Kansas Populism

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the eve of the nominating conventions of 1894, it was quite obvious the Lewelling administration was in trouble. Most Populists and quite a few Democrats were in no mood to listen to talk of a Democratic-Populist coalition, an end toward which Republican party managers had been working since the humiliating defeat at the hands of the coalition of 1892. Regulars were back in command of the G.O.P. again, and Republican strategy was being molded, rather adroitly, to accomplish one supreme objective—Populist defeat. As one Republican regular put it, "In Kansas politics I am a firm believer in the doctrine of the survival of the fittest." There was of course no question in his mind which party was fit and which was unfit; nor was there any question that the concept of survival included a large dose of political cunning. With the wealthy Troy merchant and wily political boss Cy Leland calling the shots again, Republicans were assured an ample supply of the latter.

By the time the Republican state convention assembled in Topeka the first week in June, the party's conservative wing had the upper hand. This faction, with Leland's careful direction, then proceeded to draw up a platform and to nominate a slate of candidates which not only suited their conservative temper but which also was designed so as not to assist in patching up the rift between Populists and Democrats. The latter maneuver was achieved by avoiding statements on woman suffrage and prohibition enforcement, despite a rather vocal demand from within and without the convention that the party declare itself on those two issues as it had done in 1892. The gubernatorial nomination went to Leland's man, Edmund Morrill, a banker and a former congressman from Hiawatha.
Republicans had done all they could do to divide the opposition, but the final decision on whether Populists and Democrats would make a joint effort depended on the actions of the Populist convention which was to follow. If the convention could avoid committing itself on the proposed woman-suffrage amendment, as Governor Lewelling and State Chairman Breidenthal apparently hoped, there was still a chance that the Democrats, for whom there was no more abhorrent reform, would indorse the Populist ticket. But Populist conventions were noted for making their own decisions.

On June 12 the Populist state convention was called to order in the same hall the Republicans had used less than a week before. Close to three thousand enthusiastic delegates and observers were on hand. According to one sympathetic observer, the contrast between the delegates of the two conventions was most striking. Said he, "untanned faces, spotless shirt fronts, and new clothes" had been "the rule in the Republican convention"; most of the Populist delegates had the mark of "the sturdy sons of toil" upon them. To this observer there was an unmistakable message in this contrast. He was sure this great representation of the state's working classes, "the very men from whom in years gone by the Republicans used to roll up their overwhelming majorities," met, as they were, to oppose that "once grand old party," would be "a lesson to this fanatical, hidebound Republican town of Topeka ...."

The Populist organization had not been content to rely on the subjective powers of observation to convey their sentiments. The hall was decorated in gala colors. Flowers and bunting were used liberally throughout. The most striking decor, however, adorned the south wall of the hall. Under a large banner which read "REPUBLICAN REDEEMERS" (the theme of the Republican state convention and campaign), a number of placards were on display which expressed quite aptly the Populist feeling about the would-be redeemers. Former Republican Governor George T. Anthony appeared in one which pictured him getting away with a sack of money from a safe designated as the "New York school fund." Edmund Morrill was portrayed over the words
"Three per cent. a month redeemer." J. K. Hudson, editor of the Topeka Capital, champion of prohibition, and arch foe of the Populists, was caricatured in one showing him drinking a bottle of beer. Another placard pictured a bloody shirt, and under it were the words: "This is a real live issue, and we mean what we say." Beneath a cartoon of John J. Ingalls, Populists had applied the words of Kansas poet Eugene Ware: "Up was he stuck, but in the upness of his stuckitude he fell."

Of the several banners which also appeared on that south wall, two in particular caught the eye. One read "DEATH TO POPULISM," with the words "Republican State Convention, June 6, '94" attached. Directly beneath this hung another reading: "DEATH TO POPULISM MEANS DEATH TO THE COMMON PEOPLE."

If the banners and placards were there to evoke enthusiasm, they were not needed. The delegates and observers all knew that the convention would have to deal with the issue of the woman-suffrage amendment placed on the ballot by the 1893 legislature, and, whether they opposed or favored the commitment of that Populist convention to woman suffrage, both sides were convinced that the decision was critical for the future of the party. No simple explanation would suffice to explain why the convention was split on the issue. Among the opponents of a supporting resolution were some who opposed woman suffrage on principle and others who believed an indorsement unnecessary and unwise, who may or may not have supported the right of women to vote, but who were certain an indorsement would cost the party badly needed Democratic support. The motives of those who favored a supporting resolution were more complex. For extreme antifusionists the woman-suffrage issue had become a test of the party's purity. Prohibition was involved as well. It was a commonly shared opinion that if women were given the vote the state's prohibitory amendment would be that much safer from repeal. For those Populists then who were also prohibitionists and antifusionists, woman suffrage was a means of striking a double blow at the Democratic party, to which of course both prohibition and woman suffrage were anathema. There were many Populists, however,
who nevertheless supported woman suffrage on principle and wanted the convention to indorse the pending amendment.

Even before the convention opened, both sides had settled on a man for temporary chairman—W. F. "Ironjaw" Brown of Kingman for the anti's and Ben S. Henderson of Winfield for the pro's. In that first test of strength, Henderson was the choice of the convention for temporary chairman, and in his acceptance speech the Cowley County lawyer wasted no time in getting to the crucial issue. He told the convention he was proud to have been selected to preside over a party that had as "its mission the destruction of both the Republican and Democratic parties, both of which were responsible for the legislation that had doubled the mortgage indebtedness of the United States, and cut the price of wheat down from two dollars to fifty cents a bushel [a voice in the crowd rang out: 'thirty-five cents a bushel']," and for the legislation that "had made four million . . . tramps." He then told the convention that it must not emulate the cowardice of the Republican convention on the issue of woman suffrage. "The women," he said, "were in this convention, just as they were in that, asking for nothing but their God-given right, and this Populist convention ought to give it to them." This statement evoked a loud cheer, especially from the galleries where the Equal Suffrage Association was present in force. 6

The rest of the morning passed rather quickly and without incident. When it came time to close for the noon meal, Henderson requested that the convention stand while a minister from Pawnee County offered a prayer. That prayer became one of the highlights of the morning session. The Populist reporter representing the Ottawa Journal and Triumph recorded that the

The prayer was of rather a small-sized kind, injected into a large-sized political speech. It was full of timely and telling hits, and pleased the audience immensely. When the reverend gentleman, after praying for Governor Lewelling, the state administration, and the success of the people's cause, got to that point where he called upon "God to bless the President of these United States—after he has repented of his sins," the audience, running over before, could contain
itself no longer, but broke loose in a storm of appreciative laughter and applause. 7

The reporter could have added that the minister also made a direct plea for action in support of woman suffrage.

By afternoon the crowded hall grew quite warm. The delegates and observers, many in shirt sleeves by this time, sat and sweltered and fanned themselves while listening to speeches and awaiting anxiously the reports of the various committees. Most of the time on the floor during the afternoon was consumed by speeches for and against a formal indorsement of the woman-suffrage amendment. Woman-suffrage interests were well represented in the personages of Mrs. Carrie Lane Chapman Catt, Miss Susan B. Anthony, Reverend Anna Shaw, and Frank Doster. These speeches, plus the selection of the officers of the ill-fated Dunsmore house as the convention's permanent officers, rounded out quite an eventful first day's activity.

Chairman John Dunsmore's call to order the next morning, however, signaled the beginning of a session that made pale in comparison the events of the previous day. The majority report of the resolutions committee was presented to the convention minus a resolution in support of the woman-suffrage amendment. The convention was clearly agitated by this development. At this tense moment E. R. Ridgely of Crawford County was presented to the convention in order to make a minority report on resolutions. With this announcement the hall fairly exploded with applause and cheering. Women in the audience were especially demonstrative, as it was now obvious that this Populist convention was not about to be gagged as had been the Republican convention. 8

In his remarks before reading the minority report, Ridgely announced with obvious satisfaction that the antisuffrage men on the committee had served notice that they would file a minority report if the suffrage plank was inserted; consequently, when the suffrage advocates found themselves in the minority they felt no qualms about pursuing the same course. Great applause accompanied this announcement. It was plain to everyone now that this
divisive issue would have to be fought out on the floor of the convention. The committee had divided fourteen to eight on the question. Peter P. Elder and W. L. Brown were the only members on the committee who had distinguished themselves as leaders of state Populism up to that point, and they were the leading opponents of the plank. This by no means, however, should be taken as an indication of the position of the major leadership on this question; loyalties were clearly divided, although the party organization, as it had managed to represent itself on the resolutions committee, preferred to avoid the issue.\(^9\) Ridgely’s appearance on the stage smashed that preference.

Ridgely stated the minority position rather succinctly: “Whereas, The People’s party came into existence and won its glorious victories on the fundamental principle of equal rights to all and special privileges to none: therefore, be it Resolved, That we favor the pending constitutional amendment.” Pandemonium then broke loose in the hall. Delegates were on their feet in an instant, standing on chairs, yelling, seeking recognition from Chairman Dunsmore. The chairman at the same time began pounding and screaming for order, which, as one might expect, seemed a long time in coming. As soon as a semblance of order had been restored to the hall, the chairman was deluged with motions and amendments on the critical issue. Finally, W. H. Wilson, delegate from Miami County, obtained the floor and presented the following compromise amendment: “Whereas, The initiative and referendum is one of the cardinal principles of the Populist party, we indorse the action of the people’s legislature of 1893 in submitting the question of female suffrage to the voters of the state of Kansas.” W. L. Brown was then recognized, and he stated that the woman suffragists who had appeared before the committee would accept nothing but an unequivocal indorsement of the pending amendment. Brown turned to Annie Diggs who was on the stage with him at the time and asked that she verify his statement. Mrs. Diggs, who since the disaffection of Mary Elizabeth Lease wore undisputedly the laurels of the most outstanding woman in Populist ranks, declined to do so but stated emphatically that her co-workers in the cause of woman suffrage
“did not like the milk and water amendment” presented by delegate Wilson.10

An animated discussion then ensued, initiated by Wilson in behalf of his compromise proposal. He was followed by another delegate, advocating the defeat of the Wilson amendment and an immediate vote on the minority report. Then Ben Henderson, the convention’s temporary chairman, obtained the floor and spoke quite strongly in opposition to the compromise measure. He told the convention he regarded the Wilson amendment as a “subterfuge.” As for him, he wanted “the noble men of the People’s party to declare where they stood upon the question.” His next statement revealed the prohibitionist-antifusionist side of the woman-suffrage question: “God Almighty hated a coward,” he said. The People’s party was “not making platforms for Republicans or Democrats or whiskyites.” The party “stood for right and law, and the opponents of suffrage for the beer classes.”

The argument that the opponents of the suffrage plank were either “whiskyites” or were afraid to alienate the “beer classes” had been circulating freely about the convention; Henderson’s statement therefore stirred W. J. Costigan from Franklin County to the attack. After obtaining the floor this opponent of the suffrage plank declared:

I have been in this reform fight for sixteen years, and the charge of cowardice does not apply. I was in it when it was so small and weak that the gentleman who has just spoken went back on us, after being state secretary of the party, and fought us from the ranks of the Republican party. The charge of cowardice comes with poor grace from him. I received my education at the knee of a Christian mother, who taught me to hate whisky, and I protest against being called a whiskyite by a graduate of the Keeley cure.

A mixed response of cheers, hisses, and cries of “Shame!” “Shame!” prevented Costigan from going any further. Henderson then regained the floor on a point of personal privilege and stated: “I have listened with considerable contempt to the sarcastic words of the gentleman who preceded me. I will admit to you that I
have been one of those unfortunates, and I stand here now and say . . . , God being my judge, I propose to stand for the women.”

It now seemed that everyone had something to say on the matter. Hence it was suggested that speakers be limited to five minutes with debate coming to a close at the noon hour. The last ten minutes, it was proposed, would be reserved for Annie Diggs and P. P. Elder to make closing statements for their particular sides.

This agreed, the debate continued in earnest. There is no count of how many delegates spoke during this period. Undoubtedly more wanted to speak than did. Most used less than the allotted five minutes. Speakers followed each other in rapid succession and engaged in a heated dialogue, the arguments of one speaker generally rousing another in response. T. J. Thompson from Miami County pleaded the case of the compromise measure and warned, without specifying how, that the suffrage plank was “detrimental to the party and to the cause of women.” G. E. Miller, delegate from Republic County, declared that “cowardice was always contemptible” and admonished the convention to “stand for what they believed to be right, and cease following the will-o’-the-wisp-policy.” A Negro delegate from Pottawatomie County, identified only as Beck, declared that “the Republican party had been buried by isms,” and in his opinion “it was very foolish for the Populist party to get down on all fours and play horse and allow these isms to be unloaded upon it.” He then spoke out in no uncertain terms in opposition to woman suffrage. His effort accentuated feeling on the issue.

At this point, Frank Doster, who was a leading proponent of woman suffrage, managed to gain recognition from the chair. He stated with as much feeling as he could muster that

The Populist party is a party of isms, and without desiring to say anything which will bring back unpleasant memories to the gentleman who has just sat down, I will remind him that if it had not been a party of isms, he would have not had a chance to speak before this convention.
What does this substitute for all these other resolutions signify? Does it signify that the Populist party is about to take any progressive step? I stand against regarding this as a question of expediency, and ask that the Populist party take a step forward and adopt the minority report.

John Otis, elected to congress in 1890 but sacrificed in 1892 for the fusion nominee in the fourth district, obtained the floor several times during the debate to speak for the suffrage plank; he did so again a short time after Doster's effort. Otis was a prohibitionist and an extreme antifusionist—he was in fact president of the recently organized "Anti-Fusion People's Party League of Kansas," which featured Cyrus Corning as secretary. This time up, Otis stated that the issue was simply a question of whether "the people of the People's party control its policy or the politicians?" As he saw it, the opponents of the plank "simply wanted to bid for the ignorant foreign vote, the Democratic vote, and the whisky vote." Beck from Pottawatomie then rose to a point of order and requested that Otis be silenced. Said Beck, "He has been talking all morning. He has talked himself to death, and now he is talking the party to death."

Mrs. Eliza Hudson, the only woman delegate in the convention, gained the floor a short time later, spoke a full five minutes in support of the plank, and then sat down dejectedly when time was called. A delegate from Marshall County, Andrew Shearer by name, identified himself as a Scotchman and as a spokesman for the foreign-born. He stated that those who had arrived more recently on American shores were "catching on to the spirit of American institutions as rapidly as possible." Conceding that the adjustment was difficult, Shearer indorsed the suffrage plank, advising: "Don't turn back for us!"

Of the many speeches in opposition, that of an unidentified farmer must have struck a responsive chord. Speaking in a manner that communicated at once the honesty and conviction of his position, he informed the convention, the Ottawa Journal and Triumph reported,
that it was not so much a question with him or his wife whether she should have the right to vote, but the question was whether they would be able to retain their home. The People’s party had been organized and educated on the line of the paramount importance of the financial question, and he believed that it was only by a reformation of this system that the people could find relief. He thought it unwise to incorporate planks in the platform to which a large number of the delegates were opposed . . . .

Amidst all these lively happenings, the time had slipped away almost unnoticed. Shortly before the noon hour Chairman Dunsmore brought the floor debate to a close and called Annie Diggs and Peter Elder to the rostrum for their closing statements.

It was no accident, of course, that Mrs. Diggs and P. P. Elder were selected to represent each side in the finale; they had clashed three years before when the same question was before the 1891 house, and if the passage of the woman-suffrage bill by that Populist house was any indication, Mrs. Diggs had won the first encounter.

Mrs. Diggs spoke first. Woman-suffrage proponents were indeed fortunate to have “Little Annie” on their side. Now forty-one and as attractive as ever, no other woman within Populist ranks could have won as readily as she an instant hearing for the cause of woman suffrage. Since that first rough-and-tumble Populist campaign of 1890, through thick and thin she had maintained her equilibrium, demonstrating by word of mouth and by pen that she was eminently qualified to play a leading role in the male world of politics. All this she had done without destroying her image of femininity—no small accomplishment in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Mrs. Diggs first tried to allay the suspicion entertained by some that the women who had appeared before the convention in behalf of the plank were enemies of the party. “Does any man here doubt my loyalty to the Populist party?” she asked. “I stand here to say that these women are simply here in the interest of suffrage, as I was on the Republican platform in the interest of suffrage.” She then stressed that the issue being debated was of vital
concern to men as well as women. "It is to your interests," she said, "to get this amendment in your state constitution, and I believe that the vast majority of this convention means to stand by their own Populist women and give us their votes for the amendment." This statement brought cheers from the audience. She then pointed out that it would be broadcast that the Populists were going to vote for the amendment, so it would be used against them just as strongly whether in or out of their platform.

"The Republicans met in convention the other day," she continued. "They had not the courage to declare in the presence of the people that they were going to vote for the amendment, but their candidates promised the women, on the sly, that they would vote for it on the sly." She then assured the delegates that the amendment would be approved and asked:

Don't you want to have the leverage of having the gratitude of the women of this state? Don't you want to be able to say, to the Populist party belongs the honor of not only submitting this amendment, but also of supporting it at the polls? If you take a noble, manly and courageous stand, as I am sure you will, then every cowardly Republican candidate will be forced to go upon the rostrum and plead the record of his party in its defense. My good friends, the thing for you to do now, from a People's party standpoint, is to have the courage of your convictions.

She had used her five minutes, and her talk ended with the great applause of the convention resounding about the hall.

The mood of the convention being what it was, Peter Elder had an unenviable assignment ahead of him as he rose to address the delegates. Elder's long experience in public life, his enduring commitment in opposition to woman suffrage, should have enabled him to present an effective case against the minority report. But the situation was delicate, and the Ottawa Journal and Triumph reporter recorded that the old reform campaigner "proved himself wholly inadequate" to deal with the arguments of Mrs. Diggs. In the words of that reporter, "his rambling speech was no match for her downright reasoning." Elder simply took second place to Mrs. Diggs when it came to extemporaneous speaking.
The essence of his plea came toward the end of his talk. With much feeling, he remarked: "In the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress, we have been struggling for fifteen years against Republicanism. Don't, for God's sake, ladies, don't drag us down this time so we cannot whip them. You will not gain anything. This question has been submitted as an independent proposition." He then assumed a more confidential tone of voice and stated: "I confess to you, gentlemen of the convention, that I did not dare to have a vote taken in the presence of the ladies in the committee room." This remark prompted some loud jeers. As the noises began to subside, Chairman Dunsmore signaled to Elder that his time was up. Elder turned and remarked: "My God, is my time up?" Granted more time to make a brief closing remark, Elder then made one very large faux pas. "I want to say just one word," he remarked. "Now I say let us have a clean repub—" At this point the convention broke loose in a demonstration of continuous and uncontrollable cheering. In the meantime Elder returned to his seat; perhaps, as the reporter of the Ottawa Journal and Triumph observed, to "meditate upon the mutability of human affairs." He made no effort to clarify the remark that had ended his talk.

What followed was anticlimax. The compromise amendment was defeated by a decisive 528 to 82 vote. The vote was then taken on the minority report. The ayes and nays remained close throughout most of the count. At the end, the vote stood 337 for and 269 against, and John Breidenthal's announcement that the minority report had carried touched off the most enthusiastic demonstration of the convention.

To whom did the victory belong? To a small segment of extreme antifusionists like Corning, Henderson, Otis, and Lease who were psychoneurotically prohibitionist, at times nativistic, and above all anti-Democratic? Or did it belong to that greater number who supported woman suffrage simply because it was a progressive measure, without relating it to any particular prejudice, who may or may not have been antifusionists but, if so, were such primarily because they believed the Democratic party much too backward in its economic policies for fusion to be of any bene-
fit? The answer to that question is that both groups shared in the victory; Populist-Democratic coalition was the immediate loser, and both elements were satisfied principle had triumphed over political expediency. It remained to be seen whether woman suffrage or fusion would be the ultimate loser.

Compared to the struggle over the suffrage plank, the remainder of the convention was anticlimactic. Before the convention several Populist leaders had spoken out in opposition to the renomination of Governor Lewelling (Noah Allen and W. F. Rightmire had even attempted to resuscitate the Citizens’ Alliance to oppose the administration), but this opposition failed to materialize in any significant form in the convention, and Governor Lewelling was renominated without difficulty. Secretary of State Russell Osborn declined to run again, and Lieutenant Governor Percy Daniels was not renominated because he had conditioned his candidacy on the convention’s adoption of his graduated tax reform; the rest of the ticket was renamed.

The symbolic woman-suffrage struggle held center stage, even to the closing moments when the noted writer Hamlin Garland addressed the convention and said, in part: “If you had not put that suffrage plank in your platform I would not have been here this afternoon, because it would have taken all the heart out of me. I want the people of this great party in Kansas to stand by their great principle of equal rights to all.” He assured the convention “that every humanity loving man in the East expects you to support that principle. It does not matter what the Eastern papers say of you. I know that the thinking people of the East look to Kansas as the great battleground of all these great reforms.”

Kansas had indeed become a battleground of reform, and the stage was set for one of the most vitriolic campaigns the state had yet experienced. The principal combatants, of course, were Republicans and Populists, but there was to be a third party. As expected, the state’s Democrats, represented rather heavily by the patronage element, met three weeks after the Populist convention and nominated their own slate of candidates and adopted a strict-constructionist platform that praised President Grover Cleveland,
called for re-submission of the prohibitory amendment, and op­posed woman suffrage.15

There was no waiting to commence the campaign; each faction was engaged in a holy war that would brook no delay. On the Populist side, Governor Lewelling delivered a major address in Kansas City on July 26 which served notice that the administration was not backing away from the major issues it had already emphasized. Among other things, the governor said:

It is my opinion that if you are an honest and industrious citizen; if you are frugal, if you are careful of what you earn, that you have a right to enough to eat and drink, and clothe yourself and family, and if you do not have it, it is because somebody else has got more than his share. Now, that is anarchy—Talking treason now. But, if that is an­archy my Republican fellow citizens, put it in your pipe and smoke it....

If that be treason, when I state a citizen is entitled to enough to eat and decently clothe himself—If that is treason, my Republican fellow citizen, “Make the most of it.” What is government to me if it do not [sic] make it possible for me to live! and provide for my family! The trouble has been, we have so much regard for the rights of property that we have forgotten the liberties of the individual. .... I claim it is the business of the Government to make it possible for me to live and sustain the life of my family. If the Government don’t [sic] do that, what better is the Government to me than a state of barbarism .... That my fellow citizens is the law of natural selection [,] the survival [sic] of the fittest—Not the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the strongest. It is time that man should rise above [above] it.

The governor concluded his address by stating that there was no “greater crime breeder in the world than poverty.” His purpose in coming to Kansas City, he said, was to ask if its citizens would join him in “the organization of a great anti-poverty society.”16

The governor’s speech was no isolated phenomenon; it contained a message that a number of Populist leaders attempted to put across to the Kansas electorate during that campaign. None
were more effective in that endeavor than Frank Doster. In a Labor Day speech delivered in Topeka, Doster declared, "There is a fatal mental inability in both Democratic and Republican parties to comprehend the new and strange conditions of our modern industrial and social life, an utter inability to cope with the new and vexing problems which have arisen out of the vacillation of this latter day." After commenting on the magnitude of "the revolution in our ways of working," Doster stated:

The failure to adapt the legislation of the country to the strange conditions which this new life has forced upon us is the cause in greater part of our industrial ills. A recognition of this fact I make the supreme test of intelligence in the discernment of causes and cures. . . . The Populist party proposes as the only means to the desired end to utilize the power of the social mass to bear upon the rebellious individuals who thus menace the peace and safety of the state. It says that the subjects of those monopolies and trusts are public in their nature, and that the powers exercised through them are in reality the functions and agencies of government itself.

He went on to say that Populists would have the government, which was, after all, only the people in their organized capacity, "assert their rightful dominion" in this new situation. And as a basis for such action, they advanced two political propositions: first of all, "it is the business of the government to do that for the individual which he cannot successfully do for himself, and which other individuals will not do for him upon just or equitable terms; the other, that the industrial system of a nation, like its political system, should be a government of and for and by the people alone."17

Other Populist leaders battled to make a discussion of society's problems the major topic of the campaign, but with little success. Republicans were convinced that what ailed society was the Populist party; they therefore made the charge of corruption and immorality in the Lewelling administration the major point of their attack. They were aided in that task by several widely publicized desertions from the Populist camp. Early in August
Ben Clover released a letter to the press charging that the party had “FALLEN INTO THE HANDS OF A DICTATOR ....” Then, after listing numerous ways in which he believed the party had been corrupted, the former Populist congressman announced his return to the Republican party by emphasizing: “We don’t want anarchy; we don’t want socialism.”

A few weeks later, Ben Henderson, who as temporary chairman of the Populist convention had made such a fuss to help get the woman-suffrage plank included in the platform, announced that he could not support the Lewelling administration because of its alleged corruption.

Needless to say, Republicans were pleased with developments. The Clover-Henderson disclosures dovetailed exactly with the party line, stated rather succinctly in the Topeka Capital as follows: “The administration is the friend of tramps, saloon keepers, lottery gamblers, anarchists, defiers of law and order and government. Its record is a festering conglomeration of crimes and blunders.”

Republicans were also assisted by Corning’s New Era, which had immediately pronounced the Populist convention a “fusion convention” and called for the defeat of the party. The Corning line, repeated continuously until after the election, was that “Kansas Populism stands for unrestricted operation of saloons,” “gambling dens and policy shops,” “more bawdy houses and more prostitution,” and for “moral, financial and material ruin.”

Most Populist leaders had at first written Corning off as a spiteful crank intent upon putting an end to any kind of Democratic-Populist cooperation; but when he intensified his attack upon the administration, despite the obvious rebuke of fusion at the convention, they began to wonder if there were not more to his attack than met the eye. By late August they were all the more convinced when it was discovered that the Republican state central committee was distributing Corning’s New Era to Republican candidates to use as campaign material. Then, on October 4, midway through the campaign, Cy Corning and other so-called “middle-of-the-road” Populists filed a separate “Populist State
Ticket" headed by Corning himself. If the scheme had not been concocted by Republican manager Cy Leland, it certainly had his support, and Leland, at the very least, was prepared to provide the Corning group with railroad passes during the remainder of the campaign. That was the clincher; Populists generally were ready to agree with one of their major papers when it declared about “the Corning gang”:

We always knew they were not Populists but a lot of rotten boodlers, but were unable to prove it until now, when we are able to hold them up to the light and prove to the world that they are not Populists at all, but a lot of sneaking cowardly Republicans [sic] character assassins, working in the interests of the Santa Fe railroad corporation, under the . . . direction of the Republican state central committee, for boodle.

Populist State Chairman Breidenthal wasted no time in filing a protest against the Corning ticket as an obvious attempt to mislead and to divide the Populist vote. Later, less than three weeks before the November election, a hearing was held on the matter with Secretary of State Russell Osborn and Attorney General John Little serving as the board of certification; the Corning slate would not appear on the ballot.

After the Corning diversion was foiled, the thoroughly vicious campaign—the tone of which was largely determined by Cy Leland’s direction—came to an inglorious conclusion with charges and countercharges being fabricated almost entirely out of whole cloth. Only the most partisan voter could have avoided being utterly bewildered as he headed to the polls that November. There was no mistaking the outcome though—Kansas was “redeemed.”

The entire Republican state ticket was elected by a substantial margin; the lower house of the legislature was taken by the Republicans by an overwhelming majority; in the congressional races, only William Baker out in the sixth district managed to survive the Republican landslide, and he only by less than two hundred votes; Jerry Simpson, John Davis, William Harris, and
Jeremiah Botkin were defeated. Woman suffrage, too, since it had become a partisan issue, was turned down in referendum by a decisive 130,139 to 95,302 vote. The outcome, it would appear, demonstrated that Populism, on its own resources, had gone just about as far as it could go; the party had started with roughly 108,000 (36.8 percent) of 290,000 votes for its gubernatorial candidate in 1890 and had climbed to just over 118,000 (39.4 percent) of 300,000 votes in 1894. Populism had begun with only a minority of the voters behind it, and it was still a minority party four years later.

Governor Lewelling ran four to five thousand votes ahead of the rest of the ticket, so his renomination appears not to have hurt the party. Populist support for woman suffrage, on the other hand, may have been a decisive factor. Lewelling carried twenty-nine counties; fourteen of these also voted favorably for woman suffrage—all fourteen were overwhelmingly rural, agricultural counties. Only three of the twenty-nine could even be said to have had any significant urban industry—Crawford, Cherokee, and Osage. These three were strong Populist counties which contained important mining industries as well as a large farm vote. Because of the mines, these three counties also contained a significant foreign-born vote. In Crawford County, Lewelling defeated Morrill by a vote of 3,388 to 3,250; woman suffrage was defeated there by a 2,797 to 2,722 vote. Osage County voted for Lewelling 2,846 to 2,640; woman suffrage failed by a vote of 2,443 to 2,121. In Cherokee County, the vote was 2,982 for Lewelling and 2,864 for Morrill; woman suffrage lost by 2,508 to 2,124. In the urban areas throughout the state, where the foreign-born, Democratic vote was concentrated, woman suffrage was rejected rather soundly. It would of course be impossible to measure the effect of the Populist suffrage stand with precision, but the issue unquestionably had cost the party badly needed votes.

The defeat was devastating, and as its full impact began to work its effect upon the reform camp, Populism's foes gloated over their redeeming triumph. Cy Corning dashed off an editorial line that expressed his mood with characteristic style: "Pimps, thugs and prostitutes will not be permitted to longer administer
the government of the people,” said Corning. The New Era then became a semimonthly and shortly thereafter ceased publication; Corning’s parting words advised, “The republican party of Kansas has the opportunity of a life time. Will it be wise enough to use it?” Republicans were perhaps less slanderous than Corning in their triumph but certainly more ostentatious. On the night of November 13, they held an elaborate public funeral in Topeka to celebrate the death of Populism. It was a devastating gesture, for only the most impractical Populist could fail to see that Populism in its original form was indeed dead; it might rise again to fight another day but never again in the same form.
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