

## THE PEOPLE'S PARTY IN MINNESOTA<sup>1</sup>

For a long time the farmer who made his home along the American frontier was the recipient of far greater favors than he knew. Here he might have land for next to nothing — virgin land, the fertility of which would not for many a year appreciably decline. Lack of capital was no great handicap. It took comparatively little to get a start, and if all went well the homesteader or the purchaser of cheap lands might hope in a few years — certainly less than a lifetime — to pay off his debts and to have his farm “clear.” Ceaseless labor it meant, labor which aged him while he was yet young and which, falling even more heavily upon his wife, carried her to an early grave. But the returns were good. No other farmer in all the world had such an opportunity. Foreigners realized this far better than Americans and came in an ever-increasing throng to share the bounty which providence and the American government placed before them.

These free, rich lands did indeed constitute a generous subsidy for agriculture. Richard Rush, secretary of the treasury under John Quincy Adams, pointed out a third of a century before the Homestead Act went into effect that the low prices asked by the government for its land operated as a “perpetual allurement to their purchase. . . . a bounty . . . in favor of agricultural pursuits.” To him it appeared that the manufacturer was the one who labored against odds. Rush even maintained that “the further encouragement of manufactures by legislative means, would be but a counter-balance, and at most a partial one, to the encouragement to agriculture” inherent in the “terms upon which the public lands are sold.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Read on June 20, 1924, at the state historical convention held under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society at Detroit.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of the Treasury, *State of Finances*, 25 (20 Congress, 1 session, *House Documents*, no. 4 — serial 169).

But the era of free lands could not last forever. Well before the close of the nineteenth century they were practically gone. The price of land had begun to climb. The landless farmer now had increasing difficulty in making a start, and the farmer who had land saw his land values appreciate without furnishing him a corresponding increase in income. The "subsidy" to agriculture had run out, and there was nothing to place in its stead. The farmer must now take his chances with the rest.

He found the competition keen enough. That spirit of ruthless conquest with which he and his progenitors had attacked the woodlands and the prairies had passed into all things American. By the end of the eighties the railways had overtaken the frontier at every point—indeed, they had appeared in time to aid materially in speeding it to an end. Their methods were the methods of the pioneer. They built with blind optimism and with prodigal expenditure wherever there seemed to be the slightest hope of gain. They relied upon and obtained the generous help of the government. They "watered" their stock well before they sold it. And they charged all the traffic would bear. Here was no mean competitor!

Nor were the railroads the only rivals the farmer had to meet. There were other corporations, usually called trusts, which with a lasting and dependable protective tariff behind them were leading the farmer a merry race. There were the trusts which furnished him with the things he wore; there were the trusts which furnished him with the machines he had to use; there were the trusts which furnished him with the fuel he had to burn; there were the trusts which furnished him with the materials of which he built his home, his barns, his fences. And worst of all, there were the trusts to which he must sell his produce—an elevator combine, a miller's ring, a packer's trust. They all played the game in true pioneer fashion. They were there to get all that they could out of a

rich virgin soil. Was not this a free country? Had they not the same rights as anyone else? Who was to tell them what prices they were to charge or to give? That was for them to decide. If people didn't like their prices they knew what they could do.

And then there were the money-lenders. Ever since the Civil War the accumulation of capital, especially in the manufacturing regions of the East, had been going on apace. Here money to loan was available in large quantities, and the western lands, with their appreciating values, furnished excellent security.<sup>3</sup> As for interest rates, the sky was the limit. The western farmer always wanted money badly and could rarely resist the temptation to borrow on any terms. His optimism, born of a never-faltering faith in the future, derived from generations of pioneer ancestors, made him certain that he could repay. He mortgaged his lands for all they were worth, whether it was absolutely necessary or not. As a rule, however, it was absolutely necessary. The latest improved machinery cost money even when purchased on the installment plan; and a long succession of bad years, due to drouths, grasshoppers, and hail, cost more.

These, then, were the competitors—the railroads, the trusts, and the bankers—who disputed with the farmer every step in the race for prosperity. The condition, to be sure, was not altogether new. Ever since the West began the pioneer had had to struggle with the problem of too costly transportation. He had never known a time when the price of the things he had to buy was not as much too high as the price of the things he had to sell was too low. He had had his troubles with banks and bankers. But these earlier days were the days of cheap lands and when things went wrong the disgruntled sought solace in another move to the West. Here was the chance for a new start. Broader acres, more

<sup>3</sup> Hallie Farmer, "The Economic Background of Frontier Populism," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 10:410 (March, 1924).

fertile fields would surely bring the desired results. And with the restless moving ever on and on the more stable elements of society who were left behind made progress that was steady and sure. Now with the lands used up this safety valve was closed. The frontier was turned back upon itself. The restless and discontented voiced their sentiments more and fled from them less. There was a veritable chorus of denunciation directed against those individuals and those corporations who sought their own advantage without regard to the effect their actions would have upon the farmer and his interests.<sup>4</sup>

Premonitions of the gathering storm had not been lacking. In the seventies the farmers protested through the Granger movement against the methods by which the railroads wrung profits from them. The movement was short-lived, however, although it did indeed establish the principle that the roads must submit to state regulation even of their rates. Perhaps its most important contribution — the lesson it taught the farmers of the necessity of coöperation — was less tangible. They learned that by combining they could get a hearing, even if they could not at first accomplish great results. This was a hard lesson to learn and was perhaps never fully mastered, for the pioneer farmer was by practice and precept an individualist. Like his ancestors before him he wished to manage his own affairs in his own way, and he asked only to be let alone. But alone he was unable to face effectively the combinations and corporations that opposed him, and clearly the only hope lay in opposing combination by combination. After the Granger movement came the Greenback movement, with its protest against the steadily mounting value of the dollar and, correspondingly, of the farmers' debts. And then came the Alliance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 275-281 (New York, 1920).

<sup>5</sup> An excellent summary of the history of these movements is presented by Solon J. Buck in *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (*The Chronicles of America Series*, vol. 45 — New Haven, 1920).

The history of the Farmers' Alliance in Minnesota is fairly typical of the whole movement, the development of which differed in the various western states in detail but not much in kind. After beginning in a small way early in the eighties, the organization by the end of the decade had drawn to its support an enormous following, especially in the western and newer portions of the state. The Alliance at first made no pretense of entering politics as a third party; indeed, its leaders expressly denied that it had any such desire. What it did propose to do, however, was to secure legislation through the older parties, or through any available means, for the benefit of the rural classes. It interested itself especially in the selection of farmers and friends of the farmers to sit in the legislature, trusting that through their votes such laws as were needed could be passed. As early as 1885 this policy had netted results. In that year a state railroad and warehouse commission was created to which regulatory powers of seemingly great importance were given — powers which the legislature of 1887, even more completely under the influence of the farmers than its predecessor, was able to increase.<sup>6</sup>

The farmers' regulations, however, were by no means agreeable to the railways and the elevator companies against whose practices they were aimed, and means of evading objectionable laws were generally discovered. If worst came to worst, the courts could be depended upon to set aside any really effective legislation on the grounds of deprivation of property "without due process of law." Moreover, the game of controlling legislatures was one in which the farmers were not well versed, whereas their opponents had had long experience. When the legislature of 1889 met it soon became apparent that the farmers had been outplayed. "The railroad corporations are now jubilant," the Alliance leaders mourned. "They have defeated the re-election to the House of many

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller statement see John D. Hicks, "The Origin and Early History of the Farmers' Alliance in Minnesota," in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 9: 203-222 (December, 1922).

of the men who defended our rights. The great newspapers are not on our side. The corporations propose to send a railroad man to the United States Senate. They intend to eventually unite all the railroads of the United States into one great 'trust.'"<sup>7</sup> "This legislature," wrote another prophet of disaster, "will be controlled by the worst enemies of the human race and the American people, the corporations. A few years ago the corporations did not possess much power and did not control legislation. Now, the great danger of the country is from the combinations of soulless corporations."<sup>8</sup> The absence of leadership among the farmers in the legislature of 1889 was at once apparent. Although there were thirty-three of them in the House of Representatives they fell to fighting among themselves, and were unable so much as to select a candidate for speaker whom they could all support.<sup>9</sup> Their efforts to secure further remedial legislation were half-hearted and wholly unsuccessful.

It was this breakdown of the Alliance program of non-partisan and bipartisan activity that led finally to the attempt to form an independent political party. The movement, moreover, was a ground swell, having its origin more in the desperate financial condition of the farmers than in the plans or hopes of a few determined leaders. Indeed the one really outstanding leader of the reform forces in Minnesota, Ignatius Donnelly, appeared at this time, for reasons best known to himself, to be definitely against third party action.<sup>10</sup> When the annual meeting of the state alliance convened in March, 1890, it was apparent that neither Donnelly nor any other

<sup>7</sup> From a four-page pamphlet containing a circular letter signed by the officers of the state alliance and headed "Headquarters State Farmers' Alliance," in the Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 7. The Donnelly Scrapbooks, Papers, and Letter Books are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>8</sup> P. Cudmore to Donnelly, January 12, 1889, Donnelly Papers.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Pioneer Press* (St. Paul and Minneapolis), January 8, 1889.

<sup>10</sup> John D. Hicks, "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8:115 (June-September, 1921).

leader could long hold back the tide. The gathering, according to the *Minneapolis Journal*, was noted for two things — “an immense flood of resolutions and an attendance that crowded the House of Representatives to the doors.” The resolutions were doubtless Donnelly’s, and in them his doctrine of the union of all the producing classes of the world to protect themselves from the robberies of the non-producers found adequate expression. The platform contained twenty-five planks and voiced demands for laws to prevent railway and elevator discriminations, to provide for the taxation of mortgages, to prevent the exaction of usurious rates of interest, and incidentally — eleventh in the list — to increase the volume of the currency. But it was one thing to accept Donnelly’s facile pen as a means of assuring adequate expression of Alliance grievances and quite another to accept his leadership of the movement. Had Donnelly been wholeheartedly in favor of third party action doubtless he might have fared better. By a vote of 159 to 134, however, the alliance presidency was withheld from him and conferred upon a far less conspicuous worker, R. J. Hall, whose mind, it was thought, could be more certainly trusted to go along with the will of the masses.<sup>11</sup>

That will found adequate expression in a convention held in St. Paul on July 16, 1890, with the avowed purpose of putting a full ticket in the field. The call came from the executive committee of the state alliance in response to instructions from a large number of local chapters, and it met with the enthusiastic approval of Alliance men all over the state. It recited some of the chief grievances which the farmers felt and announced, as a full and complete apology for the contemplated action, that “No party has had the courage to undertake to free us from these and kindred evils.” The size of the convention which responded to the call attests

<sup>11</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, March 5, 6, 1890; *St. Paul Daily News*, March 6, 1890; *St. Paul Daily Globe*, March 7, 1890.

somewhat the interest in the movement. There were 505 delegates, of whom 53 were representatives of the various trades unions of the Twin Cities. Donnelly, who by this time had climbed into the band wagon and, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary, was fully receptive towards the Alliance nomination for governor, claimed to be responsible for the inclusion of the labor leaders. If so, they repaid him but badly for his favor, for they joined with his opponents to nominate for governor the editor of a well-known Minneapolis farm journal, Sidney M. Owen. Donnelly probably had a nominating majority of the Alliance men. It was the labor vote that defeated him. Had the convention been free to do as it chose, however, it would doubtless have passed by both Donnelly and Owen to give the nomination to Knute Nelson, whose independence in politics had attracted much attention, but Nelson hoisted the Republican banner and refused to pull it down.<sup>12</sup>

The election which followed was full of excitement. Donnelly threatened for a time to sulk in his tent, but at length came out for Owen. "At the convention we put up a man whom I thought was an accident," he said. "But the course was a wise one, and I think the nomination of S. M. Owen was directed by an over-ruling Providence."<sup>13</sup> The Alliance forces were fully aroused to their opportunity and their leaders made a strenuous campaign. Low prices and poor crops counted even more heavily than oratory in their favor. For governor the Republican candidate, William R. Merriam, received 88,111 votes; Thomas Wilson, the

<sup>12</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 17, 1890; *St. Paul News*, July 15, 17, 18, 1890; *Daily Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), July 18, 1890; *Minneapolis Journal*, July 19, 1890; *Great West* (St. Paul), July 25, 1890; Eugene V. Smalley, ed., *History of the Republican Party*, 232 (St. Paul, 1896); *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia and Register of Important Events*, 1890, p. 556; Jacob A. O. Preus, "Knute Nelson," *ante*, p. 336.

<sup>13</sup> From a clipping headed "Rice County," which includes a résumé of a speech made by Donnelly at Faribault on October 9, 1890, in Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 8.



Democrat, had 85,844; and Owen, the Alliance, 58,513. Adolf Bierman, who had been nominated for state auditor both by the Democrats and by the Alliance men, was triumphantly elected. Otherwise the whole Republican state ticket pulled through. In the Congressional elections the Alliance fared better. Here the Republicans lost two of the five districts in the state to Democrats and two to Alliance men. The one Republican they succeeded in sending to Congress was John Lind, whose later career would seem to cast doubt on the importance of his triumph to the Grand Old Party. As for the state legislature, the Alliance men held the balance of power in each house, no party having a majority.<sup>14</sup>

The leadership of the Alliance movement in Minnesota was now assumed definitely by Donnelly, who had been elected to the state Senate and by his conduct during the campaign had convinced the rank and file of the Alliance following that he stood for independent political action. At a state convention held late in December Donnelly won the alliance presidency by an overwhelming vote, and when the legislature convened in the following month he directed the Alliance strategy.<sup>15</sup> Donnelly's plan was to weld the Alliance men firmly together into a bloc which could throw its influence to the Republican or to the Democratic side in each chamber as expediency might demand. At first he had considerable success. The farmer members met with him to discuss plans of procedure and prospective legislation, and they willingly followed his leadership.<sup>16</sup> Finding the Democratic members more inclined to make concessions than the Republicans, he speedily formed an Alliance-Democratic combination with

<sup>14</sup> *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1890, p. 557; *St. Paul Globe*, December 30, 1890; Minnesota, *Legislative Manual*, 1891, p. 555; Smalley, *Republican Party*, 236.

<sup>15</sup> *St. Paul News*, December 31, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, January 14, 15, 1891; and numerous clippings in Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 8.

which he succeeded in organizing both houses. In the Senate this occasioned an interesting conflict between Donnelly and the Republican presiding officer, Gideon S. Ives. According to long-established precedent the lieutenant governor in Minnesota was charged with the unique and important duty of appointing all committees. When Lieutenant Governor Ives refused to attend to Donnelly's insistent demand that leading committee assignments be given to himself and to his Alliance brethren, the Alliance-Democratic combination voted to vest committee appointments in the Senate and not in the chair — and as a consequence the Alliance men got the places they sought. The Republicans protested bitterly, even refusing to select minority members on the committees named, but their protests were unavailing.<sup>17</sup>

"The sky is luminous with promise," Donnelly had written the autumn before, when he first learned of his election to the state Senate.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, however, most of the promises were never fulfilled. A comprehensive amendment to the constitution, providing among other things that elevators and warehouses for grain should be deemed public warehouses and that the state should have the right to fix the rates of storage, lacked one of the necessary majority when voted on in the Senate.<sup>19</sup> Other Alliance measures fared about as well. This was probably Donnelly's most conspicuous term in the legislature, yet scarcely a bill that he advocated became law. His supporters dropped from him one by one, and when the session was over only a fraction of his famous legislative bloc was on hand to affix signatures to a grandiose "Alliance Manifesto," which told what noble things the

<sup>17</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, January 7, 10, 16, 1891; *Pioneer Press*, January 10, 1891. See also an interesting letter from Lieutenant Governor Ives to Donnelly, December 20, 1890, in the Donnelly Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Donnelly to Dr. William W. Mayo, November 6, 1890, Donnelly Letter Books, 4: 183.

<sup>19</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, March 14, 1891; clippings in Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 8.

Alliance men had tried in vain to do and acknowledged that they were "defeated, but not disheartened." <sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, the prospect of doing on a national scale what the Alliance was attempting to do in Minnesota and elsewhere on a smaller scale had attracted much attention. After all, there were certain problems which lay beyond the bounds of state authority. There was a genuine reluctance on the part of Alliance men to regard the tariff as an important political issue inasmuch as it was the favorite political football of the older parties; yet the McKinley tariff bill was anathema to the farmers, and only through national legislation could the tariff be touched. The trusts, too, were usually beyond the reach of the state governments; the railways could be controlled only by the nation; and then there was the "crime of 1873." More and more the western agitators came to believe that all the ills of their section were traceable to the conspiracy against silver which denied to a rapidly growing country an adequate volume of currency. The West had always sought panaceas. It had never shown much willingness to submit its ailments to expert analysis, much less to follow patiently annoying directions which pointed only to a slow and none too certain cure. Instinctively it preferred a patent medicine to a physician's prescription, and a magnificent cure-all was at hand:

The dollar of our daddies,  
Of silver coinage free,  
Will make us rich and happy  
Will bring prosperity. <sup>21</sup>

Free silver won the West precisely because it promised the most with the least bother. Exactly what it meant or why it would help, the average man who believed in it could rarely tell. But the greater his ignorance of the subject the pro-

<sup>20</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, April 22, 1891.

<sup>21</sup> The authorship of this verse, which was found, undated, among the Luman H. Weller Papers in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, is credited to M. H. Daley.

founder his faith in it. And free silver, despite the misguided efforts of a few western legislatures, was a blessing which only the national government could confer.

Those agitators who favored a nation-wide party and a nation-wide program of reform finally had their way when a great mass convention, held at Cincinnati in May, 1891, formally launched the People's party. Minnesota was brought into considerable prominence during these proceedings by the activities of Ignatius Donnelly, the leader of the Minnesota delegation, who perhaps did more than any other one man there to make certain that independent action would be taken.<sup>22</sup> Donnelly had often before preached the necessity of a national reform party, and he now once more embraced the idea with his customary warmth. Upon returning to Minnesota he made every effort to lead the state farmers' alliance (over which he still presided) into the new movement, and he succeeded well in his undertaking — indeed, he could hardly have prevented the steady growth of the Populist ranks within the state had he tried.

Nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to overlook the fact that there was noteworthy opposition to abandoning the local Alliance party, organized in 1890, in order to make way for the newer national party. Many ardent and convinced reformers questioned the wisdom of emphasizing national rather than state issues, as a national party must needs do. Win the state first for reform, they argued; put into effect the program which the Alliance had advocated for so long a time and there would then be time enough to capture the national citadel. To these reformers the idea of fusion with the Democrats was by no means unthinkable, for it was the program, not the party, to which they were devoted.<sup>23</sup> They were, moreover, exceedingly mistrustful of Donnelly, whose

<sup>22</sup> *Pioneer Press*, May 20, 1891; clippings in Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, January 4, March 14, 1892; *Chicago Times*, February 4, 1892; *Great West*, April 1, 1892.

constant search for some new thing had often led him rather far afield. They warred with him openly, accusing him of seeking only his own political advantage at the expense of the cause he pretended to serve. He fought back, as was his custom, and the real issue at stake — whether the national or the state program should take precedence — was buried completely from view by a flood of personalities, in which neither side, to quote an impartial observer, “succeeded in advancing very convincing proof of the irredeemable wickedness of the other.”<sup>24</sup>

The men who had managed the campaign for Owen in 1890 were the leaders of the anti-Donnelly faction. They still controlled the Alliance state central committee, and they took rather unfair advantage of their opponents by calling an Alliance convention to meet at St. Paul on July 7, 1892; for at that time Donnelly would be attending the great People's party gathering at Omaha and he would, therefore, be unable to combat his enemies in person. The convention was well attended, named a full state ticket, and adopted a lengthy platform of traditional Alliance principles.<sup>25</sup> But when the Omaha convention was over and the Minnesota delegates had returned, the stronger appeal of national Populism at once asserted itself. A week after the anti-Donnelly Alliance gathering had concluded its labors 650 representatives of the new party met in St. Paul, named an entirely different ticket, headed by Donnelly for governor, and so effectively eclipsed the earlier convention in numbers and enthusiasm that the Alliance candidates soon withdrew. The Minnesota Populists naturally echoed in their platform the Omaha pronouncement, which Donnelly had so lately helped to write; but they took care to recognize state issues, although in far less detail than their rivals. They demanded more effective state control of corporations and transportation companies; erection by the

<sup>24</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, March 12, 1892.

<sup>25</sup> *St. Paul Globe*, July 7, 8, 1892; Smalley, *Republican Party*, 238.

state of terminal elevators at Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth; and, strikingly enough, amendment of the state constitution in such a way as to provide that all laws passed by the legislature must be referred back to the people for their approval. It was clear, however, that the state platform was meant merely to supplement the national program of reform upon which obviously the main attention was to center.<sup>26</sup>

Upon the Republicans rested the chief responsibility for meeting the Populist attack, and they managed their campaign with skill. They proposed to "pull the whole Alliance back into the Republican party" by the nomination for governor of Knute Nelson, whose stand on public questions — particularly the tariff — had been so far in harmony with Alliance views that in 1890 the revolting farmers could scarcely be restrained from adopting him into their fold and nominating him for governor. "If the Alliance doesn't come nearer Knute Nelson's conception of political orthodoxy than the Republican party then his views are not in consonance with his acts," is what one Democratic editor thought about it. Nelson, moreover, was a leader among the Scandinavians, and as the same irreverent observer declared, was "supposed to carry the Norwegian vote of the State in the coat-tail pocket of his trousers." If anyone could win for the Republicans, certainly Nelson was the man.<sup>27</sup>

Lawler, the Democratic nominee, was a Catholic whose nomination, Donnelly claimed, was engineered by James J. Hill and other leading Democrats to cut into the heavy vote which Donnelly would normally receive from members of the Catholic church, particularly the Irish members.<sup>28</sup> However that might be, these leaders doubtless did use their

<sup>26</sup> *St. Paul News*, July 15, 1892; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 15, 1892; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1892, p. 470.

<sup>27</sup> *Broad Axe* (St. Paul), September 24, 1891; February 25, August 25, 1892.

<sup>28</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 10, 1892; *Duluth Daily News*, September 9, 1892; *Penny Press* (Minneapolis), June 8, 1894.

influence to block all efforts to bring about fusion between the Democrats and the Populists. They probably reasoned that the Populist strength would be drawn mainly from the Republican ranks and that with the opposition divided the Democrats had a fighting chance to win. Also they hated Donnelly with a mighty hatred and could never have supported a ticket which bore his name at the top.<sup>29</sup>

The Populists really expected to win Minnesota in 1892. Indeed, the Alliance showing in 1890 had been so remarkable that even the Republicans, who had not lost a state election since 1858, felt somewhat alarmed. Donnelly fought for all he was worth—he even began his fight months before he was nominated. “We are making a tremendous campaign,” he wrote to “Calamity” Weller of Iowa. “I start out tomorrow to begin a series of 65 speeches before July. After July I shall be at work all the time.”<sup>30</sup> “From Forge and Farm; from Shop and Counter; from Highways and Firesides;” ran a Donnelly broadside, “come and hear the ‘Great Commoner’ on the mighty issues which are moving mankind to the ballot box in the great struggle for their rights.” And the crowds came. When Nelson took the stump to bare Donnelly’s erratic record and to urge the greater dependability of the Republican candidates and platform, Donnelly promptly

<sup>29</sup> Some bargains, however, were struck between the Democrats and the Populists. Minnesota in 1892 was entitled to nine electoral votes. The Democrats nominated only five electors on their own ticket; they then gave their indorsement to four of the electors nominated by the Populists. In the ensuing election the total vote for the four “fusion” electors was 110,465; the five straight Populist electors received 29,313 votes; and the five Democratic electors, 100,920. Harrison, with 112,823 votes, had a substantial plurality and the nine electoral votes of Minnesota were cast for the Republican ticket. In state politics the Democrats and the Populists joined in the nomination of Daniel Buck and Thomas Cauty, who were elected to the Minnesota Supreme Court. *Congressional Record*, 52 Congress, 2 session, 1321; *Legislative Manual*, 1893, p. 228, 374, 377; *Farm, Stock and Home*, 9:242 (May 1, 1893); *Representative* (St. Paul), April 19, 1893.

<sup>30</sup> April 15, 1892, Weller Papers.

challenged his chief opponent to a public debate, and taunted him unpleasantly about his plutocratic associates. But Nelson wisely declined to mix with the versatile Irishman, as did also Lawler, whom Donnelly generously included in the invitation.<sup>31</sup>

The result of the election demonstrated plainly enough the hard and uncertain road a new political party has to travel to achieve success. People's party enthusiasts had predicted freely that their ticket would poll a hundred thousand votes and carry the state. Instead the result fell far below the Alliance record of 1890. Donnelly's vote was more than eighteen thousand under that given to Owen two years before, a fact not to be explained on the ground of personal unpopularity, for Donnelly ran nearly eleven thousand votes ahead of Weaver, the People's party candidate for president. Nelson won the governorship handily, but he trailed Harrison in the state some ten thousand votes; and Lawler was a full five thousand votes behind Cleveland. In the Congressional contests also the People's party was less effective than its predecessor had been in the election of 1890, winning but a single district, and that by the slender margin of eighty-five votes. Two districts went to the Democrats, and the other four (the state then had seven representatives) to the Republicans. In the state legislature the new party was reduced to a scant two dozen votes all told.<sup>32</sup>

It is not easy to explain this disastrous slump where an easy victory had been predicted. It was doubtless due in no small measure to two somewhat related causes: first, the division among reformers themselves as to the wisdom of

<sup>31</sup> Donnelly Scrapbooks, vol. 11; *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 13, 1892; *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 1, 1892; *Marshall County Banner* (Argyle), October 20, 1892; James H. Baker, *Lives of the Governors of Minnesota*, 339 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 13).

<sup>32</sup> *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1892, p. 470; 1893, p. 497; *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 13, 1892; Baker, *Lives of the Governors*, 339; Smalley, *Republican Party*, 241.



sidetracking the local Alliance party with its emphasis upon state issues to make way for the People's party and a national program of reform; and second, the fact that 1892 was a presidential year. The abandonment of traditional party lines was far less difficult when purely state and local issues were involved. When the control of the national government was at stake many evidently halted and turned back.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the greatest importance of third parties is to be found in the way in which they force the older parties to take up and make effective the radical plans they propose. The nomination of Nelson by the Republicans was in the nature of a guarantee to the farmers of the state that the legislation they demanded would not long be delayed, and under Nelson's leadership some notable laws were passed. State inspection of the weighing and grading of grain at the great terminal points, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Duluth, had been put into effect under a law of 1885, but the farmers still complained that they were defrauded at the country elevators. A law of 1893 extended the benefit of state inspection to those sellers of grain who could not avoid dealing through local grain merchants. Another law increased the punishment meted out to individuals who were responsible for the creation of pools and trusts, providing that in addition to the punishment by fine already assigned there should be also imprisonment of from one to ten years in the penitentiary. Still another law provided for the purchase of a site and the erection by the state of an elevator at Duluth, to be managed and operated by the state warehouse commission. This was precisely what the Populists had demanded in their platform,

<sup>33</sup> This conclusion is further borne out by the results of subsequent elections. The year 1894 was, like 1890, a far better third party year than 1892 in Minnesota. Comparisons between 1894 and 1896 are not easily made because of the fusion in the latter year of Democrats and Populists, but 1898 was a better Fusionist year than either 1896 or 1900. On all three occasions John Lind headed the Fusion ticket, but in 1896 and 1900 he lost, whereas in 1898 he was elected.

but the law never went into effect — perhaps it was never so intended. The state attorney-general ruled against the project, and his opinion was later upheld by the state supreme court, which declared the act unconstitutional and void. An attempt to place upon the tax list all unsold railway land grants likewise failed.<sup>34</sup>

It is a law of third party movements that once an older party begins to adopt the reforms originally demanded, the new party, if it continues to exist, must and does plunge still further ahead. It was so in Minnesota in 1893. In earlier years the legislation noted would have been about all that the reformers themselves could have asked. Now they had plans far more extensive. They had indeed passed beyond the point where any program of state legislation would satisfy them. The panic of 1893 with its attendant hard times converted many who had had their doubts before to the belief that nation-wide reforms of the most radical and thorough-going sort were necessary. Converts to the free silver heresy were especially numerous. In August, 1893, a great free silver convention, held at Chicago, sounded the call to action in a set of resolutions doubtless drafted by the redoubtable Donnelly himself.<sup>35</sup> Free silver thereafter made tremendous inroads into the older parties. When Cleveland accomplished the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Law in 1894 such prominent Minnesota Republicans as John Lind, Frank A. Day, and George N. Lanphere came out openly for free silver, and the Democratic state convention made itself ridiculous by indorsing Grover Cleveland and free silver in the same paragraph. That the white metal could work miracles multitudes verily believed. The writer of an editorial in the *Representative* declared that "It means work for the thousands who now tramp the streets of Minneapolis, St. Paul and

<sup>34</sup> Minnesota, *General Laws*, 1893, p. 131-138, 140-143, 251; Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission, *Annual Report*, 1893, p. 8-20; 1894, p. 35; 56 *Minnesota*, 100; *Broad Axe*, October 4, 1894.

<sup>35</sup> *Chicago Times*, August 2, 1893; *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 1893.

Duluth, not knowing where their next meal is coming from. It means food and clothing for the thousands of hungry and ill-clad women and children in these cities. It means the restoration of confidence in the business world. It means the re-opening of closed factories, the relighting of darkened furnaces; it means hope instead of despair; comfort in place of suffering; life instead of death." <sup>36</sup>

All this trend towards free silver meant a great influx into the ranks of the People's party, which alone had a clear record on the silver question. The Republican party in its state convention of July 11, 1894, made its stand on a type of bimetallism which favored the maintenance of a "substantial parity of value of every dollar in circulation with that of every other dollar." <sup>37</sup> As for the Democrats any local pronouncement that they might make favorable to free silver was of little importance in view of the hostile stand which Cleveland had seen fit to take. But the Populists had always been for free silver, they were for it still, and in their direction the discontented masses turned.

The Republicans were almost in a panic as they confronted the crisis precipitated by the approach of the state elections of 1894. That the result would hinge upon national rather than state issues, and especially upon free silver, no one could doubt. Nor could anyone doubt that the hard times were making converts for the Populists "every day and hour." <sup>38</sup> "All the [country] newspapers are turning Populist," one gloomy writer proclaimed, and "of the papers printed in any of the Scandinavian languages which retain the Republican spirit pure and without bias, only two are left." <sup>39</sup> Among the Populists there was far greater harmony than there had

<sup>36</sup> *Penny Press*, June 8, 1894; *Broad Axe*, September 6, 1894; *Representative*, September 12, 19, 1894. Beginning in May, 1894, the *Representative* was published in Minneapolis.

<sup>37</sup> *Representative*, July 18, 1894; Preus, *ante*, p. 337.

<sup>38</sup> *Representative*, May 2, 1894.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from the *Minneapolis Tribune* of June 15, 1894, in the *Representative* of June 20, 1894.

been two years before, although minor disturbances were by no means wanting. By common consent they passed by Donnelly, the unsuccessful standard-bearer of 1892, in order to renominate for governor Sidney M. Owen, whose record as Alliance candidate in 1890 had been so phenomenal. They admitted to their convention also a large and enthusiastic labor delegation which chose from its ranks the party candidate for secretary of state, and they adopted a platform of principles which placed the money question ahead of every other consideration. Their money stand, in fact, went much further than free silver, for even free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the ratio of sixteen to one was not enough to satisfy the old-time Greenbackers who were still present in numbers. The convention therefore demanded in addition "a national currency, safe, sound and flexible, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private," in quantity "not less than \$50 per capita." Other reforms, mostly bearing on national affairs, were also advocated, among them government savings banks; government ownership of the railway, telegraph, and telephone systems of the country; income and inheritance taxes; the reclamation of excessive railway land grants; direct election of the president, vice president, and United States senators; and equal suffrage for men and women. Trusts and combines were roundly denounced, and the Republican administration in Minnesota was duly charged with high crimes and misdemeanors.<sup>40</sup>

Nelson was renominated by the Republicans and again bore the brunt of the Populist attack. He made a tremendous campaign and succeeded in drawing to his standard many conservative Democrats, who felt that the real choice lay between him and Owen. Indeed, the Democratic candidate for governor, George L. Becker, was freely accused by the Populists of being nothing more than a tool in Republican

<sup>40</sup> *Broad Axe*, July 12, 1894; *Representative*, July 18, August 1, 1894; Smalley, *Republican Party*, 243.

hands used to impede the very obvious drift of the less conservative Democrats to the Populist camp. Becker was at the time of his nomination a member of the bipartisan state board of railroad commissioners by appointment of Governor Nelson, and although he resigned to make the race he remained on very friendly terms with his former chief throughout the campaign. "Republican papers laud Becker to the skies," one Populist objected, "and the Democrats treat Knute with the greatest respect." <sup>41</sup>

Populist hopes of victory were once more shattered. Owen made an admirable showing, polling a total of 87,890 votes to Becker's 53,584 and Nelson's 147,943. But the triumph of the Republicans was complete. They not only elected their entire state ticket, but for the first time in years they sent an undivided Republican delegation to Congress. The Populists failed even to secure the election of John W. Willis, a Democrat whom the third party men had nominated and the Democrats had accepted, to be associate justice of the supreme court. It is clear that the Populists had overestimated their strength, but even so they were not entirely cast down. As one leader expressed it, "This protest of 80,000 of Minnesota's toilers against existing conditions is a most eloquent one, and if no attention is paid to it, as there probably will not be, it will be still more eloquent, because more powerful, in the early future." <sup>42</sup>

The poor showing made by the Democrats in 1894 gave some reason for the Populists to hope that their party would soon take its place. Donnelly predicted that the Democrats would never recover from their defeat—that in state and nation they would soon go the way of the Whigs four decades before. <sup>43</sup> Had the Democrats continued to face both ways

<sup>41</sup> *Broad Axe*, September 27, 1894; *Representative*, October 10, 1894.

<sup>42</sup> *Broad Axe*, September 6, 1894; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1894, p. 490-491; *Legislative Manual*, 1895, p. 333, 334, 381; *Farm, Stock and Home*, 11:10 (November 15, 1894).

<sup>43</sup> *Representative*, November 7, 1894.

on the money question it is not unlikely that Donnelly's prophecy would have been fulfilled, at least in the West, where the silver movement was strongest. But the Democrats were now well on the way towards the full acceptance of this item of the Populist creed. History was again repeating itself. What the third party men had first taken up and popularized one of the older parties made haste to adopt — in fact, had to adopt or else run the risk of extinction. During the two years which followed the election of 1894 the Bland-Bryan wing of the Democratic party consolidated its ranks and prepared for the coming fray. The "gold-bug" president, Grover Cleveland, was anathematized, and the continuance of hard times was blamed upon his deference to the "money power." Many western Republicans, likewise, had swung over to the free silver doctrine, and the word soon began to pass around that in 1896 all the silverites must get together. "It may be," wrote one Minnesota editor, "that this is the way it has been decreed that humanity shall advance a step." When the Silver Republicans bolted the St. Louis convention in June, 1896, under the leadership of Henry M. Teller of Colorado, the same editor made this proposition: "Suppose the democrats give up their favorite sons Boies and Bland and the people's party forego the pleasure of nominating their great genius and splendid patriot Ignatius Donnelly, and all unite in the nomination of Henry M. Teller for president?"<sup>44</sup>

That the silver forces would unite for the campaign was hardly open to question. But under what banner? The Populist leaders did not at first realize how powerful the

<sup>44</sup> *Broad Axe*, June 25, July 2, 1896. Such suggestions did not meet with universal approval. Robert Shilling of Milwaukee, the editor of a radical Wisconsin paper called the *Advance*, wrote to Donnelly on June 22, 1896: "I am raising hell about the Teller address. They wanted me to sign it, but I refused point blank. These fellows run off after strange gods at every opportunity. Wonder if the Gresham blunder at Omaha was not enough? . . . You would be my first choice, but the d—— A. P. A. nonsense would hurt you." Donnelly Papers.

free silver movement had become among the Democrats, and they fully expected their own ticket to be the only frankly silver ticket in the field. They planned that their national convention should take place in August after both the old party nominations had been made. They confidently believed that the Democrats and the Republicans would alike succumb to the pressure of the gold interests, and that the People's party would then have nothing to do but to gather up all the bolting silverites and elect its candidate. To this end they first dispatched their agents to St. Louis to induce the bolting Republicans to join forces with the Populists. It was discovered, however, that Bryan and other leading Silver Democrats were on hand to lead the apostate Republicans into the Democratic fold. A battle royal took place, with the stake the promise of the Tellerites' coöperation, and the Populists seem to have won.<sup>45</sup> The center of activity now shifted to Chicago, where the Populists gathered in numbers a week before the meeting of the Democratic convention "to see what can be done towards getting the silver democrats to unite with us or in some way co-operate so that we can all vote for one electoral ticket in the next campaign." But this ambitious program met an untimely end when Bryan and the silver forces captured the Chicago convention. What should the Populists, who had been the greatest agitators for a single silver ticket, do now? Should they nominate a

<sup>45</sup> Henry D. Lloyd, "The Populists at St. Louis," in *Review of Reviews*, 14: 300 (September, 1896); H. E. Taubeneck, chairman of the national executive committee of the Populist party, to Donnelly, June 10, 20, 22, 1896, Donnelly Papers. The letter of June 22 recounts that "The Democrats had a large and influential lobby here, moving Heaven and earth to get the bolting Republicans to join the Democratic party and go to the Chicago Convention. Bryan was here the entire week. Bland also had a strong lobby on the ground. We got in touch with the bolting Republicans before the Convention opened, and agreed upon a policy" which permitted the bolting Republicans to maintain a provisional organization; planned fusion with the Populists locally in the western states on electors, Congressmen, and state and local tickets; and proposed that the Silver Republicans join the Populists in their July convention.

third ticket in August and thus divide the silver forces, or should they give their indorsement to Bryan, who was assuredly a Populist in everything but name? "Our convention never should have been postponed until after those of the old parties, with the object of catching the crumbs that might fall from their tables," scolded one of "Calamity" Weller's correspondents, but the damage was done.<sup>46</sup>

Eventually the Populists took Bryan, though they tried to save their separate identity by nominating a candidate of their own for the vice presidency. Many old-time Populists, especially Southerners, to whom fusion with the Democrats meant complete and abject surrender, were loath to give up the hope of a separate ticket, feeling that the preservation of the party was of even more importance than the carrying of the country for free silver.<sup>47</sup> They pointed also to the long list of Populist doctrines not included in the Democratic creed, and they questioned the advisability of abandoning these reforms merely to have their way on free silver. These "Middle-of-the-Roaders" seriously discussed the advisability of nominating Donnelly, or some other genuine Populist, at their St. Louis convention, and Donnelly seemed willing. "The People's party . . . needs to live," he said in a speech seconding the nomination of Watson for vice president. "I stood at the cradle of the People's party, and God forbid that I should be here to attend its funeral."<sup>48</sup> But the movement came to naught and Donnelly himself, doubtless discouraged by the overwhelmingly hostile attitude of the Minnesota delegation and by the assurance from home that nine-tenths of the Minnesota Populists would vote for Bryan

<sup>46</sup> Taubeneck to Donnelly, July 5, 1896, Donnelly Papers; G. W. Everts to Weller, July 26, 1896, Weller Papers.

<sup>47</sup> *Representative*, August 26, 1896.

<sup>48</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, July 23, 1896. It will be recalled that the Populists reversed the usual procedure and nominated the vice presidential candidate first. Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency*, 551 (New York, 1900); William J. Bryan, *The First Battle: A Story of the Campaign of 1896*, 271 (Chicago, 1896).



even if a straight Populist ticket should be named, surrendered to the inevitable, even making an effective seconding speech for Bryan.<sup>49</sup>

With national fusion an accomplished fact the movement for fusion on state tickets became irresistible throughout the West. Minnesota leaders expressed whole-hearted approval of "the union of the reform forces of America under a common standard for a common cause," and reformers of every degree were encouraged to lay aside their petty differences for future settlement in order that the united front now achieved might not be broken. A single Democratic-Populist-Silver Republican ticket was agreed upon as the best mode of procedure within the state. There was fortunately substantial agreement upon John Lind of New Ulm as the man best fitted to head this ticket. Lind was a Silver Republican who had attracted the attention of all reformers by the independent and courageous stand he had taken in opposition to the majority of his party on the money question. He was of Swedish birth, but had been a resident of Minnesota since 1868. After achieving success as a lawyer and a local politician, he sat in the fiftieth, fifty-first, and fifty-second Congresses, and was the only Republican representative elected from Minnesota in 1890. In 1892 he declined to be a candidate for reelection on the ground that he was out of harmony with his party on economic questions, and after the St. Louis Republican convention of 1896 he openly proclaimed his adherence to the bolting Teller faction of the party. His honesty and sincerity of purpose seemed not to be open to question. With the first place on the ticket conceded to the Silver Republicans there was nothing for the Democrats and Populists to do but to divide the remaining nominations between themselves. This they accomplished at conventions held in Minneapolis respectively on August 5 and August 26.

<sup>49</sup> Telegram from W. H. Smallwood and others to Donnelly, July 21, 1896, Donnelly Papers; *Minneapolis Journal*, July 22, 1896; *Representative*, July 29, 1896; Bryan, *The First Battle*, 279.

The platforms of the two parties were in substantial harmony, not only on free silver, but on other matters as well. With true Populist fervor the Democrats denounced the Republican party of the state "for its subservience to corporations, rings and trusts and its total disregard for the producing masses, the middle classes, the common people, farmers, mechanics and laboring men." <sup>50</sup>

But the Fusionists did not win. "Honest John Lind" gave the Republican candidate, Governor Clough, the race of his life, piling up a total of 162,254 votes to his opponent's 165,906. Lind, however, ran far ahead of his ticket, and all the other Fusionists were badly beaten. The electoral vote of the state and the delegation to Congress were again solidly Republican. The legislature was overwhelmingly the same.<sup>51</sup> Naturally such a defeat was deeply disappointing to the reform forces, and they may be pardoned for trying to explain it away. Bitter complaint was made of the success which had attended Republican efforts to frighten silverites into voting against their true sentiments. Owen's paper had this to say: "When employes . . . of railroads and other great corporations and industrial establishments are told, as they were, that if the restoration of silver was demanded their wages would be largely cut, or they would be thrown out of employment entirely by the closing of establishments, it was next to impossible for them to voice their political convictions through their ballots." <sup>52</sup>

Was fusion as a political device discredited by the campaign of 1896? Many Populists thought it was. The third party was composed of two distinct elements, first, the advocates of a genuine and thoroughgoing social reform who regarded

<sup>50</sup> *Representative*, July 8, September 2, 1896; *Broad Axe*, August 6, 20, September 3, October 29, 1896; Baker, *Lives of the Governors*, 375-394; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1896, p. 490.

<sup>51</sup> *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1896, p. 490; *Legislative Manual*, 1897, p. 449.

<sup>52</sup> *Farm, Stock and Home*, 13:2 (November 15, 1896).

the entire Omaha platform as political gospel, and second, "silverites" who had little interest in the other items of the Populist creed. The latter faction still pinned its faith to fusion, but the former now demanded a return to sound Populistic doctrine, and a complete divorce from the Democrats, who had only led them astray. Donnelly, one of the most earnest of the "Middle-of-the-Road" workers, in his last days described the Democratic leaders of Minnesota as "merely a bag-pipe under the armpit of Republicanism to squeak out discordant harmony." Owen took the reverse position, arguing that for a decade the only achievements of material benefit to the people of the state had come from fusion, or at least from coöperation, "between the opponents of the reigning party and prevailing systems in the state." In the two years between 1896 and 1898 Populists tended to line up definitely on one side of this contention or on the other.<sup>53</sup>

The Fusionists were probably in the majority, and at any rate, thanks to the plan of campaign in 1896 they were in control of the party machinery. They arranged that the Populist state convention of 1898 be held at the time and place chosen by the Democrats and the Silver Republicans. Fusion, bordering closely upon amalgamation, might then be worked out in conference, and a common ticket, again headed by Lind, would be named. On the appointed day the "Middle-of-the-Roaders" were on hand "with blood in their eye," led of course by Donnelly. Their hope was to capture the convention and to nominate an independent ticket. Failing in that, they were determined to bolt the proceedings and in a rump convention have things their own way. There was a battle royal, but the Fusionists were in a clear majority, the vote standing 569 to 396 on a test ballot, and the Fusionist program was carried out to the letter. Next day the "Middle-

<sup>53</sup> Frank L. McVey, *The Populist Movement*, 182 (American Economic Association, *Economic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3—New York, 1896); *Representative*, July 13, 1899; *Farm, Stock and Home*, 14: 242 (July 1, 1898).

of-the-Roaders" had a session by themselves, named a ticket of their own headed by L. C. Long, and adopted a platform in harmony with their views. "We refuse to get into the grave," said Donnelly, "where the Greenback party lies, fused to death." <sup>54</sup>

In the election which followed Lind won the governorship, although the rest of the Fusionist ticket was defeated. Lind's chances of success were considerably bettered when he accepted the post of quartermaster in one of the Spanish-American War regiments from Minnesota and fearlessly left the state to his opponents on the very eve of the campaign. On the other hand, William H. Eustis, the Republican nominee, suffered from the bitter opposition of a faction within his own party headed by none other than Governor Clough himself.<sup>55</sup> As for the "Middle-of-the-Road" ticket, it cut but a sorry figure. Donnelly's apology for this circumstance, however, is hardly convincing. "In this state," he wrote, "the real strength of our midroad ticket was immensely reduced by our disgusted people going squarely over to the Republican party. They sought revenge on the Democrats, who had invaded our ranks, bought up our leaders, and forced their loathsome nuptials on our unhappy people." <sup>56</sup> A simpler and more plausible explanation would seem to be that the "Middle-of-the-Roaders" merely lacked the votes. By the year 1898 radical Populism, not only in Minnesota but also throughout the nation, had run its course. The Democrats under Bryan had robbed the Populists of many of their favorite reforms, and even among the Republicans such men as Theodore Roosevelt had already begun to demand with Populistic eloquence the rule of the people rather than the

<sup>54</sup> *Representative*, June 15, 22, 1898; *Broad Axe*, June 16, 1898; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopædia*, 1898, p. 458.

<sup>55</sup> *Farm, Stock and Home*, 14: 274 (August 1, 1898); *Broad Axe*, July 7, 1898; *Representative*, September 9, 1898; Baker, *Lives of the Governors*, 368, 385.

<sup>56</sup> *Representative*, November 16, 1898.

rule of the party bosses. A Republican "counter-reformation" was on the way, and but for the Spanish-American War it would have broken out much sooner than it did. Populism, one might almost say, was crushed between the upper millstone of Roosevelt Republicanism and the nether millstone of Bryan Democracy. Furthermore, prosperity had replaced adversity, and the prolonged spell of hard times, which had heretofore proved so valuable an ally to political agitators, incontinently deserted.

There is little need of following the Populist movement further. Lind made a good record as governor, but he became a Democrat, not a Populist, and he was not reëlected. In 1900 the form of fusion was maintained, but the substance was lacking, as far as the Populist faction was concerned. This once formidable and aggressive organization had become "merely a side show of the Democratic party, bound to do the bidding of its conquerors and its bosses, and having no principles, so far as the public can see, which are not taken care of by the stronger organization" <sup>57</sup> — "fused to death," as Donnelly had feared. A handful of active "Middle-of-the-Roaders" showed much greater per capita vitality, but they lacked numbers sorely. They nominated candidates in 1900 on state and national tickets by referendum ballots rather than by conventions,<sup>58</sup> and for years thereafter their scattered voices crying in the wilderness prepared the way for the Roosevelt revolt of 1912 and the La Follette movement of 1924.

But in spite of the anticlimactic career of the People's party the fundamental principle for which the original Populists fought survived and grew. They grasped the idea that the extreme individualism of the old frontier was forever a thing of the past, and that the combination of the many

<sup>57</sup> Quoted from the *Minneapolis Tribune* in the *Representative* of May 3, 1900.

<sup>58</sup> *Representative*, January 4, May 10, September 13, 1900.

who were left behind in the mad race for prosperity to control the few who had forged farthest ahead was an absolute necessity if anything like equality of opportunity was to be maintained. Pioneers of an earlier age had barely tolerated government as a necessary evil, but these farmers of the last American frontier could see no other way to check the aggressive tendencies of those who opposed their interests than the interposition of the power of the state. Once they had believed in the slogan, "The less government the better," but now they saw that all ordinary men must join together in demanding an extension of governmental activity. The common people must take control of the government in order to make of it an instrument of the popular will and an adequate check on those who would otherwise make it the tool of special interests. "In brief," as Mr. Turner puts it, "the defenses of the pioneer democrat" had shifted "from free land to legislation, from the ideal of individualism to the ideal of social control through regulation by law."<sup>59</sup> And that newer ideal despite setbacks both violent and recent still stands.

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<sup>59</sup> Turner, *Frontier in American History*, 277, 305-307.



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