



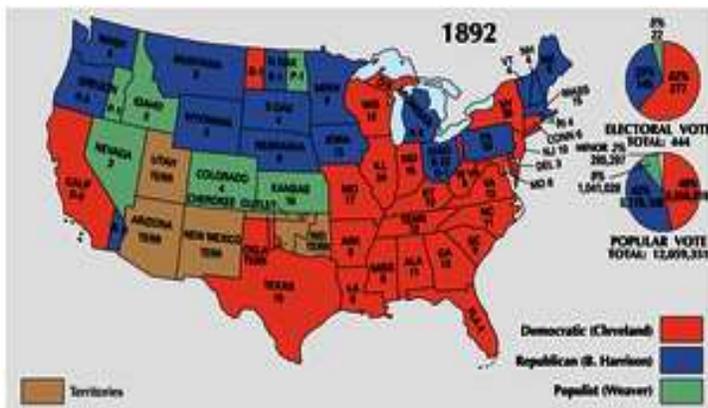
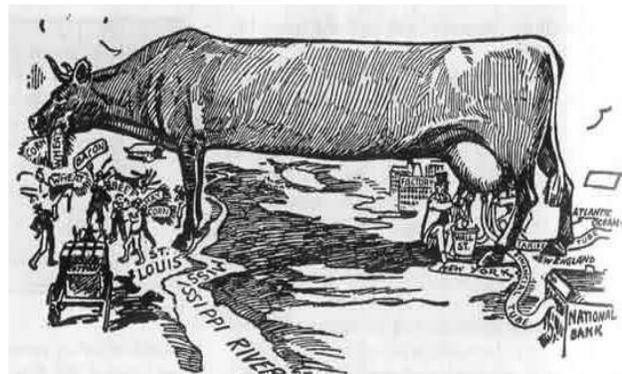
Uncle Sam: "It Won't Work Without a New Wheel"

The Populist Party (AKA - The People's Party of the USA) & The Omaha Platform – A Summary

The Populist Party grew out of the agrarian revolt that rose because of the collapse of agriculture prices following the Panic of 1873. The Farmers' Alliance promoted collective economic action by farmers and achieved widespread popularity in the South and Great Plains. The Farmers' Alliance was ultimately unable to achieve its wider economic goals of collective economic action against brokers, railroads, and merchants, and many in the movement agitated for changes in national policy. By

the late 1880s, the Alliance had developed a political agenda that called for regulation and reform in national politics, most notably an opposition to the gold standard to counter the deflation in agricultural prices.

The drive to create a new political party out of the movement arose from the refusal of both Democrats and Republicans to take up and promote the policies advocated by the Alliance, notably in regard to the Populists' call for unlimited coinage of silver. The Populist Party was formed by members of the "Alliance", in conjunction with the Knights of Labor, in 1889–1890. The movement reached its peak in 1892 when the party held a convention in Omaha, Nebraska and nominated candidates for the national election.



In the 1892 Presidential election, **James B. Weaver** received 1,027,329 votes. Weaver carried four states (Colorado, Kansas, Idaho, and Nevada) and received electoral votes from Oregon and North Dakota as well. The party's platform, commonly known as the **Omaha Platform**, set precedents in what it wanted government to do (see below). The Populists did not achieve most of their aims of the Omaha platform, **but it is significant to note** the later reform

movements & groups will achieve *most* of the Populists aims.

Facts of the Populists:

- Work within the system
- Get a little over 1 million votes out of 11 million cast in 1892 (22 electoral votes)
- By 1894 Populists elect 4 senators, 4 congressman, 21 state executives, 150 state senators, & 315 state representatives (mainly in the West & South).
- After 1893 depression, plan to make serious bid for president in 1896

What the Populists wanted as stated in the Omaha Platform of 1892

- Coinage of silver to gold at a ratio of 16 to 1
 - Never happens – eventually the US will officially drop the gold standard in the 1970s. Now our “word” backs up our money supply
- Federal loans to farmers
 - Happens & is still happening – *subsidies* are given to farmers not to farm or to produce a particular crop. This helps protect prices of agricultural products (Done first during the *New Deal* of the 1930s)
- Graduated income tax
 - Happens – the **16th Amendment** (1913) (The *Progressives* will get this amendment to our constitution passed)
- Postal savings banks – the abolition of national banks
 - Happens [of sorts] – **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)** is established to protect people’s earnings if a bank goes under. (*New Deal* of the 1930s establishes this)
- Civil service reform
 - Happens – **The Pendleton Act of 1883** established the United States Civil Service Commission, which placed most federal government employees on the merit system and marked the end of the so-called "spoils system." The act provided for some government jobs to be filled on the basis of competitive exams. (During the *New Deal* **The Hatch Act** of 1939 will reform the idea even further; the law’s main provision is to prohibit federal employees (civil servants) from engaging in partisan political activity.)
- Public ownership of railroads, telephone, & telegraph systems
 - Never happens – & most likely will *never* happen in the United States. This is called *nationalization*, which is a socialistic & communistic practice – something the United States does not like
- Prohibition of foreign(alien) land ownership
 - Happens & doesn’t happen – There are certain federal & some state restrictions on foreign ownership of American land – mostly restricting agricultural properties. However, there are ways around this. During the *Progressive Era* & the *New Deal* there will be a move to protect American land, but not necessarily from foreign ownership
- Immigration restriction
 - Happens – Will get the **Chinese Exclusion Act** which was the first significant restriction on free immigration in U.S. history. The Act excluded Chinese "skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining" from entering the country for ten years under penalty of imprisonment and deportation. Will get later restriction of immigration in the 1920s & in the 1960s & 70s

- Ban on use of private “armies” by corporations to break strikes (Pinkerton Detectives)
 - Happens, but doesn’t happen – The *New Deal’s* **National Labor Relations Act** appears to bar strikebreakers; However, the U.S. Supreme Court in *NLRB v. Mackay Radio & Telegraph Co.* (1938) effectively ruled that an employer may not discriminate on the basis of union activity in reinstating employees at the end of a strike. The ruling effectively encourages employers to hire strikebreakers, so that the union loses majority support in the workplace when the strike ends.

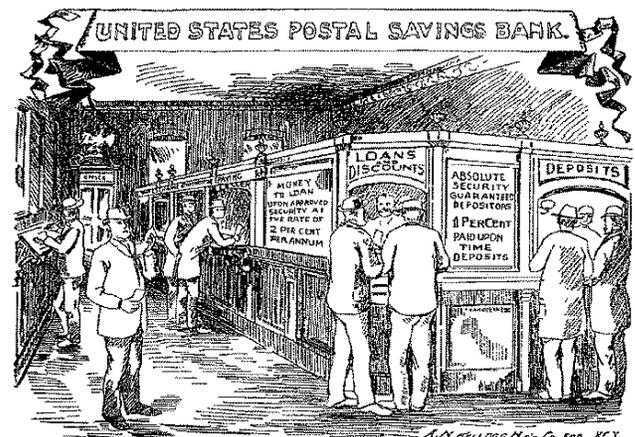
- An 8 hour day
 - Happens – (*Progressives—New Deal*) The **Adamson Act** was a United States law passed in 1916 that established an eight-hour workday, with additional pay for overtime work, for railroad workers. This was the first federal law that regulated the hours of workers in private companies. The United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Act in 1917.
 - The eight-hour day was realized for many working people in the U.S. in 1938, when the **Fair Labor Standards Act** under the *New Deal* made it a legal day's work throughout the nation.

- Single six-year term for president
 - Never happens – Remember! The confederacy had this, but how long did that government last?

- Direct election of senators
 - Happens – the **17th Amendment** (1913) (The *Progressives* will get this Amendment to our constitution passed)

- The right of **initiative & referendum**
 - Happens – the *Progressives* will make this part of their agenda & add one more to this people-empowering act -- **recall**

- Use of the secret or “Australian” ballot
 - Happens – In the United States, it is *also known as* the **Massachusetts ballot** since Massachusetts was the first U.S. state to use the secret ballot. The “Australian ballot” defined as having four parts:
 - an official ballot being printed at public expense,
 - on which the names of the nominated candidates of all parties and all proposals appear,
 - being distributed only at the polling place and
 - being marked in secret.



A FEATURE OF THE PLATFORM.
We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.—St. Louis Demands, Feb. 22, 1892.

In the United States, most states had moved to secret ballots soon after the presidential election of 1884. However, Kentucky was the last state to in 1891, when it quit using an oral ballot. Therefore, the first President of the United States elected completely under the Australian ballot was president Grover Cleveland in 1892.

