# A National Bulletin

I am so impressed with the need of a national bulletin that in this article I shall ask the reader to consider the reasons that have led me to urge its establishment. In the first place it is not to be a newspaper; those who have attacked the proposition heretofore have generally done so on the theory that the proposed bulletin was to be in the nature of a newspaper. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The newspapers can be relied to print the general news and they ought to have full freedom in the printing of political news and in commenting upon it. The government publication proposed has nothing in common with the newspapers. It should be only and solely a bulletin, somewhat like those already issued by various departments, but differing in the kind of information which it gives to the people. The weather bulletins discuss the weather; agricultural bulletins discuss matters of interest to the farmer; commercial bulletins deal with things that are of interest to business men. During the war the government published a bulletin which dealt almost exclusively with matter regarding the war, a considerable part of the space being devoted to lists of the killed or wounded. The need of a bulletin dealing with the problems before the public and presenting arguments on both sides of questions at issue, will be seen when it is remembered that such a bulletin will deal with subjects that are of paramount importance and universal interest. Only farmers are interested in the bulletins issued by the agricultural department and only business men in the bulletins issued by the department of commerce. But every citizen is interested, or should be, in the questions that are at issue in congressional and presidential campaigns. The whole direction of the government may be changed at the polls; policies are endorsed or condemned; vital interests are involved in these elections, and yet the public is entirely dependent upon private sources of information. This would be unfair even if all the sources were disinterested, unselfish and imparital in purpose. Honest men are biased and that bias affects the judgment unconsciously if not consciously. A man's sympathies have as much to do with his decisions as his reason—sometimes more. Even when he sincerely tries to state a proposition impartially, he will present what he regards as the most important arguments and omit that which he regards as less important. And yet a political opponent may differ from him radically as to the relative importance of the things presented and omitted.

The fate of a nation depends upon the will of the people, and the will of the people can not be intelligently expressed unless the people are informed upon the subject upon which they are called to speak.

But the situation is made more difficult by the fact that not all of the newspapers are owned and edited for purely patriotic purposes. Sometimes the ownership is secret, less so now since we have a law compelling newspapers to reveal their ownership, and yet it is not always easy to enforce this law. A number of incidents can be cited. Twenty years ago, the Chicago Chronicle was owned by a Chicago banker named Walsh. It claimed to be a Democratic paper and was quite dictatorial in its editorial policy. The owner was promoting a number of business enterprises and finally was convicted of crime in connection with some of his work. On the contrary, it was conducted at a loss (I think it was running behind something like a quarter of a million a year). The paper was not primarily conducted as a newspaper but rather as an adjunct to exploiting enterprises. When one examines the facts he can understand at what a disadvantage its readers were when they came to act upon political questions.

In the investigation of the New York, Hartford and New Haven railroad, it was found that a leading Boston daily was actually owned by the railroad although it was conducted in the name of an individual. When one examines into the condition of the railroad as the investigation showed it, he can understand how unfair it was to leave the public dependent for information on a paper controlled in the interest of that great railway corporation. In Florida, two of the prominent dailies were until recently owned by railroads. After the death of Vice-president Fairbanks, it was learned that an Indianapolis paper, ostensibly owned by a local journalist, was actually the property of the vice-president. In New York it is not an unusual thing for men connected with big financial enterprises to become owners of newspapers.

On ordinary questions of a general character such paper has no interest in misrepresenting the situation, but whenever there is a conflict between corporate interests and the masses, these papers appear as the champions of the corporate sde.

There are always before the nation great economic questions, sometimes they relate to the tariff, sometimes to the trusts, sometimes to transportation lines. Many big newspapers are quite intimately connected with banks and other business enterprises, and sometimes these are directly involved in the questions at issue. In 1913-14 the banking interests were almost unanimously opposed to the currency law, and their influence upon the newspapers which they controlled made the struggle between the friends and opponents of the currency law an unequal one.

But let us turn from illustrations of the need of a government bulletin to the details of the proposed measure. The bulletin should be NOT NON-PARTISAN but BI-PARTISAN. That is, it should be in the control of persons selected by the various parties and responsible to the parties so that all sides of the question shall have a hearing. I have no desire to set forth any hard and fast rule for the control of the bulletin but suggest for consideration the following plan. The board of control might be made up of five persons, one appointed by the president, one appointed by the majority party in the House, one by the minority party in the House, one by the majority party in the Senate and the fifth by the minority party in the Senate. This would make sure of two Democrats and two Republicans on the board (with the parties as they now are,) with the politics of the fifth man dependent upon the party affiliations of the president. The law establishing the bulletin should, as far as possible, determine the things to be printed, with power vested in the board to decide other details. To make sure that the minority would have a fair hearing, any two members of the board should have permission to cause the insertion of such matter as they deem necessary. There would be no dfficulty in designating the kind of matter to be printed.

It is important that there should be editorial space in the bulletin and it should be divided between the parties in proportion to the voting strength at the last election or in Congress. Each party in Congress should be permitted to select the editor who would use the editorial space assigned to the party. In order that all factions in Congress may be represented in the editorial space, any minority faction of a party which rejected the editor selected by the majority should be allowed to have its own editorial representation and be assigned space according to its voting strength.

The publication should be published at certain intervals which might be made shorter during the campaign season when the interest in the publication is greater and the information more immediately necessary.

The paper should be furnished at a nominal sum, say 25 cents per year, to all who are interested enough to subscribe for it. A nominal subscription fee is suggested in order to make sure that the paper will be read, otherwise there might be waste. Of course, the paper would cost much more than that but there is nothing that would better justify the expenditure of public money than a bulletin that would inform the people upon the issues they are called upon to settle at the polls. With such a publication within the reach of all who desire to inform themselves on campaign issues, we may expect a more speedy settlement of questions and thus a shorter period of uncertainty.

Such a bulletin would not interfere with any legitimate newspaper. On the contrary, it would furnish authentic facts for the newspaper to discuss and it would also furnish the arguments pro and con from the highest sources. Nothing is more important in the discussion of public questions than an authoritative statement of the arguments in support of and against the proposition at issue.

Of course, objections to such a bulletin will come from owners of the papers that have a pecuniary interest in deceiving the public, but they dare not give their real reason. Who else can offer a valid objection?

The first question to be decided is, are the people upon whose consent the government rests entitled to understand the subjects submitted to them for decision? This question must of necessity be answered in the affirmatve.

Second: Do the privately owned newspapers, as they now exist, furnish the information that the people need for intelligent political action? If this is answered in the affirmative then there can be no justification for a government publication.

If a negative answer is given, it brings us to the third question. Can the government afford to occur the expense necessary to give the public the information needed? This admits of but one answer, and a fourth question completes the review of the subject. Does the plan proposed furnish a practical means of supplying the information needed? If not, let a better plan be suggested. Those who believe that SOME plan is needed will gladly accept the best plan offered.

W. J. BRYAN.

NEBRASKA'S SLOGAN

—From the St. Louis Star.

## BILLY SUNDAY ON GOV. EDWARDS

(From interview in Philadelphia North American)

"I regard the action of the New Jersey Legislature on the booze bill as one of the most rebellious, anarchistic, un-American measures ever enacted, and the star that represents New Jersey shoud be erased from the American flag.

"That infamous business that has left behind it nothing but ragged children and scaffolds, electric chairs and asylums hasn't got a comeback in its system.

"It would turn the calendar back from June to January. It turned a paradise into a desert, but Prohibition turned the desert in a paradise; and now New Jersey would ruin all.

"No man who is the mouthpiece of that dirty, rotten, vile, hellish, God forsaken business will ever sleep in the White House as President of these United States. Governor Edwards can no more be elected President than he can cross the ocean on a grindstone drawn by cockroaches. The anti-saloon element in Republican and Democratic parties accepts the challenge, and we will lick to a frazzle any man that either party nominates who stands for booze."