

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

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What is Democratic?

The democrats who voted against free lumber have

Voted to repudiate the national platform of the democratic party;

Voted to encourage the destruction of our forests;

Voted to raise the price of one of the chief necessities of life;

Voted to tax a material that enters into a multitude of industries, and thus to place an unnecessary burden upon these industries;

Voted to tax the people of the whole country for the benefit of a comparatively few owners of timber lands; and

Voted to tax a majority of their own constituents for the benefit of a minority of those constituents.

To cast such a vote a democrat must have arguments that have not yet been given to the public and must be prepared to present these arguments to his constituents.

The Commoner will give space (up to two thousand words) to any democratic senator or member of congress who desires to present an argument in favor of a duty on lumber, provided he will in his article answer the following questions:

First, is a platform binding?

Second, is it wise to encourage the devastation of our forests?

Third, will the country as a whole be benefited by a tariff on lumber, and if so, how?

Fourth, how many of his constituents produce lumber as compared with the number of his constituents who use lumber?

Fifth, will he give the names of the men who have by letter or in person urged him to vote for the tariff on lumber?

The Commoner also invites brief letters from constituents who either approve of or condemn the votes cast by their democratic senators or congressmen. The Commoner believes that the democratic senators and members of congress who voted against free lumber have greatly embarrassed the democratic party, greatly strengthened the republican party, and grievously wronged their constituents. But it is the desire of The Commoner to do justice to all, and it thus offers space to both sides that the readers may judge for themselves after reading the arguments presented.

The democratic platform adopted by unanimous vote at Denver last July, contains the following tariff plank:

"We welcome the belated promise of tariff reform now offered by the republican party as a tardy recognition of the righteousness of the democratic position on this question. But the people can not safely entrust the execution of this important work to a party which is so

deeply obligated to the highly protected interests as is the republican party. We call attention to the significant fact that the promised relief is postponed until after the coming election—an election to succeed in which the republican party must have that same support from the beneficiaries of the high protective tariff as it has always heretofore received from them; and to the further fact that during years of uninterrupted power no action whatever has been taken by the republican congress to correct the admittedly existing tariff iniquities.

"We favor immediate revision of the tariff by the reduction of import duties. Articles entering into competition with trust controlled products should be placed upon the free list; material reductions should be made in the tariff upon the necessities of life, especially upon articles competing with such American manufactures as are sold abroad more cheaply than at home, and gradual reductions should be made in such other schedules as may be necessary to restore the tariff to a revenue basis.

"Existing duties have given the manufacturers of paper a shelter behind which they have organized combinations to raise the price of pulp and of paper, thus imposing a tax upon the spread of knowledge. We demand the immediate repeal of the tariff on wood pulp, print paper, lumber, timber and logs, and that these articles be placed upon the free list."

It will be noticed that the last sentence of the last paragraph of the plank contains a definite and specific demand for "the immediate repeal of the tariff on wood pulp, print paper, lumber, timber and logs, and that these articles be placed upon the free list."

No language could be more clear; no platform promise could be more explicit. If the democratic party is committed to anything, it is committed to the repeal of the tariff on wood pulp, print paper, lumber, timber and logs.

In the tariff contest in congress a number of democrats in the senate and house have voted for tariff on lumber, and have attempted to defend their action in so doing. Two questions are involved, and the democratic party must be prepared to meet these questions and answer them to the satisfaction of the country.

First, is a platform promise binding? We are now charging that the republican party is guilty of breach of promise in not revising the tariff downward. But how can the democrats criticize the republicans for construing the word "revise" to mean an increase in the tariff if democratic senators and congressmen deliberately repudiate a plain and unmistakable promise of free lumber? The democrats who voted against free lumber will, of course, be called upon to defend themselves, and to do so they must deny that national platforms are binding, or they must insist that the national platform was not binding upon them. If they say that platforms are not binding, they attack a well settled democratic doctrine, namely, that the voters can instruct their representatives. A platform that is not binding is worse than no platform at all, because it misleads the voters. It is better for a party to make no promises than to make a promise and then break it.

If those democrats who have opposed free lumber opposed it on the ground that, while platforms are generally binding, this platform was not binding upon them, it is incumbent upon them to show either that they were elected before this platform was adopted, or that in their campaign they openly repudiated the platform and gave notice of their adherence to a different doctrine. Even the senators elected before the platform was adopted might feel justified in giving some consideration to a platform endorsed by so large a vote at the polls. The democrat who sets his judgment up against the declarations of his party assumes the burden of proof to establish the righteousness of his own position and the error in the position taken by his party.

Aside from having to meet the question of platform, the anti-free-lumber democrats will have to be prepared to defend their votes upon the merits of the question. Will they insist that as a national proposition a tariff on lumber is desirable? Or will they defend their

action on the ground that they speak for the interests of their states or districts? Even if they attempt to justify a tariff on lumber as a national proposition, and without regard to local interests, it will probably be found that the national argument only has weight with those who represent constituencies where there is a local sentiment in favor of a tariff on lumber, and the public will doubtless weigh the local interest in deciding upon the motive of the senator or congressman in voting against free lumber.

There is nothing more necessary to the welfare of all the people than lumber, and it ought to be as cheap as possible. To put a tariff on lumber is like putting a tax on salt, and the salt tax has even been considered a hardship, and it has always been resorted to by despots, for no one can escape such a tax.

But lumber is not only a necessity, but it is a vanishing product, and a tariff upon it simply stimulates further destruction. If there is any one product that ought to go on the free list, it is lumber.

Not only is lumber one of the necessities of life—not only do our timber lands need such protection as can be furnished them by the free importation of lumber—but a tax on lumber imposes a heavy burden upon all the people for the benefit of a very small percentage of the people. What proportion of the American people can possibly be benefited by a tariff on lumber? The percentage is exceedingly small. Even in the states where there are lumber interests, the majority of the people are buyers of lumber rather than producers.

BELATED WRATH

In an editorial entitled "Popular Feeling and Tariff Bunco," the St. Paul Pioneer-Press, a republican paper, says:

"The most wholesome thing for congress to do at this juncture would be to adjourn for a few weeks and distribute itself among its constituents. It would learn something to its ultimate advantage, and to the advantage of the country. It would get in touch with the practically universal exasperation and disgust of the voters with the Payne bill, the Aldrich monstrosity, and the cheap skulduggery and chicanery which have characterized the framing of the house and senate measures. But there is not the slightest hope that congress will consult its constituents. The tariff framers do not want to hear from the country. The leaders want to put their heads in the sand and imagine that there is no trouble in store for their blessed protected industries. They can't and they won't see that unless they grant the just and reasonable demands of consumers for a more moderate tariff on necessities, and for free raw materials, particularly for free lumber, free wood pulp, free hides, free iron ore and free coal, there will be a storm that is not unlikely to put an end for good and all to the republican party as at present constituted, or at least to the domination of the standpatter and reactionary, and to extreme protection for any industry whether it needs it or not.

"Let congress commit the crime it threatens to commit and by a little judicious leadership on the part of the democratic party, by sloughing off free trade, free silver and other populist excrescences, that party would be likely to carry, four years hence, almost every state in the Mississippi valley. To elect a republican president against a sound and sensible democratic candidate standing on a platform of common sense, there would not only have to be a republican candidate and platform unequivocally pledged to a definite tariff policy, but a complete change in the feeling that now exists.

"It is probably not exaggerating to say that millions of voters west of Ohio are ready today to rebuke congress for its evident intentions in a way that will disturb the gall even of that hoary old sinner, Aldrich. For the rank and file of the republican party is mad, and mad clean through. They are not only exasperated at the 'gold brick' which it is the purpose of Aldrich and his followers to hand them; they are

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