

THE ANTI-MONOPOLY PARTY IN IOWA,  
1873-1874

By Mildred Throne\*

In 1873 and 1874 the farmers of Iowa revolted against low prices and high freight costs. Socially and economically, this revolt found expression in the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange as it was more popularly known; politically, in the birth of the short-lived Anti-Monopoly party.

The call for a new party — variously called Reform, People's, or Anti-Monopoly — came from the farmers whose class-consciousness had been aroused by the Granger movement. Times were hard, the prices for farm produce were low, the cost of farm machinery and of transportation remained high. For almost a decade the Iowa farmer had been asking his legislators to regulate the freight rates charged by the railroads. At each session of the legislature he had watched while the lawmakers hesitated and then retreated from taking such a step.<sup>1</sup> At last, in the face of dire warnings from the majority of the press of the state, the farmer took the reins into his own hands and sent out a call for a new political party.

He was inexperienced, and he had but one plank in his platform — regulate the railroads. He believed that all his problems would be solved, if only he could force the railroads to cut their freight rates. The Republicans looked on with horror at this revolt of the voters; the Democrats, long out of power in Iowa, watched with calculating eyes. And the leaders of the Grange tried to keep their organization — if not their members — out of this political experiment.

The constitution of the Order expressly forbade any political action, as an Order. When a group of Grangers at Waterloo in Black Hawk County took it upon themselves to resolve to support the retiring State Master, Dudley W. Adams, for the gubernatorial nomination, Adams quickly rebuked them: “. . . as our order was not organized as a political party, per-

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<sup>1</sup>See Earl S. Beard, “The Background of State Railroad Regulation in Iowa,” *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 51:1-36 (January, 1953). For the Grange, see Mildred Throne, “The Grange in Iowa, 1868-1875,” *ibid.*, 47:289-324 (October, 1949).



mit me to say in all kindness to my brother patrons, that it seems most injudicious to divert it from its original plan, as tending not only to defeat the very object aimed at in the present, but also endangering our usefulness in the future."<sup>2</sup>

Other Grangers, and many newspapers, were not so gentle in criticizing the action of the Waterloo group. Coker F. Clarkson, a member of the Grange, farm editor of the *Des Moines Register*, and father of that paper's powerful Republican editor, James S. Clarkson, wrote that the men at Waterloo were probably not really Grangers, but enemies of the Order seeking to embarrass it.<sup>3</sup> William Duane Wilson, editor of the *Iowa Homestead* and himself an active Granger, joined Clarkson in his denunciation of the action taken at Waterloo. "If those restless spirits in the Order," he wrote, "who are so anxious to control politicians and make nominations for offices cannot effect their object in any other way than in the Order, they should be taught that its folds are not such as can safely embrace men who cannot appreciate its unselfish principles."<sup>4</sup>

The editor of the *Waterloo Courier* was incensed at the action and took it upon himself to clear the Grangers of his county of any connection with the affair. He urged the press of the state not to blame the Patrons of Black Hawk County for the action of a secret meeting of a few men "who concocted it on the sly for purposes of their own." John P. Irish, fiery Democratic editor of the *Iowa City Press*, who was watching the political upsurge of the farmers with care, promptly came to the defense of the instigators: "We do not now recollect of having read a more arrogant, impudent and thoroughly silly production than that string of abuse of Iowa gentlemen who have only used a right which is every American's birth right, viz: the right to name a public policy or men for public office." In Davenport, David N. Richardson, editor of the *Democrat* of that city, agreed with Irish and welcomed the Waterloo nominations as a sign that the farmers' movement would soon lead to the overthrow of the Republican party.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Letter of D. W. Adams, dated Waukon, April 16, 1873, and published in *Waukon Standard*, April 24, 1873. Waterloo meeting reported in *Iowa Homestead*, April 11, 1873, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of C. F. Clarkson, dated April 8, 1873, and published in *Iowa Homestead*, April 18, 1873, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> William Duane Wilson in *ibid.*, April 18, 1873, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> *Waterloo Courier*, quoted in *Waukon Standard*, May 1, 1873; *Iowa City Press*, April 25, 1873; *Davenport Democrat*, April 10, 1873.



The Grange, as an Order, properly repudiated any political activity in its name; but that did not prevent individual Grangers and like-minded farmers from capitalizing on the general unrest by sponsoring independent political meetings. The first such meeting was held in Des Moines on May 6, 1873, with about fifty persons present. John B. Miller, a Republican and a former county judge and auditor, was chosen president of the meeting; J. M. Walker, formerly chairman of the Democratic state central committee, was selected as secretary; and John Youngerman, a Polk County farmer, presented a resolution calling for a county "Anti-Monopoly Convention" of all those opposed "to the encroachments of the rings and monopolies on the rights of the people . . . for consultation as to the propriety of nominating candidates to be supported by the people at the October elections."<sup>6</sup> This first call for a new party was representative in that it had as its ringleaders one man from each party and one farmer. It would not be long, however, before the Democratic element would push the Republicans and the farmers into the background and take over the new movement as its own.

The meeting called for at the Des Moines gathering was set for June 7. Within a few days a call endorsing such a meeting appeared in the Des Moines *Register*, with some 200 to 300 names as sponsors. A check of the names with the county history published several years later indicates that the majority of the signers were farmers with little or no political experience. Certain names stand out, however: William Duane Wilson, one of the leading Grangers of the state; Thomas Mitchell, a prominent Republican of the county; M. L. Devin, a Democrat and treasurer of the State Grange; E. L. Burnham and C. D. Reinking, described by the *Register* as "excited" Liberals and anti-Republicans.<sup>7</sup>

When the full-fledged county convention met on June 7 there were some 150 to 200 delegates present, representing all but one or two of the townships of Polk County. "It was a farmers' convention, in large majority," reported the *Register*. But, although politically the membership was about equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, it was the former who took over the organization of the party, aided by Republicans of the

<sup>6</sup> Des Moines *Register*, May 7, 1873; see *History of Polk County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1880), 901, 1036-7, for sketches of Walker and Youngerman; *ibid.*, 494, refers to Judge Miller's offices.

<sup>7</sup> Des Moines *Register*, May 28, June 8, 1873; *History of Polk County*, 936-7.



Liberal persuasion. Their aim, according to James S. Clarkson of the *Register*, "was the disruption and disorganization of the Republican party." The result, he claimed, was that the Democrats and Liberal Republicans turned the meeting from a farmers' movement to an "anti-Republican and anti-Grant party, simply and purely this, nothing less and nothing else." Its platform, continued Clarkson, would be satisfactory to any Democrat. Although it was merely a county convention, it took upon itself the task of creating a state central committee of five members composed of two "real" Republicans, two "excited" Liberals, and one out-and-out Democrat. The *Register* concluded its comments with the assertion that William Duane Wilson and A. B. Smedley, the latter the new Grand Master of the State Grange, had called the meeting "unwise in its policy and most unfortunate in its conclusions."<sup>8</sup> This last comment, of course, was an effort by the Republican *Register* to warn the Grangers away from the Anti-Monopoly party.

Wilson and Smedley immediately denied the statements that Clarkson had attributed to them. "I approve of the meeting," wrote Wilson, "and every resolution thereof, except that calling for a State convention." Smedley, on the other hand, assured Clarkson that as Master of the Grange, which repudiated all political activity, he "would not presume to criticize their action in any manner whatever."<sup>9</sup> The nonpartisan antimonopoly sentiments of the farmers, voiced through the Granges, had been taken over by a frankly political movement, and the Grange officers were treading lightly. They sympathized with the new party but did not intend to let the Grange be publicly linked with it.

In 1925, when his memory had possibly dimmed a little, William H. Fleming, secretary to a number of Iowa governors and thus on the inside of the political activities of the time, wrote of the Anti-Monopoly party:

. . . the party began in the county of Polk, and its first movement was in opposition to John A. Kasson, and largely made up of persons friendly to the railroad interests. It got up a local ticket composed of Republicans that were not friendly to Kasson, in fact emphatically hostile to him, but it adopted certain resolutions plausibly framed favoring railroad regulation, and took for itself

<sup>8</sup> Des Moines *Register*, June 8, 1873.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, June 10, 1873.



the name of the "Antimonopoly" party. The suggestion of "anti-monopoly" took with the Granger movement.<sup>10</sup>

John A. Kasson, then representing the seventh district (which included Des Moines) in the lower house of Congress, belonged to the faction of the Republican party that James S. Clarkson and his followers were busily trying to destroy. The Clarkson-Kasson feud was rapidly assuming magnificent proportions by 1873, and Clarkson would certainly have welcomed any movement unfriendly to Kasson. But his account of the meeting contains no hint of such an attitude; in fact, he went out of his way to report just the opposite:

Messrs. Reinking, Devin and Burnham have always been, and are now, intimate and devoted friends and ardent supporters of the present Congressman of this District, and in all his fights have been active and prominent in his support. Whether the delivery of the Committee over to such a majority as this means anything or not, the public needs no help in concluding.<sup>11</sup>

It can be deduced, therefore, that Fleming's account of the origin of the Anti-Monopoly party in Polk County is in error. He suggests first, that the movement was started to destroy Republican Kasson, and second, that its lip service to railroad regulation "took" with the Grangers. Rather, it can be seen now that the origin of the movement stemmed from the Grange, where the antimonopoly sentiment of the farmer was finding united expression, and not from any local political feud. The demand for state regulation of railroad rates was older than the Grange; that Order merely speeded the development of organized political activity in its favor. Nothing in the practices of the Patrons of Husbandry led to the Anti-Monopoly party, but the Order did bring the farmers together; the farmers had problems; they discussed those problems and sought solutions for them. And their biggest problem, or so it seemed to them, was the high rates charged by the railroads. Every session of the General Assembly since 1865 had considered bills to regulate freight rates, but such legislation had consistently failed of passage. By 1873 many farmers had lost faith in the old parties, and their political allegiances were weakening. The rapid growth of the Grange had shown them that they could organize for social and economic betterment;

<sup>10</sup> William H. Fleming, "The Autobiography of a Private Secretary," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 15:19-20 (July, 1925).

<sup>11</sup> *Des Moines Register*, June 8, 1873.



why not for political action also — if not within the Grange, then within some party of their own. Thus, the Anti-Monopoly party grew out of the Granger movement rather than being adopted by the Grangers, as Fleming suggested.

The Anti-Monopoly idea spread rapidly through the state — another indication that it had a much wider base than the political future of John A. Kasson. The June 7 meeting in Polk County had sent out a call for a state convention, to be held in Des Moines on August 13, to nominate candidates for the state offices of governor, lieutenant governor, supreme court judge, and superintendent of public instruction. Many counties called conventions to nominate delegates for this convention, and the Republicans began to worry.<sup>12</sup> As early as April, Charles Aldrich had written to his friend, Governor C. C. Carpenter:

I went through the Know Nothing times & I know how clannishly men run wild over such matters. The leaders who get on the top wave ride it until it spends its force. They are making Grangers every day, & they now have nearly 10,000 votes enrolled. I think this matter deserves the fullest investigation by our friends. The corruptions of Congress, the extortion of the R. R. Companies, the low prices of produce, hard times & all, have "fired the farmers heart." I think they are now determined to "bust the heads" of the politicians. They have thrown the tea into the harbor, & wisely or unwisely they are in for a determined struggle.<sup>13</sup>

At first, both parties were uncertain as to what to do about the movement. In spite of the long agitation for railroad regulation, it had not been until the 1870 campaign that either party had recognized the issue in its platform. In that year the Democrats had "asserted" the right of the people "by legislative enactment, to tax, regulate, and control all moneyed corporations upon which extraordinary rights are conferred by charters." The Republicans had countered with a statement that they favored "such legislation as will protect the people from the oppression of monopolies controlled by and in the interest of corporations." These meaningless phrases brought no action by a Republican-dominated legislature. The 1871 Demo-

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4, 5, 19, 1873; *Newton Free Press*, May 28, June 4, 18, 25, July 2, 1873; *Belle Plaine Union*, June 10, July 3, 1873; *Ottumwa Democrat*, Aug. 14, 28, 1873; *Webster City Hamilton Freeman*, July 2, 1873.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Aldrich to C. C. Carpenter, April 1, 1873, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter Papers* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).



cratic platform repeated the "right of the people" to regulate corporations and in addition favored taxing the railroads equally with other property. The Republicans joined with the Democrats in approving a "uniform system of taxation," and they strengthened their plank on legislative regulation of corporations, even going so far as to name railroads as organs of "monopoly and extortion." In the 1872 presidential campaign, both parties — the regular Republicans and their combined Liberal Republican-Democratic opponents — ignored the issue.<sup>14</sup> Now, with 1873, and the transfer of the farmers' protest from mere oratory to a political movement, both parties found it necessary to take a definite stand.

Most Republican papers alternately scolded and courted the Grangers. "Father" Clarkson, in a two-column article in the *Des Moines Register*, tried valiantly to equate the principles of the Grange and its war on railroads with the policies of Republicanism. Should the Grangers "plunge into separate political action," he warned, they will alienate both parties. Better that they stay under the "proud banner of the Republican party . . . which has saved the country from rebellion and the public treasury from pillage." Stay within your old party — preferably the Republican — and "vigilantly work therein" to control nominations. Furthermore, "Father" continued on another day, if you have any complaints about the men who represent you in the legislature, it is your own fault. You, the farmer, hold the balance of power at the ballot box; if you fail to use it you have no one to blame but yourself. "There is a vast amount of ungenerous croaking by farmers, about public officers, when the farmers themselves are responsible for such men being in office."<sup>15</sup>

This was, of course, nonsense, and Father Clarkson knew it. By the time the farmer reached the ballot box his candidate had been chosen for him by a carefully manipulated convention. In the days before primary elections, a candidate had only to secure the backing of a few of the leaders of his party in each locality to gain nomination in a convention. The farmers, unless they did combine to control the nominating conventions, had no voice, as a class, in politics.<sup>16</sup> The instigators of the Anti-Monopoly

<sup>14</sup> The party platforms appear in Herbert S. Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics . . . 1838 to 1884* (Iowa City, 1884), 83-9.

<sup>15</sup> Coker F. Clarkson in *Des Moines Register*, April 25, May 16, 1873.

<sup>16</sup> For the technique of controlling political conventions, see Leland L. Sage, "William B. Allison and Iowa Senatorial Politics, 1865-1870," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*,



movement were on the right track; if neither of the old parties would come forward with a candidate pledged to support the farmers' demands, then they themselves must provide such candidates. And the place to do that was not at the ballot box but in the county, district, and state nominating conventions. But neither party wanted to see this happen. From the politicians came pious warnings to the farmers to stay out of the dirty business of politics.

A Jasper County editor warned the farmers "against a move that must end in defeat and humiliation," and cautioned the Republican voters "against being lured to a feast that must in course of preparation become offensively tinctured with the leaven of Democracy." In the Belle Plaine *Union* a correspondent who signed himself "Incognito" warned against reformers, who are usually only "hungry office-seekers," recalled the fate of the Liberal movement of 1872, and concluded, after a great many words, with "silent contempt" for such activities. The "substantial reforms" which the people wanted could be obtained better under the "great progressive Republican party," wrote the editor of a Webster City paper.<sup>17</sup>

And so it went, throughout the Republican press of the state. Little heed was paid the question of railroad regulation — the backbone of the Anti-Monopoly program. Rather, the Republican attack on the new movement was an indirect assault on the political opposition, whether it was Democratic or the Liberal Republican remnants left over from 1872. Governor Carpenter, during the campaign, asked his audiences: "What better Anti-Monopoly party do you need than the Republican party?" The reform movement was one of "shameless dishonesty" dominated by Democrats, he assured them.<sup>18</sup> In the Republican book, that was all the argument needed. No effort was made to oppose the Anti-Monopoly demand for railroad regulation. In fact, the Republicans had included the usual plank in their platform, supporting such a policy. Therefore, their tactics were to damn the movement as Democratic-controlled.

It is quite obvious, from a study of the newspapers of 1873 and 1874, that the Republicans had a valid argument. By the time the Anti-Monopo-

52:97-128 (April, 1954); Mildred Throne, "Electing an Iowa Governor, 1871: Cyrus Clay Carpenter," *ibid.*, 48:335-70 (October, 1950).

<sup>17</sup> Newton *Free Press*, June 18, 1873; Belle Plaine *Union*, July 17, 1873; Webster City *Hamilton Freeman*, July 2, 1873.

<sup>18</sup> Des Moines *Register*, Sept. 18, 1873.



lists gathered in state convention in August, 1873, leading Democrats were entering the party in large numbers, not as followers but as managers. Having failed to win an election in Iowa since 1853, they were searching frantically for a winning platform. Tarréd with the brush of "Copperheadism," the party had found the going heavy at election time. In spite of that, however, about one-third of Iowa's voters had remained loyal to the Democrats: the party had polled a peak of 43 per cent of the vote in 1865; the Democratic-Liberal Republican combination had won 36 per cent of the votes in 1872. The agrarian unrest of 1873 gave the Democrats a golden opportunity for victory, but they still approached the issue with caution. In spite of the fact that they prided themselves on being the party of Jefferson, postwar Democrats in the North had fallen under the dominance of the Bourbon element whose interests were far from agrarian.<sup>19</sup> Even in Iowa, a predominantly agricultural state, this was true.

Bourbon Democrats, no less than Republicans, had profited by the new industrial revolution of the postwar years. A laissez faire economy, in which the government kept hands off the developing industries of the East and North, suited them just as much as it did the Republicans. From the Middle West there could have come, under the fostering hand of the Democrats, a united protest against the imbalance of the American economy. As the prosperity of the war years receded, and the hard times of the seventies dawned, the farmers were seeking a way out of their economic doldrums. But instead of capitalizing on this discontent, the Bourbon Democrats made every effort to still the voice of agrarian discontent within their party. "After thirty years, though they had won but few elections, they could boast success in their main purpose — that of keeping farmers and wage earners from effective control of the Democratic party," is the judgment of Horace Merrill in his recent study of Middle Western Democracy.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in Iowa, when it looked as though the farmers might develop a political machine of their own, the Democrats moved in, gave lip service to the antimonopoly planks in the platform, and within two elections had destroyed the movement. The farmers, as Clarkson had warned, lost control of the machinery of the party almost at once. They had no strong voice to speak for them, no firm political hand to manipulate the party in

<sup>19</sup> Horace Samuel Merrill, *Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West, 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge, La., 1953).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.



their interest. Into the void stepped John P. Irish, Democratic editor of the *Iowa City Press* and chairman of the Democratic state central committee.

Irish was one of the prominent Democrats of the state and the favorite whipping boy of the Republicans, who never let slip a chance to ridicule him. A native of Iowa City, Irish had become editor of the *Iowa City Press* at the age of twenty-one, and through his paper he had grown powerful in the Democratic party. He had served several terms in the state legislature, but had failed in a bid for Congress in 1868. The editorial warfare in Iowa City between Irish's *Press* and Nathan H. Brainerd's *Republican* was a classic in political vituperation. Although the "Prospectus" of the *Iowa City Press* was a standard Jeffersonian document, Irish's loyalties were not always those of the father of his party. True, he preached the "good old Jefferson maxim, 'The Greatest Good to the Greatest Number'"; he cried "Down with the pretension that railroads are above the people's control" and "Let us return to the 'Farmer Republic'";<sup>21</sup> but in practice his control of the Anti-Monopoly movement destroyed its agrarian principles. By 1874 the Anti-Monopoly platform came out for states' rights, hard money, and free trade, strange doctrines for Middle Western farmers.

For some months before the August convention of the Anti-Monopolists, Irish had been sidling up to the Grangers. When the State Grange held its annual meeting in Des Moines in January of 1873 he had sent glowing reports to his paper at Iowa City of the "sturdy, clear-headed and full blooded farmers" who attended the meeting. "They remind me of a Democratic State Convention," he wrote, "they are the same elements."<sup>22</sup> At the same time an editorial from the pen of Irish under the caption "What Remedy?" must have pleased the farmers:

Subordinate the monied corporations, is the remedy for the evil times. Let banks, rail roads and manufacturers stand their chances, as the people have to stand theirs. Don't hedge around and fence in with law and protection the monied men and leave the masses bare and shorn. . . . So long as the people suffer themselves to be kept talking, thinking and voting about negro politics, so long will wealth accumulate and men decay. Say what you please about it, the elder Democracy was the party of the people. Its issues were

<sup>21</sup> From "Prospectus" which appeared in issues of the *Iowa City Press*, during 1873. For sketch of Irish, see Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa . . .* (4 vols., New York, 1903), 4:142-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Iowa City Press*, Jan. 29, 1873.



made up of those matters that were of fireside interest to every laborer. Its talk was of tariffs, its hand struck monopoly full in the face, its currency was specie and its corruptions were few. The policy of the Republican party is perfectly plain to every thoughtful man. It puts on the thumb-screws for the corporations. Its legislation is in their interest. Its judicial decisions are for their benefit. All this for the purpose of burdening the people to an extent that will force them to consent to the absorption by the Federal government of the rail roads and telegraph lines, to be run by government officers as a part of their political machinery. It is the policy of the papers of that party to keep prating about the war, treason, loyalty and other unmeaning things of no application to our present condition. . . . So it goes; with the fire that warms, the food that feeds and the cloth that clothes the people every year costing more and more, while the tax cuts like a cancer. While fiscal officers are stealing themselves rich, while the corporations are mangling the fortunes and filching the livelihood of the people, we are respectfully requested in default of anything better to eat, to go on mumbling "loyalty," "victory," "battles," and "war." Excuse us. The men who fought us openly in the field were better and braver men than the crew that is picking our pockets stealthily and in the dark.<sup>23</sup>

This was Irish at his best, and it sounded like good Anti-Monopoly doctrine. When he appeared at the state convention in August, the farmers welcomed him with open arms. Unfortunately for them, Irish's future efforts were concentrated on destroying Republicans rather than monopolists.

For weeks before that convention met, the Republican papers had been full of charges that the new party would be taken over by the Democrats and the "renegade" Republicans who had joined the Liberal movement of 1872. They pointed to the number of Democrats and Liberal Republicans who had managed the various local conventions which were a prelude to the state gathering.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Democrats were giving them some excuse for this attitude; hints of an abandonment of the Democratic label kept cropping up in the papers published in the interests of that party. In Clinton, even Judge Edward H. Thayer, editor of the *Clinton Age*, one of the leading Democrats of the state and a strong Bourbon at that, admitted that his party might have to combine with the Anti-Monopolists.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 4, 1873.

<sup>24</sup> *Des Moines Register*, June 8, 1873; *Belle Plaine Union*, July 17, 1873; *Newton Free Press*, June 18, 1873.



A native of Maine, Thayer had studied medicine and law, been admitted to the bar, and had risen to a judgeship in Muscatine County before turning to journalism. He had established the *Clinton Age* in 1868 and had made it one of the leading Democratic papers in the state. He was a strong and loyal party man, having been a delegate to practically every national convention since 1860 and the party's nominee for Congress in 1862 (an election he lost to Republican Hiram Price). Among his many activities was that of railroad promotion; for a time he had served as president of the Iowa Southwestern Railroad Company. This background hardly fitted in with the Anti-Monopoly agitation, but on July 4 Thayer wrote in his paper: "We understand it is the determination of the Democratic Executive Committee to issue no call for a State Convention this season. Certainly this plan gives any other organized opposition to the Republican party a free field to operate in. While we prefer a convention, we submit to the wisdom of the committee."<sup>25</sup> In the light of this statement, over a month before the Anti-Monopoly convention, Irish's public "burial" of the Democratic party at that gathering should not have been the surprise it seemed to be to many.

A week later Thayer again reported on the situation. Democrats all over the state were now ready to abandon their party, he claimed. If a new party should arise, strong enough to defeat the Republicans, "then the abandonment will be complete." But a new party must make more than a show of opposition; if it really means business, then "the whole rank and file of the Democratic party will go to the polls with the word Democratic erased from their tickets."<sup>26</sup>

Still another week later Thayer repeated these statements, but warned the farmers and Grangers to beware of "the old Republican stagers" who would try to fool them. "Men who can't tell a hay-rake from a milking stool, or a Durham heifer from a monkey wrench" were now courting the farmers with letters dated "On the farm near—." Beware of these men, thundered Thayer; they are merely "playing Granger" for their own benefit. Undecided at first about the Anti-Monopoly movement, Thayer now claimed to have come around to accepting it. "Go where you can do the most good," he advised the Democrats, and then added a most illuminating sentence: "Then when all of us shall have tired of running after strange gods, we have

<sup>25</sup> *Clinton Age*, July 4, 1873. For a biographical sketch of Thayer, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:261.

<sup>26</sup> *Clinton Age*, July 11, 1873.



no doubt we shall return to the inimitable principles of Democracy, no matter what may be the name of the organization which shall carry the old banner."<sup>27</sup>

After the Anti-Monopoly state convention, Thayer, untroubled by the virtues of consistency, astonished his readers by completely reversing his position. "We never in our political experience," he wrote, "knew of a more unwise or mischievous step to be taken by any party" than the abandonment by the Democrats of their own organization. The Anti-Monopoly party was not a Grange movement, he claimed, but actually in opposition to the Grange. Furthermore, he did not like the name "Anti-Monopoly" because it meant nothing. Everybody was opposed to monopolies, said Thayer, and you cannot build a party on such a platform. The best method for controlling monopolies is "more capital instead of less." You do not make war on monopolies by making war on capital, but by "encouraging competition and elevating labor." "Democrats, certainly, have no business in such an organization," he continued. "Let them stand aloof, keep their organization intact, and we predict the time is not far distant when to preserve the material interests of the West, to restore confidence and prevent general bankruptcy, the time-honored Democracy will be asked to take the helm." In another column Thayer wrote on "Rail-Road Securities in Iowa," claiming that the Grangers could not hurt the railroads, but they could slow up things by their talk.<sup>28</sup>

Admittedly, it is difficult to follow or explain Thayer's changes. On July 4 he had admitted "the wisdom of the committee" in not calling a Democratic convention; on August 22, after Irish had proclaimed the death of Democracy at the Anti-Monopoly convention, Thayer denied the power of the state committee to disband the party, washed his hands of the whole thing, and promised not to "refer to this subject again." This promise was not particularly binding, however, for in the very column in which he declared his political independence, he printed and endorsed a call from the *Dubuque Telegraph* for a state Democratic convention, suggesting that such a meeting be held in Des Moines on September 17.<sup>29</sup>

Some Democrats were not so undecided, either one way or the other, about the movement as was Thayer. David N. Richardson of the Davenport

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, July 18, 1873.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 8, 1873.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 22, 1873.



*Democrat* had welcomed the call for an Anti-Monopoly convention, even though it was not made in the name of the party he "delighted" to honor. He foresaw "certain good" in its success and concluded that it was "nonsense to talk about strict party lines, when the whole West is in a state of ferment and the waters of the great deep are broken up." A week later he was "quite willing to enter into a league offensive and defensive" against the Republicans.<sup>30</sup> That the Anti-Monopolists wanted a league against monopoly and not especially against Republicans did not bother Richardson.

On the other hand, the Democratic *Dubuque Herald* strongly opposed killing off the party, claiming that it "is as thoroughly alive to-day as it ever was, though in a minority." While admitting that antimonopoly was a part of the Democratic principle, the editor insisted that Democracy was "far more than a mere anti-monopoly or grange movement." He called for a Democratic convention as such: "A minority party is better than no party." Irish spoke only for himself, not for the party, continued the editor, and if the party followed him it would regret it. In Johnson County the Republican editor took pleasure in printing a letter from LeGrand Byington, a stubborn Democrat who had refused to pay taxes to support a war he considered unjust and had thereby lost much of his property. Byington, who was in Kansas at the time, considered Irish a "blatant political rake" who had "begged his way into the chairmanship of [the Democratic] imbecile state committee," and he hoped that Irish would now stay where he belonged, "outside of the party which he has habitually betrayed."<sup>31</sup>

In Ottumwa the editor of the Democratic paper, Sam B. Evans, vehemently denied that the Democratic party was dead. Even if the committee had "abandoned the field," there were still plenty of Democrats who would not follow them in their "base surrender." Evans then called for a meeting of the Wapello County Democrats on September 6; "if you choose to die, do so in a decent and orderly manner. Surrender if you will, but take the responsibility on your own shoulders." Accordingly, the Wapello County Democrats met and "died" legally, or at least declared a cessation of activity by agreeing not to name candidates and to "place their votes where they will do the most good." Evans made the best of this, praising their action

<sup>30</sup> Davenport *Democrat*, July 10, 17, 1873.

<sup>31</sup> *Dubuque Herald*, Aug. 14, 1873, quoted in *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 19, 1873; *Iowa City Republican*, Sept. 10, 1873. For Byington, see Robert Rutland, "The Copperheads in Iowa: A Re-Examination," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 52:7-8 (January, 1954).



as showing independence and interest only in the good of the country. Rather than be accused of favoring monopolies by opposing the Anti-Monopoly party, they "withdrew from the contest, and will make the decisive charge at the right moment." Evans had not liked the nominations of the Anti-Monopoly state convention, had criticized Irish for his action, and had now come to the conclusion that although he did not like it, he would probably have to vote the Anti-Monopoly ticket, meanwhile maintaining his independence, "with strong tendencies to Democracy."<sup>32</sup>

In Dubuque County the Democrats met and passed a resolution condemning Irish for his action, which was "unwarranted, unauthorized, indiscreet, and in our opinion prejudicial to the best interests of the party." The editor of the Dubuque *Herald* praised this resolution and called for allegiance to the party and its principles, concluding with an attack on Irish and a plea for a real Democratic state convention. Another Dubuque Democrat, Dennis A. Mahony, also called for a state convention and criticized Irish for his "egotistical eccentricities."<sup>33</sup> It would seem that most of the top Democrats objected not so much to what Irish had done as to Irish himself.

In all this political unrest and name calling, little attention was any longer given to the agrarian protest which had been the basis of the Anti-Monopoly party. Democratic and Republican charges flew back and forth, with side issues threshed out within each party. Factionalism was in evidence everywhere. The Anti-Monopoly convention had convened against this background of charge and countercharge within both parties. Clarkson pointed out that if this were really a farmers' party they had chosen a very poor time for their convention — right in the middle of harvest. Either the "self-constituted managers" did this on purpose, in order to keep the farmers at home, or as an excuse for the lack of farmer attendance. "There's a political trick in this matter, or else an inexcusable ignorance of the farmer's calendar," concluded Clarkson.<sup>34</sup>

For a time the Republicans forgot their intraparty fights and concentrated their attention and their ridicule on the new party. "It was weak in conception, illegitimate in birth, and hasn't grown any since it was born," was Clarkson's conclusion. Only some 36 of the then 102 counties in Iowa were

<sup>32</sup> Ottumwa *Democrat*, Aug. 21, Sept. 11, 1873.

<sup>33</sup> Dubuque *Herald*, quoted in Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 20, 1873; Mahony quoted in *ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1873.

<sup>34</sup> Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 12, 1873.



represented, and Clarkson declared that some of these delegations were self appointed. Also, according to Clarkson, the "ring" that dominated the activities was made up of John P. Irish, Josiah B. Grinnell of Poweshiek County, Ed Campbell of Jefferson, James M. Tuttle of Van Buren, James Savery of Polk, Harvey Dunlavy of Davis, Samuel Sinnett of Muscatine, R. R. Harbour of Mahaska, "and others." Of this ring, the Republicans with one accord singled out a few for special attention: Irish, of course, whose editorial policy was singularly malicious and had earned him a host of enemies; Grinnell, the ex-Republican whose failure to defend himself against a public caning in Washington by an irate Kentucky Congressman was constantly harped on by his opponents; Campbell, who had been Democratic state chairman for some ten years and who, incidentally, would align himself with the Gold Democrats in 1896 in protest against the nomination of William Jennings Bryan; and Tuttle, whose brilliant record in the Civil War had raised him to the rank of brigadier general, but who had been a Democratic candidate for governor in 1863, and thus had placed himself beyond the pale, in Republican eyes.<sup>35</sup>

The Anti-Monopoly convention was called to order by M. L. Devin, treasurer of the State Grange and chairman of the Anti-Monopoly state committee. Temporary chairman was R. R. Harbour of Mahaska County, while the permanent chairmanship went to Henry W. Lathrop of Johnson County. Lathrop's presence at the convention must have been a shock to the Republicans. A former editor of the *Iowa City Republican*, Lathrop had been one of the founders of the Republican party in 1856. He had sold his newspaper and devoted his time and attention to farming, to the State Historical Society as librarian, and to writing. He had also been active in the founding of railroads in eastern Iowa.<sup>36</sup> His background should have given the Democrats the opportunity to complain of Republican and railroad infiltration of the Anti-Monopoly movement, but his role was evidently slight and he remained free from the newspaper attacks reserved for other members of the convention.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 13, 1873. For report of convention from Republican point of view, see *ibid.*, Aug. 14, 1873. For Grinnell, see Charles E. Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell* (Iowa City, 1938); and for the most recent interpretation of the caning affair, see Sage, "William B. Allison and Iowa Senatorial Politics," 116. For Campbell and Tuttle, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:40-41, 269-70.

<sup>36</sup> For Lathrop, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:163-4; for his railroad activities, see "Source Material of Iowa History: The Davenport & Iowa City Rail Road," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 49:257-67 (July, 1951).



A hint that the real agrarian protest was pretty much ignored is seen in the treatment of Porte C. Welch of Mahaska County, a former Democratic editor who had been championing reform since 1869. According to a report in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, the resolutions suggested by Welch "never saw daylight" but were shelved by Irish, who although not a delegate to the convention was active behind the scenes. During the convention, Welch's efforts to gain the floor were repeatedly ruled out of order by the chairman. Welch had renounced his allegiance to the Democratic party as early as 1870; now he demanded to know whether "this be a new party or a ghost of Democracy." Welch and Harbour, whose records of antimonopolism and reformism were older than those of many of the new converts, were pushed aside by the convention in Des Moines — another indication that political power and not agrarian reform was the real issue.<sup>37</sup>

When the time came for nominations for governor the name of Jacob W. Dixon, an Ottumwa lawyer, was shouted down vociferously because he was not a farmer. Three other names were presented: Jacob G. Vale of Van Buren County, an attorney and a former Republican; James Mathews of Knoxville, a farmer-lawyer and a Democrat; and Andrew Hastie of Warren County, a farmer. During the nominating speeches, and before the vote, a telegram from Vale was read to the convention. He would accept the nomination — if it was offered. Since his name had been endorsed by Ed Campbell, one of the "managers" of the convention, it would seem to indicate that the choice of the convention for the top office had been decided ahead of time. For some reason, Vale's profession of the law did not interfere with his choice, in contrast with the rejection of Dixon because he was a lawyer. Vale was nominated on the first ballot, although the farmer, Hastie, garnered a satisfactory number of votes in opposition.<sup>38</sup>

A suggestion that Hastie be nominated for lieutenant governor by acclamation — since he had run a close second to Vale — was quickly squelched by Campbell, who said "we farmers came up here to act deliberately." The

<sup>37</sup> *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, quoted in *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 30, 1873. For Welch's editorial policies, see *Oskaloosa Progressive Conservator*, Nov. 30, 1870; Feb. 23, June 1, 8, 29, 1871. For biographical sketch of Welch, and his newspaper career in Oskaloosa, see *History of Mahaska County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1878), 341-2, 723-6.

<sup>38</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 14, 1873; *History of Warren County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1879), 717; *History of Marion County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1881), 594-5; *History of Wapello County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1878), 566.



choice of the convention for lieutenant governor then went — promptly and with a minimum of “deliberation” — to Fred O’Donnell of Dubuque, lawyer and Democrat, by acclamation and with Campbell’s blessing. The fact that O’Donnell was too young to serve if elected only came to light some three weeks after the convention, when he was forced to withdraw his name from the ticket.<sup>39</sup>

The two other places on the ticket were quickly filled. T. O. Walker of Bloomfield, another of the “managers,” and famous as a reading clerk at Democratic conventions because of his powerful voice, named B. J. Hall for the judgeship; while Campbell again found it necessary to step into the contest for superintendent of public instruction by brushing aside a suggested name because of the need of a “geographically balanced ticket.” D. W. Prindle of Fort Dodge, whom Governor Carpenter described as a “scrub” and a “sweet-scented reformer,” received the final nomination. “The firm of Irish & Campbell had planned well, and they executed well, too,” admitted Clarkson in the *Register*.<sup>40</sup>

Irish, while not a delegate to the convention, appeared after the nominations had been made and, as chairman of the Democratic state committee, declared his party dead and “hopelessly bankrupt,” having “outlived its day and its usefulness.” J. B. Grinnell also addressed the convention; his only bow to Anti-Monopoly being the statement that the greatest monopoly in the state was the Republican party. There were really no monopolies in the country, he assured the delegates, “but there is a growing tendency in that direction.” Railroads, on the other hand, were “great civilizers and improvers of the country, and we ask nothing of them but justice to our producers.”<sup>41</sup>

This must have sounded rather strange to a convention that had just adopted a platform calling for legislative control of the monopolies that Grinnell declared did not exist. Yet even that platform had a Democratic tinge. Whereas the Republicans asked for “congressional and legislative”

<sup>39</sup> Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 14, 1873; Belle Plaine *Union*, Sept. 4, 1873; Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers . . . of Early Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1916), 855-6. O’Donnell was replaced on the ticket by C. E. Whiting, a farmer of Monona County. Davenport *Democrat*, Oct. 1, 1873.

<sup>40</sup> Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 14, 1873; *History of Davis County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1882), 640-41; C. C. Carpenter to brother Emmett, Aug. 8, 1873; Carpenter Diary, Aug. 13, 1873, *Carpenter Papers*.

<sup>41</sup> Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 14, 1873.



control of railroad rates, the Anti-Monopolists asked for a divided control over the carriers — Congress to regulate the railroads it had created, the states to regulate those it had chartered.<sup>42</sup> This was good Democratic strict constructionist doctrine and virtually denied to Congress the right of control over interstate commerce, since the great majority of the nation's railroads operated on state charters. The Republican position, more realistic, would eventually result in the passage of the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, during the Democratic administration of Grover Cleveland.

Hardly had the Anti-Monopoly convention adjourned than the Republican press began to heap scorn on its activities. In Iowa City, Nathan H. Brainerd of the *Republican* and Irish of the *Press* had long carried on one of the hottest editorial and political feuds in the state. Brainerd filled his columns for days with ridicule of Irish and Grinnell — “the two most notorious political prostitutes in Iowa” being one of his milder criticisms. Meservey of the Fort Dodge *Messenger* claimed that the convention was managed “by some of the most rickety old political hacks and heartless monopoly blatherskites in the country,” while in Belle Plaine the editor of the *Union* considered the whole movement a “decided failure.” Clarkson called the convention a “burlesque” and predicted a 60,000-vote majority for the Republicans in the coming election.<sup>43</sup>

The Democratic editors were of several minds. Dennis A. Mahony of the Dubuque *Telegraph* frankly admitted that the convention had been composed mostly of Democrats and Liberal Republicans, but asked “Why not? — hasn't the Democratic party always been opposed to monopolies?” Yet he also warned Democrats not to “approve nor accept as binding or final the course of Mr. Irish in this case.” Irish claimed that through the new party the “deathless principles of Jefferson” could now “reach the people through a purer channel and cleaner hands.” Judge Thayer, with chagrin, agreed with Clarkson's prediction of a 60,000-vote Republican majority in the fall, and disagreed with Mahony and Irish on Anti-Monopolism and Democracy: “the democracy are not in sympathy with the objects and purposes of the Anti-Monopoly party.” The Democratic Dubuque *Herald* viewed “Democracy differently” than did Mr. Irish, “or he would know that

<sup>42</sup> For Anti-Monopoly platform, see *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 14, 1873; Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 92-3; for Republican platform, see *ibid.*, 90-92.

<sup>43</sup> *Iowa City Republican*, Aug. 20, 1873; *Fort Dodge Messenger*, Aug. 21, 1873; *Belle Plaine Union*, Aug. 21, 1873; *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 14, 1873.



it cannot die."<sup>44</sup> Obviously, the Democrats of Iowa did not see eye to eye on the issues raised by Anti-Monopoly.

Governor Carpenter, who had been renominated by acclamation at the Republican state convention, was not at first much worried by his opposition. Before the Anti-Monopoly convention he had not regarded the movement as dangerous; after the convention he considered it a "forlorn hope." For Carpenter's running mate the Republicans, after briefly toying with the idea of choosing Dudley W. Adams as a sop to the Grangers, had nominated Joseph Dysart of Tama County. This in itself was a concession to the agitation against monopolies. Carpenter's first lieutenant governor had been Henry C. Bulis, an avowed railroad man who, as president of the state Senate, had opposed railroad bills in the 1872 legislature. His presence on the ticket in 1873 would have done much to weaken the Republican cause; therefore he was replaced by Dysart, whose record in the Senate had been distinctly on the side of railroad regulation.<sup>45</sup>

The Republican claim that the Anti-Monopolists were dominated by the Democrats must be taken with a grain of salt, of course, as standard political tactics in dealing with the opposition. But the actions endorsed at the Anti-Monopoly convention, the platform adopted, and especially the 1874 history of the movement would seem to substantiate the Republican stand. From the date of the 1873 convention to the death of the party after the 1874 election, the movement became more and more Democratic and less and less a farmer-Granger agrarian revolt.

The campaign was rather a dull one. The Democratic protests of Thayer, Evans, and others against Irish and his faction of the party gradually died down. They reluctantly accepted the *fait accompli* and supported the Anti-Monopoly ticket with more or less enthusiasm. Locally, the Anti-Monopoly candidates were chosen for the legislature in many counties and districts. Here again Irish showed his hand by refusing to support an out-and-out Anti-Monopoly movement in his own county of Johnson. Instead, he called and ran a "Johnson County Convention" that was nothing but a Demo-

<sup>44</sup> Dubuque *Telegraph*, quoted in Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 21, 1873, and Fort Dodge *Messenger*, Aug. 14, 1873; Iowa City *Press*, Sept. 3, 1873; Clinton *Age*, Aug. 22, 1873; Dubuque *Herald*, Aug. 14, 1873, quoted in Des Moines *Register*, Aug. 19, 1873.

<sup>45</sup> C. C. Carpenter to brother Emmett, Aug. 8, 1873; Carpenter Diary, Aug. 13, 1873, *Carpenter Papers*. For Dysart, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:83; for Republican state convention, see Des Moines *Register*, June 26, 1873.



cratic party meeting in disguise. Brainerd explained this to his own satisfaction. Statewide, the Democrats had no chance, therefore Irish was willing to kill off the party and support Anti-Monopoly; locally, he saw a chance of success in Johnson County, traditionally Democratic — therefore, the party was still alive there. Do not be fooled by this “trickster,” Brainerd warned the Anti-Monopolists, but come over into the Republican party, “which is thoroughly in sympathy” with you.<sup>46</sup> Irish ignored the Anti-Monopolists in his home county, spoke of the “Free” convention at Des Moines, and insisted that the Democratic party “long years ago pioneered every principle that broadly underlies the Grange organization and was father to every declaration which can constitute a political issue in the platform of the Free Convention.”<sup>47</sup>

But a revolt was brewing in Irish’s own bailiwick. On September 20 a new paper appeared in Iowa City — the *Anti-Monopolist*, edited by J. G. Sehorn, deputy master of the Johnson County Grange and an active farmer. Sehorn, a native of Johnson County, had been a Democrat, but he denounced his former political allegiance in the “Prospectus” of his new paper and promised to publish “a progressive and aggressive Radical Reform Journal,” which would “war on corruption, fraud, fanaticism, political wire-working, demagogues [sic] and monopolies wherever found.”<sup>48</sup> Thus Irish found himself under attack both from the right and the left; from Brainerd who said Irish was still a Democrat, and from Sehorn, who insisted Irish was not an Anti-Monopolist.

On election day the Johnson County voters were faced with three tickets and, true to their Democratic traditions, they chose the men in the “Johnson County” column. Thus Irish won in his county, in spite of two outspoken opponents. Of interest, as showing the unsureness of the Anti-Monopoly-Democratic movement, is the fact that Irish’s choice for chairman of the Anti-Monopoly state convention, H. W. Lathrop, became one of the two Johnson County nominees on the Anti-Monopoly ticket. Lathrop evidently felt more at home in the frankly Anti-Monopoly ranks than in Irish’s disguised Democratic party.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Iowa City *Republican*, Aug. 27, 1873.

<sup>47</sup> Iowa City *Press*, Sept. 4, 1873.

<sup>48</sup> Iowa City *Anti-Monopolist*, Sept. 20, 1873. For sketch of Sehorn, see *History of Iowa County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1881), 536.

<sup>49</sup> For the three tickets, see Iowa City *Press*, Sept. 3, 1873; Iowa City *Anti-Monopolist*, Sept. 20, 1873; Iowa City *Republican*, Sept. 3, 1873.



As already indicated, many Democrats throughout the state found it difficult to accept Anti-Monopolism, and several calls went out for the convening of a Democratic state convention. But the calls were not answered; no leader or group seemed willing or able to rally the party. Gradually, some of the counties called conventions under various names, and candidates for the legislature were nominated on platforms calling for reform, railroad rate regulation, and opposition to the Republican regime.

The Republicans officially opened their canvass on September 17, and a desultory campaign ensued. They had much to explain away, and it was not easy. The scandals of the Grant regime were mounting; Congress had voted itself a pay increase at the last session which had brought down storms of protest from both parties and accusations of "salary grab" and "salary steal"; the Credit Mobilier affair of 1872 made excellent campaign material for the opposition, even though the expose touched men of both parties. In Iowa, the defalcation of the state treasurer, Samuel E. Rankin, who had stolen some \$38,000 of the Agricultural College funds, was grist for the Democratic mill. Although the governor had emerged from the Rankin scandal without blemish, some Democratic papers tried to wring what political profit they could from it. Carpenter, growing uneasy, wrote in his diary on the eve of the canvass: "I have never gone out to speak with such a feeling of dread as I have this year. It seems almost impossible to awaken in my own mind anything like an interest in the crooked politics of this year. Too much claptrap."<sup>50</sup> R. H. Dutton, secretary of the Republican state central committee had written the governor in August: "The course of Donnan on Back Pay & Bullis [sic] & Bemis on R R question last winter has been very demoralizing. Our speakers are very much loth to take the field this year, and we shall have hardly enough to make an effective canvass of Six weeks but by putting them all in for a month can make it lively." Republican Chairman A. H. Neidig found it necessary to make a personal visit to ex-Governor Kirkwood at Iowa City, to "endeavor to induce him to take part in the canvass."<sup>51</sup>

It had been hard work to stir up the speakers, but the campaign opened on schedule with enough big names on the roster of speakers to make a proper showing. John A. Kasson, the stormy petrel of Polk County politics,

<sup>50</sup> Carpenter Diary, Sept. 15, 1873, *Carpenter Papers*.

<sup>51</sup> R. H. Dutton to Carpenter, Aug. 8, 13, 1873; A. H. Neidig to Carpenter, Aug. 1, 9, 1873, *ibid.*



invaded Irish's home grounds at Iowa City and discussed congressional powers over interstate commerce, thus going at once to the heart of the real conflict between the two parties in the campaign — whether Congress or the states should attempt to regulate railroads. George W. McCrary of Keokuk, who had served in the House from Iowa's first district since 1869, spoke on the same theme in Iowa City a few days later. As chairman of the committee on railroads in the House, McCrary had prepared a report on the constitutional powers of Congress in dealing with interstate railroads, and he pointed out that the support for his report had come from the Republicans, the opposition from Democrats. "Can there be any question," he asked, "that the Republican party, in maintaining the doctrine that Congress has this power is, after all, the best Anti-Monopoly party?"<sup>52</sup>

Governor Carpenter concentrated his attention on the Grange. He spoke constantly before Grange gatherings, and many would have to admit later that it was his personal popularity, his record of honesty in office, and his known stand in favor of governmental control of railroads that carried the party to victory. In his first inaugural he had stated flatly that he did "not regard the pretense that railways are beyond the control of law, in respect to fare and freights, as worthy of more than a moment's consideration."<sup>53</sup> In January of 1873 the governor had made an address at the annual meeting of the State Agricultural Society, an address which helped to enhance his popularity with the farmers. In this speech, afterwards known as the "skeleton" speech, he had referred to the "cost of exchanging commodities over long lines of communication, by expensive agencies, and at exorbitant charges for transportation" as the "skeleton in every Western farmer's corn-crib." The farmers were delighted with this somewhat ghoulish imagery, and the Republican newspapers of the state promptly fell in line and praised Carpenter in glowing terms. Clarkson of the *Register* wrote the governor, asking to publish the speech and suggesting that the *Iowa Homestead* also should publish it, "so it would reach more farmers, to the end that they may see we now have a governor who is awake to their interests."<sup>54</sup> Carpenter

<sup>52</sup> Iowa City *Republican*, Sept. 18, 24, 1873. For McCrary, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:174-5.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin F. Shambaugh (ed.), *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* (7 vols., Iowa City, 1903-1905), 4:20.

<sup>54</sup> James S. Clarkson to Carpenter, Jan. 10, 1873, *Carpenter Papers*. Speech published in *Report . . . Iowa State Agricultural Society . . . 1872* (Des Moines, 1873), 194-216, and in *Des Moines Register*, Jan. 17, 1873.



continued to emphasize this theory, if not in so macabre a fashion, during the fall campaign, and left no doubt in the minds of his hearers that if re-elected he would strongly support state railroad regulation of the farmers' most hated monopoly, the railroads. It was good politics, and it paid off on election day.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Monopoly-Democrats seem to have carried on a weak campaign, dealing mostly with local issues rather than the state ticket. Candidate Vale made but little stir in the state, against the organized campaign put on by the Republicans. Locally, the strong Democratic papers concentrated on the personalities of the candidates for the legislature and their opposing editors, the theory evidently being that if you could accuse your opponent often enough of being a liar, you could thereby win votes for your side. Irish ignored the state ticket and filled the columns of his paper with attacks on the editors of the *Republican* and the *Anti-Monopolist*, both of whom replied in kind. Actually, the Republican papers gave more attention to the real issue of the campaign — railroad regulation — than did the Democratic editors. Antimonopoly, as a phase of the agrarian revolt, was almost ignored by those who had adopted its name if not its principles.

In spite of a weak campaign, however, the various tickets parading under the Anti-Monopoly standard made a surprisingly strong showing. When the votes were all in, it was found that although the Republicans had carried the state offices, by a reduced majority it is true, and had maintained a good control of the state Senate, in the House of 100 members, 50 were Republicans and 50 Anti-Monopolist-Democrats. Publicly the Republicans tried to put the best face on the matter that they could, but privately Dutton and Neidig congratulated Carpenter "that the matter is no worse."<sup>55</sup> In 1871 the Republican ticket had carried by a 40,000 majority; in 1873 Carpenter was re-elected by about a 26,000 majority.<sup>56</sup> Whereas in 1871 only seven counties (Allamakee, Dubuque, Jackson, Johnson, Lee, Audubon, and Fremont) had given a Democratic majority, in 1873 twenty-five counties preferred Vale to Carpenter. In the 1872 legislature the Democrats had had only one-quarter of the 100 votes in the House; now they and the Anti-Monopolists had exactly one-half. For the first time since the Civil War, the organization of the Iowa House of Representatives was in question.

<sup>55</sup> R. H. Dutton to Carpenter, Oct. 17, 1873, *Carpenter Papers*.

<sup>56</sup> Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 88, 93.



Geographically, the Anti-Monopoly vote was concentrated in the southern half and in the eastern third of the state. The northwestern quarter of Iowa, where railroads were still needed, significantly sent only two reform candidates to the House, one from traditionally-Democratic Webster County, and one from a district comprised of five thinly-populated counties on the western slope.<sup>57</sup> Significantly, also, the only House votes cast against railroad regulation came from this section. The four men who represented sixteen northwestern counties — all Republicans — opposed the law.<sup>58</sup>

In the Senate, 27 of the 50 districts in the state had holdover Senators — elected in 1871 for a four-year term. Of these, 6 were Democrats. In the remaining 23 districts, the Anti-Monopoly opposition elected 10 members.<sup>59</sup> As in the case of the House, the opposition Senators were located in southern and eastern Iowa, with the entire western slope and most of north-central Iowa loyal to the Republicans. On the crucial vote on the railroad regulation, only 9 Senators voted against it — 6 of them holdover Republicans, one a holdover Democrat, and the remaining 2 newly-elected Republicans. Geographically, four Senators from the western slope opposed railroad control, the other five being holdovers from scattered eastern counties.<sup>60</sup>

Both sides tried to “explain” the election. Of course the Democratic newspapers were jubilant. They foresaw great things in the future. The Republican majority had fallen; perhaps by the next election it would fall even further and give the Democrats (by whatever name) a complete victory in the state. Irish called it a revolt against the Republican party — another indication that his interpretation of the times was political rather than economic. “On our side,” he wrote, “the campaign has conducted itself.” The people “instinctively” supported the opposition parties, said Irish. “Let now the new party be cemented and its organization perfected.”<sup>61</sup> Irish, who had done little, editorially, to support the state ticket, was now ready to cash in on its victory.

<sup>57</sup> *House Journal, 1874, 6-7.* The politics of the members, not listed in the *Journal*, has been deduced from the vote for Speaker, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid., 404-405.*

<sup>59</sup> See *Laws of Iowa, 1874* (section on Private, Local, and Temporary Acts), vii-viii, for members of the Senate. Politics of members compiled from comments in *Des Moines Register* following October election, and from votes as recorded in *Senate Journal, 1874, passim.*

<sup>60</sup> *Senate Journal, 1874, 295.*

<sup>61</sup> *Iowa City Press, Oct. 16, 1873.*



The Republican editor of the Keokuk *Gate City* had various explanations for the election. It was the natural reaction from the large majority of 1872, he claimed, when the state had given Grant a 60,000 majority; the American people do not like to give any party "too immense a majority persistently," so they like to try another party once in a while. His most surprising conclusion was that there had been no "great issue" in the campaign, to bring out the vote.<sup>62</sup> Granted, neither side had played the antimonopoly theme too strongly, preferring to conduct the campaign in the time-honored tradition of personal vilification for the opponents, but to the farmer, harassed by high prices, the phrase Anti-Monopoly must have seemed a real issue.

The Democratic editors who had been suspicious of the Anti-Monopoly movement, and who had regretted the seeming demise of their own party, now saw the light and quickly joined in praising the new party. Thayer said that the election meant "a new deal all around. . . . Old things have passed away, and new things are in order."<sup>63</sup> Evans, of the *Ottumwa Democrat*, gave a bow to the Anti-Monopoly movement in his surrender:

The time has come when the people must league together for mutual protection, and we speak in the name and for thousands of Democrats, pledging ourselves that hereafter we will join cordially with any set of men in putting down the monstrous usurpations of the railroad companies. They are, as they now stand, the greatest enemies against the prosperity and happiness of the people. They are selfish and self-important.

Evans had a personal reason for lashing out at the railroads, for he claimed that they had sent voters into Ottumwa to swing the election to the Republicans.<sup>64</sup> But whatever his reason, Evans' attack on the railroads was what the farmers wanted to hear, and what they did not hear from most of the other Democratic editors.

Clarkson of the *Des Moines Register* was wiser than most of the Democrats in judging the issues of the election. In an editorial titled "Redeem the Republican Pledge," he pointed out that the one great issue before the next legislature was the regulation of railroad rates. This the election had proved; this both parties had promised. He hastened to reassure the voters

<sup>62</sup> Keokuk *Gate City*, Oct. 22, 1873.

<sup>63</sup> Clinton *Age*, Oct. 24, 1873.

<sup>64</sup> Ottumwa *Democrat*, Oct. 16, 23, 30, 1873.



about the so-called holdover Senators from the previous session, claiming that they would certainly uphold such legislation, that if they had opposed it in the past it was merely because the laws presented had not been "fair and equitable."<sup>65</sup> Clarkson, promising that the Republicans would redeem their pledge and pass a regulatory act to protect the people from monopoly, thus strove to steal the Anti-Monopoly thunder and put in a claim, ahead of time, for fulfilling the demands of the electorate.

When the legislature met in Des Moines in January, 1874, there was, thus, no question but that railroad tariff regulation would pass. A long deadlock over organizing the evenly divided House was finally resolved by allowing the Republicans the Speaker, and the House settled down to work. Meanwhile, Democrats throughout the state were laying plans for the 1874 congressional elections with high hopes. N. M. Ives of Ottumwa, a former Democrat who was chairman of the Anti-Monopoly state central committee, opened the new year with a call to the "Friends of Reform." The time has come, he said, to "crystalize" the new movement against the "bold bad men who compose the legions of monopoly," and he called a state convention for February 25. Evans of the *Ottumwa Democrat*, still not able to accept the term "Anti-Monopoly," heartily endorsed Ives's call for what Evans called a "Free party" convention, while Thayer of the *Clinton Age*, who shared Evans' distaste for the name, christened the movement the "People's Party." "This call is broad enough for everybody," he claimed. "We see no reason why the Democracy of the State cannot ally itself with the element which set on foot the new party, and by thus joining forces secure success at the polls." Irish endorsed the call "unhesitatingly and without reserve."<sup>66</sup>

A sour note came from Sehorn of the *Iowa City Anti-Monopolist*, however. In the call he saw an attempt to turn the movement over "to the chief fuglemen and political demagoges [sic] of the dead Democracy." Sehorn believed that the Anti-Monopoly party already had an organization; why, then, should a new meeting be called? If they just wanted to reorganize the "dead Democracy," he would have none of it.<sup>67</sup>

This presaged a squabble in Johnson County, one of the few strong-

<sup>65</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 30, 1873.

<sup>66</sup> *Ottumwa Democrat*, Jan. 1, 1874; *Clinton Age*, Jan. 9, 1874; *Iowa City Press*, Jan. 7, 1874. For Ives, see *History of Wapello County*, 578-9.

<sup>67</sup> *Iowa City Anti-Monopolist*, Jan. 17, 1874.



holds of the Democratic party in Iowa. Two conventions were held, one called by Irish, one called by Sehorn and his brand of Anti-Monopolists, and both conventions sent delegates to Des Moines. Only a compromise between the two delegations, engineered by Irish, kept this intraparty battle from breaking out on the convention floor.<sup>68</sup>

The *Register*, after calling the convention respectable, dignified, and well attended, went on to classify it as dominated by "old-time Democrats," carefully listing the leading men of the supposedly dead party who had been in attendance. It was a "brigade of old Bourbons," with a small sprinkling of former Republicans. Further to show that the convention had been run by the Democrats, Clarkson cited, first, the "Democratic game of kicking out half of the Anti-Monopoly delegation from Johnson county," and, second, "the pure Democratic essence of the platform."<sup>69</sup> Even discounting the political animus of the Republicans in searching for every excuse to tar the new party with the brush of Democracy, Clarkson's comments on the platform cannot be ignored.

Aside from the usual clauses viewing with alarm the present condition of affairs under the Republican party, the convention "recognized" a monopoly in the protective tariff and called for the old Democratic principle of a tariff for revenue only; secondly, it repeated and emphasized its previous stand on the powers of Congress and the state legislatures in controlling corporations. Here the Democratic principle of states' rights came to the fore. Railroads, said the platform, were necessary and should be encouraged, but they should pay a fair share of the taxes and should charge "no more than a just and equitable rate for transportation and travel."<sup>70</sup>

Thayer, the reluctant Anti-Monopolist, considered the platform "the most sensible set of resolutions" he had ever read. It would do "a vast amount of good in the way of satisfying capital that it will be as free from unfriendly legislation, in Iowa, as in any State in the Union." This was strange doctrine to the Anti-Monopolist, who considered "capital" his natural enemy. Thayer still did not like the name of the party, "because it is entirely meaningless as applied to politics," but he agreed to support the party on its adopted platform.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Iowa City Press*, March 4, 1874.

<sup>69</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 27, 1874.

<sup>70</sup> *Ottumwa Democrat*, March 5, 1874.

<sup>71</sup> *Clinton Age*, March 6, May 1, 1874.



Meanwhile, the legislature was wrestling with a number of bills purporting to "regulate" Iowa's railroads. In the Senate railroad committee some half dozen bills were combined into one catchall, which passed with little or no opposition. When the bill reached the House it was found to be "so crude and grossly full of error" that it had to be rewritten. The House committee of twenty-three members — twelve Republicans and eleven Anti-Monopolists — held hearings, listened to the railroad lobby, asked the Grange for advice, and finally brought in a bill of elaborate and weighty proportions. Following a lengthy and wrangling debate and an unsuccessful effort by Dixon of Wapello County to rewrite the bill on the floor, the measure passed with but four nay votes. The opponents took occasion to explain their votes, three claiming economic or constitutional objections, while one justified his vote "because he believed there was a hereafter."<sup>72</sup>

Reaction to the passage of the "Granger law" was varied. Clarkson was cautious in his appraisal of the work of the legislators. They had honestly tried to do their best, he wrote, and if the law fails "it will prove an honest failure." The Burlington *Hawk-Eye* hoped that the law would prevent the "ruinous discrimination" against various business centers in the state. In northwestern Iowa, where railroads were still needed, the Estherville *Vindicator* saw "naught of encouragement to either the farming or mercantile interests of north-western Iowa" in the bill. Brainerd of the Iowa City *Republican* was mildly optimistic: the bill had been drawn with great care, but no doubt defects would appear, once the law went into effect on July 4. He hoped it would result in a "more satisfactory relationship between the railroads and the people."<sup>73</sup> Surprisingly, neither the *Press* nor the *Anti-Monopolist* of Iowa City commented on the passage of a law which had been the basis of the Anti-Monopoly movement.

While the bill had been before the legislature Irish had come out in its favor, but took occasion to insist that only the state could regulate freight charges and that Congress had no power over state-chartered railroads. The Republican claim that regulation was up to Congress was, according to Irish, just so much "Administration and Monopoly nonsense." The Republican papers immediately took up the challenge. Clarkson, in an I-told-you-

<sup>72</sup> Keokuk *Gate City*, March 18, 1874; Des Moines *Register*, March 13, 1874.

<sup>73</sup> Des Moines *Register*, March 27, 1874; Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, April 2, 1874; Estherville *Northern Vindicator*, March 28, 1874; Iowa City *Republican*, March 18, 1874.



so attitude, pointed out that he had foreseen this "several months ago," and that "the old Democratic party's fealty to the doctrine of State Rights would lead it to the position that the Government had no right whatever to interfere with the railways or any other corporations." He was sure, he continued, that the Democrats had had this in mind when they took over the Anti-Monopoly party and "led it blind-fold to an union with the old doctrine of State Rights." In Congress, Iowa's McCrary had introduced an interstate commerce bill which was arousing considerable attention both locally and nationally. When the bill passed the House by a slim majority, the Republicans delighted in pointing out that the opposition had come entirely from the Democratic side of the House.<sup>74</sup> They repeatedly warned the Anti-Monopolists against the company they were keeping.

Evidence that some of the Anti-Monopolists were harking to the Republican warnings came even during the session of the legislature and the meeting of the Anti-Monopoly state convention. As early as February 11 a Republican, Moses A. McCoid of Jefferson County, had introduced into the Senate a resolution to the effect that it was the "right and duty" of Congress "to so regulate inter-State railway commerce as to prohibit extortion." This resolution passed the Senate unanimously, with all the Anti-Monopolists and Democrats in the chamber voting "aye." When the resolution reached the House it was put on its way to passage without much attention until, according to a Keokuk editor, "an old antiquated Democrat" saw the contradiction, said "he was not sure but that the bill was a trick of the pesky Republicans to circumvent State Rights," and asked that consideration be delayed. "The anti-Monops pricked up their ears, and said 'Amen.'" <sup>75</sup>

The delay seemed permanent until about a month later when Jacob W. Dixon, Anti-Monopolist from Wapello County — and the man the Anti-Monopolists had supported for Speaker — introduced a resolution calling for the "passage of a law by congress, regulating freights and fares on railroads in all cases where such regulation cannot be reached by the legislation of the several states." The House Anti-Monopolists immediately saw that the resolution did not completely jibe with their platform, and a prolonged debate took place. When the vote was taken, Dixon and eleven other

<sup>74</sup> *Iowa City Press*, Feb. 27, 1874; *Des Moines Register*, March 13, 24, 1874; *Iowa City Republican*, April 8, 1874.

<sup>75</sup> *Des Moines Register*, Feb. 20, 1874; *Keokuk Gate City*, Feb. 18, 1874; *Senate Journal*, 1874, 119.



Anti-Monopolists joined the Republicans in passing the resolution. The Republicans immediately took pains to point out that this looked like a serious break in the Anti-Monopoly ranks, and Brainerd invited Dixon "back to his old friends, where common sense rules, instead of exploded southern Democratic states rights theories."<sup>76</sup>

In the months before the Anti-Monopoly nominating convention, called for June 24, Irish carried on an editorial war with various Republican editors, a war in which he several times showed the Democratic — even the Bourbon Democratic — hand inside the Anti-Monopoly glove. He argued with Brainerd of the *Iowa City Republican* on the issue of congressional versus state control of railroads, and he was goaded by the *Belle Plaine Union* into taking a strong hard money stand, a very strange position for a leader in the farmers' movement which was steadily edging toward greenbackism as the new solution to hard times. Richardson of the *Davenport Democrat* was even more frankly a "Free Trade, Hard Money, Home Rule" man than Irish, while at the same time claiming adherence to the Anti-Monopoly cause. Such political schizophrenia can only be explained by Sam Evans' frank statement on the eve of the election: "We act with the Anti-Monopolists because that organization is in opposition to the Republican party, and its principles are essentially Democratic." Even before that revealing pronouncement, Thayer had disavowed any approval of the railroad tariff law, a law which had passed in 1874 and not before because the demand for it had brought the Anti-Monopoly party into being. But Thayer calmly stated that the "claim that the railroad tariff law is of Anti-Monopoly origin or is approved by the Anti-Monopoly party" was nonsense. "The Anti-Monops can stand a good many things, and not wince, but this new railroad law it cannot father and live."<sup>77</sup> The party had not "fathered" the law — that had been done as early as 1865 — but it had most certainly breathed life into it as the result of the 1873 election. Now leading Democrats proposed to carry on the party while disavowing the very issue which had given it birth.

In Ottumwa, Sam Evans, who had accepted Anti-Monopolism as the best

<sup>76</sup> *Des Moines Register*, March 13, 20, 1874; *Iowa City Republican*, March 11, 1874; *House Journal*, 1874, 421-2. For resolution, see *Laws of Iowa*, 1874, 86.

<sup>77</sup> *Iowa City Press*, March 25, April 8, 1874; *Iowa City Republican*, April 22, 1874; *Belle Plaine Union*, April 9, Oct. 1 (quoting *Ottumwa Democrat*), 1874; *Clinton Age*, Sept. 4, 1874; *Davenport Democrat*, quoted in *Des Moines Register*, May 8, 1874.



way to defeat the Republicans, and who had attended the February convention and helped write a hard money plank into the platform, continued to be restless under the new party label. When in May a meeting of Democrats at the Manhattan Club in New York called forth a number of letters extolling the virtues and the liveliness of the Democratic party, Evans published them with relish, pointing out that they indicated a great Democratic revival, that such protest parties as that in Iowa had merely been "the bridge which has carried us safely over the chasm," and that such "ephemeral organizations" as the Anti-Monopoly party could never have existed had it not been for the "grand old Democratic party." The *Register*, with tongue in cheek, congratulated Evans on his honesty.<sup>78</sup> The Republicans never lost a chance to warn the Anti-Monopolists against the Democratic infiltration of their ranks, no doubt preferring the continued existence of a party they could stigmatize with Civil War guilt, rather than a new organization against which bloody shirt oratory could not be used.

Thus was the agrarian protest of the farmers used by both sides to further their own political ends. The Republicans were, however, more intelligent politically in their acceptance of the farmers' program, in that they wrote it into their platforms and then proceeded to support it right down the line, even helping to pass the laws it demanded. The Democrats, on the other hand, merely used the unrest of the agrarian protest to try to hoist themselves back into office and power, with little or no intention of furthering the farmers' cause. Their platform, adopted at the state convention in June, did not even bother to pay the usual lip service to the farmers' demands but emerged as a typical Democratic program — a program which had small appeal to Iowa farmers. States' rights meant nothing to the Iowa farmer — in fact it smacked too much of Southern Democracy and the Civil War. Hard money was just what the farmer did not want; as the depression deepened he began to show more and more interest in increasing the number of greenbacks in circulation — a policy which the Democrats opposed vigorously. Iowa farmers had, on the whole, accepted the Republican belief in a high tariff as the source of America's wealth, and thus the Democratic plea for a tariff for revenue only could have little appeal.

Both parties in their platforms gave wary allegiance to the railroad tariff act of the 1874 General Assembly. Said the Republicans: the law should "be upheld and enforced until it shall be superseded by other legislation, or

<sup>78</sup> Ottumwa *Democrat*, May 21, 1874; Des Moines *Register*, June 5, 1874.



held unconstitutional by the proper judicial tribunal"; the Anti-Monopoly Democrats wanted the law faithfully enforced "until experience may have demonstrated the propriety and justice of its modification."<sup>79</sup> Since the law had not even gone into effect when the parties held their conventions, this hedging and hesitancy shows either an uneasiness or a dissatisfaction about the legislation even before it had been tried. The politicians had accepted the demand for control of the railroads with a fairly good grace; when the tide turned, they would just as eagerly embrace the repeal of the law.<sup>80</sup> With the changing economic picture, the wise politician changed too; if he did not — and here lies the weakness of nineteenth century Iowa Democracy — he met defeat at the polls.

The state ticket for minor state offices nominated by the Anti-Monopoly party in 1874 was characterized by Clarkson as consisting of one farmer and five lawyers. In an effort to shake off what many considered the stigma of Anti-Monopoly, the convention had called itself the "Independent party of Iowa," but the original name still clung to the movement.<sup>81</sup>

Coker F. Clarkson, a Republican, a Granger, and a sincere agrarian, wrote a strong protest in his farm column in the *Register* against the "unhallowed" use of the farmers' name in the various reform parties which were mushrooming in the Middle Western states, under the guidance of "sore-head politicians."

In no sense are these farmer movements, and by no parity of reasoning should we be held responsible for their crude, ill-advised, contradictory platforms, with a plank in them to suit any faction, feeling, or sentiment of a congregation of hungry soreheads, or half-weaned treasury suckers. Generally these reform tickets are filled with lean and lank Bourbon Democrats, with a nobody Republican sandwiched in to catch gulls. And then to blanch an honest man's inmost soul with horror they call it a farmers' movement. Farmer! In thy name what unhallowed deeds are committed.<sup>82</sup>

To the Republicans, all Democrats were Bourbons, but within the Democratic party the Bourbon element represented only one faction of the mem-

<sup>79</sup> For platforms, see Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 93-7.

<sup>80</sup> See Mildred Throne, "The Repeal of the Iowa Granger Law, 1878," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 51:97-130 (April, 1953).

<sup>81</sup> *Des Moines Register*, July 3, 1874; Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics*, 95.

<sup>82</sup> *Des Moines Register*, June 26, 1874.



bership. This was the element that preferred Republican conservatism to Democratic progressivism and fought the members of its own party who called for a change to meet altering economic conditions. Even in the seventies some Democrats saw this split in their party. In 1875, when the Anti-Monopoly movement was dead for all practical or political purposes, Richardson of the Davenport *Democrat* lashed out at his fellow-Democrat Sam Evans: "Sam Evans is a Bourbon, he never forgets anything." Evans accepted the challenge — "We are a Bourbon, and proud of the name" — and reminded Richardson that "It was the most heroic act of the age when the Count de Chambord refused the French crown unless it was decorated with the lillies of France — the white flag of the legitimate Kings; the hereditary emblems which were nothing in themselves, yet powerful in the vindication of a principle."<sup>83</sup>

This split within the Democratic party was evidenced many times in the congressional district conventions which were held during the summer months of 1874 to name candidates for Congress. Sehorn of the Iowa City *Anti-Monopolist* found more fault with his party's nominations in some instances than he did with the Republican candidates. He saw the conflict within the Democratic ranks, and named Irish as a "simon pure democrat of the bourbon stripe." While Irish and others pretended to support the Anti-Monopoly party, said Sehorn, "they are secretly maintaining and nurturing the old Democratic organization into life and force as their party of the future." Irish, who publicly supported the Anti-Monopoly program, was "in secret collusion with the railroad and other monopolies of the State." How much of this is true, and how much may be attributed to local political animus, cannot of course be proved, but the very fact of the conflict points up the lack of harmony in the ranks of the protest movement. In Ottumwa, Jacob W. Dixon accused Evans of defeating him for the Anti-Monopoly congressional nomination and threatened dire consequences.<sup>84</sup> Faced with a well-managed Republican party, these internal quarrels boded no good for the opposition.

Meanwhile, the voters looked on, made up their minds, and went to the polls in October to destroy the so-called farmers' movement embodied in the Anti-Monopoly party. The margin of victory for the Republican state

<sup>83</sup> Ottumwa *Democrat*, July 29, 1875.

<sup>84</sup> Iowa City *Anti-Monopolist*, July 16, Oct. 8, 1874; Ottumwa *Democrat*, July 23, 1874.



ticket was below that of previous years, with the exception of 1873, but it was satisfactory. There was one fly in the ointment for the Republican congressional delegation — one Anti-Monopolist had slipped through, to spoil Iowa's solid Republican record. Lucien L. Ainsworth of West Union, a former Democrat, won election in the third district composed of Buchanan, Delaware, Dubuque, Fayette, Clayton, Winneshiek, and Allamakee counties.<sup>85</sup> Although elected as an Anti-Monopolist, Ainsworth voted with the Democrats during his term in Congress.

But one Congressman did not make a victory, or a party, and the Democrats began running for cover with unseemly haste. Two days after the election Evans wrote in an editorial headed "Emancipation Day": "On Tuesday, Oct. 13th the Democrats of Iowa closed their engagement with the Anti-Monopoly Troupe and on Wednesday Oct. 14th entered into business on their own account." Thayer was also relieved: "There seems to be a disposition all over the State to turn 'anti-monop' out to grass. This is wise. Such a name is enough to destroy any political organization. . . . Now let us come back to the good, old democratic organization. . . ." It was all the fault of an "ill-constructed platform," said Thayer a week later, evidently forgetting that in March he had called the preliminary platform "the most sensible set of resolutions" he had ever read. Irish's comment is perhaps the most amazing, considering the part he had played in taking the Democrats into the Anti-Monopoly party.

In the organization of the Anti-Monopoly party of Iowa, old political leaders had no part nor lot. The people concluded that for the purpose they desired to accomplish the Democratic party of Iowa was no longer useful and they consigned it to the limbo of undone things, and chose a new instrument of their own accord.

Sehorn admitted that the Anti-Monopoly party had been "a myth," and called for a "new and pure political workingmens party to save the country." By the spring of 1875, however, even Sehorn had surrendered, had left Iowa City, and had started publication of the *Marengo Democrat*.<sup>86</sup>

Porte Welch, who had long advocated reform movements within and without the Democratic party, tried to explain the latest setback. He con-

<sup>85</sup> For Ainsworth, see Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4:3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ottumwa Democrat*, Oct. 15, 1874; *Clinton Age*, March 6, Oct. 23, 30, 1874; *Iowa City Press*, Oct. 28, 1874; *Iowa City Anti-Monopolist*, Oct. 22, 1874; *History of Iowa County*, 536.



cluded that it was not "lack of merit" in the Anti-Monopoly party that had brought defeat, but rather the "class of political adventurers" who had left the Republicans and taken over control of the party. This excuse is not borne out by the facts, however, since most of the top men in the movement had been Democrats rather than Republicans. Welch was closer to the truth when he added that if the new party had really been that — "a new party in spirit and in truth, and not an old party with a new name" — then the movement might have been more successful. If the Democratic party is now reorganized, he warned, it must "make a new departure from the repeated follies of the past, and must define its position on every important issue of the times." The leaders must not only preach the principles of Jefferson, they must also practice them. Here Welch put his finger on the real weakness of the Democratic party in Iowa. At the convention in June the Anti-Monopolists had "dodged every prominent question at issue," he wrote, and had thus lost the trust of the voter, who sensed that there was no real meaning to the movement.<sup>87</sup>

Actually, the defeat was not a loss for the farmers' movement, but a defeat for the Iowa Democrats. This flirtation with the farmers' movement shows the inherent weakness of the party under the domination of a Bourbon element which refused to recognize the economic realities of the region. The state had a number of strong Democratic editors, but nowhere in their publications is found an awareness of the problems facing the farmer in an age when industry — "monopoly" to the farmer — made the profits and the agriculturist received only the crumbs from the table. Furthermore, Iowa Democracy had no strong leader who could rally the voters. Their candidates were often unknowns, and their campaigns were weak and poorly organized. Irish, probably the best known Democrat in the state, had no real platform on which to stand. In 1873 he had hurried to put himself at the head of a movement that grew out of the farmers' economic problems, and then did his best to turn that movement from the path it had chosen. He and others like him succeeded only in destroying the movement, temporarily. Horace Merrill, in a recent study, assessed Iowa Democracy as "spiritless" and without leaders "whose profession was regional politics,"<sup>88</sup> a thesis confirmed by the 1873-1874 history of the Iowa Democrats.

<sup>87</sup> Letter of Porte Welch to Sam Evans, Oct. 20, 1874, in *Ottumwa Democrat*, Oct. 22, 1874.

<sup>88</sup> Merrill, *Bourbon Democracy of the Middle West*, 97.



The story of the Anti-Monopoly party in Iowa thus comes to be the story of the Democratic party, rather than an account of a phase of the agrarian revolt. Greenbackism, already stirring, was more fortunate in finding a leader — this time from the ranks of the Republican party. James B. Weaver, a life-long Republican, quarreled with his party over the currency issue and left it to join and to lead the Greenbackers.<sup>89</sup>

The traditional view of the Republican party is that it is the party of "big business." But in Iowa the party was from time to time willing to ignore the demands of business interests, if by so doing it they could win elections. The Republican leaders in the state were undoubtedly favorable to monopoly and opposed to greenbackism, as were the Bourbon Democrats, but they managed to hide their feelings better. Clarkson of the *Register*, the strongest editorial voice in the party, embraced railroad regulation with enthusiasm; four years later, and with certainly more enthusiasm, he supported the repeal of that legislation, once the political winds had shifted in that direction. He even preached a mild greenbackism for a time, when that was becoming popular. Realizing that economic prosperity and political success often go hand in hand, the Republicans wisely followed the needs of their region, and thus succeeded in remaining in power. This may not be high principle, but it was successful politics. In addition, the Republicans had a goodly number of well-known and popular candidates to offer the voters. And, probably most important, they conducted organized and carefully planned campaigns. Republican politicians worked hard at their jobs and were rewarded with almost uninterrupted control of the state from the Civil War until the political revolution of 1932, with the exception of a four-year interim under a Democratic governor, Horace Boies. Boies's victory in 1889 can be attributed on one hand to the fact that the Democrats in that year adopted and strongly supported a current popular issue — the repeal of the state's prohibitory law — and on the other hand, to the fact that the Republicans made a bad choice for their gubernatorial candidate in picking a man unacceptable to the Farmers' Alliance, which was then the voice of agrarian protest.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup> For biography of Weaver, see Fred Emory Haynes, *James Baird Weaver* (Iowa City, 1919).

<sup>90</sup> Jean B. Kern, "The Political Career of Horace Boies," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 47:220-21 (July, 1949). For Clarkson on greenbackism, see Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War . . .* (Iowa City, 1916), 175ff.



Even as the Democrats of Iowa ran cheering back to their old party standard in 1874, the farmers were toying with a new idea to solve their continuing economic troubles. Inflation in the form of more greenbacks now won their allegiance. But the Democrats were not to be taken in again by the farmers: their biggest fight in the convention which met in June of 1875 was over nothing more than a name for their party. Evans wanted the time-honored name of "Democratic," while Irish, still trying to be all things to all men, wanted something more all-inclusive. Irish won, and the party's platform began with the sonorous words: "The Democrats, Liberal Republicans, and Anti-Monopolists of the State of Iowa, in delegate convention assembled. . . ." Although the Democratic party of Iowa in 1875 is sometimes considered a continuation of the Anti-Monopoly party, actually it was wholly Democratic with not even a bow to antimonopolism.

The defeat of 1875 was even worse than that of 1874, and Evans concluded that in the future Democratic platforms did not need to contain "a single utterance outside of the usual resolutions adopted by Democratic conventions." Since the platform had been just about that — except for the ponderous name adopted but not used — it is hard to see what Evans complained about. However, he wanted no more "new departures," just the old principles, the "traditional doctrines of the Democratic party." Even Irish now agreed with him.<sup>91</sup>

Thus ended the Democratic experiment with reform. They had succeeded in destroying the Anti-Monopoly party, but the farmers were already turning to the greenback issue as the new panacea. The Democrats had accepted antimonopolism as a vehicle for political victory, and they had failed. They would not go so far as "soft money," even to win an election.

<sup>91</sup> Ottumwa *Democrat*, July 1, Oct. 28, Nov. 4, 1875.