

The New Party

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THE NEW PARTY.

THE era in American politics which began with the candidacy of Fremont closed with the defeat of Blaine.

When in a time of strong feeling and clashing interests no man can state a principle which will be a test question between the great political parties, and a Presidential contest, fought on questions of personal character, is decided by the foolish utterance of an irresponsible speaker, it needs not even the son of a prophet to tell that the time for the drawing of new political lines has come, and that essentially new political parties must soon appear.

The Republican party died at heart some time ago—with the second administration of Grant or, at least, with the early part of the administration of Hayes ; but partly for reasons similar to those that make the days of the autumnal equinox warmer than those of the vernal equinox, and partly because of the weakness of its opponent, it still held its place. If the great party that fought the war and abolished slavery had become but a party of the ins, the great party that claimed political descent from Jefferson had become but a party of the outs. It needed only that the ins should take the place of the outs to destroy both. And this, thanks finally to the Rev. Dr. Burchard, the election

of 1884 accomplished. Now that the Republican party has lost control of the National Executive and no disaster has occurred, and the Democratic party has gained it and no particular good been done, the old prejudices, old fears, old hopes, old habits of thought and touch, are so broken down that new issues can readily come to the front and new alignments of political forces take place.

The process of disintegration and reconstruction is now going on. The growth of the Prohibition party on the one side and of a labor party on the other, and the readiness with which Republicans and Democrats have united in some of the recent municipal elections when threatened with what seemed to them a common danger show how rapidly.

The prohibition movement, a natural effort to bring into politics, in the absence of larger questions, a matter on which a great body of men and women feel strongly, is in itself a significant evidence of the disposition to turn to social questions, but the great movement now beginning in the rise of the Labor party takes hold of these questions lower down, and whatever importance prohibition may for some time retain in local politics, the drawing of political lines on a wider and deeper issue must throw its supporters to one side or the other of the larger question.

The deepest of all issues is now beginning to force its way into our politics, and in the nature of things it must produce a change that will compel men to take their stand on one side or the other, irrespective of their views on smaller questions. Of all social adjustments, that which fixes the relation between men and the land they live on is the most important, and it is that which is coming up now.

It has been, of course, for a long time evident that American politics, in the future, must turn upon the social or industrial questions, and while the questions growing out of the slavery struggle have been losing importance; these questions have been engaging more and more thought, and arousing stronger and stronger feeling. What men are thinking about, and feeling about, and disputing about, must, ere long, become the burning question of politics, and the organization of labor, the massing of capital, the increasing intensity of the struggle for existence, and the increasing bitterness under it, have for years made it clear that in one shape or another the great labor question must succeed the

slavery question in our politics. In farmers' granges and alliances, and anti-monopoly associations, in trades unions and federations, and notably in the enormous growth of the Knights of Labor, a vague, but giant power has been arising, which could only reach its ends through political action. What has delayed the crystallization of these forces into a political party has been the indefiniteness of thought on such subjects. Discontent with existing conditions there has been enough, but when it came to the improvement of these conditions by political action there was no agreement. In short, up to this time, Labor has not gone into politics, because it did not really know what to do in politics. This great vague power has been like a vast body of unorganized men anxious to go somewhere, but utterly ignorant of the road and without leaders whom they have learned to trust. And while one has called "This way!" and another "That way!" and constant efforts have been made by little parties starting out in this or that direction to get the great mass to follow them, the main body has refused to move.

The Greenback Labor party was a protest against the wasteful and unjust financial management which has enriched the few at the expense of the many, and it appealed with great strength to the debtor class; but the issue that it tried to raise was not large enough to move the great body. So with the various anti-monopoly movements, and with the local labor parties which have here and there from time to time carried a municipal or county election, and sometimes by combining forces with one or the other of the two great parties have carried a State. With all such movements the fatal weakness has been that they could formulate no large vital issue on which they could agree.

Political parties cannot be manufactured, they must grow. No matter how much the existing political parties may have ceased to represent vital principles and real distinctions, it is not possible for any set of men to collect together incongruous elements of discontent and by compromising differences and pooling demands create a live party. The initiative must be a movement of thought. The formation of a real party follows the progress of an idea. When some fundamental issue, that involves large principles and includes smaller questions, and that will on the one hand command support and on the other compel opposition, begins to come to the front in thought and discussion, then a new party, or

rather two new parties, must begin to form, though of course one or both may retain old names and develop from old organizations.

That now is the situation. Gradually yet rapidly the land question has been forcing itself upon attention ; and that process of education that has been going on in Central Labor Unions, in Assemblies of the Knights of Labor and in the movements, abortive though they may have been in themselves, by which it has been attempted to unite the political power of the discontented classes, has been steadily directing thought toward the relation between men and the land on which they live, as the key to social difficulties and labor troubles. And this process has been powerfully aided by the interest and feeling that the Irish movement has aroused in the United States. Here, in fact, the tendencies of that movement have been more openly radical than in Ireland. Shut out of Ireland the *Irish World* has freely circulated here, and in the beginning of the Irish movement sowed broadcast among a most important section of our people the doctrine of the natural right to land ; and while the influential editors and politicians and clergymen who have been so ready to assert or to assent to the truth that God made Ireland for the Irish people and not for the landlords, have been careful to avoid any insinuation that this continent was also made by the same power and for an equally impartial purpose, they too have been unwittingly aiding in the same work.

I was originally of the opinion that the first large steps to the solution of the labor question by the recognition of equal rights to land would be taken on the other side of the Atlantic, and in what I have done to help in arousing sentiment there have always had in mind the reflex action on this country, where, as I have told our friends on the other side, I believed the movement would be quicker when it did fairly start. But although I have known better perhaps than any one else, how widely and how deeply the ideas that I among others have been striving to propagate have been taking root in the United States, they have reached the stage of political action quicker than the most sanguine among us would have dared to imagine. In going into the municipal contest in New York last fall on the principle of abolishing taxation on improvements and putting taxes on land values irrespective of improvements, the United Labor party of New York City raised an issue, which by the opposition it aroused and

the strength it evoked showed the line along which the coming cleavage of parties must run. We did not win that election—few among us really cared for winning, for we were not struggling for offices. But we did more than win an election. We brought the labor question—or what is the same thing, the land question—into practical politics. And it is there to stay.

The coming party is not yet fairly organized, nor is the name it will be known by probably yet adopted. But it has an idea, and that an idea that is growing in strength every day, and that from the opposition it provokes, no less than from the enthusiasm it arouses, must gain support with accelerating rapidity. For so monstrous is the notion that some men must pay other men for the use of this planet,—so repugnant to all ideas of justice and all dictates of public policy is it that the values created by social growth and social improvement shall go but to swell the incomes of a class ; so opposed to the first and strongest of all perceptions is it that the rights of individual ownership which properly attach to the products of human labor should attach to natural elements that no man made ; and so clearly does the simple means by which the common right to land can be secured, the taking of land values (*i. e.*, the value which attaches to land by reason of social growth and improvement, and irrespective of the improvements made by the individual user) for public purposes harmonize with all other desirable reforms,—that our present treatment of land as individual property can only be acquiesced in where it is not questioned or discussed.

As this discussion goes on, and it is now going on all over the United States, the principle of common rights in the land, brought to a definite issue in the proposition to abolish all other taxes in favor of a tax on land values irrespective of improvements, must win adherents, and permeate and bring in line under its standard those associations and organizations whose existence is a proof of widely-existing discontent, but which have lacked the definiteness of purpose necessary to successful political action.

As yet the United Labor party of New York is the strongest organization on the new lines, and the convention which it will hold in Syracuse on the 11th of August will probably give an impetus to organization throughout the country, the way for which is now being prepared by the formation of land and labor clubs. What is known as the Union Labor party formed at Cin-

cinnati in February by a gathering composed of some delegates from the Farmers' Alliances of the West, Greenbackers, and Knights of Labor, with self-appointed representatives of all sorts of opinions and crotchets, was one of those attempts to manufacture a political party which are foredoomed to failure. Sooner or later its components must fall on one side or the other of the issue raised by the more definite movement. On which side the majority of them will fall there can be little doubt.

While the new party aims at the emancipation of labor, and in its beginnings derives from the organization of labor that has been going on the strength which wherever it has yet appeared has made it at once a respectable factor in politics,—it aims at the improvement of the conditions of labor, not by doing anything special for laborers, but by securing the equal rights of all men. It will not be a labor party in any narrow sense, and in the name which it will finally assume the word labor, if not dropped, will at least be freed from narrow connotations.

But questions of name and questions of organization, are to us who see the coming of the new party, and who know its power, matters of comparatively unimportant detail. We have faith in the idea, and as that moves forward we know all else will follow. We can form no combinations and will make no compromises. How our progress may affect the political equilibrium, and give temporary success, locally or nationally, to either of the old parties, we care nothing at all. Even whether our own candidates, when we put them up, are elected or defeated, makes little difference,—the contest will stimulate discussion and promote the cause. We follow a principle that through defeat must go on to final triumph. And because the new party that is forming *is* clustering round a great principle, we have no fear that it can be captured or betrayed. The “politicians” who would anywhere get hold of its organization, would get but an empty shell, unless they, too, bent themselves to serve the principle.

What is the deep strength of the new movement is shown no less by the manner in which the Catholic masses have rallied around Dr. McGlynn than by the political power it has exhibited when its standard has been fairly raised. Whoever has witnessed one of those great meetings which the Anti-Poverty Society is holding on Sunday evenings in New York, must see that an idea

is coming to the front that lays hold upon the strongest of political forces—the religious sentiment ; and that the “ God wills it ! God wills it ! ” of a new crusade is indeed beginning to ring forth.

Our progress will at first be quicker in the cities than in the agricultural districts, simply because the men of the country are harder to reach ; but whoever imagines that the foolish falsehood that we propose to put all taxes on farmers will long prevent the men who till the soil from rallying around our banner leans on a broken reed.

HENRY GEORGE.