

# Mr. Bryan's San Francisco Letters

(Below will be found the second installment of the special letters from the Democratic national convention at San Francisco which were furnished to newspapers throughout the country by Mr. Bryan. The first installment appeared in the July issue.)

## PROFITEERING

San Francisco, June 28.—The profiteering plank will occupy a prominent place in our platform for two reasons: First, because of the importance of the subject itself; second, because action by this convention has been made more imperative by Republican evasion. Profiteering is a real evil and demands immediate attention. Exploitation is going on all over the country and grand juries are trying to reach the more notorious of the commercial pirates. One clothing merchant in Omaha was found selling for \$97.50 suit bought for \$13.50; a merchant in Lincoln was discovered collecting an average profit of 85 per cent on shoes. A New York State clothing corporation was fined \$55,000 for collecting about 100 per cent on clothing; the head of the Woolen company was arrested for profiteering in cloth; the Gimbel Brothers have been arrested for overcharging. The tax records at Washington are disclosing amazing instances of profiteering. One hundred per cent, five hundred per cent, one thousand per cent, two thousand per cent and some even five thousand per cent—these are profits reported under oath.

Legislation has been strangled by lobbyists employed by the profiteers. The representative of a wholesale grocery association in New York reported to his employer that at Albany he had killed thirty out of thirty-one bills proposed for regulating trade or providing relief for communities. One of these bills was intended to authorize cities and towns to establish markets. Think of a grocer's association closing the door to relief! In Nebraska the lobbyists of the middle men strangled a bill intended for the restraint of profiteers. These impudent retainers of predatory corporations and greedy commercialists were hanging about Washington and snapping at the heels of the Trade Commission. Congress, instead of protecting the public, seemed rather inclined to resent the activities of those who tried to safeguard the masses.

The Republican convention not only failed to make any vigorous pronouncement against the profiteer, but, on the contrary, attempted to divert attention from the real cause to subsidiary influences. It is very evident that most of the profiteers were present as delegates or were represented by proxies. The inability of the Republican party to deal with this question effectively is illustrated by a story. A man went into a clothing store, and, when the merchant wasn't looking, put on a coat and ran out. As he went out the door the merchant caught sight of him and gave chase, shouting, "Stop Thief." Then a policeman, joined in the chase, calling to the thief to stop. This failing, the policeman drew a revolver and threatened to shoot. The merchant became excited and, grabbing the policeman, said, "Policeman, if you do shoot, shoot him in the pants—the coat belongs to me." The Republican party can't find any place to shoot.

The profiteers who were not present at Chicago are here, but they are not so numerous and our party will therefore find it easier to deal with the problem. I do not anticipate much difficulty in securing an explicit condemnation of profiteering and a pledge of specific remedies that will prove effective. I have not been able to confer with the other members of the committee, but shall lay before them as a basis for action a plank something like the following:

"The Democratic party pledges the nation to rid it of the profiteer and to close the door against his return. It will endeavor to eliminate all unnecessary middlemen by the encouragement of organizations among producers that will bring those who sell and those who use nearer together. It will enact and enforce laws that will effectively prevent excessive charges by such middlemen as are necessary. To this end it will demand legislation subjecting to the penalties of the criminal law all corporate officers and employees who give or carry out instructions that

result in extortion; it will make it unlawful for anyone engaged in interstate commerce to make the sale of one article dependent upon the purchase of another article and it will require such corporation to disclose to customers the difference between cost price and selling price or limit the profit that can be legally charged as the rate of interest is now limited. It will also endeavor to create in the several states trade commissions with powers as ample as those of the federal trade commission and to enact laws authorizing each local community to create, as needed, similar commissions for the investigation of local charges of profiteering."

## A NATIONAL BULLETIN

San Francisco, June 29.—The mills are grinding—whether they are the mills of the Gods or not remains to be seen. They are not grinding slowly and people differ as to whether they are grinding "exceeding fine" or coarse. The men in control are men through whom the President could speak without interruption of the current if he desired to do so. The subcommittee of the Resolutions Committee, whether by accident or design I know not, is supposed to favor the Virginia idea on the platform with the exception of one man whose selection for this important committee could not be avoided. One advantage of an harmonious subcommittee is that its work can be done speedily. Difference of opinion is the fruitful source of discussion and discussion is anathema where one side is in control. Whatever controversy there is, is likely to take place in the full committee whose membership is made up of committeemen selected by the states. If this rule could be changed so that the committeemen could be selected by some central power much conflict could be avoided, provided, of course, the central power was not compelled to regard state lines in making its selections. The perfection of such a plan would lead ultimately to having but one man on the committee which would furnish the maximum of harmony and give that unity of thought which characterizes the form of government away from which the world has been moving for some centuries. The Democratic method of inviting discussion on the ground that discussion brings out the truth was justified by Jefferson on the theory that troubled waters are more pure than the waters of the stagnant pool.

After the report of the full committee, which is sometimes not unanimous, comes the discussion in the convention unless those in charge take the precaution to prevent free discussion by narrowly limited debate. It is impossible at this time to estimate the divergencies on different questions or to guess how much generosity will be displayed in the apportionment of duty to the party to withhold my endorsement of the disposition manifested or to make my acquiescence in it as complacent as the my well managed situation seems to demand. My obligation is not to a few but to a multitude of Democrats who, having honored me as they have honored no other living American, have a right to expect from me such service as I can render to the party and to the country also—since a party's only reason or existence is service to country. I have in previous articles outlined four planks which I am offering to the committee. First, the plank endorsing the 18th amendment and pledging enforcement, second, the plank dealing with profiteers, third, the plank presenting a solution of the treaty muddle; fourth, a plank outlining a plan for promoting industrial peace. I have reserved for this article what I regard as one of the most important planks that our platform can contain because all political success depends upon getting before the voters, the issues submitted for the people's judgment and the arguments pro and con. At present all the channels of information are in private hands—the papers being divided into two classes, those that are conducted with a patriotic purpose and those that secretly represent predatory interests. Those that are conducted for a patriotic purpose are managed by men who are consciously or unconsciously biased. Sometimes the bias is purely political, sometimes the bias

is even more fundamental, namely, a class bias. No one intelligent enough to direct the policy of a newspaper can be entirely without bias—the more blindly he is biased the more sure he is that he is absolutely impartial. Political truth must therefore be filtered through bias or, if it comes through papers that represent the predatory interests, diluted, the dilution sometimes reducing the truth less than one-half of one per cent.

The Democratic party suffers doubly from this one sidedness presentation of political truths. The Republicans have a great advantage over the Democrats in the fact that the Republican papers far outnumber the Democratic papers in all the contested states and in the additional fact that nearly all the papers that are subservient to corporate wealth are on the Republican side. It is to meet this difficulty that I have for several years been urging a national bulletin—not a newspaper, but a bulletin—issued by the Federal Government under bi-partisan control to be furnished to all persons connected with the government, national, state and local and at a nominal cost to all voters desiring to subscribe. It would also be furnished without cost to all libraries, colleges, schools and other societies through which information can be distributed. It should contain information in regard to all issues before the public whether those issues be embodied in legislation enacted or legislation proposed. It should have editorial space in which representatives of all parties and all factions of parties represented in congress should have opportunity, proportionate to their size to present their arguments on these issues. The paper should be published at intervals, the duration of which would depend upon the matter to be presented, the intervals being shorter during campaigns than between campaigns. Such a bulletin would not only enable the people to act intelligently upon questions submitted and therefore hasten the triumph of very righteous cause but it would also enable aspirants for the Presidency and other national offices, when legitimately before the public, to lay their claims before the voters and thus remove the excuse for large campaign funds offered by the Republican candidates at Chicago, namely, that it takes an enormous amount of money to supply and distribute the literature necessary for the proper enlightenment of voters. The highest offices in the land should be open to deserving aspirants, regardless of their wealth. In a Democratic country like ours a man's right to aspire to the Presidency, to the Senate or to Congress ought not to depend upon the amount of money he can spend himself or upon the amount that rich friends are willing to subscribe. I know of no reform more imperatively needed than the reform that will make sure that the people shall secure through unpoluted sources the information needed for intelligent exercise of the franchise.

## DEMOCRATIC LEADERS IGNORED IN NAMING OF RESOLUTIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

San Francisco, June 30.—The convention is approaching its decisive moments. So far they have simply been building the scaffolding. The construction of the political edifice is soon to begin. The first fight would be in the committee on resolutions when the sub-committee reports a tentative platform to the full committee. In the selection of the sub-committee Chairman Glass, in collaborating with Secretary Colby, who sat by his side, departed from the unbroken precedents that control popular government. It is universally recognized that in all deliberative bodies the opposing parties should be represented by their most prominent men. In the selection of any committee the leaders of the two sides are chosen as a matter of course. No Republican presiding officer would think of picking out Democrats less prominent than the Republicans selected, and a Democrat presiding officer would follow the same rule as the Republican. But we have reached a new era, and Secretary Glass, with a surprising narrowness of vision, has seen fit to ignore men who would have a right to expect a place on the committee which under ordinary circumstances, writes a platform acceptable to all or presents the issues to the full committee.

In making up his committee of nine Mr. Glass ignored the vice president, who represents Indiana on the committee. Twice the distinguished citizen from Indiana, previously a gov-