastic meeting of earnest and purposeful men and women, and their object was in the main commendable; but one could not but marvel at the steadiness of their gaze towards Uncle Sam's strong box.



Admitting their contention that there are in the United States 74,500,000 acres of swamp lands, and granting that these lands are very fertile, still one may balk at the deduction that it is the duty of the Federal government to drain these lands for the benefit of private owners.

Were it public land it would be a different matter, for then the selling price might be made to include the expense of the work. Or, even if it

were proposed to assess the cost upon the owners of the lands benefited, there would be no objection.

But to propose to confer this great value upon the owners of swamp lands at the expense of those who do not own swamp lands—what shall we say?

As if to still further complicate this point of ethics, the drainage of swamp lands of the Mississippi Valley is to be made part of a scheme to create a navigable channel in the Mississippi River and its tributaries.* Particular point is given to this feature at the present moment by the floods that are now overflowing the lands that have been drained. The cry is raised that this is a national question; that the Mississippi river is a national river, draining more than half the States of the Union, and should not, therefore, be allowed to run riot through the alluvial lands of Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee—not to mention Little Egypt.



The control of the Mississippi River has been a vexatious problem.

From 1840 to 1880 steamboat interests on the river were so great that the Federal authorities made some effort to improve the channel. At the same time the planters in the low lands threw up small levees along the water front to keep out the extreme high water. A levee of three or four feet was sufficient in the early days; but with the clearing of the northern forests and the draining of the farm lands, the spring freshets gradually increased, which necessitated higher and higher levees, until now embankments twenty feet high and a hundred feet wide at the base may be seen.

The owners of the lands fronting on the river were unable to bear this increasing burden, so levee districts were created. By means of special taxes in these districts, a dollar a bale on cotton, etc., the necessary funds were found. The theory upon which this work proceeded was that if the river could be kept within its banks the current would scour out a channel deep enough to carry off all the water.

Unfortunately the swift current scoured the sides as well as the bottom of the river, and the caving banks ate into the levees erected by the planters. This united the levee boards and the Federal authorities in an effort to hold the banks; that is, the levee boards agreed to the necessity, and the Federal authorities did the work. Then followed the work of mattress-laying, and rip-rapping or revetting the caving banks, which has

*See Public of October 6, 1911, page 1019, and October 13, 1911, page 1045.

cost the Federal government many millions of dollars. This method of channel deepening required that all gaps in the levees should be closed, and in certain sparsely settled regions, where the levee boards were too poor to do the work, the Federal authorities did it.

The Mississippi River Commission, which has this work in charge, appears to have been prudent, helping those only who were disposed to help themselves; but with this policy in force an elaborate system of levees has been created from Cairo to the Gulf.

So well was the work done that many people were disposed to think the problem had been solved.

But, alas for the man who wrestles with the Mississippi River—even though he be no less a person than Uncle Sam himself! The cry is now raised that the government must take charge of the whole levee system; and it grew louder and louder as the floods spread. That such a proposition—though it seems but yesterday that the people of the United States lifted their hands in horror at the idea of a One-Billion-Dollar Congress—will carry us far toward a Two-Billion-Dollar Congress cannot be doubted when it is known that it is proposed to spend \$30,000,000 annually for ten years.

Just what we are to spend after the close of the tenth year we are not told. One might hazard a guess, from the frequency with which the statement is made, that the problem of the river control is vastly greater than the construction of the Panama Canal.



There are a few points that the common citizen may do well to keep in mind.

First, the government will undertake this work. Waterways are popular with the people, and politicians are taking advantage of it to tap the public till.

Second, an effort should be made to have the owners of the swamp lands pay for the benefits conferred upon them. An excellent precedent, and to the very point, is to be found in the reclamation of the arid lands of the West, where the cost of the work is added to the price of the land; or, in case the lands have already passed into private hands, is met by a special tax on the lands benefited.

Third, a deep channel is not all, nor is it the chief thing required to revive river traffic. The proposed 14-foot channel from the Lakes to the Gulf will not restore commerce to the Mississippi river so long as the railroads are allowed to charge

more for a short haul than for a long haul. Even a 40-foot channel would not and could not be used so long as the railroads might cut rates to river points and recoup themselves by higher rates to interior points.

Let us have the Two-Billion-Dollar Congress if we must, but let us see that the money is expended for intelligent purposes; and, what is even more important, let us see that it is *collected from the people who derive the benefits*.

STOUGHTON COOLEY.



THE SINGLETAX IDEAL.

In all countries and ages the theoretical ownership of the land has vested in the people of the land; but while this has been and still is true, the benefits of ownership have gone and still go to holders of the fee. The Singletax proposes a practical reversal of this situation. It says, Let the *title* remain where it may, the *benefits* of ownership shall go to the theoretical (and rightful) owners—the people.

If rent is the measure of land values, and if the Singletax takes rent for the people, the benefits of public ownership are practically realized. They are also exactly realized *in proportion* to the exactness with which this proposition is actually carried into effect.



Let the inhabitants of a city or of a country be likened, for illustration, to the tenants of a skyscraper. A thousand people occupy this office building, we will say. It is a community in itself. There is a transportation system, the elevators. There are open highways, the corridors and stairways. There is a sewer, water, heating, gas, electric light and telephone system, and so on. There is also an elaborate service for the care of the building and the comfort of the inmates. The ground floor is occupied by large banking or commercial concerns paying large rents; there are commodious suites on the street front, and small inexpensive offices on the inner court, and for each is paid a proportionate rental. Many of the inhabitants of this building are employes of the tenants, or of the building management, and pay no rent.

Here is an almost exact parallel of the city community, the rooms of the office building corresponding to the building lots of the city.

We may now further suppose that each one of the one thousand inmates of our building, from bank presidents and members of law firms to sten-