
The Outlook for 1896: A political interview with the *St. Louis Chronicle*, Sept. 13, 1895

by Eugene V. Debs

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Woodstock, Ill., Sept. 13 [1895].— (Special.)— *Notwithstanding the stifling and almost unbearable atmosphere of the county jail during the hot days of the present week, Eugene V. Debs, the imprisoned President of the American Railway Union, gave a Chronicle representative an interview relative to the Presidential election in 1896. He said:*

Views upon the Presidential election in 1896 must, of course, be largely conjectural and take the form of hypothesis. "Ifs" and "buts" must be introduced, not to obscure convictions or conclusions, but rather to emphasize them.

The minds of the people have not, of late years, been so greatly perturbed upon political issues as at present. The two old parties, like ships storm-driven toward a rock-bound coast, are trying to find safety from wreck.

The Republican Party, hopeful of success by the demerits of the Democratic Party rather than any merits of its own, evidently believes a victory in 1896 is in sight, while no one who surveys the field dispassionately regards the Democratic Party of sufficient strength to capture a single state of the republic, regardless of who may be its candidates. The Republican Party, equally corrupt and untrustworthy, is more adroit. Confessedly the party of trusts, corporations, and every piratical combine known to the country, it boldly flaunts its flag, and the great boodlers of the nation rally to its standard. If it wins in 1896 it will be a notable victory of the money power; and if

the signs of the times are worthy of attention they force the conviction that whatever the money power has accomplished in the past in debauching the press and in levying contributions to win elections by the corrupting power of money, will be as 1 to 16 compared with what it will do in 1896.¹

There is still another possibility to be considered relating to the Presidential election of 1896. The Republican Party and the Democratic Party are on the money question practically one. The goldbugs dominate both and declare that at all hazards the gold policy must be maintained.

Goldbugs under One Banner.

The Democratic Party being irretrievably wrecked, nothing remaining in sight but Cleveland and his office holders and defeat in 1896, what more natural that Democratic goldbugs should go over en masse to the Republican goldbugs and join in the fight against Democrats, Republicans, and Populists, whose rugged patriotism and integrity are pledged to rescue the government from the hands of American plutocracy?

Hitherto John Sherman has stood for all that is vile and corrupting in the financial affairs of the country — the arch foe of the masses and the trusted friend of the money power. But now Grover Cleveland has vaulted into prominence and out-Shermans Sherman, and instead of seeking to rescue the country from deplorable conditions created by Sherman and the Republican Party, doffs his Presidential cap and climbs into the Republican bandwagon and scowls at every Democrat who dares oppose his treason to Democratic principles, while he sends forth his cabinet ministers — Carlisle and the rest — to bring Democrats into the Republican fold.

This is the last nail to be driven into the Democratic coffin before its burial in 1896; and this done the Democratic Party passes away as did the old Whig Party. Such being the trend, what of the outlook in 1896?

¹ Allusion is to the fixed 16:1 value ratio of silver to gold advocated by "free silver" advocates of the period.

Plutocracy vs. The People.

There are millions of men in the two old parties who will no longer be dominated by the money power. They see distinctly that the end is widespread ruin. The break is ostensibly on the financial question — on the one side the Rothschilds and on the other the American people. In other words, the Plutocracy vs. The People. The term Rothschilds is accepted to stand for all that is odious and infamous in American finances and free silver for all signifies redemption from foreign control of the American monetary system.

I have not the time to state nor have you the space to print the far-reaching reforms that would follow in the wake of the free coinage of silver. It would annihilate the dominating power of the plutocracy. It would divorce America from the corrupting alliance with foreign Shylocks and sharks and make the United States, financially, an independent nation, and open up the way for reforms which the People's Party is pledged to inaugurate.

The disintegration and death of the Democratic Party simplifies the situation, since it emphasizes the fact that in 1896 there will be but two parties, practically, in the field — the People's Party and the Republican Party.

Principles, Not Men.

If it be accepted that goldbug Democrats will combine with goldbug Republicans to win a goldbug victory in 1896, then as a corollary the free silver Democrats and free silver Republicans will combine with the People's Party to save the government from still greater disaster than has already been inflicted by the rule of the money power.

Ming such allowances as are required for the tenacity of men, their disinclination to abandon longstanding associations, it is evident that millions of men are prepared to renounce their allegiance to the two old parties and swing into line under the Populist flag, and this being true the People's Party has only to formulate a platform embodying the reforms which the people demand, a platform upon which all classes of reformers can unite to sweep the country.

In this contest it does not matter who the Republicans nominate, [Benjamin] Harrison, [William] McKinley, or [Thomas Brackett]

Reed. They all stand for the same odious policy and are equally obnoxious.

The People's Party.

The People's Party stands for reform. It is preeminently an American party. It is the party of the common people of all classes, including the farmer, the mechanic, the laborer, the businessman, the professional man, and all those whose love of country is greater than lust for gold. It is the party of those who believe the people should rule and to this party the patriots of America are rallying as in 1861 they rallied to the standard of the Union.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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