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CITIZENS' LEAGUE BULLETIN.

To Popularize Civic Information and to Spiritualize Our Citizenship

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“King of Kansas City, Emperor of Missouri”

By permission of The Forum, the Bulletin is privileged to quote from the February issue of that magazine an account, by Ralph Coghlan, of the character and political methods of our well-known citizen, Thomas J. Pendergast. Mr. Pendergast is now sojourning in Arizona. He has already announced his presidential candidate for 1940.

“We think, as we gaze at this portrait of the man, of Kansas City, boss-ridden, rotten with corruption. We know that, in this his own private barony, there have been placed on the registration rolls 268,000 names of a total population of 415,000—64.5 per cent. According to U. S. census estimates, only 60 per cent of the people are over 21. If that holds true of Kansas City, it means that more than the total adult population—including aliens, the sick, the insane, the imprisoned, the indifferent—are on the rolls. In the First Ward, where Pendergast got his start, the registration figure was 21,073, though federal census figures show a total population of only 19,923. In the Second Ward 23,469 voters were registered, though census figures show a total population of but 18,478.

The Technique of Rule “And most of these names are voted.

“In the August, 1936, primary, Lawrence McDaniel, well-known St. Louis lawyer, was running for the State supreme court against Judge Ernest S. Gantt, a Pendergast machine candidate. McDaniel carried a substantial majority of the 114 counties in Missouri and the City of St. Louis, and, not counting Kansas City, he had a comfortable lead. Here’s what became of him there. In the First Ward Gantt got 18,919 votes to eighteen for McDaniel—a ratio of 1,045 to one. In the Second Ward Gantt got 19,201

votes to thirteen for McDaniel, a ratio of 1,469 to one.

“In the last presidential election a vote of 41,805 was cast by the 38,401 babies, children, and adults of these two wards!

“In the August primary, the Pendergast candidate for the guber-

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natorial nomination beat his opponent, a highly respected and widely known citizen, by the ratio of 29 to one.

“We know that in the last Kansas City mayoralty election, when a group of independent citizens attempted to defeat the machine candidate, corruption and brutal force decided the issue. As Jesse W. Barrett, Republican candidate for governor in the recent election, told a Kansas City audience:

“‘We all remember the pictures of the hospital wards filled with men who were broken and bruised by the gangsters who assaulted them at the polls. You remember that flood of fraudulent votes. You were baptized in blood, but the contest was won by the machine. The score was four murders, two hundred assaults, and one hundred thousand felonies.’

“We know that the Pendergast machine enjoys all the political patronage in Kansas City and Jackson County, but that is only a small part of the machine's perquisites. It controls State and city contracts. It sells the construction materials which go into public buildings. It can, if it wishes, exercise a virtual monopoly of Kansas City's liquor business and its soft-drink business. The jackals of the machine enjoy the slot- machine, dice, roulette, and prostitution rackets—and a Parisian who recently visited Kansas City described it as the wickedest city he had ever seen. There is hardly a phase of Kansas City's life untouched by this monstrous outfit.

“Do the citizens complain? Well, many of the outstanding ones do business with the

machine or by its favor. They are mum if, indeed, they are not the machine's apologists.

### Dictates Senatorial Nomination

"In 1934, there was to be an election for collector of Jackson county. To this latter post a county judge (an administrative, not a judicial, post), Harry Truman, passionately aspired. It was a job paying a large sum of money, and Truman could use the money. The boss was sorry. He could not endorse Truman for the collectorship but he would put him in the United States Senate. He did. In doing so, he defeated one of the finest public servants Missouri has produced—Congressman John J. Cochran, chosen in a poll of Washington correspondents some time ago as one of the five or six most useful members of Congress. (Fortunately for the public, Cochran got a place on the ticket, and was re-elected to the lower house.) In the senatorial primary, believe it or not, the county judge who wanted to be a collector polled 120,180 votes in Kansas City; and a brilliant and tremendously popular veteran, Mr. Cochran, got 1,221 votes.

### The Monarch's Creed

"I went into politics,' said Mr. Pendergast to a representative of The Forum, 'because it appealed to me and it looked like a good business. My brother, Jim, was in politics, and I started helping him. We got along because we made friends and because we gave the people good men. How could we get along in Kansas City for fifty years without giving the people good men?

"I function year in and year out. I don't wait until three weeks before the election. I'm working all the time. I'm kind to people because I like to be. I never give an argument when a man comes in for a dollar and wants help. Maybe he wants a job. I always go out of my way to help.

### Local Conditions Paramount

"What's the government for if it isn't to help people? They're interested only in local

conditions, not about the tariff or the war debts. They want consideration for their troubles in their own house, across the street, or around the corner. Something like paving, a water main, police protection, consideration for a complaint about taxes. They vote for the fellow who gives it to them. We never ask about their politics. We know pretty well how they'll vote after we help them.

“I've never bulldozed anybody and never let anybody bulldoze me. Newspapers, churches, reformers, or narrow-minded fellows—they can't bulldoze me. I have never changed my mind when I knew I was right and I have never broken my word. The biggest mistake a man can make is failing to keep his word. Sometimes I've been sorry I made a promise but I've always kept it. I'm just an ordinary fellow that was able to keep his word.

“If a candidate hasn't got sense enough to see who helped him win and hasn't sense enough to recognize that man's friends, there is no use asking for favors from that candidate in advance.

“ ‘There are no alibis in politics. The delivery of the votes is what counts. And it is efficient organization in every little ward and precinct that determines national as well as local elections. National elections, national politics are just Kansas City on a big scale. It boils down to the wards and precincts. The whole thing is to have an organization that functions in every ward and precinct. That's where the votes come from. The fundamental secret is to get the vote registered—and then get it out after it's registered. That's all there is to it. All the ballyhoo and showmanship such as

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they have at the national conventions is all right. It's a great show. It gives folks a run for their money. It makes everybody feel good. But the man who makes the organization possible is the man who delivers the votes, and he doesn't deliver them by oratory. Politics is a business, just like anything else.

“If by calling the city wide-open, you mean gambling and poker games where the poor man obtains his recreation just as the big men do in their clubs, it is wide-open. I wouldn't put a stop to it.”

“A certain former lieutenant of yours, Mr. Pendergast,’ continued the visitor, ‘a man named Johnny Lazia, an ex-convict who was machine-gunned to death in July, 1934, was in trouble with the federal income-tax authorities in 1933. The case was mysteriously hushed up for a while, but later, on demand of a federal grand juror, it was prosecuted, and Lazia was convicted. Did you, on May 12, 1933, write this letter to Postmaster General James A. Farley?’

“Dear Jim:

Jerome Walsh and John Lazia will be in Washington to see you about the same matter that I had Mr. Kemper talk to you about. Now, Jim Lazia is one of my chief lieutenants and I am more sincerely interested in his welfare than anything you might be able to do for me now or in the future. He has been in trouble with the Income Tax Department for some time. I know it was simply a case of being jobbed because of his Democratic activities. I think Frank Walsh spoke to the proper authorities about this. In any event, I wish you would use your utmost endeavor to bring about a settlement of this matter. I cannot make it any stronger, except to say that my interest in him is greater than anything that might come up in the future. Thanking you for any and everything you can do, I remain sincerely,

Your friend,

T. J. PENDERGAST'

“Yes,’ said the boss, ‘I wrote it. I stand by it, too. I’d do it again and I’ll stand by it.’

### Ready-Mixed Concrete in Brush Creek

“It has been publicly charged that in no public building erected in Kansas City in the last ten years has there been used a single cubic yard of ready-mixed concrete except that furnished by the boss’s company. One of the eyebrow-lifting uses to which it was put was to pave Brush Creek. Brush Creek is a rather harmless stream, which pursues its meandering course through Kansas City for about fifteen miles. For one reason or another it now has a concrete floor about 50 feet wide and a foot and a half thick. In many private construction projects, too, the contractors have decided to use the boss’s concrete.

“Let it be said of the T. J. Pendergast Liquor Company that it sells as much liquor as it cares to sell. If it wanted to, it could establish a monopoly in Kansas City, for no tavern owner could continue to do business if the forces of reprisal in the hands of the Pendergast machine were unleashed against him.

“At the office of the concrete company is a warning sign: ‘No politics discussed here.’ He spends the afternoon at business and then he repairs to his home in a fashionable section of Kansas City. Unlike his office, the boss’s home is handsome and richly furnished. No importunate callers follow the boss there. Even his key men dare not telephone or drop in. In the bosom of his family, consisting of a wife, a son, and two daughters, his privacy is inviolate.

“Perhaps he will take an afternoon drive through the countryside with one of his daughters. But nine o’clock will find him in bed against a five o’clock rising to go through the grind once again at 1908 Main Street. No good fellowship. No late conferences. No carousing. No liquor. A monk in a monastery could maintain no more Spartan an existence.

#### Enjoys the Race Track

“One exception must be made to this. There is a race track—operated without benefit of legal sanction—at Riverside, near Kansas City, where he is to be found every afternoon when a meet is on. He loves to own horses and he loves to bet on them. This, the only personal vice of his later years, he indulges to an extreme. A New York racing paper estimated his losses in 1935 at \$500,000. Nor does he confine his attendance to Riverside. He is to be found at Saratoga and at Churchill Downs, when the Kentucky Derby is run. Racing, and an occasional trip to Europe—with elaborate quarters on the newest luxury liner— are the breaks in his routine.

#### In Early Days

“A picture of Tom in the early days is now and then resurrected. John Rogers, then a young reporter, who was later to carve out a brilliant career in newspaper work and to

win a Pulitzer Prize, was on his rounds in the First Ward late one night prior to an election day when he saw a strange sight. A powerfully built man, whom he afterward identified as Tom Pendergast, was walking up and down before a polling place directing the placing of chairs along the sidewalk. The man barked his orders. The chairs were lined up on both sides of the polling place, reaching to the door. Some of them were already occupied by derelicts, to whom coffee and sandwiches were passed. By the time the polls opened, these chairs were

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filled with adherents of Tom and his brother Jim. It was their job not only to vote but to hold the line intact to discourage Pendergast enemies from voting. When late-coming Pendergast allies arrived while voting was in progress, they were admitted to the line, while opponents were kept to the rear.

### Crowning Glories

“By the time he died in 1911, Jim was undisputed master of the First Ward, and control readily passed to Tom. Tom then was an alderman, in which position he served from 1908 to 1915. He had previously been a street commissioner, in the administration of Mayor, later Senator, James A. Reed, and was Marshal of Jackson County from 1902 to 1904.

“Whereas Jim was content to be master of a single ward, Tom used his power there as a lever to extend his control throughout the city, then into Jackson County. By 1930, he was able to deliver 50,000 votes for Democratic candidates, and that made him a statewide power. Two years later, of his slate, only one candidate failed to win.

“The Democratic landslide of 1932, 1934, and 1936 consolidated the boss's power. In 1936, his candidate for governor received a plurality of 137,791 votes in Kansas City, a plurality greater than President Roosevelt's.

“It appeared for a time that, at the very pinnacle of his career, the boss was not to

enjoy its fruits. He became seriously ill at the Democratic National Convention last summer, and was confined to the hospital for many months. His lieutenants were seriously worried about the succession. Tweeds, Crokers, Vares, Pendergasts are not easy to replace.

“But the man on the hospital bed was not through. He is back at the old stand. Again the worn stairs of the Jackson County Democratic Club sag under the weight of governors and senators and bankers and bums. Napoleon is now at Austerlitz.

### The End Is Not Yet

“But the epilogue remains to be written. Even now the forces of retribution are gathering. Though the Kansas City election and law-enforcement authorities fail to move in the public interest, the powerful arm of the federal government is now upraised. On December 14 last, Judge Albert L. Reeves instructed a federal grand jury to investigate the appalling election frauds in Kansas City. Judge Reeves said:

--“When a dishonest vote is introduced into the ballot box, it tends to contaminate whole government. A fraudulent ballot is common enemy, a canker gnawing from within. We cannot surrender our ballot box to plug-uglies and hoodlums who parade the streets with machine guns. We must not stand them any longer. I cannot sit quietly in my district and witness the open flouting of election laws.’

“Such was the tone of Judge Reeves’s instructions. As he neared the close of his exhortation to the jury, he raised his right hand, with fist clenched, and said: ‘Gentlemen, reach for all, even if you find them in high authority. Move on them!’

“Is the Duke of Wellington speaking?”

EDITOR’S NOTE—Since the publication of the above, 76 persons have been indicted by a federal grand jury for conspiracy to defraud our citizens by corrupting the ballot. Four have been sentenced to the Leavenworth penitentiary, two to the federal reformatory at El Reno, Okla., one to the Platte county jail, and four are on probation for one year each. The federal grand jury remains in session. More indictments are

anticipated. Trials are set for other indicted groups.

It was the Duke of Wellington who spoke.

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