

Take the Tariff Out of Politics

(BY JOHN W. KURFEES.)

The situation today throughout the United States, from a political standpoint, is indeed an interesting one. Politicians of the different schools are seeking vantage ground all along the line. How many of these have at heart the real good of the country, regardless of their own welfare, the Lord only knows.

That we must have some kind of political government, and that the people—the real people—should manage and control that government, goes without saying, but to convince the people that the politicians and not themselves are running the government seems hard to do.

One faculty of professors from one political school, bearing the name of one political party, gets hold of the reins of government, proclaiming that they are the champions and everlasting guardians of the people's rights. A little over half the people applaud this proclamation and rejoice that their "side" has again "got in." But before the victors are hardly well seated, those who are "out" begin to lay plans to again "get in." The people,—did I say? No, no; not the people; the politicians. The people are never "in." They are always "out." But, says one, do you mean to imply that the people should all be in office? No, I do not mean that, but the offices, from township constable to President, belong to the people and whenever they, of their own free will and choice, unhampered by political bosses or machine politicians, select a citizen to fill one of these offices, then it can be said and truthfully said that, so far as that office is concerned, the people are "in."

When all the offices in the country are filled in this way, then, and not until then, will it be a real people's government. The people should not only select those who fill these offices, but they should have a stipulated contract with them, let the office be large or small, and have the power to "swap horses in the middle of the stream" if contract is broken. A political platform, as such documents are usually called, is nothing but a contract between the people and the official. I frankly confess that popular government has suffered at the hands of machine politicians until platforms in most cases no more than "molasses to catch flies."

IF NOT, WHY NOT?

When a firm or corporation employs a man to fill an important position they have a concrete understanding with him that certain duties are to be performed. How long do they keep such man if he begins to fall short of their requirements? His resignation is at once demanded and no time lost in finding a man who will do their bidding. If such a policy is good business for the firm or corporation, it certainly would be for the people in running their government. If not, why not? But notwithstanding the soundness of the foregoing reasoning which no one can question, the people continue to follow blindly and, no matter what the wording of the platform or what the general understanding of the people was, the official,

after being safely landed in his job, begins to take dictation from the "powers that be," viz: "the favored few" or the "invisible government." The "molasses" has served its purpose, the "flies" have been caught, and those who hold the offices have nothing more to fear till election time again rolls round.

The national government is today controlled by the Democratic party. Unlike former administrations of its own or the opposition party, it has with a few exceptions, endeavored to carry out its platform pledges. Whether or not their program is best for the country is open for discussion, but the fact that they are keeping faith with their promise to the people should be placed to their credit.

Two political parties, viz: Democratic and Republican, have had control, either one or the other, of this government, for over a half century. Republican party has been in control the greater part of the time. Just two cardinal principles (one each) have been the greatest asset of these political parties for more than 40 years.

THE TARIFF ISSUE.

The Republican party has stood for a high protective tariff on the one hand, and the Democratic party has stood for free trade or tariff for revenue only on the other. Thus they have been arrayed against each other in almost every campaign since the Civil war. Isn't it passing strange that intelligent people like us Americans would wrangle over a thing like that for so long and never get it settled? When the Republicans make a tariff, their school of politicians declare it the "best ever written," and when the Democrats make one, we hear the same glad (?) tidings from their side. And so it goes: the people doing the dancing but paying dear for the music.

I read with interest President Wilson's speech delivered some time ago at Indianapolis. From his standpoint, it was a great speech. However, just one sentence in that speech impressed me more than all the rest. It was this: "The Republican party hasn't had a new idea in 30 years." If he had just added one more sentence and said: "Neither has the Democratic party," it would have been fine. He did not mean that no member of the Republican party had ever advanced a new idea. He knows that men like LaFollette, Cummings, Borah, Beveridge, Roosevelt and others have been forging to the front with new ideas for several years, but his assertion that the party, as a party, had not had a new idea in 30 years, was unmistakably true, as evidence the wonderful activity of the real bosses to trot out the same old "idea" in 1916.

Just as certain members of the Republican party have advanced new ideas from time to time, so have Mr. Bryan, President Wilson and others of the Democratic party; but the real milk in the coconut with their party is "antitariff" and, with Mr. Penrose's party, it is "more tariff."

But, says one, "can't you see

how much better off the country is when the Republicans are in power, with a protective tariff on the statute books?" Yes, I frankly confess that my observation has been that we were more prosperous at such times; and, to be still more frank, I believe that a system of protection is best for the country, provided the benefits derived from such protection can be fairly distributed among the American people, but when such a system is practiced in a way to pour millions into the coffers of the few and providing a mere living for the many. I am unalterably opposed to it. That such has been the result with the Republican tariffs in the United States is not to be successfully denied.

AND THEREBY HANGS A TALE.

But, says the inquirer, "is it not a fact that, under such laws, our factories were all running, with labor all busy?" Very true, and thereby hangs a tale: It is mighty easy for the special interests, who own or control practically all the manufacturing plants in America, to blow their whistles each morning, make the spindles hum, and thus whoop up the boys with the slogan "full dinner pail," while the protection those special interests are getting not only gives them a full meal three times a day, but swells their fortunes until they are at a loss to devise the best methods of giving it away. What has the fellow with a "full dinner pail" got out of it? He perhaps sure enough has gotten sufficient to keep soul and body of himself and family together, after paying in some instances extortion rents for a house owned by the company and enormous profits on their food and clothing, dispensed by a company store. He is perhaps feeding and clothing his family and doing the best he can at educating his children on a wage of from one and a half to two dollars per day, with no doubt six to 10 children; yet, the poor fellow is called a spendthrift if he doesn't save up something for a "rainy day."

Far be it from the writer's intention to array labor against capital, but the illustration I have drawn shows the result of American protection, which is not fairly distributed. Why do I applaud when the American manufacturer, either with or without a protective tariff, runs his machinery to enrich himself and associates with enormous salaries and dividends, and call it "prosperity" when the labor he is using is receiving a bare living? In the name of social justice, why should I applaud? The Democratic party, instead of admitting that the principle of protecting is essential to our best and setting about to remedy the evils attendant upon it in the past, have all along endeavored to swing the pendulum to the opposite extreme, by fighting all forms of protection and thus prejudice the people against a just economic principle which has only been abused. "But," says someone, "the doctor who can only diagnose the disease and has no remedy to offer, is not our choice. What we want when sick is a prescription to make us well." In conclusion, therefore, I propose to point out for consideration a remedy which I believe, if taken by the American people, will make us not only a healthy nation, but will render us practically immune against the "tariff ups and tariff downs, with business fever and business chill."

(Continued next week.)

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