

Democratic Labor Legislation

The so-called "labor planks" in the party platforms have long been regarded as a joke, albeit a somewhat sardonic one. The failure of the party in power to live up to its promises has come to be regarded as in the natural order of things. Political managers have come to regard the "labor plank" as a promise that may be made and broken with equal impunity.

Labor itself is the only party in interest that has taken the matter seriously. The continued insistence of the labor representatives, despite the continual disappointment of their hopes, has been regarded as an evidence either of the force of habit or of the "hope that springs eternal." In short, the "labor plank" has been regarded as a thing of less real meaning, if that be possible, than any other feature of the declarations of purpose periodically issued by the political parties.

Times are altered. The hopes of labor have at last been realized in abundant measure. For once the party in power has actually kept its pledges. The "labor planks" in its platform have been translated into the law of the land.

Four years ago the democratic party adopted as a feature of its platform for the national campaign a number of proposals in the interest of labor—that is, of the people at large. Many of those proposals were fundamental, even radical, if you please; all of them were of the highest importance to large bodies of our citizenship.

The democratic party was returned to power, and in open defiance of all traditions proceeded to make good its promises. The record is now open for inspection. That record is in itself a record of great achievement for the cause of labor; by comparison with previous records, it is nothing short of marvelous.

It is to be noted that the "labor planks" in the democratic platform of 1912 covered a wider field than in any previous instance. The legislative measures enacted by the democratic party are correspondingly numerous and varied in the scope of their influence upon industrial conditions. A complete summary of these measures would "fill a book," only the more important of these measures can be dealt with in an article of this kind.

The democrats secured a majority in the house of representatives of the 62nd congress. Many labor laws were passed by that congress. Several of these measures, including some of the most fundamental in character, were vetoed or pocketed by President Taft. Among the labor laws passed by the 62nd are the following:

LABOR LAWS PASSED BY 62ND CONGRESS (APRIL 4, 1911—MARCH 3, 1913)

Abolition of "gag-rule" as applied to Post-office and other civil service employes.

National Eight-Hour law made applicable to contractors.

Mandatory enforcement of eight-hour day for letter carriers and postal clerks.

Children's bureau established.

Commission on Industrial Relations established.

Department of Labor created.

Seamen's Bill passed. (Vetoed by President Taft.)

Anti-phosphorous-match bill.

Labor organizations exempted from prosecution under Anti-Trust act. (Vetoed by President Taft.)

Investigation of labor conditions in iron and steel industry.

Three-watch system for ships' officers.

Increased wages for pressmen in government printing office.

Increased wages for employes of Naval Gun factory.

Investigation of textile strike at Lawrence, Mass.

Investigation of the Taylor "stop-watch" system.

Both branches of the 63rd congress were controlled by the democrats, and a democrat occupied the White house. Following is a partial list of the measures in the interest of labor enacted by that congress and now in effect:

LABOR LAWS PASSED BY 63RD CONGRESS (APRIL 7, 1913—MARCH 4, 1915)

Exempting labor and farmers' organizations from prosecution under Anti-Trust act; limiting the use and preventing the abuse of the injunction in labor disputes; defining contempt of the injunctions; providing jury trial and restricting punishment in trials for contempt of the injunc-

tion; prohibiting department of justice from using funds to prosecute labor and farmers' organizations under the Anti-Trust act. (Signed by President Wilson.)

Seaman's bill passed. (Signed by President Wilson.)

Conciliation, mediation and arbitration act for railroad employes.

Eight-Hour law for women and children in District of Columbia.

Eight-Hour law for employes under Alaska Coal Land act.

Public construction of Alaska railroad.

Industrial education.

Taylor "stop-watch" system prohibited in United States arsenals, navy yards, gun factories and torpedo stations.

Piecework prohibited in post-office department, Washington, D. C.

Public construction of warships and other vessels in navy yards extended; repairs to be made in public instead of private yards.

Protection of ships' officers in reporting defects or violations of law.

Bureau of Mines act extended and strengthened.

Investigation of labor dispute in coal fields of West Virginia, resulting in great improvement in miners' conditions.

Compensation for injuries extended to post-office employes.

Letter carriers salaries restored.

Locomotive boiler inspection extended to include engines and tenders.

Investigation of labor disputes in Colorado coal fields and Michigan copper region.

Increase of wages of metal trades mechanics at Washington navy yard.

Additional appropriation for children's bureau.

Additional appropriations for the department of labor.

Every one of those measures means much to large classes of the American people. Many of them affect vitally the welfare of the nation itself.

To describe these measures as "labor laws" hardly conveys an adequate impression of their significance. They are in fact people's laws, since their influence is bound to affect for good the people, not only of the so-called labor class, but of every other class. They are in the truest and broadest sense democratic laws, since they deal with the conditions that underlie the whole social structure, and by improving these conditions they make for the establishment of equality upon an ascending plane of social life.

It is a truism that laws are good or bad according as they are well or ill administered. In this respect the record of the present administration parallels its record of legislation. A striking, but by no means exceptional instance is the administration of the department of labor.

Secretary of Labor Wilson possesses in the highest degree, the qualities of an ideal official. That Mr. Wilson was available for appointment was a matter of good fortune, let us say. Nevertheless, his appointment was a stroke of genius on the part of the President. More correctly speaking, it was a stroke of courage. Some of the qualities that make Secretary Wilson an ideal man at the head of the department of labor might be considered as detracting from his availability on "practical" grounds.

It is characteristic of the President's whole conduct in such matters that he did the right rather than the expedient thing, and that in choosing the man who should be entrusted with the formulation of policies in the new field of governmental activity he selected one who combines all the necessary qualifications, in preference to one who although lacking some of these qualities might for that very reason be considered more likely to "hold the balance even"—that is, to administer the affairs of the new department with the least possible disturbance of the existing order of things.

In all other appointments President Wilson has been actuated by a courageous and intelligent view of the needs of labor and the purpose of the newly-enacted labor laws. The officials intrusted with the administration of these laws may be depended upon to discharge their duties in accordance with the spirit as well as the letter of the new order.

The American Federation of Labor, in a recent review of its legislative achievements, says: "Not all the members of organized labor or its friends fully appreciate the remarkable prog-

ress that has attended labor's political activity. Many critics and enemies of the political policy of the American Federation of Labor have condemned that policy and sought to minimize its effectiveness. These objections need no other reply than an enumeration of the federal legislative measures in behalf of labor enacted since March, 1906."

Labor is to be congratulated upon the progress it has made during the period named, and especially in the 62nd and 63rd congresses, the record of which greatly exceeds that of the preceding period.

Great as is the work already accomplished, much remains to be done. Many labor measures are pending in the present congress and in a fair way of passage. The record already established affords every assurance that with a continuance of public confidence the present and future congresses will move on to still greater achievements on behalf of the people of the United States.—San Francisco Star.

INJUSTICE TO MR. BRYAN

[Christian Science Monitor, Boston, Mass., Tuesday, May 23, 1916.]

Only the impartial, unbiased, careful student of contemporary political history in the United States is able to account, to his own satisfaction or to the satisfaction of others, for the bitterness and pertinacity with which William Jennings Bryan is pursued by certain writers, certain newspapers and certain interests. To attribute the acrid tone of the abuse heaped upon him almost without intermission, to his attitude toward militarism and his advocacy of world peace would be folly, for the harsh treatment meted out to him dates much farther back than the beginning of the European war or the inauguration of the preparedness agitation. It can not be due to the fact that he resigned from the Wilson cabinet on a point of conscience, because in other countries, as well as in the United States, many other members of ministries and cabinets have so resigned without bringing the integrity of their motives or the purity of their patriotism into question. It can not be because Mr. Bryan resigned at what was regarded as a critical moment in the country's diplomatic relations, for a majority of such resignations are actually precipitated by governmental crises.

Mr. Bryan is not friendly toward the enlargement of the military or naval establishments; he is, and long anterior to the outbreak of the European war he was, a warm advocate of international arbitration and of good will and peace among men, but he has not stood alone in either respect. Many of the leading men of America have been in sympathy with his doctrines, are in sympathy with them today. It can not be that Mr. Bryan is singled out for exhortation and condemnation from the scores of prominent citizens of the republic professedly opposed to war. William Howard Taft, both as private citizen and as president, has stood in the past practically for the Bryan pacifist doctrines. Woodrow Wilson as a private citizen stood for them; is standing for them as President. Theodore Roosevelt, while president, was granted the Nobel peace prize. Many have differed from each of these, but none of the three has been vituperated as has Mr. Bryan for believing and declaring that war is something to be abhorred and shunned.

As a proof that Mr. Bryan can not be disliked or detested by certain persons, papers, or interests altogether because of his pacifist views, an incident at the meeting of the peace conference at Mohonk Lake, N. Y., a few days ago deserves attention. During one of the sessions Major George Haven Putnam, member of a New York publishing firm, began by attacking Mr. Bryan's peace policies but had not proceeded far before he found himself denouncing the distinguished Nebraskan for "misrepresenting the country by his theory of discharging its debts at 50 cents on the dollar." Fair-minded men at the gathering at once, and quite properly, protested against dragging the partisan fight in which Mr. Bryan was engaged in 1896 into the peace discussion of 1916.

But we have here a clew to the anti-Bryan propaganda. He is evidently not disliked, and he is evidently not being lampooned or traduced so much for his attitude on the peace question as for his attitude toward "the interests." He has been for a quarter of a century an implacable foe of the financial manipulator, exploiter and speculator. He preceded Roosevelt as "an enemy of the trusts"; indeed, he made it possible for Roosevelt to fight the trusts. To Bry-