The "People's Century" in Iowa

Coalition-Building among Farm and Labor Organizations, 1945–1950

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IN THE 1940s Henry A. Wallace popularized a vision of a "People's Century" when there would be equality through greater consumption opportunities in an economy of abundance. To realize his vision, he called for an extension of New Deal reforms and public planning that recognized the growth of an increasingly interdependent international economy. With their emphasis on the reforming power of government intervention, the vision and the movement it spawned took their place in a tradition of progressive political movements that have played an important role in the politics of the nation and particularly the Midwest.[1]

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1. One of the more incisive assessments of Wallace is Norman Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941–1948* (New York, 1973). The pertinent sources on the midwestern progressive political tradition include Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford, 1978); Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwest Populist Thought* (Cambridge, 1962); James M. Youngdale, *Populism: A Psychohistorical Perspective* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1975); John D. Hicks and Theodore Saloutos, *Twentieth-Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900–1930* (Lincoln, 1951); Donald T. Critchlow, ed., *Socialism in the Heartland: The Midwestern Experience, 1900–1925* (Notre Dame, 1986); Millard L. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative* (Minneapolis, 1979); and Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln, 1982). William C. Pratt's "Radicals, Farmers, and Historians: Some Recent Scholarship about Agrarian Radicalism in the Upper Midwest," *North Dakota History* 52 (Fall 1985), 12–25, is a review of much of the recent literature. See also Pratt's "Notes for the Past," in *The Omaha Labor Chronicle* (January 1982), 2 and 6, which deals in part with the movement and events described in this essay.

Fred W. Stover, president of the Iowa Farmers Union beginning in 1945, shared Wallace's vision. Between 1945 and 1950 he and a group of Iowa farm and labor leaders sought to create a coalition of farm and labor organizations that would recognize the interdependence of farmers and laborers and would support publicly planned economic growth and world peace. Their efforts had a sophisticated ideological base and were rooted in a deep and longstanding tradition of progressive political movements in the Midwest. They failed because in the Cold War era their ideological positions, which could be easily associated in the popular mind with communism, and the actual willingness of some leaders to cooperate with Communists, split the leadership of the movement and made it impossible to mobilize popular support for their efforts.[2]

IN 1944 Fred Stover was elected vice-president of the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), and nine months later he became president, even though he had not been a member of the union until just before his election. The son of a prosperous German Baptist immigrant who settled on a farm near Sheffield in north central Iowa, Stover followed in his father's footsteps by renting a farm from him and becoming an activist for the Farm Bureau. He launched a career as a farm leader when he was elected president of the Cerro Gordo County Farm Bureau in 1931.[3]

In his early years Stover was concerned with economic reform; he and a farm neighbor promoted Robert LaFollette's candidacy for president on the Progressive ticket in 1924. In ten years of service with the U.S. Department of Agriculture from 1933 to 1943 he also came to share the New Deal's social concerns. He had only limited contact with Henry Wallace, but he did spend time in Washington with many who shared Wallace's views. By the time he returned to Iowa in 1943, he was a devotee

2. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York, 1973), provides a clear account of the postwar split in the Democratic party over support for Communists.

3. Fred W. Stover, interview by Alan K. Lathrop, 12 February 1969, Fred W. Stover Progressive Party Records, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; *Biographical Sketch of Fred Stover* (Hampton, Iowa, 1985), 2–10.

of Wallace's vision of a worldwide extension of New Deal social and economic reforms as a basis for international cooperation.[4]

Prior to his election as president, Stover considered the IFU as reactionary because it had generally opposed the New Deal. It had rejected the reduction philosophy of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), for example, supporting expansion through "cost-of-production" programs instead. The shift in the IFU's orientation reflected a shift in the distribution of its membership. In the 1920s and 1930s most of its members came from southern and northwestern Iowa, but after World War II more members came from the north central and eastern parts of the state, where dairy and livestock farming predominated, and from the rural areas around the state's manufacturing centers.[5] Locals tended to be short-lived, but the strongest and most consistently active county locals were in Cerro Gordo and Scott counties. The fact that Stover farmed in Cerro Gordo County no doubt helped his cause in north central Iowa. More significantly, though, both Cerro Gordo and Scott counties contained important manufacturing cities—Mason City in Cerro Gordo, with Charles City in nearby Floyd County, and Davenport in Scott. The Armour meat-packing plant in Mason City and the Oliver farm implement manufacturing plant in Charles City each employed more than one thousand people, and Davenport was part of America's farm implement and machinery manufacturing center. The organization of CIO locals in each of these cities in the 1930s probably spurred a greater consciousness about labor and its problems in the surrounding rural areas. In Iowa, as elsewhere, many union members were first-generation factory hands with not-too-distant ties to the farm, and many were still part-time farmers. Between 1940 and 1950 the number of rural Iowans employed in factories increased statewide. The proximity of IFU farmers and CIO leaders aided the cooperative efforts

4. Stover, interview; *Biographical Sketch of Fred Stover*, 12–14; Dyson, *Red Harvest*, 192; Markowitz, *Rise and Fall of the People's Century*, 20.

5. F. W. Stover, Presidential Report, Iowa Farmers Union Convention, 24 September 1947, box 6, U.S. Farmers Association Records, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. David E. Hamilton, "From New Era to New Deal: American Farm Policy Between the Wars," in Lawrence E. Gelfand and Robert J. Neymeyer, ed., *Agricultural Distress in the Midwest Past and Present* (Iowa City, 1986), includes a useful discussion of the Farmers Union's policies before James Patton assumed leadership.

that Stover supported, as did the tradition of support for left-wing political activity in some of the counties, especially Scott.[6]

As soon as Stover assumed the presidency of the IFU, he began his appeal to farmers who, like himself, wanted social and economic fairness and world peace. During the next two years many were receptive to these efforts. Stover's first statement to IFU members emphasized his support for a publicly planned economy of abundance and a foreign policy based on "mutual understanding and tolerance." He called for measures like the Murray Full Employment Bill and the Missouri Valley Authority (MVA). Invoking Henry Wallace's phrase, Stover felt that Americans could still make this the "century of the common man."[7]

6. In Cerro Gordo, Floyd, and Scott counties, those who resided on farms and worked as factory operatives rose from 7.9 percent of all employed rural inhabitants in 1940 to 9.2 percent in 1950. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1940*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 2, Florida–Iowa, Table 26–27 (Washington, D.C., 1943); idem, *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 15, Iowa, Tables 48–49 (Washington, D.C., 1952). For a broader analysis of the numerical importance of industrial workers with farming backgrounds, see Richard F. Hamilton, *Class and Politics in the United States* (New York, 1972), 309, 314. On the left-wing political heritage in Scott County, see William H. Cumberland, "The Davenport Socialists of 1920," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Summer 1984), 451–74; David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge, 1987), 281–90; and "The Socialist Candidates" of Iowa campaign brochure, 1944, Microfilm Reel No. 97, Socialist Party of America Records. Hildegard Binder Johnson, "Adjustment to the United States," in A. E. Zucker, ed., *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (New York, 1950), spells out the activities of many of the Forty-eighters who settled in Scott County.

7. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 30 June 1945. As originally proposed in Congress by Senator James E. Murray of Montana, the MVA would have encouraged family farming by providing irrigation to farmers with no more than 160 acres of land. As might be expected, this feature appealed especially to the Farmers Union. But given the general unpopularity of New Deal social welfare and planned economic programs in the country and Congress in the immediate postwar period, the Republican-dominated Congress rejected it every time it was introduced. They preferred the Bureau of Reclamation's and Army Engineers' joint Pick-Sloan Plan for Missouri River development and flood control. See *St. Louis Labor Tribune*, 22 August, 26 September 1945, 21 May 1947, 9 February 1949; *UE News*, 26 May 1945; St. Louis Committee for MVA, Basic Information for Speakers on MVA, 2 February 1945, file D/8-191, United Electrical Worker (UE) Archives, University of Pittsburgh Libraries, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; "An MVA for All," [1945], file PA-111, UE Archives; Rufus Terral, *The Missouri Valley: Land of Drouth, Flood, and Promise* (New Haven, CT, 1947); Raymond Moley, *Valley Authorities*, National Economic

Like Wallace, Stover also used New Testament references to bolster his arguments. From all indications, Stover's evangelical Protestantism was as sincere as Wallace's; it does not appear that he used such themes simply for public consumption.[8]

In his first editorial for the *Iowa Union Farmer,* Stover called for sympathetic understanding on the part of farmers toward labor and labor organizations. Farmers, he said, should resist efforts to pit them against labor unions. In this regard, Stover was following the example of the National Farmers Union (NFU), which under James Patton's leadership had been advocating joint efforts since the war. In an editorial a month later Stover wrote, "the inter-dependence of agriculture and labor can not be over emphasized. Farm income goes up and down as income to labor goes up and down. The best farm program is a program of full employment at high wages for every able bodied worker. . . . A sympathetic understanding by farmers of labor and labor organizations is of prime importance if we are to progress as citizens in a democracy and not be mislead [*sic*] by the tory interests who know they can exploit us if they can keep us divided." Stover's insistence that farmers and workers were interdependent would accompany his frequent references to New Testament theology as a common refrain in the forthcoming years.[9]

At its state convention in the fall of 1945, the IFU confirmed its support for the New Deal's publicly planned economic programs. Jim Patton and AAA Chairman Albert J. Loveland

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Problems 438 (New York, 1950); and 15 February 1945, *Congressional Record,* 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1121–27.

8. A prime example of Stover's use of New Testament themes in defending his left-wing views is his closing speech to the IFU convention in September 1951 (box 6, U.S. Farmers Association Records). "I believe that those who profess Christianity should practice it seven days in a week. I believe that those who give lip service to brotherhood should endeavor to carry out the implications of that brotherhood. . . . I believe that if Christ were walking on earth today, he would be with the oppressed peoples of the earth and not with the imperial powers that rattle the atom bomb. In His time, He gave expression to the peoples' need for a better social order and instead of catering to the war lords of Rome, he exalted the peacemakers. I am sure He would do that now." Herbert Gutman notes the importance of evangelical Protestantism as a radicalizing tenet for workers in "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York, 1977).

9. *Iowa Union Farmer,* 14 July, 11 August 1945.

stressed the need for farmer-labor understanding, and the IFU passed resolutions calling for a sixty-five-cent minimum wage for all laborers, passage of the MVA, and the continuation of the Farm Security Administration. Stover was reelected president, and Lee Harthan, another young liberal farmer from Cerro Gordo County, was elected to the board of directors, signaling a continuation of the trend toward making the state organization's top administrative body much more supportive of the policies of the National Farmers Union.[10]

THE FIRST CONCRETE TEST of the IFU's willingness to act on its rhetoric of farm-labor cooperation came in early 1946 with the nationwide strike wave. The IFU had ample opportunity to help workers in their efforts to gain higher wages. IFU members in Cerro Gordo County raised money for packinghouse strikers while members in Dubuque and Scott counties passed resolutions in support of higher wages for laborers. At a Scott County FU meeting, Arvid M. Sheets, executive board member of East Moline, Illinois, Farm Equipment Workers (FE) Local No. 104 and a candidate for state senator in Illinois captured many farmers' and laborers' sentiments by noting their "common cause, peace and prosperity for all. . . . Workers and farmers must unite politically and economically to represent the common people." Members of the Scott County FU noted that wage increases for laborers would "mean general prosperity for all people."[11]

Support for farm-labor cooperation also came from the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). Their support, like the FE's, stemmed from multiple causes. Both groups, but especially the FE, had numerous Communist leaders. Between the mid–1930s and the late 1940s, the Communist Party of the United States advocated a broader coalition-building approach with liberals. This approach downplayed strict Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideology for a long-term "Americanized" political program that entailed developing a class-conscious mass movement while working with liberals and within democratic institutions. Like the FU, the UPWA and FE could trace the beginning of their farm-labor efforts to the war and, especially

10. Ibid., 10 November 1945.

11. Ibid., 26 January, 23 February, 9 March 1946; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 24 January, 14 February 1946; *FE News*, 27 February 1946.

in the case of the UPWA, to political action committee (PAC) activities for the Democratic party before the 1944 elections. The UPWA was also particularly interested in organizing farmers who worked in packing plants. Union leaders believed employers hired farmers because they felt farmers would have little sympathy for unions and would not be able to participate actively in them even if they supported unions because of the distance from their homes to work. In the March 1945 issue of the *Packinghouse Worker,* Lyle Cooper, UPWA Research Director, wrote on the topic, "Farmers in Packing Plants." His article included reports by local representatives in Cedar Rapids and Ottumwa on how PAC activities in the rural areas around the plants helped increase votes for the Democrats. Efforts by Ottumwa packinghouse workers also helped to elect two farmers to county offices.[12]

The National Farmers Union convention in Topeka, Kansas, in March solidified the interest of the leadership of the Farmers Union, the FE, and the UPWA in farm-labor cooperation. The NFU had invited a number of CIO labor union representatives to its convention. Robert Lodgson of the United Electrical Workers (UE) noted that most of the labor speakers dwelt on labor problems "without sufficient attention to farm problems as such," but FE representative Edward Schoenfeld's speech was an exception. "He spoke some twenty minutes on the present strike issues and placed the proper emphasis where it should have been placed. He got a tremendous reception." Following Schoenfeld's speech, the four hundred delegates to the convention raised more than two thousand dollars for striking United Auto Workers and Farm Equipment Workers. Lodgson wistfully noted that the farmers at the convention showed "much more spirit than [laborers at] a labor union convention. In the middle of a spirited discussion someone will holler for a song and one of

12. *Packinghouse Worker,* 30 March 1945; *Ottumwa Daily Courier,* 8 November 1944. Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT, 1982), and James Weinstein, *Ambitious Legacy: The Left in American Politics* (New York, 1975), provide good accounts of the Communist party's "Americanized" policies during the period. On the influence of the Communist party in the CIO, see Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), and Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984).

their two trained song leaders will take over the microphone and ten minutes or so would be spent singing. Everyone takes part in the singing which is an amazing thing to me."[13]

The enthusiasm generated by the NFU convention helped convince the FE and UPWA to appoint full-time farm relations directors. In May the FE appointed Homer Ayres to fill the first farm relations position created by a CIO union. Later in 1946 the UPWA established a farm relations position and, with the advice of Fred Stover, appointed Lee Simon to fill it. By the end of 1946 both the FE and UPWA had increased their cooperative efforts with the Farmers Union in Iowa and elsewhere in the Midwest.[14]

This excitement about the possibilities for cooperation also carried over into many other joint farm-labor actions in 1946. On May 24, 1946, Fred Stover called a mass meeting of farmers, laborers, and consumers in the Charles City area to discuss the impact of the recent strike at the Oliver farm equipment plant. Oliver had just granted its workers an eighteen-cent wage increase, yet many farmers were disgruntled about Oliver's continued production lags and about the possibility of price increases for tractors. Stover, along with Paul Mathers and Glenn Marrs of FE Local No. 115, explained the reasons for the strike and the attitude of the company toward the public. After company representatives declined to address the meeting, Marrs parodied the "noble and patriotic and American" role of big business. The 350 farmers from three counties and a sizable contingent of Oliver employees repeatedly interrupted Marrs's rendition with laughter. From another speaker farmers learned that

13. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 9 March 1946; *FE News*, 13 March 1946; *Packinghouse Worker*, 22 March 1946; Lodgson to William Sentner, 8 March 1946, Organizers' Files, FF732, UE Archives.

14. Ayres was particularly well suited for the position. The son of Tom Ayres, South Dakota Populist newspaper editor and politician, Homer Ayres became the first Farmers Union president for Perkins County, South Dakota, and was a member of the Communist-led United Farmers League, with whose support he ran for lieutenant-governor of South Dakota in 1934 on the Farmer-Labor party ticket. As the FE's farm relations director, Ayres wrote a widely syndicated column called "The Farmers' Angle." See Homer Ayres, Biographical Sketch, Fred W. Stover Progressive Party Records, box 1; *Iowa Union Farmer*, 11 May 1946; *FE News*, 8 May 1946; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 23 May 1946; and Allan Mathews, "Agrarian Radicals: The United Farmers League of South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 3 (Fall 1973), 408–21. On Simon's appointment, see *Packinghouse Worker*, 18 April 1947.

of the $1,000 paid for a tractor, $143 goes to "monopoly" while $45 goes to labor. In July a picnic of the Dubuque County FU drew five thousand people, including labor unionists, businessmen from Dubuque and Farley, and even local American Legion members. And at the 1946 IFU convention, an entire evening session was devoted to farm-labor relations. It featured Grant Oakes, president of the FE, and Edward Schoenfeld, FE education director. Oakes, a former farmer, emphasized, as many labor leaders did at such gatherings, that dealer markups on tractors as a percentage of total cost were much higher than labor costs. He also assured farmers that nearly all labor strikes were concerned with wages and thus were similar to farmers' efforts to gain a better price for their goods. The FE District 5 convention in Ottumwa reiterated the union's interest in farm-labor unity and featured a four-man delegation from the Farmers Union, including Fred Stover.[15]

Meanwhile, both the UPWA and the Iowa-Nebraska States Industrial Union were trying to build closer ties to the IFU. UPWA District 3, which included the UPWA locals in Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado, held a farm-labor convention in Des Moines in late April. A.T. Stephens, District 3 president, urged all locals to act on the resolution made there by setting up farm-labor committees. The Iowa-Nebraska States Industrial Union convention in late August pledged its support for family farming and the goals of the Farmers Union. The regional dimensions of this interest in left-liberal farm-labor cooperation was further underscored by the sizable interest in the American Labor Education Service's September meeting of the Northwest Farmers and Workers Educational Conference attended by delegates from Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, and Iowa.[16]

Even though these meetings indicated the presence of a number of committed adherents, Stover and the IFU did not make a concerted effort to translate this support into political action at the polls in the 1946 election. Waiting until just before the elections to

15. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 8 June, 13 July, 12 October 1946; *FE News*, 8 May 1946.

16. *Packinghouse Worker*, 19 April, 26 July 1946; *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 29 April 1946; *Iowa Union Farmer*, 14 September 1946; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 12 September 1946.

discuss political action, Stover's editorial in the October 26 edition of the *Iowa Union Farmer* basically advocated voting against Republicans without specifying which races were most crucial. One state contest that would bear particularly ominous results for labor unions the following year was the gubernatorial race. In a pattern that replicated the Republican landslide across the country in 1946 in which Republicans came to dominate Congress for the first time since the beginning of the New Deal, Republican Robert Blue easily defeated the pro-labor Democratic candidate, Frank Miles. In 1947 Blue strongly advocated "right-to-work" legislation which eventually became law. Except for *The Unionist and Public Forum* based in Sioux City, the left-liberal farm and labor newspapers had not devoted much effort to promoting Miles's candidacy. Even so, he did better in rural areas of the counties where the IFU was strong than elsewhere.[17]

Taking their cue from the provisions in the Taft-Hartley Act, state legislators in Iowa met in late April 1947 and formulated a "right-to-work" law. While members of the Iowa House deliberated on April 21 in Des Moines, twenty-five thousand unionists protested the proposed law. Among the protestors was a contingent of IFU members, some of whom had joined FE Local No. 115 members from the Oliver plant in Charles City. Despite their protests the "right-to-work" law passed.[18]

Farm-labor work continued unabated in 1947, however. In April Lee Simon of the UPWA served as a conciliator for the four-day Ottumwa milk strike in which 190 dairy farmers refused to accept the price cut of the four area milk distributors. Later in the same month, at the IFU district conferences in Davenport and Mason City attended by sixty and one hundred people respectively, farmers and laborers discussed the theme, "Building for Peace and Abundance." Homer Ayres addressed the evening session of the conference in Davenport, while Jim Patton did so at Mason City. Patton told the crowd that America was in more danger of being taken over by corporations than by communism.[19]

17. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 26 October 1946; *State of Iowa, Official Register, 1947–1948*, 295–96.

18. *National Union Farmer*, 1 June 1947.

19. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 5 April 1947; *Iowa Union Farmer*, 19 April 1947; *Packinghouse Worker*, 18 April 1947.

In May, as part of the IFU's organizing drive in southeast Iowa, Stover, Simon, and Rev. John Harley Telfer, pastor of the First Congregationalist Church in Ottumwa, elaborated on the IFU district conference theme by speaking to Ottumwa citizens on "Farmer-Labor Teamwork for Peace and Abundance." Telfer, an Ottumwa resident only since July 1945, had already made a name for himself as an outspoken advocate of black civil rights. Educated at the University of Chicago, he had been director of the Milwaukee Federation Forum and Milwaukee Town Hall before moving to Ottumwa. He chaired Ottumwa's Interracial Committee and the People's Flood Prevention Committee, an organization of local farmers and laborers. And beginning in 1947 he became the UPWA District No. 3's radio show host. The show aired three times weekly and was one of the most ambitious labor radio shows in the country.[20]

Soon after the IFU conference, UPWA Local No. 1 in Ottumwa formed one of the first farmer-labor committees, and, later in the fall, Ottumwa was the site of the UPWA-IFU jointly sponsored Farmer-Labor Day picnic. More than three thousand people attended the two-day celebration at Wildwood Park in Ottumwa and heard liberal and left-wing labor and farm leaders urge a "political revolt against [R]epublican legislators and congressmen." The picnic was organized by Ed Fillman, the UPWA No. 1 president, and Dwight Anderson, an Agency area farmer and local IFU leader, along with a planning committee of five Morrell meat-packing employees, five Dain Company farm implement workers, two employees of the Ottumwa Iron Works, and one machine operator at the Hardsocg Pneumatic Tool Works. The UPWA institute at Clear Lake in late July and early August emphasized farm-labor cooperation and included speakers from the IFU as well as Rev. Telfer.[21]

The FE also continued its farm-labor efforts. During the summer Charles Hobbie, FE District 5 president, addressed the Franklin County FU at Hampton, and Albert Loveland spoke to

20. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 17 May 1947; First Congregationalist Church file, Ottumwa Public Library, Ottumwa; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 28 August 1947.

21. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 20 September 1947; *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 28 August, 1 and 2 September 1947; *Ottumwa City Directory*, 1947; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 31 July 1947.

a crowd of one thousand at the Worth County FU picnic at Northwood. In November the Mitchell County FU, after hearing speeches by Loveland, Hobbie, and Stover, adopted antiwar, MVA, and farm-labor cooperation resolutions. At the second annual meeting of the Northwest Farmers and Workers Education Conference held in Minneapolis in late September, Jim Patton presented the keynote address, and the 250 delegates from nine states urged farm-labor cooperation to stem the growing tide of public opinion against farm cooperatives and labor unions.[22]

When the new state CIO council was elected in the fall, its executive board included a number of UPWA and FE leaders, including Charles Hobbie, who advocated continued cooperation with the IFU. The state CIO pledged its resources to fight the "reactionary" atmosphere in Iowa by continuing farm-labor work, establishing statewide radio programs, expanding the publication of CIO papers, and sponsoring more picnics and social events.[23]

THE HARMONY within the state CIO and between the CIO and IFU was rather short-lived, however. The breakdown of the left-liberal farm-labor coalition began in early 1948 after the FE and Fred Stover both endorsed Henry A. Wallace's candidacy for president on the Progressive party ticket. The FE International Executive Board gave their support to Wallace in December 1947; the FE District 5 convention followed their lead and also urged noncompliance with the Communist affidavit component of the Taft-Hartley Act. Stover endorsed Wallace in the January 1948 issue of the *Iowa Union Farmer*. "Henry Wallace is giving the American people a chance to vote for peace," he argued. "He is providing them with an alternative to the present international tangle of mutual distrust, suspicion and recrimination that is rapidly creating the hysteria that will again lead to war." This support for Wallace divided the state CIO, caused most of that body to condemn both the IFU and the FE, and, in the end, demonstrated how little public support there was for left-liberal farm-labor cooperation. The division in the CIO's ranks in Iowa reflected a national trend whereby support for

22. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 19 July, 16 August, and 15 November 1947; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 2 and 23 October 1947.

23. *FE News*, September 1947.

Truman and the Democratic party became the chief loyalty "test."[24]

Prior to the state CIO convention in the summer of 1948, though, Stover and the IFU continued to push cooperative efforts. In April one hundred farmers and many FE members attended an IFU-sponsored rally supporting the striking FE local in Charles City. Throughout the spring Stover explained the goals of the IFU on his radio program on station KWDM in Des Moines. On one of his April programs he discussed how the "UPWA Strike Will Be a Farm Victory," noting that not only were workers in a democratic society entitled to a decent standard of living, but that higher wages and a strong labor movement were the best guarantees of farm price support. And in the pages of the *Iowa Union Farmer,* he stepped up his criticisms of universal military training, the federal government's various infringements on civil liberties, and the antidemocratic nature of the Taft-Hartley Act.[25]

When the FE joined Stover and members of the IFU in denouncing the Truman administration's foreign policy, the majority of the state's CIO council, representing Iowa's forty thousand CIO union members, moved quickly to isolate and denigrate them. Even though members of the Communist party had played a critical role in helping to organize the CIO, most of the state council members, like the majority of the national CIO leadership, were rapidly disassociating themselves from the Communist party and positions that might indicate support for the party. The left wing of the Democratic party was under increasing fire from other Democrats and Republicans who saw communism at home and abroad as a threat to American security. The national CIO, wedded to the Democratic party and its budding Cold War posture, condemned Wallace's candidacy in January. When the state CIO council met in August at Davenport, it amended the state constitution to provide for annual

24. *FE News,* December 1947; *Iowa Union Farmer,* 17 January 1948; Cochran, *Labor and Communism,* 267–312; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport, CT, 1981), 208–72; Max M. Kampelman, *The Communist Party vs. the C.I.O.: A Study in Power Politics* (New York, 1957), 141.

25. *Iowa Union Farmer,* 20 March, 17 April, 15 May 1948; *FE News,* April 1948; "The Farmers Union," typescript, Station KWDM Broadcast, 12 February 1948, box 6, U.S. Farmers Association Records.

elections and to disqualify "persons who subscribe to Nazi, Fascist or Communist principles" from holding office. The state council then promptly removed Charles Hobbie and other leftists from office over the protests of the FE delegates and some of the UPWA delegates. Ben Henry, Iowa CIO Regional Director, explained the council's actions by noting that "if the communists had not attempted to control the policies of the CIO State Council prior to the Davenport convention, there would not have been any organized group against them. . . . What higher objectives could any labor group have than that of keeping our Union on a sound democratic trade union basis—free from control by the Communist Party."[26]

Older members of the IFU supported the CIO leadership. IFU board members G. W. Beck and Dwight L. Anderson, both longtime IFU members from southern Iowa, zealously opposed the "partisan" position of Stover and his supporters. Beck's and Anderson's involvement with the IFU went back to the 1930s, when the organization had been opposed to the New Deal. Anderson had been actively involved in the 1936 Farmer-Labor party in Iowa and had helped organize events like the Farmer-Labor Day picnic in Ottumwa in 1947. Both men, like many in the IFU in the immediate postwar years, rejected the political orientation of the organization's leadership once the changing attitudes in the country concerning communism encouraged it. They and others felt the protest message of the IFU was being subsumed in a foreign ideology. This split reflected the fundamental ambivalence of the American public toward the politics of the left-liberal coalition; that ambivalence would soon turn to outright rejection. Anderson challenged Stover for president of the IFU in September. Although Stover defeated him by more than a two-to-one margin, the open break with the left-liberals within the IFU was already evident.[27]

The FE's break with the state CIO council had important ramifications for the IFU as well. Stover supported Hobbie's and the FE's actions at the state CIO council meeting, and, having already read the handwriting on the wall, he declined an invitation to address the meeting. Then at the IFU convention,

26. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 16 October 1948; *Des Moines Register*, 7 November 1948.

27. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 14 August, 16 October 1948.

Stover refused to invite any labor representatives from unions that had supported the anticommunist actions at the state CIO meeting. In the October 16, 1948, issue of the *Iowa Union Farmer* and in a letter to Stover, Ben Henry criticized Stover for allowing Hobbie to trumpet his "hysterical opinions" about the state CIO in the pages of the *Iowa Union Farmer* and for refusing to allow representatives from the state CIO office to speak at the IFU convention. He reminded Stover that the state CIO had actively aided the IFU since 1946 in its farm-labor cooperative efforts. Henry also denied Stover's charge that the state CIO had aided Anderson's candidacy against Stover. Still, this course of events seriously damaged the IFU's relationship with the CIO.[28]

Stover refused to admit publicly that opposition to him could come from within the IFU, but there is no doubt that his positions were too extreme for most farmers in Iowa and in the nation. In addition, Henry was correct about the previous aid the state CIO had given farm-labor work. Henry had even joined Stover in speaking to farm-labor groups. Nevertheless, the state CIO had never initiated such efforts itself, and after 1948 its promotion of farm-labor cooperation was little more than empty rhetoric. The left-liberal advocates within the IFU, FE, and UPWA District 3 had led farm-labor work, and Stover, in particular, was not about to work with a group that refused to accept his positions. Moreover, Stover could not stomach an organization that, in the words of Charles Hobbie, was now "kissing the tail of the kite held by Mr. Allen Kline [president of the American Farm Bureau Federation]." Henry's claim that the CIO in Iowa should now work with the Farm Bureau since they were "interested in the welfare of American farmers and workers" was rightly seen with great cynicism by many in the IFU and FE, given the Farm Bureau's long record of antilabor positions. The break with the state CIO by the IFU, FE, and elements within the UPWA was due in large part to the unwillingness of Stover and others to sacrifice their moral and philosophical positions; if they could not have farm-labor cooperation based on popular front principles they would not have it. Although one might

28. Ibid., 16 October 1948; Henry to Stover, 30 October 1948, box 1, Fred W. Stover Progressive Party Records; Anderson to Henry, 9 November 1948, and Henry to Anderson, 15 November 1948, box 4, Ben A. Henry Papers, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

commend their principled persistence, their position cost them public support.[29]

The lack of support for the left-liberal coalition in Iowa and the nation was reflected in the outcome of the 1948 presidential election. Much has been made of the evaporation of support for Henry Wallace's candidacy in the 1948 election. Wallace spoke to large audiences all across the United States that year, including a crowd of four thousand in Davenport in April, and expected five million votes in November, but he gained only about one million votes nationally and fared dismally outside of New York and California. In Iowa he received his greatest support in the north central region of the state where the IFU was strongest, particularly in the counties of Franklin, Mitchell, Winnebago, and Hardin. No one bemoaned his failure more than Fred Stover. He had given the keynote speech at the state convention of the Iowa Progressive party in June and shortly after had given Wallace's national nominating speech in Philadelphia, and in the pages of the *Iowa Union Farmer* he had urged farmers and laborers to support Wallace. Apparently, though, only the most ardent left-liberal farmers and laborers voted for Wallace; most probably shied away from him because he supported a cause that no longer seemed justifiable.[30]

AFTER 1948 left-liberal farm-labor educational efforts declined noticeably. This was due in part to conflicts within the IFU, to conflicts between them and the state CIO, and to the virtual absence of support for the popular front in the state as a whole. Another significant factor in the decline was the loosing of the ties between the IFU and the UPWA. Even though the UPWA District 3 leadership continued to pass resolutions sup-

29. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 16 October, 20 November 1948. On the Farm Bureau, see Grant McConnell, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy* (Berkeley, CA, 1959).

30. *FE News*, May 1948; Stover, interview; *State of Iowa, Official Register, 1949–1950*, 298–99. Wallace received 3 percent of the vote in Franklin and Mitchell counties and 2.5 percent in Winnebago and Hardin counties. Although the percentages registered for Wallace appear paltry, comparisons to other areas of the country where there had long been significant leftist activity are revealing. For example, in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Wallace received just less than 2 percent of the vote. See *The Pennsylvania Manual*, 1949–1950, 141.

porting farm-labor work, they no longer organized farm-labor meetings and conferences.

From 1948 to 1950 the UPWA devoted most of its efforts to promoting farm-labor cooperation by distributing leaflets at its booths at county fairs in the Midwest. These efforts were substantial in their own way. In the fall of 1948, for example, the UPWA District No. 3 staffed booths at twelve county fairs in Iowa and at least two 4-H shows, and during the summer of 1949 it increased its allocations for exhibits and literature and even sponsored a group of ballad singers at five major midwestern state fairs. In all, the UPWA visited more than forty fairs in 1949 and expanded its monthly literature mailings to farmers from fourteen thousand to one hundred thousand pieces between 1948 and 1949. Yet, unlike the FE, the UPWA no longer was as active in sponsoring farm-labor meetings and conferences. Consequently, after 1948 the FE was the only labor union willing to work in this way with the IFU.[31]

The FE, however, was having as much trouble as the IFU in weathering the changing political climate. As one of the "red" unions in the CIO and because of its support for Wallace and its disapproval of Truman's foreign policy positions, the FE faced the full wrath of the national CIO in 1949. In March the FE national convention rejected an order to affiliate with the UAW just as it had in 1947. Before the CIO could expel them, the FE decided in October to join forces with another "red" union, the UE. The CIO expelled the UE in late 1949, but the FE felt that its merger with the much larger and more financially secure UE would allow it to ride out the storm in the labor movement.[32]

Beginning in 1946 the UE had expressed support for farm-labor cooperation, and each year since then had passed resolutions backing it. Indeed, since 1944 the UE's support for the MVA, postwar economic planning, and international cooperation among other issues indicated its congenial attitude toward a left-wing political and economic vision, so left-wing advocates of farm-labor work celebrated the merger of the UE and FE in 1949. The UE, with nearly six hundred thousand members

31. *Packinghouse Worker*, 9 September, 7 October 1948, 8 December 1950; *The Unionist and Public Forum*, 14 October 1948, 14 July 1949.

32. *FE News*, March 1949; Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 309–10; Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO*, 202–5, 271–72, 291.

nationwide in 1949 combined with the FE's fifty thousand (of whom fifteen thousand were in the UE's District 8, which included Iowa, Illinois [outside Chicago], Missouri, and southern Indiana), wielded much greater financial resources than the FE ever had, and there was good reason to hope that some of these resources would be directed to farm-labor work. But like the IFU and the FE, the UE faced hostile forces, a declining membership, and dwindling finances after 1949. Part of the membership drain was due to the CIO's creation of a rival electrical union, the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), which siphoned off UE members until 1955, when the UE had fewer than one hundred thousand members remaining in its ranks. Nevertheless, in the midst of this slide, the UE-FE's new District 8 president, Donald W. Harris, devoted considerable personal energy to farm-labor work.[33]

Meanwhile, in June 1949, representatives of the FU in Minnesota, along with Fred Stover and members of the IFU as well as FU members from South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska, met with labor union members from the FE, UE, Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, Food and Tobacco Workers, and some UPWA District 3 representatives at a conference in Davenport. A total of more than one hundred delegates and observers from ten states attended the conference. These individuals formed the Midwest Farm-Labor Alliance, fulfilling a goal Stover had harbored for more than a year, but which had been stalled by the animosity of the state CIO.[34]

One major rallying issue for the alliance was the Brannan Plan. As proposed by the U.S. secretary of agriculture, the Brannan

33. Minutes, District 8 Executive Board Meeting, 4 August 1944, file D/8-8; Minutes, Semi-Annual District 8 Meeting, 24–25 March 1945, file D/8-24; Proceedings of the UE District 8 Annual Convention, 4–5 October 1947, file D/8-30; Minutes, District 8 Executive Board Meeting, 31 July 1948, file D/8-11; Sentner to C. B. Baldwin, 3 November 1945, file D/8-94; Rex Wheelock to Sentner, 14 June 1944, file D/8-62; Sentner to James J. Matles, 11 February 1946, file D/8-96; Minutes, District 8 Council, 1949, file D/8-38, all in UE Archives; *UE News*, 22 September 1945, 2 March 1946; Kampelman, *Communist Party vs. the C.I.O.*, 134–39; Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO*, 301–14; Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923–60* (Urbana, IL, 1983), 167–87.

34. *Des Moines Register*, 12 and 19 June 1949; *Rock Island Argus*, 20 June 1949.

Plan included provisions for 100 percent price supports on both nonperishable and perishable commodities (whereas previous plans had only protected nonperishables at less than 100 percent), a shift in policy focus from farm prices to farm income, and, at least initially, full price supports for only smaller, family farmers. All of these provisions made it a revolutionary farm plan with potential effects as significant as earlier New Deal Department of Agriculture programs. Since it was also meant to provide cheaper food prices, the plan attracted (and was designed to attract) farm, labor, and consumer support for it and the Democratic party. For the same reasons, though, and because of its probable great expense, conservatives in Congress along with many agricultural experts reacted quite negatively to it.[35]

Nevertheless, agitation for the Brannan Plan in 1949 and 1950 extended the life of the farm-labor coalition. The Davenport conference of the Midwest Farm-Labor Alliance convened just one week after a major Democratic rally in Des Moines, which was led by a number of important members of the Truman administration and designed to forge farm-labor cooperation for Democratic objectives in the 1950 election, including the Brannan Plan. The Davenport conference, however, was more comprehensive. The platform adopted there included all the major programs that the IFU, FE, and UPWA had been advocating since 1946. The conference participants envisioned fairly extensive work by the Alliance, such as issuing regular newsletters, providing labor information for farmers and farm information for laborers, mobilizing joint farm-labor support on legislative matters, organizing membership drives for farmers and laborers, and initiating similar future conferences on the state and local levels. Ambitious as these goals were, funding for the Alliance was supposed to come from individual and organizational contributions. Given the deteriorating climate for left-liberal politics, only the IFU and the UE-FE contributed financial support.[36]

35. On the Brannan Plan, see Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics in the Truman Years* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 196–214; McConnell, *Decline of Agrarian Democracy*, 141–43; Gilbert L. Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington, IN, 1981), 96–98; John L. Shover, *First Majority–Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb, IL, 1976), 247–48.

36. "Is the Depression Here?" Midwest Farm-Labor Alliance Program,

The only substantial farm-labor cooperative effort guided by the Alliance took place on Labor Day of that same year. With the help of the Scott County FU, seven FE locals, and one UE local all from the Quad Cities area, the Alliance sponsored a farm-labor picnic at Davenport's Mississippi Valley Fair Grounds. Described in the *FE News* as the largest Labor Day event in Quad Cities history, the festivities included a "top-flight stage show" consisting of entertainer Sarah Vaughan, high-wire aerialists, jugglers, trained animals, and drawings for an automobile and television set. The main events were speeches by Fred Stover and UE international representative Robert Lodgson. They spoke to a crowd of eight thousand. Stover urged farm-labor cooperation and asserted, "we must join with all who cherish our American tradition of civil liberties. We must move in every field against every form of reaction which threatens to overwhelm us." Lodgson condemned UAW raids on FE-affiliated plants and criticized the Fair Deal as thus far only a paper program. Nevertheless, given the increasingly reactionary political environment, he urged continued support for Truman as the lesser of political evils.[37]

After the Labor Day celebration the Alliance was denounced, and it stagnated. That event marked the end of left-wing farm-labor work in Iowa. Although the IFU and UE-FE supported other related causes, such as Albert J. Loveland's Democratic candidacy for Iowa's U.S. Senate seat in 1950, most were no more than symbolic gestures since much of the base of support for such work was gone. New Hampshire Senator Styles Bridges's attack on the National Farmers Union in September 1950 accelerated the decline. As part of his effort to secure passage of the Internal Security Act, Bridges implicated the NFU in a Communist conspiracy in American agriculture. A former leader in the New Hampshire Farm Bureau, he traced the roots of the conspiracy to the late 1930s, when Communists planned

[1949], file PA-219, UE Archives; William D. Smith, "Labor Report to the Founding Conference of the Midwest Farmer-Labor Committee," FBI file on FE, 100-7879-525a3, Chicago Field Office; Financial Statement, September 1952–February 1953, UE-FE District 8, file D/8-146, UE Archives; Julius Emspak to Harris, 23 June 1953, file D/8-103, UE Archives.

37. *FE News*, September 1949; *UE Reporter*, September 1949, file D/8-155, UE Archives; *Rock Island Argus*, 6 September 1949.

to "infiltrate and take over the Farmers Union." James Patton and Fred Stover figured prominently in Bridges's rendition of this conspiracy. Stover and the IFU quickly rebuked the charges and challenged Bridges to repeat them before the IFU convention; Patton, on the other hand, promptly brought the NFU back into the Democratic party fold. The NFU then issued a directive making support for the Korean War mandatory in all its state affiliates.[38]

At the state IFU convention in October 1950, six members of the board of directors, with Patton's encouragement, elected Vice-President Leonard Hoffman of Hardin County as the new IFU president. A number of former left-liberal sympathizers were involved in this secessionist activity. Stover and his allies in the IFU fought off the challenge by changing the state constitution so that board members would no longer be elected at-large but would thereafter consist of county IFU presidents whose counties had five or more township-based locals. In March twenty-one members of the IFU went to the NFU convention in Denver and were able to dissuade the NFU from revoking their charter. And in May the courts upheld the IFU's constitutional changes. All in all, though, the split within the IFU signaled the continuation of the same dissension that had surfaced in 1948 and reflected a further diminution of support for the left in the IFU.[39]

The effects of this internal dissension were most evident in the membership declines of the county locals. Although some locals stood behind the IFU—the Mitchell County and Scott County FUs, for example, both passed resolutions supporting Stover and calling for world disarmament through the United Nations—membership in most of the county locals dropped considerably. The Hardin County FU lost almost three hundred members, and the Dubuque and Worth County organizations

38. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 21 January, 18 March, 15 April, 20 May, 15 July, 16 September 1950; Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 307–9; Matusow, *Farm Policies and Politics*, 220–21; Robert P. Howard, *James R. Howard and the Farm Bureau* (Ames, 1983), 201; 7 September 1950, *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 14276–96; Dyson, *Red Harvest*, 197–98; Stover, interview; C. B. Baldwin to Patton, 22 March 1951, box 1, Fred W. Stover Progressive Party Records; Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 404.

39. *Iowa Union Farmer*, November 1950, March, April, May, October 1951.

likewise suffered large losses. Most of the county organizations in southern Iowa, which had been small to begin with, withered. During this period Stover, recognizing that little could be done to recruit farmers to his positions, concentrated less on membership drives and more on attending and speaking at various peace rallies, including one in Australia. Indeed, the focus of the IFU shifted from farm-labor cooperation to peace issues beginning in 1951.[40]

The UE-FE continued to include resolutions on farm-labor unity at its conventions, invited Stover to speak at its conventions, and distributed copies of Stover's "The Contest Between the People and the Plunderers" to its locals. Recognizing that "many thousands of our members are directly connected with the farms," Don Harris, between 1952 and 1954, urged the national UE-FE leadership, without much success, to increase its funding for farm-labor work. He did succeed in 1953 in prompting the UE-FE to publish a forty-page booklet entitled "Farmer-Labor Teamwork" and a "Farm Fact Sheet" for its locals. He also succeeded in establishing a farm-labor subcommittee on the UE-FE executive board. Yet Stover's experiences with the CIO had made him increasingly disillusioned about farm-labor work; in 1951 he chastised the CIO for shying away from farm-labor work because of the Communist issue.[41]

HISTORIAN ALONZO HAMBY, referring to the farm-labor cooperative efforts attempted by the Democrats in 1949, noted that the "down-to-earth, church-social, 4-H ethos of the Farmers Union would not homogenize with the sophisticated, intellectual progressivism of the city liberals or the wage-and-hour,

40. *Iowa Union Farmer*, 15 April 1950, December 1950, February, May, August, September 1951, May 1952, August 1955.

41. Harris to Albert J. Fitzgerald, 27 June 1952, file D/8-117; Harris to Emspak, 2 November 1951, file D/8-114; Harris to National Officers and General Executive Board, 20 July 1953, file D/8-219; Harris to Emspak, 19 June 1953, file D/8-120; Harris to Matles, 30 December 1953, file D/8-121; Harris to Fitzgerald, 25 November 1953, file D/8-121; Harris to Sterling O. Neal, John Gojack, Ernest DeMaio, and Russ Nixon, 22 December 1953, file D/8-121; "Farm Fact Sheet," UE District 8 Council, [1953], file D/8-164, UE Archives; "Farmer-Labor Teamwork," [1953], Aleck G. Kringlock Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

union-shop reformism of labor."[42] This characterization slights the sophisticated ideological underpinnings of the IFU-led farm-labor alliance. Nevertheless, as Fred Stover and the left-liberal farmers and laborers discovered, their ideology was too extreme for most Iowans (and Americans) at that time. Yet, for a time between 1945 and 1947, farmers and laborers did demonstrate interest in a publicly planned economy of abundance and international cooperation and took part in a number of coalition-building efforts.

Even so, the programs of these people were increasingly shunned as unfeasible, naive, and even immoral since they included cooperation with Communists. Inevitably, the social and economic reform programs of the left-liberal coalition were also victims of this rejection. In this sense at least the efforts of the groups involved suffered from bad timing; they came during the onslaught of the Cold War.

Beginning in 1948, a combination of public hostility, farm and labor union in-fighting, and state propaganda and persecution first deflected and then effectively ended popular farm-labor efforts. The divisions among the leaders of the IFU and state CIO over the Communist issue were particularly damaging. Certainly by 1950 it is all too clear that outside a small core of committed proponents like Stover the ring of the coalition's message was hollow. And, too, it is rather dubious in retrospect whether their desired goal of increased governmental planning of the economy could ensure equality; increased centralization and intervention has had an ambiguous legacy at best. In the end, though, this movement must be seen as another in a long tradition of progressive midwestern political movements based among farmers and laborers. Perhaps its failure owes more to its adherence to a particularly left-leaning ideological version of this political tradition than to farmers' and laborers' lack of interest in progressive economic and social reform.

42. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 309.