

AP US History

HW – Progressive Era Documents – please read by next class

Teddy Roosevelt, speech on the "New Nationalism" -- August 31, 1910

...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 games, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service...

Now, this means that our government, national and State, must be freed from the sinister influence or control of special interests. 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... every special interest is entitled to justice, but not one is entitled to a vote in Congress, to a voice on the bench, or to representation in any public office. There can be no effective control of corporations while their political activity remains. To put an end to it will be neither a short nor an easy task, but it can be done...

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. I do not wish to see the nation forced into the ownership of the railways if it can possibly be avoided, and the only alternative is thoroughgoing and effective regulation... It is my personal belief that the same kind and degree of control and supervision which should be exercised over public-service corporations should be extended also to combinations which control necessities of life, such as meat, oil, and coal, or which deal in them on an important scale...

Combinations in industry are the result of an imperative economic law which cannot be repealed by political legislation. The effort at prohibiting all combination has substantially failed. The way out lies, not in attempting to prevent such combinations, but in completely controlling them in the interest of the public welfare...

Woodrow Wilson, speech on the "New Freedom" -- September 2, 1912

I want to speak upon this occasion, of course, on the interests of the workingman, of the wage earner... We are not afraid of those who pursue legitimate pursuits provided they link those pursuits in at every turn with the interest of the community as a whole; and no man can conduct a legitimate business, if he conducts it in the interest of a single class...

I am a Democrat as distinguished from a Republican because I believe that the leaders of the Republican Party have allowed themselves to become so tied up in alliances with special interests that they are not free to serve us all. And that the immediate business, if you are to have any kind of reform at all, is to set your government free, is to break it away from the partnerships and alliances and understandings and [purchases] which have made it impossible for it to look at the country as a whole and made it necessary to serve special interests one at a time...

I want to call your attention to the fact that just as soon as a minimum wage is established by law, the temptation of every employer in the United States will be to bring his wages down as close to that minimum as he dares, because you can't strike against the government of the United States... The minute you are taken care of by the government you are wards, not independent men... The workingmen of this country are perfectly aware that they sell their commodity, that is to say labor, in a perfectly open market. There is free trade in labor in the United States... and the world demand is what establishes for the most part the rate of wages... The purpose of the Democratic leaders is this: not to legislate competition into existence -- because statutes can't make men do things-- but to regulate competition...

Ours is a program of liberty and theirs is a program of regulation. Ours is a program by which we find we know the wrongs that have been committed and we can stop those wrongs...What I fear, therefore, is a government of experts. God forbid that in a democratic country we should resign the task and give the government over to experts. What are we for if we are to be [scientifically] taken care of by a small number of gentlemen who are the only men who understand the job? Because if we don't understand the job, then we are not a free people...

Thinking Questions:

- ★ How does Roosevelt understand the relationship between government and business? What about Wilson?
- ★ What is the most significant difference between New Nationalism and New Freedom? Most significant similarity?
- ★ To what segment of society do you think each president is trying to appeal? Why?