

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

NEW YORK.

New York, May 23.—Municipal ownership sentiment appears to be in a state of general agitation here, but the circumstances make any concrete expression of it apparently impossible. A community more helplessly at the mercy of public plunderers of the respectable sort it would be hard to find. In politics, the drift at present appears to be toward the reelection of Mayor McClellan; and this drift is distinctly not in the direction of municipal ownership.

The impulse of the drift toward McClellan comes from a curious set of circumstances. By giving the city "good government," McClellan has actually made Tammany Hall respectable. The stench of Tammany, thanks to him, is no longer a stench in the nostrils. The corruption which now prevails in New York has the fragrance of the violet and the color of the rose; and the unco-good, who loathe the dirty dollar but love the tainted million, are turning from good government clubs to Tammany Hall as the Prodigal Son turned from the husks of a strange land to his father's fatted calf.

This impulse has been accelerated by two gentle slaps in the face which the Republicans in the legislature gave the financial interests of New York. The particular grievances of those interests are the mortgage tax law and the stock-transfer tax law. The former imposes a small tax on mortgages in such manner as to make it "stay put" on the mortgagee. This is a deadly offense. Taxes on financial interests, no matter how large, which can be shifted, are never objectionable in financial quarters, and often they are really welcome. But a tax that cannot be shifted—that is a different matter. The stock transfer tax is in a similar category. It is an infinitesimal tax, like the tax on mortgages; and like that tax it falls on the financial interests and stays there. Small as these taxes are, they have made the financial interests (unable to appreciate a bit of demagoguery at their own expense) wild with rage at the Republican party. A common expression among Wall street men is that they would vote for a yellow dog for Mayor this fall in preference to the best Republican.

But they will not have to vote for a yellow dog. Tammany announces that McClellan is to be the Democratic candidate, and McClellan is a young man of attainments, ability, honesty, respectability and good family, who, while keeping faith with the franchise corporations, has given the city good government.

It might be supposed that the very reasons which drive the rich New Yorker away from the Republican party and over to Tammany would draw poor New Yorkers away from Tammany and into

the Republican party. But that will not be the effect. The legislature which has so offended rich New Yorkers, was so manifestly demagogic that the Republican party which controlled it appeals favorably to nobody with a civic conscience. Moreover, the Republican legislature that enacted those two tax laws was so shamelessly corrupt, so indifferent to public rights, and so solicitous (for a consideration) for the privileges of public service corporations that no one would repose any confidence in the Republican party if it should declare without reservation even for municipal ownership. It loses all whom its tax laws drive away and gains nobody in return.

Tammany Hall is consequently placed in what, for it, is an enviable position. With platform platitudes it can bid freely for the poor man's vote, while with private understandings it bargains liberally for the rich man's campaign contribution.

That has always been the Tammany ideal of political tactics. It bids fair, at the approaching election to be an ideal realized. The common expectation is that the Republican party in New York will have fewer votes relatively, and a smaller campaign fund absolutely, than ever before.

It is quite improbable that the Republicans will be able this year to make a combination with the Citizens' Union, the nonpartisan organization with which it has heretofore been able to unite upon bi-partisan nominations against Tammany Hall.

One very strong reason for this is the fact that the conditions which have heretofore obliged the Citizens' Union to concede the head of the ticket to the Republicans are now reversed. McClellan having proved to be a "good man in office," the Citizens' Union can insist upon him as the head of the fusion ticket; and a good many men in that organization are for one reason or another inclined to do so. They have felt the anomaly of nominating a Republican invariably for mayor of a Democratic city. But if the Republicans were to concede this point, for a fusion with the Citizens' Union, they would find themselves in a fusion also with Tammany Hall, whose candidate McClellan is certain to be; and that, from their point of view, would be unthinkable.

The probability is, therefore, that the Republicans will be unable to make their usual fusion; and, being thrown back upon the resources of their own party, at a time and under circumstances when and in a place where their party is inordinately weak, it is not unlikely that they will become completely demoralized. This probability is made all the more likely by the fact that ex-Gov. Odell, who is the Republican boss of the State, is at

loggerheads with the Platt faction, which, though moribund, may be galvanized by J. Pierpont Morgan if the exigencies of his war with Harriman make it desirable, and by the further fact that ex-Lieutenant Governor Timothy L. Woodruff, who controls the party in the Borough of Brooklyn, is none too friendly toward Odell.

What the Citizens' Union will decide to do is as yet quite problematical. It is as badly demoralized as are the Republicans. The Citizens' Union was organized in the '90's for the purpose of giving effect to the nonpartisan purpose of the new constitution of the State. That document had provided for the holding of State and municipal elections on alternate years, with the intention of freeing municipal elections from the disturbing influences of State and national politics. To make this provision effective the Citizens' Union of New York, composed of citizens regardless of their partisan affiliations, was organized. Its first campaign was in 1897, when it nominated Low, a Republican, for first mayor of Greater New York and was defeated by Tammany Hall. In 1901 (the previous term having been for four years) it made a fusion with the Republicans, with Low as a candidate for mayor, and the ticket won. In 1903, with Low again at the head of the ticket, it again fused with the Republicans, but was defeated by Tammany with McClellan as the mayoralty candidate.

At the time of its organization, the Citizens' Union stood for the "good government" idea, which McClellan has borrowed from it for the use of Tammany. It has also stood all along for the idea of municipal ownership and operation of public service utilities, and it has actually secured the establishment of a municipal ferry from the Battery to Staten Island, which will be in full municipal operation early in the Fall. But while it has stood for the principle of municipal ownership and operation that feature of the organization was never much emphasized. Most of the emphasis was placed upon the "good government" features. Consequently, some of the bitterest adversaries of municipal ownership and operation were large contributors to the funds of the Union. If they paid any attention at all to the municipal ownership planks in their platform, it was only to regard these complacently as a necessary sop to the radical element in their ranks, whose votes were worth getting provided their radicalism was treated as something to be patronizingly considered but never put in practice.

But as municipal ownership sentiment began to crystallize, municipal ownership issues to take shape, and

believers in municipal ownership to take sides, the Citizens' Union gave more emphasis, properly and honestly, to its municipal ownership principles. At this, most of its financial backers indignantly withheld their contributions. They accused the Union of abandoning the good government principles in which they believed, and of running off after the socialistic and revolutionary principles of municipal ownership in which they did not believe. It has consequently come about that the Citizens' Union, as it has gained strength for the kind of good citizenship that objects to being plundered in a large way by monopoly corporations as well as in a small way by corrupt politicians, has lost strength financially.

Naturally enough, this has been followed by considerable confusion in the counsels of the organization, which will yet have to be fought out. Outspoken demands for a candid municipal ownership and operation policy are made by some of the leading members, and supported by many more. The only step that has been officially taken, however, has been to call a conference of civic organizations. This was done at a meeting on the 22d. The public were astounded the next morning to observe that the traditional enemy of the Citizens' Union, Tammany Hall, had been included in the call. It was done, however, only against vigorous protests. It means, of course, that the members of the Union who favor an endorsement of McClellan, were in the ascendant at the meeting.

If all depended upon the Citizens' Union it is not probable that the question of municipal ownership and operation would enter into the approaching municipal campaign. But the forces in that organization which favor municipal ownership and operation, are supplemented by the activities of the Municipal Ownership League. These are tending toward an independent campaign, against Tammany Hall and all its allies, for municipal ownership and operation of public service utilities.

The chief difficulty confronting this movement, and all other efforts to the same end, is the elusiveness of anything like a concrete issue. Public sentiment is alive—nowhere more so. But politics always abhors the academic, and the moment you put your finger on a practical issue it seems to fade away.

The new subway question ought to furnish a practical issue of the first order. Everybody realizes that the city was mercilessly robbed by its "best citizens," in connection with the existing subway. There is abundant indignation, therefore at the brazen efforts of the same "best citizens,"

backed by Tammany Hall, to hand out franchises for a vast system of new subways which the people need and demand. If a referendum were possible, the vote for municipal ownership and operation of this new system would doubtless be overwhelming. Here, then, would seem to be an issue for the Fall campaign—a ticket and a platform pledged to public operation of the new subways.

But no. The capitalists have so tied up the power of the city, that the question of public or private operation of the new subways could not be affected by the municipal election. A Rapid Transit board, self-perpetuating, highly respectable, thoroughly plutocratic, and bent on handing out franchise plunder, can legally determine this question to-morrow. They could determine it in the middle of the campaign; they could determine it against municipal operation after the election had put into office a full quota of officials in favor of municipal operation. The people are simply helpless—bound hand and foot by vicious legislation through which they are to be bound in the future by vested interests.

Whether or not a campaign for municipal ownership and operation, under these circumstances, would be of value for its moral effect, there is no escaping the fact that the circumstances furnish plausible excuses for opposing such a campaign and for apologetically opposing municipal ownership candidates, should such a campaign be made.

Another practical issue seems at first blush to be available. This is the question of gas franchises. All the gas franchises which have not already expired, will expire by 1907. What better practical issue could be desired for a municipal ownership campaign? Why not make the election turn, then, upon the taking over by the city of the gas service? The Municipal Ownership League asks itself that question and may try to make this the issue. But the response is: How can the city take over the gas service without authority from the legislature which it does not possess, and which the Republican legislature will not give to it? This response is obviously evasive. Because the city has not the legal power now, that is no reason for going to sleep over its rights. If a municipal ownership campaign could be effectively made this Fall, on the issue of municipal ownership and operation of the gas service, the legislature might not be so slow in giving to the city the necessary authority. What is needed is an emphatic expression of the public opinion which unquestionably exists in New York in favor of municipal operation. The coon doesn't always have to be shot before he comes down.

L. F. P.

Ministers are often leaders in reform; churches never. Why?—The Crown, of Newark, N. J.

NEWS NARRATIVE

Week ending Thursday, May 25.

The Chicago Teamsters' Strike.

A settlement of the Chicago strike (p. 101), satisfactorily to the employers' union, the team owners' union, and the teamsters' union, has been prevented by the seven express companies that center in Chicago, and the danger to public order which so large a strike involves is now more threatening than ever.

Further conferences between the team owners' union and the teamsters' union (p. 101) resulted on the 18th in an offer by the latter to arbitrate their mutual obligations and to agree meanwhile to the delivery of goods by union teamsters to all strike-bound establishments that would consent to an arbitration with the strikers. Arrangements for arbitration between the teamsters and the team owners were accordingly made. But the importance of these adjustments was overshadowed on the 19th by negotiations between the teamsters' union and the employers' union relative to a complete settlement of the strike.

The pacific negotiations brought forth a proposition from the employers' union submitting the following terms for settlement:

(1) All strikers will be taken back as fast as vacancies occur without discrimination, except as to those guilty of violations of the law.

(2) The express companies will adhere to their decision not to re-employ any of the strikers.

(3) The Employers' Teacing Company will continue doing business along the lines laid down when it was organized, viz., of employing only non-union teamsters.

(4) A calling off of the strike will be followed by policemen and deputy sheriffs being relieved from further strike duty.

(5) No nonunion teamster will be discharged to make room for a striker.

(6) The State street department stores will re-employ as many of their old employes as there are vacancies.

(7) Strikers who are re-employed will be permitted to wear their union buttons.

These terms were reported on the 21st as acceptable in their general features to the strikers' committee, the only objection being to the