

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'?"

+ +

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."

+

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.

+

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.

+ +

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

land values, which increase would be covered into the public treasury by taxation. There can be no question as to the truth of this position. In order to have complete economic justice behind the demand for public ownership of public utilities we will find the necessity for the only just system of taxation—a tax on land according to its value.”

+ +

Disappointed.

The corporation crowd in Chicago politics have looked forward with keen interest to the appearance of George Kibbe Turner's article in McClure's Magazine for April. It was to appear in the very nick of time to defeat Mayor Dunne by holding him up to the awe-stricken gaze of the good people of Chicago as a protector of vice. But before Mr. Turner's article appeared, Mayor Dunne's adversary had been exposed by the Prohibitionists as a man whose affiliations and habits of life are so "growsome," as Jenkin Lloyd Jones expresses it, as to make such Republicans as Mr. Jones turn with nausea away from him. When the article did appear, it was utterly without value as an anti-Dunne campaign document. It describes vicious conditions in Chicago that are characteristic of all large cities, and cannot be removed by law or anything else short of social regeneration. But not only is there no attempt by McClure's to hold Mayor Dunne responsible for these conditions; such a purpose is plainly disclaimed in the article and expressly so by the publishers.

+

Indeed, if the article had dealt at all with the Dunne administration, it could not fairly have been silent about his suppression of open vice and crime. On this subject Alexander Cleland reports to Graham Taylor of the Chicago Commons:

After close observation for the past three years, much of it done in relation to the work of the Law and Order League, the Midnight Mission and the Young Men's Christian Association, I feel confident that during this period the conditions have grown steadily better and that at the present time the city of Chicago is much freer from open and flagrant vice than at any time within my knowledge of conditions. I would say in reference to conditions in the West Side Levee district, which have called forth such keen newspaper criticism, that said criticism was not justified by the facts. Chief Collins was only asked to clear up the car lines; namely, Sangamon, Randolph and Lake, and Peoria was left in its present condition by a tacit understanding with the different people connected with the bettering of conditions in that section. Frequent visitations during the past few weeks show definitely that there has been no lifting of the lid in this section. The conditions are better than ever before. I think

that it is only fair to state that in no case has this administration been called upon to suppress vice in which it has not been ready and willing to co-operate with the various organizations with which I am connected, newspaper reports notwithstanding. I beg to call your attention to Mr. Arthur Burrage Farwell's statement made at a meeting at the Y. M. C. A. on the 12th inst., at which, among other things, he said: "That, regarding the wide open town, he had lived in Chicago since 1869, and he believed that, considering the increase in the population of the city, the city of Chicago was in better shape regarding the wide open town than it had been since 1873."

To the same effect is the following letter of the chairman of the Anti-Crime League, T. J. Stead, a Republican, to the City Council, made as late as February 14th last:

We think the benefits resulting from the increased police force last year must be apparent to the most casual observer; as this organization, whose time is devoted to crime, police and police work and who make a special study of these conditions, finds them one hundred per cent better than a year ago and Chicago to-day freer from crime, vice and lawlessness than it has ever been in its history.

+ +

The Chicago Tribune and the School Board.

When the Chicago school board sued the Chicago Tribune to set aside as fraudulent its transaction with a prior school board (p. 1212), through which a ground lease with 90 years to run upon condition of readjustment of ground rentals every ten years, was turned into a 90-year lease with a flat rental on the basis of the low values of 1895; the Tribune published a report of the event so expurgated that hardly more appeared than the bare statement that some kind of lawsuit had been started against it. But in the same issue it devoted nearly a column of editorial space to a labored attempt at exculpation.

+

In that editorial the Tribune asserted that one of the conditions of the alteration of its lease was that it should erect an expensive building. There was no such condition. An effort to make that condition was voted down by the Tribune's friendly majority. The same editorial asserted that it did erect a building costing \$1,750,000. But its friends in the taxing office estimate the value of this building for taxation (the ground is exempt) as hardly more than half that amount—a little above \$900,000. For these and other misrepresentations in that editorial, the Tribune used so much space that it had none left to explain how it happened that its own lawyer, who was on the school board that altered its lease, came to take the lead in engineering the alteration.