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POLITICS IN THE MIDWEST[1]

BY WALTER JOHNSON

When Charles Francis Adams returned to the United States in 1871, after being absent for a decade, he was astonished at the changes that had transformed his country from a rural to an increasingly industrial and urban society. Adams observed in a bitter mood that the years since the Civil War "have witnessed some of the most remarkable examples of organized lawlessness, under the forms of the law, which mankind has yet had an opportunity to study. If individuals have, as a rule, quietly pursued their peaceful vocations, the same cannot be said of certain single men at the head of vast combinations of private wealth. This has been particularly the case as regards those controlling the rapidly developed railroad interests. These modern potentates have declared war, negotiated peace, reduced courts, legislatures, and sovereign states, to an unqualified obedience to their will . . . ."

The new order of industrialism swept quickly into power in American life during the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Although based on the machine age, the industrial forces relied partially on the State for subsidies to usher in this new phase of American civilization. Tariffs, a national bank system, land bounties to the railroads, and a contract labor law were all enacted for the benefit of the new industrialism.

[1] An address delivered at the seventy-third annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society, at Lincoln, Saturday, October 28, 1950.

The triumph of industrial capitalism ushered in the day of the tycoon; the new American elite. Adopting the simple and primitive ethic of "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost," the Goulds, the Fisks, and the Vanderbilts built powerful corporations and immense fortunes for themselves. The economic philosophy of this new ruling class was best elaborated by Andrew Carnegie, the great steel entrepreneur of the Gilded Age. According to Carnegie, the individual had the right to make his fortune without any governmental restrictions. If the rugged individualist was free to exploit and to create great wealth, it was the contention of Carnegie that society would benefit since this wealth would trickle down to the mass and make them prosperous as well. As to property, it was the duty of the state to protect the individual's "divine" right to hold property, and the state had no right to regulate the use of that property.

By 1889, when Carnegie gave expression to "the gospel of wealth," rumblings of discontent were audible in many sections of the nation because slums, depressions, and unemployment had come with the triumph of the industrial age. The industrial leaders and their academic and literary spokesmen argued, however, that poverty was actually a blessing. "Congratulate poor young men upon being born to the ancient and honorable degree which renders it necessary that they should devote themselves to hard work," commented Carnegie.[2] If a person did not work hard and rise out of poverty, he could simmer in hell. For after all, wasn't poverty as inevitable as sin? Certainly there was no social responsibility for poverty, slums, and unemployment.

The belief in the rugged individual, in the divinity of property, and in poverty being an individual responsibility were attitudes that had a deep background in the American past. They were the attitudes of a simple, friendly, rural world where it was easy to assess responsibility for success or failure or for theft or for cheating the consumer. The rise of industrial America, however, with its powerful corpora-

[2] See Andrew Carnegie, *The Empire of Business* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company 1902), pp. 109, 192.

tions extending over a national market destroyed the world that had produced these social ideas. Yet, the industrial leaders of the day found their path easier by using these rural attitudes to justify their new way of life.

"The gospel of wealth" assumed that society should be controlled by a natural aristocracy of business men and that their wealth was sacrosanct. To this the leaders of the Gilded Age added the idea that for the state to regulate wealth and property was undesirable since politics were in the hands of mediocre people. The Carnegies assumed, too, that the average man would gladly accept the overlordship of the industrial forces. But they overlooked the fact that the farmers and laborers who had lost out in the economic battle would turn to politics to regain their place in American life.

When the midwestern farmer erupted in the 1890's and led the first significant revolt against "the gospel of wealth," he quickly discovered that the Republican party was the political organ of the industrial group. To his consternation the farmer realized that the party that had been launched as the party of ideals in the 1850's had since been transformed into the party controlled by industrial capitalism. The leaders of the agrarian revolt were to discover to their dismay, however, that the average man continued to vote for the Republican party believing that it was still representative of Lincoln's liberalism. "In such an atmosphere as that in Ohio of those days," Brand Whitlock once recalled, "it was natural to be a Republican; it was more than that, it was inevitable that one should be a Republican; it was not a matter of intellectual choice, it was a process of biological selection . . . It was a fundamental and self-evident thing, like life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or like the flag, or the federal judiciary. It was elemental, like gravity, the sun, the stars, the ocean. It was merely a synonym for patriotism, another name for the nation . . . It was inconceivable that any self-respecting person should be a Democrat."[3]

[3] Brand Whitlock, *Forty Years of It* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1914), p. 27.

The first significant protest to the new order of industrialism came from the Midwest. During the 1870's and 1880's these early protesters organized third party movements with such names as Independent, Reform, Anti-Monopoly, and Greenback and allied themselves with discontented forces in the eastern cities in a vain attempt to check the growth of industrial power. In some midwestern states, through the medium of the National Grange, the protesting farmers secured laws regulating the rates charged by railroads and warehouses. It was not until the closing decade of the nineteenth century, however, that the protests of disgruntled midwest farmers made any decided impact on national trends.

The early years of this decade were grim, stormy years for American democracy. A major depression swept the nation in 1893, and bloody labor troubles shook the steel and railroad industries. These were the years, too, when the United States Senate was controlled by conservative forces and when the Supreme Court struck down an income tax law and crippled the enforcement of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The control of government seemed to be firmly in the hands of the new industrial elite, and as one of their members expressed their philosophy:

> . . . Touch the question of tariff, touch the issue of the income tax, touch the problem of railroad regulation or touch the most vital of all business matters, the question of general federal regulation of industrial corporations, and the people amongst whom I live my life become immediately rabid partisans . . . It matters not one iota what political party is in power or what President holds the reins of office. We are not politicians or public thinkers; we are the rich; we own America; we got it, God knows how, but we intend to keep it if we can by throwing all the tremendous weight of our support, our influence, our money, our political connections, our purchased senators, our hungry congressmen, our public speaking demagogues into the scale against any legislature, any political platform, any presidential campaign that threatens the integrity of our estate . . . .[4]

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[4] Cited by Avery Craven, *Democracy in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 115.

The major objection to this philosophy dominating the United States came from the midwestern farmer in the Populist crusade. Until the Civil War the midwestern farmer in an alliance with the southern farmer had controlled the political destinies of the nation. These two farm groups, however, were split by the war. Then in Reconstruction the midwestern farmer was kept from rejoining his southern ally by clever appeals of Republican politicians to vote as he shot during the war. It was not until the Populist party of the 1890's that a serious attempt was made to re-create the ancient alliance of southern and midwestern farmers. Although leaders like Tom Watson of Georgia tried to build a southern Populist party, the power of the Democrats with their slogan of White Supremacy made the southern branch of the Populists only a minor phase of the Populist record.[5]

Not only was the political power of the agrarian forces irretrievably destroyed by the split of 1860, but the tremendous expansion and settlement of farm states like Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas resulted in a torrent of farm produce which in turn brought a drastic decline in farm prices. At the same time the price of farm machinery and other manufactured goods increased under the tender care of the protective tariff while the farmers began to see their mortgages grow and farm tenantry greatly increase.

Led by the Populists, many midwestern farmers, particularly from the wheat country, began to demand political action to curb railroad and interest rates, and to increase the economic return to the farmer. Particularly did the Populist farmers denounce the government policy of subsidy to industry as a threat to basic American principles. "The existence of corporations," declared James Baird Weaver of Iowa on the floor of Congress in 1880, ". . . seems to be necessary to the progress of our civilization; they are inseparable from it; but they should not be clothed by legisla-

[5] C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938).

tion with exclusive privileges over the citizen. The people must put hooks into the jaws of these leviathans, and control them . . . There is no such thing as shutting the eye . . . to the fact that there is a growing tendency today in this country to concentration of power in the hands of the few . . . Whenever this Congress or this House has the opportunity to strike down that tendency, and to reduce all classes of citizens to an equal footing, and to remand them to common rights, they should avail themselves of the opportunity."

The Populist movement, then, was not only a protest against the hard times, but it was also a fundamental assertion that the Jeffersonian principle of an equal chance for all was in danger of being destroyed by the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few industrialists. A few industrial figures, the Populists charged, had misused the freedom of American life to create powerful corporations and a plutocratic society endangering an equal chance for all. The government must step in at once, the Populists asserted, to curb these predatory forces and to assure traditional Jeffersonian principles.

It actually was quite natural for midwestern farmers to turn to the government for help in this situation since they had been conditioned to expect government help in the past. The government under the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had projected the land and governmental system for these frontier areas and had also sent troops into the region to protect the settlers from the Indians. But above all, states like Kansas and Nebraska, which were the heart of the Populist crusade, had been settled by people who were confident that it was the mission of America to create a perfect democratic society—to establish the Holy Commonwealth on earth. Such a concept led the Midwest before the Civil War to be the outstanding exponent of American expansion or what was conveniently called "manifest destiny." Before the Civil War, too, whenever such evils as alcohol and slavery threatened to prevent the attainment of the Holy Commonwealth, midwesterners turned to the government for assistance in eradicating

such evils. At the heart of this belief in the mission of America was the emotionalism and humanitarianism engendered in the great religious revivals sponsored by such churches as the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian. After the war, these revival churches continued to flourish in the Midwest, and it was inevitable that depressed farmers would gradually come to feel that the industrialists were destroying democracy and preventing the achievement of the Holy Commonwealth. Through the speeches and literature of the Populist party runs the theme that the eastern industrialists were immoral and unchristian. "The campaign of 1890," asserted the Kansas City *Times*, ". . .was a great deal more than a political campaign. It could be diagnosed as a religious revival, a crusade." The Populist campaign songs were suffused with a religious spirit. One of them, entitled "The Kingdom of Mammon Shall Fall," declared:

> There's a grand reformation;
> Have you heard its welcome tone?
> It is sweeping through our nation,
> 'Tis a mighty power grown.
> 'Tis the voice of downcast labor,
> As she rises from the dust,
> Saying, Come ye weary workmen,
> Hear this verdict just.[6]

William Allen White, bitter contemporary foe of the Populists, caught the basic Christian feeling behind the crusade when he wrote: "It was a fanaticism like the crusades. Indeed the delusion that was working on the people took the form of a religious frenzy. Sacred hymns were torn from their pious tunes to give place to words which deified the cause and made gold—and all its symbols, capital, wealth, plutocracy—diabolical . . . . They sang their barbaric songs in unrhythmic jargon, with something of the same mad faith that inspired the martyrs going to the stake."[7]

The Populists failed to appeal to the farmers east of the Mississippi nor did they ever succeed in making a successful

[6] Files of the Kansas State Historical Society; See John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931).

[7] William Allen White, *Stratagems and Spoils* (New York: Scribners, 1901), p. 207.

appeal to the urban workingman. They did, however, so well prepare the ground for the progressive movement of the next decade that most of their demands were to become part of the laws of the nation.

Populist doctrines found their greatest leader in the person of William Jennings Bryan, who captured the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 1896. Bryan was the silver tongued spokesman for the farmer's bitter discontent. He was also a "Christian Statesman," thoroughly rural and midwestern, in his reflection of the aspirations of revivalistic America. "... Mr. Bryan was pre-eminently an evangelist," Frederick C. Howe has observed. " . . He thought as the Middle West thought. More than anyone I have ever known, he represented the moralist in politics . . . He was a missionary; America was a missionary. Her greatest contribution to the world would be her righteousness—the righteousness which other people did not possess."[8]

Bryan was confident that he was called upon to defend the good, Christian yeoman of the agrarian Midwest against the filthy cynicism of city life and urban ways and to lead the assault on the immoral, unchristian manipulators of Wall Street. At the Chicago Convention in 1896, Bryan warned the economic overlords that, "I come to speak . . . in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity." As Avery Craven has so well pointed out:

> Through William Jennings Bryan the whole rural world had become articulate. He had voiced the protest of the old America against the overshadowing dominance of a new urban-industrial order. He had talked as farmers wanted to talk; he had talked like hard-headed men who daily read their Bibles, said their family prayers, and listened on the quiet Sabbath to the Protestant ministers' sermons. He had revealed their distrust of the new ways to wealth and the greater wealth they yielded; their hatred of privilege and corruption in politics for private gain; their contempt for the new aristocracy which revealed itself in city ways; their feeling that honest toil should give prosperity. He had called America back to old principles and doctrines—principles and doctrines as old as Jackson and Jefferson. He had launched another democratic revolt just as Lincoln had

[8] Frederic Clemson Howe, *Confessions of A Reformer* (New York: Scribners, 1925), pp. 130-131.

> done in 1860. The money issue was merely a tragic symbol. The real issue was the old America. One day Bryan would climax his life-work in a great battle against evolution, against science—the handmaid of industry and the modern age! That was as it should have been."[9]

Up to the Civil War the problem of freedom for the individual and an equal chance for all Americans had taken care of itself. The frontier, with its ample cheap land and expanding opportunities, had made it possible for hardworking Americans to forge ahead in the economic and social worlds. But the growth of urban industrialism, as the Populists and Bryan were explaining, frequently had meant the misuse of freedom by the industrial interests with the resulting development of millionaires on the one hand and poverty stricken slum dwellers on the other. Equal opportunity could no longer be left to chance. The government now would have to curb the greedy to insure an equal chance for all.

The Midwest, the main strength of the Populist crusade, was to lend significant support to the lineal descendant of Populism, the progressive movement from 1901 to 1917. Fighting Bob La Follette, as governor of the State of Wisconsin during the opening years of the twentieth century, for instance, brought that state to new vistas of democracy. He showed the people how the railroads and timber interests were corrupting politics and securing favorable legislation, and he secured laws to curb these predatory forces. "The essence of the progressive movement as I see it," declared La Follette, "lies in its struggle to uphold the fundamental principles of representative government . . . The people have never failed in any great crisis in our history. The real danger to democracy lies not in the ignorance or want of patriotism in the people, but in the corrupting influence of powerful business organizations upon the representatives of the people."[10]

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[9] Avery Craven, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8.

[10] Quoted in A. O. Barton, *LaFollette's Winning of Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1922), pp. 16, 29.

The Midwest contributed novelists like Booth Tarkington, Theodore Dreiser, and William Allen White to the growing number of writers who were developing a literary basis for the progressive movement. Meanwhile, midwestern cities like Toledo and Cleveland were undergoing progressive administrations but, of course, at the same time Lincoln Steffens was revealing that other midwestern cities were boss ridden and devoted to the service of special interests.

During the Taft administration, midwestern progressive figures took the lead in the struggle for control of the Republican party. Victor Murdock and E. H. Madison of Kansas, John Nelson of Wisconsin, George Norris of Nebraska, and Charles A. Lindbergh of Minnesota were the chief figures in breaking the dictatorial power of Speaker of the House of Representatives Uncle Joe Cannon, a fellow midwesterner. In the Senate, R. M. LaFollette of Wisconsin, Joseph L. Bristow of Kansas, Moses Clapp of Minnesota, Albert Beveridge of Indiana, and Jonathan P. Dolliver and Albert Cummins of Iowa led in the struggle for a downward revision of the tariff and for increased railroad regulation. Although all of these figures were from the agrarian areas of the Midwest, the Midwest, of course, was not the only region that had powerful progressive currents. New Jersey under Governor Woodrow Wilson, Oregon under the leadership of W. S. U'Ren, and California under Governor Hiram Johnson ranked with Wisconsin among the leading progressive states of the nation.

Out in the state of Kansas, newspaperman William Allen White, who was leading the fight to defeat all pro-Cannon congressmen, expressed the philosophy of the progressives of the Taft era when he told a friend in 1910: ". . . we are now facing the crisis of this country in which there are on the one hand politicians and those who finance the politicians, the great organizations which receive special privileges, and on the other hand all good citizens of every creed and caste politically and socially."[11]

[11] See Walter Johnson, *William Allen White's America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947), p. 181.

When the progressive element lost control of the Republican party in 1912, midwesterners were conspicuous among the thousand delegates who launched the new Bull Moose party. The atmosphere of the convention was supercharged with a passionate fervor for the Progressive crusade for social justice. To their chieftain, the delegates sang:

> Thou wilt not cower in the dust,
> Roosevelt, O Roosevelt!
> Thy gleaming sword shall never rust,
> Roosevelt, O Roosevelt!

Under Roosevelt's leadership, the Bull Moose party adopted a new attitude toward the problem of monopoly in American life. Relying heavily on the ideas of Herbert Croly, the Bull Moosers advocated the regulation of monopoly rather than trust busting. This new attitude, however, was not accepted too willingly by many midwesterners who still believed that the government should continue to follow a course of restoring competition in American business. "Many Progressives," Senator Bristow of Kansas warned Colonel Roosevelt on July 15, 1912, "contend for a restoration of competition, believing that it would be better for the country and more conducive to industrial progress." Bristow, also, expressed the fear of many rural and smalltown midwestern progressives when he asked Roosevelt, "In this scheme of regulation is there not a grave danger that 'big business' will more likely control the government than the government controlling big business?" In spite of this reluctance to abandon enforced competition for the regulation of monopoly, most midwestern Republican progressives followed Roosevelt into the new party's ranks.

The Bull Moose party had strength in all sections of the nation except in the South. It drew support not only from the agrarian areas that had supported the insurgent revolt against Taft, but it also had a real appeal for urban America. Big city progressives like Harold Ickes, Raymond Robins, Charles E. Merriam, Jane Addams, and William R. Nelson were to be found in the inner circle of the Bull Moose party. The party platform in addition to planks, which agrarian and small town progressives had long advocated—such as the

initiative, referendum, recall, direct election of United States Senators, and presidential primaries—had a number of significant appeals to urban people. Among these were the demands for a minimum wage and maximum hour provision, unemployment insurance and old age pensions, abolition of child labor, and laws for the protection of women in industry.

When the votes were counted that November it was clear that the Bull Moose party had its greatest strength in the states of the Midwest. Roosevelt carried six states—California, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Washington. He ran second in the following midwest states—Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Nebraska, and two thirds of the counties that he carried were in the Midwest. It should, of course, be recalled that Woodrow Wilson, a more profound progressive than Colonel Roosevelt, carried every midwestern state that Roosevelt did not. The Midwest, then, as well as the rest of the nation, since Taft carried only Vermont and Utah, voted for the two progressive candidates. During the resulting Wilson administration, midwest progressives like Robert M. La Follette were to assist Woodrow Wilson in passing a greater number of progressive laws to curb the predatory forces than all Republican administrations combined since the Civil War.

An analysis of the 1912 vote reveals not only that the Midwest supported the two progressive candidates, but that Theodore Roosevelt's main strength was in urban America. In the eighteen largest cities of the nation, Roosevelt captured thirty-five per cent of the total vote, Wilson forty-one and Taft twenty-three, while in the country at large Roosevelt received twenty-five per cent, Wilson forty-five, and Taft twenty-five.[12] In the case of Illinois, for instance, close to fifty per cent of Roosevelt's vote came from Chicago and Cook County.

The progressive base, which had been almost wholly rural during the days of the Populists, was now shifting to

[12] See George E. Mowry, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1946), pp. 280-281.

urban America. The future would see the farm area becoming exceedingly conservative, and the cities gradually emerge as the principal hope for progressive legislation.

The entrance of the United States in World War I brought about a cessation of progressive legislation. The next decade witnessed a decline in American liberalism and a collapse of interest in idealistic progress; a trend nowhere better illustrated than in the election of midwesterner Warren G. Harding to the presidency. Harding's "Return to Normalcy" signified an America gone money-mad, isolationist, and supernationalistic.

In the small town and rural Midwest, excessive American nationalism manifested itself in the second Ku Klux Klan. The Klan, of course, was a country-wide movement, but it flourished most in the South and the agrarian Midwest. It was a significant factor in the campaigns in a number of states from 1920 to 1924, and it elected a governor of the state of Indiana. It secrecy and its terroristic methods nullified democracy and the Klan proved to be a demoralizing influence in the community life of the Midwest.

While the Midwest contributed its share to American isolationism and to super nationalism, in the 1920's the region was undergoing vast economic changes. The automotive and radio industries were developing rapidly, and the widespread use of the motor car as well as the standardization brought about by radio broadcasting and motion pictures meant that many of the provincial qualities of the region were disappearing and that the section was becoming more and more like other areas of the country.

The agrarian region of the Midwest, however, still proved to be an area of discontent. While the urban Midwest was enjoying a boom, the wheat farmers, particularly, were suffering a disastrous depression. The demands of the war had led to fantastic prices for farm produce and a resulting overexpansion in the farm region. The return of European farms to production, American prohibition, and changing American food habits led to a catastrophic drop in farm prices. Just as the farmers had organized once before when

they were suffering, the more desperate ones went outside the two party system to secure aid. The Nonpartisan League, advocating state owned elevators, flour mills, packing houses, and cold storage plants, dominated North Dakota politics for some years, and the Farmer-Labor party launched in Minnesota was to become a significant force in the politics of that state and control the state government during much of the thirties. In Wisconsin the La Follette progressives finally broke from the Republican party and launched a new third party.

None of these movements, however, developed into a national party like the Populists or the Bull Moosers. Instead, Senators and Congressmen from the farm areas worked together as a Farm Bloc to secure legislation to aid the farmers. The one national third party of importance during the twenties—La Follette's Progressive party in 1924—was only partially a farmer backed political organization. Liberal city intellectuals and organized labor took the lead in the La Follette movement. In states like Illinois, for instance, the urban center contributed half of La Follette's vote. Although La Follette polled approximately five million votes, over half of which came from the Midwest, the nation preferred Calvin Coolidge by fifteen million votes and J. W. Davis by eight million.[13]

The great Republican sweep of the Midwest came in 1928. Herbert Hoover carried this region by nine million votes to five and a half million for Al Smith. This was a larger margin of victory for Hoover than he received from any other section. Smith's opposition to prohibition, his Tammany connections, the fact that he was a life-time city dweller, and his religion were all strangers to the small town and rural Midwest. But Smith could not even carry Cook County in Illinois where his ideas and background had a more sympathetic audience.

The depression years temporarily shook the Republican allegiance of the small town and rural Midwest. Alf Landon

[13] See Kenneth C. MacKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947).

Robert M. LaFollette
of
Wisconsin

William Allen White
of
Kansas

Albert J. Beveridge
of
Indiana

failed to carry his own state and could find sufficient followers only in Maine and Vermont. The calamitous condition of the farm country, however, rather than an agreement with the progressive doctrines of the New Deal seem to account for the support given Mr. Roosevelt in 1936. As an Iowa farmer explained to John Dos Passos in 1943, "The only time folks worry about politics around here is when times are bad and they can't get a price for their corn. Other times they just naturally vote Republican."[14]

A study of presidential elections since 1920 reveals the significant fact that rural and small town America has been losing its dominance to metropolitan America. The ten states that contain these metropolitan centers, furthermore, are not located in any one section of the nation.[15] As a result, old sectional patterns and sectional rivalries are less important today than the conflict between rural and metropolitan communities.

If a presidential candidate can carry the ten urban states, he need obtain only approximately forty additional electoral votes from the other thirty-eight states to be elected president. Since 1932 the Democratic party of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman has been notably sucessful in the metropolitan areas, and the Republican party finds that its rural and small town support is not sufficient to bring it into dominance.[16] As Professor Arthur Holcombe pointed out in 1940: "My thesis is, that for a large part of our national existence that class (which held the balance of power) was the rural middle class and that increasingly in our time it tends to become the urban middle class . . . . At present the system of presidential elections

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[14] John Dos Passos, *The State of the Nation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1944), p. 272.

[15] The ten states are New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and California.

[16] See S. J. Eldersveld, "The Influence of Metropolitan Party Pluralities in Presidential Eections Since 1920," *American Political Science Review,* December, 1949.

tends more and more to shift the balance of power to the urban middle class."[17]

For a party to appeal to the urban areas today, it must have a progressive program comparable to that of the New Deal and the Fair Deal. These two political faiths, of course, draw heavily from the older progressive doctrines of the Populists, Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Robert M. La Follette, George W. Norris, and Woodrow Wilson. It is a startling fact, however, that whereas the rural and small town Midwest contributed significantly to the pre World War I progressivism, today it furnishes the major opposition to progressive doctrine. From the rural and small town Midwest, too, come the chief opponents in the Congress of the United States to such international policies as the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and the North Atlantic Pact.[18]

As is well known, political developments since 1945 reveal a serious split in the Republican party. In the Midwest the Republican party had had little appeal to the urban areas. Its rural and small town support, on the other hand, has proved to be a far more conservative force than the support that the Republican party receives from the east and west coast regions. The east and west coast leaders of the party, who have supported to a high degree progressive measures domestically and favored significant cooperation with other nations, are today in a bitter conflict for control with many rural and small town midwestern leaders.

In view of the constantly increasing dominance of the metropolitan areas over, at least, American presidential

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[17] Arthur N. Holcombe, *The Middle Classes in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 219.

[18] See William Carleton, "Why Call the South Conservative?", *Harpers Magazine*, July, 1947, for a comparison of the votes of southern and midwestern congressman on progressive issues. Mr. Carleton, for instance, points out that in one session of Congress Georgia had forty-one progressive votes while Nebraska and Kansas combined had only seventeen progressive votes.

politics,[19] it is difficult to see much presidential election success for a Republican party that succumbs to domination by the midwestern rural and small town leaders.

It appears that the metropolitan areas today can be captured only by a progressive appeal—an appeal which the rural and small town Midwest once could make with its Bryans, La Follettes, and Norrises, but which it seems unable to make with its present leadership and direction.

It is rather ironic, from the vantage point of history, that the region which once gave Abraham Lincoln and liberalism to the Republican party has now become the section where progressive ideas find a most uncongenial reception within Lincoln's own party. William Allen White, commenting on this point in 1942, declared: "If only the Republican party that gave us Lincoln would forget its hatred of Roosevelt, get rid of its bias toward plutocracy, get back to the grass roots and the hearts of the people . . . ."[20]

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[19] Senator Paul H. Douglas of Illinois pointed out in the *Congressional Record* on March 17, 1949, however, that in the Senate twenty-five rural states with twenty-five million people had through their fifty senators the means for dominance in his branch of Government.

[20] Walter Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 563.