



5-1-2000

A Real Republican: The Political Life of Gov. George F. Shafer

Richard K. Stenberg

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Stenberg, Richard K., "A Real Republican: The Political Life of Gov. George F. Shafer" (2000). *Theses and Dissertations*. 3736.

<https://commons.und.edu/theses/3736>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact und.commons@library.und.edu.

A REAL REPUBLICAN: THE POLITICAL LIFE
OF GOV. GEORGE F. SHAFER

by

Richard K. Stenberg
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2000

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

2000

This thesis, submitted by Richard K. Stenberg in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of History from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

(Chairperson)

This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

(Dean of the Graduate School)

PERMISSION

Title A Real Republican: The Political Life of Gov. George F. Shafer
Department History
Degree Master of Arts

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my dissertation work or, in his absence, by the Chairperson of the department or the Dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Signature _____

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I STATE OFFICE	22
CHAPTER II THE 1932 SENATE RACE	57
CONCLUSION	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation to the University of North Dakota Graduate School staff members, Graduate Dean Harvey Knull and the members of the thesis committee: Dr. Kim Porter and Dr. Richard Beringer from the Department of History, and Dr. Douglas Munski from the Department of Geography. Additionally I would like to thank two prior committee members, Dr. D. Jerome Tweton and Dr. James Vivian, who prior to their retirement, aided me in this endeavor. I would also like to thank the librarians of the Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, UND; archivists at the North Dakota Institute of Regional Studies and the State Historical Society of North Dakota research library; and Head Librarian Kelly Hell of Williston State College in tracking down some of the more exotic requests that I submitted to them.

Special thanks to Gerald Shafer for answering the many inquiries that I posed to him over the phone and in various interviews about his family and the career of his uncle, and to Eugene Holen for allowing me access to his research materials, especially his many interview notes. To my good friend Brad Peterson, a thank you for his legal advice concerning interpreting of the Attorney General's opinions. Also to Dominic Schaff, James Stout, Linda Clemes, and President Garvin Stevens of Williston State College for constant encouragement, cajoling, typing and editing input. Thank you, as well to Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site for allowing me access to their microfilm viewer and Head Ranger Randy Kane for his understanding and granting me a leave of absence to complete this thesis.

My last acknowledge is for my dear wife Mary, who has been the threatening, sympathetic and editorial voice that I have relied upon for much.

ABSTRACT

Since very little research has been dedicated to the Independent Voters' Association and its leadership, much of the work of this thesis had to come from manuscript collections, various theses, and other secondary sources. Events surrounding George F. Shafer's career presented some special problems to the researcher.

After Shafer's death in 1948, his widow had workmen remove his personal papers from his law office and many were accidentally thrown away. What comprises his remaining papers are in the Special Collections Library at the University of North Dakota. Various campaign speeches are also drawn from the Clyde Duffey and Theodore G. Nelson manuscript collections at the University of North Dakota, the North Dakota Institute of Regional Studies, the State Historical Society of North Dakota archives, a few personal papers drawn from sources in Watford City, North Dakota, and several lengthy personal interviews with nephew Gerald F. Shafer.

To reconstruct Shafer's public career, reliance was placed upon many newspapers. The best papers to accommodate this were George Shafer's hometown papers of the Schafer Record, The Watford Guide, and the McKenzie County Farmer. The Bismarck Tribune was the best paper for covering the state's political news and a lengthy time was spent reviewing the issues from 1917 to 1933. The major dailies of the state were consulted when noteworthy events occurred in a campaign or at the meeting of a political convention.

The use of these sources helped to illustrate and assess the public career of George F. Shafer, and the Independent Voters' Association, placing them in context that they deserve.

To my parents, Ray & Jessie Stenberg,
and the friendship they have shared with Gerald F. Shafer.

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Voters' Association. What exactly was this organization? The story of the Independent Voters' Association (IVA) is inextricably linked with that of the Nonpartisan League (NPL). The story of the NPL has been recounted in many books, theses, and articles,¹ and rightfully so; the Nonpartisan League is unique to North Dakota and American history.

The Independent Voters' Association organized those who were opposed to the NPL. Unlike the NPL, the IVA was not an organization of common farmers; from the outset, it was a weapon of politicians and businessmen in their fight against the League.² Its objective was to achieve control of the state of North Dakota from this movement of farmers, particularly Norwegian immigrant farmers, who had introduced some novel, and to some very radical, measures and policies.³ Leaguers considered the IVA a group of anti-Leaguers, conservatives and outside business interests who were not speaking for North Dakotans. The IVA was termed the "Old Gang," "Big Biz," or "McKenzists," the latter a

¹ Compiled by Patrick K. Coleman and Charles R. Lamb The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922: An Annotated Bibliography (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985). This work includes 1,010 entries of books, articles, unpublished papers, etc.

² Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association" (M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1986), 28.

³ Kathleen Moun, "The Social Origins of the Nonpartisan League," North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains 53 (Spring 1986): 19; Jon Wefald, A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917 (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1971), 58.

reference to the former "Boss" of North Dakota, Alexander McKenzie. McKenzie's power had been diminished in the "Revolution of 1906," which combined progressive Republicans and Democrats behind the push to elect John Burke Governor.⁴ In actuality it was the founder of the Nonpartisan League, Arthur C. Townley, who collaborated with Alexander McKenzie.⁵ Both the IVA and the NPL agreed that economic problems confronted the state, which depended heavily on the condition of agriculture. But the solution to these problems was the point of contention. The difference between the NPL and the IVA was the difference between liberalism and conservatism.⁶

Accounts of the IVA opposition to the Nonpartisan League are few. In 1986 Thomas M. Contois, at Duke University, wrote a master's thesis entitled "The Fight Against The Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association," which is a well written account of the IVA from its initial organization in 1919 to its successes over the Nonpartisan League in the October 1921 Recall Election and the regular elections in 1922. Contois believes that "On March 15, 1923, the Independent Voters' Association disbanded."⁷ To a point, that is correct, but that was far from the demise of the IVA.

The only other work that has been done solely on the Independent Voters'

⁴ For a good overview of both Alexander McKenzie and John Burke see Robert P. Wilkins, "Alexander McKenzie And The Politics of Bossism" and Dr. Charles N. Glaab "John Burke and the Progressive Revolt," North Dakota Political Traditions, The North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 3-39, 46-65.

⁵ David B. Baglien, "The McKenzie Era: A Political History of North Dakota From 1880 to 1920" (M.S. Thesis, North Dakota Agricultural College, 1955), 149-151.

⁶ Edmund C. Brackett, "Anti-Conservatism in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1972), 6.

⁷ Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against The Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association" (M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1986), 124.

Association is a familiar piece written by D. Jerome Tweton, an essay in The North Dakota Political Tradition, a volume from the North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series. The essay, entitled "The Anti-League Movement: The I.V.A.," covers essentially the same period as the Contois thesis.⁸

Both of the works rely heavily on the Theodore "Two Bit" G. Nelson papers. Nelson was involved in the founding of the IVA and served as secretary of the organization. Both works are indirectly sympathetic to the NPL, and contend that the IVA wrecked a useful organization. While both works are thorough in their examination of the IVA for the 1919-1922 time period, the Independent Voters' Association's role did not end in the early 1920s. In fact, it continued for another ten years.

Other studies also slight the importance to the IVA. Bruce Nelson, in Land of the Dacotahs, spends many pages detailing the Nonpartisan League, but mentions the IVA in only one paragraph.⁹ The North Dakota volume in the U.S. Bicentennial History series was written by Robert P. and Wynona H. Wilkins. Their reference to the IVA was "the organization in which conservative Republicans and Democrats coalesced to fight the NPL."¹⁰ Again, this is correct, but the reference is only a very condensed description of the IVA, in the context of the Recall Election of 1921. Conrad Leifur's Our State North

⁸ D. Jerome Tweton, "The Anti-League Movement: The I.V.A.", North Dakota Political Traditions, The North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 93-122.

⁹ Bruce Nelson, Land of the Dacotahs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 298.

¹⁰ Robert P. and Wynona H. Wilkins, North Dakota (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1977), 150.

Dakota discusses the NPL-IVA contest in four pages with a little more detail.¹¹ The highly regarded and still standing work on the Nonpartisan League is Robert L. Morlan's Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922, which describes the Independent Voters' Association in somewhat more depth. But Morlan only discusses what is necessary, and then in the briefest terms.

The most comprehensive work on North Dakota is Elwyn B. Robinson's History of North Dakota. Again, the IVA is discussed only in passing and primarily for its role in the Recall Election of October 1921 in which the three NPL members on the state Industrial Commission--Governor Lynn J. Frazier, Attorney General William Lemke, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor John Hagen--were removed from office.¹² Robinson does indicate that "the 1920s saw a running fight between Leaguers and Independents for control of the Republican party and the state government."¹³ Robinson's reference stems from Eugene Holen's 1959 thesis, which states that "In every election during the 1920s the League, which proposed extensive state ownership, and the IVA which bitterly opposed the principle of state ownership, waged vigorous campaigns against each other."¹⁴ Politics was no longer a contest between Republicans and Democrats; in

¹¹ Conrad W. Leifur, Our State North Dakota (New York: American Book Company, 1953), 300-304.

¹² For a short monograph on Governor Frazier, see Nels Erickson, The Gentleman from North Dakota: Lynn J. Frazier part of the North Dakota Mini-Biography Series (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986).

¹³ Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 391.

¹⁴ Eugene O. Holen, "The Election of 1928 in North Dakota" (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1959), 19.

1919 and 1920 and beyond, the IVA would battle the NPL for supremacy in the Republican Party North Dakota.¹⁵

Since territorial days, the Republican party had dominated the political scene.¹⁶ With the exceptions of the 1892 elections which saw the Populists elect Eli Shortridge to the governorship, and the fusion campaign of 1906 to elect Progressive Democrat John Burke governor, one needed to be a Republican to win. So factions fought for control of Republican nominations in the June primaries. The general election was a foregone conclusion, a fact not understood by many out-of-state observers during the 1920s.

Clearly, scholarship on the Independent Voters' Association is scarce and not definitive. The rest of the IVA story has yet to be told, but that will not be the objective of this thesis. Rather, the ideology and truly final defeat of the Independent Voters' Association will be illustrated by the public career of George F. Shafer, an IVA leader and governor at the start of the Great Depression.¹⁷ There is nothing like biography to get close to a person and his trials and tribulations. And Shafer's story is the epitome of those who were opposed to the NPL.

George F. Shafer was involved with the organization almost from its inception and served as one of the IVA's leading campaign speakers, activists, and officeholders. After the recall election of October 21, 1921, Shafer was named the First Assistant to Sveinbjorn Johnson, the new IVA Attorney General. Shafer was elected Attorney General in his own right from 1922 to 1928, and then as two-term Governor from 1928 to 1932. George

¹⁵ Contois, 47.

¹⁶ Howard R. Lamar has reviewed the territorial politics in Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956).

¹⁷ George F. Shafer is no relation to Edward T. Schafer, the two term Governor of North Dakota from 1992-2000.

Shafer can best be thought of as the “Herbert Hoover” of North Dakota, elected with much promise, but collapsed when confronted with economic depression. He was the IVA’s senatorial standard bearer in the 1932 June primary election, the election that saw the IVA’s true demise. This election will be the focus of this thesis.

George Frederick Shafer was born November 23, 1888, at Taylor, Stark County, Dakota Territory. He was born out of wedlock to Eva Diehm, a 22-year-old German immigrant.¹⁸ She had been employed in Mandan and was "seduced" by one George Gates, a soldier stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln.¹⁹

Eva Diehm returned to her parents' farm at Taylor to have the baby. After George's birth, she went back to Mandan and found work in a restaurant, where she met Charles Shafer. Charles (Charlie) Shafer was an early pioneer in the rough Little Missouri River Badlands area of western Dakota Territory.²⁰ In 1890 he married Eva Diehm and adopted George.²¹ Charles Shafer moved his young family into the isolated central area of the

¹⁸ Shafer's illegitimacy was used by the Nonpartisan League to smear him in more than one election, but primarily in the 1928 gubernatorial election. Throughout his career, however, the state’s major daily newspapers ignored the issue.

¹⁹ Interview with Gerald F. Shafer, nephew of George Shafer, Bismarck, North Dakota, March 8, 1993; interview notes with Mrs. (Frances) George Shafer, Bismarck, North Dakota, May 15, 1959; the author wishes to thank Gene Holen for access to Frances Shafer notes and other materials.

²⁰ Shafer interview, March 8, 1993; “Charles Shafer--Hunter, Indian Trader, and Rancher” North Dakota Historical Quarterly, vol. 8, no. 3 (April 1941): 167 (hereafter Charles Shafer); Watford City Golden Jubilee Book, Watford City, North Dakota: 50 Years of Progress (Taylor Publishing Co., 1964), 161; The Williston Herald, April 7, 1927, 1.

²¹ Charles Shafer, 177; Watford City Golden Jubilee Book, 161.

"Island or Inland Empire" of what would become McKenzie County.²² They remained the only white inhabitants for many years. Charles treated George as his own, along the other children he and Eva had: two sons (Charles & Fred) and two daughters (Mary & Catherine).²³ Charles taught his children honesty and basic Christian principles. He also favored schooling, but the ranch work had to come first.²⁴ George was not mechanically inclined, but he did enjoy books, especially history. At an early age he was discovered to have a photographic memory, an aptitude that his mother also possessed.

Because of a lack of schools in the county, it was decided to send George, age twelve, to Williston for an education. Williston was the nearest town, but it was over fifty miles away. George was considered handicapped during his first year in public school because some subjects had not been included in his ranch-home curriculum.²⁵ He was at the same level of reading as his classmates, but he was behind in mathematics.²⁶ He quickly made up for it with extra studying and was soon leading his classes, while finding time to play football. He graduated from Williston High School in June 1908. The class consisted of four people (three men and one woman), who chose for their motto "Quality, not Quantity." At the graduation ceremonies, George presented a well-received speech

²² This is in reference to the inaccessibility of most of McKenzie County, which is bound by the Missouri River on the north and east sides, the Yellowstone River to the west, and the Little Missouri Badlands to the south.

²³ Shafer interview, January 30, 1993.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Dickinson Press, November 2, 1928, 3; Pierce County Tribune, October 25, 1928, 6.

²⁶ Lewis F. Crawford, History of North Dakota, Vol. II (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1931), 3.

entitled the "PASSING OF THE PIONEER."²⁷ Even at this early stage in his life, George Shafer displayed a unique speaking ability, a skill which would prove to be one of his greatest assets, and which enabled him to reach the public mind in the days before radio and TV sound-bites.

George had expressed an interest in law, and the summer before his senior year in high school he was clerking in Charles C. Converse's²⁸ law office in the developing town of Schafer.²⁹ Converse was sufficiently impressed with the young Shafer to allow George to try a jury case. The case, BERGEM vs. LILLESLET, involved a claim that cattle owned by Mr. Bergem had caused damage to a wheat field owned by Mr. Lilleslet. Despite a stout defense by Lilleslet's attorney, young Shafer won the case for Bergem and his cattle.³⁰

In the fall of 1908, George Shafer entered the University of North Dakota to prepare for law school. He quickly gained acclaim as an orator and became a successful member of the Hesperia Debating Society. At the end of his first year, he won the annual Walter Stockwell Contest for the Public Instruction prize in oratory with a speech entitled, "THE WEST AND THE NATION."³¹ Of his oratorical skills, the campus paper The

²⁷ The Williston Herald, June 4, 1908, 1; Williston Graphic, June 4, 1908, 4.

²⁸ Charles C. Converse would be another "Regular Republican" & IVA activist, long involved with county and state legislative offices. He would be appointed North Dakota Tax Commissioner by IVA Governor R.A. Nestos and served in that position from 1922-1925.

²⁹ Though named for Charles Shafer, a bureaucratic mistake on the part of the United States Postal Service ensured that the official postmark and name of the community would be Schafer.

³⁰ Schafer Record, August, 29, 1907, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, June 10, 1909, 1; The Student (University of North Dakota), June 10, 1909, 6.

Student declared, "Mr. Shafer is one of the University's leading orators and debaters."³² The yearbook for George's senior year would say of him, "Persuasion tips his tongue whene'er he speaks."³³ He graduated as the valedictorian of his class.³⁴ Based on his accomplished law school scholastic record, he was elected to the Order of the Coif at the UND School of Law.³⁵

After passing his bar exam, he was admitted to the state bar on June 10, 1912.³⁶ Shafer returned to Schafer to open a law practice, which soon proved lucrative and rapidly expanded. He participated in local Republican politics and in 1914 campaigned unopposed across McKenzie County for the State's Attorney position. He won the Republican nomination in the June primary, receiving 912 votes.³⁷ In September 1914, age 25, he was selected as a member of the Executive Committee of the Republican State Central Committee, a notable accomplishment for a young country lawyer. Shafer delivered many political addresses during that election, including one at Alexander during McKenzie County's first fair.³⁸ This speech, as well as many of his early campaign speeches, was

³² The Student, January 25, 1911, 1.

³³ The Dacotah 1912: A Chapter in the History of the University of North Dakota-Vol. V, no publisher, no page number.

³⁴ Crawford, 4.

³⁵ "George F. Shafer" (obituary), North Dakota Bar Briefs: Journal of the State Bar Association, Volume 24, Number 4 (October, 1948), 249.

³⁶ The Evening Times, June 10, 1912, 5; Penny Miller, Clerk of the Supreme Court of North Dakota, March 15, 1994, letter to author.

³⁷ Schafer Record, July 30, 1914, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1914, 1.

not recorded, nor do they survive in any of his personal files.³⁹

On September 1, 1915, George Shafer married Frances Kellogg, the daughter of the county judge,⁴⁰ and a very remarkable woman.⁴¹ The two had grown up together in Schafer. She had attended Williston High School, graduating in 1910, and later went to the University of North Dakota graduating in 1915.⁴² Frances was politically astute herself; she was a little more critical of people than her good humored husband, but she was not mean spirited or spiteful.⁴³ After George's death in 1948, Frances would outlive her husband by almost thirty-five years, dying on July 18, 1983, in Bismarck, North Dakota, at age 93.⁴⁴

In 1916 Shafer ran for re-election, again unopposed, for McKenzie County State's

³⁹ The author would like to comment on the research of George F. Shafer. After his death, his widow had workmen remove his personal papers from his law office and many of them were accidentally thrown away. The heart of the research for this thesis has consisted of the few remaining personal papers at U.N.D., other collections in the Special Collections, the State Historical Society, the North Dakota Institute of Regional Studies, a few private papers in Watford City, interviews with the nephew Gerald F. Shafer, and heavy reliance on newspaper files to reconstruct Shafer's career.

⁴⁰ The Watford Guide, September 2, 1915, 1

⁴¹ They had three sons: George, who graduated from the University of Colorado-Boulder and operated Shafer Construction in Bismarck until his death; Richard, who graduated from Southern Methodist University, worked for Phillips 66 Petroleum, settled in Ohio, and died at a young age from a heart attack; and Charles, who before the Second World War completed pilot's training, studied aeronautics at UND, and flew commercially for many years for American Airlines until his retirement in Long Island, New York. The couple also had one daughter, Virginia, who lived and worked in Mandan for Cloverdale Foods. She died of cancer in the late 1980s.

⁴² Watford City Golden Jubilee Book, 258.

⁴³ Shafer interview, March 8, 1993.

⁴⁴ The Bismarck Tribune, July 19, 1983, 17; Shafer interviews, January 30, 1993 and March 8, 1993.

Attorney on the Republican ticket. After the First World War began in 1914, he had become active in organizations that attempted to assist war relief efforts in Europe, including the McKenzie County Committee that aided Herbert Hoover's Committee for the Relief of Belgium, the C.R.B.⁴⁵ He served as a speaker and county chairman for the Red Cross.⁴⁶ In fact, George Shafer would be a leading spokesman for the Red Cross all through his life, including his gubernatorial years, when he advocated the use of the Red Cross as a relief agency during the Great Depression. Shafer also was part of the effort to mobilize North Dakota for war footing in 1917 and delivered many patriotic speeches when the United States entered the war. Soon he would become embroiled with another war front, that of the coming of the Nonpartisan League to North Dakota.

The account of the meteoric rise to power of the Nonpartisan League has been well-documented, and need not be retold in its entirety here. It is sufficient to say that victories in the 1916 and 1918 elections and the 1919 Legislative Session were the zenith of the NPL's power.⁴⁷ In McKenzie County, the NPL's influence was extremely strong, but if Shafer made any statements concerning the NPL's dominance in his home county, they are unfortunately unrecorded.

In May 1918, Shafer again announced his candidacy for the State's Attorney's

⁴⁵ Schafer Record, December 3, 1914, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1917, 1; The Watford Guide, May 16, 1918, 1.

⁴⁷ See again Robert L. Morlan, Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922 (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), reprint St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1985 or a brief sketch by Larry Remele, "Power to the People: The Nonpartisan League" North Dakota Political Traditions part of the North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 66-92; see also Theodore Saloutos, "The Rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota," Agricultural History 20 (January 1946): 43-61.

position, "subject to approval of the voters at the coming primary."⁴⁸ His opponent was League-endorsed attorney Edwin R. Johnson of Alexander, who defeated Shafer 1155 to 828 in the June primary.⁴⁹ This time his good fortune and capable oratory were insufficient. In the four prime municipalities of the county, George Shafer easily carried the election over Johnson. In Alexander the recorded vote read 44 to 11, in Arnegard 88 to 49, in Schafer 49 to 13, and in Watford City 62 to 8.⁵⁰ The pattern was constantly to repeat itself in the county. The state's cities and towns would be the areas from which the Independent Voters' Association drew its support. Shafer lacked sufficient votes from the rural dominated and NPL orientated voters of the county however, and returned to private practice in the town of Schafer after his term for State's Attorney expired.

Meanwhile, the successes of the NPL had stirred up an organized opposition. In Minot on May 1, 1918, the North Dakota Farmers' League of Bottineau County, the Independent Political Association, the Lincoln Republican League, and the State Legislative Campaign Committee convened together with delegates from almost every district of the state in order to unite opposition to the NPL. Ultimately, in an effort to attract conservative Democrats, these groups adopted the nonpartisan-sounding Independent Voters' Association (IVA) name. The rise of the Independent Voters' Association and its functions at the state level are outside the scope of this thesis. Its early workings, personalities, and activities on the 1921 Recall Election are described in the two works cited above.⁵¹

⁴⁸ The McKenzie County Farmer, May 2, 1918, 4.

⁴⁹ Schafer Record, July 11, 1918, 5; The Watford Guide, July 18, 1918, 4.

⁵⁰ Schafer Record, July 11, 1918, 5; The Watford Guide, July 18, 1918, 4.

⁵¹ See again Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association" (M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1986); and D. Jerome Tweton, "The Anti-League Movement: The I.V.A.", North Dakota Political Traditions part

Soon after World War I, the IVA set up a state headquarters in Fargo and started a newspaper which carried the masthead:

The Independent

Official Organ Of The Independent Voters' Association

The first issue was published March 13, 1919.⁵² The paper was a four-page weekly with a subscription rate of \$2.00 a year. Matt Johnson was the editor, and Theodore G. Nelson, the past originator of the Equity Co-Op Exchange, was the manager and the organization's secretary.

Annual membership in the IVA was \$10.00, or more if the subscriber so desired. "Large corporations supplied the IVA with funds," states Elwyn Robinson in History of North Dakota.⁵³ Contrary to widely held belief, the IVA was initially financed from within the state and not from business interests in Minneapolis. The issues of The Independent list the association's contributors. In its first two years of existence, the IVA was financed by North Dakotans, including small town banks, store owners, newspapermen, some farmers, and many politicians opposed to what the League was trying to accomplish. One such individual was Fargo banker and former Governor Louis B. Hanna.⁵⁴

The State Headquarters of the IVA in Fargo also provided field assistants for

of the North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 93-122.

⁵² The Independent, March 13, 1919, 1.

⁵³ Robinson, 346.

⁵⁴ The author attempted to ascertain the degree of Louis B. Hanna's financial involvement in the IVA. The Chester Fritz Special Collections Library has only a few papers. There are none at the North Dakota Institute of Regional Studies in Fargo. Research librarians at the State Historical Society of North Dakota concluded that the bulk of Governor Hanna's papers burned up in the North Dakota Capitol fire of December, 1930. For more detail on the matter of financing, consult the "Appendix on IVA Funding" in the Contois thesis.

campaign organization and finance, termed the Committee on Campaign Methods, Organization, and Finances. George Shafer also was appointed to this committee.⁵⁵ As would others, Shafer served in a variety of roles at the state level for the IVA.

In Minot, on May 12 and 13, 1920, the IVA held an endorsing convention for its first ticket. Three defectors from the Nonpartisan League were there: Attorney General William Langer, Secretary of State Thomas Hall, and State Auditor Carl Kositzky. Hall and Kositzky were renominated for the positions they already held. Langer, however, was seeking the gubernatorial nomination. Privately, the IVA leaders were not anxious to endorse Langer because his former affiliation with the League made him suspect to many of the IVA's backers: the state's bankers and businessmen.⁵⁶ Ragnvold A. Nestos of Minot was a favorite among the leadership, but Langer wanted the nomination and seemed to be the leader among the delegates. To demonstrate the role Shafer was already being accorded by the leadership ranks of the IVA, he delivered the nominating speech for Langer.⁵⁷

The IVA employed two major tactics in its strategy to defeat the League. The first was an effort to prevent the bond sales necessary to finance the League program. The IVA, with help from its natural allies in the business community, raised doubts about the safety of League bonds in the hope that such doubts would deter potential investors.⁵⁸ The second tactic was an intense campaign of discredit waged against the League leaders. As the "Red Scare" successfully inflamed the national psyche against Bolshevism and

⁵⁵ The Independent, February 12, 1920, 3; Grand Forks Herald, February 6, 1920, 1.

⁵⁶ Contois, 62.

⁵⁷ Minot Daily News, May 13, 1920, 8; The Bismarck Tribune, May 13, 1920, 1; The Fargo Forum, May 13, 1920, 1.

⁵⁸ Contois, 46.

radicalism in the early 1920s, the IVA toiled to convince North Dakotans that the League leaders were really "socialists in disguise," and that they posed a threat to the American way of life.⁵⁹

The League was often portrayed by its opponents as "Bolshevik," "Socialist" and "Communist," taking its "marching orders" directly from Moscow. While no evidence exists to support that accusation, there was indeed interest from Moscow. Mikhail Markovich Borodin was an active agent of the Communist International and the official Soviet government agent who was in the United States to carry propaganda and money to American Communists. He received a letter from no less a person than V.I. Lenin inquiring about the NPL.⁶⁰ Had the existence of this correspondence been known at the time, the fall of the League would doubtless have been precipitous.⁶¹

Shafer was one of those IVA leaders who believed the NPL was socialist, and he used this as a weapon against the League. He contended that "Many farmers were slow to believe statements to the effect that the leaders of the League were adherents of socialism

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The letter Borodin received was dated July 13, 1921. It read:

Dear Comrade:

Could you get me some material relating to the American third party of the workers' and peasants', or the workers' and farmers' union, or the non-partisan party, and its activity in the state of North Dakota, which is in this party's hands. I should like to have a few but the most important documents on this party and its activity in North Dakota, what would be even better, a short note from you on this question, in addition to these documents. If it is not too much trouble, write me soon, whether you are able to do this and when.

Signed

V.I.Lenin

From V.I.Lenin (translated by Yur Sdobnikov) V.I. Lenin Collected Works Volume 45 November 1920-March 1923 (Moscow, U.S.S.R.: Progress Publishers, 1976), 210.

⁶¹ For further examination of the Socialist roots of the Nonpartisan League see Jackson Putnam, "The Role of the NDSP in North Dakota History," North Dakota Quarterly 24 (Fall 1956): 115-122.

and that they were plotting to foist socialism on the people of the state. I happened to be in a position to know that to be true." He noted that "in 1913, A.C. Townley, President of the Nonpartisan League, was speaking in the county in the interests of socialism. In the month of November of that year he lectured on socialism in [the town of] Schafer and he and I publicly debated on that subject before a fair-sized audience of men and women, many of whom are still residing in the community. Afterwards he visited with me at my office where he stated that he intended to bring about a socialistic form of government in North Dakota and that he intended to accomplish it by means of a farmers' movement."⁶² Shafer told Townley that it could not work; Townley replied, "I'll make it work."⁶³ Shafer continued to stump the county for IVA candidates in the days before the primary election. Shafer's encounter would often be cited in IVA literature and newspaper coverage of as the only defeat of Townley, and apparently it was Shafer's oratorical abilities that were responsible.

The 1920 primary election was a significant triumph for the IVA,⁶⁴ which influenced the re-nomination of "Regular" Republican Congressman George Young and IVA Congressman Olger B. Burtness. IVA candidates won nomination for a state Supreme Court Justice, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (Minnie J. Nielson), Secretary of State (Hall was renominated), State Treasurer (John Steen), a Railroad Commissioner, and enough districts to gain control of the state House of Representatives. Although it lost the gubernatorial nomination to Lynn J. Frazier, and Carl Kositzky was defeated for State Auditor, and three referral measures, the IVA counterattack was clearly

⁶² The Watford Guide, June 10, 1920, 1.

⁶³ Edward C. Blackorby, "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932" (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1938), 4.

⁶⁴ Tweton, 112.

now under way and was having a significant measure of success.

The McKenzie County Farmer⁶⁵ in reaction to the June 1920 primary, proclaimed in bold

headlines:

We Win Once More

McKenzie County Still Safe And Sound⁶⁶

Soon after the primary election, leadership of the IVA met in Fargo and created a "fusion" ticket by endorsing Democrats for those offices for which NPL candidates had won the Republican nominations. For the gubernatorial race, the IVA chose Democrat J.F.T. O'Connor, a UND Law School graduate and college friend of Shafer's. The decision was also made to put five initiated measures on the ballot. This newly created vehicle, the initiative, was a "progressive" reform in politics and it would serve the IVA as a venue for its attack against the NPL on election ballots. In addition, there was national notice of what was happening in North Dakota. The IVA had the help of none other than former President William Howard Taft. Editorially and with several public appearances in the state, Taft conveyed anti-League sentiments and endorsed two-party fusion.⁶⁷

The 1920 general election was close. All the initiated laws passed and all the IVA primary election winners were elected. But the fusion candidates were narrowly beaten.

⁶⁵ In McKenzie County, the NPL's influence was extremely strong. The Arnegard Call newspaper was renamed The McKenzie County Farmer with its August 30, 1917 issue and had become overtly pro-League in their reporting. In opposition to The McKenzie County Farmer was The Watford Guide, owned and operated by William S. Graham, a strong IVA & Shafer advocate. For a time he managed both The Schafer Record and The Watford Guide, but he had to close the Schafer paper after The McKenzie County Farmer had become the official county newspaper in 1919. The Watford Guide credited the "Townley monopoly" for killing off The Schafer Record.

⁶⁶ McKenzie County Farmer, July 1, 1920, 1.

⁶⁷ James Vivian, "Not A Patriotic American Party: William Howard Taft's Campaign Against the Nonpartisan League, 1920-1921," North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains 50 (Fall 1983): 4-10.

Governor Lynn J. Frazier defeated O'Connor by just 4,630 votes.⁶⁸ The IVA won a four-vote majority in the state House of Representatives, while in the Senate, the NPL retained control by a one-vote margin. The election signalled the end of the NPL's dominance in North Dakota, for without control of the legislature, it could neither expand its program nor protect its political power.⁶⁹

The 1921 legislative session, which met in January, was to turn into a hopeless morass. In the state House the session was particularly riotous, not much better than a brawl. The Speaker of the House was Luther L. Twichell of Fargo. He set the precedent for which he would ably serve the IVA, that of a consummate parliamentarian. This created wrangling that kept the sergeant-at-arms busy restraining members who came to blows. The senseless bickering that had enveloped both Leaguers and IVAers insured that politics of the worst kind took precedence over the good of the state, and the session came to a close without accomplishing much.

Despite its success in 1920, the IVA still faced essentially the same problem in 1921 that it had from the start. The League's program was still in place, and the League had elected all the necessary officials (via the Industrial Commission) to continue administering the program.⁷⁰ The Industrial Commission had been created to oversee the League's industrial program. The three-member board consisted of Governor Frazier, Attorney General William Lemke, and Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor John Hagen.

⁶⁸ Boyd L. Wright, North Dakota Election Statistics: A Compilation of Voting Statistics for Territorial Delegate to Congress for Dakota Territory from 1878 to 1888 and for all National and Statewide Elective Office in North Dakota from 1889 to 1976. (Grand Forks: Elections Research Division, Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota, 1977), 18.

⁶⁹ Tweton, 114.

⁷⁰ Contois, 75.

Legislators had barely gotten home when the IVA leadership began to deal with the worsening economic plight afflicting the state, which they believed due to the Industrial Commission. IVA leaders thought its removal was paramount.

The IVA leadership wanted to recall some state legislators and all state offices still held by NPLers. But surveys carried out by the state headquarters of local IVA units and comments to The Independent revealed opposition to a recall action on that scale. Shafer received the following responses from his own delegation: "let them stew in their own juice;" "not certain enough of winning to justify effort now;" and a "close victory for the Independents might result in defeat in 1922 due to reaction due to disappointment to relieve conditions at once."⁷¹

At a meeting in the Grand Theater in Devils Lake, a compromise was reached. The effort would be confined to recall of the Industrial Commission. R.A. Nestos, a lawyer from Minot who had bowed out to Langer's nomination in 1920, was the uncontested and unanimous choice for the gubernatorial race against Frazier. Sveinbjorn Johnson, a lawyer from Grand Forks and the chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, was chosen to oppose William Lemke for the Attorney General's position. The convention left the choice of Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor up to the Committee of Twenty-One⁷², with the understanding that a member of the American Legion would get the nod. It later chose Joseph A. Kitchen, a farmer and teacher from Sentinel Butte.

During the months before the October 28 special election, the people of North

⁷¹ Theodore G. Nelson papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 595, Box 1, Folder 12.

⁷² This was the leadership organ of the Independent Voters' Association. It was comprised of seven Republicans, seven Democrats, and seven Independents. After women were franchised in North Dakota, the IVA included them into leadership positions with a "Committee of Twenty One" of women. Together they made up the "Committee of Forty-Two".

Dakota witnessed one of the state's most bitter and intense political campaigns. Both factions knew that defeat would mean disaster.⁷³ During the weeks leading up to the recall, the League was desperately short of money. Letters from A.A. Liederbach, the NPL State Executive Committee Chairman, implored the faithful for money - "Give Until It Hurts The IVA." But the League and its supporters were broke. The McKenzie County Farmer printed the names of those in the county who signed the IVA petitions.⁷⁴ It exhorted its readership that "Ballots are Bullets--Shoot Straight, Vote **NO** Nine Times."⁷⁵ For George Shafer, the recall election kept him out of the county and on the road, working and speaking for the IVA. Primarily his themes were heavily against the League backed industries.

The voters turned out the Industrial Commission in the recall election of October 28, 1921. Nestos beat Frazier by 4,102 votes, Johnson won over Lemke by 6,786 votes, and Kitchen defeated Hagen by 5,335 votes.⁷⁶ The Independent heralded a

Grand Independent Victory⁷⁷

But all the IVA measures that were designed to dismantle the League's industrial program were defeated. This paradoxical result seemed to indicate that while North Dakotans refused to curtail the industrial program, they wanted the IVA to put it on a solid fiscal course. Nestos, Johnson and Kitchen were given a mandate by the voters to continue the

⁷³ Tweton, 116.

⁷⁴ McKenzie County Farmer, September 15, 1921, 1; October 13, 1921, 1; October 20, 1921, 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., October 27, 1921, 1.

⁷⁶ Wright, 18.

⁷⁷ The Independent, November 3, 1921, 1.

program the League had started at the same time that the Industrial Commission that supported the League was recalled.⁷⁸ The newly elected governor, attorney general and commissioner claimed their offices on November 23, 1921.

Once again Shafer's hard work and oratorical ability had led to IVA success -- and personal success as well. Apparently he had the talent to reach voters, and the IVA leadership was sufficiently alert to reward him accordingly. One of Attorney General Sveinbjorn Johnson's first acts was to name George Shafer First Assistant Attorney General of North Dakota.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Blackorby, 140.

⁷⁹ The Bismarck Tribune, November 23, 1921, 8; The Ward County Independent (Minot) November 24, 1921, 1; The Watford Guide, Nov. 24, 1921, 1; The Williston Herald, November 24, 1921, 1.

CHAPTER I: STATE OFFICE

The IVA membership intended to "take counsel upon ways and means to redeem the state from the chaotic condition into which its government had been plunged."¹ For many, the anti-league movement had become a political crusade to bring "sane," "responsible," "common-sense" government back to North Dakota. To Shafer "The middle ground between the Independents and the League has long since disappeared. The time has come when those who are not with us, are against us."²

After the recall win for the Independents, one in which North Dakota made history in the United States with the removal of a governor from office, the IVA was forced to make the state-owned industries function profitably. After serving as first assistant to the Attorney General for four months, George Shafer received another vote of confidence from the IVA leadership when he was approached to run as the IVA candidate for attorney general in the 1922 primary. Sveinbjorn Johnson was the state Democratic Committee Chairman. And Johnson felt he could not enter into a Republican primary fight.³ Instead he would run for a nomination on the North Dakota Supreme Court. Ambitious for success, Shafer agreed.

In the statement announcing his candidacy, Shafer declared, "The best interests of the state at this time requires that any Republican candidate for state office, seeking the

¹ The Watford Guide, Oct. 20, 1921, 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ Bismarck Tribune, March 17, 1922, 1; The Watford Guide, March 23, 1922, 1.

support of the independent voters, should be willing to submit his candidacy to the decision of the state-wide conference of representatives." Also, Shafer believed "that the general policies of the Nestos administration should be approved and the officials supporting that administration returned to office this year," along with an IVA controlled legislature "pledged to a support of the laws consistent with the principles of sound government, an immediate reduction of the public tax burdens, and in the introduction of economy and efficiency in all departments of the state."⁴ In his first state-wide race, Shafer revealed his conservative views in regard to government spending.

The IVA held its nominating convention in Jamestown. Nestos was renominated to run as the gubernatorial candidate, and Shafer was the unanimous choice of the convention as the IVA candidate for attorney general.⁵ Shafer's campaign speeches during the weeks before the June primary had a central theme, that of targeting the League's excesses. His plans were to devote three weeks to a tour of the state in June, urging voters to continue to support the Nestos administration.⁶ He referred to the deplorable conditions in which the IVA officials found the state after the recall election, specifically naming the weak financial standing of the Bank of North Dakota, state licensing department, and the Home Builders Association.⁷ His oratory and conservatism proved persuasive. The primary witnessed George Shafer defeat the League-backed candidate, Peter Garberg, and win the Republican

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Watford Guide, April 27, 1922, 1.

⁶ Letter, Clyde Duffy papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 52, Box 1, File 7.

⁷ Texts of speech in Theodore G Nelson papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 595, Box 1 Files.

nomination. The vote was Shafer 83,412; Garberg 77,731.⁸ George Shafer went on to win the general election by defeating NPL candidate J.H. Ulsrud, 100,584 to 75,537.⁹

After inauguration as attorney general in January 1923, Shafer believed that “We are living in abnormal times; in a period of business depression and unrest, and are suffering from an unprecedented crime wave which is nation wide.” He continued that “Crimes against life and property, and against the prohibition laws are on the increase and there is a great need . . . for a more pronounced and emphatic public demand for such enforcement.” Shafer concluded, “I am not a fanatic in any line of law enforcement, but believe in a firm, steady, aggressive and impartial enforcement of all the criminal laws on the statute books for the protection of all people and all lawful interests in the state.”¹⁰

Conservative George Shafer announced a conservative “law and order” stance that would be his hallmark as attorney general and later as governor. North Dakota of the 1920s was a violent state. An overview of the Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota for the five bienniums for the period January 1, 1921-June 30, 1930, indicate that Shafer was not simply speaking for political effect. Crime was real. Collectively, top crime for the years mentioned were 1) auto theft, 2) liquor trafficking and 3) robbery.¹¹ The three

⁸ Boyd L. Wright, North Dakota Election Statistics: A Compilation of Voting Statistics for Territorial Delegate to Congress for Dakota Territory from 1878 to 1888 and for all National and Statewide Elective Office in North Dakota from 1889-1976. (Grand Forks; Elections Research Division, Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota, 1977), 19.

⁹ Wright, 20.

¹⁰ The Watford Guide, Jan 4, 1923, 1.

¹¹ Report of The Office General January 1, 1921 to June 30, 1922, (State Printers); Report of The Attorney General of North Dakota July 1, 1922 to July 1, 1924, (State Printers); Report of The Attorney General of North Dakota to the Governor, July 1, 1924-July 1, 1926, (State Printers); Report of Attorney General of North Dakota to the Governor

were supposedly connected, as automobiles were stolen to facilitate either the illegal running of alcohol or used in bank robberies and similar crimes where a quick get away was required. These crimes would test the state's law enforcement capabilities and would lead Attorney General Shafer to suggest some draconian measures. Personally Shafer was opposed to prohibition, not that he favored drink, but because he felt it created more crime than it prevented.¹² It was the law of the land, and Shafer reminded every sheriff, marshal, constable or other peace officer in the state, by letter, to be a real watchdog of the law. They were not simply to serve papers, but to secure all law violators. Officials must remember their oaths and obey the law, in spite of the sentiment of the community.¹³

In 1924 the IVA renominated all of its incumbents and anticipated a larger primary campaign than usual. Its most vociferous campaign speaker was George Shafer, who was once again called upon to provide effective and persuasive oratory. From June 4 to June 8, Shafer spoke at Fort Yates, Hettinger, Reeder, Bowman, Rhame, Amidon, Belfield, Sentinel Butte, and various locations in Dunn County.¹⁴ Shafer maintained that the League candidates could not evade the record of their failures. He reminded voters "of the failures caused by them in nearly every field of activity in which they engaged . . . instead of discussing such record and explaining their political principles, they violently and indiscriminately assail this [Nestos] administration from every angle which their

July 1, 1924-July 1, 1926 (State Printers); Report of Attorney General to The Governor July 1, 1926-June 30, 1928, (State Printers); Report of Attorney General of North Dakota to The Governor July 1, 1928-June 30, 1930, (State Printers).

¹² Gerald Shafer Interview, January 30, 1993, Bismarck, N.D.

¹³ The Watford Guide, January 25, 1923, 1; The Williston Herald, January 4, 1923, 1, 8.

¹⁴ The Bismarck Tribune, June 4, 1924, 1; June 7, 1924, 1.

imagination can suggest with an utter disregard for either facts or logic."¹⁵ At a speech in Williston on the eve of the primary, he presented a typical overview of the state industries and the Nestos administration. The Williston Herald enjoyed the "straightforwardness of his utterances, unaccompanied by anything that smacks of political rancor." It was also reported that the talk was presented to "an audience that was almost discouragingly small, even in the present year of political apathy."¹⁶

Shafer's NPL opponent was Thorstein Hartvig Haugen (T.H.H.) Thoresen, Dunn County States Attorney. Shafer defeated Thoresen by a vote of 73,705 to 67,421.¹⁷ But in an election that most observers assumed was going to be an IVA sweep, League candidate Arthur G. Sorlie upset R. A. Nestos, 73,000 to 70,783, a narrow 2,217 vote margin to win the Republican gubernatorial nomination.¹⁸ Stunned by the loss of Nestos, the IVA planned to fuse with the Democrats that fall. The make-up of State Industrial Commission would now be comprised of an NPL Governor (Sorlie), an IVA Attorney General (Shafer) and an IVA Commissioner of Agriculture & Labor (Kitchen). The fusion failed, however, and George Shafer became the highest ranking IVA politician in state government. Shafer kept a low profile during the 1925 legislative session, which was split between the IVA and NPL and as such was primarily a stalemate.

¹⁵ Ibid., June 6, 1924, 1, 3.

¹⁶ The Williston Herald, June 19, 1924, 1.

¹⁷ Wright, 21.

¹⁸ Ibid.

On June 22, 1925, North Dakota's Senator Edwin Ladd died.¹⁹ Governor Sorlie felt the vacancy should be filled by gubernatorial appointment rather than by special election. Prior to passage of the 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, this had been the standard procedure for filling a vacancy, which gave him precedent. However, many voters questioned whether or not the governor had the authority to appoint someone to fill a vacancy instead of calling an election.

"There will be no special election," Sorlie stated. "An election at this time is not feasible. It would not be in accord with the program of harmony that the administration is following and it would cost all of \$100,000."²⁰ Sorlie repeated that an election would not be necessary, and contended that any qualified citizen might become a candidate and that there would be at least 100 candidates. Pressed by reporters about when he would name a successor, Sorlie declared, "Not for some time, the state is not suffering from the lack of a senator and the senate is not in session now. I feel that we ought to let Senator Ladd's body cool off."²¹

There were differences of opinion within both the ranks of the IVA and NPL on how the vacancy should be filled. William Lemke wanted a special election, as did IVA elements, but some felt the cost was prohibitive. It was a candidate-rich field. The IVA considered Olger Burtness, R.A. Nestos, Louis B. Hanna and Judson LaMoure. The NPL had even more candidates, and Roy W. Frazier, Vice Chairman of the Non-Partisan League

¹⁹ For further information on Senator Ladd's life and career see Ralph J. Kane, "Edwin Fremont Ladd, North Dakota's Pure-Food Crusader" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1960) and Alfred C. Melby, "A Chemist in the Senate, Edwin Fremont Ladd, 1921-1925" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1967).

²⁰ The Bismarck Tribune, June 25, 1925, 1.

²¹ Ibid.

Executive Committee, issued a call for a state-wide League meeting in Bismarck to decide the issue.²² However, others on the executive committee opposed a convention and stated they had not been consulted on this call. Governor Sorlie came out against Roy Frazier's call for a state meeting.²³

In the midst of this debate, Attorney General Shafer warned that "Governor Sorlie will violate the constitution of the United States by making an appointment to fill the vacancy caused by Senator Ladd's death."²⁴ North Dakota state statutes did not provide for a contingency, so the chief executive was forced to follow the national constitution. But Attorney General Shafer did not formally present his opinion to Sorlie since he had not been asked to give one. Other possibilities open to the Governor, according to Shafer, were to name a temporary appointee who would need a certificate of election from the Secretary of State, or to call a special session of the legislature and have it decide the issue. Shafer believed that the expense of a special election would not exceed \$50,000 since only a short ballot would be needed, and that the cost would not reach the \$100,000 figure.²⁵

Sorlie continued to procrastinate on the Senate vacancy issue. August and September came and went. It was well into October and still no action had been taken. For a time, an old name in state politics was proposed to enter the race: Former U.S. Senator Porter James McCumber had been approached. There also was a groundswell building to

²² Ibid., June 27, 1925, 1.

²³ Ibid., July 1, 1925, 1.

²⁴ Ibid., June 27, 1925, 8.

²⁵ Ibid.

have George Shafer enter the field.²⁶ Meanwhile, Sorlie received word from Washington, D.C., that whoever he would approve would not be seated due to the feeling of Senators that the governor did not have the legal right to appoint.²⁷ The author can not confirm nor deny certain allegations that Sorlie was considering to name himself to the Senate vacancy. Sorlie would later deny this, telling all interviewers that he was not a candidate and he was "tending to business on the job I have now."²⁸

On November 7, Sorlie finally called for a special election to be held in conjunction with the next primary election in June 1926. A great deal of criticism within League circles resulted.²⁹ A group of Leaguers meeting at the Patterson Hotel in Bismarck to discuss the financial problems of the League paper, The Nonpartisan, invited the Governor to attend. The group argued that not having a Senator would hurt the League.

Allegedly, Governor Sorlie breached the idea of his own nomination to this group of NPL leaders, but their reaction was strongly negative. He also asked those present to write on unsigned slips of paper their first and second choices for the appointment. Retiring to an adjoining room to consider the ballots, his only statement to the group was that he wanted to sleep on it and that he would make the appointment the following morning.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid., September 25, 1925, 8.

²⁷ Edward C. Blackorby, "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932" (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1938), 87.

²⁸ The Bismarck Tribune, November 13, 1925, 1; Gerald Shafer interview, January 30, 1993, Bismarck, N.D.

²⁹ Blackorby, 87.

³⁰ Blackorby, 87. His citation for this reads "From interviews with a prominent Leaguer.

The majority of the voters named Lieutenant Governor Walter Maddock of Plaza. He had served in the state legislature from 1914-1924, and was a very strong supporter of the Nonpartisan League and the state industries. He was not regarded as extremely intelligent, but he was capable. He was a Catholic and tended to be far to the left.³¹ Supposedly Maddock never learned of his consideration until Sorlie's death in 1928, when Maddock moved into the Governor's office and while cleaning out desk drawers, ran across the ballots with his name in the majority.³²

Rejected himself, and unfavorable to Maddock, a week later, in a surprise move, Sorlie named 33-year-old Gerald P. Nye to the U.S. Senate to fill Ladd's vacancy. Nye had come to North Dakota from Wisconsin and initially ran a small paper in Fryburg, in western North Dakota. He had been active in the League and had run against Thomas Hall without success in the Second District Congressional race in 1924. Nye was a strong proponent of Wisconsin Progressive Robert LaFollette, Jr. and wrote League editorials in his newspaper, Griggs County Sentinel Courier.

Quite upset by this turn of events, Attorney General Shafer stated the Governor had no right to name Nye to the seat and that the act was invalid. In an official opinion, Shafer announced that "When vacancies happen in the representation of any state in the senate, the executive authority of such state shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies," unless the state legislature had given that power to the Governor.³³ The fight over the seating of

³¹ The author again would like to thank Gene Holen for access to his research notes. Robert Byrne interview, May 15, 1959, Bismarck, North Dakota; Edith Cooley interview, May 9, 1959, Minot, North Dakota.

³² Gerald Shafer interview, January 30, 1993, Bismarck, N.D.

³³ The Bismarck Tribune, December 8, 1925, 1.

Nye had given his name a great deal of publicity and as a result, he became a household word in North Dakota.³⁴

The fight over the senatorial appointment pitted NPL Governor Sorlie against IVA Attorney General Shafer. Who better under the circumstances to oppose Sorlie at the next gubernatorial election than George Shafer? But the IVA leadership was surprised when they approached Shafer and he turned them down. Shafer was evasive; perhaps he was getting fatigued from the political fighting. Since there are no records regarding his decision, it can not be explained. He would run for attorney general again if he ran for any office.³⁵ It was assumed by IVA leaders that Louis B. Hanna would be their senatorial nominee, but R.A. Nestos (who many hoped would run against Sorlie instead of Shafer) declared he was a candidate for the Senate nomination as well.³⁶

In the 1926 primary campaign, Shafer was again out in the forefront giving campaign speeches and demonstrating his oratorical skills. His ability to connect with crowds was exceptional. He was, by some accounts, the best campaigner the IVA had, unlike R.A. Nestos, who often came across as serious, rigid and often cold in his delivery. Shafer could loosen up a crowd with his humor and ready smile. He possessed a laugh which you could hear easily over the noise of 100 plus people.³⁷ The primary, held on June 30, 1926, saw every incumbent renominated, regardless of factional affiliation.

³⁴ Blackorby, 89.

³⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, January 26, 1926, 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, January 26, 1926, 8; January 30, 1926, 1.

³⁷ Gerald Shafer interview, January 30, 1993, Bismarck, N.D.; Robert Byrne, May 15, 1959, Bismarck, N.D.; Mark Dahl (NPL activist), May 15, 1959, Bismarck, N.D.

Shafer defeated his NPL rival W.E. Matthaei, 88,914 votes to 65,060.³⁸ Edward Blackorby states of the 1926 primary, "Nothing shows more clearly than this that the voters were satisfied with the present regime and that they were not particularly excited over campaign issues. The outcome of the fall campaign was conceded in advance and aroused little interest."³⁹ It was perhaps not satisfaction, but a lack of interest, or even boredom and poor agricultural market conditions which account for the status quo. The "Farm-Labor" group did not influence the election outcome either. The point of voter intransigence was not lost on the NPL or IVA. Neither faction would attempt to fuse in the General Election. Shafer's general election opponent was S.L. Nichols, a Democrat and part of the rump party of "Progressive Democrats" which usually did not fuse with the IVA.⁴⁰ Shafer defeated Nichols easily, 112,362 votes to 29,173.⁴¹ For the first time since being elected the McKenzie County States Attorney in 1916, George Shafer finally carried McKenzie county, where he defeated Nichols 1987 to 70.⁴²

Attorney General Shafer was busy carrying out his duties. In his Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota to the Governor, July 1, 1924-July 1, 1926, Shafer made many recommendations for reforming the legal system of the state. He suggested clarifying state statutes, reducing time allowed in which an appeal from a lower court could

³⁸ Wright, 22.

³⁹ Blackorby, 91.

⁴⁰ The author suggests for further research the tracing of the actions of the "Progressive Democrats" during the IVA-NPL factional fighting.

⁴¹ Wright, 23.

⁴² McKenzie County Farmer, November 10, 1926, 8; The Watford Guide, November 18, 1926, 3.

be made, adjusting penalties for certain crimes, revising definitions of criminal conspiracy, and changing the system for selecting trial jury members. In December 1926, Shafer made certain appeals to the pending legislative session, including proposals to create a state bureau of criminal investigation and toughen penalties for "repeat" offenders, and he strongly urged the restoration of capital punishment as a penalty for murder.⁴³

The 20th Legislative Session was mundane. Some of the newsworthy issues the session did take up included workmen's compensation, an attempt to change the primary law requiring voters to register party affiliations (which was intended to allow Democrats to vote in Republican primaries), and the capital punishment bill, which was ultimately defeated in the Senate by a 30 to 19 no-party vote.⁴⁴

Prior to its 1928 convention, the IVA gave attention to possible candidates for the United States Senate and for the governorship. R.A. Nestos had already announced his candidacy for the Senate, and on February 17, 1928, George Shafer tacitly announced his candidacy for the position as well, stating that after seven years in the Attorney General's office, he no longer desired to hold state office. But if chosen, "I shall deem it a privilege as well as a duty to support the ticket as nominated with the same desire of loyalty and energy as I have shown in the past several campaigns."⁴⁵

Shafer had good qualifications to offer in such a race. As of 1928, he was the highest IVA officeholder in the state. Also, he had won re-election to the Attorney

⁴³ The Bismarck Tribune, September 9, 1925, 3; December 30, 1926, 3; Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota to the Governor, July 1, 1924 - July 1, 1926 (state printed document) preamble to report; The Watford Guide, October 21, 1926, 1; December 16, 1926, 1.

⁴⁴ The Bismarck Tribune, January 4, 1927, 1; January 17, 1927, 1; January 26, 1927, 1, 7; February 2, 1927, 1; March 5, 1927, 2.

⁴⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, February 17, 1928, 1.

Generalship with comfortable margins. And Shafer's persuasive oratory and his ability as a campaigner have already been discussed. After Shafer's announcement about seeking the Senate seat, IVA Speaker of the House John Carr of Jamestown declared his candidacy for the governorship. Carr had the unique distinction of being a unanimously elected Speaker of the State House, and he possessed a reputation for fairness in state politics. Some felt these positives would garner NPL votes for a Carr gubernatorial run.⁴⁶

The IVA Convention met March 7 and 8 in Jamestown. In county conventions held prior to the state convention, many delegates had expressed a preference for Nestos for Senate and Shafer for Governor. But Shafer did not want the governorship. Perhaps with Sorlie's experiences fresh in his mind, he believed that if he held the governorship for even one term, he would even have trouble in the next election being elected dog catcher.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he was nominated for governor, and he accepted.

After the nominating convention, Shafer stated, "I appreciate more than words can tell the expression of confidence involved in my endorsement for Governor. It came to me entirely unsolicited and apparently in response to the sincere desire of the Independents generally over the state."⁴⁸ He also stated the principle issue of the election was the question of the expansion of the industrial program and the true function of government. In a conciliatory voice, Shafer hoped for a campaign "free of unpleasant personalities and partisan bitterness which has characterized some of most recent campaigns. Let us forget all other considerations except what is best for the state of North Dakota."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., February 29, 1928, 1.

⁴⁷ Gerald Shafer interview, January 30, 1993, Bismarck, North Dakota.

⁴⁸ The Bismarck Tribune, March 9, 1928, 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Shafer delivered his first formal campaign speech for the Republican Primary endorsement to the Fargo Kiwanis Club. As in past speeches, the Kiwanis address was full of statistical analysis about the debt increase in state government. "Until such time as both our population and wealth increase we have all the government and all the state-owned and operated institutions and enterprises that we can afford to maintain" Shafer declared. "And it behooves the good people of our state" he concluded, "to throttle down the speed of the gigantic governmental machine that has been established to the end that it may become a servant of the people and not their master."⁵⁰ It was what a conservative of the time was expected to say.

At times Nestos and Shafer, the "big guns" of the IVA, campaigned together. Shafer would usually discuss the state industries because of his familiarity with the subject. Depending on the crowd, Shafer would also lead discussions on farm policy. Some Independents favored the McNary-Haugen bills that the Congress had considered as early as 1923 and passed in 1927 and again in 1928 only to be vetoed by President Coolidge on both occasions. McNary-Haugen attempted to remedy the problem of agricultural surpluses and to increase prices by dumping the surpluses on the world market. The goal was to achieve "parity," that is to raise domestic farm prices to a point where they would have had the same purchasing power - relative to other prices - they had between 1909 and 1914, a time viewed in retrospect as a golden age of American agriculture.⁵¹ More economically conservative individuals such as Shafer and Commerce Secretary Herbert

⁵⁰ Ibid., March 27, 1928, 8.

⁵¹ George Tindal, (with David Shi), America: A Narrative History, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 3rd Edition, 1992), 1083.

Hoover, preferred agricultural co-operative marketing ventures. They wanted individuals to solve their own problems with perhaps the aid, but not the subsidy of government.⁵²

During Shafer's campaigning for the IVA, he continually reiterated his and the IVA's position. "The Mill and Elevator problem," Shafer declared, "is both political and economic in its nature. As long as the plant is owned and operated by the state, no one can tell how many of its difficulties are due to economic or political considerations."⁵³ But he was not always negative. The 1928 IVA platform was consistent with past platforms, he asserted, stating that, "We declare ourselves to be unalterably opposed to the principle of state-ownership of private industries."⁵⁴ Perhaps being pragmatic, the IVA and Shafer discussed a plank of their platform that was more positive and conciliatory: place the management of the Mill in the hands of two Non-Partisans and one Independent, having the same power that the governor was vested with. Again, depoliticize the state industries. This board would operate the Mill and Elevator until it could be placed by law under control of a farmers' organization or co-operative company.⁵⁵

⁵² An excellent overview of such co-operative ventures can be found in Gary H. Koerselman, "Herbert Hoover and the Farm Crisis of the Twenties: A Study of the Commerce Department's Efforts To Solve the Agricultural Depression, 1921-1928" (Ph.d. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1971.); see also Joan Hoff Wilson, "Herbert Hoover's Agricultural Policies, 1921-28," Herbert Hoover As Secretary of Commerce 1921-1928: Studies in New Era Thought and Practice (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1981), 115-147.

⁵³ The Bismarck Tribune, June 5, 1928, 10.

⁵⁴ Bureau of Governmental Affairs (compiled & edited by), A Compilation of North Dakota Political Platforms, 1884-1978, (Bismarck: North Dakota State Library, 1979), 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The voters of North Dakota went to the polls on June 27, 1928, and decided heavily in favor of the IVA. Except for incumbent Senator Frazier, who won handily over Nestos, the League candidates failed to win another major office.⁵⁶ Shafer defeated Thoresen for governor, 92,212 to 83,209.⁵⁷

Why had the IVA done so well? A number of factors contributed to the League defeat, including dissension and disunity. In order to win the NPL needed to exert a maximum effort; this they failed to do.⁵⁸ The fact that George Shafer waged an active offensive that kept the League candidates on the defensive swayed the final decision in his favor. Also, the Independents cooperated well with each other and maintained party unity which also helped the IVA win.⁵⁹

Shafer thanked the voters of North Dakota, "This was a victory for sound government and clearly demonstrates that when aroused the majority of our citizens realize the importance of protecting the state against the further extension of League principles in our system of government." He gave special commendation to "the Independent Women's Organization for the effective work done. This organization was a big factor . . . and contributed much to the success of the Independents."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁷ Boyd, 24.

⁵⁸ Gene O. Holen, "The Election of 1928 in North Dakota" (M.S. Thesis, U.N.D., 1959), 65.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The Bismarck Tribune, July 2, 1928, 3.

It had been the practice of the Republican gubernatorial nominee in past campaigns to wage a less than active campaign, since the real battle was in the Republican primaries. Shafer now rejected that practice and concentrated on a live campaign for the IVA. "Since the fight is on," he declared, "we shall meet the issue with vigor and firmness, confident that the decision of the voters at the primaries will be emphatically approved at the general election."⁶¹ In 1928 Shafer declared his support for Hoover, the Republican nominee for President, but he regarded political issues within the state as more immediate. In Shafer's judgment, "the state issues . . . exceed the national issues."⁶²

Shafer had repeated the charge that despite the fact that state-owned industries were losing money, the NPL intended to build more. Shafer proclaimed that North Dakota could not sustain any further attempts at League industrialization. In almost every speech Shafer accused his League opponent, T.H.H. Thoresen, of trying to avoid his platform commitments on industrial expansion. He maintained that there was only one major issue in the election: Whether or not the state would begin more costly ventures by creating more state-owned business at a time when the present industries had not proved themselves economically feasible.⁶³

As to branch banks for the State Bank, Shafer declared, "When a business institution dealing in finances is established on a political basis by political methods, it is doomed to failure. Its establishment will injure, not help, the community where it is

⁶¹ Ibid., September 14, 1928, 1.

⁶² Ibid., October 5, 1928, 1.

⁶³ Holen, 55.

located." He maintained that, "We may expect these banks will be conducted by politicians. We will have political, not business banking."⁶⁴

Thorstein H.H. Thoresen and Shafer had debated in Valley City over the status of the industrial program. After serving four years as Tax Commissioner, Thoresen had achieved statewide support and prominence due to his consistent attention to the internal politics of the Non-Partisan League.⁶⁵ Thoresen believed that if an administration existed which was committed to the state industries, they would be successful. More than 2,000 people attended the verbal sparring event. Thoresen stated that Shafer had spoken for more than 90 minutes without presenting a constructive program. Shafer countered that the Independents did indeed have a better plan than the NPL offered: A nonpolitical plan of farmers' co-operatives which had businessmen in control and no country lawyers or office-seekers in the organizations.⁶⁶

The League also attempted to turn Shafer's humor against him. Thoresen delivered a speech in Grand Forks and referred to Shafer as wanting to burn down the Mill. The IVA Campaign Headquarters staff went to work researching the origins of this comment. It was found by John Gammons in the newspaper files of the State Historical Society. The reference was a speech Shafer had delivered June 24, 1926, in Watford City which was strong NPL country. Shafer had made a facetious comment about hoping the Mill was fire proof. Gammon warned Shafer, "Evidently it is dangerous to indulge in any form of

⁶⁴ The Bismarck Tribune, May 17, 1928, 16.

⁶⁵ Cynthia T. Selland & Chandice Johnson, T.H.H. Thoresen: States Attorney, Tax Commissioner, and Lieutenant Governor, part of the North Dakota Mini-Biography Series, (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986, 14.

⁶⁶ The Bismarck Tribune, May 29, 1928, 1.

humor with these serious-minded Leaguers of the Thoresen stripe."⁶⁷ Also, Thoresen had been put on the defensive by IVA attacks on the League platform. He could not repudiate the industrial program expansion plank in the League platform without offending the League extremists.⁶⁸

On November 6, 1928, the voters of North Dakota elected George Shafer governor. The vote was 131,193 for Shafer, 100,205 for Walter Maddock.⁶⁹ Only two weeks short of his 40th birthday, George Shafer became the youngest elected governor in North Dakota history. His election marked another first: he was the first native-born governor elected in the state's history. As before, George Shafer could not carry his home NPL-dominated county; he lost it to Maddock 1852 to 1598. Though Shafer and the IVA carried the municipalities, once again he lost the support of the farmers.⁷⁰

On January 9, 1929, George Shafer was sworn in as governor. Back in Schafer, his parents listened to the inaugural proceedings and address over a special radio hook-up.⁷¹ No governor had entered office so familiar with the problems he faced.⁷² He appeared before the joint session of the 21st Legislative Assembly and delivered an address

⁶⁷ George F. Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 24, Box 3, Folder 1.

⁶⁸ Blackorby, 100.

⁶⁹ Boyd, 25.

⁷⁰ McKenzie County Farmer, December 6, 1928, 8.

⁷¹ The Bismarck Tribune, January 9, 1929, 1.

⁷² Blackorby, 104.

that covered 29 typewritten pages and touched briefly upon practically every phase of state government.⁷³

In his address Shafer urged strict economy for all branches of government -- state, municipal and county -- for purposes of tax reduction, especially property tax. He addressed such issues as revision of the state banking laws, the inadequacies of the Teacher's Retirement Fund, creation of a Bureau of Criminal Identification and Apprehension and establishing four-year terms for state and county offices and longer terms for Supreme Court judges. He urged the state to make a financial commitment to a Roosevelt national park project in the Little Missouri Badlands.

Increased road building would entail additional revenues. Governor Shafer therefore suggested that the legislature form a commission to study state government and propose means of cutting costs by eliminating or consolidating boards and departments, and by reducing governmental functions. In keeping with a platform and campaign promise, Shafer recommended operating the Mill "with the view of placing this business on a sounder and more stable basis . . . , future operation of this enterprise should be removed from the control of the Governor and placed under a commission of three, a majority of whom should be of non-partisan affiliation."⁷⁴

Shafer felt that some legislation could deal with the organization and operation of farmers co-operative marketing associations and farm storage.⁷⁵ He encouraged farmers to develop on-farm grain storage facilities instead of selling crops at market value in the fall; this was a concept in which Shafer became a strong believer and it became a hallmark of his

⁷³ The Bismarck Tribune, January 9, 1929, 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, January 9, 1929, 8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

first administration. He also believed that non-political, farmer-owned co-operative marketing associations would greatly aid in promoting agricultural prosperity.

Closing his long oration, Shafer spoke of what later would be termed “economic development”: "To hasten our industrial and agricultural growth, we need more capital and more people; we need the confidence and assistance of the business world; we need to build up and foster the spirit of good will and cooperation, not only among all classes and groups within the state, but likewise between the people of this state and those of other states." To endeavor to achieve that, "Let us take the barbs and other sharp edges out of our laws which tend to drive investors and other business interests away from the state and discourage industrial development."⁷⁶ Shafer advocated a “Return to Normalcy” model for the state, a restoration of political stability (along IVA lines) that would foster economic prosperity.

In the 21st Legislative Assembly, the IVA controlled the House which elected Edwin J. Traynor of Ramsey County, its Speaker.⁷⁷ The NPL controlled the Senate by a two-vote majority. Shafer outlined many ideas in his address and by February 9, most of the bills he supported had been drafted and laid before the Legislature, but it was a divided legislature.

Blackorby called the 1929 session an uneventful one.⁷⁸ It was “uneventful” in the context of non-controversial issues, but it was productive. Expansion of the state's infrastructure continued: approval was given for bridges on the Red River east of Grafton

⁷⁶ Ibid., January 8, 1929, 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., February 9, 1929, 1.

⁷⁸ Blackorby, 104.

and on the Little Missouri north of Killdeer,⁷⁹ and appropriation was made for a "state capital building fund" for the purpose of constructing a new capitol, although the fund already totaled more than \$600,000.⁸⁰ An expanded highway bill was passed, although the increase in gas tax would be one of the last issues decided by the Legislature.⁸¹ The grain or farm storage measure lingered the longest in the NPL Senate, but finally won approval.⁸²

Governor Shafer proved that he had meant "economy of government" when his first veto went on an IVA-drafted wolf bounty bill. The veto was regarded by the Legislature as an executive message that the Governor wanted appropriations held down.⁸³ Again the Governor was showing his fiscal conservative tendencies. Shafer lost his criminal bureau proposal, primarily over the projected cost of \$30,000. The IVA House defeated the bill.⁸⁴ The NPL Senate defeated Shafer's initiative to change the makeup of the management of the Mill and Elevator. He stated that the maintaining of the status quo of the Mill was "especially regrettable in view of the fact that the question of policy incorporated in this bill was twice approved by the people in the elections of 1928 . . . I

⁷⁹ The Bismarck Tribune, February 8, 1929, 5; February 22, 1929, 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, January 19, 1929, 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, February 21, 1929, 1; March 9, 1929, 1.

⁸² *Ibid.*, February 28, 1929, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1929, 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, February 10, 1929, 3.

shall, of course, continue the operation as required by law and will give it the business management of which I am capable."⁸⁵

By the end of the 21st Legislative Assembly, the session had passed bills spending \$778,000 more than Shafer had budgeted for the 1929-31 biennium.⁸⁶ At adjournment, there were 14 additional bills awaiting gubernatorial action.⁸⁷ The Bismarck Tribune stated, "The Governor's views were fairly well known to the legislators while they were in session . . . and in those cases where the legislators strayed too far from the executive's ideas, some reproof may be expected."⁸⁸

State law provided that elevators allow farmers to store grain free for 20 days, beyond which a fee would be charged. However, if one of these last bills was enacted or signed, the rate of that fee would be lower than that of neighboring states or at grain terminal elevators. Pointing out that North Dakota elevators would have to store grain at the terminals and sustain a loss, Shafer vetoed the bill. He stated that "such loss would have to be made up at the expense of those patrons who are obliged to sell their grain at the time of delivery."⁸⁹ Shafer would continue to encourage farmers to store grain, but not at the expense of others. It would be advantageous for farmers to build their own storage facilities. Shafer also dealt with the grain storage problem by signing a bill that permitted the lending of money on grain stored on farms. To aid in its implementation, the governor

⁸⁵ Ibid., March 25, 1929, 1; March 7, 1929, 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid., March 11, 1929, 1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., March 13, 1929, 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid., March 14, 1929, 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., March 15, 1929, 1.

travelled to Minneapolis to confer with Twin City businessmen. The farmers were to be issued "farm storage certificates" on their grain, which could serve as collateral for loans. Shafer described the program to bankers and businessmen in mid-April 1929. Although the law would not take effect until July 1, Shafer wanted to arrange the proper financial support for the program.⁹⁰

Concerning higher education, especially in building projects, the two major schools - UND and the state Agricultural College - had been jealous rivals as their appropriations bills had been discussed.⁹¹ Governor Shafer vetoed \$102,000 for building projects at the Agricultural College, noting that it had already received \$190,000 for building projects. Shafer felt that "the total appropriations made for new buildings at the various state educational, penal and charitable institutions are more than present conditions fairly warrant, and that consideration of public economy require some reduction."⁹²

Rozanne Junker asserts that "The 1929 session reflected the growing economic crisis in the state."⁹³ North Dakota of the 1920s was even more overwhelmingly rural and agricultural than it is today. Of a population of 646,872, 86.4 percent or 558,633 was classified as rural, and fully 61 percent or 394,500 people actually lived on farms.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., April 12, 1929, 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., February 1, 1929, 1.

⁹² Ibid., March 16, 1929, 1.

⁹³ Rozanne E. Junker, The Bank of North Dakota: An Experiment In State Ownership, (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1989), 103.

⁹⁴ Edwin A. William, Social Organizations and Agencies in North Dakota, (Fargo: Agricultural Experiment Station, North Dakota Agricultural College, Bulletin 221, August, 1928), 11.

Perhaps George Shafer and the IVA were preparing for that rainy day, as best as their political philosophy allowed.

The 1928 IVA platform did contain a provision declaring it was “unalterably opposed to the principle of state ownership of private industries.”⁹⁵ But it also “recognized that the present State Mill and Elevator is an existing fact to be dealt with the best manner possible.”⁹⁶ The Governor’s inaugural address and subsequent actions illustrate that he recognized them as a political reality, but that he also wanted to get them on a sound, non-political operating basis. Not everything the Nonpartisan League accomplished was divine, and anyone who opposed the League (and its creations), such as the Independent Voters’ Association and George Shafer, were not malevolent.

The Independent Voters’ Association held its 1930 convention from March 26 to 28 in Grand Forks. As always happened at such an IVA convention, the “Real Republicans” were convening in tandem; Blackorby called the convention a “quiet meeting.”⁹⁷ For many delegates, George Shafer’s administration qualified as the strongest platform.⁹⁸ All incumbents won re-endorsement. New names were also added, including three women,⁹⁹ the most ever endorsed by a major political group in North Dakota to

⁹⁵ Bureau of Governmental Affairs, 133.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Blackorby, 106.

⁹⁸ Grand Forks Herald, March 27, 1930, 1.

⁹⁹ They were Mrs. Victor Wardrope of Leeds for State Treasurer, Laura Sanderson of LaMoure for Secretary of State, and incumbent Bertha Palmer for Superintendent of Public Instruction.

date.¹⁰⁰ The convention participants basked in the popularity of Shafer and his re-endorsement was unanimous.

In his acceptance speech, Shafer urged control of both houses of the Legislature because, without them, “our efforts can only be partially successful.” With both, “I believe we can present a legislative program of real practical benefit to our state.” The governor stated that, “Vigilance is the price of good government as well as liberty.” He concluded, “It behooves us not to slacken but to perfect the best organization and put on the most effective campaign in the history of the state.”¹⁰¹ Both the IVA and “Real Republicans” had planks in their platforms commending Shafer.¹⁰²

In the week leading up to the primary election, IVA speakers, including Shafer, were out in force. Shafer spoke of the need for an oleomargarine tax to aid restoration of the state’s dairy industry, continued to urge the adoption of a four-cent gas tax, and proposed adoption of four-year terms for state officials. He believed that the Independents of the state had definite views, stated in their platform, but he questioned what the NPL was offering.¹⁰³ Shafer also urged voters to go to the polls. And, in response to a radio address by Senator Frazier, who advocated the state establish a state-owned power plant, the Governor declared, “I am sure the people, even at this late date, would appreciate

¹⁰⁰ The Bismarck Tribune, March 28, 1930, 1; Grand Forks Herald, March 28, 1930, 2.

¹⁰¹ Grand Forks Herald, March 28, 1930, 2.

¹⁰² The Bismarck Tribune, March 28, 1930, 3; Grand Forks Herald, March 28, 1930, 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, June 17, 1930, 6; June 18, 1930, 13; June 24, 1930, 7.

receiving a clear unequivocal and un-evasive declaration" concerning such expansion of state industries.¹⁰⁴

The June 25, 1930, primary saw the overwhelming re-nomination of Shafer and the IVA. Shafer defeated E.H. Brant 103,371 votes to 69,249.¹⁰⁵ The voters delivered a severe reversal to the NPL, and, for the first time in its history, the Independent Voters' Association controlled not only the governorship, but most executive branch offices. Secretary of State Robert Byrne was the highest ranking NPLer.¹⁰⁶ The IVA also now controlled both houses of the legislature. The years 1930-31 would be the high water mark of the Independent Voters' Association.

A significant portion of the IVA's success must be attributed to the popularity of George Shafer; his personality, speaking ability, and accomplishments appealed to most North Dakotans. The IVA even made inroads into the west, which was strong NPL country. In McKenzie County, a bastion of NPL strength, the IVA managed to elect Arthur Hagen of Arnegard to the Legislature.¹⁰⁷ The IVA failed to get every member re-elected, but after the primary its majority was estimated to be only 58 to 54 in the House. The Senate stood at 27 to 22 in favor of the IVA.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., June 23, 1930, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Boyd, 25.

¹⁰⁶ The only other NPL candidates re-nominated were Bertha Baker for the post of State Treasurer, and S.A. Olsness, the Commissioner of Insurance.

¹⁰⁷ The Bismarck Tribune, June 28, 1930, 1 & 7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The general election in the fall of 1930, observed Edward Blackorby, was "the quietest campaign since the advent of the League. There was no contest."¹⁰⁹ George Shafer was re-elected over his Democratic opponent Pierce Blewett by more than 91,000 votes.¹¹⁰ The IVA primary endorsements held for the House and Senate, and Shafer carried all but one of the state's fifty-three counties.¹¹¹ As it turned out, however, Shafer and the IVA would soon be faced with two disasters; the destruction of the state capitol and the Great Depression.

On the morning of December 28, 1930, the state suffered a great loss: fire destroyed the state capitol building when oily rags caught fire near a heater in a janitor's storage room; preparations had been under way to wax all the wood in the House and Senate Chambers. Governor Shafer summed up the calamity: "The destruction of the state capitol building Sunday by fire is a great disaster to the state, causing a heavy loss, the full extent of which cannot even be estimated until we know whether the vaults have remained intact."¹¹²

The 22nd Legislative Assembly convened a week later in January 1931 in the World War Memorial Building. Newly inaugurated Governor Shafer presented his state of the state address to the joint session. "The financial condition of the state is in good order.

¹⁰⁹ Blackorby, 107.

¹¹⁰ The actual count: Shafer 133,264; Blewett 41,988; and Charles Hill 5,029, source Wright, 26.

¹¹¹ Shafer failed to carry Eddy County, which he lost by only 34 votes. The author is at a loss to explain this discrepancy. Shafer had lost the county in the 1928 General Election by 573 votes, and had lost it again in the 1930 Primary by 358. The fact the county was lost by only 34 votes shows very capable work by the local IVA organization, but the anomaly perhaps was of a local nature.

¹¹² The Bismarck Tribune, December 29, 1930, 1.

Public expenditures have been confined to the available funds, future obligations have to be rigidly avoided, and we enter the new term without the burden of accumulated debts.” The Governor continued, “We have striven unceasingly to administer the government not only in accordance with sound business principles, but in harmony with sound political principles as well”¹¹³

The address included twenty-three proposals for the legislature to consider. The most pertinent were:

- On appropriations, a reduction of \$835,000 from the last legislative session. This was to be achieved not by providing fewer services, but by having no new building projects.

- Public debt due to bondedness was \$38,357,200, with municipal debt near \$19 million. Shafer asked that the legislature limit not only amount, but purpose of such indebtedness.

- State Highway Department had added more than 1,800 miles of new roads and counties were demanding more roadwork. Since the state operated on a cash basis, North Dakota had failed to match national government money available. If the state could match it, an additional \$800,000 would be available. The Governor proposed to raise gas tax by one cent and to enact a moderate increase in vehicle registration fees.

- Also, Congress had passed the Federal Emergency Fund in December 1930, providing additional monies for highway construction. The state qualified for \$1,298,000.

- Concerning his prior initiative of Grain Storage certificates, Shafer stated that 1930 was not as good as 1929. And since wheat prices were so low, it was not worth borrowing against. Therefore, he asked that stored grain be exempted for tax assessment purposes.

¹¹³ Ibid.; January 8, 1931, 12.

- After studying the results of his Banking Commission study, Governor Shafer felt “the present banking facilities in the state are entirely inadequate to provide proper credit accommodations for those farmers and ranchers who need credit for livestock raising and feeding purposes.” Shafer urged banking reforms on the legislature because both private and public deposits needed better protection.

- The state Mill and Elevator did not have a year in the black. The final report from the auditors was not in for 1930, but for the first 11 months it recorded a \$67,944.46 loss. Instead of encumbering the governor’s office with the direct management, Shafer advised “it would be decidedly to the benefit of both the business of the Mill and Elevator and the state to remove managerial responsibility . . . and place it in the hands of a commission, which should supervise the enterprise in the manner of an industrial board of directors.”

- The state bank was in a better condition, having earned profits of \$603,000 in the two-year period ending in December 1930. Due to “keeping out of the field of commercial banking, it has largely avoided the risk and losses which have befallen private commercial banks”

- The Governor requested that the Legislature grant the Industrial Commission the authority to dispose of the first state owned Mill at Drake.

- Concerning the loss of the state capital building, he confessed that “We tempted the gods of fire too long and now are faced with the problem of building a new Capitol.” He recommended the creation of a Capitol Commission. Its budget “need not be large,” he said. A new building should not be expensive, large, or pretentious. It should be small, inexpensive, and utilitarian with facilities for use by all state governmental agencies. Such a building would, Shafer felt, “be entirely consistent with the dignity of the state.” The Capitol Commission was created with a \$2 million budget to work with.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ The Bismarck Tribune, January 13, 1931, 1; January 24, 1931, 1.

In closing, Governor Shafer asserted that changing social and economic conditions “sometimes call for the application of new principles in political science, but more often, the situation is fully met by the new application of old and proven principles.” Shafer realized that people had fear and anxiety over the future, but “our people have seen these times before. The pioneer settlers of North Dakota have witnessed more serious periods in other days and have triumphed over them. I am confident that this generation of North Dakotans has the courage, ability and genius to conquer the obstacles and to solve the problems of the present day and to continue making noticeable progress in the building of our commonwealth.”¹¹⁵

The twin crisis of the loss of the capitol and the full scale onset of the Great Depression (especially the latter) had far reaching effects on the IVA in general and George Shafer in particular. Thus his message had emphasized economic retrenchment and development, all the more necessary because of the need to build a new capitol. Between the two problems, however, the economy was the most critical. In the spring and summer of 1931, Shafer travelled out of the state to find assistance for the state’s farmers and businesses. He attended the Conference of State Governors in French Lick, Indiana.¹¹⁶ “Shafer,” it was stated by the National Magazine of Business, “epitomized the topics discussed at the conference.” The magazine went on to quote Shafer as promoting “the curbing of expenditures of local subdivisions of state governments, and the need of shifting the tax burden from land to other forms of taxation.” The governor urged his fellow chief executives to use their veto power and also stressed the need to revise the deportation laws of the nation. He felt deportation needed to be more effective because the prosperity of the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., January 8, 1931, 12-13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., April 27, 1931, 1, 7; June 1, 1931, 7.

people of America and the security of the government depended on it.¹¹⁷ Shafer, certainly aware of national Republican policies, reflected the stance of the Congress that immigration represented “undesirable” elements.

George Shafer was rising to the challenges posed by the combined factors of drought and economic depression. Unfortunately, what he and the state of North Dakota did not have, in spite of the presence of a state bank, was the necessary funding to alleviate conditions. An examination of the fragmentary correspondence that survives in the Shafer papers further illustrates challenges to the chief executive at this time. In response to George S. Burgess, vice president and secretary of the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, Shafer wrote, “I beg to advise you that no state funds have been appropriated in North Dakota to provide for emergency employment.”¹¹⁸ He continued that some “of the cities are carrying on extra public works for the purpose of providing employment in such cities, but there is no statewide program of that character, and none is deemed necessary.”¹¹⁹ Shafer’s last comment reflected his prevailing political conservatism, and a political and economic blindness that would bring his downfall.

The Governor constantly urged the state’s citizens to do all they could to aid themselves. “I believe it is the duty of North Dakota to support itself to the fullest extent

¹¹⁷ George F. Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D. Collection 24, Box 3, Folder 10, “Printed Materials” article from p. 11 of the National Magazine of Business: News of the Business World, dated June 30, 1931.

¹¹⁸ The funds being referred is legislated state appropriations; it does not refer to what the state Industrial Commission would do with state bank monies.

¹¹⁹ George F. Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 24, Box 2, Folder 12, letter dated November 18, 1931.

possible in the emergency”¹²⁰ Also he made an appeal for farmers in the eastern portion of the state to save straw for redistribution to the western portion, which Shafer toured in the company of Charles Rowland, assistant regional director of the Red Cross. Stopping in Watford City, they addressed a county meeting. Rowland assured people that there was “nothing spectacular” about the drought, and he promised that the Red Cross would stay on the relief job for as long as it took. Shafer said that he had never witnessed a situation as the drought and declared, “I want to see North Dakota do its part” in relief efforts because if left unaided, “The drought and depression will set North Dakota back for years.” The Governor urged, “I don’t want you people out here to feel depressed or discouraged. I want you to look the situation square in the face and move forward with hope and courage.” He continued, “As a matter of personal pride I want North Dakota to do everything it can to take care of its own people. The ability to do that will make a lasting impression on the rest of the country, ”¹²¹ he thought, but he still thought a state wide jobs program was not needed.

As drought and depression continued into 1932, a severe blizzard struck the state and Shafer sent out an urgent appeal for clothing and bedding to be donated to the Red Cross relief efforts. “This need is so great that it can hardly be oversupplied,” Shafer noted. He also stated that there “are now more than 9,000 families, representing 45,000 rural people, who have or are now receiving Red Cross aid during this emergency.”¹²² In various press releases Shafer pleaded with any welfare group, such as women’s clubs,

¹²⁰ McKenzie County Farmer and Watford Guide, August 13, 1931, 8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1931, 1.

¹²² McKenzie County Farmer and Watford Guide, January 21, 1932, 1.

homemaker's clubs, church groups, American Legion posts, farm organizations and the Parent-Teacher Association, to pitch in on relief. This again shows the heavy reliance which George Shafer placed on volunteer efforts as opposed to programs initiated by state government. A strong conservative, he emphasized volunteerism over government.

In 1932, several county superintendents of school requested the Governor's assistance with the financing of school districts. They had heard about President Herbert Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation.¹²³ Modelled after a World War I program, this "pump priming" agency lent money to a variety of agricultural, commercial and industrial enterprises. Although it was created with a short duration in mind, the R.F.C. would operate until 1956.¹²⁴ To County School Superintendents C.I. Ware of Amidon and Inga Norstog of Schafer, who had written Shafer about the availability of R.F.C. Funds, the Governor stated that the R.F.C. could not, by law, loan monies to school districts. "Its authority to loan to political subdivisions is limited to unemployment purposes only, which in this state is principally for relief purposes."¹²⁵

¹²³ For a more complete explanation of the origins and workings of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, see Gerald Nash, "Herbert Hoover and the Origins of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review Vol. 46, No. 3 (December 1959), 455-468; James Olson, Herbert Hoover and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 1931-33, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977); Martin L. Fausold, The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985); Edgar Robinson & Vaughn Bornet, Herbert Hoover: President of the United States, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975); Gene Smith, The Shattered Dream: Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression, (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1970); William Meyers and Walter Newton, The Hoover Administration: A Documented Narrative, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).

¹²⁴ See James Olson, Saving Capitalism: The Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal, 1933-1940, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹²⁵ Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 24, Box 2, Folder 10, letters dated September 5, 1932.

Perhaps the most telling plea for assistance came from A.N. Lazier, a Tioga farmer who had written Shafer. He described his operation, losses and loan situation and asked about agricultural credit. Shafer sympathized and said he did not know where it would be possible to secure credit and stated that the R.F.C. was organizing an Agricultural Credit Corporation. He also warned Lazier that he was “making a mistake in trying to farm so much land by the production of grain crops. If you will go into livestock production I think it will be possible to secure credit.” Shafer concluded, “We should raise more livestock than wheat in western North Dakota.”¹²⁶ Lazier’s reaction is unknown, but such advice would not help him much in the short term, much less feed his family, and at the depths of the depression livestock had to be destroyed in an effort to keep pork and beef prices up. Clearly, Shafer did not understand the magnitude of the economic situation that North Dakotans and all Americans faced. This failure would destroy his political career.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER II THE 1932 SENATE RACE

Naively unaware of what the depression and his voluntaristic response had done to his political fortunes, in 1932 Shafer decided to leave the governorship and run for national office. He sought the Republican/IVA nomination for the U.S. Senate. In preparation Shafer spent part of the month of February delivering addresses. Minnesota Republicans invited him to address their Lincoln Day dinner. His address was entitled "Lincoln, the Politician."¹ In it Shafer linked governmental problems and political trends of the pre-civil war 1850s period with those of 1932. He cited the "experience of North Dakota with radicalism" and warned of "any political party or movement that is shot thru with the trend of socialism." Governor Shafer called political fallacies "any program or measures which propose to benefit the whole people at the expense of the wealthy few."² This strong conservative ideology, especially its fiscal aspects, would increase as Shafer ran his campaign in 1932. It would also contribute to his downfall.

The NPL held its nominating convention first in Bismarck. The main issue to be decided was who to endorse for the governor's race. T.H.H. Thoresen was a declared candidate, but so was a politically rehabilitated Bill Langer. For all intents and purposes, by 1932 Langer had transformed the Nonpartisan League into his own political machine. This was due in part to finances because from 1928 to 1932, Langer had spent \$21,000 of

¹ McKenzie County Farmer and Watford Guide, February 18, 1932, 1; Minneapolis Tribune, February 13, 1932, 1; St. Paul Pioneer Press, February 13, 1932, 1.

² Ibid.

his own money to help bring back the League.³ But Langer and his supporters viewed the NPL as a vehicle to provide a political comeback.⁴ Both Thoresen and Langer factions supported Gerald P. Nye, and he was quickly renominated for the U.S. Senate. But the gubernatorial contest lasted for eight ballots, and Langer prevailed. The League had a strong anti-Langer faction within, but it had been defeated.⁵

Meanwhile, Shafer continued his gubernatorial duties. He traveled widely on behalf of the state. He discussed the challenge of the depression at the Governor's Conference in Virginia; in Washington D.C., he lunched with Hoover and met with members of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. He also attended a meeting of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Waterway Association in Chicago.⁶

Six weeks later the IVA and "Real Republican" conventions met in Valley City on April 6. The most difficult aspect of the conventions would be the nomination of a gubernatorial candidate. In the end Senator Frank Hyland defeated Attorney General James Morris 186 to 125, and Roy Johnson was unanimously named for the Lieutenant Governor

³ Elwyn B. Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 403.

⁴ Agnes Geelan, The Dakota Maverick: The Political Life of William Langer: Also Known As "Wild Bill" Langer (Fargo: Kaye's Printing Company, 1975), 58.

⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, March 4, 1932, 1; Edward C. Blackorby, "Political Strife in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932" (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1939), 110; Cynthia T. Selland & Chandice Johnson, T.H.H. Thoresen: States Attorney, Tax Commissioner, and Lieutenant Governor part of the North Dakota Mini-Biography Series (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986), 17-19.

⁶ Minneapolis Tribune, February 26, 1932, 4.

candidacy.⁷ The other nominations were quickly settled, including the two Congressional seats held by the IVA, which went to O.B. Burtness and Thomas Hall. On the other hand, the U.S. Senate nomination was a triumphant affair. A main plank of the IVA platform was a commendation of the four years that George Shafer had served as the state's chief executive and when nominations for the Senate seat were opened, only Shafer's name was put forth. An old friend and attorney from Watford City, J.S. Taylor, delivered a nominating speech that noted all of Shafer's accomplishments. Often interrupted by applause, numerous seconds were made of the nomination even before the chair called for them. The nomination was unanimous. To this, the Governor expressed warm thanks, and discussed the difficulties of holding office and of the upcoming campaign. "After 10 years of office," Shafer declared, "my political history is written in the history of North Dakota and I believe in the minds of the people." Also, he asserted, "I am not afraid of a fight where there is a fight . . . And to take chances of defeat to win a victory."⁸

In his thesis on political strife in North Dakota, Edward Blackorby claimed the IVA platform of 1932 "stressed an economy program. The whole Independent program indicated a large degree of over-confidence."⁹ However, examination of the IVA platform does not show this to be a case of overconfidence. It was a continuance of what Governor Shafer and the IVA legislature had implemented. In regards to the economic climate, their (Shafer and the IVA) attitude was one of belt tightening to weather it. Such a time did not warrant going to extremes to answer a short term problem, again as perceived in their

⁷ The Bismarck Tribune, April 17, 1932, 1; Valley City Times-Record, April 7, 1932, 1, 7.

⁸ The Bismarck Tribune, April 6, 1932, 1.

⁹ Blackorby, 111.

minds. Additionally, the platform cited the record of the IVA and its basic ideological principles. An examination of the “Real Republican” platform that came out of the Valley City Convention shows an extremely strong and almost fanatical politically conservative stance and defense of President Herbert Hoover’s administration.¹⁰ The elections of 1932 were to be a watershed for the state (and national) politicians who professed conservatism. As stated before, the Depression was a challenge to such individuals and it presented a crisis of ideology for them. To shift their paradigm was going to be difficult at best. It was a difficult experience which would be shared with other ideologies, including progressives and socialists. It is not surprising that most ambitious conservatives failed.

Based on the “Real Republican” platform rather than the IVA platform, the strategy for the primary campaign was to go on the defensive for Herbert Hoover. As the major standard bearer, Shafer should have sensed the political winds that were certainly indicating change. Had he then responded like other politicians, the outcome of the primary campaign perhaps could have been different. If he had followed the modern dictum that “all politics is local” and emphasized the record of the IVA, what was to come could have been avoided. It was appropriate that the motto for his senate campaign was “Safer With Shafer.”

In an exchange of letters, Shafer was told by Clyde Duffy of Devils Lake, who was a long-time activist of the IVA, “It seems to me that there are a few things (concerning the campaign) that should be particularly stressed.” The first is “the fact that you are more closely identified with the development of the state than Mr. Nye,” and second, whether a Hoover or Democratic administration is in Washington, “a maverick (like Nye) can’t get

¹⁰ George F. Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 24, Box 3, Folder 3; Valley City Times-Record, April 7, 1932, 4.

anything for the state.”¹¹ Responding, Shafer agreed that his career/life was more closely identified with the state than that of Nye. He also claimed that his “record of public service in the state has been entirely constructive, and that in a period of great emergency, beneficial results have followed from my relief activities.” Concerning his election to the Senate, he believed it would help North Dakota since he would pursue issues that were of primary interest to the state and would cooperate with an administration rather than “pursuing an attitude of continual obstruction and antagonism.”¹²

Shafer had tremendous editorial backing across the state, as the major dailies supported his senate nomination. The Minot Daily gave an overview of some of his accomplishments as governor, especially concerning the drought conditions that the state was enduring, and Shafer’s work getting federal agencies, primarily the Department of Agriculture, to respond to farm concerns. Also it lauded his Red Cross work for relief during the 1931-32 winter. “Never in the history of North Dakota has there been such a demonstration of sane, cool-headed executive ability.” It was something that the state could feel proud of.¹³ In a later editorial, The Minot Daily bluntly asked its readers, “What has or can Senator Nye do for the good of North Dakota, in the way of obtaining consideration from the Republican party under the garb of which he seeks re-election but which he denounces and opposes at every turn of the road?” It replied that it was Governor Shafer who “promises to co-operate with and work with the president and his administration, and

¹¹ Clyde Duffy Papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D. Collection 52, Box 1, Folder 15.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Minot Daily, June 4, 1932, 4.

not continuously and studiously oppose them.”¹⁴

The Grand Forks Herald felt that the Shafer candidacy was a position that “calls for the qualities which have [after four years as governor] already been exhibited in large measure by Mr. Shafer.”¹⁵ In another column, the paper declared that he “uses excellent judgment in preferring to become identified with one of the stable political parties rather than of a faction, that, history teaches, will become a cause with a title of ridicule and no accomplishments, and whose leaders no one will care to remember.”¹⁶ And closer to the election, the Herald felt, “his election will give North Dakota for the first time in a good many years representation in the senate by a man to whom party membership is a means of service and not a sham.”¹⁷

The Fargo Forum was one of the strongest supporters of the Shafer candidacy. It complimented his powers of analysis and his gift of expression. “In Washington today the governor of North Dakota wields a greater power for the advancement of North Dakota’s interests than do either of our senators,” and “the high officials of this Government have recognized in him a man fair in his demands, tolerant in his views, yet firm in his desire to serve his people.”¹⁸ On the eve of the primary, the Forum ran a lengthy editorial entitled “Our Need For A Constructive Senator.” After an overview of Nye’s “obstructionist”

¹⁴ Ibid., June 15, 1932, 4.

¹⁵ Grand Forks Herald, April 1, 1932, 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., June 10, 1932, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., June 16, 1932, 4.

¹⁸ Fargo Forum, June 8, 1932, 10.

actions, and an examination of Shafer's record, the Forum exhorted that "Isn't it time that North Dakota was heard in the affairs of Washington?" The election of Shafer would be a valuable step toward the "taking of our rightful place around the conference tables of Washington where the destinies of North Dakota, and the United States, are being determined."¹⁹

Small town papers also supported Shafer. One of the staunchest was The Napoleon Homestead, which was owned and published by Otis F. Bryant who, throughout the twenties, had been a strong IVA supporter. After Shafer's nomination in 1928, Bryant was chosen to serve as his executive secretary. The Homestead declared that "Shafer will practice cooperation and speak for the people of North Dakota as they would have their senator speak. If sent to Congress he will go down in history as one of the greatest statesmen ever placed in the Senate by North Dakota voters."²⁰

The Minneapolis Tribune called the race between Shafer and Nye the "most interesting battle of ballots North Dakota has staged in the last 10 years." This battle was one that been in the making since 1928 when the recognized "champion" vote-getter of the conservative Republicans did not run against Lynn J. Frazier. The contest was "clear-cut" cooperation or opposition with the Hoover administration.²¹ This was based on an assumption of a continued Hoover presidency, the possibility of which was decreasing daily.

The formal campaign kicked off in May. As he had done in past contests, Shafer campaigned for the entire ticket. Often he ignored his own candidacy and pleaded for the

¹⁹ Ibid., June 26, 1932, 18.

²⁰ The Napoleon Homestead, June 24, 1932, 4.

²¹ The Minneapolis Tribune, June 29, 1932, 4.

support of the IVA ticket or defended President Hoover. Speaking of the challenges facing the state and nation, Shafer stated that the IVA needed to take them on as an artisan, not as an axe-wielder like the NPL was doing. In several speeches, Shafer spent considerable time asserting that if he was compelled to choose between defeat for himself and victory for the ticket, he would accept defeat.²² Assisting Shafer on the campaign trail were Frank Hyland and Attorney General James Morris. From late May to the eve of the primary, the three maintained a strenuous tour of the state, with Shafer averaging more than two speeches per day.²³

“I do not believe there is any political or government panacea for this national and world-wide crisis,” Shafer declared in a typical speech, “but I do believe that the federal government can, in cooperation with business and individual initiative, aid in restoring normal business conditions.”²⁴ He would also spend time supporting the Hoover policies, such as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Hawley-Smoot tariff and the Hoover Moratorium. This strong identification with Hoover’s policies was not good judgement under Depression conditions, but he also advocated the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway project; implementation of a management plan of the Missouri River for flood control and irrigation; establishment of a national park in the Little Missouri Badlands; and restructuring of credit to farmers, to name only a few.

“There is a growing disposition on the part of a certain class of political leaders in this country to put the United States government into private business.” Shafer warned that the citizens of North Dakota had already seen this attempted. As before, he declared, “I am

²² The Bismarck Tribune, May 21, 1932, 1 & 11.

²³ *Ibid.*, May 23, 1932, 2; May 27, 1932, 6; June 8, 1932, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, June 7, 1932, 1.

opposed to these proposals on principle and believe that to the extent that we involve the government in the direct ownership and operation of industry it will bring harm to the country.” Such “chronic insurgency” did not help the country, rather it resulted in the “regular pursuit of obstructive tactics” and was destructive. Shafer said that what were truly needed were candidates who could constructively solve these problems.²⁵

Agnes Geelan alleged that people who were listening to Shafer deliver campaign speeches were walking out of the rallies at which he spoke.²⁶ Her work is focused on Bill Langer and is not footnoted; the author did not find any news coverage of people walking out of Shafer rallies. Edward Blackorby contended that Shafer’s defense of Hoover, while politically courageous, was also political suicide.²⁷ In this assessment, the author would concur. George Shafer, the individual, was quite popular, but his ideology had fallen into disfavor. Economic adversity tends to increase political extremes. Out of respect for the man, the electorate would listen to him speak. Those who obviously opposed him would certainly leave, if they attended his rallies at all.

The Minneapolis Tribune reported that there were three senate races in the region that were worth watching: Wisconsin, Iowa and North Dakota. “Regular Republicans” within each of these states were attempting to unseat what the Tribune termed “Progressives.” It also noted that the first round within North Dakota had gone to the regular forces by their election of Hoover delegates to the national convention in Chicago

²⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, June 7, 1932, 7.

²⁶ Geelan, 59.

²⁷ Blackorby, 111.

during the Presidential primary.²⁸ During the IVA nominating convention for presidential electors and delegates, former Governor R.A. Nestos delivered a speech backing Hoover. Nestos chided those “who are trying to make the President the goat for the world depression, blaming him in many cases for the consequences of their own faulty economic judgements and political misdeeds should have their statements challenged and disproved.”²⁹ These were sentiments that Shafer would frequently utter.

Shafer’s opponent, the incumbent Gerald P. Nye, was a very capable campaigner in his own right. Nye’s name was already known, and he would continue to become nationally prominent in the mid-1930s as chairman of the Senate’s Special Committee to Investigate the Munitions Industry,” or more commonly known as the Nye Commission. Nye had investigated the corrupt election of the U.S. Senator Ruth Hanna McCormick from Illinois.³⁰ Nye’s record in the Senate already had established him as an inheritor of the designation as one of the “sons of wild jackasses” in Congress.³¹ His candidacy was a great asset for the NPL. Wayne Cole states in his classic work on Senator Nye that George Shafer “was confronted by an impossible combination in the primary: A serious depression, an unpopular national administration, and a popular progressive adversary who

²⁸ The Minneapolis Tribune, May, 1, 1932, 4.

²⁹ The Bismarck Tribune, January 28, 1932, 1, 7.

³⁰ Robinson, 403.

³¹ This in reference to a comment made by Senator George H. Moses of New Hampshire describing the midwesterners in Congress. See for further explanation: Ray Tucker and Frederick R. Buckley, Sons of the Wild Jackasses (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970).

was a master of the art of campaigning in North Dakota.”³² All of these factors, plus his own poor judgement would combine to hurt Shafer.

Shafer and the IVA came under heavy fire in NPL campaign speeches. Fargo Mayor A.T. Lynner, campaigning for the NPL, condemned the American system which allowed five percent of the nation’s citizens to control ninety five percent of the wealth. Lynner and many other NPL speakers stated that the cost of government had mounted and that public debt in the country was staggering. “Yet,” Lynner decreed, “the (IVA) . . . Have not raised a voice against these intolerable conditions, but they have placed their stamp of approval upon the system in its entirety.”³³ Langer attacked the IVA administration, stating it was guilty of nepotism and most of his campaign dwelt on this issue.³⁴ Congressional candidate William Lemke noted that the IVA repeatedly denounced the state industries, yet “while they have been in control of these state institutions during the past 10 years they have not dared destroy them, in fact are using them and then complaining.”³⁵

Past speeches, or rather parts of speeches, delivered by Shafer were distributed by the NPL in the form of campaign literature. Primarily, they were drawn from the Lincoln Day dinner at which Governor Shafer spoke in St. Paul. It concerned his comments about socialism and what some organizations would do with it. The episode is a classic example

³² Wayne S. Cole, Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1962), 53.

³³ The Bismarck Tribune, June 16, 1932, 5.

³⁴ Blackorby, 111; The Bismarck Tribune, June 17, 1932, 3.

³⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, June 17, 1932, 7.

of taking comments out of context. Edward S. Blackorby discusses the literature and states that in previous elections and years, it would have had little effect. But 1932 was not a usual year.³⁶

In the last weeks of June before the primary, the campaigns continued in intensity. In a candid appraisal of the races, The Bismarck Tribune charged that a revitalized Democratic Party might play the part of a spoiler. The races were too close to call, but the paper discussed the “roarbacks”³⁷ which were being used. The Tribune described such incidents and claimed that IVA leaders admitted that Shafer faced a difficult race. “Ordinarily, this is tantamount to a concession of defeat,” the paper remarked. It also reported the “painfully small crowds” that had turned out for the Governor and all of the IVA speakers, not that the NPL was doing better, for some attenders of NPL events were known IVAers.³⁸ As he had done in previous elections, George Shafer closed his campaign with a speech broadcast from Bismarck on election eve, June 28.

The primary election of June 29, 1932, was catastrophic for the Independent Voters’ Association. At the statewide level, the IVA did not carry a single office. In the Senate race, Shafer was defeated by Nye 134,009 to 63,232.³⁹ It was one of the worst defeats on the whole IVA ticket, even impacting Shafer in his home county of McKenzie.

³⁶ Blackorby, 111-112.

³⁷ A campaign tactic of making charges on the eve of an election to which the opposition cannot respond because of lack of time.

³⁸ The Bismarck Tribune, June 18, 1932, 1, 2.

³⁹ Boyd L. Wright, North Dakota Election Statistics: A Compilation of Voting Statistics for Territorial Delegate to Congress for Dakota Territory from 1878 to 1888 and for all National and Statewide Elective Offices in North Dakota from 1889 to 1976, (Grand Forks: Elections Research Division, Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota, 1977), 26.

The only municipality that he carried was the community of Alexander. In Schafer, George Shafer lost his hometown 46 to 31.⁴⁰ Discussing the election, The Bismarck Tribune headlined “New Situation Is Created By Voters.” The IVA organization “was dealt a mortal wound and its death is only a matter of time.”⁴¹

The Minneapolis Tribune called the defeat a “decisive rout” and “it is quite apparent that it was, broadly speaking, an economic revolt insofar as it is possible to say that any popular election is an expression of that type of mass emotion.”⁴² In the most detailed analysis of the election, The Fargo Forum felt that in “a sweep such as this . . . the Senatorial candidate in the Republican primary represented in the public mind so faithfully the spirit of unrest abroad in the land, and . . . a vote for him could be interpreted so clearly as a protest against the Washington Government, against President Hoover, against economic conditions as a whole.” It attributed the NPL’s appeal “to the frustrated men and women of North Dakota who have seen their farms go on the auction block, who have seen the State take possession of their property through taxation procedure, who have witnessed the prices of their products fall to the point where there no longer existed hope of operating profitably.”⁴³

George Shafer gave a very brief statement on the election results. He acknowledged his decisive defeat and thanked the many thousands who had worked for and supported him not only in the primary campaign, but for more than ten years. “I trust that the friends

⁴⁰ McKenzie County Farmer and Watford Guide, July 21, 1932, 7.

⁴¹ The Bismarck Tribune, July 2, 1932, 1.

⁴² The Minneapolis Tribune, July 4, 1932, 4.

⁴³ The Fargo Forum, July 2, 1932, 10.

of good government in the state will not allow this defeat, which, I believe is a temporary reverse only, to weaken their determination to carry on the fight against the aggressions of radicalism and in defense of our real constitutional government.” In conclusion, the Governor said that surrender was not to be considered, “for the preservation of not only our liberties but our property depends upon our ability and will to fight with relentless determination for our principles of sound government in both the state and nation.”⁴⁴ This was a political stance that Shafer would continue to hold onto the rest of his life. On a more personal note, in response to a well wisher, George Shafer expressed thanks for the support shown him and many others within the IVA. “I am not particularly discouraged over the results, disastrous as they appear to be. The tide of politics ebb and flow like the tides of the sea and in due time the tide of conservative sentiment will again carry the radical leadership to the shores of retirement.”⁴⁵

After the general election in November, the IVA’s legislative Senate seats were reduced from 27 to 18 out of a total of 49. In the House of Representatives, the IVA would hold only 31 of 113 seats, down from 58.⁴⁶ In the 1933 session, the IVA would be assigned to few posts of any influence. Statewide, the IVA was done. Some local candidates would continue to invoke the title and would be elected during the rest of the 1930s. This was, however, only a local phenomenon.

The increasing economic collapse of agricultural prices into the summer and early fall of 1932 had many farmers across the nation demanding action. A farm strike was

⁴⁴ George F. Shafer papers, Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, U.N.D., Collection 24, Box 3, Folder 7.

⁴⁵ George F. Shafer file, Research Library folder, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck, North Dakota.

⁴⁶ The Bismarck Tribune, November 5, 1932, 1; January 9, 1933, 1.

promoted by some, especially the North Dakota Farmers Union. Calls for a moratorium on farm foreclosures and an embargo on wheat were being heard. These were actions that League candidate Bill Langer would later take as Governor, but which Governor Shafer was unwilling to invoke. "The farmers of North Dakota have the right . . . to ship their wheat or any other property to another for any lawful purpose." Additionally, "the free exercise of that right cannot be interfered with or prevented by the governors of the states under either civil or military law."⁴⁷ Candidate Langer responded that "only a coward hides behind the word unconstitutional."⁴⁸ The continued support of the Farmers Union for a farm moratorium and produce embargo led to the formation of the Farmers' Holiday Association which would, in the western counties, cause militant change.⁴⁹

In an effort that turned out to be "too little - too late," the Reconstruction Finance Corporation started bringing monies into North Dakota. Applications of \$40,000 for Ward County and \$10,000 for the city of Minot had been approved. Governor Shafer applied for an additional \$50,000 to be used in poor relief in Williams, Burke and Mountrail counties.⁵⁰

In the general election in the fall of 1932, Shafer kept an extremely low profile. He did attend a meeting in Detroit urging the members of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Tidewater Association to get their senators to vote for the treaty with Canada that would

⁴⁷ Ibid., September 3, 1932, 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., September 7, 1932, 5.

⁴⁹ For an excellent overview of the North Dakota Farm Holiday Association, see Larry Remele, "The North Dakota Farm Strike of 1932," North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains Vol. 41 (Fall, 1974): 4-19.

⁵⁰ The Bismarck Tribune, October 5, 1932, 12.

allow the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway. "Our real battle is to make the eastern states see that in looking to Europe and the Far East for their markets, they are looking in the wrong direction," Shafer extolled. Their "profitable market is the inland empire of the United States to be opened to them by this waterway."⁵¹

After the first of the year, Shafer moved his family out of the Governor's Mansion and his things out of the office. His last official act was to deliver a message to the new legislative session. It was a long oration in which Shafer outlined his four years in office. Much of it was dedicated to discussing the financial condition of the state government and state industries, the status of loans and bonds that were due, continued projects such as highway paving and the capitol building project, and Reconstruction Finance Corporation applications.⁵² He also encouraged the legislature to continue pursuing the St. Lawrence Seaway project and encouraged the donation of state lands to the International Peace Gardens which had been dedicated the previous July.⁵³

Governor Shafer concluded his remarks by thanking all those in state government, regardless of their political affiliation. "For 10 busy years, it has been my high privilege to serve the people of North Dakota in the important executive positions, that of attorney general and that of governor. While fully conscious of my errors and shortcomings as a public officer, I have striven unceasingly to serve the best interests of the state as a whole." Shafer continued by thanking all of North Dakota, and "I shall retire to the ranks of the citizenship with a genuine sense of personal relief, but with the firm conviction and in the

⁵¹ Ibid., November 17, 1932, 1.

⁵² On December 31, 1932, the state auditor reported that North Dakota had \$14,549.36 in the general fund. Shafer was leaving office with the state in the black, but barely.

⁵³ The Bismarck Tribune, January 4, 1933, 2, 3.

unshakable belief, that North Dakota and its institutions, are worthy of the continued loyalty and faith of its people, and that our state will grow in greatness . . . ”⁵⁴ So ended the administration of George F. Shafer.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

III CONCLUSION

Following his unsuccessful run for the Senate, George Shafer went into private practice in the city of Bismarck. He was quickly subpoenaed before a legislative investigating committee which was questioning his authority, while governor, to issue \$400,000 in bonds to aid in construction of the new state capitol. On October 8, 1932, Shafer had presided over a ceremonial breaking of the ground and laying the cornerstone of the new capitol building. It was an issue on which the Langer-influenced legislature was being exceedingly petty and attacked the former leaders of the IVA. Governor Langer felt there had been mismanagement in the commission which Shafer had named. Some contractors felt they had been overlooked and that Shafer had shown favor to out-of-state businesses. Langer asked for a senate committee to investigate.¹

In a very tense questioning session, counsel of the committee E.R. Sinkler sought an admission of wrong-doing from George Shafer. Shafer explained that he had conferred with then state bank manager C.F. Mudgett to obtain the necessary funding to complete the construction project. Sinkler kept pressing Shafer about the alleged wrong-doing, asserting that this was the reason the money was needed and he questioned whether Shafer, while Governor, had not “dictated” the bank. Shafer rebutted his inference and stated that he only made suggestions and that the bank manager made the final decisions.²

After further testimony from other contractors, commission members and bankers,

¹ Agnes Geelan, The Dakota Maverick: The Political Life of William Langer; Also Known As “Wild Bill Langer” (Fargo: Kaye’s Printing Company, 1975), 62.

² The Bismarck Tribune, February 7, 1933, 1, 7.

the legislature repealed the 1931 Capitol Commission Law, calling the earlier Shafer ceremony “premature” and authorized a new cornerstone to be made. On September 5, 1933, Governor Langer presided at the second cornerstone laying for the new capitol.³ Shafer’s feelings and impressions about this are unknown, but they may well be imagined.

The 1930s brought about the opening of the Shafer Law Office, which specialized in matrimonial law. He handled the divorce cases of some of North Dakota’s prominent and well-known individuals, enabling him to make a very good living for his family.⁴ He also became very active with the Boy Scouts, the Kiwanis, and the American Red Cross. He also was a director of the St. Lawrence Waterway Association, the North Dakota and American Bar Associations, and many other organizations.⁵ He was frequently requested to give addresses at graduations, Memorial day commemorations, and other occasions. Well liked in spite of his political defeat, Shafer’s nephew, Gerald, recalled travelling with his uncle and the fact that wherever they stopped, people would approach them and greet the “Governor.”⁶ During World War II, when the Republican Organizing Committee (R.O.C.) was organized, George Shafer was viewed by some as a senior statesman and mentor. Some of the R.O.C. activists had been Independents a decade before.⁷

³ Geelan, 62.

⁴ Interview with Gerald F. Shafer, Bismarck, North Dakota, March 8, 1993.

⁵ The Bismarck Tribune, August 13, 1948, 1.

⁶ Shafer interview, March 8, 1993.

⁷ The Republican Organizing Committee is an area the author would suggest could be examined in greater detail. A brief sketch is provided by Dan Rylance, “Fred G. Aandahl and the R.O.C. Movement,” North Dakota Political Traditions part of the North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 151-182.

Several in the Shafer family have been afflicted by a heart condition. George Shafer's law office was located a little more than 3-1/2 blocks from his home, enabling him to walk to work every day. In 1947, he started treatment for his heart. On August 12, 1948, in the summer heat, Shafer labored to get home. That evening, he indulged in one of his passions, chocolate cake. He had trouble getting to sleep because of chest pains and sat up in the living room, assuming it was indigestion. Shafer had had trouble with his sinuses and he would often get up at night, therefore no one in the family was overly concerned this night. At about 2 a.m. on August 13, 1948, George Shafer collapsed, went into a coma and died about one-half hour later. He was 59 years of age.⁸

He was interred at St. Mary's Cemetery in Bismarck. His tombstone carried an appropriate epitaph, "The First Native Born Governor of North Dakota." After Shafer's death Governor Fred Aandahl delivered an address at the funeral, calling him "a distinguished citizen, a close friend and a helpful companion," as well as an individual of the highest integrity.⁹

George Shafer's success and popularity were very important in keeping the "alliance" of the IVA together. Certainly his two terms as governor, and especially the 1931 Legislative Session, can be called the true highwater mark of the IVA. In assessing Shafer, Edward Blackorby stated that, "It is doubtful if Mr. Shafer could have won in 1932 regardless of the campaign he conducted."¹⁰ This is certainly debateable. It was alleged that former South Dakota Governor Peter Norbeck, running for re-election to the United

⁸ Shafer interview, March 8, 1933; The Bismarck Tribune, August 13, 1948, 1; Grand Forks Herald, August 124, 1948, 192; Minot Daily News, August 13, 1948, 1.

⁹ The Bismarck Tribune, August 16, 1948, 1.

¹⁰ Edward C. Blackorby, "Political Strife in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932," (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1939), 111.

States Senate in 1932, recognized how big the Franklin Roosevelt tide was going to be. He distributed campaign materials which stated “vote for Roosevelt and Norbeck.”¹¹ Much like Norbeck had fifteen years earlier when he was fighting the NPL in his state, the South Dakotan was willing to bend his political philosophy to fit the time.¹² And William Langer of North Dakota went from the NPL to the IVA then back to the NPL.

Politicos such as Norbeck and Langer were willing to do whatever it took to be elected. It is a moral and ideological debate, but how far should one compromise one’s principles and ideology. George Shafer had stated clearly where he stood. Years after his involvement in public life, Shafer answered a biographical questionnaire for The Bismarck Tribune. In it he stated that “My principle interest, outside my profession, is the preservation of Americanism and its fundamentals.”¹³ However, had he been willing to compromise on the defense of the Hoover administration and run more on his own laurels the results might have been different. Had he run for the Senate in 1928 or 1930, he would assuredly have been elected again due to his popularity. The year 1932 was simply the wrong time for Shafer and the IVA. It is very tantalizing to postulate what a Shafer senatorship would have brought, not only to the state, but for him as well. North Dakota lost the services of a very capable and great civic minded servant with the defeat of George Shafer.

In his chapter on the twenties, Elwyn Robinson states, “After 1922, no leader, no

¹¹ Gilbert C. Fite, Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1948), 189.

¹² Gilbert C. Fite, “Peter Norbeck and the Defeat of the Nonpartisan League in South Dakota,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 33 (September 1946): 217-236.

¹³ Questionnaire form, Governor George F. Shafer, Newspaper file, Library of The Bismarck Tribune, Bismarck, North Dakota.

issue, and no faction dominated either the political scene or state government.”¹⁴ This can be challenged by looking at George Shafer’s political career. Shafer and the IVA became extremely successful and dominated state affairs. Perhaps Robinson was bitten by the bug which appears to have impacted many interpretations of this period in North Dakota’s political history: that the NPL was wonderful and the only show in town capable of governing, while the IVA opponents were agents allied with out-of-state interests. Blackorby concluded that “the advent of the Non-Partisan League inaugurated a period of factional strife without parallel in the history of the state of North Dakota. It created a sentiment and a point of view.”¹⁵ It is this “sentiment” that has been, I submit, prejudicial in assessing especially the IVA and George Shafer.

The NPL was a unique creation, but so too was the IVA. Both attempted to influence the electorate, and George Shafer’s political career should serve to illustrate this. Shafer’s and the IVA’s fears of “radicalism, syndicalism, industrialism, Townleyism, etc.” within North Dakota were not realized. Neither was the implementation of the League’s industrial plan. However, if the League proponents from the 1920s could see the presence of terminal elevators across the state today, it would be interesting to hear what they, and Shafer would say. Vestiges of the NPL-IVA years are still with us, and so is the ideological debate, a debate that George Shafer would relish.

Why did not Shafer bend to the prevailing political winds in 1932? Can his claim to stand upon principles be taken at face value? Perhaps, but perhaps not. Shafer’s oratorical ability and energy had carried him from one success to another. Very likely he was so caught up in his own ambitions and beliefs that he was not able to assess the true state of

¹⁴ Elwyn Robinson, History of North Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 389.

¹⁵ Blackorby, 116.

public opinion in 1932; he was not the only politician to be so detached from reality at the depths of the depression. His repeated successes, notably in the 1926 and 1930 elections, blinded him to political reality. Seeking to continue conservative individualism when a suffering population desired political activism and sometimes even radicalism, Shafer allowed time to pass him by.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Private Papers

Clyde Duffy papers, Elwyn Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Theodore G. Nelson papers, Elwyn Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Governor George F. Shafer, Newspaper File, Library of The Bismarck Tribune, Bismarck, North Dakota.

George F. Shafer papers, Elwyn Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

George F. Shafer file, Research Library folder, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck, North Dakota.

Public Documents

Report of the Office of Attorney General January 1, 1921 to June 30, 1922.
Bismarck: State Printers, 1922.

Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota July 1, 1922 to July 1, 1924.
Bismarck: State Printers, 1924.

Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota to the Governor, July 1, 1924 to July 1, 1926. Bismarck: State Printers, 1926.

Report of the Attorney General to the Governor July 1, 1926-June 30, 1928.
Bismarck: State Printers, 1928.

Report of the Attorney General of North Dakota to The Governor July 1, 1928-June 30, 1930. Bismarck: State Printers, 1930.

Williams, Edwin A. Social Organizations and Agencies in North Dakota. Fargo: Agricultural Experiment Station, North Dakota Agricultural College, Bulletin 221, August 1928.

Interviews

Personal Interview with Edith Cooley, Minot, North Dakota, May 9, 1959,
conducted by Gene Holen of Arnegard, North Dakota.

Personal Interview with Robert Byrne, Bismarck, North Dakota, May 15, 1959,
conducted by Gene Holen of Arnegard, North Dakota.

Personal Interview with Mark Dahl, Bismarck, North Dakota, May 15, 1959,
conducted by Gene Holen of Arnegard, North Dakota..

Personal Interview with Frances Shafer, Bismarck, North Dakota, May 15, 1959,
conducted by Gene Holen of Arnegard, North Dakota.

Personal Interview with Gerald F. Shafer, Bismarck, North Dakota, January 30,
1993 & March 8, 1993.

Newspapers

Arnegard The McKenzie County Farmer

The Bismarck Tribune

Dickinson Press

The Fargo Forum

Grand Forks Herald

Grand Forks The Evening Times

Independent Voters' Association, Fargo, The Independent

The Minot Daily News

Minot Ward County Independent

Minneapolis Tribune

The Napoleon Homestead

Rugby Pierce County Tribune

Schafer Record

University of North Dakota The Student

St. Paul Pioneer Press

Valley City Times-Record

Watford City The Watford Guide

Watford City McKenzie County Farmer and Watford Guide

The Williston Herald

Williston Graphic

Books

Bureau of Governmental Affairs, A Compilation of North Dakota Political Party Platforms, 1884-1978. Grand Forks: Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota, 1979.

Cole, Wayne S. Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1962.

Coleman, Patrick K., and Charles R. Lamb. The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922: An Annotated Bibliography. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.

Crawford, Lewis F. History of North Dakota. Vol. II, Chicago & New York: The American Historical Society Inc., 1931.

The Dacotah 1912: A Chapter in the History of the University of North Dakota-Vol. V.

Erickson, Nels. The Gentleman From North Dakota: Lynn J. Frazier. North Dakota Mini-Biography Series. Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986.

Fausold, Martin L. The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985.

Fite, Gilbert C. Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman. Columbia: University of Missouri, 1948.

Geelan, Agnes. The Dakota Maverick: The Political Life of William Langer; Also Known As "Wild Bill" Langer. Fargo: Kaye's Printing Company, 1975.

Hawley, Ellis W. Ed. Herbert Hoover As Secretary of Commerce 1921-1928: Studies In New Era Thought and Practice. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1981.

Howard, Thomas, ed. North Dakota Political Traditions. North Dakota Centennial Heritage Series. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981.

Junker, Rozanne E. The Bank of North Dakota: An Experiment in State Ownership. Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1989.

- Lamar, Howard R. Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.
- Leifur, Conrad W. Our State North Dakota. New York: American Book Company, 1953.
- Lenin, V.I. (Translated by Yur Sdobnikov), V.I. Lenin Collected Works, Volume 45, November 1920-March 1923. Moscow, U.S.S.R.: Progress Publishers, 1976.
- Meyers, William and Walter Newton. The Hoover Administration: A Documented Narrative. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.
- Morlan, Robert L. Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922. (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1955) reprint edition St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985.
- Nelson, Bruce. Land of the Dacotahs. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Book edition, 1964.
- Olson, James. Herbert Hoover and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 1931-1933. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977.
- Olson, James. Saving Capitalism: The Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal, 1933-1940. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Robinson, Edgar and Vaughn Bornet. Herbert Hoover: President of the United States. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975.
- Robinson, Elwyn B. History of North Dakota. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Selland, Cynthia T. and Chandice Johnson. T.H.H.Thoresen: States Attorney, Tax Commissioner, and Lieutenant Governor. North Dakota Mini-Biography Series, Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986.
- Smith, Gene. The Shattered Dream: Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1970.
- Tindal, George, with David Shi. America: A Narrative History. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 3rd Edition, 1992.
- Tucker, Ray and Frederic R. Barkley. Sons of the Wild Jackasses. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970.
- Watford City Golden Jubilee Book, Watford City, North Dakota: 50 Years of Progress. Taylor Publishing Co., 1964.
- Wefald, Jon. A Voice of Protest: Norwegians in American Politics, 1890-1917. Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1971.

Wilkins, Robert P. and Wynona H. North Dakota. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1977.

Wright, Boyd L. North Dakota Election Statistics: A Compilation of Voting Statistics for Territorial Delegate to Congress for Dakota Territory from 1878 to 1888 and for all National and Statewide Elective Office in North Dakota from 1889 to 1976. Grand Forks: Elections Research Division, Bureau of Governmental Affairs, University of North Dakota, 1977.

Articles and Periodicals

“Charles Shafer-Hunter, Indian Trader, and Rancher.” North Dakota Historical Quarterly Vol. 8, No.3 (April 1941): 166-178.

Fite, Gilbert C. “Peter Norbeck and the Defeat of the Nonpartisan League in South Dakota.” Mississippi Valley Historical Review. 33 (September 1946) 217-236.

“George F. Shafer (obituary).” North Dakota Bar Briefs: Journal of the State Bar Association. Vol. 24, No. 4 (October, 1948): 249.

Moum, Kathleen. “The Social Origins of the Nonpartisan League.” North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains 53 (Spring 1986): 18-22.

Nash, Gerald. “Herbert Hoover and the Origins of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review. Vol 46, No.3 (December, 1959): 455-468.

Putnam, Jackson. “The Role of the NDSP in North Dakota History.” North Dakota Quarterly. 24 (Fall 1956): 115-122.

Remele, Larry. “The North Dakota Farm Strike of 1932.” North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains. 41 (Fall, 1974): 4-19.

Saloutous, Theodore. “The Rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota.” Agricultural History 20 (January 1946): 43-61.

Vivian, James F. “Not A Patriotic American Party: William Howard Taft’s Campaign Against the Nonpartisan League, 1920-1921.” North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains. 50 (Fall 1983): 4-10.

Unpublished Material

Baglien, David B. “The McKenzie Era: A Political History of North Dakota From 1880 to 1920.” M.S. Thesis, North Dakota Agricultural College, 1955.

Blackorby, Edward C. “Political Factional Strife in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932.” M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1938.

- Brackett, Edmund C. "Anti-Conservatism in North Dakota From 1920 to 1932." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1972.
- Contois, Thomas M. "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association." M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1986.
- Holen, Eugene O. "The Election of 1928 in North Dakota." M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1959.
- Kane, Ralph J. "Edwin Fremont Ladd, North Dakota's Pure-Food Crusader." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1960.
- Koerselman, Gary H. "Herbert Hoover and the Farm Crisis of the Twenties: A Study of the Commerce Department's Efforts To Solve the Agricultural Depression, 1921-1928." Ph.d. Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1971.
- Melby, Alfred C. "A Chemist in the Senate, Edwin Fremont Ladd, 1921-1925." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1967.

Other Sources

- Miller, Penny. Clerk of the Supreme Court of North Dakota, to Richard Stenberg, University of North Dakota, 15 March 1994. Letter in possession of Richard Stenberg.

Selected Secondary Sources

Books

- Blackorby, Edward. Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963.
- Bennet, David H. Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969.
- Burdick, Usher L. History of the Farmers' Political Action in North Dakota. Baltimore: Wirth Brothers, 1944.
- Fossum, Paul R. The Agrarian Movement in North Dakota. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1925.
- Jenkinson, Clay. A Humanities Guide to "Northern Lights". Bismarck: North Dakota Humanities Council, 1981.
- Livermore, Seward W. Politics Is Adjourned: Woodrow Wilson and the War Congress, 1916-1918. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966.

Murray, Robert K. The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.

North Dakota Legislative Authority, Directed by Secretary of State Ben Meier. North Dakota Centennial Blue Book, 1889-1989. Bismarck: State Printers, 1989.

The Red Flame: A Chronicle of the Fierce Controversy Surrounding the Early Days of North Dakota's Nonpartisan League; Covering the period November 1919 through October 1920. Reprint, Minot: Lowe & Larson Printing, Inc., 1975.

Remele, Larry. The Last Years of A.C. Townley (After the Nonpartisan League). North Dakota Humanities Council Occasional Paper #1. Bismarck: North Dakota Humanities Council, 1988.

State Historical Society of North Dakota. The North Dakota Newspaper Inventory. Published in conjunction with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC, Inc.) database, 1978-1991.

Tweton, D. Jerome and Theodore B. Jelliff. North Dakota: The Heritage of a People. (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1976)
Reprint, Fargo: Knight Printing Company, 1983.

Articles and Periodicals

Kelly, Darwin K. "The McNary-Haugen Bills, 1924-1928: An Attempt to Make the Tariff Effective for Farm Products." Agricultural History 14 (October, 1940): 170-180.

Remele, Larry. "The North Dakota State Library Scandal of 1919." North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains. 44 (Winter, 1977): 21-29.

Saloutous, Theodore. "The Expansion and Decline of the Nonpartisan League in the Western Middle West, 1917-1921." Agricultural History 20 (October, 1946): 235-252.

Shafer, George F. "Early History of McKenzie County." Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. IV. Edited by O.G. Libby, Bismarck: Knight Printing Co., State Printers & Binders, 1913.

Vivian, James F. "The Last Round-Up: Theodore Roosevelt Confronts the Nonpartisan League, October 1918." Montana: The Magazine of Western History Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 1986): 36-49.

Unpublished Material

- Goldberg, Ray. "The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota: A Case Study of Political Action in America." Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1948.
- Hagen, E. Bruce. "The North Dakota State Mill and Elevator Association: History, Organization, Administration, and Operation." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1955.
- Haley, Richard W. "Stephen Joseph Doyle and Wartime Democracy in North Dakota During the 1918 Gubernatorial Election." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1987.
- Reiger, Amy. "Porter James McCumber: Evolution of a Senator." M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1993.