

MR. BRYAN AND GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP

Mr. Bryan's statement at Louisville with respect to his position on government ownership follows:

Before addressing myself to other subjects, which I wish to discuss, I beg your indulgence while I present a statement in regard to one question concerning which my attitude has, to some extent, been misrepresented.

In my speech at the New York reception I made some remarks concerning the government ownership of railways and I thought that I had expressed myself so clearly that my position could not be misconstrued even by those who desired to misconstrue it. The New York speech was prepared in advance. It was not only written, but it was carefully revised. It stated exactly what I wanted to state and I have nothing to withdraw or modify in the statement therein made. What I say tonight is rather in the nature of an elaboration of the ideas therein presented.

After quoting from the democratic platform of 1900 that "a private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable," and after laying it down as a principle that public ownership should begin where competition ends and that the people should have the benefit of any monopoly that might be found necessary, I stated that I had reached the conclusion "that railroads partake so much of the nature of a monopoly that they must ultimately become public property and be managed by public officials in the interests of the whole community." I added: "I do not know that the country is ready for this legislation. I do not know that the majority of my own party favors it, but I believe that an increasing number of the members of all parties see in public ownership a sure remedy for discrimination between persons and places and for the extortionate rates for the carrying of freight and passengers."

I then proceeded to outline a system of public ownership whereby the advantages of public ownership might be secured to the people without the dangers of centralization. This system contemplates federal ownership of the trunk lines only and the ownership of local lines by the several states. I further expressed it as my opinion that the railroads themselves were responsible for the growth of the sentiment in favor of public ownership and said that, while I believed that the rate bill recently enacted should be given a fair trial, we might expect to see the railroads still more active in politics unless our experience with them differed from the experience we had had with franchise holding corporations.

This statement of my views has been assailed by some as an attempt to force these views upon the democratic party, and by some as an announcement of an intention to insist upon the incorporation of these views in the next democratic national platform.

Let me answer these two charges. I have tried to make it clear that I expressed my own opinion and I have never sought to compel the acceptance of my opinion by any one else. Reserving the right to do my own thinking, I respect the right of every one else to do his thinking. I have too much respect for the rights of others to ask them to accept any views that I may entertain unless those views commend themselves to others and I have too much confidence in the independent thought in my own party to expect that any considerable number of democrats would acknowledge my right to do their thinking for them even if I were undemocratic enough to assert such a right.

As to platforms, I have contended always that they should be made by the voters. I have, in my speeches and through my paper, insisted that the platform should be the expression of the wishes of the voters of the party and not be the arbitrary production of one man or a few leaders.

If you ask me whether the question of government ownership will be an issue in the campaign of 1908, I answer, I do not know. If you ask me whether it ought to be in the platform, I reply, I can not tell until I know what the democratic voters think upon the subject. If the democrats believe that the next platform should contain a plank in favor of government ownership, then that plank ought to be included. If the democrats think it ought not to contain such a plank, then such a plank ought not to be included. It rests with the party to make the platform and individuals can only advise. I have spoken for myself and for myself only, and I did not know how the suggestion would be received.

I am now prepared to confess to you that it has been received more favorably than I expected. It has not been treated as harshly as I thought possibly it would be treated. That it would be denounced bitterly by some I fully expected; that it would be gravely discussed by others I hoped. There is this, however, that I do expect, namely, that those democrats who opposed government ownership will accompany their declaration against it with the assertion that they will favor government ownership whenever they are convinced that the country must choose between government ownership of the roads and railroad ownership of the government. I can not conceive how a democrat can announce himself as opposed to government ownership, no matter to what extent the railroads carry their interference with politics and their corruption of officials. I think I may also reasonably expect that democrats who oppose government ownership will say that if government ownership must come, they prefer a system whereby the state may be preserved and the centralizing influence be reduced to a minimum. Such a plan I have proposed, and I have proposed it because I want the people to consider it and not be driven to the federal ownership of all railroads as the only alternative to private ownership. The dual plan of federal ownership of trunk lines and state ownership of local lines not only preserves the state, and even strengthens its position, but it permits the gradual adoption of government ownership as the people of different sections are ready to adopt it.

I have been slow in reaching this position and I can therefore be patient with those who now stand where I stood for years, urging strict regulation and hoping that that would be found feasible. I still advocate strict regulation and shall rejoice if experience proves that that regulation can be made effective. I will go farther than that and say that I believe we can have more efficient regulation under a democratic administration with a democratic senate and house than we are likely to have under a republican administration with a republican senate and house, and yet I would not be honest with you if I did not frankly admit that observation has convinced me that no such efficient regulation is possible and that government ownership can be undertaken on the plan outlined with less danger to the country than is involved in private ownership as we have had it or as we are likely to have it. I have been brought to regard public ownership as the ultimate remedy by railroad history which is as familiar to you as to me. Among the reasons that have led me to believe that we must, in the end, look to government ownership for relief, I shall mention two or three. First and foremost is the corrupting influence of the railroad in politics. There is not a state in the union that has not felt this influence to a greater or less extent. The railroads have insisted upon controlling legislatures; they have insisted upon naming executives; they have insisted upon controlling the nomination and appointment of judges; they have endeavored to put their representatives on tax boards that they might escape just taxation; they have watered their stock, raised their rates and enjoined the states whenever they have attempted to regulate rates; they have obstructed legislation when hostile to them and advanced, by secret means, legislation favorable to them. Let me give you an illustration:

The interstate commerce law was enacted nineteen years ago. After about nine years this was practically nullified by the supreme court, and for ten years the railroad influence has been sufficient in the senate and house to prevent an amendment asked for time and again by the interstate commerce commission. That railroad influence has been strong enough to keep the republican party from adopting any platform declaration in favor of rate regulation. When the president, following the democratic platform, insisted upon regulation he was met with the opposition of the railroads and every step, every point gained in favor of the people was gained after a strenuous fight. The bill was improved by an amendment proposed by Senator Stone, of Missouri, restoring the criminal penalty which had been taken out of the interstate commerce law by the Elkins law. This same amendment had been presented, in substance, in the house, by Congressman James of Kentucky, and had been defeated by republican votes. The bill was further improved by an amendment proposed by Senator Culberson, of Texas, forbidding the use of passes and it should have been still further improved by the amend-

ment proposed by Senator Bailey of Texas, limiting the court review, but the railroad influence was strong enough to defeat this amendment.

I have no idea that the railroads are going to permit regulation without a struggle and I fear that their influence will be strong enough to very much delay, if it does not entirely defeat, remedial legislation. You, in this state, know something of the railroad in politics. When I visited the state and spoke for Mr. Goebel I heard him charge upon every platform that the railroads were spending large sums in opposition to his election and I have always believed that the railroad influence was largely responsible for the assassination of that brave defender of the rights of the people.

Another reason which has led me to favor government ownership, is the fact that the people are annually plundered of an enormous sum by extortionate rates; that places are discriminated against and individuals driven out of business by favoritism shown by the railroads. You say that all these things can be corrected without interference with private ownership. I shall be glad if experience proves that they can be, but I no longer hope for it. President Roosevelt, although expressing himself against government ownership, has announced that only successful regulation can prevent government ownership. Is there any democrat who is not willing to go as far as President Roosevelt and admit the necessity of government ownership in case the people are convinced of the failure of regulation? I can not believe it.

Then, while we attempt to make regulation effective, while we endeavor to make the experiment under the most favorable conditions, namely with the democratic party in power, let us not hesitate to inform the railroads that they must keep out of politics; that they must keep their hands off of legislation; that they must abstain from interfering with the party machinery and warn them that they can only maintain their private control of the railroads by accepting such regulation as the people may see fit to apply in their own interest and for their own protection. Without this threat our cause would be hopeless. It remains to be seen whether, with this threat, we shall be able to secure justice to the shippers, to the traveling public and to the taxpayers.

THE CUBAN INSURRECTION

The administration is to be commended for recalling the troops landed in Havana, doubtless before the complications that must follow intervention by the government were given serious consideration. We should do all in our power to bring about peace by offering the good offices of this government. We can not, however, rush in every time the Cuban people have a little internal strife. A Paris newspaper gave us a valuable hint when it said: "The United States helped Cuba to liberty, and will not take the first opportunity to withdraw it."

It was charged from the first that the Platt amendment was intended to give warrant for a land grabbing expedition whenever occasion should provide a plausible excuse and the United States must do nothing to confirm this accusation.

The pathway of popular government is not strewn with roses. Constant struggle and the best thought have been necessary in the past and will be required in the future among all men who hope to establish and maintain a government of, for and by the people. We of the United States have not been free from troubles in the past and even at this moment some very perplexing problems confront us and some very dire predictions are made by our critics in the old world. These critics even yet call the great American republic an "experiment," and it remains with the Americans of the present day to justify the theories of the fathers, just as it remains with the Cubans to work out their own salvation. They must settle their disputes among themselves. The United States government can help them materially in the office of the impartial mediator; but it is not the part of wisdom either for the welfare of our own people or the future of Cuba that we interfere in the local affairs of the little island over which the flag of the United States was raised in high honor only to be lowered to its greater glory.