The True Story Of Woodrow Wilson

By DAVID LAWRENCE

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Chapter XIII

Wilson and Party Platforms

Woodrow Wilson did not feel bound by party platform in the making of which he had no part. Certain principles of policy appeal to him as worthy of emphasis but, knowing the hasty manner in which platforms were drafted and perfunctorily adopted, he construed each document to be really a series of suggestions and not a program of action. In his formal speech accepting the nomination in 1912, he revealed that interpretation; but its true significance did not become apparent until Mr. Wilson as President developed his legislative programs. He wrote practically all of the 1916 platform himself and felt privileged to do so as leader of the Democratic party.

Two planks on the 1912 platform Mr. Wilson never mentioned during that campaign. One was that which pledged the party to a constitutional amendment restricting a President of the United States to a single term and the other that which upheld the action of the Democrats in enacting a law exempting American vessels from payment of Panama Canal tolls. Mr. Wilson believed that the discussion of the one term plank was none of his affair because if the party chose it could repeal that plank in a subsequent convention — and it was only binding upon party in convention assembled and not upon individuals who inevitably would be compelled to accept the party's decision. The Democratic party — not Woodrow Wilson — reversed itself in 1916 by nominating for a second term the man who in the judgment of the delegates had made a worthy record in a single term. Similarly Mr. Wilson held that the 1912 plank relating to Panama Canal tolls was merely and off-hand endorsement of the action of the Democrats in Congress and that if the Democrats on Capitol Hill in their wisdom, choose to reverse themselves, the party would be compelled to approve that reversal.

Throughout the campaign Mr. Wilson felt a certain admiration for many of the planks in the Bull Moose platform. After he was elected he did not fail to seek the support of many of those who had voted the Bull Moose ticket by striving to meet the wishes of the progressive leaders, men and women, who had supported the third party.

Mr. Wilson's praise for the third party platform was ungrudging. The author and several other newspaper men were seated with Governor Wilson on a train going to New York two days before the election in 1912 when someone in the group, realizing that no one of us would be home on election day, raised the indiscreet question of how each one would vote if he had the opportunity. Fortunately, another wisely suggested that the vote be taken on the question of platforms rather than individuals and, when the author stated that he would vote neither the Republican nor the Democratic ticket in 1912, but the Bull Moose ticket because of its platform, Mr. Wilson with a twinkle in his eye admitted there was a great deal to be said in favor of that view-point.

Running throughout Mr. Wilson's political careers is a streak of independence which did not bind him to the Democratic party as a lifelong proposition. It is not difficult to conceive of him as the candidate of some party other than the Democratic. He sensed the division of groups in American politics along the lines of conservatives and radicals, reactionaries and progressives, standpatters and liberals.

Parties, in Mr. Wilson's judgment, depended entirely for their appeal upon the leadership given them. Just as many sincere Republicans finally became persuaded that they could accomplish more inside of the Republican party toward making it progressive than outside, so did Mr. Wilson become convinced that he could rid the Democratic party of some of its old fashioned conservatism and make it the instrumentality of progressivivism and liberalism.

Although Mr. Wilson was an excellent speaker, eloquent and ingenious in his ability to make impromptu addresses, he really did not enjoy stump speaking or back-platform talks. His audiences were never aware of that fact. Every outdoor meeting was an ordeal for him. Nor did he like to prepare speeches in advance, preferring to map out addresses with a few notes ahead of time and trusting to his power of concentration in developing a theme in original fashion as he spoke. This meant that his best speeches were made when he had an attentive audience or when he spoke in a small hall where quiet could be assured. The speeches sounded well and read well. He never edited them after delivery. Newspaper men who traveled with him were impressed again and again by his versatility in handling from day to day the same topic in a different way. If his speeches were to be examined and compared it would be found that while he employed the same argument he never used the same phraseology. Reporters never knew what he was going to say — they found themselves listening always for the unexpected.

Sometimes the reporters used to feel that he was conscious of their presence and that he felt the necessiyt of making every speech different so that he would not seem to them to be repeating. Each campaign held the interest of those who were reporting it and in this respect Mr. Wilson's publicity sense, which was none too good as a whole, was especially effective.

Election night, 1912, was about as uninteresting and undramatic an occasion as it was important to the man who was the chief figure in it. Possibly it was that Mr. Wilson felt confident of the result and possibly it was Mr. Wilson's characteristic ability to disguise his true feelings. But were it not for the student body of Princeton University who came marching down to the little cottage on Cleveland Lane, a stone's throw from the house where Grover Cleveland lived and died, the incident migh have passed into history without even a cheer of enthusiasm or a note of exultation of any kind.

To the modest little cottage on Cleveland Lane, came the torch-light procession, with fire and drum, singing, yelling, and giving to the whole atmosphere more of the appearance of an athletic victory than a political celebration. Students of Princeton will parade anyhow on the slightest provocation and the fact that a graduate had been elected President of the United States gave them a thrilling excuse.

Down the same streets students had tripped in the days when General Washington received the thanks of the Continental Congress meeting at Nassau Hall after the Revolution. It was in the same environment that James Madison, another President of the United States, had lived. More recently —only five years before election night 1912 — the students had marched to the home of Grover Cleveland to greet him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. The last President of the United States elected on the Democratic ticket and the first Democrat to be elected since then—both had been a vital part of Princeton.

Only a few persons were admitted to the Wilson cottage, mostly newspaper men who had accompanied the Governor during his presidential campaign. Except for the ticking of a telegraph instrument in the library one would have believed it was a social evening in the Wilson home.

Serenaded by the students, Woodrow Wilson made his first speech that night as the elected chief executive of the American people. It was an impromptu address but it paralleled the words of his second inauguration address more than four years later. He said then in 1912 what he said in 1916—he did not feel the thrill of triumph but a sense only of solemn responsibility.

Day by day we had our conferences with the President elect. His answers to our questions were general — he was feeling his way. His first impulse was to get away from it all and think alone. This tendency, not unlike that of the artist who seeks solitude or the literary genius who locks himself in his study for uninterrupted thought, was noticeable on later occasions when Mr. Wilson was face to face with a crisis. When the Lusitania was sunk, he shut himself off immediately from the hue and cry of war and detached himself from the fighting passion in the very atmosphere. Alone on the front seat of his automobile into the woods he fled to get a proper perspective on what had occurred.

Off to Bermuda, presumably on a vacation, went the President elect as soon as elected, but the real purpose of the journey was to find a quiet place in which to think out a course of action. On the steamer enroute to Bermuda, and in the life of the Wilson household during the month's sojourn in the beautiful Paget section of Bermuda, the Wilsons revealed themselves as truly democratic. They were innocently unaware of the burdens of officialdom.

All the correspondents who made the daily trip to the Wilson home found a delightful family circle,—in fact one of the embarrassments from the newspaper man's viewpoint was the fact that Mr. Wilson accepted the correspondents as social visitors then rather than as business callers. Many a visit which was begun with the avowed object of getting news from the President-elect turned out in vain because the charm and attractiveness of the drawing room where Mr. Wilson, his wife and daughters participated in a discussion of everything except news. This effectively prevented the scribes from conducting their usual cross-examination.

There is no doubt that Mrs. Wilson won the friendship of every one of the correspondents. On more than one occasion she smoothed out a difference between the newspaper men and her husband. She was their friend throughout and sympathized with them in the embarassing duty of pursuing a President-elect while he was trying to get a needed rest.

(The next chapter tells why Mr. Wilson chose Bryan as Secretary of State—The beginnings of currency legislation.)

FORD PRODUCTION IS BELOW EXPECTATIONS

Detroit, March 8.—March production of the Ford Motor Company probably will be somewhat short of the figure previously indicated. Clogged roads in the country districts have held back retail sales and production has not been expaned as planned, in order to give the sales department a chance to catch up. Therefore the Ford Company will not reach for some time its widely heralded goal of 10,000 cars a day. The March output is expected to be about 185,000 units. On the other hand, the companies manufacturing the Paige, Hudson and Chevrolet cars have heavier schedules for March than in February. Fear of further price increases continues to be the most potent sales stimulant for some cars. Figures collected by the Employers Association show there are 364,5[illegible] men employed in 3,000 Detroit factories. The average wage is exactly $5 a day. Including office workers and clerks it is estimated that the average weekly payroll in Detroit is about $15,000,000, nearly twice as large as in the post war boom days.

SHELVES SWEPT CLEAN OF WINTER MERCHANDISE

Chicago, March 8.—The big department stores and even the small retailers here expect to start their spring selling campaigns this year with winter goods and specialties cleared off their shelves. Sales the past winter have been from 10 to 40 per cent heavier in all lines than ever before, according to an estimate made here today. An informal survey just completed shows a large increase in the number of mercantile and specialties stores in Chicago. Most of the latter are stores dealing exclusively in radio equipment. A new record high price for real estate in the heart of the retail shopping district has been established in the sale of property with a sixty foot frontage on State street at $5,666 a front foot.

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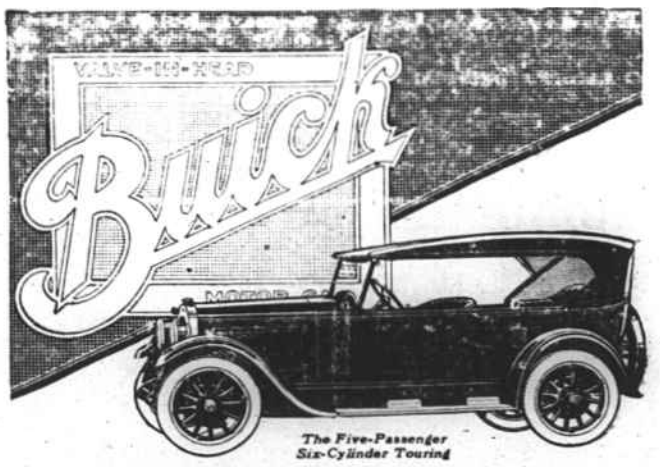

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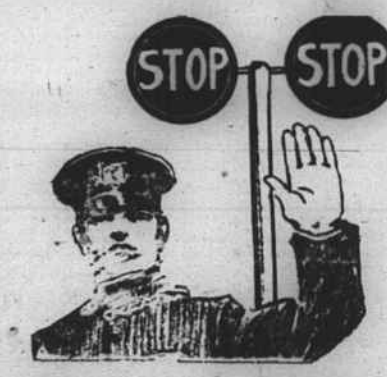

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