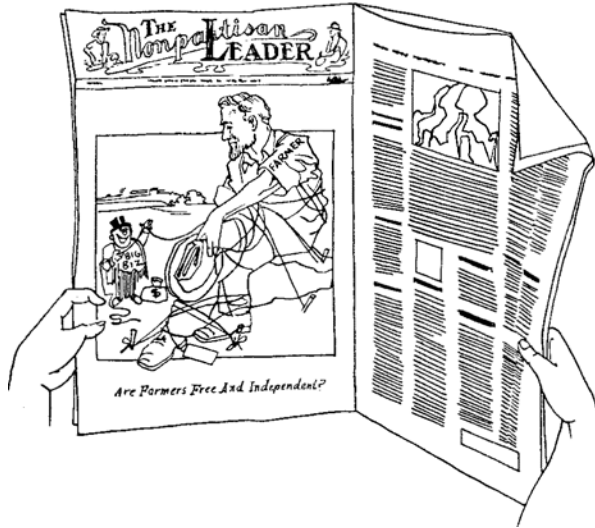


CHAPTER 13



The Progressive Movement

IN THE FIFTEEN YEARS or so from the turn of the century to the outbreak of the First World War a great reform movement swept over the United States. The progressive reformers, many of their leaders from the urban upper middle class, sought to make democracy work more effectively. To that end they wished to take away the power of political bosses, to curb trusts and railroads, and to cure a multitude of social ills by means of legislation. The progressive movement changed the pattern of American life; it was felt not only on the national level but on the state and municipal levels as well. Progressivism became a vigorous force in North Dakota, just as it did in many other states.

North Dakota had long been struggling against boss-controlled government and the exploitative practices of the railroads, the money-lenders, and the grain trade. After 1900 the fight became both more intense and more successful. Reformers with education, urban professions, and well-to-do backgrounds tended to replace the farm leaders of reform of the 1880's and 1890's and to win strong public support. They were admirers of Robert M La Follette, the progressive leader in Wisconsin, and also of Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan, leaders for reform on the national scene.

The reformers in North Dakota destroyed Alexander McKenzie's control of state government and the Republican party. They secured reform legislation which ensured progress for the state. Some leaders attacked the grain-marketing problem, established many cooperative rural elevators and finally a cooperative terminal marketing agency (the

Equity Cooperative Exchange), and helped to secure the passage of a federal grain-grading law.

For a time, everyone in North Dakota was a progressive, or at least wore a progressive mask. Conservative Louis B. Hanna, state chairman of the Republican party and closely identified with McKenzie, proposed a constitutional amendment to authorize a state-owned terminal elevator. Conservative Porter J. McCumber put the grain-grading law through the United States Senate. The North Dakota Bankers Association investigated the evils of the grain trade. The Republican party, while still under McKenzie, adopted a platform advocating all of the progressive reforms.

The progressive leaders were frequently lawyers, merchants, editors, and professors. Many of them had conservative records, for they had earlier opposed Populism and had worked with McKenzie. Although they belonged to both the Republican and Democratic parties and cooperated with one another, they were cool to the idea of a third party. Their cooperation did not really impair North Dakota's staunch allegiance to the Republican party, though they elected Democrat John Burke governor three times and Woodrow Wilson carried the state in 1912. The progressives found their strongest support in the eastern portion of the state, the region settled by Norwegians; McKenzie's stronghold was the Missouri Slope and the area of heavy German Russian settlement.

THE REFORMERS AND THEIR OPPONENTS

North Dakota had a long record of interest in reform. The new country and the open view of the prairies seemed to encourage friendliness to change. There are many early examples: the success of the Farmers' Alliance, the deliberations of the constitutional convention, and the acceptance of prohibition. The dominance of wheat gave the people a common interest; the concentration of control of the terminal grain markets, the railroads, the wholesale dealers, and the banks in the Twin Cities focused the resentments of North Dakotans and thereby strengthened them. Thus in North Dakota even conservatives often adopted liberal, progressive views, and opponents of reform hesitated to act openly against it. From the Earl of Selkirk to Glenn J. Talbott, the region has always had some leaders with a progressive outlook.

So, too, has North Dakota always had conservatives. The railroad corporations were the major conservative force, and genial Alexander McKenzie built a political machine to influence the state government in the interest of the railroads and their natural allies, the grain dealers and bankers of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Many men worked with McKenzie: Judson A. LaMoure (state senator from 1889 to 1912), Henry C. Hansbrough and Porter J. McCumber (United States senators), C. B. Little (a Bismarck banker who was chairman of the judiciary committee in the state senate from 1889 to 1909), E. C. Patterson (proprietor of the

McKenzie Hotel in Bismarck, now the Patterson), Marshall H. Jewell (editor of the *Bismarck Tribune*), Alanson W. Edwards (editor of the *Fargo Argus* and later the *Fargo Forum*), George H. Walsh (Grand Forks businessman), and many others.

Such men made up the McKenzie machine. Their power was not absolute and they, of course, were not McKenzie's automatons. Yet, led by "Big Alec," they worked together and exerted great influence. McKenzie himself stayed in the background; he never ran for public office, although for many years he was Republican national committee-man for North Dakota. He held much power because of his personal talents, the support of friendly newspapers, and his railroad connections. The railroads contributed campaign funds and free passes. McKenzie, long a land agent for the Northern Pacific, distributed both the railroads' gifts and federal patronage. By such means he could control Republican nominating conventions and legislative committee assignments. Just as in times past Indian chiefs, recipients of white traders' gifts, protected the traders from angry, exploited tribesmen, so did McKenzie, recipient of railroad gifts, protect the railroads as best he could from angry, exploited North Dakota farmers. In this role McKenzie was aided by the saloonkeepers (usually active in politics), the support of the Missouri Slope and the German and German Russian elements, and the general loyalty of North Dakotans to the Republican party.¹

McKenzie's opponents, the reformers, hailed from the eastern part of the state; they were generally of Scandinavian or older American stock. Some, the earlier ones, were Farmers' Alliance leaders. Others, such as Charles Fremont Amidon and Robert M. and Charles A. Pollock, were Fargo lawyers. In Grand Forks, R. B. Griffith, a successful pioneer merchant, and George B. Winship, editor of the *Herald*, led the cause. Elizabeth Preston Anderson, a Methodist minister's wife who during the course of her husband's work lived in a series of towns, led the North Dakota Woman's Christian Temperance Union for more than thirty years.

The W.C.T.U. reform—prohibition of the sale of liquor—was one of the first. Saloons were everywhere, and saloonkeepers exerted an evil influence in politics. Farmers did not want their harvest hands to drink. Temperance advocates, mostly Methodists or Scandinavian Lutherans, formed societies and held conventions. They distributed a leaflet entitled *The White Ribbon*, used county newspapers to reach the public, and held sunrise prayer meetings on election day. The *Grand Forks Herald*,

¹Charles N. Glaab, "[John Burke and the North Dakota Progressive Movement, 1906-1912](#)" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1952), p. 20; William W. Phillips, "[The Life of Asle J. Gronna: A Self-Made Man of the Prairies](#)" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1958), chap. 3; D. Jerome Tweton, "[The Election of 1900 in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1957), p. 28.

largest paper in the state in 1890, came to support prohibition; another Grand Forks newspaper, the Norwegian-language *Normanden*, was started as a temperance sheet. Alanson Edwards' *Fargo Argus* and Marshall H. Jewell's *Bismarck Tribune* fought the reform. In 1887 the territorial legislature passed a local-option law allowing any community to forbid the sale of liquor, and in 1889, North Dakota put prohibition in its state constitution.

Enforcement proved difficult. The saloons closed on July 1, 1890, with many liquor dealers moving to Minnesota. The first governor and his attorney general tried to enforce the law, but several state's attorneys did very little and, later, some state officials made no effort at all. In the western part of the state, Germans opposed prohibition, saying that they did not need to obey a law forced upon them by the Scandinavians of the Red River Valley. In many places, "blind pigs," operated by "piggers," sold illegal liquor; bootleggers would invade harvest fields with whiskey bottles in pockets or carts. The prohibitionists formed a state enforcement league and secured many convictions. In the legislature, however, the McKenzie machine used the threat of resubmitting the prohibition article to a vote of the people as a means of blocking railroad regulation. In 1893 resubmission passed the house and failed in the senate by only one vote. In South Dakota resubmission brought repeal in 1895, but North Dakota did not repeal prohibition until 1932.

The prohibitionists were interested in many reforms. They secured repeal of the ninety-day divorce law. In the 1890's Fargo had been a divorce mill, with many eastern society women, Broadway actresses, millionaires, merchant princes, and even British aristocrats living high in Fargo's fine hostelrys while establishing the necessary residence. The wife of James J. Corbett, world heavyweight champion prize fighter, was among them. Thousands of divorces were granted. One judge heard 350 cases in a single year.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union asked for laws restricting the sale of obscene literature, providing for separation of first offenders from recidivists in prisons, limiting child labor, and giving women the right to vote. In 1883, Dakota Territory had granted women the right to vote in school elections. In 1892 the Independent party put woman suffrage in its platform, and the men elected Mrs. Laura J. Eisenhuth, the first woman to hold state office, superintendent of public instruction.

But full suffrage for women met stubborn resistance. In 1914 the voters defeated a woman-suffrage law (49,348 to 40,209), and the following year, the legislature killed a state woman-suffrage amendment which had passed the previous legislature. Opposed to woman suffrage were the foreign-born (especially Germans), the liquor interests, the McKenzie machine, and the railroads. Success came after the Nonpartisan League put woman suffrage in its platform. In 1917 the legislature gave women the right to vote in local and presidential

elections, and in 1919 the legislature ratified the federal woman suffrage amendment. On November 2, 1920, the women of North Dakota had the full right to vote for the first time.²

CHARLES F. AMIDON: FIGHTING JUDGE

The progress of reform owed much to vigorous leaders. Three men were especially outstanding: Charles Fremont Amidon, the federal district judge; Edwin Fremont Ladd, a professor of chemistry at the Agricultural College; and George B. Winship, the editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*. Highly respected, they influenced the course of public affairs in North Dakota for many years. Winship and Ladd were born in Maine, Amidon in upstate New York. Ladd and Amidon had anti-slavery backgrounds; their parents had named them after the Republican candidate for President in 1856, John C. Frémont, suggesting a family upbringing marked by moral earnestness.

Amidon's father, a Methodist circuit rider, aided fugitive slaves. Young Amidon inherited his father's humanitarian zeal and his mother's eager mind and love of books. After graduating from Hamilton College at Clinton, New York, with Phi Beta Kappa honors, he came out to Fargo in 1882 to organize a high school. He soon began to read law, won admission to the bar in 1886, and became a leading attorney. From 1882 to 1887, Amidon and the Reverend R. A. Beard of the First Congregational Church took political control of Fargo from the hands of a gang led by Alanson Edwards, editor of the *Argus* and a McKenzie man. When President Grover Cleveland appointed Amidon as federal district judge, Senator Henry C. Hansbrough and the McKenzie machine tried to block Senate ratification of the appointment.

Amidon was a tall, slender man with prematurely white hair. He loved justice, felt a deep sympathy for the exploited farmers of North Dakota, and believed that "the court's decisions must be tested by the way they work in actual application to the national life." He became one of the leading progressive judges of his generation, and formed friendships with great progressives—Louis D. Brandeis, Zechariah J. Chafee, Jr., Robert M. La Follette, and Theodore Roosevelt. In 1906, Roosevelt urged one of Amidon's suggestions for judicial reform upon the Congress. In 1911 he wrote to Amidon: "How I wish you were on the Supreme Court!" Amidon's wife, a widely read and active person, worked for woman suffrage and helped to raise money for the statue of Sakakawea on the capitol grounds at Bismarck. The Amidons entertained

²Ruth Stenerson, "[Opponents of the Foaming Cup in North Dakota](#)" (Seminar paper, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1956), pp. 9-28; Jeanne F. Tucker, "[The History of the Woman's Suffrage Movement in North Dakota](#)" (Seminar paper, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1951); *Fargo Forum*, *Diamond Jubilee Edition*, June 4, 1950, sec. 6, pp. 6-7.

distinguished visitors (Gifford Pinchot and Florence Kelley) in their Fargo home.³

EDWIN F. LADD: FIGHTING PROFESSOR

The same courage, energy, and love of fair play which marked Amidon also characterized Professor Edwin Fremont Ladd, another great North Dakotan. Ladd was born on a Maine farm in 1859. After graduating from the University of Maine, he worked as a chemist at the New York Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva. Then in 1890, when North Dakota Agricultural College opened its doors, he came out to teach chemistry and take charge of the chemical work at the new experiment station. At thirty-one the blond, short, stocky Ladd still had a boyish appearance in spite of his full beard. He was an extremely serious, intense young man, quick to anger, and had a keen sense of justice and an all-consuming passion for work. Although he had only a bachelor's degree, he made up in vitality and ambition for what he lacked in training.

Ladd and the staff of the experiment station, men like Henry L. Bolley and Clare B. Waldron, were very capable; they plunged into experiments designed to advance the state's agriculture. Ladd was soon studying the suitability of sugar beets as a North Dakota crop, the flour-making qualities of the lower grades of wheat, and the value of screenings as stock feed. The station was a lively place: by 1899 none in the nation exceeded it in number of experiments, and that July, some fifteen hundred farmers came to visit.

Before long, Ladd was an investigator of and a crusader against adulteration in foods, paints, and fertilizer. In the experiment station's Bulletin 53, published in 1902, he issued a wholesale indictment of the food being sold in North Dakota. In his laboratory, Ladd found evidence of shocking adulteration: canned foods preserved and flavored with chemicals, colored with harmful aniline dyes, sweetened with saccharin, mixed with water, and short in measure; coffee mixed with roasted peas; beef embalmed with poisonous preservatives; alum added to flour; paint diluted with water and chalk; formaldehyde too weak to kill the parasites on grain; fertilizer with little plant food.

Such investigations were common in agricultural experiment stations, but Ladd, with his zeal, his courage, and his flair (almost mania) for publicity, became a hero in North Dakota for his work. To capture public opinion, in 1899 he had begun to edit and publish (with "Uncle

³Elwyn B. Robinson, "Charles Fremont Amidon," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1958), XXII; Amidon Papers, [Chester Fritz Library](#), University of North Dakota; [Grand Forks Herald](#), February 10, 13, 16, 1897; [Fargo Forum](#), February 10, 17, 1897; Zechariah J. Chafee, Jr., *Freedom of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), pp. 42, 50, 69, 70, 77.

Will" Crocker of Lisbon) the *North Dakota Farmer and Sanitary Home* in order to publicize his findings and to preach sanitation. Soon the legislature was ready to do his bidding. State Senator Louis B. Hanna and others helped to frame Ladd's laws and introduce them. There was no opposition. The people were naturally hostile toward the interests responsible for the frauds; Judge Amidon was ready to render favorable verdicts; there were no commercial interests in the state to fight the reforms.

Ladd secured many important changes. The laws stopped the use of aniline dyes in candy (1897); improved the regulation of dairy products (1899); prohibited adulteration and misbranding of foods and drinks (1901); strengthened that prohibition and provided for a food commissioner (1903); regulated fertilizers, illuminating oils, and gasoline (1903); stopped fraud in paints, formaldehyde, and drugs (1903); set standards for pure liquor, pure seed, and sanitation in food processing establishments (1909); and forbade short weights (1911). In 1903 the basic law, one of the best of its time, made it the duty of the experiment station to analyze foods and beverages suspected of being adulterated and to furnish, twice a year, each county auditor with a list of adulterated foods for publication in the official newspapers. The information published included the adulterant, the brand name, and the manufacturer; the lists attracted much attention. Ladd himself became pure-food commissioner, pure-paint commissioner, oil inspector, hotel inspector, and grain inspector.

Because of Ladd's work, the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station probably exerted a more profound influence than did any other such station in the United States. The North Dakota laws were not notably different from those passed in some other states, but Ladd's enforcement of them was more vigorous and successful. He made North Dakota a leader in pure food. When some outside food processors sued him for \$100,000 for libel in the fall of 1904, the whole state rallied to his support. The fighting professor (Ladd stood his ground) became known and loved throughout North Dakota as the farmers' champion. Indeed, he gained an international reputation and was showered with honors. In 1916 he became president of the Agricultural College and in 1920 a United States senator. In the Senate he allied himself with Robert M. La Follette and George Norris and opposed legislation favoring what he called "the two percent of the people with their 65 percent of the wealth of the country." The Republican leaders dropped him from the steering committee for his independence.⁴

GEORGE B. WINSHIP: FIGHTING EDITOR

⁴Ralph J. Kane, "[Edwin Fremont Ladd, North Dakota's Pure-Food Crusader](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1960), pp. 34-141.

A third notable progressive was George B. Winship, editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*. Amidon, Ladd, and Winship—a humanitarian judge, a crusading professor, and a fighting editor comprised an effective reform triumvirate long before the rise of the Nonpartisan League. Winship was born in Maine in 1847, moved to Wisconsin as a child, and left school at thirteen to work in a printer's shop. For some years he knocked about the Red River frontier—campaigning against the Sioux with the Minnesota cavalry, flatboating on the river, running a stage station near Manvel, and working on newspapers in Winnipeg and the Twin Cities. Then in 1879 he founded the weekly *Grand Forks Herald* in a tar-paper shack with a hand press and a few fonts of type.

Winship succeeded. In 1881 he made the paper a daily and was printing five hundred copies. In 1890 he moved the *Herald* into a \$45,000 stone building, had \$35,000 worth of equipment, and absorbed the old *Grand Forks Plaindealer* (established in 1875 by George Walsh). Winship then had the largest and best newspaper in North Dakota.

Probably Winship was the chief opponent of the McKenzie machine. He called Alanson Edwards, editor of the pro-McKenzie *Fargo Argus*, a “blabbering blatherskite and unprincipled hoodlum.” He abused Mayor Ed Patterson of Bismarck, McKenzie's ally, when Patterson's gang destroyed the press of a hostile newspaper and drove the editor out of town. He attacked railroad abuses and sneered at James J. Hill: “A certain railroad president and his bulls... are an impertinence.” He stood against the spoils system, the grain trust, gambling, and drinking. He opposed all the machinations of McKenzie: the removal of the territorial capital from Yankton, the parceling out of state institutions in the constitution, the appointment of William Budge and Alexander Griggs (close friends of Hill) as territorial railroad commissioners, and the chartering of the Louisiana lottery. When Winship, a senator in the first legislative assembly, reported that he was offered money to vote for the lottery, the McKenzie machine ended his legislative career by gerrymandering his district. In 1898 and again in 1900, McKenzie, controlling the state convention, frustrated Winship's ambition to be governor.

Yet Winship was loyal to the Republican party. When the Farmers' Alliance formed the Independent party in 1890, he refused to support it. He also opposed free silver. But after 1900, like many another reform leader of the time, he became more progressive. He began to praise La Follette in the *Herald* and to speak out for direct primaries, the popular election of United States senators, the initiative and referendum, the conservation of resources, and the regulation of monopolies.

The McKenzie machine, however, eventually drove Winship out of the newspaper business. During the bitter campaign of 1906, in which Winship supported Democrat John Burke for governor, Senator Henry C. Hansbrough established the *Grand Forks Evening Times*. That paper cut down the advertising revenue of the *Herald* and impaired its profits. On August 15, 1911, Jerry Bacon and a group of businessmen bought

both the *Herald* and the *Evening Times*, and the fighting editor moved to California. Although Winship, then sixty-four, retained a one-third interest in the consolidated enterprise, the crusading days of the *Herald* were over.⁵ Yet Winship had advanced the progressive cause and prepared the way for the overthrow of McKenzie.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1906

Progressive sentiment gradually brought about the decline of McKenzie's influence. McKenzie had been entirely successful in 1900, when his lieutenants from the Missouri Slope persuaded the Republican convention to bypass Winship. That fall, the Republican slate, headed by William McKinley for President, Frank White for governor, and Thomas F. Marshall for congressman, won easily. In the campaign the Democrats called themselves "the party of the laborer and the farmer" and said that "McKinleyism is another name for imperialism." Yet William Jennings Bryan secured only 35 percent of the votes, a smaller percentage than he had accrued four years earlier. He did not even do so well as the Democratic candidate for governor, Max Wipperman. Wipperman, though nominated to catch the German vote, carried only one German county.⁶

McKenzie's success continued in the next two elections. In 1902, White and Marshall were re-elected (White was the first governor to have two terms), and Burleigh Spalding became the state's second member of the House of Representatives, an expansion which followed the census of 1900. In 1904, Theodore Roosevelt carried North Dakota for President with 52,595 votes to only 14,273 for Alton B. Parker. That year, McKenzie dropped Spalding for Asle J. Gronna, who had good organizing ability and the support of the Scandinavian Republican League, and elected Elmore Y. Sarles as governor. But the progressives forced a plank for a direct primary into the Republican platform. A primary election would destroy McKenzie's control of nominations and hence the whole structure of his power.

The year 1906 brought the revolution. Late in 1905, McKenzie's opponents had organized the Good Government League, with George B. Winship as president. His editorials calling for an end to McKenzieism were reprinted by papers throughout the state. The progressive Winship shared the insurgent leadership with conservatives Burleigh F. Spalding and Martin N. Johnson, whose ambitions for high office McKenzie had frustrated.

The insurgents were aided by the publication, early in 1906, of Rex Beach's articles on "The Looting of Alaska" in *Appleton's Book-lovers*

⁵Edward C. Blackorby, "George B. Winship, Journalist of the fiddle Border" (Seminar paper, Department of History, University of North Dakota, 1956), pp. 3-29.

⁶Tweton, "[The Election of 1900 in North Dakota](#)," pp. 23-89.

Magazine. He also wrote a fictionalized account, *The Spoilers*. Beach told how, in 1900, McKenzie had secured control of disputed mining claims through Judge Arthur H. Noyes of the Alaskan Second Judicial District. McKenzie boldly worked the claims, taking the gold for himself in defiance of an injunction issued by the federal circuit court of appeals in California. Finally that court sentenced McKenzie to a year in jail and removed Noyes, who had formerly lived in Grand Forks and whose appointment to the Alaskan position McKenzie had secured. At the time, the people of North Dakota were shocked, but when President McKinley pardoned McKenzie soon after he went to jail, his influence in North Dakota did not seem much damaged. James J. Hill and Mark Hanna had asked for McKenzie's pardon.

In 1906, as many newspapers reprinted Beach's articles, McKenzie fell more and more into disrepute. Yet the Republican convention, ignoring the Republican insurgents of the Good Government League, nominated Sarles for a second term as governor and John Knauf for the North Dakota Supreme Court. Knauf, the boss of Stutsman County because he could deliver the German Russian vote for the machine, was obviously unqualified. The insurgents wanted Charles J. Fisk of Grand Forks, a respected district judge and a Democrat. To attract disgruntled Republicans, the Democratic convention nominated John Burke for governor and Fisk for the court. The Democratic platform called for progressive reforms and concluded: "The political affairs of the state of North Dakota are controlled by the railroads."

John Burke, a son of Irish immigrants, had come to North Dakota in 1888 as a struggling young lawyer of twenty-nine. He had served in the legislature, and after some years at St. John and Rolla, he built up a large law practice at Devils Lake. By 1906 he had an income of perhaps fifteen thousand dollars a year and was widely respected. Thin and angular, he stood over six feet; his rough-hewn features, large ears, and homely gaunt appearance seemed to reveal his integrity. He was fond of reading, especially the poetry of Robert Burns, and he felt a deep sympathy for people. A modest man, he disliked his nickname, "Honest John," with its recollection of "Honest Abe" Lincoln.

Burke campaigned hard, speaking seven or eight times a day. He attacked McKenzieism, the railroads, and the St. Paul bosses of the state. Winship's *Herald* and other progressive papers supported Burke, as did the prohibitionists. Elizabeth Preston Anderson denounced Governor Sarles for serving liquor in the executive mansion; some Protestant church groups endorsed Burke, a Roman Catholic. On election day, ten thousand or more Republicans voted for Burke and Fisk. They were elected, but the rest of the Democratic ticket lost. Burke's majority came from the eastern part of the state; the wealthy, urban Sarles, the machine candidate, did better in the west.

PROGRESSIVE VICTORY

When the legislature met in January, McKenzie and a prominent Democrat had a fist fight in the lobby of the Grand Pacific Hotel. The progressive Republicans and Democrats organized the house, but the McKenzie stalwarts still controlled the senate. Many anti-railroad bills were introduced, and lobbyists were busy against them. Usher L. Burdick, a member of the house, has recalled that railroad lobbyists photographed a progressive legislator with a nude woman and then forced him to vote against the railroad bills or risk exposure. But some of these bills, as well as other progressive legislation, went through: a direct-primary law with a senatorial-preference provision, a joint resolution for a constitutional amendment for the initiative and referendum, a public library commission law, and laws to enforce prohibition.

The election of 1908 was another progressive victory. McKenzie believed that primary elections (the first in North Dakota was held in 1908) would mean his downfall. Recognizing the strong feeling against him, he voluntarily retired as Republican national committeeman but was able to choose his own successor. The primary disappointed the progressives, however; many McKenzie men won nominations, including Charles A. Johnson for governor. After the primary, the Republican state committee, still in the hands of the machine, drew up an extremely progressive platform: retention of the primary, direct election of United States senators, and an antipass law.

In the fall, Burke beat Charles Johnson with Republican votes, but the other Republican candidates won. Martin N. Johnson, a conservative now backed by McKenzie, was elected to the Senate over Thomas F. Marshall, now a progressive though formerly a McKenzie man. Louis B. Hanna, a McKenzie man, and Asle J. Gronna, now anti-McKenzie, won seats in the House of Representatives. Hanna was a successful merchant and banker of Fargo who had served in the state legislature and as a chairman of the Republican state committee from 1902 to 1908.

The 1909 legislature, with the conservatives controlling the senate, largely ignored the progressive platforms of both parties. Yet it did pass laws for pure seeds, a game and fish board, a tuberculosis sanitarium, a serum institute for animal vaccines, limitations on child labor, and cooperatives with the one-member-one-vote plan and distribution of patronage dividends. Such legislation, however, received little attention; Democratic and progressive papers called the session a failure.

The progressive triumph finally came in 1910. During the campaign, Burke, nominated by the Democrats for a third term, said at Minot: "This is McKenzie's last stand." The *Grand Forks Herald* called it "a contest between the people... and predatory interests." The stalwarts, directed by McKenzie himself at Bismarck and aided by large contributions from out-of-state interests, made an all-out effort to defeat Burke. Willing to bend before the progressive wind, they still held the party machinery and again cynically adopted a more progressive platform than the Democrats.

They again won some of the Republican nominations in the primary and hence some of the state offices and congressional seats. They re-elected Porter J. McCumber to the Senate and Louis B. Hanna to the House.

But Burke again beat the McKenzie candidate for governor, with the aid of Republican votes, and the progressives and Democrats won control of the legislature. The progressive Republicans elected progressive Asle J. Gronna to the Senate (to fill the unexpired term of Martin N. Johnson, who died in October, 1909) and progressive Henry T. Helgesen to the House. The 1911 legislature put North Dakota in the front rank of progressive states when it passed a whole catalog of reforms without opposition. Laws and constitutional amendments (some passed a second time, as was then required, before being submitted to the people) dealt with corrupt practices in elections, lobbying, a presidential primary, railroad passes, juvenile courts, and workmen's compensation.⁷

THE WILSON CAMPAIGN

North Dakota again showed its progressive sympathies in 1912. In its presidential-preference primary on March 19, the first ever held in the United States, it favored Robert M. La Follette, giving him 34,123 votes to 23,669 for Theodore Roosevelt and only 1,876 for President William Howard Taft. The McKenzie stalwarts realized that Taft had little appeal. Led by Louis B. Hanna, they supported Roosevelt, but La Follette seemed the better progressive to the majority of North Dakotans. The *Minot Daily Reporter* said that Roosevelt "had the wrong bunch behind him."

The nominations were decided by the national conventions. Late in June at the Democratic convention, John Burke swung North Dakota's votes, pledged to him as a favorite son, to Woodrow Wilson on the first ballot. After Wilson's nomination, William Jennings Bryan, a good friend of Burke and the leading supporter of Wilson, wanted Burke for Vice-President. Burke, however, was passed over because of a promise made to Indiana for the votes of its delegates.

When the Republican convention nominated Taft, an angry Theodore Roosevelt formed the Progressive party. North Dakota progressives were reluctant to join in this third-party movement, but upon Roosevelt's urging, a Progressive party was organized in the state in September. In the June primary, progressives had captured all Republican nominations except that for governor, which was won by the stalwart Louis B. Hanna. Hanna had led the fight for Roosevelt in the March primary. How could the North Dakota supporters of Roosevelt

⁷William W. Phillips, "[The Growth of a Progressive: Asle J. Gronna](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1952), pp. 36-37; Glaab, "[John Burke](#)," pp. 50-154; David B. Baglien, "[The McKenzie Era: A Political History of North Dakota from 1880 to 1920](#)" (Unpublished M.S. thesis, North Dakota Agricultural College, 1955), pp. 96-102, 127-129.

The Progressive party of North Dakota did ignore Hanna. After Usher L. Burdick refused its nomination for governor, it nominated Dr. C. C. Creegan, president of Fargo College. When he was found ineligible because he had lived in the state only three and a half years, it chose Mayor W. D. Sweet of Fargo. It also endorsed the previous nominations of the progressives on the Republican ticket. These nominees, however, refused to have their names placed in the Progressive column on the ballot and announced that they would support the men nominated in the Republican primary, including Hanna for governor.

During the campaign, Roosevelt had little support from progressive leaders in North Dakota. Both Hanna and the progressive Gronna supported Taft for President rather than Roosevelt. Few newspapers supported the Progressive party. The *Fargo Forum* reported that 226 newspapers were for Hanna for governor, 33 for the Progressive party, 19 Democratic, and 62 noncommittal. Burke, of course, campaigned for Wilson, attacking Roosevelt and inviting Republicans to come over to the Democratic party. La Follette, always a hero in North Dakota, also opposed Roosevelt, and Bryan came to the state to speak against him as a come-lately progressive. Many North Dakota progressives distrusted Roosevelt's backer, George W. Perkins of the J. P. Morgan group and International Harvester.

Because of such opposition, Wilson was able to carry North Dakota in November. He had 29,555 votes to 25,726 for Roosevelt, 23,090 for Taft, and 6,966 for Socialist Eugene V. Debs. Hanna won the governorship with 39,811 votes to 31,544 for Frank O. Hellstrom the Democrat (warden of the state penitentiary) and 9,406 for Sweet the Progressive. Wilson had carried the state with fewer votes than were received by the defeated Democratic candidate for governor. After considering Burke for a cabinet post, Wilson appointed him Treasurer of the United States, a lesser position. Burke's Catholicism apparently barred him from the cabinet after Wilson was severely criticized for making Catholic Joseph Tumulty his private secretary.⁸

PROGRESSIVES AND CONSERVATIVES IN CONGRESS

After the census of 1910, North Dakota was allotted three members in the United States House of Representatives. In 1912 the state elected three progressives to the House. Porter J. McCumber in the Senate and Louis B. Hanna as governor were the only conservatives in important positions. Hanna, who came to northern Dakota in 1881 as a young man of twenty, was born in western Pennsylvania and educated in the common schools. At Page in northwestern Cass County he built up a

⁸Richard M. Norman, "[The Election of 1912 and the Progressive Party in North Dakota](#)" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1950), pp. 31-47, 123-161.

lumber and mercantile business, prospered, and entered politics. He served three terms in the legislature (two in the senate), worked with McKenzie while chairman of the Republican state central committee from 1902 to 1908, and then went to the national House of Representatives for two terms. In 1899 he moved to Fargo to become vice-president of the First National Bank. Later he built a large brick house in the English Tudor style; with its spacious grounds, it was a show place of the city.

In 1912 and again in 1914, Hanna won the Republican nomination for governor over a progressive opponent through the support of William Lemke and his friends of the Varsity Bachelor Club of the University of North Dakota, the first fraternity on the campus. Although Lemke and his friends were progressives, Hanna had lent money to help build the club's elaborate house (soon to be the Phi Delta Theta fraternity), which Lemke was promoting. In 1914, Usher L. Burdick, a true progressive, opposed Hanna in the primary but lost by less than four thousand votes. So Lemke's support of Hanna may have paved the way for the defeat of the state elevator in 1915 and hence the rise of the Nonpartisan League. Governor Hanna's opposition to the state elevator was significant; his loan to the fraternity apparently changed the course of the state's history. Governor Hanna, who had a clean record, did not end progressivism in North Dakota; the 1913 legislature passed a number of reforms.

Through the progressive years, North Dakota elected both progressive and conservative Republicans to Congress, but not a single Democrat. Oddly enough, some of the progressives were elected as McKenzie men, and some of the conservatives supported progressive measures. To the House the state sent Burleigh F. Spalding (1899-1901, 1903-1905), Thomas F. Marshall (1901-1909), Asle J. Gronna (1905-1911), Louis B. Hanna (1909-1913), Henry T. Helgesen (1911-1917), Patrick D. Norton (1913-1919), and George M. Young (1913-1924). To the Senate it sent Henry C. Hansbrough (1891-1909), Porter J. McCumber (1899-1923), Martin N. Johnson (1909), and Asle J. Gronna (1911-1921). In the House, Spalding and Hanna were conservatives; Marshall, Gronna, Helgesen, Norton, and Young were progressives. In the Senate, Hansbrough, McCumber, and Johnson were conservatives; Gronna, of course, continued his progressive record. Yet Hansbrough (a silver-mine owner) stood for free silver and introduced a pure-food bill; McCumber was the principal sponsor of the pure-food legislation of 1906 and of the federal grain-grading law of 1916.

The most important men, both for their abilities and their long years in the Congress, were McCumber and Gronna. McCumber was born in Illinois of Scottish parents in 1853. His family soon moved to Rochester, Minnesota; today the Mayo clinic rests on the site of the McCumber farm. Not content to be a farmer, the proud, strong-willed youth studied law at the University of Michigan and began to practice in Lisbon, North Dakota. In 1882 he moved to Wahpeton, combined politics with law, and

went to the territorial legislature in 1884. There he supported McKenzie's efforts to keep the capital at Bismarck. In 1899, McKenzie helped him win election to the Senate. Then forty-one, McCumber was a good lawyer and an effective speaker, and soon became an outstanding, articulate member of the Senate.

Gronna was born in Iowa on December 10, 1858. His parents, recent Norwegian immigrants, soon moved to a farm at Spring Grove, Minnesota. There they reared their family on religious faith and hard work. Asle, like many a farm boy, was doing a man's work at twelve. But he attended the academy at nearby Caledonia for four years, taught school for two, and came to Fargo in 1880. That summer, he carried grain sacks onto Red River barges and in the fall taught school at Buxton. He soon turned merchant, moved to Lakota, and built up a large enterprise. He had a keen business sense and an engaging personality; he made his store clean, attractive, and up to date. Gronna quickly grew rich. In the early 1890's he began to acquire land in the settlement of debts. When he lost heavily through bank failures in 1895-1896, he put more of his savings into land. By 1902 he held over ten thousand acres and by 1920 some twenty thousand. He became the publisher of the *Lakota American*, established banks and lumber yards, and built himself a large house. Gronna was friendly to the Farmers' Alliance, took an active part in church affairs, and served on the board of trustees of the University of North Dakota. He raised \$2,500 from private sources to found a Scandinavian library at the university. He was also ambitious for public office and worked diligently with and for the McKenzie crowd in the Republican party organization.

When McKenzie wanted to punish Burleigh Spalding a second time, he sent Gronna to the House in 1904. Gronna was the first North Dakota congressman to become a national figure. In Washington he was the close friend of his neighbor George Norris, the famous progressive from Nebraska, and of Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. From the beginning he stood with the progressives or Republican insurgents against the Republican Old Guard under Nelson Aldrich. With his boundless energy, Gronna was active in debate and in introducing bills. He voted for all of President Theodore Roosevelt's reforms, including railroad regulation. When the Hepburn railroad bill was under debate in 1906, he mailed McKenzie his free pass on the Great Northern with a sarcastic letter. To gain Gronna's favor, that railroad named a station in Rolette County after him.

Although Gronna cooperated with McKenzie until 1908, he never attacked reform proposals. He always favored direct primaries, the popular election of United States senators, income and inheritance taxes, the regulation of corporations, the initiative, referendum, and recall, the conservation of natural resources, a government guarantee of bank deposits, and, of course, federal inspection and grading of grain. Yet Gronna took no part in the revolt against McKenzie. In 1906 he traveled

with Elmore Y. Sarles in the last week of campaigning; that is, he worked for John Burke's opponent in the revolution of 1906. In that year and in 1908 he worked for a straight Republican vote and never supported John Burke, although he broke with McKenzie in 1908. In the fall of 1912 he stood by Taft, an unpopular figure in the state, against Roosevelt.⁹

In many ways Gronna was typical of the North Dakotan of his day. He seized the opportunities offered by his state and rose rapidly in the world; he fairly breathed energy, ambition, and drive; he stood loyally by the Republican party and worked willingly with McKenzie. Yet in his independent, courageous way, he fought for a better society with forward-looking zeal.

THE MARKET FOR WHEAT

Although North Dakotans supported progressive measures, they worried more about the market for wheat. They, of course, had to sell their wheat in outside markets, where they could control neither its grading nor its price. They well realized that their lower income, their position of economic disadvantage, sprang from that situation. They were dependent and exploited, just as the Indians before them had been dependent and exploited. Moreover, their concentration of wheat—the one dominant and universal crop—united North Dakota farmers and intensified their sense of grievance by giving them a common interest and a common foe.

The wheat farmer, hauling his crop to town, might sell it to a line elevator, to an independent elevator, to a cooperative elevator, or to a track buyer who had no storage space. The line elevator would be one of a line of rural elevators owned by a Minneapolis grain firm or flour mill. Most of the rural or local elevators in North Dakota belonged to Minneapolis grain firms. F. H. Peavey, for example, owned 104 elevators in North Dakota. The line elevators and the independents received a daily price card from Minneapolis. To avoid competition, the elevators frequently entered agreements to stay with the card. To keep such agreements firm, the elevator companies held weekly meetings at Minneapolis. In 1905 it was estimated that some 1,400 elevators in the Northwest were in a pooling agreement.

The rural, or country, elevators—line, independent, and cooperative—shipped their wheat to Minneapolis or Duluth, the terminal markets. In Minneapolis some of the grain went directly to the mills, but the larger part was sold by commission merchants in the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce or the Duluth Board of Trade. The operations of these terminal markets were regulated by the laws of Minnesota; they were beyond the reach of the North Dakota Legislature. This irritating fact was the chief stumbling block to the thousands of North Dakotans who believed that they were being robbed in the terminal markets.

⁹[*Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949.*](#)

More than their fellows in other states, North Dakota farmers—an independent, courageous lot—cried out against the crooked practices which reduced their income. Because virtually all of them received the principal part of their income from the same crop and were the victims of the same set of exploiters, they were moved by the same emotions and spoke with one voice. Wheat united the state. Again and again the wheat farmers of North Dakota read the reports of investigations which confirmed their ugly suspicions. Investigations by the legislatures of North Dakota and Minnesota, by the North Dakota Bankers Association, by the Interstate Commerce Commission, by the United States Industrial Commission of 1898-1901, and by the Federal Trade Commission—all told essentially the same story of unfair trading, short weights, and excessive dockage.

In the fall, when the farmers were selling, the inspectors graded rigidly; later, when the grain dealers were selling, the inspectors graded easily. So wheat went into the terminals at low grades, came out at high. The grain buyers knocked off an increasing amount for dockage. The injury was twofold, for such screenings had a cash value of eight dollars a ton, for which the grower received nothing. The suction draft used to remove dust at the terminal elevator also removed grain, so the farmers were cheated in weighing. In ten years the elevators at the head of Lake Superior shipped out 26,868,000 bushels more than they had received. The terminal elevators regularly mixed lower grades with higher; consequently they sold more No. 1 hard than they bought. In 1906, Senator Porter J. McCumber charged that such irregularities were costing wheat farmers from three to five million dollars annually.¹⁰

REFORMS FOR THE GRAIN TRADE

Aroused by such reports, thousands of North Dakotans were figuring their losses and demanding reforms; the need for them was never an issue in the state. In their dissatisfaction with Minnesota grades, they repeatedly asked for federal inspection and grading, the basic demand. For a time, Superior, Wisconsin, sought the cooperation of North Dakota in an effort to take part of the grain trade away from Duluth, Minnesota. State Senator George B. Hudnall of Superior persuaded the Wisconsin Legislature in 1905 to establish a grain-inspection commission on which North Dakota growers and Buffalo millers would both be represented. The commission would eliminate abuses in the grain trade. But the Wisconsin law failed. A conspiracy between the railroads (the Great Northern owned elevators in Superior) and the Duluth Board of Trade and then a federal court injunction defeated its purpose.

J. L. Cashel, a North Dakota state senator and prominent banker, had

¹⁰Robert H. Bahmer, "[The Economic and Political Background of the Nonpartisan League](#)" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1941), pp. 162-260.

appealed in vain to Louis W. Hill, president of the Great Northern, to stop his efforts to break down Wisconsin inspection. Then Cashel arranged for Hudnall to speak to the North Dakota Bankers Association. After Hudnall had denounced the grain trade, Cashel introduced a resolution for its investigation. The bankers' committee visited Minneapolis, Duluth, and Superior. It, too, appealed to Hill to allow the Great Northern's elevator to come under Wisconsin inspection, and its report listed once more the abuses of the grain trade.

In 1905 and again in 1907 the North Dakota Legislature asked the Minnesota Legislature to reform the trade. It got only an acrid refusal. Banker Cashel thought that North Dakota farmers should own the country and terminal elevators and work for a federal grading law. In 1907, Louis B. Hanna, former president of the North Dakota Bankers Association, did ask that the legislature inquire into the feasibility of a state-owned terminal elevator. When the board of inquiry, reporting in 1909, recommended such an elevator, the legislature proposed a constitutional amendment authorizing one in Minnesota or Wisconsin. In 1911 the legislature approved the amendment a second time, as the constitution-amending process then required. The voters accepted it in 1912. Another amendment for a state-owned elevator within North Dakota went through the legislature in 1911 and 1913 and was accepted by the voters in 1914.

Discrimination against durum fed the sense of grievance. By 1907 over a third of the state's wheat crop was durum, a higher-yielding type of wheat more resistant to drought and disease. But the millers, having trouble with the flinty grains, would not pay as much for it as for hard red spring wheat. The market for macaroni and other semolina products (the best outlet for durum) was slow to develop, and sometimes durum brought twenty cents a bushel less than No. 1 hard.

The idea of price and grade based upon actual milling value was beginning to take hold. In 1907, George M. Young talked the legislature into appropriating money for an experimental flour mill at the Agricultural College. That year, Professor Edwin F. Ladd began to test the milling value of wheats. His results showed that the price discriminations against both durum and Velvet Chaff, a new variety, were unjustified. By 1914 durum was bringing a premium.¹¹

COOPERATIVE ELEVATORS

Scientific tests of milling value were an important goal, but the farmers themselves also needed to own the elevators. At first they had lacked the capital for even country elevators. Outside capitalists built the elevators and advanced money to buy the crop. In 1892 there were only 11 farmers' elevators in North Dakota and in 1900 only 4. Then the number began to climb, to 40 in 1904 and to 264, with 19,500 members,

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 221-273.

in 1915. That year, the state led the nation in grain-selling cooperatives; more than one-fourth of the state's farmers belonged to elevator associations. Although farmers were by nature individualists, those in North Dakota, united by their common interest in wheat, were drawing together to a remarkable degree for common action. The cooperatives had to fight for their lives. They faced price wars by line elevators, pressure against the commission men who sold their grain, railroad discrimination, and sometimes even the hostility of local bankers and businessmen. But they were aided by the Rockwell plan (worked out at Rockwell, Iowa), by which the members pledged themselves to pay a half-cent penalty on each bushel of grain they sold to competitors of their cooperative. The plan assured the cooperative an income even when competitive prices lured away its members.

Thus the cooperatives won the battle at rural points. They lowered the margin between local and terminal markets for all country elevators, and they broke the monopoly of the line elevators. By 1920, 54 percent of the elevators in North Dakota were line, 24 percent were cooperative, 15 percent independent, and 7 percent mill. Each cooperative gave competition to two or more line or independent elevators. While there are no accurate figures, it was estimated that the cooperatives, generally larger than the others, shipped from 30 to 50 percent of the grain which reached Minneapolis.

Some of their members were fiercely loyal. The agent of a line elevator at Regan, North Dakota, wrote that some of the farmers would not leave the cooperative even though he offered them twenty-five cents a bushel more than the cooperative could pay.

THE EQUITY COOPERATIVE EXCHANGE

Success in the terminal markets was more difficult. The effort of these years grew out of the American Society of Equity, created by J. A. Everitt in 1902. Everitt, an Indianapolis farm editor, wanted farmers to organize, as business and labor had, so that they, too, could set a minimum price for their product. Equity asked its members to withhold their wheat (a sort of farmers' strike) until the price reached a dollar a bushel.

In 1907, Equity made its greatest effort to control the wheat crop. Everitt, touring the wheat states, found the best response in North Dakota: some ten thousand of the state's farmers pledged to withhold a million bushels. That summer, farm-raised Theodore G. Nelson, directing a force of trained organizers, brought thousands of North Dakota farmers into Equity. Their leaders wanted a grain growers' department. Nelson—a progressive, son of a Traill County pioneer, and only twenty-seven years old—became its president and later editor of the official *Equity Farm Journal*.

Some members wanted to stop withholding crops, an ineffective tactic, and begin cooperative marketing, and in 1908 they organized the

Equity Cooperative Exchange in Minneapolis as a terminal marketing agency. The organizers set a goal of \$50,000 for capital stock subscriptions, but in three years they could raise only \$14,000. The Exchange, however, began to sell grain through commission merchants who were members of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber barred cooperatives themselves from membership). In 1911 the Exchange incorporated in North Dakota.

At first the Exchange had little success; it sold only 805 carloads of grain from 1908 to 1912. Its officers encouraged the formation of cooperatives which would consign their wheat to the Exchange. Most members lived in North Dakota, and John M. Anderson, a North Dakota legislator (1909) from Grand Forks, was president. Anderson was a friend of William Lemke, a graduate of the University of North Dakota, and a founder of the Varsity Bachelor Club. For a time the Equity paper, the *Cooperators' Herald*, was published in Fargo. The Exchange began to grow when George S. Loftus became its sales manager in August, 1912. He was an admirer of La Follette and an aggressive, fiery enemy of the grain trade.

The Exchange and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce fought each other. The Chamber, the only market for wheat in the city, forbade its members to sell grain for the Exchange. The Exchange, in turn, instigated state and federal investigations of the Chamber. The war continued with lawsuits, violent words, and proceedings to have the Exchange declared bankrupt. In 1914 the Exchange moved to St. Paul, where business leaders promised it bank credit, a site for a terminal elevator, and a \$30,000 stock subscription. The St. Paul Grain Exchange was then established. It was expected to become a sort of farmer-controlled chamber of commerce.

Although Loftus died in 1916, the Exchange expanded rapidly. That year, it organized a livestock commission company. In 1917 it opened a \$200,000, half-million-bushel terminal elevator in St. Paul and established a second elevator in 1920. Its stockholders grew from about 7,000 in 1917 to about 17,500 in 1922. In 1918 it handled fifteen million bushels of wheat, built 21 elevators in North Dakota alone, and began to supply its members with carload-lot shipments of flour, feed, salt, potatoes, wire fencing, lumber, shingles, and groceries. It also began to purchase local elevators for use as feeders. By 1921 its capitalization had been increased to nine million dollars. It was financing the grain purchases of more than 100 independent elevators which consigned their grain to the Exchange. By 1922 it owned 80 rural elevators: 52 in North Dakota, 26 in Minnesota, and 2 in South Dakota. That distribution was most significant in revealing the leadership of North Dakota in the cooperative marketing of grain—the unifying effect of North Dakota's concentration on wheat. The Exchange was also managing some elevators for local farmers' associations.

Finally, in 1923, the Federal Trade Commission ordered the

Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce to cease and desist from interfering with, injuring, or destroying the business or reputation of the Equity Cooperative Exchange or the St. Paul Grain Exchange. But the Exchange was in bad shape. Poor business management had caused heavy losses, and on March 10, 1923, it became bankrupt and went into an operating receivership. In 1926 it was taken over by the Farmers' Union Terminal Association.

The Exchange had gone down because its managers were better fitted for agitation against the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce than for the direction of a large economic enterprise. Yet the Exchange did influence the inspection, weighing, and grading of grain on both the local and terminal markets. It did carry on the agitation for marketing reform. It did give farm leaders invaluable experience in the problems of grain marketing. Moreover, the Equity Cooperative Exchange actually began the grain-marketing and cooperative-buying enterprises which, with various reorganizations and changes in control and growth, eventually became the powerful Farmers' Union Grain Terminal Association and the Farmers' Union Central Exchange. Myron William Thatcher, who later became director of the vast operations of the Farmers' Union Grain Terminal Association, was a young auditor with the Exchange.