

## A National Bulletin

Editor of the Forum.—My Dear Sir: Responding to your invitation, I beg to submit the following reasons for the establishing of a National Bulletin. The publication proposed is not a newspaper, and will not be a competitor of either the daily or the weekly press. Its sole purpose is to give to the voter information, absolutely necessary for an intelligent exercise of sovereignty. Our government rests upon the consent of the governed, but the value of that consent depends entirely upon whether it is given with an understanding of the issues to be decided.

At present all the avenues of information are in private hands. Our newspapers may be divided into two general classes, partisan papers and so-called independent papers. The partisan paper is admittedly biased. It does not pretend to give both sides with a view to enabling the reader to form a judicial opinion; and it could not if that was the purpose of its existence. Partisanship makes an editor unconsciously unfair, even when he tries to be just. His convictions color his judgment so that he cannot fairly weigh the arguments, pro and con. Without intending to do so, he will give undue weight to arguments which influence him and entirely ignore arguments on the other side which have great weight with opponents.

But if a partisan paper is unreliable, a so-called independent paper may be even less trustworthy. When one reads a partisan paper he makes allowance for the known bias of the editor; when he reads a so-called independent paper he will be deceived if he expects the arguments to be presented without bias. This is an impossibility. No man with sense enough to edit a paper of importance can be without conviction on the great issues and he cannot be without bias if he has convictions. I may add that he cannot escape from his bias no matter how hard he tries.

Many of the so-called independent papers are published for the purpose of deceiving; they deliberately conceal the reasons that prompt them to take the position they do. It is not always easy to know who owns a paper, why the owner owns it and what he is really doing with it, even though we have a law intended to compel the disclosure of ownership. We have had recent illustrations of this. One of the leading papers of New England was found to be owned by the New York, New Haven and Hartford R. R., and still more recently an Indianapolis paper was found to be owned (three-fourths of the stock) by a prominent public man, although another man had for years been making affidavit to its ownership. To summarize the above, the situation seems to be that the partisan papers cannot be absolutely fair EVEN WHEN THEY TRY, and some of the so-called independent ones DO NOT TRY.

It is to meet this situation—a really serious situation—that the National Bulletin is proposed. It should be under bipartisan control—that is, controlled by a board whose members are chosen by the parties for which they speak. I would suggest a board of five, two chosen by the majorities in the Senate and House, two by the minorities and one by the president. This would give the majority to the party that controlled the White House, but the board should be controlled by rules which would insure, first, the publication of all important acts of the president and Congress, together with the important measures proposed, but defeated, or kept from coming to a vote. Second, editorial space divided between the various parties in Congress and factions of parties according to voting strength. Every party represented in Congress should have editorial space in proportion to its members in the Senate and House. If the editor chosen by a party does not represent all the party, those who dissent from the choice should be permitted to select a spokesman with space proportionate to the number who designate him as their representative. Third, space for the presentation of the merits of candidates legitimately before the public for nomination or election. Presidential candidates would speak through the entire circulation of the Bulletin, Senatorial candidates would speak through the Bulletin sent into their representative states, and the Congressional candidates would speak through the Bulletin sent into their respective districts.

Such a bulletin would have the triple merit of informing the reader of the issues before the country; of giving the arguments pro and con from the highest authoritative sources, so that each voter could form an intelligent opinion;

and of doing away with the necessity for large campaign funds by offering an inexpensive means of making known the claims of candidates.

The proposed bulletin should be sent free to every library, college, school and official, national, state and municipal. Every organization and every person holding a public position should receive it and it should be furnished to all others desiring it, at a purely nominal price—not at cost, but for a sum only large enough to indicate an intention on the part of the subscriber to read it. If it were sent free to all there might be some waste because not everyone is interested enough to read such a paper although every voter should be interested.

In giving the details of the plan I have no thought of urging them; they are only suggested by way of explanation so that the readers will understand what I have in mind. The proposition is based upon the theory that the government has a right to the conscience and judgment of all its citizens and it cannot secure such an expression unless the citizens are properly informed. If popular government is of any value, it is worth enough to justify any expenditure necessary for the enlightenment of those who must sit in judgment upon the methods and policies of the government.

I said in the beginning that such a publication would not be a competitor of either the daily or the weekly press. The statement could be made even stronger than that; it would be a very great service to all publications. The partisan editor would find in the Bulletin the best arguments in support of his side and he would also find the best arguments on the opposite side. He could quote with approval those which represented his views and answer those of the other side. The paper that wanted to be independent could then be really so; it could confine itself to news and quote the editorial utterances of the Bulletin as presented by the representatives of both sides.

I might add that as "no question is ever settled until it is settled right," such a publication would greatly hasten the settlement of public questions and by so doing reduce to a minimum the period of agitation which precedes the settlement of an issue—a period now longer than it should be because of the inability of the people to secure the facts and the arguments on both sides.

The above is presented to meet a need which I conceive to be not only real but pressing. I shall gladly transfer my endorsement to any better plan proposed, or accept and use any improvement suggested; my only purpose is to aid the voters to understand the matters voted upon and to open public office to citizens without regard to their own wealth or the wealth of their political friends.

"Let there be Light" is a command as important in politics as elsewhere; and, in a free government, "equality of opportunity" in politics as well as industry is quite as important.

Very truly yours,

W. J. BRYAN.

When Charles W. Bryan of Lincoln was mayor of Lincoln the only important fight in which he lost out was when the city commission repealed, over his protests, an ordinance requiring bread to be sold by standard prescribed weights. The repeal was favored by the bakers because it gave them the opportunity to make any weight loaf they desired to sell for a dime, and was secured by circulating a petition for the repeal which misstated the question involved. Only the other week the Nebraska legislature made a state law out of the ordinance Mr. Bryan championed, and every baker in the state must hereafter sell his bread by the pound or half pound and not by the dime.

Advices from Washington are to the effect that the Republican congress has made up its mind to repeal the excess profits tax and substitute a direct sales tax. An excess profits tax is one which the profiteering merchant finds it difficult to pass onto his customers, while a direct sales tax is one which is added directly to the cost of each sale of goods made. Republican congressmen appear to believe that nothing should be left undone to leave the consumer in any doubt as to whether he is carrying all the burdens of government.

The recent increase in railroad rates has resulted in many instances in making it unprofitable to use the transportation companies for the marketing of products. The belief that most of the railroad executives are Republicans is strengthened by their great devotion to the principles of a prohibitive tariff.

## Journalism

Journalism is one of the great professions, and it can be made greater than it is. The editor has a very large field of usefulness. Speaking daily or weekly to an audience proportionate to the subscription list, he has only to win the confidence of his readers to wield an influence on every vital question. With the editor, as with everyone else, success depends upon his ideals. I believe that signed editorials would give the editor an individuality which the editorial page otherwise lacks. At present, few know by name the editorial writers on our leading papers, and for that reason it is difficult for an editor to establish a reputation. He goes off of one paper and on to another, according to the whim of the owner, bequeathing to the owner such prestige as his writings have brought to the paper.

The signed editorials will be more accurate and less likely to do injustice to those about whom the editor writes; when the identity of the writer is concealed, there is an invitation to carelessness if not to recklessness.

But what the present needs most is an ideal that will lead the writer to express his own convictions or none. No man can afford to write that which he believes to be untrue, whether he is discussing men or measures. If he yields to the temptation to express the opinion of others contrary to his own, he will in time obliterate the truth-discerning-sense and thus cease to be a moral factor in the newspaper world. No one can legally excuse the commission of a crime by pleading he was the agent of another; and so there is no moral justification for the writing of that which one believes to be untrue, merely because he is told to do so. Great editors do not work in the dark; they establish their place by winning the confidence of the public and they hold that confidence by conscientiously guarding the trust reposed in them.

W. J. BRYAN.

### THE PRESIDENT AND PEACE

Two things are regarded as certain respecting any steps President Harding may take looking to America's part in any understanding or association among the nations on the subject of peace and its preservation.

He will not leave the country. He will remain on base, or close to base, while the matter is under consideration, and in touch with his constitutional advisers and public sentiment. He will not hold himself superior to home advice while negotiations are in progress.

He will not ignore the Senate, or attempt to force his will on that body. He recognizes the Senate as part of the treaty-making power of the government, with the right to review any work of the kind he may submit to it for judgment. Conferences will "go" in that matter as in other matters. He believes in conferences. He is constantly conferring as to domestic affairs, and especially as they are so much more difficult to handle?

Mr. Harding would probably take this course without a warning. It chimes with his nature and his view of things. But there is a warning. It is the opinion of all Republicans and many Democrats that in going to Paris, and while there ignoring the Senate, and upon his return insisting that the Senate accept his work without change, Mr. Wilson made a mistake, and made the ratification of the peace treaty impossible.—Washington Star.

The only way that the Democratic party can achieve success is by deserving it. The only way in which it can deserve it is to present to the voters of the nation a progressive program of legislation that common sense and human experience indicate will solve the great national problems that are pressing for settlement and solution. That program must be fought for under leadership that has proved its sympathy with the struggle of the average man for his share in the prosperity of the nation, and a capacity to carry it forward to success.

Nebraska Republican leaders, after having forced through the house a bill to repeal the law making all elections of judges and school superintendents non-partisan in character, acquired a case of cold feet and allowed it to be killed in the senate. Whether this was done in obedience to the strong hostile public sentiment that was developed or whether they began to figure that when the next election rolled around nobody but Democrats would be elected remains among the unanswered questions.