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Ignatius Donnelly

MINNESOTA CONGRESSMAN, 1863-69

MARTIN RIDGE

WHEN THE thirty-eighth Congress assembled on December 7, 1863, the young and able Ignatius Donnelly was on hand to represent the Second Congressional District of Minnesota. He shared a desk with another youthful member of the House, James A. Garfield. The friendship then begun was to continue through the years, although Garfield was long known as a conservative and Donnelly became a reformer. Donnelly represented a new Western state which was admitted to the Union only five years earlier in 1858. Like his state, he possessed the vigor, youth, and optimism characteristic of the frontier. A Philadelphian by birth, he had moved to Minnesota in 1856 at the age of twenty-four to try his luck at land speculation and farming. He turned to politics when the panic of 1857 ended his speculative dreams and farming proved unprofitable.¹

Donnelly's political efforts had not been

crowned with immediate good fortune. As a Republican candidate for the state Senate, he was defeated both in 1857 and 1858. Although his county, Dakota, was considered a Democratic stronghold, he had not been able to reconcile himself to that party's slavery position, and it appeared that his campaigns were to prove of token worth. Fortunately, however, his talents for writing and public speaking were so well displayed that he was recognized as a possible leader by Republican party captains. The following year his opportunity came, as the state political scene altered so completely that the Republicans could anticipate victory. Donnelly, determined that his services as an orator and writer in the preceding elections should not be ignored, worked vigorously for nomination to public office. In spite of the judgment of many of the older party members, in 1859 he was named Republican candidate for the lieutenant governorship.² The election that followed proved that the party's confidence was not unfounded; the ticket, headed by Alexander Ramsey, was triumphant to a man.

After he was elected to a commanding position in the state government, Donnelly proved efficient and successful. Even those who had opposed his nomination were forced to change their views. A Min-

¹ See John D. Hicks, "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8:80-132 (June, 1921).

² *Emigrant Aid Journal* (Nininger), September 26, 1857; *Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), November 5, 1857, October 10, 1858; *St. Paul Daily Minnesotian*, October 29, 1858; *St. Paul Times*, January 19, 1859; *Hastings Independent*, July 28, 1859; *Central Republican* (Faribault), July 27, 1859; Donnelly to George Burns, January 22, 1859; to John H. Stevens, May 9, 1859, Donnelly Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

neapolis paper, commenting on his strength in the campaign, noted that "Mr. Donnelly's nomination was thought by some, at the time it was made, to be a weak one, but the service he has rendered the cause, and the fact that he has run ahead of Governor Ramsey even, in many sections, must, we think, satisfy every Republican that his selection for that post was a most excellent and fortunate one." Possessed of genuine parliamentary ability, he proved to be an able presiding officer of the state Senate. His views advocating relief for the farmers and speculators still suffering from the panic of 1857 added to his popularity. As a party whip, he supported Lincoln and the Republican party in the campaign of 1860.³

With Lincoln's election and the subsequent rebellion, Donnelly was called upon to assist in securing adequate supplies and recruits for the state militia. Working energetically, he endeavored to avoid the corruption and fraud which often accompanied wartime military contracting, and worked to equip the army suitably. He served as acting executive on several occasions while Governor Ramsey was away from St. Paul. During his absence in Washington when the Civil War began, Donnelly signed the proclamation of April 16, 1861, calling for Minnesota's quota of volunteers. After the Sioux attacked the Minnesota frontier in August of the same year, Donnelly went into the field with the troops. In these activities he demonstrated his ability as a leader.⁴

Thus, in the autumn of 1862, when he decided to run for Congress, his possibilities for election were excellent. Since a Republican nomination in Minnesota during the Civil War was tantamount to election, the major struggle was waged within the party ranks. Although several others wanted the office, none had Donnelly's political bargaining ability, and he won easily.⁵ As a result, at the age of thirty-two, he went from Minnesota to the nation's capital to represent his district in Congress.

THE NEW CONGRESSMAN supported the party program and ardently admired President Lincoln, of whom he wrote: "Out of all the horrors of fierce civil war this magnificent spirit drew neither wrath nor hate nor revenge, but in the darkest hour seemed faithfully resigned to the task before him. He subdued wrath with gentle kindness; hate with love for his fellow man, revenge with benign sympathy and understanding. In all the history of mankind no man, save Christ himself, ever carried a more unbearable burden with forgiveness written upon every line in his sad face."⁶ When Lincoln favored the abolition of slavery, Donnelly championed the cause. After the president's death, Donnelly continued to struggle for economic and political equality for the Negro. On December 18, 1866, he petitioned the House "for an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to the end that no inequality may exist in the laws of any of the States by reason of birthplace, race, or color of any citizen therein." In an effort to obtain equal suffrage for the Negro by constitutional amendment, he submitted other similar petitions, and he urged Congress to remove immediately voting inequalities in the District of Columbia, the territories, and the defeated Southern states.⁷

Donnelly's views on reconstruction, in

³ Everett W. Fish, *Donnelliana: An Appendix to Caesar's Column*, 32 (Chicago, 1892); *Pioneer and Democrat*, February 10, 1860; *Stillwater Messenger*, March 27, 1860; *State Atlas* (Minneapolis), March 17, 1860; Daniel Rohrer to Donnelly, September 5, 1860, Donnelly Papers.

⁴ William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2:77 (St. Paul, 1924); *Pioneer and Democrat*, August 27, 1862; *Press*, August 28, 1862; *Central Republican*, September 10, 1862.

⁵ Donnelly succeeded in retaining the friendship of both Governor Ramsey and Cyrus Aldrich, rival candidates for the United States Senate seat to which Ramsey was elected in 1862. Donnelly to Ramsey, May 7, 1862, Ramsey Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society; Aldrich to Donnelly, April 15, 1862, and H. G. O. Morrison to Donnelly, May 11, 1862, Donnelly Papers.

⁶ Donnelly, *A Tribute to Abraham Lincoln*, 5 (n.p., n.d.). A copy of this pamphlet is in the Newberry Library, Chicago.

THE call for troops
issued by Donnelly in
Ramsey's absence,
April 16, 1861

Now therefore, in pursuance of law and of the
acquisition of the President of the United States, I do
hereby give notice that volunteers will be received
at the City of Saint Paul for one regiment of Infan-
try, composed of ten Companies, each of sixty four
privates, one Captain two ten lieutenants, four sergeants,
four corporals and one bugler. The volunteer com-
panies already organized, upon complying with the fore-
going requirements as to numbers and officers, will
be entitled to be first received. The term of service will
be three months unless sooner discharged. Vol-
unteers will report themselves to the Adjutant General
at Saint Paul, by whom orders will at once be is-
sued, giving all the necessary details as to in-
rollment and organization.

State
Seal

Given under my hand and the Great Seal
of the State, at Saint Paul, this sixteenth
day of April, in the year of our Lord one
thousand eight hundred and sixty one
Signed
Ignatius Donnelly
Governor
ad interim.

general, were compatible with those of Re-
publican party leaders. When he spoke
about the contrasting views of the South
and the West, his remarks met with con-
siderable popular approval. "We who come
... from the far West," he said, "have not
that deep and ingrained veneration for
State power which is to be found among
the inhabitants of some of the older States.
We have found that State lines, State
names, State organizations, are in most
cases, the veriest creatures of accident. To
us there is no savor of antiquity about
them. Our people move into a region of
country and *make* the State. We feel our-
selves to be the offshoots of the nation. We
look to the nation for protection. The love
of our hearts gathers around the nation;
and there is no prouder and gladder sight
to our eyes than the flag of the nation
fluttering in the sunshine over our frontier

homes. We are willing to trust the nation.
... We need erect no bulwark of State
sovereignty behind which to shelter our-
selves."⁷

Although he agreed with the radicals
who opposed President Andrew Johnson,
Donnelly did not share their views on
Southern relief. When he petitioned for the
president's "removal from office," he tem-
pered his attitude by supporting legislation
which would extend Southern political
privileges. In an address on January 18,
1867, he advocated the restoration of
equality among the states. "The purpose of
government is the happiness of the people,
therefore of the *whole* people," he said.
"A Government cannot be half a republic
and half a despotism—a republic just
and equable to one class of its citizens, a
despotism cruel and destructive to another
class; it must become either all despotism
or all republic. If you make it all republic
the future is plain. All evils will correct
themselves. Temporary disorders will sub-
side; the path will lie wide open before
every man, and every step and every hour
will take him farther away from error and
darkness."⁸

Paralleling this stand for political equal-
ity, he advocated a bill creating a freed-

⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 2 session, p.
181, 421, 430. Donnelly also tried to obtain the fran-
chise for the Negro in Minnesota. See letters to him
from Joseph Wheelock and Christopher C. Andrews,
November 9, 10, 1865, and the Donnelly Diary, Janu-
ary 14, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 1 session, p.
2037.

⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 2 session, p.
482, 561, 1133.

men's bureau. He seemed to ignore the possibilities for the misuse of funds and power, defending the measure in the name of humanity. He believed it to be essential for the relief of the South, declaring in debate that if it were defeated, "The demagogues who led the ignorant people of the South into rebellion, and who still to a great extent retain their confidence, will point to it as an unerring indication of the hatred of the North toward the southern people. . . . You diminish Unionism in the South . . . you solidify rebel sentiment; you intensify rebel feeling; the contrary will prevail if the bill should pass."¹⁰ Although Donnelly was idealistic enough to want progress and security for the South, he was politician enough to accept expediency and to support measures which benefited his party as well as his country.

WHILE aiding his party in its reconstruction program, Donnelly also made every effort to serve his constituency. Since he was familiar with the needs of the expanding West, he devoted the bulk of his efforts as a Congressman toward solving the most pressing problems of the pioneer. After moving to the West in the mid-1850s and participating in the campaign against the Sioux in 1862, he became aware of the problems relating to the Indian situation and the importance of the Indian agent's role. Donnelly worked to combat a tendency to use the position of agent as a "political plum," and to obtain men of higher caliber for the job. He advocated increasing the pay of the agents, at the same time that he carefully examined the operations of the bureau of Indian affairs for frauds and graft. Following the Sioux War of 1862-65, Donnelly made every effort to have the Sioux removed from Minnesota. His suggestion that they should be moved into Dakota Territory met with objections from a fellow House member, who protested "that these Indians have been removed from Minnesota and have been located in close contiguity to the settled

portion of Dakota. I am willing that they shall be removed as far as possible from Minnesota, but I am not willing that they shall be located within four or five miles of where I live."¹¹

Donnelly was deeply interested in transportation, and he introduced and supported measures that would result in extending lines of communication into his home state. In 1865 he introduced a bill "to authorize the construction of a telegraph line over the public domain from St. Cloud to Pembina . . . and there to connect with the telegraph line of the Hudson[s] Bay Company." In the following year, on behalf of the Minnesota legislature, he petitioned for a more extensive mail system in his area. Later he requested that Congress establish more comprehensive mail routes extending into Montana and Dakota territories. As early as 1864, he suggested a bill "for the construction of a wagon road, with branches from Minnesota, Iowa, and Utah, to Idaho Territory." Shortly thereafter, he advocated the building of military roads across the northern tier of states. By 1867, he had prepared a measure which would create a wagon road for military purposes and postal routes from Minnesota to Dakota and Montana. If it was found feasible to operate a pony express in a region, Donnelly suggested the use of stagecoaches to further the westward advance.¹²

¹⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 1 session, p. 91. The *St. Paul Daily Pioneer* of October 18, 1862, denounced Donnelly for his stand on a "Nigger Bureau, Nigger Schools and Nigger Bounty of \$300."

¹¹ Fish, *Donnelliana*, 47-49; *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 1 session, p. 460. Donnelly touched off a bitter argument between the Indian agents' friends and the reformers during the summer of 1864, when the *St. Paul Press* defended the agents and the *St. Cloud Democrat*, the *Central Republican*, and the *Hastings Independent* called for an investigation of their activities.

¹² *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 1 session, p. 1174, 2 session, p. 616; 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 446, 1615, 2 session, 471; 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 1083, 1620, 2288. One wagon road supported by Donnelly was projected by James L. Fisk. See his letter to Donnelly, December 23, 1865, and the Donnelly Diary, January 18, 1866, Donnelly Papers.

After the Civil War, Donnelly began an ardent campaign for the improvement of interior waterways which could be used to supplement wagon road transportation and the telegraph. Most of his plans were concerned with Western projects. In February, 1866, he advocated the improvement of navigation on the Mississippi River as far north as Minneapolis. In the months that followed he petitioned for appropriations to provide improvements on the piers and harbors of Lake Superior. He continued from 1866 to 1868 to work for the dredging and clearing of harbors, the construction of canals, and the improvement of river navigation. He demanded that surveys of the upper Mississippi River Valley be made to ascertain the possibilities of expanding water transportation into the area. He asked that the House be given a report on the military surveys of Western rivers.¹³

Although most of these measures were greeted with enthusiasm by the representatives of Western states, many met with considerable disapproval from Eastern Congressmen. Debates were frequent, and in the course of one, Donnelly expressed the following views of the frontier concerning river navigation: "We owe it to the West that, where nature has done so much toward the construction of a mighty highway, no niggardly policy should govern us in relieving it of any partial impediments to navigation."¹⁴ The concept of the indebtedness to the West was not new, nor was the idea of federal aid on which the frontier had always insisted. The Westerner had many problems, and he looked to the national government to solve them. His primary economic need was cheap transportation for the exportation of produce and the importation of manufactured

goods. The development of water or rail transportation, which not only would provide for the movement of commodities, but would increase land values, would solve the pioneer's problems. Land prices were controlled by population pressure and by land improvement. Since the frontier farmer was basically a small speculator, he was keenly concerned with seeing transportation expanded, immigration stimulated, and land policies liberalized.

Donnelly clearly understood the needs of the frontier farmer, and his major efforts in Congress were dedicated to their fulfillment. Armed with the concept that the national government was the guardian of the West, he tried logically to put frontier needs into law. Since the primary demand was for an extensive railroad system, Donnelly devoted most of his time to railroad legislation. He argued that "The importance of the railroad system to the West cannot be overestimated. The grain raised upon land forty miles from a railroad or any great water course is almost valueless save for home consumption, and a people so situated must continue in a poor, primitive, and unprogressive condition. . . . Railroads mean to a new country population, commerce, enterprise, prosperity, cultivation, civilization, everything."¹⁵ No serious opposition to the construction of an extensive railroad network existed, but a critical attitude toward the method of subsidizing such projects was developing among some Congressmen.

The government had long used land grants to assist the railroads. When associated with public works, land grants dated back to the very beginnings of settlement. Despite doubts concerning its constitutionality, land subsidy gradually became accepted practice. The system was used extensively for internal improvements after 1850, when the Illinois Central Railroad received its land grant—the first made to a railroad.

Although the system persisted until after the Civil War, it had by 1866 reached such

¹³ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 578, 1615, 1751, 2 session, p. 226; 40 Congress, 1 session, p. 132, 2 session, p. 648, 2030, 2830.

¹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 2292.

¹⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 2385.



DONNELLY, a photograph
taken during his
Congressional career
of the 1860s

proportions that formidable foes had come forward to challenge its desirability. As tremendous quantities of land vanished from the public domain, a cry of protest arose from the Eastern states. The argument was basically an East-West controversy, with the Congressional chambers serving as the sounding board and battleground. Donnelly commented on the situation in a speech delivered on July 20, 1868: "One word in regard to the objection . . . against granting lands for such improvements as this. I do not wonder at it as coming from gentlemen from eastern States, where a state of affairs is found totally different from that which exists in the West. I can only say to the gentlemen that if they lived in the undeveloped West, in a community where land is almost nothing and population is everything, they would take a different view of this question." His arguments were not new, for two years earlier he had silenced opponents with a similar statement of the frontier attitude:

"It is then to us simply a question of the administration of this great donation so set apart for the good of mankind. And I say, speaking here as a western man, and responsible to my constituents for what I say, that railroads are as important to that country as population. . . . We deserve well of the country. We are laying the foundation for a mighty future and the whole nation is interested in our work."¹⁶

Despite such speeches in defense of land grants, the voices of protest continued as the lands of the West fell into the hands of railroads and speculative interests. Donnelly defended the profits of the railroad owners as justifiable. "The great object of all railroad grants," he said, "must be the construction of means of transportation. The incidental result is . . . necessarily the enrichment of the corporators." On May 7, 1868, five months later, he assumed a

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 3464; 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 4256.

more tactful stand on the profit issue, stating that "The chief end and aim of railroad grants should be to furnish transportation for the productions of the actual settler and to induce men to go upon the public lands and occupy and cultivate them." Later in the year, when he spoke in opposition to the establishment of rates for the Union Pacific Railroad, Donnelly expressed the same point of view. He defended his position on the basis of a legal technicality in the act creating the federal subsidy for the road and providing that rates could not be adjusted until the entire line had been completed. At the time only a third of the line was finished.¹⁷

Donnelly has been severely criticized for defending the railroads. His motives seem somewhat unsavory in the light of two letters to Jay Cooke, a Pennsylvania banker who was financial agent of the Northern Pacific Railroad. On February 15, 1871, Donnelly wrote: "I hold \$10,000 of stock of the Lake Superior & Miss. R.R. Co. which was presented to me, without solicitation on my part, by the Company, as some slight recognition of very important and valuable services rendered by me to the Company." Six months earlier, on September 28, 1870, he had written: "I need not say to you that I am a friend to the Northern Pacific Railway Company. I drew most of the original bill under which it took its first land grant . . . and on all

subsequent occasions I have labored earnestly and I think efficiently in behalf of the Company. If I am returned to Congress I shall go there as the firm friend and advocate of the Northern Pacific R.R."¹⁸

Regardless of his motives, Donnelly succeeded in inaugurating a complete program of railroad expansion, especially for Minnesota. On April 26, 1864, he "introduced a bill making a grant of lands to the Territories of Dakota and Idaho, in alternate sections to aid in the construction of certain railroads in said Territories to connect with the railroad system of Minnesota." A month earlier Donnelly had obtained the printing of a memorial of the Minnesota legislature asking aid and land grants for the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad. This was followed by a measure seeking for the Northern Pacific land grants and subsidies similar to those received by the Union Pacific. After Donnelly was re-elected in 1864, he continued to work on behalf of railroads as a member of the Thirty-ninth Congress. He asked for a bill to complete certain land-grant railroads, and a measure to aid in the construction of a railroad from St. Cloud to the line of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad. He obtained grants for other roads running from St. Paul to Lake Superior, and serving the Minnesota and Red River valleys. Thus, Donnelly fought for land grants for rail lines that were to crisscross the entire state of Minnesota.¹⁹

Donnelly did not limit to Minnesota his efforts to obtain railroad land grants. He introduced and secured the passage of a bill providing a land-grant railroad for Wisconsin. He even suggested a measure which would appropriate public lands in Minnesota for a railroad in Iowa. On behalf of the transcontinental lines, he submitted a resolution suggesting "that the Secretary of War be requested to report to this House what addition to the force of the regular Army would be required to thoroughly protect communication by two

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 839, 2385, 2424.

¹⁸ Copies of both letters are in the Donnelly Papers. The first is incorrectly dated February 15, 1870. To indict Donnelly as a tool of the railroad, both are quoted by Hicks, in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8:84. In defense of Donnelly, who was at the time involved in a political campaign, it should be noted that he included the following statement in his letter of September 28: "I do not ask you to exert the influence of the Company in my favor, as it is manifestly improper for these public enterprises to tamper in politics or become instruments of factions. I simply ask that it shall not be exerted against me."

¹⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 1 session, p. 1010, 1884, 2 session, p. 202, 296, 2293-2295; 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 410, 1348, 1968, 2208-2211, 3842, 2 session, p. 643, 1358; 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 2022, 2263.

great routes across the continent, to wit, a route upon the general line of the Union Pacific railroad, and a route upon the general line of the Northern Pacific railroad" in order that work could proceed without interruption or disturbance.²⁰

THE ENCOURAGEMENT of immigration was another matter that drew Donnelly's attention during his Congressional tenure. The West needed large numbers of people to settle on unoccupied lands and use the railroads as they were built. In one of his first speeches, Donnelly called attention to the need for settlers. "Let us stimulate, facilitate, and direct that stream of immigration which, with increased volume, now crowds the seaports of England and burdens down every immigrant ship sailing for America," he said, adding that "In the great Northwest we have ample room and verge enough for all these coming multitudes." He then went on to propose the establishment of a bureau of immigration for the protection of newcomers, pointing out that no agency existed to furnish them necessary information and protect them from fraud and imposition. Donnelly firmly believed that people from many lands could be assimilated in the United States, and that their cultures would enrich American life. "We care not how multifarious may be the languages spoken," he declared, "nor from what remote regions of the world's surface that population may be gathered together. Let them but enjoy the schoolhouse, the church, the newspaper, and free institutions, and one generation will fuse the heterogeneous mass into a population intelligent, enterprising, patriotic, ready to spend their hearts' best blood in defense of the institutions transmitted to them by their emigrant fathers, and which have so incalculably blessed and benefited them."²¹

Donnelly proposed legislation that would safeguard the health of the immigrant and alleviate the miserable conditions under which he traveled. He brought before Con-

gress his observations concerning the state of passengers on incoming vessels, and noted that the unsanitary conditions under which they traveled menaced all Americans. Pestilence could sweep the nation's seaports, Donnelly warned, if newly arrived immigrants were not healthy. "We must avoid these 'horrors of the middle passage,'" he said, "the recital of which . . . revive[s] the memory of the African slave trade."²²

Among the measures introduced by Donnelly was one providing that the government "establish, under the direction of the Secretary of State, agencies in Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Norway, for the promotion of emigration to the United States." To make prospective settlers aware of the advantages of free land, he suggested that "with a view to the encouragement of immigration and more rapid settlement of the public lands of the United States the Committee on Public Lands be instructed to inquire into the expediency of preparing an abstract of the report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office . . . to be printed and distributed through the consuls of the United States in Europe to all such persons as may apply therefor."²³ Efforts to attract settlers to the West had long been linked with American land policy. Before the Civil War, the South had opposed both a liberal land policy and immigration, but legislation favoring them accompanied the decline of Southern political power.

Wartime conditions are reflected in some of the petitions and proposals relating to land policies introduced by Donnelly. For example, he was the author of a bill "to prevent deserters and others, therein named, from acquiring public lands under

²⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 3202, 2 session, p. 29; 40 Congress, 2 session, 2406.

²¹ *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 1 session, p. 857, 858.

²² *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 2315.

²³ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 97, 2750.

the preemption and homestead laws," as well as of a joint resolution intended to "enable discharged soldiers to change the location of homestead selections in certain cases."²⁴

Most of his proposals, however, were concerned with the general land policy. He encouraged the use of land grants to increase the value and productivity of undeveloped areas. The fact that existing laws required the filing of land claims in federal land offices, which were often far from the settlers, drew Donnelly's criticism. He pointed out that such a situation often compelled the pioneer to travel great distances, taking witnesses with him to establish his claim. To Donnelly, who understood the difficulty and expense of such trips, it was vitally important that land claims be handled more simply. At first, he petitioned for the creation of many new land districts in advance of settlement; finally, on January 15, 1867, he introduced a measure which would permit the filing of land claims in local county offices. This plan was a definite departure from the conventional pattern of the land system, and it stimulated much heated discussion. Eastern Congressmen, disturbed by land frauds against the government, feared that the removal of registration from a national agency would increase such abuses. Donnelly pointed out that the measure was not entirely new and the plan not impractical. He was opposed by Congressman Elihu Washburne of Illinois, who argued that his state had also been a frontier area and that its settlers had filed their land claims without too much difficulty.²⁵

Another resolution introduced by Donnelly was intended to solve one of the major problems of farmers on the Great

Plains. He asked that grants of land be made to encourage the growing of forests on the treeless prairies, since wood was essential to the economy of the region and was practically unavailable. The measure was suggested prior to the invention of barbed wire, in an era when all wood for fences had to be hauled great distances and fuel and housing materials were scarce in the prairie states and territories. Donnelly pointed out that trees would provide "an interruption of the great winds which now sweep with unbroken force over those regions in Dakota Territory, Nebraska, Iowa, or Kansas," and he enumerated other advantages, including "The production of flocks of insectivorous birds, which by destroying the larvae of the grasshopper will put an end to that pest which now consigns vast regions to desolation," as well as "a supply of wood for fuel and for building purposes, and for the thousand minor uses for which it is employed by civilized man." He reminded his colleagues that "Our Government has paid as high as \$150 per cord for wood at its military posts on the great plains," and added that "A civilized people cannot like the savage use the dry manure of the buffalo for fuel, nor can any frontier population afford to consume for fuel an article almost as scarce and as valuable as gold."²⁶

In suggesting solutions for the problems of the frontier, Donnelly did not necessarily support the interests of the large-scale land speculator. Although he engaged in land speculation in his early years in Minnesota, and in a sense continued to do so, he spoke for a policy which encouraged the industrial poor of the East and the newly arrived immigrants to settle on available lands of the public domain. "The homestead law needs but one thing more," he contended; "namely: that all the lands capable of cultivation by actual settlers should be given to the actual settlers, and that none be sold to speculators."²⁷ This concept, which he expressed late in his Congressional career, reflects an awareness

²⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 2 session, p. 47; 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 3361.

²⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 538-540.

²⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 2674; 40 Congress, 2 session, Appendix, p. 475.

²⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 2386.



SENATOR *Alexander Ramsey*

of the rising antagonism in the postwar West toward the speculative and moneyed interests, especially railroads, and an attempt to please the farmers among his constituents.

In trying to represent all elements in his constituency, Donnelly supported varied economic measures. In 1865, he introduced legislation designed to allow small banks in the West to hold federal securities tax free—a typically Western measure characteristic of Minnesota's accelerating economy. In the following year he petitioned for an increase in the tariff on wool to aid the sheep interests. In 1866 also he expressed Western disapproval of wild-cat banking by petitioning for the "citizens of St. Paul, Minnesota, in favor of just and equal laws for the regulation of inter-State insurances." He expressed a growing agrarian discontent by opposing the Eastern wing of the Republican party on the money issue, introducing petitions asking

"that no curtailment of the national currency be made . . . and that the national banks be not compelled to redeem their notes in the city of New York." Although this was heresy to the Easterner, to the money-starved West it was a perfectly reasonable request. Western bankers were eager to be freed from the so-called money monopoly of the New York banks. In giving support to the agrarian reform element in Minnesota, Donnelly opposed the capitalists. For example, in 1868 he advocated a measure designed to tax federal securities.²⁸

THROUGHOUT his Congressional career, Donnelly gave support to the reformers and their causes, and he demonstrated a desire to find new frontiers and proclaim new justices. He advocated the promotion of army medical officers on the basis of competitive examination, and he made an effort to improve the efficiency of the newly organized department of agriculture by inaugurating administrative reforms. He supported temperance measures and suggested the establishment of a music academy in Washington, D.C.²⁹

His interest in cultural advancement is perhaps best demonstrated by his attitude toward education, which to him was the answer to all social and political problems. In 1865, for example, he introduced a resolution providing "That the Joint Committee on Reconstruction be instructed to inquire into the expediency of establishing" in Washington "a National Bureau of Education, whose duty it shall be to enforce education, without regard to race or color, upon the population of all such States as shall fall below a standard to be established by Congress, and to inquire whether such a bureau shall not be made an essential and permanent part of any system of reconstruction." In an address which James

²⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 38 Congress, 1 session, p. 2049, 2 session, p. 804; 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 1925, 2 session, p. 401; 40 Congress, 2 session, 3758.

²⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 2119, 2180, 3274; 40 Congress, 2 session, p. 638.

G. Blaine described as "one of the most striking speeches made in the House upon this subject," Donnelly stressed the importance of education. In answer to the question "what is education?" he declared: "It is a means to an end—the intelligent action of the human faculties. He who is opposed to education is opposed to the enlightenment of the people, and must necessarily be their enemy, since he seeks to himself some advantage out of their ignorance, and strives to obscure their judgment that he may the better mislead them. . . . Let the great work go on. Its tasks are but half completed. Let it go on until ignorance is driven beyond our remotest borders. This is the noblest of all human labors. . . . The freedom of the people resting upon the intelligence of the people!"³⁰

Donnelly continued to support educational measures during his three terms in Congress. He entered petitions seeking to assure adequate educational opportunities in the South, and he introduced a resolution calling for a standing House committee on education to keep members informed of the nation's needs. It was Donnelly who inaugurated the movement that resulted in the organization of a national department of education, and he gave it constant support during its short period of existence following 1867. He also worked for an adequate salary for the commissioner, often

opposing the views of party leaders like Washburne, the "watchdog of the treasury," and Thaddeus Stevens. Although Donnelly was not always successful, he never ceased to promote his "gospel of education."³¹

DONNELLY completed his third term in Congress in March, 1869, having been re-elected in 1864 and 1866. He faced the campaign of 1868 confident that he had earned respect and popularity by representing not only the views of Minnesota Republicans, but the interests of all the people. His popularity, however, aroused fears among Senator Ramsey's followers that Donnelly might receive support if he were to seek the former's seat in the upper house. The result was a split in Minnesota's Republican ranks, with Ramsey's friends backing General C. C. Andrews against Donnelly in the Congressional race. Although Donnelly polled more votes than Andrews in the November election, the Democratic candidate, Eugene M. Wilson, won by a small plurality.³²

This defeat did not extinguish the fire of Donnelly's ambition for political success. In January, 1869, he tried unsuccessfully to defeat Ramsey in the contest for his seat in the Senate. Between 1869 and 1873 he gradually withdrew from the Republican party, and during the last three decades of the nineteenth century he emerged as the political spokesman for Minnesota's farmers and laborers. Although he led the Granger, Greenback, Alliance, and Populist parties, he never again was elected to a national office. His years in Congress, however, were very important to him because there he gained experience and reputation that were to influence his entire future. Though he broke with the Republican party and became a bitter foe of railroad companies and monopolies, Donnelly never repudiated his Congressional career. He continued to feel that while in Congress he gave Minnesota and the nation a program wanted and needed by the people.

³⁰ Fish, *Donnelliana*, 53, 56; *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 586-590. Donnelly's proposal for a "National Bureau of Education" was the subject of comment in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago newspapers, which were quoted in the *Press* and the *Pioneer* of St. Paul and the *Hastings Independent* in December, 1865, and January, 1866.

³¹ *Congressional Globe*, 39 Congress, 1 session, p. 1727; 40 Congress, 1 session, p. 633, 2 session, p. 1139.

³² Folwell, *Minnesota*, 3:15.

THE document pictured on p. 175 is from the Executive Office records, May 25, 1858, to December 15, 1862, in the Minnesota State Archives. The photograph of Donnelly, reproduced on p. 179, was taken in the studio of Mathew Brady in the 1860s. The original negative is in the National Archives, Washington, D. C. The illustration on p. 182 is from a print owned by the Misses Anna E. R. and Laura Furness.



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