

Urges Municipal Coal Yard

The whole country seems to be up in arms to resist the continued profiteering of those engaged in the coal business. The coal operators, wholesale coal dealers, coal brokers and retail dealers all seem to be part of a gigantic scheme to hold up the country on one of the most important of the necessities of life during the winter months.

The evidence being brought out at Washington shows that coal men charged the federal government more than one hundred per cent above a reasonable profit for the coal that the war department purchased during and since the war in addition to charging the government a commission for buying coal from themselves while acting as agent for the government. Evidence being developed throughout the country—which has resulted in some indictments and convictions against coal men—indicates that there is a gigantic combination including all branches of the coal business to hold the public up regardless of the fact that there is the largest coal crop in the country's history, and the coal market is now glutted with coal to such an extent that coal mines are shutting down because they cannot find a market for their coal or places to store it.

The Attorney General, United States district attorneys, federal judges, grand juries and other instruments of law enforcement should immediately commence action against the coal profiteers and other holdup men and organizations that are taking advantage of the people.

In the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, coal that can be purchased from the mine and laid down in Lincoln at \$7.80 a ton is being retailed at from \$13.00 to \$14.00 a ton, or in other words, the retail coal dealers have been charging the people one-hundred per cent above the purchase price of the coal after it arrives in Lincoln for selling it and delivering it to the consumer.

Mr. Charles W. Bryan, former mayor of Lincoln and associate editor and publisher of *The Commoner*, has been leading a fight to reduce the price of coal in Lincoln and is demanding that the city officials establish a municipal coal yard for the purpose of throttling the coal profiteer and selling to the people of Lincoln coal at a reasonable profit.

Mr. Bryan's second public statement on the coal situation in Lincoln is a communication to the mayor and city council demanding immediate action on their part in restoring competition in the coal business by putting in a municipal coal yard. His letter to the council follows:

Lincoln, Nebraska, Jan. 7, 1921.
TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF LINCOLN.

Gentlemen:

The object of this communication is to urge you to immediately establish a municipal coal yard to prevent the people of Lincoln from being further held up by the coal combine in this city.

Since my article was published on the afternoon of Jan. 1—in which I gave the cost of coal at the mine, freight charges, retail selling price in Lincoln, the price that the city government of Omaha was selling coal for to those who desired it and also the city of Denver for supplying its people without restriction—I have been besieged by hundreds of Lincoln people who are feeling the chill of winter on account of empty coal bins and from other hundreds who are unable to pay the present coal prices and have any money left to buy shoes, groceries, meat and clothing, asking how they can assist in emphasizing to you the necessity for immediate action on your part.

I urge the establishment of a municipal coal yard and that through this municipal coal yard coal should be furnished to all who desire to patronize it, the price delivered in the people's coal bins not to exceed \$9.50 per ton at the present time or \$8.00 at the yards, and the only condition or restriction will be limiting the amount that any one person could purchase at one time to not more than two tons.

I urge the immediate establishment of a municipal coal yard for the following reasons:

The country is overstocked with coal. There is the largest coal crop on hand ever produced

in the United States, and yet it is retailing here at the abnormal and outrageous price of at from \$13.00 to \$14.00 per ton. I stated on January 1st that first class southern Illinois coal in assorted sizes can be bought at \$2.75 per ton f. o. b. at the mines. The freight rate to Lincoln is only \$4.05 per ton, making the coal cost f. o. b. at Lincoln a total of \$6.80.

You should immediately establish a municipal coal yard because the local coal dealers are charging the people as much for delivering the coal after it arrives in the city of Lincoln as all of those interested in the production and transportation of coal together received up until the time coal arrives f. o. b. in the Lincoln yards. This includes the money received by the men who have their money invested in the coal mines, all those who receive money from the dividends from coal mines; it includes all of the expense of overhead in operating a coal mine and in loading the coal on the cars at the mine; it includes all that the miners receive in wages for mining the coal, and it includes all that the railroads receive for transporting the coal from the mines in southern Illinois to the city of Lincoln.

The facts, staggering as they are, can be verified from the records of the books of the municipal coal yard operated by the city of Omaha through its commissioner of streets department.

Since my statement of Jan. 1 that coal could be bought at the mines in southern Illinois at \$2.75 per ton, the federal government has confirmed the figures by an official announcement Jan. 4, stating that the government is offered coal in the west and on the Pacific coast at \$2.70 per ton at the mine, which is five cents less than the figures quoted by me.

Since I stated on Jan. 1 that this country was overstocked with coal and that it was being hauled up and down the railroads seeking purchasers, the cable dispatches from France on Dec. 5 stated that the coal market in France was glutted with American coal; that there was enough American coal on hand in France to take care of the industrial and economic needs of that country for six months; that the price of American coal had been reduced from \$32.00 a ton to \$12.50 per ton and that \$100,000,000 in coal contracts had been recently cancelled by France in the United States.

You should immediately establish a municipal coal yard and break the coal combine in the interest of the public as American coal is now selling in France for a dollar less than it is being sold in Lincoln.

The city of Omaha by establishing a municipal coal yard and selling coal to everyone who desires to purchase from the city at the reasonable price fixed of \$9.50 a ton delivered, has saved the people of Omaha since the first of October, 1920, more than \$50,000 in excess profits that otherwise would have gone to the coal combine.

The delay of the city government of Lincoln in supplying coal to the people of Lincoln through a municipal coal yard has caused the people of Lincoln more than \$25,000 in excess profits since the 1st of October. Each day's delay in establishing a municipal coal yard is costing the people of Lincoln hundreds of dollars a day in excess profits on soft coal alone.

You should immediately establish a municipal coal yard because by doing so you can save to the people of Lincoln more than \$25,000 between now and spring in excess profits on soft coal alone. A saving of \$25,000 to the people of Lincoln on their coal bills will enable them to spend their money on shoes, clothing, groceries and meat, and hundreds of them will be unable to buy these necessities of life in the quantities needed for their sustenance and comfort unless you save to them the \$25,000 or more that they will have to pay in excess profits for coal during the remainder of the winter.

There is no provision in the city charter and there is no city ordinance that prevents the city government from immediately establishing a municipal coal yard. The higher courts have held that the distribution of water, light, power and heat is a public function and that the distribution of coal for producing heat is also a public function that governments have the power to do.

I am not advocating the city going into business generally but only urging that you break the coal combine by restoring competition through fix-

ing a reasonable price for coal at the municipal coal yard. This is what the people demanded and secured when the city went into the commercial light business. When the city commenced to sell electric light, it broke the light combine and reduced the price of electric current from fifteen cents per kilowatt to five cents per kilowatt. In other words, the city restored competition in the light business and as a result is saving the people of Lincoln at least \$100,000 per year which was formerly paid in excess profits to the light monopoly that existed in the city of Lincoln.

It will not require any investment of capital on the part of the city to establish a municipal coal yard; it will not add to the burden of any taxpayer. The suggestion for the establishment of a coal yard is for the purpose of protecting the taxpayers from the profiteers in the coal business.

If the coal dealers of Lincoln cannot buy first class Illinois coal for \$2.75 at the mines, they should engage someone to buy the coal for them as it is being sold at the mines at that price or less as stated by the federal government.

I urge you to establish a municipal coal yard because at least 98 per cent of the people of this city desire it done. If you doubt that the people in the overwhelming majority indicated above are in favor of the municipality establishing a municipal coal yard and selling coal to the people at \$9.50 per ton, I would be glad to suggest a number of ways by which the sentiment of the people could be ascertained quickly and emphatically.

I urge the immediate establishment of a municipal coal yard because each day's delay is adding to the unrest in the city and creating a lack of confidence in the municipal government's ability to function.

In closing may I not again urge that your honorable body take immediate action to relieve an intolerable condition. Most respectfully yours,
CHARLES W. BRYAN.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN DECLARES HE IS 'LATENT' DEMOCRAT

A Marion, O., dispatch, dated Dec. 21 says: William Jennings Bryan is not nearly so dead, politically, as some Democrats think.

President-elect Harding doesn't consider him dead. Of all the "best minds" who come to Marion, none, apparently, left a better impression than the Commoner.

Harding got a great deal of inspiration from the Bryan visit, and will consult him frequently on nonpartisan questions during the next four years.

The subject nearest Bryan's heart is the entrance of the United States into the League and this he discussed at length with the next president.

Linked with this is his plan to prevent wars through international agreements that nations shall take a referendum of their citizens before going to war.

This plan Harding has characterized as a "big idea."

Bryan will exert his influence in the next United States Senate to secure ratification of the League covenant.

Bryan also will seek ratification of the proposed constitutional amendment to permit a bare majority of the Senate, rather than the two-thirds now needed to ratify a peace treaty.

"A bare majority of congress can declare war," he points out.

"I now refer to myself as a 'latent Democrat,'" says Bryan. "That's a Democrat who's more active sometimes than other times."

FROM A COMMONER READER

E. B. Howard, Iowa.—I am proud that I voted for you three times for president. Seven voters of my family will stand by you and your principles. I am proud that I have so many times raised subscription clubs for *The Commoner*.

Before election *The Commoner* stated "that the eastern states and Wall street clamored for a wet candidate; they got him, but he was not a Wall street favorite—see if they don't treat him as they did Judge Parker in 1904."

American progressives cannot depend upon rich men to represent them in conventions. I have written you many times that even in Iowa many of our convention Democrats were Parker and Governor Harmon sympathizers, which analyzed means Republican sympathizers; so progressive Democrats must re-organize by referendum ballots. You and your principles forever and a day.