THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE CITIZEN

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE JACKSON BANQUET OKLAHOMA CITY, JANUARY 8, 1906.

BY HENRY M. FURMAN, ADA, I. T.

Mr. Toastmaster and Fellow Democrats:

In the monarchies the people are divided into two classes—sovereigns and subjects. The kings constitute the sovereigns and all others are subjects. When our forefathers threw off the British yoke they decided that politically speaking there should be but one class of people among us—that we would have no subjects and that all citizens should be sovereigns. This sovereignty of the people has no degrees, differences or distinctions, but is equally vested in each citizen. The poorest, the weakest and humblest, stands upon an equality and is as much vested with sovereignty as the richest, the strongest and the most prominent. That this is right in principle cannot be denied. The strong, the rich and the influential can protect themselves. It is the weak, the poor and the humble that need the arm of the law for their refuge and defense. When statehood comes the attitude which the Democratic party assumes upon this question will determine its defeat or triumph in the future state. While the majority of the voters in Oklahoma and Indian Terriory are democratic in sentiment it will not begin to do to assume that we will, can or would carry the state regardless of the principles which we advocate or the antecedents and environments of the candidates upon our ticket. There are over one hundred and fifty thousand voters in Indian Territory. Many thousands of these have never voted in a state election and do not today know how they will cast their maiden votes. It has been some time since the rest of our voters have participated in a state election and it is safe to say that party lines are lying very loosely upon their shoulders. As a rule our people are reading everything that they can get their hands on which has the semblance of reason about it. They are not only doing this but they are discussing what they read. It is the brave and hopeful people who go into a new country and blaze out roads, cut down trees grub up stumps, blast out rocks, conquer the wilderness, build houses and cities and establish civilization. It is the brave and hopeful people who rule this world and make it better, brighter and happier for their having lived in it. It is the brave and hopeful people who will not submit to dictation from any source, but who think and act for themselves. Our people are well informed with reference to current events and the trend of public affairs. They are determined that no advantage shall be given to any interest in the new state and that no honest and useful class shall be discriminated against. They have their minds made up to take an active personal interest in the settlement of public questions and in the nomination of all candidates. If we desire their support no attempt must be made to stifle their voice. This is right, for no man can justly call himself a Democrat who would thwart the will of the people. If we must succeed we must recognize and adapt ourselves to conditions as they exist. Depend upon it, my friends, that the people of the new state are going to demand bottom facts and plain arguments. They are going to look to substance rather than to forms; they are going to be governed by principles rather than by names. They are going to demand the nomination of candidates whose lives have been consistent and in harmony with their election purposes. These are the conditions which we must meet if we would succeed. This is what Thomas Jefferson meant when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive their power from the consent of the governed. Strike down the sovereignty of the citizen and you destroy the ideal of democracy. Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson were abused as though they were pickpockets and sneak thieves. They were denounced as demagogues, anarchists, lunatics and Jacobins because they advocated these views. But they trusted the people and in turn they were trusted by the people. They bravely faced, fought and defeated combinations of power and money which were apparently invincible and who hated and sought to destroy the power of the people and to substitute in its place a political and financial aristocracy. In both cases the feat was regarded as well nigh impossible, but they succeeded alone through the sovereignty of the citizen. Want of time forbids that I should now and here describe the conditions under which Jefferson destroyed the odious and infamous Alien and Sedition laws and under which Jackson struck down the grasping, avaricious and tyrranical pretentions of the United States Bank. The man who thinks that the American people have lost their intelligence, their courage or their patriotism is deceiving himself. Free born American flesh, blood and soul will not suffer always or endure all outrages. The people may be hard to arouse but the hour of their awakening is at hand. Look at the stinging rebuke to and defeat of ring rule in Missouri, in Ohio and in Pennsylvania. Let us profit by these examples and make it our business to see that similar conditions among us will never call for the indignant repudiation of the people.

Our people are informed as to what is going on. They are aware of the fact that powerful combinations have been organized which are defying the majesty and power of the law, and which are seeking to reduce them and their children to a condition of subjects, as degrading and debasing as the vassalage of feudalism, the serfdom of Russia or the peonage of Mexico. They know that our country is honeycombed with the spirit of commercialism which seeks to place the dollar above the man and which would have all questions determined by the standard of profit rather than inherent right. Our people know that a favored class has grown up in the United States which despise the people who do the hard and honest work and which makes this world worth living in and who therefore constitute God's aristocracy. Our people know that this favored class look upon the people as being so many dumb animals bridled and saddled while they stand by booted and spurred with whip in hand ready to mount and ride the people to their heart's content. Therefore our people will be on their guard and will not allow themselves to be deceived by surface appearances or soft promises. They know that if the serpent had not disguised his purpose and resorted to false representations he never could have induced Mother Eve to eat the apple. They know that the highwayman never informs his intended victim that at a certain place upon the road he will present his arms and demand money or life. They know that those who seek to destroy this sovereignty of the people dare not avow their purposes and resort to open attack but that they depend upon stealth and stratagem for success. I sound a note of warning now. Our people will never support a ticket nominated by a packed convention obtained by corporation grafters, special trains and free passes. Any attempt to force a ticket upon them will be met with indignant repudiation regardless of consequences. Do not misunderstand me. I am not the enemy of useful corporations honestly and legitimately conducted, neither are our people. On the contrary the people desire to encourage and protect all such corporations. But they do believe that men and not corporations should rule the future state and that corporations should keep out of politics and obey the law. Experience will show that corporations will consult their own interests by pursuing this course and depending upon the intelligence, the fairness and the sense of justice of the people and by abstaining from any attempt to dictate to the people. The people believe that corporations when properly conducted are like men's passions and fire and water—good servants; but when given unrestricted away they are bad masters. If there are those among us who think differently let them beware. They will kindle a flame which they cannot control and which may develop into a consuming fire. Upon the heads of those who attempt such a course will rest the responsibility for the consequences that will certainly ensue.

This is no time for compromises or for cowardice. It might as well be understood at the start that the people are determined that this shall be a state of, by and for the people; that the people will protect their servants and crush their enemies, let it cost what it may.

The sooner any man who differs with this gets out of the Democratic party the better it will be for him. He can expect nothing except defeat at the hands of Democratic voters. The people are not going to allow themselves to be hugged with one arm and stabbed with the other; they would rather have ten open enemies than one secret enemy.

Therefore when statehood comes our people will follow the scriptural injunction and "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil." They will demand that every honest class and interest shall have equal protection and that all alike must obey the law. They will allow no discrimination against or in favor of any interest and will insist that every candidate for office shall stand or fall alone upon his individual merits. I challenge, impeach and denounce the idea that our people are anarchists or that they cannot be trusted. They neither intend nor desire to inaugurate a system of destructive legislation against any honest and useful branch or department of industry. On the contrary they earnestly desire and intend to protect and encourage all useful lines of business. But on the other hand they are in no humor to be trifled with or dictated to. They will stamp beneath their feet and crush the life out of any attempt to deprive them of their sovereignty, it matters not under what name or from what source it comes. This is an ideal condition for the promulgation of principles of democracy as advocated by Jefferson and Jackson and if we wisely avail ourselves of it our success is certain. Let us remember that democracy stands for the sovereignty of the citizen and not for the sovereignty of the politician. Democracy teaches that public officers are public servants and not public lords. Our people are tired and sick of the public lords who with a few honorable exceptions have ruled them under the bureaucratic government to which we have been subjected. They are determined that in the future we will have public servants. What reasonable and honest man can object to this? What honest and useful line of business can be injured by this? That such a line of conduct upon our part may excite opposition and criticism is to be expected. But abuse never deters a man of courage whose heart beats in sympathy with the principles of justice and liberty. Abuse is an evidence of weakness and a confession of want of ability to make a reasonable defense. Who ever heard of a dog barking at a train of cars while it was standing still. Is it not true that the faster the train is going the louder the mangy pup howls? The man who is afraid of criticism will never accomplish anything worthy of being remembered. For defending the rights of the people the bitterest and vilest abuse was heaped upon the heads of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. We know that the same course has been pursued, for the same reason, toward the greatest living Democrat, William Jennings Bryan.

My friends, if we would succeed, we must first merit success. If we desire the people to trust us, we must first trust them. If we are afraid to trust the people we need not be surprised if the people are afraid to trust us. Therefore, when statehood comes let us plant ourselves firmly upon the sovereignty of the citizen. Let us invite every democrat to attend our primaries with the full assurance that it is our desire and determination that the voice of the people shall prevail. Let us have a trial by jury of all public questions and all candidates for office and let the people be the jury. No man is worthy of public confidence and support who would accept an office which did not come to him as the free, untrammeled gift of the people. Candidates nominated by secret intrigue will serve the ring that secured their nomination. That "No man can serve two masters" is not only our experience, but it is also the declaration of the God whom we worship. Therefore let the officer owe his position alone to the people and he will serve the people. The candidate who thinks that he is better than the people and is therefore too good to appear before them, or the man who is afraid to defend his views before the people or the man who seeks political preferment by secret intrigue, deception, undue influence, purchase or through the influence of any special interest or class should never have his name upon a democratic ticket. An officer is but the representative of the people. How can he represent the people unless he is in sympathy with them? How can he be in sympathy with them unless he knows them. How can he know them unless he mingles with them upon terms of friendship and equality? How can an officer know the wishes, the desires and the necessities of the people unless he is one of them? The matter of secret political intrigues and rings in the nomination of candidates has become such a crying evil that in nearly all of the southern states, all democratic nominations are now made, from United States senators down, in primary elections where the sovereignty of one citizen is worth as much as that of any other. This plan takes away many opportunities for improper and corrupt practices. Experience has proved that the convention plan often results in the sovereignty of the politician. Therefore as a rule politicians favor it. The primary election plan vindicates the sovereignty of the citizen. Therefore the people should demand it. My friends, let us start right, then it will be much easier to stay right than if we start wrong and afterwards have to retract our steps to get right. If our candidates are nominated in a primary election it can never be said to our disgrace that a democratic senator has purchased his seat or had been placed in it through the machinations of special interests. Then no one can say that any special interest owns the democratic party of the future state. Then we will be able to make an aggressive and not a defensive canvass. Then we can with confidence call upon the people to elect the ticket which they have nominated, and this appeal will not be in vain. Let us with equal firmness rebuke any attempt to stir up class prejudice among our people, and upon the other hand protect the people from class encroachments. Let us spare no pains or effort to defeat ring politics in the democratic party. Let us place the man above the dollar right above gain, and the sovereignty of the citizen above the interests of any class or the ambition of any man. Do these things and our success is an absolute certainty. Do these things and we will establish a state government which will be fair and just to all classes and all interests. Then public questions will be settled intelligently and upon their merits without arousing the prejudices and passions of the people to such a pitch as to cause them to act unjustly. Then both capital and labor will be encouraged and protected and consequently will be on friendly terms; then with equal vigor and justice the law will suppress the cormorant and the commune; then avarice under the forms of law will not be permitted to take from the mouth of labor the bread which it has earned and anarchy will not be allowed to injure or destroy the investments of honest enterprise. Do these things and yours will be the proud and glorious work of having established a state government close to the people and responsive to their wishes and one which will enjoy their confidence and be the object of their affections. This is the ideal of democracy. Make it your ideal and a brave, free, intelligent, prosperous and patriotic people will rise up and call you blessed.

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