

The Civic Revival in Ohio

Samuel M. Jones: The Man Without a Party

By ROBERT H. BREMNER

(Tune: "Battle Cry of Freedom")

I'm a man without a party, a free untrammelled soul,
Striving for liberty and freedom;
An undivided portion within the human whole,
Striving for liberty and freedom.

SAMUEL M. JONES

SAMUEL MILTON JONES, mayor of Toledo from 1897 to 1904 and the first of the Civic Revivalists, was born in Wales in 1846. His family immigrated to America when he was three years old and settled in western New York. At ten he was "hired out" to a farmer for three dollars a month. At fourteen he was working twelve hours a day in a saw mill. A little later he got a job on a Black River steamboat, and when about nineteen, excited by stories of high wages, he went to the Pennsylvania oil regions. This was to be Jones' home for twenty years. After the death of his first wife he moved to Lima, Ohio, where new oil fields were being opened. He leased land, drilled wells, and was one of the incorporators of the Ohio Oil Company which was later absorbed by Standard Oil. In 1892 he remarried and moved to Toledo. Meanwhile he had been working on improvements in oil well appliances and in 1894 organized the Acme Company to manufacture the steel sucker rods which he had invented. Three years later Jones was nominated for mayor by the Republican party. He won the nomination because three other men were fighting for it. Two of them hated the third so much that they withdrew from the race and gave their combined support to Jones. At this time Jones had been a resident of Toledo for only about four years. As an employer his labor policies had attracted considerable local attention. He was considered an orthodox party man with some mild eccentricities which it was hoped would attract the labor vote to the Republican ticket. In a normally Republican city he was elected by the comparatively narrow margin of 534 votes.¹

¹ The chief source of material on Jones' life up to 1899 is the autobiography which forms the first chapter of his book, "The New Right," (New York, 1899).

I

THE MAN WHO BECAME MAYOR of Toledo under such ironic conditions was destined to dominate Toledo politics for seven years. His ideas, turned into issues by his attempt to apply them to specific conditions, were to be the fundamental ones in Toledo for almost another decade. Out of his reflections upon certain of his experiences he had already constructed a fairly definite social philosophy. His political theory was not yet definitely formulated, but the events of his first term would crystallize into a political philosophy attitudes which were already a part of his personality.

Jones' experiences were not unique, but his reactions to them were, at the very least, unusual. As a young man working (usually out of work) in the oil fields of Pennsylvania, he and some friends discovered that the planks on a certain bridge were in such bad condition that the bridge was all but impassible. Appropriating some boards from an abandoned oil derrick, Jones and his companions repaired the bridge, built a toll gate, and began to charge the teamsters who used the bridge ten cents. At first the teamsters were glad to pay the toll. At length, however, they joined forces and demanded a free bridge. Jones and his friends were forced to give way, but not before they had collected about twenty-seven dollars as their reward for the use of some other men's lumber and two hours of their own labor. "And I presume that we would have been taking toll to this day had not the teamsters asserted their rights . . .," he wrote.² The moral Jones drew from this episode was "combine and stop injustice." Most business men of his day would have said: "This shows how anybody who has initiative can get ahead no matter how hard times are."

Jones' experience with the Standard Oil Company was typical of what happened when independent operators were confronted by the trust: The Ohio Oil Company was forced to sell out and Jones' attempt to interest Standard in the improved sucker rods he had invented was unsuccessful. These events were instructive rather than embittering to him. Looking back upon them several years later, Jones said that from the Standard Oil Company he had learned that competition leads inevitably to monopoly. The methods of Standard Oil were simply the methods of business. It had succeeded in mastering the game all business tries to play. Instead of passing laws to prevent the consolidation of business, he said, the public should assume the ownership and operation of all the trusts. Then the savings made possible by the trust (which savings he regarded as social products) would be distributed for the benefit of all of the people.³

² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-61.

Without a doubt the event that had the greatest influence on Jones' later career was the opening of the Acme Sucker Rod Company in Toledo in the depression year of 1894. The experience gained from this venture shocked him into a realization of the problems of the city worker.

While the factory building was being made ready for occupation, hordes of men swooped down on Jones, begging him for a chance to work, a chance to do anything no matter how low the pay. For several years, according to his son Paul, he had been distressed by the labor strife of the early eighteen nineties. He had reasoned that the cause of it, was low wages; if workers were paid better they would not strike and then there would be no violence.⁴

Now he began to see that there were social problems which involved deeper issues than wages. He never recovered from the sense of shame and degradation, the feeling of physical nausea, which overwhelmed him at the thought of men eager to work but denied the right to do so through no fault of their own.⁵

Jones was forty-eight years old when the opening of his factory called his attention to social problems. His awakening was not accompanied by a revelation of what he should do about the conditions that disturbed him. He had to work out the answers for himself. The remaining ten years of his life were devoted first to an attempt to find a satisfactory personal solution to the economic and moral problems of the modern industrial world, and second, to a conscientious experiment in putting his convictions into effect in his daily life.

In this quest he got some help from books. One of the first things he read was an essay by George D. Herron, the Iowa Christian philosopher, called "The Philosophy of the Lord's Prayer." Herron's argument—that if we call God "Our Father" then we must treat all men as "our brothers"—made a deep impression upon Jones.⁶ He had always enjoyed poetry and now he began to read more deeply in what Brand Whitlock called "the literature that dealt fundamentally with life."⁷ He came to love especially the works of Whitman, Emerson and Tolstoi. From them he gained many ideas and appropriated phrases he liked to quote.

It appears, however, that consciously or unconsciously what he was looking for in them was an expression of the thoughts which were already forming in his mind. His reading buttressed his thinking rather than

⁴ Interview with Paul Jones, March 27, 1942.

⁵ For Jones' own account of this experience see "The New Right," p. 61 *et seq.*

⁶ Jones discusses the effect upon him of this essay, *ibid.*, p. 400.

⁷ Introduction to Samuel M. Jones, "Letters of Labor and Love," (Indianapolis, 1905).

made it. Despite the influence men like Herron and Eugene V. Debs⁸ may have had on Jones, he seems to have reached his philosophical conclusions mainly by a process of observation, reflection, and feeling rather than by consciously adopting a ready-made social program.

A question that must be answered is why it was that Jones' experiences and readings made such a deep impression upon him. Other men have had experiences similar to his and have read the same books without being impelled to do the things he did. The answer, or part of it, at least, is that Jones had in a very real and literal sense a social conscience.

Jones was not a reformer. A year before he died he wrote: "I have never had a program; I have never planned a campaign to reform society, the city or the world. . . . I have simply tried to keep at peace with the eternal hammering within my breast."⁹ Jones was a religious man. Just as simply as a child he wanted to be good. The strongest religious belief he had was a faith in people and a feeling of kinship with them.

He differed from most pious men in refusing to separate humanity into categories of good and bad. We are all people, he would say, just people: all good, all bad, all alike and all different. We are not equal in strength, in wisdom, in hereditary advantages or in social opportunities. But we are equal in the sense that we are all brothers and all dependent upon each other; all contributing something to society and all bearing a responsibility for society's failures and injustices.

To Jones, not the value of land alone, but our whole civilization was a social product. Even the most original inventor builds upon the work of other experimentors; even the most radical thinker uses the ideas and language of other men. Perhaps the chief reason why the Golden Rule appealed so strongly to him was because of its social implications. There must be "others" as well as "you."

For one with such a conviction of the brotherhood of man it was as impossible to live placidly in an inharmonious world as it would be for a sensitive man to live happily in a wrangling family.

II

IN ORDER TO KEEP at peace with himself, Jones adopted the labor policy at the Acme Sucker Rod Company which won him his nickname, "Golden Rule." He had the Commandment printed on a piece of tin and hung

⁸ In a Socialist Party broadside Debs claimed that a speech he delivered in Toledo in 1895 was chiefly responsible for starting Jones on his career of agitation for better social conditions. (Eugene V. Debs, *Mayor Jones and 'All the People.'*)

⁹ "The Non-Partisan in Politics," *The Independent*, LV, 1963-1966 (August 20, 1903), 1964-65.

it up as the only rule of the factory. The eight-hour work day was established. A minimum wage of two dollars a day was paid employees. Each employee received a week's vacation with pay and at Christmas time was given a bonus amounting to five percent of his year's wages. He encouraged his employees to join a union both for the practical benefit he felt they would derive from membership in it and because he favored all organizations which made men brothers rather than competitors.

In order to bring the men into closer relations with each other and with himself Jones had low cost meals served in a dining room operated by the company. He insisted that making men was as important a part of the company's work as making money. Next to the shop was an acre tract of ground called Golden Rule Park. On Sunday afternoons in the summer, Jones, his employees, and other interested people would gather here for discussion and music.¹⁰

Jones looked upon the park, and upon Golden Rule Hall, later constructed across the street from the shop, as forums where the workers and the public could discuss social problems. To an interviewer he tried to express "how much like men it makes us feel" to think that part of our time is spent in learning how to help each other rather than in complete devotion to the business of making a living.¹¹

Jones was always careful to point out that the Acme Company's labor policy was not adopted because of his philanthropic interest in the working men. It was an earnest expression of his belief in the social origin of the wealth produced by his factory, and a recognition on his part, of the injustice of the existing wage system.¹² As Jones saw it, the wage system was unjust because the employees of the Acme Company did not receive the full value of the labor they put into the sucker rods produced by the factory. They got the value of their labor, *minus* the company's profit.¹³ Under present conditions, said Jones, the only purpose for which any factory is operated is to make money out of labor; when a shop is unable to make money out of a man's labor, that man is fired.¹⁴

¹⁰ A typical program included music by the Golden Rule Band and the Golden Rule Singing Club; an address, "The Church of Yesterday and the Church of Tomorrow," by Charles Ferguson; and the participation of the audience in the singing of two of Jones' "Freedom Songs": "Freedom Day" and "Promise." Golden Rule Park Program, Sunday, May 17, 1903 (Jones Family Scrapbooks).

¹¹ Orison Swett Marden, "Little Visits with Great Americans," New York, 1905, p. 506.

¹² See "Letters of Labor and Love," pp. 91-8, for Jones' discussion of the labor policy of the Acme Company and his reasons for adopting it.

¹³ Jones' theory of wages is most clearly stated in "The New Right," p. 210.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

All he was doing, Jones insisted, was adopting expedients to distribute the wealth created by his employees a little more equitably than was done in most factories. He saw no hope of a really fair distribution as long as society retained the system of competition and private ownership of industry (*i.e.*, as long as the employer's profit was extorted from the value of the employee's labor).

From first to last, the social problem that most interested Jones was unemployment. It had a special significance to him because he felt work was necessary to the proper development of personality. He was as truly sorry for the idle rich as for the unemployed poor. Furthermore, he had convinced himself that the right to work was as much a natural right of man as the right to breathe.¹⁵ But to him the right to work encompassed more than mere employment—more than slavish toil at a monotonous task. It meant the right to do honest work, useful work, work to which the individual was suited, and the right to receive full pay for the labor expended. It meant the chance to do artistic work, the kind of work William Morris had in mind when he said, "Art is the expression of man's joy in labor."¹⁶

Jones was distressed by the way unemployment was forcing men into poverty and crime. The right to self support seemed to him an especially acute problem in a democracy. Without that all of our boasted liberties are a myth, he said, and he was not sanguine of the possibility of long retaining other individual rights in a country where the overwhelming majority of people had no legal claim to a livelihood.

It was typical of Jones that he did not point to any individual or classes as the cause of unemployment. As an employer, as mayor, and as an open-eyed man, Jones was constantly confronted by unemployment. But unlike many men less familiar with the realities of the problem than he, Jones declined to put the blame on the unemployed. They are shiftless; they are lazy; they drink; they don't want to work. None of these worn cliches convinced him.

There is something wrong, he agreed, but it is something deeper than the frailties of the poor. He did not blame machinery. Machines have added speed, intensity and discomfort to production so that many factory jobs are equivalent to imprisonment at hard labor, but they are not the cause of unemployment.

In his opinion the chief cause of the most pressing problem of our time was the competitive system. This system has failed, Jones would say, for

¹⁵ The "New Right" of which Jones wrote was the right to work; *ibid.*, pp. 115-61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150; this was one of Jones' favorite quotations.

it has not given men jobs, adequate pay, or reasonable hours of work. It has failed because it is not geared to satisfy the needs of society but only to fill the pockets of a few individuals.¹⁷ He hated it because he saw in it a denial of brotherhood. It makes our lives a scramble for money, said Jones; it makes the strong exploit the weak and the weak kick the weaker. The more he thought about it the more convinced he became that the competitive system must be replaced by one of cooperation.

Jones did not think this an impossible thing to hope for. In his own lifetime he had seen men accomplish such wonderful things for themselves that he was sure they could do even more wonderful things for each other. Enthusiastically he noted "the larger recognition of social obligation that is coming to us, and coming with whirlwind speed in these closing years of the nineteenth century."¹⁸

He believed that with the help of this awakening spirit the substitution of the co-operative for the competitive society could be brought about by combining political action with the personal regeneration of the individual—*i.e.*, by a program of legislation and education. In the meantime, while working for the fundamental reform, Jones recommended some immediate steps to combat unemployment: divide the day into eight-hour shifts, thus making more jobs available¹⁹ and organize a public works program to bring together idle men and idle capital.

III

HIS ANNUAL MESSAGE to the Council for the year 1898²⁰ reveals that by the middle of his first term as mayor, Jones had arrived at some conclusions regarding the function of government, and that he was ready to propose measures to carry out his theories. As indicated above, he believed that the State [*i.e.* any political unit], to which he habitually referred as "all of the people," was the agency through which social reforms should be affected. He believed this to be true because he felt the State was the only organization of which every person was a part; it was the only instrument

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142. Jones quotes a sentence to this effect which he attributes to Alfred Russel Wallace.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁹ Over the entrance to Jones' factory was a sign bearing this message:

"Every man who is willing to work has a right to live
Divide up the day and give him a chance."

One of his most popular songs was entitled "Divide the Day." Words and music to it may be found in *Toledo Saturday Night*, May 13, 1899.

²⁰ Toledo, *Annual Statement . . . and Reports of the Various Departments for the Year Ending April 1st 1898*, pp. 13-38. (Hereafter cited as Toledo, *Annual Statement*, with year). There is a brief, understanding statement of Jones' political beliefs in Ernest Crosby, "Golden Rule Jones, Mayor of Toledo," (Chicago 1906), pp. 43-8.

through which men could express their love and concern for all their fellows.

Jones' political ideal was Whitman's "land of comrades." He liked to picture the ideal State as similar to the ideal family. We should notice, however, that the thing that attracted Jones to the family as the pattern for the State was not its disciplinary aspects—the stern father keeping turbulent children in check by meting out just punishments—but the equality that members of a well-knit family share. He liked the all-for-one, one-for-all spirit which common interests and common ownership of the things necessary for life promotes within a family group.

He wanted the citizens of Toledo to be members of a family that owned the things necessary for its life, and that did things for its members. In the city-family of which he dreamed, no members would make money at the expense of others, and all members would contribute something more to the city's life than their mere presence and the payment of taxes.²¹

In order to bring this ideal nearer to actuality, Jones, in his message of 1898, presented an ambitious program of civic improvement for the consideration of the council. He proposed the erection of a city hall; increased appropriations for streets and parks; the establishment of public baths, playgrounds, kindergartens, and better market facilities. He recommended the adoption of the merit system in all city departments.

More threatening to certain interests within the city and the Republican party were Jones' proposals that the city should own and operate its own gas and electric lighting plants; that the contract system of carrying on public work should be replaced by a policy of direct employment of labor for these projects by the city; and that no grants of new or extensions of old franchises should be made to private companies without the approval of the voters.

Jones' humane attitude toward city problems is shown by his recommendation in the message that the city's licensing laws should be revised. He thought it both unnecessary and undesirable that Toledo should obtain revenue by forcing the poor to surrender to the city, in the form of license fees, a part of the money they scraped together from such activities as peddling and junk collecting.

It is plain that Jones was already acting upon the ideas that he was later (in his book, "The New Right," for example) to express in words: politics is the science of doing good through government; governments

²¹ For an example of Jones' analogy of the family and the state see "Letters of Labor and Love," pp. 32-3.

exist to serve people, not to rule them; and the function of government is to even up social inequalities rather than to create distinctions by granting privileges to some men.

Jones' idea that government exists to serve rather than to rule was not revolutionary. It was precisely what the politicians and business men of Toledo believed. But they believed in it like the religious revivalist whom they imported to stir up moral indignation against Jones believed in the Golden Rule—"up to a certain point." They believed government existed to serve them and to rule the people.

As mayor, Jones made a conscientious effort to administer the affairs of Toledo in such a way that the interests of all the inhabitants, or, when this was impossible, the interests of the city as a whole, would be protected. This was the fundamental issue between Jones and his opponents: Who shall the government of Toledo serve, all of the people of Toledo or certain groups of Toledoans?

When the party leaders began to realize that this man whom they had elected was really sincere in the things he said, and that he really did look upon himself as "the Mayor for all the people," it was clear to them that they must get rid of him. Jones was no man to have in office when the street railway company wanted its franchises renewed and when the contract for lighting the streets was soon to expire.

At the Republican city convention in 1899 Jones was denied renomination. His party irregularity was held against him by many delegates, and the votes of others, who had professed to support him, were quite openly bought.²² Jones had earlier warned that he would not consider himself bound by the action of this convention, which he believed had been elected in an irregular manner.

He immediately issued an announcement of his independent candidacy for re-election to the mayoralty.²³ In this document he reiterated the promise he had previously made that he would oppose all grants of new franchises or extensions of existing ones and that he would work for public ownership of all public utilities.²⁴

IV

INDEPENDENCE WAS THRUST upon Jones, but he accepted it as gladly as if the choice had been his own. "I am a man without a party, a free

²² The Convention is described by Jones in "The New Right," pp. 89-91. See also Wendell F. Johnson, "Toledo's Non-Partisan Movement," Toledo, 1922, p. 12; the *Toledo Blade*, March 4, 5, 1899, and the *Toledo Bee*, March 4, 5, 1899.

²³ Reprinted in *Toledo Saturday Night*, April 22, 1899.

²⁴ *Toledo Bee*, Feb. 18, 1899.

untrammelled soul, owing allegiance to nothing less and determined to serve nothing less than the whole human family, rejecting none, excluding none, permitting and inviting . . . I believe in the absolute . . . unity of the entire race. . . ."²⁵

It was as an advocate of absolute non-partisanism in all politics that he won his widest fame. He ran for Governor of Ohio in 1899 as an independent and his later mayoralty victories were scored as an independent candidate. In 1900 he declined the Democratic nomination for Representative to Congress from his district and he steadfastly refused to organize an independent third party in Toledo.

One party is as bad as another, was his attitude. He disliked parties not only because of the use to which they were put by privilege-seeking business men, but also because, by their very nature, they were representatives of only part of the people. He wanted to serve all. He opposed them, too, because he felt they robbed men of their intellectual freedom by blinding them with prejudice and bias.

He came to look upon the non-partisan as playing the same rule in politics that the non-resistant plays in war: the only way to stop war is for individuals to stop fighting, he said; the only way to get rid of the curse of partyism is to renounce parties.²⁶ Jones believed that partisanship would linger longest in national elections. He was convinced that it was already disappearing from municipal politics²⁷ and he always insisted that his victories in Toledo were not personal triumphs but were evidences of a popular discontent with parties; they were object lessons in what the people could do when they really wanted to discard, not only the boss and the machine, but the whole institution of Party.

The acceptance of non-partisanism marks the beginning of a shift of emphasis in Jones' philosophy. Heretofore he had been primarily interested in the ills of society. Now he began to devote more thought to how the individual (and he meant Jones as much as anybody) could make himself a better person. He had always recognized the necessity for this. On the fence at Golden Rule Park he had painted a line from his favorite poet, Walt Whitman: "PRODUCE GREAT PERSONS—THE REST FOLLOWS."

In the last two or three years of his life, without giving up his earlier collectivism, he stressed this individualistic, passive aspect of his thinking more than formerly. The magazine articles that he wrote emphasizing

²⁵ "Letters of Labor and Love," p. 119.

²⁶ For Jones' mature reflections on political parties see his article, "The Non-Partisan in Politics," *The Independent*, LV, 1963-66.

²⁷ "Mayor's Message," *Annual Statement*, 1901, p. 16.

the duty of every man to improve himself and his right to do nothing contrary to what his heart told him was good presumably reached a larger audience than his book, "The New Right," which was published in 1899. It was these articles along with his championing of the idea of non-partisanism in politics, which made him known as a philosophical anarchist.

Although he did not lose his faith in people Jones began to doubt whether, in the long run, government could be much better or worse than the average citizen. He retained his belief in municipal ownership and continued to advocate the submission of franchise grants to popular referendum, but he wryly acknowledged that in a city of thieves municipal ownership of public utilities would not produce a righteous social order. Our politics will not improve radically until our personal ideals are raised to a higher plane.

Certainly, he said, there will be little improvement as long as our criterion of success is the possession of things. He did not forget his hatred of the competitive system but he realized more keenly than before the impossibility of establishing a co-operative system until education and evolution had produced co-operative citizens.²⁸

These conclusions were not induced by any bitterness or disillusion on Jones' part. They were not stale platitudes mouthed by a dispirited old man. They deserve our consideration because they were the sincere reflections of a man matured by work, experience, reading and thought.

Jones knew more about people, more about politics, and more about business than most men. He had read, seen, done, and thought more than most. It is significant that nearly all of the leaders of the Civic Revival, travelling by different roads, arrived finally at the same conclusion as Jones. When you put your faith in individual men rather than in God, supermen, or classes, the inevitable deduction is that society will improve only as the average man becomes better.

The Civic Revivalist pointed out that "the system" (Jones called it "competition") makes it hard for people to be good. Jones is important to us because he provides an example of the kind of man we will all have to become before the co-operative commonwealth is a reality.

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²⁸ This trend of Jones' thought is well illustrated in the following articles: "Patience and Education the Demands of the Hour," *The Arena*, XXV, pp. 544-6 (May 1901) and "The Way to Purify Politics," *The Independent*, LIV, pp. 512-3 (Feb. 27, 1902).