

whether the mere appropriators of the earth shall control distribution without contributing to production. On that issue Mr. Baer and his kind stand for the appropriators, while the spokesmen of the producers are the "street corner blather-skites," as Mr. Baer lovingly calls them.

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ANOTHER GREAT LAND STEAL.

The "muck-raker" is again at his foul work of exposing respectable thieves. This time the victims of his malignant veracity are some very excellent gentlemen, enterprising men of "business," who were about to develop the coal mining interests of the West. They had hardly got beyond the preliminary stages of bribing a lot of poor devils to take up undeveloped coal fields as settlers upon agricultural land, and to turn the titles over to them, when the contemptible "muck-raker" got upon their trail. And now they may not only be obliged to abandon their patriotic developing enterprise; they may also lose the loot they have corruptly bought with a price, and some of them may peradventure go to the penitentiary, like vulgar thieves of the "lower orders."

These "captains of industry" (or should it be "chevalier d'industrie"?) will probably pay roundly for their misadventure. They have failed in the perpetration of a legal crime, and verily there is no business crime like failure in legal crime. But after all, the injury to the people had these enterprising business men succeeded, would not have been so much in the theft of titles to this rich public land, as in the titles themselves. In other words, the great injury to the people in such matters consists not in stealing land titles, but in profiting by land titles whether stolen or not.

We are accustomed to look with horror upon thefts of land titles, and it is right we should. But the loss to the people, accruing through a perpetual diversion of community values year by year from the community to individuals whose claims rest upon ownership of the sites where these values accumulate, is the real loss; and that is a loss which the community suffers whether titles are regular or fraudulent.

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Consider for a moment the difference between stealing from government a horse, and stealing a title to government coal deposits.

The theft of the horse involves a genuine financial loss to the government. But in a few years this loss must occur without the theft, for the horse would die. The effect of the theft would pass away with lapse of time. True, the thief

might by his theft have hammered out another nail for the coffin of his dying character. He might be detected and imprisoned. The act, as a matter of personal morality, and its economic result, might be for the time, both to the thief and the people, precisely the same as if the subject of the theft had been a title to coal deposits. But not so with reference to the continuing economic results.

The coal land title would never die. As long as the same government stood, and the same confusions as to property rights persisted, this title would give to the thief, his heirs and assigns, a legal right and an economic power which would not in the case of the horse survive the animal's life. It would give him in perpetuity the power to levy an increasing tribute upon the annual output of the industries of the community to which the coal deposits in question might be tributary. In the case of these Western coal fields, for instance, the stolen titles would enable their illegal possessors to exact a higher and higher proportion of the product, without limit of time, as the people of the United States came to be more and more dependent upon the natural coal deposits which that stolen title would command.

On the one hand, the economic effects of the theft of such property as horses—objects of human propagation and limited duration—soon pass away. On the other, the economic effects of the theft of such property as coal lands, never pass away. They enable the possessor to exact tribute of industry forever, with the power and the regularity of a robber baron and the ethical insistence of a moral law.

But theft is not an element in distinguishing the difference. The same result follows whether horse and land title are honestly and legally, or dishonestly and illegally, obtained from the government. In the one case as in the other, the loss to the people is determined not by theft or sale, but by the subject of the theft or the sale. In the case of such things as horses, it is limited by the life of the horse and the virtually stationary value of horses; in the case of the coal land, there is no limitation either as to length of time or increase in value.

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It would be difficult, perhaps, to indicate the difference we have here tried to point out, in fewer words than those of the *New York Journal of Commerce*, one of the most conservative of the old and influential newspapers of the United States. In an editorial of the 28th that staid old paper told its readers that—

All the substance constituting wealth must come from resources belonging to the country through the labor and co-operation of its people, and . . . every scheme or device which prevents an equitable distribution of the proceeds of that labor and co-operation, which diverts to one or to some any part of what fairly and honestly belongs to others, is in its essence stealing and robbery.

The mere stealing of government land titles, let it be observed, is no different in essence from buying those titles. The substance of the injury to the people is not the stealing of the titles; it is the preventing of "an equitable distribution of the proceeds" of the "labor and co-operation" of the people, through which "all the substance constituting wealth must come from resources belonging to the country." Whatever be the scheme or device whereby an equitable distribution of those proceeds is prevented, it "is in its essence stealing and robbery." It makes no difference in the long run whether the device be legal or illegal. The essential consideration in such matters as the diversion of natural coal deposits from governmental to private ownership, is not the method or device whereby it is done, but the fact that it is done at all.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

NORTH DAKOTA'S AWAKENING.

Mayville, N. D., Nov. 26.—The wave of reform which has been sweeping over States to the East has just reached us here, and its freshening influence upon the body politic is both delightful and invigorating. For more than a decade the public affairs of this State have been controlled by the railway corporations through their ownership of the machinery of the Republican party; and, although several fights have been made against such domination, their grip seemed to be continually growing stronger. During all of the time since its admission to the Union, North Dakota has been entirely in the hands of the Republican party, except during the years 1892-94, when a Populist-Democratic administration held the reins of government. The Democrats have always been in the minority; and, although the Republican lead was cut down to 5,000 in the Bryan campaign of 1896, in 1904 with Parker as candidate for the Presidency, the State gave Roosevelt a majority of nearly 40,000 and elected the Republican candidate for governor, E. Y. Sarles, over M. F. Hegge, the Democratic nominee, by more than 30,000.

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A growing demand for a primary election law compelled the Republicans to declare in favor of such a measure in their platform of two years ago, but upon their return to power they passed a bill which was far from satisfactory in that it gave the people no direct vote on the nomination of State officers, applying only to county officials and delegates to

State conventions. In the meantime there was coming to be felt within the party a strong influence opposed to the continued domination of the corporations; and upon the passage of a primary election measure, which was regarded as a betrayal of the people's cause, the murmurings grew louder and the signs of dissatisfaction more evident. Then began the formation of "good government leagues" in different parts of the State. Before long, two distinct factions were arrayed against each other, fighting for the control of the Republican organization—the "gang" and the "insurgents."

The former of these two, the "gang," representing the railroad and corporation interests and headed by Alexander McKenzie of "Looting of Alaska" fame, was very loath to relinquish a hold which had proved for over ten years to be both pleasant and profitable, and gave battle to the "insurgents" at the primaries in June last, electing a large majority of the delegates to the convention called for nominating State officers. If the "insurgents" were somewhat unfortunate in the matter of leadership, the quality of the rank and file went a long way toward making up for such defect, the sturdy Scandinavian-American citizens constituting the "backbone" of the movement. The "gang" had complete control of the Republican State convention at Jamestown in July, and insisted upon renominating for governor the man whose home county, Trall, had sent a solid "insurgent" delegation against his candidacy, and placed with him upon the ticket men in every way satisfactory to the corporate interests.

Among the matters of importance coming before the convention was the placing in nomination of a candidate for the vacancy upon the Supreme bench caused by the resignation of Justice N. C. Young. For this position the "insurgents," holding among their good government principles a firm belief in a non-partisan judiciary, voted as a unit for a Democrat, Charles J. Fisk, Judge of the First Judicial District, who has long been regarded by men of all parties as without a peer upon the District bench of the State. The "gang," flushed with their triumph at the primaries and grown arrogant with thoughts of their own strength, refused to conciliate the "insurgents" by conceding to their wishes in the matter of the judgeship, and placed in nomination John Knauf, a man better known as a politician than as a lawyer, who, it is contended, was given a place on the ticket as a reward for party services. At once upon the announcement that Knauf was to be the nominee of the convention, Associate Justice Engerud of the Supreme Court declared that, in the event of Knauf's election, he would resign from the bench, as he regarded him as without qualifications and unfit for such a position. As soon as the convention adjourned, Governor Sarles appointed Mr. Knauf to serve until a successor to Justice Young should be elected.

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When the Democrats assembled in convention at Minot in August, they adopted a splendid declaration of principles, including demands for justice in taxation as between the corporations and the people, a complete primary election law, the initiative and referendum, and the enactment of an anti-pass law,