The Commoner

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THEY LISTENED TO THE PEOPLE

When the history of the present tariff struggle is written, credit will have to be conceded to nearly all the democratic senators and members for resisting the temptation to put local interests above the general welfare. In the discussions of the tariff question heretofore, allowances had to be made for the pressure of local beneficiaries upon democrats who, in principle, repudiated the doctrine of protection but, in practice, found it difficult to make their votes harmonize with their speeches. This was especially true in the discussion of the Payne-Aldrich bill, when a number of democrats so far forgot themselves as to declare that, while they opposed protection as a matter of principle they wanted their constituents to have their share of it so long as its benefits were being passed around.

When congress met in special session, at the call of President Wilson, to reduce the tariff in the interests of the people, the democratic party realized that it was time to get together and that success was possible only by the recognition of the right of the consumers to recognition. There has been, therefore, an astonishingly small amount of talk about the claims of particular industries. Only in the case of two articles has there been any considerable effort to retain for an important product the benefits of a protective tariff, namely, wool and sugar.

Some of the representatives from the states where wool is largely produced felt that the transfer of this commodity to the free list might work a hardship upon a portion of their constituents. Discussion, however, disclosed, first, that even in the states where wool is most largely grown the number of those specially benefited is few compared with the number of those who would be burdened by the tax, and, second, that the compensatory duty which always accompanies a tax upon raw material would enable the manufacturers to take from the consumers of woolen goods vastly more than the producers of wool could possibly receive. As a result of investigation, the opposition to free wool gradually diminished until the democratic party was practically a unit against the tax upon wool.

With free wool has come a greater reduction in woolen goods than would have been possible had the tax on wool been retained and the whole country will be benefited. It is not certain that free wool will work a real hardship, even to the large sheep owners, since the increased production of woolen goods in this country will stimulate a demand for the local product to mix with the larger quantity of the wool imported. And then, too, the steadily increasing monopoly among the manufacturers of woolens has left the wool growers at the mercy of a few buyers so that it is questionable whether he was in a position to collect the benefits which had been voted to him by those who gave him a tax on wool. But whether or not there is actual pecuniary loss to the large flock-masters, there is no doubt that free wool will bring enormous advantage to the mass of the people and it will, in addition to that, remove the keystone from the protective arch and make it impossible for the beneficiaries of protection to justify their system on the ground that it includes the farmer in its benefits—a plea that has been used with great effect for many years, in spite of its absurdity.

The democratic representatives from the wool growing states should be applauded for the courage which they have manifested in defying the clamor of special privilege and casting in their lot with the over-burdened masses.

The sugar interests have made an even more stubborn resistance to the demands of the tariff reformers, due largely to the fact that this industry is distributed over a larger number of states and is concentrated in its benefits. And here, too, the president won because of the overwhelming demand of those who have borne a heavy burden for the benefit of the relatively limited number who have profited by the tax. These senators from the sugar states who have stood for free sugar should receive the plaudits of the tax payers; they have been faithful to the many rather than subservient to the few. It is fortunate that we now have the election of senators by direct vote of the people, since the special interests can no longer punish patriotic senators through the successful manipulation of legislatures. The Commoner will not risk offending by apportioning credit among those who have stood up valiantly for a real tariff reduction, but it appeals to the constituents of these men to express appreciation. It is cheering to the legislator to receive commendation from the rank and file of his constituents—and he is entitled to it when he votes right—to offset the abuse which is sure to come from those who recognize that they can no longer convert the government into a private asset in business.

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President on Mexico

On another page will be found the president's message on the Mexican situation, together with the documents which accompanied the message. The readers of The Commoner are invited to examine carefully the president's utterances on this subject, for this message will stand out in history as the beginning of an epoch. The tone of the message is superb, and the literary style measures up to the high standard of excellence which the president has set in his state papers. The delivery was impressive, and the applause which greeted the message was so universal and so hearty as to leave no doubt that he spoke the sentiments of the American people. The press comments, without regard to party, have been most favorable and emphatic.

The president has been patient in dealing with the Mexican situation, and the language in which his proposals were expressed was carefully selected, with a view to avoiding anything which could wound the pride of our southern neighbors or give just cause for criticism. The president tendered the good offices of the United States as a friend and neighbor, and tendered them in the spirit of friendship and neighborliness—the offer resting upon the most substantial grounds, grounds that are recognized by all civilized nations. The terms which he proposed were the simplest and most obvious that could have been suggested, and it is not his fault that his offer was rejected. He awaits the sober second thought of those who form the public opinion of Mexico. He has confidence in the triumph of moral forces; "he has faith in the wisdom of doing right." He is testing the truth of the words of Carlyle who, in the closing chapters of his French Revolution, said that "thought is stronger than artillery parks," and that back of every great thought is love.

Some of the European editors—those who have not yet learned how temporary are the victories that violence can win, and who still wage their battles on the level of physical force—these, few in number, speak disparagingly of the outlook. But they will not be able to find among the boasts of those of their class anything that will approach in length of life or in its power to command increasing approbation a sentence like that with which the president concluded his message:

"The steady pressure of moral force will before many days break the barriers of pride and prejudice down, and we shall triumph as Mexico's friends sooner than we could triumph as her enemies—and how much more handsomely, with how much higher and finer satisfactions of conscience and of honor!"

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