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Anyone who has ever had any illusions about George Wallace's candidacy for the role of 20th-century "populist" leader should read this booklet.

Vincent Copeland tells the story of the real Populists, especially those in the South, who rose to prominence in the 1890s, challenged the rule of the giant monopolists—the railroads, the landlords, and the rejuvenated Bourbon masters of the plantations—and made more allies of Black farmers, with more than a million Black delegates from the deep South.

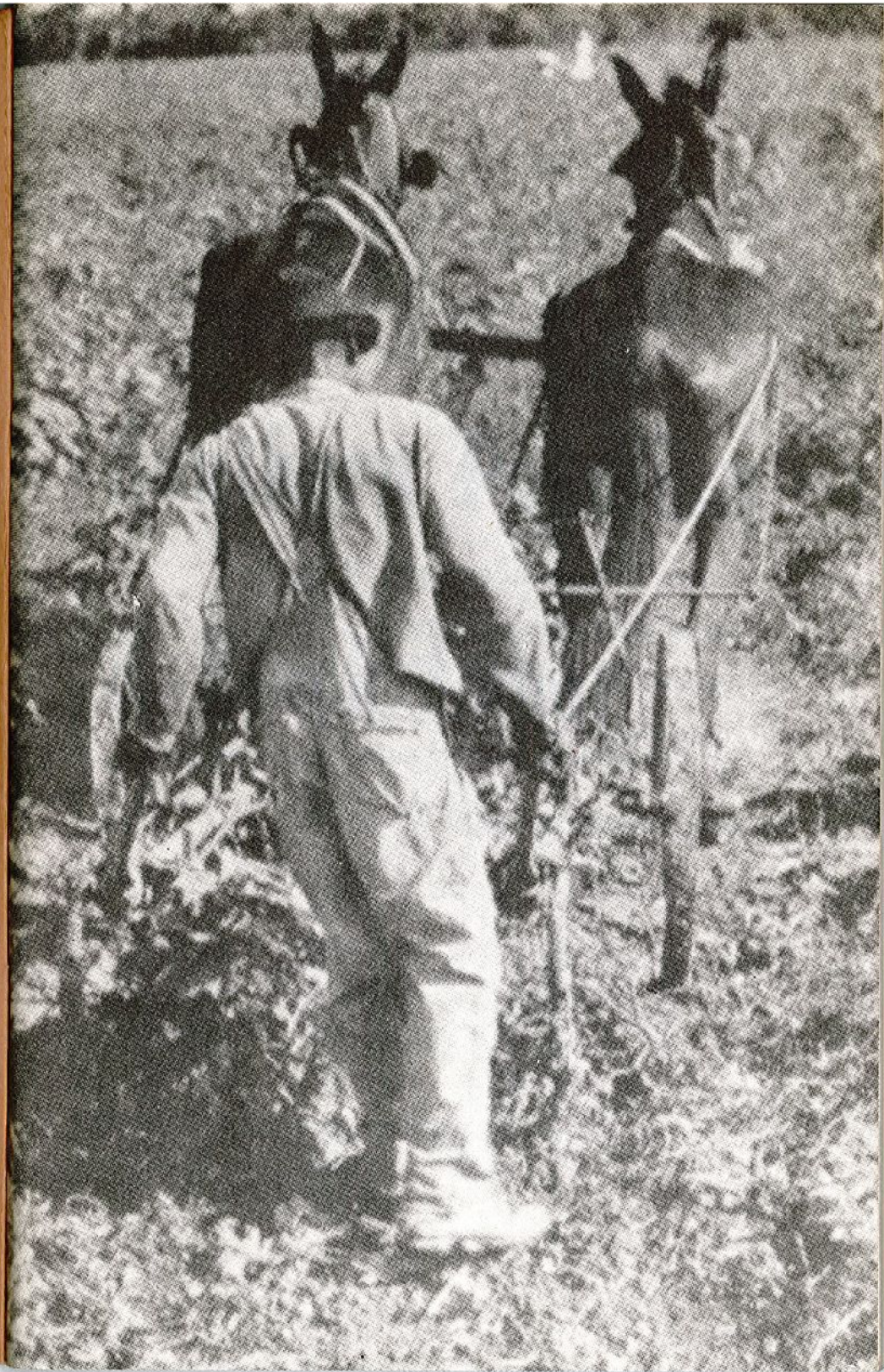
**Southern Populism & Black Labor** is not only a study of a near forgotten chapter in American history, but a warning to American workers never to trust the demagoguery of racist politicians, no matter how slyly they try to mask their real intentions.

World View Publishers

**ANSWERS WALLACE AND OTHER RACISTS  
WHO MAKE FALSE CLAIM  
TO THE POPULIST  
IMAGE**

# **Southern Populism & BLACK LABOR**

**BY THE  
AUTHOR OF  
BLAST FURNACE BROTHERS  
VINCE COPELAND**



OTHER PAMPHLETS BY VINCE COPELAND:

BLAST FURNACE BROTHERS

EXPANDING EMPIRE

*The Introduction to*  
A VOICE FROM HARPER'S FERRY—By Osborne Anderson

# Southern Populism & Black Labor

by VINCENT COPELAND

WORLD VIEW PUBLISHERS  
New York, New York

*World View Publishers  
46 West 21 Street  
New York, N. Y. 10010*

*Second printing November 1975  
First printing 1973*

*Labor Donated*

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## Introduction

This pamphlet was written during the 1972 Presidential election campaign and serialized in *Workers World*. As a result it refers repeatedly to individuals who may be completely forgotten (and that would not be a bad thing at all) before the booklet comes off the printing press.

Two of the individuals already in partial or permanent eclipse are George McGovern and George Wallace. McGovern, the "extreme" liberal, and Wallace, the really extreme racist, occupied a special position in the middle of 1972, particularly before the latter got shot and cleared the way for an overwhelming Nixon victory.

Whereas Richard Nixon, powerful and dangerous though he is, is a common or garden variety of opportunist right-wing racist scoundrel, the other two candidates represented, or at least seemed to represent certain *principles* — one of the principles being the liberal one and the other being the reactionary fascist one.

This general proposition was more or less clear to all political people. But the super-racist Wallace moderated the extreme *language* of his 1968 Presidential campaign in 1972 and covered it with a fig-leaf; Establishment reporters called it "Populism." In addition to clothing his extreme racism and segregationism in the double-talk of a straight-faced opposition to "busing innocent little children," he appealed to the poor (whites) to vote against the rich liberals, against high taxes, etc.

Since the frightened liberals and sleazy editorial writers had to cover up Wallace's racism partly in order to cover up their own cowardice in not attacking him, they concentrated on the fig-leaf and poured out some tons of ink in speculation about Wallace's "Populism."

McGovern, who won the Democratic nomination from Wallace and other less forthright racists, also appealed to the disenfranchised, the poor, etc. And there were many columnists who, out of a brainless consistency as well as a typical ruling class desire to confuse the voters, called *both* McGovern and Wallace Populists. In reality, the two men were as opposite as you could get within the Democratic Party, that is, within capitalist-imperialist politics in general.

Some commentators insisted that many voters for Wallace would actually go for McGovern after the Alabama demagogue was shot. Now, only a few months later, this speculation has been completely forgotten.

But even if it had not been forgotten, it would have been convincingly disproved by the 1972 Nixon vote, which clearly *combined* the Wallace and Nixon votes of 1968. The right-wing Republicans and ultra-right Democrats and Republicans joined forces under the leadership of the almost unanimous Wall Street community to elect the racist, anti-labor Nixon.

The purpose of this pamphlet, however, is not to rehash the 1972 election, but to throw some light on why "Populism" today contains a sneer — an altogether different intonation than it had in the 1890's. It contains the sneer of the cultured middle class intellectual and writer of books or newspaper columns who has no confidence in the "people" — particularly the oppressed and working people. It is a word now loaded with the condescension of comfortable white liberals who imagine they are superior to the poor and ignorant white racists because they, the cultural elite, have read the right books and utter the right *words* about Black Freedom.

Having seen many white workers aroused in opposition to the black, but without having the slightest comprehension of *who* arouses them, the liberal intellectuals wring their hands at the backwardness of the white workers and the reactionary character of "Populism," which in their minds is a *white* phenomenon, since they take it for granted that the "people" are *white*.

They will soon be pointing to the tremendous vote for Nixon as proof in itself that the white masses are racist, reactionary, backward — and stupid — by nature, when it is really just a matter of the masses being brainwashed by the *New York Daily News* or the *Chicago Tribune*, rather than by the *New York Times* (which last-named paper does its own brainwashing and takes care of making the liberals support the racist system in their own peculiar way). And while such people will not lift one little finger to actually struggle or sacrifice in the cause of Black Freedom, they will console themselves with the thought that the masses are reactionary and that they, the liberals, would save humanity, if only humanity would allow itself to be educated by them, the liberals.

I hope that the following lines will not only set the record straight about the real Populism, but will also help to puncture the pretensions of these anti-Populist, anti-working class elements. I hope that in providing a little ammunition against the reactionary imperialist system, it will also help white workers to learn to support their black sisters and brothers in the real rather than the shadow struggles of our time. I hope it will encourage black workers with the perspective of fighting for the unity of *all* the workers, even though black caucuses may be absolutely necessary in the light of the persistence of white racism. And I hope that through the mistakes and failures of the *white* Populists (particularly in respect to the *black* Populists), certain clues to class victory will emerge and this work may show a glimpse of the coming new and really revolutionary Populism of the working class, one in which the black worker will play an outstanding role and the white worker will accept and reinforce that role.

November 10, 1972

## Populism and anti-Populism

A new word cropped up in the 1972 political campaign — or a new *old* word. And that word is “Populism.” Partly in order to cover up George Wallace’s appeal to white racism, and partly to try to explain a vote-getting strength that seems to go beyond this appeal, the newspaper columnists have begun to talk about Wallace’s “Populism.” At the same time, George McGovern is also being labeled as something of a Populist because he, too, speaks of reducing taxes and he occasionally criticizes the big corporations.

Since Populism literally means “people-ism,” it is hard to see how Wallace, who is so viciously opposed to all black people, can be a Populist in any way whatever. McGovern, it is true, claims to speak in the name of *all* the people—just as Johnson claimed to do. And McGovern was once a supporter of Henry Wallace, who dared to oppose the Cold War at its very height and to take on both the Republicans and Democrats in the Presidential election of 1948. But McGovern, although he may be *personally* more committed to “people-ism” than the present Wallace, and not a racist as far as anyone knows, is even closer to the big corporations, and as President he could be depended upon to be their faithful servant. Even if McGovern does not intend to be the war-making dictator that Wallace does, he could find a way, like those other liberals — Wilson, F. D. Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson — to lead the people to war, if his faction of big business were to require it.

McGovern, representing the particular faction of the ruling monopolists he does—a faction which at present is opposed to the Vietnam war mainly because it cannot win—fights Nixon, the chief war-maker, with the weapons of liberalism and “reform” politics, counting on the war-weariness of the people to get himself elected.

George Wallace, however, represents—up to now—only local corporate interests, i.e., the Alabama branch offices of U.S. big business. He only aspires to represent the front offices and the executive suites of Wall Street, and to represent them in his own twisted, racist way.

But Wallace does have something McGovern does not have. Or at least, he seems to be more serious about establishing it—and that is an active mass base, looking for mass action. Some of this base may be just ordinary, dissatisfied people. But the dynamic and activist part of it is undoubtedly the most prejudiced and anti-black whites. Regardless of misunderstandings and confusion of large numbers of whites who support him, Wallace’s own ambition is to lead a white racist mob on a national scale. And this is not the same as leading the *people*.

Some of the liberals who call Wallace a “Populist” seem to think so, however. And many of them profess to see Wallace’s appeal as basically similar to McGovern’s. Big-city editorialists have insisted that in spite of his demagogy, Wallace somehow does represent “the people”—it being understood that “the people” are an ignorant mass not to be trusted, and that the real choice in U.S. society is between fascist dictators and liberal saviors.

Last year in Pontiac, Michigan, a number of pro-Wallace whites organized a bus boycott, and with the help of admitted members of the Ku Klux Klan, dynamited ten school buses. Then on September 14, they picketed the Fisher Body plant of General Motors on the south side of town and stopped most of the day and afternoon shifts from working on that day, as part of the “protest” against school busing.

In the subsequent white boycott of the Pontiac schools, only one-quarter of the white children stayed home. But the reactionary movement was formidable, especially in the light of the KKK violence.

Some of the columnists attach the name “Populist” even to

racist acts like this, because, they say, the whites involved have other grievances besides their objections to busing for the desegregation of schools. One reporter of a Detroit “underground” paper even did an “in-depth” study of this racist movement and called its chief organizer, Charles Yockey, a *Populist*. This was after describing Yockey as a vulgar, sleazy character who lived by “renting 16 mm movies of naked bodies to Pontiac’s civic leaders.”

Underneath this characterization of Wallace and his supporters as “Populist” there lurks a contempt for the people and particularly the working people. Underneath it is also the belief that *white workers* are the “people” and a non-belief that white workers would ever support the struggle of black workers. There is also the conviction that only the middle class intellectual-liberal, rather than the vulgar “Populists” could understand the real problem and could be trusted to carry on the fight for the desegregation of schools, possibly along with an honorable and uncorrupted police force cooperating with such dedicated liberals in forcing the backward poor whites to do the right thing.

The liberal underground writer who practically lived with Yockey for days, dogging his footsteps with great diligence to get his story, further confused himself by saying that the Pontiac movement had a “schizophrenic combination of left-wing and right-wing slogans”—implying thereby that the people concerned were more to be pitied than blamed, and never suggesting once in several large pages of small print that the anti-bus demonstrators or the Ku Klux Klan ought to be punished for what they did—either by the black people or by the black and white workers together.

It is true that there have been occasions in history in which people have used right-wing *words* along with left-wing *actions*. Such occasions are often known as revolutions. People have sometimes said, “God Save the King,” for instance, just at the time when they were in the process of removing the King’s head from his body and doing away with kings altogether.

Or take the case of the up-to-now rare white shop steward who battles for the upgrading of a black worker, advancing the latter over other whites with less seniority in the plant.

Due to lack of education and the generally racist atmosphere, the white steward might use a derogatory *word* in referring to the black worker’s race, while the foreman who

resists the steward's progressive action might use the correct word (having been taught to do so by a shrewd labor-relations department). In such a case any black worker would know exactly which of the white persons was the enemy and which the ally. He would have no trouble in diagnosing the schizophrenia of either party.

But there have also been occasions in which the opposite contradiction has prevailed, when people performed *right-wing* acts and covered them up with faintly left-wing slogans culled from the genuine progressives and revolutionaries of their time.

These have been *fascist or counterrevolutionary* actions, such as anti-Jewish pogroms and anti-black lynchings and terror campaigns, in which the persecutors often *talk* against the oppressors, even while they are murdering the oppressed.

Thus the racist acts in Pontiac, Michigan, are best described as acts of a fascist character and not remotely as manifestations of "Populism" or people-ism. And *this* schizophrenia is a *social* sickness, not a psychological problem. It requires not a doctor but a powerful political cleanser, a political education of the more innocent dupes along with a more forceful, sudden, and salutary education for the most recalcitrant racists and the Ku Klux Klan.

The people, it is true, are constantly brain-washed by their rulers and often act against their own real interests. But there really was a Populism once in this country—and especially in the South.

The mass of whites in the South have been manipulated by the rulers more successfully than anywhere else in the United States. But the only large and consistent *mass* movement of Southern whites that surged up from the masses themselves was an *anti-racist* one and it called itself "Populist."

## 2

### **They tried to overcome**

It is true that, honest and rebellious as the old Populists were, right down to the last country editor and last member of the humblest white farmer's family, they were basically white-oriented—but with one tremendous difference from the Wallaceites and the Klan today. The tremendous difference was that the whites tried very hard to overcome their anti-black prejudice, defended the right of black people to vote, fought—sometimes physically—against lynching, and agitated for political equality.

The Southern Populists were much more concerned about this than the Northern or Western groups and much more pro-black in their writings and speeches. Their black membership was many, many times that of the black membership of the North and West, with well over a million blacks in the Southern Alliance (the predecessor of the People's Party). Before this there was an all-black "Colored Alliance" formed on the initiative of the blacks themselves in the most basic sense. But the white leaders did the first organizing of blacks and the latter were warmly welcomed into the movement and played a highly important role during the real heyday of Populism.

The top leaders of the movement were all white—which automatically proves that the period was not as revolutionary as that of Reconstruction had been. But the *attitude* of these white leaders, and particularly in the South, was not like that of the so-called Populists of the Wallace variety today.



Even the more "moderate" white leaders were considerably more militant in their support for black equality than the liberals of today. James Baird Weaver, for instance, was the People's Party candidate for president in 1892, having replaced a more radical one who had just died. Weaver, who had been a Greenback candidate in 1880, said in his principal 1892 campaign speech (entitled *A Call to Action*):

"Our own war of independence was a war against taxes. Our late internal struggle (a very euphemistic reference to the Civil War—euphemistic because so many of the white participants on the Southern side were now in the People's Party—V.C.) was for the freedom of labor and the right of the laborer to possess and enjoy his own. That struggle is still on and it is now thundering at our gates with renewed energy. . . . The people will rise and overturn the despoilers although they shake the earth by the displacement."

### FREEDOM FOR BLACK LABOR

Weaver, although somewhat less militant than some of the other leaders, did not hesitate to speak of "freedom of labor," which in connection with the Civil War meant freedom of *black* labor. He himself had been a brigadier general on the Union side. Southern Populists gave him great support, however (he got 36.5 percent of the vote in Alabama), and not one of them would have dreamt of counterposing Jeb Stuart to Weaver or waving the Confederate flag at his meetings—all of which Wallace and his Southern supporters do on every possible occasion.

Milford W. Howard was a Populist Congressman from Alabama, elected on the People's Party ticket in the early 1890s. Showing how the two big parties worked and referring to the manipulation of the race issue (to the detriment of the *whites!*) he wrote the following words in his book, *The American Plutocracy*:

"In the North the shibboleth has been, 'vote as you shoot.' In the South it has been, 'down with the carpet-bagger and the Yankee. . . .'"

"Every four years there is a great commotion throughout the country, and the Democrats nominate a candidate for President and the Republicans nominate a candidate, and then both parties

go to the plutocracy and say, 'We must have campaign funds with which to make this fight.' They get the money, and then the loudmouthed campaign orators go out to harangue the people, and each abuses the other's party, and says the leaders are the meanest men on earth, and that the members of the party are all too corrupt to occupy even a humble place in one corner of His Satanic Majesty's Kingdom, and they proceed to wave the bloody shirt on the one side in the wildest alarm, while the followers on the other side shout at the top of their voices, 'Nigger, nigger!' and when the people are all worked up, almost to a frenzy, the wily old plutocrats get together and determine which candidate must be elected and at once go to manipulating and wire-pulling, so that they can accomplish their purpose. . . ." (Quoted by Norman Pollack in *The Populist Mind*.)

Howard's idea of opposing the shout of "Nigger, nigger!" and eliminating the cry of "Black supremacy" did not flow from conscious solidarity with Black Freedom but from an analysis of the big business rule over the white masses and a keen understanding of how racial conflict perpetuated that rule. And his idea was not at all unusual in those times. He was a very "practical" radical and was writing a book that he fully expected his constituents to read. Congressmen, like governors, are usually quite interested in getting re-elected. And he had good cause to believe the voters would listen to what he said. These voters, it should be emphasized, came from the very same social strata in Alabama that the voters for George Wallace now come from. But instead of telling the (white) "workingman" to be a segregationist, as Wallace does, Howard *attacked* that approach as a device of the big business "plutocracy."

### "NO MORE COLOR LINE"

Ignatius Donnelly, a People's Party man and an extremely popular author of the day, said of the movement's program:

"We propose to wipe the Mason and Dixon line out of our geography; to wipe the color line out of politics; to give Americans prosperity (so that) the man who creates shall own what he creates; to take the robber class from the throat of industry; to take possession of the government of the United States and put our nominee in the White House."

The Wallaceites want to put the “color line” into politics — with a vengeance. It is true, they do hope to “wipe the Mason and Dixon line out of our geography” — but with a slight difference. They would move it steadily North until it becomes the border of the United States, with the whole country openly racist and white supremacist. But the real Populists, whatever their deficiencies and in spite of their generally white orientation, wanted to move the line steadily *South* and make the then generally fairer political and social system of the North the rule in the South, too.

Lorenzo Dow Lewelling was People’s Party governor of Kansas from 1893 to 1895. Unlike the present governor of Alabama he was opposed to segregation and in favor of black liberation. In a speech at Kansas City, Kansas, on July 26, 1894, he made the following observations:

“I have been asked why I was a Populist. I want to say to you, friends, that the same principles that made me a Republican in the early days (i.e., during abolition and Civil War — V.C.) have today made me a Populist, and I’ll tell you what they are. I remember when I was a little boy, my parents were the old line abolition kind of people that believed in equal rights to all and special privileges to none. God bless them for that sentiment, and don’t you say so? Well, I remember in those days of the abolition question that we took a little paper called Uncle Lucas’ Child’s Paper, and one side of the paper bore a motto about the size of a coin in the center of a picture — a picture of an African slave with his hands uplifted and in chains, and around the rim of the coin a motto ‘Am I not a man and a Brother?’ That made a wonderful impression on my mind. . . I say these are the reasons that made me a Populist, and today my heart goes out to the working men and women of this nation as it went out to the black slave. I believe and I say it freely, that the working men and women of this country, many of them, are simply today in the shackles of industrial slavery.”

Perhaps Governor Lewelling (who was expressing the feelings of millions of white Populists) did not really *identify* with the black laborer. But he made a conscious effort to connect the slavery of the black to the slavery of the white, while Governor Wallace, seventy-eight years later, says he espouses the “workingman’s” cause, and works day and night to turn white *against* black in a calculated effort to wreck that cause.

# 3

## **They defied the trusts, fought the government**

The followers of George Wallace may have some Populist delusions about their leader in addition to their racist prejudices to which he appeals. They may hope for lower taxes and better breaks against the monopolies as a result of their supporting Wallace. But if they do, they are doomed to cruel disappointment.

The reason they are doomed is not merely that Wallace is a liar and a demagogue. (McGovern is not likely to reduce taxes very much or for very long, either.) The reason is that Wallace, like McGovern, represents the same corporate interests he claims to be fighting — as do all major politicians of the Democratic Party, as well as the Republican. The “Populism” of Wallace, like that of McGovern, consists of making certain *promises* to the people, which will inevitably be broken.

The *old* Populism — the Populism that was so popular in Wallace’s home state of Alabama, as well as throughout the South — was a big *social movement* of the masses themselves against the corporate monopolies. It was led by hundreds or even thousands of small business and farm people who had a vital stake in getting the monopolies off their neck, a stake that had nothing to do with white people opposing the rights of black people, but on the contrary, compelled both white and black to seek each other’s aid in the giant struggle. The movement educated and mobilized larger and larger sections of the broad masses.

The old Populism was infinitely more serious in its opposition to the big monopolies than Wallace. And yet it failed. A revival of it today in its nineteenth century form would be a great advance over any large movement on the political arena of 1972, at least from the point of view of honesty, struggle and racial equality. But it, too, would fail. It would not deceive its followers in the demagogic way that George Wallace does. But it would collapse — and much more quickly than did the People's Party of 1892.

The reason is that the *social basis* for Populism — that is, for an anti-monopoly political fight led by small owners through the ballot box — has gone with the wind. In fact, it *went* with the winds of the elections of 1896 and the Spanish-American War of 1898. And it was the economic victory of the billion-dollar monopoly businessmen over the small-business, small-farmer Populists that blew up that wind over 80 years ago.

But in their time, the Populists elected state legislators, governors, and in one Congressional session during the eighties, with a total of about 350 members in the House, there were over 50 Representatives with generally Populist leanings. In the election of 1892, they elected some state governors, five U.S. Senators and ten Representatives directly, and frightened the Wall Street rulers considerably thereby.

Some of the office-holders of Populism showed an ability to carry out the people's wishes and a loyalty to the people's interests that is absolutely non-existent among the politicians of big business today.

The legendary Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, although not in the People's Party, was deeply committed to Populist principles. He refused to call Federal troops during the Pullman strike in Chicago (1894) and openly condemned President Grover Cleveland for doing so. It was he who defied every corporation in the country and sacrificed his political career by pardoning the survivors of the original May Day (1886) frameups — the so-called anarchists, who fought so magnificently for the eight-hour day.

Governor Davis H. Waite of Colorado, who was a representative of the People's Party, sent that state's militia to protect striking miners at Cripple Creek in 1894 on perhaps the only such occasion in the history of the United States.

The mining companies had hired hundreds of thugs and had a

sheriff deputize them and use them to terrorize the strikers. Waite eliminated the "deputies" and then acted as arbitrator of the strike, but an arbitrator of an entirely different kind than the Park Avenue variety who now impose sweetheart agreements on labor.

He also used the militia against the *police* when the police commissioners proved corrupt and used the armed power of the police ranks to keep themselves in office. The U.S. Army was called in at that time to *prevent* him from disciplining the police, thus showing that the monopolists (who included the owners of Cripple Creek) in Washington were more interested in keeping their own hold on the police, even if the latter were corrupt enough to take bribes from all the brothels and gambling houses in Colorado.

"Law and order" was not invented by George Wallace; it has nearly always meant the law and order of the ruling class. The Populists, however, in spite of other deficiencies, saw through this fakery and exposed it for what it was.

The leaders of the original Populists were not only serious about reducing *taxes*, they also wanted to reduce the power of the big corporations themselves, and the ones they did not want nationalized, they wanted pared down to ordinary size so that ordinary small business could compete with them.

Even in those early days there were several companies with hundreds of millions in capital, and more than a dozen with twenty-five million or so. (Today there are no less than 127 companies *each with assets over one billion dollars.*) (Imagine Wallace calling upon the Morgan-dominated U.S. Steel Company to disgorge its Alabama plant and give it back to the "small" corporate millionaires who used to have it!)

The Populists wanted the end of corporation domination of the state and national governments and they exposed how that domination worked in every way they could. They exposed racism and white supremacy as part of the mechanism of this corporation rule and correctly saw this white supremacy as an *obstacle* in their getting rid of their oppressors. Wallace and his kind, on the other hand, attack the corporations mostly for their alleged help to the black people in getting jobs and for trying to soften the racism by school desegregation, etc.

The black-and-white People's Party of Alabama rolled up 47.64 percent of the state's votes in 1894. But it did not do so by

bribing state construction contractors and buying votes. It did not do so by appealing to racism and segregation. It fought the racist plantation owners tooth and nail, just as it fought the Yankee businessmen who were in cahoots with these ex-slave-masters.

Neither George Wallace nor George McGovern would come out and say that the corporations run every state legislature as well as Congress and the President. But the Populists did.

The previously quoted Congressman Milford Howard of Fort Payne, Alabama wrote, after a passionate condemnation of Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller and the railroads for their oppression of farmers and workers:

"These trusts, have been guilty of bribery, lying, perjury, high-handed robbery, midnight assassinations and cold-blooded murders. They have crushed competition, bankrupted thousands of honest men, oppressed the poor, robbed and plundered the helpless, until today they are absolute and supreme masters of the situation, able to regulate production, control prices, grind the faces of the poor, build up enormous fortunes for the trust funds, *elect Governors and Presidents, own the Attorney-General of the United States, purchase Legislatures and Congresses*, and hold high carnival while the dance of death goes merrily on and people starve, and rot and die all over the land." (Emphasis added.)

This was only one of many similar statements from Southern and Western Populists. In some cases they quoted actual amounts spent by the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, Jay Cookes, etc. in buying legislatures.

Thirty-five years after the Populist period, Franklin Roosevelt did say—privately—to Harold Ickes, his Secretary of the Interior, that he could "buy any whole state legislature for a million dollars" (which was considerably more than Vanderbilt, etc. had to spend in the 19th century on any one occasion, even in the U.S. Congress). But FDR's comment was a very indirect way of showing that corporations owned the legislators, and it was not made publicly. Furthermore, it only referred to the *corruption* of U.S. lawmakers, not to their fundamental subservience to big business.

The historian, John D. Hicks, wrote in his *The Populist Revolt*, that "It is not unfair to say that normally the railroads — sometimes a single road — dominated the political situation in

every Western state. . . . Beyond a doubt whole legislatures were bought and sold. . . . In the South, the sins that the roads were held to have committed differed in degree, perhaps, but not much in kind, from the sins of the Western roads."

And in *Alabama*, railroads were as big a thing as anywhere else in the South.

"Railroad building increased in Alabama," says W.E.B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction*. "In 1860 there were 743 miles; in 1867, 851 miles. In 1871-72, 1,697 miles were completed, with other lines in construction. The cost of the miles completed, with equipment, was over \$60,000,000."

Thus, even during Reconstruction, during the period of greatest freedom and relative self-rule for black labor, the basis for railroad domination of the Alabama legislature was being laid — and incidentally, also the basis for the alliance between Northern capital and big Southern landholders, an alliance that was to be cemented over the crushed bodies of black labor.

The question the "Populist" Wallace has to answer, if he wants the title Populist at all, is this: Has he, as Governor, chased the railroads out of the Alabama legislature (that is, the railroad lawyers who are legislators) — or even tried to do so? Has he taken on the Tennessee Coal and Iron Co. (giant subsidiary of U.S. Steel), which has the huge plant at Bessemer just outside of Birmingham? As Governor, does he govern the big textile corporations, the timber and paper interests, with their hundreds of thousands of acres of Alabama land and their virtual ownership of the Alabama towns and villages where his votes come from?

Does he complain that these corporations really govern the Alabama he is supposed to govern? That is what the Populist governors of Colorado and Kansas did in the 1890's, but you can bet that no Democratic, Republican — or "American-Independent" (Wallace's 1968 party) — governor will ever do that.

The only difference between the big business rule of the legislatures and the country 80 years ago and today is this: that whereas the big railroads and other corporations had to *bribe* the legislatures in state and national bodies at that time, nowadays, they groom them and pass on them *in advance*. Whole legislatures are not usually bought and sold today, except on secondary or third-rate questions, like passing a special in-

surance law, or getting special favors for some relatively small clique of oil billionaires, etc. This is because the law-makers are *already owned* by a big business that is no longer challenged by the Populism of small business.

Bribery still goes on, of course. But when Nelson Rockefeller himself a member of the richest family in the country, can be governor of the wealthiest state in the country (which would have been impossible in the days of Populism), it is obvious that the underlings and ordinary legal representatives of the Rockefellers, DuPonts, Morgans, Mellons, etc. have all the important political jobs. And those who only *wish* they were direct top representatives of these billionaires have to jump the political hoop for them in small-time legislatures and governorships like those of Alabama.

# 4

## **The manipulation of money wasn't the half of it!**

The fascistic Wallace and even the liberal McGovern cover up the fact that the basic rulers of the country are the big corporations. They cover up the fact that no election can by itself possibly get the corporations out of that rulership. But the original Populists were in the fight precisely because they saw the corporations in the process of taking over and were so indignant about it and desperate that they revealed it to everybody. The enemy was clearly marked out. It was talked about in every country store and written in capital letters on the pages of every Populist newspaper (and there were hundreds of them!)

However, the Populists also created a false enemy for themselves which caused a lot of confusion and ultimately had a great deal to do with their defeat. This was their concept of money and the monetary system.

The Populists thought that the source of their oppression was the government's use of *gold* as the money standard. They wanted to use *silver*, since this was more plentiful and they thought that money would be easier to get, debts would be easier to pay back, etc. etc.

The wage workers of today have a better theory of money. Without thinking very much about it, they don't really care whether they get paid in gold, silver, or paper, as long as they get *enough* to buy the things they want. In fact, they would not mind even if they got paid in *peanuts*, just so long as they got *enough* peanuts. The real issue, workers suspect, is how many peanuts

the boss cheats the workers out of and keeps for himself.

While this peanut theory does not solve all the theoretical and historical problems about money and currency, it is much superior to the free silver theory of the Populists. And it tends to guarantee that the workers' movement of the future will not destroy itself over a battle about using silver instead of gold — or sheep, wampum, copper, cattle, etc. for money.

The "funny-money" theories of the Populists were wrong. But the situation that gave rise to them was not funny.

The price of cotton had gone down from a dollar a pound during the Civil War to 7 cents in the 1890s. The price of wheat made a similar catastrophic decline. Corn went to 10 cents a bushel in Kansas in 1889 and was often used instead of coal.

The farmers were told that the cause of all this was "over-production." But they saw the bankers getting richer and richer, while during much of the eighties and in the depression of the nineties, city workers could not buy the wheat, corn or cotton, because half of them had no jobs and the other half had no money. The farmers and many others thought the *money* system of the bankers was to blame for this.

The government had inflated the money during and shortly after the Civil War by getting huge loans from the bankers. After the war, the bankers demanded repayment in hard cash—i.e. gold. This gave a big profit to the bankers as it stabilized the money but also deflated it. Farmers who had borrowed money in the 1860s, or even later (and they *all* borrowed), had to pay it back in the '70s, '80s, and '90s in a currency that was often worth twice as much as the currency they had borrowed. The farmer who had borrowed the equivalent of a thousand bushels of wheat or a thousand pounds of cotton found himself paying back two thousand bushels or pounds and sometimes much more—with interest on top of that.

More fundamental than the money-tinkering was the fact that the new (and expensive) farm machinery was making wheat easier to produce. And the constant opening of new lands was creating a greater supply of wheat, which consequently tumbled in price. Add to this the fact that Western wheat lands were not as productive as Eastern lands and the railroads drained more than half the price of the wheat — or cotton — in freight charges, and you have some good reasons for the almost revolutionary anger of the Populists against railroads, Washington and Wall Street.

Since the great depression of the 1890s threw millions out of work there was additional reason for lower prices and at the same time a fellow feeling between poor farmers and poor city workers in the face of such catastrophe. Although then, as now, the great farmer base of Populism — West and South — wanted *higher* prices, and propertiless laborers wanted *lower* prices, the most militant leaders of the working people lined up with the farmer-Populists in the conviction that they were all fighting the same enemy — the Wall Street monopoly corporations and the big bankers behind them.

In the North and East there were big and bloody strikes in the late '80s and early '90s. The farm people who were generally too poor themselves to exploit any labor other than their own and their children's, were sympathetic to the labor struggles, already identifying the enemies of labor with their own. The most advanced of the unionized industrial laborers joined in with the Populists and ran powerful campaigns in several states.

Indeed, says Anna Rochester, "Wage workers were the first to move at this time toward independent political action. Independent state parties, variously named and chiefly made up of trade unionists, Knights of Labor and Greenbackers, entered the 1886 elections in thirteen Northern states. . . . Union labor tickets were nominated for local elections in fifty-nine places. These included New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, where independent labor candidates put up a stiff fight against the old parties."

(In her *History of American Populism*.)

Since the United States itself had been populated with small producers, with 80 or 90 percent of the people working on the land for most of the 19th century, it was hardly surprising that the mass and leadership of the Populist movement was of small farmer character. But the movement swept up along with it most of the other radicals of the times in towns and cities as well.

Many socialists, such as Henry Demarest Lloyd, first writer to seriously expose the Rockefellers, and Edward Bellamy, author of the long-popular *Looking Backward*, enthusiastically supported them. Eugene Debs, not yet a socialist, was a powerful ally, leading the embattled railroad workers in armed struggles against the companies and the state. The "single-taxers" blocked formally with the Populists in at least one major election. Henry George, the uncompromising advocate of free land, ran for Mayor of New York City ahead of the Republican Theodore

Roosevelt. But George lost to the Tammany Democrat by a very small — and suspicious — plurality.

The single-taxers believed in the public ownership of all land, including especially the great ranches, timberlands, oil wells, mines, expensive city business districts, etc. on the very logical theory that it was only the presence and work of society that gave the land any price at all and therefore society should own it.

Among other tendencies who supported the Populists were the Knights of Labor who were generally more radical than the leaders of the American Federation of Labor. Unlike the AFL, they had many local union chapters in the South — some all-black, some black and white. At one time there were 90,000 black members out of a total of 500,000 North and South. The Knights ran their own candidates in some states and supported the Populists in others.

The American Federation of Labor under the leadership of William Gompers had already begun to take its anti-political position (which in reality was one of accepting the corporate rule of the country and has now degenerated into a crude electioneering for slightly “lesser-evil” candidates of big business). But even the AFL wasn’t quite so tame in those days as it is now. Its convention called for nationalization of railroads and communications both in 1892 and 1893, although it did not endorse the People’s Party.

The United Mineworkers, quite sympathetic to the Populists, took the socialist position at its convention in 1894 in favor of “the collective ownership of all means of production and distribution.”

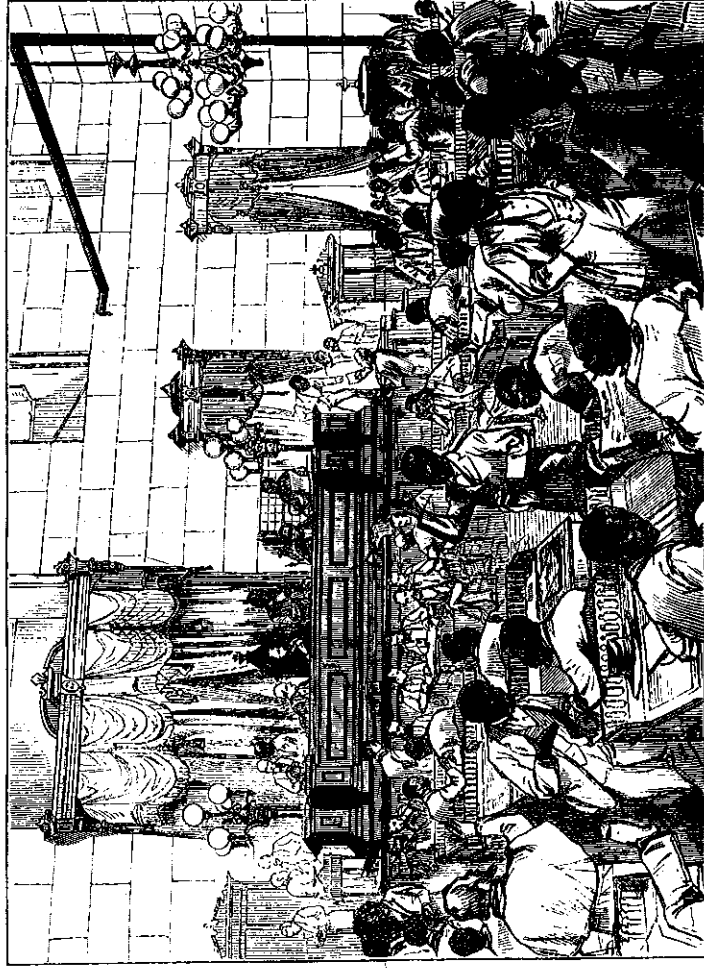
All these labor groups were small compared to nowadays, however, and of course extremely persecuted.

Even less popular, if not more persecuted, than labor at the time were the women’s suffrage and women’s rights groups. They too supported the Populists for the most part, and vice versa. While organized labor was almost exclusively male, the farm movement counted many outstanding women in its ranks. The farm women were used to playing an important role in both the work and the management of the farms, large ones as well as small. And their status of partnership with their husbands led naturally to their expressing the politics of the movement with equal and often greater eloquence than the men.

The Prohibitionists, who were more radical at that time than is generally understood today, also blocked with the Populists. Most of the anti-liquor fighters were motivated by a concern for the advancement of labor, the self-education of the poor, etc. which was of course incompatible with getting drunk after a twelve-hour day at work.

The one great section of the people, whose *basic interests* were neglected by the majority of the Populists, however, was the *black* people. Great as was the *support* of the blacks for Populism and great as was the effort of Southern white Populists to break down the political system of “white supremacy,” the fundamental social needs of the black people as a whole at that time were misunderstood or ignored by the Populist movement. (The basic social need, of course, was land for the landless.)

Naturally, the heritage of racism had something to do with this. But the real cause lay in the *class* relations between the great corporations, the big Southern landholders, the merchants and bankers, the mostly white small farmers, the mostly black tenant farmers — and at the bottom of the whole pyramid, the *black laborers*, who at that time were mostly plantation laborers — especially in the Black Belt.



Black and white representatives in the South Carolina legislature in 1877. This was at the end of Reconstruction, just before the anti-black counterrevolution.

# 5

## Poor whites tied down by the black lynch rope

There has always been a deep and complicated struggle or potential struggle in the South. The struggle itself is over the livelihood of the poor, the working people — and over the super-profits for the rich, that is the landowners and big bosses of industry. But the struggle is extremely sharpened by the fact that the poorest and hardest-working people are almost invariably black. And it is further complicated by the additional fact that poor whites have *nearly* always been misled by the rich whites to solidarize with their own oppressors on the basis of being the same race, rather than joining with their fellow-oppressed, who are of a different race.

This has gone on for over two hundred years and was an old story even before the Civil War. But since Reconstruction and since the advent of Northern capital into the South, it got even more complicated and much more subtle than non-Southerners generally think.

There had to be a political system for keeping the poor whites in line just as there was a terror system for keeping the still-poorer blacks totally suppressed. The political system after Reconstruction could be summed up as *The Democratic Party*.

The Populist break from that party was therefore a much greater wrench and more loaded with revolutionary possibilities than the radical politics of the West.

Of course George Wallace broke with the Democratic Party in 1968. But the reason for the Populist break in the 1890s was



diametrically opposite to Wallace's reason, especially as far as "white supremacy" was concerned.

Today the Democratic Party has been compelled to run black candidates in many areas, to sponsor mild civil rights bills, etc., etc. And Wallace's idea of a third party (as revealed in 1968) was to end all this, to build a party that is wholly white supremacist and segregationist to the core, to restore the absolute rule of the slaveholder type and to re-establish lynch law as the rule of the land.

### PARTY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

After Reconstruction, the Democratic Party was *The party of white supremacy* and that was the slogan on which it won its elections and maintained itself in power. In *Alabama* this was first done in the election of 1874, two and a half years before the formal end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of Union troops from the last outposts of revolutionary enforcement of black equality.

The 1874 Democratic Party election slogan in Alabama was "White Supremacy or Death!" And with that slogan the big landowners made an alliance with their natural enemies, the poor white tenant farmers and squatters, and crushed the revolutionary democracy of the black freedmen who had formerly been allied with a large section of these same poor whites.

("The chief characteristic of Reconstruction in Alabama," says Dr. DuBois, "was the direct fight for mastery between the poor whites and the planters." This fight was so furious that at the beginning of the Civil War several Alabama counties with predominantly small farms at first opposed the Secession and declared for the Union. Winston County in the northwest part of the state *seceded from the Confederacy*. But its rebellion was later crushed and it had to get into line.)

The big planters couldn't possibly have succeeded in their maneuver without the use of force and terror. They continued this terror long after the first electoral victory of the post-Reconstruction Democrats. But to do this, they had somehow to win over the poor whites.

"The planters and poor whites after their first enmity early made alliance in Alabama," continues the author of *Black*

*Reconstruction*, "and their concentrated social weight descended on whites who dared to vote with the blacks. Such persons were warned and attacked until they fled the state or made peace with the new masters. Later, Northern capital poured into the poor white belt to develop coal and iron (these were the interests that sold out to the Morgans in 1907 — V.C.). Convict labor was widely used and exploitation developed, with labor divided by race, and helpless."

The "whites who dared to vote with the blacks" in the period Dr. DuBois speaks about, then voted Republican because that party was still seriously defending equal rights — *at the time* — and seriously opposing the big planters. But as Northern capital moved into the South and looked for agents to carry out its needs, lo and behold, it soon found the big planters, the former slaveholders whom it had just made war upon, and then made a pact with them to let them rule the South so long as they would be loyal to Wall Street and share the booty with it.

In the process of doing this, of course they betrayed the black people back into semi-slavery, but what is even less understood is that they also enslaved a large number of poor whites and even middle class whites as they made the South a semi-colony of the North.

### POPULIST THIRD PARTY

The creation of a third party in the '80s and '90s therefore, not only signified an attempt of the poorer whites to break out of this colonial status and to challenge their colonial stooge-masters, the big landowners, but it meant, of necessity, an attempt to include the black people in the new revolt, too.

Thus the Populist third party of the '80s and '90s, quite opposite of Wallace's third party movement, was a thrust toward black representation instead of away from it. It automatically raised the question of the black vote. And white Populist leaders in every Southern state except for the exceptionally racist South Carolina, went to great efforts to get out the black vote and win it for Populism.

This was not merely opportunism on their part, although it was connected with their desire for victory. In the course of the struggles they tried hard to educate the poor whites to the con-

cept of equal rights -- most likely with much more success than conservative white historians have taken the trouble to reveal.

Tom Watson, who was a congressman, and editor of a string of Populist newspapers, often returned to this subject, calling upon the *whites* to give up their prejudices in a way that very few mass leaders have done in this country since that time.

"Both the old parties have done this thing until they have constructed as perfect a 'slot machine' as the world ever saw. Drop the old worn nickel of the 'party slogan' into the slot, and the machine does the rest. You might beseech a Southern white tenant to listen to you upon questions of finance, taxation, transportation; you might demonstrate with mathematical precision that herein lay the way out of his poverty into comfort; you might have him 'almost persuaded' to the truth, but if the merchant who furnished his farm supplies (at tremendous usury) or the town politician (who never spoke to him except at election time) came along and cried 'Negro rule!' the entire fabric of reason and common sense which you had patiently constructed would fall, and the poor tenant would joyously hug the chains of an actual wretchedness rather than do any experimenting on a question of mere sentiment." (From *The Negro Question in the South*, an article in the Populist magazine, *The Arena* of October, 1892.)

Analyzing the economic causes of race discrimination further, but confining himself to examples of tenant farmers (rather than the black field workers in the big plantations) Watson continued in the same article:

"The white tenant lives adjoining the colored tenant. Their houses are almost equally destitute of comforts. Their living is confined to bare necessities. They are equally burdened with heavy taxes. They pay the same high rent for gullied and impoverished land.

"They pay enormous prices for farm supplies. Christmas finds them both without any satisfactory return for a year's toil. Dull and unhappy, they both start the plows again when 'New Years' passes.

"Now the People's Party says to these two men, 'You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may

not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.' "

Outside of the reference to the "*monetary system*," which the Populists thought was the source of all inequality and oppression, this was a striking condemnation of racism and a clear explanation of its causes.

It was no accident, however, that Watson referred to the black *tenant farmer* and the white *tenant farmer* and left out the black plantation *laborer* -- whereas he often referred to the rights of *Northern* (white) labor.

# 6

## ***It was a different Montgomery, Ala.!***

Although both the Western Populists and the Southern Populists sympathized with Northern labor, this was not exactly the case with their attitude to *Southern* labor. It was clear that Northern labor was fighting against the same Wall Street interests as the Western farmer, the Southern farmer and the Southern tenant farmer. But the case of the Southern laborers was different. These laborers were mainly plantation laborers. Southern Populism, although strong for black and white voting equality, could not win the black votes in the Black Belt mainly because they did not champion the *laboring* interests of the black people.

The black farmers and tenant farmers were a class very close to the small white farmers, economically speaking. Tom Watson, in the previously quoted speech, was talking to sections of two races which had common interests. But the black plantation *laborers* who lived and worked in the Black Belt cotton plantations of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, and were more oppressed than anybody else in the South, were not so close to the Populists. And this was only partly because their former slavemasters, the plantation owners, found ways to keep them enslaved politically to the Democratic Party.

Although the small white farmers hated the great plantation overlords, some of the bigger white farmers—many of them Populists — employed black laborers and here and there among the very large owners there was a supporter of the Populists, too.

In fact, Watson himself was a landowner; only he had mostly tenant farmers on his land, which was one reason he was so familiar with their problems. He could identify with these tenants as against the merchants and Wall Street-dominated politicians, but he never called for higher wages or easier piece-work for the black laborers on the plantations—nor, of course, lower *rents* or lower shares of the crops for the landlords.

On the other hand, the big landowners had tied up the black laborers politically in a way that the Populists could not easily unravel. After Reconstruction was defeated, the former big slaveowners did not immediately *prevent* the black laborers from voting. Instead, they marched them up to the polls and made them vote Democratic.

The plantation owners, although they no longer ran the United States government, were now politically more powerful than ever, compared to the poor whites in the up-country part of the state. Whereas their slaves had once been counted as only three out of five for purposes of representation in Congress, now they were counted *five for five* (because of the Fourteenth Amendment!). So the Black Belt counties were now stronger than the less populated up-country counties where most of the small farmers lived. The catch was that the black laborers were forced to vote for their bosses.

The white Populists and their black tenant allies hated this situation and they hated the big plantation owners, who could only do this dirty work because they had the support of the Northern politicians and big businessmen. But outside of the Populist period, the poor white farmers were the slaves of their own racism on this issue as on others.

At the beginning of this period—on *June 24, 1880*—a large delegation of white workers and white farmers met in Montgomery, Alabama, at the state's Greenback Labor Party Convention and took a position firmly opposed to school segregation (74 years before the Supreme Court's "historic" decision!).

Montgomery is now known as "the cradle of the Confederacy"—the political center of human slavery, that is. It is now the seat of the Wallace-led state government, the place where Wallace pledged in his first inaugural speech as governor to carry on the purely "Anglo-Saxon" tradition and called upon the spirit of Jefferson Davis, the president of the slaveholders, to

help him maintain "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Yet 82 years before Wallace called for segregation now, tomorrow, etc.; 83 years before he stood "in the schoolhouse door" to prevent a black man and woman from studying at the state university, the Greenback-labor Populists denounced the decrepit, reactionary, segregated *school system* that had taken the place of the Reconstruction schools. (The Reconstruction-established institutions were the first public schools in Alabama.) And the Greenback-labor convention denounced all government favoritism to railroads, banks and insurance companies, as all Populists did almost routinely at that time.

More than this, the convention openly took on the "Bourbons of the South," being one of the very first groups in the North or South to even use that term to describe the big landowners and former slave-owners.

(The original Bourbons in French history were the Royal family and old landed nobility who had "learned nothing and forgotten nothing" after their overthrow in the Great French Revolution. When they made their partial comeback, they tried to be just as dirty and oppressive to the former serfs as their parents and grandparents had been.)

The Greenback-Labor Party called for a voting alliance with the black plantation laborers as well as the black tenant farmers. But due to the situation described above this was easier said than done.

But when you consider the present "*Populism*" in Montgomery — the "*Populism*" of George Wallace — the efforts of the 1880 convention take on a special interest.

And at the height of Populism, in the same city of Montgomery, when the Alabama People's Party held its convention there in 1892 just before getting 46 percent of the statewide vote, the new party platform declared:

"We favor the protection of the colored race in their legal rights and should afford them encouragement and aid in the attainment of a higher civilization and citizenship, that through the means of kindness, fair treatment and just regard for them, a better understanding and more satisfactory condition may exist between the races."

This statement of a large number of Alabama Populists in convention is a far cry from the so-called "*Populism*" of George

Wallace. True, it is not exactly a flaming manifesto of black liberation, either. But considering that many of the white people who voted for it were the same small farmers, hill folk and so-called "red-necks" that Wallace pretends are his main supporters today, the note of paternalism can easily be forgiven. It was an *honest* statement for the unity of the poor of both races and as such it is a hundred times more valuable than the actions of big white liberals of today, who fold up like accordions whenever George Wallace and the Ku Klux Klan take the offensive.

"This is at last a thinking and a reading people," a Populist said of the Georgia white farmers. "The last four years—the last two campaigns— have been full of education and the people are thinking more freely than they have ever done before. You cannot any longer shake the red flag of Negro supremacy in the faces of the white masses and make them think that life and death and salvation depend upon voting the Democratic ticket. They are thinking for themselves now."

This was in a letter to *The Atlanta Constitution* (an anti-Populist paper) and quoted in *The People's Party Paper of Georgia* on Aug. 11, 1894.

Of course, the writer meant the *white* people were "thinking for themselves" and would not permit their exploiters to frighten them with the "red flag of Negro supremacy." This represented a negative rather than a positive sense of equality for the black people. But compared to the sentiments of that great "*Populist*" George Wallace, it was about as radical as you can get.

# 7

## Land—and the revolution that didn't happen

The white Populists were land-hungry, especially in the West, where they saw the railroads and ranch-owners grabbing land a million or more acres at a time. But the Southern *black* Populists needed land not only as a way of competing with big business and of growing prosperous. They needed it desperately in order to assert their human right to exist at all in the modern world — that is, in order not to sink into the same slavery that existed before the Civil War. This was only vaguely understood among the whites, who confined themselves to supporting the right of blacks to vote and did not stir themselves to make an active alliance to help the blacks get the land.

The Colored Alliance (founded in Houston, Texas in 1886) grew to the then prodigious number of one-and-a-quarter million members before merging with the previously all-white Southern Alliance a very few years later to become the People's Party. The blacks built their organization in nearly all the states of the South, and considering the very great handicaps under which they labored, only the smouldering passion for the land denied them after the Civil War could possibly explain their drive and their organizational successes.

The revolutionary U.S. Freedmen's Bureau had distributed some 800,000 acres to ex-slaves during Reconstruction. But this was relatively very small. It would have come to less than one acre per black family, had it all been evenly divided. Furthermore, most of this land was taken back by the ex-slaveholders after the 1877 counterrevolution, some of it even before that time.

(By 1890 there were over 6 million black people in the South. According to Dr. Rayford W. Logan in his *Betrayal of the Negro*, there were 120,738 *black-owned* farms in the whole country, most of them in the South. There were three times as many black *tenant* farmers, says Dr. Logan, as there were owners. Most of the tenant farms, too, were in the South. Few of the independent farms could trace their origin to any division of the land — least of all to the revolutionary expropriation of slaveholders' land that never really did take place.)

The Colored Alliance must have had its own tempestuous history with inner conflicts and dynamic development. But it was severely handicapped. To begin with, the great majority of members were very poor tenant farmers, and this alone must have prevented them from traveling and organizing in the way many of the white farmers could do, especially those who had middling incomes or better.

This situation was a little like that of the modern labor movement. The almost lily-white leadership of U.S. labor today is a characteristic of the *top* ranks, the high-paid leadership—that is, the labor bureaucracy. But on the picket lines and in plant stoppages and wildcats, the leadership of the *struggle* is often black or partially black. This is much more common than outsiders would expect in light of the general racism and repression of this country. The phenomenal organization of the Colored Alliance required a similar and even greater initiative from the rank and file. And this initiative must have been applied, although perhaps in a hidden way.

The white Populists had hundreds of *unpaid* leaders, of course, infinitely different from the modern labor bureaucracy in *that* respect. They had publicists, lawyers, editors, etc., as well as country-wide organizers and speakers who went from town to town and state to state. When the black and white Populists merged, it was more or less inevitable that the united leadership would have been a white one—especially given the fact that the whites had not figured out any basic *social* approach to the blacks and were not especially sensitive to the deeper needs of the more revolutionary black people.

It was hard for the more impoverished black farmers to provide the kind of leadership the Populists then had, and the few who had the education and the finances for it probably found the general racism of society too difficult to contend with, in spite of the improved attitude of the white Populists.

## CLASS INTERESTS OF BLACK FARMERS

In Texas, however, two black leaders were on the state committee of the united People's Party, and united rallies of black and white voters were addressed by black speakers from time to time, as was also the case in Georgia, even before the merger of the Colored Alliance with the white one. (This was probably true in other places, too. But the published records are inadequate and unclear on it.)

The Colored Alliance tried to do what the white Populists could not possibly have done — and that was to penetrate the ranks of black labor on big plantations and win them as converts to Populism. Had this been successfully accomplished, the future of the whole movement would have been assured. The solid black vote, plus a large fraction of the white vote, would have accumulated constant majorities and the Bourbons would have been parliamentarily defeated. And this — together with more concrete struggles — would have raised the question of land and equality for the blacks as well as the whites, as it gave the poor whites a chance to get representation, along with the blacks, in the legislatures.

But this did not happen.

First, because of the Bourbons, by a combination of terror and deceit, reinforced by their economic power over the poor plantation laborers, made the black field workers continue voting Democratic and defeated the Populist party in practically all elections.

Second — and more important — because the white Populists, although they desired the votes of the black laborers, did not support them *as a class*. The black tenant farmers and the white tenant farmers had the same enemy in the merchants, the railroads and the banks. And they both sympathized with Northern labor because it fought the same railroads and banks that were oppressing the farmers. But the attitude to *Southern labor* — black labor — was different. And they did not organize against their landlords *as* landlords partly because some of these landlords were in alliance with the tenants, sometimes even leading the tenants — against the big money people of the North.

The tenants, oppressed as they were, also shared the illusions of the owner-farmers in the West, that they could make money and get bigger farms if only they could get the railroads and banks off their necks, and they could do this by getting Populist candidates into Congress.

However, the *black* tenant farmers, being so dirt-poor and also being black, could identify more with the black laborers of the big plantations. Furthermore, the black tenant farmers being more oppressed generally and more confined to *tenant* farming than the poor whites, were also more land-hungry and more unanimous against the big Bourbon landholders, still hoping for the revolutionary division of the land that Reconstruction had promised, but failed to give them. They must have seen the black laborers as a powerful ally in any struggle for the land. And they must have seen this much more clearly than the white tenant farmers did, even though these particular whites would have gained nearly as much by such an alliance.

"Once the Colored Farmers Alliance proposed to call a general strike of Negro cotton pickers," says Woodward. "*The Progressive Farmer*, paper of Colonel L. L. Polk (white), president of the National Alliance did 'not hesitate to advise our farmers to leave their cotton in the field rather than pay more than 50 cents per hundred to have it picked.' The Negro brethren were attempting to 'better their conditions at the expense of their white brethren. Reforms should not be in the interest of one portion of our farmers at the expense of another.' "

This unbelievable callousness (Polk's paper was generally quite radical and pro-black) becomes more believable when you consider the *class* character of the Populist movement and the fact that it was a farmers' movement and somewhat wealthier farmers were almost automatically in the lead of it. Their radicalism, which attained almost revolutionary fervor was directed against the Wall Street plunderers, but was by no means in favor of an equalitarian society or a country ruled by wage workers.

## EX-SLAVES SOLD OUT

It should be added that the unnatural situation of the black plantation laborers themselves was the result of a previous sellout — the sellout that ended Reconstruction. If the great slave-operated estates had been divided up so that each ex-slave family could have had "forty acres and a mule" (this was the bare minimum proposed by the white radicals of the North) and *own* them, the whole situation would have been different and the Bourbon class would not even have been in existence, economically speaking.

"To have given each one of the million Negro free families a

forty-acre freehold," says Dr. DuBois, "would have made a basis of real democracy in the United States that might easily have transformed the modern world." He discusses (in *Black Reconstruction*) the way the landed Bourbons would have been decisively beaten by such a procedure and the consequent alliance of black labor and white labor that would necessarily have taken place twenty years before the Populist revolt.

But of course it was precisely for this reason that Northern capital made its alliance with the Southern Bourbons so quickly after the Civil War, even in fact, while the more radical Northern small businessmen and farmers were still supporting the Reconstruction program and their Congressional representatives still demanding "forty acres and a mule" for the freed slaves.

"As early as 1865 and 1866," DuBois declares, "there was evident in Georgia a transition of leadership from the old landed aristocracy to the new commercial class." And it was inevitable that this class would be bound by a thousand ties to the big capitalists of the North.

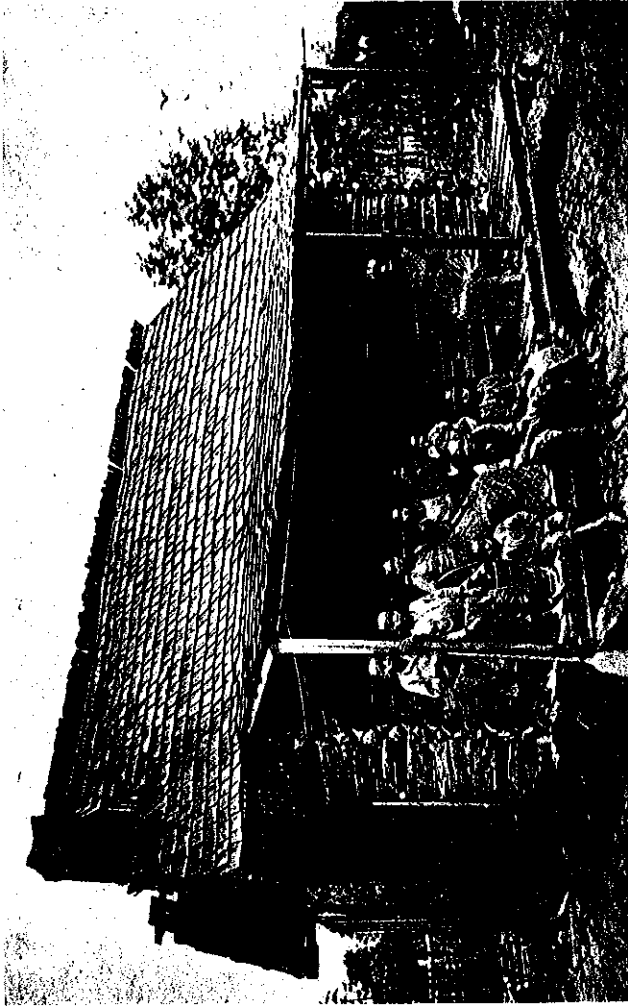
DuBois shows that the new reactionary alliance was consummated well *before* the big sellout of 1877 when Northern troops were removed from the whole South apparently in return for Wall Street's Republican Presidential candidate being virtually given the election by the new Southern section of the ruling class. "When the Democratic Party secured a majority in Congress in 1874," he says, "the majority sat under the dictatorship of big business."

It was this dictatorship, already buttressed by the big Southern landholders who had been given stock in railroads and were collaborating in new business enterprises, that the Southern Populists were fighting so furiously — and so blindly, two decades later.

Where the poorer whites understood Wall Street, they did not fully understand its method of ruling the new South. And where they understood the method and conquered their race prejudice, they could not solve the class contradiction between poor farmer and plantation laborer. Having failed to consummate the first alliance with the black revolution by a division of land after the Civil War (which would of course have been a boon to poor whites as well as blacks), they failed to consummate the second alliance (during the Populist movement) with a support of the demands of black wage labor against the big farmers *along with* a division of the land.

Thus, the once-defeated slave-masters were twice strengthened. And the former Northern enemy of the slave-owner, the former "emancipator" of the slave, now the overlord of the whole South, was still further strengthened as the whole system bore down upon the poor black and white farmers and still more upon the black plantation laborers.

Thus, the long-delayed revolutionary solution of the land question and much else was delayed still further by the failure of the small-owner and small-tenant forces of Populism — desperate though they were — to form the fighting alliance with black labor that would have been so beneficial to nearly all concerned.



*The log cabin vividly portrays the poor living conditions of the black tenant farmer or field laborer in the mid-1890's. Surprising as it may seem, conditions for small white tenant farmers were not much better.*

## 8

### **They were called "communist"**

The bitter cry of the Populists against Wall Street land-grabbers in the West and the Northern exploiters in the South used much of the phraseology of communism, even though they did not really advocate economic equality and did not want to nationalize the land, much less the whole factory system. They expressed the agony of the mostly white farmers and of the mostly white, at that time, terribly oppressed Northern laborers. The Populists' alliance with the black farmers was weakened by their attitude toward black labor.

But they did politically oppose the whole repressive and exploitative apparatus in Washington and Wall Street.

George Wallace and other pro-corporation demagogues have occasionally made little sideswipes at the corporate plunderers in modern times. But they have never mounted a consistent campaign along this line as the Populists did. This is not merely because they are liars while the Populists were honest people. It is because the Populist politicians were part of a genuine mass movement against the monopolies and their government, whereas the Wallaces, Eastlands, Maddoxes, etc. are the most willing political servants of these same corporations, but are compelled to disguise their true role in order to get the votes of the (white) victims of these corporations.

The Populists never called the opponents of the government "anarchists" or "communists" as Wallace now calls the anti-war protesters and the fighters for Black Freedom. But the racist Wallaces of that day, the advocates of repression and low wages,



were always at the throats of the Populists, calling *them* such names. The Populists answered their enemies by saying that the corporations — the Wall Street oppressors — and the President of the United States himself, were the “anarchists.” Sometimes they half-seriously *accepted* the name “communist” for themselves, somewhat in the same way the early United Auto Workers and other CIO militants did when they were accused of communism as they fought for a living wage.

The Populists particularly attacked President Grover Cleveland who was as determined in his repression of the white Pullman strikers as Nixon or Johnson has been in sending troops against the black people in the United States or the Asian people in Vietnam.

C. Vann Woodward says in his biography of Tom Watson:

“When the anarchist, Emma Goldman, was jailed for daring (in the words of Watson — V.C.) ‘to denounce the damnable system which makes a God-imagined men of less value to society than a St. Bernard dog,’ he contrasted her offense with the ‘immeasurable disaster which stalks behind the anarchy of Grover Cleveland (and Senators — V.C.) John Carlisle and John Sherman.’ A cartoon illustrated the article, headed, ‘The Anarchist Who Does the Most Damage,’ which depicted the President, surrounded by Gould, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt and Carnegie, hurling bombs at the crumbling edifice of ‘Jeffersonian Democracy.’ The arrest of the leaders of Coxey’s Army of Protest . . . reminded him that ‘Carnegie stole two hundred thousand dollars from the government, and Cleveland did not prosecute him as the law requires.’”

## POPULISTS VERSUS THE RICH

It is hard to imagine George Wallace styling a Rockefeller as a “bomb-thrower,” calling Nixon names for shooting and burning the Vietnamese, or telling him to arrest the steel barons instead of the strikers or the youth who march on Washington.

The Populists understood very well that nobody ever really *earns* a million dollars. They had too often seen the robberies at first hand by which the corporate scoundrels got rich. They had experienced too much of a fleecing from their own backs to have any naive faith in the honesty or good will of the big bosses. Consequently the name-calling did not bother them in the least, and they took the offensive on this front as on others.

When Mary Elizabeth Lease, the Kansas farm Populist, famous for telling the farmers to “raise less corn and more hell,” was attacked in Georgia along with two other Populists as “this trio of communists and South-haters,” she replied, “You may call me an anarchist, a socialist or a communist, I care not, but I hold to the theory that if one man has not enough to eat three times a day and another man has \$25 million, that last man has something that belongs to the first.”

(Macon County, Ga. *Telegraph* of Aug. 11, 1891.)

Tom Watson said around the same time:

“Let me show you how communist and paternal our platform is. We are the people. We have created the corporations. They are our legal offspring. Shall it be said that the servant is above the master, or the child above the father? . . . Will you Knights of Labor help the farmers of the field in their fight on the common enemy? . . . What of this cry of class legislation? . . . Our statute books are filled with legislation of capital at the expense of labor. . . . If we must have class legislation, as we always have had it and always will have it, what class is more entitled to it than the largest class, the working class?”

Watson denounced the system of law that “tears a tenant from his family and puts him in chains and stripes because he sells cotton for something to eat and leaves his rent unpaid, and which at the same time cannot punish its railroad kings,” and said it was “weak unto rottenness.” This system deserved to die, he said, “and it will die, just as certainly as there are enough brave men left to denounce the system and arouse the people to tear it down.”

## WALLACE’S ANTI-COMMUNISM

Now the alleged “Populist” Wallace might well say that Washington politicians are “weak unto rottenness.” But according to him that is because the leaders are “soft on communism” and soft on poor welfare victims. Wallace advocates “tearing to pieces,” all right, but tearing whom? — The black people! Wallace would not harm one hair of any of the Morgan family’s heads—certainly not for as long as they own the state of Alabama and all the politicians in it!

“The breakdown of law and order,” said Wallace in the 1968 campaign, “is the result of the activities of a few activists, revolutionaries, anarchists and Communists.” And in the 1972

campaign he remarked that his own Democratic Party's mild program on taxes and welfare was too "socialistic."

If the old-time white Populists failed to make the revolutionary alliance with the black Populists and black laborers that they should have made, they nevertheless did stand up against the banks and the real enemies of the black people. And where "Populist" Wallace attacks the Wall Street Establishment for being too "socialistic," the real Populists attacked it for what it really was.

Mrs. Lease, the mother of four children, a tireless speaker and a never-flagging friend of the oppressed, quite a different kind of Populist than George Wallace, expressed the conscious sentiments of literally millions of people in the United States during the Populist period when she said:

"Wall Street runs the country. It is no longer the government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street. The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East. Money rules, and our Vice President is a London banker.

"Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honest men in rags. The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us . . . the politicians say we suffer from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children, so statistics tell us, starve to death every year in the United States and over 100,000 shop girls in New York are forced to sell their virtue for the bread their niggardly wages deny them. . . . Kansas suffers from two great robbers, the Santa Fe Railroad and the loan companies. The common people are robbed to enrich their masters. . . .

"There are thirty men in the United States whose aggregate wealth is over one and one-half billion dollars. There are half a million looking for work. . . . We want money, land and transportation. . . . We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. Land equal to a tract thirty miles wide and ninety miles long has been foreclosed and bought in by loan companies of Kansas in a year. We will stand by our homes and stay by our firesides by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the government pays its debts to us. The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware!"

(Quoted in *Kansas and Kansans* by Elizabeth Barr.)

## OUTSIDE AGITATORS AND WALL STREET

Mrs. Lease was a Westerner, a Kansas farmer, and was slandered as a "South-hater" by the anti-Populist Southern newspapers. Thus the old cry against the "outside agitator" was given a special Southern twist and she was baited as a "Westerner."

But the truth was that the more radical and bitter struggle against Wall Street was not in the West but precisely in the *South*.

"Political campaigns in the North," says an unnamed veteran of Alabama Populism quoted by Woodward, "even at their highest pitch of contention and strife, were as placid as pink teas in comparison with those years of political combat in the South." And the historian adds his own observation: "Taking into comparative account the violence of the passions unloosed by the conflict, the actual bloodshed and physical strife, one is prepared to give assent to that judgment."

One Populist paper published in Augusta, Georgia, was called *The Revolution* and just below this title on the masthead was the quotation, "Not a Revolt, It's a Revolution." (This was a quote from the apocryphal courtier who told Louis XVI what was really going on over at the Bastille in 1789.)

Woodward continues: "Whenever this note of revolution—bloodless or otherwise—was sounded in the movement—and that was not infrequently—it usually came out of the South. Throughout the history of the movement a large element among the Western farmers was afraid of this tendency in their Southern allies. The Northerners were generally more content with gradual reform. A hostile Kansas editor warning of the preponderance of the South exhibited more perspicacity than he knew when he branded the whole alliance movement a 'rebel yell.' "

Yes, but the rebel yell of the eighties and nineties was not a simple repetition of the battle cry of slaveholders defending slavery during the Civil War. It was not against the same radical Republican Party and its more or less revolutionary industrial backers who had led the war against slavery; it was against the now already reactionary big business bankers and corrupt politicians who had betrayed the freed slaves and were now making slaves of the white farmers, too. These white farmers now wanted an alliance with former slaves; and the white rulers of the South feared this development as much as they had feared the ex-slaves themselves during Reconstruction!

In order to emphasize the misunderstanding about the Populist period and its relation to the modern South, let us look once again at the liberals' criticism of George Wallace.

Marshall Frady, a biographer of the Alabama demagogue, weeps about Wallace's "stand in the schoolhouse door," because he is afraid it inspires the whole white South to side with Wallace. The stand says Frady with sad conviction, was Wallace's "finest hour." And then he adds still more seriously "It was even more; in personally striking the pose of hopeless (!) defiance, he sensed he was on the verge of becoming the apotheosis of the will of his people."

### WHO WAS DEFEATED IN THE CIVIL WAR?

Apart from implying that the white poor are in the same class as the well-heeled bigshot business politician, apart from misunderstanding the class character of the Southern whites and their differentiation and potential differentiation into opposing camps, Frady is also wrong on his basic premises. Like most other liberals, he assumes that the poor whites are still trying to get even for the defeat of their slave-owning oppressors in the Civil War.

The defeat, when viewed as a defeat of the *whole* white South, may still rankle, even in the breasts of the poorest whites. But if so, who and what *makes* it rankle? That is the question.

To answer the question, it is necessary to ask who *profits* most from segregation, who *profits* most from the division of the working class along racial lines?

It is not the spontaneous yearning for the times of Scarlet O'Hara and the mint julep-drinking, pistols-at-dawn fraternity of parasitic plantation owners that winds the clocks in the South and fires up the adrenalin of the white poor. It is the calculated propaganda, the cradle-to-grave indoctrination injected into them by a class far more powerful than the plantation owners ever were or ever will be. Behind the sheets of the Ku Klux Klan are not the ghosts of Beauregard and Stonewall Jackson, but the living puppet-masters of Wall Street — the money-barons of the *North*, who set the Klansmen into motion. It is *they* who rule the South — and far more thoroughly than they did in the days of Populism. They run the railroads, the company towns, the buses, the airplanes, the utilities, the big newspapers, and even whole chains of "country" newspapers. It is they who created the black

stereotypes in the movies (for they *own* the movies). It is they who shaped and still shape the minds of the Southern white masses.

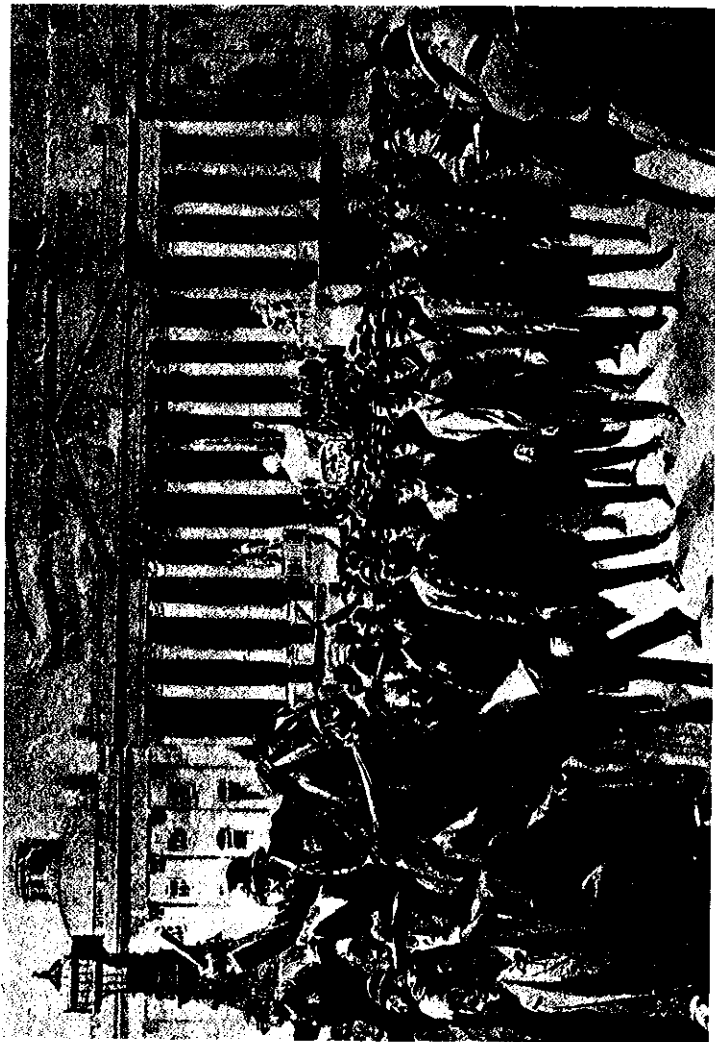
But how did they ever defeat such a promising movement as that of the Populists? How and why did the movement fail? How did it disappear so completely from the American scene and become so forgotten that a racist, liar, and faker like George Wallace and an Establishment liberal like George McGovern can both be called "Populists" with hardly any question or discussion about the matter?

## The death of Populism and the rebirth of the Klan

History books tell us that the People's Party was maneuvered out of existence by the Democrats' luring its supporters back into the fold under the leadership of the oratorical semi-Populist, William Jennings Bryan. This demagogic superstar ran for President on the Democratic ticket in 1896 (as he also did in 1900 and 1908). Many were the Populists who raged and wept over the sellout (i.e. the sellout of the Democrats co-opting the whole Populist Party). But the merger did go through and the People's Party never really revived after that, except to run more or less token candidates.

Bryan, who took only the least important and most fallacious part of the Populist program — the demand for "free silver" — lost to Wall Street's eighteen karat gold candidate, William McKinley. McKinley had the backing of Rockefeller's personal political manager, Mark Hanna, who lined up practically every corporation and trust in the United States and even assessed them each a small percentage of their profits in the highly organized campaign to defeat Bryan.

Big business could have taken over Bryan in the long run and used him in one way or another. (They had Wilson appoint him to the crucial job of Secretary of State just before World War I.) But in 1896 it was clear that the big undigested Populist strength in the Democratic Party might well act as a check on the now rampaging big capitalists, who had ambitious plans to increase the monopoly control of the country and to expand it into the rest



*Climaxing the depression of 1893-1894, Jacob Coxey, a Populist, led an "army" of 20,000 unemployed from the Midwest to Washington. This first march on Washington was very popular and gained much support, not only from Populists but from the masses in the South and Midwest.*

of the world, too.

The very fury of the Wall Street campaign against Bryan increased the credibility of the *Democratic Party* (the party of white supremacy and slavery!) in the eyes of the city masses as an anti-big business party, while large numbers of them voted Republican out of fear of their bosses or as a capitulation to the hysteria against the "radical" Bryan.

Furthermore, although the Democrats were defeated nationally in the election of 1896, they were enormously strengthened in the turbulent South by the capitulation of the Populist Party. And the resurgence of the Democratic Party helped to reestablish all-out white supremacy.

But now it was no longer a case of the Democratic planters buying or forcing the votes of black laborers on the plantations and grudgingly permitting black tenant farmers to vote Populist or Republican. It was a case, rather, of eliminating *all* black votes by poll tax, impossible literacy tests — and unvarnished terror. It was a case of unrestrained lynch law — imposed by the revived Ku Klux Klan, which was reorganized in 1915, exactly a half-century after the Civil War, to exert its torture and violence in behalf of a very different ruling class than the one which had been defeated fifty years earlier.

Indeed, outside of the actual military defeat of the armed black militias at the end of Reconstruction, the physical terror against the black people was never greater, and rarely as great as it was from approximately 1906 until about 1930. Dr. Logan says (in *Betrayal of the Negro*) that the highest publicized figure for lynchings in the eighties and nineties was 211 for *the whole South* in 1884 and that it went down to 96 for 1890. Dr. Logan, a careful and meticulous scholar and professor at Howard University, incorrectly assumes that the terror was mitigated in the early 20th century, because there was a slow material progress for some sections of the black people — in the number of college students, amount of farm acreage owned, etc. But he himself shows other aspects of the matter and he quotes Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. as saying in 1906: "Lynchings are increasing and riots are more numerous . . . the two races in the South are a thousand times further apart than they were fifteen years ago and the breach is widening every day."

The statistics bear out Powell more than Dr. Logan. In the two years 1921 and 1922 (a period his book does not cover) there

were admitted to be 135 black people lynched *in Georgia alone*. Georgia Governor Dorsey said at the time, "In some counties the Negro is being driven out as though he were a wild beast. In others, he is being sold as a slave. In others, no Negro remains."

The Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920's boasted of an income of \$25 million per year. It elected senators, representatives and governors, including at least one Northern governor (in Indiana, 1922). In 1924 it virtually took over the Democratic National Convention, at least sufficiently so as to block the nomination of Alfred E. Smith, who was a Klan-hated Catholic, for President, and to prevent adoption of a plank condemning the KKK. The vote on the KKK was 546 to 542.

This influence of the Klan at first seems to resemble the influence of the Populists, who also frightened the legislators and at times made them pass some legislation they wanted. But what seemed a parallel was actually a reversal. The Populists had been trying to advance the interests of the great masses and trying to destroy the hold of big business on the government. But the Klan was doing the opposite and holding down the masses, including the white masses, for the *benefit* of the big business it occasionally fulminated against.

There were literally millions of members in the Klan during the teens and twenties, many more than just after the Civil War. But with all their numbers and all their power; they never got any legislation passed to benefit the poor whites whom they aroused to lynch madness against the blacks, or even proposed any.

And yet there are liberal historians who will tell you that the Klan represented — especially at that time, when it was so big — some kind of "Populism"!

Again, this is because the liberal mind (which is a product of the big business system in its own way, just like the mind of the Ku Klux Klan), thinks that all this Klan violence and terror, just came out of the "ignorance" of the "people." The liberal mind can never figure out why the "people" do things differently at different times and why different sections of the "people" set the tone for the rest of the people at different times.

According to the liberal mind the German people were natural-born fascists and that was why Hitler took them over from 1933 to 1945. The liberals forget that the same German people followed the *liberal* (Social Democratic) government for fifteen years before that, and fought three revolutions (1918, 1921

and 1923), each of which tried to overthrow the big business power which first used the liberals to govern Germany and later used Hitler.

In a great social turnaround such as that from Southern Populism to the reign of the Ku Klux Klan, one of the big questions is what happens to people, what happens to their former idealism, their willingness to fight, their optimism about the battle. Where did Mrs. Lease's drive to unleash the people against "the bloodhounds of money" disappear to? What happened to the hundreds of editors, the speakers, the writers of letters to the newspapers, the white defenders of black people in the South, including those who rode all night to a town in Georgia to prevent a lynching? One of the leaders, Tom Watson, actually turned into an extreme racist himself and set the pattern for the modern Southern demagogues whose hearts bleed for the poor while they use the black lynch rope to tie the whites to low wages and company-town politics.

The great mass of Southern Populists were no doubt stunned by Watson's renegacy just as they were crushed by Bryan's defeat. The truth is that the social forces of Populism became *exhausted*. The social goals became impossible and *obviously* impossible to the economic class that gave birth to the movement. This class itself was defeated, and indeed effectively destroyed as an independent entity. The end of Populism was the end of the long history of "American"-type independent farmers, craftsmen, etc., having any direct influence in governing themselves, much less governing the whole country.

The fact that the most violent expression of the death-pangs of this class (a class which began in New England), took place in the *South* rather than the North, or even in the West, only *concealed* the demise; it did not contradict it.

The new and terrible rebirth of totalitarianism in the South after the end of Populism was only the first fruit of capitalist monopoly rule over the *whole* country — the "strange fruit" of *imperialism* in a social soil where the seeds of revolution should have germinated long ago, but were choked by the racist terror of Southern goons in the service of Northern capital.

It was *imperialism* that created virtually all the ills of the modern South, and above all imperialism that continued the super-oppression of the black people.

And yet Tom Watson's renegacy and the rebirth of the Klan

are often pointed out by liberal historians as examples of . . . Populism!!! This development was actually the ultimate *betrayal* of Populism, the turning of Populism into its opposite by the tremendous power of the new monopolists of the North pressing down on their colony in the South, integrating themselves more thoroughly with the old Bourbons, bribing a certain larger number of whites at the expense of *all* the blacks, and creating what may have been the first really *fascist* movement of modern times—before Hitler, Mussolini or Franco were heard from.

As for Watson himself, he became a Catholic-baiter and Jew-baiter as well as a virtual lyncher of black people. These new attributes were closely related to the political needs of ruling a dissatisfied Anglo-Saxon colony along with a super-oppressed Afro-American colony for a newly imperialistic Wall Street.

The psychological and personal aspects of Watson's renegacy have interest only to those cynical liberals who want to make out that every social struggle is doomed in advance because it contains the germs of its own destruction in the form of some bad leaders, etc., and that the common people being ignorant and unschooled can easily be misled, swayed by prejudice, hatred, chauvinism and racism. But Watson was only *one* leader. There were hundreds of similar leaders, black and white, now unknown, who went down to an honorable and unsung defeat at the hands of the big business oppressors of labor. And most important — Watson's new demagogy was exactly what big business needed to rule the South. If he hadn't existed, he would have had to be invented.

It was big business of course that took over the country completely in the wake of Bryan's defeat. But even at that, they simply took over *politically* what they already had taken economically. The political victory on the other hand helped them greatly to increase their already tight economic stranglehold. With the Spanish American War in 1898, these capitalists began to take over the world as well. Having done these things it was easy to take over the small businessmen, the country newspapers, etc. and where they could not corrupt the remaining ideological leaders of the middle class, they created new ones. Having in effect *wiped out* the old middle class they now destroyed the last vestiges of its political rule and expression.

Populism was in the final analysis a last painful cry from the small producers against the big producers who were strangling and murdering them. And after the Spanish American War and the advent of Theodore Roosevelt, the bellicose imperialist who appeased the now more diffused, but less aggressive Populist sentiment with words of opposition to big business, the situation was locked up completely.

"Taft's victory," (in 1908) says Lundberg in *America's Sixty Families*, "placed him at the head of a country very different from the one Roosevelt had inherited. In 1900, for example, there were 149 trusts of four billion dollars capitalization (altogether); when the 'trust-busting' Roosevelt breezed out of the White House, there were 10,020 with thirty-one billions of capitalization." (Today the top 500 corporations alone have combined assets of \$456 billion and nearly a quarter of the whole colossal pile is owned by just the top ten.—V.C.)

But at the very same time big business finally crushed the Populist movement, it had also to insert a slight trace of the old Populism — in words — into its own politics. So Theodore Roosevelt took on some of the reform demands of the Populists — phony "trust-busting" was only one of them. And big business liberals have come out for some restrictions and reforms of big business ever since. But this is strictly *self-reform* by the capitalists and strictly for the purpose of *saving* big business from the wrath of the people and the rebellion of the workers.

In fact, Roosevelt started his own pseudo-Populist party in 1912 (the "Bull Moose" Progressive Party) and ran "independently" for President. Actually backed by the Morgans, he ran against Republican Taft (who was an agent of the Rockefellers) and paved the way for Democrat Wilson, another intimate of the Morgans, to win the Presidency.

It was not until the second Roosevelt was elected in 1932 at the depth of the worst crisis the U.S. people — and U.S. big business — ever had, that the Populist, anti-corporation, anti-trust phraseology really rang out in the White House. The purpose of this, as with the New Deal legislation and subsequent concessions to the poor and oppressed, was to *quiet the masses and save the system*, keeping big business in the saddle, but making the necessary adjustments so the working-class horse would be more manageable.

But all this was done from above. At no time did the farmers

or small business (much less the workers!) have the slightest *direct* influence on the actual government after 1900. A handful of the top banks and industrial corporations named every Cabinet member, every Supreme Court Justice, every top general, admiral, etc. (through their now absolute control of the Presidency). And even the millionaires and half-millionaires became a mere *social support* for the billionaires.

Even if the economic class represented by the old Populists has not *completely* disappeared, it has lost all strength both relatively (as against the billionaires) and absolutely, to launch a political party with one-tenth the chance of taking office that the original Populist Party had.

It is true that much of "small" business is very prosperous today and it would seem that it should have some independent voice for itself in Congress, if not in the monolithic, big business-controlled White House. But on closer inspection, it turns out that what appears to be "small business" is really nothing but a branch office of big business and not independent at all.

Take the classical case of grocery stores. Besides the openly named big chains, which are linked to the billionaire banks, there are the more camouflaged chains. These are grocers' "alliances," for instance, wherein the individual stores are mere outlets for huge wholesalers. There are innumerable "franchised" stores, like the chicken roasts, beefburger stands, ice cream parlors, drive-in restaurants, etc. in which the "owner" and risk-taker is in reality a manager for a big financial empire. Even the truck-vendors for soft ice cream are either wage-workers or franchised "independents" who are harassed to death. Laundromats are mere outlets for General Electric or Westinghouse washing machines on a rental basis. And the thousands of gasoline stations are also franchised, and the manager takes all the risk and the oil company takes the profits. They are all controlled by big business. Even those small factories and machine shops which might just be classified as independent are usually in debt to the local bank, which in turn is part of a statewide chain of banks, controlled in turn by the super-banks of Morgan, Rockefeller, Mellon or Bank of America.

So the small and once independent producers who led the Populist movement and formed its real ideological leadership against the monopolies, have disappeared as a real factor in American life. Before 1900, they were revolting against the

monopolies which were strangling them. But they did get strangled. Their grandchildren and great grandchildren are now the *employees* of the same monopolists the Populists fought against.

The radical Western and Southern farmers have all but disappeared. While a tax-shelter-seeking rancher like Robert O. Anderson, president of Atlantic-Richfield Oil, has a million acres in which to play cowboy and professionals like the owners of the King Ranch have three million acres and "farmers" like the conglomerate Tenneco Corporation have a million acres of lush garden-type farms, the great farm population of the United States, once over eighty percent of the people and the backbone of the country, has dwindled to a relative handful.

Today there are less than 2,800,000 farm families — rich and poor — in this whole vast country.

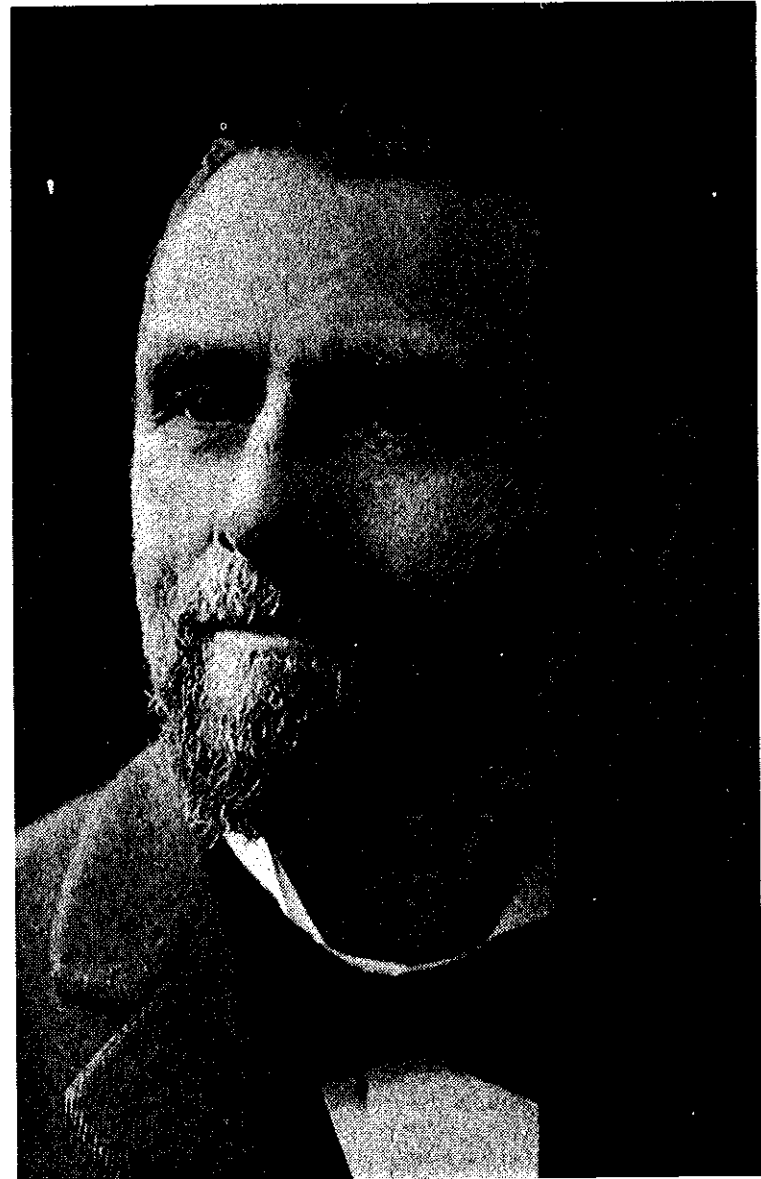
To understand the different role of the farmer today and the role of the propertyless production worker — or at least the *potential* role of the workers — we should look at the above number of farmers in the light of the following equally startling statistics:

*The ten biggest U.S. corporations alone now hire 2,960,823 workers, nearly all of whom are production workers or office employees.*

This one fact shows that Populism as a political movement of small business to restrain big business and break up monopoly is dead. And it also shows that a *new* class has replaced the old small-owning middle class — a new class which has no interest in going back to one-horse or one-mule farms and will get no benefit from reducing the billion-dollar corporations to million-dollar corporations — a new class whose best interests will be served by taking over *all* the corporations in the name of the whole of society.

But does this class face the same limitations that the old Populists did? And is it equally doomed to be a victim of monopoly repression on the one side and racist propaganda on the other?

On the surface, the answer to these questions appears to be "yes." Certainly that is the answer given by the liberals who are so afraid of what they call "Populism" that they prefer to support enlightened billionaires rather than try to organize the oppressed masses to overthrow the whole billionaire system.



*John P. Altgeld, Governor of Illinois and strongly influenced by the Populist movement, pardoned several of the surviving Haymarket martyrs.*



# 10

## **A new class, a new struggle —the victory will come**

Since the once-powerful middle class—the vast majority of the country—was unable to stop the growth of the ruthless monopolies or to slow down the murderous drive to imperialism, how can the working class, a slave class without any property of its own in the instruments of production, how can such a class hope to succeed where the middle class Populists failed?

The working class lacks the leaders, the writers, speakers, and publicists of the old middle class. It lacks culture. And where it does have a modicum of culture, it is the culture of slavery — a capitalist soothing syrup made up of TV, baseball and perhaps “higher things.” Furthermore, the white section of the working class is infected, by and large, with much more conscious racism than was the white middle class of 1890. The obstacles to working class unity and the weakness of working class understanding — in fact, the class’s incomprehension of its own strength — all seem to add up to continued slavery for another century if not longer.

But history is not made by angels, nor by philosophers either. Tyranny was never overthrown by a handful of poets or operatic heroes. Wrong ideas never stopped revolutions, however long they delayed them. And even the people with the wrongest ideas often have given their lives in the fight for the right, while the sensitive souls who despaired of the masses have often turned up on the side of the masters.

The old Populists were far more conscious about Wall Street’s oppression than the workers are today, far more receptive to the *ideas* of revolution (if not to the ideas of socialization of the means of production and the complete expropriation of big business). But the Populists were never in a *material position* to stop the growth of the big corporations, much less to overthrow them. They themselves—the Populists—were small owners, millions and millions of them. Even where they were only tenant farmers instead of owning farmers, they were still in business for themselves. They could not oppose the *principle* of the average every-day exploitation of labor which leads to the super-exploitation of masses of laborers and of whole countries, without denying their own right to be in business. And yet they *did* oppose the super-exploitation by Wall Street because it bore down so hard upon themselves as tiny *competitors* of Wall Street.

Their failure was not due nearly so much to the failure of their *ideas*, as to the failure to maintain their social position — to hold on to the material base of independent small and especially *farming* business, from which these ideas originated.

The new class, the industrial working class, does not *yet* have the ideas that correspond to its class position. But its class position is infinitely superior to that of the old Populists from the point of view of having the base to mount a serious and successful struggle. When the new “people-ism” of the workers is born, it will soon grow powerful enough to really *lead* the people and rule in the name of practically the whole people — something the Populists could not have done, even if they had won.

Today the basic opposition of material interests is not between the big monopoly producers on the one side and the small independent producers on the other. It is between the monopoly corporations and their own employees — between big business and the workers. This basic opposition has been concealed to some degree in recent years by relative prosperity, by the wars abroad. And it has been overshadowed by the super-oppression of black, brown, red and other oppressed peoples at home, making it appear that the struggle is *only* a racial or national one and has no connection with the struggle of labor as a whole.

But the imperialists who so easily ran roughshod over the old Populists are now in trouble. Their crisis is bringing the workers’ struggle as a whole once more into the forefront. Like a tremendous explosive charge, the irresistible drive for black

freedom a drive which necessarily includes all oppressed nationalities, is being brought back into the plants.

Unlike the case with the old middle class Populists, big business cannot eliminate or absorb the workers into its system. It cannot eliminate the working class as it did the classical middle class. It must, on the contrary, keep creating *more and more* of the workers (with built-in unemployment for many of them, to be sure), even while it presses down upon them. And the potential power of these workers is equal and actually superior to that of big business itself.

When the farmers were pushed off the land, they ceased to be farmers and became *workers*, employed or unemployed. But when workers are pushed out of a plant they are still workers. As monopolies are amalgated and merged into super-monopolies, the workers still remain.

And who are they, these workers? They are not only the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the old white Populists: they are the children and sisters and brothers of the black farmers and laborers of the South — those whose grandparents were doubly betrayed when the Populists were betrayed, and had to endure the hell of renewed lynching and neo-slavery for more than a half-century afterward. And then, when the white farmers were driven off the land, the black farmers and black farm laborers were driven off even more ruthlessly. The great bulk of small farmers who came to the factories in the last twenty or twenty-five years were the black ones. The six hundred thousand farm families pushed off the land between 1960 and 1966 alone were largely from the South.

But monopoly capitalism has done its work well. In destroying the old middle class, it has not only created the new factory working class, it has also created the conditions for the welding together of the at-first-sight irreconcilable black and white masses.

If the North has moved to the South — in the form of big capital, railroads, runaway shops, etc. and other businesses all exploiting the black and white working people there — it is also true that *the South has moved to the North*.

The South has moved to the North in the form of black labor pushed off the Southern land and often denied entrance into the Northern-owned Southern factories. So far this tremendous development has apparently brought only the open racism of the

South into the areas of formerly hidden racism in the North. But actually it has brought infinitely more and infinitely better than that.

Black labor and white labor are finally in almost exactly the same place — i.e. in the factory. And their sameness, that is, their equality, is expressed objectively every day and every minute in the product they make and the conditions under which they work. Whereas their conscious minds and their physical eyes see each other as different, their irrepressible class *needs* compel them to see each other as the same.

The cars that come off the end of a GM or Ford assembly line do not differentiate between black and white by the thousandth of a degree of the energy poured into producing them. It takes the same amount of white muscle to do the scientifically apportioned work on the assembly line that it takes of black muscle, and vice versa. A quart of sweat is equal to a quart of sweat. And racist as many brainwashed white workers' minds may be, they know that it takes black and white workers together to keep the production going or to shut the plant down. They know they must unite with black workers in the struggle for the most elementary demands if they really want to win them. This is already an accepted fact: but it is only *subconsciously* accepted.

How much more *conscious* the unity must be if there is to be a struggle for more than a few cents per hour or more than some fringe benefit that can always be taken away or challenged at the very next contract negotiations! How much more conscious the unity must be in order to achieve even half the goals the old Populists set for themselves! And for that matter, how much more conscious it must be in order to resist the inevitable drive of big business to take away, in their expensive war drive to take over the world, even the modest gains that black and white labor have already won.

But this consciousness, apparently still far from the minds of the white workers — and even of the black — must at some point explode into the brains of the workers of both races. The backwardness and racism of a large percentage of white workers is in such direct and deep conflict with the conditions of their existence, in conflict with the desperate need for unity — a need which will increase before it diminishes — that the development of militant solidarity and black-white worker unity is absolutely inevitable. It may surprise the workers themselves as much as it

surprises their bosses: but it will come.

One of the ways that the bosses drive a wedge between black and white workers is to create a large *surplus* population of black workers which is created by a ruthlessly forced migration from the automated, big business cotton fields. Much of this surplus population is unemployed or on welfare, and big business works day and night to convince its *white* slaves that the non-working black slaves are loafers and parasites supported by the taxes of the white. Actually the payment of welfare to unemployed workers operates like a minimum wage. Such a minimum helps the *working* workers to keep their wages higher, whereas a lack of welfare money might easily lead to desperate people—willing to work below the minimum and bringing down everybody else's wages.

Naturally those capitalists who are flirting with the idea of defying the whole working class with an all-out onslaught against their wages and living standards will also flirt with the idea of supporting anti-welfare demagogues like the "Populist" George Wallace. But the capitalists as a whole do not feel strong enough to do this right away, so they give their millions in campaign funds to *ordinary* racists like Nixon — or to demagogic liberals like McGovern.

But the racism engendered by the welfare question — and "busing" and job competition — is enough so that George Wallace could win big primary votes in the very heart of the most overworked and exploited autoworkers in Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, Ypsilanti, etc.

It is because of this racism and because of the whole history of oppression and super-oppression of the black people *as a people*, it is because of the betrayal of Reconstruction, because of the failure of Populism, and because of continuing super-unemployment, and sub-average pay-scales for blacks that the advanced white workers must support the right of black people to self-determination, including the right of separation. Within the plant, this means the right of black workers to have black caucuses. In special cases this also means that advanced whites should support the right of black workers to be advanced *without* any special seniority or "qualifications" — so as to right the wrongs of the past.

This is not in contradiction to the equality now being created by the machines of Detroit and other places, but on the contrary,

a formula for making the equality come alive in the given *social* conditions inherited from the past.

However, the machines *are* doing their work and the ugly racism of the past—and the present—is being countered by the solidarity of the future. This is happening inside precisely the factories where Wall Street capital finances the Ku Klux Klan along with the conveyor belts for Chevrolets, Fords and Chryslers.

In the spring of 1972, some weeks before Wallace got shot, some second shift workers in a Detroit GM plant were arguing heatedly during lunch hour over the coming Presidential primaries. And the supporters and opponents of Wallace divided almost exactly along racial lines, with all but three whites out of the nearly thirty supporting Wallace and *all* black workers opposing him.

Bad as this polarization was, the next day the three anti-Wallace whites found all the workers of both races to be as friendly as ever. But more important, a day or two later, there was a group grievance over an aspect of the speed-up, and *all* the blacks and *all* the whites signed it! Still more important, a couple of weeks later, there was a brief work stoppage which concerned nearly the whole group of black and white who had argued over Wallace, and the participation was *unanimous*.

It is also helpful to remember that in the most strategic plants of the country, the proportion of black and Latin workers is far higher than their proportion in the population as a whole.

Whereas the Afro and Latin proportion of the whole population may come to between 15 and 20 percent, the proportion in some big cities like New York is between 35 and 40 percent. Furthermore due to discrimination and sexism, the huge office force in that city is composed of *white women*. The industrial workers are black and Latin by an *absolute majority*. And except for the almost lily-white construction workers, the manufacturing force is easily 60 to 80 percent black and Latin.

In cities like Newark, New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Gary, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; Wilmington, Delaware; and dozens of smaller cities, the blacks — or blacks and Latins — are in a city-wide *majority*. And now because of the exodus from the land and the unemployment in the North, the black people are filling up the *Southern* cities that were once preponderantly white (e.g., Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana).

Detroit, which has become a more crucial center of U.S. industry than Pittsburgh, is now half-black and several of its plants are predominantly black. Chicago may have a slightly smaller percentage of black people, but like New York City, probably has a majority of industrial workers who are black and certainly a *large* majority who are black or Chicano.

In spite of racism, in spite of the white leadership of the Autoworkers' and Steelworkers' unions, this has a new and profound meaning for U.S. labor.

Imagine the case if on a plantation of a thousand black slaves, there had been added a thousand *white* slaves to endure the same agony, receive the same whippings, produce the same cotton and live in the same run-down cabins. The color line would have disappeared in the fires of revolt, and certainly in the smoke of the Civil War. And even if it did *not* disappear, the possibility for the unity of slaves *as* slaves against the white master, would continue to exist as long as these *conditions* existed.

This is somewhat the situation in modern industry — with this difference: that the wage slaves are potentially far more powerful and potentially far more united by the machine than they ever could have been by the whip alone. And they are no longer the minority, as they were in the days of Populism, but the immense majority, a one-class majority which needs only unity in order to win against the ruling class.

Another aspect of their strength is this: the nearly three million black and white workers now working for just the ten top corporations (see preceding chapter for figures) are not only greater in number than all the remaining farmers in this country — *they are also greater than the number of all the adult slaves in the eleven states of the Old South at the beginning of the Civil War!*

It is as if all those slaves from all that territory had moved together to work under ten roofs, bringing all their passionate opposition to slavery into those confined areas. It is as if the isolated bands of Nat Turner, Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, John Brown, and Madison Washington had had railroads and airplanes and television at their disposal and had been able to march into the front office of all the plantation owners combined.

True, the big monopolies have by no means dug their own graves yet. But they certainly have brought their own grave-diggers into the bosom of their factories and given them the

spades and shovels to do the work. They never did this for the old Populists, you can be sure!

Where Populism could not come to grips with its enemy other than by denunciation and political rhetoric — good as the rhetoric was — the forces of the modern working class are growing in the very guts of Populism's old enemy and now have him by the bowels and the heart as well as by the jugular vein. Where Populism, even in its most revolutionary period, could use no other material force than the ballot (which its monopolist enemies already controlled, although not as much as they do today), the 80 million-strong working class has a material power against its masters that can effectively *overthrow* them, once it makes the inevitable decision to do so.

It is true that there were strikes of the workers even during the Populist period. But these bitter struggles — and the Populists did support them as we have seen — were launched in the swashbuckling era of the robber barons, who could shoot the workers down almost at will. Only a small portion of the workers were organized at all. And the very existence of the huge farming class from which Populism got its main support, was also a social support to the robber baron monopolies, since the competitive small producers had so many reasons to support the *system* in which they might vainly hope to become larger producers themselves.

Now the diametrical opposite prevails and the political support of the workers for their bosses is completely due to indoctrination and deceit, while the *social position* of the workers is pressing inexorably toward a fundamental showdown between big business on the one side and black and white labor on the other.

How is this showdown to be prepared? How is the true "people-ism" of the people to be realized? Naturally, a *program* is necessary, as is a dedicated leadership to carry out that program. The real fight for the people means standing up to the Klan, for instance, and wiping it out. It means beating the racists ideologically and physically. It means organizing Southern labor and conquering Southern industry. It means whites fighting for black equality on the job — organizing white workers to beat the bosses economically and politically by uniting with black workers. In addition to whites supporting the right of blacks to have independent black caucuses, etc., it means blacks sup-

porting the progressive fight against the union bureaucrats and continuing to be the best militants against the companies and shaming the more backward whites into progressive actions wherever possible. It means building the advance guard of the working class inside the industries of the monopolistic, imperialist enemy, and educating the general ranks as well as the vanguard.

The leadership that will carry out this program among the workers, and in fact among the general public, has to be built at the shop level against the foremen and the general foremen as well as against the top owners in Wall Street. It has to be built in the neighborhoods, especially the super-oppressed neighborhoods of the minority peoples and nations. It has to be built among the unemployed as well as the employed.

But above all, it has to be built as a conscious political party different from the old Populist Party, in that every single member is devoted to the goal of social revolution, the overthrow of the monopoly capitalists and their government, and spends every waking moment of his or her life, even while creating profits for the bosses, to helping the workers defeat their old enemy and leading the people to a new and better life of equality and self-government.

This is socialism. In fact, it is communism. And it is also "people-ism" — *real* people-ism. Long live the struggle of our black and white great-grandparent Populists! And long live the revolutionary, multi-national working class of today who will bring the struggle to its progressive and positive outcome in a socialist society!

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