

PLATFORM INSINCERITY

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

A PARTY should not contain utterly incongruous elements, radically divided on the real issues, and acting together only on false and dead issues insincerely painted as real and vital. It should not in the several States as well as in the Nation be prostituted to the service of the baser type of political boss. It should be so composed that there should be a reasonable agreement in the actions taken by it both in the Nation and in the several States.

Judged by these standards, both of the old parties break down. Neither can longer be trusted to do the work so urgently needed by the country. They have been shown to be utterly reactionary by the platforms of their Conventions, by the actions of both sets of bosses in the various States, and also by

the legislative work of the standpat Republican Senators and of the Democratic Fitzgerald-Underwood alliance in control of the House of Representatives. Any real and lasting success for the people must be based on the liberalization of the party as well as of the party's candidates. A President hampered by a party controlled by special privilege, especially if he is bound to great State bosses who are themselves controlled by special privilege or if he is faced by the bi-partisan alliance of corrupt legislators, can give to the people practically nothing. The best prospect for a liberated party exists in extending the revolt of the Progressives who have so successfully worked out their control in Pennsylvania, California, Washington, Oregon, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Kansas,

and Nebraska. It is the part of wisdom to make use of this effective organization of Progressive sentiment, and to appeal to all voters to come together without regard to past political differences and fight the new fight on the new issues instead of again dividing on worn-out and purely artificial lines.

The bosses of the Democratic party and the bosses of the Republican party alike have a closer grip than ever before on the party machines in the States and in the Nation. This crooked control of both the old parties by the beneficiaries of political and business privilege renders it hopeless to expect any far-reaching and fundamental service from either.

It is in large part a sequel to this crooked control that there has been so long a record of failure on the part of both the old parties to redeem their platform pledges. I very earnestly hope that the Progressive party will bear this fact in mind when it comes to building its platform. Not only should the platform be right, but it should be so clearly drawn as to make the intentions of those who draw it perfectly understood by the average man; it should deal wisely and boldly with the new issues confronting our people; and, finally, it should scrupulously refrain from promising anything that cannot be performed, and should clearly show that it intends as a matter of honorable obligation to carry out every promise made. To make a promise which cannot be carried out or which would hopelessly damage the country if carried out is equivalent to announcing in advance that, not only this promise, but all the other promises in the platform, are meant to be broken, and are for campaign uses only. No party, and no candidate, should receive the support of the people if the platform shows on its face the corrupt insincerity of those making it.

The present conditions in the two old parties, and the platforms put forth by both of them and judged by the standards outlined above, show that it is hopeless to get anything good out of them. To endeavor to punish each alternately by voting for the other is to follow the course most gratefully appreciated by the corrupt bosses of both. There is nothing that the bosses of the two parties more heartily approve than the action of the man who does not attempt to wrest control of either party away from the boss or to establish a new party, but contents himself with action which results in keeping

the bosses in control of each party and merely forcing these bosses to alternate with one another in control of the Government. Mr. Taft's election means the perpetuation of the control of the Cranes, Barneses, Penroses, and Guggenheims. Dr. Wilson's election means the perpetuation of the control of the Murphys, Taggarts, Sullivans, the Evans-Hughes people, and their like. The bosses are just as powerful in one party as in the other.

The platforms of the two parties are models of dangerous insincerity and of bad faith. The platform of the Republican party is bad anyhow. Taken in connection with the action of the Convention, it amounts to a declaration against actual rule by the people and a determination that the politicians or the beneficiaries of special privilege shall completely dominate the people in the future just as they are doing at this moment. The actions of Mr. Taft and his Administration and the actions of the Republican National Convention itself make any protestations of virtue on the part of the Barnes-Penrose-Guggenheim combination, which at the moment represents all that is efficient and real in the existing Republican party, of no consequence whatsoever. Any declaration of good intentions in the Republican platform on any subject is rendered worthless, first, by the fact that the present Administration has broken the most important pledges on which it was elected; and, second, by the fact that the National Convention at Chicago, which nominated Mr. Taft, acted with such deliberate bad faith, such flagrant violation of every obligation of decency and honesty, as to make any and all of its promises not worth the paper on which they are written. A homily upon honesty by a pickpocket who still keeps the stolen goods does not tend toward edification. Not a promise made by any man who took part in, apologizes for, or benefited by the stealing of the Chicago Convention should receive a moment's consideration.

The Baltimore platform offers perhaps as good an example as any platform of the last thirty years of what has become a typical vice of American politics—the avoidance of saying anything real on real issues, and the announcement of radical policies with much sound and fury, and at the same time with a cautious accompaniment of weasel phrases each of which sucks the meat out of the preceding statement. Neither the Republican

nor the Democratic platform shows the slightest grasp of the real situation that confronts this country—the fact that we are now face to face with a great industrial evolution which, unless frankly accepted as such by the Government, will become an industrial revolution. Three or four of the issues involved in this movement have been touched on by the two parties in their platforms—the right of the people to have their representatives really represent them; the right of the people to embody their sense of civic justice in their statute laws even over the objection of reactionary courts; the cost of living; the tariff problem; and the trust problem. On all these matters both parties have spoken loudly, but on no one of them has either party spoken clearly. It is difficult to know whether most to condemn the Republican platform for daring to make declarations to which its own actions and the actions of the Administration during the past three years have frankly given the lie, or the Democratic platform for unctuously stating that the pledges it makes are intended to be carried out after election, and not intended merely for platform use. There could be no more flagrant example than that which the Baltimore platform affords of the making of promises in such fashion that they shall seem to be what they are not, and of such a character that there could by no possibility be any serious effort to carry them out under penalty of Nation-wide disaster.

What the Baltimore platform says on the tariff and the trusts illustrates completely what I mean. It first declares that protective duties are unconstitutional. If the Democratic party is sincere in this belief, then it is necessarily committed to a construction of the Constitution which would gravely impair the powers which the Government has employed time and time again for industrial and social betterment. If it is unconstitutional to impose protective duties for the sake of helping wage-workers, then it is unconstitutional to lay an inheritance tax or an income tax for the purpose of equalizing burdens and securing a better distribution of wealth; then it is unconstitutional to collect a corporation tax levied with the incidental purpose of securing publicity regarding corporation and trust methods; then the State bank tax, imposed for the purpose of regulating the issuance of currency, was and still is unconstitutional; then it would be unconstitutional to enact any kind of workmen's

insurance law that would levy a tax for the purpose of creating a fund out of which wage-earners would receive insurance; it would be unconstitutional to use the taxing power of the Government in any form for the purpose of improving social conditions and promoting economic efficiency. There can be legitimate discussion as to the extent to which the principle of protection should be applied, and, in my judgment, it should be applied for totally different purposes than those for which it has been applied for the last three years. But it is quite impossible to declare the principle of protection itself as unconstitutional unless the Constitution is interpreted in a way that would at once reduce us to impotence in dealing with nine-tenths of the serious social and industrial problems which now confront us. Nor is this all. If the Democrats are sincere in what they say about protection, if they really believe it to be unconstitutional, it is out of the question for any protective duty to be left for more than a very short period on the statute-books. If the tariff is really to be made a tariff for revenue only, then every species of protection must be removed from the American farmer and the American laboring man no less than from the American manufacturer, and duties must be imposed on such articles as tea and coffee. If Dr. Wilson were elected, he would either have to repudiate the promises made about the tariff in the Democratic platform or else bring every industry in the country to a crash which would make all the panics in our past history seem like child's play in comparison. In short, were Dr. Wilson elected on this platform, he would be obliged at the very outset of his Administration to face the alternatives of dishonesty or disaster, the alternatives of refusing to carry out the expressed pledges of the platform, or else of causing such disaster to every worker in the country as would mean Nation-wide ruin. There would be just one loophole for him, and this loophole is itself to be found in the dishonesty of the platform. After stridently proclaiming that the protective tariff must be immediately abolished, and making assertions about the present tariff duties which, if true, would demand their immediate abolition, it adds that in carrying out the principles enunciated it will proceed "by legislation that will not injure or destroy legitimate industry." This is as fine an example of a weasel phrase as could ever be imagined. Either it is itself

absolutely meaningless or it sucks all meaning out of all the previous denunciations of the tariff. It admits in so many words that the tariff system is intimately connected with the legitimate business of the country; it also says that it is unconstitutional, that it makes the rich richer and the poor poorer, that the farmer and the laboring man are the chief sufferers under it and gain no benefits from it; and then proceeds to say that the tariff shall at once be put on a revenue basis, and yet that there shall be no legislation that will injure or destroy legitimate business! After this, the platform continues by stating that its pledges are made to be kept when in office as well as relied upon during the campaign. Which pledge does it mean to keep about the tariff? If the Democratic platform is sincere when it says that the legislation it advocates is not to injure any legitimate industry, then it is simply advocating what the Republican platform advocates, doubtless with equal insincerity, when that platform says that it wishes to reduce excessive rates, and, using the language which the Democratic platform a few days later copied, to do so "without injury to any American industry." If, on the other hand, it is true that our present system does make the rich richer and the poor poorer, and if it is unconstitutional to have anything except a revenue tariff, then it is out of the question to alter the situation except by legislation that will destroy the present industries. The two pledges made about the tariff in the Democratic platform are mutually exclusive. One cannot be kept without repudiating the other. As a matter of fact, if the Democratic party came into power, it would doubtless break both pledges; it would not abolish all protective duties, but it would act with sufficient unwisdom about them to cause Nation-wide disaster.

The same thing is true in what the Baltimore platform says of the high cost of living. It states that import duties on the necessities of life must be materially reduced. Yet later on it expresses a fervent purpose to encourage agriculture. But of course those who drew up this platform must know that in the average household it is farm products which go to make up most of the cost of living, and it is both cowardly and insincere not to state that the proposed reduction of duties is aimed primarily at the farmer.

Yet, again, consider what the Baltimore platform says about the trusts. There is

much sound and fury in the declaration for a drastic enforcement of the Anti-Trust Law. There is loud demand that it be enforced not merely by civil but by criminal proceedings. There is a purpose expressed to amend it so that the Supreme Court will no longer be able to show any leniency in its construction. If this portion of the platform means anything, it means that the Anti-Trust Law is to be made of such a character that it would, as President Van Hise has shown, if literally applied, stop all business not merely by business men but by farmers throughout the United States. But farther on in the platform comes the weasel phrase for this statement also, for in connection with the Anti-Trust Law occurs the further statement that the platform denounces any attempt to enlarge or magnify by indirection the powers of the Federal Government, and insists that Federal remedies for inter-State commerce shall be added to, and not be substituted for, State remedies. This is, in effect, merely to declare that the position taken by the Supreme Court in the Sugar Case many years ago was correct when the Supreme Court absolutely emasculated the Anti-Trust Law in the name of States' rights. The sound and fury of the Baltimore declaration against trusts is entirely in the vein of Mr. Bryan, but the weasel sentence about States' rights could well have been suggested by the astuteness of Mr. Bryan's fellow-Democrat Mr. Ryan. The first or declaratory part, if true and if lived up to, would necessarily mean that all business would immediately be stopped. It is sufficiently unreasoning to satisfy every rural Tory in the country, every man who believes that somehow or other we can get back to the conditions of the fifties, and who is ignorant of the fact that, if the Anti-Trust Law were literally enforced as the Democratic platform in this particular paragraph demands, every farmers' organization, every workmen's organization, every small tradesmen's organization, every species of co-operation, would all be declared illegal, and all business everywhere throughout the United States would stop. Even men untrained in business would revolt against such a platform. But of course they are all assured privately by all the men entitled to speak for the Democratic party that there is nothing whatever serious in the proposal, that it is a mere campaign statement that is not meant to be honestly enforced. Of course it could not be strictly enforced; and strict enforce-

ment could at best be attempted only by the most feverish effort—sufficient to frighten and damage honest business men, but, as was conclusively shown in the Standard Oil and Tobacco Trust Cases, not such as to do any real damage to the trusts against which it is nominally aimed. As with the tariff, if Dr. Wilson were elected, he would have at once to face the fact whether he would violate the platform or destroy all business. But the weasel phrase above quoted should satisfy every one. The Constitution was framed more for the purpose of giving to the Government complete power over inter-State commerce than for any other object. Every trust magnate in the country can rest in safety if he can have the law relegated to the States instead of to the Nation. All danger to him will vanish forthwith. The experience of New Jersey during the last

eighteen months, while Dr. Wilson has been Governor, is enough to prove this. New Jersey has been in the past well known for its leniency in permitting the formation of trusts to operate outside the State. Dr. Wilson has been at the head of its Government for nearly two years; yet during that time nothing of real importance has been done—doubtless nothing could have been done—to help solve the trust problem. The States are powerless in this matter. The Nation must act.

There is not a dishonest trust in the country that could not afford to support the Democratic platform rather than face the honest and efficient purpose of the Progressive party, and there is not an honest business concern in the country that would not be ruined if the promises of the Democratic platform were kept.