

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

Vol. 4, No. 48.

Lincoln, Nebraska, December 16, 1904.

Whole Number 204

MR. WATSON'S PREDICTIONS

Hon. Thomas E. Watson, late populist candidate for president, has outlined his position as to the future and has ventured some predictions. He predicts that Mr. Bryan will be nominated in 1908 and then he predicts that Mr. Bryan will be defeated worse than Judge Parker was etc., etc. Mr. Watson has the same right to make predictions as he would have had he not been a candidate for the presidency, but his predictions must be taken upon their merits and dealt with as the predictions of any one else. The difficulty with Mr. Watson is that he views the subject from a standpoint entirely hostile to the democratic party. Having left the party and having opposed it for some years, he naturally has less confidence in it than those who are members of the party. The fact that he gave indirect assistance to Mr. Roosevelt in the late campaign and thus contributed to the extent of his influence in increasing the size of Mr. Roosevelt's plurality, also tends to make him take a gloomy view of the democratic party's future. But there is no reason why Mr. Watson should ignore what the democratic party has done and is trying to do in the direction of political and economic reform.

Mr. Watson believes in the income tax. The democratic party enacted an income tax law and still believes in the income tax. At St. Louis while a majority of the committee was in favor of leaving the income tax out of the platform, all but one member of that committee expressed themselves in favor of an income tax and now that the policy of the party is no longer to be dictated by those who desired to conciliate the corporation element, the income tax will be a part of the democratic creed.

Mr. Watson believes in the election of senators by direct vote of the people. The democratic party stands for this reform. A plank in favor of the necessary amendment was inserted in the national platform four years ago, and again at St. Louis, and this reform, when accomplished, will make easier every other reform.

Mr. Watson believes in tariff reform and advocated it in congress. The democratic party stands for tariff reform. The platform adopted at St. Louis was clear and strong on this subject and, while Judge Parker weakened himself by assuming that tariff reform would be impossible because of a republican senate, there is no question of the party's position.

Mr. Watson is opposed to the trusts, and so is the democratic party. Its honesty of purpose was questioned this year because Mr. Belmont, Mr. Sheehan, and some others, who stood sponsor for Judge Parker, were known to be closely connected with the trusts, but the overwhelming defeat visited upon the party under their leadership will make it certain that the party will renew its aggressive fight against private monopolies.

The same influences that will direct the party on other questions will direct it on the labor question and make it the champion of the cause of those who toil. On the subject of imperialism, on the army question and the navy question, it will also stand with the people. The heart of the democratic party is sound and a large majority of its members are earnest in their desire for economic reforms. The fact that Mr. Watson does not have confidence in the party is to be regretted because Mr. Watson is an earnest man and sincerely desires to advance the interests of the common people. He must not assume, however, that those who differ from him are lacking in patriotism or in genuine interest in reform. He was a candidate for the presidency and made his appeal to the public. The small vote which he received—a vote much smaller than populists, democrats, and even republicans expected him to receive—shows either that there are few

who agree with him as to the course of action to be pursued or that they did not have confidence in his leadership. It is not only more charitable, but more in accordance with the facts, to assume that the reformers had personal confidence in Mr. Watson, but did not agree with him as to the best method of securing remedial legislation. Reforms are not to be secured all at once. There is a great deal of difference between the work of the pioneer and the work of the party that espouses a reform and crystallizes it into law.

It is evident that the populist party is not in position to do the work that is needed. The returns show that it has lost ground. Some of its members have gone into the socialist party; some of them prefer to act with the democrats and thus secure the reforms for which the democratic party stands. It is a disappointment to populists to find that their party organization is impotent to secure the legislation which the members of the party have advocated and some blame the falling off in the populist vote to the fact that the party has fused with the democrats, but there is no foundation for this charge. If the populist party had failed to fuse with the democrats it would not have retained its strength so long as it did. The populist party did an important educational work; it helped to bring certain reforms before the country. The democratic party took up a number of these reforms (reforms which were really democratic) and brought to them a larger vote than the populist party was able to secure for them. Those who are more interested in the reforms than in the name of the party through which the reforms are to come, will not complain that the main work of the populist party was done through another party rather than directly. Results count and parties are only important as they contribute to those results. The populist party has helped to put the democratic party in line with some needed reforms, just as the socialist party is now exerting an educational influence.

The president in his message warns the republicans that they must regulate railroad rates if they would prevent the growth of sentiment in favor of "more radical" legislation. This is a clear reference to the growth of the socialist party. When the populist party entered the political arena it favored the income tax, the election of senators by the people, the referendum, bimetallism, the issue of non-redeemable legal tender treasury notes; the government ownership of railroads, a sub-treasury system for the storage of farm products and the loaning of money directly to the people at a low rate of interest. After the first campaign the sub-treasury and the loaning of money were virtually dropped. The democratic party took up the income tax, the election of senators by the people, direct legislation and bimetallism. The populist contention for an irredeemable currency (that is, a currency not redeemable in any other kind of money but a legal tender for public dues as well as private debts) is not now discussed as much as it formerly was. The increased volume of money has lessened the interest in all phases of the money question, while the democratic advocacy of the right of the government to issue the paper money has narrowed the issues for which populism distinctly stands.

The democratic party did not accept the populist position on irredeemable money, but it did endorse the proposition that the government should issue whatever paper money we have, and should issue whatever paper money we have, and the question of issue is far more important than the question of redeemability. A greenback redeemable, as the democrats declared it should be, either gold or silver at the option of the government, would never become a drain upon the treasury and therefore the question of issuing irredeemable paper would, with the restoration of bimetallism, become an abstract one rather

than one of actual and practical value. The populist contention for the government ownership of railroads is the only vital one (the sub-treasury plan having been dropped and the question of irredeemable paper not being discussed to any considerable extent) which the democratic party has not endorsed. Whether the democratic party will adopt it remains to be seen.

There is undoubtedly a growing sentiment in favor of the government ownership of railroads, not only among democrats, but among republicans, and this growth is due to the manner in which the railroads have disregarded their duty and combined for the exploitation of the public. It requires no prophet to foresee the day when the people will prefer to risk whatever dangers may be involved in government ownership to a continuation of private ownership under prevailing conditions. Whether the experiment will be tried through the federal government or through the state governments is the question open to discussion. The government ownership of railroads, while endorsed by the socialists, does not involve the fundamental principle which underlies the socialist propaganda. Democrats who advocate the government ownership of railroads do it on the ground that competition is impossible or, at least, so costly and so difficult to secure as to make it inexpedient for the public to rely upon it. The government ownership of railroads can be defended much upon the same ground as the municipal ownership of lighting plants and water plants is to be defended. It does not involve the question of "the government ownership and operation of all means of production and distribution," which is the ultimate aim of the radical socialist. The railroads in Germany are owned by the state governments, and yet the German government is very much opposed to socialism. Socialism does not control France, and yet the railroads of France are, according to the terms of the charters, to become the property of the government in about twenty-five years. England is not socialistic, and yet England does many things that the republicans denounce as socialistic when suggested by democrats. Each new question must be settled upon its merits and the people will not be driven from the adoption of anything they believe to be wise by any epithets or harsh names that may be applied to it.

It is not only unnecessary to organize a new party for dealing with these questions, but it would be unwise to do so. The formation of a party is a slow and difficult process and is only possible in great crises. Only once since the adoption of our constitution has a great party been organized, and the question which brought the republican party into existence was one of such tremendous magnitude that it involved the country in a civil war.

All parties have their influence, even though they may not develop a great deal of numerical strength. There are more reformers in the democratic party than are likely to be massed under the name of any other party. When the democratic party adopts its next platform it will doubtless lose some votes which were cast with it this year, but it is likely to gain from the reform republicans, from the populists, from the socialists and from other reform parties a great many more than it loses.

It is Mr. Bryan's purpose to contribute toward the securing of every reform within reach. If he could advance these reforms more by becoming a member of some other party he would not hesitate to leave the democratic party, but he believes that he can accomplish more through the democratic party and, while he so believes, he will work with the democratic party. To him the future seems full of hope. He believes that the democratic party is going to meet the expectations of its members and disappoint the fears of