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KERN'S MISTAKE

Mr. Van Vorhis Discusses the Cleveland Democrats of Indianapolis and Points Out Their Duplicity

Editor Independent: The recent contest for chairmanship of the democratic city committee ought to be enough to set the people, not only of Indianapolis but of the state, to thinking and acting.

For several years this city has been controlled by the worst elements in it, and public business has been a "private snap." No difference what party has been in control, it acquired power by the support at the polls of the classes that prey upon society and prosper because of depraved appetites and bad passions. By the aid of such influences the vicious classes have been controlled and men, by their votes, lifted into prominence who could be depended upon to remove legal restraints, give free sway to the gratification of appetites and passions, close their eyes while gamblers rob the ignorant, assist corporations to steal our public utilities, and open opportunities for contractors to rob the taxpayers.

Never before, however, has any party given such a slap in the face to public opinion and so audaciously disregarded even the appearances of political decency. There are not twenty men in the city who do not know that the man selected to head the organization has the reputation of being in full sympathy with the classes in politics and business that prosper most when appetites and passions are least restrained. His reputation is that of a man who must necessarily seek the association of the lowest, and who will necessarily be controlled by personal and pecuniary motives. It will be absurd to expect him to have the ability, or even the inclination, to make any effort in the direction of the enforcement of law or the improvement of public morals. It is unreasonable to suppose that he can attract to the party, or have any influence with, men whose motives have a moral basis, or are controlled by an unselfish desire for public welfare. It will be difficult to find a single man in the city of Indianapolis who will say he believes that Mr. Keach will be controlled in his political action by regard for public morals or for the morals of any question. It is well known that, for several years, he has been doing all he could to disorganize and defeat the party.

It is probably true that the party is in no worse condition than when Taggart was in ostensible control. He represents no worse crowd than the republican crowd now in control, but no man in the city is so prominently identified, in the public mind, as the leader of the low, degraded and unscrupulous classes. He is, no more a leader, really, than Taggart has been. There is no difference between them except Taggart's smooth surface. They have both taken their instructions from Morss, editor of the Sentinel. There were some democrats who were foolish enough to believe that in supporting Keach they were opposing the Taggart ring. Properly speaking, there is no Taggart ring and never has been. Taggart and

Keach were both the tools of the ring of which Samuel E. Morss has been the head. Morss and Taggart had a difference—exit Taggart. Morss has been blowing the anti-trust horn with considerable vigor and some eclat until the public learned that he is a member of the Pierpont Morgan-Standard Oil-Economic league. Keach was selected by Morss to complete Taggart's overthrow with the result that, practically, the same old influence is in control of the committee with Keach as chief-of-staff in place of Taggart. The men who supposed they were helping to get rid of what they are pleased to call the Taggart ring have made fools of themselves, and have assisted in perpetuating the control of Morss in the city organization. Neither Taggart nor Keach knows anything about the principles of true democracy, nor cares anything about them. Neither of them in any sense represents the friends of Mr. Bryan, although they both played for their support, and both by deceptive professions had the aid of a few of them. It is remarkable that any one, who wants democratic principles to prevail in the party, or who desires the party to preserve any semblance of decency, could be induced to tolerate a man like Keach, who left the party and did what he could from the outside to defeat it; or how he could have any confidence in a man like Taggart who, although he remained with the party and professed loyalty to it, kept up very intimate relations with its enemies, trying to keep himself solid with both, but actually ready to betray either.

The mass of democrats took no interest in this contest between the two fragments of the Morss crowd, the difference and the result were both immaterial. There are democratic voters enough in the city, who were spectators, to have prevented this disgraceful struggle, and to have taught both parties that dishonesty and treachery would not be tolerated. It is a shame that they did not do it.

It is a matter of the greatest regret that John W. Kern allowed himself to be identified with, and used by, the Taggart fragment. But even his great popularity was not sufficient to overcome the disgust excited by the memory of Taggart's administrations as mayor, and his double dealing politically. Unfortunately, Mr. Kern has occupied a somewhat ambiguous attitude in the public mind. At one time he denounced the principles of the Chicago platform, but changed his views. There is no doubt about his being sincere, and the change has been so accepted by the supporters of that platform. There has, however, been a feeling that Mr. Kern has been too intimate with Morss, Taggart and others known to be opposed to Mr. Bryan, or under strong suspicion of duplicity. There has been some curiosity, that has found expression, to know how he was able to maintain his popularity with them.

If Mr. Kern could have seen his way to have said some time ago, in the same public way, what he has said recently, and have cut loose from all those who openly or secretly opposed Mr. Bryan, he would have made himself the undisputed leader of his party in the state. If he had taken

this course and stood for the truth, as there is no doubt he sees it, without so many complimentary references to Cleveland, Hill, Gorman, Waterson and others well known to be untrue, not only to the party, but to democratic principles, he would have had a standing and influence in his party possessed by no other man in this state. He might not have been the candidate for governor in 1900, but he would not have been in a situation to be used by Taggart to maintain his position in the party, in the hope that it would assist him in his ambition to be national chairman. To be used by such a man as Taggart, and defeated by such a man as Keach for such a position as city chairman, and feel compelled to publicly declare his fealty to Keach, must bring a feeling of humiliation that is indescribable. While there is no doubt about his sincerity, it would appear that he has allowed his political friendships and his hopes to deceive him concerning the real purposes of Morss and other members of the old Indiana Cleveland ring.

This ring had practical control in the campaign of 1900. They would have been glad to have Mr. Kern elected governor if they could have been sure that Mr. Bryan would not carry the state. To have had the state ticket elected and Mr. Bryan defeated would have given them added pleasure.

As for Keach, what reasonable assurance can be given, if he is to be judged by his past conduct, that he will not use his position at the head of the democratic city committee to elect the republican ticket. There is no man in this city crazy enough to believe that he has any political principle that will not give way to his private interests. From this standpoint there is not a single reason why he will not prefer the election of Bookwalter to the election of any democrat, who cannot be controlled by the elements that have controlled both Taggart and Bookwalter.

In the face of Mr. Keach's political record and his reputation, it is difficult to understand how a democrat of this character can afford to accept the nomination for mayor, and take the risk of betrayal in the headquarters of his own party. In the face of the general want of concern manifested by the better class of democrats the same kind of influences that selected Keach for chairman can select a candidate for mayor. The chances are that they have already determined who it will be, and that we are again to be left the alternative of "choice between evils" or "taking to the woods."

FLAVIUS J. VAN VORHIS.
Indianapolis, Ind.

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