The Real Reasons California Went for Wilson

Western Authority Says His Mexican Policy and the Support Women Gave Him Placed the State in the Democratic Column

By Edgar Williams.

Because California's vote in the recent national election finally turned the scale in favor of President Wilson, Democrats give the voters of that State credit for rejecting the President, and Republicans place upon them the responsibility for defeating Mr. Hughes.

If its vote had been announced before Ohio, Kansas, Utah, and New Hampshire those States, singly or jointly, would have been given credit for the result.

California is willing to accept the responsibility for the result of the election if the country so desires. But they are also eager that all the circumstances of the campaign shall be carefully scrutinized by the country, and that conditions are understood, for they are not willing to leave unchallenged and undescribed the most brazen kind of false witnessing and the most outrageous lies against the political honor, morality, and integrity of a man who did more for Mr. Hughes than any other campaign worker in the country, under conditions which would have caused most men to have done very differently than he did.

Before Mr. Hughes visited California it was recognized by the leaders of both parties as a safe Democratic State, but with the odds favoring the Republican nominees. California was, of course, a safe Republican State, and by the electoral calculators of the Republican National Committee, but those on the ground preferred to wait, they were not sure. Certain things gave President Wilson a personal strength in California which made California doubtful, a comparatively close State at least, before the tragic faux pas which carried it definitely over the line for him.

That the United States had been kept out of war was a potent, moving consideration with many voters, men and women, throughout the West and Northwest, and particularly in California. I will give one concrete, tangible proof of that. San Diego County, in the southern West, and State, bordering on Mexico, had been a very regular Republican county, less responsive to progressivism than the other large counties of the West, but the San Diego County, a majority of which voted for the regular Republican candidate for Governor in 1914, a majority of 213 votes over his Progressive opponent. When it was recalled that Mr. Hughes had been defeated by the Republicans throughout California by 189,506 votes, and that it was one of the four counties of California's fifty-eight which gave Frederick a majority, the regularity of its regularity will be the better appreciated.

It was one of those counties which were naturally and reasonably counted upon to give a large vote for Mr. Hughes. It addressed an audience of from 18,000 to 20,000 at the Exposition open-air auditorium. What was his vote in San Diego County? He had carried the county by a beggarmajority of 184. It should also be noted that Congressman Kettniker, Democrat, received 14,722 majority, and Governor Johnson, 12,000. These variations indicate the most independent kind of voting. The only way I can explain Governor Johnson's vote in a county heretofore unfriendly to him is that, having carried the Republican majority decisively in a fair, square fight, the bulk of the regulars supported him this time.

Extensive inquiries as to the reasons for the vote plainly indicate that President Wilson's large vote was due to the support of all, especially the women, who voted that the United States had been kept at peace with Mexico.

As a border county, many felt that San Diego would suffer more or less in the event of war. There is no doubt that many were influenced by the Democratic "kept-us-out-of-war" plank, in the same connection, is interesting to note that all the border States were for President Wilson. New Mexico, a fairly Republican State, might have been expected to support the President, but it did not. I do not like to disagree with anything in William Allen White's "Who Killed Cock Robin," but he is wrong when he says that "he out of war" did not influence thousands of votes.

The enactment of the Adamson law and the strike which had threatened, delayed, or altogether averted an all-out strike which had threatened had helped the President materially in this State. It strengthened him with the labor unions and also with the fruit growers and farmers, all the people who would have immense losses if there had been a tie-up of freight. If shipments had been held up, many would have been embarrassed and not a few ruined. The settlement of the strike was a boon to them, and President Wilson profited thereby in a substantial manner on election day.

It was felt also that President Wilson had shown himself to be progressive and more concerned, or at least equally concerned, about human rights and interests as any candidate of either party; as much alive to the welfare of the army as to the welfare of those who have looked upon themselves as constituting the "State," to whose interests all others should contribute or be subordinate.

All these considerations, feelings, and convictions concerning President Wilson contributed very much to make him a formidable issue in this State and to make California a close State. But notwithstanding President Wilson's strength, California would have been carried by Mr. Hughes if it were not for his fatal campaign mistake in August. It was made notwithstanding the protest of both the State members of the National Republican Committee. Why, nobody knows. But this fatal blunder was followed by others and a Presidency was lost.

Dr. Hughes was so used by the campaign managers of the regular State organization, temporarily in power by the grace of the former Progressive organization, that he was not favorably disposed toward Governor Johnson. The presence and co-operation of the liberal element of the party in the management of meetings was not desired, and they were made fully aware of the fact. There was no guessing at it or misunderstanding. So far as Governor Johnson was concerned he was informed that he was very much outside of the bureaucratic and his presence at a Hughes meeting would not be tolerated.

The impression intended to be made was made upon the mind of the public. Democrats never understood the sign manual better. The public interpreted Mr. Hughes's campaign in California to mean a vote not for the President, but conservative; not a standout reactionary, perhaps, but not a real progressive. A state of mind was created just as it was intended. The mental impression that Mr. Hughes sympathized with the Old Guard and did not favor Governor Johnson and his works was duly created.

But, fatal miscalculation! It did not work that way. Mr. Hughes did not do nor, in fact, did defeat. Mr. Hughes for President. And, after all, having had the greatest admiration in the world for Mr. Hughes, having favored his nomination from the beginning in 1908, 1912, and 1916, who was given to him by one of five or six California editors who favored him in a poll of The Chicago Tribune in 1912, and speaking with the favorable bias of an admirer, I nevertheless believe that Mr. Hughes is not without large responsibility for the unfavorable impression made upon the California electorate. His managers might drive his Progressive and fair Governor Johnson from any participation in the Hughes meetings, but they could only make use of Mr. Hughes as that gentleman permitted. They could not direct his thoughts, they could not control his utterances. If they did it was with his consent and acquiescence. His speeches did not lead the dominant, liberal element of the Republican Party to regard him as a liberal with Progressive sympathies. And it was what he did not say, his great silence on the things nearest the California voters' hearts, that told.

When, however, he never mentioned the name of Governor Johnson in his farewell, he removed one of the most potent of the Governor's brave and successful fight in overthrowing corporate control and restoring California to the people, but we are glad that he did not do it. When he was elected as Governor of New York may have been, (and only a small number of voters were acquainted with it) he was not new a progressive, and they were absolutely sure that he was a near reactionary when he said to an audience of 15,000 or more in San Francisco that "In local differences I have no concern."

Mr. Hughes never sought to dispel the bad impression made by his San Francisco statement, and when he left California for New York to study percentages concerning those essential principles and policies the people were so eager and impatient to hear enunciated, the electoral vote of the State had been lost to him.

If any man had procrastination to remain in his tent Governor Johnson had, but the natural resentment which he felt on his unsuccessful treatment he did not show. He subjected it to his loyalty to the Republican Party's standard bearer. He therefore took the field without any delay and made what was probably the most important Republican campaign speeches. He spoke at seventy-nine scheduled meetings and at probably twenty others. Thousands were convinced by his appeal that Mr. Hughes could not be trusted as a forward-thinking man with progressive ideals, who should receive the support of every Republican. He referred constantly to his record as Governor of New York, that he was known to be fighting the trusts. There wore thousands, however, who would not be convinced, and there were also others who, whether convinced or not, resettled Mr. Hughes' course in California, and the loss of these votes was fatal.

The strongest Progressive organization in any county of the State from the beginning has been Alameda County. It was so efficient and successful as to excite the particular criticism and opposition of the regular organization. Governor Johnson was always strong there and could depend upon good majorities. Alameda County gave Mr. Hughes a majority of nearly 8,000. In proportion to population this was the largest majority given Mr. Hughes by any county in the State. In San Diego County, as has been shown, where the regular Republican organization was strong, and where Governor Johnson had to effective organization to depend upon and was never successful, Mr. Hughes received a scant majority when the normal Republican county is 900.

But that majority of 286,815 for Governor Johnson and 3,773 majority for President Wilson! Why the Republican candidate for President was short of Mr. Hughes of 80,000 votes, why Governor Johnson received his immense majority are as easily explainable. The disparity does not mean so much, or what the average Eastern voter unaccountable among people for a few hundred thousand of them. Generally speaking, it was the reward bestowed upon a faithful servant of the people by a grateful and appreciative citizenry.

In 1914 Governor Johnson received 121,573 votes in the Progressive primary for the Gubernatorial nomination. The The New York Times Published: February 18, 1917 Copyright © The New York Times
candidates for the Republican nomination received 240,141 votes. Apparently Governor Johnson was doomed to defeat. The Old Guard certainly thought so. He was elected by nearly 190,000 votes over Frederick. In the same election Frank C. Jordan, regular Republican, was elected Secretary of State by 270,966 votes over his Progressive opponent. In the same year Johnson, as the Progressive candidate for Governor, and having a Republican opponent also, had a majority over his Democratic opponent, Senator Curtin, of 344,374. In 1916, as the only candidate against his Democratic opponent for United States Senator, Mr. Patton, no other candidate dividing the Republican vote, he received a majority of 296,815.

It has been urged in feeble proof of treachery that in those counties where Governor Johnson was strongest, in those very counties President Wilson received his largest vote. Sacramento, Fresno, and San Francisco Counties are particularly referred to. He received less votes in both Sacramento and Fresno Counties than in 1914. In Fresno County, also, the regular Republican organization was in full control and managed the campaign. In San Francisco County Governor Johnson received a greatly increased vote, but the situation there was extraordinary and is well understood in California.

Yet he has always been strong in labor circles, especially in San Francisco, and he was more unitedly supported there last November than ever. On the other hand, labor was driven to President Wilson by the almost unbelievable blunder of the Commercial Club dinner, which was served by colored waiter strikebreakers after a perfectly fair and reasonable request of union waiters to remove an offensive placard while the dinner was served had been refused.

Governor Johnson has always been strong in Los Angeles County. In 1910 that county gave him about 7,000 majority; in 1914, 54,368 majority; in 1916, 58,551 majority. Roosevelt and Johnson had 20,483 majority in 1912 and Mr. Hughes 21,484 majority in 1916. This was the largest majority given Mr. Hughes by any county, and does not indicate that where Governor Johnson was strongest Mr. Hughes was weakest. He received 157,918 less votes for United States Senator, with both Republican and Progressive nominations, than the combined Republican and Progressive vote in 1914. Mr. Hughes received 174,998 votes more than the combined Roosevelt-Taft vote in 1912.

It is therefore a matter of record, attested by the press of both wings of the Republican Party, that Governor Johnson consistently and continuously supported Mr. Hughes on the stump and that his support was hearty and enthusiastic. And now, nearly two months after the election, his enemies, who would move heaven and earth to prove disloyalty to Mr. Hughes, can only point to the 296,815 majority he received for United States Senator and the 3,773 majority President Wilson received, roll their eyes, and shrug their shoulders.