

## Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920

Duncan Stewart

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ment law for the amendment, "specifically permitted possession and consumption of alcohol within the home by the homeowner, his family, and his guests" (90). That this loophole created ethical problems is well known, but Murdock argues that it also allowed the continuation and consolidation of a domestic alcohol culture that eventually triumphed to become the mainstream pattern of American drinking. Domesticated drinking formed a middle ground between saloon culture and the dry America advocated by the WCTU and other dry radicals. This did not happen overnight or easily, and the author devotes several chapters to charting the political course dry and wet women followed in the campaigns for Prohibition and its repeal.

Murdock's overall analysis is convincing. However, in her desire to proclaim the originality and importance of her work, she occasionally falls into absolute statements that would feel comfortable on the lips of the reformers she castigates for their excess. Instead of telling us that her analysis is "correct" (10) and "absolutely accurate" (110), it would have been better to simply let her evidence speak for itself. Although she makes a strong case that the American male subculture based on "exclusivity, inebriety, and violence" has been modified, the book's evidence indicates that it has not been "eliminated." *Domesticating Drink* is a fine piece of analysis and scholarship; Murdock would have been wise to take the advice she offers to her readers: moderate claims are more persuasive.

*Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920*, by Jim Bissett. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. xiii, 249 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, bibliographical essay, index. \$33.95 cloth.

Reviewer Duncan Stewart is a librarian at the State Historical Society of Iowa. His research interests include the midwestern Left, rural radicalism, and Iowa labor history.

Jim Bissett's *Agrarian Socialism* joins Garin Burbank's *When Farmers Voted Red* and James R. Green's *Grass Roots Socialism* as the third work dealing with Oklahoma socialism since 1976. Bissett acknowledges these authors but challenges their belief that Sooner socialism was largely an imported idea. In *Agrarian Socialism* he describes Oklahoma socialism as an outgrowth of earlier protest movements, economic conditions, and unresponsive politicians.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, low crop prices and sharecropping kept many Oklahoma farmers in poverty and provided ready recruits for the Farmers Union, and, later, the Socialist Party.

Both large landowners and dirt farmers from the pre-statehood Oklahoma and Indian Territories joined the Indian Territory Farmers' Union (IFU) to raise prices by withholding crops. By 1907 the landowners had seized control of the IFU and its publications and small farmers had deserted the union. Meanwhile, the Oklahoma Socialist Party (OSP) was expanding. Bissett believes there was significant overlap between the IFU and the socialists in membership and ideas. He writes, "Undoubtedly many recruited into the [Socialist] Party between 1900 and 1908 already belonged to the Farmers' Union . . . [and the] Marxist language often used by Union members and organizers facilitated . . . coexistence" (63). Their experience in the IFU led former members to resist centralization of Socialist Party decision making and an official party press, ideas pushed by state and national socialist leaders. IFU men also came to the Socialist Party with a sophisticated critique of market forces arrayed against small farmers, and a wealth of organizing experience.

In addition to creating a democratic and decentralized party, Oklahoma socialists, Bissett argues, were successful for two other reasons. The OSP advanced the novel idea that farmers and tenants who worked the land had a right to possess it—agricultural producers would own the means of production. Until then, the Socialist Party labeled all farmers bourgeois and called for land nationalization. Oklahoma socialists blended this call for "land to the tillers" with a Jeffersonian celebration of yeoman farmers, Marxist economics, and the communitarian strain of Protestantism into a potent political movement. They published dozens of papers, held camp meetings drawing thousands, and overtook the Republicans as the opposition in parts of the state. The OSP shook the ruling Democratic Party to its core by appealing to poor whites in class, not racial, terms.

By 1912 Oklahoma socialists had won many local races and taken 16 percent of the presidential vote. They also gathered enough signatures to force a referendum on electoral reform in 1916. Then Democrats and Republicans joined together to undercut the socialists through voting restrictions, ballot manipulation, and electoral fraud. U.S. entry into World War I enabled the state to harass socialists and arrest them for sedition. The party's agrarian strength became a weakness. Rural socialists were isolated and exposed to the full fury of official and vigilante pressure. The OSP vote dropped from almost 47,000 in 1916 to 7,000 in 1918.

Oklahoma-style socialism did not happen in Iowa, but *Agrarian Socialism* underscores the value of state-level historical analysis done well. Oklahoma socialism is less of a puzzle after Bissett details Okla-

homa's unique confluence of agricultural crisis, politicized dirt farmers, Marxism, and the social gospel. In Iowa, that period was the "golden age" of agriculture. Iowa's fledgling socialism, based in its mining camps and river towns, fell victim to the xenophobia and red baiting that destroyed the Socialist Party elsewhere. Like Oklahomans in the 1910s, Iowa farmers responded to agricultural depression in the 1920s and '30s in ways conditioned by Iowa history—working with Iowa farm groups and the Farm Bloc to seek remedies. Even in the 1930s, when some Iowa farmers joined a radical movement, it was a group of their own creation led by Iowan Milo Reno. As Bissett implicitly reminds us, every state has its own stories to tell.

*Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*, by M. Alison Kibler. Gender and American Culture Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. xiv, 283 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Reviewer Laural Weintraub is affiliated with The New-York Historical Society. Her dissertation was "Fine Art and Popular Entertainment: The Emerging Dialogue between 'High' and 'Low' in American Art of the Early Twentieth Century" (City University of New York, 1996).

In her rousing introduction to *Rank Ladies*, M. Alison Kibler describes the appearance of French singing star Yvette Guilbert at B. F. Keith's vaudeville theater in Philadelphia on November 15, 1909. Guilbert, a sophisticated "artiste," was expected to enhance the respectability of the show. Unfortunately, the audience resisted her elevating influence and chose instead to honor a slapstick comedian with their greatest approbation. Kibler uses this example to illustrate the contest between taste factions in vaudeville—managers on the one hand who sought to elevate vaudeville in order to market it to women, and audiences who resisted their efforts—and also to introduce the element of gender into the interpretive mix.

In promotional materials, Keith consistently emphasized that the entertainment he offered in his theaters was suitable for respectable ladies. Kibler's study, which focuses exclusively on the Keith circuit, the most powerful chain of vaudeville theaters, is in part a correction of this public record. She relies extensively on managers' unpublished report books (in the Keith/Albee Collection at the University of Iowa Libraries) to support her assessment of the fluctuating variable of gender. While Keith's publicity emphasized the refinement of women in the audience, the report book record indicates, for example, that during the presentation of a boxing match "a lot of the women in the

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