

*Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880–1924*, by Lowell J. Soike. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1991. viii, 275 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$18.00 cloth.

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Lowell J. Soike's *Norwegian Americans and the Politics of Dissent* is a carefully argued account of the political behavior of Norwegian Americans in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Soike's primary concern is to show the inadequacy of the "ethnocultural" model of voting behavior and to suggest a more complex and satisfactory explanation. In brief, the ethnocultural model emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as an alternative to the then dominant view that partisan loyalties were based primarily on socioeconomic class divisions. Ethnoculturalists argued instead that partisan loyalties were related to differences in religious outlook. According to this argument, "liturgicals" emphasized personal liberty and opposed efforts to reform society through prohibition, while "pietists" were willing to use the state in order to effect moral reform. Liturgicals tended to be Democratic, while pietists were most often Republican. Within this typology, Norwegian Americans are an interesting group, since some Norwegian denominations can be characterized as liturgical and others as pietistic. For Soike, then, a close analysis of Norwegian-American voting behavior provided an opportunity to examine the validity of this typology.

Through a careful analysis of particular Norwegian-American communities, Soike shows that the ethnocultural typology is of limited use in explaining Norwegian-American political behavior. In Iowa, where "prohibition specifically had been made a dominant issue—perhaps *the* dominant issue—in politics since before the Civil War" (193), Norwegian-American sentiment about prohibition *did* correspond to the liturgical/pietist split. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, however, that was not the case. Overall, Norwegian-Americans' attitudes toward prohibition were quite complex, and they changed over time. What is most important, however, is that attitudes about prohibition were only one of several considerations that affected partisan allegiance. Indeed, Soike painstakingly demonstrates that several other variables had an important impact on voting behavior. Among many rural Norwegian Americans class feeling and a suspicion of town elites encouraged various manifesta-

tions of agrarian radicalism. Moreover, different waves of Norwegian immigrants brought different political outlooks, and upon arriving in the United States had their political views shaped by the circumstances and issues salient at that particular moment. At another level, the fact that the three states had distinct political cultures was crucial, as these "controlled ways in which issues were raised and resolved" (187). None of this means that the ethnocultural interpretation is utterly wrong, but that there are serious shortcomings in any monocausal explanation. Instead, Soike sensibly concludes, "complexity and contradiction" characterize the story (186).

While Soike's balancing of various factors is generally satisfactory, there are times when he might have discriminated more carefully among competing variables. For example, in analyzing why Norwegian Americans in Iowa did not vote Populist whereas those in Minnesota did, Soike contends that there was greater hardship in Minnesota, where farmers remained dependent solely on wheat, than in Iowa, where the "shift toward diversified farming in the 1880s [had] absorbed most Populist militancy that might have developed" (73). That may be the case, but at this point Soike fails to consider his own generational explanation for variances in voting behavior. Might it not have been the case that Norwegian Iowans, having settled during a period of relative prosperity, developed a different set of partisan allegiances from Norwegian Minnesotans, who settled during a later period of significant economic dislocation?

Soike develops his argument for the complexity of Norwegian-American voting behavior primarily through analyzing several different local communities. For some readers this case-study approach may give the book an overall feeling of being somewhat disjointed. Those who persist, however, will be rewarded by a strong conclusion in which Soike clearly summarizes his major findings. And many readers may find much in the individual case studies of great interest even if it is not directly related to Soike's arguments about voting behavior as such. Soike's accounts of local politics in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, during the Populist revolt and of Trempealeau County, Wisconsin, during the Progressive era reveal a great deal about the texture of local ethnic politics and of their relationship to state politics. Soike's chapter on the Norwegian-American response to Iowa Governor William Lloyd Harding's 1918 proclamation banning non-English conversations in public places will be of particular interest to students of Iowa history.

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