

I congratulate my countrymen upon the strong national sentiment which finds expression in every part of our common country.—*William McKinley.*

“PARAMOUNT ISSUES”

DEMOCRATS INVENT A NEW ONE EVERY FOUR YEARS
TO SAVE THE ENDANGERED REPUBLIC—
PARALLEL OF 1864 AND 1890.

The “Paramount Issue” is not a new thing with the Democratic party. It is of quadrennial production. The cry of impending danger to the foundations of the Republic has been raised regularly every four years. Each time the assumed cause has been something different from the preceding. Each time the alarm has been proved by the course of events to be false.

As early as 1864, with the successful conclusion of the Civil War not nine months away, the Democracy in national convention declared the war a failure.

They hereby declare, the platform read, that they consider that the administration of extraordinary and dangerous powers not granted by the Constitution is calculated to prevent a restoration of the Union and the perpetuation of a Government deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed.

“After four years of failure to restore the Union,” this platform of August, 1864, said, “by the experiment of war, during which under the pretense of a military necessity or war-power higher than the Constitution, the Constitution itself has been disregarded in every part, and public liberty and private right alike trodden down, and the material prosperity of the country impaired, justice, humanity, liberty and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities.”

THIS YEAR’S “PARAMOUNT ISSUE.”

Strikingly like this sentiment and this language reads the Kansas City platform defining the “paramount issue” of 1900.

“The burning issue of imperialism growing out of the Spanish war involves the very existence of the Republic and the destruction of our free institutions. We regard it as the paramount issue of the campaign,” the platform of Kansas City says.

"We condemn and denounce the Philippine policy of the present administration," it further declares. "It has involved the Republic in unnecessary war, sacrificed the lives of many of our noblest sons and placed the United States, previously known and applauded throughout the world as the champion of freedom, in the false and un-American position of crushing with military force the efforts of our former allies to achieve liberty and self-government."

The war against Secession in 1864 was "false and un-American."

The war to sustain United States authority among the Filipinos in 1900 is one of "criminal aggression."

DEMOCRACY'S FAVORITE EXPRESSION.

"Paramount issue" is a favorite expression with the Democratic party. Four years ago the party in convention at Chicago recognized that the money question was "paramount to all others."

In 1896 the thing that was "un-American" was the gold standard.

"It is not only un-American but anti-American," the Democratic platform declared, "and it can be fastened upon the United States only by the stifling of that spirit of love and liberty which proclaimed our political independence in 1776 and won it in the war of the Revolution."

In 1868 the Democratic party threw another paramount issue fit. Its platform, "recognizing the questions of slavery and secession as having been settled for all time to come," nevertheless arraigned the Republican party "for its disregard of right and the unparalleled oppression and tyranny which have marked its career."

"Under its repeated assaults" the Democratic platform of 1868 proceeded, "the pillars of the Government are rocking on their base and should it succeed in November next and inaugurate its President, we will meet as a subjected and conquered people, amid the ruins of liberty and the scattered fragments of the Constitution."

MORE "PARAMOUNT ISSUES."

The Republican party did elect its President then and subsequently and the Democratic party survived to discover more "paramount issues."

In 1872 "impartial suffrage" was declared to be one of the "vital principles" of the Democratic party.

The most space in the platform, however, was given to the necessity of civil service reform. The spoils system was the great menace to the Government. This plank is worthy of reproduction. It read:

"The civil service of the government has become a mere instrument of partisan tyranny and personal ambition and object of selfish greed. It is a scandal and reproach upon free institutions and breeds a demoralization dangerous to the perpetuity of Republican government. We therefore regard a thorough reform of the civil service as one of the most pressing necessities of the hour; that honesty, capacity and fidelity constitute the only valid claim to public employment; that the offices of the government

cease to be a matter of arbitrary favoritism and patronage, and that public station become again a post of honor. To this end it is imperatively required that no President shall be a candidate for re-election."

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM PARAMOUNT.

Four years later, in 1876, there was a slight echo of the "paramount issue" of civil service reform when the party in convention declared that government positions should be "held for fidelity in the public employ."

Later when the platform of 1872 regarding re-election of a President had been nullified by two re-nominations and the re-election of Cleveland, the Democratic party solemnly declared "we are opposed to life tenure in the public service." It also declared for such administration as will "afford equal opportunities to all citizens of ascertained fitness." And this position was reaffirmed at Kansas City. From the illustration it appears that the party not only shelves "paramount issues" but occasionally reverses them.

"Centralism" was the "paramount issue" in 1876. Democratic success, it was declared, was the only thing which could save the Union "from a corrupt centralism which, after inflicting upon ten States the rapacity of carpet bag tyrannies, has honeycombed the offices of the Federal government itself with incapacity, waste and fraud; infected States and municipalities with the contagion of misrule, and locked fast the prosperity of an industrious people in the paralysis of hard times."

SOUTHERN ELECTIONS PARAMOUNT.

Centralism continued. It was scarcely referred to in the Democratic platform of 1880, when it was called "centralizationism." Interference with elections in the South had become the new "paramount issue."

"The right to a free ballot is the right preservative of all rights, and must and shall be maintained in every part of the United States." So the Democratic party virtuously proclaimed in 1880. Again the Republic was in danger, as per the following bill of particulars.

"The existing administration is the representative of conspiracy only, and its claim of right to surround the ballot boxes with troops and deputy marshals, to intimidate and obstruct the electors, and the unprecedented use of the veto to maintain its corrupt and despotic power, insult the people and imperil their institutions. We execrate the course of this administration in making places in the civil service a reward for political crime, and demand a reform by statute which shall make it forever impossible for the defeated candidate to bribe his way to the seat of the usurper by billeting villains upon the people."

THE "TARIFF REFORM" PARAMOUNTCY.

In 1884, the year of Democratic success, tariff reform was brought forward. The Democratic platform said:

"We denounce the Republican party for having failed to relieve the people from crushing war taxes, which have paralyzed business, crippled industry and deprived labor of employment and of just reward."

The "paramount issue" was a change and the country got it. This same Democratic platform declared: "We believe in a free ballot and a fair count." To this was added:

"Asserting the equality of all men before the law, we hold that it is the duty of the government in its dealings with the people to mete out equal and exact justice to all citizens of whatever nativity, race, color or persuasion, religious and political."

SUPPRESSING NEGRO SUFFRAGE.

And then began the movement resulting in the adoption of state constitutional amendments in the South to suppress negro suffrage, in the framing of election laws to nullify Republican suffrage, white or black, in Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri.

Tariff reduction was the "paramount issue" in the platform of 1888 and on it the Democratic party went out of power.

In 1892 the "paramount issue" was tariff reform in more pronounced form.

"We denounce Republican protection as a fraud, a robbery of the great majority of the people for the benefit of the few," the platform declared.

"We declare it to be a fundamental principle of the Democratic party that the federal government has no constitutional power to impose and collect tariff duties, except for the purposes of revenue only."

Then came the "paramount issue" of 16 to 1, and now the "paramount issue" of imperialism.

Of the long list of "paramount issues" a single one has been given trial by the nation. It has been repudiated with an emphasis that has to all appearances shelved it forever.

