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"Equal Opportunity For All, That's All"

South Dakota's Henry L. Loucks and the Fight for Reform, 1885–1928

In the middle of a Kansas winter, the National Farmers' Alliance held its convention in Topeka in February 1894. One of the meeting's high points would be the annual address of the organization's president. While there were plenty of issues to consider, the nation's recent economic troubles certainly weighed heaviest on the delegates' minds. A financial crisis known as the Panic of 1893 had devastated the pocketbooks of many ordinary Americans. Uncertainty in the form of boom-and-bust business cycles, agrarian discontent, and industrial labor strife undermined many citizens' faith in the economic system. Striding to the podium, Henry L. Loucks of South Dakota laid out the causes of the panic as only he could. Financial conditions were "appalling," Loucks said, and Wall Street tycoons had "hood wink[ed] the people" into believing the downturn was a normal economic hiccup.[1] His nineteen-page speech summarized Alliance economic thinking, calling for monetary reform, direct democracy, agrarian rights, and economic and social fairness. These demands were the impetus behind a new political movement, the People's Party, or Populists. "Until 'equal rights to all and special privileges to none' shall be a fact," Loucks announced, the nation would never be what "our fore-fathers hoped . . . a beacon light to the oppressed of all nations of the world."[2]

Although an outspoken and tireless activist for over forty years in South Dakota reform politics, Henry Langford Loucks was, until recently, curiously overlooked in most historical writing on the People's Party. While the history of Populism in the Midwest and the Dakotas

1. H. L. Loucks, *The New Monetary System as Advocated by the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union* (Huron, S.Dak., 1895), p. 131.

2. Ibid., p. 149.

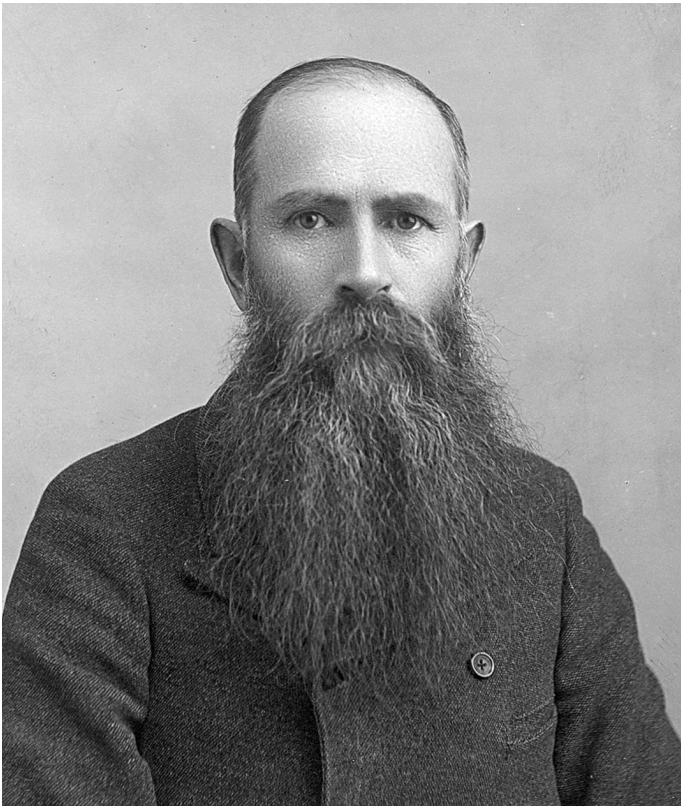
has been well covered, Loucks, an important leader in the movement, has been only a tertiary character.[3] Readers will not find mention of Loucks in classic histories of American Populism such as Norman Pollack's *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (1962) and O. Gene Clanton's *Kansas Populism* (1969).[4] R. Alton Lee's *Principle over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota* (2011) may well be the first book to treat Loucks as a figure worth studying in his own right.[5] Not only did H. L. Loucks make his mark on the South Dakota political landscape, but he also gained national prominence in the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party. His goals of social justice, political pragmatism, and economic fairness were akin to those of countless other reform-minded Americans of his time. Activist and author, Populist and publisher, politician and Progressive, Loucks stands as a notable example of committed reform thinkers of the 1880s through the 1920s.

Loucks's life had ordinary beginnings. He was born in the Canadian province of Ontario to parents of Luxembourgian, German, and Irish descent in 1846. His father William worked at an Ottawa post office. The young Henry Loucks received a solid education. He went to Michigan at the age of nineteen for two years of work as a lumber contractor, which may account partially for his later pro-labor sympathies. Upon his return to Canada, Loucks spent twelve years as a merchant in Hull, Quebec. At age thirty-two, he married Florence McCraney, who was twelve years his junior and the daughter of a member of the Canadian Parliament. Searching for economic opportunity, Loucks and his new wife headed to Missouri, where he made a life in lumber contracting. However, they later decided to seek land ownership under the Homestead Act. In 1884, the Loucks family secured a claim at Clear Lake in Deuel County, Dakota Territory. Over time, the Loucks farm expanded to two sections of land with at least five hundred acres under cultiva-

3. *See,* for example, William C. Pratt, "South Dakota Populism and Its Historians," *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter 1992): 311–12.

4. Howard R. Lamar, "Public Values and Private Dreams: South Dakota's Search for Identity, 1850–1900," *South Dakota History* 8 (Spring 1978): 137–38.

5. R. Alton Lee, *Principle over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880–1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011).



Henry L. Loucks rose to prominence as a leader of the Farmers' Alliance movement in Dakota Territory and made a significant impact on South Dakota politics.

tion. By 1898, the operation boasted "three hundred and fifty sheep, twenty head of cattle, and twenty-five head of horses."[6]

Loucks did not wait long to begin work on behalf of agrarian interests. In 1885, only his second year in Dakota Territory, he joined a local farmers' club. In his words, he did so to "learn how to farm from my neighbors in Dakota."[7] This move came during a time when dis-

6. *Memorial and Biographical Record: An Illustrated Compendium of Biography . . . Including Biographical Sketches of Hundreds of Prominent Old Settlers and Representative Citizens of South Dakota . . . .* (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1898), p. 1032.

7. Carla Bates, "Dakota Images," *South Dakota History* 13 (Spring/Summer 1983): 177.

contented farmers joined a movement known as the Farmers' Alliance in large numbers. The Southern Farmers' Alliance, formed in Texas in 1877, boasted four million members by 1890. In 1880, a separate National Farmers' Alliance, better known as the Northern Alliance, emerged in Illinois. Although the two regional groups eventually agreed to cooperate, they never did merge completely. The Alliance movement in Dakota Territory was affiliated originally with the Northern Alliance. A keen yet well-mannered debater, Loucks connected with his fellow farmers, who elected him president of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance in January 1886.[8]

In a speech to the organization's annual convention in Huron on 13 December 1887, Loucks both articulated the causes of agrarian discontent and proposed solutions to farmers' problems. Despite all their hard work, he said, farmers remained undercompensated. Grain prices stayed low while they paid inflated prices for transporting crops to market and for the manufactured goods they purchased. Trusts and monopolies would, in Loucks's estimation, raise the prices farmers paid "as high as they dare, and they dare boldly." Although farmers "would grumble under the most prosperous conditions," they could not depend on politicians, whom Loucks dismissed as "the rascals in power," to redress their economic grievances. The federal Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, he thought, lacked the teeth necessary to keep transportation rates fair, particularly on fuel and grain. Without voting representatives in Congress prior to statehood, Dakota Territory farmers could do little but petition legislators to regulate railroads more stringently.[9] Even the territorial agricultural college seemed to have deviated from its mission, as the board of regents did not have a majority of farmers as members. Loucks demanded that Territorial Governor Louis K. Church appoint at least two farmers—and Alliance members—to the

8. Lamar, "Public Values and Private Dreams," p. 137; Larry Remele, "'God Helps Those Who Help Themselves': The Farmers' Alliance and Dakota Statehood," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 37 (Autumn 1987): 24; Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 16–17, 20–21, 64.

9. "Address of President H. L. Loucks before the Annual Meeting of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance at Huron, Dakota," 13 Dec. 1887, Folder 1, South Dakota Farmers' Alliance Records, South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, South Dakota State University, Brookings.

board. After all, Loucks said, "Who better [was] qualified to guide its course than those in whose interests it is conducted?" Church, however, failed to accommodate this request.[10] Still, Alliance representatives were present at every territorial legislative session from 1885 to 1889 to press their demands.[11]

Under Loucks's leadership, the Dakota Alliance took direct action to address farmers' needs. In 1887, the organization formed the Dakota Farmers' Alliance Company, a purchasing cooperative that offered its members reduced prices and favorable credit terms for implements and supplies. The Alliance Hail Association provided members with low-cost hail insurance. Its office in Huron boasted over three hundred fifty thousand dollars in insurance business and more than eight thousand hail policyholders in just the first year. The Alliance later expanded its insurance operations, offering members affordable fire and life insurance, as well. Loucks, as Territorial Alliance president, served on the board of directors for these enterprises. His capable ally, Alonzo Wardall, was business manager.[12]

Wardall and Loucks fashioned what historian Robert C. McMath, Jr., described as "the strongest Alliance cooperative agencies in the West, and probably the nation."[13] In 1889, Wardall helped to organize an Alliance insurance company in neighboring Minnesota and visited Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska to spread the word about cooperative insurance for farmers. The following year, he announced plans for a national insurance program, which eventually became known as the Alliance Aid Degree. Although neither Loucks nor Wardall seems to have profited personally to any great degree from the Farmers' Alliance purchasing cooperative and mutual insurance operations, their efforts did result in significant financial savings for many Alliance members.[14]

10. Ibid.

11. Kenneth E. Hendrickson, "The Public Career of Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, 1848–1926" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1962), p. 64.

12. Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877–1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), p. 101; *Dakota Ruralist* (Aberdeen, D.T.), 12 Feb. 1889.

13. McMath, *American Populism*, p. 101.

14. Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 35–40.

Recognizing the importance of organizational propaganda, Loucks had called for an official Alliance newspaper in his December 1887 address to the annual meeting of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance.[15] Instead, the *Dakota Ruralist*, founded in Aberdeen in September of that year, emerged as the de facto newspaper for the Alliance. Although George Crose was apparently its first editor, Loucks likely had a connection to the *Ruralist* almost from the beginning. Several letters from the Alliance president appeared in the newspaper's pages before the masthead indicated he had a formal editorial role. By the spring of 1889, Crose was still overall editor, but the publication now featured an "Alliance Department" edited by Loucks. In June of that year, an Alliance convention designated the *Ruralist* as the organization's official newspaper and offered it financial support. E. B. Cummings became its editor in early 1890 and served until July 1891, when Loucks succeeded him. By January 1891, the newspaper's offices had moved to Huron. At that time, the *Ruralist* boasted a weekly circulation of twelve thousand copies. The newspaper listed Loucks as its editor until at least 1895.[16]

Loucks's predecessors at the *Ruralist* had apparently held the Alliance president in high esteem. For example, the issue of 24 November 1888 touted him as the "Powderly of the Alliance movement in Dakota."[17] The comparison was with Grand Master Workman Terence V. Powderly, the national leader of the Knights of Labor. Easily the country's most influential labor union in the late 1880s, the knights formed local assemblies in several important communities in Dakota Territory. Some knights were also members of the Farmers' Alliance and would later join the Populists.[18]

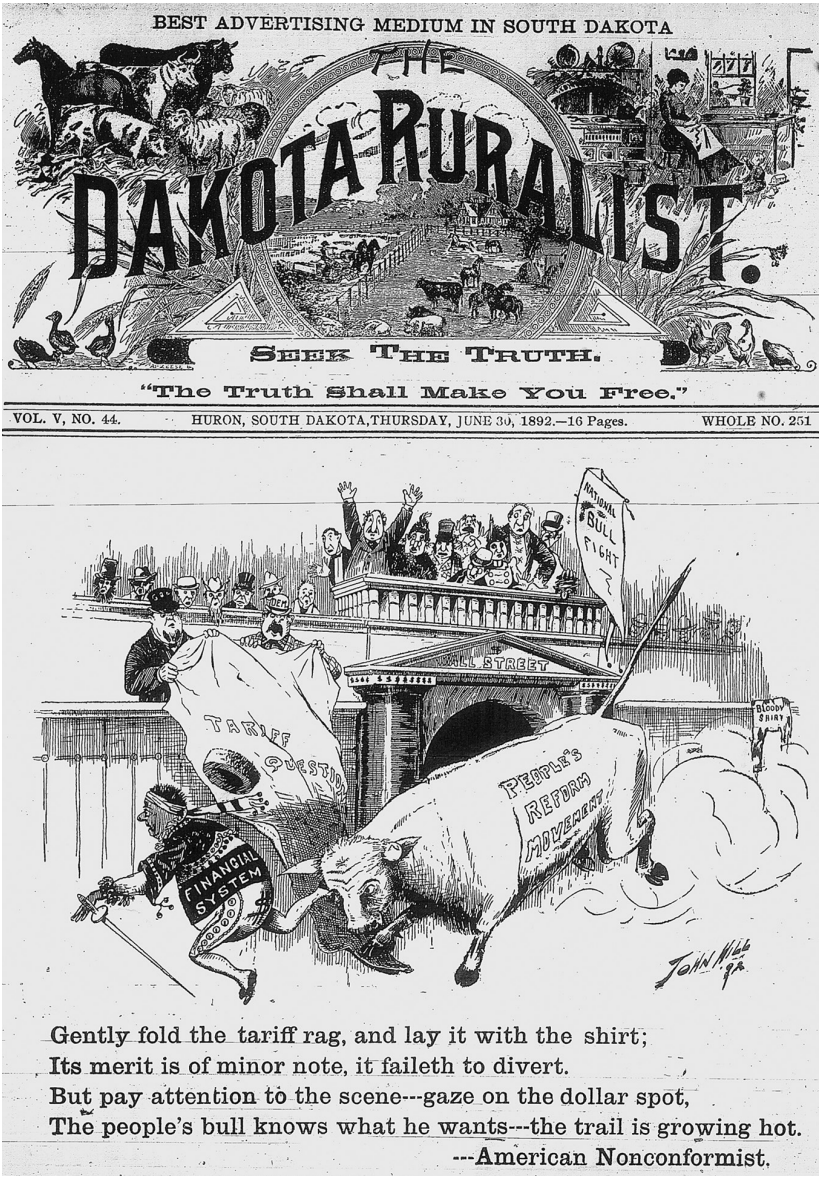
At the Alliance's 1888 annual meeting at Jamestown in northern Dakota Territory, Loucks proudly argued for government ownership of the railroads, telegraphs, and coal lands. He even made national news with a new plan for freeing farmers from the yoke of heavy transporta-

15. "Address of President H. L. Loucks."

16. Thom Guarnieri, "H. L. Loucks and the *Dakota Ruralist*: Voices of Reform" (M.S. thesis, South Dakota State University, 1981), pp. 44–46; *Dakota Ruralist*, 31 Jan. 1891.

17. *Dakota Ruralist,* 24 Nov. 1888.

18. Erling N. Sannes, "Knowledge Is Power: The Knights of Labor in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter 1992): 407–9, 414, 417.



The *Dakota Ruralist* served as an effective means for the Farmers' Alliance to spread its ideas in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

tion costs. On 4 March 1888, the *New York Times* ran an article under the headline "To Relieve the Farmers." The piece profiled Loucks and outlined his proposal for an Alliance-led syndicate of grain elevators that would send Dakota Territory wheat to eastern markets "wholly and directly by the agents of farmers." This system would, in Loucks's estimation, save producers eighteen cents per bushel—a significant boost to their bottom line. The plan's ultimate goal was to liberate farmers from market forces that heretofore had been beyond their control. Alliance farmers, the *Times* reported, meant to "free themselves from the tightening grasp of wheat rings and monopolies."[19]

Loucks personally led the charge against monopoly. The grain marketing cooperative he had envisioned took form as the Scandinavian Elevator Company in April 1888. Late that year or early in 1889, Loucks moved his family to Minneapolis, where he served as company president. The business plan was to ship high-quality wheat from Duluth, Minnesota, directly to Great Britain via the Great Lakes, thus bypassing numerous middlemen. The company expected to raise the necessary capital by selling stock to Farmers' Alliance members in Dakota Territory and Minnesota as well as British investors. Unfortunately for Loucks and his fellow stockholders, the company could neither persuade enough British millers to buy their grain from the upstart venture nor entice any British investors to supply the needed financial resources. The enterprise failed within a year. Reorganized as the Alliance Elevator Company, Loucks's project foundered again in the face of determined opposition from established Twin Cities business interests, which were apparently powerful enough to deny his company a membership in the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, thus preventing access to the grain markets. Ultimately, the cooperative marketing plan failed. Loucks and his family moved back to Dakota Territory sometime in 1889, having suffered significant financial losses.[20]

With statehood imminent in 1889, the Farmers' Alliance held a special meeting in Huron from 18 to 20 June to consider strategy for the

19. *New York Times*, 4 Mar. 1888.

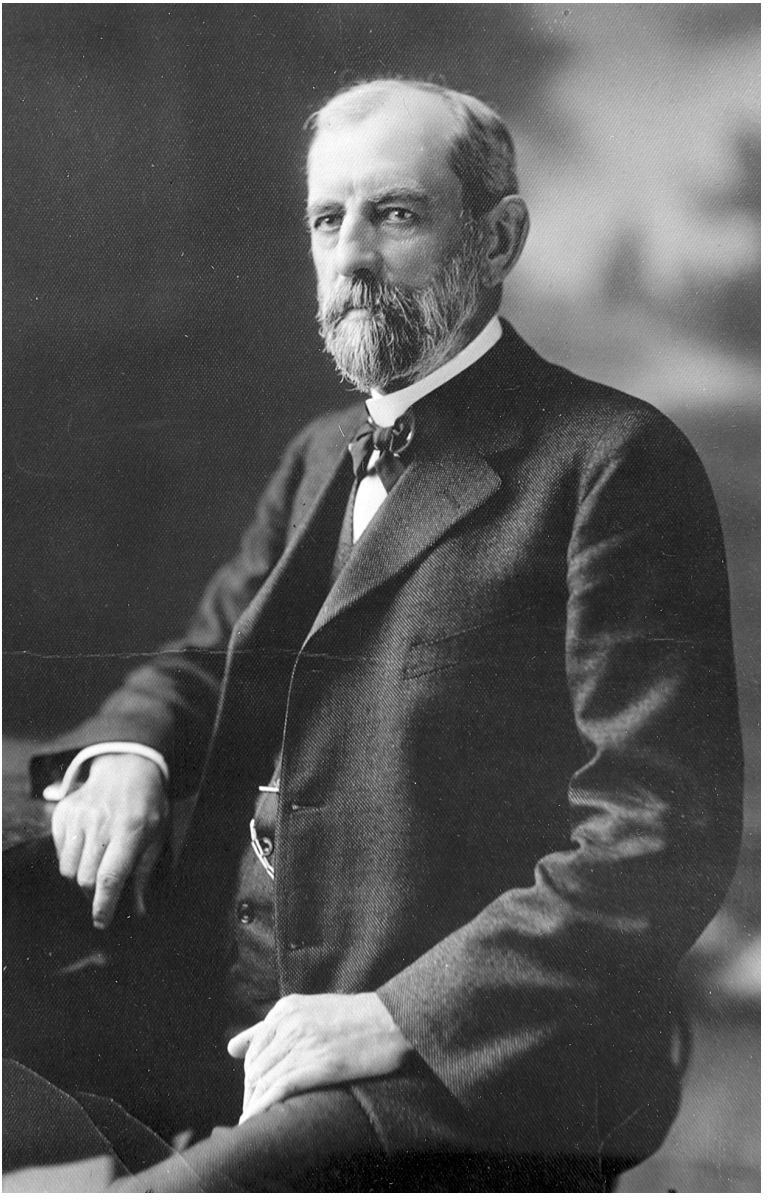
20. Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 30–35; Steven J. Keillor, *Cooperative Commonwealth: Co-ops in Rural Minnesota, 1859–1939* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), pp. 194–95; Loucks obituary, *Clear Lake* (S.Dak.) *Courier*, 3 Jan. 1929.

South Dakota constitutional convention to be held in July, as well as for the state elections to follow. Loucks declared that farmers should be elected for the entire North and South Dakota congressional delegations and for most statewide offices. He urged Alliance members to cooperate with like-minded reform groups. Loucks may have had the Knights of Labor and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in mind as potential allies. Both organizations sent statements supporting Alliance goals to the North and South Dakota constitutional conventions. Alliance leaders, including Loucks, were satisfied with the outcome of the South Dakota convention since the new state constitution included provisions for an elected railway commission and the protection of school lands.[21]

While Loucks did not advocate the formation of a new political party in the months before statehood in 1889, he clearly expected the Farmers' Alliance to take an active role in South Dakota politics and to make its policy desires known through the Republican Party, then the dominant party in Dakota Territory.[22] "The farmers of North and South Dakota have a great opportunity before them," the *Dakota Ruralist* announced in August 1889. Farm interests ought to prevail at election time, the newspaper argued, "[as] the producers far outnumber the schemers . . . . The land shark, bankers, railway monopolists and lawyers are in a decided minority."[23] Although Loucks and the Alliance leadership expressed satisfaction with the Republican platform for the first state elections in 1889, party leader Richard F. Pettigrew of Sioux Falls cast a suspicious eye on the agrarian movement. A former Dakota Territory delegate to Congress and member of the territorial legislature, Pettigrew feared that farmer-led protest might check the party's power or threaten his own political prospects.[24]

Loucks apparently considered running for one of the new state's two seats in the United States Senate, where he could speak on behalf of the farming majority. Support for his candidacy appeared in the pages of the *Ruralist* on 3 August. "Farmers!" the newspaper warned, "If

21. Remele, "God Helps," p. 30; Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 55–57.
22. Hendrickson, "Public Career," pp. 82–83.
23. *Dakota Ruralist*, 3 Aug. 1889.
24. Hendrickson, "Public Career," pp. 82–83.



Richard F. Pettigrew, South Dakota's first United States senator, was initially suspicious of both Loucks and the Farmers' Alliance movement. After breaking with the Republican Party over the "free silver" issue in 1895, Pettigrew began to exchange political ideas with his former rival.

you go back on H. L. Loucks in this emergency, you go back on yourselves, for his fight is yours."[25] His campaign was short-lived, however. An Omaha newspaper reported that the Canadian-born Loucks was ineligible to run for public office, and Republican opponents of the Alliance seized upon the issue. *Ruralist* editors published a column in Loucks's defense penned by Alonzo Wardall, who asserted that he met both the age and naturalization requirements to stand as a candidate.[26] Moreover, Wardall wrote that Loucks was "one of the cleanest, brainiest, and most popular farmers in Dakota, and if that doesn't render him eligible . . . then I see no other way for us."[27]

Nevertheless, Loucks rethought his campaign. While honored by the support he had received for his candidacy, Loucks claimed that others had hastily thrust him into the Senate race at the expense of his other duties, particularly efforts to establish a successful grain-marketing cooperative. Upon his election as president of the Dakota Farmers' Alliance, Loucks had also pledged that he would not run for any political office. Writing in the *Ruralist* on 7 September that "the great need of the day is statesmen rather than politicians," he backed out of the 1889 Senate race.[28] In the wake of Loucks's withdrawal, the newspaper suggested in an editorial that Alonzo Wardall would make an excellent senator. Instead of running for public office, Loucks successfully sought the presidency of the new South Dakota Farmers' Alliance in November. With Wardall's support, Loucks led the state Alliance to transfer its allegiance in December from the Northern Alliance to the more energetic Southern Alliance, now known as the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, after the two regional groups had failed to agree on a merger.[29]

On 1 October 1889, South Dakota voters approved the state constitution, chose the members of the first state legislature, and elected Arthur C. Mellette, the last governor of Dakota Territory, for a one-year term as governor of the new state. Mellette had won the Republican

25. *Dakota Ruralist*, 3 Aug. 1889.
26. Lee, *Principle over Party*, p. 57.
27. *Dakota Ruralist*, 17 Aug. 1889.
28. Ibid., 7 Sept. 1889.
29. Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 58, 60, 64–65.

nomination for governor despite opposition from the Dakota Farmers' Alliance, which was disappointed in his performance as territorial governor. The newly elected legislators assembled in Pierre to select two United States senators in mid-October. Alonzo Wardall and Alonzo J. Edgerton sought the Senate seats with Alliance support, but neither man was chosen. Richard Pettigrew and Gideon C. Moody, both members of the Republican Party establishment, emerged victorious instead. Edgerton's withdrawal from the race after the early rounds of balloting opened the way for Moody. Edgerton later received an appointment as a federal judge, thanks in part to the lobbying efforts of Senators Pettigrew and Moody. Loucks concluded that Edgerton had betrayed the Alliance cause.[30]

Although Loucks had hoped to work with the Republicans in 1889, he was soon disappointed by the failure of the Republican-led South Dakota state government to translate the promises of the 1889 platform into sufficient action on behalf of farmers' interests. This disenchantment led to his defection from the Republican Party. At a convention in Huron on 6 June 1890, delegates representing the South Dakota Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor voted to establish an Independent Party, which nominated Loucks as its candidate for a full two-year term as governor the next month. The party's platform included demands for government ownership of railroads, the secret or "Australian" ballot, and a national income tax. Because the Huron gathering occurred a few days before a similar Independent Party convention in Kansas, some historians have argued that South Dakota, not Kansas, can be considered the birthplace of Populism. These state-level Independent parties became part of the new People's Party in 1892. Accordingly, Loucks could be considered one of the "fathers" of the third-party movement.[31]

As the Independent candidate for governor, Loucks emphasized a pro-farmer, anti-monopoly message and took his responsibility to voice agrarian concerns seriously. "It is our fault," he declared, "that

30. Ibid., pp. 58–60; Hendrickson, "Public Career," pp. 84–86.

31. Herbert T. Hoover, "Farmers Fight Back: A Survey of Rural Political Organizations, 1873–1983," *South Dakota History* 13 (Spring/Summer 1983): 133; McMath, *American Populism*, p. 137; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, p. 157; Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 68–70.

the condition of the farmer has become so bad . . . . We [farmers] have been so conservative that we have been afraid to act and protect ourselves."[32] Attempting to bolster agrarian influence in politics, Loucks and the new Independent Party championed the initiative and referendum, which would allow citizens to enact needed laws directly and to overrule the state legislature if it passed legislation they deemed harmful. Loucks used the *Dakota Ruralist* to build support for the measure.[33] He also supported female suffrage at a time when many in the Republican and Democratic parties did not. In 1889, working with the Equal Suffrage Association, he had invited famed suffragist Susan B. Anthony to tour South Dakota. Arriving on 10 November, eight days after President Benjamin Harrison signed the South Dakota statehood proclamation, Anthony addressed the Farmers' Alliance convention on 26 November. Loucks's support for woman suffrage, however, had its limits. Acting with political expediency, he refused to mention the topic specifically in his acceptance speech for the 1890 Independent gubernatorial nomination and offered lukewarm support for it during the campaign.[34] Loucks, as historian Patricia O'Keefe Easton observed, "was a supporter of woman suffrage when it suited his needs."[35]

In the 1890 gubernatorial election, Loucks received over twenty-four thousand votes (40 percent of the total) and finished second to incumbent Governor Mellette. The campaign confirmed Senator Pettigrew's fear that agrarian protest was gaining strength. Another irritant, in Pettigrew's opinion, was the Alliance-supported subtreasury plan, under which farmers could store staple crops in federal warehouses

32. Quoted in Nancy Tystad Koupal, "From the Land of Oz: Frank Baum's Satirical View of South Dakota's First Year of Statehood," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 40 (Spring 1990): 52.

33. H. Roger Grant, "Origins of a Progressive Reform: The Initiative and Referendum Movement in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 3 (Fall 1973): 395–96. *See also* Steven L. Piott, "The Origins of the Initiative and Referendum in South Dakota: The Political Context," *Great Plains Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1992): 181–93.

34. Cecelia M. Wittmayer, "The 1889–1890 Woman Suffrage Campaign: A Need to Organize," *South Dakota History* 11 (Summer 1981): 200–201, 205, 217.

35. Patricia O'Keefe Easton, "Woman Suffrage in South Dakota: The Final Decade, 1911–1920," *South Dakota History* 13 (Fall 1983): 214. Loucks did argue in favor of greater female representation on the Farmers' Alliance's National Executive Committee at the Topeka convention in 1894. *Western Kansas World* (WaKeeney, Kans.), 17 Feb. 1894.

and receive low-interest loans in the form of treasury notes for up to 80 percent of their value. The proposal would put more currency into circulation and permit farmers to hold their crops in hopes of better prices after harvest time. South Dakota Representative John L. Pickler had introduced the measure into Congress in February 1890.[36] Showing his disdain for the proposal in a letter to Governor Mellette in August, Pettigrew called it "the most insane and idiotic scheme ever concocted outside a lunatic asylum."[37] The 1890 gubernatorial election and controversy over the subtreasury bill galvanized Loucks's commitment to independent politics. After the election, Loucks, who had only reluctantly accepted a third party, earnestly embraced what became the People's Party and in so doing transformed South Dakota politics.[38]

By the end of 1891, as both the president of the South Dakota Farmers' Alliance and a national Alliance leader, Loucks was becoming a key player in organizing the People's Party. The National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (the former Southern Alliance) held its annual meeting in Indianapolis in November. Discussions of third-party politics dominated the proceedings. Loucks demonstrated his capacity for leadership once more as delegates elected him vice president to serve under President Leonidas L. Polk of North Carolina, who was also receptive to the idea of forming a new party. Loucks would succeed to the group's top post in June 1892 following Polk's sudden death.[39]

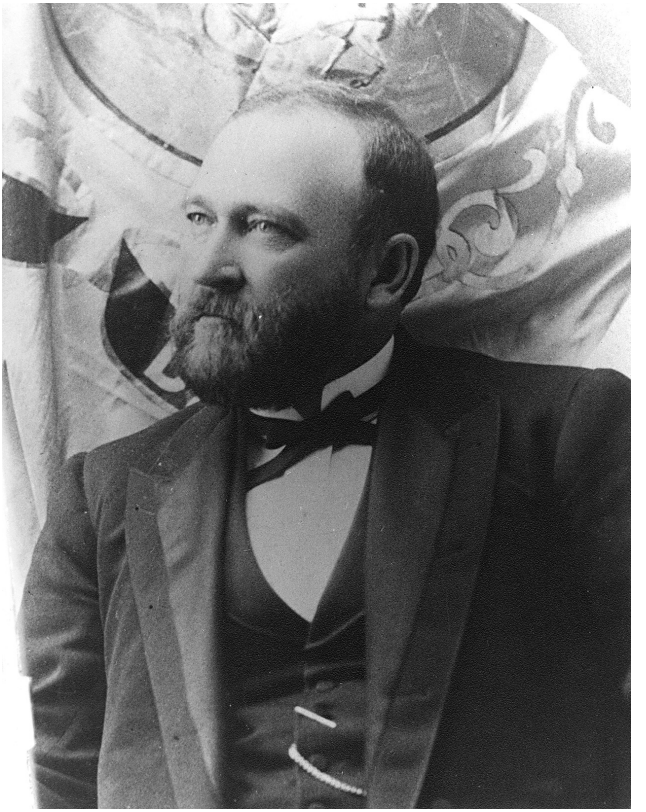
In July 1892, the new People's Party held its first presidential nominating convention in Omaha, Nebraska. Loucks remained at center stage, serving as permanent chairman of the meeting and presiding over the adoption of the statement of principles that became known as the Omaha Platform. The document outlined Populist demands for government ownership of railroads, telephone, and telegraph systems,

36. Bates, "Dakota Images," p. 177; McMath, *American Populism*, p. 137; Hendrickson, "Public Career," pp. 127–28, 132–33; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 153; Lee, *Principle over Party*, p. 65.

37. Quoted in Hendrickson, "Public Career," p. 132.

38. Hoover, "Farmers Fight Back," p. 133–34.

39. O. Gene Clanton, *A Common Humanity: Kansas Populism and the Battle for Justice and Equality, 1854–1903* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 2004), p. 156; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 139.



Elected for a one-year term as the first governor of South Dakota in 1889, Republican Arthur C. Mellette defeated Independent Party candidate Henry Loucks in the race for a two-year term as governor in 1890.

low-rate loans for farmers under the Southern Alliance subtreasury plan, and bimetallic coinage to increase the amount of currency in circulation. Now a charter member of the freshly organized People's Party, Loucks emerged as one of its central figures. Indeed, John D. Hicks's classic account *The Populist Revolt* (1931) cites Loucks as the party's preeminent organizer during the 1892 campaign. According to Hicks, there were no Populists "more energetic and enthusiastic" than Loucks on behalf of the cause.[40]

40. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, p. 270.

Loucks's leadership contributed to important political successes. South Dakota Populists elected a governor (Andrew E. Lee in 1896 and 1898) and two United States congressmen (John E. Kelley and Freeman T. Knowles in 1896). In 1897, the votes of Populist members of the South Dakota Legislature were vital to the passage of a bill that placed an initiative and referendum proposal on the 1898 general election ballot. When voters approved the measure, South Dakota became the first state to implement a process by which citizens could enact or repeal legislation directly, without a requirement that the legislature itself place the matter on the ballot.[41]

Loucks emerged from the 1892 election cycle as a national leader for both the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party, thus demonstrating the linkages between the movements. Indeed, in many ways Loucks typified what historian Charles Postel called "a coalition of reform movements" populated by similarly minded agrarian activists at the end of the nineteenth century.[42] The National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union elected the South Dakotan to a full term as its president in Memphis that November. The victory did not come easy. Press reports described the organization's nomination and election process as highly contentious. Delegates intensely debated whether it had been wise to form the People's Party in the first place considering that presidential nominee James B. Weaver of Iowa had come nowhere near being elected. The national Alliance movement lost many of its members during the 1892 campaign. Still, Loucks's election signaled a firm shift toward Alliance support of the Populists.[43] During his presidential address in Tennessee, Loucks delivered a familiar message. "The trouble is not with the production of wealth," he explained, "but with its unjust distribution through special privileges." He urged Alliance members to support only political parties sympathetic to the group's demands.[44]

41. Jon Lauck, John E. Miller, and Edward Hogan, "Historical Musings: The Contours of South Dakota Political Culture," *South Dakota History* 34 (Summer 2004): 161; Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 138, 156–60.

42. Postel, *Populist Vision*, p. 12.

43. Clanton, *Common Humanity*, p. 191; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, pp. 144–45; *New York Times*, 19 Nov. 1892.

44. *Advocate and Topeka* (Kans.) *Tribune*, 23 Nov. 1892.

Despite the decline of the Farmers' Alliance national organization, Loucks remained an ardent supporter of the People's Party in the wake of the 1892 elections. He traveled on behalf of the cause, addressing the silver coinage issue and the "calamitous times" during a July 1893 speaking stop in Sedalia, Missouri.[45] He also put pen to paper on behalf of Populist principles. Responding to a request from the executive committee of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, Loucks planned a series of pamphlets explaining the group's principles with regard to money, transportation, and then "the rest of our demands."[46]

Loucks wasted little time. His first pamphlet, published in 1893, focused on a common target for Populists—railroad monopolies. "Many of the great fortunes that have been accumulated during the past 25 years have been largely through or by our transportation system," Loucks claimed. He cited New York financier Jay Gould's fortune of $172 million, "made chiefly through wrecking railroads, stock-gambling, and watering of stock."[47] Unfortunately for the common man, Loucks argued, little could be done legislatively to combat railroad power. "To attempt to control the railroads by legislative enactments is utterly futile," he wrote. "They have become so thoroughly entrenched in power . . . that they can defy all legislative or constitutional enactments."[48]

While Loucks had welcomed the 1887 act of Congress that created the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate the nation's railroads, he saw the measure as insufficient. Only government ownership of railroads could, in his opinion, eliminate fictitious stock values and high executive salaries while bringing shorter hours, merit-based promotion, and permanent employment to workers. Loucks also advocated government ownership of telegraph systems. While the nation's first telegraph line between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore had operated under the auspices of the post office, the profit potential led private corporations to take over the industry. Government ownership of the

45. *Sedalia* (Mo.) *Weekly Bazoo*, 11 July 1893.

46. Loucks, *New Monetary System*, p. 6.

47. H. L. Loucks, *Government Ownership of Railroads and Telegraph as Advocated by the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union* (Huron, S.Dak., 1893), p. 10.

48. Ibid., p. 41.

wires, he contended, would allow for lower rates and greater simplicity because the post office could efficiently operate the telegraph lines.[49]

Loucks's pamphlet *The New Monetary System* (1895) outlined Populist ideology critical of privileged monopolies and advocated for an increase in the money supply by coining large quantities of silver. "Under our present system of special and class legislation," Loucks wrote, "the wealth of the nation is rapidly accumulating in the hands of the few."[50] He observed an especially unequal distribution of wealth between regions of the country, claiming that "in accumulation of wealth one person in the nine North Atlantic states equals twenty in the West and South."[51] The Populist prescription for remedying inequality was to strike at privilege with the initiative and referendum as well as an increase in the money supply. More currency in circulation would result in higher prices for crops and reduce the burden of debt on farmers. Loucks also proposed a new system of savings banks to be operated as a public service by the United States Post Office. This arrangement would protect the savings of working people from private bank failures.[52]

The 1896 presidential election brought Loucks and the People's Party to a crossroads. Although Weaver had lost the presidential race in 1892, Populists had won some important victories at the local and state levels in the Midwest and South. The party's candidates stood poised for even more significant victories in local, state, and national elections four years later. Complicating their plans, however, was William Jennings Bryan, a young, fiery Nebraskan who secured the 1896 Democratic nomination for president on a "free silver" platform. The rising People's Party decided to throw its support behind Bryan and nominated him as well, despite important policy differences. While the Democratic platform endorsed silver coinage, it did not include other Populist goals such as government ownership of railroads and the subtreasury plan. The Populist convention refused to support Democratic vice-presidential candidate Arthur Sewall of Maine, who had ties to

49. Ibid., pp. 44, 46, 68–69, 89, 105.
50. Loucks, *New Monetary System,* p. 5.
51. Ibid., p. 11.
52. Ibid., pp. 90, 113.

the banking and railroad industries. Instead, Thomas E. ("Tom") Watson of Georgia became the Populist nominee for vice president.[53]

In South Dakota, Alliance leaders such as Father Robert Haire, the Aberdeen priest who later campaigned for the initiative and referendum, expressed serious concern over fusion with the Democrats. "Fusion," Haire said, "means the death of the People's Party."[54] For his part, Loucks argued strongly against fusion and had even supported an early

53. Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 131–35; Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, eds., "Democratic Party Platform of 1896," *The American Presidency Project*, online at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

54. Daryl Webb, "'Just Principles Never Die': Brown County Populists, 1890–1900," *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter 1992): 389.

Father Robert W. Haire warned South Dakota Populists in 1896 that allying themselves with the Democratic Party might not be in their political interest.

nominating convention—perhaps in late 1895—to prevent it.[55] In 1898, Loucks commented that he was unable to support an "unholy union" of Populists with Democrats and free-silver Republicans.[56]

Just as Loucks feared, fusion turned out to be a colossal failure for the fledgling party. Republican presidential nominee William McKinley's defeat of Bryan represented the loss of an important electoral opportunity for the Populists, and the party's identity weakened tremendously. The Populists had taken a political gamble and lost. Although the People's Party soldiered on through the 1900 presidential election cycle, it fell apart after McKinley's reelection that year. In South Dakota, the last significant Populist electoral victory was Governor Andrew Lee's reelection by a narrow margin in 1898, but even that success depended in part on Democratic and "Silver Republican" votes. Lee faced a hostile Republican-controlled state legislature throughout his second term.[57]

Loucks never forgot the ill-advised fusion of 1896. Two years later, he compared the Democrats to "wolves," arguing that the older party's hunger for political office had been greater than its commitment to principle.[58] The Populist movement, in his view, had been the victim of the Democrats. Loucks carried on with the now-weakened Farmers' Alliance and its longstanding goals such as free silver and government ownership of railroads. Yet, like many former Populists, he eventually found himself reconsidering his party affiliation. Loucks formally rejoined the Republican Party in 1898. By then, the economy was recovering and the nation had fought a successful war against Spain. True to his principles and surely to the chagrin of many Republicans, however, he agitated for familiar policies. In a letter to the 1898 South Dakota Republican Convention in Mitchell, Loucks urged the party to support the initiative and referendum, which was then on the general election ballot, but the delegates agreed only to study the matter.[59] The

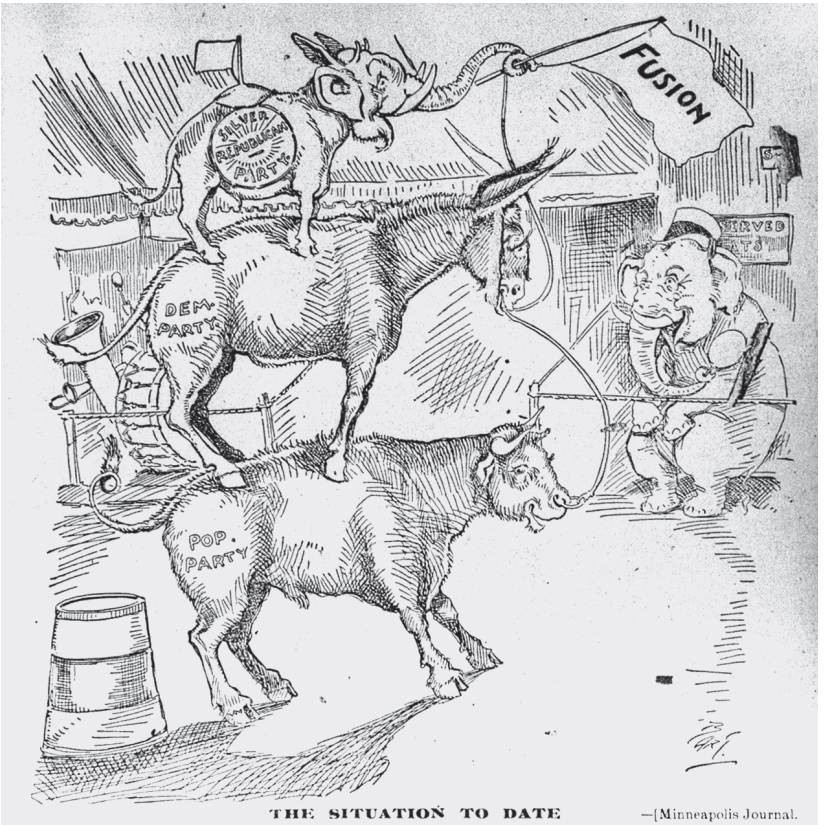
55. Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), pp. 233–34.

56. *San Francisco Call*, 27 Oct. 1898.

57. Postel, *Populist Vision*, pp. 269–71; Lee, *Principle over Party*, pp. 153, 159–72.

58. *San Francisco Call*, 27 Oct. 1898.

59. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre:



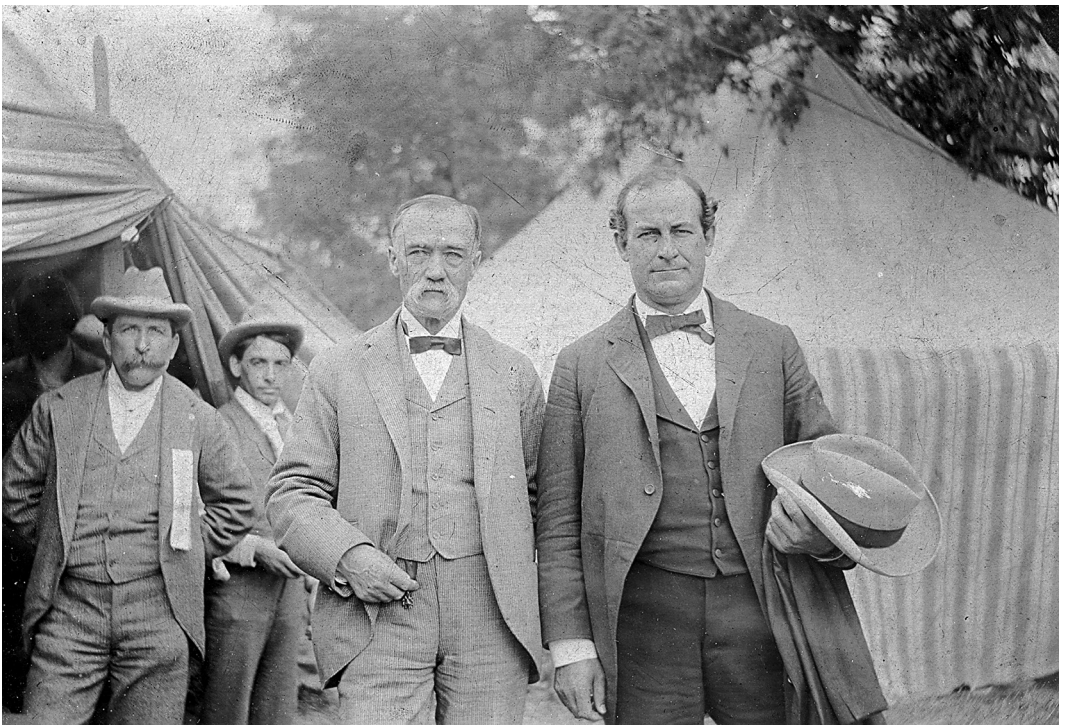
This editorial cartoon from the *Minneapolis Journal* depicts the unwieldy coalition among Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans in the 1890s.

former Populist leader denounced the fusion of Democrats, Populists, and Silver Republicans again in 1900, describing the resulting organization as a "ruthless political machine."[60] Loucks remained a Republican for the first few years of the twentieth century.

Loucks even forged a friendship with his erstwhile rival Richard Pettigrew. After 1895, the former foes found common ground as advocates of free silver and railroad regulation and corresponded about political

South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), p. 241; *Omaha Daily Bee*, 25 Aug. 1898; Lee, *Principle over Party*, p. 155.

60. Webb, "'Just Principles Never Die,'" p. 394.



People's Party candidate Andrew E. Lee (center) needed Democratic support to win the 1896 and 1898 South Dakota gubernatorial elections by narrow margins. Lee appears here with 1896 and 1900 Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan (right).

tactics.[61] In 1908, Loucks left his farm for Watertown and lived there for the rest of his life. Regardless of party or address, he continued to fight for reform in the name of greater economic equality.[62] The motto he used in publications and on his personal letterhead was "Equal Opportunity For All. That's All."[63]

Loucks's motto fit well with a new political and ideological movement, Progressivism, which emerged in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Both the Republicans and the Democrats developed

61. Hendrickson, "Public Career," p. 190.

62. Bates, "Dakota Images," p. 177.

63. Henry L. Loucks to Richard F. Pettigrew, 26 Mar. 1915, Folder 2, H. L. Loucks Correspondence with R. F. Pettigrew, South Dakota State University Archives and Special

"progressive" wings that existed in tension with more conservative elements within the two major parties. Individual "Progressives" could stand for one or more of a long list of reform causes such as the regulation of big business, woman suffrage, currency reform, Prohibition, or political reforms like the initiative and referendum, to name only a few. What unified these disparate causes was the idea that right-minded people could and should act to ameliorate the social and political ills of the industrial age for the common good. Progressive ideas influenced Republican President Theodore Roosevelt between 1901 and 1909, as his famous "trust-busting" policies demonstrated a willingness to use federal power to regulate business in the public interest. During the 1912 presidential election campaign, both Democratic nominee Woodrow Wilson and Roosevelt, who had bolted from the Republican Party after losing its nomination to conservative incumbent William H. Taft, claimed to be the better progressive. Indeed, Roosevelt called his new political coalition the Progressive Party, although it is perhaps better known by its nickname of "Bull Moose Party." The 1912 campaign, in which Wilson emerged the victor, was probably the high-water mark of the Progressive movement in electoral politics.[64]

Given his own political proclivities and the similarity of certain Progressive goals to earlier Populist causes, it is no surprise that Loucks fell in line with the Progressive crusade. So inspired, Loucks re-entered politics in 1914 to campaign for the United States Senate. Under the newly ratified Seventeenth Amendment, senators were now chosen by direct vote of the people rather than by state legislatures. Despite an endorsement from one of the nation's most prominent Progressives, Senator Robert M. La Follette, Sr., of Wisconsin, Loucks mustered only about 2 percent of the vote.[65]

Electoral defeat in 1914 appears to have been a hard blow for the old Populist to take. He expressed his frustration to Pettigrew just days

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Collections, Hilton M. Briggs Library, South Dakota State University, Brookings, S.Dak. Hereafter cited as Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.

64. Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1983), pp. 21–25, 36–46.

65. Loucks to Pettigrew, 16 Nov. 1914, Folder 1, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence; Ralph R. Tingley, "The Crowded Field: Eight Men for the Senate," *South Dakota History* 9 (Fall 1979): 329–30.

after the election, writing on 9 November that "the people who deserted me . . . really shun me on the street." He added, "This nearly gets my goat."[66] Loucks complained bitterly about both major political parties. On 5 November, he had written to Pettigrew of his belief that the administration of Woodrow Wilson was "fast approaching the rocks."[67] Four days later, Loucks described the Republican Party as "in fine shape to smash, and they deserve it, for it would be hard to find a bunch who have less regard for principles."[68]

Even the Progressive Party was not immune to criticism. Loucks suggested that the party should change its name, as "there has [*sic*] been too many sins committed in the name of Progressiveness, for the name to be any longer attractive to true progressives."[69] He faulted the party for its organizational shortcomings in a March 1915 letter to Pettigrew, writing, "I do not see how we can work under their organization . . . . There is nothing to it."[70] Later that year, the old Populist placed particular blame on former president Theodore Roosevelt. Writing to Pettigrew in October, Loucks claimed that Roosevelt's 1912 campaign had been based more upon the ex-president's ambition to reclaim office than on a commitment to Progressive ideology. "If Roosevelt . . . should be eliminated," he argued, "we could build up a real progressive party." Despite his disappointment in Roosevelt, Loucks remained true to his ideals. "I do get very much discouraged at times . . . but it [progressive reform] has become my religion."[71]

After his unsuccessful run for office in 1914, Loucks returned to organizing South Dakota farmers on the local level. In March 1915, he informed Pettigrew that despite previous challenges (perhaps meaning the demise of the Farmers' Alliance movement), he had noticed a "spontaneous desire for an organization of some kind." In response to this need, Loucks worked to form new farmers' clubs in a number of districts. He boasted of fifteen chapters of the Order of Patrons of

66. Loucks to Pettigrew, 9 Nov. 1914, Folder 1, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.
67. Loucks to Pettigrew, 5 Nov. 1914, ibid.
68. Loucks to Pettigrew, 9 Nov. 1914.
69. Ibid.
70. Loucks to Pettigrew, 26 Mar. 1915, Folder 2, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.
71. Loucks to Pettigrew, 19 Oct. 1915, ibid.

Husbandry (or the Grange) in Deuel County and reported "quite a strong movement" for what he called "Equity Societies" in northwestern South Dakota.[72]

In addition to grassroots organizing, Loucks built up his prolific publication record. In 1915, he began work on his largest literary project, a volume entitled *The Great Conspiracy of the House of Morgan and How to Defeat It.* The book was a scathing critique of the financial system and its effects on farmers.[73] Loucks developed the work out of an address he had written for the Equity Co-Operative Exchange of Saint Paul, Minnesota. He described it to Pettigrew as a "campaign text book of the best I can put together."[74]

Rejecting the Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties alike by 1916, Loucks took an interest in the Socialist Party, whose leader, Eugene V. Debs, had received over nine hundred thousand votes for president nationwide in 1912. The Socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason*, published in Girard, Kansas, had claimed a weekly South Dakota circulation of nearly five thousand in 1913. Loucks sent his *Great Conspiracy* manuscript to the *Appeal* some time before deciding to self-publish the work in 1916.[75] Loucks's interest in socialism may have been genuine, but he also sought publishing opportunities for himself. Corresponding with Charles Kerr of Chicago, the editor of the *International Socialist Review*, Loucks wrote, "I am very sure that our aim is the same although our method of reaching it may be somewhat different." Loucks sent proofs of his work to Kerr, hoping that he would accept them for publication. The old Populist tried to sway Kerr with an appeal to the importance of farmers, writing that political parties in the United States could not gain power "unless they are able to secure a very large vote from the agricultural class on fundamental principles."[76]

72. Loucks to Pettigrew, 26 Mar. 1915.

73. H. L. Loucks, *The Great Conspiracy of the House of Morgan and How to Defeat It* (Watertown, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1916).

74. Loucks to Pettigrew, 10 Feb. 1916, Folder 3, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.

75. Jason Roberts, "Presidential Election of 1912," *Encyclopedia of Campaigns, Elections, and Electoral Behavior*, ed. Kenneth F. Warren (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), pp. 612–13; *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kans.), 29 Mar. 1913; Loucks to Pettigrew, 17 Mar. 1916, Folder 3, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.

76. Henry L. Loucks to Charles Kerr, 8 Aug. 1916, Folder 1, Henry Langford Loucks

Familiar Populist antimonopoly sentiments continued to appear in Loucks's writings even as the nation entered the First World War. In April 1917, for example, he demanded state-owned and state-operated grain elevators and attacked what he dubbed the "sham pretense" of the American currency system in the pages of the *Equity News* of Madison, Wisconsin.[77] He also critiqued certain aspects of the war effort. Loucks balked at the federal government's practice of appealing to farmers' patriotic sensibilities to persuade them to increase food production. Farmers, he pointed out, faced labor shortages because of military conscription. Loucks called for fixed commodity prices, interest rates for farm loans comparable to rates offered for war loans to America's allies Great Britain and France, and insurance for farmers against natural disasters like hail and drought.[78] For Loucks, the war only further entrenched the power of finance and worsened wealth inequality in American society. In 1921, three years after the fighting stopped, he argued that banking magnates had "made greater progress during the three years of war in securing a complete monopoly of our financial system and control of commerce and industry than they could have secured in 25 years of peace."[79]

In 1924, the seventy-eight-year-old Loucks gave electoral politics one last try, running for the United States Senate as one of eight candidates on the general election ballot. Unsurprisingly, the old Populist focused his campaign on financial reform, stumping to end interest charges on all borrowed money. In the end, he mustered only 1,378 votes and finished in seventh place. Republican Governor William H. McMaster emerged victorious in the Senate race.[80]

Despite the results, Loucks's unsuccessful 1924 campaign was an example of his lifelong commitment to progressive reform. He contin-

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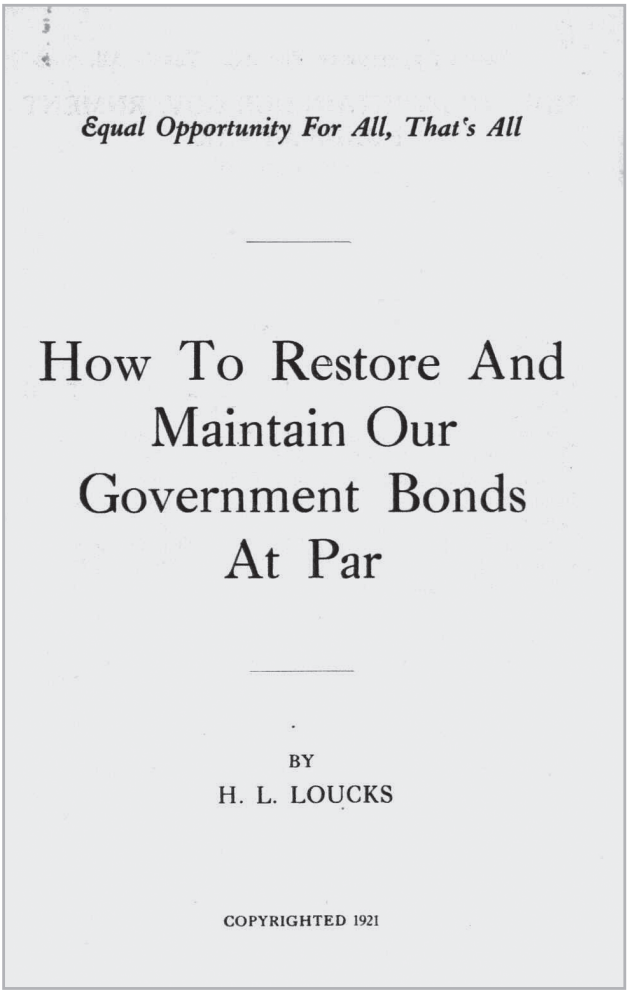
Papers, Richardson Collection, University of South Dakota Archives and Special Collections, I. D. Weeks Library, University of South Dakota, Vermillion (hereafter cited as Loucks Papers).

77. *Equity News* (Madison, Wis.), 1 Apr. 1917.

78. H. L. Loucks, "Will the Farmer be the 'Goat' Once More," May 1917, Folder 3, Loucks Papers.

79. H. L. Loucks, *How to Restore and Maintain Our Government Bonds at Par* (Watertown, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1921), p. 2.

80. Tingley, "Crowded Field," pp. 329–30, 336.


Equal Opportunity For All, That's All

How To Restore And Maintain Our Government Bonds At Par

BY
H. L. LOUCKS

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Many of Henry Loucks's political writings criticized the financial system.

ued to write on public affairs in his last years, as in a 1925 piece that supported public ownership of utilities.[81] As governor, McMaster had directed a state program to sell gasoline in order to lower the prices consumers paid. In Loucks's opinion, the venture was a success. How-

81. *Watertown Daily Public Opinion*, 27 Nov. 1925.

ever, McMaster's successor, Carl Gunderson, opposed state enterprises that competed with private companies and halted the program.[82]

A lifelong agitator, H. L. Loucks never allowed his efforts for agrarian, financial, and political reform to waver. "Before departing for my reward," he wrote in 1916, "I want to raise a little Hell for the men who are doing their best to make a Hell on earth, and I am at least going to make some trouble for them."[83] Loucks seems to have succeeded. After joining his first farmers' club in 1885, he argued forcefully and unashamedly for both political and economic democracy until his death at the age of eighty-two in Clear Lake on 29 December 1928.[84] Henry Langford Loucks offers a valuable lens to examine the resolute commitment of late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers in South Dakota.

82. Ibid., 28 Nov. 1925.
83. Loucks to Pettigrew, 13 Mar. 1916, Folder 4, Loucks-Pettigrew Correspondence.
84. *New York Times,* 30 Dec. 1928.