WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN —THE POPULIST WARRIOR

By Michael Collins Piper

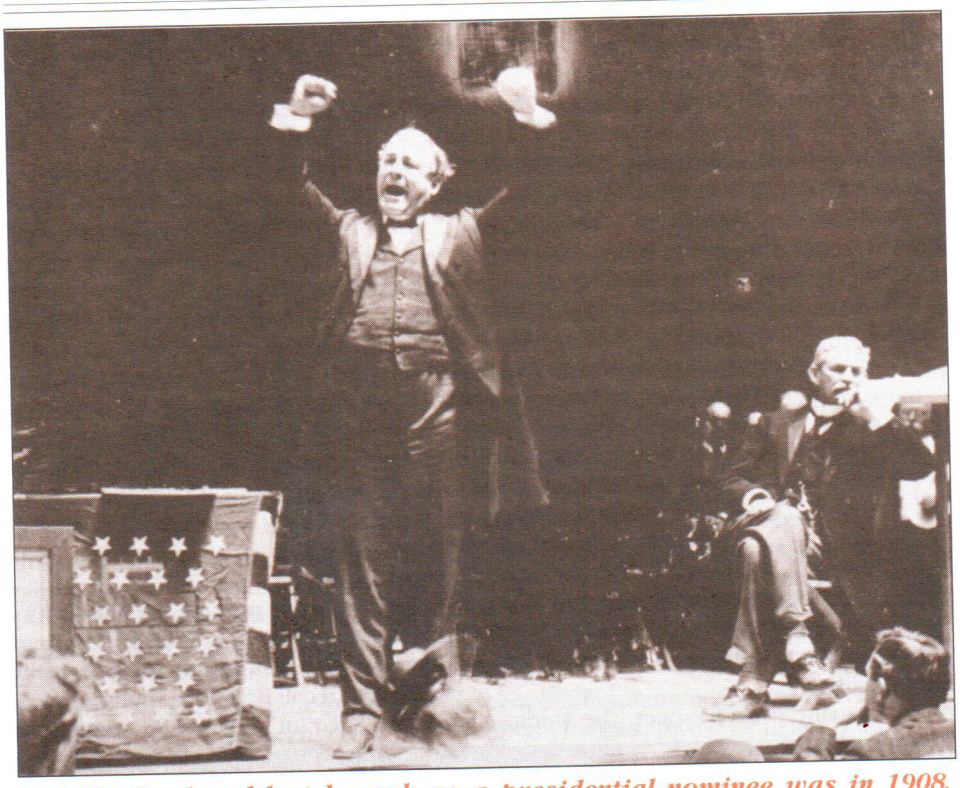
In 1896, the forces of American populism rallied behind Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. For the first time, our political arena filled with the drama of middle America's champion squaring off against the international plutocratic interests. Controversy over the nation's money system was the core issue of the day. Americans from all walks of life freely debated the question of our monetary structure. Today the subject is virtually taboo. What a difference a century makes.

In 1896 the Democratic Party held its national convention in Chicago, nominating William Jennings Bryan for the presidency. A hundred years later the Democrats again gathered in Chicago, to renominate President Bill Clinton. This year the Democratic Party's national convention was a tightly orchestrated love-fest. In 1896, the party was split down the middle.

Congressional Quarterly's 1976 *Guide to U.S. Elections* stated. "The Democratic convention that assembled in Chicago in July, 1896 was dominated by one issue—currency. A delegate's viewpoint on this single issue influenced his position on every vote taken. Generally, the party was split along regional lines, with eastern delegations favoring a hard-money policy with maintenance of the gold standard, and most southern and western delegations supporting a soft-money policy with the unlimited coinage of silver."[1]

In virtually every respect, the Democrats of 1996 are nothing like the Democrats who nominated William Jennings Bryan in 1896, although they certainly wanted to recall Bryan's populist appeal. Since U.S. Grant's successful Republican

William Jennings Bryan is pictured in 1896, about the time he received his first presidential nomination. In the mid-term 1894 elections, People's (populist) Party candidates received a surprising vote of over 1.4 million. Their largely rural strength was essentially based on the championing of free silver. Bryan won most of their 1896 support. There were of course "Silver Republicans" and "Gold Democrats" who reflected their agrarian or industrial area interests. The backing of urban working men and Union army veterans proved decisive for William McKinley.



Bryan's third and last hurrah as a presidential nominee was in 1908. Here he campaigns against outgoing President Theodore Roosevelt's chosen successor, William Howard Taft. No burning issues separated the major party candidates. Both opposed monopolistic trusts and supported a graduated income tax. Minor party candidates included Populist Thomas E. Watts, Socialist Eugene V. Debs and, ominously, prohibitionist Eugene W. Chiffon.

bid for the presidency in 1868, entire state GOP delegations from the South were totally or largely composed of blacks.

Most American Jews of the time and the ever increasing numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants allied with the GOP; favoring its financial policies and rightly perceiving it as the "social activist" party. The Democrats of that era were the party of a patriotic (and essentially segregationist) middle and lower middle America. The massive party identity shifts would not begin to occur until the Franklin D. Roosevelt administrations.

As columnist Robert Novak commented: "In the weekend festivities preceding the convention, there was an actor's recitation in Grant Park [in Chicago] of William Jennings Bryan's 'Cross of Gold' speech during platform debate at the 1896 Democratic National Convention. It is hard to imagine a major party nominating anybody who dispensed such claptrap about free silver coinage, agrarian populism and the struggle by the masses against commercialism . . . In 1996, Democrats won't even debate their platform,"[2] he predicted.

Novak was right about this year's gathering. As he later noted, it was "the most peaceful, unified Democratic National Convention in memory." Yet he pointed out: "Democrats have been fighting about platforms throughout their history."[3] In 1996, though, that was hardly the case.

Tom Johnson, the populist mayor of Cleveland, called the 1896 election "the first great protest of the American people against monopoly—the first great struggle of the masses in our country against the privileged classes. It was not free silver that frightened the plutocrat leaders. What they feared then, what they fear now, is free men."[4]

An outgoing Democratic incumbent occupied the White House in 1896. President Grover Cleveland was completing his second (non-consecutive) term, but he was by no means in control of his party. The chief executive from Buffalo, N.Y., like many in the Eastern wing of his party, was a "Gold Democrat." But since the president was not seeking re-election, the party and its convention were wide open—and ripe for a split.

According to historians R. Craig Sautter and Edward M. Burke: "In the politics of 1896, support for gold was a declaration of allegiance to the Eastern banks and the large corporate holdings they financed and the economic prosperity they promised. To declare for silver was to side with Southern and Western farmers and for working men and women whose standard of living was crushed under half a decade of the worst depression the United States had yet experienced. Silver as a political issue represented a dire cry for relief from insurmountable personal debt. As the 1896 election approached, the silver forces represented constituencies that were on the verge of open economic rebellion and violence."[5]

Ironically, Cleveland's Republican opponent in the 1888 campaign, James G. Blaine, had endorsed silver. However, by 1896 the Grand Old Party had firmly endorsed gold, taking the same position as the Democratic president. This led to some interesting maneuvering within both parties.

Three weeks before the Democratic convention the Republicans convened in St. Louis and nominated the popular 53-year-old Ohio Governor William McKinley on the first ballot.

A Civil War hero who had served in Congress (where he was nationally known as the author of protectionist trade measures), McKinley was, actually, a bimetallist. He advocated joint usage of gold and silver in regulating the nation's economic affairs. However, McKinley and his closest political strategist, Ohio industrialist Marcus A. "Mark" Hanna, another bimetallist, accepted the GOP's gold plank in order to get the party's endorsement. They sensed, correctly, that endorsement of gold would be a sure way to win the support of the Eastern financial interests. These titans were watching events within the Democratic Party with great concern.

Writing in *Tragedy and Hope*, Georgetown University Professor Carroll Quigley described the events leading up to that momentous Democratic convention of 1896:

"The inability of the investment bankers and their industrial allies to control the Democratic Convention of 1896 was a result of the agrarian discontent of the period 1868-1896. This discontent in turn was based, very largely, on the monetary tactics of the banking oligarchy. The bankers were wedded to the gold standard . . . Accordingly, at the end of the Civil War, they persuaded the

Grant Administration to curb the post-war inflation and go back on the gold standard . . . This gave the bankers a control of the supply of money.

"The bankers' affection for low prices was not shared by the farmers, since each time prices of farm products went down the burden of farmers' debts (especially mortgages) became greater. Moreover, farm prices, being much more competitive than industrial prices, and not protected by a tariff, fell much faster than industrial prices, and farmers could not reduce costs or modify their production plans nearly as rapidly as industrialists could.

"The result was a systematic exploitation of the agrarian sectors of the community by the financial and industrial sectors. This exploitation took the form of high industrial prices, high (and discriminatory) railroad rates, high interest charges, low farm prices, and a very low level of farm services by railroads and the government.

"Unable to resist by economic weapons, the farmers of the West turned to political relief, but were greatly hampered by their reluctance to vote Democratic (because of their memories of the Civil War). Instead, they tried to work on the state political level through local legislation (so-called Granger Laws) and set up third-party movements (like the Greenback Party in 1878 or the Populist Party in 1892). By 1896, however, agrarian discontent rose so high that it began to overcome the memory of the Democratic role in the Civil War.

"The capture of the Democratic Party by these forces of discontent under William Jennings Bryan in 1896, who was determined to obtain higher prices by increasing the supply of money on a bimetallic rather than a gold basis, presented the electorate with an election on a social and economic issue for the first time in a generation."[6]

(For more on the history of the political struggle over money in America and worldwide see articles by Stephen Zarlenga in the March, April and June, 1996 issues of THE BARNES REVIEW.)

The opening functions of the convention signaled that the silver forces were in command of the Democratic Party in 1896:

Sautter and Burke wrote: "The band played *Dixie* as the silver candidate, Sen. John W. Daniel of Virginia, defeated the national committee's candidate, New York's David Bennett Hill, for the position of temporary chairman . . . Daniel's victory was greeted with waves of enthusiastic endorsement among the silver delegates that lasted nearly half an hour. The early victory signaled that a strong silver contingent had made its way to Chicago from the state conventions."[7]

With the final vote on adoption of the party's platform plank on money, tensions ran high. There was even a call for the impeachment of President Cleveland by Senator "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman of South Carolina. He called the president "a tool of Wall Street," and angrily denounced "Cleveland Republicanism."

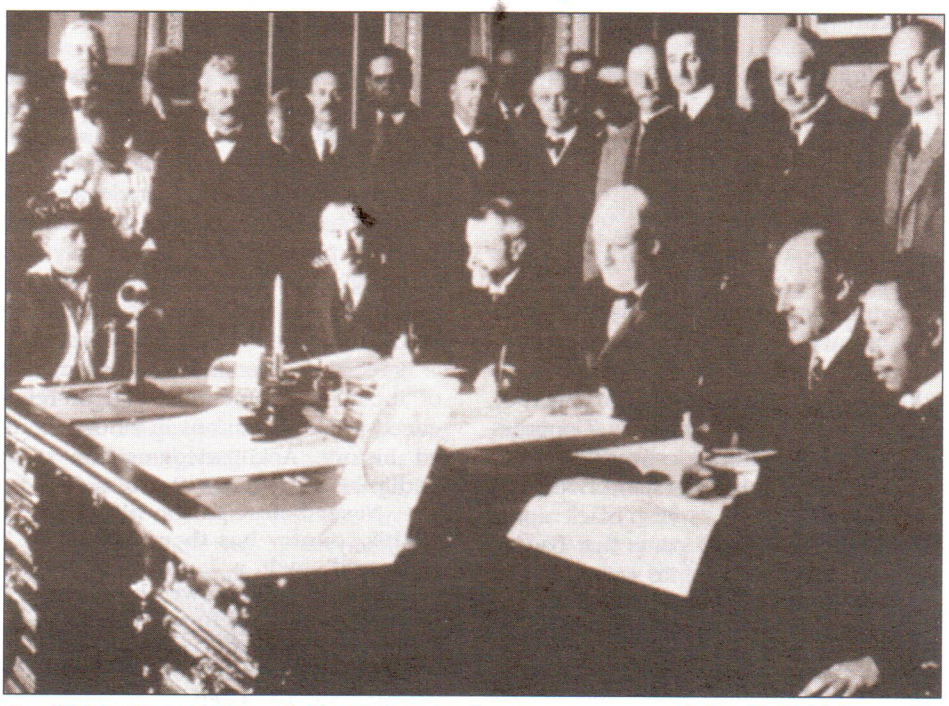
It was during the platform debate over the money question that it became evident that William Jennings Bryan would win the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. For nearly a generation thereafter, he would be recognized as the leading national voice of the American populist movement.

Born in Salem, Illinois on March 19, 1860, Bryan was graduated from Illinois College in 1881. After studying at the Union College of Law in Chicago, he opened a law office in Jacksonville, Illinois. But his law practice drew him westward and he settled in Nebraska, in 1887. Bryan became active in the Democratic Party in his adopted state, delivering his first (and well-accepted) political speech in 1888.

Having married Mary Baird in 1884, Bryan soon discovered he also had an active political helpmate. No shrinking violet, Mrs. Bryan was college educated and took up the study of law. Eventually she was admitted to practice by the Supreme Court of Nebraska. She had little personal interest in the business of law. Mrs. Bryan was interested in helping advance her husband's career, and felt knowledge of the law would prove beneficial.

Already known as a skilled orator, Bryan was elected as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1890 and re-elected in 1892. He ran for the Senate in 1894, but was defeated. However, during his short tenure in Congress, Bryan established himself as an able political strategist and built a national reputation. From 1894 to 1896 he retired to the field of journalism. He kept active in the public arena, particularly in regard to the growing controversy over the money question.

Leading a pro-silver delegation from Nebraska to the 1896 Democratic convention, Bryan was in the right place at the right time.



In 1914, Secretary of State Bryan became enraged by Britain's early wartime disregard of treaty documents and related inter-power agreements. Although technically America could trade with Germany, His Majesty's government added petroleum and some 800 "nonmilitary" items to its blockade list. In an earnest but near-farcical 1915 attempt to achieve peace, he forged the Bryan Peace Treaty. Above, Bryan (center) signs with representatives of Great Britain, France, Spain and China.

Bryan's last crusade, his prosecution of the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee, would remain one of his most memorable. Here, seated right, he is photographed with the famed (and not always legally fastidious) defense attorney, Clarence Darrow. The nationally followed proceedings had taken a great deal out of the energetic warhorse. The jury agreed with Bryan. Defendant John Thomas Scopes was fined $100 and court costs, the legal minimum. However Bryan died the following Sunday. He had delivered a church oration in Dayton, Tennessee, and in the afternoon succumbed to diabetes mellitus; the immediate cause attributed to the trial's heat and exertions.

Although the pro-silver forces had largely prevailed throughout the convention, by the time of the platform debate the rhetoric was so harsh and so pitched that even the silver forces sensed their position was weakening. They needed forceful action to reclaim the initiative.

Sautter and Burke describe that critical moment: "The silver forces needed to regain control of the controversy. At this moment, a handsome, slim, six-foot, 36-year-old former two-term Congressman from the Nebraska silver delegation leaped to the speaker's stand two steps at a time. He wore a stylish black alpaca coat, Western boots, pants that bagged at the knees, and a white string bow tie . . . Amid the waving state banners and tossed hats, the crowd finally held its breath as the speaker stood for several minutes motionless, statuesque against the sea of waving handkerchiefs. The delegates and even the spectators sensed that they were about to be lashed by a verbal storm.

"Bryan appeared like a Democratic Apollo before them, his figure chiseled against the portraits of former presidents, his head tossed back, his hand upon the podium . . . Though a lawyer of the highest quality, Bryan did not answer in kind the legalistic arguments of the gold men. Instead he elevated his political battle for silver to a moral and spiritual plane that would typify the campaigns he fought all his long life. His beautifully melodic voice resonated lute-like in the hearts of his sympathizers."[8]

Bryan then proceeded to deliver one of the most momentous and oft-referenced political orations in all of recorded history. Acknowledging the strife within his party ranks, Bryan said:

> **Never before in the history of this country has there been witnessed such a contest as that through which we have just passed. Never before in the history of American politics has a great issue been fought out as this issue has been, by the voters of a great party.**
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> **In this contest brother has been arrayed against brother, father against son. Old leaders have been cast aside when they have refused to give expression to the sentiments of those whom they would lead, and new leaders have sprung up to give direction to this cause of truth. Thus has the contest been waged, and we have assembled here under as binding and solemn instructions as were ever imposed upon representatives of the people.**

Turning to the gold delegates, Bryan declared:

> **When you come before us and tell us that we are about to disturb your business interests, we reply that you have disturbed our business interests by your course.**
>
> **We do not come as aggressors. Our war is not a war of conquest; we are fighting in the defense of our homes, our families, and posterity. We have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned; we have entreated, and our entreaties have been disregarded; we have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more; we petition no more. We defy them.**

Responding to critics who said the Silverites were demagogues—potential tyrants, Bryan thundered:

> **In this land of the free you need not fear a tyrant that will spring up from among the people. What we need is an Andrew Jackson to stand, as Jackson stood, against the encroachments of organized wealth.**
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> **We say in our platform that we believe that the right to coin and issue money is a function of government. We believe it. We believe that it is a part of sovereignty, and can no more with safety be delegated to private individuals than we could afford to delegate to private individuals the power to make penal statutes or levy taxes.**
>
> **Those who are opposed to this proposition tell us that the issue of paper money is a function of the bank, and that the Government ought to go out of the banking business. I stand with Jefferson rather than with them, and tell them, as he did, that the issue of money is a function of government, and that the banks ought to go out of the governing business.**

Bryan emphasized the fact that money was the overriding issue of that particular time, given the fractures that had developed within American society. Until that issue was addressed, no other issue was as important:

> **If they ask us why we do not embody in our platform all the things that we believe in, we reply that when we have restored the**

money of the Constitution all other necessary reforms will be possible; but that until this is done there is no other reform that can be accomplished.

Bryan described the conflict over money as a historical and universal struggle and one that was central to a nation's sovereignty:

No private character, however pure, no personal popularity, however great, can protect from the avenging wrath of an indignant people a man who will declare that he is in favor of fastening the gold standard upon this country, or who is willing to surrender the right of self-government and place the legislative control of our affairs in the hands of foreign potentates and powers.

We can tell them that they will search the pages of history in vain to find a single instance where the common people of any land have ever declared themselves in favor of the gold standard. They can find where the holders of fixed investments have declared for a gold standard, but not where the masses have. Upon which side will the Democratic party fight: upon the side of the "idle holders of idle capital" or upon the side of "the struggling masses"?

At this point in his fiery speech, the great orator had worked the Democratic convention into a fever pitch:

You come to us and tell us that the great cities are in favor of the gold standard; we reply that the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic, but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country.

Bryan then laid down the gauntlet to the gold forces and the international financial interests. His words were a populist reaffirmation of the spirit of the Declaration of Independence:

This nation is able to legislate for its own people on every question, without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation on earth It is the issue of 1776 over again. Our ancestors had the courage to declare their political independence of every other nation; shall we, their descendants declare that we are less independent than our forefathers? No, my friends, that will never be the verdict of our people.

Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is fought. If they say bimetallism is good, but that we cannot have it until other nations help us, we reply that, instead of having a gold standard because England has, we will restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it.

Not until 1913, at least.

Bryan then concluded his address in words that are among the most memorable ever delivered in a political oration:

If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."[9]

Bryan then touched his temples and spread his arms wide—as a man crucified.

"The force of Bryan's last words electrified his audience first into stunned silence, then into an ecstatic rapture that was deafening and chilling," wrote Sautter and Burke. "This young man from Nebraska was the answer to their most earnest prayers, a leader who could unite all the silver forces.

"The floor broke into pandemonium as bands played, delegates marched, men cried and the foot stomping spread like an earthquake through the immense hall . . . Chicago poet Edgar Lee Masters, who was in the crowd, remembered, 'They lifted this orator upon their shoulders and carried him as if he were a god.' "

In his campaign memoirs Bryan was quite modest, giving no indication the affect his words had on the crowd. He commented on the response to his address by noting that "The concluding sentence of my speech was criticized both favorably and unfavorably."[10]

Bryan thus became the party's frontrunner. Congressman Richard Bland of Missouri—popularly known as "Silver Dick"—had been the favorite up to this point. But compared to the flamboyant orator Bryan, Bland had the misfortune of living up to his name. On the fifth ballot, Bryan prevailed. Arthur Sewall, a wealthy Maine shipbuilder, was named as Bryan's running mate. The party concluded that the presence of an Eastern businessman on the ticket would help allay fears that Bryan was somehow "anti-business."

The Democratic platform hammered out by Bryan and his followers sent a clear message to Wall Street and the allied Rothschild banking and financial interests in London and the capitals of Europe. The words were defiant—and nationalist to the core:

We are unalterably opposed to monometallism which has locked fast the prosperity of an industrial people in the paralysis of hard times. Gold monometallism is a British policy, and its adoption has brought other nations into financial servitude to London. It is not only un-American, but anti-American, and it can be fastened on the United States only by the stifling of that spirit and love of liberty which proclaimed our political independence in 1776 and won it in the war of the Revolution.

We demand the free and unlimited coinage of both silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 15 to 1 without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation. We demand that the standard silver dollar shall be a full legal tender, equally with gold, for all debts, public and private, and we favor such legislation as will prevent for the future the demonetization of any kind of legal-tender money by private contract.[11]

On foreign policy the platform was equally forthright:

The Monroe Doctrine, as originally declared, and as interpreted by succeeding Presidents, is a permanent part of the foreign policy of the United States and must at all times be maintained . . . [12]

While today's Democratic Party wallows in its vast federal power to rework society in its own warped image, the Democrats of 1896 took a far different view:

We denounce arbitrary interference by Federal authorities in local affairs as a violation of the Constitution of the United States and a crime against free institutions, and we especially object to government by injunction as a new and highly dangerous form of oppression by which Federal judges, in contempt of the laws of the States and rights of citizens, become at once legislators, judges, executioners . . .13

And although the Democratic Party of

1896 was known (in contrast to the GOP and its "McKinley tariff") as the low-tariff party, the Democrats set forth a measure of protectionism for American workers in their platform that would shock modern-day members of the Democratic "mainstream" who favor untrammeled immigration: "We hold," declared the 1896 Democrats, "that the most efficient way of protecting American labor is to prevent the import of foreign pauper labor to compete with it in the home market . . ."[14]

Disgruntled "Gold Democrats" left the Bryan convention in Chicago and nominated one of their own, Sen. John M. Palmer of Illinois, as a protest candidate. The so-called Silver Republicans ditched the Grand Old Party and endorsed Bryan.

The Populist Party, which had made its national debut in the 1892 presidential election, saw the handwriting on the wall: Bryan, the Democrat, had co-opted their major issue. The Populists gave Bryan their nod, but rejected Sewall. Instead, the Populists nominated Thomas E. Watson of Georgia for vice president.

In reaction to Bryan's nomination, the plutocratic interests allied as never before. The railroads reduced rates so people could travel to see McKinley, who was running a front-porch campaign from his home in Canton, Ohio. Many industrial workers were told by their employers that a shift to silver would shut down the plants and that if Bryan won they should not bother coming to work the day after the election.

The 1896 presidential election was historic in that it marked the first time that the plutocrat-controlled media in America made a coordinated national effort to smear a populist candidate—a phenomenon common in the United States today.

According to Ferdinand Lundberg: "The first of these great unified press campaigns to manifest centralized motivation and direction took place in 1896, when virtually every important newspaper, Democratic as well as Republican, plumped for William McKinley and the gold standard, against William Jennings Bryan and free silver."[15]

Historian Carroll Quigley succinctly summarized the course of the 1896 election: "Though the forces of high finance and of big business were in a state of near panic, by a mighty effort involving large-scale spending they were successful in electing McKinley.

"The inability of plutocracy to control the Democratic Party as it had demonstrated it could control the Republican Party made it advisable for them to adopt a one-party outlook on political affairs, although they continued to contribute to some extent to both parties and did not cease their efforts to control both."[16]

Election Day saw a narrow victory for McKinley, who won 51.01 percent of the vote and carried 23 states with a total of 271 electoral votes. Bryan won 46.73 percent of the vote, with 24 states in his corner and a total of 176 electoral votes. The Prohibition Party's candidate, Joshua Levering, and the National Democratic candidate, John M. Palmer—"the Gold Democrat"—each won slightly less than one percent of the vote.

Shortly after the election Bryan assembled a memoir of the 1896 campaign and titled it *The First Battle*. Thus he implied that future battles lay ahead. Four years later, in the 1900 presidential election, there was a Bryan-McKinley rematch; McKinley's percentage of the vote actually increased slightly while Bryan's declined.

Beginning in 1901 Bryan began publishing a populist newspaper called *The Commoner*, using it as his personal political platform. He continued speaking around the country and keeping his hand in Democratic politics.

Having twice lost the presidency (and control of the Democratic Party) Bryan was unable to capture the party's nomination in 1904. However, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumed the White House in 1901, upon the assassination of William McKinley. "TR" emerged as a remarkably popular president, evidenced by the 56 percent of the vote Roosevelt received against Alton B. Parker, his Democratic challenger in 1904. (McKinley's Vice President—Garrett Hobart—had died in 1899 and Roosevelt had been placed on the Republican ticket in 1900.)

In 1908 Bryan wanted to seek the presidency again, but he was willing to step aside if another candidate would carry his populist message in the campaign. However, no major candidate emerged, and Bryan was nominated a third time; once again falling short. Theodore Roosevelt's hand-picked Republican successor, William Howard Taft, won 51.58 percent of the vote to Bryan's 43.05 percent. (The Socialist Party candidate, Eugene Debs, won nearly 3 percent of the vote and Eugene W. Chafin, the Prohibition Party candidate, won nearly 2 percent of the vote.)

In 1912 there were other candidates in the wings. Bryan's star was fading but House Speaker James Beauchamp "Champ" Clark of Missouri—a populist in the Bryan mold—was gaining strength with support from the Bryan wing of the party.

The other major contender was Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey, the former president of Princeton University. He was a dyed-in-the-wool internationalist with a Anglophilic predilection common to the plutocratic-academic élite of the day.

"Champ" Clark led on the first ballot at the 1912 Baltimore convention, and Bryan was initially inclined toward Clark's candidacy. However, the plutocratic interests knew that a Bryan-Clark alliance stood in the way of their complete control of the Democratic Party. As a consequence they concocted a clever ruse to mislead Bryan and undermine Clark's candidacy.

Through their agents in the press they "leaked" word that the big money interests were lining up behind "Champ" Clark. Also, Clark refused to eschew the support of New York's powerful and popular Tammany Hall boss, Charles F. Murphy. This prompted Bryan into a vigorous attack on Clark, forcing a stalemate. In the meantime the big money henchmen began making deals on Wilson's behalf. The convention dragged on through 46 ballots, ending in Woodrow Wilson's nomination. Ironically, by stalling Champ Clark's drive to the nomination, Bryan shared indirect responsibility for eventual U.S. entry into World War I.

After winning the presidency Woodrow Wilson appointed Bryan secretary of state. But Bryan was frankly out of place in the new administration, one filled with Old School Tie sophisticates more at home on a White Star or Cunard Liner than a train traveling through America's heartland.

Ironically, it was Bryan who—once again unwittingly—played a major role in a measure that advanced the power of the plutocratic interests he had long battled: the creation of the Federal Reserve System.

Although the story of the creation of the Federal Reserve and much of the subterfuge related thereto is beyond the

scope of this article, suffice it to say that it was Bryan's endorsement of the Federal Reserve Act, approved by Congress in December of 1913, that made passage possible.

Although the measure was being steered through by the Wilson administration, it was Bryan's blessing that led many congressional populists to support the measure. They (like Bryan) had been hoodwinked into believing that it would stem the influence of international bankers over the American economy.

According to William Greider, a historian friendly to the Federal Reserve: "With a few cosmetic changes, the president persuaded Bryan to endorse the measure as a triumph over the 'money trust.' "[17]

Although, according to Greider, bankers publicly proclaimed their opposition to the legislation, "many bankers were also writing their senators urging them to vote for it."[18] The late Dr. Martin A. Larson, a populist historian critical of the Federal Reserve, pointed out that Edward M. House noted in his own papers "it would appear [that Bryan] never entirely understood"[19] the meaning of the legislation that created the privately-owned banking monopoly.

Bryan himself ultimately repudiated his role in the creation of the Fed. "That is the one thing in my public career," said Bryan, "that I regret—my work to secure the enactment of the Federal Reserve Law."[20]

In dealing with foreign affairs, Bryan also seemed in over his head. Although officially the nation's foreign policy czar, matters were developing behind the scenes that were completely beyond his control.

As Bryan's politically astute wife later reflected: "While Secretary Bryan was bearing the heavy responsibility of the Department of State, there arose the curious conditions surrounding Mr. E.M. House's unofficial connection with the president and his voyages abroad on affairs of State, which were not communicated to Secretary Bryan . . . The President was unofficially dealing with foreign governments."[21]

War was brewing in Europe. Although the U.S. was officially neutral, President Wilson—in accord with long-held sympathies toward imperial Britain he had developed as a Princeton undergraduate—was maneuvering to bring America into the war. In fact, according to Anglophile historian Carroll Quigley, the entire Wilson administration, "with the single exception"[22] of Bryan, was committed to U.S. participation in the war on the side of England.

Ferdinand Lundberg writes of Bryan's efforts to keep America out of the war: "Less than two weeks after war began, [Bryan] informed President Wilson that J.P. Morgan and Company had inquired whether there would be any official objection to making a loan to the French government through the Rothschilds.

"Bryan warned the president that 'money is the worst of all contrabands,' and that if the loan were permitted, the interests of the powerful persons making it would be enlisted on the side of the borrower, making neutrality difficult, if not impossible."[23]

Bryan's warnings fell on deaf ears. Wilson and his inner circle were committed to U.S. intervention in England's war. The sinking of the *RMS Lusitania* on May 7, 1915 (See THE BARNES REVIEW, May 1996) gave Wilson yet another excuse to move toward intervention. Bryan realized his efforts to prevent American involvement were fruitless.

Arthur H. Vandenberg, who as a U.S. Senator from Michigan would later be a leader in efforts to prevent U.S. involvement in the second great war in Europe, noted: "Bryan, who had declared that so long as he was secretary, the country would not engage in war, resigned."[24]

Bryan returned to private life, devoting his efforts to writing and lecturing. He never sought public office again.

In 1925 Bryan became involved in the last great battle of his life, the famous "Monkey Trial." Long one of the nation's most prominent and fervent Christian fundamentalist foes of the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution, Bryan was brought in as an assistant prosecutor in the trial of John Scopes, a Tennessee schoolteacher charged with teaching evolution (which was banned in Tennessee schools). Scopes' defense attorney was famed Chicago attorney Clarence Darrow, who had actually campaigned for Bryan in the 1896 election. Yet, when the two former allies met in courtroom combat, most observers concluded that although Scopes was actually convicted and Darrow lost, Darrow far outshone Bryan and left the Great Commoner appearing narrow-minded and dogmatic. (The trial was immortalized in the Broadway play *Inherit the Wind*, later made into a classic Hollywood motion picture).

At his home on July 26, 1925, shortly after the conclusion of the Scopes trial, Bryan collapsed and died. The old warrior was exhausted and perhaps disillusioned. But he had given his all in every fight, and was remembered by one Nebraskan as "the brightest and purest advocate of our cause."[25] ✦

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