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THE JEFFERSON OF 1904

Speech of Thomas E. Watson
at Houston, Texas, September
23, 1904.

Hon. Thomas E. Watson of Georgia, the nominee of the populist party for president of the United States addressed a splendid audience at Turner hall, Houston, Tex., Friday, September 24. While he was still suffering from the effects of the severe cold, which came near prostrating him while in Arkansas, he had recovered sufficiently to make himself audible throughout the great hall. His hearers embraced all shades of political belief and the applause given him evidenced the fact that he was by no means without sympathizers.

Long before the hour for the speaking the big auditorium began filling up, and when the hour of 8 arrived there was scarcely a vacant seat left. A few moments later the windows and doors could be seen framing a sea of faces.

As the speaker appeared a mighty cheer went up, all classes joining. Accompanying him were Hon. John H. Kirby and Hon. Edgar Watkins, both democrats, and Hon. Milton Park, chairman of the populist state executive committee.

Among other things Mr. Watson said:

To every voter his ballot should be sacred. It is not only the bloodless weapon with which he must defend his civil, constitutional liberty; not only his individual expression of political opinion as to the men and the measures which shall rule the land; but it is a trust delegated to him by the hero-martyrs of the long struggle for freedom. From the day that he gave the voice of those heroes saying, "I won for you that ballot, that franchise, by paying the price of toil and sacrifice and blood; I wrested it from tyrants who were oppressing humanity. I fought for it and died for it, in order that you, the plain citizen, the common man, might have voice and vote in the making of the laws upon which your prosperity and your liberty depend." Use that ballot in a spirit of consecration. Be worthy of the heroes who won it for you. Don't betray the sacred trust. Consult your reason before you vote. Let your heart go with your hand when you vote. Do that, and no matter who gets your support it will come to him in the spirit which patriot statesmen always contemplated when they gave you the right of self-government. Cast that ballot in any other way, with any other motive—prejudice, passion, blind obedience to party—and you will have done that which makes the political student despair of government by the people; that which shows you to be unworthy to exercise the trust committed to your hands by the heroic men of the past; that which lowers you as a man, injures your neighbor as it does yourself, and weakens the lines of those who strive upward for better laws, better rulers, happier homes.

Voters! In this year of grace 1904, for God's sake, for the sake of yourselves, your children, your country, consider, consider, consider, before you vote!

A political party has no right to exist, has no right to the support of intelligent, honest men, unless that party is in fact a combination of men who hold the same opinions, have a common purpose, and who seek to unite their individual strength in order that the common purpose may be enacted into law. Any organization in the body politic, which can not be measured by this standard, has no legitimate right to be considered a political party. Unless it has a creed which can be put into plain words which the average man can understand; unless it has a common purpose, as the accomplishment of which it can move with a unity of action—a purpose which it is willing to proclaim to the world; then it is a mere combination of men, a mob, a rabble, a mob of crazed, discredited, and unprincipled men, with no other end, nothing on earth, but to get out to disface

had been tried and found true, rather than for those who had been tried and found wanting. But if, as in 1904, there are principles at stake which overshadow any mere personal preferences, if there are wrongs and abuses which threaten the very life of the republic, then every voter owes it to himself to ask, which of the political parties now in the field stands for those convictions which are nearest my heart?

A simple question, a vital question, a question which goes to the very bottom of the situation. It must be asked; it should be answered.

Before you vote, compel the candidates to speak out like honest men, so that you can vote your honest convictions. And remember this: The only ballot which is ever "thrown away" is the ballot which violates your sense of right. Every vote which runs counter to the sincere opinions of the voter is a prostituted ballot, is a traitor to the cause of good government; is an apostate from principle; is a political leper, which ought to stand forth in the highway and cry, "Unclean! Unclean!"

In every speech which I have made in this campaign I have declared my undying hostility to the Hamiltonian principles represented by Theodore Roosevelt and the republican party. For the last fourteen years I have been doing the same thing. In every book which has been written by me there lives as earnest a spirit of Jeffersonian democracy as can be found in the literature of the world. My position toward it has never wavered with what it was in 1890, or in the year 1900. I challenge any man to prove the statement untrue. For the holding of these opinions I have been made to suffer; but I was ready to suffer for them, and am ready to do so again.

Once more I now proclaim that the principles and policies of the republican party have no enemy more inveterate and uncompromising than myself. If you will pardon me for alluding to my own book, I will say that in my "Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson" the doctrines of Hamilton and the literary assaults of Roosevelt and Lodge and other republican authors upon the south and upon the southern statesmen of the Jeffersonian school are repelled with all the force at my command.

From my head to my heels—in my heart and my conscience, in sympathy, and in mental conviction, I am a Jeffersonian democrat! Never have I been anything else. From 1890 up to the present hour I have been an open book to the public. I challenge all the legions of envy, hatred and malice to find a single sentence in any speech, a single line in any of my writings, a single vote in congress, a single act, or word, or thought of mine that was not absolutely in line with Jeffersonian democracy.

Senator James K. Jones of Arkansas, so I am told, found his voice a few days ago and spoke his little piece in the New York World. The people's party, says Jones, is working for the republicans. If there is any one man whom the public would heartily forgive for keeping his mouth shut at this particular time it is Jones of Arkansas! Among all the assinine blunderers who butchered Bryan's campaign in 1896, the Saul of the whole lot, the great, hulking booby who had his head and shoulders above all the boobies, was Jones of Arkansas. That memorable year of 1896, when the democratic senatorial visitor to the convention who was the mortgage machine for populist voters in Arkansas. It belonged to Bryan to poll only a blunderer could have done that. It was inevitable that the populist campaign should be a failure.

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play into their hands as was done in 1896 by Jones of Arkansas.

The republican party had its Burchard, but he was an accident, he just happened along at the critical time, and while he was an ass, there was no peculiar mark, brand or distinguishing trait about his assinility. He was an ass—and that ends the story. And the beauty about Burchard was that he knew his place on the catalogue, and having been duly told what kind of an animal he was, he went off into decent, permanent, almost respectable desuetude. But in Jones of Arkansas the democratic party owns a great national donkey who does not know that he is a donkey; who never realizes that his bray differs in melody from Schubert's "serenade," and who can not be made to see that his ears are more prominent than his head. Burchard, who killed Blaine in 1884, was a mere cup of water; emptied at the right time, he managed to put out the fire that was burning. Then the cup was empty ever more. But Jones of Arkansas is a fountain, a perennial stream; "Men may come and men may go," but Jones "goes on forever." He put out the fire in 1896; he did it again in 1900; he is doing it again now. Bully for Jones! Mark Hanna must have loved him! Is there any one man in the country who ought to hold a warmer place in the affections of the republicans than Jones of Arkansas? As a grave-digger for democratic presidential candidates, he is absolutely without a peer—is this heavy, rapid, pretentious, cumbersome, imbecile, Jones of Arkansas.

What do we care about this talk of "drawing votes from Parker?" A third party has no excuse for existence except upon the idea that both the old parties are wrong. A third party is a protest against both a wrong and a right. A third party is a sword, cutting both ways. In one campaign it may hurt democrats the most; in the next the republicans. That result is merely the accident of war. We have nothing to do with that. It is our business to hew to the line, let the chips fall as they may. If our campaign hurts the democrats most this year, that is not our fault. It is the fault of Jones and all the others who sold out the principles of democracy to Wall street at St. Louis. Had Jones and his crowd re-adopted the Omaha platform, or something similar, and then nominated some such real democrat as Bryan or Bryan, the people's party could not have done business in 1904 at all. It was the astounding betrayal of democratic principles by Jones, Hill & Co. which gave the people's party the opportunity to renew the fight for Jeffersonian democracy. Inasmuch as we are now advocating the same principles which Bryan democrats advocated eight years, it seems a little strange that we should be abused by the republicans." If any man would be reasonable, he would see that it was the principles of the people's party which were the cause of the failure of the republican party in 1896. The true cause of the failure of the republican party in 1896 was the principles of the people's party.

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can be answered, "Yes." Abuses do exist, and reform must be had.

Does any sensible citizen expect these reforms from the republicans? Responsible as it is for the systems we now have, they boldly declare that conditions are satisfactory and shall not be changed. They stand pat. Not timidly, not doubtfully, but boldly, aggressively they assure us that present conditions are satisfactory and shall be maintained. In the republican party, therefore, we recognize the open enemy, defying us to combat. We accept the challenge, and we do combat them all along the line. We combat their principles. We make war upon their measures. We seek to undermine the very foundations upon which they have reared their citadel. We want to breach the wall and drive out the Hamiltonians—the men as well as the measures.

What is it that the national democratic party is doing? They are not changing the men without changing the measures. They want to get Roosevelt out, but they are willing to leave undisturbed the laws which he believes in. They want to get rid of the man, but not of the measures. The people's party seeks to get rid of both the man and the measures.

Parker and Hill neatly manipulated the St. Louis convention until the nomination was safe and could not be recalled. Then came the Wall street pressure and the Wall street telegram. For eight years Parker had voted the free silver ticket without saying that it was right. Then he declared the gold standard to be irreversibly fixed, without saying that it was right. The words right and wrong seem to have no place in the political philosophy of Alton B. Parker and his crowd.

If I were a Bryan democrat, I never vote for Parker. After eight years with them for eight years, he is without saying they were wrong. He merely says that he is a gold democrat. I support Parker. He does not say that the gold standard is fixed. He merely says that he is a republican for Parker. I support Parker. I support Parker.

For the last eight years the democratic leadership has been in the hands of the people's party. The people's party has been the only party that has stood for the principles of the people's party.

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