

SECTION 15

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT,
A RELUCTANT PRESIDENT
1909-1913

“I don’t think there can be found in the whole country a man so well-fitted to be president.”

—President Theodore Roosevelt, 1908

“Don’t sit up nights thinking about making me President for that will never come
and I have no ambition in that direction.”

—William Howard Taft, 1908

“He’s [Taft] all right; he means well and he’ll do his best. But he’s weak. They’ll get around him.”

—President Theodore Roosevelt, the last day of his presidency, 1909

“Taft, who is such an admirable fellow, has shown himself such an utterly commonplace leader,
good-natured, feebly well-meaning, but with plenty of small motive; and
totally unable to grasp or put into execution any great policy.”

—Former President Theodore Roosevelt, 1910



**WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT**

27th President, 1909-1913

Political Party: Republican**Vice president:** James S. Sherman**Nickname:** "Will"

6'2"—332 pounds

William Howard Taft, age 51, became president under the shadow of the most towering president since Lincoln, and he never saw light. A jovial man before and after the presidency, he suffered depression and even tears in the White House.

Taft never wanted the presidency. His wife Helen did. She steered his career in that direction, while he yearned instead to be a Supreme Court Justice (a position he later attained).

When Theodore Roosevelt picked Taft as his successor, he chose his polar opposite: Taft was calm, careful, slow, and—well, judicial. Whereas TR considered fair game any action not explicitly prohibited by the Constitution, Taft moved only with explicit Constitutional direction.

What went wrong? In the end, Taft could not satisfy a Republican party split between western progressives, who wanted him to exceed TR's reforms— and eastern conservatives, who wanted fewer restraints on business.

Worst of all, and hence the tears, a broken friendship: Roosevelt turned on Taft for, in TR's words, betraying his progressive policies.

BIOGRAPHY AT A GLANCE: WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, 1857-1930

BORN: September 15, 1857, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

ADULT HOME: Cincinnati, Ohio.

ANCESTRY: English. The first Taft, Robert, emigrated to America in 1678. He settled in Braintree, Massachusetts, within a few years of Henry Adams, ancestor of John Adams, the second president.

RELIGION: Unitarian.

EDUCATION:

Yale University, 1874-1878; graduated salutatorian.

Cincinnati Law School, 1878-1880; graduated and admitted to the bar.

MARRIAGE:

Married to Helen (Nellie) Herron (1861-1943); daughter of John Herron, a prominent Cincinnati judge and a law partner of Rutherford Hayes. She attended President and Mrs. Hayes' 25th wedding anniversary at the White House. Graduate of Cincinnati College of Music; school teacher before marriage.

First president's wife to ride with her husband along Pennsylvania Avenue at inauguration.

Responsible for planting 3,000 cherry trees from the Japanese Ambassador at the Washington Tidal Basin.

CHILDREN:

Robert A. (1889-1953), U.S. Senator, 1939-1953; sponsor of Taft-Hartley Act which limited labor union activities; Helen (1891--1987); Charles Phelps II (1897-1917).

MILITARY SERVICE: None. (Taft was a descendant of a Bunker Hill veteran.)

PRE-PRESIDENTIAL CAREER:

Lawyer, judge, professor of law and dean of the University of Cincinnati Law School.

United States solicitor general, 1890.

Governor-General of the Philippines, 1901-1904; lauded for land reform, roads, schools, honest government.

Secretary of War, 1904-1908 (appointed by Roosevelt); supervised building of the Panama Canal.

POST-PRESIDENTIAL CAREER:

Professor of law, Yale, 1913-1921; Chief Justice of the United States, 1921-1930 (appointed by President Harding).

BOOKS BY TAFT: *Four Aspects of Civic Duty* (1906); *Our Chief Magistrate and His Powers* (1916).

15-2 ★ TAFT'S PROGRESSIVE REFORMS ALIENATE CONSERVATIVES

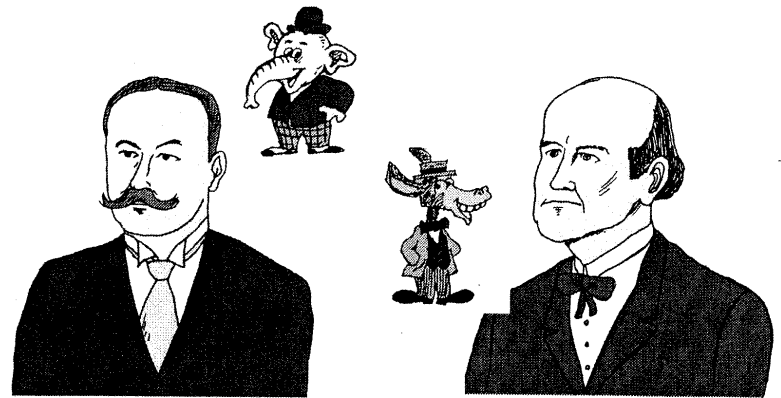
THE 1908 ELECTION

Republican William Howard Taft defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan by an electoral vote of 321 to 162.

He did so by running on Theodore Roosevelt's record, but probably not on his coaching. Dismayed at Taft's lackluster campaign style, TR had told Taft that he:

"must treat the political audience as one coming, not to see an etching, but a poster..."

"He must, therefore, have streaks of blue, yellow, and red to catch the eye, and eliminate all fine lines and soft colors."



WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

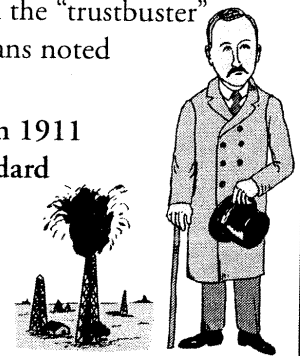
TAFT'S TRUST POLICY AND STANDARD OIL OF NEW JERSEY'S DEMISE



Taft had an aggressive trust policy, for which progressive Republicans never gave him due credit. During his four years as president, he initiated 90 proceedings against monopolies for violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act.

Roosevelt's record pales by comparison: only 44 trust suits in seven-and-a-half years. Yet TR was called the "trustbuster" rather than Taft. Conservative Republicans noted Taft's trust policy with growing alarm.

John D. Rockefeller was a loud critic. In 1911 the Supreme Court ruled his trust, Standard Oil of New Jersey, to be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act and ordered it dissolved. (The case had been filed during Roosevelt's administration.)

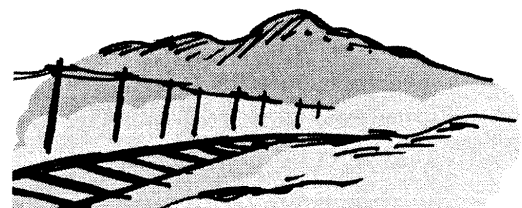
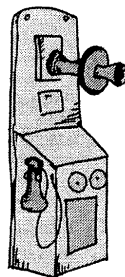


INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION STRENGTHENED BY MANN-ELKINS ACT, 1910

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS ALWAYS AIDED BUSINESS. FROM NOW ON, IT WILL REGULATE IT AS WELL.



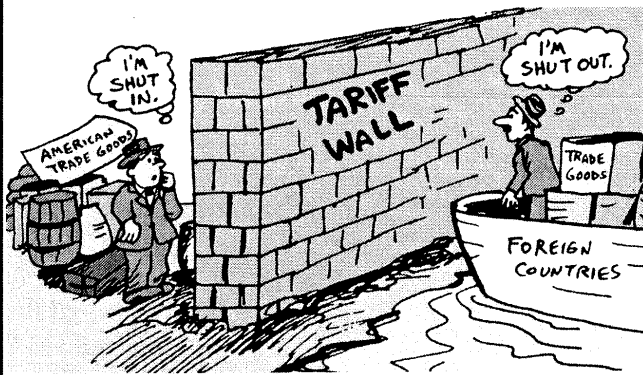
Taft further alienated conservative Republicans by recommending passage of the Mann-Elkins Act. This act placed interstate communication companies—such as telephone, telegraph, cable, and wireless—under the regulatory authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission.



“It is now a year and three months since I assumed office, and I have had a hard time...” — Letter from Taft to TR, 1910

THE TARIFF FIASCO

Taft took office promising not only to “cinch” Roosevelt’s progressive reform policies, but also to deal with an area TR had avoided: tariff reform. Progressives sought low tariffs because they considered high tariffs conducive to monopolies. Why? They protected manufacturers from competition. The 1908 Republican platform called for tariff revision, and Taft said this meant a downward revision, a lower tariff than the record high Dingley Tariff of 1897.



Congressional bedlam began when the the House of Representatives sent a low-tariff bill to the Senate. There, conservative Republicans led by Senator Nelson Aldridge raised the bill’s tariff rates with 600 amendments.

Progressive Republican senators led by Robert La Follette rose to battle, with only limp support from Taft. Nicknamed the “insurgents,” they accused the opposition of being tools of big business. To no avail. The high-tariff bill passed.

Taft signed into law the Payne-Aldrich Tariff bill, enacting a tariff higher even than the Dingley Tariff and thus alienating the progressives. His lack of leadership deepened the party split.

THE BALLINGER-PINCHOT CONTROVERSY

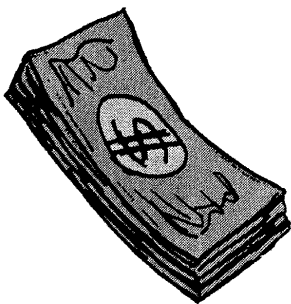
Taft made things worse in a controversial event that positioned him as an opponent of conservation.

Taft’s Secretary of Interior Richard A. Ballinger sold some protected public lands for commercial use at a low cost. When Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot accused Ballinger of challenging Roosevelt’s conservation policy and of committing fraud, Taft defended Ballinger (later cleared of fraud) and fired Pinchot.

Progressive Republicans began to look for Roosevelt’s return from Africa so they could claim his return to party leadership.



TAFT’S DOLLAR DIPLOMACY



Taft extended the Roosevelt Corollary to include “dollar diplomacy.” This policy fostered American business interests abroad through military and diplomatic influence.

Through his Secretary of State Philander Knox, a former corporate lawyer, Taft encouraged American businesses to invest abroad, particularly in Latin America after Asian efforts faltered. Taft promised that United States military might would protect American foreign investments in the case of political or economic unrest.

In 1912 dollar diplomacy brought about American intervention in Nicaragua when that country seemed near bankruptcy and revolution. Taft sent United States marines to restore order and protect American lives and property. They remained for 13 years.

ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO BECOME STATES, 1912.

President Taft was the first president to preside over the nation's contiguous 48 states when in 1912 Arizona and New Mexico became the last two states to join the Union.

A salute to Thomas Jefferson is in order. He framed the 1787 Northwest Ordinance stating that new territories would be accepted into the United States not as colonies but as states equal with the original thirteen.

THE 1787 NORTHWEST ORDINANCE ESTABLISHED THE STEPS TO STATEHOOD.

THE NORTHWEST ORDINANCE:

- ◆ Allowed the Northwest Territory (and later other territories) to divide into three to five territories—each with self-government and a bill of rights that included religious freedom.
- ◆ Prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory—based on Thomas Jefferson's 1784 proposal.

Jefferson had proposed prohibiting slavery in ALL future states after 1800, but this clause lost by one vote in 1784.

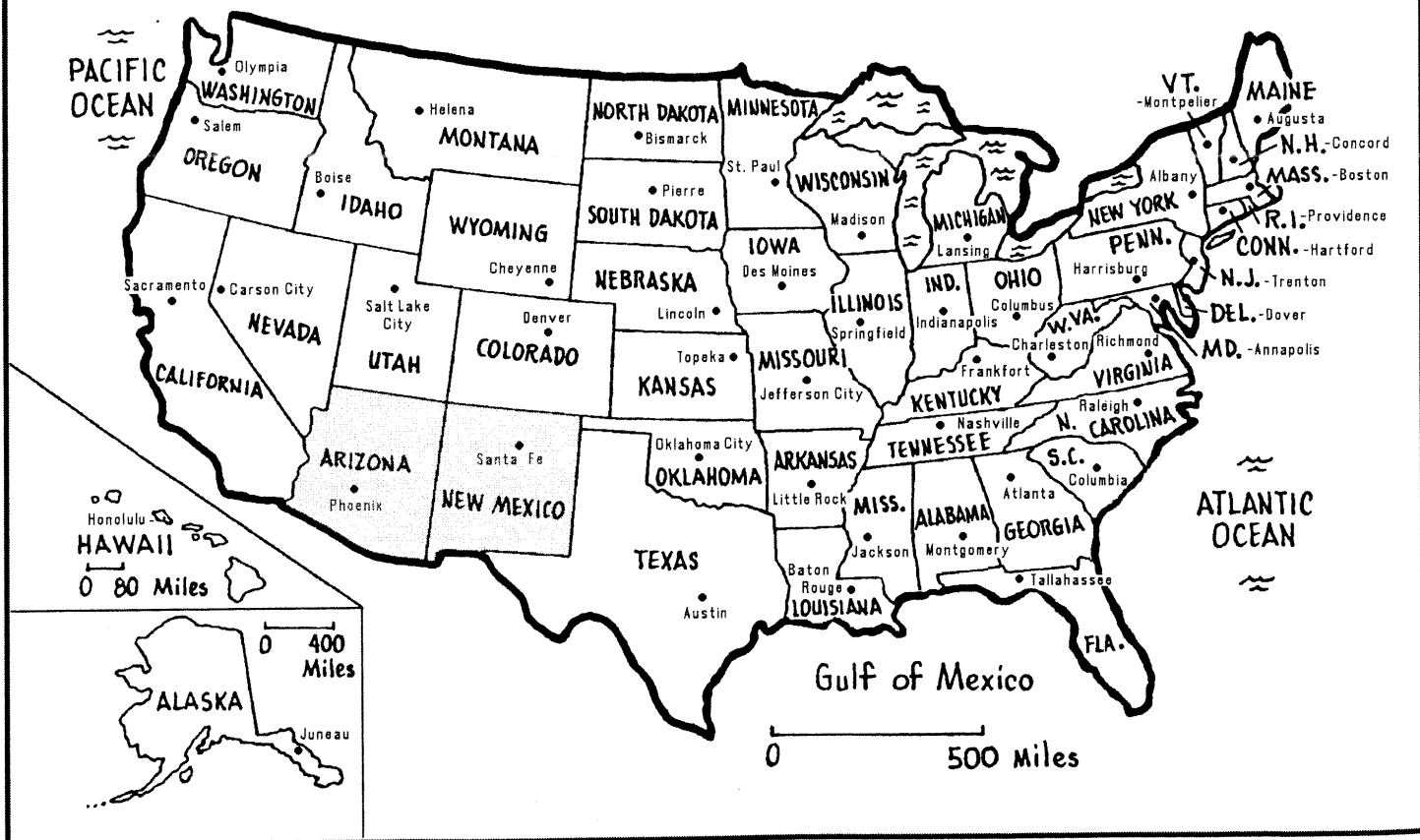
TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT
WOULD DEVELOP IN THREE STAGES:
(This plan also applied to subsequent territories.)

1. a Congressionally appointed governor and 3 judges at the first stage,
2. an elected legislature and a non-voting delegate to Congress when the population reached 5,000 free, white males,
3. a state constitution and admission to statehood when the above population reached 60,000.

The Northwest Ordinance set an important land policy by taking in new western lands as equal states rather than subordinate colonies, a democratic policy rare in history.

"FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA": THE UNITED STATES SPANS THE CONTINENT, 1912.

The territories of Alaska and Hawaii became states in 1959.



SIXTEENTH AMENDMENT: A FEDERAL INCOME TAX—FEBRUARY 3, 1913

How should the American people be taxed: a consumer tax (tariffs) or an income tax?

Populist and progressive reformers alike clamored for an income tax—moreover a graduated income tax whereby the higher the income, the greater percentage taxed. Progressive reformers achieved success with the Sixteenth Amendment which gave the federal government the power to tax personal incomes.



THE SIXTEENTH AMENDMENT STATES:

“The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several states, and without regard to any census or enumeration.”

WHY WAS THE SIXTEENTH AMENDMENT NECESSARY?

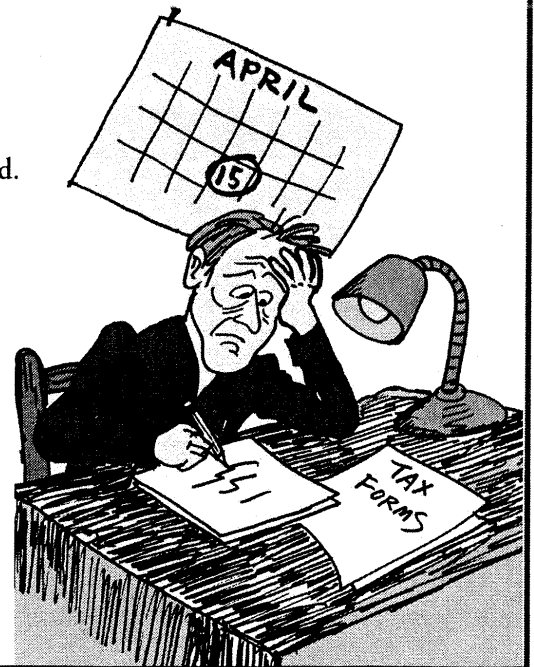
The United States Constitution, Article 1, states that direct taxes (such as income taxes) must be apportioned to the states according to population.

An income tax briefly was levied during the Civil War and then repealed.

In 1894 Congress levied an income tax to compensate for an expected loss of revenue from a lowered tariff. The next year, in *Pollock v. Farmer's Loan and Trust*, the Supreme Court declared the income tax law unconstitutional because taxes were not apportioned to the states according to population.

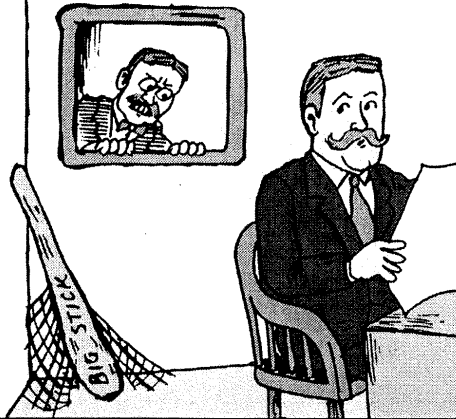
In 1909 President Taft sent a message to Congress recommending the passage of a constitutional amendment to legalize federal income tax legislation.

Ratification of this, the 16th Amendment, came February 3, 1913, a month before Taft left office.



ROOSEVELT RETURNS, 1910

Furious at what he deemed Taft's betrayal of his reform policies, Roosevelt began to speak out.



ROOSEVELT'S "NEW NATIONALISM"

On August 31, 1910, Roosevelt made a speech in Osawatimie, Kansas, in which he articulated his own ideas of progressive reform, called "New Nationalism." In 1912 the speech became the keynote of his presidential campaign.

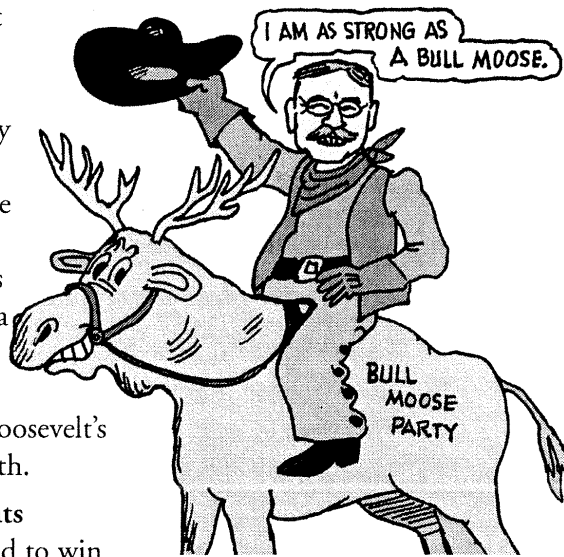
"The New Nationalism," he said, "puts the national need before the sectional or personal advantage...." Americans were "face to face with a new conception of the relations of property to human welfare."

Roosevelt was influenced by Herbert Croly's book, *The Promise of American Life* (1909), which called for Hamiltonian means to achieve Jeffersonian ends: a strong central government to achieve democracy, equal, rights, and equal opportunity. Problems of an industrial order required no less, said Roosevelt.

THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY—"MY HAT IS IN THE RING"

In 1912 Roosevelt ran against Taft for the Republican presidential nomination—and lost. He and his followers bolted the Republican party and formed the Progressive party August 4, 1912, in Chicago. Delegate Jane Addams made a major speech. The party nominated Roosevelt as its presidential nominee, with California Governor Hiram Johnson his running mate. The party's nickname became the Bull Moose party after Roosevelt's response to a question about his health.

Meanwhile, in New Jersey, Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson—bound to win with Roosevelt's "hat in the ring," splitting the Republican vote.



PROGRESSIVE PARTY PLATFORM

- ◆ regulation of business
- ◆ limitation on campaign funds
- ◆ lower tariffs
- ◆ income and inheritance taxes
- ◆ workers' compensation laws
- ◆ protection of women and children in industry
- ◆ direct primaries
- ◆ initiative and referendum and recall
- ◆ direct election of senators
- ◆ woman suffrage

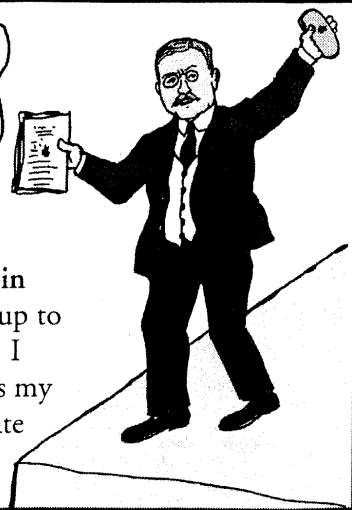
ROOSEVELT SAVED BY A SPEECH

Leaving his hotel to give a campaign speech in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on October 14, 1912, Roosevelt was shot by a crazed assailant. Miraculously, the bullet was slowed by the folded speech and glasses case in Roosevelt's pocket, and it did not reach his heart.

Although bleeding from the bullet in his chest, Roosevelt insisted on giving his speech. He spoke for more than an hour, waving his blood-stained manuscript:

"Now, I do not know who he was or what he represented. He was a coward. He stood in the darkness in the crowd around the automobile and when they cheered me, and I got up to bow, he stepped forward and shot me.... I do not care a rap about being shot; not a rap. I have had a good many experiences in my time and this is one of them. What I care for is my country.... And now, friends, this incident that has just occurred—this effort to assassinate me—emphasizes to a peculiar degree the need of the Progressive movement...."

YOU SEE, IT TAKES MORE THAN THAT TO KILL A BULL MOOSE.



WOODROW WILSON DEFEATS TAFT, ROOSEVELT, AND DEBS TO BECOME PRESIDENT.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY
 435 electoral votes
 6,293,454 popular votes

REPUBLICAN PARTY
 8 electoral votes
 3,484,980 popular votes

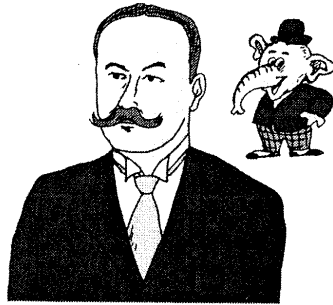
PROGRESSIVE PARTY
 88 electoral votes
 4,119,538 popular votes

SOCIALIST PARTY
 0 electoral votes
 900,672 popular votes
 (Debs won 6 percent of the popular vote, highest yet for the socialists.)

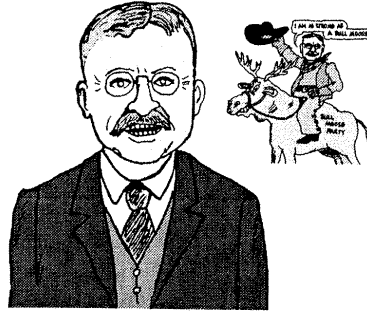
★ THE WINNER



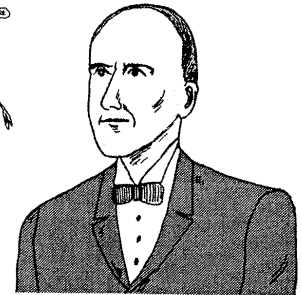
Thomas Woodrow Wilson
 (moderate progressive)



William Howard Taft
 (conservative progressive)



Theodore Roosevelt
 (liberal progressive)



EUGENE DEBS
 (socialist)

WILSON'S LANDSLIDE VICTORY

