

Political Address

by

Theodore Roosevelt

Through which the bullet  
passed when the attempt  
was made to assassinate  
him at Milwaukee in 1912.

Chicago, Oct. 12th, '12.

Mr. Wilson has suffered many changes of heart on many different subjects and among them is his attitude as regards his fellow-Americans of foreign birth and origin. Until Mr. Wilson became a candidate he looked at these fellow-Americans of his, who were born abroad, from the most pronounced nativist standpoint, his feeling being, not that they were fellow Americans at all but that they were foreigners who had remained foreigners. In the Atlantic Monthly in November 1889, he spoke with comprehensive dislike of all immigrants from European countries, saying that because of "the enormous immigration which year after year pours into the country from Europe our own temperate blood, schooled to self-possession and the measured conduct of self-government, is receiving a constant infusion and yearly experiencing a partial corruption of foreign blood,"



Now, if Mr. Wilson believed this before he was a candidate, then after he became a candidate, he ought to have stood up for his beliefs; and if he changed his beliefs, he ought frankly to have said so. Instead, he endeavored to explain his remarks by saying that he referred only to "certain lawless elements" and "pauper contract laborers." Any man who will read the above quotations from Mr. Wilson's writings will see that it is a simple impossibility that Mr. Wilson could have meant to refer only to criminals and paupers. He used the phrases: "enormous immigration pouring in from Europe" and "multitudes of men of the lowest classes." He was speaking of the immigrants as a whole. He was speaking of Poles, Hungarians and Italians as a whole. And now in his speech the day before yesterday he tries to evade responsibility for what he said by using such expressions as "the great Irish people" and "the great

people of liberty-loving Poland" and "the great Slavic people" and "the great peoples out of Sicily" which set of phrases does Mr. Wilson intend permanently to abide by after this campaign is over? Or does he intend to try to combine both? Does he for example intend in a new edition of his History to combine his two statements by saying that "a partial corruption of our blood" has been worked by the "great Irish people"? Does he intend to say that "multitudes of men of the lowest classes" have come from the "great peoples out of Sicily" and the "ancient peoples of Italy"? Does he intend to say that the "men of the meaner sort out of Poland" belong to the "great Slavic people"? Which form of expression does he intend to abide by? In his speech day before yesterday he says of these immigrants "they are great liberty-loving men and women who have "spent much blood in the cause of human rights". Well, these people do not love liberty any

more now than they did when Mr. Wilson was writing about them in his History and in the Atlantic monthly, and since that date, they have not fought in the cause of Liberty or any other cause. How does Mr. Wilson think it would look if he made a further combination for the next editions of his History uniting the phrases and sentiments of his speech of the day before yesterday and what he has already written in the History and saying "the great liberty-loving men and women" are "unlikely fellows" and this "coarse crew" has "spent so much of its blood in the cause of human rights". Mr. Wilson can choose between his two sets of phrases but he will find it uncommonly difficult to combine them both. And I think he would do far better to choose once for all whether he will stand by and avow the statements he expressed prior to being a candidate or those which he has expressed since becoming a candidate.

Now, friends, we Progressives do not have to explain

away our attitude; we do not have to atone by insincere compliments now for gross inaccuracies in the past, which we do not venture to retract. If you will turn to the published correspondence of Mr. Wilson with the United Polish Societies of South Brooklyn through Mr. Drobinski, you will see that Mr. Wilson promised Mr. Drobinski to re-write the passage referred to in his History. Mr. Drobinski, after learning Mr. Wilson's excuses, wrote to him: "While judging from your letter you are on the right path yourself in the estimate of the Polish character, still it is felt that you have set the readers of your volumes on the wrong path, and something should in justice be done to return your misguided readers to the proper way by assuring the Polish immigrants." The members of the United Polish Societies of South Brooklyn state that, according to the information

they received from his publishers, three editions of his History have appeared since this last one and yet that in spite of Mr. Wilson's promise to retract his statements, they remain unchanged in these editions.

Now, friends, here is what the Progressives, in their National Platform, have said about immigrants:

"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 government 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".

You will notice that we especially say that we wish to prompt their assimilation. My own position from my



entry into politics thirty-two years ago to the present time has been that the only safe course to pursue in this country of ours is to treat each man on his own merits, neither discriminating in his favor not against him because of his creed or because of his birthplace. Thirty-two years ago when I went into the New York legislature, my close allies in that body included men like O'Neill, Costello and Kelly, men like Kruse and Miller, who had themselves been born or whose parents had been born in Ireland or in Germany and neither they nor I were capable of considering where the birthplace of any one of us had been or what creed any one of us professed or what land his parents came from. All that any one of us demanded to know about the others was whether they were square and honest men, good Americans, devoted to the interests of our common country. During the time I was Police Commissioner of New York, the two laymen from whom I got most assistance were

Jacob Riis and Arthur von Brissen, the first born in Denmark and the second born in Germany, and [hole] them represent as high a type of American citizen as this [hole] land can produce. The day before yesterday I was at Duluth and the head of the Progressive movement in that city, the man who introduced me at the meeting was born in Finland, and he was an American in every fibre of his body just as much as I am. In New York state we Progressives have nominated for Governor Oscar Straus, a Jew, and as our candidate for Attorney General, we have Palmeri -- I do not know whether it was he himself or his parents who were born in Italy. We did not nominate one of these men because he was a Jew and the other an Italian. We cared nothing for the creed or the birthplace of either. [hole] nated them because they were first class American citizens because we believed that they stood for those ideals which we Progressives hold

should triumph here in America. In my regiment my two best officers were Allen Capron and Bucky O'Neill, both of whom were killed in battle under me. Allen Capron was the fifth in line from father to son who had served in the United States Army. Ancestors of his blood and his name had fought in every war that this nation had seen since the Declaration of Independence. Bucky O'Neill's father was in Neaugh's Irish Brigade when it left its dead nearest to the fatal stone wall than any others on the Iron day of Fredericksburg. I did not care a rap which man it was whose father came from Ireland, which man whose forefathers had come over here two centuries and a half ago. I did not care a rap for the fact that one was a Catholic and the other a Protestant. All I cared for was that both of them represented the best type of American manhood, that each was fit to stand as the perfected example of what an American soldier should be. In that regiment one

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Wilson's report on record of immigration ten  
years ago as compared with the present.



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