

Woodrow Wilson's Message to the American People

Sea Girt, N. J., Oct. 19, 1912.

To the Voters of America:

I am glad to have an opportunity to state very simply and directly why I am seeking to be elected President of the United States. I feel very deeply that this is not an ambition a man should entertain for his own sake. He must seek to serve a cause, and must know very clearly what cause it is he is seeking to serve.

The cause I am enlisted in lies very plain to my own view: The Government of the United States, as now bound by the policies which have become characteristic of Republican administration in recent years, is not free to serve the whole people impartially, and it ought to be set free. It has been tied up, whether deliberately or merely by unintentional development, with particular interests, which have used their power, both to control the government and to control the industrial development of the country. It must be freed from such entanglements and alliances. Until it is freed, it cannot serve the people as a whole. Until it is freed, it cannot undertake any programme of social and economic betterment, but must be checked and thwarted at every turn by its patrons and masters.

In practically every speech that I make, I put at the front of what I have to say the question of the tariff and the question of the trusts, but not because of any thought of party strategy, because I believe the solution of these questions to lie at the very heart of the bigger question, whether the government shall be free or not. The government is not free because it has granted special favors to particular classes by means of the tariff. The men to whom these special favors have been granted have formed great combinations by which to control enterprise and determine the prices of commodities. They could not have done this had it not been for the tariff. No party, therefore, which does not propose to take away these special favors and prevent monopoly absolutely in the markets of the country sees even so much as the most elementary part of the method by which the government is to be set free.

The control to which tariff legislation has led, both in the field of politics and in the field of business, is what has produced the most odious feature of our present political situation, namely, the absolute domination of powerful bosses. Bosses cannot exist without business alliances. With them politics is hardly distinguishable from business. Bosses maintain their control because they are allied with men who wish their assistance in order to get contracts, in order to obtain special legislative advantages, in order to prevent reforms which will interfere with monopoly or with their enjoyment of special exemptions. Merely as political leaders, not backed by money, not supported by securely entrenched special interests, bosses would be entirely manageable and comparatively powerless. By freeing the government, therefore, we at the same time break the power of the boss. He trades, he does not govern. He arranges, he does not lead. He sets the stage for what the people are to do; he does not act as their agent or servant, but as their director. For him the real business of politics is done under cover.

The same means that will set the government free from the influences which now constantly

control it would set industry free. The enterprise and initiative of all Americans would be substituted for the enterprise and initiative of a small group of them. Economic democracy would take the place of monopoly and selfish management. American industry would have a new buoyancy of hope, a new energy, a new variety. With the restoration of freedom would come the restoration of opportunity.

Moreover, an administration would at last be set up in Washington, and a legislative regime, under which real programmes of social betterment could be undertaken as they cannot now. The government might be serviceable for many things. It might assist in a hundred ways to safeguard the lives and the health and promote the comfort and the happiness of the people; but it can do these things only if its actions be distinterested, only if they respond to public opinion, only if those who lead government see the country as a whole, feel a deep thrill of intimate sympathy with every class and every interest in it, know how to hold an even hand and listen to men of every sort and quality and origin, in taking counsel what is to be done. Interest must not fight against interest. There must be a common understanding and a free action all together.

The reason that I feel justified in appealing to the voters of this country to support the Democratic party at this critical juncture in its affairs is that the leaders of neither of the other parties propose to attack the problem of a free government at its heart. Neither proposes to make a fundamental change in the policy of the government with regard to tariff duties. It is with both of them in respect of the tariff merely a question of more or less, merely a question of lopping off a little here and amending a little there; while with the Democrats it is a question of principle. Their object is to cut every special favor out, and cut it out just as fast as it can be cut out without upsetting the business processes of the country. Neither does either of the other parties propose seriously to disturb the supremacy of the trusts. Their only remedy is to accept the trusts and regulate them, notwithstanding the fact that most of the trusts are so constructed as to insure high prices, because they are not based upon efficiency but upon monopoly. Their success lies in control. The competition of more efficient competitors, not loaded down by the debts created when the combinations were made, would embarrass and conquer them. The Trusts want the protection of the government, and are likely to get it if either the Republican or the so-called "Progressive" party prevails.

Surely this is a cause. Surely the questions of the pending election, looked at from this point of view, rise into a cause. They are not merely the debates of a casual party contest. They are the issues of life and death to a nation which must be free in order to be strong. What will patriotic men do?

