

# Limiting Presidential Campaign Expenditures

[By Frank B. Lord, Washington correspondent, in National Monthly.]

How much should it cost the people of this country to elect the president of the United States?

According to the figures available from the several statements of election expenses, filed under the campaign publicity laws with the clerk of the house of representatives by different committees, organizations and individuals, incident to the recent election, it cost the public in voluntary contributions more than five millions of dollars to conduct the campaign. This sum is more than was expended in most previous campaigns, but it is doubtless less than others cost, notably the two McKinley campaigns, when the figures reached such vast proportions that it would stagger the nation if they were ever to be disclosed. The probabilities are that the truth will never be made public by any one who was in a position to have accurate knowledge.

Estimates have set the sum which the late Mark Hanna raised and expended in the campaign of 1896, all the way from eight millions of dollars, and there is likelihood that the last-named figure is more nearly accurate than the first. Four years later a somewhat lesser amount was contributed and disbursed, and following the campaign of 1904 there was so much agitation of the subject of campaign expenditures, that the republicans, in power in all branches of the national government, were forced to pass a law which is still on the statute books, prohibiting corporations from making any money contributions whatsoever toward the election of presidential electors or representatives in congress. That was the first step taken in the direction of preventing corrupt practices in national elections. It was largely due to the efforts put forth by a campaign publicity organization of which the Hon. Perry Belmont was the president and the moving spirit.

The republicans had been reluctant to pass any laws which would deny them the privilege of "frying the fat" out of rich corporations which were the beneficiaries of their legislation, were practically obliged to yield to the demand for this measure as a result of the insurance investigations in New York, which disclosed that many thousands of dollars belonging to stockholders had been taken by the directors of these concerns, as well as other corporations, and turned into the coffers of the republican campaign committees to aid in influencing elections.

### Democrats First on Publicity

In the campaign of 1908, Mr. Bryan suggested the idea of popular contributions solicited through the medium of the newspapers of the country. The idea was adopted by the democratic national committee and scores of democratic journals opened their columns for contributions, with the result that a large portion of the meager fund which the democratic national committee had for the legitimate expenses of that campaign was raised by the newspapers of the country. Then, too, for the first time in any campaign by any party the democratic national committee voluntarily published from week to week prior to the election, a statement of its re-

ceipts and expenditures, as well as the sources from which its income had been derived. It called upon the republican national committee to follow its example and make public the names of its campaign fund contributors and the purposes for which its money had been expended. This challenge was not accepted though it could not be wholly ignored.

Defining the republican position on the subject ex-President Roosevelt in an open letter to Mr. Bryan, dated September 27, 1908, in reply to a letter by Mr. Bryan in which he had called attention to the contributions made to the fund for the election of Mr. Hughes, late republican candidate for president, as governor of New York, said:

"I emphatically approve of the publication of campaign expenses after the election, whether provided by law or not. You have shown by this letter of yours that if the contribution to Mr. Hughes' campaign fund had been made public before election, you and those who act with you would have striven to give a false impression that Mr. Hughes was unfitted to be intrusted with the position of governor; and you have shown by this letter of yours that if Mr. Harriman's contribution to the campaign fund of 1904 (and incidentally I may mention that I am informed that this particular contribution was not used for the national campaign at all, but in the New York state campaign) had been made known before the election, you and your supporters would have endeavored to use the fact of its having been made as an insincere and untruthful argument to show that I could not be intrusted to deal out exact justice to Mr. Harriman. No stronger argument against your proposition has yet been advanced than this you have unconsciously advanced."

The same position was taken by the republicans in congress two years later when a campaign publicity measure was forced upon them and they declined to require publicity before election, although they did provide for the filing of a statement of collections and expenditures, after election. It was not until the democrats came into control of the house of representatives in the Sixty-second congress that a real campaign publicity law was enacted which required the filing of statements concerning campaign funds before as well as after election, and which also placed a limit of \$10,000 upon the amount which any candidate for the senate might expend for his nomination and election, and a limit of \$5,000 upon the sum which might similarly be expended by a candidate for the house of representatives.

### Two Parties Spent \$4,000,000

Throughout the entire fight for the elimination of corrupt practices in national elections the republicans have stubbornly opposed each step in the legislation proposed. They are continuing that opposition now as they did in the recent session of congress when they prevented consideration of the Owen corrupt practices bill which is regarded as the last word in the way of purifying national elections by the limitation of the use of money.

The cost of the recent campaign to the democratic national committee was in the neighborhood of \$1,800,000. The republican committee col-

lected, according to their statements, a fund which exceeded two millions of dollars. Thus more than four millions of dollars was the cost to the two major campaign committees. To be added to this amount are the funds of National Hughes Alliance, its auxiliary woman's branch and other women's organizations which worked for the election of Mr. Hughes, the fund of the Wilson Independent League and kindred bodies, the amounts expended by the progressive party committee as well as by the socialists, the national committee of the prohibitionist party and various individuals acting independent of the committees, but who, under the law, are required to file a statement of their expenditures. Among the individuals are such men as John Wanamaker and Henry Ford whose expenditures were chiefly confined to moneys paid out for advertising purposes. The expenditures of these several organizations and persons aggregate more than a million of dollars and serve to bring the total cost of the recent election to voluntary contributors to a figure far in excess of five millions of dollars.

In thus computing the cost of the election no account whatever is taken of the vast sum which is legally expended by the states in actually holding the election, such as the payment to election officials, the cost of printing official ballots, advertising and other necessary expenses. Consideration is here given only to the cost of conducting the canvass in behalf of the various candidates. For this there is no public money avail-

able, and in every instance the funds employed were, as in all campaigns, raised by private subscription.

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