

The Commoner.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

Vol. 4, No. 36.

Lincoln, Nebraska, September 23, 1904.

Whole Number 192

“IMPROVISING CONVICTIONS”

Charging the democratic party with inconsistency, Mr. Roosevelt says: “It is doubtful if they (the democrats) venture resolutely to press a single issue. As soon as they raise one they shrink from it and seek to explain it away.” Mr. Roosevelt adds: “Such an attitude is the probably inevitable result of the effort to improvise convictions; for when thus improvised, it is natural that they should be held in a tentative manner.”

Mr. Roosevelt ought to be an authority upon “improvising convictions.” He certainly has had considerable experience in that line.

When he was vice president, Mr. Roosevelt had the conviction that the trusts must be suppressed and he delivered an address at Minneapolis on Labor day. He said: “We shall find it necessary in the future to shackle cunning, as in the past we have shackled force.” In that address, Mr. Roosevelt went so far that the Kansas City Star, a republican paper, printed an editorial commenting upon Mr. Roosevelt’s speech, in which the Star said: “William Jennings Bryan, with all his professed hostility for combinations against trade, has never said anything in relation to trusts so emphatic and unequivocal as the utterances of Vice President Roosevelt at Minneapolis. To the notable political epigrams of the day must be added the declaration of Mr. Roosevelt that ‘we shall find it necessary in the future to shackle cunning as in the past we have shackled force.’ The whole range of modern democratic literature might be searched in vain for a pronunciamento more courageous than that on the tyrannical centralization of capital.” As soon as he became president, however, Mr. Roosevelt seems to have “improvised” his convictions; at least, he has done nothing to “shackle cunning as in the past we have shackled force.” He has not undertaken to enforce the criminal clause of the Sherman anti-trust law, nor has he attempted to wage a serious campaign against the trust system.

In his earlier days Mr. Roosevelt was an ardent champion of the civil service, but since he became president, he seems to have “improvised” his convictions on that subject.

When Mr. Roosevelt succeeded to the presidency he announced that he would carry out the McKinley policies to the letter. In his last speech at Buffalo, Mr. McKinley attached great importance to reciprocity, and republican papers very generally commended that speech not as the “handmaiden of protection,” but as an essential departure from the protective theory. Several months after Mr. Roosevelt was inaugurated president the Washington correspondent for the New York World quoted a member of the Roosevelt cabinet in which that member said: “We can not come down from President McKinley’s position too rapidly. That would be unkind to his memory and impolitic. But we can come down and we will and by the end of the Fifty-seventh congress, we will be just where we started, with no reciprocity of any consequence and with all our protection.” History shows that this cabinet member knew what he was talking about. Evidently, Mr.

Roosevelt had “improvised” his convictions on that subject.

In his book entitled “American Ideas and Other Essays,” Mr. Roosevelt protested against colonies. He seems, however, to have “improvised” his convictions on that subject, and is now an ardent champion of the colonial system.

Several years ago Mr. Roosevelt was a member of the New York free trade club. Today he is a radical protectionist. He seems to have “improvised” his convictions on that subject.

In his book, “Life of Thomas H. Benton,” Mr. Roosevelt said: “Political economists have very generally agreed that protection is vicious in theory and harmful in practice,” and referring to the tariff of 1828 he said: “It purported to benefit the rest of the country, but it undoubtedly worked real injury to the planter states.” Today, Mr. Roosevelt believes that protection is essential to the welfare of this government. Evidently he has “improvised” his convictions on that point.

In his book entitled “The Winning of the West,” Mr. Roosevelt said: “Whether the westerners governed themselves as wisely as they should have, mattered little. The essential point was that they had to be given the right of self-government. They could not be kept in pupilage. Like other Americans, they had to be left to strike out for themselves and to sink or swim, according to the measure of their own capacities. When this was done, it was certain that they would commit many blunders, and that some blunders would work harm not only to themselves, but to the whole nation. Nevertheless, all this had to be accepted as part of the penalty paid for free government.” Today, Mr. Roosevelt believes that the essential point is not the right of self-government. He believes that men should be kept in pupilage. He presents as an argument against self-government, the probability that the Filipinos left to themselves would commit many blunders. Evidently, Mr. Roosevelt has “improvised” his convictions on that subject.

In his “Life of Thomas H. Benton,” Mr. Roosevelt said: “Of course, no one would wish to see these or any other central communities now added to our domain by force. We want no unwilling citizens in our union.” Now, Mr. Roosevelt is in favor of conquest and believes that men should be governed without their consent. Evidently, he has “improvised” his convictions on that point.

In a speech delivered before Harvard University, Mr. Roosevelt said: “It was the custom in England to reward men who did great work with titles and lands, while in this country the hero is rewarded by malign attacks and is fortunate if he is permitted to take up the threads of business left in a tangled condition when he responded to the call of his country.” Mr. Roosevelt did not then seem to believe that it was proper to “reward” heroes by attacking them; and yet, everyone remembers how Mr. Roosevelt repeatedly went out of his way to assail Dewey, Miles and Schley. Evidently, Mr. Roosevelt “improvised” his convictions as to the manner in which heroes should be rewarded.

Years ago, as an author, Mr. Roosevelt had much to say about liberty and the consent of the

governed, but in a Century Magazine essay which Mr. Roosevelt wrote, he said: “But I have even scantier patience with those who make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity, and who cant about ‘liberty,’ and the ‘consent of the governed’ in order to excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men.” Evidently, Mr. Roosevelt has “improvised” his convictions on liberty and the consent of the governed.

In his work on Benton, Mr. Roosevelt referred to the “manifest destiny” idea, which he said “reduced to its simplest term” was that it was “our manifest destiny to swallow up the land of all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand us; a theory that forthwith obtained immense popularity among all statesmen of easy international morality.” Today, Mr. Roosevelt is an ardent champion of this same “manifest destiny.” Evidently, he has “improvised” his convictions on that point.

It would seem that Mr. Roosevelt is treading upon dangerous ground when he talks about “improvising convictions.”

When Panics Raged

In his letter of acceptance, Mr. Roosevelt said: “It is but ten years since the last attempt was made by means of lowering the tariff to prevent some people from prospering too much. The attempt was entirely successful. The tariff of that year (1894) was among the causes which in that year and for some time afterwards effectually prevented anybody from prospering too much and labor from prospering at all.” This statement is in line with the declaration in the republican national platform for 1904 that “a democratic tariff has always been followed by business adversity; a republican tariff by business prosperity.”

Neither the statement of Mr. Roosevelt, nor the declaration in the republican platform is justified by history.

As a matter of fact, every panic during the last thirty years originated under republican rule and developed under republican legislation.

The gold panics which gave history “black Friday” occurred during the month of September, 1869, when the republican party was in power.

The great panic marked by the failure of Jay Cook & Co. occurred in September, 1873. Then the republican party was in power and eleven months prior to the time of that panic, the republican party had been re-elected to power.

It is true the Wilson bill was passed ten years ago. That was in 1894. But that panic did not originate in 1894; it did not originate in 1893; it began long prior to the presidential election of 1892. That panic originated and reached its worst under that famous tariff law known as the McKinley bill.

The republican party was restored to power March 4, 1889.

The McKinley bill became a law October 6, 1890.

November 11, 1890, the reports showed financial distress in New York. The New York clearing