Kansas Populism

Clanton, O. Gene

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Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men.
Words fail to describe the ferment that came over Kansas in the summer of 1890. The campaign was on. As Elizabeth N. Barr has written so well, "The upheaval that took place... can hardly be diagnosed as a political campaign. It was a religious revival, a crusade, a pentecost of politics in which a tongue of flame set upon every man, and each spake as the spirit gave him utterance." The ground had been well prepared by the Alliance. Literally hundreds of lecturers throughout the state, men and women, addressed themselves to topics that agitated their audiences. But it was not just the recognized leaders who sounded the call for action; in the words of Barr, "The farmers, the country merchants, the cattle-herders, they of the long chin-whiskers, and they of the broad-brimmed hats and heavy boots, had also heard the word and could preach the gospel of Populism." Preach they did; never before had the ordinary citizen been so engrossed in political matters. From August to November, 1890, political ferment consumed the state like a prairie fire, as tens of thousands of Kansans flocked to the banner of the People's party intent on demonstrating, apparently, that the purification of politics was not an iridescent dream.¹

The discontented did not have to look far for spokesmen: numerous third-party campaigners eagerly threw themselves into the fray; and skill in political criticism and analysis, in some cases developed over a twenty-year period, immediately and logically catapulted them to positions of leadership. The Alliance movement, moreover, provided the forum whereby many new personalities burst upon the political scene.

By far the most spectacular of the relative newcomers was Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Lease.² The future stem-winding prophetess of Kansas Populism was born in 1853 in Pennsylvania, not Ireland
as she occasionally claimed in the Populist era, and her maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Clyens. She received an academy education in New York and moved to Kansas in about 1873. Settling in Neosho County, she became a teacher in the parochial school at Osage Mission. It was there she met and married a druggist named Charles Lease. Shortly after their marriage they moved to a farm in Kingman County. After a brief and unsuccessful effort at farming, they moved to Denison, Texas, and then back to Kansas again. In the meantime ten years had intervened. During this period Mrs. Lease bore four children, managed the household, and in her spare time studied law. Her study of law was done entirely at home; at times, so it was said, this required “pinning sheets of notes above her wash tub to study while she scrubbed the washings she ‘took in’ at 50¢ a day.” However it was done, she was admitted to the bar in 1885 and became one of a small number of Kansas women lawyers.

Between 1885 and 1887, Mrs. Lease began to build a reputation as a lecturer on various subjects. She gave several lectures in behalf of the Irish National League, and championed woman suffrage and temperance. Until 1888 she was a Republican. In that year, however, she left the G.O.P. to work in behalf of the newly organized Union-Labor party. She made a political debut of sorts that year also by speaking before the Union-Labor party’s state convention.

Mrs. Lease gained considerable experience from her activities in the 1888 contest and a certain amount of notoriety in the middle counties of Kansas, and from there she moved quite logically and wholeheartedly into the reform agitation that led to the creation of the Populist party. Her natural talents then catapulted her to prominence among the orators of the time.³

Mrs. Lease obviously had a truly remarkable voice, for it was widely noted. Annie Diggs, who rivaled Mrs. Lease for the affection of Kansas Populists, considered it her greatest “distinguishing gift.” William Allen White stated that he had “never heard a lovelier voice than Mrs. Lease’s.” He described it as “a golden voice—a deep, rich contralto, a singing voice that had hypnotic qualities.” Concerning her persuasive powers, White
wrote, "She put into her oratory something which the printed copies did not reveal. They were dull enough often, but she could recite the multiplication table and set a crowd hooting or hurrahing at her will." The pudgy little Republican editor supplied the following image of her appearance: "She stood nearly six feet tall, with no figure, a thick torso, and long legs. To me, she often looked like a kangaroo pyramided up from the hips to a comparatively small head. . . . She wore her hair in a Psyche knot, always neatly combed and topped by the most ungodly hats I ever saw a woman wear. She had no sex appeal—none!"

Mrs. Lease, nevertheless, had that special something that made her a magnetic orator. Early in 1891 she was interviewed by a reporter who was indeed quite fair in his treatment of that interview. In summing up, he stated that she impressed him "as one of those radical, strong, warm natures which feels and has impulses rather than thoughts. She can see a wrong and feel an injury quickly, but would be slow and far from sure in her remedies. Her mind is untrained, and while displaying plenty of a certain sort of power, is illogical, lacks sequence and scatters like a 10-gauge gun."

It would seem that a good deal of Mrs. Lease's success was due to her ability to feel and express what was agitating many people at the time. She was in this sense more a barometer of discontent than an originator and leader of reform activity. Years later, Mrs. Lease herself noted this fact but gave it a mystical twist. A reporter asked her how she became an orator; she replied: "Brother, I don't say that I ever did. I was untrained in the arts of the public debater, unschooled in the methods of the political exhorter. If I succeeded in swaying my audiences I did not deserve the credit. That belongs to a hidden power that worked within me. I was merely a voice, an instrument in the hands of a Great Force." Reform pursued in this fashion may perhaps have been effective as long as the impulse was strong and its meaning reasonably clear, but it could be disastrous in opposite circumstances. This observation may hold the key to understanding why the subsequent careers of Mrs. Lease and several other Populist leaders, in Kansas and elsewhere, were quite erratic.
For the moment, however, the Lease style of oratory was just the thing. Unquestionably, she played a mighty role in that first whirligig campaign. She moved about the state, her reputation growing by leaps and bounds, roasting the opposition in a manner that most men would dare not use for fear of physical reprisal. A measure of the effectiveness of her attack may be seen in the following remarks of a Republican editor in Wellington, Kansas, after a Lease visit: "At the opera house last Monday night, a miserable caricature upon womanhood, hideously ugly in feature and foul of tongue, made an ostensible political speech, but which consisted mainly of the rankest kind of personal abuse of people in this city, among which [sic] the editor of this paper understands that he came in for the principal share." He went on to write that he did not know exactly what were the "old hag's reasons" for the attack. "All we know about her is that she is hired to travel around the country by this great reform People's party, which seems to find a female blackguard a necessity in its business, spouting foulmouthed vulgarity at $10 a night." He was certain "the petticoated smut-mill earns her money, but few women want to make their living that way." He capped off this bit of vitriol by sardonically, "We thought at first we would write her up in something after her own style of expression, but upon reflection concluded that the space could better be devoted to something else. Her venomous tongue is the only thing marketable about the old harpy, and we suppose she is justified in selling it where it commands the highest price." Besides, "In about a month the lantern-jawed, goggle-eyed nightmare will be put out of a job, and nobody will be the worse for the mud with which she has tried to bespatter them."

A summary example of Mrs. Lease's oratory in the 1890 campaign was distilled in a speech she delivered in Kansas City late in March, 1891. Speaking with little attention to notes (her usual style), her speech, as noted by a Kansas City Star reporter, was presented in "a fragmentary, desultory way which showed it to be a crazy-patch of perhaps a dozen different speeches." Considering her importance in that campaign and the paucity of extant material, it merits special attention. She said:
Wall street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, for the people, by the people, but a government of Wall street, for Wall street, and by Wall street. The great common people of the country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East. Money rules and our Vice President is a London banker. . . . [Our legislation] is the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags. The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us. We were told two years ago in Kansas to go to work, raise a big crop—that’s all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shown, nature smiled and we raised a big crop they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn and ten-cent oats and two-cent beef and no price at all for butter and eggs; that’s what came of it. Then the politicians said we suffered from over production, when 10,000 little children . . . starve to death every year in the United States and over 100,000 shop girls in New York City are forced to sell their virtue for the bread their niggard wages deny them. . . . John J. Ingalls never smelled gunpowder in all his cowardly life. His war record is confined to court marshalling a chicken thief. . . . Kansas suffers from two great robbers; the Santa Fe railroad and the loan companies. The common people are robbed to enrich their masters. . . . There are thirty men in the United States whose aggregate wealth is over one and one-half billions of dollars. There are one-half million tramps; that is men looking for work . . . . What the Alliance wants are money, land and transportation. We want the abolition of national banks and we want the power to make loans direct from the government. We want either the amendment or the wiping out of the accursed foreclosure system in the state of Kansas. Land equal to a tract thirty miles wide and ninety miles long in Kansas has been foreclosed on and bought in by the loan companies in a year. We will stand by our homes and stay by our firesides by force, if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the shark loan companies until the government pays its debts to us. The
people are at bay; let the blood hounds of money who have
dogged them so far beware.8

"Raise less corn and more hell!" was the advice she allegedly
gave to Kansas farmers;9 it was the kind of advice they could
well understand.

Decidedly inferior to Mrs. Lease in spectacular crowd­
pleasing attributes but by far superior in intellectual attainments
and abilities was Mrs. Annie L. Diggs—or "Little Annie" as she
was affectionately identified by her fellow Populists. Almost a
decade after this campaign, a journalist gave the following de­
scription of Mrs. Diggs:

Imagine a little woman, slender, almost to fraility, barely
five feet tall and weighing only ninety-three pounds. Pic­
ture . . . a face on which shines the light of zealous en­
deavor and enthusiastic championship of a beloved cause;
rather thin lips, an intellectual forehead from which the
hair, now fairly sprinkled with gray threads, is brushed
back pompadour like; twinkling eyes which alternately
squint almost shut, then open wide as she expounds her
favorite doctrines of socialism; a trifle nervous, a soft voice
and an occasional musical little laugh as she talks, and you
have a fair photograph of [Annie Diggs] . . .10

Born in Canada in 1853 to an American mother and French
father, Annie La Porte had moved with her parents to New Jersey
at age two. She was not a college graduate (a fact that she "re­
gretted"), although she had a better than average education,
having studied with a private tutor, in the public schools, and, for
a time, in a convent school. An adventurous soul by nature, eager
to confront new challenges, the young and attractive Miss La
Porte had gone to Washington, D.C., to take up a career in jour­
nalism soon after the termination of her education. After working
at that for a time, she decided to go out West. The year was 1873;
she was nineteen; and the destination was Lawrence, Kansas. She
had arranged for a position in a Lawrence music store, where she
would demonstrate the quality of the store's pianos. Within a
short time, she met and married A. S. Diggs, an employee in the
Lawrence post office, and the Diggs family was soon enlivened by the addition of a son and two daughters.11

Much too talented and energetic a woman to be content solely with the cares of homemaker, Mrs. Diggs worked enthusiastically for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and for woman suffrage; she also became actively involved in the activities of the Unitarian Church and in the Social Science Club of Kansas and Western Missouri.12 In the early 1880s she returned to the East on several occasions to lecture before Unitarian conferences. Then came an opportunity to resume her journalistic career, in Boston, as a representative of several Kansas papers. Back East, she maintained her interest in reform; in fact, her thinking was affected significantly by the conditions she encountered there. About this experience, she later stated: "While I studied conditions in the East I became all the more convinced that the reforms which we sought were after all economical rather than moral questions. There was little hope in the East because the wage earners were afraid to say their souls were their own. But if the farmers could become interested there was, I thought, some promise of success. You cannot evict a farmer whose farm is his own. He is a sovereign."13

Returning to Lawrence just as the Farmers' Alliance was becoming a force to be reckoned with, Mrs. Diggs turned her persuasive charms on Colonel O. E. Learnard, who was editor of the Lawrence Journal, the leading Republican newspaper in the town, and won his consent for an Alliance column written by herself. The day following her first article an editorial appeared disclaiming any responsibility for the views that appeared in her column; she was allowed to continue, nevertheless, and her articles were widely copied. Her work came to the attention of Dr. Stephen McLallin and he persuaded her, without much difficulty, to join the staff of The Advocate in Topeka as associate editor in March, 1890. Together they created, in The Advocate, a newspaper which was indeed worthy of the reputation that it soon acquired as the leading reform weekly in the state. At its peak in the mid-nineties the paper would attain a circulation of around 80,000.14
In spite of her numerous public activities before 1890, Mrs. Diggs was apprehensive about campaigning actively; once enlisted in the cause, however, she proved herself a highly effective campaigner. In her speeches she drew upon her acquaintance with conditions in the East and in the West, added a large dose of factual argument, and in her reasoned, soft-spoken, and pleading oratorical style won over her audiences completely.

Mary Elizabeth Lease, Annie Diggs, and many other Kansas women added considerable color to the campaign, but all the excitement was not generated by the ladies. The party's congressional nominees managed to create considerable enthusiasm. Ben Clover led the fight in the third congressional district, encompassing nine counties in the southeastern corner of the state. Big, insipid, malleable, superficial but determined would be a fair description of the state Alliance leader. Clover used that determination to hammer home the arguments he had perfected since leaving the Republican party in 1888.

Out in the north-central portion of the state, in the fifth congressional district, John Davis drew effectively upon his twenty-year association with reform to carry the message to the people. One of Davis' favorite themes was the "new slavery." He asked: "Have we abolished slavery?" Go "Ask the factory girls, the sewing women, the coal miners, the iron workers, the farmers and all the men and women of toil who form the great public which the Vanderbilts would damn to perpetual servitude!" The ante-bellum slave system, he said, "rested on three millions of blacks, whom it pauperized, but fed and clothed." But "The masters never became millionaires. They were brutal and overbearing, but they had not the means to purchase great lines of railroads and telegraphs, and through them to levy tribute on whole states." The new slavery, he insisted, was much worse, "it rests on sixty millions of people. It makes paupers which society must feed; and it has created thousands of millionaire slave masters...."

The "new slavery" motif was prominent also in the campaign of John Grant Otis in the fourth congressional district. A native of Vermont, where he was born on a farm in 1838, Otis was
perhaps as intense and sober a personality as Kansas Populism counted among its leaders. Reform was a deadly serious matter to him, and perhaps no one took Mr. Otis quite as seriously as he did himself. He operated a dairy farm to the southeast of Topeka, but his interests and his abilities had always roamed far beyond the barnyard. His educational qualifications were considerable: he had attended Burr Seminary in Vermont, Williams College in Massachusetts, and Harvard Law School. In 1859 Otis moved to Topeka where he practiced law for about five years before giving up his practice for the dairy business. In politics, he was a Republican of “abolitionist vintage,” and during the Civil War he had organized and commanded a contingent of Negro troops in an effort to turn back the Confederate forces of General Sterling Price. In the mid-seventies, however, he had left the Republican party to work for reform as a Granger, Greenbacker, and Prohibitionist.

Early in 1890 Otis had informed Ben Clover by public letter that he earnestly believed that “When the American people shall introduce co-operation into the field of PRODUCTION as well as into the field of DISTRIBUTION, and shall organize for ‘work’ as we organize for ‘war’! then will we behold PROSPERITY such as the world has never witnessed.” A communitarian socialist of sorts by 1890, Otis was ready to apply that principle to American society. He had also played an active part within the Grange, and when the People’s-Alliance forces of the fourth congressional district looked about for a leader, Otis was ready to assume a leading role.

The John Otis message in the 1890 campaign was stated best at a Grange picnic in Olathe. Reflecting, perhaps, his familiarity with Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward, 2000-1887, he told his audience, “This great industrial movement, over our land to-day, is but another advancing step in the forward march of human society. We are emerging from an age of intense individualism, supreme selfishness, and ungodly greed to a period of co-operative effort. Competition is giving way to unite[d] action.” It seems that we are “waking out of the mesmeric sleep of a selfish age, to find ourselves closely related to the whole human family
and to discover whatever effects the interest of one, in a greater or less degree effects the interests of all." All the old issues were dead, he declared. The people were arraying themselves on one side or the other of a "portentous contest." On the one side were the forces of capital, on the other was labor. Events, he believed, indicated the struggle was about to be won by the strength of the combined forces of labor, which would herald the establishment of a society founded on "mutual co-operative effort."\(^{21}\)

Out West in the sixth congressional district, an area encompassing twenty-two counties in the northwestern corner of the state, the Alliance had nominated its district lecturer, a fifty-nine-year-old rancher and former Republican from Lincoln County named William Baker, who was destined to be the only Populist elected to three consecutive terms in congress. Although Baker had been engaged exclusively in ranching since his arrival in Kansas in 1878, his background was diverse: before coming to Kansas and following his graduation from Waynesburg College in his native state of Pennsylvania in 1856, he had worked in the public school system as teacher and principal, studied law and qualified for admission to the bar, as well as engaging in the mercantile business for sixteen years. The William Baker style of oratory was hardly spectacular but it was convincing. He spoke primarily from experience, emphasizing the particular difficulties that confronted farmers, ranchers, and small businessmen; it was the kind of approach that many people of the northwestern counties could well understand. In William Baker the Alliance had found a formidable and level-headed spokesman.\(^{22}\)

The southwest quarter of the state, thirty-six counties in all, made up what was generally referred to as the "Big Seventh." Like the sixth congressional district, it had become a hotbed of Alliance activities after 1888; political revolt was a foregone conclusion. In late July there emanated a cry of horror and anguish from Holton that the seventh district would nominate "a rabid fiat greenbacker with communistic tendencies."\(^{23}\) That political monstrosity was one Jeremiah Simpson, or the "Sockless" Jerry of political legend.
William D. Vincent
Congressman, 1897-1899

William A. Harris
Senator, 1897-1903

John W. Leedy
Governor, 1897-1899

John W. Breidenthal
State Chairman and
Bank Commissioner

Frank Doster
Chief Justice of the State
Supreme Court, 1897-1903

John M. Dunsmore
Speaker of the House, 1893
The man destined to become one of the most popular and renowned of all Populist leaders was born March 31, 1842, in the province of New Brunswick, Canada. Moving with his parents to New York at age six, he received a rather limited elementary education before he left home at fourteen to follow a seafaring life. For more than twenty years (excluding a short period during the Civil War when he had served with an Illinois regiment until incapacitated by illness) he had sailed the Great Lakes as cook, sailor, mate, and captain. Marriage in 1870, and family responsibilities that followed, greatly altered the pattern of Simpson's life, however, and he soon left the sea for the land. After a brief period on a farm in Indiana, where he was introduced to an agricultural depression and the Grange, he moved his family to Kansas, purchasing a small farm and a sawmill near Holton in Jackson County in the northeastern part of the state in 1878.

Years later, when asked by Victor Murdock what had prompted his move to the West, Simpson would answer: "The magic of a kernel, the witchcraft in a seed; the desire to put something into the ground and see it grow and reproduce its kind. That's why I came to Kansas." Undoubtedly, he also had hopes of bettering his station in life, but the going was tough. Not long after their small daughter was killed in a tragic logging accident, the Simpsons moved out to a ranch in the southwestern part of the state near Medicine Lodge. With all of their savings invested in land and cattle, Jerry Simpson soon became acquainted with all the special problems confronting those who were endeavoring to earn their living as farmers and ranchers. Somewhere along the way he left the Republican party to work actively in support of the Greenback party, and in 1886 he ran as a candidate on the Independent ticket for the legislature. Then came the severe winter of 1886-87, and the savings of a lifetime were swept away with his winterkilled herd. Already a reformer by temperament and affiliation, Jerry Simpson was all the more committed to third-party politics.

Simpson's education had not prepared him satisfactorily for writing; he was a terrible speller, and apparently he made no great effort to overcome the handicap, but he was an omnivorous reader
and his many years aboard ship had given him the opportunity to do much reading.26 William Allen White later recalled: "He was smart. He had read more widely than I, and often quoted Carlyle in our conversations, and the poets and essayists of the 17th century. His talk . . . was full of Dickensian allusions, and he persuaded me to try Thackeray, whom I had rejected until then."27 One of his favorite works was Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, and his reading of George had made him a devout Single-Taxer.28

Above all else, though, Jerry Simpson was a reformer with an unrivaled sense of humor. It was a rare quality that could be ascribed to few of the era's politicians. It affected his whole presence, adding the one simple touch that elevated him above his fellows. Hamlin Garland met him in Washington in 1891 and wrote a vivid description which is not likely to be improved upon:

> He is about fifty years of age, of slender but powerful figure, whose apparent youthfulness is heightened by the double-breasted short sack coat he wears. His hair is very black and abundant, but his close-clipped moustache is touched with gray, and he wears old-fashioned glasses, through which his eyes gleam with ever-present humor. The wrinkles about his mouth show that he faces the world smilingly. His voice is crisp and deep and pleasant to the ear. He speaks with the Western accent mainly; and when he is making a humorous point or telling a story, he drops into dialect, and speaks in a peculiar slow fashion that makes every word tell. He is full of odd turns of thought, and quaint expressions that make me think of Whitcomb Riley. He is a clear thinker, a remarkable speaker, and has a naturally philosophical mind which carries his reasoning down to the most fundamental facts of organic law and human rights.29

In 1888 Jerry Simpson had again campaigned for a seat in the legislature, running on the unsuccessful Union-Labor ticket. By this date also Simpson had been forced by economic circumstances to supplement his income as best he could. As happened with so many other third-party leaders, the Alliance movement
claimed him and he claimed it. But this time the stakes were larger; the city marshal of Medicine Lodge—for that was the position he held at the time of his nomination—was a candidate for congress.

In the campaign Jerry Simpson was subjected to extremely bitter abuse by the opposition press. He was accused of being an "infidel," an "anarchist," an "atheist," a "swindler," as well as being "unpatriotic," and having "simian" characteristics. But Jerry Simpson stood up well under the attack; in fact, with his humor, he usually managed to turn the abuse to his advantage. An example of this was seen in his speech at Harper on August 30. He began by stating: "You may be surprised to see me in the form of a man, after the descriptions of a partisan press, but I'm no zoological specimen—not even a monkey or an orangutan." There followed a great roar of laughter, and Jerry Simpson had attuned his audience for the remainder of the speech.

Just as in this Harper speech, he liked to stress that in spite of "improvements in wealth producing machinery" the farmer was worse off than twenty years before. What was the problem? The "People are without a medium—less than $10 per capita in circulation." The railroads also shared in the responsibility for the people's plight, he said. "We have all the machinery for the finest government on the face of the earth, but we are fast becoming entangled in the web of the giant spider which controls our commerce and transportation. We must own the railroads or enough of them to do the necessary carrying. 'Tis idle talk to say we have not the authority. The government is the people and we are the people." Land was another subject dear to his heart. The existing land system, he said, was "robbery." "Man must have access to the earth or he becomes a slave." And so he spoke, here and there interjecting a pertinent and usually humorous story to emphasize a point and to retain the interest of his audience.

The Republicans of the seventh district had nominated Colonel James R. Hallowell, a rather sedate gentleman who carried the appellation "Prince Hal." Much was made of the contrast between Hallowell and Simpson. "The opposing candidates are opposites in every way," said the Topeka Capital. "Colonel
Hallowell is a brilliant, experienced and competent man who would add strength to the Kansas delegation; Jerry Simpson is an ignorant, inexperienced lunkhead . . . .” Said the Capital, “Jerry would disgrace the state in congress; scarcely able to read and write, unacquainted with public affairs, without experience as a legislator, raw, boorish, fanatical with the fanaticism of sheer ignorance, he would render Kansas a laughing stock . . . .”

Republican leaders hit upon the idea of bringing the two candidates together for a debate. The obscure city marshal of Medicine Lodge would be vanquished by the polished and dignified personage of “Prince Hal.” The debate was arranged to take place toward the end of the campaign, and Hallowell, as agreed, was assigned the opening and closing speeches. Jerry Simpson later recalled the event as follows:

He was a handsome fellow, a good dresser, and his followers had dubbed him “Prince Hal.” He was a splendid talker, and long before he had finished his speech I knew he had the crowd with him and that I would have to do something drastic to jar them loose. He poked considerable fun at me. The idea of sending a man to Washington who had no public experience, other than being city marshal of Medicine Lodge, was really funny. He, Hallowell, on the other hand had had legislative experience. He knew how laws were made, etc.

When my turn came I tried to get hold of the crowd. I referred to the fact that my opponent was known as a “Prince.” Princes, I said, wear silk socks. I dont [sic] wear any. The crowd laughed at this but it was not enough and I had to try again. Now, I said, Hal tells you that he is a law maker. That he has been to Topeka and that he has made laws. I am going to show you the kind of laws that Hal makes. Reaching over on the table and picking up a book I opened it and, tapping on the page with my finger, I said, here is one of Hals [sic] laws. I find that it is a law to tax dogs, but I see that Hal proposes to charge two dollars for a bitch and only one dollar for a son of a bitch. Now the party I belong to believes in equal and exact justice to all.”
As one might imagine, "the crowd roared" and Jerry Simpson had his audience right where he wanted them. Having miscalculated in bringing Simpson and Hallowell together in the first place, the opposition press compounded the error by providing Simpson with an invaluable sobriquet—from that day forth it was "Sockless" Jerry Simpson. 35

As the story of Jerry Simpson demonstrated, the Republican organization was slightly out of touch with the people. "Abuse and vituperation" of People's party candidates—or so one Republican editor admitted—was the major strategy of the G.O.P. 36 The Topeka Capital waged a somewhat more inclusive campaign, which amounted to one part personal abuse, one part bloody shirt, and one part prohibition. J. K. Hudson of the Capital repeatedly informed his readers that the only thing at stake was prohibition—whisky was the issue. 37 Speaking of the leaders of the new party, Hudson stated: "They are unworthy of citizenship and belong in the penitentiary." 38 The October 12 edition offered this commentary: "Members of the people's party: Your man Polk appears to be an unscrupulous trickster; your man Clover an unprincipled demagogue; your man Willits a low-lived perjurer; your man Rightmire an indicted swindler, and your man Ives a creature of the rum-soaked democracy." The same issue ran an article entitled "The People's Party is the Scheme of Ex-Rebels." 39

The editor of the Capital, and Republican leaders throughout the state, were indeed shocked by the effrontery of Kansas voters who went to the polls early that November and administered a stunning blow to the Republican party. Said Hudson, "The people's party managers trusted for victory to the ignorance of the people, and to the shame of Kansas their confidence was not misplaced." 40 Republican Governor Lyman Humphrey was reelected by a small plurality, as was the rest of the ticket, with the exception of the attorney general, but the People's party elected Clover, Otis, Baker, and Simpson to congress and 96 of 125 members to the lower house of the legislature. All this in a state where the G.O.P. had grown accustomed to a comfortable majority approximating that of 1888 when the party had elected 120
of 125 members of the lower house and 39 of 40 members to the state senate for four-year terms.\textsuperscript{41}

Comparing the returns for 1888 (vote for presidential electors) and 1890 (vote for secretary of state), the vote had shifted as follows:\textsuperscript{42}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>1888</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>Loss</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>182,800</td>
<td>120,969</td>
<td>61,831</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>102,600</td>
<td>55,873</td>
<td>46,727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union-Labor</td>
<td>37,600</td>
<td>37,600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibition</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td>1,316</td>
<td>5,384</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s</td>
<td>115,933</td>
<td>115,933</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>329,700</td>
<td>294,091</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vote of 1890 showed a decline of about eleven percent since 1888, caused both by the exodus of people from the state and by the normal reduction of an off-year election. By reducing the vote of each party by that amount its natural loss may be seen; further reduction may be attributed to defection to the People's party. On that basis, then, the rank and file of the People's party included roughly 41,000 former Republicans, 35,000 former Democrats, 33,000 former Union Laborites, and 4,500 former Prohibitionists.

Populists were of course jubilant; Republicans were shaken. The latter could console themselves, however, as did J. K. Hudson of the Topeka Capital, by noting that "While the people's party controls the house by a very large majority, the senate is still republican by 38 to 1, and a governor's veto also stands in the way of radical legislation of which businessmen and capitalists might have stood in dread. There is no danger of the passage of any measures which would render capital unsafe . . . ."\textsuperscript{43} There was, on the other hand, a real possibility that Senator John J. Ingalls would be defeated for reelection by the new legislature.

The legislature that convened in January, 1891, presented an interesting contrast in membership. Compositely, the Populist representative was a forty-six-year-old farmer or stock raiser, who was most often a native of Ohio, Indiana, New York, Illinois, Virginia, or Kentucky, and had moved to Kansas in 1878. About one in nine, however, was foreign born; one in three had been
active in third-party politics for years; one in five was a college graduate. Only eleven had had previous legislative experience, while one in three had held local office only.\textsuperscript{44} The Republican representative, on the other hand, was a forty-five-year-old native of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, or New York, and a business or professional man who had moved to Kansas in 1877. One out of four had had previous legislative experience; one in five was a college graduate, and only one of the group was foreign born.\textsuperscript{45}

The holdover Republican senate offered a sharper contrast with the Populist house. The Republican senator was, compositely, forty-five years old (forty-three at the time of his election), a lawyer, a proprietor of some business, or a banker, who was a native of Ohio, Pennsylvania, or New York, and had lived in Kansas since 1868. Only four of the thirty-eight were farmers. One out of two had had previous legislative experience. Six of the group were college educated.\textsuperscript{46}

In short, the most meaningful and distinct contrast between Republicans of the house and senate and Populists of the house was not one of age or education but of occupation. To use the terminology of Lee Benson, it was a case of the agrarian-minded versus the commercial-minded. But it was not the agrarian mind of the eighteenth century; these men were not unaffected by the considerable changes that had occurred over the course of the nineteenth century, even though their place in society predisposed them to be most concerned with what might be termed agrarian-interest politics. One should note, moreover, the rather significant contrast revealed in the major leadership's middle-class orientation as compared to the legislator's farmer background.

The most pressing assignment facing these legislators once the house was organized was the selection of a United States senator. The leading candidates for the position among the Populists were John Willits and William Peffer. Between the two, Peffer was regarded as the conservative candidate. Nearly all the former third-party leaders opposed the editor of the \textit{Farmer}. As one of them later wrote, "they lacked faith in his loyalty to the principles on which the campaign had been fought, and believed that he would really act with the Republicans after going to
The People's party caucus, nevertheless, chose Peffer, and his election was assured as long as there was no bolt from the caucus decision. To prevent this occurrence, as much as anything, a meeting of all those members who had opposed Peffer (nearly all former third-party men) was held at the Copeland Hotel in Topeka. Its participants reconciled themselves to the support of Peffer rather than elect a Republican by working for his defeat.

The ranks held. Senator Ingalls was defeated, and the new party had a United States senator to go with five congressmen. The defeat of Ingalls, in a sense, marked the real close of the 1890 campaign. Senator Ingalls, never at a loss for words, described himself as "the innocent victim of a bloodless revolution—a sort of turnip crusade, as it were." What had occurred in Kansas did indeed represent a sharp turnabout; it remained to be seen just how revolutionary the results would be.