

AN IMPENDING CRISIS

THE REPUBLICAN GOVERNOR OF WISCONSIN ASKS AND ANSWERS THE QUESTION: "IS OUR GOVERNMENT OF CITY, STATE, AND NATION THOROUGHLY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE?"

Governor La Follette of Wisconsin delivered a speech at Colfax, Ia., on August 6. The Wisconsin governor is a republican, but he made bold to warn his hearers against corporate greed which he declared is drawing tighter the halter of commercial slavery about the neck of the people.

Governor La Follette disclaimed any intention to excite the prejudice or invoke unfair judgment on the part of his auditors, but he said that "a deep conviction impels me to appeal to your patriotism, your love of liberty, of the country to meet the impending crisis. 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's address on this occasion should be read by every American citizen. Pointing to the fact that one of the causes of the revolution proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence was the imposition of taxes without consent, Governor La Follette said:

"Today great aggregations of corporate wealth buy immunity from taxation in our legislatures, and throw the burden which they should bear on to the individual taxpayers 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 of coal and iron and the food products, makes a pretense and a mockery of political freedom."

Governor La Follette declared that the time is ripe for a new declaration of American independence. He said:

"We are building up colossal fortunes, granting 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?

"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.

"I make this statement in no spirit of hostility to any interest, but deeply impressed with its profound significance, its vital importance to republican institutions and its ultimate influence upon all citizens and all citizenship."

The governor declared that the danger is not a new one; that it is not limited to any state or any section of our country, but he said that the responsibility it brings cannot be shirked or pushed aside or postponed. He declared that the national government and every state government, particularly that of every large city, has this problem to solve, not at some other time, but now.

Referring to the control exercised by great corporations over the public service, Governor La Follette said:

"The danger point in our system is the lawmaking power. It is just here that all the evil forces of monopoly are concentrated for attack. Every executive wanting in honesty and courage, every legislator who is weak or corrupt, is sure to be controlled by the lobby agents of the great corporations. Occasionally by straight, simple bribe, more often by insidious indirect means, they are ensnared and captured by alluring deceptions and promises of political preferment, or frightened and intimidated by threats of ruin to private business and to bring political annihilation. It is the close association of political and corporate power that defrauds the public of its rights, defeats legislation for the general good, and passes laws to promote private interests.

"It was in the New York legislative investigation of the Erie railway that Gould testified as follows:

"I do not know how much I paid toward helping friendly men. We had four states to look after, and we had to suit our politics to circumstances. In a democratic district I was a democrat; in a republican district, I was a republican; in a doubtful district, and at all times, I have always been an Erie man."

"More recently the treasurer of the New York Central Railway company testified that his company had paid out for legislation in one year sixty thousand dollars, and in another two hundred and five thousand dollars.

"Asked whether his company succeeded in getting the legislation it wanted, he answered: 'Yes, we succeeded in getting the legislation.'"

The governor quoted from the correspondence 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. Extracts from that correspondence have already been presented to The Commoner readers. Describing the power of railroad corporations the governor said:

"Their influence has been more powerful than that of the people; their wishes and their whispered directions have been more potent than the outspoken and oft repeated demands of their constituents, the recommendations of the commission or even those of the president of the United States. No proof of this declaration is required. The record is the proof."

Here the governor read a letter bearing upon the action of the last congress. This letter has already been printed in The Commoner, but it cannot be too often published. The letter was written by a United States senator under date of February 9, 1903, and contained this paragraph:

"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, approve a measure that would, to an extent, 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."

"How clearly," said Governor La Follette, "this discloses the naked truth. How startling! How abhorrent! The United States senate with its honored name which glorify the pages of American history, in close association with the great railroads and corporations. Yet we cannot reject the testimony offered. It must be bravely met. How to make this august body serve the people instead of corporate power—not a hundred years from now—but right soon, is the part of the problem I shall discuss in speaking of the remedy for the evils considered. The railroad prefers to deal with large shippers and it squeezes out the small ones. It encourages centralization in business. It creates and encourages monopoly. Every great trust and combination in this country is either the direct offspring or foster child of the railroad. Let me invite your attention to some illustrious examples of the methods employed by the railroads to create a monopoly and control legislation. Passing by the one with which we are familiar—the Standard Oil monopoly, with its history of unspeakable wrong, which has destroyed prosperous, independent, thriving communities and towns, happy homes and individual hopes—which has left all along its course desolation and despair—passing by this appalling record, with its hollow pretense of cheapened product—enough in itself for an entire discourse, I present to you, in a word, some of the methods of procedure which the railway company pursues in the formation of trusts and combinations."

Republican Party on Trial.

When Caleb Powers sought contributions from postmasters throughout the country he declared that the republican party in Kentucky was on trial. The evidence recently produced at the trial seems to bear out the assertion.

Youtsey produces an agreement signed by Powers "waiving the truth or falsity" of an affidavit made by Youtsey for the assistance of Powers after both were convicted. In the agreement Powers promises not to make the affidavit public and to return it within fifteen days. The affidavit was given at the instance of a federal official, whose name Youtsey gives—a federal official who was a son of a republican judge and who desired the affidavit to use with republican members of the court of appeals to secure a new trial for Powers.

Youtsey's testimony is strengthened by this paper and it will be difficult for any one, after reading it, to deny that the killing of Goebel was a political conspiracy formed among republican officials and carried out with a shamelessness that would disgrace an absolute monarchy.

Will Durbin still refuse to give Taylor up? His rigid enforcement of the law against those who interfere with the rights of the black man is all right, but this will not atone for his refusal to deliver up a prominent republican who is

indicted for the assassination of a democratic governor.

It raises a new race question if a man must be black in order to receive consideration from a republican governor.

Compliments from the Enemy.

The Commoner does not publish many complimentary notices, but the editor feels so grateful to the Nashville American for its hostility that he is constrained to reproduce its latest eulogy. This is not referred to to show the sincerity of the reorganizers' plea for harmony, but rather to prove that The Commoner is earning the opposition of papers which, like the Nashville American, are owned by and published in the interests of certain great corporations—papers whose chief purpose is not to print the news or to defend the principles of a party, but rather to lay in wait for the unwary and play the part of the "bunco steerer." Because The Commoner exposed the American and challenged it to disclose the names and politics of its owners and editors, it says:

"It is too late for The Commoner to frighten or cajole the Iowa democrats. They have expressed their opinion of The Commoner and its owner's views in a way that leaves

no room for misunderstanding. As for the American, it is disposed to deal leniently with The Commoner and its discredited and disgruntled owner, who finds his influence slipping away from him and only his vanity and his stubbornness remaining. The American is one of his pet aversions, because it has not hesitated to give him the boot when others were afraid to speak. Now that even former worshippers do not scruple to kick him downstairs, the American is disposed to deal with him as it would with a political tramp who has seen better days. The American takes no notice of dead politicians or of barking newspapers that cannot bite. The once 'peerless leader' has degenerated into an impotent kicker and a cheap, common scold to whom nobody who is anybody pays any attention. As for The Commoner, Hostetter's Almanac has a larger circulation and more influence."

But The Commoner will continue to defend the principles of democracy from both the open and secret enemies of the party.

If you see a quotation from Abraham Lincoln in a daily newspaper, you are perfectly safe in assuming that it is not a republican paper.