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Populist thought in North and South Dakota, 1890-1900

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POPULIST THOUGHT IN NORTH AND
SOUTH DAKOTA, 1890-1900

by
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Bachelor of Arts, Northwestern University 1961
Bachelor of Science in Education, University of North Dakota 1967

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

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for the degree of

Master of Arts

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This Thesis submitted by Brian J. Weed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done.

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Date August 14, 1969

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the number of general and specific studies of Populism, there is no unanimity of opinion on the progressive or retrogressive nature of Populist thought, nor on its specific characteristics. By examining the specific attributes of Populism through newspapers, manuscripts, and public documents, this case study focuses on the progressive or retrogressive nature of North and South Dakota Populist thought.

On the whole, North Dakota Populism fails to reveal a progressive nature. First, the North Dakota Populists lacked a viable movement. Secondly, their thought and political endeavors suggest opportunism rather than progressivism. Thirdly, the common ground of their thought discloses a provincial, dualistic point of view emphasizing the primacy of agriculture, a conspiracy of the "money power," and a simplistic faith in the panacea of free silver. Examples of nativistic, anti-Semitic, anti-Indian, and anti-Negro thought existed; yet, with the exception of nativism, these instances indicate no broad based sentiment. The North Dakota Populists, however, did protest the United States involvement in the Philippines.

In contrast, South Dakota Populism represents a progressive movement centering on the idea of humanizing American industrialism. The Populists's moral concern for a humanitarian society, however, included a qualified nativism, a period of anti-Semitism, a feeling of

white superiority, conspiratorial thinking, and political naiveté. Although none of the specific charges were central or pervasive in Populist thought, they formed a part of the Populists's attempt to alter the course of industrial America. The South Dakota Populists also rejected United States involvement in the Philippines.

CHAPTER I

INTERPRETATIONS OF POPULISM

Since the publication of Richard Hofstadter's Age of Reform in 1955, the historiographical discussion of the nature of Populist thought has taken on new dimensions. Allowing that there was some good in Populism, Hofstadter contends that Populism was a retrogressive movement reflecting a belief in the "agrarian myth" and desiring a restoration of "the conditions prevailing before the development of industrialism and the commercialization of agriculture."¹ In addition, Hofstadter writes that the Populist movement was provincial, nativistic, nationalistic, anti-Semitic, overly concerned with money, conspiratorial in its thinking, and politically naive.² This interpretation varies considerably from the thesis of an earlier consensus historian, John D. Hicks.

Often considered the definitive work on the practical or operative aspect of the Populist movement, Hicks's The Populist Revolt portrays the Populists as a truly progressive movement originating with the farmers and providing the foundation for twentieth century reform

¹Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955), p. 62.

²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

movements.³ Defending this thesis against Hofstadter's criticisms, Norman Pollack, in his 1962 seminal work The Populist Response to Industrial America, rejects Hofstadter's view of Populism as a movement looking for a utopian "golden age" in the past, contending that "it accepted industrialism but opposed its capitalistic form, seeking instead a more equitable distribution of wealth." And, according to Pollack, Populism went further in its criticism: "Industrial capitalism not only impoverished the individual, it alienated and degraded him. . . . Clearly, Populism was a progressive social force."⁴

Whether the historian is considering the general essence of Populism or looking at specific characteristics, to a large degree his discussion is focused on this question of the retrogressive or progressive nature of Populism. As is apparent, there is no unanimity of opinion on the basic nature of Populism, nor, as will be seen, is there agreement on its specifics. In discussing North and South Dakota Populism in relation to the historiographic issues, no attempt is purposely made to vindicate the Populists from the charges of their critics. Throughout the examination of newspapers, manuscripts and public

³John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931), pp. 404-414, 422. For additional comments on the Populist contribution see Hicks's article, "The Legacy of Populism in the Western Middle West," Agricultural History, (October, 1949), p. 226.

⁴Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 11. For specific discussions of Hofstadter's thesis see Norman Pollack, "Hofstadter on Populism: A Critique of 'The Age of Reform,'" Journal of Southern History, XXVI (November, 1960), pp. 478-500, and Walter T. K. Nugent, The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 3-28.

documents, this case study focuses on the progressive or retrogressive nature of Populism.

Much of the historiographic controversy surrounding Populist thinking originates from the differing definitions of Populism. The critics tend to define Populism broadly as a "kind of popular impulse that is endemic in American political culture."⁵ The defenders of Populism, however, treat the Populists as "a momentarily very large and diverse group of people seeking by a handy means to preserve themselves against such inimical forces in their society as were threatening, in very concrete ways, their personal arrangements and, therefore, their view of life."⁶ What the critics dislike most in the "endemic impulse," which they have discovered, is that "Populism proclaims that the will of the people as such is supreme over every other standard;" that their ideology is the manifestation "of primarily agrarian revolt against domination by Eastern financial and industrial interests." To the critics, "it exists wherever there is an ideology of popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a long-established, differentiated ruling class, which is believed to have a monopoly of power, property, breeding, and culture."⁷

⁵Hofstadter, Age of Reform, p. 4.

⁶Walter T. K. Nugent, "Some Parameters of Populism," Agricultural History, XL (October, 1966), p. 270.

⁷Edward A. Shils, The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1956), p. 98, and Victor C. Ferkiss, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, X (June, 1951), p. 352. Additional support for this view is found in Shils' article, "The Intellectuals and the Powers: Some Perspectives for Comparative Analysis," Comparative Studies in Society and History, I (October, 1958), p. 20, and in Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 104-106.

The tendency is to extend the reasoning to include a retrogressive description of Populism linked with similar reactions of later years. Referring to the western "Old Guard" Republicans of the 1950's, social commentator and historian Peter Viereck suggests that "what all these groups are at heart is the same old isolationist, Anglophobe, Germanophile revolt of radical Populist lunatic fringers against the eastern, educated, Anglicized elite." Continuing, Viereck says, "only this time it is a Populism gone sour; this time it lacks the generous, idealistic, social reformist instincts which partly justified the original Populists."⁸ Although also critical of Populist thinking, political scientist Victor C. Ferkiss's position conflicts with Viereck's concluding statement. Ferkiss contends that "some qualifications must be made of the popular conception of Populism as a democratic or liberal force," for the "agrarian trend toward political reform was rarely based upon any broad ideas about human freedom or the fuller human life."⁹

By contrast, the foremost contemporary defender of the Populists, Norman Pollack, contends that Populist ideology "attacked the very character of industrial capitalist society, not only on economic but also humanistic grounds. . . . The issue at stake was nothing less than human dignity."¹⁰ Contending that Populists were a progressive social

⁸Peter Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite," in The New American Right, ed. by Daniel Bell (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1955), p. 95.

⁹Ferkiss, "American Fascism," p. 355.

¹⁰Pollack, Populist Response, p. 143.

force based on a positive frame of mind, Pollack concludes that "what stands out, then, about the Populist mind is an affirmation of man, a faith in man's capability to shape his own history."¹¹

Closely associated with Hofstadter's indictments of Populist ideology as being provincial, nativistic, nationalistic, anti-Semitic, overly concerned with money, and conspiratorial in its nature, is the charge of a fascist tendency in Populist thinking. The proponents of this view define Populism broadly and seek to provide a link between Populism and later fascist thought. Writing in mid-1944, Daniel Bell lamented that "the Populist tradition, outwardly progressive, has shrunk and become twisted into a reactionary form, its garb ready for America's Fuehrer (Midwest product, no doubt) to don."¹² Almost twenty years later, with a new crop of reactionaries on the scene, Bell draws another contemporary comparison by noting that "the radical right of the early 1960's is in no way different from the Populists of the 1890's, who for years traded successfully on such simple formulas as 'Wall Street,' 'international bankers,' and 'the Trusts,' in order to have not only targets but explanations for politics."¹³

Not neglecting the 1930's or 1950's, Peter Viereck suggests a link between Populism, Progressivism, Fascism, and McCarthyism through

¹¹Norman Pollack, "Fear of Man: Populism, Authoritarianism and the Historian," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), p. 60.

¹²Daniel Bell, "The Grass-Roots of American Jew Hatred," Jewish Frontier, XI (June, 1944), p. 17.

¹³Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed," in The Radical Right: The New American Right, Expanded and Updated, ed. by Daniel Bell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 3.

the figure of Father Charles Coughlin and his crusade for the panacea of "free silver."¹⁴ In light of Pollack's specific contention that free silver was not a panacea, this assertion seems questionable on its face, at least suggesting that any supposed link between fascism and Populism requires further study.¹⁵ Victor C. Ferkiss also suggests a tie between Populism and Fascism in his study of "Ezra Pound and American Fascism." Drawing on the same characteristics projected by Hofstadter, Ferkiss concludes that "these Populist beliefs and attitudes form the core of Pound's philosophy, just as they provide the basis of American fascism generally."¹⁶ Commenting on a later study by Ferkiss, Paul S. Holbo says that Ferkiss's view of American fascism is too simplistic, for the "themes are ideas that many Americans besides the fascists of the 1930's and the Populists of the 1890's have voiced for a long time."¹⁷ While this view of Ferkiss's study is a valid criticism, it also suggests the possibility of Americans being more fascist than Holbo cares to admit.

In contrast to the paucity of response by Populism's defenders to the charge of a Populist fascism, Hofstadter's contention of a verbal and symbolic anti-Semitism within Populist ideology draws extensive comment. Michael P. Rogin's study, The Intellectuals and McCarthy,

¹⁴Viereck, "Revolt," p. 94.

¹⁵Pollack, Populist Response, p. 137.

¹⁶Victor C. Ferkiss, "Ezra Pound and American Fascism," Journal of Politics, XVII (May, 1955), p. 174.

¹⁷Paul S. Holbo, "Wheat or What? Populism and American Fascism," Western Political Quarterly, XIV (September, 1961), p. 730. The study Holbo refers to is Ferkiss's "American Fascism."

contends that it is doubtful that the admittedly widely used symbols of "Shylock" and the "House of Rothschild" had specific anti-Semitic connotations. Compared with the United States in general, he continues, "it is possible to argue that the Populist movement was less anti-Semitic than late-nineteenth century America as a whole."¹⁸ Even Oscar Handlin, who earlier suggested the presence of anti-Semitism in Populist thinking, now declares that "what a mass of error would be cleared up by the recognition that the Populists were neither exceptionally tolerant nor exceptionally prejudiced!" According to Handlin, "they shared the attitudes of most other Americans before 1900."¹⁹ Another historian, John Higham, noting this somewhat ambivalent view of Populist anti-Semitism, "suggests that their anti-Semitic rhetoric did not come from a radical impulse as much as from a nationalist one."²⁰ A leading defender of Populism against Hofstadter's anti-Semitic indictment is Norman Pollack. Over the last ten years Pollack has written many articles, in addition to his book, defending Populism against the charge of anti-Semitism. Pollack grants that "Populism contained some anti-Semitism," yet

¹⁸Michael P. Rogin, The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967), p. 174.

¹⁹Oscar Handlin, "Reconsidering the Populists," Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), pp. 69-70.

²⁰John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIII (March, 1957), p. 574.

concludes that "the evidence, or lack of it, proves that the anti-Semitism thesis is invalid."²¹

Walter T. K. Nugent, in his excellent local study, The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism, defends Populism not only against the charge of anti-Semitism but also against the question of nativism. Contending that nativism in Kansas Populism was limited and infrequent, with little evidence to support a case for Populist anti-Semitism, Nugent concludes that, "in fact, the Kansas story supports something more like the opposite of each of the outstanding points of criticism."²² In agreement with Hofstadter's thesis is a recent consensus treatment of the election of 1896 by Stanley L. Jones. Stating that Populist leaders were not farmers nor foreign-born, Jones further argues that Populism "did not thrive in those communities where recent German, Scandinavian, or other European immigrants were concentrated."²³ Advancing this view another step, Ferkiss states that the "Populists often advocated severe restrictions on immigration."²⁴ This position

²¹Norman Pollack, "The Myth of Populist Anti-Semitism," American Historical Review, LXVIII (October, 1962), p. 80. For an article defending Ignatius Donnelly against charges of anti-Semitism see Pollack's, "Ignatius Donnelly on Human Rights: A Study of Two Novels," Mid-America, XLVII (April, 1965), pp. 99-112. Also of tangential interest on this issue is the exchange of letters between Pollack and Handlin in the "Communications" section of the Journal of American History, LI (March, 1965), pp. 807-808. For a refutation similar to Pollack's see Robert F. Durden, The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896 (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky, 1965), p. 151.

²²Nugent, Tolerant Populists, pp. 120-121, 231.

²³Stanley L. Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 74-75.

²⁴Ferkiss, "American Fascism," p. 354.

has not, however, gone unchallenged. Rogin, for instance, considers this impression "virtually" without basis. Acknowledging the inclusion of platform planks prohibiting alien ownership of land, he contends that "these planks are not nativistic in motivation, but were directed against the ownership of land by large foreign corporations and by nonresidents who held the land for speculative purposes."²⁵ In a 1968 study of immigration, Are Americans Extinct?, Jethro K. Lieberman points out that most nativistic thinking originated in New England and that Congress passed legislation restricting immigration during the 1890's.²⁶ Therefore, how uniquely nativistic was Populist thinking in relation to the general sentiment of the country? That any examination of Populist anti-Catholicism also requires a relative approach is indicated by Donald L. Kinzer's An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association. Noting that "there must be some reservations," Kinzer states in his "Epilogue" that "in no instance has it been shown that the A. P. A. was clearly to be affiliated with the Populists to the exclusion of the Republican affiliation."²⁷ Summing up the extent of anti-Semitic, anti-foreign and anti-Negro sentiment in Populism, Theodore Saloutos, a historian of agrarian movements, grants that there is some of this in any group, but concludes, "yet the truth of the matter is that no conclusive evidence has been uncovered to

²⁵Rogin, Intellectuals and McCarthy, pp. 175-176.

²⁶Jethro K. Lieberman, Are Americans Extinct? (New York: Walker and Company, 1968), pp. 31, 44-47.

²⁷Donald L. Kinzer, An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 245.

substantiate the widespread prevalence of these forms of bigotry among the Populists."²⁸

Such a summation, however, does not go very far in attempting an analysis of Populist thought. Granting that the relative or comparative approach is valuable, to explain away their stance on issues as merely reflective of the general tenor of the times does little in establishing the depth of their particular concern. To say that the majority of Americans shared the characteristics of the Populists or that Populists were merely middle-class "businessmen," or "small capitalists," while giving support to the American "success myth," does not explain why their protest raises such a historiographic discussion.²⁹

More germane to an examination of Populist thinking are two excellent studies by Chester McArthur Destler delineating the points of most concern to the Populists. Destler contends that the "radical system of Populism was primarily economic in character," based on the twin foundations of "antimonopolism and the labor-cost theory of value" within a "semi-collectivist economy." Denying the Frederick Jackson Turner and John D. Hicks thesis of radical democracy originating on the

²⁸Theodore Saloutos, "The Professors and the Populists," Agricultural History, XL (October, 1966), p. 242.

²⁹Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), pp. 31-32. See also C. Vann Woodward, "The Populist Heritage and the Intellectual," American Scholar, XXIX (Winter, 1959-1960), pp. 67-69; Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (2d ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), pp. 610-611; Oscar Handlin, The Americans: A New History of the People of the United States (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 280-281; Eric R. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), pp. 51, 75; Samuel P. Hays, The Response to Industrialism: 1885-1914 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 28, 31-32.

frontier, Destler argues that the Populist ideology was not just emotionalism but was based on concepts foreshadowed by earlier men and movements. Destler also offers fruitful suggestions for the continuing study of the failure of the farmer and laborer to unite in common action and the relation of this problem to the fusion question within the People's Party.³⁰

On this point Destler is in harmony with a communist treatment of the Populist movement by Anna Rochester, albeit not for the same reasons. Although sympathetic to the movement, Rochester concludes that through fusion in 1896, the Populists "distorted" the class struggle and, therefore, forced those true to the class concept into socialism, and, as such, Populism must be considered as a retrogressive movement.³¹ Predictably, Pollack takes exception to this interpretation

³⁰Chester McArthur Destler, "Western Radicalism, 1865-1901: Concepts and Origins," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXI (December, 1944), pp. 336, 351-352, 360-363, 366-367; and Destler's American Radicalism, 1865-1901: Essays and Documents (Connecticut College Monograph No. 3; New London, Conn.: Connecticut College Press, 1946), pp. vii-viii. For a more detailed study supporting the Turner-Hicks thesis see Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 1, 8, 180, and Alfred W. Griswold, Farming and Democracy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), pp. 145-146. For a critique of McConnell and Griswold see Charles M. Hardin, "Farm Politics and American Democracy," Journal of Politics, XVII (February, 1955), esp. pp. 654-655.

³¹Anna Rochester, The Populist Movement in the United States (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1943), pp. 100, 118, 121-122.

and sees national fusion in 1896, not as proof of conservatism but as a necessity which proved too radical.³²

Pollack sees this radical position as precluding a union with the more conservative and negative American Federation of Labor, which "guaranteed the ultimate downfall of Populism."³³ Other interpretations place more of the blame for this failure of united action on the Populists. The farmer and the city laborer could not "agree on a common political course," for the Populists "could offer little to industrial labor because they were outside it, and could not understand it."³⁴ Although Pollack also makes a case for the similarity of Populism and Marxism, Russell B. Nye claims that agrarian politicians and Marxists were not the same, since the Populists wanted to keep the "economic principle of individual competition, except in the case of those natural monopolies and resources which he assumed were public

³²Pollack, Populist Response, pp. 103-104. For a more thorough examination of the fusion question in the national election of 1896, see Matthew Josephson, The Politicos (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1938), pp. 669-679, 681-684; Robert F. Durden, "The 'Cow-Bird' Grounded: The Populist Nomination of Bryan and Tom Watson in 1896," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, L (December, 1963), pp. 397-423; and Woodward, "Populist Heritage," p. 62. Suggesting that the People's Party was through in 1894 and that fusion in 1896 "simply" finished them is Harold U. Faulkner's, Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900 Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 183.

³³Pollack, Populist Response, p. 64. Also suggesting that the People's Party provided "The organizational structure for cooperation between farmers and urban workers," is Paul W. Glad in his McKinley, Bryan, and the People (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), pp. 51-52, 151.

³⁴Russel B. Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of Its Origins and Development, 1870-1950 (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State College Press, 1951), pp. 80-81; and Irwin Unger, "Critique of Norman Pollack's 'Fear of Man,'" Agricultural History, XXXIX (April, 1965), p. 77.

properties any way."³⁵ A specific study of the relation of Populism and socialism by George H. Knoles supports this view by contending that agrarian Populism and industrial socialism "were in fact basically antithetical."³⁶ Victor Ferkiss amplifies the positions of Nye and Knoles in noting that "though the People's Party flirted with the labor theory of value their inferences from it resemble those of Locke rather than those of Marx. Populism was no attack on private property or the wage system." Populism was the attempt "to retain the former and avoid becoming subject to the latter; hence Populism's lack of sympathy for and appeal to urban labor."³⁷

Although agreeing that Populists were not socialists, Destler sees their program as a statement of economic collectivism.³⁸ Indeed, many students of Populism agree with J. Rogers Hollingsworth's statement that "the history of the Populists should be viewed as the struggle of the discontented to save themselves by political means from the penalties imposed on them because of their inability to adjust to

³⁵Pollack, Populist Response, p. 83; and Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics, pp. 174-175.

³⁶George H. Knoles, "Populism and Socialism, with Special Reference to the Election of 1892," Pacific Historical Review, XII (September, 1943), p. 296. Theodore Draper in The Roots of American Communism (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), p. 38, concludes that, although similar in every day propaganda, Populism demands were "a peculiar American device to defend the capitalism of the many against the capitalism of the few."

³⁷Ferkiss, "American Fascism," p. 353. Also supporting the thesis of the divergent views of farmers and urban laborers is J. Rogers Hollingsworth, The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 9.

³⁸Destler, "Western Radicalism," p. 356.

economic conditions."³⁹ It is this aspect of Populist thinking that draws the most criticism and provides the basis for many of Hofstadter's indictments.

A historian of the Greenback Party, Irwin Unger, holds that in Populist thought "money was almost always given first place. Indeed, eliminate the money question from the Populist platform and you have virtually reduced it to its peripheral issues."⁴⁰ The way in which historians view the Populist's relationship to labor, socialism, fascism, nativism, anti-Semitism, and provincialism is often based on this adjudged concern with the "primacy of money" and its associated conspiratorial view of an international money power. As Hofstadter writes, "the pervasiveness of this way of looking at things may be attributed to the common feeling that farmers and workers were not simply oppressed but oppressed deliberately, consciously, continuously, and with wanton malice by 'the interests.'"⁴¹

Some of the recent scholarship on this issue indicates that there may be some basis for this view, at least in regard to the "Crime of 1873," which demonetized silver, and possibly in relation to the silver question in general. Historian Allen Weinstein tempers the conspiracy position by concluding that "the facts concerning the 'crime' show that more of a conspiracy existed than goldbugs cared to admit—yet less of one than silverites preferred to believe." Although the

³⁹Hollingsworth, Whirligig of Politics, p. 7.

⁴⁰Unger, "Critique," p. 76.

⁴¹Hofstadter, Age of Reform, p. 70.

situation was more complex than many admitted, the "money-power myths such as the 'Crime of 1873' reflect more than the paranoid fantasies of partisan contemporaries."⁴² In another study, economists Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz propose that a silver standard certainly was as good as the gold standard and perhaps better, at least in the period before 1897.⁴³ If there is some truth to the Populist's view of the 'Crime of 1873' and the silver question, the contention of an irrational conspiracy theory must be tempered.

The historiographic issues of Populist thought are complex. In the following chapters this case study of North and South Dakota Populism centers on the questions raised by these historiographic issues. Were the Dakota Populists progressive or retrogressive--searching for a better future or an idyllic past? Were they provincial isolationists with a xenophobic bent? Were they forerunners of American fascism? Were they anti-Semitic, nativistic, anti-Catholic and anti-blacks? Were they small capitalists accepting the "success myth," or economic collectivists with a common grievance with industrial labor? Were they socialists? Were they seeking simplistic answers to complex questions?

⁴²Allen Weinstein, "Was There a 'Crime of 1873?': The Case of the Demonetized Dollar," Journal of American History, LIV (September, 1967), p. 326. Also contending that the Coinage Act of 1873 was based "upon calculated hostility to silver" is Paul M. O'Leary, "The Scene of the Crime of 1873 Revisited: A Note," Journal of Political Economy, LXVIII (August, 1960), p. 392. Suggesting that "neither the gold man nor silver man was wholly right," is Paolo E. Coletta, "Greenbackers, Goldbugs, and Silverites: Currency Reform and Policy, 1860-1897," in The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal, ed. by Wayne H. Morgan (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1963), pp. 138-139.

⁴³Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960 (National Bureau of Economic Research; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 134.

Were they too concerned with a dualistic struggle of society? Were they an irrational movement relying on a conspirational view of existence? Were they overly concerned with money? These are the basic questions treated in the following chapters. They are discussed "because the emotionality surrounding the discussion of Populism suggests that more than an academic squabble is involved: for today's historians Populism is not a movement of the past, but a living threat of the present."⁴⁴

⁴⁴Norman Pollack, "Handlin on Anti-Semitism: A Critique of 'American Views of the Jew,'" Journal of American History, LI (December, 1964), p. 403.

CHAPTER II

SOUTH DAKOTA POPULISM: A PROTEAN MOVEMENT

In 1896, the nation rejected the Democrat-Populist presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, and elected William McKinley. In South Dakota, however, the voters elected Bryan, a Populist Governor, and two Populist Representatives. Why should South Dakota Populists come to political power in the waning years of national Populism? Although the Populist movement spanned ten years of South Dakota history, Herbert S. Schell and Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr. in their respective studies contend that Populism had done little to "distinguish" itself, with the exception of an initiative and referendum measure and a vague contribution to later reform.¹ Thus, it is pertinent to ask what provided the consensus for their election yet denied the fruition of their program?

From 1890 to 1896, the South Dakota Populist party's direction and ideology revolved around its founder, Henry L. Loucks, editor of

¹Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 241, and Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "The Populist Movement in South Dakota; 1890-1900" (unpublished Master's thesis, State University of South Dakota, 1959), p. 77. Hendrickson's thesis is the best study of the political history of the South Dakota Populist movement. For a condensed version of his findings see his article, "Some Political Aspects of the Populist Movement in South Dakota," North Dakota History, XXXIV (Winter, 1967), pp. 77-92.

the Dakota Ruralist. To Loucks, the "great necessity" during these early years was "to start the farmers to thinking, reading [and] studying the science of government." Through education and "uniting with organized labor," Populism would "wipe out every vesige of special class privileges."² Removal of class privilege by educating the people was one element of Populist thought that remained basically the same during the 1890's. This idea provided the basis for their belief in a paternal role for government, their humanitarian concern for the "toiling masses," and, indeed, established the framework for the most commendable aspect of Populist thought. Ironically, within this ideological structure Populists also made the statements which drew the criticisms of the historians discussed in Chapter I.

Throughout the nineties, the statements by Populists ranged from the most eloquent expressions of humanistic concern to demagogic tirades. Expressing an opinion on the role of government, a writer to the Ruralist called for "the spirit of love in all our politics, in every action, and in all political transactions, in every law of our government, to the extent that all laws shall be for the common welfare of all the people of our nation and not for the wrong and injustice to any one of us; a government friendly to everybody and unfriendly to no person, and if we cannot make it as good as we would wish, we ask all persons to help us make it as good as we can."³ In contrast, another writer to the Ruralist offered "A Recipe" for a new party by advising

²Editorial, Dakota Ruralist, Jan. 5, 1893, p. 5. (Hereinafter cited as Ruralist).

³C. W. Hill, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Sept. 1, 1892, p. 6.

that "what ails us at present is, these foxes, the lawyers; these wolves, the bankers; these jackals, the trusts; these weasels, the combine; these hyenas, the middle men, are killing us, and they don't even leave a few feathers."⁴

Within these extremes the Populists debated the question of man's relationship to society. Whether discussing the role of government, the money question, labor, socialism or defining the contemporary situation, the Populists usually approached the issue with the tenor of their motto, "equal rights to all and special privileges to none." This is not to say that their expressions were entirely magnanimous, for they were not, but rather that their arguments took place within this concept. Even when expressing a patent self-interest, the Populists dealt with what they believed were the inequities of American society.

Their protests against the inequities of society most often focused on the basic relationship of government to the people. An analysis of this relationship reveals the varying ways in which the Populist accommodated socialism into his general view of society, and, more specifically, emphasizes the conflicting role of free silver in the campaign of 1896. That there are disparate views within any political movement is to be expected; what reveals the essence of that movement, however, is the method used to deal with these differences. Furthermore, the People's (Populist) party

had a broader base than its Alliance origins implied. Recruits came from other quarters, especially from the Knights of Labor which had local assemblies throughout the entire state. The Populists also found converts for their cause among the

⁴J. S. Hyde, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, May 2, 1891, p. 3.

proponents of women's suffrage and prohibition. Single-taxers, socialists, and professional reformers as well were drawn to the Populist banner in South Dakota.⁵

Additionally, the Populists were not always in agreement on the impetus for their movement. At one time the Ruralist could claim that the "revolution" was "caused by the great depression of agriculture and labor," and at another that "the independent party is not the outgrowth of drouth and grasshoppers, but instead the result of a better understanding of the drift of legislation which gives to many an undue power over the productive forces of the country."⁶ Such conditions suggest that the South Dakota Populists were not a homogeneous group nor did their complaints always originate from farmer grievances.

Most often these references were to the "system" and its corrupting manifestations. In their protests against the system, the Populists sounded almost Rousseauian. Although not saying simply that "society corrupts," the Populists contended that the society in which they lived was corrupt. To them, the American people could no longer boast that they enjoyed the "best civilization," for the "daily occurrences indicate that this boast was a hollow sham."⁷ Commenting on the assumption that America was a "free country," a sometime Ruralist columnist, Louis N. Crill, retorted:

⁵Schell, South Dakota, p. 230. See also Editorial, Ruralist, Sept. 12, 1895, p. 5; T. B. McDonough, Letter to the Editor, Britton, Marshall County Sentinel, Nov. 1, 1894, p. 1. (Hereinafter cited as Sentinel).

⁶Editorials, Ruralist, July 4, 1891, p. 4; Dec. 8, 1892, p. 5.

⁷Editorial, Ruralist, July 25, 1895, p. 1.

Yes, congress and the legislature rule on free passes. Foreigners are free to buy up our land. Railroads are free to put on all the traffic will bear. Wall Street is free to bond our nation. Syndicates are free to appropriate our nation's resources to their private profit. Bankers are free to loan confidence to the people at rates which paralyze industry, and last but not least, the people are free to change this freely and without further delay. You are one of the free people--then freely join the sons of Freedom.⁸

This was not a denial of America as a "liberty loving country," but a rejection of the subverting of this liberty.⁹ To rectify the situation the Populists sought a return of government to the people. Continually, they referred to a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

At first, the challenges to the "system" centered on this subversion; later, however, the emphasis shifted to an attack on the form as well as the operation of the "system." Throughout the 1890's their platforms recommended changes in the operation of government, but with no sign of action on these recommendations, the Populists began to place more emphasis on changing the "system" itself. Where later transportation planks initially demanded "government ownership," the 1890 Populist platform demanded only that railway transportation, telegraph and telephone service be provided at actual cost, adding, almost incidentally, that the "government shall own and operate the same."¹⁰ By 1894 more importance was given to the role of government. It was not just a larger role for the central government but a special kind of

⁸Lake Preston Times, Aug. 17, 1894, p. 1.

⁹Henry M. Wallace, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, May 31, 1894, p. 3.

¹⁰Ruralist, Jan. 10, 1891, p. 6.

role. One month before the election of 1894 a Ruralist editorial advised that "the question for the American citizen to decide at the ballot box next November is, which kind of paternalism he prefers, special or general? For the few or for the many?"¹¹ An earlier editorial issued a similar challenge: "Which do you prefer? Paternalism or Capitalism?"¹² Such statements represent the Populist's increasing challenges to the prevailing American belief in Social Darwinism. Posing the question in Darwinian terms, another Ruralist editorial projected that "nihilism, communism, paternalism, agrarianism, home-rulism, socialism and a general protestism in its various forms are but the tokens of an evolution, that must inevitably revolutionize the present system of competitive labor."¹³

By early 1895 the Ruralist challenged capitalism itself. Referring to the use of troops against laborers, an illustrative editorial painted a gloomy picture:

The citizen who can see these periodic contests between men and corporations and not shudder at the storm that is brewing is either blind or heartless. It is the duty of every good citizen to do his utmost to bring about a revolution in industrial methods peaceably, for the revolution must come, and come speedily. Capitalistic production is nearing its end. Capitalism itself is unyielding, arrogant and pitiless. But by its greed it is digging its own grave. In the evolution of human progress it had nearly filled its mission--that of teaching men the economy of concentrated effort and the weakness and helplessness of the individual. But how shall it leave the stage of human action? It will not willingly let go its hold upon the world. Shall we be compelled to go through a struggle similar to that by which

¹¹Editorial, Ruralist, Oct. 4, 1894, p. 1.

¹²Editorial, Ruralist, Nov. 16, 1893, p. 5.

¹³Editorial, Ruralist, July 7, 1892, p. 4.

we overthrew chattel slavery before we free our wage slaves?
or will the people awake and end the revolution at the ballot
box?"¹⁴

Although many Populists made similar attacks on capitalism, not all of them were as enthusiastic about socialism. The Ruralist, through its new junior editor, William E. Kidd, led the proponents of socialism, but not without some dissension.¹⁵

Because of the Ruralist's zealous advocacy of socialism, its readers often called upon Loucks to clarify his position on the features of socialism. A strong supporter of the Omaha platform and an ardent anti-fusionist, Loucks favored the community undertaking whatever it could perform better than the individual, and advocated public control and administration of any industry which was a public necessity. His socialism guaranteed the opportunity of labor to control the means of production and exchange the products of that labor at the minimum of expense; it in no way contemplated an "equal division of the products of labor."¹⁶

Kidd, however, was more radical and his extensive coverage of socialism brought about a schism between the Ruralist, the National

¹⁴Editorial, Ruralist, Feb. 14, 1895, p. 1.

¹⁵Kidd was also the editor of the Populist newspaper, the Aberdeen Star. Unfortunately, all copies of this newspaper have been lost. Just before he assumed the joint editorship Kidd was found guilty of libeling South Dakota Governor Charles H. Sheldon and received five days in jail in lieu of paying a ten dollar fine. Ruralist, Dec. 13, 1894, p. 4; July 4, 1895, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶Editorial, Ruralist, Aug. 1, 1895, p. 4. In November, 1895, Loucks proposed a national platform for 1896 containing a union of ideas from the Omaha platform and socialist ideology. Much of this proposal was incorporated into the South Dakota state platform in 1896.

Watchman and South Dakota's Populist U. S. Senator James H. Kyle. The National Watchman, a Populist periodical published in Washington, D.C., drew its support from the more moderate Populist congressmen and national leadership located in Washington. Commenting on the Watchman's contention that the time had come for the "populists and the socialists to part company," the Ruralist retorted that the Omaha platform

demands the nationalization of banking, of money, of transportation and of land. These are the demands of socialism. The Populist can part company with the socialists whenever they see fit to abandon the Omaha platform.¹⁷

Believing that this was happening, Senator Kyle resigned as a member of the board of directors of the Aberdeen Star "because of its radical position." ~~Before his selection as Senator in 1891, Kyle had been a~~ Congregationalist minister in Aberdeen and secretary at Yankton College. In his resignation statement, Kyle affirmed the Omaha platform but rejected the sub-treasury plan, emphasized his contention that the financial question was the paramount issue of the day, and registered his disapproval of reconstructing the government on a socialistic basis, for, he believed, this went beyond the Omaha platform.¹⁸ Explaining their position in regard to the controversy surrounding Kyle's resignation, the Ruralist admitted that

the South Dakota populists have followed the socialists beyond the Omaha platform. Under the lead of the gallant John E. Kelley [later a U. S. Representative], who wrote the plank, they have in two campaigns demanded nationalizing coal mines, so that our people may keep from freezing without paying

¹⁷Editorial, Ruralist, Mar. 7, 1895, p. 1. For additional editorials against the National Watchman see Ruralist, Mar. 21, 1895, p. 3; Mar. 28, 1895, p. 1; Apr. 18, 1895, p. 1.

¹⁸Ruralist, Jan. 20, 1895, p. 1.

tribute to the coal barons and in the last campaign they demanded a settlement of the liquor question on the same line, through state dispensaries. Both of these measures are socialism, but they are good populism in South Dakota.¹⁹

Another populist newspaper, the Britton Marshall County Sentinel, came out in support of Kyle's decision and against the extension of socialism.²⁰ Framing what turned out to be the basic issue within the Populist party during the campaign of 1896, the Sentinel cautioned "that some so-called populists are carrying their personal views too far," for they "are trying to inject into the Omaha platform something that is not there, and was never intended to be there, by the framers of that platform."²¹ With Kyle stressing the financial question and the Ruralist editorializing against fusion of the reform parties, particularly on the basis of the free coinage of silver, the Britton Sentinel and the Brookings Individual attempted to find some common ground:

We hear a good deal said about "trimming" the platform but we have failed to find a single Populist exchange in the state that has ever mentioned "trimming" the Omaha platform. . . . We don't need to trim the Omaha platform because we press the fight on the main question in issue.²²

The main question, of course, was the coinage of silver at a ratio of 16 to 1 with gold, the common ground of those opposing the

¹⁹ Editorial, Ruralist, July 11, 1895, p. 1. For additional representative editorials on socialism see Ruralist, Jan. 10, 1895, p. 2; Jan. 31, 1895, p. 1; June 27, 1895, p. 1; Dec. 5, 1895, p. 1.

²⁰ Ruralist, July 4, 1895, p. 2.

²¹ Editorial, Britton Sentinel, June 18, 1896, p. 4. For additional editorials supporting Kyle and rejecting socialism see Sentinel, Nov. 26, 1896, p. 4; Dec. 24, 1896, p. 1; Feb. 25, 1897, p. 1; Mar. 11, 1897, p. 1; July 15, 1897, p. 4.

²² Editorials, Britton Sentinel, June 11, 1896, p. 4; Ruralist, July 18, 1895, p. 2.

gold-standard Republicans. Those pushing for fusion on the basis of a common interest in silver coinage saw this as the only practical way to gain office and implement reform. The Ruralist contingent, although completely in favor of silver coinage, did not consider free silver as the key to the money question nor the money question to be central to the reform of society.²³

Stacy A. Cochrane, the popular editor of the Populist Brookings Individual, expressed the opinion of many Populists in his contention that the sub-treasury plan was the key to the money question, not free silver.²⁴ Although not as popular in the north central states as in the South, the sub-treasury plan offered the farmer credits on his unsold crop, whether cotton or wheat. The Ruralist was even more explicit in its explanation of the difference between the Populists and the new silverites and delineated a multi-point program favoring the abolition of the national bank system, a flexible and elastic volume of currency, and public improvements giving employment to the unemployed. The Ruralist emphasized that employment through public improvements was the "most vital question confronting" the people.²⁵ Although the letters to the Ruralist were not as comprehensive in their rejection of the one issue or "one plank" platform, they were just as adamant in their emphasis on principle:

²³Editorial, Ruralist, Mar. 7, 1895, p. 1.

²⁴Ruralist, Sept. 5, 1895, p. 4.

²⁵Editorial, Ruralist, June 6, 1895, p. 5. Also rejecting the primacy of the money question are editorials, Ruralist, Feb. 7, 1895, p. 1; Mar. 7, 1895, p. 1; Sept. 12, 1895, p. 1; Oct. 24, 1895, p. 4.

The promulgators of the narrow-minded one-idea, one-eyed, one-legged silver party do not wish to see the people in power. They still want the railroads to own and control the government and trusts to swallow the wealth of the masses; and riot and corruption to absorb the last remaining remnant of pure government. . . . We want no men who think that the remonetization of silver is the panacea for all the ills that affect the masses. These one-idea men are a positive detriment to any party.²⁶

Another letter to the editor advised the people that it was "better to be true to our principles 'equal rights to all, special privileges to none' and be forever in the minority, than to adopt some popular whim and gain a temporary success, but lose our honor."²⁷ The Mitchell Gazette also carried an article by Populist Walter Price in which he threatened to leave the party if silver was made the one important issue, for, he concluded, "loyalty to principles is greater than loyalty to party or the spoils of office to some of us."²⁸

Some of those stressing the coinage of silver cautioned the party to "be moderate and only ask one thing at a time." Taking a temperate stance, they felt there was "no use in trying to reform everything all at once."²⁹ Others, however, attempted to be more practical by emphasizing the connection between the prices of silver and wheat. In an editorial titled "Why Wheat is Forty Cents," the Britton Sentinel explained that with silver coinage in the United States,

²⁶Hermie M. Harden, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Apr. 10, 1895, p. 4.

²⁷George M. Steele, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 8, 1895, p. 2.

²⁸Mitchell Gazette, quoted in Ruralist, July 4, 1895, p. 5.

²⁹"One Idee," Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, July 11, 1895, p. 1.

England would lose her favorable trade balance with the free silver wheat producing countries such as Russia, India and Argentine, and the price of wheat would rise in the United States.³⁰ Attacking Loucks's "extreme socialistic or communistic ideas," the Elk Point Republican, a Populist newspaper, opined that "the object of the populist party can be accomplished sooner by taking things easy instead of rushing theory."³¹ Senator Kyle emphasized a two-pronged position of anti-socialism and pro-silver. In an open letter to the Star and Ruralist, Kyle reiterated the saliency of the financial question while rejecting socialism. Granting the feasibility of government ownership of a trans-continental railroad, Kyle stated that he could not support total socialism because he felt that the People's Party stood for the "preservation of individualism."³²

The Ruralist, however, refused to alter its original stance and continued to place the silver question within the framework of the people's relation to the "system:"

All the conditions which make the congestion of wealth possible must be changed. This can be done, not by trimming the Omaha platform, as the silver bugs propose, to one plank but by carrying out its provisions in their entirety, or expanding them if necessary. The bankers and money loaners must go, but there are a lot of other fellows who will have to go with them. Of course, we would all be delighted to see these money changers, who have been putting the thumbscrews on us for the past fifteen

³⁰Editorial, Britton Sentinel, Sept. 10, 1896, p. 1. The Vermillion Plain Talk denied that there was any connection between silver and wheat, saying that it was merely the position projected by the "gold idolators," who say nothing of the "law of supply and demand." Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Dec. 18, 1896, p. 4.

³¹Elk Point Republican, quoted in Ruralist, Sept. 5, 1895, p. 6.

³²Britton Sentinel, June 18, 1896, p. 1.

years so mercilessly, walk the plank and drop into the sea of oblivion, but if to get rid of them means only to let some other crowd take a new twist at us, where is the benefit? Let us dispose of the whole system of Capitalism at one job and not make two bites of a cherry.³³

The campaign and election of 1896 did not result in a triumph for either party faction. Indeed, by a compromise platform, and a union with the Democrats and silver elements of the Republican party, the Populists gathered new converts and developed new strength. As illustrated by the state platform, the 1896 election marked a significant turning in the development of Populist thought in South Dakota. Initially, the platform supported a republican form of government which "might be progressive" if based on the "declaration of independence." It further asked for the prohibition of private monopolies of public necessities, whatever the means of production, distribution or exchange; and called for the reclamation of all lands held by railroads or other corporations, in excess of their actual need, and all land owned by aliens.

The platform also urged that the government "purchase or construct, operate and control all rates of transportation on a just and equitable basis," for the telegraph and telephone to become part of the postal system, for postal banks, for direct legislation by means of the initiative and referendum and for the direct election of United States Senators. Not until the fourth plank did the platform mention the unlimited coinage of silver, adding that the government "should provide

³³Editorial, Ruralist, Feb. 21, 1895, p. 1. Supporting this position were the Deadwood Independent, quoted in Ruralist, Sept. 5, 1895, p. 6, and the Sioux Falls Press, quoted in Britton Sentinel, Sept. 23, 1897, p. 1.

for a full legal tender national currency safe, sound and flexible, issued without the aid of banking corporations, and in sufficient volume to do the business of the country on a cash basis." Concluding the basic portion of the platform with a call for "more money to increase prices" and a non-partisan commission to administer the tariff laws, the Populists adopted a resolution stating that since "it is evident that the paramount issue in this pending campaign will be the money question, . . . whatever commodity, whether of gold, silver or paper that bears the impression of the sovereign power of this nation should be good enough for any American citizen."³⁴

What took place was a common acceptance of basic principles without making either of the contending factions paramount. It was the establishment of a new party ideology with new leadership. Loucks no longer held his predominant position, although Kidd of the Star and Ruralist and Father Robert W. Haire, the head of the South Dakota Knights of Labor, continued to represent the socialist contingent of the party. Also accepting a modified socialism but representing the silverite contingent were the newly elected Populist Governor, Andrew E. Lee, and U.S. Senator Richard R. Pettigrew, a recent convert who had bolted the national Republican convention over the silver question.³⁵ Senator Kyle was re-elected in 1897, but on the strength of Republican votes, and, as

³⁴Clark County Republic, Aug. 7, 1896, p. 1.

³⁵Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., "The Public Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota: 1848-1926," South Dakota Department of History, Report and Historical Collections, compiled by the South Dakota State Historical Society, XXXIV (1968), pp. 240-241, 244-246, 248. . . Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Nov. 20, 1896, p. 4.

such, despite his denials of "selling-out," the Populist party formally ousted him from membership.³⁶ The result was a unified party expressing dedication to the reform of society.

The unanimity arising from the 1896 election did not fade until the Populists's defeat in 1900. The general tenor of Populist principles and programs during this period reflects the harmony of their thinking. The Vermillion Plain Talk, edited by W. R. Colvin and Thomas H. Ayres, private secretary to Governor Lee, outlined this new ideology in an expressive editorial, titled "Our Only Safeguard:"

The issue of the future is whether or not the people are to rule this country. It affects fundamentally the silver question, the railroad question and the question of government ownership and management of natural monopolies. The socialist, silverite, greenbacker, prohibitionist--in fact every reformer--can unite on a platform which says 'give the people a chance to be heard.' None of the reforms now contended for can be successful until the people do rule. . . . What then is to be done: Unite the people in an effort to secure the initiative and referendum. Give the people a chance to say at the ballot box whether they will adopt free silver; whether they will adopt government ownership of railroads; whether they will authorize the purchase of the mines and other monopolies by the government.

Having delineated their basic program, the editors concluded with a timeless statement of progressive principles:

We have never had representative government in this country and shall not have it till some improvements are made in our methods. We have progressed in every art but that of government and we have falsely imagined that no improvement could be

³⁶Hendrickson, "Populist Movement," pp. 53-55. Even though ousted by the Populists, Kyle had proposed many bills and resolutions based on Populist principles while in the Senate, especially on rural delivery, postal saving banks, working conditions of labor, employer liability, shorter working hours, women and child labor, education and immigration. Congressional Record, 53rd Cong., 1st sess., 1893, XXV, 329; 2nd sess., 1894, XXVI, pp. 1760, 2446, 3385, 3463, 7198; 54th Cong., 1st sess., 1895, XXVIII, 252.

made in that. The people are beginning to learn that the constitution--adopted to restrain the popular will by the aristocrats and capitalists who succeeded to power after the revolution--is not in harmony with democracy and is sadly out of joint with the declaration--the fundamental law upon which liberty was achieved. The constitution has always been a drawback and always must be till it is amended or displaced with a better instrument under which the majority may rule. Therefore those who are fighting over this and that reform had better come together and agree first to secure majority rule instead of wasting energy on measures which cannot prevail till the people can speak at the ballot.³⁷

That the reformers did come together is further indicated by the enthusiasm shown at their "Triple Alliance Convention" of 1898. The convention represented the merger of the Populists, Democrats, and silver Republicans. Thomas Ayres, as a special correspondent to the convention, reported that the Populist platform was "one on which the most radical populists can stand," adding that it was a "pretty good indication that no populist need fear any backward step by the party. It is progressive in every sense." Ayres assessed the "cheers of approval" for the platform as "further evidence that populist party leaders have lost their former timidity about the adoption of socialistic planks." The "moderate socialists" were on top in the convention and the name had "lost its terror both in populist and democratic ranks."³⁸

A speech by W. O. Temple, temporary chairman of the Democratic state convention, calling for government ownership and praising radical agitators, inspired the Democrats to adopt a platform almost identical to the Populists'.³⁹ The Populist platform reaffirmed the

³⁷Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Dec. 17, 1897, p. 2.

³⁸Vermillion Plain Talk, July 1, 1898, p. 1.

³⁹Britton Sentinel, July 7, 1898, pp. 2-3.

unlimited coinage of silver, favored the government issue of all money, demanded the passage of a free homes bill, approved of the war in behalf of the oppressed people of Cuba and the Phillippines and demanded its quick termination at the fulfillment of its initial purpose, denounced government by injunction, favored direct election of judges and senators, favored the initiative and referendum, reaffirmed the public ownership of natural monopolies, favored employer liability for workmen's injuries, opposed convict labor, and demanded an equitable tax on railroads and other corporations. The Democratic platform echoed the Populist principles and added a significant provision favoring the enactment of laws in behalf of laboring classes, such as, "regulating the employment of women and children, limiting the hours and days of labor, regulating labor contracts, providing for compulsory arbitration of labor disputes, the abolition of government by injunction, and compelling employers to take better precautions for the safety, health and comfort of their employees."⁴⁰

Both before and after the convention the state Populist press reiterated their support for fusion of the reform parties, and during the convention the party members voted 803 to 55 in favor of a fusion ticket. Even the more radical Kidd-Haire contingent accepted the verdict of the party and admitted that they had no choice but to abide by the principle of the rule of the majority.⁴¹ The only resister was the ardent

⁴⁰ Britton Sentinel, July 28, 1898, p. 3.

⁴¹ Vermillion Plain Talk, July 1, 1898, p. 1. Supporting fusion in 1898 were the Clark County Republic, June 10, 1898, p. 1; Britton Sentinel, Apr. 21, 1898, p. 4; June 16, 1898, p. 1; June 30, 1898, p. 1; Vermillion Plain Talk, Dec. 31, 1897, p. 2.

anti-fusionist, Henry L. Loucks. Before the combined convention met in June, Loucks went on record against any type of fusion, especially if it meant a sacrifice of principle and a union with his continual adversary, the Democratic party.⁴² Loucks did not attend the combined convention, and in September, sent a letter to the Republican convention announcing his withdrawal from the Populist party and his alignment with the Republican party for the coming campaign. Even though Loucks ended his letter restating his belief in changing the "system" to a public monopoly of the whole people, by the whole people, for the whole people," the response berated him for his rejection of principles, suggesting that the reason for his change of direction was one of "jealousy, disappointment and resentment, and a determination to injure the party which refused to be made a creature of [his] personal ambition."⁴³ Despite Loucks' defection, the general feeling of the convention was one of harmony and enthusiasm with all prescribing to the belief that "men who agree on principle will get together."⁴⁴ Within these general principles, the Populists continued to differ on specifics. The coalition of 1896 did not bloom without water from earlier discussions, or without the expressions often drawing the accusations of Populism's critics.

⁴²Lake Preston Times, June 23, 1898, p. 1.

⁴³Lake Preston Times, Sept. 1, 1898, p. 1; Vermillion Plain Talk, Sept. 2, 1898, p. 4. Also attacking Loucks for his defection was the Flandreau Herald, quoted in Vermillion Plain Talk, Sept. 9, 1898, p. 1. Unfortunately, there are no copies of the Ruralist available for comparison during Loucks's change of heart. Therefore, if his pronouncements and the reaction are taken at face value, Loucks felt that he could no longer labor for the Populists and they responded with some surprise and resentment at this change of direction.

⁴⁴Vermillion Plain Talk, July 1, 1898, p. 1.

Ironically, shortly after the Ruralist began its crusade for socialism it also became anti-Semitic. There was no explanation given for this new emphasis, but it is likely that the sentiment came from the new associate editor, William Kidd. Prior to mid-1895 there were references to the Rothschilds and to "Shylocks," but these lacked specific anti-Semitic connotations. In late 1893 the Ruralist even commended "that eminent Jewish Rabbi, Soloman Schindler" for choosing reform over the pulpit.⁴⁵ In the same year, however, they carried two articles claiming a connection between "Judaism" and gold.⁴⁶ Calling for a "social democracy" to solve the present inequities, a frequent writer to the Ruralist, Z. D. Scott, expressed the first blatant anti-Semitism in purporting that the basic problem was "a set of exploiters posing as representatives of the people, but instead are acting indirectly under the dictates of the European Jew power."⁴⁷

Introducing a response to an article signed "Sound Money" with the contention that the people should rule, the Ruralist endorsed the article and conceded:

We will not attempt to discuss the theological propositions. Even at the expense of being called a heretic, we are opposed to permitting the Jews through Baron Rothschilds to continue crucifying Christ by oppressing His people.

We concede that they are just as selfish, relentless, and cruel as they were 1900 years ago and that is why we so earnestly protest against permitting them to control the commerce and industry of this nation. No, we will not--we cannot--admit that God's hand is in this oppression. . . .

⁴⁵Editorial, Ruralist, Nov. 9, 1893, p. 4.

⁴⁶Ruralist, Apr. 27, 1893, p. 5; Aug. 17, 1893, p. 1.

⁴⁷Z. D. Scott, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, May 24, 1894, pp. 6-7.

The power of the Jews through Rothschilds and associates to crush the Christian church was never so apparent as at present. . . . The Jews could not devise a surer method of undermining and destroying the Christian church than is the present subservient position of the vast majority of our clergy to the money power. . . . We have an abiding faith that when they [the people] realize the danger they will respond to the call of duty, and overturn the Jewish dynasty now controlling.⁴⁸

"Sound Money" then returned to the Ruralist's columns to reiterate his conviction that the "hand of God" was "shaping the destinies of the nation's Jeweryard."⁴⁹ The Ruralist did not reject his basic premise that the "Jews" were in control of the world's finances, their objection was to the inevitability of his conviction. Couching their response in terms of the greater struggle, the Ruralist asserted that

Labor had developed the resources of the nation and not capital. We protest against the proposition that Capital is a brother or an equal with Labor. Capital as the term is used is stored labor. . . . Enlarge the system; make it national, with the government the depository; and enacting that all checks issued on the stored products of labor should be a full legal tender for all debts public and private and we will have a perfect money, a representative of the products of labor for the more convenient exchange of the same. Such a money will effectually stop the further march of the laborer 'Jeweryard' and emancipate labor from the power of money to oppress. All hail the day!⁵⁰

That this represented the view of the Ruralist is indicated by its reprinting a letter, titled "Jeweryard," affirming the Ruralist's position on the "Sound Money" contention:

It is an alarming state of affairs for either a patriotic citizen or a true Christian to contemplate. . . . The gold standard

⁴⁸Editorial, Ruralist, June 27, 1895, p. 4.

⁴⁹"Sound Money," Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 15, 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁰Editorial, Ruralist, Aug. 15, 1895, pp. 4-5.

nations of the world are in the grasp of the insatiate Jews. It makes no difference as to the form of government or political parties in control. . . . Political parties may change in Great Britain or these United States, but it makes no difference to Shylock so long as they maintain a gold standard. . . . In peace or war, good crops or bad, prosperity or distress, the Jews have their traps set to as despoil the Gentiles agoing or acoming.⁵¹

By mid-1895 anti-Semitic comments were quite open and represented a consensus of the Ruralist editors. What is even more important, when considering the Populists as a whole, is the complete lack of reaction against this anti-Semitic stance from either the readers of the Ruralist or from any of the Populist newspapers available for examination. This contrasts to the extensive comment usually forthcoming on issues of disagreement. The Ruralist had a circulation of from 10,000 to 12,000, and, without any response to offset these views, it appears that most readers were not in disagreement with the Ruralist's anti-Semitism. Although none of the other Populist newspapers carried reprints of these articles or originated any similar editorials of their own, the lack of response may be considered as tacit approval of the Ruralist's position. One thing that stands out in the Ruralist's editorials is an explicit connection between the terms Rothschild, "Shylock" and anti-Semitism.

The Populist's limited nativism arose from the same sentiment as his anti-Semitism. Faced with an inability to control his existence,

⁵¹Editorial, Ruralist, Aug. 29, 1895, p. 2. For other editorials connecting usury, the Rothschilds, and Shylockism with anti-Semitism see Ruralist, Jan. 11, 1894, p. 5; Aug. 15, 1895, p. 5; Aug. 29, 1895, p. 2; Sept. 19, 1895, p. 1.

the Populist tended to think in dualistic terms. A letter to the Ruralist, written in 1894, suggests the unity of nativistic and dualistic thinking:

Now let me say right here; in union there is strength and by uniting all labor organizations we are bound to win now. Labor and Capital; Capital in the two old parties and labor in the Populist. This thing will have to be met and decided in one way or another to see which shall rule, English shylockism and money, or brain and muscle and American principles and it will have to be met soon too.⁵²

The South Dakota Populists, however, were not against foreign-born citizens. On the contrary, they supported the foreign-born against charges from many quarters. With at least one-third of South Dakota's population foreign-born and many of them Populist, this is not too surprising.⁵³

On two occasions the Ruralist vehemently supported the foreign-born citizen. Responding to an accusation by the Watertown News that he had a foreigner working on his farm, Loucks, himself a former Canadian, replied that the worker was a "citizen and no longer a foreigner unless all who were born in foreign lands are to be dubbed foreigners." Loucks concluded with the question: "Does the News wish us to boycott foreign-born labor?"⁵⁴ The second incident concerned remarks made by the Republican Governor Charles Sheldon in the campaign of 1892 against any foreign-born citizen who threatened the people's allegiance to the Republican party. Among the varied responses against the Governor was

⁵²Hiram Washburn, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Jan. 7, 1894, p. 6.

⁵³Schell, South Dakota, p. 379.

⁵⁴Editorial, Ruralist, July 25, 1891, p. 4.

a retort from the Ruralist: "The intelligent foreign born citizen who thinks and votes for himself will abate the know-nothing candidate for governor."⁵⁵ Kenneth Hendrickson, Jr. supports this view in his study of the South Dakota Populist movement emphasizing that in this election of 1892 the Republicans were "fearful of the influence that the Independent leaders might have among the voters of foreign extraction."⁵⁶

The Britton Sentinel expressed a similar concern for the foreign-born citizen:

Some hair-brained galoots are trying to make a great stir about the Populist convention not nominating all Norwegians. The Populist convention was not a Norwegian one or a German or Irish one. It was an American one composed of American citizens. No other class are eligible to hold office. There was no national lines drawn in the convention. It was a harmonious convention of American citizens. There is no hard feelings on the part of any foreigners that they are not represented on the ticket. It is a ticket of Americans and will be supported by every Populist in the county regardless of their former nationality.⁵⁷

In view of this support for the foreign-born citizen a blanket characterization of the South Dakota Populist as a nativist is unwarranted. There were, however, elements of nativism in his thinking, particularly in regard to land ownership and the affect of immigration on the laboring classes. Surrounding these particulars was an emphasis on ridding the United States of foreign influence. Typical of the latter, a resolution in the 1896 platform advised all foreign countries to keep

⁵⁵Editorial, Ruralist, Aug. 11, 1892, p. 14. For additional editorial criticisms of the Governor's remarks see Ruralist, Sept. 8, 1892, p. 15; Sept. 15, 1892, p. 5; Oct. 6, 1892, pp. 1-2; Apr. 13, 1893, p. 1; Apr. 27, 1893, p. 1.

⁵⁶Hendrickson, "Populist Movement," p. 34.

⁵⁷Editorials, Britton Sentinel, July 16, 1896, p. 4; Oct. 8, 1896, p. 1.

their "hands off not only South America but hands off South Dakota, and the United States of America, hands off our land, our public highways, our finances, industries, commerce and legislation." It concluded with the request for all to unite in an effort "to emancipate this nation from all foreign dominion and interference."⁵⁸

The South Dakota Populist's attitude toward unrestricted immigration was not directed against the laborer but against those who would exploit him and, hence, oppress all the laboring classes in the United States. To them, the danger was not "from the pauper labor of Europe . . . but the money power of Europe."⁵⁹ Thus, in regard to immigration the South Dakota Populist held to his belief in "equal rights to all and special privileges to none."

The "equal rights," however, did not always extend to the non-white. Although not brazenly racist there were enough references to the threat of "negro labor" coming into South Dakota and "negro supremacy" in the South to indicate some prejudice in this direction. When noting the common crusading spirit of the Populists and abolitionists, the Ruralist praised those "patriots who espoused the cause of the African slave," yet expressed little concern for the former slave himself.⁶⁰

The discussion of nativism and anti-Semitism indicates that the Populist felt abused by "interests" beyond his control. That this

⁵⁸Clark County Republic, Aug. 7, 1896, p. 1.

⁵⁹Editorial, Ruralist, July 25, 1891, p. 4.

⁶⁰Editorials, Ruralist, Nov. 15, 1894, p. 4; Feb. 11, 1892, p. 2. For a discussion of the racial overtones surrounding the expansionist question during the Spanish-American War see Chapter III.

feeling took such an unwholesome and unhumanitarian bent, in nativism and anti-Semitism, is unfortunate, for South Dakota Populist thought contained much to commend it. Their thinking on the money question was particularly significant. Although there were those pushing only for the larger context of changing the system which created the need for such a measure. Also, since current economic theory indicates that they were correct in demanding a program of expanded currency, more public works, the extension of credit through the sub-treasury plan, and government control over the nation's currency as a solution to the depression years of the 1890's, it is unwise to dismiss them as an irrational group concerned primarily with money. Who is irrational, those with the right solution charging "conspiracy," or those with the wrong solution calling "anarchy" and "fiat money?" In any movement name-calling sometimes suffices for reasoned argument, but the important consideration is the Populist's attempt to re-think the issue.

More specifically the Populists challenged the prevalent belief in Social Darwinism. In rejecting Social Darwinism the South Dakota Populists emphasized the need for education and unity with all laborers. They attacked the natural rights philosophy of the courts on issues ranging from the courts's use of injunctions to their rejection of the income tax.⁶¹ An eloquent letter to the editor of the Ruralist from Z. D. Scott summed up the rejection of Social Darwinism:

⁶¹J. S. Hyde, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Mar. 23, 1893, p. 1; Editorials, Ruralist, Sept. 13, 1894, p. 5; May 30, 1895, p. 1; May 23, 1895, pp. 1, 3, 4.

The power of production and the ability to control the same must be placed beyond the possible control of any central power outside of the whole people. The aspirations of humanity at present are nearly all in the direction of the dollar, instead of being in the interest of humanity, and if the age of invention and competition continues, and by this, the so-called law, the survival of the fittest predominates, we can prepare sooner or later for the conditions described in Caesar's Column.⁶²

Stating the contention more directly, another letter on the same day from D. C. Tiffany, Jr., also a frequent contributor to the Ruralist, asked the question,

do all classes have equal rights and protection under the law? If they have, millionaires and paupers are the accidents of nature instead of the products of vicious systems and vicious laws and the remedy lies not in a reversal of governmental policies but in petitions to the Supreme Ruler.⁶³

Not content with making "petitions to the Supreme Ruler," the South Dakota Populists placed their emphasis on the education of the people. Noting that the only way to improve the world was "through education methods," the Vermillion Plain Talk advised that "the people who need reforming and educating most are our middle classes who have no interest in a continuation of corrupt conditions and who still have enough virtue left upon which to lay the foundations of progress."⁶⁴ In advance of the times the Britton Sentinel advocated sex education and end to "mock modesty." "If you want men and women moral and pure," suggested the Sentinel in an editorial on sex education, "educate and enlighten them."⁶⁵

⁶²Z. D. Scott, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Mar. 29, 1894, p. 1.

⁶³D. C. Tiffany, Jr., Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Mar. 29, 1894, p. 7.

⁶⁴Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Nov. 27, 1896, p. 4.

⁶⁵Editorials, Britton Sentinel, July 4, 1894, p. 1; Mar. 31, 1898, p. 4.

Also stressing education over "petitions to the Supreme Ruler," the Ruralist opposed the trend of many clergymen toward hypnotizing the "people with lies until the church is enveloped in a miasmatic fog-of superstition that is completely paralyzing it."⁶⁶ "Our ministers are not free agents," contended the Ruralist. "They are helpless slaves chained to the chariot wheels of plutocracy and compelled to preach to starving multitudes a vile jargon that is a mockery of Christianity."⁶⁷

It was but a short step for the Ruralist to extend its contention to a belief that "the human race will not be made slaves to plutocracy." To prevent liberty from perishing from the "face of the earth," the "commonwealth should do for all" what the "individual cannot do alone."⁶⁸ Through their basic principles of education and "co-operation" against the inherent inequities of the competitive system, the South Dakota Populists were drawn to the conclusion that the "sooner we return to equal rights for all and special privileges to none, the sooner we will find the correct system."⁶⁹ A continual advocate of socialism and a Brown County farmer, George B. Daly, made a common connection between education, anti-Darwinism and the welfare of all laboring classes when he declared that

⁶⁶Editorial, Ruralist, Nov. 14, 1895, p. 1.

⁶⁷Editorial, Ruralist, Apr. 10, 1895, p. 1. The Ruralist also carried an editorial titled "Church Worships Mammon, Not God," Ruralist, Apr. 25, 1895, p. 4; and an article by the Rev. F. F. Passmore, Methodist Episcopal Church, "Telling the Haggard Truth About the Craven Cowardice of the Clergy," Ruralist, July 25, 1895, pp. 1-3.

⁶⁸Otto Anderson, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 23, 1894, p. 6.

⁶⁹E. A. Ernst, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 2, 1894, p. 2; J. B. Overhulse, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, May 4, 1893, pp. 6-7.

no one is more firmly convinced than I am that the capitalistic system, having about run its course and performed its predestined functions, in the course of evolution is about to be supplanted by the cooperative commonwealth, which is to be a pure democracy. So that the thorough schooling of the people in the above mentioned principles is the indispensable prerequisite to the uprearing of the new system. The trades and labor unions are the schools in which most of the work must be done. The disrupting or crippling of them or kindred organizations is a crime against humanity.⁷⁰

Daly made the common cause of the laboring classes even more explicit in a speech before the reform press association citing the common "despoilment" of the "landless farmer and the workless artisan" as the necessary catalyst to "bring them to each others aid, making them brothers in seeming misfortune, comrades in the mighty class struggle soon to shake America, to convulse the world--Proletarian against Plutocrat, the despoiled against the despoiler."⁷¹

The South Dakota Populist realized that the only hope for change was through organization and unity among all laborers. H. J. Eager, President of the Industrial Union of South Dakota, noting that "professional men, business men, mechanics, and more especially laborers, are joining the ranks [of the Populist party], challenged: "Laboring men organize! In organization lies your only chance for emancipation from the bonds of the mone y kings."⁷² The head of the South Dakota Knights of Labor, Father Robert W. Haire, also emphasized the need for organized labor if the government was to return to the people:

⁷⁰George B. Daly, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Dec. 20, 1894, p. 5.

⁷¹Ruralist, Nov. 28, 1895, p. 1.

⁷²J. J. Eager, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, June 7, 1894, p. 7.

The plutes will call it the deliverance of the state over to the mob. Of course, the organic people is always a mob in the mind of the plute, unless marshalled under the command of said plute. The ordinary plute has no conception of the state unless it be a nation of a few private bosses, and an army of hired wage slaves. So our plan is not for them nor to them. We address the toiler--the maker of all values--knights of labor, Farmers Alliance, federated trades and labor unions--all toilers in the field, trade, workshop and mine.⁷³

This dualistic view of society rested on a producer philosophy and a labor theory of value. In the struggle between the "robbers" and the "robbed," the Populists often referred to the Omaha platform's principle of "wealth belonging to him who creates it." Expressing an understanding of the problems hindering a union between the farmer and the urban laborer, the Ruralist referred to the Omaha platform and suggested that

this cannot mean the exploiter of labor, large or small, for the laborer, not the employer of labor, is the creator of wealth. Only by the abolition of the wage system can the wealth created by labor be made secure to labor. When the Unions abandon the futile attempt to bull the slave market and strike for industrial freedom, they will accomplish something worth while.⁷⁴

The Populist labor exchange plan, a co-operative enterprise using "deposit checks" instead of money, was based upon this "fundamental idea that labor deserves all it creates."⁷⁵ A letter to the Ruralist from C. W. Hill, an Alliance organizer, unified the producer philosophy with a dichotomous view of the "battle:"

⁷³Robert W. Haire, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 8, 1891, p. 3.

⁷⁴Editorial, Ruralist, Apr. 3, 1895, p. 1.

⁷⁵Ruralist, May 9, 1895, p. 2. This was an article written by J. R. Lowe, former President of the S. D. Farmers' Alliance, to explain the labor exchange program to the people of South Dakota. Lowe was then living in Iowa.

There is no neutral grounds. They who are not for the suppression of evil doing and evil ways and methods are for the confiscating of the products of labor and appropriating it to those who do not labor. It is the devil and his cohorts on one side and the spirit of love and justice with its advocates and laborers on the other.⁷⁶

In supporting labor strikes the Populists emphasized the unity of the "oppressed" against the "oppressor," often referring to the militia and the Pinkertons as "hired assassins" guilty of "official murder."⁷⁷ The support was not merely for the strikers but for "commonwealers" everywhere. Since the industrialist and "his kind" did not "care a fig for American labor or the American laborer," the Ruralist predicted "that the laboring men of the nation will not tolerate such a system much longer."⁷⁸

The laboring men, however, did not unite for "industrial freedom," regardless of the Populist's desire for such a union. Since the South Dakota Populist's primary concern was for changing the "system," most of his principles, programs and platform demands required national

⁷⁶C. W. Hill, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Nov. 26, 1891, p. 2.

⁷⁷Editorials, Britton Sentinel, Sept. 16, 1897, p. 1; Ruralist, July 14, 1892, p. 6; Apr. 19, 1894, p. 4. The charge of the misuse of the militia and government by injunction particularly were mentioned by the Populists. They gave strong verbal support to the Homestead striker in 1892, to the march of "Coxey's Army" on Washington, D. C. and the Pullman strikers in 1894, especially against the "mock" trial of Eugene Debs. The Ruralist even carried a section "Strike Notes" during the spring and summer of 1894. F. P. Gonser, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, July 28, 1892, p. 3; "Hayseed," Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Aug. 4, 1892, p. 3; O. C. Dow, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, June 7, 1894, p. 3; Editorials, Ruralist, Aug. 10, 1893, p. 3; Apr. 29, 1894, p. 5; Jan. 24, 1895, p. 4; Dec. 12, 1895, p. 2.

⁷⁸Editorial, Ruralist, July 14, 1892, p. 8.

action. Although laborers and farmers formed a partial union in South Dakota, the failure of the national Populist party to accomplish a union with labor and other reformers precluded the implementation of the South Dakota Populist's principles. The failure of the national party in 1896, led to failure of the South Dakota Populists in 1900. This unsuccessfulness, however, was not due to the emphasis placed on the issue of silver, but to the inability to unite with other reformers nationally on a broad program of "system" reform. By rejecting silver coinage as an overall panacea for society's ills, the South Dakota Populist "had come to see that [his] trouble [was] far more deeply seated than the remedy of the money question alone."⁷⁹ In attempting to solve these problems the Populist sought national solutions which he could not implement without a broad national reform party.

This is not to say that the South Dakota Populist was unconcerned with state problems or that he discontinued his efforts to change society after the election of 1896. In both the election of 1896 and 1898, the Britton Sentinel and its readers emphasized that the paramount question was "whether the corporations shall run the affairs of this state or shall they be run by the people?"⁸⁰ "Shall the people control their servants, the railroads," asked a subscriber, "or shall the servants control them?"⁸¹ In an 1898 article, titled "State Control of Railroads," William T. LaFollette, elected as a Populist railroad

⁷⁹Ruralist, Nov. 21, 1895, p. 1. This statement was made by George B. Daly at the organizational meeting of the Brown County Socialist Alliance.

⁸⁰Editorial, Britton Sentinel, Sept. 15, 1898, p. 1.

⁸¹A. D. MacDonald, Letter to the Editor, Britton Sentinel, June 11, 1896, p. 1.

commissioner in 1896 and brother of Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, contended that "the burning question of the hour is, how shall these gigantic combinations of capital be governed or controlled in order to prevent their absorbing an undue proportion of the wealth, created by labor." Noting that the railroads were vital to all industry and beyond the reach of the private citizen, LaFollette concluded that the people "must at an early day force congress to pass a law that will empower a national commission to absolutely control the rates charged for traffic on public highways, or better still, the people of the United States purchase the roads at their actual cash value, (with the water squeezed out) and operate them under government management the same as the postal service, which is eminently successful."⁸²

U. S. Congressman Freeman Knowles, also editor of the Populist Deadwood Independent, expressed a similar belief in referring to the railroads as "highwaymen." Before Congress, in 1899, Knowles responded to the discussion of a bill defining the punishment for crimes committed in the district of Alaska with the charge that

the robber classes have succeeded in injecting into this bill just what they would like to see inserted into the laws of every State in this Union. The trusts and syndicates claim the right to combine to rob and plunder the people at their pleasure, but they propose to imprison and fine laboring men who combine for the purpose of retaining enough of the product of their labor to keep their families from starving. . . . Trusts and combines want everybody else to compete but themselves. They want American laboring men to compete with the dregs and scum of the whole world, and they shoot them to death if they refuse. . . . Mr. Speaker, labor produces all wealth. Can you show me a particle of wealth that is not the product of some man's toil? . . . By legislation the function of issuing money has been abdicated by our Government and that

⁸²Vermillion Plain Talk, Apr. 29, 1898, p. 1.

function turned over to the banks, to be controlled by the money trust as their interests may dictate. . . . Under such laws labor is ground between the upper and nether millstone. . . . Labor is a sleeping giant. It may awake some day and use its power perhaps not wisely.⁸³

Such statements exemplify the way in which one "crime" was closely connected to another in Populist thought. Each "crime" was part of the government's abdication to the "robber classes" or the "money power." Each "crime" had within it all the manifestations of a system gone wrong. Referring to the "destitution and suffering in Chicago," a Vermillion Plain Talk editorial projected that "it reflects upon our government such a character as no barbarous country in the world would be guilty of sustaining." This same editorial concluded with an excellent summation of the dualism and the concern of the South Dakota Populist:

The lion and the lamb cannot be forced to lie side by side in amity together. What will be the outcome of a money-corrupted government is for a greater wisdom than mortal man to answer. If this condition of affairs continues, will American citizenship be a thing to boast of, or will it cause every right-minded man to hang his head in shame?⁸⁴

Both the success and failure of South Dakota Populism lay in the party's unanimity during the campaign and election of 1896. Through continued debate and discussion the rank and file as well as the Populist leadership had developed a common view of society. By 1896 the Populists had rejected the prevailing American mood of Social

⁸³Congressional Record, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899, XXXII, 418-419. Unfortunately, there are no copies of the Deadwood Independent available during this period.

⁸⁴Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Jan. 29, 1897, p. 2.

Darwinism and, instead, envisioned a unity of laborers within a moderate socialism. The unity of the reform factions led to their election in 1896, but the national scope of their program held the seeds of defeat in 1900. The burden of failure fell on the Populist Governor Andrew E. Lee.

CHAPTER III

GOVERNOR ANDREW E. LEE: CRITIC OF A SYSTEM GONE WRONG

Governor Andrew E. Lee came to office in 1897 full of hope for his administration to reform society, but with the advent of the Spanish-American War he developed a foreboding feeling about the "outcome of a money corrupted government." Along with other South Dakota Populists, Lee stressed the inequities of American society and sought a solution through a qualified socialism. When the society failed to reform he became a searching critic. The evolution of his thought epitomizes the growing pessimism of South Dakota Populists.¹

Throughout his governorship, Lee strongly identified with the "plain people." Humble in the face of nomination for office, he firmly believed in the Populist principles of "letting the office seek the man" and "majority rule." In an open letter expressing his disinclination to run for Governor on the Populist ticket, he quite likely secured the nomination by his strong statement of Populist principles. Confessing that he voted Republican until 1894, Lee wrote that in the contest "now going on between the money power--seeking further power--

¹Lee served two terms as Governor from 1897 to 1901. He was born near Bergen, Norway in 1847, emigrated to Wisconsin in 1851, clerked in Iowa and Wisconsin during the 1860's, and settled in Vermillion as a businessman and farmer in 1869. Lee also served as reform mayor of Vermillion prior to his election as Governor. Andrew Lee to Col. Arthur Linn, July 2, 1898, State University of South Dakota Museum, Andrew E. Lee Papers. (Hereinafter cited as SUSD).

and a people struggling at cross purposes to maintain their rights" he belonged with the "common people." Writing disparagingly of "eastern and European creditors," the railroads and corporate trusts, he stated that Populism's "principles are not those of anarchism," for the Populist party "is the only organization which stands between free institutions and anarchy."² This was not mere campaign rhetoric, for in hundreds of letters throughout his tenure, Lee reiterated his belief in the "common people," "good honest government for the best interests of the greatest number of people" and "majority rules."³ Even in defeat he acknowledged the rule of the majority, although not without expressing the hope that the people would realize their mistake.⁴

To Lee, the Populist party offered the people a chance to correct their mistakes and "demonstrate" that they were "competent to govern."⁵ Believing that "there never has been a reform accomplished in this or any other nation which did not originate with the plain people," he encouraged an out-of-state follower to "fight the battle manfully, and in the end we shall succeed because we are in the right."⁶

²Britton Sentinel, June 25, 1896, p. 1.

³Lee to F. C. Robinson, Mar. 9, 1897; Lee to Charles O. Knudson, Nov. 17, 1898; Lee to A. L. Van Osdel, Nov. 18, 1898, SUSD.

⁴Lee to Franklin H. Wentworth, Dec. 7, 1900; Lee to Senator Richard F. Pettigrew, Mar. 7, 1898, SUSD. Lee to Charles L. Woolheiter, Nov. 16, 1900, South Dakota State Historical Society, Andrew E. Lee Papers. (Hereinafter cited as SDhi). Lee to A. T. Hanson, Nov. 20, 1900; Lee to L. T. Norman, Nov. 26, 1900; Lee to F. H. Bacon, Dec. 3, 1900, SDhi.

⁵Lee to T. H. Green, Jan. 20, 1897, SUSD.

⁶Lee to Charles S. Mann, Feb. 11, 1899, SDhi.

His dedication to the principles of the Populist party and the "plain people" is seen in a letter to a university professor in Vermillion:

There can no longer be any doubt that the conditions of this country are rapidly working against the best interests of the masses, and if permitted to continue for a short time longer as they now exist under the present system, it will be a government for the millionaires and trusts and not for the people, as the founders of this great nation intended it should be. We have each a duty to perform in remedying this evil, and if we meet it manfully right must and will prevail in the end.⁷

In his first gubernatorial address to the state legislature, Lee reminded the legislators that they were "the chosen servants of the entire electorate of the state," and outlined the programs and principles which remained his primary goals throughout his Governorship. Pragmatically noting that the state government "cannot hope and I do not think we will be expected to bring about a radical change for the better in the general condition of the people, for that is left to the larger field of national legislation," the Governor requested state action on railroad rates and taxation, liquor regulation, improvement of educational institutions, voter registration and other voting reforms, with particular emphasis on establishing a sound system of state financing.⁸ Furthermore, he believed that even liquor regulation only could be effective if it was federal in nature.⁹

In his second address to the legislature, Governor Lee reported that the State finances were in a "good state," praised the improvement in railroad rates but noted that they still escaped "just taxation,"

⁷Lee to C. M. Young, Feb. 11, 1899, SDhi.

⁸Britton Sentinel, Jan. 14, 1897, pp. 2-3.

⁹Lee to A. E. Carhart, Sept. 13, 1900, SDhi.

reported the favorable progress of the initiative and referendum measure, and expressed his desire for more improvement in the administration of education institutions.¹⁰ He accurately observed that within the limitations of the State's capabilities his first administration brought some reform to South Dakota.

Along with other South Dakota Populists, however, Lee's concern focused on the "system" and its alteration. Four measures which would help to change the system were the initiative, the referendum, direct election of United States Senators, and government ownership of railroads, telegraph and telephone and abolishment of all trusts.¹¹ Writing to Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin, in early 1899, the Governor contended that the initiative and referendum was "the greatest safeguard ever placed in the hands of the people," for when "this measure is properly placed upon our statute books it will destroy the corrupt railroad and corporation lobbyists who infest our legislature at every session." He suggestively concluded the letter by advising LaFollette to admit that he was a "good populist" for "no man with the principles you advocate can stay in the republican party as it now exists."¹²

Lee had the same advice for others opposed to "direct legislation." "It would take no argument to convince anyone not by birth, interest and instinct a royalist that the people, being the source of

¹⁰Hendrickson, "Populist Movement," pp. 67-70.

¹¹Lee to W. B. Martin, Dec. 31, 1900, SUSD.

¹²Lee to R. M. LaFollette, Jan. 7, 1899, SUSD. See also Lee to L. K. Johnson, Jan. 7, 1899, SUSD.

all power in a representative government, should exercise that power."¹³ He also extended this belief to the direct election of U. S. Senators. In a lengthy response to a request for an opinion on this subject, he emphatically replied that "the Senate is not superior to the House in political capacity, . . . that as a rule governors are as able as the members of the Senate, . . . that the election of Senators by direct vote would [not] change the present status of the Houses in their relation to each other," and that "the more nearly you approach a full expression of the popular will the less corruption there will be and the more nearly you will conform to the true spirit of our institutions." Relating this issue to the broader implication of the people's relationship to government, the Governor concluded:

Examples of this kind could be cited by the thousand, showing that an expression of the popular will would result in most cases in benefit to the whole people. The corporations run the country today because the constitutional institutions are such that a few representatives can defy and set at naught the will of a whole people. The Senate was created by the aristocratic classes who took the reins of government after the revolution, and most of whom fought the revolutionary advocates, and the Senate and the Supreme Court were instituted as a 'check' against the people by those who were afraid of complete liberty for the masses. Multiplied instances which it is unnecessary for me to relate here go to show that the contention of Jefferson on these questions was correct, from a democratic standpoint, and I am convinced that this country has now reached a point in its national existence when there must be more democracy or there will be further curtailment of liberty. The only escape from vassalage to wealth lies in a broader exercise of the elective franchise, not only as respects the election of officials, but as to public measures as well.¹⁴

¹³Lee to Eltweed Pomeroy, May 8, 1897, SDhi.

¹⁴Lee to G. S. Cassels, Dec. 21, 1897, SUSD. Other strong letters on direct election of senators were Lee to Bart Russell, May 6, 1897; Lee to W. J. Tighe, Dec. 20, 1900, SDhi. An impetus to Lee's dedication to the direct election of senators was the re-election of

Although Lee did not come to office with a confirmed belief in government ownership of railroads, telegraph and telephones, his dealings with the railroad companies drew him to this position. In his first year of office, he accepted railroad transportation passes and requested passes for others, primarily state officials. By the second year, however, because of his attempts to regulate railroad rates and increase railroad taxes, the Governor was no longer in favor with the railroads. When discussing railroad matters in his correspondence Lee emphasized that "the people of our State are greater than the railroad corporation," and hoped that "our State at the next legislature will see fit to make sufficient appropriation for mileage for its officers so that we shall not long have to beg the railroad companies for these favors."¹⁵ Even though he claimed that the railroads had "secret agents" at work during the political campaigns, he felt discouraged that the people deliberately would "cast their ballots to continue a system which is demanding from the products of labor more than twice what it is justly entitled to for services rendered."¹⁶

Senator James Kyle mentioned in the previous chapter. Lee felt that Kyle's election resulted from a political deal between Kyle and the Republicans. He also believed that electing senators through the state legislatures brought out the worst in men and the political system. In a letter to Senator Pettigrew, Lee expressed complete agreement with the Populists' repudiation of Kyle. Lee to Pettigrew, Feb. 2, 1897; Feb. 19, 1897; Lee to F. E. Jones, Feb. 9, 1897, SUSD; Lee to Pettigrew, May 11, 1897, SDhi.

¹⁵Lee to H. H. Olson, Apr. 4, 1898, SUSD; Lee to H. A. Humphrey, June 8, 1897, SDhi.

¹⁶Lee to Thomas H. Ayres, Mar. 14, 1900; Lee to E. E. Carpenter, Jan. 7, 1899, SUSD.

Lee continually reiterated that there was "no desire on the part of our people to do the railroad companies any injustices." "In fact, if the railroad corporations were as honest with the people as the people are with them, there would be no necessity for the present controversy."¹⁷ Because he believed that the railroads were continuing their injustice, Lee predicted that they were "bringing down the house on their own heads. Let it come."¹⁸

Two of Lee's letters to reform Governors during his last term illustrate the shift to a more radical view. Replying to an inquiry from Governor H. E. Pingree of Michigan on railroad taxation, the Governor hinted at a conspiracy in stating:

I have watched and admired your splendid efforts against the wrongs of the corporations in your state as against the people but it is a difficult task to accomplish with the corporations all working in harmony and they seem to have a strong hold of the people generally. I hope the day is not far distant when some of these evils will be remedied.¹⁹

In a letter to Governor Joseph D. Sayers of Texas, citing "the evil of the gigantic combinations," the Governor more explicitly prophesied that "if their absolute control cannot be accomplished by legislation, in my opinion the only remedy remaining is government ownership of transportation and other vast industries that are now being manipulated by the capitalists directly against the interest of the masses."²⁰

¹⁷Lee to T. W. LaFleische, Jan. 12, 1899, SUSD. In a lengthy letter to another Populist, Lee emphasized that the railroads should "pay taxes upon the same basis that is exacted from private individuals." Lee to C. B. Kennedy, July 26, 1898, SUSD.

¹⁸Lee to Robert W. Haire, Feb. 2, 1898, SUSD.

¹⁹Lee to H. E. Pingree, Mar. 24, 1900, SUSD.

²⁰Lee to Joseph D. Sayers, July 6, 1899, SDhi.

This shift also occurred in his relationship to the Populist party and in his emphasis of the principles of the party. Although nominated by the Populist party, he indicated some ambivalence in his early connections with the party. In his first month as Governor, Lee wrote to Senator Pettigrew on the subject of patronage explaining that he had "to protect our populist friends as they feel that they should have their share."²¹ Also early in his first term the Governor stressed the primacy of bi-metallism, but with greater identification to the Populist party. Although against shifting the issue, he realized the larger significance of the previous national election in writing that

the railroads and other corporations fought Bryan and the silver Populists for the reason that the success of Bryan's party meant a reign of honest democracy and the destruction of corporate management of the general government. In view of these facts the People's Party cannot be true to the best interests of humanity without holding steadily in the middle of the wide road which it took at St. Louis last July.²²

Again in the fall of 1897 Lee reiterated that "bi-metallism is the issue which must be settled at once," but coupled this remark with a firm statement advocating "no compromise of principles."²³ By February, 1898, he cast aside all doubt in flatly stating that "it is a great honor to be a Populist."²⁴ With the "harmonious" sentiment burgeoning from the "Triple Alliance Convention," in 1898, the Governor wrote to

²¹Lee to Pettigrew, Jan. 20, 1897, SUSD.

²²Lee to J. A. Edgerton, Feb. 11, 1897, SUSD.

²³Lee to New York Journal, May 13, 1897, SDhi; Lee to H. L. Loucks, Feb. 15, 1898; Lee to C. W. Taber, Feb. 24, 1898; Lee to Pettigrew, Feb. 25, 1898; Lee to Col. Arthur Linn, Apr. 7, 1898; Lee to Hugh Smith, Oct. 14, 1897, SUSD.

²⁴Lee to Col. Arthur Linn, Feb. 17, 1898, SUSD.

Senator Pettigrew that regardless of some of the radical elements of the coalition "you and I are as strong populists as any of them."²⁵ Evidently the dedication to the Populist party took root, for, in 1901, after his defeat for U. S. Congressman, Lee wrote to a South Dakota Populist asking if it was "possible that another of our Populists has gone wrong! . . . I hope to learn that the charges made are not true . . . and hope you will be able to vindicate yourself and party."²⁶ Although not abandoning bi-metallism, he incorporated it into a broader concept of the money question, as had many South Dakota Populists, and this led him to the conclusion that

the money question is not the only question today that is injurious to the people. The trust and corporations are consolidating and over-riding the best interests of the people as rapidly as they can, and if it continues to go on at this rate, the producers of this country will not much longer have anything to say regarding the conducting of the affairs of our government.²⁷

By mid-1898 Lee felt that the rate was not only continuing but increasing. The source of this change of view was the McKinley Administration's handling of the Spanish-American War. Originally supporting the war against Spain, he modified his view when the war went beyond what he considered to be its initial purpose. Before the declaration of war in April, 1898, the Governor received hundreds of letters from men volunteering for service in the event of war with Spain. One of the Populist volunteers took exception to the assertion that the

²⁵ Lee to Pettigrew, June 27, 1898; July 3, 1898, SUSD.

²⁶ Lee to A. M. Allen, Mar. 5, 1901, SUSD.

²⁷ Lee to F. C. Robinson, Jan. 28, 1898, SUSD. For a similar statement see Lee to George McDonald, Sept. 12, 1900, SUSD.

Republicans were more patriotic, for, he claimed, "Three of the reform forces have signified their intention of enlisting to one Republican."²⁸ In acknowledging a letter from another Populist volunteer, the Governor enunciated his position when replying that it was very gratifying "to receive so many evidences of the patriotism of our people and to feel that my own party is not backward in expressing its willingness to fight the common enemy."²⁹ In a letter to the chairman of the Cuban Relief Committee, noting that it was "justice and not charity which the people of Cuba need," Lee charged that "it is little less than criminal on the part of our government to hold up Spanish arms and pass the contribution box for food to preserve the lives of the Cubans for slaughter by Spanish bayonets."³⁰ Although disturbed by the Administration's failure to take early action, after the declaration of war the Governor sent a telegram to the Secretary of War offering the services of the South Dakota National Guard.³¹

By July, 1898, however, Lee vehemently opposed the course of the McKinley Administration, particularly in regard to the acquisition of territory. Noting that such a policy was "foreign to the purpose of the United States," Lee concluded a letter to the Chicago Record:

²⁸R. W. Parlman to Lee, Apr. 10, 1898, SDhi.

²⁹Lee to William R. Rinehart, Feb. 23, 1898, SUSD.

³⁰Lee to Steven E. Barton, Feb. 4, 1898, SUSD. In a letter to the New York World, Lee recommended that Congress stay in session because public sentiment demanded that Congress take "prompt action to free Cuba and protect her from further Spanish butchery and since the destruction of the Maine and the loss of our brave men our nation's honor is involved." Lee to New York World, Mar. 17, 1898, SUSD.

³¹Lee to Secretary of War, Apr. 21, 1898, SDhi.

I do not believe that the monied interests of the East, which exerted such powerful influence against a declaration of war should now be permitted to make a financial conquest of the rich fields which have been drenched with the blood of soldiers who fought for humanity and not to advance the interests of money. The policy of the United States for this emergency should be, first, drive out every vestige of Spanish sovereignty. Second, assist the people of these islands to establish their own governments under such forms as will secure to them the blessings of liberty which they have so dearly purchased. Third, extend to them the protecting power of the United States in the maintenance of their institutions, and, fourth, ratify no terms of peace which will saddle upon these people the great debts created to maintain over them the Spanish tyranny which they have so justly rebelled against.³²

During the summer of 1898, the Governor's correspondence indicates that he was not against trade with the newly gained territories but against any "servitude to foreign monarchies or franchise seeking American capitalists." Unalterably opposed to any retention of territory, he proposed that only by assisting "the struggling people of these several islands to erect local governments," could the United States "teach the world that our professions of fealty to oppressed humanity were not a disguise to greed for territorial aggrandizement."³³ Implying an isolationist sentiment, Lee opposed territorial expansion for the additional reasons that it would require the maintenance of "a large army and navy at an enormous expense and that our country would never in the future enjoy the peace and safety it has enjoyed in the past."³⁴ The Governor re-emphasized this view in a supportive letter to Senator

³²Lee to Chicago Record, July 29, 1898, SUSD.

³³Lee to Chicago Tribune, July 16, 1898, SDhi. Other letters expressing the same sentiment are Lee to Col. A. S. Frost, Aug. 12, 1898; Lee to F. W. Cox, Aug. 15, 1898; Lee to Illinois Manufacturers Association, Aug. 31, 1898, SUSD.

³⁴Lee to n.n., n.d. (probably Nov. 1898), SDhi.

Richard F. Pettigrew declaring that "this country needs no expansion, for we are an independent country, having every product within ourselves necessary to maintain a great and prosperous nation."³⁵

Pettigrew, a staunch opponent of expansion, also made the "connection between the forces of economic privilege in the United States and those who favored geographic expansion."³⁶ In his study of Pettigrew's political career, Kenneth Hendrickson, Jr., calls "Pettigrew's fight against imperialism . . . his most flamboyant effort in the United States Senate."³⁷ Pettigrew's attack on imperialism, however, had racial overtones. Speaking earlier against the annexation of Hawaii, Pettigrew advised that

it seems to me that we already have problems enough; that we cannot afford to add more of the dark-skinned races to our population. With the Negroes of the South, the Chinese of the Pacific Coast, and the dagoes of the East, I believe that every problem we are able to solve will be presented to us in the future.³⁸

Coupled with this aversion to "the dark-skinned races," Pettigrew exhibited a belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons when declaring that "our aggressive energetic, active, dominating race is not suited to inhabit such lands."³⁹

³⁵Lee to Pettigrew, Jan. 21, 1899, SUSD.

³⁶Hendrickson, "Richard F. Pettigrew," pp. 353, 260. Hendrickson made this summation from two of Pettigrew's books, Imperial Washington (Chicago: Charles Kerr and Co., 1922), pp. 12-24, and The Course of Empire (Chicago: Boniwright, 1920), p. 166.

³⁷Hendrickson, "Richard R. Pettigrew," p. 253.

³⁸Pettigrew, Course of Empire, p. 197, cited in Hendrickson, "Richard F. Pettigrew," p. 258.

³⁹Pettigrew, Course of Empire, p. 180, cited in Hendrickson, "Richard F. Pettigrew," pp. 260-261.

Although racism was not the nucleus of his argument, Lee also expressed a racist attitude. In a letter to Pettigrew opposing the policy of the United States in "assuming the care of an undesirable class of people," the Governor concluded that "the race question is serious enough within our boundaries at the present time."⁴⁰ He saw no conflict in this position and his earlier statements concerning the principles of the Declaration of Independence. In fact, a letter to a Wisconsin high school debating club emphasized that the Filipinos and Cubans had fought for their independence for generations and any attitude of colonial imperialism by the United States would negate "the moral effect of the extension of so-called democratic influences." At the same time the letter stated

the natural instinct of the Anglo Saxon race is to acquire territory, but if this instinct is to be followed our acquisitions should be confined entirely to the North American continent, where there is yet abundant room for all the expansion of which the race at the present time is capable. To inject into our civilization, directly or indirectly, a race of people such as the Philippine Islanders, or even the Cubans, could not be otherwise than deleterious to them, as well as injurious to our own country.

Silently granting this dichotomy, the letter concluded that "if there were no other reason, the great moral question involved, whether we shall repudiate the fundamental ground upon which we demanded liberty from England, and declare in effect that the government does not derive its just powers from the consent of the governed, and that might makes right, would be sufficient in itself as a ground upon which to oppose with all our power any policy of territorial aggrandizement."⁴¹ This

⁴⁰Lee to Pettigrew, Feb. 4, 1899, SDhi.

⁴¹Lee to Waupaca High School Debating Club, Jan. 16, 1899, SUSD.

racist sentiment extended into state affairs on one occasion when Lee assured a Black Hills constituent that even though he had heard nothing of railroads contracting "negro labor," his sympathies were wholly with the laborers of the state and "against the importing of negro labor from any other state in the Union."⁴²

Three reprints carried by the Britton Sentinel indicate that the racial argument against the annexation of the Philippines had wide acceptance among South Dakota Populists. Variousy titled, "The White Man's Burden," "Can the Philippines be Civilized?" and "An Appeal to Filipinos," the articles made comparisons to the inability of the American blacks to participate in democracy and claimed that it would be a "very long time" before the "barbarism" of the Philippines would end.⁴³ Not limiting its argument to the racial aspects of expansion, the Britton Sentinel also stressed the effect the "unjust" war was having on the people's relationship to government. In a lengthy editorial, the Sentinel warned of imperialism causing government to "drift from a Republican form to an imperial form under the guise of democracy." Charging that "the holders of wealth have foreseen the time when unrest might develop into violence and are preparing for it by encouraging the increased reliance of the government upon the soldiery," the Sentinel predicted that the likely outcome of such a trend was an oligarchic government.⁴⁴

⁴²Lee to A. C. Potter, Sept. 28, 1899, SUSD.

⁴³Britton Sentinel, Apr. 20, 1899, p. 1; May 11, 1899, p. 1; July 20, 1899, p. 4.

⁴⁴Editorial, Britton Sentinel, Dec. 28, 1899, p. 4. The Sentinel also carried a reprint from the Pioneer Register cautioning that "those citizens who do not endorse the policy of the administration are not traitors to their country." Britton Sentinel, June 1, 1899, p. 4.

Populist Congressman, John E. Kelley, also proposed race as an argument against annexation. Although granting that the Filipinos were fighting for their liberty, Kelley asserted that "owing to race prejudice" the islanders would be incapable of appreciating any permanent government America might establish in the islands.⁴⁵

Shifting the discussion from the form of government to its operation, the Vermillion Plain Talk happily stated that the socialists could "rejoice in the fact that the war has given the people a better lesson in the wrongs of private enterprise."⁴⁶ Since the "big financiers" and corporations were swindling the government through their war contracts, the Plain Talk held that the people were beginning to see the "necessity and justice of the government--the people--owning not only the roads but all the modern conveniences which are indispensable to their well being, such as telegraph and telephone systems, public water works, electric light and gas plants and all other public necessities and conveniences upon which the people of cities and towns are dependent for comfort and convenience, and the national government should own and control the industries which are national in their scope and are of interest to the entire people of the United States." After deploring the enormous expenditure of time and money on the prosecution of the war, the Plain Talk prophetically asked "if this startling expenditure of money by the government is justifiable in war for the destruction and waste of even an enemy's country why would not an equal expenditure of

⁴⁵Congressional Record, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899, XXXII, A144-145.

⁴⁶Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, July 8, 1898, p. 4. See also Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, May 17, 1898, p. 4.

treasure be justifiable on the part of the government in providing any and all the conveniences for our people in times of peace?"⁴⁷ By the end of 1898, Governor Lee attested to the truth of these sentiments and, in a campaign letter stressing the "curse of militarism," he regretted that "instead of a government deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed, the McKinley Administration is advocating and practicing government by force."⁴⁸

Writing in early 1899 to the Surgeon of the South Dakota Volunteers serving in the Philippines, the Governor became more explicit about the cause of the drift toward militarism. "It is the money power and the greed that is at the bottom of the whole affair," avowed Lee, "while the people are paying the burden they are accumulating their millions, and it appears that they care nothing for life so long as they are gainers financially."⁴⁹ The one year enlistment of the South Dakota Volunteers was drawing to a close, and Lee could not sanction their continued service in what he felt to be an "unjust" war. Just before the terminal date of the one year enlistment, he wrote another letter to the Volunteers's Surgeon expressing his view that "our boys are not fighting for the honor of our country but for conquest and the greed of capitalists

⁴⁷Editorial, Vermillion Plain Talk, Aug. 12, 1898, p. 4.

⁴⁸Lee to Joseph Waldner, Oct. 1, 1898, SDhi. On the state level, Lee assured the labor unions in the Black Hills that he would not use the militia against labor, for "militarism is the sworn enemy of labor." Lee to Homer Bostwick, Nov. 1, 1899, SUSD; Lee to Joseph E. Moore, June 4, 1900, SDhi. In 1895, the Ruralist came out strongly against the annexation of Hawaii and the spirit of militarism which accompanied imperialism, recommending that the nation's morals ought to be better than "the morals and conduct of a decent, private individual." Editorials, Ruralist, Mar. 7, 1895, p. 3; Mar. 21, 1895, p. 1; Dec. 26, 1895, p. 1.

⁴⁹Lee to R. W. Warne, Mar. 7, 1899, SDhi.

who desire an outlet for their ill-gotten gains."⁵⁰ Lee, then, within a years time, became vehemently opposed not only to the conduction of the "war of conquest," which he expressed as early as July, 1898, but also to President McKinley and the "money power" running his Administration.

Even as late as September, 1898, the Governor harbored no animosity toward McKinley himself and had graciously invited him to attend a Peace Jubilee at Omaha, Nebraska, to celebrate the "declaration of peace which has swiftly followed the last and holiest war of history."⁵¹ By April, 1899, however, it was no longer a holy war, and in a most eloquent, open letter to McKinley, Lee requested the early return of the First South Dakota Volunteer Infantry, for "the war for humanity has ended" and, therefore, "the task for which they entered the service has been completed." Noting that there was no declaration of war and could not be under the U. S. Constitution, Lee declared that the people of South Dakota "are unable to reconcile the slaughter of our soldiers in the Philippines which will be consequent upon a prolonged struggle for the subjugation of a race which has been fighting for three centuries to gain its freedom, with our code of political ethics or with the tenets of our Christian religion, and for these and many other manifest reasons we may be pardoned for feeling our soldiers should not longer be

⁵⁰Lee to R. W. Warne, Apr. 6, 1899, SDhi. In letters to the Assistant Surgeon and Commanding Officer of the South Dakota Volunteers, and his Adjutant General, Lee reiterated his opposition to the policy of expansion and the "money power" behind it. Lee to F. W. Cox, Apr. 5, 1899; Lee to Col. A. S. Frost, Apr. 5, 1899; Lee to H. A. Humphrey, Apr. 6, 1899, SDhi.

⁵¹Lee to President William McKinley, Sept. 1, 1898, SUSD.

impressed into a service, the purpose of which is the direct opposite of the motive which caused them to enlist." He pointedly observed that the nation's recent repudiation of "the feudal theory that the white man had a right to buy the body and enforce the services and the undisputed allegiances of the black man without the black man's consent," precluded the countenance of the "present attempt of this government to enforce title with bayonets to a nation of brown men purchased from a disgraced and vanquished despot." Lee concluded that "the hundreds of relatives and thousands of friends of this Regiment would willingly bear the loss of the best manhood of the State if they felt that our soldiers were fighting to defend their homes and firesides, or to expel despotism from any quarter of the earth; but they have reason to regard the further sacrifice of our soldiers in a conflict waged against liberty and in the interest of exploiting capitalism as totally incompatible with the spirit of our institutions and a more grievous hardship than we should be compelled to bear."⁵²

The letter drew strong approval from throughout the State. In a typical reply to the supportive letters, the Governor restated the analogy of the Civil War, condemned the "exploiting capitalists," and predicted that "when the sacred history of the late war shall be written I fear it will be found that our nation was the Filipino's worst enemy for it is no secret that they were on the very eve of securing their own liberty for which they have so long struggled."⁵³

⁵²Lee to President William McKinley, Apr. 10, 1899, SDhi.

⁵³Lee to M. L. Fox, Apr. 18, 1899, SDhi. For other statements reaffirming this position see Lee to L. B. Larrabee, Apr. 14, 1899; Lee

Lee considered McKinley's reply through his Adjutant General as "simply a white-wash," and wrote a strongly worded response asking McKinley if more promises were to be broken before the return of the South Dakota soldiers.⁵⁴ Even with their return assured, he conflicted with McKinley over the location of the troops mustering out.⁵⁵ In a letter to the Secretary of the San Francisco Labor Council, lamenting the impossibility of preventing their mustering out at San Francisco, Lee reasoned that the cause was the War Department's primary interest in the "political fortunes of its chief, the President." "Its motives in ruling that the soldiers would be deprived of their travel pay if mustered out at home has a double significance," he concluded,

first, the effect upon the political situation if the soldiers were returned immediately to their states in a worn and debilitated condition would be disastrous to the party in power. Second, the soldiers if mustered out on the coast will be more readily recruited into the new regiments if they should meet with misfortune and be forced to live by charity or re-enter the service.⁵⁶

Governor Lee had extended his protestations against the expansion policy of government to the "money power" behind it, to the McKinley Administration in general, and, finally, to McKinley himself.

Having received little consideration from the McKinley Administration on his view of the war, Lee again turned his attention to the

to New York Herald, Apr. 20, 1899, SDhi. Expressing editorial support for Lee's position was the Britton Sentinel, Apr. 27, 1899, p. 4.

⁵⁴H. C. Conbin to Lee, May 6, 1899; Lee to Pettigrew, May 29, 1899; Lee to President William McKinley, June 16, 1899, SDhi.

⁵⁵H. C. Conbin to Lee, July 5, 1899; Lee to President William McKinley, July 20, 1899, SDhi.

⁵⁶Lee to Ed Rosenberg, Aug. 9, 1899, SDhi.

dolorous tendency of society. Now, however, his concern deepened, for if the government could disregard the voice of the people in continuing the war, what would prevent the government from stifling all attempts at reform. Replying to an invitation to attend an anti-trust conference in mid-1899, the Governor wrote that, although uncertain if he could attend, he would appoint delegates and hoped that the conference would discuss "the greatest question of the century, probably the greatest question of the ages:

Shall the industrial despotism which threatens the existence of free institutions continue unchecked to its logical termination, which means the complete enslavement of the masses under a political empire backed by an array, or shall the lesson in organization which the trust has taught the people be taken advantage of to avert political disaster? In other words, shall our civilization die in the agony of industrial tremors, or shall the development of forces and facts which has brought about present conditions be guided and conducted along logical lines to a logical, just and happy conclusion?

Stopping short of complete socialism in mentioning the "institution of private property," he nevertheless, contended that because the "American people will not tolerate" an "artificial person" owning all the property of the country and running its politics, dictating "its religion, its education and its social practices," the "country is thus confronted with the alternative of accepting socialism, which means common ownership of production and distribution, or yielding political and economic liberty to an imperial despotism, which means ownership of the implements of production and distribution, as well as the people, by a few corporations."⁵⁷

⁵⁷Lee to Ralph M. Easley, May 25, 1899, SDhi. In the letters appointing delegates, Lee advised them to do their best, "considering the present perilous condition of the country." Lee to Chauncey L.

One of the delegates to the conference was former U. S. Congressman, Freeman Knowles. During his term in Congress, Knowles interrupted a discussion of an Army appropriation bill to "protest against the unspeakable outrages now being perpetrated in the name of the people of the United States upon the people of the Philippine Islands." Reflecting the thoughts of many South Dakota Populists, Knowles asked "what American citizen with a spark of self-respect, to say nothing of national pride or patriotism, can look upon this spectacle without hiding his head in shame?"⁵⁸ In a letter accepting a commission from the conference to act as Vice-President for South Dakota, Lee professed that although "the outlook does not look favorable for the common man, . . . the obligation to fight becomes the stronger with such a situation." "I believe," he wrote,

that the ultimate solution of the problem lies in the government ownership of the chief industries which have been organized as trust, for it is apparent that a failure to take these institutions out of politics by the only practical remedy must end in complete subserviency of the masses to corporate wealth. Such a condition is even now upon the country.⁵⁹

In a later letter declining any additional appointments from the conference board, he poetically replied that it was "the duty of every patriotic citizen to do all within his limited power to sustain our

Wood, J. E. Kelley, W. E. Kidd, S. H. Wright, M. S. Sheldon, W. T. LaFollette, Freeman Knowles, May 26, 1899, SDhi.

⁵⁸Congressional Record, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899, XXXII, 2474. Like Lee, Knowles had been in favor of the war in early 1898, and, in a telegram to Lee, had tendered his "services in any capacity to assist in expelling Spaniards from continent." Freeman Knowles to Lee, Apr. 8, 1898, SDhi.

⁵⁹Lee to Franklin H. Wentworth, Nov. 9, 1899, SUSD.

institutions against the imperialists of capital who have set up among us a dollar god which they are seeking to build on the bodies of extinguished humanity and upon the ashes of lost liberty."⁶⁰

The election of 1900 was not just another political campaign to Lee; it was a time of momentous decision. Even though stating that "the principles upon which the Populist party is founded are rapidly coming to the front and are being adopted by the two contending parties," he adamantly contended that the question "in the coming campaign is whether we shall remain a republic or become an imperial government."⁶¹ "I do not believe," declared Lee, that "the American people are ready to place a crown upon McKinley's head and establish a monarchy."⁶²

Even in his defense of the Boer Republic's struggle for liberty, he stressed the finality of the 1900 election. Drawing a parallel with the Boers and the English bankers, Lee counseled that "this country has a serious problem before it and the next election will decide whether the people will rule this country or whether a handful of Wall Street gamblers aided by the highest officials of this government shall be

⁶⁰Lee to Franklin H. Wentworth, Jan. 3, 1900, SDhi. Lee also was in correspondence with the Anti-Imperialist League during 1899. In declining his election as Vice-President by the Executive Committee of the League, Lee gave them his thorough sympathy and wished them every success. Lee to Erving Winslow, May 7, 1899; May 10, 1899; June 5, 1899, SDhi.

⁶¹Lee to Robert W. Haire, May 31, 1900, SDhi.

⁶²Lee to Pettigrew, Apr. 28, 1900, SDhi. Other statements specifically mentioning McKinley's imperialism are Lee's opening address to the 1900 National Populist Convention held in Sioux Falls. Hendrickson, "Populist Movement," p. 73, and Lee to W. E. Kidd, Feb. 10, 1900, SUSD.

permitted to destroy it."⁶³ He hoped for progress yet realized that "the forces of reaction are at work all the time, like the forces of decay, and incessant education and agitation of the rights of man are imperative if republicanism be sustained."⁶⁴

With the defeat of Bryan, himself, and the reform party in 1900, Lee felt that the people had discarded a chance for curbing "a money-corrupted government:"

The people aspire to something better than they have; they yearn for a higher state; they demand a more benevolent life. Will they realize the hope? or will the development now nearing its completion bring them new miseries to add to those they already have? Shall the weary ascent of the past be followed by a precipitate backward movement? I hope not. I believe not. I am not a pessimist. I am, in my own estimation, the truest optimist; for I do not discount the dangers of the present, nor deny the possibilities of the future. I realize that our civilization is the natural and logical result of development--as natural and logical in human life and institutions as in plant or animal life. I feel that the orderly course of progress will lead to the realization of the truest ideals. But I also understand that the turning point may involve a retrograde movement, if the world--intellectually and morally unable to grasp its destiny--brings on a crisis before its hour or allows the hour of crisis to pass without taking the tide at its highest flow.⁶⁵

He realized that the solutions as well as the problems of the people were national in scope. Without a change in the system his hopes for

⁶³Lee to Col. Arthur Linn, Dec. 22, 1899, SUSD. Lee was a strong supporter of the Boer's cause, often noting the similarity of the Boer's "struggle for liberty against the oppression of the English Government" to the Filipino's fight against the United States. Lee to John V. L. Pruin, Dec. 19, 1899; Lee to G. H. Jackson, Feb. 27, 1900, SUSD; Lee to New York Journal, May 24, 1900; Lee to New York World, June 2, 1900; Lee to The Honorable Peace Envoys of the Boer Republic, June 4, 1900; Lee to Myron H. Walker, Sept. 24, 1900, SDhi.

⁶⁴Lee to John R. Rogers (Governor of Washington), Aug. 15, 1900, SUSD.

⁶⁵This quote is from an introduction to an undated speech probably given just before the turn of the century, SUSD.

the state and the party could not be fulfilled. With the rejection of his party by the electorate in 1900, Lee sensed a far deeper failure than mere political defeat. To him, the repudiation marked a backward step in humanitarian evolution and an acceptance of the survival of the fittest doctrine of Social Darwinism.

CHAPTER IV

NORTH DAKOTA POPULISM: MEN OR MOVEMENT?

Glenn L. Brudvig's political study of the North Dakota Populist movement notes the paucity of primary sources from the Populists themselves. There are no sizable manuscript collections available other than the papers of the fusion Governor, Eli C. D. Shortridge, and copies of Populist newspapers are almost non-existent. The only Populist newspapers extant are a dozen issues of the North Dakota Independent, and most issues from 1898 through 1900 of the Valley City People's Advocate. Throughout the 1890's the Democratic Jamestown Alert and Grafton News and Times strongly sympathized with the Populists, and their editors, W. R. Kellog and W. D. Bates, often received the title of "Populist" from rival newspapers. Although not as pro-Populist as the Jamestown and Grafton newspapers, the Democratic Devils Lake Free Press also was charged with being "Populist" by its local Republican rival, the Devils Lake Inter-Ocean. Until its defection to the Republicans in 1894, the Northwest Weekly News, served as one of the spokesmen for even the most radical of the Populists. Because of this situation the researcher faces the task of interpreting the Populist viewpoint from the sources in sympathy with Populist principles. Therefore, it is questionable whether the contentions of this chapter represent a consensus of Populist thinking.¹

¹The Silver-Republican Towner Independent and Towner News and Stockman voiced occasional support for the Populists, but yielded little overall Populist sentiment. The Northwest Weekly News, North Dakota Independent, and the Norwegian language Populist Normanden were

Paul R. Fossum attempted such a consensus in a 1925 study, The Agrarian Movement in North Dakota. On almost no evidence, Fossum asserted that the Populist movement was neither radical nor progressive, but reactionary. Prefiguring Richard Hofstadter's work, Fossum claimed that the farmer sought a return to the "good old days," not through a rejection of the competitive system but by a simplistic acceptance of capitalism.² Although also casting North Dakota Populists as small capitalists, John D. Hicks contended that they were progressive and, at least at the time of the 1892 election, the "genuine Populists."³ Interestingly, one of Hicks basic sources on North Dakota Populism was Fossum's work. Coupled with Appleton's Annual Cyclopedia, Tom Watson's People's Party Paper, and the National Economist, Fossum's evidently sparsely based conclusions formed the foundation for Hicks's thesis. Such contentions indicate that further study is necessary for an understanding of Populism's progressive or retrogressive nature.

published in Grand Forks. In the political strife of 1893, however, the Independent and the Normanden moved to Fargo. Other newspapers mentioned in the press as Populist but unavailable for examination were the Mandan Independent, Bismarck Commonwealth, Fargo Commonwealth, and the Valley City Alliance, under the editorship of D. W. Clark, the editor and publisher of the People's Advocate. Other newspapers that indicated pro-Populist leanings, either through reprinted editorials or mention in the Populist press, were the Fargo Sun or Fargo Sun-Independent, Bot-tineau Free Lance, Nelson County Independent (Michigan), Nelson County News (Lakota), Edgely Mail, and the prohibitionist North Dakota Siftings (Minnewaukan). Other possibilities are the North Dakota Record (Ellendale) and The Advocate (Hensel).

²Paul R. Fossum, The Agrarian Movement in North Dakota, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series XLIII (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1925), pp. 43-46.

³Hicks, Populist Revolt, pp. 255-258, 404-414.

North Dakota Populism differed markedly from its counterpart in South Dakota. Fusing with the Democrats in 1892, the Independent (Populist) party elected a full slate of state officers, with the exception of the secretary of state. In 1894, however, the Republicans soundly defeated both the Democrat and Independent tickets, and the Populist party ceased to be a political force. Elwyn B. Robinson, in his History of North Dakota, states that "the defeat of the Independents in 1894 marked the permanent decline of Populism in North Dakota."⁴ Brudvig's study terminates with the 1893 legislative session, only briefly mentioning subsequent events. Although noting that the "Farmers' Alliance and Populist party declined and disappeared" after 1894, Brudvig contends that the "principles for which they strove" reappeared "in the progressive movement and especially in the Non-Partisan League."⁵ This chapter examines those principles and traces their course through the 1890's, for even though the Populist party was no longer an effective political force, Populism, as such, found adherents throughout the 1890's.

Within a year of statehood, the North Dakota Farmers' Alliance developed political pangs, and in October, 1890, gave birth to an Independent party.⁶ In a "Farmers' Alliance Platform" of that month, the

⁴Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 225.

⁵Glenn L. Brudvig, "The Farmers' Alliance and Populist Movement in North Dakota (1884-1896)" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1956), p. 204.

⁶Editorial, North Dakota Independent, n.d., quoted in Grand Forks, Northwest Weekly News, Oct. 25, 1890, p. 1. (Hereinafter cited as Northwest Weekly News). The Alliance had designated the Jamestown

Populists demanded the free coinage of gold and silver, government loans with land as security, establishment of sub-treasuries, repeal of the "war tariff tax," enactment of a graduated income tax on "all incomes in excess of \$2000 per annum," prohibition, "government ownership and control of all railroads, telegraph lines and coal mines in the interest of people," equal suffrage, Australian ballot, and the direct election of "United States senators, president and vice-president."⁷ Because of the move in a third party direction, the Alliance lost much political support throughout the state and, indeed, many Alliance members repudiated this action and stayed in the old parties.⁸

The first pervasive principles stressed by the new third party were the primacy of agriculture and the suspicion of "eastern interests." Writing to the Ruralist in December, 1890, an anonymous Populist warned that "there is a growing feeling that the representatives of the people of North Dakota and the ones who choose the senators are chosen to represent the people of our own states and not the money sharks or the monopolies, and that Eastern senators can be in better business than to meddle in our local affairs."⁹ A letter to the editor of the Northwest Weekly News, titled "An Address to the Farmers and Toilers of North

Capital as the official state Alliance newspaper, but by 1891 the Capital had become a Republican organ. Northwest Weekly News, Aug. 15, 1891, p. 1.

⁷East Grand Forks News, Oct. 4, 1890, p. 1.

⁸Brudvig, "Farmers' Alliance," pp. 149-150.

⁹n.n., Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Jan. 10, 1891, p. 2. -- See also S. M. Owen, Letter to the Editor, Northwest Weekly News, Apr. 18, 1891, p. 1.

Dakota," noted that "the outlook for the future is dark and gloomy," and saw the solution for the farmer's subservient position in "always" selecting the "members of the state legislature and the governor" from among the "agricultural people."¹⁰

In his farewell address as President of the North Dakota Alliance, Eli C. D. Shortridge, a farmer north of Larimore, expressed a similar belief. Initially stressing the "identical" interests of rural and urban laborers on currency, trusts and monopolies, and his desire to avoid a strictly farmer's party, Shortridge sounded physiocratic in advising all merchants and tradesmen that "your prosperity is measured by our prosperity." Counseling them that "commercial failure and stagnation and agricultural depression have gone hand in hand," he concluded that "when we have money, you have money, and that when we fail, you fail."¹¹

Stating this position more directly in a Jamestown Daily Alert editorial, W. R. Kellog cautioned the ridiculers of farmer movements not to "forget that the very root and branch of all national progress and prosperity is the prosperity of the tillers of the soil--of the agricultural classes of any country."¹² Kellog supported the Independent and Democratic ticket state-wide in 1892, but, in an editorial

¹⁰T. G. Fladeland, Letter to the Editor, Northwest Weekly News, Apr. 25, 1891, p. 2.

¹¹Northwest Weekly News, June 18, 1892, p. 1.

¹²Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, June 20, 1892, p. 2. The Daily Alert hinted at a conspiracy among city newspapers to build "contempt among city residents for the country people." Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, July 11, 1892, p. 2.

just before the election, advised North Dakota farmers to vote for the Republican presidential electors, for "they represent the friendship of the government for the western settler."¹³ The new president of the state Alliance, M. D. Williams, an extensive farmer south of Jamestown, touched on the disunion of the Alliance and Independent party, and the primacy of agriculture when urging all farmers regardless of party to organize and stand solidly as the "largest class" in the United States.¹⁴

Since the Populist platform of 1890 demanded national solutions for nation-wide problems and the farmer citizenry professed class and regional interests, the Independent party failed in its 1890 bid for office. Although the Independent platform of 1892 emphasized national issues, the resolution section referred to state life and fire insurance, railroad facilities for grain growers, equitable redemption of mortgage foreclosures, and uniform textbooks furnished by the state.¹⁵ In addition to these local platform statements, during the campaign the Independent party strongly urged the establishment of a state-owned elevator. With specific issues to stress and a continual entreaty to remove the Republican machine, the fusion ticket, headed by Shortridge, attained office in 1892.

The unanimity of the Independent party, however, failed to last much beyond the election. Shortridge, a long time Democrat, was not as radical as many of the earlier members of the party and drew his support

¹³Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, Nov. 4, 1892, p. 2.

¹⁴Jamestown Daily Alert, Oct. 14, 1892, p. 2.

¹⁵Jamestown Daily Alert, June 18, 1892, p. 2.

from the Democrats.¹⁶ Thus, in the distribution of patronage and in the state legislature's selection of United States senator, Shortridge met head-on with the more radical contingent headed by Walter Muir. Muir farmed near Hunter in Cass county and had been nominated by the Independents for governor in 1890. As Shortridge's predecessor as President of the state Alliance, Muir seemed the logical choice of prominent Populists for the senatorship. In Muir's absence, Shortridge met with the Independent members of the legislature to discuss the selection of senator. According to the Normanden, one of the two official Alliance newspapers, Shortridge wanted a Democrat as senator. "How strange it seems," the Normanden asked,

to see the man, who of all others should stand by Mr. Muir, turn his back upon the man to whom he owes so much for his present position? The only aim the governor has in view seems to be to turn the Independent party over to the democrats. Can he do it? The Independents will answer this question in 1894.¹⁷

Prior to the 1892 convention the North Dakota Independent, the other official Alliance newspaper, suggested that the Independents nominate a candidate for the United States senate at the convention. The pro-Populist Jamestown Daily Alert and Northwest Weekly News endorsed this suggestion.¹⁸ During the convention, however, Muir "made a strong speech against the adoption of any resolutions favoring the naming of

¹⁶Brudvig, "Farmers' Alliance," p. 161.

¹⁷Editorial, Normanden, n.d., quoted in Northwest Weekly News, Feb. 25, 1893, p. 4.

¹⁸Editorial, North Dakota Independent, n.d., quoted in Jamestown Daily Alert, Apr. 28, 1892, p. 2. See also Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Apr. 4, 1892, p. 1.

any man for United States senator."¹⁹ If Muir actually desired the office, this statement precluded any chance for selection as senator, for in the political maneuvering of the 1893 legislature, Muir was out of the contest from the beginning. After a lengthy debate lasting almost the entire legislative session, the Independents joined with the Democrats and elected Shortridge's choice, William R. Roach of Larimore.²⁰

Shortridge charged that Muir and other prominent Populists came to the legislative session with a "knife in their boot."²¹ "Their opposition," wrote Shortridge, "is not actuated by a desire to protect the best interests of our party or people, but is in the interests of ambitious and disappointed individuals, who would rather be at the head of a Corporate Guard of voters, than stand in the ranks with a multitude of reformers fighting for their bread and butter."²² In contrast, the Northwest Weekly News blamed Shortridge for the apparent schism in the Independent party:

What will the Independent and farmer voters of North Dakota say when they learn that they have been basely juggled in the election of governor and that the actual ruler they now have is the great Northern Pacific railroad? . . . The NEWS probably did more than any paper in North Dakota to inflict 'plymouth Rock Pants' on the state. It went even so far as to threaten its old time democratic friends with disaster and all the ills in

¹⁹Jamestown Daily Alert, June 17, 1892, p. 3.

²⁰Brudvig, "Farmers' Alliance," p. 175.

²¹Friend Richter to Eli C. D. Shortridge, Mar. 6, 1893, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Shortridge Papers. (Hereinafter cited as Shortridge Papers).

²²Shortridge to Dr., Mar. 11, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

Pandora's box, if they did not swallow Shortridge and the whole ticket. . . . It has therefore the right to criticize. . . . The treason of Shortridge to the people of the state who elected him will not escape unscathed. . . . Instead of 'turning the rascals out' he has hugged the vipers to his treacherous bosom and can't let go, without being struck down by their venomous fangs.²³

In an attempt to assuage his critics, Shortridge suggested to his newly appointed President of the University Board of Trustees, N. G. Larimore of Grand Forks County, that he appoint either Thomas H. Ayres, editor of the North Dakota Independent, or H. A. Foss, editor of the Normanden, to the secretaryship of the Board.²⁴ Through this appointment, Shortridge hoped to maintain Ayres's loyalty and save the financially troubled Independent. Although the Board appointed Ayres, this action fulfilled neither of Shortridge's desires, for within a month the Board fired Ayres because of an editorial which depicted the hanging of the "Chicago anarchists" as "judicial murder." Ayres responded to the dismissal in a lengthy letter carried in the Northwest Weekly News. Charging Larimore with fraudulent practice in obtaining his large Elk Valley Farming Company and with being a plutocrat in principle, Ayres demanded that he resign in favor of a man "who is intelligent and liberal." Contending that Shortridge had "proved himself again a hypocrite," Ayres concluded that "my platform in the future as in the past shall be equal rights, equal privileges and equal protection to every

²³Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Feb. 18, 1893, p. 1.

²⁴Shortridge to N. G. Larimore, Mar. 3, 1893; Orr Sanders to Sever Serungar, Mar. 8, 1893; Shortridge to Rev. J. T. Langemo, Mar. 8, 1893; Sanders to Willis A. Joy, Mar. 8, 1893; Sanders to Jay, Mar. 11, 1893; Sanders to N. G. Larimore, Mar. 13, 1893; Sanders to L. D. McGahan, Mar. 15, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

man and woman in the country."²⁵ Ayres severed his relationship with the North Dakota Independent and became editor of the Northwest Weekly News, published by a long time supporter of the Independents, Willis R. Bierly.²⁶

The same issue of the News reported that the Normanden had been sold to the Republicans and that Foss would soon retire as editor. The News remarked that Foss left because of the "strenuous editorial duties" and his displeasure "with the course of Governor Shortridge and would rather retire from the editorial field than be forced to condemn the man he helped so valiantly to elect."²⁷ In one of his last editorials, Foss charged Shortridge with associating with "railroad men" and accepting transportation passes from the railroad companies. "If the party dwindles down," warned Foss, "to the 'grand old farmer' from McCanna is due the honor of bringing it about." Holding Ayres and himself "morally responsible for the governor's election," Foss lamented that during the legislative session

our principles were dragged in the dust, and whoever dared to call attention to the pledges of our party to the people and the importance of our actions upon the future of our party, were seemingly alluded to as men of 'poor judgment.' When our representatives and state officials stepped into office, they first gave the democrats their little finger, and presently their whole hand.²⁸

²⁵Northwest Weekly News, May 6, 1893, pp. 4-5

²⁶Northwest Weekly News, May 27, 1893, p. 4.

²⁷Northwest Weekly News, May 6, 1893, p. 6.

²⁸Editorial, Normanden, n.d., quoted in Northwest Weekly News, May 27, 1893, p. 4.

Bierly reiterated Foss's charges that

if it had not been for the unselfishness of such men as Ayres and Foss, Shortridge would not now be governor. He would be riding on a gang plow out at McCanna, where he properly belongs. A man with so little gratitude and so utterly devoid of common sense is unfit for governor.²⁹

After only five months in office, Shortridge had estranged himself from the head of the Independent party, lost the support of his Populist backers and affected the demise of two Populist newspapers. By the end of the summer Shortridge had also alienated his Lieutenant Governor Elmer D. Wallace of Steele County and Attorney General William Standish of Lakota, Nelson County. Both were strong Independents whom Shortridge now placed in the camp of the "enemy."³⁰ Foss retired from the Normanden and Ayres returned to Vermillion, South Dakota, to co-edit the Vermillion Plain Talk and later serve as private secretary to the Populist governor of South Dakota, Andrew E. Lee. Bierly continued to rail against Shortridge and, in the fall of 1894, denounced both Shortridge and Muir and joined the Republican party.³¹

²⁹Editorials, Northwest Weekly News, May 13, 1893, p. 4; Sept. 1, 1894, p. 2.

³⁰Shortridge to E. D. Wallace, May 9, 1893; Shortridge to Col., Aug. 26, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

³¹During this period Shortridge wrote to E. M. Upson, a member of the Board of Directors of the Independent Publishing Company (Board for the North Dakota Independent), opposing an "absorption scheme . . . concocted . . . by the trio Bierly, Ayres and Foss; they are just beginning to show their hands in the last few weeks . . . and will now, if unobstructed, administer on the estate of the Independent Party. The next scheme is the Muir transfer of the paper to Hunter to become the organ of the man who claims to be the 'Independent Party;' to both these schemes I am unalterably opposed, would rather the paper be obliterated than live under such circumstances." Shortridge to E. M. Upson, May 8, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

Although Shortridge's correspondence is notably tenuous on position statements, there is evidence supporting some of the accusations of Bierly, Ayres and Foss. Shortridge was usually vague in referring to party affiliation, sometimes aligning himself with the Independents or a combination of Independent-Democrats, but most often allying himself with the Democrats. Concerning intimate political matters, Shortridge wrote almost exclusively to Democrats.³² On the question of railroad passes Shortridge was anything but vague, for the correspondence is replete with requests and acknowledgements for free transportation passes. When passes became hard to get in late 1893, it was the receivers of the railroad companies who curtailed the practice, not Shortridge or railroad management.³³ In fact, Shortridge and Orr Sanders, his nephew and private secretary, conducted a friendly correspondence with several levels of railroad management. In a letter to W. S. Mellen, General Manager of the Northern Pacific, Sanders conveyed Shortridge's feeling of assurance

since the interview he had some time ago with you, that you would try to do what was right, as between the people and your Company, and is glad to know that there has been no radical legislation this session of the legislature. He has tried to use his influence to prevent any legislation but what was just to all parties concerned, and thinks if the policy you mention is carried out, that the people will realize that the railroads are not their enemies, but that their interests are mutual and that you desire to aid them in every possible way consistent.³⁴

³²Sanders to J. Hennessey, Jan. 9, 1893; Sanders to J. C. Sullivan, Feb. 15, 1893; Sanders to John D. Davis, Feb. 24, 1893; Shortridge to J. W. Burnham, Mar. 18, 1893; Shortridge to Willis A. Joy, Apr. 8, 1893; Shortridge to Senator W. R. Roach, Mar. 23, 1893; Shortridge to Roach, Sept. 4, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

³³Sanders to G. S. Fernald, Sept. 7, 1893; G. S. Fernald to Shortridge, Sept. 6, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

³⁴Sanders to W. S. Mellen, Mar. 10, 1893, Shortridge Papers.

Two other letters from Sanders to G. S. Fernald, Tax Commissioner of the Northern Pacific, suggest an element of collusion between the Shortridge administration and railroad management. Sanders advised Fernald that all matters of improper passes will "be held strictly confidential," and that transportation requests "will only be in the interests of the State and its Institutions, or in very few cases, personal favors."³⁵ "I am anxious to establish and maintain a better feeling between the railroads and people of our state," Shortridge wrote to James J. Hill, President of the Great Northern, and

hope you will favor 'friendly relations' even if you have to do so at your own expense, which is hardly in keeping with railroad practice if I am correctly informed. But then, you know, it is not every road that has a good Democrat for President and General Manager. Send the passes, and charge to 'Good Will' or any other account that is not over drawn.³⁶

Even granting that the lack of state funds necessitated some free transportation for state officials, the extent and spirit of cooperation indicate a type of conduct, and more importantly an attitude, inappropriate for an administration elected on a platform calling for government ownership and operation of railroads "in the interest of the people."

In fact, there is little in Shortridge's correspondence to warrant his classification as a Populist. In telegrams to Senator Roach and the New York World, Shortridge protested the sending of Federal

³⁵Sanders to Fernald, May 20, 1893; Mar. 16, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

³⁶Shortridge to James J. Hill, July 20, 1893. Shortridge Papers. In early 1894, while telling others that transportation passes were impossible to obtain, Shortridge received free passes from Hill personally and from the Great Northern legal department. James J. Hill to Shortridge, Jan. 16, 1894; Feb. 20, 1894; Legal Department to Shortridge, Mar. 21, 1894. Shortridge Papers.

troops to Grand Forks to quell a railroad strike, but in letters to his Adjutant General, W. H. Toppings, Shortridge stressed his "hope" that the strike would be settled without any interference from the state.³⁷ His stance on other issues showed no firmer resolve. Shortridge simply did not make policy statements. He apparently took as a fundamental principle his own warning to Senator Roach on the money question: "Go slow is my advice, for great issues are pending."³⁸

Shortridge went too slow for many Populists, for at the 1894 state Independent convention they refused to endorse his administration, even though they thanked "Senators Roach and Hansbrough for their labors in behalf of the people and people's money."³⁹ Indicative of Shortridge's political closeness to the Democrats, the Democratic convention endorsed "the official acts of the state executive, Hon. E. C. D. Shortridge," and approved "of the conservative course pursued by him in state affairs."⁴⁰

The convention call issued by the central committee of the "People's Party" contained no suggestion of a struggle within the party. Calling on all citizens of the state to arise from their apathy, the

³⁷Sanders to W. H. Topping, Apr. 25, 1894; Apr. 30, 1894; May 1, 1894; Shortridge to Senator Roach, May 1, 1894; Shortridge to John Faddin, May 1, 1894; Shortridge to New York World, July 13, 1894. Shortridge Papers.

³⁸Shortridge to Senator Roach, July 24, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

³⁹Jamestown Daily Alert, June 15, 1894, p. 3.

⁴⁰Northwest Weekly News, Aug. 4, 1894, p. 1. According to the Fargo Sun, Shortridge "announced himself a life-long democrat" at the Democratic state convention. Quoted in Northwest Weekly News, Aug. 4, 1894, p. 1.

committee, in true Populist rhetoric, contended that "the history of the last thirty years makes it plain to any honest investigator that our laws are made by the millionaire and for the millionaire, that the republic has gradually passed away, that we now have but the empty shell, a hollow mockery and that class rule has gradually taken its place and our government is thoroughly plutocratic."⁴¹ An anti-third party newspaper, the Grand Forks Daily Herald, gave a more disparate view of the upcoming convention:

The convention is sure to be a chaotic and inharmonious assemblage. It will be composed of incongruous elements, without any clearly defined purpose, more than a scramble for the offices. The state is sadly in need of a patriotic People's party, in its true sense, but no good can come from the Valley City meeting, and after the November elections the so-called People's party of North Dakota, as at present organized and constituted, will be nothing but a putrid reminiscence.⁴²

Although there was some indication that Muir and Wallace considered fusing with the Republicans on the silver question, the Independent convention nominated a complete slate of officers and "the conservative elements in the party were relegated to the rear." "No fusion was the popular sentiment," reported the Grafton News and Times, "and the 'middle of the road' people carried off all the plums."⁴³

⁴¹Northwest Weekly News, June 9, 1894, p. 1.

⁴²Editorial, Grand Forks Daily Herald, June 13, 1894, p. 2.

⁴³Grafton News and Times, June 21, 1894, p. 1. As early as July 1893, Shortridge had reported to Senator Roach that "Muir, Wallace, et. al. are already negotiating a fusion "with the Republicans on the issue of silver. Shortridge to Roach, July 24, 1893. Shortridge Papers. Although Bierly had switched to the Republican party, he maintained his independent position in noting Muir's willingness to accept the senatorship "from MacKenzie as from Roach or Benton." Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Sept. 1, 1894, p. 2. In Walsh County the Populists and the Republicans fused, each "putting up part of a ticket, leaving blanks to

The "middle of the road" policy, however, did not last to the election. In a September editorial, the Devils Lake Inter-Ocean (Republican) charged that a "self-constituted 'board of managers'" met to "select a fusion ticket." The Inter-Ocean asked why the delegates who

selected the two committees and directed them to draw these two platforms upon which two separate tickets were asked to run, are now expected to forget their principles, to lay aside their convictions, and cast their ballots--for whom and for what? For a ticket which is chosen in secret sessions attended by half a dozen political manipulators; a ticket constructed behind closed doors by designing men in search of political power. . . . The secret conclave is to do the work hereafter. Farewell, the primary and the convention! Hail, the dictatorship!⁴⁴

The Northwest Weekly News was even more explicit in reporting that "as a result of the meeting of the democratic and populist executive committee, Kinter [Democrat] will receive the support of both parties for governor and Muir [Independent] for congress." Noting that "this trade was bitterly opposed by a minority of the populist committee and Mr. Wallace [Independent] was no party to the deal," the News concluded that "the pops have traded off the best man on their ticket."⁴⁵ The Grafton News and Times confirmed this arrangement, noting N. G. Larimore's withdrawal as Democratic candidate for Congress.⁴⁶ Wallace, William H. Standish,

be used a 'trading stock.'" Grafton News and Times, Oct. 4, 1894, p. 2. The News and Times and the Jamestown Daily Alert were strongly fusion oriented. Editorials, Grafton News and Times, Aug. 16, 1894, pp. 1, 8; Aug. 23, 1894, p. 8; Jamestown Daily Alert, Oct. 22, 1894, p. 2.

⁴⁴Editorial, Devils Lake Inter-Ocean, n.d., quoted in Northwest Weekly News, Sept. 15, 1894, p. 4.

⁴⁵Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Oct. 13, 1894, p. 8.

⁴⁶Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Sept. 27, 1894, p. 2.

the Attorney General nominee, and George Newton, the Supreme Court Judge candidate, however, remained in the field as Independents despite the fusion of the rest of the ticket.⁴⁷ The party executive committees accomplished fusion without much difficulty, for over half the candidates on the separate party tickets were identical.⁴⁸ Excluding the three Independents who refused to merge with the Democrats, the fusion ticket only required the exchange of three names on the ballot. Notwithstanding the combined strength of the fusion ticket, the Republicans soundly defeated the Democrats and Populists in the 1894 election.⁴⁹

The actual defeat of the North Dakota Populists, however, occurred between their success in 1892 and the 1894 election rather than in the election itself. Even if the fusion ticket had won in 1894, the Populist party would have faded from the political scene. The party had not received strong support from the Alliance at the outset and by late 1893 the Alliance no longer served as the voice of the farmer. If a member of the Alliance had not joined the third party, he sought relief through the old parties or new farmer organizations such as the "Farmers' Mutual Protective and Defensive League" formed by Red River Valley farmers.⁵⁰ Shortridge's affiliation with the Democrats and cooperation with the railroads precluded his serving as the head of a

⁴⁷Grafton News and Times, Nov. 15, 1894, p. 2.

⁴⁸Grafton News and Times, Aug. 2, 1894, p. 1; Jamestown Daily Alert, June 15, 1894, p. 3.

⁴⁹Brudvig, "Farmers' Alliance," pp. 196-197.

⁵⁰Northwest Weekly News, Jan. 28, 1893, p. 1.

united Populist party. The intra-party political strife further prevented a party union. Whether through sour grapes or principle, the Populists lost the support of three Populist newspaper editors because of Shortridge. The self-pronounced leader of the Independent party, Walter Muir, concerned himself more with office than with principle, hoping for the Senate seat in 1892 and running as the fusion candidate for Congress in 1894. L. A. Ueland, "Alliance Editor" of the Edgely Mail and head of the local Populist organization, strongly opposed fusion in 1892. Yet he appeared as the 1894 candidate for Lieutenant Governor on both the Independent and Democratic tickets prior to their fusion.⁵¹

The significance is not in the fact of fusion itself but rather that the fusion occurred after the convention had nominated a full slate of officers and adopted a platform. With the leaders of the party more concerned about getting in office than in promoting Populist principles, the issues of the campaign or the outcome of the election made little difference. The merger with an established party finished the Populists as an independent political force. Even though elements of Populist thinking survived the decade, the only effective political forum remained a minority position within the Democratic party.

Because of this lack of political definition and the scarcity of specifically Populist source materials, it is difficult to grasp the nature of North Dakota Populist thought. The elusiveness in itself

⁵¹LaMoure County Chronicle, Mar. 13, 1892, p. 4; Apr. 1, 1892, p. 4; June 17, 1892, p. 4; Jamestown Daily Alert, Apr. 30, 1892, p. 2; June 15, 1894, p. 3.

suggests the failure of Populism to achieve the status of a movement in North Dakota. Granting the vagueness of Populist thought in North Dakota, there are areas which merit discussion.

Two discernible areas of Populist thought in North Dakota are a dualistic viewpoint and an acceptance of silver coinage as the panacea for the farmer's ills. Basing his sectional and class dualism on a belief in the primacy of agriculture, the North Dakota farmer continually attacked the eastern "interests" and combines. "A Western Granger" writing to the Grafton News and Times advised the editor that while he might be "aware that the welfare of the town depends upon the prosperity of the rural population, . . . a great many may be ignorant of the fact that there has been during this fall a combination at work endeavoring to reduce our wheat market."⁵² In a telegram to the New York World, Governor Shortridge similarly expressed the sentiments of the Democratic-Populist coalition when he warned that "unless the East shows more consideration for Western interests it is only a question of time when Commercial division may become a necessity."⁵³

Short of "commercial division," however, the farmer believed that the answer to his plight lay in the free coinage of silver. "We may be ignorant, we may be unwashed, we may be unacquainted with the first principles of finance or government," retorted the Silver-Republican Towner News and Stockman, "but we know enough to know that we have

⁵²"A Western Granger," Letter to the Editor, Grafton News and Times, Jan. 11, 1894, p. 4. See also Editorials, Grafton News and Times, May 17, 1894, p. 1; Towner Independent, May 18, 1894, p. 1.

⁵³Shortridge to New York World, Aug. 25, 1893. Shortridge Papers.

had enough of paying the high rate of interest, we have to pay these same National banks, regardless of the low prices we get for our stock and crops and that the time has come to throw off the shackles of the gigantic monopoly that has been established by the 'gold bugs' and vote for free silver a money of the people, by the people and for the people."⁵⁴

Although the financial combine served as the primary target for his protest, the North Dakota Populist attacked the coal trust, the school book trust, and, in the 1896 election, the political trust of Mark Hanna.⁵⁵ The financial power behind the trusts, however, remained the primary concern. Even when discussing the inequities of government legislation the Populist emphasized the excessive amount of "legislation in the interests of the men who have the money," rather than the inequities of the legislation itself.⁵⁶ Charging that the "Wall Street gold bugs . . . have fattened and gorged on the government and people for over a quarter of a century and succeeded, by fair or foul means, in shaping legislation for their benefit and to the detriment of the country at large," the Grafton News and Times found that "the financial policy which allows these conspirators to exercise such power must be

⁵⁴Editorial, Towner News and Stockman, Aug. 7, 1896, p. 4.

⁵⁵"A Dundee Farmer," Letter to the Editor, Grafton News and Times, Mar. 15, 1894, p. 1; Editorials, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 15, 1893, p. 2; Jamestown Weekly Alert, Oct. 22, 1896, p. 1; Oct. 29, 1896, p. 1.

⁵⁶Editorial, Bottineau Free Lance, n.d., quoted in Jamestown Daily Alert, June 8, 1892, p. 2.

defective and stands condemned."⁵⁷ Again, the economic aspect of the conspiracy receives the prime emphasis.

On this issue there appeared to be no middle ground. As late as 1899 the Populist Valley City People's Advocate contended that "the man who pretends to be a Populist or a bimetallist, and favors the free coinage of silver at any other than the 16 to 1 ratio, is either a degenerated gelding or a tool of the gold clique--and should not be tolerated in the councils of the party that is pledged to oppose the gold octopus."⁵⁸ To the People's Advocate, the "gold bug party [was] the breeding pen of trusts and the protecting shield of public robbers," who were "growing fat off the sweat of the farmer's sunburnt brows."⁵⁹

Populists often made this connection between the "gold bugs" and the loss of the farmer's product. William H. Standish, the Attorney General in the Shortridge administration and a leading proponent of free silver in the state, gloomily projected that "without free silver coinage our wheat, cotton and other property will fall in price and we will be ruined."⁶⁰ Commenting on the failure of the price of silver to rise with the wheat price in 1896, the Jamestown Weekly Alert claimed that "the money interests of this country and the old world" manipulated the

⁵⁷Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 29, 1893, p. 1.

⁵⁸Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Feb. 2, 1899, p. 2.

⁵⁹Editorials, Valley City People's Advocate, Feb. 9, 1899, p. 2; Sept. 29, 1899, p. 2.

⁶⁰William H. Standish, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Oct. 19, 1893, p. 1. For additional comments by Standish on the silver question see Northwest Weekly News, May 27, 1893, p. 1; Aug. 19, 1893, p. 1; May 5, 1894, p. 3.

wheat market for "political purposes."⁶¹ The Devils Lake Free Press made a similar charge in 1898 against the "wheat pit gamblers" who "were of course responsible for the excess of fluctuations."⁶² In an editorial asserting that "nothing is of any value until labor gives it value," the Grafton News and Times declared that the "idleness and misery," the "discontent and strife" cannot "be appeased until we have more silver money."⁶³

Throughout the 1890's the Populists believed that the end to this subordinate position lay in the adoption of free silver. Only by resolving the money question would the farmer, the debtor, the westerner and the people hoist themselves to a position equal with the dominate eastern "interests." "This financial problem is the question of questions which interests the entire people," reported the Grafton News and Times in 1893, for "beside it every other fades into insignificance not even the tariff approaching it in magnitude."⁶⁴ The 1896 Fusion platform was even more

⁶¹Editorials, Jamestown Weekly Alert, Oct. 22, 1896, p. 1; Oct. 29, 1896, p. 4. An article by Populist elevator manager W. H. McPherson of Valley City emphasized the connection between silver and wheat, and maintained that it "is not a populist fight. It is a silver campaign." Jamestown Weekly Alert, July 2, 1896, p. 7. See also Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, Nov. 2, 1894, p. 2; "Farmer," Letter to the Editor, Jamestown Weekly Alert, Aug. 27, 1896, p. 1; "Voter," Letter to the Editor, Jamestown Weekly Alert, Aug. 27, 1896, p. 1.

⁶²Editorial, Devils Lake Free Press, May 26, 1898, p. 1. See also Editorials, Devils Lake Free Press, Sept. 23, 1897, p. 1; Sept. 24, 1898, p. 1.

⁶³Editorial, Grafton News and Times, May 7, 1896, p. 2. See also Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 30, 1896, p. 2. Throughout the 1896 campaign the News and Times filled its columns with articles discussing the financial question.

⁶⁴Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 15, 1893, p. 2.

zealous in proposing "that while there are many questions of importance pressing for solution, we regard the money question as paramount to every other question at this time, and that we sacrifice every party prejudice and personal ambition to the settlement of this great question in the interest of all the people, and we cordially invite the aid and cooperation of all parties and citizens agreeing with us upon this vital question, and we urge the adoption by them of direct legislation as a fundamental principle, by which all other reforms may be secured."⁶⁵ That the political defeat of 1896 failed to diminish their faith in free silver is illustrated by a 1899 editorial in the Valley City People's

Advocate:

It must be borne in mind by all that the first great reform necessary in this country, is to restore the money of the constitution, to crush the gold octopus. Give us gold, silver and paper money--a'll issued by the government, and all at full legal tender for all debts and obligations, then the incubator of all the trusts and the oppressor of the human race will be squelched in this country, and we trust for all time. All the other questions now being cussed and discussed are mere pigmies in comparison with the money question. After this matter is settled, and settled right, then the others will be easy to handle. Crush the gold clique of vampires that are eating away the very foundations of our government. Make this once more a government for all the people and not for the gamblers alone.⁶⁶

Due to the saliency given the money question, the Populists made almost no mention of socialism and only limitedly discussed the

⁶⁵Jamestown Weekly Alert, June 25, 1896, p. 1; July 30, 1896, p. 1; Jamestown, North Dakota Capital, July 31, 1896, p. 1; Grafton News and Times, Aug. 6, 1896, p. 1; Towner News and Stockman, Aug. 7, 1896, p. 2. The Independent platforms of Stutsman and Cass Counties similarly expressed their willingness to concentrate the united strength of all reform forces upon the financial question. Jamestown Weekly Alert, June 11, 1896, p. 1.

⁶⁶Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Mar. 16, 1899, p. 2.

government ownership of railroads, although concerning the latter there appeared to be general agreement in favor of government ownership.⁶⁷ All the Populist platforms through 1900 included planks demanding government ownership of the railroads, telegraph and telephone, yet the issue failed to achieve the prominence of silver in the Populist press. An unidentified Barnes County man, however, went beyond "the collective ownership and operation of the iron highways" and strongly urged a shift to "public rather than private ownership of natural monopolies."⁶⁸ The intensely anti-railroad Devils Lake Free Press dejectedly stated that "THE FREE PRESS would like to see every robbing corporation under direct government ownership but never expects to, until the grind-stone method has been applied to every producer and laborer in the country."⁶⁹

Though the North Dakota Populist infrequently empathized with his fellow laborer under the "grind-stone," the press sympathetic to Populism had supported the Homestead strikers in 1892 and the Pullman

⁶⁷A North Dakota Populist, Joseph Meyer of Cavalier, wrote to the Ruralist condemning those who favored free coinage of silver as "a temporary relief, but sure spoils of office." Ruralist, June 27, 1895, p. 2. See also Joseph Meyer, Letter to the Editor, Ruralist, Dec. 12, 1895, p. 6. The only other supporter of socialism, the Northwest Weekly News, asked its readers, "who fears socialism? Those who do would be afraid in the dark." Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, July 8, 1893, p. 4. The Grafton News and Times probably expressed the position of most North Dakota Independents when declaring that "anarchy and socialism are twin sisters; the only difference is the way they bang their hair." Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 12, 1894, p. 1.

⁶⁸Valley City People's Advocate, Feb. 16, 1899, p. 2.

⁶⁹Editorial, Devils Lake Free Press, Aug. 29, 1895, p. 1.

boycott by the American Railway Union.⁷⁰ Expressing no sympathy for "Coxey's Army," the Grafton News and Times patriotically declared that "its utter failure will demonstrate to the world the fact that the American people cannot be made the dupes of every designing knave who may hold out promises of added prosperity by the abrogation of law and the intimidation of law makers."⁷¹

On many occasions the News and Times introduced this element of America for Americans. In a lengthy editorial titled "Gold Bug Trickery," the News and Times contended that

to read the gold bug press one would be led to believe that the population of that portion of the United States west of the Missouri had forfeited not alone all rights to citizenship but to the rights of humanity because they 'speak right out at a meeting' what they honestly think; not always wisely we admit but who will not feel deeply and speak passionately when he sees the labor of a life time abolished and himself and wife and family deprived of the means of sustenance and the fairest portions of Uncle Sam's dominions which he assisted, at the risk of life and limb, to place in the first rank of civilization at one fell swoop virtually ruined. And for what cause? That the credit nation of the earth England with the Rothschild's and money brokers of the world shall accomplish with the ballot by a false system of finance what she and her worthy allies, the Indian and the Hessian, failed to do with the fathers of the Republic, conquer America. The people so attacked and denounced, whether native or foreign born, are today the Americans of America and know their rights and knowing dare mention them and no portion of the country can

⁷⁰Editorials, Northwest Weekly News, July 16, 1892, p. 2; Nov. 5, 1892, p. 4; Jamestown Daily Alert, July 7, 1892, p. 2; Aug. 5, 1892, p. 2; Oct. 5, 1892, p. 2; June 28, 1894, p. 2; Devils Lake Free Press, Oct. 21, 1897, p. 1.

⁷¹Editorials, Grafton News and Times, May 24, 1894, p. 1; July 5, 1894, p. 1. By contrast, the Jamestown Daily Alert asked "why it was that other processions and societies of all kinds were never molested in parading across the capitol grounds, with music, banners, etc., yet as soon as this poor man's parade was proposed the military was ordered out and permission refused." Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, May 8, 1894, p. 2.

surpass them in loyalty to our institutions notwithstanding the hot words of some men under fearful provocation.⁷²

The News and Times seemed particularly concerned about restricting the immigration of Chinese. Since "a million Mongolians are not to be counted as equal to a million Americans in capacity for industry," asserted the News and Times, it "is a fact beyond the knowledge of common every day people" why "a lot of short haired New England old maids and long haired cranks from the same locality have their philanthropic feelings wonderfully worked up over the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States holding that the Chinese exclusion act is constitutional."⁷³ The News and Times did not limit its comments on immigration to the Chinese and accordingly advised the "migration agents of the government" that Europe could "keep its own paupers, criminals and anarchists."⁷⁴

Attorney General Standish expressed a nativistic sentiment in his discussions of silver coinage. Referring to the foreign influence of English bankers, Standish brought the situation closer to home in charging that "what makes Wall Street influence so dangerous is the fact

⁷²Editorial, Grafton News and Times, July 10, 1893, p. 2.

⁷³Editorials, Grafton News and Times, May 25, 1893, p. 2; Nov. 29, 1894, p. 2. Locally, the News and Times counseled its readers that "a Republican senator from Walsh will be of as much use to this county as a Chinaman would." Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Oct. 18, 1894, p. 2.

⁷⁴Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 14, 1894, p. 1. The News and Times, however, spoke out against the American Protective Association on at least one occasion. Editorial, Grafton News and Times, Apr. 19, 1894, p. 1.

that it is the American agent of foreign investors and when it advises it is solely for the profit of foreigners."⁷⁵

The Jamestown Daily Alert practiced what might be considered an inverted nativism in its animosity toward the Indian. The reaction originated with the Alert's fear that the Indian would be allowed to vote in the 1892 election. Concerned that they would "vote the straight republican ticket," the Alert cautioned that

the Indians of North Dakota have always been treated as children, and are children in every sense of the word, except age. They are wards of the government, unable to support themselves. As far as any moral or equal right with whites is concerned the vote of the cattle supplied by the government to the reservation Indians might as properly be counted.⁷⁶

After the 1894 election the Alert went even further in its criticisms of the Indians as wards of the government:

The system of supplying these necessaries is what has spoiled the Indian. He has had to quit hunting and has become practically an aristocratic loafer, supported by the taxation of white men. The problem of educating and civilizing the Indian by artificial means is doubtless an impossible one. . . . The inherited tendencies of generations cannot be changed in any race of people, much less so in a race having deeply imbedded traits and habits—as firmly fixed and unyielding as those of the buffalo or prairie wolf.⁷⁷

By contrast, the Northwest Weekly News came out strongly against bigotry and nativism. In the spring of 1891, it published special Irish-American and German-American editions in honor of St. Patrick's Day and

⁷⁵William H. Standish, Letter to the Editor, Northwest Weekly News, Nov. 4, 1893, p. 4.

⁷⁶Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, Nov. 7, 1892, p. 2.

⁷⁷Editorial, Jamestown Daily Alert, Nov. 25, 1894, p. 2.

the first German Parliament.⁷⁸ The News also berated editors and politicians for slandering "worthy immigrants."⁷⁹ In an editorial against the American Protective Association, the News advised "the citizens of the metropolis of the northwest, preacher, priest and rabbi, mechanic and laborer, . . . to counsel their flocks and associates to help quarantine the political plague that is creating such havoc in other cities."⁸⁰ A descriptive News editorial appropriately charged that

perhaps one of the most absurd procedures, in the methods used by unscrupulous politicians, is the unqualified abuse they heap upon the conditions of foreign immigration. These immigrants, without respect to nationality, are characterized as a lot of ignorant, indigent, indolent, ragged and brutalized beings, who are forced upon the United States by sheer want and impecuniosity. Such statements prove the trimmer and the demagogue. . . . Such statements are false in every essential and savor of prejudice, rather than an enlightened public sentiment. . . . This hue and cry of 'pauperized labor' is a bubble of many colors, and is too often used by political tricksters as a scarecrow to keep away other 'birds of prey' from their own well-stocked political orchards.⁸¹

In spite of its denouncements of bigotry and nativism, however, the News contained the only example of specific anti-Semitism found in the Populist press during the 1890's. Provincially noting "the shameless manner in which eastern democratic congressmen and newspapers declare that the Chicago platform was only made to catch western votes and not to be carried out in good faith," the News contended that this "shows how

⁷⁸Northwest Weekly News, Irish American Edition, Mar. 17, 1891; German American Edition, Mar. 28, 1891.

⁷⁹Editorials, Northwest Weekly News, Apr. 25, 1891, p. 1; Oct. 22, 1892, p. 2.

⁸⁰Editorials, Northwest Weekly News, Apr. 7, 1894, p. 4; Sept. 8, 1894, p. 2.

⁸¹Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Oct. 22, 1892, p. 2.

thoroughly degraded and dishonest eastern democrats have become in their insane worship of the Jew system of money."⁸² Even though this isolated statement should not be construed as representing a consensus of North Dakota Populists, it indicates that the News, at least, had gone beyond the symbols of "Shylock" and "Rothschild."

The Populist Valley City People's Advocate expressed little nativism and no anti-Semitic sentiment. Its editorials, however virtually stood alone in their denouncement of the Negro. Citing Booker T. Washington as an authority, the People's Advocate asserted "that the negro school, as a rule, especially the school of the higher grade, has inculcated false and vicious notions in the negro, has made him feel that he is too good for his natural and proper place, while it has failed utterly to fit him for a higher sphere of action."⁸³ The People's Advocate also blamed the "negro and ignorant foreign" voters for the defeat of "Bryan and the free coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1."⁸⁴ The People's Advocate similarly charged the 1899 Congress with passing a large percentage of bills which were "The White Man's Burden."⁸⁵ Even in its censure of the Philippine aggression, the Advocate reasoned that "in the south when a white man kills a nigger he gets strung up or goes to the pen, but the white man gets regular wages

⁸²Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Aug. 26, 1893, p. 4. After Bierly's switch to the Republican party the News carried another anti-Semitic comment, referring to Congress as the "hired rascals" of the Jews. Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, Nov. 17, 1894, p. 4.

⁸³Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Dec. 23, 1898, p. 2.

⁸⁴Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Feb. 2, 1899, p. 2.

⁸⁵Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Apr. 27, 1899, p. 2.

for killing niggers in the Philippine Islands."⁸⁶ Not only does the first part of this statement seem too gracious for late nineteenth century southern justice, the statement clearly represents, along with the others, a racist attitude during 1898 and 1899.

Although the Populist press found common ground in protesting the annexation policy of the United States during the last half of the 1890's, the reasoning behind their protestations differed. The Grafton News and Times and Devils Lake Free Press favored recognizing the Cuban insurgents, but suggested that the United States avoid "entanglements" and "remain free."⁸⁷ As the Free Press put it: "the United States as she exists today is good enough for anybody."⁸⁸ The Jamestown Weekly Alert emphasized that the regular forces should not be increased, for they would only expand the power of the central government and serve the interests of the "great capitalists and corporations."⁸⁹ The most expressive opponent of annexation was the People's Advocate. The Advocate attested that the Filipinos were not rebels, for "they stand to-day as we Americans stood when we were called rebels by England at the time of the revolutionary war."⁹⁰ Stating this position more directly the Advocate contended:

⁸⁶Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Sept. 29, 1899, p. 2.

⁸⁷Editorials, Grafton News and Times, Oct. 10, 1895, p. 2; Jan. 7, 1897, p. 3.

⁸⁸Editorial, Devils Lake Free Press, June 23, 1898, p. 4.

⁸⁹Editorial, Jamestown Weekly Alert, Nov. 19, 1896, p. 4.

⁹⁰Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Nov. 3, 1899, p. 2.

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. So says our Declaration of Independence. But it takes an almighty lot of soldiers and embalmed beef for our holized administration to get the consent of the Cubans, the Puerto Ricans, the Hawaiians, the Samoans and the Filipinos, to be governed by might. But then these people must consent or be murdered. Is this civilization? Is this Christianity?⁹¹

The Advocate considered the domestic manifestations of the annexation policy as important as the denial of the Filipino's liberty when asking:

How can any self-respecting American mechanic, or any man who has regard for the American laborer, support such an infamous gang of galoots as are now running the machine at Washington? Not content to destroy the people's money, to propagate robbing trusts, to feed their soldiers on embalmed bull beef and prosecute army officials for denouncing the rotten stuff, and rewarding other officials for calling honest men liars, they even, in their greed, resort to the heinous crime of having the soldiers clothing manufactured in disease breeding sweatshops where the wages paid to the workers runs from seven cents to as high as fifty-one cents a day!⁹²

Taking this position one step further a lengthy article against the evil results of expansion and imperialism concluded with the challenge that "let every American rally around their country's flag not for conquest, but to preserve the honor and perpetuation of his country."⁹³

Rallying around the flag was about all the fusionists could do by 1900, for they had only six members in each of the two chambers of the state legislature.⁹⁴ Their strength had dwindled since the success of 1892 and as early as 1894 the pro-Populist press marked the demise of

⁹¹Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, May 4, 1899, p. 2.

⁹²Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Mar. 9, 1899, p. 2.

⁹³Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, May 25, 1899, p. 2.
See also Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Oct. 20, 1899, p. 2.

⁹⁴Grafton News and Times, Nov. 23, 1900, p. 1.

the third party.⁹⁵ With each successive election the anti-fusionist sentiment lessened, and after the 1900 election the Grafton News and Times concluded that "there will be no more talk of fusion, there will be just two parties, republicans and democrats."⁹⁶

Fusion with the Democrats, however, was not the only reason for the end of the Independent party in North Dakota. From the beginning they lacked a strong organization, and the continued internal political struggles for office weakened the party adhesive. With an anucleated party, assimilation with the Democrats offered the only alternative to continued independence. This made little difference, for all voters, regardless of political allegiance, found little in the pseudo-Populist administration of 1892 to commend it. Coupled with this political dissatisfaction, the national flavor of the Populist program limited the party's attractiveness. The problem was not only in the North Dakota Populist's panacea of free silver, but also in the land and transportation planks of the general platform. Even if the party had succeeded in maintaining itself in office, it could not have implemented their program. In the 1898 state election, the Valley City People's Advocate wisely advised the fusion forces to "leave national issues in the background and confine their campaign work to the actual, live issues of the

⁹⁵Editorials, Fargo Sun, n.d., quoted in Grafton News and Times, Nov. 15, 1894, p. 2; Jamestown Daily Alert, Nov. 8, 1894, p. 2; Devils Lake Free Press, Nov. 8, 1894, p. 1.

⁹⁶Editorials, Grafton News and Times, Nov. 16, 1900, p. 2; Valley City People's Advocate, July 1, 1898, p. 2; Jamestown Weekly Alert, Aug. 6, 1896, p. 4.

state."⁹⁷ The failure of the national party insured the permanent defeat of the North Dakota Independent Party.

⁹⁷Editorial, Valley City People's Advocate, Aug. 5, 1898, p. 2.

CHAPTER V

DAKOTA POPULISM: PROGRESSIVE OR RETROGRESSIVE?

In his 1933 study of the character and economic basis of Northwest radicalism, Benton H. Wilcox characterized Populism as an opportunistic class struggle lacking all the qualities of "doctrinaire or theoretical radicalism and socialism." Devoid of theoretical or philosophical content, Northwest Populism focused its concern on the conflict between farming and the big business classes. "This movement grew from the people and was based upon economic needs," Wilcox contended, "so when it fell into the hands of practical politicians and the opportunistic economic and political planks were subordinated to an artificial political issue, the revolt collapsed and failed." The artificial political issue, of course, was free silver. Granting that there was some radicalism in the Populists's programs, Wilcox added that the intensity of radicalism varied from state to state.¹

¹Benton H. Wilcox, "A Reconsideration of the Character and Economic Basis of Northwestern Radicalism" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1933), pp. 53-55, 64-66, 112-113, 232. The states included in the study were Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana. Richard Hofstadter reviewed the dissertation in 1951, four years prior to the publication of The Age of Reform, and may have drawn some of his conclusions from this study. Anna Rochester, in her study of the Populist movement, characterized the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota and Minnesota as a "populist outburst" of "extraordinary fervor." Rochester, Populist Movement, pp. 117-118.

He wisely made the addition, for this case study of North and South Dakota Populist thought illustrates that, even though originating from a common Alliance, with statehood the two movements took decidedly different courses. In fact, it may be too generous to apply the term movement to North Dakota Populism. If Populist thought is narrowly defined to those professing allegiance to a Populist party, North Dakota Populism is obscure. In most respects North Dakota Populism fits Wilcox's description; however, the "practical politicians" began taking over the Populist impulse long before free silver became the "artificial political issue." Therefore, Wilcox's thesis largely applies to a general North Dakota thought, but not to a specific Populist movement. This is not to say that individual Populists held none of these attitudes, but rather that Wilcox characterized more than North Dakota Populism.

The few discernible aspects of North Dakota Populist thought indicate a belief in the primacy of agriculture, an overemphasis of the salutary nature of free silver and a rejection of United States involvement in the Philippines. Examples of nativistic, anti-Semitic, anti-Indian, and anti-Negro thought existed; yet, with the exception of nativism, these instances indicate no broad based sentiment.

The emphasis was clearly on the economic struggle between the farmer and the "interests." As a commercial farmer, the Populist sought no idyllic past, but rather a just share of the profits. Although expressing a provincial view, he made few calls for a return to pre-industrial agriculture. The primary concern was for the thousands of farmers going "into bankruptcy as a result of this dreadful conspiracy

who might have held their feet if the monopoly of the money market had not been in the bonds of the remorseless sharks of Wall Street."²

Despite their nativistic and nationalistic feelings, the North Dakota Populists voiced little jingoism. In this, they refute Hofstadter's contention that "Populism and jingoism grew concurrently in the United States during the 1890's."³ Although initially favoring recognition of Cuba's insurgency, the Populists rejected the annexation of any of the newly won territory and desired a United States withdrawal from the Philippines. Such sentiment denotes little that savors of a saber-rattling jingoist.

On the whole, however, North Dakota Populism fails to reveal a progressive nature. First, the North Dakota Populists lacked a viable movement. Secondly, their thought and political endeavors suggest opportunism rather than progressivism. Finally, the common ground of their thought discloses a provincial, dualistic point of view emphasizing the primacy of agriculture, a conspiracy of the "money power," and a simplistic faith in the panacea of free silver. While these sentiments may have eventually changed the Populists' abused economic position, when weighed on almost any scale of progressivism, they fail to indicate a progressive nature.

The Populist experience in South Dakota demonstrates a much different picture. In most respects the South Dakota Populist movement that emerged as a political force in 1896 fulfills contemporary social

²Editorial, Northwest Weekly News, June 17, 1893, p. 2.

³Hofstadter, Age of Reform, pp. 88-93.

commentator Paul Goodman's characterization of Populism. "In my opinion," Goodman states, "this was the last American political movement to face squarely the crucial dilemma of modern society: how to preserve practical democracy in high industrial conditions."⁴

This idea of humanizing industrialism is one element that stands out in South Dakota Populist thought. The Populists attacked the prevailing Social Darwinism of American capitalism and sought resolution in a moderate socialism. Their principles may have fallen short of doctrinaire socialism, but their statements lacked none of the socialist rhetoric. Only by humanizing the system would all toilers, whether urban-laborer or farmer, acquire equal rights, with special privileges to none. As such, South Dakota Populism contains nothing to warrant consideration as a proto-fascist movement, for the emphasis on a democratic socialism precludes a dictatorially administered centralized capitalism. The significance is in the attitudinal causation, not in the possibilities of a misuse of the governmental form.

The South Dakota Populists were not seeking a "golden age" in the past or a utopia in the future. They were not marching into the future looking in a rear-view mirror or through rose-colored glasses. In fact, at the end of their political tenure, the South Dakota Populists had become disillusioned over the prospects for change. The government as well as the people had apparently rejected their demands for reform. Although initially they may have been naive in assuming that American

⁴Paul Goodman, People or Personnel: decentralizing and the mixed systems, and Like a Conquered Province: the moral ambiguity of america, Vintage Books (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House, Inc., 1968), p. 40.

capitalism would magnanimously step aside, the Populists's grim outlook was more realistic than sentimental.

The Populists's moral concern for a humanitarian society, however, included a qualified nativism, a period of anti-Semitism, and a feeling of white superiority. While none of these attitudes served as the nucleus of the Populists's concern, they arose from the common belief in the dualistic nature of the struggle for a reformed society. It was not just an economic dualism as reflected in North Dakota Populism, but a struggle to change the system. The rejection of the South Dakota Populists's anti-imperialistic and anti-militaristic stance brought their disillusionment to fruition.

Despite the progressiveness of their thought the South Dakota Populists had failed perceptibly to alter the course of American society. Even though referring to events of his own day, H. L. Mencken cogently expressed the predictability of the South Dakota Populists's struggle and disillusionment:

What the authors of elegies mistake for the collapse of civilization is simply the internal struggle that I have mentioned-- the ages-old combat between the haves and the have-nots, now rendered transiently acute by a parlous shortening of the things fought for. The ultimate issue of that struggle seems to me to be plain enough. The have-nots will be given a drubbing, and under the protection of a new and unprecedentedly vigorous and daring capitalism the thing called Christian civilization will be promoted as it has never been promoted before.⁵

South Dakota Populism, then, refutes Hofstadter's general contention that Populism reflected a retrogressive movement seeking a "golden

⁵H. L. Mencken, Prejudices: Fourth Series (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1924), p. 217.

age" in the past, yet supports his specific accusations of nativism, anti-Semitism, conspiratorial thinking and political naiveté. Although none of the specific charges were central or pervasive in Populist thought, they formed a part of the Populists's attempt to alter the course of industrial America. Viewed in terms of Mencken's prophesy, South Dakota Populism should offer a poignant example to the contemporary protest against the manifestations of American industrialism.

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