DESERET EVENING NEWS.

DESERET NEWS PUBLISHING COMPANY, LESSEES.

Wednesday, - - May 9, 1894

The Deseret Evening News is published every day, Sunday excepted, at corner [illegible] and Temple streets, Salt Lake City. [illegible] Regular edition [illegible]

The Deseret Semi-Weekly News is published on Tuesday and Friday of each week. The Deseret Weekly [illegible] magazine form [illegible]

TERMS OF SUBSCRIPTION.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Communications should be addressed to DESERET NEWS PUBLISHING CO.

Telephone [illegible]

THE CITY'S FINANCES.

It is a matter of congratulation to the city that its credit stands so high as indicated by the bids offered for the new issue of bonds. To pay a premium for the city's paper under the conditions which exist at present shows marked confidence on the part of capitalists in the ability of the municipality to meet its obligations as they fall due. In such a situation it should be the first care of the administration to see to it that the city's credit, either present or prospective, is not subjected to any process of impairment by reason of extravagance or of unnecessarily heavy burdens upon the taxpayers who ultimately have to furnish the cash.]

The majority of the present City Council were elected on a reform platform. The verdict at the polls last November was notice from the people that they had had enough of reckless extravagance and misuse of municipal funds. The city then had reached the point of financial collapse under the powers it possessed, so relief was secured by extending its borrowing capacity; this proceeding being an exhibition of confidence that the new administration would not abuse its trust as the previous one had done and at the end of its term leave the city in a hopelessly insolvent condition. At the same time the sentiment of the voters was that public improvements be carried on with reasonable diligence, as the good of the citizens might require.

Less than five months has elapsed since the new administration took hold of affairs, and the manner of how these are being conducted is beginning to show for itself. The figures and arguments presented in the City Council at last evening's session will arouse in the minds of the taxpayers some perplexing questions, and if matters go on as they are it looks as though property owners will become convinced that things are becoming no better mighty fast. Take for instance the city and county building. The committee reports that there might be made there a temporary saving of $20,000 as to improvements that were intended. This means that if the Council had not sent a special committee to look into this business there would have been $20,000 spent on that building for which there was no necessity at the present time.

The showing made is that the taxpayers are being hoodwinked and deceived and imposed upon in this city and county building business. The estimates of expenditures on that structure have been continued misstatements whose only purpose, so far as those who furnished the figures to the officials who presented them is concerned, could be to mislead the public, and will arouse a storm of indignation when the facts become known. As an example it may be stated that a few months ago, as shown by figures submitted to the Council, the estimated expenditure on behalf of the city this year on that building was placed at $50,000. Already the amount has been nearly doubled, and it is certain that the expense will be still further heavily increased unless there is a change in the program.

This matter of deceiving the public is not wholly on the part of the city, but the county has a large measure of responsibility. The grossness of the fraud that is being perpetrated is shown not only by the figures of actual cost vastly exceeding the estimates, but in a remark made by one of the selectmen, when an estimate relating to further expense on the building was given to the public a short time ago. He said, "We know it will run double that or more, but we mustn't tell the people or it will scare them." As it is the taxpayers' money that is being spent, the City Council might considerately give to the taxpayers the facts relating to that expenditure.

It is urged that to stop work on the city and county building to save money would not be judicious in the present condition of the labor market. That is true; and it is equally a fact that there is no necessity for the municipality plunging deeply in debt to rush the building to completion in a few months when it might be consistently extended over a longer period. The same suggestion applies to the sewer work. But it is not the part that gives employment to local workmen that calls for serious attention. That which sends the money away when we need it so badly at home is the specially odious feature. In the City Council committee report, the item of $20,000 was stated to be only that which would "be sent from the Territory, without any monetary benefit to the people." Then from the list of other expenses a small one may be selected by way of illustration of needless extravagance. That is the [illegible] item. The contract for the city's portion is $22,000, every dollar of which goes out of the Territory when there is absolutely no need of it. One-tenth of this sum would have sufficed for present needs, and the remainder, with an amount larger still from the county, could have been distributed for needed labor by home workingmen. It is stated that this contract was made without the knowledge of some of the members of the Council, who would have opposed it had they known thereof. This statement is but further proof of the concealment that is being practiced.

It is a question whether all of the $900,000 bond issue is to be sold at the present time, or whether three-fourths of the amount would suffice. As a reason for selling all it is urged that because of the reduced assessment this year if the sale is allowed to go over the full amount cannot be legally disposed of. The argument is not correct, but if it were its only force would be that the city must go into debt merely because it has the power to do so now, even though the indebtedness entails upon the taxpayers double or treble their present burden for the future. For, as a matter of fact, although the assessment has been reduced a little the rate of tax must be raised this year, and if the city borrows all it can taxes must be further heavily increased for years to come. Under the issue of bonds as at present proposed the interest alone will reach over $125,000, or five-eighths of the city revenue. The balance remaining is insufficient to run the city for three months out of the year. The expenses for the other three-fourths of the time must come from an additional load upon the taxpayers. Is the present administration ready to assume the responsibility of throwing this great burden upon property owners and to meet the storm that will follow?

There is no desire to take a pessimistic view of the situation, but merely to present a few cold facts, with the reminder to the municipal fathers that the taxpayers have some rights in the premises that should be respected. Some of the members of the present Council labor earnestly for a judicious handling of municipal finances. It is to be hoped that a majority will be found in this position, though influences to secure an opposite result evidently are at work.

A POPULAR INSTITUTION.

The ninth annual report of the U. S. department of labor, which was presented to Congress about a week ago, gives a great deal of interesting information on the building and loan associations of the country. Altogether, there are 5,838 of these associations considered, of which number only 240 are national, the remainder being local to the states in which they operate. Vermont and Nevada have only one association each, Utah is credited with six (five local and one national), while Pennsylvania tops the list with a total of 1,079. The associations are known by various names, but the principle underlying them is the same. It is interesting to note that while they had their birth in the decade of years from 1840 to 1850, with, perhaps, here and there one prior to the first date named, the report shows that the average age of all the associations is but 5.2 years, the local associations having an average age of 6.3 years, and the national an average age of only 2.5 years; a total of 3,140 associations out of the whole number are under 11 years of age, with but 400 over that age. These figures certainly show that the building and loan associations of the country are entirely modern institutions and have reached their great proportions during the last ten or fifteen years. This, in connection with the fact that they have net assets of over $4[illegible],000,000, have made total profits of more than $90,000,000, have helped to secure probably over 300,000 homes, and are semi-banking institutions conducted by ordinary men not trained as bankers but yet have met with remarkably few losses, shows conclusively the strong hold which building and loan associations have taken upon the public.

LIQUOR LAWS IN SWITZERLAND.

The different methods adopted by different countries for the regulation of the liquor traffic and the solution of the problem of drunkenness are interesting from the fact that every civilized people suffers to some extent from the effects of that vice and has found it necessary to engage in warfare against it. A recent report sent out by the British foreign office, shows the laws in force in Switzerland and the rigidity with which they are administered. According to this report the legislative measures are directed in the first place towards the suppression of the vice itself, while they deal with the regulation of the liquor traffic only as a secondary matter. The saloons are severely taxed and subject to restrictions, but the strong arm of the law falls most heavily on the drunkard and on every person who aids him in his vice. Anyone who drinks to excess is liable to fine and imprisonment, and in some cantons he may be confined for an indefinite period in "homes" established for inebriates. Liquor dealers are liable to severe punishment for selling to minors and to intoxicated persons, or even to individuals known to be in the habit of drinking too much.

Persons convicted of drunkenness are in some cantons prohibited from entering a saloon and the proprietor is liable to a fine if he permits them to remain. Fathers of families, known to be poor, are punished if they enter a saloon, and in Berne the law is that any person who helps a pauper to drink or gamble may be imprisoned for sixty days, and no one convicted of drunkenness can lawfully enter a place where liquor is sold for a period of two years from the date of his conviction and sentence. Any appearance in public of an intoxicated person is generally followed by the arrest of the offender.

It is claimed that these severe strictures have had a most beneficial effect on the public morals in the Swiss republic and some have advocated the adoption of similar measures in other countries. The general principles on which they rest are the same as those on which most laws against drunkenness are framed; if the results are not equally satisfactory in other places, the difference must depend on the way in which those laws are administered. The Swiss people, although enjoying the benefits of a republican form of government has been trained to submission under the strong arm of the law to a marked degree. From the days of the severe reformer, Zwingli, when public flogging was the penalty of habitual neglect of attending church on Sundays, to the present day of militarism and police regulations, when even the Christmas joy of the little ones is marred by the presence on the Christmas tree of a formidable looking rod, the people have been inspired with the awe necessary for the enforcement of rigid measures. In the absence of such education the administration of unusually severe laws must necessarily be defective, since there are numerous ways in which any law can be evaded by those so disposed. And it is beyond question preferable to restrict the enactment of laws to such measures as can be administered to the very letter, rather than to multiply laws, to remain dead letters except in particular cases.

The Gothenburg system is the opposite to the Swiss method of warfare against drunkenness. It deals almost entirely with the regulation of the sale of intoxicants. It minimizes the opportunities for indulging in drink and deprives the dealers of any motive for violating the law, by fixing their salary and making it independent of the amount of business transacted. It also gives back to the community a part of the money earned, by yearly donations to public improvements and benevolent institutions, and it is founded on philanthropic principles. For these reasons many have recommended it as superior to any other method.

Probably the regulations of Switzerland are most practical to that republic, while other measures will have to be taken in other countries. One rule cannot be applied everywhere. Nations have their peculiarities, not to be overlooked in the efforts of lawmakers and philanthropists to conquer vice.

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