

C. W. Bryan Suggests All Should Help Carry War Burden

[From the Nebraska State Journal, August 10.]

"In order to strengthen the hands of the government," says ex-Mayor Charles W. Bryan, "it is the duty of the people to see that when soldiers go away to enter the army they can do so in full confidence that the folks they leave at home will not fall victims to war profiteers. A man called into the army will go much more cheerfully if he can be assured that the government is able and willing to protect his family from being imposed on in the purchase of necessary supplies.

"This matter is vital to the success of the war. The number of claims for exemption is increased, I feel sure, by a general feeling that the people at home, and especially the business men, are not prepared to make as heavy sacrifices as are demanded of the men in the ranks. This is a time for equal participation in the war and equal sacrifice. The general government is moving to secure this equality. In order that Lincoln and Nebraska may do their share, I respectfully make the following suggestions:

"First—That the city council of Lincoln meet at once in special session and make the sale of vegetables and other products free to all persons in Lincoln by repealing the present ordinance which virtually keeps hucksters off the streets. The ordinance was passed as an aid to a food monopoly and should be repealed.

"Second—The council should fix a standard weight for a loaf of bread, so that the people can tell how much they are paying and so that they may make intelligent comparison of prices.

"Third—The city council should establish a public market at a central location, where producer and consumer could meet without charge for stall rent during the war.

"Fourth—The mayor should be authorized to purchase and sell food and fuel during the war, similar to the powers now being conferred on the President.

"Fifth—A well defined feeling exists that there have been unreasonable profits in flour, fuel, produce and other necessities. If this is not well founded, business men should be free of suspicion. If they are guilty they should be prosecuted, publicly condemned and socially ostracised, and a repetition of the offense made impossible. To find out and to clear the atmosphere, I suggest a committee appointed by the city council or a public meeting, a committee having the confidence of the public, which shall confidentially investigate the books of dealers in coal, flour, produce and other necessities, and let the

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public know whether these dealers should be vindicated or condemned.

"Sixth—The legislature should be called in special session, members and employes serving without pay, to pass laws granting the state officers the right to determine what was a "reasonable profit" in connection with the purchase and sale of food, fuel and clothing, and be empowered to enforce their findings and to work in harmony with the efforts of the national administration to protect the public against 'trade patriots.'"

MR. BRYAN'S PROPOSALS

Commenting on the above proposals, the Nebraska State Journal said editorially:

"It would be useless to deny that back of former Mayor Bryan's proposal for dealing with the local food situation there lies a considerable body of public opinion.

"Mr. Bryan urges that the ordinances restraining huckstering, which he says, were 'passed as an aid to a food monopoly,' be repealed in order that anyone with produce to sell may be free to sell it as he pleases. These ordinances were adopted to protect established business men from irresponsible competition. But they have resulted in limiting the handling of produce to those permanently in that business, save only those few farmers who care to peddle produce of their own growing. This does not set up an individual monopoly, but it does limit the business to the one form and method. Now that individuals in any line of business are generally organized into associations which temper competition, the public has at least superficial grounds for fearing the existence of monopolistic elements in distribution. Merely because the repeal of these ordinances would disarm these suspicions, the merchants affected can well afford to favor the repeal. It will not harm any legitimate interest, while increasing public good feeling toward business.

"Mr. Bryan's suggestion that the council fix and enforce a standard weight for bread needs no argument. The repeal of the standard weight ordinance was brought about for no purpose but to facilitate the raising of the price of bread. The city council was not thinking of the consumers' interests when it made that mistake. Correction should be made at the earliest possible moment.

"The third suggestion of Mr. Bryan is the familiar plea for a free public market. We do not believe that such a market, in these days of telephones, will answer as broad a purpose as such markets served in former days. Not many housewives will go long distances to a public market, nor is it economical for them to do so. But the more needy would probably be helped by such a market, and as a place for wholesale dealings in produce it might be very valuable. The public would feel, moreover, that such a market provided a salutary check on prices and a stimulus to production.

"As to Mr. Bryan's further suggestion that the mayor be authorized in behalf of the city to purchase and sell food and fuel during the war, and that a committee of the city council make confidential investigations of the profits of local distributors of necessities, this would perhaps be unnecessary if the previous suggestions were followed. What the public wants to know and has a right to know is that it is not being taken advantage of under cover of war prices. It is doubtful whether the satisfaction of this need requires any radical proceeding such as the fixing of prices and profits by state action. The work of the federal authorities will probably suffice in that field. But in no way can the business men who are sacrificing their time and strength in

local war work better convince the public of the disinterestedness of their patriotism than by helping to clear up all suspicion of war profiteering in the distribution of the necessities of life."

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