

EDITORIAL

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

TO President Woodrow Wilson.
Washington, D.C.
Sir:

When your immediate Democratic predecessor, Grover Cleveland, was elected in 1892, he found the country in the throes of unrest, with language being uttered, even in the Federal Senate, that partook of the threateningly revolutionary in its denunciation of existing conditions, and of the men then in political power. The Republican candidate for President, who, as in your own instance, was also the then incumbent, was turned down with an emphasis, which, tho' not as marked as the emphasis with which your Republican opponent was turned down, nevertheless, is recalled to mind by the overturn of last November. The Democratic party was swept in; the Republican party looked like floating fragments of a wreck; and a new party, the Populist—whose defection from the Republican ranks, a defection that took place to the incoherent tune of incoherent revolution, had brought on the Republican break-down—struck up the song: “Good-bye, old party, good-bye!”

Upon his election, in 1892, Grover Cleveland turned to a distinguished personality in the Populist ranks, Justice Walter Q. Gresham; wrote to him, in substance, “at what seems a crisis in the Nation’s life, your services are needed”; invited him to a seat in the cabinet; and placed him at the head of the same in the office of Secretary of State.

The storm of the political crisis of 1888–1892 blew over. The waves that had threatened to swamp the Ship of State passed harmlessly under her. Within four years of its seemingly irreparable overthrow, the Republican party was back in the

saddle—back in the saddle with the quondam Democrat Grover Cleveland as the warmest well-wisher of Republican success—back in the saddle so much more arrogantly set in its plutocratic principles that, with the very first term of McKinley, the path of Imperialism was struck—the war against Spain, the conquest of Porto Rico to the East, the purchase of the Philippines to the West, the diplomatic iniquity of Panama, the cropping up and spread of Trust Arrogance like a veritable national plague marking the track of the “progress.”

In the sequel of events—down to and including the stage of your selection, for the chief officer on your cabinet, of a personality whose name, as much as if not more so than the name of Walter Q. Gresham, is identified with what is generally taken for radicalism—the parallel with 1892 is strikingly close.—Will the further sequel of events complete the parallel?

For the personal and the political integrity of William Jennings Bryan we entertain none but the highest esteem. Nor knows our admiration any bounds for the bravery and intrepidity with which, pointing his finger at Charles F. Murphy and Alton D. Parker, Mr. Bryan rescued the Baltimore National Convention, along with the nation, for the time being, from the double-headed hydra of Ultramontanism and Militarist, or Feudo-Capitalism.

Very different, however, is the estimation in which Mr. Bryan’s sociologic ideals deserve to be held.

The economic fallacy of “16 to 1 free coinage of silver irrespective of international agreement” is typical of the sociologic conceptions that William J. Bryan represents—so typical that, although the economic fallacy itself may be said to have lost, the sociologic conception from which it sprang preserves actuality.

The denial of economic law embodied in “16 to 1” is but a natural fruit of the sociologic concept to “restore the government to the Common People.” The sociologic concept that would “restore” things to the status that prevailed, at the time when the country entered upon the path of an independent Nation, is a concept that proceeds from such fundamentally false premises that the methods proposed for its realization cannot choose but partake of the blunder-nature of the sociologic soil from which they spring. As then, so to-day.

Government has not been wrested away from the “Common People.” Govern-

ment has remained in the hands of the economic class into whose hands government was originally placed by the Revolution of 1776. That class was the property-holding class. That a class which was not only property-less but, as James Madison prophetically expressed himself, was “without the hope of acquiring property,” had not then, as yet, come into existence to serve as foil for the property-holder, and thus sharply to mark the edges of the latter, does not affect the principle. Future economic development lay slumbering in the seed of then. The development took place—and, along with that development, a social transformation that has given rise to the issues of the day. Madison, like the intellectual giant that he was, not only foresaw the development that has since taken place, he also boldly prescribed the treatment—the adjustment of the social and political institutions, which he himself had contributed to rear,—their adjustment to the changed economic conditions in the interest of popular freedom. The elements whom William Jennings Bryan vocalizes prescribe an opposite treatment—to restore the government to the Common People.

To “restore” government to a class that never existed is an absurdity. The only interpretation that such a plan of campaign leaves open is that it is a figure of speech; is not literally meant; is simply intended to convey the idea that government should be placed in the hands of a class that holds no more wealth than the wealth held by the class in whose hands government was originally placed—likewise an absurdity.

Government is an apanage of Wealth. Where Wealth is there will government also be. The economic development, which has been hatched under the political institutions set up by the Revolutionary Fathers, enforces the conclusion that those institutions, however useful and necessary an hundred and odd years ago, have been outgrown; are no longer conducive to justice, to domestic tranquillity, to the common defense, to the general welfare, and to the blessings of liberty.

No “restoring,” or retrogression to the days of 1776 will stand: the conditions demand a going forward.

The Age in which it is the privilege of our generation to live rounds a cycle in the annals of man. It rounds the cycle since when organized society—the early guarantor of Equality, but Equality in Poverty, to its members—abdicated the

Equality in order to escape the despotism of Poverty; struck the road of wealth-production; bore with signal patience, on the whole, through hundreds and hundreds of centuries the galling ills accessory to its new pursuit; until, in our own days, organized society has finally reached the stage when an abundance of wealth for all is producible, without arduous toil by any. That stage once reached, organized society need no longer continue to pay the price, or penalty, of Inequality—along with its long train of ills,—for freedom from Poverty. That stage once reached, the conditions bid organized society re-enter upon the Equality that it abdicated, but abdicated only temporarily, and only in pursuit of the material conditions for Equality in Well-being. The transition period—when government is denied to the hands of a portion, and that the larger, of a commonweal, owing to the sociologic law which fatedly converges government and Wealth into the same hands—that transition period once passed, no consequence other than social ill-being can result so long as organized society perseveres in transitional methods, and presents the contradictory aspect of possible Equality with actual Inequality. To-day, Wealth being possible for all, government, the apanage of Wealth, need no longer be the privilege of some.

The huge interrogation mark of our Age demands, accordingly, not the answer of “restoring” government to the Common People—governmental rights are not a cause, they are a sequel of Wealth-holding: they find their level.

The huge interrogation mark of our Age demands the adjustment of our social system to the changed and improved economic facts, which render Wealth-holding a right possible to all who can and will work, hence, as a consequence, raises the whole adult population to {the} governmental sphere.

The answer to the huge interrogation mark of our Age is, accordingly, given by Socialism, that coherent radicalism, or revolutionary Movement, the demands of which are summed up in the demand for the overthrow of the Political, and its substitution with the industrial social order—the overthrow of the social order, which, beginning with a Wealth-holding class, constructs a government to match; and the substitution of the same with a social order, which, beginning with a Wealth-holding population, reflects a popular governmental system. In other words, the answer that coherent radicalism makes to the huge interrogation mark of our Age is,

the ethnic cycle having been completed, the return—a stepping forward, in this instance,—of the human race to the Communist social order upon that higher plane, now made physically possible and now known as Socialism, where Equality need no longer be yoked to Poverty, but wedded with the Affluence that civilized life requires.

Do we cast your horoscope by repeating the question put before—will the sequel of events complete the parallel between the Administration of Woodrow Wilson in 1912–1916, and the Administration of Grover Cleveland’s second term, 1892–1896? Will the answer made by the high fever of our body social be again formulated by incoherent radicalism, this time through William Jennings Bryan, with the inevitable consequence of, either a social cataclysm, or a sudden re-recuperation, in 1916, of the coherently reactionary Republican party, with Woodrow Wilson, like Grover Cleveland in 1896, the warmest wellwisher of Republican success, to be again followed by further forced marches towards a feudo-capitalist régime, with medieval prospects beyond?

With distinguished consideration, etc.,

EDITOR DAILY PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2014

slpns@slp.org