Kansas Populism

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Kansas Populists retained their enthusiasm in spite of the rather dismal showing at the polls in 1891. Plans for the February, 1892, St. Louis conference proceeded without interruption, and third-party sentiment dominated the delegations that assembled on Washington's birthday in Exposition Music Hall in St. Louis. Since the movement to create a national third party now appeared inexorable, the conference's primary attention focused on the platform. The most remarkable thing about the document it produced was its radical preamble, which bore the stamp of Ignatius Donnelly's passionate and lucid prose style. The platform itself simply restated earlier demands: only its return to the position of government ownership of railway, telegraph, and telephone systems instead of regulation, moderated after the 1889 St. Louis conference, set it apart significantly.\(^1\)

But to the delegates assembled there in Exposition Hall it was not all that matter-of-fact. The press reported that when Donnelly and Hugh Kavanaugh had finished reading the preamble and platform everyone, "as if by magic, . . . was upon his feet in an instant and thundering cheers from 10,000 throats greeted these demands as the road to liberty." "For fully ten minutes," wrote this reporter, "the cheering continued, reminding one of the lashing of the ocean against a rocky beach during a hurricane . . . ."\(^2\)

The most important work of the conference came after it was formally adjourned but with the majority of the delegates still participating. The rump action produced a committee to confer with the People's party central committee to work out plans for a
national nominating convention. July 4, 1892, and Omaha were the time and place of decision.\(^8\)

Before Omaha, however, Kansas Populists first had to deal with the important task of nominating their candidates for leadership in the state. In February, 1892, Dr. McLallin announced a significant new approach in Populist politics: whereas in 1890 he had discouraged discussion of candidates for state offices on the principle that the office should seek the man, he now was convinced he had pursued "a mistaken policy." "It will never do," he wrote, "for delegates from all parts of the state to assemble in state convention, having no knowledge of the men whose names will be presented for the several offices, and permit the slate makers to spring such names as they have selected and secure their nomination . . . ." He invited an open and thorough discussion of candidates for all positions.\(^4\) The following month W. F. Rightmire assisted this effort by taking himself out of the running by suggesting that the entire ticket of 1890 should step aside. "Each of us has had a demonstration," he said; "... we are not wanted by the people of this state for their state officers, and ... it is our duty for the good of the party to get out of the race . . . and let our party select new men . . . ."\(^5\)

McLallin's concern about the manipulation of the slate-makers was prompted no doubt by the talk of fusion with Democrats then being heard in some Populist circles. The editor of The Advocate was a staunch foe of fusion. In McLallin's mind fusion meant "a sacrifice of principle and an ultimate sacrifice of strength"; he even went so far as to declare, "Better defeat than victory at such a sacrifice."\(^6\) He was not willing to concede, however, that Populism would not continue to augment its strength without the assistance of Democrats. A number of other prominent Populist leaders were outspoken critics of fusion. In April, 1892, Mrs. Lease added her voice to the antifusion element by declaring: "there can be no fusion. We take warning by the past. The history of every fusion party has been destruction. Let us utterly and absolutely refuse to 'compromise with evil,' and go forth with the . . . hope of complete victory."\(^7\)
But the idea of some kind of cooperation with Democrats in the upcoming election could not be stilled that easily. Democrats were anxious to work out some kind of arrangement. The year 1892 was, after all, a presidential election year and the desire to remove Kansas' electoral votes from the Republican column was irresistible. A number of Populist leaders were also aware that their party, on the basis of all indications to that point, constituted a minority of the voters; victory, they believed, required the cooperation of Kansas Democrats.

As the state and district conventions drew nearer, apparently fusion exponents among the Democratic and Populist leadership did get together to devise a plan which they hoped to have the nominating conventions accept. At least this was the contention of David Overmeyer, who was a prominent Kansas Democratic leader and allegedly one of the men who participated in a conference at the Midland Hotel on June 6, 1892, in Cottonwood Falls to concert Populist-Democratic strategy. According to Overmeyer, he and some other unnamed Populist and Democratic leaders of the fourth congressional district agreed that the Democrats would, in addition to their unstated hope of removing Kansas electoral votes from the Republican column, be allowed to name congressional nominees in the first, second, and fourth districts, plus two places on the state ticket. Assuming Overmeyer's revelations were true, Populists had conceded little in the plan. The first and second congressional districts were held by Republican incumbents, and the fourth, that of John Otis, which included the Republican strongholds of Emporia and Topeka, was considered a questionable prospect—especially since Otis had made himself repugnant to Democrats by his radical views and his uncompromising antifusion position.

It was one thing to make the arrangements, quite another to convince a Populist convention to go along with the plan. The agreement apparently worked well in the fourth congressional district where it had been concocted. Democrats and Populists held their conventions in Emporia on June 14, and by arrangement both conventions nominated a Democrat named W. V. Wharton. In the first and second districts, however, the plan miscarried.
Populist leader William A. Harris, an ex-Confederate and an ex-Democrat who had many friends among Populists because of his Alliance activities, was known to be acceptable to the Democrats of the first district, but the Populist convention chose Fred J. Close, a Union veteran and a third-party man, rather than appear to be dictated to by Democrats. First district Democrats then placed their man Ed Carroll, state senator and banker from Leavenworth, in the running. In the second district, Democrats held their convention first and nominated a banker from Lawrence by the name of H. L. Moore; fusionists in both parties then urged second district Populists to indorse Moore. At the convention, antifusionists, led by John Willits, blocked the indorsement of Moore by a slight margin and nominated the Populist leader S. S. King.

By 1892 Ben Clover had adequately demonstrated his incompetence for the role of congressman; he was also embroiled in marriage difficulties by that date. The third district convention therefore passed him by to name a lawyer and former Democratic leader from Fredonia by the name of Thomas Jefferson Hudson; Democrats of the third district subsequently indorsed the candidacy of Hudson. Out in the seventh district, Populists and Democrats had no trouble getting together on the renomination of Jerry Simpson. William Baker in the sixth district, like Simpson in the seventh, had been unopposed by a Democrat in 1890, but unlike Simpson in 1892 Baker was renominated to oppose a Republican, a Democrat (stalwart variety), and a Prohibitionist. John Davis in the fifth district, who had won in 1890 against a Republican and a Democrat, was renominated to take on the same trio of opponents as Baker in the sixth. The fifth and sixth were strong Populist districts, however, and there was little anxiety among Populists about their chances there. The real concern as Populists prepared for the state convention centered on the strong Republican districts of the first and second where Populists and Democrats had failed to get together.

The issue of Democratic-Populist cooperation carried over into the People's party state convention. Wichita, inhabited by about as many Democrats as could be found in any one spot in
Kansas, was selected as the site of the affair, which in itself may well have been the reflection of a willingness to have Democratic support. On the morning of June 15, State Chairman S. W. Chase called the convention to order and introduced Mayor Carey of Wichita, who briefly extended a welcome on behalf of the city. Carey was then followed by another Wichita resident, L. D. Lewelling, who was a produce merchant and chairman of Sedgwick County's Populist organization. Because of his reputation as an eloquent speaker the local county chairman was given an opportunity to make a formal and extended speech of welcome, which would serve as a keynote address; it was an opportunity of which Lewelling was well qualified to take advantage.

Lewelling was an impressive man physically, six feet in height and weighing just over two hundred pounds, with thinning dark hair and rather heavy dark mustache, but the convention quickly became aware of an even more impressive aspect of Lewelling's presence—his ability to give the spoken word a rather dynamic delivery. In a series of short and explosive paragraphs, which was his style, he captivated those Populist delegates completely, every one of whom had been inundated by a torrent of oratory over the course of the preceding two years. "We are met today," he said, "to direct the movement of a greater and grander army than ever before went forward to victory." Be it known, "Our battle is not for supremacy, but for equality. We demand no paternalism at the hands of the government, but we do demand protection from corporate vultures and legalized beasts of prey. We ask in God's name that the government shall be so administered that the humblest citizen shall have an equal chance." How can government expect to "command the respect of the people when so large a portion are abandoned to become victims of superior cunning and insatiable greed?" The People's party, he went on to say, would right the situation, but our "contest with plutocracy will demand the most persistent effort." "It will demand the most unswerving fidelity. It will demand the most dauntless courage. It will demand the most sublime devotion of the citizens of our commonwealth."
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Populist principles, it had been said, were “but the ground work of anarchy, a sort of basement story of the edifice of destruction. But we don’t believe it.” No, “the farmers and laborers of this country are not anarchists. They are earnestly seeking to avert the experiences of the old world and to subdue the spirit of anarchy with the milk of human kindness.” But “God only knows what another generation of misrule may bring!”

Toward the end of the speech he offered some significant advice to the convention: “While we are brave let us also be wise. Let us welcome honorable allies and we shall go forth to victory.” At the finish, he was given a wildly enthusiastic burst of applause, and the local county chairman left the stage a prime prospect for the gubernatorial nomination.

Up to the time of the convention, Lewelling had not been mentioned seriously for any state office. The discussion of possible nominees for governor in the Topeka Advocate included fourteen names. William D. Vincent, S. M. Scott, John Willits, P. P. Elder, Frank Doster, and John W. Breidenthal were among the better-known men suggested. Dr. McLallin personally favored the nomination of William Vincent. Six men were actually placed in candidacy—the candidates for governor and lieutenant governor in 1890, Willits and A. C. Shinn, Vincent, Elder, John S. Doolittle of Chase County, and Lewelling. John Willits withdrew his name before the first ballot, and that vote subsequently narrowed the contest down to Vincent and Lewelling. Lewelling then won on the second ballot by a vote of 339 to 217.

According to tradition, Lewelling won solely because of his speech. Undoubtedly, his rousing address was important in bringing his name to the attention of the delegates, but this interpretation minimizes the desire to obtain the indorsement of the Democratic party. In a close contest, fusion sentiment, although in the minority, could have been a decisive factor. William Vincent was not opposed to having the support of Democrats, but he was a well-known third-party leader; Lewelling, on the other hand, had resided in the state only six years (liability or asset?) and was as new to Kansas politics as Populism, had emphasized in his welcoming address the necessity of working with “honorable allies,”
and was the resident of a city with a sizable Democratic vote. Availability, as well as oratorical abilities, must be considered in accounting for Lewelling’s nomination.

The influence of fusion leaders in the convention was not great enough to follow through on the arrangements of the Mid­land Hotel conference. John Martin (not to be confused with the former Republican governor by the same name) and David Over­meyer, the two leading Democrats in the state, were slated for the two places on the ticket. Reportedly, Overmeyer would not accept the nomination as a Populist, insisting on the Democratic label; his name was not presented to the convention. Had Overmeyer been nominated, it appears unlikely he would have received the indorsement of the convention. John Martin was far more accept­able to Populists than Overmeyer. Martin was there. He was nominated for associate justice, and he lost, receiving only 199 of 556 votes, which was an indication of the strength of the fusion block. 21

The convention chose General Percy Daniels for second place on the ticket. Stephen H. Allen of Linn County won out in the contest for associate justice. Russell S. Osborn, state Alliance lecturer from Rooks County, and W. H. Biddle, president of the state Alliance from Butler County, the party’s nominees, respectively, for secretary of state and treasurer in 1890, were renomi­nated. John T. Little, a forty-seven-year-old lawyer from Olathe and a former Greenbacker, was the choice for attorney general. 22 Forty-two-year-old Van B. Prather, one of the founders of the National Citizens’ Alliance and Industrial Union, an ex-Democrat and a college-educated, former teacher turned rancher from Cherokee County, was selected as the candidate for auditor. For superintendent of public instruction, the party selected a thirty­two-year-old educator and Populist orator from Linn County by the name of Henry Newton (“Newt”) Gaines. 23

Kansas was allowed another congressman as a result of the 1890 census to be elected at large, and the selection of the man for that position became one of the highlights of the 1892 Populist convention. William A. Harris, the party’s popular ex-Confederate and ex-Democrat from Linwood in Leavenworth County who
had lost to Fred J. Close in the first district convention, was the man to beat for the nomination. Harris had been proposed for the office through the columns of the Topeka *Advocate*, and, if anything, the Harris bandwagon had gained speed all the way to the convention. When it came time for nominations, Fred J. Close himself rose to place Harris' name before the delegates. The memories of the Civil War were still much alive for many of those assembled in the convention, and this gesture by Close, the one-armed Union veteran of Chattanooga, Missionary Ridge, and Lookout Mountain, was, however melodramatic it may seem in the telling from this point in time, deeply moving to the convention. A McPherson delegate recalled that Close rose "and pointed to his empty-sleeve, then to the American flag, and said he had sacrificed an arm for the preservation of those stars and stripes, God knew that he no longer harbored in his heart any ill feeling for the boys who wore the gray . . . ." There was no question in his mind that "Mr. Harris would shoulder his musket now as quickly as any Federal soldier to defend the stars and stripes and to keep this one united country."

As soon as Fred Close sat down, a Captain Evans, another Union veteran, was on his feet to second the nomination. Evans then appealed to the delegates to demonstrate their willingness "to shake hands across the bloody chasm." For far too long, he said, "have evil designing men stood between the blue and the gray. We have been taught to look through distorted mediums, held up by those men for the sole purpose of dividing public opinion, that they might, like Judas, satisfy their thirst for gold."

Mixed metaphor notwithstanding, in response to a request by Evans that all ex-Union soldiers stand to second Colonel Harris' nomination, several hundred "gray haired veterans" were said to have been counted. Needless to say, William Harris was the party's candidate for congressman-at-large, and more than a few delegates were rather naively convinced, as was the McPherson man, "that on the night of June 16, the great rebellion closed . . . . The war started in Kansas in '56 and ended in the People's party convention at Wichita in '92. The bloody shirt was buried there, never to be resurrected again by men who are lovers of liberty."
In its platform, the state convention reaffirmed the 1892 St. Louis "preamble and platform" and made a point of stressing that they indorsed "every sentence and line of the same ...." The platform singled out a number of issues, however, which were of special interest to the convention. Included were resolutions in support of government-owned telephone and telegraph lines, a free mail delivery system, and the direct election of United States senators. A number of other resolutions applauded the work of the Populist house and condemned the Republican senate. It concluded with the statement that even though the Populist party was composed mainly of farmers "we sympathize with all classes of laborers and will aid them in their contest for a better system and a more equitable division of the profits of their toil, and we invite their cooperation in our warfare against a common enemy."26

The convention took one other action, quite unheralded at the time but of great consequence for the party; it elected John W. Breidenthal state chairman. Breidenthal was a thirty-five-year-old organizational genius of sorts. Although young of age and youthful in appearance, his leadership credentials were impressive. The new chairman was a native of Minnesota who had removed to Kansas in 1877 from Indiana, then in his twentieth year. After residing on a farm in Labette County for several years, he moved to Chetopa (Labette County) to work as a clerk in a real estate office. By 1882 he was a partner in the business; by 1884 the business had grown with Breidenthal's assistance into a much more ambitious venture organized as the Neosho Valley Investment Company. With Breidenthal as secretary, this company then grew to comprise "nearly four hundred companies" in Kansas, but only seven of these were said to have survived the financial difficulties of the late 1880s, one of the seven being the original company. Breidenthal was bold, daring, occasionally reckless in his ventures; in 1890, for example, he became involved as secretary and chief promoter of an unsuccessful cooperative colonization project at Topolobampo, Mexico.27

Politically, Breidenthal was just as unconventional. He had been a third-party man from the time he was old enough to shave, if not earlier. In 1876, at age nineteen, he had attended the Green-
back convention that had nominated Peter Cooper for president and had campaigned actively in behalf of the ticket in Indiana. His politics had not changed in Kansas, nor had his interest in economic questions. In 1884—he was then twenty-seven—Breidenthal had been the Greenback-Labor party's candidate for lieutenant governor. With the demise of the Greenback party, Breidenthal had then become one of the principal organizers of the Union-Labor party and had served as its state chairman until it gave way to the People's party.28

The new chairman assumed his duties at a crucial point, for Republicans were more determined than ever to vanquish the Populist enemy. The Republican convention that met toward the end of June, however, was badly divided on the best approach to Populist defeat. On the one hand were the conservative regulars led by Cy Leland and Sol Miller who favored E. N. Morrill, a banker, and on the other the radical or reform faction led by George L. Douglass and other young Republicans who supported A. W. "Farmer" Smith.29 The we're-as-radical-as-you approach to defeating Populists controlled the convention. Smith was nominated, and the convention adopted a platform that was every bit as radical as that adopted at Wichita. The Republican problem was that of convincing the voters that their rather sudden conversion to reform was any more than political subterfuge.30

The radical stand of Republicans, especially their indorsement of a plank favoring the submission of a woman-suffrage amendment, made the way of fusion easy. Democrats met in convention, and John Martin, despite the aborted Midland Hotel deal, made a speech asking that the party indorse the Wichita nominees man for man; the convention did just that, and one large obstacle in the road to Populist victory was cleared away.31

Only the existence of Democratic and Populist candidates in both the first and second congressional districts prevented there being only one major opponent for the Republican nominee in each contest.32 The adroit management of John Breidenthal was soon at work to solve that problem. In a letter dated July 5, 1892, S. S. King notified Breidenthal that he was willing to withdraw in favor of the Democratic candidate, H. L. Moore. Then by letter
to the second district chairman on August 15, King withdrew from the race officially; as he put it, in order to "greatly strengthen our ticket all over the state . . . ." Later, only a few days before the election, Ed Carroll, the Democrat, withdrew in favor of Fred Close in the first district to make the united front complete. If all went well, Populists were now in a position to poll the bigger part of the 55,000 votes that had gone to the Democratic party in 1890.

Having assured themselves of "honorable allies," Kansas Populists set out for Omaha on the first day in July to help select their party’s national ticket. The convention opened on Saturday, July 2. Between thirteen and fourteen hundred accredited delegates, and many more observers, were on hand to see that the great affair would have few dull moments. With a flair of dramatics, it was arranged so that the platform and the nominations would be consummated on the third day—Independence Day. The platform was no great problem: the finished product was an extraordinary document as national party platforms had gone, but it was not a new statement by any means; it was the St. Louis demands of the preceding February with only slight alterations. The Omaha platform, however, was the official statement and rallying cry of a party waging its first national campaign, and as such it assumed immediately a far more reverential aura than all the reform statements which had preceded it.

The selection of candidates was a more trying assignment. Who in the movement had the national stature desirable in presidential candidates? Colonel L. L. Polk, the main southern contender, had died a few months earlier; Senator Leland Stanford of California was mentioned but rejected since he was unacceptable even to fellow Californians in the party. Ignatius Donnelly was a willing prospect, but he was too radical, too controversial, and too little known to inspire any general move in his direction. There was General James B. Weaver of Iowa, of course, but the Greenback party’s presidential candidate of 1880 had his liabilities. Too conservative for some and too closely associated with third-party politics for others, the general nevertheless was willing, and he
did have as great a claim to national stature as could be found in the Populist camp.

But how about going outside the party for a candidate? It was rumored that Judge Walter Q. Gresham was willing to accept the nomination. The Indiana Republican was a tried and tested national leader, and the judge was at the moment on the outs with his party over its tariff policy. The Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa delegations were determined to have the judge, and they dispatched a committee to get his consent for the use of his name. So determined were they that one of the Indiana delegates caused quite a stir on the third day of the convention by reading a telegram which said: “Have just seen Gresham. If unanimously nominated he will accept.” The message was greeted with applause, and in the heat of the moment it appeared that the convention might be stampeded into nominating a man who, in addition to being a Republican, might not even want the nomination. Several leaders immediately saw through the whole thing and gained the floor in an attempt to take the steam out of the demonstration, but with little success. At this critical moment, Mrs. Lease obtained the floor. Her presence was enough to command the attention of the delegates where others had failed. Then in her “most sepulchral tone,” she announced that “she had a message in her hand which read that if unanimously tendered Benjamin Harrison would accept the nomination.” This facetious announcement had the desired effect, and the Gresham boom was punctured with the adjournment that followed. It was subsequently learned that the judge had refused the use of his name “unconditionally.”

In the aftermath, there was little else the convention could do but nominate General Weaver. Second place on the ticket went to General James G. Field of Virginia. Although the ticket was not the kind to generate great enthusiasm, the delegates may have derived some satisfaction from their obvious ridicule of the bloody shirt by having nominated an ex-Union general and an ex-Confederate general on the same ticket.

On the national level the new party may have suffered from disorganization, stemming mainly from the very fact of its newness, but in Kansas the activities of the party were now as coordi-
nated as they had ever been. Soon after the Omaha convention, John Breidenthal established a lecture bureau under his direction so that all speaking in the campaign could be coordinated by the central committee, and hundreds of Populist speakers were readily available to blanket the state in that crucial campaign.40

Quite unintentionally it seems, the campaign got a premature start on July 30. Lewelling attended an Alliance picnic in Windom (McPherson County, Kansas) on that date which was supposed to be a nonpartisan affair. But Windom was the home of the Republican nominee, A. W. Smith. Naturally, the appearance of the two candidates at the picnic immediately converted the gathering into a partisan rally. Both men delivered speeches. An observer reported, "Mr. Lewelling presented in a forcible manner the trend of the present public policy of the Republican party, and the inevitable ruin that is daily entailed thereby upon the country." The Populist candidate was followed by A. W. Smith who praised "the thrift" of Kansas farmers which had in two decades "transformed a desert into a blooming garden," and he deprecated "the fact that there should be, in view of the blessings that we do enjoy, ... people that will belittle the grandeur of our achievements, and raise the wail of a calamity howl."41 The reporter was probably a Populist but the report was accurate enough, for it was the Republicans and not the Populists who invoked the "myth of the garden." The report contained, as well, what Republicans made the major issue of the campaign—the "calamity howl."

At about the same time, John Martin was under heavy attack for having "turned the Democratic party over to the calamity howlers." The chiding of a Republican friend prompted Martin to respond in an open letter by writing: "These 'calamity howlers' to whom you refer are the farmers, the laborers and the general workmen of the country . . . ." It was they who produced "the products and commodities that you and I and other non-producers have no lot or part in contributing to the world's mass of wealth." The intimation that the Populists, "100,000 or 125,000 citizens of Kansas," were "engaged in a conspiracy against the honor, the credit and the welfare of the state" was in Martin's mind an "insult" to any "intelligent man."42
Moderation was in short supply. Republicans and Populists were inclined to think the worst of their opponents, and both sides went all out in their political battle. Populists hammered away at the system; Republicans, generally, ridiculed Populist leaders. The G.O.P.'s defenders did not allow even trivial opportunities for ridicule to escape. It began when Sol Miller's newspaper and other Republican sheets supplied their own name for the initials of Lewelling's name—L. D. Lewelling became "Lorraine D. Lewelling." Sol Miller, for one, refused to use the name Populist, used the name People's party as little as possible, but preferred the name "Calamity party." 

J. K. Hudson of the Topeka Capital told his readers that there were two things at stake in the election (the crisis was obviously mounting, for Hudson had argued that there was only one thing at stake two years earlier—"whisky"). First of all, wrote Hudson, "Let the majority of the people of Kansas vote for the party of irredeemable money and paternalistic hobbies of the most preposterous stamp and we cannot blame the rest of the country for distrusting us in the future as a community of wild-eyed socialists and cranks. Kansas can ill-afford to bear such a reputation." Without question, "It is better to get the credit of having obliterated this party of humbug and political insanity by a majority that will establish the good name of the state and assure all observers that fiat and communism were a mere ephemeral fad in Kansas...." The second thing at stake was "property," said Hudson. "Give them the power, encourage them with a sense that the people are with them, and it will be a long farewell to the hope of business revival and property improvement in Kansas." 

In this atmosphere it was little wonder the sudden conversion of Republicans to radical reform was not taken seriously; or that Populist candidates were rotten-egged, and children of Republican parents were heard chanting little rhymes like: "Rats, rats, and pickled cats, / Are good enough for Pops and Democrats." Nor was it surprising that an attempt to discredit State Chairman Breidenthal resulted in his arrest midway through the campaign for allegedly having violated the state banking laws in connection with his Topolobampo project. Small wonder, too,
that the slaughter of the Dalton boys at Coffeyville that October would be injected into the contest when Jerry Simpson was quoted as saying that "the Dalton boys were no worse than the national bankers and thousands of others in Kansas who are engaged in pretended lawful pursuits, while they are really robbing the people." Or, for that matter, it was no less unexpected that the Topeka Capital would refer to Congressman Simpson as a "Freak," "Buffoon," "Anarchist," "the Political Mountebank," "Sockless monstrosity," and the "Clown of Kansas Politics."

As the campaign came to a close the same paper stated rather succinctly what the election signified from the Republican standpoint. Said Hudson, the issue facing Kansans was "whether to vote that the state has been a failure, that we can't pay our debts out of our own resources, that Uncle Sam must come to our assistance and satisfy our creditors, that our business is not a success and we are a state of bankrupts; or to vote that Kansas is the most beautiful, the most progressive, the most prosperous and the most promising state between the Allegheny mountains and the Pacific ocean." Populists of course looked upon the contest a bit differently, and apparently, with Democratic support, so did a majority of the voters.

The day after the election the Topeka Capital announced in bold type, "KANSAS REDEEMED," "Jerry Simpson Slaughtered by the Voters"; the Topeka Advocate announced in comparable fashion, "CALAMITY OVERTAKES THE APOSTLES OF PLUTOCRACY." Both sides were a little premature in their rejoicing. The victory belonged to Populists and their Democratic allies but it was not as complete as was first thought. The state's electoral votes went to Weaver by a margin of 5,900 votes. Lewelling and the entire Populist state ticket was elected. Harris, Simpson, Davis, Baker, Hudson, and the Democrat Moore were elected to congress by a combined Democratic-Populist vote—six of eight congressional seats, then, were denied Republicans. The picture was not quite so bright on further analysis. The Republican vote for governor since 1890 was revealed to have increased 43,000, going from 115,000 to 158,000. The combined vote of Democrats and Populists, on the other hand, was shown to have
decreased from 178,000 to 163,000, which left Lewelling with a
4,432 vote (1.3 percent) margin of victory. The fourth district
congressional race, which Otis had carried in 1890 by a 5,000 vote
(11.2 percent) margin, was lost by the Democrat Wharton to
Charles Curtis by almost 3,000 votes (5.6 percent), and Populist
margins of victory in the third, fifth, sixth, and seventh were all
smaller than they had been in 1890. In the first and second dis­
tricts, the Democratic-Populist vote had dropped considerably. In
1890 the combined votes of separate Democratic and Populist
tickets had exceeded the Republican vote by 5,000 to 6,000 votes in
each district, but in 1892 Fred J. Close lost to the incumbent Case
Broderick in the first and Moore won by a mere 83 votes in the
second.54

Worse yet for Populists, it was uncertain whether they had
 gained control of the legislature. The senate was safely in the
hands of the party with twenty-four Populists, fifteen Republicans,
and one Democrat having been elected to the upper house, but the
situation in the lower house was badly confused. On the face of
the returns certified by the Republican-dominated state board of
canvassers, Republicans had elected sixty-five members, Populists
fifty-eight, and Democrats two.55 A number of irregularities had
occurred, however, and both sides were crying “steal.” And as
Kansas awaited the installation of the Lewelling administration it
appeared that an explosive situation was building.