

The Republican Platform

One fact is very clear—and it should be made prominent—namely—that the Republican party is making its fight over MEN and not over PLATFORMS. The platform seems to be lost sight of notwithstanding the very radical differences in the candidates. This, in itself, should put Republicans on guard if they feel an interest in the policies for which the party is to stand. If any candidate secures a dominating following before the convention meets, that candidate, of course, will dictate the platform unless he is the candidate of some powerful group, in which case the group will dictate the platform for him.

The platform is more important than the man, and it is disappointing, in a chaotic time like this, that a party like the Republican party which is in control of congress, and apparently confident of success in the coming election, does not put principle first and men afterwards. When a party takes up the practical work of conducting government, it turns naturally and necessarily to policies of government, and policies are merely surface manifestations of underlying principles. Principles ought to control; policies ought to decide elections. It is easy enough to find men with the intelligence necessary to carry out the policies to which a party is pledged, and it ought not to be difficult to find men with the moral courage to announce in advance the principles which they regard as fundamental and the policies which should be pursued at the time—that is, the policies which embody the principles believed in.

It is easier to understand a principle than a man; easier to form an opinion in regard to a policy than in regard to an individual. First—Reasonable people follow reasons and understand reasons, and a principle is simply a reason upon which policies are built. Second—Principles do not change after the election; men sometimes do. A man's political program may be the embodiment of many policies, differing in their relative influence upon him, and subject to change. Circumstances may induce him to surrender one policy in the hope of securing another which he considers more important. And, influences MAY operate upon him after the election to make him change his point of view. The popular election of senators by the people became necessary because so many legislators either suppressed their purpose during the campaign or changed their purpose afterward, to the disappointment—not to say betrayal—of their constituents.

So with presidential candidates, if a man runs upon his personality, that personality must be more or less of a mystery to the multitude. One voter may like him for one thing, another voter may be influenced by an entirely different sentence in a speech or by what he is believed to stand for. If there is no definite program to which he is pledged, many of the voters are likely to be disappointed. For this reason I made the following suggestion in a speech before the Constitutional Convention of Nebraska last January:

"Candidates for offices in which they can influence public policies should be compelled to file a statement of their position on issues before the public and to answer written inquiries (filed with designated officials) or give written refusal with reasons. Statements on public issues should be regarded as a contract between the candidate and his constituents, and violations should be defined as embezzlement of power and punished with imprisonment."

The Republican party will have to deal with certain great questions, and it would seem important for the voters to align themselves according to the program to be carried out rather than make their support depend entirely on their attachment to individuals. I venture to suggest a few questions on which the public should be enlightened:

First—It may be taken for granted that with thirty-five states ratifying the suffrage amendment, the party will call for the completion of ratification if the one state now needed is not forthcoming before the conventions.

The prohibition amendment is a part of the constitution and cannot be repealed without the concurrence of two-thirds of both houses in the submission of a repealing amendment and ratification by three-fourths of the states. This, of

course, would seem impossible in view of the almost unanimous endorsement of the amendment and the improved conditions under it. But a constitutional provision is valueless except as it is interpreted by law and enforced. Congress having the power to interpret the constitution and, in this case having authority to fix the alcoholic content of permitted beverages, may so change the Volstead law as to permit the use of a larger percentage of alcohol. As the per cent of alcohol is the whole question—that is, the percentage decides whether or not the beverage is intoxicating—a wet congress might nullify the action of the country and reopen the question.

It is well known that the opponents of prohibition are actively at work in the Republican party. They are not likely to be strong enough at the Republican convention to propose a wet plank but they may be strong enough to suppress a pledge of enforcement, or they may so dilute the enforcement plank that it will have less than one-half of one per cent of certainty in it.

Why is it that the dries, who are doubtless in a large majority in the party, have not called upon the candidates for an expression of opinion or put out a platform pledge for conventions to use? Can the dries afford to be indifferent while the wets are at work?

And what is the Republican party going to do about the bonus to the service men. It does not seem likely that it will be able to reach a decision in regard to the method of raising the money necessary. Everybody is in favor of the bonus, but so far no one has been able to find a satisfactory source from which to draw the money. I am reminded of a successful merchant who upon turning his business over to his son, advised him how to be successful without expense to himself:

"Subscribe liberally to any church proposed" said the father, "no matter what the denomination; that will make you popular. Then FIGHT THE LOCATION and you will not have to pay the subscription."

The plan is quite familiar and is applied in many ways. Just now the advocates of a bonus seem to be very much divided as to where to locate the tax. The first suggestion was that the money be raised by general taxation but objection was made that it would be difficult to find new forms of taxation. Then it was suggested that the bonus be paid in bonds but objection was made that a new issue of bonds would still further depress the price of outstanding bonds and would, in effect, be a tax upon the patriotism of those who furnished money to carry on the war.

More recently it has been suggested that a fund be raised for the bonus by a tax on retail sales but that would be found still more objectionable because a tax on consumption makes the poor man pay more than his share and the rich man less than his share. Congressman Rainey, of Illinois, has proposed that a tax be levied upon the fortunes made out of the war. It is alleged that more fortunes were created out of war profits during the period of the war—August 1, 1914 to Nov. 11, 1918—than were created in all the previous history of the country from the discovery of America to the beginning of the war in Europe. Congressman Rainey proposes that one-half of these war fortunes be set apart for the payment of a bonus to the soldiers who risked their lives while the fortunes were being made. This plan would seem to be more just than any other proposed. How will the Republican party deal with this question? It cannot well refuse to do justice to the service men; will it also be careful to avoid doing injustice to the taxpayers?

The profiteer will be at the Republican National convention either as a delegate or as a lobbyist, just as he has been at state capitals and at Washington. Why is it that the victims of profiteering are not in evidence? Why have they not demanded pledges from the candidates or formulated some specific declaration which can be embodied in the platform? Profiteering is on the increase; it is spreading like a contagious disease, with the difference that the middlemen are trying to catch it instead of quarantining against. Is it possible that the unrest, due to

high prices, can be ignored, and exploitation continued without protest?

But while profiteering is the acute economic issue, the fiercest struggle is between beneficiaries of private monopoly and the public who seek to protect themselves by government ownership. The champions of monopoly are in full swing; their newspaper champions have been deriding public ownership as a principle and misrepresenting it where it is in practice. Knowing the tendency of the human mind to be consistent and to extend the application of a principle when once vindicated, these newspapers are afraid to admit the success of ANY public owned enterprise.

When the government was in control of the operation of the railroads, every delayed train and every impairment of equipment was made the pretext for complaint. A delay in a telephone call or a mistake in connection brought forth a denunciation of governmental incapacity, although ante-war officials and operators of railroads, telegraphs and telephones WERE IN CHARGE DURING THE WAR and are NOW in charge under private ownership. A New York editor recently contrasted the operation of telephones since the lines went back with operation during the war and showed that the efficiency had been decreased. Pullman rates are soon to be raised, and the railroads are clamoring for higher rates. What is the Republican party going to do? Is it going to take any position on this issue, and if so, what position? Why is the line not being drawn between the principle of government ownership and the principle of private monopoly?

And so, with the various labor problems. The industrial situation is anything but satisfactory. Have the Republicans any plan for restoring harmony? The WILLING WORKER is the only wage-earner who can meet the present demand in production. It is impossible for us to carry on a wage system under compulsion. Next to the farmers, the toilers in factory and in shop are our largest group of citizens, and it goes without saying that their labor lies at the very foundation of our nation's welfare and progress. What platform pledge will the Republican convention give? What guarantees are its leaders making to this very important element?

I have mentioned some of the questions which will necessarily come before the Republican convention—questions where difference of opinion is widest and most positive—with a view of encouraging the candor and frankness which the present situation requires. Conventions are quite representative, if the people speak when they choose their representatives; they are often, quite misrepresentative, if the people deposit arbitrary and unrestrained power in the hands of politicians with interests opposed to the interests of the masses. If there ever was a time for honesty in politics, that time has come. The masses in all parties are patriotic and anxious for the best things to be done, but the VOICE of the masses must be EXPRESSED to be controlling.

There is no danger of revolution in this country, because the people always act before abuses reach a point where the thought of force will be tolerated; but THE SOONER ABUSES ARE REMEDIED, THE MORE EASILY CAN REMEDIES BE APPLIED. The re-adjustments made necessary by the war must be made and should be made immediately.

I shall speak later of these same problems, as they must be dealt with in the San Francisco convention. It would be a very encouraging thing if the leaders of both parties would plainly state the positions of the parties and frankly lay the issues before the voters in order that they may be calmly considered and wisely decided. No convention action can be satisfactory if it does not represent the real sentiment of the members of the party for which the convention speaks. There is enough virtue in the country to protect the nation from harm—enough salt to save the country from any threatened trouble, but the salt must not be allowed to lose its savor. The virtue of the people should express itself NOW through the various parties in order that the rivalry may be an open and honorable rivalry with victory to the most deserving.

W. J. BRYAN.

"The past rises before me like a nightmare," shouted the California Republicans as they remembered the meatless days, the wheatless days and the eatless days.