

Competition vs. Monopoly

By GEORGE L. RECORD

In Everybody's Magazine

NOTE—The writer is a prominent "insurgent" and a zealous fighter against boss rule. He deals with a subject of much interest to all who are desirous of bettering conditions. Readers of The Guide are invited to discuss this subject if they have any well thought out scheme of reform.—Ed.

For several years, in newspapers, magazines and speeches, the people have been educated as to the injustice of social conditions in the country. The most of this matter, however, has been devoted to an exposure of some wrong, an explanation of how some men, or sets of men, have built up fortunes out of some monopoly or privilege. If any remedy has been suggested, it has been a partial one; but generally the writers have been content to arouse public opinion to the existence of the wrong, leaving to the future the development of the remedy.

It seems to me it is now time to attempt to formulate a complete plan of reform, adequate to remedy the existing injustice of which the public mind is conscious. I think it is possible to outline such a plan, so that it can be easily understood.

The first thing to determine is the underlying social principle, the violation of which has caused the injustice we are trying to remedy. The Socialists say that the trouble is due to the principle of competition; that the remedy is the suppression of competition, and the substitution thereof of the principle of co-operation. I contend that the Socialist philosophy is fundamentally unsound; that the trouble is not competition, but the suppression of competition and the establishment of monopoly in its place. The proof of this point is found in the fact that not a single large fortune was ever built up in any business that was purely competitive; but that all such fortunes are clearly traceable to some form of advantage or privilege, by which the favored ones were able to escape the law of competition under which their competitors were obliged to work. We must, therefore, work out our remedy on the theory that monopoly, and not competition, is the source of our trouble.

The principle of monopoly is applied

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in this country in five ways, and only five, and to one or more of them can be traced every fortune in America. I propose briefly to outline these five monopolies, and show how they can be abolished.

The first is our system of indirect taxation. This includes the tariff, the internal revenue, the new corporation tax, in the nation; the tax or charge levied by the states for so-called franchises, or corporation charters; and the excise fees and taxes on personal property and improvements levied by municipal governments. All these should go. The national government should fix its budget or appropriations annually, and levy upon each state for its quota. The state in turn should fix its budget annually, including therein the amount levied for the national government, and levy upon each county for its quota. The county should fix its budget annually, including therein the amount needed for national and state purposes, and levy upon each municipality for its quota. The municipal government should, in turn, fix its budget annually, including therein the amount needed for county, state, and nation, and raise this amount by a direct tax upon the land values of the community. The owner of land, under this system, would pay all taxes directly, and no one would be taxed indirectly. The individual taxpayer should find plainly stated upon his tax bill how much he is compelled to pay to the municipality, how much to the county, how much to the state, and how much to the national government.

How to Get Rich

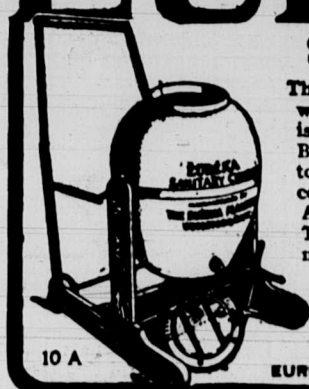
Consider the immense advantage of this system in simplicity, in certainty, and in its effect in enforcing economical government. It merely applies the plainest principle of business; that the man who pays should know exactly what he is getting, and precisely what it is costing him. In every blind and indirect system, those least able to protect themselves always pay more than their just share of the burden, and they do it only because they do not know, and cannot find out, the real facts.

The second monopoly grows out of our patent laws. Without the government grant of a limited monopoly, no inventor could make money out of his invention. If, then, the government enables an inventor to realize upon his invention, should not the government share directly in the benefits which it thus directly creates? This, again, is the business principle. Every patent should be granted upon condition that anybody can obtain a license from the government to use it, on paying a royalty fixed by the government, of which the government should have half and the inventor half. This would prevent the suppression of patented improvements upon inventions which monopolies now hold, would prevent any huge fortune growing out of a patent, and would insure and maintain competition among the users of patented inventions.

The third form of monopoly is in the railroad, telegraph, telephone, express, Pullman palace car, trolley, electric light, gas and water businesses. All these utilities should be owned and operated by the governments of the nation, or municipality. This would squeeze out all watered stock, lower all the charges for the services of these companies, cut down the prices of all commodities into the price of which these charges enter, and abolish gambling in these securities. It would stop the rebating, private car privileges, control of mines, privileges to favored shippers, etc. Incidentally, besides restoring competition by abolishing privilege, government ownership and operation of public utilities would remove the most powerful sources of corruption of our local, state and national governments.

The fourth monopoly is land. This is the greatest monopoly of all. It includes mines, oil wells, terminal lands of railroad companies, and wharfing privileges. It grows out of the absurdity of applying

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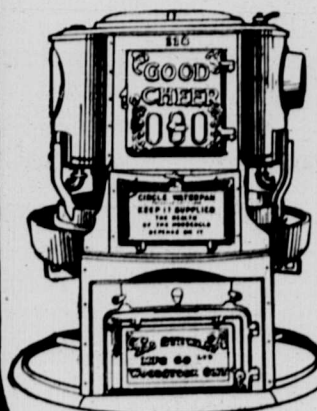
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