

The Independent.

Vol. XVI.

LINCOLN, NEB., AUGUST 11, 1904.

No. 12

THE POPULIST SLOGAN

Mr. Watson's Eloquent Address
Before
The Nebraska State Convention

R. D. Sutherland: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: The pleasant duty of introducing to you a gallant son of the south has been placed upon me. Our nominee for the presidency is a native son of Georgia. He is this side of fifty years of age. He is an author and writer of some of the best and strongest history that we have in our libraries today. He has been a warrior, and a strong gallant fighter for populist principles ever since there has been a populist party. (Applause.) He served two years in the United States congress and from the very moment that he entered, that moment he assumed leadership of that small but energetic band of men. They labored for the best interests of the country as they saw it, the populists of that day. One of the measures that our candidate for the presidency offered in that body and secured its passage, is the bill that provided for the rural free delivery system. In February, 1893, when the postoffice bill was up for consideration he offered an amendment that \$10,000 of that sum should be set aside for the experimental use of the free delivery of mail outside of the cities and towns and our candidate for the presidency, Thomas E. Watson, thereby secured into law the first great principle of the populist ideas, the looking after the interests of all the people of our country, and it is Thomas E. Watson to whom is due the honor of being the father and originator of the rural free delivery system and the first successful one to secure an appropriation from the government for the benefit of all the people of our great rural community. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure and honor of presenting to you our gallant standard bearer, Thomas E. Watson of Georgia. (Great applause.)

(Mr. Watson's speech reported stenographically by J. E. Ferris.)

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: For the first time in eight years I assume to make a political speech. For the first time in eight years I take part in a political campaign. In 1896 I met you people of Nebraska, and so far as I knew, proclaimed the principles of Jeffersonian democracy, those principles upon which popular government must rest, no matter by what name you call them, the right of the people to dictate their laws, mold their institutions and shape the destinies of their government. (Applause.) All over the broad plains of Nebraska, as far as my strength would allow, I fought loyally for these principles and did my utmost to bring success to them. The eight years that have intervened have not been happy ones to me. The eight years that have intervened have been years of sorrow to me. But I come back to Nebraska in 1904. I can look you squarely in the eye, meet you front to front, and foot to foot, and tell you that the fires of populism that burned in me then, burn just as brightly today. (Applause.) I am proud to believe that I represent a people that stand for principles, principles which are necessary to good government; principles, without which, the name democracy is but a delusion and a snare; people who, planting themselves upon the rock of what they believe to be right, are not to be shifted back and forth at the ballot boxes, but will stand by their principles as long as their conscience dictates to them that they are in the right.

In 1898 the populists of Georgia tendered me the nomination unanimously, of governor. It was just after the great campaign of 1896. It was not possible for me to accept that nomination. I had something then to fight for, and in declining that nomination, I said in 1898 to the people of my state as follows:

"Let no man believe that I despair of your principles, for I do not. You stand for the upward tendency of the middle and lower classes. You stand where the reformer has always stood, for improvement, for beneficial advantages, for recognition of human brotherhood in its highest sense; for equality of all men before the law, and for an industrial system which is not based upon the right of the strong to plunder the weak; you stand as

sworn foes of monopoly, not monopoly in its narrow sense, but monopoly of power, monopoly of place, monopoly of wealth, monopoly of progress. You stand knocking at the closed door of privilege as the reformer has ever stood, and saying to those within, open, open wide the door that all who are ready, may enter therein, let all who deserve, enjoy; erect no barriers against the unborn; save out no generations that are yet to be. God made life for all. Put no barriers around the good things of life. Make no laws which foster inequality, establish no caste; and legalize no robbing under the name of taxation; give to no person, natural or unnatural summary powers over his fellowmen. Open, open wide the door, keep the avenues of honor free; close no entrance to the poorest or weakest or humblest. Say to men everywhere, the field is clear, the contest fair. Come, and win your share if you can. (Applause.)"

"Such is populism. Such is its clearest creed. As such, I have loved it with zealous preference. As its disciple, I have loved you, fought for

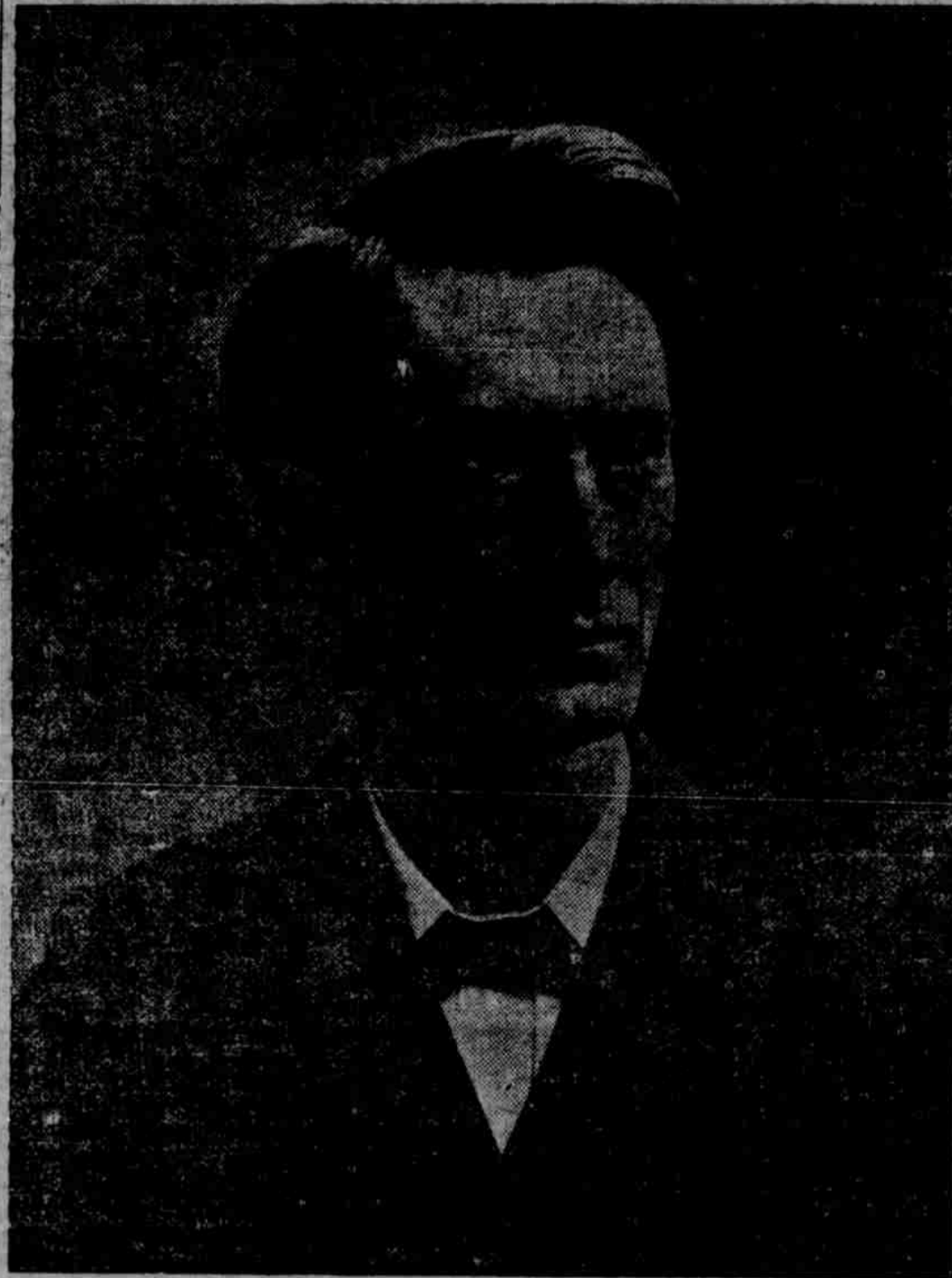
long comparatively since all this country was a wilderness, and its every inhabitant a savage. It has not been so long since it was given over to the wild beast and the wild man who came here. Go and trace it to the Jamestown in the south, or the Plymouth Rock in the east, and the answer is the same. It was the tyranny, the oppression, the unbearable burdens of the old world that drove those pioneers out. The king, the priest, the church, the state, tyrannical, privileged in power, and the individual without power, without privilege, without freedom. King the source of all law; the priest the guardian of the conscience; the church and state taxing the masses to the utmost limit of endurance, and dividing the results between them in tithes and taxes. No freedom of speech; no freedom of conscience; no civil law or corporate; everything centered in the hands of the king and the nobility. Brave men said these things are unendurable. Brave men said, let us risk the savage and the wilderness in which he dwells, and make us a new home and

establish a government like Prussia, or like that of Austria or of Russia. No, they had had enough of the privileged few; they had had enough of class law; they had had enough of corruption; they had had enough of oppression, they had had enough of tyranny, and they came here not to make a government like those abroad, but a government different from those abroad (applause), and throwing off the yoke of the king, the combination of church and state, the yoke of the nobility, the dictation of the priest, they dedicated their energies to the government of all the people, equal and exact justice to all men, and class privileges to none. (Applause.)

I need not dwell for a moment except to remind you that under these splendid principles, with these splendid beginnings how the colonies rose into a great democracy, a great republic; because in the broad sense of the term the two words mean the same, the rule of the people, by the people, and for the people. (Applause.) The mother country endeavoring to fasten her grip, her tax system, her caste system upon us, we cried out, liberty or death; and the soldier said, liberty or death; and the statesman said, liberty or death; and American citizenship, men, women and children, said liberty or death, and they fought and risked death rather than wear the chain of servitude of the king of Great Britain (applause) against a whole people in arms. We won out because we were united. We won out because we were consecrated; we won out because we were right. (Applause.)

And today, my countrymen, if the spirit of our fathers is still to dwell in the institutions which they established, we have got to resolve once more that we will make our fight, and fight all along the line for the liberties which they bequeathed us (applause), when independence was established. Before the old eternal civil conflict which takes place in every government began in ours, as far back as the historian can see there is a conflict in every organized society, just as inevitable as the conflict between right and wrong, just as inevitable as the conflict between light and darkness—what is it? The impulse of the masses toward liberty, and the impulse of the classes toward oppression, impulse of the few to monopolize the benefits of government, and the impulse of the masses to resist it, and have them distributed so that all men may enjoy it. (Applause.) Two great schools of political thought sprung up—Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian. You know without repetition what Hamilton believed and stood for; also, what Jefferson stood for. Hamilton believed that the English government was the best; that the few should always rule, but despised the mob, calling it the great beast, had no confidence in it, no respect for it, no pity for it, no sympathy with it. Put the government into co-partnership with the rich; put the law making power into the hands of the few, create an aristocracy of wealth and privilege and commence as nearly as may be, under our laws, of establishing what they have in the old world. As opposed to that came Jefferson, believing in the people, sympathizing with the people, hoping for the people, a champion of the people, and says to Hamilton and his disciples, all the people fought for this; all the people prayed for this; all the people are interested in this; all the people shall have a share in this. (Applause.) We shall have no class legislation; we shall have no special privilege; we shall have no aristocracy of wealth, but we will have now and forever a democracy consecrated to the principles of equal and exact justice to all men. (Applause.)

You remember that under General Washington, Mr. Hamilton being his adviser, with the entire democratic press against Washington establishing national banks, enacting class laws, creating a funding system, patterned after everything of Great Britain as far as possible, Jefferson resigned from Washington's cabinet and said, I will fight it, I will fight it; it is wrong; it violates the compact, the purposes of the pioneers; it violates the spirit of the early set-



you, dared for you; never for one moment doubting that you were right, but that your creed was the same, simple creed which in all ages has challenged wrong. Such a creed can never die." (Applause.)

In the darkest hour of our fortunes in Georgia I said that to our people there, and what was our creed, our purpose, our inspiration then, is our creed, our purpose and our inspiration now. (Applause.) I wonder to what extent this audience is composed of earnest men and women who wish to view the situation in the face, and see exactly what it is. Exactly what we fear; exactly what we hope; exactly what we mean today; exactly what we would do if we could? I would not have come a thousand miles that separate me from you if there were not in my heart and my soul an earnestness which time can not destroy; which life only deepens and which nothing but death could strike out of my heart. (Applause.)

How long has it been since our people in the old world struggled with conditions worse than these which we have here today; it has not been so

dedicate it to the rights of men. And so they came, the bravest men known to history; the pioneers of the south, the pioneers of the north; the pioneers of the east who risked all the horrors and all the suffering, and all the dangers of that terrible situation rather than live to be servants of the kings in the old world. (Applause.)

What did they intend to establish? The very first assemblage that met in the south at Jamestown in old Virginia; the first assemblage in 1619 pledged that handful of colonists to the rights of trial by jury, representative government to make their own local laws, freedom of speech, and while they did not proclaim it, they practiced the freedom of conscience. I say what the colonists did in the south at Jamestown, the other colonists did also at Plymouth Rock, and so these two communities planted their standards and proclaimed the sacred principles of human progress and human liberty. (Applause.) It was not their purpose to establish a government like that of France; it was not their purpose to establish a government like that of England; not their purpose to