

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTION AND MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP.

For some years the London (England) county council has been controlled by a majority called the Progressives, who have favored the establishment of municipal electric plants and tramways. At the elections held in March the Progressives were defeated. The opponents of the municipal ownership idea in all parts of the country are active in directing attention to the result as an argument against municipal ownership.

The New York *Tribune*, in an article headed "The Wastrels' Waterloo," says that the result is not void of significance with regard to national affairs, and "will doubtless be regarded, not as a rebuke to the Government, but as an admonition to adhere to these democratic standards of true Liberalism which have marked the real strength of its party, and not to forsake them for the will-o'-the-wisps of Socialism and the Commune." The New York *Times*, in an article condemning municipal ownership as a "swindle," remarks that Socialism everywhere is undergoing destructive exposures. The *Evening Post* says that the result not only affects the administration of London, but will have its influence on the whole English-speaking world.

The English *Municipal Journal*, in referring to the results of the election, says:

What is the municipal meaning of the London county council elections? The outstanding facts are clear enough. The Progressives are superceded by the Moderates, and the Moderates control almost as large a majority as that formerly held by the Progressive. The reactionary newspapers are claiming the result as a victory for anti-municipalism. They say that London has "revolted against municipal trading," and they urge that an example so inspiring should be copied by the country. The truth of the matter is that London has done nothing of the kind, and that under no conceivable circumstances would provincial municipal authorities dream of following an example set by the metropolis because the metropolis set it

Issues that Were Not Issues.

Let us get down to the facts. What were the extreme municipal proposals contained in the Progressive program? Or rather, what were they not? Because the Moderates secured a valuable electoral advantage by opposing schemes which the Progressives never advocated. They set up ninepins for the pleasure of knocking them down. Amongst these issues that were not issues were:

1. A municipal coal supply.
2. A municipal milk supply.
3. Municipal boot shops.
4. Municipal restaurants.
5. Municipal pawnshops.
6. Municipal general shops.

The Progressives never advocated one of these issues, so they could not have been beaten on them. A man who sets an "Aunt Sally" on its legs and then knocks it down flat is not exactly a victor. The "triumph" is not one that does him much credit, nor is he inclined to boast about it in circles in which he is intimately known. Only amongst outsiders, whose acquaintance with him is less than casual, does "Aunt Sally's" discomfiture assume any significance—a kind of suspected significance.

The Socialists

There were two "municipal trading issues" at the London county council elections, and they were tramways and electricity. There was not one other, and that is proved by the simple fact that the Progressives, officially or unofficially, never advocated another. It is true that the Socialists rushed in with one of their usual manifestoes. But the Progressives have nothing to do with the Socialists, and not a single Socialist was successful. The manifesto

was Socialist from the first line to the last, and it was at once repudiated by the Progressive leaders. The Moderates stuck it up as an "Aunt Sally," and scored by it. Saturday's Moderate victory was, as a matter of fact, a triumph for "Aunt Sally."

We come now to the two municipal trading issues—tramways and electricity. If the professions of the Moderate party be sincere, then the new council is a municipal tramways council. "It would be madness to sell, lease or dispose of the trams," said the Moderate leader a few weeks before the election. By leaflet, poster and speech, the Moderates indignantly repudiated the suggestion that the Moderate party was unfavorable towards municipal tramways.

Tramways

Where, then, does London now stand in regard to this matter? It stands now, more than ever it did, for municipalisation. The party that gave a lease of the northern system to a company, and that six and even three years ago defended that policy and recommended its extension, dared not at this London county council campaign preserve its traditional attitude. There were about 260 candidates for the 118 seats. Not one of these opposed municipal tramways. Three years ago, and six years ago, half of them opposed municipal tramways.

Where is to be found in this a "set back" to municipal trading?

Electricity

The other "municipal trading" issue was electricity supply. Here, again, no one "inside" the recent campaign can honestly say that a blow was struck against the principle of municipalism. Even the Moderates, who were financially and electorally supported by electric lighting companies, had to advocate a full measure of public control over private enterprise. What occurred in regard to this question was that the voters were frightened by the ceaseless talk about "millions of debt"—one of the Moderate leaflets got it up to 153 millions just before polling day, and had there been another three weeks or so for campaigning the national debt total would have been doubled before the end. Another "Aunt Sally"!

THE ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD.

The Local Government Board, one of the largest offices in the home civil service is a Parliamentary department. Just as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has acquired by custom of the constitution sole responsibility for the financial policy once shared with the Lords of the Treasury, so since 1871 the president of the Local Government Board has been solely responsible to the ministry and Parliament for all that has been done. The nominal board never meets. Its sole remaining use is that in the absence of the president one of its members may affix a *pro forma* signature. The president receives the relatively low salary of £2,000 (which will probably soon be increased to £4,000 or £6,000), his Parliamentary secretary £1,200, the permanent secretary £1,800, the five assistant secretaries £1,000 to £1,200, each presiding over one of the five sections into which the work of the board is divided (these five sections being again divided into eleven departments). In 1902 the junior clerks numbered upwards of 350 besides an army of expert officials. An annual examination is held for the clerkships of the upper division, and the competition is very severe, the successful candidates being usually men who have graduated with high honors at the universities. Clerkships in the second division require only an ordinary commercial education. The board's budget in 1900 was £197,085. The president is usually now a member of the Cabinet, but not necessarily or always.