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## Dashed Expectations

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# Dashed Expectations

## The Iowa Progressive Party and the 1948 Election

MARK R. FINLAY

ON JULY 24, 1948, when Fred W. Stover, president of the Iowa Farmers Union, nominated Henry A. Wallace for president on the Progressive party ticket, the customary demonstration followed. Stover's one-minute speech set off thirty-five minutes of convention-hall pandemonium. The Iowa delegation led the way, singing a new version of the "Iowa Corn Song":

Oh he's from Ioway, Ioway  
Henry's from our state  
And we think he's great  
'Cause he's from Ioway, Ioway  
That's where the tall corn grows.<sup>1</sup>

The author would like to thank and acknowledge Clarence E. Biederman, W. C. Biederman, Carl Hamilton, Tom Knudson, George Mills, and especially Fred Stover for their willingness to be interviewed in connection with this project.

1. Song lyrics are reported in Curtis D. MacDougall, *Gideon's Army* (New York, 1965), 525; and the *Des Moines Register* (hereafter cited as *DMR*, including *Des Moines Sunday Registers*), 25 July 1948. Technically, Stover was not the IFU president, for he had resigned his post the day before to avoid possible charges of conflict of interest. However, the IFU soon rejected the resignation and reinstated Stover as IFU president. The song had these other verses:

Oh, out in Ioway, Ioway,  
Republicans are strong.  
But they won't be for long,  
For out in Ioway, Ioway,  
Wallace's forces grow.  
  
Not only in Ioway, Ioway,  
But in every state  
Now, it's not too late  
For Henry, from Ioway, Ioway,  
To lead the people to peace.

Stover and the other Iowa delegates believed they had a great deal to be excited about in their candidate. Wallace, of course, had been a hero to Iowa's farmers as secretary of agriculture during the New Deal. The national Progressive party leadership included other friends of agriculture as well. Rexford Guy Tugwell, undersecretary of agriculture in the New Deal, was chairman of the platform committee. C. B. "Beanie" Baldwin, former assistant secretary of agriculture and director of the Farm Security Administration, was the party's campaign manager. The chairman of the national Progressive party was Elmer Benson, a former governor and senator from Minnesota, and a farmer himself.

In addition to Stover, other Iowans were prominent at the convention. Des Moines attorney Charles P. Howard delivered the keynote address that touched off the previous night's bedlam: the Iowa delegation paraded through the convention hall carrying fifty large cornstalks. E. E. Roelofs, another Iowa delegate, obtained the corn from a former Iowan's farm near Philadelphia. C. W. Hobbie, a union leader from Cedar Rapids, gave a seconding speech for the party's vice-presidential nominee, Senator Glen Taylor. During the convention week, three Iowans—Roelofs of Sioux Center, Clarence E. Biederman of Mitchell, and Fred Stover of Hampton—met privately with Wallace to discuss campaign strategies in rural areas. Three Iowans also sat on the convention's committees: Roelofs on the rules committee; Howard on the nominating committee; and, most significant, Stover on the platform committee. Summarizing the early convention activity, the *Des Moines Register* called the whole affair "an Iowa show."<sup>2</sup>

Iowa Progressives felt fortunate to have a native son as their national candidate, and many of Iowa's liberal farmers and Progressive party members believed the Wallace campaign could be successful in their home state, thus ignoring James B. Weaver's

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Though he's from Ioway, Ioway,  
 We won't keep him there,  
 We are glad to share,  
 Though he's from Ioway, Ioway  
 We give him to the world.

2. *DMR*, 22, 23, 24, and 26 July 1948. See also MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 604.

dismal showing in his native state as the Populist party's candidate in 1892, and overlooking the failure of the Roosevelt-Wallace ticket to carry Iowa in 1940. In his speech before the Iowa Progressive party's founding convention in June, Fred Stover urged Iowans to abandon their "political Rip Van Winkelism" by leading the new party's success. He declared that "Iowa can be proud to be the state that is furnishing this great new political movement."<sup>3</sup> Many farmers who remembered Wallace as secretary of agriculture expected the new party to endorse and emphasize generous farm programs, and Progressive leaders assumed many farm voters would support the anti-monopoly, full production, and high price support proposals in the party platform.

Despite these hopes, expectations, and favorable circumstances, the Progressive party failed to gain support in Iowa and among farm voters. By November the Progressives had little strength in rural America; their impact on the election in farm states was negligible. In Iowa, the Wallace-Taylor ticket received only 12,125 votes out of more than one million votes cast, or just 1.17 percent of the vote. In many rural counties, especially in southern and western Iowa, fewer than one percent of the voters supported the native son. By anyone's definition, the "campaign . . . to rebuild Wallace as a great rural prophet of the Midwest" proved a failure.<sup>4</sup>

Why did Wallace's party do so poorly in Iowa and among rural voters? Certainly much of the answer lies in the problems that befell the party nationwide. Historians as well as contemporary observers have cited several reasons for the Progressives' dismal showing.<sup>5</sup> Generally, they have argued that rumors and

3. Fred W. Stover, "Address at the Founding Convention of the Wallace Party," Waterloo, Iowa, 12 June 1948, unpublished manuscript in the possession of Fred W. Stover, 5.

4. DMR, 22 July 1948. The Iowa vote totals are from *State of Iowa, Official Register, 1949-1950*, 298-301. Nationally, the Progressive party ticket received 1,157,063 votes, or 2.37 percent of the total votes cast.

5. For typical analyses of the Progressives' difficulties, see Richard S. Kirkendall, "Election of 1948," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, 5 vols. (New York, 1971), 4: 3099-3145 (hereafter cited as HAPE); Norman D. Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948* (New York, 1973); Allen Yarnell, *Democrats and Progressives: The 1948 Presidential Election as a Test of Postwar Liberalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1974); and Karl M. Schmidt, *Henry A. Wallace: Quixotic Crusade 1948* (Syracuse, NY, 1960).

evidence of Communist party infiltration, promulgated by a hostile press, caused many voters to reject the Progressive ticket. Wallace's refusal to repudiate the Communist party's endorsement may have cost him millions of votes. The year's Cold War crises in Berlin, Czechoslovakia, and Greece would have made any liberal political party subject to extreme suspicion, let alone one with an endorsement from the Communist party. Moreover, Wallace's respect for the Soviet Union seemed naive at best.

There were other reasons for the Progressive party's failure nationwide. The party's national convention in Philadelphia proved a disaster, generating only unfavorable press. Also, failure to get on the ballot in three states, and frequent difficulties with election officials elsewhere cost many votes. But Harry S Truman also deserves credit for recognizing Wallace's problems and adopting "the pose of a populist" to cut into Wallace's support. Liberals and labor unions, a large part of Wallace's natural constituency, increasingly left the Progressives as the Democrats' "liberal strategy" brought laborers, liberals, and blacks back into the Democratic party.<sup>6</sup> In November Truman's coalition was strong enough for him to triumph over two third party challenges as well as a popular Republican candidate.

Historians have also stressed the importance of the farm vote in shaping the 1948 election.<sup>7</sup> Truman's aggressive attack on the Republican Eightieth Congress clearly appealed to farmers. He blamed Republicans for the severe shortage of grain storage facilities; he scared farmers with the threat of another depression; and he reminded them that their record prosperity had

6. Markowitz, *Rise and Fall of the People's Century*, 267, 276; Allen Yarnell, "Liberals in Action: The ADA, Henry Wallace, and the 1948 Election," *Research Studies* 40 (1972), 270; Kirkendall, "Election of 1948," 3125.

7. This thesis is generally attributed to Samuel Lubell's *The Future of American Politics* (New York, 1952), 158-78, 205-11. Many early analyses of the 1948 election also stressed the same point. See Schmidt, *Henry A. Wallace*, 241-51; Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of its Origin and Development, 1870-1950* (East Lansing, MI, 1951), 383-86; Murray S. Stedman, Jr., and Susan W. Stedman, *Discontent at the Polls: A Study of Farmers and Labor Parties, 1827-1948*, 2d ed. (New York, 1950), 170-71; Wesley McCune, "Farmers in Politics," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 319 (1958), 45; and Irwin Ross, *The Loneliest Campaign: The Truman Victory of 1948* (1968; reprint ed., Westport, CT, 1977), 256-58. Lubell's argument has been reexamined recently by Thomas G. Ryan, in "Farm Prices and the Farm Vote in 1948," *Agricultural History* 54 (1980), 387-401.

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occurred under his Democratic administration. This approach was especially successful because the Republican candidate, Thomas E. Dewey, did not respond forcefully to Truman's charges. Dewey bragged that he lived on a dairy farm in New York, but his proposed farm policies remained vague. Meanwhile, Wallace and his party tended to ignore agricultural issues. By emphasizing peace and foreign policy issues, the national Progressive party neglected the potential farm vote. Iowa Progressives, who were interested in farm issues, also failed to deliver farm votes for the Wallace ticket. Internal squabbling, inadequate funding, and several embarrassing campaign incidents all hurt the Iowa Progressive party's image and effectiveness. In brief, Wallace wasted his opportunities in Iowa.

FROM 1946 TO EARLY 1948 many liberal Democrats believed a third party led by Henry Wallace offered great promise. Truman, who had replaced Wallace as Franklin Roosevelt's running mate at the 1944 Democratic convention, seemed ineffective as president. Postwar inflation, labor disputes, and the Republican Congress all crippled Truman's domestic policies. Wallace's attacks on Truman's foreign policy gained special attention. A Gallup poll in June 1947 showed that 13 percent of the voters were prepared to support Wallace in a new party. Another Gallup survey in early 1948 suggested that the issues Wallace emphasized interested many Americans: 38 percent of the voters believed peace was the most important campaign issue; 27 percent listed other aspects of foreign policy. According to an editorial in the *Iowa Falls Citizen*, "more people are paying attention to Henry Wallace than had been predicted" because of Americans' "uneasy state of mind" regarding world peace.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, many farmers were displeased with the Truman administration's farm policies, which they saw as a conservative reversal of the New Deal. In 1946 and 1947 James Patton, president of the National Farmers Union (NFU), offered tentative support for Wallace's ideas. Though Patton did not go so far, Fred Stover, as president of the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU),

8. Markowitz, *Rise and Fall of the People's Century*, 276; DMR, 18 April 1948; *Iowa Falls Citizen*, 13 May 1948; Carl Hamilton, former editor of the *Iowa Falls Citizen*, interview with author, Ames, 8 September 1986.

endorsed Wallace's presidential bid.<sup>9</sup> Yet when Wallace announced his candidacy on December 29, 1947, he foreshadowed the Progressive party's direction regarding the farm vote: the former secretary of agriculture's speech ignored farm issues.<sup>10</sup>

By early 1948 Wallace's candidacy appeared strong in several parts of the country. Opinion polls suggested that Wallace's strength in New York and California virtually assured a Republican victory. In Iowa, however, the Progressives' campaign started badly. In February 1948 Stover organized an Iowa Wallace-for-President Committee. He invited thirty political friends, whom he said he was "pretty sure of," to meet in Des Moines on February 29. Optimism prevailed at the meeting. Stover, who was named a cochairperson of the state organization, was especially confident of the farm vote. "We expect strong support from farmers in Iowa," Stover said, since Wallace had done "more for farmers than any man in the history of the US."<sup>11</sup>

That first meeting, however, was spoiled, according to Stover, when Lee Simon, a labor union official and suspected Communist, brought about twenty radicals without Stover's invitation.<sup>12</sup> The outsiders' insistence on publicizing the Wallace-for-President Committee's activities soon led to disaster. The press discovered that Henry Felsen, who was elected publicity chairman at the Des Moines meeting, was a former Communist party member. Immediately, Felsen in particular, and the Iowa

9. For the relationship between Stover's IFU and Patton's NFU, see Steven A. Chambers, "Relations between Leaders of the Iowa and National Farmers Union Organizations, 1941 to 1950," honors paper, University of Iowa, 1961; Marc Geller, "Fred Stover and the Farmers Union in Cold War America," unpublished paper, Grinnell College, 1976, 9-13; Wilson J. Warren, "The People's Century in Iowa: Coalition-Building among Farm and Labor Organizations, 1945-1950," in this issue of the *Annals of Iowa*; and Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York, 1973), 75-76, 138-39, 197, 217. Both the Chambers and Geller papers are located in Special Collections, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames.

10. See Henry A. Wallace, "Broadcast by Former Vice-President Henry A. Wallace," in *HAPE*, 3173-76.

11. Fred W. Stover, interviews with author (hereafter cited as Stover interviews), Hampton, Iowa, 18 November 1984 and 12 August 1985; *DMR*, 1 March 1948; MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 808. The IPP's organizational meeting took place on February 29, not in "March or April," as MacDougall says.

12. MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 808; Stover interviews.

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Progressives in general, were on the defensive. Felsen first claimed he had never been a Communist, admitting only that he once had read a radical speech for a woman who was too ill to read it herself. Then, in a letter to the editor of the *Des Moines Register*, Felsen conceded that he had been a Communist party member in 1940. He also pointed out, however, that since 1940 he had done work for the Marines, the American Legion and similar groups. And Felsen's wife declared that her husband had not been a Communist for eight years.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Felsen's name was soon in the news again in connection with an absurd article he wrote for the April issue of the *American Mercury*. There, Felsen described how high corn and cattle prices had changed Iowa farmers' lifestyles. He claimed that Iowa "clerks are no longer astonished at the sight of unshaven, overalled men who carry as much as \$50,000 in their denim pockets as they come in for fur coats and saddles." Iowa farmers were allegedly buying three-hundred-dollar shirts, "having special foods flown in from New York for a small picnic," and flying their personal airplanes "by the score to watch plowing contests."<sup>14</sup> Letters to the editor of the *Register* challenged Felsen's claims. One reader searched every store in Des Moines, but could not find one shirt for sale at even thirty dollars. Another reader showed how this episode was relevant to the Iowa Progressives. "One might expect such fantastic exaggerations . . . coming from supporters of crackpots and Commies who either don't know what they are talking about, or are deliberately trying to fool and mislead prospective voters who would believe such trash."<sup>15</sup> Stover recalled that the Felsen incidents "really dropped a bomb on us." Though Felsen resigned from his position on the Wallace committee, Stover assumed "many good Wallace people" were discouraged from the start of the Iowa campaign.<sup>16</sup>

13. *DMR*, 2, 12, and 20 March 1948.

14. Henry G. Felsen, "The State of Iowa," *American Mercury* 66 (April 1948), 454-61.

15. Charles H. Tye and Larry Geer, letters to the editor, *DMR*, 4 April 1948.

16. Stover interviews; *DMR*, 25 March 1948. In his resignation statement, Felsen claimed that writing "obligations" prohibited him from remaining an officer in the Iowa-for-Wallace Committee.



Paul Robeson's speaking tour in April exposed more problems in Wallace's Iowa campaign. Robeson, a famous baritone and notorious Communist sympathizer, spoke at Drake University without incident. There, Robeson told his audience of three thousand that they would be proud if their native son were president.<sup>17</sup> Robeson's Sioux City visit offered more complications. Robeson initially scheduled his speech for Central High School, but the school's superintendent insisted that he pledge to "make no statement which could be construed as opposed to the Constitution." Robeson refused when he learned that no other school speakers had been required to sign such a pledge. Meanwhile, an official for the packinghouse workers union denied Robeson access to their union hall. Thus, Robeson was forced to speak at the much smaller Malone African Methodist Episcopal Church. The *Sioux City Journal-Tribune* reacted with an editorial urging a "wholesale avoidance" of the rally, if only to assure that "we shall not have others of a like stripe moving in to speak in our midst." "The appearance of a speaker of this type," the editorial explained, "is close to an insult to the loyal citizens of this community." This episode further tarnished the Wallace movement when black attorney Charles Howard unleashed an undisguised charge of racism against the CIO official who blocked Robeson's use of the hall. Though Robeson eventually did appear at the union hall, Howard believed the initial denial "did us a greater disservice than the school board."<sup>18</sup>

Wallace's only 1948 campaign trip to Iowa generated still more unfavorable publicity. In mid-April, the Iowa Board of Education ruled that Wallace could not deliver political speeches in public buildings. Thus, authorities canceled planned addresses for halls at the State University of Iowa in Iowa City and Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls. Despite these problems, Wallace spoke in four Iowa cities on April 28 and 29. Because of the state's ruling, Wallace spoke outdoors in Iowa City, where four thousand people heard him. In Des Moines thirteen hun-

17. DMR, 13 April 1948; Charles P. Howard, diary, 12 April 1948, in MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 672.

18. Stover interviews; *Sioux City Journal-Tribune*, 14 and 15 April 1948; DMR, 14 and 15 April 1948. Howard's diary account, in MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 672-75, reveals the vitriolic nature of the incident. Stover feels that Howard was unfair, for the union official was not really the one to blame.

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dred people greeted Wallace enthusiastically and donated more than three thousand dollars to his campaign. There, he made a rare appeal to farm voters, asserting that the "oil trust" and "war profiteering and preparations" threatened American farmers' prosperity. Wallace warned that federal programs might be eliminated, and farmers' sons and hired hands were likely to be drafted into military service. The next day, in Oskaloosa, Wallace contrasted the free speech permitted by William Penn College, affiliated with the Society of Friends, with the suppression of free speech practiced by the state universities. In Cedar Rapids more than one thousand people heard Wallace assail American foreign policy. There, Wallace also learned that, despite their earlier overtures to the Progressives, the CIO's Farm Equipment and Metal Workers union was unlikely to endorse a third party candidate.<sup>19</sup>

On April 29 Wallace and Stover discussed agricultural issues during a car ride after the Cedar Rapids speech. That discussion illustrates the differences between Wallace and the Iowa Progressives. Both men agreed that one of the Progressives' problems was their inability to appeal to a broad range of farm voters. They also agreed that the government's farm programs were out of balance, for they tended to favor larger and more productive farms. Stover promoted one innovative solution: a guaranteed minimum annual income for farmers. When Stover told Wallace that thirty-five hundred dollars should be the minimum, Wallace answered, "Oh my God, Fred; we couldn't do that." Similarly, throughout the campaign, Stover failed to get the farm program he expected from the Progressives.<sup>20</sup>

Though Wallace's campaign trip attracted large crowds, the Iowa press's reaction was largely negative. Newspapers varied widely in their tolerance for Wallace. The *Sioux City Journal-Tribune*, for example, called Wallace "an enemy of the United

19. *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 29 April 1948; *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, 29 April 1948; *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 30 April 1948; *DMR*, 27, 28, and 29 April 1948. Wallace's Iowa trip encountered still more difficulties: in Iowa City, protesters threw eggs at him while he was holding a baby; and, while he spoke, he was ticketed for illegal parking.

20. Stover interviews. Stover said that as far as he knew the plan was never made public nor was it adopted by the national party. Instead, the Progressive party's platform set a "major goal" of three-thousand-dollar minimum annual income.

States," explaining that the candidate's difficulties in securing speaking halls clearly illustrated "where Henry Wallace stands in his home state." The *Iowa City Press-Citizen* was more sympathetic, insisting that all candidates deserved to be heard in a democratic society. Before the Iowa trip, the *Des Moines Register* editorialized that Wallace seemed to have "changed." In particular, the editors deplored his "tawdry techniques" of emotionalism. The *Register* repeated the same theme after the Des Moines speech. In an editorial entitled "Somehow It Isn't the Same Henry," the editors argued, "the skillful staging and the heavy theorizing of Mr. Wallace seems somehow out of character with the modest scholar and scientist." *Register* reporter George Mills contrasted the logic and reason Wallace demonstrated in his small, private audiences, such as in Oskaloosa, with the "bitter invectiveness . . . more typical of demagogues" he employed at large public rallies, such as in Cedar Rapids. Mills acknowledged that Wallace was not a Communist, but suggested that the bitter speeches might have been written by Communist-influenced ghostwriters. In a letter to the editor, Stover responded to those articles. He called the *Register's* charges "amusing," and denied that Wallace had changed. Stover further explained that Wallace's emotional language was justified by the significance of the monopolies and cartels he exposed.<sup>21</sup>

THE IOWA PROGRESSIVE PARTY'S founding convention, which opened in Waterloo on June 12, 1948, illustrated Iowa Progressives' continuing commitment to innovative agricultural policies. Unfortunately, the convention also exposed the party's continuing organizational problems. Several incidents suggested the Progressives were neither strong nor unified in Iowa. Iowa's own presidential candidate, Henry Wallace, was conspicuously absent from the Waterloo convention. Glen Taylor, vice-presidential candidate on Wallace's ticket, had promised to speak in Waterloo, but

21. *Sioux City Journal-Tribune*, 16 April 1948; *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 29 April 1948; *DMR*, 18 and 30 April, 2 and 8 May 1948. Mainstream journalists also might have objected to Stover's description of the press's coverage of the European Recovery Program: "This gigantic fraud is dressed up and made to look respectable by the 'pressstitutes' who prostitute the news and who flutter and who literally drool at the feet of the industrial Titans whose loyal servants they are." Stover, "Address at the Founding Convention," 4.

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backed out just a few days before the convention because of "urgent business" in the Senate. The *Des Moines Register's* headline is instructive: "Taylor Too Busy To Talk in Iowa." Iowa Progressive officials had predicted that three hundred delegates would attend, but fewer than 125 were present.<sup>22</sup>

Internal strife continued to hurt the Iowa Progressive Party (IPP). Their inability to fill all the spots with candidates on a statewide ticket also embarrassed the Progressives; only two of the eight congressional races had Progressive candidates. Russell Lasley's nomination as a candidate for lieutenant governor was especially damaging. When Lasley refused the nomination, an IPP official explained it was because Lasley was "ill." Lasley, a leader in Waterloo's meatpacking unions, offered a different explanation: "I was not a delegate to the convention, and I had no connection with it at all. I declined the nomination as I had not authorized it."<sup>23</sup> The editors of the *Waterloo Courier* concluded that the convention did "not indicate overwhelming public demand for a new party. The Wallace movement in fact has all the appearances of activity prompted from above rather than spontaneously arising from the ranks."<sup>24</sup>

The IPP's platform, however, was quite significant for its strong agricultural planks. The "Full Income Protection" proposal was its most outstanding feature. Under this liberal plan, farmers would receive 100 percent parity on their first six thousand dollars of production annually, with a sliding scale not to go below 60 percent parity on production over ten thousand dollars. The IPP's farm planks, written by Stover, also included a number of specific statements on soil conservation, agricultural cooperatives, farmers' mortgage loans, and long-range planning. Over the course of the campaign, it became clear that the IPP's farm planks were significantly more generous, particularly to small farmers, than the Democratic, Republican, and even the national Progressive parties' farm policies.<sup>25</sup>

22. *Waterloo Daily Courier*, 10 June 1948; *DMR*, 11 June 1948.

23. *Ibid.*, 13 and 14 June 1948; *DMR*, 11 and 13 June 1948; Stover interviews. Eventually, the Progressives offered four candidates for the House.

24. See editorial, "Strange Wallace Movement," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, 15 June 1948.

25. Stover, "Address at the Founding Convention," 6-7. See also MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 607; *DMR*, 13 June 1948; and "The People Now

Despite their setbacks, Iowa's Progressives actively and enthusiastically participated at the national party's convention at Philadelphia in July. Stover's powerful speech in Waterloo earned him the job as the nominating speaker. Party officials agreed it would be wise to have an Iowan nominate Wallace. The party professionals then suggested that since the Progressives were an unorthodox political party, they should also use an unorthodox nominating speech. On July 24, as the nominations began, the Alabama delegation yielded to Iowa's. Clarence Biederman, the Iowa delegation's chairman, then presented Stover. Stover's opening remarks were brief:

It is customary for the old parties to keep the delegates in suspense as to the candidate's identity until they have finished with all the effusions, and only then to reveal the name. I want to reverse that custom. I want to speak the name first. I want to place in nomination now, for president of the United States, the man who will give the American people a chance to vote for peace, my fellow Iowan, Henry A. Wallace.

A thirty-minute demonstration erupted immediately. Stover recalled that "I had quite a time getting them to stop clapping so I could finish my speech, but I enjoyed it." Though Stover brought a prepared speech with him to Philadelphia, professional speech writers deleted most of his references to agricultural issues. Yet Stover's final version retained at least some of its original strength. He warned of a return to depression-era commodity prices, since only a "skeleton" remained of Wallace's New Deal farm programs.<sup>26</sup>

The Progressives' national convention in Philadelphia resembled the Waterloo affair in its organizational chaos.<sup>27</sup> Iowa

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Have a Choice: Peace vs. War; Plenty vs. Scarcity," campaign flyer distributed at the Waterloo convention, in the possession of Clarence E. Biederman.

26. Stover, quoted in MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 525; Stover interviews. See also *DMR*, 25 July 1948; and MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 527, 604. MacDougall calls Stover's speech a "full-blown eulogy, but contained nothing that has not been stated over and over again."

27. Historians' accounts of the convention vary, depending on their interpretation of the alleged Communist party infiltration. Irwin Ross, who maintains the Progressives were "from the outset a creature of the Communist Party," argues that the convention's platform paralleled the Communist

Progressives were particularly disappointed with the vague and conservative agricultural planks in the national party's platform. Believing the IPP platform could be a model for the national party, Stover brought a copy of it to Philadelphia. For example, he hoped to include meatpackers among the industries that would be nationalized in a Progressive administration. When he arrived, however, other platform committee members informed him that the farm planks had already been written. The committee also tried to limit him to just five minutes of speaking time. Stover recalled he had to fight just to get parity proposals included in the platform. Meanwhile, Wallace believed the farm platform did not deserve special attention. He even suggested that the committee consult with the United States Department of Agriculture for current agricultural data. Stover said that he "blew his top" at the idea of seeking such assistance from the Truman administration. According to Rexford Tugwell, the platform committee's chairman, the agricultural planks were difficult to draft: "Henry's an expert in agriculture, and I'm supposed to be one. You would think we could have taken care of that plank without much trouble. But that isn't the way it worked out." Stover called the national party's farm platform a "good" one, though he complained that "nothing was done about it" during the campaign.<sup>28</sup>

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party's platform in all important ways. He suggests that the deceptive Communists were able to manipulate the convention. See Ross, *The Loneliest Campaign*, 142-61. On the other hand, Norman Markowitz suggests that "administrative chaos" and "confusion and occasional comedy, rather than conspiracy," defined the Progressive party's leadership at the convention. See Markowitz, *Rise and Fall of the People's Century*, 284-86. Historians of both interpretations admit that the Philadelphia convention proved to be a public relations disaster for the new party. For the Iowa Progressives who were so active at the convention, the chaos could only lead to disillusionment and disappointing vote totals in November.

28. *DMR*, 23, 24, and 26 July 1948; Stover interviews; MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 604-6. See also Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, *Prophet in Politics: Henry A. Wallace and the War Years, 1940-1965* (Ames, 1970), 182-83. The Progressive party's farm planks included an emphasis on full production; expansion of the Farmers Home Administration; a "goal" of three-thousand-dollar minimum annual income for farmers; a crop insurance program; a five-year program of 90 percent parity for all crops (with higher support for dairy products and other special commodities); and cooperation with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in stabilizing world markets.

In his speech accepting the Progressive party's presidential nomination, Wallace listed his "commitments" to America's progressive future. Among those commitments, his statement on agriculture was listed thirteenth: "I am committed—as I have been my whole life through—to advancing those programs for agriculture which will increase the productivity of our land and better the lives of our farmers and their families." It is difficult to imagine a more vague appeal to farm voters. Although many farm activists still hoped Wallace would deliver a major farm-policy speech after the convention, most of his subsequent campaign speeches ignored agricultural issues. In August "several carloads" of Iowans traveled to Chicago to hear Wallace speak. According to Stover, they were disappointed and "disgusted" when Wallace spoke on the Berlin crisis instead of on farm policy.<sup>29</sup>

AS THE CAMPAIGN PROGRESSED, the major party candidates devoted increasing attention to the farm vote. *Wallaces' Farmer*, the farm magazine the candidate's family once owned, printed little favorable news about its former editor. In mid-September, a *Wallace-Homestead* poll of Iowa farm voters showed Dewey leading Truman 50 to 33 percent. Only four percent of Iowa's farmers supported Wallace.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps sensing an opportunity, Truman aggressively courted those farm voters who seemed dissatisfied with Wallace, though part of his natural constituency. Earlier in the year, Truman had named Charles Brannan, a longtime friend and associate of NFU president James Patton, as the new secretary of agriculture. This appointment effectively returned Patton's and the NFU's support to Truman. Brannan aggressively campaigned for liberal farm votes; then Truman himself appealed for farmers' support. On September 18, speaking before eighty thousand people at the

29. Henry A. Wallace, "Acceptance Speech," 24 July 1948, unpublished press release, in the possession of Fred W. Stover, 1, 4, 9; Stover interviews.

30. Other *Wallace-Homestead* polls showed 9 percent of the prospective farm voters supporting Wallace in June; only 2 percent in October. See *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, 12 June, 18 September, and 16 October 1948. Editorials in *Wallaces' Farmer* conspicuously avoided any mention of the Progressives' campaign, though readers occasionally endorsed Wallace in letters to the editor. See the issues of 14 May, 19 June, 17 July, and 4 September 1948. Henry A. Wallace had no connection with the magazine in 1948.

National Plowing Contest near Dexter, Iowa, Truman delivered his now famous attack on Republican agricultural policies: "This Republican Congress has already stuck a pitchfork in the farmers' back." Truman solidified his attack with specific criticisms of the Eightieth Congress, while he reminded farmers of the success of the Democrats' New Deal policies.<sup>31</sup>

With little time left in the campaign, the Progressives were forced to address agricultural issues. On September 14 and 15 the Progressive party held a farm policy conference in Chicago. There, about thirty delegates created the National Farmers for Wallace Committee (despite Wallace's nap during the proceedings), with Fred Stover as chairman. The committee urged Wallace to devote more attention to agriculture in his speeches. Dan A. Wallace, the candidate's uncle, offered similar advice in a letter written prior to the campaign swing through Minnesota. "While you are here in the West, you should direct some attention to the farm angles on the campaign and talk to farmers direct, in a way they might expect from you. . . . Foreign policy comes first, of course, but as you go along with your set program there are quite a few shins sticking out to be kicked in your stride whch [*sic*] has been magnificent to date."<sup>32</sup>

On October 10 Wallace finally delivered the long-awaited full-length farm speech at Moorhead, Minnesota. It was all the more anticipated because Wallace arrived more than three hours late. In his speech Wallace endorsed expanded federal farm programs, in order that no "competent" farmer would earn less than three thousand dollars annually, but he stopped short of suggesting income guarantees. He accused Dewey and Truman of "playing games" with the "pitchfork" issue. In fact, Wallace

31. Harry S. Truman, "Speech by President Harry S. Truman," in *HAFE*, 3201-3. See also *DMR*, 16 and 18 September 1948; Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 171, 176, 178, 181; Kirkendall, "Election of 1948," 3124-25; Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 258; and MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 609-10.

32. Dan A. Wallace to Henry A. Wallace, 22 September 1948, Henry A. Wallace Papers, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. In early October Wallace delivered a few speeches on farm topics to the tenant farmers of California's Central Valley. See MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 759-60; and *DMR*, 5 October 1948. Only 372 people paid to hear Wallace speak at a three-thousand-seat baseball stadium in Bakersfield, and it is unlikely that his speeches in California improved his appeal in the Midwest. Ross, *The Loneliest Campaign*, 228.



claimed, both parties were guilty of stabbing farmers. Nonetheless, the press again chastised Wallace's appeals to farmers. The *Moorhead Daily News* complained, "Red River political observers today had the sore disappointment of knowing no more than they knew before about Henry Wallace." Wallace's speech was quite vague, for he merely gave a "verbatim rendition" of the party's farm platform. These episodes did little to change farmers' disenchantment with the Wallace candidacy.<sup>33</sup>

When the Progressives' vice-presidential nominee toured Iowa in mid-October, there was little evidence that the Wallace candidacy could improve. By this time the press devoted less attention to the candidate's radical politics than to his unusual campaigning methods. Glen Taylor's rallies featured him singing "in heartfelt western harmony" with his wife and children. A *Des Moines Register* editorial said, "none of the candidates can lay a glove on Taylor when it comes to putting on a good act." Taylor claimed that the Progressives were much stronger in rural areas than the press realized. At an Iowa City rally he even predicted that the Wallace-Taylor ticket would win in Iowa. In Davenport he predicted, more prophetically, that the Republicans were too confident of victory in the farm states. Taylor's campaign trip also brought more embarrassment to the IPP: he arrived in Fort Dodge one hour late, forcing an angry and unprepared Fred Stover to address the anxious audience.<sup>34</sup>

The Iowa Progressives' organizational weaknesses and their distance from the national Progressive party became even more evident as the election approached. The IPP's farm committee was not founded until October 29, four days before the election. At a meeting in Mason City's Hanford Hotel, Charles Biederman, the Iowa Progressives' gubernatorial candidate, expressed the IPP's commitment to agricultural issues. Biederman's speeches typically emphasized a number of proposals that were not prominent in the national campaign literature. In an August speech, for example, Biederman specified that direct payments to farmers and high parity prices were essential "to encourage a high level of consumption without jeopardizing

33. *Moorhead Daily News*, 9 and 11 October 1948; *Clay Sunday Press*, 9 October 1948; *DMR*, 11 October 1948; MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 606.

34. *DMR*, 14 October 1948; *Davenport Democrat*, 13 October 1948; *Fort Dodge Messenger*, 13 October 1948; Stover interviews.

farm income." In Mason City he advocated extensive federal and state programs for rodent control, soil conservation, crop insurance, and river valley development projects. Biederman also complained that farmers bore a grossly unfair percentage of the state income tax, while banks and insurance companies were exempt from the tax. Of course, all of these proposals would appeal to rural voters. However, this new organization was not capable of generating rural support for the Progressives. Only about one hundred people attended the meeting in Mason City; the audience donated little more than one hundred dollars. By that time Iowa Progressive party officials conceded that they had no illusions of victory. J. P. Hansen, the IPP's candidate for state secretary of agriculture, admitted the Progressives were merely "working to accomplish a principle."<sup>35</sup>

ON THE FOLLOWING TUESDAY, American voters shocked pollsters by reelecting Truman, while they handed the Wallace-Taylor ticket a crushing defeat. Ever since, historians have sought explanations for Truman's victory and Wallace's collapse. Generally, they credit Truman with rebuilding a coalition of farmers, laborers, and liberals—three groups that formed the core of Wallace's natural constituency. Truman's strength among midwestern farmers has received particular attention.<sup>36</sup> Truman won in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Ohio, three states the Roosevelt-Truman ticket had lost to Dewey in 1944. Truman's campaign rhetoric warned farmers that declining corn prices signaled a new agricultural depression under a Republican ad-

35. *Charles City Daily Press*, 30 August 1948; *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 27 and 29 October 1948; Roy Dyas to members of the IPP Farm Committee, 25 October 1948, in the possession of Clarence E. Biederman; Clarence Biederman, "Excerpts from Speech of C. E. Biederman," in the possession of Clarence E. Biederman. For more information on Biederman, see *Mitchell County Press and Osage News*, 17 June 1948; and "For Peace and Abundance, Elect C. E. Biederman, Governor," campaign flyer, in the possession of Clarence E. Biederman. An interview with Biederman and his son, W. C. Biederman, 12 August 1985, Osage, Iowa, was also helpful.

36. In addition to the historians' interpretations cited in footnote 7, see also several contemporary accounts that analyzed the impact of the farm vote on Truman's victory: *Fort Dodge Messenger*, 4 November 1948; *DMR*, 7 November 1948; Donald R. Murphy to Henry A. Wallace, 11 November 1948, Henry A. Wallace Papers; and Progressive Party in Iowa, "Election in Review," unpublished letter to IPP members, n.d. [late 1948], in the possession of Clarence E. Biederman.

ministration. As a recent analysis by Thomas G. Ryan has shown, this tactic may have been less significant than farmers' realization that the farm economy was not depressed, but prosperous. High prices for livestock and other farm commodities convinced farmers to support the existing administration.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Wallace and Dewey did little to challenge those assumptions.

The Iowa Progressive party, of course, had no chance to overcome the handicaps that plagued Progressives nationwide. The allegations about Communist infiltration, the realities of Cold War tensions, the inevitable problems of third party campaigns, and postwar prosperity all crippled Wallace's campaign. In Iowa those problems were compounded by the Progressives' failure to address agricultural issues, a lack of adequate funding, a series of embarrassing campaign incidents, and evidence of organizational problems in the IPP. Despite the Iowa Progressives' activity at the Philadelphia convention, the *Marshalltown Times-Republican's* prediction came true. "An Iowan delivered the keynote speech at the Wallace convention. Another Iowan nominated Wallace, and the oldest delegate to the convention was from Iowa. Wallace is a former Iowan. Where Wallace will miss out on the support of Iowans will be in the election Nov. 2."<sup>38</sup>

Fred Stover's recollections further explain the Progressives' many problems in Iowa. "If it hadn't been for those CP people sticking their head into that meeting in Des Moines," Stover explained, "we might have had a hell of a start in Iowa." However, the party's mistakes were soon obvious to its cochairperson. "We got souped up too fast, and started telling everyone else what we were doing. We were so enthusiastic and optimistic we didn't realize it would have been better to keep quiet for a while. We opened ourselves to attack too soon, and we soon had nobody to carry out the big plans we had made." Stover further recalled that the Iowa Progressives "had a dickens of a time with Henry," particularly regarding his attention to farm issues. They were "not sure our messages got through to him," perhaps because campaign manager Beanie Baldwin sheltered the candidate. More significantly, Stover believed Baldwin was "very anxious

37. Ryan, "Farm Prices and the Farm Vote," 387-401.

38. *Marshalltown Times-Republican*, 26 July 1948.

to please the CP.<sup>39</sup> For whatever reason, the Iowa Progressives were never able to convince the national campaign to accept their liberal farm planks.

Poor organization also damaged the Iowa Progressives' credibility. According to Stover, two of the IPP chairmen, E. E. Roelofs and E. Cliff Richards, were ineffective and not respected by party members. Often party leaders had difficulty arranging the time or location of their rallies. Limited funding, of course, was a major handicap.<sup>40</sup> The party lacked the human resources needed to be effective on the precinct level. On several occasions farm and labor leaders in the IPP fought among themselves. Finally, the press in Iowa treated Wallace's candidacy negatively, often emphasizing the IPP's petty problems.

One other issue hampered the Progressives' campaign in Iowa. Despite the pageantry of the Philadelphia convention, the national party leadership considered Iowa an unimportant state. The Progressives ran an urban campaign, concentrating on the industrial Northeast. The national party rarely sent its funds or its candidate to Iowa. Wallace himself admitted that his party was not designed to attract farmers. "What was there in our platform to appeal to farmers?" he asked later. "We were discussing the peace issue. . . . There was nothing in our platform to appeal to [them]."<sup>41</sup> Several Iowans, however, believed Wallace's new attitude about agricultural politics was mistaken. For example, a *Des Moines Register* reader maintained that if Wallace "had not

39. Stover interviews; Stover, quoted in MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 806.

40. Although the IPP was short on funding, the national party was relatively well funded. Its primary benefactor was Anita McCormick Blaine, daughter of Cyrus McCormick, daughter-in-law of James G. Blaine, the former Maine senator and Republican presidential nominee, and heiress to International Harvester's wealth. During the summer Blaine gave as much as a half-million dollars to the national committee in installments. Wallace and C. B. Baldwin, the campaign manager, determined how Blaine's gifts were divided: which state committees were entitled to receive those funds, at what time, and in what amounts. In all, Wallace and Baldwin awarded at least thirty-three state Progressive party organizations with the Blaine funds. Curiously, the IPP was not one of them. MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 293-99, 808; Henry A. Wallace to Anita McCormick Blaine, 13 July and 17 August 1948, Henry A. Wallace Papers. I have not seen exact figures for total funds available to the IPP from other sources. Mrs. Blaine's funds were directed to five of the six states bordering Iowa: Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

41. Henry A. Wallace, quoted in MacDougall, *Gideon's Army*, 606.

deserted his friends, the farmers, he would still be a great American statesman."<sup>42</sup> Fred Stover was even more optimistic about the Progressives' potential appeal to farmers. Discussing the farm issue nearly forty years after the 1948 election, Stover recalled, "Wallace could have done one hell of a job with that, but no, . . . Wallace did not deserve the farm vote, and he did not get the farm vote, *but he could have had it.*"<sup>43</sup>

42. Donn Lucker, letter to the editor, *DMR*, 24 April 1948.

43. Stover interview, 18 November 1984. The ellipsis represents the phrase, "like Mondale." Stover was pounding the table as he made this point.

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