

A NAKED ISSUE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE contest for the Republican nomination has now narrowed down to a naked issue of right and wrong; for the issue is simply whether or not we shall permit a system of naked fraud, of naked theft from the people, to triumph.

I have made this contest on two great principles—first, the right of the people to rule, and therefore in the exercise of their deliberate judgment to control their Government and their Governmental agents; and, second, their duty so to rule as to bring about not only political but social and industrial justice. I have endeavored everywhere to appeal, not to the politicians, but to the people themselves, and to get their judgment, stating scores of times that I would do my best to convert them to my way of thinking, that I should acquiesce as a matter of course in their judgment if it was adverse, but that if their judgment was favorable I did not intend tamely to submit to an effort by the politicians—that is, by the bosses acting as the representatives of special privilege—to throw aside the verdict of the people and substitute a fake verdict of their own. This is precisely what Mr. Barnes, Mr. McKinley, and their associates and representatives on the National Committee at Chicago are now attempting; but I am not prepared to believe they have the support of a majority of the Committee.

I freely admit that many upright and honorable men have disagreed with me on the issues which I have raised. From the foundation of our Government to the present time there have been plenty of men of high character who have taken the other side. Many such men at the present day disbelieve in the power of the people to rule; and other men of high character, devoted to what I personally regard as an outworn system of

political philosophy, disbelieve in any efficient action by Government to remedy social injustice; others, who are convinced adherents of the *laissez faire* dogma of political economy, conscientiously put property rights above human rights—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they do not believe that there is anything real in the talk about human rights, and feel that in actual fact the rights of humanity are best preserved by securing the rights of property. Men of this stamp, and many other men of ultra-conservative temperament, are shocked when I point out that certain courts have done cruel injustice, social and industrial, and are genuinely alarmed at the proposals I have made to secure to the people themselves the right to act as ultimate arbiters in certain classes of Constitutional cases where the State Legislature and the State courts disagree as to the power of the people to do justice under the Constitution.

On this platform I freely admit that honorable and upright men can differ from me, although I strongly contend that the doctrines I uphold are essential if our country is to be kept as a true democracy. But during the last six weeks Mr. Taft's campaign has been carried on, on his behalf, by those behind him—I do not say merely those under him, for I think some of the interests to which I allude are really over him and not under him—in such fashion as to make the contest a far simpler one. The talk of the Taft managers, and even of Mr. Taft himself, the utterances of the great dailies, especially the great metropolitan dailies which are controlled or influenced by Wall Street, and the action threatened by many members of the National Committee, all combine to show that the backers of Mr. Taft realize that they have lost in the appeal to the people, and are

now deliberately conspiring to steal the victory from the people. In a government by popular vote, where under certain definite limitations the majority is supposed to rule, such theft is quite as great a crime against the body politic as any species of commercial robbery—indeed, in some ways it is worse. This is recognized by law as regards elections. It is just as true as regards nominations; but as yet the law has not grown so far as to be able to control nominating conventions as it does elections. There is, however, not the slightest moral difference between controlling a nomination for the Presidency by fraudulent and improper means in seating and unseating delegates, and controlling the election to the Presidency by fraud at the polls.

The Republican Convention to nominate a candidate is now about to meet at Chicago. The National Committee has already met. Properly speaking, the National Committee's only function is honestly to judge what delegates have *prima facie* the right to a seat and to suggest the name of a temporary chairman who shall call the Convention to order. Practically the attempt is being made by the Taft managers to use the present National Committee for the purpose of unseating honestly elected delegates and of seating enough fraudulently elected delegates, especially from States where there is no real Republican party, to secure the nomination for Mr. Taft. Such a nomination would morally stand on precisely the same plane as any election secured in New York State in the old Tweed days by fraudulent voting at the polls.

The members of the National Committee were chosen four years ago. They were not chosen by popular vote, they were chosen by the delegates to the last Republican National Convention. Practically none of the delegates were themselves chosen by popular primaries. These men represent the choice of the politicians of four years ago. In some cases these politicians were good and wise men, honestly endeavoring to represent the people; and the National Committeemen thus chosen were men of the highest character and standing, who have acted accordingly. In other cases the politicians did not act from good motives; and certain National Committeemen represent bosses and special privilege in their most odious forms. In many cases the National Committeeman, chosen under the old system, stands for the old alliance of

bossism and privilege, although the State which he is supposed to represent has this very spring under the direct primary by vote of the people declared in the most emphatic terms against bossism and privilege. Pennsylvania and New Jersey, for instance, have gone overwhelmingly against bossism, sending at the recent primaries ninety-six Roosevelt delegates and only eight Taft delegates to the Chicago Convention. Nevertheless the two National Committeemen of these two States represent the old bosses and are standing for Mr. Taft, and following the lead of Mr. Taft's lieutenant in the Chicago fight, Mr. Barnes—than whom no man in the United States better illustrates all that is most offensive and objectionable in bossism. The mere recital of these obvious facts furnishes its own commentary. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey the Republican party, having spoken at the primaries, repudiated Mr. Taft by a vote of nearly two to one; yet the National Committeemen from these two States chosen four years ago by the politicians of the two States are assuming to speak for the rank and file of the Republican party who have just overwhelmingly defeated both of them when they were candidates for the Convention. These two beaten and discredited would-be delegates to the National Convention now assume to cast the votes of New Jersey and Pennsylvania in deciding the make-up of that very Convention in which the people have decided that they are not to sit.

Moreover, of the thirty-nine members of the National Committee who followed the lead of the Taft manager in the vote on publicity at the first meeting in Chicago, fifteen have been defeated and repudiated in their States, four represent territories, insular possessions, having no vote, and ten are from Southern States that have given no electoral vote for the Republican party. These twenty-nine, constituting two more than a majority of the Committee, will be without political standing after this week and have no popular vote behind them.

Yet in a recent speech in New Jersey Mr. Taft stated that he believed he would be nominated because he believed that the National Committee would support him. Apparently Mr. Taft was not aware of the full significance of his words. He is himself being used by men who know thoroughly what they want and what they mean, who had doubtless told Mr. Taft that the National

Committee would be for him, but with no idea that he would repeat the statement in public. The real meaning of such a statement is that an appeal from the people lies to this body of fifty men chosen not by the people but by the politicians four years ago. I have made my appeal to the people of the States where there is a real Republican party. Mr. Taft, unwarily stating the real truth of his canvass, announces that he puts his trust not in the people but in a body of fifty men chosen four years ago over whom the rank and file of the Republican party to-day have no power whatever, and who, as a matter of fact, have been in case after case by overwhelming majorities repudiated by the Republican party at the primaries just held.

Direct Presidential preference primaries have been held in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, California, and Oregon. In these eleven States nearly 2,400,000 voters have freely expressed their choice for President, and their individual preferences have been recorded. Among the 2,400,000 there is a majority of nearly 800,000 against Mr. Taft. These are all Republican States, which have ordinarily gone Republican in Presidential elections, and in them the vote against Mr. Taft has been nearly two to one, and ten of the eleven States voted against him, while in the eleventh, Massachusetts, the vote was practically even. Furthermore, in Washington, New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kansas, Minnesota, and Missouri there were primaries held under such conditions as to give a rough approximation of the popular preference among Republicans. In every one of these States except New Hampshire, and including both Maine and Vermont, the popular majority was against Mr. Taft, and the delegates from them are three to one against him. Maryland, a State which has twice divided its electoral vote in Presidential elections, went against Mr. Taft on the popular vote and sent a solid delegation against him.

There remain in the North certain Rocky Mountain States, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Indiana, and Michigan, in which no direct primaries were held, and where under the old convention system the politicians have more or less complete control. In these States Mr. Taft has a substantial majority of the delegates. There remain also the Southern States which are

Democratic. In certain of these, in North Carolina, for instance, there is a real Republican party. North Carolina went solidly against Mr. Taft. But there are seven States—South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas—where two years ago the whole Republican vote was but thirty thousand. Mr. Taft's manager, Mr. McKinley, claims for Mr. Taft about 140 votes from these seven States. These votes represent no Republican party whatever. They represent nothing but Mr. Taft's own office-holders and the survivors of the carpetbag régime, which so deeply discredited the Republican party in the past. On Mr. McKinley's own showing, Mr. Taft can be nominated only by these votes, which represent literally nothing.

To recapitulate, then. In the Republican States which have had direct primaries nearly two and a half million Republicans have voted, and of these nearly two-thirds have voted against Mr. Taft. In the other Republican States where the primaries have been such as to give the people, not an entire chance but some small chance to express their will, the showing has been almost as heavily against Mr. Taft. In but two of these States (twenty-one all told, including Maryland), and then by small majorities, did the voters vote in favor of Mr. Taft. In the aggregate, the vote was nearly two to one against him; in some States it went as high as five or six to one against him. The other States in the North which sent Taft delegations were States in which the Republican voters had no chance to vote, or where, as in Michigan and Indiana, they were deliberately cheated by the Taft supporters out of their right to vote. In Ohio very flagrant action was taken, which, while it may not technically come under the head of cheating, represented such outrageous defiance of the popular will as to call for the condemnation of every honorable man. The State went by over thirty thousand majority against Mr. Taft at the primaries, but the Taft managers had refused to permit a vote to be taken at the primaries for the delegates at large, and in the State Convention by adroit political trickery they sent six Taft delegates to vote at Chicago for the man whom his own State had just repudiated by thirty thousand majority.

I fail myself to see how an honorable man can profit by or take part in such a piece of trickery as this Ohio State Convention

"victory." In the same way, I fail to see how an honorable man can profit by or connive at or approve of the farcical New York county primaries, where the Taft organization removed two hundred inspectors of elections because they were suspected of being Roosevelt men, and left the polls in the absolute control of the Taft men—an act which should be held to create much more than merely a presumption of fraud. But the case was far worse in Washington, in Indiana, in Michigan. The Indianapolis "Star" was originally a Taft paper, and was supporting Mr. Taft at the time of the Indiana State Convention. But in a temperate and fair-minded editorial it stated that the Convention was fraudulent, that the Roosevelt delegates were cheated out of their seats, and that the Taft delegates were unfairly elected. The Spokane "Spokesman-Review" was originally a Taft paper, although, as I understand it, it has not supported Mr. Taft since the Taft people affected to hold what was obviously a fraudulent State Convention after they had been beaten in the primaries three or four to one, and in some places eight to one.

In many of these cases the Taft delegates represent absolutely nothing but fraud as vulgar, as brazen, and as cynically open as any ever committed by the Tweed régime in New York forty-odd years ago. No honorable man can profit by or connive at these frauds and escape having his honor tarnished. This applies not merely to the participants and would-be beneficiaries, big and little, of the Chicago Convention; it applies also to every man who has hitherto supported Mr. Taft, and especially to every college president, to every man who pretends to preach high ideals, to every man who asserts that he stands for decency in politics. Whoever—especially among these classes—fails now at once to do his part in publicly denouncing these actions and in helping create a public opinion which will refuse to tolerate them is estopped from ever again preaching ideals, estopped from ever again professing devotion to the cause of honest government and civic decency. The man who stands for the practices by which Messrs. Barnes, McKinley, Penrose, and their allies now seek to nominate Mr. Taft will make himself an object of derision if he hereafter states that he believes in honesty in politics or preaches a high standard of public morality.

Mr. Taft cannot be nominated unless he gets the overwhelming majority of the rotten

borough States which never cast a Republican electoral vote, and in which the delegations represent only the office-holders. Even if he gets practically all the delegates from these States, he cannot be nominated unless, by deliberate fraud in such States as Indiana, Michigan, and Washington, not to mention others, the Republicans are defrauded of their right to express their preference as to who is to get their votes. He can be nominated only by disregarding the expressed will of an overwhelming majority of two and a half millions of Republicans who, from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania to Illinois and California, have voted as to their choice for President. Under such circumstances his nomination would represent the overriding of the expressed will of the people by Messrs. Barnes, Penrose, Guggenheim, Powell Clayton, and the rest.

The loyalty of members of the Republican party is due to the deliberate choice of the majority of that party. It is not due to Messrs. Barnes, Penrose, Guggenheim, and the rest when they misrepresent and invert the will of the party. The foundation of free government is the right of the people under the forms of law to express their will and have that will honestly recorded. Messrs. Barnes, McKinley, and their allies, on behalf of Mr. Taft, are now deliberately trying to defraud the people of this right. I do not believe that they will convert the National Committee to their views; and if the National Committee is converted, I do not believe that the Convention will support the revolutionary and fraudulent action of the National Committee. But I wish to call attention to the fact that it is Messrs. Barnes, McKinley, and their associates, on behalf of Mr. Taft, who are engaged in the effort to perpetrate the gravest wrong upon the Republican party and upon the people of the United States, and that in such action they stand, not as the representatives of the Republican party, but as individuals misrepresenting that party, with no claim to loyalty from it, and whom it is the bounden duty of that party to repudiate. I wish also to call the attention of the honest men who have hitherto supported Mr. Taft that the issue is now one of naked right and wrong, and that they cannot support or acquiesce in the action of those who, under the circumstances given above, are seeking to nominate Mr. Taft, without being false to the principles of good citizenship.