

themselves provide us with one of the best social histories as written by contemporaries of that decade that we have. Collectively they prove conclusively Gruening's thesis: there is no single civilization in this vast country. The plural "these," not the singular "this," is the proper adjective to use with "United States."

Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy, by Richard M. Valelly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. xvi, 258 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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In some respects, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party is the great exception of twentieth-century political history. Richard M. Valelly claims in *Radicalism in the States* that it is "the most successful case of a radical, state-level third party that American politics has seen" (xiii). Here, to use his vocabulary, political entrepreneurs built a movement at the height of the World War I antiradical hysteria, met with their first success in the Harding era, and elected congressmen and governors in the 1930s.

Valelly, a political scientist at M.I.T., argues that prior to the New Deal era there were opportunities for capable third-party advocates in the upper Midwest and West. These openings were most likely to occur in one-party states, which were dominated by Republicans who were unwilling to make room for insurgents or respond to their issues. In addition to Minnesota, such efforts also were successful for a time in North Dakota with the Nonpartisan League (NPL) and in Wisconsin with the La Follette Progressive party. Later, however, after the New Deal took hold, there was less political space for left-wing third parties, and they withered on the vine. New Deal innovations strengthened the role of the federal government and, regardless of Roosevelt's intentions, weakened or disrupted the constituencies of the insurgents. Valelly argues that New Deal farm policy helped the Farm Bureau, an opponent of the Farmer-Laborites, while the pro-CIO National Labor Relations Board alienated AFL unionists. In 1936 the Minnesota Federation of Labor endorsed the Farmer-Labor ticket; two years later it only backed Elmer Benson, the incumbent Farmer-Labor governor. Valelly does not neglect the Benson administration's handling of the patronage issue, or the role of the Red Scare and antisemitism in the 1938 defeat, but he is more concerned with establishing that

there was no longer any room for viable third parties in U.S. politics.

I am impressed with his discussion of Farmer-Labor patronage matters and his efforts to treat the Minnesota third-party experience in comparative perspective. Here, his discussion on the Saskatchewan Cooperative Commonwealth Federation is particularly insightful. Like a recent article on Iowa Populism by Jeffrey Ostler ("Why the Populist Party Was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa," *Western Historical Quarterly* 22 [November 1992], 451-74), this account shows the utility of comparative approaches to the study of state politics. Yet I do have some misgivings about Valelly's treatment of North Dakota's NPL. Despite negotiations, the NPL ultimately did not ratify a closed shop arrangement with the Industrial Workers of the World to provide harvest hands in 1917. And then I question his assertion that the NPL no longer was important after the early 1920s. While it became a different organization after William Langer took it over in the depression years, the NPL was a key player in state politics from the early 1930s until it merged with the Democrats in 1956.

Valelly may also close the books too soon on the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party. As far as he is concerned, the story ends in 1938 with the Republican landslide. It is true that the Farmer-Labor party never again elected a candidate for statewide office. Still, the party managed to finish second behind the Republicans in most major state races until it merged with the Democrats in 1944. While historians are not primarily concerned with what ifs, the story of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party might have been substantially different if Governor Floyd Olson had not died of stomach cancer in 1936, or if the United States had not entered World War II, or if the Hubert Humphrey-Arthur Nafatin faction had not emerged in the Democratic party in the war years.

But these are minor points. *Radicalism in the States* is an insightful retelling of the story of Minnesota's Farmer-Labor party. Valelly has written an important book that has relevance beyond Minnesota history, and deserves to be widely read by historians, political scientists, and others interested in midwestern and U.S. politics.

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