

10. RESOLVED, That this convention sympathizes with the Knights of Labor and their righteous contest with the tyrannical combine of clothing manufacturers of Rochester, and declare it to be a duty of all who hate tyranny and oppression to refuse to purchase the goods made by the said manufacturers, or to patronize any merchants who sell such goods.

MARY E. LEASE

The Money Question (1892)

The Populist movement provided unprecedented opportunities for women to participate in its development. Among the most active and impassioned was Mary Elizabeth Lease. Born in Pennsylvania in 1853, she moved to Kansas at the age of twenty. There she married, had four children, practiced law, and became a fiery orator on behalf of Populism. She urged farmers to "raise less corn and more hell!" The following excerpt from one of her speeches reveals her impassioned style.

From Elizabeth N. Barr, "The Populist Uprising," in W. E. Connelly, ed., *History of Kansas, State, and People* (Topeka: Lewis Publishing Co., 1928), 2:1167.

This is a nation of inconsistencies. The Puritans fleeing from oppression [in England] became oppressors [in New England]. We fought England for our liberty and put chains on four million of blacks. We wiped out slavery and by our tariff laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the first.

Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a 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. . . . The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us. We were told two years ago to go to work and raise a big crop, that was all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop that they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn, ten-cent oats, two-cent beef, and no price at all for butter and eggs—that's what came of it.

Then the politicians said we suffered 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 shopgirls in New York are forced to sell their virtue for the bread that niggardly wages deny them.

Tariff is not the paramount question. The main question is the money question. . . . Kansas suffers from two great robbers, the Santa Fe Railroad and the loan companies. The common people are robbed to enrich their masters. . . .

* * *

We want money, land, and transportation. We want the abolition of the national banks, and we want the power to make loans direct from the government. We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. . . .

EVA McDONALD-VALESH

FROM *The Strength and Weakness of the People's Movement (1892)*

The emergence of the People's party generated great interest within social and political reform circles across the country. The following article in the Boston-based Arena magazine focused on the need for the agrarian-based organization to make common cause with the urban working class. Its insights and warnings proved to be quite astute.

From Eva McDonald-Valesh, "The Strength and Weakness of the People's Movement," *Arena* 5 (May 1892):726-31.

The rapid growth and popularity of the political movement known as the People's Party invest it with an importance that leads the general public to scan it closely for those indices which mark all truly great industrial move-

ments. If it has not certain characteristics, it may excite those momentary outbursts of discontent emanating from a single class, only to die of inattention or be buried under a storm of well-directed ridicule.

We will stand by our homes and stay by our fireside by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the government pays its debt to us. The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Lease mean when she wrote, "Wall Street owns the country"?
2. How did Lease interpret the conflict in geographic terms? How might such a regional outlook inhibit the effort to build political coalitions?
3. Characterize Lease's attitude toward the federal government. Explain your response.

EVA McDONALD

A political movement real industrial progress enough in its scope to workers whose conditions general causes. Today the population, on one hand enough to feed the workmen; producing, more than enough to civilized needs of the quite distinct, so far as yet consuming each of ing both necessities classes, there is between interest, stronger than Both classes, while ble superiority of their of their ancestors of a differences are yet to attains the dignity and progress of the vision of the industrial expressed discontent for the future. . . .

The two great boxes are working independent on the same path wealth. In the past, relations to each other seeming to form a barrier appear to have but of interest.

It is of vast significance have the same trying to solve the nation of circumstances community of purpose, workers of the farm by that strongest of trial world is becoming the People's Party will be

The recent conflict a surprisingly large already agree on the

¹ Farmers and labore

A political movement, to be an instrument of real industrial progress, ought to be general enough in its scope to embrace all classes of workers whose conditions are affected by the same general causes. Today there is the agricultural population, on one hand, producing more than enough to feed the world; on the other, the city workmen; producing, in their many occupations, more than enough to clothe and supply all other civilized needs of the race. The two classes are quite distinct, so far as environment is concerned; yet consuming each other's products and supplying both necessities and luxuries to all other classes, there is between them a bond of common interest, stronger than either realizes.

Both classes, while conceding the immeasurable superiority of their present condition over that of their ancestors of any time, still feel that many differences are yet to be adjusted before industry attains the dignity warranted by the achievements and progress of the nineteenth century. Each division of the industrial body has various grades of expressed discontent with the present and hope for the future. . . .

The two great bodies of organized discontent¹ are working independently and by different methods on the same problem—the distribution of wealth. In the past, having observed so little their relations to each other, or the local conditions seeming to form a barrier between them, they now appear to have but faint sympathy or community of interest.

It is of vast significance that the two organizations have the same reason for existing, and are trying to solve the same problem. Some combination of circumstances must soon reveal its community of purpose, and from that moment the workers of the farm and the factory will be bound by that strongest of ties, self-interest. The industrial world is becoming convinced that the People's Party will be this agent.

The recent conference at St. Louis showed that a surprisingly large number of reform elements already agree on the general principles, leaving de-

tails to the future. . . . Still, to those familiar with industrial organization in cities, this conference revealed that the mass of city workers was unrepresented. Did this silence mean antagonism, even indifference, it might prove fatal to the success of the new movement. For if the People's Party, in its ultimate development, only represents a class, no matter how large that class, its work must necessarily partake of a sectional character, and from a lack of breadth and depth, fail to accomplish those great reforms which mark epochs of civilization. . . .

A promising field of work open to view, although it still needs cultivation. Workingmen understand the value of the right of suffrage and its importance in securing industrial reform. They cannot fail to be keenly dissatisfied with the prospect held out by existing parties.² The agricultural classes equally need just the elements that the cities could contribute. Each organization would be the gainer from close contact and interchange of views with the other.

There is still an element wanting to insure harmonious action. It is a peculiarity of the People's movement that it has not yet produced a leader. It has teachers—earnest, thoughtful, and progressive. It has statesmen of good parts. But a leader, in the true sense, is yet wanting. . . . A true leader can unite them in so irresistible a force that by a peaceful revolution of ballots, great abuses will be swept away and replaced by more equitable conditions inuring to the benefit of all society.

Nor should such a coalition of the forces of farm and factory be feared by the most conservative. The *world will advance*, in spite of the remonstrances from those who are perfectly satisfied with the existing order. Reforms, working in peaceful and legitimate channels, are a sure guarantee against the violence which, in preceding eras, has so often accompanied popular movements.

¹ Farmers and laborers.

² I.e., national political parties.