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THE FARMER-LABOR PARTY

Where most persons make their mistake is in considering Minnesota's Farmer-Labor party a phenomenon peculiar to the 1930's in the state's history.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Farmer-Labor party is not a new or a recent movement; rather is it a climax to a whole series of movements that had their beginnings before Minnesota even entered statehood. These movements also were felt in other states to as great a degree, and, in some cases, to an even greater degree than in the land of ten thousand lakes. Yet only Minnesota emerged with a Farmer-Labor party. Surely, then, this so-called climax that is the Farmer-Labor party would have emerged elsewhere as well were it not a product of more recent thought and activity? Not so, as further reading in this chapter will explain. Certain peculiarities--especially geographical and (juxtapositional) ones--typical of Minnesota have played an important role in the state's politics.

Study of a topographical map will indicate certain definite qualities in Minnesota that make it physically unlike other states. It will be noticed that the vast prairies that stretch half way across the continent come to an end by a graduating process starting at the Dakota border and ending at the outskirts of Minneapolis. From there on, forests and woodlands set in originally until they were cut down by the early settlers. That section where the prairie starts petering out is the western border of what is perhaps the world's richest agricultural belt. The eastern border is reached at the

Twin Cities. Thus, in the excessive richness of its southern, central, and western farmlands is Minnesota geographically different from most states.

The richness of this area is further enhanced by the fact that when the glaciers which once covered most of the world started receding, Minnesota was perhaps the last state of the union that they left. This assured the state of a plentiful water supply. It is dotted with lakes and is the source of several rivers, including the mightiest of all--the Mississippi. This river is navigable up to the Twin Cities, and provides them with somewhat of a seaport. Further protection against being landlocked is provided by the Great Lakes which border on northern Minnesota. The vast forest belts that once covered all of eastern and northern Minnesota and which still cover a great section of the state also are significant, in their way, in the development of the Farmer-Labor party. And last, but certainly not least, are the gigantic iron deposits in the Iron Range area. It is said that at times the Mesabi mines alone supplied more than half the world's iron. That Minnesota has mined at times as high as two-thirds of the United State's iron is an indisputable fact.

How then, does this topographical study of Minnesota concern the fact that the state is the only Farmer-labor state in the union? Notice that the above facts indicate one thing; that Minnesota is the border between eastern United States and western. It is the natural port between these two areas as Jim Hill knew and profited from when he built his colossal railroad empire. Minneapolis is frequently referred to as a typical western city whereas its twin, St. Paul, is known as an eastern town. Yet these two settlements rub shoulders on their mutual border line. This is significant.

Farmers in the northwest have always been class-conscious. This has been mentioned in greater detail in previous chapters but is important enough to bear repetition. Time after time waves of political revolt have

spread over the western prairies and rolled right into Minneapolis. In fact, greatest leader of any of these revolts was Minnesota's own Ignatius Donnelly. The northwest farmers have been more class-conscious than their eastern and southern fellows for one very good reason: their distance from markets. Because they were so unfavorably remote from their markets, it was simple for them to be exploited by railroads, milling companies, and other capitalist groups that deal with agriculture. To combat this, agrarian political and economic movements swept the Northwest's farm belt. Politically, this idea was represented by the Anti-Monopoly party, the Greenback movement, the Populists, and the Nonpartisan League. Economically, by the Grange, the Wheel, the Farmers' Alliance, the Farm Union, and the Farmers Holiday Association. Minnesota was in on all of these. In fact, most of these organizations originated in the state.

On the other hand, influences of a different sort penetrated from the east. Minnesota was more populous and had greater urban areas than other western states because of its ports and because it was a natural capital of the Northwest Empire. Also, its vast forests and its iron mines drew many urbanites to it. Its climate, peculiarly similar to that of the Scandinavian peninsula, brought many Swedes, Norse, Danes and Finns. These people were independent thinking men and women; they were readily Americanized in the best sense of that word, and yet they left nothing that they found good in the Old World behind them. They brought, among other things, social-democratic ideals and ideas to Minnesota. Thus, Marxist ideas that were being felt in Eastern United States found fertile ground in Minnesota with its large laboring class of milling, transportation, mining, industrial, and lumbering workers. In fact, it was in 1916 that Minneapolis, largest city, elected a Socialist mayor and one town on the Iron Range, Crosby-Ironton, at one time had a Communist mayor.

Thus, geographically, Minnesota was the spot where two political philosophies--radical agrarianism and socialism met. Either one of these movements was strong enough to stalemate the other. Yet neither was strong enough in itself, because of the State's peculiar balance, to gain control of the government. For political success, it was necessary that they work together.

At first glance, it seems paradoxical that farmers, who by their very station in life are small capitalists and socialists could ever find common grounds politically. Republican and Democratic candidates and conservatives of all sorts have been quick to observe this and use it in an attempt to disrupt the movement that later evolved itself into a Farmer-Labor party. However, this is but superficial observation and thinking. The two economic groups have many things in common. First, each is definitely anti-monopoly or anti-big-capital. Secondly, farmers are interested in a good market. Labor makes up the bulk of urban consumers, and when labor is well-paid, agriculture profits. Likewise, the reverse is true. When agriculture flourishes, the fruits of labor have a good market and salaries and jobs are both increased. It probably was these considerations that eventually brought the two classes together under one banner.

But now that the background, both topographically and economically, is clear, it might be well to examine more specifically the political technique that evolved itself into a Farmer-Labor party and then to deal with the tribulations, problems, and successes with which this allied movement eventually met.

It is singularly significant and interesting to note that the one person who more than any other was responsible for the actual organization of this latest manifestation of class discontent---Arthur C. Townley---had experience as a participant in both sections of the movement--labor and agri-

culture. A native Minnesotan both through birth and education, he started life as a school teacher, then engaged in flax farming on an ambitious scale. A combination of poor crops and market exploitations, however, ruined him in this last venture and he became an organizer for the Socialist party, which, at that time, was sole representative of International Marxism in America.

Being a man of quick and vivid imagination, it did not take him long to realize that there was no poorer field in the world to sell unadulterated Socialism than among land-owning farmers in the world's richest agricultural belt. He noticed further that despite the fact socialism wasn't a highly marketable article in the Midwest, there was nevertheless widespread discontent throughout that section directed against capitalism and more particularly, against specific fields and organs of capitalism. Therefore, he switched his political commodity of Socialism to fit in with regional demands and with the traditional agrarian class-consciousness and organized the Farmers' Nonpartisan League in North Dakota. This, he decided was not to be a political party in itself, but was to be composed of dues-paying members who would throw their support to such candidates of the two major parties who would support the League's platform.

The League was opposed specifically, first, to the grain exchanges, second, to the packing interests, then to the bankers, and fourth, to the railroads. Big demon behind all these organizations was the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. Therefore, the main proposals of Townley's program were state-owned elevators, packing houses, cold storage plants, and flour mills with exemption of farm improvements from taxation and state inspection of grain, hail insurance, and rural credit banks. Thus did he adulterate his socialism to fit in with agrarian needs.

With his program definitely decided upon, A. C. Townley selected a propitious moment--while the North Dakota state legislature was deadlocked over the enactment of a state elevator bill--to organize his league. Travel-

ling in a borrowed Ford, he set out to solicit members. Seventy-nine farmers paid dues of \$2.50 a piece the first week. Thence, the movement spread like a grasshopper plague throughout the state. Nine months after he first started organizing, 22,000 farmers had joined the League. Six months later, 40,000 paid dues. And in 1916, the Farmers' Nonpartisan League had captured the Republican party of North Dakota, elected most of the state wide officers including the governor and the Supreme Court, won a huge majority of both houses of the legislature, and sent three Congressmen to Washington.

With the fire of a crusader, A. C. Townley left this success behind him and returned to his native state of Minnesota, where conditions also were ripe for his purposes. Here war hysteria was high, bigotry was on the rampage, and a panic-stricken oligarchy--witnessing the success of Townley's North Dakota venture--was unscrupulous in its methods of combating the new movement. The reign of terror that was instituted against the Nonpartisan League had been dealt with in the two previous chapters. Despite this terrific obstacle, six months after Townley set up his state offices in St. Paul, January 1, 1918 and started publication of an official organ, "The Minnesota Leader," more than 50,000 dues-paying members were included in the ranks of the Minnesota Farmers' Nonpartisan League. The League was especially successful in northern and western Minnesota. It was in the southern counties of the state that progress was slow. To further conform with specific Minnesota needs, planks calling for an eight-hour day except in agriculture, free employment bureaus, a tonnage-tax, state owned pulp and paper mills, a moratorium for soldiers, and old age pensions were added to the platform which had succeeded so thoroughly in North Dakota. On March 19, a state convention of the League was held in St. Paul. Governor Burnquist, upon being invited to address the gathering condemned it as pro-German and declined the invitation. But this didn't bother the League insofar as the invitation was more a courtesy gesture than anything. After drawing up their platform, they embarked on the

primary campaign inside the Republican party in support of Minnesota's great liberal congress man, Charles A. Lindbergh, as their candidate for governor.

The campaign was unprecedented in ferocity. Sums totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent to defeat the new movement. The red herring--of socialism was drawn across the political horizon, and old-line Republican chieftains sent out a Macedonian cry to save the state from socialism. Democrats were asked to leave their primaries for this purpose and professional mud-slingers and patrioteers were engaged to incite the populace against what they termed an invasion of pro-Kaiserites and Bolsheviks. When the smoke of battle had cleared, Burnquist emerged victor over the League's candidate by 50,000 votes only to find that he had another real and tremendous hurdle to leap before he could return to his governor's chair for another two years---the Farmer-Labor party.

The defeat of the organized farmers in the primaries, paradoxically enough, meant their ultimate triumph. For, because of the vicious, bitter campaign waged against them, they were in a position where they could not support the primary victors. They also learned the lesson that they could not succeed without the aid of labor and other urban elements. Therefore, in conjunction with a Minnesota Federation of Labor sponsored organization known as the Working People's Nonpartisan League, they agreed to support the independent candidacy of David H. Evans of Tracy in the November final elections. Because Attorney-General Clifford L. Hilton ruled that the name of some party, the name Farmer-Labor Party was chosen to comply with the attorney-general's requirement. Thus was the new party officially baptized.

The campaign that followed in no way diminished the bitterness and viciousness of the primaries. Broken meetings, yellow paint, tar and feathers, and rotten fruit, vegetables, and eggs were freely employed in a desperate effort to stop the onrush of the organized common people. Details and spec-

ifces of this campaign would make a volume in themselves. Suffice it to say here that when the ballots were counted, Governor Burnquist emerged victor but received less than a majority of the votes cast. He polled 166,515 votes, Evans, 11,948, and Fred Wheaton, the Democrat, 76,793. Likewise, conservatives were victorious in both houses of the legislature. They definitely felt the liberal threat, however, and passed several belated compromise measures which, had they been passed earlier, might have staved off the organized revolt.

In 1920, there was a dual convention held in St. Paul. The Farmers' Nonpartisan League met in one room, the Working People's Nonpartisan Political League met in another. The two agreed on a slate of candidates and a platform, and, after some discussion, it was decided to work through the Republican Party again. After another bitter primary campaign, the compromise candidate decided on by conservative forces, J. A. O. Preus, emerged victor over the Leagues' candidate Dr. Hendrik Shipstead, by less than 8,000 votes, whereupon Shipstead entered the finals as an independent candidate for governor and was again defeated. It is interesting to note at this point that O. J. Kvale, successful League candidate for congress in the seventh district primaries, had his name removed from the ballot by conservative and defeated incumbent, Andrew J. Volstead, on the grounds that Kvale had called Volstead an atheist.

The end of the Townley period of domination in the progressive movement came with the decision of the 1922 dual conventions meeting in Minneapolis, to give up trying to capture the Republican party through its primaries and to launch on a permanent basis the Farmer-Labor party. This was against the desires of Townley as was the next decision passed by the convention to continue its way independent of the Democratic party which also was meeting at the same time and which came forth with the proposal that the Farmer-Labor party name a candidate for governor and that the two parties cooperate in electing their men. With the decision made to reject this, the influence of Townley came to an end.

Subsequent results of the November elections proved that the third-partyites were not too overly optimistic in their rejection of Democratic support, for, with women now voting, their candidate for governor, dirt-farmer Magnus Johnson, came within 14,277 votes of unseating Governor Preus. and their candidate for senator, Hendrik Shipstead, defeated incumbent Frank Kellogg by a margin of 83,539. Two of their congressional candidates, O. J. Kvale and Knud Wefald, also were victorious.

No sooner had the Townley influence in the movement been defeated and replaced with the third party policy than a new, vital figure whose personality was to dominate the party for many years to come made his appearance and started a new era in the development of the common peoples' cause. This new figure was Floyd Bjornsterne Olson.

Originally a Democrat, this youthful Hennepin County Attorney became gubernatorial standard bearer for the Farmer-Labor Party at the age of thirty-two. He was ideally fitted for this job in more ways than one. His youth, like that of his party's, made him forward-looking. His racial antecedents--a Swedish mother and a Norwegian father--fitted him ethnologically with a majority of the electorate. And his humble beginnings as the son of poor immigrants and his birth and early childhood in a neighborhood which was as near to being a slum area as anything that could be found in comparatively slumless Minnesota gave him the class angle necessary to his advancement.

As a personality, Olson was further qualified not only to be a leader in the third-party movement, but in any political party. Six-foot-two, he was a modern edition of his viking ancestors. His logic, his platform manner, his political oratory, and his wit were as deadly as a machine-gun. However, the times were against him. The United States, in the aftermath of the World War, had approached a peak of development and prosperity that was unprecedented. This fact made the cries of "Bolshevist" and "Socialist" that were hurled

against the third party deadly enough to defeat it by a comparatively close margin. Olson retired for the time being with the promise that he would prepare himself for some future campaign, and that when he ran again, he would not be defeated.

Also defeated in the 1924 election was the veteran agrarian, U. S. Senator Magnus Johnson, who had been elected to that position a year before to fill the unexpired term of Senator Knute Nelson. He was replaced by the blind congressman, Thomas Schall, who had a reputation of being a liberal Republican and who usually voted progressively on labor and agrarian legislation. Farmer-Labor candidates for Congress in the seventh, eighth, and ninth districts, however, were elected, and Senator Shipstead still held his seat in the upper house.

The next six years were years of right-wing Republican ascendancy. The 1924 bid for the presidency of the United States as an Independent by veteran Republican Senator La Follette of Wisconsin had been defeated, and for the next several years, Republican insurgents were required to play second fiddles in the national picture. This same condition prevailed in Minnesota where most liberal Republicans had cast their lot in with the Farmer-Laborites. Theodore Christianson, who had defeated Olson in 1924, respectively defeated Magnus Johnson in 1926 and Ernest Lundeen in 1928, for the governorship. Christianson represented the conservative elements of his party and most of his six years of administration were devoted to making the machinery of government more economical and more efficient.

During this period of conservative Republican ascendancy, Farmer-Laborites lost their congressman from the ninth district in the 1926 campaign, and their representative from the eighth two years later, in addition to Congressman Kvale in the seventh. Only Senator Shipstead survived, and this, strangely enough, by the largest vote ever given a candidate for public office in the state of Minnesota--665,169 votes, or over a hundred thousand more than

the record-vote-getter, Herbert Hoover, got in the state.

Meanwhile, vigorous Floyd Olson was preparing to fulfill the promise he made after his 1924 defeat of running for the governor's seat and winning it. He was making friends by the thousands and his reputation as a capable, efficient, and honest office holder was being enhanced by his sojourn in the County Attorney's office.

During this same period, the national economy was also working itself out in favor of the coming candidacy of Floyd Olson. The wave of prosperity that had engulfed the United States since the war was but little felt in Minnesota. In Minneapolis, for example, money wages rose between 1921 and 1929 only 2.1% whereas throughout the nation as a whole they rose 11.3%. During this same period, the Minneapolis and Minnesota cost of living was higher than that of the country as a whole. Nor was the condition of agriculture relatively any better. Minnesota was still as far from markets as ever, and the failure of the federal government to satisfactorily regulate farm production was working a hardship on northwest farmers. Then the epoch-making "depression" which started in 1920 and has continued to this day, preceded Olson's second gubernatorial bid by only a few months.

Small business men and independent bankers, too, were suffering noticeably from the expansion to the northwest of chain stores and banks. Thus, the stage was well set for almost any man who could effectively unite the various dissenting and dissatisfied elements under one single banner of protest. Such a man was the brilliant Floyd Olson. Just shortly prior to the 1930 Farmer-Labor convention he announced that he would accept the third party's endorsement for governor with the single provision that he have a free hand in making appointments when he was elected. This was granted him.

At the time, no one realized what a serious blunder had been committed by the convention in thus allowing their gubernatorial candidate a free hand

to build a personal political machine. Most Farmer-Laborites figured that the Skipper, as they affectionately called him, wanted office holders under him to be selected for their efficiency rather than their political usefulness, and at the time the depression wasn't so hardly felt that employment of deserving Farmer-Laborites was of paramount importance. Then no one foresaw the bitter intra-party struggle that was to ensue between Farmer-Labor Association members--which was the name of the dues paying organization that had succeeded the two Nonpartisan Leagues--and All-Partyites, which was the name of the office holding clique the Skipper eventually built around himself.

When the primaries came, it is estimated that more than a hundred thousand loyal Farmer-Laborites cast their ballots in the Republican column to insure election of opposition candidates who either were pushovers or who were willing to trade votes for certain Farmer-Laborites candidates in the November elections in exchange for support for their own candidacies. Others cast their votes in their own primaries and, while dutifully nominating the other convention endorsed candidates upset the apple cart somewhat by preferring Ernest Lundeen to Knud Wefald, convention endorsee, for United States Senator.

One fortunate occurrence in the Republican primaries that played to the advantage of the Farmer-Laborites and Olson especially, was the bitter primary battle between Governor Christianson and Senator Schall for the senatorship endorsement. Schall won, but the struggle between the two Titans of Republicanism left the party sharply and bitterly split.

Ray Chase, Republican gubernatorial opponent of Olson, was closely identified with national Republican politics and policies, or Hooverism, as it was called. Hooverism, because of the depression, was decidedly unpopular with the masses. Indrehus, the Democratic candidate, was an unimportant factor in the election, and the contest revolved itself into a clear-cut

battle between conservatism and liberalism. Ray Chases's past activities made his 1930 campaign tactics unfortunately inept for his purposes. Wishing liberal and progressive support as much as possible to offset the unpopularity of his Hooverism, he campaigned, strangely enough, in behalf of the cause of Farmer-Labor purity. He lauded the party of 1920 as being made up of "splendid men and women" and being genuinely progressive. The party Floyd Olson represented, he claimed, was dishonest, insincere, non-progressive, and unworthy. "Political history records no more audacious attempt," he stated, "to defile a political party than the present attempt by political pirates to scrap the life-giving principles of the Farmer-Labor Party and make a job-hunting band wagon of its corpse!"

Farmer-Laborites, led by their acid-tongued Skipper, immediately took up this cry to Mr. Chase's and stuffed it down his throat. They reminded him of the part he had played in Governor Preus's "Smash Socialism" campaign against the Farmer-Labor party in that same year of 1920. They quoted, from one end of the state to the other, his references at that time to the "splendid men and women" whose cause he now espoused as "bolsheviks," "rats and vipers," "Home-wreckers" "free-lovers" and other similar uncomplimentary terms. They also repeated his charges of pro-Germanism and disloyalty against those "life-giving principles," that he now so heartily was hailing.

Thus, the political sagacity of Ray Chase and his Republican followers also played an important role in electing the first Farmer-Laborite governor in the state of Minnesota. The results weren't even close, and Olson went into office with a plurality of near to a hundred thousand. Also erected with him was the third party candidate for lieutenant governor, Henry Arens, and a scattered number of state senators, representatives and congressmen. Control of both houses of the legislature remained firmly in the hands of conservatives. The victory, thus, was more a personal victory

for the Skipper than a victory for his party. This is significant and should be remembered.

When Olson took office, conditions in Minnesota as throughout the state were undeniably bad. More than a year had elapsed since the stock market collapse. Business men felt insecure. Farmers didn't know where to turn. Labor was in a chaotic condition, and the unemployed in the state alone numbered more than 55,000. The new governor's inaugural message gave encouragement to these victims of social upheaval. Nor did it ask for anything particularly radical. A strong liberal reform program not too unlike similar programs that had been enacted by Republicans and Democrats in such states as New York, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin was asked and it included such provisions as income taxes, old age pensions, unemployment insurance and various other measures which have since been enacted into national law under the blanket coverage of the Social Security law. Unfortunately, the conservative legislature was not disposed to cooperate to any great extent with the new administration. One of the first acts of the Senate was to deny the Farmer-Labor lieutenant governor the privilege of appointing Senate committees, a privilege that had been accorded lieutenant-governors at every session of the legislature for the past forty years.

Nor was the new governor badgered only from the right. Communists of both the Trotskyite and the Stalinist varieties were, if anything, more severe than conservatives in their condemnation of the governor's program. Scarce had the last echoes of his inaugural message died out in the corridors of the state house than a communist-led march of several hundred unemployed on the capitol took place. With excellent tact Olson handled this march as he did similar and subsequent marches of bereaved, unemployed, or draught-ridden farmers during his five and a half years in office. His utterances to the public were radical and were music to the ears of many who wanted ex-

treme changes. Control of the legislature by his opponents gave him little opportunity to do anything but talk for his program. However, before he placed his name for re-election in 1932, several compromise reform measures, milder than what he wanted and stronger than conservatives desired, were worked out.

Then, in 1932, a bombshell hit the country in the shape of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, governor of New York, and his New Deal campaign for presidency. Olson's opponent in this case was Earle Brown, head of the highway patrol and like Chase also closely identified with the National Republican administration. Olson had a terrific battle on his hands. One of his strongest weapons was his tendency never to underestimate the strength of his enemies. He had no editorial friends to speak of. All the big dailies of the state were opposed to him and every ounce of organization the Republican party could muster was pitted against him.

He lost no time in tying himself to the New Deal and in supporting the candidacy of his personal friend, Roosevelt, for the nation's presidency. The campaign that followed was a rough and tumble one with no holds barred. Vicious whispering campaigns attacking the governor's personal life were spread throughout the state. Efforts were made to discredit his administration as being spend-thrift and extravagant. However, nothing could stop the land tide that swept the New Deal into power throughout the entire nation. Once again was Olson re-elected and this time with one of the largest votes ever given a candidate for governor. That was an endorsement of the Skipper's personal popularity there can be no doubt. But that the party itself was becoming stronger is indicated in the fact that the lieutenant-governor's office was again captured as was the attorney-general's, five congressional seats, and a majority of the lower house of the legislature. The Senate did not come up for election this time or undoubtedly the third party would have captured that important branch of government too. Final victory was the elect-

ion of Knud Wefald to one of the three railroad and Warehouse Commissions seats.

This time even stronger reform measures were put through. Greater sums for relief were appropriated. A mortgage moratorium that won national fame was instituted and various other legislative measures of importance were forced through a reluctant Senate. However, perhaps the most significant happenings during this period were the Austin and Minneapolis strikes.

Austin is a healthy meat packing city of close to 17,000 population. Its only industry, is the George Hormel Company and what took place in this thriving little community the latter part of 1933 was historically more significant than any one at the time and very few now are able to realize. For there, under the leadership of Frank Ellis, diminutive but colorful labor agitator, what might be termed the first organized sit-down strike in modern times occurred. Before the strike, there was no union to amount to anything, but the company notified its employees that it was going to impose an insurance plan on them that was unpopular with the employees. So walking out in mass, they conducted a meeting at the town square and then returned and seized the plant, which they held until their demands were met. Time was on their side for a five million dollar refrigeration plant which would have been destroyed were it not tended and eight million dollars worth of stored meats which, with the refrigeration plant out of business, would have spoiled served as hostages. Hormel officials demanded martial law of Olson which the governor did not give them. Instead he appealed to the strikers, pointed out that their action was unlawful, and asked them to trust him to see that their grievances were satisfactorily settled. The strikers complied, and the Austin situation was ironed out after two days and nights of conferences, with a resulting working agreement drawn up between the company and the workers. Since that time, the Hormel Company and its methods of

treating its help have been cited as a model example throughout the nation.

While the Austin strike received international publicity and attention, it was dwarfed by the two tremendous truck-drivers strikes that took place in Minneapolis not long after. A growing restlessness on the part of Minneapolis Labor burst into a belching volcano of rioting, bloodshed, terrorism, and class warfare in May, 1934. Minneapolis business interests had long boasted of their city as an open shop town where labor was peaceful and contented and where wages were none too difficult for capital to meet. However, a lie was given to their contention when approximately 5,000 workers in the vital and key occupation of the distribution center for the Northwest Empire took command of the city for several days, innovated a number of revolutionary tactics into strike technique such as the cruising automobile squads and the new type commissary, engaged in at least one pitched battle that resulted in two deaths (of strike-breakers) and hundreds of injuries, and found the eyes of the world upon them.

Olson was in a dilemma. As a Farmer-Laborite, he was elected to office to uphold the cause of labor. As governor of the state of Minnesota, he was pledged to maintain law and order, which phrase, in the minds of many, means strike-breaking. However, he managed to handle the issue beautifully after terrific days and nights of attempting to bring two thoroughly crystallized class-enemies, labor as represented by the teamsters union, and capital, as represented by the now defunct Citizen's Alliance, together. May 26 the strike ended.

However, a more terrific and bloody strike was called by the same union again on July 17. Union men accused the employers of chizzeling on their agreement and an outburst that dwarfed the preceding one flared up. Because business interests were adamant and refused to come to any agreement in the midst of what they termed lawlessness and disorder, the governor found it necessary to startle the world by declaring martial law. Two pre-

cedents were broken by this one; it was the first time troops were called out in a labor dispute not to break a strike, and two, Olson was the first governor in the history of Minnesota to declare martial law. After military raids on both strikers and Citizen Alliance headquarters, the strike was eventually settled, and since that time there have been no major difficulties concerning the trucking industry.

The governor found one other occasion to employ troops. A terrific drought during the spring and summer of 1934 hit most of the United States. Dust storms and high winds removed whole areas of rich surface soil from cultivated tracts and turned these tracts into literal deserts. Thousands of cattle died from starvation. Farmers became desperate and those in the Dakotas turned their eyes towards the rich Arrowhead country in Minnesota where the drought did not prevail and began driving their stock across the Minnesota border. This threatened the security of local farmers and Governor Olson used his militia to turn these outstate herds back.

Farmers, like labor, were restive during this period. They were debt-ridden and harassed. A few figures perhaps can explain this situation better than any emotional use of words could. More than 60% of the state's farms were heavily mortgaged, the average indebtedness in 1930 being \$4,734, with an average interest rate of 5½% carrying an annual interest burden of \$260. To reduce this in terms of agricultural production, it took only 116 bushels of wheat to pay this interest in 1919, 175 in 1925, and, with wheat selling at 35¢ a bushel, 743 in 1933. Seven 250 pound hogs could pay the debt in 1919, ten in 1925, and 33 in 1933. Reducing this debt in terms of butterfat, 433 pounds did the job in 1919, 591 in 1925, and 1,182--the total production of six average cows--in 1933.

Farmers all over the state were finding themselves unable to meet this burden. As a result mortgage foreclosures were exceedingly common.

The situation was so tremendous that county seat newspapers often contained full pages of foreclosure notices.

Now Minnesota's farmers are if anything more militant than Minnesota's laborers. For a while sheriffs were permitted to conduct their foreclosures and then, once again agriculture organized, this time into the militant Farmers' Holiday Association, an offshoot of the Farmers' Union. Its members believed in direct action. Their tactics were simple. Whenever a foreclosure sale was announced, word went out to all members for miles around. When the sheriff made his appearance at the scene of foreclosure he would often find the crowd too congested for him to get through to make the sale. At other times, clubs and threats saw to it that no one bid more than a dollar at the sale and when it was over, all purchased articles were turned back to the original owner. From time to time "holidays" were proclaimed during which period no farmer was permitted to market his commodities. This helped keep prices up.

Then, in the spring of 1933, more than 20,000 Holidayites marched on the Minnesota capitol to exert direct pressure on the legislature for relief measures. While in other states these marches and demonstrations were being treated with violence, Olson employed diametrically opposite tactics. Inviting a committee to meet with him, he then arranged a joint session of the legislature to be addressed by the demonstrators. At this session, Holiday spokesmen employed reason, logic, facts, actualities, threats, reminders of historical precedents such as the Boston Tea Party to drive their point home. So effective were they that Olson's famous mortgage moratorium law was passed and eventually found constitutional by the United States Supreme Court in a five to four decision. But for a while it looked as though conservative senate was going to prove recalcitrant. Olson met this recalcitrance with a speech from the steps of the State Capitol April 13, when he threatened

to declare martial law and take what was needed if relief, the moratorium, and other needed measures were not passed.

One sentence of his speech that helped put the whole on the front pages of most of the country's newspapers is especially interesting: "I hope," he shouted to the crowd, "that the present system of government goes right down to hell." His threat proved successful and the condition of farmers and the unemployed were both temporarily alleviated.

As time for the historical 1934 convention of the Farmer-Labor Association approached, one internal party condition must be kept in mind. All-Partyites and Association members were bitterly fighting each other. All-Partyites were mostly state-office holders and only too frequently were opposed to Farmer-Labor Association objectives and principles. Sometimes these men occupied policy-making positions. It must be recognized, however, that quite frequently state-office holders were loyal Association men, and that even left wing Farmer-Laborites often saw eye to eye with All-Partyites in matters of political expediency. However, for purposes of clarification, All-Partyites were the practical wing of the party and according to Association members, were willing to sacrifice principle to victory. Hence the source of the bitter controversy.

When the 1934 convention met, Association members unexpectedly won a victory that exceeded expectations of even the most optimistic left-wingers. The Skipper, in his keynote speech, made another speech which gave him front page attention throughout the nation. His address meant to be stimulating and it visioned a future "co-operative commonwealth" in which the government owned key industries and in which co-operative stores and small independent retail outfits were freed from chain and big monopoly competition. He terminated his address with firebrand words..."I am not a liberal. I am what I want to be--I am a radical. I am a radical in the sense that I want a definite

change in the system. I am not satisfied with tinkering, I am not satisfied with patching, I am not satisfied with hanging a laurel wreath upon burglars and thieves and pirates and calling them code authorities or something else... I want, however, an orderly constructive change...it must be gradual...the ultimate co-operative commonwealth."

Then, without waiting for the convention to proceed further, the governor left for Washington. When he got off the train at the national capital, his consternation was great upon learning that the convention had taken his words seriously and under the direction of Howard Y. Williams, had drafted a platform calling for immediate institution of co-operative commonwealth with public ownership of all banks and factories! Olson definitely did not want such a platform, nor did he for a moment anticipate the 1934 convention's drawing up such a program. He failed to consider the fact that during the past two years, both labor and agriculture had reached new highs in militancy and in radicalism. His speech, while meant to be stimulating and nothing else, was the match which lit Farmer-Labor radicalism up the brightest it has ever been.

Immediately upon publication of the platform, Republicans and right wing Democrats again raised a cry to "Save the State from Socialism," and perhaps what was the most viciously bitter political campaign ever to take place within the confines of the state followed. Olson's private life and character were attacked by a vile whispering campaign. The foul smell of the Red Herring permeated the entire state. Money, influence, and power were all drawn up against the third party. A. C. Townley, who had turned against Olson on the All-Party issue, filed as an independent candidate for governor against him hoping that the radical platform plus internal party discontent would be enough to defeat the governor. The Republicans ran as their candidate a man of liberal reputation, Martin Nelson of Austin, and the Democrats ran John Regan once again. These two latter parties both wanted fusion against

Olson, but each wanted fusion behind its candidates. As a result, fusion was not achieved and Olson was again elected governor, this time with a much reduced plurality. Other Farmer-Laborites elected were Hjalmer Peterson for lieutenant governor, Harry Peterson for attorney-general, John Gundersen for clerk of the supreme court, and former speaker of the house Charles Munn for Railroad and Warehouse Commissioner. Hendrik Shipstead was returned to the United States Senate. Both houses of the legislature, however, were won by conservative.

The cooperative commonwealth that caused all this stir wasn't as communistic as it seemed at the time. It was a logical objective for radical agrarianism and radical labor. It was by no means Marxism. It was reformism carried to a more or less logical conclusion. It called for government ownership of key and basic industries and for a greater distribution of the profits of society to agriculture and the common people of the urban areas. It maintained a place for the small independent business man and the cooperative store, both of which along with the private farmer are definitely capitalistic institutions.

While this platform hadn't a chance of being put into law what with the make-up of the legislature, it served a strong and definite educational purpose and brought many thousands of Minnesotans a political philosophy that was to cling to them and be their guide for the future. It also helped pave the way for dramatic events which were to follow in later years.

With their program stalemated and nothing but mild reform permitted to get past the watchful eye of the legislature, the next two years, as far as Farmer-Laborites were concerned, were interesting insofar as they were to bring forth Olson's successor as governor. For everybody knew Olson was going to run for the Senate and looked forward with the greatest of relish to the battle of Titans that was to take place when the Skipper contended with Blind

Senator Schall for the latter's seat. The contest promised to be a battle royal. Each man was a brilliant speaker. Each had color. Neither asked nor gave quarter. And each had gone into previous contests with the endorsement of labor.

Fate, however, intervened. On December 19, 1935, Senator Schall was struck down by a speeding automobile in Washington, and several hours later he died. Thus did one of the gladiators withdraw from the coming contest. The other, too, was soon to withdraw. For some time he had been bothered with stomach disorders and had been on a diet. He made several trips to the famous Mayo clinic at Rochester. He kept cheerful throughout, but day by day his condition grew noticeably worse. When the primaries came along, he was awarded the Farmer-Laborite endorsement, as planned, for senator, and Senator Elmer Benson of Appleton whom the Skipper had appointed to fulfill the unexpired term of the blind Schall, was nominated over Magnus Johnson's primary opposition to succeed Olson as governor. But long before the November elections everybody in the state save the courageous Skipper himself knew that Olson would never don the Senator's toga. Not a newspaper, not an enemy, not a soul save one--and his name is better left unmentioned--was heartless enough to inform the governor that his days were numbered. He made his final trip to the Mayo Clinic July 9, 1936, and before the month was up, he died.

Then followed the most tremendous funeral demonstration that had ever taken place in the state of Minnesota. Hundreds of thousands from the ranks of both his friends and political enemies paid tribute to the colorful personality that had been governor of the state. One thing that everyone was conscious of was that something had departed from the scene--something that was alive and alert and vigorous.

With the passing of Floyd B. Olson, there entered a new phase in the development of the party. Townley had brought organization and method

into the movement. Olson brought color and personality. He also brought dissension in the form of his All-Party set-up. Among his critics for this action were many of the party's founders and foremost figures. More than once had the threat of revolt arisen and more than once was the Skipper roundly cursed. When election time came along, however, these dissensions were forgotten because everyone realized that Olson was the best vote-getter the party had. Many claim that the Skipper was merely a political adventurer, an opportunist who wasn't sincerely the radical he pretended to be in public. However, most of these same critics maintain that after the 1934 campaign he took a sharp turn to the left in his convictions. Whatever the truth may be, no one knows. It is sufficient to say that Olson, whether intentionally so or not, was a great force in organizing and molding radical opinion in his native state.

Lieutenant-Governor Hjalmer Peterson of Askov succeeded the governor for the remainder of the term. He was an extremely ambitious man who had more or less identified with the anti-Olson revolt, at least to the extent that a goodly share of dissenting third-partyites looked to him for leadership in the drive against the All-Partyites. His ambitions were for the governorship, but he was also willing to succeed the late governor as candidate for the U. S. Senate. He was forced to be satisfied with the endorsement for Railroad and Warehouse commissioner however, while Congressman Ernest Lundeen, at the time closely identified with the left-wing of the party and also an anti-All-Party man, was given the call for the Senate.

In the election that followed, Democratic candidates for Senator and Governor withdrew in favor of Lundeen and Benson respectively. Already riddled with feud and internal strife, the Democratic party was further shattered by this move. However, insofar as Farmer-Laborites were supporting Roosevelt for re-election, a majority of the Democrats apparently were

satisfied with this arrangement, for Benson and Lundeen were elected to their offices by record votes. This triumph was the greatest the Farmer-Laborites had experienced to date. When the ballots were counted, it was found that they had elected every statewide office holder but two, the secretary of state and the state auditor who was not up for re-election at the time, insofar as his, like the state senators, was a four-year office. Likewise, the state Senate remained the same...under conservative control. Thus, never in their history did the third party get control of this august body. They did, however, win control of the lower house, and were successful in electing five of the state's nine congressmen.

Stymied by his Senate, the new governor, despite his record-breaking vote, was unable to accomplish any more than his predecessor in office. True, his veto power exercised a constant threat and like Olson, he managed to force through a few compromise measures. Then, too, he was able to exercise a few functionary powers such as his official exoneration of Professor William Schaper who had been dismissed from his post in the midst of the World War hysteria and in his appointments. All these actions, of course, did nothing to forward the actual Farmer-Labor program.

The two years Benson was in office were years of internal struggle within his party. Railroad and Warehouse Commissioner, Hjalmer Peterson, despite his being relegated to the Commissioner, had not forgotten his ambitions to be governor. And during the ensuing two years he took pot-shots at his party's governor. One of his points of attack was against what he termed "Mexican Generals," or, as he explained, office holders who according to him controlled the party. Another point of attack was directed against what he described as Communist infiltration into the party. This so-called infiltration, however, commenced during Olson's last two years as governor rather than under Benson. It was Olson who first took up the cudgel against what he termed red witch-hunt and welcomed all anti-capitalist and New Deal

forces to his standard.

Despite these accusations, Benson continued his way as head of the Farmer-Labor Party rather than as an all-party man. He made a number of important changes in appointive offices during his term, and a majority of the men whom Association members were most anxious to have removed were replaced. This seems almost paradoxical insofar as Benson was supposedly the choice of the All-Party faction in the previous primaries.

As the 1938 primaries came into view, the attacks of Peterson grew more and more vociferous. Finally, they were culminated by his filing as gubernatorial candidate against Benson and without so much as seeking indorsement of the party convention, which he claimed was packed by the "Mexican Generals."

As was expected, Benson was endorsed for re-election by the convention, and the battle that followed between him and the Railroad and Warehouse Commissioner was scorching to the extreme. Charges and counter-charges flew thick and fast. The Peterson camp, strangely enough, took on an All-Party flavor with many of the Olson appointees who had been dismissed by Benson, flocking to the banner of the insurgents. This alignment repeatedly hurled charges of inefficiency, "Mexican Generalship," and Communist support at the regulars. The regulars, on the other hand, insisted that Peterson was merely a Republican stooge, that he was reactionary, and that he was more interested in Peterson than he was in the state's welfare.

When the votes were counted, it was found that Benson was winner by
the slim margin of to

The Democrats meantime had nominated Thomas Gallagher to carry their standard while the Republicans surprisedly enough found themselves being led by the Young Republican, Harold Stassen, who in a whirlwind campaign, had piled up a tremendous majority over the two veterans, Martin Nelson and George

Leach, mayor of Minneapolis.

The primary tactics of Peterson were immediately picked up by Stassen and his followers. From one end of the state to the other they carried charges of inefficiency, Communistic tendencies, Mexican Generals, graft, corruption, and malfeasance in office. They were ably supported in these charges by the metropolitan press. Once again the cry "Save the State from Socialism" was raised. Once again demands for fusion by Republicans was made. Peterson, defeated primary opponent of Benson, now became the man of the hour. Everyone wondered where his support would go. Most political commentators knew, of course, that tens of thousands of Republicans and Democrats had invaded the primaries of the third party in an effort to there defeat Benson. But everyone expected a close battle between Stassen and Benson and what the Farmer-Laborite followers of Peterson would do became an important matter.

The question was answered partially when the organized group which had backed the Commissioner announced their support of Stassen. This group included the names of many who had been formerly big names in Farmer-Labor circles. Petersen, himself, remained hostilely neutral.

When final election returns came in, it was found that Benson and the Farmer-Labor Party had lost by a landslide. Every single office that had been up for election was lost. All that was retained were the two commissioners of the Railroad and Warehouse Commission whose terms were not expired--and one of these was the insurgent Peterson---the two United State Senators--who also were not up for re-election, and one congressman. The Farmer-Labor majority in the lower house of the legislature was wiped out and reduced to infinitesimal proportions and the Senate minority was further reduced. The lowest ebb in the history of the party since it first captured the governor's office was reached. And for the second time in the history

of the state, a governor was denied re-election.

The reasons for the stunning defeat are difficult to discover. Suggested reasons are numerous. One is that the governor was too ardently opposed to organized liquor interests, another is that the anti-Semitic campaign conducted against several office holders under the governor had taken hold, a third is that the governor's veto of a Civil Service bill had caused resentment among liberals, a fourth is that the Red-Scare had finally been successful, a fifth is that Hjalmer Peterson had started a drive that couldn't be stopped, a sixth is that what was happening in Minnesota was not isolated but merely part of the Republican landslide that took place throughout the country in 1938, a seventh is that Stassen's liberal platform was so much like Benson's that it didn't make any difference to liberals who was elected, an eighth was Benson's lack of tact and inability as a politician. There are many other reasons advanced. But whatever the reason, the fact remains the same: Farmer-Laborites will have to start the future at scratch. Whether the party will survive its decisive defeat remains to be seen. Republicans and Democrats claim not. Farmer-Laborites scoff at this. Some even go so far as to claim that their defeat was a welcome relief and gave them a change to engineer as much-needed reorganization of their party.

One thing that must in all fairness be considered before the story of the Farmer-Labor Party is finished is the fact that never have they had complete control of the legislature. In other words, their eight-year sojourn in power were eight years of what might be termed negative government by veto and compromise. How well their program might succeed in starving off the ills that beset modern society is a question that can never be answered until the party gains control of both the legislative and executive branches of government. Whether this will ever take place is a problem for the future to decide.

(Curtis Erickson