

CITIZENS' LEAGUE BULLETIN

To Popularize Civic Information and to Spiritualize Our Citizenship
No. 653 KANSAS CITY, MO., SATURDAY, JAN. 12, 1935 Non-Partisan
Kansas City Presents "A Challenge to Missouri"

It is sometimes well to "see ourselves as others see us." A representative of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch recently made an investigation of affairs in Kansas City. The investigator's report and an editorial in the Post-Dispatch of Dec. 9, 1934, here quoted, furnish food for solemn thought in Kansas City and present a state-wide problem which Missouri must recognize.
"Challenge to Missouri"

(From Post-Dispatch Editorial)

"The moral and civic destitution of Kansas City may be explained in a sentence. The underworld has got the upper hand. Organized lawlessness is the law. An irresponsible political machine, concerned solely with spoils, is in full, terrifying control.

"Rackets of all kinds flourish. Saloons boastingly proclaim, 'We never close.' Gambling houses operate without pretense of concealment. All the games contrived by the art of chance are there, on a scale of play to accommodate piker and plunger. The poor are quite as privileged to lose their money in Kansas City as the rich. The democracy of corruption knows no caste. The unbolted doors swing a welcome to everybody. Night clubs boom riotously. The oldest profession beckons boldly. The business of stealing automobiles is an important industry. It is so diligently conducted that insurance rates against the liability of theft in Kansas City are almost prohibitive

"That Kansas City elections are a travesty, with accompaniments

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410 THE CITIZENS' LEAGUE BULLETIN Jan. 12, 1935

of terrorism and tragedy, is another item in this long and dreadful bill. A reform movement that became formidable enough to threaten the machine's domination in the election last April was crushed under the violence of thuggery which piled up a score of four fatalities and numerous casualties.

"And there is, of course, the Union Station massacre in June of last year with a tally of four dead, when outlawry attempted to rescue a fellow gangster en route to Leavenworth. Here was rebellion, in miniature, perhaps, but an assault, nevertheless, on the Federal Government, with a sequel of dark and daring villainy. In the sequel appears an underworld figure of public enemy proportions, charged with having directed the Union Station attack on the Federal officers, with having managed the escape of the gunmen, while the police kept hands off under instructions assertedly issued by superior officers

"It is no exaggeration to say that the shadow of Tom Pendergast now falls across the whole length and breadth of Missouri. His nod makes Governors and United States Senators, by the puissance of his Kansas City machine that produces votes in whatever quantity desired. Pendergast has enslaved Kansas City. The tyranny of his domination has become so intolerable that the Bartenders' Union has been moved to protest in the form of an appeal to the Legislature to pass a license law under which the law-abiding saloons shall be freed from the ruinous cutthroat competition of the dives that pay only the price of machine protection.

“Is Missouri to become the hinterland of Tom Pendergast?”

“Price the Community Pays”

“The price the community pays directly for the operations of the ring has been tabulated by Ray Wilson, secretary of the insurance committee of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Full theft coverage for a Ford, based on a \$500 maximum, costs \$26.50 in Kansas City, as compared with \$8 in St. Louis and \$5.25 in Los Angeles. In the country over, only Chicago has a higher rate, with \$32.50.

“Similar coverage on a Buick up to \$500 costs \$22.75 in Kansas City, \$14.50 in Chicago, \$5 in St. Louis, and \$3.25 in Los Angeles.

“On a Packard the premium is \$17.50 in Kansas City, \$7.50 in Chicago, \$2.50 in St. Louis, and \$1.75 in Los Angeles.”

“The Federal Grand Jury’s Accusation”

(From the report made to United States District Judge Merrill E. Otis, Nov. 5.)

Many facts have been presented to us which are supported, we believe, by absolute evidence, which are not the basis of any indictment or true bill returned. We believe these facts to be of such major importance to this community and have so challenged our attention, that we believe if generally known to the extent and in as definite a way as disclosed to us would thereupon likewise challenge the attention of every thinking citizen . . . The most important ones are as follows:

1. The police department of Kansas City was, on the date of the massacre at the union station in June of 1933, unquestionably not as efficient or not as effective in the discharge of its duties as it should have been. In many respects, this same situation applies during the whole of the period of time covered by our investigation.

2. Criminal mobs and racketeers exist here composed wholly of men who permanently live in Kansas City. We have proof beyond question of reasonable doubt that they have close connections with men of similar character living in other cities where it is known there are harbored criminals of the worst type.

3. Unbridled gambling of major proportions in almost every conceivable form and in most numerous quarters has, according to positive testimony, been tolerated as a matter of general policy by more than one high official charged with the suppression thereof, and is running in a most wide-open fashion.

The whole situation above outlined is one we believe is undoubtedly known to and permitted by many men holding places of high authority and continues down to and includes many men holding minor offices. At the same time, it is reassuring to find many honest, intelligent and brave officers. This jury has been greatly handicapped by the fear of witnesses to tell the truth

In receiving the statement, Judge Otis said from the bench:

“I am very grateful to the grand jury for having supplied me with this statement or comment. It should serve to arouse in the community sentiment for maintenance and support of the law.”

Jan. 12, 1935

THE CITIZENS’ LEAGUE BULLETIN

411

“Rest of the State Must Save

Kansas City, Says Grand Juror"

Russell F. Greiner, foreman of a Jackson County grand jury whose report 13 months ago declared Kansas City to be infested with gambling, racketeering, commercialized vice and other forms of lawlessness, said that a grand jury is but a gesture at law enforcement. Its findings, he pointed out, resulted in little prosecution and the National Youth Movement which campaigned on a non-partisan platform to rectify conditions met with overwhelming defeat at the machine-controlled polls.

Greiner is president of the Greiner- Fifield Lithographing Co., an organizer of the Law Enforcement Association and one of the principal supporters of Dr. A. Ross Hill, former president of the University of Missouri, in his mayoralty campaign on the Citizen-Fusion ticket last spring. He said that conditions in Kansas City had not improved since the late Circuit Judge James R. Page told his jury it need expect no help from the police department and declared that crime levied a higher tax on business than did the Government.

"The unholy alliance between crime and politics has become so powerful that citizens of Kansas City who desire to free their city from machine rule must look to other communities in the State for aid," said Greiner, himself a Democrat who believes the present Democratic organization in the city is out purely for profit.

"It is useless to deny that efforts made to break the power of criminal forces in Kansas City have been futile," Greiner said. "The disorders at the city election last spring," he continued, "when four persons were killed, many others beaten, all sorts of election irregularities brazenly carried out, exemplified the power of the forces which have undermined the social and economic structure of the city.

"There is only one remedy that I can see. That is for the general population of the State to elect a Legislature which will enact laws insuring honest and properly supervised elections with provisions for voting machines and permanent registration.

"Such legislation, in my opinion, is not only necessary to aid this city but to save other sections of the State from being virtually disenfranchised through the rolling up of huge majorities of mythical votes, as has been done here in Kansas City.

"The problem goes far beyond local or partisan boundaries. Kansas City today offers an example of what may happen to any American community which falls under the domination of a political machine, regardless of its party label, which functions through an alliance between politics and the underworld and corrupts every department of the city government."

"Gambling a Major Industry"

"Gambling, the writer soon learned from personal observation, is a major industry in Kansas City, ranging from elaborate establishments where the plunger may risk thousands on the turn of a card or roll of the dice to places designed to attract the housewife and schoolgirl.

"There is nothing concealed about it. Gambling houses are as public as corner drug stores and almost as numerous. On

the sixth floor of a prominent downtown hotel a game runs day and night. No invitation was needed to go there; in fact, as the writer entered the elevator the attendant remarked, 'To the game? Well, good luck!'"

"Invisible Government"

"Contracts for public works as a rule go to the contractors who are approved by the political powers and those business men outside that fold find nothing but obstacles in the way of their

bids and harassment and interference if, as is rarely the case, they succeed in getting a job.

“Citizens who are not members of any political organization privately say that the hand of an invisible government is in everything, finally touching indirectly every purse. They see anti-machine candidates overwhelmed at the polls amidst scenes of brazen election irregularities and shocking incidents of violence.”

412 THE CITIZENS' LEAGUE BULLETIN Jan. 12, 1935

“Crime and Politics”

Alliance between crime and politics in Kansas City was alleged in the indictments returned by the Federal grand jury which investigated the daylight machine-gun murder at the Union Station plaza on June 17, 1933, of a Federal officer, three police officers, and a Federal prisoner. The prisoner, Frank Nash, was killed seemingly accidentally in a desperate attempt to liberate him.

The jury found that certain Kansas City police officials instructed their men not to investigate the killings, not to search a rendezvous for gangsters, and that one of them said that his loyalty to the political organization of “Boss” Pendergast outranked his duty as a police officer.

Indictments for perjury were returned against Eugene C. Reppert, director of police at the time, Thomas J. Higgins, chief of detectives, and Lieut. George Rayen, head of the police motor car theft bureau.

Rayen was indicted for denying before the jury that he stated to another officer:

“We have got to work for the good of the Democratic party. I am in the employ of Kansas City, Mo. Nevertheless I owe a greater duty there to the organization which is headed by Mr. Pendergast.”

His remark was alleged to have been made to two Kansas officers with whom he was discussing the extradition of three men accused of an attempt to kill a minor gangster. This man, Micheal La Capra, had told Federal agents that John Lazia was the protector of Kansas City gambling houses and “unofficial chief of police,” and that he aided in planning the killings and facilitated the escape of the murderers.

“Pendergast and Lazia”

It was for Lazia, his North Side lieutenant, that Thomas J. Pendergast, the “Boss,” wrote the urgent appeal to Postmaster-General Farley, published exclusively in the Post-Dispatch, Nov. 30, last, entreating him to save Lazia from Federal prosecution on income tax charges which had already begun. After several delays, including “stop” orders from Washington, the Government proceeded only when a grand juror stood up in open court and protested against the delay.

Lazia was convicted. While on liberty on an appeal bond he was machine-gunned to death on July 10, last.

Federal agents investigating the Union Station killings declare that Kansas City police ardor cooled off when word went around that Lazia might be involved.

Reppert, who has resigned as police director, was indicted on the charge that he falsely denied he instructed subordinates to “lay off” the Union Station case, telling them: “This is not our case, it is a Government case. Go on about your assignments.”

Higgins, the Chief of Detectives, who twice testified before the grand jury, is accused of perjuring himself by denying he instructed a fellow officer to “have nothing to do” with the

investigation.

Despite the jury's indictments both Rayen and Higgins remain in office. Not only did the present director of police, Otto Higgins, refuse to suspend them, describing them as "good officers," but the Pendergast-controlled City Council gave the Police Department a vote of confidence and rejected a resolution, supported by the two anti-administration members of the Council of nine, was voted down by the others, including Mayor Smith.

"Night Clubs Provide Hostesses"

"By night most of the East Twelfth street saloons are 'night clubs,' providing numerous 'hostesses,' some of them clad in the short skirts of the dance hall days of the Old West, who receive a percentage from the house for each drink they induce a patron to buy and for each dance. When 'the girls' make dates, sometimes repairing to quarters above the dance floor, they are required to pay the house a fixed commission.

"Prostitution, however, is not confined to any section of the city. Women soliciting men are numerous on the principal thoroughfares. Competition is especially brisk in the heart of the business district."