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Article Summary: The Nebraska farmer turned to politics in 1922 for solutions to the economic problems he was experiencing in the severe depression of that year. He rejected the notion that his plight was none of the government's business. The political parties of Nebraska were aware of this discontent and all responded, to varying degrees, to the pressure. The agrarian voter was demanding an equality of economic opportunity, a reduction in taxes, and an elimination of what he believed to be wasteful spending.

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Photographs / Images: C A Sorensen; Guy Spencer Omaha *Morning World-Herald* cartoon, October 20, 1922

POLITICAL RESPONSE TO AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION IN NEBRASKA, 1922

BY FREDERICK C. LUEBKE

“THERE is no angrier man in the country than the western farmer,” wrote Mark Sullivan in his last syndicated column before the November elections of 1922. He described the farmer’s plight, how the farmer had to borrow money to pay his taxes, how, for example, his potato crop in many cases was not worth harvesting, and how high taxes, high wages for labor, and “wanton extravagance” by state governments were reinforcing the farmer’s suspicion that he was being “exploited by some subtle and invisible combination.”¹ Distrust of all politicians and of both old parties was the prevailing mood of the country, Sullivan wrote, and he predicted that radicals and third party candidates would do well as the farm population would express its discontent at the polls that week.

This analysis of the political situation was remarkably valid for Nebraska. While circumstances in this state pre-

¹ *Nebraska State Journal*, Lincoln, Nov. 5, 1922.

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cluded the possibility of its third party, the Progressive party, winning many votes, politicians who succeeded in creating a progressive image met a full measure of success, pushed down and overflowing. These were the men who accurately assessed agricultural discontent and, within the realm of the politically possible, engineered for themselves unusual victories.

It will be the purpose of this study, first to describe briefly the post-war farm crisis in Nebraska and the proposed political remedies for the farmers' ills, and, secondly, to describe and analyze the response of the political parties and their candidates in the general elections of 1922.

The prosperity enjoyed by the farmers of Nebraska, like those of the rest of the country, had been great during the years of shortage created by the first World War. With the coming of peace at the end of 1918 the agricultural community expected farm prices to tumble as normal conditions returned. But to everyone's surprise, the high levels not only continued but in 1919 new records were set. Not realizing how long it was taking for European agriculture to recover from the ravages of war, farmers began to believe that a new day of permanent prosperity had dawned. Accordingly, they continued their spending habits acquired during the war. Automobiles, tractors, machinery, luxuries of various kinds were purchased and, more important, many farmers mortgaged themselves at high rates of interest to acquire more acreage, much of it overpriced. New land was plowed, herds and flocks were increased, feed lots were filled.²

By the middle of 1920 the foreign markets for American agricultural products fell off sharply and about the same time the government price supports for wheat were discontinued. These events, coupled with a decision by the

² James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 296 and 298; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska The Land and The People* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), I, 983-4; George H. Fisher, "The Response of Nebraskans to National Political Issues, 1928-1932" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1958), pp. 1 and 2.

Federal Reserve Board to curtail credit, resulted in a sharp and sudden drop in farm prices.³ The total value of crop production in Nebraska dropped from a high of \$507,427,000 in 1919 to \$198,329,000 two years later, a mere 39.1% of the earlier figure. In 1922 the total value increased to \$238,888,000 but even that was less than half of the total for prosperous 1919.⁴ Corn, the most valuable single crop in Nebraska, dropped in value from \$224,294,000 in 1919 to \$75,125,000 in 1921, a 67% drop. While prices received for dairy products maintained themselves comparatively well through the depression period, all major Nebraska crop and livestock prices fell sharply, as shown by the following table:

AVERAGE PRICES FOR MAJOR FARM
COMMODITIES IN NEBRASKA, 1918-1922⁵

Year	Wheat bu.	Corn bu.	Oats bu.	Cattle cwt.	Hogs cwt.	Sheep cwt.
1918	\$2.01	\$1.45	\$.64	\$11.00	\$16.00	\$11.50
1919	2.07	1.32	.70	11.50	16.90	10.00
1920	1.59	.38	.49	9.70	12.80	7.60
1921	.96	.37	.25	6.20	7.30	4.45
1922	.92	.62	.32	6.50	8.10	7.20

Average commodity prices for each month illustrate the abruptness of the deflationary trend. For example, wheat was still commanding an all-time high of \$2.46 per bushel in June of 1920, just before the discontinuation of the government price supports began to take effect. By December the price had tumbled to \$1.35 and twelve months later the decline continued to \$.84. During the same months

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Inspection and United States Department of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Historical Record, 1866-1954* (State-Federal Division of Agricultural Statistics, n.d.), p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-19 and 155 to 157. It should be noted that these averages do not always reveal what they seem to because they are based on "crop years" which do not always correspond to the calendar year.

corn dropped from \$1.63 per bushel to \$.42 and reached a low point of \$.20 in January of 1922.⁶

Perhaps a better indication of the severity of the agricultural depression of 1921 and 1922 is to be seen in index numbers which reveal buying power on a relative basis. As the following table shows, the indices for 1921 were somewhat less than half of what they had been for 1919:

INDEX OF PRICES RECEIVED BY FARMERS OF
NEBRASKA, 1918-1922⁷

Year	All Commodities	All crops	Wheat	Feed Grains	Meat Animals
1918	213	229	245	240	213
1919	224	240	254	244	218
1920	200	241	257	204	174
1921	112	104	132	68	104
1922	115	101	119	80	116

Another measure of the agricultural depression in Nebraska, as it affected other sectors of the economy, can be seen in the number of bank failures in the state. During the years 1920 to 1922, forty-six state banks and five national banks closed their doors. This was in contrast to a total of twelve state and two national banks closing in the first two decades of this century.⁸ State banks were hit particularly hard because their assets were frequently tied up in real estate and crop mortgages which were increasingly difficult to collect.⁹

As 1922 ran its course a small measure of prosperity returned. The downward trend was halted generally and an optimistic note was sounded here and there. Governor Sam McKelvie, motivated at least in part by political considerations predicted increased and permanent prosperity.¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 139 and 141.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-135.

⁸ *The Nebraska Blue Book: 1924* (Lincoln: The Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1924), p. 273.

⁹ Olson, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

¹⁰ *Nebraska State Journal*, June 16, 1922.

But his was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. The farmer was still experiencing hard times; his own financial transactions made this abundantly clear, and he read about those hard times in virtually every newspaper and farm journal that came his way, including McKelvie's own publication, *The Nebraska Farmer*.

Everyone agreed that the situation was serious and that something had to be done. The solutions offered by the leaders of the farming population ran the full range from avoiding any kind of political involvement to the extreme of forming a farmers' political party.

Governor McKelvie, who was devoted to the idea that the farmer is a businessman and that successful farming required the adoption of methods and approaches adapted from commerce and industry, discounted the possibility that legislation alone could solve the farmers' problem. "The most that legislation can do is keep the course of opportunity open, and free from trammeling influences," the *Nebraska Farmer* editorialized. Most important was hard work and thrift on the part of the farmer himself. Legislation that goes beyond the point of creating equality of economic opportunity, the editorial continued,

and seeks to give an unfair advantage either to the farmer or to any other group, is soon recognized as prejudicial to the public welfare, and thus ultimately proves highly inimical to the very group whom it was intended to serve. The farmer who thinks and acts normally, seeks no special advantage. He asks only a fair field in which to operate.¹¹

A similar point of view was frequently expounded by L. S. Herron, the editor of the *Nebraska Union Farmer*, the official publication of the Nebraska Farmers Union. A fervent advocate of both consumer and marketing co-operatives as the means to agricultural prosperity, Herron characterized his union as strictly a farmers' organization, not politically oriented as earlier groups had been. He called for "just enough of legislative activity to insure farmers a square deal."¹² But among farm leaders there

¹¹ *Nebraska Farmer*, Lincoln, March 11, 1922, p. 8.

¹² *Nebraska Union Farmer*, Omaha, Sept. 12, 1922, p. 4.

was by no means agreement as to how much activity was needed to insure the desired end.

As part of his attempt to cope with agricultural depression President Harding called a National Agricultural Conference which met in Washington in February, 1922. The platform adopted by this group called for lower transportation costs, readjustment of price levels, the encouragement of co-operatives, crop and market statistics, the development of foreign markets, and, as might be expected from this group, continued high tariffs which included protection for farm products.¹³ Most of this program sounded harmless enough to most Nebraska farmers, although many of them opposed the administration's tariff plans. But they saw little in it that seemed directly related to the situation in Nebraska. Furthermore, the proposed farm reforms of a later day, such as the equalization payments of the McNary-Haugen plan, domestic allotment plans for restricting acreage, and government purchase and storage of surplus crops had received little or no publicity in 1922. To the farmer of Nebraska there was one easy way to lighten the load, one simple enough for anyone to understand, and that was to reduce taxes.

Taxes and the accompanying levy rates seemed to go higher and higher every year. During the prosperous war years of 1917 and 1918 the total amount of state taxes was \$8,846,838.67. This increased in the next biennium to \$15,316,120.62 and during the hard years of 1921-22 the amount climbed to \$18,271,560.21. In other words, as Governor McKelvie's Democratic enemies delighted to point out, the four years of his Republican administration cost \$33,587,680.33, in contrast to the \$15,179,015.13 spent during the previous four years when Democratic governors held office.¹⁴

According to the political propaganda of the day, the blame for such "wanton extravagance" was placed upon

¹³ *Nebraska Farmer*, February 18, 1922, p. 6.

¹⁴ *The Nebraska Blue Book: 1922* (Lincoln: The Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1922), p. 444.

the administrative code law, enacted at Governor McKelvie's behest by the Republican legislature of 1919. This rather progressive piece of legislation sought to reorganize the administrative structure of the state government. It sought to achieve greater efficiency and to center responsibility for administration in the office of governor. Yet in 1922 voices everywhere were raised against it as the cause of wasteful expenditures, duplication of function, and even as a violation of the people's will.

Equally bad, in the opinion of many farm leaders, was the revenue act of 1921. This law called for the assessment of intangible property, mortgages, stocks, bonds, and annuities, at 25% its actual worth. In the case of real property, the full value was established as the basis for the levy, rather than one fifth the actual value as the law formerly had specified. At the same time, however, the mill rate was dropped from 10.39 to 3.3, and the regulations governing the taxation of railroads, insurance companies, and franchises were also rewritten. The result of this juggling was slightly more than \$3,000,000 additional taxes in 1921.¹⁵

These two laws especially led many a farmer to conclude that his hardship would be substantially relieved through a general reduction in taxes and the elimination of wasteful spending and duplication in state government. Hundreds of articles were published which told him this. Many aspects of the tax problem were treated and much attention was given to alternative levies like sales taxes, gasoline tax, and income tax.

Further non-partisan political involvement by farm organizations may be seen in the fact that the Nebraska Farmers Union chose a committee for the purpose of studying legislation and recommending to the Union appropriate stands. Resolutions passed by this group, which met in Lincoln in September, 1922, favored a tax on municipally owned public utilities and home control over taxation and

¹⁵ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 280 and 444.

the expenditure of public funds. They opposed duplication of departments and of the work of public institutions "costing vast sums and bringing disaster and inefficiency of administration." It is significant that they also voted "conscientiously to investigate the past record of every candidate and support only those whose previous record has been such as to convince us they stand for the farmers' and producers' interest."¹⁶

In accordance with this "blacklist" resolution, the *Nebraska Union Farmer* published the voting record of all state legislators on the code bill and on the revenue act. The article also listed those members of the state legislature who were candidates in the coming election.¹⁷

The other major farm organization in Nebraska, the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, followed a policy almost identical to that of the Farmers Union. The executive committee of the Farm Bureau, together with the presidents of constituent county organizations, met in Lincoln in October, 1922, and adopted a legislative program that was also heavily tax oriented. While they called for taxation of municipally owned public utilities, for full taxation of intangible property, for a state income tax, and for opposition to a sales tax, their program was silent on the code bill and on the Fordney-McCumber tariff. The Farm Bureau stand also included the raising of the farm loan limit from \$10,000 to \$25,000, and the repeal of that portion of the Esch-Cummins act which guaranteed rates to the railroads based on fixed earnings.¹⁸

While the official committees of both the Union and the Farm Bureau found themselves unwilling or unable to take a stand on the Fordney-McCumber tariff, the editors of the farm publications were not so reluctant. Each of

¹⁶ *Nebraska Union Farmer*, September 13, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, October 11, 1922, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Nebraska Farm Bureau Review*, Lincoln, Oct. 25, 1922; *Nebraska Farmer*, Oct. 28, 1922, p. 9.

them attacked the tariff.¹⁹ One of the best statements against the tariff is found in McKelvie's *Nebraska Farmer*. High tariffs were opposed because they shut off trade with foreign countries, thereby causing drops in prices. If farmers accepted high protective rates for their products, then the manufacturing interests, who received real protection instead of the token variety promised the farmers, would get their way also and thus be enabled to charge still higher prices for their goods which the farmer must buy.²⁰

A variety of other issues were endorsed in the pages of the farm journals as possible solutions to the farm problem. Among these were continued support for the farm bloc in Congress, the appointment of a farmer to the board of governors of the Federal Reserve System, and government control, but not ownership, of the coal mines and railroads.²¹

The two farm organizations also held similar positions with respect to the endorsement of candidates. While the Union listed those legislators marked for defeat, the Farm Bureau urged its members to vote for every "dirt" farmer on the ballot, regardless of party affiliation. Voting a straight party ticket is an "insult to the individual and collective intelligence," and to do so is "to help politicians secure the spoils of office." The *Nebraska Farm Bureau Review* also cautioned its readers to be on guard against "farmers by proxy" who are in reality lawyers and city politicians. City newspapers too were to be held in suspicion:

Remember the large daily papers get their life-blood—their advertising—from the big business houses in the cities, not from the farmers. They have reason for giving publicity to city candidates and refusing to print the truth about farmer candidates, but you have no reason to be fooled by them.²²

¹⁹ *Nebraska Union Farmer*, Sept. 27, 1922, p. 7; Apr. 26, 1922, p. 1; July 12, 1922, p. 4; *Nebraska Farm Bureau Review*, July 12, 1922; Sept. 27, 1922.

²⁰ *Nebraska Farmer*, Feb. 14, 1922, p. 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*; *Nebraska Union Farmer*, Sept. 13, 1922 and Sept. 27, 1922.

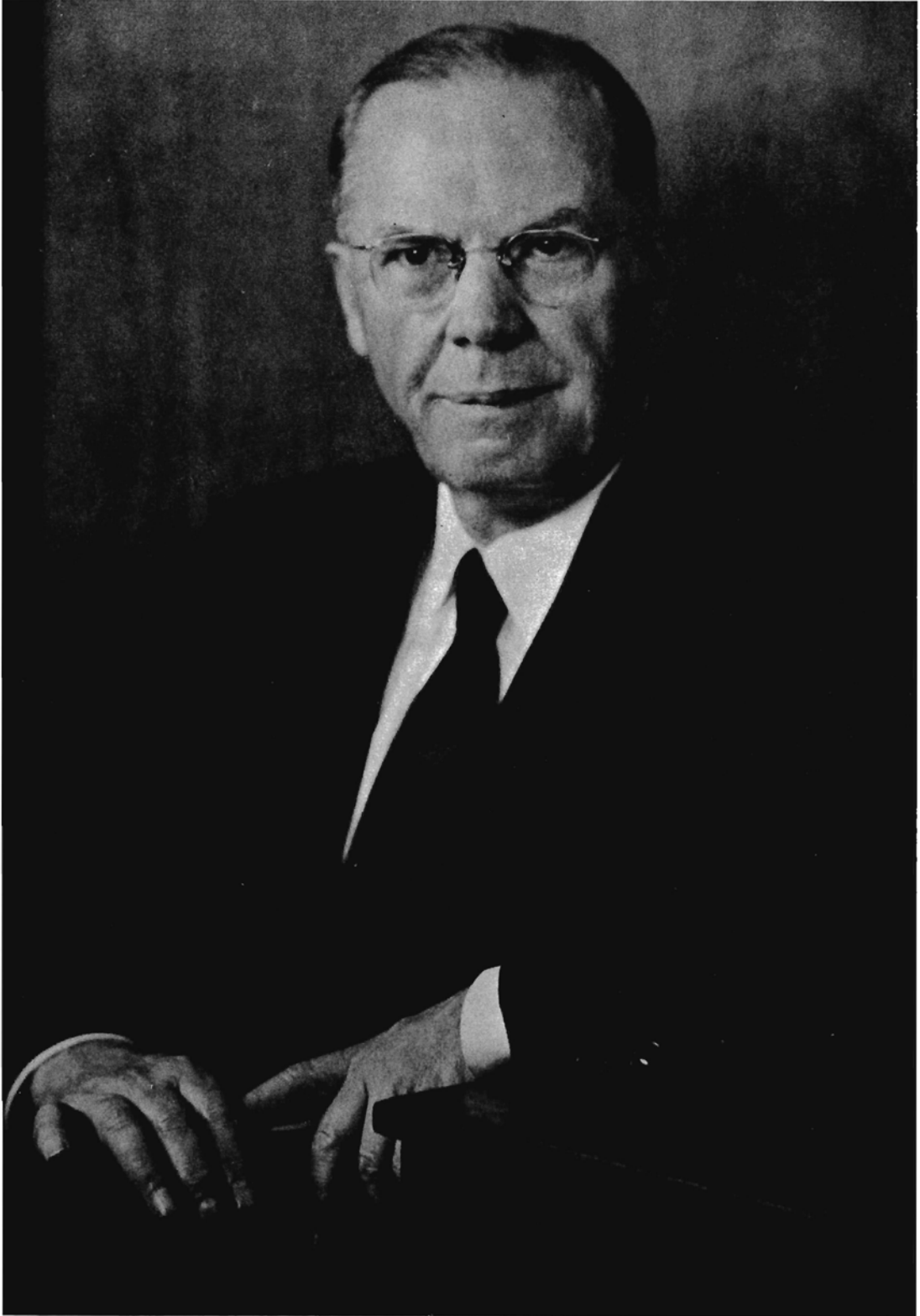
²² *Nebraska Farm Bureau Review*, July 12, 1922; Sept. 27, 1922.

It is possible to draw comparisons between these two farm organizations and to observe, for example, how one strongly objected to the code while the other "soft-pedaled" it, how the Farm Bureau seemed to be more business-oriented and how the Farmers Union was more closely allied to a neo-Populist point of view.²³ More significant than the differences between these two organizations relative to the political issues of 1922 were their similarities, how they both feared an Eastern financial conspiracy centered in Wall Street, how they believed they suffered from the excessive demands of labor, and how they shared common attitudes toward taxation and a distrust for both established political parties.

A number of prominent leaders of the farm population carried their political involvement to the point of running for office. Most prominent among these was John N. Norton, president of the Nebraska Farm Bureau, who became a candidate for governor on both the Democratic and Progressive tickets. Among the candidates for United States senator were C. H. Gustafson of Lincoln, national president of the United States Grain Growers Association and former president of the Nebraska Farmers Union, and J. O. Shroyer, chairman of the important legislative committee of the Farmers Union. Two other members of this committee, James Auten and A. L. Ullstrom, became candidates for the state legislature.²⁴ Yet the fact remains that while such men were active farm leaders, their organizations ordinarily did not back their candidacy in the columns of their official publications. L. S. Herron, editor of the *Nebraska Union Farmer*, felt that organizations like his own may safely push legislative programs, especially to insure effective co-operatives, but to endorse farm leaders as candidates for political office was dangerous since such men would be accused of using the farm organization as a step-

²³ Cf. James A. Stone, "Agrarian Ideology and the Farm Problem in Nebraska State Politics with Special Reference to Northeast Nebraska, 1920-1933" (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1960), p. 81.

²⁴ *Lincoln Star*, Lincoln, Nov. 9, 1922.



C. A. Sorensen



Nebraska agricultural discontent as seen by cartoonist Guy Spencer
(*Omaha Morning World Herald*, October 20, 1922)

ping stone. Much to be preferred, wrote Herron, was the dissemination of information and the discussion of issues.²⁵

In direct opposition to those farm leaders who denied the effectiveness of the political process to remedy agriculture's ills were those who felt that hope lay in the formation of a farmers' political party. While some believed that it was necessary for the farm vote to operate in and through the existing major parties by capturing its leadership and influencing its policy, others were firmly convinced that the only adequate solution lay in the formation of a separate party. Such a political force, in alliance with the urban labor vote, they believed, could be created and could displace either the Republican or Democratic party.²⁶

The concept of making farm or farm-labor influence decisive in the councils of whichever political party held the most promise was vigorously advanced by the North Dakotan, Arthur C. Townley, of the Non-Partisan League, and in Nebraska notably by C. A. Sorenson, a young Lincoln lawyer. The nucleus of the League in Nebraska was the Farmers Union and was particularly strong in the German settled rural areas.²⁷

In contrast to Townley's "balance of power" idea, as it was often called, farmers like W. J. Taylor of Merna and labor leaders like Anson H. Bigelow, a labor union lawyer from Omaha, were dedicated to the proposition of a third

²⁵ *Nebraska Union Farmer*, June 28, 1922.

²⁶ Thus hoping to exploit such a combination with the addition of a strong ethno-religious factor, "Alfalfa John" Franklin wrote to C. A. Sorenson regarding his possible candidacy: "I got letters of recommendation from the Brotherhood of Ry. trainman [sic] and also from the Conductors, and the best one from the German S. W. Nebraska Luthern [sic] Conference, they couldn't make it any stronger," "Alfalfa John" [Franklin] to C. A. Sorenson, Beaver City, Nebraska, May 25, 1921, C. A. Sorenson MSS, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

²⁷ Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics: A Historical Study of its Origins and Development, 1875-1950* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 315.

party. To this end the Progressive party was formed in December, 1921.²⁸

However, the former point of view was the one which seemed to be the more potent, as the 1922 primary elections across the nation suggest. In the Republican party such regulars as McCumber of North Dakota and Cummins of Iowa were replaced by the radicals Frazier and Brookhart. The great progressive leader Robert LaFollette remained supreme in Wisconsin while Pinchot and Beveridge won nominations in Pennsylvania and Indiana.²⁹

To summarize, a consensus existed among the farm leaders of Nebraska regarding the relationship of government, politics, and legislation to the farm crisis of 1921 and 1922. The agrarian voter was demanding an equality of economic opportunity, a reduction in taxes of all kinds, and a corresponding elimination of what seemed to him to be wasteful spending by the state and local government. How such a program was to be achieved was another question. Some leaders of Nebraska agriculture claimed that politics offered no solution at all, while others suggested split ticket voting, endorsement of issues by farm organizations, blacklists, and the endorsement of "dirt farmer" candidates. Several offered themselves as candidates for government office within the major parties, but others insisted on a third party that would unite the interests of the farmer with those of labor.

In 1920, Nebraska was thoroughly Republican. The state's only major political office held by a Democrat was Gilbert Hitchcock's United States senate seat. His was the only position that had not yet been subjected to the post-war wave of disillusionment that had swept Wilsonian Democrats from office. Nebraska's other senator, the governor, and the six-seat Congressional delegation were all Republican. Perhaps the Republican landslide of 1920 in Nebraska is best measured by the fact that in the state

²⁸ See "Agreement to Form a New Political Party in the State of Nebraska," Sorenson MSS.

²⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, June 15, 1922.

house of representatives only four seats out of a hundred were held by Democrats and in the senate they held none at all.³⁰

Senator Hitchcock knew that, even though he was chairman of the prestigious Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a leader of national reputation, he would have to battle for his political life. Not only did he remain the symbol of discredited Wilsonian policy, but he also had evoked the wrath of powerful political groups by opposing both the prohibition and woman suffrage amendments in the Senate even though the latter measure had won the overwhelming approval of Nebraska voters in the election of 1918.³¹

While there was little doubt that Hitchcock would be able to win the Democratic nomination for re-election, there was no possibility of success in November without a unified Democratic party. Harmony became the catch word among the Democrats as politicians in all parties jockeyed and maneuvered during the months preceding the primary elections.

This pre-primary struggle became extremely complicated. It is important, however, because it clearly illustrates the political response in Nebraska to agricultural depression.

The leading candidate for the Republican nomination for the Senate was Robert Beecher Howell. As the organizer and administrator of municipal corporations in Omaha and as a Republican national committeeman, Howell had become a prominent leader of the progressive element in the party. According to C. A. Sorenson, Howell had made up his mind to run as early as January, 1922, even though he knew that President Harding, Harry Daugherty, and the regular Republican organization intended to put Congressman A. W. Jefferis in the race. Howell wanted to go to Washington, Sorenson wrote, "so that he can join the

³⁰ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 209-226.

³¹ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I, 954.

farm bloc and raise hell."³² His chances of winning the nomination were excellent, not because the Republicans wanted him, but because they feared if Jefferis was to get the nomination instead of Howell there would be "a stampede of the Republican farmers to the Progressive party."³³

The intentions of another politician, Judge Arthur G. Wray, also figured in the senate race. As an independent progressive candidate for governor in 1920, Judge Wray had garnered nearly ninety thousand votes, about one fourth of the total cast. Wray had been thinking of the Senate but since Howell had set his hat for that office, Sorenson advised him to think again in terms of the governorship on the Progressive party ticket, but this time with the help of the Howell Republicans.³⁴ Yet by the time a complicated series of events had run its course, Wray had announced for governor, then withdrew, filed as a candidate for the Progressive nomination for senator, and after getting the nod withdrew from that race in favor of Howell.

The race for the several nominations for governor presented another complicated picture. Samuel R. McKelvie, who had competently filled the office for two terms, was under merciless attack and was not expected to run again. Therefore the race was wide open in the Republican party. Nevertheless the progressives in the party were hard put to find suitable candidates.³⁵

As for the Democrats, the contending Hitchcock and Bryan factions had their separate hopes. To balance his candidacy, Hitchcock's followers were willing to accept almost any progressive Democrat as candidate for governor except the eventual nominee, Charles W. Bryan of Lincoln, brother of the "Great Commoner," William Jennings

³² C. A. Sorenson to Arthur G. Wray, Jan. 20, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

³³ C. A. Sorenson to Frank A. Harrison, January 27, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

³⁴ Sorenson to Arthur G. Wray, Jan. 20, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

³⁵ Sorenson to Frank Harrison, Jan. 27, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

Bryan.³⁶ It was Sorenson's opinion that the Hitchcock people would even be willing to support John N. Norton of the Nebraska Farm Bureau. Norton, however, was hesitant to run because he expected Judge Wray to be in the race. A Norton candidacy would thus split the progressive-farmer vote and thereby weaken the chances of satisfying agrarian discontent at the polls.³⁷

Yet the possibility of Norton in the governor's mansion was appealing to many people. He was being pushed hard by friends who wished to see him win both the Democratic and Progressive nominations.³⁸

This complication presented a dilemma to Sorenson and the influential group that he led. Characterized as the "Mark Hanna of the bi-partite Nebraska progressive party" by the *Nebraska State Journal*,³⁹ Sorenson had committed himself to advance the political fortunes of both Wray and Howell.⁴⁰ If the Progressives backed Norton, Wray would have to be switched back to the Senate race. This action, in turn, would eliminate the anticipated endorsement for Howell by the Progressive party.⁴¹

At the same time this turn of events laid bare the inner struggle which was going on in the Progressive party. Sorenson and his group believed that the Progressive party should endorse the best candidate, be he Democratic, Republican, or Progressive. Such a "fusionist" or "balance of power" approach had led to the demise of the old Populist party. If the Progressive party was to continue its brief existence, declared its secretary, W. H. Green, a leader of the purist "middle of the road" position, endorsements like the one proposed for Howell must be avoided. Green correctly identified "the fine Italian hand of Mr. Soren-

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Sorenson to Frank Harrison, Jan. 27, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

³⁸ *Omaha World Herald*, February 4, 1922.

³⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, May 21, 1922.

⁴⁰ Sorenson to Arthur G. Wray, Jan. 20, 1922, and to Frank Harrison, Jan. 27, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁴¹ *Omaha World Herald*, February 4, 1922.

son," to use his phrase, behind the maneuvering within the Progressive party.⁴²

Unfortunately for the destinies of the Progressive party, the confusion over who should run for what increased during February and March, 1922. Norton at first decided against running for governor; consequently Wray announced that he would. Meanwhile, Sorenson and company became convinced that the Norton candidacy was to be preferred so they circulated a petition to make him a candidate for the nomination.⁴³

The problem of Wray's candidacy remained. J. H. Edmisten, an old line Populist leader who had become an officer of the Progressive party, signed his name to a lengthy letter, a heavily edited copy of which is in the Sorenson papers. Its purpose was to convince Wray to withdraw from the gubernatorial race in Norton's favor and to announce for the senate, which, of course, is what Wray had wanted to do in the first place. Edmisten wrote: "As this new movement is largely a farmer movement, it would bring tens of thousands of votes to us if a well known progressive farmer could be secured to run for Governor." Edmisten reminded Wray that in the event that Hitchcock and Jefferis got the Democratic and Republican nominations respectively, he might very well make it on the Progressive ticket since both opponents were conservative Omahans, "wet" on the prohibition issue, and both had fought woman suffrage. By contrast, Wray was from outstate, "dry," progressive, for woman suffrage, and closely associated with the farm movement and could therefore expect to be elected.⁴⁴

To the "mid-road" Progressives, endorsement of the Democrat Norton was no more welcome than one for

⁴² *Omaha World Herald*, Feb. 5, 1922. See also Feb. 13, 1922.

⁴³ Sorenson to R. C. Roper, Feb. 28, 1922 and R. C. Roper to Sorenson, David City, Mar. 12, 1922, Sorenson MSS

⁴⁴ J. H. Edmisten to Arthur G. Wray, Apr. 8, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

Howell. Sorenson received one impassioned reaction which voiced the purist point of view:

I want you to know that I would nearly as soon vote for McKelvie as Norton, Now Why, [sic] not that he isn't particularly progressive but I say damn a man that beats around the bush, it makes me so damn mad when I think of Norton being at Grand Island [at the organizational meeting of the Progressive party in December, 1921] as a damn sneak to see what he could find out but not progressive enough to help us build a real progressive party but willing to ride into office by this vote and throw laurels to the Democratic party, and wreck the progressive party just as they did with the Populist . . . Let me say that the people of Nebraska want Wray for Gov. and you folks will be a sorry bunch after election if you don't let them have him. Lastly let me say that the only way Norton can have my vote is to come out in the open, he must be a progressive and not just pose as one.⁴⁵

Edmisten's letter to Wray had ignored the likelihood that Howell would win the Republican nomination for the Senate. If Wray became a candidate on the Progressive ticket and Howell would win his race, Wray could not possibly hope to win; on the other hand if Wray became a candidate and subsequently was to withdraw in favor of Howell, as he had just done for Norton, his political future would cease to exist. Therefore Sorenson, in an attempt to salvage the wreckage of Wray's political career, advised him not to file as a Progressive candidate for the Senate, but to create a public image of 100% sacrifice for Norton's chances; then, in case Howell lost the senatorial nomination to Jefferis, an overwhelming popular demand would arise for a Wray candidacy to run by petition as a Progressive and a "dry."⁴⁶ A week later Sorenson could assure Senator Norris that if Howell was nominated Wray would not run against him.⁴⁷ Yet Wray eventually did file for the Progressive nomination as he had to do to keep it from going to his "mid-road" rival, Anson H. Bigelow.

The effect of Sorenson's manipulation was to intensify the split in the ranks of the Progressive party. On May 17, 1922, a conference of about a hundred Progressives met in

⁴⁵ H. L. Swanson to Sorenson, April 18, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁴⁶ Sorenson to Arthur G. Wray, May 9, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁴⁷ Sorenson to Sen. George Norris, May 17, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

Grand Island for the purpose of devising means to head off the "Wray-Norton fusion combination." Bitterness and acrimony, rather than solid accomplishment, characterized this meeting and it led to the withdrawal from the party by Edgar Howard, who subsequently won election to Congress as a Democrat.⁴⁸

The split in the Progressive ranks between the fusionists and the midroaders is a reflection of the role labor was to play in relation to the farm vote. Most of the leaders of the midroad group were associated with labor interests while Sorenson, Wray, Edmisten, and other fusionists sought their support primarily among farmers. Sorenson was wary of labor leaders. He thought of them as radicals and socialists. To have such men as standard bearers was not good politics, he wrote, for if radicals win control responsible men take their leave.⁴⁹

As the deadline approached for filing in the primary election it appeared that most of the Progressive party candidates were Democrats or former Democrats that would still be acceptable to the voters of that party. According to the *Lincoln Star*, this was an attempt to make fusion easy. While most of these men filed on both tickets, they did not actually expect to get both nominations. Yet it was done for a specific purpose. Under Nebraska law, a candidate running for both major and minor party nominations was automatically eliminated from the general election if his vote in the minor party's primary did not exceed that which he received in the major party's primary.⁵⁰ Thus if a candidate ran in both the Democratic and Progressive elections, lost as a Democrat, but won as a Progressive, he would forfeit his nomination as a Progressive unless his minor party vote was greater than the number of votes he got in the Democratic primary. A vacancy on the Progressive slate would then be created which would have to be filled by the state central committee. The

⁴⁸ *Columbus Daily Telegram*, May 17, 1922.

⁴⁹ Sorenson to F. A. Amsberry, May 13, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁵⁰ *Laws of Nebraska*, 1917, c. 35, p. 111.

state central committee, observed the *Star*, was controlled by fusionists and therefore could be expected to endorse the regular Democratic candidate.⁵¹

Events ran according to plan. Norton filed on both Democratic and Progressive tickets, opposed in the latter by W. J. Taylor, a mid-road leader. While Norton failed to win the Democratic nomination he polled more votes in that race than he did in the Progressive primary, which he won. Thus he forfeited his Progressive nomination but, more significantly, he beat out Taylor, who was thereby finessed out of the general election. The central committee could then endorse either the Democratic or the Republican nominee, whichever was more favorable to agricultural interests.⁵²

As the *Star* had predicted, the Progressives eventually endorsed for governor the winner of the Democratic primary, Charles W. Bryan. "Brother Charley" had been serving the city of Lincoln as a commissioner and as mayor. As such he had created a public image of a progressive politician dedicated to the concept of municipal ownership of coal yards and ice plants as means of forcing privileged moneyed interests to give the little fellow a square deal.⁵³

Although Bryan filed at the last minute, ostensibly in response to a petition signed by fifty Democrats which he claimed represented all elements,⁵⁴ his candidacy was part of the attempt to rescue the party from disaster by "harmonizing" the Hitchcock and Bryan factions. As Addison Sheldon pungently put it,

For at least eight years each had vigorously been proving that the other was wholly untrustworthy, had betrayed the people, and was an enemy to the cause of human progress. The political situation now required that each and his friends should solemnly assert that all they had been saying about each other were untrue and that no nobler Democrats existed in Nebraska than these respective champions.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Lincoln Star*, May 26, 1922.

⁵² The Progressive vote for governor: Norton, 4,648; Taylor 3,624. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 991.

⁵³ *Omaha World Herald*, August 16, 1922.

⁵⁴ *Omaha World Herald*, June 17, 1922.

⁵⁵ Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I, 990.

As noted above, the major issues that had divided the two factions were prohibition and woman suffrage. Now both groups proclaimed loudly and frequently that these issues were settled. The people had spoken, having written these measures into the Constitution. While it is true that woman suffrage was no longer being debated, the liquor issue was very much alive in Nebraska. Throughout the campaign both Hitchcock and Bryan naturally but not always successfully tried to sidestep the question.

Nor was "harmony" universally acclaimed within the ranks of the Democratic party. Norton was hurt badly by Bryan's filing for governor. Before his entry the only other major figure that had entered the Democratic race was Dan Butler of Omaha. As a big city candidate and a "wet," that is, one who advocated the exclusion of beer and light wines from the enforcement provisions of the Volstead act, Butler provided a real contrast to Norton. But with Bryan in the race, the "dry" vote and the farmer vote would be split and therefore vastly improve Butler's chances of winning the nomination, as he very nearly did. However, Bryan won with a narrow margin and Norton came in third.⁵⁶

The Republican race for the gubernatorial nomination was characterized by the absence of what might be called a progressive candidate. The chief aspirants were Adam McMullen of Beatrice, State Senator Charles H. Randall of Randolph, and Albert H. Byrum of Bloomington but none of these had the qualifications of a running mate for Howell.⁵⁷ All three were "dry" and campaigned on their personal and political records.⁵⁸ Although McMullen had some appeal for the progressive element, he was edged out in a very close race by Randall, a regular Republican who

⁵⁶ *Nebraska State Journal*, July 4, 1922; July 12, 1922. The results of the Democratic primary for governor were: Bryan, 28,244; Butler, 24,555; Norton, 19,615; Maupin, 6,414. Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I, 991. A month later the *Nebraska State Journal* piously stated that Bryan had entered the race "as his sacred duty" to keep the nomination from Butler or a dry like Norton who was supported by the wet Arthur Mullen. *Nebraska State Journal*, Aug. 18, 1922.

⁵⁷ Sorenson to Frank Harrison, Mar. 11, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁵⁸ *Nebraska State Journal*, July 17, 1922.

bravely defended the record his party had made under Sam McKelvie.⁵⁹

Shortly before the deadline for filing a series of events occurred which clearly indicates the importance politicians were attaching to agricultural discontent. As has been noted, the leadership of both farm organizations in Nebraska had urged the election of real "dirt" farmers. Yet neither R. Beecher Howell nor Albert Jefferis, the two announced candidates, were closely or personally identified with the farm population. Therefore C. H. Gustafson, former president of the Nebraska Farmers Union and the president of the U. S. Grain Growers Association, had been urged to enter the race as the *bona fide* farm candidate.⁶⁰ Gustafson succumbed to this pressure, filed as a candidate, and in the process threatened Howell's chances of beating Jefferis, the regular Republican candidate, for, as Sorenson described it, "every vote he gets is a vote that Howell would have gotten if Gustafson had stayed out."⁶¹

What had been true of the Republican field of candidates for the senate was also true of the Democratic. Senator Hitchcock, hardly identified as a farm candidate, had only token opposition. Thus, when farmers who normally voted Democratic would see Gustafson's candidacy, large numbers of them could be expected to cross over into the Republican party for the time being in order to vote for a farmer.⁶²

Furthermore, this development was damaging to Norton's race for the governorship since both Gustafson and Norton were of Swedish parentage. If Gustafson were not running, farmers of Scandinavian extraction would tend to vote in the Democratic primary for Norton. But they were likely to be more interested in the election of a Swede

⁵⁹ Randall received 49,561 votes to 48,734 for McMullen. Byrum ran a poor third with 12,106. Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I, 991.

⁶⁰ Arthur G. Wray to Sorenson and Bollen, June 19, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁶¹ Sorenson to Frank Harrison, June 23, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁶² *Ibid.*

to the senate than to the governor's chair. Hence, Norton could expect a considerable defection.⁶³

The solution to the problems raised by Gustafson's candidacy was disarmingly simple. All that was necessary to keep those normally Democratic farmers and Swedes within the fold was to get a "dirt" farmer candidate into the Democratic senate race to balance Gustafson. In order to accomplish this, Reverend F. A. High of the Anti-Saloon League took J. O. Shroyer, secretary of the legislative committee of the Farmers Union, upon a mountain, to use Sorenson's colorful analogy,

and told him how popular he was and how all the women of the state would get back of him in an attempt to beat Hitchcock and how all the farmers' organizations would get back of him. Well, Shroyer didn't say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." When High made his report to his republican friends there must have been great rejoicing; they knew that Shroyer's candidacy would keep in the democratic primaries thousands of farmers and women who would think that there was a chance to defeat Hitchcock. . . . Of course Shroyer has not the slightest chance of defeating Hitchcock.⁶⁴

The results of the primary election held July 18, 1922, were not unexpected. Hitchcock won his Democratic re-nomination with no difficulty and Howell easily defeated Jefferis and four other opponents in the Republican contest. Interestingly enough, the two farm candidates each polled eighteen thousand votes in their respective races.⁶⁵ Judge Wray had won the Progressive party nomination for senator but since Howell was victorious, his candidacy could do more harm than good to the agricultural interests. Consequently Wray withdrew from the race in Howell's favor long before the general election in November.⁶⁶

Matched in the gubernatorial race were Charles Randall, Republican, and Charles W. Bryan, Democrat. John

⁶³ *Lincoln Star*, June 22, 1922.

⁶⁴ Sorenson to Frank Harrison, June 23, 1922, Sorenson MSS.

⁶⁵ Democratic results: Hitchcock, 46,752; Shroyer, 17,045; Monohan, 10,134. Republican results: Howell, 40,254; Jefferis, 25,925; Davis, 25,534; Gustafson, 18,516; John, 4,622; Yeiser, 3,450. Sheldon, *op. cit.*, I, 991.

⁶⁶ *Omaha World Herald*, August 26, 1922.

Norton had won the Progressive nomination but, as explained above, was disqualified by law.

The following table lists the winners of the nominations for Nebraska's six seats in Congress:⁶⁷

MAJOR PARTY NOMINEES FOR CONGRESS FOR
THE GENERAL ELECTION, 1922

<i>District</i>	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Democratic</i>
1	Walter L. Anderson	John H. Morehead
2	Willis G. Sears	James H. Hanley
3	Robert E. Evans	Edgar Howard
4	M. O. McLaughlin	H. B. Cummins
5	W. E. Andrews	Ashton C. Shallenberger
6	Robert Simmons	Charles W. Beal

Of the Republican candidates, Evans, McLaughlin, and Andrews were incumbents. Anderson had been the speaker of the Nebraska house of representatives and was closely identified with the code law, the revenue act, and other policies of the McKelvie administration. Of the Democratic nominees, both Morehead and Shallenberger were former governors and Howard was well known as the editor of the *Columbus Telegram*.

The conventions of the several state political parties all met on August 15, 1922. The chief task of the several conventions was to hammer out a platform acceptable to all elements within the parties.

The Democratic meeting in Omaha was a love feast. The "harmonized" Hitchcock-Bryan factions completely dominated the convention. The platform was larded with purple adjectives and exaggerations that had become almost cliché. The Democrats pledged themselves "to drastic retrenchment and economy in government," to "oppose special privilege in all its myriad forms," including the Fordney-McCumber tariff, the ship subsidy bill, and the

⁶⁷ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 470-473.

revision of federal laws. They denounced "the unnecessarily drastic deflation of currency and credits, at the expense of agriculture, labor, and legitimate business, as a perversion and misuse of the powers of the federal reserve system." While they favored the increase in the farm loan limit from \$10,000 to \$25,000 they deplored both the delay and the cost of irrigation projects in western Nebraska. The Esch-Cummins act was to be amended, child labor in industry opposed, and the eight hour day and the principle of collective bargaining endorsed. While they demanded the immediate passage of a compensation act for ex-service men, the prohibition issue was treated in typical "harmony" style: "We stand for the equitable and impartial enforcement of the constitution and the laws, and believe they should be respected by the government itself the same as by the citizens."⁶⁸ Of course the question of the status of beer and light wine was ignored.

After endorsing Hitchcock and the several nominees for the national House of Representatives, the platform moved on to state problems:

In Nebraska, as well as in the nation, the great issue of the pending campaign will be the problem of taxation. To meet this issue fairly the democrats of Nebraska have nominated as their candidate for governor a man whose very name is an argument in opposition to code bills and all other forms of republican incompetence and extravagance.⁶⁹

The individual planks were largely negative and clearly designed to attract agrarian votes: repeal the code and thereby restore "constitutional government," repeal the "iniquitous" revenue law, reduce the automobile tax, and keep the cost of the new state capitol within appropriations. At the same time they endorsed the principle of cooperative marketing, the primary system, and were for water power development under state control.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 405-7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

⁷⁰ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 407-8. See also *Omaha World Herald*, Aug. 16, 1922 and *Nebraska State Journal*, Aug. 16, 1922.

Harmony among the Republicans was much more difficult to attain. As Adam Breede, a Republican editor from Hastings, pointed out in an editorial, the two men who headed the Republican slate, Howell and Randall, differed on several fundamental issues. Howell, he wrote, was for the direct primary, Randall against it; Howell was "radical," Randall was a conservative banker; Howell was "progressive," while Randall was regular.⁷¹

On many points the Republican platform differed from the Democratic only in the choice of words which clothed the issues. While it was silent on the revenue act, the document pointed out the fact that the Republican legislature had, in a special session, reduced appropriations by two million dollars. A major difference lay in the endorsement of a high protective tariff. Regarding the administrative code, the platform endorsed its principles but called for "such amendments as four years of experience have demonstrated will further efficiency and economy," an obvious concession to the progressive wing. The Republicans also saw fit to congratulate President Harding "upon the remarkable achievements of his administration."⁷²

One issue fought out at the Republican convention in Lincoln was to have considerable significance for later developments. This was the question of endorsing the Reed-Norval act. This law, enacted at the behest of superpatriotic members of the American Legion and other organizations forbade in the name of Americanism the use of any language other than English in the elementary schools public or private. Aimed primarily at German Lutheran and Catholic parochial schools, the Reed-Norval act had received endorsement by a number of county conventions.⁷³ Many Republicans wished to give the law a ringing endorsement but Randall, who came from northeastern Nebraska where German farm population was heavy, wished

⁷¹ *Omaha World Herald*, Aug. 9, 1922.

⁷² *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 408-411.

⁷³ See, e.g. the Lancaster County Convention, *Omaha World Herald*, August 9, 1922.

to avoid alienating these people whose resentment, he knew, could very easily be brought to the surface. The platform committee supported Randall's point of view by rejecting the proposed endorsement, six to three.⁷⁴ Later on the *Lincoln Star* charged that the chairman of the committee, who was the attorney for German language interests, had been deliberately picked in order to bring about the defeat of the resolution.⁷⁵

The Progressive party met in convention also in Lincoln, August 15, 1922. Like all third party platforms the Progressive platform was a good deal more radical than the other two. While it contained many of the same planks found in the other platforms, it took a definite stand on many more issues, both national and state, and borrowed heavily on its heritage of Populist thought and rhetoric.⁷⁶

All the splendid oratory and all the evangelical zeal of Judge Wray's keynote address was inadequate to bring about any semblance of unity within the party's ranks. To write a platform was not difficult; the real problem had to do with vacancies on the Progressive slate of candidates. Was John Norton's candidacy to be replaced by an endorsement of the Democratic nominee, as the "fusionists" wanted, or was a *bona fide* Progressive to be appointed in his place, as the "midroaders" demanded? Furthermore, the question of Wray's candidacy remained. Everyone expected him to withdraw in favor of Howell, yet he had not yet officially taken that step.⁷⁷ Despite the fact that the "midroaders" apparently held a majority at the Lincoln meeting, the convention voted to adjourn temporarily in order to meet in Grand Island with the state convention of the Non-Partisan League on August 24, 1922, to work out a joint league-progressive program.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Omaha World Herald*, Aug. 16, 1922.

⁷⁵ *Lincoln Star*, Oct. 31, 1922.

⁷⁶ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1922*, pp. 411-413.

⁷⁷ Formal withdrawal did not occur until Sept. 26, 1922. *Omaha World Herald*, Sept. 26, 1922.

⁷⁸ *Omaha World Herald*, August 16, 1922.

At Grand Island the "fusionist" or "balance of power" concept won out. Long championed by the able C. A. Sorenson, this cause was abetted by the presence at the convention of Arthur C. Townley of North Dakota, national head of the Non-Partisan League. The opportune moment had arrived for Wray to resign his nomination, and the convention proceeded to endorse, but not with enthusiasm, the Republican candidate for senator, R. Beecher Howell, the Democratic candidate for governor, Charles W. Bryan, and the Progressive candidate for lieutenant governor, T. J. Ellsberry.

The "midroader" faction, however, refused to stay dead. Several members of the executive committee of the Progressive party together with a number of Non-Partisan Leaguers successfully bolted the convention and were able to get the names of their candidates on the ballot as the representatives of the Progressive party.⁷⁹ But it was a Pyrrhic victory; the Progressive party was reduced to little more than a name. In the general election these candidates, the Reverend James L. Beebe, for senator, and Henry Parmenter, for governor, were able to attract less than five percent of the vote for their respective offices.⁸⁰

The last ten weeks of the campaign were not unusual. The expected charges and counter charges were made; some were relevant while others were not. Specious argumentation and fine oratorical style weakened by countless repetitions were sparked by the emotional content of the campaign. Disagreement existed as to what the main issues actually were. The *Omaha World Herald*, owned and published by Senator Hitchcock, hammered away at high taxes, extravagant spending, the "robber tariff," deflation, and the administrative code. Other issues were virtually ex-

⁷⁹ *Omaha World Herald*, Aug. 27, 1922.

⁸⁰ *Tabulated Report of the General Election Held Nov. 7, 1922*, Nebraska State Canvassing Board (Lincoln: Charles W. Pool, Secretary of State, n.d.), p. 7.

cluded.⁸¹ While it denied that prohibition was a real issue, its Republican counterpart in Lincoln, the *Nebraska State Journal*, seemed to believe that it was the only issue of real significance.

Charles Bryan frequently predicted that with the abolition of the administrative code taxes would drop sharply; Governor McKelvie replied with statistics to demonstrate that with repeal and the elimination of the salaries paid under it taxes would be reduced .036 of 1%. More money was being spent, the governor explained, because the people were asking for a new capitol, for five thousand miles of roads, for an increase in the size of the state university, the state colleges, and the state penitentiary.⁸²

Another example of the confusion which assaulted the voter was revealed by the *Nebraska State Journal* when it cited a farm journal as informing its readers of an ICC reduction of ten percent in railroad rates on all but agricultural products, thereby creating the impression that the farming population had to suffer while the manufacturing interests could prosper. Actually, according to the *Journal*, shortly before the publicized reduction the rates on agricultural products had been reduced fifteen percent—five percent more than any other group interest had received.⁸³

The fundamental issues as R. Beecher Howell saw them were two in number and much of his campaign oratory consisted of variations on them. First, there was the problem of compelling the application of private business methods to public affairs, and second, the problem of curbing monopolies. The best method of accomplishing this, Howell said, was to adopt the idea of public competition. According to this plan, a publicly owned and operated business

⁸¹ A spot check of the *World Herald* from Sept. 16 to Nov. 7, 1922, indicated the following number of editorials or feature articles: high taxes, 18; deflation, 13; tariff, 13; code, 9; prohibition, 7; spending, 7; against the Non-Partisan League, 4. It should be remembered that many editorials dealt with interrelated issues and therefore cannot easily be categorized.

⁸² *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Oct. 19, 1922. See also *Nebraska Farmer*, Oct. 28, 1922.

⁸³ *Nebraska State Journal*, June 22, 1922.

should be created in any industry where a monopoly threatened.⁸⁴ By this means there could be a return to individualism by the restoration of free competition. He advocated exclusive public ownership of an industry only as a last resort.⁸⁵

Although Howell frequently devoted many words to radio development, an infant industry in 1922, he refused to take a position on the Fordney-McCumber tariff and on taxation problems generally. As far as the prohibition issue was concerned he was thoroughly "dry" and therefore safe. His fundamental problem, however, was to reconcile his diverse support, which ranged all the way from A. C. Townley on the left to Nelson Updike, who was a grain speculator, publisher of the *Omaha Bee*, and epitome of Harding Republicanism, on the right.⁸⁶

By the end of his campaign Howell had unquestionably created in the public mind an image of a progressive, acceptable to labor and the "dry" vote as well, who was committed to advancing the interests of agriculture.

In order to counteract this picture, Senator Hitchcock sought to disown his conservative reputation and build himself up also as a progressive. His newspaper asserted that if conservatism was determined by an "adherence to the fundamental principles of American democracy, harking back for a century and a half to Thomas Jefferson," then Hitchcock was conservative; but his public record showed that he supported progressive measures throughout his career and provided him with a much more substantial claim to being a progressive than did Howell's record, which was based solely on the operation of municipal ownership of water and gas, measures which Hitchcock also had supported.⁸⁷

But Hitchcock was weak on the prohibition issue and no amount of campaigning, even by William Jennings

⁸⁴ *Columbus Daily Telegram*, Nov. 2, 1922.

⁸⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, June 23, 1922.

⁸⁶ *Lincoln Star*, November 2, 1922.

⁸⁷ *Omaha World Herald*, July 21, 1922. See also Nov. 3, 1922.

Bryan, could dispel this cloud. "The Great Commoner" could declare that the former causes of differences between himself and Senator Hitchcock were settled, but the alliance remained brittle and unreal. The opposition could joyfully quote Hitchcock as having in another day called Brother Charles "rather a hopeless sort of ass" who "sings paens of self-praise, compliments his own virtue and superior holiness," a man who is "as intolerable in victory as in defeat."⁸⁸

Hitchcock also suffered from the attacks of his colleague in the United States Senate, George Norris, who campaigned vigorously throughout the state, not so much in support of the Republican slate, but against Hitchcock. The public record which Hitchcock hoped to parlay into a progressive image Norris denounced as reactionary and he noted that Nebraska's senior senator and Senator Penrose of Pennsylvania usually voted together.⁸⁹

Charles W. Bryan's campaign for the governor's chair varied little during the campaign. He limited himself to the administrative code and to high taxes. Although his enemies sought to embarrass him on the prohibition issue by claiming that he had had to adopt an equivocal position in enforcement of prohibition in return for Hitchcock support, Bryan seemed to ride out that storm well, his record on prohibition being unassailable.⁹⁰

Charles Randall, who hoped to be the next Republican governor, was not so fortunate in riding out last minute attacks. He had based his campaign squarely on the party platform, defended what was often unpopular, hedged when he could, tried to explain to the farmers why Republican policies were the best for them, and all in all sought to be as practical as circumstances would permit.⁹¹ Yet in the end it was the German language issue, the issue he had

⁸⁸ *Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 16, 1922.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1922.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1922. See also *Lincoln Star*, Nov. 1, 1922.

⁹¹ *Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 1, 1922.

earnestly tried to avoid, which backfired during the last week of the campaign.

As Randall himself described it in a speech at Hastings, a "whispering campaign" had been started in the last days before the election on religious grounds by those who wished to see him defeated. He had been challenged, he said, on a 1919 law which prohibited a teacher from wearing a religious garb, on a 1919 law which aimed to bring parochial schools under state supervision with regard to the qualification of teachers, curriculum, and propaganda, and finally also on the Reed-Norval law which forbade foreign language instruction on the elementary school level. Randall reiterated his stand on these measures, upheld them all, and claimed to base his position on no "ground other than true Americanism."⁹² Implicit in Randall's statement is the charge that the Bryan forces had injected religious and racial antagonisms into the campaign so that German Lutherans, German Catholics, and other ethno-religious groups that might otherwise vote Republican would now defect to Charles Bryan.

A few days later, Judge E. B. Perry, chairman of the Republican state central committee, further defended Randall and the Republican record, and stated that reference to these matters was necessary in order to reply to a widely distributed circular, printed in a foreign language, which denounced Randall for his stand on the laws in question.⁹³

However, some leaders of the American Legion, resentful over Randall's opposition to a Reed-Norval plank in the Republican state platform, provided the press with another version. The charge was made that the affair was actually a bait to catch the American Legion vote, "to make political capital out of the Reed-Norval language law by issuing a statement just before election that he is not in favor of repealing the measure."⁹⁴ Implicit in these charges

⁹² *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Nov. 1, 1922.

⁹³ *Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 4, 1922; *Lincoln Star*, Oct. 31, 1922.

⁹⁴ *Lincoln Star*, Nov. 1, 1922 and Nov. 3, 1922.

is the idea that Randall, expecting to lose the German vote after all, decided to retrieve what he could by catering to all advocates of "true Americanism." No matter which version one is prone to accept, the facts suggest that Randall was in trouble and that he knew his chances of victory were not great.

The six races for congressional seats were distinguished by the number of well known candidates in them and by the fact that in most the voters were offered genuine alternatives. The first district, located in southeastern Nebraska including Lincoln, had to choose between former Democratic governor John Morehead, fruit raiser, landowner, known advocate of agricultural interests, and the former speaker of the state house, Walter L. Anderson, a Lincoln lawyer. As one of the architects of the Republican regime under attack, Anderson stoutly defended the record of his party in the same spirit displayed by Randall. Morehead, meanwhile, echoed the Hitchcock line and made a decided pitch for the farm and labor vote.⁹⁵

The second district, Omaha and vicinity, was offered a rather colorless race between Democrat James H. Hanley, a young prohibition enforcement director, and Judge Willis Sears of the Omaha district court. For the most part each candidate counted on his party to carry him to victory.⁹⁶

The Democratic party was normally dominant in the third district, located in northeastern Nebraska, an area where the German population was heavy. Running for reelection was Robert Evans who had first been elected in 1918 as part of the anti-Wilson feeling.⁹⁷ His Democratic opponent was the well known Bryanite editor of the *Columbus Daily Telegram*, Edgar Howard. Evans had voted for the Esch-Cummins law, gave support to the Fordney-McCumber tariff, and, in general, campaigned as a regular Harding Republican. Howard, in contrast, characterized

⁹⁵ *Omaha World Herald*, Oct. 20, 1922; *Lincoln Star*, Oct. 28 and 30, 1922.

⁹⁶ *Omaha World Herald*, Oct. 9, 1922; George Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ *Lincoln Star*, Nov. 6, 1922.

himself as a champion of agricultural interests, and blasted away at high taxes and the tariff.⁹⁸

The fourth district, made up largely of Blue River Valley counties west and south of Lincoln, had been Republican for twenty years. The incumbent, M. O. McLaughlin, who expected to suffer some losses because of his opposition to the ex-soldiers' bonus bill, gave strong support to the Harding administration.⁹⁹ His challenger, Dr. H. B. Cummins of Seward, identified himself strongly with the farmers and followed a typical neo-Populist line. He denounced the rising tide of bureaucracy and warned against the great danger of centralization of power in the national government.¹⁰⁰

For nearly half the years since 1894, the fifth Nebraska district had been represented by either the Republican incumbent, W. E. Andrews, or by his Democratic challenger, Ashton C. Shallenberger. The latter was also well known as a former governor and as a prominent stockman. Although Andrews met strong opposition because he had voted for the Esch-Cummins law, Shallenberger's candidacy was hampered by the Progressive candidate, "Alfalfa John" Franklin, whose votes would come from citizens who would normally vote for Shallenberger.¹⁰¹

Nebraska's "Big Sixth" included everything north and west of Grand Island, not including Hall County. Strongly Republican, it had been served continuously since 1903 by Moses P. Kinkaid, who had died in office in 1922. Robert Simmons of Scottsbluff was billed as a young, capable, and energetic candidate, a worthy successor to the honored Kinkaid. His Democratic opponent was C. W. Beal, a progressive Democrat who espoused a platform similar in many respects to Simmons'. The contest seemed to be one of personalities rather than of issues.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Columbus Daily Telegram*, Nov. 3, 1922, Nov. 6, 1922; *Omaha World Herald*, Oct. 26, 1922.

⁹⁹ *Lincoln Star*, Nov. 6, 1922; *Beatrice Daily Sun*, Oct. 27, 1922.

¹⁰⁰ *Beatrice Daily Sun*, Oct. 25, 1922, and Oct. 30, 1922.

¹⁰¹ *Lincoln Star*, Oct. 28, 1922, and Nov. 6, 1922.

¹⁰² *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Nov. 3, 1922.

In general, it seems apparent that each of the political parties responded in some way or another to the agricultural discontent which stirred Nebraska during the depression of 1921 and 1922. Some candidates, like Randall or McLaughlin, refused to be stampeded, and tried to show the farmers that Harding and McKelvie Republicanism was their best bet. Such men were banking on the normally preponderant Republican majorities to carry them through the time of troubles. The progressive Republican candidates, led by R. Beecher Howell, tended to gear their programs more heavily to the agricultural interests. The same must be said for the great majority of the Democratic candidates who had the advantage of not having to defend a record. Some candidates were saying nothing that they had not been saying all along; the difference was that in 1922 their audience was bigger and more attentive. Certainly this was true of those politicians who found themselves in agreement with the politics of C. A. Sorenson and his allies in the Non-Partisan League and in the Progressive party. The intricate maneuverings within the latter organization were designed to capitalize on agrarian discontent; the "fusionists" were convinced that their opponents; purist farm-labor combination could bear no fruit and they were willing to leave their party in shambles in order to get their way.

As summer merged with fall in 1922 agricultural conditions were improving. Prices on almost all commodities had stabilized months before and as the general election approached most were improving. No doubt thousands of Nebraska farmers regularly checked the business and markets columns of their farm journals and were encouraged by what they read. Just before they went to the polls, prime steer prices were reported to be the highest in two years, lambs and hogs were both doing well, corn was bringing its highest price since January, 1921, and wheat was enjoying a three months high.¹⁰³ Thus, as Nebraskans cast their ballots on November 7, 1922, their anxieties were

¹⁰³ *Nebraska Farmer*, Nov. 4, 1922.

lessened by signs of returning prosperity. Yet the effects of an acute agricultural depression of nearly eighteen month duration were still very much with them.

The results of the general election in Nebraska in 1922 were mixed and at least superficially confusing. Republican Howell won his bid for the senate with an astonishing plurality of seventy-two-thousand votes while Democrat Charles Bryan was elected governor with an equally amazing fifty thousand. Each party won half of the Congressional delegation while the Republicans retained control of the state legislature. A Democrat won office as secretary of state but the remaining state elective offices remained Republican. The totals for the major contests were as follows:¹⁰⁴

SENATOR

R. Beecher Howell, Republican	220,350
Gilbert M. Hitchcock, Democrat	148,265
James L. Beebe, Progressive	19,076

GOVERNOR

Charles H. Randall, Republican	163,735
Charles W. Bryan, Democrat	214,070
Henry Parmenter, Progressive	13,435

CONGRESS, FIRST DISTRICT

Walter L. Anderson, Republican	23,075
John H. Morehead, Democrat	25,079
E. Luella Barton, Progressive	1,224
A. L. Tidd, Prohibition	1,607

CONGRESS, SECOND DISTRICT

Willis Sears, Republican	26,308
James H. Hanley, Democrat	25,251
Roy Harrop, Progressive	3,048

CONGRESS, THIRD DISTRICT

Robert E. Evans, Republican	32,930
Edgar Howard, Democrat	34,843
John Havekost, Progressive	4,252

¹⁰⁴ *Tabulated Report of the General Election Held Nov. 7, 1922, Nebraska State Canvassing Board, pp. 7-11.*

CONGRESS, FOURTH DISTRICT

M. O. McLaughlin, Republican	29,743
H. B. Cummins, Democrat	25,504
John O. Schmidt, Progressive	3,034

CONGRESS, FIFTH DISTRICT

W. E. Andrews, Republican	25,456
Ashton Shallenberger, Democrat	26,923
S. J. Franklin, Progressive	6,250

CONGRESS, SIXTH DISTRICT

Robert G. Simmons, Republican	41,558
Charles W. Beal, Democrat	35,784
John A. Smith, Progressive	3,672

In general, the election results clearly show that the farm population was successful in making its influence felt. As the *Nebraska State Journal* stated it, the farmers "are gradually learning how to organize and how to make an effective drive toward their desired objective."¹⁰⁵ They had been told innumerable times to ignore party lines and to vote the man. Senator Norris, Sorenson and the "fusionists," the Non-Partisan League, the leaders of the various farm organizations, all had told them the same thing. The result was the "most extraordinary feat of cross-party voting" in Nebraska history up to that time.¹⁰⁶

In a very real sense the farmers, with their progressive-independent orientation, constituted a third political force. The Non-Partisan League had endorsed the Howell-Bryan combination and undoubtedly contributed thereby to its stunning success. While it is true that a large number of progressives were for Howell and not for Bryan, whom they considered a mere "player of politics," this distinction was never made in the public mind.¹⁰⁷ Both Bryan and Howell became symbols of progressive politics. And, as the *Beatrice Daily Sun* aptly put it, "Reiteration clinched the argument."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 12, 1922.

¹⁰⁶ *Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 9, 1922.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Beatrice Daily Sun*, Nov. 8, 1922.

The effect of the farm vote on the state legislature is difficult to determine. On the one hand, the "blacklist" of the *Nebraska Union Farmer* can hardly be considered a success. This seems true even though Charles Randall and Walter L. Anderson, who had voted "wrong" on every issue, were both beaten. Of the twenty candidates for the state senate who had been members of the state legislature in 1921 and who could be considered responsible for much of the legislation objected to by the farm interests, only five were defeated.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, the results of the election appear to be much more significant when it is recalled that the 1920 Nebraska senate contained no Democrats at all. The new senate consisted of twenty-one Republicans and twelve Democrats while the house, which had contained only four Democrats out of a hundred members, now had fifty-nine Republicans, thirty-nine Democrats, and two Progressives, a remarkable increase in Democratic strength in a predominantly Republican state. It is revealing also to note that twenty-two of the thirty-nine Democrats elected to the house in 1922 called themselves farmers by occupation while an additional nine were former farmers or retired farmers.¹¹⁰

An interesting variety of explanations was offered to account for the spectacular differences in the results of the gubernatorial and senatorial races. Senator-elect Howell, in his victory statement, merely repeated his favorite campaign speech in capsule form. The people's acceptance of his principles accounted for his victory he said, and as for Bryan, he seemed to stand for the same ideas also.¹¹¹ Edgar Howard claimed that Howell won because he succeeded in evading all public questions which Congress would have to face soon and because he had refused to stand squarely on the Republican platform. Bryan's victory, by contrast, was due to his brutal assault on code government, Howard said.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1924*, pp. 192-196.

¹¹⁰ *Nebraska Blue Book: 1924*, pp. 196-207.

¹¹¹ *Omaha World Herald*, Nov. 9, 1922.

¹¹² *Columbus Daily Telegram*, Nov. 9, 1922.

Certainly there is an element of truth to each of these claims and many more like them that were made. But such statements were superficial. More penetrating was the analysis of the *Hastings Daily Tribune*, which attributed Howell's victory to his strong stand on the Esch-Cummins act, to his labor support, and to his "public competition" idea which served as the basis for his progressive image. At the same time the newspaper cited as contributing to Hitchcock's defeat the great support he had given to the League of Nations and to the opposition of the German vote, which, it pointed out, made up one fifth of the total vote.¹¹³ Along the same vein, the *Lincoln Star* attributed Hitchcock's failure at the polls to the opposition of labor and of the Non-Partisan League, as well as to the defection of the "solid German vote."¹¹⁴

Hitchcock's own newspaper, the *Omaha World Herald*, claimed that the results were the handiwork of A. C. Townley and the Non-Partisan League, but beyond this, however, the blame belonged to the German vote:

[Hitchcock] was practically the sole target of the organized and massed "German vote" under the direction of leaders determined to satiate their hatred because he had conducted the fight in the senate for the war resolution, because he had given uncompromising support to all measures essential to the winning of the war, and because, through a historic period of many months in the Senate, he had been the leader of the contest for ratification of the peace treaty and the entry of the United States into the league of nations.

The results of the revengeful activity of the German leaders was that the vote they set out to influence was recorded almost solidly against Senator Hitchcock and in favor of his opponent, who had gained their enthusiastic support.¹¹⁵

As evidence to support the contention the *World Herald* reprinted a lengthy letter from Edmund von Mach, a German propagandist, to the *Daily Omaha Tribune*, the major German newspaper in Nebraska. In it abuse was heaped upon Hitchcock as the one who did Wilson's dirty work and as one who richly deserved to be trounced at the polls.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1922.

¹¹⁴ *Lincoln Star*, Nov. 8, 1922.

¹¹⁵ *Omaha World Herald*, Nov. 9, 1922.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In order to verify or discount these charges a series of statistical correlations were run by the author of this study. In general they suggest that "Germanness" was not a factor of importance in accounting for Hitchcock's defeat.¹¹⁷

To summarize the findings of this study, it should be noted that the Nebraska farmer turned to politics in 1922 for solutions to the economic problems he was experiencing in the severe depression of that year. He rejected the notion that his plight was none of the government's business. The leaders of the farm population advocated a wide range

¹¹⁷In order to locate statistically the "German" vote, it was decided that the percentage of German-born residents in each county, as revealed by the 1920 census, would serve as the index of "Germanness." A percentage was obtained for each county and these figures were correlated with the percentages of the total vote cast by counties for senator that had been won by R. Beecher Howell. If a high coefficient of correlation would be obtained, Hitchcock's charges that there had been a solid German vote against him would be sustained; a low figure would suggest that he possibly was looking for a scapegoat. With the ranges extending from 1.00, indicating a full, positive relationship to a negative 1.00, a figure of .11 was obtained, very near .00, the middle of the scale. This indicates that there was virtually no connection between the "German" counties and the way they voted for senator.

Another correlation was then run in which the vast differences in size of population among the counties could be taken into account. Each county was given a weight factor based on the number of units of 10,000 people it contained in 1920. Thus, a county with a population of 33,000 would receive a weight factor of three, and its percentages would be included three times in the computation; a county with a population of less than 5,000 would thus receive a weight factor of 0, and therefore would be omitted from the computation. The coefficient of correlation obtained in this manner was .19, a figure still too low to lend any support to Senator Hitchcock's charges.

A correlation was also run in connection with Charles Bryan's victory in the race for the governorship. With all the furor that had arisen over Randall's last minute endorsement of the Reed-Norval law and related measures, it could be assumed that the German population was supporting Senator Hitchcock's running mate, Charles Bryan. A correlation was therefore run between the percentage of the total vote cast for governor by counties that had been won by Bryan with the percentages of the total population that had been born in Germany, by counties. No differences in the size of population were taken into account. All counties were included in the computation. A coefficient of .34 was obtained, a figure high enough to indicate that there might have been a positive relationship between the "German vote" and Bryan's victory. Interestingly enough, neither the victor nor the vanquished made anything of this possibility.

of political involvement but agreed generally in their espousal of certain kinds of laws favorable to the farmers and especially did they agree in their condemnation of high taxes and of what they considered unnecessary spending by the state government.

The political parties of Nebraska were cognizant of the agricultural discontent and they all, in greater or lesser degree, responded to the pressure. Each party had to endure some internal strife as the attempt was made to secure candidates who could benefit from the agrarian discontent. The Democratic party, through the harmonizing of the Bryan and Hitchcock factions, was able to keep the internal struggle at a minimum. The Republican party, after the primary election, found itself with one major candidate that was progressive while the other was a regular. The contention within the Progressive party was so severe that it was left a wreckage by the two opposing factions, both of which were anxious to capitalize on the farm crisis. The importance of the Progressive party continued in its co-operation with the Non-Partisan League. This farmer-dominated organization endorsed candidates from all three parties. It is particularly significant that the candidates this group backed for senator and governor were the ones who won sweeping victories in the general election.

Condemnation of high taxes and extravagant spending were the themes of the Democratic platform, a document clearly designed to attract farm votes. While the Republicans were in the position of having to defend their record, they too were anxious to show the farmer in their platform that continued Republican rule would be the best solution for the farm problem.

In the campaign which followed, two candidates, one from each major party, succeeded in creating a progressive image. These two seemed particularly attractive to many rural voters because, like the farmers, they were sharply critical of the status quo and because they seemed to give promise of new approaches to the farmers' problems. These two, Howell and Bryan, won remarkable victories while

their running mates, who never succeeded in getting rid of a "stand-patter" image, went down in defeat. The results in most of the other contests were mixed. Yet when it is recalled that the legislature and the congressional delegation had been almost completely Republican during the preceding biennium, the Democratic gains, generally the consequence of agrarian discontent, were most impressive.

To conclude that the results of the election of 1922 may be attributed essentially to agricultural dissatisfaction may be to overstate the case. Other important issues also influenced the voters that year. Among these, prohibition and the German-language law were probably the most significant. Yet there can be no doubt that in 1922 there was a political response to agricultural depression that was far-reaching, varied, and, in some cases, spectacular in results.