

# TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of  
American Public Life  
from 1870 to 1920

By  
**R. F. PETTIGREW**  
Formerly United States Senator  
from South Dakota



Printed by THE ACADEMY PRESS  
112 Fourth Avenue, New York City

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

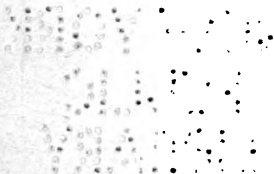
50077A

ASTOR. LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS  
R 1922 L

Copyright 1921 by R. F. Pettigrew.

All rights, including the right of translation into foreign languages, reserved.

Published January 1, 1922.



#### XXXIV. LOOKING AHEAD

I have had a long experience with the public life of the United States; I have been repeatedly to Europe; I have studied the life of the East at first hand; I have read economics, history, sociology; I have been busily engaged in the life of the world for more than half of a century. If long experience and investigation, coupled with study and discussion, fit a man to understand what is going on about him, then I believe that I have the necessary qualifications for passing on the events that are now transpiring, and for predicting the trend of our economic and political life.

There are certain things that I see very clearly; and certain tendencies that are working toward their logical goals just as inexorably as the sun passes across the heavens. These tendencies in our public life are similar to, though not identical with, similar forces that have operated in other societies during historic times; and they bear a very close resemblance to the forces that are now at work in all of the great capitalist countries of the world.

In the fight over the annexation of Hawaii, I predicted that the road which was then being followed by the United States would lead speedily to empire. Well, the empire is already here—having arrived more speedily than I, in my wildest imaginings, ever dreamed that it would arrive.

At the time of the struggle over the Hawaiian Treaty, few people believed that the United States could ever be an imperial nation. They were skeptical, or else they scoffed openly. Even the representatives of the great interests had little idea of what was happening. They knew that they were serving the men who had retained them, but with the exception of a very few among them they saw no farther than the immediate present. They were lawyers—not statesmen.

As for the masses of the people, they were as ig-

norant then as they are now. They were swayed by their emotions. "They responded to the "full dinner pail" appeal. They were the victims of an education that taught them to remember—not to think; and they were so busy remembering the glories of seventeenth century Revolutionary America that they had no energy or attention to devote to the problems of nineteenth century plutocratic and imperial America. During the campaign of 1900 I went before the farmers of South Dakota as a man who had served them for a decade in their fight against the exploiters. Mark Hanna, the direct representative of those exploiters, came out to Dakota with half a million dollars, and the half million carried more weight than my eleven years of service in the Senate.

Such experience taught me that, all other things being equal, people will do what their immediate economic advantage prompts them to do. Against the weight of this economic advantage, ideals and abstract ideas will not win with the average man or woman.

Therefore, I reached a conclusion that I have since seen verified again and again—that where the carcass is the vultures will be gathered together. So long as the privileged few hold the reins of economic power, and so long as they are willing to share up with the workers a portion—even a small portion of the plunder—they can hope to maintain their authority.

So I realized that progress was to be made from the tyranny of the masters as well as from the spirit of revolt among the workers, and where the workers had been crushed and exploited for generations, as in England, I realized that it would take a great deal of tyranny before the masses could be expected to revolt.

Thus, the danger of the American farmers and wage-earners lay in their very prosperity and in the leniency of their masters. So long as the bread was abundant I did not see how it was possible for forward-looking people to expect any effective progress.

Nevertheless, I expected the present century to yield

a crop of revolutions, based on tyranny and starvation, and I predicted such a result in 1900. I made this prediction in reply to a letter from the Red Cross, in which the Director of the 20th Century Department asked me to tell what the world might expect in the new century. The Red Cross request was as follows :

**“THE AMERICAN NATIONAL RED CROSS**

**20th Century Department**

**Walter L. Phillips**

**General Secretary, Bridgeport, Conn.**

**“Miss Clara Barton, President,**

**Miss Ellen Spencer Mussey,**

**Counsel and 3rd Vice-President,**

**Washington, D. C.**

**Frank D. Higbee,**

**Director 20th Century Dept.,**

**New York**

**New York, Nov. 21, 1900.**

**“Hon. Richard F. Pettigrew,**

**Sioux Fall, South Dakota.**

**“Sir :**

**“The Red Cross regards your position and standing to be such as to make your views on the progress and value of the 19th Century, in comparison with other centuries and your prophecies regarding the 20th Century of great value, and we respectfully request you to forward to us at your earliest convenience from 40 to 70 words in your own handwriting giving your thoughts in that connection. We shall read them at all of our meetings throughout the United States, and afterwards allow the United States Government to take them and forever exhibit and preserve them in the Congressional Library at Washington.**

"An engraved invitation is being prepared, one of which will be mailed to you, but the time is short, and we take this method to expedite matters, and hope you will send in your "Greeting" before December 1st, if you can do so.

"We prefer to have the 'Greeting' in your own handwriting rather than typewritten because we wish to have each 'Greeting' in autograph form when turned over to the government for preservation for all time.

"Thanking you in advance, I am,

"Very truly yours,

"FRANK D. HIGBEE,

Director 20th Century Watch Meetings.

"Approved :

"CLARA BARTON, President."

To this letter I sent the following reply ;

"To the American National Red Cross :

"During the century just closed, mankind has made marvelous progress in his control over the forces of Nature, and in the production of things which contribute to his physical comfort.

"The early years of the century marked the progress of the race towards individual freedom and permanent victory over the tyranny of hereditary aristocracy, but the closing decades of the century have witnessed the surrender of all that was gained to the more heartless tyranny of accumulated wealth. Man's progress has therefore been material and not spiritual or ideal and the future alone can demonstrate whether any real progress has been made.

"I believe the new century will open with many bloody revolutions as a result of the pro-

test of the masses against the tyranny and oppression of the wealth of the world in the hands of a few, resulting in great progress towards socialism and the more equal distribution of the products of human toil and, as a result, the moral and spiritual uplifting of the race.

“R. F. PETTIGREW.

“Washington, D. C.,  
Nov. 22, 1900.”

It was twenty years ago that I predicted “many bloody revolutions as a result of the protest of the masses against the tyranny and oppression of the world in the hands of the few.” These revolutions have occurred—the first in Russia (1905), and subsequently the revolutions in Russia, Hungary, Germany and other portions of Central Europe.

Then, too, there has occurred the “great progress towards socialism and the more equal distribution of the products of human toil” that I predicted at the same time. The progress has been unequal. In the United States and in Japan, it has only just begun. All over Europe it has reached advanced stages, and the same forces of tyrannous capitalism and imperialism that have been at work in Europe, making for these revolutions, and for this revision of the ways of handling economic life are now busy in the United States, where the ruling class is following the old course of empire, and where the workers are beginning to wake up to the fact that they must take charge of their own economic affairs or perish, as have their European comrades, in the inevitable struggle between contending empires.

We have not yet witnessed “the moral and spiritual uplifting of the race,” about which I wrote in 1900, but already there are intimations that progress is being made in that direction. A spirit has come out of Russia that has transformed the thinking of the world in three short years, and the end is not yet. This spirit

is permeating the masses everywhere, and inspiring the most thoughtful among them with the ideas and ideals of a free economic society.

The closing years of the Nineteenth Century saw the imperialists of the world at the zenith of their power. The World War marked the beginning of their downfall.

Today I see the workers of the world coming into their own. Before this present generation passes, the workers in all of the important industrial countries of Europe will be the masters of the jobs on which they are dependent for a livelihood.

The workers will gain this control only through the course of a struggle during which western civilization will either pass to a new level of industrial and social organization, or else it will destroy itself in the conflict. This is the supreme test of the effectiveness of the present level of working-class intelligence. If the workers have learned enough and can maintain sufficient solidarity to hold the machinery of economic life together, while the transition is being made, the next steps in material and in spiritual progress must come in quick succession. If, on the other hand, the workers fail to make the transition, there must ensue years or perhaps centuries of stagnation, like those which followed the dissolution of the Roman Empire.

Whatever the success of the workers, one thing is certain—if those who do the world's work do not make this fight for the control of their jobs, the madcaps who are now directing the affairs of the great capitalist states will continue with their wars—each more terrible than the last one—until there remain only the fragments of the present civilization, and then the dark ages that will follow, across the war-devastated earth, will be dark indeed.

If through either struggle—that of the workers to get and to hold control of their jobs, or that of the plutocracies for the right to exploit the garden spots of the earth—the present civilization of the West is



destroyed, then the ancient civilization of the East, based on the agricultural village, will again dominate the earth.

The beginnings of these changes already are seen in Central Europe, where finances, transportation and manufacturing have been seriously deranged, or where their operation has been completely suspended, and where starvation and disease are consuming a population for which the old order of society can afford no remedy.

The war has been officially over for some time, yet, during the many months since there were open hostilities on the main battle-fronts, the economic life of Central Europe has not recovered its normal tone. There were many who felt that no sooner was the armistice agreed to than there would be a resumption of the ordinary economic activities of the peoples of the warring countries. At least "by the first of the year," insisted the optimists, things would "pick up." The first of the year has come and has gone—for the year of 1919, for 1920 and for 1921, and unless all accounts are at fault the starvation, disease, suffering and misery are more acute now than they were at the end of the war. Certainly the financial reports show that the economic portion of Austria, Poland, Hungary, Esthonia and probably of Germany is growing progressively worse. It is impossible to turn the energies of hundreds of millions from useful labor to destruction for five years without breaking down or wiping out the old impulses and habits that lead to useful labor. War is more than hell. It is chaos, negation and denial of human civilization and progress. The worst that can be said about the present system is that it makes war inevitable.

There is a crisis in the life of nearly four hundred millions who make up Europe. Many of the people are facing a situation that is desperate to a degree that cannot be appreciated by those who have not seen it.

The people of the United States have a unique opportunity in this crisis. I do not speak of their opportunity to give food and clothing. By that means they may push off the anguish of Europe for a few months. I mean an opportunity to show how things should be arranged to guarantee the life, liberty and happiness of a people.

The United States is isolated geographically. Hence it is in a better position to experiment and to work out its new ideas than is any other nation of the world.

Again, nature has supplied the United States with an unexcelled store of all the resources necessary to the building and maintenance of a great civilization. Hence it follows that, unlike the peoples of overcrowded Europe, none of those who live in the United States need lack for food or clothing or shelter. The coal and iron, the cotton and the wheat, the corn and the cattle, the beneficial climate and the generous soil all are present in extraordinary abundance.

Besides that, there are no near neighbors that are in a position to interfere with the internal affairs of the country. Once the American people have decided to reorganize their economic life on a basis of intelligence, there can be no effective check placed upon them from the outside.

Finally, the past few years have given this country an immense surplus in machinery, in liquid capital, in goods of various kinds that represent a great lead over any would-be rival.

Such are the advantages which the people of the United States now enjoy. There is one way and only one way in which they can make good and utilize them to the full. That is for the workers to take possession of their jobs, assume the direction of economic policy, and take the full product that they create.

Under our form of government this can and should be accomplished, not by force but by political action. Those who do the work and produce all the wealth should combine and form a political party with a plat-

form of eight words: "Every man is entitled to all he produces," with a slogan, "All power to the people who do the work and produce the wealth," and take possession of the government in all its branches, drive the lawyers out of office and repeal all laws granting privileges, and enact laws for the public ownership of all utilities of every kind that are now owned by corporations.

By this means, and by this means only, can imperialism be checked, the class struggle eliminated, and the life of the people be placed on a sound and rational basis. In this direction and in this direction only can they hope to attain the life, liberty and happiness of which our forefathers dreamed.

