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### Populist fusion movements as an instrument of political reform, 1890-1900

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POPULIST FUSION MOVEMENTS  
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL REFORM, 1890-1900

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Division in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Science

APPROVED:

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Chairman of Thesis Committee

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Chairman of Graduate Council

By

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Lee A. Dew

KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE

Pittsburg, Kansas

June, 1957

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1890, and continuing through the election of 1896, the Populist party became progressively more important in American politics as the agent of the dissatisfied American farmer unwilling to realize and unable to adjust to the new conditions of economic life at the end of the nineteenth century. The movement represents, at bottom, the last of a series of post-Civil War protest movements against the growing power of Urban America; but its most important contribution lies in its educational significance, for the Populists were the first group actively to campaign for political reforms through legislation. Unlike most third party groups in this country, the Populists lived to see their goals attained and their platform legislated into statute, although there was not the party to accomplish these things. That the reforms were accomplished, by one-time enemies of the People's party, is the most important single facet of Populism.

The study begins with a survey of the background of the movement, then deals with the elections of 1892, when



## ABSTRACT

The importance of the People's Party of the 1890's is not to be found in the record of the party itself, but the effect which the existence of the party had on the two major political organizations, and the significant contributions made by ex-Populists who returned to the old parties after obtaining a liberal education in Populism. Beginning with the election of 1890, and continuing through the election of 1896, the Populist party became progressively more important in American politics as the agent of the dissatisfied American farmer unwilling to realize and unable to adjust to the new conditions of economic life at the end of the nineteenth century. The movement represents, at bottom, the last of a series of post-Civil War protest movements against the growing power of Urban America; but its most important contribution lies in its educational significance, for the Populists were the first group actively to campaign for political reforms through legislation. Unlike most third party groups in this country, the Populists lived to see their goals attained and their platform legislated into statute, although theirs was not the party to accomplish these things. That the reforms were accomplished, by one-time enemies of the People's party, is the most important single facet of Populism.

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INTRODUCTION  
Populists fused with Republicans and Democrats to gain power for their organization. The rise of the free-silver movement is examined, and its effect on the Democratic party. The position of the Populists, and their resultant dilemma regarding acceptance of the Democratic candidate and platform is discussed, together with the effects of the 1896 election. The study is concluded with a critique of Populism, and an evaluation of how these influences came about.

Most of the material was gathered from contemporary periodicals, of which Porter Library has a significant collection, which gave an insight into the thoughts and positions of many of the most important figures of the time, both supporters and opponents of the Populist movement, and from pertinent secondary materials, primarily John B. Hicks' The Populist Revolt, which was utilized in the first two chapters as a basic reference, due to a paucity of available primary sources during that period when Populism was thought of as too unimportant to occupy space in periodicals. Especially valuable have been the publications, North American Review, Arena and Forum, and the analytical monthly, Review of Reviews. Pertinent secondary sources, when applicable, have been utilized when primary materials were unavailable; but where secondary sources have been cited, clues to the availability of primary materials will be found in the citations noted. To the acceptance of the reforms which they championed, reforms which today we take for granted as part of our democratic heritage.



## INTRODUCTION

The Populist party was not unique among the third-party movements of the post-Civil War nineteenth century in their utilization of fusion with other groups to aid the accomplishments of their desired political ends. Fusion is basically the joining together of two different political organizations for the election of a slate of candidates upon which both agree, and the urging, by the two organizations, of support for the united group by their respective memberships. It is, in effect, a sort of "popular front" activity carried on against an opposing party which is, generally, stronger than the two fusion groups are individually. Thus when two political parties are fused, they are collaborating for a particular election; but there is no union of party organizations, each remains autonomous, and there is no guarantee that the arrangement will continue for more than the duration of the particular election at question.

The difference between the Populists and the other nineteenth century protest movements is that the Populists were able, through fusion with first one party and then another, to influence both parties, gain an importance far out of proportion to their numbers, and ultimately educate the American people to the acceptance of the reforms which they championed, reforms which today we take for granted as part of our democratic heritage.



The purpose of this narrative is to tell the story of the significance of fusion movements to the Populist party, and to the nation as a whole; and to illustrate how, through fusion, the Populists were able to be assimilated into the two major parties, where their ideas took root and grew, ultimately to flower into the reforms of the Progressive movement. The story of the blooming of political reform in the twentieth century has been told many times--this is a story of the seed-time.

agrarian America staged its last organized effort to halt the trend toward industrialization and urbanization, characteristic of the twentieth century, and was thereby able to exert an influence upon the two great American political parties which prepared them for the transition into the great period of political reform and re-evaluation which has characterized America in the present century.

The causes of Populism can be found in the Civil War; for in the fratricidal strife of the 1860's were born the situations and conditions which were to influence the American economy for the rest of the century, and to bring into being the forces which, in their clashing interests and aims, were to give birth to the Populist uprising, and leave an indelible imprint upon American politics even to the present day.

Three basic economic conditions of this period form the background for Populism, namely, the settlement of the western territories, the impoverishment of the South, and the

rise in the Northeast of great business and industrial empires.

## CHAPTER I

The Civil War made drastic changes in the American economy,

and concomitant THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT thinking of

the people of the United States, for in the last twenty-five

Sectionalism, the political division of the United States into areas of differing thoughts and philosophies, was the main characteristic of nineteenth century American political history. Nowhere in this century is political sectionalism

more evident than in the final decade, when, in the Populist movement, agrarian America staged its last organized effort to halt the trend toward industrialization and urbanization, characteristic of the twentieth century, and was thereby able to exert an influence upon the two great American political parties which prepared them for the transition into the great period of political reform and re-evaluation which has characterized America in the present century.

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rise in the Northeast of great business and industrial empires. The Civil War made drastic changes in the American economy, and concomitantly, brought great changes in the thinking of the people of the United States, for in the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century not only the political but also the intellectual life of the people of this country emphasized one subject--Economics.<sup>1</sup>

The economic difficulties which led to the Populist movement were centered in the West, which, in the days following the Civil War, rapidly became changed from a region of grasslands and wilderness, to booming communities and broad wheat fields. Thanks to the Homestead Act of 1862, which enabled settlers to obtain deeds to farms in the West by payment of a nominal cost, Union veterans and their families began to flow in increasing numbers to the lands of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, where land was theirs for the taking, and, according to the publicity given it by railroad brochures, "cheaper and more easily tilled" than the lands of the East.<sup>2</sup>

Instrumental in the settling of these areas were the railroads, which, following the Civil War, were themselves experiencing great periods of expansion, and the grading of new railway rights-of-way was placing tracks throughout the

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<sup>1</sup>Frank B. Tracy, "Rise and Doom of the Populist Party," Forum, XVI (October, 1893), 240.

<sup>2</sup>John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, p. 12.



plains. Because of tremendous grants of public lands given to various western railroads by the federal government,<sup>3</sup> the carriers were especially anxious to secure settlement in the West. Not only would increased western settlement give the railroads the opportunity of disposing of their government lands at a tidy profit, but settlement of the West was absolutely necessary for the railroads to survive, for no railroad could exist in the plains states without some form of revenue to sustain it, and the revenue for the Union Pacific, Burlington, Santa Fe and other lines was going to originate with the farmers who could be induced to settle in areas close to the tracks, and to grow crops for shipment to eastern markets.

While in the South, the economy which was nearly destroyed by the Civil War would take decades to revive, and a crop-lien system of agricultural financing placed the Reconstructed South in the same one-crop dilemma which had plagued it for generations,<sup>4</sup> the West was the exact opposite. The "boom" psychology dominated everything. Land was cheap and fertile, prices were high, profits were to be had everywhere, and a wave of mass speculation and optimism settled over the West. Towns sprang up almost overnight, and immediately voted bonds for construction of utility companies, street railways, and other expensive and unnecessary luxuries. Towns rivaled each

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup>Fred A. Shannon, Economic History of the People of the United States, p. 411.



other for railroads, and many small communities were served by two or more competing companies.<sup>5</sup> And while towns and villages were bonding themselves to the limit, individual farmers were taking advantage of the readily-available cash which loan companies had for their convenience, by investing in equipment, land, and livestock. Debts were everywhere, but nobody worried, because the rains came, the crops grew, and the profits continued.

But not for long. The artificial prices which had been the basis of the economy during the late 1860's fell, due in great degree to the removal from circulation of approximately one-fourth billion dollars, in greenbacks, short-term treasury notes and other obligations.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, the amount of circulating medium, per capita, dropped from \$31.18 to \$20.10, and the general base-price index dropped from 132 to 87.<sup>7</sup> This, coupled with exorbitant railroad rates, as much as two-thirds the market price of wheat, caused the farmer's economic situation to deteriorate.<sup>8</sup>

A crushing blow came in 1873 when, precipitated by the severe losses suffered by insurance companies in the Chicago and Boston fires, and the unloading of American securities by European firms because of a panic on the Vienna stock

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<sup>5</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>Shannon, op. cit., p. 460.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 461.



market, there was a rush of liquidation on Wall Street, most famous of which was the collapse of the firm of Jay Cooke and Company.<sup>9</sup> Farmers and agricultural communities were caught between falling prices, high costs and a scarcity of money on the one hand, and interest payments and pecuniary obligations based on cheap money on the other. The boom was over, but the worst was yet to come.

The farmers and the farm communities managed to survive the "Panic of 1873," although many individuals were forced into bankruptcy and many towns disappeared or shrank considerably in size. Due to a series of good crop years, when adequate rainfall at the right time brought forth good yields, the farmer kept afloat, although often forced to rely on the products which he himself could raise, depending as little as possible on commodities for which cash payment had to be made. This precarious situation continued for a decade, in which the farm-based economy of the prairies managed to keep alive.

In 1887 another tragedy came, in the form of drought, and for many a pioneer who had survived 1873 and the years of hard times, the dreams of riches in the new lands of the West became nightmares of bankruptcy and defeat. As the summer wore on, and the hot, dry winds continued to blow, crop prospects declined precipitously. Money became scarce,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



prices dropped, foreclosures became even more common and countless numbers of speculators, farmers, businessmen and bankers were destroyed.<sup>10</sup> Cattle, crops and confidence were gone, not to return again for a decade.

The great droughts which began in 1887 brought to a climax a movement which had been growing among farmers throughout the West and South for several years, expressing the farmer's desire to rid himself of the stranglehold held on him by the railroads, the loan companies and the industrial empires of the Northeast. As early as 1870 certain discontented groups among the settlers in the West were already beginning to voice their opposition to the economic situation in which they found themselves. A meeting was held in the State House at Topeka, Kansas, February 9, 1870, for the purpose of organizing a Workingman's Party, which, in non-industrial Kansas, meant a Farmer's Party. At this meeting a speech was made favoring the distribution of public lands, allocated for use by the railroads, to individual homesteaders.<sup>11</sup> The suggestion was rejected at this meeting, but two years later it was formally adopted by the Liberal Republican party, a political organization which was formed that same year.<sup>12</sup>

Two years later, in 1874, an organization was formed in Lampasas County, Texas, which in various forms, spread

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<sup>10</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," in A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans, II, 1123-1124.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. (November, 1891), 406.

<sup>13</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1123.

<sup>14</sup>Morgan, loc. cit., p. 406.

<sup>15</sup>Shannon, op. cit., pp. 461, 464.



throughout the South and West.<sup>13</sup> This was the Farmers' Alliance movement, which soon was able, by capitalizing on the natural misfortunes which befell the farmer, and on the economic entanglements with which he found himself burdened, to take the place of the Patrons of Husbandry, the Grange, and other early farm reform groups,<sup>14</sup> and emerge "a powerful organization for political resistance to political wrong and injustice."<sup>15</sup> A supporter of the movement characterized it as "The attempts of a people to wrest control of the means of livelihood from the hands of corporate power..., "<sup>16</sup> and even its critics admitted that: "It was made necessary as a means of resistance to legalized monopoly, to legalized tax-robbery, to trusts ... and to the accumulated advantages given to corporations and great combines by the legislation of the country."<sup>17</sup>

The farmers had much to complain about, and little hope of securing redress for their grievances through political means, for although in 1870 forty-seven per cent of the American people were engaged in agriculture only seven per cent of the members of Congress were directly connected with the soil, and even in such predominantly agricultural states as Iowa, the railroads were so secure politically that they could nominate their man, William B. Allison, for the senate, and be confident of his election.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Solon J. Buck, The Agrarian Crusade, p. 111.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 112. *Valley Historical Review*, I (March, 1924).

<sup>15</sup>John T. Morgan, "The Danger of the Farmers' Alliance," Forum, XII (November, 1891), 406.

<sup>16</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1123.

<sup>17</sup>Morgan, loc. cit., p. 406.

<sup>18</sup>Shannon, op. cit., pp. 461, 464.



By 1888 the Farmers' Alliance had spread to encompass most of agricultural America, being especially strong in the South and in the states of the prairie West, the Middle Border. The Alliance forces were actively agitating for the control of corporations, especially railroads, by the government, for devaluating the currency, and for lessening the tariff. In that year, in spite of the devastating drouth which occurred the previous year, the farmers of Nebraska still blamed economic rather than natural causes for their plight. A questionnaire was sent to farmers by the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, and while there were only seventy-four replies, the results give some indication of the frame of mind of the farmers of that state. Twenty-five of the farmers listed the credit situation as the cause of their difficulty; fourteen, high interest rates; eleven each named the railroads and the tariff; and thirteen named minor points.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to observe that none named drought. Other polls in Kansas and the Dakotas revealed similar thoughts in the minds of residents of those states.<sup>20</sup>

But in spite of the many grievances which farmers in the West and South had in common, they were unable to bring concerted political action to bear to achieve concrete support for their position. This was due to the division of the

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<sup>19</sup>Hallie Farmer, "Economic Background of Frontier Populism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, X (March, 1924), 426. (Hereafter cited as M. V. H. R.)

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 127.



Alliance movement into two basic groups, a Southern Alliance, comprising the Southern states, and later the states of Kansas and South Dakota, and a Northern or Northwestern Alliance, comprising the remainder of the states of the Middle Border or prairies. The division was caused because of the basically secret character of the Southern group, with its ritual and segregation of Negroes, and the Northerners' insistence upon federal regulation of the sale of substitutes for hog lard, which did not appeal to the cotton growers of the South.<sup>21</sup>

Because of this basic weakness, and because the farmers still refused to believe that the way to political reform was not through the established political parties, the Union Labor ticket got little support, even though it advocated many of the reforms which the farmers themselves favored.<sup>22</sup> While more than half of the Union Labor vote was from the four states of Kansas, Texas, Missouri and Arkansas,<sup>23</sup> its weakness as a sounding-board for the views of farmers was evidenced, and the farmers went to the polls in 1888 still supporting the traditional two-party system.

By 1890, however, the economic plight of the farmer had reached such a desperate state that he was ready for action. The base-price index continued to drop (it reached 29.6 in 1896, the lowest on record), and the amount of money in

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<sup>21</sup>Shannon, op. cit., p. 478.

<sup>22</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 127.



circulation per capita sank to below \$20.<sup>24</sup> The price of cotton fell to 7.7 cents per pound, nearly 1.5 cents lower than the previous decade, and the prices for corn and wheat dropped to averages of 36.7 cents and 67.3 cents respectively.<sup>25</sup> More than thirty-five per cent of all farms operated by owners were mortgaged, and capital was being drained away from the West and South by loan companies to a greater and greater extent.<sup>26</sup>

An "appalling" number of farms had been sold for taxes, and even larger numbers had been foreclosed by mortgage holders, who, since many farms were mortgaged for more than their cash value, held judgments against farmers even after foreclosure. For example, a farmer may have mortgaged his farm for \$1,500, but the farm may have been valued at only \$1,000 when foreclosed, leaving the farmer still owing a \$500 judgment.<sup>27</sup> Many farmers, faced with these circumstances, gave up all hopes of surviving, and began the long trek eastward. One observer could recall seeing as many as four or five wagons camped overnight in sight of his home, each wagon representing a family which had been "starved out" of Kansas; and this, in 1890, was a common sight.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Shannon, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 477.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 477-478.

<sup>27</sup>Personal interview with Professor O. F. Grubbs, Pittsburg, Kansas.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.* The name "People's Party" had already been chosen for the new organization.



The situation had become so severe in Kansas that the members of the Farmers' Alliance realized that they must abandon the announced policy of the Alliance, and actively enter their own candidates in the political fight for betterment of their economic status. While the Alliance had formally declared that the organization would not "nominate or support any man or set of men for office as a distinct political party,"<sup>29</sup> the farmers began to see that their only hope lay in getting their own candidates elected to office. Therefore, following the 1888 election, the Kansas farmers began to organize politically, using the machinery of the Alliance. They selected a group of organizers, mostly former Republican office-holders who had become dissatisfied with their party because of thwarted political ambitions, and set these people to organizing the counties of the state.<sup>30</sup> By 1890 the organizational work had progressed to such an extent that a state convention of officers of the new Alliance party was held at Topeka, March 25, when a resolution, announcing that "we will no longer divide on party lines, and will only cast our votes for candidates of the people, for the people, and by the people," was passed.<sup>31</sup> In August of the same year a state nominating convention was held, which selected a full slate of state, congressional and county candidates.<sup>32</sup> With

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<sup>29</sup>W. F. Rightmire, "The Alliance Movement in Kansas--Origin of the People's Party," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, IX, 2.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. The name "People's Party" had already been chosen for the new organization.



this action, the interest of the Alliance in Kansas was transferred to the newly-organized party.

The new party had at its disposal a ready-made pressure group in the Alliance farmers, with their newly-found political consciousness. The farmers, pressed to the wall by economic necessity, were made-to-order for political organization, and readily found tongues to utter their battle-cry of class warfare: "The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East," was their cry; and they began to organize the fight which they hoped would end the system which "clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags."<sup>33</sup>

Throughout Kansas farmers arose earlier than usual on many days during the summer of 1890, hurried through the "chores," loaded their families onto wagons, and drove into town, where a mass rally for Alliance candidates would be held. A festival air prevailed, with the farm women bringing picnic lunches, to be consumed on the court-house lawn, bands playing, and speeches throughout the day by the candidates of the newly-formed party.<sup>34</sup> The movement quickly spread throughout the Middle Border, with similar Alliance organizations appearing in Nebraska and the Dakotas, although the main strength of the movement at this time was centered in the state of its birth.

<sup>33</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1150. 891), 51.

<sup>34</sup>Personal interview with Professor O. F. Grubbs.

<sup>37</sup>Samlin Garland, "The Alliance Wedge in Congress," Arena, V (March, 1892), 447.



The People's Party was blessed with several orators, who toured the rural areas, addressing hundreds of groups, and always dealing with the same theme--economics. They pointed out that while, in the decades from 1870 to 1890 the growth of capital wealth in the United States totaled about \$25,000,000,000, the farmer's share was only an estimated \$2,500,000,000<sup>35</sup> and they joined together in meetings throughout the prairie states to sing:

I was a party man one time  
The party would not mind me  
So now I'm working for myself,  
The party's left behind me.

A true and independent man  
You ever more shall find me--  
I work and vote and ne'er forget  
The party left behind me.<sup>36</sup>

The "true and independent" farmers in 1890 began their organized political campaign with a respectable show of strength. In November they succeeded in electing nearly fifty congressmen who had "Alliance leaning," and nine who stood "solidly together as a separate organization" in the House of Representatives.<sup>37</sup> These nine were almost all from the West, and they represented four states: Jerry Simpson, John G. Otis, John Davis, Ben H. Clover and William Baker were from Kansas; O. M. Kem and W. A. McKeighan represented Nebraska; Thomas E. Watson was a Georgian, and K.

<sup>35</sup>John W. Bookwalter, "The Farmer's Isolation and the Remedy," Forum, XII (September, 1891), 51.

<sup>36</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>37</sup>Hamlin Garland, "The Alliance Wedge in Congress," Arena, V (March, 1892), 447.



Halvorsen represented Minnesota.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the Alliance candidates were able, in Kansas and Nebraska, to secure majorities in the state legislatures which resulted, in Kansas, in the election of W. A. Pepper, an Alliance candidate, to the United States Senate. In other western states Alliance candidates polled large blocks of votes, and throughout the South the old-guard Democratic party was either completely defeated or thoroughly scared.<sup>39</sup>

These successes prompted increased agitation for a formal third-party movement among farmers, and this idea was pressed by members of the Kansas delegation at a meeting of the Alliance at Ocala, Florida, in December of that year. Congressman-elect "Sockless" Jerry Simpson pleaded for the organization of a formal party, on the model of the Kansas People's Party, but his moves were blocked by the Southern members of the Alliance, who were determined to achieve their reforms by gaining control of the Democratic party in the South by unseating the "Bourbon aristocrats" which controlled it.<sup>40</sup>

The main significance of the Ocala meeting, however, was the issuance by the Alliance of six demands which they believed basic to the survival of the farmer and the nation's

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Hicks, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 207-208.

see C. C. Post, "The Sub-Treasury Plan," Arena, V (February, 1892), 351-352.

<sup>42</sup> Hicks, op. cit., p. 210.



economy. The Ocala demands included the abolition of national banks; a sub-treasury plan for government loans and storage of farm commodities; the increase of the amount of currency in circulation; the forbidding of speculating on grain and land; free coinage of silver; abolition of tariffs, and government control of the means of transportation and communication.<sup>41</sup>

The formal adoption of the slate of demands at Ocala gave further stimulus to the movement for a separate political organization by which to implement them. This movement was further aided by the Alliance congressmen, who, operating as a separate "farm bloc" in the House of Representatives, disassociated the Alliance movement from the two political parties. At a meeting of the Northern Alliance at Omaha, Nebraska, January, 1891, the delegates passed resolutions reiterating the Ocala demands, and adopted a plan whereby a petition was to be circulated in all the farm states calling for a national convention to meet in 1892 for the purpose of setting up a formal political organization and nominating candidates for president and vice-president.<sup>42</sup> Amid scenes of bitter internal strife, the formal party organization was finally agreed upon, and the birth of the People's Party as a national organization became imminent.

As the main opposition to the formation of a third party was located in the South, immediate pressure was put to

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<sup>41</sup>See Appendix I. For a discussion of the sub-treasury, see C. C. Post, "The Sub-Treasury Plan," Arena, V (February, 1892), 351-352.

<sup>42</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 210.



bear on that section by members of the Kansas Alliance, which was a member of the Southern Alliance although a western state. Jerry Simpson, Senator Pepper, Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Lease, Mrs. Anna L. Diggs and other campaign veterans of the battles of 1890 toured the South, urging the dissatisfied to join with them under the banner of the People's Party.<sup>43</sup>

While some Alliance supporters claimed that the third-party efforts altered the basic tenets of the Alliance movement, and "its noble mission has been degraded into a disreputable hunt after office,"<sup>44</sup> most argued with Senator Pepper that: "The party has a good and sufficient excuse for its existence."<sup>45</sup> The farmer's problems remained, and the congress elected in 1890 did not seem able to alter them.

"Finance, land, and transportation"--these were the three fields which the farmer believed that he must control if he were to live,<sup>46</sup> and the Congress did not seem anxious to have him control them. The farmer was still in the predicament of having to save himself, by political means, from the penalty for his failure to adjust to economic conditions.

As Senator Pepper said:

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<sup>43</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1154.

<sup>44</sup>Morgan, loc. cit., p. 406.

<sup>45</sup>W. A. Pepper, "The Passing of the People's Party," North American Review, CLXVI (January, 1898), 12.

<sup>46</sup>Farmer, loc. cit., p. 427.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.



The general level of prices fell to the cost line or below it, and the people were paying seven to ten per cent annual interest on an enormous private debt. Personal property in towns and cities was rapidly passing beyond the view of the tax-gatherer. Agriculture was prostrate. Farmers were at the mercy of speculators; the earth had come under the domination of landlords; forests and mines were owned by syndicates; railway companies were in combination; wealth and social influence had usurped power, and the seat of government was transferred to Wall Street.<sup>47</sup>

The result of these arguments was a gradual acceptance of the third-party idea, an "organized demand that the functions of government shall be exercised only for the mutual benefit of all the people."<sup>48</sup> Support for the third party grew as the farmers and their spokesmen continued their campaign, proclaiming that government is useful only when it advances the common weal, and that "public good is paramount to private interest,"<sup>49</sup> and vowing that they would protest "the producing masses against the spoliation of speculators and usurers."<sup>50</sup>

The climax of the campaign for the organization of the new party came when a plenary session of the interested Alliance members and others was held in St. Louis on Washington's birthday, 1892. The third party forces agreed to hold a general nominating convention in Omaha, Nebraska, on the

<sup>47</sup>Peffer, "Passing of Party," loc. cit., p. 12.

<sup>48</sup>W. A. Peffer, "The Mission of the Populist Party," North American Review, CLVII (December, 1893), 665.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 666. See Appendix II for the financial planks of the platform.



Fourth of July of that year (the Populists believed in the auspiciousness of national holidays as portending success for their venture). At the latter meeting the People's Party brought forth a national platform upon which their candidate for the presidency was to conduct his campaign. The platform was summed up as:

1. An exclusively national currency in amount amply sufficient for all the uses for which money is needed by the people, to consist of gold and silver coined on equal terms, and government paper, each and all legal tender in payment of debts of whatever nature or amount, receivable for taxes and all public dues.
2. That rates of interest for the use of money be reduced to the level of average net profits in productive industries.
3. That the means of transportation be brought under public control, to the end that carriage shall not cost more than it is reasonably worth, and that charges may be made uniform.
4. That large private land-holdings be discouraged by law.<sup>51</sup>

For their candidate for President, the People's Party named General James B. Weaver of Iowa, an old-time third-party war horse and one-time presidential candidate for the Greenback Party, and as his running-mate selected General James G. Field of Virginia, creating the interesting situation of having on the same ticket a former Union general and a former Confederate. While there was some opposition to Weaver as a candidate, because of his former association with the defunct Greenback cause, he was easily nominated by

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 666. See Appendix II for the financial planks of the platform.



a vote of 995 to 275 over his only opponent, Senator James H. Kyle of South Dakota, who very reluctantly opposed him.<sup>52</sup> Field handily defeated another ex-rebel, Ben Terrell of Texas, for the vice-presidential spot by a vote of 733 to 554.<sup>53</sup>

Amid scenes of general rejoicing the convention ended and the Populists<sup>54</sup> got down to the task before them, publicizing their issues and proselyting voters for the November elections. Enthusiastically they set about their task, confidently justifying their position by saying "third parties never exist unless there be occasion for them,"<sup>55</sup> and pointing out to the electorate of the United States that the occasion was obviously at hand. For, after all, did not the People's Party consist of:

... the wealth producers ... of the republic. They are the largest and the best class in our population; our defense in war and our safeguard in peace.... They are united in a common purpose ... in defense of those principles which insure a prosperous and enduring nation.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>The name Populists was soon adopted in common usage. It was made necessary because of the need to have an adjectival form of the party name, since People's Party was awkward in descriptions; since one could describe himself as a Republican or a Democrat, but could not very well say he was a "People's." The origin of the word Populist is from the Latin, *Populares*, the name of a party in Rome which was organized as a popular front movement to combat the party of the wealthy, or *Optimates*, during the period of the Roman republic, 178-133, B.C.--Interview with Professor Grubbs.

<sup>55</sup>James H. Kyle, "The Pending Political Campaign," Arena, VI (August, 1892), 309.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 310.



While many persons treated the newly-born party with scorn,<sup>57</sup> other observers presciently pointed out that "the movement is not to be treated with disdain."<sup>58</sup> One contemporary periodical editorialized that: "The People's Party demands the nationalization of railroads and of various other corporate or monopolistic services; and they will some day bring these questions to a front place."<sup>59</sup>

The Populist claim that the burden of debts was too great for individuals to resolve without government assistance got them into some difficulties with opposition newspapers, even in the Populist state of Kansas, where one editor commented that: "There are evils enough to combat without distorting the truth and slandering the state for purely political purposes."<sup>60</sup> But while newspapers and Republicans in Kansas and elsewhere in the West, and Democrats in the South alternately scoffed at and damned the People's Party, the "true and independent men" were busily thinking about their favorite intellectual appetizer--economics, and were adding up the score of the Harrison administration and the promises made to them of a gold standard and an economic status quo, which both

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<sup>57</sup>One scoffer was disposed of by Jerry Simpson, who, when asked by a G.O.P. congressman to tell about Kansans burning corn replied: "Yes, they did burn corn, and by the light of that burning corn they read the history of the Republican Party. That is why the Peoples [*sic*] Party carried the state." Quoted in Annie L. Diggs, The Story of Jerry Simpson, pp. 118-119.

<sup>58</sup>"The Meaning of the Movement," Review of Reviews, VI (August, 1892), 10.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Pittsburg Weekly Headlight, VIII (October 29, 1891).



parties vouchsafed them in their 1892 platforms and which both candidates, Harrison for the Republicans and Cleveland for the Democrats, upheld.

A typical spokesman was Henry Cabot Lodge, who typified the views of both the Republicans and "hard money" Democrats when he admitted that "free coinage and the tariff will form two leading issues of 1892."<sup>61</sup> But to Senator Lodge a third question "of equal magnitude and greater importance" was that of election and ballot reform.<sup>62</sup> He, like many of his Democratic colleagues, failed to recognize the basic seriousness of the demands of the People's Party, and the basic unhappiness and distress of the farmers, both Western and Southern.

The People's Party did receive some support, albeit rather half-hearted support, from organized labor. Terence V. Powderly, president of the Knights of Labor, happily announced that there were thousands who "long for a change, not from the rule of Republicanism to that of Democracy--so called--but to a new and honest party;"<sup>63</sup> and while he pointed out that 1892 may not be the year for that party to elect a candidate for the presidency, he nonetheless declared that "every workingman, every thinking man, and every patriot should cast his vote for the candidate of the People's party this year."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup>Henry Cabot Lodge, "The Political Issues of 1892," Forum, XII (September, 1891), 104.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Terence V. Powderly, "Wanted, a New Party," North American Review, CLV (November, 1892), 595.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.



While gloomily predicting that it would make little difference to organized labor whether Republicans, Democrats or Populists were elected in 1892, Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, did admit that "acting upon the principle 'of all evils choose the least,'" labor would "more generally co-operate with the People's party."<sup>65</sup> He hastened to point out, however, that the Populists were not a "labor" party, and were composed mostly of "employing farmers without any regard to the interest of the employed farmers...."<sup>66</sup>

To all outward appearances the summer and early fall of 1892 were unique in American election-year experiences, for the unconcern on the part of the electorate was pronounced. While a leading Democrat cautioned that "the present calm, amounting to seeming apathy, which had marked the opening of the campaign on both sides, must not be quickly construed as due entirely to indifference to the result;"<sup>67</sup> a more realistic Republican approach admitted that "the lack of excitement and of active interest in the ... campaign ... is a feature common to both parties. For a period of more than three months after the nominations were made, the country gave no intimation of any special concern in the result."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Samuel Gompers, "Organized Labor in the Campaign," North American Review, CLV (July, 1892), 93.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>W. F. Harrity, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, "The Democratic Outlook," North American Review, CLV (November, 1892), 552.

<sup>68</sup>James G. Blaine, "Presidential Election of 1892," North American Review, CLV (November, 1892), 513.



The professional politicians, however, did not have their ears close enough to the political ground to detect the tremors of the electoral earthquake which, while it would do no serious damage to their party structures, would give them a pretty thorough shaking. November, 1892, was the beginning of the end for much of which the nineteenth century had taken for granted or had resisted only passively.

ing of the movement was still effecting tremendous suffering upon the debt-ridden farmers of the West; and in the South, caught between the one-crop system on the one hand and the one-party system on the other, many erstwhile Democrats were becoming more and more unhappy. Since there was practically no Populist strength in the states North of the Ohio and East of the Mississippi,<sup>1</sup> the workers of the People's Party set their sights on the West and South, where they hoped to win victories significant enough to give them a strong bargaining position in the Congress, and to establish a foundation upon which to build future political triumphs.

To accomplish this, however, they knew they could not work alone. Nowhere was the political strength of the

<sup>1</sup>Two reasons are apparent for this: first, the farmers of this area were close to markets and therefore not plagued with the high transportation costs of the Westerners, and, having settled longer on their lands, were not burdened with the mortgage debts which so severely handicapped the Western farmers. Secondly, many of the voters of this area were wage workers, whose ideas were diametrically opposed to the Populists, for they were in favor of low prices for farm commodities, and high wages for labor.

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movement, still but two years old, enough to offset the entrenched power of the two traditional parties. The only way the Populists could strengthen their position was through

## CHAPTER II

By the autumn of 1892 the forces which were to comprise the bulk of Populist strength were in a relatively strong political position. The depression which had caused the economic difficulties leading to the founding of the movement was still effecting tremendous suffering upon the debt-ridden farmers of the West; and in the South, caught between the one-crop system on the one hand and the one-party system on the other, many erstwhile Democrats were becoming more and more unhappy. Since there was practically no Populist strength in the states North of the Ohio and East of the Mississippi,<sup>1</sup> the workers of the People's Party set their sights on the West and South, where they hoped to win victories significant enough to give them a strong bargaining position in the Congress, and to establish a foundation upon which to build future political triumphs.

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movement, still but two years old, enough to offset the entrenched power of the two traditional parties. The only way the Populists felt they could hope for victory was through arrangements whereby at least part of the strength arrayed against them would be eliminated. This the Populists hoped to do, but as it turned out, this was what was done for them by their former opponents.

In the West the Populists hoped to appeal to discontented groups within the Democratic party; in the Middle Border to persons dissatisfied with Republican domination, and in the far West to free-silver advocates unhappy with their party's stand on the money question. In the case of the Democrats they found a group in many cases willing to co-operate, for the supporters of the Democracy were in a weak political position in the band of states settled primarily by ex-Union soldiers. In the states of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota the forces of the Alliance had, in 1890, administered stinging defeats to the old Republican groups; and in these states the People's Party was in a favorable political position, having taken over the candidates and issues of the farm groups. Here the question centered around the problem of whether to attempt a unilateral victory over both parties or, in a coalition with the Democrats, be assured of much greater hope for victory, with a resultant obligation to share the spoils.

The Democrats, in many cases, were anxious for fusion, if for no other reason than to see victory taken from their



old enemies, the Republicans. For them it was good politics to work for a Republican defeat, even though they might not gain the victory.<sup>2</sup> But to counterbalance this thought was the fear of what the Populists might do when and if they got control of the state governments, and this gave pause to many who advocated a union with the new party.

In the end, fusion was accomplished in only two of the border states, Kansas and North Dakota, and in both of these instances it was brought about primarily upon the instigation of the Democrats.<sup>3</sup>

In Kansas, the two parties agreed upon a common slate of candidates, state, electoral, and congressional; nearly all the nominees being Populists. At the Democratic state convention the motion was made for the endorsement of the whole Populist state ticket, and while the idea was fought savagely for some six hours by recalcitrant groups within the party, the issue was finally decided by an affirmative vote, taken at three o'clock the next morning, with the final tabulation showing 390 Democrats favoring fusion on the presidential electoral slate, while only thirty-nine opposed.<sup>4</sup> On the state ticket, 226 delegates voted to support the Populist candidates, while 176 wished to nominate a separate slate of Democratic candidates.<sup>5</sup> The results of the balloting would

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<sup>2</sup>W. F. Harrington, "The Populist Party in Kansas," in Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, XVI (1925), 423.

<sup>3</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>4</sup>Harrington, loc. cit., p. 423.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



seem to indicate a greater enthusiasm on the part of the Democrats of Kansas to deprive Harrison of the electoral votes of that state than to put into the state house the nominees of the new party.

While some disgruntled Democrats proceeded to hold another state convention in Kansas, and advised voters to defeat the Populists at the polls, the only effect of this move was to alienate themselves in the eyes of their fellow party-members, for the only way to defeat the Populists would be to vote for the Republican ticket, since this "rump" convention did not make any nominations.<sup>6</sup>

In North Dakota the same procedure was followed, with the Democratic convention endorsing the Populist candidates, who had already been nominated by their own party, with the major difference being that the electoral ticket included both Cleveland and Weaver electors.<sup>7</sup>

Ignatius Donnelly, the Populist candidate for Governor of Minnesota, was instrumental in quelling the fusion movement in that state, because he was confident that the People's Party would be able, on its own, to emerge victorious; and he was not anxious to be under any obligation to the Democrats.<sup>8</sup> Two Democrats, however, were nominated by the Populists for Supreme Court positions because the Populists were short of

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<sup>6</sup> Appleton's Annual Cyclopedia, 1892, pp. 370-371.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 530.

<sup>8</sup> John D. Hicks, "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," M. V. H. R., VIII (June-September, 1921), 123.



lawyers, and in return four Populists were endorsed by the Democrats as presidential electors.<sup>9</sup> In South Dakota and Nebraska fusion between Democrats and Populists took place only on the local level, with three complete state and electoral tickets in the field in both states. In the Western states, where the silver question was the primary topic of political discussion,<sup>10</sup> the Populists, with their strong free-coinage plank, received much support which came to them for no other reason than this. The Populism of the Western states was centered on this one issue, and because of this emphasis, many Democrats and Silver Republicans joined with the newcomers. In Nevada and Colorado, both important silver-mining states, this movement was most pronounced. In the former state the maverick groups formed a splinter party, known as the Silver party, which sent delegates to the People's Party convention at Omaha, and officially endorsed the Populist presidential candidate.<sup>11</sup> In Colorado, the Democrats officially endorsed Davis H. Waite, the Populist candidate for Governor, and the rest of the People's Party ticket.<sup>12</sup> In Wyoming and Idaho fusion arrangements were worked out between the Populists and Democrats, with the silver issue serving to bind the two groups together.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>See Chapter III for a complete discussion of this issue.

<sup>11</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 265.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. J. Book, The Agrarian Crusade, p. 148.



The emphasis upon the silver question by the Western states was not a healthy sign for the new party, for it signified that the party leaders were able to abandon many of the planks of the Omaha platform for the political expedient of gaining allies for the fall election. The silver plank was emphasized, the other planks ignored in the West. Of course, the Western miner had something in common with the farmer of the Middle Border in the hardship caused by the recession, caused partly by the loss of the silver market, but the Populist strength of the West was artificial at best. An agrarian reform movement was out of place in the states of the Rocky Mountains.

In the South the Populists concentrated primarily upon cooperation with Republican minority groups, in an attempt to defeat the entrenched Democratic party.<sup>14</sup> The movement of the Populist party in the South was handicapped, however, by the fact that the influences of the Civil War, which played a significant part in bringing about the formation of the party in the West, were to be equally significant in hindering its development in the states of the former Confederacy.

Having only recently fully recovered the political control of the Southern states from the hands of the Reconstruction governments, the Democratic party of the South was not anxious to let it go back into the clutches of the Republicans and Negroes, whose years of Reconstruction rule were memories too near and too vivid to allow them any complacency.

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<sup>14</sup>Solon J. Buck, The Agrarian Crusade, p. 148.



Since the Democrats of the South were in such political strength in their area that they did not need the Populists, and since the only allies the Populists could hope to obtain were Negroes and Republicans, the movement suffered severely. The groups to which the Populists would logically turn for strength, the small farmers, were the very ones who were most bitter against the Negroes and the G. O. P., the People's Party's potential allies.<sup>15</sup> The Democratic party in the South was more than a political organization, it was the organization which stood for the maintenance of white supremacy and white sovereignty against the forces of race and northern oppression, and the people of the South rallied around it.

The Populists realized that if their party was to succeed against the political power of the Northeast, which would have to be done if they hoped to carry out the aims of their platform, they would have to form some sort of political association which would give them sufficient strength to carry the South as well as the West. The Farmers' Alliance had already acquired political control of nearly all the Southern states, by working within the Democratic organization,<sup>16</sup> and the Populists hoped that the Alliance men would swing over to their party. The fact that they did not meant not only the failure of the Southern Alliance, but the defeat of the new

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<sup>15</sup>This animosity goes back to Reconstruction, when the Negroes were settled on the richest lands, and the "poor whites" shuttled to the less productive hill counties of the South. Shannon, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>16</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 239.



party, which became identified with the groups which the Southerner hated and feared.<sup>17</sup>

When the Democratic convention failed to placate the Alliance forces by rejecting their major demands, the movement was strong in the South for action against the Chicago nominee. However, the only way, the Southerners felt, to vote against Cleveland, would be to vote for Harrison, and this they refused to do. The compromise which they worked out was typified by "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman of South Carolina, who, after ousting the Bourbon politicians from the Democratic party in that state became the spokesman for the dissatisfied "wool hat" farmers of the uplands (the very groups that the Populists looked to for support). Tillman declared it would be "simply infamous" for any true Democrat in South Carolina to vote for a Populist candidate, for this would only increase the chances for the election of a Republican; but he did let it be known that he favored many of the Populist beliefs, such as free silver, a national income tax, senatorial elections, and other planks of the Omaha platform.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in many parts of the South, the Democrats "stole the thunder" from the Populists, who were left with no issues and few supporters. And while General Field, who as a Virginian and an ex-Confederate officer, had respect if not support in the South, many of the imported campaigners, such as

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Francis B. Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian, p. 311.



General Weaver and Mrs. Lease, fared much worse, their audiences showing their appreciation of the oratorical efforts of the Populists' campaigners by rewarding the speakers with rotten eggs and other tokens.<sup>19</sup>

There were, however, a few instances of fusion in the South between Populists and Republicans which proved successful. In Alabama and Arkansas the two parties placed fusion tickets in the field for state candidates in 1892, and with their combined strength gave the Democrats greater competition than they had experienced in many years. And while the fusion efforts in these states was not victorious, it did demonstrate that co-operation between the two parties was possible.<sup>20</sup> A similar situation existed in Louisiana, where the two groups reached an agreement.<sup>21</sup> The fusion groups were most successful in the upland areas of these states, where the population was predominantly white, and where most of the people were small farmers. In the "black belts" of the South, where there were large concentrations of Negroes, the traditional Democratic strength remained.

The success of the fusion groups, while very limited, brought the problem of the Negro voter into the center of attention, and instead of being merely a political nonentity, the Negro found himself, in many parts of the South, suddenly

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<sup>19</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1170.

<sup>20</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>21</sup>Melvin J. White, "Populism in Louisiana During the Nineties," M. V. H. R., V (June, 1918), 11.



on the center of the political stage. One of the main results of the fusion efforts in the South was to place the fusionists in the position of courting the Negro vote.<sup>22</sup> That most of the Negro vote went to the Democrats was due in part to the effort by Republicans in the House of Representatives to pass, in 1888, a bill which would have guaranteed adequate protection to the Negro voter of the South, even if federal supervision and the exercise of military power were necessary.<sup>23</sup> With this threat hanging over them, Democratic leaders in the "black belt" counties made sure their colored constituents voted "right" by providing them with plenty of liquid refreshment and all-night entertainment on election eve, and marched them to the polls the next morning with explicit instructions.<sup>24</sup> The Democrats won handily in these areas.

The results of fusion were apparent when the votes were counted in November. Weaver, with a total vote of 1,041,000, had carried the states of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada and North Dakota, and had received large percentages of the popular vote in Wyoming, Alabama, South Dakota and Nebraska.<sup>25</sup> But while Weaver had received nearly nineteen per cent as many votes as were given to Cleveland, and had actually polled well over a million votes, the figures are not entirely

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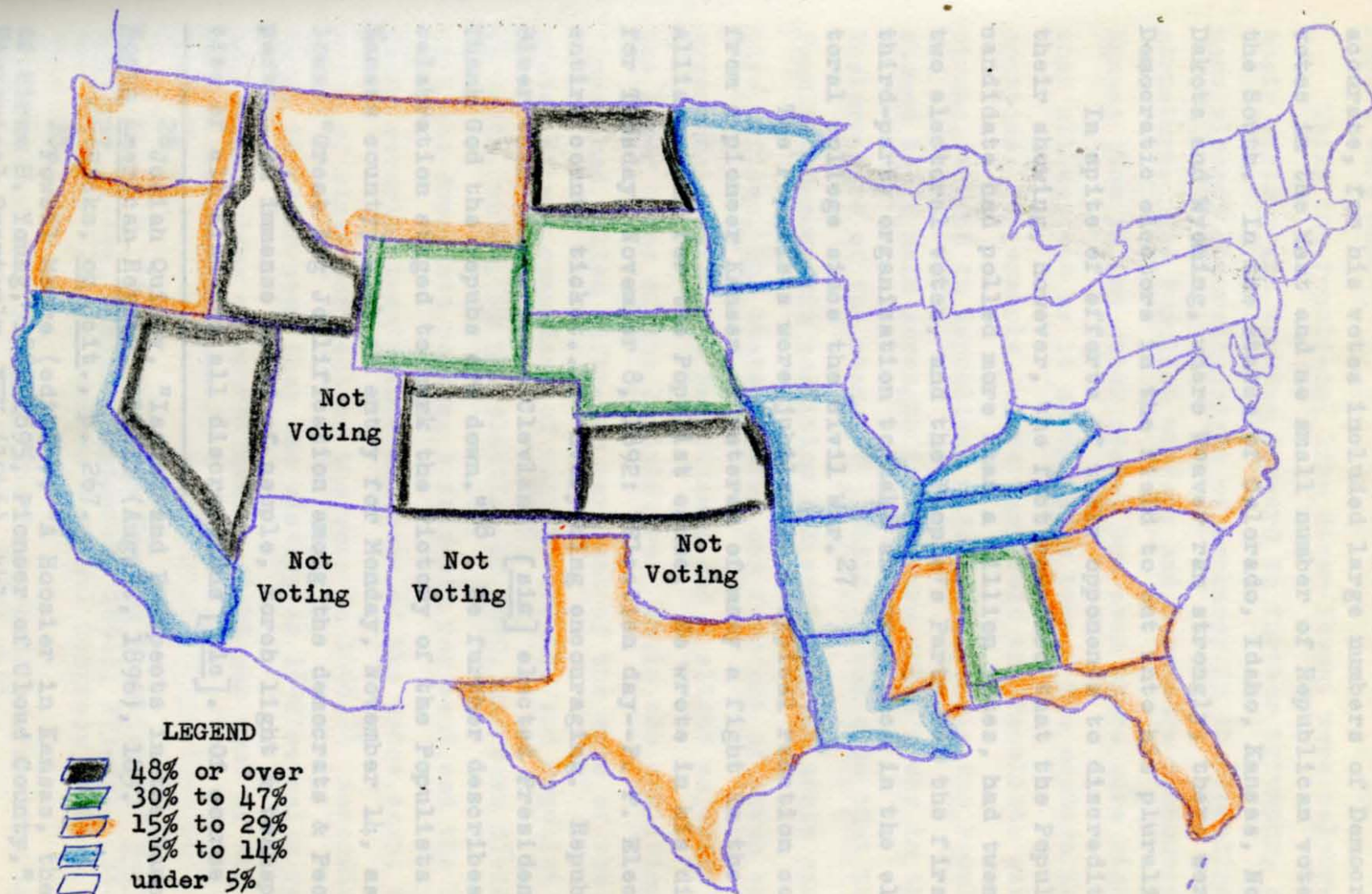
<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>25</sup>Appleton's Annual Cyclopedic, 1892, p. 755. See Figure 1.





Hicks, op. cit., p. 263

0 200 400 600

Figure 1.

Electoral Vote for Weaver  
1892



accurate, for his votes included large numbers of Democratic votes in the West and no small number of Republican votes in the South. In the states of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, North Dakota and Wyoming, where Weaver ran strongly, there were no Democratic electors in the field to cut into his plurality.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of efforts of their opponents to discredit their showing, however, the fact remained that the Populist candidate had polled more than a million votes, had twenty-two electoral votes, and the People's Party was the first third-party organization to make an appearance in the electoral college since the Civil War.<sup>27</sup>

The Populists were jubilant! A typical reaction comes from a pioneer Kansan, a veteran of many a fight in the Alliance and for the Populist cause. He wrote in his diary for Tuesday, November 8, 1892: "Election day--P. P. Elected entire county ticket.... Everything encouraging. Repubs Bluer than thunder.... Cleveland [sic] elected President. Thank God the repubs are down."<sup>28</sup> He further describes the celebration staged to mark the victory of the Populists in one Kansas county, with an entry for Monday, November 14, as follows: "Great Big Jollification among the democrats & People's party. An immense crowd of people, torch light & transparencies of all kind and all discreptions [sic]. Of course the

<sup>26</sup>Josiah Quincy, "Issues and Prospects in the Campaign," North American Review, CLXIII (August, 1896), 185.

<sup>27</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>28</sup>Powell Moore (editor), "A Hoosier in Kansas, the Diary of Hiram H. Young, 1886-1895, Pioneer of Cloud County," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XIV (1946), 441.



repubs were Mad."<sup>29</sup>

While the Populists, like Hiram Young, were celebrating their victory and looking forward to further triumphs, others were already observing signs of weakness in the Populist structure. The Populist victory had been more pronounced in Kansas than in any other state, but even there were signs that all was not as it should have been. The western Kansas counties, for example, where many felt the Populists were strong, turned in Republican majorities, while the Populists showed their main strength in the more urban areas in the Eastern part of the state.<sup>30</sup> While it was true that the Populist-Democratic coalition had captured the state executive offices, the state senate, and four out of seven congressional seats, the Republicans had a slight majority in the lower house of the legislature. While the coalition ticket had polled fifty-two per cent of the vote of the state, it was comprised of both Democratic and Populist strength, which, in the election of 1890, had been divided, with the Populists polling thirty-six per cent and the Democrats securing twenty-four per cent of the votes cast, or a total of sixty per cent of the vote in 1890.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, then, it would seem that the victory in 1892 actually resulted in a loss of approximately eight per cent of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> John M. Stahl, "Are the Farmers Populists?," North American Review, CLXIII (September, 1896), 273-274. Stahl was secretary of the Farmers National Congress in the United States.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond C. Miller, "The Background of Populism in Kansas," M. V. H. R., XI (March, 1925), 481.



strength of the coalition from the votes polled two years previously. Republicans in the state claimed that it was only because of "mongrel fusion" that the victory was won, and "without the aid of democratic votes there would not have been a single populist congressman or presidential elector or state officer elected and there would scarcely have been a baker's dozen members of the legislature entitled to their seats."<sup>32</sup>

The fact remained, however, that the Populists had won in many contests, with the aid of their allies, and by doing so had badly hurt the Republican party. This was great compensation for the Populists, who viewed the G. O. P. as the organization principally accountable for the difficulties from which they suffered.<sup>33</sup> It was in the far West, particularly, where the Populists had succeeded in encroaching upon traditional Republican strongholds, with Colorado, Nevada and Idaho lost, and Wyoming barely preserved in the Republican column, by a majority of 8,454 votes to 7,722.<sup>34</sup>

In the East, where Populism had never been strong, the Populist vote was nil, with such states as Ohio giving Weaver less than fifteen thousand votes out of a total of nearly one million votes cast in the state.<sup>35</sup> Here Populism

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<sup>32</sup>Topeka Daily Capitol, December 30, 1892, in Populist Party Clippings, Volume I, Kansas State Historical Society collection, Topeka.

<sup>33</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>34</sup>Appleton's Annual Cyclopedic, 1892, p. 755.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



had little strength, for silver was no issue, the farmers were not discontented, and the wage workers, who could see nothing in Populism to improve their lot, were content to vote in their traditional pattern. In Weaver's home state, Iowa (with Missouri, the least "western" of the trans-Mississippi states), the Populists polled less than five per cent of the total vote, with the General getting a little more than twenty thousand votes out of a total of more than four hundred thousand.<sup>36</sup>

Following the election, the Populists set about to consolidate their gains, and plan their strategy for the off-year election of 1894, when they hoped to gain additional strength in the Congress, stabilize their control of state legislatures, and prepare for the presidential battle in 1896. Strong in their victories, and retaining the platform of 1892, complete with its free-silver plank which had served them so well in the far West, they hoped for greater triumphs.

The consolidation of their victories, however, proved a rather challenging task, and in several cases they did a rather sorry job. In Kansas, for example, after a ludicrous battle between Populists and Republicans for control of the House of Representatives, which at one time led to the existence of two separate bodies,<sup>37</sup> the Populist Administration of Governor Llewelling found itself in considerable difficulty,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See Edwin J. Walbourn, Jr., "Rump Legislature of Kansas, 1893, an Evaluation" (unpublished Master's thesis, K. S. T. C., Pittsburg, 1950), for a thorough discussion of this.



being beset by irregularities in the administration of the government, and torn by internal strife.<sup>38</sup> In Nebraska, where the Populists were able to elect the able William V. Allen to the Senate, they soon got involved in a quarrel with the state supreme court over attempted impeachment proceedings of Republican state officers. The result of this flare-up was that a judicial election went to the Republicans because the Democrats and Populists failed to agree on a fusion candidate, and the Populists held the Democrats, their erstwhile allies, responsible.<sup>39</sup>

Because of these and other difficulties arising between the Populists and Democrats, a movement began to take shape among members of the People's Party for a dropping of the fusion efforts, and the keeping of a "middle-of-the-road" course by the party in the election campaign of 1894. Instead of attempting to win votes by fusing with other parties, many of the Populists became more resolved upon the course of gaining converts individually to Populist beliefs, which would give additional strength to the party and eliminate the necessity of working out unhappy "deals" after the election was over. But it was the very fact that fusion had led to success in 1892 which led many of the older party members to oppose this middle-of-the-road movement, and blinded them to the weaknesses in the results of the 1892 election.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Barr, loc. cit., pp. 1188-1193, for discussion of this.

<sup>39</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 285-286.

<sup>40</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 153.



The party continued to gain strength and support during the years 1893 and 1894, however, in spite of the difficult times which were besetting many Populist office-holders, and in spite of the fact that the Populist movement in general was viewed in some sections, particularly the East, as some form of "advanced socialism," which would plunge the nation into a "cheap money debauch."<sup>41</sup>

In a move designed to increase their power among industrial workers of the Northeast, the Populist convention in Illinois in 1894 voted to endorse the political program of the American Federation of Labor in that state, with the significant exception of a plank in the Labor platform dealing with collective ownership of the means of production and distribution.<sup>42</sup> With this move, the Populists hoped to enter an area which heretofore had been barred to them, and perhaps, with an alliance of workers, break the hold which the older parties had in this section.

By the summer of 1894, the middle-of-the-road movement was bearing fruit, and in many states, where fusion had been the rule in 1892, it was abandoned in favor of straight Populist nominations. While Weaver and other leaders warned that chances for victory would be greater with fusion tickets, many states abandoned the policy, and, impressed with apparent

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<sup>41</sup>"The Populists in Congress," Review of Reviews, X (July, 1894), 7.

<sup>42</sup>Chester McA. Destler, "Consumation of a Labor-Populist Alliance in Illinois, 1894," M. V. H. R., XXVII (March, 1941), 597.



Populist strength, decided to try for victory alone.<sup>43</sup> In Kansas the middle-of-the-road Populists had gained strength sufficient to give them control of the state party organization, and the Democrats, disgusted with the excesses of the Llewelling administration, refused to fuse, even though it would possibly mean the returning to office of the Republicans. This upset many fusion Populists, and Hiram Young wrote, disgustedly, on September 29, 1894, "Democratic Convention. Placed full ticket in the field except for county Superintendent ... I will remember those Democrats in the future."<sup>44</sup>

But in the South fusion grew apace, and the few unions of Populists and Republicans continued to gain strength. With the Democrats the target of vote-fraud accusations, the two parties united in an attempt to secure more honest elections in the South. The coalition parties still attempted to woo the Negro vote, as well as appeal to the white residents of the highland areas.<sup>45</sup> In Missouri and other states, which heretofore had been relatively weak Populist areas, the Alliance movement became completely political, and nearly all the members of that organization identified themselves with the Populist cause.<sup>46</sup> In North Carolina, where Republicanism

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<sup>43</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 326-327. Weaver accepted both Populist and Democratic nominations for Congress from Iowa in 1894.

<sup>44</sup>Moore, loc. cit., XV (1947), pp. 176-177.

<sup>45</sup>White, loc. cit., p. 12; Hicks, op. cit., p. 329.

<sup>46</sup>Homer Clevenger, "The Farmers' Alliance in Missouri," Missouri Historical Review, XXXIX (October, 1944), 44.



was strong, a union was effected which was to be especially important since two senatorial vacancies were to be filled by the legislature which would be elected that year.<sup>47</sup>

With fusion still in effect in many areas, but with it faltering, or very shaky in others, the Populists went to the polls in confidence that they would again triumph, hoping to secure for themselves a victory even greater than they had won in the election two years earlier.

The story of the election was succinctly told by Hiram Young, the diarist, who wrote on the election day: "Fine day. Complete victory for the repubs."<sup>48</sup> The one bright spot for him was the fact that while the entire state Populist ticket lost, there was one winner on the county Populist slate, the People's Party candidate for Probate Judge, who won by a majority of twenty votes. This was Young himself.<sup>49</sup> In Kansas, where the anti-fusion forces, coupled with the irregularities of the Populist administration, led to the abandonment of fusion, the People's Party polled thirty-nine per cent of the total vote, while the Republicans obtained forty-nine per cent, and on the strength of this plurality were returned to office.<sup>50</sup>

In Iowa, where there were a total of five fusion congressional districts, the Populists scored some gains,

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<sup>47</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 330-331.

<sup>48</sup>Moore, loc. cit., XV (1947), 180.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Miller, loc. cit., p. 481.



although even General Weaver went down to defeat in the general Republican victory.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the West, the Republicans regained the territory lost in 1892, with Colorado and Idaho both safely back in the G. O. P. column; and in Nevada the Silver party, which refused to fuse with the Populists, was the victor.<sup>52</sup>

In the South, the Populists were able to compensate to some degree for this loss with a clear fusion victory in North Carolina. Polling 148,000 votes,<sup>53</sup> or nearly fifty-four per cent of the vote in the state,<sup>54</sup> the fusion forces won in the state and judicial races, the Populists alone won control of the state senate, and the Populists and Republicans together gained control of the state House of Representatives. Thus, by controlling the legislature, the fusionists were able to name a Republican to fill an unexpired Senate seat, and a Populist, Marion Butler, was elected for the six-year term in the Senate.<sup>55</sup>

In Arkansas the Populists scored 24,000 votes, more than doubling their 1892 showing, while in Georgia the result was

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<sup>51</sup>Herman Clarence Nixon, "The Populist Movement in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXIV (January, 1926), 76.

<sup>52</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 333.

<sup>53</sup>Quincy, loc. cit., p. 186.

<sup>54</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 335-336.

<sup>56</sup>Quincy, loc. cit., p. 186.

<sup>57</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>58</sup>See Figure 2.



equally impressive, with the 1894 total of 96,000 votes, a considerable gain over the 42,000 registered in 1892.<sup>56</sup>

Texas, Virginia, Alabama and Missouri also showed considerable advances in Populist strength, with resultant gains in congressional seats. As a whole, the Populists, while they had fewer victories to show for it, had gained ground over 1892, polling a total of 1,471,590 votes, an increase over the preceding election of forty-two per cent.<sup>57</sup>

It was the Republicans' turn, however, to be jubilant! They had regained control of the national House of Representatives, and had defeated the Populist threat where it had hurt them the most, while allying with the same group in the South and showing a profit thereby. This anomalous situation had given them victory, and had enabled them to beat the Populists at their own game, using fusion to effect political triumphs in doubtful areas. True, they had lost Nebraska, where fusion had, after a fashion been effected at the state level, but they had won back the states of Kansas, Colorado and Idaho.<sup>58</sup>

In Kansas, where the Republican victory was viewed rather like the awakening from a nightmare, the victors celebrated their reconquest of the state by a huge demonstration in Topeka, advertised as the "celebrated Populist funeral parade." On the program they obligingly included an obituary of their defeated rivals:

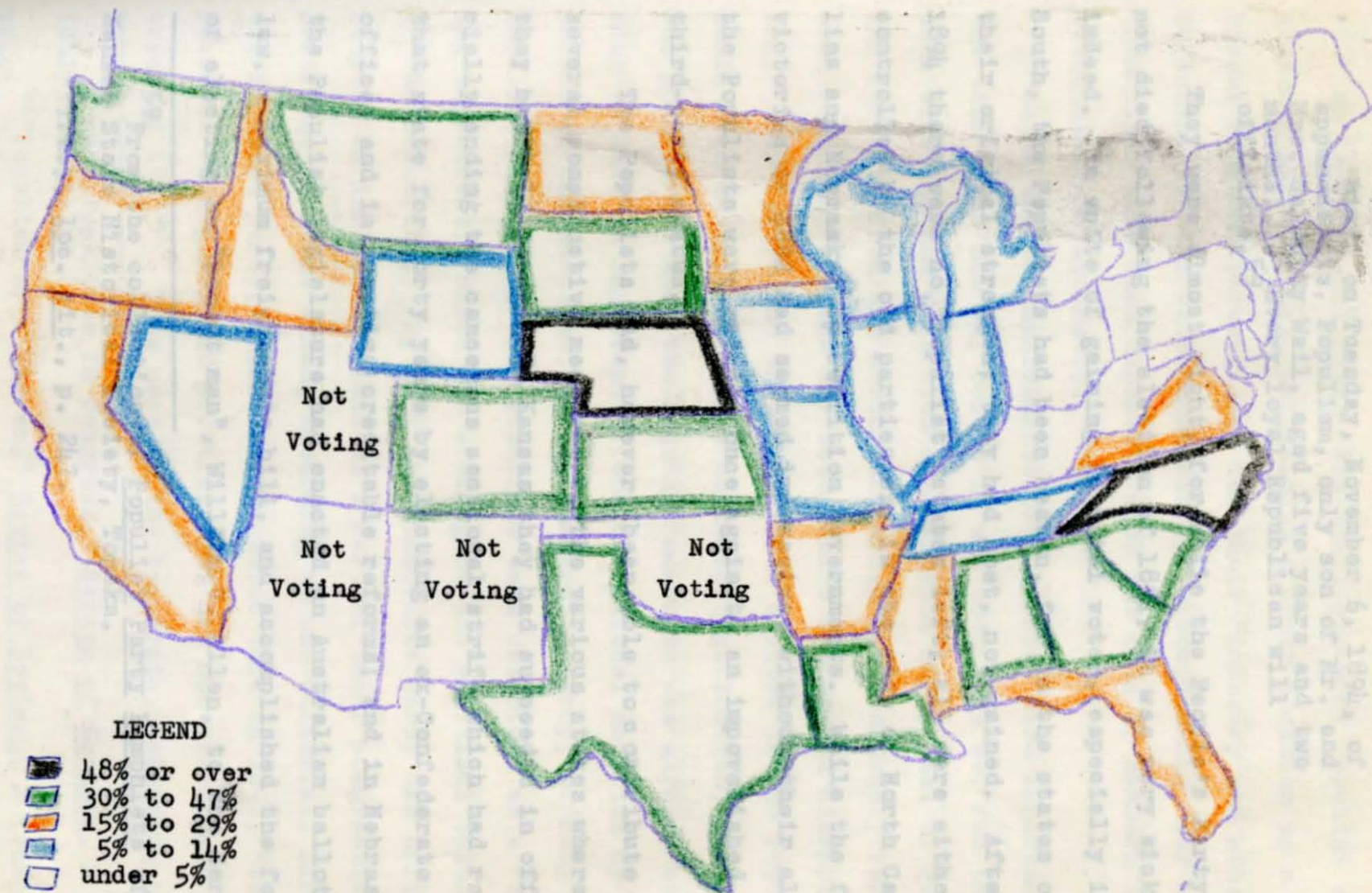
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<sup>56</sup>Quincy, loc. cit., p. 186.

<sup>57</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>58</sup>See Figure 2.





Hicks, op. cit., p. 337. Figure 2. Populist and Fusion State Tickets  
Vote Percentages, 1894



Died, on Tuesday, November 6, 1894, of appendicitis, Populism, only son of Mr. and Mrs. Calamity Wail, aged five years and two months.... Every loyal Republican will officiate.<sup>59</sup>

They were almost right, for while the People's Party had not died following the election of 1894, it was very sick indeed. In spite of gaining in total votes, especially in the South, the Populists had been beaten, for in the states of their original strength, they had lost, not gained. After 1894 there were no "Populist" states left, all were either controlled by the old parties or, in the case of North Carolina and Nebraska, by coalition governments. While the fusion victories of 1892 had seemed impressive, without their allies the Populists were reduced once again to an impoverished third-party status.

The Populists had, however, been able to contribute several constructive measures to the various states wherein they had held power. In Kansas they had succeeded in officially ending the cancerous sectional strife which had rent that state for forty years by electing an ex-Confederate to office, and in enacting creditable reforms; and in Nebraska the Populist legislature had enacted an Australian ballot law, a maximum freight-rate bill, and accomplished the feat of electing an "honest man", William V. Allen, to the Senate.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>From the collection of Populist Party Pamphlets of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

<sup>60</sup>Tracy, loc. cit., p. 247.

<sup>62</sup>"Populism as a Leaven," Review of Reviews, X (July, 1894), 7-8.



On the national scene, the small group of Populist congressmen and senators, maintaining a power position as a bloc, became nationally-recognized for their "industry and attention to business;" and were commended for accomplishing "far more than might have been expected, with the odds of numbers so overwhelmingly against...." them.<sup>61</sup>

While the accomplishments of the party were important, the task which now lay before it was even more so, for the 1894 election had destroyed one Populist hope, that of gaining strength from the Northeast, which had thoroughly repudiated Populism, and the Far West, which had proved disappointing. Even before the election it was doubted if the Populists would even be able to form a national organization, and it was pointed out that the Populist movement was already beginning to have an important effect on national politics by the virtue of the adoption, by the Democratic party, of many Populist proposals. The Populists were described as a "leavening ingredient," which was working on the political thinking of the Democrats. By 1894 the Democratic party had officially adopted an income tax plank as a part of their congressional platform, an event which, according to one editorial, lifted the Populist party, which had suggested this in 1892, "to a position of dignity and prestige that had not previously been accorded it."<sup>62</sup> This move by the Democrats, according to the

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<sup>61</sup>"The Populists in Congress," Review of Reviews, X (July, 1894), 7.

<sup>62</sup>"Populism as a Leaven," Review of Reviews, X (July, 1894), 7-8.



editorial, "may justly be called a mighty manifestation of the working of the Populist leaven."<sup>63</sup>

Another example of this was the change of heart on the part of the Democrats on their 1892 plank calling for the repeal of a law levying a ten per cent tax on state bank notes, which in essence demanded "the re-establishment of paper money issued under authority of state laws."<sup>64</sup> The Populists the same year had demanded a strictly national currency.<sup>65</sup> In 1894, the Democrats, who held a sweeping majority of the Congress with which to pass into law their proposed change, "deliberately voted down the proposition to repeal the state-bank tax."<sup>66</sup> While it was pointed out that both the Republicans and Populists opposed the repeal of the measure, it was concluded that in the course of action to be pursued as a result of the defeat of the repeal bill, "it seems likely to that the Populist leaven is destined to work more effectively upon the Democratic majority...."<sup>67</sup>

But while the Democrats were busily adopting Populist planks for their own platform, the Populists were equally busy, in the years following their July convention in 1892,

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>"Another Instance," Review of Reviews, X (July, 1894), 8.

<sup>65</sup>See Appendix II.

<sup>66</sup>"Another Instance," loc. cit., p. 8.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Tracy, loc. cit., p. 248.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.



abandoning them. Pointing out that the Populists were rapidly moving in the direction of "conservatism and sanity," one observer pointed out the "remarkable speed with which it the Populist party is deserting its former tenets..."<sup>68</sup>

The reason for this was the influence, in the West especially, of newcomers to the party fold, Democrats who supported the free-silver issue and who felt they had been "betrayed by their party and their executive."<sup>69</sup> With the influx of these people into the party in the West, the Populists were yielding more and more to the temptation to abandon their other issues, concentrate on the silver question, and hope to wean enough Democrats away from their party to win in 1896. The 1892 Democratic platform had supported the gold standard as against free silver, and Cleveland, the Democratic president, was known to favor this stand; it seemed, therefore, safe to the Populists to continue their support of the silver issue, which was bringing new converts to the fold, in hopes that the other parties would continue with the money planks of their 1892 platform.

As it would happen, by the end of 1894, the Democrats were beginning a program of adoption of Populist ideas and planks, and the Populists, in turn, were embarking on a program to woo Democrats who were dissatisfied with the planks of the 1892 platform which dealt with money. The Populists were risking all for 1896 on a gamble, that the Democrats

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<sup>68</sup>Tracy, loc. cit., p. 248.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.



would support the same financial program which they supported in 1892, and that Populism, then, could gather into its ranks hordes of discontented Democrats and western Silverites, who would change parties rather than principles. The Populists were going to gamble; the stakes were to be silver; the odds would be unknown.

THE SILVER QUESTION ALTERS POPULISM

the one with the largest appeal to the electorate was that of the free coinage of silver. In the 1892 election this was the one factor which brought into the Populist camp many groups which had no other reason for allying themselves with the party. Because, in 1892, both of the other parties had supported the gold standard, many persons, particularly in the far West, flocked to the Populist banner, for no other reason than the Populists had pledged to do for silver what neither of the old parties had dared.<sup>1</sup>

The silver issue was based on the demand by the Populists that silver bullion be coined at a ratio of sixteen ounces of silver to one ounce of gold, and that no limitation be placed on silver coinage.<sup>2</sup> This demand can be traced back to the Ocala demands of the Farmer's Alliance, which advocated approximately the same plank in their reform platform of 1892.<sup>3</sup> The real causes of the difficulty, however, go back more than twenty years, to 1873, when a bill, known as the Coinage Act,

<sup>1</sup>Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup>See Appendix I.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE SILVER QUESTION ALTERS POPULISM

Early in the career of the Populist party it was discovered by leaders of the movement that of all the issues of the Omaha platform the one with the largest appeal to the electorate was that of the free coinage of silver. In the 1892 election this was the one factor which brought into the Populist camp many groups which had no other reason for allying themselves with the party. Because, in 1892, both of the other parties had supported the gold standard, many persons, particularly in the far West, flocked to the Populist banner, for no other reason than the Populists had pledged to do for silver what neither of the old parties had dared.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick L. Paxson, *Recent History of the United States*, p. 35. Hicks, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix II. p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix I. p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



was passed eliminating the standard silver dollar as an American coin.

The reason for this action was that the silver dollar had practically disappeared from the American scene. It had seldom been seen in circulation since a law, sponsored by President Andrew Jackson in 1834, had established the sixteen to one coinage ratio.<sup>4</sup> Because the market value of silver was greater than this established ratio, it made the silver dollar actually worth slightly more than one dollar and drove it out of circulation, into the hands of persons who hoarded it for its silver content.<sup>5</sup> It was possible to grow to manhood, before the civil war, according to Professor Paxson, without ever seeing a silver dollar of American coinage.<sup>6</sup>

In February, 1873, when congress passed the law demonetizing silver, no coins had been in circulation for a dozen years and silver dollars had been practically out of circulation since 1834. The price of silver at that time was still above \$1.2929 per ounce, at which commercial rate it would have been equal to gold, so it remained the dearer metal.<sup>7</sup> Since the silver dollar was not economically justifiable, and since the American public was not accustomed to using that particular coin, the Congress felt that it should not be included on the coinage list as prescribed by law.

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<sup>4</sup>Frederick L. Paxson, Recent History of the United States, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>6</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



The law, in effect, merely dropped the standard silver dollar from the list of coins which would be manufactured from bullion presented to the mint.<sup>8</sup> The silver dollars then in circulation were not demonetized, but their circulatory value was limited.<sup>9</sup>

Almost immediately upon the passage of this law, however, the price of silver dropped sharply, changing the value of the two dollars and causing widespread losses throughout the silver industry. This price decline was caused by the great silver strikes in the Comstock lode in Nevada, which increased production of domestic silver tremendously; the lessened cost of silver production due to opening of the western railroads; and increased efficiency in the mines due to new processes for extracting silver from low grade and refractory ores.<sup>10</sup> This increased production, coupled with the limitation placed on the buying of silver bullion by the Coinage Act of 1873, caused values to drop precipitously.

With the drop in the value of silver, the ratio of silver in relation to gold began to change, and by 1874 the ratio stood at 16.17 to 1, followed by continued depreciations during the years immediately following.<sup>11</sup> With this drastic change in the relative values of the two metals, and the

<sup>8</sup>Henry Steele Commager (editor), Documents in American History, II, 75-76.

<sup>9</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>10</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>11</sup>W. H. Harvey, Coin's Financial School, p. 34.

<sup>15</sup>Commager, op. cit., pp. 97-98.



placing of the gold dollar as the basic monetary unit, a movement began which, some politicians contended, "so decreased the world's supply of standard money [meaning silver] as to bring about a shrinkage of values that covered a period of more than twenty years."<sup>12</sup>

With the stepped-up production of domestic silver, immediate pressure was placed upon the Congress for the resumption of the coinage of silver dollars, to furnish a market for the extended silver production of the country. Senators and representatives from the western states were especially vocal in their demands for a resumption of silver coinage, which they felt would place more money in circulation and help to alleviate the effects of a depression which had been depressing the nation for several years, following the collapse of the great Cooke financial empire in 1873 and the stock market panic which occurred in that year.<sup>13</sup>

A bill was introduced into the House of Representatives in 1877 by Representative Richard P. Bland of Missouri which would allow for the resumption of coinage of silver at the old ratio, with no limitation on the amount. Under the leadership of Senator Allison of Iowa,<sup>14</sup> the bill was altered by the upper house to provide for a minimum of two million dollars worth of silver dollars to be coined each month.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>William Jennings and Mary Baird Bryan, The Memoires of William Jennings Bryan, p. 113.

<sup>13</sup>See above, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>See above, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Commager, op. cit., pp. 97-98.



The bill, which in this form was approved by both the Senate and the House of Representatives, was vetoed by President Hayes, who asserted that:

... the silver dollar authorized by this bill is worth 8 to 9 per cent less than it purports to be worth, and is made a legal tender for debts contracted when the law did not recognize such coins as lawful money.<sup>16</sup>

This, of course, was precisely what the advocates of the bill wanted, and why they included in the measure the provision making silver legal tender in payment of contractual debts "except where otherwise expressly stipulated in the contract." It was the hope of supporters of the bill that, by making money, especially silver money, more plentiful, their constituents in the debt-ridden areas of the West would be able to solve their economic problems more easily. The measure was passed over the president's veto on February 28, 1878, by a "sweeping bi-partizan majority."<sup>17</sup>

In that same year the ratio between silver and gold fell to a record low point of 17.94 to 1; and the next year, 1879, the ratio reached a low of 18.40 to 1.<sup>18</sup> By 1885 the ratio between the two metals had fallen to 19.41 to 1,<sup>19</sup> and the situation became desperate; for far from alleviating the conditions which it was designed to correct, the Bland-Allison Act was merely intensifying them, for the below-par dollars

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

<sup>17</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>Harvey, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., op. cit., p. 104.



which were being coined under the provisions of the act, two million dollars worth each month, were not being accepted by the public. The situation became so intolerable that President Cleveland, in 1885, was forced to ask Congress to repeal the measure, which he did in his first annual message to that group, delivered December 8, 1885.<sup>20</sup>

Pointing out that since February, 1878, the Secretary of the Treasury had been purchasing and coining silver bullion to the value of \$2,000,000 each month (the minimum allowable under the Bland-Allison Act), which made a total of 215,759,431 silver dollars, the President stressed that only about 50,000,000 such dollars had actually gone into circulation, leaving more than 165,000,000 of the coins to be stored by the government, which entailed a considerable expense for the construction of vaults and storage facilities. "Every month," he concluded, "two millions of gold in the public treasury are paid out for two millions or more of Silver dollars, to be added to the idle mass already accumulated."<sup>21</sup> Instead of making more money available, the act was indeed making money even "tighter", for not only was the silver not being accepted by the public, but gold which otherwise would have been in circulation was being drained from the treasury to pay for the silver bullion. The actual value of the silver dollar at that time was eighty-five cents.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 104.



By 1889 the ratio had dropped to 22.09 to 1,<sup>23</sup> and still no action was taken on Cleveland's suggestion, beyond debate in the Congress, but in the following year a bill was introduced for the repeal of the Bland-Allison Act, and the inauguration of a new plan, which, it was hoped, would curb the excesses of the old bill and accomplish what the silverites had hoped to accomplish with the Bland-Allison bill, namely give to the country a silver currency which was on a par with gold, and still consume the domestic silver production.

The bill, called the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, was designed to correct the basic evils of the Bland-Allison bill, namely the draining off from the treasury of gold to pay for silver bullion, and the coining of sub-par-value silver coins.

The proposed bill directed the Secretary of the Treasury to buy silver bullion and to pay for it with treasury notes, rather than gold. The bill stipulated that no more than 4,500,000 ounces of bullion could be purchased, and the price would be the market value thereof, not a standard set by the act, thereby taking advantage of the falling price of the metal.<sup>24</sup>

This bill, supporters boasted, would "utilize every ounce of the silver produce of the country and more--utilize it for money and turn it into the channels of trade and avenues of business," and claimed that as a result of the

<sup>23</sup>Harvey, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>24</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 137., 1892, p. 757.



passage of the bill "silver is nearer parity with gold today than it has been for the last fifteen or eighteen years."<sup>25</sup> True, the ratio of the two metals rose in the year the bill passed, moving up to 19.75 to 1, but this was to be but a temporary condition.<sup>26</sup>

While opponents of the measure claimed that it was passed "mainly as a party necessity to appease the silver producing States for their support in the Senate and at the polls,"<sup>27</sup> its supporters insisted that the bill, "whatever its defects, leaves the currency which it enlarges on a safer basis than it was under the old law, and which maintains the two metals and the paper currency at an equal value in circulation."<sup>28</sup>

In spite of these hopes, however, the value of silver in relation to gold again began to fall, reaching a ratio of 20.92 to 1 in 1891, and by 1892 dropping to the record low of 23.72 to 1.<sup>29</sup> With the rise of silver dollars being coined in the country, the amount of gold coin began to drop, falling from \$596,386,272 on November 1, 1891, to \$569,633,412 on December 31, 1892.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>William McKinley, Jr., "What Congress Has Done," North American Review, CLI (November, 1890), 516.

<sup>26</sup>Harvey, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>27</sup>William McAdoo, "What Congress Has Done," North American Review, CLI (November, 1890), 528.

<sup>28</sup>Henry Cabot Lodge, "What Congress Has Done," North American Review, CLI (November, 1890), 518.

<sup>29</sup>Harvey, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>30</sup>Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia, 1892, p. 757.



In the election of 1892, Weaver, the free-silver candidate of the Populists, was showing great strength in the states of the West, but the very Western farmers and miners who demanded free silver by their votes for the Populists were not anxious to use the silver money already on hand. By the time of Cleveland's second inauguration in 1893, the silver dollar as produced by the United States mints was worth sixty-five cents in gold.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly this situation could not last, and by 1893 the movement was strong for repeal of the Sherman act, with President Cleveland leading the fight. Most of the Republicans in the Congress, who were in the minority, sided with the president in the disputes;<sup>32</sup> and, allying themselves with the "gold Democrats," were able to bring the issue of repeal to a vote on November 1, 1893, at which time an act was passed calling for repeal of the Sherman law.<sup>33</sup>

The passage of the repeal measure marks the peak of Populist strength, in many respects; for it was on the vote of approval of this proposal that the traditional party lines were broken, for many of the Southern and Western Democrats broke with the administration faction of their party on the issue.<sup>34</sup> Vociferous attacks on the administration were made by Democrats, led by William Jennings Bryan, a congressman

<sup>31</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>33</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 149 contains the text of this act.

<sup>34</sup>Paxson, op. cit., p. 205.



from Nebraska, who called the repeal movement the "burial of silver, with no promise of resurrection."<sup>35</sup> Bryan attacked the gold standard and the gold dollar as "that child of ignorance and avarice," and called it "the most dishonest dollar which we could employ."<sup>36</sup>

Both Silver Democrats and Silver Republicans attacked the President and his supporters for destroying their pet arguments by showing that the attempt by the United States alone to bolster the price of silver had resulted in a fall, rather than a rise, in its price. During the period from 1891 to 1895 the commercial ratio of the two metals averaged 27 to 1.<sup>37</sup>

The supporters of repeal did not intend further to depreciate silver; indeed, many agreed with Senator Sherman, the author of the bill of 1890, who justified his vote for repeal by saying: "If I had the power to regulate the market I would gladly advance it [silver] to par with gold at the legal ratio."<sup>38</sup> Sherman assured the Senate that he would support any measure "that will tend to maintain the parity of the two metals at some fixed ratio approaching their commercial value."<sup>39</sup>

While conservative Republicans like Senator Lodge were blaming "the utter indifference of the Administration to

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Marion M. Miller (editor), Great Debates in American History, XIV, 318.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Jeannette Paddock Nichols, "The Politics and Personalities of Silver Repeal in the United States Senate," American Historical Review, XLI (October, 1935), 28, footnote 7.

<sup>38</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 401.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.



the currency question and the complete failure of the Democrats, from the President down, to make the slightest effort towards its solution,"<sup>40</sup> supporters of free silver were equally adamant in their viewpoint, and they echoed the views of their constituents. Jerry Simpson, of Kansas, for example, explained the typical Populist approach to the problem in a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives. "I received," Simpson said, "a letter from a friend of mine today that expresses my sentiments exactly. He says: 'Jerry, you stand by 16 to 1 until hell freezes over, and we will send you a pair of skates to come home on.'"<sup>41</sup>

Obduracy, then, was the chief characteristic of both sides in the dispute during and after the repeal of the Sherman Act. Both convinced of the correctness of their views, both expressing the opinions of great groups of the American public, neither group was willing to change from the position in which it found itself. The Republicans were standing more solidly than the Democrats, but both parties were split on the issue.

Indicative of the feeling of some Democrats toward the Administration's stand on the silver question was that of William Jennings Bryan, who, in a speech at the Democratic State Convention at Lincoln, Nebraska, October 4, 1893,

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, "The Results of Democratic Victory," North American Review, CLIX (September, 1894), 274.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, op. cit., pp. 341-342.



declared that if the Democratic party of Nebraska supported the gold standard: "I promise you that I will go out and serve my country and my God under some other name, even if I must go alone."<sup>42</sup> By June, 1894, the silver sentiment in Nebraska, led by Bryan, had grown strong enough that a group of Democrats were able to meet in Omaha and organize the silver Democrats of that state into an active political organization. In September of that year they were able to get the approval of the state party convention for a plank declaring: "we favor the immediate restoration of the free and unlimited coinage of gold and silver at the present ratio of 16 to 1, without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation on earth."<sup>43</sup>

Early the following year a conference was held in Salt Lake City, at which time was formed an organization known as the National Bimetallic Union, with headquarters to be at Chicago, and a weekly newspaper, called the Bimetallist, was established to spread the views of the silver faction.<sup>44</sup>

On March 5, 1895, silver supporters in Congress, headed by Bryan and Bland, issued an address outlining the views of the silverites, a move which Bryan himself called, "the beginning of the successful efforts upon the part of the

<sup>42</sup>William Jennings Bryan, The First Battle, pp. 123-124, contains the full text of this speech.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151, for the text of this plank.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-157. See also Commager, op. cit., p. 167.



silver Democrats of the nation to take control of the Democratic organization."<sup>45</sup> Their views were as follows:

We believe that the establishment of gold as the only monetary standard and the elimination of silver as a full legal tender money, will increase the purchasing power of each dollar, add to the burden of all debts, decrease the market value of all other forms of property, continue and intensify business depression, and, finally, reduce the majority of the people to financial bondage.

We believe that no party can hope for enduring success in the United States so long as it advocates a single gold standard, and that the advocacy of such a financial policy would be especially fatal to a party which, like the Democratic party, derives its voting strength from those who may without reproach be called the common people; and we point to the overwhelming defeat of the party of 1894, to the opposition aroused by the veto of the seigniorage bill and to the still more unanimous protest against the issue of gold bonds, as proof that the Democratic party cannot be brought to the support of the gold standard policy.

We believe that the money question will be the paramount issue in 1896....<sup>46</sup>

This pronouncement on the part of the silver supporters within his party was answered by President Cleveland, who, on April 13, 1895, wrote a letter declining an invitation to speak at a meeting in Chicago of supporters of the gold standard policy. In the letter Cleveland pointed out the evils of a "degenerated currency" and asserted that the people who would benefit least from the proposal of the silver forces were those who were most vocal in its support,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-157. See also Commager, *op. cit.*, p. 167.



the farmers and wage earners.<sup>47</sup> Bryan, not to be outdone, replied to this in an open letter to the President which was printed in an Omaha newspaper.<sup>48</sup> The Democratic split had become a gulf which separated the silver faction, of which Bryan was becoming the recognized spokesman, and the gold faction, represented by the President.

The center of the controversy was the same issue which the Populists had included in their reform platform of 1892, which now had been bodily adopted by a large group within one of the two great parties, and to which the Populists also were still adhering. The silver issue had been only one of a number of suggested reforms in the campaign of 1892, except in the Western silver-mining states, and had not been highly publicized in 1894, because the silverites of the West had ended fusion arrangements with the Populists. The issue had now reached a predominance unsuspected when it was first drafted. Rather than concentrating on abuses and evils which had been continuing since the Civil War, the minds of the people in all sections of the nation were becoming fixed on the single issue of free coinage of silver, an issue which was at best superficial.<sup>49</sup>

Many Populists opposed this trend toward a single issue for their party, feeling that the party would lose much of its strength which it had obtained as a result of the reform

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-160, for text.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-161.

<sup>49</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It, p. 186.



proposals of the Omaha platform. Former Congressman Tom Watson of Georgia, one of the original Alliance members of Congress and a leading Populist spokesman declared:

We favor Free Silver as much as we favor Fiat money--and no more.

We favor Free Silver as much as we favor Income Tax--and no more.

We hate the greed which strikes down silver in the interest of gold--but we hate just as fiercely the National Banks ..., the High Protective Tariff, ... and the Railroad tyranny....<sup>50</sup>

Other Populist leaders, however, felt differently, and there was strong sentiment in the party supporting the view that the silver question was "the only living issue before the people."<sup>51</sup> State conventions of the Populist party were urged to "build a platform making the 'money question' the great central idea, unencumbered with details or side issues."<sup>52</sup>

The object of this concentration upon a single issue, of course, was for the proselyting value it would have, to gain more converts to the Populist cause. The difficulty was, however, that new recruits brought into the party on the basis of this plank alone were not agrarian Populists at all, but merely silverites.<sup>53</sup> They rapidly altered the beliefs of the organization, and while the old-time Populists still

<sup>50</sup>Tom Watson, in an article in People's Party Paper, quoted in Thomas G. Manning and David M. Potter, Government and the American Economy, 1870-Present, p. 220.

<sup>51</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 344.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 50.



supported the Omaha platform, and used its many planks as the basis for their political beliefs, the newer party members supported only the one plank which they favored, and ignored or suppressed the others.<sup>54</sup>

It became one of the major objectives of the silver group to wean the old-line Populists away from the Omaha platform and commit them to the single issue of silver. That the demands for political reform and basic democratic action were subverted to the monetary question, which even at the time was recognized as a "single temporary side issue,"<sup>55</sup> is the tragedy of the election campaign of 1896.<sup>56</sup> In the conventions which preceded the campaign, and in the campaign itself, the money question was uppermost, and the entire attention of the American public was concentrated on only one small facet of the reform movement which had begun under such impressive auspices in 1892. While Ignatius Donnelly warned that "the silver question is but an incident in the great struggle that covers the world,"<sup>57</sup> the incident became, for the American public, the end result, and the greater scope of political reform was lost for a time in the great scramble for votes.

When, in the summer of 1896, the three parties were to meet to nominate their candidates for President and Vice

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<sup>54</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 319.

<sup>55</sup>John D. Hicks, "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," M. V. H. R., VIII (June-September, 1921), 126.

<sup>56</sup>Avery Craven, Democracy in American Life, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup>Hicks, loc. cit., p. 126.



President and to promulgate their platforms, the interest of the nation was concentrated on two specific questions: One, whether the Republicans from the western silver-producing states would be able to sway their party from its traditional adherence to the gold standard, and if not, what the actions of the Silver Republicans would be; and, secondly, whether the Silver Democrats would have enough strength in their party to force the insertion into the platform of a free silver plank and to secure the nomination of their candidate for President.

The first party to meet in convention was the Republican, which met the last of June, at St. Louis. Immediately the money question came up, and a majority of the platform committee reported a plank strongly favoring the gold standard. It opposed the free coinage of silver, "except by International agreement."<sup>58</sup> A minority of the committee, headed by Senator Teller of Colorado, submitted an alternate plank, which would pledge the Republicans "to secure the free and unlimited coinage of gold and silver at our mints at the ratio of 16 parts of silver to 1 of gold."<sup>59</sup> Teller's minority report was defeated and the majority recommendation was adopted.

With the defeat of his proposed plank, Teller realized that the sentiment of the convention was unalterably opposed to his views on the money question, and he, accompanied by

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<sup>58</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 169. See Appendix III for the full text of the G. O. P. money plank.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. See also Pittsburg Headlight, XI (June 25, 1896).

<sup>60</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 177.



several other delegates representing the states of Idaho, South Dakota, Utah and Montana walked out of the convention. But before he left, Teller addressed the meeting, explaining his views on the silver issue, and giving his reason for "bolting" the convention, saying: "I cannot, before my country and my God, agree to that provision that shall put upon this country a gold standard and I will not."<sup>60</sup> Thus the bolting of silverites from their party, threatened by Bryan in 1893,<sup>61</sup> actually came to pass in 1896, although it affected a different party.

The abandonment of their party by Teller and the other silver Republicans was viewed with mixed emotions. Bryan, who attended the G. O. P. convention as an observer for an Omaha newspaper, welcomed the move, and immediately wired back to Nebraska his suggestions for the Democratic plank on the question, urging immediate adoption, by the Democratic party, of an unequivocal free silver plank.<sup>62</sup> This suggestion was published, and attracted further attention to Bryan as the silver spokesman.

The futility of Teller's stand was pointed out by some of his opponents, who, while agreeing that the Colorado Senator was undoubtedly sincere in his views, "he has never had the least rational ground for hoping that the Republican

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<sup>60</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 170-176 contains the full text of Teller's speech.

<sup>61</sup>See above, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 177.



party would swing over to his ideas."<sup>63</sup> Loyal party members drew solace from the fact that while some Western silver votes were lost to their presidential nominee, William McKinley, Teller's move strengthened the chances that many gold Democrats would find the Republican party all the more acceptable to them if the Democrats at their convention should endorse a free-silver plank.<sup>64</sup>

That such a plank would be endorsed by the Democratic convention, which was to meet in Chicago, seemed more and more a probability, with the silver movement gaining strength throughout the South and West. "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman of South Carolina, the man who had opposed the Populist movement in his state in earlier campaigns,<sup>65</sup> threatened to bolt the Chicago convention if the gold Democrats secured enough votes to renominate Cleveland or support a gold-standard plank.<sup>66</sup> Arkansas, North Carolina and Georgia were other Southern states where the movement for free silver was strong, and in each of these states the Democratic State Conventions had endorsed platforms calling for free coinage and the 16 to 1 ratio.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Editorial, Kansas City Star, XVI (June 18, 1896), 4.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid. (June 19, 1896), 6.

<sup>65</sup>See above, p. 31. the platform. Here the expected

<sup>66</sup>Simkins, op. cit., p. 327.

<sup>67</sup>See The Pittsburg Headlight, XI (June 25, 1896) for the Arkansas convention, and Ibid. (July 2, 1896), for the North Carolina and Georgia conventions. The decisions of these groups are contained in news dispatches published on the dates cited.

<sup>70</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 180.



Shortly before the Democratic convention was scheduled to begin, President Cleveland, the spokesman for the "sound money" faction within the party, addressed an open letter "to the Democratic Voters," in which he outlined his views on the upcoming convention fight. "I refuse to believe," he wrote, "that when the time arrives for deliberate action there will be engrafted upon our Democratic creed a demand for the free, unlimited, and independent coinage of silver."<sup>68</sup> He pointed out that he felt that such a course would be harmful to the party, and would "inflict a very great injury upon every interest of our country which it has been the mission of Democracy to advance, and will result in lasting disaster to our party organization."<sup>69</sup>

The convention got under way on June 30, with an immediate credentials fight involving rival delegations from various states, Bryan himself, as a member of the silver delegation from Nebraska, having to sit in the visitors' gallery due to the recognition of the gold Democrats from that state during the temporary organization of the convention.<sup>70</sup> The dispute on credentials finally being resolved in favor of the silverites, the convention was then able to get to the next order of business, the platform. Here the expected fireworks materialized!

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<sup>68</sup> Allen Nevins, Letters of Grover Cleveland, 1850-1908, pp. 440-441.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Bryan, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 208-209.



A majority of the platform committee was composed of delegates pledged to free silver, and the committee delivered a majority report favoring this approach. Not only did the report favor free coinage of silver at 16 to 1, it demanded legislation to forbid "the demonetization of any kind of legal tender money by private contract," which would eliminate one of the grievances of the farmers, that of requiring payment of loans or mortgage debts in gold, through a clause of the contract.<sup>71</sup>

The minority of the committee submitted their report, which called for a maintenance of the gold standard, and stating that the adoption of the suggestions of the majority of the committee would "not only imperil our finances, but would retard or entirely prevent the establishment of international bimetallism.... It would place this country ... upon a silver basis, impair contracts, disturb business, diminish the purchasing power of the wages of labor, and inflict irreparable evils upon our nation's commerce and industry."<sup>72</sup>

Senator Tillman opened the debate on the platform, supporting the majority plank, followed by four minority speakers, and then by Bryan, who concluded the debate with his famous "Cross of Gold" speech, after which the majority recommendation was adopted by a vote of 628 to 301, with only sixteen delegations voting against the platform while thirty-five delegations voted in favor of it.<sup>73</sup> Nominations for candidates for

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<sup>71</sup>See Appendix IV.

<sup>72</sup>Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.



president then followed, and on the fifth ballot Bryan was named. *they were depending to gain the strength necessary for*

*them* Thus the Democratic convention officially went on record, both in their platform and presidential candidate, as favoring the issue which the Populists had first brought before the people of the United States four years earlier. The convention nominated for vice president Arthur Sewall of Maine, a prominent industrialist of that state, who had widespread interests in a shipyard and in railroad ventures, as well as being for twenty-six years the president of the Bath National Bank of Maine, although Bryan contended that: "He is opposed to the present national banking system, although business necessities have forced him to avail himself of it."<sup>74</sup>

Shortly after the conclusion of the Democratic convention Senator Teller and other leading Silver Republican bolters issued a statement supporting the Democratic platform and nominees, and calling upon all Republicans who supported the free coinage of silver to join with them in support of the candidates nominated at Chicago.<sup>75</sup>

The time was now approaching for the Populists to meet in convention to make their bid for support by the adoption of their platform, and to nominate their candidates for the highest offices in the land. But they had a problem, for the Democratic convention had definitely "stolen their

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 230-231.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-187.



thunder" by adopting their strongest issue, the plank upon which they were depending to gain the strength necessary for them to win. They had gambled on the Democratic party keeping their 1892 platform, and they had lost. They were, truly, on the horns of a dilemma.

Every possible course for the Populists presented a problem: if they chose to support the candidate and platform of Chicago they would strengthen the position of their platform, but they would probably destroy themselves as an independent party; if they chose not to join with the Democrats, they would be more able to preserve their party entity, but would probably guarantee the defeat of the free silver forces because of the resultant division of the silver votes. This was the situation that confronted the members of the People's Party as they journeyed to St. Louis for their nominating convention.

Many party members were quite sympathetic with Bryan, and openly advocated complete endorsement of him by the convention. This group was growing stronger daily, for the farm-bred Bryan, who was known to be an extreme advocate of the basic doctrines of Populism, was accepted by the agrarians as their friend.<sup>1</sup> It did not seem too illogical to these persons that by endorsing Bryan they were supporting a party which had in the past constituted one of the chief opposition groups to their own party; they were aware that the only possibility of victory was to unite with any group which felt the way they did on the issue of free silver.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Elmer Ellis, "The Silver Republicans and the Election of 1896," N. Y. H. R., XVIII (March, 1932), 524.



## CHAPTER IV

## THE GREAT FUSION FIGHT

Every possible course for the Populists presented a problem: if they chose to support the candidate and platform of Chicago they would strengthen the position of their platform, but they would probably destroy themselves as an independent party; if they chose not to join with the Democrats, they would be more able to preserve their party entity, but would probably guarantee the defeat of the free silver forces because of the resultant division of the silver votes. This was the situation that confronted the members of the People's Party as they journeyed to St. Louis for their nominating convention.

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<sup>1</sup>Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Elmer Ellis, "The Silver Republicans and the Election of 1896," M. V. H. R., XVIII (March, 1932), 524.



Since the Populist convention was the last of the three, they had only to second the motion made for silver at the Democratic convention, rather than introduce the question in the national political debate. Most of the Southern Populists had wanted to hold the 1896 convention early in the year, before the other two parties met, but the party's national committee, meeting in January, misjudged the strength of the silver Democrats, felt that both the Democrats and Republicans would declare for the gold standard, and by meeting last the People's Party could then be in a position to gather all the dissatisfied silver supporters into their camp.<sup>3</sup>

As the delegates arrived at St. Louis they aligned themselves into three different factions, each group with their own ideas regarding the convention and the campaign. One group favored the straight endorsement of Bryan and Sewall, bringing a union of Populist and Democratic groups; another group desired a fusion electoral ticket pledged to Bryan and Sewall, but with an independent Populist party organization which would be in a favorable bargaining position if the ticket should win; and, thirdly, there were the Middle-of-the road Populists who favored an independent ticket and platform and opposed any attempt to fuse with the Democrats.<sup>4</sup>

Southern Populists had supported a plan whereby the convention would name a presidential ticket, adopt a platform,

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<sup>3</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 350.

<sup>4</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 23, 1896), 4.

Henry Demarest Lloyd, "The Populists at St. Louis," Review of Reviews, XIV (September, 1896), 302.

<sup>5</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 184.



and nominate presidential electors in all the states where there was a Populist state organization, and then, following the election, cast their electoral votes in combination with the Democrats for the strongest candidate.<sup>5</sup> The group favoring fusion, however, seemed the stronger, particularly because this group contained many persons who either had in the past or hoped in the future to hold elective office, and felt that fusion was the best way to gain the votes necessary to accomplish this.<sup>6</sup>

The fusion question had become the prime consideration of most of the delegates, and this was to become the dominant theme throughout the convention and the campaign which followed. The silver issue was to overshadow the great reform planks of the Omaha platform, but while the silver Democrats really felt free silver to be a great reform, many Populists felt that it was only the most insignificant of reforms and many of them did not even consider it a reform at all.<sup>7</sup> The middle-of-the-road Populists were included in this last group, for they were not so enthusiastic about the silver issue that they were willing to surrender their other contentions for it. Some of these leaders were from the West, but most of them were southerners.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most articulate opponents of fusion was Ignatius Donnelly, who as early as 1894 called it a "sacrifice

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. (July 16, 1896), p. 4. of Ignatius Donnelly,"

<sup>6</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1195.

<sup>7</sup>Henry Demarest Lloyd, "The Populists at St. Louis," Review of Reviews, XIV (September, 1896), 302.

<sup>8</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 184.



of opinions and beliefs for the sake of plunder," and declared that "the middle of the road is the place for Populists."<sup>9</sup> Donnelly had grave doubts about the reform spirit in the Democratic party, and viewed fusion as merely the "selling out" of the more vital issues and planks of the Omaha platform for the sake of one rather trivial reform.<sup>10</sup> Senator Peffer of Kansas, another opponent of fusion, in a statement issued in Washington, D. C., on June 25, decried the proposed fusion schemes, declaring:

I do not think existing conditions warrant populist endorsement of the democratic presidential ticket, even though the nominee is for free silver, and the platform contains a positive free-silver declaration. I regard the integrity and perpetuity of the populist party as essential to carrying out the plan of reform we have espoused....

... all that remains is for the populist party to maintain its integrity by nominating its own candidates on its own platform.<sup>11</sup>

On the other side, as chief spokesman for the fusion supporters, were General Weaver, the 1892 standard-bearer, and the famous W. H. ("Coin") Harvey. Weaver, in 1894, had described the position of the opponents of fusion when he said: "I am a middle-of-the-road man but I don't propose to lie down across it so no one can get over me. Nothing grows in the middle of the road."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Donnelly, in People's Party Paper, quoted in Hicks, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>10</sup>Hicks, "The Political Career of Ignatius Donnelly," loc. cit., p. 126.

<sup>11</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 2, 1896), 5.

<sup>12</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 327.



Harvey had an elaborate fusion scheme designed, complete to the parceling out of the spoils. He proposed the endorsement by the Populists of the Democratic free-silver candidate for president (he personally favored Bland), and the nomination, by the Populists, of Senator Marion Butler of North Carolina for vice-president, and his endorsement by the Democrats. The Populists would receive the Secretaryships of the Interior, of Agriculture, of War and of the Navy under his plan, and Senator Teller would be named Secretary of the Treasury.<sup>13</sup> The optimistic Mr. Harvey's fusion plan went further than most of those suggested. The difficulty was that neither the Democrats or Populists would cooperate in bringing it about.

With the opening of the convention, on July 22, Senator Butler was named temporary chairman, and in his acceptance speech accused the Democrats of committing "petty and grand larceny by stealing the People's party platform almost in its entirety."<sup>14</sup> Claiming the Democrats were "frightened," "alarmed," and "conscience-stricken," he suggested that their platform was the result of the exposing, by the Populists, of their "straddling treachery" on the money question.<sup>15</sup>

With the replacing of Butler by Senator Allen of Nebraska as permanent chairman, the fusion forces won their

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<sup>13</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 2, 1896), 4.

<sup>14</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. op. cit., pp. 184-185.

<sup>17</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 268-269.

<sup>18</sup>Wicks, op. cit., p. 364.



first victory. Allen, who was seated by a vote of 758 to 564,<sup>16</sup> presented the views of the fusionists in his acceptance speech, when he said:

There are those who desire us to promulgate a wild platform that will be the subject of ridicule. They want us to take some man as a candidate for President, who is unfit and unacceptable and who is willing to run, with certain defeat staring him in the face, for the mere empty honor of being a candidate, and they will cry to him to "keep in the middle of the road," but they are our enemies, and not our friends.<sup>17</sup>

When Allen was elected by such a large majority, indicating control which the fusion forces exercised over the convention, the anti-fusionists proposed to nominate first the vice-presidential candidate, for here, unlike the presidential nomination, there was serious contention. Sewall, the Democratic nominee, being both a national banker and a railroad man, personified two of the interests to which the Populists were most opposed. Both fusion and anti-fusion forces were fearful lest Bryan be assassinated or otherwise removed from office and Sewall be then in a position of leadership, representing the very forces against which they were fighting. Others argued that with their own candidate for vice president the Populists could better preserve their party organization and not face complete absorption into the Democratic party. It was also agreed that the vice presidential candidate should be a Southerner.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Buck, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

<sup>17</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 268-269.

<sup>18</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 364.



With the vote for the changing of the rules, the compromise on the vice presidency was almost a reality. When the roll-call of states was read for the purpose of nomination, six candidates were named, only two of whom were significant, Thomas E. Watson of Georgia, and Sewall. On the first ballot Watson was nominated, receiving 469 votes, while Sewall polled 257 votes.<sup>19</sup>

When it became apparent that the Populists were going to amend the rules and nominate their vice-presidential candidate before their presidential nominee, Senator James K. Jones of Arkansas, the Democratic National Chairman, telegraphed Bryan, asking his advice as to a course of action if Sewall was not nominated. Bryan, answering, instructed him to withdraw his name as a candidate if Sewall was not named.<sup>20</sup> Bryan's telegram was not taken seriously by the Populists, who, by the time it was published, were well into the floor fight for the vice-presidential nomination.

On the next day the convention met to hear the report of the platform committee, which submitted a proposed platform stressing the free coinage of silver, but also calling for an income tax, postal savings banks, government ownership of railroads and telegraph lines, the initiative and referendum, and direct election of President, vice-president and senators.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>20</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 271-276, for text.

<sup>22</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 276-279.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



By this time the nomination of Bryan was almost assured, in spite of a resolution introduced by the Missouri delegation, as follows: "Resolved, That we, the delegates of the State of Missouri to the national convention of the People's party are opposed to the nomination or endorsement of W. J. Bryan for president, or any other democrat or republican."<sup>22</sup>

Bryan's name was placed in nomination by General Weaver, who called for complete support for the Chicago nominee. His reasons were as follows:

The recent convention at Chicago sounded a bugle call for union which can neither be misunderstood or go unheeded. In its patriotic utterances and action it swept away all middle ground, and opened the road to formidable organic alliance. They not only made union possible--thank heaven, they have rendered it inevitable.

From the very beginning, our organization has made party fealty subordinate to principle....<sup>23</sup>

Following Weaver's speech, Bryan's nomination was seconded by General Field of Virginia, the 1892 vice-presidential candidate, Jerry Simpson, Ignatius Donnelly, and many other prominent Populists, including a delegate from Missouri who had apparently forgotten about the recent resolution introduced by his state.<sup>24</sup>

The only other name placed in nomination was that of Colonel S. F. Norton of Illinois. The results of the first ballot were 1,042 votes for Bryan, 340 for Norton.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 23, 1896), 5.

<sup>23</sup>Bryan, op. cit., pp. 276-279.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.



With the nomination of Bryan the triumph of the fusion forces was nearly complete. True, they had lost a battle when Watson was named for the vice-presidency, but many of them felt that the Democrats would withdraw the name of Sewall and substitute that of the People's party candidate. This was, in fact, the basis for Watson's acceptance of the nomination, and many Populists believed that Senator Jones, the Democratic National Chairman, had promised that he would work toward that end.<sup>26</sup>

Bryan, however, had other views, and expressed regret that the St. Louis convention had not nominated Sewall. He pointed out that he had instructed his name be withdrawn as a candidate when Sewall was defeated for the nomination, but that this was not done; and he stated that there were several planks in the Populist platform which he did not approve. He hastened to point out, however, that his first concern was with the free silver issue, and he would do nothing to injure the chances for a silver victory.<sup>27</sup> His position was made easier for him by a letter from Sewall urging him to accept the Populist nomination in the interest of victory at the polls, and by the end of the campaign Bryan could conclude that two vice-presidential candidates were better than one, and as a result the silver cause had gained votes.<sup>28</sup>

The defeat of the middle-of-the-road faction, however,

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<sup>26</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 365.

<sup>27</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 297.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 252--for their platform.  
<sup>30</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 30, 1896), 3.



and the association of the People's Party with the Democratic cause, was the source of considerable concern to some reformers, like Henry Demarest Lloyd, who wrote that: "The People's Party has been betrayed...." He pointed out that if the Populists had been organized around a clear-cut principle, and had not vacillated with the silver issue, it could never have been "seduced" into fusion, "nor induced even to consider the nomination of a man like Bryan who rejects its bottom doctrine."<sup>29</sup> He complained that the Populists had "'shot the chutes' of fusion and landed in the deep waters of Democracy," which he called "that bourne from which no reform party returns--as yet."<sup>30</sup>

At the same time that the Populists were meeting in St. Louis, the free-silver Republicans, led by Teller, were holding a convention in the same city of the newly-formed National Silver Party. The decision to hold their convention in close proximity with the People's Party caused the Silver Party to be associated with the Populists in the minds of many persons,<sup>31</sup> but they disclaimed any Populist leadership, saying that they differed from the People's Party on all questions except that of free silver.<sup>32</sup> This group adopted a platform dealing entirely with the silver issue,<sup>33</sup> and nominated Bryan and Sewall as its candidates.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Manning and Potter, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

<sup>30</sup>Lloyd, loc. cit., p. 298.

<sup>31</sup>Ellis, loc. cit., p. 521.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 521-522.

<sup>33</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 252--for their platform.

<sup>34</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 30, 1896), 3.



The silver Republicans hastened to assure their constituents, however, that their support for the Democratic nominee did not mean that they were abandoning their traditional views on other issues. In a letter publicized to explain their position, they affirmed that it was not necessary for silver Republicans to "abandon or surrender their political views on other questions," but to concentrate solely on a victory for silver.<sup>35</sup>

Following the conventions, the silverites were faced with the problem of effectively uniting their forces to meet the Republican threat in November. While the supporters of the gold standard were strongly united in the Republican ranks, and were looking for aid from gold Democrats dissatisfied with the Chicago nominee, the silver forces were divided into three groups, Democrats, Populists and National Silverites. The task that lay ahead was to unite these three forces into one effective team to defeat the Republicans and bring victory to the cause of free silver. Fusion was essential for any hope of victory, and this meant not only fusion on electoral tickets for Bryan but on state and congressional tickets, for the task lay not only in electing a free-silver president, but in winning seats for congressmen, and in electing state legislatures who in turn would name senators who would support the silver issue, thus strengthening the position of the silver forces in the Congress.

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<sup>35</sup>Ellis, loc. cit., p. 532.



The Populists, old veterans of many a fusion battle in the past, clearly recognized the problems which would arise as a result of the decision to fuse. Shortly after the close of the convention, an address was issued by the Populist National Chairman, Marion Butler, which outlined the possible courses of action which the party could follow. It established two alternatives: first, for every state to run a straight Bryan and Watson ticket, without any attempt at fusion with the Democrats; and, secondly, working first for a silver victory by conceding electors to Bryan and Sewall in return for fusion arrangements which would give the opportunity for electing some Bryan and Watson electors.<sup>36</sup>

The first of these suggestions, the committee felt, would have the same result as the placing of a separate Populist presidential nominee in the field at St. Louis, namely the splitting of the silver vote and the certain election of McKinley. The second issue showed the most promise, and the committee felt it would give the greatest opportunity for the election of Watson electors, and was the most certain way of assuring the victory of the advocates of free silver. The committee warned, however, that the way would not be easy, for some Populists would advocate the middle of the road, and would attempt to block fusion attempts, and some Democrats, dissatisfied with Bryan, would attempt to remove Populist electors from the ballots.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Bryan, op. cit., p. 293, for text of the address.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 293-294.



In some areas the fusion problem was easily solved. In Kansas, for example, where fusion between Populists and Democrats had worked well in 1892, the union between the two forces was quickly accomplished. Kansas Democrats, at their state convention, voted to accept the Populist nominees for state offices in return for the People's Party supporting Democratic presidential electors.<sup>38</sup> The Populists agreed to abandon their vice-presidential candidate, and accepted the Democratic electors; and, in return, as quickly as the Democratic convention learned the names of the Populist nominees for the various state offices, they were endorsed.<sup>39</sup> Some anti-fusion Populists complained that the fusion ticket candidates were "either Democrats or ... had always been Democrats at heart though in the Populist Party."<sup>40</sup> The iconoclasts organized a Middle-of-the road Populist Party, but did not nominate a state ticket, being handicapped by the fact that whatever action they took against the fusion ticket, they would succeed primarily in aiding their hated enemy, the Republicans. They did endorse a slate of Bryan--Watson electors, however.

In Iowa another example of enthusiastic fusion occurred, which divided the electoral ticket, giving the Democrats nine electors; the Populists, two; and the Silver Republicans, one. All state offices were to go to the Democrats, with the

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<sup>38</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (August 13, 1896), 3.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>40</sup>Barr, loc. cit., p. 1192.



exception of state auditor, which was given to the Silver Republicans.<sup>41</sup> This fusion agreement was reached at a conference of the three parties, held on August 11, and it was expected that the Populist state convention would readily agree, since they had instructed their delegation at the St. Louis convention to "do all in their power to secure a union of all reform forces on a common ticket...."<sup>42</sup> The fusion agreement was ratified by the Populists at their state convention held the next month. They were apparently satisfied with their share of the prospective spoils, which was not ungenerous of the Iowa Democrats, since in 1894 the Populists had only polled 8.23 per cent of the vote in that state.<sup>43</sup>

But while fusion agreements were rather easily arranged in many states of the Middle Border, in the South it was a different story, for there the Populists suddenly found themselves on the side of the party which they had formerly opposed, against their former associates, the Republicans. In most of the states of the South the Democrats firmly refused to fuse themselves with the Populists, for they were fairly sure of victory and saw no reason to have to divide the spoils. In five states, however, fusion tickets were obtained. These were Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and North Carolina.<sup>44</sup> In Missouri, where the Populists had

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<sup>41</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (August 13, 1896), 5.

<sup>42</sup>Herman Clarence Nixon, "The Populist Movement in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXIV (January, 1926), 88.

<sup>43</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 369-370.



polled only 8.45 per cent of the vote in 1894,<sup>45</sup> the fight was especially bitter.

The Missouri Populists had expressed their feeling on the matter of fusion with their resolution against Bryan's candidacy,<sup>46</sup> but by the end of the convention were more enlightened about the trend within their party; and by the end of July the Populists were actively working for a fusion ticket. The People's Party was reportedly seeking eight of the state's seventeen presidential electors, and were willing to agree not to put a state ticket in the field against the Democrats if this condition were met.<sup>47</sup> Chairman Albert Rozzelle of the State Populist Committee was reported to favor a less arbitrary agreement with the Democrats, whereby the Populists would get four electors and the Democrats thirteen, but he and his supporters were also anxious to run a state Populist ticket.<sup>48</sup>

By the time of the state Populist convention, which was being held at Sedalia, it was observed that: "The most active workers ... among the Populists ... were Democrats," including such Democratic state notables as Governor Stone, whose reported argument was: "I want Bryan; so do you. Now why can't we each help to secure his election by giving him all the strength of both parties?"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>46</sup>See above, p. 81.

<sup>47</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 30, 1896), 4.

<sup>48</sup>Kansas City Star, XVI (July 30, 1896), 1.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



The convention was opened by Rozzelle, who acted as temporary chairman.<sup>50</sup> An immediate fight developed over the acceptance of a report by the platform committee, which called for a "union of forces with the democrats of the state on the electoral and congressional tickets."<sup>51</sup> After a considerable debate, this motion was accepted by the convention by a vote of 267 to 132, and fusion in Missouri became a fact.<sup>52</sup> A Populist state ticket was nominated, but the candidate for governor later withdrew from the race and his place was never filled, apparently in a further effort to consolidate with the Democrats.<sup>53</sup>

In Louisiana, the fusion between Republicans and Populists had endured through the state elections early in 1896; but by the time of the presidential campaign most of the Populists had successfully crossed the political party line and found themselves co-operating with their former opponents, the Democrats.<sup>54</sup> Thus the year 1896 found the People's Party in that state fused with both parties, one on the national and the other on the state ticket.

In North Carolina, where the Populist-Republican fusion of 1894 had paid rich dividends, this policy was continued, with fusion candidates nominated for all state offices except governor and lieutenant governor; while the national and

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<sup>50</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (August 6, 1896), 3.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 370.

<sup>54</sup>White, loc. cit., p. 17.



congressional ticket was fused between Populists and Democrats, in an interesting display of political adaptability.<sup>55</sup> In Arkansas, the Populists nominated their own candidates for state offices, but made no congressional nominations.<sup>56</sup>

In the far West, the National Silverites were faced with the difficulty of being without an organizational nucleus around which to organize their campaign,<sup>57</sup> and this fact helped the fusion moves by enabling the silverites to work in close co-operation with the established Populist and Democratic parties. Fusion tickets were soon set up in Montana, Washington and Idaho.<sup>58</sup> In the mountain states, where the sentiment for silver was strongest, it was not the Populists or Democrats who won, but "an illicit and slightly incongenial marriage of both to the bigamist (and opportunist) Free Silver."<sup>59</sup> But while there was little difficulty in fusing the three parties in the West on a common electoral slate, in Idaho the Populists and Democrats opposed the National Silverites on the state level, and in Montana and Nebraska the silver party was kept from the ballot on the grounds of legal obstacles.<sup>60</sup>

The importance of the silver issue in the campaign is demonstrated by the fact that one contemporary news magazine

<sup>55</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 371-372.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>57</sup>Ellis, loc. cit., p. 524.

<sup>58</sup>Hicks, op. cit., p. 370.

<sup>59</sup>William Diamond, "Urban and Rural Voting in 1896," American Historical Review, XLVI (January, 1941), 293.

<sup>60</sup>Ellis, loc. cit., p. 532.

<sup>61</sup>William Allen White, Editorial, Republica Gazette, quoted in Helen Ogden Mahin, The Editor and His People, p. 237. (Hereafter cited as Mahin, op. cit.)



devoted eight and one-half columns to the silver question, and two and one-half columns to all the other issues of the campaign. The article ended with the prophecy that McKinley would be elected and that: "With this election the coinage issue may perhaps disappear from American politics."<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps the most significant analysis of the importance of silver, however, comes from an avowed "Eastern Democrat ... unable to transform himself into an advocate either of the free coinage of silver or of populism....,"<sup>62</sup> who wrote:

One thing is clear; the time has gone by when the political movement for monetary reform which has now expressed itself in the demand of the Chicago platform for the free, independent, and unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1, can be laughed out of court with mere ridicule. ... Nothing is to be gained by simply shrieking "Populists, repudiators, and Anarchists" at those who have proved themselves numerous enough to exercise complete control over the present course of one of the great political parties of the country.<sup>63</sup>

Others saw in the silver issue a threat to the America which they knew, the status quo, which they were anxious to defend. William Allen White, the vociferous Kansas Republican editor, wrote on July 31, 1896, that: "The fight between the political parties today is for existing American institutions and against them."<sup>64</sup> White saw growing in the United States, and particularly in Kansas, "the un-American

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<sup>61</sup>Lyman Abbott, "A Summing-up of the Vital Issues of 1896," Review of Reviews, XIV (November, 1896), 544-549.

<sup>62</sup>Josiah Quincy, "Issues and Prospects in the Campaign," North American Review, CLXIII (August, 1896), 182-183.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-184.

<sup>64</sup>William Allen White, Editorial, Emporia Gazette, quoted in Helen Ogden Mahin, The Editor and His People, p. 237. (Hereafter cited as Mahin, op. cit.)



doctrine of state paternalism."<sup>65</sup> White's comments reflect vividly the attitude of the nineteenth century political conservative, and are worth examining if for no other reason than they represent the political philosophy which triumphed not too long ago.

White wrote:

It is claimed ... that when one man is weak ... the state should help him up.... It is the duty of the state to check the accumulation of one man's wealth and to end another man's poverty. They say that the man with the large fortune and the man who commits a crime are both subjects for state interference. They say that the man who is without means is the nation's ward, that he should be protected against the "oppression of wealth."

These two theories are violently antagonistic--one is American, Democratic, Saxon; the other is European, Socialistic, Latin.<sup>66</sup>

Paternalism should play no part in government, White wrote, it should be free for all, "and in the end the keenest, most frugal, and most industrious win. That, says the Republican party, is as it should be."<sup>67</sup> In another editorial, written on the eve of the election, White voices relief that the country apparently will escape "a revolution to a mild yet dangerous form of Socialism," and predicts that "the matter is settled for this generation."<sup>68</sup>

Republicans feared and distrusted the Democrats and their allies, and one prominent Republican went so far as

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 241-242.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>68</sup>William Allen White, 40 Years on Main Street, pp. 300-301, quoting an editorial.



to claim that "Mr. Bryan numbers among his followers 99 per cent of the dishonest people of the country; the men who are enemies to society and have no interest in the preservation of this country as a nation."<sup>69</sup>

This view was even shared, to some extent, by some erstwhile Populists, who saw in their former political bedfellows men "who would trade everything, anything, all things, for the hope of continuing themselves in office."<sup>70</sup> Indeed some former Populists were, by the end of the campaign, talking in the same sentences about "political combinations and traitors" and implying that anyone connected with the Bryan-Populist fusion party fitted this category.<sup>71</sup>

But in spite of all the adverse publicity of these writers, the Populists and Democrats were confident. In Kansas they issued a statement saying: "Our opponents are fighting among themselves as never before.... The conditions are ripe for proselyting. Victory is within our grasp."<sup>72</sup>

The issue would be now up to the people, and upon the outcome of the balloting would rest the future of the issue,

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<sup>69</sup>T. C. Platt, "The Effect of Republican Victory," North American Review, CLXIII (November, 1896), 514.

<sup>70</sup>"Populism," Pamphlet issued by the Middle-of-the-Road Populist Committee, in Populist Party Pamphlets, Kansas State Historical Society collection.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>"A Message and Plan for County Candidates," Headquarters, People's Party and Democratic State Committees, in Kansas State Historical Society collection, Populist Party Pamphlets.

Leavenworth Headlight, XII (November 5, 1896), 5.

<sup>75</sup>Diamond, loc. cit., p. 285.



the coalition, and the reform movement in general. The Populists had run their race, now they waited for the decision of the judges.

When the votes were counted McKinley had won, carrying every state North of the Ohio and East of the Mississippi, plus Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon and California. The Republicans won not only the executive, but also the Congress. The fusion forces, however, had won some fights, for example, in Kansas, where they swept to victory in the state contests, and gave Bryan the state's electoral votes. Bryan polled more than 12,000 votes above McKinley's total, the state fusion ticket ran nearly as well, and all the fusion congressional candidates were elected except in the first and fourth districts.<sup>73</sup> Crawford county followed the trend, giving Bryan and Sewall 4,758 votes, McKinley and Hobart 3,680 votes, and Bryan and Watson fifteen votes.<sup>74</sup> This shows how little influence the middle-of-the roaders had on the average voter.

In an analysis of the electoral vote, the predominant fact is the weakness of Bryan in the Northeast, and the strength which he showed in the rural areas. Out of a total vote of 6,493,441, the urban vote for Bryan was only 1,212,127.<sup>75</sup> In every southern state, with the exception of Virginia, Bryan's rural majorities were higher than his urban

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<sup>73</sup>Harrington, loc. cit., p. 441.

<sup>74</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XII (November 5, 1896), 5.

<sup>75</sup>Diamond, loc. cit., p. 285.



totals, and in the West, the cities tended to support the Republicans. St. Joseph, St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri; Kansas City, Kansas; and Omaha, Nebraska, all gave majorities to McKinley; it was the rural populations which turned the tide to Bryan.<sup>76</sup>

The Populist influence in the campaign corresponded to the relative radicalism of the area. In centers of Populist strength the cities were not as enthusiastic about Bryan as were the rural areas; but where the People's Party was weak Bryan tended to poll more urban votes, such as in Virginia, which was considered the weakest Populist state in the South, where the cities gave Bryan greater majorities.<sup>77</sup>

A total of twenty-eight states had worked out fusion agreements, either dividing Bryan electors or supporting the same electoral ticket. Of this number, fifteen gave majorities to these fusion tickets.<sup>78</sup> Fusion had worked, but it had not worked well enough. The battle was lost, and the future ahead was anything but bright.

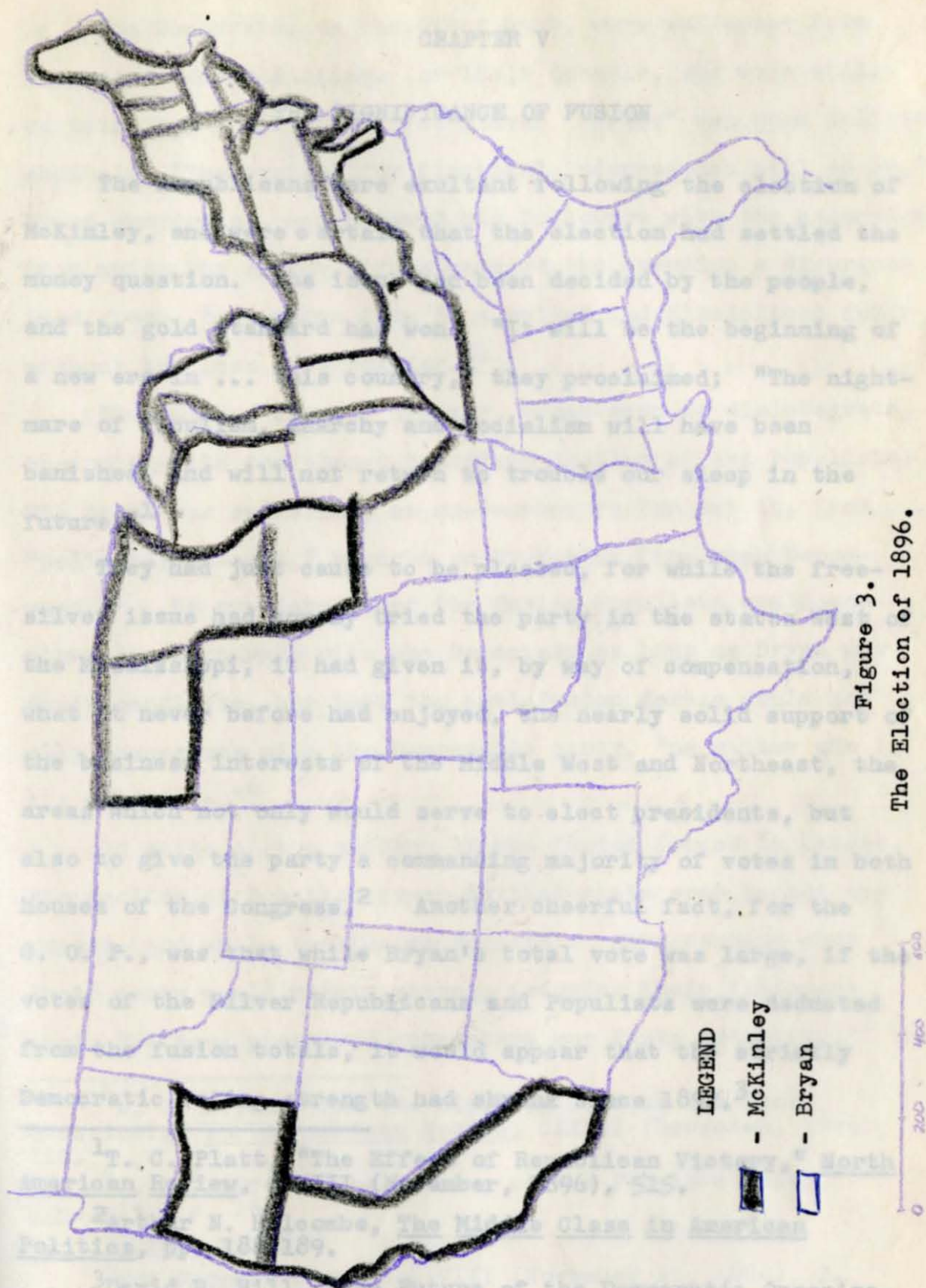
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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 302-303, and footnote 18, p. 303.

<sup>78</sup>See Appendix V.







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CHAPTER V

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FUSION

The Republicans were exultant following the election of McKinley, and were certain that the election had settled the money question. The issue had been decided by the people, and the gold standard had won. "It will be the beginning of a new era in ... this country," they proclaimed; "The nightmare of Populism, Anarchy and Socialism will have been banished, and will not return to trouble our sleep in the future."<sup>1</sup>

They had just cause to be pleased, for while the free-silver issue had sorely tried the party in the states West of the Mississippi, it had given it, by way of compensation, what it never before had enjoyed, the nearly solid support of the business interests of the Middle West and Northeast, the areas which not only would serve to elect presidents, but also to give the party a commanding majority of votes in both houses of the Congress.<sup>2</sup> Another cheerful fact, for the G. O. P., was that while Bryan's total vote was large, if the votes of the Silver Republicans and Populists were deducted from the fusion totals, it would appear that the strictly Democratic voting strength had shrunk since 1892.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>T. C. Platt, "The Effect of Republican Victory," North American Review, CLXIII (November, 1896), 515.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur N. Holcombe, The Middle Class in American Politics, pp. 188-189.

<sup>3</sup>David B. Hill, "The Future of the Democratic Organization," Forum, XXII (February, 1897), 651.



The Democrats, on the other hand, were suffering from a paucity of explanations for their debacle, and were still certain that their great free-silver "cause" was good political capital. "The contest for financial independence will go on," Bryan prophesied, and cheered his followers with the assertion that while the silver forces entered the campaign a disorganized group, "we emerge from it a united and disciplined force without the loss of a soldier."<sup>4</sup>

The "united front," however, began soon to disintegrate, beginning with the almost immediate decline of the Populists. The party was suffering, as ex-Senator Peffer put it, from "political anaemia," brought on by taking "too much Democracy."<sup>5</sup> He predicted that the fusion Populists would continue to co-operate with the Democrats as long as Bryan was their candidate, but that the anti-fusion forces would not ally themselves with the Democratic party, "no matter who is its candidate."<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the victory of the fusion forces in Kansas, the decline of Populist power in that state soon became apparent, and while the fusion Populists were certain that their party would remain strong, assuring their followers that: "We have preserved everywhere our Party integrity,"<sup>7</sup> the

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<sup>4</sup>W. J. Bryan, "Has the Election Settled the Money Question?," North American Review, CLXIII (December, 1896), 710.

<sup>5</sup>W. A. Peffer, "The Passing of the People's Party," loc. cit., p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>The Farmers Advocate, VIII (November 11, 1896), 2.



Populists soon began rapidly to desert the party's standards. Ex-Republicans soon began returning to the secure folds of their former party, not wishing to be placed in the disturbing situation of having to co-operate with Democrats in the state administration if they remained Populists, and due to the fact that the national Republican ticket had made such a significant showing.<sup>8</sup> By the year 1898 the party was not able to put up an independent fight, depending again upon fusion with the Democrats.<sup>9</sup>

Bryan's boast began to have a hollow ring. In the South, too, Populism began a noticeable decline, with the third-party forces gradually returning to the Democratic party.<sup>10</sup> While the Bryan forces did not suffer the loss of voter strength in the South that they did in the Western states, the Populist party as such was severely taxed, and by 1900 had ceased placing candidates in the field.<sup>11</sup>

Why did this sudden disintegration take place? Two reasons are paramount for the demise of Populism: First, fusion, which destroyed the party entity, by associating it with the Democrats, whose candidate it adopted; secondly, the free-silver issue, which was only a minor part of the Omaha platform, but which grew to such stature as to overshadow the other reforms of the Populists and make them a single-issue

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<sup>8</sup>Barr, loc. cit., pp. 1193.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>White, loc. cit., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



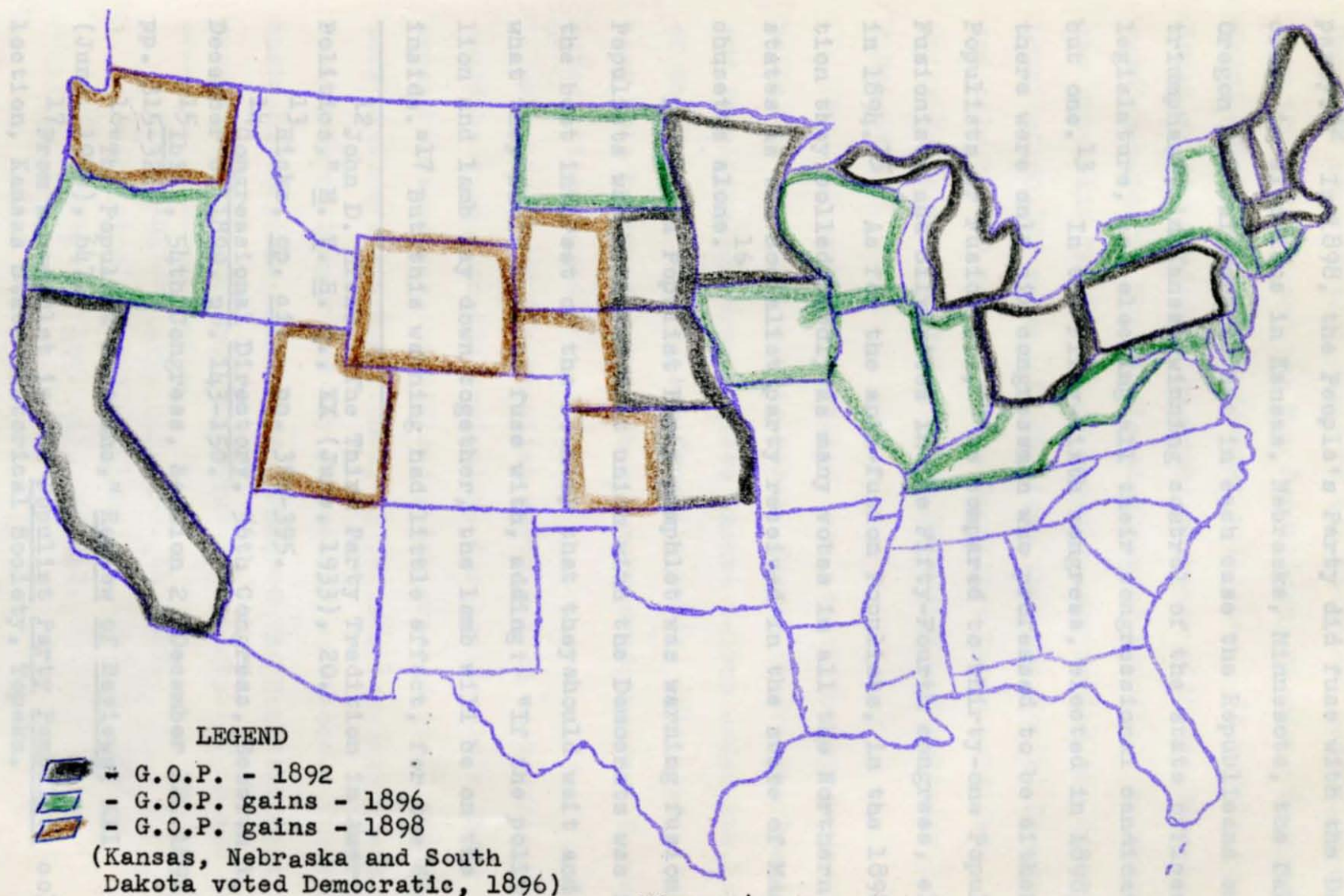


Figure 4.

Republican Gains, 1892-1898\*

0 200 400 600

\*Congressional Record, 60th Congress,  
Session 1 (May 27-30, 1908), Appendix,  
p. 172.



party.<sup>12</sup> In 1898, the People's Party did fuse with the Democrats in elections in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Oregon and California, but in each case the Republicans emerged triumphant, in Kansas winning control of the state offices and legislature, and electing all their congressional candidates but one.<sup>13</sup> In the Fifty-Sixth congress, elected in 1898, there were only six congressmen who professed to be either Populists or Fusionists,<sup>14</sup> as compared to thirty-one Populists, Fusionists and Silverites in the Fifty-Fourth congress, elected in 1894.<sup>15</sup> As for the anti-fusion Populists, in the 1898 election they polled hardly as many votes in all the Northern states as the Socialist party received in the state of Massachusetts alone.<sup>16</sup>

By 1900 a Populist Party pamphlet was warning fusion Populists who believed that union with the Democrats was in the best interest of the country that they should wait and see what they would have to fuse with, adding: "If the political lion and lamb lay down together, the lamb will be on the inside."<sup>17</sup> But this warning had little effect, for the decadent

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<sup>12</sup>John D. Hicks, "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," M. V. H. R., XX (June, 1933), 20.

<sup>13</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 394-395.

<sup>14</sup>Congressional Directory, 56th Congress, Session 1, December 8, 1899, pp. 143-150.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 54th Congress, Session 2, December 12, 1896, pp. 315-322.

<sup>16</sup>"The Populist Factions," Review of Reviews, XXI (June, 1900), 647.

<sup>17</sup>From a pamphlet in the Populist Party Pamphlets collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.



Populist organization, much of its political capital stolen from it by Bryan and the New Republican, Theodore Roosevelt, found little excuse for further existence. It meekly accepted Bryan as its candidate in 1900, together with his Democratic running-mate.<sup>18</sup> The Middle-of-the-road Populists nominated the vitriolic Tom Watson of Georgia, who polled the miserable total of 50,373 votes, 34,000 less than the Social Democrats and only 11,000 more than the Socialist Labor candidate, while Bryan was receiving 6,374,397 votes and McKinley, 7,206,677.<sup>19</sup>

By 1902 even the Populist name ceased to appear on the ballot in the state of its birth, Kansas, where the Democrats and Populists agree on a state ticket to run under the banner of the former. The Kansas Populist party, which twice had been able to command more than one hundred thousand Kansas votes, disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

The death of the Populist party was an occurrence which could be seen from the beginning, for the People's Party arose to remedy the conditions which created it,<sup>21</sup> and when this mission was accomplished, by legislation or circumstance, the party no longer had any excuse for existence. Throughout their history the people who comprised the Populist party proclaimed that if only the Republican party (if in the West),

<sup>18</sup>Harrington, loc. cit., pp. 447-448.

<sup>19</sup>Appleton's Annual Cyclopedic, 1900, p. 721.

<sup>20</sup>Harrington, loc. cit., p. 448.

<sup>21</sup>Miller, loc. cit., p. 467.



or the Democratic party (if in the South), were as good as it once was, they would vote for it again. As early as 1893 writers and political observers were forecasting that as soon as conditions improved for the farmers, as soon as they were relieved of some of the economic pressures under which they suffered, they would become reluctant "to ride forty miles in a lumber wagon through the rain to hear Mrs. Lease and General Weaver make speeches."<sup>22</sup>

More money was soon forthcoming for the farmers. The discovery of gold in Alaska increased the bullion supply. In 1895 there was \$484,728,547 in gold in circulation, by 1896, \$517,743,229, and by 1898 \$667,796,579; and this in addition to more than \$65,000,000 in silver dollars and more than \$70,000,000 in subsidiary silver coins.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the increase in the supply of standard money available, other conditions began to improve for the farmer which made him become less concerned with seeking redress through politics. As one observer put it: "Into three periods may be divided the business history of the western Mississippi Valley--settlement, extravagance, and depression. Upon a fourth it is now entering."<sup>24</sup> A new day was indeed dawning in the West, and the farmers were

<sup>22</sup>C. S. Gleed, "The True Significance of Western Unrest," Forum, XVI (October, 1893), 257.

<sup>23</sup>Appleton's Annual Encyclopedia, 1896, p. 794; 1898, p. 815.

<sup>24</sup>Charles M. Harger, "New Era in the Middle West," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XCVII (July, 1898), 276.

<sup>27</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 16, 1896), 7.



appreciating it. The crops were better, the rains had come, the prices remained high, new sowings looked favorable, the farmer was able to make a profit, and what is even more important, was able to reduce, and in many cases eliminate, the grinding burden of debt which had for so many years encumbered him.<sup>25</sup> As one observer, a mortgage broker by trade, saw it:

Instead of A farmer came into my office one day last summer wearing ragged, faded clothes, and appearing very shabby. "Look pretty tough, don't I?" he remarked, laughing. "Well, it will be better next time. I am going to buy a new suit of clothes this afternoon. I have not had a new suit of clothes for five years--just couldn't afford it. My wife has been saving her egg money, and I have kept up the taxes and interest. Now we are getting out of the woods, and I am to have a suit and she a dress from the egg-money."<sup>26</sup>

This was the crux of the matter--the farmer was "getting out of the woods," and when he did he was also getting out of the Populist party, and returning to the political fold.

There were, of course, other factors in the returning farm prosperity. Railroads, for example, became keenly aware of competition, and began enticing the farmer's business with rate reductions. The Rock Island, for example, reduced tariffs from Kansas City to Chicago for wheat and flour to thirteen cents per hundredweight; corn and oats, eleven cents; and flax and millet, fourteen cents; while the Missouri Pacific reduced rates to St. Louis to eight cents for wheat and flour and nine for flax and millet.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. loc. cit., pp. 1115-1116.

<sup>27</sup>Pittsburg Headlight, XI (July 16, 1896), 7.



Diversification of agriculture played a great part in the return of prosperity to the Middle Border states, with the introduction of crops more suitable to the land. The farmer's "egg-money" illustrates a vital source of revenue to many farmers, while the monthly milk check, in payment for milk purchased by dairies, constituted another source of income. Instead of relying entirely upon wheat or corn, the farmers began raising cattle, which could subsist upon the prairie grass much easier than the plow could break through it, and began planting such crops as kaffir corn which thrived during periods of drought which would have killed many other crops. In the crop-year of 1897, for example, nearly ten million dollars worth of kaffir corn was harvested from western fields.<sup>28</sup>

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The phenomenon of the Populist party was not that it came into being, wrote a platform of reforms, and then succumbed; this happened to the Liberal Republican, Independent Reform, Greenback, Anti-Monopoly and other parties founded following the Civil War, as well as the Populists.<sup>29</sup> The thing that makes the Populist party unique is the change which it wrought upon its members, and through fusion with other parties, ultimately upon them also. The strength of the Populist party was never in its million or so members,

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<sup>28</sup>Harger, loc. cit., p. 280.

<sup>29</sup>Barr, loc. cit., pp. 1115-1116.



but in the influence which these people and their ideas had on the rest of the American public; else how could this rather small number have had such widespread effect upon American political life. The very life of the party hung by a thread in 1896, yet its position was vitally important to both the older parties. How close Populism came in 1896 to being almost completely forgotten by the mass of the American electorate was pointed out by Senator W. E. Chandler, who wrote that: "The Populists would have made little figure with their demonstration," if the Republicans had stood for "sound money as defined and understood by the great mass of the Republicans ...," and the Democrats for "sound money as understood by the Cleveland Democrats."<sup>30</sup> This did not occur, however, and the Populists were spared--to die after the campaign, when Bryan, "driven to seek a home among the Populists ... brought trouble to his kind hosts..."<sup>31</sup>

The effect of the Populists in 1896 was so great that one analyst, writing more than a half-century after the pressures of the campaign, could conclude that: "The Populist spirit captured the Democratic party in 1896..."<sup>32</sup> This was apparent to contemporaries, also, one of whom wrote: "the fact cannot be disguised that the success of free silver at

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<sup>30</sup>W. E. Chandler, "Issues and Prospects in the Campaign," North American Review, CLXIII (August, 1896), 175-176.

<sup>31</sup>Andrew Carnegie, "Mr. Bryan, the Conjuror," North American Review, CLXIV (January, 1897), 109.

<sup>32</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, pp. 4-5.

<sup>36</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 407-408.

<sup>37</sup>Barr, loc. cit., pp. 1194-1195.



Chicago meant the birth of a new party.... Almost the only link which connects it traditionally with the old Democratic party is the candidate for the Vice-Presidency..."<sup>33</sup> Gold Democrats were among the first to recognize this change, not only in the platform, but in the spirit of their party. They charged that the Chicago convention was a "repudiation of old and well-established Democratic principles and the substitution of new and dangerous populist doctrines in their stead."<sup>34</sup>

The accomplishments of the "new party," which Mrs. Bryan could list with pride as being the causes which her husband championed, have a curiously familiar ring. She listed the federal income tax, direct election of senators, woman suffrage, a Department of Labor in the president's cabinet, more strict railroad regulation, currency reform, state initiative and referendum, and others.<sup>35</sup> Compare these with planks from the Omaha platform which later were enacted into law:

1. The Australian Ballot.
2. Direct election of Senators.
3. Initiative, Referendum and Recall.
4. Federal Reserve Act.
5. Warehouse Act of 1916 (the sub-treasure plan).
6. National control of Railroads and Telegraph.
7. Conservation of Natural Resources.
8. Income tax.<sup>36</sup>

As one contemporary writer put it: "We no longer recognize the divine right of wealth and cussedness."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup>"Mr. Bryan's New Radical Party," Review of Reviews, XIV (October, 1896), 391.

<sup>34</sup>Hill, loc. cit., p. 644. The writer was a New York Senator, and a supporter of the Cleveland faction in 1896.

<sup>35</sup>Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, p. 195.

<sup>36</sup>Hicks, op. cit., pp. 407-408.

<sup>37</sup>Barr, loc. cit., pp. 1194-1195.



These were the direct political accomplishments of the People's Party, not direct in the sense that they were strong enough to enact them into law, but direct in the sense that the Populists were the ones who publicized these issues, took them before the public on thousands of stump speeches, made them to some degree "respectable" to the American people; and while the Populists party was falling to pieces, carried them to the other parties, where they took firm root, and thrived in the hearts of Republicans and Democrats who such a short time before had been bitterly fighting against these very things.

In this manner the relatively few people who actually were active Populists were able to make their ideas known to, and eventually respected by, the majority of the American people. The Populist organization "fulfilled its third-party function. It transferred one of the major parties, had a sharp impact on the other, and in the not too long run saw most of its program become law."<sup>38</sup> The People's Party was the first organization to bring before the American people in a full-scale campaign the great reform issues of the nineteenth century, the ideas which have become so firmly imbedded into the political consciousness of the twentieth; and they were the first group which placed these reform programs before the nation with the hope of ultimately securing relief through legislation for the ills which they saw and the grievances which they felt.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 108.

<sup>39</sup>Peffer, "The Passing of the People's Party," loc. cit., p. 14.



The fact that they were successful in this is illustrative of the profound influence which the publicizing of these ideas had on the other parties, which, rather than the Populists, were given the task of putting the proposed reforms into execution. As far as political power is concerned, Populism was a failure, for, as Professor Hicks said: "The Populist Party lived only to die."<sup>40</sup>

But there was something beyond the mere enumeration of political strength, the mere counting of ballots on election day, the mere numbering of members in the organization. The Populist movement, in this respect did die, but in another and perhaps a greater sense the movement lived on, for, as Hicks continues: "But Populism was good on diagnosis, even when it was faulty on prescription. As an educational movement it was a great success."<sup>41</sup>

This is undoubtedly the central point in the importance of the influence of Populism on the American people. Populism awakened the American people to the study of the problems of the time in which they lived, and by so doing stimulated the greatest interest in economics which the United States has seen.<sup>42</sup> When a Populist speaker finished talking about the evils of Wall Street and the need for controlling the railroads, people thought about what was said, whether they

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<sup>40</sup>Hicks, "The Farmer Protests--Populism," in Earl Schenck Miers, The American Story, p. 224.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Tracy, loc. cit., p. 248.



agreed with the speaker or not, and many were introduced in this manner to the idea of reform in government who formerly had been complacent in the status quo. The influence of Coin's Financial School and the many other books on free-silver economics and finance published by the Populists and their supporters was felt in thousands of homes, and these volumes were read and discussed by many thousands of people who never voted for the Populist ticket. As Tracy observed, in 1893: "The whole country has been filled with the desire and spirit of investigation, and questions respecting finance and governmental functions have been studied by men and women as they are studied nowhere else in the world."<sup>43</sup> Would this have occurred if the Populists had not first publicized monetary reform on the basis of free silver and suggested reforms in the role of government in relation to the individual welfare? This is a question for speculation.

Hindsight often makes experts of even the most unobservant, but hindsight also is valuable for the supposition at hand. That the Populists were first to demonstrate, in 1892, that great political capital could be made of the free silver issue has been indicated, and that a money problem existed even before the rise of Populism has been shown; the problem remains, would the silver issue have become as dominant, with its resulting influence upon the thinking of a great segment of the American people, if Populism had not existed. The

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.



most logical answer seems to be probably not, for Populism served as the catalyst which caused the reaction between silver miners in the West, farmers in the Middle Border, and farmers of a different stamp in the South to make, in 1892, a strong impression on the Democracy, which saw, in the more than one million Populist votes, a lever by which to break the hold of the conservative Northeastern faction of their party. The Populists served to stimulate the silverites within the Democratic party to renewed vigor, which ultimately led to the "Cross of Gold," and to 1896.

In many other respects the Populists were great educators, and continued their educational influence through fusion with other groups. In the realm of the relationship between the individual and the government Populism introduced new ideas and new concepts into the thinking of the nineteenth century. The idea that the federal government has some responsibility for the common weal was first introduced into modern American political thinking by the People's Party,<sup>44</sup> and the members of the party, when they returned to the Republican or Democratic camps, following the decline of Populism, retained their conviction that government intervention for the public good was essential for the general welfare, even though the official stand of the two parties at that time did not favor those ideas.

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<sup>44</sup>Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup>Hicks, "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," loc. cit., p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Alice C. Rosselle.



The political philosophy of the American farmer was greatly altered by Populism, and the idea of government assurance of equal economic opportunity and the necessity of government intervention remained even after Populism had gone.<sup>45</sup>

The Populists' principles thoroughly infected the Democratic party, which, under Bryan's leadership "was nearly as much Populist as Democratic."<sup>46</sup> With the decline of Populist strength and the switching of loyalties from the dying People's Party to the revived Democracy under its new reform platform of Chicago, new life was infused into the Democratic organization. The one-time Populists found a welcome place in the Democratic machine, where their views were accepted and their support sought by their former opponents. In Missouri, for example, the former state Populist chairman, Albert Rozzelle, was appointed by a grateful Democratic state administration to the post of State Labor Commissioner for his aid in securing fusion between the two groups in that state in 1896, and he later became an active supporter of the Bryan brand of Democracy in the state, acting as a state campaign director for the Nebraskan during the 1900 race.<sup>47</sup> Even the vitriolic former senator, W. A. Peffer of Kansas, after an unsuccessful try for the governorship of that state as a Prohibitionist, eventually returned to the Republican ranks, for, as he observed in an editorial, "The same conditions that bred

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<sup>45</sup>Clevenger, loc. cit., p. 44.

<sup>46</sup>Hicks, "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," loc. cit., p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Alice C. Rozzelle.



Populism operated to extend its influence not only into the ranks of the Democrats, but among Republicans as well."<sup>48</sup>

The influence of Populist ideas on the Democrats was sufficient to stifle the conservative element of that group, and retain the principles of the Chicago platform through the campaign of 1900, when the Populist element was given credit for being the "greatest obstacle" to blocking the success of the conservative Eastern faction within the party in their attempt to regain control at the 1900 convention.<sup>49</sup> While the Populists did hold an independent nominating convention, at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, they astutely remembered the mistake of 1896, and this time met in advance of the Democratic convention. They nominated Bryan and again advanced a free-silver platform. When the Democrats also nominated Bryan and adopted the same platform they had placed themselves in the position of merely seconding the Populist nomination, for the People's Party had "nominated the presidential candidate for the Democratic party and dictated its platform."<sup>50</sup> Far from the position in which they found themselves in 1896, they had, by anticipating the Democrats, made the latter "merely the endorsers of the Populist candidate and programme."<sup>51</sup> While this is perhaps an over-evaluation of the strength of the Populists at that time, the fact remains that it was

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<sup>48</sup>The Farmers Advocate, VIII (November 11, 1896), 4.

<sup>49</sup>"The Populist Factions," loc. cit., p. 647.

<sup>50</sup>"The Presidential Situation," Review of Reviews, XXI (June, 1900), 648.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," loc. cit., p. 20.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.



Populist ideas which the Democrats adopted again in 1900 and not the ideas of the conservatives, in spite of the defeat of the Bryan group four years earlier. Thus it would seem that Populism, while politically dead as an independent party, still retained considerable influence on the Democrats, and had advanced considerably in the ten years since they had first adopted their Omaha platform.

The immediate effects upon the Grand Old Party, while not so direct as upon the Democracy, were fully as pronounced, and while the Republicans during this period on the national level still opposed the basic Populist doctrines, fusion with the Democrats had given the Populists a strength greatly out of proportion to their numbers, and they used this strength to influence the Republicans in the national government. Populists within the Republican ranks by 1898, brought there through the distaste many former Republican Populists had with working with the Democrats which they would have had to do if they had remained in their fused party, have been credited with being one of the principal reasons for McKinley's decision to fight the war with Spain in 1898, to forestall a threatened Populist outburst in the ranks of his own party.<sup>52</sup> The influence of Populist ideas within the Grand Old Party ranks has also been credited with the rise to prominence of Theodore Roosevelt,<sup>53</sup> whose espousal of many Populist ideas caused concern in the minds of many of the more conservative Republican leaders.

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<sup>52</sup>Hicks, "The Third Party Tradition in American Politics," *loc. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*



The progressive movement, which Roosevelt headed, and which so drastically altered Republican political thinking in the early twentieth century, had its beginnings in the Populist movement, and the influence which this movement had on the Republicans; and many of the planks of the reform platform of the progressives can be traced back to the Populists, such as the direct election of senators, the income tax, anti-trust action, the initiative and referendum, and others.<sup>54</sup>

The similarities between the traditional Republican policy of protectionism, with its stress on home markets and aid to home producers, and the Populist doctrine of government aid for domestic farm producers are more pronounced than many writers on this period have admitted; and the similarities between the two may have been tacitly accepted by the Republicans as early as 1896, for while the Republicans in the Northeast opposed the Populists, they seemingly lent their approval to Populist-Republican fusion efforts "wherever any political advantage was to be gained."<sup>55</sup> As one bitter "gold-bug" Democrat explained: "It seems, from a Republican point of view, that Populism is dangerous only when it coalesces with the Democracy."<sup>56</sup>

As early as 1894 the Populists had begun to exert their influence on the Republicans on the state level, particularly in Kansas, where the Republicans had been thoroughly shaken

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<sup>54</sup>Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny, pp. 75-76.

<sup>55</sup>Hill, loc. cit., p. 657.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



by the People's Party victory in 1892. Following their return to power in 1894 the Grand Old Party was not as flagrant in their disrespect for the multitude of farmers which comprised much of the electorate in Kansas; they "heeded the voice of the people, and the ideals of the people were more nearly achieved than before."<sup>57</sup> But the change was not sufficient, apparently, for the Kansas Grand Old Party was again unseated in 1896. The people wanted more evidence of conformity than the Republicans at that time were willing to show, for the state party was still dominated by an extreme conservatism.

The Republican view of Kansas Populism was perhaps most eloquently expressed by William Allen White, whose bitter anti-Populist editorials made him the recognized spokesman for the Republicans throughout the state, and eventually gained him nationwide recognition. White called the Populists "the American socialists," and alleged that they were "unhampered by scruples."<sup>58</sup> Accusing the Populists of seeking an Utopia, he claimed that if the people of Kansas could be put to work, "at reasonably profitable work," the Populists "will be in search of an employment bureau."<sup>59</sup> At the very time this was being written (March, 1897), Kansas was already entering upon the fourth period of Western history, and conditions were already beginning to improve. The Populists

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<sup>57</sup>Walbourn, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>58</sup>W. A. White, "Kansas, Its Present and Its Future," Forum, XXIII (March, 1897), 77.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 79.



remained for White, however, the personification of their candidates, which he had described in his famous editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas." In this attack upon the People's Party he described one of the party's candidates for state office as follows: "We have another shabby, wild-eyed, rattle-brained fanatic who has said openly in a dozen speeches that 'the rights of the user are paramount to the rights of the owner;' we are running him for chief justice."<sup>60</sup>

Only ten years later, a far different William Allen White, representing a far different brand of Republicanism, wrote: "Judge Doster was right, but he was out too early in the season and his views got frost bitten."<sup>61</sup> The occasion for this public retraction on White's part was an article written by Andrew Carnegie, in which Carnegie reportedly echoed the same philosophy which White such a short time before had derided. White wrote: "If Andrew Carnegie in the campaign of 1896 had said what he is quoted as saying today, he would have precipitated a panic, or a riot, or both...."<sup>62</sup> On another occasion White wrote:

The other day a pamphlet came to the Gazette which seemed about the right thing. It was going after railroad discrimination. It seemed sane and calm and well poised. The man who wrote it seemed to have his head full of fact ground through the wheels of logic. When, lo, and behold, the pamphlet was written and

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<sup>60</sup> White, op. cit., p. 298, contains the full text of this famous editorial.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Ibid., op. cit., p. 275 (Quoting editorial, April 11, 1905).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>65</sup> Congressional Record, 60th Congress, Session 1, May 27-30, 1908, Appendix, pp. 266-268.



printed in 1890, and was written by Percy Daniels! The Populist Lieutenant Governor of Kansas, 1893. The sun do move. This is a funny world!<sup>63</sup>

In another article, written in 1909, White attacks another old Populist enemy, the trust, saying:

Just now in America great corporate combinations of capital in the trusts--the sneaking sugar trust, the criminal oil trust, the sandbagging steel trust, the greedy wool trust, the nefarious tobacco trust, the diabolical lumber trust--are robbing the American people.<sup>64</sup>

In only ten years the Populists had risen from "wild-eyed, rattle-brained fanatics" to political philosophers who were "sane, calm and well poised." Truly the influence which the Populist ideas brought to bear on this one Kansas Republican was tremendous. And the most unusual thing about it is the fact that it was not rare. The entire party, by 1904 was standing behind these very ideas, and both the Republicans and Democrats had forsaken the conservatism of the nineteenth century for the progressivism of the twentieth.

By 1908, for example, twenty-seven states had already ratified the proposed constitutional amendment calling for direct election of United States Senators. Of this number there were both Republican and Democratic-controlled states, as well as one brand-new state, Oklahoma. The list includes states where the Populists had been strong, such as Kansas, and others where their direct influence had been negligible, such as Indiana.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Mahin, op. cit., p. 275 (Quoting editorial, April 11, 1905).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>65</sup>Congressional Record, 60th Congress, Session 1, May 27-30, 1908, Appendix, pp. 266-268.



Soon the reforms which the Populists had wanted were law. The fusion had become complete--had become in fact union, and with this union of members had come an assimilation of ideas which enriched and benefited both the Republicans and Democrats, and which brought ultimate triumph to the Populists.

The triumph of Populist ideas was brought about by fusion's influence. The Populists themselves were not strong enough to force their demands directly through by legislation, because they were too few to elect a controlling block in the Congress. Their allies were only temporary, and their greatest alliance was made on an issue which in a few years had no basis, and was soon forgotten. It was by the influence which they exerted on the other parties, following 1896, and on the American electorate throughout their entire career, that Populism was able to make its move, and was able to do so then more readily because the Populists had already begun the great campaign of education which prepared the American people for the radical innovations which were soon being legislated by co-operative congressmen of both parties.

Without fusion the Populists of the nineteenth century would probably have been like the Socialists of the twentieth--a small group urging a series of political changes upon an American people which, on the whole, was unwilling to accept their basic tenets. By fusion, however, the Populists were able to accomplish something which the Socialists have been much less able to do, legitimize their proposals with the label



of an old, respected, and powerful political organization. The Populists were Machiavellians--they were concerned with achieving their desired ends, without concern for the means by which they were to be achieved. If their achievement meant the destruction of their party, the party must be destroyed. If their achievement necessitated fusion with former enemies, fusion there must be. And if in fusion lay the means by which their principles would be brought into concrete existence, then fusion would be the great salvation of Populism, for the principles would live even if the party itself had to die. For, after all--"Parties ... are born for principles, not principles for parties, they are merely ladders upon which truth and wisdom may climb for a season."<sup>66</sup>

This was the great idea of Populism, that it is the ideal, the principle that is important, and not the party label. And this is the great contribution of the Populists, who believed that ideas and beliefs, not parties, were the most important part of American democracy; and if by changing one's political loyalty, even by deserting or destroying one's party, the desired goals could be reached, then this was not only the right but the obligatory thing to do.

The two parties have changed much since the 1890's, have adopted new ideas and revised old ones to conform to the wishes of the American people, and have worked to bring to America a new concept of the role of government in the

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<sup>66</sup>Diggs, op. cit., p. 58.



lives of citizens, and a new interpretation of the Constitution of the United States. That the Populists were responsible for a part of this is accepted by most historians--that by fusion the Populists were able to play this part should be an important lesson to anyone interested in political reform. The Populists fulfilled a definite need in the 1890's, a need for reform and publicity for reform. The day has not yet come when that need has ceased to exist.

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Mrs. Alice C. Rozzelle, Webb City, Missouri, wife of the former state chairman of the Populist Party in Missouri.

APPENDICES

Continued on page 130.



APPENDIX I

Ocala Demands, December, 1890<sup>1</sup>

1. a. We demand the abolition of national banks.  
b. We demand that the government shall establish sub-treasuries or depositories in the several states....  
c. We demand that the amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.
2. We demand that Congress shall pass such laws as will effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions....
3. We condemn the silver bill recently passed by Congress and demand in lieu thereof **APPENDICES** and unlimited coinage of silver.
4. We demand the passage of laws prohibiting alien ownership of land....
5. Believing in the doctrine of equal rights for all and special privileges to none, we demand--
  - a. That our national legislation shall be so framed in the future as not to build up one industry at the expense of another.
  - b. We further demand a removal of the existing heavy tariff tax from the necessities of life, that the poor of our land must have.
  - c. We further demand a just and equitable system of graduated tax on incomes.
  - d. We ... demand that all national and state revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.
6. We demand the most rigid, honest, and just state and national government control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation, and if this control and supervision does not remove the abuse now existing, we demand the government ownership of such means of communication and transportation.

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<sup>1</sup>Commager, op. cit., pp. 142-143.



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---

<sup>1</sup>Commager, op. cit., pp. 142-143.



7. We demand that the Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each state.

FINANCE. - We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the federal government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations; a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed 1 cent per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or a better system; also to provide in discharge of its obligations for public expenditures.

1. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.

2. We demand that the volume of circulation medium be speedily increased to \$100 per capita.

3. We demand a graduated income tax.

4. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

5. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

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<sup>1</sup>Comrager, op. cit., pp. 144-145.



## APPENDIX II

### Financial planks, Populist Party Platform, 1892<sup>1</sup>

FINANCE. - We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations; a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed 2 per cent per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or a better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvement.

1. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.

2. We demand that the amount of circulation medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.

3. We demand a graduated income tax.

4. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

5. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

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<sup>1</sup>Commager, op. cit., pp. 144-145.



### APPENDIX III

#### Financial Plank, Republican Platform, 1896<sup>1</sup>

The Republican party is unreservedly for sound money. It caused the enactment of a law providing for the resumption of specie payments in 1879. Since then every dollar has been as good as gold. We are unalterably opposed to every measure calculated to debase our currency or impair the credit of our country. We are therefore opposed to the free coinage of silver, except by international arrangement with the leading commercial nations of the earth, which agreement we pledge ourselves to promote, and until such agreement can be obtained the existing gold standard must be maintained. All of our silver and paper currency must be maintained at parity with gold, and we favor all measures designated to maintain inviolable the obligations of the United States, of all our money, whether coin or paper, at the present standard of most enlightened nations of the world....

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<sup>1</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 174.

We demand the free and unlimited coinage of both silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1 without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation. We demand that the standard silver dollar shall be a full legal tender, equally with gold for all debts, public and private, and we favor such legislation as will prevent for the future the demonetization of any kind of legal tender money by private contract.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Congressional Globe, 42nd Congress, Session 3, 1872-1873, 868-874 for a discussion of the demonetizing of silver. In spite of the contention that it was done without the "knowledge" of the American people the debates on the issue in Congress were quite public. The thing the lawmakers did not know, and the people were equally ignorant, was that the price of silver was soon to drop so precipitously.

<sup>2</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 178.



#### APPENDIX IV

##### Financial Plank, Democratic Platform, 1896

We declare that the act of 1873 demonetizing silver<sup>1</sup> without the knowledge or approval of the American people has resulted in the appreciation of gold and a corresponding fall in the prices of commodities produced by the people; a heavy increase in the burdens of taxation and of all debts, public and private; the enrichment of the money-lending class at home and abroad; the prostration of industry and impoverishment of the people.

We are unalterably opposed to monometallism which has locked fast the prosperity of an industrial people in the paralysis of hard times. Gold monometallism is a British policy, and its adoption has brought other nations into financial servitude to London. It is not only un-American but anti-American, and it can be fastened on the United States only by the stifling of that spirit and love of liberty which proclaimed our political independence in 1776 and won it in the War of the Revolution.

We demand the free and unlimited coinage of both silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1 without waiting for the aid or consent of any other nation. We demand that the standard silver dollar shall be a full legal tender, equally with gold for all debts, public and private, and we favor such legislation as will prevent for the future the demonetization of any kind of legal tender money by private contract.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>See Congressional Globe, 42nd Congress, Session 3, 1872-1873, 668-674 for a discussion of the demonetizing of silver. In spite of the contention that it was done without the "knowledge" of the American people the debates on the issue in Congress were quite public. The thing the law-makers did not know, and the people were equally ignorant, was that the price of silver was soon to drop so precipitously.

<sup>2</sup>Commager, op. cit., p. 178.



# APPENDIX V

## Fusion Electoral Tickets, 1896<sup>1</sup>

States	Democratic electors	Populist electors	States	Democratic electors	Populist electors
Arkansas	5	3	Missouri	13	4
California	5	4	Montana	1	2
Colorado	2	1	Nebraska	4	4
Connecticut	5	1	New Jersey	9	1
Idaho	2	1	North Carolina	5	6
Illinois	20	4	North Dakota	-	3*
Indiana	10	5	Ohio	18	5
Iowa	10	3	Oregon	2*	2
Kansas	10*	-	Pennsylvania	28	4
Kentucky	11	2	Utah	1	2
Louisiana	4	4	Washington	2	2
Massachusetts	13	2	West Virginia	4	2
Michigan	9	4	Wisconsin	9	3
Minnesota	4	5	Wyoming	2	1

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\*Kansas - The Democratic ticket was endorsed by the Populists, the electors to vote as they pleased for vice-president.

\*North Dakota - Populists endorsed the Democratic electors in return for state officers.

\*Oregon - One Silver Republican elector.

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<sup>1</sup>Appleton's Annual Encyclopedia, 1896, p. 770.