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GRADUATE COLLEGE

A HISTORY OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN OKLAHOMA


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A HISTORY OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN OKLAHOMA

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## A HISTORY OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN OKLAHOMA

### CHAPTER I

#### THE SEEDBED OF SOCIALISM

In 1889, as the land hungry raced into Oklahoma Territory, the Socialist economist, Richard T. Ely, wrote that the United States had an American type of Socialism which he called the "New Nationalism."<sup>1</sup> Few of the people who were closing one of the last North American frontiers knew or cared about this radical movement which had taken hold in the east. But, within the next three decades, this potpourri of viewpoints built on a Marxist ideology, called American Socialism, would affect a great many of their lives. Rather than being just a foreign ideology taking hold in America, the Socialist movement encompassed conflicting and even contradictory points of view. These, in the late Nineteenth century, varied from the strict

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<sup>1</sup>Richard T. Ely, Social Aspects of Christianity (New York: n.p., 1889), p. 143; cited in Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons (eds.), Socialism and American Life (2 Vols., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), I, p. 270.

Marxist approach of Daniel DeLeon and the Socialist Labor Party to the thinking of Edward Bellamy as stated in Looking Backward, published in 1887, which sought state ownership through what the author termed "Nationalism," to the thought of Henry George on the "Single Tax."

This eclectic thought spread throughout the United States and was espoused in varying degrees by several organizations. One of the strongest of these in the late nineteenth century was the Socialist Labor party which came under the heavy hand of Daniel DeLeon in the decade of the Nineties. In time a large faction known as the "Kangaroos" left the Socialist Labor party under the leadership of Morris Hillquit. In 1900, this dissident group attempted to join with the newer Social Democratic Party, which had met with political success in Massachusetts in the elections of 1898.<sup>2</sup> Controversy kept the two groups apart, despite the efforts of Eugene V. Debs, who had become a leader of the Social Democratic party. Nothing was settled, but as Debs noted, unity was desirable and so he continued efforts to bring about a combination of the various Socialist organizations.<sup>3</sup> Attempts at expansion met with some success as the Social Democratic party began to spread

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<sup>2</sup>Howard H. Quint, The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>Ray Ginger, Eugene V. Debs: A Biography (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 229.

through sections of the United States and in a merger with the Socialist Party of Texas, into the Southwest.<sup>4</sup>

Socialism in Oklahoma represented one of the most radical manifestations of rural discontent in a period of widespread dissatisfaction over changing conditions. As such, it closely related itself to the environment and manner of living in the area. For, as the farmer was associated with the land, so were the agrarian movements which expressed his discontent. Such organizations as the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union as well as the People's Party flourished in the region and left a lasting imprint upon the thoughts of the rural classes of the early twentieth century. The Socialist Party, thereupon, entered the area and adapted itself to fit the needs of the farmers. Thereby, a strong frontier spirit expressed itself in the early twentieth century through the voice of a radical, alien ideology, pledged to overturn the existing capitalist system.

One cannot understand, however, the innovative spirit of this agrarian movement and those which influenced it without a clear comprehension of the area as a geographical and cultural unit. Within this frame of reference,

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<sup>4</sup>Henry F. Bedford, Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), p. 66; Nathan Fine, Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 193.



the present state of Oklahoma, which is made up of the former Oklahoma and Indian territories, is dominated by two broad physiographic provinces. The first of these, the Coastal Plain, extends from the Atlantic coast through the South into the southeast corner of Oklahoma, as far as the Cross Timbers. There the Great Plains move down from Canada and encompass the western portion of the State. The Coastal Plains, a generally rolling and heavily eroded area, contains varied forms of vegetation and people. It has more water and therefore more agricultural productivity than the Great Plains portion. The two can be contrasted best as the sub-humid east and the semi-arid west. Rain-fall in the area varies from a heavy fifty inches or more in the southeast to less than fifteen inches in the north-western part of the State. The vegetation ranges from the expanses of pine in the east to a level, wholly treeless short grass plains area in the west.<sup>5</sup> The entire state has a relatively long growing season which compensates somewhat for the hot, dry summer climate.

Farming in Oklahoma and Indian territories showed several general tendencies in the early twentieth century

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<sup>5</sup>C. Langdon White and Edwin J. Foscue, Regional Geography of Anglo-America (2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), pp. 158-159; Ralph H. Brown, Historical Geography of the United States (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), p. 377; Ladd Haystead and Gilbert C. Fite, The Agricultural Regions of the United States (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 204-217.

that became more pronounced as World War I approached. One of the main trends was a move toward more specialization in cash crops. Although it may be an overstatement to say that the area's economy was based on a one-crop system, this remained the rule rather than the exception. In this manner of thought, two crops assumed major importance. Cotton developed as the major cash crop in the eastern portion of the territories, while in the western section wheat farming predominated.

The more important of the two crops in terms of money value was cotton. It was grown primarily in a belt extending from southeastern Indian Territory through the far southwestern portion of Oklahoma Territory. In general, the cotton farmer had certain advantages -- his crop season was long enough to keep him active most of the year; he had few storage problems; and there was always some kind of market for his crop.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, tenancy and low prices were linked closely with the cotton economy. When Congress investigated the land question in the Southwest, it noted that the tenancy rate was highest in those areas of Oklahoma and Indian territories where farmers concentrated

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<sup>6</sup>Rupert B. Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, A Study in Social Geography of the American South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), pp. 22-23; Hugh Hammond Bennett, The Soils and Agriculture of the Southern States (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921), pp. 52-53, 228; James H. Street, The New Revolution in the Cotton Economy, Mechanization and Its Consequences (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), pp. 35-37.

on cotton.<sup>7</sup>

As the twentieth century opened, there were still no boundaries on the westward march of cotton. New upland varieties, resistant to the semi-arid climate of the eastern Great Plains and dry farming techniques permitted further expansion.<sup>8</sup> Still, in 1900, the principal producing area lay in Indian Territory to the east. There, thirty-nine per cent of the farms derived their primary source of income from cotton. Yet, throughout the widening Cotton Belt, the farming system included the raising of corn and hay. Many farms in areas of less intensive specialization often produced as much in forage crops as they did in cotton.<sup>9</sup>

Wheat production centered primarily in western and northern Oklahoma Territory. This area was an extension of the hard winter wheat belt that dipped down from Kansas. Almost twice as much wheat was grown in Oklahoma as was grown in Indian Territory. It had been a favorite frontier

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<sup>7</sup>U.S. Senate, United States Commission on Industrial Relations, "The Land Question in the Southwest," Final Report, IX, Senate Document No. 415, 64th Congress, 1st Session, 1916, p. 8955.

<sup>8</sup>Matthew B. Hammond, "The Extension of the Cotton Belt and the New South," Readings in Economic History of American Agriculture, edited by Louis Bernard Schmidt and Earle Dudley Ross (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 429-430; Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Agriculture, VI, p. 228.

crop in the more arid regions through the latter part of the nineteenth century. But, even after the passing of the frontier, wheat culture thrived in the open prairie where large scale harvesting and thrashing operations were practicable.<sup>10</sup>

The difference in crop preference between Oklahoma and Indian territories was illustrated clearly in the production figures for wheat and cotton. In Oklahoma Territory, 1,274,826 acres were cultivated to produce 18,124,520 bushels of wheat. Farmers in Indian Territory planted only 247,247 acres and harvested 2,203,780 bushels.<sup>11</sup> The difference in cotton production was not quite so great, but still showed a basic difference in the farm economy. Indian Territory grew more than twice as much cotton as Oklahoma Territory. Indian Territory yielded 143,608 five hundred pound bales valued at \$4,809,929 whereas the Oklahoma Territory total was 71,983 bales, with a value of \$2,217,119.<sup>12</sup>

It must not be forgotten that on most farms, whether in the Cotton Belt or in the wheat producing area,

<sup>10</sup> Arrell M. Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries (Norman: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1965), p. 439.

<sup>11</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 256.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
Value of Wheat	\$1,121,259	\$8,989,416

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

there existed a considerable amount of mixed farming. Generally, farmers raised a number of feed crops such as sorghum, clover, and alfalfa. Fruits and vegetables were grown on almost every farm for either domestic consumption or for market. Cattle and other livestock ranged throughout the area. Yet, in spite of these varied crops and other farm production, the most important commercial agricultural activity in Oklahoma and Indian territories centered around cotton and wheat farming.<sup>13</sup>

Another feature of the farm situation in the territories was the prevalence of the single family farm. Again there were exceptions, especially in the east, but in general, the farmer lived on his own land or rented it and carried on his farming activities with the aid of his wife and children. Thus, the more children a family had, the better its labor situation stood. But if more help was required, a hired man supplemented the family labor supply.<sup>14</sup> In this family farming area most of the farms remained small.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Bennett, Soils and Agriculture of the South, pp. 20-31.

<sup>14</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 234; Paul S. Taylor, "The American Hired Man: His Rise and Decline," Land Policy Review, VI (Spring, 1943), pp. 3-17; Fred A. Shannon, The Farmers' Last Frontier, Agriculture, 1860-1897, Vol. V of the Economic History of the United States (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961), pp. 53-54; Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmers' Frontier, 1865-1900 in Histories of the American Frontier, edited by Ray Allen Billington (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 206, 209.

Yet, agriculture was definitely a capitalistic affair and required a relatively important outlay of money. The size of the investment depended primarily upon the price of land, which varied widely in place and time. For example, in the two territories, the average value of land increased from \$6.50 an acre in 1900 to \$22.49 in 1910, a gain of 246 per cent. This trend of increasing land values continued into the period of the First World War, for as testimony in 1916 stated, a typical Oklahoma farm could be purchased for about \$75 to \$100 an acre.<sup>15</sup>

There were also some important differences in the types of farm properties in Oklahoma and Indian Territory in 1900. Oklahoma Territory had 62,495 farms or a third more than Indian Territory's 45,505. The acreage and land values varied considerably in relation to the total number of farms. First, the acreage in Indian Territory of 7,269,081 was less than half that of the 15,719,258 acres in Oklahoma Territory.<sup>16</sup> Second, all farm property in

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<sup>15</sup>Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, VII, p. 352; U.S. Senate, "The Land Question in the Southwest," IX, pp. 8977, 9052-9053.

<sup>16</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 234.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
No. of farms		
Total	45,505	62,495
With buildings	44,857	60,505
No. of acres in farms		
Total	7,269,081	15,719,258
Improved	3,062,193	5,511,994
Unimproved	4,206,888	10,511,264

Oklahoma Territory was valued at \$185,343,818 compared to \$92,181,615 in Indian Territory.<sup>17</sup> Other than the fact that there were more farmers in Oklahoma Territory, a major difference between it and Indian Territory was that its arid climate demanded more land for cultivation and range for livestock. In coping with the drier climate, the farmers invested more money, especially in land, for the yield per acre remained less than that of the more humid Indian Territory. Thereby, the average farm size ranged from one hundred and sixty acres in Indian Territory to two hundred and fifty-one acres in Oklahoma Territory in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup>

The matters of relative value and output were even more visible on an average individual basis as shown in the census. Notably, the value of the products per acre in Indian Territory exceeded those of Oklahoma Territory. This remained true even though the farmer invested \$2,966

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
All farm property	\$92,181,615	\$185,343,818
Land and improvements with buildings		
Total	46,863,440	123,941,235
Land and improvements except buildings	39,188,250	110,209,650
Buildings	7,675,190	13,731,585
Implements and machinery	3,939,480	6,573,015
Livestock	41,378,695	51,829,568

<sup>18</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI,  
p. 234; W. Eugene Hollon, The Southwest: Old and New  
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), pp. 12-13.

in his farm in Oklahoma Territory on the average as compared with \$2,026 in Indian Territory.<sup>19</sup> Also, the average expenditure for farm labor of \$38 in Oklahoma Territory stood slightly higher than the \$29 average in Indian Territory.<sup>20</sup> This may be explained in part by the tremendous need for seasonal laborers in the wheat culture of Oklahoma Territory. Yet, part-time labor was also needed to pick cotton on the large farms in Indian Territory. In the final analysis, the major difference seemed to be that tenancy was more widespread in Indian Territory, where the harvesting of cotton was most often a family affair.

Another means of comparison, the individual farm income totals, are difficult to ascertain. The only information listed in the census of 1900 was for fertilizer

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<sup>19</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, p. 237.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
Average value per farm		
Total	2,026	2,966
Land and improvements		
except buildings	861	1,764
Buildings	169	220
Implements and machinery	87	105
Livestock	909	877
Products, 1899		
Total	608	727
Not fed to livestock	511	597
Average value per acre		
of products of 1899 not		
fed to livestock	3.2	2.38

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.



and hired labor.<sup>21</sup> In the census report, fertilizer was listed as being of negligible cost. As already noted, the average expenditure for labor varied only slightly between the two territories. In Indian Territory the figure stood slightly lower than the \$38 for Oklahoma Territory.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the census gives no information as to mortgage indebtedness or payments for interest and principal. So the figures are not complete enough to enable the computation of total amounts spent over a year to get an average farm income profile.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, such features of the agricultural situation as the racial make-up of the farm population were made reasonably clear by the census figures.<sup>24</sup> First, considerably more Negro and Indian farmers lived and worked in Indian

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.; see Fred A. Shannon, "The Status of the Midwestern Farmer in 1900," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVII (December, 1950), p. 505.

<sup>23</sup>At a later date, Carl Williams of the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman related instances where on small short term loans of twenty-five dollars or so, as much as forty-eight per cent interest per year was paid. Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, XXVII (October 10, 1914), p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 225.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
Total no. of Farms	45,505	62,495
No. operated by specified race:		
White	35,451	59,324
Negro	4,097	2,256
Indian	5,957	915

Territory than in Oklahoma Territory. Many of the Indians, however, were mixed bloods, with a considerable amount of Anglo influence in their cultural make-up.<sup>25</sup> More astounding was the fact that the vast majority of farmers in both territories were white. In Oklahoma Territory, about ninety-five per cent of all farms were handled by whites, whereas in Indian Territory almost seventy-eight per cent were operated by white farmers.<sup>26</sup> These figures do not take into account, however, the fact that the operator's race did not necessarily correspond with that of the owner's. A great divergence in ownership existed, especially in the Indian lands where mixed-bloods had amassed large amounts of land. This in turn was leased or rented to white tenants.<sup>27</sup>

The amount of tenancy of Indian Territory seemed staggering and certainly a growing problem in the recently

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<sup>25</sup>Laura Edna Baum, "Agriculture Among the Five Civilized Tribes, 1865-1906," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1940, p. 124.

<sup>26</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 225.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
Per cent operated by specified race:		
White	77.9	94.9
Other	22.1	5.1

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.; of the 19,526,966 acres belonging originally to the Five Civilized Tribes, 15,794,400 acres were allotted to those on the tribal rolls. There was no land for home-stading as in Oklahoma Territory. Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries, p. 326; Baum, "Agriculture Among the Five Civilized Tribes, 1865-1906," p. 124.

opened Oklahoma Territory. Only 25 percent of the farms in Indian Territory were operated by their owners, while the figure for Oklahoma Territory was 79 percent.<sup>28</sup> Even more amazing was the large number of farms owned by absentee landlords, especially in Indian Territory.<sup>29</sup> There the situation was further complicated by the fact that the tenants held little or no hope of ownership. The concept of the "agricultural ladder" remained an impossibility because of the Federal Government's system of holding the land in trust for the Indian population.

The land of the Five Civilized Tribes totaled 19,526,966 acres and of this, 15,794,400 acres were allotted to those whose names appeared on the tribal rolls. The allotments were transferred to individuals by the United

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<sup>28</sup>Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, VI, p. 227.

	<u>Indian Terr.</u>	<u>Oklahoma Terr.</u>
No. of farms of specified tenure	45,505	62,495
No. operated by owners	11,404	49,346
No. operated by cash tenants	8,883	5,020
No. operated by share tenants	25,218	8,129

<sup>29</sup>The tenant problem in its intense form in Indian Territory was primarily a white man's problem. Government interference in the land holding system held the land for the Indians. This may be examined if the figure of 5,957 farms, those operated by Indians, is subtracted from the figure of 11,404 farms operated by their owners. The remainder is 5,449 farms left for white and Negro ownership. Further, if this remainder of 5,449 is taken from the total number of farms operated by whites and Negroes, 39,548, the figure is 34,098, the total of white and Negro farms not owned by the operator. The last figure conforms to the figure of 34,101, the total number of cash and share tenants in Indian Territory. Ibid., pp. 225-227.

States government in various sizes despite a great amount of Indian resistance. The major point, however, was that most of the allotments were held in trust by the federal government.<sup>30</sup> In this manner, although nearly 4 million acres were sold at auction, the government created a situation in which the white tenants could not pass into the land owning class.<sup>31</sup> The situation was worsened because the unnatural system perpetuated itself as only the poorer class of tenants tended to enter the area. Once settled they had little urge to better themselves or the owners' land, which created the worst form of tenancy in the two Territories.<sup>32</sup>

Other problems, many of which were the same that the rural population had tried to correct in the late nineteenth century, continued to plague the farmers in this period. Farmers, especially in the wheat producing areas, continued to blame many of their troubles on the railroads which took their crops to market. Local freight

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<sup>30</sup>Gibson, Oklahoma, A History, pp. 325-326.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; Roy M. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage, The Public Domain, 1776-1936 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 134-135.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Senate, Report of the Country Life Commission, Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress, 2nd Session, 1909, pp. 42-43; U.S. Senate, "Land Question in the Southwest," IX, pp. 8954-8955; E. V. White and William E. Leonard, "Studies in Farm Tenancy," Bulletin of the University of Texas, No. 21 (1915), pp. 115-116; L. F. Cox, "Tenancy in the United States," Agricultural History, XVIII (July, 1944), pp. 97-105.

rates in the southwest were high and there was little or no competition between the various lines to lower them.<sup>33</sup> The farmers saw the necessity of the railroads and wished to control them, through legislation, to stop the alleged discrimination against the small shipper.<sup>34</sup>

It was the grinding burden of debt and taxes, however, which aroused the farmers to action in many instances. Widespread dependence upon crop liens and mortgages caused extreme havoc in many individual situations. When a farmer could no longer obtain money on his real estate, he usually mortgaged his chattel holdings. As a result any profits the farmer may have gleaned from the sale of his crops were passed on to others. In many cases, the farmer observed too late that the money he contracted for was not worth what he paid for it.<sup>35</sup> Many faced the gloomy prospect of foreclosure by which they could expect to lose all property. Even if there were controlled indebtedness, taxation added a heavy burden to the financial problems of the farmer. It was noted many times that others could conceal their property, but the farmer bore the chief brunt of taxation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Taloga Times, July 18, 1901.

<sup>34</sup>Oklahoma Socialist /Newkirk7, August 1, 1901.

<sup>35</sup>Appeal to Reason, September 5, 1903; Elk City Democrat, April 14, 1904.

<sup>36</sup>Stillwater Gazette, February 27, 1902; Woodward News, August 20, 1904; Madill News, November 4, 1904.

The farmers tried to allieviate these problems through political action, most notably in the Nineties with the People's party. This political organization first received attention in Oklahoma Territory during the fall of 1889 shortly after it came into being. Under the leadership of George W. Gardenshire of Payne County, the Populists made limited gains through the first months of 1890. Although the People's party showed little strength in the elections for the first territorial legislature that year, it managed to hold the balance of power between the Democratic and Republican parties.<sup>37</sup> It controlled five votes in the legislature so that no party had a simple majority. Thus, the two major parties paid more than usual attention to the Populist demands. Generally, the Populist platform in Oklahoma Territory through the Nineties advocated free homes for the settlers in various land openings, statehood for the Territory, and supported the national Populist platform, which called for free coinage of silver as the main plank. In all, the People's party attempted to meet the local needs of the farmer, as well as the broader issues that faced the agricultural segments of the nation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Elmer Fraker, "The Spread of Populism into Oklahoma Territory," unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1938, pp. 41-42.

<sup>38</sup>Roy Gittinger, Formation of the State of Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 240; Roscoe C. Martin, The People's Party in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1933), pp. 118-123.

The Populist movement climaxed, however, in the election of 1896. Rather than carry through as an independent third party, the Populist leadership chose to fuse with the Democrats. The result of this action was that the Populist candidate for territorial representative in Oklahoma, J. Y. Callahan, won a term in Congress. Yet, the issues which elected him to office such as free homes and statehood found little lasting support. Populism thereupon went into rapid decline after this important election.<sup>39</sup>

This collapse of the Populist movement left a void which many sought to fill through new approaches to agrarian problems. Therefore, farm life in Oklahoma was in a state of flux in the early twentieth century. Prosperity existed in the rural areas, but this by no means was shared by all. The growing problems of tenancy and rural overpopulation, as well as the continuing ones of freight rates, mortgage indebtedness, and taxes were not solved in the eyes of large segments of the farm population. So, in Oklahoma and Indian territories, in relatively good times, agrarian discontent was on the rise and was not being dealt with in an intelligent manner by the political parties in power. "These conditions," noted one careful observer, "have not made Socialism, but they constitute an excellent seed bed

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<sup>39</sup>Gibson, Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries, p. 310.

for Socialism."<sup>40</sup> Thus the farmers found an alternative vent for their unrest in the expression of a new political movement -- the Socialist party.

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<sup>40</sup>"Land Question in the Southwest," IX, Senate Document No. 415, 64th Congress, 1st Session, 1916, p. 9051.



CHAPTER II

SOCIALIST PARTY STRUCTURE AND  
BEGINNINGS IN OKLAHOMA,  
1900-1903

Although the Populist movement gained considerable support in the late nineteenth century, it failed to achieve any real measure of success in solving farm problems. More importantly, its fusion with the Democratic party disillusioned many of the agrarian reformers within its ranks. Conditions, thus, ripened for the Socialist party's development as a crusading agency for agricultural reform in Oklahoma. In the course of its genesis and growth, the Socialist party took on a driving and sometimes ruthless attitude in the period before the First World War. This radical movement, founded on a basis of Marxian socialism and domestic agrarian thought, affected political activity in Oklahoma for more than two decades. Its anomalous nature, with a foreign ideology super-imposed over American agrarianism, gave it wider attention than an organization of its size might normally have received.

Socialists established their first local organization in Medford, Oklahoma Territory in 1895. The most influential organizer of this initial group was G. G. Holbrooks, who later served as National Committeeman from Oklahoma Territory and still later as Territorial Party Secretary. At the beginning, however, Holbrooks was a relative newcomer to the recently opened area. He was born in Coles County, Illinois in 1871 and moved to McPherson County, Kansas, two years later. In 1890, he joined the Topolobampo Co-operative enterprise and worked with it in Mexico until 1893. In September of that year he claimed land in the Cherokee Outlet and settled there permanently.<sup>1</sup> This man with his utopian socialist background joined with others such as Mont Howard, also of Medford, who apparently had a strong Populist bent, to give even the first Socialist local a peculiar flavor.<sup>2</sup>

This beginning in Medford, in the northern part of Oklahoma Territory, was made under the auspices of the Socialist Labor Party. But, the Socialists in Oklahoma never took on the strict Marxist ideology that Daniel DeLeon wished for his party. DeLeon felt obliged to rid the party of those elements who refused to accept strict party discipline, and so in 1899 the Populist-oriented Socialists in Medford followed those who rebelled against

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<sup>1</sup>Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), September 5, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

this type of thinking.<sup>3</sup> The Medford local and those immediately surrounding it organized as a part of the Social Democratic party, not waiting for a unity move on the national level. Morris Hilquit and a large body of the Socialist Labor party, known as the "Kangaroos" did attempt to meet with the Social Democrats later in 1900.

Meanwhile, the Oklahoma Socialists attempted to organize as a part of the Social Democratic party in 1899. This was the first move to organize beyond the local level in the territory and the Socialists succeeded in forming a temporary territorial organization in October of 1899 at the Oklahoma City meeting.<sup>4</sup> There they selected a Central Committee and elected temporary officials to aid in the organization of the party in every part of the territory; E. T. Tucker of Newkirk, the temporary chairman, presided over the meeting which put forth several demands. These included first of all the advocacy of single statehood for Oklahoma and Indian territories, followed by a list of demands reminiscent of the Populist platforms of the Nineties. Included were planks for universal suffrage,

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<sup>3</sup>Howard H. Quint, The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), p. 168; Chester McArthur Destler, American Radicalism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), pp. 168-169.

<sup>4</sup>Edmond Sun-Democrat, November 2, 1899; El Reno News, December 16, 1899; Stillwater Gazette, January 4, 1900.

irrespective of sex, color, or creed; direct legislation through initiative and referendum; a graduated income tax; compulsory education and free text books; and an eight-hour day for labor.<sup>5</sup> The ideas resembled the Populist platform so much that one editor saw no need to organize a new party as, " . . . the demands of the Populist party are right in line with those of the new party with a few exceptions."<sup>6</sup> A second and better attended meeting took place in El Reno in May of 1900. There, O. C. Poole of Cleveland County received the chairmanship of the party, while H. E. Farnsworth became the permanent secretary. The platform remained the same as that put forth in the original meeting and was accepted with no opposition. The most important new business was the nomination of E. T. Tucker as candidate for Congressional delegate.<sup>7</sup> As intended, this second meeting drew many former Populists who were very much in evidence and played an important role in the development of the early organization.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The graduated income tax was to be placed upon property, franchises, incomes, and inheritances. Exemptions included \$300 per year for personal property, \$300 per year for income, and \$1,000 per year on each home. Also included in this section was a demand that a homestead was not subject to any tax, levy, lien, or other involuntary forfeiture; Alva Review, November 2, 1899.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>El Reno News, May 24, 1900.

<sup>8</sup>Delegates attended representing Blaine, Cleveland, Canadian, Grant, Logan, Noble, Kingfisher, Kay, Oklahoma, Pawnee, and Washita Counties; El Reno Weekly Globe, May 25, 1900.

Having thus succeeded in establishing a territorial organization, the important work began of establishing and relating on the county level to the new organization. One of the best examples was in Payne County where the process began with a picnic in early August. After this initial meeting of interested persons, a county convention was called to meet at the court house later in the month. There they organized and nominated candidates and put forth a platform which was in line with the El Reno program, but went further, calling for public ownership of "all industries controlled by monopolies, trusts, and combines."<sup>9</sup> Essentially the same process took place in a majority of the counties throughout the territory, with the most important activity being in the former Populist stronghold in the northern part of the Oklahoma Territory.<sup>10</sup>

Early in 1901, the Socialists took steps toward developing a more permanent structure and establishing better communication between the locals. In January, the Socialists met in Guthrie<sup>11</sup> to establish a more durable organization

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<sup>9</sup> Stillwater Gazette, August 9, 1900; ibid., August 23, 1900; ibid., August 30, 1900; ibid., September 20, 1900.

<sup>10</sup> Daily Oklahoman /Oklahoma City7, August 5, 1900.

<sup>11</sup> Stillwater Gazette, January 10, 1901; William Butscher, National Executive Secretary, to G. G. Holbrooks, Medford, Oklahoma Territory, April 17, 1901, National Executive Secretary's Letterbook, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

which would be an effective force in the elections of 1902. After their candidate for Territorial Delegate was defeated ignominiously in 1900, receiving only 796 votes, the leadership sought a more effective means of spreading the Socialist message. The answer came with the establishment of a party newspaper, the Oklahoma Socialist.<sup>12</sup> This paper, formerly the Kay County Populist, was edited by Thomas S. Smith and was the only Socialist newspaper in the Territory at that time.<sup>13</sup> It began by espousing a more radical stand than had been indicated in the platforms of 1899 and 1900. Smith immediately attacked the concept of private property with statements like, "No person may own real estate. Every acre of land in the country is owned by the whole people through the national government -- taxes are simply rent."<sup>14</sup> The editor promised a better life with Socialism, as it would:<sup>15</sup>

. . . guarantee to every man, woman, or child a beautiful home.

That home will be built for use, not for rent.

It will be built in the best locality, as regards health and sanitary conditions, and built of the very best material that can be procured, granite, terra cotta, tiling or glass. It will be built absolutely fireproof.

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<sup>12</sup>Oklahoma Socialist /Newkirk, Oklahoma Territory7, August 15, 1901; W. B. Richards (Comp.), The Oklahoma Red Book (2 Vols., Oklahoma City: n.p., 1912), II, p. 305.

<sup>13</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, June 20, 1901.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., September 6, 1901.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., June 27, 1901.

All education would be free, which would include an unlimited opportunity to learn a trade, occupation or profession. Employment would be guaranteed the worker in what he or she could do best and all that would be demanded in return for this would be four hours daily six days in the week.

What acceptance Smith's line of thought received is difficult to determine, but less radical demands soon replaced this type of program in the front page columns.

At the national level, the different Socialist organizations sought to bring themselves together into one national party. With the exception of the DeLeon Socialist Labor party, this was accomplished as the Socialist Party of America was established in Indianapolis in July of 1901.<sup>16</sup> Oklahoma Socialists elected two delegates, T. S. Smith, editor of the Oklahoma Socialist, and E. T. Tucker, former candidate for Congressional Delegate. After some delay, however, the Oklahoma territorial delegates failed to attend the conference. Even though the Oklahomans did not participate and the convention did not include any farm planks in the party platform, the Oklahoma Socialists began actively to change their organization to comply with the convention's plans, and soon became a territorial affiliate of the new national party.<sup>17</sup> For a short time, there was some debate

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<sup>16</sup>David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, A History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 1; Quint, Forging of American Socialism, p. 377.

<sup>17</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, August 1, 1901; ibid., June 20, 1901; ibid., July 11, 1901; ibid., August 8, 1901; ibid., September 6, 1901.

as to how this was to be carried out, either by referendum vote of the local branches or through a territorial convention, but the locals took the initiative and led the way. Among the first locals to take action were those in Kingfisher, Oklahoma City, Medford, and Norman.<sup>18</sup> Soon the entire territorial membership was a part of the new national party.

Although the design broke down in certain instances, the basic pattern of organization was maintained. In this scheme of things, an individual joined the Socialist party by paying his dues of 25 cents a month to the particular local organization. Of this, from five to ten cents were sent to the state office, which, in turn, forwarded five cents to the national headquarters for each person in good standing. Every member was afforded a voice in all party affairs through a general referendum. Under certain restrictions, members could introduce any matter they chose for consideration. Thereby, the Socialists attempted to afford great latitude for democracy and individual expression within the party structure.<sup>19</sup>

A local could be organized when as few as five Socialists joined together. In turn, the local organizations

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., November 14, 1901.

<sup>19</sup>"The Structure and Organization of the Socialist-Party of the United States," /typescript/, National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers; also see David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, pp. 1-42.



in a city or county had their representatives establish a central committee. This committee had no power as such, but only duties and responsibilities concerning the cooperation of the various locals. In all cases, these committees were subject to the referendum of the membership within the city or the county.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the territorial party as a whole had complete control of its affairs. No member of the party in another state, no official from another state, or the national office was permitted to interfere with the internal affairs of the territorial organization. This allowed wide latitude for possible action. Thus, the territorial party drafted its own constitution and platforms, held its own conventions, and conducted its own propaganda campaigns.<sup>21</sup>

Within this framework, the central concern of the Socialists revolved around the establishment of locals in the Territory.<sup>22</sup> The work met with only limited success,

<sup>20</sup>"The Structure and Organization of the Socialist Party of the United States," National Office Files, Socialist Party of America Papers; "How to Organize a Local" and "Order of Business for Socialist Party Locals and Branches," NES Correspondence, Socialist Party of America Papers; Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 157.

<sup>21</sup>David A. Shannon, "The Socialist Party Before the First World War; An Analysis," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVIII (September, 1951), pp. 279-288; Morris Hillquit, History of Socialism in the United States (5th ed., New York: Macmillan Company, 1910), p. 136.

<sup>22</sup>Labor Signal /Oklahoma City7, May 30, 1902; Oklahoma Socialist, July 17, 1902.

but continued into the election year of 1902. Appeals in the Oklahoma Socialist and by organizers were made more simple and more appealing to the Oklahoma farmers. One of the best examples was the increasing reference to religious parallels with Socialism. After being attacked as anti-Christian and free-love advocates, many Socialists reacted by trying to show that Socialism was really the practical application of the Christian gospel. They pointed out that "God, Christ and the Holy Spirit cooperated in creating the universe."<sup>23</sup> Another reference stated that Jesus taught the principles of the cooperative commonwealth.<sup>24</sup> Still another implored the people to study Socialist doctrine and Henry George and "line yourself up in the army of the Lord."<sup>25</sup>

Using this simpler line of reasoning, the Socialists undertook the most important activity of the year, the election of a Territorial Delegate and other local officials. A nominating convention took place in Oklahoma City late in June. In this, all locals in good standing were entitled to one delegate with additional delegates for each ten members over the basic number of five.<sup>26</sup> At the convention, the Socialists nominated Thomas S. Smith of Kay County

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<sup>23</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, May 15, 1902.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1902.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1902.

<sup>26</sup>Stillwater Gazette, June 12, 1902; Oklahoma Socialist, June 26, 1902.

for Territorial Delegate and put forth an expanded platform. It contained certain basic demands as well as new so-called constitutional demands. Essentially, these called for initiative and referendum and public ownership of "all means of production, distribution, communication, and exchange."<sup>27</sup> The constitutional demands included suffrage for all over twenty-one years of age, a graduated tax on property and income, compulsory education with free text books, and the eight-hour work day. A new more radical plank found its way into the platform concerning school lands. The Territory would hold these lands and lease them to the occupants on a long-term basis. Proceeds from the rental of the land were to be used to support the public schools and colleges.<sup>28</sup> The most notable deletion from the earlier platforms was the proposal for single statehood. Socialists, as they stated later in the year, saw this question as a false issue used by the two major parties to confuse the voters. The Socialists went so far as to say that statehood was immaterial to the farmer and would solve none of the ills of the economic system.<sup>29</sup>

The campaign itself went badly from the beginning for the Socialists. There was little organization and

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<sup>27</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, July 3, 1902.

<sup>28</sup>Platform of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1902, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>29</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, October 2, 1902; ibid., December 4, 1902.

practically no campaign funds. Smith, candidate for Territorial Delegate, complained that he had to do everything by himself.<sup>30</sup> Even so, the Socialists sponsored large picnics and barbecues so the voters could hear the candidates and sign a declaration of principles and agreements to support the Socialist ticket. There were also appeals to labor successful enough to gain support in the Labor Signal, a trade union paper in Oklahoma City. It noted that the laboring class should support the Socialist Party for it was " . . . the one that puts in their platform an endorsement of our principles."<sup>31</sup>

One of the more important appeals, in 1902, was the fact that the Socialist party was a new independent political party, which refused to be swallowed up by fusion, as had the Populists. This sentiment was stated best in Payne county when a writer declared:<sup>32</sup>

The socialist party is composed of the remnant of the old populist party which refused to be swallowed up by the democrats. This being their status the individual members of the party are much more antagonistic to the democrats or fusion party than they are to the republicans. They are a class of people who have refused to sacrifice their principals for self and now while standing out by themselves helping to build up a new party on

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<sup>30</sup>Daily Oklahoman, July 26, 1902; Norman Democrat-Topic, May 30, 1902; Oklahoma Socialist, August 7, 1902; Stillwater Gazette, July 31, 1902.

<sup>31</sup>Labor Signal, October 24, 1902.

<sup>32</sup>Stillwater Gazette, August 21, 1902; also see Taloga Times, September 11, 1902.

the ruins of the old pop [sic] platform are exceptionally bitter against the party which swallowed the big end of the organization.

In this early period, the transition to Socialism was relatively easy for many of the old Populists, for with the exception of the proposals of government ownership of the means of production, the party's platforms were similar to their own.

In 1902, the Republicans were still very much in control of Oklahoma territorial politics. Theodore Roosevelt had just appointed as governor Thompson B. Ferguson, who drew the Republicans together into a formidable body. The Socialists had very little chance for victory under these circumstances, but Smith ran a vigorous campaign only to receive 1,963 votes for Territorial Delegate. This was a very poor third behind the two major party candidates, yet there was a noticeable increase in Socialist voting strength.<sup>33</sup> The northern wheat-producing section gave Smith the most important portion of this vote. The Socialists polled over three per cent of the balloting in six counties. All of these, with the exception of Cleveland county, were in the northern area.<sup>34</sup> The major

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<sup>33</sup>W. B. Richards (Compiler), Oklahoma Red Book, (2 Vols., Oklahoma City, n.p., 1912), II, p. 306.

<sup>34</sup>Voting Abstract, 1902, State Election Board, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City. The counties receiving more than three per cent of the vote were Cleveland, Dewey, Kingfisher, Pawnee, Payne, and Woods.

point of the limited Socialist strength rested where it had been in 1900 and where the old Populist strength had been important. Throughout the territory, the Socialist vote was rural in nature as most of it came from outside the major towns in each county.<sup>35</sup> Although the Socialists did make an improved showing, they still fell short of being an important third party movement in the 1902 election.

The reasons for the poor showing centered principally around a lack of organization, as well as failure of the Socialist program to arouse a significant following. Thomas Smith wrote late in the year that: "There should be some way provided by the socialists to perfect their organization in every county in the territory. It is impossible to win victories without being in close touch with one another."<sup>36</sup> He went on to complain that he, as a candidate, had to do everything by himself, including ordering of his own speaking schedule. Although the situation seemed bad, the Socialists did bring into the organization a number of members from the older third party movements. C. A. Calhoun, for instance, wrote that he personally was "a republican, then a greenbacker, then a greenback laborer, then a

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid. The percentage of the town vote ranged from 7.2 to 30.6 per cent. The higher percentages for the town vote were most often in the counties where the Socialist balloting was the lightest.

<sup>36</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, December 4, 1902.

populist, and now a socialist."<sup>37</sup> He and the Socialist leadership saw that there was communication and order for the next election, and this set the tone for Socialist activity in 1903.

In the territorial Socialist meeting in January of 1903, the Populist-oriented leadership retained control. W. H. Sweatt of Medford was selected as Secretary-Treasurer, G. G. Halbrook of Medford as National Committeeman, and Thomas S. Smith of Newkirk as organizer. This last position was new in the territorial organization, and received the applause of all in the party.<sup>38</sup> This leadership came from Kay and Grant counties, which after 1902 no longer accounted for a sizeable portion of the Socialist vote. Those men, however, were experienced and ready to work for a better organization.

One of the primary accomplishments in 1903 was closer contact with the national office. After the Unity Convention, one of the major tasks of the Socialists was to bring the twenty-three state and territorial organizations into a united party structure. The Oklahoma Socialists were as interested in this as much as the national leadership.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., December 11, 1902.

<sup>38</sup>Oklahoma Socialist, January 8, 1903, as to organization problems, see William Maily to W. H. Sweatt, Medford, Oklahoma Territory, February 18, 1903, NES Letter-book, Socialist Party Papers; Appeal to Reason, June 30, 1903.

So, upon the request of the Territorial Secretary, the National Executive Secretary, William Mailly, selected George H. Goebel of New Jersey to go into the Southwest as regional organizer.<sup>39</sup> Goebel was recognized as one of the more able of the Socialist trouble-shooters. He was to organize Texas, Oklahoma, and Indian territories. Although the process was slow, there was a great deal of optimism which pervaded the reports from Oklahoma Territory. Communication with Socialist locals in Indian Territory also began during this period.<sup>40</sup> There is no accurate account of membership in the Socialist party in Oklahoma and Indian territories during these initial years. However, Oklahoma Territory reported twenty-three locals as of June, 1902, and Indian Territory chartered twelve additional locals in 1903. Voting statistics remain the most accurate reflection of party strength, but this in itself is no indication of the number of card-carrying members in the party.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>William Mailly to George H. Goebel, Newark, New Jersey, July 7, 1903, NES Letterbook, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>40</sup>Annual Report of the National Secretary of the Socialist Party, January 1, 1903--December 31, 1903, National Committee Weekly Reports, Socialist Party of America Papers; Appeal to Reason, September 5, 1903.

<sup>41</sup>Annual Report of the National Secretary, 1903; "Then it was noted that Oklahoma was, by agreement, declared in good standing in March 1903 upon the payment of dues for ten locals from January 1st." Appeal to Reason, September 5, 1903.



While the Socialists attempted to strengthen their position, they took notice of the growth of the Farmers' Cooperative and Educational Union as another sign of growing discontent among the farmers. In a report on the progress of the movement, W. H. Sweatt wrote that: "To the Socialist, it is a hopeful sign to perceive this tendency [the growth of the Farmers' Union] of the farmers to awaken to a consciousness of their class interests."<sup>42</sup> Although the Union did not emphasize this class interest, in the Socialists' minds, it strengthened their own position.

The Farmers' Union, also composed as it was of many former Farmers' Alliance and Populist members, retained more of the ideals of those organizations than the Socialists. The leaders of the movement, especially the founder, Isaac Newton Gresham, was convinced that only by keeping the organization out of party politics could the Union succeed. The Union's primary purpose was to control marketing in much the same way as the Alliance had sought to do under the leadership of Charles W. Macune a decade and a half earlier. Its attempt proved partially successful and the Union established cooperative stores, cotton warehouses, grain elevators, and flour mills throughout the South.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>W. H. Sweatt, "The Oklahoma Work," Appeal to Reason, September 5, 1903.

<sup>43</sup>Charles Simon Barrett, The Mission, History and Times of the Farmers' Union (Nashville, Tennessee: Marshall

The Union moved into Oklahoma and Indian Territory early in 1903, shortly after its establishment in Texas. By the time of the Union's meeting at Fort Worth, Texas, in February of 1905, there were reportedly 839 locals north of the Red River.<sup>44</sup> Even with its rapid growth and non-partisan policy, the Socialists saw only good coming from the movement.

In comparison, the organization of the Socialist party was slow and at times unsatisfactory, but the leadership of the party pointed to the fact that Oklahoma's Socialist party was developing more rapidly than any other area of the United States. The causes for this growth were many and complicated, but they were essentially connected with the particular economic problems of farmers in the area. For, as the Socialists pointed out, even while this relatively new land was rapidly being transformed

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and Bruce Co., 1909), pp. 103-105; Commodore B. Fisher, The Farmers' Union, Vol. I, No. 2 of the University of Kentucky Studies in Economics and Sociology (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1925), p. 20; Robert L. Hunt, History of Farmer Movements in the Southwest, (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M College Press, 1935), p. 44; for Alliance background see Charles W. Macune, "The Farmers' Alliance," Charles W. Macune Collection, Archives, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Ralph Smith, "The Farmers' Alliance of Texas, 1875-1900; A Revolt Against Bourbon and Bourgeois Democracy," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XLVII (January, 1945), p. 346; H. L. Meredith, "Charles W. Macune's 'Farmers' Alliance'," University of Texas Library Chronicle, VIII (Spring, 1966), p. 43.

<sup>44</sup>Muskogee Phoenix, March 31, 1905; J. Y. Callahan, The Burning Issue and What Cooperation Will Do (Enid, Oklahoma: Publishers Printing Co., 1908).

into farms and cities, the farmer was not sharing in prosperity. Lands were mortgaged in spite of relatively low original cost and fairly good crops, and farmers had to struggle against debt and low incomes. The Socialists believed this situation existed because capitalism was a system which created inequities and hardship.<sup>45</sup>

The Socialists, to combat their inadequacies during this early period, drew on the experience of the former Populist leaders and sought to bring as many of the older party's membership into the new organization as possible. Populist principles even entered the platform, which closely resembled that of the People's party in the Nineties.<sup>46</sup> From 1900 to 1903, the power base of the party was in the north central wheat producing district on the Kansas border. But even by the election of 1902 the Socialist vote was distributed more widely throughout the northern half of Oklahoma Territory. In the balloting that year, the six counties that gave the Socialist candidate over 3 per cent of the total vote, Cleveland, Dewey, Kingfisher, Pawnee, Payne, and Woods, could no longer be considered just wheat

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<sup>45</sup>Appeal to Reason, September 5, 1903.

<sup>46</sup>Walter T. K. Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, Kansas Populism and Nativism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 151; Donald R. Pickens, "Oklahoma Populism and Historical Interpretation," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XLII (Spring, 1965), pp. 275-283.

producing areas in which Socialism in Oklahoma had begun.<sup>47</sup> Cleveland County actually had more acres in cotton than in wheat; both Dewey and Pawnee Counties were primarily grazing areas.<sup>48</sup>

In this early period of the Socialist party growth, a comparison of the voting records and the census data seems to indicate that the bulk of the Socialist strength came from land-owning farmers. For example, in Dewey and Woods counties in the northwest, the owners and part owners of land accounted for 93.8 and 89.5 per cent of the population, respectively. Only in Pawnee County, of the six counties that had the heaviest Socialist vote, was over 30 per cent of its farm population in the tenant class.<sup>49</sup> Also, it should be noted that there was no laboring class outside the farm in any of these counties.<sup>50</sup> In fact, as noted,

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<sup>47</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board 1967), pp. 277-283.

<sup>48</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, V, Agriculture, p. 433.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 114-115.

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County	Average Size	Owners	Part Owners
Cleveland	140.3	1,289 (61.5)	106 (13.3)
Dewey	174.4	1,781 (90.5)	66 ( 3.3)
Kingfisher	181.0	1,911 (67.1)	338 (11.9)
Pawnee	224.9	1,076 (58.4)	129 ( 7.0)
Payne	139.7	2,087 (66.7)	134 ( 4.3)
Woods	185.8	5,405 (74.3)	1,105 (15.2)

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., II, Population, pp. 407-408.

the vast majority of the Socialist voting strength came from outside of the urban settlements in each of these counties.<sup>51</sup>

So essentially, the Socialist vote came from small land-holding farmers who did not want to lose what they had worked so hard to get. These people were hurt economically by the fluctuations in the market, as well as high interest rates. For example, wheat sold in 1902 for about 60 cents a bushel, nearly as low as it had been in 1895. There had been relief in 1897, but prices had generally fallen off after that date.<sup>52</sup> This farm element wanted answers to their problems and sought them through the political system, as the Populists had done before them. Agrarian Socialism in Oklahoma was conceived as a radical, democratic answer to the economic hardship which faced the small farmers during the early years of the twentieth century.

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<sup>51</sup>Voting Abstract, 1902, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>52</sup>Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), p. 777.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY SOCIALIST DEVELOPMENT, 1904-1907

In the years immediately preceding Oklahoma's entrance into the Union, the Socialist party continued to attract an increasing number of voters in every election. During this period, although the leadership of the party called for the establishment of the "Co-operative Commonwealth," a society based on cooperation rather than competition, its real appeal rested in its evangelistic promise of agrarian and political reform. More than ever before, the Socialists addressed themselves to the small wage-earning class, in addition to the depressed farm population. With this envisioned, widened political base, the party leadership hoped to make an impact on the coming organization of the state government and the drafting of the state constitution. Although many Socialists believed that the statehood issue was a false one, used by the two major parties to keep the interest of the populace from the real problems confronting them, the party was carried along by the course of political events.

Although Oklahoma had a sufficient population for statehood by 1900, the United States Congress had rejected early proposals of statehood for a number of reasons. One major objection was there was too little taxable land for financial support of the new state because of the homestead land and the Indian allotments. There was the added problem of the existence of Indian Territory and the question of double statehood. Also, the Republican party was attempting to build a political base through appointments under the territorial administration. As the situation changed through the first years of the twentieth century and ameliorated so that statehood became more of a possibility, the competition for votes became stronger.

By 1903, the Oklahoma Socialists began earnestly to try to attract the laboring class in order to expand their political base. They endorsed Labor Signal, published in Oklahoma City, and the paper's appeal began to change slightly in favor of the Socialists' position. Although there were only about three thousand wage earners in Oklahoma Territory, it seemed important to have their support in the Socialist political struggle against the older parties.<sup>1</sup> Before statehood, the coal miners, a major portion of the wage-earning class in Indian Territory, were of no political importance because the tribal governments

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, Manufactures, 1905, Part II, p. 885; Oklahoma Socialist (Newkirk), August 28, 1902.

were in control of the region.<sup>2</sup> In all, the agrarian Socialists met with little success in their attempts to enlist labor support, which was concentrated in the Oklahoma City area. In fact, the Twin Territorial Federation of Labor, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, opposed the Labor Signal which expressed some friendship for the Socialists.<sup>3</sup> The Twin Territorial Federation of Labor favored a non-partisan posture, while the paper's appeal was that:<sup>4</sup>

If workingmen vote for something they don't want and get it, they shouldn't kick. They can get the earth if they vote right but the Democrat and Republican parties won't give it to you. Baers and Morgans own them. Workingmen own the Socialist party.

Although they had little success in gaining the support of organized labor, the Socialists had hopes of making important voting gains in the election of 1904. The territorial convention of the Socialist party was held at Labor Hall in Oklahoma City on the Fourth of July. About a hundred delegates were in attendance from most counties in the territory.<sup>5</sup> The chief features of the

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<sup>2</sup>Arrell M. Gibson, Oklahoma, A History of Five Centuries (Norman, Oklahoma: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1965), pp. 317-319.

<sup>3</sup>Twin Territory Federation of Labor Proceedings, 1903 /Microfilm copy7/, American Federation of Labor Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>4</sup>Labor Signal (Oklahoma City), July 1, 1904.

<sup>5</sup>Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), July 8, 1904; Stillwater Gazette, July 7, 1904.



convention were the adoption of a platform and the nomination of a candidate for Delegate to Congress. Although the platform differed little from earlier ones, it emphasized the demand that school lands should be retained by the territory. The plank concerning land included the idea that it should be leased on a long term, non-transferable basis, and that the mineral resources were to be controlled by the counties.<sup>6</sup> Once the platform became a reality, the convention nominated four party members for Congressional Delegate. These included A. S. Loudermilk of El Reno, Thomas S. Smith of Newkirk, Clinton Simonton of Shawnee, and A. F. Eggleston of Oklahoma City. Each of these names were in turn submitted to a referendum vote of the party membership. As a result, the nomination finally went to Clinton Simonton, who later fell ill and had to remove himself from the race.<sup>7</sup>

Loudermilk replaced the ailing Simonton during the campaign which left him little time to organize an even moderately effective effort. Even so, he ran ahead of the previous Socialist candidates in both total number and percentage of the vote cast in every county in the territory with the exception of three. The Socialist candidate's

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<sup>6</sup>Oklahoma Territorial Platform of the Socialist Party, Oklahoma State Historical Society Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>7</sup>Taloga Times, August 4, 1904; Stillwater Gazette, August 18, 1904, Woodward News, August 20, 1904.

total was 4,443 out of a territorial vote of 190,145, while the winner, Bird S. McGuire, a Republican, received 51,454 ballots. The Democrat, William M. Glass, trailed with 43,284 votes.<sup>8</sup> Loudermilk's vote came from the small landholding farmers as had Socialist votes in the earlier elections. There was a noticeable, though not complete, shift in the Socialist vote to the western part of the territory. Six counties had a Socialist voting percentage of at least 6 percent, including Cleveland, 7.6 percent; Dewey, 11 percent; Pawnee, 6.8 percent; Roger Mills, 6.1 percent; Woods, 6.6 percent; and Woodward, 6 percent.<sup>9</sup> These counties had certain common characteristics which included a low rate of tenancy, few Negro farmers, and with the exception of Cleveland County, these counties had a great deal of marginal land. In fact, the average value per acre for these counties was about \$6.51 which was far below the territorial average. There was no data taken on mortgage debt in the Census of 1900, but it may well be that the poor productivity of the land and low incomes were important elements in accounting for the increases in Socialist balloting in these counties.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Abstract of the Oklahoma Territorial Vote, 1902; Abstract of the Oklahoma Territorial Vote, 1904, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Stillwater Gazette, September 29, 1904.

<sup>9</sup> Abstract of the Oklahoma Territorial Vote, 1904.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, IV, Agriculture, pp. 114-115;

A pattern of voting did emerge throughout most of the territory, which indicated the importance of the farm vote to the Socialists. In this race, although Loudermilk was a lawyer and lived in El Reno, a comparatively large town, most of his votes came from farmers. In a representative selection of five counties, the vast majority of Socialist vote in this election came from outside the major town in the county.<sup>11</sup> The rural vote accounted for percentages of the Socialist total ranging from 69.4 percent in Roger Mills County to as much as 97.1 percent in Dewey County. The majority of the counties had a rural farm vote percentage which accounted for approximately 85 percent of the Socialist county total.<sup>12</sup> Reinforcing this, there was evidence of some antagonism between the farmers and the townspeople through the election year. Generally the farmers' principal complaint was the amount of tax money spent on the towns in comparison to the rest of the county, while the farm population paid the bulk of the taxes.<sup>13</sup> In all, the Socialist strength rested with farmers and

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U.S. Bureau of the Census, Wealth, Debt, and Taxation, 1907, pp. 73, 115, 1123.

<sup>11</sup>Abstract of the Oklahoma Territorial Vote, 1904; the counties surveyed were Kay, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Payne, and Roger Mills; also see Stillwater Gazette, September 29, 1904.

<sup>12</sup>Abstract of the Oklahoma Territorial Vote, 1904.

<sup>13</sup>Stillwater Gazette, September 1, 1904; Taloga Times, August 25, 1904.

ranchers, but outside the best wheat and cotton producing regions of the territory.<sup>14</sup>

Although there were no corresponding elections in Indian Territory, the Socialists were active in the area. Their principal center of activity was in the coal mining district in Coal, Pittsburg, and Pontotoc counties in the southern portion of the territory. There they reported success, although no figures are available to measure their progress.<sup>15</sup> Although most of the land owners were on the Indian rolls, there was also activity among the farmers, centering around Madill; but the Farmers' Union was apparently much more important in this region than the Socialists.<sup>16</sup>

In late December of 1904, the Socialists of both Oklahoma and Indian territories met in Guthrie to form a permanent organization to include representatives of both territories. There was little or no dissension among those present over issues of the leadership of J. E. Snyder of Pawnee who headed the older Oklahoma Territory organization. Snyder, in fact, was elected to the important position

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<sup>14</sup>Oklahoma Socialist (Newkirk), June 21, 1904; Perkins Journal, June 3, 1904; Cheyenne Star, August 11, 1904; Woodward News, November 4, 1904.

<sup>15</sup>Coalgate Courier, August 4, 1904; Ibid., August 18, 1904.

<sup>16</sup>Madill News, September 30, 1904; Ibid., November 4, 1904.

of Secretary-Treasurer of the new and larger party.<sup>17</sup> The convention also outlined a program based on the principles of international Socialism and the Oklahoma Territory platforms of the preceding years. Their demands included universal suffrage; compulsory education for those from seven to fourteen years of age with free textbooks provided by the state; retention of school lands by the state; government ownership of railroads, and telephone, telegraph, and pipe lines; municipal ownership of public utilities; an eight-hour law and prohibition of child labor under fourteen years of age; and a pure food law. The most interesting change from earlier platforms was absence of reference to race in the matter of suffrage. This platform included a demand for a separate coach law and separate school law.<sup>18</sup> The Socialist press claimed that the call for the Negro vote had only caused the Socialists trouble with prospective white voters. Furthermore, the Negro population, which was concentrated in the southern half of Indian Territory, apparently was not interested in the Socialist movement. The change at this time may indicate that the members from Indian Territory influenced the older segment of the party to discontinue support for Negro rights.

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<sup>17</sup>Oklahoma State Register (Guthrie), December 29, 1904; Wilburton News, January 5, 1905.

<sup>18</sup>Weekly Oklahoma State Capital (Guthrie), December 31, 1904.

Altogether, the larger element of the Socialist party continued to function as an organization of the dissident agrarian population, as the newspaper reports mention only farm leaders, even among the Indian Territory delegates.<sup>19</sup> Even the motto adopted by the convention, "Agitation, Education, and Organization," brought up memories of earlier farm organizations, such as the Farmers' Alliance and the Populists, which had used the same slogan a decade earlier.<sup>20</sup> Even so, it was considered the best statement of the goals of the Socialists at the end of their fourth year of existence.

As the time moved closer to the possibility of Oklahoma and Indian territories achieving statehood, the Socialists tried industriously to strengthen their party. Through 1905, the party leadership placed increasing emphasis upon organization. Yet, there was difficulty in that the most important voice of the party, the Oklahoma Socialist lost much of its appeal for the more radical agrarians through the year. The paper had become a daily and began to receive more advertising. At the same time, it carried fewer news items about the Socialist party and

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.; also see Charles W. Macune, "The Farmers' Alliance," Typescript 7, Charles W. Macune Collection, Archives, Barker History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; Walter T. K. Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, Kansas Populism and Nativism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 59-90.

practically nothing that might be considered radical in nature.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Newkirk in Kay County, where the Oklahoma Socialist was published, and the surrounding north central block of counties where the party had established itself originally became less important to the Socialist cause. These counties were the most important wheat producers in the territory and the price of wheat had risen by nearly 30 cents a bushel between 1902 and 1904.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, land values had risen there more spectacularly than in any other portion of the Territory.<sup>23</sup> These factors tended to make the area serve as a poor base for Socialism and the party's strength had shifted westward to where it had become a substantial factor in the last two elections.

During 1906, the Socialists stepped up their organizational drive. In both Oklahoma and Indian territories, new techniques and outside organizers were introduced on a scale much larger than ever used before in the area. While the Socialist picnic had been a potent means of spreading radical thought throughout the party's early

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<sup>21</sup>Wilburton News, January 5, 1905; Frederick Enterprise, April 11, 1905; Socialist Party Official Bulletin, January, 1906, II, No. 5, Socialist Party Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (1961), p. 297.

<sup>23</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Wealth, Debt, and Taxation (1907), p. 73.

development, a larger affair known as the encampment was used in this period to enable the Socialists to reach much greater crowds. It was not a new technique for the area, for the Populists had utilized this same method during the 1890's.<sup>24</sup> Although this form of meeting was used in conjunction with the various conventions and "Red Card" gatherings, it was by far the most popular method of spreading Socialist thought.

The Socialist encampments became a standard feature of the movement in Oklahoma as the number of followers increased in the years before the First World War. Usually the meetings ran from one to six days, with a large attendance, sometimes numbering as many as ten thousand a day.<sup>25</sup> Their popularity with the farm population as social events made them of immense value to the Socialist cause. The first major encampment was held near Oklahoma City in July, 1906, and it was the initial mass meeting for both Oklahoma and Indian Territory Socialists.<sup>26</sup> Prominent

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<sup>24</sup>Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), pp. 263-267; Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life (2 Vols., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), I, p. 306.

<sup>25</sup>Oles Stofer, "Conducting Socialist Encampments," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham North Carolina.

<sup>26</sup>Appeal to Reason, June 9, 1906; ibid., July 21, 1906.



Socialist speakers made their appearances, notably, "Mother" Jones and E. P. O'Hare, who were connected with the Kansas movement. Even Eugene V. Debs spoke during the summer of 1906 at a Chautauqua in Tulsa, Indian Territory.<sup>27</sup> These speakers traveled widely promoting the party's activities at every chance while in the territories.<sup>28</sup>

These large-scale meetings usually came about as a result of the work of the encampment organizations, which were separate from the locals. This type of organization allowed several locals to join in the backing of one large meeting. The officers of an association consisted of a chairman, a secretary-treasurer, a manager of concessions, and a finance committee. These men would meet several months before the encampment date to make the necessary decisions concerning place, time of year, and finances.<sup>29</sup> In most cases, the place for the encampment required a good grove of trees with plenty of water and spacious camp grounds. In this agricultural section, the best time of year to meet was in the summer before harvest. The cost of an encampment varied considerably, depending on the length of time for the meeting, number of speakers, music,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., July 21, 1906; ibid., August 11, 1906; ibid., August 18, 1906.

<sup>28</sup>Taloga Times, June 28, 1906; Appeal to Reason, September 8, 1906.

<sup>29</sup>Oles Stofer, "Conducting Socialist Encampments," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

and advertising expenses.<sup>30</sup> Financing, if correctly managed, could make the encampment pay for itself. For example, Oles Stofer in Snyder, Oklahoma, noted that as soon as the encampment organization was established, the secretary opened the subscription book for the party members. A dollar was requested from each member and from \$50 to \$75 were raised in this manner. Also, if an encampment was to be held near a town, a bonus might be expected from the merchants. Some Oklahoma towns contributed as much as \$200. However, the sale of concessions was considered the best method of raising funds. All of these means were important when used together to produce a successful encampment.<sup>31</sup>

The newspapers usually gave only an outline of what happened at these meetings, but Oscar Ameringer, who entered the territory at about this time, left an account of the color and excitement of these affairs in his autobiography. Usually in the mornings mixed choruses were formed and Socialist songs were rehearsed; most of these were of familiar Populist origin. "After singing school we conducted economic and historical mass lessons," noted Ameringer, who enjoyed all of this.<sup>32</sup> Picnic lunches were

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, p. 306; Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, pp. 263-267.

<sup>31</sup> Stofer, "Conducting Socialist Encampments," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 265.

served during mid-day and followed by the "two o'clock meeting." This was in the big tent with singing and instrumental music. During the rest of the afternoon, the individuals were often left to their own devices, which usually meant social calls on friends. Again at night there were mass meetings with singing and music. But, after the night meetings, " . . . discussions around the glowing camp fire continued on into the small hours. Radicalism was not an intellectual plaything for these people. Pressure was on them."<sup>33</sup> These encampments continued in much the same manner as had the Populist encampments before them. It was a time of excitement as large numbers of people gathered together to sing, talk, and generally enjoy one another's company.

Less colorful work was accomplished at the same time as local organizers worked to perfect a better party structure. Among the more important of these men were Otto F. Branstetter, a professional organizer from Chicago, and the State Secretary, J. E. Snyder of Oklahoma City. Branstetter attempted with little success to organize the students at the University of Oklahoma. But usually these and others like them concentrated on speaking and, in rare instances, engaging members of the older parties in debate.<sup>34</sup> The most important area for organization

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>34</sup>Appeal to Reason, September 15, 1906.

during this period was Indian Territory where the political activities of the party had been negligible because of the tribal form of government in the area. The principal center of activity was the coal mining area. In the fall of 1906, the Appeal to Reason noted that: "The coal mining region of Indian Territory is aflame with Socialism, and the farmers of the Territory are not far behind in their endorsement of the movement."<sup>35</sup> Most certainly, this overstated the Socialist success, but apparently the response in the southern portion of Indian Territory was out of the ordinary. The only figures for card-carrying members during this period were unofficially, " . . . over 150 locals, and over 1,500 members, two-thirds of whom are in good standing."<sup>36</sup>

These locals soon became active centers in the attempt to gain support for the Socialist program in order to influence the Constitutional Convention which was to be held the following year. In order to facilitate communication, the Executive Committee required each local in every district which would elect a constitutional delegate to choose a member for a local district committee. In turn, the district committee called a mass convention of card-carrying members to nominate delegates for the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., September 8, 1906; Stillwater Gazette, September 7, 1906.

<sup>36</sup> Appeal to Reason, July 26, 1906.

Convention.<sup>37</sup> In response to this call, conventions were held throughout both Oklahoma and Indian territories.<sup>38</sup> However, the party nominees ran into procedural difficulty because the enabling act passed by Congress failed to recognize the Socialists as an official party. So, the Socialists had to petition the Election Commissioner for a place on the ballot.<sup>39</sup>

The Socialists wanted to see their program, or as much of it as possible, incorporated into the new state constitution. The major points of interest for the Socialists were the initiative, referendum and recall; equal suffrage for men and women; the right of the state to engage in any industry; and the retention of all public lands by the state.<sup>40</sup> In demanding these points, the Socialists could not marshal any support from the major farm organization in the state, the Oklahoma Farmers' Union. Although there were some similarities in the basic agrarian demands of the two groups, the Union, which was a much larger association, failed to aid the Socialists.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1906; note that all official notices of the Oklahoma and Indian Territorial organizations appeared in the Appeal to Reason, as the Oklahoma Socialist no longer existed after the death of Thomas Smith.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., September 1, 1906.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>"Oklahoma Socialist Program," Appeal to Reason, June 30, 1906; Stillwater Gazette, January 23, 1906.

Rather than deal with the Socialist third party movement, the Union officially endorsed the Democratic delegates to the Convention to insure their influence.<sup>41</sup> Thus, many of the principles of the Socialist platform were far more popular than the movement itself. In fact, as J. E. Snyder, the Territorial Secretary, noted, the Socialists had " . . . made the class struggle the big issue," but only within the ranks of the Socialist membership.<sup>42</sup> The real struggle in 1906 was between the Republican and Democratic parties. The Republicans had been in power through the territorial period and hoped to control the Constitutional Convention. But of the 112 convention districts established by the Enabling Act, the Democrats were victorious in 100 and thereby controlled the Convention.

While very few Socialists were found on the ballot in Indian Territory, the Socialist vote in Oklahoma Territory for Congressional Delegates again showed an increase in voting strength, in both numbers and percentages. Although no Socialist candidates were elected to serve in

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<sup>41</sup>William H. Murray, "The Constitutional Convention," Chronicles of Oklahoma, IX (June, 1931), p. 133; Gaston Litton, History of Oklahoma (4 volumes, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1957), I, p. 93; Oklahoma, A Guide to the Sooner State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), p. 49.

<sup>42</sup>J. E. Snyder, "Some Things that Make for Socialism in Oklahoma and Indian Territory," [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection; also note Patrick S. Nagle, "The Interlocked Directorate," Kingfisher Times, November 1, 1906.

the Constitutional Convention of 1906, there were sporadic signs of Socialist strength. The best example was found in District Number 46, which included portions of Custer, Roger Mills, and Washita counties, in the western part of the territory. There, the Socialist candidate, George Patterson, came within twenty votes of his Democratic opponent. Patterson finished a strong second and received 331 votes out of a total of 719 cast.<sup>43</sup> In Oklahoma Territory, as a whole, the Socialists had candidates in thirty-four of the fifty-six districts and received 3,986 votes out of a total of 30,937 in these districts. This represented 12.9 percent of the ballots in 1906 as compared to 4.65 percent of the territorial vote in the election for a Congressional Delegate in 1904.<sup>44</sup>

The shift in the 1906 voting as compared to the earlier contests was important for a variety of reasons. In this last election in the territorial period, the strength of the north central counties fell even more noticeably behind the other sections of the state. For example, in the three districts which made up Kay County, an early stronghold of Socialist strength and the home of the only territorial Socialist newspaper, the party

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<sup>43</sup>Voting Abstract for 1906, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.; Appeal to Reason, December 1, 1906.

received slightly more than 1 percent of the total vote.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, important growth took place in the western portion of the territory. Aside from the aforementioned District 46, the best illustration was that of District 45, which rested wholly within Roger Mills County. There the Socialist candidate received 31.7 percent of the vote. In fact, throughout the western counties where there were Socialists seeking a position, the party candidates ran strong races.<sup>46</sup> The western portion of the territory was easily becoming the Socialists' most important voting base.

In the territorial period, a general pattern of development had appeared in Oklahoma Territory as numbers increased and Socialist voting concentrations became more apparent. In the earliest elections, those of 1900 and 1902, Socialist strength was concentrated in the north central counties near the Kansas border, an area which had been the center of Populist power in the 1890's. However, by 1904 and 1906 the strongest Socialist following was in the counties further west, but still above the Thirty-fifth parallel.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the most important counties in terms of Socialist voting percentages lay in the Great Plains.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>A. K. Lobeck, Physiographic Diagram of the United States (New York: Columbia University Geographical Press, 1948), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.



Socialism now centered in the western counties where farmers suffered from undependable rainfall and poor top soil. Rainfall averaged about 22 inches in the Low Plains in the west as compared to 35 inches in the Humid Interior Lowlands.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, the western counties lay in an area of red shale and sandstone which neither absorbed nor released water readily and were easily eroded by wind.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the growing Socialist strength tended to be among farmers on marginal lands, which were unproductive for crops and which required large acreages for successful ranching. Land values in the heaviest Socialist area, in the western counties above the 35th parallel, had an average price of \$10 to \$25 an acre, which was far below the \$50 to \$75 an acre cost of the land further to the east and south.<sup>51</sup> In Oklahoma Territory, the Socialists made their most powerful showing in the areas where the farmers were economically pressed the hardest.

Even with these gains in voting strength, the Socialists had no delegate voice in the Constitutional Convention. With no representatives of the so-called

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<sup>49</sup>T. B. Dover, A. R. Leonard, and L. L. Laine, Water for Oklahoma, Geographical Survey Water-Supply Paper 1890, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1968, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, VII, Agriculture, p. 350.

laboring class to speak for them, the Socialists feared that many of the reform measures that they supported would be submerged. But the Farmers' Union had influence in the convention and favored several of the measures which the Socialists had been advocating, including the initiative, referendum, and recall; a system of primary elections; compulsory education; as well as free textbooks, printed by the state.<sup>52</sup> It also provided that 8 percent of the voters could initiate legislation by petition, 15 percent of the voters could initiate a constitutional amendment, and 5 percent of the voters could obtain a referendum on an act of the legislature.<sup>53</sup> There was also provision for a limited use of the eight-hour day on public works and in the mines.<sup>54</sup> Still, the Socialists felt dissatisfied because the courts had the power to review legislation begun by initiative, and the fact that the eight-hour principle had been applied only to a limited degree. Furthermore, they opposed the legislature's power to determine suffrage, especially to levy poll taxes. At the same time, the Constitutional Convention failed to

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<sup>52</sup>Murray, "Constitutional Convention," p. 133; Shawnee State Journal, August 25, 1906; County Democrat (Tecumseh), May 4, 1906; also note labor's demands which were in many cases the same, State Federation of Labor Proceedings, 1907, pp. 4-5, American Federation of Labor Collection.

<sup>53</sup>Gibson, Oklahoma, A History of Five Centuries, pp. 333-334.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 334; Daily Oklahoman, March 17, 1906.

enfranchise the women of the future state. Because of what they considered so many shortcomings, the Socialists decided in a referendum of the party members not to support the proposed state constitution. They emphasized that the constitution was unfavorable to the working class and thus unworthy of their support.<sup>55</sup>

The Socialists now decided to run a complete slate of candidates in the September election of 1907. This was the first time the total political strength of the party was tested in both halves of the future state. At the convention of Indian and Oklahoma territorial Socialists at Guthrie in late December of 1906, the party leaders were confident of a good election turnout for the coming year.<sup>56</sup> The race seemed to be an extension of the campaign to elect members of the Constitutional Convention. The Socialists appealed to the people on the same platform they put forth in 1906. A major difference in this campaign, however, was better central direction of the party by Secretary J. E. Snyder working out of new offices in Oklahoma City.<sup>57</sup> A full slate of candidates sought office on the Socialist ticket, headed by gubernatorial candidate C. C. Ross. A

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<sup>55</sup>Shawnee Daily Herald, April 3, 1907; Stillwater Gazette, April 5, 1907; Taloga Times, July 4, 1907.

<sup>56</sup>Oklahoma State Capital (Guthrie), January 7, 1907.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

native of Virginia, Ross served the Socialists as a professional organizer, just as he had done in the Populist party of the 1890's.<sup>58</sup>

In the elections, the Constitution was ratified by a vote of 180,333 to 73,059. The contest for state offices was an overwhelming victory for the Democrats, led by Charles N. Haskell, who soundly defeated Republican Frank Frantz for the governorship, 137,559 votes to 110,292, while Ross polled only 9,740.<sup>59</sup> Of the five places for Congress, four were won by Democrats, leaving the Republicans with only one seat. The Socialists who ran for Congressional seats were A. W. Renshaw in the First District, J. Tad Cumbie in the Fourth, and Wood Hubbard in the Fifth. Only one Socialist had a greater percentage vote than Ross; J. Tad Cumbie, running for United States Representative of the Fourth District in the Southeastern portion of the state, won 4.3 percent of the vote as compared with the 3.9 percent for Ross.<sup>60</sup> This was the first time that voters had a chance in the Southeast portion of the state to cast their vote for Socialist candidates. Although it must be said that the Socialists

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<sup>58</sup>Taloga Times, September 12, 1907.

<sup>59</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Compiler), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 126.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

over-estimated their strength, this southern section of former Indian Territory had become the most powerful Socialist voting base in terms of percentages. In fact, this election showed two basic areas of Socialist voting strength--the western counties of old Oklahoma Territory and the southern counties of former Indian Territory. In these two core areas, the Socialists took at least ten percent of the vote in six counties: Dewey, Major, and Roger Mills, in the West, where the Socialists had shown strength in 1906, and Coal, Marshall, and Stephens, in the South.<sup>61</sup> The six counties, out of a total of seventy-seven, gave over seventeen percent of the total Socialist vote in this election. Moreover, twenty-one counties in these two general areas accounted for more than half the total Socialist vote in this first statewide election.<sup>62</sup>

Also of importance was the fact that the farm population remained the backbone of the Socialist party in Oklahoma. Rarely did the Socialist vote from the towns exceed ten percent of the total Socialist vote in any county. In a wide sampling of counties, the rural vote ranged from 88.4 percent to 96.4 percent of the total Socialist vote.<sup>63</sup> The Coal County vote in the southeastern

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<sup>61</sup>Abstract of the Oklahoma Vote, 1907, State Election Board.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

portion of the state was an exception to this and showed a relatively high percentage, 11.6, urban vote for the Socialist. This was accounted for by the miners who were concentrated in the area. When compared to an urban vote of 3.6 in Marshall County in the same section, with little doubt it was apparent that the farm vote accounted for the vast majority of the Socialist strength at the beginning of statehood.<sup>64</sup>

Even with the added support shown in this first statewide election, the party did not have the strength to elect an official to state or federal office. However, some limited success was found on the local level in 1907. At El Reno in Canadian County, Socialist Josiah Bunch became one of the three County Commissioners. H. B. McKenzie of Taloga in Dewey County also won a County Commissioner post. But these hardly could be called major victories. So after seven years, the party was not a success, even considering its relative growth during the period.<sup>65</sup>

Standing at the end of this territorial era, certain general patterns were clear for the Socialist party in Oklahoma. The principal area of party strength had passed from the north-central counties of Grant, Garfield,

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>W. B. Richards (Comp.), Oklahoma Red Book (2 Vols., Oklahoma City: n.p., 1912), II, p. 463.

Kay, and Noble, which had been relatively important Populist areas to the more arid counties of Custer, Dewey, and Roger Mills in the west, as well as the southern counties of Coal, Marshall, and Stephens. With the addition of these latter counties in Indian Territory to the potential Socialist vote, the situation did seem somewhat brighter to the party leadership by 1907. Although the Socialists attempted to widen their appeal, the movement remained primarily agrarian in nature. Small farmers faced with increased debt and taxes demanded greater governmental support in solving their problems. Apparently an increasing number of these people believed that through Socialist reform measures they could fight the economic hazards produced by an increasingly complex society.

## CHAPTER IV

### AGRARIAN SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY AND STATEHOOD, 1908-1909

Socialism in Oklahoma began its most important period of growth with the advent of statehood, and by 1908 had settled into the basic patterns which it would follow throughout its brief history. Even though statehood was an accomplished fact, the farmers espousing Socialist thought still faced the same problems. As the editor of the Oklahoma Socialist had noted in the territorial period, statehood changed nothing in the economic structure of the period. The most important political change was the implementation of the initiative and referendum. But this would mean nothing to the Socialists unless they could increase their appeal. The party needed a larger voting base if it ever intended to achieve its program. In order to obtain this, Socialist leaders stepped up their appeal directed at both farmers and laborers. In this effort, however, the Socialists continued to concentrate on the rural voters, and their ideology reflected rural needs and aspirations.



At this time, the nature of the national Socialist movement was an important factor in shaping the party's appeal in Oklahoma. The national leadership was no longer controlled by the "Left" as it had been during the early years of its existence. With new power, the non-revolutionary "Right" wing decided during this period to change the party's emphasis. The reform nature of the non-doctrinaire Socialists in Oklahoma approximated the position of the new national leadership. In fact, there were close ideological connections between the new organizers who were sent into Oklahoma and who worked themselves into positions of leadership in the state movement and leaders at the national level.

In the early years of development, the national Socialist party had divided into three basic factions -- the Right, Center, and Left. Soon, a coalition of the Center and the Left took control of the party as it constituted a majority of the movement's membership.<sup>1</sup> The Center-Left leadership, headed by Eugene V. Debs, devoted itself to winning elections at all governmental levels so that Socialism could be inaugurated after the working class had gained complete political power. The Left, with its concept of revolution, had subverted its wishes enough to join with

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<sup>1</sup>Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 106-107.

the great Center of the party led by Debs. This coalition, known as the "Impossibilists", felt that any other plan than complete control of government would bring about degeneration of the Socialist movement. But, opposed to this line of thinking, the Right led by Victor Berger held that Socialism would be achieved through gradual reform, rather than a complete take-over. This group believed that only partial control of government by the Socialists would ever exist and that in the near future certain reforms must be won in whatever manner possible.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most important areas of contention between the various factions was the lack of agreement on the farmers' place in the American class structure. The Right-wing Socialists believed that the party's only hope of success lay in winning the western farmers to their cause.<sup>3</sup> Their principal argument was simply that the western Socialist state movements, based on the farm vote, were growing more rapidly than any others in the nation. On the other hand, the Left-wing Socialists argued that, despite the farmers' importance, they would be won only by "Populist" reforms, such as the inflation of the currency and control of freight rates. In their way of thinking,

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<sup>2</sup>Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life (2 Vols., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 277.

<sup>3</sup>Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, pp. 217-218.

the farmers were property holders who would not embrace full-blown Socialism. Furthermore, victories won on the basis of a Socialist-Populist ideological alliance would cripple the Socialist party. In the last analysis the Left believed, the farmers could not be relied on as true revolutionaries.<sup>4</sup>

Only after the Right-wing element assumed more of a voice in national party affairs was there a concerted effort to attract the maximum farm vote. Berger was primarily responsible for sending several organizers, such as John Hagel, Otto Branstetter, and Oscar Ameringer, into Oklahoma to develop the Socialist party along the lines advocated by the Right-wing faction.<sup>5</sup> By 1908, these men from the Chicago and Milwaukee area had worked their way into the leadership of the Oklahoma party. John Hagel, one of the first to come into Oklahoma, worked without much success to bring the miners and the trade unionists into the Socialist movement.<sup>6</sup> Otto Branstetter, after a brief period at the University of Oklahoma where he attempted to organize the student body, also worked as a state organizer.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, A History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 23-25.

<sup>5</sup>Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, pp. 217-218.

<sup>6</sup>Labor Unit (Oklahoma City), November 21, 1906.

<sup>7</sup>Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), September 15, 1906; Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, the Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), p. 227.

By 1907, he was the state Secretary-Treasurer. Oscar Ameringer arrived in the state in 1907 as a speaker and rapidly rose to an important position within the party hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> The rapid rise of these men within the party was facilitated by two important factors. First, these organizers, sent in by the national party, had excellent credentials and were readily accepted by Oklahomans and allowed to assume places of leadership within the party structure. For example, Branstetter was elected to the party's most important position, Secretary-Treasurer, after being in the state for only about a year. Second, the older leadership was no longer the vital force that it had been earlier. Some important early Socialist figures, such as Thomas Smith, editor of the Oklahoma Socialist, party official, and candidate for office, had died. So there was acceptance and opportunity for such men as Hagel, Branstetter, and Ameringer, and they took advantage of the situation.<sup>9</sup>

In early 1908, Oklahoma had a higher percentage of Socialists in its total population than any other state in the Union. In 1907, the Oklahoma party had paid dues on an

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<sup>8</sup> Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, pp. 227-235; also note Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, p. 520; Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, p. 218; Shannon, Socialist Party of America, pp. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> Appeal to Reason, September 8, 1906.

average membership of 1,542.<sup>10</sup> But, during the month of January, 1908, Branstetter reported a membership of 3,000. By March, the Oklahoma party paid the highest dues in the nation, \$160, while Pennsylvania stood second among the states with a sum of \$159.<sup>11</sup> The Appeal to Reason, a national Socialist organ, credited Otto Branstetter with this exceptional growth in party membership. Much of his success can be accounted for by the more efficient methods of reporting membership, especially in former Indian Territory, and also to better means of organization in the field. Indeed, this exceptional development of party strength gave new hope to the Socialist leadership for the elections coming later in the year. Branstetter felt that the Socialist vote could be at least five to six times the number of card-carrying members.<sup>12</sup>

Several things, however, tended to confound the Socialist push for political power in the campaign of 1908. The most important of the obstacles faced by the party officials was the new primary election law of 1908. It provided that petitions containing one thousand signatures of qualified voters, properly sworn to, had to be filed by

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1908.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1908; ibid., April 18, 1908.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., October 10, 1908; Otto Branstetter, Socialist Vote in Oklahoma, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

minority parties on or before June 25, in order to qualify for participation in the primary elections. This was made more difficult by the fact that the state legislature adopted the primary law on May 28, and it was first published on June 12.<sup>13</sup> Despite little time, the Socialists under Branstetter's leadership made the deadline with petitions for the state and congressional tickets. Another problem arose when adverse reaction to Socialism manifested itself in the arrest of Oscar Ameringer in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in early July for selling a pamphlet entitled "Supressed Information," published by the Appeal to Reason.<sup>14</sup> Yet, even with the trouble that confronted them, optimism reigned as the Socialists made it clear that the party was, " . . . in the field not for the purpose of capturing this or that office, but . . . to capture the entire powers of government. . . . "<sup>15</sup>

In a brief platform, the Oklahoma Socialists took a noticeable leftist turn on basic issues compared to earlier statements, but still it contained demands for familiar Populist-type reforms. They called for more state ownership and management, " . . . for use and not for

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<sup>13</sup>Appeal to Reason, July 11, 1908.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., July 25, 1908.

<sup>15</sup>Branstetter, "Socialist Vote in Oklahoma," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

profit; use and occupancy the only title to land."<sup>16</sup> Platform demands included " . . . orderly transfer of banks and public utilities, natural resources and key industries to social ownership and democratic management."<sup>17</sup> New important planks referred to the need for public ownership of grain elevators and state financial assistance for those in need of credit. Greater emphasis was placed on universal suffrage, irrespective of sex and race, an issue which still disturbed large numbers of voters. With more emphasis on strictly Socialist rather than Populist measures, the party took on a somewhat different outlook in its search for a wider voting base.

During the territorial period, the Socialist membership had been drawn mainly from small farmers who owned their land or who were trying to become owners. They had small amounts of land and some equipment and did not want to lose them. But, after Oklahoma's entry into the Union in 1907, the new Socialist leadership began to seek the votes of the tenant farmers -- a rural proletariat -- to build Socialist strength.<sup>18</sup> Oscar Ameringer was one of those who became deeply interested in the tenant problem.

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<sup>16</sup>State Platform of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1908, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>John Spargo, "Sidelights on Contemporary Socialism" (pamphlet), National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

Their desperate condition made a deep impression on him. Looking back at his first speaking engagement among tenants during 1907, he recalled how impressed he was with both their condition and the fact that they were interested in Socialism noting:<sup>19</sup>

The meeting was in a one-room schoolhouse, unpainted on the outside, unceiled on the inside. I was late. The audience had already assembled and what an assemblage! All hands were soaking wet.

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All were wretchedly dressed: faded blue jeans for the men; faded Mother Hubbards and poke bonnets for the women. These had trudged in soaking rain, or come in open wagons or on horseback or muleback, to hear a socialist speech -- and they were farmers! This indescribable aggregation of moisture, steam, dirt, rags, unshaven men, slatternly women and fretting children were farmers!

While a few tenant farmers had apparently become interested in the Socialist movement earlier, Branstetter, Ameringer, and the other party leaders now began a concerted drive to enlist them in the political struggles of the coming years.<sup>20</sup>

The election of 1908 was an important one for the Oklahoma Socialists and particularly for its new leadership. But, again the party faced serious problems. The Socialists spoke in terms of the unity of the working classes, yet there was little actual evidence that farmers and laborers were willing to work together. The primary difficulty lay

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<sup>19</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, pp. 227-229.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 227; Oscar Ameringer, Socialism, What It Is and How to Get It (Milwaukee: Political Action Co., 1911), p. 32.



with the Trade Unionists in the state who were becoming increasingly opposed to the Socialist party. Going beyond its non-partisan policy, the Oklahoma Labor Unit noted that in this election year, " . . . the trade unionist is opposed to the whole Socialist partisan program. . . . "<sup>21</sup> This refusal to support the Socialist position, however, hurt the party's ideological position far more than it limited the party's voting strength; since the vast majority of the Socialist vote came from the rural areas, labor played an essentially unimportant role.<sup>22</sup>

The Socialists managed only light participation in the primary election; but since none of the offices were contested, it held little interest beyond the party membership. In this presidential election year, the most important positions aside from the President were those of United States Representative, for the Socialists ran no one for Senator.<sup>23</sup> Socialist campaigning during the summer was strenuous and a number of outside speakers toured through Oklahoma, including the Socialist Presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs.<sup>24</sup> One hundred and sixty-five meetings were

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<sup>21</sup>Oklahoma Labor Unit (Oklahoma City), October 16, 1908.

<sup>22</sup>Voting Abstracts, 1902-1906, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capital, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>23</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 127.

<sup>24</sup>Appeal to Reason, July 25, 1908; Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), July 21, 1908.

held in August alone to boost the Socialist candidates. At one meeting, a liberal estimate placed the crowd at Konawa in south central Oklahoma, at over ten thousand people, who heard speeches given by Frank O'Hare, W. T. Banks, both from Kansas and connected with the Appeal to Reason, and Oscar Ameringer. Also, printed material in large quantities was available for distribution.<sup>25</sup>

For the first time, the Oklahoman's were voting for the presidency as well as lesser offices. In this election, William Jennings Bryan with a vote of 122,363 captured the state's electoral votes against William Howard Taft's 110,474 and Eugene V. Debs' vote of 21,425. For Debs, even in defeat, his vote count was more than twice the Socialist vote in 1907.<sup>26</sup> However, the Congressional vote was more indicative of the relative Socialist strength in the state. The two strongest candidates ran in the Fourth and Fifth Congressional Districts, which were those in the southeast and southwest portions of the state.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Appeal to Reason, August 20, 1908; ibid., August 27, 1908; Branstetter, "Socialist Vote in Oklahoma," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Benson, et. al., Oklahoma Votes, 1907-1961 (Norman, Oklahoma: Bureau of Government Research, 1961), p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> W. B. Richards (Comp.), The Oklahoma Red Book, (2 Vols., Oklahoma City: n.p., 1912), II, pp. 299-301; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 127.

Milton C. Carter made the best effort of all the Socialist candidates, receiving 13.2 percent of the total vote in the Fourth Congressional District.<sup>28</sup> Importantly, J. Tad Cumbie, the "Gray Horse of the Prairies," had run well there in 1907 and new local leadership began to formulate itself around such men as Cumbie and Stanley J. Clark in this southern cotton-producing area.<sup>29</sup>

By comparison with earlier election patterns, the 1908 results showed little resemblance to those that had preceeded it. In District One, only two counties, Pawnee and Payne even produced a Socialist vote of over 8 percent. In District Two, there were six counties that had a Socialist vote over 8 percent. Among these, Dewey and Major county Socialists received over 16 percent of the total vote, which was a 5 percent gain over 1907. These two districts represented the old strongholds of Socialism.<sup>30</sup> It was in the southern half of the state where the major gains were made. There were four counties in the southern portion of District Three with a Socialist vote over 9 percent. Socialists in Seminole county won 17.6 percent of the ballots. In District Four, thirteen counties, or all but one county in the district had a Socialist vote of over 10 percent.

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<sup>28</sup>Richards (Comp.), Oklahoma Red Book, II, p. 300.

<sup>29</sup>Appeal to Reason, April 7, 1907; Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, p. 306.

<sup>30</sup>Benson, et. al., Oklahoma Votes, p. 62.

In three of these counties, Coal, Johnson, and Marshall, the Socialist balloting ranged from 23.4 to 24.5 percent of the total vote cast. Finally, in the Fifth District, thirteen counties ranged above 8.3 percent of the total.<sup>31</sup>

Two main generalizations may be made about the Socialist vote in 1908. First, the overwhelming majority of the Socialist strength again came from rural farm areas. Over 90 percent of the Socialist vote came from counties with little or no urban concentration and practically no wage earning class. The principal exceptions to this were found in Coal and Pontotoc counties; but even there, in studying the voting abstracts on the precinct level, 86.7 percent of the vote came from the strictly farm precincts.<sup>32</sup> Second, as usual, the Socialist vote came from outside the more prosperous farming areas. Indeed, if a map of the percent of land area in farms and average value of land per acre by counties were laid over a map of the Socialist voting strength, it would show that the highest Socialist voting percentages were completely outside the central corridor of counties with the highest concentration of land in farms and the highest average value per acre.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 277-353.

<sup>32</sup>Voting Abstract, 1908, State Election Board.

<sup>33</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, III, Population, VII, Agriculture, XI, Mines and Quarries, pp. 466-483; p. 350; p. 137; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 277-353.

In fact, the counties with the highest Socialist vote were broken into two distinct areas, the western counties and those in the southeastern portion of the state.<sup>34</sup> The economic profiles of the farms in each of these two sections was different, however. In the west, the farms were larger and the value of property was higher than in the southeast, but the number of farms with mortgage debt was also much higher. The southeastern counties, on the other hand, had a much higher tenancy rate.<sup>35</sup>

In these six counties, Coal, Johnston, Marshall, and Seminole, in the southeast, and Dewey and Major, in the west, the economic conditions were clearly evident. In the southeast there was an overall picture of people who had little or nothing. Most were tenants, working small farms on shares. In the west, the problems were different in nature. Facing high mortgage debt, home owners were struggling to hang onto their farms against high interest rates, foreclosures, and in many cases high property taxes. In comparison, the average value per farm was much higher in the west, with a figure of \$5,553, than in the southeast, where the average was only \$2,513.<sup>36</sup> There was also a vast difference in the tenancy rate. The average rate in the

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<sup>34</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, VII, Agriculture, p. 350.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 364-371.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

two western counties was 28.1 percent, while in the southeast the rate was almost triple that or 80.7 percent.<sup>37</sup> Finally, there was also a noticeable difference in the average percentage of farms under mortgage debt. In Dewey and Major counties, 50.1 percent of the farms reported mortgages as compared to Coal, Johnston, Marshall, and Seminole counties, where 35.2 percent of the farms were under mortgage.<sup>38</sup>

With the newly found voting strength in the southeast, came a group of local leaders. They were among the reformist "yellows," who sought the gradual adoption of the Co-operative Commonwealth. As was mentioned earlier, many of these men were associated with Victor Berger, the most important voice of the Right-wing reform element.<sup>39</sup> Although not as powerful as they would be in the second decade of the century, men such as Cumbie and Clark considered themselves much more radical than the "yellows." These local leaders from the southeast were "reds" of the Left or revolutionary portion of the party. In fact, Cumbie always wore a flaming red shirt at the party conventions to show what he stood for in terms of party doctrine.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 370-378.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 364-371.

<sup>39</sup>Shannon, Socialist Party of America, p. 36; the term "yellows" refers to the reform, compromise element within the Socialist Party as opposed to the "reds" or revolutionary wing.

<sup>40</sup>Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, p. 306.

Although conflict would grow between the two emerging elements of the Oklahoma party over ideology and speed of the Socialist take-over, the "yellows" under Ameringer and Branstetter maintained leadership from 1906 to 1913. Because of this, the agrarian radicalism of these reformers took precedence during these years. This leadership saw Socialist success as being achieved only through education of the exploited class and regular use of the electoral process. Moreover, ultimate victory was thought possible only when the two were used in conjunction. The constant conflict of the "red" or revolutionary and the "yellow" or non-revolutionary elements presented an anomalous situation which caused Ameringer, Branstetter, and other Socialist leaders great difficulty. For, although opposed to violent overthrow of the government, they held that revolution always stood as a last resort for the masses when they could not improve their condition by peaceful means.<sup>41</sup>

Ideologically, Oscar Ameringer, more than anyone else, was responsible for producing a theory and set of principles of agrarian Socialism that fitted the needs of the farm population in Oklahoma. Building on the strong blending of Populist-Socialist thought, he produced a number

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<sup>41</sup> Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 454; also see Harlow's Weekly, I (October 26, 1911), p. 19; "Political Action vs. Economic, Industrial or Direct Action," National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

of works on the subject and exerted strong influence through the various party papers.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Ameringer possibly became the single most important authority on agrarian Socialism in the Southwest, and is credited with being instrumental in building the strongest state movement in the nation.<sup>43</sup> In Ameringer's mind, the two forces of revolutionary and non-revolutionary action had a common strain. They represented opposite energies of one and the same course. Incorporating the teleological view of history, as Marx had, Ameringer believed that out of the present system: " . . . grows the needs of the cooperative commonwealth." He added that, "Socialism is not coming some day, it is coming now."<sup>44</sup>

The Socialist message found large audiences in the summer encampments of that year. The gatherings were well attended, with reported outpourings of from 1,500 to 5,000 people at a single encampment.<sup>45</sup> In August of 1909, Eugene V. Debs, who was extremely popular with the Oklahoma farmers, made a two-week speaking tour through the state,

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<sup>42</sup>Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, pp. 520, 572.

<sup>43</sup>Kipnis, American Socialist Movement, pp. 217-218.

<sup>44</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer (Oklahoma City), March 2, 1910 /Clipping/, Oscar W. Ameringer Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; also see Oscar Ameringer, Socialism What It Is and How to Get It (Milwaukee: Political Action Co., 1911), pp. 21-22.

<sup>45</sup>Appeal to Reason, September 8, 1909.



which climaxed at an encampment near Elk City.<sup>46</sup> Writing a few years later about this tour, Debs noted that:<sup>47</sup>

At every point the meetings were of the same character, varying only in the extent of the numbers in attendance. There was not a small meeting on the entire route. Without exception they were large and full of enthusiasm, and notwithstanding the heat and drought which had practically destroyed the greater part of the crops in the section. The heat was sufficient to prostrate anything except a Socialist demonstration. Any other kind of a political meeting would have been a flat failure. At several points the mercury went up to 117° in the shade and the papers reported no such record for heat had ever been known. But despite the fierce and withering rays of the sun and the hot winds that blew up from the tropics the crowds were there and for genuine Socialist ardor and enthusiasm they could not be excelled.

Among the other speakers attending were Ameringer and Patrick S. Nagel, a lawyer from Kingfisher who had recently turned away from the Democratic party to join the Socialist ranks.<sup>48</sup>

After a late summer and an early fall of successful encampments, the Socialists held their state convention in December of 1909 in Oklahoma City to prepare for the off-year elections of 1910. The Socialist vote in Oklahoma had already far outstripped that of the other Southwestern states. From the first recorded election .

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<sup>46</sup>Daily Oklahoman, August 4, 1909.

<sup>47</sup>Eugene V. Debs, "Revolutionary Encampments," National Rip-Saw, September, 1914.

<sup>48</sup>Elk City Record, August 11, 1909.

reporting Socialist strength in 1900 to the election of 1908, Oklahoma's Socialist vote increased from 796 to 21,779 as the party balloting in Texas, second in strength, rose only from 1,846 to 7,870 during the same period.<sup>49</sup> The figures were made more astounding by the fact that Texas by the end of the period had a population of 3,896,542, while Oklahoma's population numbered 1,657,155.<sup>50</sup>

Because of the rapidly growing Socialist vote in Oklahoma, the Democratic party viewed the situation with some alarm. A circular sent out by the Democratic State Central Committee in 1909 stated that: "The time is at hand when we must be up and doing if we are to maintain a Democratic state government. The Socialists are making inroads in our ranks, especially in the central and southern counties, it will take hard and persistent work to counter-act this enemy. . . ."<sup>51</sup> In a lengthy circular letter, again from the Democrat State Central Committee, G. A. Smith

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<sup>49</sup>"Socialist Votes in the States," National Office File, Socialist Party Papers. The comparative figures for the entire Southwest were as follows:

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1904</u>	<u>1908</u>
Arizona	----	1,204	1,912
New Mexico	----	162	1,056
Oklahoma	815	4,443	21,779
Texas	1,846	2,791	7,870

<sup>50</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, III, Population, pp. 461,770.

<sup>51</sup>As quoted in the Appeal to Reason, November 20, 1909.

noted that:<sup>52</sup>

While we have busily engaged in fighting the republican party in front we have been assailed by the Socialist party in the rear, and many of us, including myself, was [sic] inclined to minimize the danger of this attack and to excuse our lethargy [sic] in the matter by saying that Socialism would die out if we would let it alone. Facts do not appear to scar [sic] out this assumption. In 1907 the Socialist vote of the state was 9,423, in 1908 it was 21,134, an increase in the twelve months of 11,711, or more than 100 percent. During the past year the Socialists have conducted a persistent and aggressive campaign and have imported their best talent from other states. . . .

There is not the slightest doubt but what the republican slush fund has paid the expenses of many of the socialists attempts and has paid for tons of Socialist literature which has been spread broadcast throughout the democratic portions of the state.

Certainly, the Socialists were making their greatest gains in the Democratic portions of the state, but there was no evidence to show that the Republicans offered any aid to the Socialists. But the Democrats were genuinely concerned about the Socialist progress and intended to do something about it.

The Socialists had every intention of cutting further into the ranks of both parties. Their platform emphasized state ownership and control of land and industry, noting a number of ways to acquire both. It called for

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<sup>52</sup>G. A. Smith, "Socialist Effect on Democratic Party," (December 5, 1909) [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

state retention and enlargement of the public domain by retaining school and other public lands.<sup>53</sup> The party had achieved a measure of success in this area, for in 1908, the people of Oklahoma rejected an initiative petition to authorize the sale of school and other public lands at auction.<sup>54</sup> The Socialists desired further enlargement of the state holdings by purchase of arid and over-flow lands; the purchase of all lands sold for non-payment of taxes; the purchase of unallotted Indian lands; and by retention of leased lands after the expiration of the leases. The platform demanded that state factories be established for the manufacture of farm machinery, as well as state owned cement plants. Further, the state was to open coal mines and drill oil wells to provide fuel at cost. They also wanted free textbooks, equalization of taxes, and "unrestricted and equal suffrage for men and women."<sup>55</sup>

While much of the platform in 1909 dealt with land reform, the Socialists developed a "Farmers' Programme", which went far beyond anything proposed earlier. This document called for radical changes in the agrarian

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<sup>53</sup>"State Platform of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, Adopted December 28-30, 1909," Socialist Party Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

<sup>54</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 229.

<sup>55</sup>"State Platform of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1909," Socialist Party Platform Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

situation, revolving around two basic concepts of state-owned land.<sup>56</sup> First, the state was to encourage co-operative societies of farmers, not only for common purchasing and sale of farm produce, but also for the "working of land by groups."<sup>57</sup> In conjunction with this, the state was to create a Department of Agriculture under the direct control of the actual farmers; erect state-owned elevators and warehouses; offer free agricultural education; underwrite state insurance; and institute a graduated tax on the value of rented lands. Second, the program offered another means of working the land, which was closer to private ownership, but still based on the concept of state-owned land. It demanded that:<sup>58</sup>

Land now in the possession of the state or hereafter acquired through purchase, reclamation, tax sales to be rented to landless farmers under the supervision of the Board of Agriculture at the prevailing rate of share rent or its equivalent. The payment of such rent to cease as soon as the total amount of rent paid is equal to the value of the land and the tenant thereby acquires for himself and his children the right of tenancy. The title to all such lands remaining with the commonwealth.

Never before had the Socialist party in Oklahoma put forth such a radical program for the farm population.

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<sup>56</sup>"Farmers' Programme, 1909", Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.; also note Industrial Democrat, January 8, 1910; John Hagel, "Impressions Gathered at the State Convention," Oklahoma Pioneer, January 12, 1910.

Indeed, the Socialist party in Oklahoma had never seemed so restive. It was pushing more radical reforms directed toward evolving a program to alleviate the problems of the tenant farmers as well as the small land-owning agrarian population. Judging by the platform, the Socialists had given up, at least for the time being, attaining much labor support in the state. The new leadership offered by the organizers from the midwest began to impose a more radical posture within the agrarian Socialist framework. Yet, at the same time, a more revolutionary element within the party under the leadership of Oklahomans from the southern block of counties, began to seek answers of their own. The "Yellows" led by Branstetter and Ameringer had gained control of the party leadership in the years from 1907 to 1909, only to begin to feel the challenge of the "Reds", led by Stanley J. Clark and J. Tad Cumbie. Thereby, the Socialists were changing their relative position within the political structure of the state and within their own ranks as well.

## CHAPTER V

### YEAR OF DECISION, 1910

The men who met in the Socialist state convention in December of 1909 to decide the future activities of the party believed they shared the same point of view. Their confidence in the basic Socialist tenets, however, clouded the practical differences which had grown up among the various factions of the party. By 1910, only the main concepts of Socialism remained to link the various elements of the party. The faction led by Oscar Ameringer, Otto Branstetter, and John Hagel sought to align the Oklahoma Socialist movement with the reform element of the national party. Yet, at the same time, the newer agrarian Socialist leadership from the southeastern portion of the state, headed by such men as J. Tad Cumbie and Stanley J. Clark, sought a more radical course of action. The bonds of party membership proved to be strong enough to hold the factions together for the election year, but not without difficulty.

In their desperate struggle to gain a political wedge in the one-party system that had been established since statehood, the Oklahoma Socialists had made important

gains on the basis of their agrarian program. In 1910 this fact seemed to be truer than ever before as the Socialists sought to attract the discontented farmers with the special "Farm Programme," which was introduced late in 1909. It demanded massive state involvement in the agricultural economy in Oklahoma. The program advocated that the state encourage farm co-operatives and hold land for tenants as long as they worked the land. The Socialists also sought reform by creating a Department of Agriculture which was to be under the direct control of the farmers and by supplying a number of services, such as insurance, offered at cost.<sup>1</sup> By these measures the party leadership hoped to attract both landowners and farm tenants, thus strengthening the Socialist party's growing numbers. John Hagel, a professional organizer from Chicago argued that the answer to the farmers' problems could only be solved by voting the Socialist ticket, as it was the only party offering real reform to alleviate the economic problems that faced the farm population in the state. Most importantly, he noted that all the farmers had to vote for the Socialist program or none would receive it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Farm Programme," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>John Hagel, "Impressions Gathered at the State Convention," /typescript/, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.



Socialists were mainly concerned throughout 1910 with this question of their voting strength, although this was not the only matter of importance. Through the year, they dealt with such issues as the growing rate of tenancy, which entailed the struggle against "landlordism" and the elimination of rental abuses forced on the tenants. In this, the more radical element of the party carried the fight to improve conditions among the tenants further than ever before through the Renters' Union. Another issue was the restriction of suffrage, enforced through the "Grandfather Clause" legislation which was passed in 1910. Beyond this, the Socialists carried on small scale experiments in co-operative cotton farming as an example of the ability to work farms in groups and to raise money at the same time. But a most important problem underlay these economic questions -- a split in the party's leadership. Divisions within the party were reflected in the controversy between the Industrial Democrat and the Oklahoma Pioneer, both semi-official party organs published in Oklahoma City.

The question of the growing rate of tenancy had been a vital issue among the Socialists through their early years, but had received much greater emphasis after statehood. In 1910, the mounting problem presented the Socialists with one of the best possible issues on which to appeal for support of their radical program. Between 1900 and 1910, the number of farms operated by tenants in Oklahoma increased

from 43.8 percent to 54.8 percent, while the number of farms run by their owners decreased 10.8 percent.<sup>3</sup> The problem was most acute in the cotton producing area in the southeastern portion of the state that was once Indian Territory. In the fourteen counties of the Fourth Congressional District, which contained most of this area, there were only 6,973 land owners as compared to 22,703 tenants.<sup>4</sup> In other words, about three-quarters of the farms there were run by renters and sharecroppers. Thus, the concentration of land ownership became the central issue around which the Socialists attempted to create the idea of class and class conflict in the minds of tenants. Added to the landlord, the land speculator and the banker were made hated symbols to the poor and uneducated renters.<sup>5</sup>

As the Socialists emphasized the tenant problem, the leadership became more involved in the actual day to day abuses which they believed were perpetrated on the landless farmers and lent their support to the newly formed Oklahoma Renters' Union. The Union itself was not officially

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<sup>3</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, VII, Agriculture, p. 353.

<u>Percentage of Farms by Operator</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1910</u>
Owners	55.7	44.9
Managers	0.5	0.3
Tenants	43.8	54.8

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 364-379.

<sup>5</sup>"Landlordism in Oklahoma," /typescript/; Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

connected with the Socialist party, but Socialist leaders took part in its organization and tenants who voted the Socialist ticket were strongly urged to join the association.<sup>6</sup> The Oklahoma Pioneer stated emphatically that: "The great movement for the emancipation of the working class has its political and its economic arm; and both arms are of equal importance."<sup>7</sup> The principles of the Renters' Union were ill-defined, but it generally sought to aid the tenants in bargaining with the land owners. It emphasized the importance of organization. Naturally enough, the leaders of the movement in southeastern Oklahoma, where the tenancy rates were highest, argued that collective action was the only effective method to counteract high rents and the landowners' position of strength. As a spokesman of the Renters' Union stated: "The Renters' Union is not a political organization but a fighting body of landless men who are struggling to better their conditions on the economic field."<sup>8</sup>

As the Renters' Union took shape with Socialist support, the party prepared for the election campaign of 1910. The party platform was adopted by a referendum vote

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<sup>6</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer (Oklahoma City), February 2, 1910; Industrial Democrat (Oklahoma City), May 7, 1910.

<sup>7</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, January 12, 1910.

<sup>8</sup>Declaration of Principles of the Oklahoma Renters' Union, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

the membership, using the same language as that put forth by the State Convention in December of 1909. As in the past, the platform called for assumption of state control of land and industry offering everything in terms of the farmer and little specifically for labor. The platform demanded "the retention and constant enlargement of the public domain of the state. . . ." Beyond this, the party demanded that the state establish factories to provide its citizens with the machinery they required and other manufactured items such as cement and textbooks. Political reform was also demanded in terms of equalization of taxes and unrestricted suffrage in the state.<sup>9</sup>

The most controversial plank in the platform was that demanding unrestricted suffrage.<sup>10</sup> The reform leadership of Ameringer and Branstetter, which pushed this idea, met strong opposition within the party. Although the Negroes had voted Republican in the elections since statehood, some Socialists hoped to bring them into the party membership.<sup>11</sup> Ameringer, who opposed any kind of racial

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<sup>9</sup>"Oklahoma State Platform of 1910," Oklahoma Pioneer, August 10, 1910, Oscar W. Ameringer Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>10</sup>"How the Democratic Party in the House Endeavored to Fasten Peonage on the Renters of Oklahoma," Oklahoma Pioneer, March 16, 1910.

<sup>11</sup>Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), p. 280.

inequality, argued that in the capitalist system the degradation of the Negro constituted an integral part of the economy and was not a matter of race.<sup>12</sup> The principal opposition to Ameringer's position came from the southeastern portion of the state, locally known as "Little Dixie." In that area, the whites were in competition with the Negroes for tenant farms and the racial attitudes were typical of much of the southern United States of that time. The editor of the Industrial Democrat tried to placate those, especially in the southeast, who felt animosity toward the Negroes, when he wrote:<sup>13</sup>

Socialism does not teach nor assume that all men or all races are equal. The only equality sought by Socialists is an equality of opportunity to work and for each to get the full value of what he would produce. And this can be done without making one race of people associate with another race unless such association were mutually agreeable.

Later in the year, the same paper stated that there were three aspects to the race question:<sup>14</sup>

1. Socially the Negro can never expect to reach a position of equality with the whites.
2. The more the Negroes advance in education, thrift, and the acquisition of property, and self-respect, which all are agreed they should be encouraged to do, the more natural and inevitable it is they should demand their rights.
3. Should the time come when they are brought into active competition with white labor, they

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<sup>12</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, August 27, 1910.

<sup>13</sup>Industrial Democrat, March 12, 1910.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1910.

would undoubtedly go to the wall and be forced out of all lines of employment except that of day laborers.

It was clear that racist thought existed in the Oklahoma party, but by no means was this the sole attitude of the movement, or the official one. This pattern of calling for political and economic equality without social equality was the local Socialists' attempt to make the Negro question more acceptable to the "lily-white" faction of the Socialists in Oklahoma. In doing so, the local leadership from the area around Sulphur came into direct conflict with the leadership offered by Ameringer and Branstetter. The whole issue was forced into the open in the fight over the "Grandfather Clause" later in the year. Not only was the issue of the Negro question continued in this campaign year, but the larger issue of leadership within the party itself came to the surface by the end of the year.<sup>15</sup>

A much more popular issue was women's suffrage. There was no observable disagreement among the Socialists on this point. In fact, it was felt to be only sensible to ride the momentum of this movement already generated by

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., February 26, 1910; for a view of the national party's position see "The Poll Tax Evil," and "Race Question," National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers; also note E. F. Andrews, "Socialism and the Negro," Internationalist Socialist Review, V (March, 1905), pp. 524-526.

the feminists. By January of 1910, the women had succeeded in obtaining 38,949 signatures for their petition to initiate a proposed equal voting amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution.<sup>16</sup> Although the movement failed at this time the Socialists were able to take a positive stand with a large body of the population and possibly gained voters as a result of their support for the women's suffrage issue.<sup>17</sup>

Although the Socialists were gaining more voters than ever before in their short history, and had a larger, more powerful organization, there was still a serious lack of money. In 1910, however, a new and imaginative scheme of fund raising which entailed the production of cotton was put forth. More importantly, it was the implementation of one of the central tenets of agrarian socialism -- co-operative farming. It began with a Socialist local in Healdton, Oklahoma, where the members rented twenty acres of cotton land. By setting aside certain days for cultivation and harvesting, the members of the local and their families met, carried out the work, and made the gathering into a social, as well as an economic function.<sup>18</sup> Giving an immediacy to

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<sup>16</sup>Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), January 22, 1910; "Suffrage and Justice for Women," speech by Patrick Nagle, February 12, 1910 [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

<sup>17</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, February 16, 1910; ibid., June 12, 1910; Oklahoma Labor Unit (Oklahoma City), February 26, 1910; Industrial Democrat, February 26, 1910.

<sup>18</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, February 16, 1910; Caroline A. Lowe, "More Cotton for Socialism," [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

Socialism that the farmers had not experienced before, the plan spread with amazing rapidity and to a limited scale generated funds which would not have been available otherwise for the election campaign.<sup>19</sup>

The pleas from the central office in Oklahoma City for campaign funds were incessant throughout the year. Money to finance an expanded propaganda campaign continued to be urgently needed as the party sought to extend its activities. Beyond the idea of the co-operative cotton patches and the regular campaign contributions, the party leadership used several other methods to raise funds. J. Tad Cumbie, Socialist candidate for governor, moved that the state office start a "relief corps" to provide extra money.<sup>20</sup> This consisted of individual contributions during the campaign, each of which were published in "relief corps" column in the Socialist papers. The party also stepped up the campaign to sell subscriptions for the Appeal to Reason, from which it received a portion of the subscription money.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the situation became so pressing that a mandatory apportionment for needed funds was made by the Central

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<sup>19</sup>"Cotton for Socialism," Oklahoma Pioneer, April 6, 1910.

<sup>20</sup>J. T. Cumbie to the Socialists of Oklahoma, Ada, Oklahoma, February 22, 1910, in the Oklahoma Pioneer, March 2, 1910.

<sup>21</sup>Central Committee Office Notes, March, 1910, /typescript/, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.



Committee in each county.<sup>22</sup>

In all areas of the state the Socialists were doing everything possible to increase their political influence. One of the main issues was a "fight for political liberty as well as a fight to overthrow capitalism."<sup>23</sup> As stated in the platform and elsewhere, the Socialist leadership was opposed to the so-called "Grandfather Clause" which was to be decided upon in the primary elections. This was considered to be a matter of vital interest by the Ameringer faction of the party, for by eliminating much of the Negro vote, it would limit potential party voting strength.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, this seemed to be just the first step to restrict suffrage, for the party leadership believed that, "the next legislature will pass a poll-tax qualification that will strike at the suffrage of thousands of white voters and won't have the negro [sic] vote to help defend it."<sup>25</sup> Yet, as was noted earlier in the year, the Socialists could not keep a united front on this issue. Many of the farmers voting the Socialist ticket were imbued with traditional southern racial attitudes which made it difficult for the

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<sup>22</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, July 13, 1910.

<sup>23</sup>Industrial Democrat, April 16, 1910.

<sup>24</sup>Appeal to Reason, July 23, 1910.

<sup>25</sup>"Vote in the Primaries," Oklahoma Socialist, July 20, 1910.

Socialists to win much support on this question.<sup>26</sup>

The issue of restricting Negro voting was settled in the August primaries, with the adoption of the "Grandfather Clause." The initiative proposal passed by a vote of 135,443 to 106,222, as even the Socialists could not muster all of their following to oppose the measure.<sup>27</sup> The outcome, however, stimulated the more radical elements in the party to the point that they attacked the Democratic party for election fraud. A spokesman for this segment of the party, Stanley J. Clark, wrote shortly after the primary, that when there were attempts such as this to "rob the people of the ballot there remains no other course open to them to restore their rights, but organized, determined physical force, and further attempts of these election thugs to nullify the will of the people may result in something worse for them even than the penitentiary. Let the people rule."<sup>28</sup> This statement, in fact, represented a departure from the more reform-minded ideology of the party in the territorial period. Clark clearly represented the "red" element of the Socialist leadership,

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<sup>26</sup>Industrial Democrat, April 16, 1910; Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, pp. 279-280.

<sup>27</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 230.

<sup>28</sup>Stanley J. Clark, "The Ballot Boxes Were Stuffed," Oklahoma Pioneer, August 27, 1910.

which was based in former Indian Territory and connected with the tenants rather than the small landholding farmers. The outcome of this initiative vote clearly stimulated greater radicalism within the party.

The primaries also finalized the Socialist nominations for political office. The process had begun earlier in the spring when the central committee nominated candidates and these in turn were offered to the party membership in a referendum. The primary elections in August actually only endorsed what had already been decided as there was only one candidate for each office on the ballot.<sup>29</sup> The Socialists nominated a full slate of candidates for office, headed by J. Tad Cumbie, the nominee for governor.<sup>30</sup> The Socialist primary vote totaled only about 13,000. It proved difficult to hold votes when many people who were inclined toward the Socialists felt they were wasting their ballot when they voted the party ticket. H. M. Sinclair, Socialist leader from McAlester, said, " . . . several Socialists in his precinct refused to vote while others took Democratic or Republican ballots to vote against the Grandfather Clause."<sup>31</sup> In the Oklahoma State Capital, a similar attitude was described,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>W. B. Richards (Comp.), The Oklahoma Red Book (2 Vols., Oklahoma City: n.p., 1912), II, pp. 278-280.

<sup>31</sup>Industrial Democrat, August 6, 1910.

for when it appeared that there were not enough votes among the Socialists to win, many believed the only way to rid themselves of the Democratic corruption was by joining the Republican party.<sup>32</sup> The Socialists were also hurt by the fact that neither the Farmer's Union nor the State Federation of Labor would abandon their non-partisan positions, although they did endorse individual candidates primarily from the Democratic party.<sup>33</sup> There was added difficulty with the Labor Unions in that they demanded the "immediate sale of all state lands," which was in complete opposition to the Socialist land program.<sup>34</sup>

Despite discouragements, the Socialists campaigned hard. Their encampments were more popular than ever before and a large number of them were held throughout the summer. Approved Socialist speakers traveled from one meeting to another. Among those endorsed by the State Executive Committee were Oscar Ameringer, J. T. Cumbie, Wood Hubbard, and Stanley J. Clark, who represented all segments of the party. These men worked by arrangement

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<sup>32</sup>Oklahoma State Capital /Guthrie/, August 28, 1910.

<sup>33</sup>O. F. Branstetter, State Office Notes, Oklahoma State Historical Society, Historical Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Official Year Book and Proceedings of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, 1910 /Microfilm/, p. 119, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; also see Daily Oklahoman, August 15, 1910.

<sup>34</sup>Official Year Book and Proceedings of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, 1910, p. 155; also see Oklahoma Pioneer, September 3, 1910; Industrial Democrat, August 27, 1910.

through the Oklahoma City office. Although others such as "Pap" Davis arranged their own schedules, the Central Committee warned against these unendorsed speakers.<sup>35</sup> The encampments themselves ranged over the state from Anadarko to Sulphur to Sapulpa.<sup>36</sup> Just as important was the support of many of the rural ministers. The Reverend J. W. Hull, of the Christian Church at Fairview, was quoted as saying that he had "been in sympathy and worked for Socialism for four years."<sup>37</sup> Another effective speaker was the Reverend Charles Steizle, who spoke on many occasions on the "Truth About Land Monopoly."<sup>38</sup>

Most important of the Christian representatives speaking for Socialism was Thomas W. Woodrow of the Universalist Church. Woodrow was a Socialist before he came to Hobart, Oklahoma, from Texas about 1909. Beginning with the basic assumption that "the ethics of Socialism and the ethics of Christianity are identical," he spoke and wrote fervently for Socialism.<sup>39</sup> The main theme that Woodrow

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<sup>35</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, April 27, 1910; Industrial Democrat, April 20, 1910; Appeal to Reason, August 13, 1910.

<sup>36</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, July 13, 1910; Appeal to Reason, September 24, 1910.

<sup>37</sup>Industrial Democrat, May 7, 1910.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1910.

<sup>39</sup>T. W. Woodrow, "Social-Democracy and Primitive Christianity," Thomas W. Woodrow Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

kept reiterating was that the Socialists were making a serious mistake by ". . . harping exclusively on the political side of the revolution, insisting on votes only as the means of industrial emancipation, ignoring and sometimes opposing . . . uniting and co-operating in the industrial field where they must unite to consummate the revolution."<sup>40</sup>

He also declared that one of his major pursuits was to break down the "concepts of 'orthodox' theology which are opposed to the spirit and ethics of social-democracy."<sup>41</sup>

Woodrow's Christian-Socialism stood on what he considered well-defined principles. First, he believed in every man's and woman's right to work. Following this, he spoke of the right of everyone to "exercise political power by elective franchise, and the right of the workers to rule."<sup>42</sup> He even went so far as to make liberal interpretation of the Bible to support this position, quoting from the seventh chapter of Daniel: "Only 'Servants of our God' -- the only 'Saints of the Most high' to whom 'judgment (franchise) is given' by which they will 'possess the kingdom (government)' and 'reign on the earth'."<sup>43</sup> In a very

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<sup>40</sup>T. W. Woodrow, "Socialism and Religion," Industrial Democrat, February 19, 1910.

<sup>41</sup>Scrapbook, Woodrow Collection.

<sup>42</sup>"Socialist Religious Journal," Woodrow Collection.

<sup>43</sup>T. W. Woodrow, "Vote Your Class," Scrapbook, Woodrow Collection; apparently Woodrow made reference to Chapter 7, Verse 18 of Daniel, which in the Oxford Annotated Bible is translated: "But the saints of the Most High shall

strained manner he, like a number of others, tried to couple divine providence with historical materialism to win support from the rural population who followed the rationalization of this man's mind.

The campaign of 1910, for the Socialists, in many ways centered around one of the party's most forceful figures, J. Tad Cumbie, the "Gray Horse of the Prairies." He had been a figure of growing stature within the party ranks since statehood because his base of strength rested in southeastern Oklahoma. Cumbie was an energetic radical, who reportedly "set the old party politicians to quaking with terror."<sup>44</sup> Speaking daily throughout the year, he and others such as Stanley J. Clark and J. N. Gilmore, the Socialist candidate for United States Representative from the Fourth District, attempted to make themselves heard in every community throughout the southern portion of the state. By late summer and early fall when the encampment season was in full swing, large numbers of people came to hear the Socialist, sometimes reportedly driving 100 miles to attend.<sup>45</sup> His oratory was fiery; he cried:<sup>46</sup>

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receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever and ever." Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (Revised Standard Version, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 1079.

<sup>44</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, July 13, 1910.

<sup>45</sup>Appeal to Reason, August 13, 1910.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., September 24, 1910.

The time for action has come. We are now in the campaign of 1910. Our comrades in every state and nation have their eyes on Oklahoma. Our enemies, the capitalists and their henchmen, are leaving no stone upturned to stop the onward, rushing, rising tide of Socialism.

We must get our forces organized. The working class must get itself into a solidarity at the ballot box, as capitalism was [sic] forced it into a solidarity of wage slaves.

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Everything points our way. All roads lead to Socialism. Let us go up and posses [sic] the land.

Although the situation varied throughout the state, much the same thing was heard in almost every community as Cumbie and the others put on their best organized election campaign.

In the election Lee Cruce, the Democratic nominee, won over the Republican, Leslie Ross of Lawton, by a vote of 120,218 to 99,527. But even with more effective canvassing of the state by Socialist candidates and speakers, the election disappointed party leaders. The Socialist vote increased, but not enough to elect any candidate to state office. Cumbie ran ahead of the rest of the Socialist slate, polling 24,707 votes, or 10 percent of the overall balloting.<sup>47</sup> For the first time in the race for governor, the Socialist candidate placed second in the voting in three counties, Beckham in the west and Marshall and Murray in the South. Six counties in the state had a

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<sup>47</sup>Richards (Comp.), Oklahoma Red Book, II, p. 278.



Socialist vote of over 20.5 percent.<sup>48</sup> These included Beckham and Dewey in the West and Choctaw, Marshall, Murray, and Stephens in the South.<sup>49</sup>

The Congressional vote indicated the areas of relative Socialist strength much more accurately than the governor's race. The largest Socialist vote and the highest percentages, following the pattern of 1908, continued to be in the southern and western portions of the state. J. N. Gilmore, Socialist candidate in the southeastern Fourth District, won 5,534 votes or 14.0 percent of the total. In the southwestern Fifth District, H. H. Stallard received 6,539 votes or 13.4 percent of the total vote cast.<sup>50</sup> But former State Secretary G. M. Snyder could gain only 5.8 percent of the vote in the Third District in the northeastern portion of the state, with its important lead mining area. H. I. Bryant won the highest percentage vote outside the southern portions of the state in the northwest counties of the Second District. The original stronghold of Socialism in the First District of the north central counties gave W. L. Reynolds only 6.1 percent of the vote.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 281-288.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 297-298; Oliver Benson, et. al., Oklahoma Votes, 1907-1961 (Norman, Oklahoma: Bureau of Government Research, 1961), p. 142.

<sup>51</sup>Richards (Comp.), Oklahoma Red Book, II, pp. 281-288.

In 1910, the Socialist candidates for Congress ran far better in the southern districts than in any other portion of the state.

Although no election can be explained entirely by demographic data, certain patterns did arise in areas with the highest concentrations of selected types of voters. The most important of these groups, outside the small land-holding farmers who lived throughout the state, were the tenants, the Negroes, and the miners of the coal producing area. First, the tenants were an important element in the Socialist voting base. There was a relatively high correlation between high rates of tenancy and high percentage of Socialist vote in the counties in the lower Canadian and Red River Valleys.<sup>52</sup> In the counties with a Socialist vote of over 20.0 percent in this area, the rate of tenancy ranged between 66.4 percent and 82.7 percent.<sup>53</sup> Yet, this high correlation between tenancy and Socialist voting only holds true in the one-crop cotton producing area in the southern portion of the state.<sup>54</sup> This does not explain the large Socialist voting percentages in western Oklahoma. Tenancy was by no means the problem in the West that it

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<sup>52</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, VII, Agriculture, pp. 372-379; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 277-353.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

was in the Southeast. In this section of the state, there seemed to be a correlation between the number of mortgaged farms and the Socialist voting percentage. In the five western counties with the highest Socialist vote, Beckham, Dewey, Greer, Major, and Roger Mills, the percentage of farms with mortgage debt were the highest in the state, ranging from 40.8 percent to 55.3 percent.<sup>55</sup>

The Negro voting pattern in Oklahoma during this period is much more difficult to discern before the passage of the "Grandfather Clause." Blacks were concentrated in McIntosh, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, and Wagoner counties in the east central portion of the state, and Logan county in the central section.<sup>56</sup> When these counties are compared with others in terms of Socialist voting percentages and large Negro population, there is little or no correlation between the two factors. The one possible exception was in Okfuskee county of the old Creek Nation where 40.4 percent of the population was Negro and the Socialist voting percentage was 16.4 in 1910.<sup>57</sup> But no real pattern emerged as the Socialist vote in these counties ranged from 2.8 percent in Muskogee, with Negroes

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, III, Population, pp. 466-479.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 277-353.

accounting for 31.2 percent of the population, to the 16.4 percent of the vote in Okfuskee county.<sup>58</sup>

There was even less correlation between the labor vote and the Socialist strength. Again there was an exception in the coal producing areas of Coal and Pittsburg counties in the southeast. In Coal county, the Socialist vote accounted for 17.3 percent of the total, while in Pittsburg the figure was 10.5 percent.<sup>59</sup> But even in these counties, the principal Socialist voting strength came from the rural precincts and not from the mining communities. Certainly, miners did vote the Socialist ticket, but they were by no means as important as the farm population.<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere in the state, the labor vote was even weaker. There was practically no Socialist vote in the lead mining district in the northeastern portion of the state. Moreover, the trade unions supported Democratic candidates rather than Socialists as there was little within the Socialist platform that was designed for labor in 1910. The main strength of the Socialist party came from the white farm population which had little or no land.

The Socialist strength in this election was found primarily in two distinct areas. The most important of

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Voting Abstract, 1910, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

these was the southern portion of the state along the Red River. The second was found in the western portion of the state near the Texas panhandle.<sup>61</sup> Following the example of earlier elections, the Socialist voting pattern was distinct enough to show that the party's areas of strength were outside the areas of better farm land. In fact, the two Socialist areas lay on either side of the land which sold on the average for more than \$25 an acre.<sup>62</sup> The average value of farm land in the state was \$22.49 per acre. Every county with a Socialist vote above 14 percent had an average per acre valuation below the state average. The six counties with the highest percentage were Beckham, \$18.28; Choctaw, \$17.04; Dewey, \$13.82; Marshall, \$16.84; Murray, \$15.86; and Stephens, \$20.46.<sup>63</sup> The most valuable lands were not the main centers of Socialist strength; rather, the agrarian radicals tended to be in the lower priced, poorer lands.

The Socialists were undoubtedly weakened in 1910, not only by their lack of appeal beyond the agrarian ranks, but also by internal dissension. This issue came into the open in the struggle between the two new Socialist newspapers

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<sup>61</sup>Richards (Comp.), Oklahoma Red Book, II, pp. 281-288.

<sup>62</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, VII, Agriculture, p. 350.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

which had begun publication in Oklahoma City in 1910.

The state organization had been without a newspaper since the demise of the Oklahoma Socialist in 1906. But in January of 1910, the Industrial Democrat began publication under the editorship of Marvin L. Brown, formerly of the Appeal to Reason staff in Kansas. In the first issue of the Socialist weekly, it announced that it stood for "Humanity's Advancement."<sup>64</sup> As such, it was intended to be the Southwest's major Socialist propaganda organ.<sup>65</sup>

Trouble arose when there was to be a change in the editorship of the paper. Oscar Ameringer, although scheduled to take over as editor, was refused that position because of difficulties that arose between him and C. H. Armstrong, the president of the Industrial Democrat.<sup>66</sup> This struggle between Ameringer and his followers, and the Brown-Armstrong faction, supported by the native Oklahoma Socialists, broke into the open in May, 1910, but was kept from the public eye through the election campaign. As a result, the Ameringer faction started its own paper, the Oklahoma Pioneer, to "preserve and safe-guard the basic

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<sup>64</sup>Appeal to Reason, April 16, 1910; Industrial Democrat, January 1, 1910.

<sup>65</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 228.

<sup>66</sup>Minutes of the State Executive Meeting, April 3-4, 1910 [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

principles of Socialism in Oklahoma."<sup>67</sup> From the beginning the Pioneer, edited by Ameringer, spoke out against the Industrial Democrat as not properly representing the Socialist cause. Reacting to this, Brown launched an attack on the leadership of the party provided by Ameringer, Otto Branstetter, and John Hagel, representing them as the "silk stocking contingent," of the Socialist party in Oklahoma.<sup>68</sup>

Ameringer and his supporters carried on an all out attack on the Brown faction. In a campaign to discredit the Industrial Democrat, the Pioneer carried a front page facsimile of an Industrial Democrat subscription card which the editorship thought, or pretended to think, had been counter-signed by Henry Asp. Asp was a leader in the Republican party and had been an attorney for the Santa Fe Railroad.<sup>69</sup> The Ameringer forces eventually prevailed

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<sup>67</sup>Industrial Democrat, May 7, 1910; Oklahoma Pioneer, September 3, 1910.

<sup>68</sup>Exceptions to the Findings," /typescript7, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection; Industrial Democrat, December 12, 1910.

<sup>69</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, November 17, 1910; there is some confusion as to the origins of the Industrial Democrat. Although the contemporary papers repeatedly spoke of C. H. Armstrong as owner and Marvin Brown as editor, Oscar Ameringer stated in his autobiography that: "... I started the Industrial Democrat." Even further, John Chamberlain in his book Farewell to Reform credited Ameringer with inventing the term, "Industrial Democracy;" see Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 278; John Chamberlain, Farewell to Reform, The Rise, Life, and Decay of the Progressive Mind in America (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), p. 321.

and at the next state Executive Committee meeting, the Pioneer was accepted as the official organ of the party in Oklahoma. This meant that the Ameringer-Branstetter-Hagel faction gained control of the party's central leadership, as well as the party's official newspaper.<sup>70</sup> Although this ended the open objection for the next few years, the struggle was indicative of a much more fundamental split in the party. The radicals from the southeastern portion of the state were growing in strength and would again challenge the "reform" faction for power. All of this tended to weaken the party, as one group became more alienated from the other.

So 1910 proved to be a most important turning point for the Socialists in Oklahoma. Although the relative prosperity of the period began to reach some farm elements, especially in the north central wheat belt, the Socialists continued to make important gains in the southeast and southwest portions of the state. This took place in the face of failing membership in the once powerful Farmers' Union.<sup>71</sup> Thus, until the end of the First World War, the Socialist party was the principal voice of agrarian discontent in Oklahoma.

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<sup>70</sup>Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 218.

<sup>71</sup>Federal Writer's Project, Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1940), pp. 60-61.



## CHAPTER VI

### SOCIALIST PARTY BATTLES 1911-1913

As the Socialist party gained stability in the state, it developed a set of immediate demands as well as long term goals. In Oklahoma, a comprehensive state program was designed to provide a pattern for continued expansion and growth. This was presented by an increasing number of party-affiliated newspapers which attempted to persuade the public that the party was not truly revolutionary. In all of this, however, the party structure or chain of command was becoming extremely difficult to follow. Originally, the Socialist party in the state was merely a conglomerate of locals without decisive leadership, but with statehood and the coming of the Ameringer-Branstetter faction to power, the situation began to change dramatically. Confusing the emerging pattern was the local element, which resented the so-called outside leadership.

The increased strength of the party and the contest for power within the party structure are both best exemplified in the rapid growth of party newspapers during the period. These organs spread the Socialist ideology and, at

the same time voiced the discord which led to an open break after 1911. The Socialists had suffered a disadvantage through the first decade of the party's existence for lack of a party newspaper other than the Oklahoma Socialist. This paper had gone out of existence in 1906, and until 1910 the Socialists had no official organ in the state. There was only one short-lived exception, the Cleveland County Socialist, which was published for seventeen weeks in the summer and fall of 1902.<sup>1</sup> The Socialists did try to carry on a campaign in such papers as the Elk City Democrat and the Labor Signal, the official paper of the Central Trades and Labor Assembly, but with little success. It was not until 1910, when both the Industrial Democrat and the Oklahoma Pioneer came into existence that the Socialists again had a voice of their own.<sup>2</sup>

Besides these two papers, there were many Socialist papers that had an unsteady existence. Probably the most important one published outside of Oklahoma City was the New Century. It was established in Sulphur, Oklahoma, in the southern portion of the state. The paper began publication

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<sup>1</sup>Oklahoma Socialist (Newkirk), August 28, 1902; the Cleveland County Socialist failed primarily because its mail privileges were denied, causing the Norman Democratic-Topic to declare: "The men behind the Socialist movement are farmers of good standing and were having the paper published in good faith," Norman Democratic-Topic, May 29, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), April 16, 1910.

under the editorship of Stanley J. Clark in January of 1911, with the banner: "Not mad, but desperately in earnest."<sup>3</sup> By September of 1912, it was in dire financial trouble and J. Tad Cumbie pleaded on several occasions for additional funds to keep it going. It claimed more than three thousand subscribers by October of 1912. In 1913 it merged with a new Socialist organ in Oklahoma City, the Social Democrat.<sup>4</sup> The Social Democrat replaced the Industrial Democrat, which had failed after the clash with the Oklahoma Pioneer, edited by Oscar Ameringer. In fact, those who opposed the Ameringer-Branstetter faction of the party combined to publish several papers to attack their leadership. Leaders among the dissident group included J. Tad Cumbie, Stanley J. Clark, as well as C. H. Armstrong, who edited the Industrial Democrat and later the Social Democrat, after its merger with the New Century.<sup>5</sup> The various newspapers thus became not only voices of the party, but tools for the warring factions within the party in Oklahoma.

There were also several county Socialist newspapers, which were not so much a part of the struggle for power in

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<sup>3</sup>New Century (Sulphur), January 6, 1911.

<sup>4</sup>Social Democrat (Oklahoma City), February 5, 1913.

<sup>5</sup>New Century, November 22, 1912; Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), p. 320.

Oklahoma. Generally, these were not as radical as the state and regional papers. Two examples, the Johnston County Socialist and the Ellis County Socialist, serve nicely to show what these publications were like. The Johnston County Socialist, which was established at Tishomingo in the southern portion of the state, began publication in September of 1910. It was less militantly Socialist than other papers in the area, such as the New Century, and carried general news and numerous advertisements in its eight pages.<sup>6</sup> The Ellis County Socialist began publication in 1914 in Shattuck, located in the western part of the state. Although it was not as militant as the state papers, it was more so than the Johnston County Socialist. The Ellis County paper carried local news, advertising and printed county material, including commissioners' proceedings. It even included the International Sunday School lesson.<sup>7</sup> All the local Socialist papers followed much the same pattern, running on a small budget of about \$25 a week and constantly facing financial difficulty. As a result, most of these publications lasted only a short time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Johnston County Socialist (Tishomingo), October 13, 1911; ibid., December 15, 1911.

<sup>7</sup> Ellis County Socialist (Shattuck), July 15, 1915.

<sup>8</sup> State Office Notes, October 14, 1911 [typescript], Socialist Party Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; other Socialist journals included: Agitator (Sayre), 1913-1914; Beckham

As the increasing numbers of Socialist newspapers added a new sense of unity to the party membership, the Socialist central leadership undertook internal reform of the party structure to create a more responsive political organization. After their success in the newspaper struggle of 1910, the Ameringer-Branstetter faction sought to further entrench themselves and prepare for the presidential election of 1912.<sup>9</sup> This included improving the means of communication within the party structure and continuing its attempt to inform the public through its newspapers.

Socialists labored throughout 1912 for their candidate. This was unlike the other parties which were active only through the intensive campaign period which immediately preceded an election. Much of this Socialist activity continued to center around the encampments which were held throughout the state. Eugene V. Debs again visited Oklahoma and spoke to large crowds at Muskogee and McAlester in the southeastern part of the state. There he

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County Advocate, (Carter), 1913; Clark's Buzz-Saw (Sulphur), 1911-1913; Constructive Socialist (Alva), 1911-1913; Grant County Socialist (Medford), 1912-1913; Otter Valley Socialist (n.p.), 1913; Social-Democrat (Ardmore), 1912; Sayre Social Democrat, 1912; Musings of the Old Kuss (Sayre), 1915; Socialist Antidote (Granite), 1916-1917; Sword of Truth (Sentinel), 1913-1914; Oklahoma Farmer and Laborer (Sapulpa), 1911-1915.

<sup>9</sup> Appeal to Reason, March 25, 1911; also see R. E. Hoxie, "The Rising Tide of Socialism," Journal of Political Economy (October, 1911), pp. 609-631.

told the audiences emphatically that their only hope was the Socialist party and that "the farmers and laborers could not hope for relief from the two other parties."<sup>10</sup> Campaigning in the old Indian Territory tended to be most active throughout the year with a great number of meetings being held in and around Sulphur.<sup>11</sup> In the western portion of the state, encampments, held in conjunction with rodeos and other entertainment, took place under the "stars and stripes and the red flag of international socialism."<sup>12</sup> Through their activity, the Socialists reached new sympathizers and, according to one report, one hundred and thirty new locals were added throughout the state in 1911.<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of 1912, the Socialist party was in a stronger position in Oklahoma than ever before. In 1910, the Socialist candidate for governor had received 24,707 votes, while the party claimed only 1,700 members. But, with the increase in party membership during 1911 to some 6,500 members, the party leadership fully expected a stronger vote in the next presidential contest. Leaders believed that Socialists would pull at least ten votes for

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<sup>10</sup>Muskogee Times-Democrat, September 14, 1911; New Century, February 10, 1911; Appeal to Reason, January 14, 1911; ibid., January 28, 1911.

<sup>11</sup>New Century, May 31, 1911; Blanchard Record, August 11, 1911; Johnson County Socialist, November 3, 1911.

<sup>12</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, October 14, 1911.

<sup>13</sup>Appeal to Reason, January 13, 1912.

each member of the party in the 1912 election.<sup>14</sup>

Simultaneously, the National party began to pay more attention to agrarian needs and put forth a "Farmers' Program," which helped to strengthen the Oklahoma Socialists' position. The Program demanded state ownership of all industry and transportation facilities connected with agriculture, that "actual use and occupancy shall be the only title to land; retention of national and state owned lands; co-operatives; and insurance provided by government."<sup>15</sup> The appeal to farmers outlined by the national party was very similar to that put forth in Oklahoma, except in the matter of state lands. This article demanded that the land be held by the state and collectively operated. A. M. Simons elaborated on this plank by stating that the time had come:<sup>16</sup>

For the beginning of socially-operated farms; these farms would be sufficiently large to use the most improved machinery; they would be officered and directed by socially-trained graduates of our agricultural educational institutions and their wealth would all go to those who produced it and worked upon the farm.

He added that until such time as this program could be implemented, the Socialist party would try to get "a series

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<sup>14</sup>Harlow's Weekly, I (August 31, 1912), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>"Proposed Farmers' Program, Adopted by the Socialist Party, 1912" /typescript/, Labor File--Farmers, Socialist Party of America Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

of measures especially designed to afford relief to the great class of workers on the farm."<sup>17</sup> Oklahoma Socialists never responded to this national party plank, but continued to advocate the individual tenant-hold they put forth originally in the 1910 "Farm Programme."<sup>18</sup>

Much of the Oklahoma Socialist platform remained the same as in 1910. The main planks still demanded "state ownership and control of industries and means of transportation. . . . ; universal suffrage; that "public school houses and all buildings owned by the state . . . be opened for the public use as a common meeting place"; a state bank with branches in every county seat; repeal of all poll tax laws; "medical services and medicines at the expense of the state"; a usury law; and finally, a plank that denounced the game wardens as "spies on the working class."<sup>19</sup> There were, however, a few significant changes. First the platform committee added a strong plank advocating the abolition of capital punishment. Another addition called for an amendment to the state constitution that would allow any municipality to engage in business and

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>"Farm Programme," [typescript], Socialist Party Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection; Renters' and Farmers' Program, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>19</sup>State Platform, Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1912, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.



industry without restriction. A much stronger plank concerning Negro rights was added. On this issue, the Socialist party found reason to denounce the two major parties. First, the Republican party was condemned for its abandonment of the Negro in 1876 and for its lack of enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Democratic party was considered the symbol of "political expression of slavery, peonage and serfdom," while the Progressive party evaded the race issue, pretending to "accord him a recognition elsewhere."<sup>20</sup> Other than defaming the different political parties, the section on the race question was a general statement, calling for complete racial equality in economic and political matters. An added qualifying statement noted that social inequality was inherent in the capitalist system for all whether the worker was white or black.<sup>21</sup>

Even with this compromise position, the plank brought on a sudden racist reaction. For example, one Democratic candidate for Congress was quoted as saying that the Socialists were " . . . seeking to tear down the stars and stripes and hoist in its stead the red flag of revolution among the ignorant negroes [sic] in Oklahoma City."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.; also see Harlow's Weekly, I (October 26, 1912), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup>State Platform, Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1912, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>22</sup>As quoted in the Appeal to Reason, August 24, 1912.

Senator Robert S. Owen went further saying: "No question in my mind but that Socialism is spreading at a phenomenal rate and that a fight between individualism and Socialism is not very remote."<sup>23</sup>

As the Socialists were being attacked, the party's speakers lashed out at a number of grievances and unfair practices which burdened the working class in Oklahoma. The abuse of renters was the subject of a great deal of the Socialist criticism. Possibly the most important voice on this subject in 1912 was Patrick S. Nagle, who established a new journal in 1912, the Tenant Farmer. Nagle, a former Democrat, was a lawyer from Kingfisher, where, surprisingly enough, the tenancy rate was relatively low. Here again middle-class leadership was attempting to deal with the problems of the lower class. In trying to show how the renter was being robbed of his labor, Nagle wrote: "Every third year is an absolute and complete failure so far as you [the renters] are concerned no matter how much the rainfall or abundant the crop yield."<sup>24</sup> Here he referred to the many tenants who worked for thirds or fourths, or in other words, gave the landlord a third of the crop in return for the use of the land. Nagle then

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<sup>23</sup>Hollis Post-Herald, May 23, 1912; also note ibid., June 13, 1912; Sulphur Democrat, August 8, 1912, for similar reaction.

<sup>24</sup>Patrick S. Nagle, "The Farmer and Socialism," Tenant Farmer (Kingfisher), September, 1912.

offered the Socialist alternative of state owned land, "ready for anyone's plow," at only minimal cost.<sup>25</sup>

The Socialists took their criticism of capitalist society and their program into every part of the state. They appealed to the farmers and sought to alienate them from the middle class. The two most important Socialist candidates, who sought labor as well as farm backing, were Fred W. Holt and H. H. Stallard, who campaigned in the two southern Congressional Districts. Holt was running for Congress in the Fourth District, yet his attraction was broader than previous Socialist candidates who had run before him in this district because he appealed to miners as well as farmers. Formerly he had been District Secretary of the United Mine Workers of America and knew many of the miners personally. One of his strongest appeals to laborers in the area was his emphasis on the ideas of state employment for those without work, socialized medicine for widows with families, and elected mine inspectors.<sup>26</sup> He managed to create considerable interest in these reforms among coal miners and farm tenants.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>New Century, August 9, 1912; Appeal to Reason, October 12, 1912; James R. Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma, 1907-1949," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1949.

<sup>27</sup>New Century, March 22, 1912.

H. H. Stallard, the Socialist candidate from the Fifth District in the southwestern portion of the state, appealed strictly to the farm element which had been the traditional approach of Socialists in Oklahoma. He had been active in the Farmers' Union until that organization failed to function after 1910.<sup>28</sup> In fact, he had been editor of the Farmers' Union Advocate at Shawnee and had held the office of Vice-President of the state Union organization.<sup>29</sup>

As the campaign grew in intensity through the late summer and early fall, a number of encampments were held throughout the state. The largest of these, held at Sulphur in August, was a state-wide meeting attended by 10,000 to 15,000 Socialist enthusiasts. Fred D. Warren, a Socialist lecturer on the Appeal to Reason staff and the featured speaker delivered an emotional plea to do away with the capitalist system which was abusing the worker.<sup>30</sup> Other Socialist spokesmen ranged from relative unknowns to Eugene V. Debs, who made a second tour through the state in September of this election year. At Muskogee, before his largest crowd in the state, Debs directed his main attack on Theodore Roosevelt while he only gave slight

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<sup>28</sup>Oklahoma Labor Unit, October 29, 1912.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>New Century, August 9, 1912; Appeal To Reason, July 13, 1912; Sulphur Democrat, August 9, 1912.

notice to either Wilson or Taft.<sup>31</sup> The encampments were frequent; in fact, to the outsider the election campaign seemed rather slow in the headquarters at Oklahoma City, but it took on a special quality of excitement and activity in the field. With all the camp meetings and rallies over the countryside, the Socialists fully intended to drive an " . . . entering wedge into the legislature of the state and the nation."<sup>32</sup> The Socialists had candidates in every federal Congressional district and in all but two of the state legislative districts. With almost a complete ticket, all hopes in the last stages of the campaign pointed to a total of at least 50,000 Socialist votes.<sup>33</sup>

In the election of 1912, four presidential candidates all claiming to be progressive sought office. The Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, sought to bring about a reform-type program based around the de-centralization of the "New Freedom." A split in the national Republican party made William Howard Taft the choice of the conservative wing of the party. Theodore Roosevelt led an insurgent faction known as the Bull Moose party and entitled his reform program the "New Nationalism." It was little different

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<sup>31</sup>Muskogee Times-Democrat, September 24, 1912; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, September 23, 1912; Appeal to Reason, October 12, 1912.

<sup>32</sup>Harlow's Weekly, I (October 26, 1912), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.; New Century, March 22, 1912.

than what Richard Ely had defined as "New Nationalism" in 1889, with its emphasis on centralization and social legislation. Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate, continued to espouse a Socialist position which fell to the left of all other candidates. In Oklahoma, Woodrow Wilson won the electoral vote by a popular count of 120,446, or about 49.0 percent of the total. The Socialists showed their greatest strength up to that time by casting 41,283 votes for Debs.<sup>34</sup> In one respect the Socialist gain ranks as one of the most important developments of the election. In a comparison with the 1908 presidential election in Oklahoma, the Democrats lost 1,321 votes and the Republicans lost 16,787, while the Socialists gained 22,907 votes.<sup>35</sup>

The Congressional elections in 1912 provided another positive comparison of Socialist strength in the various districts of the state. In the most important Congressional contests from a Socialist point of view, Holt and Stallard ran a strong third, in their respective races. Holt was only 100 votes behind the Republican nominee, E. N. Wright, in the Fourth District, while Stallard trailed Republican C. O. Clark by only 11,033 to 11,987 ballots.<sup>36</sup> Of course,

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<sup>34</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: The State Election Board, 1967), p. 134; "Socialist Vote by the States," National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>35</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 134.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

both the Republican and Socialist candidates ran far behind the Democratic victors, C. D. Carter in the Fourth District with 23,987 and Scott Ferris in the Fifth District with 29,574. For the first time since statehood, there occurred a contest for Congressman-at-large. Taking this as an indication of statewide party strength, the various Congressional Districts may be compared with each other as well as over-all voting power. Oscar Ameringer was one of those who ran for Congressman-at-large and received 41,229 votes out of a total of 249,840 or 16.2 percent of the whole.<sup>37</sup> In comparison, A. W. Renshaw won 10.5 percent of the ballots in the First District in the north-central counties of the state. In the northwestern Second District, P. D. McKenzie surpassed all other Socialist candidates in the northern tier of counties by taking 13.4 percent of the vote. Lewis B. Irvin, in the Third District, located in the Northeast, received 11.7 percent of the total.<sup>38</sup> In other words, this whole northern section of the state ran behind the state-wide percentage set by Ameringer.

The reverse was true of the southern counties. Holt got 24.2 percent of the vote in the Fourth District in the Southeast, while Stallard received 20.9 percent in the southwestern Fifth District.<sup>39</sup> These percentages bear

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 277-353.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

out the fact that the Socialist strength was certainly growing throughout the state, but the most important gains were being made in the southern counties. Seventeen counties, all of which were in this southern tier, had a Socialist vote of over 25 percent, with Marshall County showing an impressive 34.6 percent of the total vote.<sup>40</sup>

In explaining why the Socialists attracted more southern than northern support, a number of factors should be kept in mind. First, the greatest Socialist strength was found where the Republican organization was weakest. Throughout the Fourth and Fifth Districts, the Socialists, by 1912, equaled Republican voting numbers and in many counties surpassed them.<sup>41</sup> Second, there were high correlations between Socialist voting strength and high tenancy rate. This was especially true of the southeastern counties, where the Socialist strength was the greatest and where the most radical element of the party was based.<sup>42</sup> This, however, does not explain the high vote in the southwest, which did not have the same economic problems. But even more surely than in the Southeast, the Socialist vote in the southwestern section of the state was connected

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, VII, Agriculture, pp. 372-379.



with agrarian needs and problems, and there was no other large voting force outside the farm population.<sup>43</sup> The factor that seemed to create the most discontent was mortgage debt and high interest rates. The counties with the heaviest Socialist vote tended to be ones where more than half of the farms in the county reported mortgage debt. This in itself is not conclusive, but when the amount of mortgage debt in these counties is correlated with the value of land and buildings, there is a strong tendency among farmers whose debt exceeded 25 percent or more of the value of their property to vote Socialist. This also helps to differentiate between those counties in the western wheat belt with strong Socialist showings and those without such.<sup>44</sup>

The Socialists in 1912 continued to receive their most important support from the small debt-ridden farmers who worked their own land and the tenants who either rented or worked on shares. Socialist voting strength remained in the rural areas with the towns contributing very little to the total vote.<sup>45</sup> An exception to this was found in the mining area in the Fourth District where, for example, Coalgate contributed 17.2 percent of the Socialist vote in

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Voting Abstract, 1912, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Coal County. Moreover, the small mining towns, with more than one precinct, in both Coal and Pittsburg counties increased their Socialist vote by 48.7 percent over 1910. In comparison, the small mining towns, although they accounted for less than a third of the total county vote in each case, raised their vote slightly more rapidly than the remainder of the county, which produced a 42 percent gain over the 1910 vote.<sup>46</sup> Part of this apparent increase in miner's voting the Socialist ticket resulted from the candidacy of Fred Holt, a familiar and trusted figure. So in the final analysis, the Socialist vote was primarily agrarian in nature, with the exception of the Fourth Congressional District, where the miners contributed significantly to Socialist strength.

This increase in Socialist votes caused a certain amount of alarm among Democrats and other conservative elements. Fleeting signs of reaction appeared as the Socialists' enlarged vote gave importance to the party's attack on the capitalist system. Although there was little notice of the agrarian radicals except in the heat of campaigning, an anti-Socialist paper began publication in Tishomingo in the fall of 1912. Under the editorship of Andrew A. Veatch, the Remonstrator tried to exploit the fear of a revolution of the lower classes under the banner of

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<sup>46</sup>Voting Abstract, 1910, ibid., 1912.

the Socialist party.<sup>47</sup> Only rarely after the election did the regularly published papers take notice of the emerging Socialist party. One exception was the Hollis Post-Herald, which attacked the Socialists as "the enemies of Christianity, morality, and good government."<sup>48</sup> The reaction, such as it was in 1912, was still only a weak manifestation of what it would become as the Socialists continued to gain strength.<sup>49</sup>

The Socialists, however, took little notice of such criticism. The party officials were optimistic about the election results, but were even happier about the growth in party membership. The average number of card-carrying Socialists in 1912 was placed officially at 4,775, which allowed the Oklahoma party two National Committeemen.<sup>50</sup> Optimism proved to be the overriding feeling as the Socialists looked to the future. Their cry was: "Hurrah for Socialism! The 1914 fight opened here last night."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Veatch to Robert M. Williams, Tishomingo, Oklahoma, November 14, 1912, Robert L. Williams Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma, 1907-1949," p. 152.

<sup>48</sup> Hollis Post-Herald, December 4, 1912.

<sup>49</sup> Sulphur Democrat, November 14, 1912; New Century, November 22, 1912.

<sup>50</sup> "Weekly Bulletin," January 9, 1913; ibid., January 25, 1913, Information Department, National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers; Appeal to Reason, January 25, 1913.

<sup>51</sup> H. G. Milner, "The Outlook for the Farmers," New Century, December 30, 1912.

Even as the words of hope for success were published in the papers, the under-current of factionalism within the party broke into the open once again. Just as the Right-wing of the national Socialist party had exerted itself in 1912, the Left-wing of the Oklahoma party now sought and gained ascendancy. On the national level, the Right, led by Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger, systematically strengthened their position through the recall of William Haywood and by openly rejecting the use of violence that Haywood advocated. After the removal of Haywood, Shannon<sup>52</sup> noted that: "The Hillquit-Berger axis now controlled the Socialist Party and the organization drifted steadily in the direction of conservatism." In Oklahoma, the situation was just the reverse through the period from 1912 through 1913. The Right-wing leadership of Ameringer and Branstetter, both of whom were closely connected with Victor Berger, was rejected and then replaced by the more leftist oriented faction from the Southeastern portion of the state. So, as hundreds of Left-wing Socialists left the party on the national level, those of basically the same ideology took control in Oklahoma.

The first open sign of trouble had been the newspaper controversy in 1910, which set the Ameringer-

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<sup>52</sup>David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, A History (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1955), pp. 76-79; also note Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 418.

Branstetter-Hagel leadership at odds with the Armstrong-Cumbie-Clark faction. The renewed split came into the open as early as the spring of 1912, when Stanley J. Clark was expelled from the party by the State Executive Committee for not turning over state Socialist money to the headquarters in Oklahoma City. Clark tried to explain this by saying that the party owed him over \$300 for work he had done in 1910, and he felt that he had taken the only feasible action to be reimbursed.<sup>53</sup> The New Century in Sulphur took another position that Clark had been expelled for reasons other than those made public. To those in the southeastern portion of the state, the real question was that Clark believed in "decentralization of power, believing that the membership was capable of self-government."

To a number of Socialists, Ameringer and Branstetter had offered too much leadership and far too much centralization of power through control of funds. Much of the split lay on an ideological level. There was mounting criticism against the more moderate "Yellows" who were in the position of leadership through the first years after statehood. The more radical "Reds" with leadership provided by such men as Cumbie and Clark chafed under this reform Socialism. In fact, it was Clark who, as early as 1910,

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<sup>53</sup>New Century, May 10, 1912; ibid., May 24, 1912; also note Oklahoma Labor Unit, March 30, 1912; ibid., April 27, 1912.

publicly called for open rebellion if the Socialists were not treated fairly in the elections.<sup>54</sup> In 1912, Ameringer had not only been associated with this Clark affair, but had given Oklahoma's delegate votes in the Socialist National Convention to Emil Seidel in opposition to Eugene V. Debs for the party's nomination for president. Ameringer's decision was said to have been influenced by his close association with the Milwaukee Socialists under the leadership of Victor Berger. The "Reds" viewed close association of Ameringer and the Socialist leadership in Wisconsin as another irritant.<sup>55</sup> The native Oklahoma Socialists believed that Oklahoma loyalties and "Red" sentiments were necessary for party leadership. Thus, the publishers of the New Century began a movement to recall all the members of the State Executive Committee who had voted to suspend Clark.

The movement gained enough strength during the year to make itself felt at the state convention in December of 1912. The convention repudiated the State Executive Committee for expelling Clark from the party, capitalizing on the growing distrust of the "Oklahoma City Gang," of Ameringer and Branstetter.<sup>56</sup> The Cumbie-Clark faction

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<sup>54</sup>Oklahoma Pioneer, August 27, 1910.

<sup>55</sup>New Century, January 3, 1913; David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 73.

<sup>56</sup>Grant County Socialist, November 9, 1912; Hollis Post-Herald, December 5, 1912; New Century, January 3, 1913.

gained sufficient control of the convention to begin a purge of the so-called foreign elements of the party leadership. The first step was to refuse Otto Branstetter a seat at the convention because his family resided in Chicago and he could not be a resident of Oklahoma. George Owen, then editor of the Oklahoma Pioneer, was treated in the same manner.<sup>57</sup> The purge continued into the spring when the local leadership decided to rid itself of Oscar Ameringer. He was serving at that time as the National Committeeman for Oklahoma, but was recalled by a state-wide vote on June 7, 1913.<sup>58</sup> Others such as John Hagel were caught up in this, and were stripped of their positions until the radical local faction took control of the party machinery. Thus, after a long and bitter conflict, the local, native element succeeded in eliminating much of the outside influence which had stimulated the growth of the party since statehood.

When the new leadership took its place, Henry M. Sinclair became the new Secretary-Treasurer of the party early in 1913. Sinclair, an active Socialist organizer since 1910, was a relatively unknown figure as far as the state organization was concerned. But he represented the

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<sup>57</sup>New Century, January 3, 1913; Harlow's Weekly, VI (August 22, 1914), p. 10; "Weekly Bulletin of the National Committee, March 22, 1913; "Socialist Party Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

<sup>58</sup>New Century, June 28, 1913.

native Oklahoma element of the party which tended to be more radical and less interested in centralized party control.<sup>59</sup> As part of the change in power, the Oklahoma Pioneer was allowed to go out of existence and the Social Democrat became the semi-official paper of the party. It supported Sinclair, stating that "he took over the party when it was not in good shape. It had suffered from division and the membership had fallen off."<sup>60</sup> Later, the editors of the paper took pride in the fact that shortly after Sinclair had taken office "the Socialist party was in debt \$3,255.25 but by August 1, 1913, the debt had been reduced to only \$934.75."<sup>61</sup> Although the party was always in rather bad financial shape, it was especially destitute after the strenuous campaign of 1912. This was common after every election, but it made for good relations as the new leadership sought favor of the rank and file membership. The new leaders, however, were unable to solve the problem of declining party membership. The number fell to 2,777 for the first quarter of 1913, and by the end of the year this figure had risen only to 3,025.<sup>62</sup> In all, the split within

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<sup>59</sup>Harlow's Weekly, February 8, 1913.

<sup>60</sup>Social Democrat (Oklahoma City), February 19, 1913; ibid., July 9, 1913.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1913.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., December 31, 1913.



the party and the purge of the "yellow" reform leadership took a heavy toll.

One major theme did not change with the leadership and this was the interest in agrarian problems. H. G. Milner, a Socialist organizer with the Sulphur group, made a fact-finding tour through various parts of the state in late 1913 and reported on conditions. In his report, Milner told of the difficulties he found the farmers facing in Oklahoma. He placed most blame for their condition on the fact that free lands were gone and the rapidly increasing price of acreage made it progressively more difficult to become a landowner. Another problem was the growth of mechanized farming, which hurt the small farmer who could not compete with the larger landowner. Mechanization stimulated the trend toward larger farms and concentration of ownership. This situation, along with rural overpopulation, acted as a "safeguard against the possibility of his [the tenant] revolting, for if he steps out of the way, another man is ready to take his place."<sup>63</sup> Milner then spoke in terms of making the tenant farmer the only voting base for the Socialists in Oklahoma. Although this seemed foolhardy to a number of people, he argued that the Farmers' Union had made the mistake of taking in landowners, who

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<sup>63</sup>New Century, December 30, 1913.

controlled the policy of the movement and thus destroyed the organization.<sup>64</sup>

The native Oklahoma radicals had indeed taken over the party and were seeking to push the party further to the left. However, the purge of 1913 weakened the party more than anyone realized at the time, as Branstetter, Ameringer, and others left the state to work elsewhere in the Socialist organization.<sup>65</sup> A definite imbalance was created within the party, for now the extreme left had no tempering agent of importance. Even as this was happening, the seeds of reaction and suspicion found their way into the thinking of some who, in the past, gave only passing notice to the Socialist movement. This suspicion would gain credence as the Socialists took even more unpopular stands in the next few years. The older Socialist leadership had taken advantage of the Populist and Progressive reform spirit to further their ends. Socialism had come of age in the state in a relatively amicable environment, only to find this situation slowly changing in the years immediately preceding American entry into the First World War.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 280.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE EARLY WAR YEARS,

1914-1915

Oklahoma Socialists, heartened by the progressive spirit of the period, optimistically prepared for the campaign and election of 1914. Party membership had increased somewhat and the new leaders confidently continued to emphasize their solutions to local agrarian problems and, at the same time, attempted to review their efforts to attract labor to the party. By the end of the year, the Socialists were espousing the anti-war pronouncements of the national party. This stand would, by the end of the period, cause the Socialists more difficulty than any other issue. Also, the more radical International Workers of the World appeared in the rural areas of Oklahoma to challenge the Socialists and to have their actions confused with that of the Socialists in the public mind. As a result, the Socialists found themselves in the ironical situation of reaching the height of their power as their popularity was waning.

As the year opened, there was little evidence of these crippling problems. The Socialists had held their convention, adopted their platform, and their aspirations ran high. As always, the platform stated the long-range objective of seizing control of the government by political means, " . . . for the immediate betterment of the conditions of the workers and eventually to bring about a classless society."<sup>1</sup> The document advocated progressive reform measures such as opposition to the use of child labor, capital punishment, and the poll tax. More positive demands included free use of public schools for various social meetings and state supplied medicines and medical services. These planks were not considered as " . . . charity, but as a partial restitution to the working class for the robbery and exploitation suffered by them."<sup>2</sup>

The Socialists re-emphasized their opposition to "usurious interest," a stand which had always brought wide support from all sections of the state. However, now other agrarian-minded publicists joined with the Socialists in their attack. John Fields, editor of the Oklahoma Farm Journal, pointed out that the United States Department of

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<sup>1</sup>Oklahoma State Platform of the Socialist Party, 1914, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.; also see H. M. Sinclair, "The Real Democracy of the Socialist Party," Harlow's Weekly, V (April 25, 1914), pp. 21-22.

Agriculture, "had found that farms in Oklahoma paid a higher rate of interest on short-time loans than in any state in the Union."<sup>3</sup> Carl Williams of the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman related instances where, on small short-term loans of \$25 or so, as much as 48 percent interest per year was paid. He added that anywhere from 25 to 50 percent seemed common.<sup>4</sup> The Socialists charged that the law then in effect, placing the legal rate of interest at ten percent, was violated in most quarters with no penalty.<sup>5</sup>

In reaction to this problem, the Socialists proposed that the legal rate in the state of Oklahoma be defined by law as six percent per annum, except when otherwise stipulated by contract. The usury question became one of the most popular issues ever espoused by the Socialist party in Oklahoma because it made so much sense to many debt-ridden farmers who turned to the Socialists in larger numbers than ever before to find some relief from their hardships.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Oklahoma Farm Journal, XXII (February 15, 1914), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, XXVII (October 10, 1914), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>"The Dollar Versus the People," Socialist Bulletin No. 1, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>6</sup>"Socialist Will Be Big Factor in Campaign," Harlow's Weekly (June 20, 1914), pp. 7-11; Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), June 24, 1914.

As the Socialists continued attracting members from among the farm population, the party was making headway for the first time with labor. On two fronts, the Annual Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor and in the pages of the Oklahoma Labor Unit, the Socialists came closer than at any time in their history to receiving outright support of organized labor in the state. In the early part of 1914, H. H. Stallard, a long-time Socialist organizer, was allowed to publish a Socialist page in the Oklahoma Labor Unit. Stallard's purpose was to allow the "Socialists and the labor unions to better understand each other."<sup>7</sup> This endeavor ended rather abruptly because the Socialists would not support the page in the Labor Unit by purchasing subscriptions. Stallard was angry and disappointed at the lack of support, declaiming that: "I saw the Farmers' Union grow to be a power in the state. I also saw it melt away, not however, by the efforts of its enemies, but by a misunderstanding of co-operation and petty jealousy."<sup>8</sup> In the convention of the State Federation of Labor in Oklahoma City in 1914, the Socialists fared somewhat better. A resolution was introduced in the proceedings that endorsed the Socialist press and that part of the Socialist party principles which stood for

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<sup>7</sup>Oklahoma Labor Unit (Oklahoma City), March 21, 1914.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., May 17, 1914.

advancement of labor. It stated:<sup>9</sup>

Whereas, Organized Labor has received the loyal support of the Socialist press, and inasmuch as many victories have been won by Organized Labor through the cooperation of the Socialist press in giving publicity to the cause of organized labor, and,

Whereas the National Socialist Party has contributed both energy and finance to the cause of organized labor and is doing an immense amount of good for Union labor and,

Whereas the Socialist party is a working class expression both politically and economically and,

Whereas, Its press and party has given impetus to the Organized Labor movement, both by publicity and party activity, therefore be it,

Resolved, By the 11th Annual Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor assembled that we go on record as commending the attitude of the Socialist press and endorse that part of the Socialist party principles which stand for the advancement of labor's cause, both economically and politically.

Although this resolution failed, there was active support within the convention for the Socialists. Union labor failed to endorse the Socialist position, but the fact that a resolution even was presented to the convention bespoke a better reception for the Oklahoma party than it had been given before by organized labor.

Because of this at least limited support among the laborers, the Socialist platform committee not only repeated

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<sup>9</sup>Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, 1914, p. 63 /microfilm copy/, Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

the demands which had been important up to this point, but added planks for labor as well. The unusually long platform called for state ownership of the mining industry and of common carriers. It also demanded constitutional amendments to make the initiative and referendum, and recall more "effective weapons in the hands of the working class."<sup>10</sup> Going farther, the platform favored universal suffrage, opposed capital punishment and the poll tax. To attract union votes, the Socialists opposed the use of child labor; demanded employment of organized labor on construction of all public buildings; advocated the election of mine inspectors by miners; sought state pensions for widows; and pledged that when the Socialists controlled the government of Oklahoma "state, county, and municipal governments . . . will use all the power of these governments to furnish the unemployed work at productive labor--the product to be for the benefit of the workers."<sup>11</sup>

Even though there was more emphasis on labor, the farmers, as always, received the most attention in the platform. It promised the farmers a state bank with branches in each county seat and the curbing of "usurious interest." It further urged the farmers to support a

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<sup>10</sup>Oklahoma State Platform of the Socialist Party, 1914, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Collection.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



landless "renters" union, the purpose of which would be to resist exploitation by the landlord class.<sup>12</sup> A section entitled the "Renters' and Farmers' Program" called for nine major points. These followed the plans given in the years since the inception of this section of the platform and included demands that the state retain and expand the public domain; that there be direct election of members of a Board of Agriculture; that state-owned grain elevators and warehouses be created; that cooperatives among farmers be encouraged; that the state grant loans on mortgages and warehouse receipts; that the state provide insurance; that a \$1,000 tax exemption be granted for farm tools, animals, and buildings; and finally that the state lands should be rented to landless farmers.<sup>13</sup> The major difference between the "Farmers' Program" of 1914 and those that preceded it was that it did not include the working of land by large bodies or groups of farmers. In all, the program was even more Populistic than Marxist than in previous years.<sup>14</sup> Actually, it was a compromise which upset many of those on the radical left.

With the platform completed, the Socialists again sought to increase their voting strength. The coming

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.; also note Sinclair, "The Real Democracy of the Socialist Party," p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>"Renters' and Farmers' Program," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Collection.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

election caused the Socialist party organization to be very active in Oklahoma in 1914. From January 1, the party reportedly increased its "Red Card" membership by nearly 8,000, or from 200 to 300 members a week.<sup>15</sup> In perspective, there were 3,010 members in 1912, when nearly 42,000 people voted the Socialist ticket.<sup>16</sup> In June of 1914, the recorded membership was 10,851 and the party leadership hoped for the same ratio of members to voters in this campaign.<sup>17</sup> The central office in Oklahoma City arranged about sixty Socialist encampments during the election campaign. The Central Committee announced during the summer that the party had active committeemen in more than 80 percent of the voting precincts of the state.<sup>18</sup> In fact, only two counties in the state were completely without a Socialist organization.<sup>19</sup> The most important mass meeting was held in late August in Otter Valley, Oklahoma. Ten thousand people attended the encampment and heard such speakers as Fred Holt, the Socialist candidate for governor; State Secretary, H. M. Sinclair; Lewis J. Duncan, Mayor of Butte,

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<sup>15</sup>Harlow's Weekly, V (June 20, 1914), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Appeal to Reason, June 22, 1914.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>State Executive Meeting, July 17-18, 1914 [type-script], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

Montana; and Eugene V. Debs. N. D. Pritchett wrote later that the "encampment was a financial success," and that the party "expected to use . . . the money to put up a literature campaign having for its object the carrying of this legislative district in the November elections."<sup>20</sup> The Socialists continued at this level of activity through the summer and into fall.

The leadership fully expected that the real strength in the state would be in the southeastern section. Yet the West had always been important to the Socialist movement. Interest ran high as the party placed a candidate in every state senatorial district and in all but two of the house districts. Fred W. Holt as the gubernatorial candidate headed a state Socialist ticket which included a number of familiar names. The best known were H. M. Sinclair for Secretary of State, Oles Stofer for State Treasurer, John Hagel for State Examiner and Inspector, Thomas W. Woodrow for Commissioner of Insurance, and Patrick S. Nagle for United States Senator. All of these men, with the exception of Woodrow who was a radical religious spokesman, were professional Socialist organizers.<sup>21</sup> But with all, the

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<sup>20</sup>American Socialist (n.p.), September 5, 1914  
/Clipping/, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

<sup>21</sup>Basil W. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), pp. 139-140; Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), September 15, 1914.

real hope of the party rested with the numerous candidates for seats in the state legislature.<sup>22</sup>

This election, as had been true in the past, presented difficulties for the Socialists. Trouble marred the Socialist enthusiasm when the party poll watchers were refused their respective positions during the primary election. The editor of Harlow's Weekly reflected that: "Much bitter feeling was displayed over the refusal of the Democratic election officials in some localities to allow them the Socialist party officials<sup>7</sup> as watchers in the primary."<sup>23</sup> In Kingfisher County, Nagel, the Socialist candidate for the United States Senator, procured a pre-emptory writ of mandamus from the district court which ordered that the Socialists be given the watchers to which they were entitled under the election law. Copies of this were sent around the state prior to the general election, but still there was evidence of discrimination. Although the party officials complained about particularly bad treatment in such places as Shawnee and neighboring communities, they were unable to alleviate the situation.<sup>24</sup>

As the election drew near, it became clear to a number of ranking Democrats that the Socialists would be

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<sup>22</sup>Appeal to Reason, August 17, 1914.

<sup>23</sup>Harlow's Weekly, VI (August 29, 1914), pp. 24-27.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., (August 22, 1914), p. 10.

more of a challenge than ever before in the state's short history. It seemed that as the marketing season approached, the Socialists found a new issue with which to attract voters. In letter after letter to Robert L. Williams, Democratic gubernatorial candidate, the friends of the Democratic party decried the effect of the low price of cotton caused by the outbreak of war in Europe. In Cleveland County, John S. Allen wrote: "The cotton situation has taken the starch out of the Democratic farmers and they are sore and disgruntled. . . ." <sup>25</sup> In the south and southwest, the situation was much the same. E. L. Mitchell of Cheyenne noted that: "In this county Roger Mills<sup>7</sup> socialism is a protest against hard times and indirectly an assault upon the party in power." <sup>26</sup> Another reported that the Socialists were making a hard fight "on low cotton and hard times." <sup>27</sup> Carl Williams, editor of the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, wrote that there was no market for cotton at all in Oklahoma and that "It's pretty discouraging for a grower to pick cotton, haul it to town and then have to haul it home again." <sup>28</sup> The situation was

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<sup>25</sup> John S. Allan, Norman, to R. L. Williams, October 27, 1914, Robert L. Williams Papers, Oklahoma State Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>26</sup> E. L. Mitchell, Cheyenne, to Robert L. Williams, October 29, 1914, Williams Papers.

<sup>27</sup> I. R. Jacques, Chattanooga, to Robert L. Williams, October 28, 1914, Williams Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, XXVII (September 10, 1914), p. 3.

created by a tremendous drop in the price of cotton, which ranged from 11.5 cents a pound in 1912 to 12.5 cents a pound in 1913, and finally to 7.25 cents a pound in 1914.<sup>29</sup> It was reported that the price in many areas was 5.5 cents on the farm. Even by mid-October the cotton situation continued to worsen and the farmers' feelings consequently grew in intensity.<sup>30</sup>

The campaign itself ran in a more orderly fashion than in the years previous to this. Socialist candidates decided among themselves that "no nominee would be permitted to make a personal campaign, and that all of them must adhere strictly to the party cause."<sup>31</sup> Thus there was little deviation from the party platform. The only real trouble among the candidates was when J. Luther Langston, a labor leader and member of the Typographical Union, withdrew from the Socialist ticket as the nominee for Commissioner of Labor.<sup>32</sup> No mention was made of his withdrawal by Socialist sources, but apparently his leaving the ticket was caused by the offense of contributing \$5 to Democrat

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<sup>29</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (1961), p. 301.

<sup>30</sup>Cub Ream, Cheyenne to Robert L. Williams, October 29, 1914, Williams Papers; Harlow's Weekly, VI (October 17, 1914), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Harlow's Weekly, VI (August 22, 1914), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., VII (September 17, 1914), p. 43.

Mont R. Powell's campaign for Congress from the Fifth District. The matter ended in Langston's withdrawal from the Socialist ticket and his replacement by U. G. Tuttle of Tulsa.<sup>33</sup> Although this incident came relatively late in the campaign, it did not dampen the Socialist hopes of success. There was a vigorous campaign with many large meetings, with Fred Holt, Patrick Nagle, and even Eugene V. Debs, covering the third Congressional district.<sup>34</sup>

With the critical farm situation and the forceful Socialist campaign, the election caused a great deal of excitement, but less trouble for the old parties than some Democrats had feared. Robert L. Williams, a Democrat, defeated John Fields, the Republican for the governorship by a vote of 100,597 to 95,605. The Republicans' split continued and the Bull Moose candidate, John Hickham, took 4,189 possible Republican votes. Fred W. Holt received a vote of 52,703 or 20.8 percent of the total balloting.<sup>35</sup> This was indeed the high point in the Socialist voting strength as the party had risen from 9,740 or 3.8 at the beginning of statehood in 1907 to this high in 1914.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.; Otter Valley Socialist (Snyder), September 17, 1914; Madill News, September 24, 1914.

<sup>35</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 124; the 1914 vote was the highest in the history of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma on a statewide level, with 44 of the 77 counties also reaching their highest mark.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

Patrick S. Nagle, running for the Senate seat held by Thomas Gore, with 52,229 votes ran third behind Gore with 119,442 and the Republican, John H. Burford, who received 73,292 votes. A Progressive party candidate received 3,966 votes.<sup>37</sup> Much of the balloting seemed to be along straight party lines, with only two slight deviations, Patrick O'Shea in the race for Mine Inspector and surprisingly enough, U. G. Tuttle for Commissioner of Labor. Both of these men ran over 500 votes ahead of the rest of the ticket.<sup>38</sup> With redistricting for the United States House of Representative Districts, the Socialists managed to come in second in two races. R. L. Norm in the Third District in the extreme southeast and H. H. Stallard in District Seven in the extreme southwest ran good races.<sup>39</sup> Stallard, a former organizer for the Farmers' Union, was the strongest Socialist Congressional candidate, receiving 33.1 percent of the vote in his district.<sup>40</sup>

The Socialist failure in the state and Congressional races was tempered by the election of six members to the Oklahoma Legislature. George E. Wilson of Cestos from the Second District was elected as the only Socialist senator.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-141.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 141.



The house members included: S. W. Hill of Roll, Roger Mills county; C. H. Inghram of Ringwood, Major county; D. S. Kirkpatrick, Seiling, Dewey county; T. H. McLemore of Elk City, Beckham county; and N. D. Pritchett of Snyder, Swanson District of Kiowa county.<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly enough, these men all were elected by the voters in the western portion of the state, although many observers had believed that the Southeast was the most important to the party and the most likely to elect Socialist candidates to office. In a comparison of the two sections, the Socialists received similar voting percentages in the Southeast and Southwest. For example, the Socialists placed first in Beckham with 39.8 percent of the vote, in Kiowa with 35.5 percent, and Roger Mills with 35.6 percent. In the Southeast, the Socialist percentages were 35.6 in Johnston, 40.9 percent in Marshall, and Pontotoc had 35.2 percent of the total vote, and yet the Socialists placed second in each of these counties.<sup>42</sup> The determining factor of the outcome in the two sections was the role played by the Republican party. In the West, the Republicans ran very close races with the Democrats

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<sup>41</sup>Appeal to Reason, November 21, 1914; Daily Oklahoman, November 17, 1914; Benson, et. al., Oklahoma Votes, 1907-1962, p. 27; Donald K. Pickens, "The Principles and Program of Oklahoman Socialism, 1900-1918," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1964, p. 56.

<sup>42</sup>Abstract of the Oklahoma Vote, 1914, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 281-341.

and the Socialists, while in the Southeast, the Republicans ran a very poor third. For example, in Roger Mills County, the Democrats polled 636 votes compared to the Republicans' 657 and the Socialists' 727. In Marshall County, on the other hand, the Democrats won 1,037 votes, while the Socialists had 1,000 and the Republicans trailed with 399.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while the Socialists achieved relatively the same voting strength in both sections the more viable two party system in the west allowed the Socialists to hold the balance of power and to win some local contests for the legislature. Because of this and their overall enthusiasm, the Socialists seriously believed that there would be "a full socialist [sic] congressional delegation from Oklahoma in 1916 and a complete capture of the state in 1918."<sup>44</sup>

To assume that the November vote was merely a protest of the farmers against hard times and low cotton prices is unwarranted. Rather, the crisis created by the poor cotton market was only one factor among many which strengthened the Socialist position. The Socialist vote remained high in the counties where Socialist candidates had received strong support in the past several elections.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.; Appeal to Reason, November 21, 1914.

<sup>44</sup>Otter Valley Socialist (Undated clipping), Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection; "How the Socialists Do Things in Oklahoma," American Socialist, (Chicago, Illinois) September 5, 1914 [typescript], Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

In the last three elections, for example, Beckham County Socialists had increased their percentages from 22.0 in 1910, to 28.1 in 1912 and to 39.8 in 1914.<sup>45</sup> In Kiowa County, in the same southwestern section of the state, the rise in Socialist percentage of the total vote was even more spectacular. In 1910, Socialists took 8.2 percent of the vote, in 1912 it was 23.3 percent and in 1914 it grew to 35.5 percent.<sup>46</sup> The same sort of rise of Socialist voting percentages accrued in all the counties where the Socialists placed their candidates either first or second in the running, whether in the Southeast or the Southwest.<sup>47</sup> But, overall the Socialists ran best in the counties where the Democratic party traditionally won and this was primarily in the southern portion of the state.

Late in the month following the election, N. D. Pritchett, one of the recently elected state representatives, reviewed the party convention. At least three to four hundred delegates worked for three days giving "thoughtful consideration of questions both state and party."<sup>48</sup> He reported that: "The enthusiasm and determined stand taken on serious questions concerning the working

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<sup>45</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 281.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 281-341.

<sup>48</sup>State Office Notes (undated), Oklahoma State Files, Socialist Party of America Papers.

class of this state bodes ill for the forces of capitalism."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature of the convention was the harmony that prevailed throughout the sessions, both in committees and on the floor of the convention. Of the three days, the first was given over to organization, while the most important business of introducing the new state legislators took up the second day.<sup>50</sup>

George E. Wilson of Cestos, Dewey County, was the only Socialist senator. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he lived much of his life until he came to Oklahoma soon after statehood. He was a farmer who rented a 160-acre farm. Like most of the Socialist legislators, Wilson at 47 was middle-aged at the time of his election.<sup>51</sup>

Sidney W. Hill of Rall, Roger Mills County, who was born in Smith County, Texas, was a Democrat through his early years, and was appointed Postmaster by Grover Cleveland in the 1890's at Slusher, Oklahoma. Hill was 42 years old and owned a 160-acre farm.<sup>52</sup> A second House member, C. H. Ingham, born in Atow County, Nebraska, was 45 years old. He was a farmer, stockraiser, and merchant who owned a

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Otter Valley Socialist (Undated clipping), Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection.

<sup>51</sup>H. G. Creel, "Socialist Hat in the Ring," Appeal to Reason, January 16, 1915.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

farm. Before becoming a Socialist party member, he had been an organizer for the Farmers' Union. Supposedly, his daughter was disappointed in his election, saying with a play on words that: "They said Socialism would break up the home and now I have to give up my papa [sic]." <sup>53</sup> D. C. Kirkpatrick of Seiling, Dewey County, was the oldest of the Socialist legislators at the age of 62. He was born in Clinton County, Missouri and like all the others had little formal education. He, also, was a farmer and merchant who owned his own farm. <sup>54</sup> Thomas H. McLemore of Elk City, Beckham County, was 40 years old and rented 102 acres on a cash basis. In Titus County, Texas, where he was born his father was a preacher and farmer and like his father, Thomas farmed and preached for the Church of Christ. <sup>55</sup> Thirty-year-old N. D. Pritchett of Snyder, Kiowa County, was the youngest member of the Socialist contingent. Unlike the others, he was not a farmer, but a telegrapher and had at one time been a member of the Order of Railway Telegraphers. He was born in Xenia, Illinois. Also unlike the others, he had run for the same position twice before the 1914 election. <sup>56</sup> In every case, these Socialists were

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.; Official Report of the Legislative Representatives of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor--1915,

members of the community rather than organizers.

The newly elected Socialist members of both houses of the Oklahoma legislature remained rather quiet during the early days of the 1915 session. They surprised a skeptical public by being more responsible than most people had expected. Rather than introduce a flood of legislation, they chose to introduce amendments to the bills for state insurance, public warehouses, and a state printing plant.<sup>57</sup> They also supported a number of bills which were primarily designed to help labor, including a workman's compensation bill, a statewide nine-hour bill, and one to provide pensions for widowed mothers.<sup>58</sup> Because they considered it central to the Socialist reform program, N. D. Pritchett and D. C. Kirkpatrick wanted a law to define in greater detail the legal rate of interest. However, this legislation failed to get out of committee, as did other pieces of Socialist-backed legislation.<sup>59</sup>

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p. 28 /Microfilm7/, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>57</sup>Oklahoma House Journal, Regular Session, 1915, pp. 557, 778, 839; Tulsa World (March 17, 1915; Oklahoma City Times, February 6, 1915.

<sup>58</sup>Official Report of the Legislative Representatives of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor--1915, pp. 21-28 /Microfilm copy/, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor Collection.

<sup>59</sup>Oklahoma House Journal, Regular Session, 1915, pp. 426, 771; also see H. G. Creel, "Socialist Surprises in Oklahoma," Appeal to Reason, June 30, 1915.

At the time when the Socialist party made its most important electoral gains and for the first time participated in the state legislative process, it was confronted with new competition. This appeared as a syndicalist organization named the Agricultural Workers Organization. Officially, the Socialists repudiated this group. Using the direct action philosophy of the European syndicalists, this arm of the International Workers of the World sought to agitate among the migrant workers employed in the wheat harvest.<sup>60</sup> The AWO was not officially connected with the Socialist party; in fact, the Socialists opposed the syndicalist approach, but these radical organizations were linked in the minds of the people. Thus what one did affected the other. Oklahoma, to the AWO, seemed the logical place to begin organizing the workers, following the apparent success of the Socialists in the state. Also at harvest time, Oklahoma farmers, as farmers throughout the Great Plains area, hired large numbers of additional laborers. The AWO began its organization process in western Oklahoma and continued to move slowly northward in the wake of the ripening wheat.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Philip Taft, "The IWW in the Grain Belt," Labor History, I (Winter, 1960), p. 56; Carl D. Thompson, "What Is Syndicalism?" National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>61</sup> William D. Haywood, "To Migratory Workers," Solidarity, November 28, 1914.

This radical farm labor organization was begun in the spring of 1915. Delegates representing the agricultural workers met in Kansas City in conjunction with the International Workers of the World and established the Agricultural Workers Organization 400. William D. "Big Bill" Haywood backed the movement from its inception and was instrumental in the organization of the movement. Thereby, its demands reflected those of the larger IWW movements. The AWO called for a minimum wage of \$3 a day, fifty cents overtime for every hour worked above ten in a day, adequate room and board, and no discrimination against members of the labor organization in the field.<sup>62</sup> The first organizational campaign centering in Oklahoma got underway in June of 1915. At this time, the AWO's primary purpose was stated purposefully in their motto: "Harvest the Harvesters."<sup>63</sup> Tactics employed by the Agricultural Workers Organization proved only partially successful. In and around Enid, Oklahoma, large numbers of migrant workers sought an answer to their economic problems by enlisting in the movement. But, in their determination to get support, the leaders at times used force on some workers. Using clubs and guns, organizers allowed no one into the fields without a card issued by the Agricultural Workers

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<sup>62</sup>Taft, "The IWW in the Grain Belt," pp. 58-59.

<sup>63</sup>Solidarity, July 10, 1915.



Organization 400. This campaign was directed by the organization's members, who took specific territories to supervise. Stationary delegates located themselves at principal points in the wheat producing area during the harvest season. Enid was one of the most important of these places and served as a central organization point. Since commissions were paid for new members, the leaders were prompted to use any method at hand to enlist laborers. These tactics and the general theme of the movement were strongly opposed by the Socialist party.<sup>64</sup>

Just as the AWO brought added opposition to the Socialist party, the Socialists themselves were losing popularity by the early months of 1915. A new anti-Socialist paper, the Socialist Antidote, had begun publication in late 1914 with the avowed mission "to expose the evils of Socialism and to defend the Bible and the Christian faith."<sup>65</sup> Logan Stone published this monthly in Mangum and hoped to alert the people to what he called the dangers of the Socialist party, "atheism, free love, and anarchy," and because, as he charged, it encouraged disloyalty.<sup>66</sup> It was in this last charge that the Socialists would feel

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<sup>64</sup> Appeal to Reason, August 15, 1915; "Socialism in 1915 in Oklahoma," Harlow's Weekly, IX (November 20, 1915), p. 385; Taft, "The IWW in the Grain Belt," p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Socialist Antidote (Mangum), November 15, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., January 15, 1914.

the pressure of the more conservative element in the state. Although World War I had broken out in Europe in 1914, it had not become a major topic of discussion among Oklahoma Socialists. It was in the December convention of the party that "without a single dissenting vote the . . . Socialist party of Oklahoma voted that in case of conscription for military service the workers turn their guns on the officers who command them. . . ." <sup>67</sup> It was resolved that: <sup>68</sup>

If war is declared the revolutionary comrades of the body will refuse to enlist and if forced to enter the military services to murder their fellow workers or to be shot for treason, shall choose to die fighting the enemy of humanity in their own ranks rather than perish in the struggle fighting their fellow workers and that all toilers not involved refuse to work for the master class during such war.

This revolutionary stand proved to be the most disastrous ever made by the party in Oklahoma. The Socialist party stood against war, just as many other Socialists did during this period, because it believed that capitalistic aggression caused all wars. The Socialists reasoned that war aided only the capitalists and served to destroy the working class movement. <sup>69</sup> In this period early in the war, the

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<sup>67</sup>H. G. Creel, "Oklahoma Socialists Take Drastic Action to Prevent a War in This Country," Appeal to Reason, January 9, 1915.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Proceedings of the State Convention of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1915, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; H. M. Sinclair, "Significance of the Recent Socialist State Convention," Otter Valley Socialist, January 13, 1915.

Oklahoma Socialists believed that the Socialists in Europe would bring the conflict to a halt through their anti-war activities. The party believed that the brotherhood of man and international sentiment were strong enough among the lower classes so that peace was the only foreseeable outcome of the European situation.<sup>70</sup>

Before American intervention into World War I, the Socialists could still criticize war and the prospect of American entry which they were not able to do without prosecution after 1917. But the anti-war stand was complicated and worsened by agitation from another International Workers of the World-sponsored organization, which was also repudiated by the Socialists.<sup>71</sup> This organization, the Working Class Union, with national headquarters in Arkansas, began to establish itself in eastern Oklahoma. The Union organized local chapters into a loose federation which had practically no contact with any other branch of the organization. Usually there were no fixed meeting places and practically no records were kept. Even so, the membership has been estimated as ranging from 18,000 to 35,000 in Oklahoma alone.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Creel, "Oklahoma Socialists Take Drastic Action to Prevent War in This Country," Appeal to Reason, January 9, 1915.

<sup>71</sup>"Working Class Union," Harlow's Weekly, X (January 1, 1916), p. 4.

<sup>72</sup>McAlester News-Capital, August 13, 1916.

This syndicalist organization arose out of the same environment as the Socialist movement in Oklahoma and the Southwest in general. Agrarian discontent remained acute and, since the Socialists had lost some of their fervor, many of the tenants sought more radical leadership elsewhere.<sup>73</sup> Thus, frustration more than positive action lay at the foundation of the Working Class Union. While there was mention of such things as abolition of rent, interest, and capitalist enterprise, nothing ever came of these demands.<sup>74</sup> The only program which was universal throughout the Union was the advocacy of violence and even open rebellion.<sup>75</sup>

Although the direct action concept of the syndicalist movement found its origins in European anarchism, it owed much of its success in Oklahoma to the vigilante attitude of the American frontier. The activist role of the WCU followed much the same course of action as the early Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in terms of burnings and terrorism. In Pontotoc County, WCU members reportedly burned the barns of two county commissioners and attempted

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<sup>73</sup>U.S. Senate, United States Commission on Industrial Relations, "The Land Question in the Southwest," Final Report, IX, 64th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document No. 415, 1916, p. 9053.

<sup>74</sup>Sequoyah County Democrat, February 25, 1916.

<sup>75</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (January 29, 1916), p. 5; Shawnee Daily News-Herald, September 25, 1917.

to assassinate the county attorney, A. L. Bullock.<sup>76</sup> In Sequoyah County, farmers marched through the streets of county towns dressed in red shirts to protest the disbarment trial of L. C. McNabb. The trial of this Sallisaw lawyer, who headed the Working Class Union in the area, was moved to Muskogee because of the already threatening situation elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> In the same general area of the southeastern portion of the state, farmers were taken from their homes and beaten by night riders when they refused to join the syndicalist struggle against the capitalist segment of society.<sup>78</sup>

Although the WCU remained a secret organization prone to violence and revolution, it could and did on occasion use other means to further the tenant's and farm laborer's cause. McNabb, working as an organizer and attorney for the WCU, prosecuted a number of usury cases in Sequoyah County.<sup>79</sup> Another means the Union used was a system of blacklisting unpopular landlords. Once a landlord was placed on the list, no tenant farmer would work his

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<sup>76</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (February 26, 1916), p. 1; Carl D. Thompson, "What Is Syndicalism?" National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>77</sup>Muskogee Daily Phoenix, January 6, 1917; Sequoyah County Democrat, February 25, 1916.

<sup>78</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (February 26, 1916), p. 1.

<sup>79</sup>Ada News, January 15, 1916; Charles C. Bush, "The Green Corn Rebellion," unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1932, p. 10.

land until certain improvements were made in contracting or in the physical structures on the farm. This, however, succeeded only sporadically as a result of the poor overall organization.<sup>80</sup>

Even though the Socialist party leadership opposed much that the syndicalists stood for, many tenant farmers who voted Socialist joined the Working Class Union. Contrary to public opinion there was no official connection between them. The Socialist leaders attempted to make it readily apparent to all that they had nothing to do with the syndicalists. In Oscar Ameringer's autobiography, he noted the differences which existed between the Socialist party and the Working Class Union. He wrote: "Both of these [the Working Class Union and the Jones' Family, another activist group] were secret societies, as contrasted to the open and above-board organization of the Socialists."<sup>81</sup> He added that: "They were the true Reds; we of the center and the right wing were 'compromisers,' 'opportunists,' and 'yellows'."<sup>82</sup> During the period in question, no amount of explanation could sway the people from the confused idea that Socialism was one and the same with anarchism

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<sup>80</sup>Muskogee Daily Phoenix, February 16, 1916; Harlow's Weekly, X (January 1, 1916), p. 4.

<sup>81</sup>Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, the Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), p. 352.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

and syndicalism.<sup>83</sup>

In 1914 the Socialist appeal to the people against the capitalist system made some sense in the face of a poor market. The Socialist party attained a place in the state government with the election of six of their candidates to office. In reaching the point they did in the elections of 1914, the Socialists had chosen a reform program and rhetoric that would appeal to the greatest number of supporters. The general framework of class politics appealed to large numbers of small farmers and tenants who were being hurt by the economic system. But at this juncture in late 1914 and through 1915, the Socialists' initiative was lost for a number of reasons. Certainly one of their own making was the anti-war stand. While this was not as important in the period before direct American involvement, the Socialists' verbal commitment to "turning their guns on their officers," upset many people.<sup>84</sup> But more importantly, the Socialists were hurt by the activity of the new syndicalist and anarchist movements, such as the Agricultural Workers Union, the Working Class Union, and the Jones Family. In reality, the Socialist party lost the initiative to these groups, especially in the Southeast, and suffered from the syndicalist philosophy

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<sup>83</sup>Bush, "The Green Corn Rebellion," p. 13.

<sup>84</sup>Appeal to Reason, January 9, 1915.

of activism. The Socialist party had no control over the activities of these "red" organizations, yet were associated with everything that was done in the name of radical agrarianism. Thus the Socialists at the height of their political success, casting about a sixth of the total Socialist vote in the United States, found public opinion hardening against them as never before in their existence in the state.



## CHAPTER VIII

### REBELLION AND DECLINE, 1916-1918

At the beginning of 1916, the Oklahoma Socialist organization was one of the most powerful of all the state parties. Consisting of 231 locals and 9,369 red card members, it claimed almost 70,000 registered male adults in the state.<sup>1</sup> In this presidential election year, the party leadership fully expected that, on the strength of their membership and registration, from 80,000 to 100,000 votes would be cast for Socialist candidates. The Socialists had working organizations of precinct committeemen and several co-workers in 2,365 of the 2,535 precincts who were ready to distribute the free literature from the state office.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Socialists in Oklahoma were riding a momentum that had carried them to a position of

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<sup>1</sup>Appeal to Reason (Girard, Kansas), July 1, 1916; Patrick S. Nagle, Oklahoma City, to National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, April 1, 1922. Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>2</sup>American Socialist (Chicago, Illinois), January 2, 1917.

some importance in the state and in the nation. Dues-paying membership had grown from 2,698 in 1912 to nearly four times that in 1916.<sup>3</sup> The voting statistics showed the same sort of growth pattern, growing from 9,740 votes in 1907 to 52,703 votes in 1914.<sup>4</sup> So the Socialists believed that they would be successful in the coming election.

There was no factionalism to speak of in the party convention in December of 1915 in Oklahoma City, and the same sort of platform as had been put forth in the past was issued to the party regulars for approval. It demanded state ownership of industry and of the means of transportation "used by the people of Oklahoma." Another plank advocated universal suffrage,<sup>5</sup> which attained new importance when the United States Supreme Court declared the Oklahoma Grandfather Clause void in a decision in the Guinn and Beal vs. United States case in 1915.<sup>6</sup> The platform went on to oppose "any and all schemes for exploiting children in mills, mines, and factories;" and capital punishment.<sup>7</sup> A new plank

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<sup>3</sup>Appeal to Reason, March 16, 1916.

<sup>4</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, 1967 (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>Platform and Campaign Book of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1916, Oklahoma State Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>6</sup>Guinn and Beal vs. United States, 238 U.S. 347 (1915), 368.

<sup>7</sup>Platform and Campaign Book of the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, 1916, Oklahoma State Historical Society.

promised tenure and civil service protection and equal pay for all teachers. Furthermore, the platform stated demands for the right of municipalities to engage in business; a state bank with branches at each county seat; a state printing plant; medical services and medicines at the state's expense; state pensions for widows; and a very important plank that stated that "interest above the rates allowed by law shall be null and void and uncollectable. . . ."<sup>8</sup> Labor received very little recognition in the platform except the demands that "organized labor be employed in the construction of all public buildings," and condemnation of the use of the "police powers of the state to break strikes," and that mine inspectors should be elected by the miners.<sup>9</sup>

The Renters' and Farmers' Program objectives were included as an integral part of the platform in 1916, rather than as a separate document as they had been previously. The Program remained much the same as those of the past election years except for the deletion of a demand for collective farming in large bodies.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, it kept the demands for retention of public lands; erection by the state of elevators and warehouses; state support of

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

cooperative purchasing societies for farmers; state loans on mortgages and warehouse certificates; and state insurance.<sup>11</sup>

There were two new political demands in the platform which caused a great amount of excitement through the election year. Article 33 was the more important of the two, at least in the sense that it was pushed farther by the Socialists than the other. It demanded an amendment to the constitution providing for a system of "proportional representation," whereby each political party would have representation on all official bodies of the state and counties in proportion to its numerical strength. All members of these official bodies were to be elected by the people of the state.<sup>12</sup> Article 36 demanded that the state constitution be amended to abolish the primary system of nomination. The Socialists stated in disgust that "any political organization that is so corrupt that it can not trust its members to select its political representatives, should not be permitted to saddle this expense upon the public in general."<sup>13</sup> Thus the Socialists took the position of demanding more involvement of the people in one plank and then insisted that a system which allowed more direct participation be abandoned. Socialists pointed to the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

expense of the primaries and declared that it was an added tax burden. Since the Socialist primaries were of no importance because there was no choice of candidates, the party sought to embarrass the Democrats.<sup>14</sup>

After the convention, some discussion of issues appeared in the Socialist press. At first, there was the usual mention of the need for solidarity among the tenant farmers, and the building of morale.<sup>15</sup> Usury was another topic of importance for the Socialists. The Oklahoma page of the Appeal to Reason noted that "Usury is a serious evil in Oklahoma," and that Oklahoma bankers charged from 40 to 1,000 percent interest on their short-term loans.<sup>16</sup> Socialists went so far as to demand that a law be passed which would revoke the charter of any bank charging more than 10 percent, but this never became important in the campaign.<sup>17</sup> But all of these issues soon took a subordinate position to the so-called "Fair Election Law".<sup>18</sup>

The proposed Fair Election Law was to do away with the Democratic party's complete domination of the State

<sup>14</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (April 1, 1916), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ellis County Socialist (Shattuck), March 2, 1916.

<sup>16</sup>Appeal to Reason, February 26, 1916.

<sup>17</sup>Ellis County Socialist, February 3, 1916; Blackwell Times-Record, January 28, 1916.

<sup>18</sup>P. S. Nagle, "Promises vs. Performance, Is the Democratic Party Democratic?" Harlow's Weekly, X (April 8, 1916), p. 14.

Election Board. Socialists felt abused because the Board was made up of three men: the secretary of the senate, and two men selected and appointed by the Democratic governor.<sup>19</sup> This Fair Election Law was presented in the form of a proposed amendment to the state constitution. Initiated Petition No. 51, containing the signatures of 64,037 petitioners, was filed by Patrick Nagle on September 11, 1915 and was designated State Question No. 78.<sup>20</sup> There was little doubt that the measure was extremely important to the Socialist party and created much excitement early in the year. Early in February, Kate Barnard, Socialist speaker, threatened that if the vote was put off in any manner, "there is no other avenue for redress of grievances but red riot and bloody rebellion. . . ."<sup>21</sup>

The early agitation from the Socialists was heightened by the fact that Governor Robert L. Williams had called the Legislature into special session and it passed a measure that included a "Literacy Test" to replace the defunct "Grandfather Clause".<sup>22</sup> The law itself stated

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<sup>19</sup>"Arguments for the 'Fair Election Law'," /pamphlet 7, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers; Otter Valley Socialist (Snyder), May 10, 1916.

<sup>20</sup>Stillwater Gazette, March 16, 1916; Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, Oklahoma, A History of the State and Its People (4 Vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1929), II, pp. 657-658.

<sup>21</sup>Appeal to Reason, February 5, 1916.

<sup>22</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (February, 1916), pp. 8-22.

that:<sup>23</sup>

No person shall be registered as an elector of this State, or be allowed to vote, or be eligible to hold office under the Constitution and the laws of this State unless he be able to read and write any section of the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma. . . .

This attempt by the Democratic party to control the General Election by the literacy test infuriated the Socialists.

The Appeal to Reason reported that the Democrats were "desperate because the Socialists of Oklahoma are building an organization that might soon capture the state; the Democratic machine, headed by Governor Williams, has played its last card. Seeing defeat looming up, the Democrats have decided to keep themselves in power by jamming through the Legislature a registration law that is intended to crush all opposition. . . ."<sup>24</sup>

The Republicans, for the first time, openly supported the Socialists against the Democrats in endorsing the Fair Election Law. At their state convention the Republicans passed a resolution which stated:<sup>25</sup>

Be it resolved, that it is the sentiment of the Republican State Convention as follows:

First, that every Republican in this state should vote for and cordially support what is commonly known as the Socialist Fair Election Law for the reason that its provisions are manifestly fair and just and for the further reason that if

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<sup>23</sup>Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1916, pp. 144-145.

<sup>24</sup>Appeal to Reason, March 6, 1916.

<sup>25</sup>Tulsa World, April 7, 1916.

adopted it would be destructive of our Democratic unjust and partisan election laws, and

Second, We should likewise support the Socialist Initiative Bill when it is submitted to a vote of our people, to repeal what is now called our registration law.

With this unprecedented support from the Republicans, the Socialists came dangerously close to fusion in the minds of such party regulars as Stanley J. Clark.<sup>26</sup>

One obvious segment of the population, the Negroes, was again eligible to participate in political matters after the Grandfather Clause was declared unconstitutional in 1915. Negroes in Oklahoma had been the object of discrimination, but now they had a chance to remedy the situation and the Socialists attempted to enlist their aid against the new Registration Law and for the Fair Election Law.<sup>27</sup> Although there had been dissension within the party about the social equality of the Negro in the early years of statehood, there was never any debate over the fact that the Socialists wanted the black vote.<sup>28</sup> The Socialists did manage to enlist the support of some Negroes in an open public endorsement of the party and the party's

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<sup>26</sup> Appeal to Reason, April 8, 1916; Socialist Anti-dote (Mangum), October 16, 1916; Ada Democrat, October 16, 1916.

<sup>27</sup> Appeal to Reason, April 18, 1916.

<sup>28</sup> Oklahoma Pioneer (Oklahoma City), March 16, 1910; ibid., August 27, 1910; Industrial Democrat (Oklahoma City), March 12, 1910; ibid., June 25, 1910; Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), p. 280.



initiative and referendum measures. In a statement to the Negro population, black leaders James A. Roper, the Reverend J. A. Johnson, and William Hutton denounced both the Republican and Democratic parties and recommended that " . . . all colored people of Oklahoma vote the Socialist ticket."<sup>29</sup>

Even as the Socialists marshalled their forces in the early months of 1916, there was general unrest among the tenant farmers in the Canadian River Valley. The Working Class Union, a syndicalist organization, rather than the Socialists brought the landless farmers to a fever pitch which resulted in violence. In the disbarment proceedings against L. C. McNabb, who headed the WCU,<sup>30</sup> the judge had dismissed the case. But even so the violence continued as "night riders" who were believed to be Working Class Union members attempted to assassinate County Attorney A. L. Bullock of Pontotoc County.<sup>31</sup> There was also much opposition to a recent stock-dipping law, which resulted in the destruction of dipping vats by dynamiting and the burning of two county commissioners barns.<sup>32</sup> George W. Shamblin

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<sup>29</sup>"Negroes Favor Socialist Party," Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>30</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (February 26, 1916), p. 1; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, February 22, 1916.

<sup>31</sup>Muskogee Daily Phoenix, January 6, 1916; Harlow's Weekly, X (January 15, 1916), p. 37.

<sup>32</sup>Ada News, January 15, 1916; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, January 6, 1916; J. Stanley Clark, "Texas Fever in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIX (Winter, 1951-1952), p. 432.

of Sequoyah County was beaten by "night riders" because he refused to join them in "their fight against usurious interest charging."<sup>33</sup> Patrick Nagle, who spoke for the Oklahoma Renters' Union before a Congressional Investigating Committee later in the year, reported that the violence was exaggerated and that:<sup>34</sup>

they [the night riders] can do more damage . . . with a double-barreled, muzzle-loading shotgun with a couple of basketfuls of Johnson grass -- . . . than in any other way, because within an hour's time you can simply destroy a \$10,000 farm. That is what night riderism constitutes in some degree.

Underlying all of this was the land question, which the Socialists were unable to solve through political means. The editor of Harlow's Weekly wrote that the government sales of Chickasaw and Choctaw land to speculators was adding to the tenant's distress. In this area most of the land held and rented by Indians was bought by speculators at the government sales, leaving little opportunity for land ownership by tenants.<sup>35</sup> Even conservative observers agreed with the Socialist estimation of the tenant question. Luther Harrison, editor of the Wewoka Democrat, concurred

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<sup>33</sup>Sequoyah County Democrat (Sallisaw), February 25, 1916.

<sup>34</sup>U.S. Senate, Commission on Industrial Relations, "Land Question in the Southwest," Final Report, 64th Congress, 1st Session, Document No. 415, 1916, X, p. 9077.

<sup>35</sup>Harlow's Weekly, X (January 22, 1916), p. 4.

here stating that the tenant problem was most grievous.<sup>36</sup> Violence on the part of the Working Class Union and the Oklahoma Renter's Union and threatened rebellion by Socialist spokesmen were only outward manifestations of the growing hopelessness of the situation.

The Socialist campaign prior to the primaries continued to grow in intensity. Although the Socialist primary represented no more than endorsement of the convention's selection of candidates, as there was never a choice between individuals, the primaries of 1916 caused a great deal of excitement because of the vote on the Legislative Referendum No. 55. Aside from the Presidential electors, Patrick Nagle was the most important candidate, running for Judge of the Criminal Court of Appeals--Northern District.<sup>37</sup> The ever-present encampments and the literature centered around the electoral reform.<sup>38</sup> Legislative Referendum No. 55, which was the Oklahoma Legislature's literacy qualification law passed in the last special session in January, was the major concern of the Socialists in the primaries of that year.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Wewoka Democrat, January 12, 1916.

<sup>37</sup>Appeal to Reason, July 22, 1916.

<sup>38</sup>Otter Valley Socialist, August 31, 1916; Ellis County Socialist, September 30, 1916.

<sup>39</sup>American Socialist, Business Supplement, August 5, 1916; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 234; Harlow's Weekly, XI (August 19, 1916) p. 3.

The summer climaxed with the highest Socialist primary vote in the history of Oklahoma. Socialist Presidential electors were nominated with a vote of 33,977, more than double the number that nominated Fred W. Holt as the Socialist candidate for governor in 1914.<sup>40</sup> The proposed literacy test amendment was rejected with a vote of 90,605 for the measure and 133,140 against it.<sup>41</sup> Between the Socialists, the Republicans, and the anti-machine Democrats, the onerous literacy test failed to replace the even more infamous "Grandfather Clause" in Oklahoma.<sup>42</sup>

With the primaries behind them, the Socialists tried to flood the state with literature, reportedly distributing 280,000 leaflets a week.<sup>43</sup> These were printed in the Appeal to Reason office in Kansas, as the Socialists lacked large-scale printing facilities in Oklahoma. The leaflets were prepared by Oklahomans and were "the hottest literature ever rolled off a printing press," according to the Appeal office.<sup>44</sup> Party Secretary H. M. Sinclair optimistically announced that: "The Democratic party is split wide open over the measure advanced by the Socialist party

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<sup>40</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 137, 142.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>42</sup>Otter Valley Socialist, August 31, 1916.

<sup>43</sup>American Socialist, August 5, 1916.

<sup>44</sup>Appeal to Reason, October 19, 1916.

the Fair Election Law, Senator Robert L. Owen has caused consternation by refusing to fight the . . . law. It now seems positive that we will sweep the platter clean."<sup>45</sup>

As the election drew closer, attacks on the Socialist party grew in intensity and in number. Never before had the Socialists faced the bitter opposition that confronted them in 1916. State Attorney-General S. P. Freeling was quoted as saying, "Attack the Socialists for what they are -- enemies of the republic."<sup>46</sup> He purportedly believed that the Socialists had been able to grow because the Democrats had failed to attack them. The new anti-Socialist paper published in Mangum, the Socialist Antidote denounced the agrarian radicals and stated that: "Socialism is a system of rank infidelity, negro equality, free love and anarchy," which would never do in Oklahoma.<sup>47</sup> Even the Daily Oklahoman, which rarely mentioned the Socialists, attacked their Fair Election Law, noting that: "The Socialists propose to sweep all this away popular control of government and set up in its stead a party mechanism operated solely by politicians."<sup>48</sup> Harlow's Weekly, which had in the past tried to present a balanced

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<sup>45</sup>Appeal to Reason, October 26, 1916.

<sup>46</sup>Otter Valley Socialist, August 31, 1916; Harlow's Weekly, XI (August 19, 1916), p. 3.

<sup>47</sup>Socialist Antidote, October 15, 1916.

<sup>48</sup>Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), October 6, 1916.

view of the Socialist movement, even to the point of printing articles by H. M. Sinclair and Patrick Nagle, began a steady campaign to enlighten its readers to the "socialist peril."<sup>49</sup> Noting that "Socialism is not merely a political doctrine," Harlow's carefully explained the structure of the organization:<sup>50</sup>

the control that the Socialist organization proposes to exercise over the Socialist officers in this state is not negative, but positive; that it proposes upon occasion to tell the officers elected by the people of Oklahoma what they shall do; which means that the real governmental authority in the state of Oklahoma would be located in the hands of the socialist executive committee in Oklahoma whenever a majority of the officers of the state are socialists.

Further its pages noted that "it would seem that in the presence of this kind of politics the old parties would become aroused to their danger," but noted instead that they were not rising to the emergency.<sup>51</sup>

The general election brought to the polls the largest number of Oklahomans in the history of the state. In the presidential election, Woodrow Wilson ran on the record of his first administration and the idea that "He kept us out of War." His Republican opponent, Charles Evans Hughes, questioned even the economic involvement of

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<sup>49</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XI (August 19, 1916), pp. 3-5; ibid., XI (September 6, 1916), pp. 3-5; ibid., XI (September 27, 1916), pp. 3-4.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., XI (September 6, 1916), p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

the United States in the European conflict. The Socialist candidate, Allen L. Benson, owed his political existence to his anti-war messages. So in 1916, the voter, no matter what candidate he chose, was voting against war. The results were disappointing, however; for the first time in the history of the Socialist party in Oklahoma, their total vote dropped from the previous election. The vote in the presidential race was Wilson, 148,113; Hughes, 97,233; and Benson received only 45,190.<sup>52</sup> The Progressives and the Prohibitionists picked up only marginal votes of 234 and 1,646 respectively. The Socialist vote of 45,190 compared to 52,703 in 1914; but even with this, the Oklahoma party was the only state party in the nation to have an increase over the presidential total in 1912.<sup>53</sup> While twenty-six counties realized an increase in Socialist voting in 1916 over that in 1914, only seven counties held a Socialist voting percentage of over 25.0 percent. Three of these were in the southeast -- Marshall, Seminole, and Stephens, while the remaining four counties, Beckham, Dewey, Major and Roger Mills, were in the western portion of the state.<sup>54</sup>

For a short time, the Socialists were at least jubilant over the fact that the Fair Election Law had been

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<sup>52</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 281-341.

carried by a sizeable majority of 147,087 to 119,602.<sup>55</sup> But the Democratic-dominated State Election Board ruled that the measure did not pass as it needed 152,054 votes to carry, which was a majority of the ballots cast, even though the voters in many cases voted neither for or against the measure.<sup>56</sup> The Socialists soon protested the decision. Three weeks after the election, Patrick Nagle wrote a searing article in Harlow's Weekly, charging openly that there had been an intentional shortage of ballots on initiated questions in over 100 precincts. He stated in detail the locations of these, as well as other violations which should have invalidated the election. No official notice was ever taken of these charges.<sup>57</sup>

The elections, apart from the initiative measure, were also disappointing. Not only did the Socialists fail to elect Congressmen, but also the party was unable to re-elect a single representative to the state legislature. In Beckham county, Thomas H. McLemore dropped from 41.6 percent of the vote in 1914 to 30.7 percent in 1916 and lost to a Democrat. This pattern of dropping over 10 percentage points was followed by two other Socialists,

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 235; Appeal to Reason, November 18, 1916.

<sup>56</sup>Thoburn and Wright, Oklahoma, A History, p. 658.

<sup>57</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XI (November 16, 1916), pp. 12-15.



J. L. Pritchett in the Swanson District of Kiowa county, 49.9 percent in 1914 and 36.7 percent in 1916, and Sidney W. Hill in Roger Mills county, 39.5 percent in 1914 and 28.3 percent in 1916.<sup>58</sup> The two other Socialist incumbents increased their vote slightly, but lost ground on a percentage basis in their respective counties. They lost close elections. In Dewey county, D. C. Kirkpatrick fell only from 34.9 percent in 1914 to 33.7 percent in 1916. In Major county, C. H. Ingham, the only Socialist to lose to a Republican, fell from 31.2 percent in 1914 to 30.1 percent in 1916.<sup>59</sup> In these two cases, the Socialist numerical vote increased slightly, as both Pritchett and Ingham polled larger totals in 1916 than in 1914.<sup>60</sup>

The notable lack of Socialist success in 1916 was attributable to several factors. On November 4, before the election, the editor of the Daily Oklahoman stated that the

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<sup>58</sup>Voting Abstract, 1914; ibid., 1916, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>59</sup>Voting Abstract, 1914; ibid., 1916.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

Swanson District of Kiowa County

<u>1914</u>		<u>1916</u>	
J. L. Pritchett (S)	608	W. G. Woodlard (D)	792
R. S. Meyers (D)	432	N. D. Pritchett (S)	633
O. B. Reigel (R)	178	William Allison (R)	275

Major County

<u>1914</u>		<u>1916</u>	
C. H. Ingham (S)	632	S. J. Bardsley (R)	941
Will J. Scotts (R)	500	C. H. Ingham (S)	699
J. F. Connor (D)	484	W. E. Conreay (D)	676

improved economic conditions would hamper radicalism in the state and apparently this was a major factor in the Socialists' failure.<sup>61</sup> During 1916 there was a general increase in the price of a number of crops, especially wheat and cotton. This was just the reverse of 1914. A number of sources cited the low prices of wheat and cotton in the previous election year as a factor in Socialist success. Wheat had brought 70 cents a bushel in 1914, but in 1916, the price was \$1.14 a bushel.<sup>62</sup> Cotton prices also rose sharply, moving upward from 7.5 cents a pound in 1914, to 17.5 cents in 1916.<sup>63</sup> Rising prices and larger incomes for even sharecroppers and tenants tended to weaken any radical movement. This was the case for the Socialist party in Oklahoma where agrarian nature was linked closely to the agricultural situation.

There were other explanations for the growing Socialist weakness in the state. First, the party failed to attract the black vote in the counties where Negroes were most heavily concentrated. Of the six counties which had more than 25 percent Negroes in 1910, only two increased their Socialist vote, while the other four had an actual

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<sup>61</sup>Daily Oklahoman, November 4, 1916.

<sup>62</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957, p. 297.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

decrease in Socialist support.<sup>64</sup> The party was further weakened by the fact that the syndicalists had apparently drawn off some of the Socialists who had become disenchanted with political attempts to solve their problems. Without exception, every county in the lower Canadian River Valley, where the Working Class Union was most active, showed a loss in Socialist voting strength in 1916 as compared to 1914. These losses in most cases were in the hundreds. Pittsburg county, for example, saw a decline of 613 votes in the Socialist column, or a loss of 40.7 percent.<sup>65</sup> So the Socialists, who were unable to attract an important labor vote, also could not attract large numbers of Negroes nor retain the vote of the farm population in the state.

After this defeat, the Socialists met in convention late in 1916 in Oklahoma City and attempted to present a united front and produce the old enthusiasm of an earlier period. But this effort did not achieve much success. Even in the reports of the convention, there was notice given to "unjust opposition and attacks of an insignificant minority of malcontents in the Socialist party," led by Stanley J. Clark, against the leadership of the Party

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<sup>64</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, III, Population, p. 465; Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 318-349.

<sup>65</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, pp. 290-344.

Secretary, H. M. Sinclair.<sup>66</sup> The report in the Appeal to Reason summed up the situation by stating: "The final outcome of the efforts of the convention is problematic. There was, however, one thing that was encouraging; that was the spirit of determination to fight on to the end."<sup>67</sup> This indeed was an ominous note, as very little was accomplished other than continuing to call for co-operation on the part of the farm population, election reform, and woman suffrage.<sup>68</sup>

In the spring of 1917, it was not so much what was happening in Oklahoma which affected the Socialists, but what was transpiring in St. Louis. With the entry of the United States into World War I, the Socialist party met in St. Louis and passed sharply-worded anti-war resolutions.<sup>69</sup> Although the Oklahoma Socialists were not prominent at the convention, their position was vitally affected. Rather than bolt the party as many of the better-known figures, such as John Spargo and A. M. Simmons did, the Oklahoma Socialists remained mute on the subject.<sup>70</sup> In the period

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<sup>66</sup>Appeal to Reason, January 7, 1917; Harlow's Weekly, XI (January 3, 1917), p. 8.

<sup>67</sup>Appeal to Reason, January 7, 1917.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 7, 1917; ibid., April 8, 1917; ibid., April 9, 1917; Daily Oklahoman, April 8, 1917; David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, A History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 92.

<sup>70</sup>New York Times, June 24, 1917.

immediately after the declaration of war, two important bodies in Oklahoma did make their opposition known -- the Oklahoma Farmers' Union and the Mennonites -- but the Socialist party failed to take any action publicly.<sup>71</sup> Even so, the Socialists were branded as being "traitorously pro-German" by the Daily Oklahoman for taking the anti-war stand in St. Louis.<sup>72</sup>

While the Oklahoma Socialists took no active stand on the war in 1917, the Syndicalist movement through the Working Class Union took the initiative. Even though there was no official connection between the Socialist party and this movement, the Socialists were identified with them in the press and in the public mind.<sup>73</sup> Throughout the spring and summer of 1917, the Syndicalists continued their night-riding tactics and incendiary activities. But the Conscription Act of 1917 was the ingredient which stirred the rural proletariat to revolutionary activity.<sup>74</sup> These people were violently opposed to the draft and thought it another

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<sup>71</sup>Daily Oklahoman, April 8, 1917; ibid., April 15, 1917.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1917.

<sup>73</sup>Daily Oklahoman, June 1, 1917; ibid., June 15, 1917; Daily Ardmoreite (Ardmore), October 31, 1917; McAles-ter News-Capital, October 20, 1917; Charles C. Bush, "The Green Corn Rebellion," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1932, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup>Shawnee Daily News-Herald, August 3, 1917; Wewoka Capital-Democrat, August 19, 1917.

example of the capitalist class reaching into their lives to take their available men. They were tenants and their needs were immediate since they lived from hand to mouth. They needed their able-bodied men every growing season to make a crop. If these men were not available, the landlords sought other tenants for their farms and these families were then without a means of support. The agitators used the hatred of the landowning class and the draft issue to make true revolutionaries of the tenants, especially in the lower Canadian River Valley.<sup>75</sup>

Through early June, there was evidence of resistance to the draft measure, as WCU speakers were driven out of towns such as Henryetta, and draft resisters were arrested.<sup>76</sup> The only prominent Socialist arrested during this period was Vernon L. Rhodyback, editor of the Otter Valley Socialist in Snyder. But he proved he was over-age and was subsequently released without speaking openly about conscription.<sup>77</sup> There were hints of anti-government plots by WCU leaders through the summer of 1917, and finally several hundred farmers, both black and white, took to the field in

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<sup>75</sup>Wewoka Democrat, June 7, 1917; Holdenville Democrat, June 14, 1917; Ada Weekly News, August 16, 1917; Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, pp. 353-354.

<sup>76</sup>Daily Oklahoman, June 1, 1917.

<sup>77</sup>Otter Valley Socialist, June 14, 1917.

open rebellion in early August.<sup>78</sup> They burned bridges and cut communication lines, while shooting broke out in various counties along the Canadian, primarily Hughes, Pontotoc, Pottowatomie, and Seminole. The rebellion had little organization and lacked proper leadership, so that it soon disintegrated into little more than mob action. In the short period of armed conflict, the violence was not coordinated and was unsuccessful in its purpose. After a few days of rioting, the Green Corn Rebellion, as it was later called, collapsed in the face of opposition by law enforcement officials and the home guard.<sup>79</sup> All it accomplished was the discrediting of all who took an anti-war stand.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the Socialist party's disapproval of the Syndicalists and their ideas on direct action, several individual Socialists became involved in the attempted revolution.<sup>81</sup> Among those arrested for taking part in the rebellion were Allen Huckleberry, a former Socialist county commissioner from Konawa; W. P. Snyder, a former undersheriff; and J. H. Snyder, Socialist Justice of the Peace.

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<sup>78</sup>Daily Oklahoman, October 7, 1917; Bush, "Green Corn Rebellion," pp. 22-23.

<sup>79</sup>Daily Oklahoman, August 4, 1917; ibid., August 5, 1917.

<sup>80</sup>Shawnee Daily News-Herald, September 25, 1917.

<sup>81</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 356.

Other Socialist party officials placed under arrest included Matthew Harris, a county commissioner and W. H. Conley, a Socialist candidate for Congress in 1916.<sup>82</sup> Even so, the Socialist party hierarchy denied any connection between the rebels and the Socialist movement. State Party Secretary H. M. Sinclair put out the statement that the resistance forces in Pontotoc and Hughes counties appeared to have been " . . . composed of members of all political parties and not entirely Socialists, as had been the impression left by several of the capitalist papers."<sup>83</sup> He reaffirmed the idea that the Socialist party organization had nothing whatever to do with any movements sponsored by the anarchist-syndicalist groups.<sup>84</sup> The Otter Valley Socialist stated that:<sup>85</sup>

Of course they [the rebels] were fools with poor vision, to undertake such a foolish and disastrous thing, for while their crime was being opposed to war, they should have known every town in the county [sic] is willing to furnish men by the score to shoot farmers or laborers.

The people of Oklahoma were in no mood to accept any explanation from the Socialists. W. H. Murray aptly

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 355; Bush, "Green Corn Rebellion," p. 42.

<sup>83</sup>Ellis County News (Shattuck), August 16, 1917.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.; see "What Is Syndicalism?" "Political Action vs. Economic, Industrial or Direct Action," and "The I.W.W. and the Socialist Party," National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>85</sup>Otter Valley Socialist, August 9, 1917.



expressed the attitude of many people when he stated that "the IWW (some . . . called themselves Socialists), . . . filled their [the tenants'] clabber-brains with class hate," and misled them into this terrible mistake.<sup>86</sup>

Harlow's Weekly clearly stated the problem that:<sup>87</sup>

. . . some national leaders through prolonged opposition to the war, placed socialism [sic] in the apparent attitude of being "anti-American." The attempted rebellion in Oklahoma last August, was participated in by many socialists [sic] of the "extreme action" school and their seditious acts tended to cast opprobrium over even the political actionists who did not countenance the up-rising.

The Socialist party was discredited in the state and there seemed little chance that it would overcome the stigma brought on by the association with the rebellion.

Shortly after the trials of the rebels in October of 1917, an emergency convention of the Socialist party met in Oklahoma City. Ameringer in his autobiography described the party as being "mortally wounded" and, indeed, the situation was impossible. Therefore, Patrick S. Nagle sponsored a resolution to disband the Socialist party of Oklahoma, which passed with no reported opposition.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>William H. Murray, Memoirs of Governor Murray and True History of Oklahoma (3 Vols., Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1945), III, pp. 206-207.

<sup>87</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XIV (January 2, 1918), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 356; Daily Oklahoman, November 19, 1917; also see Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life (2 Vols., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952), I, p. 307.

Nagle apparently made this move out of fear that the overt acts in Oklahoma would injure Victor Berger's position while he was on trial in Chicago for conspiracy to obstruct the prosecution of the war. Thus Socialism in Oklahoma, which until a year before, had shown real progress as a third party, now in late 1917 voted to officially disband without having been able to achieve its purpose.

Thus, the faltering Oklahoma Socialist party received a death blow arising from rebellious action in the Canadian River Valley. The party had managed to exist through almost two decades without patronage and funds. The problems arising from these difficulties were compounded by the purge of many of its leaders shortly after the election of 1912. Despite the party's internal dissension, it still had enough strength to achieve its first major victories on the state level in the election of 1914. But, in the face of rising wheat and cotton prices during the war years, the Socialists realized little from their earlier gains. Finally, the intensified external pressure that arose following the Green Corn Rebellion proved too much for the seriously weakened Socialist party organization.

## CHAPTER IX

### OKLAHOMA SOCIALISM:

#### POST OBITUM

"The Oklahoma socialist political craft has entered the doldrums, and the skippers in charge have issued orders that just enough energy be exerted by the oarsmen to keep the prow pointed toward Utopia," so said the editors of Harlow's Weekly about the Socialist movement in early 1918.<sup>1</sup> Indeed a small minority of the party faithful tried to keep the organization together. But in truth, the Socialist party in Oklahoma was no longer a potent political force and would lead only a shadowy existence in the newer political combinations that existed in the years following the Great War. A number of organizations oriented toward the farmers and farm issues came into being, filling the Socialist party void. Shortly after the November election of 1916, representatives of the Nonpartisan League entered the state to organize it along the lines of the North

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<sup>1</sup>Alvin Rucker, "Socialism is Definitely Falling Behind in Oklahoma," Harlow's Weekly, XIV (January 2, 1918), p. 8.

Dakota plan. In 1917, there was an astounding revival of the Oklahoma Farmers' Union under the leadership of John A. Simpson. Even as late as 1921, individual Socialists joined farm and labor groups in yet another attempt to bring the working class forcefully into politics in the form of the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League. So the apparent agrarian economic problems continued to press the farmers into action after the demise of the Socialists, just as they had done before its creation in the state.

The rise of the Nonpartisan League in Oklahoma brought a rise in spirits of a minority of the agrarian radicals in the state for a short while in 1917 and 1918.<sup>2</sup> For since Socialists had been an integral part of the leadership in the strong movements in the Dakotas, it was hoped that the Socialists would do the same in Oklahoma. Even though the League advocated many of the same demands as the Socialists, such as state-owned mines, terminal elevators and warehouses, and state-financed agricultural credit and insurance, the movement never had a chance for success, because the parent organization in North Dakota sent organizers into the state.<sup>3</sup> Socialist leaders such as Patrick S. Nagle, who opposed fusion, would not aid the movement, and in fact, fought its growth in Oklahoma. With

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<sup>2</sup>Gilbert C. Fite, "The Nonpartisan League in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXIV (Summer, 1946), p. 1471.

<sup>3</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XIV (January 9, 1918), p. 6.

little support, even from the Socialists, the Nonpartisan League never lived up to its potential.<sup>4</sup>

A minority of the Socialist membership carried on after the successful vote to dissolve the party of November, 1917. Just as the Populist party had run candidates for a full decade after the 1896 election in Oklahoma, the Socialists as individuals ran for office.<sup>5</sup> In 1918, the Democratic majority of the state legislature passed a law requiring a primary vote of 27 percent of the total votes in the previous general election for any party to receive a place on the fall ballot. But this measure was declared unconstitutional by the Attorney-General, even before the courts had an opportunity to pass on the law.<sup>6</sup> So without the stricture of the "27 Percent Law" individual Socialist candidates were free to run, even without a party to back them. But even the former State Secretary, H. M. Sinclair, running for Secretary of State in 1918, received only 7,892 votes.<sup>7</sup> In 1920, J. Luther Langston, who had been expelled

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<sup>4</sup>Patrick S. Nagle to National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America, April 1, 1922, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>5</sup>Voting Abstracts, 1900-1906, State Election Board, Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>6</sup>"Socialist Comment on 27 Percent Law," Harlow's Weekly, XV (August 28, 1918), pp. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup>Basil R. Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: State Election Board, 1967), p. 147.

from the party in 1914, ran on the Socialist ticket for United States Representative and received 353 votes.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond getting individuals on the ballot, Socialists managed to re-establish a newspaper in Oklahoma in 1920. All of the Socialist papers had disappeared in the state, and the Appeal to Reason had changed hands, leaving the Oklahomans no means of publishing their views. But the Oklahoma Leader Company was incorporated in the state in early 1919 and began publication in 1920. Edwin Newdick of Boston, Massachusetts, was the editor, but Oscar Ameringer, who had returned from Milwaukee for the purpose of establishing a Socialist press, was the chief mover and promoter of the paper.<sup>9</sup> Even though the journal was established in Oklahoma City, the majority of the common stock was held in Milwaukee and Victor Berger was the principal board member.<sup>10</sup> Oklahoma Socialists such as John Hagel, Fred W. Holt, and Patrick S. Nagle supported the paper and the Oklahoma Leader struggled through the postwar period as the only Socialist voice in the state. Even then, it did not support the individuals running on the Socialist ticket, but worked consistently for a new coalition of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1940), pp. 358-364.

<sup>10</sup> Nagle to National Executive Committee, April 1, 1922, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

farmers and laborers.<sup>11</sup>

A real chance to influence the political situation in Oklahoma came in 1921 with the formation of the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League. The State Federation of Labor was credited with giving the movement impetus, but a number of Socialists also took an active part in its formation. Luther Langston, a labor leader and former Socialist candidate for Congress, joined the vanguard of those advocating a political alliance of farmers and laborers.<sup>12</sup> The only Socialist elected to the Oklahoma senate in the election of 1914, now manager of the Reconstruction League, courted former Socialists, labor union leaders, and members of the Farmers' Union.<sup>13</sup> Even Patrick Nagle, who had openly opposed the Nonpartisan League, gave his support to the new organization and Oscar Ameringer, through the Oklahoma Leader, was friendly to the movement.<sup>14</sup>

The real beginning of the Reconstruction League came at the Shawnee Convention in February of 1922. Here

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<sup>11</sup>Oklahoma Leader (Oklahoma City), September 21, 1920.

<sup>12</sup>Oklahoma City Reconstructionist, June 10, 1922; Gilbert C. Fite, "Oklahoma's Reconstruction League: An Experiment in Farmer-Labor Politics," Journal of Southern History, XIII (November, 1947), p. 537.

<sup>13</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XX (September 23, 1921), p. 16; Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 373.

<sup>14</sup>Patrick S. Nagle to National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, April 1, 1922, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America.

the coalition that had eluded the Socialists throughout their history took shape. Edgar Fenton, President of the State Federation of Labor, nominated the League's choice for governor, J. C. "Our Jack" Walton, and promised organized labor's support for him. A Negro delegate, H. J. Bouknight, said that "Walton would get the entire Negro vote in Oklahoma."<sup>15</sup> John Simpson, President of the Farmers' Union, gave his organization's support and Ed Reger, Chairman of the Farmers' Union Executive Board, stated that the "Farmers would stand for the election of state officials for a peoples' administration."<sup>16</sup> Nagle reported that there were more than a hundred Socialists at the meeting for they recognized that it was "practically impossible to reorganize the party until the conditions brought about by the war were greatly changed."<sup>17</sup>

The League captured the Democratic party and placed Walton in office by a vote of 280,206 to 230,469 for the Republican candidate, John Fields. Socialist candidate, O. E. Enfield, managed only 3,941 votes.<sup>18</sup> But

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<sup>15</sup>Shawnee News, February 24, 1922; Ada Evening News, February 24, 1916.

<sup>16</sup>Shawnee News, February 24, 1922; Oklahoma Union Farmer (Oklahoma City), July 1, 1922.

<sup>17</sup>Patrick S. Nagle to National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, April 1, 1922, Oklahoma State File, Socialist Party of America Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Wilson (Comp.), Directory and Manual of the State of Oklahoma, p. 156.



shortly after Walton took office, he forgot the farm-labor coalition. Oscar Ameringer was sorely disappointed as evidenced in this passage from his autobiography:<sup>19</sup>

Our Jack even reversed the oldest and most honored American political tradition, "to the victors belong the spoils." All the key positions in the State House, state, and county governments were presented to our vanquished foes. The highest honors which Our Jack bestowed upon his erstwhile comrades in the soviet of farmers, workers and ex-service men of Oklahoma were the ignominious positions of fish-and-game warden, auto-tag dispenser, and assistant cuspidor custodian in the state capitol. Nor, in other respects, did Our Jack make even a gesture toward speeding on the new dawn. The ancient regime of oil, cement, asphalt and privately owned public utilities that had governed Oklahoma since President Taft gave his left-handed blessing to the constitution of the state, back in 1907, reigned as supreme as of yore. The platform manifestoes and demands of the Farmer-Labor-Reconstruction League joined the collection of broken Indian treaties moldering among the exhibits in Oklahoma's new Museum of Ancient History.

Indeed, the individual Socialists who had joined the movement that placed Walton in office failed once more. This, however, was not a Socialist failure as much as it was another in the long history of failures of the farmers that ranged back to the territorial period.

During the period in which the Socialists tried to advance the agrarian cause, the party sought to change the economic system only through their elected officials. Therefore, the Socialist movement in Oklahoma evolved into what might be considered a neo-Populist organization, yet,

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<sup>19</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 383.

with one major difference.<sup>20</sup> Always within the Socialist ranks there loomed the "red" or revolutionary wing of the movement, which sought a proper time to take the initiative from the more moderate "yellow" segment of the party. The more moderate approach proved most appealing to Oklahomans and the threat of revolution and direct action proved insignificant. When, however, the "yellow" element could no longer control the situation or offer answers to the needs of the tenants, large numbers of the party considered political action inexpedient and apparently followed the dictates of direct action in the Green Corn Rebellion.<sup>21</sup>

David A. Shannon went so far as to state that: "The Green Corn Rebellion killed the Socialist Party of Oklahoma."<sup>22</sup> However, it took more than one isolated event such as the rebellion to bring about the demise of the strong Socialist organization in Oklahoma. For two decades, a comparatively large proportion of the population voted the Socialist ticket. During this period, the party's grass-roots base, primarily made up of small land-owning

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<sup>20</sup> See William B. Hesseltine, The Rise and Fall of Third Parties, Anti-Masonry to Wallace (Clouster, Massachusetts; Peter Smith, 1957), p. 40, for a general discussion of the topic.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Bush, "The Green Corn Rebellion," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1932.

<sup>22</sup> David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America, A History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 126-127.

farmers and tenants, became much larger than that of the earlier People's party in the state. In fact, in this rurally-dominated area, the Oklahoma Socialists controlled as many as one out of every five votes, while in a more industrialized state like New York the party could only muster about one out of every twenty-two votes.<sup>23</sup> The agrarian Socialist leaders proved through this period that when conditions placed the farmers in a precarious position, they could provide an organized, active base for Socialism.

In Oklahoma, the fortunes of the Socialist party were closely linked with the agrarian situation. A number of variables such as the number of owner-operated farms, tenancy rates, amount of mortgage debt, number of farms, and the price received for commercial crops such as wheat and cotton appear to have had a direct bearing on the Socialist position in the state. Demographic factors could not entirely explain the situation, although overall patterns were revealing. First, from 1900 to 1910 there was a large increase in the number of farms but between 1910 and 1920 there was a general leveling off of the number of farms in the state.<sup>24</sup> The number of owner-

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<sup>23</sup>"Socialist Vote in the States," National Office File, Socialist Party of America Papers, Manuscripts Division, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, IV, Agriculture, pp. 78-155; ibid., 1920, VI, part 2, pp. 620-622; D. P. Trent, "Farm Tenancy

operated farms also grew throughout the period, but with a more stable rate of growth, moving from 60,209 in 1900 to 85,404 in 1910 to 93,217 in 1920.<sup>25</sup> In comparison, a much more erratic pattern appeared in the number of tenant-operated farms. In 1900, the figure was 47,250, or less than the number of owner-operated farms, but by 1910, this figure had risen drastically to 104,137.<sup>26</sup> So the tenant farms numbered about 20,000 less than the owner-operated farms in 1900 and rose to about 20,000 more by 1910. Then between 1910 and 1920, the number of tenants declined to 97,836.<sup>27</sup> As revealed in the 1916 Hearings of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, the number of farms operated by tenants was about 104,000. The drop in tenancy after 1915 coincided with the loss of Socialist voting strength in the Southeastern portion of the state.<sup>28</sup>

In the west, although not always a source of unfavorable conditions, mortgage debt provided the Socialists with another issue throughout their history. Although there

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in Oklahoma," Typescript 7, Cortez E. M. Ewing Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>U.S. Senate, Commission on Industrial Relations, "The Land Question in the Southwest," Final Report, X, 64th Congress, 1st Session, Document No. 415 (1916), pp. 9072, 9159.

were no figures given on farm mortgage debt in the Census of 1900, a later study estimated that only 8.1 percent of the farms in both Oklahoma and Indian territories were mortgaged at that time.<sup>29</sup> By 1910, the percent of farms mortgaged rose to 42.2 percent. This extremely high rate of growth in the number of mortgaged farms between 1900 and 1910 leveled off somewhat in the next decade as reported in the Census of 1920, rising to 50.4 percent. This represented a growth of only 8.2 percent between 1910 and 1920 as compared to 34.1 percent in the previous ten years.<sup>30</sup> Most certainly the war, in terms of rising prices and greater prosperity, affected the number of mortgages reported in 1920, but this does not discount the decline in the number of farms and consolidation of ownership.<sup>31</sup>

In the eight counties where Socialist voting strength was most powerful throughout the party's history, these same patterns of debt and tenancy and number of farms existed. Four of these counties were located in the southeastern portion of the state: Coal, Marshall, Seminole, and Stephens. While there were no county figures for the 1900 Census, the figures from 1910 and 1920 give some

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<sup>29</sup>Trent, "Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma," Ewing Collection.

<sup>30</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, VI, part 2, pp. 620-622.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

indication as to what was happening. Tenancy, generally associated with cotton culture, was a major problem in this section. But in the ten year period from 1910 to 1920, the number of farms operated by tenants dropped in three of the four counties, while the total number of farms increased in three of the four counties accounting for a larger drop in the rate of tenancy than might be expected.<sup>32</sup> In other words, there were fewer tenants and an increased number of farms operated by their owners. In the western portion of the state, Beckham, Dewey, Major, and Roger Mills counties showed a different trend of a decreasing number of farms in operation in 1920 as compared to 1910. These counties also lost in over-all population during this period.<sup>33</sup> These facts indicate that in the west, many farmers who could not compete were no longer on the land in 1920. So, in both sections of the state, elements of the farm population, tenants in the East and small farmers in the West, who would have supported the Socialist program were no longer a substantial part of the farm population. The tenant farmers in the southeast were fewer in number and the small farmers in the west were gone from the land.

Other factors which contributed to growing Socialist weakness besides loss of farmers who might have made up the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

rank and file of the Socialist movement were lack of unity and the struggle for power within the party leadership. Essentially, there were three principal factions represented in the leadership of the Oklahoma Socialist party. The first, or native leadership, followed the older Populist program to a large extent and in many cases had been at one time members of the Populist party.<sup>34</sup> The Socialists accepted this leadership throughout most of the territorial period from 1900 to 1907. Leaders such as W. H. Sweatt and Thomas H. Smith acted as important links between the Populist organization and the new Socialist party. But these were all older men who were replaced by younger men without this dual loyalty. A second group within the party, headed by Oscar Ameringer, Otto Branstetter, and John Hagel, controlled the party movements during the years from 1907 to 1913. It was during this period that the Socialists made their most impressive gains and became an important force in Oklahoma politics.<sup>35</sup> In 1913, a third faction ousted this second element on the grounds that the Ameringer

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<sup>34</sup>W. H. Sweatt, "The Oklahoma Work," Appeal to Reason, September 4, 1903; Donald K. Pickens, "Oklahoma Populism and Historical Interpretation," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XLIII (Spring, 1965), pp. 275-283; J. E. Snyder, "Some Things That Make for Socialism in Oklahoma and Indian Territory," /type-script/, Socialist Papers, Bureau of Government Research Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>35</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 454; Egbert and Persons (Eds.), Socialism and American Life, I, p. 306.

group was foreign to Oklahoma. More to the point, the Left-wing rid itself of the Right, and went against the main stream of Socialist success and acceptance in Oklahoma with its more doctrinaire approach. This third faction continued to control the party from 1913 to the party's failure in 1918.<sup>36</sup> Whereas the first two elements had espoused reform Socialism and were considered "yellows", this last group . led by J. Tad Cumbie and Stanley J. Clark was more truly "red" or revolutionary in outlook.<sup>37</sup> This third element led the party through the peak year of 1914 when bad prices intensified the demand for change, and into the period of the party's decline. Although this faction came into real leadership very late, it was always an important minority within the party and contributed to the party's failure.

There can be no doubt that the Socialist opposition to the World War had its effect on the movement in Oklahoma. The national Socialist organization's opposition to the war represented a principal reason for much of the party's unpopularity, especially after American intervention.<sup>38</sup> But there is no positive way this can be determined, for most contemporary newspapers failed to emphasize the

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<sup>36</sup>New Century (Sulphur), January 3, 1914; Harlow's Weekly, VI (August 22, 1914), p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>H. M. Sinclair, "The Real Democracy of the Socialist Party," Harlow's Weekly, V (April 25, 1914), pp. 21-22.

<sup>38</sup>Harlow's Weekly, XIV (January 2, 1918), p. 9.



Oklahoma Socialists' criticism. Apart from infrequent reference to Socialists on the national level, apparently editors decided that a discussion of the matter did not serve the public interest, or there was little to report. The latter alternative may be the better of the two, for in the Official Report of the Oklahoma State Council of Defense, only one out of the seventy-seven County reports noted Socialist opposition to the war or the draft.<sup>39</sup> Certainly through the summer of 1917, the Council of Defense officials were more concerned about the IWW than the Socialists, as evidenced in their correspondence.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Socialists within the state de-emphasized their anti-war position very early in the war. In the 1916 convention, for example, the Socialists failed, other than to endorse the National Socialist Platform, to take a stand on the war issue. More importantly, the Socialists never made an open statement of their position after American intervention.<sup>41</sup>

There were a number of external factors arising directly from the war that acted on the already weakened

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<sup>39</sup>Official Report of the Oklahoma State Council of Defense, From May, 1917 to January, 1919, p. 37, Chester Westfall Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>40</sup>T. H. Beacon to C. H. Hyde, July 13, 1917; George L. Miller to C. H. Hyde, July 17, 1917, C. H. Hyde Collection, Division of Manuscripts, Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>41</sup>Appeal to Reason, January 6, 1917.

party. Economic injustice, one of the major Socialist issues, lost some of its impact with the rapid rise of cotton and wheat prices, stimulated by war-time needs. After the low prices in 1914, which apparently helped the Socialists in the election of that year, the situation changed radically in the years immediately after that. Rapid price rises in cotton and wheat, the two major commercial crops of Oklahoma in that period, proved too much for the Socialists to contend with during the war. For example, cotton, if a market could be found for it, sold for 7.5 cents a pound in 1914. By 1916, the price had risen to 17.5 cents a pound and continued to rise.<sup>42</sup> The same held true for the price of wheat which was 70 cents a bushel in 1914 and then \$1.14 a bushel in 1916.<sup>43</sup> As the editors of the Daily Oklahoman noted in 1916, the much improved market and price situation took the edge off of the radicalism in the state.<sup>44</sup> The economic pressures that the farmers had faced throughout the early part of the twentieth century had been eased by better war-time prices.

A second factor resulting directly from the war was that it gave the Working Class Union a clear issue, the

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<sup>42</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (1961), p. 301.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>44</sup>Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), November 4, 1916.

draft call, to bring the tenants in the Canadian River Valley to the point of rebellious action. The WCU leadership, W. C. Munson and Homer Spence, resorted to direct action to alleviate the tenants' problems. As early as 1917 they encouraged nightriding and lawless action, but with the threat of the draft, once America entered the conflict, the matter took on immense proportions in the minds of the tenants.<sup>45</sup> These tenants could not afford to lose their men to the war even for one season without some provision for the families they left behind. The WCU agitators played on this until actual revolution broke out in the form of the Green Corn Rebellion in August of 1917.<sup>46</sup> The reaction against the rebels fell on the Socialist party in Oklahoma.<sup>47</sup> It was, in fact, this draft call issue that indirectly dealt another blow to the faltering Socialist party.

But the failure of the movement was not so much a cause for wonder as was the fact that it remained a political force to be reckoned with as long as it did. More than anything else, the success of agrarian Socialism rested on the fertile ground of farm grievances, mortgage debt, market manipulation, usury, and tenancy. But Oklahoma was a

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<sup>45</sup>Charles Bush, "The Green Corn Rebellion," unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1932, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>47</sup>Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken, p. 352.

relatively new land in the West going through adjustment processes that had taken place earlier elsewhere. The first Oklahoma lands were opened to settlement on April 22, 1889. This was followed by annexation of "No Man's Land" in 1890; the lands of the Iowa, Sac, Fox, and Pottawatomie Indians in 1891; the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands in 1892; the Cherokee outlet in 1893; the lands of the Kickapoos in 1895; the Otoe, Ponca, Missouri, and Kaw Reservations in 1904.<sup>48</sup> All of these were opened under circumstances which gave settlers free or cheap land. The fact that Oklahoma developed later than those states to the north or to the south meant that the problems of farmers came somewhat later. The Socialist movement in Oklahoma was one of the last spasms of the unrest reflected in the Populist cause a decade earlier. But this would hold true primarily for the farmers in the marginal lands in western Oklahoma. The small landowning farmers were being forced into failure primarily because they began with less than the necessary capital needed for successful commercial farming and now were seeking help.<sup>49</sup> In eastern Oklahoma, the Socialist base was more along the lines of what one might expect in a radical agrarian movement of a Socialist nature. The landless tenant was a main source of strength

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<sup>48</sup>U.S. Senate, "Land Questions in the Southwest," p. 9071.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 9073-9074.

in what had been former Indian Territory. Tenancy rates were more than double what they were in the western portion of the state.<sup>50</sup> The rank and file of Oklahoma Socialism was the small landed farmer in the west and the tenant or share-cropper in the southeast. With the exception of the mining element, also in the southeastern portion of the state, the party was completely agrarian in make-up.<sup>51</sup>

This agrarian ferment was channeled and directed by a series of leaders who managed to make the Socialist party a real force in Oklahoma politics. In the territorial period, the leadership was that of former Populists with some organizational know-how. But this leadership passed away with the coming of statehood. It was replaced by reform Socialist managers, none of whom were farmers, but who still had a basic insight into the agrarian problems of the state. Certainly, Oscar Ameringer and Otto Branstetter must be given credit for shaping the agrarian Socialism that brought the party increasing support during its height between 1908 and 1912. The purge of these men and those immediately around them had to be one of the most severe blows the party withstood. It, in fact, must be termed the real turning point of the Socialist party in the state.

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<sup>50</sup>Trent, "Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma," Ewing Collection.

<sup>51</sup>U.S. Senate, "Land Question in the Southwest," testimony of Patrick S. Nagle<sup>7</sup>, p. 9074.

In the final analysis, it was the interaction of many factors, some hidden, some only partly discerned, some obvious, which resulted in the rise and fall of the Socialist movement in Oklahoma. This radical agrarian party was more successful than any other state Socialist party movement in the early twentieth century, primarily because it was located in only recently opened territory and the innovative leadership adapted to that territory. While the Green Corn Rebellion and the trial of Victor Berger in Wisconsin were the immediate reasons given for the dissolution of the party in late 1917, these events only climaxed the end of the failing movement. If the party organization had not already been weakened by the internal warning and leadership purge in 1913, as well as the factors of good prices and adjustment in settlement patterns following the beginning of the war, the Socialist party might have survived as a viable force in Oklahoma politics. But instead, Socialism was carried forward by individuals who sought solutions to farm problems in the twenties, just as the Socialists were connected with the older Populist party. The Socialist party of Oklahoma declined, having accomplished little in a practical sense; but the radical agrarianism of its former membership continued to influence the thoughts and political activities of Oklahomans.

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