

The Progressive Era¹

I. Roots of Progressive Ideology: The progressive reforms that defined the early decades of the twentieth century had their roots in several significant changes that began to occur in the 1880s and 1890s. These changes helped create a public awareness of the problems facing industrial cities and encourage politicians to embrace a reform agenda to ensure their own election.

A. The Urban Middle Class: Between 1890 and 1920, the number of white-collar workers (doctors, lawyers, educators, secretaries, engineers, etc.) in cities increased dramatically. These urban dwellers wanted to reform cities to make them more humane, with better sanitation and more beautiful, and to make them more orderly. Settlement Houses, such as Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago, combined efforts to assist immigrants adapt to life in industrial America. Wary of recent events in some European cities, middle-class urban dwellers also worried that crowded living conditions would breed disease, crime, and violence in American cities.

B. Intellectuals: A growing number of intellectuals criticized American society and advocated reforms to improve urban life. William James, *Pragmatism* (1907), argued that new social realities could render old assumptions and practices invalid. In *The Promise of American Life* (1909), Herbert Croly called on government to take a more active role to preserve democracy. Both of these ideas suggested that preserving democracy in an industrial society required far greater effort than in Jefferson's agrarian republic. Jane Addams (*Democracy and Social Ethics*, 1902), founder of Hull House, argued that a complex industrial economy tied the fate of different classes together and urged her middle-class readers to embrace urban and factory reforms for the betterment of society as a whole. John Dewey (*Democracy and Education*, 1916) promoted educational reforms that fostered community and cooperation among students as a practical preparation for citizenship. Taken together, Progressive intellectuals tried to update traditional American belief in democracy to work in an industrial era.

C. Muckrakers: Popular magazines promoted interest in reform by publishing exposes of political and economic corruption. Novelists like Frank Norris (*The Octopus*, 1901) and Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*, 1904) described the exploitation of workers and consumers by big businesses, often in lurid detail. Journalists like Lincoln Steffens (*The Shame of the Cities*, 1904), Ida Tarbell (*History of Standard Oil*, 1904), and David Graham Phillips (*The Treason of the Senate*, 1906) demonstrated how big business corrupted politics in pursuit of greater profits.

¹ Adapted from Paul Boyer, et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 626-661.

II. State and Local Reform: Mayors and governors in some states began to promote reforms to end political corruption and ameliorate living and working conditions in industrial cities. Early reforms served as examples for other states and the national government.

A. Political Reform: Middle-class reformers targeted urban political machines. Political bosses maintained power through election fraud and patronage, and generated wealth through graft. For example, Detroit mayor Hazen Pingree ended corruption in city hall and provided improved services, including lower transit fares and public baths. Samuel Jones of Toledo established free kindergartens, playgrounds, and rooming houses for factory workers.

In Wisconsin, Robert M. “Fighting Bob” La Follette challenged the Republican party bosses to win election as governor, when he introduced primary elections and promoted the initiative, referendum, and recall. La Follette often consulted with University of Wisconsin experts to help draft legislation, freeing legislators from the influence of lobbyists. Later, Wisconsin established the Legislative Reference Library to provide non-partisan, objective information for creating public policy.

B. Economic Reform: In addition to political reforms intended to make Wisconsin more democratic, La Follette and his followers also introduced reforms designed to curb abuses by big businesses. The Railroad Commission regulated prices and services and later expanded to regulate most public services. Tax reforms included ad valorem taxation of railroad property and the income tax. To protect workers, the state created the first workers’ compensation program that provided aid to injured workers and made factories safer.

In Illinois, Florence Kelly convinced the legislature to eliminate child labor in factories, and Alice Hamilton drew attention to environmental hazards in industry. Oregon limited woman factory workers to a ten-hour day.

C. Social Reform: Social reformers looked at the problems spawned by cities that grew rapidly in population and overwhelmed the existing infrastructure and tried to reshape the physical and human geographies of cities. Reformers advocated the creation of parks and playgrounds and beautification projects. Socialists in Milwaukee expanded utility and sewer systems that provided efficient services to residents. Public health was also a concern, as reformers connected epidemics to contaminated drinking water, inadequate sewer systems, and industrial pollution. Learning from the experience of settlement houses, municipal and state governments increasingly took on the responsibility of eliminating environmental problems that endangered people’s health.

D. Moral Reform: Since many progressive reformers were middle-class themselves, they were concerned about enforcing “acceptable” behavior among industrial workers. Fearful that moral failings would promote social disorder, reformers saw no great

contradiction in promoting greater democracy and social control at the same time. Reformers attacked prostitution (the “white slave” trade) for exploiting women, and demanded prohibition to reduce accidents and protect women and children from alcoholic husbands and fathers. Immigrants were particular targets because many progressive reformers viewed immigrants as incapable of adapting to American ideas of responsible citizenship or as lesser races.

III. Asserting Equality: As progressive reform pushed the democratization of the political and economic life of the nation, traditionally marginalized groups pushed for equal inclusion in a white and male-dominated society.

A. African Americans: Despite traditional American ideals of freedom and democracy, racism increased dramatically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as southern states systematically disfranchised African Americans and as vigilantes terrorized their victims to preserve white supremacy. In 1890s, Ida B. Wells-Barnett (*A Red Record*, 1895) launched a crusade to end lynching, drawing attention to the long record of racial violence. W.E.B. Du Bois (*The Souls of Black Folks*, 1903) demanded full equality for African Americans and cofounded the NAACP in 1909.

B. Woman Suffrage: In 1910, only four states (Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho) allowed women to vote. As women became increasingly important to the progressive reform movement, more women began the fight to vote in order to promote reform measures and protect their families. Carrie Chapman Catt became the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900 and began a grass-roots effort to demand the right to vote. In 1913, Alice Paul founded the National Woman’s Party as a more militant organization to pressure Congress into passing a constitutional amendment. Others, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman challenged the traditional role of women in society, arguing that women needed to free themselves from traditional domestic roles in order to achieve political and economic equality. Likewise, Margaret Sanger promoted birth control and sex education as a way for women to assume full autonomy of their own bodies.

C. Labor Unions: Although progressive reforms were championed by the middle class, many workers demanded reforms to democratize the economic system. American Federation of Labor membership grew to 20 million by 1920. Smaller but more militant unions, like the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union organized immigrant laborers and struck for higher wages and better working conditions. The most radical union was the Industrial Workers of the World (often referred to as “Wobblies”), which led several mass strikes among miners in the west and textile workers in the northeast. Some labor organizers began advocating socialism and called for public ownership of factories, utilities, and transportation. The Socialist Party of America was founded in 1900 to advocate democratic socialism and nominated Eugene V. Debs for president five

times. Socialists had greater success in cities like Milwaukee, which elected Socialist mayors Emil Seidel and Dan Hoan and Socialist congressman Victor Berger.

IV. National Progressivism: After the turn of the twentieth century, the state and local reforms begun in the 1890s began to coalesce into a national movement. Although the national progressive movement was rarely organized and included reformers from different political parties and temperaments, reformers often saw themselves as part of a movement aimed at revitalizing American democracy. Under three presidents, the federal government greatly expanded its authority over the economy.

A. Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901 and brought his boundless energy to several reform causes.

1. Economic Regulation: As president, Roosevelt was much more sympathetic toward organized labor than his predecessors. In 1902 he threatened to nationalize the coal industry if mine owners refused to negotiate with the United Mine Workers. The Roosevelt administration also ordered the prosecution of trusts, giant holding companies that tended to stifle free competition. His Justice Department filed forty-four antitrust suits against companies that included Standard Oil, the Northern Securities Company, and the American Tobacco Company. In 1904, Roosevelt signed the Hepburn Act, which authorized the Interstate Commerce Commission to set maximum railroad rates and examine railroad companies' financial records.

2. Consumer Protection: Reformers had long demanded an end to unsafe foods or bogus medicines. In 1906, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* graphically described the unsanitary meatpacking industry in Chicago. Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act to regulate meatpacking and to ban adulterated foods. Because increasing numbers of Americans relied on store-bought food, these acts were especially popular.

3. Environmentalism: Roosevelt loved the outdoors and brought a desire to preserve the nation's natural resources for recreational use. As president, he established the U.S. Forest Service and set aside 200 million acres of public land as wildlife reserves, national parks, national forests, and national monuments. Like Roosevelt, many reformers saw access to "wilderness" as an antidote to stressful and unhealthy urban life.

B. William Howard Taft (1909-1913) Roosevelt declined to run for a third term and endorsed William Howard Taft, who easily won the Republican nomination and defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan in 1908.

In some ways, Taft continued Roosevelt's reform agenda. He supported the Mann-Elkins Act (1910), which strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission and extended its authority to include telephone and telegraph services. Progressives in Congress, led by Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette, demanded more reforms and broke with the president over tariff reform and the sale of public lands. Even though Taft prosecuted more antitrust suits than Roosevelt, congressional reformers perceived him to be friendlier to big business. Returning from an African safari, Roosevelt broke with his successor and sought the Republican nomination for himself.

C. Woodrow Wilson: The split in the Republican party between Roosevelt and Taft allowed the election of New Jersey governor Woodrow Wilson. Originally from Virginia, Wilson had been a university professor and president of Princeton before entering politics in 1910. Although he promoted economic and political reform, his southern roots made him less sympathetic to woman suffrage and racial equality.

1. Monetary Reform: Wilson focused first on the economy. In 1913, he pushed a lower tariff bill through congress and negotiated the Federal Reserve Act, which created a twelve regional banks partly under public control and governed by the Federal Reserve Board in Washington. This modernized banking system increased the amount of credit available to business, created a flexible and stable national currency, and gave the federal government some ability to combat inflation and prevent recession.

2. Economic Regulation: In 1914, Congress passed the Federal Trade Act, which established the Federal Trade Commission as a regulatory body authorized to investigate violations of federal regulations and require reports from corporations. Also in 1914, Congress passed the Clayton Antitrust Act, which outlawed certain practices, such as selling at a loss, that hurt competition. Subsequent measures banned products made by child labor from interstate commerce, established an eight-hour day and workers' compensation program for federal employees. Following up on an old Populist demand, Wilson also supported legislation that allowed farmers to get low-interest government loans using their crops as collateral.

3. Constitutional Amendments: The states ratifies four amendments to the Constitution that reflect progressive reforms. The Sixteenth Amendment (1913) granted Congress the right to tax incomes, thereby establishing a permanent source of revenue that was based on an individual citizen's ability to pay. The Seventeenth Amendment (1913) provided for the popular election of United States senators to make them more responsive to the will of the people rather than political bosses or corporate wealth. The Eighteenth Amendment (1919)

prohibited the manufacture, importation, or sale of liquor. The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) gave women the right to vote.

Herbert Croly, excerpt from *The Promise of American Life*, 1909²

When, however, Americans talk of their country as the Land of Promise, a question may well be raised as to precisely what they mean. They mean, of course, in general, that the future will have something better in store for them individually and collectively than has the past or the present; but a very superficial analysis of this meaning discloses certain ambiguities. What are the particular benefits which this better future will give to Americans either individually or as a nation? And how is this Promise to be fulfilled? Will it fulfill itself, or does it imply certain responsibilities? If so, what responsibilities? When we speak of a young man's career as promising, we mean that his abilities and opportunities are such that he is likely to become rich or famous or powerful; and this judgment does not of course imply, so far as we are concerned, any responsibility. It is merely a prophecy based upon past performances and proved qualities. But the career, which from the standpoint of an outsider is merely an anticipation, becomes for the young man himself a serious task. For him, at all events, the better future will not merely happen. He will have to do something to deserve it. It may be wrecked by unforeseen obstacles, by unsuspected infirmities, or by some critical error of judgment. So it is with the Promise of American life. From the point of view of an immigrant this Promise may consist of the anticipation of a better future, which he can share merely by taking up his residence on American soil; but once he has become an American, the Promise can no longer remain merely an anticipation. It becomes in that case a responsibility, which requires for its fulfillment a certain kind of behavior on the part of himself and his fellow-Americans. And when we attempt to define the Promise of American life, we are obliged, also, to describe the kind of behavior which the fulfillment of the Promise demands.

The distinction between the two aspects of America as a Land of Promise made in the preceding paragraph is sufficiently obvious, but it is usually slurred by the average good American patriot. The better future, which is promised for himself, his children, and for other Americans, is chiefly a matter of confident anticipation. He looks upon it very much as a friendly outsider might look on some promising individual career. The better future is understood by him as something which fulfills itself. He calls his country, not only the Land of Promise, but the Land of Destiny. It is fairly launched on a brilliant and successful career, the continued prosperity of which is prophesied by the very momentum of its advance. As Mr. H.G. Wells says in "The Future in America," "When one talks to an American of his national purpose, he seems a little at a loss; if one speaks of his national destiny, he responds with alacrity." The great majority of Americans would expect a book written about "The Promise of American Life" to contain chiefly a fanciful description of the glorious American future—a sort of Utopia up-to-date, situated in the land of Good-Enough, and flying the Stars and Stripes. They might admit in words that the achievement of this glorious future implied certain responsibilities, but they would not regard the admission either as startling or novel. Such responsibilities were met by our predecessors; they will be met by our followers. Inasmuch as it is the honorable American past which prophesies on behalf of the better American future, our national responsibility consists fundamentally in remaining true to traditional ways of behavior, standards, and ideals. What we Americans have to do in order to fulfill our national Promise is to keep up the good work—to continue resolutely and cheerfully along the appointed path.

² <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14422/14422-8.txt>.

Platform of the Progressive Party, 1912 (excerpts)³

The conscience of the people, in a time of grave national problems, has called into being a new party, born of the nation's sense of justice. We of the Progressive party here dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of the duty laid upon us by our fathers to maintain the government of the people, by the people and for the people whose foundations they laid.

We hold with Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln that the people are the masters of their Constitution, to fulfill its purposes and to safeguard it from those who, by perversion of its intent, would convert it into an instrument of injustice. In accordance with the needs of each generation the people must use their sovereign powers to establish and maintain equal opportunity and industrial justice, to secure which this Government was founded and without which no republic can endure.

This country belongs to the people who inhabit it. Its resources, its business, its institutions and its laws should be utilized, maintained or altered in whatever manner will best promote the general interest.

It is time to set the public welfare in the first place.

THE OLD PARTIES

Political parties exist to secure responsible government and to execute the will of the people.

From these great tasks both of the old parties have turned aside. Instead of instruments to promote the general welfare, they have become the tools of corrupt interests which use them impartially to serve their selfish purposes. Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people.

To destroy this invisible government, to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.

The deliberate betrayal of its trust by the Republican party, the fatal incapacity of the Democratic party to deal with the new issues of the new time, have compelled the people to forge a new instrument of government through which to give effect to their will in laws and institutions.

Unhampered by tradition, uncorrupted by power, undismayed by the magnitude of the task, the new party offers itself as the instrument of the people to sweep away old abuses, to build a new and nobler commonwealth.

A COVENANT WITH THE PEOPLE

This declaration is our covenant with the people, and we hereby bind the party and its candidates in State and Nation to the pledges made herein.

THE RULE OF THE PEOPLE

The National Progressive party, committed to the principles of government by a self-controlled democracy expressing its will through representatives of the people, pledges itself to secure such alterations in the fundamental law of the several States and of the United States as shall insure the representative character of the government.

In particular, the party declares for direct primaries for the nomination of State and National officers, for nation-wide preferential primaries for candidates for the presidency; for the direct election of United States Senators by the people; and we urge on the States the policy of the short ballot, with responsibility to the people secured by the initiative, referendum and recall.

AMENDMENT OF CONSTITUTION

The Progressive party, believing that a free people should have the power from time to time to amend their fundamental law so as to adapt it progressively to the changing needs of the people, pledges itself to provide a more easy and expeditious method of amending the Federal Constitution.

³ <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=607>

NATION AND STATE

Up to the limit of the Constitution, and later by amendment of the Constitution, it found necessary, we advocate bringing under effective national jurisdiction those problems which have expanded beyond reach of the individual States.

It is as grotesque as it is intolerable that the several States should by unequal laws in matter of common concern become competing commercial agencies, barter the lives of their children, the health of their women and the safety and well being of their working people for the benefit of their financial interests.

The extreme insistence on States' rights by the Democratic party in the Baltimore platform demonstrates anew its inability to understand the world into which it has survived or to administer the affairs of a union of States which have in all essential respects become one people.

EQUAL SUFFRAGE

The Progressive party, believing that no people can justly claim to be a true democracy which denies political rights on account of sex, pledges itself to the task of securing equal suffrage to men and women alike.

CORRUPT PRACTICES

We pledge our party to legislation that will compel strict limitation of all campaign contributions and expenditures, and detailed publicity of both before as well as after primaries and elections.

PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE

We pledge our party to legislation compelling the registration of lobbyists; publicity of committee hearings except on foreign affairs, and recording of all votes in committee; and forbidding federal appointees from holding office in State or National political organizations, or taking part as officers or delegates in political conventions for the nomination of elective State or National officials.

THE COURTS

The Progressive party demands such restriction of the power of the courts as shall leave to the people the ultimate authority to determine fundamental questions of social welfare and public policy. To secure this end, it pledges itself to provide:

1. That when an Act, passed under the police power of the State is held unconstitutional under the State Constitution, by the courts, the people, after an ample interval for deliberation, shall have an opportunity to vote on the question whether they desire the Act to become law, notwithstanding such decision.
2. That every decision of the highest appellate court of a State declaring an Act of the Legislature unconstitutional on the ground of its violation of the Federal Constitution shall be subject to the same review by the Supreme Court of the United States as is now accorded to decisions sustaining such legislation.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

The Progressive party, in order to secure to the people a better administration of justice and by that means to bring about a more general respect for the law and the courts, pledges itself to work unceasingly for the reform of legal procedure and judicial methods.

We believe that the issuance of injunctions in cases arising out of labor disputes should be prohibited when such injunctions would not apply when no labor disputes existed.

We also believe that a person cited for contempt in labor disputes, except when such contempt was committed in the actual presence of the court or so near thereto as to interfere with the proper administration of justice, should have a right to trial by jury.

SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL JUSTICE

The supreme duty of the Nation is the conservation of human resources through an enlightened measure of social and industrial justice. We pledge ourselves to work unceasingly in State and Nation for:

Effective legislation looking to the prevention of industrial accidents, occupational diseases, overwork, involuntary unemployment, and other injurious effects incident to modern industry;

The fixing of minimum safety and health standards for the various occupations, and the exercise of the public authority of State and Nation, including the Federal Control over interstate commerce, and the taxing power, to maintain such standards;

The prohibition of child labor;

Minimum wage standards for working women, to provide a "living wage" in all industrial occupations;

The general prohibition of night work for women and the establishment of an eight hour day for women and young persons;

One day's rest in seven for all wage workers;

The eight hour day in continuous twenty-four hour industries;

The abolition of the convict contract labor system; substituting a system of prison production for governmental consumption only; and the application of prisoners' earnings to the support of their dependent families;

Publicity as to wages, hours and conditions of labor; full reports upon industrial accidents and diseases, and the opening to public inspection of all tallies, weights, measures and check systems on labor products;

Standards of compensation for death by industrial accident and injury and trade disease which will transfer the burden of lost earnings from the families of working people to the industry, and thus to the community;

The protection of home life against the hazards of sickness, irregular employment and old age through the adoption of a system of social insurance adapted to American use;

The development of the creative labor power of America by lifting the last load of illiteracy from American youth and establishing continuation schools for industrial education under public control and encouraging agricultural education and demonstration in rural schools;

The establishment of industrial research laboratories to put the methods and discoveries of science at the service of American producers;

We favor the organization of the workers, men and women, as a means of protecting their interests and of promoting their progress.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

We pledge our party to establish a department of labor with a seat in the cabinet, and with wide jurisdiction over matters affecting the conditions of labor and living.

COUNTRY LIFE

The development and prosperity of country life are as important to the people who live in the cities as they are to the farmers. Increase of prosperity on the farm will favorably affect the cost of living, and promote the interests of all who dwell in the country, and all who depend upon its products for clothing, shelter and food.

We pledge our party to foster the development of agricultural credit and co-operation, the teaching of agriculture in schools, agricultural college extension, the use of mechanical power on the farm, and to re-establish the Country Life Commission, thus directly promoting the welfare of the farmers, and bringing the benefits of better farming, better business and better living within their reach.

HIGH COST OF LIVING

The high cost of living is due partly to worldwide and partly to local causes; partly to natural and partly to artificial causes. The measures proposed in this platform on various subjects such as the tariff, the trusts and conservation, will of themselves remove the artificial causes.

There will remain other elements such as the tendency to leave the country for the city, waste, extravagance, bad system of taxation, poor methods of raising crops and bad business methods in marketing crops.

To remedy these conditions requires the fullest information and based on this information, effective government supervision and control to remove all the artificial causes. We pledge ourselves to such full and immediate inquiry and to immediate action to deal with every need such inquiry discloses.

HEALTH

We favor the union of all the existing agencies of the Federal Government dealing with the public health into a single national health service without discrimination against or for any one set of therapeutic methods, school of medicine, or school of healing with such additional powers as may be necessary to enable it to perform efficiently such duties in the protection of the public from preventable diseases as may be properly undertaken by the Federal authorities, including the executing of existing laws regarding pure food, quarantine and cognate subjects, the promotion of vital statistics and the extension of the registration area of such statistics, and co-operation with the health activities of the various States and cities of the Nation.

BUSINESS

We believe that true popular government, justice and prosperity go hand in hand, and, so believing, it is our purpose to secure that large measure of general prosperity which is the fruit of legitimate and honest business, fostered by equal justice and by sound progressive laws.

We demand that the test of true prosperity shall be the benefits conferred thereby on all the citizens, not confined to individuals or classes, and that the test of corporate efficiency shall be the ability better to serve the public; that those who profit by control of business affairs shall justify that profit and that control by sharing with the public the fruits thereof.

We therefore demand a strong National regulation of inter-State corporations. The corporation is an essential part of modern business. The concentration of modern business, in some degree, is both inevitable and necessary for national and international business efficiency. But the existing concentration of vast wealth under a corporate system, unguarded and uncontrolled by the Nation, has placed in the hands of a few men enormous, secret, irresponsible power over the daily life of the citizen, a power insufferable in a free Government and certain of abuse. This power has been abused, in monopoly of National resources, in stock watering, in unfair competition and unfair privileges, and finally in sinister influences on the public agencies of State and Nation. We do not fear commercial power, but we insist that it shall be exercised openly, under publicity, supervision and regulation of the most efficient sort, which will preserve its good while eradicating and preventing its ill.

To that end we urge the establishment of a strong Federal administrative commission of high standing, which shall maintain permanent active supervision over industrial corporations engaged in inter-State commerce, or such of them as are of public importance, doing for them what the Government now does for the National banks, and what is now done for the railroads by the Inter-State Commerce Commission.

Such a commission must enforce the complete publicity of those corporation transactions which are of public interest; must attack unfair competition, false capitalization and special privilege, and by continuous trained watchfulness guard and keep open equally all the highways of American commerce.

Thus the business man will have certain knowledge of the law, and will be able to conduct his business easily in conformity therewith; the investor will find security for his capital; dividends will be rendered more certain, and the savings of the people will be drawn naturally and safely into the channels of trade.

Under such a system of constructive regulation, legitimate business, freed from confusion, uncertainty and fruitless litigation, will develop normally in response to the energy and enterprise of the American business man.

We favor strengthening the Sherman Law by prohibiting agreement to divide territory or limit output; refusing to sell to customers who buy from business rivals; to sell below cost in certain areas while maintaining higher prices in other places; using the power of transportation to aid or injure special business concerns; and other unfair trade practices.

PATENTS

We pledge ourselves to the enactment of a patent law which will make it impossible for patents to be suppressed or used against the public welfare in the interests of injurious monopolies.

INTER-STATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

We pledge our party to secure to the Inter-State Commerce Commission the power to value the physical property of railroads. In order that the power of the commission to protect the people may not be impaired or destroyed, we demand the abolition of the Commerce Court.

CURRENCY

We believe there exists imperative need for prompt legislation for the improvement of our National currency system. We believe the present method of issuing notes through private agencies is harmful and unscientific.

The issue of currency is fundamentally a Government function and the system should have as basic principles soundness and elasticity. The control should be lodged with the Government and should be protected from domination or manipulation by Wall Street or any special interests.

We are opposed to the so-called Aldrich currency bill, because its provisions would place our currency and credit system in private hands, not subject to effective public control.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The time has come when the Federal Government should co-operate with manufacturers and producers in extending our foreign commerce. To this end we demand adequate appropriations by Congress, and the appointment of diplomatic and consular officers solely with a view to their special fitness and worth, and not in consideration of political expediency.

It is imperative to the welfare of our people that we enlarge and extend our foreign commerce.

In every way possible our Federal Government should co-operate in this important matter. Germany's policy of co-operation between government and business has, in comparatively few years, made that nation a leading competitor for the commerce of the world.

CONSERVATION

The natural resources of the Nation must be promptly developed and generously used to supply the people's needs, but we cannot safely allow them to be wasted, exploited, monopolized or controlled against the general good. We heartily favor the policy of conservation, and we pledge our party to protect the National forests without hindering their legitimate use for the benefit of all the people.

Agricultural lands in the National forests are, and should remain, open to the genuine settler. Conservation will not retard legitimate development. The honest settler must receive his patent promptly, without hindrance, rules or delays.

We believe that the remaining forests, coal and oil lands, water powers and other natural resources still in State or National control (except agricultural lands) are more likely to be wisely conserved and utilized for the general welfare if held in the public hands.

In order that consumers and producers, managers and workmen, now and hereafter, need not pay toll to private monopolies of power and raw material, we demand that such resources shall be retained by the State or Nation, and opened to immediate use under laws which will encourage development and make to the people a moderate return for benefits conferred.

In particular we pledge our party to require reasonable compensation to the public for water power rights hereafter granted by the public.

We pledge legislation to lease the public grazing lands under equitable provisions now pending which will increase the production of food for the people and thoroughly safeguard the rights of the actual homemaker. Natural resources, whose conservation is necessary for the National welfare, should be owned or controlled by the Nation.

GOOD ROADS

We recognize the vital importance of good roads and we pledge our party to foster their extension in every proper way, and we favor the early construction of National highways. We also favor the extension of the rural free delivery service.

ALASKA

The coal and other natural resources of Alaska should be opened to development at once. They are owned by the people of the United States, and are safe from monopoly, waste or destruction only while so owned.

We demand that they shall neither be sold nor given away, except under the Homestead Law, but while held in Government ownership shall be opened to use promptly upon liberal terms requiring immediate development.

Thus the benefit of cheap fuel will accrue to the Government of the United States and to the people of Alaska and the Pacific Coast; the settlement of extensive agricultural lands will be hastened; the extermination of the salmon will be prevented and the just and wise development of Alaskan resources will take the place of private extortion or monopoly.

We demand also that extortion or monopoly in transportation shall be prevented by the prompt acquisition, construction or improvement by the Government of such railroads, harbor and other facilities for transportation as the welfare of the people may demand.

We promise the people of the Territory of Alaska the same measure of legal self-government that was given to other American territories, and that Federal officials appointed there shall be qualified by previous bona-fide residence in the Territory.

WATERWAYS

The rivers of the United States are the natural arteries of this continent. We demand that they shall be opened to traffic as indispensable parts of a great Nation-wide system of transportation, in which the Panama Canal will be the central link, thus enabling the whole interior of the United States to share with the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard in the benefit derived from the canal.

It is a National obligation to develop our rivers, and especially the Mississippi and its tributaries, without delay, under a comprehensive general plan covering each river system from its source to its mouth, designed to secure its highest usefulness for navigation, irrigation, domestic supply, water power and the prevention of floods.

We pledge our party to the immediate preparation of such a plan, which should be made and carried out in close and friendly co-operation between the Nation, the States and the cities affected.

Under such a plan, the destructive floods of the Mississippi and other streams, which represent a vast and needless loss to the Nation, would be controlled by forest conservation and water storage at the headwaters, and by levees below; land sufficient to support millions of people would be reclaimed from the deserts and the swamps, water power enough to transform the industrial standings of whole States would be developed, adequate water terminals would be provided, transportation by river would revive, and the railroads would be compelled to co-operate as freely with the boat lines as with each other.

The equipment, organization and experience acquired in constructing the Panama Canal soon will be available for the Lakes-to-the-Gulf deep waterway and other portions of this great work, and should be utilized by the Nation in co-operation with the various States, at the lowest net cost to the people.

PANAMA CANAL

The Panama Canal, built and paid for by the American people, must be used primarily for their benefit.

We demand that the canal shall be so operated as to break the transportation monopoly now held and misused by the transcontinental railroads by maintaining sea competition with them; that ships directly or indirectly owned or controlled by American railroad corporations shall not be permitted to use the canal, and that American ships engaged in coastwise trade shall pay no tolls.

The Progressive party will favor legislation having for its aim the development of friendship and commerce between the United States and Latin-American nations.

TARIFF

We believe in a protective tariff which shall equalize conditions of competition between the United States and foreign countries, both for the farmer and the manufacturer, and which shall maintain for labor an adequate standard of living.

Primarily the benefit of any tariff should be disclosed in the pay envelope of the laborer. We declare that no industry deserves protection which is unfair to labor or which is operating in violation of Federal law. We believe that the presumption is always in favor of the consuming public.

We demand tariff revision because the present tariff is unjust to the people of the United States. Fair dealing toward the people requires an immediate downward revision of those schedules wherein duties are shown to be unjust or excessive.

We pledge ourselves to the establishment of a non-partisan scientific tariff commission, reporting both to the President and to either branch of Congress, which shall report, first, as to the costs of production, efficiency of labor, capitalization, industrial organization and efficiency and the general competitive position in this country and abroad of industries seeking protection from Congress; second, as to the revenue producing power of the tariff and its relation to the resources of Government; and, third, as to the effect of the tariff on prices, operations of middlemen, and on the purchasing power of the consumer.

We believe that this commission should have plenary power to elicit information, and for this purpose to prescribe a uniform system of accounting for the great protected industries. The work of the commission should not prevent the immediate adoption of acts reducing these schedules generally recognized as excessive.

We condemn the Payne-Aldrich bill as unjust to the people. The Republican organization is in the hands of those who have broken, and cannot again be trusted to keep, the promise of necessary downward revision.

The Democratic party is committed to the destruction of the protective system through a tariff for revenue only a policy which would inevitably produce widespread industrial and commercial disaster.

We demand the immediate repeal of the Canadian Reciprocity Act.

INHERITANCE AND INCOME TAX

We believe in a graduated inheritance tax as a National means of equalizing the obligations of holders of property to Government, and we hereby pledge our party to enact such a Federal law as will tax large inheritances, returning to the States an equitable percentage of all amounts collected.

We favor the ratification of the pending amendment to the Constitution giving the Government power to levy an income tax.

PEACE AND NATIONAL DEFENSE

The Progressive party deplores the survival in our civilization of the barbaric system of warfare among nations with its enormous waste of resources even in time of peace, and the consequent impoverishment of the life of the toiling masses. We pledge the party to use its best endeavors to substitute judicial and other peaceful means of settling international differences.

We favor an international agreement for the limitation of naval forces. Pending such an agreement, and as the best means of preserving peace, we pledge ourselves to maintain for the present the policy of building two battleships a year.

TREATY RIGHTS

We pledge our party to protect the rights of American citizenship at home and abroad. No treaty should receive the sanction of our Government which discriminates between American citizens because of birthplace, race, or religion, or that does not recognize the absolute right of expatriation.

THE IMMIGRANT

Through the establishment of industrial standards we propose to secure to the able-bodied immigrant and to his native fellow workers a larger share of American opportunity.

We denounce the fatal policy of indifference and neglect which has left our enormous immigrant population to become the prey of chance and cupidity.

We favor Governmental action to encourage the distribution of immigrants away from the congested cities, to rigidly supervise all private agencies dealing with them and to promote their assimilation, education and advancement.

PENSIONS

We pledge ourselves to a wise and just policy of pensioning American soldiers and sailors and their widows and children by the Federal Government. And we approve the policy of the southern States in granting pensions to the ex-Confederate soldiers and sailors and their widows and children.

PARCEL POST

We pledge our party to the immediate creation of a parcel post, with rates proportionate to distance and service.

CIVIL SERVICE

We condemn the violations of the Civil Service Law under the present administration, including the coercion and assessment of subordinate employees, and the President's refusal to punish such violation after a finding of guilty by his own commission; his distribution of patronage among subservient congressmen, while withholding it from those who refuse support of administration measures; his withdrawal of nominations from the Senate until political support for himself was secured, and his open use of the offices to reward those who voted for his renomination.

To eradicate these abuses, we demand not only the enforcement of the civil service act in letter and spirit, but also legislation which will bring under the competitive system postmasters, collectors, marshals, and all other non-political officers, as well as the enactment of an equitable retirement law, and we also insist upon continuous service during good behavior and efficiency.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

We pledge our party to readjustment of the business methods of the National Government and a proper coordination of the Federal bureaus, which will increase the economy and efficiency of the Government service, prevent duplications, and secure better results to the taxpayers for every dollar expended.

GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION OVER INVESTMENTS

The people of the United States are swindled out of many millions of dollars every year, through worthless investments. The plain people, the wage earner and the men and women with small savings, have no way of knowing the merit of concerns sending out highly colored prospectuses offering stock for sale, prospectuses that make big returns seem certain and fortunes easily within grasp.

We hold it to be the duty of the Government to protect its people from this kind of piracy. We, therefore, demand wise, carefully thought out legislation that will give us such Governmental supervision over this matter as will furnish to the people of the United States this much-needed protection, and we pledge ourselves thereto.

CONCLUSION

On these principles and on the recognized desirability of uniting the Progressive forces of the Nation into an organization which shall unequivocally represent the Progressive spirit and policy we appeal for the support of all American citizens, without regard to previous political affiliations.

Suggested Readings

Cooper, John Milton, Jr. *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.

Lears, Jackson. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009.

McGerr, Michael. *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*. New York: The Free Press, 2003.