

Book Reviews

The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought. By Norman Pollack. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. Pp. 166. Notes, index. \$3.50.)

Populism was not retrogressive. It did not seek to return to an agrarian past. It faced up to the realities of industrial and social change that came in the nineteenth century, and it sought solutions to the problems resulting from that change. In its criticism of American capitalism and in its program, Populism stands revealed as a truly radical force—that is the fundamental thesis which Professor Pollack presents in this important little book. In support of his argument he introduces evidence drawn from a wide variety of sources found largely in state libraries and in other collections in the Middle West. While he focuses on middle western Populist thought, however, he does not hesitate to make generalizations about the movement as a whole.

Elaborating on his view that "Populism was a progressive social force" (p. 12), Pollack shows middle western Populists concentrating their attention on problems arising from industrialization. They opposed monopoly and the inequality of wealth which they thought resulted from monopoly. Yet they were concerned with the consequences of economic power and not with the personalities or motivations of captains of industry and finance. Their criticism, Pollack contends, did not reflect a conspiracy theory of history but a desire to alter society in a radical direction. Following the lead of Chester M. Destler, he shows how they sought to form a farmer-labor coalition. That such a coalition failed to come about he attributes to labor conservatism rather than to any reluctance on the part of Populists to pursue radical objectives.

How radical was Populism? Pollack notes that Populists were not Marxists, but he is impressed with parallels between the Populist and Marxist analyses of industrial society: both groups viewed industrial capitalism as a force which alienated man from man; both saw tramps and vagabonds as a symbol and a result of this alienation; both treated ideology as stemming from dominant group interests; both attributed the same economic features to capitalism; both believed that capitalism developed by a dialectical process and both thought in terms of a class struggle. Populist radicalism is also evident in the rivalry between the People's party and the Socialist Labor party. The attacks made by Socialist Labor leaders on the Populists were, according to Pollack, sectarian attacks. Even the policy of fusion, which culminated in the nomination of Bryan by the People's party, is here interpreted as a means of saving radicalism and not as a capitulation to the Democrats.

This is a stimulating book, one that provides a corrective to the view that Populism was retrogressive and to the view that Populists were opportunistic and anti-Semitic crackpots. It does, however, have its limitations, as Pollack himself recognizes. Because he does not attempt

to deal with southern Populists, his generalizations must be qualified. More important, running through the book is the suggestion that Populism had an organic existence apart from the individuals who contributed to it. While he admits that some Populists were more "grass-roots" and more "rank-and-file" (whatever this means) than others, the author seems to minimize individual differences in developing the theme of Populist radicalism.

Individual differences were nevertheless important. Bryan was nominated by the People's party in 1896, as Pollack argues, because enough radical Populists believed that fusion served the radical cause. Yet the consensus was not complete, and in part because of disagreements within the party Tom Watson received the vice-presidential nomination in place of Arthur Sewall, Bryan's running mate on the Democratic ticket. If the primary aim of Populists was to save radicalism by defeating McKinley, it is difficult to see how they might have thought that Watson's nomination could help them achieve their objective.

Pollack demonstrates that most middle western Populists regarded the silver issue as a means to a larger end. Yet he does not fully appreciate one of the significant realities of 1896: that the silver forces had developed effective organizations which Populists were unable to control. One finds in this work little recognition of the fact that—the silver issue as an economic matter aside—the strength of silver organizations was one of the problems Populists had to face. Certainly one finds no indication of why the silver movement became important independent of Populist support.

Although Pollack does develop his basic thesis with skill his book raises some significant questions. The author does not pretend otherwise; he describes it as "a tentative first step toward the more comprehensive analysis of industrial America" (p. 1). If this is a hint that he will eventually attempt such an analysis himself, historians can look forward to the appearance of what promises to be a major work.

Coe College

Paul W. Glad

John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union. By Albert D. Kirwan. ([Lexington]: University of Kentucky Press, 1962. Pp. xii, 514. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$8.50.)

John J. Crittenden was a member of the Kentucky assembly, governor of that state, representative in Congress, cabinet official under three presidents, and a "president-maker." Five times he was elected to full terms in the United States Senate (and to the unexpired term of Henry Clay) and was offered appointments to the Supreme Court by John Quincy Adams and Abraham Lincoln. Yet it was ninety-nine years after his death before a scholarly biography of this rather remarkable man appeared.

This is a good biography: the research was extensive and intensive, the writing is clear and unambiguous, and the balanced evaluations