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The Progressive Convention

What was the meaning of the convention held at Chicago last month? Why was it so unlike any other political convention ever held in this country? What was the mysterious force which inspired and dominated the delegates and the thousands of spectators to think and act as one? We are asked these and similar questions with increasing frequency.

Tell us what force causes the seasons to change. Tell us what causes the birds to fly northward in summer and southward in winter. Tell us what power controls the law of gravitation and why the buds burst forth in spring and the leaves fall in autumn. Tell us whence comes man's desire at all times to better his condition. And what you tell us will be the answer to your questions about the Chicago convention.

There are at least 25,000 living witnesses who can bear testimony as to what they saw and felt at that historic meeting. Thousands, no doubt, will assert that it was a great spiritual gathering, unique and irresistible.

Other thousands will tell you that it was a gathering whose course was shaped by that practical, everyday religion which rests upon the common brotherhood of man. And other thousands will testify that what they felt while sitting in that convention was an experience so novel, so mysterious and so wonderful that they are incapable of interpreting its meaning.

All who spent an hour or more at any of the three sessions will bear witness that they felt the working of a mighty force which, for the time being at least, fused the thought and action of the assembled thousands into a single purpose.

Persons from all walks of life were delegates and guests. The plainman from the far west and the men and women from the drawing rooms of wealth sat side by side. Those whose lives had been dedicated to social warfare work neighbored with the mere politician and camp follower.

Newspaper writers of national fame, sent by their papers because they were cynics and able satirists, elbowed earnest essayists on economic and welfare topics. The southern Democrat and Confederate soldier sat next to the northern Republican and Union veteran.

Yet two hours after the convention opened these hitherto diverse elements were welded into one common body, and all the old class distinctions were broken down. Old and experienced newspaper men who come to scoff wired their Tory editors that they could not write the stories which they had been sent to make.

And some of the very best accounts of the convention were written by these amazed and newly enlightened writers.

We feel that we understand the significance of that convention. It was a crystallized and concrete expression of the desire which long has existed in the hearts of a great majority of the American people, for wider justice as between man and man.

While the foregoing seems to us to be the interpretation given by the average man to that extraordinary convention, it surely has a still wider significance. It is another milestone along the course of progressing civilization. It is the opening of a brighter chapter in the evolution of democracy.

When the fathers established the American republic, they gave to this country as large a measure of democracy as its people were capable of comprehending and exercising. Our intellectual growth and our universal education due largely to our public school system, have fitted the American people for a wider democracy if they desire it.

The revolution in our social conditions and industrial system, resulting from labor-saving machinery, immense combinations of capital and modern business organization, has made necessary that the democratic principle shall be extended if the great mass of the people are to retain their economic and political independence.

The awakened business conscience and the aroused social sense of the nation, due in a large degree to the teachings of Theodore Roosevelt, have made the people realize the inadequacy of our outgrown system.

The Progressive movement is nothing less than a demand for a wider and a truer democracy under which the now fettered as-

pirations of man may be freed in which his capabilities may find space for natural expansion.

Can any one doubt that the divine power which has guided the civilizations of the world has selected the American continent upon which to rear the highest form of democracy? Was it an accident that this continent with its matchless resources, its varied climate and its diversified products, remained unknown while the older civilizations of the world were struggling through centuries of ignorance and want?

Was it by mere chance that this vast virgin land was kept hidden from civilized man until the time was ripe in the evolution of the race for the great experiment, the worth of which Theodore Roosevelt says "depends upon it being in good faith an experiment—the first that has ever been tried—in true democracy on the scale of a continent?"

Those who believe that behind the development of the nations there is a wisely ordained plan cannot but believe that this continent was reserved for such an experiment in true democracy. The experiment advances as the people are ready for it and as the needs of the time require it.

The injustices in our present economic and social systems prove that no set or class of men are intellectually and morally strong enough to be entrusted with great power over masses of other men. It is to remove these injustices by taking power away from a small set or class and distributing it among all the people that the Progressive movement aims.

The convention at Chicago was an expression of those who believe that power should be so distributed among the people instead of being lodged in the hands of a few. It was a council of men and women who hold that this American experiment should be in good faith an experiment in true democracy.

We are told that the Chicago convention was essentially a one-man convention, a Roosevelt convention. The Tory press must continue to repeat this untruth or else themselves give the lie to the campaign of falsehood which they themselves have made against the Progressives. The falsity of the statement can be proved by calling as a witness any person, man or woman, who attended the convention.

It undoubtedly is true that no other citizen of this country could have aided so much in calling together the thousands of men and women who attended that convention. But the convention was not made up of Roosevelt followers. Its delegates were believers in Roosevelt and believers in the policies which he exemplifies.

Colonel Roosevelt has no political following in the usual sense of that term. One of his earliest assertions in the campaign was to the effect that no man should follow him with hope of political reward, because he had nothing to give and probably never again would have political patronage to dispense.

The greater part of those who attended the Chicago convention did so with but little hope of victory this year. Their later confidence in the outcome of the present battle came to them because of what they saw and heard after they arrived in Chicago.

The convention that adjourned on Wednesday night was as much a Johnson convention a Roosevelt convention. It was a Beveridge convention. It was a Ben Lindsey convention. It was a Jane

Addams convention. It was such because the members of that convention believed that all these persons, devoutly and understandingly, represented their hopes and their desires.

If Theodore Roosevelt had delivered before the Progressive convention the speech which Taft delivered in Washington the previous week, the delegates would have driven him out of the building.

And if Governor Johnson had repeated to that convention Governor Wilson's delicately phrased speech of acceptance, he could not have been their choice for vice-president.

The Chicago convention represented a sentiment so sincere that it has become a religion with millions of Americans, a sentiment so enlightened so exacting and so suspicious that if Theodore Roosevelt were to equivocate, falter or attempt to compromise he would be cast aside and another leader would take his place.

The assertion that it was a one-man convention is due in most cases to deliberate misrepresentation on the part of Tory advocates. Sometimes, however, it is the result of the same shortness of memory or narrowness of vision as that exhibited in the adverse claims as to the origin of the platform. Mr. Bryan, for instance, says the platform is largely a rewriting of policies advocated by the Democratic party. Mr. Debs says that the platform was lifted bodily from the Socialists.

As a matter of fact, the platform antedates both the Democrats and the Socialists by many centuries. It was really written nearly 1900 years ago, and its author came out of Nazareth.

The spirit of the Chicago convention has behind it a force as irresistible as the force behind the tides. The spiritual atmosphere of that convention and the religious fervor of the delegates and the audiences were only a reflection and an interpretation of the significance of the Progressive movement. Senator Beveridge, in his masterful speech, summed up the whole case when he said:

"Never doubt we are a nation whose God is the Lord."

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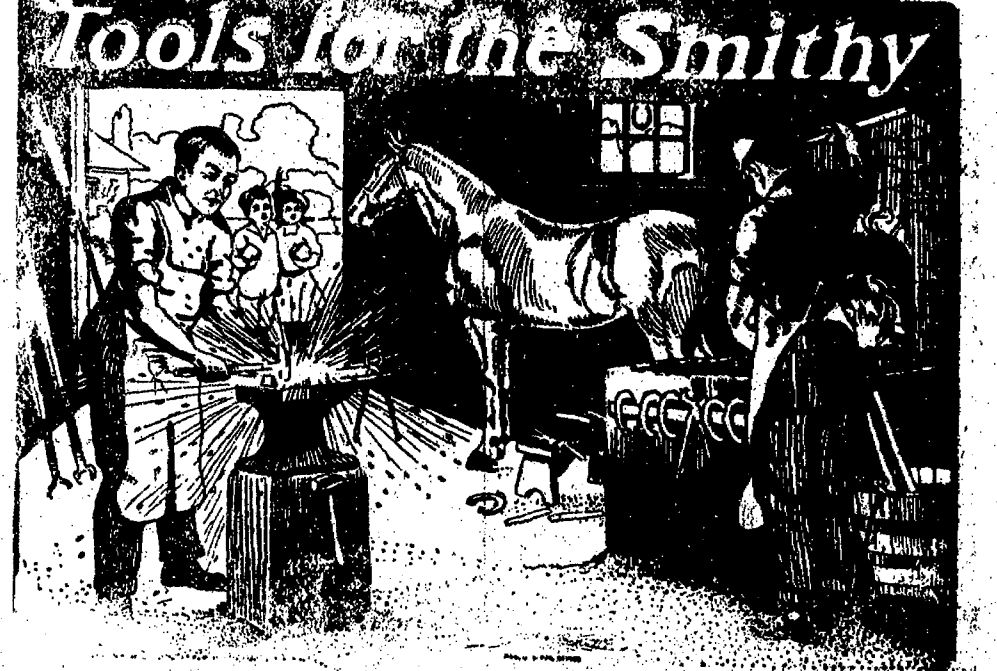
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