

The New Railroad Law

(Continued from Page 7.)

amend the House bill by providing for the federal incorporation of railroads. The avowed purpose of the Senate amendment was to COMPEL the federal incorporation of ALL railroads. The railroads have desired this for at least twenty years. President Roosevelt recommended federal incorporation in one of his messages, and the president of one of the western railroads (which a legislative committee had recently reported as capitalized for three times as much as it would cost to reproduce the road) gave, as his reason for favoring federal incorporation that it was the only way to protect the railroad from the "demagogues in the state legislatures."

It seems that the House would not stand for federal incorporation, and the House conference committee reported that the conference bill strikes out all of these sections providing for federal incorporation, re-incorporation.

The senate amendment declared it to be the policy of the United States to require the consolidation of all of the railroads of the country into not less than twenty nor more than thirty-five separate systems and provides that the transportation board shall prepare a plan for such a consolidation.

Voluntary consolidation was provided for within the period of seven years after passage of the act but after that period the board was given power to COMPEL such consolidation. The House did not consent to COMPULSORY consolidation but agreed to VOLUNTARY consolidation. The Interstate Commerce Commission is authorized to permit the acquisition by one carrier of the control of another by lease or purchase of stock. The Commission is expected to preserve, "existing rates and competition as far as possible," but it is not always possible to PRESERVE COMPETITION when competing lines are allowed to consolidate.

The Senate amendment discloses the purpose of the railroad managers to create, as soon as permission can be secured, the most gigantic private monopoly the world has ever known. If the existing railroad systems could be consolidated into from twenty to thirty-five systems, the next step would be to reduce the number to fifteen or twenty, then to four or five and then to one. If we are to have private ownership we might as well understand now as later that there is no end to the consolidation scheme until all are under one management. The railroad, reaching into almost every county and, in most cases, into nearly all parts of the country, secures such an immense number of retainers—lawyers, railroad physicians, railroad experts and railroad politicians—as to become an almost invincible power in politics. Sooner or later, the public will be compelled to choose between "government ownership of the railroads" and "railroad ownership of the government," as the issue was stated many years ago.

The House was not ready to go as far as the Senate, (altho' on some questions it was the Senate that refused to concede as much to the railroads as the House demanded), but the House consented to VOLUNTARY consolidation, and voluntary consolidation has in view the same end, namely, one great private monopoly, with something like twenty billions of dollars back of it, interwoven with the banking influences and the influences of the trusts. What an unequal combat it will be when the unorganized masses attempt to protect themselves from such highly organized capital with its thoroughly trained representatives and its secret hold upon the avenues of information! Last winter the railroads entered upon a systematic effort to lay their side before the public thru the newspapers, and the amount they were prepared to spend was probably one hundred times greater than any sum that could be raised from all the patrons for the purpose of presenting the patrons' side. When the public read the bill as the Senate intended it to be, or even as the House permitted it to be, the people will understand how impossible it is for them to have anything like an equal chance or reasonable justice, with the railroad systems in the hands of private corporations.

The Senate agreed to the House provision with

respect to pooling—"subject to the approval of the commission." Pooling simply means the elimination of competition; the railroads have been fighting for this privilege for at least a quarter of a century. I remember when they had a bill before Congress some twenty-five years ago permitting pooling. The railroad side of the fight was led by the president of the B & O, who had been elected by Congress and had the privilege of the floor, the fight being made before he took his seat. The phrase "subject to the approval of the Commission" is used to assure the public that no harm will be done the patrons of the roads, but two facts stand out so prominently that even a wayfaring man ought to be able to see them.

First, when the question of consolidation and pooling is left to the decision of the members of the Interstate Commerce Commission, the railroads are given an immense financial interest in congressional, senatorial and presidential elections. Just in proportion as the power of the Interstate Commerce Commission is increased, the control of that commission becomes a political prize for which the railroads are sure to contend. If they are permitted to pick out a man for president and by the power of their influence secure his nomination and election, it is reasonable to suppose that he will be influenced by the opinions of the railroad magnates as to the fitness of aspirants for positions on the Interstate Commerce Commission. The big railroad attorneys are prominent men, known to the public, and the public does not always remember that a fundamental bias can pervert the judgment of a very respectable—even conscientious—man. A man is often most biased when he thinks himself entirely impartial. The new railroad law gives to the big transportation lines the greatest stake in politics they have ever had. They may be expected to take part in every congressional fight, in every senatorial contest and in every presidential campaign. Working in the dark rather than in the open, it may be expected that they will exert a potent influence in politics as it is now certain they did in the campaign of 1918.

But the other fact is even more important, namely, that the railroads are now able to capture the last citadel which defends competition. Competition has been weak enough, heretofore, but even the semblance of competition is to be destroyed. Authorized pooling is a declaration that, in the case of the railroads, competition is impossible. The railroads become a monopoly, a private monopoly, and therefore the railroad monopoly falls under the condemnation of a well-established democratic principle, namely, that a private monopoly is indefensible and intolerable.

The railroads are hastening the day when the question of private monopoly vs. government ownership will be the paramount issue before the country. When that issue is understood there can be only one side to it, and that the peoples' side, viz., government ownership. An economic law, as irresistible as the law of gravitation, is drawing the NATURAL monopolies within the sphere of the government. As soon as it is determined that competition between railroads is impossible, then government ownership becomes necessarily the next step. It requires some bold stroke to awaken the public. Experience shows that warnings are usually unavailing. Solomon says that "the wise man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, while the foolish pass on and are punished." It is a beautiful proverb and contains a great truth, but it is difficult to persuade the public to foresee the evil and provide against it. It foresees the evil and is punished. But, blessed be popular government; WHEN AROUSED, THE PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER TO RIGHT ALL WRONGS, AND THEIR INTELLIGENCE DEVISES EFFECTIVE REMEDIES. If this new railroad law shocks the voters into a realization of the danger that confronts them, the Republican victory of 1918 may prove a blessing in disguise.

W. J. BRYAN.

THE LASTING ORATOR

It is just thirty years since the people of Nebraska got the habit of hearing William J. Bryan. He had come to Lincoln two years before, but only a few had hints of his oratorical fore, for the purpose of giving a struggling young lawyer a chance to advertise the First congressional district awarded him the otherwise profitless honor of a Democratic nomi-

nation for congress. In that campaign of 1890 the boy orator of the Platte emerged. The discontent reflected in the populist movement was just getting under way. It loosened the moorings of enough Republicans to make them susceptible to a silver tongue. Mr. Bryan was elected, made his tariff speech hit in congress and was re-elected. That is the only elective public office he has ever held. But he has talked on, garnering three presidential nominations as he went, always defeated, yet always heard.

Night before last, Lincoln people packed the auditorium to hear again the voice they have heard for thirty years. It was the old, old theme, politics. Nothing new could be expected of Bryan on that subject. Yet the crowd came, stayed, applauded and went home feeling that it had been well entertained. The familiar sixty-year-old man had charmed his hearers as effectively as did the fresh youth of thirty. Surely, an orator who can hold his crowd for thirty years is an orator indeed.

Many who sat him thru on Friday night passed thru their minds a score of such appearances. There were his debates with Connell, with Field, with Thurston, the speech to a jammed, shabby city when he came home with the presidential nomination in '96, the birthday dinners, the great speech of 1910 when, refusing to lead his party into delirium tremens, he bolted Dahlman. The Bryan present before them represented a host of Bryans behind them. Yet the old Bryan present had all the power of the young Bryan past.

It was possible to see why Mr. Bryan is easy to listen to. One might be at the remotest part of the auditorium or even just outside the door, and whether he listened or not, the Bryan voice boomed easily into his ears. To be an orator one must be born with a voice. But that isn't enough. It is easy to "get" Mr. Bryan. His thought is predigested. One has no wearing ramifications to follow. He does not put his hearers to the labor of putting two and two together. If one misses a sentence at an outburst of applause he has lost only a sentence. The next will be complete in itself. Stories come often enough to pepper the dish. The general geniality of the thought is sufficiently broken by notes of defiance and denunciation. And then the fur is smoothed the right way. Mr. Bryan can defy an audience of politicians with grand effect when he feels like it. But he never defies an audience of common folks. If he cannot agree with them, he at least avoids rasping them.

In his thirty years of talking to us, Mr. Bryan has seldom had a majority of his own Nebraska with him. Yet the political generation which came on the stage thirty years ago will find on reflection that no man of any party has woven his personality into its period as has Bryan. His has been the dominant note in Nebraska and in more than Nebraska, for much of that time. We may not agree with Bryan. We may not vote for him. But after he is gone we shall doubtless agree that it was our fortune to have witnessed the rise and extraordinary duration of one of the most compelling orators of all time.—Nebraska State Journal, Lincoln.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Stabilizing the Dollar. A plan to Stabilize the General Price Level Without Fixing Individual Prices. By Irving Fisher, Professor of Political Economy in Yale University. Ex-President of the American Economic Association. The Macmillan Company, Publishers, New York. Price \$3.50.

The Railroad Problem. A proposed plan for an undivided administration of the railroadism for promoting competition in railroad service; and for stimulating local initiative in railroad development. By Walter W. Davis, Great Neck, L. I., N. Y.

The World 1920 Almanac and Encyclopedia. Issued by The Press Publishing Co., Pulitzer Bldg., New York. Single Copies 35 cents. By Mail 50 cents.

The Trinity and The Deity of Christ. A Bible Study. By Rev. Edwin Barneston, Cohocton, N. Y., R. F. D. 3. Price 25 cents.

The Lincoln Cabin and Other Poems. By Saxe Churchill Stimson. Author of The Trench Lad. Published by the Author, Milwaukee, Wis.

The Economic Consequences of the Peace. By John Maynard Keynes, C. B. Representative of the British Treasury at the Peace Conference. Carnegie Endowment of International Peace. 407 West 117th St., New York.