

The Commoner

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VOL. 15, NO. 2

Lincoln, Nebraska, February, 1915

Whole Number 670

The Ship Purchase Bill

The ship purchase bill which provides for the creation of a corporation, a majority of the stock of which shall be controlled by the government, empowered to secure, by purchase or otherwise, a line of ships to be controlled by the government, is one of the most important measures of recent years. There are two arguments in favor of the bill:

First: That government controlled ships are needed PERMANENTLY to establish new trade routes and extend our foreign commerce; and

Second: That government owned ships are needed at this time to give additional facilities during the war and to protect the public from extortionate rates.

Not only are the shipping facilities insufficient at present, but freight rates have risen in some cases more than seven hundred per cent since the war began. The president and his administration are behind the bill, and the country now knows enough of the president to know how much force he can put behind a measure constructed in the interest of the public.

The theoretical opposition to the bill is based upon objection to government-ownership in the matter of ships. But, like the opposition to the postal savings bank, which represented the pecuniary interests of the banks, and like the opposition to the parcel post, which represented the pecuniary interests of the express companies, the opposition to the ship purchase bill represents the pecuniary interests of the private shipping interests, foreign and coastwise.

Seven democrats are acting with the republicans, but the democrats have secured the support of enough progressive republicans to give them a majority, and the seven democrats are likely to have the mortification of defeat as well as the criticism which their desertion of their party has aroused. If the filibuster continues for the remainder of the session the president may be compelled to call a special session of congress, and in the new congress the democratic majority will be increased and the progressive element of the party will be even stronger than it is now.

The fight over the ship purchase bill, while irritating, will serve a useful purpose, for it brings out into bold relief the president's devotion to the public interests and the party's espousal of the people's side of a great question. The republicans have, without knowing it, strengthened the president's popularity with the masses by compelling him to do the things which prove both his courage and his fidelity.

W. J. BRYAN.

If you read an editorial in favor of the liquor traffic, look for liquor advertisements. Why don't they put the liquor ads. on the editorial page?

CLOTURE IN THE SENATE COMING

The action of the democratic caucus Saturday, in endorsing cloture, is the beginning of the end of the barbarous rules that have bound the senate for several generations. Unlimited debate, when wisely employed, has its advantages, but it is a power that can not safely be entrusted to a partisan minority. It denies to the majority the right to rule. It gives the presumption of wisdom and patriotism to the few rather than to the many. But it is doomed, and with the change the senate will become a popular body, in reality responsible to the people's will. It is another reform added to the important list of reforms achieved by the democratic party during its brief control of public affairs. It may be some time yet before the democrats will be able to make the change, but the change is coming, and the day of its adoption should be a day of general rejoicing. It has been the bulwark of plutocracy — the last trench to which the decreasing band of reactionaries could retreat. Hail to the change, and honor to those who are joining to bring it about.

W. J. BRYAN.

THE SEVEN DISSENTING DEMOCRATS

The seven democrats who are acting with the republicans on the ship purchase bill are Bankhead of Alabama, Camden of Kentucky, Clarke of Arkansas, Hardwick of Georgia, Hitchcock of Nebraska, O'Gorman of New York and Vardaman of Mississippi. Bankhead, Clarke, Camden, Hardwick and Vardaman have democratic colleagues from their states who are supporting the bill. Senator Hitchcock of Nebraska has no democratic colleague, but Senator Norris of Nebraska, a progressive, is acting with the democrats. Senator O'Gorman of New York has no democratic colleague, but is acting on the ship purchase bill with his republican colleague, Senator Root.

The blue book issued by the United States Brewers' association gives the interesting information that "beer may be substituted for bread." The brewers are too modest. It has been substituted for bread quite often, as a number of beer drinkers' families can testify.

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Opposing the Income Tax

A press dispatch from Chicago to the Washington Post announces that "Bankers, lawyers and business men here generally join in condemnation of the income tax law, which some have declared to be stupid 'failure to fill the gap in the treasury caused by equally stupid tariff tinkering.'"

The article goes on to say that the people have less money with which to buy and "are saddled with an income tax."

The protest is not new but it is unavailing. When the supreme court, by a majority of one, held unconstitutional the income tax of twenty years ago, those responsible for the opposition then little thought of the trouble which they were laying up for themselves. As long as the question could be fought in the courts the opponents of an income tax could claim that they represented public sentiment, but the decision compelled the adoption of a constitutional amendment, and when that amendment went before the country it was ratified by three-fourths of the states; republican states as well as democratic states hastened to set their seal of approval upon this method of taxation. The unequivocal endorsement of the principle of the income tax, now sanctioned by constitutional authority, silences opposition.

"The people are not saddled with an income tax." The returns show that considerably less than 1 per cent of the people pay the income tax. Not even all of the "bankers, lawyers, and business men" pay an income tax. A few escaped their share of taxation, so long as our revenues were collected through taxes placed on consumption — these are now compelled to contribute more nearly their share of the expense of the government. The income tax will not be repealed; even the republican party, if in power, would hardly dare to repeal the income tax. The country is making progress away from injustice and toward equity in the distribution of the burdens of the government and it will not turn back to the old system which overburdened the masses — in fact made them pay practically all the taxes while the privileged interests monopolized the advantages of government.

W. J. BRYAN.

Democratic ideas are growing. After having inspected the excellent workings of the federal reserve bank system placed into successful operation by Secretary McAdoo, the Kansas senate is seriously considering creating a central bank that shall do for the state what the federal reserve bank does for the nation.

Democratic reforms continue to march on. The republican state senate of New York, when it recently organized, took from the lieutenant governor his time-honored privilege of naming the committees of that body and performed the job themselves.