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NEW DEAL LEFTISTS, HENRY WALLACE AND "GIDEON'S ARMY," AND THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY IN MONTANA, 1937–1952

HUGH T. LOVIN

Many forces occupied America's sociopolitical terrain to the left of New Dealers who dominated U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt's administration of the 1930s. Some fastened themselves temporarily to the New Dealers' coattails. Ideologically motivated, others touted their special panaceas for ending the Great Depression that had begun in 1929, and certain of the mainstream Democratic Party's expatriates added to this cacophony by pursuing their own agendas. Comprised principally of the Democratic Party's out-of-power people, another group wanted to restore Roosevelt's reforming to its 1933–34 height, change the federal government's thrust to the leftward in certain particulars, and impose New Deal-style reform programs in states where the Democratic Party's conservative wing had gained the upper hand.

Subscribing to the last proposals, self-defined New Deal Leftists in Montana, a group whose members often labeled themselves as "progressives," in part because they traced their political identities to the Bull Moosers' Progressive movement in 1912, judged themselves as Roosevelt's only truly committed followers in the state. But they wanted more social change than Roosevelt's forces had accomplished and in 1937 broke away from the more conservative Democratic Party majority in Montana. It was a divorce between sides that had tired of their togetherness. Then these Leftists reasserted numerous New Deal principles but sought to expand the scope of existing New Deal programs, tried to elect like-minded Montanans to public offices in 1938–48, and generally supported Montana liberalism in 1947–52. It was a fight that the Leftists lost.

But even in failure, the Leftists' course was remarkable. They supplied another yardstick with which to measure the dimensions of the...
many realignments within the Democratic Party that happened after 1932. A scholar labeled these readjustments “Aftershocks of the New Deal Earthquake.” Such realignments continued to happen. The most dramatic incidents included Dixiecrats migrating to the Republican Party in the 1940s to the 1970s and Green Party members to the Democrats after the 2000 elections. Meanwhile, among groups that rebelled earlier against the Democratic Party in the wake of Roosevelt’s New Deal of the 1930s, Montana’s New Deal Leftists believed so strongly in their principles that they bolted from their old party instead of muddling through within the Democratic Party’s reigning coalition. Moreover, these Montanans acted independently in a state where their political realignment seemingly had reasonable prospects for enduring. There, Montanans’ old-time flirtations with radicals had left behind a residue of nineteenth-century Populist and early twentieth-century Socialist thinking as well as living remnants of a strong Nonpartisan League movement of farmers which made an appreciable showing in the 1920s despite conservative efforts to suppress it. And in the northeastern sector of the state, Communist ideas and certain practices flourished briefly in the 1930s in Sheridan County and attracted sympathizers in neighboring Daniels and Dawson Counties. Nonetheless, complex historical time-and-place conditions precluded Montana’s New Deal Leftists from succeeding either in making their political realignment permanent or, along the way, becoming the main architects of the sociopolitical order they envisioned.

Furthermore, Montana’s New Deal Leftists, even though they failed in the end, contributed a significant chapter in the historical annals of movements in the 1930s and 1940s by plainspeople who were especially dissatisfied with the achievements of Roosevelt, his national administration, and Little New Deal forces in certain states. As in Montana, these dissidents threatened to disrupt conventional political life, and their dissonance received considerable nurture from a political milieu that seemingly gave them a fighting chance to prevail. Even more than in Montana, a rich and dissenting Populist heritage from the nineteenth century remained intact, as in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. In several Plains states, Socialist ideas thrived among these anti-New Deal critics, and they proposed modifications to mainline New Dealers’ programs that they judged economically too weak and socially constrained by middle-of-the-road conventionality. More important, as in Montana, the ranks of these activists in the Plains included many survivors of Arthur Townley’s earlier Nonpartisan League movement, especially in the Dakotas, who helped to promulgate and struggle for left-of-the-New-Deal measures. They, too, constituted a lively component of so-called aftershocks of the New Deal earthquake.

Scholars have written at length about only a number of these developments outside Montana. Among the more dramatic examples of such Plains dissent, Milo Reno’s Farmers’ Holiday Association spread from Iowa to Plains farmers who liked the association’s ideologies and radical direct action practices. Sometimes with Communist intervention, these farmers participated in incidents such as ones at Loup City, Nebraska, and Sisseton, South Dakota, in 1934, that had disturbing sociopolitical implications. Different radical activists helped to convince 12,487 electors in Nebraska and 36,708 in North Dakota to vote for William Lemke, the Union Party opponent of Roosevelt in the 1936 elections. Meanwhile, other elements called for drastic changes and received a hearing in the Plains states for their scheme to create a farmer-labor party that would implement production-for-use economics in the nation. The latter became a force in South Dakota politics and generated considerable interest in successful farmer-labor party activity in Minnesota.

In the following pages, this narrative focuses on New Deal Leftists in Montana who, like other discontented plainspeople, attempted to establish better conditions for Americans. The Montanans’ journey began in 1937; their political aspirations were largely frustrated in the ensuing decade. In 1947,
through a political marriage of convenience for both sides, the Montana leftists joined Henry Wallace's national third-party movement, and the leftist-controlled Montana Progressive Party emerged from these nuptials. After 1947, though the Montana party encountered numerous tribulations, it survived but prospered little until explosive disputes over Korean War issues and election-day setbacks destroyed it early in the 1950s.

A BLEAK FIRST DECADE FOR MONTANA LEFTISTS

After breaking away from the Montana Democratic Party conservatives in 1937, these New Deal Leftists created the Montana Council for Progressive Political Action (MCPPA), and through it, tried to impose their agenda in state and federal circles. Subsequently, the MCPPA movement expanded, and by the end of 1940 its largely middle-class founders had lost part of their influence to like-minded but politically more left-of-center agrarians and labor unionists. The newly dominant components included agrarian representatives of the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union (Farmers Union for short), which was organized in 1902 and whose strength was rooted in the prairie counties of eastern Montana; a few leaders of American Federation of Labor (AFL) locals; and industrial unionists of the newly established Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO). The latter belonged mainly to one CIO affiliate, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union and its locals at Butte, Anaconda, East Helena, and Great Falls. After 1940, Farmers Union representatives controlled the MCPPA by selecting a majority of the organization's central committee, supplying most of its funding, and providing nearly all of the financing when the Farmers Union and several labor groups launched a weekly newspaper, the People's Voice.

Herman "Cap" Bruce, often a spokesman for Farmers Union interests, edited the People's Voice until 1948, when a controversial figure, Harry Billings, followed Bruce. Enemies of the Voice even accused Billings of holding pro-Communist ideas, and a columnist at the University of Montana's student newspaper alleged that Billings provided a forum to "any crackpot, poolroom pink who feels like blowing off a little steam." The Voice, which was published at Helena until 1969, remained the MCPPA's main editorial voice. A few weeklies admired the MCPPA, and Hamilton newspaper publisher Miles Romney transformed his weekly into a MCPPA mouthpiece.

In common with aggrieved farm and labor groups in different locales, MCPPA Leftists criticized Roosevelt's federal administration and Democratic majorities in Congress. They denounced the Democrat-controlled regimes in Montana's state government in 1938-46. For instance, they faulted Democrats in power for not compelling industrialists to bargain collectively with their workers despite new federal laws such as the Wagner Act of 1935; they deplored resistance from the same Democrats to their demands for government-guaranteed "cost of production" pricing of agricultural products; and they lamented that Democrats in power failed to mandate more generous hours, wages, and social benefits for wage earners, the aged, and handicapped people. The Leftists proposed local reforms including more restrictions on gambling and fewer state controls on wildlife. Also, MCPPA Leftists charged, Democrats in Montana had created political machines that corrupted the state's government.

Active in state politics starting in 1938 and claiming to speak for all Montana "liberals and progressives," the MCPPA engaged in political action to correct the ills that it deplored. It helped U.S. Senator James Murray, a conspicuous liberal in Congress, to stay in office during the next eight years. Otherwise, the MCPPA usually boosted in vain when it biennially endorsed sympathetic Democrats for state and congressional offices. Even the MCPPA's favorite choices, Jerry O'Connell and Leif Erickson, repeatedly lost in elections. Despite MCPPA support, O'Connell failed, in 1940 and 1942, to regain the U.S. congressional seat that he could not retain in 1938. Erickson, sometime
Sidney lawyer and a sitting Montana Supreme Court jurist, polled 89,224 votes but failed in the contest for governor of Montana in 1944. Then Erickson prevailed over veteran U.S. Senator Burton Wheeler in the 1946 Democratic primary. However, despite strong support from the MCPPA, which had assailed Wheeler in the past for his many disputes with Roosevelt, Erickson succumbed in the general election to a conservative Republican, Zales Ecton.  

HENRY WALLACE'S PROGRESSIVES

Despite little success, the MCPPA group persevered until it could seize what it deemed better political openings. Its wait ended shortly. On September 26, 1946, U.S. Secretary of Commerce and former U.S. Vice President Henry Wallace criticized President Harry Truman on grounds that Truman's foreign policies could provoke a war with the Soviet Union. Retorting privately, Truman labeled Wallace "a pacifist one hundred percent." Wallace also aired numerous reservations about Truman's domestic policies, especially those that had neither ended social and racial discrimination nor effected social justice for legions of other less privileged Americans. In reply, Truman expelled Wallace from his cabinet, and Wallace replied by renewing his attacks, thus raising speculation that Wallace might become the Democratic Party's U.S. presidential nominee in 1948.  

In short, the MCPPA forces had been finessed into Wallace's camp to their own liking. For the most part, these Montana Leftists had acted on the premise that Wallace sought the Democratic Party's U.S. presidential nomination. But Wallace was persuaded, late in 1947, to lead an independent Progressive Party and run for the United States presidency on this third party's ticket. Many of his new Montana allies disliked this choice, and Romney—an old MCPPA supporter and the (Hamilton) Western News publisher—predicted that nationally "labor leaders and liberals" would not "stand up and be counted" for Wallace and his new party over the long haul. Nonetheless, most of Wallace's new Montana followers stuck by him. In supporting Wallace, they ignored the weakening of his movement in 1948 on account of considerable Communist influence in his camp. Communists could be members of the new Progressive Party; Progressives like C. B. "Beanie" Baldwin, who was deemed "close" to the Communist Party, managed Wallace's presidential campaign; and Wallace reportedly eyed some of these same controversial Leftists, among them Harry Dexter White, for posts in his U.S. presidential administration. Consequently, many of Wallace's early liberal supporters, now offended by Communist machinations in the Progressive Party, established the Americans...
for Democratic Action and several similar organizations to oppose Wallace.²⁰

When this anti-Communist resistance to Wallace intensified, most of the MCPPA crowd renewed their support for him. Having antecedents in radical rural agrarian and urban labor circles likely influenced some to make this choice. Others judged Wallace’s Progressive Party to be suitable political machinery for them over the long term. Meanwhile, different MCPPA activists argued that Wallace deserved strong support because he proposed many of the social betterment measures that the MCPPA had called for since 1937. Others believed a theory that Wallace’s third party might evolve into a liberal-labor coalition that could replace the Democratic Party at federal, state, and local levels.²¹ Consequently, just a handful of MCPPA activists deserted, most of them going to Americans for Democratic Action, which charged that “Communist-dominated [labor] unions” and “Communist apologists” controlled the new Progressive Party.²²

Wallace’s so-called Gideon’s Army thus passed its first tests in Montana, whereupon his partisans circulated nominating petitions by which Montana laws allowed third parties to place their nominees on the state’s election ballot. However, Kinsey negated this work by selecting another procedure that Montana laws permitted—naming Wallace and his vice presidential running mate, U.S. Senator Glen Taylor, at a nominating convention. On June 26, 1948, such a convention was held at Helena, and the Montana Progressive Party was launched. But by not following, in June, certain procedures that Montana laws prescribed, it was necessary for Wallace and Taylor to be selected again, this time at a party conclave on September 4, 1948.²³

With the Wallace-Taylor ticket safely on the Montana ballot, Gideon’s Army recruited new followers statewide. Principally a handful of Mine-Mill labor unionists, certain radicals, and reform-minded professionals were added. For example, Henry Maury—a Helena attorney, former Socialist activist, courtroom attorney for numerous radicals, and lately a convert to MCPPA idealism—became a Montana Progressive Party warhorse.²⁴ In the opposite political spectrum, Montana Communists newly involved themselves in Montana Progressive Party affairs; like Communists in California, they backed Wallace despite their party’s national leadership demanding that its locals desist until the Comintern authorized this course. Such directions arrived belatedly in the summer of 1948.²⁵ Meanwhile, the Montana Communist Party, composed of seventy-one people in 1948 (according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s estimates) participated in the Montana Progressive Party by exercising the Communists’ influence in several Farmers Union locals and a number of Mine-Mill unions at Butte and Great Falls. More important, a Montana Communist Party official, John Hellman, led what he described as a “left” faction in the Montana Progressive Party. Most of Hellman’s followers were Mine-Mill union radicals.²⁶

Growing more slowly in the political middle, the Montana Progressive Party absorbed several small groups that had, since the 1930s, advocated generous pensions for the aged and whom the conservative-minded Montana legislature had riled. More consequential, the party recruited successfully in a few different middle-class circles. For instance, party organizers converted Jerome Locke and most of his Missouri Valley Association associates. This group proposed a U.S. Missouri Valley Authority similar to the Tennessee Valley Authority that New Dealers had established in the 1930s. A politically influential activist, Locke once presided over the irrigation farm-minded Yellowstone Valley Association and flirted in the 1930s with midwestern radicals who wanted to organize a nationwide farmer-labor party, but finally focused politically on federally controlled economic development in the Missouri River Basin despite resistance from Montana stockgrowers and commercial forces. Wanting no federal controls on the state’s water resources, the resisters characterized the Missouri Valley Authority plan a “socialist” scheme.²⁷
Montana Progressive Party had gradually become a broader coalition of forces, partly by adding special interest groups at a time when pollsters' data revealed that the Progressive Party was losing ground nationally. According to one poll, 51 percent of Americans wrote off the Progressive Party because they believed that Communists controlled it.28

Adding these forces to the Montana Progressive Party coalition undercut the hegemony of the Farmers Union and its middle-class allies in the party, and intraparty conflicts ensued. A major dispute centered on the party's next political strategies. Led by Hellman, his faction (mostly Mine-Mill radicals) proposed that in addition to the Wallace-Taylor ticket, the party try to elect its own third-party candidates for Montana congressional offices, important elective posts in the state government, and many state legislative seats.29 This proposal evoked stiff opposition. Admirers of U.S. senator Murray argued that, were the Montana Progressive Party to run its own senatorial candidate, it would jeopardize Murray's chances of winning reelection in 1948. Furthermore, this group contended that Murray deserved help from the party because he tended toward their idealism even though he recently voted in Congress for several of Truman's Fair Deal proposals and supported the Truman administration's alliances with "reactionary" elements in Greece and Turkey for anti-Communist reasons. These activists also posited that Murray deserved to win with Montana Progressive Party help because he professed to be a good "friend" of "labor," the "middle class," "small business," and "professional men and women."30

Furthermore, it was argued that running Montana Progressive Party nominees for state elective offices could deprive "liberal Democrats" of just enough votes to win over Republicans in 1948. And doing so seemed doubly impermissible in light of Montana New Deal Leftists always helping such Democrats to win since MCPPA days.31 Also, People's Voice editor Bruce contended that "with a full slate of candidates on the Progressive Party ticket, the hue and cry would be raised that [the] Moscow regime in the Soviet Union] is trying to get control of Montana."32

On September 4, 1948, this dispute ended when, at the Montana Progressive Party's state convention, Hellman's forces retreated and only a Wallace-Taylor ticket appeared on the Montana ballot in November. The victorious camp also wrote a platform composed of thirty-five planks, which included public ownership of utilities, improvements in the nation's social security system, the forty-hour workweek, guaranteed annual wages, better unemployment benefits, and new restrictions on gambling in Montana.33 Conversely, Hellman's radical faction prevailed in Silver Bow County (an industrialized sector, including Butte and Anaconda, where Mine-Mill unions exercised considerable influence). There, Montana Progressive Party radicals placed a slate of five candidates for the state legislature on the ballot over opposition from the Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly (which had sided with Democrats statewide in order to stymie Republicans in the coming elections). The Progressive slate included three miners, a retired railroad industry employee, and a Mine-Mill union organizer.34

Begun with vigor, the Montana Progressive Party's election campaign lost its momentum. In part the campaign faltered because Wallace appeared in Montana only once, and Taylor staged just a few rallies in this state.35 Moreover, Taylor's campaign style evoked criticism of the Wallace-Taylor ticket. Taylor's stumping, his critics alleged, exhibited showmanship (earlier he was a local entertainer in Idaho) but little intellectual depth.36 At the same time, nearly nationwide "vilification" of Wallace and Gideon's Army harmed the Montana Progressive Party ticket in Montana. According to People's Voice editor Bruce, party locals lacked enough resources and access to "channels of communication" to rebut such "red herring propaganda" successfully.37

The party's electoral prospects improved briefly when the national Mine-Mill union organization endorsed Wallace, and most of its state and local unions followed suit. Also, several of
the CIO's United Mine Workers local unions in Montana supported the Wallace-Taylor ticket.\textsuperscript{38}

But lethargy returned after this upturn even though the Progressive Party's national organization advanced $2,000 for the Montana Progressive Party to expend on bettering its electioneering.\textsuperscript{39} Most of the windfall paid for printed material and the expenses of party campaigners. Nonetheless, the party encountered new problems. Belatedly, much of its labor support evaporated when unions, other than certain local Mine-Mill groups, rallied behind Democrats in the 1948 elections. Secondly, Montana collegians remained mostly disinterested despite considerable student support for Wallace in other states, and Montana's population contained few Jewish and other ethnic minorities that were Progressive Party mainstays in major urban areas.\textsuperscript{40} Thirdly, Montana Progressive Party sympathizers tended to withhold their help on grounds that, given the realities of Montana's politics, the Wallace-Taylor ticket could not win because the "kept press" of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company opposed it. Different Montanans judged the Montana Progressive Party and its national parent as irrelevant inasmuch as they believed that both parties' ideology grappled little with American socioeconomic conditions late in the 1940s. Even Wallace Progressives sometimes agreed, saying their movement's thinking seemed to echo many of the bygone New Deal's responses to Great Depression tribulations in the 1930s. For example, Verda Barnes, Progressive Party National Committee member who supervised Progressive election campaigns in the Far West in 1948, had concluded that American farmers, workers, and small business people fared "pretty well" in post–World War II times and would generally support the Progressive Party only when "their plight," as in the 1930s, became "so desperate they have nothing to lose by so doing."\textsuperscript{41}

ON THE SAME COURSE

On election day 1948 the Wallace-Taylor ticket polled only 3.3 percent of all votes in Montana but as much as 10.6 percent in Roosevelt County (an eastern Montana stronghold of the Farmers Union) and more in Silver Bow County than in any other.\textsuperscript{42} Nonetheless, the Montana Progressive Party's conservative and radical factions saw silver linings in the election outcomes. The former claimed that because the party nominated only a Wallace-Taylor ticket, Murray preserved his U.S. Senate seat, and that in the Democratic Party's 1948 landslide in Montana, the party helped liberal-minded Democrats to prevail by running no candidates.\textsuperscript{43} Conversely, the same group could not brag because one of its favorites, Judge Erickson of the Montana Supreme Court, ran third in the primaries among Democrats seeking the state's governorship.\textsuperscript{44} For its part, Hellman's "left" camp claimed vindication for its liking for third-party political action. The camp's five nominees for the state legislature from Silver Bow County polled 30 to 40 percent of the 10,000 votes by which each could win.\textsuperscript{45}

Even though certain Gideons credited it with an "impact of vital importance" in 1948, the Montana Progressive Party lost members in the next two years to the Democratic Party, and its national parent fared worse, losing much of its political "center and right."\textsuperscript{46} The Montana Progressive Party faithful warned the defectors that changing sides made them "apologists for war [with the Soviet Union] and increased militarization" because of Truman's foreign policies and his desire for a universal military training program for all youth. But such rhetoric deterred few from leaving. The defectors typically decided, as Senator Murray had done recently, to recant their latest political pasts and make their peace with Truman and his 1948 victors. (As for Murray, he anticipated a new place in the Montana Democratic Party where Murray and newcomers Congressmen Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf were influential liberal voices.) Many of these Montana Progressive Party expatriates particularly applauded Mansfield and Metcalf for supporting new proposals for a federal Missouri Valley Authority even though Truman had downplayed the scheme after his party's whipping in the 1946 midterm elections.\textsuperscript{47}
These defections left the Montana Progressive Party weakened but active and still dominated by Farmers Union activists and their middle-class and labor union allies. Their protégé—Kinsey, Montana Progressive Party state secretary—remained at the helm. Much of the party’s “sporadic activities” in 1949 centered in the organization’s Progressive Club at Great Falls. On a different front, the old Montana Progressive Citizens of America was reorganized and assigned a key role in the coming Montana Progressive Party campaign in 1950 at which it would explain and defend the party’s reform ideologies. The party’s plans also entailed backing Wallace if he ran a second time for the U.S. presidency in 1952. Meanwhile, the Kinsey-led agrarians and their helpers united with the party’s Hellman-led radicals to attack the Truman administration’s foreign policies more vigorously. Their main targets included Truman’s Marshall Plan to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its sphere in Europe. Taking their cue from Wallace, who had characterized the Marshall Plan as “give guns to people when they want plows,” these critics charged that the Marshall Plan would precipitate “Cold War Calamity.”

Using this unity to their own advantage, Hellman’s radicals demanded third-party political action to elect the mayor and aldermen for three wards in Great Falls. The in-power side acquiesced, despite past MCPPA and MPP practices, in trying to elect liberal Democrats to Montana public offices. The third-party strategy little benefited the radicals, proving, both sides concluded, that “only 10 percent of the people at Great Falls will support a Progressive Party candidate,” and double this number might be “high pressure[d]” to do so.

NEW TROUBLES: KOREAN WAR DISPUTES AND POOR SHOWINGS AT THE POLLS

This new comity in the Montana Progressive Party between the in-power group and the radicals lasted until June 25, 1950, after which time the party splintered because of developments in Korea and the Truman administration's response. On this date, North Korea’s “Red Army” attacked the South Korean republic, and Truman sent American armies to defend the latter. Similarly, Korean war issues wreaked havoc with Progressives and to a large extent doomed Wallace’s third party nationally after Wallace more or less sided with Truman on the need for American intervention in Korea. Even more detrimental to Progressive unity, Wallace withdrew from the national Progressive Party. In turn, Progressive Party organizations in twenty-two states deplored Wallace’s choice, and a Montanan accused him of deserting “us when we needed him the most.”

In Montana, the same developments so split the Progressive Party that it lost members to the Democratic Party even though the departers once hated it. Meanwhile, Hellman’s radicals denounced the Korean War on its face and accused Truman of helping the corrupt Syngman Rhee regime to remain in power in South Korea. Conversely, the Truman administration’s actions in Korea were praised in opposite party circles, among them the bulk of the party’s Farmers Union people. They viewed Truman as a fighter against Communist aggression in Korea. Disputing this interpretation, antiwar radicals exploited the new differences so outrageously that the state-level leaders of the Farmers Union intervened. Guided by the thinking of Patton, their national president who approved of Truman’s Korea policies, these leaders deprived Hellman of his place as an organizer in the Farmers Union, and they cleansed their state and most local organizations of nearly all Communists and their sympathizers. In fighting back, they also repudiated the Farmers Union’s old ties to the Montana Progressive Party and threatened to withdraw all Farmers Union subsidization of the People’s Voice.

Exploiting this turmoil, radicals seized enough power to position the Montana Progressive Party more firmly against any American involvement in Korean warfare. Hellman replaced Kinsey as the party’s state secretary. At the same time, these radicals gained an important supporter of their antiwar
stance. Billings, the new editor of the *People's Voice*, provided the radicals an editorial voice on grounds that he had detected "silent, but very real and very widespread resentment" in Montana "over the Korean war." In saying so, Billings replicated distaste for the war in many circles nationwide.54

More than just denouncing the Truman administration's Korean policies, Hellman's group, Billings, and several other Montana Progressive Party figures called—as the national Progressive Party organization had done earlier—for a negotiated peace settlement in Korea. All of them argued that the United States had no alternative because American forces had been driven back from the Korea-China boundary at the Yalu River to the region surrounding the Thirty-Eighth Parallel border between North and South Korea. There, it was pointed out, American and Chinese armies could only wage inconclusive campaigns that cost many soldiers their lives.55 Maury, the Helena lawyer and Montana Progressive Party activist, called this proposal "a glorious work for peace." In an "Open Letter" to Truman, two Montana Progressive Party officials plugged for "peace instead of slaughtering American [soldier] boys in Korea," and other writers accused "war-making monopolies" of prolonging the war.56 The Montana Progressive Party's antiwar forces next organized "peace" rallies at Great Falls and several other towns. Korean War supporters fought back, charging that Communists had inspired the rallies, and at Conrad they recorded the names of persons participating in a local "peace" rally.57

Korean matters aside, Hellman's forces demanded third-party political action in the 1950 elections but were persuaded at a state-level convention for selecting Montana Progressive Party nominees to shorten sail so much that only two candidates were selected (one for state railroad commissioner and another for the U.S. House of Representatives). In Silver Bow County, radicals nominated two of their own to seek seats in the state legislature. Thus, the Montana Progressive Party abandoned the old strategy of the MCPPA and their own party of helping liberal Democrats to prevail in Montana elections. However, the Montana Progressive Party gained no ground on election day. At best, the party's candidate for railroad commissioner (Lawrence Price, party officer and vice president of the Cascade County Trades and Labor Council) polled about 1 percent of the statewide vote. In Silver Bow County, radicals fell by the wayside, polling about 40 percent of the 10,000 votes each needed to win. In Flathead County, a Montana Progressive Party sympathizer won a place in the next state legislative session.58

Following the 1950 elections, little remained of the political coalition that had comprised the Montana Progressive Party in better days, but the Hellman-led camp barely managed to keep the party alive in the next two years. Trying to infuse new energy and attract more followers to the party, Hellman issued a mimeographed bulletin and publicized the party in sympathetic publications.59 He also launched a campaign aimed especially at helping western Montana miners who had contracted silicosis. By his proposal, compensation to victims of occupational diseases must be paid from employers' contributions to Montana's state-administered workmen's compensation system. In particular, a party figure added, by Hellman's proposal the Anaconda Copper Mining Company would at last be held "responsible for compensation to silicosis victims." Then, in 1951, the party began a drive to secure 18,000 signatures on petitions for a ballot initiative so that the proposal was enacted. Hellman's forces collected about 2,000 signatures before a committee composed of labor union and Farmers Union representatives commandeered the drive. But these efforts were negated by opponents who blocked the initiative from a place on the Montana ballot. They called the proposal "dangerous and destructive to Montanans in every walk of life."60

When the 1952 elections neared, Hellman anticipated good returns from the Montana Progressive Party by capitalizing on opposition to Truman's Korean War policies, the party's recent third-party political action practices, and

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a relatively innocuous platform that resembled the party’s 1948 and 1950 platforms. \textsuperscript{61} More important in Hellman’s view, his plan entailed selecting a prominent U.S. Senate nominee who could be juxtaposed on the campaign trail to Republican U.S. Senator Zales Ecton and Democratic U.S. Congressman Mike Mansfield. Hellman described these people as, respectively, an apostle of “reactionism” and an apologist for Truman’s Korean “war policies.” For this role, Jerry O’Connell seemed an ideal choice even though his critics accused him of close kinship with American “Communists and fellow travelers.”\textsuperscript{62} Formerly a U.S. congressman from Montana who failed to win reelection in 1938, 1940, and 1942 despite support from the Montana New Deal Left, O’Connell had sided with Wallace in his fight against Truman in 1946–48, helped to establish Wallace’s Progressive Party at its national convention in 1948, and was executive secretary of the Progressive Party in Washington State until at last he returned to Montana where he opened a law office in Helena.\textsuperscript{63}

Unexpectedly, O’Connell declined to run again for office on grounds that he had abandoned strenuous political roles because of his worsening health, and Hellman revamped the party’s course when his forces could not agree on another nominee in place of O’Connell. Finally, third-party political action remained the party’s strategy in the 1952 general elections. But only Hellman and Lawrence Price, a party official and carpenter by vocation and labor unionist, ran for a state and a congressional office, respectively, alongside the national Progressive Party’s U.S. presidential nominees—San Francisco attorney Vincent Hallinan and California Eagle publisher Charlotta Bass.\textsuperscript{64}

**AN INGLORIOUS POLITICAL ENDING**

Because of poor 1952 electoral outcomes—less than 1 percent of the votes statewide for the Hallinan-Bass ticket and 2.4 percent of the balloting for Hellman—the Montana Progressive Party disbanded even though the Progressive Party’s national organization remained in business until 1955.\textsuperscript{65} Already Hellman had abandoned the party, and most of his old followers sided against a handful of labor union radicals who wanted to resurrect it. This large majority backed away from the Montana Progressive Party remnant partly because none of the Mine-Mill locals in western Montana seemed likely to supply any resources to rebuild the party or, as resurrectors proposed, to create a new party that functioned as the unions’ own vehicle for left-liberal politics. To restore the party in any form, the same people also reasoned, invited repression from federal authorities and chief­tains of the country’s anti-Communist AFL and CIO labor federations. Such speculation was reasonable. Allied politically to Truman and his Democratic regulars, CIO heads had already expelled their Mine-Mill unions, in part because of their support of Wallace’s Progressive Party in 1948.\textsuperscript{66} Moreover, Mine-Mill official Clinton Jencks was just one of several of the Mine-Mill international union’s secondary-level officials who had already run
athwart the federal government's antisubversive machinery during the nation's Cold War with the Communist world. And it was common knowledge in Montana that in the Red Scare of the 1950s, federal agents closely monitored Montana Communists, other local radicals, and their labor union sympathizers. One of the latter even complained that a federal agent hassled him because he had criticized capitalism too harshly and opposed American involvement in the Korean War. Other Montanans subjected to such targeting included Hellman, whom U.S. Justice Department authorities later indicted for violating the anti-Communist Smith Act of 1940. His criminalization persisted until the U.S. Supreme Court freed him.

In sum, complicated time-and-place historical conditions so beset the Montana Council for Progressive Political Action and its successor, the Montana Progressive Party, for nearly twenty-five years that success was elusive, and many participants in the two groups' political realignment were driven back into the Democratic Party from which they had bolted. Moreover, the survival of the broader coalition of leftist forces became increasingly problematical after 1948 for several reasons. For instance, when the Montana Progressive Party coalition expanded in 1948 from its heavily radical farm and urban labor composition, stress was created, tension threatened to divide the party, and Mine-Mill radicals manipulated the new conditions in politically divisive ways. Meanwhile, it proved difficult for the party to endure when, in the 1940s, many electors judged the party's ideas to be irrelevant to post–World War II conditions in America. In another instance of trouble for the coalition, Korean War issues splintered it so badly after 1950 that Mine-Mill unions gained the upper hand but could not save the party from extinction. In a different fatal development, anti-Communist ideas and governmental antisubversive measures prospectively threatened the radical remnant of the old Montana Progressive Party so much that most of these frightened radicals sought cover by abandoning their rebellious politics. In other words, the wages of the historic Montana Progressives' political realignment—as one of the aftershocks of what scholar James Sundquist called the New Deal earthquake—amounted to very little in proportion to these Montanans' political efforts. Painfully, Montana Progressive activists learned the lesson that it was risky to become an independent political force, and the outcome from doing so was inevitably unpredictable because, down the road, historical time-and-place conditions intruded and often could not be changed. Small wonder that Montana's New Deal Leftists gambled and lost.

However, these unsuccessful Montana forces shared plentiful company when they failed in the end. Across the Plains, left-of-the-New-Deal groupings—whose dissent focused from the outset on criticism of Roosevelt and his mainline New Dealers, sometimes to the point of accusing the latter of doing nothing about the country's Great Depression maladies—generally achieved little more than the Montanans did. Another of the so-called afterthoughts in the New Deal earthquake, these groups at least enlivened Great Plains politics for a time.

NOTES


3. Starting with V. O. Key, author of the pathbreaking Political Parties and Pressure Groups (1948), numerous scholars have theorized about such political behavior by analyzing conditions under which political party coalitions typically form and collapse. Others have focused on related issues such as the crucial roles that interest groups play in these developments. For examples, see Sundquist, Dynamics, 35–49; John H. Aldrich, Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 159–240, 319n23; Allen J. Cigler and Bartlett A. Loomis, eds., Interest Group Politics (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2012).
4. For a better understanding of political behavior in groups such as Montana’s New Deal Left, see Stephen Skowronek, Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).


20. Culver and Hyde, American Dream, 478–90; Alonzo Hambly, Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press), 1973; Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier, Prophet, 168, 189, 190; Thomas


28. Culver and Hyde, American Dream, 481.


31. People's Voice, August 27, 1948, 1; September 3, 1948, 1; September 10, 1948, 1.


34. People's Voice, October 15, 1948, 8; October 22, 1948, 7; Mercier, Anaconda, 102; Ellis Waldron, Montana Legislators, 1864–1979: Profiles and Biographical Directory (Missoula: Bureau of Government Research, University of Montana, 1980), 96.


37. Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier, Prophet, 194; Culver and Hyde, American Dreamer, 467–70; Bruce, "A Word of Warning," 4.


42. Waldron, Montana Politics, 326; Pratt, "Rural Radicalism," 53. The Wallace-Taylor ticket fared better in Montana than in the nationwide elections where it received 2.3 percent of the votes.


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44. Oregonian (Portland), July 21, 1948, 10.
47. Spritzer, Murray, 180, 181; Malone, “Montana New Dealers,” 261, 263; People’s Voice, November 10, 1950; Great Falls (Montana) Tribune, August 6, 1952 (clipping), Mansfield Papers, Series XIV, box 15, folder 23.
52. Dyson, Red Harvest, 201; Pratt, “Montana Farmers Union,” 65–66.
56. People’s Voice, November 23, 1951, 2, April 13,1951, 2, April 27, 1951, 2.
57. People’s Voice, November 9, 1951, 1, February 1, 1952, 1.
60. Hellman to MacDougall, August 22, 1953, PP Records, box 56, folder 236; H. S. Bruce to T. O. Thackeray, January 18, 1952, Baldwin Papers, box 9; Montana Standard (Butte), April 6, 1952 (clipping), Mansfield Papers, Series XIV, box 15, folder 23.