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EDITORIAL

Ex-President Roosevelt at Columbus.

Mr. Roosevelt's speech last week before the Constitutional Convention of Ohio in session at Columbus, was an event of first importance. No man in American public life possesses in so great a degree as Mr. Roosevelt, or uses so freely and acutely the faculty for catching and reflecting public opinion. He seems never to reason out his convictions, but always to get them from public opinion by some sort of chameleonic instinct. Wasn't this so with him at the time of the Cuban war, and again during the dreadful era of imperialism? Wasn't it so when Big Business was in the ascendant in public opinion, and so again when public opinion began to find Big Business out? It is this instinctive faculty of his and his habitual use of it—with the narrow perfections and dangerous imperfections that characterize all instinctive processes—that give transcendent importance to Mr. Roosevelt's Columbus speech.



Mr. Roosevelt has not been known heretofore to have had pronounced convictions favorable to the Initiative, Referendum and Recall; and he gives now only verbal testimony to convictions thoughtfully arrived at on that subject. Plainly, his Columbus speech is an instinctive reflection of public sentiment. It is, too, unusually definite for him. There are no "weasel-words" on that subject in this speech, as there were for instance in

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his woman suffrage editorial. Although there are spots in it which look like traces of a tendency toward "weaseling," the weasel words, if they were ever in the manuscript, were blue-penciled out of it before its delivery. Mr. Roosevelt's declarations for the Initiative, Referendum and Recall are unqualified and definite. His speech is therefore of the highest importance as a sign of favorable public sentiment. It proves better than newspaper editorials can, almost as well as a census on the subject could, or an election at which it was the dominant issue, that the people of the United States demand the Initiative, Referendum and Recall, demand them all, demand them in their fullness, and demand them now.



Ex-President Roosevelt for President.

That Mr. Roosevelt's Columbus speech was made as a prelude to his becoming the Progressive candidate for the Republican nomination for President was suspected when he delivered it. This motive is now proved. No reasonable room for questioning it remains after one considers that the speech was delivered between the formal request of his friends that he become a candidate and his formal acquiescence, and that this significant sequence is very narrowly bounded in point of time: (1) request, February 10; (2) Columbus speech, February 21; (3) acceptance, February 26. In no respect, however, does that suspicion, now confirmed, minimize the importance of the speech with reference to the Initiative, Referendum and Recall. It rather emphasizes the inference that those methods of democracy are urgently demanded by public opinion. Pitifully at fault would Mr. Roosevelt's instincts be were he deliberately to enter a Presidential race handicapped with unpopular proposals. It must be remembered that his instinctive appreciation of public sentiment is never keener than his instinctive desire for victory. But we have no inclination by this reference to motives to chill any one's enthusiasm for Mr. Roosevelt's candidacy. We emphasize the service he renders the movement for democratic control of representative government by his definite and unqualified pronouncement for it, and we dwell upon the added value of the speech for that purpose if it be considered as his Presidential platform; but this is in order to center attention upon the tremendous advance the movement has made, and not to condemn a new leadership which it has evoked.



To new leadership there should be no objection.

provided it be strong and coupled with fidelity. If Mr. Roosevelt be a recent and sudden convert, this should not count against his candidacy. In politics and warfare as well as in business, the question is never of an "original Jacobs" but of "delivery of the goods." New occasions not only teach new duties; they also make strange political associates and bring effective leadership from unthought-of quarters. So far from opposing Roosevelt's candidacy, we welcome it. For even as Roosevelt's Columbus speech is valuable as a barometer of public opinion, so his candidacy will be valuable in drawing a sharp line between the democratic purposes and methods he now bluntly avows, and the plutocratic purposes and methods of which Mr. Taft must therefore be the Republican protagonist undisguised and unashamed.



It does not follow, though, that Mr. Roosevelt should be welcomed by Progressives as the actual candidate of the Republican party, much less that he should be welcomed as President again. It is one thing to be grateful to him for the thunderbolt he has hurled at Hamiltonian plutocracy, and much the same thing to applaud him in his struggle with Taft as the democratic champion in an extraordinary prize fight; but a very different thing would it be to contemplate with gratification his re-entry into the White House and his resumption of the power he has shown so ready a disposition to use arbitrarily. Let us not be misled by his democracy. Bonaparte also was a democrat, but his democracy led to an imperial throne; and Roosevelt is the type of democrat that Napoleon was. When self-governing peoples have fallen under absolute rule, the absolute ruler (except upon conquest from without) has usually been a Bonaparte or a Roosevelt, a man of destiny and instinct whose rough and ready democracy has enabled him to lift himself to irresponsible personal power "in the name and with the might of the people."



We are not unmindful of the circumstances that incline Progressives just now toward this man of instinct as the American man of destiny. He seems to be the politically strong man, the man who can win, the only man under whose leadership plutocracy can be put down at the next election. Part of this strength is due, no doubt, to mere factional revolts against President Taft for "turning down" Roosevelt and Roosevelt's friends and breaking promises to Roosevelt after Roosevelt had made him President; and out of this situation Mr. Roosevelt may number a powerful fol-