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Temperance Situation in West Virginia

More Occasion for Care in Selecting Candidates for the Senate and House Than Ever Before

To West Virginia Temperance Voters and Friends
of Good Government:

Dear Friends—The time is near at hand when the persons who are to be nominated for Senator from each of the fifteen districts and for Representatives from the fifty-five counties of the state will be fixed upon by those who are called the managers of the two political parties. Already some are announcing themselves as candidates, more or less publicly, and others are being promoted by those who have some axe to grind. Among the interests that are thus seeking to be represented in the next legislature are the brewers and other liquor men of this state. They have their agents traveling through the state seeking to form a combination with any one who is willing to join them. They had such a combination in the Senate last winter, and succeeded in so amending our search-warrant law as to compel the sheriff to sell liquors seized in a speak-easy, the statute theretofore providing that such liquors should be destroyed.

The liquor men are greatly incensed because their licenses have been increased.* They are especially exasperated by the laws passed in the summer of 1904, providing new and severe penalties for violations of the liquor laws and improving the means for their enforcement. Scores of illegal sellers have quit the business, and much more care is exercised by those who still defy the law. Public sentiment, more than ever before, is demanding the enforcement of our laws, and many

of our prosecutors and judges are exerting themselves to curb lawlessness of all sorts.

The brewers and other liquor men in our state are more aroused than heretofore. They see that if this tide of temperance legislation and law enforcement is not checked, their business in West Virginia will be greatly curtailed or entirely wiped out. They are therefore ready to spend their money freely to defeat any further temperance legislation and prevent the enforcement of our laws. They are also on the lookout for allies. They wish to find some disaffected persons who will be willing to assist them. Of course they are demanding that in such a combination they be assured that the liquor interests will be protected.

You are doubtless aware that there is considerable feeling on the part of some prominent men in the Republican and Democratic parties, regarding the question of "tax reform", as it is called. Quite a number of influential men have determined, so they tell me, to have their notions carried out regarding the tax laws, whatever the cost, and to accomplish that end they express their readiness to sacrifice every other interest of the state, including the temperance laws.

It becomes necessary, therefore, that the voters who favor reasonable temperance legislation and believe in the enforcement of our laws should take special pains to see that a man is nominated for Senator from each district and a candidate for Representative from each county who will not trade off temperance for any other consideration; who will not vote to turn the brewers loose on the state for the sake of a few dollars of taxes, more or less.

With a few changes in our statutes, and they not difficult to be made, our West Virginia liquor

laws would be among the best of any of the states in the Union. I am very thoroughly convinced that what we need here is not more penalties and restrictions on the sale of liquor so much as better facilities to secure the enforcement of the present laws. The Legislature will be asked to enact three statutes for the purpose of helping the officers to enforce the laws we now have. First of these will be an anti-screen law, by the terms of which all obstructions must be removed from the windows of the saloon which prevent a clear view of the interior of the room from the street day and night, and a light to be kept burning in the night time; that the business shall be carried on in one room, and only one business in the room; and that there shall be only one door by which access can be had to the room, and that door opening on a public business street.

Second, a law will be asked for creating a state police, the members of which will not be elected, but will be responsible directly or indirectly to the Governor; having jurisdiction throughout the state, and their duty being to prevent or detect any violation of our criminal statutes, especially those relating to the sale of liquor, gambling and prostitution.

And third, the Legislature will be asked to give the Governor power to do the thing which the constitution makes it his duty to do, namely: "He shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed." In order to do this he must have the power that is vested in the Governor of many other states, notably Indiana and Missouri, to suspend county and state officers as soon as written charges are filed with him, and if they are convicted on a hearing, to name some one to take the place until the position can be filled according to law.

Certainly no law-abiding citizen will fail to favor placing in the hands of the Governor, our county prosecutors, mayors and police adequate means to accomplish the purpose for which their respective offices were created. While many officials are not diligent in the performance of their duties, it is true that the most honorable and zealous among them find it impossible to prevent many forms of lawlessness or to obtain legal proof when offenses have been committed. We ought to give them every needed facility to meet the ingenious devices and flagrant perjury of persistent criminals. When we have done this we can rightfully hold our officers to that strict performance of their duties which the highest interests of the state demand.

In order to assist in securing a friendly Legislature I suggest that local Anti-Saloon Leagues be promptly organized by the friends of temperance throughout the no-license counties and communities of the state, especially, and in other communities where it may seem desirable. This office is prepared to send out printed forms for organization, circulars showing how the various Representatives and Senators voted last winter when the temperance question was up and other suitable literature. Speakers and organizers will also be provided when possible on payment of their traveling expenses.

We earnestly solicit correspondence on this subject with all friends of temperance and good government throughout the state. It is none too early for voters to get together, compare notes, and organize for the election of members of the next Legislature.

Very truly yours,

THEODORE ALVORD,

State Supt. W. Va. Anti-Saloon League.