

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Vol. 3. No. 11.

Lincoln, Nebraska, April 3, 1903.

Whole No. 115.

Missouri Hits the Trusts.

The Missouri supreme court has found five great beef packing companies guilty of maintaining an unlawful combination to control the price of beef in that state, and has levied a fine of five thousand dollars on each of the companies. The opinion of the court was unanimous, and the companies affected are the Armour, Cudahy, Hammond, Swift, and Schwarzchild and Sulzburger companies.

A fine of five thousand dollars in such a case is, of course, insignificant when compared with the profits made by the companies, and this calls attention to the fact that in large violations of the law the punishments are not in proportion to the magnitude of the offence. It may be said that from a moral standpoint the crime is as great when one steals a small amount as when he steals a large amount, and yet it is well known that public opinion does not condemn large violations as it does small violations, and therefore the pecuniary penalty ought to be great enough to protect the public from repeated infractions of the law. In the cases mentioned, the fines imposed, while they may be the maximum fines allowed under the law, will hardly restrain the companies from another conspiracy against the public. The court could, upon the evidence, have prohibited them from doing business in the state, and yet such a judgment might have hurt the people of the state as much as the corporations.

These cases bring plainly to view the inability of one state alone to furnish a complete or satisfactory remedy and prove the wisdom of the Kansas City platform, which suggested a federal remedy.

The present anti-trust law, the Sherman law, is sufficiently broad to cover such a conspiracy against trade as that formed by the packers, and, if enforced by imprisonment, would strike terror into the hearts of the trust magnates. But the present law only relates to conspiracies between separate individuals or corporations. Another remedy is necessary when a number of corporations are merged in one and the one corporation controls the market. In the case recently tried in Missouri it was shown that five distinct and separate corporations conspired together to fix the price of meat, but suppose the five corporations should consolidate, and form one corporation? The injury to the public would be even greater because, instead of having to agree among themselves, the corporation would act as a unit, and yet if such a consolidation was formed neither the Sherman anti-trust law nor the anti-trust laws of the various states would reach the evil. The Kansas City platform remedy does, however, reach this very evil, and that remedy added to the present remedy, and the two remedies enforced by an administration really in sympathy with the public, would kill the trusts.

Let the criminal clause of the anti-trust law be enforced against the officials of the various corporations if they combine against the public, and then let congress declare that large corporations, before engaging in interstate commerce, must secure a permit from the federal government which permit can be granted only upon conditions that will make a private monopoly impossible.

The state of Missouri is to be congratulated upon the enforcing of its state law against these powerful companies, and the federal government is to be censured for not having used the criminal law against these same corporations. But congress and the administration cannot escape blame for failure to enact the legislation needed to protect the public from trust extortion. The failure of the president and congress to do something really effective shows how absurd it is to expect the trusts to be killed so long as the government is in the hands of officials who secure election through the aid of contributions collected from the corporations.

The Cincinnati Situation.

The Commoner is asked whether it will apply to the Cincinnati situation the same argument that was made two years ago when Rolla Wells was nominated for mayor of St. Louis. Yes, the readers of The Commoner will remember that objection was made to the nomination of Mr. Wells by the democratic party, and the reason given was that the party should not be held responsible for the conduct of a man who rejected the principles of the party as set forth in the national platform. But at the same time The Commoner suggested that whenever it became necessary to take non-partisan action in municipal affairs it should be done through an independent nomination. Mr. Ingalls of Cincinnati has been nominated for mayor by an independent movement, and has not been endorsed by the democratic convention. He does not, therefore, stand in the attitude that Mr. Wells did. Whether the local democrats should support him is a question which they can decide for themselves. They do not need advice from without, because no outsider can be as well informed about the conditions that they have to meet. The fact that Mr. Ingalls is not in harmony with all of the Kansas City platform is not in itself conclusive proof that he is incompetent for the place because he does not deal with national questions. His views on the local questions that are up for settlement are more important. It has been suggested that if elected mayor he will become a candidate for governor, and afterward for president. If he does, the democrats will scrutinize his views on national questions. Not being a democratic candidate he cannot appeal to democrats as a party nominee. Democrats should vote for him or against him according to their opinion of his merits. It would be a reflection upon the intelligence of the people of Cincinnati and Ohio to assume that they could not distinguish between the availability for a city office and availability for a higher office which must deal with other questions.

The fact that Mr. Ingalls is the president of a railroad suggests that his sympathies may be on the side of the corporations in contests between them and the people as a whole, and this might effect his action in matters of taxation and on questions effecting municipal ownership, but his position on these subjects ought to be made known either by his platform or by the speeches which he makes. The Commoner would urge independence in the selection of municipal officials. Men ought to be judged upon their merits and upon their ability to meet existing conditions, rather than because of their membership in a national political party. In some of the smaller cities no party nominations are made, all the candidates being brought out either by petition or by movements organized for the securing of some specific reform, or the enforcing of some line of policy. Much of the corruption in the large cities is due to the fact that the political machine, strengthened by the patronage it has to dispose of, controls nominations and forces unworthy men upon the party. If every one felt free to decide between men, considering only their character and the policies for which they stand, a great advance would be made toward pure local government.

The republican party in Cincinnati is dominated by a political boss and must also be considered. Whether Mr. Ingalls is the man best fitted to overthrow him is a question for the voters to determine.

The reorganizers are making an effort to capture the democratic convention about to be held in the Wichita, Kas., district to nominate a candidate to succeed Senator Long. It behooves the loyal democrats to be on their guard. We need more voters in the democratic party than the railroad attorneys, financiers and federal office-seekers can supply, and we cannot expect to get them unless the democratic party stands boldly and consistently for the rights of the people on all questions. And nowhere is Kansas City platform democracy more essential than in the western states.

Harmony and Harmony.

The editor of The Commoner has received an unsigned letter—such letters are usually unsigned—asking why Mr. Bryan is not willing to work for "democratic harmony;" why he does not "make an effort to unite all men believing in democratic principles;" why he "keeps up a war in the democratic camp?" This unknown correspondent insists that "peace and harmony are essential to success," and suggests that Mr. Bryan ought to "try to rehabilitate the democratic party and bring it into public favor." As a clincher he asks who is to be "the proper judge or judges of genuine, sound and sterling democracy?"

There are other things in the letter which indicate that the writer's sympathies are really with those who bolted the ticket rather than with those who supported the party in recent campaigns, but an answer is given for the benefit of those readers who have to meet these inquiries.

Mr. Bryan is interested in securing democratic harmony, and certainly has more personal reason to regret a lack of harmony in the party than the men who, after voting for the republican ticket, now clamor so loudly about "letting by-gones be by-gones." Mr. Cleveland was elected by the democratic party in 1892, and no one will seriously dispute the fact that he proceeded at once, knowingly and wilfully, to misrepresent the people who elected him upon an issue which his own conduct made paramount for the time being. Waiving for the present the right of a party nominee to betray those who nominated him and to barter away the suffrages that he had received, it is sufficient to say that Mr. Cleveland was the greatest disturber of party harmony of the present generation. Never before in the history of the party did a democratic president undertake to change the party's attitude upon a great public question, or to force upon the party as a party measure a bill identical in purpose and almost identical in language, with a bill drawn by the leaders of the opposing party. This Mr. Cleveland did. The bill introduced by Congressman Wilson in August, 1893, was almost an exact copy of a bill introduced for the same purpose by Senator John Sherman a year before.

The president's action was made the issue in the fight for delegates to the national convention of 1896, and in spite of the influence of patronage, the influence of money and the influence of all the great corporations, the rank and file of the party by a large majority repudiated the president's policy and adopted a platform that in effect condemned his course and pointed out a course directly opposite.

This was the most democratic convention held in fifty years and probably the most democratic ever held in the United States. Seldom, if ever, before had a battle been waged between the voters at the primaries on a definite principle, and never before did a convention more perfectly reflect the sentiments of the voters of the party. What was the result? The administration and all who could be influenced by the administration, the great financiers, the great corporation lawyers and all who held their service to corporation above their party allegiance, joined in an effort to defeat the democratic ticket and elect the republican ticket. Some of these bolting democrats went directly into the republican party and have been there ever since; some stopped half way, and tried to organize a new democratic party. Having failed in this, some of these went over to the republican party and some returned to the democratic fold. Of the prominent ones who returned nearly all boasted of what they had done, and few have ever announced a change of heart or a change of opinion upon public questions. They now demand harmony. And at what price? The