

## Mr. Bryan's Speech at Grand Island

Speech of Hon. William J. Bryan before the democratic state convention at Grand Island, Nebraska, on July 26, 1910, in support of the minority report presented by him as a member of the resolutions committee:

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I shall read again the substitute which I offer for the majority report on this subject: "We favor county option as the best method of dealing with the liquor question." I appreciate the spirit of fairness that has characterized the democrats who, if we can judge by what has occurred, are in a majority in this convention, and I assure you that it is with very great regret that I find myself compelled to differ from those with whom I have been associated so intimately and so pleasantly for so many years. In view of the fact that many democrats think me responsible for the introduction of this question, and accuse me of disturbing the harmony of the party at this time; in view of the fact that many feel that I have forfeited my right to your confidence, I think I am entitled to present my defense. Demosthenes defined the duty of a statesman by saying that he should "foresee and foretell." Possibly after three nominations for the presidency it would not be presumptuous to count myself an humble member of the group called statesmen, but if there is objections to that I am sure you will allow me to call myself one of the leaders of the democratic party in Nebraska. And I think it is only fair to apply to the leader the definition of statesmanship given by Demosthenes. It is the duty of the leader to "foresee and foretell," and I shall not ask you to deal leniently with me if I have fallen below this standard. If I have not foreseen coming evils and told you of them, spare me not; if I have advocated that which is not good for this state, let me feel your wrath. While I am not willing to accept that definition of party loyalty that puts consideration for the party good above consideration for the state's welfare, yet, for the sake of argument, I am willing to accept that definition of party loyalty, and have you measure me by it. If you find that I have done anything that is not for the benefit of the democratic party, I ask no mercy at your hands.

Do not accuse me of indifference to the harmony of the democratic party. Who among you has more reason to desire harmony than I? For sixteen years we have never had a dissenting vote on our platform in Nebraska; for sixteen years we have been in full and hearty agreement in regard to platforms. For sixteen years you have trusted me and I have trusted you. Who less than I could desire to disturb the harmony of the democratic party? You must make a strong case against me if you would overcome the presumption in my favor.

Not only that, but who will suffer more than I if I find myself justly repudiated by my own people? My work is in national politics; I travel from state to state, and I am aware that a repudiation by you will be heralded throughout the land and used against me. Do I not know that the paragraphers are already saying that I am to be turned down in my own convention. Is that a matter of no consequence to me? Can you believe that anything less than an imperative sense of duty would lead me to differ with you? Never in my life have I performed a duty that I less desired to perform; and never have I felt more sure that I was performing a duty.

It has been said by some that I am fighting on this subject now because I am not a candidate. That is unkind, my friends. No one who knows my record will accuse me of fighting under conditions under which I would have kept still if I was a candidate. Go back to '92 when I was a candidate—a candidate for congress without opposition. I went into the state convention, with only three men encouraging me I began a fight. They refused to put me on the committee on resolutions from my own county, and I was put on by act of the convention. I brought in a minority report signed by myself alone and made my fight when friends told me it would defeat me for congress. In '93 I was a member of congress, and yet I came back to a state convention at Lincoln—a convention controlled by candidates for federal office—and there again I made a fight when they refused to put me on the committee on resolutions. Did I show cowardice? Was I afraid to jeopardize my own chances by taking a position? And the year afterwards I went out and made a fight for a policy against

the national administration of my party, against the committee then in charge. Some who now tell me that I must not disturb the harmony of the party were with me then fighting for principle and not asking what the effect was going to be on the party. I remember that in '94 the distinguished democrat, Judge Oldham, who has just addressed you, was with us, and we made him our permanent chairman at a time when the money question was so acute that there was a bolt from our convention. I think if you will look back over the last eighteen years you will not accuse me of being in this fight because I am not a candidate. I am interested because it is an issue, and because individuals and parties must meet issues as they arise.

I have been called a dictator because I expressed my opinion on this subject. Have not others expressed their opinions? Have not the candidates for governor told you what they thought ought to go into the platform and what ought to go out? Have not the candidates for senator expressed their opinion? Have not many individuals expressed an opinion? By what law am I compelled to suppress an opinion upon a question which affects my state's welfare and my party's interest? Is it because I have been your candidate for president? I would not accept an office or a nomination if there were attached to it a pledge that I see wrong done and not raise my voice in protest.

And some have said that I am actuated by a spirit of resentment; that I am mad because the liquor interests were against me last fall. Well, my friends, it is true that they traded me off in this and in other states; it is true that the liquor democrats and liquor republicans put the liquor question above all else. They traded me in this and in other states, and I would have been defeated in my own state, if it had not been for republicans who, because of state pride, came to my rescue and took the place of democrats who deserted me. In Missouri, also, I have no hesitancy in saying, the influence of the liquor element was sufficient to account for my loss of that democratic state. We had the same difficulty in Indiana and in Ohio. We had the same trouble in Illinois and in New York. And do you say that I must not refer to the liquor influence in politics for fear somebody will accuse me of being sore over being defeated? I expect to be in politics many years yet, and I expect to do what I can to help the democratic party, but of what use is it to go out and appeal to democrats on national issues if, when we have done our best, a band of political assassins can come in and rob us of victory?

The liquor question has entered politics, and he is blind who does not see it. Just at the time when we were about to overthrow Cannonism the special interests—the liquor interests among them—drew away enough democrats to save Cannon. Do you call it resentment to oppose these interests? I ask why you democrats who have fought with me do not show resentment at the treatment our party has received?

(Voice—Hit them again.)

No, do not say that; I am not here to hit anybody. I am here to present the facts as I find them; and I want you to sit in judgment upon them, remembering that after you have acted, there is a court of appeals, composed of one hundred and thirty thousand democrats, that will render a decision.

Some have said that I ought not to oppose the opinion of my party on this subject. Pray, who is to tell me the opinion of my party on this subject? To whom am I to go to find out what my party thinks? Might I not assume that I know my party as well as anyone does? Is there any other democrat who is acquainted with more of the democrats of Nebraska than I am? Is there any other democrat who has kept in closer touch with these people than I have? Who is to tell me what the party wants before the party itself has had a chance to give expression to its views? But you say I ought to be satisfied when I see this convention. Well, my friends, I can indorse what Judge Oldham has said about the magnificent character of this body, and yet I could bring you tomorrow a body ten times as large and just as good looking who would vote exactly contrary to yours. You must pardon me if my experience has taught me not to place too much reliance upon an opinion expressed by a convention on a subject that has not been generally discussed. Why, Judge Oldham says he does not know

what county option means; if he does not know, how can you expect one hundred and thirty thousand fellow democrats to express an intelligent opinion? It is safe to say that not one-tenth of the one hundred and thirty thousand democrats of Nebraska attended the primaries that selected and instructed you. In Douglas county, how many of the fifteen thousand democrats of Douglas county attended the primaries?

Do not be angry; I am simply calling your attention to what you know, namely, that you had no primaries in Douglas county. Your county committee selected delegates to the county convention, and they selected the delegates (largely themselves) to the state convention. How many, I ask, of the fifteen thousand democrats of Douglas county had a voice in selecting you and in instructing you to vote as you do? I venture the assertion that not one per cent had any voice. Not that I mean to say that you do not accurately represent them; you may, but they took no part in your selection. I read of Adams county that there were but three precincts outside of the city of Hastings represented in that convention. Let me ask the delegates whether that report is correct. How many were present outside of Hastings?

(Three, three—six.)

Somebody says six, do I hear a better bid? What right has Hastings, with a brewery, to say she reflects the opinions of the men in the country? And so I might take county after county. I will venture the assertion that not ten per cent of the democrats of this state were present at the primaries when these men were selected. I do not mean to say that you necessarily misrepresent the people who did not take part, and I do not excuse the people who did not attend the primaries—they ought to have been there, but I remind you that you represent only a small proportion. I read in a Jefferson county paper, and I believe it is published by one of the members of our resolutions committee, that one reason why the initiative and referendum was voted down, was the county convention was not sufficiently representative. No, I am not willing to take the opinion of this convention as necessarily deciding this question; on the contrary, when a question like this is at issue where a city with saloons has an interest adverse to the people outside—so adverse that the people in the city are not willing to allow the county people to vote you can not say that a convention selected by the cities is necessarily representative of the democracy of this state.

But suppose that this convention was composed of delegates who had been so selected that every democrat had expressed himself in their selection—this question of county option has not been carefully considered. I remember that in 1893 we had a state convention, a convention in which the majority was overwhelming against bimetalism, and I remember that Douglas county was in that convention instructed to vote as a unit against it; and I remember that one year afterwards we had a fight in Douglas county, and by a vote of two to one secured a delegation to stand with us for the free and unlimited coinage of silver. That is history in this state, and I am not willing that this shall be accepted as a final settlement of this question. And if it is not, then you can not properly charge that I am guilty of disloyalty to my party when I dissent from the opinion expressed by a majority of you in this convention. I will go further, I believe it is the duty of every democrat to have an opinion and to express his opinion, without asking what others believe.

You will agree with me that it is sound democratic doctrine, and has been from time immemorial for a man to express his opinion and accept responsibility for it. This is a moral question. Your majority report says so. On a moral question, I have a right to an opinion. I am not required to ask anybody what I shall think on a moral question.

Now let me take the next objection that is made, namely, that I am forcing a new issue, that I am guilty of introducing a disturbing factor when the democratic party is at peace. Let me give you the history of this question. I did not create the county option issue; it was here before I knew anything about it. It was here four years ago when I never heard of it at all; two years ago it was an issue in our legislature, and I refused to express an opinion on the subject. They asked me to say a word in favor of county option, but I said, "No, these men, elected as democrats on the ticket with me, have been pledged, some for and some against, and I shall not embarrass them by ex-