

The New Labor Party

The platform of the new labor party contains, as might be expected, some demands which will be abandoned when light is thrown upon them by public discussion. A new party upon which brings together those dissatisfied with always brings together those dissatisfied with the old parties and this dissatisfaction, expressed itself in many ways and against pressing existing laws and methods, is sure to make the platform agreed upon a patchwork rather than a consistent statement of principles. Concessions have to be made to many elements in order to effect a union of forces. This is to be expected.

The new labor party organized at Chicago has, however, succeeded better than new parties usually do in framing a platform of demands. It contains a number of planks that will ultimately find their way into the platforms of the older parties, just as many planks of the Populist platform were afterwards adopted by Democrats and Republicans and finally enacted into law. Other planks will suggest reforms which will in a more conservative way remove the difficulties complained of. Take the first plank, for instance; it demands the abolition of the United States senate. This demand expresses the indignation quite generally felt at the senate because of the prolonged discussion of the treaty and the league of nations. The parliamentary bodies of other countries acted while the senate talked and talked and talked. But the senate's sins, grievous as they are, do not justify capital punishment. The chief fault of the senate is that it permits a minority to obstruct the will of the majority, a thing repugnant to our theory of government, as well as disgusting to the good sense of the public. It is not quite so bad today as it used to be. Until a few years ago a handful of senators much less than one-third had the power to prolong debate indefinitely by filibustering. Finally the senate became so ashamed of itself that it adopted a rule permitting two-thirds of the senate to close debate. The change did not go far enough, but it makes easier the next step, namely, the adoption of a rule which will permit a majority to close debate. This will come in time—the sooner the better—because even the senate cannot always be indifferent to public opinion. The platforms of all the parties next year should demand majority rule in the senate and then the indignation now felt will subside and the senate will enter upon its duties under conditions that will enable it to live up to its responsibilities. Until within ten years ago the speaker of the House was almost as autocratic as the Kaiser, but the people demanded a change and that change has revolutionized the House in the direction of democracy.

The second plank demands the election of federal judges by popular vote for a term not exceeding four years. This reform will come some day, although the term will doubtless be made longer than four years, but the people are not ready for this movement now. As it takes time to educate the people to any need of reform, it will be some years before the demand for the popular election of judges becomes a dominating issue in the campaign.

Another plank demands the eight hour day with a forty-four hour week—that is a Saturday half-holiday. There will be no serious objection to this from any quarter. The eight hour day has come to stay; opposition to it diminishes daily, and the Saturday half-holiday will find strong support from those who desire Sabbath observance. A forty-eight hour week gives the laborer no day but Sunday for recreation and amusement while the Saturday half-holiday takes the strain off of Sunday and permits a larger portion of it to be devoted to religious and spiritual things.

A minimum wage for workers is not so well understood, but it is just and will come, as will also old age pensions and pensions to those who without their fault have become disabled or are brought to need through sickness.

Government banking is not necessary if we add to the Postal Savings Banks, which we now have, a law to compel the banks to guarantee their depositors. What people need is absolute security for deposits. Comptroller Williams has recommended the guarantee of bank deposits up to \$5,000.00 and several states have already given to their people full and complete guarantee of bank deposits.

There is nothing revolutionary in the nationalization of unused lands or in the limitation of

incomes. The right of the people to act through government to protect themselves by prohibiting the withholding of needed lands will not be denied; the only question is whether the time has come to exercise the right. That is for the people to decide.

The same is true as to the limitation of incomes. Plutocracy itself would hardly contend that the limitation of incomes whenever actually needed is beyond the province of government. Even the most ardent believers in individualism will not put the property rights of the individual above the public welfare and who is to determine what the public welfare demands except the public itself? If, however, our government can succeed in abolishing privilege and favoritism it is not likely that anyone, relying purely upon his merit, will accumulate enough to make his fortune a menace to the country.

The Initiative and Referendum are no longer new. Twenty-five years ago they were the subjects of witticisms, one paper describing them as new democratic drinks, when they were first included in the Democratic platform in Nebraska. But now with states like Illinois, Ohio and Missouri and Massachusetts using both the Initiative and Referendum they passed beyond the mirth provoking stage and have become a part of the progressive movement of the country. The late President Roosevelt became a convert to the Initiative and Referendum and advised the incorporation of these reforms in the constitution of Ohio. President Wilson also became a convert to the Initiative and Referendum some ten years ago. Of the two, the Initiative is by far the most important, because it embodies also the idea of the Referendum—a law passed this year can be brought up for a vote at the next election by the Initiative. The Recall is not so popular because not so necessary, although there is no logical argument that can be made against it. The people's right to have an official acceptable to them is more important than the official's right to a salary.

The home rule plank will have to be explained before judgment can be passed upon it. If it means that the liquor interests in a city or county shall be permitted to over-ride state prohibition or that the liquor interests in a state shall be able to over-ride national prohibition, it will not stand, and exposure of the real meaning is all that is necessary to cause the rejection of that plank.

The new labor party condemns universal military training and conscription, and in so doing has struck a popular chord. Frontier methods cannot survive when frontier conditions are gone. The people will not support any military system unless convinced that its burdens are necessary and the world is now talking of peace, secured through a league of nations, instead of the old methods that make war the only means of settling international disputes.

Woman's suffrage is approved—a reform already accomplished, and equal pay for men and women is demanded—the justice of which no one will dispute. The tendency too is toward the doing of government work by day labor instead of by contract. The demand for the release of political prisoners only affects a few persons and the situation with which it deals will cease to be a practical one when peace is finally established, except in case of those who advocate revolutionary methods—no sympathy can be shown the advocates of revolution.

The criminal prosecution of profiteers and the exploiters of labor is a demand that will find endorsement in all the platforms.

The nationalization of all public utilities and of basic industries presents the largest issue advanced in the platform. In the first place it raises the question between public ownership and private monopoly. Upon that subject the people are not yet fully informed. When they are private monopoly will have no friends outside of those peculiarly interested in the ex-propriation of the public. The word nationalization raises an important question, but a distinction must be made between government ownership and nationalization, for there can be public ownership by other units besides the nation. We have public ownership now of city water-works and lighting plants. There is no reason why the federal government should operate these. And the same logic will ultimately compel the public ownership of telephone

CAMPAIGN YEAR

Readers of The Commoner who believe in the principles advocated by Mr. Bryan and his paper, and who want to enact those principles into law, now have an opportunity to assist. The Commoner will make a strenuous effort to secure a progressive platform and a progressive candidate at the democratic national convention next summer to lead the fight against the demands of the special interests of the country. Your help is needed to educate, organize and direct the efforts of the masses to curb the greed of the profiteer, to perpetuate the People's Rule, and to preserve Jeffersonian democratic principles.

Will you help to extend The Commoner's sphere of influence by extending its circulation among the free democrats and free republicans in your community? A special campaign rate of 75 cents from now until after the presidential election next year is made for that purpose.

Suggestions as to platform and candidates from Commoner readers are also desired. There are so many vital issues to be settled during the coming four years that every citizen should be alert. Campaign subscriptions will be accepted in clubs or singly at 75 cents. Kindly let us know at once what part you will take in the all-important contest now at hand.

CHARLES W. BRYAN, Publisher.

exchanges by the municipalities and also the municipal ownership of street car lines. It will take time to bring about these changes but they are in the line of progress. The telegraph lines and the long distance telephone lines will in time be operated by the national government, but there is no reason why the national government should operate all the local telephone exchanges.

And so with railroads. Public ownership of railroads is not only possible without nationalization of all the lines, but a dual ownership is more practical and more desirable than nationalization—the federal government owning a system of trunk lines and the states owning the net work of lines used in collecting and distributing freight and passengers.

The words "All Basic Industries" are a little general and will have to be defined before the plank can be discussed.

It will be seen by a review of The Labor Party platform that there is much in it that will appeal to the progressive sentiment of the country. On some propositions they are ahead of the times and must wait. On others public sentiment may never support them, but the party will be an educational influence and, like all new parties, will contribute to a better understanding of the issues that the older parties have failed to take up.

It is natural that a party in power, and parties hopeful of winning, should avoid new questions for fear of disturbing the harmony that exists among the members of the party. A new party is not restrained by such fears and therefore speaks more boldly, and, by speaking, helps to drive the old parties to new positions where the positions taken are supported by a growing sentiment.

The Democratic party, being the progressive party of the nation as shown by the splendid record of reform which it has made since 1912, will take up new issues as rapidly as the people are ready for them; to go faster than the people would be to forfeit public confidence and lose the opportunity that it now has to aid in the settlement of issues ripe for decision.

The people of a republic not only believe in free and full discussion, but welcome it as the best means of hastening the triumph of that which is right and of exposing the weakness of policies that are unsound. W. J. BRYAN.

THE RAILROAD BILL

Democrats can safely vote against both the Esch bill and the Cummins bill. They are built on the plan of the advocates of private ownership, and private ownership means control by railroad magnates. Regulation cannot be efficient because the railroad interests are in politics all the time trying to select the regulators, and as long as the republican leaders are in control of the government just so long will the railroad magnates get what they want.