

**THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY
AND PHILIPPINE
INDEPENDENCE. MAY,
1913**

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The Democratic Party and Philippine Independence. May, 1913 by Moorfield Storey

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MOORFIELD STOREY

MAY, 1913

"When I am asked if such and such a nation is fit to be free, I ask in return, Is any man fit to be a despot?"—*Lord John Russell.*

BOSTON

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THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE.

What will the Democratic party do for the Philippine Islands?

This is one of the questions which presses for immediate consideration, and which should be dealt with now while the party is in power and before new issues arise to divert public attention and divide its councils.

THE PARTY'S PROMISES.

The promises of the party have been clear and explicit. When the treaty with Spain was ratified by which the United States acquired the islands, the votes of the Democratic senators, without which the treaty would have been rejected, were given upon the theory that the treaty would end the rights of Spain in the islands, and that we should give them their independence.

The first Democratic National Convention after the treaty met on July 4, 1900, and its declarations were positive. These were its words:

"We declare again that all governments instituted among men derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; that any government not based upon the consent of the governed is a tyranny, and that to impose upon any people a government of force is to substitute the methods of imperialism for those of a republic.

"We assert that no nation can long endure half republic and half empire, and we warn the American people that imperialism abroad will lead quickly and inevitably to despotism at home.

"We condemn and denounce the Philippine policy of the present Administration.

"The Filipinos cannot be citizens without endangering our civilization; they cannot be subjects without imperiling our

form of government; and as we are not willing to surrender our civilization nor to convert the Republic into an empire we favor an immediate declaration of the nation's purpose to give the Filipinos, first, a stable form of government; second, independence, and third, protection from outside interference, such as has been given for nearly a century to the republics of Central and South America."

The next National Convention, which met on July 6th, 1904, used these words:

"We oppose, as fervently as did George Washington himself, an indefinite, irresponsible, discretionary, and vague absolutism and a policy of colonial exploitation, no matter where or by whom invoked or exercised. We believe, with Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, that no government has a right to make one set of laws for those 'at home' and another and a different set of laws, absolute in their character, for those 'in the colonies.' All men under the American flag are entitled to the protection of the institutions whose emblem the flag is. If they are inherently unfit for those institutions, then they are inherently unfit to be members of the American body politic. Wherever there may exist a people incapable of being governed under American laws, in consonance with the American Constitution, the territory of that people ought not to be part of the American domain.

"We insist that we ought to do for the Filipinos what we have done already for the Cubans, and it is our duty to make that promise now and upon suitable guarantees of protection to citizens of our own and other countries resident there at the time of our withdrawal, set the Filipino people upon their feet, free and independent to work out their own destiny."

In 1908 the National Convention repeated its declaration in the following form:

"We condemn the experiment in imperialism as an inexcusable blunder which has involved us in enormous expenses, brought us weakness instead of strength, and laid our nation open to the charge of abandoning a fundamental doctrine of self-government. We favor an immediate declaration of the nation's purpose to recognize the independence of the Philippine Islands as soon as a stable government can be established, such independence to be guaranteed by us as we guarantee the independence of Cuba, until the neutralization of the islands can be secured by treaty with other powers. In recognizing the independence of the Philippines our Government should retain such land as may be necessary for coaling stations and naval bases."

Finally, in 1912, the platform on which President Wilson was nominated and elected contained this language:

"We reaffirm the position thrice announced by the Democracy in national convention assembled against a policy of imperialism and colonial exploitation in the Philippines or elsewhere. We condemn the experiment in imperialism as an inexcusable blunder, which has involved us in enormous expenses, brought us weakness instead of strength, and laid our nation open to the charge of abandonment of the fundamental doctrine of self-government. We favor an immediate declaration of the nation's purpose to recognize the independence of the Philippine Islands as soon as a stable government can be established, such independence to be guaranteed by us until the neutralization of the islands can be secured by treaty with other powers.

"In recognizing the independence of the Philippines our Government should retain such land as may be necessary for coaling stations and naval bases."

Long antecedent to these declarations is the immortal Declaration drawn by Thomas Jefferson, the founder of the Democratic party,—the Declaration of which Americans have always been proud, and which has been read annually to the people on the Fourth of every July as the best statement of the fundamental principles upon which our political structure rests, those "self-evident truths" that "all men are created equal" and that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." In its successive platforms the Democratic party has planted itself firmly upon these great principles, and it could not have done otherwise without being false to its traditions.

Upon these statements of policy and these promises the Democratic party has sought the support of the voters, and it has now received that support and is in full control of the government. If words mean anything, it has promised to give the Filipinos their independence, and no man can trust it if this promise is broken. Why should any Democrat suggest that the policy which his party has so uniformly and so repeatedly pledged itself to adopt be now abandoned, and the Republican policy which it has "condemned and denounced," which it has characterized as "an indefinite, irresponsible, discretionary and vague absolutism," which it has called "an inexcusable blunder," be now adopted, or by delay continued in operation!

THE DEMAND FOR INVESTIGATION.

Just as the friends of protection, defeated at the polls, fill the newspapers with lamentations and prophecies of disaster, repeating with tireless iteration the familiar arguments in favor of their unjust privileges and urging that an investigation by a tariff commission, never deemed necessary when the tariff was to be raised, should now be had before it is lowered,—so all the opponents of Philippine independence with like prophecies of calamity ask that the President and his Cabinet institute an inquiry into the condition of the islands before taking any step to carry into effect the policy to which the party stands pledged.

In each case the motive is the same. It is the old policy of delay by which Fabius conquered Hannibal. It is the attempt to postpone action on any ground in the hope that meanwhile something may occur to divert attention or to discredit and divide the party in power, and so enable our opponents to recover the control of the government. Delays are dangerous, and therefore they urge delay and are fertile in suggesting reasons for it.

But what a confession is this demand for an investigation of Philippine conditions! What is there to learn? Has not the Commission made regular reports? Have not the War Department and its Insular Bureau told us all that there was to know about the islands and their people? If they have, investigation is a useless waste of time. If they have not, what facts have they concealed? What truth have they kept back? If indeed the American people are ignorant of what has been going on in the islands, that fact is the strongest possible argument for Philippine independence. It is hard enough for people to govern themselves with personal knowledge of their own affairs. It is far more difficult for one people to govern another, even if it has the fullest knowledge of all that concerns the subject people. It is absolutely impossible for one people to govern another if the governing people has not this knowledge, and, if after governing the Philippine Islands for fifteen years we have now to make an investigation in order to learn what has been done there and what are the present conditions, we have never had the in-

formation without which we could not direct the affairs of the islanders.

As long ago as April 21, 1904, Mr. Taft said to the Chamber of Commerce in New York:

"The people of the United States have under their guidance and control in the Philippines an archipelago of 3,000 islands, the population of which is about 7,600,000 souls. Of these 7,000,000 are Christians, and 600,000 are Moros or other pagan tribes."

In the same speech, referring to a petition for Philippine independence signed by Cardinal Farley, more than fifty bishops, more than sixty judges, Grover Cleveland, Charles W. Eliot, President Schurman, ex-Senator Edmunds, Andrew Carnegie, Wayne MacVeagh, Charles Francis Adams, and thousands of others among our leading men, Mr. Taft said:

"Why should the good people who signed the petition intermeddle with something the effect of which they are very little able to understand?"

He did not seem to realize that, if the very best Americans could not understand what we were doing in the Philippine Islands, it was idle to say that the American people were guiding and controlling them, and that his two statements meant that the guidance of the Filipinos by the American people was the merest farce.

Now nine years later we are told that Congress does not know enough about Philippine conditions to legislate, and as they need a tariff commission to teach them how to reduce the tariff, so they need, not the present Philippine Commission, but a new commission to tell them the facts and give them advice as to what they should do for the islands. I say again, What a confession!

This at least is true: we have heard all that can be said in favor of retaining the islands. Those who have been responsible for their administration have made the best case possible: President McKinley, President Roosevelt, and President Taft, the Commissioners and other American officials in the islands, the War Department and its Insular Bureau, the Republican leaders in

Congress and out who have favored the retention of the islands, have presented year after year all the arguments which they urge now, and these arguments have been perfectly familiar to the men who framed and the conventions which adopted the Democratic platforms that have been quoted, and notwithstanding these arguments the party year after year has denounced the policy of the Republicans and pledged itself to Philippine independence.

Now that the case is won, the Democratic party cannot afford to stultify itself by admitting that its language did not mean what it said, that its oft-repeated declarations have been made ignorantly or recklessly, and now adopt as its own the policy which it has always condemned. This is to break faith with the voters who have believed its promises and placed it in power because they believed. We have a right to say that the case has been decided after full argument and to ask for execution. Delay and hesitation now would be an admission of failure by the Democratic party, an admission of reckless and ignorant speech, like the admission of concealment implied in the Republican suggestion of investigation, and in this would be found a fresh argument for Philippine independence, since after fifteen years both parties would admit that the American people have never understood the situation in the islands, which all these years they have in theory been governing. I say again, What a confession!

THE SOURCES OF OPPOSITION.

We cannot expect that the defeated party will cease to argue, to protest, and to prophesy all manner of evil, but we have no right on that account to falter. Those men who like President Taft are responsible in large measure for the retention of the islands, and who like him have been especially prominent in their administration, naturally will not admit that they have been wrong. They are committed too strongly to recede now, but we must remember that they are not impartial. They are pleading their own case, they are insisting that they have succeeded, and their own reputations are at stake. All their arguments must be taken with that allowance.