

A MOMENTOUS PROBLEM

Governor LaFollette's Address on "Representative Government."

Governor La Follette of Wisconsin delivered an address July 18 at Chautauqua, N. Y. His subject was "Representative Government."

That address should be read by every American citizen. It shows that the evils of the day are recognized by a republican governor who has the courage to speak plainly. It is true that no well informed person denies the correctness of the charges made by the republican governor of Wisconsin; and yet it is significant that other republican leaders keep silent and that those who speak candidly upon these subjects, as the Wisconsin governor has done, are not regarded by party leaders as "thoroughly sound republicans."

In his speech at Chautauqua, Governor La Follette pointed out that the basic principle of this government is the will of the people; that its founders devised a system which seemed to assure the means of ascertaining that will, of enacting it into legislation and enforcing it through administration of the law. This will was to be accomplished by electing men to make and men to execute the law which represent in the laws so made and executed the will of the people. Governor La Follette said that this was the establishment of a representative government where every man had equal voice, equal rights and equal responsibility. And then this republican governor asked his auditors:

"Have we such a government today, or are we rapidly coming to be dominated by force, in making and enacting our laws, which thwart the will of the people and menace the very life of representative government? No man questioned it for a hundred years. Whoever asserts it now is denounced as a 'menace to industrial progress.'"

Governor La Follette quoted from Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and others to show that the fathers of the country regarded the people as the source of power and he said that it was reserved for Abraham Lincoln, on the field of Gettysburg, to express at once the profoundest and most philosophical, the simplest and most popular definition of American democracy ever uttered, when he declared:

"We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Governor La Follette disclaimed any disposition to excite the prejudices of his auditors or to invoke an unfair judgment, but he declared that deep conviction impelled him to appeal to their patriotism to meet an impending crisis. He said: "We owe it to the living as well as to the dead to make honest answer to this question, 'Is our government of city, state, and nation thoroughly representative of the will of the people?'"

Governor La Follette further said:

"One of the causes of revolution proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence was: 'Imposing taxes on us without our consent.' Today, great aggregations of corporate wealth buy immunity from taxation in our legislatures, and throw the burden which they should bear onto the individual taxpayer of every municipality and state. Betrayed by his representative, the individual taxpayer is overtaxed for the benefit of the corporation. Taxation without representation is as much a crime against just and equal government in 1903 as it was in 1776. Government by corporations is as destructive of the liberties of the people of this country as the exercise of the same power by a foreign monarch. The arbitrary control of the price of coal and iron, and corn, and wheat, and beef—whether by an extortionate transportation rate, or by a monster combination, is a more absolute tyranny of the American people than quartering the army of King George upon the American colonists without their consent. There can be no such thing as commercial slavery and individual freedom. We may have the privilege of the ballot, we may have the semblance of democracy, but industrial servitude means political servitude. Monopoly in transportation and coal and iron and the food products, makes a pretense and a mockery of political freedom.

"Let us see if the time be not ripe for a new declaration of American independence. We are building up colossal fortunes, grant-

ing unlimited power to corporate organization, and consolidating and massing together business interests as never before in the commercial history of the world, but the people are losing control of their own government. Its foundations are being sapped and its integrity destroyed. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' 'What shall it profit a nation if it gain untold wealth, and its people lose their liberty?'"

Governor La Follette pointed out that the New York legislative investigation of the Erie railway reported that more than \$1,000,000 was spent in one year for "extra legal services," and that money paid to political bosses was charged to the "India rubber account." He also showed that more recently the treasurer of the New York Central Railway company testified that his company had paid for legislation in one year \$60,000 and in another year \$205,000. He also quoted from the correspondence which passed between the late C. P. Huntington and General Colton in regard to the payment of money for the passage of legislative measures and for the control of congressmen. In one of the letters from Mr. Huntington, that great railroad magnate used this language:

"It is very important that his friends in Washington should be with us, and if that should be brought about by paying Carr, say \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year, I think we could afford to do it, but of course not until he had controlled his friends."

Having made this showing, Governor La Follette said:

"If there were no further evidences of the power of the railroads in legislation than that which is afforded by the statements from the record of the interstate commerce commission, it ought to arouse the entire country to such action as will bring congress to a sense of its responsibility to the people for some measure of justice and fair play."

And the governor added:

"The gravest danger menacing republican institutions today is the overbalancing control of city, state and national legislatures, by the wealth and power of public service corporations."

In another portion of his speech Governor La Follette read a letter bearing upon the action of the last congress. This letter was written to him by a United States senator under date of February 9, 1903. In this letter this senator wrote:

"It is expecting too much from human nature that senators, whose every association is with the great railroad corporations, and whose political lives largely depend upon them, should, in good faith, make the railroads a servant of the people and to be subject to the decision of the commission when a question of rates is raised. The senate committee is by a decided majority men who bear those relations to the railroads."

Coming to the question of combinations and referring to the coal monopoly, Governor La Follette said:

"This coal trust bears harder even upon the unfortunate, helpless labor that mines the product at a wage level of a generation ago than upon the consumers who are just beginning to feel the burden of its increasing oppression. Its utter indifference and contempt for the constitutional and statutory law, for public opinion, and wide-spread want and suffering should awaken in the people of this free country the spirit which framed the Declaration of Independence and founded a government in which the will of the people should be supreme."

The governor paid his respects to the "elevator combine," and related the history of the meat trust, showing that it was also promoted by the railroads. And then he said:

"The plan developed and consummated in building up the Standard Oil monopoly, the anthracite coal trust, the elevator combination and the beef trust, are indicative of the power of the railroads in combination. There is not an important trust in the United

States which does not have the assistance of the railroads in destroying its competitors in business. The limitation and control of these public service corporations in their legitimate field as common carriers is of primary importance in the practical solution of the trust problem which confronts the people of this country. It is manifest that any trust legislation to be effective must go hand in hand with a control over railway rates by the federal government on interstate commerce through an enlargement of the powers of the interstate commerce commission, and a like control of railroad rates on state commerce by each of the states through a state railway commission. Added to this, the railroad companies must be prohibited from using the extraordinary powers conferred upon them by the state for any other purpose than in conducting the transportation business for which they were organized."

Governor La Follette declared that the existence of a wicked alliance between the machine and corporations and the lust for money and power out of which it was born was never more brazenly confessed to the world than in a recent interview by Charles R. Brayton, machine boss of Rhode Island and principal lobbyist for the leading public service corporations of that state. In that interview Mr. Brayton said:

"I am an attorney for certain clients, and I look out for their interests before the legislature. I am retained annually by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railway company, as everyone knows. I act for the Rhode Island company (street car interests), and I have been retained in certain cases by the Providence Telephone company. In addition to this, I have had connections, not permanent, with various companies desiring franchises, charters, and things of that sort, from the legislature. I never solicit any business. It comes to me unsought. You see, in managing the campaign year after year, I am in a position to be of service to men all over the state. I help them to get elected, and, naturally, many warm friendships result; then when they are in a position to repay me, they are glad to do it."

Then the republican governor of Wisconsin concluded his remarkable speech in these words:

"The problem presented is a momentous one. It calls for no appeal to passion or prejudice or fear. It calls for courage and patriotism and self-sacrifice. It calls for solution. Shall the American people become servants instead of masters of their boasted material progress and prosperity—victims of the colossal wealth this free land has fostered and protected? Surely our great cities, our great states, our great nation, will not helplessly surrender to this most insidious enemy which is everywhere undermining official integrity and American institutions. Surely, we shall not permit this government to abandon its traditions, its memories, its hopes, and become the instrument of injustice and oppression. Surely, the American people will do their plain duty now as they did in the greatest epoch of this country's history. Surely, we shall meet the issues presented with rectitude and unflinching devotion, strong in the faith of ultimate triumph."

The Asset Currency.

The asset currency is coming. Notwithstanding the denials of the republican papers the asset currency seems likely to come. Secretary Shaw is advocating it and the financiers are using the president's vague indorsement to back up their proposition. As is usual in such matters, the Wall street crowd did not ask for a specific indorsement of their plans because such an indorsement would have called public attention to the matter, but they secure an ambiguous and general indorsement and then use that to force their schemes through. Here is what the president said:

"Our currency laws have recently improved by specific declarations intended to secure permanency of values, but this does not imply that these laws may not be still further improved."
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