THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION:
LINCOLN STEFFENS, THE MUCKRAKING YEARS

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This is to certify that the

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ABSTRACT

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By

Russell Mark Brown

This study has been designed to analyze [illegible] writings of Lincoln Steffens, the popular American [illegible] the Progressive Era in American history. Steffens' [illegible] sovereign control of the various governments in the [illegible] state, and federal--was systematically being removed from the control of the people in general by those elements within the various levels of government seeking special privileges. By use of articles in popular magazines with extensive circulation, Steffens successfully called the attention of the people to this threat, and because he did so he became a "people's champion."

After analyzing the journalistic milieu of the Progressive Era and examining Steffens training and background, this study has centered on four distinct groups of Steffens' articles. First, those articles which were collected in his book titled The Shame of the Cities, which examined corruption in city governments. Second, those articles which were collected in his book titled The Struggle for Self-Government, which examined corruption in state governments. Third,

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This study has been designed to analyze certain elements of the writings of Lincoln Steffens, the popular American journalist, during the Progressive Era in American history. Steffens contended that the sovereign control of the various governments in the United States--local, state, and federal--was systematically being removed from the control of the people in general by those elements within the various levels of government seeking special privileges. By use of articles in popular magazines with extensive circulation, Steffens successfully called the attention of the people to this threat, and because he did so he became a "people's champion."

After analyzing the journalistic milieu of the Progressive Era and examining Steffens training and background, this study has centered on four distinct groups of Steffens' articles. First, those articles which were collected in his book titled The Shame of the Cities, which examined corruption in city governments. Second, those articles which were collected in his book titled The Struggle for Self-Government, which examined corruption in state governments. Third,

a group of articles written in 1906 for circulation in various newspapers examining corruption at the federal level of government. Finally, a series of articles issued under the general title "It: An Exposition of the Soverign Political Power of Organized Business," written for Everybody's Magazine in 1910 and 1911, which examined the nature of business, which Steffens contended was the element most responsible for the corruption of government.

These four sections combined constitute an analysis of that unwritten political organization which Steffens dubbed "the System," being the real organization of government in the United States.

The study has proved that Steffens was a "people's champion." He, and other muckraking journalists, were the publicizing arm of the reform movement that swept the country in the first decade of the twentieth century.

A THESIS

Submitted to

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INTRODUCTION

On Friday, December 30, 1910, Lincoln Steffens, the famous "muckraking" journalist, stood on a stage in a public hall in Greenwich, Connecticut. Sitting in front of him, a bit bored, was his gardener George, and "down on the edge of the stage, . . . on a stool near a great blackboard" sat his secretary, a promising young graduate from Harvard named Walter Lippmann, chalk in hand. Earlier in the year, while speaking in another Connecticut town, Steffens had said that he knew his home town, like others all across the country, was corrupt. The editor of the Greenwich paper, Norman Talcott, happened to be in the audience, and he had challenged Steffens to prove his statement in front of the citizens of Greenwich.

The event filled the hall. Steffens was known as a resourceful man, and odds were being given in favor of his proving his accusation. Because of illness in his family he had not been able to research the city himself, and he was depending on notes gathered by Lippmann and his gardener, who had "'hung out around' the politicians and gathered the gossip." New York newspapers, anxious to get copy on the still-controversial Steffens, had sent reporters.

Seemingly forgetting his challenge, Steffens described the organization of corruption he had investigated in city and state governments across the United States, and as he talked Lippmann diagrammed the speech on the blackboard:[1]

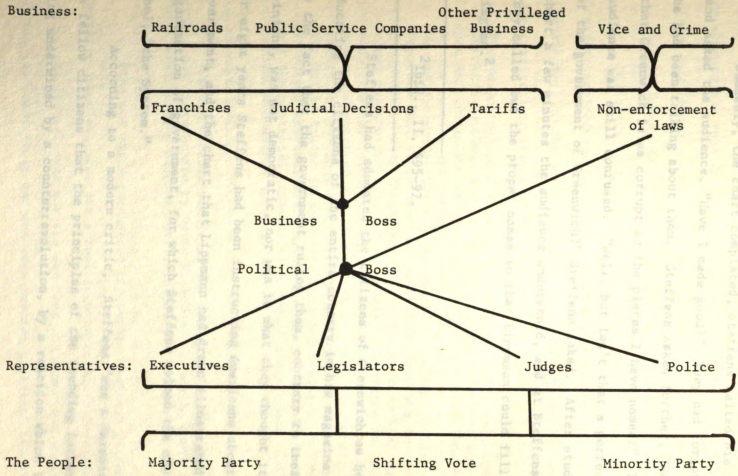

Figure 1: "the System"

[1]Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, Harvest Books (2 vols.: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), II, 596.

Suddenly, the chart completed, Steffens halted his lecture and asked the audience, "Have I made good?" They had forgotten that he had been talking about them. Steffens asked further, "Have I shown that Greenwich is as corrupt as the places I have named?" The audience was still confused. "Well, but isn't that a perfect picture of the government of Greenwich?" Steffens asked. After studying the chart a few minutes the audience understood, and at Steffens' bidding they called out the proper names so that Lippmann could fill in the diagram.[2]

[2]Ibid., II, 595-97.

Steffens had educated the citizens of Greenwich as he had been educating the citizens of the entire country in his magazine articles, to the fact that the government ruling them, contrary to their previous opinions, was not democratic, nor was it what they thought it to be. For eight years Steffens had been instructing Americans about their government, and the chart that Lippmann had drawn illustrated the real organization of government, for which Steffens coined the now famous label, "the System."

According to a modern critic, Steffens "was a Jeremiah warning his fellow citizens that the principles of the founding fathers were being undermined by a counterrevolution, by a reaction which threatened

to force Americans back into another age of the absence of freedom."[3]

[3]Lincoln Steffens, The Shame of the Cities, with an Introduction by Louis Joughin, American Century Series (New York: Sagamore Press Inc., 1957), pp. v-vi.

By showing the real forces that controlled the governments--city, state, and federal--Steffens hoped he could force the people to rise to the challenge and save their democracy.

Dedicating one of his volumes of essays to the czar of Russia, Steffens advised the czar not to fear his peoples "looking to us [Americans], to the history and the happiness of the American people, for inspiration, example, and comfort. . . ."[4]

> Your Majesty should know that after our first, the bloody American revolution, a second, bloodless, nameless and slow, set in. After we had established "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," we went back to work. We let who would rule us, and somehow or other it has happened that those men have come into power who see in government,--what Kings see, Sire,--a source, not of common, equal justice for all, but of special advantages for the few; and, like the Kings of old, they have made of our government not a safeguard of the free growth of human character, but an agency for the development of the resources of the country. The United States of America stands for business, not men, Sire; our representative democracy represents not the people but the protected business of a few of the people. And protected business is--privilege.

[4]Joseph Lincoln Steffens, The Struggle for Self-Government, with a new introduction by David W. Noble, Series in American Studies (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), pp. vi-vii.

Time and again throughout his works, Steffens proved, citing specific examples, that the actual form of American government--local, state, and federal--was not the one that the constitution guaranteed. He realized that those men who were seeking privilege for business

purposes were usurping the rights of the people for their personal profit. The public was complacent. As historian Lloyd Morris noted, "Steffens was trying to drive home to the American people . . . their own moral complicity. It was only by their tacit consent that representative government had ceased to represent them."[5] The public

[5]Lloyd Morris, Postscript to Yesterday: America: The Last Fifty Years (New York: Random House, 1947), p. 289.

allowed itself to be convinced that the business society was progressive rather than restrictive. It was Steffens' self-imposed duty to prove that the business elements in society had subverted the democratic organs of government, and each one of his articles that can be classified as "muckraking" did, to some degree, prove that point.

Further, the fact that Steffens was published in a nationally circulated periodical that was trustworthy, inexpensive, and influential gave him, and with varying degree other muckrakers, the right to the title of "people's champion." Using the mass-circulation magazine, Steffens was able to educate and influence the reading public to perform its democratic duty.

Steffens constantly led people to examine their complicity in the corruption they so detested by asking them to judge themselves. "Whatever form the issue takes upon which an honest man in politics makes his first fight," Steffens wrote in one of his articles, "he will finally come to the real American issue: representative government . . . ; before he gets through, he will have to ask the people to answer the question: 'Who is to rule--the disinterested majority or

the specially interested, corrupt few?'"[6] Steffens made his function

[6]Lincoln Steffens, Upbuilders, with an Introduction by Earl Pomeroy, Americana Library (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), p. 30.

perfectly clear to all who read: "My purpose was no more scientific than the spirit of my investigation and reports; it was, . . .to see if the shameful facts, spread out in all their shame, would not burn through our civic shamelessness and set fire to American pride."[7]

[7]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 12.

The purpose of this analysis, therefore, is to examine both the journalistic milieu of the Muckraking era and the career of the most significant and interesting of the muckrakers, Lincoln Steffens, and finally, prove the thesis that these two forces, man and magazine, combined to make the man a "people's champion."

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD OF THE REFORMER

Steffens and his fellow muckrakers were not the innovators that modern historians have led the public of today to believe. They came from a long tradition of reformist writers. The information they presented to the public, while shocking and interesting, probably came as little or no suprise. While the extent of corruption in various public affairs--local and state governments in Steffens' case--was appalling in extent, years of exposure and reform literature had clearly indicated to a large audience that all was not well.

Such novels as Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's The Gilded Age (1873) and Henry Adams (anonymously published) Democracy (1880) clearly illustrated the nature of corruption and, although their purpose may have been one of lamenting rather than reforming, their existence denoted knowledge of and literary attention to the problems of the emerging business society. As early as 1861 and 1862 the Atlantic Monthly serialized Rebecca Harding Davis' "A Story of Today," showing the distorted positons of labor and capital. Utopian novels, such as Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward (1887), William Dean Howells' A Traveller from Altruria (1894), and William H. Harvey's Coin's Financial School (1894), revealed the popularity of schemes to reform society, thus indicating existing doubts about the nature of the society

in the United States. Works relating to specific reformers, such as Ignatious Donnelly's bloody Ceasar's Column (1891) and Henry George's Progress and Poverty (1879), were read and understood by large numbers. Henry and Charles Francis (Junior) Adams had indulged in pure political muckraking with their Chapters of Erie and Other Essays as early as 1886. The illustrations of Thomas Nast were also clearly of the same school. The number of examples is extensive.

One study of pre-muckraking fiction reveals that "a great many authors gave full-scale pictures of political activities. Book after book, ranging from sophisticated novels to paper-covered melodramas, and from stories developing a central political theme to tales in which politics is a minor element or entirely incidental, presents an accurate account of life among the politicians."[1]

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[1]John Lydenberg, Pre-Muckraking: A Study of Attitudes Towards Politics as Revealed in American Fiction from 1870 through 1901 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1946), p. 396.

Theodore Roosevelt was responsibe for some of the confusion about the date of the beginning of muckraking because he created the term, or revived it from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, in 1906. Historians, attempting to trace its specific beginnings, have ignored the fact that the term Roosevelt used was synthetic in the first place, a term applied only to those who he himself specifically disliked. Indeed, Roosevelt wrote to Ray Stannard Baker, one of McClure's Magazine's writers, saying, "I disapprove of the whitewash brush quite as much as of mud slinging, and it seems to me that the disapproval of one in no shape or way implies approval of the other."[2] Steffens wrote that

[2]Quoted in Ray Stannard Baker, American Chronicle: The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), p. 203.

he "did not intend to be a muckraker; [he] did not know that [he] was one till President Roosevelt picked the name out of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and pinned it on us; and even then [Roosevelt] said that he did not mean me."[3]

[3]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 357

If Roosevelt had meant to create a derogatory term to label Steffens, he certainly was not consistent, for the same year that he made his infamous "muckrake" speech, he gave Steffens carte blanche to investigate the federal government:[4]

> To Any officer of or employee of the government.
> Please tell Mr. Lincoln Steffens anything whatever about the running of the government by or under offices of the Executive that you know (not innappropriate with its public interests) and provided only that you tell him the truth--no matter what it may be--I will see that you are not hurt.
> T. Roosevelt

[4]Note, Theodore Roosevelt to Lincoln Steffens, Jan. 9, 1906, Columbia University, Steffens Papers. Lincoln Steffens will be designated L.S. hereafter in notes referring to the Steffens Papers.

Muckraking neither started nor ceased, but rather it increased in quantity, severity, and popularity during the first decade of this century. Analyzing those who wrote before the group now labeled muckrakers, historian Edward E. Cassidy has said that "their writings provide an unbroken critical tradition from the administration of Lincoln to that of Theodore Roosevelt."[5]

[5]Edward E. Cassidy, "Muckraking in the Gilded Age," American Literature, XIII (1941-42), 135.

What happened to distinguish most clearly the output of the Roosevelt years was the altered nature of the audience and the media. What is significant is that sometime in late 1902 or early 1903 a liberal political perspective finally came to the forefront. The popularity of Roosevelt, whose political reputation as a liberal at that time was unassailable, is but another indication of the assendancy of the liberal spirit. It was, then, the change in times that caused the change in amount and emphasis of reform journalism.

The single most significant factor responsible for the sudden widespread knowledge of reformist ideas was the growth of the relatively new "popular" magazines. A product of the technical and industrial advancements of the post-Civil War era, these ten-to-fifteen-cent journals circulated to nation-wide audiences of previously undreamed-of size. Without them muckraking would have had to have been piece-meal and sporadic across the nation, and certainly nothing of a nationally influential reform movement would have evolved.

Previous to the development of these magazines, periodicals of general circulation in the United States had been both elitist and expensive, aiming at a small, educated audience with distinct tastes. Cost guaranteed that the mass audience would not buy the magazines, and consequently content was geared to those well-educated people who could afford, and probably felt their community position insured by,

tastes and subjects of no particular interest to the majority of Americans. As magazine historian Theodore Peterson has stated it, "Century, Harper's and Scribner's . . . were the leading monthly periodicals. Their editors edited not for the great masses of the population, . . . but for gentlefold of means."[6]

[6]Theodore Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), p. 2.

But the growth of democracy and technology was too thorough for such elitism to continue. On March 3, 1897, Congress granted second-class postal rates to periodicals "originated and published for the dissemination of information of a public character, or devoted to literature, the sciences, arts, or some special industry. . . ." The government also increased the chances for expanded circulation by its extension of Rural Farm Delivery (R.F.D.). In 1897, after most of the "popular" magazines were well established, there were only 44 R.F.D. routes; but six years later--1903--the year of the first muckraking articles, there were 25,000 R.F.D. routes. Although home delivery was not as influential as other factors in the growth of "popular" magazines, it certainly helped the impact of the reformist attacks by expanding the angered electorate.

Indeed, many of the factors that had acted to remove the isolation of the farmer and generally hasten the urbanization of the United States had also influenced the growth of magazines with massive circulations. Invention and extension of the telegraph and other modes of communication had lowered the price and increased the

accessibility and immediacy of available news and information. The railroad and later the motor truck decreased the cost of circulation and the production costs of acquiring necessary resources. The growth of industry had, of course, created centers of population with greater interdependency, thus increasing the need for mediums of social education and interchange. The cities themselves were huge markets for the products of journalism, as indicated by the increased circulation of newspapers.

Technical improvements in the printing press were also fundamental to the growth of "popular" magazines. R. Hoe and Company built a rotary press in 1886 that was ten times as productive as a flat-bed press of similar size, and by 1893 that firm produced one that could produce multi-color reproductions. These innovations made possible a production cost that, of course, was lessened even more as circulations increased. The price of printing thousands of copies of a page is not markedly higher than the price of printing hundreds, the set-up time being a much more expensive consideration than the paper. The unit cost per page decreased as circulation increased, and a spiral of price reductions was beneficial to sales.

The growth of nationally marketed products, also a result of the industrial expansion, increased the value of the national magazine as an advertising medium. It was not long after the evolution of national companies that Frank Munsey, publisher of Munsey's Magazine, discovered and popularized the concept of supporting the cost and making most of the profits for a magazine not from subscription or news stand sales, but from advertising rates. National advertising created another spiral, and as the effects of advertising increased,

so did advertising rates, thus decreasing the price of the magazines, which in turn increased circulation, thus decreasing production costs and further increasing advertising rates.[7]

[7]For a detailed explanation see Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century, p. 7.

A glance at population growth and distribution figures in the United States in the post-Civil War era will give some idea of the expansion of the market. In 1870 there were 38,558,371 Americans, of whom only 9,902,361 lived in urban areas. By 1900 there were 75,994,576, of whom 30,159,921 lived in the cities. The sheer numerical increases of the audience caused expansion of the market, and the growth of urban dwellers created much of the corruption that muckrakers would soon be exposing. The continual expansion of literacy was a basic element in the extension of American democracy that must not be slighted.

In 1893, three editors, S. S. McClure, Frank Munsey, and John Brisben Walker, started lowering the prices of their magazines, and by 1895 the three magazines they represented, McClure's, Munsey's, and Cosmopolitan, plus an expanding number of others, were available at ten cents an issue. The result of all these changes was an impressive increase in the ability of magazines to act as sources of information for the common people. The democratic potentials of America were greatly increased as the ability of more and more people to obtain information necessary for educated democratic action expanded.

That the ethics of responsible journalism could be and were

ignored flagrantly by some newspapers--usually labeled "yellow"--should not hide the virtue of this new situation. Never before had so many people had access to so much information for so inexpensive a price as they did after the growth of "popular" magazines, which went to national audiences rather than to local ones as did the newspapers.

It was the development of this medium of public expression that gave Steffens the ability to become a "people's champion." Exposé and reform literature were hardly new phenomena, but the immediate airing of specific political grievances to large portions of the national population created a vitality within the reform movement that was bound to be sensational in effect.

McClure's Magazine was a thriving success when Lincoln Steffens joined its staff in September, 1901. Established in 1893, McClure's had been in the forefront of those innovative "popular" magazines that, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, were circulating to middle-class audiences numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Although basically a magazine filled with fiction and articles of general interest, McClure's was attuned to the pulse of public interest, and by 1900 it showed its knowledge of the new public concern about police and crime with a series of articles entitled "The Powers that Prey," by an interesting journalist, Josiah Flint. The article, according to historian Louis Filler, "made very clear that the police and criminals were by no means violently opposed."[8]

[8]Louis Filler, The Muckrakers: Crusaders for American Liberalism, Gateway Edition (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968), p. 74.

Although Flint's article is clearly not in the same genre as muckraking, being as much a local color piece about New York criminals as an exposé, it did indicate a practiced attention by McClure's editors to the concerns of public interest. But attention to the desires and demands of the fickle reading public was nothing new at McClure's. S. S. McClure, founder of the magazine and its guiding light, had been proving his perception for years, so much so that one historian has gone so far as to say that McClure was "the greatest magazine genius America has produced. . . ."[9]

[9]John Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform: Being a History of the Rise, Life, and Decay of the Progressive Mind in America (New York: Liveright, 1932), p. 125.

Samuel S. McClure was a Scotch immigrant who came to the United States in his childhood. Working his way through Knox College at Galesburg, Illinois, the source of many writers for his magazine in the years ahead, he was imbued with a sense of the Midwest that would be significant in determining his sense of what the common man wanted to read. McClure obtained his first non-collegiate magazine work as the editor of the Wheelman, a cycling magazine sponsored by Colonel Albert A. Pope of the Pope Manufacturing Company, which produced the Columbia Bicycle. McClure made a success of his work in every sense except financial, leading eventually to a new job at the Century, one of the most respected established magazines of the times.

Noting the growth of interest in cultural subjects by the expanding literate audience, McClure and his wife mailed almost a thousand circulars to various newspapers announcing the "Literary Associated Press," a service that they said would "serve the best work by the best authors for reprinting in those newspapers which subscribed." The syndicate proved itself a worthy competitor to other similar services relatively quickly, and by late 1880s and early 1890s it was circulating articles by such writers as Sarah Orne Jewett, Edward E. Hale, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Gustaves Myers, Susan B. Anthony, Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, Francis Hodgson Burnett, and, significantly, a young American writer in Paris named Ida Tarbell. "After seven years of operation," historian Harold Wilson points out, "the Associated Literary Press was an unqualified success, furnishing fifty thousand words and forty to fifty pictures a week to customers located in the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking parts of the world. . . . [Its] annual volume of business had risen to $103,874."[10] McClure, after some unsuccessful attempts at working

[10]Harold S. Wilson, McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 46-47.

with established English literary agents, established an office in Britain to supplement his American sources as well as to expand his selling market. Eventually he represented such impressive writers as Rudyard Kipling, whose popularity in American magazines was soon nothing short of sensational, Robert Louis Stevenson, James M. Barrie, and Arthur Conan Doyle. The American and English authors combined with

writers from other foreign countries to make McClure a dominant figure in the literary world of his times. In 1890, for example, he circulated George Meredith, William Dean Howells, Leo Tolstoi, and Mark Twain.[11]

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[11]The above information is adapted from Wilson, McClure's, especially chapter iii.

The literary world had never been so directly related to the desires and appetite of the mass popular audience. The literary trend that had started with Grub Street reached its logical apex with the newspaper and magazine writers of the end of the nineteenth century. Magazines or newspapers were the central or original source of income or reputation for such literary figures as Stevenson, Conrad, Twain, Harte, Kipling, James, Crane, Richard Harding Davis, H. G. Welles, William Allen White, and countless others, and the training ground for even more who soon earned distinction. Again, these journalists gained a power distinct from what they would have received from publication in the more elite magazines. The "popular" magazines strength sprang from their popularity with mass audiences of average education. Their political influence was more pervasive because the United States was a representative democracy in which a journal reflecting such a large audience could not be ignored.

Having made contact with the best of the world's popular writers, McClure could not resist entering the competition himself. On May 28, 1893, the first issue of McClure's Magazine appeared, selling at fifteen cents a copy--far below most competitors. Although financial success was slow, McClure was able to use the best writers

available, since he had maintained (and continued to maintain) his syndicate in close alliance with his magazine. His eventual success was inevitable. In late 1894, Ida Tarbell started a series of articles (with illustrations) on Napoleon that firmly established the magazine as a success, sending circulation to 250,000 by July, 1896. McClure's "average circulation during its first year of operation was 27,072, but by 1896 [just three years later] it was 258,374, nine times greater, an unequaled feat."[12]

[12]Wilson, McClure's, p. 65.

A large part of the momentum responsible for the success of the publication can be traced directly to the personality of S. S. McClure himself. Steffens described him:[13]

> Blond, smiling, enthusiastic, unreliable, he was the receiver of the ideas of his day. He was a flower that did not sit and wait for the bees to come and take his honey and leave their seeds. He flew forth to find and rob the bees. He was rarely in the office.

[13]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 361-62.

Both Stevenson and Howells used McClure as a model for characters in novels--Stevenson in The Wrecker; and Howells, with the ever active, ever nervous personification of the industrial age of journalism, as Fulkerson in A Hazard of New Fortunes.[14]

[14]Chamberlain, Farwell to Reform, p. 125.

William Allen White, who occasionally wrote for McClure's throughout the muckraking years, said that "Sam [McClure] had three

hundred ideas a minute, . . ." and that the perceptive and more restrained John S. Phillips, one of McClure's editors, "was the only man around the shop who knew which one was not crazy."[15] Steffens spread the

[15]William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan Co., 1946), pp. 386-87.

credit for restraining McClure to the entire editorial staff, saying that "most of his great ideas were foolish, and I joined with the rest finally and served as one of the four-wheel brakes upon the madness of McClure's genius."[16] Ray Stannard Baker, another midwesterner

[16]Steffens, Autobiogrpahy, II, 363.

who worked at McClure's, recognized the importance in McClure's success of those people who worked around S. S., as he was called:[17]

> [McClure] had indeed a highly creative mind, and a great deal of excitable energy, but the success of McClure's was based upon the fecundity of S. S. McClure, as edited and condensed by J. S. Phillips, and guided and bounded on the business side by the clear-running intelligence of Albert Brady. The three together--who had been friends since their college days--made the perfect publishing organization. S. S. . . .was all intuition and impulse, bursting with nervous energy, one of the most unorganized, impatient, and disorderly men I ever knew.

[17]Baker, American Chronicle, p. 95.

Historian C. C. Regier claims that although McClure was "not himself in any way a reformer, he became, through the functioning of his editorial good sense, a tower of strength to the liberal movements of the day." White also assesed McClure's significance as quite impressive when he wrote that "Sam McClure from 1900 to 1907 . . . was

among the ten first men who were important in the American scene."[18]

[18]C. C. Regier, The Era of the Muckrakers (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), p. 57.

The degree to which McClure was a reformer himself is really of little significance here, but the fact that McClure had organized and spearheaded an unquestionably liberal magazine that reached hundreds of thousands of people is a vital fact. McClure's Magazine was a voice that could not be ignored by anyone seriously concerned with public opinion or influence. "It might be argued that McClure's had a greater influence on [Theodore Roosevelt] than did [Herbert Croly's] The Promise of American Life. Though he named [the muckrakers] in derision, Roosevelt inbibed their central doctrine."[19] A literary

[19]Wilson, McClure's, p. 315.

organ of public opinion that was unparalleled in journalism history, the new "popular" magazines, of which McClure's was one of the leaders, made clear statements of public sentiment that the supposedly representative government found impossible to ignore. "It cannot be too much emphasized that the reading public in those years was just beginning to understand that home things--ways of living, ideas, government--in a word, Americana--were as interesting, as worth knowing, as foreign things."[20] That reading public read a great deal of Americana and grew

[20]Filler, Muckrakers, p. 116.

in both power and number.

A list of the people who worked with Steffens at McClure's reads like a Who's Who in America of fin de siecle liberals. Aside from McClure (whose own position on reform may be debated) and others whose positions are secure because of other work combined with or separate from their muckraking, such as William Allen White, the Kansas newspaper editor, John H. Finley, who eventually became the editor-in-chief of the New York Times, and author Will Cather, who was an editor of McClure's for a short time in 1905, there were several who owe their primary fame to work they did with McClure's. Those who are most significant as muckrakers are Samual Hopkins Adams, Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and, of course, Steffens himself.

It is important to note that the first three of these four are also remembered as historians, although they owe their prominence and, in some respect, their later success to their work for McClure's. Adams had been trained on the New York Sun, Baker on the Chicago Record, and Steffens on the New York Sun and the New York Commercial Advertiser. The newspaper training of these men was a contributory factor to the method in which they wrote and the results they received from their muckraking articles. Miss Tarbell's writing moved into muckraking gradually (and certainly without specific intent) as the magazine itself evolved.

The ability of these four writers--especially of Steffens, Tarbell, and Baker, who are probably the most remembered of all muckrakers--was remarkable. McClure required that the work of all his writers be as close to perfect as possible. The amount of legwork he demanded, and the checking and re-checking of facts, were far beyond those

normally anticipated by most editors. Louis Filler has written of McClure's, that it "was simply the best of all the [muckraking] magazines. No other magazine spent nearly so much money as [McClure's] did getting the very best talent and material. McClure's articles were above all authoritative, and could be read as the last words on the subjects they discussed."[21]

[21]Ibid., p. 86; see also, Wilson, McClure's, pp. 192-94.

Always anxious to be the first to sing his own praises, McClure wrote an editorial in his November, 1904, edition, detailing the amount of time, effort, and money that was put into the articles that appeared in his magazine.

The major writers for McClure's were paid not on a production basis, as was traditional on magazines, but by salary. Baker took two years to write eight articles. "Steffens, in a somewhat longer period, wrote ten; and Miss Tarbell spent five years in the preparation and writing of the eighteen articles on Standard Oil Company." The least expensive of the above articles was more than $1,000, and half of them ran $2,500 a piece. Miss Tarbell probably holds the record, with a cost of $4,000 each for her articles.[22] The significance

[22]Reiger, Era of the Muckrakers, p. 58.

of this method of production, as opposed to piece-work payment, cannot be slighted; salary was the only method that allowed enough time for the research required.

Louis Filler has entitled his chapter on the outbreak of

muckraking "The McClure Idea" and Harold Wilson calls one of his chapters "Government by Magazine"; the two titles together indicate the place of McClure's in the muckraking movement and the significance of muckraking as a form of public expression and governmental reform.[23] Wilson, writing of the power of muckraking at McClure's notes that "It could make a thunderous din; it could defy the President; it could elevate or destroy. It was the vanguard of a new revolution and a force to be reckoned with."[24]

[23]Filler, Muckrakers, chapter vii; Wilson, McClure's, chapter x.

[24]Wilson, McClure's, p. 209.

The audience that McClure's reached, because of its price, its content, and its style, was the middle-class American. As William Allen White noted with great perception, McClure's writers[25]

> were at heart midwestern. They talked the Mississippi Vally vernacular. They thought as we thought in Emporia [Kansas] about men and things. They were making a magazine for our kind--the literate middle class. This group had real influence upon the times from McKinley to Wilson.

[25]White, Autobiography, p. 307

While the modern reader may correctly think of Steffens as more liberal than the rest of the McClure's writers, it is most likely that this response comes not from a consideration of his work with the magazine, but rather from knowledge of his activities after leaving McClure's. Steffens' work, like everyone else's at the magazine, was in the

mainstream of American thought. "McClure and Phillips published carefully; they were in the tradition of responsible journalism," and Steffens' flirtation with causes too far beyond the middle-class mind was not evident in the magazine.[26] Although McClure

[26]Wilson, McClure's, p. 192

himself did not mind if an article were sensational if it increased sales, it must be stressed that there was little in McClure's tradition of muckraking to cause comparison of its content with the yellow journalism of some of the newspapers of that era. The middle-class reader was never really threatened or even offended by McClure's as he most certainly was by some other products of the journalism world of the period. As Filler states it,[27]

> Myopic conservatives lumped McClure's with the more deadly of the muckraking magazines, refusing to study the differences between them. Shrewder politicians and business men, aware that the public desire for reform was not ended by a policy of silence or contempt, saw the difference, saw that by and large McClure's constituted no serious threat to the established order.

[27]Filler, Muckrakers, p. 89.

McClure's had been established with the intent of capturing the largest possible reading market. Early in his career, McClure had based his magazine's success on four themes--scientific articles, articles about trains, articles about animals and exploration, and stress on personalities.[28] The reason for the success of these themes

[28]Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. IV, 1885-1905 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 592.

in fashioning a popular magazine was the high degree of immediate interest they held for its readers. The move into muckraking was, logically, as much an indication of the direction public interest had moved as it was a specific intention of the magazine. McClure's, with its growing emphasis on public morality, was reflecting a wider social concern. When the time came for reform journalism to be in the forefront, McClure's put it there. The authoritative tone of the articles is a credit to McClure's continued insistence on hard work by his writers and, to some extent, proof that the motive behind their publication was not merely sensationalism for sales. Ray Stannard Baker was suprised that his articles were considered as something out of the ordinary. "At that time," he wrote,[29]

> I never thought of these articles . . . as "revolutionary" or "crusading." They were fact articles on conditions which keenly interested me personally, and when published they also interested many other people--judging by editorial comment and by letters received.

[29]Baker, American Chronicle, p. 166.

A coincidence that illustrated the growing interest in governmental and social concerns--the publication of three articles that dealt with these concerns, one each by Steffens, Baker, and Tarbell, in January, 1903--has usually been selected as the starting point in the muckraking movement. Always perceptive, McClure wrote an editorial

pointing out the similarities of the three articles. He then capitalized on the market he had discovered. Selections from that editorial clearly indicate the sense of public morality that the reading audience was soon to express:

> All together, these three articles come pretty near showing how universal is this dangerous trait of ours of contempt for laws. Miss Tarbell has our capitalists conspiring among themselves, deliberately, shrewdly, upon legal advice, to break the law so far as it restrained them, and to misuse it to restrain others who were in their way. Mr. Baker shows labor, the ancient enemy of capital, and the chief complainant of the trusts' unlawful acts, itself committing and excusing crimes. And in "The Shame of Minneapolis" [Steffens' article] we see the administration of a city employing criminals to commit crimes for the profit of elected officials, while the citizens--Americans of good stock and more than average culture, and honest, healthy Scandinavians--stood by complacent and not alarmed.

The crux of the problem and the most likely source of the popularity of the articles that pervaded McClure's and other magazines for the next few years, is probably summed up by the last statement in the editorial:[30]

> We forget that we are all the people; that while each of us in his group can shove off on the rest the bill of today, the debt is only postponed: the rest are passing it back to us. And in the end the sum total of the debt will be our liberty.

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[30][S. S. McClure], "Editorial," McClure's Magazine, January, 1903, p. 1.

The moral conscience of the American people was struck directly. The articles written by Steffens and others like him were popular because they aroused civic interest and directed the opinions of huge portions of the people. McClure's was, most certainly, an organ in which the people would be able to find a champion.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF A MUCKRAKER

Joseph Lincoln Steffens was born in California two years after the end of the Civil War, a war that marked a turning point in American history. His life work was to be concerned with ways of dealing with the problems that emerged as modern America evolved, and his evolution was parallel with his native state. One of his first boyhood dreams was to own a horse, and one of his last heroes was Henry Ford.

When Steffens was young he wanted a horse. A friend of his, Charlie Prodger, who was "something of a politician," promised Steffens a pair of stilts. Now, as a youngster Steffens "was made to feel that there was something bad about a politician," but Charlie Prodger kept his word. Consequently it was Steffens desire to get the "politician" to promise a horse; but he could never get that promise. Other men, supposedly honorable, promised the horse, but they lied. But Charlie Prodger did not lie. He delivered the stilts, "and on them [Steffens] climbed to heaven for a while--and for always to a belief in the word, not of all men, but of 'bad' politicians like Charlie Prodger."[1]

[1]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 15.

That was Steffens' first recorded experience with a politician, and with it he learned a lesson he never forgot--that definitions of "good" and "bad" were often poorly placed, that "bad" men were, ironically, often the most trustworthy men to be found.

Steffens got his horse for Christmas one year, and with it and a free rein from his indulgent parents, he acquired an individuality by riding alone and avoiding those social games that teach boys business. As he said,[2]

> My theory is that those games [trading marbles, knives, etc.] are the first lessons in business: they cultivate the instinct to beat the other fellow on change and so quicken their predatory wits. Desirable or no, I never got that training; I never had any interest in, I have always had a distaste for, business. . . . My pony carried me away not only from business but from the herd also and the herding habits of mind. . . .

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[2]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 25.

These were lessons Steffens learned well. Business, the god of the post-Civil War generation, was not the measure of all virtues, but rather an entity in itself to be measured. Steffens never was to become a slave to the crowd and follow in the footsteps of the praising throng that gave businessmen such inordinate power and influence.

These lessons were to be significant, for he was allowed the clear eyes a prophet needed because of his freedom from business ethics. His personality was determined early in life. The training for his duty--for his days in the wilderness--led him to an ability to use his independence and insight for the benefit of those who had been blinded by the false god, business.

The wilderness in which Steffens learned was that of the universities. The son of a prosperous man, Steffens attended the University of California at Berkeley when it was still a fledgling institution, graduating, he said, at the bottom of his class. Despite an offer from his father to buy the young graduate an interest in a San Francisco newspaper, Steffens decided to seek more insight into interests that had been dimly kindled during his final two undergraduate years. Although he had studied history as an undergraduate, he entered the University of Berlin in 1889 to work toward a doctoral degree in philosophy, with minor study areas in art history and economics. His desire for the degree was limited, but his thirst for knowledge was not. In late 1890 he wrote to his father, who had requested that he aim at a specific degree, "I rather regret your decision that the degree must be taken, since to me it will be of little service outside of satisfying vanity."[3]

[3]Letter, Lincoln Steffens to his father, December, 1890, Columbia University Library, Steffens Papers. When a letter also appears in Ella Winters and Granville Hicks, eds., The Letters of Lincoln Steffens, with a memorium by Carl Sandburg (2 vols., New York: Harcourt, Brace, Co., 1938), that volume and page of that letter will be given parenthetically, i.e. (Letters, I, 56.).

Indeed, this was written when he was in the fourth of six European cities in which he would eventually study. Finding that his study of philosophy was not providing him with a foundation for ethics, which was what he wanted to gain from his European studies, he soon shifted his interests to psychology, studying under the noted professor Wilhelm Max Wundt at Leipzig. In all, he attended the German universities at

Berlin, Heidelberg, Munich and Leipzig; and he studied at the Sorbonne in France, and at the British Museum.

The major consequence of Steffens' broad European education was the liberation of his mind from its American biases. He was an expansive man, often described as an artist, and in Europe he learned to be cultivated in the broad sense of the word. His concept of what was "liberal" was forever influenced by his European odyssey. He turned a fresh eye on American culture; he gained a perception that distinguished him from even the other muckrakers.

Although most of the other muckrakers criticized people who were working against the American system, Steffens was the only muckraker who went on to criticize the system itself. Part of the reason he continued waxing liberal even after the muckraking and liberal eras had passed, can be traced to his university days. His European training in psychology and morals, not to mention the variety of people and opinions he encountered, made it possible for him to understand that the problems of American politics and government in the Progressive era went deeper than immoral or inept politicians. He realized, because of his European exposure, that the American system of government had to adapt itself (or be adapted) to problems and challenges it had never before faced. Steffens recognized this problem when he wrote from Berlin to an American friend:[4]

> There is something wrong in the state of mind in which we [Americans] study. I am a conundrum to my fellow students from America. Since I am not going to become a professor or teacher, they do not understand why I am studying such a subject as philosophy. . . . The idea that there is any other motive [than money] never seems to occur to them.

[4]Letter, L.S. to Frederick M. Willis, January 4, 1890, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I. 39).

Many of the ideas that would later find full bloom in Steffens' most famous articles can be found in seed form in the letters he sent home from Europe. To his mother, he wrote from Berlin:[5]

> Our government with all its beneficial characteristics is a miserable one outside of what pertains to private interests. The public welfare is utterly neglected, because the public has no one at Washington to look out for its interests. We Americans are living for today, the future will not look back to their forefathers to bless them for their foresight.

[5]Letter, L.S. to his mother, February 15, 1890, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 44).

To his father: "It is a disgrace that a city like Sacramento should not have a Democratic paper. It is disgraceful anyway to be 'solid' for any party. It denotes intellectual lethargy and unpatriotic indifference."[6]

[6]Letter, L.S. to his father, November 23, 1890, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 54).

Again to his father:[7]

> Do not misunderstand me. I wouldn't see an exchange of ours for any constitution in Europe, but I mean that the men who are given the general power do more for their pay for the general welfare, and without (in France, England, and Italy) interfering with private concerns, business and life either.

[7]Letter, L.S. to his father, April 12, 1892, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 73-74).

These ideas became the groundwork for the education Steffens was later to give the American public, and one can be certain that his time and effort in gaining a European point of view was, in no small degree, a great benefit to his career.

Before returning to America, Steffens decided he wanted "to go into business for two reasons: first because I want a sure and reliable source of means to life; second, because I desire to understand that portion of American life--it being always the first and most important--to make some studies for literary works. . . ." But in the same letter he added, "Political life I am determined upon, but it must come much later."[8]

[8]Letter, L.S. to his father, May 4, 1892, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 75).

Steffens returned from Europe with no degree, but with a good and expansive education and, unknown to his family, a wife, the former Miss Josephine Bontecou, whom he had secretly married. The two had met in Leipzig and, traveling with Miss Bontecou's mother, had gone to Paris together to attend the Sorbonne. After announcing their engagement (Steffens in the meantime having rid himself of a fiancee in America), the two eloped to England and returned to France. "We told nobody of our marriage," Steffens wrote in his Autobiography, "neither at home nor in the [Latin] Quarter; so we had all the advantages of the law and all the thrills and prestige of lawlessness."[9]

[9]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 161.

Assessing his studies in Europe, Steffens wrote to his father: "My time here has been one of education, and I know no period that has not been conscientiously used by me, no day that has not had its work and its results."[10]

[10]Letter, L.S. to his father, May 2, 1892, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 76-77).

Steffens, aged twenty-six, secretly married and well educated, arrived in New York in autumn of 1892, unemployed but unconcerned. He had considered teaching or banking as professions, but his only real intent was to continue as a student of life, using whatever job he fell into as a vehicle for observations that could be translated by him into literature. As soon as he docked, he was met by his father's agent who handed him his father's letter which, after reviewing all the indulgent father had done, concluded with: "Enclosed please find one hundred dollars, which should keep you till you can find a job and support yourself."[11]

[11]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 169.

Overcoming some difficulties caused by his acquired European airs, Steffens took a job as a reporter on one of New York's most influential and respected newspapers, the Evening Post, edited by E. L. Godkin. With diligence and quickening excitement at being in the midst of activity Steffens advanced quickly, passing experienced reporters by virtue of his trustworthy "scoops." Soon he was writing

his father, "All that worries me is this tendency I feel more and more to become absorbed in the newspaper work to the exclusion of scientific and literary work."[12]

[12]Letter, L.S. to his father, March 18, 1893, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 92).

The young reporter learned early that he could gain more detailed stories and become a better reporter if he treated his job with sincere interest rather than with the boredom that most reporters soon assumed. He also learned early that becoming an active friend and confidant of the people who make the news was the best way to scoop other reporters. The path Steffens followed during his newspaper career, combined with the clear-sighted logic his European training had given him, made his later success as a muckraker seem logical and inevitable. His first major assignment for the Post was as the Wall Street reporter.

To gain an ability at trustworthy interpretation of economic signs and an insider's view of the market, Steffens made friends with many of the most significant financial leaders of the times. The titans enjoyed having their news reported in the conservative Post tradition, and Steffens was fascinated by the people he met, the most fascinating being a man named James B. Dill, the Wall Street lawyer who had masterminded the labyrinth of laws that had created the New Jersey incorporating system that was such a god-send for the emerging trusts.

Dill, a man who approached his work as a disinterested observer, was probably more responsible than anyone else for Steffens'

understanding of the details and complexities involved in the economics of business. Dill figured as a central figure when, years later, Steffens muckraked New Jersey, and he remained a lifelong friend. He also taught Steffens the power of the press:[13]

> When you and the other reporters and critics wrote as charges against us what financiers could and did actually do in Jersey, when you listed, with examples, what the trust-makers were doing under our laws, you were advertising our business--free. For financiers are dubs, as you know yourself now; don't you? They have to be told, and they have to be told plain so that they get it, and so, as I say, while I gave you the facts to roast us with, what you wrote as "bad" struck business men all over the United States as good, and they poured in upon us to our profit to do business with us to their profit. . . .

[13] Steffens, Autobiography, I, 195.

Steffens, with his training in logic, promptly discovered another fact that would re-appear time and again throughout his career, much to his amazement.[14]

> Men of exaggerated success like Russell Sage, J. Pierpoint Morgan, President Williams of the great Chemical Bank, President Maxwell of the New Jersey Central Railroad, these and other men who have succeeded by dint of their own efforts, excelling others in large enterprises requiring intellectual powers of some kind, are all, all incapable of logical thought even in business matters. They cannot reason correctly in the simplest matters of their own trade . . . . They simply feel that such a thing will go. They do not reason it out carefully.

[14] Letter, L.S. to Harlow Gale, March 18, 1893, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 93-94).

Leaving his post on Wall Street, Steffens was assigned to the police beat, a beat that the more liberal editors on the Post were subtly attempting to establish under the nose of the conservative

Godkin. Steffens, they believed, could handle the job well. The excuse for having a police reporter was the need to follow the anti-vice crusade being waged by one of the now forgotten New York reformers, Reverend Charles H. Parkhurst. Soon Steffens, becoming friends with Jacob Riis, learned the secrets of the police and the underworld. The police beat introduced Steffens to the subject of municipal corruption, and it was this subject that was to make him famous. As always, Steffens was unable to personally maintain a position of disinterest. He soon came to know the major characters in the drama of New York City's underworld, on both sides, and further, he found that the police and criminals were too often in cahoots with each other, if, indeed, they weren't one and the same. Steffens recalled that[15]

> reporting at police headquarters was like a college education in this, that one had to take several courses all together. There was the police news, police policies and politics; the Ghetto, with its synagogues, theaters, and moral struggles; the strikes; and, on the side, Wall Street. It differed from college in this, that I was interested in each of these courses and could see that they belonged together. They all contributed to the learning of life as it is lived.

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[15]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 231.

Puzzle pieces were coming together--a system was developing while Steffens observed the police. All the elements of society, however diverse they may have seemed from other points of view, converged at the police station. Steffens' police reporting was another central factor in determining his perception as a muckraker.

His first personal experience in reform came about with the Lexow Police Commission Investigations, which were a result of

Reverend Parkhurst's continued attacks on corruption in police ranks. Parkhurst was convinced that bad men were responsible for bad government, an idea that Theodore Roosevelt was soon to echo. Steffens' experience with one of the policemen, a Captain Schmittberger, who confessed his sins, convinced him that corruption was not merely a product of men, but rather of men, sometimes innocent, caught by a political and business system that rewarded corruption while it punished honesty.

The Lexow Commission brought about the election of a reform government, and the new mayor appointed Theodore Roosevelt as police commissioner. Roosevelt, in typical fashion, was enthusiastic about his job but unaware of how to accomplish it. To determine what needed doing he formed what Steffens dubbed a "kitchen cabinet" of Riis and Steffens, who gave him the inside story and suggested tactics of reform. This action was the beginning of a long and beneficial contact between Roosevelt and Steffens.

With Roosevelt in command and Steffens and Riis giving advice, the three started to reform the city. Steffens, who had become interested enough in the police captain who had told all to start a novel about his life story, shocked Reverend Parkhurst and Roosevelt by advising that Schmittberger be promoted rather than shoved aside. Reliance on the reformed too was a theory that Steffens was to reemphasize many times; he saw an honor among the crooked that did not exist among the upright--a belief that could be traced back to Charlie Prodger in his childhood. His logic seemed clear:[16]

Cannot an honest man do dishonest things and remain honest?

Isn't a strong man, however bad, socially better than a weak crook?

. . .[Schmittberger] was still an honest, good man doing bad things. He struck me as the type who would serve as well on the reform as on the graft side if he were given the chance.

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[16]Steffens, Autobiography, I, 274.

Steffens had come to a full realization of the existence of a government organization independent of the legal one by April, 1894, when he wrote to his father, "There is too much anti-machine and too little desire to reform the machine itself."[17]

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[17]Letter, L.S. to his father, April 15, 1894, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 102).

Steffens' ability as a reporter and writer had grown steadily. Norman Hapgood, a young reporter who had started at the Post while Steffens was one of their men, later wrote that[18]

> The ablest all-round reporter on the staff was Lincoln Steffens, and I thought him also the best general reporter in the city. He was at that time interested primarily in events that passed before his eyes, with comment on their significance kept in the background, and narrative, description, and humor combined with a professional thoroughness.

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[18]Norman Hapgood, The Changing Years: Reminiscences of Norman Hapgood (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1930), pp. 107-08.

By 1897 his stories had been accepted by Harper's Weekly, Chap-Book, Scribner's, and that new "popular" magazine, McClure's, for which he wrote about "Life in the Klondike Gold Fields." In 1895 Henry Holt & Company, publishers, approached him to see if he would give them first chance on any collection of stories he might wish to publish.[19]

[19]Letter, L.S. to his father, November 6, 1896, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 125).

In mid-1894, Johann Kruderwolf, a German student with whom Steffens had been friends during his university days in Germany, died and willed approximately $10,000, a major portion of his estate, to Steffens, much to Steffens' surprise. By 1898 Steffens had managed, by manipulation, to have about $15,000, plus a substantial amount of money from his wife's family.[20] Although never a really wealthy man,

[20]Letter, L.S. to his father, December 10, 1898, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 133).

Steffens was never again to worry about money. Indeed, he went so far as to loan his father some at what he later discovered was a rather exorbitant interest rate.

In 1897 Steffens, with a group of other Post reporters, left the Post and went over to the New York Commercial Advertiser, where he became city editor. The newspaper, under these men, became a literary haven. Traditional journalism was verboten and those with a literary bent were encouraged. His experience with the Commercial Advertiser made Steffens increasingly respected among New York journalism circles. He was in the midst of everything, and he loved every minute of it; but he was working long hours, and those around him could see that he would soon burn himself out if he did not slow down.

He felt the strain. On May 4, 1901, he wrote his father that, "With what we could earn by occasional writing, we could count

on $2,400 a year at the least. The trouble is health. I am home-sick today; I have not been well for some time; there have occurred to me some signs of nervous prostration."[21]

[21]Letter, L.S. to his father, May 4, 1901, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 137).

Four days later, on May 8, 1901, Steffens' wife wrote to her father-in-law, telling him that her husband had collapsed and, as of June 1, 1901, would no longer work for the Commercial Advertiser. Steffens needed three months rest and the doctor had told her that she had a "morbid spot on [her] lung" that would require that she leave New York. She also confirmed what her husband had been hinting about in some of his letters, he had been hired by McClure's at $5,000 a year as managing editor, as of October 1, 1901. Mrs. Steffens, not happy about the move, disliked some of the men who worked at the magazine.[22]

[22]Letter, Josephine Steffens to Joseph Steffens, May 8, 1901: see also L.S. to his father, May 7, 1901, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 138).

After an extended and health-renewing trip to the Adirondacks, but still a month earlier than planned, on September 1, 1901, Steffens reported for work. He wandered about the office aimlessly and soon discovered that the editorial work he thought he had been trained for at the Commercial Advertiser had really been done by other men. Steffens was ill at ease; he was really a reporter, not an editor at all. Finally, McClure told him that the only way he could learn to run a magazine was to get out of the office. With the help of one of

his assistants, Albert C. Boyden, Steffens formed a list of people across the country who might be able to lead him to good stories, the last name of the list being William C. ("Bill") Boyden, Albert's brother, a Chicago lawyer. "Bill" Boyden gave Steffens the names of Walter Fisher, his partner; Weyerhauser, a St. Paul, Minnesota, lumber baron; and Joseph W. Folk, a rising young St. Louis attorney. After finding an interesting but unusable story in St. Paul, Steffens went south to St. Louis.

CHAPTER III

MUCKRAKING THE CITIES

St. Louis, when Steffens arrived, was the fourth largest city in a nation still learning that urban growth brought with it new and difficult problems. Tweed in New York, and Croker after him, were to most Americans just single instances of corruption that concerned New Yorkers, not them. Only a few doubters, unconsciously or consciously, were suspicious that there were problems as great elsewhere. Prosperity had created in the majority a chauvinism that reinforced their belief in the "American system of government."

True, those at the extreme ends of society were becoming doubtful of the quality of American life--the populists had failed with their attempts at reform and the new and disillusioned immigrants who had poured in massive numbers into the big cities were starting to investigate social panaceas and, in the extreme, anarchism--but the majority was satisfied that it was the best of all possible worlds. The old aristocracy, and the country boys who found the city even more exciting and sinful than advertised, might nostalgically miss the past, but those who complained about the future were in the minority. Business was in command, and everybody was in business.

Historical interpretation of post-Civil War political activity has distorted the mental picture that modern readers have of that era.

The majority of citizens in 1903 had middle-class sensibilities. Agitation in favor of socialism and anarchism, despite its domination of our history books, did not constitute a serious threat to most people.

The great majority looking about saw growth that surpassed anything in the history of the world. Buildings were reaching to the sky, more and more people were installing telephones, and increasing numbers were attending high school (or even one of the growing established land-grant colleges). America was becoming a world power, the price of luxuries never imagined was reduced by technology and transportation improvements so quickly that everyone was looking forward to a century of unprecedented progress. The World's Fair that so frightened Henry Adams was an inspiration to the others who visited it.

And who was responsible? Whom could all this success be traced to? The American Businessman. He was the hero of the age, and when he supported government it meant to most Americans that that government was worthy of support. Democracy was intact. Horatio Alger, Jr., had taught a generation of boys that to succeed was to go into honest business--and success itself was proof of honesty. The business of government was just too much bother for a generation concerned with business to examine too closely--after all, businessmen were watching it.

Of course, those who were not blinded by the gold and gilt of American success realized that big business and government were in many cases synonymous; but if all those businessmen who were working

with and for the government were successes, so the government must logically be successful also.

The high noon of business seemed to have passed, however, and a shadow of doubt was starting to cross the corners of many American minds. Nagging questions that could not be ignored seemed to become more and more bothersome. Why were so many laborers going on strike? Why was the cost of government rising while the services rendered were not even remaining even? Why were the political leaders becoming less of an inspiration and politics itself a dirty word? It is hard to say when these questions first came to the forefront, but by 1902 most of the citizenry was familiar with them.

The growth of large urban areas increased the value of many commodities, perhaps none more so than public utilities. The possession of a franchise for a street railway or a contract for public building construction could make a businessman wealthy in a single transaction. The temptation this created among the representatives who gave franchises was often too great. Combines made up of members of the two branches of the municipal councils in St. Louis, not unlike similar groups in other cities, formed so as to make it necessary for businessmen to purchase their votes to acquire success, be the business requests just or unjust. Soon everything had a price; a businessman willing to sell his soul found that it would purchase much more than his integrity. Local, state, and national politicians found that great fortunes could be founded on money paid for votes for a franchise, for extending a privilege, for passing any law and, even more tragic, for laxity in enforcing existing laws.

In St. Louis corruption itself became a business. The corrupt combine that controlled the municipal council had even drawn a price list detailing bribery rates.[1]

> In order to insure a regular and indisputable revenue, the combine of each house [of the municipal government] drew up a schedule of bribery prices for all possible sorts of grants, just such a list as a commercial traveler takes out on the road with him. There was a price for a grain elevator, a price for a short switch; side tracks were charged for the linear foot. . . . As there was a scale for favorable legislation, so there was one for defeating bills.

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[1]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, pp. 22-23. When the quotations that appeared both in a periodical and later in a collected volume are given, the page number given will be from the volume.

The quality of such representatives obviously had to be low. It was worthwhile for business to condone, in fact encourage, representatives to represent not the people's interests, but the interests of the business community. The self-righteous leaders of business would not themselves sink to such clear cut and obviously low levels--it was bad for business--but they would make it profitable for men who would.

A new class arose: politicians. It was during this era that the label politician became a curse. If a man did not care what the public thought of him, or whom he took orders from, or what went on in his other hand, he could rise in politics. The businesses and businessmen who idealized competition and honesty on the one hand paid well for privilege and dishonesty with the other.

Steffens arrived in St. Louis to look for a story about the city that would interest the whole country. He intended to make McClure's

a forum; "to take confused, local, serial news of the newspapers and report it all together in one long short story for the whole country."[2] What he found was Joseph W. Folk.

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[2]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 368.

Joe Folk was a lawyer who had been elected circuit attorney for the St. Louis district. Raised in a strong moral tradition by "the race of southern Puritans who have the hard, righteous traits of their New England cousins, and chivalry besides," Folk believed all, or at least most, of the myths about virtue and the rewards of honesty that businessmen propagated in their speech while they corrupted with their hands.[3] Like most young men, he was reluctant to leave private

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[3]Ibid.

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practice; but, after long argument, the Democrats convinced him to run for office, his only stipulation being that they understand that he must do his "duty." The businessmen and politicians who controlled the party were, by experience, used to empty words. They ran Folk, and he won.

"Now the office of public prosecutor," wrote Steffens,[4]

> is a high mountain upside down, from the top of which a man with eyes to see can see all the world, the flesh, and the devil, and most observers adjust their glasses to the glare of it. Folk couldn't.

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[4]Ibid., II, 369.

Folk was on the mountain and recognized the devils. The men who ran him for office tried to control his appointments--to make sure that the men who represented law enforcement could be bought. Folk was amazed; but he had said he would do his "duty." As he learned his job, Folk also learned the nature of modern politics, and, in turn, did his share in teaching Steffens. When the two first met Folk was still in a state of shock. He was just learning the truth. "The man was dazed," as Steffens put it. From his place at the top of the mountain he saw the sources of corruption, and he was unprepared for such revelations, "his picture of the world was being slashed to pieces."[5] His heroes were false.

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[5]Ibid., II, 368-69.

But, his duty was clear. He had not mouthed empty words when he stipulated that he would do his "duty." Now the case of St. Louis was not unlike cases in other cities, but it was a revelation to Steffens and Folk--and the reading public. An understanding of the details he found in St. Louis is valuable as foundation for comparison to details he was to find later.

A few weeks after being elected, Folk was faced with some fraud cases concerning the election. Folk, sworn to do his duty, prosecuted the guilty regardless of political affiliation. The veteran politician reacted in such terms as "D--n Joe! he thinks he's the whole thing as Circuit Attorney."[6] The bosses grew uneasy, for Folk was not following

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[6]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 27.

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orders. He also interfered with graftsmen infesting the court.

In mid-1902 the Suburban Railway Company decided to sell out to its major competition, the St. Louis Transit Company. To make its product attractive, Suburban had a bill, known as House Bill Number 44, presented to the Municipal House of Delegates. The bill, if passed, would have increased the "value of the property from three to six million dollars," according to the company president, Charles H. Turner. Turner knew it would cost to get the bill passed, so he shopped around. Rather than enduring the unpleasant business of bribing others himself, he sought out a "legislative agent." First choice was a Colonel Butler, an experienced agent, who figured it would cost $145,000. Turner shopped more, until he found Philip Stock, usually a representative of the brewers, but willing to do free lance work for others.[7]

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[7] Ibid., p. 29.

With a $75,000 note from Turner, co-signed by two respected directors of Suburban, Stock arranged to meet John Murrell, of the combine in the House, at the German American Savings Bank, where the money was depositied in a deposit box, to be delivered on passage of Bill Number 44. With $60,000 more, Stock and Charles H. Kratz, representing the City Council, visited another safty deposit box at the Mississippi Valley Trust Company. This, however, was not enough money. One councilman demanded that Suburban relieve him of $9,000 worth of defunct stock--raising the boodle to $144,000--"only one thousand less than the [price] originally named" by Butler.

The bill passed, but the court system intervened. Turner was angered and he refused to allow the safty deposit boxes to be opened. The lawmakers, anxious for their boodle, tried to release enough truth to the public to force the company to pay for fear of loosing its good name. A ten-line story appeared in a local newspaper saying that "a large sum of money had been placed in a bank for the purpose of bribing certain Assemblymen. . . ."[8]

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[8]Ibid., p. 27.

A friend of Folk, a newspaper man known as "Red" Galvin, showed the article to him, adding that he felt the bill referred to was Ordinance Number 44. Until then St. Louis thought it was a joke. Folk didn't agree. An hour after seeing the article Folk subpoenaed almost a hundred persons, including "Councilmen, members of the House of Delegates, officers and directors of the Suburban Railway, bank presidents and cashiers." Playing only on hunches, Folk called his own bluff in court:[9]

> "Gentlemen," [said Mr. Folk] "I have secured sufficient evidence to warrant the return of indictments against you for bribery, and I shall prosecute you to the full extent of the law and send you to the penitentiary unless you tell to this grand jury the complete history of the corruptionist methods employed by you to secure the passage of Ordinance No. 44. I shall give you three days to consider the matter. . . ."

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[9]Ibid, p. 27-28.

Turner and Stock were scared. the penitentiary looming large in their futures, they confessed. To get concrete evidence Folk

played another bluff--on the banks. The money in the vaults would be more than sufficient evidence, but "lock-boxes had always been considered sacred and beyond the power of the law to open." But businessmen had also been beyond the law. Being as emphatic and cock-sure of himself as possible, the young public servant requested the right to search, threatening with a warrant. The boodle was found--and the case seemed as good as over.[10]

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[10]Ibid., p. 31.

But Folk had learned a great deal to fracture his faith in the business and government elite. A former lieutenant governor had tried to intervene for Stock. Charles Kratz, of the council, who was then being seriously considered to run for Congress, and John K. Murrell, of the House of Delegates, were arrested and placed under heavy bond. Emil Meysenburg and Ellis Wainwright, both millionaires, were indicted, as was another wealthy pillar of the community, Henry Nicholas. Julius Lehmann, of the House of Delegates, and another politician, Harry Faulkner, were charged. Others fled the state or country. A meeting of the "bribe-givers" and the "bribe-takers" was held within a day after the first indictments were returned. "The total wealth of those in attendance was $30,000,000, and their combined political influence sufficient to carry any municipal election under normal conditions."[11] Yet, despite proof of their guilt, their power

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[11]Ibid., pp. 28, 33.

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remained. They were the established citizens, although the mass public was shocked at the closeness of the top of society to the bottom.

The citizens banded together and came to Folk's support; many of them remained anonymous, in fear of the power of the accused. Detectives investigated Folk's background, looking for potential blackmail information. Letters, threats, and social pressures all mounted in defense of the honored corrupt. "Statesmen, lawyers, merchants, clubmen, churchmen--in fact, men prominent in all walks of life--visited [Folk] at his office and at his home, and urged that he cease such activities against his fellow townspeople."[12]

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[12]Ibid., p. 34.

But Folk persisted in his "duty." Playing the boodlers off one another, he soon "had dug up the intimate history of ten years of corruption, especially of the business of the North and South and the Central Traction franchise grants, . . ."[13] Apparently the Suburban

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[13]Ibid.

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was but one of many cases. Before the Suburban case was in trial, other cases of equal or greater stature were appearing.

In the midst of all this, Steffens appeared and asked Folk for his story; when asked, Folk "dropped everything to come. . . . He needed help, publicity." Local newspapers were under the same pressures as Folk--and they could not back him much longer, for their continued success rested on remaining in good grace with the business

world, which purchased advertising.[14]

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[14]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 368.

Folk had reached a conclusion, was shocked, and was almost afraid to admit it. As Steffens heard Folk tell his story, he watched Folk sink deeper into the corner of his chair, and when Steffens did not register expression, Folk "shot forward and shouted--no, he whispered, but the way he whispered and blazed made it sound like a shout, 'It is good business men that are corrupting our bad politicians; it is good business that causes bad government--in St. Louis.'"[15]

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[15]Ibid., II, 371.

Looking back and analyzing what he had done from 1931, when he wrote his Autobiography, Steffens realized what his mind started doing in this first case. His training in logic was starting to pay off, and the ideas he had developed about America in Europe were falling in place: "I was taking the single, separate facts of political corruption and joining them into a new view of a city as it is."[16] Here, in the first city he investigated as a magazine

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[16]Ibid., II, 371.

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journalist, Steffens applied the basic definition of what was to become "the System," or, as he put it this time, "a new view of a city as it is."

The real nature of city government was what Steffens learned on

his first trip to St. Louis. He was to return, to confirm a belief not yet fully formed, but the primary step in the education of Lincoln Steffens was over--he was, after "Tweed Days in St. Louis," the first muckraker, although he had not yet been given the title.

The control of government by businessmen was a seed of what was to come, but it was a seed that planted a new idea in Steffens' mind that grew as his education progressed. The extent of the boodle that business corruption of politics could produce was what Steffens illustrated best to the people who read about St. Louis, but it was far from a total illustration of the extent of corruption and privilege.

But Steffens was an editor, not a writer, and he did not know St. Louis as well as a local writer would. Although he had done most of the research, Steffens hired a local man, Claude Westmore, to write the story and submit it to the magazine. The manuscript Westmore wrote, however, disappointed Steffens; the local writer's knowledge of St. Louis and the social powers of the city had caused him to hesitate in reporting, to hedge in detailing the story for fear of the power of the parties attacked. Steffens, to remedy the situation, re-wrote the article, adding his name as co-author, with all the pertinent details. The advantage of exposure by a national magazine was the power of the national institution to stand the pressures local institutions could not. Never again, Steffens concluded, could he give the duty of reporting to someone who could be pressured by localities. At that time Steffens thought that his national forum could not be bribed, that it was above the power of business.

S. S. McClure had a sense second only to that of Frank Munsey,

a rival publisher, for what the public wanted to hear, and he knew that Steffens, along with Tarbell and Baker, could strike a vein that would sell. The journalism of the muckrakers went hand in hand with the political activity indicated by the popularity of Theodore Roosevelt. Response to "Tweed Days in St. Louis" was enough to give Steffens confidence in introducing more about public corruption--thus, the January, 1903, issue of the magazine has become the symbol of the beginning of muckraking. There all three of the McClure's triumvirate appeared together, along with McClure's own famous editorial, "The American Contempt of Law."

McClure also knew that the public had its own ideas about what caused corruption, and that they did not want an argument. Thus, "Mr. McClure dictated the title and thesis of the next article [Steffens] was going to write on Minneapolis before [he] left New York."[17] The

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[17]Ibid., II, 374.

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first sentence in that article, "The Shame of Minneapolis," echoed that thesis: "Whenever anything extraordinary is done in American municipal politics, whether for good or for evil, you can trace it almost invariably to one man."[18]

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[18]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 42.

This was a belief that businessmen had been trying to foster in the public mind for some time, and one that even Steffens, for the most part, thought to be true. Although a renunciation of the basic concept

of democracy, it was the gospel of efficiency brought to government from business. A good business could be defined as a business under the leadership of a strong controlling figure, and good government was, to the turn-of-the-century mind, an extension of good business. Good businessmen caused good government. "The people," Steffens continued in his opening paragraph, "do not do it. Neither do the 'gangs,' 'combines,' or political parties. These are but instruments by which bosses (not leaders; we in America are not led, but driven) rule the people, and commonly sell them out. . . ."[19]

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[19]Ibid.

A quarter of a century later, writing his Autobiography, Steffens thought that his "writings of that period were effective because [he] set out on [his] search with all the taught ignorance of [his] day. It was this that put the astonishment, shame, and patriotic indignation into [his] reports."[20] It cannot be forgotten,

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[20]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 375.

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however, that when Steffens wrote his own story he remembered with his own, politically oriented mind; Steffens, even at the time of his muckraking, was not typical, even though his thoughts hit a common chord.

None the less, when Steffens set out to examine political corruption he was aware of several popular theories concerning its causes: America was suffering from "growing-pains"; government was not being run like business (a myth Steffens would investigate later);

the "foreign element" was bad; the Republicans were bad (according to the Democrats); the Democrats were bad (according to the Republicans). There were many theories, but they all reached one conclusion that Steffens had not then learned to doubt; as he said,[21]

> I had never for a moment questioned the great moral assumption which underlay all this thinking: that political evils were due to bad men of some sort and curable by the substitution of good men.

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[21] Ibid.

The savior of the democratic country was to be, then, a moral dictator--and probably a business man. Was not Joe Folk, a lawyer, proving to be the salvation of St. Louis? True, he was salvaging the city from businessmen, but they must have just been "bad"--the people had chosen the wrong dictators. The cure for corruption was not, as of yet, thought to be in an active and aware population; it was in the moral character of the community leaders.

The man who was moral in Minneapolis, Steffens concluded, was another self-made man who, although reluctant to serve, finally decided that if he was in a position of power he would, like Folk, do his duty. The man who was in the catbird seat this time--Mr. Hovey C. Clarke--was the foreman of the grand jury--and like all businessmen who commanded respect, "he had won always, till now he had the habit of command, the impatient, imperious manner of the master, and the assurance of success which begets it."[22]

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[22] Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 58.

St. Louis illustrated the corruption of politicians by businessmen greedy for boodle; Minneapolis was to illustrate the criminal corruption of the police system. The fault had been prescribed by McClure: democracy itself caused bad government.

The political boss of Minneapolis, surprisingly, was the mayor, Albert Alonzo ("Doc") Ames. A physician, he had gained the respect of the lesser elements of society and, by reason of his sympathy and charity, had convinced them he should be in politics. "There was," Steffens reported, "a basis for his 'good-fellowship.' There always is; these good fellows are not frauds--not in the beginning."[23] After a few terms in various small offices, he became

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[23]Ibid., p. 44.

Republican mayor, then Democratic mayor. Despite a new primary law, Ames was able in 1900 to get nominated, this time as a Republican, because of weaknesses in the primary system. The party system, a tool that businessmen and politicians used to hamstring the majority of the voting public so that it would have to buy only a small, shifting, independent vote, was in the hands of the Republicans, so Ames was carried into office by voters reluctant to split their tickets.

Until 1900 Ames had not been a grafter of the first magnitude; he had been easy going and had grafted only randomly, leaving many spoils for his followers. "Now, however," Steffens wrote, "he set out upon a career of corruption which for deliberateness, invention, and avarice has never been equaled."[24]

[24]Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Choosing his brother, Colonel Fred W. Ames, as chief of police, "Doc" Ames spread the word that criminal activity would become the primary commodity in Minneapolis, one for which criminals would pay handsomely. Pickpockets, confidence men, thieves, the denizens of the jails, were to be directed by the police so they could operate with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of interference. "Coffee John" Fitchette supervised the selling of places on the police force, which had been purged of 107 (of a total of 225) men, who could not be trusted by the boodlers. Irwin A. Gardner, a medical student in "Doc" Ames's office, was put in charge of collecting from houses of prostitution.

Gardner showed particular promise in the innovative organization of corruption. He created districts, easily patrollable in which prostitution was to be "allowed." The women there set up "houses, apartments, and, of all things, candy stores, which sold sweets to children and tobacco to 'lumberjacks' in front, while a nefarious traffic was carried on in the rear."[25] Most novel, however,

[25]Ibid., p. 48.

was the method of taxation. Gardner set up a schedule by which the women were to appear before the Municipal Court once a month and pay a "fine" of $100. For all functional purposes he had gained control of the market. He created a police baseball team "for whose games tickets

were sold to people who had to buy them." The women had "to buy illustrated biographies of the city officials; they had to give presents of money, jewelry, and gold stars to police officers."[26] Ames soon

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[26]Ibid., p. 49.

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relented and made the $100 bi-monthly--or at least it looked like that; but it turned out that the $35,000 previously netted by the city disturbed the mayor, since he wasn't getting a cut. From then on collections were made in alternate months, but for the mayor directly. Finally, to add insult to injury, the mayor ordered that two city physicians make unscheduled visits "at from $5 to $20 per visit," to the bordellos--calls that increased in number and soon had no purpose beyond a shakedown.

Norman King, another local politician, was charged with control of gambling. He established a system requiring for himself and various other members of the government a set fee that, when paid, insured the gamblers of protection. The fee, however, bought more than mere police blindness. Officers stationed themselves at the doors of the gambling dens, which were restricted to districts also, and eliminated trouble-makers who had been cheated at cards by threatening to arrest them for gambling without a license.

Other methods of boodle grew. Police watched, even aided in burglaries. Big businesses were robbed. The organization, lacking any concrete check, became drunk with its own power. The greedy turned upon each other for bigger shares of the take. Chaos ruled the corrupt

as well as the law abiding. "The whole system," Steffens wrote, "became so demoralized that every man was for himself. There was not left even the traditional honor among thieves."[27]

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[27] Ibid., p. 57.

Then, in April, 1902, Hovey C. Clarke became the foreman of the new grand jury. The first question of this heroic man, said Steffens, was "Why not rip up the Ames gang?" The normal fears of lesser men did not deter Clarke. He excused the chief prosecuting attorney and gave support to an assistant, Al Smith, who followed Clarke's obviously winning gumption. Clarke applied business methods: he hired detectives whom the police watched as decoys and, using his own money, he hired additional detectives whom the police didn't know about.

Dissension among the boodlers created problems much as they had in St. Louis, where unrest among the wicked led to the publication of the newspaper article that had attracted Folk's attention. Clarke visited the jails and found two angry men, "Billy" Edwards and "Cheerful Charlie" Howard, who had been double-crossed or neglected in the scramble for riches. The power of Clarke's personality impressed these criminals, who were used to sizing up men, and they decided it was wisest to turn state's evidence rather than sit in jail. They produced a ledger that itemized exact payments of bribes--the best possible evidence.

Prosecution was swift. The grand jury, under Hovey, indicted Gardner; detective Norbuck of the police department, who had worked

closely in the gambling and burglary rings; Fred Ames; and chief of detectives King. Detectives brought in customers who had been fleeced in the gambling operation. "Two heads of departments against whom nothing had been shown suddenly ran away, and thus suggested to the grand jury an inquiry which revealed another source of 'graft,' in the sale of supplies to public institutions and the diversion of great quantities of provisions."[28] Mayor Ames, under indictment for

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[28]Ibid., p. 62.

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conspiracy, extortion, and bribery, caught the eleven o'clock train to West Baden, Indiana. Clarke was in the forefront; the old powers were routed.

At this juncture Steffens arrived in Minneapolis to report to the nation. Minor details of the reform had been leaked , but no single source had yet summarized it. Again, this was a series of local news events that, when summarized, had sufficient significance to interest a national magazine audience. Steffens, despite the danger of libel and personal harm, since he was often dealing with a criminal element, had developed a penchant for naming names and revealing facts to illustrate and enliven his articles. Thus, for the article, written by him this time, he asked to see the ledger that "Billy" Edwards and "Cheerful Charlie" Howard had produced, known as the big mitt ledger, so called from the slang term for a stud poker game with stacked hands. "Since it itemized the sums taken from victims, all expenses, the percentage and amounts paid for rent, cards, all costs, and the share in dollars of the mayor, chief of police, and each

detective, this, the Big Mitt Ledger, was a clinching piece of evidence."[29]

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[29]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 380.

Although Clarke had no hold on Edwards and Howard if they recovered the ledger, since they were hiding out and waiting to testify and not still in jail where they could be reached by the politicians under indictment, Steffens convinced Clarke to let him borrow the book, take it with him to visit the two men in hiding, and get their definitions of some of the slang terms in it. Only by masterful and artificial self-confidence did Steffens retrieve the ledger. He interviewed the two about police-criminal coalitions in other cities in addition to Minneapolis, since he was writing for a national magazine.

To gain the confidence of the two men, Steffens played a bluff, speaking knowingly of names and those facts he had on the operation of crime in major cities of the country. This illustrates two elements of Steffens reporting: first, he always did his homework before he tackled an article. He found out as much as possible about every aspect of the subject he covered. Although he depreciated the extent of his knowledge, it was not small. Second, he always interviewed as an insider. He did not condescend, neither did he attempt to cover the purpose of his inquiry. From what can be discerned from the evidence, he treated the accuser and the accused equally, and he made friends that he respected in both groups. As Louis Joughin, of the

American Civil Liberties Union, has commented,[30]

> Steffens jests about the dangers he ran into in his investigations; actually he was in frequent contact with professional criminals whose vested interests were being mortally threatened. These men knew where Steffens stood and they might have quickly and brutally turned against him. But Steffens went ahead with his work; and courage, at least when it is augmented by intellegence, is not a quality to be discounted.

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[30]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. ix.

While the court cases pended, the grand jury took control of the city government, under alderman Fred Powers. Finally, in the midst of the chaos that reigned during the upheaval of the entire local governmental system, the time came for a local election--a chance for the people to try again. Alderman Percy Jones, one of the few who had no scandal attached to his name, was called back from the East to take the position of acting mayor. To head the police, he assigned a church deacon, a man who, suprisingly, continued the disorderly houses in certain areas, but who absolutely forbade bribery, contending prostitution was inevitable, but bribery was not.

But Jones was not ruling a clean city yet. He was troubled by interests on all sides--a prominent citizen was angered by the forced vacating of some of his flats that had been rented to prostitutes; "the rent was the surest means of 'support' for his wife and children."[31]

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[31]Ibid., p. 66.

The forces of crime approached Jones asking for the right to "open four gambling-houses downtown, [guaranteeing that] they would see that no other games ran in any part of the city."[32] Jones remained open for

[32]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 687-88.

negotiations for six weeks. The group finally proposed to control crime for the city. Jones, doubting their ability, refused. Petty thefts grew; and news of them was, somehow, widespread. Jones held strong. Four prominent citizens reported jewel robberies. The number of larger crimes increased, and news of the increase was, somehow, also leaked. The syndicate reappeared and, to illustrate its power, caused the jewelry to be returned, piece at a time, to the police. The mayor still refused to give in, but he was puzzled.

Asking Steffens before Steffens got the chance to ask him, Jones wondered, "Can a city be governed without any alliance with crime?" Steffens complained, when looking back on his experiences,[33]

> All through those muckraking days I was mistaken for an expert who knew all about graft and politics and government and could tell anybody just what to do about them. . . . All assumed that I had what I was trying to get: Knowledge.

[33]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 67; Steffens, Autobiography, II, 386.

While Steffens denied knowledge, he was not reticent at giving advice, as he would soon be doing.

Neither was he so ignorant of corruption as he implied. Before leaving Minneapolis, Steffens asked Jones[34]

> a seemingly irrelevant, very relevant question. When he was talking about the solid business-church-good-people's opposition to his policy, I asked him why he did not investigate the board of aldermen. His answer gave me a thrill. "Oh," he said, "we had one. Several years back we had a scandal about the corruption of the council.

[34]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 389.

Steffens was already, with his second article, building a hierarchy of organization for the modern city--the first level of "the System." This was not the mind of a man who lacked expertise. Deny it as he did, Steffens was starting to organize in his intellect an intricate organization that would, as a concept, apply to any municipal government. He had learned two things: in St. Louis he learned that business corrupted politics, and in Minneapolis he learned that the police system was corrupted by criminals within.

His success was at hand; he could continue his study of municipal corruption as he wished. The next step seemed obvious: back to St. Louis to see if the police system was corrupt there, too. If it was, his theory would seem a little more dependable.

Back in St. Louis to renew his research into the nature of municipal corruption, Steffens found that during his absence the townspeople, rather than rising up in wrath against the corruption, had turned on their savior, Joseph W. Folk. The lessons of the past were unlearned; in his second article on St. Louis, "The Shamelessness of St. Louis," published in March, 1903, Steffens reviewed the conclusions of his previous article on that city and brought the readers up to date on civil progress. "Since that article was written," he wrote, "fourteen men have been tried, and half a score have confessed, so that some measure of the importance of the interests concerned has been given." But what of the effect of this

this testimony, of the convictions?[35]

> When they had given their testimony, and the boodlers one after another were convicted, these witnesses have hurried back to their places of business and the convicts to their seats in the municipal assembly. This is literally true. In the House of Delegates, sit, under sentence, as follows: Charles F. Kelly, two years; Charles J. Denny, three years and five years; Harry A. Faulkner, two years; E. E. Murrell, State's witness, but not tried.

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[35]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, pp. 71-72.

In fact, the delegation failed to support an appropriation for Folk to continue his investigation. Not only did the people not rise up in arms to help Folk, but they would not even retain him.

When Steffens started his second article on St. Louis he advised Folk not to do anything against the police graft; that would distract his attention and nothing good would be accomplished. Steffens advised "not to tackle the underworld. The good citizens of St. Louis were already turning against him; if he attacked the bad people also he would lose all support; he might not be able to find twelve men for a jury."[36]

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[36]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 390-91.

Folk had been incredulous when Steffens, acting on one of his own theories based on information he had received from the big mitt ledger men in Minneapolis told him, "Folk, there must be a police graft system here in St. Louis." But, after a quick check with loose-tongued prisoners in the local jail, Folk returned, his sense of duty fired, crying, "It's here. And it is like Minneapolis; it is exactly like New

York. Exactly. Methods, divisions, prices--all the same."[37] But

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[37]Ibid.

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this was not to be written; instead Steffens concentrated his article on the old city boss.

The new article on St. Louis had overtones clearly intended to help Folk. Highly partisan, Steffens carefully ordered his facts to help the sagging popularity of the young prosecutor, eventually suggesting, although not in the article, that Folk run for governor rather than prosecutor in St. Louis, thus gaining the votes of the out-state citizens who were not acting with a vested interest in the St. Louis system.

Another reason for the revised attack on the boss, rather than on what Steffens wanted to write, came from S. S. McClure, who forced Steffens to dismiss discussions of his theory of corruption, at least in the magazine. McClure's influence was beginning to be a strong hand that weighed heavily on Steffens. McClure felt his own judgment of what the readers wanted to hear was more trained than Steffens'--since Steffens' theory, he rightly believed, was in conflict with the opinions of many in the reading audience. Steffens only partially followed McClure's directive. Before writing the story Steffens decided that he [38]

> would indeed load [his] new article on St. Louis with the libelous, dangerous, explosive facts in Folk's possession, [he] would aim them and the whole story, like a gun, at the current popular theories (including McClure's). . . .[He] was a good shot. . . .

[38]Ibid., II, 394.

Consequently, the article, like many of Steffens' pieces, served several functions. While it was well written, factual, and significant current history, it was also partisan political propaganda for liberal reform. Further, it was structured within a framework based on Steffens', not McClure's, notion of the world and of modern democracy. In short, Steffens wrote politically biased articles for an audience whom he was trying to educate to his way of thinking.

The main portion of the article was relegated to a biographical review of the political rise and fall of St. Louis "boss" Edward R. (Colonel Ed) Butler. By skillful handling of various political problems, Butler had created a system by which any improvement of public welfare, be it legitimate or based on the greed of a particular businessman, had to be purchased through him;[39]

> his business was boodling, . . . It involves, not thieves, gamblers, and common women, but influential citizens, capitalists, and great corporations. For the stock-in-trade of the boodler is the rights, privileges, franchises, and real property of the city, and his source of corruption is the top, not the bottom, of society.

[39]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 78.

Butler, to insure his power, formed majorities of sufficient size in both the House of Delegates and the Council of St. Louis to overturn the mayor's veto, insuring him perpetual supremacy. Anyone wishing to get a piece of legislation passed had to approach Butler

and find out the cost. On receipt of that amount, Butler would notify his majorities in each branch to vote for the bill.

Butler's greed and the suspicion of it by members of his combines eventually caused dissension within the ranks. Butler might, for example split $1,000 with his combine out of a $10,000 fee, keeping the rest for himself. There was no check on him. "Combines were formed within the old combines to make him pay more. . . ."[40] Outside businesses

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[40] Ibid.

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tried to avoid Butler, causing the greed of the legislators to increase. Butler and his assistants were spied upon, and other spies spied on the spies. The combines often sold out to both sides, giving their final vote to the highest bidder, but using, and accepting, the bribes from both sides on an issue, forcing the price up by competitive bidding.

Steffens filled the article, as he did all his articles, with specific examples. One situation illustrates the amount of the corruption and the complexity of the method. The city railway interests wanted to retain favor with the city council, so they paid seven members of that council (of thirteen) $5,000 each year. As a precaution John Scullin, of the railroads, gave an extra $25,000 to Councilman Uthoff, one of the seven, to have someone to guarantee that the other six stayed bought. This group was Butler's combine in the council. "Robert M. Snyder, a capitalist and promoter, of New York and Kansas City, came into St. Louis with a traction proposition inimical to the city railway interests," known as the Central Traction Company. Snyder started to buy votes from the council. The combine, wanting to get

the most boodle possible, forced Butler to promise retainers up to a total of $175,000. Butler, to save what he could, sent Uthoff--who had received an extra $25,000--to either break the meeting up by causing arguments or force the combine to raise its price so high that Snyder wouldn't pay. The meeting was ended with disagreement. Everyone hurried to see Butler. Through his backers Butler paid out a total of $175,000. Then everyone hurried to Snyder.

> Four councilmen got from Snyder $10,000 each, one got $15,00, another $17,500 and one $50,000, twenty-five members of the House of Delegates got $3,000 each from him. In all, Snyder paid $250,000 for the franchise.

Being the highest bidder, he won; and he immediately sold the franchise to his opposition for $1,250,000--a profit of a million dollars. "It was worth twice as much."[41]

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[41] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

Uthoff, the special agent of Butler, was the man Snyder had paid $50,000. Uthoff, displaying a kind of thief's honor, returned the $50,000, saying he couldn't be bought for less than $100,000. When Snyder accepted, Uthoff bolted from Butler--returning his $25,000 retainer, since, as he later admitted in court, "[He] hadn't earned it." But, when he went to get his $100,000 from Snyder he was disappointed. Soon he was trying to get the original $50,000 he had returned. Finally, after getting him drunk, Snyder gave him a total of $5,000 for signing a statement that the whole Central Traction transaction was free from the taint of corrupt legislation.

Other deals were soon causing troubles. Butler had problems

with lighting contracts in which he paid out only $85,000 of $150,000 he had been given to get a bill passed; then the Suburban Traction Bill, which was the main subject of "Tweed Days in St. Louis"; and finally with an attempt to sell the water works, worth $10 million, for $15 million and keep one million for themselves, in which case the combine demanded more.

While under great pressure, Butler, who was already a millionare many times, offered $2,500 gifts to two examiners from the Board of Health to insure approval of a garbage contract that would net him $232,500. He was caught by Folk and was indicted.

Folk moved the trial from St. Louis to Columbia, the home of the state university, where Butler's easy going ways and attempts at jury tampering and bribery would be scorned. There, outside of the harsh controls of the St. Louis business district and its forces for corruption, a Democratic judge and a jury composed of Democrats found Butler guilty, proving that in areas outside of the economic control of the business system of the community, the people could and would perform justly. (This, of course, is one reason why Steffens suggested Folk run for governor, a race that could use non-St. Louis voters.)

But by the time the Steffens article was written, Butler, convicted but not in jail, was assisting a group of businessmen who asked his aid in forcing through a bill for street improvements. While Butler was on trial both Republicans and Democrats consulted him on nominees for their tickets for the next election. The Democrats nominated his son for Congress.

Meanwhile Folk, who was prosecuting in the public interest, started getting warnings to stop--not from criminals but from many of

the citizenry. The chief of police requested that Folk write all his messages to the police, thus allowing for time and delaying Folk's ability to make arrests. Folk's answer was the only reference to police corruption in St. Louis that Steffens made in the article that appeared in the second St. Louis article. Answering the man who delivered the police chief's message, Folk told the messenger to inform his boss "that hereafter all [his] communications with [the] department [would] be in the form of indictments."[42] To astute

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[42] Ibid., p. 97.

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readers this implied Steffens' knowledge of the presence of police corruption, especially since the police immediately stopped harassing Folk; but the average reader would read over this specific reference to police corruption. Steffens was trying to emphasize the good Folk had performed and to show the trouble he was having in his home district, thus winning state-wide support for Folk in the governor's race. Delving too deeply into police corruption would have forced the issue of police involvement in "the System." Folk, on Steffens' advice, was evading that particular issue because it would have diverted his energies and to make it a major point in the article would have hurt, not helped Folk.

Steffens ended his review by listing the criminals who were, despite the cases against them, still active and powerful in politics. Butlerites won the election in the midst of scandal; one of his associates, Charles Kratz, in Mexico, a fugitive from the courts, provided the ironic quote that was used to end the article, and shame

the readers into supporting Folk:[43]

> "I am waiting for Joe Folk's term to expire. Then I am going home to run for Governor of Missouri and vindication."

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[43] Ibid., p. 99.

By the time his third muckraking article, "The Shamelessness of St. Louis," was on the news stands, Steffens was a famous man. He had earned a national reputation as an investigator and courageous journalist. He felt that much of the credit rightfully belonged to the reformers he had helped, but the public acclaim still came to Steffens, whose name was recognized where Folk's and Clarke's were not.

Meanwhile elements in "the System" were working to distract Steffens attention; business itself wanted to employ him. The Wabash Railroad, controlled by Gould interests, desiring a terminal in Pittsburgh, discovered that they were unable to break the hold that the Pennsylvania Railroad had on the Pittsburgh city government--a hold made more tenacious by the hold "the Penn" had on the entire state. The mesh of state corruption under political boss Matthew Quay was intertwined with Pittsburgh so tightly that the Wabash was powerless. While Steffens was still in St. Louis, a representative of Gould's volunteered to supply him with the necessary information to expose Pittsburgh, using the mass public pressure influence of McClure's as blackmail against "the Penn"--so long as Steffens did not reveal his source of information, since to do so would cause open

rivalry between the roads that would eventually bring Gould's downfall.

Steffens did not work with Gould, for, as he said when re-telling the story years later, "When thieves fall out honest men get their due, and I was still an honest man."[44] Pittsburgh offered

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[44]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 399.

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a chance for Steffens to go it alone and still have a source of information. It would give him another chance to review business corruption of politics--this time from the side of the businessman--but still with honest government as a goal. Further, he might dispel the idea that certain foreign elements were responsible for corruption, since Pittsburgh's population, although largely Scotch-Irish in national origin, was not new and was, for practical purposes, Americanized. So, Pittsburgh became the next city Steffens investigated. But Gould's men and "the Penn's" men were bargaining well, and when Steffens arrived in Pittsburgh and asked for help he was disappointed. Blackmail, it seemed, would be as harmful to Gould's interests now as to "the Penn's," so Steffens, exposed to the public limelight, had to "do" Pittsburgh alone.

Steffens' newspaper training had not been forgotten, however, and when he found himself deserted, lonely, and in a precarious situation, he turned to the public for information. He asked people on the street for rumors, for the names of prominent men in politics, for their opinions and stories about their city and its government.

Soon he found the man who was, as he said, "it," on the newspapers; not the publisher or editor, but the representative of the political ring who watched to see that the paper was not becoming too reform oriented. He--"it"--told Steffens all about the city, including the name of one man, a reformer who had attempted to clean up city government and failed, named Oliver McClintock, who had proof--dates, figures, amounts--to back up the story of corruption. McClintock was Steffens' source man, his Clarke and Folk, in Pittsburgh.

In writing his article for McClure's, however, Steffens put evidence and specific cases of corruption in a position second to his public wrath. The people of Pittsburgh indicated that they knew about corruption in their government; if so, why did it continue? Theoretically, an educated public was the only requirement of good government, yet Steffens was the one who was learning about the corruption, and his teachers were the very people to whom he wanted to expose the corruption. "The exposition of what the people know and stand," he wrote, "is the purpose of these articles, not the exposure of corruption, and the exposure of Pittsburgh is not necessary."[45]

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[45]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 101.

Steffens readers learned all Pittsburgh's good qualities--its wealth, its sound American stock (written in, undoubtedly, to dispel the prejudice and blame for corruption that usually fell on "foreign" elements). Then, when they knew all the potential, he told how they were corrupted.

The story of corruption and its success in Pittsburgh centered around Christopher L. Magee. A man of charm, patience, and polish, he had learned "with the avowed purpose of becoming a boss." He went about building the perfect "ring"--by studying and avoiding the faults in other organized "rings" and by personal charm. Magee soon found he could form a corrupt political organization "as safe as a bank."[46]

> He had, to start with, a growing town to busy for self-government; two not very unequal parties, neither of them well organized; a clear field in his own, the majority party in the city, county, and State. There was boodle, but it was loosely shared by too many persons. The governing instrument was the old charter of 1816, which lodged all the powers--legislative, administrative, and executive--in the councils, common and select. The mayor was a peace officer, with no responsible power. Indeed, there was no responsibility anywhere.

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[46] Ibid., pp. 105-06.

With this tailor-made situation Magee, combining forces with a potential adversary, William Flinn, created a well-nigh perfect reign.[47] With roles tightly defined, Magee and Flinn went to work.

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[47] Steffens spelled Flinn's name "Flynn" when he wrote his Autobiography, but "Flinn" in the original articles.

First, Magee gained control of the local government by acquiring majorities on the various councils, as Butler had done in St. Louis. Then he took control of patronage, filling the positions in his power with relatives, friends, and "bartenders, saloon-keepers, liquor dealers, and others allied to the vices, who were subject to police regulation and dependent in a business way upon the maladministration of law,"--the same type of men he had put

into the councils, men he could control.[48] To guarantee enough

[48]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 107.

positions to make patronage work, he took control of Allegheny County, which included the city of Pittsburgh.

To counter-balance the threat of political defeat by the opposition party, Magee rose above partisan bias and gained some influence over his former enemies, the Democrats, the result being that "many a time a subservient Democrat got Republican votes to beat a 'dangerous' Republican, and when Magee, toward the end of his career, wished to go to the State Senate, both parties united in his nomination and elected him unanimously."[49] The business elements,

[49]Ibid., p. 108.

eager to have representation that would be responsive to their desires rather than public opinion, readily fell in line behind Magee and Flinn. The railroads led the way, and lesser businesses followed eagerly.

With city, county, and business influences under his thumb, Magee finally made an agreement with the state boss, Matthew Quay. They agreed to respect each other's political boundaries to secure the greatest benefits for all concerned. Steffens acquired a pencil copy of the written agreement written by William Flinn himself; thus he reproduced a facsimile and quoted "the whole contract, with all the unconscious humor of 'the party of the first part' and 'said party of the second part,' a political-legal-commercial insult to

a people boastful of self-government," in McClure's, eliminating any chance of there being a doubtful reader.

Magee became the master, and his masterful handling was fascinating in its complexity. Rather than break many of the laws, he made the laws and customs work to insure that most of the corruption was "managed well within the law." He successfully controlled most reform movements so that they were powerless or, when possible, worked to his advantage.

The control of vice was a graphic illustration of Steffens' point. Disorderly houses were rented by a ward syndicate "from the owners at, say $35 a month, and he lets it to a woman at from $35 to $50 a week."[50] The woman was required to buy her furniture, her food,

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[50] Ibid., p. 116.

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her liquor, her clothes, her jewelry, and so on from favored businessmen, at highly inflated prices. The business element thus profited from the arrangement. Consequently, the government--Magee--had business support and no laws were broken; all transactions were done legally. Steffens pointed out, however, that "The businessmen of Pittsburgh paid for their little favors in 'contributions to the campaign fund,' plus the loss of their self-respect, the liberty of the citizens generally, and (this may appeal to their mean souls) in higher taxes."[51]

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[51] Ibid., p. 109.

The key to the Magee-Flinn control of the city was the political ability they had to keep affairs at least at a superficially legal level.

Flinn's company, Booth & Flinn, Limited, took over the public contracts of the city, despite competitve bidding. Oliver McClintock, Steffens' informer, reported to the National Municipal League information that Steffens quoted to stress Flinn's control, indicating that in the nine years following the[52]

> adoption of the Charter of 1887 one firm [Flinn's] received practically all the asphalt-paving contracts at prices ranging from $1 to $1.80 per square yard higher than the average price paid in neighboring cities. Out of the entire amount of asphalt pavements laid during these nine years, represented by 193 contracts, and costing $3,551,130, only nine street blocks paved in 1896, and costing $33,400, were not laid by this firm.

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[52] Ibid., p. 119.

Firms drawing city plans were told to specify materials that only favored businessmen could supply, although material of equal or higher quality was available at equal or lesser amounts of money. Magee himself was not, for most of his period as boss, elected to any office, and consequently had no legal responsibility for the corruption. The business rape of the city's wealth progressed easily and without municipal outrage or resistance. Steffens continued to stress the point that the city was giving up without a fight; in fact, it was almost luring its attackers by its lack of concern. Charters were given to favored companies--including Flinn's and Magee's--for perpetuity, and the cost was passed on to the people.

A committee of concerned citizens was formed to reform the government, but it received little support. As McClintock reported his experience, "by far the most disheartening discovery . . . was that of the apathetic indifference of many representative citizens--

men who from every other point of view [were] deservedly looked upon as model members of society."[53] Those who did lend support did

[53] Ibid., p. 125.

it anonymously, and they fought reform when in public. Businessmen, then the heroes of American society, found that, as one man put it, "if you want to be anybody, or make any money in Pittsburgh, it is necessary to be in the political swim and on the side of the city ring."[54]

[54] Ibid., p. 126.

While the reform movement was at as high a pitch as it would reach, Magee and Flinn (along with Philadelphia's Boss Martin) attempted to destroy the hold of Matt Quay on the state. Quay, despite his reputation, joined the local reformers and fought the city rings. Although he must have found that the reformer's platform made his collar tight, Quay saw it as a way of saving his neck. The votes, however, were counted by the local ring, and despite "prima facie evidence of obvious fraud," the illegal count held, keeping the city in Magee and Flinn's hands.

Quay attempted to introduce a new reform charter for Pittsburgh, since much of the corruption of the city ring had been forced into public limelight, but had to ditch the charter to win Magee-Flinn support for himself in the national senatorial elections.

Corruption intertwined with political unrest reigned for the next few years until Magee died. Flinn, the aristocratic and brash half of the former team, found that without the aid of his polished

and charming partner his power was lost. The reformers nominated and elected a Pittsburgh lawyer, Major A. M. Brown, as mayor. But Brown, the hope of the reformers, inherited the machinery that Magee and Flinn had carefully constructed, and before the public realized it he had made himself the center of a new ring. The temptations of dishonesty were too much for the reformer, and the public learned that its corruption was possibly perpetual.

Steffens was confident. He had sketched a tentative diagram of the political corruption of American cities for S. S. McClure, based on his findings in St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh, and when he got to the next city he was to review, Philadelphia, he found facts as he predicted, giving credence to his theory.[55]

> "Iz" Durham was the Dick Croker, the "Doc" Ames, the Ed Butler, of Philadelphia. The Oliver McClintock of Pittsburgh was named Rudolph Blankenburg in Philadelphia; the Joseph W. Folk was Rotherwell; the Charles H. Parkhurst was the Watch and Ward Society. The parallel of Philadelphia with other cities was so perfect that it was comic.

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[55]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 410.

Steffens' theory frightened McClure, who continued to insist that the stories be written so as to not upset traditional theories of corruption. McClure also worried about alienating his readership and that Steffens[56]

> would degenerate from a reporter into a propagandist; and there was a danger there. . . . There was a risk in theorizing. [Steffens] had witnessed, close up, the fatal, comic effect upon professors and students of hypotheses which had become unconscious convictions.

[56]Ibid., II, 407.

Steffens claimed that he never allowed his "ideas to harden like arteries," as he put it. To a large extent this was true as far as his articles in McClure's went, since McClure kept a close eye on his work and edited with care. It is also true that Steffens often changed his mind; but while Steffens held an idea, it was usually strongly held, and McClure had just reason for restraining the personal statements of such an obviously politically oriented reporter. It has been persuasively argued that Steffens' claim of scientific method in proving his theories was far from truly scientific, although the argument is not yet closed.[57]

[57]See, for example, Alfred B. Rollins, "The Heart of Lincoln Steffens," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIX (1960), 242.

The experiences he was about to have in Philadelphia and those he had had in other cities, none the less, led him to several "tentative moral theories." First,

> no general ethical principle known to [him] held in practice; or could hold. Only special, professional ethics limited the conduct of men, and those differed so fundamentally

that they would not hold from man to man. For example,

> while a businessman is trained to meet and deal with the temptations of business, he is a novice and weak before those of politics, . . . what is right in business may be wrong in politics.

Second, and of more interest when the fin de siècle opinion of the businessman is considered,

> the ethics and morals of politics are higher than those of business.

The ethics of business required self-serving, while those of politics demanded public service. Steffens, unknowlingly, fell back on the oldest of ethics: "it is better to give than to receive." He was talking about political ethics, not political reality.[58]

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[58]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 408.

Steffens learned the superiority of political ethics over business ethics from Israel W. ("Iz") Durham, the boss of Philadelphia. In studying the corruption of Philadelphia, Steffens was most shocked to find that not only did everyone know the extent of corruption, but also that they accepted it as a permanent and unchangeable way of life. E. A. Von Valkenberg, editor-in-chief of Thomas B. Wanamaker's North American, fought persistently for reform, but never came close to success. Finally, the only way to find the full truth was to call on Durham.

There had been, under a Mayor Ashbridge, a rash of "steals" and "jobs" of such proportion that the ring was continually exposed. Steffens asked Durham why, never doubting that Durham would know and would tell him. After promising not to quote Durham by name, Steffens was told that, since Mayor Ashbridge wanted to acquire as much as possible in one term in politics and then get out, the only safe way was to go about it on a scale so large and awesome that the public would be astonished into a stupor, creating a feeling of despair, which is what happened. Everyone was numbed. The citizenry didn't know where

or how to start reform, so nothing was done. The reform charter, called the "Bullitt Charter," did no good. Steffens concluded another "tentative moral theory," that the form of government did not matter; "that constitutions and charters did not affect essentially the actual government."[59]

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[59] Ibid., II, 409.

Durham and Steffens had a mutual attraction, and they knew they could educate each other about city corruption, a subject that both favored. Steffens' first discovery was that Durham cared about government. When Steffens said that "if this process goes on, then this American republic of ours will be a government that represents the organized evils of a privileged class," he made Durham realize the scope and danger of all the independent actions that had been happening.[60]

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[60] Ibid., II, 413.

The two shared similar if opposed concerns and this increased their friendship. When asked about the details of party controls in St. Louis, which were different from those in Philadelphia, Steffens "became enthusiastic." As he put it in his Autobiography,[61]

> I had been interested in those details myself and had inquired into them; I had not written the results, and no one else had ever asked for them. To Durham, a politician, they were fascinating, and forgetting his use for them, I talked on like an enthusiast to a willing listener, as one artist to another.

[61]Ibid., II, 414.

But Durham put another question to Steffens that challenged his work in general, and it was a question that he would not let Steffens answer until he, Durham, was on his death bed. The question came hard to Durham, but when pressured he finally came out with it:[62]

> "What I was going to ask you [Durham said] was just what it is that I do that's so rotten wrong. It seems to me I am pretty square with my friends and--with everybody. But the other side, they say I'm a crook, and I don't deny it. I am as sure as they are that I go wrong somewhere. But where? What they charge me with is not so bad, not as I see it. I'm loyal to my ward and to my--own, and yet--Well, there's something wrong with me, and I'd like to know: What is it?"

[62]Ibid., II, 414-15.

Somehow any reader senses the answer, and yet is as hard pressed as Durham was to verbalize it. Durham was no hypocrite. He was a thinking and conscientious man of high intellect, and he knew the right questions. To portray him as a monster was to do him a gross injustice, and Steffens knew it. Long pholosophical conversations with him had convinced Steffens of several significant beliefs. First, speaking of the men the reformers fought, Steffens concluded that[64]

> if they were big enough and bad enough, they seem to be as eager to do great good as great evil. They simply are not asked to do good; the drift of things, the rewards, the applause and education [were] all the other way.

[64]Ibid., p. 417.

Durham had once made an interesting analysis of Steffens that adds

insight to this conclusion. He said to Steffens,

> "Well, we've been looking you over since you came to town, reading your other stuff and wondering how you, a reformer, get on to the game the way you do; you know the way it's done."

When Steffens asked for the reason, Durham replied,[65]

> "Oh, I can see that you are a born crook that's gone straight."

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[65] Ibid., II, 414.

Durham said a great deal in that sentence. Steffens and he had the same interest in details; Steffens knew politics better than almost all reformers, as did Durham. The constant problem of reformers was that they thought that moral men were all that was necessary to make moral government, a conclusion that Steffens finally was able to dismiss, before it "hardened like an artery." Steffens had learned during his schooling in Europe to doubt what Americans believed without doubt, and he had reached the theory that "no general ethical principle known to [him] held in practice, or could hold"; further, political ethics were higher than business ethics.[66] Steffens learned to dismiss

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[66] Ibid., II, 408.

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the moral codes of the United States, but had he not done this, had he remained here and learned what Durham had learned--the business ethic--he may well have never become a reformer at all. The business ethic, after all, was the best defense Durham could have, since it defended his use of political power.

By leaving America, and by studying rather than entering politics, Steffens avioded becoming what Durham was. When Durham said, "It seems to me I am pretty square with my friends--with everybody, . . ." he was using the standards of business as a measure; he was a "businessman's champion." This was the answer that Steffens finally gave him when called to the dying boss's bedside:[67]

> He was a born leader of the common people, I reasoned, . . . and he, the good fellow, had taken his neighbors' faith and soverignty and turned it into franchises and other grants of the common wealth, which he and his gang had sold to rich business men and other enemies of the people. He was a traitor to his own.

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[67] Ibid., II, 419.

Durham's comment on Steffens being a "born crook that's gone straight" hit the mark. Steffens somehow, by reason of his non-American education or because of some democratic insight, stayed true to the people--he was the "people's champion"--not business'. And he saw the potential good in men such as Durham.

Durham had made Steffens delay his answer until death approached because he feared the answer--he feared to face the truth about himself. The typical reformers couldn't help true reform because, as Steffens told Durham, "they lack the knowledge, the tools, and the honesty." They were unwilling to face the basic fallacy in the business-oriented system--that there was "something wrong--unsocial--at the bottom of the organization of business which have to control government."[68]

[68]Ibid., II, 417.

The men like Durham, however,

> knew that they [were] sinners and they [didn't] deny it (except under oath), and they [didn't] try to justify themselves. . . . They could be saved, and some day, when they are asked to, they may help us to save society. They [were] our best men. . . .

Steffens, "to repair the damage" he had done by telling this theory to Durham, replied to the dying boss's question about his eternal fate by asking,[69]

> what he did to fellows in his gang that went back on him. He said that he didn't do much: he let 'em go. Well, [Steffens] answered, as brutally as [he] could put it, didn't he believe that his God was as merciful and forgiving as he, "Iz" Durham, was?

[69]Ibid., 417, 419; Steffens also wrote a story, "The Dying Boss," based on his association with Durham. See McClure's Magazine, May, 1914, pp. 79-85.

From his admiration of Durham and men like Durham, and from the realization that Durham was a logical product of the political system, Steffens reached a significant conclusion that would influence his political reporting from then on and, as McClure had feared, add a bit of political emphasis to his writing. Steffens concluded that[70]

> If the graft and corruption of politics, which McClure looked upon as exceptional, local, and criminal, occurred everywhere in the same form, then this universal evil must be not an accidental consequence of the wickedness of bad men, but the impersonal effect of natural causes, which it might be possible to identify and deal with without hating or punishing anybody.

[70] Ibid., II, 407.

Steffens' muckraking article, "Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contented," contained few new concepts for the growing number of experienced McClure's readers. The names were different, but the politics and the modes of corruption were merely extensions of practices readers were already familiar with.

There were, however, a few subtle but significant differences about the Philadelphia story that make it a valuable addition to Steffens' work. First, Philadelphia had gone through a (so-called) reform movement and what Steffens was writing about was still as corrupt as were any of the other locations he had reviewed. And, to make the result of reform seem even more depressing, the failure of the reform had created a sense of despair and helplessness in the people that caused them to be indifferent; as the title of the article indicated, they had become "Corrupt and Contented."

Second, Steffens pointed out the connection between city, county, state, and national rings (and/or political corruption) much more explicitly and with the ramifications of such corrupt organization clearly detailed:

> The people of Philadelphia are Republicans in a Republican city in a Republican State in a Republican nation, and they are bound ring on ring on ring. The President of the United States and his patronage; the National Cabinet and their patronage; the Congress and the patronage of Senators and the Congressmen from Pennsylvania; the Governor of the State and the State Legislature with their powers and patronage; and all that the mayor and city councils have of power and patronage--all these bear down on Philadelphia to keep it in the control of Quay's boss and his little ring.

With this explanation of the extent of political control of the functions of the state, Steffens made a most telling point:[71]

> This is the ideal of party organization, and possibly, is the end toward which our democratic republic is tending. If it is, the end is absolutism. Nothing but a revolution could overthrow this oligarchy, and there is its danger.

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[71]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 143.

There was good reason for McClure to worry about Steffens' political opinions, for this was not what the reading public wanted to hear.

Steffens had never previously been that overtly radical in his statement of the possible alternative action that could be taken to change the possibly inevitable corruption of democracy. His previous articles had hinted that there were not many alternatives that would succeed with an apathetic public, but Philadelphia was a cause for national despair. A concise statement of the whole problem makes clear the staggering implications of Steffens' article--especially to the patriotic national readership of 1903. First, reform failed to eliminate corruption. Second, the interlocking rings of corruption reached all the way from the ward to the national government--corruption with the support and as a result of the actions of the "leading" businessmen of the country. Third, the conclusion was made that the possible result of democracy as known in the United States in 1903, would be absolutism and only a revolution (although not necessarily a violent one) could effectively bring about true democracy.

The first third of the article showed explicitly how all the old excuses for lack of active reform and good government did not apply to Philadelphia, an established city with enough wealth,

heritage, leisure, and known aristocracy. All the traditional cliches of escape had been successfully destroyed before Steffens established the problem, thus leading to the logical conclusion that the problem was not as simple nor as clear as the reformers or apathetic public would like to believe. Steffens exploded a myth that Americans had been believing for years:[72]

> A self-acting form of government is an ancient superstition. We are an inventive people, and we all think that we shall devise some day a legal machine that will turn out good government automatically.

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[72] Ibid., p. 137.

Philadelphia had a reform charter--the Bullitt Law--but it still did not have good government, because the people allowed their rights to be quietly taken; they allowed it by not remaining experts in their own form of government. By chance or by intent, the corrupt elements had eroded enough power from the people for Steffens to make generalizations about the loss of democracy by Philadelphians: "Disenfranchised, without a choice of parties; denied, so the Municipal League declares, the ancient right of petition; and now to lose 'free-speech,'--is there no hope for Philadelphia?"[73]

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[73] Ibid., p. 160.

There was a hope: the new mayor had declared himself against some of the policies of machine politicians who had created him. But conditions were still in a sorry state, for the salvation was not democratic; it was a dictatorship, and odds were in favor of the

corrupters:[74]

> Think of a city putting its whole faith in one man, in the hope that [he], an Englishman by birth, will give them good government! And why should he do that? Why should he serve the people and not the ring? The ring can make him or break him; the people of Philadelphia can neither reward nor punish him. For even if he restores to them their ballots and proves himself a good mayor, he cannot succeed himself; the good charter forbids more than one term.

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[74] Ibid., p. 161.

Readers of the October, 1903, issue of McClure's were finally told what many of them had probably been waiting for, the story of a city with as close to a good government as Steffens could find: the story of "Chicago, Half Free and Fighting On." Steffens had wanted to go from Philadelphia "to Boston or some other old town in New England; Boston was the logical next step" on the trail of towns, since it was older than the other towns reported and exposure there would scientifically prove that, contrary to the popular belief being spread by such men as James Bryce, the English muckraker, and E. L. Godkin, Steffens old boss from the New York Evening Post, that new governments were always corrupt from lack of experience.

At the urging of his colleagues at McClure's, however, Steffens decided to go to a new city, the metropolis of the frontier--Chicago--to see what he could find. Suprisingly, he found what was probably the most American of methods being used: a simplified version of pragmatism. "They were bound to accept the situation just as it was--the laws, the conditions, the political circumstances, all exactly as

they were--and, just as a politician would, go into the next fight whatever it was and fight."[75] It was a variation of the cliché, "If

[75] Ibid., p. 167.

you can't beat 'em, join 'em"; the only variance being that the reformers joined for the sake of the people rather than the sake of business or privilege. "In short," as Steffens wrote,[76]

> political reform, politically conducted has produced reform politics working for the reform of the city with the methods of politics. They do everything that a politician does, except buy votes and sell them. they play politics in the interest of the city.

[76] Ibid., p. 185.

Obviously impressed by the success Chicago was having in upsetting "the System," Steffens failed to point out one factor: the reform "boss" was a "boss" just as surely as was a "boodle" boss. He hinted this idea when he reported that "Chicago has such a leader as corruption alone usually has; a first-class executive mind and a natural manager of men."[77] Chicago had far from representative

[77] Ibid., p. 181.

government. If a charlatan was able to convince the majority that he was the best candidate--and many a charlatan had--the city would be back where it started--corrupt. Putting good men in "the System" might work while the people watched, but to insure good government "the System" itself would have to be altered in such a way that

even bad men would be representative. Steffens did not make this point, and he soon corrected his fault, but not in Chicago. Looking back on the story in his Autobiography, Steffens remembered seeing Wlater L. Fisher, one of the leaders of reform, and a man who had been on his original list of people to visit when he left McClure's office in search of an editorial education, "perform exactly like a regular political boss, browbeat and control a vicious lot of (honest and dishonest) politicians, and then send them out, watched and controlled," to do good.[78] But what was to stop the next "natural

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[78]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 428.

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manager of men" from representing business?

The tools the reformers used to get results were about the same as those Steffens used: facts. Fisher, the reformer, had "an orderly bureau of indexed information" about Chicago's politicians. Whenever the reformers needed power to force the still corruptible politicians to enact reformist legislation, they used their information as blackmail, forcing the politicians to deliver what they had promised or else risk exposure. This was merely a localized version of muckraking. The original reform movement, massive and corruptible, was cut down to a committee of nine men who got results. The nine could not be bought out like a big group, for the "boss" was able to keep his eyes on everyone. Pressures both from below and above, were exerted, but they were of little use. "No respecter of persons, parties, or liberal principles, [Fisher] carried the League to victories and a power that amazed and amused Chicago."[79] The

[79]Ibid.

forced the altermen to represent "the basic unstated principle of [their] reform movement, struck out early in the practice of the Nine, [which] was to let the politicians rule, but through better and better men whom the nine forced upon them with public opinion."[80]

[80]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 171.

Again, Steffens and the rest of the muckrakers were very similar to the active political reformers. They publicized the need for reform, yet they stayed out of active politics, at least in as much as they never ran for office themselves. Had they gone into politics, it is questionable whether or not their success as publicists would have been as widely accepted. Their method was the application of facts and necessary pressure on existing or new politicians in order to insure true representative government. They forced other men to lead rather than actually themselves leading.

Chicago had suprises for two observers, however. One was for Steffens and the other for the McClure's reader. Steffens announced in the first paragraph of his article that the magazine had not harbored any theory of reform, only a desire to educate:[81]

> The only editorial scheme we had was to study a few choice examples of bad city government and tell how the bad was accomplished, then seek out, here and abroad, some typical good governments and explain how the good was done; not how to do it, mind you, but how it had been done. Though the bad government series was not just complete, since so many good men apparently want to go to work right off, it was

> decided to pause for an instance on the reform side. . . . Political grafters have been cheerful enough to tell me they have "got lots of pointers" from the corruption articles. I trust the reformers will pick up som "pointers" from--Chicago.

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[81] Ibid., pp. 162-63.

In part, Steffens was telling the truth; he had not formulated a system to reform "the System," but he had been working on it. The desire (he had repressed) to go to Boston had been caused by an urge to prove his theory that corruption came from business; his theory was being thought out for pragmatic ends: to reform governments. But Chicago suprised Steffens. It was a city thriving with business, and yet it was not systematically corrupt. Why? Steffens had come to Chicago cock-sure that he knew what he would find, only to be told by Charles Montrose Faye, the stuttering editor of the Chicago Daily News,

> Y-you, you N-N-New York n-n-newspaper men, you c-come here knowing j-j-just what y-y-you'll f-f-find and nobody c-c-can tell you anything. I-I-I won't t-t-try. Go on--g-g-get it all wrong and be damned."

Somewhat taken back, Steffens called on the famous lawyer Clarence Darrow, who looked Steffens in the face and "laughed, and laughed and laughed," after having greeted him with the statement, "Oh, I know. You are the man that believes in honesty."[82]

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[82] Steffens, Autobiography, II, 424.

Chicago taught Steffens that honesty was not the only necessary requirement for reform, a lesson that Theodore Roosevelt never learned.

This discovery was probably the one that most distinguished Steffens from the other muckrakers. Honesty was not enough. At the time he missed the point, one that would have helped him see that honest "bosses" were not the cure for corruption. He would eventually learn that "bosses," good or bad, were just as bad as innocent "good" men. When he arrived in Cleveland about a year later to muckrake Ohio, he began to understand that "Honesty is not enough; it takes intelligence, some knowledge or theory of economics, courage, strength, will power, humor, leadership--it takes intellectual integrity to solve our political problems."[83] That was a lesson

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[83]Ibid., II, 478.

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that Chicago only helped him learn. He may not have learned to distrust bosses in all forms until years later when he observed Benito Mussolini in Italy. Chicago did teach him that his theory of government was not as perfected as he had supposed, and that he did not yet have a final solution to or understanding of systematic corruption.

The reading public was also suprised. Steffens presented Chicago as a reformed, or at least a half-reformed city:[84]

> Yes, Chicago. First in violence, deepest in dirt; loud, lawless, ill-smelling, irreverent, new; an over-grown gawk of a village, the "tough" among cities, a spectacle for the nation,

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[84]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 163.

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and yet this is what Steffens gave as a model for reformers.

The reason it could be called reformed was, as Steffens put it, "The machine didn't work; the bosses were in trouble." Not that corruption was gone, or crime, or any manifestations of bad government. Steffens himself realized he would shock the nation: "The New York Tenderloin was a model of order and virtue compared with the badly regulated, police-paid criminal lawlessness of the Chicago loop and its spokes." In fact, Hinky Dink Kenna, the boss of organized corruption, or what there was of it, finally advised Steffens "not to walk home alone from his place," for he had no way of protecting even his friends.[85] Reform, as it worked in Chicago, meant that

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[85]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 425.

"the System" was out of order--not that it had been replaced by order. In "the System" as it had worked the "boss" was in control of vice just as he was in control of corruption, as Minneapolis and St. Louis had proved: but in Chicago corruption had been curtailed by reform and crime was chaotic. Organization had existed in "the System," but in smashing the power of the corrupt "boss," reformers had also destroyed not crime, but the orderly and reasonable (?) control of crime. Now everyone was fair game.

And what must have suprised the readers of the October, 1903, McClure's even more was Steffens' statement that the businessmen of Chicago were unhappy with reform. As he wrote,[86]

> I was unprepared for the sensation of that day. Those financial leaders of Chicago were "mad." All but one of them became so enraged as they talked that they could not behave decently. They rose up, purple in the face, and cursed reform. They said it had hurt business; it had hurt the town.

[86]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 188.

This resentment was logical. Business had been in control of the corrupted city and, with that control, had been able to get as much money from the public's pocket as the market could bear, but when chaos took command and businessmen became as much the prey of crime as other citizens, then business cried out not for reformed or representative government, but for "good" government--"good" meaning orderly, and under their control. But this logic did not occur to the reading public. Who would have believed that once reform was achieved the model citizens of the city would be against it? Certainly not the magazine-reading public of 1903.

"From a journalistic point of view," Steffens reminisced, "the exhibition of Chicago as something for other cities to imitate was a sensation; it was more astonishing 'news' than the graft article which [he] had meant to write could possibly have been."[87] It had been

[87]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 429.

good journalism because it was something new under the sun. Not only was it a Lincoln Steffens' story about successful reform, but the reform had been achieved by an innovative method. The changes were made within politics, not by men who refrained from the old political techniques, as most people had theorized reform would have to be achieved.

But there had been reform by business methods, too. Would it

not be just as wise to write an article illustrating the method everyone was suggesting: the best idea, most people theorized, was to run a city like a business. McClure's home base, New York, the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the country, had just that kind of government. Seth Low, a highly successful banker, one-time president of Columbia University, mayor of Brooklyn for two terms, and consistently a businessman's businessman, was coming to the end of his first term as the reform mayor of New York. Would it not say much about the desires of the people to review his administration, compare it to the rule that New York could be sure of from Tammany--the rival to all reform--and then watch the results of the election?

Steffens was asking a basic question: "Do we Americans really want good government." This was not meant to be facetious. Everywhere he had been, except Chicago, reformers had merely been the instigators of less vulnerable corruption, illustrating weaknesses enough for "the System" to perfect itself, but not successfully replacing "the System." Every reform platform that Steffens carefully studied was based on what he called a "stop thief" strategy.[88] Good businessmen had

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[88]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, pp. 196-97.

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never actually reformed government; they only reformed it enough to quiet the public anger. The always were limited in that they did not hinder the regrouping and ultimate success of the forces of corruption. The repeated failure of long-term reform merely created despair and eventual submission, as Philadelphia had proved.

Seth Low had attacked Tammany specifically as a businessman, and he had been successful specifically as a businessman. Unlike the other mayors and/or bosses of New York, before and since, he did not have charisma. He went about the "business" of good government, mastering the "unstudied art of municipal government. . . . Bred to business, he rose above it, adding to the training he acquired" in his business life.[89] His only limitation was his lack-luster personality:

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[89] Ibid., p. 199.

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he did not inspire faith except by his record. Steffens realized that performance often took second place to personality in elections and asked why. Of Low's lack of charm, Steffens asked,[90]

> But what of that? Why should his colleagues love him? Why should anybody like him? Why should he seek to charm, win affection, and make friends? He was elected to attend to the business of his office and to appoint subordinates who should attend to the business of their offices, not to make "political strength" and win elections.

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[90] Ibid., p. 201.

No one denied that Low had done his job; but no one who really should have wanted him to continue seemed to want him to.

Of the alternatives to Low--Tammany Hall--there could be no question as to honesty: Tammany politicians were the first to admit their selfish purpose, honest only in their confession of dishonesty. But Steffens reported that this constituted what the majority of the people seemed to prefer. The point that seemed to escape everyone was that a representative government was not necessarily a good one; if

the people represented were in favor of corruption a representative government had to be corrupt. In reviewing Tammany's history, Steffens quoted Mayor A. Oakly Hall's question about a suit concerning the recovery of missing funds: "'Who is going to sue?' asked Mayor Hall, who could not think of anybody of importance sufficiently without sin to throw the first stone."[91] Apparently the public did not want

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[91] Ibid., p. 210.

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the unbiased and equal rending of the law. Tammany was so wide in its base that it gave enough people profit from corruption that a majority was represented by corrupt officials. The reformists forgot to consider the human reactions of citizens to the advantages of Tammany:[92]

> Tammany's democratic corruption rests upon the corruption of the people, the plain people, and there lies its great significance; its grafting system is one in which more individuals share than any [Steffens had] studied. The people themselves get very little; they come cheap, but they are interested. Divided into districts, the organization subdivides them into precincts or neighborhoods, and their sovereign power, in the form of votes, is bought up by kindness and petty privileges. They are forced to a surrender, when necessary, by intimidation, but the leader and his captains have their hold because they take care of their own. The speak pleasant words, smile friendly smiles, notice the baby, give picnics up the River or the Sound, or a slap on the back; find jobs, most of them at the city's expense, but they have also newsstands, peddling privileges, railroad and other business places to dispense; they permit violations of the law, and, if a man has broken the law without permission, see him through the court. Though a blow in the face is as readily given as a shake of the hand, Tammany kindness is real kindness, and will go far, remember long, and take infinite trouble for a friend.

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[92] Ibid., p. 205.

How could the austere and almost unfriendly countenance of Mayor Low's administration compete with such competition? Steffens' article did not hide the values of "the System" from its readers; he told them the facts in the hope that they would chose the harsher although more just form of government when given the chance.

But there were other revelations that helped Low's side. The system of favors that gave Tammany power had faults, the most obvious being its tremendous cost. Everywhere the reformer looked there was unchecked graft. How much was a citizen willing to pay for the feeling of being an "insider," especially at the price of his vote? Was the cost really known to everyone?

The personality of the typical Tammany politician compared to the personality of Mayor Low or his associates was intimate, but could it withstand Steffens' statement that[93]

> If Tammany could be incorporated, and all its earnings, both legitimate and illegitimate, gathered up and paid over in dividends, the stockholders would get more than the New York Central bond- and stockholders, more than the Standard Oil stockholders, and the controlling clique would wield a power equal to that of the United States Steel Company. Tammany, when in control of New York, takes out of the city unbelievable millions of dollars a year.

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[93] Ibid., p. 207.

Steffens pulled no punches; he named names, such as the "Ice Trust," the "Third Avenue Railroad," and the "New York Realty Company" as being involved. He detailed exactly what the cost of corruption would be if Low was defeated.

He concluded that, as he had been told by a Philadelphia

grafter, "The American people don't mind grafting, but they hate scandals. . . . We give them what they really want, a quiet Sabbath, safe streets, orderly nights, and homes secure."[94] Only when greed

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[94] Ibid., p. 213.

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or lack of control made corrupt government threaten the basic desires of the majority did reformists have a chance. When girls weren't safe on the streets, when business was interrupted, when crimes went out of control, then reform came. But until that happened the public seemed willing to pay--and pay well--for the right to feel like "insiders" in the ring. Bad politicians--men who let "the System" get boggled--were as feared by the corrupters as they were by the reformers. The reformist movements Steffens had investigated across the nation had merely controlled long enough for the "insider" in "the System" to reform "the System" so that the corruption was not scandalous. "The people," Steffens wrote,[95]

> do not like good men and good government, or, let us say, professionally good men in office and unyielding good government. They [business and the people] both prefer "bad" government.

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[95] Steffens, Autobiography, II, 433.

Seth Low lost the election in 1904.

After writing his article on New York, Steffens formulated an "Introduction; and Some Conclusions" for his first seven muckraking articles and McClure, Phillips & Company, Publishers, released a

volume containing them under the title The Shame of the Cities. The introduction attempted to show the similarities and differences of the cities investigated. Steffens listed four motives for preparing his work.

First, he wanted "to sound the civic pride of an apparently shamless citizenship."[96] He had been told that the American people

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[96]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 1.

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would not stand for the truth if that truth was a general condemnation of them; they would accept only scape goats for corruption. The Irish, or other specific nationality groups, could be blamed, or the non-business nature of politics, but not the people. Steffens, none the less, did not pass the buck; he pointed out that old-line Americans and businessmen were as guilty, perhaps more guilty, than professional politicians.

Second, and directly related, he said that business was the reason corrupt politics existed rather than a cure for it. "Don't try to reform politics with the banker, the lawyer, and the dry-goods merchant, for these are businessmen and there are two great hindrances to their achievement of reform: one is that they are different from, but no better than, the politicians; the other is that politics is not 'their line'" A businessman, both in theory and practice, is in business for his own welfare. Not so for the politician. "'Business is business' is not a political sentiment, but our politician has caught it."[97]

[97] Ibid., pp. 4,5.

Third, Steffens thought (in 1904) that "good conduct in the individual, simple honesty, courage, and efficiency . . . would result in a revolution, more radical and terrible to existing institutions, from the Congress to the Church, from the bank to the ward organization, than socialism or even than anarchy."[98] All that was

[98] Ibid., p. 6.

necessary was active concern and morality. Steffens discovered later that this simple answer would not be enough to affect lasting or effective reform.

Finally, and most significantly, he found that "the boss is not a political, he is an American institution, the product of a freed people that have not the spirit to be free."[99] This was the important

[99] Ibid., p. 7.

point. If Steffens had sufficiently aroused the spirit of the American people he felt he could achieve reform that would last. He had to convince them that "the boss" had become as much of an institution and more of a power than the mayor, the councilman, or any other elected official. He had made local stories into national stories because the implications of each were of national significance. If he could get the public's attention by arousing their spirits, he could reveal, in a systematic way, what was wrong with "the System" and the people, armed

with this fresh knowledge, could, he was sure, overcome and cure their problem. As he said, "The people are not innocent. That is the only 'news' in all the journalism of these articles. . . ."[100]

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[100] Ibid., p. 9.

Certainly there were tricks that politicians used to gain support, but they were obvious if the public took the trouble to think. The people were guilty of not thinking, at least not about politics. But big businessmen spent much of their time thinking about politics and, consequently, knew how to use them for selfish purposes; but the average businessman--the average American--only thought about politics when they overtly hurt him, and then only long enough to stop the hurt, not long enough to cure the sickness.

Because of this lack of thought, politicians were able to convince voters to vote straight tickets for the sake of the party, although the party often existed for itself rather than for the people. Steffens wanted the American voter to rise above politics. The people shunned reformers because reformers told the truth rather than flattering the public. Steffens' purpose was "to see if the shameful facts, spread out in all their shame, would not burn through our civic shamelessness and set fire to American pride."[101]

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[101] Ibid., p. 12.

Each city had been selected, he told his readers, because that city illustrated "most strikingly some particular phase or phases"

in the corruption of democracy, a corruption that was systematic and nationwide.[102]

> Thus as St. Louis exemplified boodle; Minneapolis, police graft; Pittsburgh, a political and industrial machine; and Philadelphia, general civic corruption; so Chicago was an illustration of reform, and New York of good government. All these things occur in most of these places.

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[102] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Each article was, therefore, useful as training for good citizenship. In 1904, when his book was published, Steffens was basking in the glow of success. Folk was elected governor of Missouri, and, although New York had defeated "good" government, it had defeated a businessman who happened to be pro-people, not a reformed government. New York's system had never been broken; it had only been run with the people in mind. Defeat in Chicago, where basic changes were being attempted, would have depressed Steffens, but not New York's return to Tammany.

In the meantime Steffens was a hero. His reputation was nation-wide. The Shame of the Cities and his next book of collected articles, The Struggle for Self-Government, originally published in 1906, mark Steffens' greatest influence as a "people's champion."

Indeed, President Roosevelt, Steffens' old friend, was one of the legion to recognize Steffens' power. On August 24, 1903, Roosevelt had his secretary send a letter to Steffens: "The President has been very much interested in your articles. He wishes to inquire if you cannot come down here some time to see him."[103] In October, Steffens

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[103]Letter, Theodore Roosevelt (by William Loeb, Jr.) to L.S., August 24, 1903, Steffens Papers.

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and McClure were at the White House for dinner, and Roosevelt, illustrating his awareness of Steffens' influence on public opinion, suggested that Steffens write a series of articles on the President's fights with both business and labor. Talk about the article went on past midnight, with Roosevelt promising to make available the necessary proof of his policy. A few weeks later McClure rejected the idea, and by the next year Steffens was raking some of Roosevelt's most distinguished and trusted political friends over the coals. It would have been disastrous for Steffens to have allied himself directly with Roosevelt, for he would have then become a member of the "inside group" that he so cautiously dreaded. It was far better, far more honest, that he align himself with Robert M. LaFollette, Governor of Wisconsin, as he did the next year. Although he would never himself admit it, Roosevelt came far closer to being a member of "the System" than his contemporaries realized. When Steffens attacked Republican Senator John Spooner and gave unqualified support to LaFollette, he was, in a sense, coming out against Roosevelt. Had McClure's moved itself into a position in which it owed facts and proofs directly to the President, most of its power as an independent democratic organ would have been subverted. McClure also realized the position the muckrakers had put his magazine in. He remarked to Steffens, "I believe we can do more toward making a President of the United States than any other twenty organs."

Part of Steffens' public image, it should be remembered, was

due to McClure's constant vigilance. Steffens, as the public read him, was edited under McClure's instructions. McClure, to repeat, feared the growing belief Steffens had in "the System," and he also feared that any note of that theory that reached the pages of his magazine might alienate readers. Steffens' tendency to philosophize, a tendency Baker and Tarbell never indulged, was a source of friction between him and McClure that continued to grow until the two men split. McClure gave Steffens' articles new titles and he gave their content new and different implications through his editing. As the famous publisher once told Steffens, "Always remember that I am not simply an editor, but that I have a feeling of jealousy for McClure's Magazine very much like what the lioness has for her cubs."[104]

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[105]The above is adapted from Peter Lyon, Success Story: The Life and Times of S. S. McClure (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1963), pp. 220-22; 224-28. For consideration of Roosevelt as a part of the political organization rather than as a reformer, see John Morton Blum, The Republican Roosevelt (New York: Atheneum, 1965).

Across the country requests for Steffens as a guest speaker started to grow. In March, 1903, he was invited to speak at Princeton; in November, he was invited to address the Harvard Union Club; and later that month he was asked to participate in a debate at the Economics Club of Boston.[106] As a man of influence, he could now count

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[106]Letters, Howard Armstrong (Monday Night Club, Princeton) to L.S., March 6, 1903; James A. Burgess (Harvard Union Club) to L.S., November 2, 1903; J. W. Beaton (Economics Club of Boston) to L.S., November 24, 1903, Steffens Papers.

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on being read and even more influential as a "people's champion."

Other magazines were also asking for Steffens' articles. But the surest sign of public acclaim came in December, 1903, when the American Lithograph Company requested permission to use Steffens' name and portrait on a cigar label. Indeed, American Lithograph was willing to give Steffens' career a boost, a company official assured him in February, 1904, when he wrote: "we think . . . that if you will only keep on hammering the rogues a little longer, it will not be long before we will be able to make you truely famous."[107]

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[107]Letters, Albert Lee (Collier's Weelky) to L.S., June 30, 1903; American Lithograph Company to L.S., December 7, 1903 and February 3, 1904, Steffens Papers.

Steffens also received recognition, perhaps the sweetest of all, from his family and friends. In December, 1903, he wrote to his father,[108]

> Everything, everything goes well with me, so much so that somehow it scares me. Last night I walked into the Arctic Club, of which I always have been a very humble member, and I was taken off my feet by the reception I got; so unexpected and so flattering. Men came up and spoke my praises to my face and out loud, while others applauded. . . . a London editor . . . said the articles had struck home in London, too. . . .

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[108]Letter, L.S. to his father, December 13, 1903, Steffens Papers (Letters, I, 160).

CHAPTER IV

MUCKRAKING THE STATES

Each city Steffens had studied suffered from elements beyond the power of local reformers to control. "The System" was entrenched at a higher-than-municipal level, and its opposition found that while an occasional battle could be won in the cities, the war never would be. Reasons for this seemed less evident than they should have. Steffens defined one problem when he condemned the mass public for its lack of sustained interest in the systematic operation of government.

But a second reason, and tactically a more useful observation for reformers, was the scope of "the System" when compared to the scope of reform. The studies of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia revealed the inter-relation of state, local, and possibly federal corruption. Had not these articles been confusing because of the preponderance of various rings, both interlocking and competing? Of Philadelphia Steffens had written,[1]

> It is dependent as a municipal machine, but the organization that rules Philadelphia is, as we have seen, not a mere municipal machine, but a city, state, and national organization. The people of Philadelphia are Republicans in a Republican city in a Republican state in a Republican nation, and they are bound ring on ring on ring.

[1]Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 143. This is a good example of the reason Steffens turned down Roosevelt's offer to work directly with him. Could Steffens have attacked the Republican organization if he had been T. R.'s messenger?

Reform had to be profitable to be successful. If it became unprofitable for the people (i.e. businessmen) to have reformed government, all the intentions of the reformers could not retain support. Steffens had few if any illusions about his ability to eliminate either greed or the pre-eminence of the business ethic. But, if a reformed city was to be made profitable, the outside rings that helped support municipal corruption would have to be broken. Honesty could not successfully compete with corruption unless corruption was shown to be unprofitable.

Steffens' next logical step, now that a volume on the corruption of cities was on the market, was to muckrake the states, thus attempting to break the second ring of corruption that bound American citizens. There were also functional political reasons for moving on to states. Joseph W. Folk, Steffens' first hero, finding that the roots of corruption in St. Louis were planted deep in the state-wide politics of Missouri, had decided to run for governor, both to gain a wider base of support and to help reform the state. A story about the system he was against, from the now famous Mr. Steffens, could not but help his chances. Chicago, too, was finding that the power of corruption had to be squelched in higher places, and states were a logical move up.

And further, the powers of corruption had enough local prestige to overwhelm parochial voters. When, as an editor, Steffens had hired

Claude Westmore of St. Louis to write "Tweed Days in St. Louis," he had found it necessary to add his own name to the article to put in names and places that Westmore, out of local pride, fear, or pressure, had omitted. Voters, Steffens observed, were like Westmore; they had been intimidated by the people under attack. Only by appealing to a wider base for support could the reformers continue; therefore, the states had to be considered for functional political purposes.

Since Folk needed support, and since Steffens' two articles on St. Louis had given him useful connections and information in Missouri, he started there in a series of articles for the magazine that McClure gave the general title "Enemies of the Republic." The mode of corruption, not too surprisingly for the student of "the System," was about the same as it had been for cities.

Missouri supplied a platform from which Steffens could hold up specific examples that illustrated problems that plagued states across the nation. Since he later wrote that "Folk's Fight for Missouri," the title he gave the article, showed "better than anything [he] ever wrote what political corruption means morally," it is worthwhile to examine some of the issues he raised.[2]

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[2]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 498.

Probably the most interesting part of the article is Steffens' attack on the methods of business. Ida Tarbell was the McClure's writer on business, so why should the political writer spend pages on business techniques? Steffens found a flaw in the logic used by most Americans who assumed that good businessmen would make good politicians.

To illustrate, he had to show that good businessmen were not necessarily "good" in moral terms, nor were good business methods. Why, after reading Tarbell's History of Standard Oil, did the average reader still want men like Rockefeller running their government? Because they had never analyzed the morality of "good" business in the context of politics. The bribe-givers were businessmen, yet when they wanted reform the American public always turned to these same men. And what was the road to success for the industrial or commercial tycoon in whom the American public was so willing to place its faith? Steffens illustrated his answer by telling the story of William Ziegler's Royal Baking Powder Company. "Our interest," Steffens reminded his readers,[3]

> is in the business methods of this great commercial concern, the Royal Baking Powder "trust," and the secrets of the success of this captian of the baking-powder industry. And this, mind you, as a key to the understanding of "politics."

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[3]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 19.

After a rags-to-riches struggle, although the myth of rags-to-riches "does not give 'our boys' all the secrets of success, and it does not explain the state either of our business or our politics," Ziegler gained control of the majority of the baking powder industry and contracted to buy huge amounts of the source material from which cream of tartar, a necessary ingredient in baking powder, was made. It was discovered, however, that the much more plentiful, and much less expensive, chemical alum could be substituted for cream of tartar. Consequently Ziegler, using extensive and often misleading national

advertising, attempted to convince the public, with some success, that there was danger in using baking powder made with alum. He paid newspapers to print misleading and false stories about people supposedly poisoned by alum, part of the contract for the articles reading that they were to be printed "'with the express understanding that they are not at date of publication or afterward to be designated or classed by any article or advertisement in your paper as advertisements.'"[4]

[4]Quoted in Ibid. p. 25.

Expert testimony was purchased. In 1901 ex-Governor and candidate for United States Senate from Missouri William J. Stone placed a copy of a speech on the desks of some state senators in Missouri. The senators were considering the repeal of a law forbidding the use of alum, which had been forced through the legislature by Ziegler's forces. The beginning of the speech read:[5]

> "I appear before you on the request of the Health Society of Missouri. This association is composed of a number of people--good people, both men and women--living in different parts of the State, with headquarters in St. Louis." There was no such society. The "number" was three. They were not "good people," not "both men and women"; they were Stone, his son, and one other man. And the headquarters in St. Louis was in the safe of Stone's law office.

[5]Ibid., p. 32.

But this was to be a story of business, not politics. Now Steffens was talking about corruption in government. The reason, of course, was that corrupt government was business--good business. Yet the public praised the businessmen for their "shrewdness," while they

condemned the politician. What made the public think salvation for politics could be found in businessmen?

Steffens did not attack Ziegler, but he attacked the civic immorality Ziegler represented. As Steffens' widow wrote of him,[6]

> So little was he the reformer that when others were condemning and ousting corrupt politicians, Steffens was pleading for understanding of crooks, criminals, grafters; he was interested in the bosses as characters, in how they did what they did, and why; by what code of ethics or morals they justified their behavior. He made personal friends of many of them.

[6]Ella Winter in Letters, I, xv. It should be remembered that his widow wrote this years later, and she did not know Steffens at the time he was muckraking. Further, she had a totally different political philosophy than the turn of the century American, and her husband's philosophy was quite changed by the time she met him.

Always a student of ethics, the "people's champion" was, despite his widow's denial, a reformer--but a reformer of systems that corrupted men, not the men themselves. He realized that man was a product of his environment. "Iz" Durham, the political boss of Philadelphis, had become a friend of Steffens, and in Missouri William Ziegler, the business boss, became a friend also. Steffens had mentioned his growing respect for bosses before, and in "Folk's Fight for Missouri" he hinted at it once more when he wrote that he had[7]

> . . .no malice against Mr. Ziegler; I have a kind of liking for him, but so have I a liking for a lot of those kind, good fellows, the low-down politicians who sell us out to the Zieglers. They, too, are human, much more human than many a "better man."

[7]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p.20.

There was a genius in the corrupt men, but it was misdirected; and, indeed, success in those days (and maybe today as well) depended on the ability to work inside "the System," which was corrupt.

In fact, the boodlers themselves realized that they were often in the wrong, especially after Steffens clarified their guilt. When introduced to Steffens, the lawyer for one of Missouri's biggest grafters admitted,

> You are right. We are wrong: I never realized how wrong we were. You understand, we thought we were after only this law or that franchise. We never stopped to think that other men also wanted a this or a that, and that all of us together were doing something rotten.

That lawyer then gave Steffens all the information at his disposal, he admitted that he was "in blood, stepped in so far that. . .returning were as tedious as go o'er." He gave the proof that forced his own undoing. And Ziegler himself was not a little man. He was a supporter of arctic expeditions, "in some ways an ideal citizen." In fact, after reading the proofs of the story that condemned him, he guaranteed that advertisements from his company would remain in McClure's. His only defense to Steffens was, "I certainly did not mean to change the government."[8] Steffens, throughout his career, realized that there

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[8] Ibid., pp. 447-48.

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was simply no such thing as an all "good" or an all "bad" man, a fact that could be easily regarded as another of the reasons he is distinguishable from the rest of the muckrakers.[9]

[9]One of Steffens most controversial articles, "Hearst, the Man of Mystery," which appeared in the American in November, 1906, is further evidence of this fact. When all others attacked him, Steffens defended many of Hearst's practices, yet he did not give the man a white-wash.

Steffens also re-emphasized an idea that Folk had presented in the fight to clean up St. Louis: "Bribery is treason, and a boodler is a traitor."[10] This seemed a bit extreme, for treason was not a

[10]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 16.

mild word. But Folk realized, and convinced Steffens also, that treason was not limited to active war; that it included war against our institutions as well as against our property. Corruption was becoming an intrinsic part of American local, state, and probably federal government. Treason consisted of an attack on the very structure on government; a silent but none the less active war waged against the state as defined by written law. "One bribe, two bribes, a hundred bribes might not be so bad, but what we have seen here in Missouri is a system of bribery, corruption installed as the motive, the purpose, the spirit of state government."[11] Steffens had learned long before he reached the

[11]Ibid., p. 15.

study of Missouri that the form and structure of government as it appeared in constitutions rarely matched "the System" that seekers of privilege had evolved. The expansion of business from local to state (and later state to national) proportions merely carried the

corruption--the treason--from local to higher levels of government. Missouri was a prime example of the power of trusts, both internal and external, that controlled the state not for the people, but for the boodlers.

It should be noted that the article on Missouri was the first one in which Steffens used the term "the System," capitalizing the word. While he had been defining it all along, the term itself was defined in the same section in which he capitalized it as follows:[12]

> Here, then is our guide out of the Labyrinth. Not the political ring, but big business--that is the crux of the situation. Our political corruption is a system, a regularly established custom of the country, by which our political leaders are hired, by briber, by the license to loot, and by quiet moral support, to conduct the government of city, State and Nation, not for the common good, but for the special interests of private business.

[12] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Steffens' article on Illinois was written as a parallel to the story of Missouri. If he wanted to prove that state corruption was as systematic as he thought city corruption was, he logically had to examine the state in which another city he had reviewed in The Shame of the Cities was and show the system at the next level of corruption. The point to be proved was stated, in italics:[13]

> Political corruption, then, is a force by which a representative democracy is transformed into an oligarchy representative of special interests, and the medium of the revolution is the party.

[13] Ibid., p. 42.

This was an old axiom to Steffens' readers; both political parties existed for the sake of the business community rather than for the good of the whole people. Illinois illustrated this by the state-level attempt at grabbing the Chicago traction franchise engineered by Charles T. Yerkes. Tracing names and specific bills, Steffens revealed to the reading public a point that he probably did not have to elaborate as extensively as he did: there were equally corrupt men in both parties who were subservient to the will of business rather than to the will of the people.

The use of a combine in the state legislature, a trick also familiar to Steffens' readers, was the mode of corruption. Yerkes, aware of the Chicago Voters Municipal League's power in Chicago, had decided to go directly to the state and thus evade the problem of dealing with an enlightened municipal public.[14] The politicians in

[14]The Chicago Voters Municipal League, as those who had read Steffens' article on Chicago knew, was the reform organization of Chicago.

Chicago, although they were not necessarily good men, had been forced to be representative because the League had educated the people so extensively that they were, once again, in control. Governor John Peter Altgeld, a heroic liberal for many reasons, blocked Yerkes' first attempt to acquire of railways in Chicago. Yerkes had instigated a bill that would have given him rail franchises for at least fifty years.[15]

[15]See Theodore Dreiser's fictionalized account of Yerkes' career in The Financier (1912), The Titan, and The Stoic (1917).

Yerkes tried to re-organize the corrupt system at the state level. Altgeld, who appeared too liberal to the majority of voters, was defeated by Republican gubernatorial candidate John R. Tanner, who also had backing from Yerkes. Since the election of Carter H. Harrison, a reform-oriented businessman, as mayor of Chicago put the Democratic machine there out of order, Yerkes had the Humphrey bills--which would give life to his plans--introduced in Springfield. "The Humphrey bills," Steffens explained, "began for the city one of the greatest lessons a city can learn--that the State is a part of the municipal government and that municipal reform must include State reform." Chicago rose up in arms, crying for "home rule." John Maynard Harlan, a mayoral candidate, "called a roll of directors and stockholders of the Chicago City Railway Company," and, point blank, addressed the various influential members in such terms as:[16]

> Erskine M. Phelps,. . . place your hand upon the Bible of the people; take your oath,. . . do you know that the president of your company is down at Springfield. . . for the purpose of taking part in a grand larceny of the people of Chicago?. . . If you don't know that we tell it to you now. . . . . .
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> Marshall Field, merchant prince, the founder of a great museum, . . . whose voice is heard, when he chooses to make it heard, in the councils of the nation;. . . to whom there has been no such word as failure. . ., bring your influence to bear as a stockholder and stop this robbery.

[16]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, pp. 55-56.

In short, he forced all the men who should have been the moral leaders of the community to show their hands, thus illustrating the powers behind the business/political system of the whole state.

Eventually Yerkes, attempting to evade the new problems aroused by this turmoil, substituted a new measure, the Allen bill, which merely permitted Chicago to grant fifty-year extensions to franchises. This alleviated the state-level pressure and gave the problem back to Chicago. Although it wasn't easy, he forced the Allen bill through.

Trying to get the bill for his company past Mayor Harrison's awaiting veto, Yerkes finally approached Harrison and asked, "Mr. Mayor, what is it that you want?"[17] The mayor wanted democracy, and

[17] Ibid., p. 63.

he saw to it that the people understood the issues. Aldermen were placed in the limelight, forced to represent their constituency. Harrison was one of Steffens' many municipal heroes. He had been approached by the Democratic national party powers with powerful temptations and had remained true to the people. He was not, in Steffens' opinion, capable of thorough reform, but he did "care about self-government; he really [had] a sense of government for the people."[18]

[18] Ibid.

The state legislature was forced into the limelight by the reformist activity. It was an election year. Of the sixteen state

senators who had voted for the Allen bill and who were up for re-election, fourteen were defeated; of the eighty-two representatives, only fourteen remained. The state system had been seriously damaged. Further, Lawrence Y. Sherman, the new Speaker of the House and one of the fourteen survivors, forced the repeal of the Allen bill to escape the infamy attached. The system was not destroyed, but it was certainly not in good working order.

The Mueller bill, which outlined a comprehensive railway law, was presented to the state legislature by Chicago representatives hoping to evade a re-occurence of unjust privilege seeking. William Lorimer, Congressman from Illinois and the boss of Cook County, came back to Springfield to work for the forces of corruption. He attempted to stop Chicago from controlling its own rail franchises. He had a weaker and heavily amended bill, the Lindley bill, substituted. The corrupted speaker of the state house disregarded normal rules of procedure and attempted to force through the new bill. He so enraged the members of the house that he was literally forced to flee under the protection of lobbyists. The Mueller bill was then reinstated.

The point of the article, as of the other articles on state corruption, was clear again; the city and state were part of the same "System." The power Lorimer held at the national level also implied the national scope of the organization. Yerkes' ties with New York bankers such as J. P. Morgan tied organized business into "the System." Power was interdependent and overlapping. Cleaning up any part of "the System" depended on success in cleaning the whole thing; the sickness had to be removed or any tumors would merely grow back in a few years.

It was July, 1904, and Lincoln Steffens, the "people's champion," was probably at the highest point in his career. His journalistic voice, a voice of democratic action urging reform for the sake of the republic, carried more influence than ever before, and probably as much as it ever would. The reform movement in government was in full swing, and muckraking, although not so named as yet, was its mouthpiece.

Steffens was in Wisconsin, investigating a man who was to become the favorite among his favorites: Robert M. LaFollette. Steffens was a hero worshiper, giving his praises to men who, like himself, represented the people rather than privileged interests, and few men represented the people more than LaFollette. Their eventual firm friendship was practically inevitable, for their sympathies lay in the same place.

But Steffens had to be persuaded to like LaFollette; he had to be won over. In Chicago a railroad representative had complained that Steffens had it in for business--that businessmen only stayed in politics out of self-defense. "Why," Steffens was asked, "don't you ever show up such fellows as LaFollette or Tom Johnson?"[19] The railroad representative promised to supply an informer who would reveal the demagogery of LaFollette, if Steffens would muckrake Wisconsin.

[19]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 453.

Belle LaFollette, the wife of the governor, was also anxious to have Steffens come to Wisconsin, for her own reason. She wrote

that "it had become a subconscious prayer with me. . . . I was confident he had the ability and insight to get at the truth in spite of the maze of lies he would encounter."[20]

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[20]Belle Case and Fola LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette: June 14, 1885-June 18, 1925, (2 vols., New York: Macmillan Company, 1953), I, 182.

In the final stages of his work in Illinois, Steffens journeyed to Milwaukee to visit his informer. He went "with no doubt that the man [LaFollette] was a charlatan and a crook," an opinion that had been reinforced by the staff at McClure's.[21] Calling on a banker who

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[21]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 454.

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was capable of rage but not of providing proof, Steffens was momentarily relieved by the arrival of a lawyer who assured him that LaFollette was not, as the banker had said, a crook. "LaFollette isn't dishonest," the lawyer said. "On the contrary, the man is dangerous precisely because he is so sincere. He's a fanatic."[22]

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[22]Ibid., II, 455.

The lawyer was soon furious. LaFollette, who complained about the power of bosses, was becoming--no, was--himself a boss. Steffens never was able to deny that charge; but he found nothing wrong with being a boss. Many others were to make the same accusation, but in his article Steffens answered it. LaFollette, ambitious for office, had gone to the voters directly. E. W. Keyes, a political

boss in Wisconsin at the time of LaFollette's rise explained:[23]

> He said that at the time "Bob" was running for District Attorney, "a few of us here were--well, we were managing the party and we were usually consulted about--about things generally. But LaFollette, he went ahead on his own hook and never said a word to--well, to me or any of us." So it's not a matter of dictation, but of who dictates, and what. In the case of LaFollette, his dictatorial selfishness consisted of this, that he "saw" the people of the county and the delegates, not "us," not the System.

[23]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 85.

This was one point Steffens clarified in his article: there had to be a leader, but in a democracy he should be the representative of the people, not of privileged interests.

But this is getting ahead of the story. Steffens knew that he was getting foundation information, and that finding proof of the allegations against LaFollette would be harder than he had supposed. Every attack that the furious banker and lawyer had made to Steffens, Steffens later said, "seemed fair to me [LaFollette's] methods democratic, his purposes right but moderate, and his fighting strength and spirit hopeful and heroic."[24] By the time he returned to Chicago, a

[24]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 455.

few days later, he was not so sure LaFollette was a demagogue, but he did know he was onto a lively article, perhaps his best.

Wisconsin, after all, was logical if one thought about it. Missouri and Illinois had given the proof that there was a connection between local and state corruption, and Wisconsin would illustrate a reformed (or at least reforming) state. But Steffens was not sure of this yet.

When he returned to Wisconsin he did so with a fanfare. Both sides thought that his trained eye would see things with unbiased judgement. He was met by many of the stalwart ("the System") Republicans--Phillip Spooner, Republican boss and brother to Senator John Spooner, a Roosevelt lieutenant (who represented the railroads in the United States Senate); E. W. Keyes, the boss of the state; two of the experienced stalwart newspapermen, Colonel William J. Anderson and Amos P. Wilder.[25] The Milwaukee Sentinel, another opponent of

[25]Robert S. Maxwell, LaFollette and the Rise of Progressives in Wisconsin (n.p., State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), p. 71; Albert O. Barton, LaFollette's Winning of Wisconsin: 1894-1904 (Madison, Wisconsin: 1922), p. 418.

LaFollette's, feeling sure of its side of the story, described Steffens as a reporter whose "evident purpose always has been to speak the truth on all occasions."[26]

[26]Quoted in Belle and Fola LaFollette, LaFollette, I, 182.

The reform press, not sharing the glee of the stalwart press (or of Mrs. LaFollette), felt it wisest to wait for the article Steffens wrote. But he still had no facts. He was received "eagerly as a friend, as a partisan of his, a life saver," by LaFollette. "When Bob telephoned that Steffens was at the capital and he would bring him home for supper," Belle LaFollette reported, "I was very happy. I simply took it for granted he was our friend. . ."[27]

[27]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 456; LaFollette, LaFollette, I, 182.

"He needed a friend," Steffens later reported, "he needed just what I would give him, national, non-partisan support." Both Mrs. LaFollette and Steffens admitted that they did not make good first impressions, for she had treated him as an unquestioning friend and he, still not sure of his stance, had been ill at ease and eventually "rude" and "offensive" because he was afraid she was trying to bias him. Finally, in an attempt to get LaFollette's story directly from LaFollette, Steffens accompanied him to the St. Louis Exposition where, after visiting his state's exhibit, LaFollette "stripped, politically," confessing, with the help of notes, books, pamphlets, and other proofs of what he had said, "for a week of hard-working days." The other proof convinced Steffens, for the opposition had produced none. The two men, both intellectual reformers of giant proportion, grappled with every aspect of LaFollette's history. Steffens took enough notes for a book. Here was the foundation of a life-long friendship. Long after other progressives were politically or intellectually dead, Steffens and LaFollette marched together down ever liberal paths.

Now on the right side, Steffens returned to Wisconsin and called on the stalwarts to see if they could come up with some evidence against LaFollette, for the only thing they had against him was[28]

> that he had taken the Republican party away from the corrupters and let it stand for--what?. . . It represented the people, but it did that only in the sense that it allowed for and gradually achieved the very moderate aims of LaFollette, a liberal, and of the liberals.

[28]All the above from Steffens, Autobiography, II, 460.

Steffens never denied the existence of a LaFollette machine, not even in his article. The problem for the stalwarts was that it represented the people and not them; they represented lumber and railroad interests, in the persons of Senators Sawyer and Spooner, respectively, as the article reported.

Senator Spooner's brother, the state boss, produced a list of people across the state who could testify against LaFollette, he thought. Spooner agreed to limit the number to only those living on the railroad lines, and Steffens, joined by his wife, took a working vacation across Wisconsin. One of those Steffens saw in out-state Wisconsin was A. R. Hall, who had originated much of the legislation that LaFollette was fighting for. Hall had been defeated by "the System," but his name was respected by even the corrupt, for, since they no longer had to deal with him, they could allow their natural respect for his honesty to show. This, to Steffens, assured LaFollette a place of honor eventually, for it showed the triumph of honesty over evil. Steffens visited many others also, and "they explained away all the evil there was in the gang's account of those cases against LaFollette;. . . though some of them had been hurt by LaFollette, they--all--said that Bob was Straight."[29]

[29]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 462.

Steffens published his article on LaFollette in the October, 1904, issue of McClure's. Its content basically was a political biography of LaFollette that emphasized the basic democratic nature of "the little giant." Since he had never muckraked in Wisconsin before, Steffens devoted sections of the essay to explaining the corruption at both city and state levels; but he always concentrated on LaFollette. He stressed that LaFollette was both ambitious and a politician, two factors that, of themselves, were not harmful, for he was ambitious to represent the public and was a politician capable of doing so with ability.

The most pleased with Steffens article was the LaFollette family. Mrs. LaFollette wrote to him:

> I can never make you understand what your article means to me. It is something I have longed for yet hardly dared hope for and really never expected. To have you turn your search light on Wisconsin politics is better than anything our guardian angel could do for us--on earth at least. . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> Like all the work you do, the article on Wisconsin is builded into the life of this state. . . a story. . . which strips off all masks, makes a lie stand for a lie, the truth for the truth, and puts men where they belong,--just as Darwin would classify species.

Robert LaFollette, writing after the election that Steffens' article had helped him win, said:

> No one will ever measure up the full value of your share in this immediate [election] result. It is very great. I found it everywhere. . . I was out a month before it appeared and for more than a month after and it was very interesting and instructive to note the difference.

His concluding assessment of the article gives some idea of how Steffens' opinion was respected by the common people, the voters who helped make LaFollette. Here is the essence of the "people's champion:"[30]

> It [Steffens' article] was like the decision of a court of last resort,--it surprised some, it enraged some, but it was accepted even by the badly disappointed partisans of the subject under analysis,--with bitterness and profanity at first, but it settled it even with them.

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[30]Letters, Belle C. LaFollette to L.S., August 14, 1904 (Mrs. LaFollette saw a proof of the article before it was released to the public); Robert M. LaFollette to L.S., November 14, 1904, Steffens Papers.

The October edition of McClure's, which came out in the final week of September, was sold out by October 2. The Milwaukee Sentinel, which had praised Steffens for his truthfulness before the article now claimed Steffens was[31]

> paid to write ex parte statements under the guise of impartial reports and [further] his publishers prostitute[d] their columns to libelous uses. . . . A more brazen disreputable prostitution of the power of the press has never been recorded in this country."

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[31]Quoted in LaFollette, LaFollette, I, 185.

The Wisconsin State Journal at Madison wrote that "the governor's hypnotic powers are proverbial and even Steffens, who has resisted the best of them in other states, proved an easy morsel for our governor."[32]

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[32]Quoted in Barton, LaFollette, p. 418.

Stalwarts cried "yellow journalism," but the public did not believe it. They voted with LaFollette, at the advice of the "people's champion."

He was also LaFollette's champion. His article drew the attention of the people across the nation and of other magazines--

Collier's Weekly, Outlook, Harper's Weekly, and Review of Review's were soon retelling LaFollette's story with ringing praise. "It was reported that six thousand copies were distributed" in one county alone, as a campaign document.[33] The election year was vindication

[33] Maxwell, LaFollette, p. 71.

for LaFollette, and he was impressed with Steffens' power. Indeed, when LaFollette started his own venture into journalism, his first issue was covered with an announcement of an article inside by Steffens. The article, "The Mind of a State," was basically a re-hash of ideas already familiar to Steffens' readers, but the fact that Steffens wrote it is a sign of the value LaFollette placed on his friendship. Steffens also wrote other articles praising LaFollette's progress in Wisconsin, such as a piece on the University of Wisconsin entitled "Sending a State to College," that appeared in the American in February, 1909. In 1908 Steffens had been able to persuade Norman Hapgood to speak at the University of Wisconsin, for which Mrs. LaFollette wrote him a thank you note.[34] Indeed, letters and gifts,

[34] Letter, Belle C. LaFollette to L.S., December 5, 1908, Steffens Papers.

visits and affection went on for years. As late as 1923, two years before LaFollette's death, the two men traveled to Russia together.

That politicians could and most likely would be corrupted by the business-political nature of "the System" was not a surprising

idea to most magazine readers by 1905; but Rhode Island offered a twist that was sure to sustain the fickle interest of the reading public. The people, not the legislature, of Rhode Island were bribed into voting for the corrupted (or corruptible) legislators. Not new and politically ignorant immigrants, not the outcasts of big cities, but the respectable, established farmers and country folk of Rhode Island were the guilty ones. And the reason arrested even more attention: the people were cheaper than politicians. Again, not just any people, but the backbone of the democracy--the farmers, the so-called aristocrats of democracy.

It was cheaper to corrupt the people, ironically, because the vote in Rhode Island had been limited only to the "best" elements, thus limiting the number it was necessary to bribe. Economy demanded the cheapest market for purchase. Since Rhode Island had never truly been a democracy, her founding fathers had made her undoing easier.

Those who claimed that the "leading citizens" of a state could rule without corruption were shown to be wrong, and the apologists for democracy were without one of their best arguments against Steffens. But, beyond this, the structure of government had limited democracy even further. In one branch of the state legislature, the senate, each city held one vote, despite population. The house, legally restricted to a membership of seventy-two, was required to have one member from each town, no town having more than one-sixth of the whole body; thus the smaller towns had control. Just as in the big states, the out-state population was intrinsic in "the System" and its workings. The particular result in Rhode Island was that "less than

one-eleventh of the people of the State elected more than five-tenths--a majority--of the Senate" and the house was in the control of the small towns. Providence had one senator representing 29,030 voters, and Compton had one senator of equal power, representing 78. There were twenty cities with a population of less than 2,000 each represented.[35]

[35]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 125.

The upper classes within the voting population rose with the business world, since the vote was restricted to the upper classes, and when necessity required they found they could control their state for profits much more efficiently at the level of the voter. Bribery became common, a necessary and functional element in the governmental organization. The democratic system, which really had never existed, was even more remote, since the true government was run by bribery. One governor, helpless to do anything, wrote what should have been a shocking statement in an open letter to the state assembly: "In a considerable number of towns bribery is so common and has existed for so many years that the awful nature of the crime has ceased to impress. In some towns bribery takes place openly."[36] No one was shocked anymore.

[36]Quoted in Ibid., p. 127.

Steffens stressed an idea that had grown as his articles appeared: that corruption was at national levels. To prove federal involvement, he used one of the most important political figures of

his day, United States Senator Nelson Aldrich, as an example. The senator was from Rhode Island, but he basically represented the big business interests of not only Rhode Island, but also of the whole country. He was called the "Political Boss of the United States." The state organization of Rhode Island was controlled by General Charles R. Brayton, a blind man and an aristocrat from an established family, who could have who and what he wanted inside the state. Business worked through him at the state level, and through Aldrich at the national level.

With this clear organization, what did the aristocracy do? It milked the public for all it dared. Steffens, using information from an interview between Brayton and Edward Lowry of the New York Evening Post, told Brayton's story.[37]

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[37]Brayton's relatives had refused to allow him to speak to Steffens, which Steffens claimed was due to fear of Brayton's candor; the family had not, however, stopped Lowry or Waldo L. Cook of the Springfield Republican from talking to Brayton. Steffens' and McClure's prestige and power at effecting reform would seem to explain the family's reluctance better than Steffens' explanation did.

A quote from Brayton illustrated the structure of the state level corruption:[38]

> "I am an attorney for certain clients and look out for their interests before the Legislature. I am retained annually by the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad Company, and am usually spoken of as 'of council' for that road. Of course, I don't have anything to do with damage suits or matters in relation to grade crossings. As everyone knows, I act for the Rhode Island Company [street-railway interests], and I have been retained in certain cases by the Providence Telephone Company. . . . I have connections, not permanent, with various other companies desiring franchises, charters, and things of that sort. . . . It all comes to me unsought. . . ."

[38]Quoted in Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, pp. 133-34.

Two facts are significant and should be noted. First, and most obvious, businessmen didn't have to be solicited; they came "unsought." The need of working through the "boss" was part of "the System"--not unusual, not fought but accepted. Second, and requiring further knowledge, was Aldrich's connection to the Rhode Island Company.

It should be re-emphasized that Brayton controlled who was elected by controlling the dispersal of funds for bribers (in his office as head of the Republican party in the state) and by appointment of spoils posts. (The governor did not have the power of the veto, and Brayton's legislature, by political maneuvering, had gained the right of appointment.)

Now, the Rhode Island Company, second in Brayton's political heart, was an important indication of the scope of corruption because it was founded by some of the state's leading citizens, including Marsden J. Perry, a businessman; William G. Roelker, a lawyer; and Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, a representative of business in the United States Senate. A company, partially owned by Aldrich, who called himself "the boss of the United States," was represented by Brayton, the head of the state system.

The tie was complete. Aldrich, elected by a state legislature (this was before the passage of the seventeenth amendment) that was not representative of the people (because of the limited franchise and the distorted representation) controlled the largest inter-state corporation in his state and was the representative of all business at the

federal level. His power transcended internal boundaries; "the System" was on all levels.

It was obvious that any attempt at reform would have to strike at all levels, for the power of any one of the three--local, state, or federal--could defeat reform at any level. Aldrich had all the powers of the organization, business wealth, and the un-democratic structure of the state government (and of the United States Senate also, it seems obvious) on his side. In summary, he had "the System."

Rhode Island was a state of "corrupted people," and all the safeguards suggested by reformers did not stop that. "Such is the System that has developed with a restricted sufferage, with the balance of power against the cities, with business men conducting both politics and government."[39]

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[39]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 157.

Aldrich represented more than just Rhode Island. He was a national senator. The story of Rhode Island was written for the whole country; as Steffens put it,

> when we are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of our country and our self-respect; when the American farmer will give up his two or thirty dollars "pay for time lost in voting"; when the business man will be content to do a little less business; when the manufacturer will risk his unnecessary protective tarriff (the graft, not the protection)

then there would be reform.[40] If they ignored him, they admitted he was right.

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[40]Ibid., pp. 159-60.

To all Steffens' readers it was sufficiently clear by now that business was the main source of the problems facing state government, as it had been in cities. His next two articles, published in April and May of 1905, investigated "New Jersey: A Traitor State." In New Jersey James B. Dill, Steffens' economic tutor from his newspaper days on Wall Street, had convinced the corrupt party leaders that it would be to their advantages personally and to their state's advantage in business competition with other states to form lax corporation laws. Dill then laid before them his plan for the Corporation Trust Company.

But Steffens started out his story long before the organization of that company, and its evolution is the major story told in the second part of the article. Like all his analyses, it aimed its facts at arousing the public. "Citizenship is my theme," Steffens wrote, "the character of a 'sovereign people' and the effect on the nation as a whole, the failure of any part--ward, town, county, or state--to do its full duty."[41]

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[41]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, pp. 209-210.

The patriotism of the New Jersey citizens to New Jersey--or at least New Jersey business interests to themselves--was at the same time traitorism to the rest of the nation. Steffens wanted to show how one of the weak links in America was endangering the country. He then wanted to illustrate how those weak links were produced by business motives.

New Jersey, from its founding as a state, had few commercial commodities more valuable than her central geographic position on

trade routes. The business elements there as early as Alexander Hamilton had cultivated the state as a haven for commerce: "That is her history. From the moment the family of States was formed, the fathers have gone there to do things they dared not do at home."[42]

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[42] Ibid., p. 211.

Eventually the railroads got control of the political and business systems of the state, and one railroad, the Camden and Amboy, after a series of business wars, sold out to the Pennsylvania Railroad, and an out-of-state boss was given control. But no matter, business took care of itself and only the people paid; in the case of New Jersey, it was the people of the rest of the United States. One businessman explained concisely to Steffens, "To hell with the rest; what does Jersey care for other States? That was the attitude. Their loss was our gain."[43] The state itself had hard times at first, but

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[43] Ibid., p. 270.

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eventually everything was working well. The people of New Jersey, in the short run at least, saved money, and that was all that mattered. When the Camden and Amboy Railroad controlled the state, for example, the legislature established a tax on all goods shipped on the railroads, provided those goods were through traffic. "The Jersey reasoning," Steffens wrote,[44]

> [was] that any tax on a railroad [was] borne by the traffic and, of course, this [was] sound. None the less the [charge of] "misrepresentation" by the other states was just: the obvious

> intention of that transit duty, levied only on through freight and through passengers, was to relieve the road of a tax, and let the state take it out of the country at large.

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[44] Ibid., p. 217.

Rivalry between political factions was used to secure continued business supremacy. The growing trusts, however, offered the state the greatest single source of corruption.

When the federal and state governments across the United States turned against the concept of the holding company--or of any monopoly-oriented business--James B. Dill realized that it would be to the advantage of any state to offer a haven to businessmen, a place where they would not be restricted by popular opinion. It was at this time that Dill, after being turned away by New York, went to New Jersey with his plan for the Corporation Trust Company.

The function of the company basically was to show business large and small, all across the nation, the advantages of being incorporated under New Jersey laws. To make this possible it was necessary, of course, to insure that the state laws really were more advantageous for business than those of any other state. Corruption existed everywhere, but New Jersey, under Dill's direction, could make it both legal and efficient. New York was an example of a state in which the system of corruption needed streamlining; anyone wanting legislation could get it eventually, but "from court stenographer and departmental clerks all along the line, through referees and assessors, up to legislators and bosses, it [was] tip, tip, tip."[45] If a company could

[45] Ibid., p. 255.

be formed that would represent business; if a state could be organized in such a way that costs could be uniform and large numbers of small bribes eliminated, with the majority of what had been done illegally made legal, then that company and that state could attract a large amount of income; and in the main the only people hurt would not be citizens of that state. With other legislative bodies passing[46]

> laws expressive of the public will, there was a demand for a State Legislature that would enact the will of the corporations. With business men everywhere forming pools, and trusts, and gentlemen's agreements to break the law or to get around it, and failing because, though there were trustees there was no trust, and while there were agreements, there were so few gentlemen--with all these difficulties abounding in the Union, there was money in it for the State that would throw down her sister States and give a license to business to do business just as business pleased; lawfully, widely, with a Legislature to defeat the general public will, and courts to compel private, corporate good faith.

[46] Ibid., pp. 257-58.

Steffens, of course, went on to illustrate how New Jersey was hurting itself, but he also showed that most of the people were not diligent enough to really fight for their state. They could be distracted by promised of personal profit. The dangers and problems caused by the existence of trusts was also discussed, as was the question of the effect of all this on the federal government.

Indeed, Steffens had shown a great deal about the nature of "the System" at the state level, and in the not too distant future he would begin his inquiry into the federal governmental system. It is,

in a sense, a sign of consistency that Steffens' first major idea in both this article and in his first article on the national government was that he, like the reader, was only a citizen; but in that capacity he deserved to be represented. He emphasized that he was a common citizen like his readers, not a spokesman for business. Of course, as a reporter he knew more about the details of government, and he therefore could see more clearly, as a citizen, that he was not being represented. His continual theme--local, state, and soon federal--was citizenship and representation.[47]

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[47]See Lincoln Steffens, "Is Our Government Ours?" New York World, January 14, 1906, p. E3.

Traveling back and forth across Ohio while writing on city and state governments in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin, Steffens had stopped several times to appraise the tenor of "the System" there, which was one of the most active, since Ohio was a highly industrial, and consequently political, state. Onio was particularly hard to analyze, for it contained many large cities and its system was complex. In late 1903, however, Steffens decided that he would tackle it. He chose to organize his article around two cities, probably because he had more experience with them and could keep his facts under control, although it should be mentioned that Tom Johnson, the reform mayor of one of the two, had been on his original list of people who might be able to supply interesting stories as early as 1902. Johnson had also been listed with LaFollette as a demagogue. Whatever the reason, the

result clearly indicated both how local corruption depended on state corruption and how reform could be achieved.

In January, 1904, Steffens wrote his father from Cleveland: "I've been here nearly a month now and have made studies in Toledo, Sandusky, Columbus, Cincinnati, and in this city. Ohio I feel pretty clear about." He had settled on two of the cities, Cleveland and Cincinnati, for use in his article, "Ohio: A Tale of Two Cities." "Cleveland," he wrote in the first paragraph of the article, was "the best governed city in the United States, Cincinnati the worst."[48]

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[48]Letter, L.S. to his father, January 26, 1904, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 164); Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 161.

By concentrating on cities, Steffens was able to select a hero and a villain. "Hanna," he wrote to his father, "is my villain this time. . . ."[49] Mark Hanna, it should be noted, was a colossus in both

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[49]Letter, L.S. to his father, January 26, 1904, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 164).

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the business world and the Republican party. Attacking Hanna as a villain took courage. As one historian has expressed it, after the 1896 election "Hanna was undisputed master of the Republican party and the nearest thing to a national political boss that politics had seen."[50] Tom Johnson, the businessman/mayor of Cleveland was to be

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[50]Russel B. Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of Its Origins and Development: 1870-1958, Harper Torchbooks, (New York: Harper, Row, 1959), p. 114.

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the hero. The two men possessed many striking parallels: they were both basically the same type of men--self-made, of the rags-to-riches mold. They both had entered politics for the same business motives: to get control of street railway franchises. They were dynamic men who knew how to go about achieving their goals. The only difference, really, was in their motivation for political action: Hanna entered and remained in politics for his own businessman's motives; Johnson's motives changed after he was in office. Of Hanna Steffens concluded,[51]

> He was not a bad man. He was the kind of American we all like, the kind that, wanting something, goes after it, fighting, destroying, hurting other men, and if necessary, corrupting and undermining the government and American institutions, but--winning. . . . Mark Hanna was a good man spoiled by the privileges our government let him steal; he came to think that, not only his franchises were his very own private property, but our government also.

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[51]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, pp. 204-05.

Steffens did not write to attack Hanna, but rather to attack a type of businessman, a specific, logical product of the system as it had evolved. Indeed, when Hanna become ill before the article was published, Steffens was worried about it. He wrote his father again, "The illness of Hanna leaves me in the air as to Ohio. Today he is better, tomorrow should decide his fate. I am waiting, idly. . . ."[52]

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[52]Letter, L.S. to his father, February 14, 1904, Steffens Papers, (Letters, I, 165).

It is probably also true that Steffens did not gain any of Roosevelt's friendship by attacking such esteemed members of the Republican party

as Hanna, despite the President's dislike for Hanna. The old boss's death, however, did not stop publication of the article; Steffens merely added,[53]

> He is dead. I don't believe in "nothing but good of the dead"; I believe that true obituaries of our great men would do the living good. But I hoped to be able to tell about Ohio without saying much about Mr. Hanna. That is impossible.

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[53]Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, pp. 161-62.

Mark Hanna was the prime example of the hero of the business society. He did not corrupt politics for the sake of corruption, but with specific purposes. "Mr. Hanna did not want to go into politics," Steffens reported.[54]

> He had to. It was necessary to his business that he should, and it was for the sake of his business that he did; not for the party, not for the city, not to do better things, not even for the sport. . . . He always called himself a business man in politics.

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[54]Ibid., p. 165.

Among his many ventures, Hanna had gained control of one of Cleveland's street railway systems, which became known as "Little Con"--short for little consolidated. Hanna had, by politics and business, consolidated several small lines. He had entered corrupt Cleveland politics for the sake of his "Little Con," and municipal government soon became "a government by the public utilities companies."

Tom Johnson was in the same business--street railways--and entered politics for similar reasons. He had learned early in life that control of a monoply, such as a street railway line, was the

road to becoming a millionaire. In Cleveland, not the first of the cities he conquered as a businessman, he gained control of the "big consolidated" (the "Big Con") and became Mark Hanna's nemesis. Both men entered with equally corrupt purposes, but one came out a hero, the other a villain.

Johnson became the hero, because he changed. One day, by chance, a street railway conductor recommended that he purchase a book-- Henry George's Social Problems-- that a vendor was trying to sell. Johnson followed the advice, became a convert, and was soon using business techniques and his considerable skill (he had been beating Hanna) for the public rather than personal betterment.

Johnson was one of those intellectually honest men who, like LaFollette, was most successful in Steffens' eyes. Like LaFollette, Johnson had at first seemed a demagogue in reformer's clothing. Only when Steffens researched his stories did he find out why he had at first doubted the motives of these two men. When Johnson questioned LaFollette's worth, Steffens recalled, "I had begun to suspect that, whenever a man in public was called a demagogue there was something good about him, something dangerous to the system."[55] "The System"

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[55]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 474.

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was what people expected; it was the status quo and as such was considered correct by the majority. Consequently most people considered Hanna good; he was a product of a system they understood. Similarly, they did not trust LaFollette or Johnson, who were bucking the system that had made them. Philosophizing about why most men call other men

with good motives demagogues, Steffens concluded that most men had "a need. . . to explain away a disturbing fact or idea to save themselves from the labor of thinking it out."[56] Since Hanna fitted "the System,"

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[56] Ibid.

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he required no thought; but Johnson and LaFollette were intellectually independent and were consequently labeled demagogues. So doing stopped the bother of analysis. Even Steffens had been fooled. On one of his early forays into Cleveland he had concluded, "I knew about big, bad business men; knew what a business government was; and knew that Tom Johnson, the street railway magnate, was not giving his time and his service to Cleveland for the city's sake."[57]

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[57] Ibid., II, 472.

But Johnson proved himself and his motives. He had the tried and true ability to manage effectively, and so, with good government as his aim, he knew both how to operate the city with firm business economy and efficiency and how the business motives of those who were trying to get privilege from the city worked. Johnson became another of Steffens' teachers. He taught two lessons. First, "Honesty is not enough; it takes intelligence, some knowledge or theory of economics, courage, strength, will power, humor, leadership--it takes intellectual integrity to solve our political problems." Steffens' notes contain pages of financial and political entries about Johnson's successful work in Cleveland. In case after case Johnson demonstrated

that his no-nonsense method of dealing with the day to day business of government, aided by his effective team organization of professional helpers (such as Frederic C. Howe, Newton Baker, and Brand Whitlock), was benefiting the citizens of Cleveland.

The second rudiment of politics that Johnson led Steffens to understand was the source of corruption,[58]

> First you thought it was bad politicians, who turned out to be pretty good fellows. Then you blamed the bad business men who bribed the good fellows, till you discovered that not all business men bribed and that those who did were pretty good business men. The little business men didn't bribe; so you settled upon, you invented, the phrase "big business," and that's as far as you and your kind have gone: that it is big business that has done all the harm. Hell! Can't you see that it's privileged business that does it. . . --it's those who seek privileges who corrupt, it's those who possess privileges that defend our corrupt politics. Can't you see that?

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[58] Ibid., II, 479.

Naturally Steffens soon believed that "To throw our the rascals and put into office honest men without removing that which makes good men do bad things was as irrational as our experience had taught us it was unpractical," a decision that colored all his later life.[59]

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[59] Ibid., II, p. 493.

Steffens' clear understanding of Johnson, in addition to knowledge gained from exposing St. Louis and Chicago, had taught him that the roads of corruption led to the state, and that businessmen were calling Tom Johnson ambitious for running for governor out of fear of the harm he could do them at a state level.

For Tom Johnson had reformed Cleveland, and by doing so had raised the anger of his old business competitor, Mark Hanna. Realizing that his own methods and motives had not been pure, Johnson was fully capable of understanding Hanna's. In trying to lower street railway rates for the citizens of Cleveland, Johnson and the city council opened bidding for a railway with three-cent fares to compete with the existing system, which refused to lower rates. This affected Hanna's business. Hanna, who had been chastizing Johnson as "socialistic-anarchistic-nihilistic," used his influence with the state supreme court to have the whole Board of Control of Cleveland ousted. To accomplish this it was necessary, because of state laws, to nullify all city charters. Steffens reacted, "This sounds 'socialistic-anarchistic-nihilistic'; but it wasn't; it was Systematic."[60] Indeed, the sub-title for his article was "Showing Business

[60] Steffens, Struggle for Self-Government, p. 197.

Rulers of a State Resorting to Anarchy to Check Municipal Reform." Arrangements were soon made for every city--except Cleveland--to continue to do business.

To insure that reformers never got control of the city again, however, the political powers moved to "pass a general act giving one and the same city charter to all the cities in Ohio."[61]

[61] Ibid., p. 198.

As a model for city government, "the System" powers chose Cincinnati, home of Boss George Cox, and what Steffens called "the worst governed city in the United States." Business ruled there. The idea of representative government was dead.[62]

> They talk in Cincinnati, as they do in Philadelphia, of apathy. Apathy! Apathy is corruption. Cincinnati and Philadelphia are not asleep; they are awake, alive. The life is like that in a dead horse, but it is busy and it is contented. If the commanding men, of all the natural groupings of society, were not interested in graft, no city would put up with what satisfies Cincinnati.

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[62] Ibid., p. 202.

In his article Steffens graphically described Cox, his machine, and his power. Like "Iz" Durham, Cox fascinated Steffens. But there is no need to explain the extent or exact nature of Cox's control; suffice it to say that Steffens thought Cox's machine "about the most perfect organization of the sort that I had seen or heard of," and Steffens had seen or heard of the best.[63]

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[63] Steffens, Autobiography, II, 487.

These factors clarify why Steffens organized his story of Ohio around these two cities. One, Cleveland under Johnson, represented reform; the other, Cincinnati under Cox, "the System." The use of Cincinnati as a model city illustrated both the alliance of state and municipal business control and the need for reform at a state level. "The System," rather than representing the people, was willing to make a corrupt system the legal model for city governments across the state,

by law, to insure that privilege not be threatened again as it had been by Johnson.

Thus Johnson, like Folk in Missouri, found it necessary to fight for reform at the state level. The question, to those who agreed with Steffens, was one of choosing between the people or privilege.

In his muckraking, Steffens would soon move to the next level in progression, the federal government. His political activity was becoming more and more consistent, however, and his work in the liberal campaigns of Ohio and Wisconsin in particular was definitely partisan political material. A young unknown professor named Harlan F. Stone wrote to Steffens about the influence of his article on Cleveland, "I think you more than any other one man may take cridit for the result of the elections wherever 'boss or no boss rule' was the issue. . . . I want to congratulate you on it."[64] Edward Bemis, the superintendent

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[64]Quoted in Lyons, Success Story, p. 229.

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of the water works in Cleveland wrote to Steffens, "I believe you started the whole revolt in Ohio outside, at least, of Cleveland."[65]

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[65]Letter, November 9, 1905, Edward W. Bemis to L.S., Steffens Papers.

Steffens' second book, The Struggle for Self-Government, containing the "Enemies of the Republic" articles plus those on Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Ohio was dedicated to the czar of Russia. In

that dedication, done seriously but nonetheless a bit overdramatic, Steffens advised the czar that the United States was on the road to being a monarchy under a business czar. The czar, therefore, should not fear his serfs' desire to emulate the Americans. The comparison of the United States to Russia was the shock value of the piece, and the information was merely philosophical re-statement of the consequences of a lax voting public and "the System."

By the time his second book reached the market, Steffens was accustomed to success. Men inside "the System" dropped everything when he started to snoop (as did politicians hoping that he might help them). While investigating Philadelphia, Steffens received a note from the Mayor, John Weaver, saying, "Your urgent request and the urging of many friends has impelled me to change my arrangements. . . and cancel the engagements that I had here in order to come to the City Club Dinner next Tuesday evening [to hear you]."[66] He had

[66]Steffens Papers, John Weaver to L.S., November 23, 1905.

received, and would continue to receive, numerous requests to visit other cities and muckrake them.[67] A most interesting request for

[67]For examples see Steffens Papers, J.P. Baldwin to L.S., May 6, 1904 (for New Orleans) and W.F. Cash to L.S., March 8, 1907 (for Sakamania County, Oregon).

help came from Mr. William C. Bobbs, of Indianapolis, who asked Steffens to endorse a plan of reform. Bobbs, of the publishing house bearing his name, had proposed a plan by which the businessmen of the

city would bring about a new order. Steffens growing disillusionments with restrained businessman-directed reform were beginning to show (it was 1908). Once, after some searching self-analysis, Steffens concluded that "No reform could get anywhere without going too far; any reform that is to accomplish anything worth while must go on and on until it catches and hurts [the unconscious supporters of corruption, the 'good' or 'well-meaning' middle class]."[68]

[68]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 523.

Bobbs stuck to the middle of the road in his suggestions. His inability to find the real sinners, the respectable businessmen who did not lead respectably, after all that Steffens had written to illustrate their complicity, frustrated Steffens.[69]

> I see that you propose to provide for prosecution. Good. But why haven't district attorneys prosecuted before? Who nominated them? And why? What was behind them, holding them back? Who and what are the regular forces back of all the robbery of Indianapolis?. . . . Do you know?. . . .
>
> So, not seeing these sources, you do not propose to stop them up. Hence there is little hope in your program. . . . Oh, you Business Men, with your business reforms! You will ruin yourselves yet. I laugh, but I could weap. . . . . .
>
> Pardon me if I seem disappointing. I can't help it. You say I would have some influence with the people of Indianapolis. You are mistaken. I, personally, haven't the least influence anywhere. What I have written and said has, and has had, an influence just so far as men have seen that I was right. And so now, with this letter; if you publish it, you will find that it, not I, will help you. . . .

[69]Steffens Papers, William C. Bobbs to L.S., October 27, 1908 (Letters, P. 207).

All of the years of reform work that had seemingly not paid off were starting to discourage Steffens. While he remained active and hopeful, he was unable to maintain his sheerly practical approach. The very existence of a "theory" of the organization of "the System" belied any claim to the lack of a personal philosophical construct of what should be. His European training was a part of him, and try though he did, he could not help philosophizing. The election trials of many of his new-found heroes drew him more and more into politics, and he found that his knowledge of "the System" made him continually more skeptical of the order of government itself. As one critic has contended, "Steffens was not merely careless of flip in discounting the law. He hated and ridiculed it. It had been a stronghold of privilege--an oppressor, not a protector, of the public interest."[70]

[70]Alfred B. Rollins, "The Heart of Lincoln Steffens," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIX (1960), p. 244.

A fellow reformer and friend, Frederic C. Howe, thought that Steffens "showed more penetrating knowledge of politics than any writer in the country. . . . [He] wrote political stories as brilliant as fiction and delighted in his work."[71]

[71]Frederic C. Howe, The Confessions of a Reformer, A Quadrangle Paperback (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), pp. 182; 183-84.

His influence was considerable until at least 1910, as attested to by frequent notes from Theodore Roosevelt. When investigating scandals in the far West, Steffens received one of those. "May I

ask," the President wrote[72]

> that you let me know first what you have found out about the government officials before making it public! This is not to prevent your making public everything you find; but simply that I may conduct any investigations with the advantage of not having the facts made public in advance; and also to be sure that no innocent man is charged with what can not be substantiated.

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[72]Letter, Theodore Roosevelt to L.S., February 26, 1907, Steffens Papers.

But Steffens insisted on slipping into philosophic theorizing. He gave much serious consideration to the consequences of applying Christianity to government while analyzing the devotion of socialists to reform.[73]

> I concluded that it was their vision, their imminent hope, of a better world that made them unpurchasable. . . . Suddenly, suddenly it occured to me that Christianity conveyed such a faith, hope, and--vision.
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> . . . Jesus had discovered and declared, for example, the worthlessness of the good people. He said that he could not save the righteous, only sinners.

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[73]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 525-26.

He finally got a chance to apply much of his theory when capitalist-reformer E. A. Filene paid him to come to Boston and plan the reform of the city. In October of 1908, the Boston Courier announced that

> Mr. Lincoln Steffens, the greatest living healer of municipal diseases, is in our midst and preparing to diagnose our ills. Soon--let us hope very soon--we shall know what ails us and how we may be restored to health.

Other papers echoed the welcome.[74] Steffens worked hard for a year

[74]Steffens Papers, Scrapbook II, Boston Courier, October 19, 1908; Boston Evening Record, October 8, 1908; Boston Advertiser, October 7, 1908; Boston Herald, October 7, 1908.

trying to re-build the people themselves. He gave lectures, visited businessmen, worked on all levels of society. But he found it harder and harder to work. He recalled,[75]

> The facts and the meaning of it were so common; I had reported the like so often that my mind or my stomach revolted at the repetition. Boston was so like other cities that I could not--I did not--muckrake its politics, which were all business.

[75]Steffens, Autobiography, II, 606.

The work he produced, after years of effort, was never published, and as a platform for a "people's champion" Boston failed. In fact, it can be safely said that Steffens' entire attempt at leading a specific city to reform was a stinging personal disappointment.

The tide of public support that had favored muckraking was also slowly turning. It was inevitable, if Steffens' theory that business was behind corruption was correct, that the potential of his endless popularity was limited. Certainly Roosevelt's now famous "Man With the Muck-rake" speech hit a chord that echoed in the hearts of many typically optimistic Americans. While it is impossible to give a date after which the popularity of Steffens (or the muckrakers) started down hill, Steffens himself was parodied as early as 1908, when the Saturday Evening Post published "The Complete Muckraker," by Samuel B. Blyth, a story about a character named "Mr. Blinken Biffens" and his exploits in muckraking various European cities.[76]

[76]Samuel G. Blythe, "The Complete Muckraker," Saturday Evening Post, November 14, 1908, pp. 14-15, 40.

The parody included a drawing of the character, whose suitcase was monogrammed "L.S." Although parody is a sign of declining popularity, it is also an indication of widespread fame.

But other journals attacked, and not so humorously. The Nation reported that "There [was] a gnawing feeling that we [were] approaching the limit of mere exposure of official and corporate misdoing." Arena, the oldest of the established magazines traditionally critical of the government, however, supported the muckrakers; "That the President did not mean and could not have meant the men and women who have wrought so nobly and effectively in arousing a healthy moral sentiment is apparent."[77] Steffens' scrapbooks con-

[77]"After Exposure, What?", Nation, March 22, 1906, p. 234; "The Muck-Rake versus the Muck," Arena, June, 1906, p. 625.

tain numerous attacks on him that were published at various times and places. By 1908, one Boston newspaper received a letter dismissing him as a "socialist," and another paper published "A Tearful Farewell to a Man Who Used To Count."[78] Whatever the case, sometime after The

[78]Steffens Papers, Scrapbook II, n.d., n.p.

Struggle for Self-Government was released, the decline of Steffens as a influential public personality began, and by Wilson's election he was almost totally our of the public eye.

In the meantime he continued his investigation and writing. In 1906, he and most of McClure's staff left S. S. McClure for various business and personal reasons, in Steffens' case his growing distaste at having his work re-written or rejected by McClure, and his desire to stay with his friends.[79] However, he stayed only briefly with them

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[79]For the full story of the McClure breakup see Lyons, Success Story, pp. 275-303; Wilson, McClure's, Chapter IX, "The Great Schism and Afterwards," pp. 168-69.

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when they bought out the American magazine. Two years later, not wanting to own something that he would have to be financially dependent upon and that could thus influence his judgement, he sold out. He refused to bribe himself with possessions.

But Steffens continued as a "people's champion." His next step, after the cities and states, was to "muckrake" the federal "System." Everything pointed toward it. He accepted the offer of a newspaper syndicate, and with his "carte blanche" from President Roosevelt in hand,[80] he attacked the head of the beast.

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[80]See p. 9.

CHAPTER V

MUCKRAKING THE NATION

With the cities and states muckraked, it was only necessary to show that the federal government was operated by the same methods to prove that Steffens' analysis of the political "System" was correct, or correct in Steffens' eyes. Theodore Roosevelt had given him "carte blanche" to investigate the national executive branch, and certainly Steffens was an able enough reporter to get and interpret any other information he required.[1]

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[1]See p. 9.

Muckraking at the national level, however, was a step backward in journalistic form at least; without his job at McClure's, Steffens for a brief time once again worked as a newspaper man, syndicating his Washington articles in the Pulitzer papers and others. Newspaper work, obviously, required a change in format. While his eleven articles were features in large Sunday editions to be read and digested at a leisurely pace, with one week intervals for thought, they could not be as extensive as his magazine reviews had been. Steffens had an advantage in that most readers had read or were familiar with what he had proven in his magazine articles. Thus, the newspaper columns he

produced are occasionally flawed by references to concepts that only an understanding of his former work would make fully clear.

The first of the series, which ran under various titles, depending on the newspaper which published it, appeared Sunday, January 14, 1906, on page one of the first sention of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, with a three column photo of the author. The banner read "'Is "Our" Government Ours?' Asks Lincoln Steffens, Who Will Probe the Records of the Men Who Run It."[2]

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[2]Lincoln Steffens, "Is 'Our" Government Ours," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 14, 1906, Section One, p. 1. Unless otherwise noted, all quoted in Chapter V will be from the article under consideration in that respective section, and no further reference than the primary note will be given. The placement of Steffens' articles within the various newspapers varied from city to city, as did layout and accompanying illustrations. The Post-Dispatch was unusually complimentary, probably because of the amount of work Steffens had done in St. Louis, in placing his articles on good pages.

His first sentence states his purpose:

> I have come to Washington in the plain character of a private citizen to find out all I can about my Government. It is mine; or, it should be; yours, too, of course. But I say "mine" with a definite thought in mind.
>
> "Our" Government should represent us, all of us; not only the good citizens, but the bad also, and not only the bad but the good, the bad, and the indifferent. . . .
>
> . . . I have nothing to ask that everybody should not. . . .

The entire first installment reviewed exactly what he had found at local and state levels and explained why it was necessary to go on to the federal government. "Our American optimism takes refuge," he wrote, "in the declaration made again and again to me that 'anyhow, as a nation we are all right.'" To verify or disprove this optimism Steffens had but one basic quotation to ask everyone in Washington: "What do you represent?"

If he found men who would not answer, or who he suspected had lied, he would find out for himself. But his job was not to seek out grafters or graft: "Oh, I shall look at graft if graft looks at me, but 'Where did he get it?' is not the national question. We know where he got it."

And so, with this question as an introduction, Steffens' readers started their lessons on "the System"--good or bad--of the federal government.

The next Sunday, January 21, 1906, still on page on of the Post-Dispatch, appeared the headline, "'The President Is Really President,' Says Steffens; 'No Trace of a Boss Can Be Found at White House.'"[3] The title is self-explanatory. The leaders of many states, contrary to the state constitutions, were not the same men who sat in the Governor's chair; nor were mayors always the boss of their respective cities. But no one pulled the strings on Theodore Roosevelt.[4]

[3]Lincoln Steffens, "The President Is Really President," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 21, 1906, Section One, p. 1.

[4]Since Steffens never hesitated to write derogatory or damaging material about other people who were his personal friends, and since this series did not always say the kindest things of Roosevelt, there can be little doubt that T.R.'s friendship was not enough to guarantee the President a good report. Roosevelt was, by 1906, accustomed to Steffens saying things about the Republican party that he, if possible, as head of the party, would like to have squelched. But Steffens could not be bribed by friendship.

Steffens explained the system by which states were not always ruled by their legal officials and explained that "safe" officials--safe for "the System"--were often weak spots when "the System" was under attack, for they didn't know how to fight corruption's most dangerous enemy: publicity.

But in Washington things were not peaceful. Some people were joyful, others not, but everyone was in a state of upheaval--and everyone said the reason was the President. That was a good sign. When things went (go) too smoothly there was danger that the sources that sought to corrupt were being successful; but turmoil was the sign of war--between the people and privilege. "Theodore Roosevelt," Steffens wrote, "is no figure-head. He is no man's man. . . ." And that proved at least one thing; "To that extent, then, the Constitution is intact; the description of the national Government as it was written by the Fathers is correct as to the executive."

For the third straight week Steffens held the front page of the Sunday Post-Dispatch, this time, January 28, 1906, under the headline "'The Senate Regards Itself As Savior of the Nation, Guarding the People from Themselves,' Says Steffens."[5] His study of the executive

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[5]Lincoln Steffens, "The Senate as It Sees Itself," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 28, 1906, Section One, p. 1.

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branch completed, he moved on to the most controversial branch of the Congress, the Senate. Other muckraker articles, most notably "Treason of the Senate" in Cosmopolitan that same year, 1906, had shown (or

were showing) that the Senate was far from being the bastion of democracy. But Steffens turned around, acting the part of a Senator, looked at the voting public, the people for whom he was there to investigate, saw them as the Senators saw them. "We lose our individuality completely. We merge into great masses, ignorant and powerful, unreasoning and sometimes ungovernable." He then illustrated how the Senate transcended the public. Unlike representatives and the President, who were elected by the public, Senators were elected by their state senates--parts of the "System" Steffens' readers already knew about. While the people changed, "the System" didn't.

So Senators became contented with their lordly positions. They could look at "reform waves," or at the "unsettled" and "threatening" masses, but they didn't really worry. Steffens emphasized his allusion to Senator's consideration of the voting public in the same terms as the weather. And so, of their attitude toward themselves, Steffens wrote,

> Supposed to be an oligarchy, it is itself a democracy, somebody called it, made up of nobles, and that is very pleasant. Senators become devoted to the Senate, and, like the Church for the Church and the Army for the Army, Senators, standing for the Senate, come to stand for what the Senate stands for.

Steffens had earlier illustrated, in The Struggle for Self-Government, exactly what certain senators stood for, and the Senate was where these men met together. Steffens' readers knew what national senators stood for at the state level. But, he concluded his article, Washington ignored "the past of 'our' representatives." he continued, however, to add that he could not be as permissive: "Aren't these Senators likely to represent honestly here that same element that they have stood for at home? Let us watch them this season and see. . . ."

Finally, with his fourth article, headlined, "'Our Dummy Directors in the House Organized Like a Board of Alderman As a Combine,' Says Steffens," published Sunday, February 4, 1906, the Post-Dispatch moved Steffens to section two, but still page one.[6] The

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[6]Lincoln Steffens, "Our Dummy Directors In the House," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 4, 1906, Section Two, p. 1.

Senate reviewed, in this article he set out to determine the nature of the House of Representatives.

The house had a "boss," "Uncle Joe" Cannon, the Speaker. In order to get anything accomplished the members had to work through the organized procedure, and the key figure in that procedure was Cannon. So, for the sake of doing whatever they wanted--within reason--good or bad, the representatives gave up their independence and pledged to follow the wishes of the party as represented by Cannon, and in return they became members of "the System."

It was not democracy that got things done, it was the will of Joe Cannon. He was the man to please. In order to speak, a representative had to clear what he was to say with Cannon or he would not be recognized on the floor.

Because they were both Republicans, or because they thought alike, or by some lucky coincidence--or for reasons Steffens would explain later--but not because the House represented the people, the President and the Speaker agreed in 1906 on what laws needed to be enacted. Thus there was little friction between the House, which was really a combine under Boss Cannon, and the Executive. In order to

get his programs accomplished, Roosevelt went along with the established, although corrupt and undemocratic, house organization. "Our President, like our representatives in the House, wants to accomplish something. Wherefore, like them, he combines with the 'combines.'" The House, however, was not as it should be. The national representatives closest to the people, for they were elected by popular vote and had smaller constituencies than any other national officials, were really "dummies." A combine represented what Cannon told them to, and therefore, "the System" that controlled the cities and states was active in the nation's capital.

Now the reader knew that the President was his own boss; that the Senate had no single boss, each man saying what he wanted but each man an aristocrat rather than a representative; and that the House was ruled as a combine by a boss, "Uncle Joe" Cannon.

This firmly established, Steffens went on to examine how the President and the members of congress accomplished things. The headline for this, the fifth article, read "'The President Is Bossing Congress To Make It Represent The People a Little,' Writes Steffens."[7]

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[7]Lincoln Steffens, "The President as a Boss," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 11, 1906, Section Two, p. 10 B.

The previous article had shown how Roosevelt worked with the combine that was the House in order to get his legislation through. Steffens attacked him for doing this, for in order to win, Roosevelt had gone to Cannon and recognized him as the "boss," thus showing

fealty to "the System." While accomplishing short range objectives, Roosevelt over the long term was strengthening and perpetuating an un-representative "System" in the House:

> You see, it comes down finally to a question of the relative importance of the many things to be done. I'd rather make our government represent us than dig the canal; the President would rather dig the canal and regulate railway rates. So he makes his "deal" with the Speaker and I condemn it.

Here again Steffens illustrated his independence of Roosevelt, the reformer who was also a "System" man. Indeed, time after time Steffens turned on would-be reformers who urged moderation and feared the dangers of radicalism more than those of reaction. Rossevelt adjusted himself to the situation, staying just liberal enough to look progressive but cooperating sufficiently with the established order to keep its support (and to support it in turn) but not enough to upset the average, complaisant citizen. Steffens could never barter with corruption; thus, as the country turned its back on progressivism, Steffens and those like him--his friends Robert LaFollette and Judge Ben Lindsey, for example--continued to follow liberal trails, still refusing to compromise either democracy or, as time passed, their civil liberties. Roosevelt, the politician, was always popular, but he was not always liberal; Steffens, the political philosopher, was always liberal, but not always popular.

The Senate maintained its influence with the President by virtue of the advice it gave on whom to appoint. The memebers of the Senate (and House) were, the President assumed, the representatives of the people. Thus, when he asked them whom to appoint to the various patronage positions, he assumed he heard the people's voice. But,

Steffens' readers knew better; the House and the Senate didn't represent the people.

But Roosevelt was instigating more reform than other Presidents had. He was getting much more progressive legislation through than had ever been accomplished since the Constitution itself was passed--even though it was not nearly as much as would be assumed by someone watching the cloud of dust he raised. The headline of the sixth article read "'Roosevelt Rules Congress Because It Knows He Is Backed By Public Opinion,' Says Lincoln Steffens."[8]

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[8]Lincoln Steffens, "The Reign of Public Opinion," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 18, 1906, Section Two, p. 1.

Steffens reassured his readers in this installment; the reason Roosevelt was able to get as much accomplished as he did sprang from at least two determinants. First, as they had learned the week before, T.R. decided it was necessary to go along with "the System," thus selling himself out to "Uncle Joe" Cannon in return for congressional support. The second reason--the point of the article--was the reassuring one. Roosevelt was getting results because the public supported him and "the System" dared not to defy the public will--it was too powerful. The public, therefore, was the boss, at least for that moment and at the federal level. That was good news.

But, could "the System" continue working under intense public scrutiny? Of course, the public was watching because of the dust Roosevelt (and the muckrakers, and their own extreme dissatisfaction)

was raising. But when the dust settled, would not the voters also? Apathy was the first rule of public corruption--and Roosevelt had upset that.

But Steffens explained what would happen (and he was quite accurate). The public, like their representatives, could be bought off--not by cash as they had been in Rhode Island, but by public spending. "Pork Barrel" legislation would probably do it; while foreign affairs were certainly a distraction (that Steffens did not mention). The people were likely to give up democracy for a new court house, a river improvement, or an army base in their congressional district. Steffens' story of the Hepburn (Railway) Rate Bill illustrated how Senator "Pete" Hepburn, originally against any railroad regulation, wanted his name put on a bill the year after his constituency burned him in effigy for his pro-railroad actions. Yes, public opinion was still boss, but how often did a United States Senator get burned in effigy, and how long would the public watch its government carefully? Did democracy demand the burning of Senators, even if only in effigy? Was apathy the normal state of affairs?

In the next article, bannered "Lincoln Steffens Tells How The Railroad Measures Against Our Interests At Washington," Steffens told how West Virginia, which was under the rule of railroads, was being restricted in its growth by the greed of railroad men, with the help of the national government.[9] It also told how the government had methods of redress.

[9]Lincoln Steffens, "Our People Are Helpless," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 25, 1906, Section One, p. 1.

West Virginia's basic commodity was coal. Mr. Logan M. Bullitt purchased the Red Rock Coal Company, sold cheap because the former owner failed to get the local railroad company--a branch of the Baltimore and Ohio--to ship the coal. Mr. Bullitt, who applied directly to the third vice president of the Baltimore and Ohio was told that the railway could not accept any small shippers who might endanger their larger customers (i.e., the restraint of competition by means of favoritism). He visited the president of the Baltimore and Ohio, who referred him to another vice-president, who wrote a note saying that they could not accept his business because the coal market was flooded.

But, what business was it of the Baltimore and Ohio if the coal industry was over-producing, so long as each shipper paid his bill? It was very much the business of the Baltimore and Ohio's directors, it was discovered, for they owned large interests in the established coal trust, and their influence with the rail company was the real source of the Red Rock Coal Company's problem.

Two things were done that dramatized the significance of the situation. First, the Governor of West Virginia wrote a letter to Senator Benjamin R. Tillman, from South Carolina, to be read in the Senate, saying that the destiny of his state was in the hands of the railroads, and that destiny was being foiled. To emphasize his plight, the Governor wrote not his own state's Senators, for they were in

league with the trust forces acting in restraint of trade, but to another state's Senator!

Second, Bullitt took his letter to the Interstste Commerce Commission, evading the courts completely and thereby implying that they were also in on the "ring." The Interstate Commerce Commission acted in favor of the new coal company, but each new company would have to endure the same entire process to get justice, which was not just.

The significance of Steffens' article was threefold. First, it showed that trusts were acting in restraint of trade, and how that would hinder (or help) the development of a state, at their will. Second, it demonstrated that a state could not turn to its own legal representatives--its Senators and courts--and hope to receive unbiased justice. One of the main questions Steffens was asking was "Is 'Our' Government Ours?" The article gave one state's answer, and the example was easily applicable elsewhere. Finally, it illustrated that there were forces for justice--in this case the Interstate Commerce Commission, a progressive organization. The entire article is best considered an example of the anti-trust problem.

In his eighth article, headlined "Lincoln Steffens Tells How Congress is Doctoring the Rate Regulations Bill to Please the Railroads," published on Sunday, March 4, 1906, Steffens illustrated how the forces of business that infested Congress were weakening all attempts at the reform and control of the trusts, exemplified again by the railroads.[10]

[10]Lincoln Steffens, "Washington: A Spectacle," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 4, 1906, Section Three, p. 1.

"Big business," Steffens wrote, "was the source of the corruption of the men and the Government of every city and State that I have studied, ..." But in Washington bribery was simply not in vogue; in Washington the Senators and Representatives themselves were "the System" itself. They didn't need to be bossed, in a sense, for they were their own bosses--especially the Senators. But the attentive reader could not help remembering Steffens first and most important question, to be asked to everyone in Washington: "Whom do you represent?" They represented themselves, and they were "the System," "the System" that was inadvertantly but nonetheless effectively corrupting democracy.

Men who would never take a bribe were appealing to the Senate for matters concerning business-trust to be handled by the courts. But the courts interpreted the laws; laws were made by the congress; and who was represented in congress? The argument was circular, but devastating--for the answers, like the organization, were unnerving.

The political parties didn't represent different viewpoints. There was no difference between some Republicans and other Democrats. This sounds like political observation of today, but it was the substance of Steffens' March 11, 1906, installment, headlined, "'New Political Parties Necessary,' Says Lincoln Steffens; 'Old Ones, Under Different Names, Represent Same Interests.'"[11]

[11]Lincoln Steffens, "Forming New Political Parties," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 11, 1906, Section Two, p. 1.

Steffens introduced his story be telling of a meeting between his old friends Joseph W. Folk, progressive of St. Louis, and Theodore Roosevelt, progressive of the United States. The two men, the one Democrat, the other Republican, got along famously. Upon leaving Roosevelt, Folk quipped,

> Isn't it too bad that two men who agree as the President and I do on all moral questions should be in different parties?
> When this remark was repeated to the President he answered, quick as a flash, "No, it isn't bad. It's good that there should be men in both parties who agree on all moral question."

The President, in the long run, was right, of course; but Folk's observation did pinpoint a problem: there were two factions in the federal (and probably the local and state) government, but not two factions represented by the parties. Of one section, the conservatives, Steffens wrote,

> they stand for business. . . . These men honestly believe that anything that helps business is good; no matter how much it may hurt our national character as a people or the institutions of our Government, if it helps business, that Thing must be right.

That party, call it what you will, still exists today. What Steffens was saying then is still important today, in part because it still applies. Both major parties had ceased to be valid representatives of public opinion.

There was (is) another party, thankfully, just as free of the old "Democrat" or "Republican" titles: "There are a few men in the Senate and in the Cabinet, and in the House, and in the country at

large there are many men who hold that whatever hurts our manhood and our Government, no matter how much it may help business, is bad."

The progressive bills in congress were issues that split the parties into two meaningful categories: the businessmen and the public's men. Steffens was a partisan, obviously a "people's champion."

The article also showed how the traditional party names were applied, to give the public the illusion of philosophical divergence of opinion. When Steffens was leaving "Uncle Joe Cannon's office one day he saw John Sharp Williams, the minority leader, enter. "They work together," Steffens wrote,

> these two, for government by parties. We have a bi-partisan system here as well as in the cities and States. The pension bill graft goes to the Democrats as well as the Republicans: no party difference there. . . . There's enough money to go around to all the Congressmen of both parties who voted right. And they vote right here without any regard to party.

The corruption of the people's representation was as advanced at the national level, at least with the "conservatives" of both parties, as it had been at local and state levels.

In the tenth of his articles, on March 18, 1906, the headline announced what the public had hoped it would see, "Lincoln Steffens Tells How to Reform Congress: What Trouble Is and What We Must Do About It."[12]

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[12]Lincoln Steffens, "How to Reform Congress," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 18, 1906, Section Three, p. 13.

First, Steffens explained what everyone already knew. The members of the Senate were all millionaires and, as Mr. Aldrich admitted, a Senator was, like others, "influenced by the business he had been in, by the alliances he has formed and by his environment." Obviously! And hadn't most Senators come to protect their own businesses anyway? Steffens had shown why businessmen went into politics. What was Hanna's story in "Ohio: A Tale of Two Cities"? Why would Senators bribe themselves? It was too inefficient; they merely voted as they, businessmen, thought wisest.

Second, these men would neither favor nor work for reform, even though as representatives of the people it was their duty to do so. The people wanted reform; the so-called people's representatives wanted the old "System."

Third, to Steffens the real cause of Socialism was the selfishness of representatives who would not represent. The people, if fairly represented, would not turn to new or different economic systems, unless the old method--capitalism--had been corrupted. And it had. If the Senate wanted really to save capitalism, all it would have to do was act properly keeping the people's interest first in mind.

Finally, what to do:

> But the great thing to do is to reform the Senate, and the reason that it is so important is because it can't be done except by reforming first the city, county, and State Governments. Hard? Yes, but there is no short cut to reform and to bawl at the Senate is like baying at the moon. Go for the State Legislatures. Make your Legislatures represent truely the common interests of all the people of your State and they will send here naturally United States Senators who will represent truely and naturally the common interests of all the people of the United States without being driven by a Rough Rider, heeled with "public clamor."

Steffens' final article on the national government, headlined "How the Government Favors the National Banks by Letting Them Use Public Funds Without Charge," appeared on March 25, 1906.[13] The

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[13]Lincoln Steffens, "National Bankers Graft," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 25, 1906, Section Three, p. 4.

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government of the United States, he said, (has) a large cash reserve. It put(s) this money in banks. Steffens' question then was: Why didn't the federal government get interest on its deposit, just as an individual would? The banks loaned out the money, and made a good profit. Wasn't the government, very clearly, favoring those banks in which it made deposits by eliminating a basic cost to the banks? Wasn't the government acting in restraint of competition? Steffens left many obvious questions unanswered, but he always made sure that the public was aware of the obvious ones.

The answers, of course, were determined by "the System," which was obviously significant to analyists of "the System." How did the government select what banks to deposit federal funds in? One bank, the National City Bank, which received large amounts of money, was selected by the Secretary of the Treasury, an appointed official politically indebted to the President. After investigation Steffens realized that members of the board of directors of the National City Bank were also, in many cases, on the board of Standard Oil. Further, those men as individuals--but businessmen--had made large contributions to the President's campaign in the last election.

The federal deposits, in a sense, was their return on the investment, and it was a very handsome return indeed--pure profit.

Steffens also aimed at those public officials who would not speak for publication. If these men represented the people, why wouldn't they tell what their employers wanted to know? "I'm sorry I can't quote Mr. Shaw (the Secretary of the Treasury). I'll have to follow the newspaper form and say that the Secretary declined to talk for publication, but a prominent official said. . . ." Again, later, he got in a punch: "But that's another subject and this Secretary of the Treasury--no, I forgot the red tape--a high authority of the Treasury Department, said. . . ." Thus he observed the removal of the public servant from accountability to the public, and it re-inforced Steffens' point that the people were being ignored.

Steffens concluded his series as follows:

> My belief is that so far as our Government is bad the evil thereof is traceable, not to particular bad men, but to the good citizen; and that not alone their neglect, but their (often unconscious) participation in some form of (often unidentified) graft, keeps them "apathetic." Bankers call themselves good citizens; I know three or four who are. I should like to have the others ask themselves why they are leaving reform to what they call "Socialists." Isn't it because they are not only busy, but in on the graft somewhere?

And so, the cities, states, and nation had all been shown to be systematically under the control of the businessman; and thus the businessman was in favor of the status qou. But, who was the boss of the businessmen?

CHAPTER VI

MUCKRAKING BUSINESS

In 1910 and 1911, Everybody's Magazine published a series of articles by Steffens under the general title "It: An Exposition of the Sovereign Political Power of Organized Business." It was about time. All of Steffens' articles led to the conclusion that the trouble with politics was business; now he would show the exact nature of business.

Steffens' public was familiar with the boss, and now he was going to talk about the bosses of business. Here was a--possibly the--critical part of the entire "System." Up until now Steffens had explained politics, from the local to the national level:[1]

> But in all quiet conflicts between our national business organization and our national political organization, business wins. That is to say, under normal conditions the power of business is greater than our political power. (p. 292)

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[1]Lincoln Steffens, "The Boss of All Bosses," Everybody's Magazine, September, 1910, pp. 290-98. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

Readers knew about "Iz" Durham from Philadelphia and about Boss Cox from Cincinnati, but they were not of the class of people Steffens criticized now. Politics, after all, was "dirty business,"

expected to be corrupt. True, the muckraking movement had over-emphasized it, but readers were just not shocked by cities and states that were not all aboveboard.

But this wasn't politics--"dirty business"--this was business itself that was on the block. The men involved weren't the same; they didn't "hang out" around the court house and legislature. They were the men parents taught their children to emulate--bankers, lawyers, merchants. The United States was the center of wild capitalism, and an attack on capitalists was somehow harder to accept than an attack on politicians.

"Wall Street," Steffens told his public,

> is to American business what Washington, D.C., is to national politics: the seat of all government. . . .
>
> By "Wall Street" I mean the national American financial system which, having its capital in New York and, controlling more and more perfectly money and credit, it governing more and more completely not only the machinery of organized business, but so much of our political government as big business controls. (p. 292)

And all Steffens' readers knew how much that was.

Further, Steffens contended that, as in politics, power in business had eventually centered on one man, J. Pierpoint Morgan. "And if that is so, the United States has, at last, a personal sovereign." Steffens allowed no one the opportunity of missing his point: "There's my thesis: That Morgan is more than Morgan; that business is more than business. And it is the hard, practical minds of business men I endeavor to convince. . . ." (p. 295) So, it was clear. Steffens was going to examine the business and consequently the political significance of J. Pierpoint Morgan and all he stood for in America. The reader would find the king of the American mountain.

In the second installment of "It" Steffens interviewed various bankers and financial men in order to find the evolution of Morgan's power. He went about proving his point (the existence of a single power in the person of Morgan) in a very orderly fashion.

First, he persuaded everyone he interviewed to agree that, as he quoted one of the "Standard Oil Crowd," "By a consensus of opinion among us, Mr. Morgan has assumed what might be termed leadership down here." (p. 449)[2] Everyone agreed that Morgan was leader, but they all added

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[2]Lincoln Steffens, "Wall Street on Wall Street," Everybody's Magazine, October, 1910, pp. 449-60. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

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that it was of no significance outside of New York, and that the phenomenon was of concern only to local bankers. They obviously wanted to hide something, or else were surprisingly naive of their own national significance.

Second, Steffens detailed how Wall Street's influence went far beyond New York City. When studying municipal corruption, during the business panic year of 1907, he had asked bank presidents across the country why it was impossible to supply people with money the people themselves had deposited. The responses were always the same, "Wall Street has it." Steffens was told how, at the moment of crisis in a panic, Morgan and John D. Rockefeller's own money had been loaned to save the day. However, those who told him this were misleading him. "To be very precise," Steffens wrote,

> it wasn't money at all that Mr. Morgan loaned and it wasn't Morgan that loaned it; it was the combined credit of the Associated Clearing House banks put out by Morgan for all of them against

> clearing house certificates. Back of this credit was the credit (and the money) of the people of Los Angeles and Buffalo, Chicago, Boston, and New York; in brief, the deposits of the whole country. So that all these places were represented by Mr. Morgan. (p. 451)

Obviously to be the boss of Wall Street had significance far beyond the boundaries of New York City itself, for Wall Street was the financial center of the country.

Third, Steffens illustrated the uniqueness of Morgan's supremacy. Bankers always hastened to tell Steffens that Morgan's position meant nothing. "Men come and men go." said one banker,

> banks rise and decline; railroads absorb railroads, and then are themselves absorbed. It is all Morgan now. It's been Morgan before. And before him it was Jay Gould and Vanderbilt; another time it was Harriman, Rogers, and William Rockefeller; and Morgan. (p. 451)

But Steffens noticed what the bankers missed: Never before had all the power been with but <u>one</u> man. Wall Street was at a historic moment in its evolution. Just as small combines had merged into large trusts, just as first there had been many oil companies and then only Standard Oil (or United States Steel, or any one of a number of trusts), so there had finally emerged a single head of the group who financed the trusts. A throne existed. But the bankers themselves didn't realize the significance of Morgan's position. He was, they argued, merely a man--one who could be replaced. One man Steffens argued with

> did not see any throne. He used the word but he did not see the thing. He was Julius Ceaser, not Ceaser; not the Ceasers, the czars, and the kaisers. . . .
>
> . . . The point that pricks us outsiders is that <u>some</u> one can and that probably some <u>one</u> will always be the single head of the American business system. But Wall Street doesn't believe that. (p. 452)

Fourth, Steffens clarified the business value of having a single leader. The most obvious reason, of course, was efficiency. Fights among businessmen were proving to be dangerous. Dissension within the ranks hurt the ability of business to fleece the public. "Honor among thieves" had functional advantages, and Morgan had proven to be the most honorable of the bankers. Other businessmen broke their words to one another, but never Morgan. He was always "straight." "He makes his raids like the rest of them," a banker told Steffens, "But when 'J.P.' is going forth on one of his piratical cruises he gives notice; he calls off all agreements. . . ." Steffens then asked the crucial question, the one that the readers wanted to ask: What about the public? "Oh," the broker laughed cynically, "the public is our prey. It's honor among--among financiers that I am talking about." (p. 455)

Fifth, he pointed out that the existing financial powers did not know their own strength--they were unaware. "If some one should tell [Morgan] that he was seated on a throne, he would grasp the arms of his office chair, and snort." (p. 457) He further noted that the Jewish banking community was not included in the unconscious conspiracy. In doing so he reflected the anti-Semitic feeling of his own age:

> No man who intended to put himself at the head of a perfect monopoly of money power would lock out the Jews. . . . Slow to enter into a quarrel, once in they make it a war; they join hands all around the earth and, since they have a sense,. . . of their children's children. . ., a financial war with the Jews might mean a divided Money Power for generations to come. (p. 458)

Sixth, he pointed toward the next article by asking the degree to which Morgan's power was established:

> How far have they gone? How big is their Ring now? How much business is under one control. Just how powerful is Money Power? Or, to sum up: It is true that J. P. Morgan is the personal representative of an organic, national business system. How strong is it? (p. 460)

"The Power of the Money Power," part three of the series on organized business, was basically an assessment of the greatest single trust of 1910, "the money trust."[3] For the sake of clear organization

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[3]Lincoln Steffens, "The Power of the Money Power," Everybody's Magazine, November, 1910, pp. 646-56. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

Steffens separated the article into five section, each with a separate sub-title.

Sub-section one was entitled "Measuring the Might of Organized Business." The salient idea of this introductory section was the staggering wealth of "the money power," and most especially J. P. Morgan. One entire page was devoted to the cataloging of Morgan's holdings and their capitalization. The final summary gave the combined worth of "Morgan's own banks," "Morgan's banking interests," "Morgan's affiliated companies," and "Morgan's partners" at "$10,268,582,000" (p. 647). On the next page Steffens admitted the list wasn't complete, in fact, Morgan's wealth was incalculable. But that wasn't the point; what was important was that the power associated with that wealth was even greater. The power overwhelmed most financial challengers thus leaving Morgan free from fear of attack from all but the most stout hearted. After all, influence, not wealth itself, was the real issue.

> The total capitalization of all they own would not bring home to us the influence of Morgan and his associates, direct and indirect, honest and corrupt, over presidents and congress; governors and legislatures; in both political parties and over our political power. And no figures would remind us of their standing at the bar and in the courts; with the press, the pulpit, the colleges, schools, and in society. (p. 648)

The second sub-title was "The Poor Rich." A tongue-in-cheek heading, sure, but Steffens clarified its meaning by showing that the wealthy class, in reality, was divided into two groups--the insiders and the outsiders. While a man with a total wealth of ten to twenty million might appear powerful to the average reader, his relative wealth--and his ability to greatly increase his total wealth--was limited.

A director of the Pennsylvania Railroad who Steffens thought to be wealthy asked Steffens, "What do you want to pick on a little fellow like me for? Why don't you take on one of those big trusts?" (P. 648) Much of Steffens' political muckraking had been aimed specifically at the Pennsylvania Railroad, and he knew the amount of power they held in many states was tremendous. Yet this director of "the Penn" was asking him to go after something bigger. What?

"The Money Trust" was the biggest trust in the world, "the Penn" man told Steffens--a real giant. And the "Money Trust" decided who would be the "Poor Rich" by controlling access to credit by its direction of the New York Clearing House. Credit was what "the Money Trusts" controlled, and business ran on credit. "The Poor Rich" paid dearly for credit, if and when they could get it at all. The next issue, for the typical reader, who was still working on his first million and was an "outsider," then, was, "How much money can't an outsider borrow in the United States?" (p. 651)

The third sub-title in the article was "Measuring Money Power," which is, basically, what it attempted to do. The section is very short--one anecdote--and illustrates only one point: Without Morgan's good wishes it was impossible to borrow any substantial amount of money. A banker, who was asked how much could be borrowed to promote a sound business transaction if Morgan was against it, asked in response, "Is it generally known in the market that Morgan doesn't want us to get our money?" The point was clear; Morgan was the boss. (p. 652)

The fourth sub-title was "You Can't Build a Railroad." The conclusion, which was all that was really necessary for Steffens' argument, was printed in italics: "No more railroads can be built in the United States, except with the permission of the men who control the roads that are already in existence." (p. 652)

The final section, "The Railroad Monopoly," uses the railroads to illustrate the power of the "Money Trust." American people, Steffens contended, did not (or do not) react to intellectual problems--only to specific actual situations that were hurting them personally. Thus the fact that one group of men, under the direction of one man, could decide whether or not anyone else could build a railroad--in short, one man controlled capitalism, thus eliminating it--did not arouse attention as long as each American lived comfortably. The majority of the public was bribed by its own standard of living.

It is appropriate to pause here and note that this was Steffens in 1910. He would not have said this in 1903, for what good

would all his work have been had he believed it then? He had been a reformer for eight years, and in 1910 he found the public was still apathetic. He continued to report his findings, hoping that he was wrong in his judgment, but he was no longer the blind optimist believing in the power of the truth alone as a spear to good government. The fact that a financier could see that his cook and butcher and grocer combined to fleece him of ten dollars and yet could not conceive of the danger of monopolies was too much for this optimist to withstand. "This," Steffens said, "is the American optimism that I like to call cheerful idiocy." (p. 654)

The blindness of Americans to the real problem was illustrated by the story of a group of British soldiers who continued to fire uselessly on a position long since abandoned by the enemy. The government and people were crying out against the trusts in business--the railroads, "the meat trust," "the steel trust"--and yet the real enemy, the trust in banking, the "money power," remained unseen.

Part four of the series, "The Politics of Business," tied together Steffens' earlier work on municipal and state government with his investigation of business.[4] He had clearly shown in his political

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[4]Lincoln Steffens, "The Politics of Business," Everybody's Magazine, December, 1910, pp. 813-25. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

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muckraking that there was a definite system to politics that revolved around a boss, and that the power behind the boss was business; so

far his business muckraking had shown that there was a boss in business. Now he wanted to find out who was behind that boss.

Steffens illustrated the way that reform movements in politics failed by recounting the story of a young business man who, upon entering reformist politics, found that business pressures threatened his job, forcing him to give politics back to the boodlers--thus the direct relation of business on the reform movement.

Next, Steffens illustrated that business was interdependent. David H. Moffitt, the political boss of both parties in Denver, Colorado, wanted to build a railroad and thus by competition eliminate the high fee other railroads were charging Denver businesses. This would help Denver grow. Now Steffens' readers already knew that, without the permission of the existing railroad leaders, no new railroad could be built. Whenever Moffitt tried to get a loan, the money powers that controlled the other railroads, by exerting financial pressure on the banks that were loaning the money (via the "money trust," which Steffens' readers also understood), got the loan cancelled. So Steffens sent a man to interview one of the great railroad men, James J. Hill, to see why the existing railroad powers were eliminating competition. And Hill answered, "Why don't you know that if I should tell you the truth about such things 'they' would put me out of business." (p. 815)

Who was "they?" James J. Hill was certainly in on the "Money Trust"--"It"-- but "It" was bigger than Hill alone, just as Morgan, the idea, was more than just Morgan the man alone.

Steffens explained, then, that it was not necessary to have a majority of stockholders to control a company, it was necessary only to have influence over that majority. Political terms started creeping into the article, and Steffens noticed it. But what were political terms doing in a story about business? First he found that a "majority" was not what made up "It." Next he was told that only "control," another political term, of the "majority" was necessary. But how did these men get "control?" "Influence"--Steffens felt like he was back on home ground; "Majority," "Control," "Influence."

The men having these criterion could rule business, just as they ruled politics; by using their political servant, "the boss." The power structure of business, like that of politics, was complex. Ownership of a railroad (or part of a railroad) gave influence with a bank, which, in turn, gave influence with the extension of credit, and so on:

> The control of railroads = the control of railroad directors. The control of railroad directors = the control of credit. The control of credit = the control of money. The control of money = the control of banks. And the control of banks = the control of bank directors. What is the control of bank directors? (p. 821)

Steffens once again showed that his years of muckraking had mellowed him. He had been, originally, the attacker of a "System" that created bad men; now, after seeing the power behind that "System," he wrote

> But my study of business has so confused my sense of morals that I wouldn't dare to condemn Mr. Murphey or Matt Quay or Boss Cox. Political vices are virtues in business. Bad politics is good business. (p. 823)

Finally, he drew the obvious parallel; credit, which controlled business, was administered by the man who had enough influence to

control the New York Clearing House, which was the place where little banks from across the country deposited money that they received from local depositors. The base of credit was with the people themselves, as it was in politics. But people were apathetic in politics. And even when they weren't, they only changed parties when they were dissatisfied. Steffens had shown that the name of the party in office was a small matter; both parties were controlled by business, and there was no alternative.

Businessmen gained financial power when the average investor, or the small banker, gave his proxy to a man on a board of directors. But that didn't really matter, since Morgan, to extend the analogy, controlled all directors. "Then bankers and brokers in business correspond to the ward leaders in politics," Steffens told the man he explained all this to. "Business is government." (p. 824)

Strong men who paid attention to politics could control political events, and strong men who paid attention to business could control strong political men. Thus, Steffens ended this installment: "In other words, financial power is not merely financial, it is political. It is a matter of the management of men." (p. 825)

In 1911 the final two installments of "It" were published; the first of the two, "A Business Republic," in February.[5] The two should

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[5]Lincoln Steffens, "A Business Republic," Everybody's Magazine, February, 1911, pp. 217-29. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

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not be considered as part of the series, a fact that even the publishers seemed to sense, for they played down the stressing of "It" in the layout of the story to such an extent that the title of the series ("It: An Exposition of the Sovereign Political Power of Organized Business") was never even mentioned.

The last two articles were really examples of the mismanagement of the politics of business. They depended for their meaning on the first four installments, if the reader wanted to understand the full impact of what was being said; but they were interesting stories for those who had received the Everybody's subscription as a Christmas gift in 1910.

The first thing was the story of the internal struggle for control of the Equitable Life Insurance Company. The struggle was an attempt to overthrow a man who was a business boss. Steffens had a reason for wanting to write something on life insurance. In 1906, S. S. McClure had not used an article on insurance scandals that Steffens had spent months preparing. But Steffens was far from the first to investigate insurance, Thomas B. Lawson, author of "Frenzied Finance," (1904) having strong claim to that title. Only by making conclusions that applied to his series on "It" did Steffens justify his topic, and the connection of the two topics was tenuous. His major conclusions were, first "The big Life-insurance companies are business governments by business men of a business, and they are grafts, just as our cities and states are grafts. (p. 218) He could make his connection hold well with insurance companies because the policy holders were directly comparable to voters each having a direct stake in the management of politics and business respectively.

Second, Steffens summarized the ramifications of the conclusions of Charles Evans Hughes, who had directed the government's investigation of the life insurance scandals raised by Hendrick's articles

> First: All seven of the life insurance companies which he inquired into were not only corrupt; they were all equally corrupt; all corrupted in the same way, by the same methods, for the same purposes, and to the same result to the policy-holders.
>
> Second: As these insurance companies were corrupt, so also were the trust companies corrupt into which Mr. Hughes shot sidelights.
>
> Third: All these businesses were corrupted exactly as cities, states, and nations are corrupted; exactly. (p. 29)

Finally, and again, this is only an example of what Steffens had already proven in the abstract in his first four installments, "The financial bosses who control so largely New York and other states and the United States control absolutely the insurance companies."

The final article, "A Ring-Robbed Railroad," was the story of the fleecing of the funds of the Illinois Central Railroad.[6] The

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[6]Lincoln Steffens, "A Ring-Robbed Railroad," Everybody's Magazine, April, 1911, pp. 450-66. All page citations will refer to this note until the next note appears.

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article's main purpose, obviously illustrating Steffens' theory, was that business corruption was as harmful to the public in the long run as political corruption. He wanted to show how the board of aldermen of a city compared to the board of directors on a railroad, and so on, eventually showing that the railroad, exemplifying business, was being

corrupted the same way as a city was corrupted--in short, not only were there both political and business "Systems," they were the same "System," and they were both intrinsically bound one to the other.

The article, in the sense of being an example, is a fitting final installment to the series. While it adds nothing of great philosophical importance to what Steffens had already said, it brings the moral dilemma home to the reader well.

After telling the story of the one railroad in detail, Steffens reiterates some significant conclusions.

> The essence of a system of graft, ethically speaking, is not dishonesty, but disloyalty and inefficiency, as we are beginning to see in politics, and as this business graft illustrates well. . . . Some of [the grafters] were dishonest; but others may merely have been stupid, blind, and incapable; and still others may have been simply silent, afraid to tell on the crooks and therefore only disloyal.

And finally, by retelling the story of graft in a second railroad which had been grafted for the sole purpose of raising money with which to bribe the "Board of Directors of the people of Illinois--the state legislature," Steffens emphasized his final point "the cause of the failure of political democracy lies not in democracy but in the plutocracy of business, which thinks itself the cure for political corruption." (p. 466)

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

The thesis of this study has been that Lincoln Steffens, by virtue of the power of the inexpensive new "popular" magazines of the progressive era, educated the people to the changing (or changed) nature of the municipal, state, and federal political organization. Through his efforts, and the widespread circulation of the publications in which his work appeared, the public was given much of the information required for an active democratic political system--the system intended by the various city charters, state constitutions, and, finally, the federal constitution--to continue.

Because of his devotion to public enlightenment, Steffens earned the title of a "people's champion," a title to which his intentions and his ability gave him a strong claim. The size of the audience that read his work and was influenced enough to fight for progressive reform, while significant and certainly impressive, was not the major factor in his claim to his title. There were "people's champions" who never were popular but who were, none the less, just as much "people's champions" as he. In journalism the work of such men as B. O. Flower and E. L. Godkin, while never as widely known or read in its own time as was Steffens', gave them claim as strong as Steffens, because they too were publicists sounding the alarm, telling the

people that democracy was in danger. They were "people's champions" because they too were fighting to maintain a "people's" form of government.

Yet, in a second sense, Steffens had rights to the title that others didn't. His magazine was written for the "people," and it led from amongst the people it was trying to save, not from above them. He aimed at inspiring "grass roots" democracy rather than "Hamiltonian" or aristocratic democracy. Because of the "popular" magazine medium, his work aroused the people to act against corruption and the erosion of democracy. Godkin and Flower, and those like them, because of the highly educated elite audience they appealed to, advised politicians how to lead, while Steffens advised the voting public on public conditions and gave them the information necessary to assess the work of politicians. In this second sense--of the people and for democracy as opposed to above the people and for democracy--Steffens holds better claim to his title.

Since democracy in the United States, at the municipal, state, and national level, was in the long run what Steffens was working to preserve, it has been necessary to analyze the order and method he did his work. What he said is very important, and, since his concept of "the System" constitutes a major contribution to the analysis of the progressive era, an understanding of what his conclusions were and how he reached them is essential. This is what he told the public.

First, municipal governments across the nation were acting for the interests of seekers of privilege rather than in the interests of the people themselves. Not only that, as he moved from city to city and analyzed various aspects of the erosion of democracy by the forces

of privilege, he discovered that the changes in the nature of the true acting governments were systematic. There was a uniform pattern to government, just as the local charters had implied there should be, but that pattern was not the same as those charters outlined. Government was, again, systematically arranged for the good of the privilege-seeking business class. Further, the intermingling of local, county, and state governments led to the inter-dependence of the evolving system on all levels; if a city was reformed without reforming the state in which the city existed, the corruption would creep back like a disease. While there were different levels, there was only one organization--"the System." In order to solve the problem, therefore, Steffens moved on to examine governments at the state level.

Second, his analysis of state governments confirmed Steffens belief that cities were merely local extensions of state-wide systems. Further, "the System" at the state level operated on the same principles and under the same scheme of organization as in the cities. The elected representatives of the people were, in many cases, merely figureheads, having neither the power nor the ability to enforce democratic government. Further, the real administrators of government--"the bosses"--were supported by that section of the public that cried most loudly for reform in public affairs, the business element. The most respected members of the community, when it came to a choice, backed--in fact insisted upon--non-democratic "bosses." And, just as in the cities, states were tied by the strings of influence and power to the next higher level of government.

Third, the federal government, while it had developed no single boss as at lower levels, was also under the control of business. In fact,

the Senate was, in certain senses, a meeting place for the leaders of "the System"--it was a "millionaire's club." The Senators acted for "the System" because it was, in essence, their system. The House of Representatives did have a boss, "Uncle Joe" Cannon, and he had the same power to control the movement of legislation as did local or state bosses. The national government had not finished its evolutionary development toward one single boss, but the end was clearly predictable.

Finally, and this clinched his analysis, Steffens investigated and publicized his findings about the ruling power behind the political system, the real power of the nation--the business system. He found that as in the federal government, business was ending a cycle in the process of evolution. The first single "boss," J. Peirpoint Morgan, was still enthroned. But Steffens analysis of business had shown that the order business was imposing on government was its own business organization. The essence of democratic government--the good of all the people--was contravened by the essence of business--the good of selected men, that is, business men.

His story of "the System" was complete. Steffens' duty as a "people's champion" had been to publicize the dangers of the corrupt system he had found, and he had done his duty. During the muckraking years he wrote many other articles about matters of public interest and concern, but his major contribution to political theory during the progressive era is clearly expressed in his articles on "the System." He was a "people's champion."

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

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CHAPTER ONE

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Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. IV, 1885-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). It is also important that one also read sections from James Playsted Wood, Magazines in the United States 2nd ed.,.(New York: Roland Press, 1936), and Theodore Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).

Louis Filler, The Muckrakers: Crusaders for American Liberalism (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968), is probably the most popular and readable of the histories of muckraking, and it contains much valuable and original research. Other works that add to Filler's, and expand upon areas he only outlines, are C. C. Regier, The Era of the Muckrakers (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1936) and David M. Chalmers, The Social and Political Ideas of the Muckrakers (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), which is too brief to fully handle the subject. The best anthologies are Harvey Swados, ed., Years of Conscience: The Muckrakers (New York: World Publishing, 1962), and Arthur & Lila Weinberg, eds., The Muckrakers (New York: Capricon Books, 1961).

Information about life at McClures Magazine can best be found through the various biographies and autobiographies of those who worked there, plus one major history, Harold S. Wilson, McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Among the useful autobiographies, of which almost all are well written, should be included Ray Stannard Baker, American Chronicle (New York: Scribners, 1945); William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan, 1946); and Ida Tarbell, All In A Days Work (New York: Macmillan, 1939). The best work on

S. S. McClure, since his My Autobiography is too biased, is Peter Lyons, Success Story: The Life and Times of S. S. McClure (New York: Scribners, 1963), which is extremely well researched and written. Two recent biographies of Baker, John E. Semanche, Ray Stannard Baker: A Quest for Democracy in Modern America, 1890-1918 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), and Robert C. Bannister, Ray Stannard Baker: The Mind and Thought of a Progressive (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), offer a great deal of additional insights that, while not directly relating to Steffens, give a good sense of the times. The relationship of business and the magazine is detailed in "The Muckrakers and the Growth of Corperate Power," American Journal of Economics and Sociology, XVIII (1959), pp. 295-311. A good analysis of the McClure's writers problems after leaving McClure's can be found in John Semonche, "The American Magazine of 1906-1915: Principle vs. Profit," Journalism Quarterly, XL (1963), pp. 36-44, 86.

It is hard to narrow down a list of works that will give an overall impression of the era and create for the reader a sensibility that makes the analysis seem pertinant. Although they should not be the first books read, it is almost certain that Richard Hofstader, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), on the one hand, and Gabrial Kolko, The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916 (Chicago: Quadrangele Books, 1963), on the other, will create a sense of the conflict that demands attention. Further analysis can be gained from Harold U. Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice, 1898-1914 (New York: Macmillan, 1931), George Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), Russel B. Nye, Progressive

Midwestern Politics (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1958), Lloyd Morris, Postscript to Yesterday (New York: Random House, 1947), John Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform (New York: Liveright, 1932), Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1959), and Robert H. Wiebe, Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962).

CHAPTER TWO

The primary source of all information concerning Steffens entire life, and among the most valuable tools in the preperation of this study, has been Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1931), a classic of its genre. It has been a touchstone for all other works and cannot be over-rated in importance. An article worth reading, relative to the Autobiography, although it contains many points with which I disagree, is Bud T. Cochran, "Lincoln Steffens and the Art of Autobiography," College Composition and Communications, XIV (1963).

The Steffens Papers, including his correspondence, many manuscripts, and some scrapbooks, were loaned me by the Butler Library of Columbia University. Many of the letters included therein are included, in edited form, in Ella Winter and Granville Hicks, eds., The Letters of Lincoln Steffens, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1938). Where possible, I have cross-referenced the Papers to these volumes.

Other than several bland and brief character sketches from the early part of the century, articles dealing with Steffens life are few. Probably the best are Alfred B. Rollins, "The Heart of Lincoln Steffens," South Atlantic Quarterly (1960), and the chapter entitled "Lincoln Steffens: Muckrakers Progress" from Charles A Madison, Critics & Crusaders: A Century of American Protest (New York: Holt, 1947). Justin Kaplin, "He Searched for Truth and Glimpsed the Future," New York Times Book Review, August 31, 1969, pp. 1-2, is a welcome promise of more extensive research by a major biographer.

The Readers Guide to Periodical Literature for the years from 1906 through 1910 is filled with entries on muckraking.

CHAPTER THREE

The articles used in Chapter Three, collected in Lincoln Steffens, The Shame of the Cities (New York: Sagamore Press, Inc., 1957), appeared originally between October, 1902, and November, 1903, in McClure's Magazine under the following titles: "Tweed Days in St. Louis," (Oct., 1902); "The Shame of Minneapolis," (Jan., 1903); "The Shamelessness of St. Louis," (March , 1903); "Pittsburg: A City Ashamed," (May, 1903); "Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contented," (July, 1903); "Chicago, Half Free and Fighting On," (Oct., 1903); and "New York: Good Government in Danger," (Nov., 1903).

CHAPTER FOUR

The articles used in Chapter Four appeared originally in McClure's

between April, 1904, and June, 1905, and were collected and released as Lincoln Steffens, The Struggle for Self-Government (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1968). The original titles were: "Enemies of the Republic, Missouri," (April, 1904); "Enemies of the Republic, Illinois," (Aug., 1904); "Enemies of the Republic, Wisconsin," (Oct., 1904); "Rhode Island: A State for Sale," (Feb., 1905); "New Jersey: A Traitor State," (May, 1905), and "Ohio: A Tale of Two Cities," (June, 1905).

CHAPTER FIVE

The articles reviewed in Chapter Five appeared under the titles as given in the text in the eleven consecutive Sunday editions of the Pulitzer Papers (New York Morning World and St. Louis Post-Dispatch) and other papers between January 14, 1906, and March 25, 1906. The most readable microfilm copies of those articles are in the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

CHAPTER SIX

The articles in Chapter Six appeared under the titles given in the text in Everybody's on consecutive months between September, 1910, and April, 1911, with the exception of January, 1911. The general series was under the title, "It: An Exposition of the Soverign Political Power of Organized Business." It has never been collected as a unit.

EXTRA MATERIAL

There are several political and/or biographical articles that appeared between 1900 and 1915 that are listed in the appendix of The Letters of Lincoln Steffens that are worthy of consideration. Of special interest are those articles collected in the volume Lincoln Steffens, Upbuilders (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969) plus "Hearst, the Man of Mystery," (American, Nov., 1906), "Eugene V. Debs," (Everybody's, June, 1908), "Roosevelt, Taft, LaFollette," (Everybody's, June, 1908), "Bryan, Johnson," (Everybody's, July, 1908), "Joseph Fels," (American, Oct., 1910), and two short stories based on Steffens experiences while muckraking, "The Least of These," (Everybody's, Jan., 1909), and "The Dying Boss," (McClure's, May, 1914).