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Hubert L. Gaston

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THE
NONPARTISAN LEAGUE

BY
HERBERT E. GASTON



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PREFACE

THE National Nonpartisan League, the organization of western farmers of which A. C. Townley is the founder, has lived long enough and has accomplished enough so that its career will form a genuine historic episode, the record of which, no matter what may be its future, will find a place in the permanent records of the nation. The League and its leader have attained some prominence throughout the nation and a respectable quantity of publicity. Some of this has been propaganda, with a tendency to be eulogistic, but far more has been written from a standpoint of sneering cynicism or sharp hostility. Most of the material so published has been hastily prepared and vague, particularly from the historical point of view. There have been a number of "books" on the Nonpartisan League, all of which, so far as they have come to the present writer's attention, have been works of mere counter-propaganda, circulated at the expense of political or other organizations opposing the League.

It is the intention of this volume in the main merely to tell the story of the foundation and growth of this extraordinary political organization, and in so doing to give the reader a basis upon which he may construct his own estimate of

the importance of the organization as a political and social movement; may form his own judgment as to whether it is a "menace" or a "hope," and may make his own predictions as to its future.

Three years' employment on the publications controlled by the League have kept the writer in close touch with the main events of the organization's life, and enable him to write from a sympathetic standpoint. The organization—any organization or institution, in fact—to be understood must be seen, to a certain extent from the inside; and it is useless and foolish to form judgments without understanding. With this warning the reader may be on his guard, if he wishes, and detach himself from the author's viewpoint from the start, but he may be assured of a conscientious effort to make a faithful report of facts of essential interest.

H. E. G.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<p>I.—THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE—WHAT IT IS</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">Where and how it came into being: its present extent and “program.”</p>	1
<p>II.—NORTH DAKOTA</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The soil in which the movement grew; its background and political antecedents.</p>	8
<p>III.—SEEDS OF REBELLION</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The farmers’ grievances; obstacles to co-operation; the remedy proposed.</p>	15
<p>IV.—BREAKING GROUND</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">“Agitators” at work; “better farming” and the fifty-five millions; the Equity and Loftus; farmers on the warpath.</p>	24
<p>V.—TERMINAL ELEVATORS</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">Miracles in grain mixing; a socialistic bankers’ association; the legislature disobeys.</p>	36
<p>VI.—THE LEADER FOR THE OCCASION</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">Introducing A. C. Townley, farm boy and dreamer; flax adventures; bankruptcy and a mission.</p>	45
<p>VII.—APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The great idea and how it was put to work; a program, a committee and a financial plan; psychology in action.</p>	55
<p>VIII.—“SIX-DOLLAR SUCKERS”</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">Setting the “prairie fire”; the press discerns a menace; postdated checks.</p>	65
<p>IX.—PUBLICITY</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">Early days of the <i>Nonpartisan Leader</i> and its part in the scheme of action.</p>	73
<p>X.—THE ENEMY OPENS FIRE</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The daily press and the League; how the critics were answered; political revivals.</p>	81

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI.—CHOOSING THE CANDIDATES	93
Farmers try a new game; county and state conventions and "a real farmer for governor."	
XII.—THE FIRST CAMPAIGN	110
Oil poured on the fire; picnics and politics; the country comes through; the court makes an issue; the first great victory.	
XIII.—LEAGUERS IN POWER	129
Hayseeds at the capital; the caucus, House Bill 44 and the obstructive "Old Gang"; some farmers' legislation.	
XIV.—THE LEAGUE BECOMES "NATIONAL"	156
Programs and propaganda in a dozen states; a national headquarters and a huge job ahead.	
XV.—WAR ISSUES	173
The farmer and war's burdens; Townley on "Conscription of Wealth"; new arguments for the opposition; the League's stand on the secret treaties.	
XVI.—PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS	197
A memorable conference and what came of it; "Why not fix some other prices?"; the perils of protest in wartime.	
XVII.—"PATRIOTEERING"	217
The League's enemies rally behind the flag; publicity gives way to violence; some specific instances.	
XVIII.—GROWTH AND POWER	237
Rapid increase in numbers; some League enterprises; Townley and his big job; diplomatic relations.	
XIX.—THE SECOND BIG BATTLE	252
Preparations for the campaign of 1918; the "loyalty" issue; campaign experiences and election results.	
XX.—LEAGUE DEMOCRACY AT WORK	269
North Dakota's farmer administration and its war record; going ahead with the "program"; victory again.	

CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI.—“THE NEW DAY IN NORTH DAKOTA”	284
Legislation enacted at the 1919 North Dakota session; a plan for making a legislature operate; the farmers' own laws in effect; state mills and elevators, a state bank, homes for workers.	
XXII.—ANOTHER CRISIS PASSED	303
Deserters make trouble; a “League bank” is closed and re-opens—Governor Frazier keeps the coal mines open.	
XXIII.—ORGANIZATION CHANGES	313
The League acquires wider notice; greater responsibility is transferred to membership.	
XXIV.—SURVEY AND FORECAST	319

THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE

CHAPTER I

THE NONPARTISAN LEAGUE—WHAT IT IS

THE National Nonpartisan League is an organization claiming a membership of approximately 200,000 persons in thirteen western states. With the exception of Wisconsin all of these states lie west of the Mississippi river. They are: North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas and Wisconsin.

It is entirely and exclusively a farmers' organization. It is, moreover, an organization of working farmers. Its entire membership, with very few exceptions, consists of men who are themselves living on and operating their own or rented farms. It is not a landlords' organization, but an organization of men working their living out of the soil, usually by the labor of their own hands. In its membership are a few owners of fairly extensive acreage, but these are the exception. Mostly it consists of the average working farmer on land on which he and his family do the bulk of the work. In the small grain growing states in

which the League is most active, this generally means a farm from a quarter section of 160 acres to a full section.

The order in which the states making up the League membership are given above pictures approximately its progress. But in the consideration of the League as a political phenomenon North Dakota is more important than all of the others together.

It was in North Dakota that the League was conceived and brought to life. It is in North Dakota that the League's political "program" is being enacted into law. North Dakota conditions and North Dakota psychology are in large part responsible for the League's existence. It was in North Dakota that Arthur C. Townley, founder, builder and directing genius, had the experiences and matured the philosophy that started him on this adventure.

Townley himself is a driving force—a motive power. One cannot speak of him accurately as merely a "pilot" or a "guide"; nor can one understand the League and its growth merely by an investigation of the conditions under which it was born and grew, without taking the personality of Townley fully into account. The League's philosophy is in the main his philosophy; the League's "program" is in the main his program. Yet both philosophy and concrete political program none the less faithfully represent the attitude of mind and reflect the aims and the hopes

of the great body of farmers making up the League.

This is because Townley himself is the product of the conditions and the atmosphere in which the body of the membership dwell. If he has had a large part in directing the current of their political thinking it is due mainly to his more intense meditation on the same pictures of life and the same conceptions. And with him action to give expression and momentum to his opinions was more urgent.

Thus it happens that the story of the League must be in part a picture of political and social conditions in North Dakota—as typical, probably, of the conditions in rural sections of many western states, and in part also a biography of the man who is the unquestioned leader of the movement.

In its early days in North Dakota the League was known as "The Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League." Later the words "Farmers" and "Political" were dropped from the title and it became simply "The Nonpartisan League," which expanded into "National Nonpartisan League" early in 1917, when the organization became openly active in states outside North Dakota.

In spite of the modifications of its name, however, the League has remained purely a political organization and purely an organization of farmers. Its expressed objects are to make gov-

ernment actually and fully responsive to the wishes of the "common people" and to secure economic relief for exploited and oppressed classes—primarily the farmers—through political action.

It has been freely and frequently charged that the League is "Socialistic," that it is an organization manned and led by Socialists, that Townley himself is a socialist, and that the whole movement is a plan to foist disguised Socialism onto the states and the nation. The League has never concerned itself to any extent with combatting these charges, nor has it sought to deny that among its organizers and speakers there have been at various times men who at one time or another had enrolled themselves in the Socialist movement. It has had also in responsible positions men who have never subscribed to the Socialist theories. Obviously, the League leaders' reason for ignoring the charge of Socialism lies in the fact that there have been no hidden mysteries in the League's program of action, and it has been their boast that the western American farmer is a hard-headed individual, confident of his own ability to value the particular thing that is presented to him and not likely to be frightened by names.

Actually, of course, it is apparent that there is a gulf wide and deep between Socialism as it manifests itself in America and the Nonpartisan League. Socialism is a propagandum of protest

and a theory of a future state. Admitting the truth of a considerable part of the Socialists' indictment of our industrial system, the League has proposed orderly, progressive steps to remove the grounds of protest. It presents no wide and all-embracing scheme of philosophy with which to divide even advanced theorists. It merely suggests that a few simple things be done now. The "program" of the League takes it out of the arena of theory into the fields of fact and action.

Like many other people, but to a greater degree than most, the farmer is little interested in abstract theory and in general campaigns of protest. He is intensely interested in action. He is willing to spend money and to exert himself to improve his lot, and he is capable of not a little expenditure of wealth and effort to improve the lot of others.

The League has presented from the start a program of action. It has held always before its members and those whom it has solicited for membership the prospect of definite, practicable accomplishment. It has asked men to get together and to contribute for a particular purpose. If it stirred protest against existing conditions, it was always with the prospect held out and the road shown—as the League promoters viewed it—of how conditions could be improved and evils banished.

The "program" of the League in North Dakota dealt in the main with proposals for state owner-

ship of industrial enterprises. These included state-owned "terminal" grain elevators, flour mills, packing houses and cold storage plants. There was a proposal for a new system of grain grading to be controlled by the state, a proposal for state hail insurance on an acreage tax basis, a proposal to exempt farm improvements from taxation—an approach to the single tax theory—and a proposal for "rural credit banks" operated at cost.

It will be difficult to discern in these simple and not entirely novel proposals an explanation of the sudden rise and rapid sweep into a power of a great new popular movement. The proposals themselves do not, in fact, explain the movement.

These are but necessary items in a program of proposed accomplishment by a newly built organization. The vital thing was the creation and the existence of the organization itself. That was, in fact, something new, and built upon new lines.

Regarded as a political party, the League is one in which every member is a contributor and to which all contribute equally. It is a party which, foregoing the conventional methods of levying large contributions on those wealthy individuals and corporations wishing to court the favor of the party and the officials whom it may select, and of making candidates pay for the offices to which they may be elected, goes directly to its ordinary membership for all its budget of expenses.

It is the only strictly political organization ever

formed in the United States, it would appear, which has adopted the principle of uniform dues and paid memberships as a means of financing political activity. It is probably the only political organization which ever adopted commercial methods of salesmanship by solicitors working on salary and commissions, for enrolling its membership.

The League idea has not been merely "taken up" by the northwestern farmers. It has been "sold" to them. Practical salesmanship, a program of immediate and forceful action and the use of the Ford automobile are the factors principally explaining the rise of the Nonpartisan League. "An idea, a Ford and sixteen dollars" built the Nonpartisan League, Townley himself has said.

CHAPTER II

NORTH DAKOTA

NORTH DAKOTA for years had been a tight little commonwealth, neatly controlled by men whose business was politics. It took some pride in the fact that it had a "boss" whose name was celebrated from coast to coast. His name was Alexander McKenzie. He was a young man in the frontier days when Bismarck was the western terminus of the Northern Pacific railroad and the gateway to the riches of Montana. From Bismarck, the rails' end, the argonauts embarked on a river steamer, which labored up the broad waters of the Missouri to Fort Benton, in the shadow of the great mountains.

McKenzie was among the adventurers, handy men of many trades, who pre-empted townsites in the path of empire and gathered toll of the riches that poured in and out. Those pioneer days are recent in North Dakota; so recent that many participants live to tell of them. McKenzie himself, first and only undisputed "boss," is still active in the Northwest as a railroad contractor. It was to the railroads that McKenzie was supposed to owe the larger portion of the power which he exercised over legislatures and public officials;

and they, in turn, no doubt found the simplicity of government in North Dakota a convenience in dealing with the state.

Agrarian political movements had never made great headway in North Dakota. This can be most easily explained by the composite character of the population. North Dakota's first settlements were in the lower Red River valley, at the extreme northeastern corner of the state. Into this section came men of Scotch, English and Irish birth or descent from Canada. The reversal of this current of immigration has come only in very recent years. Adventurous farmers of American birth followed the Northern Pacific railroad into the state, partially settled the Red River valley and followed the line of the railroad across the broad prairies to the Missouri. The biggest single element of the population, however, were the Norwegians, some of whom were among the first permanent farming settlers in the fertile Red River valley, to be followed quickly by large numbers of their fellow-countrymen, many coming directly from the old country and others after short sojourns in more thickly settled states further east. Minnesota had been heavily colonized by Swedes. The Norwegians, by common consent, seemed to choose North Dakota for their own.

They were a race peculiarly fit to win the really heroic struggle to open up a state in which the natural obstacles to success were so strong. It needed tough and hardy men and sturdy women

to meet the great demands for physical strength and endurance in breaking sod and sowing and reaping crops through the short and intense growing season. It needed people accustomed to privation to exist in a country whose revenue must come from small grains exclusively, and where the food must be both slender and simple. To face the long, severe winter in a sod shelter or flimsy board shack was a test of hardihood and endurance that only the real pioneering spirit, reinforced by physiques accustomed to rigorous climates, could survive. The men of the north were physically fitted to meet the test. It is a high compliment to the spirit of the native Americans that so many of them also were able to triumph over the difficulties of pioneer days.

Settlement and development of the state has robbed the long winter of many of its terrors, so that it is easy to forget what it meant to the pioneers to be prisoners in a shanty many miles from the nearest neighbor, perhaps fifty miles from the nearest trading point, with no swifter means of travel than horses and a rude sleigh, and with food supplies reduced sometimes to a sack of wheat to be ground in a hand mill and made into "mush" or a coarse bread. A blizzard which would make travel on the prairie roads as impossible as navigating the ocean in storm in a small boat, was always an impending danger, while candles, oil lamps and crude stoves and

chimneys made the prospect of fire a constant terror.

A picture of these conditions is worth while as a light on the character of the population that has developed and as a guide to their psychology. One effect was to generate a common sympathy between all elements of the population. Facing these common perils, neighbors—even if twenty to thirty miles apart—took far more thought of character than of nativity. Nowhere in the nation will one find today less of the tendency for men to draw apart because one speaks in broken English with fantastic mispronunciations, while the other is a descendant of a long line of native Americans. Courage, honesty, industry and ability earned dignity and respect; among pioneers nativity and past social standing counted for little.

Possibly it could well be argued that in such conditions men came closer to the traditional spirit of Americanism than in any community in which growth in population and industry, immigration and unequal material prosperity have built layer upon layer of social strata, and where an aristocracy develops that bases its claims upon wealth or the achievements of past generations.

Though racial barriers are soon leveled in the neighborly relations of pioneers, political community of interest does not so quickly develop. This is certain to be true in any state in which settlement is rapid and all but a few feel them-

selves, for many years, to be newcomers. Nor can men all of whose physical and mental resources are used in the struggle for existence give much thought to the problems of politics. It was not in reason for them to see in the political manipulations of pioneer days any very close relation to their own welfare. They were intent upon their own problem of living. It was naturally true, also, that the foreign-born element felt a justifiable diffidence about asserting themselves politically, a feeling akin to the natural modesty of a newcomer in any organization, who thinks it a matter of propriety to get acquainted with his fellows and with conditions before asserting himself.

It was natural that the native American stock held office and dictated political affairs to an extent out of proportion to their numbers, and it was also natural that the office-holders and those politically active—the latter more than the former—were from the towns of the state in a much higher relative proportion than from the farms. This development has an intimate relation to the history of the League and requires discussion later.

The Germans and "German-Russians" later formed a considerable fourth element in the population. It consisted mainly of a peasant class from western Russia, speaking mostly the German language, and a considerable number of East Prussian Germans. They settled largely in the

south-central and southwestern parts of the state, near the Missouri river. Their tendency has been to settle in colonies and to keep rather closely to themselves, with their own churches, priests of their own nationality, their own banks and their own merchants. Such communities lend themselves very readily to the boss system in politics with very little active political interest on the part of voters themselves. The influence of their churches has always been freely exercised in political matters.

It is thus easily seen how North Dakota's farm population, comprising two-thirds the entire population of the state, was not deeply stirred by "granger" political movements in its pioneer days, and how the consciousness of their political power did not dawn upon the farmers, or at least did not express itself in effective political action until a generation had passed after statehood.

It was not in reason for any state to be entirely complacent under the rule of a political boss such as "Alex" McKenzie, particularly when it was a matter of common belief that he was closely allied with the railroads in politics. The state was mildly infected by various epidemics of "reform" legislation. These occasioned a display of active rivalry between "progressives" and "stalwarts," and the claim, on the part of the "progressives," that the power of the boss had been overthrown. The state achieved the passage of direct primary laws, including a device by

which election of United States senators was made direct, the creation of a state railroad commission, and finally the passage of certain denatured "direct legislation" amendments to the constitution. These at length led to the more important fight on economic issues, in the heat of which the Nonpartisan League was born.

CHAPTER III

SEEDS OF REBELLION

THE awakening of the farmers of North Dakota to a group interest in politics was the outcome of their efforts at economic co-operation. Beginning with the country elevator and the country store, where he sells and buys, the farmer by co-operative organization has progressively brought himself into contact with one factor in commerce after another, and his interest in trade processes and his desire to improve upon them have quickened with each step in the journey.

In North Dakota, even before the coming of the League, the more active-minded farmers were convinced that political action promised the most effective relief from the economic abuses to which the farmers were subject. These abuses go back almost to the earliest days of settlement of the state. Helplessness in the face of conditions which they felt powerless to control or correct had built up a profound and general resentment. This furnished the motive force, first, for aggressive co-operative organization, and finally for political action through the League.

In all the cloud of accusation, denial and countercharge growing out of the intensity of the po-

litical fight in North Dakota there has been little effort to deny that the farmers in the spring-wheat country of the Northwest have been mercilessly exploited. An examination of campaign statements in the newspapers shows the opposition to the League universally admitting that the farmers had suffered many grievances which ought to be remedied. The League's obvious rejoinder to much criticism has been that no earlier political organization had come forward with a positive and definite program intended to bring relief, and that criticism of the leadership and plans of the League came with poor grace from those who themselves never had anything to propose in aid of the farmers.

A man, a product of pioneer days in North Dakota, who achieved university degrees and high official position, though a successful man himself in other than a farming career, had, as he said, "bred in his bones" the resentments which have furnished fuel for the flames of "the farmers' revolt" in North Dakota. He tells how his own father, a cripple with a large family to support, fought the battle against rust and drouth, intense cold and isolation and how his other burdens were multiplied by a burden of usury and extortion.

One bitter winter, he says, with his mother lying sick at home, their chief food had been meal, home ground, of rusted wheat. A country missionary-doctor, providentially happening along, urged a different diet, and the father struck out at risk

of his life in a storm to go to the distant village for supplies—without money to buy them.

There the merchant, who was also banker, in his capacity as banker, caused the farmer to sign a \$50 note at 10 per cent. interest, and in return gave him credit in his own store for, not \$50, but \$10 worth of supplies, with which he struggled back in the storm to the sick wife and the family.

“Father died a few years after that,” said the man who told the story. “But for the hardships he had undergone he should have lived many years longer. The thing that really killed him was usury.”

He continued:

“The banker is still living. He prefers now to be known as a farmer. He owns several farms and collects rent and interest money enough to give his family the luxuries of life. He is one of the pioneers who won out, one of the successful men who have built North Dakota, as they say at the pioneers’ meetings.

“I often think when I see these gatherings of pioneers—many of them the men who merely lent money or sold goods at exorbitant prices, while others lived in sod houses and fought to make the land produce wealth,—that the real pioneers are not among them.”

The “real pioneers,” he went on to say, are sleeping in the little country churchyards and forlorn prairie cemeteries, men and women who gave way to hardships when 50 years old or less.

The banker and the merchant in North Dakota

will say that incidents of this sort, if they ever occurred, could not have been typical. Yet probably all would admit that in any new country sharp dealing has been practised. Farmers tell many stories of "shark contracts" saddled upon them by bankers or lawyers or other townsmen, of the swindling of the unsuspecting countryman out of his land and the work of years; of mortgages at 12 and 15 per cent.; of "bonuses" and "premiums" added; of extortionate prices for merchandise sold on credit.

The wrath of a helpless victim—or one who imagines himself a helpless victim—burns deep and long; and the wrath of a trustful man who sees his trust betrayed will last and grow.

These things constitute some of the local factors that add impetus and strength to any movement of farmers alone. They and some other circumstances tend to make the farmer look askance when the town "booster" says the interests of town and country are identical. They know and appreciate that one function of the town is to serve their needs, but they have found that, in the past, another activity of some of the townsmen has been to rob them.

Today they see their own industry in a purely agricultural state as essential, while all the activities of the towns and cities which depend upon them are merely a service of supply. They have seen for years the townspeople concerning themselves with making production more efficient by

giving advice to the farmer. Now the farmer believes himself legitimately interested in making the service of supply more efficient.

Resentment of the things some townsmen had done to them; distrust of the political and commercial leadership of the banker, the lawyer and the merchant, helped to build up the League movement. But it was not the prime cause. The cause relates to the farmer's selling market, in which his interest has always been more keen than in his buying market.

The "farmers' elevator" is an old institution. There are many of them in North Dakota, of many kinds. At an early day in the history of the western grain-growing states farmers in many communities decided it was folly for them to depend upon a single grain-buying warehouse at a single country crossroads to fix the selling price of their grain. They became even more dissatisfied when they found that most of these grain elevators were linked together in large "chains" having their headquarters in the big terminal grain markets, each with hundreds of branch elevators throughout the grain-growing districts.

An early development was to form a local company to build a storage elevator, buy the grain from the farmers or receive it on consignment, and sell it at the distant terminal.

This primary step toward bettering market conditions undoubtedly has been a profitable one for the farmer. It introduced an element of compe-

tition that has made the worst of local thieveries in price and grading impossible. Where he has a local co-operative elevator in operation the farmer is fairly well assured that he can get for his grain the going quotation in the big terminal market, less the handling and shipping costs.

But the little country co-operative elevator brought the farmer face to face with new problems.

There were problems connected with the existence of the elevator itself. The trade policy which at different times has commended itself to the oil trust and the big packers was not unknown to the line elevator companies. It consists in paying more at places where an independent buying agency exists than the independent agency can afford to pay. In the case of the farmers' elevators it meant the "top of the market" for grain where there was farmers' elevator competition—and less elsewhere.

This, one would say, would be convincing argument for the usefulness of the farmers' elevator. The argument itself is without a flaw, but it would not save from bankruptcy a co-operative elevator forced to pay for grain more than it could be sold for, nor would it always persuade to loyalty farmers to whom a cent or two more a bushel meant warm clothing for the children or a menacing debt satisfied.

The co-operators frequently found, also, unexplainable lack of sympathy on the part of the

local banker, a disposition to look coldly on what looked to be sound applications for loans and even a marked preference for the business of the old line house. The bankers were "used to doing business" with the old line houses. They had formed trade connections and understood each other.

Stock in farmers' elevators, too, had a way of gravitating into a few hands. Men who go with enthusiasm into a new venture—especially if it is a co-operative community venture—frequently find they haven't money enough to carry it on. They get hard up; things are not being run to suit them at the elevator or the store, anyway, and some more hopeful individual with a little cash can quickly buy them out. Soon it develops that what started as a "farmers' elevator" is no longer a farmers' elevator at all. Others have bought it, probably for less than it cost.

There are all kinds and varieties of "farmers' elevators" scattered throughout North Dakota. The sign frequently masks a house owned by one of the big line elevator companies or by one of the many grain exchange firms; sometimes the enterprise of a local capitalist. The least likely case is that it is actually owned by a farmers' co-operative company.

Another group of problems was not concerned with the existence of the local elevator itself. In their adventure into commerce the farmers began to find out things about the big game of the mar-

ket-place. They began to find that the science of "handling" the product of the farm was more intricate and made fortunes much more quickly than the simple task of growing the grain and turning it over to the mill or the elevator.

In their simplicity they had at the beginning looked upon the terminal markets as places of free trading in the essentials of life, open markets where the full market price of their commodity could be had and where all sellers would be treated alike, where information of the world's needs and the world's supply brought a balance in prices which was fair alike to buyer and seller. They found that the market was in fact in the hands of an association which in many aspects was a close corporation; that "outsiders" who sought to upset the currents of trade were treated as the common enemy; that out of the speculative dealings in their grain great individual fortunes were being built up and had been built up; that many persons lived in luxury off the business of dealing in grain, without, as the farmers believed, performing any useful service; and they became impressed with the fact that when the farmer had grain to sell the market was glutted and the price low, while corners and "bull markets," based on stories and figures showing world scarcity, prevailed only when the bulk of the grain was in the hands of big dealers.

Gradually there began to grow among the farmers of North Dakota—as well as other states

—a strong hope and a strong sentiment for a public regulation of the market which would eliminate some of the “handlers’ ” profits and speculative wealth gathered without toil and which would enable the grain grower and the consumer of flour and bread to share in the saving.

In some states agitation began against dealing in grain “futures.” A congressman from Minnesota made an attack on the system on the floor of the national house of representatives. The influence of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, the grain board which controls the principal market for the northwestern spring wheat, began to be opposed in the Minnesota legislature; but in North Dakota a dozen years ago there began to develop a widespread agitation for the ownership by the state of “terminal” grain elevators.

Feeling themselves the victims of many economic grievances, smarting under many instances of exploitation, growing impatient with the kind of state government they were receiving at the hands of bankers, lawyers, merchants and professional politicians, and with rising resentment at the continued assumption of the right to leadership in public matters and a general attitude of guardianship over the farmer by influential townsmen, the farmers found a focus for their rebellion in a demand for state-owned “terminal elevators.”

They were guided toward this goal partly by the outcome of their own co-operative marketing efforts and partly by other influences.

CHAPTER IV

BREAKING GROUND

DISTINCT signs of unrest in North Dakota, developing into class consciousness and an organized movement among the farmers, became evident ten years before the birth of the Nonpartisan League. The League should be given neither the full credit nor all the blame for stirring the farmers to revolt. Nor did it create the issues which defined the line of battle.

When the League first came into existence, "Big Business,"—concentrated capital and commercial power as evidenced in the big grain and flour companies, the banks through which they operated and the "beef trust"—had already been discerned as the common enemy.

Already "agitators" had been at work in the state and already the town papers were indignantly and virtuously deprecating movements to "set class against class." The newspapers, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, the banks and others who felt that they had no complaint to make against existing conditions, were strong for harmony and the kind and degree of "co-operation" that already existed. To combat the growing spirit of protest and resentment among

the farmers the more progressive among the newspapers and the leading spirits of the towns went so far as to suggest "community gatherings," "getting acquainted with the farmer," and other good-will efforts.

Men who went among the farmers urging them to "fight for their rights" were called public enemies. Into this category quickly fell two classes of men. The first, whose treachery to the orderly prosperity of the state was conceived to be the most flagrant, were a group of college professors. Conspicuous among them were John H. Worst, president of the state agricultural college at Fargo, and Edwin F. Ladd, head of the chemistry department of the same institution and also state food commissioner. Others of the same faculty were also known to be highly sympathetic with the views of these leaders. Throughout the whole history of farmers' movements in the state for economic reform the farmers have, in fact, depended much upon information and advice furnished by the agricultural college faculty. Indeed, the fight to retain the "progressive" staff of the college has been one phase of the movement.

The college staff maintained a constant contact with the farmers. Farmers' sons came to them for education; the summer courses brought in some of the older generation, and, in addition to extension work, the instructors, in the regular line of their duty, made many investigations and received many reports from farmers as to seed,

methods and crops. Naturally, also, they were in demand for addresses at farmers' meetings.

An annual gathering that came to have importance in the farmers' struggle was that of the Tri-State Grain Growers' Conference, which met in midwinter at Fargo. It had received the encouragement of commercial organizations in North Dakota and drew attendance from Minnesota and South Dakota, the chief spring-wheat producing states.

It was at these conventions of the grain growers that President Worst, Dr. Ladd and others modestly launched ideas that furnished material later for much League propaganda.

The situation that faced the college professors was this: Primarily they were interested in production. They were interested in stabilizing farm production, increasing it, making it more regular and more profitable. They could not well avoid an interest in prices, for they must counsel the lines of production which would yield the best living to the farmers.

In North Dakota they had what they conceived to be an unnatural and impermanent agricultural condition. Small grains alone—wheat, oats, barley, rye and flax—were the "money" crops. The great bulk of this grain—wheat, fifty to a hundred million bushels a year, by far the most important crop—was shipped out of the state almost immediately after being harvested. It went to Minneapolis and St. Paul, Duluth and Buffalo for mill-

ing or export. The stock-raising industry in the state was small. "Finishing" butcher stock by feeding grains and mill feed was practically unknown. To do this, screenings and mill feeds, to be obtained in any quantity, had to be shipped back from Minneapolis or a more distant point. In any event, the price of these mill feeds and screenings was fixed in North Dakota by their price at the terminal markets, plus the freight.

It was argued that under existing conditions the price of mill feeds and flour in North Dakota included a double hauling charge at high freight rates—the cost of freight on the original grain to the terminals, and the cost of the return haul. In these conditions and the location of the big packing houses in St. Paul and Chicago, adding further difficulties besides the freight cost to the problem of feeding meat animals for the market, the college professors discerned a great economic waste which was a bar to well-balanced production and even to the protection of the soil of the state against impoverishment. They saw with alarm that millions of dollars' worth of soil values, in the shape of natural fertility, was shipped out of the state every year, never to return. They saw also an ill-balanced type of production, a huge gamble with the elements and the market, frequently resulting in ruin for the farmer. And they saw discomforts and privations which formed an almost insuperable bar to a healthy, natural, pleasant and permanent rural life.

They sought a solution of this unnatural condition, and they came to the matured conviction that some power other than the normal trend of trade must intervene if North Dakota was to be made to stand on its own legs economically and turn to diversified and therefore stabilized production.

Nor were they slow to bring to the attention of farmers other evils in the market situation. They pointed out how the "docking" of grain resulted in double profit to the big terminal elevator companies; how grain mixing, as there practised, resulted in an output of the higher grades far in excess of the purchases by the elevators of those grades. Finally, they openly decried the evils of grain speculation and the manipulation of the market so that the price was low in the fall, when the farmers' maturing obligations forced them to sell quickly, and high only when the grain all had passed into the hands of the speculators.

Dr. Worst delivered an address before the grain growers early in 1916, which was a summary of much that he, Dr. Ladd and Professors Bolley and Waldron had said before. He grouped estimates compiled by Dr. Ladd to make the rather surprising total of fifty-five million dollars, which he said represented the soil fertility losses and other permanent annual losses to the state due to the system of shipping the grain out, rather than milling and feeding the by-products within the state.

Seeking what they conceived to be a better-

ordered production régime in North Dakota, the agricultural college leaders thus became open advocates of the "Socialistic" projects of state ownership of terminal elevators. And later they looked with sympathy on the added proposal for state ownership of packing houses and cold storage plants, which became part of the League program.

Bankers, leading merchants, prominent lawyers and other leaders in town life in the state eventually were led to fight these proposals. The reasons are fairly obvious. Besides the fact of the close relations existing between the merchant and his banker, between the small town banker and the big city banker and between the big city banker and big capital in the city, there is the natural opposition of the man engaged in business to any project which will greatly alter existing business channels, for "you never can tell where it will end." Along with such "Socialistic" proposals also went general propaganda in favor of co-operation, which would mean co-operative shops and stores and enterprises of all kinds, which might put the towns and their merchants out of business.

The college professor conspirators against things as they were found among the "co-operators" willing workers to take up their propaganda. Great headway had been made by an organization known as the Equity Society. In North Dakota this operated as the North Dakota

Union of the American Society of Equity. The organization had been born among the tobacco growers of Kentucky, had spread thence to the tobacco districts of Wisconsin, whence its development was mainly in the line of co-operative organization among grain growers in the Northwestern states.

The object of the organization was to promote co-operative effort among farmers, both in buying and selling. The society itself did not engage in business, but it lent its encouragement to the formation of co-operative buying and selling corporations. The basis of the "Equity plan," by which alone co-operative organizations could have the good will and support of the society, was that each member or stockholder was to have one vote, regardless of the extent of his stockholding. Concentration of control thus became impossible and true co-operation was conceived to be assured.

With a large number of local elevators formed under this plan in North Dakota and with sympathy and support for the movement among farmers generally in all parts of the state, leaders in the Equity movement believed the time ripe for co-operation in the central market itself and organized a corporation known as the Equity Co-Operative Exchange. This is today successful, and one of the largest co-operative farmers' selling organizations in the country.

But the formation and successful operation of

this enterprise were not accomplished without a struggle. This struggle was bitter, and at its height the Nonpartisan League was born.

Townspeople generally frowned on the Equity Co-Operative Exchange, which started a general share-selling campaign throughout the state, opened an office in St. Paul, and began to solicit shipments of grain.

The influence of the Equity Exchange on the political adventures of the farmers of the state was due in large part to the activity of one fiery personality. This was George S. Loftus, who had the title of general manager of the exchange. Loftus had been in the grain and commission business in Minneapolis as an "independent" and had come into contact with the operations of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce houses. A fighter by nature, his passion seemed to be to wage war against entrenched monopoly. One of his achievements before he became connected with the farmers' co-operative movement, was a complaint against the Pullman Company before the Interstate Commerce Commission which resulted in the order of the commission reducing the price of upper berths.

Though employed by the co-operative marketing organization for his business experience as a practical executive head, it soon became apparent that Loftus' unique ability lay in another line. It became necessary to hold meetings of farmers to appeal for support, in the shipment of grain, in

the purchase of stock, and even in lending money or credit to tide the enterprise over emergencies. Loftus had great success in these meetings. He was able to stir his hearers to great enthusiasm, which was not lessened by the fact that town leaders at once began to oppose him as an "agitator." Soon he began to have the experience, so common later in the case of League speakers and organizers, of having town halls and even streets barred to him.

Loftus arrived one winter day at a town of a thousand or more persons in central North Dakota to find that every available hall in the place had been closed to him. Their proprietors made various evasive excuses, but the hostility to Loftus and his efforts on behalf of co-operative selling was made plain. Finally a grain warehouse on the outskirts of the town was opened to the meeting and thither marched Loftus in high dignity, followed by nearly a hundred farmers in their huge sheepskin coats, their wrath smoldering at being refused a warm and comfortable hall in which to hold their meeting.

Loftus began his talk with a recital of the various means by which the farmer was "trimmed" by the old system of selling his grain, proceeded to tell of the iniquities chargeable to the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, and finally got down to the case of the local bankers and merchants who, owing their business existence to the farmers, yet refused them a meeting place when

they gathered to talk of plans for co-operative selling.

Loftus' talk suited the farmers. They approved with loud cheers, shouts of "You bet!" and other expressions, blunt but pithy. Loftus might express his indignation in words, of which he had adequate command; but they, not having his fluency of speech, sought appropriate outlet for their feelings in action. Their action was to agree, until appropriate amends had been made, not to buy goods in this particular town.

It is worth recording that they kept their word. Not only they, but their neighbors, remained away from this town for more than a month. In the meantime their local grain elevator organization bought a carload of merchandise, had it unloaded at a siding on the open prairie and distributed it to those in need.

The town eventually sent a committee to interview the farmers, acknowledged the mistake of the forbidden meeting and promised to "co-operate" in the future. As a matter of fact, two years afterward, during all the heat of the fight against the League, this same town showed outwardly a spirit of generous tolerance toward this and other farmers' organizations, even permitting leading citizens to welcome League meetings.

Not many towns and cities in North Dakota, however, followed this example. Loftus and the Equity Exchange were denounced in many newspapers as agitators and sharpers, and they found

their presence made plainly unwelcome in many towns.

In Fargo, in January of 1915, there was held the annual session of the Tri-State Grain Growers' Conference. An afternoon at the conclusion of the conference was designated as "Equity day," and a program of speeches in support of the organization was arranged. The Equity speakers planned to extend their addresses into the evening, but while their meeting was in progress a number of prominent Fargo citizens marched into the hall, accompanied by the secretary of the commercial club, who informed the speakers that the hall had been rented for the evening to another gathering (no previous announcement of which had been made).

Among those contesting for the use of the hall was the publisher of a grain trade publication known as a Chamber of Commerce organ. They proposed to discuss marketing issues for the benefit of the farmers.

A sharp altercation and a scuffle for the possession of the platform ensued. It was settled by the appearance of the chief of police, who placed himself on the side of the town business men and the Chamber of Commerce speaker, and the Equity speakers were ejected from the hall. Practically the entire farmer audience followed them.

Equity leaders later made an effort to cause Governor L. B. Hanna to remove the chief of

police for his part in the affair. A hearing was held and evidence taken, but there was no action.

This event added to a long list of grievances. The fighting spirit of a large portion of the farmers was under a pressure which demanded an outlet in action. The feeling that the towns were in a business conspiracy against them was well developed.

CHAPTER V

TERMINAL ELEVATORS

AGITATION for either co-operative or state-owned "terminal" or large central storage elevators had been under way in North Dakota for ten years before the Nonpartisan League was born. The injustice of the Minnesota and Wisconsin grading and the many extortionate practices in these markets had been recognized by others than the farmers. Bankers, merchants and newspaper editors had joined in demanding a remedy. It was only when the farmers had ceased to beg for relief, but through their own organizations were pressing toward what they believed to be an actual solution of their difficulties, that they began to meet with town hostility.

F. W. Cathro is a former president of the North Dakota Bankers' Association and one of a very few bankers who have been throughout sympathetic with the farmers' co-operative movements in the state and with the Nonpartisan League. He has been named as a director of the Bank of North Dakota, the state reserve bank created by the farmer legislature of 1919. Mr. Cathro claims for the North Dakota State Bankers' Association the credit of the first suggestion for a terminal elevator to be owned by the farmers themselves.

The suggestion was made in a set of resolutions passed by the bankers' association in 1906, nine years before the Nonpartisan League came into existence. These resolutions embrace demands upon the legislatures of Wisconsin and Minnesota to amend their grain grading laws and practices so as to remedy injustices to North Dakota farmers, and conclude: "Resolved, that should we fail through these channels to receive our redress we recommend the grain growers of this state to co-operate for the purpose of building home and terminal elevators."

Mr. Cathro cites also the report of a committee of the bankers' association made in the same year. This report gave figures showing receipts and shipments from one large Minnesota storage elevator during three months. The report showed that while the elevator received 99,711 bushels of No. 1 Northern wheat during the season it was able to ship out 196,288 bushels of the same grade of grain, and while it received 141,455 bushels of No. 2 Northern its shipments of this grade were 467,764 bushels. Where this wheat came from is shown by the reports on the lower grades, which reveal that of No. 3 wheat there was a shortage in shipments of nearly 60,000 bushels, while of No. 4, "no grade" and "rejected" wheat, although the elevator had purchased and stored a total of 367,000 bushels, it had shipped out none at all, nor had it any of these descriptions on hand.

“It is apparent from the foregoing figures,” writes Mr. Cathro, “that the farmers should have received better grades for their wheat and a corresponding increase in price, inasmuch as the terminal elevators have found it possible to buy 100,000 bushels of so-called No. 2 and No. 3 wheat and mix it with No. 1 Northern and sell the whole mixture for No. 1 Northern and mix all of the so-called No. 4 and lower grades with what is left of the No. 2 and No. 3 wheat and sell the mixture as No. 2 and No. 3 wheat.”

The farmers had excellent authority for their belief that as long as they shipped their grain to a market and to storage elevators outside of the state of North Dakota and as long as they were at the mercy of the Minnesota grades and the Minnesota grading system they would be robbed both in grades and in weights. The defense of the elevator operators was that it was quite possible and fair to mix, for instance, No. 1 Northern having a surplus over the required weight per bushel with grain just a little under the required weight and to make the whole mixture No. 1, and also that by cleaning, evaporation of moisture and other means known to the large elevators they could improve the grade, quality and salability of grain.

This is an explanation that only partly explains. It did not satisfy the farmer in the face of such huge discrepancies as those quoted above. He was convinced, and other investigators of the

situation were convinced, that the grades were manipulated in the interest of the big buyers and that the farmer was cheated in a majority of cases.

Discussing these discrepancies, Dr. E. F. Ladd said in an interview in 1916, shortly after he had succeeded J. H. Worst as president of the North Dakota Agricultural College:

“There is no doubt at all that a great injustice is done the farmers of North Dakota through the system of grades in force at the Minnesota terminals and in the prices established by the big grain dealers for the various grades of grain. If there is a certain price established for No. 1 Northern wheat which itself may be a fair price, but if for the lower grades down to the ‘no grade’ and ‘rejected’ wheat the producer must accept a price much lower than the difference in milling value justifies, a serious injustice is done to the producers of the lower grades of wheat.”

Under Dr. Ladd’s direction was an experimental flour mill at the agricultural college, operated jointly by the state and the federal government. As a result of experiments conducted at the mill, Dr. Ladd became a strong advocate of reformed wheat grades which would more accurately take account of the flour-making value. His researches along this line strengthened the demand for state-owned mills to be coupled with state-owned grain elevators. It was pertinently pointed out that, with nearly all the wheat crop selling in the Minnesota market, no regulation of

grades in North Dakota would be effective; while it was believed that the building of large state-owned elevators and possibly flour mills would bring buyers into the state of North Dakota for grain. This would make it possible for the state to regulate the grades. At the same time, it was thought, the ownership of flour mills by the state would serve to furnish honest tests of the comparative milling value of various descriptions of grain and would help to equalize arbitrary and unjust differences in grades.

The argument that first impressed the people of the state of North Dakota, however, was the argument in favor of state-owned "terminal" elevators, at the so-called terminal markets; that is, Minneapolis, St. Paul or Duluth. An amendment to the state constitution permitting the state to build or buy a "terminal" elevator and to acquire property *outside of the state* for that purpose, was proposed in the legislature of 1909 and adopted by that body. It was again passed upon favorably by the succeeding legislature and in 1912 was ratified by popular vote.

In the meantime there had been agitation in favor of creating a market within the state for grain, and a second constitutional amendment making it possible for the state to build its "terminal" elevator, not at the terminal markets, but within the state of North Dakota, went through the processes of ratification, becoming a part of the constitution on popular vote in 1914. The con-

stitution at that time required a favorable vote by two successive legislatures and subsequent ratification by the people—a process requiring nearly five years' time—to amend the constitution. This has since been changed so that without action by the legislature the constitution may be amended by popular petition and a majority popular vote. How this was accomplished belongs to a later chapter in the story of the League and its activity.

The proposal for state-owned elevators, having the backing of some bankers and many merchants, and not complicated with any of the class issues which later arose, met no very active opposition. The two proposals,—for state-owned elevators outside and inside the state—were adopted by large majorities. They had, it is true, the active backing of such farmers' organizations as existed at that time, but not even the Equity in the zenith of its power attained more than a fraction of the membership that the League later attained. It was, however, a minority that was active and that had the attributes of leadership.

The legislature of 1913, with the mandate of a popular vote overwhelmingly approving the project, commissioned members of the state board of control to make an investigation and to report plans and recommendations for the construction of a state-owned elevator or state-owned elevators.

The board spent several months in its investigation and brought in its report. Instead of being

a plan of procedure for the acquirement of a terminal elevator or terminal elevators, it was an exhaustive argument *against* the entire project.

The prior legislature had shown its good will toward the terminal elevator, not only by the appointment of the commission to investigate, but by the imposition of a tax to create a terminal elevator fund. After the receipt of the adverse report, a bill was introduced to repeal this tax law, and it was in fact repealed, while a bill to appropriate funds for the construction of an elevator met defeat.

The politicians of the state administration and the legislature had proved in all respects true to type. After nearly ten years of agitation of a project conceived by the people of the state to be of huge importance to them and to the growth and prosperity of the state, and after a great show of activity on the part of the political leaders, the net result of their efforts was nothing at all. They had achieved the "statesman"-like swing around the circle, ending just where they began.

In the meantime, popular sentiment had not been stationary. The farmer mind was not so facile as to turn right-about-face on a project in a day. The farmer did not regard the thefts and the injustices of the grain market as mere illusions, nor did he think that a project seemingly so reasonable and one so widely advocated ought to be dropped without a trial, simply because two or three state officials had been convinced, by the

princes of the grain trade, that the state could never succeed in the grain business.

The North Dakota Union of the American Society of Equity was holding an annual convention in Bismarck while the legislature was in session. There was deliberate purpose in the time and place of holding the convention. It was the old theory of exerting a "wholesome influence" on lawmakers by conventions and lobbies. This theory the League threw overboard, to start its political action from the ground instead of attempting to build on an existing structure built for other purposes.

The Equity convention quickly turned itself into an indignation meeting at the report of the investigating board. It determined to force the legislature, if possible, to enact a terminal elevator law in spite of the report.

Delegations visited the legislature and demanded hearings before committees. These hearings developed hot arguments, during one of which an angry legislator is reported to have demanded by what right a "bunch of farmers come down here to browbeat the legislature," and ended by advising them to "Go home and slop the hogs!"

This remark was attributed to Treadwell Twichell, owner of a big farm in Cass county, a man of wealth and active in partisan politics for a number of years. Twichell himself denies using this particular language, but the phrase was

quickly reported back by the farmers' committee and became a slogan in the fight of the farmers against the ruling political group. Twichell was admittedly an opponent of the elevator project. He has been a leader in opposition to the League organization.

Whether in these exact words or not, the farmers who visited the legislature, believing themselves to represent the majority sentiment of the whole state, had in effect been curtly told to mind their own business. They had been informed that the lawyers and other townsmen, with a small sprinkling of farmers, who made up the legislature, considered themselves above advice or orders from their farmer constituents. They had been shown that legislators resented the attempt of a co-operative organization of farmers to get results by lobbying, however they might regard similar activities by railroad or other corporation representatives.

The farmers, in turn, had become a little familiar with the atmosphere of the legislative community and they were not filled with great respect for it. They had found, also, that lobbying was a failure, even when backed by an expression of the will of the majority of the people of the state.

CHAPTER VI

THE LEADER FOR THE OCCASION

WHEN the farmers in convention and delegation were receiving their rebuffs at the hands of the legislature of 1915 and there was rising in them a spirit of rebellion which cried out for action, the man who was to lead them to the effective expression of their spirit of revolt was among their number.

He was not one of the leaders of their organization. He was not even a member. He was a mere hanger-on at Bismarck—an observer, watching events with a speculative and calculating eye.

As a farmer under North Dakota conditions he had proved himself a failure. He was, in fact, "broke." He was indeed more than broke. He was in debt for more than one hundred thousand dollars, with scarcely an asset but the shabby clothes which covered his lean figure.

If any one had considered Arthur C. Townley at that time a person of distinction it would have been "the young fellow that had all that flax out in the Golden Valley and busted when the bottom fell out of the market." His wife and child had been sent away to relatives. He owed banker, merchant and implement man.

Yet Townley himself knew that he was destined

for leadership. A true adventurer, a crusader in spirit, he was preparing himself for a great task. He had dealt at one time in theories; he had grappled later with facts and materials. Now he was preparing himself for the great adventure. He had experimented a little in attempts to persuade others, and he was almost ready to become a leader of men.

In 1915 Townley was 35 years old. He was a western farm boy, born in northwestern Minnesota of native American parents. His parents still live on the farm.

He had gone to the country school as a small boy and later to high school in Alexandria, Minn., where he was a classmate of the late Carl C. Van Dyke, who at the time of his death was congressman from the state of Minnesota.

"I was a Sunday school boy," says Townley, describing his interests in his high school period. He was an industrious and tractable pupil, taking enjoyment in the debates and other forensic activities which teachers dutifully encourage.

An event happened to shape his later life. He became acquainted with a philosopher, and through him with two others—three wise men.

The first was a tailor. The youth, "Art" Townley, went to him to have a suit mended and pressed for an occasion. Young Townley was to deliver an oration on prohibition. The tailor showed a friendly interest. He asked questions that drew out the boy's views on economics and swung to-

ward religion. The graybearded tailor was Socratic in his method. Townley began to argue.

"He was a shrewd old fellow," said Townley in speaking of it. "He didn't press his point. When he found he was up against one of my convictions he gave way quickly and led off in another direction."

This wise man was a "mystic." He had studied strange and pagan religions. He had two old friends, one a carpenter and another a jeweler. All were philosophers, given to long evenings of reading and discussion of economics, religion and other abstract matters. One was a confirmed materialist, especially a devotee of Spencer's philosophy. Most admired by Townley was the old carpenter, who liked to have Townley read to him from Emerson, both to admire and to disagree. He enjoyed argument both with the mystic, questioning the logic of his mysticism, and with the materialist, doubting the soundness of his materialism. The latter was a native American, a veteran of the Civil War.

These men were Townley's university. Under their tutelage he left the paths of conventional learning for excursions with the apostles of protest and revolt. He, too, began to be a critic of the existing order, but with ambitions.

For two seasons after his high school graduation Townley taught school in the neighborhood of his parents' home. In that period he read voraciously.

“Finally,” he says, “I grew sick of books. I had read until I felt that I never wanted to see another book. I was tired of writing and theory. I wanted action.

“I was then as impractical as a man could be. I didn’t know anything about business. I didn’t know anything about dealing with men. I was a helpless bookworm.”

It was then he decided to go further west and “do things.” He chose the extreme western county of North Dakota, near the Montana border. He tried farming in the Golden Valley.

Though he pictures himself as a rather diffident, incapable sort of person at this time, it is evident that he then had the same disposition to lead that is now his chief characteristic. Working with horses was too slow for him. He persuaded other farmers to pool with him in the purchase of a steam tractor and plows. Later he added another and by running the engines—then a novelty in that country—from early daylight until far into the night, he set a plowing record that would be hard to equal. Then, as later, he was impatient with small operations. His passion was to do things in a big way.

The season was dry and the prospects for a crop began to look slim. He had formed a sort of farming syndicate, with his neighbor farmers working as a crew on one place after the other. A council of desperation was held, with the result

that Townley withdrew and allowed the others to parcel out what was left of the seed, to divide their equipment and take their own individual chances. As it happened, heavy rains fell shortly after Townley had left the state, and those who had been with him prospered. The following winter Townley spent as a plasterer's helper, wandering over all the northwest from North Dakota to the coast with another young plasterer with the traveling itch in his feet. His companion later became famous as a "big league" professional baseball pitcher.

Anxious to try again Townley returned to the Golden Valley, where money then was being made in flax. Professor H. L. Bolley of the North Dakota Agricultural College had developed a wilt-resistant strain of flax which brought about a great boom in the linseed oil industry. Townley had two fairly successful seasons. With each he expanded his holdings to the limit of his ability, reaching out to get more land, until he began to be spoken of as a "flax king," and land agents began to point him out as an example of a highly successful farmer.

His third season was the disastrous one of 1912, when he had made contracts to purchase a huge acreage of land, had rented other acres and had acquired a large amount of machinery to be paid for out of the crop.

The season was dry and the crop short, but, worse than that, the price broke sharply under a

market drive by speculators, and Townley's brief prosperity came down in ruin.

"A few months before I had been a good fellow and an able farmer," says Townley, "but after the failure nobody in town wanted to speak to me or to see me. I was a fool, a dub and a crook, and everybody had always known that I was going to blow up sooner or later. All because somebody in Chicago or Minneapolis sought to break somebody else who was buying flax."

With time on his hands, Townley began to relate his troubles and those of his brother farmers to his economic studies. He found the most sympathy for his ambitious desires for reform among the Socialists, and he became active in the Socialist party movement, though he was then and always has been impatient with much of the Socialist theory and especially impatient with their tendency to extreme theory rather than toward action. Accepting most of their criticisms against the existing economic and political order, he achieved the philosophy that the thing to do was to organize on the basis of a simple and practicable program of changes which would be put into execution and tested by experience before proceeding to other, more revolutionary, things.

The various issues and proposed reforms that had been before the people of North Dakota seemed to him to furnish the basis for a new political alignment that might result in a new economic order. Among these was the state-

owned elevator, coupled with the project for state-owned flour mills. The single tax theory, in so far as it applied merely to exemption of farm improvements, was being discussed and was widely favored. Rural credits on a new basis to reduce exorbitant interest charges were being nationally discussed, and were a particularly live topic in North Dakota, where the farmers had been for years the prey of conscienceless usurers and mortgage sharks. Over across the line in Canada they had achieved crop insurance on a general taxation basis, and big co-operative organizations had compelled the government to assist them by financing elevators and storage warehouses at railroad terminal and central points.

Here were issues made to hand, with a politician class, acting to prove the Socialists' contention that the main province of government is to protect the wealth of the wealthy.

After more than a year's absence, Townley returned to the state and became an organizer for the Socialist party. Shortly after his failure he had once engaged in a series of debates on the subject of Socialism with a lawyer at Beach. He hired the lawyer to debate with him. The debates drew crowds and the verdict of the judges and the audience was in Townley's favor. He became something of a figure with the local Socialists. It was his first contact with Socialists. He had in his mind, at the time, he confesses, the idea of a new form of organization.

“At that time I knew little about the Socialists except from reading some Socialist literature,” says Townley. “I had never met any of the Socialists at Beach until after I went broke. I went to the Socialists because I knew there was no hope of getting anything for the farmers from either of the old parties. There seemed to be some sincere men among the Socialists. So I tried to find out what could be accomplished by being a Socialist.”

Townley began to “organize” farmers into the Socialist party. They looked askance at it at first, but as Townley told of the complete failure of the other parties in North Dakota and outlined what could be done through the Socialist organization if it could get control they decided that a man with his enthusiasm deserved to be helped out.

They were used to being sold things by glib agents and to finding that they had been cheated, but they never had heard a man talk as interestingly as this intense young man talked. They wouldn't lose much if nothing came of it; and, besides, it was an alluring vision.

So Republicans and Democrats in numbers began to hand over dues and to find themselves enrolled in the Socialist party. Townley was tramping from place to place, occasionally getting a “lift,” seeing as many farmers as he could in a day.

Then a new idea evolved. The Ford car was rapidly becoming standard farm equipment.

Many of the farmers had them. Others were getting them. Gasoline was cheaper than horsefeed and much time was saved. Townley rode with farmers and decided that if he had a Ford he could sign many more members, and pay for the Ford.

He went to a farmer Socialist of some means. This farmer could not lend him the cash, but he could get it for him. He signed a note and with the note Townley was able to get enough cash to buy the car.

So Townley worked with the Ford and got many more members. But if one man could do all this, why could not other men? If one Ford car, why not a hundred?

Townley went to the Socialist state committee at Minot with the problem.

The state committee had been getting nervous about the extraordinary things this man Townley had been doing. His actions were not conventional; they were not regular. Socialists never had done things that way.

They discussed the matter with many shakings of the head, much as a group of conservative old-fashioned heads of the church might discuss the methods and the doings of some noisy, unconventional evangelist.

The matter was discussed before a state convention of the party, with the result that Townley and the Socialist party mutually agreed to part company.

“I had enough support in the convention to have had my plan adopted,” said Townley, “but it didn’t seem to me there was any use going on. Too many of them didn’t want to get anywhere, it seemed to me. In method they were as conservative as the old parties. Offer them a plan by which they could really accomplish something instead of merely talking, and they were afraid of it.”

The orthodox among the Socialists, especially the wheel horses of the party, on the other hand, were suspicious of Townley and his methods. They feared—and apparently with good reason,—that it wasn’t dyed-in-the-wool Socialism that Townley was spreading among the farmers. They were inclined to believe his converts weren’t really Socialists at all. This man Townley with his talk of a “state program” evidently was only an opportunist, a “yellow-belly,” a hated “reformer.”

Thus it happened that Townley was experimentally a Socialist, and thus he ceased to be a Socialist. Later efforts to prove that the League was a Socialist enterprise in disguise convinced many, but they never convinced the old-line Socialists in North Dakota. They knew better.

Having washed his hands of the Socialist party and with a new and totally different plan of action beginning to develop in his mind, Townley went to Bismarck to observe the farmers and the legislature.

CHAPTER VII

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

TOWNLEY'S "hunch" had developed into a definite plan before he quit Bismarck. What he saw and heard convinced him that the farmers were ready for a new form of organization. They had followed the trail of their grievances from the farm to the town with its small elevator, its group of little shacks, its marble bank and its country store, and on to the city with its huge grain storage tanks, its Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade, its big banks and its princes of industry.

They had seen the missionaries of the bankers and the big businessmen of the cities visiting their local towns and had seen the views of big business in the big town reflected in the actions of little business in the little town. They had been told, and they had become convinced, that political power held their hope of substantial relief. They had attempted to use political power, and they had been put off with promises, finally to be cheated of performance; to be told that a few weeks of "investigation" by a political commission proved faulty the reasoning which had been worked out in more than a decade of discussion.

They were suspicious of the sincerity and fair-

ness of the men who now turned against the project of state ownership. They were more than suspicious when they found townsmen and a few big farmers in their own state echoing the statements and the opinions of the big operators in the grain market and of the publications which were known to express their views.

Townley quietly sounded farmer after farmer and he found this attitude of mind firmly fixed in them all. The farmers were ready to desert the old parties and the old political leadership. They were ready to do so with enthusiasm, if anything were offered which held hope of being better.

Townley was determined to offer them something better. The Nonpartisan League was born in his brain at the city of Bismarck in February of 1915.

Among the farmers who gathered at Bismarck at this Equity meeting of 1915 was Fred B. Wood of Deering, McHenry county, in the north-central part of the state. Wood, a man of about 50 with two grown sons, was prominent in the Equity movement. He was a successful farmer, a man of ability and substance, genial by nature and widely respected; and, moreover, a man who could be trusted to stick to any cause in which he enrolled.

Townley had met Wood in the course of his Socialistic organizing. He renewed the acquaintance at Bismarck and it was to Wood that he first imparted the outlines of the plan he had in mind.

They had long conferences and Wood at length agreed that he would lend the support of his name and what influence he had to make the scheme a success.

“I had told Townley that he could come to our farm when spring broke and I would help him get started,” said Wood in one of his very few platform speeches. “But the snow wasn’t off the ground when one day he showed up. He told me he couldn’t wait.”

Another conference ensued, in the Wood farm home. This time Wood’s two sons, Howard and Edwin, joined in the talk. Howard is now lieutenant governor of North Dakota. Edwin was a speaker and organizer for the League until his death of influenza in 1918.

The talk, says Wood, senior, lasted most of the night. Early the next day Howard Wood and Townley started out with a team and bobsled to call on the neighbors. The Farmers’ Non-partisan Political League of North Dakota had begun organization.

The day’s results were to be a test of the theory. Howard Wood furnished the introductions. Townley did the talking. It was an arrangement that later became a standard of methods in the League organization work. An early convert becomes a “booster” in his township. He is persuaded to accompany the organizer and break the ice with his neighbors. Sometimes organizers during the busy seasons of farm work have been

known to hire a capable farm hand and take him along. The farm hand takes his place on the plow or the hay wagon so that the farmer may have time to hear the organizer talk. Sometimes the farm hand fills in while the farmer goes on a "boosting" excursion with the organizer.

Townley was a good organizer and Howard Wood a good booster. The League had a dozen members before the day was done.

And Townley didn't merely talk of what he might do or of what the farmers could do. It wasn't a proposal to join an organization later to be created.

By no means. The League already existed. Townley had written the program on a piece of paper. He had named himself president and Wood, senior, was vice-president.

He collected the money. He collected it on the spot. The dues were small at first—\$2.50 a year. Later as he began to get an idea of what organization work would cost and found it necessary to fix a schedule of compensation to organizers, Townley changed this to \$6 a year, within a year to \$9; and after the first successful campaign the fee was put on a biennial basis to correspond with the term of state office-holding, the amount being made \$16 for two years.

The first day's work was a success. Townley had his League started. There were more enthusiastic conferences at the Wood home and within a few days a few of the first converts

signed notes to enable Townley to get another car. The car he had used in his Socialist organization days had been sold and the note-givers repaid.

The books of the League were still in Townley's pockets and he was the sole organization force. Soon he decided his idea was a winner, and he began to create his force of organizers. They came from two sources. Some were farmers who were enthusiastic for the scheme and showed ability to talk well. A number were formerly Socialist speakers, organizers or writers.

The experience in Socialistic proselytizing was an admirable basis for League organization work. The premises, of attack upon existing political parties as useless for the farmers' purpose and of the need of an alliance to grapple with organized "big business" greed, were the same.

Townley was easily able to convert the "live wires" in the Socialist movement to a belief in a gospel of action and to a tentative political program which might from one aspect be regarded as only a slight concession to Socialism, but from any other might be viewed as a start in the right direction. He found that Socialists, like other folk, were willing to abandon much theory in the hope of getting some practical result.

With the first organizer in addition to Townley himself at work, Townley became a man of many affairs. He raised the dues to \$6 a year, had receipt blanks and report forms printed, employed office help in a temporary office at Minot, in the

northwestern part of the state, the third city in the state in population.

An "executive committee" was selected. It was a simple process. Townley selected from among the men he had "organized" five who appeared to him suitable and whom Wood and the small force of organizers approved. The names of a score of other farmers who had joined the enterprise were printed on the "program" leaflet as "references." The program, which was practically unchanged from the time of Townley's first conference with Wood, appeared in printed form. It was as follows:

State ownership of terminal elevators, flour mills, packing houses and cold storage plants.

State inspection of grain and grain dockage.

Exemption of farm improvements from taxation.

State hail insurance on the acreage tax basis.

Rural credit banks operated at cost.

These met the main complaints of the farmers in a simple and succinct way.

To make the speculator with his thousands of idle acres pay a fair proportion of tax, remove the tax on land improvements, so that the unimproved land would be taxed equally with the improved. To give protection against the most exasperating and unpredictable of natural hazards—hail destruction of crops—by state insurance which would replace private insurance costing as much

for commissions and "overhead" as it paid out in losses. To meet the demand for farm loans on a reasonable basis by a system of credits like the European plans, under which farmers, having the benefit of lower rates, would in addition be protected against seizures which would rob them of all the fruit of years of effort. Finally, to provide a new system of marketing which would give the state control over grades, insure fair grading and weighing, to guarantee to the farmer the full milling value of his grain, to enable him to hold for higher prices and still, by borrowing on warehouse receipts get the bulk of his money out of the crop, and to create within the state a market for its own products which would build up diversified farming to replace the one-crop system.

All of these things were certain to "look good" to the farmers. As has been seen, they were not original with Townley. They were the accrued product of several years of discussion. They were the accepted platform of leaders in the farmers' co-operative organizations, and they were approved by learned and scientific authority.

Yet, even these items were not the central thought in the League's propaganda. With keen foresight, Townley saw that the most important fact about his organization was the fact of organization itself. A political program, lasting for a campaign or two, may win a man's approval and possibly his support; but it takes an organization of deep common purpose to win his allegiance.

So, first and last, the organizers talked "organization" to the farmers.

"We farmers can't get what we want, because we are not organized as farmers," they told the men to whom they talked. "The business men have their organizations; the union workingmen have theirs; the doctors, the lawyers, the editors, all have their organizations, to which they pay dues. The farmers have a common object and a common interest in politics in this state. They never can get what they want from the state government unless they organize as farmers to get it."

It was an appealing and convincing argument. It might not have been convincing if the politicians had not proved its truth. But they had given dramatic evidence of it. They had shown how an overwhelming demand of the people of the state could be scouted and defied. They had given evidence that they did not fear conventions and lobbies, because they were secure in the belief that the resentment of one year would not be translated into effective action at the polls the next.

Townley proposed with his Nonpartisan League to translate this resentment into effective action, so by every means possible he kept the issues of the legislative session of 1915 alive.

Organization work progressed. Names and checks and cash began to roll into the headquarters at Minot. Townley's organizers, several of them effective platform speakers, held public

meetings. Townley spoke to groups and crowds of farmers whenever they could be gotten together. But, more important still, Townley frequently called in his organizers for consultations. At these sessions, methods and arguments were exhaustively discussed. The organizers' meetings became schools of salesmanship.

"Psychology" is a favored word in League circles. "I don't think it would be good psychology," is the most frequent objection to an argument or a method of approach. The word was not ignorantly used. The organization methods were and are scientifically practical. They are studied and deliberate. No sales organization ever worked more carefully and intensively with its men than Townley worked with his crew of organizers.

They tell a story of one of the Minnesota organizers. He had been tarred and feathered in one of the communities where, under the guise of patriotic effort, lawless demonstrations against the League had been encouraged in the towns by officials.

In company with two speakers of the League he was making a trip to a town some distance away. Suddenly he turned to his companions and said: "I don't think I'd better go back to W—. I don't think it would be good psychology."

His wonder at their shouts of laughter was perfectly innocent. He was not the only organizer thoroughly willing, in those strenuous Minnesota

days, to go boldly back into a town where a vicious mob, posing as a "loyalty" or a "vigilance" committee, had beaten or tarred and feathered him and threatened him with death if he returned.

The early days in North Dakota, however, were free of physical danger. The movement grew rapidly and quietly. Before midsummer there were 10,000 names enrolled. When snow flew there were 26,000.

CHAPTER VIII

“SIX-DOLLAR SUCKERS”

TOWNLEY and his organizers worked swiftly. It was the task of “headquarters” to increase the force of organizers as rapidly as reliable men could be had. They were not the sort of men whom the head of an ordinary sales crew would have picked to sell his goods to farmers. They were preferably men who had farmed in North Dakota—and in a majority of cases they were farmers or the sons of farmers. But the indispensable requisite was enthusiasm for the work. They must be men willing to fight and to sacrifice for a cause. The devotion and the loyalty they gave to the work could not have been bought for money. It was unpurchasable, as men’s best work everywhere is unpurchasable.

It was work for the common good, as these men saw it, and as they see it today. As they met increasing opposition, as they met more and more the hostility which is the lot of every agitator, their work required more and more the courage which is essential to being different and to fighting existing and conventional conditions. Their path became the path of the prophets of new things in all ages, who always have been stoned by their own generation.

At the start the work of organization was carried on as quietly as possible. Townley didn't seek interviews. In fact, he never has been trained to give interviews. He has been frequently enough misquoted even in his speeches. In the early months he and his workers intentionally avoided attracting the attention of a press which they knew would sooner or later attack them.

This avoidance of publicity, of course, later furnished grounds for attack. It was charged that a swindle was being perpetrated on the farmers. Small-town weeklies were the first to discover the movement. How it was received by them may be learned by the following extract from a small-town paper in an issue late in the summer of 1915:

“Recently the *Ozone* referred to the presence in the state of a number of solicitors for membership in some kind of a ‘party’ which was to be of special advantage to farmers, and who also offered a year’s subscription to some paper or magazine as material inducement for joining. A fee of \$6 was collected from each subscriber. Since then we have learned that two men have been busy around Tuttle and in Wells county, with the scheme, and from the statements of some who paid in checks, cash or note, it is more than ever evident that the farmers who took stock in the smooth strangers were too easy victims to a confidence game. In no case have the strangers sought to interest anybody in towns where they stopped, and it has been noticed that in making even a trifling purchase they always tender \$6 checks, cashing them in

that way. They never go to a bank. Two of their victims have said they had no magazine yet, though a month has elapsed. Neither had any idea of what new ‘privileges’ they were to gain. Both said they guessed most who paid the \$6 did so to ‘get rid of the solicitor,’ as had been the case with themselves. In one small town one of the strangers was overheard to say to the other: ‘We’ll get out early in the morning, drive down among those farmers south of here and get their fat.’ Only they put it a little stronger. In Wells county a couple of the ‘six-dollar gang,’ as they are called, said that \$5 of the \$6 would go into a fund for supporting a daily paper in the interests of the new party. The paper was to be at Fargo, and was to come to signers for a year, and to start in a few days. No one has received a copy. Those who gave notes are now wondering if these will be traded into the hands of innocent purchasers. As before stated, the *Ozone* believes, with the Fargo papers, that this is only a game for fleecing the unwary, and a possibly bonafide subscription to a magazine used as a safeguard by the operators. Our belief is that they are operating a questionable scheme, as there is no public knowledge of such a farmers’ protective party as they affect to represent, and their avoidance of association or contact with townspeople, and advance dating of receipts are suspicious.”

This view of the League is typical of the attitude taken by many of the weekly newspapers at that time. Their lack of information as to the real purposes of the organization was perhaps excusable. It was noticeable, however, that the papers which lacked information and were disposed to

regard the doings of Townley and his men as just another swindle being practised on the farmers were usually those which had been actively hostile to such organizations as the Equity Society and Equity Exchange. There were a number of exceptions to this attitude. A clipping from the *Carlington Record* of September, 1915, reads :

“Every daily paper in the state with one or two exceptions is shedding crocodile tears over the fact that the farmers are being ‘grafted’ for \$6 by a group of organizers. These same papers are all feeling bad to think that the Equity lets such a ‘bad’ man as Loftus manage its affairs. But the farmers are taking the position that they are able to manage their own affairs. These papers would feel that the Equity was a delightful little, harmless pink tea affair if it would but let the Chamber of Commerce and its allies name its officers and conduct its affairs for it. But, thank God, the farmers, as has often been stated, have no intentions of doing anything of the sort. If the farmers get one-fourth value for the \$6 they have put in the nonpartisan organization it will be the most profitable \$6 they have ever invested.”

As indicated by these clippings, the principal daily papers in the state had by this time begun to “expose” the organization. It was attacked at this time as a swindle being practised upon the farmers, and little credence was given to the theory that it might actually be what its promoters were representing to the farmers that it was to be.

The attacks upon the League preceded any effort to get from its founder or those connected with it a plain statement of the League's plan and purposes. It was regarded with suspicion primarily, it appears, because, as expressed by the *Steele Ozone* in the first paragraph quoted above, “In no case have the strangers sought to interest anybody in towns where they stopped.” The small-town editor who maintains a properly respectful attitude toward the town banker and the town merchant is counted upon, as a faithful watchdog, to bark when a “stranger,” not properly accredited from the town, invades the trade field of which he is guardian.

The financial methods of the League, adopted early in the game, were an interesting feature of its operation. Reference is made, in one of the extracts quoted above, to the advanced dating of receipts. This was slightly inaccurate. It was not the receipts given for membership dues which were advanced, or post-dated, but in many cases the checks given in payment of dues.

It is a condition in the grain districts that the farmer, unless he is unusually well off, does business on credit most of the year. In the fall, when his grain goes on the market, he pays his debts or renews his notes when necessary. It was soon found by Townley that farmers were not able to pay out in cash even so small a sum as \$6. Some might have balances of a few hundred dollars in the bank, which were offset by notes in round

sums, and farmers in this situation frequently were unwilling to face the questioning of the small-town banker regarding a check given for political organization purposes. That this apprehension was well grounded was shown by the fact that in many cases North Dakota bankers refused to honor currently dated checks of men having funds in the bank, even in many cases where the maker of the check was in no way indebted to the banker.

In more than one instance, wealthy farmers withdrew, or threatened to withdraw, their entire balances from the bank before the banker would give in and cash checks given for League memberships.

The post-dated check was an outgrowth of the condition mentioned above. The larger part of the organization work was done in the spring and summer months, during the most stringent part of the credit period, at the time when the farmer had continual demands for money for subsistence, for seed, for machinery, for feed for his stock and for wages for his hired help, with no revenue coming in to meet the demands. The bankers who were his creditors until the harvesting of the crop were thus in a position to supervise his expenditures rather effectively.

So the League adopted the plan of permitting the farmers to give for membership dues checks whose dating was advanced to a time in the fall when the farmer again would be on a cash basis. These checks formed a large proportion of the

League's revenue, and it became necessary, in order that operations should continue, to provide means for realizing on them in advance of the date of payment.

The means were found, though not without some difficulties. The post-dated checks were put up as collateral for loans, but it was not found possible to do this until personal notes had been obtained from influential farmers, and these notes became a principal obligation covering the loans thus made. It is obvious that any set of checks thus post-dated would be likely to have a considerable proportion of defaults. In the case of the League membership checks in North Dakota these defaults ran to approximately 15 per cent.

Later events showed the sound logic of the plan of the paid-in-advance membership as the basis of building a political organization and also the wisdom of resorting to these promises to pay—which the post-dated checks were—in settlement of membership dues. Some months later the hostile press discovered what Townley had reasoned out in advance: that a man with \$6 or \$9 or \$16 at stake, would stand by a political organization, if only to “get the worth of his money” or to convince himself and his neighbors that he had not been cheated.

-What the newspapers quoted had learned in regard to a magazine and a newspaper subscription embraced in the membership dues was in part correct. An arrangement had, in fact, been made

with *Pearson's* magazine to supply all League members with that magazine. In return *Pearson's* printed a series of articles on the League which were supplied by Charles Edward Russell. In the course of preparation of these articles Russell came into contact with the League and was for some months a valued adviser. He was in North Dakota at the time of the launching of the League's first and "official" publication, the *Nonpartisan Leader*. The arrangement with *Pearson's* lasted for a year.

Included in the membership dues, it was stated in the original receipts, was subscription to an "official paper" of the League later to be established. This was the *Nonpartisan Leader*, which was in fact established in September of 1915.

The beginning of the publication of the *Leader* may be said to have marked the end of the first period in the League's history and the beginning of the second. The first was the period of birth and youth, the period of the swift and secret growth of a potent idea and a great movement which burst upon North Dakota and the Northwest almost with the effect of having risen overnight.

CHAPTER IX

PUBLICITY

THE publication of an "official organ" of the Non-partisan League was not an afterthought, but an essential part of Townley's original plans. Its beginning waited only on the gathering of resources which would make its continued publication possible. With its appearance the machinery of the organization, as Townley had conceived it, became complete and he had the satisfaction of seeing his scheme in actual operation and making progress fully as rapidly as he could have conceived possible.

He had appropriated to himself a platform of political reforms and of economic reform by political action which had grown out of the experience of the state, and for which there was a definite public demand. At the moment when public sentiment found itself foiled by the existing political machinery he had come forward with his new form of political organization to achieve the objects the people had set before themselves. He built upon a class consciousness becoming acute—in a class which constituted a majority of the voting population. Because his political program dealt with dollars and cents reforms which, it could be

argued, would mean the prospect of speedy financial profit—his appeal for cash contributions as the basis of membership appeared reasonable and was persuasive. The farmers were used to gambles with the elements and with the market, sometimes waiting for several years to “cash in” on a heavy investment; an investment of \$6 to \$16, with “economic liberty” at stake, was an attractive proposition.

With a membership enrolled and the checks or cash in hand it became necessary to provide both active expression of the function of membership and a means of frequent report of the doings of the organization.

Until the political campaign should open these two needs could be met only by the publication of a League “organ.” By it the members of the League could be put in touch with each other, the purposes of the organization could be explained further, and, in short, the membership could be “kept sold on the proposition.”

With these purposes the *Nonpartisan Leader* made its appearance on September 23, 1915. It was on newsprint paper, but of half newspaper size, with sixteen pages. Its more noticeable features were three cartoons, including a large cover page cartoon, by John M. Baer, a North Dakota artist, more than a dozen half-tone pictures of the earliest League members, and a noticeable preference for large type and plain, crisp statement. These features reflected the influence of Charles

Edward Russell, who prepared much of the matter for the early editions, as well as the preferences of Townley himself. With the first publication of the *Leader*, the organizer and president of the League began a close study of publicity methods, which has made him one of the most searching critics, from the standpoint of publicity effectiveness, of the *Leader* and other publications affiliated with the League.

The first page cartoon of the first issue of the *Leader* was a telling representation of the League's attitude and purposes. It showed "Big Biz," a fat plutocrat, standing at a work bench with draw-shave in hand, modeling out wooden figures labeled "Governor," "Judge," "Senator" and "Legislator." A stalwart individual in farmers' dress is laying his hand on the shoulder of "Big Biz" with the words, "You're fired! I'll do this job myself!" The latter character is labeled "Nonpartisan League."

The foreword of the publication was printed under this cartoon. It read:

THE THINGS THIS JOURNAL STANDS FOR

This journal belongs to the farmers of the Northwest. It is founded by them to voice their protest against unjust and unrighteous conditions—to voice that protest and make it count.

The farming class does the hardest work and gets proportionately the smallest return.

This is the result of conditions that will never be

changed or bettered until farmers, organized for their own protection, make their power and numbers felt at the polls and in government.

That is why the Farmers' Nonpartisan Organization League came into being. It has no idea of starting a new party; it seeks only to secure union and organized effort that the farmers may secure their just share of representation in the affairs of government.

The League is publishing *The Leader* to help that cause.

If you believe in justice and true democracy, come and join hands with us. We start the *Leader* with the largest subscription list any journal ever began with in this state. We have gone far enough to see opening before us an inspiring prospect of achievement and usefulness. If all the friends of fair play will unite with us we shall surely make a new day in the history of agriculture in the Northwest.

Read this paper from week to week. You will see in it how great is the opportunity to turn injustice into justice that shall endure for us and our children.

This first number of the *Leader* reviewed the story of the previous legislative session and of the refusal of the legislature to comply with the demands of the farmer delegations for the terminal elevator and other projects, and it outlined the purposes of the League. It contained also reprints of dispatches and comment showing huge profits made by railroad promoters, grain market speculators and others, and comparing their dealings with the dealings of the farmer. One article points out that "practically all" of the 35 men in

the lower house of the legislature who favored the measures asked by the farmers' organizations were themselves farmers, and dwells on the mistake of electing to office men who are the "friends of the farmers" only while they are candidates. It outlines a better way:

"Instead of several hundred farmers spending their time and money petitioning friends of the corporations after election to do something for them, it would be much more effective for all the farmers to spend a little time and money before election investigating the business connections and records of the men who want to be elected. They have determined to organize and make a united effort to find out who are their friends before they send them to Bismarck."

There were in this issue the pictures of fourteen men who were among the first members of the League. All were residents of McHenry county in the vicinity of Deering, the home of the Wood family and the birthplace of the League. Among them is John N. Hagan, a native American of Irish descent, who came to North Dakota to visit relatives while in the midst of a college course and stayed to become a school teacher and later a farmer. Hagan was one of the League's first candidates for state office. He was commissioner of agriculture in 1916 and was re-elected to that office in 1918. Of the fourteen whose pictures and brief biographies are printed, three are natives of Norway, while all the others are Ameri-

can born. Their names are Morrison, Thomas, Linbo, Trudell, Johnston, McDonald, Barnes, Fast, Olson, Hagan, Hoff, Erickson, Livingston and McCoy.

In fact, the names and nativity of those most active and enthusiastic in the League at this time, as well as later, furnish small ground for the accusation that the League carried on its propaganda among aliens and the alien-born, and that those whom it incited to political action had no real sympathy with nor understanding of American institutions.

The native American of farmer forebears greeted the League plan with enthusiasm. An organization to make the ballot more effective in the interests of the majority class seemed to him reasonable and proper. The foreign-born were far harder to convince.

Another interesting feature of the first number of the *Leader* was the reply to the attacks of the press of North Dakota. This was in the form of an editorial article signed by Charles Edward Russell. Pointing to instances of the use by great corporations of their power over publications to cause matter to be printed which would favorably affect their cause or which would destroy a popular movement, Russell warned the farmers that they could expect the same weapon to be used against them.

“Look out for it,” he warned. “You have launched in a just and honest way a just and

honest cause. Do not believe anything you read about it unless you read it in your own journal or in journals that you know are absolutely with you."

Townley and his associates were wise enough to feel sure that their opponents would be able to muster the strength of the greater part of the influential press and they prepared to discount the attack.

They knew that even the so-called "country paper" is, in fact, a small-town paper; that it lives on the sufferance of the small-town banker and business man. This is especially true in a state like North Dakota, where the newspapers had been "helped" by laws fixing high rates for legal printing and multiplying the number of journals in which "official publication" must be made. The effect of these laws was to breed a swarm of insignificant and needless publications which quarreled over the crumbs of support which the small town and even crossroads community could eke out to keep them alive. A "country paper" of large circulation can exist with very little advertising. Those with very small circulations are almost wholly dependent on the sale of space to advertisers to take care of their proportionately larger "overhead." The laws in "aid" of the press reduced the press, in fact, to a condition of beggarly subserviency. Here and there a few dared to refuse chains.

Knowing these things, Townley had no illusions

of insuring himself against press attack. He knew the leading citizens of the towns would fight him and that their papers would do the same. So he prepared a backfire. "Tainted news" and "the kept press" have become familiar terms in North Dakota.

The first issue of the *Leader* also printed a number of letters from farmer members of the League. This practice was continued in later numbers. The letters showed a spirit of real enthusiasm. It was soon found that they were even more effective than the most eloquent editorial in developing the same spirit in other farmers. During the succeeding winter there was such a flood of letters that it became impossible to print even extracts from all of them, though pages were devoted to that purpose.

The *Leader* was thus fulfilling its mission. It was showing the farmers that their League was a reality; it was educating them in the League purposes; it was reminding them of the ills they had suffered; it was keeping up contact between them, and developing a reliable and speedy means of communication.

The farmers were highly appreciative. Few publications anywhere have been so thoroughly and completely read from cover to cover by so large a proportion of their subscribers as the *Non-partisan Leader*. In that respect it has been unique among "official organs."

CHAPTER X

THE ENEMY OPENS FIRE

It is not necessary to make an apology for the use of war terms in a description of the political battle which the Nonpartisan League has waged and which has been waged against it. They have abounded in the League's publicity matter at a time when they were naturally expressive. The farmers, also, liked the simile of battle.

It was in the winter of 1915-16, then, that the troops of the enemy were sighted and the first skirmish began. There had been some desultory sniping on the part of the weekly press in the state and a round or two fired by the daily papers, but the concentrated attack did not develop until the first season's organization work had been done.

The *Grand Forks Herald*, published at Grand Forks, the second city in the state—(it has a population of about 15,000 and would scarcely be called a "city" in any but a sparsely populated state) was one of the first active enemies of the League and has been a consistent fighter of the organization. It is published by "Jerry" (J. D.) Bacon, a man of intense convictions and a violent partisan. Early in the history of the League he conceived a

strong antagonism toward the plan and toward its leaders. He has been active in the organization of various "Good Government Leagues," "voters' associations" and other organizations to combat the League, has published at least two pamphlets containing compilations from his newspapers of his attacks on the League, and is known to have conferred with many men from other states into which the League later spread, giving them advice and information with which to combat the farmers' movement in their states. Concerning this activity, League publicity men have been disposed to be facetious. They point to the degree of success the Grand Forks publisher has had in his own state as evidence of how far his efforts will go in other states.

The Grand Forks publisher was aided in the attack by L. T. Guild, a retired Methodist minister who was the editor and principal owner of the *Courier-News*, a morning paper published at Fargo. This paper continued a rather venomous campaign against the League for a year. In September of 1916, Rev. Mr. Guild, in the face of heavy loss in circulation, tired of the battle and sold his interest to two young newspaper men from another state. They, in turn, within two months sold their control of the property to the Nonpartisan Publishing Company, the partnership which represented the League in the publication of the *Nonpartisan Leader*.

The League thus came into control of a daily

newspaper of considerable circulation. In spite of rather determined efforts on the part of influential Fargo men to deprive it of business, it remains in the possession of the League publishing concern, has a much larger circulation than it had during the former régime, and is successfully and profitably operated.

A third daily newspaper opponent of the League in the early days and later, as well, was the *Bismarck Tribune*, the one daily newspaper published at the state capital. This paper nominally has been under various ownerships in four years, but generally has been controlled by a Bismarck banker and his associates.

A fourth newspaper foe of some importance has been *Normanden*, a paper published at Grand Forks in the Norwegian language and appearing twice weekly.

This battery of newspaper opposition began a steady fire of attack in the winter of 1915-16, which has continued practically without cessation or intermission for four years. In that time it has taken a shot at every man and every measure proposed by the farmers' organization. Their attack has been marked by a bitterness seldom witnessed in a political campaign.

The first line of attack was to warn the farmers against the "smooth strangers" who were getting their money, telling them that they were not likely to see again either it or the individuals who were holding out to them such rosy hopes of political

control through a farmers' organization. As the League gathered greater headway and information began to drift in as to the personnel of the organizing force, it was recognized that several had formerly been active in the Socialist party of the state. Then the attack began to center upon advertising the movement as "Socialism." The anti-religious aspects of much of the genuine Socialist propaganda were emphasized. League organizers, Townley's associates, were referred to as "atheists," "freelovers" and anarchists.

It was not long before open public speaking became one of the League's devices for winning members. Some of the ablest speakers were men with whom Townley had come into touch in his work with the Socialist party and whom he had persuaded to desert Socialism for the promise of speedier action in the League.

Among these men was A. E. Bowen, a young man of about Townley's age, who, like Townley, had spent several years teaching school before he had drifted into political agitation. He had been a candidate for governor on the Socialist ticket. Bowen was a remarkably able platform speaker, and among the most effective of the organizers. He had come into touch with Townley early in the movement; and he is given credit by Townley for many suggestions influencing the plans of the organization. Others who had been identified with the Socialists included J. Arthur Williams of Grand Forks and O. M. Thomason, who had been

editor for a time of a Socialist paper at Minot. These two and Bowen were among the effective platform force of the League in its early days; their presence threw Townley's previous Socialistic affiliations into the foreground.

Later other men, whose dreams of a different—and, to their minds, a better—social order had taken them first into and then out of the Socialist party, were recruits to the movement. Their former Socialistic affiliation furnished support to the charge that the League was “disguised Socialism.”

Fault was found by the newspaper critics of the League with its form of organization. “It is not democratic,” said *Normanden*, and “Who elected Townley president?” inquired the *Grand Forks Herald*. All wanted to know what was being done with the money, the farmers' money collected for dues. All wanted to know by whom the accounts were to be audited and who was to control the expenditures.

It must be admitted that the whole form of organization of the League, while having its peculiar elements of strength, was left open to this line of attack. It had been foreseen by Townley and his associates, and preparation had been made to answer it.

It was Townley's fixed determination, made after mature deliberation, to keep the organization strictly in his own hands and the hands of the men whom he should select as his advisers, until

the "idea" had been proved a success or a failure. It was his plan to have the control at the start as well-centered, and the organization as flexible as that commanded by the chairman of a great national campaign for one of the old established parties, who is not hampered by directors' meetings while he is carrying on a campaign. He intended that affairs should move and move swiftly. He did not intend to waste time with formalities, with parliamentary meetings and the machinery of conventional organization, little understood by the farmers, but suited to the purposes of the ambitious small politician who might attach himself to the movement.

Townley intended that his own position, and that of his own executive committee, should be well safeguarded while he was attempting to prove what could be done with his plan.

"Suppose I should call for an election now," said Townley when the League was less than a year old. "What would be the result? Some opposing candidate for president would rise within the organization. Newspapers would advertise his candidacy. They would do their best to build up a faction supporting him. We should have politics within the League and the League's state campaign would be stopped before we could get to first base."

In a speech at Grand Forks in 1917 Townley devoted a few words to answering the question of who elected him president. The speech itself af-

fords an excellent example of Townley's platform style. The following extract is given as reported by a stenographer employed by the League:

"By the way, I want to be very frank with you this afternoon. The *Grand Forks Herald*, and the gang in the senate that killed 44 (House Bill 44 of the 1917 session, one of the important League measures), and Everson down here, and all the fellows that oppose this organization, say that I was not elected president of the League.

"They want to know what right I have got to call myself president of the Nonpartisan League. I am going to be very frank with you and explain what right I have. When Howard and his father and two or three more of us found that this thing would go, after I had been organizing for four or five days and put on everybody we saw during that time; we saw that it would be necessary to have some kind of committee to take care of it.

"We didn't have automobiles and gasoline enough to go to all the farmers in the state, and to Jerry Bacon and the *Grand Forks Herald*, to ask them who this committee should be.

"So we got busy and picked out a committee. The old gentleman named five men that we knew, and asked this little group of farmers if they thought these men would be all right. By the way, Howard was to be a member of that committee to begin with, because at first, the old gentleman did not know whether he wanted to or not, so Howard was proposed as such a member of the committee. Mr. Wood was suggested as treasurer and vice-president. So we took a piece of paper and wrote the League program on it; and wrote the names of this committee here up at the top; and because I had

the idea they named me as chairman of the committee and wrote my name on there as president.

“And then when we went to the farmers we showed them these names and said the League would be carried on under the direction of this committee. And there was a clause there that said in so many words that the management of the funds was to be in the hands of that committee.

“And this fellow, and this fellow (pointing to men in the audience) and every one who joined the League, read the program and those names and signed up and paid his money. And I have got a kind of a foolish idea that all of those men who signed that paper voted for me at that time. I don't know of any one that voted against me.

“And we have got the names of 40,000 farmers, in their own handwriting, on this paper, subscribing to this program and to those men to carry out that program. I think that was a pretty fair election.”

A voice: “Yes.”

“About as good as we could accomplish at that time, with the machinery we had. Of course, it might have been better to have got 4,000 or 5,000 farmers to come down to Grand Forks and hold a convention; but we could not have convinced them at that time that they ought to come.

“I will tell you who would have been here if we had tried to do that. There would have been about half a dozen politicians and corporation lawyers, and a newspaper man or two. But you farmers would not have come. We had to show you first that something should be done, before you would come. Now that is how I came to be president of the committee and how these other men came to be members of the committee.

“Last winter when we had a convention down in Fargo, there were a great many ambitious people outside of the organization who wanted an election of officers. And most prominent among the men that wanted an election were Dr. Guild of the *Courier-News* and Jerry Bacon of the *Grand Forks Herald*.

“And they have been wanting an election ever since. They want one today.”

This speech, in 1917, when the League was two years old, was the first complete reply made by Townley on this point. The League's defense in general against all charges was to attack. Townley was never a believer in being on the defensive. The *Nonpartisan Leader* wasted little space in replying to the charges of Socialism and boss control of the League. It did devote considerable space to the motives of the newspapers and men who made the attacks. It wanted to know what the publishers who were attacking the League had ever done to remedy the abuses from which the farmers suffered. It asked why it should be necessary for the farmers to get instructions from bankers or publishers on how to organize. To the complaint of some critics that their quarrel was not with the farmers nor their organization but with the character of the leadership the reply was made that these were the tactics of the enemies of any cause.

The League had an advantage in the fact that its principal opponents had been in the forefront of battles against other farmers' organizations.

Just a few months before suit had been brought in the endeavor to force the Equity Exchange into bankruptcy.

During the trial the connection between the attack on the co-operative company, ostensibly brought in the interest of stockholders, and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce was made plain. The same newspapers which had exploited the troubles of the Equity were in full cry after the League. Loftus had been attacked in almost the identical language with which Townley was attacked. Farmers who had joined the League were, in a large percentage of cases, also members of the Equity Society and stockholders in the Equity Exchange. They found the same persons fighting the League as had fought the Equity. They recognized them as enemies not to be believed, but to be fought.

So the farmers began writing letters to the publishers of the opposition papers. They sent copies of the letters to the *Nonpartisan Leader* and some were published. The circulations of the daily papers fighting the League began to fall off amazingly in the rural districts. Some indignant and energetic farmers seem to have gone about getting signatures to letters of protest and apparently canvassing readers to stop their subscriptions to the "Old Gang" papers.

It is certain that in the first winter of the League's existence, when it was a new thing and so of absorbing interest to the farmers, the at-

tacks of the opposition press served to keep wide awake the spirit of loyalty to the organization, served to stimulate a fighting temper, and did more than any other influence to weld the members into a genuine organization, with a feeling of comradeship and allegiance. Reading the attacks upon the League, writing letters in reply, discussing them with neighbors, supplied the proper activity to make membership in the League seem an active function.

The members of the League were further acquainted with their duties and responsibilities and the purpose of their organization by a comprehensive series of meetings during this first winter.

These meetings were held at town halls, in district schoolhouses, sometimes in barns—anywhere farmers could come by sleigh or wagon for a gathering in midwinter. The meetings were addressed by Townley and members of his force of organizers, the subjects always being various aspects of the League's program and the League's plan to put the government in the hands of the people.

Many of the men who were thus sent out to hold meetings had been totally inexperienced in public speaking until they became organizers for the League. Several were farmers' boys with only a scant common school education. To a newcomer the development of natural oratory in these speakers was one of the most interesting features of the whole movement.

These men faced audiences which were often in considerable part hostile. Townspeople had already heard through the newspapers of this "radical" movement among the farmers, and were prepared to frown upon it as a rude, rebellious manifestation. The farmers who came to hear were often suspicious. The meetings were in many instances a break into new territory.

Under such conditions, a man, though he might not have grace of manner nor fluency of language, must have an interesting story to tell and he must speak to the point.

The story was an interesting one, and the men were themselves so interested in it and so absorbed in its advocacy, that they often were as convincing as the most eloquent of evangelists. The winter's series of meetings resulted in a considerable increase in League memberships and, more important, maintained the morale of the organization. They prepared for the big job of the year, the capture of the state in the general elections of 1916.

CHAPTER XI

CHOOSING THE CANDIDATES

THE League plan of action for the capture of the state on behalf of the farmers began to develop early in 1916. The first step was the holding of township or election precinct caucuses. These were held throughout the state on February 22—Washington's birthday.

For several issues before this date the *Non-partisan Leader* carried notices of the caucuses and a general appeal to all members of the League to attend them.

These furnished the first occasion for direct exercise by the League members of the privilege of membership, and were, in fact, the one occasion when League membership constituted the power to act. In these caucuses the individual member was given his representation in the selection of candidates. While the promotion or "organization" end of the League activity was concentrated in the hands of Townley and his executive committee, every member had a vote in the process by which candidates were chosen.

In the *Leader*, and through letters, great stress was laid on the precinct meetings and the importance of the action to be taken there. Townley

himself very carefully drafted a series of letters to the members which were printed in the *Leader* and which sought to make plain the spirit in which the caucuses were to be approached. Townley felt that in a large measure the attendance at these caucuses and their results would show the success or failure of the League in its first campaign. General participation of the membership and an amicable series of meetings, and the selection of men without political ambitions of their own, would mean that the League was in a fair way to attain its purposes. A small attendance, manipulation of the meetings by the friends of candidates, and other symptoms of orthodox political party caucuses, would mean that the League held no new and unique significance for the farmer, and that it could never hope to gain what it had set out to gain.

Very strongly the League president warned the members against permitting politicians to worm their way into the caucuses. He instructed the members to defeat any man who sought to get himself elected a delegate to the legislative district convention. The election of the one delegate from each voting precinct to the district convention which was to be held in each of the forty-nine legislative districts in the state was the single duty to be performed by the precinct caucus.

“Avoid the politician who seeks office, for he usually, though he may not admit it, seeks it for himself and not

for the good that he may do for all the people. Avoid also the men who may be too friendly with bankers, middlemen and big business, for they may betray you."

So wrote Townley, in his "Call to Patriotic Action" published in the *Leader* of February 10, 1916. Further, he explained the responsibility that would devolve upon the delegates:

"A heavy and sacred duty will rest upon these delegates. Heretofore, when you went to the polls you have had no way of knowing about the fitness of the candidates for the different offices. Usually they were all politicians seeking office for the benefit the office would bring to them, and if two or three good men were candidates the farmer vote would be split between them and some smooth grafter would be elected.

"Now these delegates, from each precinct, will act as a committee to investigate the fitness of the candidates for office. They will learn which of the men who want your votes are sincere in their professions of friendship for the farmers and the people of the state, and if none for any given office, in the judgment of these delegates, are sincere they will find some one who is and recommend that you support him at the polls.

"So if you select for precinct delegates, strong, level-headed men—men who seek nothing for themselves, but only the good that they may do for you—then will the men whom they indorse to make your laws be men upon whom you can depend, and when these men take up the affairs of this state they will have only one purpose—the greatest good for the greatest number."

It is obvious that upon the character of the men selected at these precinct meetings was dependent

the spirit and attitude of the conventions themselves, what sort of reports of these conventions would go back to the membership, and the heartiness of the support to be given to the candidates for office selected. There are more than 1,800 voting precincts in North Dakota, and Townley could not hope to control the precinct meetings in selecting delegates. He could do no more than give the farmers his point of view on what he expected them to do.

The reports that began to come into League headquarters at Fargo a few days after Washington's birthday were one of the first great causes for jubilation in the League camp. Every precinct in the state where there were League members reported, through the secretary elected at the caucus, the results of the meeting. The reports, usually laboriously written by fingers unused to holding a pencil, were that nearly all the League members in the precinct—in a great many cases every one of them—were present at the caucus. Many wrote letters telling how men who appeared to be seeking the honor of election as delegate were rejected because the members realized the importance of keeping the "self-seekers" out.

In a very large percentage of cases the farmers chosen for delegates were men who had protested vigorously that they knew nothing about politics and they thought some man of more experience ought to be chosen. There were many letters

showing how the members had labored with the man elected to convince him that it was his duty to the cause to overcome his modesty and act.

These meetings were a noteworthy experience to the men who attended them. For most of them it was their first participation in the preliminaries of a political campaign, their first adventure in the actual selection of candidates. Before they had gone no deeper than the vote in the general election; or, at the most, the vote in the direct primary. Native Americans were actually taking part, often for the first time, in the really significant steps of democratic, representative government. Foreign-born Americans for the first time were realizing the power which the American citizen could exercise under the law in the choice of the men who were to make his laws and assist in shaping his government.

There was truth in the League's claim that for the first time in the history of the state, at least, representative government was being taken out of the hands of a politician class to be put directly into the hands of the voter. With all the criticism of "autocracy" in this new farmers' movement, its enemies failed to point out any state in the Union where so large a percentage of voters was taking part in a representative political convention.

By March 1 the reports were in from all the precinct caucuses. There was then a complete record at League headquarters of the men who

were considered by their fellow-members to be the trusted leaders in their communities. This was also a list of the men who would choose the candidates for the legislature and the members of the state convention who, in turn, were to choose the candidates for state office.

The League had no state ticket. Neither Townley, the members of the state committee, nor any of Townley's advisers at state headquarters had men in mind for the important state nominations. Newspapers were busily guessing the men to be indorsed by the League.

One candidate for governor had already run afoul of the League machine, and had been badly bumped. He was the publisher of a string of four weekly newspapers in the western part of the state. He had written a letter to a farmer in Minot prominent in the Equity movement and known to be a member of the League asking him to "try and get on the delegation to the county convention and also to the state convention." He added that he was "very anxious to secure the indorsement of the League."

The League member promptly sent the letter in to headquarters. It was prominently reproduced in the *Leader* with the comment that this was an example of the very effort on the part of the politician class against which they were being warned. The publication of the letter ended this man's hope of becoming governor. His newspapers immediately turned from a friendly attitude

toward the League to one of active opposition, thus enabling the Nonpartisan League to point a further moral.

The legislative district conventions, which followed the precinct caucuses, furnished material for further criticism of the League. These conventions were not all held on one day, but at different dates in the month of March. One of the purposes of this was, as charged by the opposition press, that Townley might have a representative from headquarters, one of his organization and speaking force, at each of the meetings.

This, said the opposition, was so arranged that Townley might dominate and "hand pick" his state convention. The delegates themselves did not so regard it. They were ignorant of the procedure to be followed and they were green in politics. They wanted education in how they were to act to confound their political enemies, and they welcomed and approved the addresses and instructions which Bowen and the other trusted League lieutenants gave them.

One delegate, however, among all the 1,500 or more who attended the conventions, was violently displeased at the arrangement and at the actions of Bowen, who was the League representative at the Traill county convention. This man was a small-town storekeeper as well as a farmer. He had been active in politics as a member of the Progressive party in past campaigns. He wanted to go to the legislature again as a League repre-

sentative. According to Bowen's story of the affair, he discovered that this man was actively canvassing the delegates to land the job for himself. Bowen promptly engaged in counter-propaganda, and in his address to the convention, without naming the man, but leaving none in doubt as to whom he meant, denounced this sort of activity as foreign to the spirit of the League.

This man on one ballot got one vote and on the second two. He left the convention and thereafter joined the ranks of the League's opponents and became another "object lesson" for the use of League speakers. His story of the "domination" of the League district conventions by Townley was widely published by the opposition press.

With the holding of the last of these conventions, all occurring within the first three weeks of March, the greater part of the work of selecting candidates was accomplished. There had been chosen the candidates for the lower house of the state legislature, from one to four in number, depending on the population of the legislative district, and one candidate for the state senate in each of the odd-numbered districts. The latter were twenty-five in number, senators being elected for four years, and half of the forty-nine members holding over each term.

It would require the election of a majority of the candidates for the lower house to dominate that chamber, and the election of all of the can-

didates for the senate to control that body, unless support for the League measures should be obtained from some of the "holdover" senators.

The plan of action presented by League headquarters to the district conventions was that there should be one delegate from each district to the state convention. The rule generally followed was that the legislative candidate having received the highest vote at the district convention should be the state delegate. This, said enemies of the League, was to make it easier for Townley to control.

There were other arguments, however, in favor of the plan. It created a nominating chamber made up of men who were to have an active part in shaping the program of legislation, the men who would have to come into contact with the state officers. It created a new relation between the legislative and the executive branches by making the leaders of the legislature feel that the governor was their man—a man of their choice and selection. It also put the framing of the campaign program into the hands of the men who were to be charged with enacting it into law. And in addition, it gave novices in politics their first opportunity, in many cases, for parliamentary action, and that in association with men with whom they would have to be associated in the legislature itself, if they were elected. From the standpoint of strength and efficiency it was, all in all, a thoroughly good plan.

Early in March the *Nonpartisan Leader* announced that on March 31 and April 1 there would be held "Grand State Convention Mass Meetings," which would be addressed by the League's candidates for governor and the various state offices. These candidates had not yet been selected.

Townley's attitude toward the problem of the personnel of the state ticket, as might be expected, was one of active interest. He spent many days of anxious consultation with his most trusted advisers and he sought in every way to canvass the possibilities by consultation with men in whom he had confidence. He made a number of trips to talk to League members whom he had heard mentioned as possible material for the governorship. He visited men who had been chosen as state delegates to get their views.

His attitude in this respect was probably not different from that of many political "bosses," with the great exceptions that Townley was bending every effort to the enactment of a program of laws conceived to be for the benefit of the people of the state, and he had no clubs nor bribes to enforce his will except the weight of his own judgment, the logic of his own argument and the force of his own personality.

One of the men whose name, Townley felt, was certain to come before the convention was already openly a candidate for the office. This was one count against him, but as he had a record for hav-

ing been a "progressive" and as he seemed inclined to be sincerely friendly toward the farmers' movement, Townley sent men to sound Usher L. Burdick of Williston to find out what might be expected of him if elected.

The resulting impressions were not favorable. Burdick was not willing to support so comprehensive a scheme of state ownership as the League proposed. Townley decided to look further.

Those at League headquarters, including Townley, influential farmers who occasionally would drop in, and organizers, were agreed that if a farmer of standing and ability who had never been active in politics and was not a candidate for office could be nominated and persuaded to run he would make the most fitting candidate for governor. There was debate, however, as to whether such a man could be nominated and elected, as, of course, he would have to rely wholly on the League's support.

Was it better to take such a man and stake all on the possibility of lining up a majority of voters for a strictly farmer candidate, or to get behind the most progressive of the candidates with an assured political following, providing, of course, such a candidate would accept and indorse the League program, with its state ownership features?

These were the alternatives of the governorship question which Townley had to present to the state delegates when they assembled. The ques-

tions affecting the other state offices were similar. Some preliminary scouting had been done so that the names of alternative candidates were ready for presentation to the convention.

While "convention mass meetings" were scheduled for March 31 and April 1, having been publicly advertised, the actual convention of state delegates was held on the two days preceding and the nominations had been completed when the first day of the mass meetings arrived. The delegates had been notified by letter of the time and place of holding the convention, to which none but the delegates, the officers and executive committee of the League and a few persons connected with League headquarters were admitted.

The result of that convention was a ticket headed by Lynn J. Frazier as candidate for governor, a farmer of Pembina county, son of a pioneer homesteader, of native American stock for generations back. Frazier was 41 years old, a graduate of the state university of North Dakota, practically unknown outside of his own community, where he was respected as a successful farmer, a good neighbor, an honest and generous man, a person of some public spirit, and a very earnest prohibitionist. He had voted the Republican ticket all his life and his father, who had also been known as a "temperance crank," had also been a Republican.

Here was a man fitted to remove part of the curse of "Socialism" from the League ticket, but

otherwise his equipment certainly was unusual for a man selected to make the race for governor of the state. He had never held office beyond that of township supervisor and school director, to which he had been named because of his college education; two years' experience as a school teacher, and the further qualification of four children of school age. He had never been a candidate for any office in his life; had never asked a man for his vote for anything. He had never made a public speech since his college days; nor had he any ambition to do so.

Frazier was a farmer, as fully occupied about the business of farming as any merchant with his store. Yet he was a Leaguer. He could express in short and simple words his disgust with the past trend of politics in North Dakota. He believed in the League plan and the League program.

How did it happen that Frazier was selected? His name had been given to Townley by the organizer who had "signed him up" as that of a man of influence and ability, with a high standing in his neighborhood. William Lemke, the Fargo lawyer who was counsel for the League, had been his classmate in the state university and mentioned him as a man fit for a responsible state office. He seemed to fill the bill of the qualifications desired if the delegates were to choose in favor of a farmer "unknown."

Townley himself was in favor of that choice.

He so expressed himself before the convention. The names of seven candidates were placed on a blackboard at the state convention as they were nominated by delegates. Of those nominated all but Frazier and one other were known to be active candidates for the office. There was a long discussion in which nearly every delegate participated. No vote was taken until all agreed they were ready for it. Frazier, the unknown Leaguer, the strictly farmer candidate without office experience or ambition, received every vote but one.

The delegates were as happy as schoolboys over the selection. To elect such a man, to put a plain farmer in the executive offices at the state capital—a farmer straight from the farm, and not a “city farmer”—epitomized the spirit of the whole movement.

They were all anxious to see Frazier right away, to slap him on the back and to wish him luck. They called him on the long-distance telephone and told him to hurry down to Fargo to make a speech as candidate for governor. The telephone message found him with his “gum” boots on “messing around the barn.” He was willing to come to Fargo, but he couldn’t make a speech, he said.

He did, however. At the last of the mass meetings he appeared and was cheered long and enthusiastically. When he spoke it was in rather hesitating fashion and diffidently. It was not strange. A man used to speaking mostly to three

big farm horses hitched to a sulky plow found himself facing 2,000 persons in the big, barn-like Fargo auditorium. He told his farmer hearers in straightforward language, however, that he believed in the League program; that he had had no thought of being nominated for governor or for any other office; that he would feel far more at home driving a plow than campaigning, but that he was willing to do his best.

For twelve state positions, aside from the supreme court, to be filled at the election, the League convention indorsed four who were recognized candidates for office. The remainder indorsed by the convention were League farmers, unknown to office. The four office-holders were Thomas Hall, then secretary of state, named for the same position; William Langer, then state's attorney of Morton county, named for attorney general; Carl R. Kositzky, then secretary of the state tax commission and commissioner of Burleigh county, named for state auditor; Neil C. Macdonald, rural school inspector in the state superintendent's office, named for state superintendent.

All of these men were opponents of the men in state office and had been generally classed as political "insurgents." All had expressed their support of the League's program.

The farmer candidates included P. M. Casey, an Equity leader, for state treasurer; S. A. Olness, an Eddy county farmer who had been secretary of a co-operative fire insurance company, for

state insurance commissioner; John N. Hagan of Deering, a farmer who was a graduate of an Indiana college, for commissioner of agriculture; and for railroad commissioners three more farmers, M. P. Johnson, state president of the Equity; Charles Bleick, a young farmer from the southwest who was an agricultural college graduate, and Sam Aandahl, a Barnes county farmer of wide acquaintance. None of the candidates selected was a Socialist. All but Casey were Republicans.

The story has been circulated in print that for members of the supreme court this first League convention named farmers who were not even admitted to the bar.

It is a picturesque tale, but not in accord with the facts. Three vacancies were to occur in the supreme court and the League convention named three men to fill these vacancies. One of the three was Luther Birdzell, a member of the faculty of the state university school of law and generally recognized as one of the most brilliant lawyers in the state. A second was Richard H. Grace, for many years a practising lawyer at Mohall in Renville county, and the owner of a farm, as well. The third was J. E. Robinson of Fargo, law partner of William Lemke, attorney for the League.

Robinson was known as an eccentric character. He had once campaigned for congress and gone about the streets ringing a cowbell to attract a crowd. He was an old man and wore a flowing

gray beard. He had been one of the first lawyers in the state, had decided ideas about judicial reform and was able to write in very concise, almost masterly English, which was probably his best attainment, aside from a very strong preference for the substance of justice as against legal technicality.

This was the makeup of the ticket that on the last day of March, 1916, agitated the office-holders, perplexed the politicians and set the whole state to wondering whether they were witnessing a huge joke or a revolutionary political movement.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN

THE attacks against the League steadily carried on by the leading newspapers had as their basis, as has been seen, a general policy of opposition to any movement which tended to cultivate protest against existing conditions on the part of the farmers or to cause them to form organizations independent of, and perhaps hostile to, their "natural guardians" of the towns and cities. The staid citizens who made it their duty to protect the "best interests of the state" also saw in men of former Socialist party connections the worst possible leadership for the farmers.

Then and later they moaned because their alarmist stories were not taken seriously enough, because they could not waken the business men to active enough steps to meet the "menace."

In Fargo, for instance, at the time of the state convention and mass meetings, the League's activities met with a considerable degree of tolerance, if not approval.

D. C. Coates, a former city commissioner of Spokane, Washington, once a Socialist, but out of the Socialist party because he refused to agree to the Socialist policy of putting control of his

official acts into the hands of the party, had joined Townley's staff of advisers in the early part of the winter.

Coates was made manager and was for a time editor of the *Nonpartisan Leader*. He was a man of experience in public affairs and a "good mixer," with a natural tendency toward conciliation and compromise. In Spokane he had made an efficient record as an administrator under the first commission plan city government, and had given a strong impulse to the policy of public ownership. He had failed of re-election through opposition by the chamber of commerce element, coupled with desertion by the extreme radicals.

Coates, urbane, good-natured and conciliatory, made a valiant effort to neutralize town opposition and to make friends among the town liberals. He made the arrangements for the first convention mass meetings, induced the city council to tender the use of the public auditorium, a big brick and concrete structure built a year or two previously by public subscription, got the mayor to welcome the farmers, arranged for street parades, and accepted free entertainment for the visiting farmers at the hands of the Commercial Club.

The mass meetings themselves were a novel, impressive and, to some, a disturbing demonstration. It was said that never before had there been at one time so large a gathering of farmers in Fargo. Long sessions, beginning at 10 in the

morning and lasting until late at night, were held in the auditorium. A great part of the time the hall, seating nearly three thousand persons, was filled to the doors. The farmers paraded on foot on the streets, with three bands among them, carrying banners inscribed: "Everybody's organized; why not the farmer?"; "On to Bismarck, 50,000 strong"; "Privilege knows no party; why should the people be fooled?"; "Who are they who fear the people? Think it over; there's a reason"; "Political bosses don't like us; we should worry," and "What have partisan politics done for you?"

The throng, massed in the street in front of the Fargo auditorium, was the first of the big assemblages of people which later became characteristic of the League's campaign gatherings. They awoke the state to a realization of a new situation in politics and government. It was not the largest company which Townley has addressed. Since that time he has spoken to open-air throngs estimated to number at least 8,000 people—not a huge gathering for a big city, but at least remarkable in a prairie state four hundred miles wide with a population of only 700,000. Some of these later gatherings were held on the open prairie in summer, and it was not at all unusual for farmers to come fifty miles to attend.

Men are gravely stirred when they make such efforts to attend a political meeting and listen attentively to hours of speechmaking.

The speeches at the Fargo mass meetings were not especially conciliatory.

“I regret to say,” said Townley, responding to the welcome uttered by Mayor Emery, “that not all the business men here in the past have been willing to work with the farmers for the common good. Some have been willing to exploit the farmer and to pass their profits on to their masters in other states.

“Yes, the farmers are willing to co-operate with the business man. They have been co-operating in the past and they are not happy over the result. They are willing to go on co-operating in the future, but they want a little different plan of co-operation.”

Townley advised the farmers to resolve to “take better care of these business men than they have been taking care of you.”

Little was said, however, of high prices, of extortionate interest or of any of the other direct grievances of the farmer against the town merchant. The burden of complaint was that the town business man had taken sides with the Chamber of Commerce monopolists and speculators and was helping them to loot the farmers through the sale of their products. The farmers were told that it had been definitely proved that there was no help for them except through their own effort; and that the thing to do was to take control of the government of the state.

John H. Worst, for years president of the North

Dakota Agricultural College at Fargo, had been forced out of office just a few weeks before by the board of regents. The altercation which led to his dismissal was due to the usurpation of his powers, as he felt, by Thomas Cooper, who had been placed in charge of the experiment station and extension work by the regents. Cooper had been director of the efforts of an organization known as the "Better Farming Association," which had been backed heavily by the big grain and lumber interests, the banks and the business men. Farmers generally resented the activities of the "Better Farming" association. The displacement of Worst, whom they felt to be their friend, aroused their indignation. The resentment was the more acute because President Worst, just a short time before his dismissal, had addressed the Tri-State Grain Growers in the speech in which he said that, through the shipping of all the grain out of the state to be milled, the farmers annually were losing fifty-five million dollars by misgrading, in loss of by-products and impoverishment of the soil. The farmers generally felt that Worst's dismissal was due to his fidelity to their interests, and to his refusal to serve "big business."

Worst again addressed this Fargo convention.

"I am sorry you are here," he said to the audience of farmers. "I am sorry so many farmers of North Dakota find it necessary to come down here to a meeting

like this. I am sorry conditions are such you find it necessary to have this League through which to make this protest and seek your rights.

“There never can be a genuine spirit of patriotism in a country not worth loving, and a country is not worth loving if it does not yield a reasonable remuneration to the tillers of the soil. Your great end is to help North Dakota to come into its own. She has not come into it yet or you would not be here today at this meeting. We have worked along the ‘more production’ line long enough and let the profit and business end go—we must now work for a fairer share of the wealth we produce. That, I understand, is the ultimate end of this organization and it is a worthy one.”

The farmers had heard these things from the lips of the organizer and they had read them in the *Nonpartisan Leader*, but in these big meetings they heard them in a far more impressive way. Investing their money in the League as a gamble, in part, half doubting that it would ever accomplish anything, they now were impressed by the fact that they were members of a big and powerful organization, that thousands of farmers all over the state had enlisted with them, and they caught a glimpse of political power which could confound the men who had held the upper hand over them.

The effect of the Fargo convention mass meetings was extended the following week in seven other meetings in the other big towns of the state. In the meantime the series of schoolhouse and

town-hall meetings that had continued through the late winter was brought to a close.

The stir that these mass meetings created helped awaken the state to the fact that the League was a really formidable movement. Those who had observed it closely began to see it was fully possible that the League could capture the primary elections, as it had set out to do.

For the first time the League's plan of operation began to be generally understood. The Republican party, except in occasional off elections, had been the dominant party in the state. The League, it was noticed, had given it out that its state candidates, with the exception of Casey, the candidate for state treasurer, would file for Republican nominations. Casey, it seems, did not think his name would look well on the Republican ballot.

The supreme court candidates and the candidate for state superintendent of education were elected by a nonpartisan primary ballot voted by all parties.

The League began to be spoken of, therefore, as an effort to "capture the machinery of the Republican party." There were voluble protests: it was a "violation of the spirit of the direct primary law," thus to superimpose another organization on the regular political organizations contemplated in the primary law.

The campaign, thenceforth, waged hotly in the press. The attacks, as before, continued to be

directed principally against the League as an organization, against its process of selection of candidates and against its organization leaders.

It was charged that Townley had "hand picked" the entire state ticket and even the legislative ticket of approximately 120 names. To answer this charge the League obtained letters, one by one, from all of the men who had attended the state convention. They emphatically testified that they had exercised their own free will in the state convention; that they had had ample opportunity to name candidates and to speak in their favor, and that they were well satisfied with the result.

"I think there were forty or fifty delegates at this convention and I think they will all agree with me that this was the fairest convention ever held in this state," wrote C. H. Noltimier of Valley City. "We were not dictated to; we did our best, and this ticket is going to win. They can't beat it."

Others of the best known and most influential farmers in the state wrote similar letters. They were difficult to attack, because to do so would impeach either the truthfulness or the intelligence of these prominent farmers; and the opposition press was not ready to do that. The *Grand Forks Herald* did complain plaintively that "Whenever Townley is accused of anything he passes the buck to the farmer and says we are attacking the farmers," which was certainly eloquent testi-

mony to the shrewdness of the League's "autocrat."

North Dakota operated under a direct primary law which required candidates to be nominated by petitions of voters, and League headquarters at once began to use its lists of the precinct and district officers elected at the caucuses and conventions to send out copies of petitions for the nomination both of the state candidates and of the local candidates for the legislature. League organizers assisted in this detailed work, which kept a large force busy at state headquarters.

The League officials did not content themselves with the minimum number of signatures required by law to petitions in the case of the candidates for state office. In the process of gathering names in each legislative district for the district nominees they obtained signatures to the state candidates' petitions amounting, in the case of Frazier, to more than 20,000.

"The League candidates now are not only the candidates of the League," said Townley, after the petitions had been filed. "They are not only the candidates of the farmers. They are the candidates of the people of the whole state."

Obtaining this large number of signatures was intended, in part, as an answer to the charge of "hand picking" the state candidates by Townley and his close advisers.

While the League was at work with its petitions

there was some stir of an effort to create an organization to oppose the League. The difficulty which its promoters faced, apparently, was to induce men who might have supported the movement to appear in it publicly. Publicity, of a sort, was an easier matter. The farmers were indignant to discover in their mail one day a pamphlet in the form of a single sheet of newspaper size, carrying the large heading, "North Dakota Faces a Crisis," and containing fourteen columns of argument against the League, largely reprinted from the *Grand Forks Herald*, the *Fargo Courier-News* and other papers. Simultaneously the same effort made its appearance as page advertisements in the newspapers. In the columns of the *Courier-News*, a signature was affixed, though the advertising had appeared anonymously on the other newspapers and the circular had been unsigned. The signature in the *Courier-News* was "North Dakota Good Government League."

In the same issue the *Courier-News* printed an account of a meeting of "prominent citizens" and of the formation of the North Dakota Good Government League, which had been made responsible for the advertising.

It developed that the circular had been printed in the plant of the *Grand Forks Herald*; its distribution had been under the supervision of Norman Black, formerly the business manager of that newspaper. Soon afterward it was announced that Norman Black had been retained as secretary

of the Good Government League; and he opened offices in Fargo.

Two names alone, besides that of Mr. Black, were given out as those of persons connected with the organization. It was stated that Morton Page, a Fargo insurance man, was president, and an employe of another Fargo business house was named as secretary.

The *Nonpartisan Leader* gave liberal space to this organization and interviewed both Black and Page in an effort to get the names of other members. Both declined to give them out. Later it developed that the names of six Fargo men, the attorney for the Northern Pacific railroad, one other attorney who had been active in politics, two bankers and two wholesale merchants—had been used by Secretary Black in correspondence as those of the "executive committee" of the organization. From his Fargo office, Black sent out a considerable volume of campaign "literature," but the organization showed no other evidences of being, and the offices were closed before the end of the year. A few weeks later it was announced that Black "and associates" had purchased the *Fargo Forum*, which until then had generally been neutral toward the League. The *Forum* at once began uncompromising antagonism toward the League and those connected with it.

While opponents of the League were thus careful to keep their identity hid, its friends were somewhat bolder. Coates and others who had

been active in union labor before their connection with the League made friendly advances toward organized labor, with the result that the Fargo Trades and Labor Assembly and the North Dakota State Federation of Labor in turn made known their indorsement of the League platform and candidates.

North Dakota has a short and late growing season, and all its crops are spring sown. There is a time of great activity between the day in spring when the ground becomes dry enough to work after the spring thaw and the dead line in June after which it is too late to sow grains. Between the convention mass meetings, therefore, and June 1 the League attempted no public meetings, but with the primaries to be held on June 28 a whirlwind canvass in that month was necessary.

This canvass was made by a series of "picnics," all-day meetings to which the farmers came for many miles in their wagons or automobiles and which were, to strangers, the most interesting feature of a campaign unique in several respects. The League speakers, including President Townley himself, Frazier, the candidate for governor, and the other League candidates were scheduled for these meetings.

The candidate for governor was received with abounding enthusiasm. The farmers did not expect polished eloquence from him; they were delighted by his apparent sincerity and his few,

straightforward words. Frazier is of medium height and of powerful frame, calm in his manner, naturally reticent, but of decisive words and actions. He developed into a rough and ready talker, admirably suited to campaigning among farmers. They were overjoyed at the absence in him of every quality that they associated with the political orator. They delighted to honor him as being one of them. The fact that so plain and "common" a farmer could be governor of the state filled them with confidence in their own power to make laws and to conduct public affairs.

Never was a decision more amply vindicated than the decision that Frazier, from the standpoint of campaigning power, would make a good candidate.

In the final week before the primaries a special train was chartered and with banners proclaiming it to be the "Frazier Special" it made the round trip of the state, north to Grand Forks, west to Williston on the Great Northern, by a connecting line in Montana south to the Northern Pacific, entering the state at Beach, scene of Townley's flax disaster, and back to Fargo over the Northern Pacific. On the trip Frazier spoke from many stands and frequently from the car platform, and at every stop there was a large proportion of farmers come from many miles in his audience.

The year 1916 was one of frequent rains and intense heat. Primary day, June 28, saw one of the most violent and long-continued thunder-

storms in the history of the state. It was a day of gloom around League headquarters and at the office of the *Nonpartisan Leader*. The rain came down in torrents. A car could not possibly travel the drenched and slippery "gumbo" roads of the Red River valley. It seemed impossible that with similar conditions elsewhere in the state there could be much of a farmer vote.

The returns of the early evening were not in the least reassuring. Huge majorities for Burdick, the leading opposition candidate, were reported. But here and there came a ray of hope for Townley and his companions in this political adventure. Country precinct returns would drift in, with such reports as "Frazier 27, Burdick 11, Fraine 3." The newspaper offices announced confidently that Burdick was nominated, but along about midnight some hopeful ones got busy with their pencils in analyzing the vote. Separating as near as could be done the "country" from the city vote, it became apparent that if the country vote were only big enough, it would bring Frazier, at least, out a winner.

With that small consolation, the Leaguers gave it up for the night.

The next day dawned bright and cheerful. The returns, to the political experimenters, were equally so. The morning paper, the *Courier-News*, had announced the probable nomination of Burdick. Before noon, it was apparent that Frazier had won, and when the day was over it was

known that every man on the state ticket indorsed by the League had been nominated, that nearly all of the legislative candidates had won, and that the supreme court candidates were leading their opponents. The country had completely overturned the town vote.

The final tabulation of the results on the primaries showed that, out of a total Republican vote of approximately 75,000 Frazier had 40,000, a clean majority over all, with the other farmer candidates running close to him.

This was the great victory of the year and the first and most important of the League's triumphs at the polls. Frazier was assured enough votes to win in the fall elections. His opponent was a "progressive" Democrat who had little desire to make an active campaign.

The League had been helped in the campaign by many of the tactics of its opponents, and it had the support of other farm organizations, the Equity, the Farmers' Union and the Grange. The state master of the Grange, Ray McKaig, a former preacher, had taken the stump for the League and had been a delegate to the state convention.

The issues of the *Nonpartisan Leader* during the ensuing months of summer and early fall showed the League had passed through the most severe storm for the present and into quieter waters. Time was found for articles promoting the general program and policies of the League. There were further studies of grain grading, ar-

ticles showing how the Minnesota mills were making huge profits out of the milling of low-grade wheat, studies of organization and its services to other classes than farmers, stories of the success of public ownership and even articles on blooded cattle and farm problems.

An incident of the summer was the capture of the Republican state committee meeting at Bismarck by League representatives. No special effort had been made to obtain the election at the primaries of League precinct committeemen, but in a majority of cases the farmers had thoughtfully attended to this matter themselves. As a result League headquarters were interested to discover that they held a majority of the men who were to make up the state committee. There was some skirmishing when the time came for the convention, and some effort to bar enough League committeemen to swing the convention to the League's opponents. But a truce was reached, and a platform generally resembling that of the League, though slightly equivocal in places, was agreed to. Previously Frazier, in reply to an effort to "put him in a hole," had announced that he was for the League program, no matter what platform might be agreed to at Bismarck.

Campaign efforts during the summer were concentrated by the League on the election of members of the state supreme court. Here events played somewhat into their hands. In 1914, the people of the state had adopted an amendment to

the state constitution which provided that the constitution itself might be amended through the initiatory process. If signatures of "at least 25 per cent. of the voters in each of not less than one-half of the counties of the state" were obtained to a petition calling for a constitutional amendment, it became the duty of the secretary of state to have the proposed amendment placed upon the ballot for approval or rejection by the voters. If thus approved it would go before the subsequent legislature for ratification, and if not ratified it would again come before the people at the ensuing election, when, if approved again, it would become a part of the constitution.

New Rockford entered upon a campaign for removal of the capital to that city from Bismarck. Petitions were circulated and were said to contain signatures of more than 25 per cent. of the voters in more than one-half the counties of the state. Citizens of Bismarck obtained a court order restraining the secretary of state from putting the amendment on the ballot, under the claim that the constitutional amendment providing the initiative process was not "self-executing" and could not be effective until made so by the legislature. The supreme court upheld this contention, and in doing so appeared to uphold the contention that, in spite of the constitutional amendment, the legislature could delay granting the initiative process for amendment of the constitution as long as it wished and could limit the

amendment itself so as to call for any percentages of signatures in excess of those specified in the amendment.

This decision was savagely attacked in the *Non-partisan Leader*. Cartoons were drawn showing in one case the supreme court as a club in the hands of "Big Business" slaying the people's laws, and in another the court tearing in pieces a document labeled "People's Legislation."

The candidates engaged in another speaking tour after harvest and before the fall election, during which much attention was devoted to the supreme court candidates, and a strong effort was made to direct the farmers' attention to Casey, candidate for state treasurer, who was in the Democratic column. It was feared not enough voters would have the forethought to "scratch" the ticket so as to include Casey.

This fear was well grounded, for Casey was, in fact, beaten by a few votes. The League candidates for the court won by large majorities; all the men indorsed by the League for state office were elected. Control had been obtained of the lower house of the legislature by the election of 81 Leaguers out of a total of 113 seats. For the senate twenty-two had been indorsed, there being twenty-five vacancies. Eighteen were elected. This left control of the senate an open question, depending on how many converts the League could expect among the "holdovers."

The presidential and senatorial campaigns ab-

sorbed a great deal of interest in the fall and somewhat softened the asperity of the campaign against the League. Both Senator McCumber, the Republican incumbent, and United States Treasurer John Burke, Democratic nominee, were anxious for the League's indorsement, which was withheld from both. McCumber, however, had the benefit of the fact that the League candidates were on the Republican ticket and that William Lemke, attorney and campaign adviser of the League, had been named by a League-controlled convention as Republican state chairman and was therefore bound to work in McCumber's interest. A very strong effort was made by the League officers to make the neutrality of the League's position plain, but McCumber won heavily, though President Wilson captured the state, overcoming the great Republican lead in other offices by a very narrow margin.

CHAPTER XIII

LEAGUERS IN POWER

BISMARCK sits on rolling, treeless hills overlooking the Missouri. Geographically it is central in North Dakota, but the rich valleys of the Red River of the North, the Sheyenne and the James, sometimes called the Dakota river, are to the east of it. It was once a gateway to a wild land of treasure, a metropolis for the cowmen of the range days. The hills and valleys which surround it were not so long ago black with buffalo, and Sioux hunting bands roamed among them.

The country west of the Missouri is scarcely tamed yet to the spirit of peaceful agriculture. It has been a land of plungers, of adventure, gambling and easy money. Farmers who enter it share its adventurous ways. It is too bleak a country to be fancied by many for the site of a farm home. They are attracted by cheap acreage to huge adventures in wheat and flax, gambles with nature and the grain market that may make a snug little fortune in a year—or lose one—as Townley lost his.

Bismarck is proud of its history as a frontier town, proud of its reputation as an up-to-date "big little city." It remembers many flush days;

it has entertained lobbyists of distinction and a band of politicians as crafty and unscrupulous as any little state capital has seen. In the midst of a dry state it has had the duty of providing the attractions which free spenders and capable "entertainers" demand. Open saloons long operated in defiance of constitutional prohibition; and its chief tavern keeper likes on occasion to tell stories of the roistering nights of the past and how cranks who sought to enforce the law were outwitted.

Bismarck, with its young old-timers and their memories of hectic days, was capable, more than any other town in the state, of feeling a large contempt for the rustic strangers, diffident and abashed, who came trooping in that January of 1917 to tread the halls made famous by Alex McKenzie and his satellites, to sit in council in the rooms where big deals once were hatched, and to encumber the hotel lobbies once graced by men of millions. Even the street urchins appreciated the ludicrous comparison and expressed the derision older observers felt.

There came to sit in the executive office in place of the millionaire, L. B. Hanna, banker of Fargo, a man who hadn't been off the farm in twenty years, who had never dictated a letter to a stenographer and who was used to wearing a white collar only to church. Three men right off the farm were to take their places in the railroad commission offices, where they would have to deal with

men who are big figures in the business world, and a man who had come to America from Norway to handle a pick and shovel in building Jim Hill's Great Northern railroad was to occupy the insurance commissioner's office.

The disgrace of the situation was expressed in print by the newspapers which had been opposing the Nonpartisan League, but covertly, because, after all, most of the citizens of the state were farmers and might understand the sneers if they were made too plain.

But though they acted with modesty proper under the circumstances, the farmer legislators were resolved to "put through the program" and to show the state and the world that possibly farmers could make laws as well as city folks. There was just a handful of League legislators in each house who had been there before. They were expected by their colleagues to act as leaders and to show them the ropes.

The members of the opposition to the League in the legislature laid their plans with some gleeful anticipations. They had all the freedom from responsibility of the ordinary minority, and, besides, there were wonderful opportunities for mischief in the unsophisticated character of the members of the majority.

There was speculation, of course, as to whom the Leaguers would elect for speaker, and opposition newspapers kindly supplied several candidates and started "booms" for them. They sup-

plied, also, helpful suggestions and opened up promising lines of controversy on how the "program" measures should be framed and how the constitution should be amended. It seemed apparent that under a properly democratic procedure the rule of the farmers would strike serious snags at the outset.

Then Townley, a day before the opening of the session, played another of the cards which so frequently he has been found to have up his sleeve or concealed elsewhere about him. The League members of the legislature, of senate and of house, met in secret caucus for organization. Howard Wood of Deering, son of the vice-president of the League, was chosen as the League candidate for speaker, and it was announced that the action was unanimous. Wood had not been mentioned by the opposition press as a candidate. Also it was given out that the League caucus would consider measures both before and after their introduction in the legislature; that all the League "program" bills would be the product of the caucus, and that every measure reported out on the floor of either house or likely to be reported out, would come before the caucus before League legislators voted on it.

Another development augmented the storm of criticism that followed. It was made known that the League had "legislative experts" at Bismarck; that they would assist in drafting legislation and would even make suggestions to the cau-

cus, and it also became known that Townley, Bowen, Lemke, Coates and others would "advise with" the caucus.

The *Courier-News*, the morning paper published at Fargo, had passed from the control of its former owner into that of the League and was being edited by the former editor of the *Nonpartisan Leader*. It came stoutly to the defense of Townley's plans, including the secret caucus, which was justified as the only means by which the farmers could properly frame legislation, could inform themselves on legislative procedure and could mature their methods of meeting the attack of the opposition; all of which was necessary in order that they might keep faith with the people who elected them.

The caucus was, in fact, an efficient school in legislation. In it the failures in tactics of the day in house or in senate were discussed; members, free of the restraint of the legislative chamber and the presence of hostile critics, spoke their minds before their brother farmers and differences of opinion were "ironed out."

The sessions were held nightly in the assembly hall of the Northwest hotel. This entire structure had been leased by the League for the session and was run as a League hotel. A large number of the League members roomed there. It was an old building and had once been the chief hotel of Bismarck.

Whatever may have been the justice of the

criticisms it is certain that these caucus sessions promoted a feeling of comradeship among the League legislators and state officers, developed at a rapid rate their understanding of legislative affairs and disarmed the plans of the opposition to confuse and divide them.

In the organization of the house A. E. Bowen, League organizer and speaker, was made chief clerk, and Edwin Wood, brother of the speaker, was made his assistant. Naturally, parliamentary tactics sometimes proved confusing to new members, and one of the stories gleefully told by newspaper men of the opposition press was that the instructions to League members in the house were to vote "Aye" on all measures read by the black-haired clerk and "No" on all measures read by the red-headed one. Probably the foundation for the story was that Bowen, who is dark haired, did not miss an opportunity to read the League "program" measures. He enjoyed them and was an able elocutionist. And, often, he passed off the onerous duty of reading a measure framed by one of the hated opposition to his assistant, Wood, who had red hair. At any rate, the story of the red-headed clerk and the black-haired one made a good "feature yarn" to portray the ignorance of the farmer legislators as picturesquely as possible.

The complexion of the senate had been the subject of interesting speculation. The League had elected eighteen out of a total of twenty-five mem-

bers chosen at the 1916 elections. Twenty-five were required for a majority. It developed that of the eighteen, one, Stenmo of Grand Forks county, was no more than lukewarm in his attitude toward the "program." The League's expectations of winning over enough of the holdovers to make up a majority soon were seen to have been premature. Possibly the compactness with which the League had organized contributed to driving the so-called "progressives" into union with the "stalwarts" of former sessions. The League also suffered the defection of Kraabel, the lieutenant governor, who appointed senate committees having, in the case of all important committees, a minority of League members.

It seemed to be apparent that the opposition had forestalled the League and lined up the senate against the farmer machine.

The important issue was seen to be the amendment of the state constitution so as to make possible the enactment of all the items of the League program into law. Authority was needed to permit the state to engage in other industries than the operation of a "terminal elevator," to authorize the issuance of bonds to finance such industries, to permit the exemption of farm improvements from taxation and to make possible taxation to provide for hail insurance.

The methods provided for changing the constitution were slow. One process was a favorable vote on a proposed amendment by two successive

legislatures and its subsequent adoption by the people. It was seen that by that method amendments proposed in the 1917 session could not go before the people until the general election of 1920 and laws pursuant to them could not be enacted until 1921. The supreme court had just rendered a decision that the direct initiative process for amendment of the constitution was not in operation and would not be until made operative by the legislature. But even under this process amendments could not be proposed until 1918 and could not be made part of the constitution until the 1919 session.

The League wanted speedy action. The farmers demanded it, after so many years of delay, and Townley and his advisers feared the effect of several years of waiting on the program of legislation. Besides, could the League's machine be kept going for the length of time necessary to get its ideas into operation by this slow process? And, if it could, would not the expense of the repeated campaigns be a tremendous strain on the patience of the farmers?

Another process for changing the constitution was known to precedent. In the history of the nation there had been more than one constitutional convention called to revise a constitution and to present a new constitution to the people for their adoption or rejection. There had been for some time something of an agitation in the state for such a convention.

This process would entail, first, a legislative enactment calling for such a convention; second, a possible referendum vote on this act; third, an election of members of the constitutional convention; fourth, the sessions of the convention itself, with all the influence that might be brought to bear to neutralize its purpose, and, fifth, the election for approval of the new constitution, possibly after the state was thoroughly tired of the whole subject of constitutional revision.

All these appeared rough and tortuous roads to travel for the simple object of clearing away technical obstacles to the enactment into law of a program already "overwhelmingly," as the League papers said, approved by the vote of the people in electing the League state ticket and a strong majority of League legislators.

The League's advisers had another plan. It was simple—startlingly so, to the opposition.

It was that the legislature, regardless of the provisions in the constitution itself for its amendment, should frame a new constitution and present it to the people, the new constitution to replace the old as soon as it had been adopted by a majority popular vote.

"It is impossible," "It is a lawless proposal," "It is anarchistic," "No court would dare to sanction such a procedure," "The supreme court of the United States would overrule it," were some of the characterizations of the plan. It was denounced as the climax of effrontery and disregard

of fundamental law and orderly procedure on the part of the "Socialist boss."

The League had its defense to these charges. "You say that the constitution does not sanction any such method of amendment," said the League's spokesmen; "show us where the constitution of North Dakota or any other state constitution says anything about the calling of a constitutional convention to frame a new constitution. We do not propose to amend the constitution. We propose to make a new one. Such a procedure always has been extra-constitutional. But it is not unconstitutional. All power in our form of government comes from the people. Whatever they adopt as their constitution in an election formally called for that purpose is thenceforth the constitution. A new constitution does not need the sanction of words written in the old one."

There were lawyers enough found to support this view so that the farmer members saw no reason why it should not be acted upon. Accordingly the proposed new constitution made its appearance in the lower house. It appeared as House Bill 44, and was introduced by A. M. Hagan, a farmer of Bottineau county.

House Bill 44, in the form of a concurrent resolution, cited the results of the 1916 election as evidence of the will of the people to enter into certain state enterprises, stated the fact that the existing constitution presented obstacles to the course desired by the people, and added that the

legislature had prepared a new constitution, "reading as follows." The resolution, after setting forth the new constitution entire, then provided for a special election at which the proposed constitution should be presented to the people.

The proposed new constitution was, in fact, the existing constitution of the state with a number of changes highly important in their subject matter. The first of these was a substitute section providing that "The right of the state, or any political subdivision thereof, to engage in any occupation or business for public purposes shall not be denied or prohibited."

This section, removing the constitutional obstacles to state ownership, was supplemented by another section, equally simple and comprehensive in its wording, permitting the issuance of bonds to finance state-owned industries. This latter section read: "The state or any political subdivision thereof may issue or guarantee the payment of bonds in excess of the debt limit specified in this article, provided such bonds are secured by first mortgages upon real estate, or upon property of public utilities, enterprises or industries."

This obviously opened the way, not only for state ownership of elevators and flour mills, packing houses and cold storage plants as advocated by the League, but permitted counties, cities and school districts to enter any business which could be shown to be "for public purposes" and provided a means of financing such enterprises by

the sale of bonds. The proposed constitution contained also specific authorization of an acreage tax to provide funds for indemnifying owners of crops damaged by hail and a provision that the legislature might, by law, "exempt any or all classes of personal property from taxation, and within the meaning of this section, all fixtures, buildings and improvements of every character whatsoever upon land shall be deemed personal property and all exemptions under this section shall be uniform in their operations."

Embraced in these sections was the power to carry out all of the pledges implied in the League's program, including, through the power to issue bonds secured by real estate first mortgages, means for refunding loans made direct to the farmers by the state on first mortgages.

Other innovations, however, were inserted. They included a revision of the direct legislation provisions, inserted in the constitution by amendment a few years before. The percentage of voters required to initiate laws was reduced to 10 per cent. of the number voting for governor at the last previous election, and the same percentage was made to apply to initiating constitutional amendments or causing to be referred to popular vote laws passed by the legislature. Amendments to the constitution were to become law after approval by the people without action by the legislature and laws passed by the people were not to be repealed or annulled except by a vote of the

people, nor could the courts declare such laws unconstitutional.

The constitutional revisionists of the League faction in the legislature also undertook to make possible the application of the "short ballot" theory to the affairs of the state. It was placed within the power of the legislature to provide for the appointment instead of election of the secretary of state, state auditor, state treasurer, superintendent of public instruction, commissioner of insurance, commissioner of agriculture and attorney general.

This would have left the governor and the lieutenant governor the only administrative officers to be elected, virtually applying the federal government's system to the state. The same course was taken with respect to all elective county offices, excepting those of judges, which would have made it possible to bring county administrative offices directly under the control of the state government.

The elective term of administrative officers and legislators was made four years instead of two.

The result of the introduction of House Bill 44 was to galvanize into new activity the faction opposing the farmer majority. The Republican state platform, which only slightly altered the League program and which had been the result of a compromise, had declared for amendment of the constitution to make possible the enactment of the League program into law, and this was now

quoted as a pledge by the League to proceed toward its innovations in "orderly" and "constitutional" manner. It was declared that Governor Frazier, before his election, had declared that the regular process of amendment of the constitution would be followed.

The bill showed that the policy of the League in the legislature was not to be a half-loaf, compromising one, as had been predicted, but that the full measure of the "program" declarations was to be demanded.

The counter effort of the holdover opposition in the senate was the introduction of a bill calling for a special election for delegates to a constitutional convention.

Efforts were made by both sides to sway public sentiment to exert pressure on the legislature. Townley held a series of meetings in several towns in the state, and at these meetings had the satisfaction of obtaining practically unanimous approval of the proposed constitution. The "old gang" of holdover senators were pictured as conspiring to defeat the will of the people and to obstruct the enactment into law of the League program.

In the meantime the opposition, while less successful in getting expressions of popular opinion, were not idle. Newspaper correspondents representing the opposition newspapers were commissioned to issue a pamphlet attacking the new constitution, which was issued under the title of "A

Socialist Constitution for North Dakota" and was distributed through much the same channels as the earlier "Good Government League" circulars. The lawyer who led the house opposition to the farmer contingent held a few meetings with town business men and endeavored to stir sentiment against the bill.

In debate on the floor of the house an opposition member asserted that the proposed constitution removed all limits on the freedom of the state to incur indebtedness, and one of the League representatives is said to have made the jocose remark, "The sky's the limit." The phrase became a slogan for the League's opponents, used to indicate a reckless disregard for financial consequences.

The features of House Bill 44 which were chosen for concentrated attack were not, strangely, the vital features from the League standpoint. Opponents found in the draft of a proposed constitution features which they claimed showed the socialistic and unpatriotic tendencies of the League movement and the desire of the leaders to build up a strong political machine. The short-ballot provisions were, it was said, solely to give Townley power over a large number of political appointments, while of the direct legislation provisions it was said: "These are so loose in their character that if they become the basic law the state would be involved in a constant turmoil of freak laws and constitutional amendments being

promoted. It would be so easy to secure the necessary petitions to initiate or refer a measure that the farmers, business men, bankers, teachers, preachers, lawyers, wets and drys, suffragists and all other classes would be seeking new laws, or relief from new laws, all the time. Surely we have enough laws already without opening the floodgates to let forth streams of new proposals every few minutes, whenever any one had a grievance or a dream of something that ought to be fixed up."

The League's legislators and publications answered that this criticism merely pictured a condition in which the people would be taking an active interest in their government, and they pointed out that the new and more liberal form of the referendum offset any danger that might exist in unlimited power of contracting debt, since any measure to issue bonds or to enlarge upon the program of state industries could easily be brought before the people for a vote. "Our opponents," said the League speakers, "do not fear the League so much as they fear government by the people."

Oratory in the house when the bill was presented for passage was of an impassioned character and there was little friendly feeling evidenced between the small coterie of lawyers and city business men who headed the opposition and the farmers of the League majority. The climax of strong statement came from the lips of A. G.

Divet, a Wahpeton attorney and leader of the house opposition, over the revision of a paragraph relating to the schools. This paragraph in the old constitution read: "A high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity and morality on the part of every voter in a government by the people being necessary to insure the continuance of that government and the prosperity and happiness of the people, the legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools which shall be open to all the people of North Dakota and free from sectarian control. This legislative requirement shall be irrevocable without the consent of the United States and the people of North Dakota."

As changed, the section read: "The legislative assembly shall make provision for the establishment and maintenance of a system of public schools which shall be open to all children of the state of North Dakota and free from sectarian control."

One might take the view of this change that to eliminate two-thirds of the language from a paragraph without eliminating any of its purpose or legal force, reducing it to an unadorned statement of law, would be a gain and a proper act in constitutional revision; and it might be added that if it were necessary in a constitution to furnish a defense of education, the language in the original constitution was scarcely adequate to the purpose.

But the League's critics brushed such a weak

defense aside. Obviously, the Socialist revisionist had intended nothing less than an assault upon education, patriotism, morality and even integrity. Representative Divet expressed this view on the floor of the house in the words:

“I say this change in this section was made designedly, and I cannot pass it by without making the statement that to my mind those changes represent the malicious cut of a poisoned dagger of treason and licentiousness held in the secret hand of disloyalty and hate; that the hand that penned those lines and deliberately made that change would put poison in the wells in front of the country’s armies, or would lead a little sister to the brothel.”

When Bill 44 came to a vote in the house eighty-one were found to favor and twenty-eight voted against it. Six non-Leaguers voted with the League members and five men elected on League indorsement voted against it.

The bill came up in the senate three days later and was indefinitely postponed by a vote of 29 to 20. One senator elected on League indorsement voted against the bill, while four non-League senators voted for it.

The action of the holdover majority in the senate was regarded by League members and was pictured by the League’s publications as a betrayal of the farmers’ interests and a defiance of the mandate of the people of the state, who had twice specifically voted in favor of state-owned

terminal elevators and had given the League candidates huge majorities in the 1916 elections. The defense of the senate majority against this charge was that nothing had been said in the League program about any such revolutionary procedure as House Bill 44 contemplated, nor had it been an issue in the election. They claimed that they stood ready to grant constitutional revision by "constitutional" means.

The League program had called for state ownership of elevators, flour mills, packing houses and cold storage plants; state hail insurance; exemption of farm improvements from taxation; rural credit banks operated at cost and state inspection of grain. The constitution imposed insurmountable obstacles to every item except a terminal elevator, for which the constitution had been specifically amended, and state grain grading.

To the terminal elevator project a serious obstacle also existed in the lack of means to finance it except by taxation, although there was in the state treasury some \$70,000 raised by tax for that purpose. To inaugurate state ownership of elevators on the plan wanted by the farmers—on any plan that would have any appreciable effect on existing conditions—meant the use of not less than a million dollars, in the opinion of League advisers, and it was desired to have about five million dollars for the joint mill and elevator projects which were deemed most desirable. Advisers of the League, notably President Ladd of the Agricul-

tural College, believed that a flour mill and elevator should be started together and as one unit.

The state constitution had a debt limit of \$200,000 in addition to the debt at the time of the adoption of the constitution, and this could be incurred only as an emergency measure to meet failure of revenue. It was clearly out of the question to issue bonds even for a terminal elevator.

Nevertheless there was some slight difference of opinion even among the League farmers as to whether it would not be best to provide a start toward a terminal elevator as authorized by the constitution with what sums were available in the terminal elevator fund and what could be added by taxation. Some were fearful of their ability to explain clearly to their fellow members of the League their refusal to enact a "terminal elevator" law when a previous legislature had been roundly censured for its refusal to enact such a law.

The opposition shrewdly saw in this situation an opportunity to divide the League members, and it was given out that members of the senate were preparing a terminal elevator law to "carry out the instructions of the people."

Such a bill was framed by League opponents and passed the senate. It carried an appropriation of \$300,000, to be made up out of the amount in the special terminal elevator fund, the balance to come from the general fund. This bill was before the house in the final day of the session

and, after some changes in conference, was passed by the house, League members dividing on the question.

The bill was promptly vetoed by Governor Frazier, who gave as his grounds objection to the principle of taxation to build state industries, which should return earnings to pay interest on the investment; his belief that a state-owned elevator should not be built without a state-owned flour mill; that any bill for a state-owned elevator should specifically provide that it should be within the state, and that there were not sufficient available funds to meet the appropriation.

President Townley held meetings throughout the state explaining the bill and the veto of it, and he found little disposition among the League members to question the wisdom of the action. The *Co-Operators' Herald*, organ of the Equity in the state, in an editorial attacked the Governor's action, and M. P. Johnson, state president of the Equity and railroad commissioner elected by the League, made known his dissatisfaction. The rank and file of the Equity, practically all members of the League, did not support the position of these leaders. The Equity paper did not pursue its course of opposition, but later returned to warmer support than ever of the League; and Johnson was not joined by other Equity leaders. Both he and Bleick were dropped from the state railroad commission in the election of 1918.

During the legislative session the League's po-

sition had been unequivocally supported by two big organizations of farmers in their annual conventions. The Tri-State Grain Growers' conference in Fargo in January and the later session of the North Dakota Union of the American Society of Equity at Bismarck both went on record as unanimously indorsing House Bill 44, the League's proposed new constitution.

The League legislators did not devote their whole attention to the constitution. The legislature passed a resolution of amendment to the constitution to give votes for women (requiring action by a subsequent legislature and by the people), extended suffrage to women on all offices and all questions where there was no constitutional bar, passed a state grain grading act, a Torrens title registration law, a law guaranteeing deposits in state banks, reduced the rate of assessment on farm improvements to 5 per cent. of their true value, passed two freight rate laws intended to reduce freights, and created a state highway commission with additional appropriations for good roads.

The attitude of the League legislature toward the schools was significant and interesting. While granting the institutions of higher learning undiminished appropriations, the Leaguers virtually trebled the appropriations for state aid to rural schools, which had in the past proved a powerful stimulus in raising the standards of the schools.

The superintendent of public instruction, elected on League indorsement, had been an inspector of rural graded and consolidated schools and a strong advocate of better rural education. He received warm support from the governor and the legislature for his program of rural school betterment. The League propaganda from the start, in fact, has embraced strong advocacy of better education of farmers' sons and daughters and unsparing criticism of the backwardness of the country school as compared with the city school. The grain grading act of the 1917 legislature deserves especial mention as probably the most important single enactment. In the past an effective system of grain grading had been denied the farmers of North Dakota under the theory that since all or virtually all the grain sold on the Minnesota market, and that since the state of Minnesota had a very elaborate system of grades and a large organization to administer them, it would be folly for North Dakota to waste its time and energy with its own grading.

This was seen by the League's advisers, notably the Agricultural College staff and Commissioner of Agriculture Hagan, to be a fallacy. What was wanted was honest enforcement of whatever grades were used at the primary markets, together with honest weights and honest accounting. A bill for which the League senator, Charles E. Drown, was sponsor, largely developed in the

League caucus, created two departments, one of warehouse accounting and supervision, and another of grain inspection and grading under President E. F. Ladd of the Agricultural College as food commissioner. This League bill abandoned the old plan of a multitude of salaried inspectors with the resultant heavy drain on the resources of the state. Instead buyers of grain were themselves compelled to procure licenses as grain inspectors. A license thus secured could be revoked for violation of the state's rules or for any misgrading or short weighing. The elevator or warehouse employing him could not buy grain until the buyer regained his standing as an inspector or another properly recommended and qualified had been licensed in his stead.

A few months of operation of this law showed a wonderful effect not only in the more uniform and generally higher grading of grain, together with less deduction for dockage, but it also indirectly improved the prices paid for the various grades. It was administered through a chief deputy inspector appointed by President Ladd. This was James A. McGovern, a veteran farmers' elevator superintendent and farmer, who at the time of his appointment was chief grain grader for the Equity Exchange at St. Paul. McGovern encouraged farmers to send samples of all their grain to him at Fargo for analysis, where he subjected it to baking tests as well as the ordinary weighing and grading. Where the grain had been

misgraded by the buyer he was promptly notified and asked to correct the error.

The state railroad commission, acting as a grain board of appeals, was authorized to adopt state standard grades. This function was performed by making the newly adopted federal grain standards the state grades. This was necessary in order to prevent confusion in selling and shipping, but it gave the state grain inspection department the power to compel honest application of the standards, which was found to be fully as important as the fixing of standards just in themselves.

Thus the conclusion of the 1917 legislative session found but one of the planks in the League's platform actually accomplished and written into law. The League had been balked in its attempt to clear away the constitutional barriers to the enactment of the main features of the "program." It had been balked, its leaders asserted, by the perverse opposition of an "old gang" of holdover state senators. It faced the period between the adjournment of the legislature and the next general election in 1918 with the firm determination to do two things: to provide other means for amending the constitution to make enactment of its program possible, and to clear away opposition in the legislature by winning enough more senate votes to give control over that body, while holding its strength in the lower house.

Before the legislature adjourned the League's

plan with respect to the constitution was openly announced. It was to frame constitutional amendments covering the main changes desired and to cause these to be placed on the ballot in the 1918 election. It is true that there was a supreme court decision (in the New Rockford capital removal case) that the constitution could not thus be amended until the legislature had passed supplementary legislation. "Surely," said the *Non-partisan Leader* after the defeat of House Bill 44, "the senate will not defy the people by refusing to pass this legislation; but if it does, the matter will go before the supreme court again and the reactionary judges of the old court will be reversed." (Three judges indorsed by the League had been chosen and had taken office since the decision.)

Knowing that to pass a law removing the technical obstacles to invoking the initiative process for amending the constitution would enable the League more speedily to put its program into effect, the opposition majority in the senate accepted the challenge and defeated a League bill to make the provision of the constitution effective. The same senate majority, now acting as a unit against all proposals labeled "League," also defeated a bill for non-partisan primary elections. Two years later they saw their mistake, having discovered that the League could operate more effectively within the Republican primaries than outside of them, but in the legislative session of

1917 partisan bitterness blinded them to the course dictated by wise political strategy.

Citing the defeat of House Bill 44, citing also the refusal to enable the voters to initiate amendments to the constitution, the *Nonpartisan Leader* affirmed, in summary of the result of the 1917 session: "The motto of the Old Gang is: We don't trust the people."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LEAGUE BECOMES "NATIONAL"

IN January of 1917, shortly after the legislature began its sessions, announcement was made that the League had already begun to operate in other states, and that national headquarters had been opened in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Organizers at that time, it was stated, were at work in Minnesota, South Dakota and Montana, and their work would soon be extended into other states. An entire floor of an office building in St. Paul had been leased for the "national" and Minnesota state headquarters, and the League's offices in Fargo, center of operations for the most interesting political campaign the state ever had seen, were to become state branch offices for an inter-state organization.

For the first time it was revealed that, for several months, the League had men in the three states bordering on North Dakota testing the reception the League plan would meet there, and the verdict had been favorable. The organizers, as a matter of fact, started work in western Minnesota in July, 1916, immediately after the League's success in the North Dakota primaries. Soon others were busy in the northern tier of counties of South Dakota and in eastern Montana.

The plan of operation in each of these neighboring states was practically identical with that followed in North Dakota, except that Townley now had at his command both the men and the methods necessary to more rapid work. The form of organization was the same. The preliminary work consisted of visits to the homes of influential farmers, sounding them on their attitude toward the League, and finally the selection of a state committee. In the place of a "president," the office Townley held in North Dakota, a "state chairman" for each of the other states was chosen.

The "program" was about the same as that in North Dakota, but in Minnesota there was added a demand for the tonnage tax on iron ore. This proposal for several years past had found favor with progressives in the state. Northern Minnesota is the nation's greatest storehouse of iron, and it was thought that this huge resource should yield a revenue proportionate to the amount of the treasure taken out, a procedure which would bring a higher tax return than a tax based upon the wealth estimated to lie in the ground.

The state ownership of elevators, flour mills, packing houses and cold storage plants, the central equipment concerned with the marketing of the farmers' products, continued to be the cardinal point in the League's program as it spread. Along with that, of course, went the more important feature of the plan of political action by which the farmers were to place into state office,

through the machinery of the primaries and by capturing control of existing political parties, only men pledged to enact their wishes into law and to administer those laws.

The farmers in these adjacent states had read both evil and good of the "farmers' revolt" in North Dakota. The daily newspapers of St. Paul and Minneapolis had said something about it. One newspaper, the *St. Paul Daily News*, had been friendly in its attitude, while the *Tribune* and *Journal*, the chief newspapers of Minneapolis, had shown undisguised hostility. These newspapers had been recognized by the League publicity agencies as "organs of the Chamber of Commerce."

Publications of national circulation had begun to recognize the League. After the North Dakota legislative session, a farm journal of prominence sent a correspondent to get the story of North Dakota's insurgency against conventional politics, and he treated it in a way that gave no comfort to the opposition; though a number of the most active antagonists of the League had been seen and were quoted. Correspondents of eastern daily newspapers, of press syndicates and of other magazines began dropping in at League headquarters at Fargo and at St. Paul to learn more about the farmers' uprising, and to write of its picturesque features. Business interests in the Northwest had not yet succeeded in arousing a proper antagonism toward the League among their bigger fellows in the eastern business world. "Big

Business" had not yet taken the League entirely seriously, but regarded it as a local affair—something of a joke on the politicians in North Dakota.

In January of 1917 there were approximately ten thousand members of the new organizations outside of North Dakota. All memberships in the North Dakota League itself theoretically expired with the close of 1916. Reorganization was necessary. This might, in the case of another organization, have taken the form of sending notices to all members asking them to pay their dues. But the League used a different method. It was not content to wait for the members automatically to re-enroll themselves. The same principles of salesmanship used in the original canvass were applied to the re-enrollment. But, whereas the dues collected from members in the initial period had been at first \$6 and later \$9 for one year, the new schedule was \$16 for a term of two years, from election to election.

Enrolling membership by personal canvass, the fundamental working plan on which the League was built, is an expensive process, as any man who directs a crew of agents in the field realizes. Consequently the work must not be done oftener than once in a two-year term. This gave one year solely for organizing and another for campaigning.

In addition to the three states outside of North Dakota in which active organization work was already in progress, campaigns were opened in

Idaho, Washington, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa and Wisconsin.

The difficulties of handling and directing such an organization were of course multiplied out of proportion to the number of states. It was no longer possible for Townley to control all the details of the situation, and he began to trust far more to the judgment of lieutenants and leading members in the various states.

The most trusted and able among Townley's lieutenants in North Dakota were sent to the new states as managers of organization. They took with them men of experience as organizers in North Dakota, and later developed local men to do the work. This was advisable to avoid the charge of "carpet-bagging."

The states which the League chose for its operations were mainly agricultural; some of them, as North Dakota, almost wholly so. The majority of farmers reached by the organizers showed strong sympathy with the idea of the organization. They felt that it would bring about the election of men to office who would follow their wishes in matters relating to the farming business, and who, particularly, would pledge themselves to a program by which the state would assert control of the conditions under which the farmers were compelled to market their products.

In none of the states, however, did the work move so swiftly as it had moved in North Dakota. This was not wholly due to the fact that the na-

tional organization, with its scattered territory and enlarged problems of administration, could not put shrewd attention and hard work into each individual state. In North Dakota, as has been seen, the conditions had been particularly opportune. These conditions had created the League's program and its plan of action. It was the psychological effect of having been foiled in what they had set out to do by right of their power as a majority in the state; foiled through the failure of the political machinery to function in a democratic way. The farmers had rushed to Townley's League as the happy solution of the problem—a solution particularly appropriate because it promised the end toward which they had been traveling in their prior experiments in politics.

It was not quite so easy to convince the farmers of other states that what was a panacea in North Dakota was good medicine elsewhere. North Dakota had been notorious as a boss-ridden state; it had been a laggard in the farmer movements of insurgency and progressivism. Should Kansas and South Dakota and Iowa, birthplaces of Populism, incubators of government control of railroads, direct legislation and assaults upon entrenched privilege, take lessons from the state that had been Alex McKenzie's own empire? And Minnesota, that had looked on North Dakota as the forlorn wild prairie—was it to seek instruction from this modern Nazareth?

Organization, therefore, could not go so fast in

these states. But it moved. The extension of the League seemed sure to succeed. South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Idaho, Wisconsin and still others would eventually yield to the power of organization if the work among the farmers continued.

Minnesota drew the most concentrated attention. It is closely related to North Dakota, as closely related as landlord and tenant, as employer and employee. North Dakota grew the wheat; Minnesota received it and "handled" it—mixed it, cleaned it, speculated in it, profited from it, ground it and profited again. Minnesota banks "financed" North Dakota—drew in the golden flood of gold as they drew in the golden flood of wheat, and doled it out again with cautious benevolence on proper security. North Dakota was "dependent" on Minnesota, just as the farmers of North Dakota were dependent on the town bankers and merchants; just as the horse is dependent on the plow and the blossoms on the bees that gather their honey.

The farmers of Minnesota knew more of the League movement than farmers of other states and were even more favorably impressed by it. With North Dakota farmers declaring their independence of big grain dealing, and milling interests, they saw no reason why they should not do the same. But in Minnesota farmers were not in majority. There were big cities to reckon with, a much higher proportion of urban population,

and therefore impossibility of political domination, except by alliance with other factions or interests. That interest, as the philosophy of the League plainly pointed out, was with the other branches of essential producers, with manual workmen, in other words. And it was the natural and logical thing that the alliance should be with union labor, the one big class organized to combat aggressions by capital, by "profiteers," by "exploiters of labor," by "big business."

The League, early in its career in Minnesota, began pointing out the essential community of interest between the workingman and the farmer, and to lay its plans for a close alliance with organized labor in the state. The advances to union labor, however, did not represent a new idea, for it was a policy inherent in the general philosophy of the League. In North Dakota the unions, insignificant in point of numbers, already were beginning to reap the benefit of the unsolicited support of the League, in spite of the earnest attempts of the city press to point out that the interests of farmers and laborers necessarily were in opposition.

It was not difficult to persuade the unions of the advantages of the alliance. In every state their own efforts to influence legislation had been puny. They had found other elements in politics combined against them and they had been betrayed by the men they had supported more often than they had been served. The rank and file of union mem-

bers were and are strong believers in the theory that all who work with their hands and brains in actual production of commodities could share a much larger profit if "parasites" and "profiteers" were eliminated. Almost without exception they are strong supporters of municipal ownership of utilities, of government ownership, or control, of great natural monopolies. Their convictions, as a rule, are not less "socialistic" than those of the organized farmers of North Dakota, with their plan of state operation of elevators, mills, packing houses and cold storage plants.

The alliance with the unions became important in Montana as well as in Minnesota. That state not only furnished a ground highly favorable for the League's propaganda, but offered organized opposition as well.

Montana, more than any other state in which the League operates, is cursed with the political influence of capital. For the most part it comes from a single great corporation, together with its allied companies and related interests. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company is a monopoly whose ruthless domination of a state—control over business, the press and politics—furnishes a story too intricate and too extensive to be reviewed here. The League soon found natural allies there in farmers' organizations, in unions, in college professors, and in independent men and women of all walks of life who had been injured

by the great trust or who had chosen to fight it rather than bow.

In Idaho there were special conditions that favored the League movement. W. G. Scholtz, who had come out from Minnesota, giving up a position as clerk in a railroad office to take up fruit farming for his health, discovered, like Townley in North Dakota, that farmers and fruit growers in Idaho were injured by the control of "trusts" and monopolies over the market. He believed that unfair advantage was being taken of the farmers' ignorance of market conditions.

Scholtz began the publication of a farmers' weekly journal which devoted its attention to the problems. It found a ready response among the farmers and built a large circulation. In his publication Scholtz contended for state laws creating the office of State Market Commissioner, giving authority to collect and publish information on prices and market conditions. This mild measure of reform was unanimously backed by the farm organizations then existing, with the result that the legislature found it unwise to disregard their demand. Immediately after the passage of the law creating the office, Governor Moses Alexander asked the farmers' organizations to recommend a candidate or candidates for the position. To Scholtz's surprise, the farmers recommended him and declined to make any other recommendation.

Governor Alexander gave Scholtz the appointment, and tied a string to it. The appointment

was by law for a definite term, but the governor argued that he would be responsible for the record of the office, and he wanted the power to remove at will. So he asked Scholtz's resignation, undated and to be used when desired, as a condition of the appointment.

Scholtz soon found himself involved in a battle with organizations of cream buyers, grain dealers and fruit handlers. He desired more power to cope with their practices, and went before the next session of the legislature with proposed laws extending his powers, after Governor Alexander had declined to be sponsor for the changes. The legislature accepted his ideas and the governor promptly accepted his resignation.

The dismissal of Scholtz roused a tumult of protest among the farmers and it was at this opportune juncture Scholtz learned of the extension operations of the Nonpartisan League. He welcomed it with open arms, joined forces with the state organizer sent out from St. Paul headquarters, and converted his own magazine into the *Idaho Nonpartisan Leader*.

In the state of Washington co-operation was extended to the League by groups of party-less "radicals" both in Spokane and Seattle. Spokane was the home of David C. Coates. Coates had left the League work in North Dakota shortly after the 1917 session to return to his private interests in Spokane. A few months later he became manager of the national headquarters of the newly

formed National party, which was largely an attempt to build a new liberal political party out of the ruins of the Progressive party, deserted by Roosevelt.

The political wiseacres, whose guess is always worth much more than any amount of information, knew at once that the Nonpartisan League had been only the curtain-raiser for a deep-laid political plot now more fully revealed in the formation of the National party, of which Coates, so the story ran in the state of Washington, was the real Machiavelli.

This guess was too complimentary to the men who formed the national party. Their political ideals were much the same as those of the League and Townley welcomed their co-operation, but he had no thought of turning the League machinery over to the use of a group of political idealists who had not yet shown practical ability.

In the campaign of 1918 the League did, however, indorse several candidates running on the National party ticket. The more notable were Jeanette Rankin, of Montana, for the United States senate, and W. G. Calderwood for the senate in Minnesota.

In spite of the friendship of a few city liberals in the state of Washington, organization made rather slow progress, largely because of the very diverse character of agricultural production in the state and an overbalance of urban and industrial population. Here, as in every other state, the

entry of the United States into the war and the absorption of general interest in war activities acted as a serious brake on League progress.

The League's entry into Texas and Oklahoma was in response to general appeals from farmers and political progressives in those states, where usurious interest rates and other oppressive conditions were rapidly increasing tenantry and where there was a class of farmers probably the most miserable of any in the Union. The very conditions which persuaded the League to enter these states made it difficult for the League to thrive. A year of organization work resulted in a severe drain on the League's treasury; it was due to a well-organized persecution of League representatives by the dominant elements in the state; persecution which included beatings, tar and feathers for League organizers—notably in Texas—and the inability of the farmers to give their support. The great majority were ready to wish the League godspeed, but they were unable to pay dues to meet the expenses of organizing effort.

The stories of opposition journals created the fiction of a huge cash fund in the hands of the League from its dues collections, a fund from which the officers of the League could pay themselves huge salaries and live in luxury. The fact was that there had never been a day since the start of the League when it was not burdened with debts secured by the voluntary notes of farmers

and the post-dated dues checks; when its resources were not strained to the utmost to keep the stream of ready money flowing to meet the huge expenses of the organization.

The executive committee of the League, beginning with the first state convention in Fargo in 1916, has presented annual audit reports both of state and national affairs to state and national conventions. At all times Townley has been restrained by the cashier's department of the League. The audit reports and the testimony in Townley's proceedings in bankruptcy, which came to a hearing in 1918 (the outcome of his failure at Beach in 1912), show that Townley's own earnings from the League were less than was paid to heads of departments under him, where the work required special training and ability.

In granting Townley's petition for discharge from bankruptcy, Federal Judge C. F. Amidon said:

"The trustee (representing the creditors in the bankruptcy proceedings) has been permitted to go through the record of all these concerns (the League and its affiliated organizations) as with a lighted candle. He has found no trace of any grant of any of the funds or property of the Nonpartisan League or its subordinate agencies to Mr. Townley, except a salary of \$300 per month. On the contrary, the record shows clearly and affirmatively that the Nonpartisan League and its subordinate agencies have never granted to Mr. Townley any part of their funds or property as his personal

estate and he has never used them for any purpose except that of a political leader, devoting them honestly to the achievement of the objects of his party. The record is full and has been honestly kept and it shows an honest purpose to give an account of an honest stewardship.”

Midsummer of 1917, in spite of all the difficulties faced, saw organization work proceeding under Townley's direction in the thirteen western states named. In each state there were from half a dozen to one hundred organizers, a state office and its corps of workers, and at national headquarters a staff of accountants, library experts, a book department for the sale of progressive literature, a correspondence school for organizers, a staff of regular lecturers. Always, in some part of the territory, one or two men of national prominence were temporarily engaged, at the League's expense, in propaganda.

The first criticism on the finances of the League was that the huge fund being collected from memberships was to be used for the private enrichment of Townley and his associates; the second, made by innuendo during the war, that the League was receiving money from German sources. The argument in the first case was that the League could not possibly be using honestly all the money collected; the second, that its legitimate collections certainly couldn't equal all it was spending. Either line of attack could be used, depending upon the purpose, and, ludicrously enough, the

same critics used both in turn. In North Dakota the leading newspaper opponent at one time presented estimates to show that only a fraction of the League's collections were being expended in League activity, while, not long afterward, it estimated that so rapidly was Townley spending the money he could have nothing left for campaigning in North Dakota, which was really what the farmers had paid for.

With all the stir in other states, activity in North Dakota was not lessened. One of the chief events was the League's first participation in an election for a national office. The death of Congressman H. T. Helgesen in the spring of 1917 made it necessary for the League to decide whether or not to take the plunge into national affairs at that time.

Governor Frazier called a special election for June 10. The district, the First North Dakota, comprised the counties of the eastern border and some adjacent—the most thickly populated area in the state, embracing the two chief cities, Fargo and Grand Forks.

The League decided to participate, and Townley called all the League members of the legislature in session as a convention to choose their candidate. The result was the selection of John M. Baer, cartoonist for the *Nonpartisan Leader* from its beginning. Baer was scarcely thirty years old, younger than any member of congress at that time. After being graduated from a small college

in Wisconsin, he had come to North Dakota as a civil engineer. He settled in Beach, the scene of Townley's North Dakota farming experience. He used cartooning, a talent he had practised on a college paper, as a diversion, and he had done an occasional political cartoon for campaign use before the League was born. He was popular in Beach and had married the daughter of a prosperous farmer. Baer was a Democrat and had been appointed postmaster by President Wilson. He resigned in 1916 to come to Fargo to devote all his time to cartooning for the League's official paper.

Baer is a man of winning personality and had no enemies. The League farmers considered his drawings depicting "Big Business," the "Old Gang" and the farmer as the very heart of the *Leader*. His nomination struck a very popular chord with them. Baer in his campaign developed the ability to speak effectively. Running as an independent, having been nominated by petition, he defeated the "regular" candidates by a close vote and took his seat in congress.

By this time antagonism to the League, based on issues relating to the war, had become acute.

CHAPTER XV

WAR ISSUES

WOODROW WILSON was elected in 1916 on the anti-militaristic issue and by an anti-war vote. North Dakota, by the narrowest of margins, gave its electoral vote to Wilson, though McCumber, Republican, was re-elected to the United States senate. The vote for Wilson was undoubtedly heavily reduced by the fact that the League nominees were in the Republican column, also the Republican state committee, headed by William Lemke, one of the League's campaign committee, had coupled, in its advertising, publicity favorable to Hughes and McCumber with arguments for the support of the League Republican nominees.

In spite of many corrections and warnings against this association of candidates in the editorial columns of the *Nonpartisan Leader*, a large proportion of the League members apparently accepted the pages of paid advertising of the Republican State Committee, appearing in the *Leader* (and marked as "paid advertising") as a true statement of the League's position. This probably explains why Wilson did not poll a heavier vote in North Dakota. The Hughes advertising contained the warning that "Wilson's

vacillating policy is leading the country straight toward war.”

If there had been a clear-cut issue in North Dakota between one candidate favoring immediate war with Germany and another favoring the avoidance of war there is no room for doubt that the vote would have been overwhelmingly in favor of peace.

The sentiment of North Dakota and of practically all the states west of the Mississippi was decidedly pacifistic. It was as true in other western states as it was in North Dakota. The explanation for it must be sought in other directions than in the propaganda of the Nonpartisan League. The fact is that the League, up until the declaration of war by our government, had studiously and carefully refrained from any expression of opinion or policy on war and peace questions, the Allies or Germany.

There was political strategy in this. To introduce war questions, as to introduce religious questions, would inevitably divide opinion and beget strife within the League. It was the invariable rule that subjects likely to arouse heated differences of opinion were to be avoided. The League was neither for war nor against it. It sought to pursue its own political way without attention to so troublesome a subject.

It is probably fair to say that, generally, farmers and all others who toil at hard physical labor for long hours were far less concerned with

the troubles of Europe, far less likely to be stirred by indignities and outrages committed abroad against American citizens, were far less jealous of American rights and were much less thrilled at the prospect of war than other classes with more leisure.

It is easier for the real toiler to see war in terms of toil and suffering than to see in it abstract rights and glorious adventure. He is more slowly affected by tales of distant suffering than the man of ease and leisure. The energies and the compassions of the laborer—and the farmer is one of the hardest worked of all laborers—are otherwise occupied. This is not a question of morals. It is merely a physiological and psychological fact.

If the North Dakota vote had been polled on the subject of war or peace in April of 1917, it would have gone against war. No one who observed conditions and sentiment in the state could honestly say otherwise. The vote that would have decided it would have been a farmer vote against war. Yet even then scores of North Dakota boys, many of them farm boys, were serving in the armies of the Allies. They had slipped across the line to Winnipeg and other Canadian towns and volunteered with the Canadians. Scores of North Dakota League farmers had relatives in the Canadian and English forces. The state was largely pro-Ally. The son of one of the League's candidates, a Fargo high school graduate, was killed in

battle in 1916, as a member of the Canadian forces.

To say that the people of the state went unwillingly to war would be untrue and an injustice. They went willingly, recognizing the justice of the cause, recognizing the abundance of the provocation; against what certainly would have been their own judgment if they had been asked to express it, but with faith in the judgment of those they believed to be in a position to know.

But they did not propose to forego any of their rights as citizens. Among those was the right to protest against building up riches for the "profiteers" in war, as they had been protesting against building up profits for the "profiteers" in peace.

With war declared the League could not, in all the excitement of a country at war, hope to exist and make progress without making itself a part of the changed conditions. The League's natural preference would have been to ignore the war question. From the organization standpoint the war was a calamity. It detracted men's attention from domestic questions.

To the farmer—especially the middle-aged farmer toiling for a living and facing debts—war meant more taxes, harder work, when he thought he was working as hard as any man deserved to work for a living. War, waste, work—the three concepts went together in the farmer's mind as quickly as in the mind of an economist; far more quickly than in the mind of a politician.

“Yes; we’ll go to war, but how shall we pay for it?”

Such was the natural thought of the farmer. He was used to reckoning waste and expense in terms of toil.

Townley understood the farmer’s mind. He understood the struggle that the financing of the war meant. He was aware of the millions that had been made by Americans out of the war in Europe. All reading Americans knew of them. Every worker knew some were reaping huge fortunes while to others the prices of the necessities of life were becoming more and more difficult to meet. Farmers’ costs had risen tremendously. What was to be the story of American participation in the war? How was the load to be distributed?

Finally, the question came, was there room for a campaign of protest against profiteering, for a demand that the load of war should be more equitably borne? And could the League survive, carrying such a message of protest? And if it could, was there the courage to carry it on? Townley knew what it would mean and he decided to make the fight.

Before the legislature adjourned the League-controlled house had adopted a resolution denounced by the League’s enemies as “unpatriotic.” It called upon congress, in case war should be declared upon Germany, to make the first levy to meet the expenses of war upon the “swollen

fortunes" created by war profits in the United States.

After the legislative session Townley held a series of North Dakota meetings attended by large crowds of farmers coming from great distances. At these he explained and justified the action of the legislature and of Governor Frazier in vetoing the terminal elevator bill. He also, more frankly than ever before, had gone into the League's history, and he had asked for support of a new plan of financing through the sale of stock in an organization to be known as the League Exchange. This organization was formed to hold post-dated membership checks and to advance the League cash or lend its credit against them. He and other League speakers had also been active in North Dakota in the campaign for the election of Baer to congress.

The authorization of the First Liberty Loan seemed to be warrant for the belief that congress was likely to evade the duty, as it was conceived by League leaders, of a drastic plan of taxation for the war. In June Townley took the stump in North Dakota, holding a series of meetings to demand "conscription of wealth" as a war policy.

The opposition newspapers declared that these meetings, held in all the more important towns of the state, were in opposition to the Liberty Loan and to the war. The *Grand Forks Herald* quoted Townley as having declared "This is a war of the

rotten rich," and charged him with other "treasonable utterances." It published a cartoon depicting the imprisonment or hanging of "traitors" in other American wars and in another drawing represented Townley as advocating sedition, unhindered.

A tense feeling was created throughout the state. It increased as Townley proceeded from the smaller cities and towns of the western part of the state to Grand Forks and Fargo. Townley was booked for a speech in Fargo on Saturday, June 16. *The Fargo Forum*, which had been purchased a few months before by interests hostile to the League, asserting its position as chief press opponent, published an editorial in its issue of June 9 which seemed an invitation to violence against the League president. It read:

"The *Forum* hopes that when Mr. Townley comes to Fargo the members of the Home Defense League, 100 or 150 strong, will march into the hall, stand at attention during his address and give him a chance to repeat those remarks or make others in the same vein.

"If there isn't a public officer in the state with backbone enough to put the speaker behind the bars, there is enough spirit in the Home Defense League to prevent him from repeating the offense."

Townley accepted the challenge, came to Fargo and delivered his speech on "Conscription of Wealth" in much the same terms as he had delivered it elsewhere. There was no show of violence

against him by members of the Home Defense League, some of whom were present. The speech was, in part and in tone, highly objectionable to some; it increased the wrath of foes of the League against Townley and the organization.

A stenographer's transcript of Townley's speech at Jamestown just before he came to Fargo fails to show the "quotations" charging the most extreme statements. Of Townley's earliest speeches in the state no stenographic report was made, and so no material was at hand to contradict newspaper reports which the *Nonpartisan Leader* asserted were garbled.

The *Fargo Forum* and other newspapers, however, did ostensibly print what Townley said at Jamestown. This report was not only in different language from Townley's speech as shown in the stenographic record, but contained statements not at all like any made in the actual speech, either in words or meaning. This misquotation, which appeared to be deliberate, furnished support for the contention of the *Nonpartisan Leader* and the *Courier-News* that the "seditious" statements credited to Townley and all charges of opposing the war and the sale of Liberty Bonds, were perversions of the truth.

The anti-League papers, on the other hand, maintained that Townley actually had been engaged in stirring up sentiment against the war, but that later he grew more cautious. It may be said, however, that these papers continued to re-

gard what Townley actually said in the authorized quotations in print as "seditious."

Quotations from one of Townley's recorded speeches of this period will not be out of place, as showing just what was the course he was advocating.

Townley read figures, which he said were from reports in the hands of the federal government, showing the net profits made by various firms during the war as compared with profits in the pre-war period. Instances were: Swift & Co., \$9,000,000 in 1913 and \$20,000,000 in 1916; Cuban-American Sugar Co., \$356,000 in 1913, \$8,235,000 in 1916; Armour & Co., \$6,800,000 in 1913, \$20,100,000 in 1916; Dupont Powder Co., \$4,500,000 in 1913, \$82,000,000 in 1916; United States Steel Corporation, \$81,000,000 in 1913, \$271,500,000 in 1916.

"Now do you begin to understand the high cost of living?" asked Townley. "You have been told it was necessary because of the war. The facts are that it is necessary because during war times they use the war as an excuse to raise the prices on everything you buy.

"Oh, this power! This power of the industrial monarchs of this nation—this power to fix the price of everything you have to sell and of everything you have to buy! The governor said your political power was tremendous. Well, the next thing to it is the power of the trust to fix prices."

. . .

“I want to say to you that this nation can never succeed in war unless this, your government, instead of serving the interests of the United States Steel Corporation and the sugar trust and the beef trust—this nation can never succeed in war until it governs the business of transporting your products and wipes off the face of the earth the gamblers in food products and the necessities of life.

“It is absolute insanity for us to lead ourselves or anybody else to believe that this nation can succeed in war when hundreds of thousands of parasites, the gamblers in the necessities of life, use the war only for the purpose of extracting exorbitant profits. We are working, not to beat the enemy, but to make more multi-millionaires. That is what we are working for.

“Now here is the seditious and treasonable and unpatriotic part of my discussion. We respectfully suggest, and then we demand, that this nation, instead of serving the interests of the gentlemen it must be serving now, or it would not permit those gigantic corporations to rob you of so many millions a year—I am afraid this government must be serving them, because I can't figure out from those reports how they are serving us—and so we respectfully suggest and we demand that as a war measure this United States government shall do the one thing first of all that is necessary, and take over, before they send one single boy to Europe, take over the railroads and the distribution of food into their hands, and kick the gamblers into the sea or send them to war.”

“Well, they have charged us with treason, but I want to say to you that this nation of farmers are so patriotic that even though the government today may be in the hands and the absolute control of the steel trust and the

sugar trust and the machine trust; even though it is we are going to do our best by producing all we can. All as it is, if we can't do better, we will do that."

"Now the question is how best to raise the money that is needed to fight our battles and win this war. I want you to listen now carefully—very carefully.

"If this nation borrows twenty billion dollars during this war; if it goes in debt twenty billion dollars, that debt is going to have to be paid after the war. All debts are paid by the people that work, that produce. It means that your boys that go across the sea to fight these battles, when they come home will have to labor years and years and years to pay off the debt; labor to pay for every pound of shot and shell and food and clothing that you ship across the sea—and interest upon the debt.

"And if the war lasts long the burden will be so heavy that maybe they can never pay even all the interest on this war debt. That is not a pleasant prospect for men that are to go across the water fighting for the honor of this country.

"Last Tuesday about ten million young men—I see them in the crowd here, and here, and here—about ten million young men went to the registration booths and there pledged their lives in the defense of their country's honor, went to the registration booths and there said in effect: 'I will serve my country in any capacity that she may demand. I pledge you here my life. Take it and use it as you will. It is all that I have. My life is everything to me. It is everything to my father and my mother and my sister and my brother, and my wife and my children—or my sweetheart. It is all I have. It is all they have. In this world crisis you, my country,

take this, all I have, and as much as you need for the defense of our homes and our country.'

"This is what these young men said in effect.

"This is the acme of patriotism. No blatant demagogue approaches within a million miles of the sacrifice these men made last Tuesday when they went to the registration booths. And it is right that they should have done it. I believe in the conscription of life in time of war, because it is not right that the burden should be shouldered upon those few who have the courage in their blood to go and fight."

"There is a way to pay today. This nation is worth some two hundred billions of dollars, and the fathers and the mothers and the grandfathers and the grandmothers of these ten millions of young men that are going to war, they produced that two hundred billions' worth of wealth. They produced it, and they piled it in heaps so large and so magnificent that they themselves dare not approach the wealth they have produced. They would stand in awe of the mighty institutions that their industry has reared.

"And I propose that first of all we apply some of the proceeds of the years gone by to the payment of the war debt, and pay it as we go."

"They used this war as an excuse to pull into the coffers of the already rotten rich ten millions where before they could only rob you of one million. In the heat and haste and confusion of war they multiply their millions many times at your expense. You now sending your boys across the water must pay the steel trust added, ever-increasing millions of profit to keep your boy from being destroyed after he gets over there.

“That is the way it appears to be going now—and we have a different way.

“The steel trust here makes two or three hundred million dollars of profit; the sugar trust makes profits; the harvester trust makes profits; the railroad trust makes profits; the lumber trust makes profits; the shoe trust—the whisky trust—the grain trust—the beef trust—every trust makes an enormous war profit.

“Today and tomorrow and every day, they are sapping—these vultures upon the industrial life of this nation—are sapping the life blood not only of your allies but of you, a thousand times more than ever! When you need that blood most they sap it most. Now in this world crisis they pile up during the war more than it would take to pay the expense of the war—

“And I say to you that the first thing this government should do is to take the profits they are making today to pay the expense of the war.

“Is this treason?

“Is this anarchy?

“More than that, if, by the duration of this war, those war profits are not enough to pay the cost of the war; if by their management we are so far led into war—and we will go as far as is necessary to defend this nation—if we must go so far as to exhaust those profits, and need more money, there is still another reservoir; and that is the millions that they piled up before the war. We will take that, too.”

These are significant extracts from the speech that, with only minor variations of theme and order, Townley delivered from one corner of North Dakota to another in this memorable two weeks in June.

The first Liberty Loan was pending. It was declared that Townley was speaking against the loan; that he was obstructing the loan; that he was obstructing enlistments; that he was opposing the war.

Judgment upon these matters will depend greatly upon the point of view of the hearer. There was sharp division of sentiment in North Dakota, as everywhere in the nation. There was division even in the ranks of those who had been preaching protest against existing conditions. Some believed their duty lay in counseling submission for the time and a "moratorium" for political demands. It seemed to be generally accepted as the only truly patriotic course to obey orders and leave decisions to "constituted authority."

If a people were on the brink of rebellion against the whole business of the war, then any form of agitation on the subject of war policies might be dangerous to government.

Was Townley handling firebrands in a powder magazine? Was the state of North Dakota likely to spring into the flame of revolt against the government of the United States? Was the state in fact honeycombed with rebellion and infested with disloyalty? There were those who said it was.

One will look in vain in Townley's speeches for any indication that such was the case. One will look in vain in the records of the state's part in the war for evidences of any such condition at any

time. And if one were present at one of those big meetings of these slow-moving, patient, earnest farmer folk he would have seen no signs of menace to order or to law.

Not in them. There were lawless, fanatical groups organizing. These were men filled with the fire and zeal of a spirit they themselves called "patriotism." It led them to declare that they would "put down disloyalty and pro-Germanism"; that they would "teach these foreigners who didn't understand their advantages to go back where they came from if they didn't like our country."

These farmers had thought they understood America and its spirit. They thought it was a country where men could speak as they thought about what ought to be done by the government.

They approved Townley's doctrine that "we," the people of the nation, ought to direct that the government should control the industries necessary to the war and that the profits due to the war should be taken to pay its expenses. They are a simple, direct-minded folk. In a great meeting where a speaker asks a question of them they will answer. So they answered Townley, when he cried, "Is this treason?" "Is this anarchy?"

"No! No! No!" they shouted in chorus. "It is right!" "You are right!"

It might not be fair to judge Townley by the outcome of events. If it is true that no fortunes were made by the war; if it is true that nothing

was added to the burden of taxes and debt to build needless profits for some; if it is true that all that could have been taken out of war earnings was taken to meet war's expenses—if all these things were attended to and would have been attended to without any agitation of the matter—then Townley's speeches were needless and, judged by results, at least, purely demagogic. But, to be fair to Townley, he could not have known that this would be the case.

The powder trust and the steel trust and the beef trust and the sugar trust and the international bankers had, as he said, been making hugely increased profits out of the war before America's entry, and it seemed reasonable to him—if we were to have a concentration of all energies in the war—to cause them to forego further increased profits. He could not know that it would be done without any agitation of the subject.

Townley had seized an issue—a group of issues—that gave the opposition much material on which to work. They were better equipped to make use of the material than before.

The war had given the ordinary recognized leaders of communities—the banker, the lawyer, the commercial club member—a new field in which to exercise leadership. They were called upon to perform patriotic duties, to organize Liberty Loan teams, to direct Red Cross drives and other campaigns for war charities and war efforts.

It was but natural that in some of these groups there should be men who had been actively opposing the Nonpartisan League. It was inevitable, possibly even without the prejudice they may have had, to regard Townley's attitude as subversive of the public good, and even "treasonable."

Liberty loan campaigns were in charge of bankers who were sworn enemies of the League. The state chairman of the Red Cross in North Dakota was one of the leaders of the anti-League forces. He employed as secretary a man who, as secretary of an insurance federation, had been carrying on an active campaign against the League. This secretary sent out a letter on Red Cross stationery saying that "Here in North Dakota we consider the League thoroughly disloyal." Thinly veiled attacks on Townley, on Governor Frazier and upon others of the state administration and of the League forces, were made in the course of "patriotic" addresses. Seldom did any man connected with the League or in any way sympathetic toward it get the opportunity to make a loyalty address under the direction of any recognized patriotic organization.

The co-operation of the League was not sought for any patriotic effort; nor was its participation permitted. Collections taken up for the Red Cross at League meetings were refused by local officials, and the League, both in North Dakota and Minnesota, was warned not to take up collections for this purpose.

In North Dakota, however, farmers continued to hold their League membership and dared to attend League meetings. In one case a rather open threat of violence was met by action of the state council of defense, appointed by Governor Frazier. This body held powers equivalent to those of the sheriff in any county and at one meeting where a local "safety" committee had warned Townley not to hold a meeting for fear of "violence" the secretary of the state council of defense, sent by the governor, swore in the entire audience as "deputies," charging them with the duty of preserving order.

On several occasions League speakers were barred from holding meetings because of the refusal of owners of halls, under pressure from town interests, to permit the use of their auditoriums. These situations were met by holding outdoor meetings. In one case an entire League audience marched to the prairie just outside the town limits to hold a meeting.

The nearest approach to violence or disorder in connection with League meetings in North Dakota came at a League campaign meeting at Dickinson in 1918, where a group of young men standing outside open windows threw missiles, including eggs, into the room. The audience of more than a thousand farmers rose as one man as if to wreak punishment on the offenders. They were calmed by President Townley, but there was a tense situation for some moments, while a group

of town hecklers well inside the hall sat pale and quiet, apparently in great anxiety.

Townley's solution of the affair was to praise the farmers for their self-restraint, to remind them that because they were "right" and "patriotic" they did not need to practise violence, and to class the leading citizens who opposed the League with the small boys who threw eggs and stones "because they don't know any better."

"We must teach them," said Townley, "how good and patriotic and peaceful citizens conduct themselves."

So far as League headquarters knew, there was no case of League farmers offering violence to any opponent or heckler at a League meeting. It was a settled maxim to League policy to be peaceful and to put "the other fellow" in the wrong.

In June, 1917, Theodore Wold, governor of the Minneapolis federal reserve bank, was quoted as having said that he had evidence that the Non-partisan League was working against the sale of bonds of the first Liberty Loan issue. Townley issued a statement denying this and stating that the League had not opposed any step taken by the government to win the war, nor would it oppose any steps to be taken. He said that League speakers had "reserved the right and considered it their patriotic duty publicly to urge the adoption of a policy which will better serve to concentrate the full resources of the nation on the task of bringing the war to a successful conclusion."

A small quota had been set for North Dakota in the First Liberty Loan. This was done because of the fact that at this season of the year (early summer) the state was a borrower and no large investment could be expected. There was, in fact, no general campaign for subscriptions such as was employed in the later loans. In most communities the banks themselves subscribed the allotted quotas and the only canvass was made through newspaper space. But in this and in all subsequent loans the state quickly made up its quota and far exceeded it. There were few instances of refusal to subscribe.

Opponents of the League, however, found in Townley's speeches a fruitful opportunity to raise outcry against him and against the League. Repeated efforts were made to cause his arrest or indictment under federal laws, none of which ever materialized. In the summer of 1918 they did succeed in bringing about federal charges against three men rather prominently connected with the League in North Dakota. Leo Horst, a young school teacher and League organizer, was arrested on a federal warrant charging him with obstructing enlistments by a speech in which he said that while farmers were patriotically laboring to raise as large a crop as possible, "food speculators" were holding up prices and allowing large quantities of food to go to waste. A federal grand jury heard the charges and refused to return an indictment. An indictment on similar charges was re-

turned against J. W. Brinton, one of the League's speakers, and he was acquitted. Walter Thomas Mills of California, who delivered "lectures" for the League, was arrested and indicted as the result of a speech delivered in Fargo. A stenographic report of his address was produced by the defense at his trial and the case was taken from the jury and a verdict of acquittal directed by Federal Judge C. F. Amidon.

Horst declared that prior to his arrest he had made repeated efforts to enter the army but had failed on account of physical disqualification. After his dismissal he enlisted and was assigned to duty with the spruce-production force in the Northwest. Later he was transferred to educational work among the foreign-born recruits and was given a place in the faculty of a military school co-operating with the army.

But besides Townley's speeches and the League's pronouncements on "conscription of wealth" and the taking over of essential industries during the war there soon came forth a new issue and a new plank in the League's national platform that did even more to arouse the storm of criticism against the League and to furnish a basis for the charges of "disloyalty."

John Baer was elected to congress on July 10, receiving a majority of all the votes cast in the First district. He appeared in Washington in mid-August to take the oath of office. Before he did so the League publications had printed edi-

torials calling upon the national government to issue a statement of the war aims of the nation and the terms upon which peace would be concluded with Germany, these terms to be in general harmony with the President's statements up to that time, to declare against annexations and "punitive indemnities" and to denounce secret territorial agreements.

Baer, on his arrival in Washington, gave out a statement which he said reflected his own views and those of the League. In part it read:

"Even now the German people are demanding of their government that it declare specifically the terms upon which it will make peace. In our country the National Nonpartisan League stands without reserve upon a demand that our government make specific declaration of its terms of peace, so that we, as a people, may know that the ideal for which we war is an expression of true Americanism. To continue war when the peoples of the nations engaged are at agreement, is an international crime. . . . Today our people do not know what are the demands or what the reparation which we require of the German people to restore the conditions of amity existing prior to the war. The practice of secret diplomacy, utterly repugnant to the principles of democracy, keeps us in ignorance. I cannot improve on the platform of the League covering this feature of our national duty and our national needs. I therefore quote:

"We demand of no nation any concession which should be hid from the world; we concede to no nation

any right of which we are ashamed. Therefore we demand the abolition of secret diplomacy. The secret agreements of kings, presidents and other rulers, made, broken or kept, without the knowledge of the people, constitute a continual menace to peaceful relations.' "

The League subsequently sent telegrams of congratulation to President Wilson upon his further public statement of American war aims and assured him that the League would support him in helping to create a public sentiment which would reinforce demands he might make upon the allies of the United States to make public statements of war aims in harmony with those of this nation.

The secret treaties whose terms and binding force were revealed to President Wilson on his arrival in Paris for the peace conference more than a year later formed at this time (August, 1917) an object of concern on the part of the executive committee of the Nonpartisan League. The League leaders, in harmony with a few others in America, were fearful that in the absence of an explicit agreement and public statement by all the Allies these secret treaties, instead of the broad and generous principles of humanity and democracy expressed by President Wilson, might form the real basis of the peace which ultimately would be arranged.

The League agreed with those who were of the opinion that if the war aims of the United States, as expressed by President Wilson, were put into explicit terms and agreed upon by the Allies their

statement would hasten the coming of peace and would be an aid to a military victory.

Resolutions of the purport of that quoted above were read to League farmers at meetings addressed by Townley and others and were approved without dissent. Thus they were made the "war platform" of the League.

To many, however, this sort of teaching appeared only as quibbling over going to war, as questioning loyalty, as "stabbing the soldier in the back."

It was the cause of turning opposition to the League in states other than North Dakota from mere political jealousy into a crusade of suppression having all the fervor and bitterness of a religious persecution.

CHAPTER XVI

PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

To offset the slowing up of organization by the war, League leaders expected some gain for the movement. War is a highly socialized enterprise. In the case of all the European countries engaged it had meant ruthless overriding of ordinary trade practices and the substitution of government operation and government control. League members and League leaders were ready to welcome the efforts of the federal government in this direction, efforts which they felt would help to show some of the wastes of the existing system and pave the way for such measures of reform as the League was advocating.

One of the two chief items of war-time League policy as enunciated by Townley was that the government should take over the operation of essential war industries to stop "profiteering," to reduce the high cost of living and so to contribute to greater efficiency in the war.

When Herbert Hoover returned from Europe to take charge of the food situation in the United States, the League was prepared to support and to demand a thoroughgoing policy of government control, one which would eliminate the gathering

of speculative and monopoly profits by the big grain, flour and meat corporations.

Between the harvesting of the 1916 crop and the arrival of the first 1917 grain on the market there had been more than a dollar's raise in cash grain at Minneapolis. In midsummer of 1917 No. 1 Northern was selling between \$2.60 and \$2.80. By September 1, when trading was stopped by order of the food administration, cash grain had gone above \$3. Most of the 1916 crop had passed out of the farmers' hands at between \$1.60 and \$2.00. It was pointed to as only another instance of how the big dealers in wheat, millers, elevator companies and speculators, reaped tremendous profits which came out of the pockets both of producers and consumers. Stop the trading in wheat futures; let the government take over the grain markets and limit the millers to a fair profit, and consumers could get cheaper bread while at the same time the farmer would receive a higher price. This was the reasoning of the farmers' leaders.

It was the Equity organization, not the League, which took the initiative in demanding a "fair" wheat price guarantee. A meeting of representatives of farmers' organizations, called by the Equity Exchange, was held in Fargo in May. The result of the conference was resolutions suggesting that the government take over and operate terminal grain warehouses during the war and that a guaranteed price of \$2.50 a bushel be fixed

for No. 1 Northern or equivalent grades of wheat at terminal markets.

The action of this conference was criticized by a Fargo attorney. He declared the farmers were "setting a price on their patriotism." Cash wheat in that week was quoted at from \$2.67½ to \$3.06, while the September future had dropped from \$2.10 to \$1.80.

The farmers' conference decided to send a committee to Washington to ask congress and executive officers to fix a \$2.50 guarantee and that the government take control of the grain market. The committee which went to Washington included two state senators, Charles E. Drown of Cass county, and Thomas Pendray of Stutsman county, both of whom were members of the League, and the author of this volume. Members of other organizations, including President J. M. Anderson of the Equity Co-Operative Exchange, made up a total of seven members of the delegation.

They appeared before the house committee on agriculture. Audiences were arranged for them with the President and with Herbert Hoover, who was awaiting passage of the food control act to receive appointment as food administrator.

Before the house committee the members of the delegation all supported the bill under consideration, the Lever act, creating the office of food controller and giving him wide powers. Much of their addresses was devoted to presenting to the committee data on the cost of raising wheat in

the hope of having a guaranteed price fixed by the statute. Congressman Young of Texas, opposing the bill, warned the farmers that they were making a mistake.

“You don’t realize what you are doing here,” he told them. “You think this bill will be used to give you a better price for wheat. If I thought that, I’d be for it. But it will not. It is going to be used to give you a lower price.”

The answer of the delegation was that the farmers wanted to have the “robbery” in the grain markets stopped during the war; that it could be stopped only by the control of the market by the federal government and that they did not ask an opportunity for excessive war profits, but only a fair price based on the cost of production. They were willing, they said, to accept regulation and they asked that other factors in production take the same stand.

To the president the farmers said that they were supporting the food control bill, that they had given evidence regarding the cost of production of wheat and hoped for a fair price, but that they were far more interested in the savings that could be made both to producer and consumer by government control of the markets.

Grain exchanges, they said, ought not to be left in private hands; the federal government ought to control them. And they hoped that the administration would lay plans to use the information and knowledge of marketing conditions

gained during the war as the basis for permanent regulation of the markets in peace time. They told the President that the farmers of the Northwest would "stand by the government" and do their best to help in winning the war.

In response to a similar appeal, Herbert Hoover told the farmers that if the government found it necessary to fix a price at which grain would be bought by the government to "stabilize the market," he thought that it ought to be a price which would "stimulate production."

Mr. Hoover said in this interview:

"If we come to fixing a price for grain, we must establish as a minimum a price which will assure a large production. We must have not merely a reasonable level, but one which will stimulate production. That means a higher comparative level of prices than we have had in the past. There is a social and economic problem here far deeper even than the mere matter of a temporary stimulus to production. There is no panacea for food deficiency short of making the farm profitable. There is no use of talking about getting people back on the land unless we adopt this method."

These statements of Mr. Hoover were taken by the farmers as encouragement of the hope that they would be well treated by the food administration.

In August the "fair price" commission, summoned by the food administration, began its sessions to fix a price for wheat. In his letter to the

President asking for the appointment of this commission, the food administrator said: "The producer received an average of \$1.51 per bushel for the 1916 wheat harvest, yet wheat has been as high as \$3.25 at Chicago. Through one evil cause or another the consumer has suffered from 50 to 100 per cent. and the producer gained nothing. This unbearable increase in the margin between producer and consumer is due not only to rank speculation, but more largely to the wide margin of profit demanded by every link in the chain."

Mr. Hoover said that some "producers" in allied countries thought that the American fixed price should be such that American wheat could be delivered abroad at the amount of their guaranteed price, which, he said, would mean \$1.50 per bushel at Chicago. He did not agree to this, he said, because a price which would stimulate production would be "in the long run in the interest of the Allies." The farmers, he said, must be protected from a slump in price.

President Ladd of the North Dakota Agricultural College, recognized by the North Dakota farmers and by the League members as their friend, became one of the price-fixing commissions. While the commission was in session, word came out that there was danger of a price which the farmers would consider ruinous, and it was said that members of the food administration were contending for a price under two dollars.

The League publications called upon farmers to

wire appeals for a better price to Washington and an editorial in the *Courier-News* calling for "fair treatment" for the farmer was wired to Washington and printed in one of the daily papers there. The League also sent a delegation to Washington to make an appeal. A large number of telegrams was sent insisting that any price under \$3.00 would be a reduction from what the market, unregulated, had offered.

The price fixed by the commission was \$2.20, Chicago, for No. 1 Northern and equivalent grades. Dr. Ladd and President H. J. Waters of Kansas Agricultural College were credited with an heroic fight in preventing a price under \$2.00 being fixed. Disappointment with the price fixed was general in the spring wheat district and was expressed by the *Nonpartisan Leader*.

"President Wilson and Food Administrator Hoover promised the farmers a liberal price this year, one that would stimulate production," said the *Leader*. "On this promise the farmers sowed extra acreage. They gave up big money-making non-food crops like flax in order to sow more wheat. The government's promise meant farmers would get more than the cost of production. It meant that they would get a 'liberal' margin above cost, a margin that would 'stimulate production.' In actual fact they get far from a liberal price. Twenty at Chicago for No. 1 means a fair return for farmers who got big crops of good grade wheat. But in some states, like North and South Dakota and Montana and parts of Minnesota, crops were poor—below the

average in yield—and some farmers got little or no crop. The government's price for these farmers is a severe blow. The cash price for wheat on the day the government announced it would fix a price was \$3.06, and September wheat was then quoted at \$2.50."

The farmers saw that, instead of the government's "guarantee" price operating to give them a higher return for their wheat, it would actually operate to reduce their revenue by at least a fourth and probably a third. The first step in government control of the markets had been to hit the primary producer, the farmer.

Regulation of the profits of the millers, they were told by the food administration, was to be left to "patriotic co-operation" between the millers and the food administration. There was to be no fixing of flour prices nor bread prices by a commission. It is true, the food commission had announced that millers would be permitted to make only 25 cents a barrel above the cost of production on flour and 50 cents a ton on feed, but the farmers knew there were plenty of ways by which "cost of production" in the milling business could be inflated and expenses go from one pocket into another. Besides, this was an arrangement between the millers and the food administration of whose operation the public, it appeared, was not to have any details.

One of the League's most active enemies in North Dakota was quoted on the subject in a hostile newspaper:

“Well, the farmers wanted Socialism. Now they’ve got it, I hope they like it.”

Promptly after the report of the price-fixing commission was announced the League called a series of meetings of farmers and other citizens, the first to be held in Fargo on Monday, September 17, and others to be held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at St. Paul, Minnesota. These meetings were called to consider the price of wheat fixed by the government. “The crop situation and the financial condition of farmers will be discussed and an effort very likely will be made to influence the government to reopen the price matter,” said the *Nonpartisan Leader*. It added that “prices and price-fixing on all kinds of products will be considered.”

As the plans took shape, however, the character of the proposed meetings was altered and their scope enlarged. The meetings were to be a “producers’ and consumers’ conference.”

“It is evident,” said an announcement in the *Leader*, “that the government has not had the necessary support in its intention to deal fairly with all who produce and sell the necessaries of life. The big manufacturers and the big middlemen are fighting desperately to prevent the government from reducing their profits. They are resisting the taking of their profits and heavy taxation of incomes to pay for the war. The farmer has been hit first of all. He has been taxed first and most severely to carry the expenses of the war.

“It is evident that the support of a stronger public

sentiment is needed so that the government can carry through a successful policy of regulation and limitation of profits. The convention to be held in St. Paul is expected to solidify a strong public sentiment which will make it possible for the government to do what is needed to protect the consumers from war exploitation."

Telegrams were sent out to leaders of labor organizations asking their co-operation and invitations were conveyed to notable speakers. Among these were Senators Borah, Johnson, LaFollette, Gronna of North Dakota, and Gore, all of whom were felt to be "progressive" in their attitude and in sympathy with the League's aims. An invitation also was sent to Food Administrator Hoover and to Congressman Claude Kitchin, head of the ways and means committee, and to Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin of Montana. Efforts also were made to get into touch with organizations of consumers and others who would be interested in the general regulation of prices by the government.

President Ladd of the North Dakota Agricultural College agreed to tell of the work of the price-fixing commission. President Waters of Kansas also accepted the invitation. Congressman Baer, newly elected from North Dakota, and Congressman George M. Young, who was openly a League sympathizer, were on the program. Robert Bridges, chairman of the Seattle Port Commission, came to tell of the success of public ownership on the Pacific coast in reducing the cost

of living and increasing profits to producers. Former Senator John L. McLaurin came from South Carolina to tell of the farmers' struggle with market conditions in that state. Carl Thompson of Chicago, secretary of the Public Ownership League, agreed to talk on the line of the propaganda of his own organization. The federal department of agriculture sent a speaker.

To one who understood the League's purposes the objects of the meeting were entirely plain and altogether legitimate. The first announcements led to the supposition in Washington that protest against the fixed price of wheat was to be drawn up, and possibly rebellion against its enforcement. Events proved that nothing of the kind need have been feared. In fact, the tone of the publicity prior to the meetings showed that resentment against a price that represented a sacrifice to the farmer was being directed into the channel of demanding merely that a similar regulation be imposed on other factors in production; that the government take over essential industries and that heavier taxes be imposed on war profits.

Obviously, the meetings had another object. It was not to foment discontent. It was nothing else than an assertion of the League's place as an organization of national scope and interests, intent on fighting the battle of the common man, alert that his interests should be safeguarded in the war.

An incident happened at the St. Paul meeting

which gave a form of publicity not at all desired and put into the hands of their opponents a heavy weapon.

Senator Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin was among those invited to speak. He had been chosen chiefly because of his great popularity in the "progressive" Northwest, but also because of his fight for higher taxation of war profits. He was the author of the bill for war taxation nearest in line with the League's policy. He was expected to speak on some phase of his fight against "special privilege."

LaFollette was on hand for the final night of the convention.

Borah had given an address on war taxation; Colver of the Federal Trade Commission, whose home was in St. Paul, had spoken; Waters and Ladd had explained the work of the price-fixing commission; Governor Frazier, Senator McLaurin, Bridges of Seattle, officials of organized labor from several sections of the country, including officers of the Minnesota State Federation, had made addresses. President Townley had spoken before a large city audience and had been cheered uproariously. Officers of other farmers' organizations from Nebraska, Kansas, New York and other states had joined in the testimony that the farmer was ready all the time to do his patriotic duty and he asked only that efforts be made to distribute equally the burden.

These and others had made addresses. Reso-

lutions signed by representatives of a dozen organizations had been prepared and were passed by a vote and signed. The "conference" was declared to have adjourned. LaFollette dramatically held himself away until a night meeting arranged for the last day. He arrived in St. Paul in the morning and was in session all day with men representing the League. The report was circulated in League circles that LaFollette was insisting on delivering an address defending his own record as one of the "wilful twelve" in voting against the declaration of war. It was said that League headquarters was laboring to dissuade him.

The evening meeting was set for 8 o'clock and LaFollette was to be introduced immediately. It was after 10 o'clock before he made his appearance. Ten thousand persons awaited him. The news that LaFollette was to speak had brought out a great crowd, including many who had been against the declaration of war and were ready to cheer LaFollette for his course in opposing it. They were from both St. Paul and Minneapolis. Newspaper reports had created a high degree of interest and a tense state of mind by reports that LaFollette was likely to make sensational statements and to stir seditious sentiments.

Received with tumultuous applause by thousands who had been awaiting his appearance, LaFollette talked briefly on the rise of the League as

evidence of the failure of political parties. Referring to the war, he launched into a defense of his conduct in voting against it. "We had grievances," he said. "Germany had interfered with the rights of our citizens to sail the high seas—on ships loaded with ammunition for Great Britain."

LaFollette's speech, whose salient feature, according to the newspaper reports, was opposition to the war, was the one event of the conference that attracted the attention of the whole nation and completely diverted attention from the real purposes and actions of the meetings.

The audience which applauded was five times the size of the afternoon audience which had attended the last sessions of the "conference." In that proportion it consisted of St. Paul and Minneapolis people, who were in sympathy with LaFollette's position or came out of curiosity to hear him.

Seeking to create a union of producers and consumers, to become known as a national organization working to promote market efficiency and political co-operation of the workers, the League, instead, achieved the reputation of having called a meeting to enable a senator who had opposed the war to enunciate views in opposition to the government.

One newspaper referred to the final sessions of the conference as "a war dance of disloyalty." Another accused Townley of having, at the height

of LaFollette's criticism of the war, risen to "pat him on the back and to tell him to 'go to it.'" A much more obvious and reasonable explanation was that the League president rose, when the high state of feeling of the audience was apparent, to advise the speaker to change the current of his address.

As a result of the address, charges were made against LaFollette in the senate. After a careful reading of the stenographic report of the speech the senate committee decided that there was no justification of further proceedings. Much of the criticism of LaFollette had been based on the report that he had said: "We had no grievance against Germany." The press association which sent out this report after the senate investigation sent out a correction stating that the inclusion of the word "no" had been an unfortunate error by an employee.

Two other incidents of the summer, both in North Dakota, helped to build up a reputation for the League which was difficult to overcome.

Trouble with transient labor at harvest time had been frequent. Disorders were blamed to the I. W. W. organization, which included in its membership a large proportion, probably a majority, of the skilled migratory harvest labor. A League farmer in western North Dakota, R. J. J. Montgomery of Tappen, president of the Farmers' Union in the state, had for several seasons employed "red card" men by preference, claiming

that he could in this way get better crews. He suggested to the League headquarters that an effort be made to reach a wage scale agreement with the I. W. W. to prevent labor shortage and harvest disorder.

Negotiations were opened with the I. W. W., with the result that they presented a scale of wages for harvest work. President Townley addressed several meetings in the state asking farmers to vote on the question. As a result he notified the "wobblies" that the farmers could not agree to their scale. The fact was that a majority at all but one of the meetings at which Townley had presented the agreement was in favor of it after he had explained it. He caused them to reject it, because there were many who opposed the plan and he did not want the responsibility of having urged it upon the farmers.

At about the time the farmers were considering this proposal, Governor Frazier issued a proclamation covering the subject of harvest disorder. He told officers of the law that they must be on the alert to apprehend criminals at this time, but that the state would not tolerate persecution of transients nor the arrest or searching of men without cause or without proper legal authority. The reason for this proclamation was the practice in many communities of "shaking down" strangers, who in many cases were merely migratory laborers, by arrests and fines on "vagrancy" charges, and general persecution of the wanderers,

which particularly centered itself against the I. W. W.

There had been proposals in the legislative session for more stringent laws to guard against the "menace" of the I. W. W.—plans to swear in extra officers of the law and to arm posses to fight them. The League resolutely defeated these schemes, advancing instead a plan for a labor bureau in the department of the commissioner of agriculture and labor, with arrangements to care for the regular distribution of harvest help. The farmer legislators took the position that a "square deal" would work better with the I. W. W. and other seasonal labor than persecution.

The year's experience seemed to uphold this contention. There was much less harvest disorder in North Dakota than in adjoining states. One opposition newspaper complained, saying that the I. W. W. had been told "not to pull anything in North Dakota because the governor was their friend."

The other incident was the appearance of the People's Council in the Northwest, seeking an asylum where they could hold their meetings. This was the organization named the "People's Council for Democracy and Terms of Peace," which was demanding early settlement of the war, but which was being generally denounced by the press as an unpatriotic enterprise. Denied the opportunity of meeting in Minnesota, the secretary wired Governor Frazier of North Dakota

whether they would be given "the protection of the law and the constitution" if they should decide to hold their meetings in that state. Governor Frazier replied that he would uphold the law and protect any citizens holding a lawful meeting, but that no seditious statements would be permitted in North Dakota. Newspapers both in North Dakota and Minnesota at once announced that Governor Frazier had "invited" the People's Council to come to North Dakota. They went instead to Chicago.

Thus the League had experienced a stormy year in making itself known in national affairs and had come out with a reputation which did not agree with the principles it was seeking or the manner in which it was seeking them.

These principles primarily were contained in the plan of organization within the several states and the written "programs" which the League was seeking to put into effect. These were supplemented in the national and international fields by the resolutions adopted at the "Producers' and Consumers' Conference," which may be considered as representing a "war program" of the League.

Among the proposals contained in these resolutions were the following:

"Cheerfully acquiescing" in the fixing of the price of wheat, the farmers ask that prices on other necessities be regulated to eliminate exorbitant profits.

That the reduction in the price of wheat be passed along to the consumer in cheaper flour and bread, failing which the government should seize mills and bakeries and turn out flour and bread at cost.

That the government make low-interest loans to farmers whose crops failed.

That the food administration cease paying commission to grain buyers, and instead buy direct.

That a zone system of wheat buying be adopted to correct inequalities and injustices due to freight differentials.

That milling value of grain be made the basis of grade and price.

That income and excess profits taxes be increased.

That a federal tax be levied upon unused land.

That in case of failure of the plan to tax away excess profits in war industries "through lack of co-operation" the government commandeer all such industries necessary to the conduct of the war.

That the government operate the copper mines during the war, as requested by Butte miners' organizations.

That co-operative buying be encouraged.

That in all cases during the war in which strikes in war industries are not speedily adjusted the government take over the industries.

That soldiers' pay be fixed at \$50 a month.

That the government furnish cheap insurance to soldiers.

The President had sent his reply to the Pope's peace proposal and the conference passed a resolution commending the reply and stating that "we pledge our support and approval to all

further efforts to unite our government and its allies behind this clear statement of our purposes.”

The preamble to the resolutions contains language which became of some importance to the League, because President Townley and one other officer were twice indicted because of this language—not in the federal courts, however, but in local courts in Minnesota. The preamble contained the following:

“The moving cause of this world war was and is political autocracy used to perpetuate and extend industrial autocracy. It is the struggle of political overlords to extend and perpetuate their power to rob and exploit their fellow men. Autocratic rulers who have robbed and exploited the fathers and mothers, now slaughter the children for the single purpose of further intrenching themselves in their infamous position, and securing and legalizing their possession of the fruits of others’ toil and thrusting the world under the yoke of political autocracy, which is ever the shield and mask of industrial autocracy.

“Our war is to extend the political democracy which we in the United States enjoy, in order that political democracy may be safe in our own land and that it may be used to accomplish its historic purpose—industrial democracy.”

CHAPTER XVII

“PATRIOTEERING”

THE League had met concentrated opposition before; it had met charges of “socialism” and “disloyalty;” it had met refusal of meeting-places in towns, and even threats of violence against its organizers, but the real era of persecution may be said to have dated from the “Producers’ and Consumers’ Conference” in St. Paul in September of 1917.

The LaFollette episode at that conference was given far wider publicity than any other incident. To a very large proportion of the general public in many states it was the one incident which they could associate with the name of the Nonpartisan League. Together with what could be told, truly or untruly, of Townley’s speeches against conscription of wealth and of the League’s attitude toward the government wheat price and all the variety of biased constructions that could be put on the history of the League in North Dakota, it furnished the grounds on which to build up a pseudo-patriotic campaign aimed at the suppression and extermination of the League in all of the states, except North Dakota, in which it was operating.

To say that it furnished the grounds of this attack is not to say that it furnished the motive. A candid examination of the record of the opposition to the League reveals that it was being fought on the charge of disloyalty and in the name of patriotism by exactly the same elements as fought it on other grounds when this question did not enter.

The opposition to the League continued to be stimulated and abetted by the larger commercial interests of each state and in the small communities the head and front of the opposition usually consisted of the banker and the lawyer or business man who had been most actively interested in politics.

In Minnesota men prominent in financial and commercial circles secretly formed an organization to combat the League. Their activities were carried on principally through publicity bureaus whose origin and financial backing were not voluntarily made public. Two different magazines, one called *On the Square*, and another *The Pan-American Anti-Socialist*, had brief careers devoting themselves almost exclusively to attack on the League, and were known to have cost their backers several hundred thousand dollars. Quiet efforts were made to form local organizations against the League and to cause attack on the League by existing organizations.

Several months after the close of the 1918 campaigns the *Nonpartisan Leader* obtained posses-

sion of correspondence which had passed between the backers of the anti-League effort and their hired publicity agents. This revealed the existence of an executive committee numbering in its membership leading bankers, an official of a public utility corporation, the head of a large lumber company, the manager of a printing concern who had long been active in politics and others prominent in commercial life. Among the active leaders were shown to be Rome G. Brown, an attorney and political agent for large corporations, Charles S. Patterson, a wholesale shoe dealer and municipal lighting contractor, and F. H. Carpenter, of the Carpenter-Shevlin Lumber Company. The League publications, in seeking to counteract the publicity campaigns carried on by this group, did not fail to point out that the foes of the League seldom willingly made their identity or their methods of operation public.

During the war also there was organized in Minnesota an “America First Association,” whose purposes were stated to be to combat unpatriotic sentiments and actions. A newspaper thought to be within the councils of those who took the lead in organizing the Association, represented it to be a political organization formed to combat the Nonpartisan League. This purpose, however, was denied and repudiated by the Association after it had been organized and many Nonpartisan League members became members of it, taking its program of patriotic principles at

face value. In other states the plan of forming such an organization was recommended as a means for combating the League.

Other states fell into line with plans and organizations for fighting the League, frequently in the guise of patriotic effort. In Iowa the Greater Iowa Association, an alliance of commercial interests, made opposition to the League a part of its patriotic wartime activity; in the state of Washington the Employers' Association charged itself with this duty, while in Montana a "Loyalty League" was especially organized for this purpose by a newspaper man generally known as the chief publicity representative of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, Montana's super-trust.

There was friendly co-operation between states in the campaign. A series of interviews was published at different points in the country with a traveling "North Dakota farmer" who revealed that the League was in fact a pro-German organization. The "North Dakota farmer" turned out to have been a real estate and insurance man in a North Dakota town. Another insurance agent made the circuit of the west speaking before commercial clubs and rotary clubs, pointing out the "menace" which the League held for "legitimate business," showing how it could be opposed on patriotic grounds and outlining the form of a patriotic organization to do the work.

There was singular lack of success in enlisting

any actual farmer or farmers' organization in such an enterprise. Where farmers' organizations did not actually indorse the work of the League, they could not be persuaded into any form of active opposition to it, “patriotic” or otherwise. The Farmers' Union, the Grange (Patrons of Husbandry), three different organizations using the name Equity, and local farmers' organizations of different parts of the country as well as farmers' organizations in Canada, looked with friendly regard on the League. Many of the leaders and officers of these organizations became members of the state committees of the League.

This division of friends and foes of the League, in the midst of the disloyalty fight against the organization, seemed to indicate either that the real motive behind the struggle was the clash of interests and desires of two industrial classes, or that the farmers were totally lacking in the patriotic sentiments held by insurance men, bankers and grain brokers.

The persecution was directed first against organizers and agents of the League, but later against farmer members of the League also, when the “pro-German” cry had waxed strong enough and official curbs on the mob spirit had been relaxed as they were in Minnesota under the policy of Governor J. A. A. Burnquist. Organizations masquerading—perhaps also in their own eyes—as “patriotic” leagues, or “home guards,” be-

came emboldened to exercise of assumed authority or even to violence which could have had no popular sanction under ordinary conditions.

Individuals and organizations progressed from refusal of quarters for meetings or quasi-official orders against holding meetings to the next step of open threats of punishment or physical violence, and from this to mob violence itself was but another step. Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, Texas, Montana and Washington all furnished instances of the same feeling and the same activity against the League. Organizers were ordered out of town, were beaten or were tarred and feathered, as happened in at least a dozen cases. Farmers were driven out of the places in which they sought to hold meetings, in a number of cases where no agent of the organization department of the League was present. One organizer who attempted to hold a meeting in a Minnesota town was knocked down, trampled and beaten and led out of town at the end of a rope with the announcement that he was about to be hanged, but was finally liberated after more kicks and beatings and apparently a disagreement among his captors as to what ought to be done with him.

In the spring of 1918 the League was undertaking an active campaign in all of the thirteen states on its rolls. In Texas a crew of organizers worked under the direction of M. M. Offut, a farmer and stockman resident in that state for

thirty-five years and a “lay preacher” of the Methodist church.

On Thursday, April 4, two organizers for the League drove into the town of Quitman, Wood county, Texas. Their names were H. L. Higdon and A. A. Cother, and they were both citizens of Texas. At Quitman they were accosted by a deputy sheriff, a man named Apel, who led them to the courthouse, where they were cross-questioned by the deputy and by a lawyer, Andrew J. Brinton, and by a merchant, Charles McCain. They were asked whether the League was not a pro-German organization, and denied it. McCain said to Cother (according to Cother’s statement): “You are a German spy,” and struck him in the face, drawing blood. They were warned by the men present to get out of town.

The narrative of the organizers proceeds to relate as follows:

They went to Mineola, in which town were also H. F. Hoover, another League organizer whose home state was Arizona, and Offut, the aged state manager. There Hoover, Cother and Higdon were all arrested on charges of “vagrancy” and taken to jail. Offut, the state manager, was seized, dragged into a room and his flowing whiskers and gray hair hacked off with a pair of sheep shears. He was beaten and afterward put on a train and sent out of town. Offut said that his purpose in being in Mineola was to visit Reverend Charles Hughes, pastor of the Methodist church, who had

been attacking the League from the pulpit. Offut said he wished, as a brother Methodist, to lay the facts before Hughes and to convince him that he was mistaken. He says the Mineola preacher, with insulting language, ordered him out of his house.

At 10:30 that night a crowd including well-known men of Mineola broke into the jail without interference by any officer, took Higdon, Cother and Hoover outside of town in automobiles, amid much cursing and threatening, including the brandishing of firearms. The men were told they were to be hanged, but instead they were stripped, thrown face down on the ground and beaten with horsewhips. Salt water was then poured into the open cuts on their bodies and they were turned loose and told to run, while shots were fired after them to hasten them.

These organizers not only denied that they had done anything to interfere with the war or to stir up anti-war sentiment, but offered to prove that they had been actually urging the purchase of Liberty bonds. None was a Socialist. They assert that the sentiment against them had been actively propagated by the local banker and by Dabney White, proprietor of the *Tyler Tribune* and a member of the Ginners' Association, who had been active in opposing a law requiring a different method of sampling cotton and was a rabid opponent of farmers' associations.

The *Greenville Banner*, a newspaper in a nearby

town, published a lurid and gloating account of the affair. “The three organizers,” it said, “learned by bitter experience and to an extremely painful degree that pro-German propoganda will not go in Texas.”

At Winlock, in the state of Washington, Alfred Knutson and M. L. Edwards, organizers of the League, were taken out of hotel rooms late at night, led some distance from the town and after rough handling and beating Knutson was covered with hot tar and cotton, while Edwards was released with a warning. Three days later Edwards resumed his organizing effort. He was taken from the home of a farmer at midnight, beaten and tarred and feathered with a further warning to leave the vicinity. As in the Texas case, he named prominent citizens of the towns of Toledo and Winlock as his assailants. He went to the prosecuting attorney of Lewis county, who refused to issue a warrant, but promised to tell the ring-leader, a well-known politician, to “lay off.”

In Minnesota N. S. Randall, a speaker for the League, was assaulted and beaten by a mob at Glencoe, and was carried out into the country by an armed mob, members of which told him that they were about to hang him. He was later “rescued” by another party, who ordered him to leave the county.

In October, 1917, an organizer who had obtained 40 members for the League in Pine county, Minnesota, was driven out of the county by a mob.

Other workers were sent in, with the result that by May 1 there were 600 members in the county. On May 2, Nels Hokstad, a farmer of Norwegian birth, owning a farm in the county but engaged in organization work, was making a speech at Turpville schoolhouse, near Hinckley. An armed and drunken mob came to the schoolhouse, took Hokstad a prisoner and, after carrying him a distance of some miles, stripped and beat him and covered his body with hot tar and chicken feathers.

“If you want to stop me from organizing, you’d better swing me,” said Hokstad while the tar was being poured on him; “tar and feathers won’t stop me.”

The men who attacked Hokstad wore well-made black sack masks covering their entire heads except for eye slits. One of the masks was put over Hokstad’s head.

Two days later Hokstad spoke from a platform in Pine county to a crowd of 750 farmers and told them of the threat made by the mobbing party that the first League organizer or speaker who came back into the county would be killed.

At New Richland, Minnesota, League farmers attempted to hold a meeting on March 26, 1918. Just before the meeting and when a large crowd of farmers had assembled the town marshal served an order signed by a “war board” forbidding the meeting. On the invitation of E. E. Verplank, a Civil War veteran and a farmer, 84 years old, the audience moved to his place, where they

were pursued by the sheriff, who again ordered them not to meet.

In Montana, W. H. Brownell and B. H. Brinton, League organizers, were taken prisoners and roughly handled by an organization calling themselves the “Musselshell Hundred.” At Columbus Organizer Thomas Bradley was taken prisoner by a mob armed with shotguns, but was taken in charge by the sheriff, who later released him. There were no arrests. At Miles City on April 8 Organizer J. A. McGlynn was seized and taken into the basement of the Commercial Club building, where he was told that “decision had been reached in his case” and he was held until train time and then placed on a train and sent out of the city. Attorney General S. C. Ford of Montana caused the arrest of several citizens of Miles City as a result of this case. When the case came to trial a mob in court hooted Ford, tickets to the courtroom were sold by men in Red Cross nurses’ uniforms and the newspapers treated the affair as a joke.

R. B. Martin, chief speaker of the League in Montana, was ordered not to speak in Big Timber and was similarly treated at Columbus, but after he had spoken in Billings a number of influential men sent him a letter of congratulation on his speech and invited him to speak there again soon, which he did.

In Nebraska the State Council of Defense refused the aid of the Nonpartisan League in pa-

triotic fund campaigns and sent a letter in reply to the state manager charging that the pamphlet on "war aims" being circulated by the League was unpatriotic. Various local authorities and volunteer organizations took measures to stop League organization and League speaking. Organizers were arrested on charges of sedition, but the charges in each case later were dismissed. Pursuant to an order of the state council of defense referring to men "not engaged in useful occupations," half a dozen organizers were arrested on that account. One of them, Kinney Yenawine, was a naval veteran who was with Dewey at Manila, who had attempted to enlist, but had been rejected as physically unfit. County Attorney J. C. Cook of Dodge county, who had been stirred to opposition against the League on the representation that it was a disloyal organization, was prevailed upon to make an investigation on his own account and he made public announcement that he believed these charges to be without foundation.

The Saunders county, Nebraska, Council of Defense issued a letter to League members ordering them to fill out requests for withdrawal of their names from the League rolls and asked them to place their membership receipts in the hands of the council in order that suit might be started to recover them, promising that the proceeds would be given to the Red Cross.

On July 6 an agreement was reached between

the Nebraska State Council of Defense and the Nonpartisan League in that state. The agreement was entered into in settlement of a suit brought in the Lancaster county court at Lincoln to restrain the state council from interfering with League meetings and organization and to restrain it from enforcing an interpretation of the “work or fight” order which would prevent all organization work for the League.

The state council agreed to permit the League to continue its work and not to interfere with its meetings or its organizers, and the League agreed to employ none but citizens of Nebraska in the organization work and to discontinue circulation of the “war aims” pamphlet. The state manager of the League explained that the “war aims” pamphlet, containing the resolutions of the St. Paul conference and the statement of Congressman Baer, had not been circulated for some time, due to President Wilson’s having made sufficiently explicit statement of America’s war aims since the pamphlet was issued.

In Iowa the Greater Iowa Association, an organization of commercial clubs, was carrying on an active campaign against the League and succeeded in a number of instances in causing League meetings to be stopped under patriotic pretext. Lafayette Young, a newspaper publisher and politician, as chairman of the state council of defense, sent a letter to one editor who had printed an article favorable to the League, warning him

against repeating the offense and telling him that "the State Council of Defense would like to hear from him." The secretary of the Oskaloosa Commercial Club caused the arrest of a League organizer on the charge of sedition. The organizer was taken before a United States commissioner, who refused to issue a warrant on the evidence presented and dismissed the prisoner.

In South Dakota, Idaho and Colorado League meetings were stopped and League organizers warned. Threats were made to lynch an organizer at Holly, Colorado, and at Haxtun the editor of the local paper, who had supported the League, was warned that if he did not leave town he would meet with violence.

In Minnesota conditions were aggravated by the attitude of Governor J. A. A. Burnquist, who knew that the political success of the League meant defeat for his own political hopes. Burnquist scornfully refused an invitation to address the 1918 convention rallies, replying in a letter which charged that the League was attracting to itself the support of the pro-German elements in the state and charging it with close relations with the I. W. W. The executive secretary of the League, said Burnquist in this letter, was the man who "defended the I. W. W. murderers on the Iron Range."

This reference was to Arthur LeSueur, one of the League's staff of legal advisers. LeSueur had, indeed, defended members of the I. W. W.

charged with murder as the outcome of a strike on the “iron range,” but the men whom he defended were acquitted, a fact which did not appear material to the governor.

Burnquist’s own known position toward the League and the attitude of the state Public Safety Commission, which had been given wide war powers by the legislature, together with an appropriation of one million dollars, undoubtedly encouraged those officers of the law and quasi-public war bodies in the various counties who were making use of war conditions and war sentiment to prevent League meetings and to suppress further organization of the League if possible.

So successful were they that in 19 out of 87 counties the League had been defeated in mid-summer of 1918 in its attempts peacefully to hold meetings, and organization work practically was impossible in those counties.

The state-wide direct primary elections in Minnesota were held in June and for several days before the League caused to be held a series of automobile parades of farmers. There were as many as, in one case, seven hundred automobile loads of farmers and their families in these parades. As an exhibition of solidarity the parades were routed to pass through towns, many of which were hotbeds of opposition to the League. In several cases these parades were stopped by town peace officers, while in many others stones were

thrown at them, banners torn from cars and other acts of disorder permitted.

Delegations of farmers were sent to wait on Governor Burnquist and Attorney General Hilton of Minnesota asking them to take action to protect League farmers and League meetings from molestation. Both the governor and the attorney general disclaimed responsibility for the attacks, but no active steps were taken to prevent their recurrence.

The League in Minnesota had scheduled 250 meetings in the winter and early spring of 1918. Of these forty had to be abandoned. As a test of the authority of Jackson county officials who had ordered that no League meeting should be held in that county Joseph Gilbert, at that time "organization manager" of the League, went to Lakefield and after a conference with local men who warned him not to attempt to hold a meeting he went out on the street and started a speech to a group of farmers. He was promptly arrested on a warrant charging "unlawful assemblage." Later another charge, that of "discouraging enlistments" was preferred against him under a state law. Gilbert was convicted under this state law on both charges amid circumstances which led the *Nonpartisan Leader* to charge that this and a later conviction of N. S. Randall, another League speaker, in another county, were "travesties on justice."

At the trial of Gilbert in Lakefield on the charge

of “unlawful assemblage” the courtroom was crowded with highly excited opponents of the League and strong feeling was manifested against James Manahan, former congressman from Minnesota, attorney for Gilbert. As Manahan left the courtroom he was surrounded by a threatening crowd and was told that if he did not immediately leave the town he would be tarred and feathered. The intervention of the sheriff, who was present, was confined to offering Manahan “safe conduct” to an adjoining town. Manahan reported that a man in the courtroom, unknown to him, who had applauded his statement that the most recent Liberty Loan in North Dakota had been oversubscribed by 73 per cent., was struck in the jaw and knocked down and afterwards chased out of town by a mob.

On February 28, 1918, President Townley and Joseph Gilbert both were arrested on indictments procured by a district attorney in Martin county, Minnesota, another of the southern Minnesota counties only sparsely organized by the League. This warrant charged him under the state law with “discouraging enlistments” through the circulation of the pamphlet entitled “The Nonpartisan League, Its Origin, Purposes and Methods of Organization.” The charge was based on the language in the resolutions adopted at the “Producers’ and Consumers’ Conference” quoted in the preceding chapter. The case came before the supreme court of Minnesota on an appeal from a

ruling of the lower court overruling demurrers to the two indictments. The indictments were returned in February, but the supreme court did not hand down its opinion until after the primaries in June. It reversed the case, ruling that the lower court should have sustained the demurrers. The court analyzed in great detail the documents on which the League officials were accused and found that in no respect did they conflict with the law.

“The resolutions taken as a whole,” said the court, “appear to be nothing more serious than a rhetorical and somewhat flamboyant platform upon which a certain class of citizens are solicited to join an organization whose avowed purpose is the amelioration of the alleged evils of present economic conditions, and to bring about a more equal distribution of the wealth of the world among all classes of mankind. The pursuit of this object does not violate the statute in question. . . . It is perhaps not out of place to say that the resolutions have not yet attracted the attention of the federal authorities.”

The acquittal of Townley and Gilbert on these charges was hailed as a great victory by the League's publications, but in the time intervening between the accusation and the court's decision much use had been made of the case in agitation against the organization.

An incident of the year which illustrated the extent of the antagonism which had been stirred

up against the League occurred in Walla Walla, where the Washington State Grange held its annual sessions early in June.

William Bouck, state master of the Grange, in his annual address made reference to the League in a favorable way, recommending that Grange members unite with it. As a result, one of the local papers made an attack on him and, following a meeting in the Commercial Club, the Grange was served with a demand that Bouck's position be repudiated. The Grangers almost unanimously voted to stand by Bouck, whereupon they were ordered to vacate the high school building, in which they were holding their meetings, and they found every hall in town closed against them. A culminating incident occurred at a church where visiting Grangers had been invited to attend a prayer meeting in their honor. Arriving at the church, members of the Grange and their wives were told that they were not wanted there. Mrs. Bouck, wife of the master of the Grange, asked that they be permitted to hold a prayer service in the church yard, but was met with the request that they leave the premises entirely. She stood her ground, however, long enough to mount the church steps and utter a prayer concluding with the quotation: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

President A. C. Townley and Joseph Gilbert, former organization manager, were brought to trial in Jackson county, Minnesota, in the sum-

mer of 1919, on a state charge of "conspiracy to discourage enlistments," based on the pamphlet previously referred to and on utterances of both men. Both were convicted after a trial in which the judge was accused of open hostility to the defense and in which Townley was denied the privilege of addressing the jury in his own behalf. A new trial was asked and the case was appealed to the supreme court.

It was widely advertised that Townley was "convicted by a jury of farmers." There were no League members in the jury nor on the jury panel, though there are many in the county.

CHAPTER XVIII

GROWTH AND POWER

THE condemnation and the persecution which the League met almost as soon as it had started to become a movement of more than state-wide scope and interest might have appeared to the outsider to be strangling the enterprise and ending forever its hopes of capturing other states. But this was far from true. The League continued to grow and to grow rapidly. What it might have accomplished if the war, war issues and war hostility had not intervened cannot, of course, be told. But it made progress through the period from the declaration of war against Germany in April, 1917, until the armistice in November, 1918, and the end of the war found it still going ahead and making new plans.

The League made its first tentative excursion outside North Dakota in July of 1916, but it was done without publicity and so quietly that it was not known generally even in North Dakota until six months later. When the outside organization work was started, there were less than 40,000 names on the North Dakota rolls, constituting the whole membership of the organization. A year later there were approximately 100,000, and when

the *Nonpartisan Leader* was moved to St. Paul on January 1, 1918, the total was around 150,000. The close of organization work that year found just about an even 200,000 names on the lists.

North Dakota and Minnesota together accounted for nearly half of that number. South Dakota and Montana made up almost half of the remainder, with Nebraska, Idaho and Colorado next in line. Wisconsin, Texas, Iowa, Kansas and Oklahoma completed the total.

It is easy to compute that if 200,000 members pay \$8.00 each a year there is an annual revenue of \$1,600,000, and it has been a favorite question to demand "what becomes of the money?" Audit reports presented regularly at annual state and national meetings and an examination of the books by committees chosen at these meetings of League delegates have always satisfied the members and their representatives.

The revenues of the League, however, have been nowhere near as large a sum as this estimate would indicate. The defaults in the membership checks, even in the older states, always has been considerable, while in such states as Texas and Oklahoma the League encountered conditions where it became impossible to collect more than a small proportion, due mainly to poverty and the failure of crops.

The League, regarded as a business enterprise, has had a respectably large organization. Its corps of organizers and speakers in the summer

of 1918 exceeded 500 men. Such a force of field men requires a large office and accounting staff. There were the organization manager and his assistants, the head of the speakers' bureau, charged with arranging meetings and routing speakers, the various members of the campaign department, engaged in consulting on and directing the campaigns of candidates, the publicity staff, the librarian (not only caring for a reference library, but handling the sale of books bearing on the League's program and propaganda), the head of the educational department, engaged in instructing organizers by correspondence, and the accounting department, having charge both of the finances and the membership records.

Early in 1918 the League national headquarters moved from a floor in a smaller building to occupy almost an entire floor in one of the largest office buildings in St. Paul, which was no more than sufficient to accommodate its various departments. At that time funds were required, not merely to meet the headquarters expenses and payroll, but to supply operating funds for all the "official publications," to issue League pamphlets and other literature, to pay commissions sufficient to provide earnings and expenses for a crew of 500 or more organizers constantly in the field, to furnish support of twelve outside state offices, with their managers and accountants, to provide salaries and traveling expenses for a score of speakers who did no organizing, and to

build up funds in each state to meet campaign expenses and provide campaign literature.

The publication ventures of the League at the close of 1918 had reached rather wide scope. There were, first, the "official publications." These included the *Nonpartisan Leader*, a weekly magazine of farm journal proportions, and weekly state "Leaders," published in newspaper form in each of the following states: Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, South Dakota and Colorado. (Nebraska was added to the list early in 1919.) The publication plant of the *Nonpartisan Leader* in St. Paul consisted of a completely equipped composing room and job printing office, the presswork being let by contract, but arrangements were being made for the purchase and installation of a large magazine press.

The Nonpartisan Publishing Company also held the controlling interest in the *Courier-News*, a daily newspaper published at Fargo, N. D. A second daily newspaper, the *Grand Forks American*, launched under direction of the League's publication manager, was owned by a farmers' stock company. In addition approximately one hundred weekly newspapers in Minnesota and North Dakota, owned by stock companies of farmers, were under the direction of a "service bureau" maintained by the League.

These activities were all supplementary to the political and organization work of the League. Less directly connected were the string of farm-

ers' banks in North Dakota which grew out of the necessity of having institutions through which to borrow against the large amounts of notes and post-dated checks given for League membership and not payable until some months later. With no ostensible connection with the League, nevertheless a score or more of these banks were promoted with the assistance of League representatives, their stockholders were League farmers and they handled considerable amounts of notes secured by post-dated checks given for League memberships, enabling the League to carry on its publicity campaigns.

Quite another sort of venture, however, is that of the Consumers' United Stores Company, launched in 1917 with the active backing and assistance of President Townley of the League. This company undertook to distribute merchandise to farmers at its wholesale cost, to which was added ten per cent. for operating expenses. The company formed local buying associations in one community after another by the sale of "buyers' certificates" good for ten years at \$100 each (usually paid by note). With the proceeds of these notes stores were established and stocks of goods put in.

The Consumers' Stores Company became another item in the indictment against the League in North Dakota, being used to frighten merchants into opposition. The company now operates general offices and a warehouse in Fargo and

sells staple groceries, a limited variety of clothing, shoes, hardware, furniture and farm implements. It has thirty local stores in operation and is declared by its managers to be proving a great success. In the autumn of 1919 the Consumers' Stores Company, under the management of H. A. Paddock, a young attorney who had become one of Townley's ablest and most trusted advisers, began reorganization on a strictly co-operative basis, exchanging shares of stock for buyers' certificates and adopting the patronage dividend plan of trading.

Directing the most interesting and sensational political movement of his day, with policies to form and defend, with publishing and business ventures claiming his attention, with campaigns in thirteen states to be planned and directed and with an organization numbering more than 200,000 persons operating under his direction, Townley, it may well be understood, was a fairly busy man.

The League was not merely his sole business. It was his sole occupation, virtually, and his sole thought. Unused to any personal indulgences, unacquainted with luxury, accustomed to the hard life of the western ranch, Townley worked as the farmer worked, which means that he worked during all his waking hours. He never had the slightest regard for the clock, and he slept and ate when it was convenient.

Men do not take Townley out to luxurious

luncheons or dinners. He has no time for that. When he is in his office at St. Paul he makes his excuses to all such forms of entertainment and hurries out to a rushing "eat shop" where he quickly gathers a simple meal on a tray, eats it and is back in the office in twenty minutes. When on the road speaking frequently he eats nothing at all until after his main address, if it is in the afternoon. If it is in the evening he is likely to eat no dinner, but midnight may find him comfortably relaxing over a steak, if he can find one.

He has had no time for amusements. The theater does not interest him. He plays no games except an occasional game of cards to while away a long railroad journey. He does not gamble; he does not use intoxicants; he does not use tobacco.

Ever since the day in 1915 when he began the work of promoting the League Townley has been a man of single purpose and he has moved with unremitting persistency and tremendous vital energy toward its accomplishment.

Physically, Townley is slender and not at all rugged. He has confided to friends that he can not stand exposure and hardship as he used to stand them in his younger days on the windswept prairie in a shack through which the snow would filter. As is the case with any man of emotional, high-keyed temperament, speaking, or any other intense mental effort, burns up his energy rapidly and exhausts him. He plans most carefully and frugally to be ready for every emergency. He is

not of the stolid, comfortable type which does not get tired except from physical exertion. His strength has been sufficient to do several men's work because he has not wasted it.

Townley is similar, probably, to many other capable executives, in his disposition to give wide latitude and authority to those to whom he has intrusted work, and to demand only satisfactory results. He is generous in his trustfulness and in his treatment of the employees in his organization.

He has the peculiarity, perhaps the western custom, of raising his voice to a high pitch in argument over some point of policy or strategy. Overhearing such a discussion in progress between Townley and one or more of his associates one is apt to get the impression that here is a man of overbearing, tyrannical disposition. This is far from the case. His violence is entirely impersonal, and reserved for impersonal discussion. His convictions, after he has given thought to a matter, are likely to be decisive and positive and to demand forceful statement. But the reason he gives them this statement is to find out what people in whose judgment he has confidence think of them. He distrusts persons who always agree with him—a highly valuable quality in an executive.

If there was at all a serious weakness in Townley's system of promotion and government for his organization it was that there was too much Townley and not enough of division of authority

in the affair. That might be, as one looked at it, an element either of strength or of weakness. This centralization in the League—the opponents and the two or three deserters who attempted to make themselves heard called it “autocracy”—promoted the swiftness and the efficiency with which the organization was able to move. It got results. “That is why our enemies criticize it,” said Townley through his publications and his speakers.

But it was the machine with which the fight was being waged, not the political ideas nor the selection of candidates, which was of Townley’s making. He was not “telling people how to vote.” He was telling them how to make their votes count. He was fighting for the very things which the judgment of the farmers themselves had approved.

If Townley’s system of organization was open to serious criticism it was not on the score of “autocracy,” in the sense in which the critics meant the word, but that of dangerous centralization. This centralization was dangerous to the peace of mind of practical politicians, but it might prove dangerous to Townley’s whole enterprise if he himself should fail in his energy or the machine itself should grow so great that he simply could not spread himself over the functions his plan of organization demanded that he fill.

But the thing had not been done before, and

Townley no doubt was right in being impatient with people who were anxious to turn the League forthwith into an aggregation of debating societies. The thing had to move from a single center outward. It had to get its initial vitality from that center. It might engraft that form of life onto other roots and they might, in the end, make it part of themselves. It would have been fatal to the League to have said to other states simply: "Organize yourselves as we have done and join with us in trying to get national as well as state reforms which will help the real producers and cut off the support of some of the parasites of agriculture and industry." They couldn't have done it. They didn't know how.

Townley was not an office man. He wrote few letters and spent little time in his office at League headquarters. He dealt face to face by personal suggestion, advice or order with the members of his organization. In North Dakota he had met with the organizers regularly, had traveled about making speeches, had gone into localities where there were difficulties in organization to give the organizers help on the ground, had kept a close watch on the finances, had given much attention to guiding and criticizing the editorial makeup of the *Nonpartisan Leader*, had made the acquaintance of the candidates and watched them closely, had studied issues and proposed legislation and had advised with the legislative caucus in its sessions. It was obviously impossible to do this in

the national field. He must reorganize and generalize his work. He must train new helpers and trust others for much of the detail he himself had formerly supervised.

Townley's greatest special ability lay in his power as a platform speaker and his personality in meeting men, coupled with his intimate knowledge of the farmer's psychology. Since the time when the League first began to be known as an active organization in North Dakota, he has been a man whom many people wanted to hear. In North Dakota he can draw a crowd at any place and at any time and there is probably none of the states in which the League has operated and possibly no agricultural state in the Union where a throng would not turn out to hear him speak.

The year 1919 brought a lull in this respect, caused mainly by Townley's own fatigue at the continuous session of arduous campaigns he had been through, but prior to this year scarcely more than a week or two ever went by at a time that Townley was not upon the platform touring North Dakota or Minnesota or venturing into other Northwestern states. His first speaking trips outside of North Dakota were in 1917 to Montana, South Dakota, Minnesota and Idaho. In all of them, and later in Nebraska and Colorado, large throngs came to hear, farmers traveling for long distances and devoting several days' time to listen to his words. In every state he has received tes-

timonials of interest such as men pay only to a popular hero, seldom to a mere politician.

The winter of 1917-1918, following the Producers' and Consumers' Conference of September and the LaFollette speech, was marked by Townley's first visit to the east. He was accompanied by Arthur LeSueur, an attorney for the League and political adviser, and by John Thompson, former editor and manager of *Pearson's Magazine*, who joined the organization late in 1916 as manager of publications and afterward occupied the position of confidential adviser and assistant to President Townley.

Matters were so arranged that in the national capital Townley had an audience with President Wilson and also met Herbert Hoover, the food administrator, besides making the acquaintance of other men of distinction and prominence in public life.

In New York city Townley spoke from the platform of historic Cooper Union, in company with Food Commissioner Dillon of New York state. The event gave "radicals" and liberals of the metropolis an opportunity to get in touch with the new "Socialistic" movement of the western farmers and to estimate Townley at close range. The New York newspapers all gave some space to the affair, one or two treating it in rather friendly vein, but the more powerful and conservative papers sent men to Townley to inquire if the League were not, as a matter of fact, "pro-

German," or, at the best, a "Socialist scheme." One great newspaper sent a staff man to hear Townley speak, but printed nothing at all of his speech.

It was known that, beginning late in 1917 and continuing through 1918, the national capital and especially the offices of the department of justice, were being besieged by men in various western states who thought that some of Townley's utterances could be used against him in the federal courts as being obstructive of war effort, and who were anxious to have the great political weapon of a prosecution of the League or men prominent in the League by the federal government. Steps were taken to counteract this by laying before the interested officials facts regarding the League's actual activity and its purposes.

Whether this diplomatic effort had any effect on the result or not, it is at least true that no federal prosecution was ever brought against President Townley, and the only cases against men prominent in the League work brought in the federal courts resulted in dismissal or acquittal.

The failure of the federal administration to co-operate with business men's patriotic organizations in the Northwest in their war against the Nonpartisan League, which they declared their purpose to smash as being "damnable Hun propaganda," did not enhance the administration's popularity among this class. Administration

leaders, however, probably bore this with the more equanimity inasmuch as the leaders in these organizations had been, for the most part, Hughes men in the most recent presidential campaign.

The "patriotic conference" which gave rise to the "America First" association in Minnesota was held in St. Paul in November, 1917. One of the newspapers which approved the project announced that the association was formed "to combat the influence of the Nonpartisan League." Subsequently, in addressing a meeting of bankers in Michigan, an officer of one of the larger banks of Minneapolis complained that when a committee formed at this conference sent word to Washington asking the administration to send a member of the cabinet to address a patriotic rally in St. Paul, the reply came that the invitation could not be accepted unless President Townley of the Nonpartisan League were asked to speak from the same platform.

The administration appears to have taken the view at that time that it would be a mistake to recognize that any faction held a monopoly of patriotic spirit. George Creel, chairman of the Committee on Public Information, the war publicity service of the government, incurred the wrath of the anti-League forces in the early summer of 1918 when a letter he had addressed to an officer of a farmers' organization in Oklahoma was made public. The letter read as follows:

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.*May 13, 1918.*

MR. JOHN A. SIMPSON, Weatherford, Okla.

Dear Sir: It is not true that the federal government is pressing the Nonpartisan League in any manner, or that the federal government considers it an act of disloyalty to be a member of this League.

The federal government is not concerned with the political, economic or industrial beliefs of any organization at a time like this, insisting only that every individual stand behind this war, believing absolutely in the justice of America's position.

The Nonpartisan League, by resolution and organized effort, has given this pledge of loyalty. North Dakota, controlled by this organization politically, has as fine a record of war support as any other commonwealth in the union. Mr. Baer, its representative in the lower house, has never even been criticized for a single utterance that might be termed disloyal.

Mr. Townley is under indictment in Minnesota, and there is a very bitter fight being made on the League in that state by certain groups. With this the government has nothing to do, refusing absolutely to take part in these local differences.

Very sincerely,

GEORGE CREEL,
Chairman.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECOND BIG BATTLE

IN two states as the campaigns of 1918 approached the League had the strength to challenge the power of the "old line" politicians. These states were North Dakota, where another victory was essential to the good name of the League and its success in other states, and Minnesota, location of national headquarters of the League and scene of its most concentrated efforts.

The membership was close to 50,000 in each of these states by midsummer, the time of the primary election. Minnesota, however, had a population of two million persons, more than three times the population of North Dakota, in which the vote of the League membership alone was sufficient to swing a primary election. In Minnesota it was necessary that combination should be reached with other elements of the population.

The League hoped to be able to rally enough sympathetic votes to win in the primaries and in the general election. Burnquist, the governor, was known as a "reactionary," a man who stood well in the esteem of the railroads, the big timber corporations, the steel trust, the grain and flour companies and the public utility corporations. He

had been repeatedly attacked by liberal political groups. His appointees, especially those to the powerful Public Safety Commission, were, in a safe majority, men known by organized labor as its enemies. He had the support of the newspapers which were constant in their defense of the powerful vested interests of the state and nation.

Resolved to make a clean sweep in Minnesota, as it had in North Dakota, the League went about holding its series of caucuses and conventions in the same way. Precinct caucuses were held in February in every voting precinct in the state where the League had membership. These were followed by conventions in the senatorial districts at which candidates for the legislature were nominated and delegates chosen to attend a state convention.

These delegates met in St. Paul on Tuesday, March 19, and indorsed a ticket of candidates for state offices. As in North Dakota, the League publicity carefully refrained from calling these selections "nominations." Technically, nominations were to be made at the direct primary. The League was merely "indorsing" men to be candidates for "nomination" at the hands of the voters in the party or parties in which they were nominated.

For the head of the Minnesota ticket the delegates chose Charles A. Lindbergh, of Little Falls. Lindbergh was a former congressman

from Minnesota and a Republican. In congress he had been of the progressive group and a fighter of "trusts" and monopolies. His companions on the ticket were all Republicans but one, the candidate for state treasurer, a Democratic banker known to be friendly to the League.

Victor Power, labor union mayor of Hibbing, was indorsed for attorney general. Power was a receptive candidate for the governorship and the indorsement for the post of attorney general did not please him. He declined to make the race and there was for a time the rumor that he would declare himself independently for governor. Besides Power, there was a labor union candidate on the ticket in the person of F. E. Tillquist, a railroad engineer, candidate for a position on the state railroad and warehouse commission.

As had been the case in North Dakota, there were held in St. Paul three days of "convention rallies." The League sent invitations to a number of notable people to attend or send messages to these meetings. Among them was an invitation to Governor Burnquist to welcome the visitors to the city and an invitation to Mayor Irvin to do the same honors on behalf of the city. The mayor politely excused himself, but Governor Burnquist sent a letter to the League flatly refusing to have any part and accusing the League of being a "party of discontent" and of being "pro-German" and accusing the League officials of openly seeking an alliance with "that element

which has been opposed to compliance with just orders of duly constituted authority." Already antagonistic to Governor Burnquist, organized labor in general took the language of parts of the governor's letter to be a pointed insult to its membership.

The convention rallies were welcomed to St. Paul by City Commissioner Oscar Keller, who was being opposed for re-election by the interests friendly to Burnquist. Keller was the champion of organized labor, a strong advocate of municipal ownership and friendly to the League. His appearance before the Nonpartisan League rallies was used as a campaign issue before the city election, which occurred a few weeks later, and in which Keller was re-elected by a much higher vote than any other commissioner. A year later, in 1919, he was elected to congress as an independent, defeating Democratic and Republican nominees and having the indorsement of organized labor and the League.

The national administration sent representatives to the convention rallies in St. Paul. Just before they were held the League had sent a delegation to Washington to ask the house and senate committees for heavier excess profits taxes than seemed likely to be enacted.

The representatives of government departments included Tariff Commissioner William Kent and Gilbert Hyatt, representing the department of labor. Judson King, secretary of the National

Popular Government League, and Governor Frazier of North Dakota were other speakers from outside Minnesota.

The rallies drew attendance from a number of League states, including Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin, and there were throngs of from two thousand to five thousand persons present. Labor unions of the Twin Cities had charge of the program on the second night and brought out a large attendance, emphasizing the danger to other political groups through the possibility of an effective alliance between labor and the farmers.

Candidate Lindbergh, in his brief address to the mass meeting, made a dignified statement of the issues.

“The governor of the great state of Minnesota has said that there is but one issue, loyalty, and proceeded to divide the people into two classes,” said Lindbergh. “It is observable that a few persons do that. What is the difference between the two? The difference is that a few would destroy democracy to win the war, and the rest of us would win the war to establish democracy.”

The governor of Minnesota, he said, had failed to grasp the point that it was democracy we were fighting to establish. “For months democracy has not existed in our state,” he added.

“All the people are loyal,” he said, except in “isolated instances,” and these should be “arrested and dealt with by law, and no false issue

of loyalty should stalk over the country to create prejudice and riots.”

It is not the Nonpartisans, he said, who were disloyal, but the profiteers, “who subvert their loyalty to selfish action, and since the Nonpartisans advocate an economy that would destroy monopoly, the subterfuge of the profiteers is an attempt to deceive the people as to what your League stands for.”

This was all good and effective, from the League's standpoint, but it happened that some months previously Lindbergh had written a book. It was a mere pamphlet which he had caused to be printed immediately after the declaration of war. It was enough, however, in the hands of the daily newspapers, all of them hostile, and of the publicity agencies which devoted themselves to attacking the League candidate, seriously to embarrass his campaign. It was portrayed as an “anti-war” book, a few favorite passages being frequently quoted for that purpose.

Lindbergh's book was entitled: *Why Is Your Country at War, and What Happens to You After the War, and Related Subjects*. It was a random series of chapters on various subjects suggested by the declaration of war by the United States, but in the main it constituted a continuation of the theme of a previous work, published while the author was in congress, entitled *Banking and Currency and the Money Trust*, the title of which reveals its point of view. In his introductory chap-

ter the former congressman, stating his own position on the war at that time, said:

“Trespass upon our rights on the high seas makes our cause just; still I do not claim that it was wise to enter the war. I believe the problem could have been settled without war or sacrifice of national honor, the same as we expect to adjust the trespass upon our rights on the high seas by other nations. Our purpose is humane, nevertheless I believe that I have proved that a certain ‘inner circle,’ without official authority and for selfish purposes, adroitly manœvered things to bring about conditions that would make it practically certain that some of the belligerents would violate our international rights and bring us to war with them.”

This paragraph furnished the text for the declaration that Candidate Lindbergh was another of those who declared the war to be a “rich man’s war,” and his selection to be further proof that Townley was covertly carrying on an anti-war propaganda.

In the campaign Lindbergh’s book was misused in exactly the way one would expect a candidate’s statements to be treated by partisan bias and the unscrupulous practices of partisan politics where the battle is keenly waged. His question, “To what extent shall we prosecute the war?” was spread on billboards and printed in newspapers without the accompanying answer, which was:

“Our highest representative is congress and the President. Whether we believe their official acts right or not

in this matter, we must support them with all our power. There are two sides involved internationally, and we are for America. Whether in battle, in industry or elsewhere—everywhere and wherever really needed or required, we will respond patriotically.”

The opposition press also made much of the quotation from Lindbergh of the words: “We should spurn as contemptible to the idea of democracy the oft-heralded statement of ‘Stand by the President’.” As Lindbergh used it in his book, the full statement was: “We should never surrender our sovereign right to petition or otherwise properly influence congress or the President. We should spurn as contemptible to the idea of democracy the oft-heralded statement of stand by the President, in the sense of its frequent use, because it is too often used as a guise to deceive.”

In a footnote to the fifth chapter of his book Lindbergh complained that “finance speculators” were seizing control of important war activities and were not giving “plain toilers” their proper place. He quoted the words of a Minneapolis banker regarding the use of the “big stick” in the Liberty Loans and added:

“It has indeed been humiliating to the American people to see how the wealth grabbers, owners of the big press, actually attempt by scurrilous editorials and specially prepared articles to drive the people, as if we were a lot of cattle, to buy bonds, subscribe to the Red

Cross, to register for conscription and all the other things. The people will do their duty without being hectorred in advance by the big interest press. What right, anyway, has the big press to heckle the people as if we really belonged to the wealth grabbers and were their chattel property?"

The campaign and the candidacy of Lindbergh did not abate the activity or the bitterness of the measures being taken to make it difficult for the League to operate. Lindbergh and other League speakers in Minnesota were repeatedly denied the use of halls, and gatherings of farmers who came to hear them were dispersed. In some counties this operated to arouse the resentment of the farmers and probably increased the vote for League candidates, but in other counties where organization had made little progress—notably in the southern portion of the state—the hostile acts and suppression of meetings had their intended object of preventing presentation of the League's side of the case.

The result of the primary election in Minnesota was the defeat of the League's candidate for governor by Governor Burnquist in the Republican primaries, which was hailed by the city press as a victory for "loyalty." The result was also highly pleasing to the representatives of mining interests, who felt that, with a weak Democratic candidate in opposition, Burnquist's victory was practically assured and a serious obstacle placed

in the path of enactment of a tonnage tax or other form of heavier taxation on iron ore.

Burnquist's majority over Lindbergh was approximately 50,000 votes, but the League had polled for its candidate 150,000, which was just three times the League membership in the state at the time of the primaries. In addition the League carried thirty out of the eighty-nine counties for its legislative candidates and was given a strong representation in the legislature, though not the control. The results showed that a very high proportion of the union labor vote had gone to the League and that the League had held its own membership intact.

The League, however, did not give up its effort to elect a governor because of the defeat of Lindbergh. Early in September a joint convention of the League and organized labor met in St. Paul and nominated as an independent candidate for governor David Evans of Tracy. Evans was a hardware dealer who had shown sympathy with the League and at one time had invited a League crowd to hold a meeting on his farm when they had been denied a meeting-place in his town. Although he had been active in the local war loan and other patriotic enterprises, his championship of the League set many in the town of Tracy, where he had lived for forty years, against him, and the front of his hardware store was painted yellow on one occasion.

Evans was a Democrat and had been a sup-

porter, before the primaries, of Judge Comstock, the "progressive" Democratic candidate, who was defeated.

The result in the fall was a second defeat for the governorship hopes. Evans polled a slightly lower vote than had Lindbergh. The Democratic candidate, Wheaton, divided the anti-Burnquist vote—aside from the League membership—with Evans, and Governor Burnquist was re-elected, but with a minority of the votes cast.

The League elected 11 senators and 26 members of the lower house. Together with the men known as labor candidates in the cities, apparently this gave a working force of 30 League-labor votes out of 67 in the senate and 60 out of 131 in the house of the Minnesota legislature. Putting the best construction on the situation with respect to the probable faithfulness of the labor members, the League was still in the minority in both houses. Defections on various measures during the session materially reduced this apparent strength.

While the intense Minnesota campaigns were being waged contests nearly as interesting in which the League played the central part were in progress in other states.

In North Dakota, South Dakota and Idaho complete state tickets were placed in nomination, while in Colorado, Montana and Nebraska state conventions were held and candidates nominated for the legislature in as many districts as there seemed prospect, near or remote, of victory.

In Nebraska seven members of the lower house and one senator indorsed by the League in convention were elected. In addition to these there were several others who ran without League indorsement and were elected, and who were open advocates of the League's principles.

In Colorado, where organization had been able to proceed in only a small fraction of the state's whole agricultural territory, two state senators and two representatives in the legislature were elected.

Montana had a better proportion of League membership with respect to the population of the state than Colorado or Nebraska, but organization had not proceeded far enough for the League to make any serious bid for control. The best that could be hoped was to elect a fairly strong minority in the legislature. In that state also there was a considerable industrial population, largely of miners, and approaches therefore were made to organized labor. The bitterness of the campaign against the League, which was something of a novelty in the politics of the purely agricultural states, was less strange to Montana, scene of many armed conflicts and acts of violence between miners and armed company guards.

Butte, metropolis of the state and the largest city between Minneapolis and Spokane, was the scene of the unpunished lynching of Frank Little, the crippled organizer of the I. W. W., which, throughout the war, operated one of the two rival

miners' unions in the copper mining district. There had been repeated murders laid by union miners to "gunmen" employed by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.

Undeterred by these conditions and by the open hostility of the "A. C. M.," expressed through all its recognized mouthpieces, the state manager of the League proceeded with his plans for getting as large a representation as possible in the legislature. He had the advantage of the sympathy of a large number of citizens ready to welcome any movement which promised to loosen the hold of "the company" on state, county and city government.

Jeanette Rankin, congresswoman from Montana, had made a fight for reform in mining conditions, had endeavored to get federal investigation of the labor practices of the mining company and had openly advocated the seizure and operation of the copper mines by the federal government during the war as a better policy than one of attempting to coerce labor in the interests of profits for the mining companies. Miss Rankin became a candidate for the United States senate on the Republican ticket, but was defeated by a Helena physician known as a "company man." She then became a candidate on the National party ticket for the same office. She had openly been a friend of the League's cause and had the support of organized labor. A League state convention was called and Miss Rankin was indorsed. Sena-

tor Walsh was re-elected, however, in the three-cornered contest. The League obtained a substantial representation in both houses of the legislature.

In South Dakota Mark Pomeroy Bates, a farmer and, like Governor Frazier, a man unknown in politics, was indorsed by the League for governor. A full state ticket was indorsed with him. With a state population slightly larger the League had less than half as many members in South Dakota as it had in North Dakota. Its hope of victory lay in winning almost the solid farmer vote to support of the League ticket, regardless of membership in the League. If the war issues had not intervened, with the acrimony they engendered and the impossibility of counteracting the effect of the disloyalty propaganda except through the official newspapers of the League, which went to few besides League members, the result might have been far different in this state. As it was, the League's state ticket and its nominees for congress were defeated. As in every other state, the League's vote was far in excess of its actual membership. A nucleus of five senators and eight representatives in the legislature was obtained.

One of the factors in the result of the campaign here, as well as in other states, was the difficulty, caused by war conditions, of getting League "literature" to all voters. The League's state weeklies, one of which was being published in South Dakota, were limited by the rules laid down for

all publications and designed to conserve paper. League papers were expressly forbidden the privilege of mailing out copies of the papers to voters generally during the campaigns. In states where the newspapers of large circulation were practically all hostile or, at the best, neutral, the attacks upon the League went unanswered so far as the average voter was concerned.

In all of the states in which the League operated the influenza epidemic also was a serious blow to campaigning efforts. It prevented public gatherings in many places, in many others served as a pretext for preventing them, and it put a damper on interest in and attention to new political issues.

In Idaho high hopes had been entertained by State Manager W. G. Scholtz and his aides. Primary elections were held early in September and in these the League made a clean sweep, nominating all of its state candidates on the Democratic ticket. For governor the Leaguers chose H. F. Samuels, a farmer who had reaped an independent fortune in other enterprises and was able to devote a large part of his time to political reform. United States Senator J. F. Nugent, a Democrat who had been appointed to fill out the unexpired term of the late Senator Heyburn, was indorsed by the League as candidate to succeed himself for the short term, after he had made a statement supporting the League. United States Senator Borah, Republican, was also indorsed by the Leaguers to succeed himself. Nugent won with

the League's help, the nomination having been sought also by James H. Hawley, declared by League spokesmen to be the "power trust candidate." Borah and Nugent both won also in the fall elections, but the League's state ticket met defeat, some part of the result undoubtedly being due to the general swing toward the Republican party in the western states.

An incident in the campaign was a speech delivered by President Townley of the League in Boise a few days before the primaries. Townley had been scheduled to speak earlier in the year, at the time of the League's state convention. At that time it was announced that "authorities" had prevented him from speaking. It was supposed that he was in Boise waiting to speak, but failed to do so in the face of notification that his speaking was not to be permitted.

State Manager Scholtz allowed this impression to stand. Townley, however, was busy at headquarters in St. Paul and did not go to Idaho at that time.

In September the same efforts were made to prevent his speaking. The Ada county council of defense issued an order forbidding his speaking, and halls were closed against him. He spoke from the steps of the state capitol, but not until the sheriff of the county, favorable to the League, had deputized a large number in the crowd to protect him. A crowd led by prominent and influential men of Boise attempted to seize him and prevent

his speaking. They came to blows with farmers who surrounded the League leader and were held at bay. Townley adopted the tactics of ridiculing his opponents and made them the butt of laughter of the crowd. Opposition newspapers found nothing to which to take exception in Townley's address and the event made a favorable impression for the League.

The net results of the fall election, however, were to give the League only an active minority in the Idaho legislature and the honor of having helped two United States senators to victory on opposing party tickets.

The results of the 1918 elections would not have been such as to give great encouragement to members of the League and to those who saw in it the hope of a regeneration of state government which would make it more responsive to the needs of the people had not North Dakota remained steadfast.

The League again triumphed in North Dakota. Its members and friends in that state showed their faith in the movement by again electing an entire state administration named by the League, by giving the League complete control over both houses of the Legislature, by passing all amendments to the state constitution proposed by the League to make its program effective and by electing a complete congressional delegation of League men.

CHAPTER XX

LEAGUE DEMOCRACY AT WORK

A PROMINENT educator who had held posts under the national administration in war service lectured in North Dakota during the early autumn of 1918 in the interests of the proposal for a League of Nations. In opening an address at Steele he said:

“I am glad to speak here in North Dakota, because here I seem to breathe the pure air of democracy. I feel that here in North Dakota you have something nearer to real democratic government than we have anywhere else in the union.”

Friends of the Nonpartisan League administration in North Dakota will affirm that there has been much in the record of the farmers' government in that state to justify the speaker's statement. Certainly North Dakota under its farmer governor and directed by its farmer legislature had no such disgraceful scenes of turbulence and disorder as other states had in the same period. The charge of the opponents of the League within the state was that this was because the governor of North Dakota was “protecting seditionists.”

Yet there is nothing in the state's record in patriotic effort and enterprise to justify that

charge. The state made highly creditable contributions to the Red Cross and all the other war funds. It quickly oversubscribed in each case its quota of the government loans, amounts fixed by committees of bankers opposed to the League. Its agricultural production was kept up to as high a level as natural conditions permitted. The criminal and civil law were enforced just as strictly and in many particulars with more zeal than ever before. There were no scandals of embezzlement of public funds or breach of trust. Life, person and property were protected better than ever before in the state's history.

These things can be said without entering into controversial ground. Controversy in North Dakota over the Nonpartisan League related only to the "seditious" utterances alleged to have been made by persons representing the League and to the damage to the state which it was said would be done when finally "these Socialists" worked out their full intent in law.

The administrative changes resulting from the first session of the farmer legislature were a new system of grain grading which made the farmers more content with the dealings they had with grain dealers; a reduction in the taxes on farm homes; an increase in the funds available for rural schools; an increased security in bank deposits, and added revenues from new corporation taxes.

The state board of equalization, in its first meet-

ing after the farmers' victory, materially increased the assessments of railroads, private car lines and public utilities, none of which acts brought complaint from any considerable number of citizens.

The attorney general's office began energetic proceedings before the state railroad commission which resulted in new and lower rates on cream shipments. The same office entered on a campaign of law enforcement which resulted in wholesale arrests at Minot, where "blind-pigging" and other disorderly practices had thrived, and in the closing of a brewery just across the Minnesota line from Grand Forks, brought about by joint action with the Minnesota and federal authorities. The Minot proceedings aroused the ire of many people in that city, but were heartily approved by law enforcement organizations throughout the state.

Disorders caused by transient harvest labor became fewer, though it had been declared that there were "gigantic" plots to destroy grain being hatched and that Governor Frazier's proclamation protecting casual laborers against unauthorized arrest was an invitation to acts of wholesale crime by the I. W. W.

One of Governor Frazier's first acts in office was the issuance of a request that there be no inaugural ball. The governor wanted no pretense of social frills not in keeping with the spirit of a farmers' administration. Besides,

he is one of those people of old-fashioned Methodist training who don't believe in dancing.

This might have been said to have furnished a keynote to one phase of his administration. There is no "social life" in the "capitol set" at Bismarck under the farmers' administration, except for friendly visiting between families.

Not long after the first legislature adjourned the governor instituted the custom of having the state officers gather in his office once a week to eat their noon lunch about his big table. The lunch usually consists of sandwiches, coffee and doughnuts sent up from the lunchroom in the basement. There are no "toasts," but some talk about state affairs.

Throughout the state there was no truce in politics, however, because of the war. The partisan battle against the farmers in power was kept up bitterly and unceasingly. It was not confined wholly to an unceasing fire of attack in the opposition newspapers. One of its phases was a quite general boycott of members of the farmers' administration in arrangements for speaking and other public functions. The League, even through the person of the governor, was not to be permitted to make capital out of its hold on power. Except for the unfailing enthusiasm with which he was always greeted at farmers' meetings, Governor Frazier was less honored within the state of which he was governor and in which he had

lived an honored and respected life for forty years, than outside it.

There is no event so important in any year in North Dakota as harvest. The outcome of the crop determines business and political affairs.

The crop in 1915 had been a huge one, the largest ever grown in the state. Prices had been low when the farmers sold in the fall and winter. The year 1916 was a season of excessive rains and heat. The wheat was struck by rust and blight. A light and shriveled crop was the result. It gave impetus to the demand for state-owned mills, for much of the wheat sold on "feed" grades, and it developed that this "feed" wheat, bought by the millers for less than half the price of No. 1, actually was milled into a rich and nourishing flour, the extra profit going to the millers.

But the farmers were heavy debtors in 1917 in order to get means to put in their crops. The following year, the first of the guaranteed war prices, was another bad year. This was a year of drouth and the failure was total in many parts of the state. All the time the government was urging increased acreage in wheat and greater production. In the fall of 1917 it became evident that without extraordinary assistance many North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana farmers of experience and ability could not put in grain crops in 1918. Congressman Baer introduced a bill for government seed and feed loans. It was supported by Food Administrator Hoover and passed

the house. Secretary of Agriculture Houston, perhaps resenting the fact that the proposal did not originate in his department, caused the bill to be killed in the senate.

Governor Frazier, after consultation with leading farmers and with League leaders, caused the legislature to meet in special session in January, 1918, for the purpose of enacting a seed and feed loan law. The legislature met and in a very brief session passed such a law, providing the issuance of special county bonds for this purpose. The legislature also passed laws enacting a moratorium on the debts of men in the national service, a law creating a State Council of Defense and a law providing for the organization of a state guard to replace the many volunteer home guard units being formed throughout the state. This law permitted such units to be formed under the direction of the adjutant general of the state and subject to his authority.

It had been rumored that the home guard units then organizing planned hostile acts against the League. In fact, an effort had been made to employ the Fargo home guard for that purpose. The new law permitted all such organizations to subject themselves to the authority of the state, to be controlled by the prescribed military regulations and to be subject to the orders of the governor through the adjutant general. This official, Adjutant General Angus Fraser, occupied a neutral position. He had been a member of the po-

litical faction opposed to the League, but from the time of assumption of his office devoted himself whole-heartedly to the duties of his office, cooperating in admirable spirit with his new superior. His record in the operation of the draft machinery won him high commendation from officers of the regular army and he was appointed to rank as major in the federal service in his capacity as draft officer. Under his direction North Dakota became one of the leading states in the Union in the efficient operation of its draft machinery, having fewer rejections of men sent from the state and a lower per capita cost than in any other state.

The operation of the state feed and seed loan law gave an opportunity for further criticism of the League administration of which opponents made the most. It was said that because the seed bonds were made a first lien on the land it would be impossible to obtain federal land bank first mortgage loans, and the story was printed that the federal land bank would withdraw from the state. A deputy of the state attorney general's office visited the national capital and it was arranged that in any case where a farmer having the federal loan sought the state loan a special indemnity bond could be issued, giving the federal bank full protection. This difficulty was thus surmounted and, as a result of the law, more than \$3,000,000 was advanced to farmers who had no other means of putting in crops. The state's acre-

age for the year thus was materially increased.

The State Council of Defense, created by the special session, took further steps to increase the crop acreage. An order was issued by the Council permitting farmers to take possession of idle land not their own and to put it into crop, paying a percentage of the crop receipts to the owner of the land. This order was resisted by several large owners of idle land, at least one, a wealthy non-resident. The landlords, however, changed their minds after a consultation with a representative of the attorney general's office, and the power of the Council of Defense was upheld. It was stated by officers of the Council of Defense that as a result of this order more than 50,000 acres of land which otherwise would have remained idle were put into crop.

The Council of Defense summoned before it two bankers, both accused of having, in violation of the new law, foreclosed on the property of soldiers' or sailors' dependents. One of the offending bankers was a man who had been prominent in public patriotic enterprises. Both made restitution as directed by the State Council.

The year 1918 in North Dakota brought the old issues to the front again in new form. While opponents made an effort to invoke the loyalty issue, it was not materially effective in North Dakota, where the League was known. Its use was regarded in North Dakota, more than in other states, as an attempt to cloud the real issues, and the

opposition was not able to evade discussion of the League's actual purposes and proposals. Little was found in the record of the League's administration in North Dakota to invite attack, but the campaign centered mainly about ten amendments to the state constitution proposed by the League through the initiative process. These ten amendments were designed to enable the League to put its political-economic program into effect. They dealt solely with two subjects, which were the removal of obstacles to enacting the League's "program" proposals into law and the liberalizing of the direct legislation features of the constitution.

The amendments intended to facilitate enactment of the League program, summarized, were:

Giving the legislature the right to exempt all personal property from taxation.

Authorizing an acreage tax on land for the purpose of providing state hail insurance funds.

Authorizing the issuance of bonds in excess of the constitutional debt limit of \$200,000 when the bonds are secured by first mortgages on real estate not exceeding one-half the value of the property.

Authorizing the further issue of state bonds up to a limit of ten million dollars when secured by the property of state-owned industries.

Giving the state, counties and cities the power to make internal improvements or to engage in any industry, enterprise or business except the liquor business.

The amendments modifying the "direct legislation" provisions of the constitution provided as follows:

Petitions initiating laws to be valid when signed by 10,000 electors.

Petitions referring laws passed by the legislature to be valid when signed by 7,000 electors.

Petitions initiating amendments to the constitution to be valid when signed by 20,000.

Proposed amendments to the constitution to become effective when approved by majority vote of the people without subsequent ratification by the legislature.

These proposals were in many respects less far-reaching than those contained in the former House Bill 44. In adopting the expensive and cumbersome process of amending the constitution by the initiative process the League leaders abandoned the "short ballot" proposals which had been contained in the bill in the legislature. They abandoned also the proposal for four-year terms of office in place of two-year, and discarded the effort to make the minor textual changes in the constitution called for in House Bill 44. At the same time a definite limit was set on the amount of bonds to be issued for the use of state-owned utilities, the amount being fixed at ten millions.

To meet the argument that too much power would be placed in the hands of the legislature and state officials, the League advocates could point

to the liberal referendum proposal, permitting any group of 7,000 voters to cause a law to be referred to the people for their approval.

Petitions for these amendments were circulated by League members in nearly every voting precinct in the state in the spring of 1918. Signatures far more than 25 per cent. in "each of not less than one-half the counties in the state," as specified in the existing constitution, were obtained and the petitions were filed with the secretary of state. But there still existed the obstacle of a decision of the former supreme court (in the New Rockford capital removal case) that this constitutional provision was not operative until reinforced by a legislative enactment which the senate had refused to pass. An injunction restraining the secretary of state from causing the measures to be printed on the ballot was sought by opponents of the League. The case was quickly taken to the supreme court and there the former decision was reversed by what might be called a "strict party vote," the three justices elected on League indorsement holding that the legislature had no power to block the operation of a constitutional amendment in which the people of the state had reserved to themselves a certain right in legislation.

This was no small triumph for the League. It meant the possibility of enactment of the complete program at the ensuing session, instead of a wait of further years. The hope of the opposition all

along had been to wear down the force of the farmers' purpose by long delay.

With this decision on record the opponents of the League set to work with greater energy than ever before shown in any of their campaigns to prevent the passage of these amendments. A man formerly connected with farmers' organizations who had recently turned to opposition to the League was employed as secretary of a campaign committee operating under the name of "Independent Voters' Association." This organization obtained large campaign funds and carried on an extensive campaign of circularizing and the use of newspaper advertising space.

The attack centered about the debt-limit features of the amendments and the effort was made to show that the passage of the amendments meant a greatly increased burden of taxation and debt. It was asserted that the amendments as proposed actually would remove all limits to the amount of indebtedness which the legislature and administrative officers could fasten upon the state. This assertion was true only in so far as first-mortgage real estate loans were concerned. The intent of this amendment was to permit the refunding by bond issues of first-mortgage loans to farmers. Loans of this sort were already being made from school funds in the state treasury, but the state had no power to negotiate the mortgages. It could only hold them in its vaults and no more could be lent to farmers than the amount of cash

in these funds, derived from the sale of school lands, and, by constitutional provision, a perpetual school endowment fund. With the passage of the proposed amendment the amount available in this fund would become circulating capital and would permit direct first-mortgage loans to farmers in as great an amount as farm loan bonds, issued and guaranteed by the state, could be marketed.

It was natural that this provision should meet the intense opposition of all those profiting from the handling of farm loans, including bankers and mortgage brokers.

There was also some argument against the provisions which made it much easier to amend the constitution and not a little newspaper space devoted to the "wisdom and foresight" of the makers of the constitution who had placed "safeguards" in the shape of difficulty of amendment about it.

There was good reason for League leaders to be apprehensive and the opposition to be hopeful. It is far easier to carry a ticket and elect candidates than to cause voters to vote favorably on ten constitutional amendments affixed to the ballot. Their passage requires not only a favorable sentiment, but an unusual degree of public interest, an unusual state of public enlightenment or a campaign of unusual thoroughness; perhaps a combination of all three. Experience in many states has shown that the fate of initiative or re-

ferred proposals attached to a general election ballot, especially when there are more than one or two of them, is very uncertain and that the negative usually has the advantage, since, as a rule, no man assents to anything he does not understand.

Thus when the election returns showed that every one of the amendments proposed by the League had a majority of all the votes cast for and against it, the result was a greater triumph than the re-election of Governor Frazier and others on the League state ticket and the election of a legislature in which the League had more than a two-thirds majority in both chambers.

In the Republican primaries Frazier, the League governor, defeated John Steen, the state treasurer and candidate of the anti-League forces, by a larger majority than he had received two years before. The same forces joined to support Doyle, the Democratic candidate, in the fall election, but Governor Frazier again increased his majority. The League lost one state office in the fall and gained one. It elected a state treasurer, but Neil Macdonald, superintendent of public instruction, indorsed by the League, was defeated by Miss Minnie Neilsen, of Valley City, who had been superintendent of the Barnes county schools. The election of Miss Neilsen was due to the support of the anti-League forces and of women's organizations in which she had been active, women having the vote for that office.

The result of the elections in North Dakota indi-

cated that while the League had been meeting with difficulties and had been making progress in outside states it had lost no strength in North Dakota. Its opponents there, however, believed that the close vote on several of the constitutional amendments showed that when specific measures of law were presented for approval of the people, they might be able to muster votes to defeat them. They were encouraged to continue to battle, being armed with the new weapon put into their hands by the League in the shape of the liberal referendum provision now made a part of the constitution.

CHAPTER XXI

“THE NEW DAY IN NORTH DAKOTA”

THE legislature of 1919 met in Bismarck to make of North Dakota a veritable Utopia or to wreak dire ruin on the state.

These were prophecies. The accomplishment is perhaps neither. If Utopia is not yet completely perfect, it is certainly true that ruin has not arrived. Business goes on in the state as usual. Those whose prophecies were most dire have not yet moved out. Farm lands and business property are still worth as much as before the League came into being. Indeed, the normal increases in value have taken place.

The League legislature met in Bismarck in January with the full obligation of being true to its pledges and enacting the League program into law. They interpreted the pledge as binding upon them at least to make a fair start. Few will criticize them for not having performed enough.

It is probable that in no state in the Union has any such large and novel body of epochal legislation been passed at any one session. It is worth noting, also, that the legislative session of 1919 was the shortest regular session in the state's history and one of the least expensive. The

farmer legislature knew what it was going to do or, at least, knew how to find out. It completed its job of enacting into law more than a dozen revolutionary measures and adjourned two days before the expiration of the statutory sixty-day limit of the session, whereas turning back the clock in past years has been a fixed custom.

But before it enacted these measures into law it formally ratified, as required by the old constitution, the ten constitutional amendments passed at the general election of the preceding fall.

The principal bills which became law and which form a measure of the extent of the “menace to American principles of government” (quoting from enemies of the League) inherent in the League plan and program are, briefly, as follows:

1. Creating an “Industrial Commission,” to be composed of the governor, the secretary of agriculture and the attorney general; this commission to have control of state-owned financial and commercial industries.

2. Providing for the operation by the Industrial Commission through a “mill and elevator association” of state-owned grain warehouses and elevators and state-owned flour mills, and providing a state bond issue of \$5,000,000 as working capital for this purpose.

3. Creating the Bank of North Dakota, provided with an initial capital of \$2,000,000, to be supplied by a state bond issue, this bank to be the sole de-

pository of public funds and to act as a rediscount and reserve bank for all state banks desiring to become member banks. (The Bank of North Dakota is placed under the control of the Industrial Commission.)

4. Creating the Home Building Association of North Dakota, also an activity of the Industrial Commission, operating through a building association manager. This bureau of the state government receives deposits for home buying and building purposes and lends funds for the same on low interest rates and the amortization scheme of payments.

5. Levying a graduated tax upon incomes, to be based upon the data in the possession of the federal government, which by law is made available to the states. This tax distinguishes between "earned" and "unearned" incomes—that is, incomes from personal effort and incomes from invested capital,—taxing the latter more heavily than the former.

6. Creating a hail insurance fund, providing for an acreage tax on all tillable land in the state and further assessments on all land, owners of which desire the benefit of hail insurance thereon.

7. Exempting all farm improvements from taxation and granting in towns exemption of homes to the value of \$1,000, furniture in the sum of \$300 and additional personal property to the value of \$300.

8. Classifying for taxation purposes all land,

exclusive of improvements, at 100 per cent. of true value, tangible property of public utilities, bank stock and other income-producing properties at 100 per cent., and livestock, merchandise and other personal property, including farm equipment, at 50 per cent. of true value.

9. Creating a workmen's compensation commission and providing assessments against all employers to provide sickness and accident compensation for all workers.

10. Regulating the hours and conditions of labor of employed women. (A women's eight-hour law.)

11. Providing mine inspection and regulating conditions of work in mines.

12. Levying a half-mill tax to provide a fund for the buying of homes for returned soldiers or assisting in their education, each returned soldier being permitted to draw \$25 for every month spent in the national service.

13. Establishing a single "official newspaper" in each county, this newspaper to be the recipient of all legal and public printing, the newspapers to be selected in each county biennially by popular vote, but until the first general election to be selected by the state printing commission.

14. Putting into effect in North Dakota the Minnesota scheme of distance tariffs on railroads, a bill designed to remove discrimination against North Dakota in railway freight rates.

This great bulk of legislation was all the prod-

uct of the League legislative caucus, sessions of which were held daily while the legislature was in action. It would not fairly represent the facts to say that the bills originally were evolved in the caucus. Any observer of the system of legislation in any of the states notes that its prime weakness everywhere is failure to provide for the drafting of legislation by experts and the shaping of laws to meet the needs of the state or the desires of the people in advance of the legislative session.

The League set about its lawmaking in a businesslike way. There being no drafting clerk or law-making consultant and the administrative authorities having no authority to frame concrete legislation for proposal to the legislature, as is the case in Canadian provinces, the League undertook to supply the defect. Skeleton legislation on all the subjects embraced in the League program was framed by attorneys and others in the employ of national headquarters of the League, these men acting in precisely the same capacity as the government's legislative experts in some of the Canadian provinces. The men thus employed included W. G. Roylance, a former college professor who for some months had been in the employ of the League, and William Lemke and V. A. Day of the League's legal staff.

These men, President Townley himself and Walter Thomas Mills of California, who had been lecturing and speaking for the League, constantly

conferred with the members of the caucus in the shaping of the legislation.

It was the charge of the opponents of the League that the League's “carpet-baggers and so-called experts” actually framed all the bills and forced the legislators to accept them. This is quite far from the truth. There was genuine consideration of all the bills submitted and all of them were changed in important features as a result of the views developed in the caucus sessions.

Several features of the legislation as perfected and passed were calculated to arouse great interest and comment even on the part of those who had followed the operations and proposals of the League very carefully.

The first of these novel and interesting features was the development, out of the “rural credits at cost” plank in the League's platform, of the plan of a state bank, similar in its character and functions to the federal reserve district banks and occupying a relation to its state member banks similar to that occupied by the federal reserve banks toward their member banks.

With the plan of refunding the school fund mortgage loans by means of state bonds this function of the state government promised to take on great importance and it became necessary to provide a new administrative branch to care for it. In view of the success of the federal reserve system the League's advisers saw no reason why the state could not erect a reserve and rediscount

bank on a similar plan which would answer the need of "keeping the money in the state," so long a slogan of the campaign carried on by local merchants against mail-order buying. It was an undisputed fact that the big banks of the Minnesota cities and even of Chicago acted in the capacity of reserve and rediscount banks for North Dakota, and profited accordingly.

Says a booklet published by the League:

"On August 31, 1918, the North Dakota banks had reserve fund deposits with other banks amounting to \$9,342,413.93. Of these deposits in banks outside of the state there were \$6,463,057.48, but with other banks inside the state only \$2,879,086.45. On the same date, when North Dakota banks were more in need of money than at any other time in recent years, they had borrowed from banks outside the state \$7,378,474, or only \$915,416.52 more than they had at the same time on deposit out of their own resources. The Bank of North Dakota ought all the time to have at least \$5,000,000 of the bank reserves of other North Dakota banks."

In summing up the benefits of the state bank, the League's pamphlet says:

"From the foregoing it may be said that the Bank of North Dakota will save the people of North Dakota say \$10,000,000 a year of interest payments on farm mortgages. It will save about \$4,000,000 on interest rates on the personal loans of merchants and others. It will save great sums in the services it will render for the local banks. It will make available for use in North Dakota

all the public funds from the date of their collection in taxes to the hour of their final expenditure for the public purposes for which they are collected. It will provide funds for home building at the lowest possible interest rate. It is not an unreasonable estimate that in interest rates and in increased funds available for business within the state it will be worth \$20,000,000 a year to the people of North Dakota.”

The other most noteworthy feature of the new North Dakota enactments is the Home Building Association law. One of the arguments used against the League in connection with the charge of Socialism was that Socialists believed in the appropriation of all the land and that when the League's program was in full flower means would be found practically to abolish private ownership in land and make all farmers tenants of the state. On the contrary, one of the first acts of the League on coming into power was the passage of legislation making it easier for farmers to acquire land, enabling renters and farm hands to become owners on small capital and providing mortgage loans on a simpler and easier plan than any in effect at the time.

Little serious fault could be found with a proposal that was intended to make it possible for city dwellers also to acquire their homes on long time and easy payments, without any profits accruing to real estate agents or building companies.

The home building law gives the state depart-

ment wide authority to purchase land in large blocks, whether in city limits or outside of them, and to make all necessary subdivisions and improvements.

The credit plan is co-operative. It requires the formation of local groups or buyers' clubs, in each of which the members guarantee the credit of all others of their group to the extent of 15 per cent. of their own purchases. Deposits are required of 20 per cent. of the amount it is desired to withdraw before withdrawal for home buying or building purposes is permitted. The state thus gives credit equal to four-fifths the entire investment and limits are set of \$5,000 investment in town property and \$10,000 for a farm. It thus becomes a working people's and farmers' co-operative home buying plan operated under the protection and with the assistance of the state government.

It has been declared frankly that the policy of the state administration will be to buy acreage property for these city groups of buyers and for the Home Building Association to plat it and put in the necessary improvements and in every way possible to avoid yielding profits to real estate speculators or building companies. Under the law the state may itself build the houses to be sold.

The criticism has been made that this plan offers nothing more than has been offered by building and loan companies or associations under

private ownership and direction. Experience alone can make full and complete answer to that criticism.

The workmen's compensation act, the women's eight-hour law and the mine inspection law are tokens of the friendship of the farmers for organized labor and city working people in general. The membership of trades and labor unions in North Dakota is insignificant. The state is almost wholly agricultural. There were two union labor members of the legislature. One of them, a union printer of Minot, opposed the League program throughout, but his course was denounced by the State Federation and by local trades and labor assemblies. The president of the State Federation of Labor, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, has been warmly friendly to the League and has spoken in behalf of the League in labor gatherings in the state and in other states. Other leading officers of organized labor in North Dakota are similarly friendly to the League. The second union member of the legislature was a lignite coal miner. He sat continuously in the League caucus, voted with the League members and was largely responsible for the mine inspection bill passed.

The more important of the League bills were passed with the "emergency clause" attached. Under this clause, as revised by the League amendments to the constitution, the bills became law immediately but their defeat in a referendum

election would act as a repeal. In the case of emergency measures it required 30,000 signatures to cause a special election to be called, though 7,000 signatures were sufficient to refer any measure to the next ensuing election, whether general or special.

Governor Frazier, however, made a public statement announcing that, as lay within his power, he would call a special referendum election on all the League measures if half the required number of voters signed petitions calling for such election. Petitions were turned in, through the activity of the Independent Voters' Association, said to contain more than the required 30,000 signatures. A large number of canvassers had been employed on salary and at a price per name to obtain these signatures. Many of these canvassers were returned soldiers lacking employment and it was charged by the League publications that highly irregular methods were employed to procure these signatures and that many of them would not stand inspection.

Together with these referendum petitions, which specified a day when the special election should be held, petitions for initiative measures alternative to the laws passed by the legislature were circulated. It was evidently part of the object of the opposition to present a confusing array of measures on one ballot, which would mislead many League voters. Governor Frazier checkmated this move by calling the special referendum elec-

tion at a date too early to permit the initiative measures to qualify for a place on the ballot.

The legal point had not been foreseen by the opposition, but they found the governor's position flawless and were unable to contest the point. The special election, held June 26, resulted in victory for every one of the League measures by majorities ranging from 6,914 in the case of the printing commission bill to 13,256 in the case of the Bank of North Dakota bill.

An event of some interest in North Dakota which occurred between the legislative session and the special election was the defection of the attorney general, William Langer, and the state auditor, Carl R. Kositzky. Both were office-holders who before their indorsement by the League, had been candidates for the positions to which they were elected. Langer issued an interview opposing certain of the League measures and it was declared by President Townley that for some time he had been working secretly in opposition to the policy of the League legislative caucus. In a public statement Townley denounced Langer, opposition journals began quoting him and the League publications printed a story of a secret meeting he had held with the manager of the Independent Voters Association publicity bureau.

Langer, who had been made a member of the highly important and powerful Industrial Commission of three members, placed himself in op-

position to the Governor and Secretary of Agriculture Hagan from the start, and the commission soon after its organization employed another lawyer as special counsel.

The rebellion of these members of the state administration was widely advertised as a sign of the breaking up of the League in North Dakota, but neither official had ever been prominent in the League itself and they were not able to take with them any considerable support from among the League members themselves. Indeed, the defection of these officers, together with the brass band tactics of the so-called voters' association, served to awaken the interest among the farmers necessary to secure the success of the League laws in the referendum election.

The main argument used against the League measures and the record of the League legislature was the charge that taxes would be very greatly increased. It was said by opposition newspapers that they would be two or three times greater because of the acts passed by the Nonpartisan League legislature. The League publications admitted that taxes would necessarily be higher for state purposes because of the increases in appropriations made for educational institutions, these being the largest in the state's history, for returned soldiers' bonuses and for interest on the amount of bonds actually to be issued within the year for the new state industries. The League papers, however, accused the opposition of mak-

ing estimates of tax increases far in excess of probability.

The levy and assessments announced September 23 and later by the State Board of Equalization and the State Tax Commissioner, did, in fact, show material increases in the tax for state purposes. The levy was of 2.48 mills for state purposes, contrasting with a previous annual levy of 4 mills, theretofore the legal limit. This was offset by the increases in the valuations. Figures compiled by the Tax Commissioner showed that the total of the tax to be raised for state purposes exceeded by 120 per cent. the amount levied for the preceding year, exclusive of the half-mill levy for soldiers' bonuses. This state levy was approximately 15 per cent. of the whole amount to be raised for public purposes by taxation.

The increase, however, was reduced by an act of the special session of the legislature early in December, which ordered a rebate of 25 per cent. of the general state taxes because of discovery that budget allowances exceeded requirements.

Of the whole state levy, only 5.96 per cent. was for the use of state industries launched by the League and this was made up mainly of advances, which later were to be returned.

The substantial increases in the tax were caused by liberal budgets for the state institutions, largely for carrying on a building program interrupted by the war. The amounts levied for the educational institutions of the state alone

were 40.5 per cent. of the total state levy, more than half of which was for new buildings, and the other state institutions (penal, charitable and reform) were to receive 22.35 per cent. of the total state levy.

Defenders of the League took comfort from the fact that neighboring states showed similar increases in taxes without the adoption of "radical" programs and without such liberal provisions for aid to returned soldiers.

The special referendum election put the final stamp and seal of approval of the majority of voters of North Dakota on the League program, not only as originally promulgated, but as enacted into statute law. It put the approval of the people of the state upon a plan embracing certain increases in taxation and benefits later to be proved. It was not the least of the League's triumphs in that state that it was able to rally a majority of votes behind concrete measures designed to remedy the abuses from which the farmers believed themselves to be suffering.

It is a well-known experience in politics to rally a great force behind a movement of protest, only to find the popular backing dwindling away when protest gives way to the obligation of constructive effort. It is much easier to get a majority to disapprove the way affairs are handled than to get a majority to approve a new way of handling them. The League in North Dakota was able to make the transition from destructive

criticism to constructive effort without loss of support. Whether the patience of the North Dakota farmers will be sufficient for the period of waiting and fair trial of the new state enterprises and whether or no these enterprises will commend themselves to others of the population as sound and wise ventures remain to be seen.

Of the group of state enterprises the state bank, last conceived, springing up incidentally to the development of the plan of rural credits, is now first in rank. It was the first to get into active operation and, strangely enough, it commends itself to a wider group of the population than any of the other ventures.

The bank was placed nominally under the management of J. R. Waters, former state examiner, but the control of its affairs has been directly in the hands of F. W. Cathro, who holds the title of director general. Mr. Cathro is a pioneer banker of North Dakota, one of the few who has consistently supported the League in spite of the charges of Socialism and the extent of its Socialistic trend. Cathro is a former president of the State Bankers' Association and a man personally respected and popular among them. It was due almost solely to his influence that the State Bankers' Association, nearly ten years before the coming of the League, declared in formal resolutions that if conditions in the wheat market were not remedied the farmers should build their own terminal elevators.

Shortly after the organization of the Industrial Commission, with great energy Cathro took control of the project of organizing the Bank of North Dakota. At an early stage he disarmed criticism by calling on the principal bankers of the state and seeking their advice and their help in the work. He arranged with many banks that they should take the capital stock bonds of the bank at par or better and thus planned without a public sale to provide the initial capital necessary to get the bank into operation.

The deposit of all public funds to the credit of the Bank of North Dakota and the desire of state banks to become member banks in order to participate in the redeposit of these funds at once gave to the new state institution a large volume of important transactions, aside from the sale of the bonds of state industries, of which the new public bank was made agent.

A building in Bismarck was rented, a staff of bank clerks assembled and the state bank became, almost overnight, the most important financial institution in the state, having a heavy volume of daily transactions. It is, of course, premature to express an opinion on the probability of success or the degree of success of the institution, but it has been a matter for self-congratulation to members of the state administration that there is probably less hostility to the bank than to any other of the innovations of the farmers' program, and many bankers have openly given their ap-

proval to the venture, while others accept it with good grace and have little to say against it.

Not so great progress, but nevertheless important activity has been shown in other ventures. Local buying leagues of the Home Building Association have been formed, the workmen's compensation law is in process of administration, the women's eight-hour law is being enforced, and first steps toward the building up of the string of state-owned industries authorized by the constitutional amendments and the law have been taken.

The Industrial Commission appointed as manager of the mill and elevator division James A. McGovern, the veteran elevator man and wheat grader who had been Dr. Ladd's chief deputy in the administration of the grain grading law, which had been found to be a great boon to the farmers.

One of the first steps of this division was to purchase a small interior mill at Drake, in the northern central part of the state, the purpose of this purchase being largely experimental. The 1919 wheat crop, like that of 1916, ran strongly to light, shriveled grain, grading low on the market, and it is the purpose of the state administration to demonstrate the value of this kind of wheat for milling purposes.

The Industrial Commission made public a statement that communities wishing the location of the larger terminal elevators and mills could affect the decision by buying liberally of the mill and elevator bonds, principal and interest of which

are guaranteed by the state. The *Courier-News* and the *Grand Forks American*, both recognized as League papers, thereupon began campaigns to awaken interest in their respective communities in favor of locating the mills there. Both are important railroad junction points and are the two largest towns in the state, but Fargo has the advantage in respect both to railroad lines and population. Commercial clubs of both cities and influential men who have opposed the League have become interested in endeavoring to cause the industries to be located in their communities.

In November, 1919, the selection of Grand Forks as the site of the first large state-owned mill and elevator was announced, together with details of the plans for the construction of a three-unit mill of the most modern details, having a daily grinding capacity of 3,000 barrels of flour. The selection of Grand Forks was admitted to be due in part to the apathy shown by Fargo business men, while Grand Forks men agreed to donate a site and to purchase a million dollars' worth of the mill and elevator state bonds. There was a certain degree of satisfaction among members of the farmers' administration at these signs of co-operation from a community of which one of the leaders had been the publisher of the newspaper most active in its antagonism toward the League.

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER CRISIS PASSED

THE League was not to be permitted peaceful development of its administrative plans in North Dakota. Another of the storm clouds of its tempestuous career was developing in the summer of 1919 and soon broke.

The trouble came from the office-holders at Bismarck whose defection has been mentioned hitherto and its point of attack was the financial structure which enabled the League to carry out its campaigns of education and propaganda.

The income of the League itself comes from paid memberships at \$16 each for a two-year period, but a large percentage of the payments have been in the form of post-dated checks, and the League has lived and operated so closely up to its income that the hypothecation of these checks in large amounts was early conceived to be a necessity and has been practised continuously. One of the early devices to further this plan was the creation of the League Exchange, but its capital stock was subscribed largely in notes, and these were but another form of security which had to be negotiated in place of the post-dated checks.

The Consumers' Stores Company, whose store capital also took the form largely of notes given for "buyers' certificates," later translated into shares of stock, became also a heavy borrower. To meet this situation individuals having close relations with the League obtained control of a number of banks in North Dakota and other banks were formed, farmer members of the League being subscribers to their capital stock.

The most important of the banks with which the League thus acquired a connection was the Scandinavian-American at Fargo and this institution occupied somewhat the position of a parent bank to a number of others later acquired or promoted.

John J. Hastings, formerly financial agent of the League, became the vice-president of the Scandinavian-American and an officer in a number of others. Hastings was active in the promotion and acquirement of banks intended to furnish banking facilities for farmers who found their own bankers taking a hostile attitude toward them because of their connection with the League and, incidentally, to furnish channels for negotiating the farmers' paper held by the League enterprises.

Prior to the legislative session of 1919 Hastings and one of his associates had been accused by Attorney General Langer, as a member of the state banking board, of attempting in the consolidation of two existing banks at Valley City to

make profit for themselves by a secret contract through which they were to buy the assets of one of the banks and turn them over to the consolidated bank at an enhanced price.

Langer was not at the time openly hostile to the League organization, but it was thought by some connected with the League that he employed an unnecessary amount of publicity in the affair and gave an unnecessary amount of comfort to the opposition.

The outcome of the affair was that Hastings retired from connection with the so-called "League" banks, and later, when he was attempting the formation of a "banking syndicate" with ambitious plans, his activity caused President Townley to give out an interview warning League farmers that Hastings no longer had any relations with any of the League enterprises.

The so-called League banks were carrying a large amount of paper of enterprises connected with the League, consisting of post-dated checks payable to the League, notes for Consumers' Stores Company shares, and notes given for the purchase of stock in weekly newspapers promoted by the Publishers' National Service Bureau, a League auxiliary.

This paper was not confined, however, to League banks. Bankers in many towns in North Dakota had acquired experience in the handling of the membership post-dated checks. They were accompanied generally by personal notes of

farmers as principal security and the post-dated checks were furnished as collateral, usually in the ratio of two for one. The League regularly had met its loans thus secured and experience had shown that the checks themselves paid out in the ratio of approximately 85 per cent. Bankers who had handled this paper had found it a profitable business. The notes given for stock generally were held by bankers to be a bankable security.

October, 1919, found the Scandinavian-American bank at Fargo holding loans amounting to \$143,148.55 listed as to various individuals upon their notes, but secured by League membership post-dated checks, the face value of these checks thus held as collateral being \$270,000; loans amounting to \$170,000 which were secured by Consumers' Stores Company paper and loans on Publishers' Service Bureau notes of nearly \$50,000.

This was the situation when Attorney General Langer sprang a *coup* that caused it to be heralded throughout the nation that the League's final downfall was near at hand, and in fact created a serious crisis in the affairs of the organization. Langer and Secretary of State Thomas Hall were a majority on the State Banking Board, the governor being the other member. At a regular meeting of the board it was arranged to send Bank Examiner O. E. Lofthus to Florida to investigate the affairs of a corporation seeking the privilege of selling stock in the state. At the same time, on

a showing that a stockholder in a trust company at Fargo was complaining at the acts of the majority stockholders, the attorney general was authorized to send an assistant to accompany a deputy bank examiner to Fargo to investigate. Langer drew the resolution, which gave the two state employees wide latitude to investigate the affairs of other institutions, "if deemed advisable." This was done without exciting the suspicion of the governor that the real object of the errand was not what appeared on the surface.

The two deputies went at once to the Scandinavian-American, made a hasty and apparently perfunctory examination and submitted a report. This report declared the Scandinavian-American bank to be insolvent, classed the League securities as "worthless," and asked that the bank be closed. Immediate action was taken by the banking board, ordering the bank closed, although Governor Frazier voted "No," demanding time for consideration and further examination and asking that the state examiner's advice be sought before such action was taken.

The deputies at Fargo, however, at once took possession of the bank in the name of the State Banking Board, posted a notice of the bank's closing and began action for a receivership. It was charged by officers of the Scandinavian-American that other bankers and other individuals in Fargo and elsewhere had been apprised of the decision to close the bank before the bank's own officers

knew of it and, indeed, before the state board had acted. There was, they said, something approaching a run on the day of closing prior to the closing order. Other banks demanded and received settlements from the Scandinavian-American in cash that day, though the customary method of clearing was by check.

Attorneys representing the bank took the matter direct to the supreme court and obtained an order divesting the Banking Board of control over the bank and appointing the state examiner, O. E. Lofthus, as temporary receiver. Lofthus at once began a re-examination of the bank to determine its status and submitted a report contradicting in essential details the report of his deputy and the attorney general's deputy. Directors of the bank had been active since its closing and many of the loans marked "bad" and "worthless" by the deputies had been paid in full. In other cases it was shown that the deputy examiner had listed the full original amount of certain loans where in fact there had been substantial payments made and indorsed on the notes.

One of the counts against the bank had been the making of excessive loans. The bank, under the law, was barred from lending more than \$9,000 to any one individual or firm, a limitation based on the amount of capital and reserve. In the case of the loans whose product admittedly had been enjoyed by the League and the Stores Company, the loans were shown on the books to have

been made in amounts not exceeding \$9,000 to individuals whose notes were held. This had been considered by the bank's officials as compliance with the law. Lofthus recommended that the bank be permitted to reopen, and in fact it was reopened.

The League organization was not idle. A mass meeting of farmers was called and was held in Fargo on October 21. More than 5,000 farmers came to Fargo for the meeting. The Fargo auditorium was filled at afternoon and evening meetings with not fewer than 3,000 persons and there were overflow meetings in the street outside almost as large.

The speakers charged that the attack on the bank was purely political, that the institution was sound, asked the farmers what they thought of the attorney general's assertion that farmers' checks were "worthless" and urged deposits in the bank and subscriptions to increase its capital stock.

That evening witnessed the unusual spectacle of hundreds of persons crowding into the doors of an institution officially pronounced "insolvent" to leave with the Bank Examiner funds to be placed on deposit when the bank should open. The bank was reopened within a month of its closing, and this particular crisis in the League's affairs was past.

Governor Frazier called the state legislature into extraordinary session on November 25, 1919. He asked that the State Railroad Commission be given powers as a trade commission, to co-operate

with the Federal Trade Commission and to investigate and punish "profiteering"; that the money and credit tax act be repealed; that the federal woman suffrage amendment be ratified; that further provisions be made for seed and feed loans to drouth-stricken farmers; that the office of state sheriff be created; that a resolution should be passed memorializing the United States supreme court to advance on its calendar the case involving the validity of bonds of the State of North Dakota for state industries. This case had been appealed after a decision favorable to the bonds in the federal district court.

The session took action to restrict the powers and the duties of the attorney general and the secretary of the state, two of the officials who had turned against the League. The measures failed to receive the two-thirds vote needed to make them effective immediately.

The suffrage amendment was promptly ratified by the special session. At previous sessions the League members had shown their friendship for voting by women.

Governor Frazier came into some prominence nationally by his handling of the coal strike situation. There are large resources of lignite coal in the state and the mining industry is of growing importance. When the national coal strike was ordered on November 1 Governor Frazier telegraphed to the district president of the miners' union and caused him to countermand the strike

order as it applied to North Dakota until a conference with the operators could be held. The miners remained at work while their officers met representatives of the North Dakota producers in conference at the state executive's offices. The conference resulted in a deadlock and Governor Frazier thereupon issued a proclamation taking over the mines in the name of the state. The miners, while demanding a 60 per cent. increase from the operators, agreed during the emergency to work for the state at their former rate of pay and a schedule of compensation to the operators, based on testimony as to their former profits, was put into effect.

The Governor declared "martial law" for the purpose of carrying out his order. A moving picture company enterprisingly sent a camera man to Bismarck to photograph the mobilization of the troops. The photographer found that the "troops" consisted of Adjutant General Angus Fraser and one non-commissioned officer for each mine, nine men in all. The mines were reopened and operated without sign of disorder, but two of the operators began proceedings in the courts to recover their property and to restrain the state from operating it.

The state in answering the suits asserted that many towns in North Dakota, with winter already upon the state, were entirely out of fuel and that great suffering would result if the mines did not continue to operate. By a decision in the state

district court at Bismarck Governor Frazier was ordered to relinquish possession of one mine. Federal Judge Amidon at Fargo, however, held in a similar case invoking the federal authority that the Governor and the Adjutant General were within their rights as conscientious public servants in view of the emergency existing.

North Dakota for weeks enjoyed the distinction of being the only state whose mines were in operation during the nation-wide coal strike.

The farmers' administration in North Dakota, brought into being by the League, thus continues against unremitting opposition a struggle in good faith to put into execution and to protect against attacks a program of legislation and administration which was designed—whether wisely or not—to serve the interests of all the people of the state. It is being fought, no doubt, by many who do not agree with its conclusions and do not deem it to be a beneficial program nor the League to be a beneficial movement. But unquestionably it is being more energetically fought by those who have a selfish interest in fighting it, whose compelling fear is that it will prove to be a benefit to all the people and thus establish its principles permanently.

CHAPTER XXIII

ORGANIZATION CHANGES

WHILE North Dakota thus again was the center of interest during all of the year following the termination of the war noteworthy progress yet was made in other states. In all of these states the Leaguers have been laying a groundwork. The tactics of the opposition cannot be said to have been wise from their own point of view.

The League, it will be remembered, had a nucleus of legislative representation in Idaho, in South Dakota, in Nebraska and in Montana, and a strong working group in Minnesota. In each of these states representatives of the old parties in the legislatures recognized in the League a common enemy. In none did they do more to meet the challenge of the League than to reject its proposals and to scorn the suggestion of themselves moving to remedy the conditions complained of by the farmers.

The result of each one of these legislative sessions undoubtedly was to give impetus to the belief among the farmers that only by a new political alignment could they get real representation in lawmaking.

In the Minnesota legislature the League

centered its fight on the effort to obtain the passage of a bill for a tonnage tax on iron ore. The measure was rejected in the regular session. In September, 1919, Governor Burnquist called a special session for the purpose of obtaining amendments to the direct primary law which would prevent the League from seizing control of the Republican primaries. The legislature failed to enact such a law, but instead showed a remarkable conversion of sentiment with respect to the tonnage tax. It passed a bill containing the essential provisions of a bill introduced through League channels. Governor Burnquist vetoed the bill.

Newspapers which had been supporting Governor Burnquist and opposing the League expressed the opinion that by this act he had "turned the state over to the Nonpartisan League." A political party backed by organized labor and in affiliation with the League is in process of organization in Minnesota. A daily newspaper having the backing of organized labor and the League farmers is being promoted and is soon to start publication in Minneapolis. Co-operative weekly newspapers owned by farmers and favorable to the League have been launched in nearly every county in the state. It appears not at all improbable that the League and organized labor will assert control of the state politically.

Elsewhere in the nation, more especially perhaps in the states east of the Mississippi, from

Illinois to New York, in which the League has not attempted to operate, there has been an increasing disposition among "liberal" political groups to regard the rising farmers' political organization as the possible instrument of the realization of their hopes. Unmistakable friendship has been shown by such large groups as the newly formed National Labor party and the groups who have associated themselves in the Committee of Forty-eight.

Governor Frazier has been spoken of as possible material for the presidency, or at least as an available candidate for an association of liberal groups throughout the country.

Within the League important steps have been taken which have received little outside notice. They were not so much in the direction of change as in substituting for permanent use more formal machinery of government.

An annual meeting of delegates from all states was held in St. Paul in December, 1918. At that time formal "articles of association" were adopted on behalf of the members of all the states. These articles of association provide for a series of League business meetings each two years in each state, beginning with precinct meetings and election of representatives to county or legislative precinct conventions, which elect members of a state committee. These state committees elect state executive committees, the chairmen of these committees making up the national committee,

which holds annual meetings or otherwise meets at the call of the national executive committee. This last committee, the final governing body of the League, is chosen upon nomination by its own members, whose choice must be ratified by the representative national committee.

At the annual meeting in St. Paul in December, 1918, President Townley offered his resignation and announced that he would act no longer as head of the League except on an unquestionable mandate from the entire membership. The result was the submission of his re-election by the national committee to a referendum vote of all the members. The result of the vote—conducted through the columns of the League publications—was announced to have been approximately ten to one in his favor.

A year later, in December, 1919, the national committee again met and adopted further plans for a more comprehensive organization scheme, changing vitally the general plan of local procedure and giving the League much more of the character of a locally autonomous organization. The changes were made through the adoption of by-laws, which fix upon county organizations in each of the states a greater degree of power and responsibility. They provide for a county committee consisting of elective delegates from each voting precinct and this county committee is made responsible for membership enrollments within its jurisdiction. The county organization is to

receive \$7 of the biennial membership fee (which is raised to \$18) and is to employ a salaried county organization manager, who works under the direction of the state organization manager (chosen by the national executive committee). Outside organizers are not to be sent into any county except on request of the county committee. The expenses of organization work are borne by the county organization. The membership in each county may enter into county and local politics if they wish to do so. (The rule of the League hitherto had been to take no part in county or other local affairs.) The county organization is, in general, given a free hand to develop such activities as the members of the organization in the county may favor, if they are not in conflict with the general government and program of the League.

The new plan of operation, though outlined in the League's publications, received little attention from the opposition press, which only a few weeks before had been printing rumors of revolts and demands for "greater democracy" in the League's plan of organization. It was regarded with not a little enthusiasm by members of the national committee, who saw in it the possibilities of increased interest in League affairs and strengthened unity among the membership.

The gradual transference of control and responsibility for the activities of the League from the national headquarters to local organizations and

the membership at large is in fulfillment of plans carefully considered by President Townley. He is trying to convert a following into a self-governing, self-actuating organization. He is willing to efface himself in the process if that should seem desirable.

He did, in fact, again at the 1919 meeting, seriously propose to influential members of the national committee that he should retire from the presidency of the organization and become merely an "organizer at large," and that an actual, working farmer—one in whom the membership would have confidence,—should take his place as president.

The verdict against this plan was unanimous on the part of his advisers. They felt that too much of the success of the movement still depended on his personality and the confidence the farmers have in him.

CHAPTER XXIV

SURVEY AND FORECAST

THE short span of the Nonpartisan League's life to date has been packed with interesting incidents in a dozen states. It has not been possible in this volume to do more than to select such as may give a better understanding than many possess of what has been sought and what has been done.

It has not been the purpose here to make an economic or political study of the great agricultural west, though all of the facts of economic conditions and political history not only in the west, but in the nation at large, have their bearing on the League as a political phenomenon, on its short past history and its probable future.

The League promoters rightly reasoned that North Dakota was not an isolated instance and that the conditions there were not peculiar to that state. What they are seeking to do in North Dakota will be sought in many states.

The conditions of production and distribution of the things people want to consume must inevitably shape political history and political institutions. The war certainly will accelerate the movement to impose by force of the majority will new

regulations upon trade, industry and transportation, with the object of increasing productive service and distributing it more equitably.

Some picture a condition of increasing wealth in the hands of a narrowing few, and as another symptom of the same tendency an increasing pressure of poverty upon a widening circle of the many. They see production restricted by the excessive tax of trade upon industry until want begets rebellion and the whole structure goes down under a great conflagration of revolt.

Others see a picture of organization of the voting power of the people of America to smash down and to clear away one after another of the obstacles to a generous and equitable sharing of the fruits of production. They see the possibility of such success in this as will throw a larger proportion of the people into genuine productive effort, increase the comfort and contentment of all citizens and will for many generations make impossible the great rebellion that the first class visualize.

If such is to be the course of our economic and political history it seems reasonable to suppose that such movements as the Nonpartisan League, attacking a rather narrow group of problems of a particular class, will constitute a real step forward if only one or two of the measures attempted crystallize into real and lasting benefits. If we anticipate, proximately or remotely, the dangers of destructive revolution and anarchy, we should

certainly welcome measures of progress—and they should not be too moderate.

Courage and boldness in reform beyond that ordinarily shown by political parties will be needed. Motives different from those which counsel only personal advantage and personal gain will have to be invoked.

Those who see fundamental fallacies in the propaganda of communism and of Socialism will need to bestir themselves to find other remedies for poverty and riches, idleness and underproduction, destruction of food and starvation.

One of the great problems of the day is and for some time has been an unsatisfactory and unprofitable rural economy, coupled with a decreasing per capita production of food. The League is seeking to make conditions more comfortable and more profitable for the farmer, primarily, but in its political manœuvering it has formed an alliance with organized labor, which finds itself delving deeper and deeper into all the problems of production and distribution of the things men need for their life and comfort—dealing with the fierce desire for a freer and more comfortable life.

The doctrine that through political government much can be achieved toward this end—the doctrine that those who exploit and profit have been using political government freely for their ends—is making progress and leading to a new assertion of power.

The progress that the League has made in North Dakota may easily be duplicated in other states, though no such rapid strides have yet been made. The movement still has vitality, however, in all of the states where it has been promoted.

The League's plan of organization surely has something in it for the consideration if not for the adoption of the American people. It furnishes a plan of counteracting the evil of the backing of political parties and factions by selfish interests which seek to dominate and usually do dominate. It makes the politician independent of the power of wealth if he wishes. Certainly it must be considered that there is more democracy in a political faction of which all members are equally assessed to carry on its organization and propaganda than one which derives its revenue from business interests which plan to profit by the enactment of laws, or which elects candidates who themselves make heavy investments in campaigns which they must in some way recoup.

In the light of the accomplishments in North Dakota the sincerity and honesty of the purposes of the men in charge of the League movement can scarcely be disputed. Their aim plainly has been to free the market from abuses, to liberate the state from thralldom to great market and financial centers, to stimulate agriculture, to make rural life more agreeable and socially endurable, to make it easier to acquire and to retain home ownership and productive independence and to

conserve so far as possible the wealth and production of the state for the people who live in it.

These are its objects and these the purposes which it has held steadily in view. With every day of the League's progress it has become more difficult for its enemies to attack its fundamental worthiness as a political movement. Attack on its methods and criticism of the sufficiency of its proposals to accomplish these things have not succeeded in destroying faith in the purposes themselves nor in the honesty of the effort to achieve those purposes.

Nor do many now question the existence of the evils which gave birth to the League and furnished the basis of its propaganda. It has attacked great issues which must be faced by all Americans and by all mankind. It has suggested a remedy. Its suggestions were not new, nor could their method of accomplishment be considered wholly new.

The League merely found a way to tap a fund of energy and to give it direction. Energy is the prime essential to progress in social and political affairs as well as to mechanical action. Progress cannot be made merely by talking, nor can great movements of human progress be halted by calling them names.

Any cult or propaganda becomes dangerous if it comes close to the truth. "Menaces" to the existing order of society are born of the evils of existing society in conflict with human needs and

natural human desires. To brand a group, a cult, a society, a religion, as disloyal or disreputable is one way of fighting it, but it need not forever damn it.

Those who expect measures of reform to be handed down generously from above are of a hopeful temperament that disregards the teachings of history, and as vainly hopeful are those who have confidence that if a reform movement is politic and righteous it will have the prompt commendation and approval of the thriving and the contented.

We recognize the heroes and the martyrs of another age. We have hard work seeing ourselves in the company of the Pharisees and the money changers in the temple.

They stoned the prophets and they crucified Christ. Human nature does not change much.

This is not to say that all who are stoned are true prophets, but the true prophets are fairly certain to be stoned.

The application of this to the League is that the things that it has suffered are a hopeful augury that it has in it the germ of real virtue and a possible great benefaction to mankind.

We shall probably, like other peoples, make progress from the ground up and the men who are to lead us must of necessity have their day of being hooted and despised. If we search diligently among the outcasts we may perchance find a real leader who may pass on his great idea or

his great spirit before we crucify him or send him to jail to die of disease. We shall not find him in an easy chair or behind a mahogany table. He will be consorting with the riffraff or toiling with the laborer.

THE END







