

# Mr. Bryan on the Democratic Party

Mr. Bryan has written for the Encyclopedia Americana, now being published by the Americana company of New York, an article on the democratic party. This article gives in condensed form the history of the democratic party together with a discussion of some of the more important issues advocated by that organization, and will be reproduced in The Commoner by courtesy of the publishers. Papers quoting from this article will please give credit to the Encyclopedia Americana.

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## THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

To Thomas Jefferson belongs the honor of being the founder, and for a third of a century the undisputed leader, of the democratic party. Scarcely had the present constitution been adopted before there appeared a line more or less distinct dividing those who, like Jefferson (q.v.), believed the people fully capable of self-government and trusted them, and those who, like Hamilton (q.v.), thought that the masses needed to be under the control of a strong and centralized government. This fundamental difference of opinion manifested itself in the treatment of every important question, and party organizations were soon perfected.

As Jefferson himself has described the birth of parties in the United States, his opinion can be accepted as authoritative. In a letter written in June, 1823, near the close of his life, to William Johnson, he said:

"At the formation of our government, many had formed their political opinions on European writings and practices, believing the experience of old countries, and especially of England, abusive as it was, to be a safer guide than mere theory. The doctrines of Europe were that men in numerous associations cannot be restrained within the limits of order and justice, but by forces physical and moral, wielded over them by authorities independent of their will. Hence their organization of kings, hereditary nobles, and priests. Still further to constrain the brute force of the people, they deem it necessary to keep them down by hard labor, poverty and ignorance, and to take from them as from bees, so much of their earnings, as that unremitting labor shall be necessary to obtain a sufficient surplus barely to sustain a scanty and miserable life. And these earnings they apply to maintain their privileged orders in splendor and idleness, to fascinate the eyes of the people, and excite in them an humble adoration and submission, as to an order of superior beings. Although few among us had gone all these lengths of opinion, yet many had advanced, some more, some less, on the way. And in the convention which formed our government, they endeavored to draw the cords of power as tight as they could obtain them, to lessen the dependence of the general functionaries on their constituents, to subject to them those of the states, and to weaken their means of maintaining the steady equilibrium which the majority of the convention had deemed salutary for both branches, general and local. To recover, therefore, in practice the powers which the nation had refused and to warp to their own wishes those actually given, was the steady object of the federal party. Ours, on the contrary, was to maintain the will of the majority of the convention and of the people themselves. We believed, with them, that man was a rational animal endowed by nature with rights and with an innate sense of justice; and that he could be restrained from wrong and protected in right, by moderate powers confided to persons of his own choice, and held to their duties by dependence on his own will. We believe that the complicated organization of kings, nobles, and priests, was not the wisest nor best to effect the happiness of associated man; that wisdom and virtue were not hereditary; that the trappings of such a machinery, consumed by their expense, those earnings of industry they were meant to protect, and, by the inequalities they produced, exposed liberty to sufferance. We believe that men, enjoying in ease and security the full fruits of their own industry, enlisted by all their interests on the side of law and order habituated to think of themselves and to follow their reason as their guide, would be more easily

and safely governed, than with minds nourished in error and vitiated and debased, as in Europe, by ignorance, indigence, and oppression. The cherishment of the people then was our principle, the fear and distrust of them that of the other party. Composed, as we were, of the landed and laboring interests of the country, we could not be less anxious for a government of law and order than were the inhabitants of the cities, the strongholds of federalism. And whether our efforts to save the principles and form of our constitution have not been salutary, let the present republican freedom, order, and prosperity of our country determine."

Jefferson not only gave a history of the formation of parties, but fortunately for later generations, he enumerated the elements which each party contained. In a letter to C. E. Ebeling in 1795 he said:

"Two parties exist within the United States. They embrace respectively the following descriptions of persons. The anti-republicans consist of: (1) the old refugees and Tories; (2) British merchants residing among us, and composing the main body of our merchants; (3) American merchants trading on British capital, another great portion; (4) speculators and holders in the banks and public funds; (5) officers of the federal government with some exceptions; (6) office hunters willing to give up principles for places—a numerous and noisy tribe; (7) nervous persons, whose languid fibres have more analogy with a passive than active state of things. The republican party of our Union comprehends: (1) the entire body of landholders throughout the United States; (2) the body of laborers not being landholders whether in husbanding or the arts. The latter is to the aggregate of the former party probably as 500 to 1; but their wealth is not as disproportionate, though it is also greatly superior and is in truth the foundation of that of their antagonists. Trifling as are the numbers of the anti-republican party, there are circumstances which give them an appearance of strength and numbers. They all live in cities together, and can act in a body and readily at all times; they give chief employment to the newspapers, and, therefore, have most of them under their command. The agricultural interest is dispersed over a great extent of country, have little means of intercommunication with each other, and feeling their own strength and will, are conscious that a single exertion of these will at any time crush the machinations against their government."

Jefferson's philosophical mind sought not only the facts, but the reason for the facts, and in 1824, in a letter to H. Lee, he thus classified men according to their party tendencies:

"Men by their constitutions are naturally divided into two parties: (1) those who fear and distrust the people and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes; (2) those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the most wise depository of the public interests. In every country these two parties exist, and in every one where they are free to think, speak, and write, they will declare themselves. Call them, therefore, liberals and serviles, Jacobins and ultras, whigs and Tories, republicans and federalists, aristocrats and democrats, or by whatever name you please, they are the same parties still, and pursue the same object. The last appellation of aristocrats and democrats is the true one expressing the essence of all."

Jefferson's purpose was to found a party that would be really democratic in personnel, in purpose and in method. The party, however, was at first called the republican party, and afterward the democratic-republican party. It was not until in Jackson's time that it became universally known by its present name. As there were no national conventions and no national platforms in the early days of the republic the position of the party on public questions must be gathered from the words and speeches of the leaders and from the votes of the members of the party in congress. Jefferson's first inaugural address contained the essence of the party creed as generally accepted during the first quarter of the 19th century. In fact, it is still the creed of the party, and no group of men desiring to maintain an influence in the party can even now admit any essential departure from it. It will be found below:

"About to enter, fellow-citizens, on the exercise of duties which comprehend everything dear and valuable to you, it is proper you should understand what I deem the essential principles of our government, and consequently those which

ought to shape its administration. I will compress them within the narrowest compass they will bear, stating the general principle, but not all its limitations. Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliance with none; the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies; the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad; a jealous care of the right of election by the people—a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided; absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority and vital principle of republics, from which is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism; a well-disciplined militia, our best reliance in peace and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them; the supremacy of the civil over the military authority; economy in the public expense that labor may be lightly burdened; the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith; encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaid; the diffusion of information and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason; freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of person under the protection of the habeas corpus, and trial by juries impartially selected. These principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety."

The first and most fundamental difference between the democratic party (when it was known as the republican party, afterward as the democratic-republican party, and today as the democratic party) and the party which has opposed it (first known as the federal party, then as the whig party and more recently as the republican party), was upon the construction of the constitution. The former party has insisted upon a strict construction, while the latter has leaned toward a liberal construction of the federal constitution. This difference is a natural one for the democratic party, believing in the right of the people to, and in the capacity of the people for, self-government, has insisted upon giving them as large a part as possible in the control of their own affairs.

It follows, therefore, that the democratic party favors local self-government and opposes the centralization of power in remote centers. It believes that the nearer the people are to their government the more effective will be their control over it. The various parties that have opposed the democratic party have given more or less emphasis to the Hamiltonian view and have increased the power of the representative at the expense of the constituents.

While this distinction has not at all times been clearly marked, and while these views have not been held by all the individual members, the general tendency has existed.

In the very beginning this tendency was illustrated in the alien and sedition laws, enacted by the federalists and in the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions supported by the democrats. Both parties in this instance went to the extreme, the federalists attempting to confer dangerous power upon the federal government, the democrats asserting views which were afterward so misconstrued as to weaken the federal union. The preservation of the balance between the federal government and the state governments has always been a delicate matter, and as the line cannot be drawn with mathematical accuracy there has always been room for dispute; the public sentiment having gone to the one side or the other as it was necessary to maintain the equilibrium. It is likely that this discussion will continue, but the efforts to carry the government to an extreme in either direction will be thwarted by the conservative middle class, which rallies to the support of the side that is attacked.

Beginning with Jefferson's administration in 1801, and continuing to the end of Monroe's administration (Continued on Page 11.)