CHAPTER VIII

THE FARMERS ORGANIZE

The forward thrust of industry and finance tended to focus the attention of the country on the newer problems of development and to obscure the central position which agriculture continued to hold in the national economy. In numbers the farmers far exceeded any one of the four classes into which the census of 1880 divided the country's wealth producers. Out of 17,392,099 engaged in "gainful and reputable occupations" 7,670,493 were in agriculture. This was almost exactly twice as many as in manufacturing and mining and over four times as many as in trade and transportation.[1] The value of what these farmers sold, consumed and had on hand was estimated at nearly two and a quarter billion.[2]

The drive to people unsettled land, particularly in the region west of the Mississippi, resulted during the eighties in enlarging the number of farms in the United States from 4,008,907

[1] Professional and personal services accounted for 4,074,238; trade and transportation for 1,810,256; and manufacturing, mechanical and mining industries for 3,837,112. U. S. Compendium of Tenth Census (1880), pt. ii, 1343.

[2] The exact amount was $2,213,402,564. U.S. Compendium of Tenth Census, pt. i, 685.

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to 4,564,641.[1] The average farm increased in size from 133.7 acres in 1880 to 136.5 in 1890. More important was the four-per-cent gain in the amount of improved land. The contribution of the farmer to the national wealth grew by some $4,000,000,000.

Not only did agriculture provide the food supply of the nation and, to an increasing extent, of Europe, but it formed the basis of some of the country's biggest industries. Thus, in 1880, the flour and grist-mill industry stood first in the United States with a total value of over $505,000,000, and meat packing and slaughtering ranked second with an output of more than $303,500,000. ~~This~~ The milling industry was the outcome of the efforts of a few manufacturers in and near Minneapolis to make a better grade of flour with less waste of grain than had been possible by the old-fashioned method of grinding between an upper and nether millstone. The first step had been taken in 1870 with the invention of the middlings purifier, a machine for removing the thick coat between the bran covering of the wheat kernel and the stock centers.[2] But the real revolution came with the introduction of a machine for breaking the grain by rollers. The inventor of the process was John Stevens, ~~the~~ son of a Welshman who had

[1] Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the Twelfth Census (1900), 217.

[2] See Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (A History of American Life, VIII), 38-39; also W. W. Folwell, A History of Minnesota (St. Paul, 1921-1930), III, 68-69.

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brought his family to Neenah, Wisconsin, in 1854. At the age of fifteen ~~he~~ the boy had gone to work in a flour mill and from the first he ~~took~~ had taken an intelligent and critical interest in what was going on about him. Later he was able to buy an interest in the mill and became its manager. Having seen a fellow miller getting more efficient results through using rough instead of smooth stones, he began experimenting, keeping his ~~results~~ conclusions to himself until in 1880 he produced a machine in which a roller of corrugated chilled iron broke the grain. Attached to it was a valuable device for feeding in the wheat.

With this machine Stevens ~~was able to~~ could get five hundred barrels of flour where his competitors at best got two hundred. Moreover, he was able to produce ~~ninety per cent~~ as much higher proportion of "good" flour ~~and only ten of the cheaper variety instead of the usual twenty and eighty per cent~~ than they did. According to Charles A. Pillsbury, one of the greatest millers of the day,

> The old process aimed to get as much flour as possible at one grinding; the new seeks to get as little flour as possible at the first two or three breakings. . . . The old process sought to avoid middlings as far as possible, because they entailed loss of flour. The new process seeks to produce as much middlings as possible, because out of the middlings comes the high-grade "patent" flour. [1]

The country's largest milling center in 1880 was Minneapolis. Eighteen years before, when its first flour was sent out, the

[1] C. M. Depew, ed., One Hundred Years of American Commerce (N. Y., 1895), I, 270.

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product had been labeled "Muskingum Mills, Troy, Ohio — The Genuine." Nobody then had heard of Minnesota flour, and the millers feared it would be turned back if its origin were known. Presently conditions changed, however, and Minneapolis attained its preëminent position in the milling business, a position assured by the continued adoption of up-to-date processes and of energetic methods of marketing. The stencil with which the first flour made in Minnesota was marked was cut by James J. Hill out of the oil paper he used in his manifold book as a bill clerk on the levee.[1]

A new industry built on a product of the farm was glucose. Starting in the 1870's, it had developed so rapidly that by 1881 there were nineteen factories in New York, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa and Missouri with an estimated capital of $2,000,000. Together they consumed about thirty-five thousand bushels of corn a day and between eleven and twelve million a year, and they employed two thousand one hundred persons.[2] By 1884 it was estimated that the yearly manufacture and sale of glucose amounted to about ten pounds per capita. It was used chiefly in the making of table syrups, strained honey, confectionery and the cheaper grades of sugar, also as food for bees and in the manufacture of condensed milk and mucilage. With

[1] J. G. Pyle, The Life of James J. Hill (Garden City, 1917), I, 42.

[2] Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia, n.s., VI (1881), 350.

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continued expansion the glucose trust was formed in 1897 under the name of the Glucose Sugar Refining Company, including all the plants but one in the country, at a capitalization of over $40,000,000. According to the testimony of H. O. Havemeyer, head of the sugar trust, before the United States Industrial Commission, "the sirup made from glucose has virtually knocked out the consumption of refined molasses in this country."[1]

In the extraordinary increase of the national wealth the farmer felt that he was not getting his share, that too large a percentage went to the agencies which had been built up to serve him: the railroads, the banks, the marketing agencies, the industries based on his raw products. All this economic machinery bewildered and antagonized him. By habit and conviction he was deeply individualistic. He believed that the most satisfactory material results, as well as the finest individual development, came from self-reliance. Yet he saw himself growing more and more dependent upon an economic order which was yielding to a form of irresponsible collectivism. Moreover, he resented the increasing predominance of the cities whence the masters of capital and Big Business directed the course of economic conquest frequently to his disadvantage, and where the people enjoyed social and intellectual advantages denied to himself and his children.[2]

[1]U. S. Industrial Commission, Report (Wash., 1900-1902), I, 114.

[2]See A. M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City (A History of American Life, X), 58-59, 76-80.

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Once, the cycle of growing, harvesting and distributing his crop had been largely in the farmer's own hands. He understood its problems -- bad years, inefficient labor, wayward sons -- and he had learned in a practical way to deal with them. He had hauled his produce to town where in the open market he traded it in and returned home with the fruit of his labor in calico, sugar, seeds, new implements. It was an intimate, personal process which gave him a sense of adequacy and control. Now all this was over. His market was made elsewhere and with its making he had nothing to do. His prices rose and fell according to the operations of those whom he considered gamblers. By what right did James R. Keene and his associates attempt a corner in wheat in Chicago? Though it failed with great loss to the manipulators, why should they be allowed to juggle what he had produced? How did the farmer benefit when Armour & Company in the same year 1880 cornered his pork, controlling the supply for months to reap huge profits in the fall?[1]

For a similar reason he distrusted the railroads. During rate wars they carried his produce at a loss to themselves, but when they effected an agreement, it usually entailed a loss to him. Moreover, the instability of rates was unsettling to the marketing of his crops. He was coming to look on the railroad as his enemy, not as the friend he had expected it to be in the

[1] Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia, n.s., V (1880), 126.

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days when the government aided it with huge ~~great~~ grants of land, presumably for his benefit. Particularly did he fear the steady consolidation of the roads into systems by which one man or group of men controlled the transportation and trade of a great area.

Only less was the farmer disturbed by the newly formed industrial combinations which handled many of the necessaries of his life. He saw with anxiety that this process of consolidation was beginning to touch the small neighborhood crafts on which he had depended. The grist mill was being put out of business by the great milling centers. The number of carpenter shops, of cooper shops, of blacksmith shops, decreased under his eyes.[1] At the same time he saw the number of middlemen multiply. On them he blamed, in part, the high prices he was obliged to pay for the manufactured articles which he and his family needed. In all this the farmer sensed a concentration, in fewer and fewer hands, of the growing wealth of ~~his~~ the community, and he feared power in wealth even as he feared it in government.

The growing restlessness of farm dwellers deeply troubled him: the ease with which his neighbors sold out, moved west or south, went into new deals and new places, gave up the land for the factory, the country for the town.[2] Something was wrong

[1] U. S. Compendium of Tenth Census, pt. ii, 926-927.

[2] On the trend to the city, see Schlesinger, Rise of the City, 57, 60-64, 67-72, 76.

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when a whole countryside was abandoned, as sometimes happened, and rural communities were left to fall apart. The waste involved in the breaking up of traditional ways, the change, the instability of men, disturbed the thoughtful. They had been reared to what Horace Bushnell called

> a closely guided habit of economy. Harnessed all together into the producing process, young and old, male and female, from the boy that rode the plow-horse to the grandmother knitting under her spectacles, they had no conception of squandering lightly what they all had been at work, thread by thread and grain by grain, to produce.[1]

Yet such conditions were the inevitable outcome of the economic burdens which every year bore more heavily on the farmer's shoulders.[2] Because of the enormous expansion of Western agriculture and of stiffer competition in the world's markets with the grain-growing regions of Russia, Australia and the Argentine, farm prices fell disastrously during the eighties. Much the same thing held true of Southern cotton which had now to compete with cotton raised in India and elsewhere. Corn, which commanded 63 cents a bushel in 1881, sold for 28 in 1890. Wheat averaged but 73 cents a bushel from 1883 to 1889. Cotton fell from 15 cents in the period 1870-1873 to about 8 in 1886-1889. Overproduction as an explanation of the farmer's ills was cold comfort. He could not well adjust his production to

[1] Horace Bushnell, "Work and Play," C. D. Warner, ed., Library of the World's Best Literature (N. Y., 1896-1898), V, 2921.

[2] J. D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt (Minneapolis, 1931), 55-60.

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market needs as could the Standard Oil Company or the cordage trust. On the contrary, he urged that no real overproduction existed when low prices caused farmers to burn corn for fuel though at the same time thousands of people elsewhere were facing hunger and even starvation.

To carry on his business, the farmer found it increasingly difficult to obtain money at what seemed to him reasonable rates of interest. Obliged to borrow in the spring to put in his crop, he claimed that short-term credits cost him more than they did other wealth producers such as the railroads and industries. If he had not been heavily mortgaged, the cost of money while he was growing his cotton or corn or wheat would have been less of a burden, but in certain states the weight of debt was mounting alarmingly. By 1890 the majority (64.4 per cent) of Kansas farms were mortgaged up to 38 per cent of their value, and their owners were sweating under interest rates averaging 8.1 per cent. It is not remarkable that a large increase in tenant farmers occurred. Though no other state was quite so deep in debt as Kansas, there were several where the situation was threatening. In Minnesota 46.4 per cent of the farmers carried mortgages at 8.2 per cent; in Iowa 53.8 per cent of the farmers paid an average interest charge of 7.3 per cent.

The New York Evening Post ascribed the Western predicament to "a credit system which enables farmers to borrow heavily

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where tradesmen in like circumstances cannot. Such borrowers take the chances . . . ."[1] Yet conditions not unlike existed in certain parts of the East. Vermont, Massachusetts and New Jersey farmers carried almost as many mortgages as those in the Western states named, but at a lower interest charge, under six per cent. A similar situation prevailed in the cotton-growing South where the crop-lien system constituted the chief mortgage evil.[2] In the words of a song widely sung by distressed Southern farmers,

10 solid centered longest line

My husband came from town last night
As sad as man could be,
His wagon empty, cotton gone,
And not a dime had he.

#

Huzzah -- Huzzah
'Tis queer I do declare:
We make the clothes for all the world,
But few we have to wear.

Gradually the farmer was driven to the conclusion that it was necessary for him to ~~must~~ take things into his own hands and seek to regain control of the essential factors in his problem. To do this he must employ the principle that the railroads and industries were using to such good effect: ~~there must be a~~ national consolidation ~~of farmers.~~ In a sense, the makings of such a national union already existed in the Grange, which had been powerful in the mid-seventies;[3] but by 1878 this once popular body was

[1]Editorial digest of the report on farm mortgages made by the Eleventh Census, N. Y. Evening Post, Sept. 6, 1893.

[2]See Schlesinger, Rise of the City, 6-8.

[3]Nevins, Emergence of Modern America, 169-173, 176-177, 371-372.

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beginning to be replaced in many sections by more radical organizations known as Alliances. The first of these had been formed in 1875 in Lampasas County, Texas, originally for the purpose of protecting farmers against the depredations of horse and cattle thieves. Similar alliances later started in other parts of the state, and in 1880 these groups coalesced and were chartered under the name of the Texas Farmers' State Alliance. Spreading rapidly over the state, it united in 1887 with the Farmers' Union of Louisiana to form the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union of America. Into this new body soon came alliances which had been forming in ten or more other states of the South and Southwest.[1]

In 1889 a merger was effected with the Agricultural Wheel and the name changed to Farmers' and Laborers' Union of America, though popularly the organization was known as the Southern Alliance. Begun in 1882 by W. W. Tedford, a farmer and school-teacher, the Agricultural Wheel had increased rapidly in membership and in 1886 had launched the National Agricultural Wheel.[2] The constitution of the merger was general and theoretical with no more specific demand than "equal rights to ~~for~~

1 ~~Nevins, Emergence of Modern America, 169-173, 176-177, 371-372.~~

1/ S. J. Buck, The Granger Movement (Harvard Hist. Studies, XIX), 302-304.

2/ N. B. Ashby, The Riddle of the Sphinx (Des Moines, 1890), 439-440.

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all and special favors to none," no more direct pledge than to "suppress personal, local, sectional, and national prejudices, all unhealthy rivalry and all selfish ambitions" -- in which pledge no doubt it was expressing its opinion as to what had made earlier efforts of the alliances no more successful than they had been.[1] The leaders, however, had pretty definite notions of what needed to be done to improve farm conditions.

Meanwhile, in the Northwest, there had developed a similar movement. The National Farmers' Alliance, or Northern Alliance, as it was generally called, began with a local organization formed in Chicago in April, 1880, by Milton George, editor of the Western Rural, an aggressive farm journal.[2] By October the movement had so spread that it was possible to hold a convention in Chicago to which five hundred representatives came from various local alliances, farmers' clubs and granges.[3] The gathering drafted a constitution declaring that its object was to unite the farmers of the United States against "class legislation, and the encroachments of concentrated capital, and the tyranny of monopoly; . . . to oppose, in our respective political parties, the election of any candidate to office,

1 Ashby, Riddle of the Sphinx, 441-442.

2 Hicks, Populist Revolt, 98-104.

3 ~~Ashby, Riddle of the Sphinx, 407-410.~~

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State or national, who is not thoroughly in sympathy with the farmer(s) interests...."[1] Though growing sporadically for a few years, the Alliance profited greatly from the agricultural depression of the late eighties and became a power to be reckoned with throughout the whole Northwest.

From the beginning the state Alliances accepted coöperation as the one practical method of escaping the middleman whom they charged with taking an unfair percentage of their profits and overcharging for commodities sold over the counter. The Texas Alliance first tried a plan called the contract store. A committee of trusted members in each county made a contract with a chosen merchant by which he agreed to sell at a discount to Alliance members on condition that they would buy only from him.[2] The result, in most cases, was price-cutting warfare against the contract store by those merchants of a community who had built up a farmer trade largely by means of direct barter coupled with credit and cash advances. The merchants felt it a violation of an established relation. The consequence too often was that the farmers, tempted by lower prices, deserted the contract store.

In 1886, after a year's trial, the plan was abandoned, and the Texas Alliance advised the farmers within each county to eliminate the middlemen ~~entirely~~ by coöperating in the sale

[1] Ashby, Riddle of the Sphinx, 407-408.

[2] Edward Wiest, Agricultural Organization in the United States (Univ. of Kentucky, Studies, II), 464.

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l.c. of their products. Growers were to turn over to Alliance cotton yards their entire crop, and sale days were fixed when it was expected city buyers would compete against one another and bid up the price. But the buyers did not like the new attempt at coöperation any better than the merchants had the contract store. So few of them attended on sale days that at the end of the season large stores of cotton remained on hand.[1]

This unanticipated outcome proved less discouraging than it might otherwise have been because by this time the Texas Alliance had a new idea, that of selling cotton direct to the mills. This notion had originated with C. W. Macune, chairman of l.c. the executive committee of the state Alliance. A reflective, self-educated man, he had seen enough of conditions as a farm laborer in ~~various~~ the Far and Middle West to persuade him that the only hope for profitable ~~agricultural operation~~ farming lay in coöperation. Macune now went to New England, and, after discussing the scheme with mill owners in Fall River and Boston, he ~~went back~~ returned convinced that his plan was sound, but that in order to succeed it must be carried out on a large scale. He proposed an organization called the Farmers' Alliance Exchange of Texas with a capital of $500,000, to be paid in installments. With this money the buildings and equipment necessary for the enterprise were to be provided, together with supplies sufficient to carry the farmer until his crop was ready to be sold.

[1] Wiest, Agricultural Organization, 465.

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The cotton merchants who had been accustomed to advancing money to growers, taking mortgages on the crop, did not abandon business because of the proposed Alliance Exchange. In fact, they made so many contracts with their old customers that it was crippled from the start. The first installment of the $500,000 amounted to but $56,000 in cash and $40,000 in notes. It was not enough properly to finance the plan; and although Macune did his best to rally the farmers and to convince the banks that the future of the Alliance Exchange provided adequate security, he was unable to obtain the loans he needed. The exchange opened its doors in September, 1887; within twenty months it had gone to pieces. Like the earlier coöperative undertakings, it failed because it lacked proper preparation and a sound financial foundation and did too much business on a credit basis.[1] In the opinion of W. S. Morgan, of the Agricultural Wheel, the farmers needed further education in coöperation before the movement could succeed.[2]

The coöperative efforts of other state alliances were very like those of Texas and, when they failed, it usually was for the same reasons. The "Macune business system" spread until in 1890 it had been ~~organized in~~ introduced into eighteen states. Not all these

1 Wiest, Agricultural Organization, 466-467; Hicks, Populist Revolt, 134-137.

2 W. S. Morgan, History of the Wheel and Alliance, and the Impending Revolution (St. Louis, 1891), 97, 204, 246.

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attempts were as short-lived as the parent exchange. That in Georgia operated successfully until 1893.[1]

The disappointing results of coöperation turned the thoughts of the organized farmers more and more to political measures as a means of securing relief. A long period of drought, beginning in 1887 and attended by infestations of chinch bugs, brought fresh despair to the farming population and prepared the way for more decisive action.[2] In 1889 representatives of the Northern and Southern Alliances met for the purpose of uniting.[3] For a number of reasons, however, the plan came to naught. The Southern Alliance was secret and wanted to remain so; the Northern was open to all. The Southern Alliance wanted a complete merger, the Northern a federation. There was, besides, a difference of opinion as yet as to the extent of political activity which was wise. A surviving sectional antagonism also contributed to a lack of complete understanding. Nevertheless the gathering made the leaders better acquainted with one another and emphasized the common purposes which the two groups were aiming to achieve.

The pressure for political participation grew constantly stronger. Thus in April, 1890, the United States Supreme Court

[1]Hicks, Populist Revolt, 137-140.

[2]Hicks, Populist Revolt, 30-31.

[3]Hicks, Populist Revolt, 113-127.

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in the Minnesota Rate case decided that state commissions and state legislatures had no unrestricted right to fix rates even for railroads within state borders, for the final determination as to the reasonableness of charges lay with the courts.[1] The decision came while the executive committee of the Minnesota Alliance was in session. It meant "the subjection of the people and the states to the unlimited control of the railroad corporations of this country," declared the committee, and a resolution was adopted to the effect that the Alliance would "appeal from this second Dred Scott decision to the people of the nation . . . with a request that they unite with us in an effort to so amend the constitution as to abolish this new slavery."[2]

l.c.

By the end of the year the Southern Alliance had promulgated a list of measures which it proposed to demand of the existing parties. This program included the free and unlimited coinage of silver, an increase of circulating medium to not less than fifty dollars a person, abolition of the national banks, the establishment of subtreasuries for granting easier credit to farmers and others, legislation against stock-market speculation, a graduated income tax, stricter regulation

1 Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Co. v. Minnesota, 134 U. S. Reports, 418.

2 F. M. Drew, "The Present Farmers' Movement," Polit. Sci. Quar., VI, 300.

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of railroads or government ownership, and the popular election of United States senators.[1]

These demands were, in the main, agreed to by all other Agrarian groups, including the Grange, the Northern Alliance and the Colored Alliance.[2]

By leaders of the old parties the organized farmers were regarded as "hayseed socialists" and their list of demands as crack-brained and visionary. No item on their program caused more excited protest than the subtreasury scheme. By means of this agency the farmer would store his nonperishable crop with the government, and receive in return legal-tender certificates up to four fifths of its value, for which he would pay interest at one or two per cent a year. He would negotiate and sell these certificates "whenever the current price suited him, receiving from the person to whom he sold, only the difference between the price agreed upon and the amount already paid by the sub-treasurer."[3] The St. Paul Pioneer Press called the scheme a "transcendent absurdity." It would be as practical "to level the Rocky Mountain Range and spread the material all over the Mississippi Valley." The New York Commercial Advertiser

[1] The so-called Ocala demands, adopted in December, 1890. Hicks, Populist Revolt, 430-431.

[2] See table in Drew, "Present Farmers' Movement," 295.

[3] Morgan, History of the Wheel and Alliance, 180-181. Morgan was a member of the monetary committee which devised the subtreasury scheme.

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did not know which proposal was the madder, the subtreasury or government ownership of railroads.[1]

The embattled farmers, stung by the ridicule of the press and of the leaders of the major parties, decided in the elections of 1890 to support only those candidates who would back the Alliance demands. The center of the agitation, the political whirlwind of the movement, was Kansas. The Kansas Alliance, organized in 1888, had at first resisted the effort to turn it to political action, but it was soon swept off its feet. One of the historians of the upheaval declares that what struck Kansas in 1890 was not a political campaign but a religious revival.[2] No one expressed this crusading fervor better than Mrs. Mary E. Lease. Born in Ireland and educated in New York, she had gone to Kansas in 1873 when she was nineteen. In 1885 she was admitted to the bar, and in 1890 joined the Farmers' Alliance Lecture Bureau, being more in demand than any other speaker. During the summer and fall she made more than a hundred and sixty speeches to immense audiences. "What you farmers need to do is to raise less corn and more HELL," was her reiterated message. "We wiped out slavery," she shouted,

> and by our tariff laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the

[1] "The Farmers' Alliance," Public Opinion, IX, 408 (Aug. 9, 1890).

[2] Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," W. E. Connelly, ed., A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans (Chicago, 1918), II, 1148.

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> first. Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street. The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East. . . . The parties lie to us and political speakers mislead us. . . . We want money, land and transportation. We want the abolition of the National Banks, and we want the power to make loans direct from the Government. We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. . . . The people are at bay, let the blood-hounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware. [1]

Each of the farm states had its leader. Next to Mrs. Lease perhaps the most picturesque was Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota, a talented, oratorical and witty man of Irish stock. Born in Philadelphia, he had gone to Minnesota in time to suffer the full effects of the Panic of 1857. Turning from real-estate promotion and the law, he entered antislavery politics and served three terms in Congress as a Republican during and after the war. Later he joined one after another of the revolting farmer groups: the Grangers, the Greenbackers and, in 1884, the Farmers' Alliance.[2] Schooled in a knowledge of the farmers' grievances and adept at argument and denunciation, he was everywhere greeted by vast crowds who listened to him with conviction.

1 Barr, "Populist Uprising," 1150-1151.

2 J. D. Hicks, "Ignatius Donnelly," Dictionary of Am. Biog., V, 369-371. For his inverted Utopian novel Caesar's Column, see Schlesinger, Rise of the City, 262.

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While Mrs. Lease was firing Kansas and Donnelly Minnesota, l.c./ Alliance orators were carrying on effective campaigns elsewhere. l.c./ In Nebraska a People's Independent Party, made up of the Farmers' Alliance, the Grange and the Knights of Labor, elected a majority of the state senate and half the lower house in 1890. In l.c./ Florida, Georgia and North and South Carolina the Alliance l.c./ captured the Democratic party. Kansas chose five Alliance congressmen and a United States senator, while Minnesota l.c./ elected one Alliance congressman and South Dakota a United States senator.[1] It was a rich harvest. Not since 1856 had there been so real a chance to form a new liberal party.

The farmers' grievances were genuine even if the manner of statement was exaggerated and violent, often to the point of absurdity. It was a fact that the machinery of the economic order favored industry, finance and the railroads at the expense of agriculture. The government alone had it in its power to restore a just balance; therefore the farmers felt they must control the government. Resistance to their demands by the old parties showed that this could be done only by forming a new party. When a call was issued to the leading farmers' organizations, the Union and Confederate soldiers and the Knights

1 F. E. Haynes, Third Party Movements Since the Civil War (Iowa City, 1916), 236-245.

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of Labor to attend a conference at Cincinnati in 189[illegible], one thousand four hundred delegates appeared.[1]

This body organized the People's party and, in the next year, held a mammoth convention at Omaha to select a presidential ticket. Many of the delegates would have been glad to have as their presidential candidate Judge Walter Q. Gresham, an Illinois Republican who had been an outspoken liberal since 1854 when he had been run out of the Whig party because of opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill. After the war he had actively opposed the spoils system and the protective tariff, and as a federal circuit judge had shown his independence by removing from the receivership of the Wabash Railroad a man who was believed to be a representative of Jay Gould. Gresham was given an unofficial tender of the Populist nomination; but, being at heart a hard-money man, he declined it. The convention then turned to James B. Weaver, an Iowa lawyer who, like Judge Gresham, had fought in the Civil War. Originally a Republican, Weaver had been an early leader of the Prohibitionists, and in 1877 had joined the Greenback party, serving as its representative in Congress for several terms.[2] In 1880 he had been its presidential candidate. His change to Populism

1 Haynes, Third Party Movements, 246-247.

2 F. E. Haynes, James Baird Weaver (Iowa City, 1919), chaps. vi-xiv.

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was natural, for the new movement included most of the old Greenbackers. For second place on the ticket the convention chose James G. Field of Virginia.

The platform, written in part by Ignatius Donnelly, contained a flaming denunciation of the abuses of capitalism:

> The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes of tramps and millionaires. [1]

As cures for this condition the party offered free silver, the subtreasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, a graduated income tax, government ownership of railways, telegraphs and telephones, restriction of "undesirable" immigration, a shorter work day for urban wage-earners and the popular election of senators.

The extent to which the Populists frightened the Republicans and Democrats can be seen from statements included in their platforms.[2] On the money question the Democrats declared: "We hold to the use of both gold and silver as the standard money of the country . . . . We insist upon this policy as especially necessary for the protection of the farmers and laboring classes . . . ." In a similar spirit the Republicans asserted:

[1] Edward Stanwood, A History of the Presidency from 1788 to 1897 (Boston, 1898), 509-513.

[2] Stanwood, History of the Presidency, 494-504.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

"The American people, from tradition and interest, favor bimetallism, and the Republican party demands the use of both gold and silver as standard money . . . ." Both parties eagerly claimed for themselves the rôle of champion of the oppressed, opposed unrestricted immigration and pledged their earnest efforts against the exactions of trusts and combinations. Their main interest, however, was the tariff question, which they represented as involving the vital interests of the masses. The nomination of the protectionist, Benjamin Harrison, by the Republicans and of the "free trader," Grover Cleveland, by the Democrats made this the paramount issue in the campaign.

To the Populists, however, the emphasis upon this question represented the usual game of the old parties "to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff . . . ."[1] As far as the revolting farmers and wage-earners were concerned, their ties with the major parties were broken. Exultantly they conducted their campaign to the tune of the old song, "Good-bye, My Lover, Good-bye," the chorus running:

10 solid l.c.

> Bye, party, bye, lo; bye, party, bye, lo;
> Bye, party, bye, lo; Good-bye, my party, good-bye.[2]

[1] Stanwood, History of Presidency, 510.

[2] Hicks, Populist Revolt, 169.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

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The outcome of the election demonstrated impressively the extent of the agrarian unrest. The Populists polled over a million popular votes. Moreover, for the first time since 1860, a third party secured electoral votes -- 22 out of a total of 444.[1] In addition it elected five United States senators, ten congressmen, fifty state officials and one thousand five hundred county officials and members of the state legislature. Small wonder that Weaver was happy over the results. "Unaided by money," he wrote, "our grand young party has made an enviable record and achieved surprising success at the polls."[2] But the old-party leaders anxiously asked themselves: what of the future?

[1] Haynes, James Baird Weaver, 335-338.

[2] Haynes, Third Party Movements, 270.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.