

Why Not a Referendum?

Senator Owen of Oklahoma, one of the staunchest defenders of the right of the people to rule, has embodied this idea in a resolution proposing a referendum on war.

And why not a referendum on war? When the constitution was written, the idea of a referendum was unknown. But as the right to declare war was vested, not in the President, or in the supreme court, but in congress, the most representative body created by the constitution, the constitutional convention gave to the idea of popular control the greatest emphasis then possible. Congress is made up of representatives chosen by the people, the members of the house of representatives every two years and one-third of the members of the senate at each congressional election. Now that we have the modern device known as the referendum, which enables the people to speak directly upon important questions, why not apply the machinery to war? Is any question more important than the question of war? Is there anything upon which the people have a clearer right to speak their own sentiments? In counties it has long been the custom to submit to a popular vote the selection of the county seat, instead of entrusting it to the county supervisor or county commissioners; is not the question of war more vital than the selection of a county seat?

It is increasingly the custom to submit to popular vote the question of issuing bonds. Is not the question of war more important than the question of a public debt?

A number of the states have adopted the initiative and referendum, under which the people of the state are able to veto public measures or to legislate directly; is there any state question which is more vital to the welfare of the people than the question of peace or war? War not only involves an enormous indebtedness but the sacrifice of life as well, and when war is once entered upon the termination of the controversy is not entirely in the hands of the nation, but may depend upon the action of other nations. Is it not of the first importance, therefore, that the people should be consulted before entering upon war?

The militarists will, of course, find all sorts of objections to anything which will delay them from cutting throats and blowing off heads. They act as if they thought they had a vested right in the killing of people and they resent any suggestion from members of congress even—and they would much more resent the thought of plain people—the kind who are killed in war—putting any restriction upon the whims and fancies of the professional soldier. But what about the plain people themselves—the ones that must die, if soldiers are necessary, and the ones who must pay the taxes that war imposes—what about them? Is there any reason why they should hesitate to demand a voice in the making of war?

It would not be difficult to draw an amendment to the constitution which would put the matter in the hands of the people at large, without lessening the security of the nation. A declaration of war might be submitted to the people for ratification before it became effective WITHOUT AT ALL IMPAIRING THE GOVERNMENT'S RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST AN ATTACK ACTUALLY MADE. It would not take long to test public opinion.

With our modern facilities for communication, a declaration of war could be officially submitted to the states within twenty-four hours after the action of congress, and the governors of the various states could call an election to be held within a month, or even within two weeks, if necessary. The whole country would be informed by newspapers within a week's time, and public discussion, immediately begun, would bring before the voters the facts that needed to be considered.

Who will question that such an amendment would be in harmony with the spirit of popular government? And who doubts that such a provision, once placed in the constitution, would exert a powerful influence upon the deliberations of congress?

And why not include in the amendment the right to refer to a public vote, the adoption of a policy such as is now urged, which involves

enormous preparations and affects the tone of our diplomacy? Why not allow the peace-loving masses to give formal expression to their ideals and aspirations, instead of leaving the field to the military expert, the manufacturer of war munitions and the papers controlled by special interests?

Let the people rule. Nowhere is their rule more needed than in deciding upon war policies—nowhere would their influence be more salutary.

W. J. BRYAN.

A LETTER ANSWERING SOME MISREPRESENTATIONS

Miami, Florida, Feb. 3, 1916.

Editor Plain Dealer,
Cleveland, Ohio.

My dear Sir:

I have not thought it wise, even if it were possible, to answer all the misrepresentations which appear in unfriendly papers, but I shall depart from my custom in this case, because the report to which you give endorsement and circulation, has no foundation and was answered by me immediately after it first appeared. I refer to the following:

"Mr. Bryan's conduct as head of the state department smacked of disloyalty, not only to his chief but to the country, when he privately assured Ambassador Dumba that the President's first note to Germany was to be taken at something less than face value."

If you have read the President's letter accepting my resignation you can have no excuse for accusing me of disloyalty to him, for the language of his letter is a sufficient commendation of my conduct while acting as a member of his cabinet.

Soon after my resignation one of the New York papers stated that I had given to Ambassador Dumba private assurances contradicting the language of the first note to Germany. I immediately published the facts, which were a complete answer to the charge, and I am surprised that it is repeated.

The President was in New York on the day when Ambassador Dumba called at the department, and I immediately reported to the President in writing the conversation which I had had with the ambassador and received the President's approval. A few days afterwards I learned that Ambassador Dumba's dispatch to his government had been misrepresented. I at once notified our ambassador at Berlin that I would secure from Ambassador Dumba a denial of the reported misrepresentation. I then called the ambassador to the state department, read over to him the written report of our conversation which I had made to the President, and received from him a statement endorsing the accuracy of my report to the President. The Ambassador's verification of my report of the conversation was cabled to Germany and Ambassador Dumba, in addition, sent a specific denial that he had received from me or had reported anything contrary to the report of the conversation which I had made to the President.

All of these facts were before the President at the time my resignation was offered and I have never received from him, either before or since my resignation, any intimation that he was dissatisfied with my conduct in the matter.

Pardon me if I add, in conclusion, that a paper like the Plain Dealer should be jealous enough of its reputation for veracity to satisfy itself of the truth of a charge before making it. But instead of doing so, it has repeated this false charge in an editorial based upon another groundless accusation, namely, that I intend to follow the President on his western trip. There is as little foundation for this statement as for the one in regard to Ambassador Dumba. I never intimated to any one that I intended to follow the President; on the contrary I immediately, upon hearing of his plan, expressed gratification that he was going before the people to state his position and give his reasons.

Surely, the legitimate discussion of public men and public measures gives ample room for fair criticism without resort to misrepresentation.

Very truly yours,

W. J. BRYAN.

ROOSEVELT'S THEN AND NOW

Mr. Roosevelt was president nearly eight years, why did he not THEN urge the preparedness which he urges NOW? The war, instead of justifying increased preparedness, furnishes two arguments AGAINST preparedness. First, it shows to what preparedness naturally leads, and, second, it is increasing our relative preparedness by exhausting other nations.

China's Backward Step

It is to be regretted that the people of China should have consented to a return to monarchy, and still more to be regretted that any citizen of the United States should have counseled a return.

It is considerable more than half a century ago since Henry Clay condemned the attitude of those half-hearted advocates of popular government who take the position that only a few are fitted for self government. He said that it was a reflection upon the Creator to say that He made people unfit for self government, and left them to be the victims of kings and emperors.

There are degrees of capacity for self government just as there are degrees of self restraint in individuals, but capacity for self government is a relative term and if those who are behind can never be fit for self government until they catch up with those who are in the lead, how can they ever prepare themselves unless, without experience and practice in self government, they make more rapid progress than those who have experience and practice? How can this space between the different groups be shortened if the favored ones maintain the progress that they ought to?

However, the people of each nation have a right to determine for themselves their form of government, and the people of the United States, recognizing the right of China to make the decision, can wish her well while she experiments again with an emperor. This republic, which was first to welcome her to the sisterhood of the republics, will await the opportunity to renew the welcome when her people again conclude to undertake the responsibilities of a government republican in character.

W. J. BRYAN.

SUMNER VS. LODGE

Charles Sumner said: "All history is a vain word and all experience is at fault, if large war preparations * * * have not been constant provocations of war. Pretended protectors against war, they have been the real instigators of war. They have excited the evil against which they were to guard. The habit of wearing arms in private life exercised a kindred influence."

Will New England stand by the wisdom of Sumner or allow Senator Lodge to teach it a new philosophy?

Yes, we take chances whatever we do. If we do NOT increase our rate of preparation we take chances of not being as well prepared as the jingoes want us to be, IF WAR ACTUALLY COMES. On the other hand, if we prepare for POSSIBILITIES instead of PROBABILITIES we run the risk of taking upon ourselves an enormous unnecessary burden and the additional risk of creating a military class and a war spirit which, together, would make war more probable.

Why not guarantee bank deposits? The banks in each district could guarantee the depositors in that district—no bank would be responsible beyond its own district. This was attempted when the present law was under consideration, but it was not thought wise to jeopardize passage by insisting upon it. The way is clear now and the country needs the law.

"Why not trust senators and representatives to do their duty without letters from their constituents?" ask the jingo journals. And then these same jingo journals proceed to misrepresent these same constituents and advise the laying of unnecessary taxes upon them to prepare for imaginary wars. Why not allow the constituents to speak for themselves? Because it would spoil the military game.

THE IDES OF NOVEMBER! BEWARE!

The war MAY come to an end at any time, in spite of the jingoes; and when it DOES stop the SCARES manufactured for the benefit of the manufacturers of munitions WILL SCARE NO LONGER. What will the voters do then to the senators and congressmen who allow themselves to be FRIGHTENED into voting ENORMOUS AND CONTINUING taxes upon the public? The ideof November will afford an injured and INDIGNANT people an opportunity to register a protest.