

# TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of  
American Public Life  
from 1870 to 1920

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## XIX. CANNONISM

So much for the weak Mr. Bryan. Now for the corrupt Joe Cannon. Bryan never knowingly served the vested interests. He fought them to the extent of his ability and interspersed his political battles by giving lectures on "Prohibition" and "Immortality." Joe Cannon, on the other hand, was one of the most faithful servants that the vested interests of the United States ever had in either house of Congress. He is a type of those all-too-numerous public men who are the political body-servants of big business.

Joe Cannon is still in Congress. For over forty years he has been a member of the House of Representatives, and, as chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and, as Speaker, has had more to do with shaping legislation than any other man in the House. In fact, he was one of the leaders of the band of plunderers that, in both Houses of Congress, for two generations dominated the public affairs and made the Government of the United States one of the most corrupt in the world.

Under the guidance of this clique of men all legislation was directed to the granting of special privileges to corporations, giving them power to tax and exploit the people of the United States. The tariff became the chief vehicle for the robbery of the public and its beneficiaries were the chief contributors to the great campaign funds collected by the Republican party to demoralize the voters of the nation. Under the regime of Cannonism concessions and privileges of every sort, not only for the public service and industrial corporations, but for the financial institutions of the country, received the chief attention of Congress, and these privileges were so profitable that the halls of the House and Senate swarmed with innumerable lobbyists whose vocation it was to appeal to the ordinary members of both branches with whatever argument was necessary,

being assured in advance of the ardent and powerful support of Joe Cannon and the other leaders.

The granting of these concessions and privileges, by which the few planned to plunder the many, is the essence of Cannonism. Elected to office of trust by the franchise of their fellow-citizens, Cannon and his like utilize their position to serve, not the people who elected them, but the great interests which provide the campaign funds and other forms of compensation.

Thus a new profession arose—the profession of public lackeying to the plutocracy. To enter this profession it was necessary, first, to buy or fool the people, and, second, to convince the leaders of the plutocracy of your sincere intention to serve their interests. Thus was perfidy coupled with venality by these “public servants” who had taken an oath to support the Constitution and then busied themselves in robbing the people.

Most of the leaders among the political spoilsmen were content with a reasonably extravagant living, but Cannon in the House and Aldrich in the Senate were not thus easily satisfied. The powerful positions which they held enabled them to become enormously rich.

These men became rich because, through their positions of public trust, they were able to betray the Government and the people into the hands of the exploiters. Let me cite a few illustrations of the way in which this was done.

During the nineties there was much talk about the “land frauds.” These frauds were the product of legislation especially secured by Cannon and some of his aids in order that the railroads might secure valuable forest and mineral lands in the West and Northwest without paying anything for them beyond the cost of securing the legislation. I was the author of the law for the regulation and control of the forest reservations of the United States. (See Chapter II.) It was adopted by the Senate and, as adopted, contained a clause which permitted any homesteader, whose homestead was embraced within a forest reservation, to release his home-

stead to the Government and be accredited with the time he had lived upon it, and allowed to take land from the Government in some other locality. Mr. Cannon was chairman of the Committee on Appropriations of the House, and chairman of the Conference Committee, and he inserted the words, "or any other claimant," so that, if the lands of a land grant railroad were embraced within a forest reservation, the railroad company could exchange them for any other lands the Government might possess. I did not observe this interlineation in the conference report, which was read rapidly and approved without first being printed. Afterward I found that the Northern Pacific Railroad was receiving scrip for the sections of land of its grant which were on the top of Mount Tacoma in Washington. Lands that were absolutely worthless were exchanged in this way for lands of the greatest value.

I stated these facts in the Senate and suggested an appraisal of those lands that were embraced in the forest reservations on top of snow-capped mountains, and proposed that the exchange be made according to value. If they exchanged a section on top of one of these mountains that wasn't worth over a cent an acre for land worth ten or twenty dollars per acre, they should not get acre for acre, but exact value after appraisal; and I also moved that all operations under the law be suspended pending an investigation by the Interior Department. The Senate passed my amendments, but with a full knowledge of all the facts, showing just what frauds had been practiced and how they were practiced; the House refused to agree to the Senate amendments, and, as is customary, the bill was thrown into conference. Cannon was chairman of the Committee on Conference, and chairman of the Committee on Appropriations in the House, and he insisted upon standing by the railroads and continuing the frauds, and so refused to agree to the Senate amendment, but inserted a provision that thereafter railroads could only exchange for surveyed lands. However, as the law

provided that, when three settlers in a township petitioned for the survey of the township the Government was bound to make the survey if the settlers deposited money enough to pay for the work, these railroad thieves would send three men into a township, would have them file three homestead entries, and then make affidavit that they were residing there and wanted the township surveyed; would deposit the money necessary—four or five hundred dollars to get the survey made—and then the railroads would locate their scrip upon these lands all over the township, and when this was done the three men would move on and locate in another township, and so continue the fraud.

Cannon and his henchmen in the House and Senate made the frauds possible, and thus enabled the railroads to secure many millions of dollars worth of the best land in the West for a small fraction of their true value. Thus the timber and mineral wealth of the public domain was turned over to the great corporations whose handymen were maintained in Congress for just such purposes.

Cannonism is the profession of selling the country to the rich so that they may be enabled to grow still richer by the exploitation of the poor.

Another instance of Cannonism is found in the armor-plate scandals.

For several years the Senate of the United States limited the price to be paid for armor-plate. The armor-plate manufacturers were in a trust. Everybody admitted that. There were only two plants in the United States that could manufacture armor-plate. One was the Carnegie Steel Company; the other the Bethlehem Steel Company. The Carnegie Steel Works and Bethlehem Steel Works were in a combination, and each always bid for just half of what the Government wanted, and always bid the same price.

The Senate passed a bill limiting the price of armor-plate to \$300 per ton, and under that provision no armor-plate was purchased because the companies re-

fused to sell at that price. Two years afterwards the Senate passed an amendment to the Navy Appropriation Bill limiting the price of armor-plate to \$425 per ton. The Carnegie and Bethlehem companies were asking the United States Government \$550 per ton, and were selling the same plate to the Russian Government for \$240 per ton. The Senate amendment therefore provided that if the Secretary could not buy armor-plate for \$425 per ton, the Government should immediately commence to construct an armor-plate plant and make its own armor-plate. Joe Cannon was chairman of the Committee on Conference in the House, and he absolutely refused to submit to the Senate amendment, but insisted that the armor-plate makers should have their price, although they were in a trust and in collusion. These facts were well known to him and to every member of both Houses.

I could go into the details of the Congressional Record with regard to the duty on white pine. The Senate reduced the duty from \$2, the price fixed by the House, to \$1 per thousand. Cannon refused to agree to the Senate amendment, but insisted upon \$2, which was finally allowed. Under it, the lumber dealers of the whole country formed a combination and plundered the consumers, according to their own statement, of thirty-five millions per year.

These facts were known to Cannon and to both Houses when this duty was put on white pine. It was well known that the duty would not furnish any revenue to the Government or any protection to the building up of an infant industry, but it simply put \$2 a thousand into the pockets of the owners of the white pine timber. The statement of Mr. Winchester and other lumbermen that if they could get \$2 on lumber it would be worth thirty-five million dollars each year was read in the Senate. And yet Mr. Cannon stood pat on the tariff.

When the tariff was revised, it was revised in the interest of the plutocracy and not in the interest of the

people of the United States. Cannon's work in Congress was done in the interest of the scheming jobbery that has cursed and controlled the Republican party for the last thirty years.

I have used Cannon's name, not because I wish to discredit him as an individual, but because his story is so typical of the record of the many who are today holding offices of trust under the Government, and faithfully serving the American plutocracy.