

Populism dbq



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In the late nineteenth century, around 1880-1900, many farmers were experiencing problems and threats to their way of life. The valid complaints of the farmers dealt with the money supply system in America and the large railroad companies. In 1892, the platform for the Populist Party was laid down. In this platform it is stated that “ the national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders ... thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.”

This is discussing the demonetization of silver and the negative effect it has on the common people, such as farmers. Later on in the platform it is also discussed that silver has had widespread acceptance as a coin for a very long time and by demonetizing it to increase the purchasing power of gold, the results are several negative consequences which will eventually lead to “ terrible convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.”

This unhappiness of farmers regarding the money system in the United States is also shown in a political cartoon from *The Farmers Voice*, a Chicago newspaper in the late 1880's or early 1890's. The cartoon entitled “ The Eastern Master and His Western Slaves” depicts farmers as slaves to the wealthy eastern businessmen. It is representing the exploitation of the farmers and shows yet another of their economic struggles; the mortgages they bore on their farms.

Further evidence that supports and validates the farmers' complaints about the current economic situation is found in William McKinley's acceptance speech given in Canton, Ohio on August 26, 1896. In his speech, McKinley said that even though free silver “ would not make farming less laborious

and more profitable.. ” farmers and laborers are the ones who suffer the greatest as a result of the cheap money. “ They are the first to feel its bad effects and the last to recover from them... ”. The belief that silver is the solution of the problems for farmers is opposed in J.

Laurence Laughlin's “ Causes of Agricultural Unrest” article in the November, 1896 issue of Atlantic Monthly. Laughlin describes that the increase in supply without an increase of demand led farmers to believe that silver can solve their issues by his saying, “ the sudden enlargement of the supply without any corresponding increase of demand produced that alarming fall in the price of wheat which has been made the farmer's excuse for thinking that silver is the magic panacea for all his ills...”

He then goes on to describe that farmers have simply pushed the blame on the scarcity of gold as opposed to realizing the actual cause is their own overproduction of wheat. The effects of the different acts and laws regarding money supply is shown in the United States government data from 1961 depicting the population of the country along side the money in circulation from the year 1865 through 1895. This data shows that from 1865 through 1885, the population was increasing, however the amount of money in circulation was decreasing rapidly.

This suggests that the effects of the acts and laws regarding money were resulting in the deflation of of the currency. against the railroad companies is credible because during this time period the government showed enormous favoritism towards large businesses even though the railroads were monopolies. Further discontent with monopolies is expressed in A Call to

Action: An Interpretation of the Great Uprising. Its Source and Causes by James B.

Weaver, a Populist candidate for president in the election of 1892. Weaver described that trusts and monopolies use “ threats, intimidation, bribery, fraud, wreck, and pillage” to “ impoverish the producer, drive him to a single market, reduce the price of every class of labor connected with the trade, throw out of employment large numbers of people ... , and finally ... they increase the price to the consumer... ”.

The farmers and laborers of the late nineteenth century faced two main problems; money supply and large businesses such as railroads. These issues resulted in a variety of complaints from the agriculturists, however the grievances did prove to be valid based on the evidence previously presented. The farmers were struggling to survive off of the small profit they received, and they suffered even further when large monopolies and railroad companies took actions that dwindled their profits further.