

# PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>

## COUNTRY LIFE AND CONSERVATION

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THESE is no body of our people whose interests are more inextricably interwoven with the interests of all the people than is the case with the farmers. The Country Life Commission should be revived with greatly increased powers; its abandonment was a severe blow to the interests of our people. The welfare of the farmer is a basic need of this Nation. It is the men from the farm who in the past have taken the lead in every great movement within this Nation, whether in time of war or in time of peace. It is well to have our cities prosper, but it is not well if they prosper at the expense of the country. I am glad to say that in many sections of our country there has been an extraordinary revival of recent years in intelligent interest in and work for those who live in the open country. In this movement the lead must be taken by the farmers themselves; but our people as a whole, through their governmental agencies, should back the farmers. Everything possible should be done to better the economic condition of the farmer, and also to increase the social value of the life of the farmer, the farmer's wife, and their children. The burdens of labor and loneliness bear heavily on the women in the country; their welfare should be the especial concern of all of us. Everything possible should be done to make life in the country profitable so as to be attractive from the economic standpoint and also to give an outlet among farming people for those forms of activity which now tend to make life in the cities especially desirable for ambitious men and women. There should be just the same chance to live as full, as well-rounded, and as highly useful lives in the country as in the city.

The Government must co-operate with the farmer to make the farm more productive. There must be no skinning of the soil. The

farm should be left to the farmer's son in a better, and not worse, condition because of its cultivation. Moreover, every invention and improvement, every discovery and economy, should be at the service of the farmer in the work of production; and, in addition, he should be helped to co-operate in business fashion with his fellows, so that the money paid by the consumer for the product of the soil shall to as large a degree as possible go into the pockets of the man who raised that product from the soil. So long as the farmer leaves co-operative activities with their profit-sharing to the city man of business, so long will the foundations of wealth be undermined and the comforts of enlightenment be impossible in the country communities. In every respect this Nation has to learn the lessons of efficiency in production and distribution, and of avoidance of waste and destruction; we must develop and improve instead of exhausting our resources. It is entirely possible by improvements in production, in the avoidance of waste, and in business methods on the part of the farmer to give him an increased income from his farm while at the same time reducing to the consumer the price of the articles raised on the farm. Important although education is everywhere, it has a special importance in the country. The country school must fit the country life; in the country, as elsewhere, education must be hitched up with life. The country church and the country Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations have great parts to play. The farmers must own and work their own land; steps must be taken at once to put a stop to the tendency towards absentee landlordism and tenant farming; this is one of the most imperative duties confronting the Nation. The question of rural banking and rural credits is also of immediate importance.

There can be no greater issue than that of Conservation in this country. Just as we must conserve our men, women, and children,

<sup>1</sup>In a series of editorials, of which this is one, Mr. Roosevelt is repeating in essence the statement of his political faith made before the Progressive Convention at Chicago.

so we must conserve the resources of the land on which they live. We must conserve the soil so that our children shall have a land that is more and not less fertile than that our fathers dwelt in. We must conserve the forests, not by disuse but by use, making them more valuable at the same time that we use them. We must conserve the mines. Moreover, we must insure so far as possible the use of certain types of great natural resources for the benefit of the people as a whole. The public should not alienate its fee in the water power which will be of incalculable consequence as a source of power in the immediate future. The Nation and the States within their several spheres should by immediate legislation keep the fee of the water power, leasing its use only for a reasonable length of time on terms that will secure the interests of the public. Just as the Nation has gone into the work of irrigation in the West, so it should go into the work of helping reclaim the swamp lands of the South. We should undertake the complete development and control of the Mississippi as a National work, just as we have undertaken the work of building the Panama Canal. We can use the plant, and we can use the human experience, left free by the completion of the Panama Canal

in so developing the Mississippi as to make it a mighty highroad of commerce, and a source of fructification and not of death to the rich and fertile lands lying along its lower length.

In the West, the forests, the grazing lands, the reserves of every kind, should be so handled as to be in the interests of the actual settler, the actual home-maker. He should be encouraged to use them at once, but in such a way as to preserve and not exhaust them. We do not intend that our natural resources shall be exploited by the few against the interests of the many, nor do we intend to turn them over to any man who will wastefully use them by destruction, and leave to those who come after us a heritage damaged by just so much. The man in whose interests we are working is the small farmer and settler, the man who works with his own hands, who is working not only for himself but for his children, and who wishes to leave to them the fruits of his labor. His permanent welfare is the prime factor for consideration in developing the policy of Conservation: for our aim is to preserve our natural resources for the public as a whole, for the average man and the average woman who make up the body of the American people.