

When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924. By Garin Burbank. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976. Pp. xvi, 224. Tables, notes, appendixes, maps, essay on sources, index. \$13.95.)

When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, many of its citizens were already trying to cope with the same types of problems that faced people in other, older, parts of the country. Like their neighbors to the south, a large number of these individuals were white tenant farmers locked into a system which made it nearly impossible to work their way up the agricultural ladder to land ownership. In common with their neighbors to the north, they faced the problems of low prices for the goods they produced and strong controls on their activities exercised by businesses and railroads. Thus, many of the struggling farmers in the young state became interested in the speeches and writings of a small group of men determined to show that socialism was the answer to such problems.

According to Garin Burbank, one of the defining elements of the socialist movement in Oklahoma was that there were two different views of what socialism was or should be. Editors and writers who were at least to some degree attuned to the larger socialist effort tried to make clear the appeal of socialism as an international philosophy that had meaning for both farmers and factory workers all over the world. The Oklahoma farmer, says Burbank, took a more pragmatic view. He was looking for a system that would help him achieve the two things he wanted most: higher prices for his produce and the chance to own the land he worked. Restricted by the divergence of these two views, socialist leaders appealed to the farmer by linking socialist philosophy to aspects of Oklahoma farm life in the early twentieth century. Ministers preached the benefits of socialism from the pulpit and likened its teachings to "the Protestant doctrine of equality in the sight of God" (p. 22). Socialist advocates assured the farmer that the movement would not strive for social equality for the Negro. Political leaders emphasized what could be accomplished by elected officials who represented the needs of the rural populace instead of the desires of city folk who clung fast to the two traditional parties.

The activities of the socialists reached a peak in Oklahoma during the early 1910s, then declined during World War I because farmers hesitated to support a movement that their peers considered disloyal to the government. The war also

brought higher prices for their produce, solving one of their most immediate problems. By the time the war ended, many of the farmers had gone back to their previous political loyalties, and the Ku Klux Klan units organized by hostile townsmen further encouraged them to reconsider their support of the socialist movement.

Burbank relied very heavily on newspapers, both pro- and anti-socialist, for his study of the period. He notes that few documents left by early socialist leaders were available to him. Because of this, the treatment of the subject on the whole is somewhat localized, and one wonders about the relationship between socialists in Oklahoma and those in other parts of the country at the same time. The appendixes contain a good selection of maps and tables showing voting patterns in the state during the period 1910-1924, but very little reference to this material is made in the text. Indeed, one feels that Burbank could have done a good deal more with voting statistics, surely a more objective source than many of the newspapers. Finally, Burbank has done little to make clear how socialism in Oklahoma fit into the larger picture of the farmer's attempt to adjust himself and his goals to rapidly changing economic conditions in the early twentieth century. Surely the socialists were not the only group to suggest farmers' cooperatives, for example, but one learns almost nothing about how possible competition or conflicts of interests with other farmers' organizations affected the success of the socialists.

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Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary. By Carolyn Ashbaugh.
(Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, for Illinois
Labor History Society, 1976. Pp. 288. Illustrations, notes,
index. Clothbound, \$10.00; paperbound, \$3.95.)

Lucy Parsons, widow of the Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons, was a radical activist who championed the cause of the poor, worked toward raising working class consciousness, and fought for the free speech movement. Her public career continued after her husband's death in 1887, and she worked long and hard in print and on the platform for most left wing causes in the United States until her death in 1942.

While Ashbaugh's study is a useful contribution to the history of American radicalism, it is not satisfying biography.