

POLITICAL CHANGES AND THE ROOTS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

As Revealed by a Retired Merchant

By Richard Hirth

At the end of Civil War Reconstruction was the period of American history known as the Gilded Age, a term coined by Mark Twain in an 1873 novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. He saw America in a mock golden age with a superficial layer of gold concealing a less glamorous reality. Was it that simple, or was it more complicated than that?

The Gilded Age may have been the most remarkable period of change in American History. The destructive Civil War had ended, and the nation was focused on rebuilding in the East and building in the West. The transcontinental railroad linked the two coasts in 1869 allowing the economy to grow at leaps and bounds.

This age is also known as the second industrial revolution. Advances in technology allowed for a surge in agricultural production as machines allowed for advances in farm output. Steel, coal, and oil production rose rapidly as well. This was due in part from new techniques, but also from westward expansion. Progress in transportation and communication brought the nation closer together than previously thought possible. New uses for electricity were discovered and in 1890, Thomas Alva Edison combined all his businesses to form the Edison General Electric Company. This was just one of many new firms that illustrated the innovation and new practices seen during this era. From that point on, corporations formed the core of American business, and would now be able to work at a more national level, taking advantage of larger markets and economies of scale.

Gilded Age prosperity was not felt evenly throughout society. Increasing numbers of urban working class citizens migrated into cities from American farmland or from foreign

nations. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the foreign born population snowballed by over 2.5 million during the 1880s. This represented the most growth in a decade for this demographic throughout the entire century. Eighty-six percent of this population resided in the northern United States.¹ Industrialists, now able to take advantage of a virtually unlimited supply of cheap labor, could, and often times did, pay whatever wages suited them, knowing someone always needed job.

Adding to working class frustration,² the United States Government was unwilling or unable to provide the public with any relief from a series of tariff laws passed between 1861 and 1865. These laws placed a duty on all goods imported to the United States in order to bankroll the Union efforts in the Civil War. Congressional acts during the war more than doubled the rate of duty levied by the Federal government.² The added taxes raised the cost of living despite technological advances that would have otherwise lowered costs. These laws would remain relatively unchanged until 1913 with the passage of the Underwood Tariff Act.

Controversy arose in Washington as northern industrialists preferred a protectionist system, southern and western farmers preferred free trade, and the working class desired relief from high prices. Industrialists from both parties were elected to Congress, and used their leverage to keep the status quo intact despite popular clamor for reform. This caused conflict

¹Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population by Historical Section and Subsection of the United States: 1850 to 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, working paper no. 29, table 14, Washington DC, 1999 [government report not formally published found online]; available from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2011. No figures were kept regarding nativity of the population prior to 1850, but the total native born population from the entire half of the century counted for less than the increase the 1880s accounted for.

²The Library of Congress ed., "The Tariff Question: Described by a Retired Merchant," Printed Ephemera Collection, Portfolio 238, Folder 26, 3 [online database]; available from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.23802600>; Internet; accessed 28 February 2011.

between elected officials and their constituents. Both party platforms advocated tariff reductions at some level, yet disputed the method with which reductions would have been performed.³

“The Tariff Question,” a leaflet written by an unknown author, revealed the way duties were implemented as of 1884, an election year. In the time when mass media was print media, distribution of leaflets became a popular way to publish and distribute persuasive arguments regarding public policy. Often times they circulated throughout local taverns where they would undoubtedly start discussion. In this leaflet, the author pled his case to the reader of the reasons to lower the tariff. He emphasized that both parties fundamentally agreed on tariff revision in theory. He recounted the history of United States tariff laws, beginning with the antebellum period, when minor tariffs existed to protect the new nation’s burgeoning economy. He explained the necessity of higher duties while the Union required funding for its war chest, and provided a list of the most significant tariff laws. Lastly, he gave details about how special interests by politicians in both parties obstructed any efforts to reduce the import duties.

“The Tariff Question” delivered a peek at the United States right at its coming-of-age. Contemporary readers received an insider’s perspective of the Gilded Age’s rapid modernization of the US economy, the growing wedge between the wealthy and the working class, and the permanent affects this industrialization had on the political landscape of the United States. His political and economic interpretation of difficulties written within the midst of these events, stand the test of time.

After the Civil War and Reconstruction years, national interests were focused westward toward the abundance of seemingly unclaimed resources. Northern industries had fueled war efforts were now rebuilding the South, and allowing settlers to push frontiers ever further. Expanding markets coupled with the exploitation of newly discovered raw materials were the

³“The Tariff Question,” 4.

two major ingredients necessary for the economic boom of Gilded Age. The third, and possibly most important ingredient, was money. This came from the government either in the form of repayment of bonds sold during the war or through direct subsidies.

The Federal Government financed itself throughout the nineteenth century differently than it does today. Instead of taxing income, which James Madison believed would be “oppressive to our constituents,” a tariff was placed on foreign goods, with luxury goods carrying the highest duties.⁴ “The Tariff Question” revealed how the government continued a system of high “war tariffs” after the Civil War ended, the revenues taken from consumers and then used to subsidize American industrial growth. The author recognized the relationship between government and industry, and believed that because of this partnership “after twenty years of peace, [the tariffs] still continued substantially to be levied, the reductions made since the war having been comparatively small.”⁵

The first tariff act, passed March 2, 1861, was not for purposes of industrial protection, but because “the Government was compelled to raise immense sums of money to support its armies.”⁶ Although Democrats opposed the bill, many left congress upon the secession of their home states. This allowed Republicans, the dominant party from the North, to pass a bill increasing duties by about twenty percent. President Buchanan signed the bill into law two days

⁴House Joint Committee on Printing, *Tariff Acts: Passed by the Congress of the United States from 1789-1895*, compiled by William H. Michael and Pitman Pulsifer (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), 2 [online book]; available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=M8cnAAAAYAAJ>;Internet; accessed 15 April 2011.

⁵“The Tariff Question,” 2.

⁶Ibid.

prior to leaving office despite his affiliation with the Democratic Party. He was a northerner and the law benefited Pennsylvania, his home state.⁷

“The Morrill Tariff Act” of 1861, named after its sponsor, Justin A. Morrill, was replaced by the even higher “Second Morrill Tariff Act,” formally known as the Revenue act of 1861. The tariff increases represented only a minor portion of a much broader revenue bill.⁸ “It levied taxes in every possible form, as those who paid them still remember. It levied an income tax, internal revenue taxes, license taxes, bank taxes and stamp taxes.”⁹ This act established the nation’s first income tax, and created the Office of the Commissioner of Taxes, later called the Internal Revenue Service.¹⁰ Citizens earning more than \$800 at that time paid three percent of their income, and U.S. citizens living abroad would pay five percent.¹¹ By Christmas 1861, a Third Morrill Tariff act passed, raising the duty on tea, coffee, and sugar.¹²

Four more major pieces of legislation would raise tariffs during the war, and by 1865 duties increased to an average level of more than one hundred percent of 1860 levels. “In other words, the *tariff taxation* [emphasis in original] was more than doubled.”¹³

The author claims that “the effect of it, however, was generally to enrich corporations and individuals then engaged in manufacturing and mining. The profits were great, and they were largely invested in building new mills and factories, and opening new mines.”¹⁴ Investment in

⁷Cynthia Clark Northrup and Elaine C. Prange Turney, *Encyclopedia of Tariffs and Trade in U.S. History: The Encyclopedia Volume 1*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 265 [online book]; available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=aPrkDP3OzWC>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2011.

⁸H. Joint Committee on Printing, *Tariff Acts*, 157-177.

⁹“The Tariff Question,” 2.

¹⁰H. Joint Committee on Printing, *Tariff Acts*, 177.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 174.

¹²“The Tariff Question,” 2.

¹³*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

industrial capital surged. Between 1877 and 1891 gross domestic product increased by one hundred fifty percent.¹⁵ This would not have been possible without money for “new mills and factories.”

Another factor in this leap was the new railroad track laid each year. Railroad mileage tripled between 1860 and 1880. The United States had 93,671 miles of track. This was equivalent to almost ninety percent of all the track in all the nations of Europe combined.¹⁶ New lines brought in the materials necessary to expand cities, like timber needed to build homes, stores, churches and schools. Farmers benefited from the new rail lines that were being laid as well. Growing cities needed ever larger supplies of food, and the railroads allowed farmers to bring their produce to market in any city. The speed at which the railroads spread would not have been possible without Federal Government subsidies.

The building of cities changed too. The Bessemer process of manufacturing steel revolutionized urban architecture. For the first time in history, the strong yet flexible metal was available in abundant quantities. Overcrowded cities grew higher than before with steel framed buildings, and sprawled wider now that steel tracks allowed municipal railways to bring people to the city center.

Demand for steel mushroomed and by default demand for iron ore rose too. Hauling ore to the mills meant expanding railroad tracks to connect the mines to the refineries, and moving the steel to construction crews meant building tracks to connect the refining cities, like Pittsburg Pennsylvania, to the rest of the cities, such as New York who completed the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, only a year prior to the publication of “The Tariff Question.”

¹⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, (Washington, DC: Government Print Office, 1975), 1:231.

¹⁶Derek Hayes, *Historical Atlas of the North American Railroad*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 100.

American growth required steel, and steel required iron ore. The iron ore miners required railroads, and railroads required land and money. Land and money came from the Federal Government. Land was something the government had. Money was something they had to raise. This was a major reason why the tariff remained so high during the years after the Civil War.

The other major benefit to industry provided by high tariffs involved the effects artificially high prices for foreign competition had on domestic prices. There were two benefits. The first and obvious outcome was that with a high price of imports, domestic products had a comparative advantage in home markets. The other effect was that with import prices raised at such an *artificially* high level, domestic suppliers could also raise their prices and profit margins to levels that uninfluenced capitalism would never allow. Without government interference, industries would have to price their products at a more competitive level. Instead, the tariff allowed firms to rake in high profits without fear of losing business to their overseas competitors.

The benefits of high tariffs to the industries they protected and funded were obvious, but underneath the glamour of technology and industry was an underprivileged working class struggling to keep up with a rapidly advancing society. “To-day [sic] there are several hundred thousand persons out of employ and idle, and a great many who are working short time, and those who are so fortunate to be employed must work at reduced wages.”¹⁷

“The Tariff Question” identified a struggling lower class disproportionately disadvantaged more than any other class by the high cost of living resulting from the high tariff rates of the era as well as the business practices that drove down wages.

Railroad construction did not follow a pattern of consistent, uniform growth. Instead accelerated expansion occasionally halted while demand for railroads caught up. This was a

¹⁷ “The Tariff Question,” 3.

factor during the 1870s, the decade prior to the Gilded Age, when railroad speculation served as one of the leading factors causing the panic of 1873.

Between 1865 and 1873, railroad bonds were the most highly demanded form of long term investment available. Railroad bonds sold at very high interest rates in order to entice investors concerned with the risks involved with building through the West. Companies expected returns from Government subsidies, sales of frontier land granted by the government, and finally revenues generated by the finished railroads themselves. As more and more investors became rich from their investments, speculation increased dramatically.¹⁸

“The Tariff Question” noted that “others were tempted to embark in similar ventures. Soon the producing capacity of the country was in advance of its consuming power.”¹⁹ In other words there were too many railroad tracks already built, yet due to the high rates of interest only payable through further sales of bonds, borrowing continued. Railroad investments became a ponzi scheme. For example, in the early 1870s three major railroad companies began work on new lines without the funding to complete the lines: the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, and the Canada Southern Railroad. Major investment banks provided the railroads with starting capital, expecting that the bond market would continue to expand, and the railroads would be fully financed before completion. In reality the bond market had reached its crest as investors came to the realization that there were too many lines built in too short a time. Areas of the country, yet to be developed were laying down track without any demand for rail service. The investors knew there would be no return on investment until western development caught up with the tracks.

¹⁸Rendigs Fels, “American Business Cycles, 1865-79” *American Economic Review*, vol. 41 (1951): 325 [journal online]; available from www.jstor.org/stable/1802106; Internet; accessed 24 April 2011.

¹⁹“The Tariff Question,” 4.

Between January 1 and August 31, twenty-five railroads defaulted on interest on their bonds including the three mentioned above. Those three had been largely invested in by three major New York financial institutions. As a result, all three would fail within ten days of each other. The New York Warehouse and Security Co. suspended business on September 8, the banking house of Kenyon, Cox & Co. failed five days later; and finally on September 18, Jay Cook & Co. closed its doors. These events triggered the Panic of 1873 as depositors demanded their funds out of fear of bank failures.²⁰

While the panic itself may have only lasted eleven days, there were long term effects from halting business including massive layoffs. The surge in unemployment led to decreases in aggregate demand that slashed production, and spiraled the economy downward.²¹ “Prices fell; wages were necessarily reduced, and when a reduction was resisted, employers in some cases in our mining districts resorted to the expedient of importing foreign laborers.”²²

Immigrant labor affected many working class Americans long after the depression ended in 1879. Competition between American and foreign born laborers combined with an instability in the market for such a long period of time resulted in an increasingly temporary relationship between employees and employers. In a Kansas survey taken between 1884 and 1887, ninety-five percent of current employees reported that they had been unemployed at some point over a period of 3.7 years.²³ This would be exacerbated by the continued influx of immigrants from Europe arriving after the depression ended.

²⁰Fels, “American Business Cycles,” 336-339.

²¹Ibid.

²²“The Tariff Question,” 4.

²³John A. James and Mark Thomas, “A Golden Age? Unemployment and the American Labor Market, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 63, no. 4, (December 2003): 980-981 [journal online]; available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3132362>; Internet; accessed 27 April 2011.

“Italians, Hungarians, and Poles under contracts to work at extremely low rates of wages, and American labor. . . has found itself supplanted by [foreign] labor here at home.”²⁴ This was the beginning of a wave of “new immigrants” who rather than their predecessors from more developed Western European nations, emigrated from the poorer nations of Eastern and Southern Europe.

Migrations occurred within the borders of the United States as well. New mechanical inventions, such as the combination harvester, arrived on American farms, lowering demand for farm labor. Many unemployed workers followed the jobs to the cities. The deluge of available workers favored factory management and made workers expendable.

The wave of immigration caused its share of resentment among working class Americans. Citizens viewed themselves as free compared to the “pauper labor” of Europe. In other words they believed they were being replaced in the work force by peasants, who worked for their lords, the industrialists. This “neo-feudalism” led to disillusionment with the protective nature of the tariffs as they saw their jobs, which “were supposed to be protected by a high tariff from the *so-called* [emphasis in original] ‘pauper labor’ of Europe”²⁵ contradictorily be replaced by that very same pauper labor.

Adding to the troubles of workers was the seasonal nature of many factory jobs of this time. Canneries only operated during harvest.²⁶ Tariffs undoubtedly contributed to this as artificially high prices kept imported foods from the tropics out of food processing plants. Another cause of seasonality was temperature. Many plants continued to rely on water for power throughout the nineteenth century. Water mills shut down when rivers froze during the winter or

²⁴“The Tariff Question,” 4.

²⁵Ibid

²⁶James and Thomas, “A Golden Age?” 987.

dried out during summer months. Industries requiring large furnaces shut down when the heat of summer made work impossible. This was especially true in the glass industry. These and other factors led to very high rates of seasonal employment. In 1880, 40.2 percent of manufacturing workers were employed by firms that operated on a part-year basis. The average time that producers were not operating was 3.51 months out of the year.²⁷

All of this led to resentment among a working class with very few rights and bad working and living conditions. On top of this, their elected representatives did more harm than good by continuing to levy high tariffs upon their constituents, raising price indices and lowering standards of living. All the while American workers were working less and less despite assurances from politicians that the tariffs were put in place to protect American labor.²⁸ In reality Europeans who were willing to work for lower wages bid the U.S. workforce ever further into unemployment. It soon became evident that the tariff did nothing to protect the working class, and something needed to be done.

Republicans and Democrats during the Gilded Age differed only slightly in their party platforms. Both tended to prefer the status quo since many members of Congress benefited from the current economic situation. Divisions arose within the parties rather than between them. The issue of civil service reform led to progressive wings such as the “Bourbon Democrats,” and “Half-Breed Republicans.” Issues that divided people did not favor either party, so many voters voted by region. Democrats regained control of the the agricultural South ever since the Compromise of 1877, and secured influence in the West where agriculture also dominated. In the North, Republicans held most control, even though both parties were pro-business.

²⁷Ibid., 987-988.

²⁸“The Tariff Question,” 4.

Attempts at lowering tariffs during the 1880s were made by both sides of the aisle. In 1882, President Arthur, a Republican recommended “large reductions from customs revenue” and pushed measures “as to equalize the public burden and be in harmony with the present needs of industry” in his State of the Union Address.²⁹ Congress took up the challenge and attempted to revise the laws, but in the end passed reductions averaging only five percent and even raised duties on certain goods.³⁰ The Tariff of 1883 was a failure, renamed the Mongrel Tariff Act.

With neither party making any serious attempt to change the direction of the nation, many working class Americans felt alienated from public affairs. Change came about from other places. In 1877 the Socialist Labor Party of America was created, but they had trouble with mainstream appeal. The Socialist Labor Party did not hold a consistent doctrine, but a loose set of beliefs ranging from reform avocation to actual anarcho-syndicalists, advocating the an unappealing level of violence.³¹ Change for working class America would have to come from within. The shift in power within the Democratic Party from the old city “bosses” to the burgeoning labor movement during the Gilded Age resulted in new political dynamics between the two parties. While previously ethnic differences divided voters, class level dominated urban party politics throughout the 1880s. Resentment and division caused by the tariff played a major role in this shift.

Prior to 1880, both parties appeared to support the working man. In the 1880 presidential election, both party platforms promised tariff reform favoring American labor, and civil service

²⁹“The Tariff Question,” 3.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History*, (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 388

reform necessary to address corruption.³² The reality of the situation regarding tariff and civil service reform were that Congress, too, promised reform, but led by congressmen invested in the status quo, did nothing to damage its own social and economic interests.

When the Mongrel Tariff Act failed to achieve any practical results, Democrats came back the following year attempting real reform. “In January of this year, Mr. Morrison, of Illinois, introduced a bill embodying substantially the recommendations made by the Republican President and the Republican Commission the year before.”³³ This bill was introduced by a Democrat, supported by Democrats, and would reduce tariff rates by twenty percent horizontally, providing relief in almost every market.

With Democratic sponsorship of a revival of Republican legislation, the bill was expected to pass. “Members of both parties voted for it; but forty-one Democrats, under the lead of Mr. Randal, of Pennsylvania, joined with a majority of the Republicans, and it was lost by only four votes.” The reason: horizontal reduction was dangerous, and “some things would bear a reduction better than others.”³⁴

It seemed strange that the former Democratic Speaker of the House would lead a faction of democrats to caucus with Republicans against a Democratic bill in line with the party platform, but that was the political environment. In 1884, the year “The Tariff Question” was published, the so-called Bourbon Democrats ran Grover Cleveland against Samuel Randal in the presidential primary. The Bourbons were a conservative, laissez-faire faction within the party. They sided with the party platform with regards to tariffs – laissez-faire meant no government

³²James Mack Henry Frederick, compiler *National Party Platforms of the United States, Presidential Candidates, electoral and Popular Votes* (Akron, OH: The Werner company, 1896), 49-55 [online book]; available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=4Ig0AAAIAAJ>; Internet; accessed 28 April 2011.

³³“The Tariff Question,” 3.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

protection – but spurned the party when it came to bimetallism, the practice of basing currency on both gold and silver. Both Bourbon and mainstream Democrats did agree on reforming civil service by abolishing the spoils system.

Republicans had their own problems with factionalism. They fractured over the civil service issue. Stalwart Republicans, the more conservative side, refused to reform. In opposition stood the “Half-breeds,” so called because they appeared to be only half Republican, demanding reforms to the system. By 1884 the Half-breeds controlled the majority within their party, and nominated their leader, James G. Blaine in the Presidential election against Cleveland. This move created yet another splinter group within the party, the Independent Republican organization, whose stated purpose was “to defeat the Republican candidates.”³⁵

The so-called “Mugwumps,” refused to support Blaine after charges by his opponents in 1876 of corruption based on his connections to various railroad companies, including the Northern Pacific Railroad. By 1884 he was forgiven by most Republicans. The Mugwumps, however, refused to back a reform candidate with a record of corruption himself, and voted Democrat.

With all the division and rivalries among the parties, working class Americans could not count on their leaders to enact any real reform. The tariffs remained burdensome, and after the failure of horizontal reduction legislation to pass in Congress, it was evident that “contention among the various interests [was] likely to cause indefinite delay in the settlement of this difficult question.”³⁶

Rather than look toward politicians for help, working Americans turned to each other. The Knights of Labor, in existence since 1869, dominated the political stage during the 1880s.

³⁵Haynes E. Ford, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War: With Special Reference to Iowa* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 44-45.

³⁶“The Tariff Question,” 4.

In 1880, there were twenty-eight thousand members, by 1885 there were one hundred thousand and in only one year membership ballooned to five hundred thousand. The sudden skyrocketing of membership overwhelmed the grass-roots organization, and membership leveled off at one hundred thousand by the end of the 1880s and by the turn of the century it was “doubtful that if there [were] more than fifty thousand members in good standing.”³⁷ Despite up and down numbers, the impact did have an effect on politicians who understood the necessity of representing such a large portion of the population.

On the 1884 Democratic platform, the party pledged to “favor the repeal of all laws restricting the free action of labor, and the enactment of laws by which labor organizations may be incorporated.”³⁸ This was the first time a major U.S. political party advocated government recognition of labor unions. It would still be years before any serious progressive legislation would pass, but this platform marks the turning point between a government that ignored the unions, and one that would recognize them, paving the way for legislation providing protection for the working class opposed to unilateral support for the right to contract.

This shift within the Democratic Party may have occurred for two reasons. First, as mentioned before, the Unions were in the process of gaining widespread support among lower classes. Second, prior to 1884, lower class support for the Democratic Party came from immigrants, led by the city bosses, such as William Tweed. These were the very people both parties wanted to reform. By creating an alliance with the unions, Democrats were able to shun the bosses once and for all, and become the party of the unions, rather than the immigrants. In their 1884 platform, the Democrats went as far as saying “we nevertheless do not sanction the

³⁷William Maywell Burke, *History and Functions of the Central Labor Union*, ed. Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University, (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 7:38 [online book]; available from <http://books.google.com/books?id=ZkkB6yhIPNoC>; Internet; accessed 7 May 2011.

³⁸Fredrick, 59.

importation of . . . servile races, unfitted by habits, training, religion, of kindred, for absorption into the great body of our people, or for the citizenship which our laws confer.”³⁹

This relationship represented a major shift for the both the Democratic Party and the labor unions, and the relationship continued until today. While serious reforms would not pass through Congress until the progressive era, union members finally received a voice in Washington.

“The Tariff Question” reveals a different society than ours today. In 1884, the United States was in the process of modernization. Huge leaps had already occurred in business, where the incentives were, but social change lagged behind. Progressive changes were just around the corner, as many leaders began to questioning the status quo. The author of “The Tariff Question” was one of these thinkers. He recognized the change the nation demanded. As America began to out produce the rest of the world, it needed to direct resources toward improving standards of living rather than gross domestic product. He argued that a reduction in tariffs was the first step. While not going as far as supporting labor unions, he does reveal how the practice of importing labor benefited the industrialists at the expense of the American working class. These and other abuses of power brought about the Progressive Era. Reforms would be passed. America would finally make the social advances necessary for an industrial society to survive. Soon after publication of this leaflet, Grover Cleveland won the presidency. It was the first time since before the Civil War that a Democrat occupied the Oval Office, and it coincided with the first national platform recognizing the rights of the working class.

The Progressive Era is studied by many contemporary scholars because of its relevance today. Politicians, economists, and social anthropologists look back at the dramatic changes in role of government because many of these changes are still in effect and cause debate today. For

³⁹Fredrick 60.

better or for worse it was the Gilded Age and Progressive Era together that brought about these changes, so it is important to understand both periods not as separate eras from a historical timeline, but as the beginning and ending of the same story. It is the story of a nation recovering from a devastating civil war, and at the same time racing to catch up with the leading industrial powers of the day. After overcoming all other nations in production, America became a leading force in progressive politics, paving the way for a successful middle class. It was people like the author of "The Tariff Question" who made this possible by recognizing the problems as they were occurring, and convincing the people that change was necessary.