

# PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

PRIMARY ELECTIONS, EQUAL TAXATION

AND RAILWAY RATE COMMISSION

===== FORMER =====

Attorney General O'Connor,

WM. J. BRYAN

AND OTHER PROMINENT DEMOCRATS

===== ON THE =====

WISCONSIN SITUATION

F9021

1904

THE OSKOSH CONVENTION

## Complete Change of "Stalwart Democracy" on Primary Elections

In 1898 the Democratic party in State Convention, as good Democratic principle, placed the following plank in their platform:

"We are in favor of a primary election law to replace the present method of nominating candidates for office, to the end that all nominations shall be made by direct vote of the people."

Four years later—under the dominating influence of public service corporations—the Democratic convention in Milwaukee, which nominated David Rose of that city for governor, denounced a primary election law as "un-American," "un-Democratic" and "viciously paternalistic." Commenting on this Milwaukee convention, William J. Bryan wrote in "The Commoner," Sept. 12, 1902, the following editorial:

### "WISCONSIN GOES WRONG."

"The democrats of Wisconsin have lost a splendid opportunity to show their devotion to principles. Governor La Follette has aroused the ire of the corporation element in the republican party by attempting to make the method of selecting candidates more democratic and by insisting upon a more equitable distribution of the burdens of taxation. The democrats, instead of standing by him where he was right and then appealing to the country on the national issues in which he was wrong, adopted the short-sighted policy of trying to conciliate that element of the republican party which can never be democratic. The democratic party can only secure the support of corporation republicans by making the party unfaithful to its principles and unfaithful to the people who trust it. The plank which denounces La Follette's primary bill reads as follows:

"We are opposed to any and all measures, the tendency of which is to deprive the people of their constitutional right to assemble together, either, in their own proper person or by representatives chosen by them-

selves for the nomination of candidates for office; and we denounce the Stevens primary election bill as un-American and undemocratic in principle and dangerously and viciously paternalistic. If enacted into law it would destroy the elementary principles of republican institutions by subordinating the will of the majority to that of a small plurality, and which would disfranchise the minority in a large number of the counties in the state and give cities and municipalities great power in the selection of candidates for office."

"If this bill has defects those defects ought to be pointed out, and a better bill substituted. As it is, the party is put in the attitude of opposing the primaries as a means of selecting officers. *How can the party prefer a delegate convention to a primary without discrediting the intelligence and patriotism of the voters? Any argument that can be made against a primary can be made against a popular vote for the candidates after their nomination.* If the bill which the Wisconsin convention condemned substituted a plurality for a majority, it should have criticised that feature and suggested an amendment that would provide for a second election, as the primary laws do in most of the states where they have been adopted. *But to denounce a primary law as un-American and undemocratic is to betray an ignorance of what democracy really means.*

"It is not strange that a convention that would denounce a primary as undemocratic should also avoid a discussion of the money question, for when the corporate element is strong enough to drive the democratic party into opposition to a primary law, it can drive it away from a financial policy or from anything else that is good.

*"The reorganizers have obtained control in several of the states, but nowhere do they seem to have gone to the length that they have in Wisconsin."*

### "LA FOLLETTE'S WORK."

In another edition of the "Commoner," Aug. 8, 1902, Mr. Bryan endorsed the great work of Governor La Follette in the following editorial:

"*The Commoner* is glad to give credit to the republicans when they do something creditable, and therefore congratulates the republicans of Wisconsin upon having indorsed Governor La Follette's efforts to tax corporations and to make the method of selecting candidates more democratic. And yet Mr. La Follette is more likely to help the democratic party than the republican party by his attempts at reform, for he will educate republicans to see the viciousness of the policies for which the national republican party stands, and in the end, these enlight-

ened republicans will have to leave the republican party if they would save the country from corporate domination."

#### **OSHKOSH STATE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION, 1904.**

Not satisfied by the defeat with which these principles and Mr. Rose met with at the polls in 1902, still under the over-powering influence of the same public service corporations and in opposition to the wise opinion of a strong minority of the convention which met in Oshkosh on August 30, this same "stalwart element" of the Democratic party voted down these two strong planks of the platform:

#### **MINORITY REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED BY WILLIAM GEORGE BRUCE, T. L. CLEARY, M. E. BURKE AND J. A. WALSH.**

##### **ON PRIMARY ELECTION.**

"We heartily favor the principle of primary elections. Should the measure now before the people become a law, we pledge the Democratic party to its strict enforcement and to such amendment by the legislature as experience will prove to be advisable in order to protect the rights of the minority parties and provide for the holding of preliminary party conventions to formulate platforms and policies."

##### **ON RAILWAY RATE COMMISSION.**

Another minority report on the platform was also submitted by M. E. Burke and T. L. Cleary, as follows: "We demand that all public service corporations, including railroads, express companies, telegraph and telephone companies, should be in fact directly under the supervision of the state, and to that end we are in favor of the enactment of a law providing for the establishment of a commission consisting of three persons with ample power to supervise and control the rates, charges and fees of all the public service corporations for services rendered, and to prevent discrimination by them in favor of one as against another, such commission to be elected by the people at the spring election."

#### **DEBATE ON PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND RATE COMMISSION.**

Extracts from the speeches made on "primary elections" and an effective "rate commission" by some of the most prominent leaders of the convention are herewith quoted:

##### **BRUCE FOR PRIMARY ELECTIONS.**

William George Bruce came forward with the minority report urging a primary election plank.

"In the first place," he said, "I want it distinctly understood that the minority report emanates from strictly Democratic sources."

This statement was loudly cheered. Mr. Bruce then read his report.

"The minority report is the very essence of Democracy," he said in discussing it. "I do not come here as a theorist. I come as a man who has seen practical politics, a man who has conducted several big campaigns, and has seen the evils of the present convention system.

"I firmly believe that nine-tenths of the Democrats of the state favor a primary election plank. I earnestly appeal to you to adopt the minority report."

T. L. Cleary of Platteville then read the minority report relative to a railroad commission. It was signed by himself and Senator M. E. Burke of Beaver Dam, or, as he put it, "by a Republican from Dodge county and myself, another Republican." Mr. Cleary moved that the report of the minority be substituted for that of the majority.

##### **STRONGLY URGED BY CLEARY.**

At Mr. Bruce's suggestion, the primary election clause was taken up first. Mr. Cleary then took the platform to make his speech. He said, in part:

"The committee on resolutions tried to reach an agreement consistent with the individual opinion of its members. Being unable to do so, it came to the convention to settle the policies of the Democratic party in Wisconsin.

"A majority of the committee was absolutely opposed to any primary election at all. All of the minority were in favor of the principles of primary election."

"Now it is up to you to say what is the thing we should do on the question of the principles of the party.

"Is the principle of primary election right or wrong? I will not waste time to discuss this question; it has been fought and refought in the past two legislatures of the state. After there was struggle and strife and party war during the past six years, and a law was passed; it is imperfect, the majority says. The minority says that it should be put into effect and allow, as I hope, a Democratic legislature to correct whatever errors it contains.

"Because the Republicans adopted it after we did, is no reason that we should drop it.

"Where will the Democratic party be in five years if public service corporations of the state can tear the Republican party to pieces when they ride on Republican platforms. They tried to ruin it, and they have succeeded.

"Now they come to us and propose to get hold of the Democratic party. (Loud cheering.)

"Last night we fought this matter out in the committee. We had a committee of twelve members, eleven of them lawyers. (Cheers.) I do not intend to cast discredit upon them. (James Clancy, Stoughton, 'No, you don't.') I do not say that they are dishonest. But I do say that they are men who get most of their money from the public service corporations, and, as such, are inclined to favor them.

#### **DON'T WANT STALWART VOTES.**

"What I heard last night made me think that the party needs primary election to save it. I don't want a platform adopted that will turn voters to the Republican nominee. I don't want stalwart influence to come into this convention.

"What of the policy of it? I don't want to drive good Democrats to the support of a Republican candidate for governor. I would rather hold one good Democratic vote than get five stalwart votes temporarily. Stalwart Republicans are going to vote for Democrats because they lack principle. They have destroyed one party and they would destroy us. They are a band of pirates who would scuttle our ship and leave us.

"As to the question of primary election, you will be told the same facts that you have heard relative to the matter for the past six years. You understand it.

#### **NO USE IN MINCING WORDS.**

"The majority report of the committee on resolutions was copied, or, at least, had the idea of the platform adopted in the stalwart convention. (Cheering.)

"There is no use in mincing words here. If you adopt a stalwart platform on railroad control by the state, and primary election, you might as well make no nominations at all." (Great applause.)

#### **LIKE THE AUSTRALIAN BALLOT.**

T. H. Ryan of Appleton was the next speaker. He compared opposition to the Australian ballot to opposition to primary elections today. He said that the vicious caucus system was seen no better than in the Racine contest before the Democratic state convention which named delegates to the national convention.

#### **RIGHT OR WRONG, ASKED SCHMITZ.**

A. J. Schmitz of Milwaukee took up the cause of primary elections.

"We should not favor or attack primary elections because of stalwart or halfbreed," he said. "The question is, 'Is it right or wrong?'"

"Why did you not say you opposed primary elections in any form?" he said, addressing Senator Vilas. "Why this subterfuge? If not, why did you not say you approved of a primary election law, but were opposed to the present law. I claim that the majority report is a dodger, and that it does not face the issue."

#### **CARRUTH MAKES A HIT.**

Col. G. W. Carruth, a veteran Democrat of Kenosha, then took the floor. His proved the hit of all speeches made during the morning session. "If the Gods do not destroy the Republican party, they should be dismissed from service," he said. "I wondered why this committee remained out all night to discuss this report. I was satisfied when I learned that there were eleven lawyers and one taxpayer."

"The majority report is like a cuttle fish. They try to muddy the water and distract attention from the true issue.

"That majority report was a work of art. It should be framed and placed in some museum for permanent preservation. It was the best exhibition of how not to do it that ever was framed.

"What do we care what those Republican misfits did with a primary election law. I am not in favor of that law, but I am in favor of a law where Republicans and Democrats can go to the polls on the same day and cast their ballots for their choice of nominees the same as they will vote at the coming election.

"Why not? Can't you trust the people?"

Col. Carruth then made the first mention of George W. Peck's name made in the convention. It was not loudly cheered. Continuing, he said:

#### **DUE TO REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT.**

"Primary election is the only thing for representative government, and while it does hurt the machine, it does give us farmers a show.

"There is not a reliable Democratic state in which there is not a primary election law, and which has not had it for years."

When he closed his speech he was greeted with cheers and cries of "Come back!" "Go on!"

John A. Alward of Madison, member of the committee on resolutions, then made a defense of what he considered an attack upon lawyers.

#### **WHY ROSE WENT DOWN TO DEFEAT.**

Louis Bohmrich was the next speaker. He said that "he fought four years ago and did his duty and returned the Democratic banner unsullied.

"I tell you, members from Milwaukee," he said, "your most favored member went down in a most miserable defeat two years ago when he fought primary elections."

#### **INSTRUCTED BY THE PEOPLE.**

John Walsh of Washburn said that he came to the convention instructed by those who elected him to vote for a primary election plank. He refuted many of the arguments against primary election advanced by members of the committee on resolutions who signed the majority report.

Senator Vilas arose to speak, but it was decided that he close the debate. A motion to adjourn until 1:30 o'clock was made and carried.

#### **MERTON MAKES STRONG PLEA.**

Senator Merton of Waukesha was the first speaker at the afternoon session.

"I favored the primary law from childhood, believing in the principles of Thomas Jefferson. When the Australian law passed, the ward

heelers who controlled the caucuses had to give up stuffing ballot boxes and went to bulldozing and buying up caucuses. This primary law is designed to put a stop to these practices at the ballot boxes. If you oppose primary election law in this platform you will find yourself in the same difficulties that the Democratic party experienced two years ago in meeting the people.

"Why are the great corporate influences against the primary law? I know from personal experience that they are. When the United States senators are indorsed by the people before election, as advocated by our national platform, it will have to be done by the primary election plan.

"The spectacle of caucuses and primaries in Wisconsin this year is a stench in the nostrils of all honest men.

"Why did not the Merton election law pass two years ago? Because the Republicans did not want it from a Democrat."

J. L. Clancy of Stoughton—"I have heard it said that in 1898 the Democrats adopted a primary election platform. I spoke for it during the campaign."

He was asked whether it was not Robert Schilling who proposed the 1898 primary election law and had it put in the platform. He acknowledged that Schilling was the author. *In saying this his memory must have failed him, else Mr. Clancy would recall that the primary plank of the Democratic convention of 1898 was prepared by M. A. Hoyt, editor of the Milwaukee Daily News.*

#### **PRIMARY ELECTIONS VOTED DOWN.**

The substitution of the amendment to the platform in favor of the primary law was then put to vote and lost by a vote of 172½ to 404½.

Some delegate in the rear shouted out as the primary law resolution was voted down, "Hurrah for the stalwarts. They run this convention."

#### **RATE COMMISSION ALSO DEFEATED.**

The resolution proposed by Michael Burke and T. L. Cleary of the committee on resolutions as a minority report, which the convention was asked to adopt as an amendment to the regular platform, was voted down by the decisive majority of 171 to 404. Thus the progressive Democrats who built great hopes of being allowed, at least, to carry some of their progressive ideas into the platform, were completely shut out.

### SOME DEMOCRATIC COMMENT ON THE DEMOCRATIC STATE PLATFORM.

W. G. Bruce, Milwaukee—"I firmly believe that nine-tenths of the Democrats of the state favor a primary election plank. I come here with the experience of political campaigns and an intimate knowledge of practical politics, and I have seen the evils of conventions demonstrated again and again. I believe nine-tenths of the Democrats of the state will approve of the plank advocated by the minority."

T. L. Cleary, Platteville—"The majority is copying the recent stalwart platform and they want to cram it down your throats. If you adopt the stalwart platform you might as well adopt no platform at all."

Senator Ernst Merton, Waukesha—"The best arguments for primary election law are the caucuses recently conducted by the Republican party."

T. L. Ryan, Appleton—"The same arguments were urged against the Australian system years ago that are urged against primary election today. We do not need to go into the Republican ranks to see the viciousness of the present system. We only have to look at our last state convention in Milwaukee."

A. J. Schmitz, Milwaukee—"We don't care what the stalwarts or half-breeds think about the law. If the principle of primary elections is wrong, then why this subterfuge in the plank, which the majority of the committee asks us to adopt?"

Louis Bohmrich, Milwaukee—"The people want a primary election law, and anything the people want is Democratic."

W. F. Nash, editor of the Two Rivers Chronicle—"I do not like it. The supervisory railroad commission plank is not as good as it might be, but I suppose it will do, but I do not like the primary election plank."

George W. Caruth, Kenosha—"The minority plank was prepared by eleven lawyers and one taxpayer. Can't you trust the people? Do you want the continuance of a system which admits of a man securing

a nomination by going around in the saloons and stopping a few pinoche games?" He accused Gov. La Follette of stealing the primary election principle from the Democrats."

The work done by the convention was not up to the standard of the convention itself. It has placed in the field a good, clean ticket, to be sure, but a platform which dodges vital questions, questions over which the whole state is aroused. It is not a strong platform. It may well be doubted whether such a platform is a wise platform. The people prefer outspokenness to excessive discretion.—Henry Campbell, managing editor Milwaukee Journal.

### THE DUTY OF DEMOCRATS

#### BY GENERAL O'CONNOR AND OTHER PROMINENT DEMOCRATS.

Since the Oshkosh State Democratic Convention many prominent Democrats of Wisconsin have come out openly and publicly in favor of primary elections and an effective rate commission, and many of the county Democratic conventions have written these two planks into their platforms.

Former Attorney General James L. O'Connor, one of the leading Democrats of the state, in a letter to W. F. Nash of the Two Rivers Chronicle (Dem.) commending that paper's political stand, writes:

"It is a position which can serve the best purpose to the Democratic party. No man with an ounce of political sense can fail to know that a large number of Democrats favor a primary election, and will vote in favor of the bill now pending rather than have none at all. This being so, if the Democrats oppose the ratification of this act by the people, it must be obvious that many Democrats who are not seeking any public position or public favor, will not discriminate, but will vote for that party which will honestly enforce the primary election when adopted, rather than the candidates who are pledged to its defeat. For my part, if I do any campaigning, I shall urge the Democrats to vote for the primary election, and if the powers that be do not like this, I will then occupy my time practicing law.

"I do not think that I can fully agree with you upon the rate commission. Of course, the plank in our platform covering this subject is rot. The men who framed it and advocated it in the convention know

well that the investigation which they propose to have made by another commission has already been carefully made by the tax commission, and why another commission should be called upon to go over the same work and report to the legislature what the tax commissioners are prepared to report at this present moment, is something that I cannot understand. I imagine that some of our leaders have learned from the Republicans that whenever the party does not desire to do anything, the way to accomplish it, and at the same time fool the people, is to appoint a commission to investigate and report. I do not recall that the interstate commerce commission, when appointed, was called upon to trot all over this country and ascertain the value of railroad properties.

"My idea is that a tax commission should have the same powers in this state as the Democrats propose to give to the interstate commerce commission, namely, to receive complaints from shippers, and ascertain if the rates are unreasonable, and then determine what is reasonable, and compel the railroad companies to carry at this figure, until some court shall determine that the amount fixed by the commission is unreasonable. Under the present law, the interstate commerce commission is powerless to give any relief to shippers. They have the simple power of determining whether a certain charge is reasonable. If the commission decides it to be unreasonable, then the railroad company can appeal to the courts, and can continue charging the old rate, until the supreme court decides with the commissioners that the old rate is unreasonable, and then the railroad company can drop it down a fraction of a cent, and continue charging that rate until some other shipper complains, and go through the same process again, and if the court decides that the commissioners were right in determining that the second rate was unreasonable, they can then drop down a fraction of a cent, and continue charging that until the commissioners have gone through the determination that it is unreasonable and the courts have affirmed this finding, and can continue this until they have completely worn out the patience and the energy of any shipper.

"The Democrats proposed in the last congress a bill providing that whenever the interstate commerce commission should find that a certain rate was unreasonable they should also find out what was a reasonable rate, and that this rate should control and govern the railroads, until the courts ruled that the finding of the interstate commerce commission was erroneous. I have no doubt that a fair and effective commission could be framed upon the lines of the interstate commerce commission, giving them such power as the Democrats proposed by this measure, to which I have referred. Of course, the measure never passed the Republican congress."

**MR. BOWLER'S POSITION.  
HIS STAND UPON PUBLIC QUESTIONS IS OUTSPOKEN  
AND COMMANDS RESPECT.**

The editor of the Reporter interviewed Mr. Bowler, Democratic candidate for state senator in this district, with reference to his position on state issues in this campaign, and he desired that his position be stated as follows:

First, he stands for a railroad rate commission with full power to regulate and fix railroad rates and to prevent railroad discriminations, giving to this same commission the power and authority to regulate the charges and rates of water work companies, gas companies, telegraph and telephone companies, and other public utility corporations.

Second, he stands for the passage of law by the next legislature, giving to the people of the State of Wisconsin a two-cent railroad fare.

Third, he stands for and believes in principles of primary election, and if the present primary election law submitted to the people is approved by the people, any objectionable features in the law can be corrected by the legislature.

Fourth, he stands for just and equal taxation, compelling railroads and all other corporations to pay their just share of the taxes.

In other words, he stands for that principle which Democrats always stand for—"equal rights to all and special privileges to none."

Mr. Bowler states that he will discuss the issues throughout the district before the close of the campaign in advocacy of his position as above outlined.—Plymouth Reporter, Sept. 30, '04.

**WINNEBAGO AND VERNON COUNTY DEMOCRATIC  
RESOLUTIONS ON PRIMARY ELECTION AND  
RATE COMMISSION.**

First—We are in favor of the principle of primary elections.

Second—We are in favor of an elective commission that shall have full control with power to regulate the rates and charges of all public service corporations.

Third—We are in favor of the passage of a law establishing a universal passenger rate of two cents per mile upon all railroads within the state of Wisconsin.

The following resolution was adopted by the Vernon County convention May 14, 1904:

We recognize and hail with joy the progress in political sense made by the "half-breed" Republicans under the leadership of Governor La Follette, who has succeeded in promulgating Democratic principles among his followers, by changing the label, and we denounce the stand taken by the leaders of our party in the last state campaign, in their tacit, but well understood alliance with our natural enemy, the stalwart Republicans, as an unworthy barter of principles for votes.

### **THE INDEPENDENT PRESS.**

Many of the independent papers of the state have endorsed the principles of Primary Elections and a Railway Rate Commission. The "Catholic Citizen," under the dates of Sept. 17 and Oct. 8, publishes these editorials:

"There are conservative and radical tendencies in the Democratic party; and at times in the Republican party also.

"What Steffens calls 'the System' (the exploitation of politics for commercial purposes) is always bi-partisan; it uses both parties and gets one party as easily as the other, according to which ever is more useful.

"The present Wisconsin situation is a notable illustration. The radical or people's element in the Republican party is lined up under Robert M. La Follette, at present Governor of the state and seeking re-election on a platform favoring equal taxation and primary election reform. The conservative or trust element is in revolt against La Follette, and, with the money of the railroads and the federal machine, is strenuously seeking to defeat him.

"The Wisconsin Democrats meanwhile have the same diverse tendency. In Wisconsin, this year, the Democratic party opposes vote for their principles in voting for La Follette. The conservative Democrats, who have stock in the corporations and hold directorships on railroads, are quite as desirous of defeating La Follette as are the Stalwart Republicans. The office-seeking politicians among the Dem-

ocrats who have very little interest in the issues are quite willing to take the spoils of the campaign on any platform; and as the money to win the election is most abundant on the conservative side, their campaign has been planned accordingly."

Sept. 17, 1904.

"In Michigan the Democratic state platform favors the primary election law. In Wisconsin, this year, the Democratic party opposes primary elections, although in 1898 the Democratic party adopted a platform favoring a primary election law. At the coming state election in Wisconsin the people will be asked to vote for or against chapter 451 of the laws of 1903, providing for party nominations by direct vote. If approved by a majority of the votes cast on that question, it will go into effect and be in force. On the ballot there will be printed, "Shall chapter 451 of the laws of 1903, to make party nominations by direct vote, be adopted?"

"We strongly advise our Wisconsin readers to vote "Yes," to this question.

"If the law is deficient in its details, it may be very easily amended by the legislature. But if the law is voted down by the people, the machine influences in the legislature, which have always opposed primary election reform, will declare that the people voted against the principle of the law; and they will be right, as it is the principle of the law, and not its details, that are really before the people."

### **WHY WISCONSIN DEMOCRACY SHOULD BE OVER- WHELMED BY DEFEAT.**

The Democrats of Wisconsin have proved themselves recreant to their high trust by catering to the corrupt corporations and privileged interests and opposing the fundamentally democratic and vitally important Primary Election-law. They have proved themselves to be reactionary Bourbons of the worst type, the Esaus of modern democracy; and for this shameful recreancy as well as because Governor La Follette has proved himself to be the friend of pure and just government and the fundamental principles of free institutions, every Democrat worthy of the name should rebuke the Esaus who have gained control of the party-machine, by loyally supporting the present governor. The election of Governor La Follette in Wisconsin and of Mr. Folk in Missouri would do more for honest government and the rescuing of our institutions from the oppressive and corrupt rule of bosses backed by corporations and privileged interests than anything else that can happen at the present time. Let every patriot in Wisconsin work loyally and whole-heartedly for the election of Governor La Follette.—The Arena, Oct., 1904.