

LIVE QUESTIONS.

A Series of Articles Contributed by Advanced Thinkers.

TRUSTS AND MONOPOLIES.

We have seen that trusts and monopolies are rapidly increasing in number as well as in power; that they are good potentially, but bad practically; that, excluding agriculture, they control about three-fourths of all capital engaged in productive industry; that they extort yearly about \$1,000,000,000 from our people, and that they are largely responsible for our 5,000 millionaires and our 500,000 tramps, the majority of whom are willing to do honest work.

Higher prices, restricted production, less work and lower wages are great evils, but perhaps the worst evils of trusts are public corruption and unequal and unjust distribution of products. To obtain, maintain and strengthen monopolies bribes are given directly or indirectly by the officers of trusts and are taken by senators, congressmen and state and municipal legislators. Shrewd and unscrupulous men gravitate to the head of corporations and trusts because they are willing to lobby to obtain advantage of their honest competitors. Men buy votes that they may have a vote to sell. Political speculators abound wherever valuable franchises and spe-



BYRON W. HOLT.

cial privileges are "given away" to the corporation that knows best how to grease legislative machinery. While monopoly profits and prices are possible politicians will be corrupt.

Neither the Australian ballot system, proportional representation, the initiative and referendum nor any other method of voting or legislating will make politics pure while present monopoly conditions exist. Even when we succeed in making laws that pinch or threaten to pinch trusts they are defied and broken. Our last census is grossly defective because many trusts made false returns or, like the Sugar trust, openly defied all census laws and made no returns whatever. Our most dangerous anarchists are our monopolists.

Because of monopoly profits and low wages our laborers are unable to buy back as consumers anything like the whole of what they produce, therefore both the labor market and the goods market are constantly congested. When this congestion is at its worst, we have panics. You can't have exorbitant monopoly prices and profits without paupers and plagues. We can get rid of one only by getting rid of the other.

Before discussing the remedies for trusts we will notice that the evils of trusts grow out of monopolies and that monopolies rest upon three kinds of laws:

1. Patents, copyrights, franchise grants, etc.
2. Tariff and other trade restricting legislation.
3. Legislation permitting private ownership of the opportunities to production.

Most of the present tried or proposed remedies for trusts consist of federal and state antitrust laws and interstate commerce acts. In spite of the fact that hundreds of trusts are openly and constantly defying these laws and that no trust of importance has lost its grip or changed anything except its location or form because of any decision of any court, the people still seem to think that a government fiat, if made strong enough, could kill all trusts. It would be a pity to destroy them outright and to lose their power for good, and it is well that we cannot do so. They are a development of modern industry and they are here to stay.

Many of our eminent lawyers and judges expect no beneficial results from antitrust legislation. Some think it both unconstitutional and harmful because it is governmental interference with the right of private contract and business. It is favored by politicians because it serves to still for a time the clamor of the plundered people.

We cannot hope to get rid of the evils of trusts until we somehow change radically that legislation which makes such a fertile soil for the roots of monopoly. Savages have no trouble with trusts; neither would anarchists if they could realize their ideal and abolish all law. But the most of us are unwilling to become either savages or anarchists to get rid of the evils of trusts, great as they are. Socialists offer us a heroic remedy. They propose to gobble up all trusts, present and prospective, into one grand governmental trust or monopoly. As we would all be stockholders in this great trust, as well as consumers of its products, we would not mind being robbed, for we would then get our share of the plunder. Socialists and nationalists therefore hail with delight the formation of every great trust. They think it hastens the day of governmental ownership of all capital and land. Socialism is a possible remedy, for it proposes to go to the root of the evil. It sees no other way of securing even an approxima-

tion to a just distribution of products, and it believes that human nature would stand the strain of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." More of us might be socialists if we did not believe that the most of us would be shirks, under favorable circumstances, and if we did not see a better solution of the problem.

Our patent law system should be revised or abolished. But the worst evils of trusts are not occasioned by patents. Our tariff legislation, as well as our system of internal taxation, fosters trusts and adds greatly to their evils. They, with all kinds of indirect taxes, must be abolished before we can stop plundering on a magnificent scale. Our Sugar, Steel Rail, Steel Billet, Nail and Window Glass trusts are samples of those that are almost entirely tariff trusts. They might exist were there no tariff, but it would be only because they can produce more economically than can small producers. They could no longer make exorbitant monopoly profits.

What are termed "natural monopolies" can best be dealt with either by government ownership or control or by taxing them to death. Municipal ownership of gas, water and electric light plants has everywhere demonstrated its superiority to private ownership. It should be greatly extended and should include docks and perhaps also grain elevators and telephones. Railroads, like rivers, canals and public highways, are natural monopolies and should be owned and operated or owned and leased for short periods by federal, state and municipal governments. There is no other way of keeping monopoly profits from going into private pockets or of giving the public the full benefit of our iron and steel highways. Discriminating rates to preferred or favored shippers will cease only when private ownership ceases.

Discriminating rates, it should be noted, are responsible for some of our greatest trusts. But for them the Standard Oil and Beef and Coal trusts might never have been born. Under governmental ownership all shippers would be treated alike, and the millions of dollars that have been returned as drawbacks to favored shippers are today, in violation of federal laws, being returned to the Sugar, Beef, Oil and Iron trusts, would be saved to non-trust shippers. Practically all of the unearned and undeserved profits of the Beef and Standard Oil trusts have come from alliances with transportation companies.

The fear of a governmental or office-holding oligarchy is a bugaboo kept before the people by those who are giving \$1,000 bribes to legislators with one hand and are pocketing \$1,000,000 monopoly profits (largely stock jobbing ones) with the other hand. There is more political corruption where such natural monopolies as gas and water works, steam and street railways, are in private hands than where they are under public control. The armies of post-masters and public school teachers are not as great a menace to good government as are the officers of railroads who deal in public grants and municipal franchises and who are constantly making and unmaking officeholders, making favorable and disregarding unfavorable legislation.

Telegraphs and telephones are more or less natural monopolies and should perhaps be entirely or partly owned and operated by government. There is more justification for a public telegraph and telephone system today than there was for a public postal system 100 years ago or than there is now.

There remains but one great class of trusts—those owning mines of coal, oil, ore, borax, etc. Undoubtedly the best way to loosen the grip of these trusts is by taxation, either in the form of royalties or in the form of land value taxes. If Pennsylvania would increase taxes on her coal and oil lands until the full rental value of every acre of these valuable lands was taken in taxation, what would happen? No corporation or league of corporations could afford to pay these taxes and hold mines idle to restrict production. The Reading railroad combine, which now owns practically all of the anthracite coal lands of this country and has them mortgaged for several hundred millions of dollars, would be compelled at once to sell or give away all of the mines that it could not work at a profit. Hundreds of small corporations and mining companies would at once form; competition, stopped in the early seventies, would again appear; twice as much coal would be mined; there would be a great demand for miners; wages would rise as high or higher than they were in 1870; miners would cease to be slaves; corporation stores would disappear; the price of hard coal would be only one-half or two-thirds of present prices in eastern states; both producers and consumers would, in fact, be immensely benefited by such taxation. Not only could Pennsylvania meet all of her expenditures from the taxation of her mines (and thereby lighten the burden of taxation on her citizens), but her politics would be much less corrupt than now.

The same cause applied in other states would produce the same effect upon mines of iron, copper, lead, silver and gold ores, upon veins or deposits of salt, oil, gas, phosphate, borax and, in fact, upon all things produced from mines, forest or stream. Wherever it is possible to tax natural monopolies they should be taxed until the speculative profits of holding them idle disappear. This tax on the opportunities to production is about the only tax that cannot be charged over to and collected from the consumer. It would benefit all and injure none. It is the arch enemy of monopolies and the possible savior of mankind. It would, aided by the other remedies mentioned, stop the unjust and harmful distribution of production which has within 40 years put 53.3 per cent of our wealth into the hands of 8 per cent of our population and has left only 8.1 per cent in the hands of 68 per cent of our people.

BYRON W. HOLT.
New York, April, 1896.

Strings of Mushrooms.
There is a French story of some travellers in Africa who, while on an exploring expedition, ran out of supplies. By chance they came upon a native hut, but it was empty, and the only visible edibles in it were several strings of mushrooms suspended from the rafters to dry. For lack of anything better or more substantial, they stewed these and made a meal of them.

After a while the owner of the hut, who was a powerful native chief and warrior, returned from a hunting expedition, and, having greeted the explorers in a friendly manner, set up a wild howl of despair.

"What is the matter?" asked the explorers.

"They are gone. My evil spirits have sicken them," wailed the chief.

"What are gone?"

"Those, those!" shrieked the chief, pointing to the cut cords on the rafters.

"Why, no evil spirits took them," said the explorers. "We ate them."

The chief seized his stomach in both hands and rattled the bones inside his skin. "Ate what?" he gasped.

"Those dried mushrooms."

"Oh! suffering Moses!" roared the warrior, or words to that effect, "why, you fools! you've eaten the ears of all the enemies I killed in battle!"

The Best Parrot Yarn Yet.
A man whose niece had coaxed him to buy her a parrot succeeded in getting a bird that was warranted a good talker. He brought it home, and, after putting it in a cage, stood before it and said: "Say uncle, Polly!" The bird did not respond, and after repeating the sentence a dozen times or more with no better success, the uncle put his hand into the cage and, grabbing the bird by the neck, shook him until his head wobbled around, all the time yelling to him: "Say uncle, roll over you, my uncle!" The bird looked limp and lifeless, and, disgusted with his purchase, the old fellow took the parrot out into the yard where he had a coop of thirty chickens. Thrusting the limp bird in with the chickens he exclaimed: "There, by gosh! You'll say uncle before you'll get out!" Next morning the uncle went out to see how the parrot was getting on. Looking into the coop he counted twenty-nine dead chickens, and in the centre of the coop stood the parrot on one foot, holding the thirtieth chicken by the neck and shaking it till its head wobbled, and screaming: "Say uncle, roll over you, say uncle!"—New Bedford Standard.

going to school

Do the children go to school? And are they joyous and happy? Is school-life a pleasure? And is progress being made? Or is the opposite true? Does the close of each day bring a headache? There is no appetite and sleep is imperfect. The color gradually leaves the cheeks and only a little effort is followed by exhaustion. To continue school means to come to the end of the year with broken health. What is the best thing to do? Take

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