

Theodore Roosevelt

Who is a progressive - April 30, 1912

In his recent speech at Philadelphia President Taft stated that he was a Progressive (...)

A well-meaning man may vaguely think of himself as a Progressive without having even the faintest conception of what a Progressive is. (...) The difference has never been more accurately set forth than in a lecture by the great English writer, Mr. J.A. Froude, delivered some forty-five years ago, and running as follows:

“Two kinds of men . . . appear as leaders in time of change. . . . On one side there are the . . . men who have no confidence in the people—who have no passionate convictions—men who believe that all wholesome reforms proceed downward from the educated to the multitudes; who regard with contempt, qualified by terror, appeals to the popular conscience or to popular intelligence. Opposite to these are the men of faith—and by faith I do not mean belief in dogmas, but belief in goodness, belief in justice, in righteousness. . . . They are not contented with looking for what may be useful or pleasant to themselves; they look by quite other methods for what is honorable, for what is good, for what is just. . . . They know well that conscience is no exceptional privilege of the great or the cultivated, that to be generous and unselfish is no prerogative of rank or intellect.”

We of to-day who stand for the Progressive movement here in the United States ... Our aim is to secure the real and not the nominal rule of the people. With this purpose in view, we propose to do away with whatever in our government tends to secure to privilege, and to the great sinister special interests, a rampart from behind which they can beat back the forces that strive for social and industrial justice, and frustrate the will of the people.

For this purpose we believe in securing for the people the direct election of United States Senators, (...) the right of nominating candidates for office, from the President down, by direct primaries, because the convention system has been twisted from its purpose, so that the delegates to the conventions, when chosen under the present methods by pressure of money and patronage, often deliberately misrepresent instead of representing the popular will...

... The object, however, must be the same everywhere; that is, to give the people real control ... to secure social and industrial justice for every man and woman, so that the work of all of us ... will tend to increase the dignity, the worth, and the efficiency of each individual.

(...)

Every man is to that extent a Progressive if he stands for any form of social justice, whether it securing proper protection for factory girls against dangerous machinery, for securing a proper limitation of hours of labor for women and children in industry, for securing proper living conditions for those who dwell in the thickly crowded regions of our great cities, for helping, so far as legislators can help, all the conditions of work and life for wage-workers in great centers of industry (...)

Four years ago the Progressives supported Mr. Taft for President, The Republican party is now facing a great crisis. It is to decide whether it will be, as in the days of Lincoln, the party of the plain people, the party of progress, the party of social and industrial justice; or whether it will be the party of privilege and of special interests, the heir to those who were Lincoln's most bitter opponents, the party that represents the great interests within and with out Wall Street (...)

We do not propose to do injustice to any man, but we do propose adequately to guarantee the people against injustice by the mighty corporations which make up the predominant and characteristic feature of modern industrial life.

Prosperity can permanently come to this country only on a basis of honesty and of fair treatment for all. Those men of enormous wealth who bitterly oppose every species of effective control by the people, through their Governmental agents, over the business use of that wealth are, I verily believe, most short-sighted as to their own ultimate interests...

I stand for the adequate control, the real control, of all big business, and especially of all monopolistic big business where it proves unwise or impossible to break up the monopoly. There is a grim irony in the effect that has been produced upon Wall Street by the complete breakdown of the prosecutions against various trusts, notably the Standard Oil and Tobacco Trusts, under the Sherman Law. I have always insisted that, while the Sherman Law should be kept upon the books so as to be used wherever possible against monopoly, yet that it is by itself wholly unable to afford the relief demanded by the American people as against all the great corporations actually or potentially guilty of anti-social practices...

... The present contest is but a phase of the larger struggle.... Our opponents, representing the brute power of ceded privilege, can win only by using the led captains of mercenary politics, and the crooked financiers who stand behind those led captains, and those newspapers which those financiers and politicians own, influence, or control.

... And of course this applies no more to the slave-owner or to the foreign despot than to the present-day American citizen who oppresses others by the abuse of special privilege, be his wealth great or little, be he the multi-millionaire owner of railways and mines and factories who forgets his duties to those who earn him his bread while earning their own, or be he only the owner of a foul little sweatshop in which he grinds dollars from the excessive and underpaid labor of haggard women.

We who stand for the cause of progress, for the cause of the uplift of humanity and the betterment of mankind, are pledged to eternal war against tyranny and wrong, by the few or by the many, by a plutocracy or by a mob. We stand for justice and for fair play...

... This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in if it is not a reasonably good place for all of us to live in. When I plead the cause (...) of all who work excessively or in unhealthy surroundings... I am not only fighting for the weak, I am also fighting for the strong. The sons of all of us will pay in the future if we of the present do not do justice in the present...

Theodore Roosevelt
The New Nationalism
August 31, 1910

Delivered at the Dedication of the John Brown Memorial Park in Osawatomie, Kansas

We come here to-day to commemorate one of the epoch-making events of the long struggle for the rights of man — the long struggle for the uplift of humanity. Our country — this great republic — means nothing unless it means the triumph of a real democracy..., of an economic system under which each man shall be guaranteed the opportunity to show the best that there is in him...

One of the chief factors in progress is the destruction of special privilege. The essence of any struggle for healthy liberty has always been, and must always be, to take from some one man or class of men the right to enjoy power, or wealth, or position, or immunity, which has not been earned by service to his or their fellows. That is what you fought for in the Civil War, and that is what we strive for now. At many stages in the advance of humanity, this conflict between the men who possess more than they have earned and the men who have earned more than they possess is the central condition of progress...

I stand for the square deal. But when I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the game, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity...

Exactly as the special interests of cotton and slavery threatened our political integrity before the Civil War, so now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interests out of politics...

Corporate expenditures for political purposes, and especially such expenditures by public service corporations, have supplied one of the principal sources of corruption in our political affairs.

It has become entirely clear that we must have government supervision of the capitalization, not only of public service corporations, including, particularly, railways, but of all corporations doing an interstate business...

The absence of effective State, and, especially, national, restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power. The prime need to is to change the conditions which enable these men to accumulate power which it is not for the general welfare that they should hold or exercise....

Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more effective — a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate.

The people of the United States suffer from periodical financial panics to a degree substantially unknown to the other nations, which approach us in financial strength. There is no reason why we should suffer what they escape. It is of profound importance that our financial system should be promptly investigated, and so thoroughly and effectively revised...

It is hardly necessary to me to repeat that I believe in an efficient army and a navy large enough to secure for us abroad that respect which is the surest guarantee of peace...

Of conservation I shall speak more at length elsewhere. Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us...

The right to regulate the use of wealth in the public interest is universally admitted. Let us admit also the right to regulate the terms and conditions of labor, which is the chief element of wealth, directly in the interest of the common good. The fundamental thing to do for every man is to give him a

chance to reach a place in which he will make the greatest possible contribution to the public welfare...

National efficiency has to do, not only with natural resources and with men, but it is equally concerned with institutions... I do not ask for the over centralization; but I do ask that we work in a spirit of broad and far-reaching nationalism where we work for what concerns our people as a whole. We are all Americans... The betterment which we seek must be accomplished, I believe, mainly through the National Government.

The American people are right in demanding that New Nationalism, without which we cannot hope to deal with new problems. The New Nationalism puts the national need before sectional or personal advantage... This New Nationalism regards the executive power as the steward of the public welfare

If our political institutions were perfect, they would absolutely prevent the political domination of money in any part of our affairs

In the last analysis, the most important elements in any man's career must be the sum of those qualities which, in the aggregate, we speak of as character. If he has not got it, then no law that the wit of man can devise, no administration of the law by the boldest and strongest executive, will avail to help him. We must have the right kind of character — character that makes a man, first of all, a good man in the home, a good father, and a good husband... The prime problem of our nation is to get the right type of good citizenship, and, to get it, we must have progress, and our public men must be genuinely progressive

Remarks by the President on the Economy in Osawatomie, Kansas

Osawatomie High School - December 06, 2011

My grandparents ... believed in an America where hard work paid off... And these values gave rise to the largest middle class and the strongest economy that the world has ever known.

Today, we're still home to the world's most productive workers... But for most Americans, the basic bargain that made this country great has eroded. Long before the recession hit, hard work stopped paying off for too many people...

Now, for many years, credit cards and home equity loans papered over this harsh reality. But in 2008, the house of cards collapsed. We all know the story by now: Mortgages sold to people who couldn't afford them, or even sometimes understand them. Banks and investors allowed to keep packaging the risk and selling it off... Regulators who were supposed to warn us about the dangers of all this, but looked the other way or didn't have the authority to look at all.

It was wrong... And it plunged our economy and the world into a crisis from which we're still fighting to recover...

And ever since, there's been a raging debate over the best way to restore growth and prosperity, restore balance, restore fairness. Throughout the country, it's sparked protests and political movements -- from the tea party to the people who've been occupying the streets of New York and other cities.

But, Osawatomie, this is not just another political debate... This is a make-or-break moment for the middle class, and for all those who are fighting to get into the middle class. Because what's at stake is whether this will be a country where working people can earn enough to raise a family, build a modest savings, own a home, secure their retirement.

I believe that this country succeeds when everyone gets a fair shot... At the turn of the last century, when a nation of farmers was transitioning to become the world's industrial giant, we had to decide: Would we settle for a country where most of the new railroads and factories were being controlled by a few giant monopolies that kept prices high and wages low? Would we allow our citizens and even our children to work ungodly hours in conditions that were unsafe and unsanitary? ...

Theodore Roosevelt disagreed... And so he busted up monopolies, forcing those companies to compete for consumers with better services and better prices... He fought to make sure businesses couldn't profit by exploiting children or selling food or medicine that wasn't safe. And today, they still can't.

And in 1910, Teddy Roosevelt came here to Osawatomie and he laid out his vision for what he called a New Nationalism... Now, for this, Roosevelt was called a radical. He was called a socialist, even a communist. But today, we are a richer nation and a stronger democracy because of what he fought for in his last campaign: an eight-hour work day and a minimum wage for women, insurance for the unemployed and for the elderly, and those with disabilities; political reform and a progressive income tax.

Today, over 100 years later, our economy has gone through another transformation. Over the last few decades, huge advances in technology have allowed businesses to do more with less, and it's made it easier for them to set up shop and hire workers anywhere they want in the world. And many of you know firsthand the painful disruptions this has caused for a lot of Americans...

Now, just as there was in Teddy Roosevelt's time, there is a certain crowd in Washington who, for the last few decades, have said... "The market will take care of everything"... And we have to admit,

it's one that speaks to our rugged individualism and our healthy skepticism of too much government. That's in America's DNA... But here's the problem: It doesn't work. It has never worked.

We simply cannot return to this brand of "you're on your own" economics if we're serious about rebuilding the middle class in this country... It results in a prosperity that's enjoyed by fewer and fewer of our citizens.

Look at the statistics... The typical CEO who used to earn about 30 times more than his or her worker now earns 110 times more. And yet, over the last decade the incomes of most Americans have actually fallen by about 6 percent... That's why a CEO like Henry Ford made it his mission to pay his workers enough so that they could buy the cars he made. It's also why a recent study showed that countries with less inequality tend to have stronger and steadier economic growth over the long run.

Inequality also distorts our democracy. It gives an outsized voice to the few who can afford high-priced lobbyists and unlimited campaign contributions... It leaves everyone else rightly suspicious that the system in Washington is rigged against them... But there's an even more fundamental issue at stake. This kind of gaping inequality gives lie to the promise that's at the very heart of America: that this is a place where you can make it if you try...

So what does that mean for restoring middle-class security in today's economy? ... It starts by making education a national mission... In this economy, a higher education is the surest route to the middle class... In today's innovation economy, we also need a world-class commitment to science and research, the next generation of high-tech manufacturing.

Yes, business, and not government, will always be the primary generator of good jobs with incomes that lift people into the middle class and keep them there... But we don't have unlimited resources... If we want a strong middle class, then our tax code must reflect our values... The fact is this crisis has left a huge deficit of trust between Main Street and Wall Street... Investing in things like education that give everybody a chance to succeed. A tax code that makes sure everybody pays their fair share... That's what will grow our middle class again. In the end, rebuilding this economy based on fair play, a fair shot, and a fair share will require all of us to see that we have a stake in each other's success...

... In the final years of his life, Roosevelt took that same message all across this country... We still believe... in the words of the man who called for a New Nationalism all those years ago...