

## POPULISM IN WASHINGTON: A STUDY OF THE LEGISLATURE OF 1897

The Populist movement in the State of Washington was of political significance for a period of some years, although its striking success occurred in the campaign of 1896. Populist members began to make their appearance in the legislature as early as 1893, when eight populists were elected to the lower house,<sup>1</sup> and did not completely vanish from the legislative halls until after the session of 1901, when the terms of the last two populist senators expired.<sup>2</sup> A study of the numerical apportionment of the legislature between parties during the period above mentioned shows clearly that the Populist fortunes were rising steadily until their virtual triumph in 1896 and that they declined as steadily thereafter. The eight representatives elected in 1893 increased to twenty in 1895 and were augmented by three senators.<sup>3</sup> It must be noted, however, that the Republican majorities in both houses were larger in 1895 than in 1893, so that these figures are chiefly of significance as showing the growing identification of the political opposition in the State with populism.

In 1896 the "People's Party" carried the State. It elected a majority in both houses of the legislature and named the governor and his administrative subordinates. But in 1896 the name "People's Party" upon the ballot represented not merely populism, but a fusion party which included the Silver Republicans and Democrats as well. Populist predominance was by no means so great as the election results would indicate.

By 1898, the tide had turned. Again fusion was resorted to by the three parties, but it is significant that the ticket appeared on the ballot as "Democratic,"<sup>4</sup> and that in spite of the combination the Republicans carried the house of representatives by a large majority.<sup>5</sup> Only the nine holdover Populist senators prevented a Republican majority in the upper house, but three new Populist senators being elected.<sup>6</sup> In 1900 a third fusion ticket was put in the field<sup>7</sup> but did not prevent the Republicans from electing substantial major-

1 Washington Public Documents, 1893, *Report of the Secretary of State*, pp. 12-13.

2 *Ibid.*, 1901.

3 *Ibid.*, 1895.

4 *Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1898, p. 287.

5 H. of Reps. *Journal*, 1899, p. 1010.

6 Sen. *Journal*, 1899, p. 716. Two holdover senators (Plummer, High) who labelled themselves Democrats on this occasion called themselves Populists in 1896. This evident attempt to get out of the populist party while it was still alive is indicative of the change in its fortunes.

ities to both houses of the legislature. Two holdover senators were all that remained to represent the Populists in the Washington legislature, and with the expiration of their terms Populism vanished from the Washington political arena. After 1900 the party did not put a ticket in the field.

When we turn to examine the striking political success of the Populists in the campaign of 1896 it soon becomes evident that the tide was not so completely or so strongly Populist as a preliminary survey might indicate. Following the lead of the national parties, all the free-silver groups in Washington united for campaign purposes in 1896. Fusion in Washington, however, even after the St. Louis convention, was not achieved without struggle. Chairman Bulger of the Populist state central committee—a so-called “middle of the road” Populist<sup>8</sup>—was freely accused of trying to prevent fusion. His delay in fixing the time and place for the State Convention was regarded as an effort to force the Democrats and Silver Republicans to act independently.<sup>9</sup> Any such intention, however, was checkmated by the action of the other parties in calling their conventions to meet at the same time and place as that of the people's party.<sup>10</sup>

The three parties met in separate conventions at Ellensburg on August 12. It was obvious from the beginning that the excitement would center about the Populist assemblage, where a bitter fight against fusion was predicted.<sup>11</sup> Temporarily, however, the conflict was transferred to a joint conference committee which was promptly created for the purpose of drafting a fusion agreement. It now appeared that the allocation of offices between the three groups was the chief source of friction. The Populists, commanding as they did the greatest strength among the electorate, demanded a heavy preponderance of the nominees.<sup>12</sup> No great difficulty was encountered in distributing the minor offices, but a heavy conflict ensued in connection with the governorship and the two congressional positions. Early in the proceedings the two latter were divided between the Silver Republicans and the Populists. The Democrats, disappointed here, made a bitter fight in behalf of their

7 *Annual Cyclopedia*, 1900, under “Washington.”

8 This term implied extreme rather than moderate Populism.

9 *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane), July 28, 1896.

10 The Populist call was issued July 27 and was followed by the two others within the space of a few days.

11 Many Populists felt that their chance of carrying the state election independently was good and that fusion involved needless sacrifice. See an estimate of the prevalence of this view quoted in the *Spokesman-Review*, July 2, 1896, from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. The latter paper, solidly Republican in sympathy, had no leaning toward any movement which might make for Populist success. Its estimate of Populist strength was undoubtedly a conservative one.

12 The three proposed tickets are listed in *Spokesman-Review*, July 14, 1896.

gubernatorial candidate, Colonel James Hamilton Lewis. Bickering was prolonged all day July 13, but on the following morning, after a conference with Colonel Lewis, the Democrats conceded the governorship, and fusion seemed assured.<sup>13</sup>

The conference committee report was now submitted to the three conventions. Satisfied with their representation on the fusion ticket, the Silver Republicans and Populists promptly ratified the report. The Democrats, however, gave it a stormy reception, noisily threatening to put a full ticket in the field if the Populists did not give up the congressman awarded them by the committee, and refusing to consider conciliation on any other basis. Rupture seemed imminent, but during the day of August 14 a joint committee of Silver Republicans and Democrats prevailed upon the Populists to give way, and at ten o'clock that night the Democratic Convention accepted the revised apportionment and made its nominations, the long fought for place on the ballot going to Colonel Lewis.<sup>14</sup>

The Silver Republican Convention also nominated its candidates without delay and without friction, although there was some rivalry for the congressional nomination. In the Populist Convention a hot fight ensued over the governorship. H. N. Belt, Populist Mayor of Spokane, C. W. Young of Colfax and John R. Rogers of Puyallup were the contestants in a three-cornered race finally won by the last when Young withdrew in his favor. The intrigues which preceded this outcome disclosed serious dissensions among the Populists. Rogers had many bitter enemies in the party ranks. The King County delegates in particular displayed great hostility, even combining with Spokane representatives in an effort to select Belt. Two efforts to discredit Rogers were noteworthy. His popularity in the eastern counties was attacked by an accusation that he had "sold out" to the Pierce County machine in the matter of removing the capital from Olympia, a scheme which intrigued the fancies of many Populists. Another maneuver was the inclusion in the preliminary draft of the platform of a resolution condemning all state officers who had ever used free railroad passes as having "betrayed the trust reposed in them by the party." Rogers was widely supposed to have used a pass when a member of the legislature. This phrase, however, was eliminated in the final draft, at the instance, it was said, of Rogers' supporters.<sup>15</sup> These backfires against the

<sup>13</sup> Lewis evidently regarded further struggle in the committee as futile and preferred to bargain with the Democratic convention at his back.

<sup>14</sup> A full account of the proceedings is found in the *Spokesman-Review* for August 14 and 15. This newspaper will hereafter be cited as *Spokesman*.

<sup>15</sup> These accusations were assiduously promulgated by the *Spokesman*.

Rogers candidacy were ineffective in view of his known high character and his wide reputation as a Populist pamphleteer and as the author of the "barefoot school boy law."

Nominations for the other state offices went off quietly, the only serious contest being over the lieutenant-governorship, for which Belt was again an aspirant.<sup>16</sup>

The three conventions adopted separate platforms, that of the Populists being the longest and most thorough-going in its demands. Save in the case of the single-tax plank, the details aroused little controversy. As finally approved the platform called for the enactment into law of propositions embodying reduction of excessive salaries of all state officers, lessened freight, passenger, telephone and telegraph rates within the state, adoption of the Torrens system of registering land titles, a system of non-interest bearing warrants receivable as taxes throughout the state, free school books supplies by the state, detailed regulation of foreclosures for debt, "liberal" exemption from taxation of personal property and improvements on land, an amendment to the state constitution embodying woman suffrage, and a law enforcing the constitutional prohibition of the use of railroad passes by officials. The convention condemned the state administration, affirmed its approval of the St. Louis and Omaha conventions, and advocated the protection of representative government by the enactment of a national referendum on important measures and the recall of national officers.<sup>17</sup>

The Silver Republican platform was similar but less outspoken. It demanded a law prohibiting the uses of passes, reduced railroad rates, the prohibition of deficiency judgments (one of several specific measures along this line advocated by the Populists), denounced the existing salary fund law, favored allowing taxpayers to pay taxes half in warrants, demanded revision of the constitution to relieve taxpayers of the burden of unnecessary judicial machinery, favored

16 The fusion ticket, as it finally appeared on the ballot, was as follows:  
 Governor..... John R. Rogers ..... Populist  
 Lieutenant-Governor..... Thurston R. Daniels ..... Populist  
 Secretary of State..... W. D. Jenkins ..... Populist  
 Auditor..... Neal Cheatham ..... Populist  
 Treasurer..... C. W. Young ..... Populist  
 Commissioner of Public Lands..... Robert Bridges ..... Populist  
 Justice of Supreme Court..... John B. Reavis ..... Democrat  
 State Printer..... Gwin Hicks ..... Democrat  
 Attorney General..... P. H. Winston..... Silver Republican  
 Supt. of Public Instruction..... F. J. Browne..... Silver Republican  
 Congressman..... W. C. Jones ..... Silver Republican  
 Congressman..... J. Hamilton Lewis..... Democrat  
 Presidential Elector..... H. N. Caton ..... Democrat  
 Presidential Elector..... I. N. Maxwell ..... Democrat  
 Presidential Elector..... C. E. Cline ..... Populist  
 Presidential Elector..... D. C. Newman ..... Populist

See *Spokesman*, Aug. 16, 1896.

17 *Spokesman*, August 14, 1896.

woman suffrage, the Torrens system and free text books. It denounced the contraction of the currency as responsible for the prevalent hard times, demanded the immediate resumption of free coinage and condemned as insincere and hypocritical the Republican suggestion of an international conference on silver. An interesting provision was the demand that the government foreclose the mortgage on the Union Pacific Railroad and operate that road when it had taken possession.<sup>18</sup>

The Democratic platform was as non-committal as good politics could make it. It condemned the Republicans, state and national, promised a reduction of state taxation to the "lowest limits consistent with a just and careful administration of governmental function," promised to stop the present squandering of the public domain,<sup>19</sup> and favored a law regulating railroads and fixing rates.<sup>20</sup>

The Republican State Convention met in Tacoma on August 26, nominating P. C. Sullivan, political boss of Pierce County, for governor. There were few contests and no important struggles over nominations or over the platform, the latter being unanimously adopted on the first day of the convention. Besides lengthy commendations of the Republican Party and indorsement of the state administration, the platform contained little of importance. It demanded "such legislation as will secure equitable freight rates," favored the direct election of United States Senators, and pledged the "most economic administration consistent with business-like management."<sup>21</sup>

The campaign which ended November 3 was a lively one, although at no time was the outcome seriously in doubt.<sup>22</sup> Even Republican opinion admitted the probability of success for fusion. The campaign, however, was not without its high lights, color being lent it by the frequent repetition by the Silver press of the accusation,

18 *Spokesman*, August 15, 1896.

19 This provision referred to the very questionable course which had been resorted to by the incumbent Republican administration in allowing the wholesale preemption of tide lands by private interests, in obvious violation of the intent and the letter of the State Constitution. A brief summary of the tide land question, together with an estimate of its political consequences, may be found in W. F. Prosser's *A History of the Puget Sound Country*, Vol. I, pp. 215-18. The conclusion there reached that the reaction against the flagrant betrayal of the public trust in the tide land affair was chiefly responsible for the Republican eclipse of 1896 may be exaggerated. It obviously underestimates the deeper significance of the Populist movement. It is natural that the Silver Republicans should omit a plank involving so direct a condemnation of the existing Republican administration. The Populists do not seem to have been greatly concerned with the question at their convention, an indication that Prosser's estimate of its importance is overdrawn.

20 *Spokesman*, August 15, 1896.

21 The complete platform, together with an account of the convention may be found in the *Spokesman* for Aug. 27. The entire Republican ticket is printed in the issue for the following day.

22 N. W. Durham, in his *Spokane and the Inland Empire*, describes the campaign as the "most spectacular and spirited in the state's history." He gives an interesting narrative of events in the Spokane campaign. Unfortunately his account of the political events of the state as a whole is too meagre to be of much use to the student.

Tide lands  
7  
Rep-  
defeat 1896

first made at the Silver Republican Convention by W. C. Jones, that Mark Hanna's money was being corruptly used by the Republicans.<sup>23</sup> The election returns gave Rogers a majority of over thirteen thousand, slightly more than that received by Bryan. The fusionists carried both houses of the legislature,<sup>24</sup> although the Republicans hoped until the returns were nearly in that they might retain control of the senate.

The legislature assembled on January 11, 1897, and completed its organization without difficulty, in spite of sharpshooting by the Republican minority.<sup>25</sup> The fusion caucuses functioned smoothly, the majority slate being broken only for one minor senate office. Governor-elect Rogers had early evinced a desire to conciliate the varied element to be found in the fusion camp. His first statement as chief of the incoming administration had been aimed at forestalling disputes relative to patronage and had emphatically condemned "personal appointments."<sup>26</sup> His inaugural address, delivered January 13, was couched in terms calculated to preserve harmony. He laid great stress on the avoidance of strife in the election of a United States Senator, declaring the success of the Populist movement in the state to be at issue:

"These are the conditions: The great plain people . . . are to unite against the organized aggression of the privileged few, or they are to become the helpless servants of a poorly concealed plutocracy . . . If you fail to agree, if by lack of agreement you render the success of the people's cause impossible, do not forget that the men of this state will call you to account as unworthy and incapable servants. . . ."

His legislative recommendations recapitulated a number of the important planks in the fusion platforms, and may be taken as evidence of his intention to carry out the policies there outlined.

The most important items were as follows.

1. *Taxation*: readjustment of taxes to place the burden on "great properties" and free the homeowner.
2. *Schools*: maintenance of the "barefoot school boy law" of

<sup>23</sup> The *Spokesman* for September 26 quoted a "staunch Republican" to the effect that Hanna's money was being wasted in influencing Washington votes and that Republican campaign managers were misusing it.

<sup>24</sup> Brief biographies of the members of the 1897 legislature may be found in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* for January 14, 1897. This newspaper, stalwart Republican in sympathy, is hereafter cited as *P.-I.*

<sup>25</sup> For example Wilson's senate resolution condemning extravagance, calling on the Populists to redeem their pledges of economy. *Sen. Journal*, 1897, p. 17. The majority replied that "it was not the object of the people's party to retrench by cutting the wages of employees." See *Seattle Times*, Jan. 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Spokesman*, Nov. 10, 1896.

1895, with amendments revising the apportionment of state funds in the interest of smaller and poorer districts.

3. *Higher education*: a single board of control for all the state institutions of higher learning.

4. *Text books*: free school books to be provided at state expense.

5. *Corrupt practices*: a law to prevent intimidation and coercion of the voter.

6. *Free passes*: the reception of railway passes by state official to be made a felony.

7. *Railway rates*: maximum rates to be fixed by law; a railroad commission to be created to make further reductions when possible.

8. *Administrative reform*: unnecessary commissions to be abolished; a single board of control for state institutions to be created; alleged abuses to be investigated.

9. *Inspection laws*: mine disasters, failures of state banks, building and loan associations to be checked by state inspection.

10. *Fishing*: fish wheels to be abolished.

The address embodied a plea for moderation in reform measures, emphasizing the danger of reactions following radical measures, but concluded with a denunciation of the exploitation of the many by few.<sup>27</sup>

Its task having been thus defined, it remained for the legislature to attack the problems before it. The first and most vexatious of these was the election of a United States Senator to succeed Senator Squire. No agreement had been reached at Ellensburg relative to this office, although the "middle-of-the-road" faction contended that the senatorship had been definitely promised them. This group had held a secret caucus supposed to have had the purposes of fortifying opposition to all but out and out Populists, and there were threats that the fusion agreement would be broken unless this demand was conceded.<sup>28</sup> Had the Populists been able to concentrate on a single candidate, the election might have been speedily terminated, as they possessed a majority without Democratic or Silver

<sup>27</sup> The complete text of the governor's address may be found in the legislative journal of either house. The address was favorably received on all sides. The Tacoma *Morning Union* (hereafter cited as *Morning Union*) of Jan. 14 characterized it as "the ablest state paper ever delivered by a Washington Governor." This journal was fusionist in sympathy. The *Seattle Times* (hereafter cited as *Times*), a Silver Republican organ, declared on the same day "We are of the opinion that Governor Rogers has given clear evidence of his ability, his sagacity, his honesty and his fearless determination to give the people of Washington an honest, upright and fearless administration."

<sup>28</sup> *P.-I.*, Jan. 15. This staunchly Republican paper reports with great thoroughness the petty squabbles within the fusion ranks.

Republican support.<sup>29</sup> Their lack of unity gave a great advantage to the Silver Republicans, who offered two prominent candidates, Squire, who desired to succeed himself, and Judge George Turner of Spokane, who had played an important harmonizing role at Ellensburg. Squire was strongly supported by the *Seattle Times*, which urged that his acknowledged views and services, his part in the Ellensburg proceedings and a just recognition of the claims of the Silver Republicans to a share in the federal representation of the state entitled him to be the choice of the legislature.<sup>30</sup> Many Populists, however, questioned Squire's sincerity, asserting that he did not support the whole of the Omaha platform and that his views on Chinese exclusion were unsound.<sup>31</sup> Turner's Populism was of a more outspoken variety, while his constancy on the silver issue was assured by his connection with the silver mining industry.

Efforts to secure a caucus of all fusionists were feared by both the Populists and the Turner group, and no agreement had been reached when balloting began on January 20. The first joint ballot revealed the Republican candidate, Denny, solidly supported by the minority of twenty-six votes, Turner with nineteen, Squire with two, and the remainder hopelessly divided among more than a dozen candidates.<sup>32</sup> It was quite apparent that Governor Rogers' appeal for harmony<sup>33</sup> had fallen on very deaf ears, and, indeed, the governor was freely accused of having a hand in the senatorial lobbying himself.<sup>34</sup>

The balloting continued day after day with slight fluctuations of strength among the various candidates. Attempts were made by the Populists to concentrate upon one candidate and various shifts were made in an effort to find a Populist who could command the necessary votes. The deadlock continued, however, Turner's maxi-

<sup>29</sup> Party affiliations as stated by the members for publication in the legislative journals were as follows:

House	Senate
44	15
10	4
11	2
13	13

Fifty-seven was an electoral majority. A Populist vote was gained in the House by Rader's victory in his contest against Seymour, Republican, but this affected only the last senatorial ballot. Populist strength was usually given as fifty-seven, three being ranked as independents. See *Times*, Jan. 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Times*, Jan. 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, correspondence.

<sup>32</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1897, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> "Gettsburg took but two days. A senator is to be named within the next seven days. Gentlemen . . . if quarreling is essential let your quarrels be settled within the next seven days and let the election of a Senator occur on the first day that you are permitted to ballot." For this "stinging rebuke," see the *P.-I.* for Jan. 14. It was omitted from the official text of the inaugural address.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers was accused of making a deal with Turner whereby he, Rogers, would be supported for the next senatorial vacancy. See *Times*, Jan. 18. Even the *P.-I.* scouted this rumor, but it was later credited with having materially contributed to the breakdown of Populist harmony. Rogers publicly denied the charge. *Times*, Jan. 20.



mum being thirty-five votes, while the Populists reached a high mark of forty-four votes divided among their various candidates. This situation continued until January 28, when enough Populists gave in to allow the calling of a fusion caucus, now the ardent hope of the Turner forces. After some stormy moments in the organization of the caucus, Turner was chosen as fusion candidate and was elected by a substantial fusion majority on the next day.

Although the legislature was presumably controlled by a group actuated by high ideals of public policy, the senatorial contest was not concluded without a melee of charges of intrigue, manipulation and outright corruption. The greediness of the Populists for office was alarming,<sup>35</sup> while the Silver Republicans were equally determined to win the election.<sup>36</sup> Most disconcerting were the charges of direct corruption implicating Senator Plummer and Representative Warner, as well as both Squire and Turner.<sup>37</sup> These were made the subject of committee investigations in house and senate which took much testimony. The evidence tended to throw the blame on Warner, but the legislature apparently wished to smooth over the affair and discharged the committees without action.

The result of the senatorial election was a severe blow to the confidence of the Populists. Squire's poor showing was an indication of the desire of the fusionists to choose a convinced Populist, but the choice of Turner failed to satisfy this criterion. If ac-

35 On January 19 forty or more fusionists met to discuss the possibility of caucusing. A motion carried that all candidates be excused. So many left that no quorum remained! *Times*, Jan. 20.

36 A plan was agitated whereby Silver Republican votes would be so concentrated as to threaten the nomination of the Republican, Denny, whereupon the Populists were to be stamped into voting for a Silver Republican who had supported the Ellensburg program. This fell through, as did a "gold bug" Republican scheme to block the choice of Turner. *Times*, Jan. 24, *Morning Union*, Feb. 3.

37 Representative Tobiassen charged Fritz, a Turner man, with offering him a bribe. Friends of Turner were said to have a "jack-pot"—a "Le Roi mine combine"—out of which these matters were to be paid. Fritz flatly denied this. Warner charged Squire with offering him \$1000 down and \$5000 contingent on election. The following conversation was said to have occurred.

"Warner, what is this twenty men you have got?"

"I don't know of any club . . . there are twenty or twenty-five men in this legislature who propose to elect a senator as soon as we can."

"Warner, I've got to make the last desperate effort. This campaign has cost me a whole lot of money, and since the Ellensburg convention I have spent \$15000 and I don't know what has become of it. I have no money but about \$3000, but I can get \$13000 contingent upon election. If you can get me elected I will give you \$1000 to take the boys down to Doane's and buy them oysters and fill them up, and will give you \$5000 when I am elected."

Warner replied that "there ain't any man in this organization that you can buy," but also testified that on Squire's list there were several names checked off indicating that they had already been bought. *Times*, Feb. 4.

Dr. Calhoun, who had made the above charges, claimed that there were at least thirty members of the legislature who were for sale like "sheep in the shambles" or "beef on the hoof." He accused Senator Plummer of offering his vote for \$500 and Warner of offering a pool of twenty members for \$5000. *Ibid*, Jan. 29, and edit. of same date.

Squire's defence was that Warner took the initiative and that no money had actually passed. *Ibid*, Feb. 10.

Turner's expenses, as stated by him, amounted to \$4300 and \$239 spent by friends. *Ibid*, Feb. 2.

The *Post-Intelligencer* accused the Populists of "whitewashing" the guilty. Issue of Feb. 9.

tual bribery, as many believed, had not been resorted to, interest rather than principle had controlled the action of many of the fusion group. Promises of appointment to office had seduced many, it was said, Rogers being blamed for leading many into the Turner camp.<sup>38</sup> But the most saddening reflection was that had the Populists united firmly on one of their own men—Lieut. Governor Daniels, Speaker Cline, Davis, Winsor or Baker—they could have avoided the whole nasty controversy. The *Seattle Times* early predicted that if the Populists kept up their “Kilkenny fight among themselves” the great mass of the people would repudiate every man connected with the fusion party,<sup>39</sup> while the anti-fusion press freely asserted that this would be the first and last fusion legislature in Washington.<sup>40</sup>

Turner, to be sure, was verbally committed to the Populist cause, and his election was hailed in some quarters as a triumph for reform. The *Tacoma Morning Union* (Populist) characterized him as “the steadfast and courageous champion of the people” who might have been elected Senator long before if he had “yielded his convictions and entered into a truce with the railroads.”<sup>41</sup> Turner himself issued a statement to the effect that he was now a member of the People’s Party and declared that “as long as I live I never expect to cast another Republican ballot so long as God helps me.”<sup>42</sup> It was clear, however, that his chief interest was in silver—due to his mining connections<sup>43</sup> and that the Populists had lost the game through lack of organization and good leadership.

The legislative program of the fusionists suffered heavily from the disintegrating effect of the senatorial election. Far better would it have been, declared the *Times*, if the Ellensburg conventions had settled this matter, for thus jealousy and animosity would have been avoided and time would have been left for the legislature to work for the good of the state.<sup>44</sup> Instead, wedges had been driven into the fusionist alignment, the demoralizing effects of patronage and money had manifested themselves and the friendly relations between the governor and the legislature had been sadly shaken.

Bills incorporating the Ellensburg proposals and many other characteristic Populist measures were introduced,<sup>45</sup> but their pro-

38 The *Seattle Times*, Jan. 30, gives a list of such aspirants for office.

39 Jan. 23, edit.

40 *Times*, Feb. 5. *Morning Union*, Feb. 1, quotations.

41 *Morning Union*, Feb. 1.

42 *Times*, Jan. 30.

43 “Financially he has prospered in recent years. He retains 35000 shares (estimated to be worth \$300,000) of the Le Roy mine, of which he is general manager, and has large interests in other mines.” *Morning Union*, Feb. 1.

44 *Times*, Jan. 16, 23.

45 These included a concurrent resolution advocating direct election of U.S. senators, bills providing for the initiative and referendum, proposing a simpler method of amending the state constitution, giving priority to laborers’ liens, forbidding the pay-

gress was disappointing. On February 16 an enthusiastic Populist correspondent<sup>46</sup> pointed out that half the session had passed, yet nothing in the way of remedial legislation had been secured. As late as March 7, the *Morning Union* thought it necessary to reprint the Ellensburg program as a warning to the legislature that its work was woefully in arrears.<sup>47</sup> When the legislature emerged from the turmoil of the "end of session rush" it was seen that most of the major items of the governor's program had either failed or received inadequate treatment.

A brief recapitulation of the principal measures passed will indicate the extent of the collapse of the fusionist legislative program. A taxation law was enacted, but instead of readjusting the burden of taxes it contended itself with revisions in the manner of collection, substituting a fifteen per cent interest charge on unpaid taxes for the advertising of delinquents, and fixing a \$500 exemption for personal property and an additional \$500 for improvements in and on real estate. A referendum was provided on a constitutional amendment embodying the principle of the single tax, but this was defeated in the 1898 election. The school bill desired by the governor<sup>48</sup> was passed, but the plan for free text books was entirely forgotten.

The demand for inspection laws was met by a measure designed to increase safety in mines and by an insurance law providing for publicity of accounts and prohibiting combinations to raise insurance rates. The latter, however, was not an innovation, as it followed a model already adopted in fourteen states.<sup>49</sup> The anti-fish-wheel bill was passed, at the cost of much dissension and with the addition of an amendment forbidding purse seines.

Railroad rate and anti-pass legislation were perhaps the most important pledges of the Populist platform. Governor Rogers was strongly committed to the Stafford bill fixing a maximum freight rate of \$3.75 per ton and establishing a railroad commission. This measure was twice beaten in the house and its duplicate in the senate was defeated by a combination of ten fusionists with the solid republican vote. To offset the governor's threat of a special session if rate legislation failed, a weak substitute was passed fixing the

ment of wages in company warrants, a workmen's compensation law, bills preventing blacklisting and coercing employees, providing that all obligations of debt, etc., might be payable in "lawful money," i.e., not gold, providing for reclamation of arid lands, etc., etc. See *Journals of House and Senate, passim*.

46 *Times*, Feb. 16.

47 *Morning Union*, March 7.

48. This was little more than a codification of existing law, though it changed the method of apportioning state money—a concession to the poorer districts.

49 *P.-I.*, Mar. 14.

maximum at \$4.25 per ton and omitting the commission feature.<sup>50</sup> Passenger rates were dealt with in a bill which passed the house March 1 and was favorably reported to the senate, but this measure failed of further consideration. One of four anti-pass bills emerged from the house, but an unfavorable committee report was accepted with alacrity by the senate.

Economy was another important Populist rallying cry, but in this respect also the legislature fell far short of its objectives. The much talked of promise to reduce the salaries of state officers came to nothing, although a series of bills embodying the necessary constitutional amendments were introduced in the senate.<sup>51</sup> The saving resulting from substitution of a single board of control for the trustees of the various state institutions was fully counter-balanced by the creation of a bureau of labor, a state road commission and a commissioner of horticulture.<sup>52</sup> Some superficial economies were achieved, to be sure, but only, according to Republican critics, at the expense of efficiency in the administrative offices. Populist assertions that the state had been saved nearly two million dollars were branded by the *Post-Intelligencer* as barefaced juggling of figures, and, on the whole, this latter version seems correct.<sup>53</sup> Governor Rogers himself was displeased with the legislative appropriations. His reply took the form of vetoing the appropriations for two normal schools and the \$500,000 item for a new capitol building. The latter was perhaps the appropriate type of economy for lean years, but all of the vetoes aroused heavy protest.

Nothing illustrates better the temper of the legislature than the treatment accorded two favorite Populist proposals, direct election of senators and woman suffrage. The former might seem to have been non-controversial as it had been indorsed in the Republican platform. A house joint resolution favoring such a federal amendment, however, died in a senate committee. A state referendum on the latter measure was provided, to be sure, but it was delayed and

<sup>50</sup> A bill fixing maximum charges for milling grain was also lost. Rogers' disappointment with the rate bill was shared by most Populists outside the legislature. Representative Geraghty termed it a "fake bill," and Representative Wolf thought it "the bastard product of the railroad companies." Undue influence by railway representatives was freely charged. An editorial in the *Tacoma Morning Union* declared that the senate was "fixed" by the railroad interests and that the senate amendments which had choked the commission bill were written by a Seattle railway attorney. Winsor, a populist, claimed that a "jackpot" of \$180,000 had been raised in Tacoma to buy legislators. Senator Plummer, also a Populist, took a more favorable view, denying railway influence. A 10 to 20 per cent reduction in rates, he said, was a real advantage. The *Morning Union* estimated that the bill would save Whitman county \$100,000 per year, and Walla-Walla county from \$60,000 to \$70,000. See *Spokesman*, Mar. 14, *Morning Union*, Mar. 9, 10, 14.

<sup>51</sup> *Senate Journal*, 1897, p. 84 ff.

<sup>52</sup> The promised unified board for higher educational institutions also failed of creation.

<sup>53</sup> The *Tacoma Morning Union* placed the saving at \$1,716,919. The *Post-Intelligencer's* figure was less than \$100,000 with the qualification that even this saving would disappear when the records were all in. See issue of Mar. 14.

actually endangered while house and senate conferees disputed as to whose bill should take precedence.<sup>54</sup>

The debtor class perhaps fared best at the hands of this Populist legislature. The tax bill had been drawn in their interest and to this was added a deficiency judgment law limiting satisfaction for foreclosures to the property pledged. A half-dozen minor bills of similar purport emerged from the legislature but nothing was heard of the Torrens system of registering land titles, so much desired a few months before.

In the interludes of this contentious session a considerable program of minor legislation was passed, most of it useful and practically none of it vicious.<sup>55</sup> It is apparent, however, that there were large lacunae in the output of the legislature, whether compared with the governor's recommendations or the proposals of the Ellensburg platforms.

Contemporary opinions of the work of the legislature varied widely. The Populist *Morning Union* had been much disgusted with its behavior, expressing the hope that in the future the electorate would choose men "who are a little long on manhood and common decency and extremely short on pusillanimity."<sup>56</sup> At the end of the session, however, it declared that a great deal of good work had been done.<sup>57</sup> A Spokane member, Senator Houghton, characterized it as "the best legislature we have ever had," and declared that "quite as good work for the public has been accomplished by this more noisy and disagreeing body than usually comes from a better trained legislature."<sup>58</sup> Judged, indeed, by the standards of the time, the legislature was far from being a failure. It had avoided a senatorial deadlock such as had disgraced its Oregon contemporary, and although not entirely free from the taint of corruption, it could hardly be called a "controlled" legislature. To Republicans, however, its

54 See newspaper reports, March 11. Woman suffrage, like the single tax amendment, was beaten in the Republican landslide of 1898. The initiative and referendum was also lost in the senate after passing the house.

55 A total of 140 bills reached the governor, 72 of the 290 senate bills passing, together with 68 of the 631 introduced in the house. Omitting a few of routine character, the 134 chief measures may be classified as follows.

Amendments to criminal, civil and procedural codes.....	29
Organization and powers of state government.....	16
Organization and powers of local governments.....	20
Relief of debtors .....	11
Protection of labor .....	4
Morals, sanitation and inspection.....	6
Regulation of corporations .....	4
Conservation and development .....	12
Roads and highways .....	9
Elections .....	3
Private bills .....	8
Revenue and appropriations .....	12

See *Session Laws*, 1897, and a digest of laws passed printed in *P.-I.*, Mar. 14.

56 *Morning Union*, Feb. 27.

57 *Ibid.*, Mar. 14.

58 *Spokesman*, Mar. 17.

proceedings were a glorious farce,<sup>59</sup> while many sincere Populists were convinced that they had been betrayed. The fusionist *Spokesman-Review* was especially denunciatory. It was not a sufficient defence of the legislature, declared an editorial in this journal,<sup>60</sup> to say that they had met some promises. They had been unusually fertile in pledge and promise, emphatic in denunciation of corporation control of past legislatures, and had promised to keep themselves free of such control:

"They return to their homes tainted with corporation influence. They have broken their promise for lower freight rates. They have not reduced the exorbitant fares charged by the railroads. Nor have they lowered telephone and telegraph rates as promised. They denounced past legislatures for failing to forbid the official use of free passes and promised to pass a law making acceptance of such passes a felony. They have not kept that promise. . . . They stand self-condemned before the people."

The result was, in the words of Representative Geraghty, a "pitiable and humiliating end to a movement that promised so much good for the people," a conclusion concurred in by the rank and file of the Populists.<sup>61</sup>

In striking a balance between these views we may perhaps concur in Governor Rogers' own opinion, that the session was not all that it should have been, but that it *was* an improvement over the preceding regime. The reasons for this failure to measure up to Populist hopes are not hard to find. First and foremost may be placed the lack of harmony and absence of leadership among the Populists themselves. An inexperienced group, politically, they betrayed the temperamental independence characteristic of radical groups. The lack of a strong hand was extremely apparent both in house and senate, and the quarrel over the senatorship dissipated

59 "Let the Populists say with Thackeray: 'Put up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.'" *P.-I.*, Mar. 14.

60 *Spokesman*, Mar. 17.

61 What the people who rolled up the Populist majority wanted is well expressed by a correspondent of the *Seattle Times*, Jan. 23, in a letter signed John Govan, dated Sequim, Jan. 18;

"We are in a deep hole, sir, and we are looking to this legislature to help us out of it some; and in my humble opinion there is only one way to do it, and that is by abolishing a great many of the offices and cutting all of the salaries, from the governor down, till they correspond somewhat with ours, or the taxpayers' incomes. Economy, economy, is what we want and what we must have if we are to survive.

"I have been a Populist since the party was first organized in this state and have anxiously longed for and worked for this day of triumph, and I sincerely hope that the men we have sent to Olympia will not fritter away their precious sixty days in far-fetched ideas, however fair they may appear, but do something practical to deliver us from the bondage we are living under at present.

"I think I may venture to sum up all that is hurting us at present as follows: Our taxes are too high; when we work for the county we get paid in warrants, and they refuse to take them for taxes. If the legislature will relieve us a little, along this line first, they can go on and do as much good as they can along other lines beyond our ken. I think I may say that a majority of my neighbors would second what I have said."

the hope that Rogers himself might supply the needed discipline. Suspicious of his ambitions and greedy for office, the more capable Populists in the legislature set themselves almost from the beginning to destroy his program. The attitude of the Populist State Chairman, Frank Baker, who wished to be patronage dispenser for the new regime, contributed largely to this result.<sup>62</sup> Inability to caucus on the senatorship carried over to the legislative program. Time-wasting debates on inconsequential measures<sup>63</sup> pushed genuinely important bills into the crowded last days where they perished. The small but well organized Republican minority thus was able practically to dictate the bills to be passed. It was actually asserted that only three bills not approved by the Republicans were enacted!<sup>64</sup> The frequent complaints made by populists as to the obstructive measures of the "gold bugs" merely testified to the populists' own inefficiency.

Some weight may perhaps be given to the presence of strong railroad, liquor and fishery lobbies and to the corrupt use of money among the legislators, but these would have been ineffective if the Populists had acted in complete accord. The situation was well summarized in the *Post-Intelligencer*:

"This family row was the characteristic feature of the whole session. At no time after the first week was there anything like unity of action on the part of the members of the majority party. The session was conspicuous by a total absence of that feeling of party pride and responsibility which should characterize the party in power. On nearly every fundamental proposition that came up the fusionists were divided and the hostile factions fought each other bitterly.

"This was no more than was to be expected considering that the men sent to Olympia had not served together in one party long enough to become familiar with each other's ideas, but on the other hand represented political principles entirely at variance with each other. The Fifth legislature will go down to history as a riotous, incoherent, tempestuous, irresponsible assemblage of men, and, with the exception of the Republican minority, with no political affinity binding them together, and with no sense of the responsibility they were under to the party who sent them to Olympia."<sup>65</sup>

62 This was brought out in the *P.-I.* for March 14.

63 Such as Speaker Cline's bill to introduce the South Carolina dispensary system. Many hours were spent debating the desirability of forbidding the wearing of large hats in theatres.

64 A Republican leader was quoted to this effect. *Morning Union*, Mar. 25.

65 *P.-I.*, March 14.

The oft-repeated forecast that the record of this legislature would result in the repudiation of Populism was amply fulfilled. The 1898 election brought not only a Republican landslide in the legislative contests but also overwhelming defeat for the Populist constitutional amendments, woman suffrage and the single tax. It would be erroneous, however, to attribute this result entirely to Populist ineptitude. The passing of two years had brought alleviation to the hard times which had been basically responsible for the acceptance of Populist panaceas. The rising price curve was the surest guarantee that the voters of Washington would abandon the false gods of Populism and return to their traditional Republican allegiance.<sup>66</sup> Of great importance, also, was the decline in significance of the free silver question. Washington Populists had been urged by Secretary Edgerton of the National People's Party Committee to cut loose entirely from silver. Governor Rogers had replied that this was the only issue upon which the opposition groups could combine.<sup>67</sup> His hope that free silver, like the Republican doctrine of 1860, would serve as the entering wedge for the creation of a new party, was, however, doomed to be confounded from the moment of Bryan's defeat. The protest movement, in truth, was on the wane in 1896,<sup>68</sup> and by 1898 its strength had largely spent itself.

Disappointing as was the 1897 legislature to the enthusiasts who had created it, the Populist interlude was not without its redeeming features. Many of the problems attacked—the creation of an equitable system of taxation, the regulation of fisheries, the control of institutions of higher learning, to name but a few—were of the utmost difficulty, and have escaped solution to the present day. Moreover, the fear that the Populist legislators would lose themselves in a mist of idealist theorizing was not realized. The neces-

66 On the morrow of the election of 1896, the *Post-Intelligencer* gave the following explanation of fusionist victory:

"Five years of hard times has brought about a feeling of unrest. General depression, trade stagnation and reverses in business have made men sour. A lack of prosperity always breeds uneasiness and the reaction from boom contentment to hard times despair has been sufficiently sharp to create an army of those short-sighted people who favor a change because they imagine conditions cannot be made worse than they now are. That such a feeling of hopelessness existed is clearly shown by the character of returns in all parts of the state. The result in Washington was only a repetition of what has occurred in other states when unusual prosperity has been followed by widespread depression. Wherever populism has triumphed it will be found to have been under precisely similar conditions. And with the return of prosperity and brighter and more hopeful prospects for the people, populism will disintegrate and disappear here just as it has in other commonwealths where it has temporarily flourished during periods of common distress." *P.-I.*, Nov. 7, 1896.

67 This correspondence is cited in an editorial in the *Times*, Feb. 17, 1897.

68 Ex-Governor McGraw, Rogers' predecessor, declared that the fusionist vote of 1896 was less than that which would have been cast for a Populist-Democratic fusion in 1894. See his letter to the *Spokesman* quoted in the *P.-I.* for Nov. 5, 1896. He declared that "the chief reasons why fusion was so complete are, I believe, that the general depression existing in this state since 1892—more severe here than in almost any other state owing to our lack of productive industries and to our overconfident speculation—has been so severe as to lead many to turn to any suggested remedy, no matter how hopeless it might be."



sity of practical relief for specific injustices was fully understood, and much legislation of real value was placed on the statute books. There is reason to believe that Populist leaders appreciated, though too late, the need of disciplined unity, and that, had continued distress resulted in their return to office, many of the errors of 1897 would have been avoided. In spite of their temperamental independence, their occasional susceptibility to bribery and influence, the Populist legislators of 1897 will not suffer greatly by comparison with their contemporaries, while in Governor Rogers the party gave to the state a great leader, deserving of lasting recognition for his courage, his integrity and his devotion to the cause of the common man.

CARROLL H. WOODY,  
University of Chicago.