CREATING THE COMMONWEAL: COXEY'S ARMY OF 1894, AND THE PATH OF PROTEST FROM POPULISM TO THE NEW DEAL, 1892-1936

by

Wesley Bishop

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

West Lafayette, Indiana

December 2018

THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL
STATEMENT OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Dr. Nancy Gabin, Chair

Department of History

Dr. Susan Curtis

Department of History

Dr. Tithi Bhattacharya

Department of History

Dr. Bill Mullen

Department of American Studies

Approved by:

Dr. David Atkinson

Head of the Graduate Program

To Allison, a friend and partner whose voice has never hesitated to protest an injustice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All dissertations begin by admitting sole credit does not reside with the single author listed. This is because all dissertations are the result of not a single author, but instead a community of support. This dissertation is no different. For the past six and a half years, first at Indiana State University and then Purdue University, I have been honored and blessed to have numerous friends, colleagues, and family members support me in my endeavors to complete an advanced degree and begin a career in academics.

I first came to Purdue interested in the general concept of how social movements, specifically those movements made up of the working class, interacted in the broader arena of the public sphere, how democratic norms shifted over time to either harm or help said movements, and lastly what a historical investigation of said questions could tell us about the broader concept of the public sphere. My committee members— Professors Nancy Gabin, Susan Curtis, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Bill Mullen— all encouraged me in this endeavor but stressed that to be a historian I would need to ground my questions in the realm of specific events and actors. So I began examining the period of the Gilded Age and Progressive era curious to see what I could find, and almost immediately Coxey's Army of 1894 presented itself as a perfect topic. What I discovered in the archives challenged many of my previous thoughts and forced me to rethink a number of assumptions I had. Therefore, no matter what number of embarrassing omissions or mistakes I make in the following pages (and as a young historian I have no doubt they exist) I count this project a success. Historical research is often nothing more than an attempt to converse with a different time period and leave that conversation altered in one's thinking about the present world. I owe Professors Gabin, Curtis, Bhattacharya, and Mullen an immense amount of thanks for teaching me this very important lesson and guiding me through the process.

During my time at Purdue I was also involved in a fair amount of political organizing and protesting. I wrote the introduction and outline of the first two chapters of this dissertation while sitting on the floor of Hovde Hall protesting President Mitch Daniels' unwillingness to condemn white supremacists on campus. I formulated many of my thoughts about the logistics and impact of marches while marching against police violence and xenophobia. I planned my research trips to archives in between attending graduate student government meetings where I advocated alongside survivors of sexual assault the need for a campus center of resources to combat sexual violence. This research examining the history and content of protest politics was done from the vantage point of someone in the twenty-first century deeply interested in how a democratic people could save themselves and reshape society for the better. To that effect I was honored to be a part of the Purdue Social Justice Coalition during my time at Purdue and count among my friends and colleagues Michelle Campbell, Guillermo Caballero, Tiffany Montoya, Fernando Tormos, Dana Smith, Dana Bisignani, Enosh Kazem, Ti' Riggins, Lauren Murfree, Viviana Tsangaropoulos, Caleb Milne, Allen Chiu, and Malik Raymond. All of them, and many others, taught me so much in terms of what it means to be a scholar activist. I wish them all fruitful careers and many political victories.

I was also fortunate to have a number of friends and colleagues in the graduate schools of both Purdue and Indiana State University. These friendships sustained me throughout my studies and whether it was a standing coffee date, a weekly dinner, or an open invitation to bear one's soul on the "private" messenger app, these friends were always there for me to discuss ideas, debate broader topics, and be a sympathetic ear. Many thanks to Ricardo Quintana Vallejo, Pádraig Lawlor, Ruisheng Zhang, Angela Potter, Lauren Haslem, Kyle Pruitt, Cale Erwin, Michael White, Jason Collins, Daniel Stearns, Lama Sharif, Ed Gray, Andrew McGregor, Hyeseon Woo, Renee

Gaarder, Bo Blew, Molly Mersmann, Marc Smith, Valentina Conku, Sascha Angermann, Anshul Mishra, Guillermo Jaramillo Pizarro, Ana Carolina Murcia, Julian Chacon, Andrea Adomako, Kera Lovell, and Stephen and Melissa Horrocks for all you have done for me.

The research for this dissertation included many travels to multiple archives and I am deeply indebted to the tireless work of countless librarians and archivists who were always willing to assist in my research. Special thanks to the staff of the archives at the Library of Congress's newspaper and manuscript division, University of Maryland College Park, Massillon Historical Society, University of Pittsburgh, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, the Iowa State Historical Society, and the Wisconsin Historical Society.

I also owe special thanks to a host of other professors throughout my graduate school experience who profoundly shaped the way I think. Many thanks to Richard Schneirov, Lisa Phillips, Dan Clark, John Enyeart, David Atkinson, Harry Targ, Rebekah Klein-Pejsova, Chris Yeomans, Caroline Janney, Yvonne Pitts, Doug Hurt, and James Farr. Likewise, the department's staff and secretaries at Purdue University, Indiana State University, and Ohio University, although often unsung in their heroic efforts, were vital to my time in school. I thank them all deeply for their commitment to professionalism and dedication to their work. Special thanks to Donna Capezzuto of Ohio University-Eastern, Ellen Knoblett of Indiana State University, and Fay Chan, Rebecca Gwin, and Julie Knoeller of Purdue University.

I also owe a special thanks to my friends and colleagues of Marian University's Department of History and Social Sciences. Bessie Rigakos, Adrianna Ernstberger, Michelle Meer, Deeb Kitchen, Holly Gastineau-Grimes, Amber Nelson, B.J. Bruther, and Emilie Brinkman have all been both wonderful colleagues and dear friends who were incredibly supportive during the final

stages of the dissertation process. As a junior faculty member I am incredibly fortunate to have such mentors and colleagues.

Finally, but far from the least, my friends and family back home have been vital to this process. My mother and father Gary and Sharon Bishop, brother Wade Bishop, sisters Hannah Maynard and Sarah Bishop, in-laws Ted, Carol, Jon, and Joey, nephew Ezra, and my dearest and oldest friends Ken and Lena Williams and Roger Pickenpaugh, have all been a relentless cheering section, believing in me and encouraging me to continue with my studies. We do not stress this enough, but our work as scholars and activists to learn about and improve the world is really nothing more than an attempt to build a better world to foster these vital connections. It is therefore fitting that every piece of scholarship dedicate the first several pages to celebrating those connections. And to that effect I would be remiss if I did not specially acknowledge and thank the dearest and most important person in my life, the person who more than any other bears more thanks than any other, Allison. For over ten years she has been my dearest friend and partner. She, more than any other person I have ever known, has taught me the most about how to speak truth to power and remain committed to what is fundamentally right regardless of what others say. To her I dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Author: Bishop, Wesley. PhD
Institution: Purdue University
Degree Received: December 2018
Title: Creating the Commonweal: Coxey's Army of 1894, and the Path of Protest from Populism to the New Deal, 1892-1936.
Committee Chair: Nancy Gabin

This dissertation examines Coxey's Army of 1894 and the subsequent impact the organizers and march had on American politics. A handful of monographs have examined this march on Washington D.C. but all of them have focused specifically on the march itself, largely examining the few weeks in 1894 when the march occurred. By extending the period study to include the long life and activism of Jacob Coxey what historians can see is that although the march was an expression of anger and concern over general inequality in American society, Coxey's Army was also protest for specific demands. These two demands were specifically a program of public works and a desire for fiat currency for the United States. By examining the life Jacob Coxey we see that both of these demands grew out of longer issues in American social politics and reflect Coxey's background in the greenback labor movement.

The question over currency— whether the economy should rely on a gold, silver, or fiat standard— has largely been untouched by historians, yet reflects one of the most interesting aspects of the march, namely that it was an instance in a broader movement to drastically change the U.S. state and establish a socialistic commonwealth, or commonweal, for American society. Coxey fit into this broader project by arguing specifically that the U.S. should maintain a market-based economy but do so through a kind of socialistic currency backed by the state. By organizing various marches throughout his life, Coxey attempted to achieve this goal by direct organizing of the masses and in so doing contributed to the long history of American social reform movement's various efforts to reshape and redefine the concept of "the people."

This dissertation makes four major arguments. First that the concept and phenomena of American Populism is a broad based, elastic movement with no essential political character. Attempts to define Populism as either reactionary or radical miss the broader issue that Populism could take on various political flavors depending on how it positioned itself in opposition to

various actors in the state, economy, and civil society. Second, Coxey's Army shows how the first march on Washington D.C. was part of a longer legacy of direct political action, and that although this march did make a contribution to the overall political debate of the time, it was not as a communicative act that the march was most significant. Instead Coxey's Army was significant in the way it led to a reconceptualization of "the people" and therefore reimagined what legitimate democratic action entailed. Third, the concept of the commonweal, although largely taken for granted in previous historiographies, was part of a much deeper and intellectually rich fight between various activists and thinkers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At stake in how a movement or party conceptualized something like the commonweal was what type of social, economic, and political order should be fought for and advanced by organizations of working class people. In this regard the currency question, far from being simply a side issue, was in fact central to how activists envisioned the role of the market and state in a more equitable society. Finally, this dissertation looks at the understudied career of Coxey after the march, specifically his short tenure as mayor of Massillon, Ohio. His failure as mayor raises further questions for historians to think about the promise and limitations of American Populism as both a protest movement and political force.

INTRODUCTION

May 1, 1894. International Worker's Day. On the outskirts of Washington, D.C., hundreds of people gathered preparing for the first national mass demonstration on the nation's capital. Many of those gathered were unemployed workers. Ravaged by the effects of the Panic of 1893, they had come from all over the country to demand that the federal government do something to alleviate the crisis. From the Midwest to the South, and stretching from the East to West coasts "The Industrial Army Movement," as it was commonly known, reflected a growing potential in Gilded Age America.

The masses of precariously employed wage earners were becoming politically organized, economically self-aware, and culturally distinct. Massive strikes and demonstrations were frequent in the decades following the U.S. Civil War, and now that potential was finally at the doorstep of the nation's top government bodies.

The prospect of this mass demonstration filled the politically powerful with dread.

For weeks, as the different groups marched from their respective regions to their common location, Grover Cleveland's administration worried about the potential issues a massive "army" marching on the capital would bring. Dispatching agents from the Secret Service to infiltrate and report on the marchers' activities, Cleveland and his advisors observed in alarm the masses of workers and social activists slowly making their way to the District of Columbia.

Members of Congress worried too, both for what they saw as a danger of further potential mass protests, and for the rising popularity of the so-called "Populist movement" which had gained considerable traction in previous elections. "It is quite possible," one senator remarked on the

dangers of the marchers, "…that it may become a habit to make pilgrimages annually to Washington and endeavor to dominate Congress by the physical presence of people."[1]

One contingent of the industrial army movement stood out to the elected officials and nation's newspapers. Dubbed "Coxey's Army" by the press, the contingent from Massillon, Ohio, led by Jacob S. Coxey, a prosperous businessman and political activist who had his roots in the Greenback Party, and Carl Browne, a Populist orator and political organizer, had for weeks during the marches dominated headlines across the country. Calling themselves the "Army of the Commonwealth of Christ," or more simply the "Commonweal Army," Coxey and Browne had capitalized on media coverage to the point that their ideas and arguments flooded the national press's attention. Although contingents of the marchers came from California, Iowa, New York, and Pennsylvania, with even smaller groups in various parts of the country holding rallies and demonstrations, it was this group from Ohio that became a stand-in for the broader movement.

Yet, as Coxey and Browne were to discover, this national spotlight was far from celebratory. As *The Washington Sentinel Weekly* reported on April 28, as Coxey's Army neared the city limits of Washington D.C., the Commonweal intended to "teach the restless and dissatisfied people the coercive power that lies in aggregated numbers." The paper continued that such "lessons" would be disastrous, resulting in a situation where "the delicate adjustments of existing social order will be brushed away like leaves before a whirlwind."[2] Coxey's Army and the broader Industrial Army movement faced hostile reporting from multiple newspapers, which compared the marchers to dangerous insurgents and claimed that many of the people were either lazy or uneducated in how American economics worked.

---

[1] Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 2002), 2.
[2] "The Coxey Crusade," *Washington Sentinel Weekly Edition*, April 28, 1894.

Yet, this negative coverage did not deter people from turning out and watching as the marchers crossed the city limits. Thousands gathered to watch as the several hundred person Commonweal marched by the stores and homes lining the boulevard that led directly to Capitol Hill. Riding in a carriage with his wife and newborn child named "Legal Tender," Coxey waved to the throngs of people. Behind them, Browne rode on his own horse. He was dressed as a buckskinned frontiersman in a large white sombrero. Coxey's two children, his seventeen-year-old daughter Mamie Coxey, and his eighteen-year-old son Jesse Coxey, were similarly dressed in costume. Jesse rode on a horse behind his father and Browne who wore a Union blue jacket and a Confederate gray pair of pants. The imagery was meant to symbolize how the North and South had become unified under the Commonwealth of Christ through the practice of populist protest. Mamie was on her own horse, a white Arabian, and was dressed as the "Goddess of Peace." Wearing a liberty cap of red, white, and blue, which had the word "peace" spelled in silver, she rode past reporters who took immediate notice of her and the pageantry. Maggie's costume was meant to communicate that the Army of the Commonwealth was one of mass demonstration, dedicated to peaceful revolution.

And at the front of the procession was Jasper Johnson Buchanan, an African American man who was designated to carry the American flag. This move by Browne and Coxey to both integrate the march as well as have a person of color lead the procession through the streets of Washington D.C. did not go unnoticed. The *Washington Bee*, an African American newspaper, argued that it was an action other social reformers should practice.[3]

It was all clearly spectacle, but spectacle engineered to make a specific political argument— the masses of people were marching as a unified nation. Attempting to tie North and

[3] Jerry Prout, "Hope, Fear, and Confusion: Coxey's Arrival in Washington" *Washington History* Vol. 25 (Summer 2013): 3.

South together with a multi-racial message of democratic peace, Coxey and Browne were articulating a vision for modern American nationalism, a nationalism that was expansive, liberal, representative of a democratic people, and hostile to economic exploitation. As one banner carried by the marching workers read, "Peace on earth, good will toward men, but death to interest on bonds."

In this manner, the procession made its way through D.C., eventually arriving at Capitol Hill. From there, Coxey disembarked his carriage and began walking to the steps of the legislative building. In his hands he clutched a speech he planned to give to the onlookers which argued for an expanded role of government in the economy— a public roads program for unemployment and infrastructure improvement and a program of low interest bonds to stimulate the economy. Although Coxey and Browne had repeatedly billed these ideas as the product of Coxey's individual mind, they were in keeping with the burgeoning Populist movement. Coxey's speech dealt with monetary policy, the problems of large scale capitalist influences in government, and the need in these times of economic hardship to adhere to the nation's highest democratic principles. Furthermore, it enveloped and blended a host of socialist ideas about nationalism, politics, and economics. In all, it would be a speech that rallied support for a proposed set of radical bills. It was a piece of oratory to accompany a grand expression of political activism.

He never delivered it.

Capitol police descended before Coxey could begin speaking and arrested the leader of the march as he crossed the lawn. Chaos quickly ensued. As the police forcibly arrested Coxey they rushed Browne, still on horseback, and then attacked Jasper Johnson Buchanan. The police made quick work of dispersing the rest of the crowd as they attacked the onlookers. Their crime? The

police would later say the marchers had stepped on the grass and shrubbery. This despite the signs that said "keep off."

Contingents of the Industrial Army movement around the country learned that the main group had been routed at the Capitol Building. Charles T. Kelley, another "general" of the movement, upon receiving the news of Coxey's and Browne's arrest was publicly frustrated. Not only angry at the Washington D.C. police for breaking the march, he was also annoyed that Coxey and Browne had not waited for his group to arrive. Travelling from California, Kelley's group had much more ground to cover than the Massillon contingent, not to mention the often hostile local governments.

In Texas, for example, an industrial army had been detained, loaded onto train cars, taken to a rural desert area, and simply stranded. State officials such as Governor J.S. Hogg, sympathetic to several of the Populist's ideas, then forced the railroads to rescue the group from dehydration and exposure. As he told the *Dallas Times Herald*, "When a railroad company hauls tramps or unemployed penniless men into this state it cannot dump them into a barren desert and murder them by torture or starvation… Nor will I permit [the marchers] to be shot down on Texas soil by any armed force, no matter how much the Southern Pacific and the other enemies of the State may howl about the Commune."[4]

Coxey and Browne were aware of these other groups, indeed encouraged them, and were also aware of their various plights. However, the original plan was to enter the nation's capital on International Labor Day, and both Coxey and Browne felt it important to follow through on the plan. Therefore, after Coxey, Browne, and Buchanan were finally released on bail, and were able

[4] Donald McMurry, "The Industrial Armies and the Commonweal" *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10:3 (1923): 228.

to regroup with the marchers outside of the city, tension among the various groups arose, some of whom had finally made it to the nation's capital in the intervening period.

Others, however, never made it to Washington D.C.

Leading another California group, Anna Ferry Smith's army was rerouted when in Kern County the Sheriff's department forced them to leave the city, and like the army in Texas, dumped them in the Mojave Desert. Forced to commandeer a train carrying fruit and other supplies Smith's army used the hijacked train to try and make up lost time. The federal government then used the action of the group to arrest them, ending their participation in the movement.[5] Similar fates befell multiple groups. The result was that despite the efforts of Coxey, Browne, and others like Kelley, the Commonweal and Industrial Army Movement marching on Washington quickly evaporated.

As interest in the marchers waned in the press, federal authorities used the dearth of coverage to remove the remaining encamped marchers. By mid-summer the entire affair for most of the reading country was a distant episode, especially as other instances of unrest like the Pullman Strike got underway.

That was it. It was over. Or was it?

Historians and social commentators in the coming years would continually return to this mass march and examine what it meant for United States politics and broader American social movement history. Numerous articles and three major books have been written on the march alone. Countless other studies of marches, direct democracy, and economic protest have likewise used Coxey's Army as a subject. Why has a single march that lasted only for a few months in the summer of 1894 warranted so much attention? This project is an exploration of that question. In answering the question of the importance of what Coxey's Army was to U.S. political history, one

[5] Anna Smith would later go on to have a career in the Socialist Party as a public lecturer.

discovers a broader story of protest politics that helps explain the connection from the earliest national protests to later programs like the New Deal.

The three major works dedicated to Coxey's Army— Donald McMurry's *The Industrial Armies and the Commonweal* (1923), Carlos Schwantes' *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (1985), and Jerry Prout's *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs* (2016)— all make major contributions both to understanding the march itself as well as illuminating how different periods post-1894 have thought about march.

McMurry's work, aside from being the first major scholarly study, was largely a polemic. Arguing that Coxey's Army and the other Populist protests of the era were made up of clueless buffoons and political charlatans, the book stands as not only an entry in the historiography, but also a valuable primary document of how some thought about the legacy of the march. Written before the Great Depression and New Deal, and published when figures like Jacob Coxey were still alive and not even at the height of his political power, McMurry miscalculated how the march and its ideas would continue to influence US politics.[6]

Schwantes' work, written in the mid-1980s, is far more nuanced and appreciative of the march. In many ways, Schwantes wrote the first real major study of the march, and gathered in one place what many scholars suspected— that Coxey's Army was a major incident in the history of American social reform and a vital part of American Populism. Furthermore, Schwantes did the much needed and painstaking work of tracking down multiple sources across the country, and showing how Coxey's Army was a radical moment in American history were a movement, popularly fueled and national in scope, arose to deal with the issues of American economic

[6] Coxey would eventually be elected mayor of Massillon Ohio in the 1930s.

inequality. Three decades later, Schwantes work remains one of the major interventions in the history of Gilded Age political protests.

Prout continues this argument in his 2016 work, stating explicitly that Coxey's Army was a clear expression of proto-New Deal thought. Prout paid even more attention to the forward thinking attitudes of Coxey and Browne on the issue of race, attitudes that would not be repeated in later mass marches such as the Suffragist Parade of 1913. Prout also places Coxey's Army in a more nuanced context of American Populism. Popular historical understanding often depicted Populism as a homogenous group, but Prout argues that Coxey, Browne, and the Commonweal were a specific part of American Populism— a left-wing, protest-oriented part of the movement that presaged later social movements. "Coxey preferred to call himself a Populist," Prout argues, "and his plan, like those of other notable Populist reformers, was noteworthy for its breadth and imagination. However, what set Coxey apart from many of his fellow reform-minded colleagues was his willingness to take his argument outside the meetinghouses and convention halls where Populist reformers often spoke to one another or argued among themselves over platform planks and the wording of resolutions."[7]

Yet, for all of the important contributions Schwantes and Prout make the bulk of their studies focus almost exclusively on the few months in 1894, really beginning when the marchers left Ohio and ending shortly after the marchers were chased out of D.C. They imply the connection to the New Deal due to the similarity of the commonweal's demands and the programs undertaken by FDR's administration. Yet no systematic study has yet been undertaken that focuses primarily on how the march impacted thoughts and events in American history after 1894. Although some works, like Lucy G. Barber's 2002 book *Marching on Washington*, explains how Coxey's Army

[7] Jerry Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016): 4.

was the beginning of a broader shift in politics toward national demonstrations in the street, the study does not focus on the specific ideas of the marchers in 1894. Schwantes provides a clear narrative and serious understanding of the march, Prout deepens that understanding, and Barber speaks to the history of the specific action of marching in public space. This all counters various popular understandings that Populism was a supposedly reactionary movement of farmers angered at the advent of modernity. Instead, it illustrates that there existed a vibrant and large wing of the movement that was radical and active.

Although historians like Walter Nugent have largely attributed the rise of the negative reading of Populism to "revisionist" historians in the 1950s, with Richard Hofstadter being the primary suspect, Populism did not need to wait until the height of the Cold War to receive negative press from liberals, conservatives, and the American media. As chapter one will demonstrate, the negative reception of Coxey's Army and Populism was there from the movement's beginning. Negative reactions to Populism were as much a part of the late nineteenth century world as it was later in the historiographies of the twentieth. This anti-Populism, in fact, reflected a deeper ideological divide between bourgeois liberal democracies, and mass demonstration politics. The disagreement between the two questioned the very prudence of Populist politics, regardless of the period. This project argues that Coxey, Browne, and their march were part of the broader American Populist movement of the 1890s, that it represented a specific left wing of the movement, and that it was undertaken by actors who had a lasting impact on US politics long after 1894. It also traces the development, content, and impact of the central idea of the protest—The Commonwealth.[8] Called the "Co-Operative Commonwealth" by certain socialists, this concept that Coxey and Browne adopted and then developed and promoted, was a fascinating mixture of socialist politics,

[8]Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Socialism*, rev. ed. (New York: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1890).

democratic republican ideals, and Christian social ethics. By focusing on this concept, and not just the march itself as a physical occupation of space, this project shows how the ideas of the march grew out of the American socialist movement of the 1890s, that those ideas were later present in the political debates in the People's Party, and how those ideas continued to influence arguments into the 1930s as activists, Coxey included, pushed for a radical remaking of the American political economy.

The Populist movement was never a single homogenous group with a singular essence. Instead, it was a multifaceted movement that was divergent even before the 1896 People's Party convention in St. Louis. After this convention, the movement continued as a myriad of different political efforts. The issues of bimetallism, fusion with the Democratic Party, and political action all were contentious because they spoke to fundamental questions about how one operated as a democratic entity in society, what role (if any) a market economy had in a free society, and which faction, party, or group truly spoke for the people. Figures like Coxey, Browne, Henry Demarest Lloyd, Eugene Debs, William Hope Harvey, and other socialists, labor activists, and reformers were in conversation with one another, theorizing both in print and practice what would constitute a new, liberated American political order. Likewise, this debate continued among figures like Coxey, Harvey, James Renshaw Cox, and later reformers who entered politics in the first decades of the twentieth century. By focusing on these activists, thinkers, and their movements and organizations this project explores how the power of ideas in democratic action can reshape how people fundamentally think about their society. Jacob Coxey's unusually long life (he lived from 1854-1951) provides the historian with a convenient thread to trace this history. But no biography, no matter how long, can fully encapsulate these various changes. As such, Coxey's career, the concept of the Commonweal, and the mythos of the march will all be examined to see how the

arguments of activists in this period related to the major changes experienced in turn of the century America.

It will be noted from the outset, that Coxey and the marchers that joined him in 1894 were not the sole actors who created this change. Decentering Coxey's Army as the defining moment in the Gilded Age, or somehow the moment New Deal thought emerged in the streets and minds of America is vital. An understanding has emerged in the historiography of Coxey's Army, and popular protest in general, which views the act of marches, protests, sit-ins, etc. as *the* moment of creation for social change. It follows a faulty logic where social problems are assumed to be lurking below the surface of a society until a group of people force the rest of society to see the problem, inspire debate, and lead to change on the issue. This certainly can happen, but it is not the principal feature of a protest. Refuting this logic is key to refuting the broader bourgeois liberal logic that is often so hostile to mass demonstration politics.

The Problem of Populism:

Not surprisingly from the fractured historic subject that is Populism an even more fractured historiography has followed. The Populists have been called everything from proto-fascists, to proto-New Dealers, to latent Socialists. They have been praised for their ingenuity, their idealism, and their ability to reframe American politics, and have also been denounced for emboldening popular reactionary politics, inspiring mass nativism, and tearing at the foundations of modernity. Naturally, the different views of Populists have led to deep schisms in the historiography. The argument over Populism among historians has even been called "one of the bloodiest episodes in American historiography…an unusually bitter historiographical controversy."[9]

[9] Walter Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), xi. Nugent's book, aside from being a spirited and well researched defense of American Populism, is likewise a first rate recounting of the of the nuanced and politically charged field of Populist studies.

This has been such a combative subfield in American history because of the diverse intellectual nature of the subjects themselves. As a mass political movement Populism defies a basic, simple definition. This is in part due to the heterodoxy that made up the movement's ranks, but also on a more philosophical level because it demonstrates how Populism organized itself as a political movement. In its simplest form, Populism claimed to be a democratic movement concerned with the advent of modern corporate capitalism and argued that it spoke as the legitimate voice of "the people." Growing out of collections of small-scale farmers, urban workers, and anti-corporate capitalist politics, the Populism in 1890s America was a movement to preserve and restore democratic promise to a society in danger of being overrun by the trusts, monopolies, and newly emerging industrial corporations. But in claiming to be a movement not just for people but for "the people" the Populists faced an existential crisis. Exactly who were "the people"?

"The people" is an elastic concept. This was the major insight Shelton Stromquist offers in his 2006 book *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism.* What is democracy precisely? The simple answer is "rule by the people." But this definition is vague and requires a more detailed inventory of who made up the legitimate ranks of "the people." Stromquist contends that by replacing class and other distinct social identities and positionalities, Progressives created a loosely defined category based on older republican thought to inform modern democratic politics.

Since the category of "the people" was so amorphous, upper-class activists in the Progressive Era, armed with Victorian senses of morality and social control, could justify reforms whose end goal was treating biological and political bodies as clay in an eager potter's hand. The power many of the Progressives cultivated, Stromquist argued, was their keen understanding of the flexibility of this concept. By shaping the definition of people to be an idealized political body,

undemocratic practices laden with problematic assumptions drove many of the Progressive Era's reform efforts. "[The Progressives] crafted a common language that stressed the paramount need for social reconciliation in the service of democratic renewal," Stromquist writes. "They convinced themselves that class conflict and the 'parochial' class loyalties that bred it could be transcended. They imagined 'the people' as a civic community in which class would lose its meaning. They reinvented a broad notion of citizenship and civic responsibility drained of nineteenth century producerist class partisanship."[10] This imagining of "the people" was deeply problematic, Stromquist argued, because it "failed to come to terms with the structures of class power that shaped 'public' interest and over time undermined [the Progressives'] quest for democratic community."[11]

In much the same way the American Populist movement of the 1890s struggled with defining and organizing around a shared common understanding of who were "the people" and what democratic society should entail. This has led some historians and thinkers to argue that the Populists of the 1890s and later were not really a movement at all. Thinkers such as John Judis have stated that Populism is not an ideology, but a political logic, and therefore it is difficult to link the various branches of Populism together. "There are rightwing, leftwing and centrist populist parties," Judis writes. "It is not an ideology, but a political logic— a way of thinking about politics."[12] Therefore, there was no common ideology that have defined the various populisms of American and world history. Why? Because there is no common definition of "the people." "It can be blue-collar workers, shopkeepers, or students burdened by debt, "Judis argues, "it can be the

[10] Shelton Stromquist, *Re-inventing the People: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), viii.
[11] Ibid, viii.
[12] John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016), 14.

poor or the middle class… The exact referents to 'the people' and 'the elite' don't define populism; what defines it is the conflictual relationship between the two."[13]

In other words, even an inherently democratic concept like "the people" could ultimately serve as the intellectual basis of a profoundly undemocratic political practice. It was precisely this ability of "the people" to be reshaped by those espousing certain rhetoric that many critics have worried about the potential of Populist politics to harm democracy. Were "the people" based on class, race, and ethnicity? Was it stripped of these concerns? Was it imperial, violent, and exclusionary?

The anti-Populist scholars have typically charged that if the Progressives and their "the people" were fraught with Victorian notions which ignored class, race, and ethnicity, then the Populists, made up of rural whites, Euro-American workers, and eager politicians, were plagued by nativism, xenophobia, and blatant white supremacy. In this fashion, Jan-Werner Müller argues in his 2016 book *What is Populism?* that Populism is an undemocratic and anti-pluralistic political movement. "Populism…is a particular moralistic imagination of politics," he explains, "a way of perceiving the political world that set a morally pure and fully unified— but, I shall argue, ultimately fictional— people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior."[14] Müller intended his study to be an indictment of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Populist movements, but his arguments are a fruitful theoretical framework for anyone interested in the long development of Populism throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries.

Müller argues that for any democratic society to remain liberal, open, and robust it has to maintain a plurality in so far as the majority of actors understand that no one group speaks,

---

[13] Ibid, 15.

[14] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 19-20.

represents, or constitutes the true "people." Adopting the attitude that one spoke for the people was to assume that one's political movement was the legitimate representation of democratic will. This, naturally, assumed that opponents were illegitimate, outsiders, and most troubling traitors to the people. Intolerance and an inability to share power, which Müller contended was a major aspect of liberal democracies, became virtually impossible. "In short, populism distorts the democratic process," Müller argued. "And if the governing party has a sufficient majority, it can enact a new constitution justified as an effort to appropriate the state for the 'real Hungarians' or 'real Poles,' as opposed to post-Communist or liberal elites that supposedly rob the people of their own country."[15]

Yet even Müller acknowledges that there was still an issue in this formulation. There was a stark difference between European populism and the populisms found in the Americas, Müller argued that the European variety of populism was largely nothing but destructive nationalism based on xenophobia, race essentialism, and fascist politics. The Americas, both in North and South America, was somewhat different. In Latin America, populism had a strong orientation to liberatory politics. Much of this could be accredited to the anti-colonial struggles in South America, Central America, and Mexico. But what about the populism of the United States? Specifically, the populism with a capital-P that marked much of the political activism of the 1890s? Müller contends that this "version" of Populism was not really a branch of populist politics. Instead, it reflected a latent socialism in the United States. In this way, left-wing inclusive movements should be severed from right-wing exclusionary ones, regardless of the fact if they both called themselves "Populists." "We have to allow for the possibility," he explained, "that a plausible understanding of populism

[15] Ibid, 57.

will in fact end up excluding historical movements and actors who explicitly called themselves populists."[16]

This argument is attractive. It simplifies the task of the historian who has to figure out how such radically different political traditions could be contained in a single term. Yet despite this appeal it is too simple. This reasoning maintains that Populists and Populisms are simply different just because they are. They share the same term simply because they do. This is far from a meaningful answer for those who are trying to figure out the complex and nuanced way politics evolved. Populist studies and the political theorists interested in defining a historically based, definitive view of Populism would do well to acknowledge how scholars of the Progressive Era have dealt with systematizing and classifying the broad array of "Progressives" and "Progressivisms" that are far more multiple than the Populists and Populisms of the modern period.

Scholars like Stromquist provide an interesting insight into how this taxonomy can be achieved. Progressives were not a specific movement, like the abolitionists, suffragists, or labor movement. Instead, the Progressives represented a broad culture of movement politics, ideology, and historic time. Progressivism was a designation that explained both individual actions and the spirit of an entire age. "By claiming their own organizational and ideological space," Stromquist explained about the Progressives, "they challenged the producer's conception of a society divided along class lines. This Progressive movement articulated with rising confidence the proposition that class conflict could be transcended, social harmony between classes orchestrated, and a classless citizenry— the people, made the agents of democratic renewal."[17]

In other words, the Progressives as a general rule believed in the concept of progress to improve life and make democratic civilization a possibility. Modifying or in some instances

---

[16] Ibid, 19.
[17] Stromquist, *Re-inventing the People*, 16.

abandoning explicit class positions, the Progressive movement tended to gravitate toward Whiggish interpretations of human development. Historical being, that is the very act of moving through time as a civilization, produced change and that change could be studied, directed, and brought to the service of a people. Robert Wiebe, Alan Trachtenberg, James Kloppenberg, Eldon Eisenach, and Daniel Rodgers, along with the vast array of Progressive Era studies, likewise agree that what gives the Progressive Era its continuity is a shifting but interconnected articulation in the belief of progress.

The fact that different actors, organizations, and political movements differed in their definition of what exactly "progress" looked like is beside the point. Or, more precisely, is the point. As Stromquist argued, the very idea of progress for a "people" helps explain both the democratic idealism and the dictatorial shortcomings of the period. From social democracy to eugenics, industrial technology to social work, public education and public sanitation to segregation, all are different programs which impact different people at different rates. Yet binding them together is a fundamental belief in the ability of society to progress both temporally and qualitatively and actively shape itself into new social realities.

Applying the logic on the topic of Populism of thinkers like Müller, this vast array of Progressivisms would lead us to the conclusion that the Progressives of the nineteenth up through the twenty-first century were nothing more than a bizarre coincidence in naming. Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger, Richard Ely, and Teddy Roosevelt may all have called themselves Progressives, and this movement may have contributed to New Deal liberalism and continued in important ways into the Democratic Party of the 21st century but the links between them would be, since their programs ranged from reactionary to leftist, virtually non-existent. But the fact that the concept of progress was so prevalent is precisely why thinkers like Daniel Rodgers and Thomas Bender were

able not only to tie the various Progressive Era ideologies together in specific nations, but also to link them in a broader transnational history.[18]

This historiographical insight matters deeply. Populists and the various iterations of Populisms are as much historically linked as the various strains of Progressives and Progressivisms. That link is a common ideology based on a broader idea, elastic in nature and historically contingent. The Populists, for all of their ideological and political differences, maintained that "the people" were witnessing a profound betrayal of their democratic government. Historical change was afoot, and the rise of large scale industrial and corporate capitalism threatened the very social relations and body politic that made democracy possible. To combat this, the Populists argued for a massive political movement to "reclaim" or radically alter American democratic institutions. Therefore, there was a deep connection between the broader Populist movement and the wider Progressive Era. Both designations speak to a period preoccupied with the concept of progress, historical change, and the ability of people to alter and shape the evolution of their society. For the Populists this meant tackling the issue of capitalism by organizing philosophically and politically on the concept of "the people" to maintain, and expand democratic life.

So, how did Coxey's Army, indeed the whole lot of mass demonstrators in the 1890s, fit within this broader context of Populism?

Scholars like Richard Hofstadter and other historical critics of the Populist movement advanced the argument that the Populists were "anti-modern." That is, their opposition to corporate capitalism and the trusts was a reactionary response to changes in the economy. Mix this in with the preponderance of what many critics say are clear signs of anti-Semitism, racism, and

---

[18] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
Thomas Bender, *Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

xenophobia, and one was left with a Populism that was an anti-modern movement which wanted to reestablish the supposedly glorious days of America's Anglo agrarian republic. Hofstadter, whose long career as a historian was often dedicated to questioning the supposed "exceptional" nature of American life and thought, as well as challenging the Whiggish interpretation of American political and economic progress, frequently challenged the value of American Populism. His 1955 book *The Age of Reform* rethinks the alleged path of progress that had been initiated by the American Populists, which was assumed to continue into the Progressive Era, and which culminated in the establishment of American social democracy in the New Deal state.

Although there was a sizeable opposition to Populism in general, and Coxey's Army in particular, by the 1950s there was a significant pro-Populist school of interpretation in the field of American history. Works such as John D. Hicks's 1931 book *The Populist Revolt*, C. Vann Woodward's 1938 *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, and Woodward's 1951 *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* had all argued that American Populism was a robust, democratic movement that had led the U.S. through the Gilded Age into a new era of economic liberalism. The Populists of these studies were largely open-minded, forward-looking reformers. Their studies, also, were published at what seemed to be the height of power of Populism, what with Coxey finally swept to his only electoral victory, the election of FDR, and emergence of New Deal liberalism.

Yet Hofstadter and other revisionists were far less sanguine about the Populists. Hofstadter in *The Age of Reform* looks at the rank and file of the movement. As such, one of Hofstadter's major claims was that New Deal liberalism developed not as a progression of Populism and Progressivism, but instead emerged almost *in spite of* the earlier movements. Nugent, Charles Postel, Lawrence Goodwyn, and Elizabeth Sanders have all since taken turns refuting this argument, with Nugent offering the most spirited and pointed critique of Hofstadter. Yet, in both

Nugent's original 1963 book *The Tolerant Populists* and his historiographical essay in the updated 2013 edition, the major issue for Nugent was Hofstadter's charge of Populism as the purveyor of right-wing ideology, white supremacy, and nativism. Nugent, and several other historians after him, argue that such a charge was patently unfair and historically inaccurate. But the question still lingers, and since the 2010 US midterm elections has remained a perennial question for both American and European observers. How exactly did the racism of nineteenth century America affect Populism? Were the Populists responsible for incubating later xenophobia, paranoia, and reactionary politics of the McCarthy era, second Ku Klux Klan, and Jim Crow South?

Although less studied than the question of race, the charge that the Populists and their mass demonstrations were reactionary due to their opposition to corporate capitalism is just as significant. This is so, because how we answer this question influences how we, in our own period, categorize anti-corporate capitalist movements. Hofstadter argued that part of the appeal of the Populists to American historians was not its influence on the establishment of New Deal liberalism (since according to Hofstadter that connection was somewhat tenuous) but because the Populists represented the ability of thinkers to harken back to an inaccurate and nostalgic past of small scale, largely agrarian producers. "Much of America still longs for—indeed, expects again to see—a return of the older individualism and the older isolation," Hofstadter argued in his conclusion. "In truth we may well sympathize with the Populists and with those who have shared their need to believe that somewhere in the American past there was a golden age whose life was far better than our own. But actually to live in that world, actually to enjoy its cherished promise and its imagined innocence, is no longer within our power."[19]

[19] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 328.

In other words, Hofstadter argued that historians and political observers needed to grow up. Populism was a false narrative based on the lost vision of producerism. James Livingston in many ways has continued this argument, fundamentally challenging anti-corporate capitalist Populism, and arguing that the Populists contained dangerous impulses for democratic society. "If you call someone a fascist, that's a criticism, but to say the man is a populist, well, maybe that's high praise," Livingston has argued. "Ask almost any historian, from Charles Beard and Vernon Parrington to John D. Hicks and Fred Shannon, on toward Lawrence Goodwyn, Elizabeth Sanders, and Charles Post[el]. By their accounting, Populism in the 1880s and 90s was a mass democratic movement because it was dedicated to the abolition of the 'trusts,' the late-19th century vernacular term for the corporations."[20] Livingston maintained that it was the corporation, specifically its ability to organize society into more and more connectivity, and efficiency which held the radical potential for society. This new state, made possible by modernity and the corporation, was the vehicle toward a socialist future. "[M]y quarrel with populism," Livingston argued, "has been carried out in these professional precincts. Once upon a time, I agreed with Hofstadter's critics. But it gradually, eventually dawned on me that the Populists were angry anti-modernists, and that their pro-corporate opponents, including the newborn AFL, were searching for a way into, and maybe beyond, modernity."[21]

Yet, this reading of Populism's singular defining feature as "anti-corporation," and therefore "anti-modern," misses a significant portion of Postel, Sanders, and Goodwyn's argument. As Postel argued, "The Populists challenged the corporate frameworks. They protested the inequitable distribution of wealth. They demanded more responsive government. But they, too

---

[20] James Livingston, "The Anatomy of Populism," accessed March 12, 2018, https://politicsandletters.wordpress.com/2016/11/11/the-anatomy-of-populism/

[21] Ibid.

James Livingston, "On Richard Hofstadter and the Politics of 'Consensus History'," *boundary 2* (2007): 33-46.

were modern. They embraced the Enlightenment notions of progress as firmly as their opponents did, and this allowed them to shape the weapons of protest out of the modern materials of technological, organizational, and ideological innovation."[22]

Furthermore, this "anti-modern" critique assumes that the push for a small scale, agrarian republic was specifically always a call "to go back in time." Yet, as several of the scholars working in the so-called "New History of Capitalism" have argued, this agrarian republic never actually existed. It was an ideal created by political philosophers like Thomas Jefferson, and championed by the figures attracted to the call of the Democratic-Republicans. Federalists and Jeffersonian Democrats, therefore, were competing political parties that vied for control over the US's republican *future*, as in yet to come. The agrarian republican ideal, therefore, constituted a belief in what America could become, not what it was or what it should return to. This is an important distinction to make, because it flips what many supposed to be the progressive, pro-corporate capitalist trajectory of American history.

What critics of Populism, like Livingston and Hofstadter, have missed is that Populism at its core represented a radical breakdown in the politics of a particular era. Populism, specifically the action of the Populist protest, had the ability to drastically reshape the concept of "the people" in ways that was difficult to predict. Populism is less a sense of majority rule, or an anti-pluralist politics, and instead a counterhegemonic movement that gathers great swaths of people disenfranchised, typically on the basis of economics, and reshapes that group into a new political potential. A new base of political alliances suddenly erupts from the streets and occupied public places of particular eras, and challenges the existing political parties, governing bodies, and hegemonic political assumptions to respond, adapt, and potentially revolutionize themselves in

[22] Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii.

response to the breakdown in hegemonic validity. This argument is important to this project for three key reasons.

First, previous scholarship on Coxey's Army of 1894 has largely only focused on the way in which the march developed and the way the federal government responded. In only focusing on the march and the immediate aftermath historians have, correctly, noted that Coxey's Army serves as a kind of precursor to the New Deal, but since a detailed study of Coxey's Army post-1894 has not been given as much focus as the march itself, the studies largely assume that the simple raising of the issues— unemployment, public works, and unstable monetary policy— led to a mass awakening in American society, eventually culminating in the creation of the New Deal. This relies on a political logic grounded in bourgeois liberal democracy. By arguing that the public sphere, as an arena adjacent to representative states and capitalist economies, provides the staging grounds of democratic development via rational debate, it is simply assumed in works by historians like Prout and Schwantes that the protest served as a particular speech-act. Coxey "made" the voices of the unemployed heard, thrusting their arguments into a broader public sphere that was then debated. As this project shows, there is little evidence for this. Instead, Coxey's actions as a political activist were full of radical potential, not because of the speech-act they engendered, but instead in its ability to contribute one of many mass political actions that challenged federal authority, provided a counterhegemonic claim to corporate capital, and most importantly demonstrated the power in direct organizing of people to act on their own accord.

Second, the majority of the historiography concerning Coxey's Army has also largely only focused on the issue of unemployment and public works. In this sense, Coxey's role as a Populist leader is clear. Populism has often been categorized, and somewhat criticized, as being an "empty signifier" in that its core political philosophy outside of responses to liberal democracy are void.

Instead, Populism typically takes the concerns of groups, like the working class, and transposes those ideas generated by those groups into a broader political program. Although Coxey's "Good Roads Program" would frequently be accredited to his own ingenious thinking (Coxey being a particular strong proponent of this argument) the fact is solving the unemployment crisis through public works long predated Coxey and the 1890s. The Reconstruction era alone overflowed with popular protests of workers demanding virtually the same concept Coxey and other Populists proposed decades later. Therefore, Coxey's thinking concerning public works and unemployment, although important, were not the most significant component of his political agenda. Instead, as it is shown in chapter one, Coxey was throughout his long political career a greenback-labor activist. His main focus throughout much of his life was the solving of the economic issues of the U.S. by creating a true fiat currency based on its ability to serve a social purpose of simple exchange, and not a capitalist one of accruing new value.

These two points are vital to understanding the third major point of this project. Coxey and other Populists who aligned with him were essentially concerned with the production of new value, who benefited from that new value, and how social, economic, and political organization led to the benefit for some and the disenfranchisement of the masses. Where many historians have either ignored or downplayed Coxey's focus as a monetary reformer, they have missed the rich, and often bordering on the sectarian, intellectual battles that ensued in reformist circles around the money question. This issue, as it is shown in chapter three, could largely be broken into four major camps. The greenback currency reformers, like Coxey, favored a true fiat system of currency, marrying the state, economy, and civil society's market into a larger economic and political system that "spoke" for the people, since it placed the production of value in the market's reliance on cooperation and tied the state to its direct regulation. The second group, also monetary reformers,

were the "Silverites." These reformers argued that the U.S. had to readopt a bimetal standard (gold and silver) in order to shore up a sufficient, democratic, and large based monetary supply. Third was the so-called "gold bugs" who favored a strict gold standard that benefitted large corporate financial institutions. Fourth were figures like Henry Demarest Lloyd, Laurence Gronlund, and other socialists who believed the question of money was at best a distraction, at worse a surrendering of basic socialist principles. For them, the production of value was not in the market at all, but instead in the activities of the working class. Historians like Benjamin Alexander have touched on this aspect of Coxey, arguing that he was essentially a "producerist." But what Alexander does not fully appreciate is that there were variations of producerism, historically contingent and often politically diverse. What Alexander misunderstands is that, yes, Coxey was interested in the question of the production of value, but that this interest did not make him a non-radical in opposition to the socialists. In fact the entire project of socialism was directly related to the question of producerism. The questions, how new value was created by society, who benefitted from that production, and most importantly how should society benefit from the production of value were all related to the ultimate question— how should society be organized to benefit the "true" producers, and as a result what social ordering was the most just?

This was no minor question. In fact, one could argue, it was the major question that influenced entire political programs in popular thought and the actions of parties. Coxey and other Populists argued that the modern economy did not represent a fair distribution of the new value created by the modern economy. Populists, ranging from officials in the People's Party to the farmer's movement, to figures like Coxey, argued that the corporation unjustly moved new value to the upper echelons of the economy, impoverishing the masses in the process. The socialists and growing labor movement, far from disagreeing with this observation, agreed that the arrival of the

modern economy had brought the tools for a new, improved, and better future, but that without a political program dedicated specifically to moving that value back to the masses the benefits of modernity, and indeed the very health of a democratic people, would be lost. Yet, what proved difficult was establishing a common political movement with shared specific programs. Little consensus existed among the diverse movement in the 1890s.

Yet, one concept, the "commonweal" emerged as a shared concept, a possible new state for American society. Coxey, Browne, Lloyd, Gronlund, Debs, Lewis, and a host of other figures all contributed to this concept, and in so doing bequeathed a vibrant and fascinating venture into political philosophy concerning how a newly revolutionized American society *could* come into being. The commonweal was a decidedly historical concept, resting on the idea that American society had undergone certain historic periods, and that the sum of all of its experiences could converge on a new era of justice, equality, and liberation. Lloyd, perhaps, provided some of the best understanding in this regard, arguing in an extensive correspondence with activists, politicians, journalists, and clergy of what exactly this commonweal entailed. In short, it relied on the advent of Christian social ethics, corporate capitalist efficiency, and American democratic republicanism. These three components came together as a new summation of civilization and provided the historical building blocks for a radically new society. "The Co-operative Commonwealth is the legitimate offspring and lawful successor of the republic," Lloyd argued during a speech at a convention in October of 1894. "Our liberties and our wealth are from the people and by the people and both must be for the people. Wealth like government is the product of the co-operation of all, and like government must be the property of all its creators, not of a privileged few alone."[23] In 1897, Lloyd elaborated further in an address entitled "The New Political Economy." "Christianity

[23] Henry Demarest Lloyd, "Evolution of Socialism," October 5, 1894. Box 54, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

came out of paganism and the republic out of despotism. Something comes out of Christianity and the republic better than either… Paradise."[24] Lloyd continued arguing that the raw potential of this new society lay not in a vision of utopian future, but in the very historical conditions found in the present—

> It lies about us, as our Virgils and Dantes and Miltons have told us, circle on circle; but these circles, as the poets have not always said, rest on the earth. We have in every response which we can educate the powers within us to make to the calls from man and nature without, a new possibility of paradise.

Coxey's contribution to all of this was primarily as a Populist political activist, agitating for particular political changes from the vantage point of creating a commonweal society. Yet, whereas Coxey viewed himself as a first-rate political thinker, the originator of ideas on public works, he instead contributed to American history the illustration of how Populist protests of people could radically remake the boundaries of the possible, altering the foundations the political process operated upon by remaking "the people" through mass action.

Therefore, either removing or controlling certain aspects of corporate capital was not forsaking America's destined future, either in the nineteenth or twenty-first centuries, unless one assumes that the U.S. was destined to wed itself to large-scale corporate capital. The Populist argument against corporate capital was not necessarily a call to the past, but more importantly a vision for how future states should be constructed.

Furthermore, if we are to take the historiography of Coxey's Army seriously we must account for the fact that from the 1920s to 2016 historians have, without fail, categorized the march as one of the major demonstrations of the Populist movement. Yet, nowhere contained within the march itself was an argument to outright destroy corporate capital, replace corporate capital, or

---

[24] Henry Demarest Lloyd, "The New Political Economy," June 19, 1897. Box 23, Folder 3, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

return society from the lobbies of corporations to village-centered past societies. Instead, the "commonweal" was a vision for a new society. Henry Demarest Lloyd, Austin Lewis, and Laurence Gronlund, Coxey and Browne never argued for a small scale producerist republic. Taking seriously what the majority of socialist orators and writers said in their period, Coxey and Browne argued that American civilization had to evolve into a new state, a state based on co-operation, modernity, and democratic politics if it were to survive as a free society in the age of the corporation. Understanding this key difference, a difference that did pit various Populists against one another (often at vital political junctions) is key to understanding one of the most misunderstood but significant elements of Coxey's Army. To do this, we must examine the history, content, and evolution of the ideas that created the commonweal.

Coxey's Army maintained that the federal government needed to use its considerable power and uphold its duty as a democratic body to improve society. The Populists, or at least a great deal of them, were not anti-modern so much as they were modernists of a different stripe. Whereas the modernists of the U.S. who espoused unbridled corporate capital growth (and their numbers have always been debated) argued for one particular conception of modernity, the Populists argued for another. Turning the power of the increasingly large federal state to the issue of regulation, protection, and a check on the power of large scale capitalists, the Populists were modernists who argued history had progressed in a certain economic vein that raised fundamental questions about the political ideals of the nation and that, as a result, there needed to be some new state of affairs.

Chapter One quickly recounts the events and actions leading up to the march itself, starting with Coxey's early political career in the Greenback Party, examining the influence of the Panic of 1893 and Chicago Columbian Exposition on Browne and Coxey's activism, and the early

planning and intellectual makeup of the march. Chapter Two examines the march and its reception, both by the government and the nation's press, and then connects the march to another major event in American political history, the Pullman Strike. Often treated as universes apart, with one an expression of Populism and the other of industrial unionism, historians have not looked at the similar attacks that the Cleveland Administration and national press made in their coverage and treatment of both actions. By examining how Eugene V. Debs, the ARU, and the larger labor movement intersected with Coxey and other Populist reformers in both action, thought, and rhetoric one can see how Populism better fit into a longer tradition of American left-wing protest politics.

This will lead to Chapter Three, which begins with the 1896 People's Party convention in St. Louis. At the convention both Coxey and Debs were considered for the honor of leading the national ticket since they, as Lloyd argued, were the only figures who had actually led real political movements. Yet, key differences contained in the Populist movement and the broader left-wing activism of the time devolved into enraged infighting at the convention, with Coxey often at the center of the arguments. This chapter also explore the intellectual and political debate over the currency question, and shows how the debate was related to differing visions of producerism and what, exactly, was meant by the concept of the "commonweal."

Chapter Four examines the impact of Coxey's Army after the 1890s. Following the march the meaning of it was not entirely clear. Although some socialists like Daniel De Leon saw great potential in the march's organizing of people, he was skeptical of Coxey's programs and his focus on the currency question. Likewise, this chapter will also look at the problems Coxey and other Populists had in their vision of what "the people" were, what the legitimate legacy of the nation

was, and most importantly how Populists like Coxey could readily be found peddling in overtly anti-Semitic arguments.

Chapter Five examines both the Bonus Army March of 1932 and James Renshaw Cox's march of unemployed workers. Both events were compared in the press to Coxey's Army, and the rise of Cox as a nationally known Catholic labor priest and activist coincided with a resurgence of importance for 1890s reformers like Coxey as the nation moved from the Hoover administration to the first years of FDR and the New Deal. The chapter concludes with an examination of Coxey's 1931 election as mayor of Massillon, Ohio, and the reforms and changes he attempted to enact in his brief term. The conclusion considers the question of why Coxey's Army remains significant to historians and activists to this day, and discusses the problems Populism continue to inspire in American politics.

CHAPTER 1. PLANNING THE MARCH

1.1 Introduction

Although Coxey's Army began its trek to Washington, D.C. from Ohio in March of 1894, its roots and conception were a year earlier in the city of Chicago. Rocked the decade before by such explosive incidents as the Haymarket Affair of 1886, Chicago continued to be a bustling hotbed of political thought, activism, and movement building throughout the 1890s and beyond. The city also served as a microcosm of the new gilded wealth and abject poverty that marked the period. Perhaps no event demonstrated this divide in wealth and promise more so than the 1893 Columbian Exposition, a yearlong massive world's fair showcasing the century's major American and global advancements in art, science, and economics. Buildings, collections, and shows supposed to represent the multiple facets of human global civilization, occupied well over six-hundred acres of Chicago and was meant to be a celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's 1492 arrival in the Americas, and the subsequent waves of European colonization that had eventually birthed the United States.

Although over forty nations participated in the exposition, it was clear from the majority of the buildings and displays that the theme of the fair was American exceptionalism. With the Civil War a receding memory, the fair's organizers presented an argument that the American republic was a transplanted and improved European-like culture, a new democracy thriving in the Americas. The evidence was the plethora of modern innovations such as electricity, large scale industrial capitalism, and the United States' rising supply of consumer goods displayed in building after building.

Yet beneath the fair's quickly assembled and white washed structures was a festering series of contradictions. Billed as a way for the masses of the United States and international travelers to

come and learn about the various cultures and peoples of the world, along with advances of the U.S., critics of the fair's exhibits argued that the organizers misrepresented and portrayed various groups, specifically people of color, in a negative light.

Fredrick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and other leading African American activists protested the exposition, claiming the fair whitewashed American civilization and purposefully portrayed the nation's large African American population in an inaccurate, unfair, and unsympathetic light (when it was presented at all). Writing in a pamphlet *The Reason Why The Colored American is not in the World's Exposition*, they argued that,

> "Those visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition… will naturally ask: Why are not the colored people, who constitute so large an element of the American population, and who have contributed so large a share to American greatness, more visibly present and better represented in this World's Exposition? Why are they not taking part in this glorious celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of their country? Are they so dull and stupid as to feel no interest in this great event? It is to answer these questions and supply as far as possible our lack of representation at the Exposition that the Afro-American has published this volume."[1]

Mere representation in a public venue, they argued, was not emancipation or liberatory politics. Instead, by not controlling the content of the displays or addressing long standing political issues, people of color were placed into a public script which negatively reinforced certain stereotypes promoted by the nation's white population. Eventually the board of directors for the fair sought a compromise with the protesters providing a "Colored People's Day" where African Americans could display specific cultural and intellectual achievements. The move further alienated Wells who saw the compromise as a cynical and unsatisfactory way to appease both African Americans who were boycotting, while not upsetting segregationists, all while striking a

[1] Ida B. Wells, ed., *The Reason Why The Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (n.p. 1893). Accessed, August 15, 2018. http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html

"peaceful" resolution as the international press reported on the fair's activities. However, Douglass accepted the chance to address fair's visitors and thought the opportunity could be used to challenge racist stereotypes and practices. Yet the board's decision, and Douglass's participation, largely did little to achieve any anti-racist victory. As one caption from a souvenir book published after the fair closed stated, "Perhaps one of the most striking lessons which the Columbian exposition taught was the fact that African slavery in America had not, after all, been an unmixed evil, for of a truth, the advanced social conditions of American Africans over that of their barbarous countrymen is most encouraging and wonderful."[2]

The caption referenced the white supremacist depictions of "native" African cultures in the fair's exhibitions which reduced people from Africa to little more than dangerous, uncivilized brutes. By conceding mere representations in space without control over content, the fair's public viewing of people of color only added another layer to the justification of white supremacist oppression in the United States and abroad. As the *Indianapolis Freemen*, one of the nation's largest African American newspapers, argued the exposition's decision had "only serve[d] to attract invidious and patronizing attention to the race, unattended with practical recompense or reward."[3]

This lesson of the exposition's representation, and the harm it did, spoke to a broader concern over how mere physicality and presence in public debate was not necessarily positive for people oppressed by social and economic conditions. The lesson played out the very next year as marching unemployed workers converged on D.C. and found not only hostile police, but also a

---

[2] Robert W. Rydell, "The World's Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact," *Journal of American Culture* 1:2 (Summer 1878): 264
[3] Ibid.

largely hostile press that misrepresented and maligned their ideas, demands, and existence as precarious workers.

The connection to the Columbian Exposition for Coxey's Army ran even deeper than this lesson in movement politics. Amidst all the boasting of American political, social, and economic exceptionalism, a major depression raged outside the fair's gates. Commonly referred to as the Panic of 1893, the nearly half decade long depression coincided with the beginning of the fair and was in many ways a perfect symbolic ending for the Gilded Age which had been wracked with economic booms and busts dating back to the 1870s.

Overproduction, declining farm profits, and a bust in the American railway industry culminated in a massive economic crisis that resulted in the unemployment of nearly twenty percent of the nation's workforce. Unemployed workers, unable to sustain themselves with the complete absence of wage work, turned to vagrancy and migration traveling the country desperate for work.[4] It was this world, mass unemployment and economic insecurity, existing next to a boasting of economic power and American exceptionalism, that the idea for the march on Washington was born.

1.2 Part One

The American labor leader Samuel Gompers, himself no stranger to the mass political movements that arose from economic depression and an early participant in labor demonstrations in New York following the Panic of 1873, argued that the Panic of 1893 was "the greatest industrial depression this country has experienced."[5] Until the Great Depression in the next century, the 1890s depression would hold this dubious honorific.

---

[4] Carlos Schwantes, "Petition in Boots" in *TIMELINE* (1990): 3-17.
[5] Ibid, 14.

As participants and fair goers walked amidst the alleged promise of American economic and political power, a crisis in U.S. society raged outside the gates of the Columbian Exposition. A series of political conventions, organizational meetings, and demonstrations convened in Chicago to address the deepening economic crisis and its systematic causes. As the economic depression worsened, the American Bimetallic League called a meeting in Chicago to discuss alleviating the crisis by expanding available currency in the market. Dubbed the "Silver Convention," the delegates came from all over the country to express opposition to the repeal of the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act, and organize a sustained demand for the return of the U.S. to a true two metal currency. On the evening of July 30, Jacob Coxey, one of the country's many monetary political activists, arrived in Chicago by train to join the conference. Dressed in his standard three-piece suit with wire rimmed glasses, Coxey looked the part of an upper-class gentleman, a professor perhaps. In many ways the outfit was a costume, an outfit he would sport his entire life, which obscured his working-class origins and made a plea for Victorian Era respectability and erudition. A member of the "nouveau riche" of the Gilded Age, Coxey was born in Pennsylvania in 1854 to a working-class family. In the 1870s he began working with his father in the steel mills, eventually advancing to the rank of stationary engineer. In 1873, at the outset of the economic panic, Coxey was temporarily unemployed. Although he and his family fared considerably better than most of the nation's workforce, the experience for him as a nineteen-year-old laborer at the mercy of the fluctuations of the volatile market, left a lifelong impression on him.

In 1878, he left the mills when his uncle decided to go into the scrap-iron trade. In 1884 while on a business trip to Massillon, Ohio, the young Coxey fell in love with the small Midwestern town and decided to relocate permanently. Selling his share of the company, Coxey reinvested in

a quarry and began producing silica for the glass industries in Indiana and Pittsburgh.[6] Coxey also purchased land and entered the business of horse breeding, a venture that guaranteed a steady stream of revenue from the nation's elites. Combined, these two business ventures and the sheer luck of the market guaranteed Coxey a comfortable living. One of the lucky few, Coxey rose with the nation's economy as it increasingly industrialized. When he arrived in Chicago he and his businesses were estimated to be worth close to a quarter of a million dollars.[7]

Coxey, however, was not content to merely live the life of a Gilded Age Victorian gentleman. Interested in politics and the various reform efforts of the period, Coxey had from an early age taken interest in electoral politics. Initially a member of the Democratic Party, Coxey in 1877 joined the Greenback Party. Coxey would later recall that during the Panic of 1873 his Pennsylvania community had used an artificial scrip for currency to trade for goods and services.[8] This anecdote is of particular interest, and provides an origin story to perhaps Coxey's most prominent and consistent political idea.

Money, that is a medium for the use of transactions of goods and services, could be changed so as to not serve the interest of a capitalist economy, but could be turned to a more general social use. Therefore, when the Democratic Party failed in 1876 to prevent the 1875 Resumption Act (a massive federal mandated retirement of Civil War paper currency) Coxey not only left the party, but became a successful ward organizer for the Greenbacks in his area of Pennsylvania.[9] Founded in 1874 by liberal Republicans and other political activists interested in monetary reform, the party was largely anti-monopolist in its politics, pro-labor rights in its outlook, and committed to a

---

[6] Henry Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal: Complete and Graphic Narrative of the Origin and Growth of the Movement* (W.B. Conkey Company: Chicago, 1894): 49.
[7] Jerry Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age* (NIU Press: DeKalb, 2016): 16.
[8] Benjamin Alexander, *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age* (John Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 2015): 5.
[9] Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs*, 15.

general program of democratic socialism. The party fielded presidential nominees in three consecutive elections (1876, 1880, and 1884) before eventually collapsing in on itself and giving way to the People's Party and Union Labor Party. Yet, despite its short existence, the party served as an important training ground for figures like Coxey who throughout his career endorsed the concept of a paper currency based on social use and what he saw as a "socialist market" that was not used by large scale capitalists to accrue new value.

This sudden shift in party allegiance signified two important points that would follow Coxey's long political career into the 1930s and 1940s. First, Coxey was anything but a sectarian or loyalist when it came to party membership. Running in multiple elections throughout his life, petitioning various elected officials for specific reforms, and never hesitant to declare sympathy with a party if it bolstered his ability to be involved in politics, Coxey was never a member of any one party. Yet the second point this shift to the Greenback Party demonstrated was a reflection that although Coxey was an agnostic when it came to a specific party, there was a consistent logic to his political thinking.

This consistency in his thinking has often been overlooked, with more attention given to the march he helped organize and lead, and his call for concrete public works. Even the introduction to the 1894 book *The Story of the Commonweal*, a sympathetic history of the march written by the march's historian and participant Henry Vincent, stated that when it came to Coxey's ideas on money, "[Coxey] proposed the issuance of non-interest-bearing bonds— and there is no necessity for explanation here of the exact method of doing this; the matter of bond having always been a perplexing one to the greatest of thinkers. If the particular method proposed were not the

best, perhaps, if the proper spirit were shown, some way might be devised by which the country, as a whole, should raise money to give labor to the unemployed."[10]

In a book that was written *solely* for the purpose of explaining the aims of the Army of the Commonweal, the author chose to ignore the central political project of one of the key organizers, and instead focused on the more concrete and easily presented ideas such as public works. In the very next paragraph, after dismissing the argument that Coxey was making for a massive infusion of currency into the economy, the author argued, "It was proposed that good roads should be made all over the United States, that men should always have employment on them…" and conveniently, "Omitting the question or manner of payment, could there, in a general way, be a better suggestion?"[11]

In other words, the introduction's author saw as easily acceptable the aim of creating a system of government funded roads that employed workers in their construction and maintenance. Yet Coxey's larger idea of changing currency practices was confusing and best ignored. However, despite this difficulty in fully understanding the ideology of Coxey, it was clear to even the casual observer of the march on D.C. that the protesters were advocating far more than government sponsored works programs in the form of roads and public projects.

Coxey as a member of the more radical wing of the Greenback Party, was in essence promoting a fundamental reimagining of the U.S. economy. And he was far from the first to do so. Advocates for an expanded currency had long argued that the U.S. Constitution specifically stated in Article 1 Section 10 that both gold and silver were to be used as a basis of coinage for the

---

[10] Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 10.
[11] Ibid.
Although the book *The Story of the Commonweal* was written by the Populist political activist and "historian of the Army" Henry Vincent, the introduction was penned by Stanley Waterloo, a novelist and journalist of the period who had taken an interest in the various protest and reform movements of the Populists.

national currency. To them, this was "proof" that among the U.S.'s founding principles was a fluid and expanded currency.

The idea of a paper currency dated back to the 1840s when the antebellum economist Edward Kellogg published his work *Labor and Other Capital* in 1849. Proponents for the expanded currency were buoyed by the federal government's decision in the Civil War to print paper money whose only basis was full faith in the government issuing the currency. Following the Panic of 1873, Kellogg's argument again gained prominence when Alexander Campbell, the founding father of the Greenback Party popularized his work. This reform effort took on new urgency as the federal government passed the Coinage Act of 1873, severely limiting the ability to mint new silver coins. The ideas, both in the 1840s and 1870s, found a ready audience in the nation's farming communities and wage workers, who saw a flexible money supply regulated by a democratically elected government as a way to regularly infuse currency supplies to help with rising debt, prices of goods, decreased buying power, and most importantly challenge the money monopoly found increasingly in the gold industry.[12]

In this way, the Bimetallist League was nothing entirely new, but was instead a continuation of a longer reform tradition dating back to the antebellum period and which had periodically appeared during the American economy's roller coaster development. For the Bimetallist League's attendants, then, the Panic of 1893 was just the latest example of the fragility of the U.S. economy, and the problems that arose from unsound money practices. Another part of the urgency for the delegation was that President Grover Cleveland had called for a special session of Congress to discuss the repeal of the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act. If this repeal went through Congress, coupled with earlier decisions to retire Civil War paper money and limit silver

---

[12] Darcy G. Richardson, *Others: Third-Party Politics From the Nation's Founding to the Rise and Fall of the Greenback-Labor Party* (iUniverse, Inc.: New York, 2004): 448-449.

coinage, the U.S. would move closer to being completely on the gold standard, a move that would economically harm small scale producers, farmers, and enrich Wall Street banks and investment firms. "Never before in the history of the country," A.J. Warner the president of the American Bimetallic League said at the opening of the Chicago convention, "has there been such widespread fear and distress…The industries are everywhere breaking down and laborers by tens of thousands are thrown workless on the streets with want staring them in the face."[13]

Cheers of agreement and chants against President Cleveland and his administration filled the convention hall. "He represents Wall Street!" the convention goers yelled, demonstrating a deepening anger and mistrust of the Bourbon Democrat in the White House.[14] Coxey listened and participated in the days that followed, yet occasionally he slipped out of the convention's boisterous hall and meetings and made his way to Lake Front Park where street orators made a regular habit of setting up and pontificating on the various social and political problems of the day. One such orator was Carl Browne, and Jacob Coxey was taken in by the political activist's rabble rousing.

Far less is known about Browne's personal life compared to Coxey, but what is known paints a very distinct picture. Born in 1849, Browne had originally apprenticed in a print shop in his youth. Following the death of his mother, Browne migrated west to Iowa to train as an artist and began a career as a cartoonist, journalist, and labor organizer, along with working odd jobs in between such as cattle ranching and carnival barking. His ability to mix spectacle, performance, boosterism, and writing and illustration well suited him to be a Populist activist and agitator. In 1869 he moved further west, eventually settling in California in 1872. Through the rest of the decade he was active in the artistic and political scenes of California, moving about the San

---

[13] Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs,* 13.
[14] Ibid.

Francisco art circles. In 1877, however, Browne became interested in the power of direct action and what was possible when masses of people protested. That year the nation was rocked by the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. Beginning on the east coast, the strike inspired mass action by the nation's working class, and in turn drew increasing government suppression. Browne would later report that seeing the masses of people engaged in fighting authorities drew his attention and whetted his appetite for political agitation.

During the 1877 strike, Browne became a close associate of the labor leader and agitator Dennis Kearney, and served as Kearney's secretary. Kearney's activities eventually drew the attention of the San Francisco's workers as well as the city's officials. And before the end of the strike, Kearney and Browne were central figures in the newly created Californian Workingman's Party. Browne relished the adrenaline that came with fighting with authorities, mob actions in the streets, and the subsequent reporting of the incidents. Publishing sympathetic stories and cartoons in his paper the *Great Strike*, Browne was threatened with hanging by San Francisco's extrajudicial vigilante groups if he continued to publish his paper. Therefore, he shifted the paper's focus more to the upper and working classes' shared hatred of Chinese immigrants. By doing this he was able to capitalize on widespread white supremacist sentiment, while continuing to add ideas in support of labor activism and to serve as Kearney's mouthpiece. Calling the anti-Chinese paper the *Open Letter*, Browne along with the Workingmen's Party, stoked white hatred to the point that on July 23, 1877 a mob moved through the city's Chinatown murdering at least four Chinese people, burning down several Chinese businesses, and causing over ten thousand dollars in damage.[15] Far from shame for his part in what became known as the "San Francisco Riot of 1877" Browne's actions would later be depicted in *The Story of the Commonweal* as, "[Browne] got the paper out

[15] Ibid, 124.

and continued its publication as an anti-Chinese newspaper, under the name of the 'Open Letter,' backing up Dennis Kearney's agitation with cartoons for many months…This Chinese agitation resulted in the placing of a law upon the statute books excluding the Chinese from entering this country, as a matter at the first deemed impossible."[16]

The Chinese exclusion that the official history of the commonweal refers to is, of course, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a racially based piece of legislation that effectively barred Chinese people from entering the country. The legislation remained in effect until the last vestiges of the law were removed in 1965. Only six years removed from the Los Angeles Anti-Chinese Massacre of 1871, one of the largest single instances of racially based lynching in U.S. history, the openness and pride that both Browne and Vincent evinced in mixing white supremacy and labor activism, speaks to the broader concern of historians with populist activism and how easily it traded in conceptions of "the people" along parameters of race and ethnicity to achieve political and economic aims.

Nonetheless, Browne's experiences in California taught him how to find a politically contentious subject, build spectacle, and organize the energy of masses of people into various political actions. Coxey it seems understood and recognized this talent as he watched Browne whip crowds into passionate frenzy in Chicago, and the fact that the city's press seemed to be increasingly drawn to Browne was all the better. When Browne challenged the Populist writer and leader Ignatius Donnelly to debate, and then trounced him in both substance and style, Coxey approached the cowboy-dressed orator and proposed a joint effort to plan some political action.

Although Coxey would later be described by historians as the more "serious" of the two figures, with Browne only being the showmanship-flare to Coxey's serious political ideas, this

[16] Henry Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 110.

interpretation needs to be challenged. Donald McMurry argued in his 1929 study that the odder aspects of the march on Washington reflected the influence of Browne's eccentrics, and Coxey's mismanagement and misjudgment. "In fact, many people received the impression that Browne was the moving spirit of the enterprise," McMurry criticized, "and that he had acquired a strange ascendency over Coxey, who merely served as the figurehead and supplied the funds."[17] Another, less formal history, also advances this popular idea. Writing in 1981 in a popular magazine, one writer said that the partnership of Coxey and Browne, "was an unfortunate association from Coxey's point of view. For whereas Coxey was essentially a serious and sobersided conservative, Browne was just the opposite. A labor agitator… Browne preferred being billed as 'The Don Quixote of California Labor'"[18]

Yet, it is important to remember that although Browne was often a walking embodiment of his own work— a cartoon character animated by caricature and polemical rhetoric— Coxey too was engaged in performance politics, albeit perhaps not as consciously. Wearing three-piece suits and wire rimmed glasses, a look that he sported throughout his life, Coxey was playing the part demanded of respectable politicians. Together, the posing cowboy and costumed academic, provided a joint leadership of spectacle and substance. Coxey, despite his serious ideas, was never above using spectacle to achieve his ends.

Coxey was willing to engage in spectacle and direct action in large part due to his past endeavors. As an organizer and activist within the Greenback Party, Coxey had attempted to influence political and economic change via the traditional routes of electoral politics and formal

---

[17] Donald McMurry, *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1929): 39.

[18] Commander Hamilton, "The Retired Officer," October 1981. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society. This particular article is filled with inaccuracies and problematic statements. For example, in the conclusion the author argues "As for Coxey, he went back in defeat to Massillon [after the 1894 march] with Mrs. Coxey, continued to dabble in local politics (progressing so far as to getting elected to Congress)…" (pp.33). Although a candidate for Congress on numerous occasions, Coxey was never actually elected to any higher office than mayor of Massillon.

debate. As the country increasingly moved in the direction Cleveland and the other pro-gold monetarists advocated, and the economic crises only deepened and became more frequent, Coxey was willing to try something radically new. After introducing himself to Browne, the two began formulating a plan to organize a massive march of some kind, combining the spectacle Browne could create with the ideas of Coxey's petition for unemployment benefits, monetary reform, and reimagining of national economic practice. Not much survives in terms of historical record of those early meetings between the two Gilded Age political activists, but before the end of the bimetallist convention Coxey had invited Browne to come back to Massillon with him to begin organizing a national campaign, a "petition in boots," that would organize unemployed workers to directly petition national elected officials in a disruptive and very public manner.

Browne initially hesitated to accept the offer, but reconsidered. Increasingly in trouble with the city's officials for his fiery rhetoric and political activities, historical accounts maintain the mayor's office offered Browne an ultimatum— get out of town or suffer the consequences. Browne, eager to avoid arrest or worse, happily obliged and took Coxey up on his offer.[19]

And so with the lights of the Columbian World Exposition fading in the background, Coxey, and then Browne, made their way to northeastern Ohio. From there they would organize and promote their march and then set out to D.C. in the spring of 1894. After that they would be catapulted into the highest spotlight of national coverage, a visibility they actively courted, but could not have imagined would have such a lasting impact. In many ways, it was a spectacle that eventually exceeded anything the fair had hoped to achieve.

[19]Henry Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 112.

1.3 Part Two

Browne lobbied for the march to begin in Chicago, as it was a major urban center, a center of political activity, and therefore could garner more initial support and participation. But Coxey was adamant that the honor of the origins point of the march be his adopted home of Massillon, Ohio. Due to a fire in 1894 which destroyed much of the papers and material related to planning the march, the early documentation of how Coxey and Browne formulated certain ideas, their conversations in Chicago, and their initial views of the Commonweal are lost forever. Yet, some of their words and early thoughts did survive in the form of Henry Vincent's chronicling of the march, the large amount of press coverage, and the ability of both Browne and Coxey (not to mention the members of the several hundred marching army) who later recollected their initial experiences in personal papers, essays, interviews, and published works.

Based on these sources, it is clear that Coxey and Browne blended left wing political ideas, fringe religious concepts, and older traditions of monetary reform politics into a singular, but complex image of how they thought society should operate. Taken together, these various strains of reform, revolutionary ideals, and political practices were collectively called "The Commonweal." One of the best records from the 1894 march that has survived to the present is Henry Vincent's 1894 official history of the march entitled, *The Story of the Commonweal*. Vincent first met Coxey and Browne in Chicago, and was interested in the same strain of radical reform as they were. A radical, left-wing journalist, Vincent was born in 1862 in Iowa, was from a radical abolitionist family. Working through the 1880s as a writer and reporter, Vincent and his family's newspaper *The American Nonconformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator* never shied away from voicing political opinions. Ardent supporters of the labor movement, the Vincents were known to pen fiery editorials describing the necessity of a worldwide revolution of workers. After the Haymarket Affair, Vincent ridiculed the police, supported the anarchists who had been arrested, and called for

the nation to support the continued labor agitation for an eight-hour day. At this point Vincent and *The Nonconformist* drew sharp criticism from the Winfield, Kansas, community which housed the paper.[20]

Refusing to endorse either the Democratic or Republican parties for their paper, the Vincents instead maintained that their journalism was for the entire nation, generally, and the people, specifically. As early as 1886, Vincent had declared in an editorial that the paper, and his journalism, were only for "the most ultra reform, the Greenback some would call them, but we do not want to stop with them." As Vincent concluded, the late nineteenth century's very air was "fairly magnetic with reform."[21] To meet, then, both Coxey and Browne in 1893 in Chicago must have seemed like fate. Here were two political activists willing to take their ideas in radical directions and more importantly organize people to put pressure on the state. Vincent became the "official historian" of the army, and went about recording the march, the initial reactions, and explaining the radical potential that could come from attempting to establish "the commonweal" via national policies. The book, once completed, was to be used to help organize further industrial army movements and marches, and Vincent marched with the Massillon contingent as far as McKeesport, Pennsylvania.[22]

Although the introduction fails to deal with Coxey's idea of non-interest bearing bonds, the book remains a fascinating document. In many ways it is one of the best sympathetic accounts left from the march itself, and shows that the organizers of the march, and to a large extent the marchers themselves, viewed their movement as a specific moment in time—a revolutionary break with the past and a jolting into the modern-era. For example, the first chapters of the book deal

[20]Ibid, 15.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs,* 2016.

surprisingly little with the 1890s, the march, or even the United States. Instead, Vincent historicized the industrial army movement and the moment in which the United States found itself. He argued that, "The pages of history, tinctured though they be with reverential regard for power and state, will have been read to no profit if they do not show conclusively that there has been going on for twenty-five hundred years a perceptible conflict between labor and capital, it being understood that until more recent times capital was in effect centered in the titled aristocracy which supported the crown in all its tyrannies and oppressions."[23]

Historians often paid too much attention to the rulers and their systems of control, Vincent argued, and had largely missed the more radical transformation in modern history, specifically the ability of people to organize, protest, and demand change. If that change was not met, then the people would resort to open rebellion and mass action to achieve new improved social states. "So in the island of Sicily," Vincent explained in one of the early chapters, "the downtrodden slaves under command of one Eurus, a man of common parts who followed the art of a juggler, massed themselves together and, in the year 620 B.C., marched through the country adding daily into their forces, first seeking a redress of their grievances by the peaceful means of arbitrament."[24] The historical analysis and accuracy of these claims were beside the point. Most fascinating was that Vincent concluded, "Again and again during the next two years nomadic forces of slaves moved about, until finally, in 622, an army of 70,000 men had put itself under a leader who appealed spirit and fairness of the people." This struggle, Vincent contended, was part of a broader global push for the emancipation of peoples and the ending of the practice of slavery. "Their struggles were the beginnings of a courageous contest which endured until the act of emancipation of 1863 by

[23] Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal,* 23.
[24]Ibid, 25.

Lincoln…"[25] In other words, the United States was part of a longer history of emancipatory movements and protest politics, one that had seen the overturning of such ancient institutions as slavery through what Vincent saw was democratic government and mass action.

To Vincent, and to Browne, this spirit of mass action was in the religious fabric of the United States. Nodding to the broader history of Western thought as it pertained to the Crusades and religion of the popular masses, Vincent admitted, "Call the crusaders fanatics and cranks and declare their captains blind leaders of the blind, but the fact remains that the results were far reaching…for the first time in thirteen centuries, it became possible for men to attain distinction without becoming soldiers and the proletariat saw the morning star of deliverance."[26] The act of pilgrimage, of literally moving one's body through space, was imbued with spiritual significance. It was a mindset, Vincent argued, which bound the various nations of Christendom into a common cultural outlook, a "common cause, and representatives of every country fell into the procession whose watchword was, 'The tomb of the risen Christ.'"[27]

Vincent's historical argument served as a religious observation to the reader. "The tomb was empty" implied that the spirit of Christ was no longer contained in a single body, but instead was part of broader spiritual web connecting the believers of the world together in common cause. Naming the march "The Army of the Commonweal in Christ," Browne made this religious argument of Christ's body as a spiritual reincarnation one of the focal points and spectacles of the march itself. In doing so, Browne borrowed heavily concepts found in the non-traditional religious movement theosophy.

---

[25]Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 29.
[27] Ibid, 28.

A religious practice that had its origins in as early as the sixteenth century, theosophy was a notoriously difficult system of religious belief to categorize. It was defined by theologians as a large grouping of esoteric mystical thought which borrowed heavily from various world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. Central, though, to the iterations of theosophy from the sixteenth century to the present was a basic belief that ancient understandings, and therefore non rationalist views of the universe, contained the secrets to enlightenment and salvation.

Browne relied on a loose understanding of this religious philosophy when he invoked the idea that Coxey, the marchers, and he were parts of a larger spiritual body, specifically the body of Christ, reincarnated. As Vincent reported, "[Browne] acquainted Mr. Coxey with his religious views," as Browne stayed with Coxey in preparation of the march, "claiming that what he termed the soul part of Christ in him was sufficient to reorganize the soul part in Mr. Coxey."[28] According to Vincent, the argument that both men contained elements of Christ's soul reincarnated appealed to Coxey, and that "Since that time [Coxey] has fully unbound the doctrines of Browne, and professes to believe with him that the movement to Washington means the second coming of Christ."[29]

It is easy to dismiss this aspect of Coxey's Army, and many later histories do, except when they try to discredit the march, its leaders, and its various intellectual components. As Donald McMurry stated in his unsympathetic account, "Browne converted Coxey. By christening their organization 'The Commonweal of Christ' they gave it a religious tone that was taken more seriously by the leaders of the army than by anybody else…Among Greenbackers and Populists who were sympathetic towards…the unemployed there were many who felt that the old-time religion was good enough for them. A captain of the Salvation Army in Massillon urged her

[28] Ibid, 112.
[29] Ibid.

soldiers not to join Coxey's Army, considering [its] utterances blasphemous."[30] McMurry, along with others who noted the unconventional religious aspects, saw the talk of reincarnations, spirits of Christ, and religious fervor as further evidence that the march was organized by cranks, composed of homeless vagrants, and was a poorly organized attempt to take advantage of the U.S. during a time of economic turmoil.

And these critics had plenty of ammunition. Painting banners that depicted Christ, and readying leaflets that talked about the virtues of the Commonweal, Browne drew fire for the odd resemblance his Christ depictions bore to his own likeness. Yet the ideas and images used by the organizers of the marchers should be taken seriously. Coxey and Browne had no shortage of religious, political, or economic arguments to make in advancing their conception of the commonweal. So why did this particular set of religious beliefs, images, and arguments prove so convenient and attractive to Coxey and Browne? In many ways these religious tones added yet another dimension to the march and grounded it in a very unconventional and eye-catching spectacle. The idea that the marchers were part of a spiritual body on a larger mission appealed to workers who may have rejected churches but were drawn to the figure of Christ. If the commonweal was to be a radical reimagining of society, then it would include a reimagining of how that body politic actually congealed and held together. Christian social ethics, and a belief in the very divinity of the body politic in mass actions, was in some ways a tacit argument that a broader crusade, would draw people into a specific action, lobby power, and transform society. The theosophists had found a way to look the modern world in a radically new light. This outlook was, for Browne, an intellectually rich framework to translate the issues of the modern world into a mindset not just seeking greater peace, but also as a way to frame a march of dissatisfied workers

[30] McMurry, *Coxey's Army,* 38-39.

harmed by the modern capitalist economy. The theosophist inspired notions of a body of individual people coming together as a new spiritual entity was a literal argument for a reimagining of "the people."

Vincent explained in an earlier section of the book that, "The part of wisdom is not the jeering at those whose methods are unconventional, or whose views are not in harmony with preconceived and moss-covered public opinion… the unprejudiced student of history is compelled, if against his will, to admit that revolutions and not evolutions are the mile-stones of civilization. Science boldly declares that nature never makes a leap, but history on its every page shows that great social overthrows have been sudden as the death which comes like a thief in the night."[31]

Despite their best efforts, or perhaps because of them, the elements of theosophy coupled with the anti-vagrant sentiments of the press provided fodder for the press to depict the Army of the Commonweal as a collection of cranks. "IN DREAMS HE SEES AN ARMY," declared the *New York Times* on March 25. "Then Coxey Awakes and Sees Only Fifty Tramps." The headline was but a taste of the wave of negative and critical coverage the army was about to receive. "Henry Vincent of Chicago, son of Henry Vincent, who was associated with John Brown in the underground railway movement, also arrived this morning and will marshal one wing of the army," the *Times* warned.[32]

Although the press would oscillate between mocking, fear mongering, and occasional support, one group was not at all amused. The Cleveland administration in Washington, D.C. followed the activities of the various industrial armies closely, fearful of what would happen when hundreds of unemployed workers, led by various labor activists and political radicals, swarmed

---

[31] Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 29.
[32] "In Dreams He Sees An Army: Then Coxey Awakes and Sees Only Fifty Tramps," *New York Times*, March 25, 1894.

the city streets and marched on the government buildings. Although the banners of Jesus and confusing spectacle caught the attention of the press, the mass mobilization of unemployed workers wedded to a very anti-conservative political message, appeared to the White House occupants a threat that D.C. police and the national government would take very seriously.

1.4 Part Three

President Cleveland and his supporters in Congress were correct to see the marchers and Coxey and Browne as direct challenges. A committed "gold-bug" on the question of currency, Cleveland had little tolerance for demonstration politics, the growing labor movement, or the remnants of the Greenback movement which sought a fundamental change to the nation's political economy. As indicated in various speeches, essays, and papers throughout their careers, Coxey and Browne both were aware of the Marxist concept of money found in the first three chapters of *Das Kapital*. Writers like Henry Demarest Lloyd, Austin Lewis, and especially Laurence Gronlund had all popularized the famous Marxist $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M^1$ formula for American audiences, arguing that capitalist markets only existed to move newly created surplus value away from the working class and into the hands of capitalists. "The reason why a man wants to purchase a pair of shoes is that he needs them," Gronlund explained to American readers, "that they will be useful, that they will possess 'worth' to him. But their usefulness is not at all the reason he pays two dollars for them."[33] Summarizing Marx's major arguments in *Das Kapital*, Gronlund continued that the market subsumed the real social relations of capitalist society, and as a result hid how capitalist political economy oppressed the masses of people. Capitalist markets, when they permitted an

[33] Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Socialism*, rev. ed. (New York: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1890), 7.

exchange of goods of equal value, were really only expressing the average labor time required to produce a good.

Gronlund had great success in popularizing this concept. His 1884 book *The Co-Operative Commonwealth* influenced reformers, working class people, and even the nation's literary class. Edward Bellamy relied heavily on its analysis to inform his 1888 science-fiction novel *Looking Backward*. Although different in key aspects of their critique of capitalism, Bellamy and countless other American writers and political activists learned from Gronlund's Marxist analysis to conceive of a world run by a system other than capitalism. Both Bellamy's and Gronlund's books were huge successes, with Bellamy's work in particular spawning reading groups dedicated to the idea of building the futuristic world of the novel.

Gronlund was delighted that his work was taken so seriously by American reformers and radicals and begrudgingly acknowledged that Bellamy's style drew in even more of an audience. Writing in the preface to the 1890 second edition Gronlund said, "The happiest effect of my book is that it has led indirectly, and probably unconsciously, to Mr. Bellamy's 'Looking Backward,' the novel which without doubt has stealthily inoculated thousands of Americans with socialism."[34] But Gronlund was frustrated with what he saw as a misunderstandings of socialism in Bellamy's work. "It should, however, in justice to the cause, be stated, that there are three ideas in that novel for which socialism should not be held responsible…These are a love of militarism, equal wages, and appointments by retired functionaries. They are decidedly unsocialistic notions, belong exclusively to Mr. Bellamy…"[35]

Although Coxey and Browne were aware of Gronlund and other writers theorizing about the Commonwealth, neither was hesitant to break with orthodoxy and formulate his own concept.

---

[34] Ibid, viii.
[35] Ibid.

For Coxey, this meant an elaborate and sometimes confusing argument about how the capitalist market could possibly be transformed via the money form to serve the common good. Preserving what he saw as the positive traits of the markets, such as individualism, civil society, and autonomy, Coxey believed that by changing how the government issued currency, moving to a legal tender that people used solely to trade goods in the market, the United States could keep the benefits of the market while also eliminating the problems of capitalist class inequality. This was argued specifically in one Browne and Coxey's cartoons labelled, "The Rosy Result That Would Follow With A Money In Accordance With The Constitution of the U.S." Towering above men working, a benevolent Uncle Sam stretches out his arm and out pours paper dollar bills. "Legal Tender Money," the shower of paper currency reads. In Uncle Sam's other arm is a sign that reads, "As you create value by great public improvement, I coin that value into a medium of exchange called 'money.' Instead of using bonds bearing interest based upon that same value! SEE!" In the background a happy family celebrates the product of the "legal tender" with a mother cooking, and a father lifting their child in joyous celebration. This cartoon by Browne best illustrates one of his more misunderstood and ignored ideas. The nation, Browne believed, already possessed many of the traits needed to continue to progress towards a better, more enlightened future.[36]

The state was not to be the seat or principal organizer for a new, more socialistic future. Instead, this new era of American civilization would grow out of older ideals and civil structures. "The first things that confront a government," Coxey would reiterate later, "when constructing law are land, labor, production and distribution. The laws must be enacted to control and regulate or own and operate, these things."[37] The state had an important function in the construction of the

---

[36] "A Money In Accordance With The Constitution of the U.S." in Henry I. Tragle, *Coxey's Army* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974).
[37] Jacob Coxey, *The Coxey Plan: Medium of Exchange Without Cost* (n.p. 1914), 1. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.

commonweal, but only insofar as the state was what arose from co-operation between free people collectively agreeing upon certain courses of action. The heart of the social world pre-dated the state, civil society and its various members who worked, lived, and traded among each other. Invoking ancient empires, Coxey argued that—

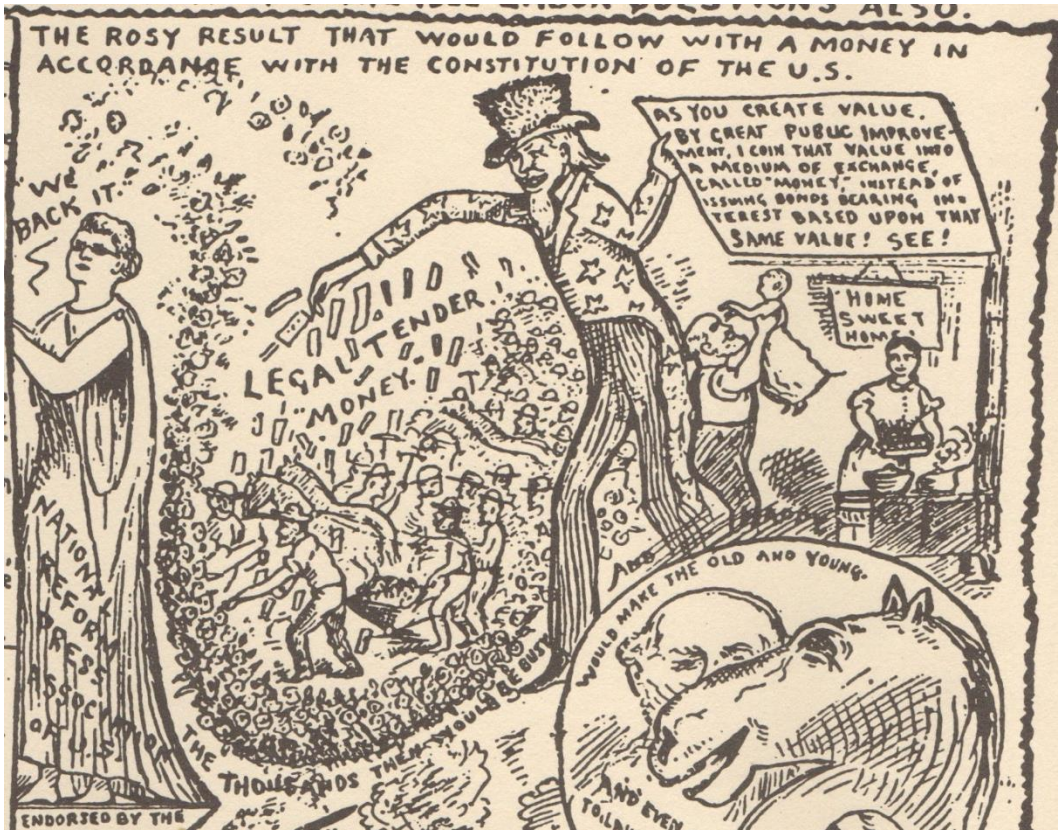

Figure 1: The Rosy Result That Would Follow With Money In Accordance with the Constitution of the U.S. Carl Browne. Originally published 1894. (Henry I. Tragle. Coxey's Army. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974).

> "Justinian, who is conceded to have been the greatest law-giver of the Roman period, reduced Law into three precepts: First, to live honestly; second, to hurt nobody; and third, to render unto each his due. These three precepts are the foundation of the Commoweal and should be expressed in the laws, so as to bring about a government of the people and for the people."[38]

Coxey agreed with the nation's growing socialist movement and the major insight of Marxist thinkers that under capitalism, "we have practically solved the question of production." However, this solution to producing goods quickly, cheaply, and in enough quantity was stymied by the fact that modern society had not "brought about a system of equitable distribution. We," Coxey concluded, "are working under a system of inequitable distribution."[39] Coxey would develop exactly how equal distribution of the modern economy would be achieved, sometimes siding with the broader socialist and labor movement and other times agreeing with strict bimetallists, the mainstream parties of U.S. electoral politics, and more widely accepted reform efforts.

Although he jumped from party to party, Coxey's major argument remained the same— if the money question was not properly addressed then the broader economic issues of the U.S. would continue to be unresolved. Browne produced a number of cartoons and images in preparation for the march on Washington. He drew "badges" that could be distributed to marchers and those sympathetic with the establishment of the Commonweal. One "badge" to be pinned to one's lapel showed an image of one of the major aims of the marchers—paper money. Labelled "legal tender" and "one dollar" the remnants of the radical Greenback Party were on full display. Another badge had two hands stretched out in greeting, clasping each other. Together the two arms read "Commune. The Commonweal. Community."[40]

---

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "Badges of the Commonweal" in Tragle, *Coxey's Army*, 1974.

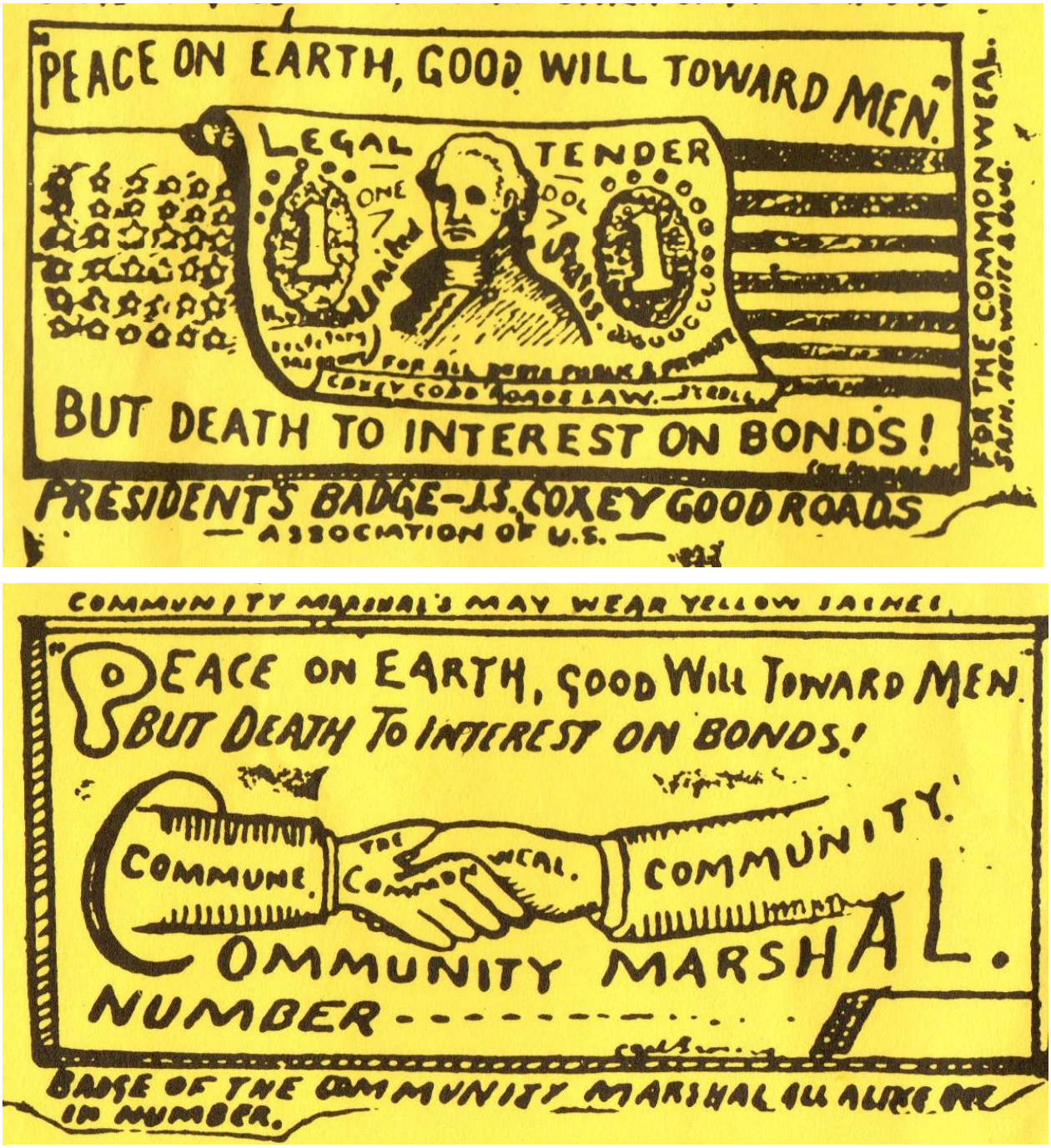

Figure 2: Badges for the marchers in the Army of the Commonwealth of Christ. Carl Browne. Originally published 1894. (Henry I. Tragle. Coxey's Army. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974).

In these ways, both Coxey and Browne were laying the groundwork for what they hoped would be a widely circulated, discussed, and ultimately accepted idea that the Commonweal would arise from civil society. Imbued with a sense of nationalism that was based on an imagined community, the glue that held that community together would be a currency issued by a democratic state for the sole purpose of people living together to engage in complex trade of goods and services.

Much of the historical analysis of Coxey and the iteration of the Commonweal movement with which he was involved, argues that he was a proponent of the "producerist philosophy." Both Benjamin Alexander in his 2015 book *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age*, and Jerry Prout in his 2016 work *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age* make this claim. Prout says that Coxey "remained true to his earlier conversion to the Greenback-Labor ideology that championed the common producer over the monopolist." According to Prout this political ideology maintained that political movements needed to champion "the producer with [the] simple observation that 'labour is the sole cause of value.'"[41] Alexander takes this argument even further. "When members of the labor force spoke out in the language of a belief system critical of industrial capitalism… it tended to be, not radicalism, but producerism," Alexander asserts. "Producerism lay at the heart of the Coxeyite protests of 1894, as well as most labor movements in the nineteenth century."[42]

In much the same way that historians attempted to depict Coxey as the "serious" reformer, and Browne the "crank," the effort by Prout, Alexander, and others to de-radicalize and sanitize Coxey, the Army of the Commonweal, and his particular brand of greenback monetary reform is misleading. Although it is true that Coxey was a "producer" insofar as he argued that labor

[41] Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs*, 16-17.
[42] Alexander, *Coxey's Army*, 15.

produced value, and therefore working people should benefit from their efforts, this was hardly a non-radical idea. Socialist thinkers and orators frequently argued that it was labor, as a social class, which created not only goods but all new value in a capitalist economy. “I therefore mean, by ‘capital,’ that part of wealth which yields its possessors an income without work,” Gronlund had argued. “Indeed, capital and labor are just as harmonious as roast beef and a hungry stomach,” he continued. This was all to be found in Marxist writings. Labor produced new value. Capital needed labor. “Producerism,” then, needs to be better defined. The socialists and radicals of the nineteenth century were well aware that capital, in and of itself, did not produce anything. Their entire political project was to foster revolutionary change so that the true producers of wealth would actually enjoy the fruits of their labor. Yet Alexander and Prout classify Coxey’s thinking as a more conservative philosophy since Coxey focused heavily on the question of the production of value. But Coxey’s point was similar to the socialists. It was within the aspects of modern economics that new production of value was generated.

What thinkers like Prout and Alexander noted was that there was a differing form of producerism, one that harkened back to the earlier days of preindustrial America, and which was markedly different from late-nineteenth-century thought in various radical circles. The older conceptions of producerism maintained that not only did small-scale production produced value, but that it also, as a socio-economic system, was the better economic model to preserve democracy. This brand of producerism was found in a wide range of political philosophy, rhetoric, and some organizations. Most notably, the leadership of the Knights of Labor were one of the last working-class organizations in the United States to seriously propose this older small-scale producerism as an economic model. There were also elements of older producerism within the Populist movement, especially in the rhetoric of the farmers, their alliances, and the early Granger movement. Founded

in the decade following the Civil War by agricultural researchers to promote better farming techniques, the Grange movement eventually grew into first a fraternal type organization and then an anti-monopolist activist group that was resistant to the growing corporatization of industries like agriculture. In many ways, these early farmer efforts have long been seen as the origins of both the broader Populist movement as well as one of the first major national reform efforts of the late nineteenth century. Initially, the Granges declared themselves as non-partisan, but they quickly began encouraging members to organize and become politically active. Following the Panic of 1873, many of the members embarked on direct agitation to force governmental change. In Illinois these "Farmer Uprisings," as they were dubbed by the press, influenced the passage of a railroad commission law in Illinois. The action was a direct challenge to the state's Supreme Court which, just two years earlier, had struck down a similar law as unconstitutional.[43]

The attitude was simple enough to understand. Large-scale production was increasing in the post-Civil War economy. Small-scale producers, specifically those in agriculture, were increasingly being harmed as the economy incorporated various industries and sections of the United States. Ignatius Donnelly, and other early Populist leaders, pushed this natural anger in publications such as the *Anti-Monopolist*, and the Granges encouraged third-party participation by pushing members to support neither party wholesale, but instead only candidates that were willing to follow through on specific programs that would protect small-scale producers. As one newspaper demonstrated with a reprinting of a popular song from the period, the anti-trust sentiment had broad support.

[43] Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Brothers of the plow,
The power is with you;
The world in expectation waits
For action prompt and true.
Oppression stalks abroad,
Monopolies abound,
Their giant hands already clutch
The tillers of the ground.

Chorus:
Awake! then, awake!
The great world must be fed,
And Heaven gives the power
To the hands that holds the bread.
Yes, Brothers of the plow!
The people must be fed,
And Heaven gives the power
To the Hand That Holds the Bread.[44]

This encouragement of shunning traditional parties, along with participation in direct protests, did much to the lay the ground work for the Populist movement and its later third-party bid, and more importantly, begin the process of forming alliances with the growing urban labor and reform movements of the period. In the 1870s, many of the members of the Granges began advocating for a "soft money" in the form of a greenback currency. The belief was that by increasing currency in the market, underpaid producers such as farmers would better be able to buy goods, and more importantly strike a blow to their natural rivals in the financial industries who benefitted from low levels of currency. This naturally put the burgeoning Populist movement in alliance with the greenback-labor activism and figures like Coxey.

Yet producerism that not only challenged corporations, but did so with an eye toward championing the small-scale producers, was in rapid decline. In many ways, when the Knights of Labor collapsed in the mid-1890s as national force the prospect of the small-scale producer

[44] "The Hand That Holds the Bread," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), April 24, 1873, 3.

cooperatives died with them. Founded in 1869, the Knights of Labor promoted a solution to capitalism by advocating for producer cooperatives. The Knights advocated for small scale producerist communities, which would bring the true producers— workers, shop owners, farmers, etc.— together in communities throughout the United States. In this way the Knights would both be able to offset the growing power of the corporations and ensure the survival of a true form of republican government, one which arose from individuals living collectively and equally in communities. The fact that the Knights of Labor grew to organize skilled, unskilled, people of color, and white workers spoke to this broader commitment to not only representing workers in capitalist society, but also reshaping "the people" for a new system of governance that shunned what they saw as the negative effects of the trusts and industrial production.

The Knights by the 1880s had wide ranging membership. Miners, garment workers, Southern farmers, and the nation's growing railway workers were just some of the people represented in the organization. In 1887, the Knights went forward with efforts to organize workers in the sugar industry in southern Louisiana. The plan had made sense to the leadership of the Knights. By 1887, there were more than 5,000 black agricultural workers in the fraternal order in the area alone. By threatening the sugar plantation owners with a strike, the organizers of the Knights believed that they could simultaneously drive up wages but more importantly rally support for the purchase and then operation of cooperatively owned local farms that could be a model for the small-scale producer co-ops. "[B]y January 1," one letter writer to the Knights of Labor's main publication stated, "we will be in good trim to lease on the co-operative plan) a good plantation."[45] The plan was both audacious and threatening to the local Southern white elites. If the Knights

[45] Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

succeeded in establishing a black-owned collectivist plantation, then there was no telling what else could be done.

The white Southern elites responded with a force that demonstrated how seriously they took the threat. The governor first called out the state militia, and once they had broken the strike, the state's forces forcibly marched the workers to the town of Thibodaux. Once there a judge placed the workers under martial law and the state militia withdrew its forces. After that, the real violence began. A white supremacist vigilante group, calling itself the "Peace and Order Committee" then descended on the corralled workers, proceeding with a three-day killing spree of the captives, which included family members of the striking workers. Precise body counts were never recorded, and in fact the bodies following the massacre were simply dragged out to the edge of town and thrown in open air ditches. But the body count was not important. The message was clear enough. The Knights and their members faced enormous hostility in their efforts to organize.[46]

Yet it was not simply white supremacist and corporate capitalist opposition to the Knights of Labor that hampered the group's efforts to build a society of producer co-ops and foster a kind of labor republicanism. The political scientist Alex Gourevitch has explored both the origins, contributions, and limitations of the concept of "labor republicanism." Gourevitch begins by grounding the rise of labor republicanism in a particular historical mindset. One of the major fears of republican thought had always been that some entity, either political or economic, could arise within a democracy and by pushing its own special interest subsume the public good for its own agenda. One of the ways this fear was expressed in the late nineteenth-century was a fear that working-class people were quickly losing their independence, and subsequently no longer have

[46] Ibid, 4-5.

either a stake in the democratic community or the ability to challenge the mammoth trusts of the industrial era. Gourevitch argues that this ideal was eventually applied to views on economics, specifically within the Knights of Labor. Adopting an ideology of "labor republicanism" the Knights argued wage work should be completely replaced with a system of cooperative production.

But there was a growing opposition to this concept. As more and more wage workers entered the Knights ranks, however, it became increasingly difficult to maintain this ideal. Wage workers in large urban areas could not easily become owners of shops and farms, and therefore depended on wage work to sustain themselves. To many of these workers the producer co-op ideal, when explained to them at all, seemed far off, unrealistic, and inapplicable to their own lives. This, naturally, led to a new focus for the Knights on the issue of higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. Yet as workers increasingly set the tone and agenda for these specific battles, the Knights' leadership vision and broader political ideology was not only challenged, but seemed remote and unimportant.

Terrence Powderly and other national leaders of the Knights of Labor also had to contend with political rivals in their own organization. Although the use of the strike was permitted by the Knights of Labor, and indeed led to the organization's greatest victories, the leadership of the Knights never endorsed the principle of the tactic. To many of the leaders, the practice was too disruptive, too costly, and did not directly advance the goals of the creation of a producer co-operative society. Instead, strikes were in large part direct confrontations with the corporations that were either suppressed when not successful, or producers of concession from corporate capitalists when they were successful. Therefore, as the United States continued into the Gilded Age, and with it saw the continual rise of protests, strikes, and direct actions, the small-scale producerism of Powderly and other Knights' leaders was increasingly distant. When the Knights

attempted to centralize the efforts of the organization in New York, to reach the growing number of radicals in urban areas, as well as transition into a national political force, the so-called "Home Club" simply became the ground for different elements of the Knights of Labor to internalize disputes and decrease organizing efforts. Anarchists, Marxists, German socialists, and members of the east coast labor movement all clashed with Powderly and the other Knights over questions over the use of the strike, boycott, and elaborate rituals the Knights had used to foster "brotherhood." This came to a head in 1882 when several of the radical members were kicked out of the organization, which only led to denunciation of the Knights by many in the Left that the Knights were not serious about sustained social revolution.[47]

Therefore, by the time of Coxey and Browne's march this older form of producerism was either a fading utopian vision of socialism, or it was undergoing significant changes in its view of the trusts and corporations. As it will be shown in chapter three, the concept of the commonweal that Coxey, Browne, Lloyd, Gronlund, and other left-wing labor, socialist, and Populist activists advocated for was, like the Knights of Labor's vision, based on a concept of republicanism. Yet, unlike the older producerists who harkened back to small-scale, agrarian, and locally owned production, these new commonwealers argued that the modern economy, both its use of the combination, the modern market, and mass production, had to be combined with the notions of democratic republicanism to produce a new, socialistic society. Instead of doing away with the corporation to go back, these commonwealers advocated taking the corporation's efficiency and controlling it democratically. Coxey's own rhetoric shows this disconnect with the older forms of producerism. They were ideals that were the furthest from what he or the later cooperative commonwealers advocated for. Coxey was part of a growing radical critique of American political

[47] Robert Weir, "Powderly and the Home Club: The Knights of Labor Joust Among Themselves" in *Labor History* 34:1 (1993): 84-114.

economy that fundamentally challenged the way in which capitalist markets worked. Insofar as he disagreed with the socialists, anarchists, and other radicals it was less on the ultimate goal, which was an overturning of the current market, and more on how that fundamental change would be created.

Gronlund addressed this disagreement with radical Greenbacks in his book, arguing, "Gold and silver will then become absolutely worthless as money, as far as the internal affairs of society are concerned… When the co-operative commonwealth money has been superannuated, we shall have nothing but checks, notes, tickets, -- whatever you will call them, -- issued by authority."[48] "Ah!" Gronlund argued in mock debate, "So you socialists are half-greenbackers."[49] Gronlund was unequivocal with his rebuttal—

> "You are mistaken, sir! It would be more correct to say that Greenbackers are half-socialists; and because they are only that 'half,' I maintain they are wholly wrong, even on the money question. We have already seen that on the broader question of social development they are absolute reactionists; that they have no fault to find with individual ownership of the instruments of labor, but war against its inevitable natural development… [The Greenbackers] want to abolish money— that is, the precious metals as money— and yet to retain the present system of production… they have appropriated [the socialist movement]; they have put the cart before the horse."[50]

Greenbackers, Coxey included, bristled at this characterization. Writing in his own pamphlet years after the march, Coxey explained his issue with the various socialist movements, orators, and parties, had little to do with too much radicalism or a self-professed belief in conservative producerism. Instead, Coxey argued that the majority of the socialist activists in the U.S. presented an unrealistic and apolitical pathway to revolutionizing the American economy. "What provision does the Socialist program offer for the employment of labor displaced by

---

[48] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth,* 146.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid, 146-147.

improved machinery during this transition period so much talked about, through which we are supposed to be passing, from capitalism into the next, or, Socialism?"[51]

Coxey was critical, a criticism that grew the longer he stayed in politics, over what he viewed as a lack of specific policies that some left-wing activists proposed. "The Socialist is supposed to be long on program… Programs which tell 'how' and all about it." Was it too much to ask, then, Coxey wondered, that the socialists provide specific policies, legislative agendas, and more than simple calls to "organize the working class?" "Is the worker to be paid in gold, silver, paper, or checks?" he asked. "Who is to control the issuance of such funds, and how does the Socialist propose to deal with the banking question which he will promptly bump into when he starts to open public works and peacefully begin to revolutionize?"[52] These were fundamental questions to address for any political movement that wished to revolutionize something as large as the U.S. economy. And to be sure that no one mistook this as a half-way measure, or a co-opting of the movement for the benefit of the state, Coxey argued—

> Coal operators are running their mines in [the manner] under martial law, trying 40 men and Mother Jones under this law from the alleged killing of soldiers who had fired upon a body of miners. How is all this to be remedied? There is no half-way ground. First, reverse the order of things as they are today, and legalize all these utilities for the people at cost, namely: Furnish all money to all the people at cost. Abolish all stocks and bonds. Abolish all interest and dividends. Take over… ALL RAILROADS, pipe lines, public utilities, telegraphs and telephones, paying physical value for them in full legal tender money, confiscating the franchise and water value. Take over all mines, oil, gas, all large productive corporations, and run them at cost to all the people.[53]

Finally, Coxey concluded, "Put in place of all stocks and bonds," the form of currency which permitted the issues of corporate capital, "full legal tender money at cost." It was a

---

[51] Jacob Coxey, *The Coxey Plan: Medium of Exchange Without Cost* (n.p. 1914), 79. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[52] Ibid.
[53]Ibid, 78.

fascinating idea that linked the older left-wing movement of the Greenbackers to the burgeoning American socialist movement. However, as Coxey would find out in preparation for planning the march and in the subsequent years, it was an argument that increasingly had little support among other radical reformers and political activists.

Conclusion:

In the spring of 1894 Henry Demarest Lloyd, one of the nation's leading radical thinkers and writers, received an invitation to speak on the "Commonweal Movement" then already marching on Washington. Lloyd had delivered a major address at the 1893 AFL convention in Chicago in which he had spoken on democracy, working-class movements, and the issue of large-scale capitalism. His 1893 address, coupled with his years of work as an investigative reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* and his books denouncing the trusts and municipal machines, had made him a champion of worker and reform movements in the late Gilded Age. As the industrial army movement prepared for its massive marches on D.C., organizers and those sympathetic to the Commonweal Movement hoped Lloyd would speak to the marchers before their departure. Lloyd responded on April 27, as the armies were in mid-march, and gave his surprising answer.

"If I addressed such a meeting it would be to oppose the commonweal movement by all the means I had," Henry Demarest Lloyd wrote. Explaining his reasoning and describing what he saw as folly, Lloyd continued, "It is with the profoundest sympathy I view this unrest among the people. They are outrageously wronged, and are right to seek a remedy… But this proceeding is physical, instead of political; reactionary instead of radical."[54]

Lloyd held that a march, even a national march on Washington D.C., only strengthened the corrupt political structure that mass movements should be trying to overthrow. "These men at

[54] Letter from Lloyd to Gans, Box 5, Folder 2. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Washington are not our representatives," he argued in his rejection of the invitation to speak to the Commonweal, and "to petition them is a mockery. A people that governs itself should not petition but command."[55]

Although Lloyd was sympathetic to the marchers, he saw their action as nothing but reactive. "The commonweal movement is a direct and natural effect of the wrongs I have done what I could to combat. It is strictly evolutionary as the distress of the Roman people…America is at the verge of her Decline and Fall unless by political means we can remove both such causes and their results."[56] Any march that presented demands to alleviate and reform the problems of American society, Lloyd argued, would be met either with refusal or worst acceptance. The first would result in a waste of organizing time and the latter would only prop up a decaying state apparatus. "When I go to Washington I should wish to go with those who will take complete possession of the government."[57]

Too radical for the government, too farfetched for some mainstream religious thinkers, and not radical enough for certain thinkers in the various radical movements. It was a perfect representation of a problem Populism would continue to have. Populism was capable of carrying multiple criticisms at once, yet incapable of delivering what many exactly needed. Lloyd was also not alone in denouncing the march as folly. As the marchers of the industrial army movement prepared disparate political factions ranging from the far left to the most reactionary voices in American politics denounced them for a host of reasons. As Coxey, Browne, and the members of the Commonweal left Massillon, they marched not only toward the capital, but also into a flurry of negative press.

---

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2. 1894, THE MARCH AND THE STRIKE

2.1 Introduction

The city of Massillon, Ohio, hummed with activity. As the day of departure neared, unemployed workers continued to arrive and were met by Coxey and Browne who organized them into a single mass for the purposes of the march. The press, too, was arriving in droves. Elated to see their plans working, Coxey and Browne gave interviews to the press and spoke at length about what they hoped their march would achieve. After the Army of the Commonweal left Massillon, Ohio, on March 25, there would be no shortage of commentary and press coverage. As one observer amidst the sea of excitement wrote when the Army reached Maryland, "I wrote to you yesterday… thinking the 'army' would leave to-day," the letter began, "it has been decided not to leave until to-morrow (Thursday morning)." However, this description of Coxey's Army's movement was not from a marcher or even a journalist. Instead it came from a Secret Service agent sent by the Treasury Department to infiltrate and spy on the march as it neared Washington. "The route has been changed," Operative J.W. Cribbs reported. "They will take the Georgetown or National Pike from here through by way of Hyattstown. Coxey and Browne spoke in Junior Hall last evening—same old speeches as ever." Cribbs barely masked his disgust as he continued, explaining supportive donations for the march were quite "liberal" and just the day before nearly fifty new recruits had joined the Army of the Commonweal. "It would be policy to be ready for this 'army' when they arrive," he warned. "I had a talk with a fellow who calls me his 'Butty' last night in camp, and judging from his tone I would advise you to be on the alert."[1]

[1] Treasury Department Memo Report of Operative J.W. Cribbs, April 25, 1894. Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress.

Washington, D.C. police and the national government, therefore, were nervously waiting. Reports were coming from multiple parts of the country, and it appeared that the national government was about to be beset by thousands of workers, political activists, and reporters. The various sections of this "industrial army" would take differing amounts of time to reach D.C. but the fact that the various contingents would converge on the capitol on the first of May was now unavoidable.

Government officials were not the only ones who feared what this meant. Newspaper accounts and political commentary negatively depicted Coxey, Browne, and the marchers as participants in a dangerous and irresponsible action. Instead of unemployed workers deserving the nation's sympathy, many of the newspaper accounts depicted the movement as a rabble of lazy and listless workers who were being tricked by dangerous radicals, ignorant of the purported virtues of America's political process and political economy. Negative coverage was not just in the major party papers and the commercial press, it was even in parts of the Populist press.

Even though criticism of the Cleveland administration's lack of response to the Panic of 1893 was standard in Populist newspapers, some Populist writers did not support what they saw as the anti-democratic, pro-anarchy politics of marchers and protesters. For example in the Georgia Populist newspaper *The People's Party Paper* a cartoon appeared on the front page directly referencing Coxey's Army. In the first panel there appeared a caricatured millionaire delivering a petition with his associates to Grover Cleveland's administration. The president and his advisers warmly welcomed the petition, signaling they would favor the policies of the rich and powerful. In the second panel Coxey's Army was turned away for petitioning the government, and the

caption read “The Government Says to the Poor Man: ‘Keep off the Grass’” as a police officer rushed to arrest them.[2]

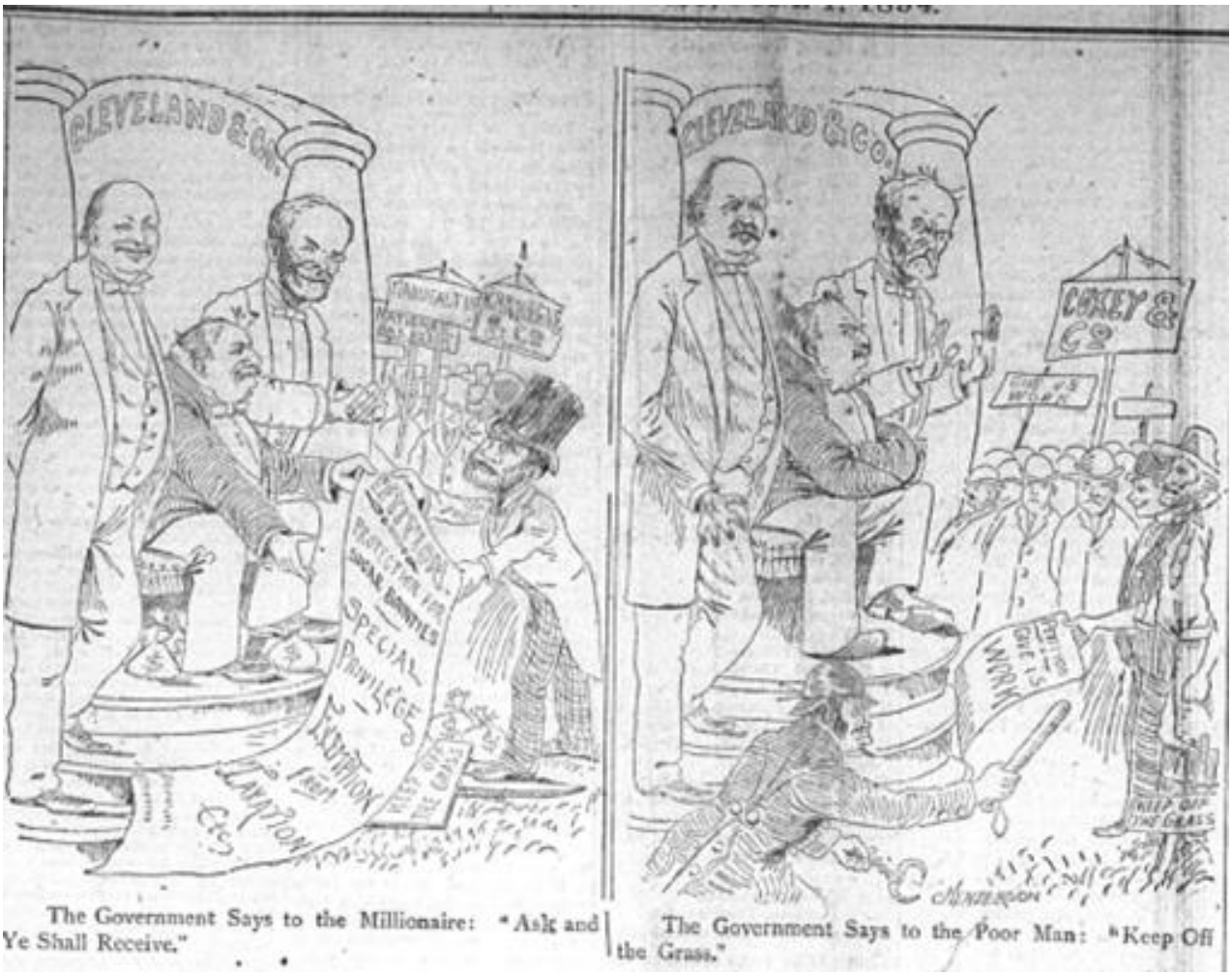

Figure 3: Editorial Cartoon. The People’s Party Paper. (Library of Congress, June 1, 1894).

This message of support, however, was countered in the same issue as the editors of *The People’s Party Paper* criticized Coxey, the ideas of the commonweal, and specifically the tactics of Coxey and Browne. The editors claimed the march was a disturbance, and that arrests were

[2] *The People’s Party Paper*, June 1, 1894.

necessary since the marchers would be "stealing, rioting, and committing the usual city devilries."[3] The owner of the paper was Thomas E. Watson, a Southern Populist and vocal advocate of segregation and white supremacy. A defender of what he saw as the lost promise and betrayed heritage of a producerist agrarian republic, Watson's editorials argued for less radical direct actions against the federal government. "This paper is now and will ever be a fearless advocate of the Jeffersonian Theory of Popular Government, and will oppose to the bitter end the Hamiltonian Doctrine of Class Rule, Moneyed Aristocracy, National Banks, High Tariffs, Standing Armies and formidable Natives— all of which go together as a system of oppressing the People,"[4] Watson explained.

The fact that Coxey and Browne racially integrated the march did not help matters with some southern Populist figures. Yet, aside from the issue of white supremacist opposition, a deeper issue in popular political ideology prevented Coxey and Browne gaining sympathetic press coverage. Many populists believed that the route to influence government and the political process lay not in directly organizing, agitating, and forcing an issue to the public forefront. Instead, elections, formal parties, and the idealized liberal public sphere were avenues citizens should pursue to influence public issues. On March 25, 1894, the day Coxey's Army departed Massillon for Washington, the *Washington Post*, which chronicled and criticized the march over the next few weeks, had little to say about the workers, their demands, or the economic panic sweeping the nation. Instead, the front page reported a very different kind of story. "SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON CONNECTICUT AVENUE," the headline read. Below the subtitle continued, "A Spring Day Pageant: Fashion and Beauty Out for a Sunday Promenade." The story featured a large pictorial spread showing men and women appropriately dressed for a public stroll.

---

[3] Ibid.
[4] *The People's Party Paper*, March 2, 1894.

"Let us consider only the Easter Sunday as it should be," the story continued. "Let us celebrate the ideal… leaving the real to take care of itself. This is Easter Sunday… [a time for] new bonnets, multi-colored eggs, radiant sunshine, budding trees, brilliant neckties, and general rejoicing."[5]

The story also stated, "Senators and Magistrates, Rulers and Clerks, Diplomats and Dudes, Matrons and Debutantes Mingle in the Dazzling Procession— A Sight that Can Be Witnessed Only at the Capital— The Pageant as It Probably Will Appear To-day."[6] Published as a procession of unemployed workers were marching to Washington's streets, the story revealed something far more significant than a mere holiday special. The illustration demonstrated how men and women *should* occupy the public space of Washington. A certain dress, demeanor, and behavior should prevail. According to the story, this decorum allowed society to mingle peacefully in public. The fact that the *Washington Post* was well aware that such an image was fantasy only highlighted how the intellectual foundations of American democratic civil life so clearly challenged direct protest.

As Coxey's Army and other contingents of the Industrial Army movement marched to Washington, and then were routed at the capitol, another working class demonstration would soon face a similar discursive challenge. The American Railway Union and their activities in the Pullman Strike of 1894, although an industrial strike, were directly compared to Coxey's Army in the press. Criticized for being "anarchism" and "despotic" both actions were denounced for failing to appreciate and respect the way in which American democracy *should* operate. It was a criticism with long durability as the activists and workers were soon to discover.

---

[5] "Sunday Afternoon on Connecticut Avenue: A Spring Day Pageant," *The Washington Post*, March 25, 1894.
[6] Ibid.

2.2 Part One

Ray Stannard Baker could hardly believe his luck. Earlier in March the young journalist had been sent to Massillon to report on the plan to march on Washington. Baker's editor, Charles H. Dennis of the *Chicago Record*, had told the young writer, "[Coxey] is going to demand legislation to cure all the ills of the nation. We hear that he is getting a good deal of support. Go down there and see what it all amounts to."[7] Baker had not known what to expect, but upon arriving knew he had found a wealth of sensationalist material. Although Coxey was something of a disappointment, looking more like a professor or bank teller than a dangerous revolutionary, Browne was a different story. "[He] was too good to be true," Baker wrote. "He was strongly built with a heavy moustache, and a beard with two spirals. He wore a leather coat fringed around the shoulders and sleeves. A row of buttons down the front were shining silver dollars."[8] Baker telegraphed Dennis about the unfolding spectacle and how Browne made for a fascinating focal point.

"Your telegram relative to the eccentricities of the chief operator at Massillon is just received," Dennis wrote back. "The photos arrived to-day and are very good. Get the picturesque side and do not write against space." But Dennis cautioned the excited young reporter, "While matters are dragging it would be just as well not to send more than about half as much matter as you have been sending. Don't put Brown too much in evidence as the hero of the plot is Coxey, though he seems to be rather a puppet in Brown's hands."[9]

Despite the warning against sensationalism, there was still plenty to report. Flyers for lectures and public performances circulated around town. As one read, "TO-NIGHT THE GREAT UNKNOWN, JESSE COXEY AND THE VEILED LADY of the Commonweal Movement will

---

[7] Benjamin Alexander, *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), 44.
[8] Ibid, 45.
[9] Telegram, March 20, 1894. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.

appear at Miller's Hall." Admission was twenty-five cents, and the lecture started at "8 o'clock sharp."[10] Baker and the other journalists whose number grew by the day, could not help but report on the spectacle. "The 'Unknown' will be speaker of the evening," the flyer explained in more detail, "and give an exciting account of his wonderful trip across the mountains while in charge of the Coxey Army."[11] The "Great Unknown," oddly enough, was just Browne concealing his identity in a shroud of mystery to drum up press. Even though the journalists, the readying marchers, townsfolk, and eventually the Secret Service agent all knew the "Great Unknown's" identity, it nonetheless accomplished what Browne desired— coverage in the papers. Coxey and Browne then used that coverage in their own pamphlets and flyers to further the campaign.

"REFORMERS AND THEOSOPHISTS," one circular issued by Coxey and Browne boldly claimed. It simply reprinted a story from the February 20, *Massillon Independent*. "The official standard of the 'Commonweal' is on exhibition today in J.C. Haring's window," the piece read. Pictured was the image of Browne's Jesus declaring, "Peace on Earth Good Will Toward Men! But Death to Interest on Bonds!!!" The article continued, noting the bizarre poster now publicly displayed in the Ohio town—

> It is likely to shock some people's religious sensibilities, although its designer is far from desiring to even suggest the sacrilegious. It is to be carried at the head of the army of peace, alongside the American flag, as were the Roman eagles of old.[12]

The streets of Massillon gave journalists a plethora of material. Coxey and Browne also continued to feed the press quotes that made for good headlines. Coxey at one point estimated some twenty-thousand marchers would join them. Browne outdid this number, telling Baker it would be near one hundred thousand marchers. Coxey supported that claim with more interviews and high

[10] Flyer, n.d. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Bulletin No. 3, n.d. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.

estimations of what Washington could expect. These numbers, wildly inaccurate, nonetheless made their way into the papers. It was a gamble, because although the press was forced to discuss the ideas of Coxey and Browne, noting the concepts of greenback currency, non-interest bearing bonds, public works, and a broader social security backed by the state, it largely discussed these ideas negatively, focusing instead on the spectacle and dismissing the enterprise.

"Look Out for 'Em Congressmen! Here's Mr. Coxey Coming 100,000 Strong to Do Wondrous Things," read one mocking *New York Times* headline. *The Washington Post* joined the criticism. "Candidate for an Asylum: The Crazy Idea of a Wealthy Resident of Massillon, Ohio."[13] Despite the negative coverage, Coxey was elated that his initial instinct that Browne would raise public interest was correct. "We're beginning to hear from your articles in Chicago," Coxey is reported to have told Baker one day as he passed the young writer on the streets. Coxey carried in his arms a large bag of mail, proof that the efforts of Browne to boost the march, and gain the press's attention were working. At least the Commonweal was not being ignored. Baker would later reflect, "I was helping to launch this crazy enterprise."[14] Finally, after much fanfare the Army in the Commonweal of Christ left the small town with around a hundred or so marchers, and an eager press corps.

Despite the sensationalism Coxey and Browne advanced important ideas on politics and economics. In one widely circulated document titled, "Preamble: Constitution and By-Laws of the Coxey Non-Interest Bond Club National Organization," Coxey and Browne laid out a specific vision of democratic practice. "The INITIATIVE: The Right of the people to propose a law. The REFERENDUM: The right of the people to vote on, accept or reject, any law proposed or enacted

[13] Alexander, *Coxey's Army*, 46.
[14] Ibid, 48.

by the legislature of State or Nation."[15] Coxey and Browne then explained their vision of a radical direct democracy, one that relied on the will of the people, its ability to discern right from wrong, and finally to position the state, not as a structure hovering above society, but as an extension of the nation of people.

> WHEREAS— All progressive, patriotic, practical, thinking men and women are now agreed, that delegated legislation does not sufficiently reflect or represent the wishes, and therefore, the welfare of the whole people, and, that the plan of legislation known as the INITIATIVE & REFERENDUM, for years and years successfully operated in the Cantons of Switzerland… is the best plan of self-government. Therefore, it has been deemed proper, in order to give expression to this public conviction in the United States, to form an organization, by which, to work to attain this end, and, as the presentation to Congress by the Commonweal of the Coxey good roads, and non interest bond bill was not only a practical realization of their method, as far as possible, under existing laws, but the text of said bill, being in harmony with the Omaha Platform of the Peoples Party, which demands a National currency, safe, sound and flexible issued by the general government, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.[16]

Coxey and Browne called for a popular referendum, and a more direct democratic process to hold the state accountable. They argued for a change that would increase not only the effectiveness of the American state but also its legitimacy. One of the major problems Coxey, Browne, and the Commonweal therefore faced was whether or not the concept of the nation, as a broader community governed by a modern state, could be reformed into a vehicle for fundamental revolution. Eugene Debs and the ARU, the American Socialist movement, and the broader Populist movement struggled to answer this question as well. The march on Washington signified at least an effort to make this concept of a modern nation work. The march was an attempt to integrate the will, interests, and concerns of the masses into the state apparatus which governed the nation.

---

[15] Preamble: Constitution and By-Laws of the Coxey Non-Interest Bond Club National Organization. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.
[16] Ibid.

More conservative thinking viewed the state simply as a physical manifestation of abstract government principles, an intellectual and physical presence of assorted agencies. Many critics of Coxey's Army and direct protest viewed the state as an ahistorical construction existing for its own sake, protecting abstract rights, and ultimately serving the interest of a political economy unconcerned with the plight of people ravaged by an economic boom and bust cycle.

Populism, at least that of the 1890s represented by Coxey, sought to avoid the calcification of governing systems, and to return the state to its original purpose as the organic, collective mechanism that arose naturally from "the people" through their connections in civil society, and the various public concerns they expressed. This distinction demonstrates that Coxey's Army was not really a call to small scale producerism, or an agrarian republic, as either the leadership of the Knights of Labor or Tom Watson envisioned. Referring to Coxey and his ideas simply as "producerism" collapses distinctions between antebellum idealism and Gilded Age reality and forfeits how the labor theory of value played a major role in the thinking of left-wing figures in the 1890s Populist movement. Second, by only calling it "producerism" as equating the labor theory of value with a vision of primitive communism, historians risk missing how left wing Populists and early socialists used various ideas to work through concepts of how society underwent historical change. The producerism of Coxey, Gronlund, Debs, and Lloyd was not just an argument for the laboring class as the source of all new value (although that was part of the argument). The labor theory of value offered another important concept—the idea that actual use for people superseded the needs of something like capitalist production. The economy should be organized to benefit actual people. To be a producer was not merely to be the site of value creation, but it meant that both the social positionality and the actual living people who occupied it were the

representatives of a new civilization, more egalitarian and dedicated to the material benefit of the masses.

"In the ancient States," Gronlund argued, "where the civilization of our race commenced, there was no wage-system; there was slavery… We who have reached a higher stage of development look very properly back with horror on this ancient slavery; and yet we should not forget that we are indebted to this same slavery for our civilization."[17] The state, for many of these early socialist thinkers and left-wing Populists was a vehicle to transform society, to take the efficiencies of capital and change the economy into one based on a spirit of mutually beneficial co-operation. These left-wing industrialist producerists nonetheless saw themselves as historical actors. Revolutionary change was possible precisely because of the historic time in which they lived. As Gronlund explained in describing the Co-Operative Commonwealth's historic placement—

> Look at our Indian tribes. They work, in their way, as well as civilized people do. Yet they are strangers to progress. Why? Because they never accumulated any wealth. And they accumulated no wealth, because they worked as isolated individuals; because they never have known any division of labor. Now slavery was to our race the first division of labor; it was the first form of co-operation; for it is too often overlooked that division of labor is at the same time co-operation in labor. The ruling principle during slavery was, of course, despotism, the irresponsible will of the lord.[18]

Gronlund's issue with cultural and racial diversity, unlike Watson's white supremacy, was a racism based on a reading of modernity, economics, and the divisions of labor. Slavery, Gronlund posited, had created for the Western social systems a basic division of labor that forced cooperation through coercion. This had radically altered any earlier communist ordering of older human civilizations where radical equality had prevailed. Instead, by violently forcing some to have control of the

---

[17] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 53.
[18] Ibid, 52.

means of economic production, society on an economic level had forced a basic cooperation between the classes, albeit maintained by fear and force. This, in turn, had created a producerist class which generated new value. Capitalism, therefore, was the historic stage in which socialization of the economy could occur. Yet to achieve this socialization both Gronlund speculated, and Coxey agitated for, a state needed to have some kind of involvement, because the state was a place that could be an arena in which cooperation among the people occurred, collective will enacted, and individuals worked towards democratically determined goals.

This was not the only form of "socialism," however. In this plurality of socialisms the distinctions within producerism can be lost. For example, not only did Gronlund criticize Edward Bellamy, so, too, did socialists who looked on in horror at Bellamy's acceptance and use of class divisions as the means to produce a new socialist state. The British socialist, artist, and writer William Morris, similarly, in 1889 criticized in the journal *Commonweal* Bellamy, his book, and those who believed modernity would achieve socialism. "Mr. Bellamy's ideas of life are curiously limited," Morris argued. "He has no idea beyond existence in a great city; his dwelling of man in the future is Boston (U.S.A.) beautified. In one passage, indeed, he mentions villages, but with unconscious simplicity shows that they do not come into his scheme of economical equality, but are mere servants of the great centres of civilization."[19]

Morris argued that by relying so much on a future vision of socialist society Bellamy had argued that industrialism and industrial class relations were the only way to achieve the goal of "economical equality." "It follows naturally from the author's satisfaction with the best part of modern life that he conceives of the change to Socialism as taking place without any breakdown of that life, or indeed of disturbance of it…"[20] Morris elaborated his criticisms the next year with

[19] William Morris, "Bellamy's Looking Backward," *Commonweal*, June 21, 1889.
[20] Ibid.

the novel *News From Nowhere*, which was a direct challenge to Bellamy and other socialists who theorized about the modern state and industrial class relations as vehicle to revolutionary change. Like Bellamy, Morris depicted a man falling asleep and waking up in the distant future. Yet instead of a society transformed by industrial work and the state, this new society was a reimagined ideal of older, smaller, proprietary societies that had revolutionized the very idea of work as something playful, enjoyable, and meaningful, unlike Bellamy and Gronlund who saw work largely as a necessary evil to be dealt with in a revolutionary manner so as to make society equitable. Morris and other producerists of his persuasion agreed that the producer was the source of value, but that there was no way to honor this reality within modern class relations. Only by moving forward with an eye on replicating the supposed past could this be achieved.

Scholars who label left-wing Populist protests as "producerism" as if to say "non-radical" or "conservative," are wrong. Roseanne Currarino, for example, uses the term "industrial producerism," Richard Schneirov argues there was a distinct "republican socialism," and James Livingston looks at the thinking of figures like John Bates Clark who wrote about what he called "economic republicanism." These different variations all point to a similar phenomenon in late nineteenth century American political economy. The emergence of a more recognizable industrial corporate economy and permanent, visible, and recognizable class distinctions, made the question of how American democracy would survive this rupture increasingly urgent. Some in the labor and Populist movements argued that the U.S. needed to turn back the clocks on economic change, returning the United States to a more agrarian past. However, this "past era" was as much fictitious as it was historical. This vision was a type of agrarian producerism based on idealized notions of the market and a spirit of "primitive" communism.[21]

---

[21]Roseanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011). Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern*

Another version of producerism acknowledged the staying power of large scale industrial capitalism. This producerism relied on a basic understanding of the theory of value and argued that all new value— the surplus that made increasing levels of human civilization possible— came from industrial class relations and the cooperation these relations demanded. Yet this raised a troubling question for these industrial producerists: how would the relations of capital be made to transform a society so radically? The answer to this question had no definitive answer, and was a source of continued debate and disagreement, but as Coxey's Army marched toward Washington, the state and direct protest were at least a large part of that answer.

After half a day's march, the Army reached Canton, Ohio, where Vincent reported that thousands of the city's inhabitants met them on the streets, despite the cold, and cheered their arrival. "Here [the Army's] reception was no less enthusiastic in character than that heralded far and wide…" Vincent wrote, but there were rumors in the papers that creditors were trying to slow Coxey Army's progress. "By this time the newspapers had already heralded far and wide that attachment proceedings had been begun by certain of Mr. Coxey's creditors for the sole purpose of disarranging his plans and of staying the progress of the Commonweal movement."[22] Governor William McKinley commented on the stories, stating the Army of the Commonweal was of little consequence. "This [McKinley] said was what he had confidently expected. The few that had

---

Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998). James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). These thinkers have argued, in some manner, that ultimately the socialist left and the broader Populist movement failed to reconstruct American economics and society. Instead, they see the unionism of organizations like the AFL as far more successful in humanizing capital and pushing for the socialization of the corporation. The major insight in these works is that through the duality of consumerism and formalizing the unions role in corporate capital's stability, labor was able to establish a mixture of socialism and capitalism. As a result it is the often maligned "conservative business unionism" which served as a vehicle for reattaching the democratic state to the economic and social concerns of the people. This raises a larger question of how the protest movements, and left-wing producerists influenced not just the state, but also the sections of the labor movement which emerged from the nineteenth century as supposedly the "acceptable" segments of the movement.

[22] Henry Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1894), 57.

joined the army had, no doubt, been induced to do so by the press, which had made much more of the project than it really was."[23] Vincent claimed that the people of Canton, angered at the claims in the press and dismissal from the government, rallied to help the march. "Citizens of Canton, justly indignant at this proposed treatment, had appointed a committee to prepare an address to the country calling for funds to aid Mr. Coxey…"[24]

The marchers established a camp for the evening in a woodlot next to the city's workhouse. That evening Coxey and Browne both gave speeches to large crowds. The next morning the marchers left the city and marched twelve miles to Louisville. By this point, Vincent claimed that the march still maintained one hundred marchers. Yet before they left Canton, Coxey received a telegram from Senator William M. Stewart, a pro-silver Republican Senator from the state of Nevada, and sympathetic political figure for many of the aims of the Populist movement. Coxey read the letter from Stewart to the public before offering his own rebuttal. "Dear Sir," Stewart's letter began, "The preservation of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness was [entrusted] to the people under the Constitution of the United States. A free ballot was the means by which the sovereign people could retain the right acquired by the patriots." Stewart explained that the ballot could no longer be counted on to deliver "control of the government" into the hands of noble republican leaders like "Washingtons, Jeffersons, Jacksons, and Lincolns," as a result, "There have been no Washingtons, Jeffersons, Jacksons or Lincolns elected President of the United States

---

[23] "Gov. McKinley Thinks it a Fizzle," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 1894.
[24] Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 57.
"Coxey's Army Starts: Coxey's Stallion Attached," *The Washington Post*, Monday March 26, 1894. As one story read, "Coxey's Stallion Attached: Massillon, Ohio… Col. James E. Pepper, of Kentucky, yesterday had an execution for $24,000 issued against Coxey and attached the latter's $40,000 stallion…Coxey bought the horse from Pepper, but only paid $16,000 on him," and "New York, March 25, A Special to a morning paper from Massillon, Ohio signed by Hugh O'Donnell, the labor leaders, says: 'Unless Coxey can manage to raise $24,000 by nest Wednesday, he is probably a ruined man. He still owes that amount on the celebrated stallion Acolyte, and the former owner of the horse…holds a mortgage on the horse and other property of Coxey to protect the amount… The result is that attorneys were instructed to proceed against Coxey to-day… 'This is very likely but the beginning of the end. Coxey's entire property is heavily mortgaged… Coxey is done for…'"

in… two decades." Steward pleaded with Coxey to understand that "A soulless despot of alien origin is monarch of the commercial world. His name is money. His servants are administrative and legislative bodies."[25] To continue on a march was to court disaster since the state, divorced largely from the people, would not tolerate a direct challenge like the Army of the Commonweal. "Abandon the folly of marching an unarmed multitude of starving laborers against the modern appliances of war under the control of a soulless money trust. Such folly will augment the power of the oppressor and endanger the safety of the ballot itself."[26] Stewart suggested that Coxey's Army rely, instead, on the older mechanisms of republican political power— the election. "The ides of November are approaching," Stewart argued. "An opportunity for the people to strike for liberty will again be presented."[27]

Coxey provided his response after reading aloud Stewart's letter. Coxey applauded Stewart's leadership on the question of opposing the gold standard, but argued that to turn back now was folly.

> We shall march on peaceably and depend upon the outpouring of a peaceful public to defend us from Pinkerton's policemen, military, soldiers of petty party politicians. This is a non-partisan movement and he who is not with us is against us; there is not room for neutral ground, and that a house divided against itself cannot stand is as true today as when originally uttered and used in the dark days of the Civil War by Abraham Lincoln, the father of the legal tender. Following in his footsteps we seek to dethrone gold, as our forefathers did King George in 1776, and once more have legal tender money… Now we have followed your leadership, advocating the bill for unlimited coinage of silver as money, and if we are to judge of the silver men by you… your attitude in slighting this movement as folly places you and the silver men you represent in an unenviable position as the ally of our common enemy— gold. Thus the [R]ubicon has been crossed by the silver forces and we cannot falter. The fiat must now go forth— demonetization of gold as well as silver.
>
> Yours, J.S. Coxey[28]

[25] Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 58-59.
[26] Ibid, 60.
[27] Ibid, 59.
[28] Ibid, 60-61.

The language of republicanism was on full display in Coxey's response. Using the concepts of the American Revolution, as well as older ideals of republicanism, Coxey was donning the mantle of a Populist leader and orator. Claiming to speak for the legitimate concerns of the people and that the forces in the state and modern economy were arrayed against the public good, the movement Coxey saw himself leading would simultaneously return the state back to its democratic origins as well as permanently topple the special interests. Because he was so focused on the issue of currency, Coxey, therefore, was somewhere between the producerist ideologies of communitarians, like Morris and the leadership of the Knights of Labor, and the more state-sponsored socialism of figures like Gronlund, Bellamy, and later Austin Lewis.

Coxey's position, difficult to fully articulate, would be complicated by his activism after 1894, and his willingness to move through and among various political parties, and movements. However, during the 1894 march the major opponent Coxey faced was not a contentious American left-wing of assorted political outlooks, but instead an entrenched bourgeois view of electoral politics and liberal democratic government.

Themis, a typically apolitical literary newspaper in California, demonstrated this ideological opposition when on April 29 it ran an editorial chastising "the industrials" for their nationwide protests. "If J.S. Coxey were coming to Washington to petition congress for the issuance of $500,000,000 of interest-bearing bonds, instead of being a tramp and a gambler, he would be a gentleman and a patriot. The entire banking fraternity would laud him as a statesman…Cleveland…would banquet him."[29] Neither Cleveland nor the leaders of national finance had the slightest interest in listening to Coxey or his ideas, but this fact did not deter the writers from continuing to argue that it was the form and behavior of the marchers that made them

[29] "Pay What You Owe," *Themis*, April 29, 1894.

illegitimate. In fact, the D.C. authorities could probably be persuaded to ignore the "statute that forbids the parading of banners on the capitol grounds, and the foot sore soldiers would be [permitted] to rest on the capitol steps, while the distinguished rural gentleman from Ohio was being respectfully listened to by the senate committee…"[30]

On May 6, the commentary continued, and five days after the Army of the Commonweal had entered D.C. the editors were willing to admit that the depression did demand some kind of action, especially for the nation's farmers. "Industrial armies may be ill-advised in some particulars… [yet] it is patent that very generally they have the sympathy of the masses, and congress should not be blind to the fact that the people of the country are looking for the enactment of popular legislation."[31] But this general sympathy and need to do something did not outweigh the fundamental problem of Coxey, Browne, and their political agitation. "The People and Demagogues," the very next editorial read, "For many years our ablest men, those of the highest character, have not been able to attain prominence in governmental affairs…. If a man is brainy enough, and possesses the courage to declare himself on public measures, those who should support him usually flock to the standard of the miserable parasite who will promise them any absurd or impossible thing which might strike the fancy of the ignorant and unthinking people. It is just such an idea which pervades the minds of the masses… The people themselves do these foolish things, then complain and howl about bad government."[32]

Although a clearly elitist argument, it was repeated in an array of other newspapers. For example, *The Freeman*, the same upper-class Indianapolis African American newspaper that had spoken out against the segregation at the Chicago Exposition, wrote negatively of the march and

---

[30] Ibid.
[31] "Help Out The Farmers," *Themis*, May 6, 1894.
[32] "The People and Demagogues," *Themis*, May 6, 1894.

efforts to directly challenge the federal government.[33] Comparing the marchers to the participants in the French Revolution, *The Freeman* stated in one editorial, "…Coxey [issued] his pronounciamento that urged the ragged, hungry, and lazy hordes of idlers to start on what is really their laughable and ridiculous tramp to Washington."[34] This negative reception, therefore, challenges historians who consider the event as a moment of multi-racial solidarity that gained widespread approval from the African American community.[35] Historians such as Jeffrey Prout and Charles Postel have argued that African American groups, specifically African American members of the Knights of Labor, widely supported Coxey's Army. Although true, a contingent of upper-class African Americans denounced the march as well. "The one [conversation] for Mt. Zion Baptist church is 'That the Commonweal Army is detrimental to the United States,'" one advertisement for a church study group stated. Professors R.P. Purdy and K.L. Peak were listed as the speakers and readers were heavily encouraged to attend.[36] Race did not automatically determine support for the march.

The negative headlines continued. The New Jersey *Daily True American*, announced "The Commonweal Army: Crank Coxey's Forces are Treated to a Surprise!" and later published a letter that said, "Coxey Living High While His Army Tramps Muddy Roads."[37] *The Newark Daily Advertiser* described Coxey's Army as "Coxey and His Cranks."[38] Charles Jay Taylor captured

---

[33] In 1892, *The Freeman* had switched ownership when Edward E. Cooper due to finances had sold the paper to George L. Knox. At that point Knox had switched the paper's allegiance from Democratic to Republican, and began to promote the ideas and work of Booker T. Washington's accommodation and Black Nationalism.
[34] "Will History Repeat Itself?" *The Freeman*, April 2, 1894.
[35] Prout uses as his example for this interpretation the *Washington Bee*. An African American newspaper that heavily favored Coxey, his ideas, and the march it was nonetheless not the only black newspaper at the time, and therefore, should not be used to represent an entire group of people. However, Prout is correct to note that there was widespread support for the march in Washington D.C.'s African American community.
[36] "'Commonwealers' Discussed," *The Indianapolis Freeman*, April 28, 1894.
[37] "The Commonweal Army," The New Jersey *Daily True American*, March 21, 1894.
"New York Letter," The New Jersey *Daily True American*, April 20, 1894.
[38] "Coxey and His Cranks," *The Newark Daily Advertiser*, April 20, 1894.

the spirit of these headlines when he illustrated Coxey's Army for the April issue of *Puck*. In the cartoon Coxey brandished a blade that read "Sensation," and wore a paper hat meant to look like a general's. Behind him an army of vagabonds followed with Carl Browne bearing the banner of the Commonweal. "Coxey's Crazy Chase— This is What Comes from Preaching 'Paternalism.'"[39]

Figure 4: Coxey's Crazy Chase. Puck. (April 1894). In this image Coxey is shown waving a sword labelled "Sensation," demonstrating how the protest leader had weaponized the press to push his cause.

The charge of paternalism contained the essence of the critique of Coxey's Army and the broader Industrial Army movement. What was the role of the state in this new democratic society organized by industrial class relations? What rights did the working class have in demanding as a

[39] "Coxey's Crazy Chase," *Puck*, April 1894.

collective force that the state take seriously and adopt their concerns? The answers to these questions determined not only one's outlook on the validity of direct action and protest, but also whether or not the state had a fundamental responsibility to reflect the concerns of people and not simply principles and bourgeois rights that related to the capitalist political economy. The editors of *Themis* and other critiques of the Industrial Army movement were not merely treating with contempt the unemployed and laboring classes (although that was the cultural attitude) but was instead advancing a particular political ideology. As the editors argued, "Our system of government is of extreme liberty to the citizen. Every man is a sovereign, and, unrestrained by reason or responsibility, may assist in making laws to govern the people. Often the more ignorant, stupid or imbecile, the more likely he is to be selected to manage the great financial concerns of our cities, counties, or states, either as legislator, trustee, or supervisor." The promise of democracy, in other words, was at risk due to the volatile nature of people. In order to ensure liberty democracy had to be curtailed, precisely because people existed, had their own opinions and interests, and ultimately those concerns would infect the democratic process if concerned citizens of the republic were not wary. "The extremely liberal right of suffrage has in the past, and will in the future, serve to fasten great burdens upon the people."[40]

Although Cleveland fully endorsed this broader political ideology, he was nonetheless but one of the many figures in the administration who held this outlook. Attorney General Richard Olney was even more involved in the process of deciding federal policy toward strikes, demonstrations, and the growing unrest brought on by the Panic of 1893. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877 had generated great national unrest that in many areas had required state and federal organized responses to suppress the strike. Government officials were becoming all too aware of

[40] "Themis is our Name," *Themis*, February 24, 1889.

the power and danger to corporate interest that the working class was amassing in the industrial age. With no formal policy or guidelines to determine arbitration, Cleveland largely relied on the Justice Department and his Attorney General to determine how these labor uprisings would be handled. Olney was a former high ranking lawyer for the railroad corporations, an associate of the General Manager's Association, and saw in the federal government's power and reach the perfect tool to move across state lines and suppress national strikes that enveloped multiple areas of the country.[41] In the same way, the federal government could be used as a tool to keep interstate corporations, like the railroads, free from the concern of burgeoning national movements, like the Army of the Commonweal and the industrial army movement.

Olney well understood there was practical precedent for this course of action. After 1877 government officials realized a mixture of federal and state National Guards could, more so than municipal police or local law enforcement, contain and suppress strikes. When strikes and national movements moved beyond the scope of one city, county, or even state, it was nearly impossible to coordinate and suppress the action. Instead, local authorities struggled to maintain control and in the cases of incidents like the industrial army movement, force marchers out of cities and public areas. In Milwaukee in 1886, in Homestead in 1892, and in Alabama in 1894 National Guard units had been key to breaking various strikes. Although National Guard officers vehemently denied these charges, arguing they were not behaving as armed agents of the trusts. "The National Guard is above all this. It simply represents the law and nothing else," Major Charles Boardman of the Wisconsin National Guard argued when charged with strike breaking. However, the results were

[41] The General Manager's Association (GMA) was a trade organization that represented the railroad corporations.

still the same. Representing the law in states hostile to organized labor, with a federal government unwilling to represent working class concerns, meant that the "law" was a tool for strikebreaking.[42]

It was true that certain elected state government officials, like the governors of Texas, Colorado, and Illinois, were either pro-labor or members of the Populist movement themselves, which was all the more reason for the federal government to suppress marches and strikes. In 1894, with multiple iterations of the Industrial Army movement and thousands of protesters planning to demonstrate in the nation's capital, Olney and D.C. authorities were tasked with dealing swiftly with the movement while simultaneously perfecting the tools for further suppression of strikes.[43]

Olney increasingly monitored the situation as Coxey, Browne, and the Army of the Commonweal neared D.C. After leaving Ohio the Army of the Commonweal followed the Pennsylvania Railroad, passing through eastern Ohio and entering western Pennsylvania. The newspapers and word in the army circulated rumors that militiamen blocked the state border, and that in order to continue their march they would either have to find an alternative route or fight their way through. Yet when the Commonweal moved into the state no such opposition manifested. In fact, as Coxey's Army made their way through the various working class towns the marchers were generally greeted with support and aid. Labor and the Populist movement were popular in many of these towns in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, and it was not uncommon for

---

[42] Jerry Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865-1920*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 62.

[43] Gerald G. Eggert, *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), 115. Even a sympathetic biography of Richard Olney was forced to admit, "Frequently when strikes or other labor disorders blocked passages of the mail, stopped the flow of interstate commerce, led to the seizure or destruction of property under the protection of a federal court, or resulted in tumult or riot in a territory, the United States government was called upon to act. Having no overall policy for coping with such disorders Cleveland left these matters to the Justice Department. There the attorney general, who also had no formula, improvised policy as incidents occurred… Olney allowed the power of the federal government to be used to break strikes and weaken labor unions as well as protect property and maintain law and order. In handling the Coxeyite armies and the Great Northern Strike early in 1894, Olney and his subordinates forged the legal weapons that subsequently would be used to break the Pullman Strike."

the press to have to report or Vincent to chronicle how townspeople would meet the marchers with warm drinks, food, supplies, and public displays of support. Although the western and eastern contingents of the Industrial Army movement would face considerable backlash, Coxey's Army for the most part experienced a relatively positive reception from everyday people with a handful of towns providing some opposition but not enough to stall the march's progress. This was all the more reason why the state would be required to ultimately disrupt the march.[44]

In Allegheny City, the police blocked a planned route of the march that took the Commonwealers too close to working class neighborhoods that supported the march. An alternative route was quickly decided, and much to city officials' dismay the city's working class turned out in large numbers to cheer the procession. Browne was reported to be playing the part of full showman, riding along the crowds, waving his white sombrero, and working the crowd into larger and larger cheers of support. By the time the Army of the Commonweal crossed into neighboring Pittsburgh Coxey's Army had more than doubled its numbers from the contingent that had left Massillon. In Pittsburgh the city's inhabitants still felt the bitter sting of the Homestead Strike and provided an even warmer welcome. When the Army of the Commonweal left for Homestead on April 5, the *New York Times* reported the undeniable growing support. "Coxey's army marched out of Pittsburgh to-day, and was cheered by a great crowd for three miles on the tramp to this place… The most surprising feature of to-day's encampment was the large number of enlistments, 200 men crowding up to the improvised desk of Recruiting Sergeant Bails. Two new communes— the Pittsburg and the Allegheny— were organized." The paper then stressed who the new recruits were. "The Recruits were in the main Huns and Slavs and densely ignorant. As it now stands, the entire force numbers about 500."[45] Yet despite this enthusiasm there was

[44] Carlos Schwantes, *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1994), 53.
[45] "Coxey Has a New Commissary," *New York Times*, April 6, 1894.

uncertainty among the labor movement's formal organizations as to what should be done in response to the march. When the Baltimore Federation of Labor met to discuss possible endorsement of the movement disagreement erupted among the group's members. Opponents of Coxey's Army argued that their organization should only support the right of free speech, endorsing the fact that the state should simply respect the right of workers to organize, petition, and protest. Nothing more. As one member of the union complained, "Coxey is a horse speculator and… Carl Browne [and he] are patent medicine men or [fakers]." Another complained, "We are opposed picking up a lot of darn infernal tramps who are living on the public."[46]

Once Coxey's Army reached Maryland the marchers became visibly more excited. Browne's shows of riding alongside the gathered crowds, and as reporters noted whooped louder and longer eliciting more and more cheers. As Browne told the marchers, "Commonweal Comrades— we have 'crossed the Alps' of our journey, where the ice and snows met our legion; not with 'the cold hand of death,' thanks to unceasing care, and we are now in the sunny Italy of 'Maryland, My Maryland.'"[47] The press, too, noted that despite the initial skepticism, the Army of the Commonweal of Christ was now going to complete its exodus and arrive in D.C. "Vanguard Near Washington," one headline reported as Coxey's Army crossed into Maryland and made their way to Frederick. Three days before the army's arrival on April 24 Mayor Fleming announced that if the Commonweal knew what was best for it the marchers would "never set foot within the city limits."[48] The marchers defied the warning, however, and the city government assigned mounted deputy sheriffs to escort the Commonwealers through the town and prevent them from inspiring

---

[46] Schwantes, *Coxey's Army,* 56. Carlos Schwantes argues that these debates provide an interesting insight into the way in which the protest displayed the broader issues facing the evolving political tactics of the broader labor movement, the Populist movement, and Gilded Age protest politics. "By the time Coxey's Commonweal reached Pittsburgh it was clear that aside from the popular press, the two institutions doing more to sustain the industrial movement were the Populist part and union labor."
[47] Ibid, 71.
[48] "Vanguard Near Washington," *New York Times*, April 25, 1894.

unrest. But the escorts were reported by the press to be welcomed by the marchers. "The Coxey men are jubilant. They say that calling out the posse had done them more good than anything else that could have happened. It has started a local political fight between the Republicans and independent Democrats and the regular Democrats, and probably will net them more provisions and contributions than at any other point on the march."[49]

Coxey broke with the march to deliver an address in New York to garner more support and press. As the Army of the Commonweal headed toward D.C., he rejoined the march. The press noted that his address at the Grand Opera House was well received, and when he spoke to the marchers again he had good news. Congressman Henry A. Coffeen of Wyoming had endorsed the march and contributed fifty dollars to its cause. On April 24, an agent of the Secret Service reported on the continued advancement, relaying what he had seen and who currently made up the ranks.

> General left last night via Pennsylvania Railroad for Baltimore, bought excursion ticket for Philadelphia, had mileage for balance of trip. To return Saturday night or Sunday morning to speak here Sunday night. [Agent] took same train rigged out to join Army and will shadow him till his arrival there. He met no known Anarchist while here.[50]

Yet despite the lack of visible anarchists in the march, the federal government and Olney's office were on high alert. Reports were streaming in from the western states that contingents of Kelly's Army and other sections of the Industrial Army movement were marching through towns, threatening property, and in some cases hijacking trains to speedily close the distance to D.C. "TWO TRAINS STOLEN BY COXEYITES," one headline read.[51] "Another Train Stolen by Tramps," another exclaimed.[52] "MORE TROOPS ORDERED OUT: Coxey's Recruits in Oregon

---

[49] Ibid.
[50] Treasury Department Memo, April 24, 1894. Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress.
[51] "Two Trains Stolen By Coxeyites," *New York Times*, May 19, 1894.
[52] "Another Train Stolen by Tramps," *New York Times*, June 6, 1894.

are Threatening Trains."[53] "An Appeal for Federal Aid," the *New York Times* reported on April 25. The paper then reprinted an open letter from the governor of Montana to frame how dire the situation was becoming. Governor Rickards demanded the federal government use the military to intercept the protesters and put a stop to the growing nuisance.

> To the President of the United States:
> Information reaches me by wire that a band of Coxeyites, fleeing the state with a stolen train, was overtaken at Billings by Deputy United States marshals who were trying to serve a writ emanating from the United States court. A fight ensued. One Deputy Marshal and the leader of the Coxeyites were wounded. Deputy Marshals were overpowered and driven off with revolvers and other weapons. The mob then surrounded the deputies and now hold them prisoners… [now] Impossible for State militia to overtake them. As Governor of Montana I hereby request you to have Federal troops at Fort Keogh intercept, take into custody, arrest, and hold these Coxeyites subject to the orders of the United States court…I request that Federal troops be ordered to overtake them. Promptness is required.
> -G.E. Rickards, Governor of Montana[54]

The sensationalism of the press, combined with the anger and desperation of the working class contributed to the emergence of new contingents of the Industrial Army. St. Louis, Buffalo, Duluth, Hartford, and more chapters in Chicago were reported forming in late April as Coxey's Army reached the outskirts of D.C. "Three hundred Commonwealers were at the cooper shop," read one report out of Chicago, "… and 100 more came with tickets of admission and membership in the army during the night… There are now eight companies of sixty-four men each."[55]

Coxey's Army on April 26 began the last three days of their march bolstered by the news of the growing support. On April 29 they arrived at Brightwood Riding Park, a plot of land that was only seven miles from Capitol Hill. The owner of the land was happy to rent to the Commonwealers since he had a long standing complaint against the D.C. police for graft. For the

---

[53] "MORE TROOPS ORDERED OUT," *New York Times*, April 27, 1894.
[54] "An Appeal for Federal Aid," *New York Times*, April 26, 1894.
[55] "New Armies Being Formed," *New York Times*, April 26, 1894.

next two days the marchers made camp as Coxey took up residence in a nearby hotel. Altogether the army had marched for thirty-five days and had travelled more than four hundred miles. The embedded reporters telegraphed stories to their respective newspapers. It had been accomplished. Populist Senators William V. Allen of Nebraska and William A. Peffer of Kansas were asked how they felt about this action which claimed membership in the broader Populist movement. "[It is] absurd and useless," Allen said. "It is the work of a man who, if not a knave, is crazy, and who does not represent any of the principles of our party."[56]

Cleveland, Olney, and D.C. officials were not impressed either. "Coxey Will Go To Jail," one headline warned. "Maj. W.G. Moore has been busy looking up laws which will enable him to seize the Commonweal soldiers just as soon as they enter the District. In addition to the very broad vagrancy law of the District, and another law which effectually prevents the Commonwealers from holding their proposed meeting on the steps of the Capitol building, Maj. Moore has found two more statures which apply to the case."[57] "Now I am not an alarmist," one letter to Cleveland from a supporter read, "but such is the importance and magnitude of this great conspiracy that it deserves more than ordinary consideration and precautionary steps to meet it. They want money and mean to have it without the usual process of working for it…" The supporter continued urging the President and his administration to oppose at all cost the marchers and their demands. "If their object was to present a petition to Congress, as they claim they could do, it would be more effective than to do so by or through their Senators and Congressman, and they know it; hence I sincerely hope that you will not be misled by the tergiversations of Coxey and his representatives…Their object is to rob the U.S. Treasury of its millions of dollars."[58]

---

[56] Schwantes, *Coxey's Army*, 169.
[57] "Coxey Will Go To Jail," *Washington Post*, April 8, 1894.
[58] Letter to President, April 30, 1894. Grover Cleveland's Papers, Library of Congress.

Another supporter wrote to the President in alarm about what the march signified for the future of electoral politics. "I hope your city has prepared itself in such a way as to meet the mob-element and take the step immediately to decide whether it is the mob-element that shall control this country or shall it be the better element." This was not a partisan issue the supporter argued, as "All good men will unite in any effort of this kind, regardless of the party… American principles must come to the front." The elected officials of the national government were now required to preserve an order and "keep down in this country the anarchist, the socialist, and the criminal."[59] Cleveland and Olney agreed. There were no plans to entertain the marchers, and D.C. police were to disrupt the march before Coxey could deliver his remarks.

As Coxey and the marchers readied to enter D.C. for the final stretch of their march Browne had one more surprise in store for the press and even his colleague from Ohio. Unbeknownst to either Mr. or Mrs. Coxey, Browne had sent for their daughter Mamie to attend the final stretch of the march. Browne provided a costume for the seventeen year old, dressing her as the Goddess of Peace. Browne calculated that this final flourish would garner numerous stories and press attention. Throughout the march both Coxey and Browne had been forced to deal with charges of impropriety by the men in the movement as they moved through towns and allegedly threatening women in the path of the march. The other contingents also dealt with the charge of debauchery. Each group handled the charge differently, but the Massillon group decided that although the marchers were to be racially integrated it would be segregated on the basis of sex. Or, at least, until they reached D.C. at which point the issue of camping and sleeping together would be moot. Coxey was reported to be shocked that Browne had sent for Mamie, and that she was present for the march to the Capitol Building. Coxey allowed her to be part of the procession, and as he tried to secure

[59]Charles Richardson to President Cleveland, April 26, 1894. Grover Cleveland's Papers, Library of Congress.

permission to speak on Capitol Hill, Browne took the young woman around town and had their photographs taken. It was the beginning of a relationship that would later scandalize the press and estrange the two planners of the march.[60]

As the Army of the Commonweal of Christ entered D.C. all of the pieces of Browne's masterpiece of spectacle were in place. He rode on his horse like a character from a romanticized western. Mamie and Jessie donned their respective costumes. Coxey and his wife rode in their carriage with their newborn son named "Legal Tender." At the head of the Army of the Commonweal of Christ marched proudly Jasper Johnson Buchanan. The city's working class, Populist sympathizers, thousands of members of D.C.'s African American community, and the general public fascinated by the spectacle showed up in throngs to watch as the marchers made their way through the streets carrying their theosophist inspired banners to the political capital of the republic. Leaders of the city's black churches largely supported the march, and applauded Coxey and Browne's decision to racially integrate. So impressed by the display, the African Methodist Mount Pisgah Negro Chapel volunteered to be the base of operations for a contingent of the Industrial Army movement.[61] Hailing from New England, the group was led by the radical socialist and anti-racist activist Morrison Swift who had written to Cleveland urging him to reconsider the government's reaction. "At first thought it may seem to the national authorities that the simplest way of dealing with those penniless unemployed persons… would be to employ some form of 'strict and stern repression,'" Swift wrote. "… The truth is, before tranquility is restored there will have to be a readjustment of the wealth conditions." Swift then attacked Cleveland's lack of sympathy and sense of the national crisis. "You may not realize that the case is grave. When have American citizens starved in this manner before? Is there not wealth enough? The

[60] Schwantes, *Coxey's Army,* 175.
[61] Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 258.

national cry is over-abundance of wealth," Swift argued. The government therefore needed to reconsider its relationship to the economy. "Let us not be children in this matter any longer. Wealth must be better distributed," and the state was the key to this, "Will you assist us in establishing the industrial rights of the people?"[62] No, Mr. Cleveland would not.

As the Treasury Department secured itself against possible siege, Cleveland remained at the White House reading reports that agents sent him on the march's progress. "House reports there is a large crowd all about the Capitol," one telegram to the President at 12:45 read, "but everything very quiet."[63] Then fifteen minutes later, "Coxey Army just reached Peace Monument and going up hill to B. street and Delaware Ave.," then "1 P.M. Police have arrested Coxey."[64] A more elaborate telegram arrived fifteen minutes later. "Man at Senate reports that Coxey's men started to come into Capitol grounds but the mounted policemen charged down through the large crowd and drove them from the grounds. He also adds that Brown and Coxey, it is reported, have both been arrested."[65] Another telegram described the whole event—

> Coxey went to the steps of the East Portico and went up about five steps. Lieut. Kelly and other police officers met Coxey and informed him he could make no speech. Coxey said he wished to enter a protest. The officers said 'you can take no action here of any kind'— Coxey said he wished to read a program. The officers told him 'It cannot be read here' Coxey showed no inclination to yield and the officers hustled him off the steps into the middle of the plaza.[66]

Another report went into even more detail about the other marchers. "Browne was not so fortunate as Coxey. He rode his mettlesome charger in the forbidden parts of the capitol grounds and jumped him over… to the eastern part of the park. A mounted officer started after him and as he resisted

---

[62] Morrison Swift to President Cleveland, April 26, 1894. Grover Cleveland's Papers, Library of Congress.
[63] Telegram, May 1, 1894. Grover Cleveland's Papers, Library of Congress.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

arrest he received a clubbing. His head was cut, but it was not thought that he was badly hurt."[67] Capitol police then used the incident of violence to claim the crowd was potentially unruly and drove the marchers from the grounds.

Coxey and Browne spent the night in jail as the Army of the Commonwealth of Christ was forced back to their camp outside of the city. Other groups of the industrial army, receiving word that the main contingent had marched on the capital without them, quickened their pace. The various groups arrived, and although Coxey and Browne were quickly released and permitted to rejoin the group, morale was dissipating quickly. The Commonweal had come to the nation's capital to petition for specific programs and encourage the state to reconnect with the democratic will of the people. With virtually no support in the government, then, the movement was fatally stalled. Henry Demarest Lloyd had proven prescient. By petitioning the state the Commonwealers had placed much power in the government itself. Nevertheless social activists like Lloyd watched from afar and reconsidered their previous dismissal. The march regardless of its outcomes had rallied and encouraged working-class organizations around the country. What could be achieved if that energy were redirected to another purpose? The growing Populist movement would soon find out in St. Louis two years later at the People's Party convention.

Even before the suppression of the march on May 1, railway officials were grateful for the support they could count on from the Cleveland administration. As James McNaught, an employee of the railroads attested, "The President has issued the necessary orders and is now furnishing the troops for the purpose of arresting Coxey's Mob, or the 'Industrial Army,' as it is called in North Dakota." [68] McNaught continued, arguing that the executive's swift action had prevented considerable damage to the railroad company. "This prompt action on the part of the President,

---

[67] Ibid.
[68] James McNaught Letter, April 25, 1894. Grover Cleveland's Papers, Library of Congress.

Attorney General Olney, and General Schofield will prevent very great damage to the Northern Pacific properties, enable the Federal Courts to execute process, and in all probability prevent great loss of life."[69] The statement was not hyperbole. As contingents of the industrial army continued to clash with law officials and to hijack trains in the summer months of 1894 the railways stood to lose profit should one of the marchers seriously damage the rails and locomotives. "If this contingent of the 'Industrial Army' had been successful in forcibly taking possession of the train and running it at a dangerous rate over the road" McNaught wondered in his letter. Yet the danger of "Coxey's Mob" was still present. "I have yet received news of the actual arrest of the Butte contingent," McNaught wrote, "…but am expecting to receive it every hour. It is very certain that they cannot escape us… We will, undoubtedly, succeed in arresting the mob and delivering them over to the Marshall and his deputies." However, although McNaught concluded with, "Kindly convey to the President, Attorney General Olney, and General Schofield, the sincere thanks of the people of the North-west and of the Receivers of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company and myself, for their prompt action in the matter," the country, and specifically the railway industries, were far from rid of the turmoil accompanying the national economic and political unrest. As the police in D.C. and around the country suppressed the marches, a small company town outside of Chicago was about to explode in one of the most massive labor disputes in American history.

2.3 Part Two

As early as 1885 commentators were noting the strangeness and potential danger of Pullman, Illinois. As the Progressive economist Richard T. Ely noted a decade before the massive strike, "The questions to be answered are these: Is Pullman a success from a social standpoint? Is it worthy

[69] Ibid.

of imitation? Is it likely to inaugurate a new era in society?"[70] These were not mere academic questions. At the end of the nineteenth century both Pullman the town and Pullman the company stood at the center of a larger social concern with corporate capitalism's ability to remake civil society. A company town on the outskirts of Chicago, Pullman represented the ultimate expression of managerial paternalism in the new industrial corporate order. Owned by the Pullman Company, the town-corporation billed itself as a safe and clean haven for its employees, the newest innovation in how corporate capital could simultaneously produce for the economy, direct society, and order it "appropriately." Supposedly free from the vices of modern urban living— poor sanitation, crime, visible destitution— the questions Ely asked were central to the way Americans thought and acted out their democratic society. Could corporate capital radically alter the republic and its democratic civil society, making it simultaneously more efficient, responsive to capitalism's demands, and ultimately total in its vision of controlling society?

For 1894 America there was no clear answer. Ely, like many other Progressive economists, understood that they were witnessing a great transformation of civil society, one which left behind the older paradigms of the republican political economy. No longer simply a republic of artisans, landowners, and independent tradesmen, even as an aspiration, by the last decade of the nineteenth century the nature of work and ownership of property had shifted drastically. Pullman epitomized this shift as the relation between employer and employee, federal government and its citizenry, labor and management, and public opinion and social action were all shown to have deep contradictions and potential clashes. All of these potential contradictions coalesced with the Pullman Strike of 1894. Like the events of Coxey's Army, both in its underlying causes, ultimate suppression, and mainstream backlash, Pullman was a collective action of the working class

[70] Richard T. Ely, "Pullman: A Social Study," in *Harpers Weekly* 70 (February 1885): 452.

engaging in a highly public act not only to shape popular opinion but more importantly to force social change. Like Coxey's Army, it signaled a continuing shift of the working class to engage the broader public as an industrial mass, and force the concerns of a specific section of society on the general public.

In this way, Pullman exposed the undemocratic circumstances the new political economy of corporate capital was capable of creating. Reduced to little more than neo-feudal "serfs," the workers of Pullman were at the mercy of their employer in fundamental ways. As Ely wrote, "Very gratifying is the impression of the visitor who passes hurriedly through Pullman and observes only the splendid provision for the present material comforts of its residents…But admirable as are the peculiarities of Pullman…certain unpleasant features of social life in that place are soon noticed by the careful observer, which moderates the enthusiasm one is at first inclined to feel upon an inspection of the external, plainly visible facts…"[71] The Pullman Company controlled everything in the town. There was no private property, save for that owned by the company. No structure or civic organization was present, lest it pay rents to the company. The church, which George Pullman had built for his employees, stood empty since the company could find no denomination willing to pay the rent to occupy the building. All except the public school was an arm of the corporation. This expression of paternalistic control struck at the very fiber of American democratic and civic life. A town, an expression of civil society, was reduced to a commodity of a private business.

Yet, the uneasiness that Ely spoke of ran even deeper. Although the company claimed to have in mind the best interests of its employees, this concern evaporated when profit became a concern. In September 1893, in response to the deepening panic, the company reduced wages for its workers. On May 7th and 9th some forty-six workers urged the managers to reinstate the previous

[71] Ibid.

wages. Jennie Curtis, a seamstress and president of the American Railway Union "girls" local 269 later recounted, "When it was decided to send a committee to the Pullman officials to ask for a restoration of wages I was asked to go along and speak for the girls. When I told [the plant superintendent] to what a pitiful amount our wages had been reduced he expressed surprise, but said he could do nothing for us in the way of an increase. I told him we did not ask for justice, as labor never got justice, but we only wanted a chance to live. It was no use to argue the question. The minds of the officials were made up…"[72] The Company refused to consider higher wages, and even retaliated against some of the leaders of the workers in the company. Although some later observers argued the company could not afford higher wages, many noted the double standard the company employed. As a national investigative commission report, following the Pullman Strike, concluded, "There was little discussion as to rents, the company maintaining that its rents had nothing to do with its wages and that its revenue from its tenements was no greater than it ought to receive…"[73] The *Chicago Times* reported, "Great destitution and suffering prevails at Pullman. Wages have been cut and hours when work is permitted shortened…Food, clothing, and fuel are to be obtained as best they can— the house rent to Pullman Company must be paid."[74][75] In other words, even if the company was fiscally justified in cutting wages, its policy of simultaneously keeping rents the same betrayed its purported goals of reshaping working class civil society, and placed the burden for such a project on its employees.

On May 10th three of the workers who had petitioned the managers were laid off for their alleged "lack of work." This in turn precipitated a strike of some four thousand workers on May

---

[72] "Jennie Curtis," *Chicago Times*, June 16, 1894.
[73] United States Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894): XXXVII-XXXIX.
[74] *The Chicago Times*, December 10, 1893.
[75] The *Chicago Times*, it should be noted, was a left leaning publication owned by the recently assassinated pro-labor Chicago mayor Carter Harrison.

11. Turning to the recently formed American Railway Union, the Pullman workers sought assistance for the strike. Formed in 1893, the ARU was an attempt to organize the skilled and unskilled workers of the railroad industry. ARU founder and leader Eugene V. Debs, although sympathetic to the Pullman workers, worried that the strike was too poorly organized, management too firmly entrenched, and the inclusion of the car construction workers too far reaching for the strike to succeed. Although Debs had agreed with other labor leaders that he thought the Pullman strike nearly impossible to win, he eventually backed their cause. Despite his reservations, he nonetheless never forgave colleagues in the labor movement, like Samuel Gompers and the AFL, for not supporting the strike. As Debs would later claim, Gompers had delivered "one of the final blows that crushed the strike,"[76] and had encouraged the AFL to be depicted as the "conservative" and "sensible" labor movement. This lack of solidarity in the press was fatal to the labor movement, Debs argued, as it divided workers and their organizations in the press, and permitted the newspapers to create an antagonism among the various organizations. At the beginning of the strike the ARU had over 150,000 members and was well on its way to becoming a force that the state could not ignore. An inheritor of the Knights of Labor's broader mission, the ARU did not suffer from the same internal divisions and small scale producerist vision of the Knight's leadership. Furthermore, Debs and the ARU were not only supportive of the concept of the general strike, they were willing to use it to achieve particular victories. The General Managers Association, the railroad industry, and officials like Olney understood this threat, and viewed the Pullman Strike as one of their last opportunities to break the ARU before it became too powerful.[77]

---

[76] Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 136.
[77] US Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike*, XXIII-XXVII.
[77] One of the groups of workers the ARU did not organize, and how it differed from the Knights of Labor, was the African American sleeping car porters. Reflecting the racism of many of the white railroad workers, these black railway laborers were left unorganized. Later commentators would conclude that if the ARU's rank and file could have overcome this bigotry the strike's chances would have drastically been increased.

Debs would recount later in testimony on the strike that prior to the strike Gompers, other labor leaders, and he had held a meeting to discuss how best to move forward and how to orchestrate the various labor organizations. "I was called upon as the president of the railway union by the meeting to state my views as to what should [be] done," Debs recalled. "Then Mr. Gompers asked me what I would do if I were in his place."

> "I said, 'Now understand, I am speaking for no one but myself, but I would make an injury to one in the cause of labor the concern of all… I would muster all the forces of labor in a peaceable effort to secure a satisfactory adjustment of our grievances, even if we had to involve all the industrial industries of the country."[78]

Debs's call to rally all of the industrial classes together in a mass action was not warmly welcomed. Gompers argued that the workers at Pullman were deserving of sympathy and acknowledged that Pullman represented a larger threat to U.S. democratic society, but remained adamant that supporting and participating in the strike was a poor choice. "The impulse of the men on strike was noble," Gompers explained after the strike had been broken, "but impulses must be wisely directed… Pullmanism must be downed in all its phases. The servile, the ignorant, and the usurpers in high and low places must be downed, but the downing of the evils must be accomplished by constructive forces that will replace true patriotism for Pullmanism, democracy for autocracy."[79]

Gompers was not alone in this criticism of Debs, the ARU, and the broader industrial strike. Writing in *The Railroad Telegrapher* in 1894, J.R.T Auston severely criticized the strike and Debs. "The throwing down of the gauntlet in the slave pen Pullman was a commendable act and it met with a hearty burst of sympathy from all classes of labor," Auston began, but—

---

[78] Debs' Testimony before the U.S. Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894): 154-155.
[79] John Swinton, *Striking For Life, Labor's Side of the Labor Question* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984: originally printed 1894), 308-313.

> When this champion of labor, however, hurled the boycott into the yard of every railroad and issued orders that deprived thousands of employees of a livelihood in time of business depression… it committed a grave mistake… A strike is not a toy; it is a boomerang. Sometimes it is justifiable and when it is Labor willingly accepts the injury inflicted, hoping that the injury imposed on the other side may serve as a check to avaricious methods.[80]

At stake, then, was not merely the specific questions concerning a specific strike. Instead, much like the broader issues raised by company towns all over the United States, the strike presented labor thinkers and leaders with a basic question—what was the purpose of the strike, and how was it connected to broader political action?

For detractors of the ARU, Debs, and the strike, the answer was relatively clear. Mass demonstrations of workers, specifically in the form of the industrial strike, *could* potentially force capital to concede specific demands, but concession would come with a cost. Labor could, and should, Auston argued, find a way to incorporate the interests of the working class in the capitalist political economy. "Labor and capital have been taught a lesson," he concluded, "it is to be hoped their future relations will be more harmonious. Neither can afford to resort to extreme measures… the interests of both demand the settlement of disputes by arbitration, not by the boycott or the strike."[81] The criticisms were strikingly similar to those of Coxey's Army. In both cases, parties that were supposedly sympathetic to the plight of working-class people nonetheless withheld support for the strike on the grounds of political philosophy.

Some in the labor movement argued that the Pullman strike was unsound not only because it was impractical but also because the very practice was flawed. In the case of the Industrial Army movement, sections of the Populist movement argued that protesting the government in the street violated democratic principles. What bound both critiques together was a deeper political

---

[80] J.R.T. Auston, "The ARU Strike," *The Railroad Telegrapher*, 10:15 (August 1894), 16-17.
[81] Ibid.

assumption about the validity of direct action, political activities of the working class, and protest to radically alter material conditions. Critics of both actions assumed that the political economy of the U.S. under industrial corporate capitalism, and the electoral system under bourgeois liberal democracy were fixed states, incapable of radical alterations. It was best to accept these features of modern life, and try to find a way for the American working class to best profit, avoid too much harm, and shave off as much as possible in terms of economic and political benefits.

However, in 1894 this position was not only difficult for the rank and file to accept, it was even difficult to argue. Represented by corporate leaders, the railway industry also had industry wide organizations like the General Managers Association that planned and organized the various companies. Organized in 1886 as a response to the labor upheavals of 1885-1887, the goal of the GMA was to present a united front against strikes. Its constitution articulated five large goals. First, they would develop common labor policies for the railway industry. Second, they would aggressively fund strikebreakers. Third, they would collectively take on the financial losses of industry strikes. Fourth, they agreed to offer a system of standardized wages. And finally, they established a council to deal with the above mentioned issues.[82]

This organization existed to break the back of industrial unions like the ARU, and prevent industrial strikes. The power of the organization, and the support of figures like Olney who had been a lawyer for the association prior to his service in the Cleveland administration, combined with the uphill battle workers faced made failure all but inevitable. As the national commission concluded, "This mistake led the [ARU] into a strike purely sympathetic and aided to bring upon it a crushing and demoralizing defeat."[83] Added to these problems was the eventual role of the federal government. Whereas Pullman illustrated the changing nature of the employee and

[82] US Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike*, XXX-XXXI, XLIII.
[83]Ibid, XXIII-XXVII.

employer relationship, showing one dark possibility of paternalistic rule, the role of the federal government in the strike pointed to the continuing problems the working class had in initiating change in the public sphere as the state intervened to affect changes in civil society and social reform.

As the strike got under way Debs explained the way in which the boycott would operate. "It will not be a boycott in the usual sense of the term. The order will go out to the general executive boards of the [ARU]…that no member of the union [will have anything to do with the transportation of Pullman cars…Car inspectors will not inspect them; switchmen will not switch them on to trains, and engineers and trackmen will refuse to haul them."[84] Debs foresaw the first problems beginning with the switchmen who would most likely be terminated for refusing to handle Pullman's cars. "But our men will be watchful," Debs stated, "and the moment any man attempts to take his place every member of the union employed on the road will quit work."[85] This view revealed the promise that the industrial union could create, and specifically the railroad industry could provide. By using an industry wide union, and targeting a national industry like the railroads, the labor movement could force the whole of civil society to deal with the issues workers faced in particular job sites. The Pullman town conditions were no longer a problem for a handful of workers. Through the strike the concern was transformed into a larger social issue by affecting the larger national community. However, the ARU could not adequately fight the power of the federal government.

As the strike continued, the railroad industry, like they had during Coxey's Army, pressured the federal government to intervene. Having tested certain practices, Olney was able to argue that the federal government should, and could, be used to break the strike. Using his

---

[84] *The Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1894.
[85] Ibid.

experiences from earlier labor unrests and the previous threat of the Industrial Army movement, Olney saw how government officials in other incidents had been able to violently, but quickly, suppress a labor dispute. The greatest concern would be negative press which could undermine the state's ability to claim legitimate concern. The answer to this was an easy rhetorical one. Comparing the strikers to anarchists, Olney took advantage of contemporary fears of those who remembered incidents like Haymarket. Declaring that the nation had been brought "to the ragged edges of anarchy," Olney framed the strike as an issue of national security. Writing in the *Chicago Herald*, Olney argued, "Anarchy resorts to violence of the aggressive type to accomplish its end. Debs' system of depredation is violence of another sort…Debs' system of depredation is directed at millions of working people having nothing whatever to do directly or indirectly with the Pullman or other corporations. The common people of the entire country are to-day the victims of Debs. He could not inflict more grievous injury upon them by any other mode of violence which could not be met with violence…"[86] Olney charged that Debs and the ARU were coming as close as possible to committing acts of physical violence and were therefore tyrannizing civil society. True, the strikers were not calling for direct violence, but the strikers were forcing the general public and the nation's veins of commerce and communication to become involved in the broader economic issues. Cleveland, Olney, and other conservative commentators argued that the living conditions of these particular workers, indeed any specific section of the working class, was not the concern of the larger civil society, let alone its democratic state.

[86] *The Chicago Herald*, July 2, 1894.

Figure 5: King Debs. Harper's Weekly. William Allen Rogers. (Library of Congress, July 14, 1894).

Figure 6: The Vanguard of Anarchy. Harper's Weekly. William Allen Rogers. (Library of Congress, July 21, 1894).

Olney found sympathetic allies in the nation's media for such a claim. On July 14, William Allen Rogers of *Harper's Weekly* depicted Debs as a cartoonish clown in a paper crown sitting on a bridge that refused to handle traffic. In the background, trains ran into the water, unable to access the nation's railways and commercial markets. Businesses sat idle. It was all due to one figure and the organization he led using public space for a political tactic.[1] Rogers published another caricature of Debs disrupting civil society on July 21. Reminiscent of the spectacle from Coxey's Army, "King Debs" was carried by a series of caricatured marchers representing various figures. Senator William A. Peffer was one of the "Vanguard of Anarchy" cheering as Debs and the procession led an army of monstrous figures determined to destroy all in their path.[2] Ironically, Peffer's previous denunciation of Coxey's Army did not spare him the criticism. His association with Populism and labor were enough. "Debs is a Dictator," the *Chicago Tribune* argued on June 28.[3] The next day the *Chicago Times* announced that the government was becoming increasingly involved and there was "Trouble for Debs. Labor Dictator will have his hands full Today."[4] As Cleveland, Olney, and many in the press argued, a boycott which resulted in a strike, which in turn translated into a nationwide slowdown of the railways, unfairly impacted the rest of society. This was the basis of tyranny of the masses and the state had to stop it, not negotiate.

On July 1 a large group of strikers stopped a number of trains in a southern suburb of Chicago. Following this, the courts issued an injunction for the ARU to cease and desist any threats or use of force in the interference of interstate commerce. Explicit in its language, the injunction stated that any action taken to continue the strike would be a violation of the court's ruling. Also,

---

[1] Rogers, William Allen, "King Debs," *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1894. Library of Congress. Accessed August 12, 2018. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92515992/
[2] Rogers, William Allen, "The vanguard of anarchy," *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894. Library of Congress. Accessed August 12, 2018. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92515992/
[3] "Debs is a Dictator," *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1894.
[4] "Trouble for Debs," *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1894.

and more important to the question of democratic rights, not only actions, but also speech could be grounds for violating the injunction. The court concluded, "Eugene V. Debs and all other persons are hereby enjoined and restrained from sending out any letters, messages, or communications directing, inciting, encouraging, or instructing any persons whatsoever to interfere with the business or affairs, directly or indirectly…"[5] On July 3, ten thousand federal troops, and five thousand U.S. Marshals entered the city to begin suppression of the strike. The *Chicago Times* wrote, "[We do not believe] that any court whatever has the right to order men to refrain from attempting by persuasion to induce others to leave the employment they are engaged in…There is in [the injunction] opportunity for injustice and oppression which makes it wholly bad. The injunction is becoming a menace to liberty. It is a weapon ever ready for the capitalist and there should be more careful legislation limiting its use."[6]

Illinois Governor John Altgeld agreed. Having neither requested federal troops, nor been consulted to their deployment, he argued that the Cleveland administration was circumventing his state's sovereignty and interfering with the important process of democratic civil society. Writing to the White House in an emergency cable, Altgeld demanded an explanation.

> "Sir: I am advised you have ordered federal troops into service in the State of Illinois. Surely the facts have not been correctly presented to you in the case, or you would not have taken this step, for it is entirely unnecessary, and, as it seems to me unjustifiable…To absolutely ignore a local government is ready to furnish any assistance needed, and is amply able to enforce the law, not only insults the people of the State by imputing them an inability to govern themselves…it is a violation of a basic principle of our institutions…I again ask the immediate withdrawal of these troops."[7]

The White House responded that it had no intention of withdrawing the troops. "Federal troops," the telegram read, "were sent to Chicago in strict accordance with the Constitution and

---

[5] US Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike*, 179-180.
[6] *The Chicago Times*, July 4, 1894.
[7] Swinton, *Striking for Life, Labor's Side of the Labor Question*, 437-49.

laws of the United States." The message continued, arguing that because of interference with mail deliveries, and the disruption of interstate commerce the federal government was within its right to suppress the strike. The message concluded, "…there has been no intention of thereby interfering with the plain duty of local authorities to preserve the peace of the city."[8]

Debs and many labor supporters were not convinced. Writing after the strike, Debs pointed to the blatant bias the Cleveland administration had shown in supporting the GMA and Pullman. "How did President Cleveland begin operations in the Chicago strike? Among the first things he did, as he himself tells us, was to appoint Edwin Walker as special counsel for the government."[9] Walker was a previous associate and lawyer for the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway. Recommended by the railroads themselves for the position of counsel, Walker allegedly made a small fortune for his work. Walker and Olney's close association with the railroads was only one issue, however. Underlying these problems was the overall behavior of the Cleveland Administration. "Here is the situation," Debs explained,

> …there is a conflict between the General Manager's Association…and the American Railway Union… the railroads are beaten to a standstill, utterly helpless, cannot even move a mail car, simply because their employees have quit their service and left the premises in a body…refusing only to handle the Pullman cars until the Pullman Company should consent to arbitrate its disagreement with its striking…employees. But the railroad officials determined that if the Pullman cars were not handled the mail cars should not move.[10]

At issue was not simply the Pullman Company's treatment of its employees. Now a larger issue of the federal government's involvement, the right of the workers to act collectively, and how much the rest of society should be affected was at stake. These issues raised a series of questions much larger than the specific plight of the workers at Pullman. How did one imagine a

---

[8] Ibid, 437-449.
[9] *Appeal to Reason*, August 27, 1904.
[10] Ibid.

democratic society wish to envision the role of its government in broader economic and social conditions of the new industrial age? What did this mean for democracy? Gone were the illusions of the labor republicanism of the older producerist paradigm. Although some Populists held onto the Knights of Labor's dream of a producer co-op society, it was quickly fading. The vision of that society, along with its aversion to strikes and direct protest simply proved inadequate to the demands of the new economy.

It was the goal of some in power to solidify class relations, and more importantly decrease the political rights of workers. It was here that the experiment of the Pullman town could be understood. Seeing himself as a benevolent reformer, Pullman was also interested in demonstrating that reforms could produce profits. Yet, the nature of the town led many to see Pullman as a despot. Ely, writing specifically about Pullman, compared him to the German leader Otto Van Bismarck. "The power of Bismarck in Germany is utterly insignificant when compared with the power of the ruling authority of the Pullman Palace Car Company in Pullman. Whether the power be exercised rightfully or wrongfully it is there all the same, and every man, woman, and child in the town is completely at its mercy…"[11]

The assault on the rights of the working class was furthered when the federal government, siding with the GMA and Pullman, twisted the ICC and anti-trust laws to target the ARU and the civic actions of organized labor. They argued for a democratic state and corresponding civil society that served only as a site of capitalist economic exchange, and posited any threat to that continuation as destructive of the public good. The immediate implications for labor were that capitalist society was such a social ordering where the already empowered could crush the strike, and any other mass demonstration, and claim it was in the service of democracy. Although certain

[11] Ely, *Pullman: A Social Study*, 452-466.

leaders and reformers in power, like Governor Altgeld and Jane Addams, argued in favor of the strikers and against Pullman, they were not enough to prevent the Cleveland administration from wielding power and certain segments of the press from vilifying labor. As the strike was crushed, the United States was placed on a continuing path of labor disputes, and a continued troubled path with social reform.

2.4 Conclusion

Eugene V. Debs, sitting in his prison cell in Illinois, would come to embrace a more revolutionary form of socialism. Debs would first, though, work with the Populist movement in the People's Party of 1896 before eventually moving to the American Socialist Party. His ARU broken and in shambles, Debs pondered what could be done next. The state had played a deadly role in suppressing the strike. Like Coxey's Army, the Pullman Strike's outcome seemed an immediate failure. Although Debs and his organization did much to raise awareness, organize, and agitate for civil liberties, political rights, and improved work conditions, it did little to bring social democratic trends into the mainstream or win tangible victories for the working class. Like racist depictions at the Chicago Exposition from the year before, Coxey's Army and the Pullman Strike demonstrated that mere visibility and presence in the public sphere was not an automatic victory in the larger struggles to redefine relations that constituted politics, culture, and economics. The leaders of the ARU released a statement from jail imploring the general public to continue to support the workers of Pullman and the strike. "Shall the Pullman Company have the support of the public in carrying out this hellish policy?" the leadership wondered. "We propose to continue this strike against the Pullman Company through good and evil report and without regard to consequences until justice shall be done there will be no surrender… The struggle is for humanity

and against the most cruel tyranny…"[12] A broader program of political action would be required, however, to make this a reality.

As the strike was violently suppressed, Coxey's Army dwindled on the outskirts of D.C. Coxey and Browne had secured quick releases from prison. They hoped that the Army of the Commonweal of Christ could use the reinforcements of the other industrial armies to redouble their efforts. "Should you be permitted to remain at your present camp, do you propose taking in all the other armies which are on the way to Washington?" Coxey was asked ten days after the initial march on Capitol Hill. "Not into that camp," Coxey answered. "Our desire is to be permitted to remain where we are until the other Commonwealers reach here, then to concentrate the entire army upon a more extensive tract of land. The object of our opponents appears to be to divide our forces. Our intention is to keep them together and avoid any division." This was easier said than done. The numbers of the army were dropping daily as marchers were no longer able to maintain an open-ended commitment to the action. The lectures which Coxey and Browne had been giving and charging admissions were dropping daily too. The march was on its last legs.[13]

On July 4, Browne led a procession of about three hundred to the capitol building once again, but the crowds were noticeably thinner. A woman Browne hired to play the role of Goddess of Liberty performed on horse reading the names of figures from the Revolutionary War and declaring "Liberty is dead!" At that point Browne and another one of the march's leaders proceeded with a mock funeral. It was spectacle like only Browne could provide. But with the strike at Pullman radiating across the country, and multiple strikes in the coal industry, coupled

---

[12] "Statement to the American Public from the Jailed Leaders of the American Railway Union, July 22, 1894," in *Circuit Court of the United States, Northern District of Illinois: United States of America, Complaint, vs. Eugene V. Debs et al., Respondents, Before Honorable William A. Woods, Circuit Judge, etc.: Proceedings on Information for Attachment for Contempt* (Chicago: Bernard & Hornstein, Printers, n.d. [1894], 50-52.

[13] "Coxey's Army Dwindling Away: Public Interest Has Ceased and Few Pay Admission Fees," *New York Times*, May 11, 1894.

with the fact that no one expected the government to budge on its refusal to take Coxey's proposal seriously, the national press's attention dissipated.

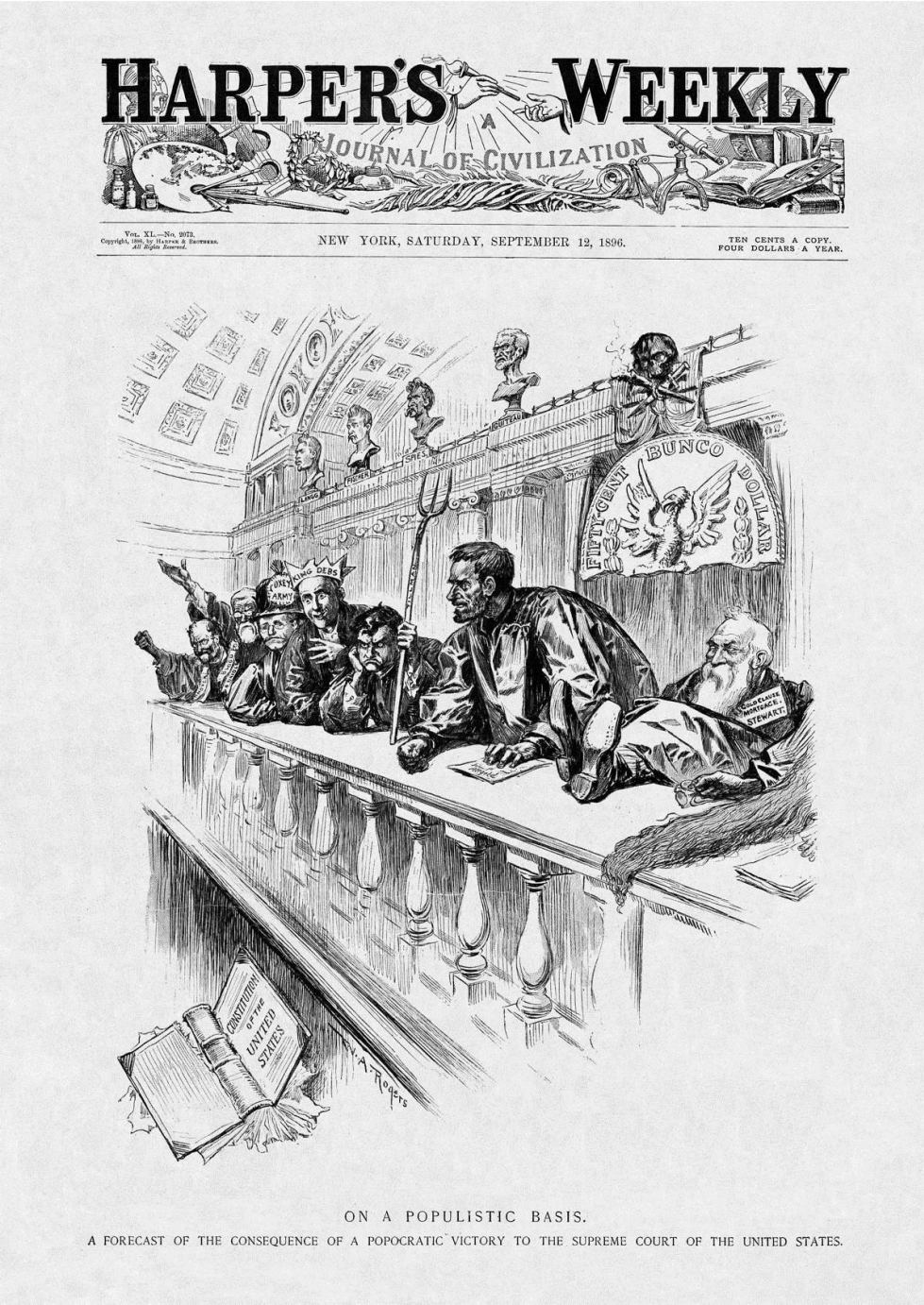

Figure 7: On a Populistic Basis. Harper's Weekly. William Allen Rogers. (Library of Congress, September 12, 1894).

In September of 1896, facing a resurgence of Populist activity in the election, *Harper's Weekly* ran yet another cartoon simultaneously mocking and denouncing the leaders of the various 1894 actions. "On a Populistic Basis," the cartoon read. Seated in the Supreme Court the "demagogues" were shown destroying democratic government. The Constitution laid tattered at the bench's feet. Debs, depicted as a crazed king clutching his chest with a face of twisted joy. Coxey sat beside him, dour and wearing a mocking military uniform that declared him a "general." Behind them a large coin was displayed shattered. A death skull hung above the visual warning. This is what the Populists, and mass working class movements promised the state if they were ever to influence its governance or worse take power.[14]

As both Coxey's Army and the Pullman Strike faded into the turbulent summer of 1894 the energies which had spawned them gave way to continued political organizing. Conservatives found themselves yet again alarmed at the danger bourgeois liberal democracy found itself in with a growing Populist movement. They would find that although a strike and march could be suppressed, the impulse to organize and influence politics was much more difficult to stifle.

[14] "On a Populistic Basis," *Harper's Weekly*, September 12, 1896.

CHAPTER 3. THE CONVENTIONS

3.1 Introduction:

Henry Demarest Lloyd's opinion of Coxey and the march on Washington had drastically changed. When first approached by organizers of the commonweal march, Lloyd had dismissed the efforts. To petition a government, as the one in D.C., was to admit to its power and give it legitimacy. Lloyd had argued that instead leaders should focus on organizing the working class in industrial society to create the structures and organizations for revolutionary change. Yet as Coxey's Army and the contingents of the Industrial Army movement had neared Washington, Lloyd was impressed by the national attention the marchers had gained. The march on Washington had forced the nation to grapple with the economic conditions of the working class. Furthermore, the draconian response of the Cleveland administration, first with the arrests of Coxey and Browne, and then later with the suppression of the Pullman Strike, had succeeded in rallying some public support. Therefore, as the various groups of the now expansive Populist movement considered their next moves for the rest of 1894, the midterm elections of 1895, and the 1896 national election, Lloyd was prepared to set aside his political disagreements with Coxey and other Populists and openly endorse the Massillon greenbacker as a candidate for the top of the national ticket. "My own preference for a ticket would be Coxey and Debs," Lloyd argued in a letter preceding the 1896 election. "Those are the two men who have done something, and have made the record that proves them indomitable and incorruptible."[1]

Lloyd wrote his friend and colleague Clarence Darrow in the months following Coxey's Army and the Pullman Strike and argued that although the situation was dire, the actions of the

[1] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Grimes, July 10, 1896. Box 7, Folder 7. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

federal government were an opportunity to further organize. State violence was the best demonstration of the growing problems of the American state and its industrial political economy. "The conviction of the A.R.U. men I have expected from the beginning," Lloyd lamented to Darrow. "Our judges register the ruling opinion, as judges always do, and that means at all hazards to put a stop to the strike. They will pretend that they are punishing for violence, but that is a pretense. Their real purpose is, and has been to stop the strike. They are religiously in earnest in their conviction that the strike is the murder of organized society; and they are right."[2]

Lloyd now saw how not only the strike, but perhaps even mass political protests, could "murder" organized society insofar as they challenged large scale corporate capitalism. By forcing the state to reveal itself as an ally to the trusts and a protector of industrial class oppression, activists could bring the crisis fully into the open and push the issue. "They will probably send Debs to jail," Lloyd acknowledged. "Olney's recent pronounciamento was intended to pave the way… to strengthen their coming claim that they are condemning not labor but violence," but he quickly added, "It is only by the aggressions of the enemy that the people can be united. Events must be our leaders, and we will have them. I am not discouraged. The radicalism of the fanatics of wealth fills me with hope. They are likely to do for us what the South did for the North in 1861."[3]

The American government's unwillingness to compromise and its open use of force would only deepen the crisis. However, in order for the reformers to capitalize on this change they needed some common program of political action and social organizing. This was no small task. Although the Panic of 1893 had thrown the United States into a state of social unrest, and although that

---

[2] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Clarence Darrow, November 23, 1894. Box 5, Folder 6. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[3] Ibid.

unrest had led to massive political agitation, there was no agreed upon course of action to capitalize on the issues and lead a united effort to produce fundamental change. Writing to Samuel Gompers, Lloyd said, "What is needed in my view is a delegate assembly of all the reform elements to give immediate direction and concentration to the acts of the people in the country."[4]

In January of 1894, Lloyd had received a letter from the journalist and activist William T. Stead that demonstrated this need for a coordinated political solution to the ongoing economic crisis. "I am going to open fire against [first name] Yerkes on Tuesday night at the People's Institute," Stead began. "Before I launch my bolt I ought to have a consultation with you." Stead detailed what he thought the issues were, what people needed to be reminded, and who public opinion needed to rally against. "My thesis is that the really disreputable in Chicago are not those who are supposed to be disreputable but those who are clothed in purple and fine linen and occupy the high places in the synagogue and the Board of Trade, etc. etc."

Stead therefore attributed the problems of the city's economics both to the financial industries as well as the city's Jewish population, a distinction in his eyes, due to both his Populist resentment against banks and his general anti-Semitism, which had little difference. These supposed leaders of the city were the real underclass. The people needed to be rallied against them. Stead noted, however, that this was far from a popular opinion. "For venturing to hint this mildly to the Woman's Club the other day there was a pretty gabbling outcry. I guess I shall have to say much more plainly what is in my heart."[5]

It was not unusual for various leaders of political and social organizations to court Lloyd for thoughts and policy positions for sustained political agitation. A nationally renowned

---

[4] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Samuel Gompers, August 14, 1894. Box 5. Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[5] William T. Stead to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 12, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

investigative journalist, he had only improved his reputation in 1893 when he delivered an address to the AFL's convention in Chicago. This address garnered the interest of the commonwealers, and throughout 1894-1895 he was still receiving requests for guidance as to how best to address the economic crisis. "I always feel that we have no end of ideas, sympathies, and purposes in common," Frances Willard of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) wrote to Lloyd. "I must say," she continued, that "[your] Address before the American Federation of Labor seemed to me to strike the clearest keynote we have ever had." She went on to request communication between groups and their various efforts, asking if Lloyd could serve as a connection between the WCTU and groups like the AFL. "I should be very glad if you could put me in friendly relations with Samuel Gompers if he is true and genuine, also with Mr. Sovereign, the new leader of the Knights of labour. What in the world has happened to our Powderly? I have always had so much faith in him that I cannot believe he has been guilty of wrong."[6] The Knights of Labor were quickly fading from prominence, the AFL and new socialist organizations were on the rise, and these new groups sought a coordinated working relation.

Cooperation, coordination, and common cause had been the major idea of Lloyd's address in 1893 when he had called for a new movement, born within the working class, which would organize industrial society to usher in a political revolution. "The progressive genius of democracy," Lloyd had argued, "is at one with its progressive necessities. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand,' said Lincoln. 'This union cannot permanently endure half slave and half free.' It is equally true that all cannot remain politically free if all are not economically free." Lloyd argued that the political revolution from which the United States had been born was only a first step, and that it was now the task to continue that revolutionary spirit to ensure actual equality and liberty, now

[6] Frances Willard to Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Lloyd, January 2, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

that the US was past the crisis of the Civil War. "Political freedom is but the first installment of economic freedom. The trade-union, even the federation, is but the initial step in the organization of labor. Shall we go on?"[7]

Lloyd's skepticism of protests and electoral politics remained throughout his life, but Coxey, Debs, Gompers, and the members of various organizations clearly demonstrated political agitation and directly organizing people was an initial avenue to Lloyd and other socialists' desired revolutionary state. Stead, perhaps unaware of Lloyd's initial dismissal of Coxey's Army and the Industrial Army movement, wrote to Lloyd at the height of the summer of 1894 complaining that observers were foolish not to appreciate the significance of the march on Washington. "I have selected Coxeyism as the subject of the character sketch, I think the article will interest you if it does not interest anybody else, but I must confess I am amazed at the indifference of the average observer to appreciate the significance of Coxeyism."[8]

Coxey's Army demonstrated the power which could come from organizing the working class into a movement and action. At best it could extract concessions from the state, and at worst it would demonstrate the legitimacy of the growing fear that the US state was divorced from the concern of its average people. Either could further fuel the organization of people into a growing movement. Stead wrote again in June, "[M]y American editor I see has pooh poohed Coxeyism and generally declared that I am an idiot in attaching any importance whatever to the armies of the commonweal…"[9] The dismissal was disappointing, but that simply meant, Stead argued, that

---

[7] Henry Demarest Lloyd, *The Safety of the Future Lies in Organized Labor: A Paper Read Before the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (Chicago: Press of the Eight-Hour Herald, 1893), 8.
[8] William T. Stead to Henry Demarest Lloyd, May 23, 1894. Box 5. Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[9] William T. Stead to Henry Demarest Lloyd, June 6, 1894. Box 5, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

intellectuals like himself and Lloyd should redouble their efforts to explain the importance of marching workers.

Lloyd was convinced. The march was significant. Furthermore, the Commonwealth that Coxey, Browne, and others were advocating could be the basis of a new framework of democratic relations, one that grew out of the promise of America's current flawed democratic state. Lloyd had alluded to this historical process in 1893 when he had argued—

> The battle of Bunker Hill was fought by a general who died without desiring American independence. Washington, John Adams, Jefferson, Franklin are all on record as striving not for independence, but colonial rights. This was Washington's hope and purpose until events forced the issue, and he had to choose whether he would take the place of father of a new country.[10]

The revolutionary potential of the United States had been buried in the halls of republican government, and it was now the task of activists, thinkers, and the mobilized working class to goad that potential into full realization. "The Commonweal" was merely the name of that new state, and Coxey and Browne had demonstrated in part, how mobilizing along calls for that new state could produce social movements, rupture continuations in consciousness, and in the process create the Commonweal.

However, this potential required guidance, organization, and some program of cooperation. Thus, throughout the last years of the 1890s, Lloyd and others in the labor movement continuously pushed for events like conventions and meetings to coordinate this massive effort. "What is needed in my view," Lloyd confided to Gompers in August 1894, "is a delegate assembly of all the reform elements to give immediate direction and concentration to the acts of the people in the country."[11] This could be achieved in any number of conventions, but as the federal elections of 1896

---

[10] Lloyd, *The Safety of the Future Lies in Organized Labor*, 6.
[11] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Samuel Gompers, August 14, 1894. Box 5, Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

approached, and the organization of the Populist movement culminated in the People's Party, the Populists would serve as a possible avenue to achieve this coordination.[12]

> Such a convention could make terms for the workingmen with the People's Party and the Socialist Labor Party and the Single Taxers that would be equal to the fruits of ten years of agitation. If such a convention gave the word as I think it would and as I think it ought to do— *for this moment*— that all the voters of discontent should unite on the candidates of the People's Party, we would revolutionize the politics of this country. The time has come for the leaders to lead… The people are scattered, distracted, leaderless, waiting for just guidance. And the opportunity will not recur. If not taken now the reigns will pass to other hands or what is more likely, no reins will be able to control the people.[13]

Lloyd would get his chance in 1896 when the Populist movement met in St. Louis for the national convention. However, Lloyd and all the other attendants quickly realized that a desire to organize the various movements, and the reality of actually accomplishing that, were two very separate things.

3.2 Part One

The People's Party and the Populists of the 1890s composed a multitude of different policy positions, political outlooks, and interests. Yet these different factions were all bound together by a common concern over the failures of current American economics and politics to serve the best interest of the people. These various Populists were united in their critique that the super wealthy, and the rising corporate order, were unfairly benefiting from the economy and had captured the state to sustain this unequal order. This diversity of opinion is important to note for two reasons. First, it helps explain the break down in the People's Party as different sections of the movement were unable to use their common ground to overcome specific sectarian arguments. Second, the

---

[12] Chester M. Destler, "Consummation of a Labor-Populist Alliance in Illinois, 1894," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27:4 (March 1941): 589-602.

[13] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Samuel Gompers, August 14, 1894. Box 5, Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

diversity of opinions and groups challenges the argument made by contemporary critics of the 1890s Populists, and later political scientists, that Populism is anti-pluralistic and undemocratic because it claims to speak for "the people." What is often missing from these critiques is an admission of the simple assumption that other political systems, including liberal democracy, does not do the same.

Many in the Populist movement did not believe a fundamental failure of the United States' electoral system had occurred. Large portions of the Populist movement believed electoral democracy was not, in fact, beyond reforming. Furthermore, there was widespread faith in the movement that their candidates, their party, and their ideas could be the source of needed reform. This commitment to the electoral process was a major source of anger for some in the more left wings of the movement, specifically labor and socialist activists who had joined the Populists in the mide-1890s, and furthermore demonstrates that for many in the Populist revolt a basic belief in elections, coalitions, and liberal democracy were not just favorable but actively championed.

Yet, despite shared agreement that something was fundamentally wrong and unequal about the American economy, the ability to enact a solution was, to say the least, quite difficult. In order for the Populists to be a major force on the electoral stage, they required a broad-based, national coalition. This meant the various groups were bound together by little more than a shared grievance. What exactly was to be done and how to go about doing it was a major obstacle for the newly formed People's Party.

As one political cartoonist of the era depicted, the very pluralist and politically diverse nature of Populism created an almost impossible scenario of political cohesion. In an 1891 cartoon, Bernhard Gillam in *Judge* depicted the Populists as a "Party of Patches."[14] Filled with hot air,

[14] Bernard Gilliam, "A Party of Patches," *Judge Magazine*, June 6, 1891. Accessed August 15, 2018. http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/210800

jerking wildly about, the entire movement was constituted of a patchwork of American reform and political movements. Prohibition, the Grangers, and the Knights of Labor were all represented. Likewise, Gilliam also depicted a debate within the Populists that was already simmering in 1891. The other patches read "Free Silver Party," and "Old Greenback Party" as Populist Senator Peffer threw out leaflets that read "unlimited Greenbacks," "free coinage," and "Government Control of R Roads and Telegraphs." In the patchwork as well resided "Anarchists," "Socialists," "Communists," and "Woman's Rights."

The currency, the role of the market in civil society, and the role of the state in providing currency would seem dull and uninteresting but they monopolized the time, energy, and thoughts of a great deal of the Populist movement and groups associated with it. Lloyd was particularly angry with this over focus on the money question. Calls for public works, employment benefits, greater control of the means of production, and social spending had all been generated by the working class. Lloyd and other figures called for moving beyond the money question, and focus on what they saw as the more legitimate concerns of the rank and file of the working class. "The free silver movement is a fake," he wrote—

> Free silver is the cowbird of the reform movement. It waited until the nest had been built by the sacrifices and labors of others and then it laid its eggs in it, pushing out the others which lie smashed on the ground.[15]

Although Coxey was a Greenbacker, he was no Silverite. Coxey consistently argued that the question of bimetallism did not fundamentally solve the problem of the United States' volatile capitalist market. Silverites, Coxey argued, only wanted to expand the currency form to include another precious metal. Coxey believed this would ease problems in the economy but it would not fundamentally solve them. Only a purely fiat, social currency based on use and use alone, backed

[15] Henry Demarest Lloyd to A.B. Adair, October 10, 1896. Box 8, Folder 1, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

by the state, would do that. Or so Coxey argued. Lloyd hoped that Debs, Coxey, and other figures associated with Populism and direct actions could appeal to the working class and outmaneuver the conservative Populists who Lloyd believed were interested in "only the most trifling installment of reform" or "no reform at all." These agrarians, especially, were providing "spinning-wheel and ox team remedies"[16] in an age of incorporation, the trusts, and industrial production. Political leaders and activists would need to embrace and confront the realities of modern industrial society. Sections of the Populist movement, especially those Populists who advocated for some form of creating the Commonweal, agreed. The modern capitalist corporation had created an entirely new possibility for government, civil society, and the economy. Calls to merely reform minor issues, or more drastically, return to a supposed small-scale agrarian past, like the leaders of the Knights of Labor had done, was to ignore both the future possibilities pregnant with revolutionary potential as well as the demands of the rank and file.

Moving toward 1896, then, the Populists were diverse and fractured. The money question proved to be a major problem for the various groups to decide what, if anything, should be done. The actors divided into four broad camps. First were the "gold bugs," proponents of the gold standard, and most prevalent in the Democratic and Republican Parties, especially the wing of the Democratic Party represented by Grover Cleveland and the wing of the Republican Party represented by figures like Ohio's governor William McKinley. Second, the advocates of fiat currency, Greenbackers who argued the maintenance of some kind of market society with a social currency backed by the state was a fundamental requirement to revolutionize both the economy and American society. Coxey belonged to this group, as did other holdovers of the earlier greenback movement.

[16] C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: The Macmillan Company), 278.

Third, were the Silverites, Bimetallists who, unlike the Greenbackers, agreed with the gold bugs that money had some intrinsic value. Precious metals, by their very rarity and properties, contained value that people desired. The problem for many of the committed Silverites was that Eastern commercial interests, who were heavily connected to the gold reserves and older markets, did not want to compete with newer silver mines in the West. Both metals, the Silverites argued, were of equal value, and to prove their point they pointed to the early American republic and the practice of bimetallism found in key documents. As such, these Silverites were prime candidates for the Populist movement. They had an outlook that readily aligned with the broader Western and Midwestern concerns of conservative producerists, abundant in the Populist movement, and their enemy, the Eastern financial institutions, were the opponents of small scale farmers. It is important to stress, though, that although figures like William Hope Harvey were outright committed Silverites, the election of 1896 produced significant realignments of political coalitions. In this manner, "Silverites" or "Bimetallists" also became a term loosely applied to discontented political actors in the other parties. The Republican Senator Richard Pettigrew of South Dakota was one of the leading voices in this move to alter the major the parties, forming what he and the press labelled "the Silver Republicans." Likewise, members of the Democratic Party like John Altgeld, still furious over how the conservative wing of his own party had suppressed the Pullman Strike, and the rising political stars like William Jennings Bryan, also found the monetary question, the Populist push for change, and the realignments brought on by the Panic of 1893 and its fallout opportunities to push their party and majority of the electorate to a more reform and progressive focus.

Finally, the anti-monetarists saw the entire issue as nothing but hot air at best, deliberate misdirection at worst. Lloyd fit into this category, yet figures that agreed with him in principle,

like Debs and Gompers of the labor movement, were not as ready to do battle over the question. Debs would campaign willingly for the Populists in 1896, and during that campaign push the silver position, as it was the dominant position of the People's Party. Lloyd, however, saw it as an inexcusable surrendering of real demands and argued that if breaking with the bimetallists meant splintering the problem, so be it. "[L]et it be a split that will be heard far and wide," he challenged.[17]

None of this endeared Lloyd or the other left-wing socialists to the leadership and membership of the Populist Party. Herman E. Taubeneck, the chairman of the Populist national committee, met Lloyd's challenge with one of his own, declaring, "[If] this is what you came into the People's party for, we don't want you. Go back where you came [from] with your socialism."[18] The crisis for the Populists, then, coming into the 1896 election was not an anti-plurality but instead an overabundance of it. The money question, a seemingly unimportant question in an age of massive strikes, widespread unemployment, rising radical ideologies, government suppression, and major political realignments, was in fact, the bedrock of the major issue Americans found themselves facing. How could the United States transition into this industrial age and remain democratic? What was the basis of that democracy and how would this new mammoth of an economy work in its relation to government and civil society? In the back and forth of the money question the shape of possible answers took form like silhouettes in fog. Despite these differences, the popular anger concerning the economic conditions of the period was fuel for increased popular actions. The money question directly related to the broader question of producerism. Was money a conveyor of value? If so, where did that value originate? How social actors answered this question determined who they saw as the principal producers of society. Furthermore, once it

---

[17] Ibid, 279.
[18] Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 3.

became evident that bimetallism could serve as an even broader coalition of reform, enveloping elements of the Democratic, Republican, and Populist parties, the possibility of fusing sections of the various parties together became less a theory, and instead transformed into a revolutionary potential. The Populists could become a national force, a cowbird egg in the nest of already established parties.

In the Western territories, fusion had already been experimented with and the results had been telling. From 1891 to 1896 the Populists picked up major electoral wins from their willingness to work with out-of-power established parties. Now, as 1896 approached and the money question loomed larger, it seemed the strategy could in a single election radically transform the government and more importantly one of the major parties, firmly moving the US onto the intellectual terrain of the Populists. However, not all sections of the US were the West. In the South, African American Populists and anti-racists saw this move to fusion, specifically with the Democratic Party, as not only ill advised, but outright suicide for a movement supposedly organized to represent working class and small scale agrarian farmers. The Southern Democratic Party was no friend to small scale farmers, the working class, or people of color in general. Yet, the national Populists were increasingly willing to sacrifice the anti-racist mission for electoral expediency. This betrayal was not lost on people. As the *Kansas Blackman* wrote in 1894—

> The first and last Negro populist paper of Kansas, has gone the way of all the world, where the woodbine twineth and the whangdoodle mourneth for his first born. Its mission on earth has ended. Negroes would not swallow its populist rot…the populist party after the November election [is finished]. Verily, the Negro populist is a peculiar animal.[19]

In 1895 this outright hostility toward the Populists who worked with people of color was on full display in North Carolina where under the leadership of Marion Butler the state's Populists

[19] "The Kansas Headlight," *The Kansas Blackman*, October 5, 1894.

fused with the Republican Party to oppose white, Southern, Democratic rule. When Populists broke with white Southern trends and simply honored Frederick Douglass in the state legislature white rage quickly ensued. Outraged whites, many members of the Democratic Party, ranted that the Populist Fusionists were on a mission to degrade the whites of the state. "The good State of North Carolina is disgraced in the eyes of the world," the *Mecklenburg Times* of North Carolina wrote in an editorial. "Who would have believed a few short years ago that the people of our State would ever elect a legislature that would do for a South-hating negro what it would not do for Robert E. Lee? Who would have thought that we would ever have come to this? The legislature of North Carolina adjourning in honor of a negro!"[20]

To add insult to injury, the *Mecklenburg Times* reported that at the same time the legislature had voted to honor Douglass it had "betrayed" the memory of the Confederacy.

> The same legislature that adjourned in honor of Fred Douglas declined to loan the ladies of the State $10,000 to complete the Confederate monuments now being built at Raleigh. They were ready enough to honor a negro who abused the old soldiers, but would not loan the women of the State $10,000 to build a monument to these old soldiers. What do the old soldiers think of that?[21]

It was clear what the state's Democratic Party thought, and more importantly what it thought could be achieved by fanning the flames of this more racially tolerant aspect of the Populist Fusionists. Douglass, the paper reminded readers, was for full political equality. What did this mean for issues like interracial marriage? "Fred Douglas, the negro in whose honor the House branch of the State legislature adjourned Thursday, had a white wife. It is against the laws of our State for a negro to marry a white woman yet the Populists voted to honor him all the same. The next step, it appears

[20] "Our Disgrace," *Mecklenburg Times*, February 28, 1895.
[21] "The same legislature that adjourned," *Mecklenburg Times*, February 28, 1895.

to us, would be to advocate the intermarriage of the races… Is this Populism? What do our Populist friends have to say about it?... Will someone answer?"[22]

The issue of Populism, then, was not an anti-pluralist politics. Instead, the opposite was true. Antipluralism assumes a diehard political ideology, a practice that will benefit a specific group, but there was no single essence to Populism of the 1890s, and it could be argued if Populism is largely a function of counterhegemonic rhetoric, protesting for change while railing against those in power, then we can begin to understand both the promise and perils of Populist movements.

We should challenge both the rhetorical move to separate the Populists of 1890s America from the broader global occurrence of Populists movements, and firmly place them together in a similar political category, jettisoning the notion that the Populists were anti-pluralists both in their pre- and post-electoral phases. Instead of assigning the ontological definition of Populism to something as broad, contradictory, and ahistorical as "anti-pluralist", the defining characteristic of Populism is its broad base. Ernesto Laclau aptly claims that Populism was an "empty signifier." Populism since it seeks to formulate the masses of people into a legitimate block, relying on normative claims of the true "people," the "nation," and legitimacy, that signifier as Laclau demonstrates is full of potential. How a specific moment of Populism formulated empty concepts like "the people" and "the nation" would determine whether it was right-wing, left-wing, or moderate. Furthermore, although these notions of legitimacy were laden with concepts of race, ethnicity, and citizenship status what gave these reconstructed notions of "the people" legitimacy was a deeper reading of capitalism. Who were the actual producers? Or to put it another way, who legitimately worked, created value, contributed to society?

---

[22] "Fred Douglas, the negro in whose honor the House branch of the State legislature adjourned," *Mecklenburg Times*, February 28, 1895.

White supremacist and nativist notions that saw immigrants as threats to labor markets, people of color as "lazy" and "untrustworthy," and religious minorities who somehow scammed the system at the expense of legitimate producers could, and increasingly were, the basis of both a nationalism and an envisioned legitimate people who were compelled to take their country back. However, this nationalism could just as easily be formulated along the lines of liberal universalism, an expansive notion of "the people" which saw democratic government arising from free people living in relative equality. This concept had precedent and had been at the base of much of the left-wing activism of the antebellum period which had informed the radical wing of the Republican Party during the Civil War, and which continued to fuel ideas in antiracist thought. Who and what produced value? How should the realm of the social and political be used to influence, and change, the realm of the economic? These questions, with the money form at its center, would dominate much of the political rhetoric of the 1896 People's Party convention. It was precisely the diversity of opinion in the People's Party in 1896 that would spell doom for it as an independent political organization.

3.3 Part Two

Lloyd was soon to find that disorganization and poorly articulated ideas were not confined to the People's Party and Populism. The broader left, both in the labor movement and the emerging socialist movement, was also rife with contradictions, theoretical differences, and disagreement over tactics.

Writing to Gompers about a piece by Frances Willard about the problems of the modern capitalist economy, Lloyd confided that he was at a loss for words over the analysis of a supposed comrade. "It is incomprehensible to me how a woman of Miss Willard's intelligence, who publicly calls herself a socialist, can reach the conclusion that overpopulation is the crucial difficulty with

England," Lloyd wrote. "Why then is not Ireland prosperous? Its population had declined roughly from 8,000,000 to 4,000,000 during the reign of Queen Victoria."[23]

Lloyd argued the issue was clearly not overpopulation, or some civil corruption of morality. Lloyd maintained that the issue was the trusts, and more importantly the logic that naturally arose from industrial capitalism. Writing back to Lloyd, Gompers agreed to publish Willard in the new *American Federationist*. However, despite his willingness to publish he agreed her analysis was flawed. "I am free to say that I am in entire accord with your criticism of Miss Willard's article, and believe it will be necessary for me to say something in the line of our thought upon the subject. Of course, any contribution from the pen of Miss Willard is interesting and will aid in giving our magazine a wide circle of readers."

Gompers was willing to broaden the scope of writers to attract more readers, but he hoped that Lloyd would consider submitting more pieces. "It may look like imposition, and more than likely it is, but I am so anxious to publish anything that you may care to write that I make so bold as to ask you to write anytime you can make it convenient to do so. The columns of the *American Federationist* are open to you at any and all times."[24] Lloyd, Gompers, and other members of the labor movement hoped to achieve a broad understanding that the problems of modern economic life did not arise from overpopulation, drunkenness, or the supposed violence of the working class in actions like strikes, but instead that current industrial relations, the forced cooperation that required workers and democratic government to sacrifice so much for the benefit of capital, led to an inevitable social system not just prone to violence, but actually predicated on it. What appeared as the occasional violence that arose from the forced cooperation of the working class to sell their

---

[23] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Samuel Gompers, April 2, 1894. Box5, Folder2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[24] Samuel Gompers to Henry Demarest Lloyd, April 5, 1894. Box 5, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

labor to capital in the form of strikes, marches, and uprisings was actually just a more visible manifestation of the ongoing violence. It was an ongoing battle to get the broader public to understand this reality. As one associate wrote to Lloyd after reading his 1893 address—

> "I have received your address, in which you undertake to show that the safety of the future lies in organized labor. It is a thoughtful and suggestive address. I am not so sure that organized labor is much more just than organized capital. In the past, it has had less intelligence and less power. In the end, the conflict must be decided in favor of the many as against the few, and in favor of intelligence as against ignorance."[25]

Lloyd's friend argued the problem was one of violence on both sides. The sooner capital and labor learned to live with one another peacefully, the better. This understanding so clearly seen in the anger and hostility directed toward strikers and protesters was precisely the attitude activists and organizers would need to overcome to build a broader political movement.

During these discussions Lloyd was not merely writing for the *American Federationist* and speaking in front of organizations like the AFL. Lloyd was also working on the finishing touches of what would become one of his most successful and widely known books *Wealth Against Commonwealth*. The book was an outgrowth of a series of pieces Lloyd had written for the *Atlantic Monthly* detailing the practices and harm monopolies had on democratic government. Filled with page after page of facts, figures, and cited documents the book was an indictment of the rising corporate culture of the United States. "This heart of a machine," Lloyd wrote of the oil industry, "beating at the headquarters in New York, and numbering its beat day and night, stands for thousands of hearts whose throbs of hope have been transmuted into this metallic substitute. This heart counts out a gold dollar for every drop of blood that used to run through the living breasts of the men who divined, projected, accomplished, and lost."[26] People needed to wake up to the reality

---

[25] Albert Moot to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 15, 1894, Box5, Folder 1, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society..

[26] Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1894), 117.

of the modern economy, Lloyd argued. The modern economy was producing at a rate that made new accomplishments in society, accomplishments that only a few decades ago would have been the stuff of fictitious speculation, everyday lived reality. However, these combinations and new advancements were not leading to improved life. Instead they were destroying the very fabric of democratic society. "Our ideals of livelihood are ideal of mutual deglutition," Lloyd explained. The modern economy was literally swallowing up civil society, transforming democratic life into nothing more than a servant to corporate capital. "We are rapidly reaching the stage where in each province only a few are left; that is the key to our times. Beyond the deep is another deep. This era is but a passing phase in the evolution of industrial Caesars, and these Caesars will be of a new type— corporate Caesars."[27]

Lloyd reasoned that just as Caesar of the ancient Roman republic had subverted democratic government, so too did the modern corporation have the potential to subvert American democracy. The violence that onlookers attributed to the working class was therefore misunderstood. The federal government, at least the members of the state sympathetic to corporate capitalism, were guilty of the violence, betraying their alleged charge of being democratic representatives to suppress the people for the benefit of the emerging corporate order. "The laboring population of the coal regions," Lloyd explained, "…is kept 'down' by special policemen enrolled under special laws, and often in violation of law, by the railroads and coal and iron companies practically when and in what numbers these companies choose."[28] The corporation's ability to so readily rely on the state reflected the deadlier relationship upon which the modern labor market was predicated. "These coal and iron policemen are practically without responsibility to anyone but their employers are armed as the corporations see fit with army revolvers, or Winchester rifles, or both,

[27] Ibid, 2.
[28] Ibid, 17-18.

are made detectives by statute, and not required to wear their shields. They provoke the people to riot, and then shoot them legally."[29]

In Lloyd's mind, no other government official was more illustrative of this relationship between the new corporate structure and the current state than Attorney General Richard Olney and the Cleveland Administration. Yet as Lloyd delved into the practices of individual corporations, problems in particular regions of the US, and detailed the anti-democratic practices of current government officials, he remained committed to the earlier reading he had provided in 1893— this was not an aberration but the logical conclusion to the present economy. Merely knowing about the problems of particular officials and corporations was not sufficient. Instead a broader revolutionary program needed to be adopted that aimed for profound historic change. This call for a new state finally brought Lloyd, Coxey, and other sections of the radical wing of the Populist movement into conversation with one another. Broadly speaking, this shift to a new historic stage was seen as the coming of the Commonweal.

Yet Lloyd's work was not readily accepted by publishers. Lloyd's manuscript was initially rejected by publishers like D. Appleton & Co. before it was finally accepted at Harper and Brothers. "I should like to thank you for the opportunity of reading your book 'Power of Monopoly,'" Ripley Hitchcock, an editor at the press, wrote to Lloyd. However, Hitchcock explained, the length of the manuscript made it impossible to publish. "The usual length of our… books is between 300 and 400 pages, and I am sorry to say that it has seemed necessary to decide that the length of the book, and the consequent large expense of the plates, would make it impossible for us to undertake its publication. I am extremely sorry that it has been necessary to arrive at this decision."[30] Lloyd did

[29] Ibid, 18.
[30]Ripley Hitchcock to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 11, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

not accept the given excuse, wrote back to Hitchcock, and pushed further. Perhaps if the publisher went with a different page size? "I delayed my answer to your letter of Jan. 16," Hitchcock responded, "in order that your suggestion regarding the book could be considered more fully by Mr. Appleton… But I am sorry to say that it does not seem possible to make the book on a satisfactory basis. If we used a larger page it would change the book…which would not be desirable, and even if the length of the MS. Were reduced to 200,000 words, this would still be too long… I am extremely sorry that this has not seemed possible to undertake the book…"[31] Lloyd persisted pushing the validity of the cost of the book. Finally, Hitchcock was forced to admit that the mere technicality of publishing the book was not the whole reason for not publishing the book. "I have delayed my answer to your letter of the 6th in order that the members of the firm might have sufficient time for a full discussion of the book," Hitchcock began. "The conclusion which they have finally reached is that the book would remain a difficult one to handle on account of its length," but after repeating this reason Hitchcock admitted that there was more to the rejection. "Secondly, they have a feeling that the book is necessarily an attack, or at any rate a very severe criticism of a few individuals, and that these individuals are not offered a chance to reply in the same book..."[32]

Lloyd's difficulty in finding a home for the manuscript was reflective of the monumental task awaiting organizers in actually creating the Commonweal. Eventually the book found a home at Harper and Brothers later that year.[33] However, before the finally copy was accepted the editors wanted a title change. Lloyd agreed. "Dear Sirs: I return herewith the contract with my signature,"

---

[31] Ripley Hitchcock to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 30, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[32] Ripley Hitchcock to Henry Demarest Lloyd, February 15, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[33] Harpers Brothers to Henry Demarest Lloyd, March 13, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Lloyd continued explaining the overall project and hope for its impact. "The enclosed extract from Le Rappel of Paris shows that the subject of the oil monopoly is one which excites an interest there which is fairly passionate. This will be equally the case in Germany and England. This suggest that the book should be copyrighted abroad. As to the title: My first four chapters and the last two broaden the book beyond one monopoly. That is juster, and so will be more popular. I treat the coal, match, stove, whiskey, meat, and cattle monopolies in detail, and mention many others." To impart the broader subject of the book, and more importantly the larger argument, Lloyd suggested the following—

> "'The Story of a Great Monopoly,' exactly fitted the magazine article it headed, but I feel that it is narrower than the book. Your judgment will be of the greatest value in the matter. Let me mention some of the titles which have suggested themselves to me. "Captains and Captives of Industry, Or The Story of Some Great Monopolies, Marketing Mankind, or etc. (After Emerson's, "Everything shall not go to market.") Wealth Against Commonwealth, or etc."[34]

Harpers and Brothers agreed, and decided the final suggestion worked best. With that, Lloyd's major work was ready to reach the masses. It would not just presage the coming genre of "muckraking" but would more importantly be an addition to a more radical tradition of imagining a concept American theorists had called "the commonweal." This argument had been the central project of Laurence Gronlund's 1884 book *The Co-Operative Commonwealth*, which had influenced movements like Coxey's and other radical expressions of the Populist movement. Likewise, thinkers like Austin Lewis who was credited in the 1944 reprint of Carl Browne's book *When Coxey's "Army" Marcht on Washington* as "one of the few living members of the very small group of American sociologists who understood in 1894 the political and economic implications

---

[34] Henry Demarest Lloyd, Letter to Harper and Brothers, March 31, 1894. Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
Harper & Brothers Publishing, to Henry Demarest Lloyd, Box 5, Folder 1. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society. On April 7, 1894 Harper & Brothers wrote back to Lloyd and said, "The title 'Wealth Against Commonwealth; or 'The Story of Some Great Monopolies' is, we think the best of those suggested by you.

of the Coxey Movement,"[35] continued the intellectual project well into the early twentieth century with his 1911 book *The Militant Proletariat*.

The entirety of this project, seen in the pages of books and in the rhetoric of marchers and even in the philosophies of certain commune projects, was to ground socialism in a historical understanding that accounted for democratic politics, Christian social ethics, and the revolutionary potential found in the corporate capitalist form to produce cooperation. Lloyd's more substantial argument, then, aside from simply listing the problems of certain corporations and government actors, was that the state, market, and civil society were arenas where people could push for a radical, socialistic future. It is why Lloyd would dedicate so much of his thoughts and writing in the years he was heavily associated with the labor-farmer alliances and the radical wings of the Populist movement to the question of republics, currency, and Christian ethics. Lloyd read these forces as grounded historical phenomena, and argued that a mixture of these occurrences could combine and produce a new revolutionary social ordering.

Yet how exactly would this be achieved? To answer this question required a theory of direct democratic action. By using the broader public sphere, both the avenues of print culture and the protests in the streets, political activists and movements could hope to force change. Lloyd maintained that the Commonweal was best understood as a potential outgrowth of current political and economic conditions. Building off what he had said in his 1893 address to the AFL, Lloyd maintained that the US as a civilization always had radical potential which, if realized, could alter the history not just of one nation, but the entire globe. The corporation was simply the latest stage in both the unrealized revolutionary potential, but also representative of how that potential lay buried in society.

---

[35] Carl Browne, *When Coxey's "Army" Marcht on Washington* (San Francisco: n.p. 1944).

A historical movement of people, which required first their organization into a common movement, was the only thing that would unleash this potential. "New freedom cannot be operated through the old forms of slavery," Lloyd argued. "The ideals of Washington and Hamilton and Adams could not breathe under kingly rule."[36] A new order of liberty could not survive, or even take root, in an older socioeconomic system. Gronlund argued similarly in his work. "Democracy" as it was commonly misunderstood in the US was nothing but the function of elections, rule of law, and a perceived permanent state that mitigated and prevented particular individuals from seizing total political control. This drew a clear line between the public and private spheres, but for these late nineteenth century thinkers and activists the division between private and public was far more tenuous. The state was not a free floating entity, clearly divided from the realm of the private. Instead, they believed that any state arose from the economic conditions of the period, and if it were successful provided a strong force to maintain those economic conditions. "For forms of government are nothing but *forms*," Gronlund argued. "They are not the substance of society. They are only coats that may or may not fit the backs… forms of government are nothing but machinery; but economic conditions are the steam. Without which the machinery is useless."[37]

In order to achieve a higher form of liberty, democracy, and civilization society was required to bring into better accord the nation— that is the body of people living in a particular societal period--and the state, the accepted political system of that period. This intellectual project lent a common cause, albeit contingent and precarious, between left wing socialists and Populists, and their counterparts in the more conservative wing of the Populist movement. The nation and state were increasingly divorced from one another in industrial society. Capital in its corporate

[36] Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, 523.
[37]Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Socialism* (New York: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1890), 179.

form was reaching a new stage in its logical growth, and in the process divorcing itself from the concerns of civil society. As Lloyd argued, "What we call Monopoly is Business at the end of its journey. The concentration of wealth, the wiping out of the middle classes, are other names for it. To get it is, in the world of affairs, the chief end of man. There are no solitary truths… and monopoly— as the greatest business fact of our civilization, which gives to business what other ages gave war and religion— is our greatest social, political, and moral fact."[38]

When proponents of corporate capitalism argued that the corporation was imbued with legal standing and that the right to own large swaths of the economy was a democratic right, then the corporate form took on a body of itself, no longer needing to justify itself as an economic system to the use of a society. The Populists of the 1890s and the socialists of the period contended that to prevent the ongoing catastrophe the state and nation had to be brought back into alignment. As Lloyd explained in the final sections of the book—

> "If the power really flows from the people, and should be used for them; if its best administration can be got, as in government, only by the participation in it of men of all views and interests; if in the collision of all these, as in democracy, the better policy is progressively preponderant; if this is a policy which, with whatever defects, is better than that which can be evolved by narrower or more selfish or less multitudinous influences of persons or classes, then this power should be taken by the people."[39]

Lloyd maintained that if democracy and rule of the people was truly a higher form of government, then the state apparatus and economic system of the nation should be based in the majority of people and their direct use. The government of a people should not simply be connected to the "will of the people," but also serve a practical use-based function to improve their lives. Viewing the corporation and monopoly as a "right of property" as government and legal figures like Olney did, conceptualized the corporation both as a legal entity and as an expression of a fundamental

---

[38] Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, 6.
[39] Ibid, 516.

right.[40] "Property is monopoly, the Attorney-General of the United States says." Lloyd argued if corporate property was protected as a fundamental right, then the ability to control great swaths of the country's economy was also a right. If it was a fundamental right to control the economy, Lloyd continued, then it was a fundamental right to control the lives of other people in the nation. Lloyd reasoned that the majority of people, then, did not have a fundamental right to life, liberty, or pursuit of their own goals. Democracy could not survive, flourish, or advance in such a situation. "Those who own the bread, meat, sugar, salt, can fix the price at which they will sell. They can refuse to sell. It is to these fellow men we must pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'"[41]

Lloyd, Gronlund, Lewis, and other left-wing commonwealers could not stress enough that the path forward was not an older form of producerism, espoused by figures like Morris, utopian agrarians, or proponents of producer co-operatives. Perceived older systems of production were both utopian and nostalgic, and even if they could be established would not benefit the majority of the working class. "The economic relations of the co-operative commonwealth will evolve out of present industrial conditions," Gronlund explained. "But the form of administration of that commonwealth will not be an outgrowth of the present form of government."[42] The current American republic rested on a set of assumptions that championed representative government and bourgeois law as the ultimate expression of democracy. The new industrial democracy would be situated in the masses of people, organized, and speaking for themselves. "We saw that the co-operative commonwealth will incorporate the whole population into society," Gronlund explained.

---

[40] Olney was not alone in this opinion. Over the course of the nineteenth century the American legal and judicial system had been slowly moving toward this interpretation of corporations as entities not for the governance of the public good, but instead as expressions of private rights of individuals and their property. In 1886 the Supreme Court in Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific had used the 14th Amendment of the Constitution to extend legal personhood considerations to the economic entities of the corporations.
[41] Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, 37.
[42] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 179.

"It will destroy classes entirely. And with classes will go all 'rule.' The 'whole people' does not want, or need, any 'government' at all. It simply wants administration— good administration."[43]

Such pronouncements naturally raised concerns. If the state, as Gronlund argued, were nothing more than the mechanism to deliver "good services," and if these services and programs were "natural" then the sphere of the political was dangerously diminished. "The People" transformed through the process of revolutionary socialism would have their needs and wants automatically met by the state, an entity whose existence was nothing but a series of permanently established agencies. People and politics, state and nation, the bodies and spheres of civil and political life melded into a single entity. "That is what democracy means," Gronlund concluded. "[I]t means, administration by the competent."[44] Yet despite this hazard Gronlund's ideas were readily accepted, debated, and seriously considered by many in American Gilded Age society. Edward Bellamy's long-lasting fame would come in 1888 when he published *Looking Backward, 2000—1887*. A speculative fiction novel, the story was largely a thought experiment to illustrate the ideas and concepts found in the works of thinkers like Gronlund. The novel was a huge commercial success, leading to not just large sales but also countless literary and political clubs that met to discuss the work and speculate how best to reach the socialist state Gronlund described.[45] As one reviewer of Gronlund's book put it, "Can the industrial work of this country be done on a cooperative basis, under the auspices of the government, with emulation and the good

---

[43] Ibid, 181.
[44] Ibid.
[45] P.E. Maher, "Laurence Gronlund: Contributions to American Socialism" *Political Research Quarterly* 15:4 (December 1962), 618-624.
Gronlund himself was happy to avail himself to these clubs, speaking and debating various groups around the country. "Before the True Commonwealth Club, which met last night in Dr. Bland's parlors," one such account demonstrates, "Mr. Laurence Gronlund read a paper on 'Sympathy as an Element in Sociology.' It was discussed by Prof. Henry C. Adams, Col. M. Pechin, Col. Richard Hinton, Dr. T.A. Bland, Mr. E.B. Fairchild, Mr. E. J. Peters, Mr. M.A. Clancy, Mrs. M. Cora Bland and others." "A Paper by Laurence Gronlund," *Evening Star* (Washing D.C.), October 24, 1890, 10.

of the state and humanity as the motives of action? It is a question which can be settled only by experiment."[46]

Although Lloyd agreed with many of Gronlund's points, he was far more cautious and offered a more nuanced solution to the problems of American economic life. Lloyd saw the possibility of radical revolution as a historic process that was a continuation of previous trends and conditions initiated in past periods. Although both Gronlund and Lloyd agreed fundamentally on the establishment of a new kind of state, a "Commonwealth" based on democratic cooperation and production and not capitalist competition and production, they differed significantly in that Gronlund largely saw this coming commonweal as the product of a radical political rupture in time.

Both Gronlund and Lloyd theorized that only through the organizing of the working class into some kind of socialist program could this revolutionary change be achieved. Furthermore, neither placed much stock in the current form of bourgeois representative government. Yet a key difference emerged when Gronlund seemed to suggest that this new ordering was on the scale of something entirely new, that it had little precedent, and that this new social system would create a new, totalizing state which encompassed all. As Gronlund stated, "the progress of mankind demanded that another step should be taken. The iron bands of custom had to be sundered, and that is done by an assertion of the individual."[47] Gronlund was quick to criticize this notion of individualism fostered by capitalism. "This individualism fructifies the germ of capital, already found in the previous accumulations of wealth… It becomes an infant, grows up to youth and manhood, bursts completely the fetters of the middle ages, first by the English Revolution of 1688… and then by the American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789," Gronlund reasoned. The notion of individuals and individualism was a façade that largely only

---

[46] "'Our Destiny,'" *The Vermont Watchman*, December 17, 1890, 4.
[47] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 54.

benefitted the capitalist and the bourgeois culture which normalized the labor market. In this way workers were tricked to see themselves as less a collective entity forced into cooperation with capital, but instead mere individual laborers who sold their labor willingly and freely on the market. "Mark this: it was plutocrats who profited by the English, by the American, and the French Revolutions; these three revolutions were theirs. The workers have hardly occasion to rejoice at the change."[48]

Lloyd agreed that the revolutions had been a boon for colonial elites and the new capitalist, merchant class, and had said as much in his 1893 address, but unlike Gronlund, believed that the political and religious developments of US society had to be taken into account. In fact, much of the potential of revolutionary change rested in the binding of these various spheres into a popular understanding which could smash the logic of bourgeois liberalism. Lloyd dedicated much of his thinking and writing in the final years of the nineteenth century attempting to show people how historically socialism could, and should, be the next logical step if American society were to continue to evolve. In his address Lloyd stated, "The Declaration of Independence of 1776 declared that the people felt themselves able to manage for themselves the government all of whose power sprang from them." The events of 1894, Lloyd argued, were simply continuations. Strikes, marches, the establishment of new organizations that represented the working class, all of this pointed to the potential of ongoing democratic revolution. "This declaration of 1894 is the proclamation of the next step [toward] independence. The people have done so well that they will move forward again, and manage for themselves some more departments of the commonwealth all of whose powers spring from them. The democratization of government— the democratization of collective industry— they are parts of the great upward emancipation. The American idea, says Emerson, is

[48] Ibid, 54-55.

emancipation. The Co-operative Commonwealth is the legitimate offspring and lawful successor of the republic."[49]

Lloyd continued with these ideas well after his formal break with the Populists and the People's Party, arguing in 1897 in an address entitled "The New Political Economy" that, "Christianity came out of paganism and the republic out of despotism. Something comes out of Christianity and the republic better than either." Lloyd argued then that Christian social ethics and republican democratic politics, instead of being false dead ends, were actually the vehicles toward new revolution. And, unlike Gronlund, these vehicles were vital to constructing the new society. Simply acknowledging the way in which corporate capital forced cooperation and thereby created a massive working class was not enough. The cultural and intellectual ideas of a period were critical. A fusion of Christianity, republican ideals, and the reality of corporate capitalism had to be brought together to produce the socialist state. In this way, the Cooperative Commonwealth of Lloyd was significantly different than that of Gronlund. Whereas Gronlund largely focused on the economic conditions he believed would eventually lead to inevitable socialist revolution, Lloyd maintained that culture and political ideals contributed greatly to this project and should not be ignored.[50]

The differences between Gronlund and Lloyd help inform a debate among historians over the radicalism of figures like Lloyd, Debs, and other American socialists in turn-of-the-century America. Historians like Nick Salvatore have argued that the so-called radicalism of the American socialists, specifically Eugene Debs, was not actually all that radical. Debs' value, Salvatore explained, "lies in the vision he articulated of the promise of American life, of the meaning of

---

[49] Henry Demarest Lloyd, "Evolution of Socialism," Address given to opening of the People's Party campaign, Chicago, October 6, 1894. Box 54, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical society.
[50] Henry Demarest Lloyd, "The New Political Economy," June 19, 1897. Box 23, Folder 3. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

American democracy, of power yet vital when individual citizens act together. Debs's vision always owed more to his understanding of the American Revolution than to Karl Marx, and he treasured the long American tradition of dissent against remaining injustices as a cornerstone of the deepest patriotic convictions."[51] Yet this reading of Debs, and other socialists who couched their language, ideas, and programs in a deeper understanding of American history misunderstands the very argument left-wing socialists were making. The process that the American Revolution had been part of was not outside the forces of history. Instead, it was a step in a longer human history of greater emancipation. Placing the American Revolution in opposition to later socialist revolutions, as Gronlund did, missed a broader point. Lloyd, Debs, and other radicals who drew on the history of specific nations were showing that the cooperative commonwealth was a historical phenomenon, not a utopian ideal. Grounding their vision of the possible American state in history radically differentiated the commonweal from its older relative, the producer commonwealth. Instead of going backwards to an agrarian producerist ideal, or forward to a utopian vision, Lloyd, Debs and others who adopted this vision were attempting not only to imagine a new state, but more importantly to raise society's consciousness to accept that such a state was not only possible, but was one of the logical outcomes of the current historical period.

Here emerged a tension in the literature of the commonweal. What was the role of the "nation" in constructing socialism, or indeed any new socioeconomic order? Lloyd's letter to the commonwealers discouraging the march illustrated this tension, as did Gronlund's dismissal of the concept of representative democracy. For Gronlund the concept of the republic, its constitution, and the norms and practices of American democracy had not just to be challenged but done away with. Lloyd and others were not so certain. Instead, the democracy inherited by the people of the

[51] Nick Salvatore, second ed. introduction, *Citizen Socialist* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982): xiv.

1890s was more a vehicle toward a socialist future, but one that was fraught with endless peril of being co-opted.

Therefore, what was the role of the state? The American Railway Union and Coxey's Army were painful and very public lessons that social movements ignored the power of the state at their own peril. Protesters could both directly protest and petition the state, as Coxey's Army had done, or attack the corporation and organize industrial society as the Pullman Strike had. Yet in both cases the state had intervened in key moments to suppress the actions, disorganize the people, and punish the leaders. Activists could have varying degrees of interest in the question of state power, but the state had a consistent interest in them.

A much more complex and sophisticated understanding of the relationship of the state and capital and how to deal with that symbiotic relationship emerged in the pages and marches of activists. This was one of the promises of the co-operative commonwealth. Although there were profound disagreements over how this new order would be constituted and achieved, the central aim was to liberate the political sphere of American life from the growing confines of corporate capitalism. Populism in part promised at least the possibility of turning political power away from protecting and bolstering capitalism and moving state power to the project of use and to treat the people with equality, dignity, and respect.

So, how would the national government factor into this project? Should movements ignore it entirely and focus on the project of organizing the working class? Should people march on the capital, petition, and participate in the government? Should movements fuse various aspects of these practices?

There was no single answer to these questions, with groups and activists changing tactics, philosophy, and outlooks over time, often breaking ideology for the expediency of pragmatic

action or following ideological commitments until coalitions were no longer plausible. In December of 1894, Herman E. Taubeneck wrote to various leaders associated with the Populist movement asking them to attend a conference in St. Louis at the end of the month. The growing crisis brought on by the Cleveland administration was an opportunity that the Populists simply could not wait until election time to discuss.

> "My Dear Sir: – At the request of the National Executive Committee of the [People's Party, we have] issued a call for a conference of our leaders to meet at the Lindel Hotel, St. Louis, Mo. Dec. 28 and 29. It will be the most important meeting held since the Omaha convention. Messrs. [Debs] and Howard of the A.R.U., C.A. Robinson, Pres't of F.M.B.A., Marion Butler, Pres't of F.A. and I.U., Senator Stewart of Nev. And our congressional delegation in the 53d and those elected to the 54th congress will be present… The call is broad enough to admit all who work and vote with the People's Party. Recent events have made this conference absolutely necessary. The President's message has forced the money question to the front. We must accept the challenge and fight it out to a finish, neither giving nor accepting any quarter. We need every cool conservative and level headed Populist at the conference. We must map out a policy for the future. We can do more good towards educating the people on our ideas with one dollar, between campaigns than with five or ten during campaigns… We need your advice in our national councils. You must take the time to meet with us. Our party is fast approaching a crisis in its history. We need wise heads and courageous hearts. Come and bring every cool, conservative and level headed Populist with you."[52]

Cleveland's insistence to defy moves toward bimetallism, thereby furthering the gold bug stance, agitated large sections of the reform movements. However, although Lloyd agreed that the spirit of the currency question was in the best tradition of the general economic and political protest

[52] Herman E. Taubeneck to Henry Demarest Lloyd, December 10, 1894. Box 5, Folder 7. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.

movements, he challenged the practice of placing too much importance on the topic. Lloyd wrote to colleagues in the remnants of the ARU and other organizations to express his caution toward the People's Party and the possible direction in which the broader Populist movement was headed. In a letter C.A. Powers, Lloyd confided—

> "…the subject of a paper for the People's Party was being earnestly discussed here as it still is. But it has not been possible yet to arrive at any conclusion. I have a telegram today from Mr. Debs, and expect him to come to see me tonight. We will discuss this matter of the paper among other things. I hope to go to St. Louis to attend the conference, Dec. 28, and shall expect to see you there. One of the important aspects of the present situation, it seems to me, is that the side opposed to us are growing radical much more rapidly than we… Some of our leaders on the contrary appear determined to take narrower ground and throw the radicals in the party overboard. Revolutions never go backward. If the People's Party goes backward it will prove that it is not a revolution, and if it is not a revolution, it is nothing."[53]

What was needed was strong commitment to radical ideals. Lloyd believed that the currency question was precisely the wrong issue to do this. When a colleague in the People's Party wrote Lloyd in March of 1896, seeking advice on how to smooth over differences in the party, and praising Lloyd's known commitment to fighting the trusts, Lloyd responded that the leaders of the People's Party were fooling themselves in stressing false issues.[54]

"As you ask my opinion I will unhesitatingly say that I think the attempt to harmonize the factions ought to be made," Lloyd began. "When I see such a panorama of oppression unfolding as is to be seen in the records of the concentration of wealth, the latest example of which is the public bond sale, it makes me bewildered to hear it propose[d] to cure this evil by— what?— going

---

[53] Henry Demarest Lloyd, Letter to C.A. Powers, December 16, 1894. Box 5. Folder 7, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.
[54] A.L. Maxwell to Henry Demarest Lloyd, March 4, 1896. Box 7, Folder 2. Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.

back to the metallic part of the currency system we had in 1873!" Such a prescription for the nation's working-class troubles was stupefying, Lloyd argued. "To go back to 1873, to restore silver, that will cure us," Lloyd wondered. "This whole brood of curses was hatched before 1873, before anyone thought of demonetizing silver, or resuming specie payment. By 1873 we had Fisk, Gould, Vanderbilt, the prototypes of all the procession of corrupters and oppressors that has followed." No, Lloyd insisted. True reform which would lead to revolutionary change that would benefit everyone had to be found in radical programs.[55] Although Lloyd would carry this severe criticism of the Populists into the 1896 national convention and beyond he was to discover the staying power of the issue as committed activists and general interest among reformers refused to wane. Much of this interest was bolstered by a highly successful writer, lecturer, and activist named William Hope Harvey and his 1894 bestseller *Coin's Financial School.*

Born in 1851, in what is now Buffalo, West Virginia, William Hope Harvey (or "Coin" as he was later known) was one of the most widely read bimetallists of the period. After working as a teacher and later studying law, Harvey moved to Ouray, Colorado, in 1884 to work as the mine operator of Silver Bell, one of the most productive silver mines in the region. Here Harvey began to develop a deep interest in the money question. After attending a series of conferences dedicated to the currency debate, Harvey was struck by the dry tone and difficulty bimetallists had in communicating their ideas with the public. "I knew it would be folly to expect the masses of the people to read a book on the money question presented in the usual form," he told one interviewer. "Yet I knew that it was imperative for them to know the great basic facts of that question… Two ways offered themselves a book in the form of a novel, and a discussion of silver as though carried on in a school, where the lessons began with the very A. B. C. of the subject. I adopted both, and,

[55] Henry Demarest Lloyd to A.L. Maxwell. March 6, 1896. Box 7, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

going to Chicago, established "Coin," a weekly paper, which had on its first page a picture of Coin as that young financier [that] now appears in the books."[56]

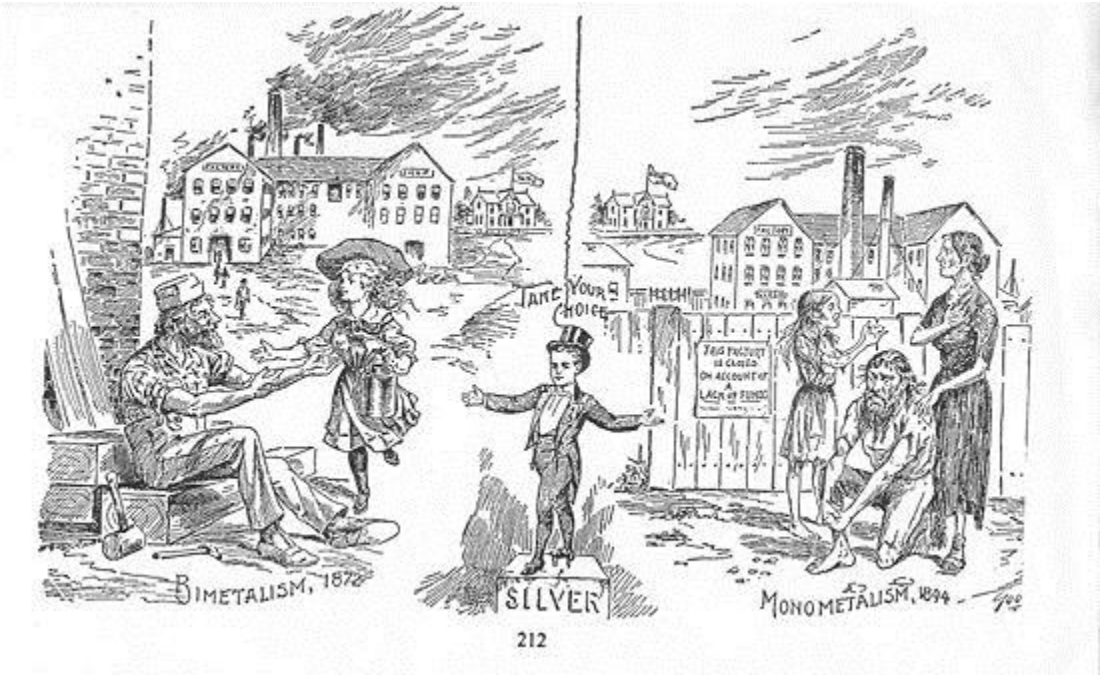

Figure 8: Illustration in Coin's Financial School. W.R. Goodall, Henry Mayer, and Bert Cassidy. (Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1894), 21.

Harvey's book was exactly as he had described it. A novelization of the bimetallist argument, it followed a young financier-turned-lecturer "Coin."[57] Coin during the story held a series of public lectures in Chicago, and each chapter was dedicated to particular points of the bimetallist position. During the story certain individuals and groups charged into the lecture hall to challenge Coin, but naturally, their hubris and ignorance got the better of them, and Harvey used the dialogue to have Coin arrive on top of any argument, the challenger reduced to vengeful scorner or converted apostle. Yet although Coin won a decisive victory in the pages of Harvey's book,

[56] "William Hope Harvey: The Man Who Wrote 'Coin's Financial School' and How He Came to do it," *The Tennessean*, May 10, 1895, 3.
[57] W.R. Goodall, Henry, Mayer, and Bert Cassidy, "Illustration" in *Coin's Financial School* (Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1894), 21.

outside the imagined lecture halls there was considerable opposition not so easily dissuaded. First and foremost were the strict gold standard monetarists. As Edward Wisner writing in a counter to Harvey and the bimetallists stated, "The American people are determining what their money standard shall be. This is the one absorbing question… on the other side of this question is arrayed a formidable combination of honest delusion and demagogism, of absolute dishonesty and purest motive."[58] These agitators on the monetary question were taking advantage of a bad economic situation, promising the working class things they could not deliver. "To this class belong those deluded people, who, like the poor, are always with us, who think it possible for… the government, to make something out of nothing, by creating value with the stamp of the mint, or with the printing press and paper."[59]

Yet despite the polemics between bimetallists like Harvey and strict gold currency advocates, a common economic assumption tied them together. Both conservative bimetallists and gold bugs held that money as a thing contained value in and of itself. As Coin explained in his lecture, "it was deemed best to select something for money which was valuable within itself. Something that had an exchange value. So that he who parted with his property for it, had something which itself was valuable."[60] The value of currency, then, was contained in the very material that the government used to mint. "Congress adopted silver and gold as money," Coin

---

[58] Edward Wisner, *Cash vs. Coin: An Answer to "Coin's Financial School* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1895), 10-12.
[59] Ibid, 13.
Ibid, 16-17.The book followed a similar structure as Harvey's, relying on a character named "Cash" to dispel the arguments of opponents. However, instead of a lecture hall Cash appears on a train talking to a friend about the ridiculous sales and attention Coin was receiving. As one opening scene depicted, "'Coin's Financial School' and be blanked!' said Cash, with vehemence. 'Why, do you know, sir, that fellow Coin has more cheek than a Delhi land boomer. I was in Chicago on my vacation when that charlatan was running his school, and was there day one. I do not claim to be a political economist, but I routed that fellow Coin after I had caught on to his method… And yet,' continued Cash, 'I see people going wild over his book.'"
[60] Harvey, *Coin's Financial School,* 45.

continued. "It then proceeded to fix the unit. That is, [Congress] then fixed what should constitute one dollar" based on units of precious metals.[61]

Since currency had a value unto itself, Coin explicitly sidestepped the issue that had been raised by Marxists about the labor theory of value. In this formulation, Marx had argued that money was merely a device to express the average amount of time a society took to produce goods and commodities. Yes, gold and silver had particular properties that allowed them to be easily coined, but insofar as gold and silver had any real value unto themselves there was none. Instead, the labor market and the average time a society took to produce goods was the true base of value, with money just being a kind of language used to express that.[62] Harvey was close to stumbling on this, arguing that the coinage of any society had use in what he called "exchange value" but he never fully developed why this exchange value existed. "If the government went to pieces that had stamped [the coins], it was still valuable property and would have an exchange value."[63]

Coxey and the other radical greenbackers rejected this reading. Currency had absolutely no intrinsic value in and of itself, and instead was largely just a technology that made market transactions possible. Silver, gold, paper, etc. could all be used, as long as a society stated it had meaning. A government could, then, infuse currency in particular instances, encouraging trade and commerce, closely regulate and monitor the use of that currency, and in the process stimulate economic growth. There was nothing "artificial" about this, Coxey and other contended, because the currency was itself an artificial expression of actual value.

This raised an important problem that followed the Populists into the convention halls and national election of 1896. Where was value principally placed? Bimetallists like Harvey and others

---

[61] Ibid, 5.
[62] Karl Marx, "Money, or the Circulation of Commodities," *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Seattle, WA: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010), 35-64.
[63] Harvey, *Coin's Financial School*, 45-46.

argued that some inherent quality in the money form had actual value. Coxey and other greenbackers disagreed, situating the production of value largely in the market and the production power people had to build and trade. This was the deeper intellectual argument Coxey had made with the concept of good roads. Simply print money in the form of non-interest bearing bonds, pay unemployed workers to build infrastructure, and in the process you would simultaneously foster social development and economic growth. The fundamental disagreement, then, between these two positions was over conceptualizing the placement of value in a capitalist economy. Bimetallists and gold bugs placed it in the money, whereas proponents of currency placed it in the market and the ability of people to freely create and exchange goods.

In many ways this put those concerned with currency in direct opposition to the socialists. One of the primary bases of a radical critique of liberal democracy was the belief that it had not fully liberated people. Simply tweaking existing social systems through reform would not be sufficient. Herein resided the burgeoning populist divide— had humanity been liberated with the ascent of liberal democracy? If yes, but not quite, the answer was a version of populism concerned with reform of existing systems. Currency and the market could, theoretically, be reformed in such a way as to liberate people. However, if the answer to the question was no, then a more radical transformation was required. Bimetallists and gold bugs fell on one side of this, believing in the fundamental worth and legitimacy of the current market. Socialists rejected it completely, and therefore focused on radicalizing society, and conceiving of what exactly a co-operative commonwealth would entail. For fiat currency advocates, like Coxey, the position was far more uncertain. By placing value in the market itself these greenbackers created the possibility of a temporary alliance with either group, advocating simultaneously for an expanded currency (the position of the bimetallists) and a vision of the market that moved beyond capitalist class relations

of production. But by only placing value in the market, and the system of production where the working class still sold their labor, the question ultimately came down to how the working class would be compensated for their work. This was a compromise and misunderstanding of basic economic principles that Lloyd could not abide.

Despite this fundamental disagreement among many in the Populist movement, bigger issues loomed on the horizon for the party and their prospects in the election. Growing fearful of a potential coup of the socialists and other radicals, leaders in the People's Party were attempting to prevent a takeover of the party. Leaders like Tom Watson, Marion Butler, and Herman Taubeneck feared that if action was not quickly taken in the election of 1896, that they could very well lose control of their party. Watson made himself perfectly clear when he stated in a letter to Butler that he would oppose "Socialism and Radicalism" and fight for a more conservative reading of American Populism. He pointed out to Butler that he and Georgia Populists had even given the "cold shoulder" to figures like Jacob Coxey, Carl Browne, their march, and their various demands.[64] If Coxey's program was unacceptable, and indeed the *People's Party Paper* of Georgia had openly opposed the march, then the socialism of figures like Lloyd and Debs would certainly be opposed.

Lloyd and Debs were well aware of this hostility. Writing to Debs' secretary in 1896, Lloyd inquired if Debs and the remnants of the ARU were aware of the hostility Watson and other Georgia Populists were fomenting in their paper. The secretary wrote back saying, yes. They were well aware.

> "The copy of the 'People's Party Paper' which you sent is… in my hands and I will take pleasure in bringing the same to the personal notice of Mr. Debs when he returns. Mr. Watson's paper is not on our exchange list but I have been handed a

[64] Durden, *The Climax of Populism*, 1965.

> copy frequently so that I am familiar with his position in regard to the Socialists and I have spoken to Mr. Debs on the subject myself. I apprehend that Mr. Watson is in a delicate position. His people have been educated largely through the Farmers' Alliance, a sort of Socialist union, limited. It would seem that there is a pressure upon Mr. Watson from this source that will in the end spoil his usefulness in the progress of Humanity."[65]

A few weeks later Debs echoed the sentiment, and attempted to calm Lloyd's fears. "I note particularly what you say in reference to the marked article in Thomas Watson's 'People's Party Paper,'" Debs wrote. "I agree with you entirely that Mr. Watson has no rational conception of what 'Socialism' really is, and it is not likely that his tirade will injure those against whom it is directed any more than it will help himself. I do not permit myself to be much disturbed by self-appointed censors."[66] Unlike Lloyd, Debs was willing to work past these differences and openly campaigned for the party, its candidates, and its various positions— including the question of currency. Asked by a reporter during the 1896 election, Debs stated, "This campaign is a contest between British gold and American freemen. In spite of their money and in spite of the railroads and their attempts at coercion we are going to elect William J. Bryan Nov. 3 to a place in the White House."[67]

All of this points to deep divisions in ideology, and raises an important question over how ideologically consistent the formation of Populism, specifically the Populism of 1890s America, ever was. But it is important to note that these divisions in the party were not only ideological. In fact, through much of 1894 and 1895 these various groups had struggled to work together. In many ways some of the irrevocable damage done to the party alliances had as much to do with personal politics as it did ideology. In 1894 Lloyd had angered many in the People's Party when

---

[65] L.P. Benedict to Henry Demarest Lloyd, January 7, 1896. Box 7, Folder 1, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[66] Eugene V. Debs to Henry Demarest Lloyd, February 1, 1896. Box 7, Folder 2, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.
[67] "Debs Talks at the Union Depot," *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1896.

he was nominated to run for office and then flatly refused both the nomination and the work of campaigning. "I am advised that you are thinking of refusing to make the race for Congress in our District," wrote one friend. "I believe that you can make a great race and I am sure that you ought to run."[68] "I have a great anxiety to see the strongest man we have in the district nominated," a member of the party wrote to Lloyd imploring him to reconsider. "I did not agree with you fully as to the measure of relief which we should adopt," they admitted, but to build the party they needed to come together.[69] Lloyd refused. Writing to another congratulator he was perfectly clear. "I do not wish to accept this nomination to Congress I have much other work to do, which I think I can do better," Lloyd explained. Also, he was set against the notion of pushing the currency question.

> "I regard the demonetization of the silver dollar as the greatest act of repudiation in financial history, and the most heinous because the act, not of desperate poor… but of greedy rich who want to add more to too much. I should always vote for the restoration of silver… But if I were called upon to propose a financial scheme, I should go much further. I hold that a civilized and moral people no more need value in their currency than in their promissory notes."[70]

Henry Vincent looked at these actions, and agreed with the concerns raised by some of the other Populists. Some of the socialist figures in the party were not interested in working with the other members. "Socialists in their arrogant assumption are looking upon the People's Party with much the same contemplation that a boa constrictor looks upon the beast he is shadowing for an early morning meal."[71]

---

[68] Miles M. Dawson to Henry Demarest Lloyd, August 20, 1894. Box 5, Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[69] A.L. Maxwell to Henry Demarest Lloyd, September 5, 1894. Box 5, Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[70] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Judge Miller, August 17, 1894. Box 5, Folder 4, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.
[71] Durden, *The Climax of Populism*, 4.

The People's Party coming into the convention of 1896 with its various political philosophies jostling to claim leadership of the party, produce acceptable coalitions, and decide on broad based platform was therefore bound to produce a raucous proceeding.

3.4 Part Three

The People's Party convention opened in July of 1896. Even the date and city had entailed a fair amount of debate. Marion Butler and many of the other leaders in the People's Party had all favored having a convention later in the year. The hope was that by holding the conference later in the election cycle the Populists could meet after the two major parties had met and selected their candidates. Many assumed that given the direction and entrenched interest in the parties that any real reform candidate and platform would be impossible.

Populist Georgia delegates disagreed. They favored holding the convention early in the spring, and furthermore petitioned that the convention be held in a Southern city. Although no specific city was chosen, Atlanta was offered as the most likely of places, since this would give Watson, Georgia, and other white Southern Populists the perception of being central to the party. The national party rejected this plan, opting for late July and St. Louis instead. The leader of the Populist Party in Nebraska urged that by doing this the People's Party would be able to maneuver after the two major parties had "unquestionably turned their backs upon the white metal."[72] Given Cleveland and his wing of the party's severe opposition to any reform effort, specifically the silver question, Populists banked on the belief that the Democratic Party would continue to ignore the growing anger of the working class and the larger fear of the economic depression. Silver, then, would be a way to possibly siphon off votes from various parties, and improve the ticket of the

[72] Ibid, 14-15.

People's Party nationally. Although Butler readily opposed emphasizing the money question at the expense of other demands, such as government ownership of certain industries like the railroads and public works, he understood that the money question might unite various reform groups, and more importantly, attract votes. Cleveland's insistence on the gold standard, along with his administration's hostility to working-class movements, provided the Populists, as he put it, the chance "for concentrating under one banner" those who favored economic reform.[73]

However, it was not just the People's Party and Democratic Party that had internal fighting over the money question. The Republican Party, too, faced questions over how it would proceed on the money question, which in reality was a symbol of how the party would approach the question of economic reform in the coming election. Senator Richard Pettigrew of South Dakota emerged as one of the leaders of this reform element among Republicans, dubbing the wing the "Silverite Republicans." Pettigrew and others sympathetic to him believed first and foremost that the Cleveland Administration and the Democratic Party had largely betrayed the promise of popular government and economic reform in their policies of favoring corporate capital and the suppression of working class movements. Furthermore, they contended that a reformist approach to issues like the money question would draw an unmistakable difference between the two major parties. Critics of Pettigrew were quick to denounce the effort to reshape the Republican Party.

"The silver republican senators are embittered and determined," one paper reported in the months leading up to the Republican national convention also to take place in St. Louis. "They deliberately separated from their party. They were denounced and read out by their leaders. They returned defiance and menace. There is more prospect that the quarrel will be aggravated than it

[73] Ibid, 11.

will be reconciled."[74] "Now if Pettigrew had not been so 'bumptious,'" another story read, "If he had not been so intense, had he not been so severe with those who differed with him, if he had not cried out to so often in the tones of the first Cato, who is said to have terrified all enemies with his voice, if he had not sworn in and out of season that silver alone could save the republic…"[75] then perhaps, the editorial argued, he could have been ignored. But since the silverites were so determined to challenge the party the convention would need to address what GOP leaders saw as an insurrection. The hope of the more conservative elements of the GOP was that the party would be able to withstand the growing reform movements of the nation, actively seeking to put pressure on the government and challenge the older parties. As an editorial cartoon in the *Chicago Tribune* illustrated, the hope was that certain elements of the parties could stand strong and tall above the ensuing calls for economic change. Picturing a man labelled "The American Workingman" and holding his vote above a fray of "Popocrats" who in vain attempted to catch his attention, the hope was that come November the Populists and their allies would be defeated and "sound money" would win.[76]

---

[74] "The Republican Revolt: Beginning of Trouble for the St. Louis Convention," *St Landry Clarion* (Opelousas, Louisiana), April 11, 1896. pp. 4.

[75] "Story of a 'Bad Man': Pettigrew's Boasts Recantation at his Home Convention," *The Galveston Daily News*, April 2, 1896. pp. 4.

Richard Pettigrew, *Imperial Washington: The Story of American Public Life from 1870—1920* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company Co-Operative, 1922), 56. Pettigrew would later write in his 1922 book *Imperial Washington* about what he saw as the many ways in which the corporate shift in the US economy had harmed both democracy and the American people. "It is the banking system of the United States. This is the system the Republican party is pledged to strengthen and perpetuate. There is no hope of relief for the people of this agricultural country in any possible thing the Republican party can or will do. In 1873, fearing the that the value of metallic money would become too large, these manipulators of panics, these gather[ers]s of the products of other people's toil, set about to secure the demonetization of silver and make all their contracts payable in gold. The result ahs been, as the thinking ones of every nation agree, that in every gold standard country on the globe, agricultural prices have fallen steadily until we have reached a point where the cost of production is denied the producer."

[76] "Last Desperate Devices of the Popocrats," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 26, 1896.

Figure 9: Editorial cartoon in the Chicago Daily Tribune mocking the efforts of Populists to sway public opinion. October 26, 1896.

With the Silverite Republicans neutralized, the GOP convention opened on June 16 and announced it would be "unreservedly for sound money," opposed to bimetallism and greenbacks, and only agree to changes in currency "by international agreement with the leading commercial nations of the earth, which agreement we pledge ourselves to promote."[77] Following the

[77] Durden, *The Climax of Populism*, 17.

nomination of William McKinley, a protectionist but gold bug, the party set the tone for its national campaign. Mark Hanna, McKinley's campaign manager, quickly went to work crafting a campaign that touched on a host of issues, specifically arguing the question of silver was a danger for the economy, and therefore people should reject it. Hanna also insisted that for working-class people the issue was wholly unimportant. "The thousands of workmen who are employed in the manufactories of this country do not care an iota about this question of free silver," Hanna told one reporter. "They say they do not, and it is apparent that what the industrial classes of America want is better times, a dawn of prosperity and some assurance that they will ere long receive better wages or at least a stipend equal to that which they were getting before the financial depression which followed the democratic victory of 1892."[78]

As the Republican Party settled into its campaign, the Democratic Party took a completely different route. Holding their convention in July in Chicago the party of Cleveland nominated the thirty-six year old statesman William Jennings Bryan to the top of the ticket. The reformist wing of the party had beaten out the gold bug, conservative section of the party. Bryan and the other reformists had been working behind the scenes as early as January, forming coalitions, and speaking to members of the Populist movement, like Ignatius Donnelly, to persuade the People's Party to meet later and "take advantage of the errors of the old parties" so that the Populists and progressive Democrats could "to bring about a consolidation of all the silver forces."[79] Cleveland had hoped that he and his supporters in the party could block the nomination of a reform candidate, and had lobbied heavily for William C. Whitney, the former Secretary of the Navy and wealthy member of the Bourbon Democrats. The actions of the Cleveland Administration, and the growing

[78] "Mark Hanna on Silver: He Thinks the Silver Question of No Interest to Workingmen," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), June 26, 1896, 1.
[79] Durden, *The Climax of Populism*, 15.

discontent among the reform members of the party all but guaranteed that the President's favored successor would not succeed. After bolting the Republican Party Pettigrew and other Silverite Republicans, along with some fusionists in the People's Party, had lobbied hard for the Silverite Republican Senator from Colorado, Henry Teller. The hope was that if the advocates for reform and silver in the Democratic Party could nominate someone perceived as independent like Teller, then the Democratic Party would provide a candidate capable of transcending partisanship and representing true reform.

As the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported, "Within an hour from the time that Senator Henry M. Teller and his little band of free silverites walked out of the Republican National Convention, telegrams indorsing their action came flashing over the wires from nearly every State and Territory in the Union." "[C]ongratulations," one telegram read. "People are with you. McKinley's name is mud." "Earnest congratulations on your noble fight for bimetallism," read another. "May wisdom direct your course as to accepting any nomination presented by the Chicago Convention." "For your action today," another said, "the common people will bless you."[80]

Teller had a long reputation as a reformer, supporting both silver and the income tax, and even was known as something of a champion for Native American rights. In the 1880s he had been a staunch opponent of the General Allotment Acts, which eliminated collective and tribal claims to land, denouncing the policy of breaking up Native lands as nothing short of land theft for the benefit of corporations seeking incorporation of western territories. "[This] is a bill to despoil Indians of their lands, and to make them vagabonds on the face of the earth," Teller had argued.[81]

---

[80] "Telegrams to Senator Teller From Nearly All the States in the Union," *St. Louis-Post Dispatch*, June 21, 1896. 3.
[81] Frank Pommersheim, *Broken Landscape: Indians, Indian Tribes, and the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 128.

The reformist wing of the Democratic Party, however, worried that if they pushed the conservative wing of the party too much then there would be a bolt from the party that would make the Silverite Republican exodus pale in comparison. Governor John Altgeld, still in opposition to the Bourbons and Cleveland for their violent suppression of the Pullman Strike, went to work simultaneously to disempower the Cleveland wing and to maintain some semblance of party unity.[82] The Democrats were left with a viable candidate via a process of elimination. Overly partisan candidates in the reform wing such as Congressman Bland of Missouri and Governor Boies of Iowa simply would not attract sufficient Populist voters, and Secretary Whitney was far too tainted by issues that plagued the Cleveland's Administration. After five rounds of voting Bryan's pre-convention work paid off, and he became the party's official nominee. Bryan's acceptance speech on July 9, 1896 admonished the moneyed interests, championed several parts of the Populist agenda, and concluded by declaring, "we shall restore bimetallism… we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."[83]

Two weeks later the People's Party meeting in St. Louis followed suit, nominating Bryan for the top of their ticket but insisting that Tom Watson of their own party be listed as their distinct

---

[82] *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896*, (Logansport, Indiana, 1896). Accessed August 15, 2018. http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5354/
Altgeld's presence would be specifically felt in a plank in the national platform that directly challenged Cleveland and Olney's practice of injunction and strike breaking. "We denounce arbitrary interference by Federal authorities in local affairs as a violation of the Constitution of the United States, and a crime against free institutions, and we especially object to government by injunction as a new and highly dangerous form of oppression by which Federal Judges, in contempt of the laws of the States and rights of citizens, become at once legislators, judges and executioners; and we approve the bill passed at the last session of the United States Senate, and now pending in the House of Representatives, relative to contempt in Federal courts and providing for trials by jury in certain cases of contempt."
[83] Ibid, 226–234.

vice presidential candidate. Historians such as Charles Postel and Robert F. Durden point to this exact moment as both the climax and moment of decline of American Populism as a distinctly independent electoral political movement. "The nomination marked a historic shift in party alignment," Postel argues, "with the Democratic party embracing a platform of minting silver, a federal income tax, and other reforms demanded by rural and labor constituencies."[84] Historians like Lawrence Goodwyn disagree with this sanguine view of the Populist fusion into the Democratic Party, claiming it was a betrayal of true third party independent political actions. Goodwyn argues that the Populists had created a mass democratic movement. "[H]istory does not support the notion that mass protest movements develop because of hard times," Goodwyn says. "'The masses' do not rebel in instinctive response to hard times and exploitation because they have been culturally organized by their societies not to rebel."[85] Only through mass mobilization, the act of forming social movements dedicated to specific causes, would people come to significantly challenge any social system. For Goodwyn that was the promise of Populism, a counterhegemonic movement to industrial corporate capital that came down as a hammer on the political order. Echoing this argument, Elizabeth Sanders asserts that the Populists were not anti-modern, but were in fact the origin of modern American politics. Because the Populists were so viscerally committed to combating the cultural and political assumptions that arose from corporate capital, the Populists were a natural focal point to understand what would become (and in fact pre-dated the 1890s) a staple of American political history— the question over the role of capitalist economy in a democratic society.

---

[84] Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 269.
Durden, *The Climax of Populism*, 1965.
[85] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), x.

However, when the People's Party convention met there was no consensus over how to approach the Democratic Party's nomination.[86] Battle lines were drawn between two major camps, the "fusionists" who favored merging with the Democratic Party and the "middle of the roaders" who argued that the movement and party should maintain a middle, independent ground between the two national parties.

When the convention opened, Jacob Coxey was in the midst of it. "There was a ripple of applause and a few shouts when the name of Jacob S. Coxey was announced as a member of the committee on platform from Ohio," one paper reported. "At the conclusion of the reading of the majority report J.S. Coxey, of Ohio, was recognized to read his minority report recommending the issuance of non-interest bearing bonds for improvement of the roads of the country."[87] Coxey had been thwarted on the steps of nation's capital, but in the People's Party he was at least permitted to speak. The convention quickly turned to the specific questions of the party platform. Much to the surprise of many onlookers Coxey sided with the middle-of-the-roaders, but did so in a way that supported the fusionist's goals. To confuse matters even more, Coxey even endorsed the position of the silverites, the ideological opponents of his greenback ideology. "It seems the irony of fate that Gen. Jacob S. Coxey of 'Keep off the grass' renown should align himself with the 'Middle of the road' forces, yet such is the melancholy fact."[88] *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported. So much for the "radical" from Ohio who had a clear, uncompromising vision.

Henry Demarest Lloyd felt anything but ironic. Once again forced to change his opinion on Coxey, the socialist fumed in his notes on the convention that, "The leaders did not lead, and

---

[86] Perhaps this inability to agree or find consensus among the Populists is the best reflection of the state of the field concerning Populist studies.
[87] "Bryan Named: The People's Party Nominates the Nebraskan for President," *The Weekly Intelligencer* (Lexington, Missouri), August 1, 1896.
[88] "Coxey's Position: The Keep-Off-the-Grass Patriot's With the 'Middle of the Road' Contingent," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20, 1894, 1.

their followers did not clamor to be led. 'General' J.S. Coxey of the Commonweal Army, who has left large property interests to suffer while he has devoted himself to educating the people of his 'Good Roads' plan of internal improvements, to be paid for by non-interest bearing bonds, was present, and made no resistance outside of the Committee of Resolutions."[89] Coxey attempted to explain that although he was against the silverites in principle, he believed there was power in allying with them in the election. He acknowledged that he disagreed with the concept of placing value in the actual form of money itself, a position the silverites took, but also noted that working with the pro-silver reformers was a step in building a broader political alliance. This was more important than sectarian purism, because it could potentially unite the people politically in challenging the capitalist form of money. Once that was achieved more radical steps could be taken in economic policy later. "I do not believe that 'free silver' is a step as Coxey has said recently," Lloyd argued in opposition. "Except it be a step backward. A man's worst enemies are those of his own household."[90]

Lloyd was not the only person who would not listen to Coxey. Standing in the lobby of his hotel, handing out leaflets, the press reported on the way Coxey lobbied a complicated and somewhat confusing position. Coxey was middle-of-the-road, but in a way that allowed the fusionists to have their Bryan candidacy as well. "The General was a conspicuous figure in the lobby of the Lindell Hotel Monday forenoon, industriously distributing printed slips embodying his plan of campaign." Coxey was dressed in his typical respectable outfit of a "neat gray suit, a

[89] Henry Demarest Lloyd, "The Populists at St. Louis," *The Review of Reviews* Vol. 14 (July-December 1896): 303.
[90] Henry Demarest Lloyd to Dr. Holmes, July 13, 1896. Box 7, Folder 7, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

felt hat of the same color and a polka-dot black scarf" which matched his "gray eyes peeping from behind gold spectacles, and has the appearance of a prosperous business man."[91]

Yet despite Coxey's best efforts the majority of the people in the hotel lobby ignored him. However, the reporters were curious to see how someone deemed a radical and opponent of Cleveland only a few years before could now be campaigning for a fusion with the Democratic Party. "When a *Post-Dispatch* reporter asked him what course he would advocate in the convention he produced one of his printed slips, saying it embodied his views."[92] The reporter then summarized the pamphlet's plans—

> The General's plans, briefly stated is to pro-rate the electoral votes of the State between the Democratic Prohibition and People's parties, giving each party representation on the electoral ticket. After the election electors shall meet in each State and reapportion the votes of the electors according to the votes cast for the head of the State ticket. In case the Democrats have more votes than either of the others, they are to have the presidency, and the party next in strength the vice presidency.

"'How many states do you expect to carry under this?'" the reporter wondered. Coxey responded, "The entire South, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, California and Kansas." The reporter, as a great many voters, was confused. "Would not the same purpose be more directly accomplished by indorsing Bryan and Sewall?" Coxey insisted, no it would not. "Besides," he was reported saying, "it would disrupt our organization. While we are all for silver that is only a minor point in our platform. With silver out of the way, we shall turn over to other issues, such as Government ownership of railroads. If we indorse Bryan and Sewall we practically give up our organization."[93]

---

[91] "Coxey's Position: The Keep-Off-the-Grass Patriot's With the 'Middle of the Road' Contingent," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20, 1894, 1.
[92] "Coxey's Position: The Keep-Off-the-Grass Patriot's With the 'Middle of the Road' Contingent," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 20, 1894, 1.
[93] Ibid.

The press was not convinced. More importantly sections of the Populist movement were not convinced. Middle-of-the-roaders, labor activists, and groups like people of color watched as the Populist movement's major party fused with the Democratic Party, whose wings in the Southern states were committed to a violent ideology of racial nationalism. Debs upon hearing the news of the fusion telegraphed Lloyd. He simply asked to have his name removed as a contender. The fight would go on in other organizations. People of color, specifically black sharecroppers, were not so easily able to shift into another organization. The Knights of Labor defunct, and now the Populist movement fusing with the Democratic Party, the agrarian revolt was being decidedly molded into a vision that purposefully excluded them. A few months before the Supreme Court had handed down the pro-segregationist decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, although the conditions of Jim Crow had been felt long before the case, the decision sent a strong signal that the federal government had fully abandoned the project of reconstruction and with it the notion of a liberal universal nationalism. Now one of the major national movements of the nation was opening a Pandora's Box which would allow the Democratic Party to more easily fuse the white supremacist hierarchies of the US with the supposed will of the white working-class farmers. John Rayner, a man of color and Populist organizer in Texas, understood immediately the danger of the national party for people of color. Organizing a convention of their own, both black and white Populists who feared the strengthening of the Southern Democratic Party endorsed McKinley and campaigned for him. However, their efforts in the state were ultimately as futile as Bryan's on the national stage.[94]

"Mr. Jacob S. Coxey, late commander of the hobo contingent, now publisher of a paper which claims to be the 'national journal for the commonweal,' has been besieged by inquiries from

[94] Postel, *The Populist* Vision, 274.

'all over the Union' as to his honest opinion about Bryan's chances of election," one reporter asked Coxey in the run up to the election. "In reply to these inquiries Mr. Coxey has no other guide than the lamp of experience which, in his case, burns with at least 1,600 candle power. He tells these people that if the big crowds that turn out to see him are any indications of success, Bryan will be overwhelmingly elected. 'But,' he adds, with a sigh, 'signs sometimes fail.'" Indeed, signs often do. The article concluded on a melancholy note, "'We have no means of judging the future save by the past, and the past is full of instances wherein the people have proven they do not always vote as they shout.' From these sad events in his own political career, Mr. Coxey can draw no glad augury for the boy orator's election."[95]

In November 1896, William McKinley was elected the twenty-fifth President of the United States. In many ways, the election of 1896 foretold much of what was to come for the United States in terms of domestic and foreign policy. After the election Coxey left the People's Party citing its inefficiency and willingness to compromise on too many issues. "'Gen.' Jacob S. Coxey of commonweal fame, has issued a letter formally withdrawing from the people's party," *The Missouri Albany Ledger* reported. "He says the leaders of the party have sold it to the free silver cause."[96] The paper continued with a brief update, noting after Coxey's withdrawal from the Populist party that Richard Olney, now Secretary of State in the final moments of the Cleveland Administration, was pushing for changes to U.S. foreign policy with Cuba. "Secretary Olney has made a report on the United States' relations during the past year with foreign governments. He

[95] "Coxey Sees No Light Ahead*," The Kansas City Journal*, October 28, 1896, 4.
[96] "Nuggets of News," *Albany Ledger* (Albany, Missouri), December 18, 1896, 4.
It would be a short lived exit from the party. The very next year Coxey would return to the People's Party to run as a candidate for the governor of Ohio.

reviews the Cuban struggle," the paper reported, "and says there may soon be a call for some decided change in the policy the United States has hitherto pursued."[97]

The paper also noted that despite the considerable effort of the Populists and fusion Democrats to push the U.S. to a fiat and open form of currency, there was little sign following Bryan's defeat that this would occur. "The national 'gold standard' democratic executive committee met at Indianapolis Ind., and issued an address to the country, declaring there would be no compromise with the silver faction and that ever plan would be adopted to strengthen the national party."[98]

The issues Coxey had marched for remained unresolved. Furthermore, the forces that had opposed the Industrial Army movement, and Populism in general, were well established in power. From this point forward Populism would be felt primarily as a loosely defined protest movement, a logic and rhetoric for American politics, not an independent party. Although the People's Party would hobble on until 1908, the Socialist Party, the labor movement, and a series of other social movements would soon claim the mantle as the nation's major opposition to the hegemony of the United States government.

3.5 Conclusion

Populism provided the staging ground for these various groups to enter into debate and conflict. By challenging liberalism's hegemonic claim to govern, Populism fundamentally questions basic institutions in society from government, to democratic action, to even the form of money circulating in an economy. Also, as Ernesto Laclau has argued, Populism is also an "empty signifier" in politics, meaning that any number of programs, political philosophies, or coalitions

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

can enter the house of Populism and emerge with entirely new political coalitions. These coalitions then, naturally, begin demanding certain fundamental changes. "This articulation, however," Laclau argues, "does not correspond to a stable and positive configuration which could be grasped as a unified whole."[99]

The mere presence of a coalition did not mean a cohesion of demands. There was no "true" essence to Populism, Laclau reasons. Instead Populism had "no referential unity because it is ascribed not a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena. Populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political."[100]

It is well known that post 1860s in the United States the national economy decidedly shifted toward a corporate organizing of the capitalist economy. This shift fundamentally transformed all aspects of American life, from personal psychology, to foreign policy, to the way in which social movements theorized and envisioned new social orders. By simultaneously abolishing slavery, establishing democratic rights as a supposed universal ideal, and forcing the nation and eventually the world into coerced, protracted, and global contact, nations like the United States continued with a world revolutionizing trend that turned the world upside down and forced reconceptualization of even basic notions like democracy, self-governance, and material security.

Liberals have often objected to Populism primarily since it is a popular uprising against the marriage of capital and representative government, a challenge to the concept of bourgeois liberal government. Yet since this counterhegemonic movement has no particular essential nature to it, since it does not draw its strength from a specific demand or predetermined social group, the Populisms of history can lead to any number of different outcomes. Populism reimagines the concept of the nation, drawing distinct lines that include, exclude, and prescribe action to certain

---

[99] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2007), ix.
[100] Ibid, xi.

groups. This can be inclusive and universal, or it can be restrictive and exclusionary. Much of this was determined by the way in which particular Populists envisioned the concept of production— who produced value, who sapped that value from the real workers.

When Tom Watson's paper cited Native Americans as a natural enemy of "the people" he was not merely advancing a racist argument. The argument itself was based on the notion that the indigenous people of the Americas were literally outside of the historical formation of the nation, their work and labor adding little perceived value to the project that had been the goal of the United States from its colonial period— incorporate territory, settle land, and produce value for a capitalist market. Immigrants— the Chinese, Irish, and Eastern Europeans— too, were suspect. Their threat to the labor market set them decidedly against the "true producers" who knew the value of their labor and therefore safeguarded the "true people" from the most disastrous forces of corporate capitalism.

Yet Populism could, just as easily, grow to incorporate socialists, black sharecroppers, and democratic egalitarians who argued for a use-based economy, challenging the power of the corporations, and imagining the concept of "the people" along a radical democratic ideal of human universalism. Suffragists, white supremacists, prohibitionists, farmers, laborers, socialists, remnants of the greenback movement, and any other mixture of movements and figures opposed to the new corporate order could, in short, assemble into a Frankenstein-like monster. But just as Frankenstein's creation was not the true villain of the story, Populism itself did not carry with it an essential character. In order to judge the worth and essence of a particular historic expressions of Populism scholars must forego abstract, ahistorical notions and instead look at the specific programs that particular groups, coalitions, and moments prescribed for the problem of global corporate capitalism. As it will be argued in the next chapter, the failures that many have ascribed

to the Populisms of Europe and the United States were not in a philosophical opposition to bourgeois liberal democracy. Instead, the troubling components of Populism arose from the historic ways it came to define the nation, the people, and who it empowered (and thereby disempowered) in the political process.

CHAPTER 4. AFTER THE MARCH

4.1 Introduction:

In 1894, as the various contingents of the Industrial Army movement were nearing Washington, Daniel De Leon, the leader of the Socialist Labor Party, assessed these movements of the armies of the poor. "Not the least of the portentous signs of the impending social upheaval here is Coxey's Army. At first, the newspapers took the thing to be a huge hoax, but by degrees all the fun has been oozing out of the reports, and Coxey's move has assumed a serious aspect." De Leon had little use for Coxey. "Altho' the demands borne by Coxey's army sound and are ridiculously trivial— 'Good Roads and No Interest-bearing Bonds,'" De Leon mocked, yet it was important to remember that "many such trivial demands have helped to ripen, and themselves ripened into most important ones, into demands that have marked epochs of history."[1]

De Leon reasoned that even though Coxey was a foolish leftover of the greenback movement, and that the demands themselves would not translate into a revolutionary new state, there was still power in organizing the working class. By rallying this class of people, Coxey's Army demonstrated the greater revolutionary potential in the United States. Much of the national news in the summer of 1894 pointed to De Leon's arguments. On May 1, as Coxey's Army entered Washington D.C., Cleveland, Ohio erupted into riots. For weeks the city had been sitting on a virtual powder keg as various working-class organizations and the city's unemployed protested the conditions of the depression. On April 21, 1894 the Ohio paper *The Newark Advocate* reported, "Idle foreigners creating trouble. They attempt to drive laboring men from work."[2] .

> "More than 1,000 unemployed men gathered in the public square, and after listening to inflammatory speeches, delivered in foreign tongues by representatives

[1] Daniel De Leon, "Editorial: Coxey's Army," *The People*, April 8, 1894.
[2] "Cleveland Riot," *The Newark Advocate*, April 21, 1894, 1.

> of the striking laborers, a raid was made on the sewer in course of construction in St. Claire street. About 100 men were found at work there and they were compelled to stop and join the strikers. Some 500 men, armed with clubs, then marched to the corner of Lake and Seneca Streets, where a gang of street pavers were at work. The men were quickly surrounded and, though they demurred, were compelled to lay down their tools."[3]

Fortunately, the paper concluded, police were quick to suppress any meetings or marches. Yet any hope that peace would remain was quickly shattered. "Cleveland Riot!" papers reported on August 21st. Stories circulated that workers led by the "McCart Street Gang" were openly fighting police. One officer was reported seriously injured.[4]

On the first of May, the protests turned against the police. "Anarchy Breaks Loose in Cleveland," one newspaper's headline reported. "Unemployed indulge in riotous and bloody demonstration. Six thousand idle foreigners parade the streets. A street car obstructs their path and they demolish it."[5] On the same page the paper ran an extensive story explaining how Coxey had been stopped at the Capitol Building, and how the actions of the police were blatant suppression. "General Coxey talked to an Associated Press reporter," the *Times-Picayune* claimed, "'I was careful to walk on the sidewalk and trespass upon no local regulations when I went to the steps,' he said" in relation to the charges that he had illegally walked on the grass. The paper also reported Browne's alleged remarks upon arrest. "I am an American Citizen; I stand on my constitutional rights."[6]

"Foreign tongues" for the Cleveland's uprising, and the "citizen's rights" of Coxey and Browne, were two diametrically opposed ideas. The first was a direct appeal to the illegitimacy of

---

[3] Ibid.
[4] "Cleveland Riot," *The Chillicothe Gazett*e, August 21, 1894, 2
"Cleveland Riot," *The Hamilton Daily Republican*, August 21, 1894, 1.
"Cleveland Riot," *The Dayton Herald*, August 21, 1894, 4.
[5] "Anarchy Breaks Loose in Cleveland," *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana) May 2, 1894, 6.
[6] "Coxey Clashes With Cops," *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 2, 1894, 6.

the speaker. Foreign, outside of the U.S., not guaranteed the same rights and privileges as a citizen of the republic. The designation "foreign" signified illegitimacy. "Foreign" was assumed to have an ulterior motive to legitimate democratic concern, and also it implied an unawareness of how to properly operate in American democracy. The natural "citizen's rights" of Coxey and Browne, however, spoke to a sense of innate legitimacy. This claim to legitimacy simultaneously argued the actor was legitimate, more legitimate than the state forces challenging it, as well as entitled to certain actions. Of course, neither of these rhetorical moves prevented the police from suppressing both actions in Cleveland and D.C., but the way in which they were later reported and discussed was not without consequence. As De Leon would argue, "Hitherto the workingmen who have been loudest for redress were said to be Huns, Italians, Dutchmen, Irish— Dagos in general, and whether so or not, were ruthlessly mowed down. But Coxey's band is conspicuously American." This fact, De Leon argued, was important enough to overlook fatal flaws in Coxey's thinking. "Whatever may be the immediate fate of Coxey's band, it is a sign of the times that portends the dawning of the day when native and foreign-born Americans will stand shoulder to should doing battle at the ballot-box for freedom from the Capitalist and Wage System of Plunder…"[7]

The use of populist protest, in other words, had the radical potential of remaking the concept of "the people" leaving behind older nativist notions, and instead creating a new consciousness based on the shared concerns of oppression and economics. Yet simply because this was one of the promises of populist protest did not mean it was a foregone conclusion. As the concept of "the people" transformed, any number of combinations could arise, encompassing and excluding different groups, ideologies, and concerns.

[7] Daniel De Leon, "Editorial: Coxey's Army," *The People,* April 8, 1894.

How did the threat and practice of Populist protest contribute to a reshaping of common notions of "the people," and with this a reconceptualization of what constituted legitimate, permissible, and understandable demands and democratic practices? If "the people" were the basis of legitimate democratic action, then who was constituted that grouping radically altered what could and should be expected from the state. Furthermore, inclusion in the Populist base meant a certain air of legitimacy in the broader culture. Although this never inoculated the "true" "the people" from the "false" "the people," it nonetheless catapulted demands from the mouths of protesters into the broader milieu. Second, all of this was couched within a broader context of how a democratic society imagines what exactly is meant by the broad-based term "the public sphere." The power and issues of Populist protest require a definition of "public sphere". Not the least because typically one of the most enduring criticisms of protests, strikes, and mass demonstrations is that they constitute some kind of deep and dangerous transgression against the public sphere—which is meant a blow to democratic norms, and therefore democratic society, itself.

By organizing people into a new group labelled the "true" expression of the authentic people, critics of Populism argue that Populists moved democratic debate from the halls of established institutions and placed them dangerously in the hands of protesters whose whims were difficult, if even possible, to transform into an established democratic system of governance. Furthermore, the defenders of the bourgeois liberal public sphere argue Populist protests push conditions for political totalitarianism. By taking the demands of the people— economic, personal, private— and demanding action by the state— the public and democratic—Populist protest was in reality advocating for a state with totalizing power. If the private sphere, with its various assumed sub spheres found in bourgeois society, becomes fully public, then the state could become capable of governing all spheres of life. Two questions, then, followed Coxey and other Populist activists

past 1894 and into the twentieth century. First, who constituted f "the people," and perhaps more importantly how did protest politics aid in the construction of this concept? Second, what was at stake in Populist protest in terms of the larger democratic public sphere?

4.2 Part One

Coxey and Browne's friendship, let alone their partnership in politics, was short lived. Soon after the march ended in 1894, the two went their separate ways. Much of it was due to a personal matter. When Browne had sent for Jacob Coxey's daughter Mamie without Jacob's knowledge, it was only a matter of time before the press speculated on the possibility of "scandal." After Browne revealed to Jacob the big surprise of Mamie appearing as the Goddess of Peace in the May 1 march, Browne escorted the young woman about town, getting her an outfit so she could appear as the Goddess of Peace in the march and posing for photographs together in a D.C. photography studio.[8]

Browne and Mamie Coxey sometime after began a courtship, apparently unbeknownst to her parents. In the midst of this secret relationship, Browne and Coxey continued to plan events and promote their political platform, albeit under growing strain. When Coxey and Browne decided to enter DC on May 1 they angered the western contingents of the Industrial Army movement. . Charles T. Kelley, leading one of the largest contingents, was still in Des Moines attempting to navigate the precarious situation of local governments, the railroads, and the large number of marchers he had to keep in line. When Kelley was told that the Ohio contingent had entered D.C. without them he told the press that Coxey's Army was "only a little squad of Eastern men." Furthermore, Browne was nothing more than a "conceited ass," a glory hound more interested in getting his name in the paper than he was in solidarity with the broader movement.[9]

---

[8] Carlos Schwantes, *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1994): 175-176.
[9] Ibid, 187.

This anger with Coxey and Browne would not dissipate after the first of May. Following the main march on Washington, where Coxey and Browne were arrested, leaders of other groups openly challenged Browne and Coxey for the role of legitimate leader of the commonweal movement. However, it was a leadership position for a quickly fading group.

In early July it was becoming increasingly clear that the federal government had no interest in even entertaining the notion of listening to the marchers' demands. Coxey and Browne's attention, therefore, were quickly drawn elsewhere. Coxey was now, due to his notoriety, a potential rising star in the broader Populist movement. As such, he had been nominated to run for Congress in his home district on the People's Party ticket. Speaking before the encampment of marchers in DC on one of the final occasions as head of the movement, Coxey reported that despite efforts to raise money for tickets home, let alone food and shelter, the commonweal movement did not have sufficient funds. Coxey then returned home and began campaigning for office. There was discontent among the marchers left in DC, some of whom argued that Coxey had abandoned them. Coxey would deny this, but this did not help dissuade the feelings of frustration.[10] On the campaign trail Coxey continued much as he had in the march, arguing for the same policies and trying to infusing those into the broader Populist movement. At a People's Party picnic in Brooklyn, Coxey was cheered when he said, "The proper way to welcome a Representative in Congress who won't do his duty is to meet him with a hemp-necktie party."[11] He then presented his platform. "I represent a party… that does not want money that is redeemable in gold exclusively, but money

---

Kelley's Army was a mixture of groups and marchers. Comprising a fair number of tramps as well as different groups that Kelley absorbed into his main contingent along the way. The origins of the group had begun in California, but by the May 1, 1894, the contingent had grown to over eleven hundred men.

[10] Carlos Schwantes, *Coxey's Army*, 247. As Carlos Schwantes argued, "Those left in 'Camp Bastille' complained bitterly that they had been abandoned by their leaders. Coxey denied this, but his suggestion that they get arrested and let the government provide for them was not reassuring."

[11] "Coxey Spoke and Made $60," *The New York Times*, July 23, 1894, 8.

that is redeemable in everything that is used in this country."[12] Coxey continued, referencing the Pullman Strike and arguing that if the private railway corporations were to behave as tyrants then the state, for the broader public good, should seize them. Coxey concluded by arguing that the current administration, the federal government, and the elected halls of government had to be the site where protest was directed. "The only place for you to strike at is Washington," Coxey argued.

> "Go through your public parks and marshal the tramps and unemployed workmen. Tell them the cushions down in Washington are as soft as they are here, and tell them I have a plan to feed them down there. I don't mind telling my plan. When the men get down there they will be sent to jail as I was. The jail in Washington can only accommodate 300 persons. It is full now, so the men will have to be put to work building jails to imprison themselves in. I cannot get them work at one thing I can get them work get them work at another."[13]

This line of reasoning was not embraced by all. Browne earlier in July had also abandoned the camp in DC. However, unlike Coxey, Browne did not immediately move into electoral politics or maintain that the seat of political power should be the site of protest. With his patented ability to conceive new protest and spectacle, Browne reasoned that instead of petitioning the government, the marchers could instead target the financial heart of the national economy. "Carl Browne As Liberty," one headline read. "[Browne] Will March on to Wall Street After the Army Has Had a Sea Bath."[14] Browne's sensational behavior was too much for the press to ignore. Describing Browne's artwork and his performances, the press gawked at the way he and the commonwealers readying for their march on Wall Street inaugurated this new phase of the march. "The next scene was a living picture entitled 'The Goddess of liberty's Death Agony,'" the paper reported. "Mr. Browne himself acted the part of a female impersonator and appeared before the footlights in an

---

[12] "Marshal Tramps Says Gen. Coxey: The Commonweal Leader Speaks at a People's Party Picnic," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 23, 1894, 7.
[13] Ibid.
[14] "Carl Browne as Liberty: The Commonweal Marshal's Graphic Representation of Her Fall," *The Times* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), July 28, 1894, 4.

airy costume consisting of a bleached blonde wig and a toga made of the stars and stripes." The reporter continued chronicling the performance. "[Browne] then struck a heroic attitude and eased himself of a poetic effusion, in which Liberty is represented as being under the control of the merciless minions of the multi-millionaires of Wall Street and the goddess so ashamed of herself that with the despairing cry, 'Liberty! Thou art a mockery; Liberty! Thou art dead!' she drops over in a swoon and is carried off stage."[15]

Browne handpicked some sixty marchers and made his way to Wall Street.[16] Without Coxey's finances or involvement, however, the march proved difficult. Browne and the Wall Street marchers attempted to sell copies of pamphlets and political propaganda, along with Browne's portraits, but there was little interest. They then attempted to advertise and sell patent medicine, baking powder, and other items, as "mobile billboards" that they would wear in endorsement as they made their way to New York. Again, the efforts were not successful. Finally, Browne was forced to give nightly lectures and the marchers relied on handouts. In late July they reached New York and Browne stated, "At Washington we were told to keep off the grass, so we started to New York to see if the cobble-stones of Wall Street were as sacred as Washington grass."[17]

Browne had planned that following the march on Wall Street, he and the dozens of marchers in his band would proceed on a travelling show of demonstrations, political performances, and lecturing making their way back to Ohio and ending up in Massillon to rally for Coxey's congressional campaign. Yet this was increasingly unlikely, given the problems Browne was

---

[15]Ibid.

[16] "Coxeyites Bound Here: Carl Browne and Seventy Wealers Tramping to This City," Associated Press, *The Evening World* (New York, New York), July 7, 1894, 7. "Carl Browne, marshal of the Coxey Commonweal, started on foot, with seventy picked men, for New York City last night. Browne expects to reach there about Aug. 5 and will pay particular attention to Wall Street and capitalists, with whose manner of doing business the marshal is not pleased. Oklahoma Sam will attempt to govern the Coxey camp at Hyattsville."

[17] "Carl Browne as Liberty: The Commonweal Marshal's Graphic Representation of Her Fall," *The Times* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), July 28, 1894, 4.

having in funding his march as well as the shift in Coxey's focus. The split focus between Coxey and Browne concerning whether to continue applying exclusively political pressure, Coxey's solution, or broadening the scope of the populist protest to include economic and more privately held institutions, Browne's approach, was reflective of their broader growing break. In Delaware, four days before newspapers reported on Browne's performance as Lady Liberty, he and the Wall Street marchers challenged police in Wilmington to arrest them. No doubt the spectacle would have led to increased press coverage and further confirmation of their status as martyrs. However, the police were wary of what sympathy and press could be achieved by antagonizing Browne and the marchers. "The Police Commission acted wisely in not restraining Carl Browne from speaking on the public streets," one editorial read. "The less restriction in this respect put upon such harmless and senseless men the better."[18]

> "If there had been fewer restrictions when the Coxey movement began it would never have assumed the proportion nor have gained the sympathy and notoriety that it did… The action of the Police commission robbed Browne of even public sympathy, which is nearly always aroused, to a greater or lesser degree, when freedom of speech is denied."[19]

What precisely was the broader goal of the commonwealers and the Industrial Army movement? With Coxey running for office and Browne's spectacles floundering who spoke for the movement, let alone its broader goals? "Coxeyism, if Carl Browne's speech is any indication," another editorial read, "is antagonism of laws, financiers, churches and newspapers instead of a movement for good roads… It was a sorry day when the newspapers boosted the cause of Coxey and gave it such widespread publicity. Had it not been for the press Coxey would have left his foolish followers long ago and joined his fellow turfmen at the race tracks."[20]

---

[18] "Carl Browne Has Had His Say," *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), July 24, 1894, 2.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "Untitled Editorial," *The Evening Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware) July 24, 1894, 2.

As Coxey and Browne spoke and demonstrated in New York, fewer than one hundred of their original marchers remained encamped outside of Washington. Finally in early August the Governor Frank Brown of Maryland ordered forty police officers to storm the camp, arrest anyone who remained for vagrancy, and destroy any of the structures the marchers had erected. The crackdown was swift, and by all accounts caught the commonwealers off guard. Easily arrested, the camp destroyed, the remnants of Coxey's Army were marched to court where with no attorney or real trial they were sentenced within two hours to three months of hard labor in the Maryland House of Corrections. To add insult to injury they would be required to break stone for gravel that would be used to make good roads for the nation.[21] This mismanagement of the aftermath of the march inspired one of the leaders of the western contingents, Edward J. Jeffries of Seattle, to challenge Browne and Coxey's leadership. Jefferies was ultimately unsuccessful in revitalizing the commonweal movement, moving back to Seattle and establishing a commune called the "Industrial Cooperative Society." The group lasted only during the winter of 1894-95, but was enough of a challenge to Browne that he established a new organization in Vineland, New Jersey on August 15, 1894. Browne called this new group the "Commonweal of the United States of America", differentiating himself from Coxey's Army and Jeffries, and more importantly skirting the criticism of sacrilege that the original title of Christ had inspired.[22] However, the renaming did little to help Browne. He had stayed at the home of the Coxeys following the march on Wall Street. The plan was to organize a follow up march the preceding summer, but in the summer 1895 press discovered the courtship between Browne and Mamie Coxey.

---

[21] Carlos Schwantes, *Coxey's Army*, 1985.
[22] Ibid, 256-258.

Figure 10: Wedding photo of Carl Browne and Mamie Coxey. (Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society).

[23]

In mid-June the following year, instead of following through with the proposed second march, Browne and Mamie Coxey married. As soon as the news was reported Jacob Coxey expressed his disapproval. "I see the evening papers," he wrote to his second wife. "Mamie is married, if so tell her to go with him before I reach home Sunday evening."[24] Browne and Mamie's original idea had been to keep the marriage a secret until July 4, when they would go to Capitol Hill and announce their marriage at the site of the year's previous march. However this plan was upended when the papers began publishing the story that the former partners were now father in-law and son in-law. When approached for comment by the press Coxey stated, "I advised her to

[23] Wedding photo of Carl Browne and Mamie Coxey. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[24] Schwantes, *Coxey's Army*, 258.

postpone her marriage until such time as he proved his ability to care for her. She has chosen to overlook my advice, and there is absolutely nothing more I can say except my home will be open to her at any time in the future should she repent her bargain."[25] Browne was never welcomed back.

Undeterred by the public's knowledge and the anger of his former political partner, Browne and Mamie went ahead with their plans to travel to D.C. and read their vows on the capital building's steps. Although police were alerted to the couple's presence, and the possibility of another mass demonstration, Browne and Mamie were able to do the ceremony, talk to the press, and leave before they could be confronted.[26] After this the two headed back to California were both would remain active in labor and socialist politics with Browne agitating for various political issues until his death in 1914. In 1910 the two would divorce, with Mamie filing in court that Browne was violent toward her and their son, William Randolph Hearst Browne.[27] Although Jacob Coxey would remain active in politics well past the life of his former collaborator, he was never able again to capture the national headlines the way he had when Browne had added his ability to develop new and robust protest spectacle.

Following his failed bid to Congress in 1894, and the fallout with Browne and Mamie, Coxey settled on a mixture of modern protest, lecturing, and campaigns for office that would define the remainder of his life and career as a political activist.[28] In 1895, he began a newspaper to

---

[25] "When She Repents: She Can Come Home Says Coxey— Meanwhile Browne Must Keep Mamie," Clippings, June 17, 1895. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.

[26] "Outwitted the Police: Carl Browne Declares He Married as Per Programme," *Washington Times*, July 5, 1895. The press relished the tawdry details of the case. In one account a paper printed the entire ceremony and described in detail the public displays of affection between the two.

[27] "Carl Browne is Sued for Divorce: Eccentric Political Agitator and Cartoonist Charged with Cruelty by Wife," *The San Francisco Call*, March 4, 1910, 4.

[28] Embrey Bernard Howson, *Jacob Sechler Coxey: A Biography of a Monetary Reformer* (New York: Arno Press, 1982), v. Howson in his 1973 dissertation on Coxey argued that it was this mixture of actions (publishing, protest, and running for office) that would define Coxey's career as a political activist, but despite these various approaches to politics, Coxey's main focus of currency and the market would remain with him throughout his life. "His activities

promote his ideas and continue arguing for public works, fiat currency, and a shift to a mixture of state control of certain sections of the economy. Henry Vincent, who like Coxey had largely broken with Browne, joined Coxey in these efforts and together the two began publishing a newspaper called *Sound Money*. The establishment of the paper was part of a broader shift in the final years of the 1890s as Populists, reformers, and socialist activists sought a more robust print culture to disseminate their ideas and recruit for certain parties and broader movements. "Populist papers are increasing in number," one paper noted. Coxey's was not the only. "*The American Patriot* is a new paper published at Denison, Texas at $1.00 per year. It is an all-around reform paper, and fights the whiskey monopoly as well as the money monopoly…" Even Browne and Mamie were involved. "We have lately received copy of *Carl's Cactus*, published by Carl Brown and his wife Mamie Coxey Brown, at Washington, D.C. at 25 cents per year. It is profusely illustrated by Mr. Brown." The establishment of these papers was vital, especially as the climax of the Populist movement in the People's Party neared in 1896. "The above papers are all in the middle of the road," the story concluded, "no fusion nonsense."[29] The hope was that of basic political rhetoric. The left-wing Populist papers by presenting particular ideas and programs could steer the development and direction of the movement.

Born out in the pages of these Populist and radical papers were complex policy debates, sometimes straying into the tall grass of policy arguments, as in the case with monetary policy, and sometimes merely into the realm of the personal, as was often the case when various figures insulted the personal qualities of political rivals. It was not uncommon for papers to shift wildly in

---

span the years from the Greenback party of the 1870's through Populism's free silver agitation and the Stable Money movement of the 1920's to the diverse monetary proposals of the Lemke-Coughlin Union party of 1936. During those years, while the nation was transformed from a monistic agrarian society to one that was pluralistic, industrial, and urban, not only did Coxey's monetary prescription remain virtually unchanged, but his outlook also remained static."

[29] "New Papers," *The Kansas Agitator*, September 13, 1895, 2.

their opinions about certain elected figures and protest leaders depending on the stance they took on a given issue. Larger, better known, and other Populist newspapers, like the *Kansas Agitator,* would also run the stories of these smaller newspapers. This burgeoning web of periodicals greatly enhanced the ability of protest figures like Coxey, Browne, and others to spread their ideas and contribute to the ongoing political debates in the movement circles. "Coxey's Sound Money is leading the great fight in Ohio," several papers reported once *Sound Money* was regularly printing by June of 1895. "None of our readers but would relish its weekly visits. Send for a sample copy."[30] Other reviewers noted that aside from circulating specific policy debates, the papers like *Sound Money* were also a key to possibly drawing more voters into political coalitions for the Populist movement. "Coxey's *Sound Money* is published twice a week," the *Kansas Agitator* explained. "It is one of the greatest vote-makers in the reform ranks. You need it in this campaign. It gives all the Populist news. It has a special cartoon service, and a regular Washington letter by special correspondent, giving inside facts as no other paper..."[31]

In the pages of *Sound Money* Coxey, Vincent, and other writers continued to push for the abolition of what they saw as capitalist currency, but also expanded their demands to include more direct forms of democracy, including the popular referendum as well as the right to vote for women. Coxey, however, largely continued to focus on the currency issue.

Some argued that despite this new presence in the print culture American voters seemed largely unwilling to move out of the major two party system and support third party candidates. "A copy of a paper before us— Coxey's *Sound Money*, sheet of Massillon, Ohio— calls up some recol[l]ections of the past twenty years that are not unfamiliar to many of… [our] readers…"[32] the

---

[30] "Untitled," *The Kansas Agitator*, September 13, 1895, 2.
"Local and Otherwise," *The Hoxie Palladium* (Hoxie, Kansas), September 6, 1895, 1.
[31] "Coxey's Sound Money," *Kansas Agitator*, February 21, 1896, 1.
[32] "Untitled," *Columbus Courier* (Columbus, Kansas), April 30, 1896, 1.

Kansas *Columbus Courier* reported. Despite the frequency of these reform ideas, the existence of political organizations to promote them, and their relative support in public opinion, the mere existence of these ideas in the broader public sphere did little to translate into successful independent political movements. At least in terms of electoral victories. As the *Columbus Courier* concluded—

> Coxey proposes the referendum plan of legislation; unlimited coinage of silver… and the issue of non-interest bearing government bonds for the improvement of public roads, or anything that people think they need. In other words it is the same old song that we have heard for twenty years. In all this time the country has been on the verge of ruin by the people who have been planning to rob the country, and would no doubt have made themselves paupers and slaves had it not been for the common 'thinking people'… for two decades and better we have been told how the great common people of the country were 'thinking as they never thought before' and how they were rising in their might to hurl the two plutocratic parties from power and install men in authority, who had some regards for the rights of the people. But somehow when the elections roll around with their accustomed regularity, the 'thinking people' are found to be in a hopeless, not to say an insignificant minority… we are forced to conclude that there is very little thinking going on in this country and that these fiat money folks must be mistake about the people doing a great deal of thinking.[33]

Coxey and Vincent, acknowledging this, presented their calls for direct democracy and fiat currency in terms that most related to the crisis found in unemployment, the degradation of the labor market, and the adverse effects of corporate capital on working class conditions. "In the city of New York last year there were 51,762 evictions— 200,000 persons turned out of doors!" Coxey argued in one editorial. "This was not in Ireland, mind you, but right here at home in the 'land of the free and the home of the brave'…"[34] The crisis in unemployment, naturally, created a situation where the economy slowed due to a decrease in buying power and therefore further degraded the price of labor that working class people depended on to make a living. By infusing the economy with more currency, Coxey reasoned, the labor markets would increase due to the expanded

---

[33] Ibid.
[34] "Untitled," *Progressive Thought*, (Olathe, Kansas), July 1, 1897, 8.

consumption, the increased economic activity of government funded projects, like good roads and other public works, and with it an ability of labor to demand a higher price. "As a sample of the eagerness with which people will respond to the demand for labor," Coxey noted in another editorial, "we note a recent call for 10,000 pickers on a 1,400 acre strawberry farm near Sarcoxie, Jasper county, MO, and fully 20,000 people responded to the circulars sent out by the company running the farm." "So great was the crowd that the town of about 1,000 or 1,200 inhabitants, was wholly inadequate to furnish shelter, and many were compelled to camp in the open air."[35]

Coxey's argument was twofold. By arguing for the preservation of the market, but in a way that rearranged the state's relationship with it, Coxey was continuing the greenback tradition of seeing the state's role in civil society as an entity that protected and ensured free people could engage in a system of commerce. For Coxey and other greenbackers the value of money was in its use for the people. By having a fiat currency, one that was controlled by a democratic state, Coxey argued that the state after abolishing the gold standard would return the market to its rightful place of ensuring the true producers of value, people building goods, exchanging services, and relating in civil society would not only be protected but also flourish. Coxey, therefore, was not an "old time producerist" like historians such as Benjamin Alexander have argued. To qualify as an old time producer, Coxey would have had to argue that individuals produce value through their alienated work. Coxey did not argue this. Instead, if one takes seriously the policy positions he advocated from the 1890s to the 1950s, one sees that Coxey rarely, if ever, couched his rhetoric in terms of a small scale producerist republic which fetishized the individual artisan. Instead, Coxey situated the production of value in a modern market. His insistence on a good roads program is illustrative of this.

---

[35] Ibid.

It was precisely this preservation of a quasi-capitalist society, reliant on some semblance of a capitalist market that so often put him at odds with the majority of the socialist movement. That socialist movement, following the failures of the People's Party and the breaks with the American Federation of Labor, was increasingly uninterested in the complex, confusing, and admittedly poorly articulated visions of Populists like Coxey. "Coxeyism" relied far too heavily on the current American state, and states like it, to make its program of economic and social revolution possible. In February of 1896, Daniel De Leon challenged Coxey, his political activities, and his newspaper for these perceived deficiencies. A series of editorials entitled "Coxeyism— Dodging Socialism," "Coxeyism— Helotism," and "Coxeyism— Irish Bullism," all focused on different aspects of the growing socialist movement in the United States, how it was different from Populist agitators like Coxey, and how there was little reconciliation between the two approaches. "Socialism maintains that the lot of the masses who toil… is increasing poverty, while increasing affluence is the lot of a small and decreasing class that toils not. This evolution proceeds from the economic laws that underlie the private ownership of the things necessary to production… and it manifests itself in the full force under capitalism." De Leon argued that no matter how Coxey and other greenbackers presented it, they were essentially advocating for the preservation of the capitalist market system. "The attempts to dodge the Revolution and patch up a truce with capitalism have been numerous," and among these recent attempts, De Leon charged, were the currency reformers. By maintaining the market, capitalist class relations, and the use of wages workers still "have to work as before for a boss at starvation wages and seeing the free coinage could not stop the progress of machinery, neither could it stop the displacement of labor, and the increasing of the army of the unemployed."[36]

[36] Daniel De Leon, "Coxeyism— Dodging Socialism," *The People*, February 9, 1896.

"Coxeyism" and other left wing Populist efforts were, in the opinion of some socialists like De Leon, even more dangerous, because they ultimately provided a way for capitalism to continue. "Socialism repudiates Coxeyism with even greater scorn than it repudiates all other quack nostrums to solve the Social problem," De Leon argued. Instead of treating the issue of unemployment as something that could be mitigated via a market, De Leon claimed that instead the entire system had to be revolutionized. What else could the establishment of a new society, one based on cooperation and the principles of an enlightened commonwealth, be based upon? "Socialism points out to the unemployed that they have assisted in producing the fabulous wealth of the nation, while its present possessors have stolen it," De Leon posited.

> [Socialism] warns the employed wage slaves that theirs will soon be the fate of the unemployed; and it demonstrates to them that, already today, they alone constitute more than one-half the whole population, and should avail themselves of their might to wrest the public power of the nation from the capitalist class, recover possession of their own, and establish the Co-operative Commonwealth.[37]

"Coxeyism,"--nothing more than greenbackism infused into the Populist movement--could deliver none of this.

De Leon concluded the February editorials by reviewing the problem he and his party had with Coxey, *Sound Money*, and their efforts for social change. First, De Leon argued, Coxey dodged the issue of socialism, and then made the working class a permanent slave— a class of "helots"— because Coxey's entire scheme rested on the reformation of the market and the radical alteration of the state. Both relied too heavily on existing, bourgeois and capitalist institutions, and not enough on the actual working class. "Coxeyism schemes a scheme that shall remove the spectre of want and shall guarantee comfort and independence to all. And what is that scheme? To pass a law by which every citizen— presumably female as well as male— shall have an opportunity to

[37] Daniel De Leon, "Coxeyism— Helotism," *The People*, February, 16, 1896.

work on the roads…" The guaranteed wages and employment, aside from being insufficient, solved none of the underlying problems. "Socialism roars at the thought. It sees that the mechanical powers, inherited by society and produced by labor, can, under their collective ownership by the people, yield a volume of wealth fabulous to think of, at an expenditure of time that is trifling." De Leon reasoned that, yes, modernity and the forced cooperation of capitalist classes did indeed produce value. However, it was principally the proletariat, both in terms of the unemployed as a source of reserve labor, and the employed as a source of directly exploited labor, who not only produced that value, but who were denied its benefits. Instead of relying on the market and current state to guarantee that reallocation of value back to a working class, which De Leon charged Coxey with advocating, the Socialist Labor Party and De Leon maintained it was far more reliable to simply lead the proletariat in taking direct control over the means of production in the modern economy—i.e. the apparatus that produced the modern, surplus value. "This is the clarion blast of deliverance from the lips of that Knowledge that animates the Socialist Movement," De Leon concluded. "Coxeyism's voice is the voice of Ignorance tooting through a penny-whistle."[38]

4.3 Part Two

The debate over the imagining of the commonweal, and how people would be situated in the social order, pre and post revolution, was intense. Much of the American left, including the radical wings of the Populist movement, were often paralyzed with inaction in overcoming these differences., In his 1911 book *The Militant Proletariat*, the journalist and lawyer Austin Lewis, a supporter of the 1894 march on Washington, argued that a socialist revolution was only possible because of the existence of the proletariat as a distinct class. "[T]he Socialist movement from its

[38] Daniel De Leon, "Coxeyism— Irish Bullism," *The People*, February 23, 1896.

early stages has regarded the proletariat as the means of revolution," Lewis argued, "…as the chief agent in accomplishing the overthrow of existing social and political conditions and substituting for them something quite other…"[39] Insofar as any hope for a cross class movement could be achieved, Lewis reasoned that such an effort was not impossible but fraught with danger of co-optation by existing political and social institutions. The modern economy produced an abundance of new value, and the proletariat was disproportionately disadvantaged in benefitting from that production. Therefore, Lewis reasoned, the proletariat had to be the driving force for revolutionary change. "The ideas of the proletarian are the ideas of socialism; the aspirations of the proletarian are the aspirations of socialism."[40] The masses would create a new social and economic system, and it would be a newer and higher form of democracy. "[T]he victory of socialism is at once the triumph and the annihilation of the proletarian," Lewis concluded, "for, by the institution of the socialist state, the proletarian vanishes, he becomes translated into something different, namely, the citizen of a co-operative commonwealth."[41]

Lewis maintained that figures like Coxey, the Populists, and even some wings of the American Socialist Party were guilty of relying too much on pre-existing notions of electoral democracy, American nationalism, and, worst of all, for socialists like Lewis and De Leon, the current American state. "The platform of the Socialist Party," Lewis explained, "represents the hodge-podge demands of the discontented…"[42] By relying too much on the electoral process of current bourgeois democracy, "the Socialist Party as the representative of a non-revolutionary body, i.e., the skilled artisan… the small bourgeoisie, feels that it must produce actual political results, must win elections, must gain administrative control, and in fact must operate, as these

[39] Austin Lewis, *The Militant Proletariat* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 6-7.
[40] Ibid, 7.
[41] Ibid, 8.
[42] Iid, 180.

officials declare, as a live and efficient political expression."[43] This reliance on the state and elections created a serious obstacle for the Socialist Party and other left-wing radicals, Lewis claimed. "In so far as [their] aims are not revolutionary [their] program can be more or less readily adopted by one or other of the ordinary political parties which can take over the demands of organized labor and the smaller bourgeoisie as the demands of the Populists have been shown to have been taken over."[44]

De Leon, Lewis, Lloyd, and others argued that the current form of American democracy did not speak for the people, either in terms of its actual actions or its stated political philosophy. Coxey's vision of a co-operative commonweal was decidedly different. Situating the promise of revolutionary potential in the existing US state, Coxey advocated that the revolutionary and democratic promise of American government could be re-established through correct and good governance. It was precisely this vision of radical transformation through commitment to longer historical ideals which made Coxey so much more identifiable with the Populists than the emerging American socialist movement in the late nineteenth century. As one poem in *Sound Money* stated, the problem of the US state and government was poor management and guidance, coupled with the modern corporation's corruption of democratic government—

"We are now upon a sinking wreck;
She will never make the land:
Not while the wheel of the old hulk
Is in the traitor's hand.
The only way that we can see out
From under tyrants' claws
Is just to take J.S. Coxey's bills,
And enact them into laws"[45]

---

[43] Ibid, 181.
[44]Ibid.
[45] "Tillman and His Fork," *Kansas Agitator*, April 17, 1896, 8.

By enacting what Coxey saw as the correct and needed legislation the US, both in terms of its state apparatus and economy, could return to the revolutionary potential it contained within its existing political structures. Primarily due to this outlook of using electoral politics to enact change, coupled with Coxey's fame following the 1894 march, William Jennings Bryan, then serving as a Congressional representative of Nebraska's first district, invited Coxey to testify before the House Ways and Means Committee. Bryan was already in the process of rallying Populist support for his 1896 run for President, so the move was undoubtedly part of a larger ploy to reposition himself and the Democratic Party away from the wing of east coast financiers and their sympathizers like Grover Cleveland and Richard Olney. However, Bryan was cautious not to appear too radical. Therefore, Coxey's testimony and the direction of the hearing were decidedly in the direction of a more moderate reformist attitude. The majority of the hearing dealt with proposed legislation that Coxey had advocated for years (including during the 1894 march) and called for a drastic increase in the nation's money supply that could be issued as government bonds that did not bear or accrue interest. Coxey proposed that this new currency then be used to employ workers for public works. The committee used the majority of their time to question how this plan would work. "This plan would eliminate interest altogether?" one member of the committee asked Coxey. "It would, as far as public improvements—" Coxey began to explain. "But would not eliminate all interest?" the congressman countered. "Well, no; I do not think it would [altogether]," Coxey answered. "You say it would destroy railroad dividends, and all that sort of thing?" another congressman interjected. Coxey explained—

> "It forces the people who now have their money invested in railroad enterprises, in telegraphs, telephones, to put their money into individual enterprises in developing the country… That is what this bill will do. That is the kind of protectionist I am; I want to drive every dollar of foreign money out of this country and make the money to do our own business."[46]

Coxey argued that the reliance on metallic standards, such as gold, drew investors and the market into international competition over how to maintain the value of a gold-based currency globally. "We are at the mercy of English money lenders now," Coxey argued. "At any time they can create a panic if they wish to do so…"[47] The bill was never passed by Congress, but the fact that it and Coxey were given a Congressional audience was enough for the Populist greenbacker to argue that their ideas were gaining ground. Coxey was quick to publish the congressional hearing, alongside an extended pamphlet. The pamphlet, *Cause and Cure*, was meant from the outset to be used as campaign literature in the Populist movement. "Greatest Campaign Document," one advertisement for the pamphlet said,[48] and the document touched on a number of issues ranging from the currency debate to immigration, the eight hour movement, and unemployment. This pamphlet, along with the publication of *Sound Money* and other materials, positioned Coxey as a frequent voice in the 1890s in terms of protest and reform politics.

---

[46] Jacob Coxey, *The Coxey Plan: Medium of Exchange Without Cost* (n.p. 1914), 39. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[47] Ibid, 40.
[48] "The Cause and Cure," *Kansas Agitator*, April 17, 1896, 8.

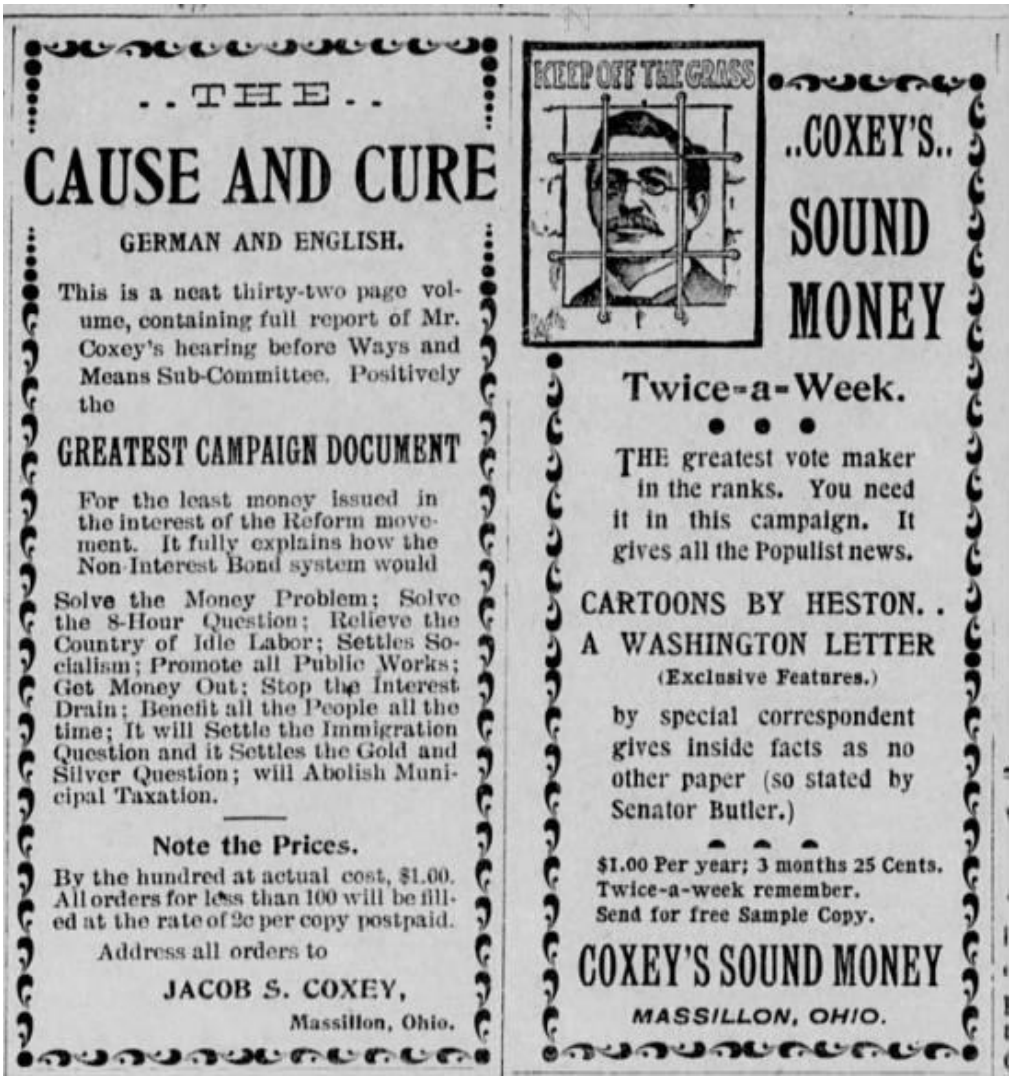

Figure 11: Advertisement for Jacob Coxey's The Cause and the Cure in the Kansas Agitator, April 17, 1896.

Coxey was advocating for a state-sponsored, nationalist approach to deal with problems of the US economy. Open to notions of organizing the working class and other groups, Coxey ultimately placed the impetus for radical transformation on the state itself, relying on the power of the state to bring corporate capital to heel, and most importantly the ability of the state to reshape itself into a more Populist-centered apparatus, which responded to the demands of the discontented and integrated itself into the broader economy of civil society.

Coxey's arguments for currency reform were just one avenue f or the state to insert itself into civil society and thereby shape and secure the economy. Coxey also argued for massive government purchases of the railways, which alarmed some of the Congressmen present.[49] Despite this, Coxey stressed in his testimony the way in which his vision of fiat currency would lead to an almost self-regulation of the economy, and that it would move value away from the concentrations of global markets and corporate leaders, and place it properly back in what Coxey saw as the producerist value of labor in the modern economy, specifically when it was directed toward public projects and social programs. In 1914, Coxey organized another national march on Washington. It was, like 1894, unsuccessful in forcing Congress or the federal government to act. Yet unlike 1894, the 1914 march was not able to garner the national press the first march had gained. The result was a complete failure, and the newspapers that paid the march any attention largely mocked the marchers' efforts. As one local Pennsylvania paper stated, "Counting the mule, Coxey's army is now in a position to recite the touching poem, 'We Are Seven.'"[50]

At least one interesting document was produced by the 1914 march. In attempting to drum up interest for his legislative proposals once again, Coxey reissued the *Cause and Cure* pamphlet, retitling it *The Coxey Plan: Medium of Exchange Without Cost*, updating certain sections, expanding certain ideas, and giving Coxey room to take aim at his critics in the major political parties, his rivals in the Populist movement, and his many critics in the socialist movement. The most extended section was on government purchase of industries like the railways. Whereas in 1895 Coxey had tepidly set this plan amidst his currency ideas and merely suggested purchasing the railways and using government bonds to run them, in 1914 Coxey called for government seizure of not just the railways, but also any and all industries that were large scale corporate

[49] Howson, *Jacob Sechler Coxey: A Biography of a Monetary Reformer*, 217.
[50] "Untitled," *Reading Times* (Reading, Pennsylvania), May 21, 1914, 6.

entities, national in focus, and which impacted the national market. Coxey singled out the railway, telegraph, roads, steamship lines, and other mass forms of transit. "The first things that confront a government when constructing law are land, labor, production, and distribution," Coxey opened the 1914 pamphlet. "The laws must be enacted to control and regulate, or own and operate, these things."[51] Coxey reasoned that any abandonment of these industries to the corporation and trust not only created a monopoly, but fundamentally altered the concept of a civil and national market, since it was no longer an arena of free movement, but a hierarchically controlled system of profit for a select few.

The Populists were a multi-faceted political movement, and although producerism was not the only defining feature of their various differences, the definition of production of value went a long way in determining the underlying political philosophy and therefore the actions of the various figures and groups who made up late nineteenth century American Populism. Coxey was not a producerist in the sense of the older term which advocated for a type of production based on individual artisanal work or small scale agrarianism. Coxey thus was not an advocate of a producerist cooperative. Neither did Coxey wholly agree with the left-wing labor Populists, like the socialists Gronlund, Lewis, Lloyd, and others who held to the Marxist view of the labor theory of value and argued that production was the result of the labor of the working class. These left wing thinkers argued that value was stored in the potential of the working class because the working class was produced outside of and in a parallel cycle of capitalist production. Where value came about, then, was in the cooperation, forced and very much coerced, where the working class was driven to sell its labor power to the capitalist to produce new goods, and as Marx stated, infuse the new value into the commodity form.[52]

---

[51] Jacob Coxey, *The Coxey Plan*, 1.
[52] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Seattle, WA: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010).

Coxey shared much more in common with this left-wing section of the Populist movement than he did with the older producerists, but he disagreed with them as well. The currency debate reflected this. Whereas Lloyd saw it as a dangerous distraction, and some of the leaders of the People's Party like Butler viewed it only as a convenient way to build a broad national movement, for Coxey the question was not a mere afterthought, but central to the crises of American democracy after industrialization. "There are three functions [of government]," Coxey argued in the 1914 edition of the pamphlet. "First, the means of communication; second, the means of exchange; third, the means of transportation."[53] These three functions of modern government, as Coxey saw them, were not so much regulating the modern economy, as integrating people's democratic society into the modern economic system of mass production. Coxey maintained that the means of communication, which he saw as the postal system, telegraph, and telephone services, were indispensable to modern national life. Through these means of mass communication the nation moved about ideas, speech, and basic individual expressed ideas. Second, the means of exchange, specifically currency, permitted commercial life to exist. Without it the basic ability to trade goods and services ceased to exist. Third, the means of transportation (which Coxey listed as market roads, railroads, and steamship lines) were the literal, physical way goods moved about society. To entrust any of these in the hands of one private entity effectively stifled and killed benefits of a modernized market. Far from advocating a return to small scale producerism, Coxey argued value was principally a product of the modern market, its efficiency, and the cooperation it fostered between various institutions and individuals. This emphasis on the modern market, its mass production and distribution, and the cooperation it engendered, is why Coxey fit within a

---

Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

[53] Coxey, *The Coxey Plan*, 1.

niche of the cooperative commonwealth movement. Yet, what differentiated him from the socialists was that instead of focusing on the proletariat, Coxey instead demanded the state be the primary agent of revolutionary change.

It is tempting to argue that Coxey was a prototype of a certain kind of statist logic, or generalized political totalitarianism, since he essentially advocated an infusion of state, economic, and civil spheres of society into a totalizing political entity that Coxey deemed his version of the commonweal. But again, this explanation ignores the primary historical record— Coxey was a Populist. And a very specific form of American Populist. Understanding Coxey and the other remnants of the greenback labor ideology in the Populist movement provides a nuanced appreciation of the intellectual and political diversity contained within Populist movements. Also, by understanding Coxey as both Populist and statist, one can begin to understand why reformers like Coxey focused so much energy in the political arena. Many of these figures had seen radical transformations wrought on the US political state. Beginning with the Civil War, moving through the upheavals of the 1870s and Reconstruction, and concluding in the Gilded Age and Progressive era it was hardly surprising that an observer like Coxey would believe that the American state was not a predetermined entity, fixed in history, but instead a possible site for radical transformation. Furthermore, Coxey's rhetoric and underlying actions as a Populist agitator and activist were always grounded in the language of the "true people." For Coxey and many other Populists the division between people and state simply did not make sense. True, Coxey could (as evidenced by his 1894 comments when leading the march) understand that the state could be (and was being) transformed by corporate capital, but that was a function of political struggle. It was not a predetermined outcome. With this in mind, Coxey's comments about the state ownership and operation of certain industries and powers as "they should be owned, used, operated and furnished

at cost to all the people," make much more sense. The state, for Coxey, was not a disembodied set of ideals or an apparatus that was separate from civil society and the people. Or, at least, it should not be. Instead, what made Coxey principally a Populist was that he truly believed "the people" should be as close to synonymous with "the state" as possible. Far from being totalitarian, this statist vision was much more related to Coxey's somewhat sanguine vision of what American democratic government should be, *could be*, both in principle and in practice.

Coxey's political activities running up to the 1895 Congressional hearing attest to his belief in totalizing the voice of the people and state power. In December of 1894, when Populist leaders and activists met in St. Louis to discuss future planks in the People's Party platform, Taubeneck and other leaders largely rebuked Coxey's ideas of greenbacks, nationalization of industries like the railroad, and laws benefitting labor. Middle-of-the-roaders like Coxey were furious. Their anger deepened when the executive committee, smarting under the political prowess of Lloyd who had, despite the executive committee's opposition, won a resolution calling for the nationalization of all monopolies, refused to endorse Coxey's comparatively more mainstream position of non-interest government bonds. Coxey returned to Massillon determined to make the issue a central one in the 1896 campaign. Coxey had originally planned on using political propaganda and the protest techniques of Browne to make this a central issue, but as Coxey moved away from Browne, and further into certain wings of the Progressive era reform circles he was introduced to the movement to extend direct democracy.

This new approach, encapsulated in the demands for direct elections of senators and the popular referendum, served two of Coxey's broader needs. First, it permitted him an avenue to agitate for his specific policies— policies that were often at odds with both party leaders and elected officials. If elected officials would not enact his ideas, then he would simply push for

changes that allowed ideas like his and other Populist agitators to be directly enacted, bypassing intransigent legislatures and entrenched party leaders. Second, the work of calling for more direct democratic methods fit with Coxey's larger goal of meshing both state power and people's direct concerns more closely. During the St. Louis meeting, various advocates in the Populist movement who wanted to push for a more direct form of democracy had met in Coxey's room at the Lindell Hotel and formed what they called the "Direct Legislation League." They then named James H. Lathrop as the president.[54]

The direct democracy movement had already, prior to the winter of 1894, established itself as a noteworthy political force. Thinkers like James W. Sullivan, editor of the monthly publication *Direct Legislation Record*, and their subsequent efforts to make direct democratic government a reality, had inspired chapters of progressive activists around the country. In 1893, Sullivan had published a book, *Direct Legislation by the Citizenship tough the Initiative and Referendum*, and had argued that republican systems of representative democracy created a state apparatus prone to capture by special interests, and ultimately a democratic form of government divorced from the will of the people. "There is a radical difference between a democracy and a representative government," Sullivan had explained. "In a democracy, the citizens themselves make the law and superintend its admiration; in a representative government, the citizens empower legislators and executive officers to make the law and to carry it out."[55] Sullivan and the other direct democrats argued that a system of representative government created a perpetual separation between the people and their state, and which then allowed those representatives to eschew the will of the majority of the people for the favor of special and minority interest. "In other words," Sullivan

[54]Howson, *Jacob Sechler Coxey*, 215
[55] James W. Sullivan, *Direct Legislation by the Citizenship through the Initiative and Referendum* (New York: True Nationalist Publishing Company, 1893).

concluded, "democracy is direct rule by the majority, while representative government is ruled by a succession of quasi-oligarchies, indirectly and remotely responsible to the majority."[56]

Coxey agreed. He made the direct democracy movement's aims— referendum, popular vote ballots, and direct legislation— major components of his future campaigns and periodic topics in *Sound Money*. The move to more closely associate with the direct democracy movement also put Coxey into a small group of influential Progressive reformers who espoused Bellamy nationalism and updated notions of greenback philosophy. These reformers readily used the avenue of reading societies, book clubs, and civic organizations to organize groups to discuss, push for, and possibly implement their various ideas. After Coxey's testimony to Congress, he returned to Massillon and began advocating not just his eventual ventures like *Sound Money*, but also a similar form of book club and reader society for his ideas. In a monthly magazine called the *Coxey Good Roads and Interest Bond Library* Coxey pushed for fiat currency (in the run up to 1896 he accepted the position of silver), the initiative, referendum, the ability to recall officials, and what would become an increasingly contentious issue in the 1930s, the payment of bonuses to veterans in greenbacks. Yet, the magazine, just as *Sound Money* would become, was principally focused on the issue of currency, and the need for government to integrate itself into the market.[57]

> Through this [non-interest bond] system we can create wealth, or value, and then issue the labor certificate of the value that is created on the value thus created, and in this way utilize all of the surplus labor of the country at all times in producing value that will not be put upon the market to come in competition with what they claim is surplus production, and give the now non-producers a producing power, and with it a purchasing power which will substitute a cash system for a credit system, that has now failed us.[58]

---

[56] Ibid.
[57] Howson, *Jacob Sechler Coxey*, 216-218.
[58] Ibid, 218.

These reading societies of Bellamy nationalists and other utopian visionaries also touched on another aspect of social reform that interested Coxey and had promoted— the establishment of a commonwealth society, or commonweal, based on social cooperation and not capitalist competition. Despite the novelty and relative attractiveness of the idea of setting up a utopian commune or more conservative collectivist cooperatives in business and using those groups as a model and platform to push for wider social change and protect workers, Coxey and the other direct democrats' concept of a commonweal was somewhat different. Coxey was not explicitly opposed to these organizations, but his interest in creating a commonweal focused on the existing state and political processes of the US. This again, points to yet another intellectual and political differentiation that existed in the commonweal movement. Gronlund had argued that such attempts of social revolution via the commune, or collectivist cooperatives, were doomed to failure, and furthermore that they did not actually address the economic conditions of the majority of people. "These successful associations are brilliant examples of workingmen raising themselves out of their class, not raising their class," Gronlund criticized. "They are not truly co-operative, but virtually joint stock companies. They compete among themselves just as ordinary concerns do."[59] Yet Gronlund was willing to endorse at least one of these collectives when his friend and admirer Burnette Haskell founded the Kaweah Cooperative Colony in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The colony was based on the writings and teachings of figures like Gronlund and Bellamy. Similar commonwealth colonies in places like California, Colorado, Tennessee, and Mexico appeared, all with varying commitments to enacting the vision of Bellamy, Gronlund, and other socialist

[59] Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Socialism* (New York: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1890), 63.

thinkers who had theorized and argued for a cooperative commonwealth to replace the U. S. capitalist economy and republican system.[60]

Gronlund surrendered his reservations about such utopian enterprises when Haskell approached him to be one of the leaders of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony. Gronlund assumed the position of secretary of the colony. The enterprise, if not already facing difficulty, was doomed to failure. Haskell and other colonial officials, solidified their hold over the colony by arguing that members of the collective did not have a right to remove them from leadership, and the physical labor, which was to be shared relatively equally between all members in the society, quickly fell to a select few—namely the colony's women members. With the men of the colony refusing to do much of the manual work, women were expected to do both the majority of the manual labor of the socialist society as well as the previous work of domestic labor in cooking, taking care of children, and cleaning. Despite this Gronlund argued Kaweah's colony was a case of exceptionalism in the communal, collectivist, commonweal movement of colonization. "That which distinguishes [Kaweah]… is that it is to be a nucleus for agitation of socialist principles," Gronlund explained, "it is not intended to take the place of national co-operation."[61]

The colony certainly succeeded in agitating the federal government, although the claim it was winning anything for the broader socialist struggle was more difficult to maintain. In 1890, the federal government rejected any claim that the colonists made over rights to the land. This became increasingly contentious as the colony realized it needed some system of commerce and business to make itself viable. Haskell and the others at Kaweah began investigating the possibility of logging, but before the venture could turn a profit, federal troops forcibly removed the colonists

[60] Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 236-237.
[61] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 64.

following Congressional actions that made the forests, specifically the redwood trees, part of a nationally protected park.[62]

Gronlund was not the only figure associated with socialism and the commonwealth to be swept up in the colonization efforts. In 1895 Eugene Debs became convinced that efforts to move large amounts of workers, Populists, and other radicals into some western territory (Debs was never specific which one) would then have the effect of colonizing the area and permit a solid farmer-labor alliance to emerge. With this voter block in place, the new cooperative colony would then be able to take over government control, establish the cooperative commonwealth, and then reengage the dominant American political system as a stable and secure political entity. This last step, the reengagement of American national political society, was significant. Much like Gronlund's assurances that Kaweah was not an unrealistic utopia nor a producer cooperative because it was founded with the idea of pushing a national cooperative commonwealth, so too was the spirit of Debs' efforts to establish a cooperative commonwealth colony. In May of 1897 the *Chicago Record* reported on the efforts of Debs, the remnants of the ARU, and a new conference that was being organized in Chicago to discuss the logistics of the plan. As the *Chicago Record* noted, Debs and others had some precedent to follow. "Mr. Debs says that while in Utah he made close investigation of the workings of the original cooperative scheme of the Mormons… When asked if the church discipline did not have a great deal to do with making the Mormons prosperous and content with their lot, [Debs] said it undoubtedly did, but that in the new cooperative movement there would be equally as strong influences in the belief of those who undertake it in the doctrine of cooperation."[63] The journalist, pressing Debs and the idea of the cooperative colony,

---

[62] Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 2007.
[63] "Plan to Redeem Toil: Eugene V. Debs and Others Look Toward Establishing a Colony in the West that Final Will Enfold All Labor," *Chicago Record*, May 24, 1897.

both in how realistic it was and how it would actually function as a real political force, was able to get Debs to admit some reservations. "Mr. Debs, himself, is opposed to the colony idea, because he believes it is not on a scale large enough to accomplish much good even if it were successful," but Debs was quick to add, "It is his impression that there is to be a radical change in the industrial system throughout the country, and that the successful operation of the cooperative idea in one state will cause to be adopted everywhere."[64] Privately, the fate of the some 2,000 blacklisted members of the ARU weighed heavily on Debs' mind. A whole new world of political leadership and action had opened for him and some of the other leaders, but for the majority of the rank and file hardship awaited with the railroad trusts barring many of them from returning to their livelihoods.

Likewise, Debs, Gronlund, and others sympathetic to the idea of creating the commonweal through the practice of colonization had not just the Church of the Latter Day Saints to provide a likely example of how colonization could alter society, they had the entirety of the Unite States' history of settler colonialism. Instead of relying on a polemic against Populism grounded in political theory, a far more damning criticism of Populism can be found in the specific historical nationalism of nations like the United States. If Populism is a type of nationalist rhetoric that challenges the inherent problems of bourgeois liberal democracy, then the very historic nationalism that the Populists advanced needs to be raised as well. Gronlund provides an unwitting, but nonetheless vital, window into the problems of using US nationalism as a rallying point for political action. "Look at our Indian tribes," he wrote in one passage of *The Co-Operative Commonwealth*. "They work, in their way, as well as civilized people do. Yet they are strangers to progress. Why? Because they never accumulated any wealth. And they accumulated no wealth,

[64] Ibid.

because they worked as isolated individuals; because they never have known any division of labor."[65] Aside from being both racist and wrong as any person who actually studied or was part of "our Indian tribes" could attest, the argument merits attention.

First, it demonstrated that the commonweal as many of the leading theorists of the time envisioned it, relied heavily on concepts that were charged with Western, white chauvinism. Native peoples were "savage" because they occupied a space supposedly untouched by modernity— that is accumulation of new value in the corporate, industrial capitalist system.[66] Second, it demonstrates that despite the commonweal movement being part of larger Populist movement, it was anything but anti-modernist. The very concept of the cooperative commonwealth depended upon the rise of corporate capitalism and the division, production, and guidance of labor in an industrial society. Third, the commonweal was not utopian, in the sense that it argued for a state of affairs situated in the distant future. Instead, the commonwealers, both the statists like Coxey and the colonial advocates, were arguing not for a divorced society, separate from the mainstream, but instead were attempting to determine the best way to radically alter the American economic and political state into a more socialistic entity.

This was the purpose of Coxey and Browne's Populist protest. It was not just to enact certain legislation, but it was to demand changes that they thought would simultaneously improve the immediate conditions of people in the present and alter the state of American life in the future. But Coxey, as a Populist, did not merely argue for a new radical state. He, and many others, grounded their vision of the commonweal in various plans, schemes, political coalitions, and campaigns to make that vision a reality. By grounding themselves in the American tradition, therefore, and by arguing that figures like Cleveland were betraying the promise of American

---

[65] Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, 52.
[66] The chapter Gronlund discusses these ideas in is fittingly entitled, "The Culmination."

revolutionary potential, Coxey and other Populists were, at least in part, going back to history and using American notions of nationalism to achieve their revolutionary goals. Coxey and other figures in the movement did resist the concepts of white supremacy, imperialism, and nativist logic. Coxey and Browne's insistence of racially integrating the march gained much attention from people of color and figures like Daniel De Leon who saw the Populist protest as a way to remake American nationalism. But racist, American nationalist logic did move about in their thinking and actions.

The ease with which Browne adopted anti-Chinese rhetoric to appease state officials in California, was the first glimpse of a broader issue in American Populism. Who were "the people"? Socialists moving into a more internationalist and class-based focus had some of this (although not completely) settled for them. "The People" were predetermined by their relation to and exploitation by capitalism. Likewise, bourgeois liberal democrats had the simpler categorization of "the people" as those who were both citizens and who fit the racial and gender profile for political participation. The Populists, however, did not have such an easy definition. "The People" was an elastic concept and just as it could be expanded to include African Americans in the 1894 march, it could just as easily snap back and leave others out in another campaign. This was especially true given the nature of U. S. electoral politics, with which the Populists were very much ingrained.

In 1897, Coxey demonstrated this problem. After Bryan's 1896 defeat Coxey bolted from the People's Party, complaining that the organization had sold itself out, not just to the Democratic Party but more importantly to the silverites. Yet prior to the election, Coxey had stayed relatively quiet about his misgivings. "The money question will never be settled until the government issues an irredeemable paper money direct to the people," the Ohio Populist paper *The Advance Guard*

argued running up to the election. Its reasoning mirrored Coxey's as well. Silverites, although better than the gold bugs, were not getting to the heart of the matter. "The fellows who are shouting free silver— a subject that is now up for settlement— should, while they are studying the silver question, go a little farther and get down to the fundamental principles of money and its functions." The silverite position was only good in bringing Populists and other reformers together to challenge the ingrained economic interests of the country. Yet, in the specific moment of 1896, the alliance of green backers with silverites had made sense. On the same page, the *Advance Guard* ran the following editorial—

> "The simple fact that all the Shylocks of the world— bankers, bondholders, brokers, usurers, and the entire thieving horde who live by skimming the cream off the products of others, are opposed to free silver, ought to convince every thinking reasoning, intelligent farmer, mechanic and business man that it is just what he should favor, as the interests of these two elements are directly in opposition to one another."

The Advance Guard was not alone in this way of thinking. In a July editorial cartoon in the *Washington Times* an image depicted a Jewish man, labelled "Shylock Broker," strapped to a rocket, read to launch and explode. Above the terrified man was the title, "A Celebration With A Purpose."

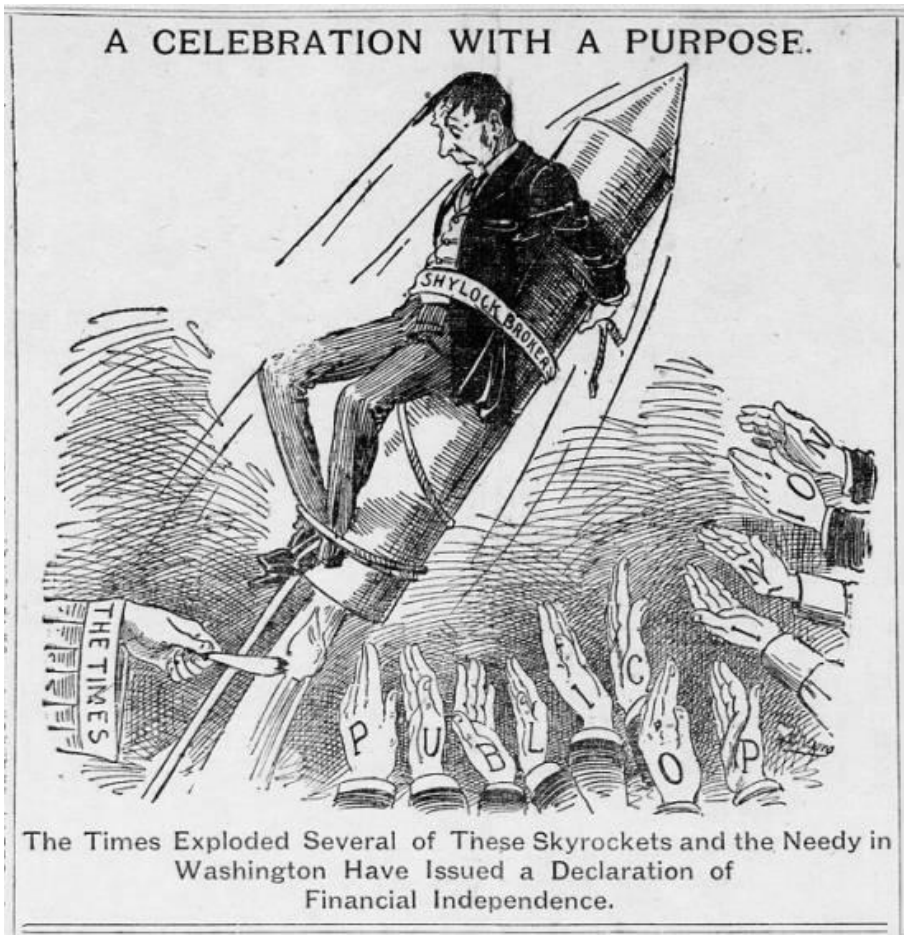

Figure 12: Editorial cartoon in the Washington Times depicting a Jewish banker being blown up to the cheers of public opinion. July 5, 1895.

[67]

Below the cartoon read, "The Times exploded several of these skyrockets and the needy in Washington have issued a Declaration of Independence." A multitude of hands spelling out "PUBLIC OPINION" applauded the act.

Jacob Coxey's *Sound Money*, as a periodical in the currency fight made similar arguments. In the fall of 1895, several papers reported with excitement that Watson Heston, "That inimitable cartoonish… is now a fixture on Coxey's *Sound Money*, of Massillon, Ohio, one of his productions appearing each week."[68] Heston's talents as an artist were far superior to Coxey's previous partner

[67] "A Celebration With A Purpose," *Washington Times*, July 5, 1895, 1.
[68] "Untitled," *The Kansas Agitator*, September 13, 1895, 2.

Browne, who continued to illustrate his own newspaper *Carl's Cactus*. But much of Heston's work demonstrated a strong tendency toward nativist and racist argument, typically couched in the broader Freethinker Movement. Heston's later cartoons of snarling Catholic clergy as alligators, Irish and Italian ape-like immigrants, and the supposed perils of religion in American political life clearly illustrated this position. In one of his cartoons for *Sound Money* Heston showed Uncle Sam, a representative of the American nation, crucified by the special interest classes of American oligarchy. "Republicanism" and "Democracy" (the latter bearing a strong resemblance to Grover Cleveland) fleeced the pockets of Uncle Sam. It was no coincidence that both were drawing the wealth from the nation via "gold" and "silver." The entire image illustrated perfectly what Coxey and other greenbackers had been arguing for decades— that the nation was being robbed through the currency and the state was the thief.

If that had been the entirety of the image then the cartoon would bear little more comment, aside from just another document amidst countless others that highlighted Coxey and the fiat currency advocates views. But there was more. Flanking both sides of the crucified nation were two stereotypically drawn anti-Semitic caricatures. "Wall St. Pirate," one of the Jewish men's coats read. On the other side was his partner, labelled "Rothschild," wielding a spear which said "gold standard." Hanging above the grimacing face of Uncle Sam was the sign, "This is US in the Hands of the Jews." [69]

"Untitled," *The Marysville Advocate* (Marysville, Kansas), September 20, 1895, 5.
"Local and Otherwise," *The Hoxie Palladium* (Hoxie, Kansas), September 6, 1895, 1.

[69] "History Repeats Itself," *Coxey's Sound Money*, April 7, 1896. Jacob Coxey's Papers, Massillon Historical Society.

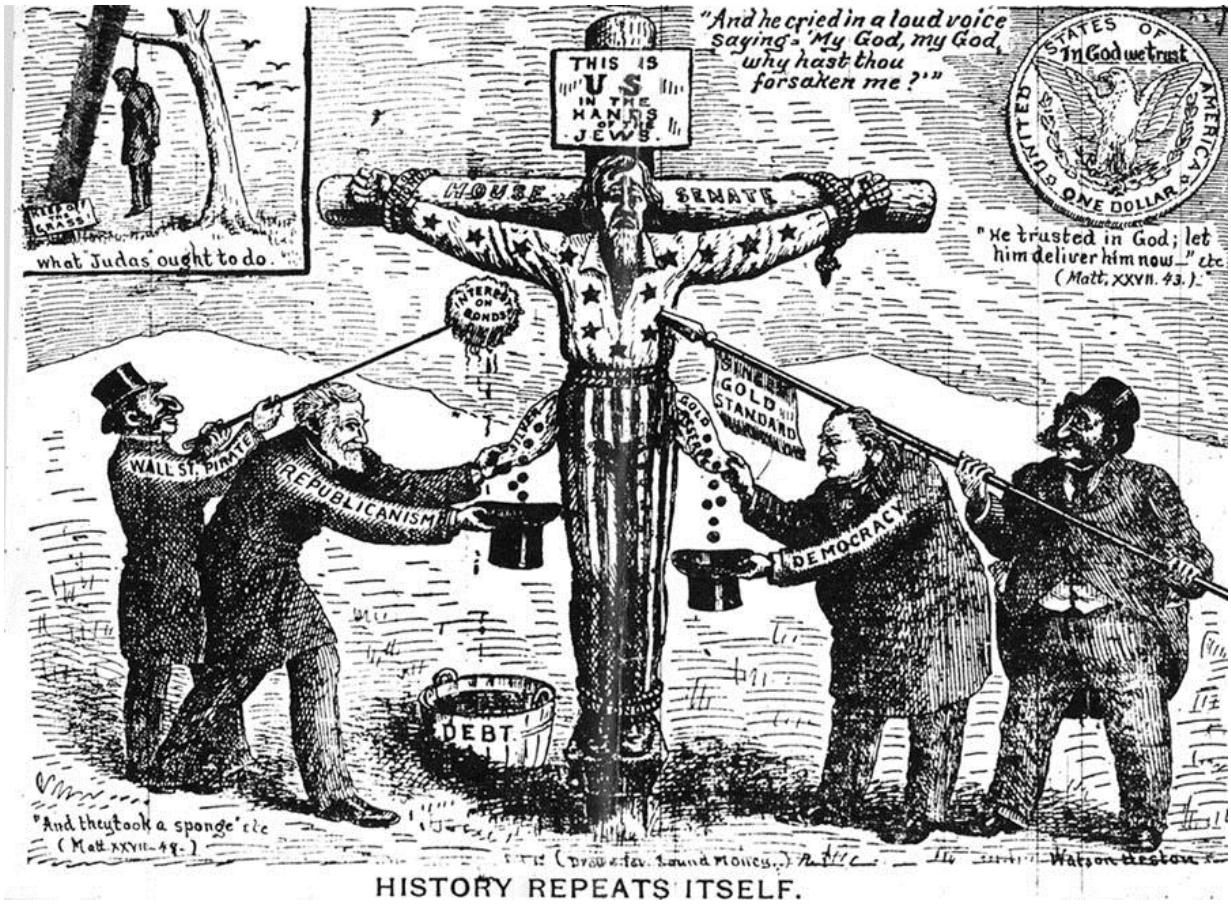

Figure 13: Editorial cartoon in Coxey's Sound Money couching greenback currency ideas in anti-Semitic imagery. April 7, 1896. (Jacob Coxey's Papers, Massillon Historical Society).

As if all of this were not explicit enough, the cartoon finished with another scene in the upper left hand panel. "What Judas ought to do," the panel read. In silhouette was a hanging man, swinging from a tree. In a period of increasingly rampant lynchings it is difficult not to read the sign as mere rhetoric. Finally, as if to remind people who was endorsed this image, Coxey's tagline from the 1894 march, "Keep off the Grass," hung from the base of the tree. The fact that this sentiment could be found in Coxey's publications— Coxey the man who led a racially integrated march and is often heralded by historians like Carlos Schwantes, Benjamin Alexander, Charles Postel, and Jerry Prout as one of the better Populist figures in terms of combatting racism—

requires a deeper meditation as to how Coxey could be tolerant in 1894 and then two years later peddle some of the worst racial stereotypes in American and European culture.

Historians have sought to understand and classify this casual and freely admitted anti-Semitism. For some historians like Richard Hofstadter it was evidence not only of a profound anti-modernism in American Populist thought, but also a persistent racist nativism based on a latent white, Christian, authoritarian culture. For Hofstadter the anti-Semitism and nativism of the Populists was hardly surprising, since they coincided with what he called an older and persistent "paranoid style of American politics" that placed blame and fear on groups ranging from Mormons, Jewish people, and Masons. For Hofstadter the paranoia spoke to a deeper cultural fear that some "other" was secretly working behind the scenes of public life, and within civil and political institutions to destroy a unique American existence—a democratic, independent, and sovereign American people who were supposed to control the political apparatus of American government.[70]

Hofstadter's interpretation of the Populist as containing some element of reactionary logic was quickly denounced by historians who largely celebrated the Populists and their efforts. Several historians have grappled with Hofstadter's arguments, but perhaps one of the most articulate and passionate, is Walter Nugent. In the preface to the 2013 second edition of *The Tolerant Populists*. Nugent not only repeats his deep disagreement with Hofstadter and other critics of American Populism, but also declares those who see the American Populists as anything other than respectable combatants of greed, corporate rule, and economic misery as misunderstanding the promise of Populism and one of the more important legacies of democratic politics. "No one found any anti-Semitic or nativist statements," Nugent explains in defense of his and other pro-Populist historical interpretations, "except for a few scattered ones" and those few were, Nugent argues,

[70] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style of American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1965), 9.

"of the Shylock-Rothschild rhetorical kind…"[71] Nugent claims that, "Though it took a while to sink in, the verdict was clear that the nativism and anti-Semitism accusations were not sustained. The revisionists lost. We won."[72]

Historians, however, should not be so quick to shut the book on the question of Populism's character. Merely dismissing the clear examples of anti-Semitic imagery and arguments, not just in Populism but arguably in the broader American culture, as nothing since it was of "the Shylock-Rothschild kind" is bizarre at best, if not dangerously misinformed over how modern notions of racism worked in rhetoric and popular thought. The idea that there were separate categories for these racist caricatures, one based on an economic reading and the other on a more "real" psychological hatred, fails to grapple with the way in which economics and cultural beliefs of ethnic and racial identity are deeply intertwined. Historians like Roseanne Currarino have examined how anti-Chinese sentiment, far from merely being an issue of personal psychological failing on the part of white Americans, was in fact a reactionary expression of fear by labor activists that due to their race, culture, and consumption, Chinese immigrants were dangerous to modern society. Figures like Samuel Gompers and other AFL leaders believed that Chinese immigrants would forever be willing to work for little and consume even less, leaving white Americans who wanted higher wages and more economic comforts unable to compete and survive in the modern capitalist economy. Also, historians such as Michele Battini have demonstrated how modern anti-Semitic attacks exist only within a broader historical moment of the state and market as entities that religious minorities could, theoretically, take hostage.[73] To argue, then, that a distinction

---

[71] Walter Nugent, *Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2013), xi.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Michele Battini, *Socialism of Fools: Capitalism and Modern Anti-Semitism*, trans. Noor Mazhar and Isabella Vergnano (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp.2. As Battini argued, "My hypothesis is that this anti-Semitic anticapitalistic literature arose in the context of the intransigent Catholic reaction against the revolution in political rights, the free market, and secularization." As such, the way in which hatred of Jewish people was articulated

should be drawn between various anti-Semitisms because one was only concerned with Jewish people as running the banks and financial institutions, ruining the nation, and threatening democracy, first misses the point that this is precisely the mode of communicating anti-Semitism and is second the equivalent of saying a distinction and dismissal should be made which treats xenophobia based on fear of damage to the labor markets toward immigrants as not that serious. Or, conversely, that racism toward people of color which depicts black workers as lazy employees is not truly racist since it is "only" economically based.[74]

To make any of these arguments is to miss the point of the racism: worth, standing, and legitimacy are drawn from how culture determines people's places on the spectrum of production of value. In this way Jewish people were viewed as the stereotypical, dominant manipulators of the modern economy. In short, they were, as a group, allegedly the people who opposed the creation of a commonweal— a society that fulfilled the profound democratic promises of American life. In the collection of Jacob Coxey's papers housed at the Massillon Historical Society's archives is a copy of Heston's crucifixion cartoon. On the front page of a copy of *Sound Money* where the cartoon appeared is the handwritten note, "The result of the cast referendum. The same as the first," the message reads in faded cursive. It continues on the other side of the crucifed American nation, "Pilate said Who Shall I release unto you, the just man or Barabbas the Robber. And the people said give us the robber. The Jew has no more fear of the referendum now than then."[75]

---

by Christian, liberal democratic societies was in the form that Jews somehow controlled the entities of the modern state, modern financial institutions, and banks. "This was the new paradigm that arose in those years: the old enemies of Christianity had become equal to all other citizens and in fact constituted a hostile power within the national Christian community; thanks to the democratic guarantees they had obtained, the Jews could now with impunity conspire to use their economic power to conquer political power. As a consequence, the fight against "Jewish" capitalism should have been direct against its main protectors, namely, liberal institutions and the constitutional state."

[74] Roseanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[75] "History Repeats Itself," *Coxey's Sound Money*, April 7, 1896. Jacob Coxey's Papers, Massillon Historical Society.

Walter Nugent is not wrong to challenge the historical understanding that the Populists were overtly reactionary, xenophobic, and white supremacist, because the Populists were not the primary agents responsible for fostering, developing, and hoisting those politics onto the nation. Nugent, and others like Postel, Sanders, and Goodwyn correctly balk at the idea that the Populists who bequeathed this troubled legacy to the United States. White supremacy was a staple of American political life long before the American Populists of the 1890s, and Nugent and Goodwyn understand that inherent in the charge that the Populists had created the conditions of the later right wing Red Scare, and organizations like the white citizens' councils, was a polemical attack which equates Populist protest with the very worst of American cultural authoritarian impulses. Nugent does not mince words when he explains in his 2013 preface that historians critical of the Populists and xenophobic bigots run the risk of equating modern right wing authoritarians and reactionaries with one of the US's more important left wing social protest movements. "What showed up there and in monographs [on Populists] was not nativism and anti-Semitism, or conspiracy-mindedness and small-town ignorance, but a concern with economic, social, and distributive justice and a willingness, even eagerness, to use government to redress grievances, end corruption, and rein in the unregulated power of banks and corporation, especially railroads." As Nugent concludes, "As statists, the real Populists were polar opposites of today's faux populists, the Tea Party people."[76] Nugent reasons that since the Populists advocated for a reformed state it made little sense to associate them with later twenty-first century conservatives and reactionaries who persistently attacked the social safety net of the United States. Furthermore, it delegitimized Populists in an ahistorical way.

[76] Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists*, xi.

Coxey and other Populists were tolerant in a way that was virtually unheard of in many different political movements of their time. There is a profound difference between simply being tolerant and actually committed to a politics of anti-racism as a social and political movement. Between the seemingly opposite poles of Hofstadter and scholars who have chronicled the racism, anti-Semitism, and more alarmingly the readiness of certain supposedly tolerant white Populists to use racism, and Walter Nugent and the pro-Populist historians who have continuously argued the movement was racially egalitarian, tolerant, and not white supremacist, is a much more complicated reality. The Populists— Coxey, Browne, even figures like Tom Watson— could be open to multiracial solidarity in some instances, and then abandon those convictions when it was convenient. Tolerance was not a politics of committed social justice and anti-racism. Many of the Populists, Jacob Coxey included, were well ahead of many of their peers in the American social movements when Browne and he decided to have a racially integrated march. This act, seemingly simple, was something the suffragists at the height of their power could not muster the moral courage to do. But just as Browne was willing to adopt anti-Chinese sentiment in San Francisco in 1877 when it suited his purposes, Coxey too was willing to dive headlong into anti-Semitic images and arguments when it helped advance his ideas of monetary and economic change.

In December 1896, Coxey's loose commitment to tolerance was fully on display. The *Advance Guard* reported with excitement Coxey's plan to push for more direct democratic government initiatives as well as an entire expanded platform of reform. Reeling from the loss of Bryan, editors of papers like the *Advance Guard* were eager for "the People's party [to] meet this winter for reorganization," and saw Coxey's call for a conference at the Linden Hotel in St. Louis just such an opportunity. "The Guard and its editor have always been warm supporters of the good roads and non interest bond plan," and Coxey's ideas especially given his new platform were "none

too broad for us."[77] The *Advance Guard* reported verbatim all twenty-two points of Coxey's platform, much of it dealing with monetary and public spending, but in the twenty first demand, Coxey called for "the prohibition of foreign pauper and contract labor,"[78] a position the *Advance Guard* and other Populist newspapers had backed in numerous editorials calling for the protection of domestic labor markets by barring immigrants from entering the country and an expansionist foreign policy. "STOP THEM," a January 1897 story read on the front page of the *Advance Guard*. "Immigration must be checked at once, not enough work in America for our own people."[79]

Likewise, Mary Elizabeth Lease, a well-known Kansas Populist, argued in *The Problem of Civilization Solved* that American foreign policy should be a "war cry… Americas for the Americans." Lease called for whites to colonize the "tropical markets" in Latin America and that white Americans should "at once proceed to assert a protectorate over the Latin nation of America."[80] On December 18, 1896, the *Advance Guard* ran a story about a Colorado Populist candidate for Attorney General, John McAndrews, and his efforts to raise a group of vigilante militiamen to invade Cuba and assist in its "[the] fight for Cuban independence." The *Advance Guard* noted that McAndrews threatened any interference from the US government would "precipitate the revolution in this country."[81]

---

[77] "Coxey's Platform," *The Advance Guard*, December 4, 1896.
[78] Ibid.
[79] "Stop Them," *The Advance Guard*, January 29, 1897.
[80] Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 240. Postel cites this work and argues, "Few Populists may have read, much less agreed with, Lease's treatise," yet offers little evidence to support the idea that the movement did not.
[81] "Populists for Cuba," *The Advance Guard*, December 18, 1896. Another newspaper report of McAndrews efforts escribed the plan to gain numbers for the invading militia, a plan that sounded strikingly similar to Coxey's Army's march. "The volunteers will not leave Denver in small bodies and by stealth," McAndrews told reporters, "Neither are they likely to go to the Gulf Coast on railroad trains. Instead they will move overland, either on foot or on horseback, picking up tributary armies along the line of the march until, upon reaching Florida, they will have swelled to such a mighty host that the United States authorities will not care or dare to interfere with their embarkation for Cuba." "Soldiers for Cuba," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), December 15, 1896, 4.

In the same month, Coxey would temporarily fall out of grace with papers like the *Advance Guard* when he bolted the People's Party following Bryan's defeat and the resistance from the party to accept his political positions.[82] "Coxey as left the People's Party," the editorial read—

> "We are sorry to see Brother Coxey take this step, as we believe it to be hasty and unwarranted. Mr. Coxey has done much for the cause of reform, and will doubtless continue to do so, but we can never win in isolated band, and Mr. Coxey's action is a step toward further dividing the reform effort forces."[83]

In the side bar, to reinforce the message, was a series of one-line editorial comments: "Stop bickering," "Unite against the common enemy," "The enemies of the people only are interested in keeping the people divided," and "Any division of the reform forces is a move in the interest of plutocracy, however good the intention."[84]

Coxey, however, would soon be back in the good graces of papers like the *Advance Guard* and other Populist circles when he rejoined the party just a few months later to run as the Populist candidate for Ohio's gubernatorial race. "As it is known," the paper gushed, "Mr. Coxey is one of the most entertaining speakers in America, and one of the best campaigners and vote makers in the People's Party. Mr. Coxey was the only logical candidate for the party this fall…"[85] In August the Ohio People's Party met to draft and adopt their platform of the 1897 election, and the language and positions taken spoke to a party wide focus on monetary reform, direct democracy, and social welfare, all wrapped in the rhetoric of a need to revitalize America's true nationalism. "We assert our political purposes to be identical with those of the national constitution," it began. "We declare that this republic can only endure as a fee government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; and that it cannot be pinned together with bayonets while

---

[82] "COXEY! Kicks out of the Party, the Ohio Commonwealer Will Go It Alone," *The Advance Guard*, December 18, 1896.
[83] "Untitled," *The Advance Guard*, December 18, 1896.
[84] "Untitled," *The Advance Guard*, December 18, 1896.
[85] "The Coming of Coxey," *The Advance Guard*, September 10, 1897.

injustices rules the land." The Populists called for a politics that rejected the supremacy of entities like the corporation, arguing, "Corporations are creatures of statutes and have no vested rights which may not be altered or abolished by the law-making power." To create a commonweal— one bound by republican virtues, Christian social ethics, and socialist policies— the Populists reasoned that the state, under their guidance, would check their growing influence and power. It is important to stress, that they did not advocate for a return to small scale producerism, but instead insisted that the modern economic combinations and trusts were the basis of cooperation and advancement to serve a society. Once that service was no longer apparent, and corporations served an interest outside the democratic community, the platform called for their immediate dissolution. "When corporations combine to control prices or restrict production the state is duty bound to annul their charters; if foreign corporations, to deprive them of their privileges of doing business in the state."[86]

Coxey was fully on board. At a campaign rally in Defiance, Ohio Coxey gave a speech tying the money question to the problem of producerism and the way in which certain groups had hijacked the American government for their own purposes. "[Coxey] started in by explaining how the Rothchilds had connived to demonetize silver and reduce its price' and how, now that they had it down to its lowest ebb, they were purchasing the silver mines at less than half their value."[87] Despite the reports of the Populist press that Coxey's oratory and reasoning "deeply impressed" many Democrats and Republicans, Coxey and the majority of Populists in the coming election lost miserably. The movement as an independent, and vital, electoral force was at an end. This would not stop Coxey, however, from remaining active in politics. Following several failed bids at various electoral campaigns and running in virtually every political party active in the US, Coxey

[86] "The Platform," *The Advance Guard*, September 10, 1897.
[87] Coxey's Speeches, *The Advance Guard*, September 17, 1897.

was never able in the first two decades of the twentieth century to fully regain the national headlines he had captured from 1894-96. This would change when Coxey finally won a bid to Massillon's mayoral office. From 1897 through 1931, Coxey ran for office, agitated for reform, embarked on numerous speaking tours, and attempted a handful of marches to duplicate his 1894 march on Washington. Yet it seemed without Browne's natural ability to create sensation that the "General" was in much the same situation he was prior to meeting the Californian in Chicago in 1893— he was a greenbacker, dressed as a professor, brimming with ideas, but little ability to enact them.

4.4 Conclusion:

Although overall Coxey remained optimistic for the potential of radical change in America, throughout these years he would often attack the press, elected officials, and even voters for what he saw as their stupidity. In 1898 he embarked on what would become the first of many lecture tours. When asked how this lecture tour would work, Coxey told reporters, "There is not going to be any other speaker with me. I'm the whole show myself. I have purchased a mammoth tent 100 feet by 200 feet that will accommodate 10,000 people and also a 40 foot baggage car, painted white, with red and blue letters…giving the noninterest bond bill in full. I intend to travel all over the United States to lecture free on good roads and national currency…"[88] When the lecture tour failed to produce much interest or movement, Coxey was disheartened. In 1929, when he returned to the lecture circuit as well as a new publication, *The Big Idea*, Coxey could not help but title an editorial, "To the Dum[b]bells, Sceptics, Prejudiced, and Can't-Be-Dones of my Home Town Massillon, Ohio," before launching into a diatribe against US banking history, how the banks were

[88] "Coxey's Novel Show," *The Lafayette Daily Call* (Lafayette, Indiana), January 26, 1898.

stealing from the national economy, and how a socialized currency would solve much of the US's ills. Throughout many of these lectures Coxey was not above copying the techniques of his late partner Browne. Although he had effectively disowned Mamie for eloping with Browne, Coxey had no problems using his other daughter Ruth Patricia Coxey as a shameless attraction for attendees. In a full page advertisement in *The Big Idea*, Ruth appeared, dressed in flapper style and promising to "assist her father on the platform in the tent during [the] campaign."[89]

Figure 14: Advertisement for upcoming tour of Jacob Coxey and his daughter Patricia in The Big Idea. May 6, 1929. (Wisconsin Historical Society).

In 1939, Coxey, following his single term as mayor, gave another interview in which he argued that "the stupidity and indifference of the American people toward their own welfare" was

[89] "The 'General's' Daughter Ruth Patricia Coxey," *The Big Idea*, May 6, 1929, 9. Box 103, Misc. Newspapers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

often sometimes difficult to bear. But, he added, he had no interest in retiring. "When a man retires he dies."[90] In these years he was often in opposition to Roosevelt's various approaches, and his criticisms, along with his views on American nationalism put him in league sometimes with figures like Father Coughlin. Coxey was willing to support policies of Hitler and the Third Reich in these years, arguing that the new Führer had at least found a way to eliminate the influences of "international bankers" and that the new German government, unlike the Weimar Republic, was dealing with its monetary crisis. In 1941, his hometown paper, *The Evening Independent*, not an infrequent critic of his tenure as mayor, criticized Coxey's arguments that "Hitler will win the war." "[Hitler] may crush temporal governments," the paper admitted, "… but he cannot crush the spirit of freedom that is in all men…" The paper continued,

> Nor can we accept the theory held by 'General' Coxey that Hitler gained his place and power he holds simply by abolishing interest and what he calls the international bankers and that the United States can compete with Hitler's Germany unless it too abolishes interest and the international banking system.[91]

Coxey, simply put, was too narrowly focused and his brand of Populism, it appeared, had passed in relevancy.

Or had it?

Previous scholarship has largely emphasized Coxey's Army and the march in 1894, and insofar as historians have looked at Coxey's thinking and the impact the Army of the Commonweal in Christ has had, they have tended to ground its importance in an older producerism, before the 1896 national elections. This fundamentally misunderstands both the commonweal Coxey advocated as well as the particular branch of Populism he represented. Furthermore, the critics of Populism, such as Jan Werner Mueller, who grounds the criticisms of Populism in political theory

---

[90] Howson, *Jacob Sechler Coxey*, 405.
[91] "Roses and Thorns," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), 4.

and a quasi-defense of bourgeois liberal democracy, and James Livingston, who argues that the Populists were anti-modernists because of their critiques of corporations, miss two vital lessons about the radical potential and profound limitations of American Populism. First, the form of Populism that Coxey and other left-wing Populists embraced was far from anti-modern. Instead, this system of Populism embraced the modern, arguing only that the modern state could simultaneously tame the benefits of corporate capitalism and preserve democratic life. Coxey and other commonwealers did not engage the early Gilded Age debates over older agrarian, small scale producerism, much of them a holdover from the antebellum period. The various ideas concerning the constitution of the new commonwealth, based on modern forms of cooperation, required that commonwealers first embrace the fact that modern systems of capitalism had revolutionized production, specifically in terms of movement, efficiency, and output of goods. For Coxey, Lloyd, and other left-wing critics of the corporation the problem was that the enormous power of the corporation could, and was, reshaping state power to serve only its own interests at the expense of democratic government and the people who made up civil society. Coxey and other left-wing Populists broke with the socialists, however, when it came to the question of how best to approach this crisis on an intellectual and political level. For socialists the answer was to directly empower and organize the proletariat, who would then serve as the vanguard in overthrowing the current system and creating a new commonweal state. For left-wing Populists, the answer was to return to the promise of democratic government in the current form of the US's political state, shifting away from a republican style government and embracing instead a more direct form of democratic government. The nation-state, with its ability to influence the market and make laws, was the assumed basis of focus.

Yet since Coxey argued that the state, and really citizen participation in that state, was the basis of radical change there was naturally a clear demarcation of who was positioned as the primary benefactor of the coming commonweal. Furthermore, by drawing on the troubled legacy of the US's cultural assumptions of nationalism, Coxey revealed a deep-seated flaw in American reform efforts. By the 1890s people of color, immigrants, women, and workers had succeeded in winning major alterations to the US's system of political inclusion. Yet it remained a troubled legacy, and white supremacists, misogynists, and nativists were far from removed from power. The impulses to intolerance, xenophobia, and authoritarianism, rather than a problem of Populism's political logic, was instead an issue of history. Populists like Coxey drew strength from a legacy that was conflicted at best. Yes, as Henry Demarest Lloyd had acknowledged in his 1893 address to the AFL, the U.S. was born of revolution, and that potential still existed, sometimes erupting to the surface when circumstance and organizing permitted it. This reliance on a historically and politically specific assumption of civic and economic legitimacy best explains how Coxey could simultaneously advocate for multiracial actions, while peddling in the worst of American anti-Semitic caricatures.

Historians like Walter Nugent are, therefore, not wrong to stress the often surprising amount of racial tolerance found in what were often predominantly white organizations of the Populist movement. White supremacy, xenophobia, and nativism were not created by the movement of the 1890s to reshape corporate capitalism in a more democratic direction. Yet, Nugent's critique of historians like Richard Hofstadter misses an important point. Hofstadter never claimed that the Populists were the principal authors of American nativism, white supremacy, and authoritarianism. Instead, in works like *The Age of Reform* and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, Hofstadter argued that there was a multi-period phenomena in American history which

gravitated toward a paranoid and anti-democratic style of politics. The problem with American Populism was not specific to the Populists, either as a moment or a general political philosophy. Instead the problem of Populism was that it drew its strength from concepts of the nation, and this nationalism in the US was built upon a historic understanding that certain actors (either corporations, foreign empires, the elite, people of color, immigrants, religious minorities, etc.) were constantly attempting to subjugate the American way of life for their own "special interest" gain.

Daniel De Leon's observations about Coxey's Army illuminate the more lasting impact of Populist protests like the Army of the Commonweal of Christ. By organizing people to take to the streets as individuals, and then becoming part of a larger mass of bodies which directly challenged the state, Populist protest could serve as a hammer to smash the hegemonic claim that modern bourgeois liberal democratic states spoke for the "true" interest of "the people." For an entire generation of radical Progressive era protest leaders, some of whom were first mobilized in the commonweal marches following the Panic of 1893, this was precisely the promise of Populism and its contribution to a radical democratic politics.

CHAPTER 5. THE POPULIST PROTEST

5.1 Introduction

In 1923, Henry James published a biography of Richard Olney. James focused on Olney's career as a government official, especially Olney's time as Cleveland's Attorney General and then Secretary of State. James did not paint a gushing portrait of the late politician, or his influence on American politics. As the *American Historical Review* stated bluntly, "Neither [Cleveland nor Olney] posed for the future biographer. Neither thought much about his place in history… It is a merit of Mr. James's biography that he does not seek to make the case for Mr. Olney."[1] Yet although James refrained from simply praising Olney, he provided a more "nuanced" analysis of how the former Attorney General had "faced his daily dozen of hard tasks, with grim Puritan conscience, determined to do his duty regardless of either its attractive or its unpleasant features."[2], Although the historical recounting was not a celebration of Cleveland's and Olney's actions during the 1890s, it was nonetheless a defense of the order they had produced.

This became even more apparent when James turned to the opponents of Olney, specifically the labor movement, the Populist protests, and the economic unrest which had defined so much of his tenure in office. James dedicated nearly forty pages to "labor problems, the Coxeyites, the Chicago strike, and labor unions," and as James explained, although Olney may have been a less than sympathetic figure, the actions of the 1890s protesters were to blame for much of their own problems. "The gist of it was that, in order to help a strike by shop-workers in the town of Pullman," James wrote, "the [American Railway] Union planned to do nothing less

[1] Robert McElroy, "Review of Richard Olney and his Public Service," *The American Historical Review* 29:3 (April 1924): 578-579.
[2] Ibid.

than seize the country's transportation system by the throat and inflict more intolerable discomfort on the country than the country could bear."[3] James' argument was nearly identical to that of Olney's at the height of the unrest in 1894. Olney had accused the marchers and strikers of "anarchy of a different sort" since their actions forced the public to consider the plight of workers struggling against their employers and the private interests of a particular class of people. As James concluded—

> So inherently and essentially violent was this [program] that Debs's orders to the members of the Union to refrain from individual acts of violence were reasonably regarded as formalism and mockery. Of course, too, the strike leaders knew that disorders and hoodlumism would attend such a strike as surely as camp-followers attend the march of the best disciplined army. Debs's plan, putting it baldly, was to hit the public rather than the Company, although his purpose was doubtless to draw the public's attention to the injustices of the Pullman situation and thus induce their removal. His error lay in not seeing that such methods were certain to focus criticism and bitter hostility against his own union.[4]

James relied on a deeper assumption of what and how the public sphere of a liberal democracy should operate. According to James, the public sphere was a manifestation of a political logic that, if misunderstood, would result in painful losses for those who fumbled with it. It was this fumbling, James claimed, which had led to Debs, the ARU, and organized labor's painful losses in the Pullman Strike. James, like Olney, believed forcing such private concerns on the allegedly isolated and innocent general public was nothing short of tyranny. At best these actions could, possibly, draw sympathy, but more likely these actions of economic and civil disruption would result in public backlash.

Yet James' conclusion contained a largely unquestioned assumption. It is debatable exactly what the actual aggregate public opinion was in terms of support and opposition to the Pullman Strike and Coxey's Army in the summer of 1894. To be sure, there were those in the nation who

---

[3] Henry James, *Richard Olney and His Public Service* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 43-44.
[4] Ibid.

agreed with Olney, and then later writers like James, who saw the protests, strikes, and unrest as poor choices and dangerous anarchy. But the sheer number of people that Coxey, Debs, and other labor and Populist leaders were able to mobilize, along with the positive reception in some corners of the press and occasional warm welcome some towns gave the commonwealers, point to a nationwide scope of sympathy. However, haggling over the exact percentages of public support misses the basic premise of a protest and strike. Although public opinion is important, it was not the public's opinion or the press' writings which lost the strike and protest. If this were the case than Olney simply would have had only to flood the papers with editorial after editorial denouncing the demonstrations. But instead, Olney had been forced to rely on direct coercion, violent suppression, and explicit state violence to suppress the strikes and populist protests. Although hegemony provides a powerful tool in directing and controlling culture, it is not the only way social classes, with vested economic and political interests, maintain their status quo.

The failings of hegemony were felt deeply in the 1890s. The United States was in the midst of a widespread depression that called into question the very foundations of its economic society. Furthermore, the shift to corporate capitalism and a more aggressive international imperialism was in many ways a reconstitution of American hegemonic power, an acceleration of a logic laid out following the end of Reconstruction in the 1870s. All of this made the years 1892 through 1896 a moment of profound uncertainty as protests reshaped the concept of the people, and political realignments shifted the scope of state power in the halls of government. Olney was perhaps correct to assume that only federally orchestrated suppression of mass demonstrations on a national scale would put down the immediate threats of the summer of 1894. James' analysis of the Coxeyites and Pullman Strikers failed to take this into consideration. Likewise, James and other bourgeois liberal critics had no real appreciation for the fact that the strike and protests, although led by

political figures like Debs and Coxey, were in fact comprised largely of workers feeling the worst effects of the prolonged depression. Whereas James saw the protest and strikes as nothing more than tyrannical undemocratic speech acts at best, or a complete breakdown of civil society with "disorders and hoodlumism" at worse, the workers of these movements were already feeling the violent effects of the depressed economy.

Protests and strikes weaponized the public sphere in a way that directly challenged the logic of bourgeois liberalism. What James and Olney saw as the fault of the strike and protests, namely that they forced the general public to face specific unresolved concerns in society and that it mobilized people to directly challenge the state, was not a shortcoming of the tactics, but instead were the very goals of the actions. It was not a design flaw, but instead the very radical potential that made the actions worth pursuing.

Liberal bourgeois democracy's insistence on the permanently separated spheres of private and public life was meant to serve a purpose. By separating these spheres the power of the state was severely truncated, leaving great swaths of power to the private sphere, individuals, and institutions in civil society. Therefore, in the Populist movement and into the Progressive era pushes against these supposed borders of private and public life fueled a liberal fear which saw potential danger in a totalizing state that controlled multiple avenues of political, economic, and civil life. The charge that Coxey was promoting a kind of "paternalism" was not merely an empty rhetorical jab. Instead the argument posited that the role of the state was not to take too much interest in people's supposed private lives, be that personal welfare or more generally civil society's economic operation. This line of thought argued that the state's primary function was in preserving social and economic order. Agents, be they strikers or protesters, who seemingly threatened that order could find themselves thrown out of the protection the state was supposed to

afford them. The state was not merely an apparatus to enact the will of the people in bourgeois liberal democracy. Instead it was a super-historical apparatus that preserved a transhistorical order, specifically capitalism and republican government which once established could possibly change, but was assumed to sail through history as an established constituted entity.

In this logic the tensions between Populism as both historical phenomena and political logic clashed with liberal democracy. A common critique of the political philosophy of bourgeois liberal democracy bound the proponents of the commonweal together. But the relative shift from common agreement to specific programs might as well have been measured in the scale of miles, with impregnable walls separating the various camps of commonwealers, more permanently separating the commonwealers than the supposed divide of public and private spheres of American life. These differences fractured the commonwealers into numerous sectarian chapters with the advocates of the commonweal ranging from Coxey to Browne to Debs to Lloyd to Gronlund to Lewis all agreed that the current political state was insufficient for modern democratic people. The rise of the trusts and the increasing power of corporate capital drew the people of the nation into permanent, sustained contact with one another; the private and public did not match what figures like Olney and James claimed it was. Lloyd's major criticism in *Wealth Against Commonwealth* was that modern corporate capital had the ability to drastically reshape society, destroying the remnants of radical potential of democratic life in America and replacing it with hierarchical control. Only by understanding that such an all-consuming economic power, like the corporations, was not, in fact, private in any meaningful sense of the term but instead a common public concern would American democratic society move into a higher idealized state, one which embraced the most revolutionary potentials of American life.

At least this had been the hope. As Coxey's defeats multiplied in the final years of the 1890s, culminating in his loss in 1897 and the virtual destruction of the People's Party left-wing activists were forced to rethink their strategy. In the place of the People's Party arose a host of other organizations, perhaps most potent the American Socialist Party, which operated as a growing powerful third party in American electoral politics throughout the early twentieth century. Likewise, the AFL unlike the ARU, survived intact into the new century and was by the end of the 1890s the de facto national labor organization of the country. Figures like Debs abandoned the scheme to create a commonweal colony and instead turned to the dual effort of bolstering the Socialist Party as an electoral force and syndical unionism in the workplace with the Industrial Workers of the World. Coxey's approach of directly confronting the state seemed to be the prevailing method, although it was hardly Coxey's program or leadership that carried the day. After a brief stint in the Socialist Party, Coxey flitted back and forth in numerous parties, organizations, and various causes, always espousing a consistent greenback labor position as he did.

So increasingly irrelevant did Coxey seem to national politics that in 1900 a journalist from the *Inter Ocean* interviewed Coxey who seemed all but destined never to influence American politics or labor issues again. "New Role for Coxey," the headline read. "Old Commonweal Army Leader is Now a Quarry Operator." The Populist rabble-rouser, it appeared, had returned to his home in Ohio and resumed operation of his business. "Setting up as a large employer of unskilled labor, General Coxey has had a chance to demonstrate the practicability of his commonweal theories," the story read. Coxey maintained a policy of offering room and board to laborers at the quarry, and due to his reputation with the tramps of America the Coxey quarry was a frequent site for vagrants to get a meal and room. Coxey's son Jesse, the story reported, was increasingly

infuriated with his father's hospitality. The story recounted one supposed encounter. "You know me; my name's Coxey, General Coxey of the commonweal army," Jacob was reported to say to a group of tramps. "Make yourselves at home, eat all you want, and do a day's work Monday." After the hoboes had eaten and rested all weekend they promptly left on Monday morning immediately after breakfast. "The thing had happened so often," the story reported, "that young Jesse Coxey took matters in his own hands, commonweal or no commonweal." Grabbing his gun, Jesse tracked down the vagabonds and at gun point marched them back to the quarry and forced them to work. "General Coxey was somewhat chagrined at the show of force," the story reported.[5] In a further demonstration of just how far removed Coxey's political ideals were from the reality of his role as business operator the story could not help but mention where meals for the workers were served.

> On the switch near his profitable quarry stand four coaches. The one, a Pullman palace car, is used by Jesse Coxey, wife, and little daughter, as a dwelling place. A second car is used as kitchen and storeroom for workmen at the quarry. The dining room is in a third car, the one used by Coxey in his political tour over the United States. The sides of the car are decorated with attractive printing, telling the principles advocated by Coxey on non-interest-bearing bonds, good roads, and other questions.[6]

Pullman's cars, one of the most potent symbols of how the state and capital had won important battles in 1894 were the literal carriers of Coxey's current efforts. The story made sure to provide numerous illustrations.[7]

---

[5] "New Role for Coxey: Old Commonweal Army Leader is Now a Quarry Operator," *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago, Illinois), March 11, 1900, 27.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

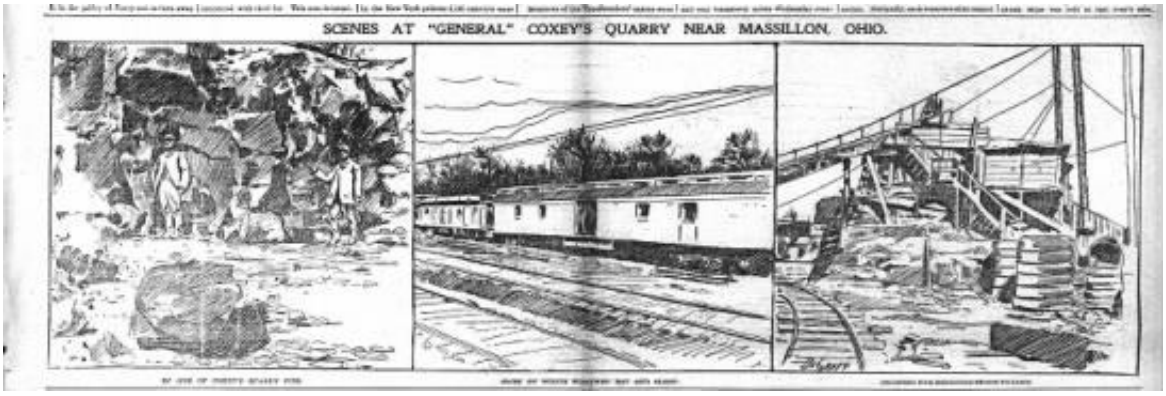

Figure 15: Editorial cartoon in The Inter Ocean discussing Coxey's return to Ohio as a businessman and quarry operator. March 11, 1900.

So sure were critics of the commonweal that the episode and figures associated with the march were unimportant subjects, whose importance was firmly placed in the past, that six years following James' publication of *Richard Olney and His Public Service* the Wisconsin trained historian Donald LeCrone McMurry offered the first full length historical study of the Army of the Commonweal in Christ in 1929 .Although a contemporary of John R. Commons and Richard T. Ely and grounded in the study of the politics of labor and the working class, McMurry offered a decidedly negative interpretation of Coxey, the Populist protests, and the unemployed. "Unemployment in the United States was an undoubted and an unpleasant fact," McMurry argued in *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894*., "but the poor are always with us, and this fact might have been taken much more as a matter of course if it had not been for the unique advertising campaign instituted by Jacob Sechler Coxey."[8] McMurry was unaware of the

[8] Donald McMurry, *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1929), 21.
"Burton Rascoe's Commentary," *Springfield Leader and Press*, February 4, 1930, 10. McMurry's hostility was not lost on readers. One conservative reviewer could hardly contain their approval of McMurry's dismissal. In a double review of Robert Penn Warren's biography on John Brown, whom the reviewer characterized as "Like most fanatics, he had no sense of honor…" the summary of McMurray's book read, "A splendid exposition of men's political passions when their stomachs are empty and their pants out as the seat. At other times they practically have no political passions…"

impending economic disaster that awaited the US. As the historian John D. Hicks writing in 1967 argued in his introduction to an updated edition of McMurry's work, "When Donald McMurry wrote his account of the 1894 marches of the unemployed, the United States, with the important exception of agriculture, was enjoying an abundant prosperity. The panic of 1929 and the great depression were still around the corner. There is nothing in this book to indicate that its author foresaw any better than the outstanding business leaders of the time the economic turmoil that was so close at hand."[9]

Amidst his criticism of the march, which he saw as confused, disingenuous sensationalism, and more importantly counter to what he saw as basic fundamental facts of a free, open market society, McMurry unwittingly made the case for Coxey's foresight when he dismissed the commonwealer's dire predictions of the American economy. "Ironically," Hicks wrote, "as McMurry observes in his concluding paragraphs, Jacob Coxey had scented the impending doom as early as 1928. The only reason that the coming hard times was not generally apparent, the Sage of Massillon declared, was that the newspapers were suppressing the evidence."[10] This lack of appreciation of how a new economic panic could easily plunge the U.S. back into depression that would rival even the bleakest months of the 1894 only serves as an important highlight to how the 1894 march on Washington, although attracting enormous amounts of attention, had not impacted large sections of thinking in the broader American public sphere. Instead, as it would become increasingly clear in the early 1930s, the power of the Populist protest resided in the ability to mobilize people to direct action, and in doing so force the general public and state to address particular issues and perhaps more importantly change the thinking of the participants themselves,

---

[9] John D. Hicks, preface second ed. *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1929), xi.
[10] McMurry, *Coxey's Army*, xi-xii.

not the observers. This ability to radically alter one's thinking via participation in the Populist protest was soon to erupt back onto the American stage. And like Coxey's Army of 1894, the nation's capital stood poised to be one of the major staging grounds.

5.2 Part One

In the years that followed Coxey's Army, the march morphed in people's thinking, contributing to an extended debate over its meaning, and more importantly, its impact. How was this march, which existed for only a few months in 1894, able to achieve such long lasting cultural and political recognition?

One strain of thinking argued the march was important mostly because it had raised visibility of issues for people to think about and discuss. Typical of political bourgeois liberal thought, the public sphere arises from civil society where actors engage in prolonged, rational debate over shared concerns. The liberal public sphere assumes that political change originates in the communicative and cognitive actions of the civil sphere of a society, that this sphere remains permanently separated from the state, and that it exists largely as a static state, moving through historical issues and concerns in a prolonged, unending, and continuous debate. This public sphere, naturally, intersects with the political state; these intersections— either in terms of informing decisions in elections or in providing needed public opinion for government officials— offer a vital lifeline between state and civil society.

Some of the strongest proponents of this understanding of Coxey's Army's importance came decades later in the prolonged historiography of the march. Historians like Benjamin Alexander, Jerry Prout, and Lucy Barber have examined the way in which Coxey's Army and the very act of public demonstrations, have reshaped the content and context of the public sphere, but have not fundamentally altered it. Prout equates 1894 with the work of writers and activists, like

Jacob Riis, who used the guaranteed protections of freedom of the press to raise awareness for the plight and issues of working class people. Yet, unlike Riis and other writers, Coxey organized people in public spaces, thrusting them into visibility and empowering them as direct political actors. "By financing and staging a spectacle," Prout explains, "Coxey hoped to dramatize the plight of the unemployed and have Congress adopt… his program. In doing so, he not only brought the unemployed to the steps of the Capitol but, with the aid of unprecedented news coverage, he brought the unemployed into the homes of millions of Americans."[11]

Barber makes a similar argument in her 2002 book *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Tradition*. The marchers of 1894 had initiated a long lasting practice of taking concerns to the streets, specifically the streets of the national capital, and in so doing forcing a visibility of issues and discussion in government that contributed to liberal democracy. As she argues, "The visible public controversies embodied in these demonstrations improve American politics by energizing political debate on terms set by the people and the organization they support. The events, in turn, spark wider debates over policy, the appropriate ways for citizens to influence politics, and the effectiveness and legitimacy of the federal government. Thus, by creating the tradition of marching on Washington, organizers, authorities, and other observers have won a 'place' for American citizens in the nation's capital."[12]

In this way, Coxey's Army and the Pullman Strike— major events of the 1890s— not only catapulted figures like Jacob Coxey and Eugene Victor Debs to national prominence, thereby impacting movements like Populism and labor, but did so in a way that supposedly challenged some of the norms of *practice* in bourgeois liberal society. The belief that the political process was

---

[11] Jerry Prout, *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 6.
[12] Lucy Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

sufficiently meeting the economic needs of the masses of people was difficult to maintain when hundreds of unemployed and discontented workers appeared on the steps of the nation's capital and stopped the nation's railways. Likewise, the belief that the American public sphere adequately gave weight to all voices was also shattered when striking and protesting workers were brutally suppressed by federal troops and police.

This unmasking of state power, the flaws in bourgeois liberal logic, and capital's exploitive nature provided an early step in a social movement's building a powerful counter hegemonic movement. But merely raising the issue, of gaining "representation" and "visibility" of a problem, did not automatically lead to a solution. Coxey's Army had no shortage of coverage in the press, and major thinkers and writers in American history would later recount how that coverage impacted their thinking on economic and political issues. Figures like Ray Stannard Baker, W.E.B. DuBois, Jack London, John R. Commons, and Garet Garrett all went on to write about and explore how their participation or observation of the Industrial Army movement confronted them with the issues of Gilded Age America. What is noteworthy about these writings is that there was never a systematic or even general agreement about the significance of the march, let alone the steps (if any) that should be taken to address the economic concerns of the working class.

DuBois credited the march as part of a series of observations that primed him to think more deeply about the American economic system and its shortcomings. DuBois recounted how Coxey, his ideas, and the march's goals were actively discredited by his professors at Harvard, and how institutions of formal education all actively discredited mass movements of the working class. "We were strong for the gold standard and fearful of silver. The attitude of Harvard toward labor," DuBois wrote, "was on the whole contemptuous and condemnatory. Strikes like the railway strikes

of 1886 and the terrible Homestead strike of 1892, as well as Coxey's Army of 1894, were pictured as ignorant lawlessness, lurching against conditions largely inevitable."[13]

DuBois was not alone. In 1895 Henry Demarest Lloyd, Richard Ely, and Edward Bemis exchanged correspondence over the issue of violations to academic freedom and free thinking when Bemis, an economist and advocate for public ownership of utilities, was pressured to resign for his political viewpoints. Bemis, in a letter to Lloyd, explained that his predicament was not isolated. "When an instructor at the Johns Hopkins University in Sociology read a paper to his advanced students, speaking favorably of the character of most of the men in the Coxey Army as he had personally observed, the Baltimore Sun reported it a little extravagantly, with the result… that wealthy business men remarked to the President 'I see you have another Ely there.' Thereupon, Mr. Gilman declared to some of the faculty that rather than have any trouble it would be better not to have any department of Sociology at all."[14] Bemis was eventually forced to resign from his position at the University of Chicago.

Although Coxey's Army certainly did impact debate it did not necessarily translate into widespread approval or a logical procession of addressing the specific issues raised by the marchers. Other writers, some of whom were even associated with the Industrial Army movement and the later socialist movement, unlike DuBois, had less of an "awakening" through their experiences. Jack London, a loosely affiliated member of the western industrial army contingent "Kelly's Army", saw the entire affair, both during and largely after, as nothing more than an opportunity to personally benefit himself. London openly admitted and bragged about how he and a group of friends after joining the movement would travel ahead of the main contingent of

---

[13] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1968), 142.
[14] Edward Webster Bemis to Henry Demarest Lloyd, June 1, 1895. Box 6, Folder 3, Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society.

marchers, arrive in a town along the path of the march a day or so earlier than the rest, feast on the food and take the supplies that sympathetic townsfolk had gathered for the group, and then move on leaving the main group of marchers and organizers without food or supplies when they eventually reached the town on the route. "I kept a diary on part of the trip," London later bragged, "and as I read it over now I note one persistently recurring phrase, namely, 'Living fine.' We did live fine. We even disdained to use coffee boiled in water. We made our coffee out of milk, calling the wonderful beverage, if I remember rightly, 'pale Vienna.'" London justified plundering of supplies by arguing that there was no foul in simply taking advantage of an opportunity. "While we were ahead, skimming the cream," London recollected, "… the commissary was lost far behind, the main Army coming along in the middle starved. This was hard on the Army, I'll allow; but then, the ten of us were individualists. We had initiative and enterprise. We ardently believed that the grub was to the man who got there first, the pale Vienna to the strong."[15]

Other writers were outright hostile. The conservative writer Garet Garrett remains relatively understudied by scholars of American literature and history, but what little is known about him paints a fascinating picture. Garrett has some notoriety, especially among certain circles of libertarian thinkers and artists, and is often credited with being a prototype of later writers like Ayn Rand. Writing in a popular biography of Garrett entitled *Unsanctioned Voice: Garet Garrett, Journalist of the Old Right,* the columnist and conservative commentator Bruce Ramsey argues that Garrett's definitive moments came in his early days as a journalist covering the labor disputes of 1894. Although it is debatable whether or not Garrett personally reported on Coxey's Army, he did witness firsthand the Pullman Strike.[16] Recounting later his disgust at watching striking

---

[15] Jack London, *The Road* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

[16]Bruce Ramsey, *Unsanctioned Voice: Garet Garrett, Journalist of the Old Right* (Idaho: Caxton Press, 2008), 15-19. Ramsey offers the largely unconvincing argument for Garrett's presence during Coxey's Army by arguing, "Seeing off Coxey's Army— a crusade for causes Garrett would later oppose— would have been a glorious start for a career

workers in the streets forcibly stopping and sabotaging the railways, Garrett said, "Have you ever been part of a mob— something like a lynching mob? I have. It is terrible."[17]

Although scholars continue to debate whether or not Garrett was present during Coxey's Army's march, there is no question that the march had a deep impact on him. In 1922, Garrett published a novel called *The Driver* that begins with a dramatic retelling of Coxey's Army, and then tells the story of the rise of the railroad tycoon Henry Galt, his plans to buy and fix a failing railroad line, and his understanding of the American economy. Garrett is particularly harsh on the labor movement and American Populism, depicting the leaders of the movements as either strange cranks or opportunists. The marchers and masses of people, on the other hand, are simply ragged and unorganized. Although Garrett depicted the marchers as largely motivated by real economic pain, he described them as a force of antagonism, a march against the institutions and norms of the United States. "What held them together? Possibly, a vague, herd sense of moving against something and a dogged reaction to ridicule. This feeling of againstness is sometimes stronger to unite men, especially unhappy men, than a feeling of forness. The thing they were against was formless in their minds… Therefore it was a foredoomed crusade. The climax was pitiably futile."[18]

Historiographical debates concerning Populism are rife with contention precisely because of the difficulty in arriving at a conclusive definition of the movement. In other words, the contention found in historiographical debates concerning Populism's meaning and significance are not the creation of historians; the mixed and unclear meaning has existed since the movement's

---

in journalism… it suggests that he had left home, and lost his shirt, the previous summer or early fall, when he was 15. That seems improbable today but boys left home early in those days… Was Garrett there? I think he was. The rest of The Driver is clearly imaginary. This scene, and ones from Coxey's Army, are real."

[17] Ibid, 17.

[18] Ibid.

creation. This Populist protests, like Coxey's Army, were not significant as political speech acts because they simply inspired debate over issues needing resolution. If this were so, then there would be evidence that the protest led to some particular change. Historians like Prout and Alexander credit going off the gold standard, public works, and unemployment benefits in claiming simultaneously that Coxey was a kind of proto-New Deal figure and that the march predicted and heralded the coming reconfiguration of American state power and liberalism. But this all begs the question— why did Coxey's Army, if it were indeed the match that set ablaze the fires of the New Deal, take so long to ignite? What was it, precisely, that bound the years 1894 to 1932? The answer, of course, is simple. The mid-1890s and the early 1930s shared one particular important historic detail in common— massive, paralyzing economic depression. Less a product of rational debate, and more a reaction to growing turmoil, the path from Populism to New Deal liberalism is precisely that, a path. Meandering and winding without a clear destination, like some lazy stream, the image of the path inspires less a sense of purpose and more a sense of makeshift usefulness. For decades the activists, Coxey primary among them, had advocated particular policies that would have, it was hoped, fundamentally alter the American political economy. These activists and movements occasionally won major victories at varying levels of government, but throughout these years there was a near intransigent refusal to change, a conservative mindset that spoke more to entrenched interests and direct power over the state and economy than it did to the ability to persuade in open debate. The dismissive tone, then, of novelists like Garret and historians like McMurry simply highlight this. Although the subject of serious literary endeavors and serious historical studies, events like Coxey's Army and the ideas it advanced did not warrant serious consideration. Populism was nothing more than the whining of the discontented masses funneled by the ambitions of dubious leaders.

Therefore, the creation of the commonweal, or less ambitiously the attempt to enact some of its ideas, did link the two periods of the Gilded Age and Depression Era, just not in a neat, ordered, and rational manner. Instead, it was more like the constant rising of a wave and its breaking across a seemingly unmovable rocky shore. The more the people railed, the more the state and capital could dispatch forces to crush the efforts and then later the efforts could be justified or outright conceal it in the broader culture of the print press.

The lasting legacy and importance of Coxey's Army and the Populist protest was therefore not in the way it inspired debate and rational discourse over particular issues. Instead, it impacted society in two major ways. The first has been discussed in chapter three where Coxey's Army and the broader practice of strikes, protests, and amassing the people to challenge the state led to a major shift not just in the People's Party, but in organizations like the Democratic Party. An impact, as it was shown, was less defined by predictable progression, and more so by volatility and unpredictability. Second, and less studied, was the impact Coxey's Army had on the minds of certain activists. Although Coxey's Army was not able to lead to changes in actual policies there is evidence that as an action of Populist protest it did inspire activists, movements, and rank and file people to take their actions directly to the streets. Coxey's Army, to be sure, was not the first time mass street demonstrations over politics and economic unrest had occurred, but it was important in that it coincided with a moment in US history when the concepts of nationalism, economics, and who constituted "the people" were in profound flux. Daniel De Leon, for example, observed that Coxey's Army was more important for its melding and reshaping of previously antagonistic groups (in his observation white and black workers) through the practice of the protest, into a new conception of the people, in his thinking a group opposed to capital and bourgeois government. De Leon was not alone in this observation.

Arguably one of the most significant protest leaders and labor organizers shared this opinion with De Leon. Born in 1837, Mary Harris was known throughout much of her early life, to the few who did know her, as a mother, teacher, and occasional dressmaker. In her later life, however, she was known simply as "Mother Jones" and the more interesting title, "The Most Dangerous Woman in America." Yet like most activists her transformation to activism and willingness to protest was a process. When her husband and four children died in 1867 and then her dress shop was destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871, Jones turned increasingly to social activism, focusing on the labor movement. By 1880, she was fully engrossed in the labor movement, but was still a relatively unknown as a national figure. In 1890 she was present and instrumental in the founding of the union of the United Mine Workers, and in 1894 she organized a small contingent for the industrial army movement. Unlike her counterparts in Coxey, Kelly, Fry, and other branches of the army, Jones' contingent never planned on marching to the capital. Instead, there was a sympathy rally and protest, one of countless that were held around the nation to raise awareness and show support for the Army of the Commonweal.

Although the main contingent of Coxey's Army did not permit women to march with the group for fear that the press would report on how the protest was encouraging debauchery, several of the other contingents encouraged the mixing of men and women, and some of the western groups were even led by women activists. In 1897, by this time known as "Mother Jones" to the press, a reporter asked Jones, "What do you think of Coxey['s] army?... Did it do any good or not?" Jones replied—

> It did a great deal of good… It set people thinking as nothing else could have done. Some people think that you can convey ideas to others through their ears. Philosophers say we can only reach the brain, the reason, through the eyes. The Commonweal army's march was an object lesson to this country that is still bearing results.[19]

[19] "'Mother Jones' is Here: Notable Character During the Debs Strike," *The Kansas City Times*, February 23, 1897.

What Jones thought those results were was not difficult to figure out. Speaking to the reporter from the National Reform Editors' association's convention, the reporter noted that it had been Jones who had intervened to save the "wretched 'wealers' [when they] were in jail in Leavenworth. It was she who interceded with the Governor and secured their transfer from the hot and spirit-crushing cells to a cool and airy camp."[20] Jones had taken to calling herself "Mother of the Commonweal" during the summer of 1894, perhaps to decrease the sexual tension of having women intermixed and likewise pioneering what would become her practice of using femininity and concepts of republican motherhood to benefit activist efforts.[21]

Jones' argument that ideas are conveyed not through one's ears, but instead one's eyes, at first seems a distinction without a difference. What was the difference whether people "heard" of economic hardship or "saw" it? The answer is less about the mode of communication, and more about how the act of protesting and marching altered people's thinking. To be sure, not everyone who participated in the march had the same reaction as Jones, Jack London being a prime example. But Jones' larger argument was quite apt. The act of simply hearing about an issue meant that only "visibility" and passing acknowledgment of a problem was being raised. As it was discussed in chapter one with the visibility of people of color at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, mere representation and visibility of a people or a set of issues did not translate into any kind of positive change. Therefore, what was the difference for someone like Jones to claim that we could "only reach the brain, the reason, through the eyes"? The answer had less to do with any communicative action, visual or auditory, and more to do with the conscious state that was altered when people

---

[20] "'Mother Jones' is Here: Notable Character During the Debs Strike," *The Kansas City Times*, February 23, 1897.
[21] Rosemary Feurer, "Mother Jones Lives: Adventures in Scholarly, Social Movement and Public History Revival of an Iconic Labor Activist," (Paper, Midwest Labor and Working Class History 2018 Colloquium, Iowa City, May 26, 2018).
Rosemary Feurer, "Radical Miners, Mother Jones, and the Occupying Tradition," (Paper, Fighting Inequality: Joint Conference of the Labor and Working Class History Association and the Working Class Studies Association, Georgetown University, May 28, 2015).

broke out of the predetermined trails set by society and instead formed their own pathways toward change.

The Populist protest, the strike, and mass demonstrations, be they marches, riots, or uprisings, did this in two very important ways. First, it initiated a crisis, visible and public, "grabbing by the throat" as James asserted, that forced some action on the part of the broader society. Instead of merely raising the issue in the form of the debate, where niceties and deference to power structures determine the content and scope of an argument, the strike and protest forces society to at least possibly contend with the plight of certain people who are often ignored, marginalized, and silenced. The second part is directly related to this first point. By showing society that fundamental problems are not being addressed by current society the protest, strike, or riot serves as a powerful corrosive of the hegemony of a particular historical period's status quo. Fundamentally questioning the foundations of a society by stepping outside its prescribed norms, protests can shut down normal political processes, strikes can cripple the economy, and the riot can shift power unexpectedly into the hands of people who previously did not have power. This is the literal way the concept of "the people" can be drastically rewritten, reformed, and revolutionized. Jones, DuBois, and others who witnessed and participated in the march testify to this radical alteration as they shifted their own perceptions from citizens in a liberal democratic republic, to advocates for a radically new society benefiting from the modern modes of production, based on cooperation, and designed to allocate wealth for the common good.

Jones, like Coxey, continued her political and activist work long after the 1894 march. Becoming known to the press simply as "Mother Jones" in the remaining years of the nineteenth century and the beginning years of the twentieth, in 1903, Jones organized a children's march from Philadelphia to Oyster Bay, New York, to protest the nation's use of child labor and demand that

President Theodore Roosevelt do more to stop the practice. Upon arriving in the mill town, Jones had asked reporters why they had so consistently failed to report on the wretched conditions of the town's children? "I asked the newspaper men why they didn't publish the facts about child labor in Pennsylvania. They said they couldn't because the mill owners had stock in the papers."[22] The solution was simple. If the newspapers would not report on the conditions, ignored and normalized by daily toil, then a campaign which organized those directly affected into the streets would force society to deal with the issue. The entire march was straight from the strategy of Coxey and Browne. High on sensationalism, the spectacle of marching children carrying banners demanding school, not death in mines and drudgery in textile mills, was too much for the press not to cover. Furthermore, Jones correctly calculated that Roosevelt, a politician who prided himself on being a voice of the people and reform, but notoriously quick to anger when directly challenged, would be the perfect foil, a representative of how the state claimed to care, but still failed miserably to protect its most vulnerable inhabitants. The press coverage was predictably mixed. "[A] crusade now in progress under the leadership of 'Mother' Jones, the woman agitator," the *Evening Star* reported in horror, "will undoubtedly receive vigorous public condemnation. This woman has organized and started on its way from Philadelphia to New York a column of four hundred children… They are to journey, unless stopped by the authorities, to the metropolis and there hold meetings and collect funds for the strikers."[23]

The paper noted the similarities between Jones and Coxey. "The deplorable spectacle presented by the so-called Coxey 'army' a few years ago proved the utter inutility of such demonstrations." The editorial admitted that, yes, perhaps the marchers of 1894 and 1903 technically had the right to protest and march, but that it was nonetheless foolish. "But their

---

[22] Mary Harris Jones, *Autobiography of Mother Jones* Dover ed. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1925), 40.
[23] "'Mother' Jones' Children's Crusade," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), July 8, 1903, 4.

exercise of this right was a travesty upon the Constitutional guarantee. Just so the children's march to New York will doubtless prove a mistake, lowering the dignity of the position of the strikers and ultimately injuring them… The day for marching propagandas has gone by."

The *Evening Star* was not the only paper to tie together Jones' and Coxey's marches. "'Mother Jones' March," the headline of the *Salt Lake Tribune* read. "Female Coxey with Forty Followers Camps in Newark Ball Grounds for Night." The story continued by detailing the march. "'Mother Jones' and her band of about forty textile workers, reached here today, having marched from Elizabeth. After parading the streets, the army encamped at the ball grounds and will leave for Paterson tomorrow."[24] Another western newspaper, the *Washington Standard*, went into greater depth about how the two campaigns nearly mirrored one another. "Another Coxey army is afoot in the East, with a woman at its head— a 'Mother Jones'— possessing all the audacity and virility of her male (it would hardly be proper to say manly) prototype," the story began. "She claims to represent the textile workers, and her objective point is not Washington, to camp on the capitol steps, at the feet of Congress, but to invade Oyster Bay, and meet the President in a face-to-face discussion. Mother Jones gathers fame from a martyr's crown, as did Coxey, and as do all crusaders, and seems to glory as much over the sensation she creates as did the phenomenal tramp, who in years agone, led his cohorts on a visionary achievements as did the crazy Spanish Knight, Don Quixote, and his devoted and valiant Squire, Sancho Panza."[25]

Although somewhat more sympathetic to Jones than it was to Coxey's Army (although barely) the paper nonetheless concluded that Jones' children's crusade was a fool's errand with little chance of getting Roosevelt to move on the issue. As the story concluded—

> Mrs. Jones would not take no for an answer in New York, and besieged Mayor Low and Acting Police Commissioner Ebstein all day before obtaining a reluctant

[24] "'Mother Jones' March," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 16, 1903, 10.
[25] "'Mother Jones' Hobby," *The Washington Standard* (Olympia, Washington), July 31, 1903, 2.

> permission to parade Broadway and hold a meeting on one of the smaller parks of the city… The parade, with some modifications was, however, finally permitted, and Mother Jones, doubtless inspired thereby, has announced her determination of marching on Oyster Bay, although her request to President Roosevelt for an appointment has met so far with a dignified silence. She, in her speeches, makes the most of this, as if to enforce a graciousness that does not come with a free will.[26]

Yet despite Jones, the children, and the strikers' best efforts they indeed could not get Roosevelt to entertain them, let alone their demands. "An Oyster Bay special says that President Roosevelt will not receive Mother Jones' 'Coxey's army.'" Roosevelt provided the excuse that he would only meet with a march "composed of women who can't vote."[27] However, although Roosevelt refused to meet with the children and Jones the march had accomplished its goal. Jones years later would recount the entire episode in her autobiography saying, "our march had done its work. We had drawn the attention of the nation to the crime of child labor."[28] While the attention of the press had been captured Jones had not wasted time trying to convince the press or president that they should change their minds. Instead, by organizing the people directly she and other participants in the strike and march had helped galvanize the workers to continue directly challenging the company and local government. Although the immediate strike was successfully broken by the company, the state legislature of Pennsylvania capitulated and passed a child labor law which, as Jones proudly reported, "sent thousands of children home from the mills, and kept thousands of others from entering the factory until they were fourteen years of age."[29]

Jones and Coxey maintained a professional relationship as organizers and activists throughout the early twentieth century, Jones passing away in 1930. In 1914, when Coxey attempted to organize another march on D.C., the press largely dismissed the efforts. The *Inter*

---

[26] "'Mother Jones' Hobby," *The Washington Standard* (Olympia, Washington), July 31, 1903, 2.
[27] "Untitled," *The Times* (Shreveport, Louisiana), July 24, 1903, 4.
[28] Jones, *Autobiography*, 47.
[29] Ibid.

Ocean represented the reception of the second Coxey's Army by running a mocking cartoon of a scruffy vagabond carrying the sign "We Demand Free Eats," arguing that the unemployed Coxey associated with were simply lazy and unwilling to work. Coxey's portrait hung above the tramp in mock grandeur. Yet, despite this, Jones enlisted to help with the efforts. "Mother Jones Aids Coxey," one story declared. Coxey reciprocated the gesture of solidarity, telegraphing "a commission as 'colonel' in the army Thursday to 'Mother' Jones, miners' leader, in Denver."[30]

Figure 16: Editorial cartoon in The Inter Ocean discussing Coxey's 1914 return march on Washington. February 15, 1914.[31]

Yet despite the best efforts of Coxey to maintain interest in his monetary and government policies, and Jones' tireless efforts to organize the working class in strikes and demonstrations, the 1920s

[30] "Mother Jones Aids Coxey," *The Akron Beacon Journal*, March 19, 1914, 6.
[31] "Coxey Again to Lead Tramp Army," *The Inter Ocean*, February 15, 1914, 27.

approached and with them a popular cultural understanding reflected in writers like McMurry, London, and Garrett that the turmoil of the 1890s to early 1900s was in the past, and really, the Populist labor activists had overreacted to a temporarily bad situation. The coming Great Depression, and with it the reemergence of the Populist protest on the nation's stage would soon prove how wrong that conclusion had been.

5.3 Part Two

After October 29, 1929 it became increasingly difficult for elected officials and writers like McMurry and Garrett to claim that the problems of the 1890s had only been a passing phase of American economic development and that good times, a healthy economy, and a prosperous American business system were there to stay. As the American stock market crashed, and along with it the global economy, rampant depression, economic volatility, and social unrest followed.

Throughout the 1920s, a bizarre cultural phenomenon, which was nothing short of historical erasure, had ensued with the so-called "Gay Nineties" obsession in literature and advertisements. The term, often attributed to the artist Richard V. Culter and his series of drawings in *Life*, depicted the last decade of the nineteenth century as a period of quaint outfits, simpler social times, and perhaps most ridiculously, personal, prosperous, comfort. As one article advertising an upcoming themed night at a local comedy club put it, "There is romance and there is humor in looking back to the 'Gay Nineties'… 'The Nineties represented 10 years, an extremely interesting period, just before the dawn of the twentieth century and its mad rush toward an advanced civilization— they were years which somewhat took on the coloring of the exciting days to follow." The story continued, delving into specific details of the decade, such as, ""The World's Fair,' the greatest exposition the world seems destined to ever know, came within the third years of the 'Gay Nineties' and stamped upon the minds of the generation living then a memory which

time can never erase."[32] For most during the period, especially in places as volatile as 1890s Chicago, the memory of the reality of the decade may or may not have been possible to erase, but nonetheless the realities of it were about to be duplicated again, rushing back to the surface as the economic depression worsened.

Following Woodrow Wilson's presidency three consecutive Republicans had held the White House. The most recent inhabitant, Herbert Hoover, had spent a lifetime building what seemed an invincible resume. He was a successful businessman, humanitarian, and then public servant in the administrations preceding his own presidency. Yet any widespread popular opinion of competence was first shaken by the onset of the Great Depression and then further eroded as the crisis deepened. As the crisis spread, destroying the nation's and people's economic prospects, faith in the federal government generally, and Hoover's administration specifically, became an associated casualty. Protests and demonstrations, none of which had ever abated fully in the 1920s came rushing back to the surface as people, organizations, and other branches of government increasingly turned to Hoover for leadership and answers.

The desire for federal leadership, along with the perception that Hoover could be doing more, were well documented by the staff of the administration. In March of 1931 Theodore Joslin, a reporter and admirer of Hoover, was named as the White House's Press Secretary. Writing in his journal, Joplin could hardly contain his excitement. "I became [Press] Secretary to President Hoover today," Joplin wrote. "After twenty-two years of work as a newspaper man, I have accepted the one and only appointive government position I would [even] consider holding and under the only President in my time that I would care to serve."[33] If Joslin had any notion that his

---

[32] Elizabeth Lyman, "Comedy Club Soon to Turn History's Pages Toward Gay Nineties: Event Scheduled for April 23 Will Recall Days of Flaring Skirts and Bicycles Built for Two," *Dayton Daily News*, April 10, 1927, 33.
[33] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry, March 17, 1931. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

new job would be easy or free from the demands of public needs, it was quickly shattered. A month later Joslin wrote in another entry, "The 'nut' letters are highly amusing. I am getting a raft of them."[34] There was simply no shortage of demands on the White House's attention. As Joslin mused—

> One woman in Philadelphia has sent me a love letter every day since I was appointed. That's a new experience. One nut wrote I was insane to take this position and was coming here to put me out of my misery. The secret service picked him up in Baltimore. A religious fanatic sent me a letter with an enclosure for the President. Here is the note he attached to the President's letter: 'Mr. Joslin is an American; and he is all right and can be trusted. But this letter is not to be opened by any sneaky, smiling two-faced Roman Catholic, with a smile and a smirk, nor by any grinning, two-faced negro.' Shades of the KKK movement![35]

The demands on the White House quickly became more organized, specific, and sustained. In May of 1932, hundreds of veterans of the First World War set out from Portland, Oregon. Their demand was simple, yet politically charged. They demanded immediate payment for their services in the war. Congress had previously rejected measures to offer immediate relief to veterans, and Hoover himself was somewhat uncommitted. The President and Congress worried that such efforts were too paternalistic and furthermore that they could result in inflation and a further destabilization of the economy. In 1924, Congress had passed a law that would result in bonus payments to veterans, but that was not set to take full effect until 1945. As many veterans argued they were homeless, many with families, and could find no work. Merely offering payment half way through the next decade was not sufficient.[36]

---

[34] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry April 11, 1931. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[35] Theodore G. Joslin diary entry April 11, 1931. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[36] Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 75-77.

Gathering initially on the nation's west coast, word spread and much like the industrial army of the previous century, the "Bonus Army" swelled to hundreds of members, many of whom took it upon themselves to make their way to the nation's capital and demand action from the state. However, travel remained a barrier. Relying on railroads, sympathetic people along the routes to D.C., and donations from organizations, the members of the bonus army made their way to the capital in various ways. The movement did not possess a single political logic, much less an agreed upon strategy of what would be done when they arrived in Washington. "All we can hope to do is make them statesmen in Washington vote on the Bonus and go on the record," one veteran told the press. Others thought that the physical presence of masses of bodies, specifically veterans and their families, would surely force the legislators and President into action. Many others, however, simply were desperate. Marching to D.C. at least provided them something to do to attempt to alleviate their situation. To "pay" for the trip across country, many of the veterans were forced to simply show up at the railway stations and demand passage. As Lucy Barber has argued, insofar as this strategy worked in places like Portland the victory was one of pure luck. The railway companies fearing the negative press that would accompany attacking veterans and their families permitted the veterans passage, and state governments, also fearful of negative blowback, did nothing to stop the contingents as they made their way to the District of Columbia. "These veterans had none of the systematic political experience that previous organizers like Jacob Coxey, Carl, Browne, and Alice Paul had brought to their efforts. Only over the course of the journey did leaders and something resembling a strategy emerge," Barber argues.[37]

Coxey watched the efforts with approval. Appearing in a photograph with Walter Waters, a young veteran from Oregon who led the initial contingent and who some considered the

[37]Ibid.

movement's leader, Coxey argued that the bonus army was following in his footsteps of marching and demanding currency solutions to the economic depression. Coxey's support of putting pressure on Hoover was something that he himself had been doing for years. As Coxey saw it, the bonus army was just the latest of protests demanding a long standing Populist grievance. By infusing increased cash supplies into the economy, specifically targeting the consumer power of veterans, the federal government would simultaneously stabilize the economy and be good for national morale. In 1929, Coxey had submitted a draft bill to Hoover to "provide for the nationalization of legal-tender money."[38] The bill was forwarded to the Treasury Department with little more comment to Coxey from the White House. The lack of attention did not deter Coxey. On April 15, a telegram was sent to Joplin's office reporting on a conference that was being organized, and which would demand the Hoover administration do something to alleviate the unemployment crisis. The White House was aware that Coxey was on the campaign trail again. Angered over the way in which a Congressional committee had killed a bill that would "enable cities, counties or states—or the federal government itself— to get all the money needed without paying a cent of interest charges," Coxey reasoned that if elected officials would not listen, then he would take the issue directly to voters. Loading up vehicles for a three thousand mile tour, Coxey planned on campaigning directly against the members of Congress who had opposed the bill. As one story reported, "The… 12 congressmen, who helped kill General Coxey's new finance bill in the house committee, will find their home districts invaded by Coxey this summer as the general opens his campaign to force his bill through congress." Ruth Coxey would accompany Jacob, and the hope was enough pressure would be created to force the change through Congress.[39]

---

[38] Jacob Coxey to White House, March 29, 1929. Box 526, Folder Presidential Papers- Secretary File "Coxe—Coxo," 1929-1932, Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[39] Bruce Catton, "'Coxey's Army' to March Again as Veteran Campaigner Carries his Fight to People," *The Richmond Item* (Richmond, Indiana), July 10, 1929, 9.

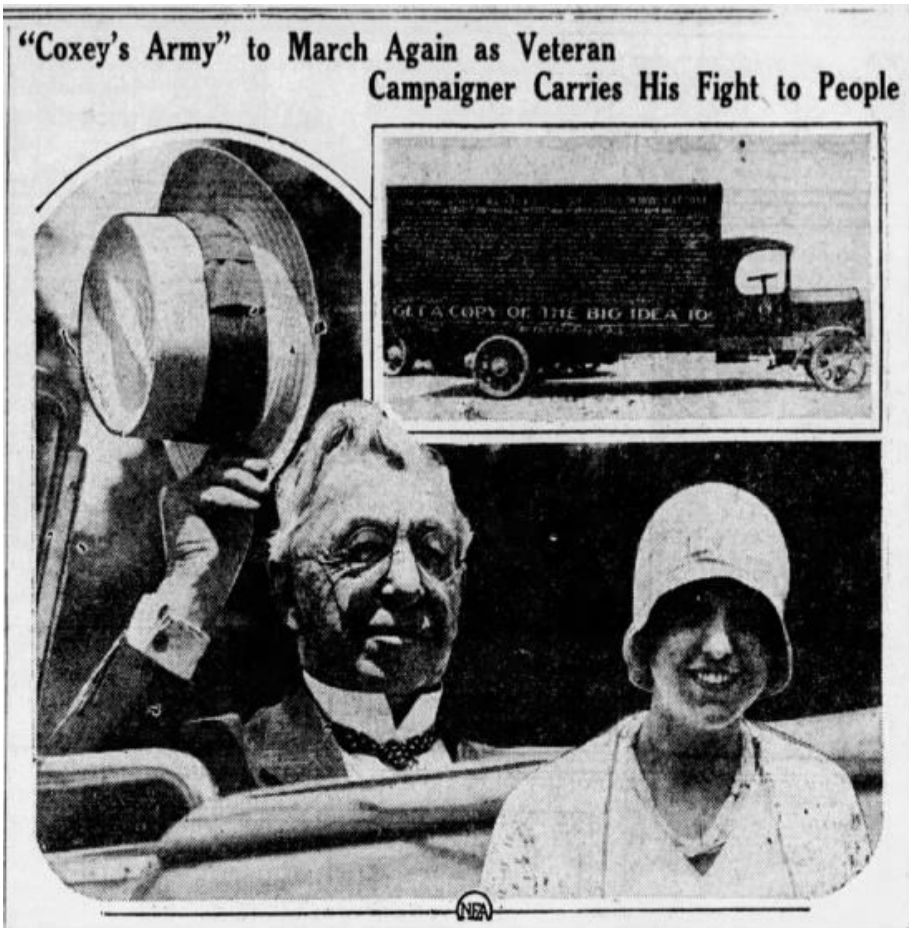

Figure 17: Newspaper photograph from *The Richmond Item* chronicling Coxey's 1929 campaign efforts. July 10, 1929.[40]

The effort was not enough, and Coxey once again was frustrated in his efforts to change federal policies. However, Coxey hoped this new expression of protest, led by and composed of veterans, would provide a means to force the federal government finally into action.

It was not. Numbering somewhere between twelve and fifteen thousand, the veterans, their families, and supporters made for an overwhelming show of force occupying the capital. Yet, when the measure to offer immediate aid in the form of bonuses failed in June in the Senate, sixty-two to eighteen, the marchers realized they were in for a much longer campaign. Setting up camp in Anacostia, makeshift shanty homes soon dotted the landscape of D.C. and spoke to the long term

[40] Ibid.

dedication the bonus army had in occupying the space. In July, during the final days of the Congress's first session, Waters marched protesters to the Capitol Building, rejecting police orders to stay out of particular parts of the plaza. Veterans who were members of the Communist Party then pushed for the protest to move to the White House. Tensions between the various political groups, namely the communist and socialist veterans and their more liberal and conservative colleagues, had been growing for some time, but as the government continued to reject the demands of the protesters the communist members' insistence on escalating and expanding the scope of the march gained support.

Although Hoover portrayed the bonus army's plight as unfortunate but complicated in public, according to Joslin, in private he had little sympathy for the D.C. occupiers. In September of 1931, Hoover decided to address the American Legion, hoping that the conservative organization which purported to represent veteran interests would be able to offset, discourage, and prevent activities like the bonus march. Appearing before the Legionnaires in Detroit, Joslin reflected in his journal, "The speech was not as sharp as I would have made it… but the reception he got after delivering it, leads me to believe he was right and I was wrong. He went far enough, but not too far, in fact it came near being his best speech." Then Joslin concluded, "I'm willing to bet right now – first – that the Legion kills the bonus resolution and secondly, that the President has more friends among the veterans than he has ever had before."[41] But the thought of victory was short lived, for even before the speech to the American Legion blows to the economic ideology of Hoover were piling up daily in the news briefings. "Trouble came in bunches for the President," Joslin fretted in another entry. "Great Britain is going off the gold standard on Monday. It must close the London stock market Monday and Tuesday." Hopefully the support Hoover could gain

[41] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry September 21, 1931. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

from organizations in civil society, like the American Legion, could offset the growing political defeats. "He must not talk about the bonus alone," Joslin thought. "Rather he must use the Legion as a forum for the country and the world."[42]

Following the American Legion speech in Detroit, when it appeared there was a chance Congress would give in to pressure of the bonus army, pass the legislation, and send the bill to the President's desk, Joslin recounted a candid conversation he had with Hoover. "They can't get very far with the Legion on record against it." Joslin said to the President. " Hoover responded—

> "Don't fool yourself… The Legion is on record, but its state commanders and other officers are at work on [Capitol] Hill this minute. They are saying that the action taken at Detroit can be [discounted] and that the bill should be passed. Unless the growing reaction among the people against increases in taxes is respected, that bill will be passed. But let Congress pass it[,] I will make short shrift of it. I'll write a veto that will sting."

Joslin approved of the hostility to the marchers and the bonus, and recorded himself as saying, "[M]ore power to your elbow."[43]

Despite opposition from the White House, the pressure from the protesters only grew throughout the summer. Hoover and officials in D.C. worried that the prolonged stay of the marchers provided an increasingly unstable situation for the city. What if marchers decided to turn their attention to targets like the Treasury, or other government buildings? Even before the large influx of marchers had arrived in D.C. the President's staff had met to discuss what could be done. "I suggested that they be stopped at the District line," Joslin said, "but the President would not listen to the suggestion." "No," Hoover is reported to have said. "[T]hat would result almost inevitably in bloodshed. Trouble must be avoided at any cost."[44] Joslin naturally wondered what

---

[42] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry September 17, 1931. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[43]Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry March 4, 1932. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[44] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry, June 2, 1932. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

would happen, then, if the marchers continued to agitate for a response, demanding some action, and especially if that entailed shifting the focus from Congress to the Presidency? "What if they ask to see you?" Joslin asked. "What action do you want me to take?" Hoover replied, "If they make the request and are [veterans], tell them that I will receive a committee representing them… But I won't receive any Communists. I think they should all be finger printed. We have the finger prints of every one who was in the service. By that manner we can be sure whether they are veterans. Any [ringers] should be thrown out."[45]

The answer then was simple. Red bait the bonus army. Agree to see some members, but discredit anyone who was not a veteran, and emphasize the presence of radicals in their ranks. From intelligence reports streaming in from the military and metro police, as well as stories from the press, it was known that there were Communist Party members and radical activists among the veterans. If the government could use the presence of communists, socialists, and activists then possibly the police and military would be able to forcibly remove the bonus army under the pretense of national security. Keeping close tabs on the activities of radicals in the ranks of the marchers, government reports followed the stories published in left-wing newspapers, infiltrated meetings with police officers, and compiled files on suspected and confirmed communists in the movement. In one report, detailing the stories appearing in the *Daily Worker*, White House files noted how the movement contained various political elements, ranging from communist to conservative, which weakened the bonus army's cohesion. Quoting from stories appearing in these papers, the President's office noted the internal struggles, and most importantly the presence of communists discontented with bonus army leadership. "First of all every effort to separate the struggle for the bonus from the main fight of the masses against hunger, wage cutting and

[45] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry June 2, 1932. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

imperialist war should be fought in the most militant manner," the *Daily Worker* had argued in one story, recorded by the President's office. "Secondly, the rank and file veterans should set up their own leading committees. Third, all matters relating to feeding, housing, etc., should be handled by selected rank and file committees." Aside from these facts, which showed there was at least some effort to expand the bonus army to a more general left-wing, Populist uprising, the *Daily Worker* took aim at different leaders in the movement too. "Walter W. Waters, fascist, and self-styled leader of a group of veterans which arrived here May 29," the *Daily Worker'*s files read "… is working hand in glove with the enemies of the bonus, the Washington police, etc. in their attempt to disrupt a united front of the ex-soldiers."[46]

Finally on the evening of July 28, the US military under the leadership of General Douglass MacArthur prepared to forcibly remove the remaining members of the bonus army. Using tanks, tear gas, and setting the makeshift homes ablaze, the dramatic scenes of fleeing veterans and their families splashed across the nation's newspapers. As if ironically placed, the Capitol Building's dome stood towering above the scenes of chaos, unrest, and military suppression. D.C. metro officials quickly distanced themselves from the action, arguing that the actions of MacArthur and the White House were unnecessarily excessive and violent. Brigadier General Pelham D. Glassford, a superintendent of the Washington police, in particular voiced his opposition. In the weeks and months that followed Hoover's administration attempted to mitigate the damage that had been done to public opinion. Attorney General William Mitchell authored a report that sought to justify the actions of the President and US military arguing in one passage, "It is probable the bonus army brought into the city of Washington the largest aggregation of criminals that had ever been

[46] "Extracts from *Daily Worker*," Folder World War Veterans—Bonus, Press Comments, *The Daily Worker*. Box 410, Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

assembled in the city at one time."[47] MacArthur, appearing at a press briefing the day after the expulsion, provided a similar line of argument. Likewise, Joslin was on full defense as Press Secretary, simultaneously arguing that the expulsion was necessary and that the President was in the right. "The first duty of the President of the United States is to maintain order. He acted unhesitatingly, Joslin argued. "Law and order were promptly restored. The great bulk of the demonstrators, instead of being evacuated, fled the city. They knew the consequences of their rioting. They were afraid to be brought before the proper tribunals. They beat it. There were thousands of good and innocent men among them. But this republic is founded on order not upon mob attack on the police. If you do your duty you will tell these indisputable facts to the American people."[48]

Even Hoover himself defended the actions of his administration, the military, and most importantly the need to suppress expressions of Populist protest, like the Bonus Army, in a statement. "A challenge to the authority of the United States Government has been met, swiftly and firmly," Hoover asserted. "After months of patient indulgence, the government met overt lawlessness as it always must be met if the cherished processes of self-government are to be preserved. We cannot tolerate the abuse of Constitutional rights by those who would destroy all government, no matter who they may be. Government cannot be coerced by mob rule."[49]

"Well that job's done." Joslin recorded the President as saying the day following MacArthur's actions to drive the veterans and their families from D.C. "We haven't heard the last of them," Joslin said. "No," Hoover replied, "but they are out of the city and that is some

---

[47] "Report Upholds B.E.F. Ejection at Washington," *The Salem News* (Salem, Ohio), September 12, 1932, 1.
[48] Theodore Joslin, "Statement to Committee of Writers," August 10, 1932. Folder World War Veterans—Bonus Correspondence, 1932 July-August. Box 409. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[49] Herbert Hoover, "Public Statement," July 29, 1932. Box 409, Folder World War Veterans—Bonus, Press Content, 1932, July 1-29. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

consolation. What will the reaction of the press be[?]" "The conservative press will applaud the action," Joslin predicted. "Hearst and Howard will go into eruption." Hoover replied, "I guess so. Reds and the yellow press go together."[50]

Joslin then handed him a batch of telegrams, mostly negative, concerning the suppression of the march. Hoover seemed unworried. '"That's all to the good.' he said. 'Most of those are from radical organization. Tell the press when they come in that I have received scores of telegrams from Communist organizations all over the country threatening me and the Government.' The telegrams certainly warranted the statement and I made it," Joslin recorded.[51]

Yet despite the best efforts of the administration to justify its actions condemnation from groups sympathetic to the bonus army and veterans poured into the White House, filled the newspapers, and most importantly opened an opportunity for Hoover's rivals in the Democratic Party to reinforce the idea that Hoover and the GOP were hostile to the concerns of common people. The ACLU was quick to offer condemnation, writing in a telegram—

> [The] American Civil Liberties Union emphatically protests your action in calling out army to disperse starving veterans petitioning government for relief… Your action will encourage similar violence by local officials against unemployed and hence will increase spirit of resentment throughout [the] country arousing the very forces you seek to suppress[.] [The] unrestricted right to assemble[,] organize[,] and demonstrate by unemployed millions is [the] only road to peaceful solution[.] Force is [the] road to revolt.[52]

The ACLU was not alone. Another letter to the White House read—

> Mr. Hoover: The day of all days in the history of the United States finally arrived yesterday when the President of the United States ordered our soldiers to attack the flag of our country, the symbol of our freedom— the freedom our forefathers gave up their lives to give us… Had this cowardly attack occurred in any other country in the world, our government would have justly risen up in protest and, Mr. Hoover,

---

[50] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry July 29, 1932. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Telegram from American Civil Liberties Union to White House, July 29, 1932. Box 409. Folder World War Veterans—Bonus Correspondence, 1932 July-August. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

> I am not so sure that the people of this fair land of ours will not raise their voices in protest when they understand the truth of yesterday's events[53]

Although many wrote in support of the suppression, agreeing with Hoover and his administration officials that the bonus marchers were undemocratic Populists and communists attempting to force the government into action, the action nonetheless irrevocably harmed the President in public opinion, weakening his party's chances in the upcoming elections, and showing the rivals in the Democratic Party the dangers of continuing to ignore protesters and demands from groups like the unemployed.

5.4 Part Three

None of this should have shocked the President, or his administration's officials. Earlier in January of 1932 D.C. had been the site of yet another mass Populist protest. This march, led by a politically active Catholic priest from Pittsburgh, had garnered considerable attention in the press, yet unlike the bonus army, Father James Renshaw Cox's march had been targeted at the issue of joblessness and general economic inequality, a wider focus the communist members of the bonus army eventually tried to get the veterans to adopt.

Setting out at the beginning of 1932 for Washington, Cox's Army was immediately compared to Coxey's Army of 1894. "COX's ARMY," one paper read, "The 'Coxey's Army' of another generation has given way to the 'Cox's Army' of 1932… carrying [the] American flag, this group from Carnegie, Pa., starts march[ing]… led by Father Cox, Catholic priest of Pittsburgh…"[54] Cox had been born in Lawrenceville, Pennsylvania, a neighborhood of the

---

[53] Philo D. Burke to White House, July 29, 1932. Folder World War Veterans—Bonus Correspondence, 1932 July-August. Box 409. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "Cox's Army," January 10, 1932. Box 1, Folder 7. James R. Cox Papers, Archive Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh area in 1886, making him all of eight years old when Coxey's Army had passed through the Pennsylvania towns on its original march. Cox had grown up during a period of massive industrial expansion and economic instability, as the communities nestled in the mountains and river systems of Appalachia underwent drastic transformation as producers of steel and other industrial goods. Yet, much like Coxey whose personal fortunes had risen during the period, Cox had been able to work his way through college in a number of odd jobs, including stints as a steelworker. He attended Duquesne University for his undergraduate degree, and then Saint Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Cox joined the priesthood in 1911, and then served as a chaplain in France during World War One.

Returning to the states, Cox attended the University of Pittsburgh and received an advanced graduate degree. The experiences of higher education, coupled with his calling to the clergy, left him with a specific political consciousness, and as the radio increased in popularity as a medium he was able to take to the airwaves of the local WJAS station and provide his sermons and lectures to the masses. In 1923 he was made pastor of Old St. Patrick's Church. From there he ran charity organizations for the poor, opening soup kitchens and bread lines, and periodically speaking on the problems of the community and nation. In 1925 he publically had cancelled a talk at the "Women's Woodrow Wilson League" because a member of the Ku Klux Klan had been invited to speak as well to the group. The decision was part of a larger political campaign Cox was part of to oppose the KKK, its influences on politics, and specifically urge institutions in civil society and government to eradicate the organization.

Therefore, in early 1932 the jobless march was less a dramatic break for the priest, and more in keeping with a broader political campaign he had been involved with for years. Yet, despite his opposition to groups like the Klan, and his advocacy for the working poor, Cox was far

from a universally accepted figure in the political and labor activist circles of Pittsburgh. On the day Cox led the thousands who had joined the army to "march" (they had secured cars to drive to D.C. as a massive caravan), eleven communist activists were arrested for "attempting to break up plans for the 'non-radical' march of unemployed…"[55] The communist activists charged that Cox was a self-appointed figure of the working poor, and that insofar as he claimed to represent the workers he was nothing more than a conservative who co-opted legitimate issues from the working class, funneling the energies of people into a dangerous program that did not solve the underlying problems of working people. The activists had attempted to hand out pamphlets attacking Cox and urging workers not to take part in the spectacle, but before they could do much convincing police arrested them, effectively ending the counter protest.

The communist activists were not wrong to criticize Cox or his political program. Although Cox had through the 1920s done much charitable work and opposed organizations like the KKK which terrorized groups, specifically working class people of color and recent immigrants, Cox's political program was often marked with troubling fantasies of authoritarianism, reactionary religious ideology, and subjugation of women of all classes. In an interview after the jobless march, Cox openly argued for a fascist dictatorship in the US. "Name a dictator first," Cox had argued. "Give him complete control for 12 or 15 years. Let him actually assume the traditional powers of the President as Commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the nation. But don't ham-string him with a Supreme Court… This all sounds like Fascism, but it's more than Fascism: it's the only way to bring sense out of chaos. Today we are absolutely bankrupt and mismanaged, not because our President is not doing his best for all the people, but the system prevents him from [s]aving the tax revenues from being filched and wasted by the multiplication of useless officials in federal,

[55] "11 Reds Arrested in Effort to Halt Priest's March," January 4, 1932. Box 1, Folder 7, James R. Cox Papers, Archive Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

state and municipal employ[ment]. Perhaps this waste of public funds is necessary to insure re-election under our party system. Under a dictatorship, no."[56]

Cox's view on women's rights, were likewise, telling. Predictably and without much surprise for a Catholic priest in the early twentieth century he was anti-abortion and anti-birth control, but when he dedicated himself to a series of widely covered sermons on the issue he grounded that outlook in a very telling manner—

> "The woman who can bear six or eight children is obviously of good stock," he declared. "Even if the business wrecks her own life, she has appreciably improved the heritage of the race." The pastor pointed out that as a matter of fact, rich mothers do not produce better offspring than the poor. Nature prefers to use such mothers as are best fitted biologically, he said. "As we gradually shut off the stream of immigration we must produce our own hewers of wood and drawers of water, or go without them."[57]

Cox's conception of politics, then, could best be classified as an updated and religiously based ideology of producerism. Whereas earlier nineteenth century conceptions of production of value had been oriented in the form of pre-industrial communities, specifically in the shops of small scale artisans, and whereas later nineteenth century producerists, like those advocating the creation of a cooperative commonwealth in the Populist and Socialist movements, had argued for a producerism based on Marx's labor theory of value and the power of the trust and corporation, Cox's producerism and basis of social value was found in the moral and social fabric of a society.

In other words, Cox was a social and religious conservative who advocated for the rights and dignity of the working poor. Yet his concept of how economic and politics intersected ultimately relied on a belief that production of value in society came from Church approved, stable, heteronormative monogamous, relationships. In sermons aired over the radio and covered heavily

---

[56] James Renshaw Cox, "Interview with Father James R. Cox, pastor of Old St. Patrick's Church at Pittsburgh," n.d. Box 1, Folder 2. James R. Cox Papers, Archive Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.
[57] C.B. Yorke, "Pastor Raps Kissless, Babyless Marriages," n.d. Box 1, Folder 4. James R. Cox Papers, Archive Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

by the papers, Cox admonished young modern men and women for not settling down, dressing in new styles, and extending courtships indefinitely. As one paper reported one such sermon—

> "Nowadays," Father Cox told his congregation last night, "as one young man remarked to me, 'there is so much to see that they prefer good light.' In olden days courting was done with no light but the grate. Girls dressed modestly then. The young men callers liked to entertain in darkened parlors. Now it is different. They want the full light so that they can see everything that the girls show… All of this has brought about a grave situation demanding the serious attention of parents and superiors."[58]

Cox's inability to understand either the changing culture and social norms of the US, or the real economic issues facing people who might not have wanted to start a family, spoke to a deeper issue in his political thinking. Hardly alone as a politically active Catholic priest in the period, with nationally known figures like Father Coughlin regularly on the radio, Cox maintained that societal problems arose from abandonment of Christian social ethics. In one radio sermon Cox maintained that modernity had destroyed notions of community and that by returning to God and conceptions of brotherly love, the relations needed to sustain people in their social and economic lives would be achieved. Naturally, the political process with its complexity, various factions, and multiple interests served as a way to divorce the political sphere from the realm of the concerns of the real people since it became too concerned with the various favors and coalitions needed to maintain power. By putting authority in a single figure, a dictator in the political realm and an authoritative god in culture, and then supporting those seats of power with conservative relationships, Cox reasoned, the political sphere could meet the needs and demands of the people in society.

Yet despite these issues, and the protests from some on the left, the jobless march was more successful than Coxey's Army before them or the bonus army after them, in that the White House

---

[58] "Father Cox Sees Legs, Garters and Lingerie as Courtship's doom," *Pittsburgh Post*, February 25, 1926. Box 1, Folder 5. James R. Cox Papers, Archive Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

was forced to at least meet Cox and a delegation as well over ten thousand protesters filled the streets of D.C. to join the protest. Yet, much like the bonus army, Mother Jones' children's crusade, and Coxey's Army, the mere visibility or simple raising of an issue proved simply not to be enough to force direct change. *Time Magazine* ran an extensive story, demonstrating yet again how the press's coverage of an event did produce sympathy, or even pressure the government officials being protested to consider the demands seriously—

> After the Capitol review, Father Cox hurried to an appointment with President Hoover, to whom he read in a shrill voice (his throat is sensitive) the same appeal he made to Congress… Demands: a five-billion-dollar public works program to provide jobs; direct Federal appropriation for unemployment relief; 'loans to re-establish the farmer'; gift taxation and inheritance tax increased to 70%. The President listened patiently, replied: 'We are giving this question our undivided attention.'[59]

After holding their rally and meeting with the President, Cox placed a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and prepared to leave. There is little evidence the demands wore heavily on Hoover's mind as the depression deepened and crisis spread. In short, the mere raising of an issue did not translate into any measurable victory.

Constantly beseeched by protesters, various members of the government, and activists who saw the White House as a way to further cause, Joslin confided in his journal that he was tired of the constant stream of rabble-rousers, self-promoters, and political opponents. "How everyone does like to use the White House for publicity purposes," he complained. "They know the effectiveness of the White House sounding board… Sometimes I think everyone is publicity mad. Certainly I know they troop to the White House, not to aid the country or to help the President, but rather to [preen] themselves in the spotlight of publicity. And the White House offers the very best opportunity."[60]

---

[59] "National Affairs: Cox's Army," *Time Magazine*, January 18, 1932.
[60] Theodore G. Joslin, diary entry March 31, 1932. Herbert Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

Joslin was more correct than he realized. Although the White House's amplification of issues did not automatically translate into political victories, it nonetheless provided a way for groups to organize and reformulate. In this sense, the constant drumming of protesters and petitioners were forcing realignments in the nation's politics, a process that was enhanced by the perception that Hoover and the GOP were unreceptive to change. Perhaps understanding this once he had returned to Pittsburgh, Cox formed a third-party, the Jobless Party, and readied himself to be the party's presidential nominee in the 1932 elections. It was clear that Hoover was not willing to vigorously fight for the causes for which Cox's Army had campaigned. Yet, in another development, Cox suddenly quit his candidacy in October, effectively ending the party. On the same day that he quit, he encouraged his supporters to vote for Franklin Roosevelt and the Democratic Party's ticket.[61] Cox would remain active in local and national politics the remainder of his life, serving on commission boards of various New Deal programs appointed by Roosevelt, and promoting causes from the pulpit of his Pittsburgh church. The process that had begun in part in 1896 of the reformation of the Democratic Party, one at least partially more receptive to Populist-like demands, was coming full circle, with Roosevelt, like Bryan before him, capitalizing on the energies of various campaigners to form a new political base in the years of the depression.

Jacob Coxey, meanwhile, had finally won a political campaign, the only election he would ever win in his long political career. In 1931, at the age of seventy-seven, Coxey won election as mayor of Massillon, Ohio. Papers around the country ran the story, noting how Coxey had campaigned hard for the position, the press wondering now that Coxey had finally secured an electoral victory would he be able to implement his policies?

---

[61] "Fr. Cox Quits Political Race," *The Sandusky Register*, October 19, 1932, 1.
"Jobless Party Candidate Out," *The Hutchinson News* (Hutchinson, Kansas), October 18, 1932, pp. 1.

Figure 18: Newspaper photograph of Coxey campaigning for mayor of Massillon, Ohio. (New-Journal, November 12, 1931).[62]

As one paper noted, Coxey campaigned on a host of issues, most notably implementing his idea of non-interest bearing bonds in the city's finances. "It gives the 77-year-old economic crusader an opportunity to demonstrate the practicability of the theories which were the talk of the entire country in the black days of 1894-97," one paper noted.[63] "For years Mayor-elect Coxey has held the view that interest was the root of much evil in our economic arrangement," another noted. "Holding fast to that view, Coxey in his mayoralty campaign advocated issuance of $200,000 non-interest-bearing municipal bonds for relief of the unemployed of the city."[64] Coxey had also campaigned on a mixture of progressive causes, such as municipal ownership of all public utilities.

[62] "Coxey Marches On: Massillon Wonders if Veteran Crusader Can Aid City's Finances as New Mayor," *New-Journal* (Mansfield, Ohio), November 12, 1931, 2.
[63] "Coxey Marches On: Massillon Wonders if Veteran Crusader Can Aid City's Finances as New Mayor," *New-Journal* (Mansfield, Ohio), November 12, 1931, 2.
[64] "Coxey Wins First Election at Age of 77," *The Newark Advocate*, November 4, 1931, 2.

However, although Coxey had beaten his opponent some 4,400 plus votes to 2,631 the papers all noted that opposition to Coxey, which had existed since his protesting days in the 1890s, meant there was an entrenched and ready opposition in city hall.[65] "All Massillon… does not see Coxey as a savior. They fear the influx of hoboes and vagrants, attracted by promises of 'free money.'"[66] The opposition only mounted as Coxey took office and prepared to make his changes. In his inaugural address, Coxey singled out the police saying, "In carrying out my policy I intend to place in the police station a placard printed in bold letters quoting Article IV, dealing with the right of free speech and with seizures and searches for the information and instruction of the police force. I am determined that the bill of rights of the American people shall be revived and that the rights and privileges taken from them by the fanatical zeal of liquor and other law enforcement officers and agencies shall be restored."[67]

After challenging the city's police, and swearing that as long as he was mayor the right to speech and assembly would be protected absolutely in the town, he then turned his attention to city council. Coming before city council shortly after his swearing in, he pressured the members to begin implementation of his programs— issuing currency, buying public works, and public works. In his remarks to the council, reporters noted that Coxey reasoned "the vote is sufficient evidence that the majority of Massillon citizens are in accord with his plans and it is his purpose to waste on time in getting them into operation."[68] Yet the coming years proved difficult for Coxey, who found that the task of governing was entirely different than being a protest candidate. Hardly a week went by without the local papers reporting on the most recent public and heated exchange

---

[65] "Unofficial Vote," Municipal Record Book. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[66] "Coxey Marches On: Massillon Wonders if Veteran Crusader Can Aid City's Finances as New Mayor," *New-Journal* (Mansfield, Ohio), November 12, 1931, 2.
[67] "Coxey Upholds Bill of Rights at Inauguration," Municipal Record Book. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[68] "Coxey Will Ask Councilmen to Ratify Program," January 4, 1932. Municipal Record Book, Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.

the Mayor was engaged in, including suspensions of the chief of police, arguments with city council members, rancorous exchanges in the papers with various local church leaders, and a long standing fight with a local judge. To categorize these various arguments as reformer versus entrenched, special interest would be inaccurate. Sometimes the disputes were political, but often they took the form of personal issues, and city council was more than once justified in its dismay at the idiosyncrasies and sudden changes to Coxey's opinions.

One example that highlighted this well was a conflict over providing milk to the children of the city. When in October of 1932 the city had decided to use tax funds to support a school children's milk fund, Coxey criticized the efforts, saying, "It's the board of education's job to look after the children… Let them apply for their own funds to take care of the children and not use the city's funds for that purpose."[69] Coxey followed through on his promise to veto the measure as soon as city council approved the measure. The outrage was as quick as it was predictable. Coxey had spent a lifetime in the public eye advocating for the well-being of the poor. Now he was willing to curtail efforts to help those living through the depression merely on a technicality of how he thought government should be funded. "It's ridiculous," one citizen of Massillon was quoted in the papers, "it's a sad state of affairs when a mayor takes it upon himself to deprive a child of a glass of milk." Another resident responded, "There is a lot of money spent foolishly— but here is a cause of real necessity. The children need the milk." "He's certainly not justified," another said angrily. "Children need the milk and may not be able to get it in their homes. They could have gotten it in the schools."[70]

These problems gathered around Coxey's feet like a rising pool of water, but the largest fiasco arguably happened in July of the same year of the milk veto, when he permitted the

---

[69] "Says Milk Fund Job of Schools," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), October 20, 1932, 7.
[70] "In My Opinion," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), October 20, 1932, 7.

Communist Party to hold its annual meeting in city hall. Staying true to his commitment to freedom of speech and unrestricted freedom of assembly, the plan for the communists to meet at the governmental building proceeded warily. As the proceedings of the party's meeting went forward, the group broke for lunch around 1:30. The meal consisted of bologna, meat loaf, potato salad, and coffee. All seemed fine, with speeches and meetings proceeding as planned when suddenly at around 4:00 PM delegates began complaining of feeling ill. Suddenly participants began vomiting, and in the heat collapsing. The party's meeting was no small affair, with roughly seven hundred members in attendance. Sprawled out along the town hall's lawn, city residents looked on with a mixture of horror and fascination as numerous ambulances, doctors, and nurses were called to the scene.

Immediate fears were that some mass assassination attempt had been orchestrated. Law enforcement began inspecting the foods and utensils. Victims worried that some trace of poison would be discovered. News quickly spread around town, and once again Coxey's Massillon, like in 1893-94, was back in the press's spotlight. "Possibility of criminal action in event any of the stricken persons dies was hinted," one paper reported. "The poisoning brought to a gloomy end the one day convention stand of the official state communist party."[71] However, it was quickly determined that no foul play was involved. Instead it was merely an instance of food poisoning, the culprit the potato salad that had been served in metal bowls in the summer heat. "More than 300 communists who became ill after a luncheon at their state convention were recovering today from what physicians believed to be ptomaine poisoning," the papers reported in relief. "The food, served yesterday, was sent to the state health department for analysis. One hundred of the sufferers became so ill they had to be sent to hospitals. All but six, who were reported well on the way to

[71] "Massillon Hospitals Filled With Poisoned Communists," *The Daily Times* (New Philadelphia, Ohio), July 18, 1932, 1.

recovery, were discharged during the night."[72]Although the press quickly turned the story into a humorous event, city officials were not amused. It was the latest in a long line of unnecessary crises produced by Coxey.

In December of 1933, Coxey was formally condemned by the city council for his erratic governance generally, and specifically his sudden change of support for a public works program he and the council had been working towards. "Council Spanks Coxey," the headline of the *Evening Independent* reported. "In strong language the city council reproves Mayor Coxey for his policy of obstruction in the matter of the canal sewer project, designed to make possible an improvement and provide with many months of work hundreds of men who for two or three years have been on relief lists."[73] The council in its censure charged that Coxey had "reasons of his own" for the sudden change in attitude, and the paper reported Coxey was demanding an extra $33,000 for the project because of some missed "technicality." In an ironic change of events, the council and local papers reminded Coxey, who had fashioned himself a representative of the people and their concerns for decades, that, "We have in the utterance of the council an expression of the people." Coxey's stubborn insistence and notoriety would not deter the council in their conviction.

At the end of December of 1933, Coxey exited office, ending his career as an elected official. To "honor" the event the *Evening Independent* ran a large story detailing all of the scandals, battles, and major events of the short two years. Joking, the paper asked, "What are you going to do for news after Jan. 1?" Coxey, however, remained active in national politics as he had throughout much of his life. In July of 1932 he had been made the presidential nominee of the Farmer-Labor Party, and unlike Cox had not exited the race to support Roosevelt.[74] Approached

---

[72] "Ptomaine Strikes 300 Communists," *The News-Review* (Roseburg, Oregon), July 18, 1932, 1.
[73] "Council Spanks Coxey," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), December 21, 1933, 4.
[74] "Plan to Make Coxey Farm-Labor Leader," *Pensacola News Journal*, July 9, 1932, 8.

by Roosevelt and others in the New Deal, Coxey had offered input and advocated for specific policies, but in 1936, when he was initially tapped to run again as the head of the Farmer-Labor Party he withdrew his nomination. He was at that point eighty-two years old, and vowed that he would campaign for William Lemke of North Dakota as the protest candidate already running in the newly formed "Union Party."[75]

Early into his presidential administration Roosevelt had, unlike Hoover, understood that if he were to maintain power he would not be able to ignore the power of protesters, like his predecessors had. Fearful of figures like Milo Reno, the various farmer unions, and the rumblings of a threat of a million man march on Washington, Roosevelt sought to incorporate much of the protest energy, Populist groups, and ideas of the groups into his early administration. The efforts were partially successful. When bonus marchers came to D.C. he entertained them, using the event to incorporate demands into policy. Reno, apparently impressed with the efforts not only held off the million man march, but also worked to prevent strikes by the agricultural unions, angering some in the organization for selling out to the new Democratic administration. When Roosevelt, likewise, moved to take the U.S. off the gold standard, reversing the policy Cleveland had initiated decades earlier and raising fears in the Treasury, it seemed as if Coxey's protest had finally landed.

Yet, Coxey was anything but persuaded. Unlike Cox, he did not join the administration readily, and in fact regarded Roosevelt with wary suspicion. Yes, it was true that the "Crime of 1873" was finally being remedied, but it was being done through an elaborate system of a federal reserve, banking laws, and policies meant to bolster the capitalist market. Coxey's dream as a greenbacker had been a socialist currency. This was not what he had agitated for all these years. Coxey continued to agitate. In January of 1933, following Roosevelt's election, he wrote to Senator

[75] "Coxey, Farm-Labor Candidate, Withdraws," *The Town Talk* (Alexandria, Louisiana), June 29, 1936, 2.

Huey Long to congratulate him on his opposition to the Glass banking and currency bill. Coxey was not convinced by bankers' denunciation of the bill. It was nothing more than a scheme to trick "the American people [into] believ[ing] that the bankers oppose[d] it." "They are really in favor of it," Coxey said in his letter. Coxey made sure that a copy of the letter was sent to President-elect Roosevelt.[76]

5.5 Conclusion

In the 1950s, shortly before Coxey died at the age of 97, he was finally invited back to the US capital to deliver his 1894 address. By this time, many of the ideas of public works, along with a growing disdain for the gold standard, were widely accepted by many in the federal government. The creation of the New Deal state, it seemed, had finally vindicated the Ohio Populist. But this is too simple of a story. The creation of the New Deal state was the result of numerous economic and political factors, many of which had taken a winding and unpredictable path through the nation's politics. By the time Roosevelt assumed the Presidency the thinking of Populism and the practice of Populist protest had made itself part of the new Democratic block of politics, and in many ways American liberal thought. Yet, this path of protest from Populism to the New Deal did not follow any systematic logic found in bourgeois liberal democracy. The Populist ideas, insofar as they had any permanent place in American politics, were not achieved by raising issues in a rhetorical and intellectual public sphere, which then led to debate, and then policy changes. Instead, the influence of Populism was born out in the halls, meetings, and political alliances of various parties, unions, and movements. The New Deal is popularly understood as one of the major accomplishments of American political society, with those on the right seeing it as a major setback to supposed

[76] "Coxey Writes Senator Long," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), January 21, 1933, 1.

"liberties," those on the left seeing it as the thing that saved capitalism from itself, and those more moderate liberals seeing it as the ultimate accomplishment of good, social democratic government. However, the ideas and longer careers of figures like Coxey, Browne, Jones, and other left-wing labor Populist agitators demonstrate that for many of the more radical elements of the Populist movement the goal was never to achieve a static social democratic state, but instead take one of many steps to a more revolutionary and egalitarian society. The creation of the commonweal, far from being achieved in the early years of the 1930s continued, indeed continues to this day, in the nation's many expressions of continued protest— an action that just as it was in the 1890s is ripe to alter perceptions of legitimate government, authentic claims of the people, and reimagined relations between state, society, and the economy.

What was the legacy, then, of Coxey's Army? Much like the questions raised in the historiography of Populism it is a fraught subject of study as it speaks not to a distant past, but instead an ongoing phenomena found in political fights— often literally in the streets as marchers and occupiers of public space demand change, challenge government authority, and claim to be the true voices of "the people."

CONCLUSION

In 1972, Massillon, Ohio, was once again at the center of a national protest movement. Irene McCabe, a thirty-seven year old white Michigan mother, and opponent to busing, had come to the small Ohio city on a national march to Washington D.C. McCabe and other opponents of forced integration were hoping to visit any "Coxey memorial" that the city may have. From that point McCabe and the other marchers would use the historic site to connect their present concerns with the nation's longer history of Populist protest against government. However, as the *Evening Independent* noted, if McCabe was looking for any marker or memorial she and her followers would be sorely disappointed. "The truth is General Jacob S. Coxey's hometown has no memorial except some Coxey papers in [the] Massillon Museum," the paper began. It was no matter. McCabe and the National Action Group (NAG) would simply use Coxey's home, or some other site associated with the late activist to begin the march. But, as the *Evening Independent* continued, Coxey's home where he had spent most of his adult life was no longer standing. All that remained was a simple frame house in a northeastern residential area where Coxey had spent the final years of his life. The building was still a private dwelling, and was not open to the public. "Mrs. Irene McCabe… will find Massillon with a red face tonight if she goes through with plans to visit the 'Coxey memorial' here."[1]

McCabe would not be deterred. She and NAG were coming from Pontiac, Michigan, the epicenter of the protests against busing, and had seen violent protests where white supremacists had fire bombed school buses, American Nazis had rallied, and massive demonstrations had been held to protest the court's decision to uphold the practice of forced integration. Massillon's lack

[1] "Mrs. McCabe wants to see Coxey's home," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), March 29, 1972, 1.

of historic place markers would hardly deter NAG from following through on their plans. McCabe and her followers therefore began their march from Massillon to neighboring Akron. There they met opposition from challengers who argued McCabe and her supporters were simply racists, and that they should abandon their mockery of a march. "I love to have an adversary," McCabe fired back at the Akron counter protesters. "I never shy away from a confrontation." The rally was attended by some two-hundred people, and the opposition was visible with picketers carrying signs that read, "Bigots in PTA clothing." "Why don't you ask the kids about [busing]?" Dick Reinbold, a law student from Akron University demanded. McCabe responded, "I don't ask the kids in my family. They don't have the mental capacity."[2] Upon arriving in Washington D.C., NAG was met by elected officials like Representative Gerald Ford who expressed optimism that the marchers' efforts would be successful. Rallying at the Washington Monument, McCabe addressed the small crowd of a little over a fifteen hundred people. "I can't believe we walked the whole way," she laughed. "Whenever you're in labor you finally give birth to something beautiful. We've labored long, and we've been through a great deal of pain, but it's worth it. Because we have given birth now to the rekindling of the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Look! You're here!"[3] Was this the legacy of Coxey's Army and Populism? Reactionaries challenging integration? For critics of Populism, the answer would most likely be, yes.

Yet in summer of 1968 during the national Poor People's campaign articles had appeared in newspapers in various Ohio cities comparing Coxey's Army and the Bonus Army to the ongoing Poor People's March. "When I was a youngster listening to old men talk in a Tennessee farm community," Ralph McGill of the *Dayton Daily News* wrote, "there was always one or more

---

[2] Ibid, 12.
[3] "Irene McCabe Mother's March to Washington, D.C., Antibusting Protest," *CBS Evening News*, April 27, 1972. Accessed September 1, 2018. http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/mattdelmont/clips/irene-mccabe-mothers-march-to-washington-dc-4-27/view

among them who recalled Coxey's Army that marched on Washington in 1894."[4] McGill reasoned that there was an undeniable connection between the Populist protests of the late nineteenth century and the current wave of protests in the late twentieth. He remembered how Coxey's name was largely treated as the butt of jokes, but "he was in his day, a sort of folk hero to the farmers whose exploitation brought on the Populist revolts of the 1880s and 1890s."[5] *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* agreed. Coxey's Army, the Bonus Army, and now the Poor People's campaign were all tied together in not so much their actions of marching on Washington, but more importantly in the issues they demanded society address. Looking at the longer impact marches had on politics, the editorial argued—

> The legislative fruit of the Poor People's march will not necessarily be measured by what Congress does this year. The impact will probably spread over several years. And the final outcome will depend on what changes it produces in public opinion.[6]

McGill concluded his editorial by noting, "Today's Poor People's campaign points to the long neglect of a minority and the dislocation caused by educational lacks and technological demands for skilled and educated workers."

Would the current wave of marchers be successful? If Coxey's Army was a predictor, then no. But, McGill concluded, "At least they are not [being] arrested for walking on the grass."[7] Was this the legacy of Coxey's Army and Populism? Constant radical critique and challenges to the United States system of economic inequality and anger over lack of government response? For supporters of Populism, the answer would most likely be some version of yes, with important distinctions of how Populism changed during various periods.

---

[4] Ralph McGill, "Poor Once Marched and Failed," *Dayton Daily News*, May 26, 1968, 49.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Misc. Newspaper Clippings, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), May 5, 1968. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.
[7] McGill, "Poor Once Marched and Failed," 49.

Therefore, was Populism nativist, racist, reactionary, and backwards? Was Populism radical, racially integrated, and forward looking? Between these two questions rests the deep and partisan historiography of Populist studies. The answer this dissertation has put forward is that Populism contained both elements. Due to its wide appeal to a host of different groups, a testament to the widespread effects of economic inequality in American society, Populism is, as John Judis has argued, a particular way politics gets expressed. Socialists, labor activists, and other fellow travelers in the long history of American protest movements have often found Populism to be a useful vehicle to accompany workers and activists who petition fundamental changes to America's socio-economic inequality. Yet, this large based appeal and attraction has meant that Populism's lack of a basic political nature can result in Populism taking a number of different, often troubling, expressions. This means that Populism ranges from racially integrated marchers in 1894, to sometimes close alliances with left-wing socialists, to the Poor People's Campaign of the 1960s, and then all the way back to Carl Browne's race baiting in 1870s California protests, to sometimes alliances with white supremacists, to NAG marches against integration and twenty-first century Tea Party protests.

Jacob Coxey, with his long life, multiple campaigns, constant shifting political allegiances, and lackluster end of a career as a failed mayor, provides historians a unique opportunity to study the radical promises and disappointing limits of American Populism. Although Coxey would claim that his policy positions were the work of his own genius, going so far as to commission a cartoon of himself where his young son Legal Tender peered into his brain and said, "Papa, I wants to shee wheels go wound," he was not the sole author of any of the remedies he put forward.[8]

[8] Cartoon, *Cause and Cure*, December 1897, 1. Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society.

Figure 19: December 1897 editorial cartoon in The Cause and the Cure.
(Jacob Coxey Papers, Massillon Historical Society).

Instead, Coxey's ideas of public works and greenback currency came from longer movements of labor and monetary reformers, to which Coxey was an important figure, but just one figure nonetheless. Yet it was precisely because of Coxey's membership in these groups, not his sole genius that he is of such importance for historians to understand. As Daniel De Leon argued, the real power Coxey's Army represented for American activists was in the demonstration of how "the people" through the Populist protest could be reshaped in a number of radically new ways. This was, and remains, one of the principle powers of Populism. Its elastic nature and

undetermined nature leaves it as a potential for activists to push for any number of changes to current society.

This potential was well illustrated in the first decade of the twenty-first century when American cities once again erupted in massive demonstrations and occupations of public space. Labelled "Occupy Wall Street," the movement was neither unprecedented nor unfamiliar to the long line of American Populist protests. However, as the wave of national occupations were suppressed by the state, much like the industrial army movement, leaders were forced to consider why this had happened. One of the earliest organizers of the public occupations in New York, Micah White, wrote that it reflected the so-called "end of protest." By this White meant that the age of using masses of people to take public space, raise issues, and force government responses had ended. "The deeper lesson of the defeat of Occupy is that Western governments are not required to comply with their people's demands, even if those demands are articulated by a historic social movement backed by millions of people in the streets. Now it is clear that the people's sovereignty has been lost."[9]

Yet protest as a mere communicative act that leads to fundamental change has long been questioned. Henry Vincent in his 1894 book chronicling Coxey's Army had noted this. Figures like Mother Jones had noted this as well, arguing that although protests and marches did raise awareness, it was instead in the way direct action empowered people, and reconceptualized politics, that the actions were so important. Conceptions of the people, money, social relations, and even the basis of civil society could all be reimagined. The protest as an act of counterhegemonic politics was a moment where it was possible to break with the past and imagine a new society. For Coxey and his associates this took the form of a more egalitarian commonweal. It was imagined as a

[9] Micah White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, Canada: 2006), 36.

radical new society based on Christian social ethics, socialist economics, and democratic politics. But, as always, history does not simply evaporate. When movements like Coxey's Army and the Populists drew on arguments about the historical conceptions of "the people" or argued that reformation should be placed in the state, it was inevitable that deeper problems of American racism, nativism, and exclusionary practices would arise. Yet this need not be the sole defining feature of Coxey's Army or Populism in general. Although some activists like McCabe and NAG search for a physical place to call forth the legacy of Coxey's Army, the real legacy is in the power and promise of people mobilized to seek redress to longstanding issues of basic inequality. We find ourselves, therefore, not in the mind of Coxey but instead in our participation in the movements we chose to champion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Documents:

Circuit Court of the United States, Northern District of Illinois: United States of America, Complaint, vs. Eugene V. Debs et al., Respondents, Before Honorable William A. Woods, Circuit Judge, etc.: Proceedings on Information for Attachment for Contempt. Chicago: Bernard & Hornstein, Printers, n.d. [1894].

Democratic National Convention. *Democratic Campaign Book: Presidential Election of 1896*. New York: n.p. 1896.

Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896. Logansport, Indiana, 1896.

United States Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago [Pullman] Strike*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894.

Browne, Carl. *When Coxey's "Army" Marcht on Washington*. San Francisco: n.p., 1944.

Coxey, Jacob. *The Coxey Plan: Medium of Exchange Without Cost*. n.p. 1914.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century.* New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1968.

Ely, Richard T. "Pullman: A Social Study." In *Harpers Weekly* 70 (February 1885), pp. 452-466.

Garret, Garet. *The Driver*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1920.

Gilliam, Bernard. "A Party of Patches," *Judge Magazine*, June 6, 1891.

Gronlund, Laurence. *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Socialism*, rev. ed. New York: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1890.

Harvey, William Hope. *Coin's Financial School.* Chicago: Coin Publishing Company, 1894.

James, Henry. *Richard Olney and His Public Service*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923.

Jones, Mary Harris. *Autobiography of Mother Jones*. Dover Edition. Chicago: C. H. Kerr & Company, 1925.

Lewis, Austin. *The Militant Proletariat.* Chicago: C.H. Kerr & Company, 1911.

Lloyd, Henry Demarest. *The Safety of the Future Lies in Organized Labor: A Paper Read Before the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor*. Chicago: Press of the Eight-Hour Herald, 1893.

Lloyd, Henry Demarest. *Wealth Against Commonwealth.* New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1894.

London, Jack. *The Road*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.

Marx, Karl. Translated by Samuel Moore. *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Seattle, WA: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010.

Morris, William. "Bellamy's Looking Backward." In *Commonweal*, June 21, 1889.

Pettigrew, Richard. *Imperial Washington: The Story of American Public Life from 1870—1920*. Chicago: C. H. Kerr & Company Co-Operative, 1922.

Swinton, John. *Striking For Life, Labor's Side of the Labor Question*. Originally printed 1894. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Tragle, Henry I. *Coxey's Arm*y. New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974.

Veblen, Thorstein. "The Army of the Commonweal." In *Journal of Political Economy* II (June 1894): 456-461.

Vincent, Henry. *The Story of the Commonweal: Complete and Graphic Narrative of the Origin and Growth of the Movement*. W.B. Conkey Company: Chicago, 1894.

Wells, Ida B. editor, *The Reason Why The Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition.* n.p. 1893.

White, Micah. *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

Wisner, Edward. C*ash vs. Coin: An Answer to "Coin's Financial School.* Chicago: C. H. Kerr and Company, 1895.

Periodicals:

Advance Guard
Akron Beacon Journal
Albany Register (Albany, Missouri)
American Historical Review
Appeal to Reason
The Big Idea
Chicago Herald
Chicago Record
Chicago Times
Chicago Tribune
The Chillicothe Gazette
Columbus Courier (Columbus, Kansas)
Coxey's Sound Money
The Daily Times (New Philadelphia, Ohio)
Daily True American (New Jersey)
The Daily Worker
Dayton Daily News
The Dayton Herald
Evening Independent (Massillon, Ohio)
Evening Star (Washington D.C.)
Evening Journal (Wilmington, Delaware)
Evening World (New York)
The Freeman (Indianapolis)
The Galveston Daily News
The Hamilton Daily Republican
Harper's Weekly
Hoxie Palladium (Hoxie, Kansas)
The Hutchinson News (Hutchinson, Kansas)
The Inter Ocean
The Kansas Agitator
The Kansas Blackman
Kansas City Journal
The Kansas City Times
Lafayette Daily Call (Lafayette, Indiana)
Marysville Advocate (Marysville, Kansas)
Mecklenburg Times
New-Journal (Mansfield, Ohio)
New York Times
The News-Review (Roseburg, Oregon)
The Newark Advocate (Newark, Ohio)
Newark Daily Advertiser
The Pantagraph (Bloomington, Illinois)
Pensacola News Journal
The People

The People's Paper
The Philadelphia Inquirer
The Plain Dealer (Cleveland Ohio)
Progressive Thought (Olathe, Kansas)
Puck
Railroad Telegrapher
Reading Times (Reading, Pennsylvania)
Review of Reviews
Richmond Item
The Salem News (Salem, Ohio)
Salt Lake Tribune
San Francisco Call
Sandusky Register
Springfield Leader and Press
St. Landry Clarion (Louisiana)
St. Louis-Post Dispatch
The Tennessean
Themis
The Times (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
The Times (Shreveport, Louisiana)
The Times-Picayune (New Orleans, Louisiana)
Time Magazine
The Town Talk (Alexandria, Louisiana)
Vermont Watchman
Washington Post
Washington Sentinel Weekly Edition
Washington Standard (Olympia, Washington)
Washington Times
The Weekly Intelligencer (Lexington, Missouri)

Archives:

AFL-CIO Labor Archives, College Park, Maryland.
The Federationist
Samuel Gompers Papers

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.
Herbert Hoover Presidential Papers

Indiana State University Special Collections, Terre Haute, Indiana.
Eugene V. Debs Papers
Misc. Socialist Papers and Pamphlets, 1890-1935

Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
Ray Stannard Baker Papers
Grover Cleveland Papers

Massillon Historical Society, Massillon, Ohio.
Jacob S. Coxey Papers

State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.
Misc. files on Coxey's Army and Populism, 1894-1895.

University of Pittsburgh Archive Service Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
James R. Cox Papers

Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.
Henry Demarest Lloyd Papers
Misc. newspapers

Secondary Sources:

Published Books:

Alexander, Benjamin F. *Coxey's Army: Popular Protest in the Gilded Age*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1993.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958.

Argersinger, Peter H. *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics*. Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1995.

Barber, Lucy G. *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002.

Battini, Michele. *Socialism of Fools: Capitalism and Modern Anti-Semitism.* Translated by Noor Mazhar and Isabella Vergnano. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Bender, Thomas. *Community and Social Change in America*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1978.

Bender, Thomas. *Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History.* New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Bhattacharya, Tithi, editor. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression.* London: Pluto Press, 2017.

Cooper, Jerry. *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865-1920*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Cresswell, Tim. *The Tramp in America*. London: Reakiton Books, 2001.

Curtis, Susan. *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Currarino, Roseanne. *The Labor Question: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Depastino, Todd. *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Digby-Junger, Richard. *The Journalist as Reformer: Henry Demarest Lloyd and Wealth Against Commonwealth*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Durden, Robert F. *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896*. Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965.

Eggert, Gerald G. *Richard Olney: Evolution of a Statesman*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974.

Eisenach, Eldon J. *The Lost Promise of Progressivism*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994.

Folsom, Franklin. *Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808-1942*. Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1991.

Goodwyn, Lawrence. *The Populist Moment in America: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Gourevitch, Alex. *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Gramsci, Antonio. *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. New York: International Publishing, 1959.

Habermas, Jurgen. *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1976.

Habermas, Jurgen. Translated by T. Burger. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

Hammond, Virgie Lee. *500 Rebels with a Cause: Coxey's Army bound for Washington DC*. Quincy, Illinois: Mid-West Press, 1989.

Heineman, Kenneth J. *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1955.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays.* New York: Knopf, 1965.

Howson, Embrey Bernard. *Jacob Sechler Coxey: A Biography of a Monetary Reformer*. New York: Arno Press, 1982.

Jinarajadasa, C. *First Principles of Theosophy. The Theosophical Publishing House*: Wheaton, Illinois, 1956.

Judis, John. *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics.* New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016.

Kachum, Mitch. *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Kazin, Michael. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

Kuhn, Alvin Boyd. *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930.

Kuhne, Karl. *Present Day's Workable Commonweal Economy*. Germany: Bank fur Germeinwirtschaft Aktiengesellsschaft, 1974.

Kuhne, Karl. *Principles of a Theory of Commonweal Economy*. Germany: Bank fur Germeinwirtschaft Aktiengesellschaft, 1970.

LaBrie, Henry G. *A Survey of Black Newspapers in America*. Georgia: Mercer House Press, 1973.

Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso, 2007.

Livingston, James. *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Martinek, Jason D. *Socialism and Print Culture in America, 1897-1920*. Vermont: Pickering & Chatto, 2012.

McMurry, Donald L. *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1929.

Müller, Jan-Werner. *What Is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Neget, Oskar and Alexander Kluge. *Public Sphere of Experience Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. New York: Verso, 1972.

Norton, Anne. *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Nugent, Walter. *The Tolerant Populists*. 2nd edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Pollack, Norman. *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Pommersheim, Frank. *Broken Landscape: Indians, Indian Tribes, and the Constitution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Postel, Charles. *The Populist Vision*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Prout, Jerry. *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016.

Ramsey, Bruce. *Unsanctioned Voice: Garet Garrett, Journalist of the Old Right*. Idaho: Caxton Press, 2008.

Rhodes, Jane. *Mary Ann Shadd Carry: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Richardson, Darcy G. *Others: Third-Party Politics From the Nation's Founding to the Rise and Fall of the Greenback-Labor Party*. iUniverse, Inc.: New York, 2004.

Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Sanders, Elizabeth. *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Salvatore, Nick. *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen Socialist*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Schneirov, Richard. *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Schwantes, Carlos A. *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey*. Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1994.

Schwantes, Carlos A. *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979.

Smythe, Ted Curtis. *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900*. Connecticut: Praeger, 2003.

Solomon, Martha M. *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1991.

Stromquist, Shelton. *Re-inventing the People: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Sullivan, James W. *Direct Legislation by the Citizenship through the Initiative and Referendum.* New York: True Nationalist Publishing Company, 1893.

Taylor, Marion Ann and Heather E. Weir. *Let Her Speak for Herself: Nineteenth Century Women Writing on Women in Genesis*. Baylor University Press: Texas, 2006.

Thomas, John L. *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Washburn, Patrick S. *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom. Chicago*: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

Watson, Bruce. *Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Williams, R. Hal. *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010.

Woeste, Victoria Saker. *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Woodward, C. Vann. *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938.

Articles and Chapters:

Barkun, Michael. "'Coxey's Army' as a Millenial Movement." In *Religion* 18:4 (1988): 363-389.

Burns, Dave. "The Soul of Socialism: Christianity, Civilization, and Citizenship in the Thought of Eugene Debs." In *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 5:2 (2008): 83-116.

Clinch, Thomas A. "Coxey's Army in Montana." In *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 15:4 (Autumn 1965): 2-11.

Coode, Thomas H. and John D. Petrarulo. "The Odyssey of Pittsburgh's Father Cox." In *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 55 (July 1972): 217-232.

Destler, Chester M. "Consummation of a Labor-Populist Alliance in Illinois, 1894." In *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27:4 (March 1941): 589-602.

Dewar, Mary. "The Authorship of 'Discourse of the Commonweal.'" In *The Economic History Review* 19:2 (1966): 388-400.

Eisenach, Eldon J. "Progressivism as a National Narrative in Biblical-Hegelian Time." In *Social Philosophy & Policy* 24:1 (2007): 55-83.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracies." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992: 109-142.

Hooper, Osmond C. "The Coxey Movement in Ohio." In *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* Vol. 9 (1901): 155-176.

Jordan, Patrick. "'Commonweal' and the 'Catholic Worker': Connects and Disconnects." In *Commonweal* (November 1994): 24-29.

Livingston, James. "The Anatomy of Populism." Accessed March 12, 2018, https://politicsandletters.wordpress.com/2016/11/11/the-anatomy-of-populism/

Livingston, James. "On Richard Hofstadter and the Politics of 'Consensus History'," *boundary 2* (2007): 33-46.

Lubienecki, Paul. "Catholic Labor Education and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists: Instructing Workers to Christianize the Workplace." In the *Journal of Catholic Education* 18:2 (2015): 99-124.

Maher, P.E. "Laurence Gronlund: Contributions to American Socialism." In *Political Research Quarterly* 15:4 (December 1962): 618-624.

McMurry, Donald L. "The Industrial Armies and the Commonweal." In *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 10:3 (1923): 215-252.

Prout, Jerry. "Hope, Fear, and Confusion: Coxey's Arrival in Washington." In *Washington History* Vol. 25 (Summer 2013): 1-19.

Rydell, Robert W. "The World's Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact." In *Journal of American Culture* 1:2 (Summer 1978): 253-275.

Schwantes, Carlos A. "Petition in Boots." In *Timeline* (1990): 3-17.

Schwantes, Carlos A. "Western Women in Coxey's Army in 1894." In *Journal of the Southwest* 26:1 (Spring 1894): 5-20.

Sumpter, Caroline. "Anthropology, Socialist Prediction, and William Morris's Commonweal." In *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society* 9:3 (2012): 349-367.

Sweeney, Michael S. "The Desire for the Sensational: Coxey's Army and the Argus-Eyed Demons of Hell." In *Journalism History* 23:3 (Autumn 1997): 114-126.

Weir, Robert. "Powderly and the Home Club: The Knights of Labor Joust Among Themselves." In *Labor History* 34:1 (1993): 84-114.

Unpublished Materials:

Feurer, Rosemary. "Mother Jones Lives: Adventures in Scholarly, Social Movement and Public History Revival of an Iconic Labor Activist." Paper, Midwest Labor and Working Class History 2018 Colloquium, Iowa City, May 26, 2018.

Feurer, Rosemary. "Radical Miners, Mother Jones, and the Occupying Tradition." Paper, Fighting Inequality: Joint Conference of the Labor and Working-Class History Association and the Working-Class Studies Association, Georgetown University, May 28, 2015.