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# The Political Effect of the Ku Klux Klan in North Dakota

By

Trevor M. Magel

A THESIS

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# The Political Effect of the Ku Klux Klan in North Dakota

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The 1920s was a transitional decade in the political history of the United States. Progressivism did not have the influence it had had in the first couple of decades of the 20th Century but its ideas were still part of the debate. But many other elements became more prominent such as: Americanism, Urbanization, and Nativism. North Dakota is a good case study of these trends and how the Klan tried to use these trends to gain power. The Nonpartisan League, Independent Voters' Association, and Ku Klux Klan conflict in North Dakota reflected broader political conflicts happening within the country over its ideals. North Dakota was the birthplace of the NPL and had a strong progressive tradition. However the Klan was able to establish a significant presence in the state during the mid-1920s and influenced the outcome of several state elections. It did this by utilizing some existing political and social attitudes not normally associated with the Klan. However, social and political elites quickly saw the Klan as a threat and drove them out.

## Introduction

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1923, the editor of the *Fargo Forum* noted:

Does the Ku Klux Klan hold sway in Ransom county, or is it a practical joke being perpetrated by some college students recently returned home?

On one of the highest hills just north of Lisbon, in plain view from the principal business street of the county seat, a large burning cross has been seen on two occasions the last few nights.

Opinion seems to be divided among the denizens of the county seat. Some are certain that the Klan have an organization there, while others pass it off as only a joke that is being played.

The cross was erected at the side of the road, near the old cement block building, just as you drive up the hill from the Main street bridge. The charred remnants of the cross, which threw a large number into consternation, still remain.<sup>1</sup>

This mysterious description of the Ku Klux Klan moving into Lisbon, North Dakota in 1923 is representative of many responses to the Klan throughout the country at this time. The Klan arrived in North Dakota at a very unsettled time in the state's political history. It was very uncertain how the Klan would affect this situation. While the burning crosses no longer remain, the Klan left a lasting political legacy behind in North Dakota that helped establish a new structure for North Dakota politics.

The 1920s Ku Klux Klan is a subject that has received considerable attention from historians. In order to understand the importance of the Klan's involvement in North Dakota, the political context of both the United States as a whole and North Dakota specially must be discussed. During the 1910s, North Dakota politics was dominated by the conflict between the Independent Voters' Association and the Non Partisan League which spilt the Republican Party, the dominant party in the state, into two polarized

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<sup>1</sup>No author, "Does the Ku Klux Klan Hold Sway in Ransom County?" *Fargo Forum* (February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1923),1.

groups. Both these organizations had characteristics that appealed to most North Dakota voters and characteristics that most North Dakota voters opposed. The Klan was pragmatic in its approach to politics and tried to incorporate the most effective elements of both organizations and occupy the space between them. However, this opening was quickly closed as the Klan's success forced the IVA and NPL to address their weaknesses and close that opening. The IVA and NPL response to the Klan along with the actions of other elites drove the Klan out of North Dakota by the late 1920s.

While the 1920s Klan has received many studies from historians, there are a few aspects of this study which contribute new ideas to the field. Most studies of the Klan have argued that its period of influence was a blip in America's history. However, this study will show that the Klan had a long term influence on North Dakota politics. The IVA and the NPL had to change and incorporate some of the elements that had made the Klan successful. Since the IVA is the backbone of today's North Dakota Republican Party and the NPL is the backbone of the North Dakota Democratic Party, these changes are still relevant to North Dakota politics today. In addition the issues the Klan emphasized in the 1920s have continued to resonate in state politics. Thus the Klan's impact on North Dakota is important to understand the political structure and culture of the state today and perhaps other states as well.

In order to see the original contributions this thesis makes to the historical profession, an overview of current historical literature must be provided. Of the three organizations studied in this thesis, the Klan is by far the most examined in the historical literature. Much scholarship has argued that the members of the Klan, particularly the middle class members, joined because of their illusions, alienation, and dependency on

current trends in American society. Scholars such as Michael Kazin and Catherine MicNicol Stock have emphasized the nativist and patriarchal elements of populism.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars even argue that populism is inherently sexist and racist. Since the 1960s Historians have shown that the 1920s Klan was not an organization for just backward, rural, fundamentalist people. Klan studies have largely been local case studies.<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Jackson's *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* started this trend. Leonard Moore argued that the Klan functioned like an interest group for white Protestants who thought their values should be fundamental to the conception of America. The Klan was actually more interested in moral issues such as Prohibition and public education than in racism. The Klan also tried to make local and state governments more responsive to the demands of their interest group. Thus the Klan was firmly a populist group.<sup>4</sup> Nancy MacLean, in her study of the Klan in Athens, Georgia, extended this analysis and called the Klan a reactionary populist organization.<sup>5</sup>

North Dakota and the Great Plains states in general, have been understudied in terms of the Klan influence. The only study of the Klan in North Dakota was William

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 6-8; Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 2-7.

<sup>3</sup> Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama, 1915-1949*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 2-4.; Larry R. Gerlach, *Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah*. (Logan, 1982), 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Moore, "Historical Interpretations of the 1920's Klan: The Traditional View and the Populist Revision," *Journal of Social History*, 24 (Winter, 1990: 341-357), 341-345, 350.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2-4.

Harwood's article about the klan in Grand Forks.<sup>6</sup> However the Klan's experience in North Dakota was much broader than this. The Klan formed klaverns or chapters throughout the state and attempted to influence not only Grand Forks municipal elections but local elections throughout the state and state-wide elections as well. Harwood's study also did not discuss the ongoing political battles between the Non Partisan League and the Independent Voters' Association and how the Klan tried to provide a solution for this conflict.<sup>7</sup>

North Dakota is also a revealing state to study the Klan because while the Klan's presence was significant, the Klan was never able to attain complete control of the state government, unlike in Indiana. The Klan was always in a competitive environment in North Dakota and had to find ways to appeal to voters that had voted for the IVA or NPL in the past.

The Independent Voters' Association in particular has really been understudied in the historical literature. There have only been a couple of dissertations that have focused on it, most notably Thomas Contois'.<sup>8</sup> Contois' work focuses on the IVA's opposition to the NPL more than on its own program. The IVA did publish a considerable amount of pamphlets and speeches so primary sources are not sparse unlike secondary sources.

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<sup>6</sup>William L. Harwood, "The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Forks, North Dakota," *South Dakota History* 1, no. 3(Fall 1971). 39-42.

<sup>7</sup>William L Harwood, "The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Forks, North Dakota," *South Dakota History* 1, no. 3(Fall 1971). 45-47.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas M. Contois. "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986), 34.

There are considerably more studies of the NPL than the IVA. Nancy Balazadeh studied the NPL from a sociological perspective and discussed how the experiences of the NPL reveal the relationships of power within the state. Bahmer focuses on the formation of the NPL and argues that changing demographics and business practices created the discontent that led to the creation of the NPL. Scott Ellsworth studied the NPL in the context of Progressivism and showed how the proposals of the North Dakota NPL were reflected and influenced by this national movement. Ellsworth and Balazadeh discuss the IVA-NPL conflict extensively. However none of these studies consider what effect the Klan had on the NPL and how the NPL tried to respond to this challenge. This is an important component of the NPL's experiences in the 1920s in the state it had the most success in.<sup>9</sup> For information on the rhetoric of the North Dakota NPL, Poehls' thesis is a useful resource which studies Townley's speeches from a social and political perspective.<sup>10</sup> In terms of general North Dakota history, Robinson's book is still the one most often cited. For the early politics of North Dakota Lamar's book is still the most well regarded. Thus these areas need some new study and to be incorporated into a larger context.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>,Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922,"(PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988), 2-8. : Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941),2-9: Scott Ellsworth. "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University,1982), 2-7.

<sup>10</sup> Alice C. Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978). 12-14.

<sup>11</sup>,Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 114 : Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study in Frontier Politics*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 34-36.



Most studies of the Klan tend to avoid long-term analysis of the trends in American society before and after the 1920s that led to the rise of the Klan. This study discusses the wider context of the Klan in North Dakota both before and after its influence on state politics. Most studies agree that the Klan was most successful among the middle class. Jackson argued that the Klan was a lower middle class movement whereas MacLean calls the Klan's supporters the petite bourgeoisie. Given the Marxist influence on MacLean's analysis these people are portrayed in a negative light. America is lucky, according to her, that this class did not get more control over the nation's politics.<sup>12</sup> However, neither the Klan nor the middle class was as one-dimensional as McLean's analysis makes it out to be.

William Jenkins argued that previous historians had focused too much on class when studying the Klan. Jenkins showed evidence members of the Klan belonged to all classes.<sup>13</sup> Robert Goldberg believed that the Klan represented a cross-section of the Protestant population and that religion and not class was the driving force behind the Klan.<sup>14</sup> Robert D. Johnston, in his book *The Radical Middle Class*, states that the Klan helped to mediate and define the middle class in the 1920s. The middle class in North

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 20-25.

<sup>13</sup> William D. Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley*. (Kent State University Press: Kent, Ohio, 1990), 2-11.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado*. (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1981), 1-8.

Dakota had a considerably different makeup from more urbanized states. It was primarily an “old” middle class, made up largely of yeoman farmers and small-town inhabitants.<sup>15</sup>

Some social context needs to be added to the study of the Klan as well. Moore emphasized the social aspects that made the Klan attractive. However, Moore did not extend this analysis further and include fraternal organizations. A major piece of context for how the Klan operated in society is missing if the structure and functions of fraternal organizations are not considered. Fraternal organizations played a significant role in American urban culture from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century until the Great Depression. The Klan consciously tried to provide the services of fraternal organizations to its members and their families. The Klan was often judged by what was expected of a fraternal organization. Existing fraternal organizations played an important role in driving the Klan out of the state in the end.<sup>16</sup>

In order to put this thesis together, the secondary literature on America in the 1920s and North Dakota political culture and history was read to provide background information. Extensive research in the primary sources of political participants in North Dakota was conducted at the Institute for Regional Studies in Fargo, North Dakota and the North Dakota Historical Society Archives in Bismarck, North Dakota. Structural ideas were used to provide a framework for studying these sources because this study demonstrates the changing political relationships between various social organizations in

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<sup>15</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13-19.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 3-7.

North Dakota society. By examining North Dakota's History chronologically the changing structures of its politics can be examined.

This study reveals the long-term impact of the Ku Klux Klan's ephemeral political involvement in North Dakota. Not only was the Klan's political involvement not a blip in American history, it is essential to understanding the continuing legacy of the 1920s on America today. The Klan made a lasting contribution to the political debate of 1920s North Dakota and the issues and ideas it advocated would reappear periodically. In addition, the Klan had lasting influences on the makeup of both the Non Partisan League, which would become the basis of the North Dakota Democratic Party in 1954, and the Independent Voters' Association, which is the forerunner of today's North Dakota Republican Party. As such the Klan changed the culture and structure of North Dakota politics in ways that still effect contemporary debates.

## Chapter One: Background and Themes of Early North Dakota Politics

The last annual statement made public from the Ford factory recently contains these interesting and astounding facts:

The company employs, in round numbers, 50,000 men and women-mostly men.

The great majority of this number receives a daily wage of \$5.00 or more, yet the profits of the concern last year amounted almost to \$60,000,000.

That is equivalent to more than \$1,150,000 a week.

If this sum had been paid back to the men and women who work in the Ford factories, it would be equivalent to a weekly increase of more than \$20 for each of them.

Inasmuch as most of the Ford employees already receive \$30 per week or more, if the Ford profits had been divided among them, their weekly wages would have been \$50 or more.<sup>17</sup>

This quotation from the *Cooperators' Herald* demonstrates the search for fairness that dominated the political battles of early North Dakota. This was brought about by how North Dakota was settled. The two major components of early North Dakota society that would influence later political events were the railroads and the makeup of the middle class.

In order to explore North Dakota politics in this period some trends in national society need to be considered. The development of early politics in North Dakota occurred within the national context of rapid industrialization and settlement of the West.

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<sup>17</sup>No author, "Why Co-opts Work". *Cooperators' Herald* (Fargo, ND: April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1916),1,4.

Railroads were central to both of these developments. It has been argued that a goal of Industrial America was to determine how to bring the coal age to the frontier. The railroads were the major answer. Many railroad executives thought that the best way for them to create a benign industrial order was to operate monopolistically. They believed in a form of monopolistic paternalism which helped preserve their political influence for the first couple decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Government officials worked to tally, organize, and catalog migrants. There were three groups of workers- the skilled artisans, the unskilled laborers, and women/children.<sup>18</sup>

The settlers the railroads brought to North Dakota carried with them the popular political ideas of the time. Populism was an influential national ideology that emerged within the old middle class during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It had several different components. One major component of Populism is Americanism. Populism's enemy is an elite perceived as doing anti-American things, usually by exploiting the common people. Another component of most Populist movements is the presence of heroes that can serve as unifying forces even if members of the movement disagree on exactly what to do. Tension often existed within Populist movements between the leaders and the rank and file. The leaders of these movements often acquired some of the characteristics of the elites they were opposing. There is also a certain degree of cultural exclusivity in Populist movements. Only a certain kind of person can be a common person. The rest are un-American.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5-14.

<sup>19</sup> Walter T. K. Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-3.

Many Populist movements had trouble defining who “the People” were. Most of the time, prejudices against African-Americans, immigrants and other groups were unchallenged. Populist parties often demonstrated significant religious prejudice. Some Populists viewed politics as a kind of war, even a religious war. Women commonly played big roles in Populism by organizing camp meetings, establishing extensive female networks to support it, speaking in public, or writing articles about the movement in newspapers. Populism became less of a force in the 1920s as taxpayers, homeowners, and avid churchgoers of the white working and middle classes lost their insurgent spirit and relied on past advances.<sup>20</sup>

Progressivism was another major political development that influenced North Dakota and national politics. The IVA(Independent Voters’ Association), NPL(Non-Partisan League), and KKK would all use some progressive ideas when appealing to North Dakota voters. One concept it promoted was that of social justice or that government on all levels should regulate the economy to ensure that the public was protected and people were treated fairly. This was an acknowledgment unlike some previous movements that the future lay with capitalist production. In 1900 1% of the population owned 87% of the wealth and 1/8 the population lived in poverty.<sup>21</sup>

Most people could agree that some kind of reform was necessary because the current system was not solving contemporary challenges, the question was what kind.

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<sup>20</sup>Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995),1-4, 39; Lawrence Goodwyn. *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4-6.

<sup>21</sup>Walter T. K. Nugent. *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010),5-7.

Taxation in cities at this time was minimal as were public services. This became an increasing problem as cities grew in size and importance. Another problem Americans saw with municipal government was corruption. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many Americans believed that corruption was threatening the democratic ideal of equal opportunity. A couple of organizations associated with Progressivism tried to fight these characteristics. The Public Forums movement tried to expose and fight corruption. The Social Gospel Movement was a reform crusade which sought to produce God's Kingdom on Earth. Religion was seen as a humanitarian idea as much as a spiritual one. If the city was not going to provide for its residents, someone had to. The Progressive Movement in general had a more worldly sympathetic vision than the Social Gospel Movement, but they shared many of the same goals.<sup>22</sup> Most social justice reformers accepted the prejudices of their times, however, and interracial cooperation was always very unequal.<sup>23</sup>

Many historians have argued that Progressivism was a unifying ideology. However, Progressivism provided a language that was malleable and could be used for the interests of any faction or group. In the long run Progressivism contributed to the divisions within North Dakota politics rather than alleviating them. This will be seen later

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<sup>22</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America 1870-1920*. (Oxford University Press: New York), 2003), 35-38.

<sup>23</sup>Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s*. (Oxford University Press: New York 2007), vii, 7-11, 31, 34, 36, 39-40, 43, 53.

on in the conflict between the NPL and IVA. All major political factions in North Dakota in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century incorporated populist and progressive ideas in some way.<sup>24</sup>

Fraternal organizations were important participants in the political debates of this period. At this time there were three major types of fraternal organizations: Secret, Funeral/Sick or Health Benefit, and Life Insurance. Each of these types had representatives in North Dakota. Most of these organizations had a democratic structure with certain set rituals and provisions for mutual aid for members and their own political agendas which often clashed. Mark C. Carnes argues that changing attitudes and ideas about gender/masculinity were the major reason lodges became popular. White men wanted to find a masculine substitute for distant fathers.<sup>25</sup>

Members of fraternal organizations were trying to find values that seemed increasingly threatened by modern society. Some of these values were independence, brotherhood, and the preservation of traditional social relationships. Mary Ann Clawson argues that it was the changing interaction between gender and class that accounts for this. There were four key characteristics that fraternal organizations shared: Corporate idiom, ritual, proprietorship, and masculinity. Fraternal organizations united people from many different social, economic, and religious backgrounds. A cultural context was provided within these groups for social action. The cultural construction of fraternal organizations was both a consensual and confrontational process because culture is both a resource and a terrain of struggle. As time went on, fraternal organizations became

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<sup>24</sup> James J Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 56-67.

<sup>25</sup> Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, Conn. 1989), 72-74, 87.



increasingly entrepreneurial. Youth and Women's auxiliary organizations were seen as necessary for patriarchal control.<sup>26</sup>

Rituals were at the forefront of all these fraternal organizations. Writing and developing rituals were important preoccupations for middle class Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eric Hobsbawm called the intense ritual of labor orders "misplaced ingenuity". Mark Carnes has argued that the rituals of fraternal organizations helped millions of men into passage of manhood in Victorian America and into the changed nature of what it meant to be a man in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Rituals also reinforced middle class norms by demonstrating social boundaries. Ritual was the means by which fraternal organizations tied their various purposes together.<sup>27</sup> Fraternal organizations also made constant references to the past. Corporatism, an influential ideology in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century America, used the body as a metaphor for social relations and stresses the indissolubility of human ties. They relied on brotherhood as the moral guarantor of scientific knowledge due to the corporate tradition.<sup>28</sup>

The last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the Golden Age of Fraternal Organizations in America. In 1896 more than 5.5 million Americans were members of fraternal organizations. Economic considerations were the major reason there were not even more members since fees could be steep. Tocqueville had said that independent citizens sought strength through association because hierarchies no longer did that as much. That was

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989),41-43.

<sup>27</sup> Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, Conn. 1989), xi-12.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989),4-5, 11-12, 18, 21, 37, and 55.

even truer in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.<sup>29</sup> The Klan's primary objective with ritual was the initiation of new membership. However, fraternal organizations often suffered from inept management and lacked the resources of private companies.<sup>30</sup>

Elements of North Dakota society besides fraternal organizations in the era before the Klan arrived need to be considered more specifically. The role of railroads was the central issue of North Dakota politics during its first quarter century. The development of railroads played a key role in the settlement of North Dakota. Settlement proceeded in waves and the two most important waves were from 1875-1887 and 1895-1915. They are often referred as the First and Second Dakota Booms.<sup>31</sup>

There were three major railroads in North Dakota: the Northern Pacific, the Great Northern, and the See Line. By 1884 James J. Hill and the Northern Pacific Railroad operated over 400 miles of track in the northern Dakota Territory and owned nearly 20% of the land. By 1888 there were 4,400 miles of track in the Dakota Territory. Through the lines of track and land owned the railroads established effective patronage networks. Fargo quickly became the largest city in North Dakota because the railroads made it the gateway city to the state. Fargo was the only city in North Dakota that all three major railroads ran through and thus was the main supply depot for businesses in North Dakota.

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey A. Charles, *Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 72-75.

<sup>30</sup> David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 64-69.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study in Frontier Politics*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 87-90.

By 1920 its population had reached over 20,000, making it bigger than Grand Forks, the second largest city in the state, by more than 7,000 people.<sup>32</sup>

In order for these railroad lines to be profitable they had to serve someone. Booster literature was published to promote settlement along their lines and this literature was translated into German and a few different Scandinavian languages. This literature claimed that farmers would pay for their homesteads within two crops. J. B. Power, the land Commissioner of the Northern Pacific, claimed that the Red River Valley was the richest agriculture section that had ever been opened.<sup>33</sup>

This booster campaign by the railroads had a significant influence on the scale of wheat farming and settlement in the state. Between 1880 and 1890, the number of bushels of spring wheat harvested annually in North Dakota increased from 2.8 million to 38 million. Many settlers, however, found themselves in places where there had been no previous settlement and no infrastructure which created heavy startup costs. North Dakota was also relatively far away from any major metro area so transportation costs were always going to be significant. Resentment was also directed towards the railroads because of the high shipping rates they charged to reach big markets.<sup>34</sup>

During the time that the political culture of North Dakota was forming, the middle class was emerging as a powerful force in American politics. All three of these political

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 37-40.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 36-38.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 41-45.

groups (NPL, IVA, and KKK) tried to attract support from the middle class in different ways. The makeup and evolution of the middle class played an important role in the transformation of North Dakota politics.

The rise of industrial America created a new type of middle class. The old middle class had been based around skilled artisans in the cities and yeoman farmers in the countryside. The new middle class centered on the urban white collar jobs that were being created as a result of industrialization. The process of class formation is perpetual as previous historians have emphasized and politics is always central to it. Both the new and old middle classes became more assertive politically and this was a major reason for the rise of the Progressive and Populist movements.<sup>35</sup>

Some historians have argued that the middle class was unequivocally supportive of the rapidly expanding industrial capitalistic system. However, the middle class's hopes and desires cannot be assimilated simply into entrepreneurial ambitions. The lower middle class in America was where the most distinctive form of anti-Capitalist ideology developed. Middle class hostility to immigrants and rich businessmen formed the backbone of many third party movements. These elements came together to form a white backlash in the 1920s that would provide fertile ground for Klan recruiters. Contrary to what Marx thought, this was not a transitional class that went away after the establishment of capitalism.<sup>36</sup> As recently as 1925 65% of Dakotans were their own boss. Rather than being simply a tool of the elites, middle class formulated a unique brand of

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<sup>35</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 39-42.

<sup>36</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 9.

politics based on their own moral conceptions of justice and individual character. As Catherine Stock has pointed out, many members of the middle class in the Dakotas came to grips with modern life in complicated ways. One important avenue in which to do this was through politics.<sup>37</sup>

The middle class was divided over the vision it should try to promote. The Knights of Labor had clung to a producer-centric vision. This represented a continuation of 18<sup>th</sup> Century ideas of a person's status being based on propertied independence. However, the American Federation of Labor limited its membership to skilled workers. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Americans made a distinction between middle class people and "capitalists".<sup>38</sup>

The rural element was the largest component of the middle class in North Dakota. Farmers' lives changed considerably at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Before the Civil War rural communities were basically isolated socially. By 1920 farmers found themselves transacting their daily affairs with people who had entirely different lifestyles. Farmers in North Dakota had little control over the production process. An increasing number of farmers had to mortgage their land. 51 percent of the farms in North Dakota had mortgages in 1910 compared to 76 percent in 1926. Tenant farming was nowhere near as big a problem here in North Dakota as it was in South Dakota or Iowa. In 1920, North

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<sup>37</sup> Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 9-12.

<sup>38</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4-7.

Dakota had one of the lowest levels of poverty in the country. The proportion of farmers with less than a section of land (640 acres) was not significant.<sup>39</sup>

The early migrants to the state had taken the most fertile lands which were mainly in the Eastern part of the state. The Western part of the state had been settled later and it was poorer. This was where the NPL was strongest because its cooperative agenda was more attractive. Most of the middle class in North Dakota were either farmers or people who lived in agricultural communities. North Dakota politics was centered on this battle between the middle class within the state and the outside business interests, particularly railroads.<sup>40</sup>

Americans throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century constantly said there was a distinction between the middle class and capitalists. This made it possible for the middle class to develop an ambiguous and sometimes hostile relationship to the emerging economic system. In the United States the “old” middle class was where the most complete and distinct anti-capitalist ideologies developed. Contrary to what Marx thought, this was not a transitional class that went away after the establishment of capitalism.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, individual success was highly celebrated while on the other hand cooperative aspects of community life which many Dakotans had carried with them from their old

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<sup>39</sup> Scott Ellsworth, “The Origins of the Non-Partisan League,” (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 78-82.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, “The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922,” (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988), 33-37; Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains.* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 12-17.

<sup>41</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 9.

countries were looked on fondly as well. In the utopia of many middle class theorists workers and the middling orders would blend together and form “The People”. Many scholars have drawn attention to the growing division between white and blue collar workers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century but there was considerable fluidity around that line well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Populist movement tried to bridge the gap between white and blue collar workers by aggressively seeking an alliance between them. The family enterprise ethos remained powerful in North Dakota, particularly among family farmers.<sup>42</sup>

Women had a complicated relationship to economic changes and were not initially accepted as full members in progressive movements. Many Progressives supported an ideological attack on women as workers by passing gendered labor laws the goal of which was to preserve “chauvinistic paternalism”. However, small business owners generally were opposed to this type of legislation because it made it harder to hire workers.<sup>43</sup>

The old rural middle class of petite bourgeoisie landowners are a part of the middle class that Americans think they know the most about but in fact know the least. In many historical studies the rural middle class functions as objects instead of subjects. Interest in Populism has not been great for the period after the defeat of 1896 but its ideas continued to influence political discourse, particularly among the rural middle class of

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<sup>42</sup>Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 2-9.

<sup>43</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 22-27.

Great Plains states.<sup>44</sup>The growing distinctions within the middle class in North Dakota are important for understanding its political evolution.

There were a couple of different stages in the evolution of North Dakota politics. During the early stage of Dakota politics (1861-1877), factions organized around specific issues were more important than the Democratic and Republican parties. Politics was chaotic as there was a high turnover in both the territorial legislature and the appointed executive offices. In their writings and speeches, North Dakota politicians articulated their goals through a discourse influenced by the old philosophy of republicanism. But even then the ideas of populism and progressivism were developing as well. This political era coincided with the First Dakota Boom and by the end of it there were enough settlers for North Dakota to take the next step in political evolution.<sup>45</sup>

The second stage began after 1877 or so the two major parties became more organized within the territory (which was split into two states in 1889) and it quickly became evident that the Republican Party was the dominant political institution in both the territory and later state. Railroads and other business interests had organized themselves effectively. The territorial capital was moved from Yankton to Bismarck in 1883 by Alexander McKenzie because he wanted to increase the value of the lots he owned outside that city. The major battle within the Republican Party at this time focused

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<sup>44</sup> Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 2, 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study in Frontier Politics*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 114-117.



on those who wanted to preserve the status quo and the Territory of Dakota and those who pushed for statehood.<sup>46</sup>

The Statehood movement was initially a top-down affair, led by the elites in the territory without much popular enthusiasm. Corporate and political leaders increasingly resented the federal government's intervention in territorial affairs. They saw statehood as a way to gain a measure of autonomy from Washington and secure their self-rule. A group called the Dakota Citizen's League (hereafter: DCL) was organized to gain support for statehood. This league consisted of professional politicians, prohibitionists, and many nonpolitical reformers such as small farmers and members of the working class. The leaders of the DCL and other statehood groups hoped their movement would stall the radical reformers who were articulating a version of Jeffersonian and Calhounist ideas about state's rights. These arguments were somewhat discredited by the secession of the Southern states which led to the Civil War but they still were used here.<sup>47</sup>

The desire for self-rule did not reach most of the population of Dakota until the end of the boom period of 1875-1887. The Statehood Movement received growing popular support in this period because of the perceived growing influence of outside interests on the territory such as the Federal Government and business interests in Minneapolis and Chicago. Democrats in Washington DC tried to prevent the admission of the Dakota Territory as two separate states but could not stop it once Republicans took

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<sup>46</sup> Martin O. Thompson Papers, Mss 123, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 106.

<sup>47</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 84-86.

over Congress in March 1889. The politics of North Dakota emerged from this template.<sup>48</sup>

The conflict between business interests and elements of the middle class which was the main dividing line became evident immediately after North Dakota attained statehood with the formation of the McKenzie Machine. Alexander McKenzie was the most important North Dakota political figure from territorial days to about 1906. While Sheriff of Burleigh County (where Bismarck is located) he made a fortune through speculation which he then used that money to organize a bank and invest in real estate adjacent to the Northern Pacific Railroad. McKenzie eventually became a broker of railroad, bank, and grain combine interests. This position put McKenzie at the forefront of the Republican Party which was the dominant party in the territory and later state. One of the first signs of McKenzie's influence occurred in 1883 when he orchestrated the move of the territorial capital from Yankton to Bismarck by working with Northern Pacific agents and Governor Nehemiah G. Ordway.<sup>49</sup>

McKenzie felt confident enough in his position as a power broker in the state that he moved to St. Paul in 1892. There, from his residence in the Merchant's Hotel, he decided which Republicans would run for state and local offices. This hotel became known as the unofficial capital of North Dakota because of McKenzie and the absentee railroad executives who stayed there. There were a few other prominent bosses that did

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<sup>48</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study in Frontier Politics*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 16-20.

<sup>49</sup> Ellsworth, *Origins*, 94-98.

not have as much influence as McKenzie but still derived considerable power from the existing system: Michael McCormack, Judson LaMoure, and John Haggart.<sup>50</sup>

The operation of the McKenzie Machine is revealed from the memoirs of Edward Wells, who was a state house candidate for the machine from Jamestown. “The soldiers from the fort came over, voted at one poll, returned to Griffin’s saloon, changed into civilian clothes, went to a second poll and voted, changed again and returned to the first poll and voted for the third time.”<sup>51</sup> Thus corruption played a big role in sustaining the McKenzie Machine.

While McKenzie’s political machine was the dominant force in North Dakota politics during these years, it was not a monopoly and was routinely challenged. Eli C. D. Shortridge, running on a populist People’s Party platform, was able to defeat McKenzie’s pick for governor in 1892. However the Populists quickly lost steam and the “Old Guard” was able to reestablish its dominance. This was in line with the decline of the Populist Party nationally. McKenzie ran into some additional trouble in 1900 when he was sentenced to a year in jail for his participation in a scheme to divest miners of their earnings in the Alaska Gold Rush. However, he was able to avoid serving time in jail thanks to the connections he had developed.<sup>52</sup>

However, it was not until 1906 that a coalition of breakaway Republicans and Democrats joined together under the banner of Progressivism to defeat McKenzie’s nominees and leave his machine in shambles. The Democrat elected Governor that year,

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<sup>50</sup> Curt Eriksmoen, *Did You Know That...? Vol.2.* (Fargo: J and M Printing, 2009), 45-48.

<sup>51</sup> Lamar, *Dakota Territory*, 111-113.

<sup>52</sup> Ellsworth, *Origins*, 99-102.

John Burke, enacted some progressive legislation which helped to temporarily heal some of the unrest that had been building. Laws of referenda and recall were enacted. However the Progressive reformers did not deal with the main issues of concern to the farmers. The memory of the McKenzie Machine would continue to influence the direction of North Dakota politics and the Progressive Movement in North Dakota for decades.<sup>53</sup>

Due to the domination of North Dakota Politics by a few elites, many North Dakotans tried to bring a more top-down nature to their politics. They sought to replace the existing oligarchy with people who shared their interests. Frustration with and opposition to the McKenzie Machine provided the impetus for rival political ideologies to develop. This movement initially took a left-wing ideology due to the conservative policies of the McKenzie Machine. The first Socialist Club in North Dakota was organized in 1900 in Fargo. However, it quickly became apparent that the most promising area for growth in the state for the Socialists was in the Northwest part of the state due to the large concentration of Norwegian immigrants there and its relative poverty.<sup>54</sup>

There was a direct correlation between inequality and the success of the North Dakota Socialist Party. The greater the presence of landlords and tenant farming in a particular county the greater the likelihood of Socialist success there. Thus the Socialists were more successful in the Western part of the state. The Socialists relied on booster-based organizing and that proved most effective in immigrant communities particularly

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<sup>53</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study in Frontier Politics*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1956), 74-78.

<sup>54</sup> Balazadeth, *Economic*, 32-35.

those from Northern Europe. However, Catholic areas proved difficult for the Socialists to find success in. The Bishop of Bismarck, Vincent Wehrhe, urged Catholics to stay away from Socialism. The Socialists achieved their greatest success in 1912 when Socialist mayors in Rugby and Hillsboro, two small towns in central and eastern North Dakota, were elected.<sup>55</sup>

Disagreements within the North Dakota Socialist Party quickly caused it to disintegrate as an influential force. Two divisions within the party prevented it from developing a viable recruitment and election strategy. A division quickly developed within the party between farmers and urban workers. There also was another growing division between a fundamentalist faction which believed in adhering to Marxist doctrine and a more flexible faction that wanted to pragmatically adapt their program to find something that could win in North Dakota.<sup>56</sup>

Another problem for reformers was attracting a coalition that could compete at the statewide level. For example, Socialists had trouble everywhere trying to get trade union workers to support them over Democrats. The Socialist Platform in many Great Plains states called for collectively owned state industries and legislation to regulate the hours, conditions, and wages of workers. Socialists had some success encouraging “cooperative societies” of farmers. North Dakota, however, was not a state of Marxists idealists.<sup>57</sup>

A key reason why Burke was able to defeat the McKenzie Machine was through his compelling use of political rhetoric. North Dakota political rhetoric was used for and

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<sup>55</sup> Ellsworth, *Origins*, 104-107.

<sup>56</sup> Ellsworth, *Origins*, 112-116.

<sup>57</sup> Ellsworth, *Origins*, 124, 127-130.

against all three organizations studied and thus plays a big role in this story. It was filled with language and ideas from two political ideologies in America during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Populism and Progressivism. Although both of these ideologies have been studied extensively, it is still relatively difficult to come up with a comprehensive definition of either one. Populism has been an influential political ideology throughout American History. Fundamentally it is an ideology that views common people as noble and tries to mobilize them against an upper class elite.

The influence of republicanism is evident by the emphasis placed on the morality of the citizenry for the health of the society. “But we have learned, by shared experience, that prosperity is girt with peril. In this hour of peril we will not scorn the voices of warning and censure, the friendly and patriotic voices of the times. We will not forget that the vital condition of natural greatness and prosperity is the moral character of the people. It is not vast territory, a temperate climate, exhaustless mines, enormous wealth, amazing inventions, imperial enterprises, magnificent public works, a public miraculously multiplied; it is not busy shops, and humming mills and flaming flames, and commerce that girdles the globe with the glory of a flag, that makes a nation truly great. These are but opportunities.”<sup>58</sup>

Burke also articulated a popular conception of the newer ideologies of populism and Progressivism.

“In older countries, in the soft air of the storied past, amid accumulated riches of art, and literature, and long and romantic legend, the finest flower of civilization may seem to bloom. But if civilization means human welfare, the happiness of the individual man, a fairer opportunity, a nobler ideal, a more equally diffused well-being, then, this very year, America, whose true significance is fair play to all men, is the century plant of civilization, covered with the opening blossoms of a greater general welfare than history records.”<sup>59</sup>

There were several specific policy debates these political conflicts centered on.

These policy debates were what the conflicts between the NPL, IVA, and KKK revolved around. One of these issues was Prohibition. The main reason this was controversial was

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<sup>58</sup> Simon Hoag Papers, Mss 643, Box 1, Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. Independence Day Speech by John Burke, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1903. 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> Simon Hoag Papers, Mss 643, Box 1, Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. Independence Day Speech by John Burke, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1904. 1-4.

due to some members of the dry side of the Prohibition debate argued that their side was the only way to promote “Americanism”.<sup>60</sup> Prohibition was another unique facet of national politics in the 1920s. However, in North Dakota, it had been a topic ever since statehood and the battle lines between the two groups were well defined. It was influenced and made popular by some members of the Progressive Movement, who argued that alcohol was an important cause of poverty.<sup>61</sup>

Elizabeth Preston Anderson was a supporter of Prohibition, Women’s Suffrage, and the education of young people. From 1893-1933 she was President of the North Dakota Women’s Christian Temperance Movement and articulated most of the pro-Prohibition arguments used in North Dakota. Prohibition was passed in North Dakota during the first legislative session after attaining statehood in 1889 and remained law in North Dakota until 1933. It was a controversial law throughout its entire tenure in North Dakota, just as it was in the country as a whole.<sup>62</sup>

In a speech on Prohibition given in 1889, just before the passage of the initial law, Anderson argued that “purity was the greatest question confronting Americans today” and that “alcohol was a big corruptor of purity and morals”. The reason many people supported selling alcohol is the money to be made in doing so. Now that the boom period of North Dakota was over the way for North Dakota to continue to stand for progress as

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<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota

Anderson saw it was by passing Prohibition. Prohibition provided “safety for the home, individual, and nation”.<sup>63</sup>

For Anderson, there was no such thing as unrestricted personal liberty. Personal liberty only goes as far as the safety and harmony of the community permits it. Even though Prohibition may cause a tax increase, it will save money in the end because there will not be any more victims from it. Anderson argued that Prohibition has already proven successful in Maine, Kansas, and Iowa.<sup>64</sup> These ideas attained special importance in the 1920s because Prohibition became a national law and linked to the debate about Americanism. The reluctance of the NPL and IVA to embrace Prohibition created an opening for a group that would.<sup>65</sup>

The World’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s Department of Juvenile Work sent Anderson many letters through the years praising her work in education. She also took on an active role at several national conventions, as noted by President Francis Willard. Anderson regularly wrote a “President’s Corner” column for *Western Womanhood* and later the *White Ribbon Bulletin* which were the official newspapers of the North Dakota Women’s Christian Temperance Union (hereafter: NDWCTU).<sup>66</sup>

*The Union Signal*, the national newspaper of the WCTU, was also widely circulated in North Dakota. There were more than 10,000 local unions of the WCTU in

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<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota

<sup>64</sup> “Prohibition” Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 1.

<sup>65</sup> “President’s Corner” Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, “Biographical Sketch” Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota



the United States by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 35 countries were represented at the world convention in Boston in 1891. Thus the WCTU could not be ignored and the Klan would later pick up many of the issues it raised.<sup>67</sup> Anderson continued to argue for stricter observance and enforcement of Prohibition rather than its repeal throughout the 1920s. The liquor business stayed out of North Dakota for 47 years.<sup>68</sup>

In her memoirs Anderson took credit for getting many laws through the North Dakota legislature, including: repeal of a 90-Day Divorce Law, prohibiting impure literature, prohibiting advertising of intoxicating liquors in newspapers, prohibiting Sunday baseball and theaters/moving pictures, and an anti-gambling/pool hall law. She was elected as the recording secretary to National WCTU President Clara Hoffman in 1904 and served two years. Her leadership and organization worked to oppose the NPL during the 1910s and 1920s because the League was opposed to Prohibition due to its support from Catholic immigrants who were opposed to Prohibition throughout the country.<sup>69</sup>

There was a large amount of disagreement over what it meant to be American. Progressives believed education, particularly education for adult immigrants, would help with create social harmony and a more homogenous population. Even many Progressives believed that some immigrants were a threat to the nation's health. However, even among

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<sup>67</sup>"Biographical Information". Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.1-4.

<sup>68</sup>Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 237-240.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Preston Anderson Papers, Mss 653 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

Progressives there was wide disagreement over what Americanization meant and what form it should take. This became a particularly important debate during and after WWI.<sup>70</sup>

Some members of the dry side of the Prohibition debate argued that their side was the only way to promote “Americanism”. Americanization was a major concern of Western states in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The rising Urbanization, Industrialization, and Immigration created angst among many people that they were losing control of their society and way of life. The anti-Catholic American Protective Association which was founded in Iowa in 1887 established several chapters in North Dakota. The Immigration Restriction League was influential nationally in arguing that good citizens cannot be poor. Progressives wanted to remove some of the self-described frontier elements from these Western states such as corporate influence in state government and corruption in city politics.<sup>71</sup>

The utility and political involvement of fraternal organizations was also hotly debated. As the number of fraternal organizations increased, their goals diverged and increasingly began to intrude on politics. Fraternal organizations had a long history in North Dakota. The Masons, for example, established their first charter in Northern Dakota Territory in 1864. The Fargo Masons were first set up in 1874 and they met in the Old Headquarters Hotel. This central location started many rumors that the Masons were influential among the elites of the state.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing The West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 26-29.

<sup>71</sup>Frank Van Nuys. *Americanizing The West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 26-29.

<sup>72</sup>Sackett, *Masons in North Dakota*, 63, 86, 97.

Most fraternal organizations in Fargo met somewhere in downtown Fargo close to people's place of work, often in a hotel. Some of the biggest fraternal organizations in Fargo at this time included the Lions' Club, the Commercial Club, the Elks Lodge, Odd Fellows, the Sons of Norway, and several explicitly American organizations such as the Fraternal Union of America and Loyal Americans. Both the NPL and KKK saw themselves as fraternal organizations as well as political movements. Urbanization was an important step towards the traditional activities of fraternal organizations becoming politicized.<sup>73</sup>

Anti-Catholicism was widespread in North Dakota during the 1920s. There was still a widespread distrust of Catholics in the state which made political cooperation with them potentially dangerous. Ralph Ward, a North Dakota state legislator, gave speeches throughout his political career as a Democrat that the duties of a Catholic and American citizenship do not conflict. Rather Catholics can make both the church and the state better by being engaged.<sup>74</sup> Several school districts in North Dakota hired nuns to come in and teach because it was cheaper. This practice was controversial and many North Dakotans saw this as an opportunity to teach Catholic values outside of parochial schools. The Klan effectively utilized this issue during school board elections, highlighting the presence of continued sectarian tension.<sup>75</sup>

Another important debate was over how decisions were made and who made them. The fact that major decisions were made behind closed by a few politicians influenced by certain railroads is indicated by the decision the capital of Dakota Territory

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<sup>73</sup> 1922 Fargo City Directory 8-18.

<sup>74</sup> Ralph Ward Papers Box 1 Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>75</sup> Van Nuys, *Americanization*, 7.

from Yankton to Bismarck in 1883. "It was a glorious victory! The little scheme concocted in my rooms by the three North Dakota green horns, McKenzie, Dickey, and the writer, came to a head tonight and has culminated in the removal of the Dakota Capitol. It has been a wonderful fight because there was arrayed against it the Milwaukee, St. Paul and the Chicago and Northwestern R. R. ring and a host of others in South Dakota."<sup>76</sup>

Since railroads were such a large presence in the state, they had a significant amount of political influence. Alexander McKenzie would use his railroad connections and his connections to other businesses with a significant presence in North Dakota to determine who the candidates should be and what the policies should be. The railroads were the most important part of a coalition of business interests headquartered outside North Dakota that tried to determine the path of the state's politics. After the McKenzie Machine fell apart the railroads were still a force in the state but they needed a new setup.<sup>77</sup>

As long as McKenzie prevented any viable political opposition from forming, he was supported wholeheartedly by the business interests in the state. As the McKenzie Machine began to be challenged, some of its members started questioning McKenzie's decisions. "I wonder if you and McK. Have decided that 'discretion is the better part of valor' and have been able to make terms with some fairly good man more acceptable to the reckless, mulish members of the Republican Party. They may be downed at last but I

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<sup>76</sup> Edward P. Wells Papers, Mss 135, Box 1, Folder 11, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 62.

<sup>77</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," ( Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 12-16.

fear they will bring you down with them.” It was increasingly clear that the old elite would have to reform if it was to hold onto power. North Dakota was maturing politically and the ideologies of Populism and Progressivism were challenging the old system.<sup>78</sup>

During this early period of North Dakota politics farmers began experimenting with political organizations that would better address their needs. Agrarian movements have been part of American History since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. They quickly became an important part of Dakota due to the high proportion of its population who were farmers. The first agrarian reform movement that gained support in Dakota was the Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange). The Grange reached the peak of its membership nationwide and in the Dakota Territory in 1875 when there were 53 Granges and approximately 1,178 members but this number quickly dwindled to 697 members within a year due to a depression. Farmers also started to form Mutual Benefit Associations and Protective Associations which had similar concerns to what the NPL’s would be.<sup>79</sup>

These groups would be the major support base of Populism when that national movement arrived in the state. These movements strove to improve their members’ lives by cooperative activities which were ideas that many of the immigrant settlers carried with them from their native countries. The Live-At –Home Movement sought to reinforce farmers’ pride by emphasizing the biggest advantage that farmers had over other Americans, namely that they could feed themselves. The Farmers’ Lobby in Washington was able to get significant legislation addressing their grievances passed. The 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act was designed to curb manipulation of meat prices for buyers

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<sup>78</sup> Edward P. Wells Papers, Mss 135, Box 1, Folder 11, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 94.

<sup>79</sup> Ellsworth, "Origins," 145-148.

while the 1922 Copper-Volstead Act exempted agricultural cooperatives from persecution under federal antitrust laws.<sup>80</sup>

Farmers increasingly turned to these more radical groups in North Dakota, such as the Dakota Farmers Alliance (DFA), after the failure of the Grange. Henry Loucks of Watertown was a charismatic president of the DFA who helped make it an important organization. The DFA continued the cooperative tradition that had already started by forming the Alliance Hail Association. This association was able to sell insurance at a reduced cost of up to 50% over the commercial insurance companies. Two other groups set up by the DFA were the Dakota Farmers' Alliance Company and the Scandinavian Elevator Company (henceforth: SEC) which were both joint stock companies. From 1887 on the DFA used these groups to buy needed commodities directly from wholesalers, help farmers sell some produce, negotiate loans for members, and handle business affairs of the DFA. The DFAC showed to farmers how much capital they would need to launch and sustain a successful business venture.<sup>81</sup>

The SEC was the first attempt of Dakota farmers to establish a cooperative terminal elevator. The DFA tried to get all the cooperative elevators of the Dakotas and Minnesota to agree to ship to just their terminal elevator and thereby break the monopolistic practices of the railroads and grain market interests. Loucks made deals with English millers to stop the practices of the grain marketers of mixing in some inferior quality grain with higher quality grain, thereby making inferior flour. The milling

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<sup>80</sup> David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 200, 189.

<sup>81</sup> Nancy Hesselstine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922," (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988), 34, 42-45.

interests seeing a big part of their business interests threatened convinced the English millers to withdraw their financial support for the venture. It proved impossible for the SEC to recover from that setback. The name was changed to the Farmers' Alliance Elevator Company but was forced to close in 1891 anyway. The Farmers increasingly wanted to have a significant stake in the region's politics and they resented the fact that most Dakota politicians selected from Washington DC in territorial days had little or no interest in the state other than using their jobs for personal gain. However, they also resented outsiders who thought they knew how to help them.<sup>82</sup>

Farmers developed several grievances against the existing political system. Despite the fact that many farmers were initially loyal to the McKenzie Machine, they were disappointed that it was not addressing these concerns and not responsive to their demands over time. There were both legal and illegal abuses of this system.<sup>83</sup>

Farmers hated being fined for grass seeds and other elements in their grain when the elevators used fans to clean them out and then sold these "mill feeds" back to farmers at increased prices. The primary market for North Dakota grain was Minnesota. Most North Dakota wheat went through Minneapolis at some point. Therefore Minnesota grades were used to grade North Dakota wheat. There was a widespread belief that Minnesota grades were unfair to farmers. The wheat of many different farmers was often combined together before it was graded. Many things were done to wheat in each stage of the journey between the farmer and the consumer each of which increased its value. A

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<sup>82</sup>Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 36-38.

<sup>83</sup>Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 42,43.

1913 Department of Labor study focused on hard winter wheat in Kansas found that consumers paid on average 12 cents more per bushel than the farmer received.<sup>84</sup>

The Federal Government made no attempt to regulate or impose uniform standards on the grading of grain until the 1916 Grain Grading Act. Nevertheless, the relationship between North Dakota farmers and the Minnesota Grain Trade was not one of simple hostility because there were many interconnections among both groups. However, the widespread belief that North Dakotans did not run their own state and had little say in the production process was something many political groups tried to exploit.<sup>85</sup>

North Dakotans became increasingly suspicious of outsiders as time went on. They did continue to have reasons to hold this view. McKenzie directed the states' politics from St. Paul for nearly two decades. James J. Hill remained an important figure in the state for a long time. Some people called him "the Father of North Dakota". He was close to Alexander McKenzie and also lived in St. Paul. Some merchants and millers in Minnesota considered North Dakota their private preserve.<sup>86</sup>

Farmers, in particular, were bothered by the outside influence on the state's politics. To secure the equipment and capital they needed, farmers had to borrow heavily on mortgages and to pay high interest rates as well as commissions and fees. It seemed like an endless cycle farmers could not get out of. Many North Dakota farmers came to

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<sup>84</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 36.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Henry Bahmer. "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 49-51.

<sup>86</sup> Robert George Paterson, "North Dakota: A Twentieth Century Valley Forge" in *These United States: Portraits of America From the 1920s*. ed. by Daniel H. Borus. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992. 285-291.



believe there was a conspiracy directed by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and the Chicago Board of Trade against them. When Fargo needed to hire a new police chief they took an officer from Duluth. The Fargo Commercial Club chef was sent from St. Paul. Big business groups in Minnesota founded the Better Farming Association to grow their profits. Farmers increasingly supported any politicians who railed against big business. Someone had to address this problem of absentee control of the transportation and sale of the farmers' produce. Parts of the state which had been settled longer, such as the Red River Valley, did not see as significant of changes in regards to fees on mortgages as the newly settled Western part of the state did. Thus the distrust and fear of outsiders took longer to develop in the eastern part of the state. This was also the most urban part of the state.<sup>87</sup>

There was also considerable distrust of the middlemen of these big businessmen. It was widely believed that grain-buyers used short scales. Many farmers feared there was a ring between these two groups that was designed to take the profits that were rightfully theirs.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these grievances, there were significant changes in the process of farming during this time. A Spring Wheat region developed in the US from 1870-1915 which North Dakota became a significant part of. This region arose due to the growth of the world's industrial population, the liberal land laws of the US (the Homestead Act of 1862 and subsequent additions), the development of transportation networks in Western states, increased immigration to the US, and improvements in labor-saving machinery. Farming

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<sup>87</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 94-96.

<sup>88</sup> No author, "The Farmer and The War" *The New Republic* (Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1917), 17-18.

increasingly became a commercial enterprise in the 50 years after the Civil War. Farmers increasingly advocated redress for themselves rather than for the interests of a particular section of the country. The Farmers' Alliance Movement in the 1880s was able to recruit significant support in both Southern and Midwestern states because of the declining influence of sectional interests among farmers.<sup>89</sup>

Certainty in comparison to the years which preceded it, the years 1897-the end of WW I were prosperous years for American agriculture. This relative prosperity allowed farmers to see that the political structure could be more favorable to them. Homesteading reached a peak in North Dakota around 1907. The Non-Partisan League had its best years before the post-WWI Depression for American agriculture. The NPL succeeded when farmers were doing well enough to know that things could be better. WW I prosperity of the Spring Wheat region lasted until 1920. In 1919 the price of wheat was \$2.19/bushel and by 1924 that had fallen to \$1.05/bushel.<sup>90</sup>

The first step towards addressing these problems was the formation of local cooperative elevators. The American Society of Equality (henceforth: ASE) was the main advocate of this idea in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century North Dakota. The ASE was an important organization in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Founded in 1902, it maintained organizations in 43 states and more than 10,000 farmers in North Dakota had joined it by 1907. Their major

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<sup>89</sup> Robert Bahmer. "Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 54-59.

<sup>90</sup> Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 186.

goal was to ensure profitable prices for farmers. They called for farmers receiving \$1/bushel for wheat and \$1.30/bushel of flax.<sup>91</sup>

Farmers continually had to struggle with having to buy their supplies in a protected market and selling them in a free market. Farmers noticed that grain prices were low in the fall and that those prices rose once the grain was in the hands of dealers. North Dakota did not sell or mill its own grain. This was done in the grain exchanges of Minneapolis, Duluth, and Chicago. These exchanges did their own grading of the grain which was seen as unfair to North Dakota farmers. In addition farmers had to ship their grain on the railroad to get their grain to these exchanges and thus pay whatever price the railroad charged.<sup>92</sup>

The proposed solution to these problems was a terminal elevator owned by the people of North Dakota. The North Dakota branch of the ASE was active in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as was a spinoff organization, the Equity Cooperative Exchange and was the big supporter of a state-owned terminal elevator. As the President of the North Dakota Society wrote in a letter to its members, "The Society is based on a grievance. If it is to exist any length of time it must be able to show that there is a grievance which should be righted and that something is being done in this direction. What has been perpetrated on the farmers by the Minnesota Grain Exchanges is something that very few people as yet know, and it will constitute an issue on which the society can go anywhere in the northwest and solicit and secure both moral and financial support."<sup>93</sup> US Senator Porter

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<sup>91</sup> Balazadeh, " Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State," 47-49.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 47, 71-74.

<sup>93</sup> Mss 183 Box 9 Folder 14 Letter from J. M. Anderson to O. H. Olson, Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1927. 1.

J. McCumber supported the ASE on this issue while Andrew MacMillian, a conservative leader in the state legislature, charged the ASE with fermenting revolt. North Dakota getting into the elevator business would not make sense or solve the problem.<sup>94</sup>

Opponents of Equity Associations struck back. “‘Societies of Equity’ like labor unions, so far as trying to restrict output and inflate their prices above the normal level, are as vicious in principle as the rankest trust or combine. All are wars against the public welfare, and all wars are evil in their nature. And in all wars, foreign, civil, commercial or industrial, there is always the greatest loss and suffering amongst the poor, the weak and the helpless. Hence the contraction of wealth and the increase in poverty, crime and insanity. ‘Progress’ so called, but real ‘poverty’.”<sup>95</sup>

Farmers’ Movements became increasingly political. “Mr. Bowen was our candidate for governor last year and is a splendid speaker. He is now giving illustrated lectures on Panama. His aim, of course, is to show the value of co-operative effort on a large scale.”<sup>96</sup>

Fargo was an important city in this emerging conscience of both the “old and the “new” middle classes. Fargo was the largest city in North Dakota by a considerable margin. Fargo was North Dakota’s cultural, financial, and political city center. Its mayors also liked to refer to it as “The Biggest Little City in the World”. The Ford plant in Fargo was ranked as one of the best in the country.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Theodore G. Nelson Papers, MSS 0631, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>95</sup> Mss 83 box 10 Folder 1 Green Growers’ Textbook 27-30.

<sup>96</sup> Mss 183, Box 8, Folder 15, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. Letter from Harry Jurgan to O’ H. Olson, Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, 1913.1.

<sup>97</sup> Robert George Paterson, "North Dakota: A Twentieth Century Valley Forge" in *These United States: Portraits of America From the 1920s*. ed. by Daniel H. Borus. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 285-291.

It was home to the North Dakota Agricultural College (hereafter: NDAC). As farmers were encouraged to become more scientific, the NDAC organized short courses for farmers. These courses played a significant role in educating farmers on new techniques. The Farmers' Institute was also organized by the NDAC in 1894. Many of the major agricultural industries were headquartered or had offices there. Thus political ideas in Fargo could have a significant impact on the rest of the state.<sup>98</sup>

A major incident that galvanized both sides occurred during a protest over farm prices in 1900 in Fargo. During this protest Police Chief J. K. Bingham had Anderson forcibly assaulted and forced from a stage where he was speaking. It was later revealed that Bingham was being paid by the Chamber of Commerce. The Fargo Riot showed many farmers that they could not continue with a hands-off stance in regards to politics. Farmers' had for too long been betrayed by two-party partisan politics. In 1910 the average farm lost \$650 due to docking and underpaying wheat per year. Distrust in the current political structure of the state continued to build while business groups tried to reinforce the old patron networks.<sup>99</sup>

Businesses in the state became more diverse as its population grew. For example, O. J. deLendrecie founded a general store in Fargo in 1879 that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century had expanded into luxury goods and shipping goods as far north as Winnipeg, east to Brainerd, and west to Bismarck. As his nephew O. J. Campbell said. "We served the people outside Fargo who had convenient train connections with the city." Fargo had an

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<sup>98</sup> Paterson, " A Twentieth Century Valley Forge," 288-291.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986),2-4.

advantage over the rest of North Dakota because it was the only place served by three railroads. Businesses in Fargo were dominated by the sale of farm machinery and the wholesale trade. Fargo's downtown was dominated by "elegant and commodious hotels and business blocks." Occasionally the McCormick Company shipped all of its daily output from its factory in Chicago to its store in Fargo. The McKenzie Machine was unable to maintain control of this diverging constituency. It seemed to a growing number of Fargoans that the members of the McKenzie Machine were not part of "them".<sup>100</sup>

Fargoans were increasingly demanded better municipal services. Wilbur Ball, another member of the McKenzie Machine, won Fargo mayoral elections of 1890 and 1894 but lost in 1896 to reform candidate J. A. Johnson, who was an implement parts dealer. There was a growing feeling that the traditional two-party system did not help farmers. John Burke's example showed that a political movement outside the traditional leaders of the Republican Party.<sup>101</sup>

The decline of the McKenzie Machine opened up new possibilities. The *Cooperator's Herald*, the newspaper of the North Dakota equity Association, argued in an editorial that voters should vote for the man and not the party. It was becoming clear to more people that state officials were not working in the best interests of farmers even though they were the backbone of prosperity for the state. However, many people were

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<sup>100</sup> Balazadeh, " Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State," 60,71-73.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986), 4.

reluctant to become involved with a Third Party or Non-Partisan politics again because they remembered what had happened when that was tried in the 1890s.<sup>102</sup>

The Farmers' Alliance/Popular Party Movement was not able to keep all the wellsprings of discontent united and ended up in most states joining Fusion tickets with Democrats. The infrastructure of these Fusion tickets proved no match for the dominant Republican Party. The failures of farmers to address their grievances were important for Fargo because the banks, stores, and industries in the city depended on agriculture. A new organization was needed to address the middle class constituency concerned with these issues.<sup>103</sup>

Women's suffrage was also an issue. Women's Clubs in the major urban areas were active in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century pushing this issue. "I don't believe in absolutely equal suffrage among men," Mr. Stockwell said. "It is not a consideration of sex, but of quality, since the government is based on the intelligent acts of the people. All agree on this proposition."<sup>104</sup>

Thus the political situation in North Dakota was unsettled at the beginning of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The old political order of North Dakota had collapsed with the fall of the McKenzie Machine and it was unclear what would replace it. Many North Dakotans had found the McKenzie Machine unresponsive to their needs. They were increasingly frustrated by the dominance of North Dakota politics by outside interests. However, these interests, particularly the railroads, retained significant influence and power and sought to retain control. Both sides would use Populist and

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<sup>102</sup> Ellsworth, "Origins," 162-164.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Henry Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the NPL," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1941), 3.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986), 80-86.

Progressive ideas which had been advocated nationally and found significant support in North Dakota.” The nation is playing with fire. It is playing with hunger. It is playing with passion. It is playing with ideals. The time will soon come when something more will be demanded from those who represent the people than quibbling; something more will be demanded of them than excuses and abuses of power and positions.”<sup>105</sup> The search for cooperation and economic fairness detailed in the newspaper article at the beginning of this chapter took on a sharper focus with the collapse of the McKenzie Machine. Many groups would try to determine what should replace the McKenzie Machine and their inability to come up with a stable political structure would result in the Klan gaining influence in the state.

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<sup>105</sup>NPL Papers Collection, MSS 51, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota



## Chapter Two: The Independent Voters' Association- Non Partisan League Battle and the Search for an Alternative

It's time for farmers now to stand together for their cause;  
For farmer legislators to make the farmers' laws.  
Pass up the politician, this message to him send;  
"We've joined the League as farmers now and we'll stick there till the end."<sup>106</sup>

This quotation is a verse from an NPL campaign song written for the 1918 election. It highlights one view of the conflict that consumed North Dakota politics in the years before the Klan's arrival between the NPL and IVA. The conflicts between business interests and the middle class came to a head in the mid-1910s when the NPL was formed.<sup>107</sup>

This organization was successful in the statewide elections of 1916 and 1918 that it forced the business interests to abandon their reliance on the old patronage networks and form a new organization, the IVA to retain their influence in North Dakota politics. The ensuing conflict between these organizations pushed them to opposite sides of the political spectrum and revealed weaknesses in both of them that a third organization could exploit. This chapter details the major political conflict in North Dakota during the

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<sup>106</sup> NPL Papers Collection, MSS 51, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>107</sup> Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922," (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988), 16-19.

late 1910s and early 1920s. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both the NPL and IVA and why many North Dakotans were open to an alternative in the early 1920s.<sup>108</sup>

The immediate political situation for the Klan in North Dakota was the conflict between the Non Partisan League and the Independent Voters' Association. This conflict arose following the collapse of the McKenzie Machine. The collapse of this machine raised the question of what new political structure would replace it. A collection of farming and labor interests tried to assume more power in the developing political structure by forming the NPL while the business interests sought to maintain control of North Dakota politics by forming the IVA.<sup>109</sup>

The action that for many North Dakotans was the last straw for the "Old Guard" occurred over a state-owned elevator. The Equity Cooperative Exchange and the North Dakota Society of Equity (hereafter: NDSE) both supported a state-owned terminal elevator. The state legislature passed a bill in 1913 putting this issue up to a referendum vote. North Dakotans voted for the state-owned elevator by a 3-1 margin. However the Board of Control that was set up to administer this elevator was quickly taken over by the Chamber of Commerce. Treadwell Trichell, a member of the North Dakota House, helped organize opposition to the elevator. While some state legislators like Staale

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<sup>108</sup> Independent Voters' Association Collected Papers 1921-1929, Mss 20620, North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986),22-24.

Hendrickson argued vigorously for the elevator, in February 1915 the North Dakota legislature overturned the referendum and got rid of the elevator.<sup>110</sup>

In response a group of aggrieved North Dakotans formed a new organization, the Non-Partisan League. Between February-October 1915 between 1700-2500 new members joined the NPL per month. The NPL was able to do this by utilizing the existing network of the Equity Society. The NDSE quickly saw that its interests were aligned with that of the NPL and that the NPL had effective public speakers and political-savvy operatives which they lacked. The alliance between the two groups quickly became beneficial for both. The original campaign messages of the NPL such as “agricultural is the foundation of prosperity” was what the Equity Society had been saying for years.<sup>111</sup>

Arthur Townley became one of the most important political figures in North Dakota History. After teaching High School for three years in Minnesota, Townley participated in a few different farming operations in both North Dakota and Minnesota. These operations proved to be failures and by 1912 the “Flax King of the Northwest” was \$180,000 in debt. That was the year Townley joined the Socialist Party. Townley was influenced by recent events in North Dakota politics. Townley, Wood, and Lemke became the Big 3 in the NPL by spring 1916. Townley saw the NPL as primarily an educational institution and acted on this belief throughout his tenure as leader of the organization. Schools for NPL orators were periodically held in Bismarck. Many songs

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<sup>110</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>111</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 2, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

were composed for NPL Picnics and Rallies. The NPL was initially aimed at recruiting farmers but broadened out into urban areas. The NPL enjoyed its first urban success in Minot.<sup>112</sup>

The NPL made a conscious effort to appeal to older political traditions. To celebrate Washington's Birthday on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1916 precinct meetings were held throughout the state which was followed up by the First NPL state convention in Fargo on March 1<sup>st</sup>. As a result of the Republican Primaries that June, the state Republican Party organization for the first time was taken from the old business interests. As a result these interests decided to support the Democrats that fall. In that November's election the NPL elected everyone on state ticket but one. Of the 24 state Senate seats up for election that year the NPL won 23 of them as well as 83 of the 113 House Seats. 3 NPL Railroad and Warehouse Commissioners were elected as well as 3 NPL supported North Dakota Supreme Court justice candidates and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.<sup>113</sup>

Despite its reputation, the NPL Platform was not as radical as the Omaha Platform of the Populist Party. Public ownership of private utilities had been proposed before. There were always five basic components of the NPL Platform: state-owned terminal elevators and grain mills, state inspection of grain and grain grading, exemption of farm improvements from taxation, State Hail Insurance, and Rural Credit Banks operated at

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<sup>112</sup> Alice C. Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978), 4-12.

<sup>113</sup> Martin O. Thompson Papers, Mss 123, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. 114-118.

cost. There was a farm-by-farm organizing campaign put together by the NPL and by the 1916 ND Republican Primaries there were already 25,000 NPL members in the state. A high emotional fervor existed between the NPL and its opponents.<sup>114</sup>

The NPL had simple guidelines for its organizers. In an instructional pamphlet entitled “Instructions to Township Organization Crews Who Are Enrolling Members in Non-Partisan League Clubs” the NPL had three instructions to its recruiters. “1. Get at least four people in the car. 2. Talk to everyone. 3. Membership fee is \$1/year and checks should be endorsed by crew captains.”<sup>115</sup>

Many of the original members of the NPL came from the Equity Association. William Lemke, for example, was an attorney for them and George S. Loftus was the manager. These men all came from farming backgrounds and aimed to provide immediate relief to farmers and as well as long-term solutions through state-owned enterprises. The NPL also tried to spread new scientific ideas about farming such as that foliage should be planted on some part of a farm to preserve acreage.<sup>116</sup>

In March 1916 the first NPL State Convention was held in Fargo. The North Dakota Attorney General Henry Linde went after the Equity Cooperative Exchange. Dr. Ladd claimed publicly that Linde’s attacks were inspired by the Minneapolis Grain Combine. This suit increased support for the NPL. More statistics that documented the

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas M. Contois, “The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters’ Association”. (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986),4-7.

<sup>115</sup> Federation of Women’s Nonpartisan League’s Clubs Papers, Mss 20581, Box 1, Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>116</sup> Alice C. Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978). 17-22.

grain grading irregularities increased the tide. By the end of 1915 over 20,000 farmers had been organized. By the end of 1916 that number had more than doubled. Many farmers also supported reforms to the North Dakota Constitution that would be submitted to a referendum of the voters. NPLers did not know who they would nominate for Governor going into that convention. Townley wanted someone who could effectively appeal to average farmers. William Lemke suggested Lynn Frazier.<sup>117</sup>

The NPLers nominated Frazier. This was a shrewd move on their part because Frazier had been a lifelong Republican and had never been associated with the Socialist Party. Many accusations were thrown at Townley during the 1916 campaign charging him with being the new boss of North Dakota politics. The NPL elected 3 North Dakota Supreme Court Justices and all of the statewide offices except Treasurer. The NPL also took over the ND House but the holdovers in the North Dakota Senate prevented the NPL from gaining control of that chamber for the 1917 legislative session.<sup>118</sup>

There was a growing call for women to get the vote which was something the Old Guard was reluctant to give because they were not sure how they would vote. In 1893 a women's suffrage bill had passed the North Dakota Senate but the Speaker of the House refused to bring it up to a vote in his chamber. When the bill was resubmitted in 1895 with Governor Shortridge saying he would sign it, it was defeated by one vote in the House. Another women's suffrage bill was also narrowly defeated in 1915 before the NPL-led legislature passed it in 1917 and Governor Frazier signed it. Townley

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<sup>117</sup>Lynn Frazier Papers Mss 70 Box 1, Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>118</sup>Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," (Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982), 118-121.

participated himself in efforts to increase women's participation. He sent a letter to the wives of the members of the organization that the best and peaceful way to solve problems is through the ballot box.<sup>119</sup>

House Bill 44 was an important component of the 1917 legislative session. This bill would legalize state-owned enterprises and appropriate funds for them. It passed the House but failed in the Senate and prevented the NPL from enacting a significant part of their platform. It also sparked a controversy the IVA would utilize to gain support.<sup>120</sup>

. NPL members of the state legislature assured many different businesses such as life insurance companies that they did not have to worry about higher rates due to the revisions in the state constitution and other reforms. Due to the Progressive notion of direct referendum, the NPL decided to submit their revisions to the voters. Some in the NPL were always skeptical of the Supreme Court because unlike Congress or the President it was not accountable for a popular referendum.<sup>121</sup>

The NPL continued to make banking interests in the state nervous however with bills like House Bill # 107 introduced in 1917 on the quantity of bank deposits which most banks felt would force good banks to bail out bad ones.<sup>122</sup> The NPL also moved to ensure that some of the practices of the old elite would not be repeated again. This idea also came out of the Progressive tradition. House Bill 417 (1917) prohibited officers from

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<sup>119</sup> Women's League of North Dakota-Fargo Branch Records, Mss 49, Box 1 Folder 1, "Secretary's Minutes Book 1910-1918". Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>120</sup> S. A. Olsness Papers, Mss 220, Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>121</sup> Edwin Ladd, *Dearborn Independent* (May 26, June 2, and June 9, 1917), 1.

<sup>122</sup> "Letter from Farmer's State Bank". Staale Hendrickson Papers, Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 3, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

appointing a relative as a deputy. Insurance companies opposed HB 278(1917) which set up a Teacher's Insurance and Retirement Fund. Staale Hendrickson continued to urge farmers in 1921 to work within the Republican Party to carry out reforms rather than form some group outside it as some people were advocating as the power of the NPL declined.<sup>123</sup> Hendrickson was open to attack on the un-American front because he was an immigrant from Norway and many immigrants from Scandinavia who were thought to have brought suspicious political traditions with them.<sup>124</sup>

The elements that made up the old McKenzie machine did not disappear with its breakup. In addition there were elements within North Dakota, such as many members of the new urban middle class, which opposed some or all of the Progressive/Populist ideas the NPL advocated. The business interests of the Republican Party knew they had to form a rival organization to counter the NPL. The first name given was the Good Government League but this was changed in the fall of 1916 to the Independent Voters Association (IVA).<sup>125</sup>

Following the NPL's successes in the 1916 Republican Primary and general election the Independent Voters' Association was formed in order to take the Republican Party and North Dakota politics back from the NPL. The IVA was led by State Senator Theodore Nelson, who led the IVA's organizing drives and helped put the IVA's

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<sup>123</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 3, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>124</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 1, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>125</sup> Independent Voters' Association Collected Papers 1921-1929, Mss 20620, North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND.



message together. Nelson also worked in the real estate business and was known as “Two bit Nelson” by his enemies because of these business connections.<sup>126</sup>

The task for Nelson was to develop an anti-NPL message while not ignoring Populism and Progressivism completely, since they had proved popular. In the run-up to the 1918 Republican Primary election, Nelson wrote in a letter to North Dakota voters: “With the liberty of nations trembling in the balance, the mortgages on thousands of farms coming due and our credit crumbling; and the finger of destiny indicating that our schools and other public institutions are being polluted with ideals detrimental to the highest standard of citizenship and civilization, it is important that every voter should know all that can be known about the men and measures involved in the present political campaign.”<sup>127</sup>

The NPL would call the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1918 a big bankers’ bill. Theo Nelson argued that Socialism was a failed conception of History since it was just based on materialism. Thus major disagreements erupted among prominent politicians about the best way forward despite the fact that the Republican Party remained the dominant party in the state.<sup>128</sup>

“In the next group are the labor laws, consisting of the workmen’s compensation act, the mine inspection, the eight-hour day and minimum wage for women, the full crew act, a law making it obligatory for employers to erect shelters for workmen engaged out

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<sup>126</sup> Theodore G. Nelson Papers, MSS 0631, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>127</sup> Theodore G. Nelson Papers, MSS 0631, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>128</sup> Theodore G. Nelson Papers, MSS 0631, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

of doors, in railway car repair work, the anti-injunction act and the law which provides that all state printing shall bear the union label.”<sup>129</sup>

Power struggles occurred both within the framework of state government and outside of it. The agenda of the NPL was initially focused on family farmers. A class conflict occurred after the 1918 Election which was the most successful election for the NPL in its History.

The NPL clearly acted based on the fraternal organization model just as the Klan would later do. These actions gave the NPL broader relevance to its members than traditional political factions. Several bills introduced by the NPL legislature tried to give the state authorization to enter the life insurance business. House Bill 81 would have set up a type of Old Age Insurance that would safeguard the programs of fraternal societies. This was another reason why life insurance companies threw their support behind the NPL’s opponents. House Bill 139 would have protected life insurance benefits from the debt of a deceased person. House Bill 140 tried to provide fraternal societies with the same rights that commercial businesses had in writing non-medical applications. The National Fraternal Congress endorsed these bills and it was very active in writing insurance laws across the country up to the Great Depression.<sup>130</sup>

The NPL also recognized that fraternal organizations needed to be policed as well because some had management problems. The NPL changed ND law so that excess profits of fraternal organizations from insurance business must be returned to the members. The Klan would differ from the NPL in that it felt that only the true American

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<sup>129</sup> Walter J. Maddock Papers, MSS 68, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>130</sup> NPL Papers Collection, MSS 51, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

organizations should be protected. Above all, the aspects of these organizations modeled after fraternal groups would broaden the conflicts between them.<sup>131</sup>

When the United States entered the World War, many North Dakotans were suspicious because it seemed like big business and the middlemen were enthusiastic about this. The emerging war industries were centered in industrial areas in cities. Farmers were expected to follow the orders and direction of people they distrusted. When attempts were made to sell Liberty bonds in rural North Dakota, they were often made by bankers who farmers knew had opposed a rural credits law. Thus these sales were unsuccessful. The NPL gave more trouble to the administrators of the war by promoting an anti-profiteering campaign in response to the complaints of their constituents.<sup>132</sup>

Due to these actions all the NPL's opponents tried to portray the organization as disloyal and un-American. Starting in 1919 the IVA framed the NPL as a class movement in control of North Dakota's government. The NPL was trying to intervene to create a more favorable mortgage market for their base. The federal government established price supports for wheat after the war in Europe broke out but this led to a depression in the Spring Wheat region for a couple of decades after World War One. Gov. Frazier also tried to combat the anti-American charges by serving on a government board in charge of

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<sup>131</sup>David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 72-75.

<sup>132</sup>No author. "The Nonpartisan League and the Loyalty Issue". *The New Republic* (Sept. 18, 1918), 7-10.

fighting first anarchists and then Bolsheviks.<sup>133</sup> The NPL wanted to amend the state constitution to allow them to set up these state-owned agencies and state boards.<sup>134</sup>

The NPL continued to expand and by 1919 it had over 200,000 due-paying members in 13 states. While the NPL expanded significantly, it had more success in its original state of North Dakota than anywhere else. The NPL also tried to attract female support much like fraternal organizations which established women's auxiliaries at this time. The national NPL's newspaper, *The Nonpartisan Leader*, had a regular feature which took up a full page called "The Farm Women's Page of News and Opinion".<sup>135</sup>

In one edition the newspaper opened with an article on the effectiveness of the Women's Auxiliary. "The women declare that they will have every farmer woman in the state signed up in the Woman's auxiliary before 1920. And mark you this: **THE WOMEN ARE VOLUNTARILY ORGANIZING THEMSELVES!** This method of organization is, I believe, unique in the history of the League activities. But the women are so enthusiastic that they go out singly or in couples. Sometimes they even inveigle a League organizer to take them on his route. **THEY GET THE WOMEN.** One enthusiastic worker said: "All I have to do is tell the woman about it and they come right in."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, *The Process of Power of the Relative Autonomy of the State: NPL in North Dakota 1915-1922* (Ph.D. Dissertation Duke University, 1989), 82-85.

<sup>134</sup> *North Dakota Non-Partisan Leader* Collection, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>135</sup> *North Dakota Non-Partisan Leader* Collection, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>136</sup> No author, "Farm Women and Nonpartisan League" *The Nonpartisan Leader*. (Sept. 8, 1918), 1.

Governor Frazier created a State Board of Administration modeled after those of other states in order to streamline state government and eliminate some corruption. These actions were endorsed by the Federal Board of Education and authorized by Senate Bill 134. The Board of Administration consolidated the duties of the State boards of Education, Regents, and Control.<sup>137</sup>

“That’s what they expected to say, after the miserable failure of the state hail law they had passed was known to everybody. But in the meantime something happened, and the politicians never got a chance to say that. The Nonpartisan League came onto the scene.”<sup>138</sup>

Many newspapers in the state owned by the business interests worked to convince farmers and urban workers that their interests were not the same and that the death of the NPL was imminent. Many NPL volunteers were threatened or assaulted. Terrorism against the NPL was strongest in Minnesota out of all the states it was in. The America First League played on this idea that the NPL was not American enough. “Townley is a Socialist. So is Kate O’Hare, the woman who was sentenced to the penitentiary for saying, among other things, that American mothers who gave their boys for the country were broodsows.” From 1915-1919, counting two special elections that sent John Baer to Congress and passed a state-owned Terminal Elevator, North Dakota voters supported the NPL eight out of eight times.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> No author, “The Struggle In North Dakota”. *The New Republic* (March 9, 1921),42-45.

<sup>138</sup> Walter J. Maddock Papers, MSS 68, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>139</sup> Thompson Papers, “The Farm Women’s Page of News and Opinion”.120, 123-126, 147, 187-188.

The NPL had to continue to answer charges that it was unpatriotic or affiliated with the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). After the NPL success in the 1916 elections, the Wilson Administration made a play for their support as fellow progressives. William Kent, Wilson's Federal Tariff Commissioner, attended several NPL conventions in North Dakota and Minnesota in which he stated President Wilson shared their views and was Nonpartisan.<sup>140</sup>

A major reason for the NPL's immediate success was its organization. Townley was able to coordinate a campaign featuring public speakers, publications, and an extensive booster network among farmers themselves. The importance of railroads was again evident in how the NPL conducted its general election campaign. They had Lynn Frazier travel up and down the state in what was called "the victory train". While the League was managed well in its early days administrative mistakes contributed to its downfall after 1921. President Woodrow Wilson was also able to carry North Dakota in the close Presidential Election of 1916, in part due to his anti-militarism and his progressive philosophy.<sup>141</sup>

By 1919 the NPL had over 200,000 dues-paying members in thirteen states. Part of the NPL's success was due to its working within the existing party structure rather than trying to win as a third party as the Populists had done. Townley organized the

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<sup>140</sup> *North Dakota Non-Partisan Leader* Collection, (Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota).

<sup>141</sup> No author, "The Victory Train". *North Dakota Leader* October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1921),1: Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986), 34-37.

membership drives, the propaganda campaigns, and the leadership hierarchy of the NPL.<sup>142</sup>

Townley was an effective public speaker. During one week in the 1920 Campaign 68,000 people attended rallies at which Townley spoke. He utilized the language of family farmers in his speeches. He found it harder to relate as effectively to other audiences. That is why he urged NPL members of the state legislature to travel around the state and explain the situation to farmers. "The League Program, the laws enacted and progress made, is now a very serious matter with the North Dakota farmers. They are tired listening to League speakers and paid organizers- and perhaps a little suspicious, fearing that these men, paid to talk, may not be free to tell everything. Farmers don't want oratory, nor do they want to be entertained. They just want to know the facts."<sup>143</sup> In 1930 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> District House Race Townley traveled with a preacher and debated prohibition. The Bank of North Dakota received all public funds and deposited them in smaller banks. The BND had an initial starting capital of \$2 million.<sup>144</sup>

All three groups tried to capitalize on the anti-corruption spirit of the muckrakers. Townley also had published in League newspapers his refusal of an offer to buy off a newspaper editor who was hostile.<sup>145</sup> The Klan also tried to emphasize that it followed this practice of not buying off its enemies as well. The League also described its members

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<sup>142</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982.143-145.

<sup>143</sup> A.C. Townley, Letter to Mr. O. H. Olson. Jan. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1920. Mss 183, Box 8, Folder 4,( Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota), 1.

<sup>144</sup> Alice C.Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978). 2-20.

<sup>145</sup>No author. "League Never Submits to Blackmail". *ND Leader*.Jan.24<sup>th</sup> 1920. p.1.

as Progressive Republicans who would not submit to the old elites ignoring the laws and elected officials of North Dakota in an attempt to hold onto power. In their newspapers protests or uprisings against the Old Guard were always described as spontaneous and not organized or directed in any way by the NPL.<sup>146</sup> As Townley argued, “Big Business does not fight in this way against a foe it does not fear. Special privileges realize that it is facing the greatest battle of its life. The war is over. Men have faced death fighting for democracy. It is no longer a name to them. It is a very real thing and they mean to have it. The profiteers who have stayed safely at home, making their millions out of the war, now face the reckoning.”<sup>147</sup>

The NPL Ransom County Central Committee responded by publishing a pamphlet which argued that League laws against immorality were a major reason for IVA opposition. The IVA attacked the former Socialist connections of Townley and Bowen. The NPL promoted class warfare instead of unity. Many in the IVA argued that the NPL was trying to usurp power by revising the state constitution through House Bill 44. House Bill 44 also would have opened up public school and university funds for misuse. The constitutional revisions also would remove the anti-trust provisions which could make the problem they are trying to solve worse. Of the \$16 membership fee, only \$3.50 goes to campaign work for the NPL. The rest goes to Townley and his cronies.<sup>148</sup>

The NPL was also charged with eroding democracy by getting rid of the secret ballot through Senate Bill 9 which required absent voters to mark their ballot in the

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<sup>146</sup> No author, “The Progressive Republicans”. *ND Leader* (Feb. 28-1920),6.

<sup>147</sup> Henry R. Martinson Papers, Mss 30, Institute for Regional studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>148</sup> Independent Voters' Association, *Townleyism's Future in North Dakota*. (Fargo, ND: 1921. North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND),8-11.



presence of a public notary. A rumor was promoted that Townley had urged NPL state legislators to sign a compact to give their independence away to him. The IVA made it clear in their literature that their attacks were focused on the leaders of the NPL not the rank-and-file who they hoped to win back to their side. In 1920 the IVA secretly formed an alliance with the Democrats and helped pick their state ticket. They felt that Dr. Ladd was sure to get elected to the Senate but that Frazier was vulnerable.<sup>149</sup>

The battle between the IVA and the NPL heated up in the years following World War One as the IVA closed the organizational gap with the NPL. All the state industries established by the NPL were major points of conflict between the two groups. This was especially true of the Bank of North Dakota. In the November 1920 election the IVA managed to get passed a referendum which allowed county and other public treasurers the right to deposit their money in a private bank if they choose instead of the Bank of North Dakota. This hurt the Bank of North Dakota's ability to safeguard the small state banks which did not have sufficient capital or surpluses to be included in the Federal Reserve System. Of the 51 county treasuries all but fourteen of them withdrew their money from the Bank. The farmers were the ones who suffered the most in this regard because most of the money the local banks had received had been lent out to farmers. In order to pay the local treasurers the obvious move would have been to demand that the farmers repay their loans but the NPL refused to do this. The IVA, which snatched control of the State House after the 1920 elections, immediately started an investigation of the Bank of North Dakota which was intended to discredit it with the electorate.

However this investigation was not successful as an audit of the Bank's finances did not

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<sup>149</sup>No author, "Democrats and IVA Colluding". *The North Dakota Leader* (June 22, 1920), 1.

turn up anything illegal. The NPL also pointed out that half the private banks in the state are not maintaining a minimum reserve. As the battles waged on in the North Dakota legislature, the Industrial Commission continued to try to carry out its program. However, the Bank of North Dakota would turn out to be the one state-owned industry that was popular in the long-term.<sup>150</sup>

There were also questions about where the money was going that the NPL was raising. In an IVA pamphlet entitled, "Where the Money Has Gone," the IVA pointed out that in order to finance the Industrial Program the state government had to sell Real Estate Bonds, Bank Bonds, Mill Bonds, and Elevator Bonds. This was at the same time that NPL leaders Frazier and Lemke were part of the Industrial Commission which was in charge of selling these bonds. Some of this money was spent on: \$2 million for establishing the state bank, \$1 million was spent on a Mill and Elevator Experiment, and \$440,000 for the Scandinavian American Bank of Fargo which was turned into graft for the NPL.<sup>151</sup> The IVA also pointed out that in 1918 the ND state debt was \$247, 000 and in 1921 that debt had risen to \$6, 500, 000.<sup>152</sup>

Many of the WWI veterans in the state felt mistreated after the war because many people felt they should not get a bonus or other support from the state. Florence Kimbull, the Chair of the Committee to foster 100% Americanism supported the

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<sup>150</sup> Scott Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982, 91-94.

<sup>151</sup> Independent Voters' Association, *Where Has The Money Gone?* Fargo, ND: 1921. (North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND), 4-9.

<sup>152</sup> Independent Voters' Association, *What Have ND State Industries Done for You?* Fargo, ND: 1921. (North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND), 6-8.

enactment of an anti-Red Flag Law and opposed any IWW influence. She did not want to be involved in politics but, “wanted answers to a lot of questions”.<sup>153</sup>

These views were some political leaders in North Dakota. In a letter by Charles Edward Russell, who served on the Committee for Public Information, to Theodore Nelson,” For many years I had desired to see better conditions for the farmers and the Nonpartisan League seemed to me by far the most promising movement to that end I had ever heard of. I helped to organize it and gave it all the help I could. It was only when I began to doubt the loyalty of the organization that I lost my interest in it. ... It certainly seemed to me very difficult to reconcile some reported utterances of League officers with that complete loyalty to the nation’s cause that seems to me absolutely demanded...” The League knew it could lose the support of voters who agreed with these ideas if they appeared too close to the IWW and similar groups. Some NPLers defended themselves against charges of Anti-Americanism by standing up for increased soldiers’ compensation for WWI Vets.<sup>154</sup>

Senator Ladd argued that the present law put too much power in the hands of big banks when the money really should go directly to the people. S. A. Oleness, a member of the NPL, gave a speech in Bismarck on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920, called “An Ideal American”. He stated that an ideal American should be,” Christian, truthful, honest and obedient. Man is

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<sup>153</sup> Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing The West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002),47.

<sup>154</sup> Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing The West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 46-48.

by nature a bully this must be combatted.”<sup>155</sup> An economy man is a bully by nature and this tendency must be combatted and that is what the NPL is trying to do.<sup>156</sup>

Townley and others in the NPL knew that the base of their movement had to be expanded from family farmers and include urban workers if their agenda was to be successful. Townley also had bigger goals for his organization beyond North Dakota. He believed that the NPL could transform the politics of every Midwestern state were the political systems had functioned in a similar fashion to North Dakota’s. Any alliance between skilled workers and small business owners was tenuous.<sup>157</sup>

The NPL fought back against IVA attacks by highlighting their accomplishments in the 1919 legislative session. In this session the NPL had control over both the State House and Senate as well as the Governorship so it was able to enact a significant part of its platform. During that session the Terminal Elevator and Flour Mill Association, Home Building Association, and the State Hail Association were established. The taxation measures enacted help to distribute the tax burden more equitably. Some improvements were made on labor protections by enacting a Workmen’s Compensation Act, Mine Inspection Act, an 8-Hour Day and Minimum Wage for Women Act, a State Printing Bear Union Label Act, a Shelters Act, and a Full Crew Act.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> S.A. Oleness Papers Mss 270 Box 8 Folder 12 Institute for Regional Studies. “An Ideal American” speech.1.

<sup>156</sup> S.A. Oleness Papers Mss 270 Box 8 Folder 12 Institute for Regional Studies. “An Ideal American” speech.1.

<sup>157</sup> Alice C. Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978),23-25.

<sup>158</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Folder 1 Box 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

A Railroad Regulatory Act was going to reduce RR rates and place Public Service Corps under the authority of the State RR Commission. There was also a Home Building Law which was designed to promote further settlement. The NPL claimed that their measures would not only help farmers but also businessmen, wholesale/retail merchants, and workers. The NPL claimed to have delivered on every plank of their 1916 and 1918 platforms. These measures had been part of the Industrial Program which they NPL had pushed in those elections. In order to get all these measures past, Governor Frazier had written to Ole.H. Olson, a friend in the legislature," Convene a special session of the legislature for November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1919".<sup>159</sup>

Ladd's was a big advocate of accountability in all branches of government. That is why his least favorite branch at the federal level was the Judiciary. Some in the NPL were always skeptical of the Supreme Court because unlike Congress or the President it was not accountable for a popular referendum.<sup>160</sup>

The Democrats, while very much a minority party in the state, were drawn into the IVA-NPL conflict because they could tip the scales one way or the other. In 1920, there was a drive to get all Democrats sympathetic to the IVA to register as Republicans so they could vote in the primary. At this time the Democrats were still largely a conservative party in North Dakota. However, many people in the state continued to doubt the relevance of the Democratic Party. The *Fargo Forum* ran an editorial entitled

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<sup>159</sup> Ole H. Olson Papers, Mss 186 Box 7, Folder 6, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>160</sup> Edwin F. Ladd, Mss 90, Box 3, Folder 8, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. *Dearborn Independent* (May 26, June 2, and June 9 1918),1.

“Those Sleepy Democrats” that said, “The Republican Party is the only party fit to role.”<sup>161</sup>

The IVA opposed a guaranty of bank deposits because they argued it would force good banks to bail out bad ones. The NPL proposed a railroad fares bill which the IVA strongly opposed. This bill furthered the business support of the IVA.<sup>162</sup>

Townley himself recognized that North Dakota farmers would turn on the NPL quickly if they did not feel that it was helping them. North Dakotans had grown to be mistrustful of people in power. The McKenzie machine had had organizers and speakers as well. By early 1920 the IVA strategy against the League was clear. Townley organized a School House Campaign in which the NPL legislators would travel to school houses across the state to discuss the accomplishments of the League and what needs to be done in the future. The League’s Campaign Headquarters tried to coordinate the organization’s funds with their candidates in each district but in 1920 it was harder because funds came in slower than expected throughout the state because farmers had less money because of the drop off in farm prices since the end of World War I.<sup>163</sup>

For the rest of his life Townley denied any wrongdoing for the mismanagement of the NPL’s funds and put the blame squarely on Lemke. “I admit that League organizers on several occasions did suggest I grab some money from the League, but I never did, and I always drove the idea into the ground, because I knew once I took some, all the rest of them would be diving in, as well as the fact that the organization would begin to go to

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<sup>161</sup> Stephan Joseph Doyle Papers, Mss 998, Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>162</sup> No author, *North Dakota Leader*, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Alice C. Poehls, "An Analysis of Selected Speeches of A. C. Townley, 1915-1921"(master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978).50-52.

pieces, and damn fast.” Townley continually blamed his assistants for mistakes his office made.<sup>164</sup>

In their 1920 Platform the NPL supported their Industrial Program, a bonus for World War veterans and legislation ensuring that the price of agricultural produce had to be greater than the cost of production. The NPL wanted to create a state sheriff position that all the county sheriffs would be answerable to. This proposal was used to support the arguments that the NPL was trying to amass dictatorial powers for itself.<sup>165</sup>

By the end of the 1910s the IVA had caught up to the NPL in its ability to put together pamphlets advocating its views, another concession to the Progressive Era. The IVA was able to strengthen its networks through its pamphlet sells. It argued the press was biased towards the NPL just as much as the NPL had argued it was biased against them earlier. However, the NPL was effective in that it forced the IVA to pick people who had roots in North Dakota for its leaders rather than out of state business leaders. North Dakota would not be run from St. Paul anymore.<sup>166</sup>

A breakaway farmer from outside Grand Forks named Jerry Bacon published a pamphlet entitled *The Farmer and Townleyism* which argued that NPL leaders, by trying to revise the State Constitution, were turning themselves into autocrats. He also accused

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<sup>164</sup> Staale Hendrickson Papers Mss 839 Box 1 Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>165</sup> Robert George Paterson, "North Dakota: A Twentieth Century Valley Forge" in *These United States: Portraits of America From the 1920s*. ed. by Daniel H. Borus. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 285-290.

<sup>166</sup> Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922," PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988. 32-34.

the NPL of being Socialists which quickly became a bad word in American politics following the Bolshevik Revolution and said that Socialism entailed government ownership of all transportation, communication, and large-scale industries. Socialists want the overthrow of the Capitalist order. He also said that Townley tried to get NPL members of the state legislature to sign a compact to give away independence. House Bill 44(passed in 1917) had opened the State Public Schools and University funds to misuse. The Constitutional revisions the NPL had pushed through had eliminated the anti-trust section from the document which will have the long-term effect of making business practices worse in the state. Of the \$16/year membership fee for the NPL, only \$3.50 goes to campaign work. The rest goes to enriching the lives of the NPL's elite. This message was the IVA's attempt to turn the populism of the NPL on its head.<sup>167</sup>

Another pamphlet published by Bacon referred to NPL leaders as "Sovietians". Here Bacon argued that Townleyism needed to be put on trial. The NPL was also against Protestantism because the NPL-controlled House had refused to listen to a resolution praising the Lutheran Reformation. The NPL legislature had also passed one of the most liberal divorce laws in the country which allowed one of the partners to dissolve the marriage. A new Absentee Voter Law was passed in December 1919(Senate Bill 9) which required that the public ballot be marked in the presence of a public notary and

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<sup>167</sup>Jerry D. Bacon, *Townleyism Unmasked: Now Stands Before the World in its True Light as Radical Socialism*. (Grand Forks, ND: Bacon, 1919), 5-25.



therefore harmed the secret ballot<sup>168</sup>. The IVA also published a pamphlet bringing this message home entitled, “What Have State Industries Done for You?”<sup>169</sup>.

The IVA also distributed speeches from outside the state which attacked the NPL. One popular speech was “American Bolshevism” by Elmer Peters, the editor of the *Wichita Beacon*, before part of the Kansas Bankers Association on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919. This speech summarized many of the arguments the IVA was making against the NPL in North Dakota.<sup>170</sup> They argued that the Frazier-Lemke group centralized power and that their candidates Nestos and O’Connor believed in localized rule. If Nestos was elected he would protect people from governor whereas Frazier believed that all productive property should be transferred to the government. Many North Dakotans were torn between the two sides in the struggle between the NPL and IVA. Some of the programs the NPL had set up, such as the BND, were clearly popular and helpful to many farmers.<sup>171</sup>

While Governor Frazier was narrowly able to win reelection in 1920, the NPL lost control of the state legislature. This election was a big setback for the League, particularly in the urban areas of the state. At the same time North Dakota also turned away from the progressivism of the 1910s and voted for Harding for President.<sup>172</sup>

The NPL’s troubles deepened significantly when it was discovered that their leaders had mismanaged their funds. Townley and Lemke had to be replaced in part

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<sup>168</sup> Jerry D. Bacon, *Sovietians*. (Grand Forks, ND: Bacon, 1919), 5-23.

<sup>169</sup> Independent Voters' Association. *What Have ND State Industries Done for You?* Fargo, ND: 1921. North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND. 1-12.

<sup>170</sup> Nonpartisan League Collection Mss 51 Box 1 Folder 4, North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND.

<sup>171</sup> Lynn Frazier Papers, Mss 70, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>172</sup> Lynn Frazier Papers, Mss 70, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

because of financial problems in the 1920 campaign. Townley's biggest management weakness was his inability to be frugal. The IVA often pointed out that lending concerns were dropping North Dakota from credit. The League did not have the money to use airplanes or to hire beauties but Townley tried to do that. Members of the NPL knew they had to find a way to keep the organization afloat financially in order to bail out many of their members from losing their life savings.<sup>173</sup>

The subsequent agricultural depression of the 1920s only made recovering financial stability harder for the League. This was a significant factor in the decline of this organization even though its ideas retained a significant popularity. However, even though Townley stepped down from his leadership position, he continued to advise the League. The League paid close attention to national politics, particularly who chaired committees important to the League. The League did not want to see Senator McCumber of North Dakota reelected because he was too favorable to the big money interests on the Senate Finance Committee. The NPL also tried to attack lawyers in general by arguing that they have done nothing for common farmers and laborers and that those are the people that should be put in charge of public policy.<sup>174</sup>

Anger at the out-of-state business interests continued to grow. Dr. Edwin Ladd, a chemist at the North Dakota State Agricultural College, published a study demonstrating

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<sup>173</sup> S. A. Olsness Papers, Mss 220, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>174</sup> NPL Collection MSS 183 Box 8 Folder 14, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. "Letter to Mr. Olson from AA Liederbach". March 12, 1922.

several ways that farmers were cheated in the grading process. Protests over what these studies revealed led to the incident known as the Fargo Riot.<sup>175</sup>

Ladd also lashed out at the power of the railroads. “They discriminated between cities building up on the one hand and destroying on the other, to further the private interests of those in control. Every device to evade responsibility to local control was made use of to continue their abuses, until in 1887 the interstate commerce law was enacted for the express purpose of erecting a ‘buffer state’ between the railroads and an outraged public opinion. Pending its adaption, the combined railroad interests set to work to change the provisions of the bill, and it received the signature of the President in such form as to be practically worthless. Unjust discrimination still continues, reckless combinations are entered into, passes are issued to officials, and where it is deemed necessary, blocks of railroad stocks are bestowed in liberal quantities. In nearly every State when railroad commissions have been established they have proven to be failures. When a determined stand has been taken against encroachments of railroads by commissions, the courts have set aside the verdict of the commissions. In the leading cases decided by the Supreme Court of the Republic, the court, usually by a divided court, undertook to determine the reasonableness of legislation and assumed, under a thin disguise, the functions of an upper legislative body, which, while it could not originate legislation, could absolutely veto laws touching the use or protection of property.”

A fundamental reorganization was necessary for America to achieve its full potential. “Private ownership is no longer equal to the commonly beneficial administration of public utilities, railways, coal mines and forests. The only hope for their utilization in the

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<sup>175</sup> Ellsworth, Scott, “The Origins of the Non-Partisan League,” Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982, 168-171.

common interest is in public ownership-but, as I said, we must improve Government before it can take up all these gigantic tasks.”<sup>176</sup>

Ladd became the NPL’s candidate in the Senate Special Election of 1921. He won, and that was a big victory for the NPL that year. It demonstrated that those members of the NPL not associated with the state-run industries could still win elections. Ladd also developed some detailed policy ideas which he explained in a series of speeches and newspaper articles. He advocated tax readjustment more than tax reduction. Ladd argued that the farmer was the last part of society to feel the effects of progress and the first to feel a downward spiral coming on. That is why special attention needed to be paid to them. The best determiner of the level of civilization of a society is how it treats its farmers. Ladd believed that tariffs were given to ship makers and that hurt ship users because it made it more expensive to make ships in the United States. As a result the United States had to rely on others to import the supplies that farmers needed which increased the price that farmers had to pay.<sup>177</sup>

In addition, oftentimes a tariff was placed on the goods the farmer needed as well and that class rather than merchants or anyone else were the ones who had to pay for it. Ladd also accused the railroads of avoiding any local control and dangerous combinations and trusts have been agreed to. The courts have all too often ruled in favor of the railroads when elected officials have tried to regulate them. The railroads are able to assign fees for service and then shift much of their expenses to government. The railroads were the single biggest galvanizing force behind farmers organizing. The

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<sup>176</sup> Mss 90, Box 1, Folder 13. “What Do We Radicals Want?” *The Magazine of Wall Street* (Dec. 9, 1919), 2: Edwin F. Ladd, Mss 90, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>177</sup> Edwin F. Ladd, Mss 90 Box 1 Folder 4, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

transition to automobiles from horse-drawn vehicles has brought down the value of some farmers' land which used to produce things the horses consumed.<sup>178</sup>

The US government has not done an adequate job in providing security for the current credit system and that is what led to the panic of 1920. The Federal Reserve Bank has not done its job of stabilizing prices. During 1920 the price the farmer got for his wheat fell 50% while the retail price increased by close to 100 percent. Also the machinery that the farmer needs in order to compete is not affected by the market because it is made by a few combinations. All too often as land prices rose, the fertility of the lands declined. Farmers are the greatest gamblers on Earth.<sup>179</sup>

Senator Ladd called for credit to be extended to farmers on a one or two year balance rather than the shorter credit banks were currently extending. Mechanisms for extending credit and insurance to cooperative societies should be streamlined and improved. The Federal Reserve Board ought to consider the primary producers more when formulating its monetary policies. Ladd argued that the government playing a bigger role in the insurance and medical fields was better than industry because those companies were just concerned about earning as big a profit as possible while the government should be concerned with the economic interests of its entire people. This change will in the long term benefit everyone. The Klan disagreed with the NPL on the

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<sup>178</sup> Dan Hassemier, *The Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads and the Making of Fargo and Moorhead*. (University of Minnesota, 2007), 19-23, 78-80.

<sup>179</sup> No author, "The Farmers Problems". Speech May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1924, Edwin F. Ladd Papers, Mss 90, Box 1, Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota, 4-7.

value of cooperative societies. It was willing to use some of the anti-monopoly rhetoric that the NPL did but the Klan believed in an individualistic society.<sup>180</sup>

For Ladd there were three major groups in the American economy: the Capitalists, the urban laborers, and the farmers. The Capitalists were represented by all the corporations, trusts, and organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce. The urban laborers were represented by labor unions. The farmers need to form organizations of their own and better yet unite with urban workers to regulate the Capitalists. Townley agreed and he wanted the NPL to appeal to the urban working class as well as farmers. During the NPL's heyday in the late 1910s this coalition held together. Ten organizations affiliated with the American Federation of Labor including four train service employees unions declared their friendship with the NPL. Congressman Jonathan Baer of North Dakota, who was endorsed by the NPL as a candidate, was also declared a friend of labor and joined an ad hoc labor group in the House.<sup>181</sup>

Some supporters of the NPL pointed out ways that the NPL had protected average people. A letter to the editor published in the *North Dakota Leader* was from a farmer who owned land in both South and North Dakota. This farmer kept his money in a bank in North Dakota although a bank in South Dakota had a mortgage on his land in that state. The South Dakota bank immediately put a foreclosure on the South Dakota land without giving 30 day notice as would have been required in North Dakota which would have given this farmer time to transfer the necessary money over to the South Dakota

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<sup>180</sup> Edwin F. Ladd Papers, Mss 90, Box 1, Folder 4, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. Letter to Ed Pierce of Sheldon, ND. April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1917.

<sup>181</sup> No author. *ND Leader* Nov. 15 1919 "Labor Shows Friendship for League" p. 1

bank. These people hoped that voters in other states would realize this and come to support NPL policies.<sup>182</sup> However, this alliance proved to be unstable and split apart. While the two groups shared some common goals, there were too many differences to keep them together.<sup>183</sup> Ladd also believed that North Dakota's future for manufacturing not related to grain was rosy.

The NPL state government created a state Industrial Commission in 1919 to supervise these state enterprises and sell bonds to finance them. In February 1921 the Industrial Commission tried to sell their bonds through Minneapolis and Chicago bankers but was refused because they wanted the state to drop its "socialist" program. Governor Frazier argued that these out-of-state banks were the reason why the Industrial Commission and the Bank of North Dakota were not performing as well as they should. This played into the fear of North Dakotans that they did not control affairs in their own state.<sup>184</sup>

The League papers claimed that the financial interests told the IVA to slow down because they feared the wrath of the people. The NPL claimed that the IVA was willing to crush small local banks and create anarchy among the state's businesses in order to defeat the League. Supporters of the League pointed to the war economic program that the Wilson Administration had put in place had been advocated by the League before.

Many League members particularly in states outside North Dakota were initially not

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<sup>182</sup>No author, *ND Leader* "North Dakota and South Dakota: Some Differences in Laws of the Two States, This Farmer Discovers April 19<sup>th</sup> 1920 p. 14

<sup>183</sup>Edwin Ladd Papers, Mss 90 Box 1 Folder 10, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. Speech by Sen. Ladd "The Farmers' Problems" May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1924 Political Study Club Washington DC. 4-9.

<sup>184</sup>Lynn Frazier Papers, MSS 70 Box 1 Folder 4, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

enthusiastic about the war which both the IVA and in later years the Klan would use against them. The loyalty issue hurt the Leaguers internally well into the 1920s. The Minnesota Gubernatorial candidate in 1918 published a book in which he criticized the war and this was used for many years against the League.<sup>185</sup>

As the NPL continued in power its leaders seemed increasingly disconnected from people who elected them. The IVA used some of the alleged illicit practices surrounding the sale of these bonds as grounds for calling a recall election on Governor Frazier. During the Recall Election the IVA brought up such things as the cost of Bill Lemke's new mansion to show that the NPL Leaders were not one of them. NPL officials in general were too profligate. The IVA papers also tried to tie the unpopularity of McKenzie to Townley and the NPL by arguing that both used state patronage to buy votes. After Governor Frazier was recalled in 1921, the IVA supported Governor Nestos set up an Independent Commission to draft a report on the state Mill and Elevator.<sup>186</sup>

The IVA stayed away from attacking the state bank directly because that was a more popular institution. It did however wish to limit the BND to the farm loan business. Many in the IVA argued that strikes ended up hurting workers more than businessmen. They claimed workers lost \$4 billion in wages due to strikes in 1921. The IVA argued that government was wasteful. There were too many bureaus of overlapping

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<sup>185</sup> No author, "The Nonpartisan League and the Loyalty Issue". *The New Republic* (Sept. 18, 1918),7-10.

<sup>186</sup>Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922,"PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988. 34-39.



responsibilities.<sup>187</sup> Studying the IVA is a good way to understand how the powerful protect themselves politically.

Although Lynn Frasier was recalled as Governor in 1921, he won the election for US Senate the next year largely due to the downturn in farmers' fortunes. He and Senator Ladd, together with other senators from Midwestern states with large farming populations joined together to get the McNary-Haugen Bill passed which established guaranteed price controls for farmers.<sup>188</sup>

The old elite learned from the NPL's success and knew that it had to conduct itself differently if it was to win elections. It had to adopt some elements of Populism and appeal to the masses in some new way. That was a major reason why the IVA was formed.<sup>189</sup>

The NPL witnessed a decline in its fortunes in large part due to its mismanagement of state industries and internal infighting, not the content of its ideas. The old populist and progressive ideas of the NPL of the 1910s and 1920s were continually modified and reintroduced. There was a proposed bill in the ND legislature (H.R. 2861) to ensure that farmers were paid at least as much as the cost of production

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<sup>187</sup> Independent Voters' Association Collected Papers 1921-1929, Mss 20620, North Dakota State Archives, Bismarck, ND. I.R. January 5 and 12, 1922.

<sup>188</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999. 56-59.

<sup>189</sup> Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986. 87-91.

for their produce and another proposal advocated wheat serving as payment for bonds in the Bank of North Dakota.<sup>190</sup>

In addition, the North Dakota Taxpayers' Association (NDTA) pushed for an Old Age Assistance Act Amendment in February-March of 1923 that would base the aid on income and other needs. The NDTA also said that the state should only use property tax money to pay state bureaus and employees. County Commissioners should be compensated in proportion to the population of their county. Counties should be prohibited from levying road/bridge taxes. An investigation should also be conducted into the duplication of committees of Higher Education. The mission statement of the NDTA was to lower taxes, eliminate extravagance, reduce public debt, prevent misuse of public funds, and cooperate with similar institutions. The NDTA and other similar groups demonstrated the increasing skepticism for many ideas of the Progressives, such as that government could be a force for good. When the Great Depression began this group argued that the state government should cut spending on public works. Later on, the Klan never made so direct appeals to the importance of farming relative to other professions but it did keep its rhetoric vague enough so that it could be interpreted that way.<sup>191</sup>

There continued to be difficulties with the state industries outside the Bank of North Dakota. Governor Sorlie, who succeeded Governor Nestos in 1925, was not able to recover the losses from the Mill and Elevator. Only 4 percent of the wheat purchased by the state Mill was from individuals that explains why it was not popular. A report issued

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<sup>190</sup> S. A. Olsness Papers Mss 270 Box 7 Folder 3. Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>191</sup> Nancy Hesseltine Balazadeh, "The Process of Power and the Relative Autonomy of the State: Nonpartisan League in North Dakota 1915-1922," PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1988. 80-85.

to the state legislature in 1927 concluded that the State Mill and Elevator could not compete with their private equivalents. They had paid less than the market price to the farmers who sold to them and still ran a deficit. The IVA government destroyed the NPL created Home Building Association (HBA) in 1923 and set up a deficit tax to pay for the losses. The HBA had never been able to sell its bonds and had been forced to borrow from the Bank of North Dakota.<sup>192</sup>

Townley became an increasingly unpopular person as his mismanagement of the NPL became evident. He had failed to anticipate a recession among the NPL's constituency and thus a dry up in the funds available to the organization. The IVA was effective at attacking his secretive style and his involvement in seemingly everything the NPL did. Stepping down as President did not immediately help matters because Townley was still seen (rightly) as having a substantial influence behind the scenes. The NPL also had an internal conflict between Townley supporters and critics within the party for several years which drained energy from it.<sup>193</sup>

The IVA had two primary strategies for the 1920 Campaign. The first strategy was to prevent the sale of the bonds necessary to run the NPL's Program and the second strategy was to discredit the leaders of the NPL and show that they did not understand the average farmer's concerns.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>No author, "The Struggle In North Dakota". *The New Republic* ( March 9, 1921),42-45.

<sup>193</sup>Martin O. Thompson Papers, Mss 123, Box 6, Folder 21, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>194</sup>Thomas M. Contois, "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986.75-82.

The NPL began to lose the support of urban working classes after WWI. In order to keep Progressivism as a movement going, various attempts were made to form labor-based political parties. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party was formed at this time out of the remains of the NPL. Although this party had success in its home state it was unable to expand outside that base due to accusations of connections to Communism.<sup>195</sup> Robert LaFollette ran with the endorsement of the Conference for Progressive Political Action and other progressive groups. However, less than 50% of eligible voters bothered to vote in that election and LaFollette only received 16.6% of the vote.<sup>196</sup>

The IVA was effective at using the rhetoric of Populism and Progressivism to attack the NPL but it was less effective in advocating its own policy positions with that rhetoric. This shortcoming caused the IVA to reach a plateau in its support. Although its electoral fortunes significantly improved during the early 1920s, this was primarily due to a drop off in support for the NPL rather than new voters siding with the IVA. As Nelson wrote, "Certainly we are taking a big risk if we think we can go into the primary election two years hence and win the Republican nomination in face of the fact that the League will most likely nominate a LaFollete type against whom the shortcomings of Frazier and Lemke could not be shook up and in the face of the fact that we cannot reasonably hope

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<sup>195</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 60-63.

<sup>196</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 63-65.

to get but a very few Democrats to register as Republicans. Practically our entire ticket is sure to be snowed under.”<sup>197</sup>

Thus neither the NPL nor the IVA could establish a coalition of a majority of North Dakota voters that could last longer than an election cycle or two. There was a significant opening between both organizations of voters who were unsatisfied with their political choices. An organization that could exploit this opening could attain significant power.

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<sup>197</sup> Theodore G. Nelson Papers, Mss 0631 Box1 Folder 4, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

## Chapter 3: Konklaves, Krosses, and Kanvassing: The Ku Klux Klan in Fargo, North Dakota 1924-1927

“Wearing their white robes and hoods, but with faces uncovered as required by North Dakota state law, the Ku Klux Klan paraded the streets of Fargo last night, as the feature event of the North Dakota state konklave, which opened yesterday morning. Between 750 and 800 were in the line of march, including some 50 women, a 36 piece band and an 18 piece drum corps and also including 30 robed children in the “junior Klan” riding on a float.”<sup>198</sup> This spectacle was part of the brief but extraordinary rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan’s influence nationally during the 1920s.

Many studies have examined the appeals and tactics the Klan used at a national level to expand from a small base in the Deep South into a bigger organization than the American Federation of Labor with more than five million members in every section of the country. The Klan utilized this large membership to attain significant political power, electing governors and US Senators in eight states (one of which was North Dakota) and influencing innumerable local elections. The Ku Klux Klan was an important component of the 1920s because it both reflected and influenced many of the cultural and political developments of the decade.<sup>199</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan rose and fell a number of times in its History. Founded in 1867 originally, the Klan’s initially aims were to violently suppress African-Americans in the

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<sup>198</sup>No author, “8,000 Attend Celebration As Klansmen Put On Rites”. *The Fargo (ND) Forum*. (September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1925),4.

<sup>199</sup>William L. Harwood, “The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Forks, North Dakota,” *South Dakota History* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1971).74-76.

South. The federal government suppressed the organization in 1871, but the Thomas Dixon novel *The Clansmen* (1906) and the movie *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which was based off that inspired another generation of the Klan to be founded. This second Klan would have more sweeping aims than the first version as it would seek to attract support throughout the country. The Klan made a conscious effort to boost its image through charitable donations, making and distributing food baskets to poor families, and by through supplying flags and Bibles to public schools.<sup>200</sup>

When moving into a new area, the Klan would first distribute literature for a period of about a week which was designed to promote discussion and anticipation which would lead to a rally in the center of the community culminating in the burning of a cross and firing of rockets.<sup>201</sup>

The Klan was able to capitalize on the trend in American society, usually referred to as isolationism, of increasing hostility to foreign institutions and influences. That was why the Klan supported the Red Scare so strongly and tried to portray its enemies as Communists, why it was opposed to the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, and supported high tariff and immigration restriction legislation. The Klan also portrayed itself as a law and order organization in part because of the growing fear of crime that Americans felt during the early 1920s. However, it became apparent by 1923 that the

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<sup>200</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 117, 127.

<sup>201</sup> Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and related American Racialist and Anti-Semitic organizations: a history and analysis*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1999), 33-35.

crime wave was caused by Prohibition rather than any Communist element. This made it much tougher for the Klan to capitalize on crime as an issue.<sup>202</sup>

Another component of American society that the Klan tried to appeal to politically was religion. Religion was an important aspect of politics in the 1920s due to developments such as the Scopes Monkey Trial and the Social Gospel Movement. Religion became even more of an issue when the Klan moved into the area. Even though Protestantism was central to the Klan's conception of American-ness, it did not address issues such as the teaching of evolution in public schools forcefully enough to attract the support of the fundamentalist movement. When the Klan addressed public education it was usually focused on how to crush parochial schools or on how to segregate them.<sup>203</sup>

While the Klan was pragmatic on economic issues, its cause would have been helped considerably had it followed a similar course in some of its other policy positions. The Klan actually shared many of the same views as the Catholic Church. They both opposed divorce, motion pictures, free expressions of sexuality, and the rapidity of change in the 1920s. But the Klan's virulent anti-Catholicism prevented it from gaining any support from Catholic areas. By restricting their potential members to native-born Americans, the Klan had cut-off its chance to recruit anti-Catholic immigrants.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Clarence S. Putnam Collection, Mss 24, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>203</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>204</sup> David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 123.



The Klan was able to be most successful in areas where its enemies (primarily Catholics, Jews, immigrants, and blacks) posed no threat. The Klan consisted of an affinity with some progressive elements coupled with xenophobia and religious bigotry. The majority of Klan events throughout the country occurred in small cities and towns where there was less scrutiny.<sup>205</sup>

For the most part the KKK focused on advocating white separatism rather than promoting open conflict. This organization was still marginal in 1920 but by the summer of 1921 it already had over 200 kleagles. Free membership was offered to clergy in an attempt to use them to recruit their Protestant congregants. William Simmons, who was the leader of the Klan from 1915-1922 lacked a sense of purpose and direction so the coup in Klan leadership in 1922 improved its fortunes even more at least for a while.<sup>206</sup>

The organization of the Klan also helped it seem more familiar than a group that had just arrived in the state and helped gain recruits. The Klan was organized similar to other fraternal organizations of the time. There were different degrees of membership and klecktoken (initiation fees) were \$10 a year (four dollars of which went to the kleagle or recruiter). This membership fee was expensive for the time. Klansmen were also constantly asked to pledge more than their klecktoken so that their Klavern could be the best. To become a member a person had to fill out a membership card and give it to the klabee (treasurer) of the local Klavern. The leader of the statewide KKK was a Grand Titian. Other officer titles included klokard (investigator), kligrapp, klaliff (Vice

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<sup>205</sup> Richard K. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America*. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1991), 17-22.

<sup>206</sup> Richard K. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America*. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1991), 28-31.

President), kladd (chaplain), klarogo (inner guard), klexer (outer guard), klokann, and night hawk.<sup>207</sup>

An important aspect of the Klan's organization in this first decade of women's suffrage was its ladies' auxiliary. The Women's Ku Klux Klan (WKKK) auxiliary was founded in 1923.<sup>208</sup> The WKKK was an important part of the Klan presence in North Dakota because it participated in all the major rallies and Konklaves held in the state and played a big role in the organization's outreach efforts.<sup>209</sup>

The WKKK was primarily supposed to help the main organization out by demonstrating that the Klan could have a positive impact on the communities which it was active in. Members of the WKKK served as the volunteers in many charity activities of the KKK. Charity activities were popular within the Klan because they were seen as empowering women and upholding their perceived moral superiority while at the same time conforming to traditional gender roles. The Klan was also quick to portray these activities as benefiting Catholics as well as Protestants. It was hoped that this would both remove pressure from the Klan for its other activities and instill some Protestant values in these Catholics, particularly Catholic kids. That way the rise of radical Bolshevistic views would be prevented. There was an association between Catholicism and Bolshevism in Klan rhetoric that is particularly interesting. This rhetoric was an attempt

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<sup>207</sup>Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001.84-87.

<sup>208</sup>Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 2-7: Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. 124-127.

<sup>209</sup>Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 144-148.

to link the intolerance that emerged as a part of public discourse during the First Red Scare in 1919-1920 and link it to anti-Catholicism.<sup>210</sup>

The Klan also created auxiliary organizations for kids and teenagers. The Klan borrowed this practice from older patriotic associations. The goal of these organizations was to instill klannish values into people during their formative years. Most of the children enrolled through churches. Klansmen and Klanswomen visited many Protestant denominations to announce the formation of a new children's organization. Boys in the Junior KKK were allowed to elect their own officers, but they were supervised by a chapter of the KKK or the WKKK.<sup>211</sup>

While plenty of studies on the 1920s Klan have been published, no one has studied the experience of the Klan in Fargo, North Dakota which had a significant Klan presence from roughly 1924-1927, but which at first glance does not seem to be a particularly amenable community for the Klan's message. Fargo had a strong progressive tradition at the time. The first Socialist Club in North Dakota was founded there in 1900 and Arthur Townley founded the Non-Partisan League (NPL), the liberal political organization for rural Midwestern states, in Fargo as well in 1915. The *Nonpartisan Leader*, the newspaper of the NPL, was published weekly in Fargo through the early 1920s.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 84.

<sup>211</sup> Blee, *Women*, 157-158.

<sup>212</sup> NPL Papers Collection, MSS 51 Box 1 Folder 10,( Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota).

While the rest of North Dakota suffered economically in the 1920s due to the agricultural depression after World War I which caused 75,000 native North Dakotans to leave the state, Fargo continued to grow economically and demographically: its population increased from 21,961 to 28,619 during the decade. Thus, how the Klan was able to attract a large following in a community like Fargo may help to explain how the Klan was able to enjoy such great success nationally. In addition, how the Klan's power in Fargo was destroyed within a couple of years may help explain why the Klan died out so quickly nationally in the mid-1920s as well. A combination of national and local factors allowed the Klan to both gain a foothold in Fargo and lose it within a few years.<sup>213</sup>

The evolving economic rhetoric of the Klan was a major way it was able to wedge itself into the space between the IVA and NPL during the mid-1920s. The economic ideas of the 1920s Klan have been one of the largest historical controversies associated with it. This debate has centered on which economic groups were most attracted to the Klan. Economic factors definitely played an important role in the Klan's success nationally. Historians have argued whether the lower or middle class provided the base of Klan support.<sup>214</sup>

In Fargo, the Klan received support from the elements of both the lower and middle classes that felt the most insecure about developments of the 1920s. The 1920s was the first decade in which a majority of Americans lived in an urban environment.

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<sup>213</sup> Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 327-329, 378; Robert P and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977. 88.

<sup>214</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. 97-101.

Many white middle-class Protestants felt uneasy about the direction the country was going. Skilled labor and small-scale manufacturing jobs which had made up a significant proportion of middle-class jobs up to this time seemed to be decreasing in favor of unskilled jobs that were part of a large corporation.<sup>215</sup>

Most of these new unskilled jobs went to immigrants and blacks who had just moved North during the Great Migration. The rise of corporations put pressure on small-scale merchants and shopkeepers as the number of chain stores increased across the country. Farmers also felt particularly insecure because deflationary monetary policies out of their control were restricting their access to credit and causing increasing amounts of money flowing to a faraway big city and away from local banks. All these developments caused a certain segment of the country to search for ways to get the economic independence and power back that they had lost.<sup>216</sup>

The Klan was effective at appealing to this group by endorsing anti-monopolistic policies while at the same time protecting people's private property rights. The economic conditions were the most important reason why the Klan could gain a foothold in so many places nationally. One reason for joining the Klan in the areas it was powerful was that you could lose your job if you were seen as being unsympathetic to the Klan or employers could refuse to hire you. One reason why the Fargo Klan was the fifth Klavern in North Dakota recognized by the national organization was that these economic difficulties came later and were not as severe as in some other areas of the state. Also

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<sup>215</sup>Rory McVeigh, "Structural Incentives for Conservative Mobilization: Power Devaluation and the Rise of the Ku Klux Klan, 1915-1925". *Social Forces* 77 no. 4(June 1999), 1461-1496.

<sup>216</sup>Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 45-49.

these lower-middle class whites felt much more threatened by Jewish and Catholic immigrants than African-Americans so the Fargo Klan did not focus on them.<sup>217</sup>

Rhetoric, no matter how appealing, is not enough to build a successful organization. It must be followed up. In North Dakota the Klan pursued several common strategies to attract a following in a new area which were similar to the booster strategies used by earlier organizations. North Dakotans were familiar with boosterism since many of them settled in the state because of it. First, the Klan would approach the Protestant ministers of the area. They believed these ministers would be sympathetic and supportive of their organization.<sup>218</sup>

If a minister was supportive, Klan recruiters would visit that church and encourage parishioners to join not only the KKK, the WKKK and the Junior Klan. The Klan would also use sympathetic ministers for moral support within communities. However, the most important function of these ministers was to lead and organize the campaigns of the Klan in the area. Ideally the minister who led these drives would be charismatic and a good speaker. F. Halsey Ambrose had these qualities and firmly believed in the Klan's goals. He used his speaking and organizational ability to get two professors at the University of North Dakota dismissed for promoting what he called "bolshevism". One major reason why the Klan ended up being more successful and

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<sup>217</sup> Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 57-60, 62: Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 152: Nancy MacLean, *Behind The Mask of Chivalry: The Making of The Second Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 90.

<sup>218</sup> Don Hofsommer, *Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads and the Birth of Fargo-Moorhead*. (University of Minnesota, 2007), 81-83.

lasting longer in Grand Forks than in Fargo was that there was no comparable charismatic figure in the Fargo Klan.<sup>219</sup>

The closest Fargo equivalent to Ambrose was Reverend C. W. Finwall. He was a Norwegian immigrant who married a Norwegian-American in Illinois before moving to Fargo in the early 1920s. He was part of the upper middle class who did not approve of many of the changes the country was undergoing. Finwall became the pastor of the Logan Square Norwegian Baptist Church in Chicago in the early 1900s and was named pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church shortly before the Klan's appearance in the community in 1922<sup>220</sup>. Reverend Finwall gave the invocations at many Klan meetings in Fargo, including the big Konklave in September 1925 but he was not the charismatic speaker or talented organizer that Ambrose was.<sup>221</sup>

When the Klan moved into a particular area for the first time it relied heavily on outside organizers to recruit. Of the four cars loaded with Klansmen attending the first cross burning in the area, three had South Dakota license plates. For many nights before this cross burning Klan literature was distributed through many residential neighborhoods by mostly out of state Klansmen. The Irish Catholic cited earlier said that out of state Klansmen purchased many things from his shop.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> William Harwood, "The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Forks, North Dakota" *South Dakota History* 13 (Fall 1971), 303-304.

<sup>220</sup> *Chicago Blue Book of Selected Names of Chicago and Suburban Towns*.1905.

<sup>221</sup> No author, "Jeffrey Addresses Klansmen After Parade Through Fargo." *Fargo Forum*. (Evening Ed. September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927),4.

<sup>222</sup> Althea Catherine Cater Papers 1917-2001, Mss 535 Box 1 Folders 20-22, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

A large proportion of these out-of-staters came from Illinois or Iowa. Some stayed in North Dakota for several years. This reliance on outside organizing and support was true for the Klan in other parts of the country. In Denver, for example, two-thirds of Klansmen in 1925 had not been born in Colorado.<sup>223</sup>

"The Ku Klux Klan has already made itself felt in politics in North Dakota," on the other hand was the statement of T. Halsey Ambrose, pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Grand Forks appearing before the state senate affairs committee at the open hearing in the county court house last night.

The court room was jammed with people.

"There are thousands, not hundreds of members of the Klan in North Dakota," Rev. Ambrose said. He declared there were hundreds of members in Grand Forks and that every business house that could qualify was represented in the membership."<sup>224</sup>

The secretary was also responsible for finding a place for the Klan to meet and oftentimes these meeting places were the same as other fraternal organizations. Harry Divine, the exalted Cyclops (leader) of the Fargo Klavern, combined fundraising with locating a hall when he sent out a letter stating, "For your information if you did not attend the Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. The question of taking over and financing the B.P.O. Elks Hall was brought up and it was decided by a unanimous standing vote that the Kass

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<sup>223</sup> No author, *The Farmers' Sentinel*. (May 8, 1924),1: Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 40: David Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 37-38.

<sup>224</sup> No author, "Jeffrey Addresses Klansmen After Parade Through Fargo." *Fargo Forum*. (Evening Ed. September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927),4.



Kounty Klan would take over the Elks Hall to be used for a home by the organization and to be financed by membership pledge. Said pledge to be paid during the year of 1926.”<sup>225</sup>

The Klan also fraternized at their meetings by singing and socializing.<sup>226</sup>

The WKKK and the Junior Klan are not mentioned much in Fargo Klan publications because the national Klan was very uneasy about women and adolescent’s political participation and most of the Klan literature focused on politics. The Klan wanted the WKKK to stay out of politics to make sure that women did not, “sacrifice that womanly dignity and modesty we all admire”. In order to achieve this goal, the Klan subordinated the national WKKK and Junior Klan to the Imperial Klonsvokation (legislature) and the Imperial Klonscilium (judicial board) which were both dominated by men.<sup>227</sup>

The Klan used several beliefs of many North Dakotans which had not been addressed by either the NPL or the IVA. North Dakota had a significant sectarian history which the Klan was able to exploit. Anti-Catholicism played an important role as a recruiting and organizing tool for the Klan in Fargo. Churches in plains communities played vital roles in social and cultural activities. Ethnic communities, even in Fargo, often revolved around a church. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century churches also became increasingly identified with politics on the plains as most Protestant groups, particularly those with English and Scandinavian heritage supported the Republican Party while

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<sup>225</sup> No author, *Wildrose*. “Kass Kounty Klan Activities”. Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924. P. 1: Harry J.Divine, Kass Kounty Klan Finance Committee Fundraising Letter. Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

<sup>226</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado*. 1-2: Nancy MacLean, *Behind The Mask Of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 78.

<sup>227</sup> No author, “About 800 in Klan Parade; Spectacle at Fairgrounds Viewed by Approximately 8,000”. *Fargo Forum* September 21, 1925, 8: Blee, *Women*, 30-31.

Catholic groups were firmly in the Democratic camp. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Anti-Catholicism experienced a revival.<sup>228</sup>

The anti-Catholic American Protective Association was founded in Iowa and became a significant presence in the Dakotas quickly (many settlers of the Dakotas came from Iowa). Even though most government officials, business leaders, and land prospectors in the Dakotas were Protestants, there was still fear of a papal-directed takeover among much of the populace. There were many areas of tension between Protestants and Catholics. Catholics were less supportive than Protestants of Prohibition and less supportive of Public Schools (understandable because many Protestant ministers served on school boards).<sup>229</sup>

The Klan appealed to Anti-Catholicism in several ways. It made clear in its advertisements for large gatherings that only Protestants could attend. For example, the *North Dakota American*, the Klan's newspaper published in Fargo, advertised its Independence Day 1925 Celebrations with "We have been informed by the Grand Titan of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan that all gentile, Protestant Americans will be admitted to the first Klonklave of the North Dakota Klansmen and Klanswomen, which will be held at Hillsboro, Traill County, on July 4<sup>th</sup> in connection with the American Legion Independence Day celebration." Other Klan publications played on the fears of growing Catholic influence in the country by arguing that Catholics were responsible for the downfall of morals in movies and in other elements of society. The Klan argued that

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<sup>228</sup> Jon Lauck, "You Can't Mix Wheat and Potatoes in the Same Bin: Anti-Catholicism in Early Dakota" *South Dakota History* 38 no 1(Spring 2008):2-6.

<sup>229</sup> Jon Lauck, "You Can't Mix Wheat and Potatoes in the Same Bin: Anti-Catholicism in Early Dakota" *South Dakota History* 38 no.1 (Spring 2008):2-6.

Catholic events were designed to get people to convert to Catholicism and teach their children bad morals. The Klan also galvanized many Fargoans' fear of marriages between Protestants and Catholics (which was particularly strong among Scandinavians) to advocate for their policies. One major purpose of cross burnings was to scare off Catholics from the area in addition to announcing the beginning of a recruitment drive. This was the case even though Catholics did not pose a credible threat to Protestant control of the area, making up less than 20 percent of the population. The Klan even made anti-Catholicism a central part of its program in Florida, where only 2.7 percent of the population was Catholic.<sup>230</sup>

However, some Catholics in Fargo did not feel threatened by the Klan. An Irish Catholic who lived in Fargo in the 1920s told the *Fargo Forum* in 1965 that, "Personally I had lots of fun with them. I wasn't scared of them. I knew anyone who had to get behind a mask didn't have any guts."<sup>231</sup> However Catherine Cater recalled her family hiding her under the bed when the Klan marched through town.<sup>232</sup>

The Klan also used hatred and fear of other groups to recruit members. A recruiter (kleagle) for the Klan in Wildrose stated, "The Jews, Chinese, Japs and the dark skinned races of southern Europe are rapidly getting possession of the clothing stores, theaters, restaurants and fruit stores in all the larger cities and this is increasing at an alarming rate. America for Americans is the Klan policy."<sup>233</sup> Jews were seen by the Klan

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<sup>230</sup>No author, "Ku Klux Klan Burns Cross Here Tuesday Night". *Farmers Sentinel* (Ellendale, ND). June 12, 1924. P.1: Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001. 39-41.

<sup>231</sup>Ted Storck, "Old-timers Recall Klan Activities in 1920s". *Fargo Forum*. April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965, 1.

<sup>232</sup>Catherine Cater Papers, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, ND. n.d.

<sup>233</sup>No author, "The Klan Meeting". *Wildrose*. Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924.1

as having a plan for world dominion and controlling the global money supply. The same recruiter said later in his speech, “The Jews, who compose 4 percent of the population of the United States, own or control 75 percent of the wealth.” The utter unreality of these claims prevented the Klan from attracting new support.<sup>234</sup>

Despite these remarks, the Klan insisted in many of its publications that it was not anti-Semitic. It had to walk a fine line between recruiting members and offending/threatening to many people. If Jews gave up the control they had over money or adopted Protestant (American) values, the Klan would not have a complaint against them.<sup>235</sup> The Klan liked to point to organizations like B’nai Brith and Brith Israel which only admitted people of Jewish heritage to justify their argument that the Klan should not be punished despite the fact that it only admitted Gentiles. The same was true with the Knights of Columbus in regard to Catholics and the African Brotherhood in regard to blacks. The Klan did not see why their restrictive membership should be seen as worse than that of these other groups.<sup>236</sup>

Some studies of the 1920s Klan have argued that the Klan’s emphasis on law-enforcement was more important in attracting new members than its prejudice against particular groups. The national Klan developed a particular dislike of Greek immigrants because the Klan associated Greeks with bootleggers. According to the Klan, all of its

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<sup>234</sup> No author, “The Klan Meeting”. *Wildrose*. Nov. 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924.1.

<sup>235</sup> No author, “A Defense of the Klan”. *Voice of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*. Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1923.2.

<sup>236</sup> No author, *North Dakota American*. June 22, 1925. Fargo, ND. State Historical Society of North Dakota Newspapers.

enemies were acting together in a great conspiracy against it that all ‘real’ Americans should be concerned about.<sup>237</sup>

Another important issue for the Klan was public education which was an important component of the Americanism debate. The Klan viewed public schools as a means to instill patriotism and national unity in the next generation as well as teach all Americans protestant values. Catholics seemed to take better advantage of educational opportunities. Many elements of the traditional Protestant elite feared this Catholic advantage would translate into more economic and political power. Many Klansmen, grounded in fundamentalist Christianity, opposed the teaching of modernism and science (particularly Evolution) in public schools.<sup>238</sup>

The Klan tried to link Christianity and education in its publications. For example, one article in the *North Dakota American* stated, “The Bible in the American public schools has been both historically and spiritually as much the symbol of self-government and of the national conscience as the American flag. Steadfast Americans want the Bible in the schools.”<sup>239</sup> Christianity and education required patriotism. The three had to go together in order to survive.<sup>240</sup>

The Klan was genuinely worried that America’s public schools were falling behind. This was an especially acute problem in North Dakota, where budget and teacher

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<sup>237</sup>No author, “Primary Work In Education”. *North Dakota American*. November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925.p.2

<sup>238</sup>No author, “Primary Work Is Most Important In Education”. *North Dakota American*. November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925.p.2.

<sup>239</sup>“Primary Work Is Most Important in Education”. *North Dakota American*. November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925.2.

<sup>240</sup>No author, “A Defense of The Ku Klux Klan”. *Voice of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*. February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1924.2.

shortages caused many school districts throughout the state to employ nuns as teachers. These nuns would wear their religious garb into class. The Klan feared that these nuns were proselytizing for Catholicism. These practices also raised questions about the separation of Church and State. Although the North Dakota Supreme Court ruled that employing nuns in public schools was constitutional, many people were still skeptical. The Klan teamed up with the Protestants of America Union to challenge these practices. Neither the IVA or the NPL had made School Board elections anywhere near as big a priority as the Klan.<sup>241</sup>

One area of Fargo in which the Klan was active was the neighborhood around North Dakota State University. The Klan set up a burning cross during the Junior Prom on campus in 1925. In the 1990s a Klan outfit was purchased from a trashman working at NDSU who discovered many of these outfits in the trash in the late 1950s which dated to the 1920s. The garbage man had cut up the other uniforms to use as rags so that only one uniform was available for purchase in the 1990s.<sup>242</sup>

Leaders of the Klan, just like those of the IVA and NPL, published pamphlets attacking their opponents. Reverend F. Halsey Ambrose published his “Sermon on Applied Socialism”. In this document he argued that “a secret caucus runs North Dakota

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<sup>241</sup> Linda Grathwohl, “The North Dakota Anti-Garb Law: Constitutional Conflict and Religious Strife,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 13 no.3(Summer 1993),187,190-191; McVeigh, *Klan*, 126.

<sup>242</sup>No author. “Flaming Insignia First Seen About 10:30 by Dancers”. *Spectrum*. April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1925. P.3.: “Outfit Joins Collection”. *Spectrum*. January 9<sup>th</sup> 1990. P.1.:”KKK Outfit was a Genuine Bargain”, *Spectrum*. January 19<sup>th</sup> 1990.p.5.

now,” and “we need backbone from President Wilson in Washington to throw back foreign socialists and preserve our country.”<sup>243</sup>

The 1924 November Elections was one of the highpoints of Klan activity in North Dakota. Ever since H. W. Evans took over leadership of the Klan in 1922 the Klan had been heavily involved in politics. The Klan tried to tap into elements in America’s political culture that went back to at least the heyday of the American (Know-Nothing) Party in the 1840s and 1850s. The Klan originally showed up in Fargo as the Ansax Club in 1923 which primarily focused on political issues and the conflict between the IVA and the NPL. The Ansax Clubs took a middle of the road approach to the conflict between the two wings of the Republican Party and helped to give the Klan a reputation for moderation among some North Dakotans. In recruitment speeches throughout North Dakota during this year the Klan frequently inserted itself in politics including asserting that former President Warren Harding had been a Klan member. Woodrow Wilson had been a known Klan sympathizer as well. Politics is also a good area to see the influence of local Klan chapters since one way to gain a foothold in the politics of the community was to appeal to local concerns. The Klan also believed elections were important because the Klan had to combat what they perceived as a unified Catholic bloc, even though there is no evidence than any church or fraternal organization in Fargo told its members how to vote.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> “A Sermon on Applied Socialism Preached By Rev. F. Halsey Ambrose in the First Presbyterian Church”. March 2, 1919. Call# 324.27327 North Dakota State Library, Bismarck, North Dakota.4, 6-8.

<sup>244</sup> Shawn Lay, ed. *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992): “The Klan Meeting”.

While the Klan was formally entering North Dakota as a fraternal organization, it was also entering North Dakota's politics by a different route. The Klan initially entered North Dakota politics in a disguised fashion. In 1922 Anglo-Saxon (Ansax) clubs were organized in both Grand Forks and Fargo. The Ansax clubs helped to spread a lot of Klan propaganda around the state and politically advocated a middle of the road approach between the NPL and the IVA within the Republican Party. Former Governor Lynn J. Frazier, an NPLer who was recalled in 1921 thanks to a petition by the Independent Voters Association (the conservative wing of the Republican party), came back and defeated the incumbent to get the 1922 Republican nomination for Senate.<sup>245</sup>

The Ansax clubs were sympathetic to some aspects of the NPL program (as would become evident in the 1924 Gubernatorial election) but they supported private property and thought that some of Frazier's actions as governor (such as the state-owned mills) were too socialistic. Thus they ended up supporting the Democrat J. O'Connor after their preferred candidate refused to run. Even though Frazier won the election, O'Connor beat him by a considerable margin in Cass County, receiving 7,930 votes to Frazier's 4,713.<sup>246</sup>

Early in 1924 the Klan demonstrated what it could do politically in Grand Forks by defeating two female candidates for the school board with two candidates endorsed by the Klan. The two Klan endorsed candidates were Leslie Stinson and E.A. Arhart, who

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Wildrose, Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1924: William Harwood. "The Ku Klux Klan in Grand Forks, North Dakota" *South Dakota History* 13 (Fall 1971). 325-326.

<sup>245</sup> "Is Ku Klux Klan Taking A Hand In State Campaign?" *Fargo Forum*. September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922.p.3.

<sup>246</sup> "Is Ku Klux Klan Taking A Hand In State Campaign?" *Fargo Forum*. September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922.p.3.



were successful businessmen in the community. The two women were Mrs. J.G. Moore, who was the wife of a Methodist minister opposed to the Klan, and Mrs. E. C. Haagenson, who was a physician's wife. Ambrose argued that even though the two women were not Catholics they were pawns of Catholics and thus would hurt public education if elected. Even though Ambrose could present absolutely no proof of his allegations the Klan organized extensively. The Klan pointed to the teaching of foreign languages in public schools as proof that Catholics had taken them over and were attempting to eliminate the Americanism of the next generation. The districts in the city with large populations sympathetic to the Klan voted heavily for Stinson-Arhart. The Fargo Klan never asserted itself as forcefully in a Fargo School Board election. One indication that the Klan was never as firmly established in Fargo as in Grand Forks is that the Fargo Klan was never able to take over the School Board and the City Council like the Grand Forks Klan was.<sup>247</sup>

The members of the Klan had ambivalent feelings about the 1924 Presidential Election. This was particularly the case with Robert LaFollette's third-party candidacy. The Klan supported LaFollette's opposition to monopolies, trusts, tariffs, and many manipulative and exploitive components of the capitalistic system. However, the Klan was opposed to protection of unskilled laborers and they very much believed in private property. Thus the Klan was weary of LaFollette's support from the socialist parties. The national organization moved against LaFollette as soon as he denounced the Invisible Empire during a campaign speech and threw their support behind President Coolidge. But the rank and file of the Klan still sympathized with much of LaFollette's message

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<sup>247</sup> Harwood, *Grand Forks*, 319-321.

and many ended up voting for him. LaFollette received 3,769 votes from Cass County, nearly as many as the Democratic ticket.<sup>248</sup>

The 1924 North Dakota Gubernatorial Election was the most contentious ever for the Fargo Klan. The Klan was determined to defeat Governor Nestos in his bid for reelection because he signed the Anti-Mask Legislation into law. Thus the Klan decided to support the NPL endorsed candidate for governor, Arthur G. Sorlie. Sorlie was a small business owner which was a class of people that the Klan did responsibly well recruiting support in. Throughout the campaign rumors that Sorlie was an actual member of the Klan which Sorlie never denied became a much debated topic. Gov. Nestos was already on record as opposing the Klan. After Sorlie defeated Nestos in the primary for the Republican nomination Democrats and IVA Republicans formed a very surprising fusion ticket and nominated Halvor Halvorson for governor. To complicate matters further, the NPL endorsed LaFollette's third party candidacy and LaFollette came out against the Klan.<sup>249</sup>

Many people thought that Sorlie was not supporting his party by refusing to condemn the Klan. A breakaway faction of the NPL nominated William Lemke for governor but he refused to accept it. Sorlie attempted to compromise between the two factions of the NPL. He explicitly endorsed LaFollette but he did not endorse the NPL platform. Finally, on the eve of the election F. Halsey Ambrose issued a statement saying that Sorlie was not currently a member of the KKK. However, this statement by Ambrose did not say that Sorlie had ever been a member of the Klan. Sorlie was able to move

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<sup>248</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 96-97.

<sup>249</sup> Harwood, *Grand Forks*, 323-325.

successfully to the center in the general election. Sorlie beat Halvorson in the general election but with a very different coalition than the one he had in the primary because support in the districts of Fargo with high Klan membership was down considerably. In fact, Sorlie lost Cass County by a wide margin to Halvorson, 4, 892 votes to 9, 912 votes.<sup>250</sup>

*The North Dakota American* tried to apply pressure on Governor Sorlie after the 1924 election to punish him for his break from the Klan. For example, the Klan was stringent in its opposition to Governor Sorlie's decision to leave one of North Dakota's Senate seats vacant for nearly a full year after the death of Senator E.F. Ladd until a special election could be organized in June of 1926. The Klan suspected that Sorlie wanted that Senate seat for himself and tried to promote opposition to this move.<sup>251</sup>

The Klan organized Konklaves during nonelection years to keep interest up and display their power. The Klan had high hopes for the First North Dakota Konclave. 1925 being a nonelection year, the Klan needed to hold people's interest in some other way. By creating a spectacle that would give an impression of excitement and adventure in a nonelection year, the Klan was sure they would receive a lot of press coverage and keep their issues in the public conversation. L. B. Farrington, the secretary of the North Dakota Klan and organizer of this event, predicted that at least 30,000 people would attend. He based this figure on what the attendance had been at South Dakota's Konclave earlier in the year and the fact that there were more Klan members in North Dakota than in South

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<sup>250</sup> Harwood, *Grand Forks, 326: Compilation of Election Returns National and State 1914 – 1928 North Dakota*. Issued by Robert Byrne Secretary of State. Edited by Charles Liessman Deputy.

<sup>251</sup>No author. "Sorlie's Actions". *North Dakota American*. November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925.p.4.

Dakota. A fireworks show which the *Fargo Forum* reported was as good as the fireworks shows at the state fair was shown and an airplane with an electric cross suspended from it followed the parade around downtown. The half-mile track at the state fairgrounds was lined with fire and the parade started and finished there. More than a thousand Klansmen from five different states paraded through the streets of downtown Fargo with a 50-piece Fargo Klan band and an 18-piece Fargo Klan drum Corps along with more than a hundred horses.<sup>252</sup>

Rome Jones, from the Indianapolis Klan was the keynote speaker at the Konklave. His speech was entitled “Do we need the Klan and Why?” He related the Klan’s justification for itself using historical arguments:

In the first place historic facts of the past 15 years prove conclusively that some such organization as the Klan is needed. Bryan and Roosevelt spent their lives fighting the radicalism in their own ranks. The same thing is true in medieval history. John Knox, Garibaldi, and Wendell Phillips did the same thing, all because of the tendency of the classes to override everything and everybody when they become powerful. For that reason, a body of Americans to act as a balance wheel is needed.<sup>253</sup>

E. C. Farrington, the Grand Titan of the North Dakota Klan (and the father of L.B. Farrington), called on those present to recruit as many people as possible to the Klan. The Imperial Wizard of the national Klan, H.W. Evans, was originally scheduled to speak but had to cancel. In his stead he sent K. G. Rutledge from the national headquarters in Atlanta. Rutledge emphasized the Americanism of North Dakota in his remarks.

The growth of the Klan in the state indicates that shrines of Bolshevism must always fail to attract American citizens of North Dakota, for obviously there exists the great spirit which ever stands true to the fundamentals of our civilization. As a state,

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<sup>252</sup> No author. “Klan Officials Predict 30,000 To Attend Conclave”. *Fargo Forum*. September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1925.3.

<sup>253</sup> No author. “Ku Klux Klan Demonstration to Open With Parade at 8; Rome Jones and Twilight Orn Address Afternoon Gathering”. *Fargo Forum*. September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1925.2.

North Dakota is truly worthy of her place in the glorious sisterhood. Wild dreamers and selfish cliques within the state have never defined North Dakota's patriotism. Behold North Dakota, a great commonwealth of Americans.<sup>254</sup>

Mayor J.D. Dahl also sent J. G. Halland to greet the Klan gathering rather than address the gathering himself. This was the first sign that the political leadership of Fargo was trying to separate itself as much as possible from the Klan. However, Halland was not a bad substitute for Mayor Dahl from the Klan's perspective. He was an immigrant from Norway who was a former Superintendent of Public Instruction for North Dakota. Halland certainly felt defensive about his presence there by saying, "The City of Fargo welcomes all strangers and visitors to the biggest little city in the world. As a city we take no stand either for or against any movement which has its supporters and its antagonists."<sup>255</sup>

Although the 1925 Konklave was the largest in Fargo, the Klan did hold another Konklave in Fargo in 1927. Klan members from four states came and the keynote address was given by Judge John Jeffrey of Aberdeen, SD because Imperial Wizard Evans once again could not attend. His address focused on foreign affairs. He argued that the recent success of the Philippines, Panama, and India was due to the UK and the US applying "Saxon sanitation" to those people.<sup>256</sup> He also stated that, "The Klan is as absolutely American as chewing gum, crooked district attorneys, or chautauquas".<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup>"8,000 Attend Celebration As Klansmen Put On Rites". *Fargo Forum*. September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1925.p.1.

<sup>255</sup> Harwood, *Grand Forks*, 361: Ted Stork. "Old-timers Recall Klan Activity In The 1920s". *Fargo Forum*. April 11<sup>th</sup> 1965.p. 5.

<sup>256</sup>No author. "Klan To Meet Here Thursday". *Fargo Forum*. Evening Ed. September 2, 1927.1.

<sup>257</sup>No author. "Kass Kounty Klan" Dakota Dispatch. Prairie Public Radio. Sept. 1, 2006. P.2.

However, the Klan's best days were clearly behind it by the 1927 Konklave. Attendance declined significantly in comparison to the 1925 Konklave from about 8,000 to about 1,000. A cross with red electric lights was once again attached to an airplane and following the parade through the city the plane circled the Fargo Fairgrounds while three crosses were lit. However, many other features such as the row of light-up crosses were gone.<sup>258</sup> The Fargo-Moorhead Telephone Directories for 1924 and 1927 included a list for secret societies and the Klan was not included on either list.<sup>259</sup>

More can be learned about the Klan by studying some of the specific people who joined the organization. The Klan was very secretive in terms of its membership roles in Fargo as it was everywhere else but the study of known members shows that they came from middle-class backgrounds and did not do well economically in the 1920s. Many Klan members were farmers who particularly struggled in the 1920s. Harry J. Divine, who found a meeting place for the Fargo Klan and helped raise money for it, was a farmer of English heritage. Joe Erdmeier was a restaurant owner originally from Shannon, Illinois who moved to a farm outside Fargo during the 1910s with his family. By the 1930 Census he had moved back to Illinois because of the tightening of credit that all Dakota farmers experienced.<sup>260</sup>

Edward F. Nesemeier was another farmer born in Illinois to a father from Germany and a mother from Illinois who had immigrated to North Dakota by 1920. The Klan relied heavily on outside organizers to gain members and establish itself in a new

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<sup>258</sup>No author. "Jeffrey Addresses Klansmen After Parade Through Fargo". *Fargo Forum*. Evening Ed. September 2, 1927.1.

<sup>259</sup>No author. "Jeffrey Addresses Klansmen After Parade Through Fargo". *Fargo Forum*. Evening Ed. September 2, 1927.1.

<sup>260</sup>Henry G Dralle Papers, Mss 10206, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

area. Leslie B. Farrington was born in Iowa Falls, Iowa in 1904. His father worked in a grain elevator and was affected by the same problems that farmers faced.<sup>261</sup> Farrington came to Fargo in the 1920s to organize the Klan chapter there.<sup>262</sup> Erdmeier and Nesemeier would be involved in an incident that confirmed the Klan's propensity for violence to many Fargoans and helped drive it from the city.

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<sup>261</sup> 1920 and 1930 US Census; 1915 and 1925 North Dakota Census.

<sup>262</sup> 1920 Federal Census; 1930 Federal Census.

## Chapter Four: The End of the Klan in North Dakota

“The Firemen’s Masquerade Ball reached its climax with the unmasking at midnight at which time prizes were awarded for the best, most descriptive, most original costumes. This was followed by a sumptuous lunch, which no one wanted to miss. Just as the prizes had been awarded and everyone was sitting down to eat, a new group of masqueraders burst into the hall. They were all wearing white sheets and hoods with KKK written across them in black. They were all carrying long corn knives in their hand, and they were all looking for my dad.”<sup>263</sup>

This quotation comes from the memoirs of Bernie Bauer, whose father was a fireman in Underwood, North Dakota in the 1920s. The Klan attempted to attack his father but this action caused people in the town of Underwood to turn against the Klan and drive it from their city. This chapter describes the shortcomings of the Klan that led to its demise in North Dakota. The Klan proved to be pragmatic on economic issues but its window of opportunity closed quickly because the Klan was quickly perceived to be a threat by the elites of North Dakota. The IVA and NPL addressed the weaknesses that the Klan had exposed and other influential elements in North Dakota society such as fraternal organizations united in opposition to the Klan as well.

The Klan forced the NPL to reconsider its political allegiances. Throughout the 1920s it became increasingly more difficult for the NPL to win Republican primaries.

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<sup>263</sup>Burnie Bauer. “When The Klan Came For My Father”. *Fidelity* Jan. 1987. North Dakota State Historical Society, Bismarck, North Dakota. P.3.



Republican Party leaders also seemed to be completely unresponsive to any of the NPL's policy ideas. Townley proposed a new strategy to not participate in the primaries of either party and support the side that nominated candidates more amenable to the NPL's views. While Bill Langer decided to keep the NPL in the Republican Party in the short term, this became an increasingly tenuous allegiance following the NPL's endorsement of the New Deal in the 1930s. The NPL and the North Dakota Democratic Party eventually unified in 1954.<sup>264</sup>

While the IVA was consolidating its control of the North Dakota Republican Party, it also was incorporating some ideas of the NPL. The IVA reversed its previous position on the North Dakota State Bank and supported it. The Nestos Administration (1921-1925) allowed construction of the State Mill to continue as well.<sup>265</sup>

There were national political trends in regards to the Klan that North Dakota followed. In 1922 Earle B. Mayfield of Texas was the first known member of the KKK elected to the US Senate. Jim Ferguson, who was anti-Klan, had been defeated in the Republican Primary. That same year Klansman Walter Sims was elected mayor of Atlanta. The Klan also began to be a force in Oregon politics as well. Democrat Walter Pierce who dominated Portland politics for years supported Klan calls for a compulsory education bill. The Klan was also successful in defeating attempts to form a farmer-labor union party in Oklahoma. But Indiana was where the Klan was most dominant politically. The Klan was able to squash proposed resolutions condemning it at both the Republican

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<sup>264</sup> Ellsworth, Scott. "The Origins of the Non-Partisan League," Ph. D diss., Duke University, 1982. 189-191.

<sup>265</sup> Thomas M. Contois. "The Fight Against the Nonpartisan League: The Independent Voters' Association". Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1986. 123-127.

and Democratic National Conventions in 1924. President Coolidge did not condemn the Klan during his time in office.<sup>266</sup>

The Klan primarily appealed to small businessmen, merchants, skilled manufacturing workers, managers, clerks, and professionals- those people who made up the old and new urban middle classes. These groups were relatively privileged but were concerned that they were losing power and wanted to make sure that did not happen. This organization would channel these people's fears into a political agenda.<sup>267</sup> These were the same groups of people who were attracted to Fraternal Organizations such as the Masons and Odd Fellows. The Klan definitely saw itself as a middle class organization. The Klansmen's Creed called for a harmonious relationship between capital and labor.<sup>268</sup>

Klan locals advertised to women with abusive husbands and helped women who had financially irresponsible husbands. Many WKKK chapters were plagued with internal strife. Some issues of morality and character were divisive such as whether and how much to support prohibition. Threats were often used to force people to join the Klan particularly in areas where it was strong such as Indiana. The Klan also tried to protect the children of its members. It tried to prevent or sanction youth dancing in areas where it had significant power to control the sex drive.<sup>269</sup> The Klan's morality campaigns helped

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<sup>266</sup> David J. Goldberg. *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999.77-80.

<sup>267</sup> Robert D. Johnston. *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. 88-91.

<sup>268</sup> Rory McVeigh. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 1-30, 42-48

<sup>269</sup> Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. 82-85, 129- 130.

to make fear and hatred of minorities normal. The Klan also conducted many lecture tours in an effort at self-promotion. These lectures usually included vivid descriptions of Catholic depravity towards women. It was argued that the Catholic Church was the major force preventing women's equality.<sup>270</sup>

C. W. Finwall moved to Fargo from Chicago in 1922. He was a member of the North Dakota State Baptist Convention from 1922 to 1932.<sup>271</sup> The Klan boasted of its political influence by claiming that President Harding was a Klansmen.<sup>272</sup> It was hard to predict where the Klan would be strong. The Klan had over 100,000 members in Kansas and helped elect a governor there but it never had more than 50,000 members in Nebraska and had considerably less political influence.<sup>273</sup>

The North Dakota State Legislature, seeing a potential threat, moved against the Klan soon after the Klan's initial foray into the state. The Legislature feared the very real threat of violence associated with Klan activities rather than the Klan's specific views on any issue. The Anti-Mask Law was intended to ensure that any Klansman who committed a crime would be caught because the Klansman's face would be seen by victims and witnesses. The bill specifically outlawed the wearing of a mask outside a hall that conceals the facial features of anyone over the age of 15. Thus whenever the Klan had big marches outside such as the 1925 and 1927 Konklaves they had to march without the white masks that were characteristic of the Klan uniform in the rest of the

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<sup>270</sup> Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. 71, 74, 86-88.

<sup>271</sup> McVeigh, *Rise*, 55, 170.

<sup>272</sup> No author. "Klan Speech". *Wildrose* Nov. 24 1924.1.

<sup>273</sup> Wilkins, Robert and Wynona Huchette. *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977. 357.

country. At the same time the Nebraska state legislature passed a law prohibiting non-law enforcement personnel from administering penalties due to alleged violations of the law. This was a different attempt to solve the same problem as the North Dakota Anti-Mask Bill.<sup>274</sup>

Interestingly, 16 of the 18 Representatives who voted against the law were Non-Partisan League members. After all, the Klan opposed significant parts of NPL's program, such as the idea that bureaucracies can help society. One of the NPLers who voted against the bill, Representative Cart of Fedge, said on the House floor that he felt the bill was intended to promote religious strife that would take people's minds off the more important economic issues of the day. He also said that these reports of unpunished Klan crimes in the South were due to the police's inability to enforce the law down there which was not a problem in North Dakota. Senator Gross, an NPLer who opposed the bill in the Senate, said that organizations who had not been convicted of any crimes should be given the benefit of the doubt and those organizations that tried to help society should be promoted. Despite extensive testimony from Ambrose and others, Governor R. A. Nestos (who was an Independent Voters' Association Republican) signed the bill into law and earned the animosity of the Klan.<sup>275</sup>

Since the Klan tried to portray itself as a "100% American", patriotic organization, it also tried hard to attract veteran support. Many veterans did join the Klan but most did not. Many American Legion chapters throughout the country were divided. The chapters in North Dakota came out against the Klan relatively quickly. They

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<sup>274</sup> No author. "ND Anti-Mask Bill Fought By Leaguers". *Fargo Forum*. January 26, 1923. P. 1.

<sup>275</sup> No author. "House Passes Anti-Mask Bill: Vote 98 To 18 For Measure". *Fargo Forum*. February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1923.p.1.

believed the Klan's values contradicted what the war in France had been about. Many veterans pointed out that many Catholics and Jews had fought and died for the allied cause (some even mentioned African-Americans as well). Despite the American Legion's stated opposition to the Klan, the Klan still tried to attach itself to the American Legion in people's minds by holding events at the same time and place as the American Legion. This was best evidenced by the July 4<sup>th</sup> 1925 Konklave outside Hillsboro where the American Legion was simultaneously holding its annual July 4<sup>th</sup> gathering. The pair of major events at the same time in the same small place set off a spirited argument in the press as the Legion did not approve of the Klan's attempts to associate with it.<sup>276</sup>

The American Legion began this conflict by issuing a statement of condemnation of the Klan at its national annual meeting in Indianapolis on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923 following the murder of one of its members by the Klan in Louisiana. Jack Williams, the adjutant of the American Legion for North Dakota, also expressed support for the Anti-Mask Law being considered by the North Dakota Legislature at the time. Prior to the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations in 1925 Lynn Spiering of the American Legion Post in Hillsboro issued several statements that the Legion and the Klan had nothing to do with each other. These statements were published in the *Hillsboro Banner* and the *Fargo Forum*. Some rank-and-file resentment of the Klan was expressed in a letter by veteran Aaron Ray Sherritt. "Who can say who '100 percent American is'? ... Why can't we have some of the

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<sup>276</sup> Richard K. Tucker. *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1991. P. 78-79.

comradeship and religion of the 5<sup>th</sup> US Marines in our home country and glorious state...In short, cut out all the hate and hard feeling we can.”<sup>277</sup>

The Klan tried to respond to these attacks. In an editorial the Klan argued that the American Legion was not the organization upholding the principles for which the veterans of the World War had fought. “The American Legion composed of Veterans of the world war, men who fought for America and the ideals of America, doing a Pontius Pilate of old, washing their hands of any connection with the knights and women of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization which stands for the very principles for which they fought.” Similar types of battles would be fought between the Klan and other fraternal organizations in Fargo.<sup>278</sup>

The NPLers who opposed the anti-Mask bill in the ND Legislature did so not because they liked the Klan but because they feared the law’s wider repercussions. They feared that someone who wore a shawl in winter could get arrested under this act or that the bill was taking attention away from economic issues and putting it on religious divisions. The IVA did not have these kinds of concerns so its members could vote for it in a much higher proportion.<sup>279</sup>

However, tension quickly developed between the men’s Klan and the Women’s Ku Klux Klan (henceforth: WKKK) which would plague the Klan throughout its tenure in North Dakota. The national Klan organization envisioned the WKKK as helping to enforce traditional Victorian gender roles while many members of the WKKK used

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<sup>277</sup> Aaron Ray Sherrit[Letter To Editor]. *Grand Forks Herald*. July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1925. P. 8.

<sup>278</sup> No author. “1,000 Attended Conclave Here July 4<sup>th</sup>”. *Hillsboro Banner*. July 31, 1925.p.1.

<sup>279</sup> No author. “House Passes Antimask Bill: Vote 98 to 18 for Measure” *The Fargo Forum* Feb. 2 1923. 1-2.

traditional gender roles to prove the discrimination that women faced in society and why they needed an organization like the WKKK to get their voices heard. Thus, while many leaders of the WKKK envisioned an independent role for their organization, the main body of the Klan wanted the WKKK to just help the men out. The WKKK had a separate leadership structure and a state's WKKK was headed by an Imperial Commander.<sup>280</sup>

The Klan was increasingly seen as a threat to the interests of the entrenched elites in North Dakota. With few exceptions, the Klan was not able to recruit anyone in North Dakota who could be considered a member of the elite. Established fraternal organizations, such as the American Legion, the Masons, Lions Club, and so forth, viewed the Klan as a potential rival for recruits. Thus the Klan was supportive of the League's Industrial Program when it was working to constrain big business but not when it sought to set up state-owned businesses. Rather than dismantle the Industrial Program as the IVA wanted to do, the Klan would gradually repeal and modify parts of it. The Klan was just as supportive of private business and property as the IVA. In North Dakota the Klan planned to involve itself in the Republican Primaries just as the IVA and the NPL did.<sup>281</sup> Its biggest success statewide was A. G. Sorlie winning the Republican Primary for the Governor in 1924. This was the election that alerted the NPL and IVA that the Klan was a threat to them.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991. 34-35.

<sup>281</sup> Jeffrey A. Charles. *Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 121-124.

<sup>282</sup> No author. "A Defense of the Klan". *North Dakota American*. November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925. 4. Fargo, ND. State Historical Society of North Dakota Newspapers.

Another reason the Klan lost its power quickly was its rapidly declining reputation. The perception of the Klan as a violent organization, which grew throughout its tenure in the state, was a major reason it was driven out of the state when it was. Specific incidents were responsible for this growing negative opinion of the Klan. On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1925, a trio of masked men stopped a sleigh outside Casselton, North Dakota. They ordered Walter Corcoran, the driver to get out of the sleigh and when he refused they pulled him out, assaulted him, and took him back to Fargo. The two women who were riding in the sleigh with Corcoran, Clara and Eleanor Edholm, later testified that they recognized one of the assailants, George Nesemeier, in spite of his mask. The assailants also told the women that Corcoran had to be taken to a meeting place and that they had better not say anything or they would receive the same treatment. Corcoran said that George told him he was the secretary of the Ku Klux Klan and that he had better not say anything about this assault because the Klan was independent of the authorities and had more than 40 members in Casselton. The Klan had sent a warning message to Corcoran's house a few days before the assault saying that he should stay away from the home of Mr. Johnson who was the Speaker of the North Dakota Legislature at the time. Corcoran had not followed this advice and had visited the home a few days before the assault. Corcoran was from a lower class than his three assailants and most Klan members in the state. He was an auto salesman who worked for wages and did not own a house. He rented a room.<sup>283</sup>

Another incident that helped to discredit the Klan in the eyes of law-abiding North Dakotans occurred in Minot. John Scheuer, who was a well-respected businessman

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<sup>283</sup>No author. "Casselton Man Victim Of Klan, Say Girls Who Were With Him". *Fargo Forum* Jan. 26<sup>th</sup> 1925.1:1920 and 1930 US Census: 1925 North Dakota Census.



as owner of a local meat market, received two threats that told him to get out of town. The threats were pasted to the front of his shop. These warnings were signed “K.K.K.” making it clear that someone wanted to convey the impression that the Klan was after Scheuer. Although there were several other incidents like this throughout the state, Scheuer’s case received the most press attention (especially in Fargo) because of his prominence in the community.<sup>284</sup>

The Klan tried to combat this characterization as a violent, non-law-abiding organization. The Klan took out a full page advertisement in many newspapers across the state stressing the Klan’s ‘foursquare’ commitment to the law. “Our hostility to bootleggers, professional gamblers and all forms of organized and commercialized lawlessness or vice is unlimited. We will spare no effort, time or expense to uproot these things and drive them from the communities where we are organized, but in doing so our members will work only in conjunction with the officers of the law.”<sup>285</sup>

The Klan also tried to convince people that the attack on Corcoran could not have been Klan related because there was no Klavern in Casselton and Klan members in Fargo did not have officers yet(although they definitely would later that year when the Klavern was held). The Klan also published part of the oath that everyone who joined the organization had to affirm that talked about doing a Klansman doing as much as he could to help and assist law enforcement and state/federal governments to uphold the Constitution. However, these incidents confirmed the suspicions that many North

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<sup>284</sup> No author. “Minot Man Gets KKK Threat”. *Fargo Forum*. January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1925.p. 9.

<sup>285</sup> No author. “The Klan’s Attitude Toward Law Enforcement”. *Williams County Farmers Press*. Aug. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1924. P. 3.

Dakotans had had when the Klan entered the state and it became increasingly hard for the Klan to change this perception.<sup>286</sup>

Fraternal organizations had significant power in North Dakota and they increasingly saw the Klan as a threat. Many Fargo fraternal organizations eventually issued statements condemning the Klan. These actions significantly hurt the Klan's staying power. The 1920s were one of the most successful periods in American history for fraternal organizations. Most organizations attracted a primarily middle-class membership and tended to emphasize social unity and harmony. The Klan attracted much the same people although it opposed the economic outlook of most of the other organizations by opposing free-market corporatist development and the culture of consumerism. The Klan did some of the same kinds of activities as the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions clubs did. It liked to emphasize the positive role it played in communities through its service activities.<sup>287</sup>

However, the Klan fundamentally opposed the way the economy was being structured while the other fraternal clubs supported it and accommodated it. Thus the Klan was seen to be in opposition to status quo. These economic attitudes rather than the Klan's other views were the most important reason for these other clubs to drive the Klan from a community. The state executive committee of the Congregational Conference of North Dakota issued a condemnation of the Klan in 1922 and called on everyone to fight

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<sup>286</sup> No author. "The Klan's Attitude Toward Law Enforcement". *Williams County Farmers Press*. Aug. 7<sup>th</sup>, 1924. 3.

<sup>287</sup> Jeffrey A. Charles. *Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 67-72.

the spread of the Klan because the Klan was an enemy of the church and the country and its goals were misguided.<sup>288</sup>

Besides the Anti-Mask Law, opposition from other fraternal organizations, and loss of its image with the public, there were other reasons why support for the Klan declined rapidly in Fargo in the late 1920s. The political space for the Klan between the IVA and the NPL disappeared as Governor Sorlie and others moved the NPL to a more moderate position. The political and business leadership of Fargo united in opposition to the Klan by the late 1920s. The Klan in Fargo proved to have less staying power against these headwinds than the Grand Forks Klan primarily because the Fargo Klan did not have the charismatic leadership or as severe economic difficulties. However, tension between Protestants and Catholics remained palpable through World War II.<sup>289</sup>

The issues the Klan addressed did not die with the Klan. There continued to be tension about sectarian influence in public schools. This was best exemplified by the Anti-Grab Law referendum that passed in 1948 which was aimed at nuns hired to teach in public schools. This law required them to wear clothing that was not associated with any religion while in those schools. The way the nuns saw it, they had been asked by the public schools to come and teach. It was not as if they were trying to force their way into the schools. But the distrust of the intentions of these nuns was indicative of the anxieties the Klan exploited in its rise. The economic concerns that gave rise to the Klan were

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<sup>288</sup> Jeffrey A. Charles. *Service Clubs in American Society: Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 30-31: No author. "Klan Condemned At Legion Meet". *Fargo Forum*. January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1925. 1: No author. "Ku Klux Klan Held Menace To Churches and Country; Executive of North Dakota Congregational Conference so Holds". *Fargo Forum*. December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922. 5.

<sup>289</sup> Robinson, *North Dakota*, 393-394.

lessened as a result of the introduction of immigrant quotas in 1924. But that same anxiety comes up even today when people who propose immigration reform are accused of advocating amnesty. Thus the potential of another movement similar to the 1920s Klan remains.<sup>290</sup>

In contrast, the Klan in many other locations was no threat to elites. For example, the Klan in Portland gave politicians a tool to mediate and define the middle of the social order. Most studies of the class support of the Klan come from a demonization of the middle class tradition. However the middle class has been more fluid than the other classes and it can end up supporting or undermining democracy. The Klan was politically anti-Populist but did incorporate some progressive elements if it felt that would help grow its membership. Left-wing Populism did not completely die out. The xenophobia and racism of the Klan did not change but the economic policies of the Klan could and did. The numerous strikes that occurred in urban areas in the years immediately following WWI became a big electoral issue for the Klan. In Portland the Klan successfully got a bill through the city council which mandated public school attendance between the ages of 8-16. Fraternal organizations also often restricted themselves to the white middle and working classes.<sup>291</sup>

The Klan did incorporate some of the popular features of the NPL. It organized and held big rallies of members from multiple states quite often so that people knew they were members of a wider group. Song books were distributed to local chapters to enliven

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<sup>290</sup> Linda Grathwohl. "The North Dakota Anti-Garb Law: Constitutional Conflict and Religious Strife" *Great Plains Quarterly* 13:3 (Summer 1993):187-188.

<sup>291</sup> Robert D. Johnston. *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. 7, 14-24, 74-76, 224-248.

meetings and rallies. The organizational structure was very similar between the Klan and the NPL (at least until Townley stepped down).<sup>292</sup>

But the coalition the Klan had put together in order to win and influence North Dakotan elections in the mid-1920s was not able to hold together. There were too many divisive issues in American society during the 1920s and the Klan ended up having to take firm positions on them. For example, many klaverns of the Women's Klan split over whether to serve as help to the main Klan or to pursue their own independent goals. The Klan's inner conflict over gender was particularly evident in politics. Many Klansmen believed women should not be troubled with politics while others recognized that women's votes were needed in critical elections. The Klan framed all of its issues around morality.<sup>293</sup> To counter this, state legislators cited Thomas Dixon's (author of *The Clansmen*) testimony that the Klan of today was not like the Klan of the Reconstruction Period, it was much worse.<sup>294</sup>

Significant tension between Protestants and Catholics existed in Fargo through the Great Depression. Each group had its own charity groups, fraternal organizations, and businesses. Catholic businesses and Protestant businesses were located in different areas of downtown. In addition, there was a migrant community of mostly Hispanic workers that was centered on Front Street. These workers mainly worked in the Crystal Sugar beet processing plant in Fargo or in the fields around Fargo. This community received

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<sup>292</sup> Ku Klux Klan in North Dakota Collection, 1922-1925, 1965, 1979. Mss 950 Box 1 Folder 3, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>293</sup> Stanley Coben. "Ordinary White Protestants: The KKK of the 1920s," *Journal of Social History*, 28 (Fall, 1994): 157-165.

<sup>294</sup> No author. "Dr. Hillis Defends Secrecy of the Klan" *North Dakota American* Feb. 21, 1923. 1-2.

considerable suspicion from many Fargoans. Many people felt they did not belong and were not American enough.<sup>295</sup>

The Klan also showed itself to be a threat to fraternal organizations by invading their events and trying to make examples of people who were suspected of opposing the Klan. For example, several Klansmen came to the Firemen's Masquerade Ball in Underwood, North Dakota and tried to take one of the members away but other firemen locked the doors and prevented the Klansmen from leaving. This action convinced the business and community leaders of Underwood that they should work to eliminate the Klan from the town. The secrecy of the Klan was also increasingly criticized. The Klan pointed out that other fraternal organizations were just as secretive but as the influence of fraternal organizations declined this defense became less effective.<sup>296</sup>

The Klan was also susceptible to the charge of more outside control of North Dakotans. During the 1927 Konklave in Fargo where Klan members marched through the downtown business area of Fargo before meeting in the Fargo fairgrounds to hear a speech. Imperial Wizard Evans had selected a South Dakota judge, John A. Jeffrey, as his representative in North Dakota. Evans himself promised to come to Fargo a couple of times and had to pull out each time which also created suspicion among some of the Klan's potential supporters. Judge Wallace Campbell of Bismarck, the Grand Titian of the Realm of North Dakota, appeared to have little power or influence within the Klan hierarchy. Mayor J. H. Dahl also did not attend the Konklave which signaled that city

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<sup>295</sup> Ku Klux Klan in North Dakota Collection, 1922-1925, 1965, 1979. Mss 950, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>296</sup> No author. "Dr. Hillis Defends Secrecy of the Klan" *North Dakota American* Feb. 21, 1923. 1-2.

officials were separating themselves from the Klan which meant that it would be harder for the Klan to organize events and that the Klan's opponents had less to fear.<sup>297</sup>

William Langer, who left the NPL over disagreements with Townley and other members of the leadership, returned to the organization in the late 1920s and helped to give it a new sense of purpose. He would go on to serve as governor and US Senator. Townley's influence, which had remained considerable despite the fact that he had been forced to resign as President of the organization due to accounting problems, was pushed aside at this point. The NPL was helped by the success of the immigration restriction acts in the mid-1920s which decreased the focus on Americanism. The lessening influence of the IWW and the end of the first Red Scare made those attacks less effective.<sup>298</sup>

The NPL also tried to respond to some of the criticisms leveled against it. Its 1936 platform called for economical government and a reduction in state taxes as well as retaining its old progressive and populist ideas of economic justice and cooperative organizations.<sup>299</sup> Langer, who left the NPL over ideological disputes in 1920 after serving as the state's Attorney General, helped to carry out this policy change.

The American Legion, resentful of the Klan's attempt to connect itself with the veterans' organization, began an aggressive campaign against it. The American Legion urged the government to come in and restore the law in areas that the Klan controlled.

The Klan portrayed itself as an organization that ensured law and order but the American

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<sup>297</sup> Ku Klux Klan in North Dakota Collection, 1922-1925, 1965, 1979. Mss 950, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>298</sup> Goldberg, David J. *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999: No author. "The Struggle In North Dakota". *The New Republic* March 9, 1921.p.42-45.

<sup>299</sup> Platform Adopted at Non-Partisan Convention 1936.2-4.

Legion argued that its divisive language hurt those goals. North Dakota newspapers of both the NPL and IVA published many editorials criticizing the Klan. Governor Sorlie, who despite denials was still thought to have been a Klan member, was heavily criticized by both the NPL and IVA during his tenure. The NPL blamed Governor Sorlie for mismanagement of the State owned Mill and Elevator while the IVA criticized Sorlie for continuing to operate these public enterprises.<sup>300</sup>

The editorial board of *The Grand Forks Herald*, Rev. Ambrose's hometown newspaper, attacked him stringently. "In presenting the letter{from Ambrose} to the public The Herald wishes it distinctly understood that it does so out of no sense of obligation to the writer, no regard for him, no respect for him. His behavior and his utterances for years have placed him beyond the pale of courtesy..."<sup>301</sup> These constant attacks in the leading papers of the state helped lessen the Klan leaders' influence.

In contrast to the North Dakota Klan, the Portland Klan was no threat to elites. Left-wing Populism did not completely die out. The Klan in Portland gave politicians a tool to mediate and define the middle of the social order. Most studies of the class support of the Klan come from a demonization of the middle class tradition. However the middle class has been more fluid than the other classes and it can end up supporting or undermining democracy. The Klan was politically anti-Populist but did incorporate some progressive elements if it felt that would help grow its membership. The xenophobia and racism of the Klan did not change but the economic policies of the Klan could and did.

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<sup>300</sup> No author. "The Struggle In North Dakota". *The New Republic* March 9, 1921.p.42-45.

<sup>301</sup> No author. "Ambrose And His Campaign." *Grand Forks Herald*. April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1924. P.8.



The numerous strikes that occurred in urban areas in the years immediately following WWI became a big electoral issue for the Klan. In Portland the Klan successfully got a bill through the city council which mandated public school attendance between the ages of 8-16. Fraternal organizations also often restricted themselves to the white middle and working classes.<sup>302</sup>

There was also a considerable amount of coordination among different women's organizations in which Fargo played an important role. For example, the Fargo City Federation of Women's Clubs held a convention in 1924 for all Federated Women's Clubs for the Sixth District in which members of women's clubs from Fargo had prominent speaking and organizing roles. The major topics of this convention were immigration, citizenship, and literacy. These women's clubs provided alternatives to the WKKK that were not as influenced by some men's organization.<sup>303</sup>

The NPL would revive its fortunes in North Dakota by welcoming back someone who had been forced out of the NPL because of repeated clashes with Townley. William Langer would improve the management of the organization and deemphasize state-owned enterprises in favor advocating a more activist federal government. The NPL would retake the Governorship and a US Senate seat in the late 1920s. The change in rhetoric of the NPL can be seen from its 1938 platform: "We pledge that we will put the government of the state of North Dakota and the management of its institutions on a business basis.

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<sup>302</sup> Robert D. Johnston. *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. 7, 14-24, 74-76, 224-248.

<sup>303</sup> Secretary's Minutes. Women's League of North Dakota-Fargo Branch Records, MSS 49 Box 1 Folder 3, Institute for Regional Studies, Fargo, North Dakota. P.32.

We will employ only so many people as may be necessary to carry on the business of the state in an efficient manner.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> 1938 North Dakota NPL Platform. 2.

## Conclusion

Thus the Klan's place as a factor in North Dakota lasted only a few years. The Klan was undone by contradictions and divisions present in American society during the 1920s. The Klan's constituency was could not agree on the political program to pursue. In addition, the Klan was seen as a threat by too many existing elements of civil and political society. With the Klan out of the picture, North Dakota politics once again revolved around the NPL and IVA. The NPL would go on to become the basis of the contemporary North Dakota Democratic Party, while the IVA would go on to become the basis of the contemporary North Dakota Republican Party. However, the Klan had shown that North Dakotans' allegiance to these organizations was not to be taken for granted.<sup>305</sup>

Most studies of the 1920s Klan have looked at it from a narrow perspective and did not provide the long-term context and long-term influence of this organization. The Klan was not an historical anomaly. In order to understand the evolving political structure of North Dakota, the Klan's activities in the state, ephemeral as they were, had a lasting impact. This impact can be seen in the changes that the IVA and the NPL were forced to undertake to respond to the Klan's challenge. Not only did the issues that the Klan brought up receive more attention, by the Klan's style of big rallies would also be used by the two mainstream organizations.<sup>306</sup>

The Klan was full of contradictions. The Klan tried to be both a secretive and public organization at the same time. It tried to be both open and exclusive. However,

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<sup>305</sup> Rory McVeigh. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 94, 100-102.

<sup>306</sup> Linda Grathwohl. "The North Dakota Anti-Garb Law: Constitutional Conflict and Religious Strife," *Great Plains Quarterly* 13:3 (Summer 1993)187-191.

the Klan both reflected and enhanced contradictions that were already present in American and North Dakota politics. The same things that were present in the 1920s Klan would not be present in the same organization again but would be parts of different organizations doing battle with each other. For example, the IVA adopted the Klan's reverence for free market capitalism while the NPL adopted Klan rhetoric about social benevolence. Thus while the Klan entered an area secretly, as the opening quotation from a Lisbon Newspaper demonstrates, it left a very public legacy on the political structure of America and North Dakota, long after the burning crosses had disappeared.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Rory McVeigh. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 224-227.

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