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Democracy Reborn

Some observations on the re-election of Woodrow Wilson to the Presidency of the United States of America

By J. A. STEVENSON

After a political contest whose bitterness was almost unparalleled and whose result wavered in the balance for several days, Woodrow Wilson seems now assured of re-election as President of the United States by a substantial plurality. If, as the London "Nation" truly said, liberals and progressives all over the world watched with sinking hearts the early returns which appeared to presage his certain defeat, they are now entitled to a compensatory deep elation at his victory. It means that for four more years the great American republic will see her destinies guided by principle and intelligence rather than by prejudice and opportunism, and that the leadership of a mind which is at once keenly progressive and sincerely democratic will during a most critical period of the world's history be at the service of what is now its strongest political unit. For the citizens of the United States it means that the liberal and enlightened policies which he had planned and translated into legislation, having now received the confirmation of popular approval will have the opportunity of a fair trial and gradually become woven into the fabric of the national life. It means that the elevation of American politics to a better plane and the substitution of intelligent discussion of public affairs for fruitless partisan feuds will continue and be extended. It means that the forces of special privilege and financial piracy, greedy exploitation, rampant jingoism and crazy militarism instead of usurping control of the fate of a vast community will have to battle for their very existence and be perpetually on the defensive. To use a military metaphor, the initiative has at last completely passed to the party of progress and reform. Hitherto their energies were devoted to the defence and conservation of popular rights, now they can choose their own time and method to attack a variety of ancient abuses.

United States Prosperous

The United States is at present enjoying an unprecedented boom of prosperity and at such times a community is wont to view reform and radical measures with stern disapproval. In his term of office, Wilson by his firm leadership which gave the necessary impetus to a somewhat lukewarm majority in Congress had instigated and passed into law a variety of far reaching reforms infringing on many privileged preserves; he had thereby offended a multitude of interests whose self-seeking motto was "Let well enough alone"; he had followed out the ideals of his "New Freedom" speeches and allowed no fear of the disfavor of privileged classes to stay his hand. He was an avowed and daring radical and as such became the object of a campaign of violence and vituperation in which old friends as well as enemies joined the serried hosts of the plutocracy to encompass his defeat. For virulence the only parallel to the anti-Wilson campaign is to be found in the 1910 budget struggle in Britain when the Tory aristocracy set their whole energies to smash Lloyd George. The processes and results were similar, in each case the attack was made too personal; the assailants did not recognize that the object of their wrath was merely the spearhead of a vast popular movement and the assault ended in ignominious defeat. That the American electorate should give Woodrow Wilson 50 per cent. more votes than in 1912 in face of a strong alternative candidate is abundant proof that the

political temper of our neighbors is steadily inclined to radicalism and reform. The existence of Woodrow Wilson and his success as a reforming president has destroyed the need for a separate Progressive party, hence its sudden disappearance. Did we enjoy a vigorous Liberal leadership at Ottawa there would be little talk of separate Western parties.

Artificial Party Alignment

Hitherto politics in the United States as here have suffered severely from the artificial condition of the party alignment. It was based on tradition and on outworn habits of thought rather than principle. The solid South was democratic; New England and the middle west were solidly republican and having the greater share of the voters usually prevailed. Each party contained in its ranks large elements whose temperaments and ideals were totally alien to the beliefs and policy of their avowed party. Nominally the Democratic was the party of reform, but it offered no real promise of the needed national amelioration till Wilson came to breathe new life into its ailing and timid body. There are still conservative reactionaries in the Democratic camp and sound radicals in the Republican ranks, but there has obviously been a thorough sifting and transmutation and now for the first time there is a marked reality in the cleavage between the American parties which alone can ensure a healthy national life. There is now a Conservative party, the Republican standing for extreme "preparedness" jingoism, high tariffs, the domination of Wall Street and all the other appendages of greedy capitalism and narrow nationalism, and there is a liberal or radical party, the Democratic, pledged to moderate schemes of national defence, low tariffs and aversion to aggressive expansionist imperialism in addition to social amelioration and progressive improvement in the national organization; in general, its aim and ideal is to adapt modern institutions to the needs of a modern community or change them for others if they cannot be adapted.

First Class Leadership

For some years to come the leadership of the world in industry and finance will be with the United States. Ten years ago experienced observers prophesied this without foreseeing the effects of the war and thought such primary could be worthily sustained, but nowhere could they discern the corollary of that first class political leadership which was necessary for true national greatness. Such leadership has now been found in President Wilson and the opportunities which lie before him are unparalleled. Great as have been his services to his own country, his services to humanity can be infinitely greater and his path should lead to a wider field and a permanent place in the world's history. A sorely tried and stricken universe cries out for the saving assistance of his democratic faith and far-seeing courage, fortified, as they now must be, by his triumphant return. Sometimes since 1914 his admirers in the British Empire have felt that a wind which had seemed willing to serve the cause of humanity rather than narrow national ends had turned to favor the creed of selfish nationalism, but they have realized in part his gigantic difficulties and problems and preferred to trust one whose intellectual prepossessions must be wholly hostile to the brazen autocracies of



WOODROW WILSON