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## THE JEFFERSON OF 1904

Thomas E. Watson's  
Ringing Speech at Nashville, Tenn.  
September 8, 1904

At a monster meeting in the Tabernacle, Nashville, Tenn., on the 8th day of the present month, at which more than 2,000 people of every walk of life were present, Thomas E. Watson, people's party candidate for president, again delivered one of his masterful addresses. Republicans and democrats of national prominence were mingled with the audience. Conspicuous among these were: Senator W. B. Bate, Congressman John Wesley Gaines, John McMillin, Internal Revenue Collector John E. McCall, United States District Attorney A. M. Tillman, Chairman of the State Republican Executive Committee J. C. R. McCall and other men equally as well known in politics and affairs. The meeting was presided over by Hon. H. J. Mullens. Mr. Watson's address follows in full:

Fellow Citizens: For the first time since the civil war, a national party has dared to nominate upon its presidential ticket a man south of Mason and Dixon's line. In this campaign that southern man, who is proud to say he is a southern man, in blood and in sentiment, is the only candidate who stands upon a platform of Jeffersonian, Jacksonian democracy. (Applause.) And yet, almost without exception, those politicians and editors of the south, who claim to have in their peculiar keeping the word "democracy" are doing their utmost to misrepresent the candidate, and to grind him down into the mire of defeat. Isn't that a singular situation? If the candidate really be a southern man, if he really stands upon democratic principles, has he no right to sympathy and support among his own people of the south?

Tonight I beg you to listen to me patiently, while I endeavor to appeal not to your passions, not to your sympathy, but to your reason—to your judgment. It does seem to me that it is high time that the average man of the south should do some of his own thinking, and should act for himself according to his own light, and not forever obey the crack of the party whip. (Applause.)

Your ballot! What is it? I wonder sometimes if American manhood stops to think what the ballot really represents, and what it is. In the first place it represents the triumph which champions of popular liberty won from tyranny in the years that are gone. The time was when this race of white people had no such thing as free speech, had no such thing as freedom of the pen, had no such thing as freedom of conscience, had no such thing as freedom of the ballot. How did the race get it? By following the lead of those brave pioneers who unfurled the standard of revolt against existing oppression, against existing tyranny, whether of king or class, and, consecrated to the purpose of lifting the common mass of humanity up upon a higher plane of civilization, demanded for the people the right to vote for themselves. (Applause.) Therefore the ballot—the ballot is the trophy—the evidence of victory which the reformer won in the years that are gone; and many a brave man lost his life—lost his life at the headman's block, or on the battlefield—before that piece of paper came into the hands of the white race. (Applause.) Not only is it a souvenir and sacred heirloom of the years that are gone—reminding us forever of the great reformers of the white race who have stood the stress and the storm, and made the fight for the rights of the common people. Not only that, but it is, after you have got it, the weapon, the bloodless weapon with which you defend home and fire-side, wife and child, liberty and life from the oppressiveness of those who might, if their encroachments were submitted to, drive you back again into a condition of class servitude. Eternal vigilance being the price of liberty, the use to which you shall put that weapon—that bloodless weapon by which civil liberty is to be kept after it is won—that weapon with ceaseless vigilance should be used wherever your liberties are at stake, and in such a way as to preserve the sacred heritage of the past. (Applause.)

I hope to God that every man who takes his ballot on the 8th day of No-

vember to cast it, will remember that "through this piece of paper speaks to me the heroes of the ages that are gone; through this piece of paper speaks to me the human race in its struggles for liberty; with this piece of paper I either lose something of what was handed down to me, or I add to the sacred treasures of liberty which ought to be carried on for future generations." (Applause.)

Now, it may be that society will some day evolve a condition in which the independent voter will accomplish his ends by simply casting his independent ballot. It is sufficient to say that we have not reached that stage yet. Nothing can be accomplished now without organization. In politics organization means a political party. What is a political party? The coming together of a body of men who have the same convictions, the same purpose, and who wish to unite their hands and hearts and minds, so that the strength of all may be combined to carry out that common purpose. (Applause.) That is a political party. And with your ballot in your hand you march, citizen of the south, march, citizen of Tennessee, with that party which represents your convictions. Otherwise you have done violence to your conscience and to those convictions that ought to be as sacred to you as life. (Applause.)

If I were a republican on principle—if I believed in the declared and practiced principles of the republican party I should not hesitate a moment how to vote. If that platform represented me; if my convictions spoke there; if my purposes were embodied there, I would not hesitate a moment, I would go fearlessly, and march with the ranks of the republican party, and follow Theodore Roosevelt to the very death. Why? Why? Because he would be my standard bearer. He would be my representative. He would be wanting to do what I would want to do. His purpose would be my purpose. His hope would be my hope. His party would be my party. And, it being a free country, I wouldn't hesitate to tell any man "Roosevelt stands for me, and I will stand for Roosevelt." That is right. That is common sense. That's courage. That's manliness. That puts the hypocrite to shame. (Applause.)

But, with the convictions which I hold, Roosevelt represents the thing that I would fight from morning to night every opportunity I got, every day of my life from now until the folding of the hands across my breast. (Great applause.)

He stands for those things that I detest. He stands for those principles which, in my judgment, are subverting our republic and making it a sordid despotism of wealth. He stands for that governmental policy which puts the dollar above the man—which puts the corporation above the people, which puts the few above the many, which puts the class above the mass. And, believing that way about it, I would blow my brains out before I would contribute to the success of republican principles. (Great applause.)

But if I believed in the republican principles I could not vote for Judge Parker, although he comes so close to the republican platform (laughter and applause) I see no reason why those two eggs might not have been taken out of the same nest. (Laughter.) To me they are two drinks out of the same jug. (Laughter.) And if I could get drunk enough to vote for Parker, I think I might take one more drink—just a little one, and vote for the other twin. (Laughter.) Let's see about that! I would vote always for the genuine, original, Simon-pure article, if that was the article I wanted. I wouldn't want an imitation. (Laughter.) I wouldn't want a copy. I would want the original. (Applause.) I don't want the counterfeit dollar; I want the real dollars. (Laughter.) I don't want the "just as good;" I want the "real thing." (Laughter.) Because the "just as good" is always a liar and a hypocrite. (Applause.)

Well, now, let us see. It ought not to be a matter of mere statement. It ought to be a matter of demonstration. I promised to address your judgment

and your reason, not your sympathy, not your passion. Let us see if I can demonstrate that.

You are told in the south not to vote for Roosevelt, because he is for republican principles. You are told to vote for Parker. And yet Mr. Parker in his speech of acceptance has nowhere had the manhood to tell you wherein he differs from Roosevelt on a single material issue. (Cheers.) Now that is true. Don't tell me anything about your platform, because, for instance, in the tariff plank, you start in with "All protection is a robbery;" and before you get through, you don't know whether you are for tariff for revenue only, or high protection. You must take your platform construed by your candidate. In other words, his construction of the platform is official, is binding, is conclusive. Not this stump speaker; not that stump speaker is responsible. Not this editor; not that editor; but the man who wants to get your votes; the man who is the official spokesman of his party; the man who is the standard-bearer of national democracy—his word is conclusive.

Now, let us take Judge Parker's acceptance speech, and find, if we can, where the difference is between him and Theodore Roosevelt. Is it on imperialism. Oh, how this country did ring with imperialism! We went to bed frightened at it; and we got up next morning surprised that it hadn't captured us and carried us off. Imperialism! Terrible things were going to rise up out of the islands of the sea and come in upon us and devour us. Mind you, I wish to God that our government never had meddled with a single one of the islands in those distant seas. (Cheers.) But when I remember that the treaty of Paris was concluded at the urgent personal solicitation of W. J. Bryan himself, it looks to me like both the parties are committed to the proposition that the holding of the Philippines was a good thing to do, or at least a necessary evil. Both are committed to it. Now, having got them, what are you going to do with them? Roosevelt says, "We will give them self-government whenever they are prepared for it." That's the substance of it. He doesn't set the time, the peace, or the manner. Judge Parker, in his speech of acceptance, says, "When they are ready for self-government we will give it to them." (Laughter.) There you've got it. But whether the Filipinos will get it materially in advance of Gabriel's trumpet, would be a hard thing to say. My own opinion is that the islands will get their independence when the democratic and republican capitalists exploiting them will get ready for it, and not before. (Cheers.) Upon imperialism there is no difference that you can figure out in plain English between the acceptance of Roosevelt and the acceptance of Judge Parker.

Now, let us take up something else. What about the trusts? The trusts! Mr. Roosevelt says there are legal and illegal trusts; good and bad trusts; criminal and non-criminal trusts; and that the criminal trusts must be prosecuted and punished, a list of them not being handed in at the time. (Applause.)

The democratic platform declared that we needed now legislation against the trusts, Judge Parker, in his speech of acceptance said: "No, we don't need any new legislation; the law as it stands is good enough; all you have got to do is to carry it out." Against whom? When? And how? Judge Parker upon that subject is gloriously indefinite, and furnishes no bill of particulars. Therefore on the subject of the trusts there is absolutely no difference that you can state in plain English, so that the common man can understand what it is.

Now, on the tariff. Oh, what a tremendous subject the tariff is during the campaign! Robbery of the poor people! It's such a wonder that the poor people have so many friends—the day before election; and yet they never can get that tariff revised. The democratic platform says the tariff must be revised, that all protection is a robbery. Mr. Roosevelt, in his speech of acceptance, says that the tariff should be revised from time to time,

without saying what is the time (laughter) and in what respect the revision should be made. Gloriously indefinite! The English language has suffered more this year in being used to keep people from saying anything than ever before. (Applause.) Shakespeare used it to say things; Milton used it to say things; Byron used it to say things; Burke, Chatham, O'Connell, Grattan, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson—they all used it to say things. Now it is used to cover up things and hide things. (Applause.)

Judge Parker says the tariff ought to be revised, without saying whose toes shall be trod on—because it is largely a question of whose toes you are going to tread on, you know. When you are going to revise the tariff, you are treading on somebody's corns immediately. Now, whose corns are you going to tread on? Judge Parker does not state. He says in advance, "I won't have that office but four years, even if you give it to me; and in four years I won't be able to do anything to the tariff." Therefore he surrenders in advance, almost before the line of battle is formed. He runs up the white flag on the tariff question, and absolutely surrenders to the republicans. (Applause.)

Let us see what else now. I think there was a question of national banks that figured very much in the democratic campaign books which I have got here. The democratic party went back to the Jacksonian and Jeffersonian doctrine that national banks were of deadly hostility to republican government, and that they must be abolished; and that the government must take back to itself the sovereign power to create money and to issue it to the people. Where is that platform now? Where is that declaration now? It has been dropped. Roosevelt in favor of national banks! Parker in favor of national banks! There they are like two black-eyed peas on the question of national banks.

Take the income tax. Jeffersonian democracy! The taxes should be laid upon the rich, but the necessities of life should go untaxed, to the end that the poverty of the country should not be burdened with the expense of government, but that the wealth of the country should be burdened with the government. Isn't that right? That is good democracy. Therefore Jefferson said, "Put an income tax, not on the poor farmer's farm, which may not produce any income; not on the merchant's store that perhaps is bankrupting him; not upon this avocation, and that, where possibly money is being lost; but put it upon the net income; put it on the profits." Don't take a part of the milk. Take a part of the cream. Take a part of the net profits, and as the net profits grow larger, let the tax grow larger and larger by geometrical progression. Graduate it according to the size of the income, and when the income swells enormously, let the tax swell in proportion, so as to put back into the general fund where all can get a chance to obtain their share of it, that overplus which greedy fellow has got more than his share. (Applause.)

Back there in those campaign books the great democratic party returned to the principles of Jefferson on the income tax. Where is it now? It isn't in the platform. Mr. Roosevelt is against the income tax, and Judge Parker is against the income tax. They are there; a noble pair of brothers fighting the battles of the rich against the poor. (Cheers.)

There was another question, the money question, and the democratic campaign book of '96 said it was the biggest of all the questions—paramount in importance—head and shoulders, like Saul, above all its fellows in political issues. They declared that they would, like Washington in 1776, fight this British policy, and assert the rights of America to maintain the constitutional currency which our fathers had framed, and which we had sworn to support. And they said, "We are not only opposed to the British gold standard; but we are unalterably opposed to it." "No matter what else we may change, we won't change on this. No matter what we may fall