

to line with the "extreme reactionary elements" and itself begun to help "confuse the issue by co-operating with special interests that hope to place in the Mayor's chair a man who can be 'used'?"

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Corporation Land-Hunger.

A gum shoe campaign for the legalization of corporate land-grabbing has been started by the Real Estate Board of Chicago. Under the existing laws of Illinois, corporations cannot own land except for their own commercial business uses. But in evasion of this law, business corporations buy building sites upon which they erect structures for their own use; and as they require for that use only a small part of these structures, they rent the rest for other business and professional purposes. It is in this way that big business corporations manage to own "skyscrapers" in spite of the law. The parts they rent, though vastly larger and more valuable than the parts they use, are regarded as a "by-product." Sometimes business corporations are organized in order to invest in real estate, their ostensible business being hardly more than a "cover" or "blind."

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Something is to be said for all this, even if it is evasive of the law. It necessitates improvement. As you can't do a banking business, for instance, on a vacant lot, a banking corporation, whether it owns land in good faith for its own uses or is a "cover" or "blind" for real estate investments, is of necessity an improver of the land. As a rule it is a good improver. But the scheme that the Real Estate Board is trying to "gum-shoe" through the legislature would be very different in its results in that respect. Let corporations own land at will, regardless of obligations to improve, and the pernicious vacant lot industry would be fostered more than any other.

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If this law is to be enacted, there ought to be provision in it for forfeiting all sites owned by corporations which remain unimproved for more than ten years. Or, better yet, the sites owned by corporations should be taxed close up to full commercial interest on their market value, with complete exemption for improvements. This would be the best possible incentive to keeping the property fully improved, and in turn it would have a strong tendency to stimulate the building trades. Unless the Real Estate Board's bill carries some such provision it ought to be defeated. No good purpose can be served by authorizing corporations to speculate in building sites. On the contrary, a

very bad purpose would be served. They would monopolize vacant land and obstruct improvement by abnormally enhancing the value of sites. They would create perpetual titles, for corporations never die. They would make it possible for alien people though enemies, to own the country under stock-certificate titles. They would enable corporations to concentrate the ownership of farming lands in but few hands in perpetuity. They would establish a system of absentee and rack-renting landlordism, in comparison with which the landlordism of Ireland at its worst would be as boy's play.

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The Free Street-Car Idea.

One of the best criticisms we have seen of the newspaper jabs at Mayor Johnson for suggesting 'free street cars, appears over the signature of William N. Hill in the Baltimore News of February 27th. The News had likened the free street car suggestion to free lodging and free board, whereupon its correspondent sensibly wrote: "There is nothing new to friends of Mr. Johnson in his proposed free street cars. I heard and read his arguments for this proposed change 20 years ago. The ground upon which the argument is based is exactly the same as for free public schools and free water—that it is cheaper for the community to supply itself with these things than to depend upon private enterprise. Experience has amply proved this to be true, so far as water and education are concerned, and it almost goes without saying that a like result would come from free street cars. How far the sphere of public activities is to be enlarged in future I do not think any man can prophesy, but it needs little argument to convince any person of ordinary intelligence that all business which requires a permanent mechanical attachment to the public highways for the purpose of operation should be publicly owned and operated. Your confusing reference to 'free board' and 'free lodging' is not worthy of your standard of editorial criticism. Though most large cities are required to give both to large numbers of people in these times of great 'prosperity,' owing to the great increase of pauperism, there is no reason to suggest any intention of Mr. Johnson or his friends to invade this field of private enterprise in the near future. One can live in free quarters for a long time in New York if his necessities require him to do so. So can he in Baltimore. Mr. Johnson's proposition is predicated on the principle that the saving of the nickels which the people now contribute to the railway companies would be reflected back in an increase of