



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BOSS, THE PARTY, AND THE SYSTEM

GRADUALLY the interests dependent upon grants, franchises, and privileges have enveloped the government, and developed a System that is highly perfected for business uses. Heretofore, corruption has been haphazard, unorganized, irregular, and occasional. It dealt with the individual official at some hazard, and with no assurance of success. Within recent years, however, all this has undergone a change—a change too subtle to be easily discerned, but far more insidious and infinitely more dangerous than the conditions which preceded it, and with which we are familiar. Rome did not appreciate that her liberties had vanished, so long as the senatorial oligarchy observed the cherished forms of the Republic. The Italian despots of a later age were sedulously faithful to the prejudices of democracy and the constitutions of the city republics which they governed. England does not resent the dominion of the landed aristocracy, so long as manhood suffrage, the right of petition, trial by jury, and Magna Charta are secure. And history has been slow in discerning that slavery had woven itself-

into the warp and woof of the government, until it became a System of government as well as an organized privilege prior to the Civil War.

A similar condition has been developed within the past decade in the Northern States of the Union. It has possessed itself of the patronage of city, county, and state. It has enveloped the party and created the machine. Through the machine it controls primaries and conventions; councils and legislatures; mayors and governors. It has even laid its hands upon the courts. This has not been done in an openly corrupt way so much as through the nomination of men of weak or controllable character; men whose predilection, prejudice, or bias is known; men who can be relied upon to stand by the party, to acknowledge the courtesy of the organization, to protect vested wrongs under the fiction of vested rights. All this has been possible, not because the public is indifferent, but because the means employed are so subtle they cannot be easily discerned. There is no crime involved in a campaign contribution, no offence in the control of a party. It is difficult to appreciate that the party is corrupt, for the party is but the organized voice of the people. We cannot believe that the party is no longer a popular organization, when the people are taken into its confidence at every recurring election.

Despite this belief, the party has ceased to rep-

resent the mass of the people who compose it. This appeared in Missouri, where the regular Democracy had become a systematized fence for dealing in franchises and privileges for steam railroads, for the street railways, for the baking-powder and school-book trusts. In Wisconsin, on the other hand, the stalwart Republican organization, which relentlessly assailed Governor La Follette, was in alliance with the railroads, seeking to evade taxation and regulation. During the life of Governor Pingree, the Republican party in Michigan was an organized force of resistance against the efforts of the people to acquire the street railways in Detroit, as well as adequately to tax the railways and mine-owners in the state. In Ohio, the Republican party is little more than a private organization under the control of men whose political influence has been acquired through the franchise corporations in the city and the railways in the state. Through these means they have elevated themselves to office, and then used the powers acquired to secure franchises of great value, to prevent competition, and to evade their proper burdens of taxation. In Pennsylvania the same is true, only there the System involves not only the interests above enumerated, but the protected industries and the mine-owners as well. In New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia the exhibit is the same. In one state the

Republican party forms the structure of the System; in another the Democratic party serves its purpose. In some states, both parties are involved, for the System is indifferent to the means it employs. It is non-partisan in its dealings, but always regular in its methods. All this has been possible because we have made a fetich of party and abandoned our principles to the leaders, to be dealt in as they wished.

For democracy works through the party organization. We have recognized the party by law, but neglected to safeguard its workings. Our votes, in consequence, have become a marketable asset, to be dealt in by men who have organized the party machinery and trade in its power for evil. But the government can rise no higher than the party, for the party is the source of the government. And the party can rise no higher than the ideals of those who control it. And they are those who have discovered its powers to be an Aladdin's lamp in the hands of men who but know the magical symbols.

All this marks a revolution in our government. It began with the years of party regularity subsequent to the Civil War, when indifference on the one hand and national issues on the other rendered dominion of the city easy. During these years the city boss came into power, the result of our indolence. He cemented his control through

the spoils system and an alliance with vice and the saloon. Promiscuous graft strengthened him, while the injection of national policies into local affairs prevented his overthrow. He was and is the natural product of democracy working through the party. But while democracy, unfamiliar with the problems of city government, let itself be drugged by the poison of party regularity, it is no longer primarily responsible for the boss and the machine. For in recent years corruption has been organized into a System of government, which now prevails alongside of the paper one which it controls. And this System is coextensive with the nation; it controls states and territories and ramifies down to city, county, and township. The constituent elements of the System are the party, the boss, the spoils system, campaign contributions, and direct bribery. These are its agencies. Through these means nominations are dictated, conventions controlled, and platforms formulated. In these matters, the boss is the accredited agent, the party and the caucus are the machinery by which his decrees are enforced.

The boss came in through political apathy. He has grown powerful through privilege. He is the natural and logical product of privilege, and he everywhere perpetuates his power through an alliance with it. And the privileges that he now represents are the great natural monopolies which

make use of our streets, the companies which supply transportation, gas, water, electric light, and telephone services. With these are allied the railways, express, telegraph, mining, and tariff-born industries, as well as other interests seeking privileges in the state at large.

Through this development the boss has acquired a business as well as a political significance. He enjoys a dual rôle, in which he not only controls the party; he traffics in legislation as well. The city boss has become the state boss, and the city machine runs into the state machine. And through the perfection of the organization the state boss is making his way into the United States Senate.

Heretofore the city has been governed from the state capital. It is coming to be ruled from the Senate at Washington, from which body a dual oligarchy of private and political interests are gradually extending their dominion over nation, state, and city.

In this new rôle the boss has become a modern feudal baron, who does homage to his superior, levies tribute on society, and distributes favors with a free hand to his retainers as did his prototype of old. He is the link which unites the criminal rich with the criminal poor. For the former he obtains millions in grants, franchises, privileges, and immunity from the burdens of taxation.

To the latter, in payment for election services, he dispenses small gratuities in the form of protection from the police, in jobs, in staying the hand of justice, and in caring for the weak, sick, and helpless in time of need. He organizes the party and devotes himself to its success. He controls the primaries; oversees legislation, and is a sort of "fence" for those who would make use of government for private ends. Party regularity has become a merchantable asset, which he uses for his own political advancement and the promotion of those interests whose agent he is.

It is through such means as these that the great corporations which occupy our streets have become dominant in city affairs. Their major-domo is the boss, who has seized the party machine, the organized agency of democracy, and through it usurped the reins of government as well. This development has created a System highly perfected for business uses. In those states of the North and East, where the city is dominant in state politics, it has reached its highest development. There is no mystery about its workings, no obscurity about its origin. It was born of privilege, just as corruption always has been, and always will be.

In some form or other, this has always been so. Privilege has ever corrupted government. In many instances it has brought about its downfall.

And it has always used an intermediary except when privilege and the government itself were united in the same persons.

In this way the System had its beginning in the city. Its extension to state and national affairs is partly traceable to one of those alliances between the reformer and the politician so common in the history of American cities. The former came to distrust democracy and the people, and rushed to the legislature for relief. Unwilling to face the burdens of self-government, he pushed the responsibility away from his door and laid it upon the legislature, confident that some indirect means would be found of securing results which he had been unable to obtain. And the legislature has ever been ready to amplify its own authority. At the suggestion of the reformer, it took from the city certain functions, and lodged them in state officials appointed by the governor. In this way many of the departments of the city of Boston passed under the control of state officials. Probably one-half of the city's activities, including the control of franchises, the administration of the civil service, the police, the parks, the sewage and water systems are now in the hands of such commissions. In New York, the interference from Albany has been constant in all departments of the city.

This policy has since become universal in other



states. It has led to the classification of cities, to the passing of special acts, to all sorts of "ripper" legislation, by means of which the party in control of the state has wrested the patronage from the party or faction in control of the city. The politician learned readily from the suggestions of the reformer. He reduced state interference to a science. He traded in local legislation, blackmailed a portion of the municipal patronage by striking legislation, introduced only to be called off, or forcibly wrested it from the chosen representatives of the people.

This interference by the state ultimately destroyed the feeling of responsibility on the part of the citizen. He came to feel that the real seat of municipal government was at the state capital, and whatever the success of reform, the fruits were sure to be seized by the state at the dictation of a dispossessed boss. A sense of helplessness has settled down on the community, which has become the football of partisan legislation and spoils politicians.

Gradually there has arisen within the city a revolt against the control of the legislature and the tyranny of these interests. In city after city the franchise question became paramount. In Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Denver, Cleveland, Toledo, and elsewhere, local campaigns have continued to turn upon this issue. Ultimately, the

people resumed a partial control. They passed beyond the dominion of the boss. Privileges and franchises were threatened. A growing sentiment for public ownership has recently developed. Efforts have been made to reduce rates or charges while competition or regulation is being attempted. The companies then retired to the state legislature, for the control which the legislature exercised over the city offered a means of further protection. In response to this necessity, the local boss enlarged the fields of his activity. The same motives that led to the organization of the city for private ends, led also to the control of the state organization for the same purpose.

With the growth of the city, its delegation to the party convention and the legislature increased. Through them the boss acquired a commanding influence in state affairs. He was able to dictate the assembly ticket from his district, and to exercise a controlling influence in the state convention. He became a state boss, and the cruse of oil which had proven so inexhaustible in local campaigns became serviceable in state affairs as well. In the legislature the city representatives, thoroughly organized, well-directed, and animated by a purpose which was intelligent if not honest, were able to control legislation. By jockeying manoeuvres and log-rolling tactics, they dictated local measures, or exchanged their support

with country members, ignorant, indifferent, if not prejudiced against the larger cities. By such means as these the position of the boss is maintained through an alliance with the corporations which supply him with funds and lend him their moral support.

In many states the boss and the owner of municipal franchises have become identified in the same person. His private interests and his political ambitions have merged. Having organized the city and the state for private ends, he has used this organization for political advancement. Having secured a legislature in aid of privilege, he now uses this control for his own elevation to the United States Senate. By such processes as these, the city boss became the state boss. From him new privileges were to be obtained and old ones made secure. Measures assessing property for taxation, like the Ford franchise tax in New York, had to be killed, if possible, no matter how equitable they might be.

In recent years tax evasions have become as imperial privileges. Prior to the passage of the Ford franchise tax, which added \$235,184,000 to the assessments in New York City alone, these evasions amounted to three and a half millions a year. In Cleveland, where for years an effort has been made to assess corporation franchises as is done in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Michigan,

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New York, Illinois, and elsewhere, the annual profit to the companies from these evasions amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars. In Chicago, the efforts of the School Teachers' Association added \$700,000 a year to the revenues of the city, through the enforcement of a franchise-taxing measure that had been upon the statute books for a generation. It had been evaded through the complicity of the traction companies with the tax officials.

The privilege of tax exemption is as valuable as a public subsidy. It is, in fact, a subsidy from those who pay their proper taxes to those who do not. It is secured through the undervaluation of property, and the defeat of measures for the proper assessment of corporate privileges. And the same motives which call forth campaign contributions running into the millions in support of the tariff or for a ships-subsidy measure, prompt the giving of immense sums to the local party machine as a price of relief from the just and proper burdens of government.

In like manner state laws or city ordinances for the regulation of street-railway fares, charges for gas, electric lighting, telephones, and water had to be disposed of, while state commissions for the supervision of franchise companies, such as prevail in Massachusetts, had to be controlled. Competition likewise, either real or striking, had to be

prevented, while even the courts and juries became serviceable in the construction of the constitution, laws, personal-injury cases, and the like. All these things the boss could arrange through his control of the state organization, the nominating convention, and caucus.

Moreover, during the past few years, franchises have begun to expire. In some instances, especially in the Middle West, the companies negligently failed to secure "perpetual," "999," or "99" year grants, and the cities with growing independence of party control have sought to secure better service, lower charges, or more liberal compensation for the use of their streets. Through this awakening on the part of the city, the corporation has been pushed back on the state legislature for grants which it could not secure from the people themselves. And the decisions of the courts, which destroyed the independence of the city and reduced it to a mere civil division of the state, have enabled the legislature to dispose of these privileges without consulting the will of the city or its interests.

Of such a character was the Allen bill, passed by the Illinois Legislature, which authorized the City Council to award fifty-year franchises to the traction companies of Chicago; the Rogers fifty-year franchise measure passed by the Assembly of Ohio; the laws exempting the street rail-

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ways of Milwaukee from the general property tax, not to speak of acts in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and elsewhere, which have entrenched the existing companies, relieved them from taxation, protected them from competition, or prevented municipal ownership or public regulation. And the courts have sustained such interference with the city's affairs by the legislature. It is by such means as these that the dependence of the city on the state has been used to dispossess the people of their streets and the control of their local affairs. It is for this reason that the state has become an essential part of the System, and the control of the party necessary to the control of legislation.

Gradually democracy has been reduced to a state of feudalism with all of its incidents. The change is not unlike that which came about in France under the Merovingian kings. They retained all the insignia of office, while the real prerogatives and power were assumed by the major-domo of the palace, who sat by the king's side, but as the representative of the great barons of the state. To-day, like the Merovingians of old, the people in many states have become *rois fainéants*. The paper form of government still persists, it is true, but the real control has passed to the party organization; from the party organization to the party boss, who is in effect but a paid broker dealing in

public rights and franchises for the modern lords of privilege, whose agent he is.

Through the perfection of the System, the state boss is graduating into the United States Senate just as the major-domo of old ultimately assumed the kingship. Here he performs the dual rôle of representing the commonwealth which elected him, and of disposing of privileges and franchises, in city, county, and state, to the interests which he represents.

This is the unseen side of American democracy. It is the underworld of politics. And it is by no means exceptional. It began with the granting of franchises. In many instances of little value when granted, the growth of the cities, the cheapened cost of producing power, gas, and electricity, has given them great value to-day. Of late this value has become apparent to the community as well as to the companies themselves. The latter entered politics. Local regulation was attempted by the cities. Improvident grants were refused. Extensions, connections, and other desires further identified the corporation with politics. It became necessary to control the tax-assessor, the auditor, then the city council, then the director of public works, and finally the mayor himself. In some states, the courts and jury system were included in the System. For this purpose, control of the party was necessary. To this end, contributions

to campaign funds were made. In many instances the contribution was impartially distributed to both parties. In order to ensure a delivery of the goods, these interests nominated the treasurer or president of the party committee. He controlled the primaries, dictated nominations, and dominated conventions. In time, he became the party. His business was politics, and his politics was business. The business man was dominant. Upon the franchises which were granted, volumes of paper securities were issued. They entered into circulation, and were used as collateral. Anything which impaired the earnings of the company by regulation, competition, or taxation impaired the value of the securities. This fear allied the stockholders, bankers, lawyers, and business men with the System. It created a class-conscious feeling on their part. It divorced them from politics and arrayed them against the city. This became the heaviest burden which reform had to carry.

Such is the condition which to-day prevails in the majority of the Northern States. It is not competitive business that is identified with politics or represented in the United States Senate, not manufacturing nor merchant princes. For competitive business does not organize for its protection. Nor does such wealth as labor creates. The property-owner seeks to control neither the city nor the state. Nor does he ally himself with party,



organizations. But almost without exception the Northern States of the Union have come to be represented in the United States Senate by privileged interests, by the railway and transportation companies, by franchise corporations, and those who have identified their privilege with politics, and through that identification have acquired grants of immense value, tax exemptions of similar importance, or who, fearing local democracy, have entered politics in person or by proxy, and have subverted local and state institutions to their ends.

These privileged industries are limited in number, but powerful in influence. They are the natural monopolies, the railways, express, telegraph, mining, and protected industries in the state and nation; the street-railway, gas, water, electric-lighting, and telephone companies in the cities. Other monopolies there are, but they are in almost every instance dependent upon or identified with some natural monopoly, or are the result of special class legislation. The Sugar Trust is born of the tariff, the Standard Oil and Meat Trusts of railways' discrimination, the Steel Trust of the ownership of the iron ore and coking coal mines. Competition cannot reach such privileges, for the railways know no competition, the mines and natural resources of the country cannot be duplicated, and the local public service corporations occupy favored rights of way in the streets.

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They are subject to no competition, regulation, or control.

It is privilege that creates monopoly, and the desire for it that gives birth to corruption. It is the privilege of tariff protection, of railway monopoly, of exemption from taxation, regulation, or competition that leads these influences into politics and causes nine-tenths of the corruption in nation, state, and city. It is about these privileges that the System centres. No other influences have so constant an interest in politics. No other business can afford to expend thousands and even hundreds of thousands of dollars for the control of legislation. And no other influences can be so readily organized.

To-day the System is approaching perfection. Franchises and privileges are disposed of at Washington instead of in the city hall or by the legislature. For, while the forms of local government remain, the control of the city as well as the state by private interests has become so complete that self-government in regard to these matters has been reduced to a minimum. In this sense, the United States Senate has become its own lobby, while even at the state capital, the special lobby is passing away. Men desiring legislation, whether it be for steam or electric railroads, for gas, telephone, or electric-lighting companies, men seeking franchises or tax exemptions, men representing book concerns or other corporations deal-

ing with the state now find their errand simplified, and their agent in the cloakroom of the United States Senate.

The System, thus created in city and state, is still further cemented by official patronage. Federal appointments for the army of postmasters, postal officials, internal revenue collectors and agents, customs collectors, inspectors, and the like pass through the hands of the Senate. Courtesy now insists that presidential nominees shall be satisfactory to the senator representing the state in which the appointee is to serve. As a result, executive appointments have become senatorial appointments. In recent years the form as well as the substance of executive control has been abandoned. Through this army of federal officials, the state machine is strengthened. In the city or county the "federal nephew" looks after the party organization. He makes up the party ticket, controls the primaries and the local conventions, dictates the platform, and declares the party policy. The spoils system has woven itself into the warp and woof of our government. Patronage has become much less a party than a private graft, while the unclassified public servants have become an army of personal retainers, serving the political as well as the business interests of the members of the United States Senate who control their appointment.

In some instances the process here described has been modified. Privilege has adopted the simpler plan of employing a United States senator as its attorney. This means the employment of his influence with the party organization, his control of the legislature, his power to make or mar political careers, and through this means his control of legislative action. Such has been the policy adopted in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, New York and Missouri, and elsewhere, where the representatives of the commonwealth at Washington have returned to the states which have elected them, and sacrificed the interests of the local communities under retainers from their private employers.

Our patriotism is not yet honest enough to condemn this type of boss. He is too formidable, too respectable. He represents the well-to-do class. Moreover, a certain sense of security is felt under such a boss. We know that he will not be too familiar with the people. He represents those who are indifferent to politics and pay their debt to self-government by handsome campaign contributions. He also relieves us from the fear of too much democracy, which, after all, is not a fear of democracy at all, but a fear that our privileges may be interfered with by democracy. When the boss becomes senator, still other reasons draw the hood over our eyes. There are social reasons, the

fear of giving offence, the desire for political advancement, and the hope of participation in the spoils of his betrayal of trust.

But our indignation is still alive to the ward boss, the petty spoilsman. He offends our sense of propriety. For his graft is of another kind. It affects the poor, is a shelter to the saloon-keeper, the gambler, the dive and policy-shop keeper. Apparently, he it is who blocks reform. He votes his precinct or his ward as advantage dictates. He deals in offices and in justice. He secures city contracts and distributes patronage. We do not see, or we will not see, that he is but a cog in the larger machine. His orders come from above. (He frankly treats politics as a game of spoils and makes no pretence of virtue.) And yet, in comparison with the larger boss, his offences are trifling and his pilfering of insignificant importance. And even he exists because of the System. Were he deprived of support from above, he would topple before public opinion. His tenure of office is based upon the spoils and plunder which the System allows to him, and this he can only secure through the aid of those whom he serves. Deprived of this source of power, his strength would depart as did that of mythical Antæus, who was readily overcome when removed from the contact with Mother Earth.