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The Nonpartisan League Leader's Role in the Development of the Nonpartisan League

Kim E. Higgs

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THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE LEADER'S ROLE
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
NONPARTISAN LEAGUE

By

Kim E. Higgs
Bachelor Of Arts, University Of North Dakota, 1998

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Submitted To The Graduate Faculty

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In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements

For The Degree Of

Master Of Arts

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This thesis, submitted by Kim E. Higgs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Harvey Kull
Dean of the Graduate School

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Department Communications

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	
Theories of Communication, Newspapers	7
and the Nonpartisan League Leader	
Community and Colonialism	18
Social Movements and Social Change	22
III. HISTORY.....	33
IV. METHOD	37
V. FINDINGS	42
VI. DISCUSSION	53
VII. CONCLUSION	71
VIII. REFERENCES	77

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To my nephew Isaac Jason Szondy

ABSTRACT

This study of the Nonpartisan League's (NPL) newspaper, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, examined the interaction between the social, economic, and political environment of North Dakota at the turn of the century and the founding and growth of the NPL *Leader*. The impact of mass media, specifically newspapers, on farming communities is a forceful tool in shaping social, economic and political processes of those communities. This impact provides a perspective that news is embedded with values, beliefs, and customs of a specific political, economic and cultural system. The evidence presented in the Letters to the Editor column provided the view that news is a social process, and that the views presented in those letters had an impact on the cultural, political and social environment of the community. It is further held that the power over discourse benefits those who own the tools of production and other elite in society.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1900s organizations such as Nonpartisan League used various forms of communication such as speech making and newspapers in order to take their struggles to the masses (Kessler, 1984 & Shore, 1988). The Nonpartisan League began publishing its own newspaper, *The Nonpartisan League Leader*, in September 1915, and began to communicate to the farmers of North Dakota what the leaders of the Nonpartisan League felt were the main issues of concern for farmers. The newspaper exposed the farmers to a wide range of agrarian reform ideas that the conventional press rarely discussed (Kessler, 1984). The *Nonpartisan League Leader* became the medium through which the farmer's demands were heard, was instrumental in converting farmers to the Nonpartisan League's cause, and orchestrating support for a wide range of reforms such as the development of a state mill and state bank (Morlan, 1985 & Robinson, 1966).

A study of the role of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* as the voice of the Nonpartisan League may provide insight into the current political climate in the state of North Dakota. The Nonpartisan Leagues' development and its' demise, along with that of the *Leader*, leave open many questions and present a wide range of areas for research. Did the dialogue the League carried on through the *Nonpartisan League Leader* alienate those it was meant to entice? Or did the League's dialogue destroy communities when its primary function was to create a community of farmers by binding them together for a

common cause? Did this dialogue, in fact, create a greater chasm between social classes and between other ethnic and minority groups? Other questions needing answers are: why would such a seemingly agrarian movement fail to develop its appeal to a wider populace; why did the leaders and body of supporters not revamp and revise the agenda for the League, and still maintain its original ideals? Or perhaps why did *The Nonpartisan League Leader* not adequately address women's issues and concerns? What did the political cartoons on the front pages of *The Nonpartisan League Leader* say to the readership of the paper?

Kessler (1984) found that American radicals felt it was necessary for a movement to have some sort of periodical published. It was through these types of newspapers that farmers were exhorted to join county, state and regional alliances, which became the backbone of powerful nationwide movements (pp.112). She identified the functions of the radical presses as providing coverage of farm reform meetings and speeches, educating farmers and attacking exploiters, monopolists, and corporations, providing information on how to set up marketing and purchasing cooperatives, and monetary reform. One of the last functions identified was that of attacking the evils of modern society and the powerful owners of the means of production and distribution (pp. 116-117). *The Nonpartisan League Leader* stated on the front page of its inaugural issue September 23, 1915, that it belonged to the farmers to voice their protest against unjust and unrighteous conditions, to make the farmers' voice count, and that they may secure their just share of representation in the affairs of government.

The Nonpartisan League through the *Nonpartisan League Leader* provided the cure for societal ills by spreading the word of its political platform concerning the

financial and economic solutions being formulated to ease the burdens of North Dakota farmers. The *Nonpartisan League Leader* became the channel through which farmers in North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, and the Northwest were able to maintain communication on the ideologies of the Nonpartisan League, and shared reports of each other's progress. Though the League sought to expand its power through the *Leader*, it was destined to have a short life because it existed within the constrained area of society in which its members lived (Kessler, 1984). The *Leader* was unable to sustain its readership because of the geographic distances that separated its members from the organization itself (Shore, 1951).

Schudson (1978) stipulated that early newspapers were expected to present a partisan viewpoint and not a neutral one, and that it was uncommon for journalists to differentiate between facts and values. He stated that journalists before the 1920s had little incentive to doubt the firmness of the "reality" in which they lived, and did not think much about the subjectivity of perception (pp. 6). He further stated that objectivity was not only a moral philosophy, but also one of political commitment because objectivity provided a guide to what groups one should acknowledge as relevant audiences, and that these audiences are defined by institutional mechanisms (pp. 8). He identified two mechanisms of social control. The first was advanced education and training, which provided scientific knowledge and an objective attitude. The second was identified as insulation from the public, which would be the use of technical language or jargon (pp. 8). One point Schudson made was that newspapers were dependent on market forces, and that they appealed directly to popular opinion. The *Nonpartisan League Leader's* purpose can be seen as being the portal through which North Dakota farmer's viewed themselves

in combat with the financial, economic and political institutions that regulated and controlled their lives.

The political conditions in North Dakota in the 1900s were ripe for a political revolt. The Nonpartisan League was able to tap into the farmer's frustrations and bring to fruition a revolt that had been brewing for 20 years (Taylor, 1953). The issues that had been continuously argued and debated were hail insurance for crops, a state grain elevator, the grading practices of the local elevator managers, and the charge that the farmers' quality wheat was being mixed with inferior grades by the elevator owners who wanted to increase their profits. These actions had the net results of decreasing the salability of the farmer's wheat. North Dakota farmers were not the only ones struggling with these issues. Davenport (1916) noted that the economic revolution of the agricultural population in North Dakota was part of a struggle for justice and more efficient system of distribution of marketing of the basic products that were needed to survive and make a living. The farmers were not only struggling for fair prices, but also for fair economic measures such as lending practices for equipment and mortgages.

Talbot (1957) noted that the economic situation in North Dakota fostered this radical political movement. He cited several reasons why this movement was able to attract North Dakota farmers. Among these reasons were the isolation of the farmers and the land and the cultural environment. By appealing to the farmer's sense of isolation, the Nonpartisan League was able to establish a political organization, which claimed to be different and more farmer friendly than the two traditional parties. Culturally the farmers of North Dakota came from a wide variety of European backgrounds for instances Norwegian, Scandinavians, German, and Polish, and brought with them a wide variety of

views on religion, economics, and a wide variety of languages and traditions. When the movement took place, farmers found that they changed their perception of themselves and their way of life. This was evident by the use of the rube farmer in the *Nonpartisan League Leader* confronting the figure representing "Big Biz" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, November 11, 1915).

When one looks at the reasons for the rise of the Nonpartisan League, one would have to look back as far as 1892 when there was an uprising of farmers in North Dakota in retaliation to then Governor Andrew Burke's veto of a bill which would have forced the railroads to lease sites on their rights of way for grain elevators and warehouses (Taylor, 1953). Other historical occurrences to take into consideration are the formation of the Equity Cooperative Exchange, the Better Farming Movement, and the efforts of such people as Charles Winship, John Sorley, and Burleigh Spalding to change the way government administration was handling farmer affairs.

The campaign for a state mill was an old one, but one that the Nonpartisan League was committed to implementing. In 1914 a bill to establish a state elevator was passed by the state legislature by a three to one margin. However then Governor Louis B. Hanna, who was seen as a lackey for Alex McKenzie, who was a political agent for the Northern Pacific and eventually came to represent the powerful interests of Minneapolis and St. Paul (Robinson, 1966), and the grain, financial, and transportation interests of the East (Bahmer, pp. 458), shifted the money that was allocated by the legislature to start a mill and allocated it to a special commission to do a feasibility study. In a 600-page report to Governor Hanna, the commission concluded that the grain elevator was not necessary.

This action riled the farmers and they petitioned to have the will of the people carried out.

This incident planted the seed that grew into the revolt that followed.

The role of the farming community and the *Leader* must be seen as agents that came together to change, or overturn, the oppressive conditions the farmers viewed themselves to be under (Cronin, 1997, & Stamm, 1985). These conditions were controlled by such entities as the mill operators, railway owners and operators, and the financial institutions that manipulated the economic situation the farmers were living under (Morlan, 1985, & Robinson, 1966).

A revolt like the Nonpartisan League would not have been possible, or successful, without a system by which to tie together people of similar values, attitudes and beliefs. The Nonpartisan League was a social movement that attempted to make a positive impact on the lives of the farmers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Communication, Newspapers and the Nonpartisan League Leader

Walter Lippmann (Wolfson, 1985) once likened the press as a beam of a searchlight, gradually “bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision.” For *The Nonpartisan League Leader* to be meaningful and provide that light to the membership of the Nonpartisan League, we need to explore a few concepts in communication processes. One of those processes is how we as individuals process the information we receive and how we use it to develop our attitudes and self-concepts.

Lippmann’s theory that one of the principal functions of the media is to mediate between “the world outside” and “the picture in our heads,” must be taken into consideration. The media were the main purveyors of the information that forms our “pictures” and has significant implications for politics. In a democracy, it is people’s cognitions and choices that determine the main direction of a polity in the long run (Takeshita, 1951).

In his review of Dewey’s work, Carey (1975) found that Dewey claimed that societies distribute information, and speak rather too anthropomorphically. It was through these transactions and channels of communication that societies were made possible. This led to two views of communication known as the transmission view and the ritual view of communication. The transmission view was tied to the idea of

transportation. In this view, communication was seen as a way of imparting, sending, transmitting or giving information to others. This theory postulated that communication was a process by which messages were transmitted, and distributed in space for the control of distance and people. The transmission view of communication was considered to be linked to religion in that the movement through space was an attempt to establish and extend the kingdom of God (Carey, 1975). Carey noted that the transmission view was the commonest in our culture because it dominated contemporary dictionary entries under the term (pp. 3).

Burke (1968) disputed McLuhan's notion that the message was the medium. Instead of viewing the medium used to transmit the message, Burke contended that McLuhan focused too much on what was being said through the medium and that this tended to oversimplify the communication process. However, communication is not linear, and the individual processing the information determines whether it is visual or literal communication. Without considering the source of information, such as newspapers, one would be hard pressed to say that the medium used for the message was an end unto itself. One actually has to consider what the context of the message is and if it has meaning to the person receiving it.

Part of the integration process of information deals with perception about that information. We assign meaning to the input and then structure the incoming information into its simplest and most orderly form (Goss, 1989). Common perceptual tendencies include closure, familiarity, and expectations (Goss, 1989), each of which plays an important part in how we process the information and then create a corresponding product from the information. Past experience, new information and the means of

delivery of the information all establish the connection between assigning meaning to the information and the perceptions we develop from it. Goss (1989) defined information as any input that the person attends to for the purposes of reducing uncertainty or confirming prior knowledge.

In the 1910s and 1920s, newspapers were the primary means of relaying information to a mass audience. Newspapers became the site for public dialogue accessible to all citizens. Newspapers were where positions that could not or would not be explored elsewhere were advanced, argued, assessed and acted upon (Anderson, et al, 1996).

When looking at the language aspect of communication theory, Shilts (1997) stated that the language of a historical movement is not simply an expression of a particular pre-existing social reality instead it proposes that language itself, the way meanings are constructed, is what helps to shape the nature of social phenomena. The farmers were rebelling against the ideology that they should accept and subordinate themselves to the standard of "business" and feel the gratitude, which only arises among equals.

Edelman (1998) noted that language provides the linkage between diverse issues and the nature of the enemy. He stated that linking these ideas through the attribution of feared traits to problematic enemies lends intensity to common causes and sometimes creates a belief in nonexistent common interests. Edelman noted that news of events involve pervasive ambiguities that people resolve in ways that reflect their class, gender, national, ethnic and other identification.

Edelman (1988) characterized language as being a prominent actor in the construction of social worlds people experience. He noted that language is just not a tool for describing objective reality. He argued that the beliefs that language helps evoke about the causes of discontents and satisfactions, and about policies that bring about a better future are intertwined with reason and rationality, ambiguity, contradiction and evocations. Consequently, the media evoke a spectacle that is constructed, and this construction is an interpretation, reflecting the diverse social situations of its audience and the language and symbols to which they are exposed (pp. 9).

Newspapers can be effective tools of persuasion by presenting information in a manner that conveys accuracy, authority or objectivity. One method is through the semantic tool of transfer which carries the importance of one object over to another in order to make the latter acceptable. Transfer also carries with it authority, sanction and disapproval to cause the reader to reject and disapprove of some issue that the newspaper would have the reader reject and disapprove (ETC., 1995). Other tools at their disposal are card stacking which involves the selection and use of facts, or falsehoods, logical or illogical statements in order to give the best possible case for an idea, program, person or product (ETC., 1995).

Not only did newspapers relay information, they were also the forums by which public opinion could be formulated. Public opinion can be static or dynamic, it can be used to denote the aggregate of the views men hold regarding matters that affect or interest the community. Public opinion can be approving or disapproving when its power is exerted by an apparent majority of citizens. While it has no legal claim to obedience,

public opinion has obliged legislatures to take it into account and shape their discourse accordingly (Bird & Merwin, 1951).

In a capitalist society, all activity, products and the language used to give meaning to those activities and products are part of the world and logic of the market (Mattelart, pp. 7). Ownership of the means and products of communication are seen as being controlled by the dominant social class, or elite. Mattelart (1980) proposed that in order to establish the commercial form of communication, mass media needed to undergo a process of fetishisation whereby living people are metamorphosed into things (factors of production) and things are given life in the sense that money “works,” capital “produces” and the media “act.” Additionally, it was through a body of fetishes that the capitalistic mode of production obtains its legitimacy and confirms its rationality of social domination.

Littlejohn (1983 & 1989), Caudill (1997), Oliver and Myers (1999), Neuman (1998), and Protes and Cook (1991) have written about media’s role as the gatekeeper of information. Neuman (1998) stated that media select issues from among those advanced for the agenda before public agitation spreads. Neuman further stipulated that once the agenda was set, the media must maintain attention on the issue and not allow the issue to be dislodged for the arena of public discourse. Neuman also postulated that the agenda could be derailed through the advent of a more urgent problem such as a war.

Mattelart (1980) argued that communications media appear to be endowed with autonomy and that they become an agency, which has the appearance of a natural force. That autonomy and subsequent distancing allows the ruling class’ monopoly ownership rights over the ideological apparatus to vanish from view. Because of the invisibility

afforded by the cloaking action of monopolistic ownership of the media, the ruling class is able to assume the right to denounce the content of the press and radio. With monopoly control over the means of production and distribution, and the language of production, the ruling class is able to transform agrarian reforms into something much more than simple modernizing measures. This control of the media by a particular social class is what demanded the repression of social movements.

Kessler (1984), Cronin (1997), and others view the agrarian press as an alternative press, or dissident press. Kessler (1984) believes that even though the messages of radical groups differed from one another they shared common goals. One important goal was to present their ideas as a counterbalance to the mainstream press. She states that these groups often presented their ideas, philosophies and goals in a variety of similar publications.

According to Shulman (1999), thriving farm presses not only inspired the farmers to address moral, technical and political issues, but would also act as the organ of rural public opinion while seeking to manipulate the agrarian agenda. By acting as the organ of rural public opinion, farm presses became a credible source of information and sound public opinion. (pp. 29 & 30). The U. S. government encouraged the use of farm presses as the “most efficient means of reaching the farmer” (pp. 30). Often these farm presses would act as the gate-keeping mediators between legislators, urban policy activists, and farmers (pp. 30).

Shulman (1999) noted that the editorial pages of the farm press dealt with the broader policy dilemmas of the day. The farm presses were not restricted to farm issues such as grain grading practices, and made the farmer an informed participant in an

evolving market society. These editorial pages were necessary to reinforce the growing consciousness of class and in unifying disparate elements of the working community (Curran, 1977). The *Leader's* Letters to Editor section provided the farmers with a venue by which to coalesce their ideas and present a unified force against the dominant elite.

Littlejohn (1983) noted that the transmission model of communication was concerned not only with the meaning of the message being presented, but also with the transmission and reception of the message. He noted, also, that there must be sufficient redundancy in the coded message, but not so much redundancy as to make the transmission inefficient (pp. 48). Carey (1975) argued that the transmission view of communication was the commonest view and its central idea was in that the signals or messages over distances were for the purpose of control. The *Nonpartisan League Leader* was the medium used by farmers of North Dakota to connect with one another in a similar language, and became the medium that united them in a common cause (Mader, 1937).

Cronin (1997) found that the three functions of the press could be applied to the alternative press. Similar to mainstream press, radical or alternative presses would provide information that mainstream newspapers either neglected or chose to ignore; they formed the core of a communication network that helped the League men and women to develop a sense of community and presented the League movement's opposition to the dominant political and economic structure as a legitimate effort. Cronin (1997) stated reform newspapers had a political bias, lacked financial stability, and failed to use innovative reporting techniques. These newspapers were also seen as legitimate sources of opposition to the dominant political and socioeconomic structures of the day.

The alternative, or radical press, could be viewed through the functions of the mobilization model of investigative reporting because these types of newspapers would publish media investigations, which in turn brought about a change in public opinion, which would then lead to public policy reforms (Protest, et al, 1991). The mobilization model was about exposing villainy and victimization, and set about to activate the conscience of citizens in order to promote public interest. Because the alternative, or radical, press were aimed at the disenfranchised, the argument can be made that it fulfilled its social obligation by being society's watchdog over government.

Oliver and Myers (1999) argued that the link between public events and the public sphere was the mass media. They also argued that these public events are not only oriented to those physically present but also to larger publics. The main purpose of those events was to garner the attention of mass media in order to communicate beyond the immediate social setting (pp. 38). Edelman (1988) stipulated that media constructed and reconstructed these events in order to create a succession of threats and reassurances.

Herman & Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model traced the way by which money and power were able to "filter" out the news, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. This was done by way of "news filters" such as size of the publishing agency, advertising and the reliance placed on media for information along with control mechanisms such as "anticommunism," "flak," and enforcers (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). These filters were seen as the means by which the elite is able to abolish, decrease in number, or absorb the production of, the alternative press companies.

The *Nonpartisan League Leader* appeared to be following in the footsteps of other radical press papers in that it attempted to reinforce a growing class-consciousness and to unify the farmers in North Dakota and the surrounding states (Curran, 1977). The creation of alternative, or radical, press can be seen as the means by which the working-class audience could be reached and could subsequently reinforce class-consciousness. This reinforcement of class-consciousness would result in the unification of the workers because it fostered an alternative value system and framework for looking at the world (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, & Edelman, 1988).

However, because of the news filters many alternative newspapers found themselves struggling against the owners of production, and the capitalistic ideal of profit making. Many alternative presses either shunned advertising, as did J. A. Wayland in his *Appeal to Reason* (Shore, 1988) or they allowed local businessmen, who endorsed the political ideologies and platform of the reform group (Shore, 1988), to place advertisements in their newspapers.

Because their profit margin was minimal, at best, many alternative papers were unable to defend themselves against what Herman and Chomsky call "flak." Flak referred to negative responses to a media statement or program (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). According to Herman and Chomsky, flak was related to power and it can be either direct or indirect (pp. 26). Direct flak was when pressure was applied through either government sources or through other media sources such as radio. Indirect flak can be the application of pressure through the use of contributions to political campaigns and help put into power politicians who will more directly serve the interests of private power (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Newspapers are judged by their treatment of that part of the news in which we feel ourselves involved (Lippmann, 1922, pp. 208 & Peterson, 1993, pp. 212, Anderson, et al, 1996, pp. 160). Part of Lippmann's argument (McQuail, 1999, pp. 154) was that the free market had failed its audiences by delivering a weak, inadequate, and irresponsible press system through the manipulations of government and the vulnerability and ignorance of the average citizen. If the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was the "voice" of the North Dakotan farmer, then its readers would have judged it favorably. Its readers voiced their concerns and opinions through the Letters to the Editor column, and felt empowered enough to speak against the financial and economic institutions that oppressed them.

The Nonpartisan League believed that the only way the farmer could do anything to improve his condition politically was to establish a string of newspapers owned and operated by the League of farmers themselves. The first issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was assured of a circulation greater than any weekly or daily newspaper in the state because every League member automatically became a subscriber (Gillette, 1919).

The need to create a newspaper to promote the platform of the Nonpartisan League was seen as paramount by the organizers of the League as evidenced by Townley pushing backward the initial publishing date of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* from December 1915 to September 1915 (Morlan, 1985). The Letters to the Editor column alluded to the fact that the subscribers were cognizant of the fact that media was used to serve the ends of a dominant elite by labeling the mainstream press "old gang press" (Morlan, 1985, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 7, 1915, pp. 7 & February 17, 1916, pp. 14). At a time when newspapers were considered to be under the control of the

dominant elite, the Nonpartisan League attempted to promote change within the farming community through a newspaper owned and operated by those who knew the conditions under which the farmer lived.

Townley knew he did not have to look far for subscribers to the *Nonpartisan League Leader* because farming communities provided a ready made marketing niche in which to promote the League's ideology. Cronin (1997) stated that the powers behind the *Nonpartisan League Leader* knew that through a network of newspapers, lecturers, writers and political cartoonists they would be able to promote and defend their cause—returning government to the hands of the people. The *Nonpartisan League Leader* was, in a sense, a traditional weekly newspaper. Its editors won the attention and goodwill of its readers by “keeping up the home lick” (Bird & Merwin, 1951) through announcements of picnics, rallies, deaths of members and successes of its members; it contained local news items, and published stories of unexpected happenings. It also fulfilled the functions of informing, instructing and entertaining its readers.

To increase their power in the legislature and to strengthen their hold on the farmer, the Nonpartisan League initiated several bills in the state senate (Mader, 1937). It created two laws to make the League newspapers the “official” county newspapers (53 in all). One was Senate Bill 158 that provided that beginning with the next general election the people of each county were to elect one official newspaper instead of three (Mader, 1937). The upshot of this is that it would give the voters the right to select their official newspaper. It would be through these newspapers that all state, county, school and municipal official notices would be printed (Mader, 1937).

The other bill is Senate Bill 157 which provided for the establishment of a state publication and printing commission of three elected officers who would supervise all state printing to serve the worthwhile purpose of coordinating and concentrating the production of state printing in one office (Gillette, 1919). Mader (1937) stated the ramifications these two bills had on the rise and fall of newspaper establishments was significant: 1915—33 weeklies began publication, while 14 were suspended; 1916—19 new weeklies, 23 suspensions; 1917—14 new publications, 28 suspended; and in 1918—22 new weeklies, 37 suspended.

The League newspapers became a major influence in fueling the fire of debate and rhetoric between the farmers, and the organizations that opposed the Nonpartisan League and its political leanings. Not only did the League newspapers fuel this debate with rhetoric, they also lashed out against the powerful through the use of political cartoons (Kessler, 1984) through the use of editorials that expressed the personal opinions of the editors, and through surveying their readers about what was important to them.

Newspapers have played an important role in the progression of protest cycles and social movements. They have been the purveyors of information and communicators of events and issues to varying public spheres (Oliver & Myers, 1999). By providing the link between public life and public places, media provides the link to individuals and groups to express collectively sentiments or influence public opinion. Newspapers are a medium by which public perceptions are shaped and movement issues are framed. They provide a shared meaning to activists, police, news reporters and the public alike (pp. 40).

Community and Colonialism

Community is a word that is used and encountered in every day conversation. It is a word rich in meaning; it is applied to places, to groups of people, and to other organizations to convey the meanings of togetherness and “we-ness.” Stamm noted that when a broad range of meanings is attached to the word community then there must also be several forms of community identification. He stated that communities are classified either as having institutional, or territorial functions, and that they are not mutually exclusive, but overlap each other. He also argued that there must be community ties such as personal contact, family connections, or even mobility (pp. 17). He added that these ties are major dimensions of community. In addition to community ties, there are community links such as communication links (pp. 21). Stamm determined that community ties are used to bridge missing links (gaps), and that mass media are used to bridge those gaps (pp. 23). The Nonpartisan League and the *Nonpartisan League Leader* appeared to bridge the political, social, and information gap between the farmers and the sources of political power. (Stamm, 1985)

Wentz (1968) found that the League’s lack of language and knowledge about its immigrant members contributed greatly to the loss of communication and in a larger sense a loss of ties with a larger society that they had previously experienced in their home countries. Though the immigrants came to North Dakota of their own free will, the case can be made that they were held in a marginal position by external commercial and political forces—forces that controlled prices, mortgages and political legislation (Robinson, 1966). Kreiling (1989), however, found that social organizations provided

stability for populations living in specific localities, and that external forces would not necessarily destabilize the community that was created.

In the postscript to Robinson's book about North Dakota history, David B. Danbom posited that dependency and economic colonialism shaped the politics of the state prior to the development of the Nonpartisan League (Robinson, 1966). At the time of the Nonpartisan League, the state of North Dakota depended on outside sources for its commodities, financial institutions, for transportation needs for its products, and for its material needs. People from outside the state ran the state's political and economic institutions (Robinson, 1966). The Nonpartisan League sought to alter the status of an internal colony by taking control of the state legislature, through the establishment of a state mill and elevator, and a state owned bank (Morlan, 1985 & Robinson 1966).

Marx believed that a class-divided society would have a culture that would have an inevitable class content and class bearing, and that this would necessarily change as the relation between men and classes changed (San Juan, 1999). This would also require a means of creating, articulating and communicating the new meanings and values, and that these are limited not only by educational systems, but also by the control of work and the private ownership of communications.

San Juan (1999) stated that the process of communication is in fact the process of community. It is through the sharing of common meanings, activities and purposes, and the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to tensions and achievements of growth and change within that society (pp. 119). Staggenborg (1998) noted that movements that are organized to protest against an issue, or issues, are

normally short-lived, but that the memories of the injustice and the experience of the collective action will remain, and possibly help to fuel subsequent collective action.

Moum's (1986) thesis noted that ethnic identification played a major role in spreading the Nonpartisan ideal to the people of Bottineau County and throughout the state of North Dakota (pp. 135). It was through the use of already established farm clubs in these communities that the Nonpartisan League was able to get a toehold in the county in which it was currently recruiting.

Moum (1986) also posited that the League was weakest in those communities that were richer, stable, and agriculturally diverse. The League was strongest in North Dakota's north central and northwestern counties because the Norwegian farmers there found themselves to be in a transitional stage between subsistence farming and diversified cash crop farming. Through the use of a local Farmer's Equity member, the League was able to secure new members. This was one way that the League was able to network from community to community, and by doing this was able to tie these communities together through not only sociability but also through economic and political institutions. (Moum, 1986)

Carey (1982) argued that democratic social order was the most active principle when viewing community life. He presented the argument that a genuine crisis in culture, a crisis of community life, of public life must be viewed through the means of a mass media manipulating objects, not as a device to establish the truth but to get others to believe what they want them to believe. Rather than using language to establish dialogue and personal relations, it has been used as a propaganda device and as a means of disrupting the very notion of truth. It was through the power of communication that

shared meaning was created. Through this shared meaning a community of equals uses rational thought to advance shared purposes (pp. 32).

Carey (1975) stated that the problems of communication, as defined by Dewey, are linked to problems of community, to problems surrounding the kinds of communities we create and in which we live. Carey posited that through a derangement in models of communication and community, we are coerced into thinking about society as a network of power, administration, decision and control—as a political order (pp. 20). Carey noted that one of the problems to creating communities was language, which can be defined as an instrument for communication and community.

Communication is the basis of human fellowship; it produces the social bonds that tie men together and make associated life possible (Carey, 1975). Carey eruditely explained how communication intertwines with the social processes to establish communities, and how these same processes can also be linked to problems communities experience. He did not hesitate to add that society has been seen as essentially relations between property, production and trade—an economic order (pp. 20). However, Cary (1975) cautioned that communities also share aesthetic experiences, religious ideas, personal values and sentiments, and intellectual notions—a ritual order.

Social movements and social change

North Dakota farmers began to feel disenfranchised. Even though they had approved the building of a state mill in 1914, the state legislature voted against it. Loss of control over their elected officials and diminishing purchasing power may have

contributed to the farmers' sense of resentment and anger. (Morlan, 1985 & Robinson, 1966)

According to Harper (1988) social change is shaped by the necessities of survival, or are shaped from within the system through conflict among groups and classes within society over the control of valued and scarce resources, or change is made through the social interaction processes between people and groups that results in the creation and ongoing negotiation and revision of meanings, symbols, and social definitions that constitute both society and change.

Harper (1998) defined social movements as the basic process by which social change takes place in societies. He further discussed social change as occurring when material factors such as new technologies and modes of production produce change in social interaction, social organization and, ultimately, in cultural values, beliefs and norms. Harper (1988) also noted that in addition to the material factors of social change there are "ideational" aspects of social change, which include knowledge and beliefs, values, and ideology.

Social movements do not always create a sustained organization, nor do they always succeed in implementing permanent social change in society (Harper, 1988). Even if a social movement only remains alive until its goal is accomplished, it must have a coherent internal structure, leadership, and a written statement of purpose, membership and a logistical base (Goldberg, 1991). To sustain its activities, a social movement must offer an ideology to its members along with a blueprint for change, explain the reason for the movement's emergence and fix targets of blame (Goldberg, 1991). Then a movement must justify and glorify itself by appealing to its culture's sacred articles and persons

(Goldberg, 1991). Seen as a challenger, the Nonpartisan League can be viewed as an economically and politically disadvantaged group engaged in sustained collective action (Amenta & Young, 1999) to secure its claim, as locally oriented and mostly issue-oriented.

In order for social movements to succeed, there needs to be a corresponding institutional change. Those who challenge the prevailing institutionalized political actors must employ a combination of familiar and unfamiliar elements (Clemens, 1997, pp. 44). For the challengers to be effective they must create an organizational repertoire that is distinct from the dominant political institution (Clemens, 1997, pp. 44). The political structure opened when a need for change was seen. The Nonpartisan League developed when the balance of power between elites and challengers shifted and a cleavage developed among the elite, which created a weakening for the established political institutions and allowed members of other farmer movements to band under one umbrella organization (Neuman, 1998).

According to Neuman (1998), this contest constrained the creation of new state agencies and policies because cultural meanings shaped popular understanding and attention. Neuman stipulated that the new frame that emerged through an interactive process as the actors tested new strategies and responded to a succession of new conditions, competing actors and evolution in the movement's organizational structure.

Harper (1998) further distinguished between revolutionary, or radical movements, which sought to change the system rather than to make changes in the system, and reform movements, which seek to make changes within the system. Added to these two distinctions, he also discussed the variants within those two movement types.

They were either expressive or instrumental. Expressive referred to changing an individual's behavior such as religious revivals. Instrumental meant seeking to change the structure of society such as the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Within these movements, Harper identified micro social explanations of why social movements happen—relative deprivation, social strains and micro structural mobilization contexts (Harper, 1998). Relative deprivation, which implies the importance of reference groups, can be defined to mean the difference between what people expect and what they actually get. The Nonpartisan League developed as the farmers' struggles failed to obtain recognition of their grievances by those in positions of power. Status strains can be defined as those strains that are produced when one's status is threatened by social change, i.e., demographic, political or occupational, or when there is an erosion of a cultural perspective which supported the prestige, power and privilege of status groups (Harper, 1988, & Stofferahn & Korsching, 1986). The Nonpartisan League and the *Nonpartisan League Leader* were the targets for the mainstream press because the League and the *Leader* were seen as threats to the power structure that was in place.

According to Marx, a society becomes ripe for social transformation when the stratification order is in disequilibrium, which means the class that is economically dominant through its control of productive process is not necessarily the class that is politically dominant. Marx further posits that one and the same class winning mastery over all the elements of power—social, economic, and political can only resolve the tensions, which this imbalance generates (Giddens & Held, 1982). He believed that the institutions of modern capitalism, particularly private ownership and control of the means of production were undemocratic, exploitive and inimical to human welfare (Shuklian,

1995). Marx saw labor as a process in which man and nature participate. Man starts, regulates and controls the material reactions between him and nature. Marx also believed that by acting on the external world and changing it, man at the same time changes his own nature (Shuklian, 1995).

Marx's ideas such as class struggle, and that the private ownership and control of the means of production were exploitive can be viewed through the letters to the editor of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. Phrases in some of those letters like "stand against our oppressors" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, October 7, 1915, pp. 7), "Big Biz keeps farmers divided" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, October 7, 1915, pp. 7), "make our voices heard" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, October 7, 1915, pp. 7), "idle parasites and liberals" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, December 9, 1915, pp. 9) and "keeping the masses ignorant" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, December 16, 1915, pp. 11) all carry with them the implications of control over the means of production and mastery over all elements of power that were not held by the farmers, but by the financial, economic and political powers.

The *Nonpartisan League Leader* was instrumental in raising the class-consciousness of the farmer. Phrases such as "advocate the cause of the producing class of our state," and "be alert for the beast of special privilege" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, August 17, 1916), and sentiments about casting off "the yoke of tyranny" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, July 27, 1916) attested to the fact that the farmers were cognizant about the class line that separated the them from the non farmer. In a letter signed "an organizer" in the October 7, 1915 issue

of the *Leader*, the writer questioned the type of legislation that was in North Dakota. He termed it "class legislation" and stated that the farmers had always been the victims of such legislation. In the September 23, 1915 issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, J. McIntyre wrote "After witnessing the political fiasco at Bismarck last winter we have come to realize that if we want legislation in our interest, we will have to look after it ourselves."

According to Oliver and Myers (1999), the way in which the meaning of the message was conveyed for a social movement can vary. It could carry the message through rallies, picnics, and marches. The way in which the message was delivered could be seen as contentious, destructive, disruptive, political or directed at the government. However, all of these methods of message carrying and meaning can lead to public debate and open a channel of communication between all parties involved. Newspapers fulfill both functions in that they provide the public with information about the event, or message, and then have a feedback loop through the use of such venues as the Letters to Editor column, or some other such forum. By charting movements and confirming and expanding the meaning of voluntary associations that come together under emergency conditions, the press can be seen as an important component of the message and its associated meaning.

Goldberg (1991) stated a social movement was a formally organized group that acts consciously and with some continuity to promote or resist change through collective action. Harper (1998) stated that social movements exist outside the institutional framework of every day life and are in some way oriented to changing every day life.

Social movements are often carriers of innovation, shape attitudes; define public issues and effect social policy in a variety of ways.

There is possible that the existing social norms, social roles and social meanings (Sunstein, 1997) were obstacles to the well being of North Dakota farmers. If they felt they had no choices of whom to sell their product too, to whom obtain financial resources from, and to whom to contract to transportation of their product, then their only means of extricating themselves from the grips of the established structure was to organize themselves and unify their voices. First and foremost was needed a change in what the farmers considered to be their social norms—an attitude about what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Farmers needed to be convinced that those processes that were used to make a profit off of the hard work of the farmer had to be challenged. Farmers had to speak out against those processes rather than being oppressed.

Stepping out of the role that was created for them by members of the urban society the farmer opened himself/herself up to being ridiculed in the press (Robinson, 1966). The ridicule took the form of a cartoon caricature of the farmer as a “rube.” The associated meaning of “rube farmer” was unpleasant at best and condescending at its worst, and in order to combat that image, the *Nonpartisan League Leader* (November 11, 1915) used the “rube farmer” as the victor in the fight against big business (Robinson, 1966). The farmers were able to voice their opinions and comments through the Letters to the Editor column, dispelling the image of the illiterate, uneducated and submissive farmer.

The Nonpartisan League was an agrarian movement, but at the same time rather than being a radical movement, it was a reformative movement in that it aimed at specific

issues rather than total transformation, and its collective action promoted modest changes within the framework of the existing social arrangement (Harper, 1988) through the development of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*.

Balazadeh (1949) postulated that movements such as the Nonpartisan League could be placed within the context of the “progressive” reform era. She noted that the reform agenda manipulated the connections between the state and monopoly capitalism. The struggle between the farmers and the grain consortiums was one of who would control wheat processing and marketing.

The ideologies of social movements can be thrust into the consciousness of the followers through the use of newspapers (Shore, 1988). J. A. Wayland was an editor and newspaper owner who was instrumental in thrusting the issues and ideology expounded on by the Socialist party into the public sphere (Shore, 1988). Shore stipulated that country editors, who were at the middle of American society, became the editors of radical presses, and were the people who brought the word of socialistic movements to the marketplace of the mass consumer market (pp. 3).

By publishing its ideology and platforms, the Nonpartisan League promised to make government responsive to the people, eradicate special privileges, improve the general welfare of the people and raise the standard of citizenship by disseminating knowledge of the rights, powers and duties of citizens in relation to government-government by the people (Gillette, 1916, pp. 757). Cronin (1997) agreed with Gillette’s finding that the language of class was used to reiterate that big business kept farmers and laborers impoverished and powerless. Power, income, and wealth can be seen as the tools to keep the laborers from bettering their positions in society (Gilbert, 1998).

The Nonpartisan League was able to use the *Leader* to direct a relatively effective campaign against the capitalist corporations and institutions (Giddens & Held, 1982). This involved recognition of the possibility of an overall reorganization in the institutional mediation of power and a belief that such reorganization can be brought about through class struggle.

Part of class-consciousness can be ascribed to what Hart (1996) described as a culture of solidarity, and that the two together represent relationships that emerge in action, and especially in workplace struggles. This meant that these cultures of solidarity appeared in new and somewhat uninstitutionalized ways, in the midst of collective action (Hart, 1996), and that it is not by language and speech alone that this happened, but that interaction and activity are a crucial part of the culture-making process. Hart (1996) defined collection action frames as cultural structures generated by movements. These collection action frames and cultures of solidarity explained why conditions were unjust, and showed why the existing conditions were not immutable. The combination of these two concepts indicated strategies for making change and argued that action, when taken by potential participants, made a difference. The *Nonpartisan League Leader* put emphasis on the financial condition of the farmer along with other issues such as political reform, and presented the argument that change in the current system was desired and needed.

During the time of the Nonpartisan League, North Dakota appeared to be an internal colony run by not only big business concerns in Minnesota, but also by the financial companies and the state legislature of Minnesota. An additional fact that contributes to the theory North Dakota was an internal colony was that a vast majority of

North Dakota's citizens were immigrants from other countries such as Norway, Germany, and Poland, and were still clinging to the ways of the "old country," and made them easy targets for the grain industry's unethical grading and regulatory practices (Robinson, 1985). Jary & Jary (1991) added that internal colonialism could involve subordination of periphery cultural groups by core dominant groups partly as a result of the uneven industrialization of territories. Each of these groups of immigrants developed their own newspapers to help them become better informed about the issues they were concerned about and to maintain ties to their traditions. One such newspaper was the *Normanden*, which was an opponent to the Nonpartisan League and its newspaper the *Nonpartisan League Leader* (Robinson, 1966).

By combining various organizations, Arthur C. Townley was able to achieve a formidable membership base. This base served as the springboard for establishing a status group of members. In turn, this affected a "class structuration" (Giddens, 1982) because class coincided with the criteria of status group membership. In essence this theory meant that social relations are seen as structured in time and space as the outcome and medium of social action (Giddens, 1982). The Nonpartisan League enveloped into its fold a disparate group of farmers. It rallied the farmers together to speak out against the financial and economic powers that held them on the periphery of the middle class. The *Leader* was instrumental in creating the political and social environment that became the impetus for the revolt that was about to occur.

According to Mader (1937), the League developed two plans, which eventually led to its demise. The first one had to do with the League's expansion to national proportions. The second plan was the implementation of press laws that had been passed by the League controlled legislature. An additional factor in to the League's demise, and ultimately its newspaper, was rather than embracing others into its political fold, it excluded some who could have helped its cause such as women, other ethnic groups, and urban dwellers from the state's many towns and cities (Remele, 1974).

CHAPTER III

HISTORY

During the early and late 1900's the Socialist Party was active throughout the Midwest. It recruited members and established an organized platform striving for institutional change by expanding democracy not only in government but also in industry and other living areas, and calling for the replacement of "private capitalism" (Turner, 1996). Many of its ideals were similar to those found in Europe such as state owned banks and business properties.

Another movement that had developed in the late 1890's was the North Dakota arm of the American Society of Equity which had been working with the state government to appropriate funds for a state run mill and elevator in order to market North Dakota farmer's grain rather than shipping it to Minneapolis. Still another movement that needs to be mentioned is the North Dakota Federation of Labor which was protesting the effects of maturing capitalism such as low wages, high transportation costs, etc. (Soloutus, 1946).

By 1914 the symbol of a state owned elevator provided a focal point for the development of a movement that extended far beyond the issue of the elevator. Once the Nonpartisan League secured the legislative branch of state government, it set about to allocate and grant entitlements to farmers and farming institutions. These initial

allocations served to reflect, to legitimate and to reinforce social understandings about presumptive rights of the farmers' ownership (Sunstein, 1997).

In 1915 a political revolt started its sweep across the prairie lands of the United States. This revolt consumed an era and left vestiges of itself on the land that it trampled. The Nonpartisan League (NPL), as a social movement, was the culmination of many years of struggle by farmers to receive fair and equitable treatment from the state government, grain elevators, mill owners and financial institutions. By incorporating platforms and issues from other agrarian movements such as the Farmer's Union, the NPL became the "voice" of the farmer.

Though it appeared the Nonpartisan League spontaneously arrived on the political scene and ignited what was to be termed a "prairie fire" by John E. Pickett (May 18, 1918), a journalist for the *Country Gentleman*, it was in fact a blending of ideologies and policies of previous farmer's movements. There had been several attempts to organize farmers in the state of North Dakota and surrounding states to fight the perceived injustices being perpetrated against them by grain elevator operators, railway companies and the mill operators. There was the Farmer's Union, the American Equity Society and then there was the Nonpartisan League. Many of these organizations had boards of directors and a chairman of the board. The Nonpartisan League followed the organizational pattern displayed by these organizations, but North Dakota history credits only one man with organizing the Nonpartisan League.

Remele (1974) in the introduction to Morlan's Political Prairie Fire described Arthur C. Townley as a "peripatetic organizer who went from idea to idea and movement to movement" (pp. XVII). Townley had been the chief recruiting officer for the Socialist

Party as the head of the Organization Department (Morlan, 1985), and was one of the prime organizers of the Nonpartisan League and its newspaper the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. His charismatic personality was so overwhelming that his name and the political antics of the Nonpartisan League are still strongly linked in North Dakota history. One cannot read about the Nonpartisan League without Townley's name and political feats being mentioned. In fact so powerful was the persona of Townley that many people had a hard time separating the Nonpartisan League and Townley.

The Nonpartisan League was a coalition of those farmer organizations brought together through the work of a few key players—Arthur Townley, William Lemke, Lynn J. Frazier, Arthur Noyes and farmers like John Hanson, Fred B. Wood, and A. E. Bowen (Remele, 1974). Morlan (1985, pp. XVIII) described Arthur Townley as one of the great natural leaders of protest movements. Townley is viewed as a person in search of power and influence (Morlan, 1985 & Robinson, 1966). Here was a man who could speak eloquently and persuade people to rally to a cause that was advertised as being pluralistic in theory, but was later viewed as serving the needs of a select few, namely—Townley and his cohorts.

This political revolt has left some indelible markings on the landscape and financial underpinnings of state, local and county governments. The North Dakota State Mill remains as a concrete reminder of the Nonpartisan League's clout in state governmental affairs. The lending procedures of State Bank of North Dakota's are rooted in legislation passed by a Nonpartisan League controlled legislature from 1916-1919 (Morlan, 1985).

The Nonpartisan League is responsible for North Dakota's high ideal of a quality education for all. Rural school systems stand as evidence of those same policies as does the law that requires young people to attend school until the age of 17. When the Nonpartisan League's legislature raised the compulsory school age to 17, it provided free transportation for students who lived more than 2 1/2 miles from the school and it provided legislation that stabilized and consolidated rural schools.

Commercial businesses still feel the ramifications of Nonpartisan League policies in such programs as workmen's compensation and minimum wage legislation. Since the days of the Nonpartisan League, financial institutions have been required to give notification of impending foreclosure.

The farmers accomplished these goals through active participation in the Nonpartisan League, a movement that was seen as radical (Robinson, 1966 & Morlan, 1985) but could be more aptly described as conservative (McVeigh, 1999) because the farmers were responding to shrinking purchasing power, loss of control over their elected officials and shrinking levels of power and influence to control their own livelihoods.

The Nonpartisan League needed a medium to take its message to the farmers in North Dakota. League organizers realized that without a channel to communicate to their members, their organization would not succeed. By publishing their own newspaper, the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, the organization assured their readers that their opinions and concerns would be addressed, and that the ideology of the organization would be accurately portrayed (Kessler, 1984).

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

To study the phenomenon of newspapers as agents of social change, a case study method was used to examine issues of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* from September 1915-1916. I chose this method because it would provide insight into time and its ramifications for social life. According to historical records, the impact of the Nonpartisan League impacted the lives of the farmers in the 1910s and 1920s, but that vestiges of their legislative acts still remain intact today.

Orum, Feagin and Sjoberg (1991) defined a case study as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. They continue in their definition by stating a case study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources. The single phenomenon in this case study is the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, and I used several resources to include microfilm copies of the *Leader* to draw my information out of.

The case study method was selected because it provided advantages for studying a newspaper as a unit of social change (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991). I tried to grasp the nature of the social action as had been experienced by the members of the Nonpartisan League, and to get at the human understandings that underlie the action being portrayed (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991). Additionally, the case study approach provided a means by which to view the Nonpartisan League and *Nonpartisan League*

Leader as a vehicle to advance our knowledge about significant social issues during the 1910s-1920s.

Specifically, I scrutinized the Letters to the Editor submitted by the farmers of North Dakota to express their dissension and to encourage one another to stand up and fight against the big business concerns in Minneapolis and North Dakota such as the mill and grain elevator owners. I investigated whether the *Nonpartisan League Leader* became the voice of the farmers and whether it played an important part in the success of the Nonpartisan League to implement its agenda and change the political landscape of North Dakota.

In order to accomplish this case study, I first lightly read all the Letters to Editor on approximately 145 pages in 54 issues of the Nonpartisan League that covered the time frame of September 23, 1915-September 28, 1916. Next, I reread the letters and noted how the farmers referred to themselves and each other, what terms or phrases they used to identify themselves, and if the farmers felt they were in a class separated from the rest of society. I also highlighted how they continuously exhorted each other to band together to create a solid wall of opposition to the political, financial and economic institutions in place. In addition to those two ideas, I also wanted to investigate what issues were relevant to the farmer, and if their discussions and debates about those issues were effective in creating the types of social change the farmers were striving to attain.

By determining what themes were prevalent in the Letters to the Editor section of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, I showed that the farmers' voice was heard and that their voice subsequently brought about a change to the policies, programs and legislation that governed farm life. Additionally, I tried to present the picture that the changes made have

remained and that it is because of the *Leaders'* influence that those changes were developed and implemented.

I noted too that many of the letters written to the editor by the farmers were letters that attested to how great it was to have a paper such as the *Leader*, and how a paper that was for the farmer was very much needed. I found very few instances of disconfirming letters, and those I did find were used to act the opposition, and counter the negative press being given by the mainstream press.

However, throughout the review of the letters to the editor, I did notice that there were very few letters written by women and that most of those letters were relegated to the women's section of the *Leader*. I noted only three letters written by women in the main letters to the editor section. Two of those letters tackled the women's suffrage movement and the third was just a letter stating how proud the writer was to be a farmer's wife.

Since their inception, newspapers have been the purveyors of information and agents of persuasion. Some were created to combat the inequalities of the society of their time such as *The Cherokee Phoenix*, or to fulfill a need created by the advent of certain types of movements such as *Freedom's Journal* (Biagi, 1999). The question guiding this case study is: Whether newspapers are simply agents of information and persuasion, or are they in fact major contributors to social change in society? Put another way, can newspapers be the key element in creating social change by providing the disadvantaged and oppressed an outlet with which to vent their frustration and bring about necessary changes to social order and structure?

Theories of communication that deal with factors such as sentence structure, meanings, information processing and persuasion will be reviewed to see what, if any, of these factors contributed to the change in attitudes, behavior or beliefs of the subscribers to the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. Littlejohn (1983) states that there are three dimensions to meaning—referential, experiential, and purposive. If in fact newspapers are agents of change, then the subscribers to those newspapers ascribe meaning to the way the sentences are structured and the words used. If the issue is presented in such a way as to sway the reader to the point of view the newspaper is promoting, then it is conceivable that the reader will change his or her opinion.

Kessler (1984) noted that dissident journals attempted to perform two major functions: education of the unconverted public, and persuading the skeptical that their cause was righteous and worth supporting. She argued that those in power rarely read dissident journals because people tend to seek out those messages they believe in. She stipulated that because populist and socialistic presses attacked basic American beliefs of private ownership, competition and the role of government that their causes never became popular. As its first step toward meeting its social and political goals, the Nonpartisan League developed the *Nonpartisan League Leader* to define and communicate those goals (Kessler, 1984).

Shore (1951) noted that farmers would weigh the merits of socialism against the competing claims of religious papers, trade-union papers, and mainstream papers. Shore (1951) postulated that socialism was intensely American, and that those who brought this information to the public were shaped by American values and competed for success in a new American culture. He noted that many of the publishers and editors of socialist

publishing history were men and women who shared a belief in the efficacy of political action even as they came to view the old parties as morally bankrupt. The founders and backers of the Nonpartisan League and the *Leader* had survived the depression of 1893 and shared a common background—they were brought up in the Midwest (Shore, 1951, pp. 5).

The view that newspapers are a basic unit of social change provided a window by which to view the ebb and flow of social life over a specific period of time (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991). The common core of shared experiences appeared to be the foundation for the message presented by the Nonpartisan League *Leader*. The farmers gave the appearance of identifying themselves as being in the same class structure and financial straits. The *Leader* became their vehicle of choice by which to combat the social inequalities of their time (Biagi, 1999). Kessler (1984) echoed that same sentiment when she noted that dissident journals became the tool of persuasion for populist and socialist movements.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

I looked at the language in the Letters to the Editor of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* to present the idea that the *Leader's* editors were able to influence public opinion, and generate action on the part of its readers towards resolution of the issues, or situations, facing the farmers in the 1910s. Noted too was how these resolutions brought about change in the farmers' way of life and created stable political and economic foundations. Having reviewed the literature on newspapers and social movements, I addressed how the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was used to create a sense of personal identification and self-esteem for the farmers, and how it was instrumental in creating an atmosphere of community.

Throughout my review of the Letters to the Editor in the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, I noticed that several themes emerged. One theme was the notion that the farmers needed to band together to present a united front against big business and the financial and economic powers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Another theme that surfaced was one of class-consciousness. I noticed that the farmers rarely labeled themselves as "farmers," but labeled themselves as "brothers," or "producers" and identified themselves as being in a particular class whether it was expressed in economic, political or financial terms. I also noticed that when they did identify themselves as farmers, it was mostly used in a generic way such as farmers should shake hands (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan*

League Leader, September 23, 1915, pp. 2). I also noticed the how eloquently and sophisticated the farmers expressed themselves with the written word.

Using Lippmann's (1922) analogy of the "pictures in our head," I found that *The Nonpartisan League Leader* skilfully painted pictures of the farmers as David and big business as Goliath. The political cartoons the *Leader* used as its attention getter on its cover page of the paper were always structured around the image of the farmers defeating big business. The farmers who wrote into the *Leader* reinforced these pictures with the words used in their letters to the editor. S. J. Aandahl wrote, "It behooves us farmers, the rank and file, to do our share, to stand together in one solid mass, to vote and work as a unit, to show the gang that we are men capable of looking after own interests" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 7, 1915, pp. 7). Fred Groth voiced his sentiments this way, "Brother farmers, why all this filibustering and cataleptic fits that the political gangsters of this state are having over the organization of farmers? Is it their fear for the welfare of the farmers or their fear of the march of justice" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 28, 1915, pp. 13).

The farmers of the Nonpartisan League were aware they had been under the thumb of big business concerns not only in the financial realm, but in the political realm as well. E. M. Watkins alluded to this domination when he wrote, "You are building a machine that will crush the idle parasites and liberate the laborer" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 9, 1915, pp. 9).

When viewing the *Nonpartisan League Leader* and the Letters to Editor column from the standpoint of McLuhan's "the message is the medium," I found that in several instances this theory could be applied to the *Leader* because the farmers in the

Nonpartisan League gave credence to the message being perpetuated through the *Leader*. The Nonpartisan League generated information on issues that were of importance to the farmers and not covered by mainstream presses. It also structured those issues to match its ideology. For instance, the *Leader* surveyed its' subscribers about the types of laws the farmers would like to see implemented. Once the farmers starting writing into the Letters to the Editor section of the *Leader* about the types of laws they would like to see, many of those ideas were presented as a political cartoon on the banner page of the *Leader*. The banner page of the October 7, 1915 issue of the *Leader* showed a two-panel cartoon depiction between how big business was keeping the farmer under control in the top panel, and then the bottom panel showing a new day dawning for the farmers with the farmers in control.

Not only was the *Nonpartisan League Leader* designed around farm issues and the League's ideology, it also was written in the vernacular used by the farmers. By writing in the vernacular of the farming communities it served, the *Leader* intensified the public debate on the issues the *Leader* thought were important. While discussing the differences between the *Leader* and the presses owned and operated by big business, H. Tosdale wrote, "newspapers are great molders of public opinion and should be free. As long as they are controlled by Big Biz so long will the people remain silent tools" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, May 4, 1916, pp. 16). After heightening the farmers' awareness of the issues surrounding them, the *Leader* opened its pages for the farmers to express their views and opinions.

The *Leader* guided the conversation around those goals, ideas, and philosophies the League felt were important, and provided a communication network that helped the

farmers to identify with one another. The farmers shared common goals and a common sense of identity. Common goals such as farmers gaining control of the political policies that affected them such as when Ed Wood stated, "The farmers of North Dakota are beginning to realize the fact that the men who furnish campaign funds have certain policies, and we will no longer accept the candidates handed to them by Big Business"(Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 9, 1915, pp. 9), or being freed from the grasp of big business as noted by R. C. Flever when he wrote, "With the earnest hope that the Nonpartisan League will not only fight to free the farmer from the greedy grasp of big business but that it will also use its power to disseminate information and combat the military leech which threatens to draw this nation's blood" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 16, 1915, pp. 11) point to the farmers growing awareness of needing to be heard and taken seriously.

The *Nonpartisan League Leader* used the farmers' emerging consciousness to garner support for political and economic reforms that were needed to improve and strengthen the farmers' position in society. The Nonpartisan League was able to pull together a voting block of farmers for 1916 election. The League accomplished this through a number of political advertisements it ran in the *Nonpartisan League Leader* and by stumping for its candidates.

Many farmers traveled over rough terrain, and swollen streams and rivers, in order to attend precinct meetings and vote (Morlan, 1985). Voter turnout, and the subsequent victory by the Nonpartisan League to secure the Legislature and Governor's office, was one of the highest in the history of North Dakota (Robinson, 1966). Legislation had moved forward on implementing those laws the farmers felt were

important to them (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, Letters to the Editor, December 2, 1915-February 3, 1916). Many of the initiatives that the League fought for echoed the sentiments of the farmers. Some of those initiatives were for a state mill and bank, rural schooling, rural roads and workman's compensation.

Through the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, the Nonpartisan League was able to secure the support of its membership and nonmembers alike for these initiatives. By appealing to the farmer's sense of justice and fairness, the Nonpartisan League was able to further its political agenda for the state. "Stick together, that is all we have to do. Now we have elected our delegates, there is no question in my mind but what the delegates will nominate men who will serve the people of this state, and not the so-called political gang that has dominated and run this state of ours all these years," was how W. H. Oleson stated his feelings about the political situation in North Dakota (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, March 23, 1916, pp. 2). S. J. Aandahl in his letter to the editor on March 30, 1916 railed against the misinformation the *Normanden* was conveying to its readers. Aandahl stated, "The League was organized neither in favor of nor against resubmission of woman suffrage, but to get legislation which will be of benefit to the entire farming class of our state such as state hail insurance... and other laws of similar import." C. J. Sundahl stated it plainly when he wrote, "that the taxpayers needed to send the self-seeking politicians and plain grafters away and on the outside of the state capitol and the legislative halls at Bismarck," (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, April 6, 1916). By integrating the farmers' own views into the League platform, the *Leader* became an effective tool of propaganda.

Several farmers wrote into the Letters to the Editor column on April 6, 1916, to express their gratitude for a newspaper that enlightened the farmers on important issues, for the *Leader's* courage in exposing the grafters of big business, and for being willing to stand up and fight for the farmers. A reader from Kansas, J. B. Lashbrook wrote, "As I understand it the farmers are not proposing to revolutionize conditions, but they just simply want to continue existing under conditions by turning some of the benefits to their personal gain" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, April 27, 1916, pp. 7). His remarks were substantiated when Geo. W. Lynn wrote, "I believe the farmers have a right to organize and it should have been done years ago. Individual farmers can do nothing to secure just laws... in the face of organized capital, monied interests and professions, but organized they will become a force" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, April 27, 1916, pp. 7).

The *Leader* focused attention on the common problems facing farmers and provided news that the mainstream press did not. The farmers could rely on the *Leader* to provide them information and advice on grain prices, stock markets, state legislative actions, taxes, and financial information with regards to mortgages and interest rates. The farmers constantly wrote into the Letters to Editor to discuss their feelings about the taxes and the usurious rates the banks were charging on their mortgages and that the rate the farmers were being charged was not same as the rate received by their urban counterparts. For instance, George Lytes discussed how he felt about the robber system of the State of North Dakota and the fact that he had been paying 12 percent interest for the past eight years on his 2000 dollar loan (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, June 22, 1916). Or maybe writing about their frustration as did H. G. Timpe

when he penned his letter about farmers needing to be part of the discussion surrounding the making of laws and how the merchant “helps” the farmer by paying so much in taxes but fails to realize he (the merchant) receives his profit and money from the farmer.

Timpe wrote, “If the farmer can take that dollar and buy for 10 per cent and save 23 1/3 percent he can afford to pay a little more taxes and not run it through some other fellow’s pocket” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, August 3, 1916).

The farmers realized that they were being “fleeced” (Letters to Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915), and that the middlemen have been the recipients of the farmer’s hard earned money (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 9, 1915). In the February 10, 1916 issue of the *Leader*, K. Ornlie demanded “emancipation of the producers from the tyrannical despots now preying upon the innocent farmer.” The farmers knew that monopolies were, in part, responsible for the price of wheat. E. Westberg plainly stated in the March 16, 1916, Letters to the Editor column, “What determines the price of wheat? Monopolies! The interlocked millers, the markets, bankers and exporters own the mills, the elevators, the machinery, the markets, everything directly, except a few farms.” Farmers during this era were aware that they were not in direct control of their own lives and livelihood.

Nearly every issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, reviewed for this case study, had its members encouraging, and being supportive, of each other to be proud of being a “\$6.00 sucker” and to “stick” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915, pp. 2) to the organization. They knew it would only be through sticking together that they would be able to get the policies and laws that were important to the farmer implemented.

By writing in the vernacular of the communities it served, the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was able to provide the members of the community with information that would confirm what most of the farmers felt they always knew and that was that their state government was pro-“Big Biz” and that the financial and economic institutions from Minneapolis were in control of North Dakota.

The *Leader* was established to serve a particular constituency, therefore, it could be said that it developed a hybrid of news reporting by juxtaposing the facts and social values against the rhetoric of its hard line stance in opposition to the power elite. The Letters to the Editor from September 23, 1915 – September 28, 1916 are inundated with expressions of farmers being hard workers such as, “This farming is great business. Nothing but work from daylight till dark... Yes, this farming games is a peach” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 9, 1915, pp. 9), being underdogs to the capitalistic market such as, “The farmers are trying to perfect an organization so they can work together to better advantage... What we are after is better legislation and better prices for our produce so we can keep afloat and still supply the politician and the rest of you...” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, May 4, 1916, pp. 13), and of speaking out with one voice to create a responsive state government as did H. Strom when he wrote, “...I have never found the political lineup so that my vote could be cast for a better government, the good men being so few that their hands were tied. Since the farmers have taken a hand in the lineup we have a ticket before us... will give us an administration of justice for one all in the state” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, July 20, 1916).

The farmers wanted more control over their own lives and livelihood, and felt they had good reason to be suspicious and leery of big business and all that it represented. Many farmers expressed their frustrations at not being dealt with fairly by the economic and political institutions of the state and by being at the mercy of the grain elevators and mills that were owned by big businesses outside of the state. A. A. Webster wrote that he thought the League was “the dawn of a better day, a day not far distant when the toiler is to enjoy the fruits of his toil which now is so ruthlessly taken away from him” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 28, 1916, pp. 2). Maybe Paul Williams put it more succinctly when he wrote, “In a fertile state like ours, where agriculture is the main factor; not matter who is last the farmers is first and as farmers all we ask is a square deal. We want every man in the state a prosperous man. . . we all know now the millions we have been compelled to part with because of our ignorance and inaction” (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, August 17, 1916, pp. 2).

By calling the farmers to action, the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was able to develop a sense of community among the farmers. Its rhetorical style and ability to create the allusion of sameness placed the *Leader* in the unique position of being the bridge between the farmers and the institutions the farmers felt were undermining their status in society. The farmers expressed their discontent at being continually ignored and at not having their needs met. By providing the farmers with a means to communicate with each other, the *Leader* encouraged the farmers to voice their discontent and dissatisfaction. In their comments to the Letters to the Editors, the farmers articulated their dissatisfaction with the way they were being treated by the political, financial and legislative structures of the state. As the farmers began to realize there were others like them, they identified

with each other and actively participated in supporting each other through the written word. The culmination of this interaction was the creation of a community of farmers who shared the same interests, goals, ideas, attitudes, values and beliefs.

This community of farmers quickly developed into a reformative social movement. They realized that if they did not speak up for themselves, or stand up for themselves against the political and economic machines that were controlled by the elite, no one else would take up their banner and fight for them.

The *Leader* lead the way by calling for the farmers to take a stand against the repressive grain, railroad, and marketing concerns that profited at the expense of the farmers. Farmers like J. F. Crosby who wanted the farmers to unite so that they could march in victory against those who would hold them down (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, February 3, 1916, pp. 2). Or like Cornelius P. Epp who wanted room for the farmer along with political and industrial freedom (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, February 3, 1916, pp. 2). These two farmers knew that there had to be a better way of doing business. They knew that without action on the farmers part that farmers would be kept in the status and social position that big business wanted them to remain in.

While the League itself was the body, the *Leader* was the heart and soul of the League. The *Leader* provided the mechanism by which farmers were able to exhort one another to become part of an organization that was run with the farmers' welfare in mind and was an advocate for farmers and not an oppressor of farmers. By publishing the voice of the farmers through the Letters to the Editor column, the *Leader* became the single

most important tool to gather consensus among the farmers. The *Leader* carried out the platform of the League and initiated the first salvo in the fight for the farmers' rights.

The *Leader* gathered strength as it culled the farmers for their opinions, attitudes, values and beliefs. The *Leader* tried to create the picture of farmers as victorious over big business, and as being the masters of their own destiny. The language used by the newspaper had the desired effect. Farmers responded by providing the League with the membership necessary to carry out the attack against the state legislature, and the political and economic structures that impinged on the financial well being of the farmer.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Progressive era farm presses have been seen as linking the isolated farmer to the politically active business influences. Not only were farm presses meant to link the farmer to business, they were also used to provide an agenda setting influence (Caudill, 1997) on the issue of rural finances (Shulman, 1999). Though *The Nonpartisan League Leader* was not considered a farm press, it did fill the need of its farmer constituency by presenting many of the same issues such as finance reforms and legislative reforms, and better farming tips. It also provided a link to other rural communities.

In the early 1910s, there was a perceived notion that the upper class people from the Minneapolis/St Paul financial and business area held tight reins on the grain exchange and pricing of grain, and the agricultural business of the farmers in North Dakota. These same forces in Minneapolis and St. Paul controlled the number of loans and dollar amount of the loans the farmers could apply for and receive for their crops, mortgages, and for purchasing farm equipment. The perception was that "big biz" (*Nonpartisan League Leader, October 7, 1915*) was holding the farmers down. *The Nonpartisan League Leader* was instrumental in creating the farmer's class-consciousness and used that emerging consciousness to rally support for political and economic reforms needed to improve and strengthen the farmers' position in society.

The Nonpartisan League felt that the mainstream press was not paying enough attention to the plight of the farmer and the issues that the farmers felt were important to

them such as a state elevator and mill. Through the creation of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, the Nonpartisan League was able to ensure that the issues and events that affected North Dakota farmers were made known to others in similar situations.

The Nonpartisan League frequently gave further details about its goals through the use of rallies and its newspaper. The newspaper provided the means with which to explain the ideologies of the League and provided its readership with a mode of response—The Letters to the Editor column in the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. The newspaper, itself, provided the pulpit for the League's debates and conversation with its members. The League wrapped its news in satirical political cartoons and biting articles on the partners of "Big Biz." The newspaper would invoke the notion of the farmer as the oppressed and challenger to the ethics, business practices and governmental legislative actions of the power elite and their cohorts.

The Letters to the Editor section of the *Leader* recognized that the farmers needed to remain united and supportive of the League's goals by expressing sentiments such as sticking together, and exhorting each other to "do a little driving ourselves in place of letting the other fellow drive the whole bunch of us with a "jerk" line" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915). If the farmers felt they were involved in the determining their own destiny, then the *Leader* had accomplished one of its purposes—challenging the legitimacy of the political and economic institutions on which it was based.

One way in which they were assured that their constituency was involved and motivated to respond to issues and policies was through the steady stream of feedback provided through the Letters to the Editor column. Using the information from the letters,

the League structured its newspapers around those issues that the farmers felt had the most impact on their livelihood.

To that end the League also purchased several of the state's major newspapers such as the Fargo Courier, and created the Northwest Publisher's Service in 1917 (Gillette, 1919). By accumulating these newspapers, the League hoped to promote a sense of community by providing news from other groups sympathetic to the League, including labor organizations and the American Society of Equity (Cronin, 1997).

Barth (1963) cautioned that the values by which people appraised individuals and issues were immeasurably affected by the values that their newspapers set before them. *The Nonpartisan League Leader* definitely sought to change the values of its readership through the way in which it presented information about big business and the state government. Because it was diligently seeking those changes, *The Nonpartisan League Leader* appeared to be upholding the primary functions of the press, which is to inform, and be responsible to its readers. The *Leader* also upheld the notion that newspapers are essential to a self-governing society and that the press is a strategically vital institution, parallel to the public school system (Lyons, 1959). Phrases such "do our own driving," (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915), "farmer as his own boss" (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, January 27, 1916) and "take our turn at the wheel" (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, March 23, 1916) indicate that the farmers were ready to have a self-governing society, and the Nonpartisan League and its paper were seen as necessary institutions of that society.

The Nonpartisan League, through the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, attempted to alter the political and economic system, which marginalized the farmer. The League

made an effort to bring about these changes by using its newspaper as a vehicle for organizing picnics, rallies, and meetings. The League paper would announce the places where these events were happening, and would provide a platform for voicing one's opinion and feedback on policies, elections and agricultural information to its constituency through the Letters to the Editor column. Through the use of a common language, the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was able to establish an interconnection among farmers from the various counties within the state of North Dakota. The League's goal was to change the attitudes and behaviors of the farmers, and bring about a change in state laws, and in financial, economic and farm policies.

The *Nonpartisan League Leader* became the "voice" of the League and its membership. It explained, defended, motivated, and advocated for economic and legislative reform. It exhorted the farmer to get involved, to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, and it offered the farmer a way in which to connect with likeminded individuals. The first issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915, provided evidence of the farmers' willingness to be identified with the League and one another. In Letters to the Editor, September 23, 1915, farmers McIntyre, Krug and Henderson wrote that they knew "they were not alone in the fight against those interests who were out to fleece the farmer, and that an organization such as the Nonpartisan League was much needed by the farmers in North Dakota."

Another goal of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was to dispel those stereotypes propagated by the mainstream press' depiction of the farmers as ignorant dupes who have affiliated themselves with the Nonpartisan League and parted with their six dollars (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 7, 1915, pp. 7).

The newspaper was the tool used to obtain a collective consensus from the farmers, and this in turn was used as a tool to upset the status quo and change the political and economic system to the benefit of the farmer. One way the League garnered support for its policies was through the use of surveys placed in the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. In the November 18, 1915 issue of the *Leader* farmers were exhorted to write in with the ten laws they felt were the most important to be passed by the state legislature. By the time of the December 2, 1915, issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, farmers began to write the Letters to the Editor column (pp. 8) and suggested laws that ranged from consolidation of rural schools to laws relating to cooperative enterprises and women's right to vote. They continued to send in their suggestions through the February 3, 1916, issue of the *Leader*, adding laws such as state owned packing plants, single tax on farm lands, establishing a budget system for disbursements of state funds, and a law to do away with all personal property taxes and implement a real estate tax (pp. 2).

Through the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, the League's programs and goals were presented. These programs and goals mirrored the organization's analysis of the economic conditions of contemporary society. The *Leader* argued that unregulated capitalism had permitted selfish individuals to monopolize control of necessary channels of distribution of goods and commodities (Remele, 1974). Its constituency agreed. The May 18, 1916, Letters to the Editor were fraught with expressions such as "not grabbers like the state has been use to," "supposed friends of the farmers," and "the old gang that is now in the saddle must be ousted" to show support for the League's stand against banking institutions and their high usurious rates, railroad company's freight rates, and

the “friends” of the farmer who had been busy looking after the interests of the political machine that was in place.

In order to perceive what really goes on in the world, North Dakotans relied on the press to help them understand their world. Wolfson (1985), Lippmann (1997) and McQuail (1999) state that the newspaper was expected to serve its readers with truth. What ensured this truth was freedom that guaranteed the availability of perfect information and perfect information that guaranteed the rationality of means (Carey, 1982). Albert Anderson in his letter to the editor, December 30, 1915, stated that the *Nonpartisan League Leader's* every word was true when he wrote, “The Nonpartisan League Leader is the only paper worth reading for the farmers. Every word in it is the truth.” Other farmers who wrote into the Letters to the Editor column expressed this sentiment.

Lippmann (1922) stated that the decisions used to determine what is printed, where stories are placed, how much space the story will occupy, and what emphasis it will have are all part of the selection process a newspapers uses to reach its readership. The decision of what is printed and where it is placed are used to provoke feeling in the reader, or inducing him to feel a sense of personal identification with the stories he is reading (Lippmann, 1922).

Carey (1982) stated that Lippmann implied that the ground for discussion of the mass media had to be shifted from questions of the public, power and freedom to questions of knowledge, truth and stereotypes. It was here that the *Nonpartisan League Leader* attempted to turn the tables on the mainstream press by educating the farmers on

issues, and by providing what the *Leader* saw as accurate depictions of the situations and events surrounding the farmer and dispelling the stereotype of the rube farmer.

H. E. Behrens was the first editor of *The Nonpartisan League Leader* and was assisted by Charles Edward Russell. Russell had been touted as a muckraker and had been a staff writer for *Reason's Magazine*. It was through Russell's pen and counsel that *The Leader* became the most effective organ of political propaganda in the Northwest (Bahmer, pp. 457). The Nonpartisan League believed that the only way the farmer could do anything to improve his condition politically was to establish a string of newspapers owned and operated by the League of farmers themselves. The first issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was assured of a circulation greater than any weekly or daily newspaper in the state because every League member automatically became a subscriber (Gillette, 1919)

Readers will pay the subscription price when it suits them and just as easily stop paying when it no longer suits them. This is one of the tenets of newspaper ownership that circulation rides on. Circulation drives production. It generates the capital to help keep the newspaper profitable, but it must be the size and type of circulation that advertisers want before they will advertise in a particular newspaper. Many of the alternative, or radical, newspapers had substantial subscriber lists even when considering their locales—*Nonpartisan League Leader* had 30,000 to 40,000 North Dakota subscribers (Mader, 1937 & Morlan, 1985) and J. A. Wayland's *Appeal to Reason* had 75,000 (Shore, 1988), but initially neither paper used advertisers to gain their operating capital.

Behrens and Russell determined what was printed, where the stories were placed, and where the letters to editor were positioned. Their audience became a part of the fight being depicted through their personal identification with others in the same class and struggle. Farmers during this era were definitely cognizant of economic, social and political differences between themselves and the elite.

Ellsworth (1982) stated that despite all statistics of “relative prosperity” the simple fact of the matter was that the average North Dakota farm family earned only about as much as its counterpart in the unskilled urban working class. One way in which the farmer tried to protect himself and his livelihood was through forming cooperatives. These cooperatives were seen as a means to control the pricing of the farmer’s grain and its fair marketability. These cooperatives were highly organized and provided yet another networking link for the Nonpartisan League to use.

Remele (1974) stated that the League wanted to build a producer-consciousness by giving tangible benefits to its newspaper’s subscribers. The League’s building blocks were the ideas of self-determination for all people, anti-imperialism and a faith in democratic principles. Remele noted the League’s newspaper, banks and consumer stores marked the Nonpartisan League’s efforts to rearrange the American economic system. The *Leader* gave the clarion call for farmers to rise up and unite on a class-interest basis and on the right to class self-determination (Remele, 1974). On the cover page of the inaugural issue of the *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915, there was a political cartoon showing the farmer-legislator, with his hand on the shoulder of the Big Biz caricature saying, “You’re fired! I’ll do this job myself.”

These same concepts ran as leitmotifs throughout all the issues of the *Leader* from September 1915-September 1916. For instance in the September 23, 1915 issue, J. C. Neum wrote that the Nonpartisan League “will change the whole game of politics from one of secrecy to one of publicity.” One of the League’s organizers stated in the October 7, 1915, Letters to the Editor column that “the farmers have always been the victims of class legislation as long as North Dakota has been a state.” Perhaps E. E. Kurtz stated the farmers’ cause succinctly when he wrote, “What we are after is better legislation, and better prices for our produce so we can keep afloat and still supply the politicians and the rest of you with bread and butter, the same as we have been doing heretofore,” (Letters to Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, May 4, 1916, pp. 13).

John Henderson in his letter to the editor (pp. 5) on September 23, 1915, wrote, “We are in the business to unload the usurious money lender, insurance shark and the farmer’s nightmare, the Chamber of Commerce.” Ira Frendburg wrote his letter to the editor (pp. 7) on October 7, 1915, and in it he called the stock exchange in New York, the Chicago Board of Trade, Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, and the Grain Exchange of Omaha “chief gambling joints,” and their work labeled as “illegal.” Thos. Wood (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 28, 1915, pp. 13) railed against what he termed “a code of parasite made laws” that compel farmers to pay 10 and 12 percent interest while other farmers in other countries and states were able to get one percent interest rates through their states, or countries. Others questioned how the price of grain could change from what is offered on one day (51 cents a bushel) to the price given on the day of shipment (44 cents a bushel), as did Christenson and Christenson in their letters to the editor (pp. 13) on December 30, 1915. Even when discussing the laws they wanted

implemented, farmers wrote that they would like to see the abolishment of taxes on their mortgages as T. Tackman did on January 6, 1916 (pp. 14).

The League's political leaders and congressional representatives were outspoken opponents of state and federal government policies that did little to sustain the agricultural economy and continued to oppress the farmers of North Dakota. Issues such as the freeze on grain prices by the federal government during World War I, the importation of the Chinese for additional wartime farm labor, and the Canadian Reciprocity Treaty were not seen as furthering the best interests of the farmer. The Nonpartisan League's foundation of its policies was the doctrine of self-determination. It also believed that no person or people should dominate another economically. This stand on anti-imperialism made the Nonpartisan League a formidable enemy to those institutions and combinations of institutions and individuals who threatened to reduce the individual's economic freedom. (Remele, 1974)

Essentially, the Nonpartisan League was aware that unregulated capitalism had permitted selfish individuals to monopolize control of necessary channels of distribution of goods and commodities (Remele, 1974). The monopolized control of these channels allowed these middlemen to manipulate prices and supply, thereby maximizing their profits at the expense of the producer and consumer (Remele, 1974).

Another fact to take into consideration was that agricultural expansion slowed down when the frontier closed and rich lands in large quantities were no longer available. Essentially this meant that the farmer needed to produce more crops with less land to feed a growing United States population. Land that was still available for agriculture proved to be of poor quality and it did not increase productivity proportionally creating a situation

where demand was greater than supply. Farmers had to find new ways to meet the increasing demands for agricultural products for this growing population. From 1900-1910, however, the cost for farmland in North Dakota increased after the abundance of cheap, rich land ceased to be available. A great deal of money used for improving the farmland had increased the farm mortgage and that resulted in raised farm values.

(Bowers, 1974)

As the signs of a declining agriculture economy became evident and organizations such as the Nonpartisan League began to develop to counteract that decline, the government became concerned and setup the Country Life Commission. The Commission stated that there were manifestations of an “unequal development of our contemporary citizen.” The Commission’s report noted that there was a loss of people in the agricultural communities--63.9 percent in 1890 to 53.7 percent in 1910; that there was a decrease in the number of those actually employed in agriculture; that there was acceleration of migration of country people to the city because of the increasing efficiency in agriculture which required fewer people on the land. It also noted that there was dissatisfaction with poor schools, lack of conveniences and recreational facilities, inadequate roads, isolation, and the alleged sterility of farm life. (Bowers, 1974)

When the United States Government’s Country of Life Commission presented its report on farmers and country living, it identified a vast array of handicaps that kept the farms from developing. The first two were linked to the financial well being of the farmer—capital was small and volume of his transactions was limited. The report went on to discuss the fact that rural society was not highly organized because there was a lack of knowledge on exact agriculture conditions and possibilities of their own region; there

was a lack of good training for country life in the schools, and the fact that farmers were disadvantaged because they were not able to secure adequate returns on their products. It also identified structural problems within the agricultural community such as lack of good roads, lack of institutions and incentives that tie the laboring man to the soil, and lack of adequate supervision of public health. (Bowers, 1974)

The farmers and the League were cognizant that these conditions existed and were determined to create a better living for themselves. Farmers like T. Wood stated, "Hats off to the *Nonpartisan Leader*! Its coming marks an epoch in the hard, bitter struggle of the producing class towards the ultimate goal of industrial and political justice." This was in his letter to the editor of the *Leader* on October 28, 1915. Mr. A. Knutson, heartily agreed with T. Wood when he stated, "Mr. Randall demonstrated... farmers are being exploited by Big Biz and showed us how we may extricate ourselves from its clutches by uniting upon the political field as farmers—as producers of the wealth which really makes North Dakota great as a state" in his January 27, 1916, letter to the *Leader* editor. Mr. C. Epp wrote, "... we will stick to this thing until we have room for ourselves, political and industrial freedom," in his February 10, 1916, letter to the *Leader* editor.

The Nonpartisan League can be seen as a reaction to social controls being imposed on the farmers by outside forces i.e. railroad owners, elevator companies and the banking industry. Weber believed virtually any group may be seized upon provided it can be used for the monopolization of specific, usually economic opportunities (Giddens & Held, 1982). The unfair grading practices of the grain elevator managers as recorded by Frank Foster when he wrote of the need to "secure legislation to break the stranglehold of the wheat ring and the milling combine upon the market" (Letters to the Editor,

Nonpartisan League Leader, July 20, 1916) and the apparent lack of cooperation by the railroad commission as written by Peter Romsaas when he complained about the lack of rail cars and the fact that the farmer elevator he used was forced to close because of the lack of rail cars, but that none of the other elevators in town closed because of the same problem (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, June 15, 1916) can be regarded as inherently exploitative even though the relationship is not one of surplus extraction deriving from property ownership (Giddens & Held, 1982).

To further their cause, the League organizers held picnics for the farmer and his family, and then used the opportunity to bolster their campaign for their reforms. Taking their movement one step further, the League launched their own newspaper rather than relying on the "old gang press" (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, October 7, 1915).

Establishing their own newspaper assured their constituency that they were receiving accurate, straightforward information about the issues that concerned the North Dakota farmer (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, December 30, 1915 & August 10, 1916). This was necessary to publicize their cause and gain support and influence.

While the *Nonpartisan League Leader* attempted to improve the conditions of the farmers, it also sought to end the subordination of the farmer to "Big Biz" (Dovre, 1963). In order to reach these goals, the Nonpartisan League's propagated its' political platform, through the *Leader*, as one of more legislative and financial control for the farmer. The farmer seemed to feel powerless against the bureaucratic structure of the grain elevator companies and the railroad owners. Mr. C. J. Anderson stated the farmer's dilemma as "through the manipulation of bankers, machine trusts and Big Biz, I am now ruined and must leave the home where I have lived since boyhood" in his letter to the editor on April

27, 1916. McVeigh (1999) stated that when segments of the population feel that they are losing their purchasing power in both economic and political exchange then there is an increase in the demand for conservative collective action. This feeling of powerlessness tended to embitter the farmer against the elite and power brokers, and further seemed to create a feeling of helplessness.

The Nonpartisan League movement in North Dakota can be placed within the context of the "progressive" reform era of the 20th century and that the reform agenda altered the direct connection between monopoly capitalism and the state. On one level power was initially manifested in the process of struggle between the grain combine and farmers over who controls wheat processing and marketing. Through the use of *Nonpartisan League Leader*, the leaders of the organization mobilized their resources to democratize the decision-making processes in formal and economic arenas through electoral reforms. These leaders directed their appeals to the personal level as well. One such appeal was when the editor of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* December 2, 1915, surveyed its readers for the ten pieces of legislation that should be considered by the Nonpartisan League held state legislature. (Balazadeh, 1988)

Balazadeh (1988) saw the Nonpartisan League as a class movement even though it was originally organized as a farmer's party to contest legislative defeat of an important farm issue—a state owned grain elevator. However, Shilts (1997) posited that the League did not seek political revolution but material prosperity and was not necessarily any more committed to democracy and social justice than were small town North Dakota merchants, and defined themselves through the middle class—seeking self respect and prosperity. A reader of the *Leader* from South Dakota identified himself with the

League, and stated in his letter to the *Leader* editor of September 21, 1916, "We are yet in the beginning of the great struggle which must ensue before the powers that be will give over their political and industrial control to the people." He went on to say that he was willing to help along the educational propaganda of the League, and to help the farmer have a better social vision and an opportunity to solve his economic problems politically. D. N. Crouch (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 28, 1916) stated this sentiment another way "Believing as I do that this movement is the dawn of a better day, a day not far distant when the toiler is to enjoy the fruits of his toil which now is so ruthlessly taken away from him."

The argument can be made that the Nonpartisan League was a reaction to the policies and practices of big business concerns in the Minneapolis/St Paul area, and to the legislative practices that kept farmers from achieving a equal footing with their contemporaries and peers. From the inception of its newspaper, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, until its dismantling in the mid-1920s, the League continued its diatribe against those economic, financial and political institutions that exploited and silenced the farmer, and the farmers readily accepted the League's banner to fight for freedom from those powers.

The farmer's occupation was not valued nor was the farmer looked on as being a part of the middle/upper class (Gilbert, 1998). It appears as if they were looked as the means to an end (profit) by big business, financial institutions, and selects prosperous individuals. At this point in history, many of the smaller farmers in North Dakota had apparently little wealth and their income was barely enough to sustain their families. A

vast majority of the farmers were of Norwegian or Germanic descent and may have been seen as a group that was easy to keep under control (Wentz, 1968).

The farmers felt they were being denied access to resources readily available to the more urban residents of the state and nation. V. D. Cunningham wrote that what took him 20 years to earn, "Big Business" got it all under what Cunningham termed "present conditions" (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 28, 1916). A. A. Webster echoed that same sentiment when he lamented "... a day not far distant when the toiler is to enjoy the fruits of his toil which is now taken away from him" (Letter to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 28, 1916). Several farmers such as C. O. Swanson, L. R. Herring, and T. Pendray wrote that 1916 was an off year for the farmers and they had been unable to send in their three dollars for their subscription to the *Leader* and *Dakota Daily Leader* (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, Sept 7 & 14, 1916).

Farmers had little personal prestige unless they were one of the big farm holders who were used by the Nonpartisan League to garner new members (Robinson, 1966). When they became members of the Nonpartisan League, the farmers were able to increase their personal prestige through association with others like themselves. (Gilbert, 1998). This socialization process seemed to afford the farmers the opportunity to reinforce some of their beliefs and attitudes about their way of life. Farmer exhorted farmer to "wake up" and to fight for "honest business in the interest of the masses of the state" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 7, 1916). Mrs. G. C. Wraalstad proudly proclaimed "I have been a farmer's wife for 25 years but I have not

been so proud of being a farmer's wife as since the League started" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, August 24, 1916).

Throughout the history of the Nonpartisan League there had been many instances where the power elite oppressed the farmer (Gilbert, 1998). The people who controlled the finances, the businesses, and the legislative process saw it was to their advantage to keep farmers in their "present" state (Mader, 1937). If farmers were held back from moving from their position in the class system, then they were not a threat. However once the Nonpartisan League was successfully organized and able to get certain farmers elected to the state legislature, farmers then were seen as a powerful political force. There were also instances where the leaders of the Nonpartisan League became "the powerful" and thereby apparently alienated its constituents (Morlan 1985 & Robinson 1966).

Many farmers wrote to the *Leader* to complain about the way other regional newspapers such as the *Grand Forks Herald*, *Bismarck Tribune*, *The Fargo Courier and the Normanden* (Robinson, 1966) wrote negatively of the League, its members, and how the farmers were "dupes," "rubes" and "hayseeds" taken in by the League's propaganda. They used terms like "corrupt press," "kept press," and "gang press" (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915-September 28, 1916). The more the "kept press" wrote negatively the more the farmers became determined to cancel their subscriptions to those papers and gladly pay the subscription rate for the *Leader* (Letters to the Editor, *Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915-September 28, 1916).

The Curtis Publishing Company's The Country Gentleman: A Journal for the Farmer, The Gardner, and the Fireside proved to be a wellspring of information on the Nonpartisan League. The articles dealt with the Nonpartisan League, its politics, its

leaders and its development. One article strictly dealt with the persona of Arthur C. Townley, and the influence this man had on the Nonpartisan League. Currie (April, 1917) and Robinson (1966) discussed how Townley was actually one of the power brokers of the League and was responsible for insuring League's political agenda was met by endorsing candidates who agreed with the League's political platform even though the candidates were from other political parties like the Republican party.

These articles also noted that it was at the farmers' level that the League was able to draw distinct class lines in that it was for farmers only and the League would not have looked after town or village merchant. Beginning on May 18, 1918, the Country Gentleman ran a series of articles written by John E. Pickett. Each of these article titles began with the words "*A Prairie Fire*," and each dealt with a different aspect of the Nonpartisan League such as it's politics, the loyalty of League leaders, and it's opponents. These articles ran through June 22, 1918.

Through it's policies and it's apparent monolithic leadership, the League alienated many of its previous supporters, and opened the way for opposition newspapers and critics to create an environment of negativity and hostility towards the League and it's members (Remele, 1974).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The voice of the Nonpartisan League was its newspaper the *Nonpartisan League Leader*. Through the use of this medium, the League was able to push for important social changes not only in the political arena, but also within the agrarian society of the time. The Nonpartisan League was seen as a challenger to the existing political structure, and as championing the cause of the farmers. The *Nonpartisan League Leader* embraced the ideals of the Progressive Era such as better public services, health services, and public education. *The Nonpartisan League Leader* quickly became the center of controversy. Alternative or radical newspapers provided a sense of community to those who were involved in struggles against the established frameworks of society (Kessler, 1984). They provided information that was not readily available through the mainstream press, kept their members in contact with one another and with others in similar struggles (Curran, 1977 & Kessler, 1984). Because these newspapers were established for a specific purpose, they became the means by which those on the periphery were able to have their voices and concerns addressed and acted upon (Caudill, 1997, Herman & Chomsky, 1988, & Leonard, 1986). By giving voice to all, these newspapers created a sense of community to those that shared those ideals (Bird & Merwin, 1951, Flora, Flora, et al., 1992, & Stamm, 1985).

Newspapers had been held up as the purveyors of information and truth, and contributors to public opinion (Schudson, 1978, & Lippmann 1922). Newspapers provided the agenda-setting function for the discussion surrounding the issues and policies facing a society (Littlejohn 1983 & 1999). Schudson (1978) stated that newspapers that provided information were seen as not having any inherent, psychological order to them, however a story was seen as being intentionally connected to human experiences.

By developing a medium that exposed the corruption and abuse of power by those in control of the legislature, and economic institutions, the Nonpartisan League sought to convince its constituency that change was necessary and desirable. The Nonpartisan League may be seen as mobilized actors who fashioned new meanings out of the policies created by the dominating elite. The policies of the elite structure directly affected the North Dakota farmer and the meanings of these policies placed specific features and meanings on the policies such as political and causal responsibility. The opposing forces saw the reframing of issues as an attack on the status quo and attempted to control the interpretation of key events through their own media sources.

The *Nonpartisan League Leader* told the story of the farmer, their struggles with those that would keep them oppressed, suppressed, and financially and economically disadvantaged. League members could readily identify with the image being portrayed and could be rallied to fight against those forces. Nonpartisan League members readily expressed their identification, through the Letters to Editor column, with what was being printed by stating they were proud to be a “six dollar sucker” (*Nonpartisan League Leader*, September 23, 1915).

Through such feedback mechanisms as the Letters to the Editor columns, newspapers could keep their “fingers on the pulse” of their readers, and be instigators of change in public opinion. Individual writers to the Letters to the Editor Column of the *Nonpartisan League Leader* readily identified themselves with the movement, its ideologies and its policies. For example through such monikers as “six dollar sucker,” or through such phrases as “we’ll stick,” the farmers seemed to be unanimous in voicing their willingness to actively participate in rallies, recruiting other farmers to garner support for legislative policies that had a direct bearing on their livelihood and lifestyle, and to vote accordingly in order to change their position in society.

Part of the allure of the Nonpartisan League was that it touted its agenda as the platform for farmer control of the agencies that affected their lives by appealing to the financial, political and economic aspects of a farmers’ lives. It honed in on the fact that they received considerably less cash for their crops than they should have because of the middlemen at the various grain elevators and inspection points, that the state legislature was under the control of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, and that the financial institutions, also governed by concerns in Minneapolis, were charging exorbitant interest rates.

The farmers were persuaded to the ideals of the Nonpartisan League through a sense of hopelessness. This hopelessness was instrumental in the development of their “class consciousness.” In their powerlessness the farmers felt that the only way to take control of their situation, to better their position in society, and to meet the needs of their families was to become a member of the Nonpartisan League. By doing so they were given a voice to express their concerns, opinions, attitudes and beliefs about the policies

that affected their lives. The *Leader* mirrored the concerns expressed by the farmers and afforded them the opportunity to speak out against the power elite. Through vocal and written opinion, and using the *Leader* as their weapon of choice, the farmers were able to create a sense of unity, a sense of community, and perhaps a sense of power over those who had kept the farmer at the periphery of society. The farmers did not want to remain on the fringe of society, but wanted to be included in middle class society and be given those same rights and privileges (Shilts, 1997).

North Dakota's population seems to be conservative after having started out as a radical political entity (Robinson, 1966, & Kessler, 1984). This conservatism obscures the fact that there is still a foothold of socialism at work in the state. One does not have to search far for remnants of socialism. There is a state owned bank and a state owned mill (Grand Forks Herald, October 21, 1999). Many of the state's prominent people such as Burleigh Spalding, Charles Winship, John Sorley, John Burke, Arthur C. Townley, and Lynn Frasier became important players in the state economy. Some of them became the prime movers of the protest movement against a corporate structure that seemed to threaten their livelihood. The repercussions of the revolt are still felt within this state through the administering of workman's compensation program and the institution of cooperatives like American Crystal Sugar Company, one of the largest cooperative sugar refining mills in the country.

Perhaps one of the reasons as to why this movement was unable to sustain itself was because it appealed to farmers who lived in the western part of the state where soil type and rainfall were less favorable to intensive agriculture than it did to the farmers from central and eastern farmers of the state (Robinson, 1966). Farmers statewide were

part of a common struggle, and yet not all of the farmers felt the need to join the Nonpartisan League and become subscribers to its newspaper. By dividing the constituency of farmers through its political ideology and by pitting the farmers against the merchants in the local community, the Nonpartisan League set the stage for its demise. However, I would argue that the League's penchant for using local farmers as recruiters for the movement actually strengthened the feeling of community felt by the farmers, and that it was through the League that these farmers were able to voice their opposition to those who held them down.

Additionally, another factor in the demise of the Nonpartisan League could be that their ideas and legislative platform were appropriated by the dominant class and made part of their plan of action. Clemens (1999) stated that in order for the challenger to be effective, they must be marginalized but not too marginalized, and that change can occur when the other political actor adopts the new model, or accept the new political actors: This appropriation generates new resources and networks that were not embedded in existing patterns of partisan loyalty and authority (Clemens, 1999).

Possibly a third reason for the demise of the Nonpartisan League, and ultimately its newspaper, was the fact that when the League organized it focused on the farmers in western North Dakota (Morlan, 1985). This organization then made what could be called a critical error in that it moved its headquarters from Fargo, North Dakota, to St. Paul, Minnesota (Robinson, 1966). To maintain an organization from a distance, and to maintain the vision of "farmer control," seemed beyond the capability of the League. It is possible that the move to the heart of "Big Biz" land was seen as the organization turning its back on the very people who supported it—the farmers. Robinson (1966) stated that

anti-League newspapers quipped that the “throne room” of North Dakota had gone back to the Twin Cities.

A fourth factor that may have contributed to the destruction of the Nonpartisan League, can be attributed to the fact that every creative act which seeks to question the apparatus of domination runs the risk of continuing to carry within itself the imprint of the system in which the creator is inscribed (Mattelart, 1980). While the Nonpartisan League through its newspaper sought to overcome the domination of the power elite by eliciting action from the farmers, it apparently was not cognizant of the fact that it carried within it the values, norms and attitudes of the larger society, and had to function within that society.

With its diverse landscapes, cultural background and heritage, North Dakota also for a period of time became diverse in its political leanings. As the voice of the farmers, the *Nonpartisan League Leader* was instrumental in providing the dialogue for change. The changes that were wrought through this dialogue remain in tact in the history of North Dakota, and lives on through institutions like the State Bank and State Mill.

“We’ll Stick” was the slogan of the Nonpartisan League. Have they?

CHAPTER VIII

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- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 3, 1915, October 7, pp. 7.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 5, 1915, October 21, pp. 13.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 6, 1915, October 28, pp. 13.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 8, 1915, November 11, pp. 13.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 11, 1915, December 2, pp. 8, 13.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 12, 1915, December 9, pp. 9.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 13, 1915, December 16, pp. 11.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 14, 1915, December 23, pp. 16.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 15, 1915, December 30, pp. 4, 13.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 16, 1916, January 6, pp. 14.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 18, 1916, January 20, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 19, 1916, January 27, pp. 7, 11, 14, 16.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 20, 1916, February 3, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 21, 1916, February 10, pp. 2, 15.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 22, 1916, February 17, pp. 3, 14, 15.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 23, 1916, February 24, pp. 2-3, 5, 15-16.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 24, 1916, March 2, pp. 2, 4-5, 12-14.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 25, 1916, March 9, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 26, 1916, March 16, pp. 2.

- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 27, 1916, March 23, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 28, 1916, March 30, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 29, 1916, April 6, pp. 13, 22.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 31, 1916, April 20, pp. 2, 9.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 32, 1916, April 27, pp. 6-8, 15.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 33, 1916, May 4, pp. 6, 10, 13, 15-17, 22.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 34, 1916, May 11, pp. 9-10, 13-14.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 35, 1916, May 18, pp. 2, 4, 6-7, 9-10, 15-18.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 36, 1916, May 25, pp. 6, 9, 12-13, 16, 19-20.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 37, 1916, June 1, pp. 10, 12-15, 19, 22.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 38, 1916, June 8, pp. 11, 15, 20.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 39, 1916, June 15, pp. 5, 12, 15, 17, 23.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 40, 1916, June 22, pp. 9, 23.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 41, 1916, June 29, pp. 15.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 42, 1916, July 6, pp. 2.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 43, 1916, July 13, pp. 7, 21.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 44, 1916, July 20, pp. 12-13, 17-18.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 45, 1916, July 27, pp. 10, 11-13, 15, 18-19, 21.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 46, 1916, August 3, pp. 10, 12-14, 23.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 47, 1916, August 10, pp. 2, 16-17.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 48, 1916, August 17, pp. 2, 14, 23.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 49, 1916, August 24, pp. 2, 6, 12.
- The Nonpartisan League Leader, 50, 1916, August 31, pp. 12, 20.

The Nonpartisan League Leader, 51, 1916, September 7, pp. 2, 12, 14, 18, 20-21.

The Nonpartisan League Leader, 52, 1916, September 14, pp. 2, 14, 17, 21.

The Nonpartisan League Leader, 53, 1916, September 21, pp. 11, 14, 16-17, 24.

The Nonpartisan League Leader, 54, 1916, September 28, pp. 2, 6, 13, 14, 15, 24.