

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

VOL. 9, NO. 15

Lincoln, Nebraska, April 23, 1909

Whole Number 431

The Future of the Democratic Party

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(Printed in March number of Munsey's Magazine, copyrighted and reproduced by permission.)

The disappointment and exultation which naturally follow an election are apt to distort the vision. Members of the successful party overestimate their party's strength, and those who belong to the defeated party are likely to feel more or less despondent. The republicans, as a matter of course, having elected their presidential ticket in four successive campaigns, face the future with confidence; while the democrats, looking back over four defeats, can be forgiven for feeling a bit disheartened.

Every intelligent estimate of the future must begin with a survey of the past, and possibly that survey can be more accurately made after election than during a campaign. When we have answered the question, "What of the past?" we shall be better prepared to consider the question, "What of the future?"

The last sixteen years have witnessed one of the greatest internal struggles through which any party has ever passed. In 1892 the democratic presidential candidate was elected; he received a large popular plurality, as well as a majority in the electoral college, and the party secured an overwhelming majority of the national house of representatives. The tariff was the paramount issue, the democratic party having taken an advanced position on that question. Although the money question entered into the campaign to a slight extent, it was but little discussed.

No sooner had the result been announced than an effort was made to secure legislation on the money question. Before Mr. Cleveland was inaugurated, his representatives appeared before congress and urged the passage of a bill repealing the purchasing clause of the Sherman law. This effort was unsuccessful, but in August congress met in extraordinary session to consider the money question as presented in a bill carrying the repeal into effect. The fight over this divided the democratic party, and the resultant bitterness of feeling left its members in no mood for harmonious action upon the tariff question, which came up for consideration at the regular session. The panic of 1893 came on, and in the congressional election of 1894 the republicans won a victory almost as sweeping as the democratic victory two years before.

The Presidential Campaign of 1896

Then came the democratic national convention of 1896, in which the two elements of the party struggled for mastery. The question was fought out at the primaries, the issue not being over

concession returned to the advocacy of progressive measures. In 1908 the policy of the party was again the issue at the primaries, and at Denver the progressive element of the party controlled the convention, having between four-fifths and nine-tenths of the total membership. The platform was clear-cut and aggressive. The party was apparently more harmonious than it had been before in fourteen years; and yet, when the polls closed, the republican ticket was again found to be successful, having a little larger majority in the electoral college than it had in 1900. The republican vote, however, was about the same as in 1904, while the democratic vote increased by more than a million; the democrats secured United States senators in Oregon and Indiana, and substituted democratic governors for republicans in Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska and Colorado, besides re-electing democratic governors in Minnesota and North Dakota. There was also a gain in the democratic representation in congress.

In the campaign just closed, the republican party had a fund of one million six hundred thousand dollars for its national campaign—not to speak of the congressional fund, which has not been published—while the democratic national committee collected only a little more than six hundred thousand. The republicans had an army of government officials, national and state, in the contested states—men who drew their salaries from the public treasury and who had a pecuniary reason for political activity. Fully three-fourths of the newspapers in the contested states were republican; indeed, measured by circulation, the newspaper opposition to the democratic party outnumbered its support by possibly six to one or eight to one.

The Campaigns of 1900 and 1904

Besides this, the republican party had the support of all of the corporations known as trusts; and the railroads, insofar as they took part in the campaign, were on the side of the administration. Mr. Brown, a vice president of the New York Central system, was quoted after the election as saying that he had confirmed purchases to the amount of thirty-one millions of dollars, which were made on orders given before the election, contingent upon republican victory.

In 1900 the convention was quite harmonious, the only fight being over the money plank, and that was not carried into the convention. In the committee there was a close vote between those who wanted to reiterate the silver plank and those who were willing to reaffirm the platform containing the silver plank, but who opposed specific reference to the silver question. In that year, however, the party was embarrassed by the injection of a new issue—imperialism—into the campaign. The republican party had the advantage which follows the successful conclusion of a war, while the democrats were charged with prolonging the insurrection in the Philippine Islands by their insistence on a promise of ultimate independence to the Filipinos.

The republican party also had the advantage of having its candidate considered conservative in the east and radical in the Mississippi valley. East of the Alleghenies he had the enthusiastic support of those republicans who denounce President Roosevelt, and in the west he had the support, equally enthusiastic, of the republicans who indorse the administration. And yet with all of these advantages, the republican ticket came within less than one hundred thousand votes of being defeated.

The Victory a Narrow One

The prosperity argument used by the republicans was even more potent. The country was recovering from the panic of 1893, and the "full dinner pail" argument was used among the laboring men, while the "let well enough alone" argument had weight with the farmers. A number of the democratic leaders who had left in 1896 supported the party in 1900, and some of the democratic newspapers returned. The ticket was defeated, however, a little worse than in 1896—the republican plurality being about nine hundred thousand.

In 1904 the reactionary element secured control of the democratic organization, mainly by using the argument that radicalism had caused two severe defeats and that conservatism would insure victory. Success clubs were formed, and "We must win" was made the battle cry. New York furnished the candidate—a man of high character, who possessed, as was conceded even by the republican press, the confidence of the business world.

In the campaign the democratic party had the support of nearly every democrat of prominence, and of all the democratic newspapers that bolted in 1896; but the republican victory surprised even the republican leaders. Those at the head of the republican organization did not estimate their majorities high enough by half. When the votes were counted it was found that the republican ticket had a popular plurality of about two and a half millions. This was mainly due to a falling off of a million and a quarter in the democratic vote; for the republican vote was only a little more than four hundred thousand greater than that party's vote four years before.

As soon as the smoke of battle cleared away it became evident that the democratic party would again be a reform party. Those who had been willing to experiment with compromise and

CONTENTS

THE FUTURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY
KEEP PEGGING AWAY
STOP THE GAMBLING
AN ILLINOIS MERCHANT'S REPLY TO MARSHALL FIELD & CO
EDUCATIONAL SERIES—WHERE EVERY PENNY COUNTS
HOW THE TARIFF AFFECTS YOU
THE TWENTY-THREE BOLTING "DEMOCRATS"
THE CLASS IN ARITHMETIC GOVERNMENT BY THE REPUBLICAN PARTY
COMMENT ON CURRENT TOPICS
LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE
"ROOSEVELT'S POLICIES ARE NOW IN THE DITCH"
HOME DEPARTMENT
WHETHER COMMON OR NOT
NEWS OF THE WEEK