

THE FIFTY-FIRST CONGRESS *

FOR the last two years my duty has been to administer a non-partisan law. As they were two years of complete Republican supremacy in every branch of the government, it has naturally fallen to my lot to battle with many of the most powerful chiefs and some of the most influential elements in my own party. This has not been a pleasant feature of my task; yet I think I can conscientiously say that I have never shrunk from it; and that in so far as lay in me, without fear or favor, and with complete disregard of all partisan or personal considerations, I have maintained against party friends and party foes alike the law with the supervision of which I was in part intrusted. So I think I have earned the right to speak a few words as a Republican this evening. Perhaps, had we been victorious last fall, I would not have been present now; but surely I can claim the privilege of standing up with my friends in time of defeat.

When I last spoke at this club it was at a meeting held to welcome Mr. Saxton, our champion for State ballot reform. It is a pleasure to me that to-night we have with us as one of our guests the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge, champion of national ballot reform. It seems to me that one of the most important problems which this nation has to solve is that of honest elections, and I am for radical measures. I always greatly regretted the acceptance by the Republican legislature of

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this State of Governor Hill's amendments to the ballot-reform law. They worked great harm and have done much to destroy the usefulness of the law. We ought to have stood straight out and let him bear the responsibility for the defeat of the measure. I hope to see our State law made as good as that of Massachusetts.

More than that, I hope to see some day a national ballot-reform law for congressional and presidential elections, a law which shall not interfere in the least with State or local elections, and which shall not be in any wise sectional, bearing upon all States and districts alike, and which shall secure, in so far as legislation can secure, honest and pure elections; a law which shall threaten the evils that exist in one State or section as much as those that exist in another, which shall tell as heavily against "blocks of five" as against tissue ballots; which shall tell equally against the policy of bribery and the policy of the shotgun, against the purchase of elections by money no less than against the carrying of elections by violence and fraud.

The Republican party during its two years' lease of absolute power has been confronted by a menacing evil, which it has met boldly and successfully. I mean the movement for an inflated, and therefore dishonest, currency, and it is a matter of comparative indifference whether the fight was made for the unlimited coinage of a short-weight dollar or for paper money outright. The demand for the unlimited coinage of depreciated silver is simply the phase in the struggle against honest money which happens to be uppermost at the moment. During the last year there has been a perfect craze on this subject, which has swept over the West and South, and has affected somewhat the Middle States. Fortunately for the honor and good faith of the country, it

was the Republican party which was in power, and the Republican party steadfastly withstood the demand.

The Silver bill made its appearance in Congress and received the support of nine-tenths of the Democratic members. It was defeated by the Republican speaker of the Lower House, backed by the nearly solid Republican strength of that House. Only the other day the most prominent member of the Democratic party, ex-President Cleveland, came out in a letter against free coinage. He has received and has deserved warm commendation for having written that letter; but it must be remembered that he simply followed along the path which had been cleared by the Republicans. He merely spoke in favor of what they had already done. He deserves credit for having written a letter against the bill for the coinage of free silver, but infinitely more credit belongs to those who actually killed that bill—that is, to Speaker Reed and the Republican majority of the Fifty-first Congress. As so often happens, the party which did a good action had to suffer for it at the moment.

The Republican Congress withstood the demand for an inflated and dishonest currency, and it was its action in this regard that was largely responsible for the Democratic victory last year. In the West, and wherever the Farmers' Alliance had sway elsewhere—for the Farmers' Alliance threw its weight solidly against the Republicans—the part played by the tariff in our defeat last fall was much less than the part played by the demand for an inflated currency and for what is miscalled cheap money—that kind of cheap money which in the end is dear to every honest man, and dearest to the man of small means.

But the point upon which I wish to lay especial stress

in speaking to you to-night is the effect of the action of the Fifty-first Congress upon parliamentary government, that upon government by popular legislative bodies all over the world. Beyond question the historian who in the future shall write a history of representative government through a legislative assembly will have to credit Speaker Reed and the Republican majority of the Fifty-first Congress with having achieved one of the greatest victories for the cause which has ever been achieved, which, moreover, was achieved at precisely the right time. Of recent years parliamentary or representative government all over the world has been threatened with a growing paralysis. Legislative bodies have tended more and more to become wholly inefficient for the purposes of legislation. The prime feature in causing this unhealthy growth has been the discovery by minorities that under the old rules of parliamentary procedure they could put a complete stop to all legislative action. Remember what a legislative body is. It is a body whose first duty is to act, not to talk. The talking comes in merely as an adjunct to the acting.

Legislative government is, as its name implies, government by the enactment of laws after debate. The debate is to be used for the purpose of assisting legislation, for procuring wise legislation. The minute it is perverted from these legitimate and lawful ends, and used to stop all legislation, or any legislation of which the minority disapproves, it becomes improper and should be suppressed with a strong hand. We have been tending to develop legislative bodies wherein the majority should only be able to do such things as the minority choose to permit. The establishment of such a principle, of course, upsets our whole theory of government. If the minority is as powerful as the majority

there is no use of having political contests at all, for there is no use in having a majority.

Here, no less than in England and Continental Europe, wherever there have been representative institutions, this tendency has been growing stronger and stronger. High credit belongs to Mr. Reed and to his colleagues for having given an example of a legislative body that was not inefficient, where the majority could legislate, no matter what course of obstruction the minority pursued. In the Fiftieth Congress, the last Congress over which Mr. Carlisle presided, we saw as humiliating a spectacle as American eyes could look upon. We saw one man, Mr. Weaver, keeping the whole Congress stationary for two weeks, blocking the wheels of the government for that period, because the majority declined to take up some measure he wished, and that nerveless, helpless, unwieldy majority looked at Mr. Weaver and shook its head and scolded him and remained impotent. Mr. Reed's rulings, sustained as they have been by the House, have rendered it impossible in the future for any obstructionists of the Weaver type to bring the wheels of government to a standstill.

The talk about freedom of debate having been interfered with is all baseless. As a matter of fact, there was more debate in the Fifty-first Congress than in the Fiftieth, and three times the debate that there was in any Congress held during the time of the Civil War. Often much of the time that could have been used for legitimate debate was wasted by the obstructive and dilatory tactics of the minority, and for this that minority—whether composed solely of Democrats, or, as in some cases, of both Democrats and Republicans—was wholly and solely responsible. If three days' de-

bate are allowed on a measure, and that period offers ample opportunity for the minority to express its views, and if then the minority from pure factiousness spends two days in fighting for an increase of time to four days, and thereby reduces the debate practically to one day, the minority itself is responsible, and has only itself to blame.

Filibustering is like lynch-law; it is something which in extreme and exceptional instances may be defensible, but which when followed systematically produces nothing but anarchy and outrage and the paralysis of all the governmental functions of the body in which it takes place. When followed out systematically it should receive the severest censure. To protest against the tyranny of a speaker and a majority in the House for putting down filibustering and riding roughshod over the filibusterers is like protesting against the tyranny of a policeman who arrests a thief; and to hold the speaker in any wise responsible for the inevitable friction and disorder produced by the suppression of filibustering is a good deal like holding a sheriff to account because in capturing a dangerous and brutal criminal it is sometimes impossible to avoid a fight. Besides, to us in New York who are acquainted with the procedure of the New York legislature, the outcry against the tyranny of the majority in Congress seems simply farcical. No rule against filibustering or dilatory legislation that has been adopted in Congress and no practice under a rule in Congress begin to approach in severity the rules and practice of the New York legislature on the same subject. The mildest speaker in the Assembly at Albany, backed by the meekest majority, would be considered hopelessly inefficient if tenfold more rigor in putting down obstruction was not displayed than has

been displayed by Mr. Reed and the Republican majority in the last Congress.

This Fifty-first Congress passed one law which will be remembered for many years after acts which now seem of infinitely greater importance have been utterly forgotten. Every American citizen has a right to lift his head a little higher and feel prouder of the country because the Copyright bill has been enacted into law. It was a measure of justice and right; a measure demanded by honor and honesty; one of those measures which distinctly raise the national tone, which give us cause to feel a just pride in the manliness and high-mindedness of the American people. It is a lasting shame to us that this law was not enacted fifty years ago, but it is a great credit to us that it has been enacted now, and as a Republican I cannot say how heartily I rejoice that it was a Republican Congress which passed this measure, which a Republican President recommended and signed. It is a Republican Congress to which the entire credit of enacting the copyright law belongs. The bill was fathered and pushed in the House by Messrs. Simonds, of Connecticut, Adams, of Illinois, and Lodge, of Massachusetts, and in the Senate by Senator Platt, of Connecticut, assisted manfully by Senators Edmunds, Aldrich, Hawley, Wolcott, Hiscock, and many others who could be named.

Yet if any one man more than another is entitled to the credit of its passage, that man is our guest of this evening, ex-Speaker Reed; for it was owing solely to the tremendous influence he wielded as speaker and to his most active and efficient support, and to the fact that by the adoption of the new rules the House had rendered it impossible for an unscrupulous and resolute minority to check any good measure, that the bill passed

through the Lower House and ultimately became a law. I would not for a moment fail to render praise to those Democrats like Senator Butler and Representatives Breckinridge, Cummings, and others of their colleagues who stood up for the law, and I deeply regret to say that a number of Republicans joined with the Democrats under Senators Gorman and Carlisle, and Congressman Roger Q. Mills, who were among the most effective opponents of the bill; but the fact remains that the great mass of the Republicans supported the bill and the great mass of the Democrats opposed it, and that all the active fighting for it was done by the Republican leaders, while all the most prominent Democratic leaders opposed it, tooth and nail. The bill was passed by a Republican Congress. It is a Republican triumph, a Republican success, and its passage reflects honor upon the Republican party, as well as upon the whole American people.

The party in Congress, as elsewhere, must to a certain extent be judged by its own leaders, and we have a right to feel proud of the men who led the fight for us in the Fifty-first Congress. That there should be one or two Republicans of whom we cannot feel proud is only to be expected. We cannot escape from the fact that it was a discredit to the Republican party of the House that Mr. Cannon, of Illinois, should be one of its leaders, and this I say though well aware that on certain points Mr. Cannon has done good work. But, speaking broadly and from a close personal knowledge of and association with the men, I say in all honesty that I question if any legislative body anywhere of recent years has had abler, manlier, braver, and more honest leaders than the men who led the Republican party in the Fifty-first Congress. It is an honor to the Federal Club to have two of them with us to-night. There has been no man in public life who has done more efficient and fearless work for decent government during the past two years than the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge, and ex-Speaker Reed has won his place in history as one of the great leaders of the great Republican party, as a man whose name is entitled to rank high among the first in her long roll-call of honor, as a man who has rendered a service to the nation which will be more and more appreciated as time goes on and its worth is fully understood, and as a man who has laid under a great debt all those all over the world who believe in responsible popular government.