

WICKERSHAM'S CHARGE

Attorney-General Wickersham says that the law of supply and demand no longer controls; that FOR YEARS the prices of ALL THE GREAT STAPLE INDUSTRIES have been FIXED BY AGREEMENT among the principal producers. What an indictment to bring against four terms of republican rule! The administrations have been republican during all these years, and until March 4, last, the senate and house were in sympathy with the president. How will republicans explain this neglect of the interests of the people? Was it due to failure to enforce the laws? Or was the law insufficient? And, if so, why did not republican presidents, senators and congressmen recommend and pass new and sufficient laws? The democrats have criticised the republican party but it is doubtful if any democrat has used harsher language than Attorney-General Wickersham does when he declares that the law of supply and demand has been suspended and that prices are fixed by combination.

SOCIALISTIC MR. WICKERSHAM

In his address before the Minnesota State Bar association at Duluth, Attorney-General Wickersham outlined with approval a course of action that should be highly satisfactory to the socialist party.

The law of supply and demand, said Mr. Wickersham, no longer controls prices in the United States. For years the prices in all the great staple industries have been fixed by agreement among the principal producers and not by a normal play of free competition. Therefore, declared the attorney-general of the United States, the interstate commerce commission, should be given power to fix the prices of commodities just as it prescribes the rates to be charged by the railroads.

This is a most remarkable assertion to come from the cabinet officer responsible for the enforcement of laws designed to insure the play of free competition. It is worthy of note that Mr. Wickersham's recommendation is in line with recent declarations made by the head of the United States Steel corporation, Judge Gary, who wants the government to step in and fix the prices of steel products.

Mr. Wickersham jumps lightly to the conclusion that regulation of railroad rates by the government constitutes a precedent for the fixing of prices of commodities by the government. There is a fundamental difference between a public enterprise such as a railroad and private business, supposed to be competitive. The activities of the former can not be carried on at all without a grant of special privileges by government, such as franchises and the right to invoke the power of eminent domain. On the other hand any one ought to be free to engage in private business.

It is not a long step from the policy of fixing prices for commodities to the adoption of the socialistic program of common ownership and operation of all the means of production. In the public utility field the alternative to effective public control is public ownership. But are the American people willing to follow Mr. Wickersham in conceding that the same principle is properly applicable to industries heretofore considered private and competitive in their nature?

Why not try the policy of seeking to restore the conditions that will make competition possible? This means, for one thing, taking the control of public service agencies, like the railroads, out of the hands of the men who are stifling competition in the production and sale of commodities. It means the removal of protective tariff duties from articles that are subjects of monopoly control and the modification of patent laws that have been manipulated in the interest of oppressive trusts.—Chicago Daily News.

WORLDWIDE

In England the house of lords is expected to save itself by consenting to the practical abolition of its power to veto the action of the commons. In America the senate bows to the public demand for the popular election of its members.

The progress of democracy is a world movement. Imperial Germany and republican France have much the same programs of governmental activity. The "activity" is for enlarging the rights of the plain people, and these rights are not the abstract eighteenth century "rights of man." They are concrete rights to eat, to work, to be healthy and to be safe.

The Lloyd-George budget of the English Asquith ministry was the relative counterpart of

the Kansas platform drafted by Governor Stubbs and William Allen White. Roosevelt's Osawatimie speech was the same thing.

The genius of democracy is doing very well, thank you. It does as well, incidentally, where there is a written constitution as where there isn't. A written constitution, lacking elasticity, sometimes, of course, impedes progress—impedes it, that is, until the public gets its mind well made up as to what it wants and then the written constitution means what the people want it to mean.

If you don't believe that the meaning of a written constitution changes without a change of words, consider the instance following: The supreme court of the United States held in the case of Munn vs. Illinois back in the '70s that a public service corporation took its franchise subject to any later conditions the people who granted it might impose. If the legislature demanded a rate which confiscated the investment that was unfortunate, but was a risk which the investors had taken.

Without any amendment of the constitution the court deserted the Munn case and nullified regulating statutes which did not appear to the court to be fair. The pendulum of constitutional construction is now swinging back though it may never get back to the judgment (or was it obiter dictum) of Chief Justice Waite.

Now, the point is that an organic law which changes under many influences—judicial death, judicial appointment, popular pressure, special privilege pressure, etc.—is not a barrier which democracy may not overleap. It may be dangerous and tedious to depend upon "construction" for the law. But, lacking a better way, it serves.

At any event, here is a worldwide movement of democracy making fairly even progress in kingdoms and republics, under constitutions and over no constitutions, and connecting up races as remote of kin as Anglo-Saxon and Turk and Japanese.—Kansas City Star.

SENATOR BAILEY'S OPINIONS

Senator Bailey is quoted as saying: "He (Mr. Bryan) has been three times the presidential nominee of our party and each defeat was more decisive than the preceding one." Senator Bailey adds that with such a record it would be only natural that "Mr. Bryan would modestly distrust his capacity to select a successful candidate."

This might be a reason why Mr. Bryan should not be a candidate himself but, as Mr. Bryan did not select himself, why should Mr. Bryan leave the selection of a candidate to Senator Bailey? What skill has the senator shown in selecting successful candidates?

Mr. Bailey was largely instrumental in selecting Judge Parker in 1904 and Judge Parker polled a million and a quarter less votes than Mr. Bryan. What is there in this record to justify Senator Bailey in assuming to pick out a winning candidate now?

But that is not Senator Bailey's only failure to select wisely. In 1908 Senator Bailey urged the nomination of Mr. Bryan. He was elected a delegate to Denver on a platform declaring for Mr. Bryan and ENDORSING THE NEBRASKA PLATFORM. It was suggested by Senator Bailey's enemies that his real object was to secure a personal vindication, but the senator must, of course, insist that he acted in good faith. Is it not a little unkind for the senator to favor a third nomination after a second defeat and then try to exclude Mr. Bryan from the party councils because of three defeats?

And after guessing so badly on Mr. Parker and Mr. Bryan would it not naturally be expected that Senator Bailey would "modestly distrust his capacity to select a successful candidate?"

DEMOCRACY'S TRIUMPH

The reduction of the British house of lords to a position of secondary importance is one of the democratic triumphs of the century. It is the most illustrious hereditary body on earth, but it bows to the will of the people and acknowledges that henceforth the people of Great Britain will speak through the elective branches of the legislature. And this change takes place just as the people of the United States purge the senate of its house-of-lords-features by making its membership elective by popular vote. "Let the people rule" is becoming more and more a world-wide slogan.

Senator Stone deserves great credit for his fight for reciprocity. He did not lose a point.

RECIPROCITY AT LAST

The senate has ratified the reciprocity agreement and we now await the action of Canada. The democrats deserve great credit for the united support they gave the president. There were only ten votes cast by democrats against the treaty in the house and only three in the senate. When the president called a special session of congress he did so because the democrats of the house had supported the treaty WITHOUT AMENDMENT in the last session. It would have been a breach of faith to have embarrassed the president with amendments after he had convened the extra session. Fair dealing pays. By supporting the treaty in the last session the democrats not only secured SOME relief from high tariff taxation, but they secured an extra session with all that that has meant to the democratic party and the country.

AFRAID OF PEOPLE'S RULE

"Evidently the thing to do is to turn government over to a small minority, which is what the advocates of direct legislation complain of now. What they actually propose is to transfer government from the hands of an occasional minority to the hands of a continuing minority, destroy all the constitutional safeguards of liberty, and then call it progress in the name of the people."

This MUST be so, for it was printed in the New York World, an organ that consistently opposes any movement threatening the dominance of the "continuing minority" of Wall street over American politics.

HON. T. E. RYAN

In the death of Hon. T. E. Ryan, democratic national committeeman of Wisconsin, the party loses one of its valued leaders. Wise in council, and active in the field, his services had earned for him the distinction conferred upon him by his party in selecting him national committeeman. His place in the organization will be hard to fill. Mr. Ryan was more than a loyal democrat; he was a citizen in the fullest sense of the term. He appreciated the responsibility which accompanies participation in a government like ours, and honestly endeavored to live up to those responsibilities. The Commoner extends sympathy to his family.

A STEP TOWARD SOCIALISM

When President Gary of the steel trust and Attorney-General Wickersham assume that competition is impossible in industry and argue in favor of permanent private monopolies they argue in favor of socialism. The only difference between them and socialists is that socialists want government ownership while Gary and Wickersham hold out on the delusion of regulation. We must return to competition if we would avoid socialism.

THE COTTON SCHEDULE

The cotton schedule, reported by the ways and means committee, is all right. The raw material (cotton) is FREE and the reductions made will bring a large measure of relief. The farmers' free list, confers great advantage upon the consumers also. Free hides made possible free shoes, harness and leather. The good work goes on.

Mr. Underwood is quoted as saying that the "country wants congress to quit." How does he know? Who says so? That is always the cry of the special interests when reforms are begun. Why not appoint a committee to investigate the sources of Mr. Underwood's information?

The democrats have kept faith with the president on reciprocity—they stood by him much better than the republicans did. Now they can proceed to reduce the tariff. Will the president stand by them?

Senator Bailey led only two democrats in his final and futile attack on reciprocity. Surely it is mortifying to be read out of the councils of the party by a man whose influence has dwindled to that!

President Taft thanks the democrats for support given the reciprocity agreement. We appreciate it but the obligation is all on our side. He helped us to make a breach in the wall.