

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

By
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Formerly United States Senator
from South Dakota



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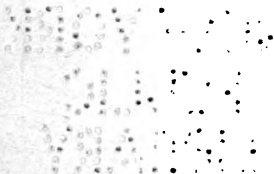
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XVI. POLITICAL PARTIES

In these descriptions of the relation between business and Government in the United States, I have not tried to draw any sharp distinctions between the Republican and the Democratic parties. Indeed, such an effort would be quite futile, since no real distinction between them exists. Historically, the two parties represent varying points of view as to the best method of robbing the workers. The Democrats favored slavery as a method. The Republicans preferred the wage system. But those differences were ironed out during the Civil War. During more than half a century both parties have accepted the system of wage labor as the most practical and remunerative system of exploitation. Today Republicans and Democrats are alike the spokesmen of big business. This assertion I can make without the slightest fear of contradiction, as I have known the leaders of both parties for fifty years and have worked in the inner circles of both party machines.

I was elected to the United States Senate as a Republican when the state of South Dakota was admitted to the Union. I was re-elected in 1894, also as a Republican. I listened to the debates in 1890 on the Anti-Trust Law which was presented by Senator Sherman, of Ohio. The trusts were at that time beginning to show great strength and both parties had declared against them in their platforms. The Sherman law was a Republican measure, but I observed to my great surprise that the leaders of the Republican party were very careful not to include anything in the bill that would interfere with big business. Indeed, the anti-trust legislation was so framed as to encourage rather than discourage combinations in restraint of trade; I also observed that those amendments which were offered to the Sherman Anti-Trust Law in order to make it effective by preventing combinations in restraint of trade, were promptly defeated by a solid Republican

vote. This opened my eyes, and I began to wonder if I was really a Republican. Out on the prairies of Dakota there was a strong protest against the exploitation of the people by eastern bankers and railroad operators, and I had never for one moment supposed that the Republican party which always claimed to be the opponent of slavery and the champion of freedom was presenting a united front to any measures looking to a diminution of this exploitation.

In 1896 I was elected as a delegate to the Republican National Convention which assembled at St. Louis for the purpose of adopting a platform and of nominating a presidential candidate. After the St. Louis platform had been adopted, twenty-two of the delegates, I among the number, left the convention and the Republican party. Our reasons for leaving were, first, that the party, in its platform, declared for a very high protective tariff and made no pronouncement against trusts and combinations in restraint of trade, but left out the plank on that subject which it had included in every National convention for at least eight years previously. The tariff wall for which the platform provided was so high as to make the trusts absolutely secure against foreign competition, which was the only competition they had to fear. The convention also declared for the gold standard and at every opportunity announced that it was in favor of the great industrial combinations, whose attorneys not only dominated the convention, but made up two-thirds of both Houses of Congress. In other words, the grand old party that had come into existence as a protest against human slavery had, after forty years, decided to abandon its great record as the champion of black slaves and become the champion of the trusts and industrial and transportation combinations which were enslaving men. Seeing this change as clearly as I did, there was only one course for me to pursue—I left the party. Still I was a Republican at heart. I never voted but for one Democrat.

After the St. Louis Convention I attended the Democratic Convention at Chicago, and was on the platform when Bryan made the great speech which resulted in his nomination. He was endorsed by the so-called Silver Republican Convention, which was composed of those who bolted the St. Louis Convention of the Republican party and their adherents. In the campaign of 1896 I supported Bryan and made a great many speeches advocating his election. Partly as a result of my activity he carried the State of South Dakota. He was beaten throughout the nation by the industrial combinations which had backed the nomination of McKinley and had adopted the St. Louis platform. These interests put up many millions to purchase and corrupt the voters of the country and to defeat Bryan, so that they could go along with their work of concentrating in the hands of a few the result of the toil of the American people.

Again in 1900 I supported Bryan, who was running on a platform which declared against trusts and combinations in restraint of trade, against the acquisition of colonies to be exploited in the interests of trade; against an enormous army and navy—in fact, which declared against everything that the Republican party in the campaign of 1900 stood for.

After the campaign of 1896 a debate took place in the Senate with regard to free homes on the public domain. In this debate I was contending that the Republican party boasted during the campaign of 1896 that it was the author of the Homestead Law; and that in the convention at St. Louis the party had declared in favor of the Homestead Law. As an advocate of the restoration of the Homestead Law, I told the Republicans that they had put the free homestead plank in their platform at St. Louis and now they were refusing to live up to it. By quoting the plank in the Republican platform and comparing it with the bill that the Republicans were trying to enact, I showed conclusively that they had abandoned it. During this debate, the whole

question of party relations and affiliations came to the surface, and above all, the spokesmen of business, who were leading the fight against the bill in the Senate, said plainly and emphatically that they were not there to do the will of the people or to represent them, but that they were rather serving their real masters who paid the party bills.

I quote the Congressional Record:

Mr. PETTIGREW: "That is the measure which the St. Louis Convention specifically and in terms endorsed and said they were in favor of. The Senator from Connecticut (Mr. Platt) says to me they did not do any such thing. Let us see whether or not they did. This bill was reported to the Senate on the 16th of May, 1896, and on the 18th of June, 1896, the St. Louis platform was adopted. Now, let us see what the platform says:

"We believe in an immediate return to the free homestead policy of the Republican party and urge the passage by Congress of a satisfactory free-homestead measure, such as has already passed the House and is now pending in the Senate."

Mr. PLATT, of Connecticut: "Did they endorse the bill which passed the House?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "'And is now pending in the Senate.' What bill was pending in the Senate? The bill reported by the Committee on Indian Affairs, the bill I have read here in terms and words."

Mr. PLATT: "What did they endorse? Did they endorse the bill which passed the House or the bill that was pending in the Senate?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "Both; the bill 'such as has already passed the House and is now pending in the Senate.'"

Mr. PLATT: "Does the Senator think they knew what was pending in the Senate?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "I think they did."

Mr. PLATT: "Or that this bill was any different from the bill pending in the Senate?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "They knew all about it. There is no question about it. Here is the difference between the two bills. The House bill provided for free homesteaders in Oklahoma, every bit of which had been bought from Indians, and the Senate bill provided that the same provisions should extend to the other states of the West. Now, the Republicans went into the campaign in South Dakota and on every stump they told these people that they should have free homes if the Republican party won and that they could not get them if they did not, and you pointed to the record of the Republican party as being the party in favor of free homesteads, and you showed them that the Democratic party had voted against it 'way back in 1860. You gained thousands of votes by that pretense and by that plank in your platform, and now you go back on it.

"It is not the only plank you have gone back on. You have gone back on your whole record as a party. You have left the side of the people of this country. You have abandoned the principles that made your party great and respectable and have become the champions of everything that is corrupt and bad in American politics.

"What is more, we passed this bill as a separate measure at the last session of Congress and it went to the House of Representatives exactly in words and terms as in this bill, being the same measure. Has the House done a thing with it? It is referred to the Calendar—the graveyard of the House. They will not even amend it and pass the provision in regard to Oklahoma; and one of the prominent members of the House stood up the other day and stated that it was made for the purpose of getting votes. One of the most prominent members of the House said that the plank was put in the platform, but the election was over. I wish I had his speech here. I should like to put it in the RECORD along with my statement in regard to it.

Mr. GALLINGER: "If my friend, the Senator from South Dakota, will permit me, we ought to be somewhat exact in these historical matters. Do I understand that that plank was in the platform of the Republican party in 1896?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "YES."

Mr. GALLINGER: "And the campaign was waged in South Dakota in behalf of that plank by the Republican party?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "YES."

Mr. GALLINGER: "And the Senator who is speaking fought the Republican party in that campaign."

Mr. PETTIGREW: "I did."

Mr. GALLINGER: "The Republican party had not gone back on that plank at that time. How does it happen that the Senator was with the opposition in that campaign?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "Oh, Mr. President, that is a long story, but I am willing to answer it. I left the Republican party at the St. Louis Convention, and I am proud of it. There has never been a day from that time to this that I have not been glad of it. I stated in that campaign that if McKinley was elected I never could return to the party, because the forces which would control his administration would make it impossible, but there was a chance to return to the party if he was defeated. Repeatedly on the stump I made that statement. I left the St. Louis Convention, first because it declared for the gold standard, which will ruin every producer in this country and every other country that adopts and adheres to it. I left the Republican party because the trusts had captured your party and had complete control of your convention, and you left out the plank against trusts, which you had heretofore adopted, because the trusts, owning you and your party and in possession of your convention, did not want to abuse each other. Reason enough, reason sufficient to justify my course before the people I repre-

sent, and enough, in my opinion, to consign the republican party to eternal oblivion.

"What has been your course since? It is known throughout this country that vast sums of money are collected and that you are in alliance with the accumulated and concentrated wealth of this country, and that you rely upon them not only to carry your campaigns and furnish money to corrupt the elections, but to elect your senators; and after you have done it, after you have elected by corrupt means a man to this body, the great convention of the state where it occurs passes resolutions congratulating themselves upon the infamy and declaring that they are glad of it."

Mr. GALLINGER: "Will the Senator permit me again? He seems to be somewhat specific now, and he says that a man has been corruptly elected to this body and that the party has not only not condemned it, but applauded. I wish to ask the Senator if there is any proof that any man occupying a seat on this floor as a republican was corruptly elected?"

Mr. PETTIGREW: "Oh, yes; and the proof is with the committee on elections. The proof is before the people of the United States, and they all know it, and it is conclusive and the Senator referred to is Mark Hanna, of Ohio."

Mr. GALLINGER: "That might be said of an accusation against somebody whose case was before a grand jury and where the grand jury had not reported. I do not understand that the committee on elections has made a report to this body giving it as their deliberate conviction, after proper inquiry and investigation, that any accusation against a republican occupying a seat here has been proved; and until that is done I think the Senator ought to be a little more careful about his statements on that point, with all due deference to his rights as a Senator."

Mr. PETTIGREW: "I am willing that the state-

ment I have made shall go to the country. The proof was sufficient to satisfy the Senate of Ohio, and they sent the case here weeks ago. An innocent man would demand that our committee act before we adjourn. Why does the case sleep in the Senate Committee?"

That was my statement to the Senate twenty-five years ago, and during those years, every contact that I have had with the Republican party organization has strengthened my conviction that I understated the case at that time. It did not need the revelations of the 1920 campaign to convince the American people of these facts. Those revelations simply emphasized knowledge that was already common.

But do not let it be supposed for an instant that the Democratic party has been less eager to play handy-man to big business. It has been the opportunity and not the will that was lacking. And even at that, it is a matter of common knowledge that the Wilson Campaign millions in 1912 and again in 1916 were greater than the funds at the disposal of the Republicans, and the bulk of them did not come from either workingmen or farmers. On the contrary, the Democrats, like the republicans got their funds from the only source that yields them in large amounts—the exploiters of the American people.

Bryan was the last of the Democratic leaders to make a stand against the vested interests and while his intentions were of the best, his knowledge of economics was woefully limited. Furthermore, he was far from being the master of Democratic party policy.

The Democratic Convention at Denver (1908), nominated Bryan for the third time. I was a delegate from South Dakota to that convention and was chairman of the sub-committee on the tariff and chairman of the Full Committee on Insular Affairs. In connection with this second committee, I brought

in a plan declaring in favor of the independence of the people of the Philippines and against the policy of acquiring colonies peopled by another race for the purposes of commercial exploitation. I brought into the full committee, composed of over fifty members, a tariff plank which resulted in a very active debate. The wheel horses of democracy were all for a high protective tariff and I had introduced a plank which was not sufficiently protective to satisfy their purposes. That debate satisfied me that the difference between the two old political parties was not one of principle. As a result of it, I saw quite clearly that they both were owned by the exploiting interests and that the contest between the two was over which one should hold the offices, dispense the patronage, and collect untold millions for campaign purposes. From that time until now the two have been as like as two peas in a pod. There has never been more than a difference in the wording of their respective platforms, and since 1918, as if to prove that they were one and the same, they have fused in those districts (notably in Wisconsin and in New York) where the Socialist candidates would have been elected in a three cornered fight.

Before the Denver Convention, I was invited by Mr. Bryan to his home near Lincoln, Nebraska, where I spent a week with him. He expected to be nominated, and we put in our time going over a platform for the Denver Convention and discussing and planning the campaign. I had great admiration for Bryan because of his sterling qualities as a man, and because of his ability to state what he had to say in a forceful and eloquent manner, and because I believed that he had the moral courage to stand by his principles.

The week that I spent with him gave me an opportunity to know the man intimately. I had access to his library and conversed with him every day.

We walked and drove together and in the course of our conversation we covered many topics. I found that he was fairly well versed in the law; that he had studied Blackstone and Kent and the English precedents, but that he was utterly ignorant of almost everything else except the bible and the evils of intemperance; that his library contained almost no books whatever of value to a man fitting himself to be President of the United States, or even member of a state legislature. I also found that, while his personality was charming, whatever ability nature may have endowed him with had been badly dwarfed and crippled by a narrow education, and that he was not big enough to overcome his training by continuing his investigations of men and affairs after he entered public life.

Bryan asked me to return by way of Lincoln after the Denver Convention and go into greater detail with regard to the campaign. He knew that I was well acquainted with Roger Sullivan, of Chicago, who had become the democratic boss of Illinois and who was reputed to be very rich. He was also aware of the fact that Sullivan for some years had been a resident of South Dakota when a very young man and that I had had his brother, who was a republican, made surveyor-general of the State of South Dakota. He knew, furthermore, that I was well acquainted with Murphy, of New York, the boss of Tammany Hall, as well as with Arthur Brisbane, the editor of the Hearst newspapers. Bryan wished me to see Sullivan, Murphy and Brisbane and authorized me to say to Sullivan and Murphy that he desired their support in the campaign and that they should receive due and proper consideration if he were elected President of the United States; that they would be consulted about affairs in their respective localities and that their political importance would be recognized. I had no trouble with Sulli-

van and Murphy and easily secured their pledges to stand by the ticket. I then talked with Arthur Brisbane, hoping to receive the support of the Hearst newspapers of which he was the editor.

Brisbane, in my opinion, has more general knowledge of the past and present and of books than any other man in America, and he seems to have the material ready for use. I have always had a high regard for his ability and experience. When I approached him and urged his support of Bryan, he turned to me and said, "Bryan doesn't know enough to be President; he is a provincial fellow, prejudiced by his training. He has none of the knowledge that a man must possess in order to be fit for the position of President of the United States."

I then asked Brisbane how much money he had made the preceding year through his writings. He replied that it was about \$70,000. Then I said, "That is nothing. Bryan made \$100,000 from the sale of his books and through his lectures, and yet you say Bryan doesn't know enough to be President."

I could make no impression upon Brisbane, however, for he still adhered to his position that Bryan was impossible. So far as I know, he is still of that opinion.

There are other incidents—many of them—that have transpired during the past few years, that I could cite if more proof were necessary to establish my point. But it seems to me that on this score, I have said enough. The able men as a rule, do not go into politics. They stay in business, and with the wealth that they derive through their special privileges and monopolies they support one or both of the old parties—turning their contributions into the channel that will yield the largest net returns.