

# WHY I AM A DEMOCRAT

## *From An Address*

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If women who are to vote should already be making choice of a political party, what should guide their choice? I do not think—good suffragist as I am—that they should make it merely on the ground of a party's attitude towards suffrage. I am proud of and grateful for the splendid support the Democratic party both nationally and in our State has given the cause nearest my heart, but it is not because of that that I call myself a Democrat—as much of a Democrat as a woman is allowed to be in Connecticut. No, I began being a Democrat for a rather cold reason; I remain one for a hundred warm ones.

When I first came to our country a very young woman, armed with a good education and entirely familiar with the meaning of the words *liberal* and *conservative* as applied to tendencies no less than to parties, I was naturally curious as to the political parties of America. I asked—honestly—nearly every one I met where lay the difference between Republicans and Democrats. They told me that the Republicans were for a high tariff, the Democrats for lowering it;—but that, I thought, is a temporary question of expedience, it does not indicate cleavage in general policy;—some of them murmured something about Centrifugal and Centripetal tendencies, and said the Democrats believed in state-rights and Republicans in strong federal control. This also seemed to me not a principle to live by.

most people who consider the question on its academic merits are inclined; and my belief in it and my conviction that the benefits of Protection to the working man were illusory, kept me a Democrat.

All such rather chilly academic convictions faded away, however, before my slowly ripening persuasion that the Democratic party really was by history and theory committed to the championship of the rights of the individual, to a real trust in the people—a tendency more or less consistently marked from the time of Jefferson on; the conviction too that the Republican party, in spite of its idealistic interlude under Abraham Lincoln, really did inherit from its predecessors the Whigs and from the Federalists before them a regard for property and for private interests, a distrust of the people, and undue trust in the mission of the propertied and educated classes to direct and lead in national affairs, still evident, it seems to me, in their attitude today. In the words of a Connecticut Democrat, “the Republicans fear the ignorance of the poor, the Democrats fear the autocracy of the rich.”

And when the star of the Democratic party led them to give to the country a leader second only to the Republican Lincoln, cold conviction became enthusiasm. It became clear to me that the Democratic party really believed that—in the words of President Wilson, “the energy and initiative of the people should not be concentrated in the hands of a few powerful guides and guardians, as our opponents have again and again in effect if not in purpose sought to concentrate them.”

President Wilson's first administration produced much legislation of natural appeal to women. It was clear, in his words, that the party “had opened its heart to social justice.” It was also clear that it was—in his words again—the

One thing I *could* understand when it was explained to me, the passionate movement against human slavery, the passionate national feeling which had given birth to the present Republican party and brought forth Lincoln, but that issue was already settled forever. My inquiry was about tendencies from which one might postulate what path either party would follow in a given circumstance, and I was not satisfied.

I believed that we naturalized citizens, who bear to our country a different and perhaps more conscious love than others, are also able to contribute to it one thing which more fortunate native citizens cannot. I mean we bring to it a knowledge of and a complete familiarity with other standards through which we get a sense of the wood and its outstanding features before the trees become so familiar that we cease to see it.

I was struck at once by the pride that merchants seemed to take in their imported goods, their absolute contempt for American products, their acquiescence in the supposed fact that American fabrics could not be expected to be as good as European goods. They even referred to "cheap American stuff." Now, as I became enthusiastic about my new country, I resented this, especially when I found that the objects of commerce with which I was familiar were in fact inferior. The spur of keener competition, I concluded in my immature mind, was what those manufacturers needed to do their country credit—lessened protection would help them to it.

I used to ask the men I knew what I should be if I were a voter, because I believed in a strong central government and also in reducing tariff protection. "You would be a mugwump," they said, and I did not like the sound of it and concluded then and there that I would be a Democrat. Maturer reflection inclined me more and more toward a belief in free trade, as I believed



party "that could meet the new conditions of a new age." The *Child Labor law*, the eight-hour day for women in the District of Columbia added to that democratic measure, the eight-hour day for government employees, the Seaman's act, and the laws concerned with safety at sea, the expansion of the Public Health Service make a special appeal to women with their sex-sense of the sanctity of life; the agricultural extension act, the Parcel Post, the U. S. Employment service, the good roads law are all, in their turn, pleasing to our practical sex, while liberal minds are attracted by the anti-injunction act, the industrial employees' arbitration act, the Workman's Compensation Act, the Direct Election of Senators and the Income Tax law.

From the beginning of his second term, from the very time of his candidacy, indeed, when he had the courage, as his rival had not, to deal plainly with the so-called German-American clique, President Wilson seems to me—by his steady abstinence from war until our whole people were behind him; his steady prosecution of the war; his share in the severe triumphant terms of the armistice; his high insistence on righteous terms of peace—to stand out as the greatest man save two our country has ever produced, to be the shining symbol and example of what the Democratic party should mean and stand for. He has made clear to all the high destiny of that party—he has put pride in the heart of all who belong to it. He has justified their confidence in its underlying principles, in its general aim and direction, in its power of guiding the nation aright in its international no less than in its national behavior. These are some of the reasons why I am a Democrat.

*Issued by the Woman's Bureau of the Democratic National Committee, Mrs. George Bass, Chairman, Woodward Building, Washington, D. C.*

