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THE POPULIST MANIFESTO

Below will be found the manifesto issued by the national committee of the united people's party at its recent session in Denver:

"The manifest unrest which everywhere appears in the nation demonstrates the dissatisfaction of the American people with the present management of government and argues the necessity of the reform forces coming together in united action at the ballot box to obtain proper legislation, whereby the right of the people in self-government may be had for themselves and their posterity. Therefore, we, the populists of the United States, having this day, at the city of Denver, united forces, with the distinct understanding that all past differences as to policy shall be and now are permanently settled, and experience having demonstrated the futility of any attempt to secure the enactment of our principles either through the republican or democratic parties, we believe the time is now at hand when the united people's party should declare itself emphatically opposed to any affiliation with either of these parties and unqualifiedly in favor of national political action.

"Our fundamental principles are known to all populists and are nowhere better stated than in that immortal document enunciated at Omaha, July 4, 1892. However, for the benefit of the uninformed, we declare our adherence to the demands for (a) a money, whether stamped on gold, silver or paper, to be coined and issued exclusively by the government and made a full legal tender for all debts, both public and private; (b) a system of transportation and the transmission of intelligence, owned by the public and operated by the government at the cost of service; (c) land for use rather than for speculation, and abolition of alien ownership of land; (d) American ships for American foreign commerce, without a cent of subsidy.

"And as an open door for all economic reforms, we urge the rule of the people through the optional referendum and initiative and the recall of derelict officials.

"Confident in the justice of the principles here set forth, firmly confident that their triumph in government would be for the best interests of the people, we call upon the patriotic citizens of this country to join with us in bringing about their enactment into law. With these principles firmly established, equal justice would prevail, special privileges would be eliminated and ours would be, as patriots everywhere desire, a government of the people, for the people, by the people."

It will be noticed that the committee not only assumed to speak for the party, but assumes to be the party. It says: "We the populists of the United States, having this day at the city of Denver united forces," etc. The first question that arises is, What authority has a committee to decide, in advance of a delegate convention and without instructions from the voters, the policy of the party?

The committee declares that experience shows the futility of fusion and that "the time is now at hand when the united people's party should declare itself emphatically opposed to affiliation with either of these (republican or democratic) parties."

Such a declaration would not be out of place coming from a committee of the middle-of-the-road populists, for that party so declared in the last campaign, but the regular populists favored fusion in the last campaign and they have had no opportunity to speak upon that question since. If

the national committee of either of the old parties attempted to commit its party to a policy diametrically opposed to the policy of the previous campaign there would be a protest from the rank and file. Will the rank and file of the populist party be less firm in their insistence upon a voice in determining the party's policy?

In the second place, it will be noticed that the compromise is no compromise at all, but an open surrender of the regular organization to the middle-of-the-road organization. The united party adopts in toto the policy of those who in 1896 and 1900 bolted the regular convention and, while pretending great loyalty to the populist party, gave what assistance they could to the republican party. In Nebraska the leader of the middle-of-the-road movement of 1900 demanded and received of the republicans a federal office as a reward. The bolters only polled about one thousand votes in Nebraska and the returns showed that the movement was either insignificant, or that the men who talked middle-of-the-road populism voted the republican ticket. Having helped to defeat the fusion ticket the bolters now secure from those who voted the fusion ticket a pronouncement against further fusion.

The most noteworthy part of the new platform, however, is its failure to deal with several vital issues of the day.

While it adheres to the party's position on the money question it fails to make specific mention of the trust question or the question of imperialism. Surely the populists cannot ignore the trusts which are practicing extortion without let or hindrance. And what a travesty to call upon the reform forces to unite to "obtain proper legislation whereby self-government may be had for themselves and posterity," and then pass over in silence the assault that is being made on the doctrine of self-government in the Philippines! Solicitude for our own rights will avail but little if we ignore the rights of others, and a party that is willing to suppress an expression on so important a subject in order to conciliate the men who helped the republicans carry out an imperialistic policy will not appeal very strongly to the friends of reform.

The new platform also fails to emphasize the demand for the election of senators by the people. This is a reform which has grown constantly for thirty years and is the gateway to other reforms. Until the senate is made dependent upon the will of the voters it will be impossible to secure a single national reform for which the populists contend.

How can they hope to secure a money issued exclusively by the government so long as the national bankers control the senate? Today both of the senators from Nebraska are national bankers and pecuniarily interested in the issue of bank notes and yet the united people's party is opposed to fusion with the democrats on candidates who are opposed to bank currency. Fusion gave to Nebraska the only senator we have had in recent years who defended the interests of the people, and yet we are deliberately informed that there must be no more fusion.

The Commoner has favored fusion because fusion offered the best prospect of securing those reforms upon which democrats and populists agree. If the democrats had preferred certain defeat under independent action to a promise of victory by co-operation they would have been justly charged with putting party above principle. Have not the united populists put party above principle? If we have failed to secure the success which we had hoped for, is it not certain that we would have been defeated even more disastrously had we refused to act together. If some of the populists voted the republican ticket because of fusion, did it not show a lack of interest in reform?

Some populists seem to think that the success of their party depends upon the breaking up of

the democratic party; some of them have not forgiven the democratic party for having indorsed some reforms first advocated by the populists. Instead of rejoicing that a great party organization had espoused the income tax, the election of senators by popular vote and direct legislation, some of the populists were jealous enough to complain that we had stolen their platform. If these reforms were urged by the populists merely as a means of winning a party victory there might be some excuse for a desire to monopolize the advocacy of them, but if they were advocated because they were good for the people, then the friends of these reforms ought to have welcomed indorsements from every source. If the republicans would reform the tariff and restore bimetallicism, destroy the trusts and abandon imperialism, they would gain a party advantage over the democrats, but what loyal democrat could complain if the republicans did for the country what the democratic party is trying to do?

The manifesto issued at Denver will, if indorsed by the rank and file, put the united populists just where the middle-of-the-road populists have been for seven years; it will, if indorsed by the rank and file, direct the populist fight against the democratic party instead of against the republican party, for to justify their action the members of the populist party will have to emphasize the differences between themselves and the democrats, whereas in recent campaigns the regular populists have emphasized the differences between themselves and the republicans. The fight which will then ensue will provoke bitterness on the part of the democrats and the real friends of reform will be divided into warring factions, each faction distrusting the other.

How can the situation be met?

First, by an appeal to the members of the populist party. They did not authorize the committee to issue such a declaration of war against the democrats and should not indorse it. Let them exercise their right to self-government and insist upon being heard before the populist party is converted into an assistant republican party, for the natural and necessary result of the committee's action is to make the populist party the secret ally of the republican party in the next campaign just as the gold democratic party and the middle-of-the-road party were secret allies of the republicans in 1896 and 1900.

As a matter of fact, the committee's action was based, not so much on the failure of fusion in the past as upon the fear that the reorganizers will regain control of the democratic party. The action of the populist committee was a groundless assumption and will naturally encourage the reorganizers who will assume that the populist committee speaks for the voters of the party—it will be an easy assumption, too, because the leaders of the reorganizers are always assuming to speak for the whole democratic party. But the Kansas City platform democrats need not be discouraged. The reforms advocated in the platforms of 1896 and 1900 were advocated because they were right and not merely to catch populist votes. Let the party stand by its principles and then if the populists attempt to help the republicans defeat those principles the earnest reformers in the populist party will, as individuals, co-operate with the democratic party. Even some of those who signed the manifesto will hesitate to follow their own advice when they see the logical and inevitable result of their middle-of-the-road policy.

The reforms for which the Chicago and Kansas City platforms declared are too important to be jeopardized by divisions among reformers and the democratic party can well afford to allow the populists to bear the blame if those divisions arise, but until the rank and file of the populist party declares against fusion, The Commoner will refuse to believe that the committee spoke for the party.