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## WHAT JEFFERSON WOULD DO

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THE circumstances of our day are so utterly different from those of Jefferson's day that it may seem nothing less than an act of temerity to attempt to say what Jefferson would do if he were now alive and guiding us with his vision and command. The world we live in no longer divided into neighbourhoods and communities; the lines of the telegraph thread it like nerves uniting a single organism. The ends of the earth touch one another and exchange impulse and purpose. America has swung out of her one-time isolation and has joined the family of nations. She is linked to mankind by every tie of blood and circumstance. She is more cosmopolitan in her make-up than any other nation of the world; is enriched by a greater variety of energy drawn from strong peoples the world over. She is not the simple, homogeneous, rural nation that she was in Jefferson's time, making only a beginning at development and the conquest of fortune; she is great and strong; above all she is infinitely varied; her affairs are shot through with emotion and the passion that comes with strength and growth and self-confidence. We live in a new and strange age and reckon with new affairs alike in economics and politics of which Jefferson knew nothing.

And yet we may remind ourselves that Jefferson's mind did not move in a world of narrow circumstances;

it did not confine itself to the conditions of a single race or a single continent. It had commerce with the thought of men old and new; it had moved in an age of ample air, in which men thought not only of nations but of mankind, in which they saw not only individual policies, but a great field of human need and of human fortune. Neither did he think in abstract terms, as did the men with whom he had had such stimulating commerce of thought in France. His thought was not speculation; it was the large generalization that comes from actual observation and experience. He had had contact with plain men of many kinds, as well as with philosophers and foreign statesmen. He thought in a way that his neighbours in Virginia could understand, in a way which illuminated their own lives and ambitions for them. And though he was deemed a philosopher, he was nevertheless the idol of the people, for he somehow heard and voiced what they themselves could have said and purposed and conceived. For all the largeness of his thought, it was bathed in an everyday atmosphere; it belongs to the actual, workaday world; it has its feet firmly on circumstances and fact and the footing all men are accustomed to who reflect at all on their lives and the lives of their neighbours and compatriots. He was holding up for the illumination of the things of which he spoke a light which he had received out of the hands of old philosophers. But the rays of that light as he held it fell upon actual American life; they did not lose themselves vaguely in space; they were for the guidance of men's feet every day.

We may be sure, therefore, that had Jefferson lived in our time he would have acted upon the facts as they are. In the first place, because he would have seen them as they actually are, and in the second place because he would have been interested in theory only as he could adjust it to the reality of the life about him. He would not have been content with a philosophy which he could fit together only within the walls of his study.

To determine what Jefferson would have done, therefore, requires only that we should ourselves clearly see the facts of our time as they are, whether in the field of government or in the field of our economic life, and that we should see how Jefferson's principle of the rule and authority of the people stands related to these facts. We are constantly quoting Jefferson's fundamental thought: it was that no policy could last whose foundation is narrow, based upon the privileges and authority of a few, but that its foundations must be as broad as the interests of all the men and families and neighbourhoods that live under it. Monopoly, private control, the authority of privilege, the concealed mastery of a few men cunning enough to rule without showing their power—he would have at once announced them rank weeds which were sure to choke out all wholesome life in the fair garden of affairs. If we can detect these things in our time; if we can see them and describe them and touch them as they are, then we know what Jefferson would have done. He would have moved against them, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, sometimes openly, sometimes subtly; but whether he merely mined about them or struck directly at them, he would have set systematic war against them at the front of all his purpose.

As regards the real influences that control our Government, he would have asked first of all: Are they determined by the direct and open contacts of opinion? He would have found that they were not; that, on the contrary, our Government as it has developed has supplied secret influences with a hundred coverts and ambushes; that the opinion of the Nation makes little noise in the committee rooms of legislatures; that it is certain large, special interests and not the people who maintain the lobby; that the argument of the lobby is oftentimes louder and more potent than the argument of the hustings and the floor of the representative body. He would have found, moreover, that until very recent

years opinion had had very difficult access, if any at all, in most seasons, of the private conferences in which candidates for office were chosen, candidates for both administrative and legislative office, and that in the private conferences where it was determined who should be nominated and, therefore, of course, who should be elected, the same influences had established themselves which ruled in the legislative lobby. That money, the money that kept the whole organization together, flowed in, not from the general body of the people, but from those who wished to determine in their own private interest what governors and legislators should and should not do.

It is plain in such circumstances what he would have insisted, as we are insisting now, that if there could be found no means by which the authority and purpose of the people could break into these private places and establish their rule again, if the jungle proved too thick for the common thought to explore, if the coverts where the real power lurked were too difficult to find, the forces of genuine democracy must move around them instead of through them, must surround and beleaguer them, must establish a force outside of them by which they can be dominated or overawed. It is with the discussion of just such affairs that the public mind is now preoccupied and engrossed. Debate is busy with them from one end of the land to the other.

As regards the economic policy of the country it is perfectly plain that Mr. Jefferson would have insisted upon a tariff fitted to actual conditions, by which he would have meant not the interests of the few men who find access to the hearings of the Ways and Means Committee of the House and the Finance Committee of the Senate, but the interests of the business men and manufacturers and farmers and workers and professional men of every kind and class. He would have insisted that the schedules should be turned wrong side out and every item of their contents subjected to the

general scrutiny of all concerned. It is plain, also, that he would have insisted upon a currency system elastic, indeed, and suited to the varying circumstances of the money market in a great industrial and trading Nation, but absolutely fortified and secured against a central control, the influence of coteries, and leagues of banks to which it is now in constant danger of being subjected. He would have known that the currency question is not only an economic question but a political question, and that, above all things else, control must be in the hands of those who represent the general interest and not in the hands of those who represent the things we are seeking to guard against.

In the general field of business his thought would, of course, have gone about to establish freedom, to throw business opportunity open at every point to new men, to destroy the processes of monopoly, to exclude the poison of special favours, to see that, whether big or little, business was not dominated by anything but the law itself, and that that law was made in the interest of plain, unprivileged men everywhere.

Jefferson's principles are sources of light because they are not made up of pure reason, but spring out of aspiration, impulse, vision, sympathy. They burn with the fervour of the heart; they wear the light of interpretation he sought to speak in, the authentic terms of honest, human ambition. And the law in his mind was the guardian of all legitimate ambition. It was the great umpire standing by to see that the game was honourably and fairly played in the spirit of generous rivalry and open the field free to every sportsmanlike contestant.

Constitutions are not inventions. They do not create our liberty. They are rooted in life, in fact, in circumstance, in environment. They are not the condition of our liberty but its expression. They result from our life; they do not create it. And so there beats in them always, if they live at all, this pulse of the large

life of humanity. As they yield and answer to that they are perfected and exalted.

Indeed, the whole spirit of government is the spirit of men of every kind banded together in a generous combination seeking the common good. Nations are exalted, parties are made great as they partake of this aspiration and are permitted to see this vision of the Nation as a whole struggling toward a common ideal and a common hope.

We as Democrats are particularly bound at this season of expectation, and of confidence to remember that it is only in this spirit and with this vision that we can ever serve either the Nation or ourselves. As we approach the time when we are to pick out a President—for I believe that is to be our privilege—we should fix our thought on this one great fact, that no man is big enough or great enough to be President alone. He will be no stronger than his party. His strength will lie in the counsel of his comrades. His success will spring out of the union and energy and unselfish coöperation of his party, and his party must be more than half the Nation. It must include, and genuinely include, men of every class and race and disposition. If he be indeed the representative of his people, there may be vouchsafed to him through them something of the vision to conceive what Jefferson conceived and understood—how the vision may be carried into reality.