

The Commoner.

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Speakers in the Campaign

The Commoner invites its readers everywhere to write to this office at once giving the names of the men whom they think will be the most effective as campaign speakers in their neighborhood. The Commoner desires this information in order that it may be of service to the national committee in that committee's assignment of speakers for the campaign. In this connection The Commoner urges the people everywhere to open the schoolhouses for the purpose of political discussions.

THE DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS

The adjournment of the first regular session of the first democratic congress in sixteen years makes this an appropriate time to consider the record made by that congress—using the term congress as it is usually employed to describe the national house of representatives. No congress in recent years and few congresses that have assembled in all the nation's history, has so much good legislation to its credit.

It began with a restoration of the principles of popular government in the organization of the house. Instead of electing a speaker and then empowering him to appoint the committees, it took from the speaker the power of appointment and entrusted the selection of committees to the house itself, each party selecting its share of the members of each committee. This was a revolution and a far-reaching one. Under the old rule, the speaker had used the patronage of the office to secure the coveted place and to retain it, and then, having entrenched himself in power, he used his power of appointment to coerce the house into obedience to his will. The power to designate the minority members as well as the majority opened the door to abuses which lessened the vigor of the minority party in presenting its protests.

The change secured by the democrats leaves the speaker to exert a moral influence over his party and invites him to aspire to a higher kind of leadership than is possible where coercion is employed. The enlargement of the committee on rules was another step toward more popular government and gave a better representation to the various sections of the country.

At the beginning of the special session, Speaker Clark outlined a program that embodied the most important planks of the national platform at Denver in 1908. The first was the election of United States senators by direct vote of the people. This reform was declared by the platform to be the gateway to other reforms. While Andrew Johnson had once recommended

it, some forty-five years ago in a message to congress; while the prohibition party had indorsed it in its platform forty years ago, and while the populist party had indorsed it in its platform twenty-eight years ago, the democratic party enjoys the distinction of putting the necessary resolution through the national house of representatives for the first time in 1892. The next congress, also democratic, also passed the resolution. Sentiment has continually grown under democratic leadership until the entire country has taken the matter up and the senate has been forced to yield to the popular demand. For more than a year, the resolution was in conference between the two houses because the resolution was radically amended by the senate. Under the present method, the state determines the time and manner of selecting senators, and the house in its resolution sought to preserve to the states this right of control. The senate, on the other hand, insisted upon changing the wording of the resolution in such a way as to reserve federal supervision. As the issue thus raised was an old one between the two parties, it looked for a while as if neither party would yield, but finally the democrats of the house showed the intensity of their devotion to the cause of popular elections by accepting the senate amendment rather than risk delay in securing the reform. The test to which the two parties were subjected in this matter recalls the mothers who contested before Solomon for a child—the real mother being discovered by her willingness to give up the custody of the child rather than jeopardize its life. If the democratic house had done nothing else than secure this organic change in the method of electing senators it would deserve the gratitude of the nation. With the senate converted into a popular body, responsive to the people's will, this branch of congress ought to become the highest legislative body in the world and seats in it should be reserved for those who in less conspicuous stations have demonstrated their capacity for governmental affairs and their fidelity to the interests of the people.

The second reform embraced in the democratic program had in view the purifying of politics. Probably in no other line has progress been more apparent than in the effort to purge politics of the contaminating influence of money secretly contributed for the purpose of controlling the instrumentalities of government. Until within a decade, it seemed impossible to make the average voter understand the extent to which the predatory interests controlled administrations through campaign contributions. The democratic party had much earlier than that called attention to the fat-frying processes employed by republican committees whereby protected interests were compelled to return in contributions a part of the money given them through special legislation. A little later, in the campaign of 1896, complaint was made of the enormous sum put up by financial interests to carry the election, but the investigations that followed the election in 1904 made a much deeper impression than the democrats have been able to make and the disclosures resulted in the enactment of a law prohibiting contributions from corporations. This was the beginning of

remedial legislation of this character but the law was no sooner enacted than it was discovered that it could be evaded by large individual contributions on the part of trust magnates and big financiers. Then came the demand for publicity as to individual contributions and by the time the campaign of 1908 opened the issue was so acute that the two leading parties were united in demanding publicity, the democrats insisting that the publication should be made BEFORE the election while the republicans protested that the publication of the names of contributors be delayed until AFTER election. It seems a little ludicrous now that anyone should have seriously objected to publicity before the election but history records that both President Roosevelt and Candidate Taft advanced arguments against any publication of contributions before the election. On no subject, however, has the sweep of public opinion been wider or more rapid and it was not two years after the law was enacted providing for publicity after election before it was amended so as to provide publicity before the election, and the amendment received a unanimous vote of the house and encountered no opposition in the senate. The amending measure even went so far as to apply the publicity to the preliminary contests for the house and senate and it fixed a maximum of five thousand dollars to a congressman's expenditures and ten thousand to the expenditures which a senatorial candidate can lawfully make.

But comprehensive as was this publicity law it soon lagged behind public sentiment on this subject and the house has within the last nine months taken three steps in advance. In one bill it asked the president to make public the recommendations, written and verbal, on which he appoints United States judges; in a second, it sought to extend the doctrine of publicity to the period before presidential conventions so as to inform the public regarding contributions made to aid in the nomination of presidential candidates; and the third compels newspapers to disclose their ownership. The last named measure was by far the most important of the three and it has recently become a law in the signing of the post office appropriation bill. In the senate, the measure was improved by the addition of a provision requiring all advertising matter to be so marked as to distinguish it from editorials and legitimate news. It is difficult to overestimate the good influence that this publicity law will exert. Heretofore, the exploiting interests have been able to use newspapers against the public either by secret ownership or through editorials and news items inserted for pay. It is a real victory for the pure food law to have it applied to our newspaper diet; next to having political poison kept out of the newspapers we can be grateful to the present congress for properly labeling it.

In the admission of Arizona and New Mexico the house did a long delayed act of justice to these two deserving territories and in the wording of the resolutions, the house set a precedent and rendered a great service to the people of the territory. When President Taft threatened to veto the Arizona statehood bill because the state's constitution contained a provision for

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