

WISCONSIN STATE UNIVERSITY AT LA CROSSE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

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ELLIS BAKER USHER AND THE WISCONSIN
GOLD DEMOCRATS OF 1896

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate College
The State University of Wisconsin at La Crosse

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Colleen Welper
July 1968

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CHAPTER I

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN THE NATION AND IN WISCONSIN

I. THE NATION AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The post Civil War period in the United States was an era of rapid economic expansion with all of the accompanying social evils which disfigure industrialization such as slums, child labor, and the degradation of man. In their haste to make a fortune, capitalists and politicians shunted aside the interests and welfare of the common people. The gross national product rose in satisfying leaps, but the economic status of the lower classes remained relatively unchanged and class distinctions hardened.¹

In industrial areas of the nation laborers organized to seek better working conditions and higher wages. Business and political leaders disapproved of such organizations, considering them revolutionary and socialistic, and grew increasingly apprehensive of a widening unrest among the industrial masses. The growing gap between classes was reflected in the rift between the conservative Cleveland Democrats and such influential party leaders as Governor

¹Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 3-9, 34-37; J. Roger Hollingsworth, The Whirligig of Politics: The Democracy of Cleveland and Bryan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3.

John Altgeld of Illinois.² In 1894 federal troops were sent into Chicago by President Grover Cleveland to quell the Pullman Strike and attendant rioting.³ The Governor publicly protested this action which he had neither requested nor considered necessary to maintain order. Altgeld's attitude merited him a press reputation as an "anarchist," the enmity of the President, and political leadership of the discontented industrial classes.⁴

Another disaffected element in the nation was the farm population. Farm prices dropped steadily after the Civil War; at the same time, prices paid for consumer goods were rising and many farmers were driven to mortgage

²Hollingsworth, op. cit., 23-24; Nathan Fine, Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 118-146; Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 617; Almont Lindsey, The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Great Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 2-16, 147-170.

³Lindsey, op. cit., 170-175; Gerald G. Eggert, Railroad Labor Disputes: The Beginnings of Federal Strike Policy (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 158-174; Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage (in American Political Leaders Series, ed. Allan Nevins. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932), 618-624.

⁴Nevins, op. cit., 624-627; Lindsey, op. cit., 184-190; Hollingsworth, op. cit., 23-25; Harvey Wish, "John Peter Altgeld and the Background of the Campaign of 1896," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIV (March, 1938), 503.

their land in order to continue operating.⁵ Rates of interest on these loans were relatively high, ranging from eight to twelve per cent normally, but after 1887 anywhere from eighteen to forty per cent. Such rates were ruinous in the eyes of a farmer struggling to free himself from debt.⁶ The natural hazards of farming--drought, hail, insects, prairie fires, an unusually cool growing season--combined to make farm income uncertain in any year. Falling farm prices meant that the farmer had to work longer hours and to produce more every year in order to meet his obligations. These conditions were further aggravated in the newer farming territories. Vast areas of the West in such states as Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas were first put to the plow in the 1870s and 1880s. There the traditional difficulties of frontier living such as isolation, primitive public services, and concentration on a single commercial crop.

⁵For a discussion of farm prices in the late nineteenth century, Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (Vol. V of Economic History of the United States, ed. Henry David, et al. New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1945), 291-292; in addition, Appendix A of this paper contains a graph illustrating the general trend of prices for three farm crops.

⁶Allan G. Bogue, Money At Interest: The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), 262-276; Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmer's Frontier, 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 130-131.

increased the farmer's economic insecurity.⁷

Western farmers were quick to fix the blame for their predicament on the financiers and capitalists of the East. It was the Eastern-owned and controlled railroad which transported farm produce to market and which used price-fixing agreements and other devices to extort the highest possible rate per mile. Furthermore, consumer goods which the farmer bought were products of Eastern corporations or, if imported, often bore a higher price tag due to protective tariffs imposed by Congress. Farmers viewed the whole system of trusts and tariffs which flourished in this period as a vicious conspiracy to rob the hard-working common people and enrich a small financial and entrepreneurial elite.⁸

In addition to low farm income and high consumer prices, Westerners were harassed by a short money supply. Farmers blamed this lack of currency for the drop in farm prices, and again traced the problem to Eastern domination of the economy. Western gold was sent East in payment for rail transportation, manufactured or processed consumer goods,

⁷Fine, op. cit., 67, 72-75; Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier, 291-295; 313; John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 15-20, 30-31, 54-59.

⁸Fine, op. cit., 74-75; Hicks, op. cit., 60-87; Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier, 291-295.

and mortgages. Thus, money accumulated in the East and became correspondingly scarce in the West. The remedy appeared obvious to people in the hard-pressed areas: get more money into circulation by issuing paper currency or silver coins.⁹

In the 1870s a reform movement favoring an expanded currency had flourished, then failed. But extensive lodes of silver discovered in the West produced a new demand to monetize silver and to increase the amount of money in circulation. In 1873 Congress had routinely passed a bill ending the coinage of silver dollars. This step aroused little comment at the time because it had merely recognized an existing situation. Silver had not been coined in meaningful amounts since the Currency Act of 1837 established a ratio (15.98+ to 1) for the coinage of gold and silver which slightly overvalued gold. According to Gresham's Law an overvalued metal dominates the currency, in this instance causing silver dollars to disappear from circulation. However, in the 1870s the price of silver dropped from \$1.02 in 1873 to \$.90 in 1876. It became obvious that if enough silver was coined at the ratio of sixteen to one silver would become the overvalued metal, driving gold coins out of circulation. This proposal to

⁹Hicks, op. cit., 21-31; Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier, 303-309; Irwin Unger, The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879

reduce the currency to the value of silver was inflationary and meant that farmers could repay debts, incurred in gold dollars, with the cheaper silver currency. Such legislation would also establish for mine owners a ready market and favorable price at the United States mints.¹⁰

The demand for free silver increased steadily throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, but it was only one facet of a general agitation for economic and governmental reforms which swept large agricultural and industrial areas of the nation. As it became apparent that the older political parties would not respond to the plea for reform, a new party appeared. Founded in 1890, the People's Party, also known as the Populist Party, was rooted in the agricultural discontent of the preceding decades, but it also made an appeal to the urban workers of the nation. Populists condemned industrialism in the United States on the grounds that it was destroying man's dignity and humanity. The only way to overcome the degrading effects of an industrial-

(Princeton, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1964), 196; Walter T. K. Nugent, Money and American Society, 1865-1880 (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 210-211.

¹⁰Hicks, op. cit., 302; Unger, op. cit., 330-333; Nugent, Money, 199-201; Fine, loc. cit.; Ellis B. Usher, The Greenback Movement of 1875-1884 and Wisconsin's Part In It (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Ellis B. Usher, 1911), 10-15, 61; J. Laurence Laughlin, The History of Bimetallism in the United States (fourth edition; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 73-74, 92-93; Harold Underwood Faulkner,

capitalist system, according to Populist critics, was to carry out a genuine reform of society, eliminating abuses and recognizing the social-economic rights of the common man.¹¹

By 1892 the Populist Party had established a solid base of support in farmer and labor organizations throughout the nation. Delegates from twenty-seven such groups met in St. Louis on February 22, 1892 to establish a formal program and to begin planning for the November elections. These delegates adopted a statement of purpose and aims which became the official party platform at the People's Party National Convention which met in Omaha that summer. This program was more radical than any the nation had yet seen. Since Populist critics of society believed that human rights were meaningless without a distribution of wealth on an equitable basis, they concluded that monopolies constituted the most serious threat to such rights. Although primarily an agrarian movement, the Populist Party affirmed the alliance

American Economic History (seventh edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 516-517.

¹¹ Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 24-27; Stanley Llewellyn Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 74-75; for a discussion of varying interpretations of Populism, Walter T. K. Nugent, The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3-32.

of the working classes, whether farmer or laborer, against their common enemies and called for such measures as government ownership of railroads, telephone and telegraph systems, free coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one, a graduated income tax, resident ownership of land, a postal savings bank, and specific items of labor legislation. The Populists thus challenged the established political parties, especially the Democrats, to do something to help the common people.¹²

The federal government, and to a lesser extent state governments, persistently ignored serious economic problems within society. The United States had not yet rediscovered programs of government regulation of society and business to advance and protect the interests of the public which had characterized the colonial and early national periods. The Jeffersonian principle of governmental non-interference in economic and social problems was still predominant. In addition, political parties and all three branches of government were dominated by conservative business principles. Government tended to stand aloof from the problems of the people and political parties resisted popular, though not yet

¹²Pollack, op. cit., 13-16; Jones, op. cit., 76-77; Fine, op. cit., 75-79; Paul W. Glad, McKinley, Bryan and the People (in Critical Periods of History Series, ed. Robert D. Cross. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), 63-67.

vociferous, demands for reform.¹³

The Populists, organizing and channeling the political power of their farmer-labor coalition, were in the van of a developing class struggle. In the elections of 1892, while Democrat Grover Cleveland was elected President, the Populists gained ground in the West and South. In addition, by fusing with Democrats in some states, they polled more than one million votes for their own candidate, James Weaver of Iowa. Thus the Populists forced a wedge into the ranks of the Democratic Party.¹⁴

This intrusion, while small in 1892, grew rapidly in the next four years. Populists realized that the one item in their platform with great popular appeal was "free coinage of silver." For this reason they welcomed into the party those Republicans and Democrats who favored free silver, hoping to convert them to basic Populist reforms later. As large numbers of debtors in the West and South left the Democratic Party its leaders expressed concern, but took little constructive action to prevent the drift toward Populism.¹⁵

¹³Goldman, op. cit., 39-41; Josephson, op. cit., 562-567.

¹⁴Goldman, op. cit., 43; Jones, op. cit., 77; Fine, op. cit., 79; Pollack, op. cit., 11, 76-82; Wish, op. cit., 505.

¹⁵Hicks, op. cit., 301, 316-320; Jones, op. cit., 53-60, 78-83; Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. (New York: Random House, 1955), 104-106.

The question of the need for economic reforms was brought into sharper focus by a depression which began in 1893, shortly after Cleveland's inauguration. Banks failed; factories shut down; the number of unemployed workers rose; but perhaps more significantly restless people began to move. Large numbers of unemployed men roamed the countryside as tramps. In some areas of the West groups of these men seized trains and began moving East. A band of the unemployed, known as Coxey's Army, converged on Washington from all over the nation for a confrontation with the government. Men of property feared that class revolution was upon them. In the midst of this turmoil the government, though taking steps to maintain law and order, was unwilling and, in the President's view, unable to relieve the ill effects of the depression. This attitude on the part of the administration strengthened demands for reform.¹⁶

A continuing drain on the nation's gold reserves which had begun some years earlier aggravated the business depression. During his second administration President Cleveland attempted to reverse this outflow by forcing through Congress repeal of the Sherman Silver Act of 1890. This legislation and its predecessor, the Bland-Allison Act of 1878, had long been blamed by conservatives as the

¹⁶Lindsey, op. cit., 12-14; Josephson, op. cit., 562-563; Goldman, op. cit., 52-53; Hollingsworth, op. cit., 22-25.

causes of gold depletion. The Sherman Act required the Treasury to buy stipulated minimums of silver each month for coinage purposes. Purchases were to be paid for in Treasury notes redeemable in gold or silver. Once these notes were in circulation they could be redeemed in gold, according to administration policy, and then recirculated. Gold men held that this continuous cycle of circulation and redemption, plus the increasing volume of such Treasury notes, was contributing heavily to the nation's gold losses. Silver men, who saw the silver purchase legislation as only a sop to pacify them and who argued that the Treasury should redeem its notes in silver, demanded increased coinage of the metal. They were incensed when Congress repealed the Sherman Act. With the simplicity of monomania they applied their silver remedy to the gold drain as well as to the problems of the farmer. Increased coinage would relieve the pressure on the gold dollar and preserve its value.¹⁷

The Cleveland administration also sold gold bonds in an effort to halt the outflow of gold. Twice in 1894 the Treasury sold \$50,000,000 worth of five per cent ten-year bonds to obtain gold. However, since those who bought

¹⁷Jones, op. cit., 44-45; Hicks, op. cit., 305-308; Nugent, Money, 243-250; Laughlin, op. cit., 211-231, 256-265; Fred A. Shannon, The Centennial Years: A Political and Economic History of America from the Late 1870s to the Early 1890s, ed. Robert Huhn Jones (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), 171-172, 178-180; Faulkner, op. cit., 517-520.

the bonds one day could present notes and demand payment in gold the next, the loans did not serve their purpose. In February, 1895 Cleveland arranged a private loan with J. P. Morgan and other bankers. Half of the 3,500,000 ounces of gold involved was to be obtained in Europe, while the bankers agreed to take steps to prevent immediate withdrawal of gold from the Treasury. The private nature of this loan roused public anger toward the President for encouraging Wall Street "conspirators" and British domination of the money market. As a result of this criticism the administration, in January, 1898, offered a fourth loan to the public rather than to Eastern bankers.¹⁸

The failure of the administration to deal with the problems of depression and gold was reflected in the 1894 elections. In the West, Populist support increased although its failure to fuse with Democrats in some states cost the People's Party offices it had obtained in 1892. Populist-Republican coalitions in the South, however, wrested control of an increased number of state and Congressional offices from the Democrats, especially in North Carolina. Democratic organizations in the South subsequently found it difficult to resist fusion with the Populists if they wished

¹⁸Faulkner, op. cit., 521; Nevins, op. cit., 652-666, 685-688; Jones, op. cit., 44-45.

to keep the South 'solid' and Republicans out of office. Small farmers found Populism and free silver just as applicable to agricultural problems in Dixie as in the West. In Northern cities, where unemployment was high due to the depression, Democrats lost offices to the Republicans.¹⁹

Looking ahead to the presidential contest of 1896, Populists and their free silver allies in both major parties capitalized upon their recent successes by pushing free silver and reform programs at every opportunity. They organized clubs to educate the people; newspapers began to clamor for free silver. The simplicity of silver as a remedy caught the imagination of the people more quickly than the complicated reform program of the Populists. As silver sentiment grew increasingly strong it promised to make the coinage question the dominant issue in the 1896 campaign. From the Populist viewpoint this was unfortunate because free silver, to them only a stop-gap measure, was a beginning rather than a solution. It was a relatively unimportant part of their program.²⁰

¹⁹Jones, op. cit., 77-78; Glad, op. cit., 92-93; Nugent, Money, 217-218.

²⁰Hicks, op. cit., 317; Hollingsworth, op. cit., 27; Pollack, op. cit., 135; Glad, op. cit., 93-94.

Until 1895 conservative gold Democrats under Cleveland had been quite sure that threats to their political leadership would soon dissipate. But as economic conditions in the nation failed to improve and free silver influence grew in Congress and in the Party, gold Democrats became more apprehensive. During this period Cleveland did not provide the effective leadership which gold forces needed. A conservative, he did not believe government should interfere in the workings of the economy. A politician, he demonstrated ignorance of the importance and necessity of party backing if political goals were to be achieved. While the split within the Party was not of his making and any action he took could be offensive to one of the factions, Cleveland's doctrinaire adherence to principles and his failure to recognize the strength of the silverites contributed to the disruption of the Democratic Party in 1896.²¹

Without effective leadership gold Democrats drifted uneasily toward the fall elections. Aside from speeches by Cleveland, Secretary of the Treasury, John Carlisle, and a few other administration spokesmen little was done to combat the demand for free silver. By the time the Democratic National Convention met in July, 1896 gold Democrats no

²¹Nevins, op. cit., 766; Hollingsworth, op. cit., 2, 14-15; Jones, op. cit., 54-56.

longer held effective control of the Party. The new party alignment, effected by the silver men, indicated to conservatives that a class war was beginning.²²

II. ELLIS BAKER USHER AND THE WISCONSIN DEMOCRACY

The orientation of the Wisconsin Democratic Party was similar to the national Party. Conservative businessmen, Bourbons, who believed that government should protect the interests of business but not interfere with its activities dominated the Wisconsin Party. Until 1887 this Bourbon group was led by Milwaukee millionaire Alexander Mitchell. He cared not at all whether the party won elections so long as business interests were protected. However, younger leadership, developed during the 1880s, took over the party after Mitchell's death. Prominent among the new leaders was a young Congressman from Madison, William F. Vilas, who had served as permanent chairman of the Democratic National Convention in 1884. Vilas was an advocate of tariff reform, an issue which he believed compatible with his Bourbon interests and at the same time attractive to Wisconsin voters. During Cleveland's first administration Vilas served in the

²²Nevins, op. cit., 678-681; Josephson, op. cit., 630, 664.

Cabinet, originally as Postmaster General and later as Secretary of the Interior.²³

At about the same time a young La Crosse newspaper editor, Ellis Baker Usher, also rose in the ranks of Wisconsin party leadership. Usher was a Democrat of a Yankee-Protestant heritage which stressed the responsibility of the individual citizen, middle class values, and the conduct of government on a high plane of immutable principles.²⁴ His family traced its lineage to the founding of Plymouth in 1620. His father, Isaac, had moved the family to a frontier logging site on the Black River of Western Wisconsin in 1855 when Ellis was only three years old. In the best 'self-made man' tradition Ellis Usher terminated his formal education at age sixteen, held a series of jobs until 1875, and then became a part-owner of the Evening Liberal Democrat in La Crosse. Three years later he changed partners and the newspaper was renamed the La Crosse Morning Chronicle. Usher became sole owner of the newspaper in October, 1879 and remained in control until 1901.²⁵

²³Horace Samuel Merrill, William Freeman Vilas: Doctrinaire Democrat (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), 30-32, 52-56, 62, 67, 133.

²⁴Hofstadter, op. cit., 8-9.

²⁵The Society of Colonial Wars in Wisconsin: List of Officers and Members (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Burdick and

Usher's political principles, well-formulated by the mid-1870s, reflected his family background and business success. He was a conservative Democrat who supported some Bourbon views. At the time of the silver agitation and the election of 1896 his ideas, based upon opinions developed as a young man, were fixed.

Usher's views on the role of government in society and the economy reflected Cleveland's Democracy. He opposed any government attempt to interfere in a man's private life, be it prohibition or compulsory education, as paternalistic, and at best a benevolent despotism. Similarly, government intervention in business and the economy was unwelcome for it was a departure from traditional policies of the Democratic Party and its Jeffersonian heritage. Generally, he did not support the Bourbon view that government should actively protect business interests.²⁶

Usher entered politics and the newspaper business in the 1870s, heyday of the Greenback Party, and developed

Allen, 1906), 65-66; Benjamin F. Bryand (ed.), Memoirs of La Crosse County (Madison, Wisconsin: Western Historical Association, 1907), 118; History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin (n.p., Western Historical Association, 1881), 557; Ellis Baker Usher, Wisconsin: Its Story and Biography, 1848-1913 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), I, 179.

²⁶La Crosse Morning Chronicle (hereafter referred to as Chronicle) statement of editorial policy, August 1, 1878 and editorials, April 3 and 5, 1896; Usher to Edwar C. Wall,

his ideas on currency during that period. The demand for an inflationary currency or, as advocated in later years, the equally inflationary unlimited coinage of silver was, in his opinion, contrary to the best interests of business and the nation. Usher was appalled by the effect such measures would have on the national credit and on foreign trade. Foreign nations, accustomed to gold as the medium of exchange, would not be willing to accept a silver substitute.²⁷

Along with these views Usher also became interested in the accepted conservative reforms: civil service, honest politics, tariff revision. In later years, when he had a position of influence in the Wisconsin party, he insisted upon observance of the spirit as well as the form of the civil service laws and the necessity for honesty in political practices. As Chairman of the State Central Committee of the Democratic Party he refused to allow that body to become a "bureau of patronage" or to assess federal office holders in order to raise campaign funds.

April 6, 1890, box 10, Ellis B. Usher Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter referred to as Usher Papers).

²⁷Chronicle editorial, August 1, 1878; Usher to Charles S. Fairchild, December 3, 1894, volume 15, 27-28, and to G. W. Traer, May 6, 1895, volume 15, 36-37, Usher Papers.

He also refused to recommend Democrats for appointment to state boards by a Republican state administration.²⁸

The reform which interested Usher most, and which became a life-long avocation, was tariff revision. By its nature, he argued, the protective tariff interfered with the free action of the economy, restricted foreign trade, raised consumer prices and contributed to the economic hardships of the farmers and laborers. Furthermore, import duties were designed to promote the interests of one class, manufacturers, at the expense of the rest of the nation, and were part of the supportive legislation which had contributed to the growth of trusts and monopolies. Usher objected to monopolies and the hardships which they caused. True tariff reform in his opinion, would do much to alleviate the nation's economic difficulties. A reduction in the tariff would undoubtedly stimulate foreign trade which in turn would revive the depressed economy of the 1890s and quiet demands for free silver. Usher applied his tariff reform remedy to the nation's economic ills in much the same way that the silverites insisted on the curative properties of their

²⁸Chronicle, loc. cit.; Usher to William F. Vilas, April 13, 1887, volume 6, and to George W. Curtis, January 2, 1888 and April 9, 1888, volumes 6 and 7 respectively, Usher Papers.

panacea.²⁹

Usher shared the political views of a large number of Wisconsin Democrats until free silver doctrines began to take hold in the mid-1890s. In 1887, at the end of Alexander Mitchell's long reign as state party boss, Usher was elected Chairman of the party's State Central Committee. Together with William F. Vilas, Usher led the party away from its formidably Bourbon orientation toward a more vote-appealing program of conservative reforms.³⁰

In 1888 Wisconsin Democrats focused on tariff reform and tried to educate voters to the advantages of low duties. As one of Usher's correspondents pointed out, the Democratic emphasis on the tariff was the only real difference between the Democratic and Republican Parties in the campaign. However, Wisconsin voters were not convinced of the need for tariff reform and the party met defeat at the polls.³¹

During the years when he had been occupied with party business, and especially during the months of active

²⁹Chronicle, loc. cit.; Usher to Fairchild and Traer, loc. cit.

³⁰Merrill, op. cit., 153-161.

³¹Usher to William F. Vilas, November 21, 1888, volume 8, 209, Usher Papers.

campaigning in 1888, his father, Isaac Usher, had been responsible for managing the newspaper and writing the editorials. The elder Usher died late in 1889 and Ellis was compelled to give up his plans for managing the 1890 election campaign. Usher's resignation from the party chairmanship was accepted in January, 1890.³²

Usher remained on the State Central Committee, however, and was consulted on most party matters. From 1890 to 1896 he wrote all or considerable portions of the party's platforms, each of which emphasized the tariff issue. During this period he received many letters from Democrats seeking his endorsement of their applications for state and federal offices. Party leaders also looked to him for recommendations on patronage questions and within the party he was respected for his honesty and impartiality.³³ Usher's relations with

³²Usher to Lute Neiman, January 2, 1890, volume 8, 252 and to A. M. Thompson, April 11, 1898, volume 20, 225-227, Usher Papers. Marginal notes in Usher's handwriting, found in his copy of History of La Crosse County, Wisconsin, op. cit., 557, clarify the authorship of Chronicle editorials. Usher wrote the editorials himself except for a nine-year period ending in 1889 during which his father, Isaac Usher, wrote them. After 1889, when Ellis Usher was absent from La Crosse, his manager wrote the editorials. The book containing these notes is currently in the Wisconsin State Historical Society Area Research Center on the campus of the State University of Wisconsin at La Crosse.

³³Merrill, op. cit., 165, 179; Usher's correspondence with party leaders, particularly William F. Vilas and Ed Wall, 1890-1896, Usher Papers; a draft of the 1890 state party platform, in Usher's handwriting, box 10, Usher Papers.

the former Cabinet member were not always warm, but in 1893 William F. Vilas described him as the "party counsellor, nobody's retainer."³⁴

The early 1890s were years of success for Wisconsin Democrats. The new State Chairman, Ed. Wall of Milwaukee, was Usher's close personal friend and chosen successor, and his political views coincided with those of both Usher and Vilas. Wall managed a victorious campaign in 1890 and again in 1892, giving Wisconsin two Democratic Senators in Washington, William F. Vilas and John Mitchell, and several Democratic Representatives. However, in 1894 Republicans regained control of the state administration and by 1896 Democratic hopes of recovery were slim.³⁵

While Wisconsin had its share of agrarian unrest in the post Civil War period, by the 1890s farmers in the state were relatively prosperous. The situation was similar to that in other areas of the Midwest east of the Mississippi River. The older agricultural areas recovered more quickly

³⁴Vilas telegram to Usher, January 26, 1893, box 12, Usher Papers.

³⁵Merrill, op. cit., 168-169, 195-196, 223-224; William Francis Raney, Wisconsin: A Story of Progress (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), 273-278; Usher to Lute Neiman, loc. cit., and to J. E. Dodge, January 10, 1890, Edward C. Wall, January 19, 1890 and January 22, 1890, volume 8, 256, 259-261, 263-270, Usher Papers.

from agricultural depression than states farther West due to less primitive conditions and greater crop diversification. Thus Populism had only slight success in the state; its best year was 1894.³⁶ Even then, most Populist votes probably came from the industrial areas, especially Milwaukee, rather than from rural districts.³⁷

Similarly, free silver had not attracted a great many Wisconsin adherents. The widespread German population was conservative and such radical proposals had little appeal. The section of the state in which free silver had its greatest success was in the southwestern counties which had a large Norwegian population.³⁸

Viewing the political situation in Wisconsin and the nation in 1895, Usher found the party's prospects gloomy. He could not take the silver proposal as seriously as did

³⁶Hicks, op. cit., 33-34; Raney, op. cit., 252-253; Roy V. Scott, The Agrarian Movement in Illinois, 1880-1896 (Vol. LII of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 122-130; Robert S. Maxwell, LaFollette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 5-6.

³⁷J. Martin Klotsche, "The 'United Front' Populists," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XX (June, 1937), 382-383.

³⁸Raney, loc. cit.

others and was unhappy to see it replacing the tariff as the major issue. In his mind the two questions were closely linked, but the tariff was by far the most important.³⁹ Furthermore, he was unwilling to compromise on the money issue. "I am a monometallist, a 'gold bug' pure and simple and see nothing but illogical nonsense in any bimetallic talk...."⁴⁰

Usher used the pages of the Chronicle to fight the silver 'craze', blaming the Republican-silver coalition in Congress for the continuing gold drain. Usher pointed out that at the end of Cleveland's first administration the cash balance in the Treasury was over \$180,000,000. By the end of Benjamin Harrison's term four years later, the balance had sunk to \$129,092,588. The Bland-Allison and Sherman Silver Purchase Acts, products of Republican Congresses, were responsible for this gold loss. These laws had made it necessary for the Treasury to support at parity with gold almost \$900,000,000 worth of paper currency, increasing at a rate of approximately \$50,000,000 per year, on a gold reserve of only \$100,000,000. Congressmen with

³⁹Usher to Fairchild and Traer, loc. cit.

⁴⁰Usher to Fairchild, loc. cit.

silver interests had fought against repeal of the Sherman Act which the Administration forced through a special session of Congress in 1893.⁴¹ Even this hard-won battle was nullified by passage of the 1894 Wilson-Gorman Tariff. This failure to achieve true tariff reform due to the efforts of protectionist Congressmen, Democrats as well as Republicans, dismayed Usher.⁴²

The Chronicle attacked the silverites both in its editorials and its front page, slanting news articles and headlines toward gold. "Democrats in Missouri and Colorado Make Bad Records" appeared over a news story relating the endorsement of free silver platforms by the conventions of those two states.⁴³ A bill passed in the Senate by a vote of thirty-two to twenty-five which would prohibit government issuance of any type of bonds merited the headline: "Thirty-Two Traitors."⁴⁴ A summary of a speech by Senator Vilas in opposition to free silver was awarded the adulatory heading, "Voice of Vilas."⁴⁵

⁴¹Chronicle editorials, January 11 and April 8, 1896; Laughlin, op. cit., 276-280.

⁴²Usher to H. F. Brackett, August 13, 1896, volume 15, 7-9, Usher Papers; Laughlin, op. cit., 279-280; F. W. Taussig, The Tariff History of the United States (sixth edition; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 290-315.

⁴³Chronicle, April 16, 1896.

⁴⁴Ibid., June 3, 1896.

⁴⁵Ibid., February 1, 1896.

In February, 1896 Cleveland declared that if the Democratic Party adopted a sound money platform, meaning gold, it would win the election. Usher rated this as "the soundest political speech" of the season. He remarked further that the Demorats would do better to lose on a sound money platform than win on any other issue.⁴⁶ Such sentiments appeared more frequently in Usher's editorials and correspondence as the Democratic National Convention approached. Intended partly to stiffen Democratic backbones these remarks also indicated his hardening resolve not to support a Democratic condidate or platform advocating free silver. Loyalty to long-established precedents and to what he considered to be the nation's best interests was to outweigh loyalty to a political party gone astray.

⁴⁶Ibid., editorial, February 26, 1896.

CHAPTER II

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The first national convention in 1896 was the gathering of Republicans in St. Louis during the second week of June. The candidate was almost a foregone conclusion. William McKinley, a former governor of Ohio, whose name graced the Republican Tariff Act of 1890, had been actively seeking the nomination for months. With the aid of his campaign manager, Mark Hanna, McKinley controlled the St. Louis Convention from his home in Canton, Ohio. Every action taken by the convention was approved by McKinley in advance, including the wording of the party platform which endorsed "the existing gold standard."¹

Nevertheless, excitement came from the convention when Senator William Teller of Colorado led an exodus of some twenty silver Republicans from the hall and the party. These 'bolters' later attended the Democratic Convention in

¹ Stanley Llewellyn Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 158-161, 164-167; Paul W. Glad, McKinley, Bryan and the People (in Critical Periods of History Series, ed. Robert D. Cross. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), 95-112; Herbert Croly, Marcus Alonzo Hanna: His Life and Work (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 190-208.

Chicago and supported its nominee for president.²

While the Republican Party was confirming the anticipated nomination of McKinley, Democrats were increasingly troubled by the gold-silver fracture within their party. Gold Democrats had been generally complacent and smug in their attitude toward the approaching campaign until just a few months before the convention. They found it difficult, as did Usher, to take the 'silver craze' seriously and were sure that when men of sound financial tendencies met in Chicago all would be well. However, events in early 1896 jolted them considerably.³

It became clear that not only would the expected states in the West and South support silver, but that some Midwestern states would as well. Prominent among these new desertions was Illinois, led by John Altgeld. In 1896 the Illinois state convention endorsed a free silver platform and the neighboring states of Iowa, Ohio and Indiana followed a similar course.⁴

²Jones, op. cit., 171-173.

³Ibid., 192; Horace Samuel Merrill, William Freeman Vilas: Doctrinaire Democrat (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), 224-225.

⁴Jones, op. cit., 197-198; Merrill, op. cit., 225-226; Harvey Wish, "John Peter Altgeld and the Background of the Campaign of 1896," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIV (March, 1938), 511-512.

Even in Wisconsin, reputedly a gold state, the silver clamor increased. A series of Wisconsin county conventions prior to the state party meeting frightened gold men and Usher commented editorially on the lamentable fact that in several counties disheartened Democrats were turning to silver. However, La Crosse County remained true to the Democracy and adopted a gold resolution.⁵

These events alarmed Senator Vilas, a close friend of President Cleveland and a staunch gold Democrat. In June, Vilas wrote to Usher that "we have the most serious problem ever presented to Democrats in my Existence, aside from War, and there was little difficulty then as to Course. We need most Earnest and Careful Study."⁶ But there was little time left for consideration of the problem. In his reply Usher advocated putting up a gold candidate to serve as a "sheet anchor" around which the gold men could rally and re-form the party after "the free silver tempest has passed."⁷

The Wisconsin Democratic State Convention was

⁵Chronicle editorials, June 11, 13, and 14, 1896.

⁶William F. Vilas to Usher, June 4, 1896, box 13, Usher Papers.

⁷Usher to William F. Vilas, June 8, 1896, volume 15, 63-64, Usher Papers.

scheduled to meet in Milwaukee at the end of June. Ed Wall, collaborating closely with former Governor George Peck, the new State Chairman, wrote to Usher requesting suggestions for the party platform. The difficulty was in devising a statement which would take notice of the money question without either abandoning the tariff as an issue or inclining to free silver. Usher prepared a rough draft which he forwarded to Wall with the remark, "The idea, ... is to tangle up free trade and the logical necessity of the best money in a way to strike the attention of a sound Democrat."⁸

As the gold men converged on Milwaukee armed with Usher's platform proposals they met an unexpectedly large number of silver delegates. One man, appropriately named Silverthorne, announced to the convention that party principles remained the same, only the leadership had changed. Senator Vilas, head of the party, was called upon for rebuttal. He received a mixed welcome, with cries of "No!" intermingled with shouts of "Vilas!." The Senator "spoke excitedly," urging the delegates themselves to decide whether the party leaders had betrayed Democratic principles.⁹

⁸Usher to Ed Wall, June 2, 1896, volume 15, 67. Usher Papers.

⁹News account, Chronicle, June 24, 1896.

The convention reassured party leaders, adopting the platform drafted by Usher and choosing delegates to Chicago who were chiefly gold men, bound by the unit rule to vote as the majority of the delegates directed.¹⁰

The second national convention of the summer was the Democratic meeting in Chicago, July 7-11, 1896. Pre-convention rumors indicated that the gathering, engineered by Governor Altgeld, would provide a triumph for the silver cause, but Eastern gold Democrats were determined to make one last effort to save the party. Under the leadership of William C. Whitney, who cancelled a trip to Europe, and David Hill of New York the gold men arrived in Chicago on a specially chartered train. But once on the scene, they discovered that they had arrived too late. Under the aegis of Altgeld, the silver wing of the party had already assumed control of two vital committees, those on credentials and on resolutions. When the convention opened everything moved according to Altgeld's direction.¹¹

The first issue before the convention, normally a routine matter of approving the National Committee's choice,

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Wish, op. cit., 512-513, 518; Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 630-635, 667-668; news accounts, New York Times, July 5, 6, and 7, 1896; news accounts, Chronicle, July 2, 1896.

was the question of temporary organization. The National Committee proposed the name of New York Senator David Hill, a gold partisan, as temporary chairman of the convention. In an unprecedented move, the silver men suggested John Daniel, a bimetallist from Virginia. The convention promptly chose Daniel, thereby handing over leadership of the party to the silverites.¹²

This defeat was followed by a battle in the Committee on Credentials over the seating of delegates from Nebraska, the fourth and ninth Congressional Districts of Michigan, and an increase in representation for each territory and the District of Columbia. The silver men needed to win in each case to ensure their control of the two-thirds majority required by convention rules for the nomination of a candidate. The Committee, after much haggling, finally submitted a partial report recommending the proposed increase in territorial representation and the seating of the Nebraska silver delegation led by William Jennings Bryan. After a floor debate the report was adopted. However, the question of the Michigan delegation was a more serious matter since the right of the gold delegates to be seated had not been challenged in Michigan prior to the Convention. Following an

¹² Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention (Logansport, Indiana: Wilson Humphrey and Company, 1896), 71-97; Chronicle news account, July 8, 1896; Josephson, op. cit., 672.

all-night battle in the committee and a heated floor debate, the convention adopted the majority report of the committee and recognized the silver delegation.¹³

Thus gold Democrats completely lost the ability to control or even to influence significantly the convention. There was little left for the men of the Eastern 'gold train' or the Midwestern conservatives to do, except try to hold the gold men together in hopes the future would be more promising.¹⁴

The Wisconsin delegation remained loyal to gold. Senator Vilas, a member of the Committee on Resolutions, spoke eloquently in favor of the minority platform report, charging that the silver issue was merely a piece of propaganda devised in the interests of protectionists and mine-owners.¹⁵ After the free silver platform was adopted, General Edward S. Bragg, chairman of the Wisconsin delegation refused to take any further part in the convention or to cast Wisconsin's vote for any nominee during the balloting. The minority of four silver men on the delegation demanded

¹³Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, op. cit., 132-167.

¹⁴Josephson, op. cit., 669.

¹⁵Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, op. cit., 223.

a poll of the group and despite the use of the unit rule in Wisconsin the chair ruled that the votes be recorded individually on each ballot.¹⁶

The question of who would become the party's candidate for president puzzled observers for the silver wing of the party contained few nationally prominent men and there were serious objections to the nomination of most of them. The obvious choice, Governor Altgeld, was ineligible because he was a naturalized citizen.¹⁷ Among the second rank there were possibilities, and one among them had been campaigning seriously, albeit quietly, for the nomination since spring. A former Congressman from Nebraska, William Jennings Bryan was an outspoken advocate of free silver and, according to conservatives, a Populist. This latter charge was not strictly true for although he had become identified as a representative of the poor, especially farmers, and in 1894 had encouraged a fusion of Nebraska Democrats and Populists, he did not support the Populist package of radical reforms. Early in 1896 Bryan began a quiet mailing campaign, managing to reach a large number of delegates to the convention as well as the silver leadership. When given

¹⁶Ibid., 295-296, 304-309, 353.

¹⁷Josephson, op. cit., 631, 668; Wish, op. cit., 513.

an opportunity to make the principal speech in favor of the silver platform, he delivered the dramatic and famous "Cross of Gold" speech which brought him the party's nomination on the fifth ballot.¹⁸

While gold Democrats did not bolt their party's convention as Senator Teller had bolted the Republican Convention, they were not content to accept the dictates of what they regarded as an unprincipled, Popocratic majority. Before the convention adjourned Eastern and Midwestern gold men, including Vilas and Bragg, met to discuss a course of action. The tactics of the silver men, the nomination of Bryan, and above all the platform adopted by the convention repelled them and they determined to organize a gold campaign and nominate their own candidates.¹⁹

When Bragg and Vilas returned to Wisconsin to begin organizing a gold campaign they were quickly joined by Ellis Usher. In his correspondence and in the pages of the Chronicle Usher pointed out to Democrats what had gone wrong

¹⁸Glad, op. cit., 30-31, 49-50, 130-131, 136-141; Jones, op. cit., 184-190; Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 126-127; Paolo E. Coletta, Political Evangelist (Vol. I of William Jennings Bryan, 2 vols; Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 99-105, 127-147.

¹⁹Josephson, op. cit., 686-687; Merrill, op. cit., 233-234; Ellis Baker Usher, Wisconsin: Its Story and Biography (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), III, 554.

with the Chicago convention. It was an undemocratic, Populistic and Socialistic production, a complete denial of the principles upon which the party had been founded and which had governed it since the days of Jefferson and Jackson. Usher noted specifically the disqualification of the Michigan gold delegates; the presence of Republican silver men who had bolted their own party and then served as advisors to the silver Democrats; and, most importantly, the platform adopted by the convention.²⁰

The silver plank was less objectionable to Usher than other items in the platform. The delegates had voted to denounce as unconstitutional Cleveland's intervention in the Pullman Strike and the administration's use of federal court injunctions against labor organizations. Usher pointed out that such condemnation was unwarranted because the President and Attorney General had merely done their duty by stepping in to preserve the rights of property owners and to maintain order when local authorities had demonstrated an inability or an unwillingness to do so.²¹

Another section of the platform which enraged

²⁰Chronicle editorials, July 10 and 12, 1896.

²¹Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, op. cit., 254; Chronicle editorials, July 16 and 23, 1896.

conservative Democrats was the criticism of the Supreme Court and an implied proposal to pack the Court by substituting a term of years for the life tenure of the justices. In a series of important decisions in 1895 the Supreme Court had resisted efforts to break the power of the railroads in the Western states. The Court allowed railroad companies to retain large acreages granted them from the public domain despite their failure to construct the specified railroads. Another decision permitted the companies to enter into monopolistic agreements with private grain elevator operators to prevent the construction of co-operative elevators adjacent to the tracks. Lower court decisions involving state laws which forbade charging different rates for freight and passengers of the same class carried for similar distances were overruled. In addition, railroad companies were allowed to escape the jurisdiction of less conservative state courts by a ruling that suits against railroads chartered in the United States or against a railroad as a corporate "citizen" of another state could be removed to the federal courts.²²

²² Alan Furman Westin, "The Supreme Court, the Populist Movement and the Campaign of 1896," The Journal of Politics, XV (February, 1953), 4-18; Chronicle editorial, July 23, 1896; for a discussion of farmers' grievances against the railroads, Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (Vol. V of Economic History of the United States, ed. Henry David, et. al. New

The 1895 Supreme Court sessions had also produced other decisions which favored the propertied, business interests. The Court declared the two per cent income tax, attached as a rider to the Tariff Act of 1894, unconstitutional on the grounds that the Constitution forbids direct taxes which are not apportioned among the states on the basis of population. This decision was widely recognized as "class oriented" and Justice Harlan, in a dissenting opinion, noted that the decision gave "certain kinds of property a position of favoritism and advantage inconsistent with the fundamental principles of our social organization."²³ In the "Sugar Trust" cases the Court destroyed the effectiveness of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act by ruling that the activities of the sugar companies involved manufacturing not directly related to commerce and thus came under state, not federal, regulation. This meant that there could be no effective control of the trusts since the sugar companies were in actuality interstate organizations which the states had no power to regulate.²⁴

These decisions clearly demonstrated a conservative

York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1945), 298-303.

²³Westin, op. cit., 22-23; Lawrence B. Evans, Cases on American Constitutional Law (seventh edition; Chicago: Callaghan and Company, 1957), 101-105.

²⁴Westin, op. cit., 25.

view of property rights which directly opposed the reform programs of the Populists, and roused the indignation of the people. In the face of this challenge, Populists advocated an elected federal judiciary, including the Supreme Court, and definite terms of office. Populist success in taking the Court issue to the people was reflected in the Chicago platform of 1896. While many conservatives, including Vilas, did not approve of some of the decisions, they could not bring themselves to criticize publicly such a prestigious constitutional body and were appalled by attacks on the Court. This issue was an important reason why conservative Democrats failed to support Bryan's candidacy.²⁵

Finally, the reform dearest to Usher's heart, and the focus of recent Democratic campaigns, the tariff, was put aside by the convention until after the silver issue could be settled favorably. This was hard for Usher to take. He pointed out that just as the protective tariff was a paternalistic measure designed to foster the interests of a particular group, the same could be said of free silver. The proposal to alter the money system was inflationary and would benefit farmers and mine owners at the expense of

²⁵Ibid., 20-21, 29-36; Merrill, op. cit., 232; Wish, op. cit., 503-504.

creditors, widows, laborers, and others who depended upon fixed incomes.²⁶

Nor was Usher pleased with Bryan's nomination, though he might have been a tolerable candidate were it not for the pernicious doctrines of the Chicago platform. But, "Bryan with his small experience, his emotional nature and his misguided start in politics, accepts everything undemocratic that the convention is and has done. He, as a candidate, stands as the evolved result and expositor of it all."²⁷ Thus Bryan, whether truly a Populist or not, had allowed himself to be subverted by Populist and Socialist ideas and could not be considered as a candidate apart from a platform containing those ideas.

The charge that Bryan was a Populist was given added impetus when the Populist National Convention convened in St. Louis on July 22 in conjunction with the National Silver Party's convention. While many Populists were disappointed in the way free silver had stolen the national spotlight from their reform program, others was silver as a vehicle which could get Populists into office and into a position to accomplish their goals. Thus the

²⁶Chronicle editorial, July 10, 1896; Usher to William H. Rogers, August 1, 1898, volume 20, 245-248, Usher Papers.

²⁷Chronicle editorial, July 11, 1896.

party was persuaded to endorse the Democratic candidate and free silver. However, it refused to accept Bryan's running mate, Arthur Sewall of Maine, and nominated instead the ardent Georgia Populist, Tom Watson.²⁸

Gold Democrats, returning to Wisconsin from Chicago, determined to organize a gold campaign and began by surveying opinion among state Democrats. The results were not encouraging. Ellis Usher and Lute Neiman, editors of the La Crosse Chronicle and Milwaukee Journal respectively, conducted informal polls of Wisconsin Democrats by interviews and by mail. These surveys revealed that although many of the Wisconsin party's leaders were in favor of putting up a third ticket, many of the rank and file either favored the Chicago platform and nominee or felt obligated by the principle of majority rule to support the party choice. A summary of the letters which Neiman printed in the Journal revealed that out of 125 men who responded, only twenty-five favored a third ticket movement. The majority, seventy-six, were prepared to support Bryan while the remainder, though not favoring a third ticket, would not vote for Bryan.²⁹

²⁸Jones, op. cit., 84-89; Pollack, op. cit., 103-105; Josephson, op. cit., 629, 670, 681-683.

²⁹Milwaukee Journal, July 14-29, 1896; Merrill, op. cit., 236; Lute Neiman to William F. Vilas, July 14, 1896,

Perhaps La Crosse area Democrats were more conservative than those in Milwaukee for Usher reported that of the first twenty men he interviewed, eighteen were opposed to the Chicago platform. However, this unanimity broke down on the question of what course to take. While some favored a third ticket, others favored voting for the Republican candidate, McKinley, as the surest way to hand Bryan a resounding defeat in November. From July 29 to August 2 Usher published many letters which he had received from Democrats around the state favoring a gold candidate, but these represented a definite minority of the party.³⁰

The contents of the letters which Usher received reveal the attitudes of Wisconsin gold men. The immediate necessity, of course, was to defeat Bryan in the coming election. If this could be accomplished and at the same time conservative Democrats could be held together, preserving some semblance of party regularity in the face of the tactics adopted by the silver men, so much the better. Such a campaign would provide a power base from which the gold men could direct the reunion of the party on their terms. Conservatives were confident that they could save the nation

box 26, William F. Vilas Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter referred to as Vilas Papers).

³⁰Chronicle, July 15 and July 29-August 2, 1896.

from the perils of free silver and Populism while simultaneously preserving the Democratic Party from its own folly. Even after the conservative leadership and principles of the party had been formally and publicly repudiated by the people, gold Democrats were unable to recognize or accept the idea that they were becoming politically obsolete.³¹

Usher's correspondence also reflected awareness of class struggle which this election contest embodied. Descriptions of the silverites as "anarchists," "populists," and "socialists" were frequent. Other phrases such as "our thinking day laborers," the "intelligent foreign voters," and "lower classes" were used in such contexts as to indicate the social and economic superiority of the gold men.³²

C. A. Hutchins of Beloit reported to Usher, "There are a few here who were long ago smitten with the heresy that wealth can be created and value conferred by legislative fiat, and who will, I presume, follow the lead of Altgeld...."³³

Gold Democrats were conservatives who wanted law

³¹S. N. Dickinson, August 5, 1896, Frank P. Coburn, August 6, 1896, and C. K. Tenney, September 6, 1896 to Usher, boxes 13 and 14, Usher Papers.

³²Ibid., Dr. R. M. Gage, July 30, 1896, S. N. Dickinson, August 5, 1896, E. J. Burns, July 27, 1896, and Dr. Louis Falge, July 28, 1896, box 14.

³³Ibid., July 28, 1896, box 13.

and order, a minimum amount of government interference in business and society, and the preservation of the status quo. While many gold men belonged to the financial elite of the nation, millionaire capitalists and tycoons, many more were of middle class backgrounds with a rather typical bourgeois outlook. Usher's correspondents were judges, lawyers, doctors, officeholders, businessmen. Only one was a self-identified farmer and he proved to be atypical for shortly after the election he informed Usher that he was planning to rent out his farm and enroll in the University of Chicago to study politics.³⁴

Most of these men were "self-made," as was Usher, and had directed their own social and economic success. They saw no reason why any other ambitious man should not be able to do likewise. The problems of the Western and Southern farmers, challenged by a strange new industrial society, were as foreign to them as the difficulties of the newly-arrived immigrant living in a big city ghetto, perhaps unable to speak English. The fact that Wisconsin farmers in the 1890s were not experiencing the same degree of economic hardship as agrarians farther West may have further insulated the gold men from rural problems.³⁵

³⁴Ibid., boxes 13 and 14, O. E. Wells to Usher, September 22, 1896 and February 4, 1897, boxes 14 and 17.

³⁵In addition to the letters from gold Democrats in

These conservative Democrats were not unusually selfish; they were merely unaware or uncertain that there was anything government could do to alleviate economic distress which would be in accord with their doctrinaire principles. They saw little need to alter ideas which were now a century old and which had been grounded in a predominantly agrarian society rather than in the complexities of an industrialized, capitalist economy.³⁶

However, if preserving the status quo had been their only concern conservative Democrats would have voted for McKinley and perhaps have joined the Republican Party. The difficulty was one of another "principle" and because of it most gold Democrats found the Republican Party and its nominee as unattractive as the silver Democrats and Bryan. The Republican Party generally, and McKinley in particular, was strongly in favor of the protective tariff. Furthermore, McKinley's position on the money question was vague and ambiguous despite the Republican platform endorsement of the gold standard.

boxes 13 and 14 of the Usher Papers, there is an editorial on opportunities for self-advancement in the Chronicle, October 15, 1899; Glad, op. cit., 14, 35-36.

³⁶Usher Papers, loc. cit.; Glad, op. cit., 32-36; Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. (New York: Random House, 1955), 23-59.

Another objection to McKinley was that votes cast for him would weaken the position of gold Democrats after the election when they hoped to be able to re-establish the old Democratic Party.³⁷ Usher made this point most positively in a letter to Frank Coburn by remarking that Democrats would have difficulty in getting an audience to listen to anti-Bryan sentiments, but a third ticket would provide an opportunity for Democratic speakers to appeal to the voters' loyalty in order to preserve the party while also providing sound money information to voters who would not attend Republican meetings.³⁸

With such an ideology gold Democrats set to work organizing their party. Both Bragg and Vilas had attended meetings of gold men before leaving Chicago. As early as July 9 Bragg had proposed waging a separate gold campaign in Wisconsin. Plans were quickly made for a meeting of Middle Western conservatives in Chicago on July 23. Ellis Usher attended the meeting and accepted the appointment as provisional Wisconsin National Committeeman of the newly formed National Democratic Party. General Bragg served

³⁷Dr. Harvey Dale, July 27, 1896, Dr. T. F. Mayham, August 2, 1896 and George W. Dyer, August 3, 1896 to Usher, box 13, Usher Papers.

³⁸Ibid., July 31, 1896, volume 15, 98.

as chairman. The men present adopted a resolution to hold a national nominating convention not later than September 2 and to meet again on August 7 to lay further plans for the convention.³⁹

Returning to Wisconsin, Usher immediately began the task of organizing the party. He sent petitions to men in every part of the state whom he considered reliable conservatives in order to establish a basis for issuing a call for a state convention of gold men. However, many were unable, through pressure of business, poor health, the extremely hot weather, or lack of sympathy with the cause, to circulate the petitions. In some areas Usher was unable to find anyone to take on the work and in many towns the number of signatures obtained was disappointingly small. Often voters who favored a third ticket were reluctant to sign a petition, fearing that the publicity would harm their business. Others feared that such a movement would help Bryan's campaign and had already decided to vote for McKinley.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., Charles A. Ewing telegram to Usher, July 22, 1896, box 13; William C. B. Breckinridge to William F. Vilas, July 12, 1896, box 26, Vilas Papers; news accounts, Chronicle, July 24 and 25, 1896; Usher, Wisconsin, III, 555.

⁴⁰Usher to party workers, July 28-29, 1896, volume 15, 73-97 and John H. Brennan, C. H. Jacobi, August 3, 1896, J. N. Cotter, A. G. Buckholz, August 5, 1896, S. S. Bowers,

Despite such disappointments, Usher remained enthusiastic and professed himself pleased with progress. In a letter dated August 6, 1896 he reported that he had established organizational contacts in fifty counties and was receiving petitions "numerously signed by the best and most representative people...."⁴¹ When the call for a Wisconsin convention was published in newspapers on August 15 it contained eight hundred names and was headed by the names of eleven of the twenty-four delegates to the Chicago convention. The call proposed that a convention be held in Milwaukee on August 26 for the purpose of choosing delegates to the national convention and of handling any other business which might be required. On the same day the National Committee published a call for a national convention to be held in Indianapolis on September 2.⁴²

During August Usher received many letters offering help for the campaign. But at the same time he received notices of regrets from many Democrats, some prominent in the state and some close friends. One of the best-known

August 8, 1896 and Dr. H. B. Dale, August 12, 1896 to Usher, box 13, Usher Papers.

⁴¹Ibid., Usher to William D. Merrill, volume 15, 192.

⁴²Chronicle editorial, August 15, 1896.

Democrats to join the silver campaign was Ed Wall, former State Central Committee Chairman. Wall decided that his duty was to accept the will of the majority of the party, no matter how distasteful it was to him. Throughout the campaign he worked closely with George Peck, his successor as State Chairman.⁴³ Another Democrat who chose to be guided by the principle of party regularity was United States Senator John Mitchell, son of the former Bourbon leader, Alexander Mitchell.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Usher was able to muster a respectable roll of party leaders, past and present, including former Congressmen Frank Coburn, Burr W. Jones, Owen A. Wells, G. M. Woodward and P. V. Deuster in addition to Bragg and Vilas.⁴⁵

Following publication of the call, county conventions made efforts to establish an organization in each county. When the state convention met in Milwaukee on August 26, 1896 there were four hundred delegates present from all over the state. One newspaper account commented that almost all of the men were middle-aged or older, but despite the

⁴³E. C. Wall to William F. Vilas, July 12, 1896, box 26, Vilas Papers; Merrill, op. cit., 234-235.

⁴⁴Senator John Mitchell telegram to Usher, August 13, 1896, box 13, Usher Papers.

⁴⁵Chronicle editorial, October 30, 1896.

absence of youth the convention was very enthusiastic. Speeches by Senator Vilas and General Bragg were greeted with great applause although they had nothing new to offer their audience. The convention ratified the informal appointment of Ellis Usher as State Chairman of the party, chose delegates to represent Wisconsin at the Indianapolis Convention, and adopted a gold platform. It was all very routine. The role which General Bragg had played at the Chicago convention and his efforts to organize a gold campaign were recognized by the delegates who endorsed him for the presidential nomination.⁴⁶

Bragg's immense popularity in Wisconsin went back to Civil War days when he had commanded the Iron Brigade of Wisconsin Volunteers. Since the war he had served in the State Senate, in Congress, and as United States Minister to Mexico during Cleveland's first administration. He was known for his oratorical ability, especially after his speech at the 1884 Democratic National Convention. At that time he had remarked that Wisconsin Democrats admired Grover Cleveland not so much for what he had done as Governor of New York but rather for the enemies he had

⁴⁶ News accounts and official stenographic report of the convention proceedings, Milwaukee Journal, August 27-28, 1896; news clippings in Usher's campaign scrapbook, volume 38, 8-20, Usher Papers; Usher, Wisconsin, III, loc. cit.

made fighting corruption in that state. Bragg's admirers believed this speech had been instrumental in swinging the presidential nomination to Cleveland.⁴⁷ During the 1896 campaign Bragg more than justified the gold Democrats' tribute. Although sixty-nine years old in the autumn of 1896, his popularity with the voters coupled with his willingness to speak several times a week throughout September and October made him probably the greatest single asset of the Wisconsin party.⁴⁸

The state convention was followed by the national convention in Indianapolis on September 2. Again, the meeting of gold Democrats was tame and routine although the delegates were enthusiastic. The platform adopted by the convention was the antithesis of the Chicago platform. It praised the Cleveland administration, insisted upon a gold standard, supported the independence of the federal judiciary, condemned the Populist-Democratic coalition, and affirmed a tariff for revenue only. As candidates

⁴⁷J. G. Hardgrove, "General Edward S. Bragg's Reminiscences," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXXIII (March, 1950), 282, 293; Merrill, op. cit., 57, 116.

⁴⁸Merrill, op. cit., 238; Chronicle news account, September 4, 1896; Usher, Wisconsin, III, 556; the original draft of Vilas' speech to the convention, drafts of the platform prepared by Vilas, and other materials relating to the convention, box 26, Vilas Papers.

the party chose two Civil War generals, John Palmer of Illinois as the presidential nominee and a Kentuckian, Simon Bolivar Buckner, as the vice presidential candidate. Wisconsin's favorite son, General Bragg, favored to win the nomination on the first day, received only $124\frac{1}{2}$ votes compared to $757\frac{1}{2}$ votes for Palmer.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Milwaukee Journal, September 2-3, 1896.

CHAPTER III

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGN IN WISCONSIN

I. THE STATE TICKET DEBATE

The National Democratic Party, a third party movement claiming to represent the "true Democracy," faced several problems which did not concern Republicans and silver Democrats. The first, requiring a decision early in the campaign, was whether the party should attempt to put up a complete ticket with nominations for local, state and Congressional offices. Usher, on July 21, had published an editorial request for a campaign carried on through all contest levels from precinct to president.¹ He expressed similar views in his correspondence. Usher believed the party would have greater impact on people if gold Democrats could bring the fight home to the local office seekers, stirring local enthusiasm for the campaign. Certainly voters would take the party more seriously if it demonstrated an interest in county and ward contests.²

¹Chronicle editorial, July 21, 1896.

²Usher to S. N. Dickinson, August 6, 1896, volume 15, 198, to T. F. Frawley, July 31, 1896, volume 15, 106, and to William F. Vilas, August 19, 1896, volume 15, 248-250, Usher Papers.

Senator Vilas was not as enthusiastic about a state campaign and pointed out the problems involved. A fiercely waged local contest, rousing bitterness and anger on both sides, might make the reunion of Democrats more difficult to achieve after the election. Also, the party must be careful not to overextend itself, taking on a larger campaign than it could handle. Vilas suggested that this question be decided by the State Central Committee or by a committee appointed by the State Convention.³

To discuss the problem more fully, Usher invited approximately forty gold men to meet in Milwaukee on August 24. Opinion at this meeting was divided between those who favored an aggressive campaign on all levels and those who supported a more conciliatory approach to the silver men. The latter group was further divided over a choice of courses: to fuse with the silverites by endorsing the candidates which they would name at their state convention, or to remain out of the contests altogether. No decision was reached and the matter was left to be brought up at the State Convention.⁴

³Ibid., William F. Vilas to Usher, August 20, 1896, box 13.

⁴News accounts, Milwaukee Journal, August 24 and 25, 1896 and Milwaukee Sentinel, August 25, 1896.

Meeting on August 26, that gathering also failed to reach a decision. The general tenor of discussion indicated a desire to conciliate silver Democrats with a view to the future. Many delegates thought a decision should wait until the silver men named a state ticket at their convention on September 1. Finally, the decision was left to the State Central Committee.⁵

Returning from the National Convention, Usher called a meeting of the State Central Committee in Milwaukee on September 10. Other prominent party men such as General Bragg and Senator Vilas were invited to attend. The group was rather evenly divided on the issue.⁶

John Webb, Secretary of the Committee, read several letters from Democrats around the state. Some writers favored fusion with the Democratic ticket, endorsing only candidates who were not tainted by Populist or free silver ideas. This would reduce the danger of generating bitterness between two groups of Democrats, yet would allow conservatives to stand by their principles. To replace the objectionable candidates, National Democrats could name men

⁵Ibid., August 27, 1896.

⁶Secretary's report, National Democratic State Central Committee meeting, September 10, 1896, box 16, Usher Papers.

with sound money instincts. Most writers considered the silver Democratic ticket highly unsatisfactory. The silverites had shown no interest in conciliation or even in recognizing the strength and validity of conservative Democratic protest. On the other hand, survival of the National Democrats as Democrats necessitated reunion with the silver wing of the party at some future time. Thus many gold men became more determined to conduct a hard campaign, to get as many votes as possible, and to demonstrate their strength in language the silver men would understand.⁷

However, the men gathered in Milwaukee had to face practical questions of how effective a full ticket campaign would be and how it could be accomplished. General Bragg noted that there were many Democrats afraid to commit themselves openly to the gold party and wondered how gold Democrats could "nominate a ticket that will interest men who are afraid to say their souls are their own? We have not the means to electrify them."⁸ Senator Vilas

⁷Jams Lytle, September 9, 1896, Dr. H. B. Dale, September 4, 1896, Walter A. West, September 7, 1896, J. H. Wheelock, September 7, 1896, Thomas E. Nash, September 9, 1896 and B. Stevens, September 9, 1896 to Usher, box 14, Usher Papers.

⁸Stenographic report of speakers' remarks at the meeting of the State Central Committee, September 10, 1896, box 16, Usher Papers.

opposed any fusion movement, questioning whether enough top quality gold men could be found to substitute for the silverites on the regular party ticket.⁹ Those Committeemen who favored a fusion ticket pointed out that there was still a chance for a Democratic victory in the state contests and that both groups would profit by fusion.¹⁰ When put to a vote, the proposal for a separate ticket failed, thirteen to ten. The question of Congressional and local tickets was to be left to a local option based on the best judgment of local party committees.¹¹

Although Usher had personally been in favor of a party ticket at all levels, he expressed himself as satisfied with the decision, especially in view of the division within the Committee. He believed that such a ticket would only be feasible if it had the support of most committeemen. Without this support, Usher thought it best to concentrate on defeating Bryan without the distractions of a state-wide campaign.¹²

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Secretary's report, loc. cit.

¹²Usher to William Knauf, September 11, 1896, volume 18, 6 and to C. K. Tenney, September 11, 1896, volume 18, 13, Usher Papers.

II. COLLABORATION WITH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

The National Democrats of 1896 were in an ambiguous position. Proclaiming their party as the 'true Democracy' of Jefferson and Jackson they nevertheless shared with Republicans the same immediate goal--defeat of the Democrat, William Jennings Bryan. Thus the party was open to charges of "Republicanism" and "McKinleyism," accusations which silver Democrats were quite willing to publicize. Yet practical aspects of the campaign suggested the need for some cooperation between Republicans and National Democrats. As party chairman and campaign director, Usher tried to follow as consistent a course as possible, accepting practical aid from Republicans in such matters as the distribution of "sound money" literature, yet insisting that the speaking campaign of the National Democrats be conducted on a partisan basis.

In addition to the question of political party loyalty there were also practical problems involved. According to Wisconsin law a third party placed on the ballot in one election would have to poll two per cent of the total vote cast in order to be on the ballot in the following contest. If the National Democrats were to be eligible to appear on the ballot in 1898, and this was likely if reunion could not be effected with the silver

Democrats, Usher estimated that they would have to poll at least eight thousand votes.¹³ Furthermore, the long range goal of the gold men, re-establishing the old Democratic Party, required as strong a showing in the election as possible.¹⁴

When the campaign started in September, Usher began receiving letters from gold men deploring Republican influence in the campaign. Usher admitted that Republicans would certainly gain from the activities of gold Democrats but pointed out that the ultimate aim of the movement was to reunite the Democratic Party. He pointed to the Indianapolis platform as a document attesting to Democratic integrity. If both Bryan and McKinley were unacceptable, he argued, then the only candidate left was Palmer.¹⁵

Nevertheless, complaints of non-partisan activity would not die. General Bragg, accused of urging voters to support Republicans, reported to Usher that he found a good number of voters "not yet quite prepared to swallow McK--but in private conversation--I have so far advised it--

¹³Ibid., Usher to General Edward S. Bragg, September 25, 1896, volume 18, 187.

¹⁴Ibid., Usher to Charles Schweizer, October 3, 1896, volume 18, 164 and to B. J. Stevens, October 16, 1896, volume 18, 300-301.

¹⁵Ibid., Usher to George Krouskop, September 24, 1896, volume 18, 164 and to W. F. Jahn, September 17, 1896, volume 18, 107.

I come mighty near it on the platform."¹⁶ Usher responded immediately, reminding Bragg of the need to gather as many Palmer votes as possible.¹⁷ While he was in favor of 'sound money' ideas and speeches, Usher opposed non-partisan campaigning.¹⁸

Then in early October Usher advised speakers to stop appearing at non-partisan, 'sound money' rallies. Republicans, in his opinion, no longer needed help to assure McKinley's victory, and Usher began urging a campaign to garner Palmer-Buckner votes.¹⁹ Henry Payne, Republican National Committeeman, assured him that there was no possible danger to McKinley's election if the National Democrats worked exclusively for Palmer votes. Indeed, such a campaign "might prevent a reaction in the last days of the campaign that would be dangerous" if Democratic voters should develop qualms about voting for Republicans

¹⁶ Ibid., General Edward S. Bragg to Usher, September 24, 1896, box 14, Rev. A. F. Ernst, October 19, 1896 and Bruno Jurgensohn, October 27, 1896, to Usher, box 15.

¹⁷ Ibid., Usher to General Edward S. Bragg, September 25, 1896, volume 18, 187.

¹⁸ Ibid., Usher to John Schmidtman, October 15, 1896, volume 20, 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., Usher to Charles Schweizer, October 3, 1896, volume 18, 251.

despite their anti-Bryan sentiments.²⁰

Although Usher urged speakers to maintain a partisan tone, there was quiet cooperation between Republicans and National Democrats on both state and local levels. Some of the most popular National Democratic orators such as General Bragg and a former Wisconsin attorney, Stuart McKibbin of South Bend, Indiana, received invitations to address Republican rallies. There was also cooperation in distributing literature. Usher arranged to have the Republican State Central Committee send copies of a speech on the money question by Carl Schurz, a former Cabinet officer from Wisconsin, to forty thousand German Democrats. The Republican Congressional Committee also provided Usher with campaign documents.²¹

Inevitably, the question of whether to seek financial aid from the Republicans arose, but again Usher drew a wavering line. Although working on marginal resources, he refused to ask Republicans to contribute funds though he

²⁰Ibid., Usher to B. J. Stevens, October 16, 1896, volume 18, 300-301.

²¹Ibid., George Krouskop. September 14, 1896, Charles Crogster, September 15, 1896, Thomas Luchsinger, September 30, 1896 to Usher, box 14, Breese Stevens, October 1, 1896 and Frank Oderbolz, October 7, 1896, to Usher, box 15, and Usher to E. C. Coe, September 15, 1896, and September 25, 1896, volume 18, 66 and 192.

was willing to accept unsolicited contributions.²²

An added difficulty involved in accepting help from Republicans was that National Democrats had to avoid the appearance of being a Republican 'side show' or risk losing their credibility for voters. In the final two weeks of the campaign Usher urged a stepped-up effort in Milwaukee. In his estimation, Republicans were weak in the city and he hoped to gain at their expense, assuring gold Democrats of a position on the 1898 ballot.²³

III. A CAMPAIGN OF EDUCATION

The principal effort of the National Democratic Party in 1896 was to communicate with the voters through a campaign of education. Usher decided that a speaking program, directed toward educating the voters on the money issue, was about all that the State Central Committee could afford. But he took pains to effect as strong and widespread an organization as possible and to make effective use of the limited resources at his disposal.²⁴

²²Ibid., Usher to Charles Crogster, September 16, 1896, volume 18, 88.

²³Ibid., Usher to party workers, October 24, 1896, volume 18, 322-324.

²⁴Ibid., Usher to William Mahoney, September 12, 1896, volume 18, 28-29 and to Henry Hagemeister, September 18, 1896, volume 18, 114.

The basic organization which Usher had hastily assembled in July and August received the endorsement of the State Convention. At the meeting of the State Central Committee on September 10 leaders extended and strengthened this organization. Members of the Committee from each Congressional District designated themselves as Congressional Committees for their districts and planned to expand their county and town organizations. As of that date the party had still not penetrated some areas of the state. Usher was particularly anxious to have representatives in those places to assist in reconstructing the Democratic Party after the election.²⁵

In September Usher sent out requests to party members for the names and addresses of voters sympathetic to gold Democrats. He intended to use the data in a mailing campaign, in forming Palmer-Buckner Clubs, and in future organizational efforts. He hoped that such lists would give him a reservoir of men to draw on for party work. For this same reason he encouraged formation of partisan clubs. Such groups could also assist in making arrangements for party rallies, distributing literature, and canvassing for votes. However, many of the clubs reflected not the partisan spirit which Usher preferred, but rather a

²⁵Ibid., Secretary's report, box 16.

strong tendency at the local levels to cooperate with the Republicans. As a result, many of these groups were actually 'Sound Money' Clubs and supported non-partisan rallies and speeches.²⁶

One organizational difficulty beyond Usher's control was the operation of the National Committee, chaired by William D. Bynum of Indianapolis. Party headquarters, located in Chicago, was not opened until September 25. Meanwhile, the anti-Bryan faction accomplished little in the absence of Bynum who had been touring eastern cities, hoping to raise funds.²⁷ In a letter to Vilas, Usher expressed disappointment at such tardiness and concluded that the National Committee would be little help in the campaign.²⁸ The La Crosse leader became a member of the executive committee of the national party and later headed the Document Bureau in Chicago. After the first of October he spent several days each week at National Headquarters, which

²⁶ Ibid., Usher to Joseph Tuteur, September 17, 1896, volume 18, 108, to Judge William H. Seeman, September 16, 1896, volume 18, 73-74 and Charles Schweizer to Usher, September 22, 1896 and E. A. Edmonds to Usher, October 1, 1896, box 14.

²⁷ Chronicle news account, September 26, 1896; New York Times news account, October 6, 1896; Stanley Llwelllyn Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 272, 274.

²⁸ September 24, 1896, volume 18, 167-168, Usher Papers.

activity slowed his work in the Wisconsin campaign.²⁹

Despite these organizational problems the party's campaign in Wisconsin began toward the end of September. One of the few advantages which the gold Democrats had was the relatively large number of newspapers which supported the Palmer ticket. Among such papers were the New York Times, New York Herald, Chicago Chronicle, St. Paul Daily Globe, and Milwaukee Journal. They provided gold Democrats with good news coverage as well as editorial support. Usher was able to arrange special subscription rates for the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul newspapers and provide Wisconsin voters with consistent news coverage.³⁰ The National Committee also made available to state organizations extra copies of a special campaign edition published by the Louisville, Kentucky Courier-Journal and a daily column of news and commentary which editors could use for publication. Some smaller newspapers including the Watertown Weltburger and the La Crosse Chronicle also distributed extra copies or special editions for campaign purposes.³¹ Usher had to reject offers

²⁹Ibid., William D. Bynum, October 3, 1896, box 14, and John Webb, October 7, 1896, box 15, to Usher.

³⁰Ibid., Usher to Lute Neiman, August 19, 1896, volume 15, 245, and R. B. Peattie, September 18, 1896, Harold Smith, August 22, 1896, L. L. Boyd, August 21, 1896, and H. W. Seymour, August 1, 1896 to Usher, boxes 13 and 14.

³¹Ibid., D. Blumenfeld, September 9, 1896 and C. Vey

from prospective editors to establish National Democratic newspapers with state party funds, however, for the party lacked sufficient financial resources.³²

Gold Democrats also received assistance from the Committee on Sound Currency of the Reform Club of New York. This group had been active during the pre-campaign period, supplying feature articles on the money issue as well as posters and pamphlets. Other feature material was obtained from such men as former Congressman Frank Coburn who wrote a series on the money problem for the La Crosse Chronicle. Usher also made use of his friendship with the editor of the Milwaukee Journal, Lute Neiman, to have published information "as if it was something your own correspondent had sought me to obtain."³³

With only limited time and money Usher was unable to distribute much literature other than through the newspapers. He was able to obtain some materials, either free or at special rates, from the Reform Club and the

Holman, October 7, 1896 to Usher, box 14 and F. A. Goodrich, October 27, 1896 and a telegram from William D. Bynum, October 8, 1896, to Usher, box 15.

³²Ibid., Usher to J. H. Gerlich, September 12, 1896, volume 18, 26.

³³Ibid., Calvin Tompkins, September 17, 1896, Frank W. Coburn, August 21, 1896 and _____ Osborne, September 16, 1896, to Usher, boxes 13 and 14, and Usher to Lute Neiman, July 31, 1896, volume 15, 101.

National Committee, but quantities were short. For example, Wisconsin's share of the campaign textbooks published by the National Committee was only five hundred copies.³⁴

The demand for literature from local party groups was heavy and the immigrant population of the state needed a large number of German, Polish, Norwegian, and Bohemian translations. Usher was able to supply some of the Schurz speeches along with Treasury Secretary Carlisle's "Speech Before the Workingmen of Chicago," but for other materials he had to rely on the few local newspapers published in the various foreign languages.³⁵

The principal effort of the Wisconsin campaign was communicating with the voters at rallies and meetings. Despite difficulties, the speaking campaign was vigorous and probably quite effective in discouraging votes for Bryan if not in gaining votes for Palmer. In his campaign scrapbook Usher tabulated a summary of this campaign effort. The State Central Committee sponsored 122 meetings from September 12

³⁴Ibid., Usher to Reform Club of New York, August 10, 1896, volume 15, 236, 243, to William D. Bynum, September 11, 1896, volume 18, 23, and R. R. Bouker to Usher, October 3, 1896, box 14.

³⁵Ibid., C. C. Eaton, September 15, 1896 and Charles Engelbracht, October 8, 1896 to Usher in addition to many other letters, boxes 14 and 15.

to November 2 in addition to numerous rallies organized by local party enthusiasts. Twenty-seven speakers, seven of them from outside the state, toured all of Wisconsin except for nineteen counties. General Bragg was the most energetic campaigner, speaking at thirty-three meetings on twenty-six days.³⁶

There were many difficulties involved in preparing such a campaign on relatively short notice. Money was scarce and speakers were paid only their expenses, not for their services. Some men, including General Bragg, voluntarily paid their own expenses. Executives of the principal railroads serving the state extended their policy of providing free transportation for party officials and speakers to include the National Democrats, relieving the Committee of a considerable financial burden.³⁷

The relative inactivity of the National Committee made it necessary for each state organization to make private arrangements for out-of-state speakers. While Usher was unable to attract any well-known national figures, except William D. Bynum, he was fortunate to obtain the

³⁶Ibid., campaign scrapbook, volume 38, 26-28.

³⁷Ibid., scrapbook, volume 38, 26-28 and letters to Usher from railroad company executives dated September 9, 15, 18, and 26, 1896, box 14; Ellis Baker Usher, Wisconsin: Its Story and Biography, 1848-1913 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), III, 556.

services of two good speakers. Stuart McKibbin of South Bend, Indiana made four campaign trips into Wisconsin while Judge Nathaniel French of Davenport, Iowa spent a week in the state. Usher's correspondents reported that both men were well-received by gold partisans.³⁸

Usher was unable to enlist the services of many conservatives, including Senator Vilas. After the Indianapolis Convention, Vilas became markedly less interested in the campaign. Perhaps as a professional politician he began to realize the complete hopelessness of the National Democratic effort to re-establish the old Democratic Party. In his letters to Usher, however, he cited his pressing business affairs and a vague nervous indisposition as his reasons for turning down numerous invitations which he received.³⁹

In October, Usher and Vilas reached an abrupt parting of the ways. Early in the campaign Vilas had advised Usher of the importance of filing a petition containing one thousand signatures with the Wisconsin Secretary of State in order to be sure that the party's candidates would be included on

³⁸Usher's campaign scrapbook, volume 38, 26-28 and letters from Usher to Vilas, September 24, 1896, volume 18, 167-168 and to Usher from Dr. H. B. Dale, October 24, 1896, Byron S. Saunders, October 24, 1896, A. J. Rosenberg, October 28, 1896 and Carl H. Mueller, October 28, 1896, box 15, Usher Papers.

³⁹Ibid., William F. Vilas to Usher, September 6, 22, and 25, 1896, box 14.

the ballot. He personally drew up the certificate which was to accompany the petition. When the two documents were ready Vilas suggested that they be forwarded to him in Madison and he promised to file them with the Secretary. Instead, Usher sent the Committee Secretary, John Webb, to file the petition in Madison.⁴⁰ Vilas, incensed by this slight, informed Webb that the action "absolves me from the least particle of obligation to render any service to the Committee; and is entirely in character with all that has been done heretofore."⁴¹ In a letter to Usher, Vilas further revealed his pique over this and other, unspecified, matters. Despite Usher's apologies and his protestations of innocence of any other offenses, Vilas remained completely uncooperative. His campaign work consisted of one speech in Madison, delivered at the request of local friends on October 28.⁴²

It was unfortunate for the Wisconsin National

⁴⁰Ibid., Usher to William F. Vilas, September 12, 1896, volume 18, 35, and October 10, 1896, volume 18, 280, and William F. Vilas to Usher, September 14 and 16, 1896, William F. Vilas to John Webb, October 3, 1896, box 14, and John Webb to Vilas, October 5, 1896, volume 19, 181.

⁴¹Ibid., William F. Vilas to John Webb, October 7, 1896, box 15.

⁴²Ibid., William F. Vilas, October 12, 1896 and B. J. Stevens, October 20, 1896, to Usher, box 15, and Usher to William F. Vilas, October 10, 1896, volume 18, 280.

Democrats that Vilas refused to participate in the campaign. He was the highest ranking member of the state party by virtue of his Senatorial position and was an excellent orator by nineteenth century standards. His prominence in the early months of organizational work had been well-publicized and must have made his later silence all the more conspicuous. The requests to arrange Vilas speeches which Usher continued to receive throughout the remaining weeks of the campaign testified to the good effects such talks were expected to have on voters.

The National Democrats had to rely on the quality of their orators to arouse the public since their rallies were generally sober, business-like affairs. Lack of money limited the number of elaborate parades, torch-light processions and other trappings to which voters had become accustomed. One of Usher's correspondents lamented the lack of dramatic appeal in the gold campaign. As a contrast he described the great Bryan rally which he had just witnessed: a huge parade with bands, banners, street decorations; sixteen little girls dressed in white and one dressed in gold; sixteen white horses and one sorrel; the whole to be climaxed in the evening with the slaughter of a golden calf.⁴³

⁴³Ibid., George Krouskop to Usher, October 27, 1896, box 15.

The highpoint of the campaign was the October tour of General Simon Bolivar Buckner, vice presidential candidate. Originally General Buckner was to have accompanied General Palmer on a tour of the northwestern states, but a death in Palmer's family forced him to withdraw from part of the trip. General Buckner, accompanied by General Bragg, crossed the state from Milwaukee to La Crosse delivering major speeches in those cities and making ten minute "whistle stops" in nine other towns across the state. The crowds of people at each stop were impressive. According to a La Crosse Chronicle reporter, one thousand people waited for the theater doors to open before the Generals made their La Crosse speeches. The building was so crowded that ladies had to be seated on the stage in places reserved for dignataries.⁴⁴

IV. CAMPAIGN ISSUES

For practical purposes the campaign of 1896, both nationally and in Wisconsin, was a one-issue affair. After Bryan was nominated, Republican campaign strategists decided to drop the tariff issue and conduct an educational

⁴⁴ News accounts, Milwaukee Journal and Chronicle, October 20, 21, and 22, 1896.

campaign on the money question.⁴⁵ This pleased silverites since they really had little else in the way of a program. Concentration on the money issue did not soothe genuine Populists, but there was little they could do about it. National Democrats, however, had one other major issue which they discussed: the nature of the "true Democracy" and the duty of Democrats. In the main, speeches and editorials in Wisconsin stressed two principal topics, the fallacies of the free silver doctrine and the patriotic duty of all true Democrats to vote for Palmer and Buckner.

National Democrats and Republican attacked from all angles the merits of silver as the solution to the nation's economic problems. One of the most popular speeches, circulated in pamphlet form and quoted in editorials, was Carl Schurz's talk before the American Honest Money League in Chicago on September 5, 1896. Schurz pointed out that the drop in farm prices was not due to the discontinuance of silver coinage as Bryanites claimed. In fact, in the nine years immediately following demonetization agricultural prices had provided no indication that an insufficient amount of money was in circulation. Schurz attributed the decline in prices instead to increased production of oats, wheat and other

⁴⁵Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 680.

crops as a result of better farming methods and improved transportation. He further asserted that prosperous farmers, and there were many, studied new improvements and benefited from them. Those who were not prosperous were the "political farmers" who had spent their time studying free silver literature.⁴⁶

Conservatives used such arguments to refute silverite claims that the drop in farm prices was directly connected to a shortage of money in circulation. Silver men believed that the amount of money in circulation was inadequate to maintain price levels, especially in rural areas.⁴⁷

A steady rise in the price of wheat reduced the force of silver propaganda during the autumn of 1896. The La Crosse Chronicle editor noted in late October that Bryan had refrained from congratulating wheat farmers on their improved prospects of making a profit.⁴⁸ The Chronicle also recognized the effects of the rise in prices on another aspect of the silver argument. Advocates of free silver

⁴⁶New York Times news account, September 6, 1896.

⁴⁷Jones, op. cit., 7-10; John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1931), 55-60; Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897 (Vol. V of Economic History of the United States, ed. Henry David, et al. New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1945), 316.

⁴⁸Chronicle editorial, October 21, 1896.

had long harped on the parallel drop in the prices of wheat and silver over the years which they attributed to a shortage of money in circulation. This part of their theory was rendered useless as the price of wheat increased while silver remained depressed.⁴⁹

Another claim of the silver men was that if the government would adopt a policy of unlimited coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one there would be more money in the average person's pocket. General Bragg, speaking in Ripon, Wisconsin on September 29, attacked this idea by asking a question: if a billion dollars worth of silver should be coined next month, how would the people be able to get any of it? The answer to this question was closely connected to another posed by the Chronicle, "How Will The Price of Silver Be Raised?"⁵⁰

An ounce of silver selling at \$1.29 in 1896 would have put the silver dollar on a par with the gold dollar. But the price of silver had declined over the years, due to an increase in production, so that the sixteen-to-one silver dollar actually contained only 53¢ worth of silver in relation to the gold dollar. Silver supporters claimed

⁴⁹Ibid., October 2, 1896.

⁵⁰Ibid., news account and editorial, September 30, 1896.

that if the government would begin buying silver at \$1.29 an ounce it would create a demand far greater than the supply and be able to maintain parity between the two dollars. The difficulty, according to the Chronicle, was that the government was not empowered to buy silver. The Coinage Acts provided only that silver bullion exchanged for Treasury notes at current market prices would be coined. Silver belonged to the man who owned it, and could only find its way into other pockets through normal commercial channels.⁵¹ Silver men denounced such arguments as inaccurate. The government was, in effect, purchasing silver. Furthermore, silverites claimed that if the Treasury would put its accumulation of silver dollars into circulation prices would rise and a return to prosperity would result.⁵²

Another issue discussed by gold partisans was the effect of the free coinage of silver on the laboring man. In April of 1896 John G. Carlisle, Secretary of the Treasury, spoke to the workingmen of Chicago and his speech was subsequently given wide circulation as a campaign pamphlet. Carlisle reminded his audience that the true market relation

⁵¹Ibid.; Jones, op. cit., 10-13; Hicks, op. cit., 87-94.

⁵²Jones, op. cit., 44-45; Hicks, op. cit., 305-308.

of silver to gold was approximately thirty-one to one. The demand for a ratio of sixteen to one would thus result in a silver dollar worth only about one-half of a gold dollar. In such a case, the gold dollar would disappear from circulation and become a speculative commodity, bought and sold on the market. The worker would receive as his salary the same number of dollars as before, but they would be inflated silver dollars with only half of the buying power of the gold dollars he had formerly received. This depreciation of the dollar, according to Carlisle, would hit hardest at workingmen, widows, and Civil War pensioners living on fixed incomes and owning no property of sufficient value to protect them. Editors and orators opposed to free silver frequently cited this picture of inflation and its effects.⁵³

The second major issue of the National Democratic campaign, the nature of the "true Democracy" received valuable impetus from an unexpected source in October. Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota issued a statement urging voters to choose McKinley rather than Bryan adding strength to claims that the Bryan Democrats were

⁵³John G. Carlisle, Speech to the Workingmen of Chicago, April 15, 1896, Senate Document No. 256, 54th Congress, 1st Session, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896), 3-4.

"socialistic." The Archbishop strongly condemned the Chicago platform, charging that "it threatens the country with destruction of social order, with lawlessness and anarchy." He was particularly concerned with the provisions of the platform which would shear the federal courts of their power "in favor of mobs, bent on rioting and the destruction of property."⁵⁴

Such a statement was a boon to conservatives. In an editorial the Chronicle noted that the Archbishop's reasons for supporting McKinley applied even more forcefully to a vote for Palmer. Furthermore, the statement appeared, from internal evidence according to the Chronicle, to have been formulated before the National Democratic ticket had been nominated, implying that if the Archbishop had waited a little longer the endorsement might have gone to Palmer rather than McKinley.⁵⁵ The popular, and Populist, criticisms of the federal courts, especially the Supreme Court, had long disturbed conservative Democrats. They were happy to have such an influential spokesman for their views even if he did not support their candidates.⁵⁶

⁵⁴News accounts, New York Times and Chronicle, October 13, 1896.

⁵⁵Chronicle editorial, October 13, 1896.

⁵⁶Alan Furman Westin, "The Supreme Court, the Populist

Numerous newspaper editorials and speeches discussed the duty of all true Democrats to vote for Palmer rather than for McKinley or Bryan. The dignity of the leisurely Palmer style of campaigning contrasted sharply with the mobs of people descending on McKinley's front porch in Canton, Ohio and to the hurly-burly of Bryan's trips across the nation, and National Democrats made the most of it. They also emphasized the true patriotism of the old generals, Palmer and Buckner, in answering the call of their country during what should have been their quiet retirement years.⁵⁷

Citizens who might have been tempted to vote for Bryan because he had been nominated by the Democratic Convention were reminded that the Nebraskan was not really a Democrat, having supported the Populists in 1894, and that the Chicago platform was the antithesis of all true Democratic principles. Gold Democrats issued frequent statements to the effect that Wisconsin was safe from Bryan and therefore gold men could feel free to vote for Palmer rather than McKinley toward conservatives who, because of their anger and disgust with the course taken in Chicago, had hastily determined to

Movement, and the Campaign of 1896," The Journal of Politics, XV (February, 1953), 36-38.

⁵⁷Chronicle news accounts of October 11 and November 1, 1896 and editorials of September 25 and October 8, 1896.

vote for McKinley. Appeals such as these became more frequent and urgent as the campaign neared its climax.⁵⁸

V. FINANCING THE CAMPAIGN

The Wisconsin National Democratic Party's difficulties in financing its campaign resulted from the party's political position. As a minority wing of the Democrats, the gold faction discovered that in almost every instance local party organizations were in the hands of men willing to support the Bryan ticket. Efforts to raise money in opposition to the regular party, with its well-developed machinery and resources, were discouraging. Many conservatives planned to vote for McKinley in order to be sure of defeating Bryan and contributed to the Republicans rather than to the National Democrats. Finally, money was scarce for a campaign which had no practical hope of success.

Through the summer months of July and August, participants financed the campaign. After the conventions, however, it became imperative to obtain additional sources since both Usher and Vilas were determined that the campaign not be supported on credit.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid., editorials of September 23, 29, October 6, 8, 10, 15, 22, 25, and 29, 1896.

⁵⁹Usher to Joseph Tuteur, September 24, 1896, volume

In early September Usher was able to arrange for a rent-free party headquarters in the Goldsmith Building in Milwaukee through the generosity of the law firm of Nathaniel Pereles and Sons.⁶⁰ This lightened the immediate financial burden. Usher placed the problem of raising campaign funds in Senator Vilas' hands, suggesting that he form a group of men to handle the financial affairs of the State Central Committee. Usher outlined his needs for enough money to assure financial support of the campaign and a personal salary of \$500 monthly, retroactive to July 23. This large sum corresponded to his salary as superintendent of agencies in Wisconsin and northern Michigan for the Mutual Life Insurance Company which had been terminated in late July due to his increasing political involvement.⁶¹ Vilas agreed that it was reasonable to pay Usher his expenses plus whatever salary he had been receiving and consented to go to Milwaukee and investigate fund-raising possibilities. He also volunteered to raise enough money in Madison to match

18, 170 and William F. Vilas to Usher, September 6, 1896, box 14, Usher Papers.

⁶⁰Ibid., C. F. Hunter to Usher, September 5, 1896, box 14.

⁶¹Ibid., Usher to William F. Vilas, September 5, 1896, volume 15, 339-341; Chronicle editorial, August 23, 1896.

whatever could be raised in La Crosse.⁶²

By the end of September, despite Vilas' efforts, the Committee was in severe financial difficulties. Usher received a guaranteed pledge of \$500 from La Crosse, but as of September 25 he had obtained only \$50 from Milwaukee since the end of August. Usher insisted that he would have to obtain \$2,000 from Milwaukee within a week or close the campaign. Shortly thereafter, his Milwaukee associates were able to forward contributions of \$500 and \$300 from the Pabst and Schlitz Brewing Companies respectively, as well as several hundred dollars in personal donations.⁶³ By mid-October the crisis appeared to be over, although Usher lamented that the effectiveness of the funds had been blunted by their late arrival. With money in the Committee treasury earlier he could have planned his expenditures more shrewdly.⁶⁴

Contributions also began to trickle into the treasury from areas scattered around the state. Usher had sent out a

⁶²William F. Vilas to Usher, September 6, 1896, box 14, Usher Papers.

⁶³Ibid., Usher to William F. Vilas, September 25, 1896, volume 18, 197 and to James G. Flanders, September 29, 1896, volume 18, all and J. J. Hogan, September 9, 1896, James G. Flanders, September 30, 1896, and John Johnston, October 1, 1896, box 14.

⁶⁴Ibid., Usher to Andrew Simonson, October 16, 1896, volume 18, 298.

series of letters requesting funds from local party organizations and also names of prospective contributors. The response was disappointing. Gold Democrats were not always generous and incumbent officeholders generally chose to support the silver ticket, thereby blocking National Democratic efforts to raise money. The local party chairmen often had a difficult time raising money for rallies. A single meeting could often cost as much as \$25 by the time a local committee hired a band, rented a hall, publicized the meeting, and met incidental expenses. To some voters it appeared cheaper to vote for McKinley since the Republican campaign was well-financed.⁶⁵

However, some National Democrats were able to raise money in their localities and were generous in their personal contributions. T. F. Frawley of Eau Claire reported that he had appointed a gold man to raise several hundred dollars in Eau Claire County and had started the fund with a personal contribution of \$100. Other party men made similar pledges or suggested the wealthier Democrats whom Usher could personally contact. When Senator Vilas withdrew from the campaign he turned over the work of canvassing Madison for funds to a

⁶⁵Ibid., W. W. Strong, H. F. Hagemeister, and Frank F. Oderbolz, all dated September 17, 1896 and John P. Hume, September 16, 1896, to Usher, box 14, and F. R. Scholl to Usher, October 13, 1896, box 15.

friend, Breese Stevens. On October 30 Stevens sent Usher a draft for \$400 representing the Madison collection and reported that everyone gave "willingly and pleasantly...."⁶⁶

The overall financial picture of the campaign appeared in an itemized financial report which the Committee Treasurer, John Johnston, prepared for Usher after the election. As of November 16, 1896 the Committee had received \$5,530.83 and expenditures had amounted to \$4,935.80 leaving a balance on hand of \$595.03. Receipts included \$2,000 from the National Committee. Expenditures included salaries for Usher; John Webb, the Committee's Secretary; Clarence Dennis who was in charge of the Speaker's Bureau; and Laura Palmer, a stenographer; and bills for utilities, telegrams and expenses connected with the distribution of campaign literature.⁶⁷

The list of contributions indicates that the financial campaign was not extensive and was limited in both the amount of money raised and the number of contributors. Johnston listed sixty-eight donors of whom fifty-nine were individuals.

⁶⁶Ibid., John Nagle, September 15, 1896, T. F. Frawley, September 15, 1896, Andrew Simonson, September 16, 1896, Joseph Tuteur, September 21, 1896, to Usher, box 14, and B. J. Stevens, October 30, 1896, to Usher, box 15.

⁶⁷Ibid., John Johnston to Usher, November 9, 1896, a summary financial report prepared by Johnston and bank draft stubs (items 52 and 53), box 16. Adaptations of Johnston's itemized lists of receipts and expenditures are in Appendices B and C of this paper.

Other donations were from industry, counties, or cities. The National Committee contributed the \$2,000 listed under "Currency" and "Usher, E. B." The average contribution of the fifty-nine individuals was \$35.23, a relatively large sum in 1896.⁶⁸ Aside from a few areas where energetic partisans took the time and effort to canvass for funds there was no organized attempt to solicit small sums from the voters. Most of the \$5 and \$10 contributions listed were forwarded to Usher on the donors' own initiative. National Democrats in Wisconsin relied upon the generosity of party leaders and wealthy patrons rather than on smaller contributions from the ordinary voters.

⁶⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMISE OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRACY

As the campaign drew to a close Usher and other gold Democrats became increasingly concerned about the number of votes General Palmer could expect in Wisconsin. Usher had earlier estimated that the party would need to poll eight thousand votes to satisfy the two per cent requirement and be eligible for a place on the ballot in 1898. He hoped to achieve a Palmer vote of from fifteen to twenty thousand.¹

National Democrats and Republicans generally believed that the large German population of the state would vote for gold, even those who had previously voted the Democratic ticket. It was questionable, though, whether German Democrats would vote for Palmer rather than McKinley.² Observers stated that Irish voters were more inclined toward Bryan and free silver, as were large numbers of Scandinavians. Stuart McKibbin, after speaking in the Lake Geneva resort area where wealthy Chicago and

¹Usher to William F. Vilas, September 29, 1896, volume 18, 223-225, Usher Papers.

²Ibid., F. W. Grumm and William Knauf to Usher, August 21, 1896, box 13.

Milwaukee families vacationed, reported that the Irish in the vicinity were not strong for gold, partly as a reaction to the wealth and ostentation which was displayed there.³

To obtain an estimate of the relative strength of the candidates, Usher requested his correspondents to report probable votes in their districts. Many of the replies were vague generalities admittedly based on guesswork. However, the more careful estimates presented a picture unfavorable to gold Democrats. Several observers reported that Bryan sentiment had increased in the last two weeks of October; there appeared to be a free silver trend among farmers and laborers.⁴ John Nagle of Manitowoc attributed this trend to Republican mismanagement. By concentrating on the county level, they had left local areas to the Democrats who waged the most effective campaign ever seen in the area.⁵

In general, reports indicated that large numbers of gold Democrats would vote for McKinley. Conservatives were

³Ibid., Stuart McKibbin, October 8, 1896, and William Knauf, August 21, 1896, to Usher, boxes 13 and 15; William F. Raney, Wisconsin: A Story of Progress (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), 252-253; Stanley Llewellyn Jones, The Presidential Election of 1896 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 75.

⁴S. N. Dickinson, October 30, 1896 and George Dyer, October 31, 1896, to Usher, box 15, Usher Papers.

⁵Ibid., October 30, 1896, box 15.

skeptical of assurances that Wisconsin was safe for McKinley; they wanted to make doubly sure. Dr. Harvey Dale, confessing that he had never known a campaign in which it was so difficult to estimate the vote, admitted that he expected more than half of the three to four hundred gold Democrats in Oshkosh to vote for McKinley.⁶ Another correspondent thought that the rather complicated ballot would deter conscientious gold men. Since there were no state and local tickets listed under the National Democratic candidates, voters would choose a straight Republican ticket to avoid making a mistake on a split ticket vote.⁷

Subsequent election returns revealed that most of Usher's correspondents overestimated General Palmer's strength, while more accurately gauging the relative positions of Bryan and McKinley. Most reporters gave McKinley overwhelming majorities, and expected Bryan to carry only a few areas. The most accurate prediction was that of S. N. Dickinson who reported from Marinette that the Palmer-Buckner votes would be very scarce while McKinley would poll the largest vote ever seen in Wisconsin.⁸ Nevertheless, as the

⁶Ibid., October 30, 1896 and S. N. Dickinson, October 30, 1896, to Usher, box 15.

⁷Ibid., J. Lytle, October 30, 1896, to Usher, box 15.

⁸Dickinson letter, op. cit., and other letters dated the last two weeks of October, 1896, box 15.

process of vote-counting proceeded on the night of November 3, 1896, National Democrats in Wisconsin began to claim a victory for their cause.

The election in Wisconsin was in fact an overwhelming victory for William McKinley and the Republican Party. McKinley's plurality of 102,612 votes was the largest ever accorded a presidential candidate in the state up to that time and netted him all twelve of the state's electoral votes. He received 59.93 per cent of the popular vote as compared with Bryan's 37.00 per cent and Palmer's 1.02 per cent. The National Democratic ticket fell far below Usher's expectations, with only 4,584 votes.⁹

Nationally, the McKinley-Bryan contest was much closer. McKinley defeated Bryan in the nation by slightly more than five hundred thousand votes, while Bryan's popular vote was larger than any previous unsuccessful presidential candidate had ever polled. However, in the Electoral College the McKinley margin was much greater: 271 votes compared to only 176 for Bryan. The National Democratic candidates

⁹ Svend Petersen, A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1963), 64-65; The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin, 1897 (Milwaukee: Henry Gugler Company, 1897), 258-259. The remainder of the votes went to candidates of the Prohibition, National Socialist and Socialist Parties.

received only 135,456 votes nationally.¹⁰

The results in Wisconsin were not as discouraging to gold Democrats as a first glance at the statistics would indicate. There were 80,152 more votes cast in 1896 than in the previous presidential contest, 1892. The Republican Party gained 97,289 votes in 1896 over its 1892 level, while the combined Democratic-Populist vote total dropped by 21,721 votes. Furthermore, McKinley ran more than three thousand votes ahead of the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 1896.¹¹ McKinley, then, must have attracted a large proportion of previously Democratic votes in addition to a large percentage of the new voters in order to account for the great increase in the Republican vote. Usher estimated that "nearly as many Democrats voted against as for Bryan in this state."¹² Since gold Democrats, whether by directly voting for McKinley or by indirectly voting for Palmer, had contributed to the defeat of Bryan in such a resounding fashion that they felt justified in counting themselves among the victors. Usher was satisfied that

¹⁰Petersen, op. cit., 64.

¹¹Ibid., 60, 64; The Blue Book, loc. cit.

¹²Usher to G. R. Lindsay, November 11, 1896, volume 18, 397, Usher Papers.

"The gold Democrat is a positive entity in Wisconsin...."¹³

Letters of congratulation came to Usher from all over the state. Everywhere gold men rejoiced in the belief that Bryanism and free silver were no more; the country was safe. National Democrats freely assumed credit for the defeat of Bryan, expressing doubt that the Republicans could have managed to achieve such an outstanding success on their own.¹⁴

More important than the defeat of Bryan was the position of leadership which the gold men believed they could now reclaim in the Democratic Party. Reunion of the two wings of the party was imminent, for the silver men could never survive such a defeat at the polls.¹⁵ In this assessment of their position gold Democrats erred seriously. They underestimated the strength of protestors who had united behind Bryan and who would not willingly accept the leadership which gold men were willing to proffer.

For gold Democrats, disillusionment soon followed the election. Early optimism that all would be well with

¹³Ibid., Usher to W. B. McPherson, November 15, 1896, volume 18, 368.

¹⁴Ibid., B. J. Stevens, November 6, 1896, A. M. Valentine, November 12, 1896, and George Crawford, November 13, 1896, to Usher, box 16.

¹⁵Ibid., Frank Coburn, November 13, 1896, and George Crawford, November 13, 1896, to Usher, box 16.

the Democratic Party gave way to serious second thoughts. It appeared to some of Usher's correspondents that there was little choice left for the gold men. The nation was evidently bent on a course of increased paternalism and socialism, the chief enemies of 'true Democracy'. The two major parties had embraced two basically paternalistic programs, free silver and protection, designed to enrich the special interests which those parties represented. Conservative Democrats, bound to the principles of Jeffersonian Democracy, could not accept the policies of either party.¹⁶ As Stuart McKibbin put the problem, "We need a conservative straight Democratic party around which the conservative men and especially the vast business interest of the country could gather...."¹⁷

The attitudes of the major parties toward gold Democrats were equally discouraging. National Democrats, despite their claims, had not polled enough votes in 1896 to impress Bryan supporters. Instead, silver men tended to look upon the conservatives as politically impotent. Neither side was willing to give in and recognize the

¹⁶Ibid., Robert Lees, February 4, 1897, William Shea, February 5, 1897, F. Winsor, February 10, 1897, and Judge Nathaniel French, March 2, 1897, to Usher, box 17.

¹⁷Ibid., September 7, 1897.

other's position. Furthermore, any rapprochement with Republicans was dependent upon the way Congress handled the tariff issue. Gold Democrats hoped that the Grand Old Party would moderate its protectionist policy, but passage of the Dingley Tariff of 1897 was a tremendous blow to their expectations. Enacted by a special session of Congress called by President McKinley, the new legislation restored the high schedules of the 1890 McKinley Tariff and raised the average tariff level to fifty-seven per cent.¹⁹

There had also been some earlier discussion as to whether gold Democrats should accept high positions in the McKinley administration if such offices were proffered. There were rumors after the election that in recognition of the contribution which Wisconsin and the gold Democrats had made to McKinley's election, General Bragg would be offered a Cabinet position. National Democratic leaders thought acceptance of such a position would indicate a move toward Republicanism and would sacrifice principle and party position.²⁰ Bragg was upset over newspaper speculation,

¹⁹Ibid., Usher to Frank Coburn, November 11, 1896, volume 18, 392 and H. J. Hilbert, and Henry F. Hagemeister, January 25, 1897, to Usher, box 17; Harold Underwood Faulkner, American Economic History (seventh edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 551; F. W. Taussign, The Tariff History of the United States (sixth edition; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 321-325, 358-360.

²⁰L. M. Martin to Usher, November 8, 1896 and Martin

writing Usher that "no man had the right to bandy my name in the public prints as a prospective councillor of the Republican party whose hobby is protection for the sake of protection."²¹ Discussion of the question remained merely academic for no appointment was forthcoming.

Aside from a flurry of dinners held throughout the nation at which gold Democrats gathered to discuss the political situation and reminisce about the campaign of 1896, National Democrats took little action in the following years. The National Committee, moribund and without effective, significant leadership was incapable of stimulating interest and directing the splinter faction. Also, Eastern gold men who had been prevailed upon to support the movement in 1896 were content to let the party die.²² As Usher remarked, "'Gab fests' seem to be about the only resource of 'our party'."²³

In Wisconsin the legislature passed a bill eliminating almost all parties from the 1898 ballot except regular Democrats and Republicans, effectively destroying

to W. W. Baldwin, November 13, 1896, box 16, Usher Papers.

²¹Ibid., General Edward S. Bragg to Usher, November 11, 1896.

²²Ibid., Usher to C. Vey Holman, March 8, 1898, volume 20, 210-211.

²³Ibid., Usher to C. F. Hunter, March 25, 1898, volume 20, 221-222.

the National Democrats as an entity. The State Central Committee voted to take no action in the campaign of 1898, refusing to endorse the ticket nominated by the silver Democrats.²⁴

Some Wisconsin Democrats expressed a desire to forget the silver issue for the duration of the campaign in hopes of effecting a reunion of the Democratic Party. Such spokesmen, from both the National Democrat and silver Democrat groups, argued that since there was no presidential contest involved, the silver question need not affect the state campaign. When the Democratic State Convention met in Milwaukee a group of gold men managed, with the help of like-minded silverites, to prevent the convention from fusing with the Populists although the gathering adopted a motion to endorse the 1896 Chicago platform. Those gold men who were more willing to accommodate the silverites hailed this as the first step in reuniting the party and supported the Democratic ticket.²⁵

²⁴Ibid., Usher to William D. Bynum, March 21, 1898, volume 20, 218 and to Joseph Tuteur, October 7, 1898, volume 20, 319.

²⁵Ibid., Usher to H. W. Hostman, August 20, 1898, volume 20, 258-259, 262 and A. M. Valentine, January 18, 1898, Lynn S. Pease, August 28, 1898, Frank Coburn, August 11, 1898, John Nagle, September 3, 1898, and Thomas M. Kearney, September 10, 1898 to Usher, box 18; Chronicle news accounts, September 1 and 2, 1898.

Usher did not share this optimistic view. It was difficult for him to give the Democratic Party "up to Populism and Socialism and...Bryanarchy.....," but if the situation in 1898 remained unchanged until 1900 the party would be merely a negation, favoring no specific program and opposed to all decent principles of government.²⁶ "I feel that to consent, even in the slightest degree to the present interpretation of Democracy, is to be a traitor and a recreant to every true Democratic principle."²⁷ While Usher admitted that many gold Democrats, including some of the best, would support the silver-dominated state ticket, he estimated that the majority of those Democrats who had voted against Bryan in 1896 would vote Republican in 1898.²⁸ He personally voted a straight Republican ticket that year.²⁹

Politically, Usher and many of his gold companions were steadily drawing closer to the Republican Party. Events of 1898 had provided the necessary impetus. The brief Spanish-American War which began in April of that

²⁶Usher to W. B. McPherson, September 20, 1898, volume 20, 299-300, Usher Papers.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., Usher to Lute Neiman and C. C. Eaton, September 4, 1898, volume 20, 270 and 271-272, respectively.

²⁹Ibid., Usher to Governor Edward Scofield, November 12, 1898, volume 20, 327-328.

year launched the United States on a new course of imperialistic expansion. By late 1899 the United States had assumed varying degrees of control over Cuba, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, and had enunciated an "Open Door" policy advocating equal trading rights for all nations with China.³⁰

As a result of these expansionist adventures, tariff reformers such as Usher looked ahead to an increase in foreign trade which would force the United States to abandon the protective tariff. Gold Democrats had long recognized that the only important obstacle between them and Republicans was the tariff. Were that barrier to be removed they could leave the Democratic Party in good conscience.³¹

The gradual drift toward Republicanism which Usher experienced in the years 1897-1899 was probably typical of many tariff reformers among the gold Democrats. By the autumn of 1898 Usher was well on his way but it was another year before he made a public declaration of his

³⁰Faulkner, op. cit., 556-569; Ernest R. May, Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 243-270.

³¹Usher to Dow Maxon, April 24, 1899, volume 20, 365-369 and Carl C. Pope, October 18, 1898, L. M. Martin, October 8, 1898, Thomas Luchsinger, October 19, 1898, and

changed political affiliation. His letters of that year provide clear picture of his gradual decision to leave the Democratic Party.

Although a life-long Democrat, Usher had no particular loyalty to the party as an organization. Rather, his loyalty was to principles which that party had represented in the hundred years of its existence. The party organization was merely a means of attaining the goals determined by those principles. Since the Democratic Party had clearly betrayed its basic principles in 1896 and had subsequently given no indication of returning to Jeffersonian ideals, he felt little compunction in leaving it.³²

Coupled with Usher's adherence to the principles of the early Democracy was his strong belief in the economic advantages of free trade. Usher argued that the expansion of the United States would work to free commerce from tariff restrictions which the Republicans had supported, and they, forced to admit the obsolescence of the protective tariff, would take the lead in tariff revision. Because

John A. Johnson, October 25, 1898, to Usher, box 18, Usher Papers.

³²Ibid., Usher to William H. Rogers, August 1, 1898, volume 20, ~~245~~-248.

imperialism would serve the cause of tariff reform, Usher became an "ardent expansionist."³³

Not only was the Republican Party being forced to "broaden its vision and its policy, with territorial expansion," but it also assumed the posture of supporting law and order, a sound gold dollar, and the integrity of the federal courts, while Democrats cried "for anarchy, practically if not literally."³⁴ For a man of Usher's political views there was little alternative to joining the Republican Party.

In October, 1899 Usher was ready to formalize his new political allegiance. The sale of the Chronicle to a syndicate composed of leading Republican citizens of La Crosse served as an announcement of Usher's change of party. He became a stockholder and president of the Chronicle Publishing Company, and remained as editor of the paper until 1901. Other members of the board of directors included such prominent La Crosse businessmen as F. P. Hixon, L. C. Colman, and Republican Congressman John J. Esch.³⁵

³³Ibid., Usher to Dow Maxon, April 24, 1899, volume 20, 365-369, to J. N. Quarles, December 16, 1899, volume 20, 413, and to Dr. H. B. Dale, October 15, 1899, volume 20, 401-403.

³⁴Ibid., Usher to Henry Watterson, September, 1898, volume 20, 274-276.

³⁵Ibid., minutes of the Board of Directors of the Chronicle Publishing Company, October 6, 1899, box 18;

On October 9, 1899 Usher resigned from all of his positions and his membership in the National Democratic Party. In letters to his many political friends he disclaimed any prospects of political advancement in the Republican Party. He firmly believed that the only logical place for a man of his views was with that party.³⁶ Furthermore, "a man with a newspaper attachment needs to say and do things that a private citizen can content himself with thinking."³⁷ Since La Crosse at that time was not large enough to support an independent press, it was to Usher's economic advantage to sell to a locally prestigious group and change the newspaper's politics along with his own. However, he assured friends that the tone of the Chronicle would not be markedly different.³⁸

The National Democratic Party had ceased to exist as a viable organization in 1898. Its members were forced to return to the regular Democratic Party or become Republicans if they wished to remain active in politics. Many gold men

Chronicle announcement of the sale, October 7, 1899.

³⁶Usher to John Nagle and George Foster Peabody, October 9, 1899, volume 20, 385-387 and 393 and to W. J. Mize, October 7, 1899, volume 20, 384, and to A. K. Jones, October 22, 1899, volume 20, 410-411, Usher Papers.

³⁷Ibid., Usher to Stuart McKibbin, October 22, 1899, volume 20, 409-410.

³⁸Ibid., Usher to Dr. H. B. Dale, October 15, 1899,

had tacitly made the transition to the Republican Party in 1896 by voting for McKinley rather than the compromise candidate, Palmer. Others waited until 1898 or later to make a decision. Among those who ultimately joined the Republican Party was General Bragg. In fact, Bragg made himself so valuable to the Republicans that, upon the recommendation of Usher to Charles Dawes, he was appointed Consul General to Havana and Hong Kong in the period 1902-1906.³⁹

Senator Vilas, who had taken such a prominent role in the organization of the National Democratic Party, retired to his home in Madison after his Senatorial term expired in 1897. In following years he took little active part in politics. However, in 1902 he joined the opposition to Republican Governor Robert LaFollette whose Progressive policies of increased governmental activity and centralization were abhorrent to conservatives. Under Vilas' leadership conservatives were able to regain control of the state Democratic Party and retained it in 1904, but they were unable to dislodge LaFollette from the governorship. This final defeat

volume 20, 401-403.

³⁹Ibid., L. M. Martin to Usher, August 25, 1899, box 18 and Usher to Charles G. Dawes, November 19, 1900, volume 21, 140-141; J. G. Hardgrove, "General Edward S. Bragg's Reminiscences," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XXXIII (March, 1950), 301.

marked the end of Vilas' political career.⁴⁰

Usher shared Vilas' disapproval of the policies of LaFollette and the Wisconsin Republicans. In 1900 he worked against the nomination of LaFollette as the gubernatorial candidate, describing him as "an agitator and a demagogue," a "personal politician attempting to build himself up by tearing others down."⁴¹ In Usher's view, LaFollette's Progressive program of reforms was Socialistic and Populistic. He predicted that the party would soon rid itself of such elements and was disappointed when LaFollette rose to the position of Governor and, later, of Senator.⁴²

Usher was pleased with the Republican "Open Door" trade policy in China which he hoped would be extended to the Philippines and lead to the elimination of tariff restrictions on world trade. Yet he was dissatisfied with the increasing paternalism of the Progressive Movement

⁴⁰Horace Samuel Merrill, William Freeman Vilas: Doctrinaire Democrat (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), 244-248.

⁴¹Usher to Congressman John J. Esch, March 13, 1900, volume 20, 443-447, and to Anna Baldwin, May 24, 1900, volume 20, 482-483, Usher Papers; Robert S. Maxwell, LaFollette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 14.

⁴²Usher to Stuart McKibbin, April 22, 1900, volume 20, 465-469, Usher Papers.

which led government into a deeper involvement with social and economic problems. Progressives probably had their most outstanding success in Wisconsin but the movement spread through the states and into the national government. Writing in 1913, Usher described the political course of Wisconsin and the nation since 1894 as "pointless" and "drifting". Progressivism was puritanical in the sense that it forced people to accept a rigid, narrow view of paternal government. Furthermore, it attacked only the evils resulting from the protective tariff rather than the tariff itself which had not yet been reduced to his liking. By increasing the amounts of legislation passed each year Progressives were "specializing in legislative interference with all human affairs," making statutory law more important than individual rights.⁴³ Usher was apparently no more at home in the twentieth century Republican Party than he had been in the Democratic Party of the 1890s.

⁴³Ellis Baker Usher, Wisconsin: Its Story and Biography, 1848-1913 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), III, 562-567.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The late nineteenth century was a period of near revolutionary change in the United States. Economic and social problems in the closing decades of the century, resulting from rapid changes in the nation, emphasized the need for a new approach to the role of government in society. Populists and, to a lesser extent, free silver advocates articulated this need and devised a reform program which they hoped would lead to the solution of the nation's pressing domestic problems. While the Populist Party fell apart after 1896, its spirit remained viable and in the following twenty years many of the Populist reforms, as well as others, were enacted into law. The Progressive Movement which was responsible for such legislation was best exemplified in Wisconsin where a program of political, social and economic reforms was developed under the leadership of Robert M. LaFollette.¹

¹James I. Clark, LaFollette and Wisconsin Progressivism (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 6-12, 19; Robert S. Maxwell, LaFollette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), 3-5, 8-9; Richard Hofstadter (ed.) The Progressive Movement, 1900-1915 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 2-3.

The gold Democrats of 1896, conservative in the sense that they opposed radical changes, also sought to defend an outmoded system of political and economic thought. They were chiefly concerned with the preservation of a specific set of principles for the guidance of government rather than with the solution of problems arising from circumstances unforeseen at the time the principles were enunciated. While Populists and Progressives led the transition into the twentieth century, gold Democrats fought a rear-guard action to maintain a nineteenth century creed of politics and way of life. They were, as Usher frequently described them, "political orphans."²

The National Democratic campaign of 1896 was a conservative protest of the radical measures adopted in the Democratic Party platform at Chicago and of the candidate who stood on that platform. The election results of that year were a victory for conservatives and a defeat for reformers. However, before McKinley's first term was over Robert LaFollette had risen to leadership of the Wisconsin Republican Party and was elected Governor in 1900. The state which had provided substantial proof of its conservatism in 1896 moved into a position of leadership in the Progressive

²Usher to G. W. Traer, May 6, 1895, volume 15, 36-37, Usher Papers.

Movement. By 1905, with Theodore Roosevelt recently elected by a handsome majority to the Presidency and LaFollette serving in the United States Senate, the hopes of conservative Democrats in Wisconsin were subdued.³

The failure of gold Democrats to establish a base from which the Democratic Party could be reformed was more immediately obvious. Although Wisconsin as a whole had voted conservatively in 1896, a substantial majority of the Democratic Party had supported Bryan and the Chicago platform. Having gained control of the party, Bryan supporters refused to return it to the domination of a minority. If gold Democrats wanted to effect a reunion of the party they could do so only by accepting the will of the majority. This was the course which many of the gold men chose. For the rest, the only choice was to join the Republican Party or remain politically inactive. Conservatives who chose to join the Republicans soon found themselves in the minority again, especially in Wisconsin, as the reforming Progressives gained control of the party.

In Wisconsin gold Democrats, led by Usher, had conducted a vigorous campaign. The enthusiasm of such men as Usher and Bragg offset the lack of interest demonstrated

³Clark, op. cit., 12-19; Maxwell, op. cit., 10-26, 56-73; Hofstadter, op. cit., 6-9.

by many conservatives who preferred the surest, safest, and least expensive method of defeating Bryan, voting for McKinley.

It was difficult for Usher to mobilize the full resources of the party in Wisconsin. This was partially due to the inability of the National Democratic Party to offer any prospects of success at the polls. The party goals were idealistic rather than pragmatic and as such lacked voter appeal. Probably in this regard it was a mistake not to establish a full state ticket with candidates for every office. As promoters of this scheme realized, it would have aroused more interest at the grass roots and the party could conceivably have won more votes. But such a campaign would have required more financial support and more effort than the conservatives were willing to provide. The difficulty which Usher encountered in raising enough money for even a limited campaign was an indication of the apathy of the conservatives.

The financial campaign was a failure in terms of the small sum of money realized and the limited number of contributors. Little effort, however, was expended on a far-reaching program to raise funds by contacting the average conservative voter. Failure to do so can probably be attributed to a shortage of time and manpower.

The speaking campaign was much more successful in terms of the number of voters contacted and of meetings held. Most of Usher's reports from the speakers mention well-filled halls or "wigwams," usually achieved through the cooperation of Republicans.⁴ General Bragg's meetings were especially well-attended and Senator Vilas would probably have drawn equally large crowds if he had chosen to participate. In addition to the 122 rallies sponsored by the State Central Committee, local clubs and county organizations sponsored "country schoolhouse" meetings at which prominent local gold men argued the cause and urged voters to choose Palmer on election day. However, the number of voters actually persuaded to support Palmer was disappointingly small, only 4,584.

In the months and years after November 3, 1896 the National Democratic Party, never having attained true party status, slowly disintegrated. In 1900 there were still a few conservatives who called themselves "gold Democrats" but they had no real organization to work through. Others returned to the regular party and gave it active support.

⁴ Charles Crogster, September 15, 1896, George Krouskop, September 21, 1896, Thomas Luchsinger, September 30, 1896, Breese Stevens, October 1, 1896, Frank Oderbolz, October 7, 1896, to Usher, boxes 14, 15, Usher Papers.

For those conservatives who joined the Republican Party the sense of belonging was short-lived. However, as Usher wrote to a friend, a man can only choose the party which best represents his personal beliefs as opposed to a party which does not represent anything in which he believes.⁵

⁵Ibid., Usher to John Nagle, October 9, 1899, volume 20, 394-395.

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The Chronicle was owned and published by Ellis Baker Usher from 1878 until 1899. Exept for the period 1880-1889 and when he was absent from La Crosse, Usher also wrote the editorials for the paper. In 1899 he sold the newspaper to a syndicate of La Crosse Republicans, remaining with the Chronicle as editor until 1901.

Milwaukee Journal, May, 1896-December, 1898.

The editor of the Journal, Lute Neiman, was a personal friend of both Ellis Usher and William F. Vilas. In 1896 Neiman and the Journal supported the National Democrats in the election campaign.

Milwaukee Sentinel, August-December, 1896.

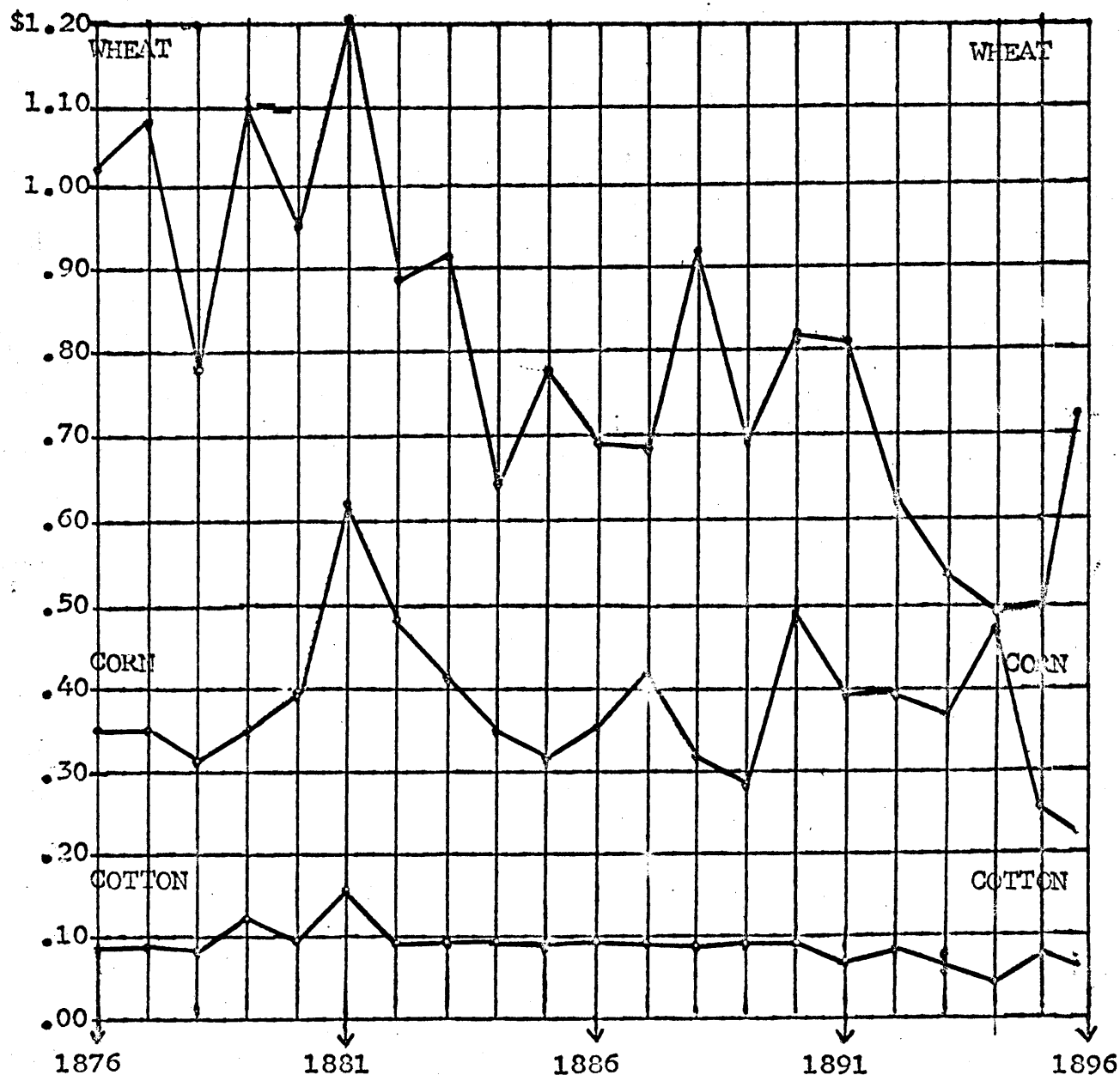
New York Times, May, 1896-December, 1898.

During the election campaign of 1896 the Times supported the National Democratic candidates.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

THE PRICE OF CORN AND WHEAT PER BUSHEL AND OF COTTON PER POUND IN THE UNITED STATES, DECEMBER 1, 1876-96



The December 1 prices illustrated above do not necessarily reflect the average prices which the farmer actually received. Wheat crops are commonly marketed in the summer, corn in the autumn and cotton in the winter, bringing prices which may have varied greatly from the above. Information obtained from the United States Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1960), 297, 301-2.

APPENDIX B

AN ITEMIZED LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
WISCONSIN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 1896*

DATE	CONTRIBUTOR	CITY	AMOUNT
August 23	J. J. Hogan	La Crosse	\$200.
August 25	J. A. Glover		50.
	H. Hagemeister	Green Bay	15.
	D. I. Craig		10.
	H. J. Hilbert	Milwaukee	10.
	A. L. Smith		25.
	C. F. Hunter	Milwaukee	25.
	Old subsc.		15.
August 26	T. E. Nash	Nekoosa	25.
	C. H. Schweizer	La Crosse	10.
	B. B. Hopkins	Milwaukee	25.
	S. S. Allen		10.
	J. S. George	Milwaukee	15.
August 27	C. H. Jacobi	Watertown	10.
	E. A. Edmonds	Oconto Falls	10.
	William Voss		10.
	Robert Lees		10.
	J. T. Kingston		10.
	S. Smead	Fond du Lac	25.
	H. B. Dale	Oshkosh	25.
	E. E. Chapin		10.
	H. C. Barnard		25.
	J. J. Hogan	La Crosse	100.
	O. A. Wells	Fond du Lac	25.
	W. W. Strong	Kenosha	25.
	Wm. Bergenthal	Milwaukee	25.
August 31	J. P. Murphy		25.
September 1	M. C. Mead	Plymouth	10.
September 4	J. Tuteur	West Superior	10.
September 5	J. K. Wright		25.
	Wm. F. Vilas	Madison	100.
	John Nagle	Manitowoc	10.
	H. P. Hamilton	Two Rivers	10.
September 9	Joseph Vilas	Manitowoc	25.
Sub Total			\$960.

*Prepared from John Johnston's itemized list and letters to Usher in boxes 13, 14, 15 and 16 of the Usher Papers.

APPENDIX B (continued)

DATE	CONTRIBUTOR	CITY	AMOUNT
		Brought Forward	\$960.00
September 11	C. Kipp		25.
September 14	Wm. Bergenthal	Milwaukee	50.
September 17	R. Weaver	Sussex	25.
	A. W. Hosmar		5.
September 21	R. M. Crawford		10.
September 24	T. F. Frawley	Eau Claire	100.
	Wm. Carson	Eau Claire	100.
	W. H. Hayden	Eau Claire	50.
		La Crosse	187.
	H. M. Enos	Waukesha	20.
	G. J. Middleton	Ripon	5.
	G. F. Homer	Ripon	10.
	E. G. Hazelton		2.50
September 28	J. G. Flanders	Milwaukee	25.
September 29	A. L. Cary		50.
	Rietbrock and Halsey	Milwaukee	10.
	A. K. Hamilton	Milwaukee	100.
	E. P. Vilas	Milwaukee	50.
	F. Kraus	Milwaukee	50.
October 1	Schlitz Company	Milwaukee	300.
October 5	Pabst Company	Milwaukee	500.
	N. C. Bacheller	La Crosse	101.33
October 6		Sheboygan	100.
	*Fred Bedel		20.
October 14	Currency		1,000.
October 17	A. Simonson	Racine	25.
	Manitowoc County		50.
	G. B. McCall	Chippewa Falls	20.
October 23	Clarence Snyder	Madison	10.
	Wm. Bergenthal	Milwaukee	150.
October 31		Madison	400.
November 5	Honest Money League	Milwaukee	15.
	George McMillan	Appleton	5.
November 9	*E. B. Usher		1,000.
	Total		\$5,530.83

* These sums were received from the National Committee. Usher withheld the second sum until after the election in order to be certain of having enough money on hand to pay the final bills and last-minute expenses.

APPENDIX C

AN ITEMIZED LIST OF EXPENDITURES OF THE NATIONAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN WISCONSIN, 1896¹

DATE	PAID TO	FOR	AMOUNT
August 23-			
November 9	Ellis B. Usher	Expenses, salary	\$2,302.00
October 5-			
November 6	Laura Powers	Salary	77.50
October 6-			
November 9	Clarence Clark	Salary	225.00
October 6-			
October 31	John Webb	Salary	248.66
		Sub Total	\$2,853.16
August 29	Clement and Williams		13.00
	Plankinton House		45.00
	Pabst Theater	Convention	125.00
August 31	Thierbach Co.	Decorations	12.00
	Furlong		6.50
September 5	N. C. Bacheller		101.33
	C. A. Schweizer		7.00
	Milwaukee Club		58.85
	Dr. Brendan		10.00
September 8	Evening Wisconsin		128.10
September 10	Western Union		8.78
September 14	Milwaukee Club		35.40
September 19	Des Forges and Co.		20.45
	West and Co.		7.19
	Evening Wisconsin		17.00
	J. C. Iverson and Co.		1.00
	Badger Typewriter		8.85
October 5	La Crosse Post Office Envelopes		27.70
October 6	Mammoth Portraits		20.00
October 8	Western Union		12.20
October 12	Milwaukee Journal	5,000 newspapers	300.00
October 13	Jorgenson	Decorator	25.00
October 17	John Webb	Office expenses	29.20
October 19	Clark and Fish		4.45
	Clement and Williams	Tables	6.00
	Germania	Printing	4.75
	W. R. Chapman	La Crosse telegrams	24.84
October 20	N. C. Bacheller	Postage	49.90
		Sub Total	\$3,962.65

¹Adapted from the itemized list of expenditures prepared by the State Central Committee Treasurer, John Johnston, and from books of bank draft stubs, items 52 and 53, box 16, Usher Papers.

APPENDIX C (continued)

DATE	PAID TO	FOR	AMOUNT
		Brought Forward	\$3,962.65
October 21	Evening Wisconsin	Printing	1.50
October 26	American Express Co.		10.97
October 27	Evening Wisconsin	Mailing tubes	2.50
	Badger Typewriter	Supplies	5.24
October 29	Wisconsin Telephone		5.55
	Ia Crosse Chronicle	Special edition	100.00
October 31	W. Maloney	Services, expenses	110.45
	C. Bach	Music, U. S. Town	
		Hall meeting	32.00
November 4	Col. W. W. Strong	Services of a man for	
		organizational work	25.00
	Evening Wisconsin	Bills	42.50
	H. C. Pleyte	Signs, U. S. Town	
		Hall meeting	6.50
	W. Webb	Pabst Theater, rent	
		for Buckner meeting	100.00
	Cream City Bill Co.		6.90
	Journal Co.	Telegraph reports of	
		meetings	50.00
	Clark and Fish	Cut of letter	4.90
	N. C. Bacheller	Stamped envelopes	77.56
November 6	Des Forges and Co.	Stationery	2.15
	Telephone Co.	Tolls to date	9.70
	M. M. Hunter	Light and janitor	42.00
	Stuart McKibbin	Expenses as speaker	100.00
	Lyman Pease	Expenses as speaker	16.50
November 11	Milwaukee Club	Bill to November 6	64.55
	Pfister Hotel	Buckner's bill	21.75
	Western Union		85.93
November 12	Thierbach Co.	Decorations, Buckner	
		meeting	11.50
November 13	Wieman, <u>et al.</u>	Flags, Buckner	
		meeting	12.50
	J. Clauder	Music, Buckner	
		meeting	25.00
		Total	\$4,935.80
		Receipts	\$5,530.83
		Expenditures	4,935.80
		Balance	595.03

LOCATIONS OF SPEECHES SPONSORED BY THE
WISCONSIN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC
STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE,
1896



APPENDIX E

TABLE I

THE POPULAR VOTE FOR PRESIDENT
IN WISCONSIN, 1892-1900

PARTY	1892	1896	% CHANGE	1900	% CHANGE
	Cleveland	Bryan	6.7%	Bryan	3.7%
DEMOCRATIC	177,335	165,523	decrease	159,279	decrease
	Harrison	McKinley	56.9%	McKinley	.9%
REPUBLICAN	170,846	268,135	increase	265,756	decrease
	Weaver	Bryan		Barker	
POPULIST	9,909	165,523		*****	
NATIONAL		Palmer			
DEMOCRATIC		4,584			

TABLE II

THE 1896 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN SELECTED
WISCONSIN CITIES AND COUNTIES

CITY	BRYAN	MCKINLEY	PALMER	COUNTY	BRYAN	MCKINLEY	PALMER
Madison	1,981	2,124	82	Dane	6,521	9,080	159
La Crosse	2,147	4,034	172	La Crosse	3,058	6,297	225
Milwaukee	23,887	30,109	416	Milwaukee	26,536	35,939	515
Racine	2,567	3,448	54	Racine	3,973	5,849	104
Kenosha	934	1,233	31	Kenosha	1,732	2,827	62
Eau Claire	1,330	2,572	35	Eau Claire	2,364	4,526	52