

THE BIRTH OF THE POPULIST PARTY

Those who have tried within recent years to found a new political party in the United States will be quick to agree that the task is not a light one. It is not merely that the inertia of the American voter is great and his adherence to party tradition firm; there are yet other obstacles to be overcome. The mere business of getting convinced reformers together in sufficient numbers to justify formal organization; the problem of inducing men who are notably contentious to agree upon any common platform or plan of action; the creation of a party machine by which candidates may be named, campaigns conducted, and elections carried — these things constitute some of the initial difficulties that the would-be reformers must confront.

Of all the third parties that have made their appearance in American politics the Populist party of the nineties, which voiced the protest of multitudes in the agricultural South and West against the rising power of an eastern "plutocracy," is perhaps the most outstanding. It did not, to be sure, win many victories as a party; rather, it forced the existing parties to take cognizance of issues they had previously tended to dodge or to ignore. Nor did it long endure. But the Populist party was more than a mere portent. Those early disasters that ordinarily make abortive the best efforts of reformers to found a party, it was fortunate enough to escape; and it lived long enough to achieve an organization and a personality as definite and distinct as either of the older parties ever possessed. For nearly a decade it was one of the "hard facts" of American politics.

The conditions, economic and otherwise, that gave rise to Populistic doctrines have often been described, but to a considerable extent the actual process by which the party, as such,

came into existence has been overlooked.¹ It is the purpose of this paper to supply the deficiency noted. There are many ex-Populists alive who could, if they would, cast much light on this subject; but, apparently half-ashamed of the part they played, they can rarely be induced to talk freely of it. Manuscripts also there may be that will add materially to what is now known, but the three collections that the writer has examined, the Donnelly Papers, the Weller Papers, and the Allen Papers, while revealing enough on some matters, are of little use for this purpose.² Chief reliance for the facts here set down, therefore, has been placed upon numerous newspaper accounts and upon such other printed materials as are now available.

The responsibility for the beginnings of the Populist party is not at all difficult to assign; the party sprang directly from the activities of the various farmer organizations that flourished in the United States of the later eighties. The chief of these societies were the National Farmers' Alliance, the strength of which lay mainly in the Northwest, and the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, which within a few years had swept the South. These orders numbered their adherents by the hundreds of thousands, and even by the millions. Professing much the same principles, they differed markedly from one another in organization. As a contemporary writer put it, the "Northern" Alliance depended "for a bond of cohesion, not

¹ Mention should be made, however, of the contemporary work by Frank L. McVey, "The Populist Movement," in the American Economic Association, *Economic Studies*, 1: 133-209 (August, 1896); and of the following later works: Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War, with Special Reference to Iowa* (Iowa City, 1916); Alex M. Arnett, *The Populist Movement in Georgia* (New York, 1922); and Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (*Chronicles of America Series*, vol. 45 — New Haven, 1920).

² The Donnelly Papers are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, and constitute probably the most extensive Populist collection in existence. The Weller Papers, in the possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, are of far less consequence. The Allen Papers are still retained by a member of Senator William V. Allen's family, Mrs. W. L. Dowling of Madison, Nebraska.

on rigid laws or rules, but on the common attachment of the members to certain central ideas and principles set forth in its constitution."³ Curiously, it was the Northern Alliance, also, that had the greater regard for state lines. It was, indeed, little more than a loose federation of state units with national officers who received practically nothing by way of compensation and whose powers were slight. But the "Southern" Alliance had a strongly centralized national organization in which state units were definitely subordinate to a supreme council representative of the entire order. This council held annual sessions during which it legislated freely on Alliance affairs and elected a president, an executive board to advise the president between sessions, and a judicial tribunal. The order was incorporated in the District of Columbia, where its foremost officers maintained their headquarters. Its president was well paid and in spite of a possible restraining influence on the part of the judicial tribunal, he was between sessions of the supreme council virtually an autocrat. So led, the Southern Alliance was able through its numerous "official" newspapers to voice a common policy and to take concerted action; while the Northern Alliance, relying more upon individual initiative, played only a small part outside of state and local affairs. There were other differences: the Southern Alliance had a secret ritual, while the Northern Alliance (with rare local exceptions) did not; the Southern Alliance drew the color line sharply, while the Northern Alliance ignored it.⁴

In addition to the two leading orders there were others of lesser magnitude: the Colored Alliance, which was sponsored by the Southern Alliance and carried its principles to the negroes of the South; the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, which had considerable strength in Illinois and members in

³ N. B. Ashby, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 418 (Des Moines, Iowa, 1890).

⁴ The constitution of the Southern Alliance, as amended at St. Louis in December, 1889, is printed in W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 158-170 (St. Louis, 1891); that of the Northern Alliance in Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 410-415.

neighboring states; the Grange, which in spite of the collapse in the seventies of the Granger movement had never completely died out; the Patrons of Industry, which sponsored farmer interests, although not strictly composed of farmers, in a number of the states of the Old Northwest; the Farmers' League, which had a certain vogue in the northeastern states; and other orders too numerous and too inconsequential to mention.⁵

To begin with, these orders were strictly nonpartisan in character.⁶ This is not to say, however, that they were non-political, for almost from the first they put pressure upon state legislatures and even upon Congress to pass laws in aid of agriculture. Their leaders talked much of educational propaganda, of social activities, and of business ventures; but they depended for results upon favorable legislation. It was assumed that the farmers could and should work for this legislation through the older parties, which were considered probably "as good as any likely to be organized to replace them."⁷ Unity of purpose and of action was the watchword. Provided only that the farmers could be induced to stand together, candidates for office who were friendly to agriculture could be nominated and elected; and it made small difference whether they were Republicans or

⁵ Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, chs. 9-12; E. A. Allen, *Labor and Capital*, chs. 14-21 (Cincinnati, 1891); Frank Drew, "The Present Farmers' Movement," in *Political Science Quarterly*, 6: 282-310 (June, 1891).

⁶ That professional third-party politicians saw other possibilities in the movement from the first seems clear enough, but they recognized the necessity of a gradual transition. A letter dated December 26, 1882, from David W. Wood, an officer of the National Farmers' Alliance, to Lemuel H. ("Calamity") Weller, now in the Weller Papers, suggests this idea. It [*the Alliance*] has been a great educator of the people, and has really been the foundation of much political success. It brings the farmers together for conference. Not being partizan, and not even political in the common acceptance of that term, there is no reason why any farmer should not join it. Once in, the almost inevitable result is that a partizan begins to unbend a little, and to see that his interests are not being served in the halls of legislation; and in the majority of cases he will become an independent voter. Then he will move with the majority of the Alliance on election day, or aid in establishing a party movement as in Nebraska.

⁷ *National Economist*, 1: 145 (May 25, 1889). This weekly, published at Washington, D. C., was the official journal of the Southern Alliance.

Democrats.⁸ The farmer program of reform differed somewhat from state to state and from section to section, but in general it expressed a debtor protest against what was esteemed to be unreasonable oppression by the creditor class. Railways should be compelled to lower their rates, either by laws directly devised for the purpose, or by railway commissions endowed with regulative power. Land monopolies should be broken down. Trusts of every sort and kind should be destroyed. Interest rates should be lowered, laws protecting mortgage holders made less stringent, and national banks abolished outright. More money — paper or silver or both — should be supplied to help carry the increasing volume of business that the growth of the country made inevitable.⁹

It is not surprising that the idea of one all-farmer organization to replace these numerous societies soon began to take form. Barring the possibility of anything stronger than federation with the colored brethren, this notion was especially pleasing to the southern leaders, whose power would be greatly augmented could they extend their control to the membership of the other farm orders. Inasmuch as the Southern Alliance had far outstripped all the rest in the race for members and had its organization more highly perfected, it seemed likely that amalgamation would indeed play into its hands. Certainly the chief propaganda in favor of union came from southern sources. Since the first important step in this direction was to get the northern and southern branches of the Alliance together, southern delegates appeared at the national meeting of the Northern Alliance in February, 1888, and again in January, 1889, to work for union. Seemingly nothing loath, the northern dele-

⁸ Characteristic utterances on this subject may be found in the *National Economist*, 1: 5 (March 14, 1889); the *Great West* (Minneapolis), October 18, 1889; and the *Alliance* (Lincoln, Nebraska), November 29, 30, 1889.

⁹ Drew, in the *Political Science Quarterly*, 6: 293, gives a summary of the various national platforms. See also Morgan, *The Wheel and Alliance*, 141-144; and Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 408-411.

gates voted to hold their next meeting at St. Louis in December, 1889, the same time and the same place chosen by the Southern Alliance.¹⁰ Here in due time the delegates from North and South met and here also came delegates from the Colored Alliance, fraternal representatives from the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, and a committee headed by Terence V. Powderly from the Knights of Labor.¹¹ But the proposed union failed of accomplishment, ostensibly because of differences between the northern and southern delegates on the admission of Negro members and on the question of secret work (to which the Southerners steadfastly adhered); actually, no doubt, because the northern leaders did not care to efface themselves entirely, as they feared they might have to do should the two orders become one. Substantial agreement was reached, however, in the demands separately adopted by the two Alliances; demands in which the Knights of Labor and the other farm orders more or less officially concurred.¹²

The St. Louis conference was notable for two reasons: first, it gave the various farm orders substantially one and the same platform of political demands; second, it made perfectly obvious the impossibility of gathering all such organizations to-

¹⁰ Drew, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 6: 284; *National Economist*, 1: 8; 2: 72 (March 14, October 19, 1889).

¹¹ *St. Louis Republic*, December 3, 4, 1889.

¹² Drew, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 6: 284-285; *National Economist*, 2: 215 (December 21, 1889); *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 6, 7, 1889; *St. Louis Republic*, December 7, 1889. Briefly summarized, the St. Louis demands of the Southern Alliance and the Knights of Labor were as follows: (1) abolition of national banks and substitution for their note issues of adequate quantities of legal tender treasury notes; (2) laws by Congress against dealing in futures; (3) free and unlimited coinage of silver; (4) laws prohibiting alien ownership of lands and compelling the railroads to return their excess land holdings; (5) taxation reform to avoid building up "one interest or class at the expense of another"; (6) fractional paper currency; (7) government ownership and operation of the means of transportation and communication. The Southern Alliance also went on record as favoring a plan for farm credits and money inflation known as the sub-treasury. On the latter point see Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 302-316.

gether in one great Alliance. Both considerations pointed vaguely in the same direction. The orders had been able to agree upon a platform, and precisely the sort of platform that a new political party would need, should such a party be formed. Moreover, since the alliances could not unite as such, did it not behoove their members to create a separate organization through which they could coöperate as individuals to put their principles into effect? These notions would not down, although the idea of forming a third party was frowned upon by nearly all the Alliance leaders. The *National Economist* found it necessary to say editorially: "A third political party will not be formed by these organizations. It is a non-partisan movement in which each member may remain true to his party, but each one will see to it that this party continues true to him." A little later, however, the same journal could not refrain from the comment that if the farmers should "take it into their heads to act with solidarity in politics, there may be, in the next year or two, some of the liveliest and most surprising politics ever known in these United States."¹³

The farmers did, indeed, "take it into their heads" so to act. In greater and greater numbers they came to realize that their nonpartisan and bipartisan efforts were mainly wasted. As Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota had once said to the Grangers, this creation of a nonpolitical organization was like making a gun "that will do everything but shoot."¹⁴ The men whom they chose on old-party tickets to represent them in the legislature or in Congress almost invariably bowed before the demands of the party machine.¹⁵ The legislation that they desired failed to materialize. As the election of 1890 hove in view,

¹³ *National Economist*, 2: 264; 3: 1 (January 11, March 22, 1890).

¹⁴ Ignatius Donnelly, *Facts for the Granges*, 18 (1873). A copy of this pamphlet, which is made up of extracts from speeches before a number of county granges in southern Minnesota in the spring of 1873, is in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁵ C. S. Walker, "The Farmers' Movement," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 4: 796 (March, 1894).

signs multiplied that the farmers were on the verge of political revolution. In several northwestern states Alliance conventions met to nominate full state and local tickets and even candidates for Congress. In the South, where the need of a solid white vote was still keenly felt, the farmers sought to capture completely the Democratic party machine. The results were startling. In Kansas and Nebraska the Alliance lost the governorships, but elected majorities in one or both houses of the legislatures and some members of Congress. In South Dakota, in Minnesota, and even in Indiana the Alliance showed amazing strength. Throughout the South the old guard of the Democratic party was put to shame — completely routed, as in Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee, or thoroughly frightened, as in Alabama, North Carolina, and Missouri.¹⁶ What would the future bring forth?

The successes scored by the farmers in the election of 1890 greatly stimulated the agitation, already under way, for the organization of a third party along national lines. The expectation that an Alliance group, composed of nominal Democrats and Republicans as well as Independents, but acting as a unit on all matters pertaining to agriculture, would now appear in Congress suggested to some the possibility of a farm bloc to occupy seats "on either side of the center aisle in the House of Representatives . . . and to take the place of the Center in the French Assembly."¹⁷ But to others it suggested the immediate necessity of forming a new political party. The opportunity to air these radical views was soon to be vouchsafed, for the supreme council of the Southern Alliance was under call to meet at Ocala, Florida, in December, 1890.

This convention became the Mecca of all the chief advocates of the third-party idea. Perhaps they were intrigued somewhat by the prospect of attending at the same time the "Semi-Tropi-

¹⁶ Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, 236-252; Arnett, *Populist Movement in Georgia*, 116, 122-124.

¹⁷ Washington Gladden, "The Embattled Farmers," in *Forum*, 10: 321 (November, 1890).

cal Exposition" arranged for the entertainment of the visitors by the local state Alliance; and once they had arrived in Florida, they enjoyed such a round of drives, receptions, and demonstrations, with free special trains to points of interest, free accommodations at hotels, and free use of orange and lemon groves as to suggest a Florida of much later date. Nevertheless, for a certain busy few the chief work of the Ocala convention was to press for action looking in the direction of a new party.¹⁸ Among these few none were more interested and active than the gentlemen from Kansas. By virtue of the fact that the Kansas state alliance had left the northern order the year before to join its southern rival, the Sunflower State was officially represented in the supreme council; and the Kansans made it their chief concern to pledge the whole Alliance organization to the support of the third-party movement.¹⁹ But they found the average Southerner definitely opposed to the project. To him the lesson of the election of 1890 seemed to be that the capture of the Democratic party, nationally as well as locally, was not out of the question. Moreover, anything that would threaten the southern one-party system, by which the political ambitions of the colored population could be permanently suppressed, would provoke unlimited criticism. Should the Alliance sponsor any such program, doubtless it would lose heavily in membership and prestige.²⁰

To promote harmony Dr. C. W. Macune, of whom it was well said, "In him beats the heart and in him the brains of our body," proposed a compromise.²¹ It was clear enough, he

¹⁸ *New York Times*, December 3, 30, 1890; F. G. Blood, *Handbook and History of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, 41 (Washington, 1893).

¹⁹ Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," in William E. Connelly, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, 2:1159 (Chicago, 1918); Raymond C. Miller, "The Background of Populism in Kansas," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11:469 (March, 1925).

²⁰ *Greensboro* [North Carolina] *Daily Record*, December 6, 1890; H. R. Chamberlain, "The Farmers' Alliance and Other Political Parties," in *Chautauquan*, 13:341 (June, 1891).

²¹ *National Economist*, 4:252 (January 3, 1891).

argued, that there was a strong demand in the North for third-party action; but it was equally clear that consent to form such a party could not now be obtained in the South. Then let the matter rest for a time. On the eve of the next national campaign, about February, 1892, let there be held a delegate convention chosen by all "organizations of producers upon a fair basis of representation." Let this convention draw up a joint set of demands and a plan to enforce them. "If the people by delegates coming direct from them agree that a third party move is necessary, it need not be feared."²² Macune's plan offered a way out, and the convention adopted it. The work of promoting such a convention as was proposed was turned over to a committee on confederation, which held an informal meeting at Ocala and agreed to meet again the following month in Washington together with such similar committees as might be selected by other organizations. The joint committees might then issue the formal call.²³

But the Macune compromise failed to satisfy the extremists among the third-party men, who believed that the inauguration of third-party action should not be so long delayed, and they decided to call a convention in the immediate future regardless of the Alliance decision. The alternative plan might, indeed, have special merits of its own. The call might be so worded as to make it appear that the third-party movement was broader than the Alliance, broader even than the farmers' organizations; and in the final draft delegates were invited from the Independent party, the People's party, the Union Labor party, organizations of former Federal and Confederate soldiers, the Farmers' Alliance,—north and south,—the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the Citizens' Alliance, the Knights of

²² Blood, *Handbook*, 66; Supreme Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, *Proceedings*, 1890, p. 25 (Washington, 1891). The latter volume contains the records of the meeting at Ocala, Florida, held from December 2 to 8, 1890.

²³ Farmers' Alliance, *Proceedings*, 1890, p. 25, 37; Blood, *Handbook*, 67; Drew, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 6: 309.

Labor, the Colored Farmers' Alliance, and all others who agreed to the St. Louis demands of December, 1889.²⁴ According to Congressman John Davis of Kansas, who claimed to have been consulted in the matter, the call was drawn up by three Vincent brothers from Winfield, Kansas, two of whom were editors of a radical paper known as the *Non-Conformist*. They were aided by Captain C. A. Power of Indiana and by General J. H. Rice of Kansas.²⁵ Individuals present at Ocala and others were asked to sign the call, which at first proposed a convention at Cincinnati on the twenty-third of the following February, but later, when the chairman of the state committee of the Kansas People's party pointed out that the date set would fall during the meeting of the Kansas legislature, at which the Kansas leaders must be present, the date was changed to May 19, 1891.²⁶

In general, northern Alliancemen were favorable to the idea of a third party, although there was much criticism of the laxness and haste involved in the Cincinnati call.²⁷ The annual meeting of the Northern Alliance was held at Omaha in January, 1891, and while the sentiment of the gathering strongly favored the Alliance taking "no part as partisans in a political struggle by affiliating with Republicans or Democrats,"²⁸ a plan differing from that embodied in the Cincinnati call was announced. Six fundamental principles were set forth: (1) free silver; (2) abolition of national banks and substitution therefor of direct issues of legal tender notes; (3) government ownership of all railroads and telegraphs; (4) prohibition of alien land ownership and of gambling in stocks, options, and

²⁴ *New York Times*, December 5, 1890; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 20, 1891.

²⁵ Power is not to be confused with J. H. Powers, for a time president of the National Farmers' Alliance.

²⁶ *New York Times*, December 5, 1890; *Greensboro Daily Record*, December 6, 1890; *National Economist*, 5: 106 (May 2, 1891); Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, 246.

²⁷ *Farmers' Alliance* (Lincoln, Nebraska), April 4, 1891.

²⁸ *National Economist*, 4: 333 (February 17, 1891).

futures; (5) a constitutional amendment requiring the election of president, vice president and senators by direct vote of the people; and (6) the Australian ballot system. A petition stating these principles and calling for a convention to nominate candidates for president and vice president in 1892 upon this platform was to be circulated by means of the executive officers of each industrial organization in every state and territory. Whenever five million signers were reported throughout the United States, all such officers in each state, acting together, were to select a state representative upon a provisional national committee. The committee thus constituted should meet in Cincinnati on February 22, 1892, to fix a ratio of representation based on the number of signatures in each state and to determine the time and place for the meeting of the nominating convention.²⁹

Meanwhile the plan that Macune had proposed at Ocala for a great industrial conference early in 1892 was being worked out. On January 22, 1891, a few representatives from the Southern Alliance, the Knights of Labor, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the Colored Farmers' Alliance, and the Citizens' Alliance met at Washington, D. C., and organized what they were pleased to call "The Confederation of Industrial Organizations." February 22, 1892, was fixed upon as the date for the proposed conference of all the orders, and an executive committee was named to decide the place of meeting and all other details. This committee first planned the meeting for Washington, but later chose St. Louis.³⁰

Neither the Omaha plan nor the Washington plan promised speedy enough action to satisfy the extremists, however, and preparations for the Cincinnati convention went on. In the states of the Northwest, especially Kansas, where local third parties had scored successes in the election of 1890 and it was supposed could count on even greater successes if supported by

²⁹ *Farmers' Alliance*, February 21, 1891.

³⁰ *National Economist*, 4: 310 (January 31, 1891); Blood, *Handbook*, 67.

a national party, the early convention was popular.⁸¹ Why take chances on what the Alliance might do later? Better decide the matter at once. There was, moreover, the whole country over, a type of professional third-party politician that fairly doted on this sort of meeting and would not let the idea die. A strictly Alliance gathering might exclude many such, but the Cincinnati call was broad enough to take them all in.⁸²

As the delegates gathered it became increasingly clear that the convention was to consist of hundreds of determined farmers from out of the West and of other hundreds of habitual reformers. One member admitted that this was the fifth national convention that he had attended with the sole object in view of founding a third party, "two in Chicago, two in Cincinnati, and now another in Cincinnati."⁸³ Delegates came who still called themselves Greenbackers; others were followers of Edward Bellamy and took the name Nationalists; still others pinned their faith to Henry George and were proud to be called Single-taxers. "A large majority," commented one observer, himself formerly a third-party man, "are honest, well-intentioned men, a few are dead-beats, and too many . . . don't know what they want and will never be satisfied until they get it." According to one reporter, "All the second and third class hotels are crowded to overflowing."⁸⁴

Known officially as the "National Union Conference," the convention was called to order in Music Hall on the afternoon of May 19, 1892, by Judge W. F. Rightmire of Kansas. Three great inscriptions, "United we stand; divided we fall," "Opposition to all monopolies," and "Nine million mortgaged homes," looked down from the walls upon the assembly, which was seated in state delegations as in national political conventions.⁸⁵ Captain Power, who had worked actively to promote

⁸¹ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 19, 1891.

⁸² *Farmers' Alliance*, April 11, 1891; *National Economist*, 5: 199 (June 13, 1891).

⁸³ *Farmers' Alliance*, May 14, 1891.

⁸⁴ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 19, 20, 1891.

⁸⁵ *Farmers' Alliance*, May 28, 1891.

the conference, read the call from the original document. As he mentioned the name of each organization invited to participate, he asked its representatives to rise. Members of the Farmers' Alliances were clearly more numerous than members of any other orders, but it was evident that many of the delegates were "joiners," and belonged to several orders. A credentials committee solved the difficult problem of the allotment of seats by giving to practically everyone with any sort of papers the right to a place in the convention. Said one observer, "I think that if anyone would sprinkle a few hayseeds on his coat he would be admitted to the floor and have a right to vote." Over a hundred members of the Reform Press Association, which was meeting in Cincinnati at the time, were allowed seats in the convention, and some Southerners who were present without any credentials whatever were allowed the privilege of the floor with right to participate in debate. Altogether more than fourteen hundred delegates were recognized, representing some thirty-three states and territories; but more than four hundred of them were from Kansas, more than three hundred from Ohio, about a hundred and fifty each from Illinois and Nebraska, and the rest mainly from other northwestern states. Few Southerners attended. The credentials committee ruled that delegates representing more than one order could have only one vote, but a proposition that each state have one vote and one additional for each fifty delegates was voted down. The gathering might as well have been in name what it was in fact, a mass convention of self-appointed delegates.⁸⁶

After effecting an organization, the convention authorized the various state delegations to select members of the customary committees, including the all-important committee on resolutions. At this juncture Donnelly of Minnesota created a scene by suggesting that members of a national executive committee should be chosen at the same time, thus assuming that

⁸⁶ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 19, 20, 21, 1891; *Times-Star* (Cincinnati), May 18, 20, 1891.

there would be a third party. This aroused James B. Weaver of Iowa, and "Amid much confusion he strided [*sic*] down the middle aisle. He shook his finger angrily at Donnelly, and denounced him for endeavoring to pledge the convention on the sly without there being a word of discussion to the most vital question it had to consider."⁸⁷ Donnelly's motion was not brought to a vote, and order was restored. The incident, however, was significant because it revealed the two points of view held by the delegates. The vast majority, including nearly all the Kansans, were with Donnelly and were ready to form a third party on the spot. A more conservative group, headed by Weaver, were for drawing up resolutions and perhaps for suggesting the advisability of forming a third party, but the actual launching of the party they would postpone until the election year.⁸⁸ Doubtless the conservatives hoped that by biding their time they might win greater support from the South. President L. L. Polk of the Southern Alliance sent a letter to the convention counseling delay. He thought that the coming year might more properly be used for "education in the principles of reform" and if then, on full reflection, the third party seemed necessary, let it come. But according to one account Polk's letter was "received with painful silence, which was broken at the conclusion by a delegate from Arkansas moving that 'we sit down on that communication as hard as we can.' " This remark occasioned great applause, but a motion to refer the letter to the committee on resolutions was put and carried.⁸⁹

The work of reconciling the divergent opinions expressed by Donnelly and Weaver, if it could be done, fell naturally to the committee on resolutions, of which Donnelly, whose facile tongue and pen were everywhere known and recognized, was made chairman. Donnelly seems, indeed, to have been mainly responsible for the invention of a formula that would suit both

⁸⁷ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 20, 1891.

⁸⁸ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 18, 19, 20, 1891.

⁸⁹ *National Economist*, 5:34 (April 4, 1891); *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 1891.

factions.⁴⁰ The committee, he explained later to the convention, had before it two alternatives: (1) form a new party at once without regard to anyone else, or (2) in the interest of harmony concentrate on the convention to be held on February 22, 1892. The latter course was finally decided upon, with important reservations. The resolutions announced the immediate formation of the People's party with a national executive committee to consist of a chairman, elected by the convention in general session, and three members from each state represented, elected by the delegations of the respective states. This committee was directed to attend the proposed St. Louis conference and "if possible unite with that and all other reform organizations there assembled. If no satisfactory arrangement can be effected this committee shall call a national convention not later than June 1, 1892, to name a presidential ticket."⁴¹ A third party was thus assured. If the St. Louis conference failed to agree to it, the national executive committee emanating from the Cincinnati convention was authorized to go ahead. When the astute plan that the Donnelly committee had devised, together with the platform upon which the new party was to stand, was announced, the convention broke forth into prolonged applause. "It took nearly half an hour for the excited delegates to cool their pent-up enthusiasm."⁴²

The platform adopted at Cincinnati contained little that was new. Rather, it sought to codify and restate the demands previously adopted at St. Louis, at Ocala, and at Omaha. The Prohibitionists, who were present at Cincinnati under the leadership of John P. St. John, sought in vain to secure the inclusion of their pet project, and the woman suffragists fared only a little better.⁴³ "We apologize," said Donnelly, in explaining the report of the committee, "because we have not

⁴⁰ The Donnelly Scrapbooks, especially volume 8, are full of clippings on this subject.

⁴¹ *Farmers' Alliance*, May 28, 1891.

⁴² *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 1891.

⁴³ *Times-Star*, May 21, 1891; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 1891.

been able to cover all the interests in the minds of men here today. . . . We believe that the party that, in such a crisis as this, shortens its platform, lengthens its muster roll. . . . We feel that we are not here so much to proclaim a creed as to erect a banner around which the swarming hosts of reform could rally." One paper commented that a banner was a rather poor substitute for a creed, but as a matter of fact, the creed was fairly complete.⁴⁴

Most of the state delegations present at Cincinnati promptly elected their three national committeemen, and the convention chose H. E. Taubeneck of Illinois as national chairman. The newly formed committee then met, chose the other necessary officers, encouraged third-party men in each state to proceed in their own way with the selection of a state executive committee, promised to this end the help of the national committee, and discussed plans for the future.⁴⁵

The course pursued at Cincinnati won approval on all sides. Radicals everywhere rejoiced immoderately that the new party was an actual fact. One Kansas delegate said that had any-

⁴⁴ Clippings in the Donnelly Scrapbooks, volume 8, dated May 21, 1891. The Cincinnati demands differed from the St. Louis demands, stated *ante*, n. 12, mainly by including the sub-treasury plan along with the other demands for financial reform, by favoring the direct election of president, vice president, and United States senators, and by urging government control of the means of transportation and communication (favored at Ocala over government ownership), but "if this control and supervision does not remove the abuses now existing . . . government ownership." Separate resolutions, not officially a part of the platform, urged the individual states and territories to look with favor on universal suffrage, called upon Congress to compensate the Union veterans of the Civil War for the losses they had suffered by virtue of their being paid in depreciated paper currency, asked for an eight-hour day for labor, condemned the directors of the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago for refusing the "minimum rate of wages asked for by the labor organizations of Chicago," and expressed a strong desire to have "the expensive and dilatory litigation" over the opening of Oklahoma brought to a speedy end. *National Economist*, 5: 162 (May 30, 1891).

⁴⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 1891; *Times-Star*, May 21, 1891; *Farmers' Alliance*, May 28, 1891.

thing less been accomplished, the representatives from his state "wouldn't have dared to go home."⁴⁶ Such Northerners as had counseled delay, — Weaver and "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, for example, — felt also that their advice had been taken. Weaver admitted that a new party had been formed, a fact that Simpson at first refused to concede, but the two agreed that the main action was now postponed until the February conference of 1892.⁴⁷ The Omaha plan for the formation of a third party, favored by the Northern Alliance at its last national meeting, but never especially popular, was now definitely dropped. Officials of the Southern Alliance, who had in general opposed holding the Cincinnati convention, professed complete satisfaction with the result. The *National Economist* thought the decision "wise and conservative" and well calculated to supply "the link that will unite the farmers with all other occupations in the great approaching conflict."⁴⁸ One significant result of the Cincinnati convention that seems generally to have been overlooked at the time was that the professional third-party men insured for themselves, quite apart from what the farmer organizations might do later, a prominent place in the councils of the new party. They were "in on the ground floor."

As for the Southerners, there was a growing disposition to concede that the attempt to work through the Democratic party was a failure. Local successes were offset by the fact that concessions from the national organization were practically unobtainable. Leaders of the Southern Alliance were particularly aggrieved that the sub-treasury plan, a scheme for the relief of agriculture and the inflation of the currency that they had pushed assiduously ever since the St. Louis meeting of 1889, found no more favor from Democratic politicians than from Republicans and was scornfully rejected by Con-

⁴⁶ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 21, 1891.

⁴⁷ *Times-Star*, May 21, 1891.

⁴⁸ 5:161 (May 30, 1891). See also *Farmers' Alliance*, April 4, 1891.

gress.⁴⁹ President Polk of the Southern Alliance voiced a general sentiment through the columns of his paper, the *Progressive Farmer*, when he said: "The new party has adopted the Alliance demands into its platform. Does anyone suppose intelligent Alliancemen will vote against a party that adopts those demands, and in favor of a party that not only fails to adopt, but resists those demands?"⁵⁰ Polk repeatedly made it clear that the southern farmers preferred to remain in the Democratic party; but he never failed to threaten their secession from it in case the Alliance program of reform, national as well as local, were not adopted as the Democratic program of reform. During the summer of 1891 a delegation of third-party men from Kansas visited the South, presumably to impress upon southern Alliancemen the necessity of independent political action; and a little later Polk made three addresses in Kansas to encourage the western revolvers in their hope of southern sympathy and help.⁵¹

When the next meeting of the supreme council of the Southern Alliance was held in November, 1891, this time at Indianapolis, the adherence of that body to the third-party movement seemed assured. At this gathering the executive committee of the newly formed People's party put in its appearance, bent on obtaining the full coöperation of the Southern Alliance in the forthcoming campaign; here also appeared the executive committee of the Confederation of Industrial Organizations to repeat the call for the February, 1892, conference at St. Louis, and to preach a type of joint action by all reform orders that logically could end only in support of the independent party.⁵² While numerous Southerners voiced their distress at the

⁴⁹ *National Economist*, 4: 133 (November 15, 1890); *Farmers' Alliance*, July 19, 1890; J. E. Bryan, *The Farmers' Alliance; Its Origin, Progress and Purposes*, 99 (Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1891).

⁵⁰ *Progressive Farmer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), June 3, 1891. Compare the same paper for February 2, 1892.

⁵¹ *Greensboro Daily Record*, August 27, 28, September 2, 15, 21, 1891.

⁵² *National Economist*, 6: 233 (December 26, 1891).

thought of dividing the Democratic vote of the South, and while some of them even went the length of withdrawing entirely from the Alliance, evidently a majority of the delegates were ready to concede that the third party had come to stay and that they might as well throw the strength of their organization to it. They voted with enthusiasm to instruct Alliance Congressmen to keep out of party caucuses at Washington and they did what they could to insure the nomination of their president, Colonel Polk, to head the third-party ticket in the coming campaign.⁵³

The scene was now fully set for the St. Louis conference, which was to determine finally and formally the attitude of the great "industrial organizations" of the country toward the third-party movement. To this gathering the well-known farm orders were all invited to send delegates, as were also such organizations of manual laborers as cared to participate; for, while the agricultural societies took the lead, they were exceedingly anxious to have strong labor support. Practically all who were invited, and many besides, responded to the call. Taking advantage of the special railway rates offered, thousands of farmers and their political friends flocked to the Missouri metropolis. The attendance, including delegates and interested observers, went far beyond the most sanguine hopes.⁵⁴ According to one reporter, those who came "were mostly gray-haired, sun-burned and roughly clothed men. . . . The 'ward-bummer', the political 'boss', and the 'worker at the polls' were conspicuously absent." Held in Exposition Music Hall, the convention turned out to be a "singing session" and in that respect different from "any other political meeting ever witnessed in St. Louis." True, the Populist Marseillaise had not yet been discovered, but seemingly it was confidently ex-

⁵³ This convention is fully covered in Ernest D. Stewart, "The Populist Party in Indiana," in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, 14: 354 (December, 1918).

⁵⁴ *Southern Mercury* (Dallas, Texas), February 11, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 380 (February 27, 1892); Blood, *Handbook*, 67.

pected and numerous aspiring airs were given a trial. Like all large audiences, this one was a thrilling spectacle. "The banners of the different States rose above the delegates throughout the hall, fluttering like the flags over an army encamped. The great stage, brilliant and vivid with the national colors, was filled with the leaders of the Alliance, the Knights of Labor, the single tax people, the Prohibitionists, the Anti-Monopolists, the People's party, the Reform Press, and the Women's Alliance. To the right of the stage was stretched a broad poster of bunting which bore the words: 'We do not ask for sympathy or pity. We ask for justice.' " ⁵⁵

According to the call each organization invited to St. Louis was entitled to twenty-five delegates-at-large from the United States and one additional delegate for every ten thousand members. In the selection of delegates, however, not much attention was paid to this rule; indeed, it made little difference whether an organization had been invited to send delegates or not, for any that wished to be represented sent delegates regardless of formality. It thus became a matter of considerable importance to have a credentials committee pass upon the merits of those clamoring to participate in the work of the convention. Until this was accomplished, little else could be done. Ben Terrell, president of the "Confederation of Industrial Organizations," called the meeting to order; a temporary organization was effected, and the eight organizations included in the call were authorized each to choose three representatives upon the credentials committee. ⁵⁶ Pending the report of this committee, the convention yielded itself to the ministrations of its favorite orators. Donnelly was "historical, classical, eloquent, amusingly exaggerative." Weaver was called upon for a speech and declined "until there was something before the convention for him to speak on," but Colonel Polk, Mrs. Mary

⁵⁵ *National Economist*, 6: 394 (March 5, 1892).

⁵⁶ *St. Louis Republic*, February 23, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 380 (February 27, 1892).

E. Lease, Simpson, Powderly, and many others, were undeterred by such irrelevancies. The feast of oratory continued until well into the second day, for the credentials committee, in spite of an all-night session by a subcommittee, was even then unprepared to report.⁵⁷

When the committee did report, the reasons for delay became clear. Organizations "the existence of which none of the old delegates had ever heard of before" clamored for recognition. Some of these orders were suspected of "mushroom growth and doubtful purposes," but they were all given a hearing, and some eight hundred delegates, representing twenty-one different orders, were awarded seats. On motion of Donnelly, Miss Frances E. Willard and two other Women's Christian Temperance Union workers were given places in the convention, raising the number of orders represented to twenty-two. Thus amended, the work of the credentials committee was accepted by the convention, although there was much exhibition of temper on the part of some who were not received. One tempestuous would-be delegate had to be "unceremoniously removed."⁵⁸

On one contest the credentials committee refused to rule. Some Georgia seats were fought over so fiercely by delegates favoring and delegates opposing a third party that the matter was left for the convention itself to decide, the committee recommending, however, that the third-party men be seated.

⁵⁷ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 23, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 394 (March 5, 1892).

⁵⁸ *National Economist*, 6: 380, 395, 396 (February 27, March 5, 1892); *St. Louis Republic*, February 23, 1892; *Southern Mercury*, February 25, 1892. Seats allotted to the eight orders included in the call were as follows:

National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union	246
Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association	53
Knights of Labor	82
National Citizens' Industrial Alliance	27
Patrons of Industry	75
National Citizens' Alliance	25
National Colored Alliance and Co-operative Union	97
National Farmers' Alliance	97

When this recommendation was promptly followed by the convention, it became apparent that the conservative element was in the minority and that in all probability action favorable to the third party would be taken.⁵⁹ The election of Polk as permanent chairman likewise scored a victory for the third-party men, for his willingness to carry the Alliance into the new political party was now well known. He was elected over Ben Terrell, who was reputed still to hope for reform through Democratic channels.⁶⁰ Nevertheless there was a strong undercurrent of opposition to placing the convention on record as favorable to the third party. Led by Leonidas F. Livingston of Georgia, a number of southern delegates made it perfectly plain that they would never consent to any program that would threaten the unity of the white vote in the South and they promised to bolt the convention should such action be taken. To avoid disruption, therefore, the third party decision was waived and the convention devoted itself to the business of drawing up a satisfactory list of demands.⁶¹

The work of the platform committee thus became the major concern of the convention. This committee, consisting of one member from each state and one for every twenty-five delegates from each organization given representation in the convention, drew up the usual demands. On only one matter of consequence was there anything new about them. The Ocala and Cincinnati conventions had swung away from the uncompromising stand of the first St. Louis convention on the matter of government ownership of the railway, telegraph, and telephone systems of the country; but now, under pressure from the labor leaders and the anti-railroad delegates of the Northwest, government ownership was again indorsed. This, it was

⁵⁹ *National Economist*, 6: 395 (March 5, 1892); *St. Louis Republic*, February 24, 1892; Arnett, *Populist Movement in Georgia*, 131.

⁶⁰ *St. Louis Republic*, February 24, 1892; *People's Party Paper* (Atlanta), March 17, 1892.

⁶¹ *St. Louis Republic*, February 23, 24, 1892; *New York Tribune*, February 24, 1892.

well understood, would do some violence to opinion in the South, where such measures were traditionally regarded as "the essence of paternalism and centralization," but the northern delegates gave in on the matter of the sub-treasury, for which they cared little, and the railway plank was essentially the price of the concession.⁶²

But the platform committee reported a preamble as well as a platform, the former far exceeding the latter in length and in the richness of its rhetoric. This preamble, written by Donnelly, drew heavily upon the language of the convention call and also upon that of a "Populist Manifesto" issued by the Kansas state central committee in November, 1891.⁶³ It was none the less a unique and startling document, which not only carried with it a ringing denunciation of the existing ills of society but also, inferentially, the promise of a third party to remedy these ills. Donnelly read the preamble to the convention and was followed by Hugh Kavanaugh, the chairman of the platform committee, who read the actual demands. "At the conclusion, as if by magic, everyone was upon his feet in an instant and thundering cheers from 10,000 throats greeted these demands as the road to liberty. Hats, papers, handkerchiefs, etc., were thrown into the air; wraps, umbrellas and parasols waved; cheer after cheer thundered and reverberated through the vast hall, reaching the outside of the building, where thousands [who] had been waiting the outcome, joined in the applause till for blocks in every direction the exultation made the din indescribable. For fully ten minutes the cheering continued, reminding one of the lashing of the ocean against a rocky beach during a hurricane." "Shouts for Donnelly went up all over the hall . . . and people crowded around him and grasped his hands reaching up from the orchestra to greet him." Livingston, who was opposed to third-party,

⁶² *National Economist*, 6: 395, 402 (March 5, 12, 1892); *Southern Mercury*, February 23, 1893.

⁶³ *Southern Mercury*, January 14, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 233 (December 26, 1891); Barr, in *History of Kansas*, 2: 1162.

action, perhaps sought to avoid any appearance of committing the conference to the new party by moving the adoption of the *platform*. The motion was carried with enthusiasm, but "some delegate saw through the ruse, got the ear of Donnelly, and rushed through a motion to include the preamble."⁶⁴

With the platform and some minor resolutions adopted, the convention adjourned *sine die*, but by preconcerted plan the delegates, or at least the great majority of them, remained in their seats. Thereupon Dr. Macune promptly took the chair, and began the organization of a mass meeting of "individual and independent citizens who love their country." General Weaver was made the presiding officer and to him was delegated the one important task that the adjourned session performed. This was the appointment of a committee of fifteen to confer with the executive committee of the People's party with regard to the calling of a nominating convention.⁶⁵

The executive committee of the People's party was, of course, on hand, although it had taken no part as such in the St. Louis conference. It now met, absorbed the committee that Weaver appointed, and proceeded to the business in hand. The matter of greatest immediate concern proved to be the date of the proposed nominating convention. Donnelly was eager to have the convention meet before either of the old parties could have a chance to prepare for the People's party onslaught and he debated the matter earnestly with his old antagonist, Weaver. Weaver and others who agreed with him held that it would help the People's party cause if when the nominating convention met definite information could be on hand to show that the St. Louis platform had been rejected by Democrats and Republicans alike. Voters who agreed to the St. Louis demands would then feel that they had been turned out of

⁶⁴ *Southern Mercury*, March 3, 1892; *St. Louis Republic*, February 25, 1892; *People's Party Paper*, March 3, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 396 (March 5, 1892).

⁶⁵ *National Economist*, 6: 385, 397 (March 5, 1892); *Farmers' Alliance*, March 3, 1892.

their old party home because of their principles and they would have no choice but to join the new party. Weaver's policy, which Donnelly declared "suicidal," was adopted, and July 4, 1892, was fixed upon as the date of meeting.⁶⁶

Other necessary preliminaries were taken care of by subcommittees. To a group of ten, appointed by Chairman H. E. Taubeneck, was intrusted the task of selecting the meeting place and it chose Omaha over Kansas City, St. Louis, and Indianapolis.⁶⁷ To a group of five was given the more important duty of drawing up the convention call. This subcommittee discharged its obligations promptly by inviting all those who approved of the preamble and platform adopted at St. Louis to hold mass meetings in their respective towns and villages on the last Saturday in March (March 26) to ratify the St. Louis demands and to take the initial steps toward the election of delegates to the Omaha convention.⁶⁸ As later elaborated the plan of organization was as follows: each of the March meetings was urged to form a local organization and to appoint a committee of three to meet at the county seat not later than April 16. The business of this April gathering was to fix the time, place, and basis of representation for county conventions and to appoint a committee of three to confer with like committees from all other counties in the same legislative and Congressional districts to fix the time and place and basis of representation for legislative and Congressional district conventions. The executive committees of each state, already organized or to be organized in conformity with the plan adopted at Cincinnati, were asked to meet as early as convenient and to fix dates for state nominating conventions, designating how the delegates from their state to the national convention were to be chosen. Eight delegates-at-large from each state and

⁶⁶ *St. Louis Republic*, February 25, 1892; *Farmers' Alliance*, March 3, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 385, 397 (March 5, 1892).

⁶⁷ *St. Louis Republic*, February 26, 1892; *Farmers' Alliance*, March 3, 1892.

⁶⁸ *National Economist*, 6: 385, 397 (March 5, 1892).

four delegates from each Congressional district were authorized — the total number for the Fourth of July convention thus being set by accident or intent at 1,776. The names of delegates as fast as they were chosen were to be sent to Robert Schilling, secretary of the national committee, and donations to the campaign treasury, which were earnestly solicited, to M. C. Rankin, the national treasurer.⁶⁹

Building thus from the very foundation, the actual construction of the party edifice went on. Not everywhere could a complete organization be worked out, for not everywhere was there sufficient third-party sentiment to justify it, but when the Omaha convention met in July between thirteen and fourteen hundred accredited delegates were on hand to be counted; this in spite of the fact that "probably through some oversight" many railroads had failed to grant the usual convention rates to the third-party delegates. Marion Cannon of California declared that "it was not by accident that the Pacific coast delegates have been overlooked. Our request for the customary courtesy was denied deliberately and with insolence." When the convention got around to the matter, sentiment seemed to oppose asking "any privilege whatever" from the railroads; but it was voted to refer to the Interstate Commerce Commission the propriety of railroads discriminating against one and in favor of other political conventions. Thousands of observers, not participants, also attended the Omaha meeting, and the thrifty management sold season tickets to the sessions at ten dollars a ticket.⁷⁰

Owing to the desire to make nominations on the Fourth of July, the delegates met for temporary organization on Saturday, July 2. The procedure followed in the main the well-known rules of the older parties and need not be recounted in detail. A platform committee was appointed to report before

⁶⁹ *Farmers' Alliance*, March 3, 1892; *National Economist*, 6: 385, 397; 7: 41 (March 5, April 2, 1892).

⁷⁰ *Omaha World-Herald*, July 1-5, 1892; *National Economist*, 7: 279 (July 16, 1892); *People's Party Paper*, July 8, 1892.

the nominations were made and on the following Monday presented the results of its deliberations. But the Omaha platform was no hastily assembled document; it contained little that had not been adopted by other conventions — at St. Louis in 1889, Ocala in 1890, Cincinnati and Indianapolis in 1891, Omaha and St. Louis earlier in 1892. The preamble that Donnelly had presented so dramatically at the Washington's birthday convention in St. Louis was repeated to make a perfect Fourth of July in Omaha. Reforms that had to do with land, transportation, and finance were still the chief concern.⁷¹

The reception which these well-worn demands received showed how admirably they fitted the temper of the crowd. For the anti-railroad plank there was a "tumultuous ovation," exceeding in volume the applause for the free-silver plank. The land plank was greeted by a "regular Baptist camp meeting chorus." And finally on the adoption of the platform "the convention broke over all restraint and went wild in a demonstration that," if we may believe a none too grammatical reporter, "had a likeness of the enthusiastic Bastille demonstration in France, the whole convention, audience and delegates, rose to their feet and the first platform of the People's party was ushered into the world with a scene of enthusiasm that in its intensity and earnestness surpassed the cyclonic ovation which greeted the mention of the name of James G. Blaine at Minneapolis. The crowd broke forth time and again in applause, until the leaders finally concluded to stem the tide, and after vigorous efforts secured it. The band played 'Yankee Doodle' and it lasted twenty minutes." Little wonder that a platform so christened should come to have among Populists a sort of religious sanction. These demands were not like ordinary political demands — they were a sacred creed.⁷²

The familiar story of the nominations — how the death of Colonel Polk removed the only serious southern contender for

⁷¹ *National Economist*, 7: 257 (July 9, 1892).

⁷² *National Economist*, 7: 279 (July 16, 1892); *Southern Mercury*, November 14, 1895; Appletons' *Annual Cyclopædia*, 1901, p. 421.

first place and left the choice to the North; how a committee went to interview Judge Walter Q. Gresham of Illinois, hoping to secure his consent to head the ticket, and failed; how the merits of the various leaders were discussed and the field narrowed down to two, an "old-timer," Weaver of Iowa, and a newcomer in third-party circles, Senator James H. Kyle of South Dakota; and how the old-timer won — these things have been stated many times before. After all, the distinctive feature of the convention was that "the enthusiasm was all spent on the platform, while at Minneapolis and Chicago they spent their enthusiasm upon the candidates."⁷³ Whatever else may be said of it, the People's party was born a party of principle and those who brought it forth were in deadly earnest. Nor did they lack a genuine grievance. As one who saw what went on at Omaha observed, "this dramatic and historical scene must have told every quiet, thoughtful witness that there was something at the back of all this turmoil more than the failure of crops or the scarcity of ready cash."⁷⁴ Whether they knew it or not, the delegates were beginning the last phase of a long and perhaps a losing struggle — the struggle to save agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America.

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⁷³ *National Economist*, 7: 279, 293 (July 16, 23, 1892).

⁷⁴ Frank B. Tracy, "Menacing Socialism in the Western States," in *Forum*, 15: 332 (May, 1893).



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