WOODROW WILSON: ONE OF THE MEN NEEDED BY THE PEOPLE: BY THE EDITOR

An interesting parallel is discernible between the admission by students of our economic problems that the basic solution is to be found in a “back to the farms” movement, and the growing recognition by observers of the political situation that nothing but a “back to the people” movement in politics can bring permanent peace and order out of the present unrest and confusion. This is the fact which gives strength to the insurgent and progressive element in both parties. If the signs all point to the control of the next Congress by the Democrats, it is not because the people have more faith in one party than in another, but because Republican politicians and officeholders are so inextricably entangled in the machinery of the great financial, commercial and industrial combinations that plain citizens feel that any change would be for the better. The extent of this feeling throughout the country is evidenced by the result of the State conventions, which have gone for the most part either to the insurgent Republicans or to the Democrats,—which is equal to saying that they have gone for the whole reform movement, irrespective of party traditions.

One of the strongest indications that this change in public sentiment is no passing hysteria, but a conviction that has grown up from the very foundations of our national life, is the tacit acknowledgment by both parties of the necessity that confronts them this year for choosing as candidates for public office men who have clean hands and sound beliefs regarding right and wrong, rather than men skilled in the intricacies of politics. The people are tired of the promises of politicians; they want the deeds of men, and so profound is their distrust of the whole machine that is run by privilege and patronage, spoils and graft, that the man who seems to stand the best chance of being elected this fall is the man who has had the least to do with practical politics in the past.

Perhaps the most significant case in point is the nomination of Dr. Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton University, for the governorship of New Jersey. Dr. Wilson has made the subject of government, and of American politics especially, his lifework. For
A MAN NEEDED BY THE PEOPLE

years he has lectured to large classes on jurisprudence and constitutional government, and in his books as well as in his lectures he has committed himself not to politics but to principles. Discussing recently Dr. Wilson’s peculiar fitness for such an office as that of Governor, the President of Johns Hopkins University remarked: “I have always been impressed with his high caliber, his brilliant scholarship, and his extraordinary executive ability. I suppose there is no man living who, from the student’s standpoint, knows as much about the principles of government as he does.” But his availability lies in the fact that with his scholarship he has not acquired the scholar’s aloofness from life. The preëminent quality of his teaching, we are told by those who have been his students, was his insistence upon the vital relation of knowledge to real life. The end of thinking, he contends, is action; the end of study, the betterment of human conditions and human life.

HIS value to the country at large lies not in the fact that he is the candidate of one party or another, but in the promise, uttered by his whole life and teachings, that in office as well as out of it he will uphold the democratic ideals of this republic. If elected he will come to the service of the people foot-free of any entangling political or financial alliances. No interest hostile to the interests of the public holds a mortgage upon his hand and brain. But his avowed and recorded principles ally him with the people, whom he is free to serve.

As gubernatorial candidate in New Jersey, a State whose hospitality to all corporations, good or bad, is a matter of nation-wide notoriety, special interest attaches to Dr. Wilson’s attitude toward the vexed question of the control and regulation of corporation activities. There is probably no more complicated and baffling problem before the legislatures and the courts than that of making the great combinations of capital amenable to the law of the land. This college president would meet it by a practical recognition of the fact that guilt is always personal. Under the present method of penalizing a law-breaking corporation with a fine the punishment falls more heavily upon the innocent than upon the guilty—upon the stockholders and the customers rather than upon the men who direct the policy of the business. But while you cannot effectually punish a corporation as a corporation, you can punish the man or men responsible for the corporation’s misdeeds. This is the course advocated by Dr. Wilson. In a recent address he aptly compares the large corporation to an automobile, and continues: “I don’t care how big the car is, so long as the driver is careful and conscientious; but the trouble is that some of our cor-
poration men are taking ‘joy rides’ in their corporations.” Thus
does he point his contention that guilt is personal. He believes in
punishing the joy-riders, whereas many reformers, when confronted
by the same problem, have shown an inclination to fine the automobile.
We must abandon at certain points, he argues, “the fatuous and
unnecessary fiction” which treats the corporation as a legal and
responsible person. In a recent interview explaining his position
on this point he says:

“Now I have no quarrel with big business, as such. But I would
have some individual or individuals held directly accountable to
the law for the wrong-doing and violations of the statutes which may
be committed in the name of the corporation. . . . Every
act, every policy in the conduct of the affairs of a corporation origi-
nates with some particular officer, committee or board. The officer,
the committee, the board which orders an act or originates a policy
contrary to the law of the land or intended to neutralize or contra-
vene it, is an insurgent against society; the man or men who originate
any such act or policy should be punished, and they alone. . . .
You will say that in many instances it is not fair to pick out for pun-
ishment the particular officer who ordered a thing done, because
he really has no freedom in the matter; that he is himself under orders,
exercises no individual liberty of choice, is a dummy manipulated
from without. I reply that society should permit no man to carry
out orders which are against law and public policy, and that, if you
will but put one or two conspicuous dummies in the penitentiary,
there will be no more dummies for hire.”

SPECIAL interests have largely usurped control of our govern-
ment. The people will turn to such a man as Dr. Wilson be-
cause they believe that his is the kind of leadership that will
make it possible for them to regain that control. That is his problem
and his test. If New Jersey elects him it need only ask that he be as
unpartisan and as uncompromising in meeting the practical problems
of government as he was in expounding those problems in his books
and in the lecture room. Dr. Wilson accepted the nomination,
because he has certain well-defined ideas of government that he
desired to put to the test, but the fact that he did accept is as signifi-
cant of a change in our political ideals as is the fact of his nomina-
tion. Even four or five years ago the suggestion that a university
president not connected with the inside organization of either party
should be chosen as political leader in an acute crisis would have
been hooted at by men whose whole lives are devoted to playing
politics. Also, it would then have been exceedingly difficult to get
any man of the stamp of Woodrow Wilson to forsake the peace and
dignity of a position such as his in order to jump into the political
arena, and do his part toward putting the fear of the Lord into the
hearts of those interests, financial and political, which have come
to regard the exploiting of the public as their natural right.

Of course, the political leaders who yield to public opinion in
nominating a man like this do so with the full belief that their own
understanding of the intricacies of the political maze will enable them
to control the situation and that, having offered a sop to public senti-
ment by setting up an attractive figurehead, popular feeling will
subside as it always has done and they will be able to play the same
old game in the same old way. Forgetting the wholesome lessons
given them by such men as Governor Hughes and Mayor Gaynor
of New York, they hold that the alliance between politics and the
privileged interests has lasted too long and become too firmly estab-
lished to be shaken by any mere impulse for reform, and none know
better than the astute politicians and financiers who have so long
ruled our national affairs how to bow before the storm and spring
back into the same position after it has passed.

As Dr. Wilson himself says: "We have come to a new era. We
have got to construct a new economic society, and in doing this we
will have to indirectly govern the political methods." Here is the
keynote of the whole situation. Straight-thinking men, no matter
what their party affiliations, are determined to do what they can
toward constructing a new economic society; hence their newly
aroused interest in politics, through which they see the straightest
road toward the impending change. There has already been a re-
alignment in fact, if not in name, and the people are showing beyond
question that what they want now are principles, not platforms.
If government is to be freed from the control of the privileged interests,
the men who are needed in public office are men who would not know
how to take a bribe in any form; men who will go straight at the right
or wrong of a question, utterly regardless of party affiliations and
time-honored party policies, and oblivious to all the subtle network
of patronage and obligation in which every politician of long standing
is enmeshed in spite of himself.

IN ORDER to live up to this standard a man would have to be some-
thing of a theorist, not necessarily a visionary whose theories would
not stand the test of practical application, but a man who stands
sufficiently aloof from his subject to see it as a whole; to know some-
thing of its history and to apply it to the general laws of cause and
effect. That is why Dr. Woodrow Wilson is likely to make an
HOME OF THE HON. WOODROW WILSON, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY.
A MAN NEEDED BY THE PEOPLE

unusually good governor for New Jersey. He knows little or nothing of "practical politics," but he does know a practical way to approach the reforms for which the better element of both political parties are clamoring because the nation demands them. The very fact that he has studied out the question in an academic way gives him a certain perspective that should aid him in testing his theories upon the armor of obstinate facts, and his incentive to do so will be tenfold as great as that of the average man who is elected governor, because he sees the chance and the necessity of living up to what he has said and written.

He is typical of the men who are now for the first time entering an active political career in order that they may apply and test carefully thought-out principles regarding the best type of representative government, going at the task in much the same spirit as the men who framed the Constitution approached the greater task of building up a new nation. If these honest and earnest leaders of the reform movement realize the greatness of their opportunity and approach it as reverently as did the men of the past, their names will be worthy to stand as high. Next to the building up of a nation, the guiding of its crude and exuberant strength into the right channels for healthy growth is a work which demands the best blood and the best brains in the whole country. We have set ourselves up as an example to the world of the success of the republican form of government. We have come close to failing, not because the form of government was wrong, but because the dishonesty and selfishness of our application of its principles have dragged it down to a condition that is little better in some respects than the open tyranny of the privileged classes in feudal times.

Returning to Dr. Wilson's relation to this problem, we find in his own words evidence of his faith in the power of the people to solve it themselves, if given the opportunity. Thus in a recent speech he declares that, if elected, his duty will be not toward the convention which nominated him, but toward the people who voted for him; and he promises to "take every important measure before the Legislature out on the stump and discuss it with the people." There is the same implication of faith in his assertion that the best thing you can do with anything crooked is to "lift it up where people can see that it is crooked, and then it will either straighten itself out or disappear." "I recognize," he has said, "no power but that of the people." And he concluded his first political speech in the present campaign with the statement: "I want the people to be the jury. I do not want any judge to 'butt in' and obscure the issue."