

# The Commoner.

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## Take Your Citizenship Seriously

In its issue of September 9, the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch printed a short editorial that ought to be read in every precinct, in every state of the union and posted up on every schoolhouse, and in every counting room and factory of the land. Here it is: "There is nothing more important than that we should take our citizenship seriously. Some people take it as a joke, some as a game, some as a selfish purpose and some as a chance to help friends or grind axes. No man is worthy of citizenship unless he regards it as a mission and uses it for the common good to free his fellowmen from every kind of servitude and oppression and make them their own levers to raise themselves to better estate. Citizenship is a duty, and every man who has a high ideal of life, who makes it brave and serviceable, has a right to be called a citizen and no other should be enrolled upon the roll of honor. A citizen is a man who honors his city, his state and his nation by living right and doing good. Such a one regards citizenship seriously. The duty of citizenship is committed to each man as a trust to be discharged always for the common welfare and the higher purpose. A ballot is to be used for the benefit of mankind and not for the advantage of individuals."

## ROOSEVELT ON CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Several circumstances conspire to suggest the propriety of a few words in regard to Mr. Roosevelt's views on the subject of campaign contributions. In his Archbold-Penrose statement Mr. Roosevelt says: "Aside from this matter of corporations," (corporations are no longer allowed to contribute), "my attitude as to contributions now is precisely what my attitude was in 1904, and will not be changed. I do not draw the line against size and never shall. The conditions I impose are, first, that the contributions shall be received without any kind of promises or obligation, expressed or implied; and, second, that the money shall be spent in honest fashion and only for legitimate expenses. I have no sympathy with the proposals to limit the contributions to \$5,000 or \$10,000 or any other sum. If the virtue of a party is so frail that it will weaken if the contribution is over \$10,000, it will also weaken if it is under \$10,000. It is morally as bad to solicit or accept \$10 for improper reasons as \$10,000. To limit contributions to \$10,000 will be no hardship to a reactionary cause, a cause championed by the enormous majority of the men who can contribute each to such sum. But we who fight for the cause of the people, as a whole, have only a few supporters among the very rich. These few supporters are from the nature of the case, idealists, men of the kind, who, when their interests are aroused give generously and without thought of personal return. I welcome their contributions, when made in such a spirit; I am honored by their support and receive it as freely and gladly as it is given. I shall make precisely the same return to all who contributed, and that return is to serve the whole people by striving for social and industrial justice."

The above quotation presents four propositions; first, that his position on the subject of contributions is PRECISELY THE SAME that it was in 1904; second, that he insists that contributions shall be received without any kind of promise or obligation, expressed or implied; third, that the money shall be spent in honest fashion and only for legitimate expenses; and, fourth, that he is opposed to any limitation whatever upon the amount of individual contributions, and always will be.

No time need be spent upon the third proposition; namely, as to the things for which the money shall be spent. No public man would be willing to admit that he favored any other kind of expenditures than those described by Mr. Roosevelt, although there might be a wide difference of opinion among politicians as to what would be considered "honest fashion" and "legitimate expenses."

The first, second and fourth propositions deserve attention. He says his attitude is PRECISELY the same now that it was in 1904. It will be interesting, therefore, in this connection to know what his attitude was in 1908—the

period half way between 1904 and the present day. The issue in 1908 was whether campaign contributions should be made public BEFORE the election or AFTERWARD. The democratic platform declared in favor of publicity BEFORE the election, while the republican platform was silent on the subject. Mr. Taft, however, announced that the contributions made to his campaign would be made public AFTER the election, and in a correspondence which I had with Mr. Roosevelt he not only indorsed Mr. Taft's position but proceeded to defend it as follows: "I emphatically approve of the publication of campaign contributions and expenses AFTER the election, whether provided by law or not. You have shown by this letter of yours that if the contributions to Mr. Hughes' campaign fund had been made public before election, you and those who act with you would have striven to give the false impression that Mr. Hughes was unfit to be trusted with the position of governor, and you have shown by this letter of yours that if Mr. Harriman's contribution to the campaign fund of 1904 (and incidentally I may mention that I am informed that this particular contribution was not used for the national campaign, but in the New York state campaign), had been known before the election, you and your supporters would have endeavored to use the fact of its having been made as an insincere and untruthful argument to show that I could not be trusted to deal out exact justice to Mr. Harriman." It will be seen that at that time Mr. Roosevelt was afraid to trust the public to make a proper use of the information if publicity was given before the election to the names of contributors and the amount contributed. Two years ago Mr. Roosevelt announced his conversion to the doctrine of publicity BEFORE the election, and it has been assumed since then that he favors publicity before the election. Are we to understand that Mr. Roosevelt stands PRECISELY where he did eight years ago? If so, he must now be opposed to publicity before the election, for the position taken by him two years ago was precisely opposite to what it was in 1908. If he now believes in publicity before the election it shows a gratifying change, a real progressive movement on his part within four years.

It is difficult to treat Mr. Roosevelt's second proposition seriously, namely, that contributions are purged of taint when received without any kind of promise or obligation expressed or implied. The idea that that sort of a condition would relieve an objectionable contribution of its evil quality would be absurd if advanced by any one less distinguished than the ex-president. To say, for instance, that Mr. Perkins, who is a director in the steel trust and officially connected with the harvester trust—both of which organizations are intensely interested in the administration of existing laws and in the enactment of new laws on the trust question—to say that Mr Perkins can make large contributions

innocently PROVIDING he makes them with the understanding that they shall have no influence upon the man whom he helps to elect, is like saying that a judge can receive favors from litigants PROVIDED he receives them with the distinct understanding that they are received "without any kind of promise or obligation expressed or implied." It is a well settled principle of jurisprudence that a judge shall not receive favors from parties interested, and no juggling of words or rhetorical legerdemain can convert the bribery of a judge into an innocent and patriotic contribution to the judge's exchequer. In taking the position that the insertion of a spectacular condition can overcome an implied obligation Mr. Roosevelt does not add to his reputation as a moralist. He knows that, as a rule, the men interested in predatory corporations give with an eye single to their interests, and he ought to know that, as a rule, men are unconsciously, if not consciously, influenced by a feeling of gratitude. He is asking too much of a confiding public when he asks that they endorse a policy by which the beneficiaries of privilege and favoritism shall be permitted to elect the officials who are to regulate them, and then trust the officials so elected to deal impartially between the givers and the public when the subject of favors comes up for consideration. Jefferson, whose name is now used to invite democrats into the progressive party but whose career has aroused only criticism from Mr. Roosevelt in the past, understood men better than Mr. Roosevelt seems to understand them. Jefferson said that free government existed in jealousy rather than in confidence—that confidence was everywhere the parent of despotism. The kind of confidence which Mr. Roosevelt invites us to extend on the subject of campaign contributions would prove the prolific parent of deception and corruption, however honestly and innocently it may be urged by the head of the new party.

Mr. Roosevelt's fourth proposition states a position that he will not long be able to maintain. The limitation of contributions is inevitable. Congress has already limited the amount that a candidate can expend; a senator is not permitted to expend more than \$10,000, while a congressman is limited to \$5,000. The house of representatives at Washington recently decided an election contest against a member on the ground that his family expended more than the law allowed, and this, too, although the evidence seemed to show that the candidate himself was kept in ignorance of the amount which the other members of the family were expending. If a candidate is to be limited as to the amount he can expend; if even his family can not spend for him more than he is himself permitted to expend, surely there can be no logical objection made to a limitation upon what third parties can expend.

Let us take a case. Suppose the harvester trust has a plant in a congressional district, and