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The Socialist Party of North Dakota, 1902-1918

Jackson K. Putnam

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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF NORTH DAKOTA,
1902-1918

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota

By
Jackson K. Putnam
"

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
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This thesis, submitted by Jackson K. Putnam in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, is hereby approved by the Committee of Instruction in charge of his work.

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CHAPTER I
AGRARIAN DISCONTENT AND THE RISE OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY

Early in 1916 a representative of the United States Chamber of Commerce traveling through North Dakota saw so little labor and social unrest in the state that he called it "a little paradise."¹ He may have been an able Chamber of Commerce spokesman, but he was certainly an inept observer. At the very time that he spoke the state literally seethed with unrest, and only a few months later the state administration was captured by that unique political organization, the Nonpartisan League. This historic event was hailed as the emancipation of the farmer on one hand and excoriated as the establishment of socialism on the other. Actually, of course, it was neither. It was instead the political climax to decades of agrarian discontent that had been rumbling throughout North Dakota and the midwest.

The primary source of discontent in North Dakota centered around wheat, the primary cash crop. The best hard and durum wheat in the world, it was in constant demand, and the farmer was constantly increasing his production. But constantly increasing also was his financial insecurity

¹ Robert P. Wilkins, "North Dakota and the European War, 1914-1917, A Study in Public Opinion" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of West Virginia, 1954), 7.

and indebtedness, and he had long suspected that he was being robbed of the just dividends of his labor by the middleman whom he regarded as both useless and omnipresent.² These suspicions were at least partially justified, for the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, which was the middleman in the case, held an economic upper hand over the North Dakota farmer by its effective monopoly of the grain trade.³ The membership of the Chamber of Commerce controlled all aspects of this trade--line elevators, terminal elevators, grain traders, and commission houses--in a closed combine dominated by a few corporations and interlocking directorates who fixed prices and dictated policy as they saw fit, and consolidated their monopoly by connivance with the railroads.⁴ In addition to operating such "combinations in restraint of trade" the Chamber of Commerce also indulged in outright illegal practices.

² Robert Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the Nonpartisan League" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1941) 32-45.

³ Herbert E. Gaston, The Nonpartisan League (New York, 1920), Chap. III-V.; Charles E. Russell, The Story of the Nonpartisan League, A Chapter in American Evolution (New York, 1920), Chap. II-V; Andrew A. Bruce, Non-Partisan League (New York, 1921), Chap. V.; Robert L. Morlan, "The Political History of the Nonpartisan League" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1949), 7-12, hereafter cited as Morlan, "Nonpartisan League;" Robert L. Morlan, Political Prairie Fire, the Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922 (Minneapolis, 1955), 6-16, hereafter cited as Morlan, Prairie Fire.

⁴ Morlan, "Nonpartisan League," 7-12; Morlan, Prairie Fire, 6-7.

These included false grading, excessive dockage, and fraudulent weighing of grain which, according to one estimate, cost the North Dakota farmers as much as \$55,000,000 a year.⁵ Moreover, the profits of the grain growers were reduced by a multiplicity of commission charges, and a highly questionable "switching fee" of \$1.50 per car which, though seldom charged by the railroads, was invariably extracted from the farmer by the grain handler.⁶ As if to rub salt in the farmer's economic wounds, the terminal elevator men utilized their monopoly powers not only to force upward to some extent the price of wheat after it had passed out of the farmer's hands, but, by a miraculous process of mixing different grades in special "grain hospitals" they converted wheat which the farmer had been forced to sell as inferior grade into "No. 2" and "No. 1 hard" which brought the highest prices on the market.⁷

The railroads victimized the farmers by rate discrimination and unjust demurrage charges.⁸ But next to

⁵ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 9-10. This estimate was made by Professor Edwin F. Ladd of the North Dakota Agricultural College, and, though it was supposedly carefully calculated it was probably a bit exaggerated, or at least misleading. It was based partially on the assumption that the farmer would utilize to maximum advantage the by-products of his grain--bran, and shorts--if these were returned to him by the elevators.

⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

⁷ Ibid., 12-15.

⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

the grain trader the farmer's main grievance was against the banker. Because of falling margins of profit on his grain and rising costs of production, the farmer needed to expand and improve his farming operations. To do this he needed easy credit--long term loans at low interest rates; what he got was a tightening of credit--excessively high interest rates, short term loans, and no amortization.⁹ Although the North Dakota law defined usury as interest charges of more than ten per cent, the debtor had to sue if he wanted redress, and even if he won his case, he was likely to find himself blacklisted for future loans.¹⁰ Thus banks in the state charged an average interest rate of eleven per cent, and, thanks to fees and special charges, rates as high as twenty-five to fifty per cent were not uncommon.¹¹ Merchants, especially machinery dealers, also took a leaf from the banker's book and charged prices that sometimes netted them profits of "twenty-five to one-hundred per cent above normal levels."¹² The not unexpected outcome of these practices was a snowballing increase in mortgage indebtedness. In 1890 the average debt of a mortgaged farm in the state was \$902; by

⁹ Bahmer, 75-87.

¹⁰ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 18.

¹¹ Ibid., 17; Russell, 24-27.

¹² Morlan, Nonpartisan League, 32-33; Morlan, Prairie Fire, 17-18.

1910 it was \$2493. Whereas in 1900 thirty-one per cent of the North Dakota farms carried such mortgages, by 1910 slightly more than fifty per cent were mortgaged, a higher percentage of indebtedness than found in any other state, save Iowa and Wisconsin.¹³ Finally, to head the list of the North Dakota farmer's financial woes, his tax rate also showed a steady annual increase.¹⁴ But by 1910 this new burden did not affect some fourteen per cent of the farmers of the state, for they had by that time become tenants on the land they once owned.¹⁵ Thus to an already impressive list of agricultural problems in North Dakota, there was added a new one-tenancy. The prospect for a full realization of the American agrarian ideal, a countryside dotted with family-owned, family-sized farms, seemed in North Dakota to have gone glimmering.

Naturally this worsening position of the North Dakota farmer colored the politics of the period. And he, like his counterparts throughout the Midwest, traveled the familiar route of the Grange, the Greenback Party, the Alliance, the Peoples Party, and Free Silver, in a frustrating quest for the rainbow of economic relief. In 1892 the farmers succeeded in electing a Populist governor,

¹³ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 5.

¹⁴ Bahmer, 87-91.

¹⁵ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 5-6.

Eli C. Shortridge, under whose administration the first abortive attempt was made to cure the injustices of the grain trade, by building a state owned, state operated terminal elevator at Duluth, Minnesota or West Superior, Wisconsin.¹⁶ But for the most part, the state of North Dakota remained a political province of the Republican Party whose grand sachem, Alexander McKenzie, was able to frustrate nearly every movement for reform. McKenzie controlled the Republican Party of the state through patronage and favoritism and he dominated the choice of candidates for political office. He enjoyed the full support of the Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railroads whom he unfailingly protected in matters of taxation and rate regulation.¹⁷ After the brief eruption of populist insurgency, the McKenzie machine quietly regained control in 1894 and remained in possession of the state government for over a decade. But in 1906 the farmers supported the urban progressives and elected to the Governorship the progressive Democrat, John Burke.¹⁸

Burke was reelected twice, and during his administrations many reforms were enacted such as railroad

¹⁶ Ray Goldberg, The Nonpartisan League (Fargo, N. Dak., 1948), 8-9.

¹⁷ Bahmer, 370-71.

¹⁸ Charles W. Glaab, "John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement" (unpublished M. A. thesis University of North Dakota, 1952), 47-84.

regulation, pure food and drug acts, laws for senatorial preferential primaries, presidential primaries, initiative, referendum, and recall.¹⁹ But progressivism in North Dakota, like progressivism elsewhere in the nation, was geared to the needs of an urban not rural population. After six years of Burke's regime the farmers had gained little apparent relief from their economic difficulties, and they began to suspect that neither the progressives nor the stalwarts of either party were much concerned with their special problems.²⁰ Actually Burke's administration devoted considerable energy to remedying the farmer's economic ills,²¹ and in Congress North Dakota's progressives and stalwarts alike actively promoted the farmer's interests with proposals for taxes on grain futures, federal grading laws, rural credit laws and the like.²² But such actions produced few tangible results, for, to the North Dakota farmer, the injustices of the grain trade appeared as severe, and the burden of his mortgage seemed as heavy as before.

It was probably this political disillusionment that

¹⁹ Ibid., Chap. III-IV.

²⁰ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 5.

²¹ Glaab, Chap. III-IV.

²² Morlan, Prairie Fire, 13-15; North Dakota's congressional delegation at this time: Senator McCumber, Stalwart; and progressives: Senator Gronna; Representatives Norton, Young, and Helgeson. All were Republicans.

caused the farmers to pin their hopes upon more purely economic movements such as the American Society of Equity and the Farmers Union. The former organization was designed to secure profitable farm prices through controlled and orderly marketing, and its main rallying cry was "dollar wheat." The organization became quite popular in the state by 1907 under the vigorous leadership of T. G. Nelson who was instrumental in the establishment of a farmers marketing cooperative called the Equity Cooperative Exchange.²³ This organization, under the fiery and able leadership of George Loftus enhanced the prestige of the American Society of Equity in North Dakota by the simple expedient of providing the leadership for the perennial agitation for a state owned terminal elevator.²⁴

This political football had been bouncing in and out of the limelight since the 1890's, and was generally supported by the discontented and opposed by the more conservative well-to-do. But when such respectable persons as Professor Edwin F. Ladd,²⁵ and President John Worst of the North Dakota Agricultural College, and the Bankers

²³ Bahmer, 172-219.

²⁴ Ibid., 285-369.

²⁵ Ladd was a chemist and probably the most effective supporter of the terminal elevator idea, since his scientific experiments not only exposed the false grading practices of the grain trade but indicated that a state owned elevator and mill could correct these abuses. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 8-10, 18-19.

Committee of North Dakota²⁶ enthusiastically endorsed the measure, it seemed well on the road to attainment. A difficult legal hurdle stood in the way, since the required Constitutional amendment for authorizing a state industry had to be passed by two successive legislatures. This was accomplished between 1909 and 1912, and the 1913 Legislature authorized a committee to investigate plans for construction of the terminal.²⁷ Despite the pronounced popularity of the proposal, the conservative Republican Governor, L. B. Hanna, and some questionable "progressives" in the Legislature opposed it, and, to the chagrin of the farmers and the American Society of Equity, the 1915 Legislature rejected the entire project. The Equity farmers were holding a meeting in Bismarck during this historic legislative session. The outspoken Loftus, suspecting that the bill was to be defeated, personally castigated the enemies of the bill from the floor of the legislative chamber.²⁸ It was then that Treadwell Twitchell, the Speaker of the House, allegedly

²⁶ Goldberg, 10.

²⁷ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 18-19.

²⁸ One student of this subject asserts that Loftus indulged in this vituperation deliberately to kill the measure and thus brand the Legislature with the opprobrium of defying a farmer mandate, and at the same time pave the way for a non-political cooperative terminal which he preferred. Paul R. Fossum, The Agrarian Movement in North Dakota (Baltimore, 1925), 90-92; Morlan, Prairie Fire, 20, note.

told Loftus and his band of farmers to "go home and slop the hogs."²⁹

This remark, whether factual or fictitious, became the rallying cry of the Nonpartisan League, for its propaganda value was immediately recognized by a spectator who at the time was little known, but whose political sagacity was soon to be recognized as the most formidable in the state. That man was Arthur C. Townley. He had recently joined the American Society of Equity, and was definitely a man with an idea. His idea was to capture political control of the state of North Dakota, and he had some tried and true methods of doing it. But his methods had not been formulated under auspices of the Equity. They had had a different testing ground--the Socialist Party of North Dakota.

A flowering of socialism in a predominantly rural state had been neither intended nor expected by the founders of the American Socialist Party. However, the proper relationship of socialists to farmers had long been under discussion by the Socialist Party and its various predecessors. The old Socialist Labor Party had been united in its opposition to the inclusion of agricultural relief

²⁹ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 20-21 and note. Twitchell was a farmer and elected as a progressive, and there is some doubt that he uttered those momentous words, for he always denied the charge. One version has it that Twitchell, after discussing farm problems with a group of farmers for an entire night, said, "It is now 5 o'clock--time for us farmers to get out and slop the hogs."

in its platform, but it was united on little else, especially the proper policy regarding labor unions. When in the early 1890's this party came under the brilliant, able, but undeviatingly orthodox leadership of Daniel DeLeon, he purged everyone from its ranks except the unquestionably simon-pure socialists (1899).³⁰ Most of those purged eventually found their way into the Socialist Party after it was formed in 1901, but in the meantime they joined that considerable group of unorthodox socialists who had few qualms about allying with movements which Karl Marx would certainly not have endorsed. In this group were the Edward Bellamy "Nationalists," the Christian Socialists, the various communitarian groups,³¹ and the rural socialists.

Of the last group probably the most important figure was Julius A. Wayland, "the one boss editor" of two socialist weeklies, the Coming Nation (1893-95) and the Appeal to Reason (1895-1912).³² While far from propagating any rigid socialist dogma, Wayland's publications, because of their terse, yet homely style, were amazingly successful in gaining converts to socialism among the discontented Midwestern farmers. By the time of its

³⁰ Howard Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (Columbia, S. C., 1953), Chap. V.

³¹ Ibid., Chap. III-IV, and IX, Passim.

³² Ibid., 194.

demise, the Coming Nation had a circulation of some sixty thousand, and its successor, the Appeal to Reason multiplied this impressive showing by gaining a subscription list of 141,000 by 1901,³³ and of more than 600,000 by 1912.³⁴ Such a phenomenal following is probably attributable to the fact that Wayland, like most other loose constructionists of the Marxian doctrine, gave whole-hearted support to the farmer's struggles with the monopolies. When the Populist upsurge occurred, Wayland and the revisionist socialists sprang aboard the bandwagon, to the chagrin of the more conservative Populist leaders.³⁵ Wayland's group, heartily endorsing all the early Populist proposals, even succeeded in incorporating a few of their own measures into the party platform.³⁶ But they clearly perceived the deficiencies of the free silver remedy, and they vigorously tried to prevent the party from staking everything on that issue. When the Populist leaders did decide to pin all their hopes on free silver in 1896, most of the socialist supporters, including Wayland, discontinued their support of the party.³⁷ This was probably

³³ Ibid., 196.

³⁴ Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912 (New York, 1952), 46 note.

³⁵ Quint, Chap. VII.

³⁶ Ibid., 213.

³⁷ Ibid., 232.

a particularly astute move, and may explain to a considerable degree why the socialists were able to gain and hold so many agricultural adherents in the early 1900's. For when the Peoples Party capsized on the shoals of free silver, the disillusioned farmer could compare his hindsight with J. A. Wayland's foresight and find the two identical. Consequently they were likely to heed the counsel of the socialists more and more and that of mere reformers less and less, especially after their disappointment with the progressives in the years following 1906. But the socialists in general were slow to pursue this advantage. Demoralized by the election of McKinley in 1896, the independent socialists indulged in a hodgepodge of nebulous reform activities known as "non-partisan socialism" which absorbed the energies of the Christian Socialists, the Fabians, and others in a movement which was socialist in name only.³⁸

However, in 1898 American socialism was given a much needed injection of adrenalin, when it secured the talents of the able and energetic Eugene V. Debs. Converted to socialism in 1897, Debs, after a brief flirtation with the communitarian movement, combined with Victor Berger, Frederic Heath, Seymour Stedman and others to form the

³⁸ Ibid., Chap. VIII.

Social Democratic Party in June 1898.³⁹ This party, because of its broad base embracing both orthodox and liberal socialists, was able to appeal to a more extensive electorate than any of its predecessors. Naturally enough, it was from the first beset by internal feuds, because of the many clashing opinions regarding the proper socialist policy.

The first manifestation of this Right-Left split occurred over the farm issue, when early in 1898 the Rightists led by Berger insisted that the party needed to incorporate planks designed to help farmers keep their farms in order to gain their support for municipal ownership of public utilities. Berger held that there was no sense in attempting to socialize the farmer, because there was no trend toward the creation of agricultural trusts. The party should instead bid for the farmer's support through the advocacy of government land grants, government operated grain elevators, and nationalization of railroads, telephones, and telegraphs.⁴⁰ The Left, on the other hand, decried the folly of allying with this class of small capitalists, for, not only would the farmers' planks seriously dilute the socialist program, but

³⁹ Ray Ginger, The Bending Cross, A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs (New Brunswick, 1949), 192-199.

⁴⁰ Kipnis, 71.

they would also give the farmers an illusory hope of well being under the capitalist system. Moreover, if such a program were enacted into law, the rich farmers would utilize it to expropriate the urban proletariat, while the small farmers would gain nothing from such halfway measures. In fact, the Leftists believed that the small farmers were ready to accept pure socialism, if it were properly presented to them, because they were certain by this time to have been driven to desperation by foreign competition, and would be disillusioned with their hope for economic relief through progressivism and populism.⁴¹ This statement on rural disillusionment with reformism indicates a greater grasp of the realities of the agricultural situation by the Leftist leaders than is generally accorded them.

Nevertheless, the agrarian planks were incorporated into the 1898 socialist platform. This was done just in time for Debs, the future presidential nominee, to tour the Midwest and address the Governor of Kansas and State Supreme Court Judges in the Topeka State House on the beauties of socialism,⁴² and to influence 140,000 Kansas farmers to vote for the various local socialist reforms

⁴¹ Ibid., 71-72.

⁴² Ginger, 197.

which were submitted to them.⁴³ The disputed national farm planks were:⁴⁴

1. Cessation of the sale of public land, and the introduction of a policy of leasing it under state regulation, along with regulation of forests and waterways.

2. Government construction and operation, at cost of grain elevators and cold storage plants.

3. Consolidation of national postal, railway, telephone, and telegraph systems, and extension of telephones to the farmers at cost.

4. Uniform railroad rates for agricultural products.

5. Public credit for soil improvements, roads, irrigation and drainage.

Such a program, especially the second and fifth planks carried considerable appeal for the midwestern farmer as the Nonpartisan Leaguers were to discover, but in July 1899 the Left wing of the Socialist Party reasserted its numerical supremacy and succeeded in getting the farmers demands eliminated from the party program.⁴⁵ Two years later at a unity convention in Indianapolis, called for the purpose of merging with Morris Hillquit's insurgent element which had bolted from DeLeon's

⁴³ Kipnis, 70.

⁴⁴ Quint, 321.

⁴⁵ Kipnis, 73.

Socialist Labor Party,⁴⁶ the Rightists unsuccessfully attempted to reinstate the agricultural program.⁴⁷ For the next five years the party contented itself with agrarian propaganda appeals telling the farmer that his struggles with the trusts were useless as long as he remained outside the Socialist Party.⁴⁸ Nevertheless this meeting attained its main object, as unity was effected, and the party adopted a new name, the "Socialist Party of America." (SP)⁴⁹

The new unity did not close the basic fissure between Right and Left, however. Yet for the first few years there was little internal strife, because the Left allied with the "Center" elements and kept the party on a fairly even keel.⁵⁰ This Center-Left coalition was led by Debs, and was composed of orthodox Marxists who propounded a unified and coherent body of thought and plan of action.⁵¹ They subscribed completely to the class struggle theory of history and considered it their primary duty to educate the workers and aid them in their labor struggles. Even election campaigns were to be

⁴⁶ Quint, 377.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 384-86.

⁴⁸ Kipnis, 127-29.

⁴⁹ Quint, 387.

⁵⁰ Kipnis, 107-108.

⁵¹ Ibid., 107-116, 423-25.

mainly educational, and success at the polls was mainly a measurement of the effectiveness of party indoctrination. Socialist education was to consist mainly of information regarding the alleged viciousness of the capitalist system which aimed at the enslavement of the proletariat, and which inevitably led to disastrous depressions and imperialistic wars. They also wished to emphasize the folly of placing faith in either of the "old parties," since the Republican Party was merely the political protector of the trusts, while the Democratic Party represented the middle classes who foolishly hoped to preserve a system of competitive enterprise in the face of an inevitable trustification of the economy. The Center-Left leaders hoped to put the SP in power by gaining support of the workers through the ballot box, and then to use the National Government to confiscate all privately owned means of production. However, they placed little faith in the ability of municipal election victories to achieve socialism, for they regarded municipalities simply as adjuncts of the central government. Finally, the Left believed in militant action for better working class conditions, but not in conjunction with the conservative AFL, nor by allying with the middle classes of whom the Left was intensely distrustful.

The Centrists did not share this distrust. Most of the leaders of the Center group were themselves drawn

from the middle class which they considered the most fertile source of potential party "brain workers." This opinion was enthusiastically endorsed by the Right-wing with whom the Centrists soon became allied.⁵² The Rightists, whose intellectual leader was Victor Berger of Milwaukee, resembled Bernstein revisionists more than Marxian fundamentalists, and their philosophy was much less rigid and more comprising than the unbending dogmatism of the Left.⁵³ The Right placed more faith in social evolution than in the Leftist theory of a sudden transition to socialism following a national election victory. In fact, the Rightists were exceedingly skeptical of the party's ability to bring about such a national victory in the foreseeable future, but regarded instead the municipality as the proper seed plot of socialism. Furthermore, the Right held that the socialist movement had to be led by an enlightened middle class which would exert a moderating influence over the ignorant proletariat whose propensities were toward violence and bloodshed. But the Right agreed with the Left that this proletariat was the most fertile ground for socialist propaganda, although they disagreed over the issue of unionism. This disagreement raged around the debate over "pure and

⁵² Ibid., 116-117.

⁵³ Ibid., 117-122.

simple unionism" versus "dual unionism." The former term referred to the AFL practice of shunning politics and confining its activities to pure and simple economic gains, while the latter term referred to the Left-wing Socialist practice of fostering unions with avowed socialist political aims as well as economic demands. Finally, the Rightists differed with the Left over the issue of whether or not to include agricultural "immediate demands" in the Socialist platform.

And on this latter issue, as on most of the others, the Right eventually had its way. However, it was progressivism rather than agricultural discontent that paved the way for the supremacy of the Berger faction. When reform sentiment became so popular that it invaded the old parties and inspired the creation of a number of new ones, the SP found its already modest strength being further reduced. To counter this trend, the Rightists persuaded the Center group led by Morris Hillquit to join them in the questionable policy of converting the party from Marxism to reformism. The Left tried to counter this move by forming the syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW),⁵⁴ but the initiative in policy formation was now in the hands of the Right-wing,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 189-198; Ginger, 237-244.

and the subsequent history of the party is mainly a record of the consolidation of its supremacy.

The dominant figures in the Right-wing movement were Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit. Both were politically ambitious and both sought election to office by campaigning for such doubtfully Marxian demands as civic morality, gas regulation, and public baths, and asserting that strikes were useless, that the SP was the nation's most implacable foe of corruption, and that it was interested only in nationalizing great corporate wealth, not competitive enterprises.⁵⁵ The Left, of course, resisted these bourgeois encroachments in their supposedly revolutionary organization, but with the exception of Eugene Debs, this faction was handicapped by a lack of "big names." In 1907 this lack enabled the Right to gain control of the all-important National Executive Committee in the party elections.⁵⁶ The Left did manage to secure the presidential nomination for the magnetic Debs in 1908, but when he polled a disappointing 421,000 votes, the party was further demoralized.⁵⁷ The Right then set about in earnest to hew away the unattractive features of socialism in order to win votes, and by the end of 1908 they had

⁵⁵ Kipnis, 169-174.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 185-187.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 213.

discarded such fundamental Marxian tenets as the theory of surplus value, the restriction of the revolutionary movement to the lower classes, and the theory of the profit motive as the cause of depressions.⁵⁸

While such measures infuriated the Left-wing and probably alienated many potential revolutionists in the proletariat, they did enable the party to appeal effectively to the distressed farmers, and the Right wasted no time in making such an appeal. As early as 1903 the innate factional strife was raging in the party organizations in the Midwest where Walter Thomas Mills, the national Committeeman from Kansas and later organizer for the Nonpartisan League, warred against the Left-wing in Kansas, Nebraska, and Ohio.⁵⁹ Mills and Wayland sought to establish the Midwest as the official center of American radicalism when they attempted to move the national SP headquarters from St. Louis to Omaha.⁶⁰ While these factional gyrations were of no interest to the farmer, he was interested in the many "drummers" and organizers who began to visit him with their pockets full of red cards.⁶¹ These organizers, for the most part, repeated

⁵⁸ Ibid., 241-242.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 179-180.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 147-148.

⁶¹ Ernest Poole, "Harnessing Socialism", American Magazine, LXVI (Sept. 1908), 428-429.

the selling points of the Populists plus such additions as national forest preserves, national irrigation systems, model farms, state aid in seed improvement, fertilizers, and animal breeds, state loans at cost, state insurance, tenant protection, and increases of public property in land. They assured the farmer that such measures could not be sold out for a mess of free silver pottage, because any changes in the Socialist Party platform had to be made by a referendum of the party members. The appeal of the organizers was further strengthened by a denial of any intention of the SP to expropriate the farmer's land, and a reiteration of the Right-wing assertion that the farmer was as much exploited as any day laborer. They pointed out that the effects of such exploitation were to be seen in all farming districts--rising tenancy, multiplying mortgages, excessive interest rates, low farm prices, and high consumer prices. This was effective salesmanship to which many a plains farmer responded, and the North Dakota farmer proved to be no exception.

The state of North Dakota had been the scene of some socialist activity since 1900, although its first appearance on the state political scene was an unspectacular occurrence. The formal birth of socialism came about in 1900 when Arthur Basset organized a socialist club in Fargo, the most populous city in North Dakota.⁶² Later

⁶² Minot Iconoclast, Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

in the same year Math Eidsness organized a similar club in Towner, McHenry County, in the north central part of the state.⁶³ Eidsness was at this time an unknown man and has remained one, but Basset became quite prominent in North Dakota socialist activities. He apparently was of rigidly orthodox views, as his official obituary says that he kept the party on straight and narrow socialist lines and refused to compromise with the local "so called labor leaders who were playing politics."⁶⁴ He was also instrumental in disseminating a socialist propaganda sheet entitled "The Coming Nation Van No. 3," the circulation of which was in charge of another unknown figure, S. E. Haight of Osnabrock.⁶⁵

Unknown also were most of the candidates who comprised the first socialist ticket presented to the North Dakota voters in the fall of 1900. They ran under the label of Debs' Social Democratic party,⁶⁶ and, aside from Basset, L. F. Dow, and Arthur LeSueur, they had no apparent influence in state political circles. Basset ran for Secretary of State and garnered a total of 433

⁶³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁶⁶ North Dakota Blue Book, the State of North Dakota Legislative Manual, 1901 (Bismarck, 1901), 127-134, hereafter cited as Blue Book.

votes,⁶⁷ while L. F. Dow, who later founded the Socialist Party local in Grand Forks,⁶⁸ and was several times a candidate for Governor, ran this year for the State Treasurership and received 421 votes.⁶⁹ The Social Democratic candidate for Attorney General was the talented and dynamic young Fargo attorney, Arthur LeSueur who a decade later became the best known socialist in the state when he was elected President of the Minot City Commission. He also attained a measure of national prominence, as is indicated by the fact that he was one of the candidates for the Socialist nomination for President of the United States in 1916.⁷⁰ He was born December 7, 1867 on a farm near Nininger, Minnesota. Leaving home at the age of thirteen, he worked in the nearby lumber camps where he earned enough money to put himself through the University of Michigan Law School.⁷¹ After his graduation he gained his first practical legal experience in the Fargo office of the well known Democratic lawyer, Tracy Bangs. After the election of 1900 he moved to Minot, the so-called "Magic City" of North Dakota and the future head-

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁸ Iconoclast, Aug. 6, 1915, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Blue Book, 1901, 132.

⁷⁰ David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York, 1955), 91, hereafter cited as Shannon, Socialist Party.

⁷¹ Meridel LeSueur, Crusaders (New York, 1955), 19-25.

quarters of the state Socialist Party.⁷² His political attractiveness which later manifested itself was not apparent in the election results of 1900, however, for he received only 397 votes--fewer than anyone else on the ticket.⁷³ Actually none of the socialist candidates had made any sort of respectable showing. Debs himself received only 520 votes to McKinley's 35,898 and Bryan's 20,531, and the rest of the socialist candidates were defeated by similar margins.⁷⁴

More important than the amount of the vote was its distribution. In this election the socialist vote came primarily from the eastern counties, especially Cass County.⁷⁵ This is partially explained by the fact that Fargo, the county seat of Cass County, was the headquarters of socialist activity in North Dakota, but probably of equal significance is the fact that the eastern counties were inhabited largely by settlers of Norwegian ancestry.⁷⁶ North Dakota was settled to a preponderant degree by emigrant peoples, and of these the Norwegians

⁷² Ibid., 25-27.

⁷³ Blue Book, 1901, 133.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19-27.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 19-27.

⁷⁶ Wilkins, 3; Carleton C. Qualey, Norwegian Settlement in the United States (Northfield, Minn., 1938), 150-167, 240-241.

constituted the largest single group.⁷⁷ By 1900 Norwegians of foreign birth or parentage comprised twenty-three per cent of the state's population,⁷⁸ and, in addition to their cultural and linguistic contributions, they brought with them a tradition of rural radicalism. Many of them had emigrated from Norway to escape compulsory military service, the rapidly crystallizing caste system, and the proletarianization of the yeomanry by overpopulation and lowering living standards.⁷⁹ These conditions in Norway had caused socialism to thrive in the rural areas there, and the Norwegian socialist parties had, since the days of the French Revolution found their greatest strength in the countryside.⁸⁰ Thousands of the Norwegian settlers in North Dakota were of these "straight left" sympathies, and many of them sent funds from their new homes to Left-wing leaders in Norway to enable them to carry on their fight against entrenched privilege there.⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Norwegians soon found reason to retain their socialism in their new homeland. The North

⁷⁷ Wilkins 2. Settlers of foreign birth or parentage comprised 70.6 per cent of the state's population in 1910, and 21.4 per cent of the state population was Norwegian stock.

⁷⁸ Qualey, 151.

⁷⁹ Wilkins, 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10-11.

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

Dakota socialist leaders quickly capitalized on the Norwegians' political heritage, and allowed them to form "language locals" in affiliation with the state socialist party.⁸² These soon became popular and respectable organizations, the members considering themselves an intellectual elite in comparison with their American comrades whose socialist education was notoriously shallow.⁸³

In addition to the language locals, the original Fargo and Towner clubs formed themselves into socialist locals in 1901, and were affiliated with the newly formed national Socialist Party.⁸⁴ Thus was born the North Dakota Socialist Party (NDSP) which held its first state convention on February 14, 1902, and elected Eidsness as State Secretary and Basset as State Organizer and Assistant Secretary.⁸⁵ If election results are any indication, Basset must have been both active and able in his organizational duties, for in the election of 1902 the Socialists nearly trebled their vote of two years previously.⁸⁶ Dow ran this time for Commissioner of Agriculture and

⁸² Interview with H. R. Martinson, former North Dakota Socialist and present Deputy Labor Commissioner of North Dakota, Sept. 8, 1955.

⁸³ Ibid.,

⁸⁴ Iconoclast, Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁶ Blue Book, 1903, 190-195.

Labor and received 1181 votes, while Robert Grant, the gubernatorial candidate, received 1245.⁸⁷ Grant later became a National Committeeman of the party, and was a friend of LeSueur who for some reason did not run for office in 1902. Because of the party's chronic shortage of lawyers, his absence from the ticket made the Socialists unable to field a candidate for Attorney General that year.

He did run in 1904, however, and polled 1843 votes.⁸⁸ This substantial increase over 1902 was in line with the improved showing of all candidates on the ticket;⁸⁹ it indicates that the Socialist organizers had been busily at work in the two year interval, and that there was a considerable accumulation of discontent for them to exploit. However, such a surmise must be considerably hedged about with the realities of election statistics, for 1904 was a year of overwhelming Republican victories in North Dakota (as elsewhere) with Republican candidates engulfing their Democratic opponents with average margins

⁸⁷ Ibid., 191, 194.

⁸⁸ Blue Book, 1905, 193.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 188-195. Bassett ran for Governor in 1904, and Dow for U. S. Representative. They received 1760 and 1734 votes respectively.

of over thirty-thousand votes.⁹⁰ Thus LeSueur's eighteen-hundred odd votes can hardly be said to have brought the state to the brink of revolution. This was also the first year that the Socialists fielded candidates for the state legislature. They did so in seven districts and were successful in none.⁹¹

As in 1900, the most significant feature of the NDSP vote in 1904 was its distribution rather than its total. In this year the Socialist strength in North Dakota began to shift from the eastern to the northwestern portion of the state where Ward County, with its county seat at Minot, captured and held first place in the number of Socialist votes. Ward County averaged about two-hundred votes per Socialist candidate this year, while Cass County (Fargo) was now relegated to second place with an average of about 150.⁹² There are three explanations for this shift, probably the most important being that the inhabitants of the western part of the state were in more severe economic straits than those of the eastern section. Along the eastern border of North Dakota lay the fertile Red River Valley where whatever agricultural prosperity that existed in the state was to be found.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 188-195.

⁹¹ Ibid., 198-205.

⁹² Ibid., 188-195.

The area north and west of the Missouri River was marginal land by comparison, and the inhabitants, devoted to one-crop wheat farming, suffered acutely in dry years. Farming in this region was a greater risk, and consequently the interest rates were higher,⁹³ which provided a greater animosity toward bankers on which Socialist campaigners could capitalize. Secondly, those contagious carriers of socialism, the Norwegians, were beginning to take up homesteads in this area,⁹⁴ and, confronted with the more severe agricultural difficulties there, they no doubt lost none of their radical convictions. Finally, the fact that the irrepressible, engaging, and eloquent Arthur LeSueur had moved to Minot cannot be considered an altogether inconsequential factor in this shift. Minot soon became the intellectual as well as the geographical center of North Dakota socialism, and reason seemed to indicate that the party headquarters should be there also. Ironically, however, during the winter of 1903-1904 it was decided to make Fargo the permanent headquarters of the party with Basset as State Secretary.⁹⁵ So long as Basset made his home in Fargo, he managed to keep the state office there too. Evidently he had less

⁹³ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 18.

⁹⁴ Quayley, 168-165, 240-241; Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900 (Washington, 1913), 348-356.

⁹⁵ Iconoclast, Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

respect for reason than for personal convenience.

Yet no matter how self-centered he may have been, Basset must have been a valuable organizer, for in 1905-1906, the party began its most intensified organizational campaign, and Basset was chosen to head it.⁹⁶ C. E. Payne, the 1904 Socialist candidate for Insurance Commissioner was temporarily given Basset's position as State Secretary, and the organizational campaign was carried on with considerable success. According to Arthur LeSueur, the Socialist Party was better organized in North Dakota from 1906 to 1914 than in any other agricultural state.⁹⁷ But the results of Basset's labors were meager and discouraging in the first year, for the state Socialist vote in 1906 fell to an average of about eleven-hundred votes.⁹⁸ The reason for this decline was the Progressive victory of 1906, when even though the Democrats won only the Governorship, the Democratic vote for the other state offices was much higher than usual. It was doubtless this Democratic increase that cut into the Socialist strength at the polls. L. F. Dow ran for Governor, and received the worst beating, a niggardly 978 votes.⁹⁹ His

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁹⁷ M.S. by Arthur LeSueur, LeSueur Papers, Minnesota State Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

⁹⁸ Blue Book, 1907, 200-206.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 202.

poor showing was caused by the fact that he faced the popular progressive Democrat, "Honest John" Burke who defeated the Republican incumbent, E. Y. Sarles, by about five-thousand votes.¹⁰⁰ LeSueur and Grant, candidates for Attorney General and Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor respectively, each polled 1204 votes,¹⁰¹ the highest totals on the slate, except for A. J. Evans who received a vote of 1689 for Superintendent of Public Instruction, an office for which the Democrats strangely did not field a candidate.¹⁰² It was perhaps fortunate that the Socialists did not field any candidates for the State Legislature in 1906.

Although the Socialist election returns of 1906 were numerically unimpressive, this election was a pivotal event in the history of the North Dakota Socialist Party. In fact, it was because the Socialist vote of that year was so unimpressive that this election was so crucial. It has been previously noted that national leaders of the Socialist Party, when confronted with the nation-wide enthusiasm for progressivism, allowed the Right-wing to commit the party to a program of reform instead of revolutionary agitation. In the same manner the leaders

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰² Ibid., 204.

of the NDSP, in the face of their electoral embarrassment at the hands of the progressives, decided to heed the political sensibilities of the electorate and to offer the voters what they wanted rather than a dogmatically determined idea of what they needed. Accordingly, in February 1908, a party convention was held in Devils Lake for the purpose of preparing a state platform.¹⁰³ The product of the deliberations there was a four point platform that was strikingly similar to the simple formula by which A. C. Townley was to skyrocket the Non-partisan League to power eight years later. The Socialist platform called for state owned flour mills, terminal elevators, and rural credit banks, and a system of state financed hail insurance.¹⁰⁴ Like the programs of the Right-wing, "constructive," "step-at-a-time" socialists throughout the United States, this platform was primarily a list of "immediate demands" which if gained in their entirety would leave North Dakota considerably short of the socialist conception of the ideal state. It is not a matter of record whether this program was adopted over the protests of the Left as happened in the national conventions, but, it would seem a safe assumption that such a program met with little approval from that apparently unimaginative fundamentalist, Arthur Basset. It also

¹⁰³ MS. by Arthur LeSueur, LeSueur Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

seems safe to assume that the platform was largely the work of LeSueur who, like his Right-wing counterparts elsewhere, had political ambitions, and was willing to resort to expediency to achieve them.

However, the high point of Socialist expediency was not the adoption of the farmers platform. In the fall of 1908, the NDSP resorted to a further bit of opportunism by running its candidates as "Independents" instead of as Socialists.¹⁰⁵ Here was the first official acknowledgement that, as A. C. Townley is credited with having said later, "the word socialism frightens the farmer,"¹⁰⁶ and it represents the most wholesale attempt by the NDSP to emulate the opportunism of the "old parties" who traditionally sought to enhance their attractiveness by espousing popular causes and concealing unpopular supporters. But if the farmer was afraid of socialism, he was even more repelled by dishonesty, and the Socialists in 1908 received the lowest vote since the election of 1900. Their candidates received a total vote averaging in the five-hundreds with the luckless Dow, again facing the unbeatable Governor Burke, receiving only 491.¹⁰⁷ LeSueur showed the greatest strength with 734, and close behind

¹⁰⁵ Blue Book, 1909, 212-218.

¹⁰⁶ S. R. Maxwell, The Nonpartisan League from the Inside (St. Paul, 1948), 45.

¹⁰⁷ Blue Book, 1909, 212-218.

him with 665 was the candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction, a former school teacher¹⁰⁸ and later an alleged co-founder of the Nonpartisan League, Arthur E. Bowen.¹⁰⁹ This miserable electoral showing is no doubt partially attributable to the encroachments of the progressives, but it seems certain that it stemmed more directly from the "Independent" aspect of the slate. This maneuver lent an air of deviousness to the party which tied in with its common stigma of sinisterness and subversion, and no doubt alienated many independent voters. Moreover, it probably aroused such disgust among avowed Socialist voters that they refused to support the organization. Yet, indicative of the fact that socialism had not completely lost its appeal to the North Dakota voters is the fact that Debs polled 2421 North Dakota votes in the Socialist column in 1908.¹¹⁰ Had the North Dakota Socialists kept their party label, they might very well have gained a larger vote than ever before by riding on Debs' coattails. The lesson must have been well learned, for never again would the NDSP candidates call themselves anything but socialists.

This election set-back did not, however, cause a

¹⁰⁸ Maxwell, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Blue Book, 1909, 216-217.

¹¹⁰ Blue Book, 1909, 212.

reaction to the Left in North Dakota socialism. As indicated earlier the disappointing showing by Debs convinced the Rightists that what the party needed was more progressivism, not less, and the leaders of the NDSP, like the national party leaders, continued their "constructive" socialist activities.

They were successful. In 1909-1910 the NDSP launched a vigorous campaign to increase the circulation of the Appeal to Reason in North Dakota, and as in the rest of the Midwest, this cleverly written propaganda organ found many sincere subscribers there.¹¹¹ By 1910 many new converts voted the Socialist ticket. In fact, 1910 was a year of triumph for Right-wing Socialists all over the nation. The total SP vote increased to over six-hundred-thousand; Victor Berger was elected to Congress; nineteen Socialists were elected to various state legislatures; and Socialists gained control of the governments of five counties and twelve cities in the nation.¹¹² In North Dakota the election returns were equally encouraging, the entire slate increasing its vote six-fold over the fiasco of 1908. Most of the North

¹¹¹ Theodore G. Nelson, A Volume of Truth, election pamphlet (Fargo, 1918), 4. Interview with H. R. Martinson, Sept. 8, 1955. Martinson was "converted" to socialism by reading a copy of the Appeal to Reason in 1906.

¹¹² Kipnis, 345-346.

Dakota candidates, with the exception of the gubernatorial aspirant, I. S. Lampman who faced the invincible Burke, polled over three thousand votes.¹¹³ The popular LeSueur harvested a grand total of 4008, a showing which was exceeded only by that of Mrs. C. E. Paine, the Socialist candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction, an office for which the Democrats again failed to field a candidate.¹¹⁴ Although this was the highest vote which the NDSP had ever gained for the state administrative offices, even more encouraging were the results of the legislative campaign. For North Dakota in 1910 was one of the states which elected a Socialist to the State Legislature. He was an obscure ex-Pennsylvanian named Wesley Fasset.¹¹⁵ He was elected from Rolette County, the Nineteenth Legislative District, in the extreme north-central portion of the state where he defeated his Republican apponent, John E. Brown by a vote of 929 to 556.¹¹⁶ Fasset served one term in the North Dakota House of Representatives, and then faded from the political picture as quietly as he had entered it. He did not run again in 1912, and he was the only Socialist ever to be

¹¹³ Blue Book, 1911, 248-253.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 251.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 538.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 325.

elected to the North Dakota Legislature.¹¹⁷ His election presents somewhat a mystery to the political history of the state, but it also reflects the increasing Socialist strength in the northern and western counties. Rolette County was gaining in the number of Socialist voters year by year, but even more rapid was the gain in strength of its western neighbor, Bottineau County which by 1910 had displaced Cass, Walsh and other eastern counties as second in magnitude of Socialist strength.¹¹⁸ Williams County with its county seat at Williston was also of increasing importance, as were the other counties in the northwestern part of the state.¹¹⁹ The counties in the southern and central portions continued to register the poorest Socialist returns, while Ward County (Minot) remained uncontested as the center of Socialist strength in North Dakota.¹²⁰

Generally speaking, the election of 1910 seemed in North Dakota, as elsewhere in the nation, a vindication of the "progressive" activities of the Right-wing Socialists. Likewise, in line with the National SP policies,

¹¹⁷ Dr. E. C. Stucke, a fairly well known Socialist in the state, was later elected to the Legislature after the NDSP had passed out of existence. Stucke was elected as a Republican.

¹¹⁸ Blue Book, 1911, 248-253.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 249.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 248-253.

the North Dakota Socialists would expand these Right-wing activities over the protests of the Left, and would seek to become a real political party with its idealism geared to the immediately attainable, and its conduct conditioned by the election returns.

CHAPTER II

"DEMOCRATIC DEGENERATION:" POLITICIANS, JOURNALISTS, AND FARMERS, 1911-1914

If the election returns of 1910 established the Right-wing Socialists in positions of national party leadership, the results of the elections of 1911 firmly intrenched them there. Debs and the other Leftist leaders protested that the victories of 1910 were made at the expense of the party's Marxian principles.¹ However, it appeared to be an expense that the party could well afford, when in the following year the Rightist tactics brought the party another series of electoral triumphs. These were exclusively local victories, and one-eighth of them made in Berger's Milwaukee stronghold,² but the Socialists also won significant mayoralty contests in Butte, Montana, Flint, Michigan, and Berkely, California.³ In fact they elected over one-hundred-thousand candidates, including LeSueur, in 337 towns and cities across the nation.⁴ In 1912 the Socialist Party reached the peak of its power and enthusiasm when Debs, after conducting

¹ Ginger, 307.

² Kipnis, 346.

³ Iconoclast, Feb. 18, 1916, p. 1.

⁴ Kipnis, 346

a strenuous campaign tour, polled some nine-hundred-thousand votes, almost six per cent of the entire presidential vote cast.⁵ In twelve years the Socialist Party had grown from ten-thousand to 150,000 members. It was active and effective in the reform movement and had conscientiously publicized the inequities of American life. Furthermore, it had increased its electoral strength from 95,000 to nine-hundred-thousand, and elected over two-thousand of its members to public office.⁶

Yet few of these victories were won by real socialists or on issues of socialism versus capitalism. They were won instead by preachers and professional men on issues of prohibition, graft, maladministration, bipartisan combination, boss and gang rule, public improvements, municipal ownership, and a few on industrial depressions and labor disputes.⁷ The party was, in other words, suffering from what the syndicalists called "democratic degeneration;" its greatest support came not from the wage earners, but from the middle class and its greatest strength lay not in the industrial East, but in the

⁵ Ibid., 367. David A. Shannon, "The Socialist Party Before the First World War," Miss. Val. Hist. Rev., XXXVIII (Sept. 1951), 279-288, hereafter cited as Shannon, Miss. Val. Hist. Rev. XXXVIII.

⁶ Kipnis, 422.

⁷ Ibid., 347.

agricultural Midwest.⁸ It was becoming a "vague, ungeneralized, democratic organization" rapidly trying to broaden its base of appeal by expanding its immediate demands, and watering down its objectionable features.⁹ In so doing the party became little more than "the left wing of the progressive movement", centering its fire no longer on capitalism as such, but only on trusts.¹⁰ Industrial unionism was abandoned as a party activity, and the socialist leaders agreed to "play ball" with the AFL and to ignore its considerable internal corruption.¹¹ With the rising popularity of La Follette progressivism and Wilsonian New Freedom, the Rightists, instead of embracing the really mistreated proletariat who were untouched by such middle class reforms, tried to play a leading role in the progressive movement.¹² In a desperate race for votes, they sacked the revolutionary principles on which the party was founded and purged the radicals who espoused them.¹³ The high point in this activity was reached in February 1913, when the party leaders succeeded

⁸ "Socialist Degeneration," New Republic, I (Dec. 12, 1914), 10-11.

⁹ "The Future of the Socialist Party" New Republic, I (Jan. 16, 1915), 10-12.

¹⁰ Kipnis, 427.

¹¹ Ibid., 426.

¹² Ibid., 428-429.

¹³ Ibid., 428-429.

in removing the IWW leader, William Haywood from the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party.

Haywood thereupon resigned from the party, taking with him some fifty thousand of the membership. According to Ira Kipnis, it was this outright alienation of the working classes that assured the decline of the Socialist Party.¹⁴

Meanwhile, however, the decline of the NDSP was thereby postponed. Although the Rightists' activities were unfortunate from the point of view of those who wished to make the party answer the needs of the urban proletariat, such activities were made-to-order for those wishing to adapt socialism to the needs of the Midwestern farmer. The much-touted election victories of 1911 were not, in the main, Eastern achievements, but were concentrated primarily in the agrarian Midwest and the Western mining regions, and the municipal victories were mostly in communities of less than ten thousand inhabitants.¹⁵ The Rightist leaders, doubtless perceiving this fact, took steps in 1912, to consolidate their Midwestern gains by securing the adoption of platform planks which sympathized with the plight of the tenant farmer, and advocated public ownership of storage plants, government

¹⁴ Ibid., Chap. XVIII.

¹⁵ Ibid., 346.

creation of experimental farms, and government-financed insurance against animal diseases and natural calamities,¹⁶ Furthermore the Right-wing leaders squelched a proposed amendment to the platform, this amendment calling for the "ultimate collective ownership of all the land used for productive purposes."¹⁷ This strategy quickly gained results, and by 1914 the Socialist polling strength in the Eastern states was being decidedly surpassed by that in the less populous states of Nevada, Montana, Arizona, Washington, California, Idaho, and especially, Oklahoma.¹⁸ The last named gave twenty per cent of its vote to Debs in 1912, and in 1914 cast fifteen-thousand more Socialist votes than the state of New York.¹⁹ As for North Dakota, as early as 1910 Debs remarked delightedly, after touring the state, on the number of persons he had seen there proudly wearing the red button Socialist emblem.

But it took more than a red button to make a Socialist. This was especially true of Debs' rather restricted interpretation of Marxism, and had he examined the

¹⁶ Ibid., 218.

¹⁷ Ibid., 218-219.

¹⁸ New Republic, I (Jan. 23, 1913), 6; Shannon, Miss. Val. Hist. Rev., XXXVIII, 280. Grady McWhinney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Twentieth Century: A Study in Rustic Radicalism", Journal of Southern History, XX (Aug. 1954), 315-316.

¹⁹ McWhinney, 315, note; Shannon, Miss. Val. Hist. Rev. XXXVIII, 280.

ideologies of those North Dakotans who so proudly displayed their Socialist badges, he probably would have found very few that measured up to his standards. He would also probably have found that those few were denied positions of influence in the party hierarchy. Like its parent organization, the NDSP was at this time apparently in the process of becoming a closed corporation of Right-wing leaders. And one of the first to be closed out was the venerable Arthur Basset. The perennial state secretary was finally persuaded to move the party headquarters from Fargo to Minot, when the adjacent Berthold Indian Reservation was thrown open to homesteaders.²⁰ Basset's socialist orthodoxy did not curb his desire for free land, and in 1911 he took up a claim near Ryder on the southern edge of Ward County.²¹ The following year he was displaced from the party Secretaryship by the election of the more conservative H. E. Thompson to that office.²² Basset then retired to his homestead where he died in 1914.²³

With the all-important State Secretaryship in Right-wing hands, the struggle for control of the party

²⁰ Iconoclast, Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

²¹ Ibid., p. 1.

²² Ibid., May 24, 1912, p. 2.

²³ Ibid., Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

apparently shifted to the State Executive Committee.²⁴ For the most part, the struggle was an uneven one, because the left, in addition to being outnumbered, suffered from a lack of "big names", as did its national counterpart. This was probably an inherent weakness in socialist orthodoxy, for the orthodox Marxist emphasized primarily the rather colorless activities of "education" and indoctrination in the principles of socialism. He regarded participation in existing political affairs as mere shadow boxing in the despised arena of capitalism. He was sedentary, stodgy, and didactic, while the "constructive" socialist was a man of action taking outspoken and definite stands on contemporary issues, meeting people, shaking hands, making compromises, and in general performing deeds that brought him a measure of public recognition. In the NDSP the leaders of the "opportunist" faction were all men who became well known in the state-- Arthur LeSueur, A. C. Townley, A. E. Bowen, Henry G. Teigan, Leon Durocher, D. C. Dorman, O. M. Thomason, Eugene Teutsch, and others. But the leaders of the "fundamentalists"-- H. R. Martinson, L. L. Griffith, Dr.

²⁴ The word "apparently" and other hedging phraseology is used intentionally. There is little actual proof of the following suppositions regarding the apparent factional struggle in the NDSP. Most of the persons involved are dead or otherwise out of reach; the official records are lost; and the official organ prated incessantly of the party's great unity--a probable indication that considerable disunity existed.

E. C. Stucke, Carl Berg, and D. I. Todd--were, with the exceptions of Martinson and Stucke, relatively minor figures.²⁵

All of these men of Right and Left did service on the State Executive Committee. The members of this five man policy group were elected by the party membership, and because of the prominence of the Rightists, they usually provided a majority of the committee. Thus usually being able to effect their proposals by a majority vote,²⁶ the Rightists apparently made little effort to pack the Executive Committee during the first three years after the party headquarters was moved to Minot. But Henry G. Teigan, who succeeded Thompson as State Secretary in March 1931,²⁷ was evidently not satisfied with the uncertainties of Right-wing leadership under the status quo. Teigan was an opportunist who believed in political action and in bringing the petty bourgeoisie into the ranks of the Socialist Party. This is evidenced by his espousal of a statement by Wilhelm Liebknecht that "as long as man is compelled to labor like a slave and receives but scant

²⁵ These persons were characterized as "opportunist" or "fundamentalist" by H. R. Martinson. Interview, Sept. 8, 1955.

²⁶ Actually any proposal could be appealed to a referendum of the party membership, but it was a slow process, and like most referendums they usually upheld the actions of their leaders.

²⁷ Iconoclast, Apr. 11, 1913, p. 4, and May 2, 1913, p. 2.

remuneration for his work, though he be a socially useless flunkey of some fat parasite, his place is nevertheless in the Socialist Party."²⁸

Teigan was a clever and ambitious person. He probably had opportunistic plans, and wanted no interference from Left-wing obstructionists. It was very likely with this in mind that he proposed in February 1914 to replace the five man State Executive Committee with a committee of three consisting of the State Secretary, the State Auditor, and the Chairman of the current State Executive Committee.²⁹ Not only would such a move greatly increase his power by giving him the two most important party functions, but the two offices would complement each other, since by his important position as State Secretary, he could dominate the new Executive Committee, even if the other two happened to be from the opposite camp. At the time he made the proposal, that possibility was nonexistent, however, for the State Auditor was then the Rightist, Eugene Teutsch, and the Chairman of the State Executive Committee was another Right-winger, E. M. Eisele.³⁰ If such a reduction of the committee had been made, it would have reduced to a minimum the representation in the party councils of the Left wing, a group

²⁸ Ibid., Nov. 15, 1915, p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., Apr. 11, 1913, p. 3, and Jan. 13, 1914, p. 1.

which, because of their probable minority among the rank and file, was already greatly declining in influence. The attempt failed, however, for it was not until two years later that Teigan achieved his object, and by that time he was pursuing a more desirable one, the newly formed Nonpartisan League. In practice probably the only effect of Teigan's maneuver was to anger the Left, although there were no outward aspects of a factional feud exhibited at this time. Yet Teigan, on the very day of his proposal, wrote, and later continued to write, glowing statements on the "utter lack of dissension" within the party,³¹ which indicates that discontent was probably seething in the inner circles, and that Teigan's utterances were more in the nature of pleas for unity than manifestations of it. This promotion of a fetish of unity was the most Marxian of Teigan's political qualities, and he resembled the Russian Marxists (in a less violent manner, of course) in their favorite political maneuver of purging the opposition and then proclaiming harmony.

The vehicle of his proclamations was the Iconoclast. This was the NDSP's official weekly newspaper, the only important one of its kind in the state, and a prize worth

³¹ Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 5, and July 17, 1914, p. 1.

winning for either faction of the party.³² The paper was founded in 1912, the first issue being printed on May 24, 1912, under the editorship of one J. M. Near. It was initially a privately owned enterprise with the controlling interest held by Arthur LeSueur.³³ Although the paper passed through a succession of ownership, management, and editorship, it always remained readable, terse, outspoken and effective. It was usually a four page publication with pages one and two devoted to national socialist news, and editorial propagandizing, page three mainly to capsule humor of both the slanted and unslanted variety, and page four to advertising.

Its advertising was more extensive than one might expect. Under the vigorous salesmanship of advertising Manager De Witt C. Dorman,³⁴ socialist advertisements of such capitalistic institutions as banks, bakeries, coal dealers, and automobile agencies were not at all uncommon.³⁵

³² There were at least three other such publications in the state during this period, the Devils Lake, North Dakota Call, the Sentinel published at McGregor, Williams County, and Industrial Freedom published at Plaza, Mountrail County, but the lives of all three of these were of short duration, and no copies of them are extant. Iconoclast, May 24, 1912, p. 1, and Apr. 23, 1915, p. 1.

³³ Iconoclast, Oct. 11, 1912, p. 2, and Oct. 9, 1914, p. 3.

³⁴ Ibid., June 7, 1912, p. 2.

³⁵ Ibid., May 24, 1912, p. 4, and June 7, 1912, p. 3.

in fact, on one occasion the editors found it necessary to apologize to their readers for allowing the advertisements to crowd out much of the reading material.³⁶ This would indicate that the Iconoclast had a circulation which the advertisers could not afford to overlook, and that the paper's finances were in good condition. Actually both suppositions are erroneous, for the circulation probably never exceeded three thousand subscribers, despite the great emphasis laid on local "boosting" of the subscription list.³⁷ Subscriptions were a dollar per year, and the public at this time was not exactly clamoring to buy, for as early as December 1912, the editor admitted that, unless a substantial increase in subscriptions was forthcoming, the paper would be bankrupted.³⁸ To encourage circulation the management made special club offer subscriptions at half price, peddled socialist books and other propaganda, and advertised for job printing "at living rates."³⁹ By such measures they kept the paper alive until the Nonpartisan League appeared and absorbed all left wing opposition.

If the Iconoclast was no Appeal to Reason in its

³⁶ Ibid., May 24, 1912, p. 2.

³⁷ Ibid., May 24, 1912, pp. 1, 4.

³⁸ Ibid., December 6, 1912, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., June 7, 1912, p. 2, May 24, 1912, p. 4, and July 19, 1912, p. 5.

ability to make converts and recruit subscribers, it was an absolutely necessary possession for anyone wishing to gain control over the NDSP machinery and membership. Henry G. Teigan, having this in mind, probably viewed the broad powers given to Editor Near as a distinct threat to his plans. When the paper was created, Near was given the jobs of Editor, Business Manager, Managing Editor, and Publisher⁴⁰ which, of course, gave him almost unlimited control over the paper's policies. Near appears to have been a radically outspoken "lone wolf" and little amenable to the desires of anyone to manipulate him. While the events of Near's subsequent dismissal are nowhere directly traceable to Teigan, his fine touch seems in evidence when in June 1913, his conservative colleague, H. E. Thompson, officially relieved Near of his function as Business Manager of the Iconoclast,⁴¹ and a month later also assumed Near's job of Managing Editor.⁴² Near continued in the important posts of Editor and Publisher, and it will never be known how he might have been relieved of these positions in the normal course of events, for in August, 1913 an unexpected incident occurred which enabled Teigan to complete the coup with

⁴⁰ Ibid., Oct. 11, 1912, p. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., June 17, 1914, p. 4.

⁴² Ibid., Aug. 1, 1913, p. 2.

great dexterity. The incident was an IWW riot in Minot which will be dealt with in detail later. It is enough to say here that on August 10, 1913, Near was discharged, ostensibly because he was too radical in his support of the "wobblies" and his denunciations of the city administration.⁴³ Of Near's strong support of the IWW's and his scathing denunciations of the city government there can be no doubt, but while Near was being deposed for these actions, there were lodged in the city jail six prominent local Socialists, including LeSueur and D. C. Dorman, who had tried to prevent the breakup of the IWW meetings by the police. These were hailed by the party as heroes, but they were not editors standing in Teigan's way. Not unexpectedly, Near's editorial successor was none other than Teigan himself,⁴⁴ and within a year the wily editor brought the Iconoclast completely under the domination of the Right-wing. In April 1914 the ownership of the paper was transferred from the small group of stockholders of which Teigan was not a member to the NDSP of which he was by this time virtual boss.⁴⁵ By October, 1914 Secretary Teigan had become Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager of the Iconoclast whose publisher was

⁴³ Minot Daily Optic, Aug. 12, 1916, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Iconoclast, Aug. 13, 1913, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., March 20, 1914, p. 1, and April 17, 1914, p. 3.

officially the NDSP. But the publishing duties and prerogatives were held in trust by the State Executive Committee which, with the exception of L. L. Griffith, was filled with Right-wing Socialists.⁴⁶

The fact that the Iconoclast became an object of a factional struggle for power did not greatly hinder its effectiveness. For the most part, the editorial viewpoint remained the same, no matter who edited it, and the paper played a significant role in the affairs of the party. One of its most useful functions was sponsoring and publicizing the veritable army of socialist lecturers who invaded the state to preach the Marxian gospel. Often such speakers received unfavorable receptions and the Iconoclast castigated this "persecution" in unequivocal terms. On July 4, 1912 W. F. Ries, the "Toledo Millionaire Socialist", was scheduled to address the gala socialist rally being planned at the Burlington Fair Grounds several miles outside of Minot, but the affair ended in failure when the "Soo Line" railroad refused to provide transportation to the scene of the projected festivities.⁴⁷

When Ries attempted to carry his campaign into the hinterlands, he was heckled, assaulted, and arrested at Plaza, re-arrested at Stanley, and barred from the

⁴⁶ Ibid., Oct. 9, 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., June 21, 1912, p. 4, June 28, 1912, p. 4, July 12, 1912, p. 1.

speaker's platform at Tolley, all with typical vituperative accompaniment from the Iconoclast.⁴⁸ Likewise during the summer of 1914 Beecher Moore, a Minnesota socialist and later a Nonpartisan Leaguer, who had aided in the early organizational activities of NDSP, was prevented from addressing a crowd in Ray, North Dakota by the local banker who drowned out his voice with his automobile horn.⁴⁹

Besides providing publicity and color for the party, these meetings provided a certain amount of capital, since the socialist speakers invariably charged admissions. The Iconoclast defended this rather unorthodox political practice by asserting that the "old parties" in reality charged admissions also, since they accepted contributions from large corporations who defrayed this expense by raising the prices of their products.⁵⁰ Whether justified or not, if a spectator's tastes ran to verbal fireworks, he probably usually considered the meeting worth the price. This was especially true of the debate between LeSueur and ex-socialist David Goldstein whose main contention was that the socialists were anti-Christian. The Iconoclast countercharged that Goldstein

⁴⁸ Ibid., July 5, 1912, p. 2, July 12, 1912, pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., July 17, 1914, p. 1, and Oct. 2, 1914, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Aug. 16, 1912, p. 3.

was free lover⁵¹ A. E. Bowen, whose forensic powers were allegedly formidable, also debated with the nationally known Goldstein, as he did also with the well known Democrat humorist, Arthur Milloy, whom he defeated in formal debate.⁵² Political discussions must have aroused considerably more interest in those days than at present, and such meetings must have "paid off" both ideologically and financially. In 1913 the NDSP launched a "lyceum course" of over 60 socialist speakers, and placed advertisements in several newspapers inviting non-socialists to " . . . come and get the best arguments they have to put up. Then you can tell more clearly why you are not a Socialist."⁵³ One of the many NDSP sponsored speakers who put forth these "best arguments" was Kate Richards O'Hare who in 1917 was to be convicted of sedition at Bismarck in a trial of at least questionable impartiality.⁵⁴ Her coming was hailed in the Iconoclast in glowing terms, and readers were reminded that the twenty-five cent admission entitled them to a year's subscription in the National Rip Saw, a socialist publication which

⁵¹ Ibid., Aug. 16, 1912, p. 3, and June 21, 1912, pp. 2, 4.

⁵² The "defeat" was decided by a vote of the spectators. Ibid., Dec. 6, 1912, p. 3, and Feb. 13, 1914, p. 1.

⁵³ Ibid., March 7, 1913, p. 1. Minot Daily Reporter, March 4, 1913, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 148; Shannon, Socialist Party, 27.

she and her husband edited in St. Louis.⁵⁵

It was not only the Iconoclast which enthusiastically welcomed Mrs. O'Hare. The Minot Daily Optic and Daily Reporter, neither of which could seriously be accused of being leftists, carried identical front page panegyrics on her intellect, motherhood, and oratorical talents, and urged their readers to ". . . come and hear Mrs. O'Hare this once."⁵⁶ Likewise, when Debs was scheduled to speak in Minot in 1915, the Minot Daily Optic -Reporter pleaded that he "be heard with courtesy even by those who do not agree with his doctrines."⁵⁷ Similar treatment had been accorded by the Reporter to Emil Seidel, Debs' running mate in 1912, when he addressed a Minot audience, and in the same year even an address of local Socialist, LeSueur, was given fair handling.⁵⁸ This indicates not only that LeSueur was a popular figure, for he had already proved that by being elected to the City Commission, but that the size of the socialist following in the Minot area was large enough to cause editors to refrain from criticising it unduly for fear of cancelled

⁵⁵ Iconoclast, Sept. 27, 1912, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Minot Daily Optic, Oct. 3, 1912, p. 1. Minot Daily Reporter, Oct. 2, 1912, p. 1.

⁵⁷ June 3, 1913, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Minot Daily Reporter, Aug. 17, 1912, p. 1, and Jan. 5, 1912, p. 1.

subscriptions. And until they were presented with a reasonable excuse for denouncing the local Socialists, such as the IWW riots provided, the Minot dailies would limit their criticism to sly hints that socialists were anarchists, liars, non-constructive mudslingers, and free lovers.⁵⁹ The Iconoclast on the other hand, found little reason to soften its blows against the opposition press, and from the first branded the Optic not only an "infinitesimal fly speck on the face of the earth," but as a slanted organ of the plutocrats (commonly called "plutes") which advertised patent medicines, overlooked poverty and straddled "every question that is of interest to the common people."⁶⁰

In fact, the Iconoclast was, from first to last a disseminator of typical socialist propaganda. However, it exhibited a good deal of editorial adaptability in applying the socialist viewpoint to local situations. Such a situation occurred in August 1912, when a Minot contractor, D. A. Dinnie, a rugged individualist and the bane of the labor organizer,⁶¹ was awarded the contract

⁵⁹ Minot Daily Optic, May 27, 1912, p. 2, and June 15, 1912, p. 2; Iconoclast, June 7, 1912, pp. 1, 4, and June 21, 1912, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Iconoclast, June 7, 1912, pp. 1, 4, and June 14, 1912, p. 1.

⁶¹ According to the Grant Youman's, Dinnie had recited his own labor philosophy as "work them hard and pay them little." Grant S. Youman's Legalized Bank Robbery (Minot, N. Dak., 1914), 16.

to build the new Minot State Normal School.⁶² When subsequently the bricks with which Dinnie planned to build the walls of the institution proved to be inferior, the Iconoclast had a field day in ridiculing Dinnie and his methods which it regarded as typically capitalist.⁶³

Later when the foundations of the partly constructed building also proved defective,⁶⁴ the Iconoclast accused Dinnie of purposely weakening the concrete mixture to save money on cement, and printed sworn statements by one of the workers that he had withheld certain amounts of cement on Dinnie's orders.⁶⁵ In 1913, however, Dinnie turned the tables by suing the Portland Cement Company for selling him inferior cement. Though at least two socialists testified against Dinnie at this trial,⁶⁶ the Iconoclast lost interest in the case when it was decided in favor of Dinnie who received a judgement of \$4000.⁶⁷

However, the Iconoclast never ceased to exploit local and state issues for propaganda purposes. Though there were some farcical utopian statements on the beauties of

⁶² Minot Daily Optic, Aug. 27, 1912, p. 1.

⁶³ Iconoclast, May 2, 1913, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁴ Youmans, 15-16. Minot Daily Optic, Nov. 6, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Iconoclast, July 11, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Minot Daily Optic, Nov. 6, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Nov. 10, 1913, p. 1.

socialism, such as it's enabling women to stay beautiful "until they are fifty--yes until they are ninety,"⁶⁸ such absurdities were quite rare. The editors wisely preferred to use concrete economic and political issues as stepping stones to socialist conversions of skeptical North Dakotans. Thus while Leon Durocher, an able Socialist propagandist, castigated the State Legislature for failure to pass laws for initiative, referendum, and recall, and for the extension of judges' terms to ten years,⁶⁹ LeSueur condemned Governor L. B. Hanna for vetoing a bill in 1913 which would facilitate the collection of damages for industrial accident victims.⁷⁰ One such victim was William F. Hall who was killed in the Bruegger lignite mine; the Iconoclast blamed the State Legislature for his death, because it had failed to enact mine safety laws.⁷¹ Despite North Dakota's small industrial population, the Iconoclast was an outspoken advocate of organized labor, especially in H. E. Thompsons "Workers of the Week" column. And it was a staunch foe of "reactionary" labor unions, like the Fargo Building and Trades Alliance which condoned the open shop in its jurisdictional

⁶⁸ Iconoclast, July 10, 1914, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., March 21, 1913, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., July 15, 1913, p. 1.

⁷¹ Ibid., Feb. 21, 1913, p. 1.

area.⁷²

On national issues too, the Iconoclast, like other typical socialist publications, paid at least lip service to traditional socialist ideals. The newspaper criticized Gompers' alleged bargaining timidity ("Please give us a crumb or two"), and favored industrial unionism over craft unionism.⁷³ It echoed the Marxist contention that the trusts were rapidly forcing the middleman and the middle class out of existence, while using the favorite Right-wing argument that this fact should induce the SP to recruit the middle class, not exclude it.⁷⁴ The Iconoclast admitted, however, that the admission of such elements could corrupt the movement; in fact, O. M. Thomason, a prominent socialist and later a more prominent Nonpartisan Leaguer, asserted that the reason why so many socialists were "ornery", "lazy," and "crooked" was that they had recently been drawn from the ranks of the Republican and Democratic parties.⁷⁵ These old parties, stated the Iconoclast, in mimicry of the Left-wing, were merely the representatives of "trustified wealth" or of the middle class, and the so-called "progressives" were

⁷² Ibid., Dec. 19, 1913, pp. 2-3.

⁷³ Ibid., July 19, 1912, p. 5, Aug. 8, 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Aug. 14, 1914, pp. 1, 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Mar. 5, 1915, p. 4.

mere capitalist sops whose main function was to gain minor concessions that did nothing but prolong the agony of an unjust rule.⁷⁶ In the light of the North Dakota farmer's disillusionment with progressivism this was probably effective propaganda. Yet when A. E. Bowen, in a series of articles on "the Socialist Platform," advocated such measures as freedom of speech, press, and assembly, the initiative, referendum, and recall, prohibition of railway passes to legislators, woman suffrage, income, inheritance, and corporation taxes, popular election of President and Vice President, abolition of the United States Senate, and a liberalization of the amendment procedure of the United States Constitution,⁷⁷ he portrayed socialism as a blend of Americanism, idealism, and reformism which if attained would actually uphold the system which Bowen professed to condemn. However, inconsistent such statements may have been, they exhibited that some North Dakota Socialists had ability to adapt ideological abstractions to national and local needs.

The same Socialists also made blunders. Sometimes their socialist dogma interfered with their editorial discretion, and caused them to antagonize the citizens

⁷⁶ Ibid., July 10, 1914, p. 1, and July 17, 1914, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Nov. 29, 1912, pp. 1, 3-4, Dec. 20, 1912, p. 1, Jan. 10, 1913, p. 1, Jan. 17, 1913, p. 1, and Jan. 31, 1913, p. 1.

whom they were trying to convert. To some extent their handling of the issue of World War I was such a blunder, but this can be easily overestimated, since as Professor R. P. Wilkins' "North Dakota and the European War" makes clear, North Dakota was probably less under the influence of chauvinistic propaganda during this period than any other state.⁷⁸ Certainly the Iconoclast's handling of the intervention in Mexico was well done, as it very effectively represented it as a conspiracy of "certain transportation interests" the army, the Navy, and "all men who can make money on war."⁷⁹ It utilized the fact that the hostilities south of the border occurred almost simultaneously with the severe outbreak of labor strife in Ludlow, Colorado. Both events were reported in red headlines, "War in Colorado and Mexico."⁸⁰ In a similar manner, when World War I broke out in Europe, the Iconoclast echoed the traditional North Dakota sentiment that war was a selfish plot of the "interests". Though the Iconoclast remained pacifist to the extent of supporting Henry Ford's "peace ship" efforts,⁸¹ the editors avoided

⁷⁸ Abstract v, passim

⁷⁹ Ibid., Mar. 27, 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., May 1, 1914, p. 1.

⁸¹ Wilkins, 129, 134. This sentiment was in line with that of many North Dakotans, even the conservative Governor L. B. Hanna who actually went with Ford on his "peace ship" voyage. He was the only United States Governor to do so.

the pro-German stigma by their sincere and unequivocal criticism of the wartime German Government.⁸² The Kaiser, they said, was as oppressive to the working class as was the Government of the United States, but with the difference that in Germany such oppressions were carried on completely autocratically, while in the United States they were done with the "tacit acquiescence of the people."⁸³

However critical it was of Germany, the Iconoclast was an outspoken enemy of United States participation in the war. Its first reaction to the declarations of war in Europe was "Don't fight, but protest." It proposed a "world wide labor strike," and demanded that the ones who declared the war do the fighting.⁸⁴ The editors held to a strictly economic interpretation of the causes of the war⁸⁵ which probably found much acceptance among the North Dakota farmers, but their assertion that the high price of wheat was "the price of the workers' blood"⁸⁶ probably found less acceptance. The Iconoclast capitalized on the emphatic anti-war sentiment in the state by

⁸² Ibid., 26, Iconoclast, Feb. 12, 1915, p. 1.

⁸³ Iconoclast, Dec. 24, 1915, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Aug. 7, 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁵ This was a very common opinion in North Dakota. Wilkins, 21.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 48.

publicizing the many proposals made for a nationwide referendum on involvement in it,⁸⁷ and submitted a few ideas of its own on the question. In 1914 the paper suggested a policy of refusing to support the United States Government, if it entered the war,⁸⁸ and at the same time to encourage the workers in the belligerent nations to use the guns which the capitalists had placed in their hands against their capitalist-militarist governments.⁸⁹ A year later the State Committee of the NDSP adopted a resolution that, in the event of war, Socialists would refuse to enlist and if drafted refuse to fight.⁹⁰ That such manifestations of projected mutiny did not shock the North Dakota populace as much as might be expected is evidenced by the fact that, when in June 1915 Debs appeared at an anti-war rally in Garrison, North Dakota, he was greeted by a large audience all of whom, Debs said, were "red to the core."⁹¹

Debs' denunciation of President Wilson's preparedness program was also echoed by the Iconoclast,⁹² and it

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92-93.

⁸⁸ This was similar to the official policy of the national SP, and it split the party after United States entry into the war. Ginger, 341-343.

⁸⁹ Iconoclast, Oct. 16, 1914, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Feb. 15, 1915, p. 3.

⁹¹ Ginger, 333.

⁹² Wilkins, 81-82, 182.

probably alienated few of its readers. The Iconoclast held that the only grounds for entering the war would be an invasion of the United States, and the Fargo Local in 1915 proposed a national slate of such anti-war socialists as Arthur LeSueur and George R. Kirkpatrick, author of a socialist-pacifist book entitled, War, What For?⁹³ This nomination was done in protest against the patriotic utterances being voiced by many American socialists, and this and similar actions cleverly tied socialism to isolationism, an intensely popular sentiment in the state at this time. Eventually the "patriotic" socialists caused a split in the national Socialist Party, and the United States entry into the war sounded the party's death knell.⁹⁴ But it had little effect on the NDSP, for it was by this time already dying of exposure to the Nonpartisan League. Generally speaking, the views of the NDSP leaders and the Iconoclast editors regarding World War I probably did not have much to do with the party's decline in North Dakota.

But some of their other actions did. The editors

⁹³ Iconoclast, Dec. 24, 1915, p. 2, and Nov. 12, 1915, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ginger, 341-343; Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., Socialism and American Life, I (Princeton, 1952), 308; Shannon, Socialist Party, Chap. V.

of the Iconoclast, especially Near, sometimes allowed their ideological zeal to lead them into petty criticisms of local customs from which advantage accrued only to the opposition. Their extreme anti-militarism was not newly born with the outbreak of World War I, nor was it confined to standing armies which, according to Near, were invariably composed of "undesirable citizens."⁹⁵ The National Guard and the State Militia also were condemned as "hired hessians of capitalism," and Minot's new armory, and the University of North Dakota's ROTC department also became targets of editorial abuse.⁹⁶ As if this journalistic pettiness were not enough, the Iconoclast also indulged in a vituperative and ill-advised condemnation of the Boy Scouts as a vehicle for the indoctrination of militarism.⁹⁷ Such a foolish assault allowed the Optic to launch a typical attack on the socialists as an anarchical group bent on destroying cherished institutions and instituting "their own 'peace' plans; which include the waving of the red flag, the use of the bomb, fire and dynamite and wreck, ruin and desolation in general."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Iconoclast, Aug. 16, 1912, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Aug. 2, 1912, pp. 1, 4, July 19, 1912, p. 1, and Jan. 1, 1915, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid., June 7, 1912, p. 1, and June 28, 1912, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Minot Daily Optic, June 8, 1912, p. 1.

More ill-advised than the insults to the patriotic element was the Iconoclast's onslaught on religion. Socialism is invariably identified by its opponents with godlessness, and any socialist party must take precautions to avoid such politically harmful publicity. The NDSP not only failed to take such rudimentary precautions, but, in fact, openly invited attack on these grounds, as the pages of the Iconoclast amply testify. The socialists asserted that they were opposed only to the malpractices of organized religion, not "religion as such." Thus Billy Sunday was denounced as a hypocrite because of his alleged greed more than for his use of profanity, although that too was condemned.⁹⁹ Likewise, the Iconoclast assured its readers that it opposed only religion that used its position "to buttress the existing system . . . [and] to justify the exploitation of labor," by sending out preachers who taught "that a prayer can take the place of a beefsteak."¹⁰⁰ Soon, however, the Iconoclast was attacking "religion as such" with such material as O. M. Thomason's poem "Is there a God?" which heaped contempt on a deity who unfeelingly presides over capitalistic injustices.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Iconoclast, May 31, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., June 14, 1912, p. 3, and Aug. 16, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Mar. 13, 1914, p. 1.

Such criticism of Protestant evangelists and ministers was kid-glove treatment compared with the verbal abuse which the Iconoclast directed at Roman Catholicism. Although beginning by attacking only the church's "pernicious political activity" by which it sought to "separate labor on religious lines and bring existing unions under the domination of the Roman Catholic hierarchy,"¹⁰² the Iconoclast was soon indulging in excessive abuse that showed it to be completely bigoted on the Catholic question. Amazingly enough the NDSP seemed not to realize that such prejudice would alienate the considerable German-Russian element in the state who were preponderantly Catholic, but who had strong socialist tendencies, as they regarded profits as robbery, and cooperatives as highly legitimate.¹⁰³ Yet in the same issue which carried the first blast against the Catholic Church, the Iconoclast blandly announced that it was translating the Socialist platform into German for distribution among the settlers of that nationality.¹⁰⁴ In subsequent issues the Iconoclast accused the Catholic Church of contributing to the increase of venereal disease by its

¹⁰² May 31, 1912, p. 1, and July 4, 1913, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Joseph B. Voeller, "The Origin of the German-Russian People and their Role in North Dakota" (unpublished M. S. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1940), 100.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., May 31, 1912, p. 2.

repression of sex education, of being a fountainhead of "hypocrisy", "mental slavery," and "sham," because of its parochial education, of fomenting disloyalty because Cardinal Manning had said, "No pledge of Catholics is of any binding force to which Rome is not a party," and of being immoral, because a French priest had recently committed suicide in the home of his mistress.¹⁰⁵ The full flowering of the Iconoclast's anti-Catholic attitude appeared in an editorial in the June 13, 1913 issue which, besides referring to the Pope as an "old macaroni stuffed, wine soaked geezer," stated that the editors had

"...no desire to please the local or foreign followers of the dago pope . . . /who/ has the power (???) to souze a soul around in the fires of hell like a rag on a stick; that at the wiggle of a dago finger, one of the faithful must fast or feast, drink water when one wants wine and wine when a glass of water would taste like the nectar of the gods."

Such barefaced prejudice not only provided ready ammunition for the opposition's anti-Socialist ideological battle, but enabled them to use it for direct political purposes as well. When in June 1912, LeSueur attacked the Catholic educational system, the Optic pointed out that his political purpose was to defeat J. A. Roell, a Catholic who was running for a seat on the local school board against the Socialist candidates Mrs. Pooler and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Jan 10, 1913, p. 2, May 31, 1913, pp. 1, 4, July 19, 1912, p. 6, and Jan. 31, 1913, p. 1.

Mrs. Thomas. The Optic predicted that if the latter two won, they would insure that "their doctrines of 'Free Love, Property Right Destruction and Anarchy' may be introduced into the public schools at will."¹⁰⁶ That such alarms were effective is testified to by the fact that the Socialist candidates received only eighty and seventy-one votes apiece, a 125 per cent decrease from the previous year.¹⁰⁷ In the school election a year later candidates Teutsch and Pooler were defeated by another wide margin,¹⁰⁸ a clear indication that the Minot citizens did not relish the prospect of socialists on their school board, especially if the socialists appeared to be anti-religious bigots.

Religious and other sundry prejudices were not the only manifestations of the political obtuseness of the North Dakota Socialists. On the IWW and harvest hands issues they even antagonized the farmer of whose political sensibilities they were usually so respectful. "IWW" was a swear word to most farmers, because of the organization's reputation for sabotage in the harvest fields, and practical politics called for a repudiation of the union's activities. Here the NDSP balked, and not only

¹⁰⁶ June 4, 1912, pp. 1-2,

¹⁰⁷ Minot Daily Optic, June 5, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., June 4, 1913, p. 1.

did the issue get them into trouble during the riots of 1913, but the Iconoclast, whose function was to gain adherents among the farmers, had originally opposed the expulsion of Haywood from the party.¹⁰⁹ This support of Haywood is partly explained by the fact that the radical and irascible Near was editor of the Iconoclast at this time, but even after Near had been removed, and the entire party had been discredited by their participation in the IWW riots, the Iconoclast continued to sympathize with the IWW in its "protest against industrial oppression."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the Iconoclast opposed the farmer's perennial desire for cheap labor at harvest time, with accusations of deliberate exaggeration of the shortage of harvest hands so as to attract many laborers into the area, glutting the market at labor's expense and depressing the level of harvest wages.¹¹¹ Although the Iconoclast avoided mentioning the farmer as a party to this conspiracy, blaming instead the bankers who were motivated entirely by the desire to collect debts owed them by the farmers, the accusation bore at least indirectly on the farmers and, no doubt, angered them. It should be added, however, that the Iconoclast's

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Jan. 24, 1913, pp. 1, 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., May 29, 1914, p. 1, and July 17, 1914, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid., July 25, 1913, p. 3.

● accusations were probably correct, as the Optic in the summer of 1912 advertised for 22,000 harvest hands,¹¹² a number which seems ordinatorily large. In the summer of 1915, the city of Minot set up a "free Employment Bureau" run, significantly, by the police department whom the Iconoclast accused of arresting for vagrancy those refusing to work at stipulated wages.¹¹³ This was also possibly an accurate appraisal of the "Employment Bureau's" functions. But correct or not, the party's utterances and actions on this issue show that the North Dakota Socialists were sometimes politically wrong on the farm question.

Usually, however, they were right. The entire NDSP, including its Left-wing, was, from first to last, a painstaking cultivator of the farmer's interests, and its most significant achievement was to evolve a politically appealing farmers program out of the welter of previous agricultural demands. These demands were shaped to serve as instruments of political socialism, and to make a significant beginning toward selling the program to the skeptical and disillusioned North Dakota farmer. Its greatest failure was to allow its carefully nurtured progeny to be kidnapped by a rival political organization,

¹¹² July 26, 1912, p. 1.

¹¹³ Iconoclast, Aug. 13, 1915, p. 4.

just when it was beginning to show its strength. The NDSP formula for gaining the farmer's support was a judicious operation of endorsing his biases, articulating his prejudices, and emphasizing those aspects of socialism that held promise of economic relief for him. Thus the party warmly supported the popular American Society of Equity, but with the typical socialist reservation that the movement was only one step in the right direction, an intermediate stage in the process of socialization which it would be "the quintessence of jackassable stupidity" for the party to ignore.¹¹⁴ Likewise one of the strongest Socialist Defenders of Equity, Arthur Le Sueur, admitted that he was defending a capitalistic institution, and that he indulged in other capitalistic practices such as holding bank stock (and he might have mentioned defending in court the Great Northern Railway).¹¹⁵ But he defended these practices with the disarmingly utilitarian argument that any socialist must live somewhat as a capitalist does until the capitalist system should be overthrown.¹¹⁶ Another socialist who actively

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Feb. 6, 1914, p. 4, and June 15, 1915, p. 1; Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939 (Madison, Wis., 1951), 155-156.

¹¹⁵ LeSueur, Crusaders, 26-27.

¹¹⁶ Iconoclast, May 2, 1913, pp. 1, 3.

supported Equity was F. B. Wood, a versatile opportunist who was later elected to Equity's board of directors, and still later became a power in the Nonpartisan League.¹¹⁷

More important than support of capitalist institutions, was the party's ability to adapt socialist theory to the farmer's needs. First the socialists took steps to dispel the ever-present bug-a-boo that they stood for destruction of private land ownership. This was done quite effectively by merely repeating the statements of the Right-wing leaders of the national Socialist Party. The Iconoclast supplemented these utterances by asserting that socialism would actually make the farmer's title to his land more secure by relieving him of the danger of loan sharks, bankers, and government capitalists who threatened the possession of his land by property taxes, foreclosures, and eminent domain.¹¹⁸ This was clever propaganda, for by their rejection of collective ownership of land, the socialists not only parried the strongest argument which the capitalists could use against them in competition for the farm vote, but they placed the capitalists on the defensive by forcing to the farmer's attention the fact that his economic "enslavement" was a product of the venerated "free" capitalist system. This

¹¹⁷ Bahmer, 439.

¹¹⁸ Iconoclast, Sept. 20, 1912, p. 1.

was unquestionably the capitalist-despised practice of "stirring up class consciousness."

The North Dakota Socialists were masters of this practice. Almost every issue of the Iconoclast carried articles decrying the exploitation of the farmer by the trusts. The articles told their rural readers that the free farmer no longer existed, for he was actually owned by the trusts who set the price of all he bought and sold, but the former was so high and the latter so low until it became absolutely impossible for the farmer to live a debt free existence. In fact, the Socialists claimed that the only successful farmer was the one who "farmed the farmer" instead of his land.¹¹⁹ Practically everyone of the hundreds of farm topical articles that flooded the pages of the Iconoclast was devoted to this theme of exploitation by the capitalists. It was even asserted that good crop yields would not aid the farmer in his distress, since more production would only depress the price of farm products.¹²⁰ In fact, as L. L. Griffith wittily pointed out, even though North Dakota ranked first in its value of production per farmer, the farmer was actually worse off, because in being so efficient, he merely made the state first in swelling the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Sept. 20, 1912, p. 3, and July 20, 1912, pp. 1, 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Sept. 27, 1912, p. 3.

profits of the railroads, the elevators, the steel mills, the lumber trusts, and the bankers.¹²¹ Arthur LeSueur, whose journalistic lucidity was considerable, forcefully explained how manufactured goods, because of price fixing agreements, no longer fluctuated with the business cycle but that farm prices were subject to all the vicissitudes of the open market.¹²² In another article he stated that what the farmer needed was a "road to market" which was not a "trust-owned road that leads through the mills, the packing house, and over the railroad."¹²³

Probably because of his proximity, the banker came in for the severest criticism. He was extremely vulnerable, because he possessed that symbol of the farmer's lack of freedom, the mortgage. The Iconoclast attacked him on sentimental grounds, as in H. R. Martinson's poem, "Western Jam's" depicting the disillusionment of the hardy homesteader who toiled his life away and in the end found himself mortgage bound.¹²⁴ More seriously the paper declared that the banker's economic power was illegitimate. The Iconoclast explained to the farmer that the reason "why you have to walk, while your banker friend

¹²¹ Ibid., Nov. 12, 1915, p. 1.

¹²² Ibid., Jan. 2, 1914, p. 1.

¹²³ Ibid., Dec. 26, 1913, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Jan. 16, 1914, p. 1.

(???) rolls by on the cushions" was that the dastardly conniver had created the twelve per cent interest rate (it was never mentioned as being lower than twelve per cent) purposely designed to keep the farmer in economic subjection.¹²⁵ In 1914 the progressive aspirant for the Republic gubernatorial nomination, Usher L. Burdick, was ridiculed by the Iconoclast for masquerading as a friend of the farmer by advocating a reduction of the interest rate, when his demand was for a paltry reduction of two per cent, which, like other progressive "reforms," would only perpetuate the injustices of the capitalist system.¹²⁶ When the North Dakota bankers themselves came out in favor of the two per cent reduction after the poor crops in 1913, P. R. La Brant, a relatively unknown socialist, wrote a clever editorial ridiculing this reform.¹²⁷ La Brant likened the North Dakota farmer to an old but faithful team of horses who were unable to pull a load of sand out of a mudhole, no matter how hard the farmer whipped them. Finally, the farmer shoveled off part of the load, and the team gratefully pulled the remainder home. In a similar manner, said La Brant, the bankers had so heavily loaded the farmer with high

¹²⁵ Ibid., Aug. 8, 1913, pp. 1, 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., June 12, 1914, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., May 15, 1914, p. 1.

interest rates that he could not pull the load through the poor crop mudhole of 1913, no matter how hard the bankers whipped him with foreclosure threats. The bankers then decided to shovel off two per cent of the interest load, and were in the process of trying to make the farmer feel grateful for this concession, whereas if the farmer had any more brains than a horse, he would vote to have the entire load shoveled off in the form of a collectively owned banking system as advocated by the Socialist Party.

In fact, every action of the banker which had the ostensible purpose of aiding the farmer, had, according to the Iconoclast, a hidden economic motive. Thus the banker's support of the better farming movement was merely to increase the farmer's ability to make money for the bankers.¹²⁸ And the bankers with their other urban lieutenants had conspired to juggle the local taxation rates so as to bear unjustly on the farmer, thus providing another reason why he had "patches on his pants half the size of horse blankets."¹²⁹

The final "pitch" was always that only in socialism

¹²⁸ Ibid., Apr. 4, 1913, p. 1. This sentiment was later voiced by another prominent American socialist. See Upton Sinclair, The Goose Step, A Study of American Education (Pasadena, 1922). 203-206. For a more favorable treatment of the movement, see Fossum, 78-80. 136.

¹²⁹ Iconoclast, Mar. 31, 1913, p. 1.

could the farmer find relief. In the journalistic idealism of LeSueur, socialism became a spiritual force rather than a simple economic creed, and he invited rather than solicited citizens to take part in this "mightiest regenerating force on earth." He extolled socialism for its moral satisfaction as well as for its ability to bring about a better life by overthrowing the capitalist system which "keeps the education that ought to be in your children's heads in the vaults of the bankers" etc.¹³⁰ The Socialists followed through their intensive propaganda activities with attention-arresting excursions into the political life of the state. In 1912 Leon Durocher running for United States Representative in the First District challenged his progressive Republican opponent, H. T. Helgeson to debate the issues of profiteering on wheat, rising farm tenancy in the state, the \$76,000,000 worth of mortgages in North Dakota, the tariff issue, and the undemocratic features of the Republican and Democratic Parties.¹³¹ Helgeson refused the challenge, and the Iconoclast castigated him for it.¹³² At the same time the Iconoclast attacked the activities of Senator Porter McCumber who was very active in Washington

¹³⁰ Ibid., Mar. 23, 1914, p. 1.

¹³¹ Ibid., July 12, 1905, p. 1.

¹³² Ibid., Sept. 6, 1912, p. 1.

promoting an agricultural tariff. Despite this fact, the editors branded him "a slave to the mighty interests that elected him to office by their influence exerted through the prostituted press of North Dakota and elsewhere."¹³³

Yet in their race for agricultural adherents, the NDSP leaders did not, like Berger and other Right-wing Socialists, sabotage the program of relief for the laboring man. The NDSP took over the half-hearted pronouncement of the national Socialist Party that the farmer and laborer were "in the same boat" and actively sought to induce the North Dakota farmer to identify the laborer's interest with his own. One of the first issues of the Iconoclast carried an article entitled "Is the Farmer an Exploiter?" and (which was a considerable concession for J. M. Near) answered the question generally in the negative, saying that he was for the most part, one of the exploited.¹³⁴ The Iconoclast was unsparing in its criticism of penniless farmers (and most of them were penniless, according to the Iconoclast) who were too proud to identify themselves with the working class, but insisted that they were part of the capitalist class which in reality exploited them.¹³⁵ In subsequent issues the appeal was

¹³³ Ibid., Oct. 25, 1912, p. 1., and Oct. 23, 1912, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Ibid., Sept. 6, 1912, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid., Aug. 23, 1912, p. 1.

made to farmers and laborers alike to unite against their oppressors under the banner of socialism. It was asserted that such a combination was entirely natural since at that time everyone was organized except "the man who toils--the farmer and the wage earner."¹³⁶ Farmer-labor solidarity was also high lighted by the state party platforms which carried both agricultural and labor demands which in many cases were purported to be identical. This was probably the first serious attempt to effect the meaningful farmer-labor coalition which Townley was later to achieve so spectacularly. It is very probable that Townley first saw the possibilities of such a coalition while a member of the North Dakota Socialist Party. The only "hitch" in the operation was the unanswered question of whether the farmer would "buy" such a program, and by 1914 indications were that he would.

The Socialists were becoming popular! It was not without its effect that North Dakotans had witnessed failure after failure of their repeated attempts to obtain the kind of economic relief they wanted. That many should court socialism was an entirely natural thing, especially since at least fifty per cent of the state populace entertained some socialistic ideas at this

¹³⁶ Ibid., Feb. 6, 1914, p. 2.

time,¹³⁷ and such a formidable segment of the public could not be ignored. It has already been noted that those arch foes of the NDSP, the Minot dailies, were forced to treat the socialists in their midst with some deference, although they were evidently reluctant to do so. But even this reluctance was not in evidence in many of the rural weekly newspapers. In the small localities the love of a show mingled with the desire for economic justice always assured the junketing socialists a good turnout. Great interest was shown in the socialist lectures and debates, and they were almost invariably given favorable coverage in the local newspapers, many of which even went to the extent of establishing "Socialist Departments."¹³⁸ This free publicity provided local socialist leaders a chance to bring socialism home to the inhabitants of their communities on a truly intimate basis, since many residents very likely read no newspaper other than the local weekly. But those crossroads radicals failed rather dismally to take advantage of this opportunity. The various "Socialist Departments" never

¹³⁷ Wilkins, 14-15. Indicative of the fact that socialism had little of the adverse connotation in North Dakota that it had elsewhere is that the popular League Governor, Lynn Frazier said in 1917: "Yes, I believe in some of the socialistic ideas. . . . We're not afraid of class legislation." Quoted in Wilkins from Bismarck Tribune, Mar. 10, 1917, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 14.

showed the editorial touch of the Iconoclast in adapting socialist theory to local issues, and aside from an occasional effective article in the Mandan Republican, they were given over mainly to arid stretches of collectivist dogma ill calculated to appeal to the farmer who read mainly for relaxation and amusement.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the surprising amount of coverage, and most of it favorable, given by the weekly newspapers to socialist activities is an indication that socialism had a considerable hold on the political imagination of the North Dakota farmer.

There are other indications also. Probably the most significant was the intensified socialist political activity on the local level. By 1912 there were many locals organized in the western counties of the state, but, like most political organizations, they tended to become slack and inactive in non-election years, thus losing their effectiveness. H. E. Thompson claimed in 1912 that such lethargy had cost the party votes in the preceding election, because, by its failure to put

¹³⁹ It should not be inferred, however, that the North Dakota farmer was less well read than the city dweller in the state or elsewhere. Governor Burke once said, "the average [North Dakota] farmer. . .takes about one paper and reads it through and through even the advertisements." Wilkins, 329. For an even more favorable opinion of the farmer's reading habits see James E. Boyle, "The Agrarian Movement in the Northwest," American Economic Review, VII (Sept. 1918), 506.

precinct committeemen in all township precincts, it allowed the election boards to throw out many Socialist votes.¹⁴⁰ It remained for the energetic Teigan to take steps to remedy this particular weakness.

Almost as soon as he became Editor of the Iconoclast, Teigan issued a call for all locals to work harder in the coming election because existing conditions--low farm prices, high cost of living, and unemployment--made the field ripe for propaganda, and he intelligently emphasized the need for more systematic organizing and recruiting activities.¹⁴¹ In February 1914 he followed up this plea by insisting that Socialists spend less time on propagandizing and more on organizing, and he wisely recommended that converts should not be ignored after their conversion, but should be organized into locals and given work to do. The most useful of such work was to make certain that the local was kept active and interested.¹⁴² A year later the State Executive Committee, probably at Teigan's prompting, ruled that no member at large would be allowed to keep his membership in the NDSP if he resided where there was a local, and had

¹⁴⁰ Iconoclast, July 19, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Oct. 31, 1913, p. 2.

¹⁴² Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 5.

refused to join it.¹⁴³ This action was in line with Teigan's policy of making every member an active instrument of the party. Teigan was building a political machine, and his intensive emphasis on political organization as opposed to propaganda (politely called "education" by the Left-wingers) marks him as a Right-wing, political-actionist type socialist of the purest sort. He had political ambitions and he knew how to achieve them. That he got results is attested by the improved fiscal condition of the party under his state secretaryship, and by the increase in the number of locals. At the end of both 1913 and 1914, during which Teigan served full time as State Secretary, the party ended in the black for the first two times in its history.¹⁴⁴ Under his leadership the number of locals was increased quite rapidly, there being only twenty fewer in existence in July 1916, after the League had encroached severely into the NDSP membership than there were when Teigan took office in 1913.¹⁴⁵

The results of this activity are also to be seen in the outcomes of local and county elections. Teigan was

¹⁴³ Ibid., Mar. 26, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 5, and Jan 15, 1915, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ There were 175 locals in December 1912, and 155 in July 1916 when the last official listing was made. Iconoclast, Dec. 13, 1912, p. 3, and July 21, 1916, p. 2.

fully aware that the county was as important to the party organization as the local, and, in line with his policy of giving every Socialist something to do, he recommended that the county officials do the work of routing socialist speakers, since they were familiar with the country districts.¹⁴⁶ After the party had gained legal standing and was thus eligible to enter primary elections, he insisted that every county field a full slate of primary candidates to give the socialist electors a chance to vote a straight Socialist ticket.¹⁴⁷ Many Socialists had been running county candidates prior to that time, although their platforms were hardly reproductions of the Communist Manifesto. The Morton County (southwestern North Dakota) Socialists of 1912 demanded the subpoena of jurors by registered mail, and the transfer of local poor relief from the county to the "cities" and townships.¹⁴⁸ To the north, the Socialists of Stanley, Mountrail County, advocated road building along the natural contours of the land instead of rigidly following section lines which necessitated expensive cuts and bridges.¹⁴⁹ Despite their non-Marxist character such

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., June 28, 1912, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Oct. 23, 1914, p. 5.

issues very likely made the party meaningful to the common voter, and often local socialist candidates were elected. Ward County, whose slate generally read like a roster of Socialist "big names" in the state gave as many votes to Debs as to Taft in 1912,¹⁵⁰ and in 1915 several Socialists were made township officers there.¹⁵¹ Williams County, in 1912, elected a Socialist Sheriff whom the Hanna administration later tried to remove.¹⁵² In 1913 Mercer County in the west central part of the state elected "on stickers,"¹⁵³ after "the most bitter fight that had even been experienced in Mercer County," a Socialist States Attorney after his name had been removed from the ballot by legal proceedings.¹⁵⁴ Bitterness against local Socialist candidates was not confined to Mercer County, as in 1912 the Burke County Socialist candidate for Register of Deeds and a father of six children was discharged from his job as a retail clerk because of his socialist convictions.¹⁵⁵ In the same year the

¹⁵⁰ Blue Book, 1913, 262-264.

¹⁵¹ Iconoclast, Apr. 2, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁵² Ibid., Nov. 15, 1912, p. 1, and Feb. 20, 1914, p. 1.

¹⁵³ This colloquialism refers to a candidate who runs without any party sponsorship or whose name is not printed on the ballot because of legal technicalities.

¹⁵⁴ Minot Daily Optic, Oct. 23, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Iconoclast, July 5, 1912, p. 5, and Aug. 9, 1912, p. 4.

Socialist candidate for city constable at Ryder, Ward County, was arrested for bootlegging, after the police had raided his cellar and found four barrels, two of which were filled with liquor and two with copies of the Appeal to Reason.¹⁵⁶ Probably the authorities considered the contents of the latter two barrels the more incriminating. These activities besides providing amusement for the researcher, show that socialism was to some extent beginning to "catch on" in the state, because the NDSP had found a method of appealing to the farmer. The most tangible aspect of this appeal was the farmers program.

The farmers program, like the rest of the NDSP had also been undergoing change. The simple demands of 1908 calling for state-owned flour mills and terminal elevators, rural credit banks, and state hail insurance had a terseness and practicality that appealed to farmers whose interests lay in tangibles instead of abstractions. But in 1911 the NDSP, in line with the nationwide enthusiasm for urban progressivism, "doctored" its program considerably at the farmer's expense. A list of twenty-one "immediate demands" was published all of which with the exceptions of provisions for state life, fire, and hail insurance, and for government ownership of banks, had

¹⁵⁶ Minot Daily Optic, Oct. 23, 1912, p. 1.

nothing to do with agricultural distress, and were either progressive proposals for liberalizing the political process or planks aimed at the labor vote. In the former category were demands for direct legislation, abolition of both the state and national Senate, abolition of the Governor's veto power, and woman suffrage, while the laborer was wooed with such attractive proposals as old age pensions, workmen's compensation, free and compulsory education to the age of sixteen, protection of unions from employers' damage suits as a result of boycotts, weekly paydays, compulsory safety devices, state printing to bear a union label, an anti-injunction statute, state medical aid, and the eight-hour day.¹⁵⁷ After calling on North Dakota labor to "vote as you strike," the Socialists outlined their farmers program. This program, aside from meaningful suggestions for a state system of rural credit, and insurance, consisted of an innocuous encouragement of cooperative operation of creameries and cheese factories, cooperative ownership of farm machinery, and cooperative purchase of fertilizers, twine, and implements. It proclaimed the Socialists' intention to distribute socialist propaganda among the farmers and farm laborers, the latter of whom were described as, "the actual proletarians who play so large

¹⁵⁷ MS. LeSueur Papers.

a role in the agriculture of the western states."¹⁵⁸ Such a platform while it was probably important in electing LeSueur to the Minot City Commission, had little attraction for North Dakota farmers who were engaged primarily in wheat production and thus little interested in cooperatively operated cheese factories, and who probably did not appreciate hearing their hired hands described as "actual proletarians." The platform caused little harm, however, since few farmers were voting in the off-year of 1911, but if the Socialists cared to win any farmer support in the election of the next year, they would have to revamp their farmers program considerably.

They did. Directing its appeal this year toward the farmers instead of the urban progressives, the NDSP platform of 1912 consisted of eight planks of which all but the first had direct application to the farmer and his economic plight. The platform called for:¹⁵⁹

1. Home rule for counties to enable the introduction of the contract system for public work through the use of a county referendum.

2. State ownership of terminal elevators, packing houses, and cold storage plants controlled on a patronage dividend plan with the operators elected by popular vote

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Iconoclast, May 24, 1912, p. 2.

and subject to recall.

3. All non-using owners of land to set their own assessment valuations with the state option of purchasing said land at the assessed figure.

4. State ownership and operation of banks which would do a general banking business and act as depositories of state funds.

5. State lands to be leased instead of sold, and after a tenant had paid rents equal to the market value of the land, the rents would then be reduced to the amount of taxes levied on similar land.

6. State life, pest, fire, hail, and animal insurance.

7. A reciprocal demurrage law.¹⁶⁰

8. A reduction of freight rates on native coal shipments within the state.

Such a platform was well calculated to attract the interest of the farmer because of its brevity and possibility of attainment. Planks three and five were ingenious innovations hitting directly at the problem of

¹⁶⁰ Demurrage was a penalty charged by the railroads to the grain shippers for delay beyond a reasonable period of time-usually set at forty-eight hours-in unloading the box cars and returning them to the railroads. A reciprocal demurrage law would probably allow the shipper to charge the railroads for delay in delivering the cars to the line elevators, and would thus tend to lower shipping costs and remedy the perennial condition of a box car shortage at harvest time.

tenancy, number three being proclaimed by LeSueur as insuring the exclusion of the railroads from the land speculating business in which they were wont to indulge, because of their vast holdings in land grants.¹⁶¹ The party called on all farmers to unite "under the banner of the Socialist Party" and did not, until August 1912, get around to incorporating a list of immediate demands resembling the labor-progressive platform of 1911.¹⁶² This delay in effect placed precedence on the farmers platform over the labor-progressive program, which was mainly a repetition, with a few additions, of the one of the previous year. Furthermore the list of immediate demands gave credibility to the professed common ground between farmer and laborer by having included in it also two planks from which the farmer would benefit. These were the introduction of agricultural instruction in the public school system, and an increase of the time for redemption under mortgage foreclosures to two years. Finally this program was adopted in a manner which enabled the party to wring out its last possible drop of favorable publicity on the democratic nature of its procedures, for it officially amended plank twenty-three by one of those tedious referendums of which the Socialists were so fond. The plank dealt with the state's prohibition law

¹⁶¹ Iconoclast, Sept. 27, 1912, p. 3.

¹⁶² Ibid., Aug. 23, 1912, p. 3.

and proposed to amend it to allow for local option, the proceeds to be used for construction of public parks and playgrounds. The referendum was a harmless proviso to make certain that the proposed law would not conflict with Federal law, and it passed 279 to 36.¹⁶³ On the whole, the platform of 1912 was a very effective instrument for attracting the farmer's vote, and for instilling within him a sense of community of interest with organized labor.

The platform of 1914 was even more appealing. The state Socialist Convention which met for the first three days of February drew up a program very much in line with the thinking of the national Right-wing Socialists that there was room for everyone in the Socialist Party except the monopoly capitalist, and even he might be allowed in if he were sorry for his capitalistic cussedness. The North Dakota Socialist program intoned that the abolition of capitalism was necessary for the benefit not only of the working man but for all classes:

the small farmer who is today exploited more indirectly but not less effectively than is the wage laborer, the small manufacturer and trader who is engaged in a desperate and losing struggle for economic independence in the face of the all conquering power of concentrated capital; and even the capitalist himself who is a slave of his wealth rather than its master.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ibid., June 28, 1912, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Feb. 20, 1914, p. 3.

More important than such idealistic vaporings calling for the capitalist lion and the proletarian lamb to lie down together and allow a little socialist to lead them into the Marxian empyrean, the NDSP went on the articulate a series of labor-progressive-farmer demands that was in complete accord with the policy of trying to induce the farmer to identify the laborer's interest with his own and vice versa. The list of demands contained few new features, for the Socialists no doubt suspected what Townley later proved--that the Midwestern farmer was less interested in new schemes than in realization of the old ones. There were, however, certain refinements of some of the provisions such as the establishment of a state Department of Education to advance modern learning to rural children, and a creation of a state Department of Agriculture to be elected exclusively by farmers; this Department was to have the power of levying a three per cent tax on farm property to obtain funds for the construction of state industries such as elevators, flour mills, packing plants, and a marketing agency for farm products.¹⁶⁵ But the most significant aspect of the 1914 program was that it incorporated farmer, labor, and progressive planks into one inclusive platform thus appealing to a broad base of the state

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

electorate. And the electorate would respond to such measures, as the election returns of 1912 and 1914 were to indicate.

The NDSP, like its parent organization, the Socialist Party of America, underwent, from 1910 to 1914, a pronounced shift to the Right, in an attempt to meet the challenge of progressivism. In the NDSP the guiding spirit of this shift was Henry G. Teigan who, despite the opposition of the Left, managed to place Right wingers in control of the party offices and of the party organ, the Iconoclast. Teigan's purpose in doing this was to make the NDSP a political power in the state by appealing to the discontented farmers and gaining their allegiance. Although errors were committed mainly in the editorial pronouncements of the Iconoclast, the Rightist leaders managed to evolve an effective political program that had attractions for farmers and laborers alike.

CHAPTER III

"DEMOCRATIC DEGENERATION:" ELECTIONS, IWW'S, AND EXPERIMENTS, 1911-1914

The November 1, 1912, issue of the Iconoclast was printed entirely in red ink under the slogan, "This is Our Year." And to a certain extent, it was. The nationwide success of the Socialist candidates in local elections of 1911 had produced a burst of enthusiasm, and had caused some concern among their opponents. The NDSP with Fasset in the State Legislature, LeSueur in the Minot City Hall, and several other lesser Socialists holding local elective posts, had some cause for optimism, and their hope for success was not to be lessened by the favorable response engendered by their election campaign. The candidates for state office campaigned vigorously, and were given considerable assistance by the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates--Debs and Emil Seidel--who appeared in the state. When on August 16, 1912, Seidel addressed a large Minot audience, even the Minot daily newspapers had pleasant things to say about him.¹ Those publications did not mention, however, as the Iconoclast did, that a local banker and judge found it necessary to leave while Seidel's speech was in progress because they "had their cuticles punctured

¹ Minot Daily Reporter, August 17, 1912, p. 1; Minot Daily Optic, August 16, 1912, p. 1.

by the smiling wit and cutting sarcasm of this representative of the common people."² Debs, as usual, produced a favorable reaction wherever he appeared, enjoying a "thorough success" in Mandan where he was greeted by a standing-room-only crowd.³

Of the state's Socialist office seekers, the most politically active were Leon Durocher and Arthur LeSueur, candidates for United States Representative for the First and Third Districts respectively, and A. E. Bowen the candidate for Governor. Durocher, who had once been a legislative clerk in the State Capitol, supplemented his energetic campaign with the publication of a seventy-five cent, four page brochure entitled, "How Laws are Made in North Dakota." In this book he expounded his theme that North Dakota legislation was a result of "cigars, booze and boodle."⁴ LeSueur campaigned indefatigably in his district which comprised the politically fertile, agriculturally less fertile, western counties of the state, and was well received, especially in the village of Beach, the home of A. C. Townley.⁵ When Bowen carried his campaign into LeSueur's district, the two Socialist spellbinders indulged

² Iconoclast, August 23, 1912, p. 1.

³ Ibid., September 6, 1912, p. 2; The Mandan Republican, August 29, 1912, p. 1.

⁴ Iconoclast, August 16, 1912, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid., August 9, 1912, p. 1.

in a series of mutual backslappings, particularly at Bowman where Bowen reportedly delivered an address that was "a masterpiece in construction and logic,"⁶ and where he found so much enthusiasm for LeSueur that he predicted a solid vote for him in that precinct.⁷ The Iconoclast enthusiastically shared this optimism regarding LeSueur, and confidently predicted that he would win the Congressional race against his Republican and Democratic opponents.⁸

He did not. He did, however, poll 5254 votes, which was more than one third of the number cast for the popular Progressive Republican incumbent, P. D. Norton, and only some two-thousand less than was cast for Halvor Halvorsen, the Democratic candidate.⁹ In Ward County he trailed Halvorsen, who carried the county, by only 210 votes; Bowen lost in this county to the Republican gubernatorial winner, L. B. Hanna, 1441 to 707.¹⁰ In fact, LeSueur polled almost as many votes in his district as Bowen did in the entire state, Bowen's vote being only 6835.¹¹ The vote for Bowen is small, however, only in comparison with that of the rest

⁶ Ibid., September 13, 1912, p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., October 4, 1912, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid., September 13, 1912, p. 1.

⁹ Blue Book, 1913, 267.

¹⁰ Ibid., 267-268.

¹¹ Ibid., 268.

of the Socialist candidates for state office who averaged about seven-thousand votes per candidate.¹² Bowen's vote was in actuality the highest ever to be received by a Socialist candidate for Governor in the state of North Dakota. The most glaring exception to the seven-thousand vote average, however, was Durocher's paltry 1310.¹³ The main significance of such a showing was that Socialist strength was now weakest in the eastern part of the state which comprised Durocher's district, and strongest in the western counties where agricultural distress was the most acute, a reflection of the distinctly rural nature of North Dakota Socialism.¹⁴ For the State legislature, the party ran a total of twenty-one candidates in eight different legislative districts in the central and western counties.¹⁵ None of these were successful, although L. L. Griffith's 615 votes and P. R. LaBrant's 525 in the sparsely populated Burke, Divide, and Mountrail Counties, were not without promise. For President, the state of North Dakota, which gave a plurality to Wilson, cast 6966 votes for Debs.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 265-272.

¹³ Ibid., 265.

¹⁴ See list of party locals, Iconoclast, July 19, 1912, p. 3. The NDSP claimed that two-thirds of its members were farmers; Wilkins, 14.

¹⁵ Blue Book, 1913, 338-341.

¹⁶ Ibid., 466.

This was almost eight per cent of the vote cast for President in the state, and, though Debs' vote in North Dakota was surpassed in percentages by Oklahoma, Nevada, Montana, Washington, California, Idaho, Oregon, Florida, Arizona, Ohio, Texas, Minnesota, and Utah in that order, this vote was considerably ahead of the national average for Debs which amounted to just under six percent of the total presidential vote.¹⁷ Thus North Dakota figured significantly in the greatest election showing the Socialist Party was ever to attain. This election finally raised the NDSP's total vote to over the required five per cent of the state vote, thus legally enabling it to enter candidates in the primary elections.¹⁸ The Iconoclast played up the Socialist gains throughout the country, and set its sights on 1916 with the hackneyed slogan "We Have Just Begun to Fight."¹⁹ Their most bitter fight was to occur in their own home town.

If the sluggish accretion of rural adherents was more important to the success of the party, the winning of city elections was more ornamental. In March 1912 the towns of Rugby and Hillsboro elected Socialist mayors, and Devils Lake, which the year previously had elected a Socialist alderman, missed electing a Socialist mayor by only nine

¹⁷ Saloutos and Hicks, 156, note.

¹⁸ Minot Daily Reporter, November 22, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁹ Iconoclast, November 15, 1912, p. 1.

votes.²⁰ Three years later that city elected Socialists to the offices of Justice of the Peace and Park Commissioner.²¹ In 1914 an Iconoclast editorialist, J. Arthur Williams, ran for Mayor of Grand Forks against J. A. Dinnie and a future Governor of the state, A. G. Sorlie.²² Dinnie, whom Williams called, "the logical representative of the financial interests," won the election with 951 votes to Sorlie's 837, and Williams' 143.²³ Williams' post election protestations were levelled not at Dinnie, but at Sorlie about whom he said: "I figure Sorlie got all my votes, and he is known as a socialist . . . Sorlie should not have been in the race."²⁴ This is probably the only case on record where a socialist sought to discredit an opponent by branding him with the socialist label. But the most attractive show-window of Socialism in the state was Minot where LeSueur was elected President of the City Commission in 1911, and earned a favorable reputation as a crusader against the firmly entrenched gambling and liquor rackets there.²⁵ He did not complete his term, however, for, when he found himself continually in the minority regarding the Commission's

²⁰ Bahmer, 431.

²¹ Iconoclast, p. 1.

²² Grand Forks, Daily Herald, April 7, 1914, p. 1.

²³ Ibid., April 5, 1914, p. 5, and April 7, 1914, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid., April 6, 1914, p. 1.

²⁵ Bahmer, 430-431.

decisions, he gracefully and rather spectacularly resigned.²⁶

Probably many Left-wing Socialists welcomed LeSueur's resignation, since their main fear was of losing control of the party to middle class reformers interested in prolonging capitalism's rule instead of destroying it. J. M. Near voiced this fear in his defense of the party's refusal to ally with the city's reform element. He characterized the reform movement as a fake which dealt only with the outward aspects of civic crime instead of its fundamental cause, the capitalist system itself.²⁷ Furthermore, Near said, fusion with the reformers would allow the bourgeoisie to infiltrate the party and eventually destroy it as they had destroyed the Populists.²⁸ Yet when the city elections of 1913 approached, the Socialists took on a distinctly progressive appearance, as they announced their platform as civic morality, municipally owned light, power, gas, and telephone systems, humane treatment at the city jail, and the appointment of a police matron.²⁹ This program placed the NDSP on record favoring reforms, but opposing reformers, and left the party open to its own traditional complaint of having its program pilfered by the opposition. As usual, the

²⁶ Minot Daily Optic, October 15, 1913, p. 1.

²⁷ Iconoclast, July 19, 1912, p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid., March 7, 1913, p. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., March 14, 1913, p. 2.

Iconoclast proved adept at exploiting issues which interested the local populace. This was especially true of the excessive light and power rates which the Iconoclast had publicized in every issue from December 13, 1912, to February 14, 1913, in a series of front page articles entitled, "How You Are Gouged." The villain in the piece was reputed to be the Consumer's Power Company which the Iconoclast excoriated mercilessly, but whose advertisements solemnly declaring the fulfillment of their duty of public service,³⁰ also invariably found their way into the pages of the official Socialist publication. Nevertheless, the Iconoclast was here exploiting a vital local issue, since, at this time, even the Minot Commercial Club was trying to induce the Consumer's Power Company to reduce its rates.³¹

Probably, it was this issue that influenced the outcome of the 1913 city election. The socialists filed an impressive slate including H. E. Thompson, D. C. Dorman, Eugene Teutsch, and H. R. Martinson,³² the name of LeSueur being conspicuously absent, to the surprise, and probable relief, of the Optic.³³ This omission is indeed somewhat of a mystery, and, though the reason for it may simply have

³⁰ Ibid., January 3, 1913, p. 3.

³¹ Minot Daily Optic, February 5, 1913, p. 1.

³² Iconoclast, March 28, 1913, p. 1.

³³ Minot Daily Optic, March 25, 1913, p. 1.

been that LeSueur was getting ready to leave the state as he did shortly afterward, it is possible that his absence from the ticket resulted from an internecine brawl from which LeSueur emerged second best. LeSueur evidently had no supporters in the Left-wing, and Teigan, probably recognizing LeSueur's ambitions as conflicting with his own, may have been able, by his rapidly solidifying domination of the Right-wing, to keep that branch of the party from supporting him. At any rate, the NDSP had a well developed propensity for sacking their most effective vote-getters, such as Basset, Fasset, and LeSueur, an indication that internecine jealousies may have played no small part in the demise of the party in North Dakota. However, the Minot Socialists probably saw little reason to regret their choice of a city ticket, for all their candidates made good showings, none losing by more than thirty votes, and D. C. Dorman was elected Street Commissioner.³⁴ Dorman soon became a fly in the municipal ointment, castigating his associates for defeating his police matron proposal,³⁵ capitalizing on dissensions among the other members of the Commission by trying to goad President Nehemiah Davis into preferring charges of laxity against Police Commissioner W. S. Shaw, and rowing with City Attorney George McGee for

³⁴ Ibid., April 2, 1913, p. 1.

³⁵ Iconoclast, June 1, 1913, p. 1.

not issuing warrants against those whom Dorman accused of violating the city ordinances.³⁶ The Iconoclast backed Dorman in his feuds with the Commission whom the editors described as "drags," especially Davis and McGee.³⁷ The paper also held up as a great achievement Dorman's success in opposing the installation of a "great white way" lighting system by contract,³⁸ and having it done as a city project instead.³⁹ On one occasion Dorman ran afoul of one of his Socialist colleagues, Eugene Teutsch, who charged that the city streets were being paved by concrete containing inferior gravel. Teutsch, who owned a gravel pit, indignantly denied that his complaint stemmed from the fact that he had not gotten the gravel contract.⁴⁰ However, it was none of these trivial incidents that cost Dorman his career as a civic crusader. It was the IWW riots that did that.

It has already been noted that the NDSP, though mostly a Right-wing Socialist organization, nursed an incongruous affection for the IWW's. In 1912 the Iconoclast described as a "white livered wop," a local heckler who rotten-egged

³⁶ Minot Daily Optic, July 1, 1913, p. 1.

³⁷ Iconoclast, July 11, 1913, p. 1.

³⁸ Minot Daily Optic, July 24, 1913, pp. 1-2.

³⁹ Iconoclast, October 10, 1913, pp. 1, 4.

⁴⁰ Minot Daily Optic, July 25, 1913, p. 1.

an IWW agitator on the streets of Minot,⁴¹ and this remained generally its editorial viewpoint regarding militant anti-IWW's until the paper's demise in 1916. However, this viewpoint caused no major repercussions during the first year of the Iconoclast's publication, because few IWW's were then to be found in Minot. When on July 25, 1913, two IWW organizers named Jack Law and Jack Allen arrived in the "Magic City," things were different. Law and Allen immediately began holding street meetings in the usual noisy IWW fashion, and these meetings often coincided with Salvation Army meetings on the opposite side of the street. Since the IWW songs, for which they were famous and which were usually lustily sung at these meetings, were often parodies of the favorite Salvation Army hymns, it was quite natural that fist fights and other disturbances should and did occur.⁴² It was not the "wobblies'" sacrilege, however, but their avowed purpose of organizing the construction workers of the city that prompted the riotings.⁴³ These organizing intentions aroused the enmity of a local cigar maker named Olander and of D. A. Dinnie who was engaged in a construction project which he immediately posted with signs saying "no organizers allowed."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Iconoclast, August 9, 1912, p. 2.

⁴² Ibid., August 15, 1913, p. 1; Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

⁴³ Iconoclast, August 15, 1915, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

On August 8, 1913, the "fun" began. On that evening Law and Allen were delivering their usual harangues to an apparently enthusiastic audience of "tramps and hoboes and some workmen who were mislead [sic]"⁴⁵ whom they told that Minot paid the lowest wages of any city which they had visited.⁴⁶ At about this juncture Olander effectively silenced the speakers by opening the muffler of his automobile parked nearby and racing the motor.⁴⁷ Law questioned the legality of such an act, while his listeners, resorting to more direct methods, surged around Olander who was saved from a mauling by Deputy Sheriff Daniel Dougherty and his aides. Dougherty sought to quell the riot by arresting the IWW's who tried to continue their speeches.⁴⁸ Evidently he did not deem it necessary to silence the anti-IWW's in the interest of order, however, for after the Sheriff intervened, "Olander and other taxpayers . . . denounced the unknown strangers as anarchists."⁴⁹ The most outspoken of these "taxpayers" was a local lawyer named D. C. Greenleaf who orated at great length on the perfidy of those "anarchists trying to bring trouble to a peaceful community" and

⁴⁵ Minot Daily Optic, August 9, 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1; Iconoclast, August 15, 1913, p. 1; Minot Daily Reporter, August 9, 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Minot Daily Optic, August 9, 1913, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

who was finally taken away by friends "who feared for his safety."⁵⁰ At this time order was generally restored.

This incident aroused a furious reaction in the Minot press. The news stories of the Optic and the Reporter covering the riot were so permeated with prejudice that it is impossible to separate fact from fiction in their accounts. These were models of objectivity, however, compared with their editorials on the subject. The Optic, referring to this "Crisis in Minot," blandly stated that all local workers were being paid "fair wages" and ". . . if they wish to progress further in life, they have the same opportunity to succeed as any other man."⁵¹ After outlining the clear duty of the Minot citizens in the statement that "full protection must be given to all men who desire to work, and the agitators must be suppressed," the Optic went on to describe the local "crisis" as destructive of business confidence. The editors asserted that the city of Minot was just beginning to attract the attention of "other manufacturers," who would be "averse to entering upon enterprises in a community where such labor troubles are tolerated."⁵² The Reporter was worried less about the city's possible economic setback than by the IWW threat to its

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵² Ibid., p. 2.

moral and patriotic resources: "No self respecting man or woman can do otherwise than hate, with a consuming hatred, the degenerate who stands up there night after night, and pours out his vile abuse against all institutions and traditions that true Americans love and revere."⁵³ After identifying hatred as a natural prerogative of all "true Americans," the Reporter ringingly inquired, "how long is Minot going to tolerate that sort of thing?"⁵⁴ The answer to this question turned out to be, "not long," for on August 10 the local police forbade any more street speaking by the IWW's.⁵⁵

It was this action of the police that brought the local Socialists into the affair. On the day of the police order they held a meeting and decided, paradoxically enough, both to accept the "resignation" of J. M. Near, an ardent champion of the IWW's, and to fight the gagging of the IWW leaders as a violation of free speech.⁵⁶ On the same night they tested the ban on street speaking by attempting to address the milling throngs in open defiance of the police order. The police, acting on the comand of President Davis to "pull 'em off the box," quickly lodged Socialists LeSueur,

⁵³ Minot Daily Reporter, August 9, 1913, pp. 1-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁵ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; Minot Daily Optic, August 13, 1913, p. 1.

Griffith, Martinson, Thompson, Ivar Elk, R. E. Wright, and Street Commissioner Dorman in the city jail.⁵⁷ They had a great deal of company, for the police, aided by the firemen and various other deputies, made nearly one-hundred arrests that night, "the police visiting the 'jungles' and the railroad yards to get their men."⁵⁸ Evidently many of "their men" evaded the clutches of the law, however, as "groups of men, Industrial Workers of the World and their enemies, citizens of Minot, stood on corners about the town most of the night . . . both sides planning new procedures in the war against anarchy."⁵⁹

The "war" was regarded less seriously by the Socialists than by the Minot dailies. Those arrested with the IWW's considered their part in the affair little more than a lark, and they enthusiastically participated in the boisterous singing of IWW songs which disturbed the composure of the prison guards,⁶⁰ and inspired Martinson to write, while still in jail, a humorous bit of doggerel entitled, "Where the Old Mouse River Flows."⁶¹ The Optic, however, saw no ground for levity regarding the new outbreak of

⁵⁷ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955; Iconoclast, August 15, 1913, pp. 1-2; Minot Daily Optic, August 11, 1913, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Minot Daily Optic, August 11, 1913, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid., August 11, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

⁶¹ Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 1.

rioting and the Socialists' part in it. It solemnly editorialized on the "treason of the IWW,"⁶² and the "Black Eye for Minot" in which it voiced a fear that Minot would become the "laughing stock of the nation" for laxity in dealing with the IWW's, and advocated the strong arm methods recently adopted by Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth against those "disturbers of peace and prosperity to all."⁶³ The Reporter was even more intolerant, denouncing even the dubiously pertinent factor of Jack Law's physical appearance: "This Law is such a handsome person. Ever see the visible part of a mule going north? Looks just like Law . . . Wouldn't wonder if they were brothers."⁶⁴ And it railed against J. M. Near who had refused to allow his dismissal to silence him, but had printed a hand bill denouncing the city administration and backing the IWW's.⁶⁵ Other Socialists circulated free speech placards, also to the vituperative accompaniment of the Reporter.⁶⁶ The Iconoclast returned as many blows as it received, especially when Governor Hanna offered to "lend all assistance within the power of the state to enforce law and order."⁶⁷ The

⁶² Minot Daily Optic, August 19, 1913, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid., August 11, 1913, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Minot Daily Reporter, August 12, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 14, 1913, p. 1, August 15, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid., August 15, 1913, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Minot Daily Optic, August 13, 1913, p. 1.

Iconoclast replied that the city needed no more of the capitalist brand of "law and order," since the Minot police were admirably performing their function of committing mass arrests and beating prisoners.⁶⁸

The Iconoclast was right. The local police force ably triumphed over the strategy of the IWW's. And by the time of the Minot riots this IWW strategy had been perfected in a series of strikes across the nation, especially the textile strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912.⁶⁹ The method was simply to pour IWW's by the hundred into a city which denied them free speech; these transients would get themselves arrested for holding street meetings, fill the jails and create pandemonium there, and when the jails became full of noisy "wobblies," and when there were as many on the streets inviting arrest as there were in the prisons, the city administration would often give in.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the IWW grapevine soon carried the message: "All you footloose wobblies come to Minot," and the response was immediate, for soon trainloads of disreputable looking characters began to arrive in the "Magic City."⁷¹ But the police resorted to such expedients as building "bull pens" to hold the excess

⁶⁸ Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Shannon, Socialist Party, 69-70.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁷¹ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955; Minot Daily Optic, August 14, 1913, p. 1.

prisoners,⁷² converting stock yards into temporary prisons,⁷³ marching groups of IWW's miles out of the city and warning them not to return,⁷⁴ and, most effectively of all, meeting the trains with armed guards and preventing the IWW's from disembarking.⁷⁵ In the end these methods broke the power of the IWW's in Minot, but for several days the battle continued to rage, and the issue remained in doubt.

The heroes of the occasion, from the city's point of view, were Sheriff "Ed" Kelley and his deputy, Daniel Dougherty, both adept in the use of the billy club, and capable though slightly unethical in dealing with "anarchists." On August 13, they formed a posse and marched some fifty-nine IWW's to Burlington, nine miles away, and warned them not to return.⁷⁶ When twenty-four of them failed to heed the order they were not only arrested, but "rubber hose and clubs were freely wielded on the heads of the agitators."⁷⁷ On August 14, Dougherty, with eight mounted subordinates, raided the hobo jungles near Minot, dispersed the inhabitants with gun fire, and smashed their camp, to

⁷² Minot Daily Optic, August 14, 1913, p. 1.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 1, August 13, 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., August 13, 1913, p. 1; Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

⁷⁶ Minot Daily Optic, August 13, 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., August 15, 1913, p. 1.

the delight of Minot Daily Optic. The Iconoclast was less delighted, and Teigan, who had prudently stayed out of jail, made his first issue a protest against the local authorities' "despotic acts against free government," and printed an appeal to the local citizenry written by the imprisoned Socialists that the police were acting like "inhuman brutes," instigating riots and clubbing "innocent working men."⁷⁸ The Optic in effect corroborated such charges three days later in its account of an attempted IWW meeting in front of the post office: ". . . the police broke up the meeting with clubs, not arresting any more, owing to the already crowded jails."⁷⁹ Such statements indicated that the IWW strategy was beginning to work, and caused Gaa Paa, a Norwegian Socialist publication in Minnesota, to remark that Minot had abandoned the slogan of "a full dinner pail" for a different one--"a full county jail."⁸⁰ But "a full bull pen" would have been more accurate, and those ingenious enclosures guarded by sentinels with shot guns and high powered rifles proved capable of accommodating nearly all IWW's who desired to be arrested. The police also provided them with a rock pile and sledges to which the inmates responded with a hunger strike, hurling their bean sandwiches

⁷⁸ Iconoclast, August 15, 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Minot Daily, August 10, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Iconoclast, September 5, 1913, p. 1.

in the faces of the guards, who charitably refrained from forcing them to work so long as they did not eat.⁸¹ But a hunger strike is an impotent weapon against an aroused citizenry and a well armed police force, and a resort to its use by the IWW's merely indicates how badly they were beaten.

Meanwhile the Socialists were fighting back with a more legally conventional approach. In the trial of the six Socialists and eighteen others arrested with them, the defendants had Arthur LeSueur as their counsel and co-defendant.⁸² LeSueur was an able lawyer and "courtroom character," and not only impressed the specatators with his display of oratorical and legal talents, but effectively demonstrated the charge of street blockading to be false by mustering thirty-nine witnesses to testify that the streets were open; one testified that she had trundled a baby carriage through the allegedly blockaded area.⁸³ The prosecution had only seven witnesses, six of whom were police. Yet, probably because Dorman made unfavorable remarks about the Federal and State Constitutions at the trial, and admitted his sympathy for revolutionists, the jury convicted the defendants, and they

⁸¹ Minot Daily Optic, August 14, 1913, p. 1, August 18, 1913, p. 1, August 19, 1913, p. 1.

⁸² Ibid., August 13, 1913, p. 1; Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid.; Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 1; Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

were fined ten and twenty-five dollars apiece.⁸⁴ The Iconoclast branded the trial a "mere farce from the standpoint of justice," and the Socialists were freed after refusing to pay their fines.⁸⁵ It is doubtful if they ever paid them, the city officials being satisfied with their moral victory.

The city authorities were doubtless even more satisfied with the outcome of the free speech issue. The Socialist attack on these grounds proved initially embarrassing to them, because there was no ordinance against street speaking, but on August 11, 1913, the City Commission hastily enacted such an ordinance.⁸⁶ There was no opposition at this meeting because of Commissioner Dorman's enforced absence. This prohibition, however, did not apply to those arrested on August 9 and 10, and on August 22 LeSueur, Law and Allen met with President Davis, City Attorney McGee, and Police Commissioner Shaw to try to settle the controversy.⁸⁷ The result was a compromise whereby the IWW's agreed to stop

⁸⁴ Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 1; Minot Daily Optic, August 19, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Iconoclast, August 22, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Minot Daily Optic, August 12, 1913, p. 1. A year later the ordinance was tested against Mrs. Fink, a suffragette Progressive who also refused to pay her fine and was allowed to go free upon the plea of her counsel, Arthur LeSueur; Iconoclast, October 2, 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Minot Daily Optic, August 21, 1913, p. 1; Youmans, 35.

holding street meetings, and the city officials agreed to release all those jailed during the riots and drop charges against them.⁸⁸ The agreement was hailed by the Iconoclast as a victory for the Socialists and for free speech,⁸⁹ but actually, of course, it was neither, for the riots had started when the city began a policy of suppressing street meetings, and they ended when the IWW's agreed to stop holding them. It was not until three months later that the Socialists won a small legal victory in the IWW affair, when George Sims, a railroad worker, was tried for assaulting a policeman during the IWW riots.⁹⁰ Sims was defended by LeSueur and another prominent local Socialist lawyer named Charles D. Kelso. The prosecution was handled by a Francis Murphy who hinted that the IWW ramifications of the case transcended the mere question of Sims' guilt when he stated to the jury: "You jurymen know what the real issue is with these fellows. I don't have to tell you."⁹¹ He should have, for Sims was acquitted, to the great satisfaction of the Iconoclast.⁹² However such a victory was of little value to the Socialists, for they had since suffered from

⁸⁸ Minot Daily Optic, August 22, 1913, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Iconoclast, August 29, 1913, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁰ Minot Daily Optic, November 18, 1913, p. 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., November 19, 1913, p. 1.

⁹² Iconoclast, November 21, 1913, p. 1.

a more serious setback resulting from the IWW riots--the recall election of 1913.

As early as August 11, 1913, the Optic reported a rumor, which it seemed anxious to spread, that Dorman was about to be recalled as Street Commissioner because of his implication in the riots.⁹³ By August 16 the rumor had taken concrete shape, as a petition was being circulated for Dorman's recall.⁹⁴ By August 29 petitions were also filed for the recall of President Davis, Police Commissioner Shaw, and Police Magistrate John Lynch all for alleged misuse of authority during the IWW riots.⁹⁵ On September 8 the City Commissioners rejected the petitions for recall of Davis, Shaw, and Lynch because of an insufficient number of signatures, and accepted the petition regarding Dorman. Five days later, however, the Commissioners accepted the other three petitions, as they had been recirculated and had gained sufficient names to make them legal.⁹⁶ This necessitated an election for the four contested offices, and an election campaign which was bound to be bitter because of the recent riots.

The Socialists chose E. M. Eisele to oppose Shaw, Charles Kelso for Lynch's post of Police Magistrate, and to

⁹³ Minot Daily Optic, August 11, 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid., August 16, 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., August 29, 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., September 9, 1913, p. 1; September 15, 1913, p. 1.

oppose Davis as President of the City Commission they picked LeSueur⁹⁷ who had probably regained some of the confidence of the Left-wing by his actions regarding the IWW's. The campaign was an embittered rehash of IWW incidents, with the Socialists berating Davis, Shaw, and Lynch for alleged inhumane actions, and the opposition accusing the Socialists of fomenting the riots, and alleging that, should the Socialists be elected, such riotings would become common. The Optic printed a letter from a "citizens committee," headed by L. J. Palda and L. D. McGahan, which stated that the issue in the campaign was: "Shall the IWW's and a few erratic members of the Socialist Party rule the city, or shall it be ruled by the citizens in an orderly and lawful manner."⁹⁸ The Optic continued to assail its readers with anti-LeSueur propaganda until the day of the election, and openly accused him of inviting the IWW organizers to the city and aiding them in creating disorders.⁹⁹ Such propaganda evidently had its effect, for the balloting on October 20 was extremely heavy, and the Socialists were defeated by margins of over two to one.¹⁰⁰ Dorman was thus recalled from the City Commission. The election returns

⁹⁷ Ibid., October 1, 1913, p. 1; Iconoclast, October 10, 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Minot Daily Optic, October 13, 1913, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., October 15, 1913, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Iconoclast, October 24, 1913, p. 1.

were not without their interesting features, however, for the Socialists received, in actuality, more votes than they had in the election which Dorman won, but they were defeated this time because the balloting was extraordinarily heavy. Dorman, in fact, polled 102 more votes in the second election than he had in the first, thus indicating that, although the Socialists antagonized many local citizens who turned out en masse and defeated them at the polls, they also apparently made some converts by their actions during the IWW riots. Of these converts, the most interesting and important was Grant S. Youmans.

Youmans was of humble origin. Apprenticed in the stonecutter's trade at the age of 13, he early developed a knack for making money, which he put into practice when he migrated to Minot in 1899 and organized a farm mortgage business there.¹⁰¹ By 1908 his Savings Loan and Trust Company was doing a substantial business in first farm mortgages, and the next year he organized his Savings Deposit Bank which handled savings accounts at five per cent interest, a losing proposition during the speculative boom then in progress.¹⁰² When the boom subsided, however, the bank became a sound enterprise, and Youmans prospered and

¹⁰¹ Youmans, 6-7, 15.

¹⁰² Ibid., 6-8.

became a respected member of the Minot Commercial Club, the Knights of Pythias, the Elks, the Minot Clearing House Association, and the Northwestern Bankers' Association.¹⁰³ To all appearances, he was a stereotype of the successful, and conservative businessman.

But Youmans had a long memory. And, unlike most self-made men, his economic success did not cause him to forget the adversities of the laborer, and his membership in the stonecutters union rendered him continually sympathetic to the labor movement.¹⁰⁴ Thus when the IWW's began their organizing activities in Minot, his reaction was the opposite of that of his business associates who chose to deal with the organizers by violent means. When they did so, Youmans was forcefully confronted with the reality of class division, and he expressed his discovery somewhat as Disraeli had in his "two nations" concept in 1845. In 1914 Youmans wrote:

When the merchants, bankers or professional men unite, the public stands by to applaud. When the toiler asks his inalienable right to organize, he is harshly condemned. The talk of universal brotherhood, it is then claimed as folly. There is a brotherhood of the rich and another of the poor. A wide gulf parts the two, it can only be spanned by riches. The rich have entrenched themselves within a walled garden lusting with laziness and luxury; they heed not the rap of the poor. It is a natural law that makes the reward for the attitude of the rich to merit the hatred of the poor.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Ibid., 7-12.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

Soon Youmans' activities were meriting him the hatred of the rich.

On the day after the arrest of the IWW speakers Youmans appeared at the city jail, and offered financial assistance to feed the prisoners and to post bail for Law and Allen.¹⁰⁶ Only the latter offer was accepted, although Youmans did give five dollars to a Socialist named Pooler to feed a group of transients who had not been arrested. He was criticised for doing this by a banking associate, R. E. Barron, who asserted that, in dealing with such persons, "the only thing to do is to club them down."¹⁰⁷ A few days later Youmans incurred the enmity of City Commission President Davis by asking him to curb the outbreaks of police brutality, and he completed the process of alienating his associates shortly afterward, when he carried in the window of his automobile one of the socialist-prepared placards bearing the words, "We Believe in Free Speech."¹⁰⁸ His endorsement of this doctrine occasioned a special meeting of the Minot Commercial Club to which Youmans was invited. The meeting was presided over by D. C. Greenleaf, the self-appointed spokesman of the local vigilantes, and, with the assistance of L. D. McGahan, he charged Youmans with

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 17, 19-20.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 21-22.

committing vile treason, to the outspoken satisfaction of the other members.¹⁰⁹ Thus Youmans was officially forsaken, and like Ibsen's Doctor Stockman who discovered that the strongest man is he who stands alone, he welcomed his ostracism as an opportunity to implement his new-found convictions. In a forceful but restrained letter to the Optic, he stated unequivocally his sympathies for the laboring man in his attempts to organize, and his determination to continue the course which he had begun.¹¹⁰ He concluded:

It looks as though I stand practically alone among my former business friends and associates on this question, but regardless of their enmity I will stand from now on, on those labor questions exactly as I have stood during the past few days. I am with the Working Class, and I believe in their right to organize. I will give the best of what cool judgement I have towards what I believe is best for the Working Class as well as the solving and bringing about the termination of our present labor troubles.

He was soon involved in other troubles of his own. And, if his interpretation of these difficulties is correct, they too were connected with his actions on behalf of the IWW's. According to Youmans, on Saturday, October 18, 1913, State Bank Examiner S. G. Severtson suddenly swooped down on his Savings Deposit Bank, arbitrarily condemned some \$20,000 worth of loans as "excessive," and gave Youmans only until nine o'clock the following Monday to produce an equal

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 22-27.

¹¹⁰ Minot Daily Optic, August 16, 1913, p. 1.

sum in cash.¹¹¹ Although it was a near impossibility to raise such a sum over a single week-end, Youmans persuaded Joseph Roach, the President of the Second National Bank of Minot, to advance him that amount, and Youmans returned jubilantly to Severtson, only to find that the Examiner had raised the required amount to \$48,000.¹¹² When Youmans asked Roach for that additional figure, R. E. Barron, who had earlier glowingly recommended the "capable and efficient management of Mr. Grant S. Youmans,"¹¹³ persuaded Roach not to comply with Youmans' request.¹¹⁴ Severtson then closed the doors of the Savings Deposit Bank, not to allow them reopened until the bank was under "safer" ownership. Youmans was certain that the entire affair was nothing more than a conspiracy between the local bankers and the State Bank Examiner to discredit and despoil him, because of his pro-IWW activities, and he wrote his book Legalized Bank Robbery to support this contention. Although subsequent events were to show that Severtson was not wholly without grounds for his actions, a measure of credibility was lent to Youmans' accusation, when Severtson allowed new owners to open the bank's doors after furnishing only \$20,400 instead of the

¹¹¹ Youmans, 43-50.

¹¹² Ibid., 50-57.

¹¹³ Ibid., 27-28.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 65-67.

\$48,000 demanded of Youmans.¹¹⁵ The new owners of the bank were all solid local conservatives including City Attorney McGee, Joseph Roach, and R. E. Barron. The Optic, hinting that the depositors' savings were formerly jeopardized, but were now safe, carried the story under the headline, "Savings Bank Depositors to be Paid in Full," and subheaded, "Strong Men in Charge," and "Two of Minot's Most Conservative Businessmen to Take over Bank."¹¹⁶ About a year later Youmans' replied to his detractors in his rather extraordinary book, and this also was publicized in the local press, including the Iconoclast.¹¹⁷ For Youmans had, by this time, become a Socialist.

Just when Youmans joined the NDSP is a matter of conjecture. The first mention of him in the Iconoclast was an advertisement of his book in the September 18, 1914 issue, and it was probably at about that time that he became a party member. It is doubtful that he considered himself a socialist while he was writing his book, as the word "socialism" or "socialist" appears on none of its pages, and, though he frequently speaks of the Iconoclast and prominent local Socialists, their party connection is never mentioned. His rise in the party was rapid, for by October 23, 1914 he was

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 98-101.

¹¹⁶ Minot Daily Optic, October 23, 1913, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Minot Daily Optic-Reporter, August 8, 1914, p. 1; Iconoclast, September 18, 1914, p. 4.

Secretary and Treasurer of Townley's innovation, the "organization department" of the NDSP.¹¹⁸ This political experiment, which will be described in detail later, was considered pseudo-socialistic by the Left-wing, and Youmans' membership in it did little to detract from this interpretation, since Youmans' Socialist orthodoxy was always highly questionable. Indicative of his doubtful orthodoxy is that during the time that he was a party official, he continued to dabble in real estate, and the Iconoclast blandly carried advertisements of his mortgage loan business, and his "land bargains."¹¹⁹ Unorthodox or not, however, he soon rose to be a power in the party, and by October 1915 held a seat on the State Executive Committee.¹²⁰ In the meantime the bank controversy raged on, and possibly had the effect of making Youmans more of a Socialist than he originally intended to be.

His accusations of the State Bank Examiner had resulted in an investigation by a State Legislative Committee. When that committee completely vindicated Severtson, saying the bank's assets "were insufficient to pay its liabilities,"¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Iconoclast, October 23, 1914, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., October 30, 1914, p. 4, November 6, 1914, p. 6, December 11, 1914, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid., October 8, 1915, p. 4.

¹²¹ Ibid., March 26, 1915, p. 2; Minot Daily Optic-Reporter, January 28, 1915, p. 1, February 27, 1915, p. 1, March 2, 1915, p. 1.

Youmans started a \$255,000 damage suit against the local inheritors of his bank, Governor Hanna, Attorney General Andrew Miller, Secretary of State Thomas Hall, and State Bank Examiner Severtson.¹²² This suit was tried before District Judge W. J. Kneeshaw with the ubiquitous LeSueur handling the plaintiff's case and his old adversary Francis Murphy handling the defense. It was characterized by such spectacular by-plays as a defense lawyer threatening to strike Youmans, and Youmans throwing a book at Murphy during his cross questioning.¹²³ Youmans was by this time enough of a socialist to admit that he had been a legal "robber" like all other bankers, and that he had tried to learn all their "tricks;" asked if he had succeeded in learning them all, he replied, "No; I never learned how to take a bank away from a man."¹²⁴ These witticisms may have endeared him to the Socialist spectators, but they did not aid him in the case. The jurors quickly ruled against the plaintiff, as Judge Kneeshaw instructed them to do in a charge to the jury in which he saw fit to inveigh against men ". . . who must have perverted minds; people that would trample our beautiful flag with the stars and stripes underfoot, men that are not entitled to live in any community . . ."

¹²² Iconoclast, October 15, 1915, p. 2.

¹²³ Minot Daily Optic-Reporter, April 1, 1916, pp. 1, 8.

¹²⁴ Ibid., April 1, 1916, p. 8, April 3, 1916, p. 1.

Thus in three years of following his convictions Youmans had apparently exchanged his economic security for a mess of socialist pottage and a probable increase in his inventory of self-respect. And all his sacrifices were for the benefit of a couple of labor agitators of the most unpopular variety. The North Dakota Socialist Party had also made the same type of transaction by its participation in the IWW riots, and, while on moral grounds the leaders might assert that it was worth the investment, the political consequences of the next year's elections were to indicate that it was not.

Very likely Henry G. Teigan hoped the election of 1914 would demonstrate the efficacy of his intensified organizational procedures. Although Teigan admitted a "slight decline in party membership" during 1913,¹²⁵ he probably looked to a political tour of the state by Emil Seidel,¹²⁶ and the interest to be generated by the first Socialist primary, to compensate for this decline. But the 1914 primary was not a particularly auspicious occasion, as the highest vote registered by any Socialist candidate was 3092 for J. A. Koeppler, the candidate for Attorney General.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Iconoclast, February 20, 1941, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid., June 19, 1914, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Compilation of Election Returns, National and State, 1914-1928 (Bismarck, 1930), 6. Hereafter cited as Election Returns.

Koeppler was criticised by his enemies as a ne'er-do-well whose socialism was simply the product of his poverty, and who, when later coming suddenly into possession of a little money, reputedly remarked that, "socialism was a great truth once, but it isn't now."¹²⁸ He was an effective vote-getter, though, and polled 6357 in the fall election.¹²⁹ This was about average as nearly all the Socialist candidates polled votes in the six-thousands,¹³⁰ with the principal exception being the candidates for United States Representatives who ran only by districts. And of these, probably the most significant is L. L. Griffith's meager 3798 votes¹³¹ in the usually socialist-inclined Third District where LeSueur had polled over five-thousand in 1912. His poor showing is very likely attributable to his stand on the IWW issue, for Griffith had been an outspoken defender of the "wobblies" who were at that time trying to foment strikes against the farmers. Yet Griffith not only went to jail for them, but he tried to exploit the issue to his political advantage by pointing to the IWW riots as proof of capitalist corruption and illustrative of the

¹²⁸ James Frost, Townley and Company and the Nonpartisan League (Beach, North Dakota, 1918), 25.

¹²⁹ Election Returns, 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹³¹ Ibid., 8.

farmers' need to join the Socialist Party.¹³²

Another indication that the IWW incidents had hurt the NDSP is the decline of the vote in Ward County where the riots had taken place. This regularly first-place county dropped to second place in 1914, averaging between five-hundred to six-hundred votes per candidate,¹³³ as compared to its over seven-hundred vote average in 1912.¹³⁴ Fortunately, this loss in Ward County was offset by a perceptible rise of the Socialist vote in Williams County to the westward. Williams County took over the first place in Socialist polling strength by averaging over seven-hundred votes per candidate, an approximately one-hundred vote increase over 1912.¹³⁵

This rise in Socialist strength in the western part of the state in a non-presidential election year leads one to the conjecture that, had it not been for the IWW faux pas, North Dakota in 1914 might have differed from almost every

¹³² Iconoclast, September 5, 1913, p. 1. This interpretation can be overestimated, however, for W. H. Brown campaigned for United States Senator in 1914 by endorsing the IWW's and polled a respectable 6731 votes; Ibid., July 10, 1914, p. 1; Election Returns 8. For the actions of the IWW among farm laborers see Paul F. Brissenden, The I.W.W., A Study of American Syndicalism (New York, 1919), 155-157, 259, 268-269, 335-337.

¹³³ Election Returns, 8.

¹³⁴ Blue Book, 1913, 265-272.

¹³⁵ Election Returns, 8; Blue Book, 1913, 265-272.

other state by gaining instead of losing Socialist voters.¹³⁶ Even with the IWW embarrassment, the state's Socialist vote declined by only about one-thousand, and this respectable showing is probably due to three factors: Teigan's stepped-up organizational activities, the improved farmers program of 1914, and the sudden appearance of a brand new political phenomenon on the Socialist scene--the "organization department."

The organization department has probably been the subject of more misconceptions than any other phase of the NDSP's activities. And most of the errors are traceable to a misleading manuscript by Arthur LeSueur.¹³⁷ LeSueur professed an intimate acquaintanceship with the details of the rise and fall of the department, because of his membership on the State Committee at the time it was formed. Actually, even if he was on the State Committee at this time, of which there is some doubt, it was an absentee membership, for at about the time the organization department began to function, LeSueur moved to Fort Scott, Kansas, to serve on the staff and later become vice president of a Socialist "Peoples College."¹³⁸ Indicative of the fact that he had no direct connection with the organization department is that he was never mentioned in the bitter conflict which raged around it.

¹³⁶ Fred Haynes, Social Politics in the United States (New York, 1924), 207. The only state to gain in Socialist strength in 1914 was Oklahoma.

¹³⁷ MS., LeSueur Papers.

¹³⁸ LeSueur, Crusaders, 36; Iconoclast, January 22, 1915, p. 3.

Although he was once listed as "National Committeeman" of the department, this was probably merely an attempt to raise the prestige of the department by linking it with LeSueur who was at that time a National Committeeman of the Socialist Party.¹³⁹ According to LeSueur's version of the founding of the organization department, the NDSP leaders saw clearly by the autumn of 1914 that their program was more acceptable to the North Dakota farmers than was the party itself, which was by then thoroughly discredited by the many attacks upon it. They saw that they could never gain the farmers' support if the farmers were required to join the party in order to support the SP program. The State Committee therefore decided to form an organization department to which the farmer could belong "without signing the red card of terrible reputation." One of the organizers whom they hired to recruit farmers into this new department was Arthur C. Townley.

The above story has been accepted by several recent students such as Robert L. Morlan, and Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks.¹⁴⁰ But it is erroneous on two main

¹³⁹ Iconoclast, October 23, 1914, p. 8, and July 9, 1915, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Morlan, Nonpartisan League, 48-49; Morlan, Prairie Fire, 43, 367. Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent, 157. The latter two books in addition question whether Townley ever was a Socialist, indicating that they know less about Townley than his political opponents did, for Jeremiah D. Bacon in his A Warning to the Farmer Against Townleyism (Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1918), 16-17 published a photograph of Townley's voter's registration certificate showing him to be a member of the Socialist party.

counts. First of all, the organization department was not the calculated creation of the NDSP officials but almost entirely the brain child of A. C. Townley. Secondly, Townley was not suddenly recruited from nowhere to implement the preconceived plans of the party leaders, but had been in the party for many months and was steadily making a name for himself there. No doubt his decision to become a Socialist was prompted by his disastrous flax venture near his home town of Beach, North Dakota, in 1912, for during the winter of 1912-1913, he was already engaged in a series of victorious debates on the topic of socialism with a Beach lawyer.¹⁴¹ That he was a persuasive speaker has never been denied, and, once converted to socialism, he began to apply his oratorical and organizational gifts even before he was put on the party payroll. In the summer of 1913 he organized a local at Gorham, a few miles from Beach, and in November of the same year, he was hired by the NDSP to perform organizational duties in the western counties.¹⁴² Once hired, he soon came to the attention of Teigan who always had an eye out for

¹⁴¹ Iconoclast, March 28, 1913, p. 1; Bahmer, 433 and note. This dissertation, unlike the other studies of the relationship of the NDSP to the Nonpartisan League, is as accurate on this subject as it is in its other excellent sections.

¹⁴² Iconoclast, November 27, 1914, p. 3, February 20, 1914, p. 5.

talent. In February 1914 Teigan ranked Townley with Bowen, Griffith, and Durocher in exceptional ability for "agitation and organization," and he attributed Townley's success to the fact that he "confined his labors almost exclusively to the country districts."¹⁴³ This foreshadowed the day when an army of Nonpartisan League organizers would descend upon the "country districts," but would avoid the towns like the plague.

In the meantime he was adding to his reputation as a debater and general platform performer, and the Iconoclast occasionally devoted space to his forensic victories.¹⁴⁴ One of the first examples of his pungent wit was exhibited at a Memorial day service at Beach in 1914, when a farmer, after listening to two local aspirants for nomination to Congress hold forth on farmers' prosperity, requested that Townley be permitted to speak. The chairman reluctantly agreed, and Townley told his audience that the two previous speakers reminded him of the Indian and the white man who went hunting, and bagged a turkey and a buzzard. The white man said, "I'll take the turkey and you take the buzzard, or else you take the buzzard and I'll take the turkey." The Indian replied, "White man, you didn't say turkey to me once." Likewise, said Townley, the previous speakers were

¹⁴³ Ibid., February 20, 1914, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., February 27, 1914, p. 2, March 20, 1914, p. 2.

guilty of not "talking turkey" to their listeners, and he, Townley, intended to do so. He was frustrated at this point, however, by the chairman who halted his speech with the reminder that the occasion was a Memorial Day ceremony, and not a political rally.¹⁴⁵ By this time Townley was a respected member of the party, and had taken part in the state convention of February 1914,¹⁴⁶ where he presided over one of the meetings,¹⁴⁷ an indication that he was rising fast in the party councils. It was this convention which produced the effective farmers program of 1914, and, in view of his extreme sensitivity to the farmers wishes, it is very likely that Townley played a significant role in formulating that program.

But Townley was not satisfied. His organizational activities, which were already showing considerable success, probably only impressed him with their shortcomings. His many contacts with the farmers no doubt confronted him with the political paradox which LeSueur, rather unrealistically, credited the State Committee with discovering--the aversion of the farmer to the party, and his attraction to its program. Moreover, he probably saw the deficiencies in the organizational practice of holding meetings which attracted

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., June 12, 1914, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., February 20, 1914, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

only a limited number of farmers, and those usually already converted. What was needed was to get to each farmer individually and "sell" him; but that required more money and better transportation. Thus, to expand the success of the party, three needs were apparent: to get more money, to enable the organizer to cover more territory, and to capitalize on the farmer's favorable attitude toward the NDSP's agricultural program¹⁴⁸ with an accompanying de-emphasis of the Socialist party.

The organization department filled all of these needs. Townley created that unique political creation in the late summer of 1914, when he was sent by the party to the southwestern part of the state to practice his organizational abilities. According to Eugene Teutsch, who wrote the fullest and most unfavorable account of Townley's historic actions there,¹⁴⁹ he started in Morton County where he persuaded some of his Socialist friends to contribute enough money to buy him an automobile. He then proceeded to organize the farmers into a "pseudo-Socialist organization," to which he held their allegiance by making them pay for the privilege of joining. He allegedly told his prospective members that he was organizing farmers, but not that he was a Socialist organizer. He charged every new member a dollar

¹⁴⁸ Bahmer, 434.

¹⁴⁹ Iconoclast, May 19, 1916, p. 2.

a month, post-dated checks acceptable, but membership in this organization did not constitute membership in the NDSP. When the organizing had reached a certain stage, he would move on to the next county, repeat the process, raising enough money to purchase another automobile, return the car to the previous county with an organizer to complete the work there, thus placing an automobile and an organizer in every county or a group of counties organized as a "district." Though Teutsch's version was subsequently denounced by Townley's friends, the use of the automobile, the post-dated check, and the principle of getting "the rube's money" to make him "stick," all Townley practices which he later used with such great success in the Nonpartisan League, indicate that, though Teutsch became one of Townley's bitterest opponents, the organization department began about as he described.

An even stronger indication of the accuracy of Teutsch's account is that its beginning is similarly described by one of Townley's warmest supporters, Grant S. Youmans. An unorthodox entity like the organization department was bound to appeal to an overnight socialist like Youmans, and he immediately became secretary-treasurer of it.¹⁵⁰ In a "Dear Commrades" letter to the readers of the Iconoclast, he explained how the organization department came about.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., October 23, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 8.

Youmans said that in August 1914 Townley began organizing in Bowman County, and, that by using about the same procedures as Teutsch described, he collected in a few days about \$2400 with which he purchased an automobile, and organized the three southwestern counties of Bowman, Billings and Golden Valley into "district one." Moving northward to Williston he organized Williams and McKenzie counties into "district two" where he soon raised enough money to buy a second auto, and sent the first car back to district one which was then to be completely organized by Bowen and Durocher. Moving east he organized Ward and Mountrail counties into "district five" under D. C. Dorman, purchased another car, and sent Beecher Moore, who had recently been hired by the party as an organizer, back to take charge of district two. He then went to the extreme northwest part of the state and organized Burke and Divide counties into "district four" under George H. Griffith, L. L. Griffith's lesser known brother. Later on he detached Mountrail County from Ward and called it "district three," and by the end of the year a sixth district had been formed in the north central portion of the state from Renville and Bottineau counties.¹⁵² Youmans was bubblingly enthusiastic about the future of the organization department, and certainly there was just cause for optimism. At a time when the Iconoclast

¹⁵² Ibid., December 11, 1914, p. 4.

was pleading for subscriptions in order to keep its head above water, and the party itself was barely in the black, Townley was able to interest enough farmers in socialism to collect from them money for the purchase of four automobiles. Certainly Teigan's faith in Townley's organizational abilities was justified.

And, if "agitation" meant propagandizing, Teigan should have been doubly satisfied with the organization department. For Townley did not neglect to distribute socialist literature to his converts, and as Youmans said: "The greatest possible strides [were] made towards the education of the people in these counties for socialism."¹⁵³ A few months later the organization department enlarged its education program by creating circulating socialist libraries in different towns in the state.¹⁵⁴ These were advertised as "Libraries Not Founded by Carnegie,"¹⁵⁵ and by February 1915, there were fourteen such libraries in the state.¹⁵⁶ These were placed under the directorship of Henry P. Richardson, the General Organizer of the People's College Extension Division, with his headquarters at Minot.¹⁵⁷ This was probably another

¹⁵³ Ibid., October 23, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., January 1, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., February 5, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., March 5, 1915, p. 1.

tenuous link which LeSueur had with the organization department.

Despite these positive achievements, the organization department soon found itself in trouble. With its initial spectacular results, it attracted even such men to its executive committee as the Left-wing L. L. Griffith and Eugene Teutsch, the moderate who became a Left-winger over this issue.¹⁵⁸ But from the first, the department apparently met with opposition from the fundamentalist element of the NDSP, as is evidenced by Youmans' remark that the organization department was heartily commended by "many of our level headed party members,"¹⁵⁹ thus suggesting that those who did not commend it were other than level headed. The issue around which the controversy centered was whether or not the department should be "officially recognized" as an integral part of the party organization,¹⁶⁰ a question that would hardly have come up if the organization department had been purposely created by the State Committee, as LeSueur asserted. On this question, the Left-wingers had their way, for the department never was "officially recognized," and it had to conduct its operations in the same anomalous position with the NDSP as it had begun. Thus the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., October 23, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., December 11, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with H. R. Martinson, September 8, 1955.

"remittance letters" printed in the Iconoclast for the collection of organization department dues bore the simple return address, Grant S. Youmans, Secretary Treasurer, Organization Department, Minot, North Dakota, making no mention of the NDSP.¹⁶¹ This might be construed as a subtle attempt to conceal the department's Socialist connections, but such a supposition seems erroneous. It seems highly unlikely that a man of Townley's political astuteness would believe that a department member would pay dues to the department by means of a letter printed in the official organ of the state Socialist Party and fail to see a connection between the NDSP and the organization department.

Officially recognized or not, the organization department was a fait accompli, and for a time the NDSP dealt with it as such. The State Executive Committee composed at this time of Dorman, Eisele, Kirkpatrick, Griffith, and Teutsch held meetings on September 22, October 6, and November 3, at which they heard reports by Townley and Youmans and made provisions for the improvement of the organizational work in district one, and for hiring Henry P. Richardson and George H. Griffith as organizers.¹⁶² They also foreshadowed their future actions by their decision to release Bowen from the department for use by the state

¹⁶¹ Iconoclast, October 23, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁶² Ibid., December 25, 1915, p. 4.

office and by their ominous declaration that the "Executive Committee wants it understood that no more districts be organized and cars purchased before spring or April 1, 1915,"¹⁶³ This was regarded as a needless concession to winter by Townley who was to begin organizing the Nonpartisan League before the snow was off the ground that year. However, the organization department was too profitable to strangle just yet, especially since the party books at this time were beginning to show a slight deficit.¹⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Committee voted on November 17 to take one-hundred dollars from district five, and 197 dollars from district four to pay for back subscriptions to the Iconoclast, and on November 25, to take forty dollars from each district each month "to create a general fund to pay overhead and general expenses for the current month."¹⁶⁵ The organization department may have been bad socialism, but it was handy when bills were due.

But on December 15 the ax fell. On that date the Executive Committee dropped Townley and three other organizers from the party payroll.¹⁶⁶ It was Eisele and Teutsch who introduced this motion, and with the Left-wing Griffith also

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., December 18, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., December 25, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., January 8, 1915, p. 3, and May 19, 1916, p.2.

on the Committee, they formed a majority which would eventually drive Townley from the party. The ostensible reason for the dismissal was that Townley organized district six after organizing activities had been ordered to cease,¹⁶⁷ but a more probable explanation was the party's greatest weakness--jealousy. Neither Eisele nor Teutsch were intellectually orthodox socialists, but they chose to become so when the comfortable status quo was threatened, especially since the proposed change was not of their own making. Townley, however, did not give up without a fight. According to Teutsch, Townley turned to Teigan who was always receptive to Townley's schemes, and the two conspired to gain control of the State Committee. The State Committee was composed of one member from each county containing at least one NDSP local, and it chose the State Executive Committee. By controlling the State Committee they hoped to overrule the anti-organization department measures of the State Executive Committee.¹⁶⁸ Teutsch opposed this Townley-Teigan coalition which he felt certain was attempting to pack the State Executive Committee with such "Townley tools" as Bowen, Dorman, Durocher, Youmans, O. M. Thomason, and Beecher Moore. Teutsch succeeded in getting the key Minot local to go on record as opposed to Teigan's reelection as

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., May 19, 1916, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

State Secretary, and to favor H. R. Martinson for that post.¹⁶⁹ Teutsch did this by publicly charging that Teigan prevented examination of the records of the state office by the State Executive Committee, and that he had failed to route effectively such well known socialist speakers as George Kirkpatrick, and Walter Thomas Mills, but did insure the effective scheduling of "some second raters who boosted for Teigan's reelection as state Secretary-Treasurer."¹⁷⁰ At the fateful meeting of the State Committee on January 26, 1915, Teutsch sought to have these charges read to the assembly but was prevented from doing so in a neat coup by Townley who made a motion that no information be given which would ". . . prejudice any member of the State Committee against any candidate for the office of the Secretary-Treasurer." This motion was carried with some assistance by Bowen who presided at the meeting, and Teigan was re-elected.¹⁷¹ Thus Teutsch lost the first skirmish in the anti-Townley campaign.

But a day later he won the battle. At a night session on January 27, 1915, in Youman's office, Townley tried to persuade the State Committee to give the organization department its much desired official recognition. He moved

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 2.

that the department be formally placed under the direction of the State Executive Committee.¹⁷² The motion was defeated, though Townley, with his usual tenacity, succeeded in having it reconsidered four times.¹⁷³ But the Committee remained inexorable, and the organization department remained an illegitimate child of the NDSP, a symbol of the unorthodox philanderings of its founder. Townley was quick to perceive that this was a political defeat, for to leave the organization department as it was, assured it a lingering death. The state office had already deprived it of most of its organizers, and would doubtlessly continue to sap its strength in that manner. Townley decided to let it die, for it was at this point that he left the party to create a hardier though very similar progeny--the Nonpartisan League. It should be noted, however, that this action of the State Committee was not, as LeSueur assures us, a sweeping decision to "discontinue" the organization department, because there was a danger that the growth of the department would cause the non-Socialist tail to wag the Socialist dog, and because the department was basically dishonest.¹⁷⁴ This interpretation has also been repeated by Morlan, and

¹⁷² Ibid., February 19, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid., May 19, 1916, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ MS, LeSueur Papers. At the time of the State Committee's decision LeSueur was at Fort Scott, Kansas.

Saloutos and Hicks,¹⁷⁵ and, though the fear of the inordinate growth of the department was probably real, the interpretation is erroneous on two other counts. First, the anti-Townleyites had no grounds to complain of the department's dishonest nature arising from its tenuous relationship to the party, since it was that group which perpetuated this "dishonesty," by resisting Townley's attempts to legitimize the department and give it formal status within the NDSP. Secondly, the action of the State Committee did not discontinue the organization department, but merely left it to continue as it was. This is demonstrated by the fact that on February 7, 1915, ten days after the fateful meeting, the Executive Committee appointed a bookkeeper for the organization department, and on the same day accepted Youmans' resignation from it and allowed Teigan to succeed him.¹⁷⁶ But Teigan was no Townley, and without the latter's imaginative leadership the organization department became a broken reed, and it expired altogether when the acids of the Nonpartisan League began to corrode the vitals of the NDSP.

In the election of 1912 the NDSP made significant gains over previous years, which indicated that the party was

¹⁷⁵ Morlan, Nonpartisan League, 49-50. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 24. Theodore Saloutos, "The Rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota," Agricultural History, XX (January, 1946), 48. Hereafter cited as Saloutos, "Rise of Nonpartisan League." Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent, 137.

¹⁷⁶ Iconoclast, March 19, 1915, p. 4.

beginning to appeal to a broader base of electors, because of its unorthodox but effective farmer-labor program. In 1913 this trend continued when the Socialists elected D. C. Dorman to Minot's City Commission, but at this point the party leaders sacrificed much of their political following by backing the unpopular IWW's during the labor disturbances in Minot. This action, though it gained the NDSP the adherence of Grant S. Youmans, caused the recall of Dorman and probably detracted from the Socialist vote in the election of 1914. More serious than the IWW venture was the NDSP's adverse treatment of A. C. Townley and his organization department. This department was an exceedingly practical and effective way of acquiring a large political following for the party, but it was deemphasized purposely by the party leaders who were apparently mainly motivated by jealousy of Townley's successes. This ill-advised rejection of Townley's ideas caused him to leave the party and create the Nonpartisan League which would eventually bring about the demise of the NDSP.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIALISTS AND THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE

From the moment that A. C. Townley severed his connection with the NDSP, the party's days were numbered. He had shown the leaders how to multiply the party's political following, and they had rebuffed him. His only course was to form his own party and pursue his own policy. Shortly after he defected from the NDSP early in 1915, he got in touch with another ex-Socialist of McHenry County named Fred B. Wood. With the aid of Wood and his two sons, Howard and Edwin, Townley hammered out a very appealing agrarian program that was almost entirely a restatement of the NDSP farm platform.¹ The methods by which Townley gained his political following were the same as those for which he was censured by the NDSP officials. The concentration on the country districts, the use of the automobile, the emphasis on each farmer's financial contribution, and the use of the postdated check were all methods whose usefulness he had proved in the organization department, and Townley used

¹ The first Nonpartisan League program was: (1) state ownership of terminal elevators, flour mills, packing houses, and cold storage plants; (2) state inspection of grain and grain dockage; (3) exemption of farm improvements from taxation; (4) state hail insurance on an acreage tax basis; and (5) rural credit banks operated at cost. Gaston, Chap. VII.

them in the Nonpartisan League with even more success.

Working diligently throughout the summer of 1915, Townley and his organizers recruited 26,000 members by the time of the first snowfall.² By April 1916 the League had forty-thousand members.³ At this juncture Townley introduced another of his "ideas" that was probably the greatest of them all.⁴ This was to use his organization to gain control of the North Dakota Republican party by electing the candidates in the state primary. Despite the embittered and vituperative reaction from most of the North Dakota press,⁵ the NPL chose a full slate of candidates all of whom were Republican except one,⁶ and all were nominated in the June primaries by majorities of approximately two to one with the gubernatorial candidate Lynn J. Frazier receiving 39,246 votes, a clear majority over the combined votes of his three opponents.⁷ In the fall elections of 1916 the League was

² Ibid., 64.

³ Russell, 211-212.

⁴ Ibid., 196-212.

⁵ Gaston, Chap. X. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 67-74.

⁶ The lone exception was Democrat P. M. Casey running for State Treasurer. He won his nomination unopposed, but was defeated in the fall election by only 200 votes. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 87.

⁷ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 75.

skyrocketed into power, with Frazier defeating his Democratic opponent 87,665 to 20,351. With the exception of the single "League Democrat," the remainder of the NPL slate was also swept into office by margins comparable to Frazier's.⁸ Thus the Leaguers captured control of the North Dakota government. In the next five years they put through several spectacular "socialist" reforms, the most enduring of which proved to be the state bank and the state mill and elevator. Such was Townley's "revolution", and though it caught many persons unaware, the members of the NDSP were not among them. Although the North Dakota Socialists differed sharply in their attitudes toward this political revolution, they did not fail to see that it was taking shape.

The American Society of Equity convention of February 1915, which Townley used as a spark to ignite the accumulated tinder of discontent, had been given broad coverage in the Iconoclast. It had previously endorsed the terminal elevator proposal which the State Legislature was considering,⁹ and it lashed out against the Legislature for its arbitrary shelving of the elevator bill in open defiance of an overwhelming popular mandate in favor of it.¹⁰ Although the Iconoclast did not mention Speaker

⁸ State of North Dakota Legislative Manual, 1919 (Bismarck, N. Dak., 1919), 256-260.

⁹ Iconoclast, Jan. 22, 1915, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., Jan. 29, 1915, p. 2.

Treadwell Twitchell's reputed "slop the hogs" remark, it did praise the Equity members' march to the capitol and Loftus' condemnation of the bill's opponents.¹¹ If editor Teigan did not know immediately of Townley's actions after the convention, he was not long in finding them out, nor did he view such actions with alarm when they came to his attention. The Iconoclast first mentioned the Non-partisan League in the April 9, 1915, issue in which Teigan declared that there was "no connection whatever" between the League and the NDSP.¹² This was Teigan's policy of official divorcement, and, though it had a tendency to become unofficial collusion, Teigan consistently maintained it in its outward aspects.

At this time, however, the editorship of the Iconoclast was temporarily assumed by O. M. Thomason, by whose pen the League was usually presented in favorable light. In a series of editorials that professed to be optimistic as to socialism's future in North Dakota, Thomason laid the basis for at least a tacit endorsement of the League's actions. In the May 7, 1915, issue he correctly discerned "a veritable political revolution" taking shape in the state, because the State Legislature had "so out-

¹¹ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1915, p. 1.

¹² p. 3.

raged the people's sense of justice" that they were "ready for anything."¹³ Two weeks later in an editorial calling for new Socialist tactics to meet new conditions, he left little doubt of his contempt for the Left-wingers who condemned the impurity of the Townley brand of socialism.¹⁴ And on August 13 he gave his first overt indication of where his sympathies lay in regard to the League, when he stated that ". . .while we are not pleading the cause of the Nonpartisan League, yet it is a joy to see the worms squirm and we calmly sit back and yell, 'sick 'em, Tige.'¹⁵ A later unsigned editorial, probably Thomason's, called openly for a reorganization of the national Socialist Party to meet new conditions. It made three main proposals along these lines: (1) simplify both state and national constitutions; (2) decentralize and autonomize the party; and (3) reduce dues by half, making up the financial deficit by doubling the membership.¹⁶ While none of these proposals mentioned the League, all of them would, if adopted, allow the NDSP to ally with the League without incurring the odium of "fusion." Thomason shortly afterward left the party

¹³ p. 4.

¹⁴ Iconoclast, May 21, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., Aug. 13, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., Aug. 20, 1915, p. 4.

to join the League, and all close readers of his editorials were probably not surprised.

Thomason was not alone in his pro-League views. J. A. Smith, an occasional writer in the Iconoclast, openly favored support of the League, stating that "It is ridiculous to think that the N. P. L. will undermine the party." He added the pragmatic plea: "Let us get results, no matter how; any action is better than inert theory."¹⁷ A week later an unsigned editorial announced its intention of not defending the League, and then proceeded to do so by endorsing the League's program as a means for the gradual achievement of socialism.¹⁸ Finally, in October 1915 the Iconoclast reprinted several articles written by Charles Edward Russell in the official organ of the League, the Nonpartisan Leader.¹⁹ Russell, ironically enough, had been invited in 1915 by the NDSP to North Dakota as a Socialist lecturer,²⁰ and on July 10 he told his listeners at Valley City that "The only sign of progress in all this dismal world is the revolt of the Northwestern farmer. God bless him in his revolt."²¹ Shortly after this utterance Russell served

¹⁷ Ibid., Sept. 24, 1915, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., Oct. 1, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., Oct. 22, 1915, p. 3, and Oct. 29, 1915, p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid., July 2, 1915, p. 1.

²¹ Ibid., July 16, 1915, p. 2.

the revolt by becoming a prolific contributor to the Nonpartisan Leader.

Not all North Dakota Socialists were friendly to the League, however. An example of Teigan's editorial neutrality was his awarding the League critics considerable space in the Iconoclast. Of these critics the most consistent and impersonal was a heretofore little known Socialist named N. M. Grefsheim. He contended that the League was bound to fail because it operated inside the old parties which could represent no one but the "interests."²² Even if the League should be able to institute its program, Grefsheim declared, it could accomplish little in the way of economic relief, for whatever gains a farmer-owned terminal elevator made would be offset by a corresponding rise in land values, rents, and interest rates.²³ Thus "the net outcome of the League's program, if carried out, would be to take a good chunk out of the profits of the Chamber of Commerce and hand it over to some of the other interlocked business interests and especially the land sharks."²⁴ The rich farmer who conducted his operations on a large scale and was in

²² Ibid., Oct. 1, 1915, p. 1.

²³ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid., Jan. 28, 1916, p. 1, and Apr. 21, 1916, p. 2.

actuality a capitalist exploiter also stood to benefit from the League program, but the tenants and mortgage bound farmers would actually suffer more acutely because of the higher rents and interest rates.²⁵ Therefore, Grefsheim wrote, gentlemen farmers like J. D. Bacon, editor of the Grand Forks Herald, and the most virulent critic of the League, should actually support it, since their class stood to benefit most from its program.²⁶ Furthermore, he asserted that the League candidates were not radicals but extreme conservatives, especially Lynn Frazier, the gubernatorial candidate. Grefsheim attributed Frazier's conservatism to his education at the University of North Dakota, an institution which many North Dakota Socialists regarded as a sink of reaction.²⁷ Being conservative, Grefsheim concluded, the Leaguers were not really interested in implementing their proposed

²⁵ Ibid., Mar. 10, 1916, p. 1, and June 2, 1916, p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid., June 9, 1916, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid., May 5, 1916, p. 1. In an earlier issue (Jan. 1, 1915, p. 2.) the Iconoclast, in a condemnation of R. O. T. C. departments, accused the state universities of Illinois, Minnesota, and North Dakota of having no qualms about "...weeding out faculty members who would preach the truth regardless of business and replace them with prostitutes who are willing to preach anything on the face of the earth in order to secure a meal ticket." For further socialist strictures on the University of North Dakota see Upton Sinclair, The Goose Step, Chap. XLII. As to Grefsheim's allegation of Frazier's conservatism. That also has some other substantiation. William Lemke, Frazier's friend and a power in the League, once described Frazier as a "conservative Progressive." Wilkins, 196.

program, but only in holding out "the bait of going to do something without actually doing anything" so that "the business--Townley's business--of organization" could be kept up as long as possible.²⁸

Other orthodox socialists who were outspoken in their criticism of the League were D. I. Todd of Williston whose prediction that it would not last a year²⁹ must have destroyed forever his reputation as a prophet, and H. R. Martinson who asserted that "Bull Moosers and Non-partisan Leagues may come and go but the real socialist remains true to his idea of establishing a world power of the working class."³⁰ Even Arthur LeSueur saw fit to condemn the League before he joined it, and he sent word from Fort Scott, Kansas, that the NPL was attempting to use government as an instrument to promote class welfare; this, he said, could never succeed, because "while classes last, capitalism will rule."³¹ But the most bitter critic of the League was Townley's old enemy Eugene Teutsch. In an article attacking Townley and his methods³² Teutsch left no doubt of where he stood on the

²⁸ Ibid., June 23, 1916, p. 3.

²⁹ Ibid., May 7, 1915, p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid., Mar. 31, 1916, p. 2.

³¹ Ibid., Jan. 14, 1916, p. 1.

³² Ibid., May 19, 1916, p. 2.

subject:

Sometimes I feel that there is no adjective in the English language strong enough to apply to myself and my comrades for letting men of the Townley stripe denude us of our senses to the extent of allowing our organization to be used as a stepping stone to deceive and defraud our fellow men.

He then proceeded to malign the characters of Townley's friends in the party--Teigan, Bowen, Thomason, Dorman, Durocher, and Youmans--and he closed with a ringing peroration on party orthodoxy and unity:

Scratch a reformer and under the desire for reforms will be found the desire for boodle and power. There are only a few of us left, but those few constitute a mighty foundation for the upbuilding of a sound movement that cannot be misled by leaders who only want to use us for their ignoble purposes. . . We must take off our coats and fight the monster with all our might and main, for if they are defeated now it will in the future discourage this habit of worming their way into our party (when the capitalist bandwagons are crowded) only to betray us. . . Down with the Yellows!

This outburst was no inspiring plea for adherence to Socialist principles. It was instead a frustrated denunciation of the party's retreat from those principles. For the Nonpartisan League, like the organization department, had inevitably provoked a split in the NDSP. Unlike the previous split, however, this one brought victory to the Right-wing. By the time Teutsch's article appeared, the battle was over, except for the shouting, and Teutsch's shouts had little effect.

The first instance of the Left-Right split over the

League issue occurred with the resignation of A. E. Bowen. Bowen had long been a friend of Townley and a supporter of his plans. In fact, he is credited by some with having originated the League idea.³³ Whether he did or not is a moot point, but there is no doubt that he was as convinced as Townley of the efficacy of the League methods. In his letter of resignation from the NDSP dated February 3, 1915, he stated his decision was "prompted by a desire to do for the good of humanity that which it seems is impossible to do within the Socialist Party."³⁴ A month later Teigan began to act as though he might follow Bowen into the League. On March 12, 1915, he resigned as editor of the Iconoclast, giving financial reasons as his purpose in resigning.³⁵ However, he did not resign from his position as state Secretary, but used that position to make certain that his editorial successor was the pro-League O. M. Thomason.³⁶ Teigan secured a salary of one-hundred dollars a month for this post which had previously been non-compensatory.³⁷

With Thomason's defection to the League, however,

³³ Maxwell, 45.

³⁴ Iconoclast, Feb. 26, 1915, p. 1.

³⁵ Ibid., Mar. 19, 1915, p. 2.

³⁶ Ibid., Mar. 26, 1915, pp. 2, 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 2, 4.

Teigan resumed the editorship on September 29, 1915,³⁸ and on the same date there appeared the first public indication that Teigan's old proposal to reduce the size of the Executive Committee had been realized. Sometimes during the summer this committee was reduced from five to three members. These three, soundly pro-League were Youmans, Dorman, and a little known Socialist named C. O. Carlson.³⁹ At last, when it could do him little good, Teigan had achieved supremacy in the NDSP--a small Executive Committee comprised wholly of Rightists, and himself in the two key positions of State Secretary and Editor of the Iconoclast.

He used those positions well. Teigan was a realist, and he nursed no illusions about the political effectiveness of the Socialist Party, at a time when the League was capturing the allegiance of the agrarian voters in the state. Yet he did not view the League as the arch enemy of the NDSP, nor did he regard it as a perfect instrument for achieving the socialization of North Dakota. The problem, as he appears to have seen it, was to preserve the Socialist Party of North Dakota in the face of the formidable strength of the League, and at the same time to utilize the League, as long as it should

³⁸ Ibid., Oct. 8, 1915, p. 4.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

last, to achieve as great a measure of socialism as possible. Such a policy necessitated a change in Socialist policy to allow for fusion and cooperation, and the principal opponent of his plans was H. R. Martinson. At the State Socialist convention in February 1916, Martinson introduced a motion that ". . .a membership in the NPL constitute fusion with another political organization."⁴⁰ To Teigan's delight, and no doubt because of his labors, the convention defeated this proposal⁴¹ and thus, he said, ". . .went on record opposing the idea of declaring Socialists who had joined the League, heretics."⁴² To rub salt in the Left-wing wounds, the convention went on to pass a constitutional amendment declaring Socialist voters would not be ". . .disenfranchised in the elections where they are unable to legally put a candidate in the field."⁴³ Of this amendment Teigan said: "The new provision of the constitution is a good one and it is our business to make use of it--as an organization."⁴⁴

Teigan did not wait long to make use of it--as an individual. At the same convention which legalized

⁴⁰ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1916, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴² Ibid., p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

fusion, he resigned as State Secretary and editor of the Iconoclast to become Secretary of the Nonpartisan League. He did not resign from the NDSP, however, and he emphasized the importance of keeping the party alive as an educating device and as an organ for criticism of the League. Teigan shrewdly realized that the League would not benefit from open support by the NDSP, and he heartily recommended that the party actively criticise the League so as to make it less obvious that the Socialists regarded it as an instrument for the partial achievement of their ends.⁴⁵ Accordingly, his letter of resignation of March 4 stated that his reason for resigning was that he was not ". . . in harmony with the views of the dominating element of the Organization. . . ." ⁴⁶ As a master stroke in this policy of official damnation--unofficial cooperation, Teigan picked the incisively critical H. R. Martinson as his successor to the positions of State Secretary and Editor of the Iconoclast.⁴⁷ This choice not only insured that the League would not suffer the stigma of Socialist endorsement, but helped to heal the Right-Left breach, since even Teutsch labelled

⁴⁵ Interview with H. R. Martinson, Sept. 8, 1955.

⁴⁶ Iconoclast, Mar. 24, 1916, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., March 24, 1916, pp. 3, 4, May 12, 1916, p. 2. Interview with H. R. Martinson, Sept. 8, 1955.

Martinson as "one of the best grounded Socialists in the State, whose honesty is above suspicion."⁴⁸

But well grounded socialism and honesty could not save the Iconoclast. When the League began to work its political magic of mass allegiance, the inevitable consequence to the Iconoclast was a rapid decline in subscriptions, and as early as August 1915 this alarming fact was given editorial notice.⁴⁹ At the state convention of 1916 an attempt was made to rescue the paper from its financial plight by converting it into a cooperative enterprise of the Rochdale type and issuing five hundred shares of stock at twenty-five dollars a share.⁵⁰ This plan had little success, as Iconoclast stocks could hardly be classed as gilt-edged securities, and few buyers appeared, despite publication of threats by LeSueur, who still held a mortgage on the paper, to foreclose and take the presses to Fort Scott, Kansas.⁵¹ The editors vainly called for more subscriptions and offered bargain rates and clubbing offers as added inducements,⁵² all to little avail among a populace captivated by the words and

⁴⁸ Iconoclast, May 19, 1916, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Aug. 13, 1915, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1916, p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., Apr. 21, 1916, p. 1.

⁵² Ibid., Mar. 24, 1916, p. 3, Apr. 2, 1915, p. 2, May 7, 1915, p. 1.

deeds of the Nonpartisan League. On May 12, 1916, the editors even decided to accept paid political announcements of candidates from the hated old parties,⁵³ but few political aspirants utilized this dubious advantage, doubtless expecting to gain few votes among the readers of the Iconoclast. The June 23 issue began to prepare its readers for the worst by announcing that it might soon ". . . be necessary to suspend publication," and the next week the editors stated that the current publication would probably be the last.⁵⁴

It struggled on for three more issues, however, and finally expired on July 21, 1916, with a plaintive page-one appeal stating, "We Must Double Our Vote Again." An ironic advertisement on page three offered: "A bargain. Newspaper Plant; . . . located in best city in Northwest; Good chance for a hustler."

It was in such inauspicious circumstances that the NDSP faced the election year of 1916. As if the North Dakota Socialists were not already enough racked by dissension, the national issue of Debs' proposal to fuse with the moribund Socialist Labor Party⁵⁵ was also injected into the compound confusion of the state Socialist politics. Teigan, not unexpectedly, editorialized against

⁵³ Ibid., May 12, 1916, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., June 23, 1916, p. 1, and June 30, 1916, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ginger, Bending Cross, 331.

such an alliance,⁵⁶ and found no difficulty in arousing opinion in favor of it.⁵⁷ But at the state convention the delegates soon lost sight of this distant issue in their feud over fusion. Before settling this issue, the convention, for some unknown reason, adopted a new party constitution.⁵⁸ It was almost identical with the old one, until the amendment allowing Socialists to vote for non-Socialist candidates was put in, and it apparently passed with little difficulty. The delegates also nominated a slate of candidates with little apparent dissension, and Teigan asserted that the farmers got "their quota on the state ticket."⁵⁹

When it came to formulating a platform, however, there was much dissension in evidence. A day before the opening of the convention, Dorman had submitted an innocuous program giving lip service to ". . .the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth. . .", and listing only three long range goals and five immediate demands.⁶⁰ The long range goals called for equality of income, an effective merit system, and cooperative ownership and management of industry; the immediate demands endorsed

⁵⁶ Iconoclast, Jan. 21, 1916, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Jan. 28, 1916, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Feb. 25, 1916, pp. 1, 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1916, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Feb. 5, 1916, p. 1.

public ownership of natural resources plus such dubiously Marxian principles as old age pensions, abolition of the Senate, abolition of gubernatorial veto power, and equal suffrage. This was a far cry from the effective platforms of 1912 and 1914 with their extensive lists of immediate demands, but most conspicuous was the complete absence of any farmer planks. Dorman was definitely pro-League, and he probably foresaw that eliminating the agrarian demands from the Socialist program would insure that the NDSP would not draw off any potential League votes from among the disgruntled farmers. His views were more than accepted by the convention, as the Right-wingers put through a platform that was so vague as to be almost meaningless. It consisted in its entirety of a traditional statement of opposition to capitalism and a five point program calling for ". . .a workable initiative, referendum and recall law," "transformation of capitalist property. . .into the collective property of the working class," operation of industry by the workers, and "the establishment of production for use instead of production for profit." The platform committee adopted as the guiding principle of the party, the statement, "will the legislation advance the interests of the working class in their struggle against capitalism?"⁶¹ Such

⁶¹ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1916, p. 2.

hackneyed shibboleths were well designed to render the party electorally ineffective, if the party rank and file would acquiesce in their adoption.

They did not. Shortly after the convention Oscar Anderson, the Socialist candidate for United States Representative in the Second District, withdrew from the ticket, stating his reason as ". . .not being in full accord with the constitution and platform adopted. . ."⁶² A month later in a letter to the Iconoclast he explained more fully his disagreement with the party leaders.⁶³ According to Anderson, he, N. M. Grefsheim, and L. L. Griffith had, by request of the State Committee, drawn up a platform calling for such traditional immediate demands as equal suffrage, abolition of gubernatorial veto power, abolition of the Senate, abolition of judicial review, abolition of the contract system in public works, home rule for counties, assessment of land by owners with state option of purchase, establishment of a state department of education, child labor legislation, and old age pensions. When this platform was presented to the convention, however, the Rightists prevented its being read, and went on to force passage of their own platform. Anderson was highly critical of this watered-down program,

⁶² Ibid., Feb. 18, 1916, p. 1.

⁶³ Ibid., Mar. 17, 1916, p. 1.

and called upon the party members to reject it. The letter sparked another feud within the NDSP, with Anderson and Grefsheim criticising the convention platform,⁶⁴ and, oddly enough, the usually Left-wing D. I. Todd defending it. Todd used the typical Rightist argument of the undependability of the proletariat as a base for political action: "If the mass, or even one-fourth of it, was class conscious, the [Anderson] platform. . . would be acceptable. But the mass is not, so why ask it to approve something it does not understand."⁶⁵ This argument was of dubious applicability to the situation, and seems little more than a thinly veiled repudiation of Socialist principles in favor of the political pragmatism of the League. Why Todd articulated this viewpoint is something of a mystery, since he apparently did not, like most of the Rightists and some of the Leftists, eventually join the League. The Iconoclast sought to settle the disagreement over the platform issue by publishing both platforms for the readers' consideration.⁶⁶

But on June 6, 1916, probably to the chagrin of the conservatives, the party adopted by referendum Anderson's

⁶⁴ Ibid., Apr. 14, 1916, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Mar. 31, 1916, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Apr. 28, 1916, p. 3.

"long" platform.⁶⁷ This indicates that after the League had attracted the allegiance of many of the party rank and file, the "rump" membership was much more conventionally Socialist than most of the leadership. It was no doubt this hard core that Teigan hoped would continue the existence of the party through the triumphant hour of the League, in order to carry on with positive work after the latter's glory had faded. The platform referendum decision was a resurgence of fundamentalism in the NDSP, and it definitely settled that squable. However, this Left-wing victory was of no help in the election campaign. The new platform reflecting the orthodoxy of its farmers played into the hands of the League sympathizers by excluding all farmer demands, and in the coming election the results of this omission would be apparent.

The North Dakota Socialists seemed to exude defeatism in 1916, and Martinson's editorials calling for a ". . .rousing [of] old locals to new interests and opening up new territory" had a hollow sound.⁶⁸ Perhaps a note of enthusiasm appeared when Debs, speaking in Williston allegedly made one-hundred converts there,⁶⁹ and when LeSueur made an attempt to capture the Socialist

⁶⁷ Ibid., June 9, 1916, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid., June 16, 1916, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Ginger, 33.

presidential nomination.⁷⁰ But any optimism generated by these events must have been chilled by the primary elections, when John Fleckton, the candidate for Lieutenant Governor, led his ticket with a meager 1,896 votes.⁷¹ It was in this year that the NPL made its first great election sweep, and the Socialists suffered from it.

The League's triumphant fall election was even more demoralizing to the NDSP. In contrast to the seven-thousand and six-thousand vote averages in 1912 and 1914, the Socialists averaged less than three-thousand votes per candidate for the state office,⁷² and they failed to elect a single state legislator, even though two of their candidates had League endorsements.⁷³ This was the first election which swept the League candidates into office by margins of four to one, and the decline of the Socialist vote reflects the League encroachments. Further evidence that their falloff in strength was largely due to the NPL is furnished by the fact that the little known Socialist, E. R. Fry, polled 8,472 votes for

⁷⁰ North Dakota Socialists cast 1,156 votes for LeSueur against 186 for the winner Allan Benson. Election Returns, 12.

⁷¹ Ibid., 15.

⁷² Ibid., 18.

⁷³ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 33, 89.

United States Senator,⁷⁴ an office for which the League did not field a candidate. This was the highest vote ever to be harvested by a Socialist in a North Dakota election, and was no doubt a protest against the pronounced conservatism of Porter J. McCumber, the Republican incumbent.⁷⁵ This vote indicates that, had the NDSP faced the typical slates of regular Republicans and Democrats in 1916, instead of the overwhelmingly popular Leaguers, North Dakota would perhaps have considerably increased its Socialist vote over that of former years. This would have been in marked contrast to the rest of the nation in 1916, when Socialist strength declined by over four-hundred-thousand votes from the 1912 figure.⁷⁶

The election of 1916 served to complete the process of Socialist defection to the Nonpartisan League. It was almost an impossibility for the leaders of the NDSP, most of whom were professed opportunists, to continue the quiet heroism of political "education," while the League dangled the bait of positive action. Even Teigan, among the Rightists the most earnestly convinced of the

⁷⁴ Election Returns, 18.

⁷⁵ This vote may also have been a protest against the Republican stand on the war issue. The Socialists waged a strongly anti-war campaign, advertising Allan Benson as "the only nominee for the presidency who is opposed to militarism." Socialist political advertisement in Nonpartisan Leader, Nov. 2, 1916, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Ginger, 337.

need to keep the party alive, did not choose to set a personal example of self effacement by remaining a Socialist Party leader. He abandoned that prosaic business to the less imaginative, and sought the excitement of political power and election campaigns. Even the discipline of the national Socialist Party which repudiated League affiliations in 1917 ("No compromise, no political trading"⁷⁷) proved ineffective in halting defections.

The League itself was, from the first, friendly to the party and its deserters. One of the first issues of the Nonpartisan Leader carried a pro-Youmans article on his bank suit,⁷⁸ and after the League victory of 1916 the newly elected League Supreme Court Judges unsuccessfully tried to take office a month early so as to hear

⁷⁷ Theodore Saloutos, "The Expansion and Decline of the Nonpartisan League in the Western Middle West" Agricultural History, XX (Oct. 1946), 246, hereafter cited as Saloutos, "Expansion and Decline." MS. LeSueur Papers.

⁷⁸ Oct. 15, 1915, p. 3. This point can be exaggerated, however, for the Leader rarely carried any references to the NDSP.

the appeal of the Youmans bank case.⁷⁹ But a more definite example of League friendliness to the Socialists was Townley's candid recruitment of his former associates to work as League organizers.⁸⁰ This call, in the end, proved irresistible, and by 1917 the "ace organizers" of the Nonpartisan League were almost entirely former "big names" of the NDSP.⁸¹

The first of such organizers to join the League had been A. E. Bowen. He became Townley's right hand man, and, the chief clerk in the North Dakota House of Representatives where he played a part in drafting and securing passage of League legislation.⁸² Probably more

⁷⁹ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 94. Youmans seems to have been on very friendly terms with the League from its beginning. The probable reason for this friendly relationship is that Youmans had formed a close friendship with William Lemke, probably before the League was organized. Considerable correspondence passed between the two regarding land sales and the mortgage business, and early in 1916 Lemke negotiated a \$14,00 loan for Youmans for which he charged him no commission, but did it "entirely as a friend." Youmans thanked him warmly for this favor and promised to repay him in a political manner, for he assured Lemke: ". . .you can depend upon it that Grant S. Youmans, Victim of Legalized Bank Robbery in Minot, will kick up considerable fuss between now and the 23rd inst. in attempt to make Minot welcome Frazier, his special train /the League campaign train, the 'Frazier Special', and its occupants." William Lemke Papers, University of North Dakota Library, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Lemke to Youmans, Dec. 17, 1915, Lemke to Youmans, Apr. 6, 1916, and Youmans to Lemke, June 17, 1916.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 27; Frost, Townley and Company 27.

⁸¹ Bahmer, 443.

⁸² Morlan, Prairie Fire, 93 note, 97; Morlan, "Non-partisan League," 51.

important to the NPL, and certainly of more importance to the NDSP, was League Secretary Teigan with his double game of dormant socialism and active "Townleyism." Indicative of his devotion to the NDSP was his subscription to one-hundred dollars worth of stock in the faltering Iconoclast,⁸³ and his participation in the November 1916 election as state campaign manager for the Socialist Presidential nominee, Alan Benson.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the NPL after capturing control of the Republican State Central Committee, urged its members to vote straight Republican, with the exception of the Democrat, P. M. Casey, the candidate for State Treasurer. Teigan further muddled the political waters by using his position as Secretary of the NPL to circulate copies of the Appeal to Reason among Leaguers in order to garner a few votes for Benson.⁸⁵ Other unofficial actions of the Secretary on behalf of socialism included establishing an "Educational Department" of the League which kept an account with the Charles H. Kerr Company, a prominent Socialist publishing house,⁸⁶ and securing in 1919 the appointments of

⁸³ Iconoclast, May 12, 1916, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 85-86. The Nonpartisan Leader carried at least one Socialist advertisement for Benson's candidacy, Nonpartisan Leader, Nov. 2, 1916, 24.

⁸⁵ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 85-86.

⁸⁶ Morlan, "Nonpartisan League," 450-451.

Socialist Signe Lund as music teacher at the Mayville State Normal School and her friend, Dr. Charles E. Stangland, as head of the State Library Commission. Both of these persons were dismissed the next year: Lund for attempting to secure the release from prison of Kate Richards O'Hare, and Stangland for allegedly "planting" socialist literature in the State Library.⁸⁷ As late as 1930 Teigan was still a SP member in sufficient good standing to confer with the prominent Socialist, Dr. Harry W. Laidler, on the most effective tactics for labor movements and third parties.⁸⁸ How long Teigan retained his Socialist connections is unknown; he retained the League Secretaryship until 1923 when he became a power in the Farmer-Labor movement, a political creation of the Nonpartisan League in Minnesota.⁸⁹ From 1923 to 1925 he served as secretary to Farmer-Labor Congressman, Magnus Johnson, and then as editor of the Minnesota Leader, the official organ of the Farmer-Labor Party; from 1933 to 1935 he served as a Minnesota State Senator, and in 1936 he attained a measure of national prominence by serving one term as United States Congressman from Minnesota's Third District.⁹⁰ His was a long, varied,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 583-586. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 254-255.

⁸⁸ Saloutos, "Expansion and Decline," 250.

⁸⁹ Bibliographical description, Henry G. Teigan Papers, State Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

and colorful political career. He was probably the most astute of the North Dakota Socialist-Leaguers, save Townley, and, in seeking political office, he was probably most successful of all, including Arthur LeSueur.

Despite his unfavorable remarks about the League, LeSueur probably began to contemplate joining it soon after it was formed. In an article in the Iconoclast in September 1915,⁹¹ he made obviously favorable allusions to the League with such remarks as ". . .to be orthodox is to be dead. . . If Marx were alive today he would be read out of the Socialist Party. . . We expect to Socialize the world apparently by becoming a segregated sect, refusing to affiliate with other organizations. . . We must forget our dogma and creeds and work for Socialization, the theoretical aim of our movement." It was not until 1917, however, that he joined the NPL as a legal consultant.⁹² He soon expanded his duties into the field of propaganda with his statements that the League ". . .demands only the social ownership of the channels through which trade and business flow. . .," while "the communistic program of socialism" demands ". . .public ownership. . .and control of trade and business."⁹³ Despite these facile apologetics, his

⁹¹ Sept. 10, 1915, p. 4.

⁹² LeSueur, Crusaders, 51-52. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 230.

⁹³ MS. LeSueur Papers.

career with the League was short lived. In 1919 he produced a plan whereby the proposed state industries would be directed by officials elected specifically for that purpose. When his proposal was rejected for Townley's plan for an industrial commission composed of existing state officials, he resigned in indignation.⁹⁴ With his usual dexterity he then proceeded to criticise the League for placing its industrial program in the hands of "politicians."⁹⁵ Just how a specially elected group whose single duty would be to manage the state industries, would be less likely to be identified as "politicians" than any other body of elective officials was not made clear.

LeSueur had such a well developed literary ability for masking polemics behind a veneer of detachment and restraint, that his writings have gained much more acceptance than they deserve. In his aforementioned manuscript on the organization department⁹⁶ he deals even more critically and less accurately with the Nonpartisan League. According to LeSueur, the main difference between the NDSP and the League was that the former emphasized the farmer's individual duty and responsibility to free

⁹⁴ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 230.

⁹⁵ Arthur LeSueur, "The Nonpartisan League: A Criticism," Socialist Review, IX (Nov. 1920), 193-195.

⁹⁶ MS. LeSueur Papers.

himself of his burdens, while the latter offered him a chimerical short cut to economic and social salvation via the ballot box. Thus, he said, ". . .the Socialists told the whole truth about the necessary remedies for the conditions which afflicted North Dakota. . . ." They placed stress on the farmer's responsibility to be "his own savior" by managing his farm efficiently, practising diversification, making certain that his children were educated, and in general fighting ". . .for that which was his. . ." not only through the Socialist Party, but also through "cooperative organizations." Such an approach, he said, was ineffective because it contained more than the farmer could stand.

This doctrine laid the farmer some, at least, of the weight of responsibility for the conditions under which he existed. He would go home from the Socialist meeting and view his tumble down abode, his ragged, overworked wife, his overworked and undereducated children, his weedy fields, his rusted out machinery, and then, applying the doctrine he had heard from the ever present socialist campaigner, he would not have a very comfortable feeling, because he could not escape a measure of responsibility for his condition.

To the farmer already "stupid from economic abuse and fatigue," these conditions were a "scourge to his self esteem," and he refused to accept responsibility for them. "It was never possible to get more than a fraction of them to embrace this doctrine. Those who preached [sic] it could never lead more than a fraction of the farmers."

The League, on the other hand, LeSueur asserted,

refrained from laying any such blame on the farmer, but instead attributed his difficulties entirely to "big business." This enabled the farmer to ". . .endure the sight of his own failure," and he ". . .sent his wife to milk the cows, and his boy to the fields instead of to school with a clear conscience."

This interpretation of the differences between the League and the NDSP has been accepted in its entirety by Morlan and Saloutos and Hicks and is quoted by them almost verbatim.⁹⁷ Yet it is probably the least accurate of LeSueur's rather extensive list of inaccurate writings. For if the North Dakota Socialists worked diligently to give the farmers the truth instead of propaganda, they left behind very scanty remains of their labors, while their propaganda still exists in abundance. The pages of the Iconoclast abound in vilifications of the capitalists, but sober economic analyses are seldom to be found. While it is true that the League blamed the farmer's plight almost entirely on "Big Biz," the Socialists did the same thing in their castigation of the "plutes." They went, in fact, one step further and denounced the entire capitalist system, while the League criticised only its monopolistic aspects. And if

⁹⁷ Morlan, "Nonpartisan League," 72-73. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 34. Saloutos, "Rise of the Nonpartisan League," 47-48. Saloutos and Hicks, Agricultural Discontent, 156.

the Socialists advised the farmer to educate his children, improve his agricultural techniques, and expand his cooperative activities, it is strange that it is mainly examples of the opposite advice that have survived. Probably the Iconoclast's most emotionally effective "pitch" was its shrill decrying of the detrimental effects of capitalism on children, and one of LeSueur's most repeated assertions to the farmer was that his hope of giving his children a good education was futile, because the capitalist system". . . keeps the education that ought to be in your children's heads in the vaults of the bankers."⁹⁸

In addition, the Iconoclast had only contempt for the "better farming" movement, deriding it as a capitalist trick to make the farmer a more profitable source of exploitation,⁹⁹ and it never devoted any space to better agricultural procedures, while the Nonpartisan Leader often carried articles on such topics. And aside from proposals for cooperative ownership of creameries and cheese factories, the Socialists either rejected cooperative schemes, or else ignored them entirely. The Iconoclast declared that cooperative stores would fail because

⁹⁸ Iconoclast, Mar. 13, 1914, p. 1. See also Ibid., May 9, 1913, pp. 1, 4, and entire issues of November 28, 1913, and Dec. 5, 1913.

⁹⁹ Ibid., June 25, 1915, p. 1, Sept. 10, 1915, p. 1.

of their inability to compete in a capitalist system,¹⁰⁰ while the League, on the other hand, engaged in an extensive if unsuccessful venture in such stores.¹⁰¹

Finally, if the League dealt only in political appealing issues, while the Socialists dealt only in truthful ones, it is odd that their campaign platforms were strikingly similar, and that both groups represented themselves as exclusively capable of bringing about the farmer's economic and social redemption. Very likely it was this last fact that motivated LeSueur in his onslaught on the political morality of the League. Both the NDSP and the League sought to "sell" the same program to the North Dakota farmers, but the latter succeeded where the former failed, and LeSueur's manuscript is the product of his jealousy which he sought to relieve by condemning the ethics of the Leaguers, and by writing off the farmers as irresponsible "rubes" unwilling to face their own inadequacies, and accept the "truth," preferring instead to follow the demagogues of the Nonpartisan League.

Probably no less outspoken of the League Socialists, but less successful than LeSueur at making his criticisms heard, was the unpredictable O. M. Thomason. Thomason served the League ably as an organizer, writer, and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., June 21, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 115-117.

speaker during its critical early years,¹⁰² but in 1918 he joined an insurgent group of Leaguers in signing a "protest and recommendation" note against the dictatorial leadership of A. C. Townley.¹⁰³ Nothing came of the protest, as Townley ignored it, and Thomason probably left the League shortly afterward. He thus joined that unhappy group of floating socialists whose irascibility made them unwanted by the Left-wing parties, and whose ideology alienated them from the general public. Caught in the post war backwash of reaction, and lacking the protection which might have been afforded by a political organization against the more flagrant abuses of a society bent on a "return to normalcy," the embittered Thomason turned even against those organizations which he had helped to build. In a letter to Teigan who had prudently avoided a similar fate, Thomason combined requests for charity and copies of the Congressional Record, with some very abusive language against Teigan's new associates, the Farmer-Laborites. He poured out his wrath against the "men who were wrestling with a milk bottle," while he was laying the foundation of the movement, and who ". . .are now polishing callouses on the seats of their pants in the state owned office chairs

¹⁰² Bahmer, 456. Morlan, Prairie Fire, 40, 66, 126.

¹⁰³ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 195-97. Also involved in this feud was former Socialist, J. Arthur Williams.

and I can't get a pleasant howdedo to say nothing of a cubbyhole in a corner."¹⁰⁴ In a subsequent letter his remarks about his ". . .temptation to 'throw in' with some of the opposition and do my godambdest [sic] to sock the good-old F. L.'s on the chin," were softened somewhat by his polite thanks to Teigan for sending him the Congressional Record which, he pathetically remarked, he had read "devotedly." His last letter to Teigan was written on the stationery of the Durango (Colorado) News a publication on which he had evidently landed a job as editor, and though in this letter he remarked typically that "times are nice and rotten here now--getting rotten-er," his steady job probably had raised his spirits a bit. He closed with a note of left handed optimism: "I am getting in good health again and hope now to live to see the old ship sink." With those happy prospects in mind, he faded from the political picture.

Other prominent North Dakota Socialists who gave notable though rather ephemeral service in the League were D. C. Dorman, Leon Durocher, and L. L. Griffith. Just when Dorman left the NDSP to join the League is unknown, but after he did, he must have served ably as an organizer, for when Townley began his activities to expand the League into other states, he sent Dormanto head the

¹⁰⁴ Thomason to Teigan, undated letter, Henry G. Teigan Papers.

organizing activities in Montana.¹⁰⁵ There being no Farmer-Labor Party to join in that state after the League died out, he became affiliated with the LaFollette movement there in 1924 and was elected to the board of directors and the secretaryship of the state LaFollette organization, the "Conference for Progressive Political Action."¹⁰⁶ Durocher left the NDSP early in 1917 and soon became an enthusiastic "pusher" of the League, registering his admiration for it and his contempt for his former organization with the remark, "The League has done more the five years of its existence than the SP could have done in 25 years, I believe."¹⁰⁷ L. L. Griffith showed a similar tendency to discount the importance of the NDSP after leaving it. He succeeded LeSueur as Socialist National Committeeman from North Dakota in November 1915,¹⁰⁸ but resigned three months later being ". . .out of harmony or not in complete accord with the methods used by our organization. . ."¹⁰⁹ He stated his intention, however, of continuing to work for the cause of socialism,¹¹⁰ but after he became an organizer for the

¹⁰⁵ Howard, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Conference for Progressive Political Action to Teigan, undated letter, Henry G. Teigan Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Howard, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Iconoclast, Dec. 10, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Feb. 11, 1916, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

League, he, like many other ex-Socialists, dissociated himself from the party, resigning in May 1916.¹¹¹

Other North Dakota Socialists who were less prominent in the NDSP but who became influential in the League were Fred B. Wood, his two sons Howard and Edwin, and Howard Elliot. It was on the Woods' farm near Deering, McHenry County, that the Nonpartisan League was born.¹¹² It was this early connection with the League that enabled them to achieve prominent positions in it. F. B. Wood became a member of the Executive Committee,¹¹³ while Howard became Speaker of the first League dominated North Dakota House of Representatives, and Edwin became A. E. Bowen's assistant as deputy clerk.¹¹⁴ Howard Elliot was a minor Socialist who had run for State Auditor in 1912, when he polled 7,264 votes.¹¹⁵ Just when he joined the League is not certain, but in 1917 he organized the Nonpartisan League Consumer's United Stores Company which was supposed to be a buying center for League subscribers. The company was poorly managed, and gained an unfavorable reputation when its funds were

¹¹¹ Ibid., May 26, 1916, p. 1.

¹¹² Gaston, 57-59.

¹¹³ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 93.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 93 and note.

¹¹⁵ Minot Iconoclast, May 31, 1912, p. 2. Blue Book, 1913, 269.

illegally used for campaign purposes.¹¹⁶

It was the presence of these major and minor North Dakota Socialists in the League, plus a few imported ones like Charles Edward Russell, Herbert Gaston, D. C. Coates, Joseph Gilbert, and Walter Thomas Mills,¹¹⁷ that lent an air of authenticity to the opposition's charges that the NPL was a socialist conspiracy. Opposition tracts like the Red Flame,¹¹⁸ J. D. Bacon's A Warning to the Farmer Against Townleyism,¹¹⁹ and Asher Howard's The Leaders of the Nonpartisan League¹²⁰ all contained extensive and accurate lists of the Socialists in the League, although, of course, their treatment of them could hardly be considered objective.

The Socialist conspiracy theory of the League was given an aura of authenticity in 1918, when a former NPL organizer named Ferdinand A. Teigan published a pamphlet entitled The Nonpartisan League; Its Origin, Development,

¹¹⁶ Morlan, Prairie Fire, 115-117.

¹¹⁷ Saloutos, "Rise of the Nonpartisan League," 51; Davis Douthit, Nobody Owns Us, The Story of Joe Gilbert, Midwestern Rebel (Chicago, Washington, New York, 1948), 90-91; Bruce, 65; Arthur Ruhl, "North Dakota Idea," Atlantic Monthly, CXXIII (May, 1919), 688.

¹¹⁸ Nov., 1919, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁹ pp. 11-15.

¹²⁰ pp. 39-42.

and Secret Purposes which supported this interpretation.¹²¹ Yet such a charge seems to be almost entirely groundless in view of the refusal of the NDSP leaders to endorse Townley's actions. Had they wished to utilize the methods which Townley perfected, they would not have hamstrung the organization department and forced Townley from their ranks. If conspiracy was their tactic, they were clumsy conspirators indeed to engage in a publicized "great debate" over the issue of fusion, and then to announce openly that they had decided to condone it, especially since they were acting contrary to the policy of the national Socialist Party which later officially condemned fusion. No doubt Teigan, and perhaps others, hoped to use the League to achieve some Socialist objectives, but there is no evidence that any of the regular Leaguers shared this aspiration. If Townley knew of the plan he probably merely winked and called for more Socialist organizers, being acquainted with the fact that in most cases, a North Dakota socialist and his socialism were soon parted when he began to follow the election returns.

If the Socialists came to indoctrinate the League with socialism, they were themselves indoctrinated with "Townelyism," and they soon showed little inclination to leave the vineyard of the Nonpartisan League to return

¹²¹ Morlan, "Nonpartisan League," 449-450.

once more to the desert of the Socialist Party. When even a former staunch Left-wing Socialist like L. L. Griffith repudiated his party connections, there was little hope for the Socialist who looked to the League to carry his banner. If the League Socialists had actually conspired to subvert the NPL they would have found it very difficult to do so, for no matter how impressive were the opposition lists of Socialists in the NPL, they never comprised more than a small minority of the official hierarchy. Furthermore, few of them held policy making positions; except for Teigan and such "safe" ex-Marxists as Bowen and the Woods, their duties were almost exclusively in the field of organization. They were given few opportunities to run for office, as most of the League candidates were, from a Socialist's viewpoint, conservatively inclined, especially those elected to the United States House of Representatives who refused to support the seating of Victor Berger, the Milwaukee Socialist who had been re-elected to the House in 1918.¹²² For the most part, the Socialists who came to the League came as organizers, and organizers they remained. Nevertheless, they performed valuable services in this capacity which cannot be discounted. By the end of 1917 about the only Socialist of note who was not doing this important work for

¹²² Saloutos, "Expansion and Decline," 246-247.

the League was H. R. Martinson.

Martinson tried hard to keep the party alive. Deprived of its newspaper, almost wholly without funds, still racked by dissension and ill feeling, its program already appropriated by the League, its followers rapidly being drained off, and its leaders steadily being seduced by Townley's call for organizers, the NDSP was assured of a speedy demise, and it was only a matter of time before it would be forced to accept its fate. The time came in the spring of 1918, when Martinson closed the party books and records and turned them over to the national party headquarters.¹²³ Shortly afterward he tried to secure a position in the Norwegian Department of the wartime bureau of censorship, but he was rejected because of the then current tendency to consider socialism as synonymous with disloyalty.¹²⁴ He then traveled the familiar road of his predecessors into the Nonpartisan League which he has served faithfully ever since. He is today Deputy Labor Commissioner in the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and Labor.¹²⁵

Martinson's joining the League was symbolic of the coup de grace of the North Dakota Socialist Party. It

¹²³ Interview with H. R. Martinson, Sept. 8, 1955.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

never filed another slate of candidates, although a blank Socialist column appeared on the ballot in the primaries of 1918, and, like the recent widower who still absent-mindedly calls to his wife, a few die-hards cast Socialist votes in that election.¹²⁶ But it was an empty gesture, for the NDSP was dead. And the Nonpartisan League had killed it.

¹²⁶ Election Returns, 23.

CHAPTER V

APOLOGIES AND POST MORTEM

Examination of the materials dealing with the NDSP furnishes one with much evidence that the party played a significant role in the political history of North Dakota. Such an examination does not, however, supply many answers to the question of why socialism had an appeal to so many North Dakotans and Midwesterners in general. Unfortunately, today's writers on socialism in America almost wholly ignore this problem, and concentrate instead upon the question of why American socialism was not politically more successful than it was. Strangely enough, the answers which they have found to the latter question provide some negative answers to the former. By reading inversely the reasons why American socialism declined in the industrial East, one gains clues as to why socialism did not decline as readily in the agrarian Midwest.

According to Daniel Bell, "the final gust that shattered the old Socialist party was the whirling sandstorm of the European War."¹ It is true that this event not only divided the party leaders on the proper response to the war,

¹ Bell, 308. In all of the direct quotations found in this chapter the writer has tried to convey them in their original meaning and to avoid distorting their meaning by quoting them out of context.

but it also enabled the party's enemies to persecute the membership because of alleged disloyalty. Most authorities such as Ira Kipnis, David Shannon, and Daniel Bell, are agreed, however, that the beginnings of the socialist decline took place before the war occurred; in fact, some assert that the American socialist movement had always contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. Again according to Bell,² socialism in the United States bore a resemblance to the "orgiastic Chiliasm" of the anabaptists. Certain of triumph in the future, the socialists refused to compromise with the present, and they placed their faith in a movement which was supposedly "based on a belief in 'history,'" but which "found itself outside of 'time.'" Disdaining politics and abhorring compromise the Socialists failed to "resolve the basic dilemma of ethics and politics," and they inevitably gave way to parties with a more realistic approach. This criticism applies mainly to the Left-wing of the SP, and, if the criticism is valid, the situation should have been remedied when the Right-wing gained supremacy in the party. Actually it appears that it was the Right that presided over the dissolution of the party, and according to Ira Kipnis,³ it was the tactics of the Right, not the Left, which destroyed the party's

² Ibid., 217-221.

³ Chapter XXXVIII.

effectiveness. Looking for more tangible causes of the socialist decline, Werner Sombart,⁴ singled out America's open frontiers, her opportunities for social ascent through individual effort, and her rising standard of living. All of these added up to the "naturally-endowed resources and material fastness of America," or as Sombart said: "on the reefs of roast beef and apple pie socialist utopias of every sort are sent to their doom."

Each of these factors is to some degree inversely applicable to the North Dakota Socialist Party. It is doubtful that the "whirling sandstorm" of World War I had much to do with the decline of the NDSP. Probably in the thinking of most North Dakotans, the NDSP was "right" on the war issue, for the Socialists advocated non-intervention, and as Professor R. P. Wilkins' "North Dakota and the European War" amply indicates, so did most of the people of North Dakota. In regard to the supposed socialist characteristics of "orgiastic chiliasm" and unwillingness to compromise, those traits were conspicuously absent from the political behavior of the NDSP. Though the North Dakota Socialists were outspoken and, to some degree, intolerant, none of them, even among the Left-wing, apparently possessed a messianic complex. And one need only read their platforms of 1912 and 1914 to see that they were willing to go very

⁴ Werner Sombart, Why Is There No Socialism in the United States? (New York: 1898). Quoted in Bell, 215-216.

far in making attempts to reconcile ideology with reality. Their principal tactical error in this respect was, contrary to the Kipnis thesis, their refusal to go quite far enough. If they had been willing to make one further compromise in regard to the organization department, they would have retained their most valuable human resource, A. C. Townley. And Townley might have done for the NDSP, on a considerably smaller scale, somewhat the same thing that he did for the Nonpartisan League. When the Socialists later tried to deal pragmatically with the League, they failed. By that time, they were too weak to compromise; they could only capitulate.

Werner Sombart's explanations of why Americans did not become socialists seem to explain better why many Midwestern Americans did. The idea of the open frontiers⁵ did not

⁵ According to the eminent frontier geographer, Dr. Isaiah Bowman, the Great Plains area remained a frontier well into the twentieth century, and the principal error of the Turner school of historians is their assumption that the frontier had disappeared by 1890. Bowman says that the main aspect of pioneer life is its lack of civilized conveniences that are available in the older areas. Thus modern pioneering requires greater sacrifices than before because it entails the forfeiture of many civilized conveniences that were non-existent in the earlier frontier periods. This is certainly true of the "pioneers" of the agrarian Midwest in the early 1900's who lagged far behind the city dwellers in the possession of plumbing, electricity, central heating, and the like. In fact some were willing to attempt to "catch up" with the city folk by instituting socialism. Isaiah Bowman, "The Pioneer Fringe," Foreign Affairs, VI (October, 1927), 49-66, hereafter cited as Bowman, "Pioneer Fringe;" Isaiah Bowman, "Settlement by the Modern Pioneer," in Griffith Taylor, ed., Geography in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1951), 248-266, hereafter cited as Bowman, "Modern Pioneer."

evoke in the Midwesterner the responses of romance and promise that it did in his city brethren. For the mid-western farmer, around the turn of the century, lived on the frontier, and he could see shortcomings in it which were not so apparent to the urban dweller or writer. He was also likely to be rather cynical regarding the supposed opportunities for social ascent, for even if he were fortunate enough to become a wealthy farmer, his rustic habits would most likely mark him as a "hick" or a "hayseed." The much-touted rising standard of living also must have seemed to have little application to the Midwestern farmer. His debts, in many cases, mounted faster than his living standard, and it seemed to him that, though he was playing a major part in developing America's "naturally-endowed resources and material fastness," the rewards therefrom were accruing not to him, but to the middlemen and the trusts. Again, this fact was probably more apparent to him than to his city cousin who had no direct contact with the massive natural productivity of the American nation.

The crux of the matter is that the Midwestern farmer was beginning to examine more closely some of the basic tenets of "Americanism." One incisive student⁶ has asserted

⁶ Leon Sampson, Toward a United Front: A Philosophy for American Workers (New York, 1933), Chapter I. Quoted in Sidney Hook, "The Philosophical Basis of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., Socialism and American Life, I (Princeton, 1952), 450-451.

that Americanism is really a "surrogate" socialism, and the reason that Americans reject socialism is that Americanism apparently offers them a better method of realizing their aspirations. A necessary corollary to this thesis is that when Americans begin to be disillusioned with the ability of Americanism to gain their ends, socialism begins to have an appeal. Thus the socialist ideal of a classless society had few attractions for those who believed that such a society already existed in United States. But to the farmer, conscious of the social and economic gulf between himself and the townsman, the socialist ideal seemed to hold promise. The socialist calling for equality of opportunity was told that evidence of such was everywhere at hand. But the hard pressed homesteader who had utilized the supposed "escape valve" to agricultural independence could see little reason to believe that his economic opportunity was equal to that of the banker or grain trader. The socialist advocating a "release of productive forces" was told that the capitalists were supremely able to perform this task, and was referred to the rising standard of living as proof of their ability. To the Midwestern farmer it seemed that the capitalist system raised the standard of living mostly for the capitalists, while he who had done the work, was left primarily with a legacy of debt. Finally the socialist ideals of freedom and equality were "the familiar shibboleths of the mythology

of Americanism,"⁷ and even the American progressives, according to one authority, defeated socialism by embracing the "alger ethos."⁸ At least the Midwestern farmers were beginning to recognize those ideals as "shibboleths," and the fact that they were becoming reluctant to worship at Horatio Alger's shrine may partly explain their lack of enthusiasm for the progressive movement.

It is also doubtful that the Wilsonian New Freedom had much effect on the farmer with socialist tendencies. Daniel Bell thinks that such measures as the Federal Reserve Act and the Federal Farm Loan Act were instrumental in detaching the farmers from the Socialist Party,⁹ but if the farmers were satisfied with Wilson's measures, it is difficult to account for their enthusiasm for the Nonpartisan League, especially at a time when agricultural prosperity was relatively high because of "Wilson's War." Actually the SP's loss of agricultural supporters after 1916 was probably due to the moribund state of the party resulting from a lack of leadership. The party had, from the beginning, been primarily led by Easterners, and when the main socialist strength shifted to the Midwest, the leaders were confronted with a

⁷ Samson, Ibid., 451.

⁸ Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution (New York, 1955), 235.

⁹ Bell, 292.

new following which they did not know how to cultivate. Vision and foresight called for a national Socialist leader from the Midwest, and the SP might have done well to choose LeSueur instead of the colorless Allan Benson as their presidential candidate in 1916. LeSueur was no Eugene Debs, but he did represent what was probably the most vital area of American socialism.

The phrase "American Socialism" has a somewhat unfamiliar, almost foreign sound. In fact there is a common tendency to write it off as wholly of foreign origin, and in North Dakota the foreign influence was considerable. Nevertheless, the political conditions in the United States and the economic and social conditions in the Midwest had made the appearance of socialism an entirely natural occurrence. Clinton Rossiter has declared that Americans' entrenched conservatism causes them to abhor socialism,¹⁰ and that such radical movements as the Populist revolt were led by "men who wanted to live as conservatives and had to act like radicals to do it."¹¹ No doubt this is a true statement, but it does not deal with the fact that, in the eyes of many distressed farmers, the Populist movement was a failure, and if, after their

¹⁰ Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York, 1955), 82.

¹¹ Ibid., 90.

disillusionment with Populism, they still wished "to live as conservatives," they were now ready to act like socialists to do it. In discussing the frontier, Professor Rossiter has a more pertinent comment: ". . . the men who lived on the frontier depended mightily on one another for security and prosperity. Together, not alone, they cleared land, raised barns, husked corn, defended their families, and preserved law and order. Together men have built America and are building it even now."¹² It is this aspect of "togetherness" on the frontier that has been obscured by Frederick Jackson Turner's emphasis on frontier individualism, and it was this cooperative factor on which the agrarian socialists based their call for solidarity and organization. It was also this feeling of "togetherness" upon which A. C. Townley capitalized, when he formed the organization department, and it is not without significance that the most effective motto of his Nonpartisan League was, "We'll stick."

Yet the Turner hypothesis is not irreconcilable with the evolution of American socialism. His hypothesis furnishes, in fact, the most plausible explanation of it. The frontier fostered equality, because "where everybody could have a farm, almost for taking it, economic equality

¹² Ibid., 80.

easily resulted, and this involved political equality."¹³ Free land, according to Turner, became the touchstone of freedom and individualism, and every successive frontier became a new seed plot of democracy. Turner probably placed the cart before the horse, because frontiers do not automatically produce democratic ideas, but democratic ideas are very likely to cause a government to make its frontier, if it has one, into a free land frontier. The frontiersmen used democracy to obtain land, and they used, to a great extent, economic individualism to improve it. Though they did not realize it, they were active propagandists for John Locke and Adam Smith whose ideas had been passed down to them from the educated classes, not whispered to them in the forest breezes. These were mainly capitalistic ideas of opportunity and expansion, and they were useful as long as the frontier lasted.

However, when the frontier began to pass away, so, apparently, did most of the immediate opportunities. This was especially true in the area of the "last frontier," the Great Plains, where the problem of aridity was added to the other economic problems. Turner, with his usual

¹³ Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), 212. This book is a collection of Turner's essays written over a span of several decades. The quotation was taken from an essay written in 1896. For an account of an American Socialist who tried to reconcile socialism with the Turner thesis, see William A. Glaser, "Algie Martin Simons and Marxism in America," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLI (December, 1954), 419-434.

acuity, early realized this fact, saying in 1896: "And now the frontiers are gone [?]. Discontent is demanding an extension of government activity in its behalf."¹⁴ As the settler began "to adjust his life to the modern forces of capital and to complex productive processes," he became aware of his increasing dependence on bankers and railroads and of their great economic and political power, and "government began to look less like a necessary evil and more like an instrument for the perpetuation of his political ideals."¹⁵ To Turner the Populist was an "American farmer who . . . [had] kept in advance of the economic and social transformations that have overtaken those who remained behind," and he lauded "Western democracy" for "gaining experience in the problem of social control."¹⁶

Turner was also aware of the gains made in socialist strength. In 1903 he noted that one of the significant features of American life was that "the political parties . . . tend to divide on issues that involve the question of socialism."¹⁷ Later he attributed the rise in socialist voting strength year by year to the fact that the other parties had not yet found a way to reconcile the two old

¹⁴ Turner, 220.

¹⁵ Ibid., 276-277. Written in 1910.

¹⁶ Ibid., 238-239, 266. Written in 1897, and 1903, respectively.

¹⁷ Ibid., 246. Written in 1903.

frontier ideals of unrestricted individualism and government of, by, and for the people.¹⁸ Turner left no doubt of where his sympathies lay in the struggle between Americanism and socialism, for he declared that it would be a "grave misfortune" if the American people should adopt some "Old World discipline of socialism or plutocracy."¹⁹ Here he was probably being rather unrealistic. For two centuries the hardy frontiersmen, whom Turner so admired, had clasped to their bosoms the "Old World disciplines" of John Locke and Adam Smith; if they now found these ideas wanting, there was no intellectual reason why they should not indulge in a flirtation with Karl Marx, or at least with Edward Bernstein.²⁰

It was as followers of Bernstein that the North Dakota Socialists made their greatest gains. Despite Ira Kipnis' thesis that only by retaining its Left-wing, Marxian character could socialism succeed in the United States, it seems

¹⁸ Ibid., 320-321. Written in 1910.

¹⁹ Ibid., 307. Written in 1914.

²⁰ In regard to this new pioneering point of view, Isaiah Bowman says: "It is indeed a question whether the pioneer spirit as manifested in the westward spread of settlers in the United States still exists or whether it has passed out--a fact of history interesting enough in its time . . . but no longer a motivating force in the occupation of pioneer areas." Bowman, "Pioneer Fringe," 50. In fact, Bowman later asserted that "today pioneering is more largely a matter of getting the government to take the risks." Bowman, "Modern Pioneer," 255-256. It was this later type of frontier attitude that seems to have been exhibited by those North Dakota farmers who became Socialists.

certain that if socialism could have had any success in rural areas of the nation, it had to be Right-wing, Bernstein-revisionist Socialism. The American farmer either was, or hoped to be, the owner of his land, and the rural socialist had to endorse that aspiration, thereby making at least one initial compromise with the Marxist doctrine. From there on the rural Marxist had to steer his way through a maze of popular prejudices, partialities, local conditions, and national and international affairs, trying all the while to adapt the issues to his party's purposes and shape them into a coherent and appealing program. At the same time it was necessary to make certain that he did not sacrifice the party's irreducible minimum of collectivist ideology that sets it apart from mere reformism.

The North Dakota Socialists proved themselves adept at this political tight rope walking. The platforms of 1912 and 1914 represent the full flowering of their efforts, and a generally steady annual increase in the number of socialist voters is some testimonial to their success. From a diminutive organization in 1900 with two locals and a polling strength of slightly over four-hundred, it grew by 1912 to nearly two-hundred locals and a polling strength of over seven-thousand. They elected to public office many local and municipal candidates, and one of their number reached the State Legislature. They were articulate instruments of reform sentiment, and most of the reform which they advocated eventually found their way into the North

Dakota statute books. By their successful operation of a party newspaper, and their dissemination of large quantities of other socialist literature throughout the state, they familiarized its electorate with the principles of socialism and nullified there the stigma that is often attached to socialist ideas. So successful were they in their propagandizing efforts that such leading politicians in the state as Lynn Frazier and William Lemke could make complimentary remarks about socialism without fear of popular rebuke.

William Lemke was a power in the Nonpartisan League and in 1916 declared in a letter that "there are perhaps more able, patriotic, high minded Socialists than Capitalists in this country."²¹

Such a favorable climate of opinion proved very useful to the leaders of the Nonpartisan League, when they sought popular support for their "socialistic" ventures. In fact most of the bases of the League successes had been developed by North Dakota Socialist Party.²² The first League program which proved so spectacularly appealing to the North Dakota farmer was almost wholly derived from the farm program of

²¹ William Lemke to Miss N. J. Kildahl, March 23, 1916. William Lemke Papers.

²² The North Dakota Socialists did not, however, invent the issues, nor the policies used so successfully by the League. They were responsible for some innovations, but mostly they capitalized on the successes and failures of previous agrarian protest groups, especially the Populists.

the NDSP. Furthermore, the Socialist experiment with a farmer-labor coalition in North Dakota very probably motivated Townley in his successful creation of the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota. With the exception of his utilizing the primary election to capture one of the "old parties," all of Townley's successful political methods had as their proving ground the NDSP. His brilliant organizational procedures which emphasized exclusive concentration on the country districts, direct personal contact with the farmer to gain his allegiance, and finally, cementing it with a financial contribution were masterful techniques to which the automobile and the post dated check were only aids. Townley's genius lay in his ability to convey to every member of his organization a feeling of personal participation in what seemed to be a great and good political movement whose adversary was a sinister and powerful combination of "interests" bent on stifling his prosperity and destroying his liberty. With his perfected organizational techniques he created, among what was long considered the most individualistic American group, a political following that was spectacular in its solidarity. Townley's organizational techniques were the levers of political power in the state of North Dakota, and he perfected them while a member of the Socialist Party.

It is doubtful that Townley would have been able to work the same political magic with the NDSP as he did with the Nonpartisan League. However, the success of the

organization department indicates that Townley might have caused a realignment of the state politics by making the NDSP representative of an at least numerically significant bloc of voters whose wishes the Republicans, Democrats, and progressives could not have ignored. Fortunately, from the viewpoint of the "old parties," the fundamentalist element of the NDSP destroyed this political possibility.

Of all the tactical errors committed by the NDSP leaders the alienation of A. C. Townley and the rejection of his ideas were the most disastrous. To have continued in the course laid down by Townley would, to be sure, have entailed some changes in party procedure, and might have created difficulties with the national party headquarters. But heretofore the majority of the NDSP leaders had not feared innovation, and it seems certain that the persons who destroyed the organization department, and thereby initiated the destruction of the NDSP, were motivated more by jealousy than by orthodoxy.

The demise of the North Dakota Socialist Party was, to a considerable extent, an eventuality of its own making. Even while the party was dying, the socialist sentiment which it had fostered was apparently as strong as ever. But in its dying days, its leaders could take some consolation from the fact that the party had both prepared the ground for, and was giving way to a hardier political organization, the Nonpartisan League.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

First hand materials on the North Dakota Socialist Party are characterized mainly by their scarcity. The widely quoted Arthur LeSueur Papers, upon which much reliance has been placed by other writers, consist of only two boxes of manuscripts which deal almost entirely with LeSueur's life after he left the NDSP. The papers in the collection that do deal with the NDSP are not entirely trustworthy, since they evidently were also written after LeSueur had left the party. The Henry G. Teigan Papers are much more extensive, but they too deal primarily with a later period of Teigan's life than that with which this thesis is concerned. The William Lemke Papers probably contain more pertinent information than the writer was able to discover due to lack of time and the collection's disordered state. Likewise the Samuel Torgerson Papers might have proven fruitful, had the writer possessed the time to examine them more closely. The largest single source of information is unquestionably the Iconoclast. It is from the pages of this official organ of the party that the bulk of firsthand information found in this thesis has been taken. The Minot daily newspapers also contained some valuable, though usually slanted, information, but most of the other newspapers examined contained very few pertinent references to the North Dakota Socialist Party. This criticism does not apply to the Fargo Forum, probably the state's leading newspaper, which, because of unforeseen circumstances, the writer was not able to examine. If he had been able to do so perhaps more light would have been shed on the early years of the party. Another source of information which the writer did not utilize fully was the memory of Mr. H. R. Martinson. Mr. Martinson was personally acquainted with most of the events dealt with in this paper, and many of the inaccuracies in it are no doubt attributable to the fact that the writer was able to interview him only once. The writer does not pretend that this bibliography is exhaustive, but comprises merely what he consulted in the writing of this paper.

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