

## **This is Your Story - The Progressive Story of America. Pass It On.**

by Bill Moyers

Fifty three years ago tomorrow, on my 16th birthday, I went to work for the daily newspaper in the small East Texas town where I grew up. It was a good place to be a cub reporter – small enough to navigate but big enough to keep me busy and learning something every day. I soon had a stroke of luck. Some of the old timers were on vacation or out sick and I got assigned to cover what came to be known as the Housewives' Rebellion. Fifteen women in my home town decided not to pay the social security withholding tax for their domestic workers. They argued that social security was unconstitutional, that imposing it was taxation without representation, and that – here's my favorite part – "requiring us to collect (the tax) is no different from requiring us to collect the garbage." They hired themselves a lawyer – none other than Martin Dies, the former congressman best known, or worst known, for his work as head of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 30s and 40s. He was no more effective at defending rebellious women than he had been protecting against communist subversives, and eventually the women wound up holding their noses and paying the tax.

The stories I wrote for my local paper were picked up and moved on the Associated Press wire. One day, the managing editor called me over and pointed to the AP ticker beside his desk. Moving across the wire was a notice citing one Bill Moyers and the paper for the reporting we had done on the "Rebellion."

That hooked me, and in one way or another – after a detour through seminary and then into politics and government for a spell – I've been covering the class war ever since. Those women in Marshall, Texas were its advance guard. They were not bad people. They were regulars at church, their children were my friends, many of them were active in community affairs, their husbands were pillars of the business and professional class in town. They were respectable and upstanding citizens all. So it took me awhile to figure out what had brought on that spasm of reactionary rebellion. It came to me one day, much later. They simply couldn't see beyond their own prerogatives. Fiercely loyal to their families, to their clubs, charities and congregations – fiercely loyal, in other words, to their own kind – they narrowly defined membership in democracy to include only people like them. The women who washed and ironed their laundry, wiped their children's bottoms, made their husband's beds, and cooked their family meals – these women, too, would grow old and frail, sick and decrepit, lose their husbands and face the ravages of time alone, with nothing to show from their years of labor but the crease in their brow and the knots on their knuckles; so be it; even on the distaff side of laissez faire, security was personal, not social, and what injustice existed this side of heaven would no doubt be redeemed beyond the Pearly Gates. God would surely be just to the poor once they got past Judgment Day.

In one way or another, this is the oldest story in America: the struggle to determine whether "we, the people" is a spiritual idea embedded in a political reality – one nation, indivisible – or merely a charade masquerading as piety and manipulated by the powerful and privileged to sustain their own way of life at the expense of others.

Let me make it clear that I don't harbor any idealized notion of politics and democracy; I worked for Lyndon Johnson, remember? Nor do I romanticize "the people." You should read my mail – or listen to the vitriol virtually spat at my answering machine. I understand what the politician meant who said of the Texas House of Representatives, "If you think these guys are bad, you should see their constituents."

But there is nothing idealized or romantic about the difference between a society whose arrangements roughly serve all its citizens and one whose institutions have been converted

into a stupendous fraud. That difference can be the difference between democracy and oligarchy.

Look at our history. All of us know that the American Revolution ushered in what one historian called "The Age of Democratic Revolutions." For the Great Seal of the United States the new Congress went all the way back to the Roman poet Virgil: *Novus Ordo Seclorum* – "a new age now begins." Page Smith reminds us that "their ambition was not merely to free themselves from dependence and subordination to the Crown but to inspire people everywhere to create agencies of government and forms of common social life that would offer greater dignity and hope to the exploited and suppressed" – to those, in other words, who had been the losers. Not surprisingly, the winners often resisted. In the early years of constitution-making in the states and emerging nation, aristocrats wanted a government of propertied "gentlemen" to keep the scales tilted in their favor. Battling on the other side were moderates and even those radicals harboring the extraordinary idea of letting all white males have the vote. Luckily, the weapons were words and ideas, not bullets. Through compromise and conciliation the draftsmen achieved a Constitution of checks and balances that is now the oldest in the world, even as the revolution of democracy that inspired it remains a tempestuous adolescent whose destiny is still up for grabs. For all the rhetoric about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," it took a civil war to free the slaves and another hundred years to invest their freedom with meaning. Women only gained the right to vote in my mother's time. New ages don't arrive overnight, or without "blood, sweat, and tears."

You know this. You are the heirs of one of the country's great traditions – the progressive movement that started late in the 19th century and remade the American experience piece by piece until it peaked in the last third of the 20th century. I call it the progressive movement for lack of a more precise term. Its aim was to keep blood pumping through the veins of democracy when others were ready to call in the mortician. Progressives exalted and extended the original American revolution. They spelled out new terms of partnership between the people and their rulers. And they kindled a flame that lit some of the most prosperous decades in modern history, not only here but in aspiring democracies everywhere, especially those of western Europe.

Step back with me to the curtain-raiser, the founding convention of the People's Party – better known as the Populists – in 1892. The members were mainly cotton and wheat farmers from the recently reconstructed South and the newly settled Great Plains, and they had come on hard, hard times, driven to the wall by falling prices for their crops on one hand and racking interest rates, freight charges and supply costs on the other. This in the midst of a booming and growing industrial America. They were angry, and their platform – issued deliberately on the 4th of July – pulled no punches. "We meet," it said, "in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin....Corruption dominates the ballot box, the [state] legislatures and the Congress and touches even the bench.....The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced....The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few."

Furious words from rural men and women who were traditionally conservative and whose memories of taming the frontier were fresh and personal. But in their fury they invoked an American tradition as powerful as frontier individualism – the war on inequality and especially on the role that government played in promoting and preserving inequality by favoring the rich. The Founding Fathers turned their backs on the idea of property qualifications for holding office under the Constitution because they wanted no part of a "veneration for wealth" in the document. Thomas Jefferson, while claiming no interest in politics, built up a Republican Party – no relation to the present one – to take the government back from the speculators and "stock-jobbers," as he called them, who were in the saddle in 1800. Andrew Jackson slew the monster Second Bank of the United States, the 600-pound gorilla of the

credit system in the 1830s, in the name of the people versus the aristocrats who sat on the bank's governing board.

All these leaders were on record in favor of small government – but their opposition wasn't simply to government as such. It was to government's power to confer privilege on insiders; on the rich who were democracy's equivalent of the royal favorites of monarchist days. (It's what the FCC does today.) The Populists knew it was the government that granted millions of acres of public land to the railroad builders. It was the government that gave the manufacturers of farm machinery a monopoly of the domestic market by a protective tariff that was no longer necessary to shelter "infant industries." It was the government that contracted the national currency and sparked a deflationary cycle that crushed debtors and fattened the wallets of creditors. And those who made the great fortunes used them to buy the legislative and judicial favors that kept them on top. So the Populists recognized one great principle: the job of preserving equality of opportunity and democracy demanded the end of any unholy alliance between government and wealth. It was, to quote that platform again, "from the same womb of governmental injustice" that tramps and millionaires were bred.

But how? How was the democratic revolution to be revived? The promise of the Declaration reclaimed? How were Americans to restore government to its job of promoting the general welfare? And here, the Populists made a breakthrough to another principle. In a modern, large-scale, industrial and nationalized economy it wasn't enough simply to curb the government's outreach. That would simply leave power in the hands of the great corporations whose existence was inseparable from growth and progress. The answer was to turn government into an active player in the economy at the very least enforcing fair play, and when necessary being the friend, the helper and the agent of the people at large in the contest against entrenched power. So the Populist platform called for government loans to farmers about to lose their mortgaged homesteads – for government granaries to grade and store their crops fairly – for governmental inflation of the currency, which was a classical plea of debtors – and for some decidedly non-classical actions like government ownership of the railroad, telephone and telegraph systems and a graduated – i.e., progressive tax on incomes and a flat ban on subsidies to "any private corporation." And to make sure the government stayed on the side of the people, the 'Pops' called for the initiative and referendum and the direct election of Senators.

Predictably, the Populists were denounced, feared and mocked as fanatical hayseeds ignorantly playing with socialist fire. They got twenty-two electoral votes for their candidate in '92, plus some Congressional seats and state houses, but it was downhill from there for many reasons. America wasn't – and probably still isn't – ready for a new major party. The People's Party was a spent rocket by 1904. But if political organizations perish, their key ideas don't - keep that in mind, because it give prospective to your cause today. Much of the Populist agenda would become law within a few years of the party's extinction. And that was because it was generally shared by a rising generation of young Republicans and Democrats who, justly or not, were seen as less outrageously outdated than the embattled farmers. These were the progressives, your intellectual forebears and mine.

One of my heroes in all of this is William Allen White, a Kansas country editor – a Republican – who was one of them. He described his fellow progressives this way:

"What the people felt about the vast injustice that had come with the settlement of a continent, we, their servants – teachers, city councilors, legislators, governors, publishers, editors, writers, representatives in Congress and Senators – all made a part of our creed. Some way, into the hearts of the dominant middle class of this country, had come a sense that their civilization needed recasting, that their government had fallen into the hands of self-

seekers, that a new relationship should be established between the haves and the have-nots."

They were a diverse lot, held together by a common admiration of progress – hence the name – and a shared dismay at the paradox of poverty stubbornly persisting in the midst of progress like an unwanted guest at a wedding. Of course they welcomed, just as we do, the new marvels in the gift-bag of technology – the telephones, the autos, the electrically-powered urban transport and lighting systems, the indoor heating and plumbing, the processed foods and home appliances and machine-made clothing that reduced the sweat and drudgery of home-making and were affordable to an ever-swelling number of people. But they saw the underside, too – the slums lurking in the shadows of the glittering cities, the exploited and unprotected workers whose low-paid labor filled the horn of plenty for others, the misery of those whom age, sickness, accident or hard times condemned to servitude and poverty with no hope of comfort or security.

This is what's hard to believe – hardly a century had passed since 1776 before the still-young revolution was being strangled in the hard grip of a merciless ruling class. The large corporations that were called into being by modern industrialism after 1865 – the end of the Civil War – had combined into trusts capable of making minions of both politics and government. What Henry George called "an immense wedge" was being forced through American society by "the maldistribution of wealth, status, and opportunity."

We should pause here to consider that this is Karl Rove's cherished period of American history; it was, as I read him, the seminal influence on the man who is said to be George W.'s brain. From his own public comments and my reading of the record, it is apparent that Karl Rove has modeled the Bush presidency on that of William McKinley, who was in the White House from 1897 to 1901, and modeled himself on Mark Hanna, the man who virtually manufactured McKinley. Hanna had one consummate passion – to serve corporate and imperial power. It was said that he believed "without compunction, that the state of Ohio existed for property. It had no other function...Great wealth was to be gained through monopoly, through using the State for private ends; it was axiomatic therefore that businessmen should run the government and run it for personal profit."

Mark Hanna – Karl Rove's hero – made William McKinley governor of Ohio by shaking down the corporate interests of the day. Fortunately, McKinley had the invaluable gift of emitting sonorous platitudes as though they were recently discovered truth. Behind his benign gaze the wily intrigues of Mark Hanna saw to it that first Ohio and then Washington were "ruled by business...by bankers, railroads and public utility corporations." Any who opposed the oligarchy were smeared as disturbers of the peace, socialists, anarchists, "or worse." Back then they didn't bother with hollow euphemisms like "compassionate conservatism" to disguise the raw reactionary politics that produced government "of, by, and for" the ruling corporate class. They just saw the loot and went for it.

The historian Clinton Rossiter describes this as the period of "the great train robbery of American intellectual history." Conservatives – or better, pro-corporate apologists – hijacked the vocabulary of Jeffersonian liberalism and turned words like "progress", "opportunity", and "individualism" into tools for making the plunder of America sound like divine right. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was hijacked, too, so that conservative politicians, judges, and publicists promoted, as if it were, the natural order of things, the notion that progress resulted from the elimination of the weak and the "survival of the fittest."

This "degenerate and unlovely age," as one historian calls it, exists in the mind of Karl Rove – the reputed brain of George W. Bush – as the seminal age of inspiration for the politics and governance of America today.

No wonder that what troubled our progressive forebears was not only the miasma of poverty in their nostrils, but the sour stink of a political system for sale. The United States Senate was a "millionaire's club." Money given to the political machines that controlled nominations could buy controlling influence in city halls, state houses and even courtrooms. Reforms and improvements ran into the immovable resistance of the almighty dollar. What, progressives wondered, would this do to the principles of popular government? Because all of them, whatever party they subscribed to, were inspired by the gospel of democracy. Inevitably, this swept them into the currents of politics, whether as active officeholders or persistent advocates.

Here's a small, but representative sampling of their ranks. Jane Addams forsook the comforts of a middle-class college graduate's life to live in Hull House in the midst of a disease-ridden and crowded Chicago immigrant neighborhood, determined to make it an educational and social center that would bring pride, health and beauty into the lives of her poor neighbors. She was inspired by "an almost passionate devotion to the ideals of democracy," to combating the prevailing notion "that the well being of a privileged few might justly be built upon the ignorance and sacrifice of the many." Community and fellowship were the lessons she drew from her teachers, Jesus and Abraham Lincoln. But people simply helping one another couldn't move mountains of disadvantage. She came to see that "private beneficence" wasn't enough. But to bring justice to the poor would take more than soup kitchens and fundraising prayer meetings. "Social arrangements," she wrote, "can be transformed through man's conscious and deliberate effort." Take note – not individual regeneration or the magic of the market, but conscious, cooperative effort.

Meet a couple of muckraking journalists. Jacob Riis lugged his heavy camera up and down the staircases of New York's disease-ridden, firetrap tenements to photograph the unspeakable crowding, the inadequate toilets, the starved and hollow-eyed children and the filth on the walls so thick that his crude flash equipment sometimes set it afire. Bound between hard covers, with Riis's commentary, they showed comfortable New Yorkers "How the Other Half Lives." They were powerful ammunition for reformers who eventually brought an end to tenement housing by state legislation. And Lincoln Steffens, college and graduate-school educated, left his books to learn life from the bottom up as a police-beat reporter on New York's streets. Then, as a magazine writer, he exposed the links between city bosses and businessmen that made it possible for builders and factory owners to ignore safety codes and get away with it. But the villain was neither the boodler nor the businessman. It was the indifference of a public that "deplore[d] our politics and laud[ed] our business; that transformed law, medicine, literature and religion into simply business. Steffens was out to slay the dragon of exalting "the commercial spirit" over the goals of patriotism and national prosperity. "I am not a scientist," he said. "I am a journalist. I did not gather the facts and arrange them patiently for permanent preservation and laboratory analysis....My purpose was. ...to see if the shameful facts, spread out in all their shame, would not burn through our civic shamelessness and set fire to American pride."

If corrupt politics bred diseases that could be fatal to democracy, then good politics was the antidote. That was the discovery of Ray Stannard Baker, another journalistic progressive who started out with a detest for election-time catchwords and slogans. But he came to see that "Politics could not be abolished or even adjourned...it was in its essence the method by which communities worked out their common problems. It was one of the principle arts of living peacefully in a crowded world," he said [Compare that to Grover Norquist's latest declaration of war on the body politic. "We are trying to change the tones in the state capitals - and turn them toward bitter nastiness and partisanship." He went on to say that bi-partisanship is another name for date rape.]]

There are more, too many more to call to the witness stand here, but I want you to hear some of the things they had to say. There were educators like the economist John R. Commons or

the sociologist Edward A. Ross who believed that the function of "social science" wasn't simply to dissect society for non-judgmental analysis and academic promotion, but to help in finding solutions to social problems. It was Ross who pointed out that morality in a modern world had a social dimension. In "Sin and Society," written in 1907, he told readers that the sins "blackening the face of our time" were of a new variety, and not yet recognized as such. "The man who picks pockets with a railway rebate, murders with an adulterant instead of a bludgeon, burglarizes with a 'rake-off' instead of a jimmy, cheats with a company instead of a deck of cards, or scuttles his town instead of his ship, does not feel on his brow the brand of a malefactor." In other words upstanding individuals could plot corporate crimes and sleep the sleep of the just without the sting of social stigma or the pangs of conscience. Like Kenneth Lay, they could even be invited into the White House to write their own regulations.

And here are just two final bits of testimony from actual politicians – first, Brand Whitlock, Mayor of Toledo. He is one of my heroes because he first learned his politics as a beat reporter in Chicago, confirming my own experience that there's nothing better than journalism to turn life into a continuing course in adult education. One of his lessons was that "the alliance between the lobbyists and the lawyers of the great corporation interests on the one hand, and the managers of both the great political parties on the other, was a fact, the worst feature of which was that no one seemed to care."

And then there is Tom Johnson, the progressive mayor of Cleveland in the early nineteen hundreds – a businessman converted to social activism. His major battles were to impose regulation, or even municipal takeover, on the private companies that were meant to provide affordable public transportation and utilities but in fact crushed competitors, overcharged customers, secured franchises and licenses for a song, and paid virtually nothing in taxes – all through their pocketbook control of lawmakers and judges. Johnson's argument for public ownership was simple: "If you don't own them, they will own you. It's why advocates of Clean Elections today argue that if anybody's going to buy Congress, it should be the people." When advised that businessmen got their way in Washington because they had lobbies and consumers had none, Tom Johnson responded: "If Congress were true to the principles of democracy it would be the people's lobby." What a radical contrast to the House of Representatives today!

Our political, moral, and intellectual forbearance occupy a long and honorable roster. They include wonderful characters like Dr. Alice Hamilton, a pioneer in industrially-caused diseases, who spent long years clambering up and down ladders in factories and mineshafts – in long skirts! – tracking down the unsafe toxic substances that sickened the workers whom she would track right into their sickbeds to get leads and tip-offs on where to hunt. Or Harvey Wiley, the chemist from Indiana who, from a bureaucrat's desk in the Department of Agriculture, relentlessly warred on foods laden with risky preservatives and adulterants with the help of his "poison squad" of young assistants who volunteered as guinea pigs. Or lawyers like the brilliant Harvard graduate Louis Brandeis, who took on corporate attorneys defending child labor or long and harsh conditions for female workers. Brandeis argued that the state had a duty to protect the health of working women and children.

To be sure, these progressives weren't all saints. Their glory years coincided with the heyday of lynching and segregation, of empire and the Big Stick and the bold theft of the Panama Canal, of immigration restriction and ethnic stereotypes. Some were themselves businessmen only hoping to control an unruly marketplace by regulation. But by and large they were conservative reformers. They aimed to preserve the existing balance between wealth and commonwealth. Their common enemy was unchecked privilege, their common hope was a better democracy, and their common weapon was informed public opinion.

In a few short years the progressive spirit made possible the election not only of reform mayors and governors but of national figures like Senator George Norris of Nebraska,

Senator Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin, and even that hard-to-classify political genius, Theodore Roosevelt. All three of them Republicans. Here is the simplest laundry-list of what was accomplished at state and Federal levels: Publicly regulated or owned transportation, sanitation and utilities systems. The partial restoration of competition in the marketplace through improved antitrust laws. Increased fairness in taxation. Expansion of the public education and juvenile justice systems. Safer workplaces and guarantees of compensation to workers injured on the job. Oversight of the purity of water, medicines and foods. Conservation of the national wilderness heritage against overdevelopment, and honest bidding on any public mining, lumbering and ranching. We take these for granted today – or we did until recently. All were provided not by the automatic workings of free enterprise but by implementing the idea in the Declaration of Independence that the people had a right to governments that best promoted their "safety and happiness."

The mighty progressive wave peaked in 1912. But the ideas leashed by it forged the politics of the 20th century. Like his cousin Theodore, Franklin Roosevelt argued that the real enemy of enlightened capitalism was "the malefactors of great wealth" – the "economic royalists" – from whom capitalism would have to be saved by reform and regulation. Progressive government became an embedded tradition of Democrats – the heart of FDR's New Deal and Harry Truman's Fair Deal, and honored even by Dwight D. Eisenhower, who didn't want to tear down the house progressive ideas had built – only to put it under different managers. The progressive impulse had its final fling in the landslide of 1969 when LBJ, who was a son of the West Texas hill country, where the Populist rebellion had been nurtured in the 1890s, won the public endorsement for what he meant to be the capstone in the arch of the New Deal.

I had a modest role in that era. I shared in its exhilaration and its failures. We went too far too fast, overreached at home and in Vietnam, failed to examine some assumptions, and misjudged the rising discontents and fierce backlash engendered by war, race, civil disturbance, violence and crime. Democrats grew so proprietary in this town that a fat, complacent political establishment couldn't recognize its own intellectual bankruptcy or the beltway that was growing around it and beginning to separate it from the rest of the country. The failure of democratic politicians and public thinkers to respond to popular discontents – to the daily lives of workers, consumers, parents, and ordinary taxpayers – allowed a resurgent conservatism to convert public concern and hostility into a crusade to resurrect social Darwinism as a moral philosophy, multinational corporations as a governing class, and the theology of markets as a transcendental belief system.

As a citizen I don't like the consequences of this crusade, but you have to respect the conservatives for their successful strategy in gaining control of the national agenda. Their stated and open aim is to change how America is governed - to strip from government all its functions except those that reward their rich and privileged benefactors. They are quite candid about it, even acknowledging their mean spirit in accomplishing it. Their leading strategist in Washington - the same Grover Norquist – has famously said he wants to shrink the government down to the size that it could be drowned in a bathtub. More recently, in commenting on the fiscal crisis in the states and its affect on schools and poor people, Norquist said, "I hope one of them" – one of the states – "goes bankrupt." So much for compassionate conservatism. But at least Norquist says what he means and means what he says. The White House pursues the same homicidal dream without saying so. Instead of shrinking down the government, they're filling the bathtub with so much debt that it floods the house, water-logs the economy, and washes away services for decades that have lifted millions of Americans out of destitution and into the middle-class. And what happens once the public's property has been flooded? Privatize it. Sell it at a discounted rate to the corporations.

It is the most radical assault on the notion of one nation, indivisible, that has occurred in our lifetime. I'll be frank with you: I simply don't understand it – or the malice in which it is steeped. Many people are nostalgic for a golden age. These people seem to long for the Gilded Age. That I can grasp. They measure America only by their place on the material spectrum and they bask in the company of the new corporate aristocracy, as privileged a class as we have seen since the plantation owners of antebellum America and the court of Louis IV. What I can't explain is the rage of the counter-revolutionaries to dismantle every last brick of the social contract. At this advanced age I simply have to accept the fact that the tension between haves and have-nots is built into human psychology and society itself – it's ever with us. However, I'm just as puzzled as to why, with right wing wrecking crews blasting away at social benefits once considered invulnerable, Democrats are fearful of being branded "class warriors" in a war the other side started and is determined to win. I don't get why conceding your opponent's premises and fighting on his turf isn't the sure-fire prescription for irrelevance and ultimately obsolescence. But I confess as well that I don't know how to resolve the social issues that have driven wedges into your ranks. And I don't know how to reconfigure democratic politics to fit into an age of soundbites and polling dominated by a media oligarchy whose corporate journalists are neutered and whose right-wing publicists have no shame.

What I do know is this: While the social dislocations and meanness that galvanized progressives in the 19th century are resurgent so is the vision of justice, fairness, and equality. That's a powerful combination if only there are people around to fight for it. The battle to renew democracy has enormous resources to call upon - and great precedents for inspiration. Consider the experience of James Bryce, who published "The Great Commonwealth" back in 1895 at the height of the First Gilded Age. Americans, Bryce said, "were hopeful and philanthropic." He saw first-hand the ills of that "dark and unlovely age," but he went on to say: " A hundred times I have been disheartened by the facts I was stating: a hundred times has the recollection of the abounding strength and vitality of the nation chased away those tremors."

What will it take to get back in the fight? Understanding the real interests and deep opinions of the American people is the first thing. And what are those? That a Social Security card is not a private portfolio statement but a membership ticket in a society where we all contribute to a common treasury so that none need face the indignities of poverty in old age without that help. That tax evasion is not a form of conserving investment capital but a brazen abandonment of responsibility to the country. That income inequality is not a sign of freedom-of-opportunity at work, because if it persists and grows, then unless you believe that some people are naturally born to ride and some to wear saddles, it's a sign that opportunity is less than equal. That self-interest is a great motivator for production and progress, but is amoral unless contained within the framework of community. That the rich have the right to buy more cars than anyone else, more homes, vacations, gadgets and gizmos, but they do not have the right to buy more democracy than anyone else. That public services, when privatized, serve only those who can afford them and weaken the sense that we all rise and fall together as "one nation, indivisible." That concentration in the production of goods may sometimes be useful and efficient, but monopoly over the dissemination of ideas is evil. That prosperity requires good wages and benefits for workers. And that our nation can no more survive as half democracy and half oligarchy than it could survive "half slave and half free" – and that keeping it from becoming all oligarchy is steady work – our work.

Ideas have power – as long as they are not frozen in doctrine. But ideas need legs. The eight-hour day, the minimum wage, the conservation of natural resources and the protection of our air, water, and land, women's rights and civil rights, free trade unions, Social Security and a civil service based on merit – all these were launched as citizen's movements and won the endorsement of the political class only after long struggles and in the face of bitter opposition and sneering attacks. It's just a fact: Democracy doesn't work without citizen

activism and participation, starting at the community. Trickle down politics doesn't work much better than trickle down economics. It's also a fact that civilization happens because we don't leave things to other people. What's right and good doesn't come naturally. You have to stand up and fight for it – as if the cause depends on you, because it does. Allow yourself that conceit - to believe that the flame of democracy will never go out as long as there's one candle in your hand.

So go for it. Never mind the odds. Remember what the progressives faced. Karl Rove isn't tougher than Mark Hanna was in his time and a hundred years from now some historian will be wondering how it was that Norquist and Company got away with it as long as they did – how they waged war almost unopposed on the infrastructure of social justice, on the arrangements that make life fair, on the mutual rights and responsibilities that offer opportunity, civil liberties, and a decent standard of living to the least among us.

"Democracy is not a lie" – I first learned that from Henry Demarest Lloyd, the progressive journalist whose book, "Wealth against Commonwealth," laid open the Standard trust a century ago. Lloyd came to the conclusion to "Regenerate the individual is a half truth. The reorganization of the society which he makes and which makes him is the other part. The love of liberty became liberty in America by clothing itself in the complicated group of strengths known as the government of the United States." And it was then he said: "Democracy is not a lie. There live in the body of the commonality unexhausted virtue and the ever-refreshed strength which can rise equal to any problems of progress. In the hope of tapping some reserve of their power of self-help," he said, "this story is told to the people."

This is your story – the progressive story of America.

Pass it on.