

Civic Education in Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh, this past month, enjoyed an unusual type of primary election campaigning. While the other candidates engaged in the mud-slinging by which American politicians habitually becloud controversial issues, the Pennsylvania city's former Mayor, William N. McNair, used the opportunity to get the public ear which the campaign afforded to engage upon mass education in municipal problems of socio-economic policy along fundamental lines.

One of the candidates for the Democratic nomination for Mayor aptly characterized the level of the bulk of the campaigning when he summed up: "We have reviewed our chief opponent's background from earliest manhood." Why he neglected to go back to the foetal period we cannot imagine; had he done so he could have convicted Mr. McNair's successor of cannibalism and perversion. Meanwhile, Mr. McNair concentrated upon such as these:

"A Mayor should have his economics on straight and be able to defend his conclusions, not sit red-faced if he gets into a jam. A Councilman should think deeper than merely voting bond issues—you cannot borrow yourself out of a depression."

"I am offering ideas. One idea is to take taxes off buildings. We say

the resulting social appropriation, through taxation, of rent would help the unemployment situation and remedy the slums by stimulating building."

"We see poverty around us and we blame the selfishness of the rich, when violations of natural laws are the causes. So it is with selfishness in politics. We see corruption in government and we blame officials, while economic causes are working which can only be remedied by the collection of the economic rent and the removal of taxes from industry."

"This proposal to collect the economic rent and thus provide jobs for all, has been ignored by the other candidates. If this plan is not practicable, if it will not put men to work, they should say so. If it will succeed, then they should join with me in advocating this fundamental reform. Unemployment is too tragic, its dire results are too far-reaching for this situation to continue."

These sentiments were not taken from a single statement, but from a handful of them, and we could quote from more if space permitted. Moreover, Mr. McNair's reiterated advocacy of extension of the Pittsburgh graded tax plan was the keynote of the appeals of the candidates on his slate for the City Council.

The result of a campaign not to

win a solitary election but to effect mass economic education might be expected to be small. The candidate who appeals to the intellect of the voters rather than to their emotions outrages the time-tried rules of vote-getting. But here the outcome was surprising. Although Mr. McNair was opposed by what The Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph declared a "closely-knit organization" he received 19,102 votes, 28 per cent of the total.

Each of those votes was a tribute to the character and intellectual calibre of Mr. McNair, as well as to his capacities as a mass educator.

In the quality of some of the candidates attracted to its primary contests for nomination to the City Council, Pittsburgh was more fortunate than most cities. In the Republican primary there were W. F. Beatty, Louis J. Conley and Walter R. Demmler, who were successful, and John B. Kearney; on the Democratic side there were Charles P. Berndt, Mario L. Bovee, Robert C. Bowers, William B. Foster, George H. Neubauer and John C. Weaver, who were not nominated.

All of these men have given evidence of acute awareness of the fundamental bases of the social problems afflicting the city.

—W. L.