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1993

Review of Populism: Its Rise and Fall.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Populism: Its Rise and Fall. By William A. Peffer. Edited with an introduction by Peter H. Argersinger. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992. Index. 208 pp. \$25.00.

William Alfred Peffer, from Kansas, the first Peoples Party United States Senator, wrote this analysis of Populism for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1899 where it was published as a series and forgotten. Almost a century later its republication establishes it as an anti-fusion insider's view of what happened to the Populist Party. Editor Peter Argersinger is the author of *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the Peoples Party* and a professor of history at University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Argersinger's introduction provides an excellent contemporary examination of conditions that brought on the Peoples Party and includes a well organized bibliography. Argersinger identifies his minimal editing with brackets and provides in footnotes vignettes of leading political figures mentioned by Peffer and corrections of Peffer's misstatements. Peffer is easy to identify in the political cartoons Argersinger has included—his belt-length beard was distinctive even in an era when male facial hair was normal.

Peffer describes what happened to Populism and almost invariably he shows the effect of his political affiliation prior to his allegiance to the Peoples Party. Peffer, a Republican state legislator in the 1870s and in 1880 a presidential elector, was an editor on a succession of Topeka papers and later the *Kansas Farmer*. He encouraged farmer activism in the Farmers'

Alliance and later in the Peoples Party. He played a big role in the Alliance campaign of 1890 that brought Alliance domination to the Kansas legislature and the replacement of three-term United States Senator John James Ingalls with Peffer. Peffer's frequent speeches and voluminous writings early identified the new reform movement as "Pefferism" in the minds of many writers.

Politics exerted a dominate influence among the males only voters of the late nineteenth century. Political speeches frequently extended for two or three hours to the delight of the onlookers, and voter turnout at elections was a greater proportion of the electorate than at any time before or since. The Republican party of that era was generally the do-something party, while the Democratic party, in a strong effort to preserve state's rights, opposed increase of federal power in any way.

As a mish-mash of quarreling groups, individual Populists had ties with the dominant Republican or Democratic parties or with third party groups such as the Greenbackers, Prohibitionists, or Union Laborites. Their agreement might be on economic issues but aligning with a new party did not eliminate past political feelings. For example, Peffer could never quite accept fusion ties with the Democratic party, which enabled Populists to win elections. Fusion, to Peffer, brought the downfall of Populism and is the major theme of this work.

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