Farmer-Labor Insurgency in Washington State

William Bouck, the Grange, and the Western Progressive Farmers

Carlos A. Schwantes

The Western Progressive Farmers represented one of America's more curious manifestations of agrarian radicalism. Nearly three decades of farmer-labor insurgency in the Pacific Northwest culminated in its formation in 1921—an event that nearly wrecked the parent Washington State Grange, a venerable reform organization in the region—yet its death some 10 years later went unnoticed. In between, the WPF attracted several thousand members from Minnesota west to the Pacific and espoused an unlikely gospel blending Bellamy nationalism and populism from the 1890s with mid-1920s-style communism and the teachings of Jesus, complete with camp-meeting revivals. More than anything else the WPF embodied the radical vision of one man: William Morley Bouck, champion of the underdog and the subject of several public controversies during the stormy years of the Great War and its aftermath.

Bouck was a strange and complex figure. At times he behaved like a wild bull crashing through one china shop of cherished tradition after another; at other times, he naïvely wondered why he was the target of such outrage and hostility. He genuinely seemed to delight in goading the rich, powerful, and conservative, yet in his private life he was a model of God-fearing agrarian domesticity. He was apparently a loyal husband and the doting father of five children. The handful of Bouck papers preserved at the University of Washington gives no insight into his contradictory nature and adds few relevant details of the controversies that swirled about him. On the other hand, investigations by the United States Department of Justice, grange reports, and newspaper clippings provide a vivid picture of the headstrong man who wished to lead American farmers into a brave new world.[1]

Bouck's time of troubles began shortly after he became master of the 15,000-member Washington State Grange in late 1917 upon the death of his predecessor, Carey B. Kegley. The reform-minded Kegley had long irritated both the national leadership of the grange and conservative politicians of Washington State, the group he caricatured as the "Fish, Sawdust, and Whiskey" gang. Before his untimely death, critics seized upon the wartime suspicion of nonconformity to undermine Kegley's leadership and discredit his progressive programs. Even had Bouck not become master, a major clash was likely; Bouck's personality and his determination to follow the course charted by Kegley made it almost inevitable. The new master, however, seemed oblivious to the growing intolerance in the nation and failed to heed the friendly counsel offered by a former North Dakota grange leader, Ray McKaig, now of Idaho, who warned that "anything you do to carry out Kegley's plans will be taking Kegley's enemies on your shoulders."[2]

A close look at the burden of the past that was Kegley's legacy to Bouck provides perspective on the new master's troubles and on the formation of the Western Progressive Farmers. When Washington grangers elected Kegley in 1905, he took the helm of an organization that had been anchored for years in the safe haven of complacency, a condition that described the national grange as well. In its early years the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry had been a fighting body, identified as a major reform organization by its promotion of the granger laws regulating railroads and grain elevators in the 1870s, but by the turn of the century it had evolved into an innocuous fraternal order. The national organization changed little during the next two decades, but under Kegley's leadership the state grange recaptured the reforming zeal of bygone years. The Washington group became not only the fastest-growing branch of the Patrons of Husbandry but also, according to a reporter for the *Arena*, one of the most progressive organizations in the state.[3]

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1. The William Bouck Papers are in the University of Washington Libraries, Seattle.

2. *Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Session of the Washington State Grange, 1917*, 35 (first quotation) (hereafter cited as WSG *Proceedings* with appropriate year); Ray McKaig to William Bouck, Feb. 4, 1918, p. 1, Ray McKaig Papers, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise (second quotation).

3. George Shibley, "Progressive Farmers," *Arena*, Vol. 39 (1908), 97. On the evolution of

A dynamic, impatient reformer, William Bouck urged Washington farmers to assert their political and economic power against the system that exploited them. (Liberator, 1924)

Within months of his becoming master, Kegley steered the Washington grange into a new political coalition that included the Farmers' Union, the Direct Legislation League, and the state Federation of Labor. This Joint Legislative Committee lobbied successfully for a variety of reforms including woman suffrage, direct legislation, a mothers' pension, and a minimum wage law, and in the process filled conservatives with fear and loathing. They would have liked nothing better than for the grange to stay out of politics. A hostile outburst long remembered by agrarian insurgents occurred during the 1913 session of the state legislature when a leader of the Republican old guard defied the farmers' demands and, shaking his fist at Kegley, who was sitting in the gallery, shouted, "The best thing you farmers can do is to go back to eastern Washington and raise wheat, instead of coming down here to raise hell." At times, 20 or more representatives of organized workers and farmers converged on Olympia to monitor the legislature. The group early got into the habit of meeting every evening to plan the next day's strategy and in the process discovered many areas of common ground beyond promotion of the initiative, referendum, and recall. These lobbyists also learned to avoid issues such as prohibition that might split the progressive coalition.[4]

Kegley's vision of a working alliance between agrarians and organized labor was not shared by many grange leaders, and neither was his advocacy of Henry George's idea of a single tax on unimproved land. Sometimes he climbed far out on a limb, as when he called for replacing the state legislature with a small, efficient board of commissioners, but Kegley was simply unafraid of heterodox ideas. During his 12-year tenure as head of the Washington State Grange, he made it a congenial home for the alumni of a variety of protest movements including the Alliance, populist, and socialist crusades.[5]

Kegley himself had been an officer of Washington's Populist party in the late 1890s, and when it collapsed he became a prime mover in the drive to convert Populists to socialism, even serving as a Socialist party organizer in the Palouse country of eastern Washington where he had his farm. He next became a Theodore Roosevelt Progressive; shortly before his death he embraced yet another reform crusade, the Nonpartisan League, a movement with socialist overtones that swept out of North Dakota like a prairie fire in 1916. No matter what cause Kegley embraced, the vast majority of Washington grangers supported him. His sincerity and honesty won their confidence; more important, they trusted him as a friend who knew firsthand the marketing difficulties and other problems facing small farmers in the Pacific Northwest.[6]

William Bouck, by contrast, was a question mark in the minds of grangers when he succeeded Kegley in November 1917. Because of his success working as a grange organizer among his fellow farmers in the Puget Sound region, members had elected him their overseer, or second in command, in 1916 and again in 1917, but few people really knew much about him. Enemies of the grange, hoping to force its members to turn to a more conservative leader after Kegley, were quick to exploit that fact.[7]

Bouck's detractors took advantage of wartime hysteria to question his loyalty, asserting that because of his German ancestry and his support of the Nonpartisan League he was unfit to head the state grange. Actually, Bouck was of Dutch descent, a fourth- or fifth-generation American who traced his roots back to New York's Mohawk Valley. Born in 1868 in Independence, Iowa, he had grown up in a staunch Republican family. His father was a nurseryman, but the son, though he eventually became a commercial bulb grower, first sought a teaching career. Following graduation from normal school in Minnesota, Bouck worked for several years as a teacher. In 1891 he married Lura Snow, a fellow educator, and two years later the young couple moved west to Washington. Their first home was in the Cascade Mountain town of Silverton, where he ran a store and served as postmaster. Occasionally, he also worked as a timber cruiser and hard-rock miner. In 1902 the Boucks moved to a farm located near the

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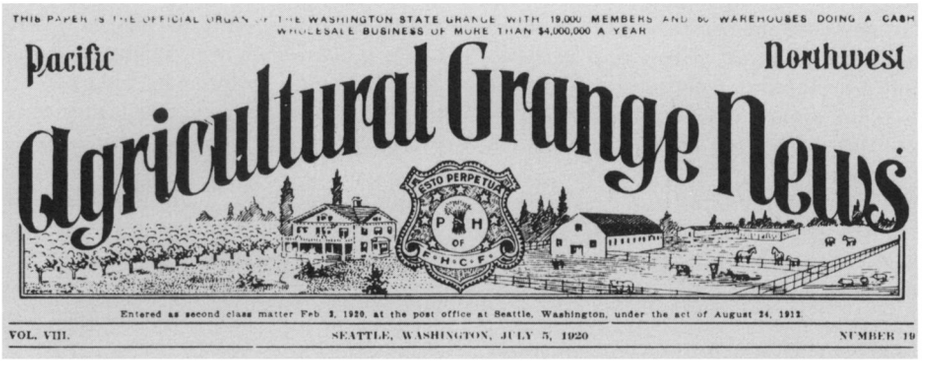
the Washington State Grange, see Harriet Ann Crawford, *The Washington State Grange, 1889-1924* (Portland, Oreg., 1940).

4. WSG *Proceedings*, 1917, p. 34; *Nonpartisan Leader* (Minneapolis, Fargo, N.D.), Feb. 4, 1918 (quotation); *Agricultural Grange News* (Olympia, Seattle, Wenatchee), Dec. 1, 1917.

5. *Agricultural Grange News*, Oct. 1, 1913, April 1, Oct. 1, 1914, Dec. 1, 1916, Dec. 1, 1917.

6. *Ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1917; *Washington Farmer*, Vol. 40 (Nov. 1, 1917), 5; *Nonpartisan Leader*, Aug. 11, 1919. On C. B. Kegley, see Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle, 1979), 107, 160-61, 170. Detailed information on the Nonpartisan League is contained in Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis, 1955). On the coming of the Nonpartisan League to the Pacific Northwest, see 1916 issues of the Seattle *Herald*.

7. Seattle *Daily Union Record*, March 3, 6, 1919. Grangers also elected Bouck's wife, Lura, their chaplain.


THIS PAPER IS THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE WASHINGTON STATE GRANGE WITH 19,000 MEMBERS AND 60 WAREHOUSES DOING A CASH WHOLESALE BUSINESS OF MORE THAN $4,000,000 A YEAR

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Skagit River town of Sedro Woolley, where they raised their five children and spent the rest of their long lives. The Boucks were naturally an education-minded family. In 1898 Lura wrote Professor Edmond S. Meany at the University of Washington asking if her husband could "find *anything* to do in Seattle whereby he can make even the plainest kind of a living this winter, . . . we want *very much* to go there to place the two little girls in *kindergarten*."[8]

The experience of straddling the line between farmer and miner caused Bouck to believe that "farmers and industrial workers stand together in this Northwest, as nowhere else in the world. They have had the same experiences, the same background." That conviction explains a great deal about Bouck's perception of the course of agrarian insurgency: unlike Kegley who was ever the reformer, Bouck grew increasingly radical and militant. During his life he had been a member of the Populist party, the Western Federation of Miners, Roosevelt's Bull Moose party, and finally the Nonpartisan League. As a miner he had experienced firsthand the violence of labor-management confrontation. Thus, as leader of the grange, Bouck considered himself the spokesman for an unusual breed of agrarian, farmers who "have worked at mining, in the woods, in Alaska. I know them by the thousands," stated Bouck. "They are in every grange in the state. Independent, free, with the spirit of the mountains." Indeed, in Bouck's day the numerous stump farmers trying to eke out a living on logged-off lands occasionally sought to make ends meet by working part of the year in nearby sawmills or logging camps.[9]

Another perception shaping Bouck's thinking was that of himself as a fighter who had enlisted in a good cause. "I have just one strong quality," he confessed to a newspaper reporter in 1920. "I have sort of an idea of right and wrong, and I can stand a lot of hammering and fight back, and not get sore about it. And so the plutocracy in this state has kept on hammering me till it has made me one of the best-known men in the state."[10]

Bouck's time of intense hammering began in mid-1918 when the grange met in Walla Walla for its annual convention, and its enemies were well prepared to depose the radical new master. With the cooperation of an influential local newspaper editor, John G. Kelly of the Walla Walla *Bulletin*, they blasted Bouck as a dangerous subversive, "the misguided exponent of the worst form of I. W. W. ism that Washington has ever suffered from," and urged grangers to repudiate him. When members defiantly elected Bouck to another term, a mob spirit seized Bouck's detractors. They broke up the convention. Bouck slipped away unnoticed as his fellow grangers left town singing patriotic anthems. When the *Bulletin* learned of his quiet departure, it sneered, "Mr. Bouck evidently did not care to endanger his health by remaining in Walla Walla until the evening train left for Pasco [and Seattle]."[11]

Bouck's troubles multiplied. During the following weeks he toured the state, speaking before at least 20 different audiences and boldly repeating his view that the government should own the railroads and that farmers should cooperate with organized labor. As odious as conservatives found such proposals, they found his views on wartime finance far worse, seditious beyond question. Like Kegley before him, Bouck opposed war in general but loyally accepted President Woodrow Wilson's war to end all wars. Bouck also hoped that the conflict would hasten the enactment of the reforms he sought, citing as evidence the government's takeover of the railroads. His ideas about financing the war differed from Wilson's, however, and conservatives saw that divergence as evidence of disloyalty. Bouck wanted to finance the war through steep tax rates for the wealthy instead of mortgaging the country's future through reliance on the sale of liberty bonds.[12]

For his controversial remarks, Bouck was indicted in August by a grand jury in Seattle and charged with violating the Espionage Act recently passed by Congress. He faced the possibility of a $10,000 fine and 20 years in jail. Bouck's friends in the labor movement and the grange believed he was the victim of a frame-up conceived by reaction-

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8. *Ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1920; *Agricultural Grange News*, March 1, 1919; *Washington State Labor News* (Seattle), Oct. 31, 1930; *Western Progressive Farmer* (Seattle, Sedro Woolley, Prosser), Aug. 15, 1924; William Bouck, autobiographical sketch, Bouck Papers; Lura Bouck to Edmond S. Meany, Aug. 29, 1898, Box 17, Edmond S. Meany Papers, University of Washington Archives, Seattle.

9. *Union Record*, Oct. 9, 1920 (quotations); *Journal of Proceedings of the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, Fifty-eighth Annual Session, 1924*, 132 (hereafter cited as National Grange *Proceedings* with appropriate year). On stump farming in Washington, see monthly issues of *Little Logged-Off Lands*, published in Seattle beginning in May 1912; and Richard White, "Poor Men on Poor Lands: The Back-to-the-Land Movement of the Early Twentieth Century—A Case Study," *PHR*, Vol. 49 (1980), 105-31.

10. *Union Record*, Oct. 9, 1920.

11. Walla Walla *Bulletin*, June 5 and 8, 1918 (quotations). For a detailed account of Bouck's troubles before and during the Walla Walla convention, see Carlos A. Schwantes, "Making the World Unsafe for Democracy: Vigilantes, Grangers and the Walla Walla 'Outrage' of June 1918," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 31 (January 1981), 18-29.

12. *Nonpartisan Leader*, Sept. 9, 1918; *Agricultural Grange News*, March 1, 1918; WSG *Proceedings*, 1918, pp. 25-45.

aries, and they determined to fight back, ultimately taking their arguments to the Justice Department. After four months of skirmishing between officials in Washington, D.C., and an overzealous special prosecutor in Seattle, the case was dropped in late December 1918 for lack of evidence.[13]

World War I had been a great ordeal for Bouck and the farmer-labor movement. Both survived it but both were changed. Bouck's year of harassment had increased his alienation and intensified his radicalism. Furthermore, if in some parts of the nation wartime persecution of dissidents banked the fires of reform, the exact opposite happened to the farmer-labor movement in Washington. Bouck and his friends were angry men and women more determined than ever to win control of government through the votes of their fellow farmers and workers.[14]

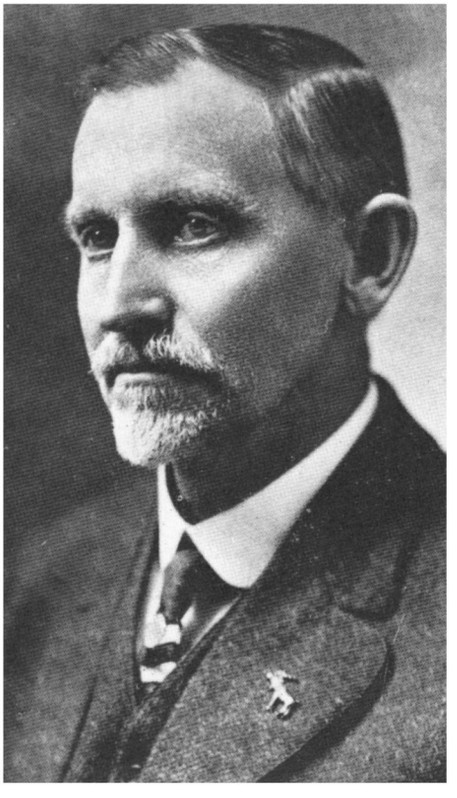
Throughout 1919 and much of 1920 the insurgents debated questions of ideology and strategy. Among the most pressing issues was whether they should continue to follow the nonpartisan course or create a state branch of the new national Farmer-Labor party. Wartime harassment had fatally weakened the Nonpartisan League; on the other hand, the mood of expectation that followed the Russian Revolution seemed to favor formation of a separate party of producers. Strengthening the case for a farmer-labor alliance were converts from the Socialist party and the virtual collapse of the state Democratic party.[15]

Meeting in Yakima in mid-July 1920, members of a progressive-radical coalition voted to form a new political party. The following September Bouck and 250 other men and women assembled in the Seattle labor temple to nominate candidates and perfect the organization of Washington's Farmer-Labor party. It was an act that borrowed heavily from the three-decades-old tradition of agitation by farmers and workers in the Pacific Northwest. By any standard the new party was a remarkable collection of people diverse in background and personality yet united by the conviction that they were the vanguard of a movement whose time had finally come. Veteran advocates of populism and the myriad other 'isms and 'osophies of the 1890s stood shoulder to shoulder with young champions of the recently organized Private Soldiers' and Sailors' Legion, a left-wing veterans group. The presiding officer at the nominating convention was David C. Coates, an initiator of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, one-time lieutenant governor of Colorado and city commissioner of Spokane, and most recently a national leader of the Nonpartisan League.[16]

The new party determined to unite farmers and industrial workers in more than name only. Congressional candidates included James A. Duncan, a Seattle labor leader; Homer T. Bone, a Tacoma lawyer, former socialist, and future U.S. senator; Knute Hill, a Prosser farmer; and William Bouck. Candidate for lieutenant governor was the Yakima Valley orchardist Elihu Bowles, nicknamed "the Cherry King." Frank Pease, general organizer for the Private Soldiers' and Sailors' Legion was candidate for state auditor. The Farmer-Labor nominee for attorney general was J. M. Phillips, a Native American educated at the Carlisle Indian School, who was a football star, lawyer, and mayor of Aberdeen. Phillips had come to Aberdeen in 1904 and worked as a hod carrier and day laborer to earn enough money to open a law office.[17]

An equally noteworthy embodiment of the American dream of success was Robert Bridges, the new party's candidate for governor and one of the state's grand old men of insurgency. Born in Scotland, Bridges had started work in the coal mines of Ayrshire at the age of nine. Migrating to the United States 11 years later with his wife and child, he was impoverished and illiterate but thrilled by the prospect of a better life in America. Bridges's wife taught him to read and write while he was employed as a coal miner in southern Iowa. From then on he was an avid student of books. He also saved enough money to migrate to Washington in 1887 where he found a job in the coal mines of the Cascade Mountains. Soon he was able to lease a

Carey Kegley, whose office and many of whose ideas Bouck inherited, was himself a controversial grange leader from 1905 to 1917. (Washington State Grange Proceedings, 1913)



13. On Bouck's legal problems, see Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Ordeal of William Morley Bouck, 1918-1919: Limits to the Federal Suppression of Agrarian Dissidents," *Agricultural History* (in press).

14. On the evolution of the farmer-labor movement, see Hamilton Cravens, "A History of the Washington Farmer-Labor Party, 1918-1924," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1962), and "The Emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party in Washington Politics, 1919-20," *PNQ*, Vol. 57 (1966), 148-57.

15. Cravens, "Emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party," 153-55; and Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle, 1964), 3-22.

16. *Union Record*, Sept. 14, 15, 1920; Cravens, "Emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party," 153-54. On David C. Coates, see Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*, 132, 151, 210, *et passim*; and Spokane *Labor World*, March 9, 1917.

17. *Union Record*, Oct. 22, 1920; *Nonpartisan Leader*, Oct. 4, 1920. Hill subsequently served in the state legislature and as a Democratic member of Congress from 1933 to 1943; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (Washington, D.C., 1971), s.v. "Hill, Knute."

farm in King County. To the problems of the agriculturists he brought the perspective of a miner educated in the American and British labor movements and in the Populist party insurgency. He was elected state land commissioner in 1896 on the Populist ticket. Committed to reducing farmers' shipping costs, Bridges openly advocated public ownership of dock and terminal facilities, and he served as chairman of Seattle's port commission prior to his 1920 gubernatorial nomination.[18]

Driven by zeal bordering on the religious, supporters of the Farmer-Labor party crisscrossed Washington seeking converts. They spoke in churches, in labor halls, and at picnic grove rallies. Though their reform program was elaborate, their message was simple: "Why should the farmers lose their crops, because of low prices, and the city workers be robbed of their wages, on account of high prices charged them by distributors of these low-price products?"[19]

During 1920 few people worked harder to promote the farmer-labor idea than Bouck, who was described by the left-wing Seattle *Union Record* as a "John the Baptist of the new industrial and political order." The paper's reporter, Anna Louise Strong, lionized the raw-boned, plain-speaking farmer and wrote favorably of his campaign for Congress. Some predicted he would be elected by a larger majority than any other Farmer-Labor candidate. Bouck confided to Strong that the one thing he would dislike most about winning was having to leave the state he loved to "go down into that dirty political mess in Washington City."[20]

When the votes were counted in November, supporters of the Farmer-Labor party were uncertain how to interpret the returns. Bouck could unpack his bags. He would not be going to Congress soon, although his capture of 40 percent of the votes in his district augured well for the future. Bridges ran well too, receiving 121,000 votes, enough to put him well ahead of his Democratic rival but not enough to overtake the victorious Republican Louis F. Hart, who received 211,000 votes. The national Farmer-Labor party's presidential candidate, Parley Christensen of Utah, who ran better in Washington than in any other state, received 77,000 votes. The new party sent three members to the state legislature, one to the senate and two to the house. That total was one more than the Democrats elected. For a party that had been in existence only a few months, it was a very creditable showing. To many observers it seemed that the Farmer-Labor party had become the only viable alternative to the Republicans, who had dominated Washington politics since statehood.[21]

It was to Sedro Woolley, his home since 1902, that Bouck retreated in the late 1920s, resuming flower bulb cultivation and sales. (Photography Collection, UW Libraries)

Bouck for one took the election results as a favorable sign. He concluded that the triumph of the farmer-labor movement was inevitable, and the collapse of the economy during the following months bolstered his conviction. Wartime prosperity vanished as the price of basic commodities fell precipitously. Agrarians were particularly hard hit; during a short period of time many lost their farms and were reduced to destitution.[22]

Troubles other than economic also added to Bouck's growing sense of alienation. Chief among these were long-standing and worsening tensions between East and West within the grange. Since the early days of Kegley's leadership, the grangers of Washington and other western states had seen themselves as progressives in an organization dominated by eastern reactionaries. They believed that the grange's national leadership was insensitive to the needs and interests of the western farmer. When Kegley had spoken to his Washington colleagues, he frequently presented a negative view of the national grange, referring to the "old ring leaders" who dominated the organization, and repeatedly predicting their fall from power. His message to state grangers in 1914 was that "the reactionaries who have so long disgraced our National body are passing out, and new State Masters are taking their place." He hoped that by 1917, the grange's 50th anniversary, the

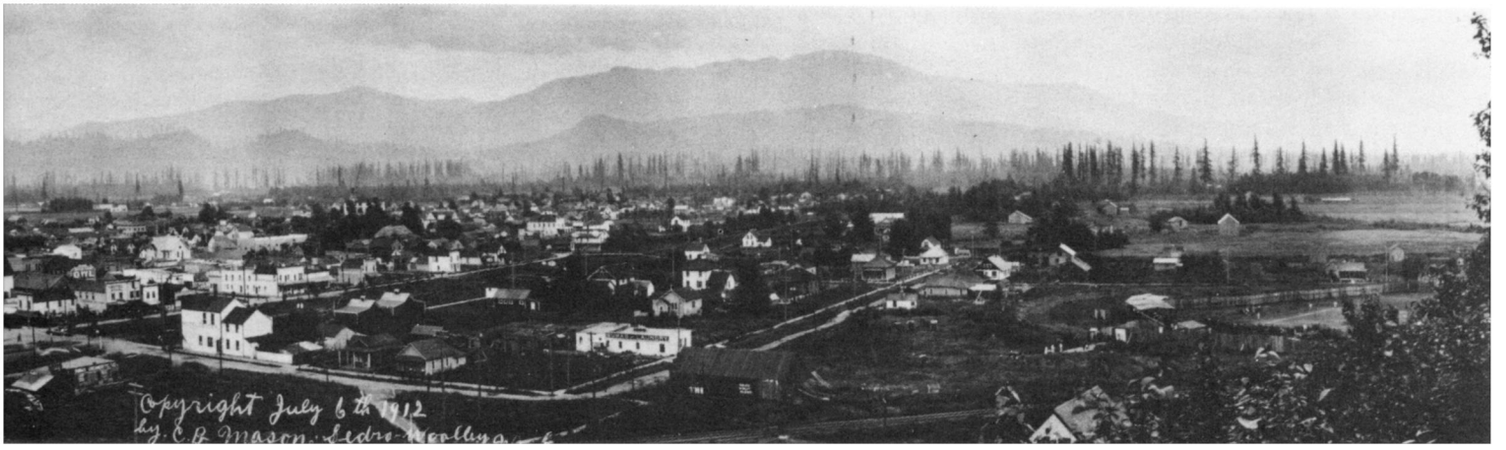
18. *Nonpartisan Leader*, April 12, 1917, Feb. 4, 1918.

19. Joel Shoemaker, "The Northwest Comes of Age," *Liberator*, Vol. 9 (September 1923), 20.

20. *Union Record*, March 6, 1919, Feb. 10 (first quotation), Oct. 9 (second quotation), 1920.

21. Cravens, "Emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party," 156-57; *Union Record*, Nov. 5, 1920; *Labor World*, Nov. 16, 1920; John C. Kennedy, "The Outlook for a Labor Party," *American Labor Monthly*, Vol. 1 (June 1923), 17-23; Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928* (New York, 1928), 393-96; Washington State, Secretary of State, *Fourth Biennial Report, Election Division, 1920* (Olympia, 1921), 21-23, 65.

22. Kenneth Campbell MacKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924* (New York, 1947), 39-43; John D. Hicks, *Rehearsal for Disaster: The Boom and Collapse of 1919-1920* (Gainesville, Fla., 1961). In early 1921 Bouck claimed that of 66,000 farmers in Washington an estimated 30,000 were "either bankrupt or on the verge of bankruptcy"; see *Union Record*, Jan. 31, 1921.



national organization would be "redeemed" from control by reactionaries and "fired with the progressive spirit of aggressive militancy in the farmers' cause." Again in 1916 he prophesied, "The day of reaction in the National Grange is passing, and we hope will soon be past forever."[23]

By 1917, however, it was obvious that Kegley's hopes for change would not be realized soon. That year in his annual master's address he sounded an especially pessimistic note: after reviewing his dozen years as state master, he regretted to say that "the things which I believe, nay, which I know, would make the National Grange a power in the land, still seem as far off as they were twelve years ago." During those years, it should be noted, Kegley had paid a price for his criticism. Once he was tried before a stormy session of the national organization and on another occasion censured. The Idaho granger Ray McKaig recalled seeing Kegley's wife "weep in silence at the insults hurled at her husband in National Session." But Kegley persisted because he believed the future was on the side of the progressive grangers of the West.[24]

Bouck held the grange's eastern-oriented leadership in even greater contempt than Kegley had. In 1920 he told Washington members that the past session of the national grange had been

a bitter disappointment to me. It opposed the extension of government operation of the railroads for two years, on not one of the great issues of reconstruction did it make a strong declaration, and it seized the opportunity of an invitation from the A. F. of L. to send delegates to a general conference, to send a curt refusal and make a denunciatory attack on organized labor generally.[25]

In only four states west of Michigan, complained Bouck, was there any considerable grange membership. "It is interesting to remember that the first big fight led by our great leader, Brother Kegley, against the old machine rulers in the National Grange was to break the conspiracy that prevented, and had prevented for twenty years, the extension of the Grange into new states." In prophetic words Bouck asserted to Anna Louise Strong after the grange's 1920 Boston convention: "The grange in the East is so different from our grange in Washington that it seems almost like a different organization. . . . Ninety per cent of the Eastern grangers are not farmers at all, but business men."[26]

The divergence between the Washington and national granges was especially noticeable in their publications. Reflecting Bouck's views, the *Agricultural Grange News* editorialized in 1919:

We are bound by ties of brotherhood to all mankind. . . . We must learn to see things from the other fellow's viewpoint and take advantage of our knowledge in improving our own position before we can be truly a reformer, and the Seattle Daily Union Record, *if read by our members, will tend to broaden our organization and teach us to see things from the standpoint of the city laboring man as well as from our own viewpoint.*[27]

The *National Grange Monthly* preached a far different message. It expressed "universal relief" when federal officials deported alien radicals and rejoiced at the "definite promise that hundreds more are soon to go. . . . With most of them deportation should have come long ago, while for some of them a firing squad would more nearly have been their just desert." The publication also supported the grange's 1920 declaration in favor of the open shop. It was just such a declaration that caused Bouck to lament to Strong that eastern grangers are

absolutely prejudiced against anything progressive, and with no idea at all of the problems in our country. . . . They look upon public ownership of public utilities as a wild, fantastic, Bolshevistic dream. They almost resent any statement about it. You mention labor, and they go off in a tirade against strikes and anarchistic schemes![28]

Bouck's unorthodox ideas and ways were openly questioned at the grange's

23. Crawford, 190; WSG *Proceedings*, 1914, p. 34 (first three quotations), and 1916, p. 51 (fourth quotation).

24. WSG *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 31, and 1917, p. 36 (first quotation); *Agricultural Grange News*, Jan. 1, 1915, Aug. 20, 1921 (second quotation); Crawford, 194.

25. WSG *Proceedings*, 1920, p. 39.

26. *Ibid.*, 39-40 (first quotation); *Union Record*, Dec. 10, 1920 (second quotation). The four western states with significant grange membership were Colorado, Kansas, Oregon, and Washington.

27. *Agricultural Grange News*, March 1, 1919.

28. *National Grange Monthly*, Vol. 17 (January 1920), 14 (first quotation), and (December 1920), 12; *Union Record*, Dec. 10, 1920 (second quotation).

December 1920 national convention in Boston, where he was forced to stand trial. A group of dissident Washington grangers, primarily from the Yakima Valley, formally accused him of such things as injecting partisan politics into the grange; recruiting mill hands, lumbermen, and radicals as members; speaking disloyally of the national body and its officers; and fostering secession by Washington members. Convicted on five of eight charges, Bouck was humiliated by being forced to stand before the assembled delegates, apologize, suffer the national master's reprimand, and—after placing his hand on the Bible—renew his pledge to uphold the order. Bouck subsequently recalled himself as having said to the delegates, "I am sorry to have told the truth," but the official record contains no such words. He may have made his pledge with a mental reservation or was, perhaps, simply voicing wishful thinking at a later date. In any case, he did not alter his course.[29]

When the 1921 convention of the state grange opened in Colville, Bouck seemed determined to provoke another clash with the grange's conservative national leadership. In his master's address he lashed out so bitterly at his favorite targets and advanced so many radical proposals that his past speeches seemed tame by contrast. The prevailing mood conveyed in his address was postwar disillusionment. He thundered,

We are in [a] much worse state than ever before in our history. The reign of greed, and the subjection of the producer [have] been fastened upon the people with iron shackles. Our state and nation are in the iron grip of a "dollarocracy" more greedy, more relentless, than any autocracy of modern or ancient history. Our shops and mines have become slave pens and shambles where more widows starve and more children drag out a miserable existence, than in the slave marts of ancient Rome or Carthage.[30]

Among other parts of the address that horrified conservatives were these:

Farmers must take an active interest in establishing industrial democracy or we ourselves will be drawn into the maelstrom of revolution incited by the greed of the Money Lords of our country. (p. 45)

Our legislature is a joke—but a serious one, for the people of Washington State—and we will never get rid of this perennial parasitic nuisance until we overcome our silly party superstitions. (p. 48)

Our present industrial system stands self convicted. The larger the farmers' crops the smaller net rate the farmer gets. This system makes thousands of widows every year. Millions go hungry because of it. (p. 55)

On the subject of militarism, Bouck probed an especially sensitive nerve when he called it the product of "ignorance and the profit system" and urged: "Let's organize against this terror of capitalism—its tool in fact. Let's agree to pay no taxes—to lend no aid—to refuse to serve as soldiers for our government or any other to carry on war, except to repel invasion" (pp. 54, 55).

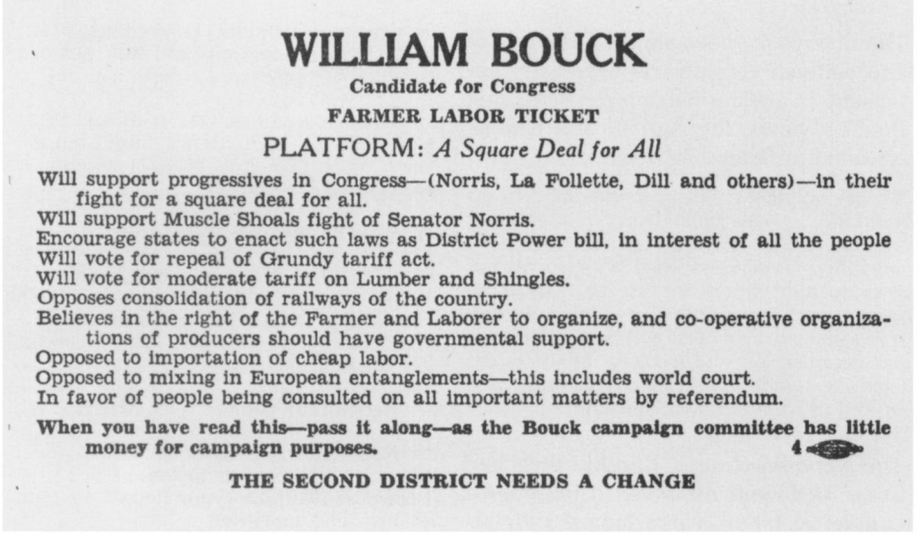
Bouck admonished his fellow grangers,

Let us change this industrial robbery into an earth bubbling over with the laughter of children, change the widow's tears into joy. This opportunity is ahead of us and as farmers we may have a large share in ushering in this glad new time and ushering out forever the sorrows and wars and hatreds of the past[,] and this means cutting out forever profit competition. (p. 55)

Never in the history of any state grange was there an address like this. The *Washington Farmer*, which had stood with Bouck at the time of the Walla Walla expulsion, called his Colville speech "reckless and intemperate" and accused him of being "more deeply concerned over the lot of the wage-earners in the industrial centers than over the bettering of the condition of the American farmer and his family." "Mr. Bouck shows too much heat, hate and bitterness," it continued. "He has copied too closely the epithets of the muck-rakers and the clap-trap of the syndicalists and communists."[31]

Others offended by the address sent protests to the Department of Justice and the national head of the grange. The Justice Department dismissed the suggestion that it prosecute Bouck under federal criminal law, but the grange's national head, Sherman J. Lowell, had clearly had his fill of Bouck. He wired the Washington master a strongly worded reprimand taking exception to his hostility toward capitalism, taxation, and military service. "After carefully reading your address I am entirely discouraged and have come to the conclusion that there could not be very much sincerity in your pledge given at Boston."[32]

Handbill, 1920. (Bouck Papers, UW Libraries)



WILLIAM BOUCK

Candidate for Congress

FARMER LABOR TICKET

PLATFORM: *A Square Deal for All*

Will support progressives in Congress—(Norris, La Follette, Dill and others)—in their fight for a square deal for all.
Will support Muscle Shoals fight of Senator Norris.
Encourage states to enact such laws as District Power bill, in interest of all the people
Will vote for repeal of Grundy tariff act.
Will vote for moderate tariff on Lumber and Shingles.
Opposes consolidation of railways of the country.
Believes in the right of the Farmer and Laborer to organize, and co-operative organizations of producers should have governmental support.
Opposed to importation of cheap labor.
Opposed to mixing in European entanglements—this includes world court.
In favor of people being consulted on all important matters by referendum.

When you have read this—pass it along—as the Bouck campaign committee has little money for campaign purposes.

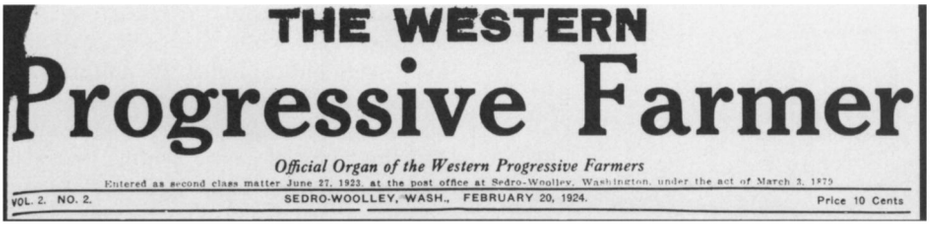
THE SECOND DISTRICT NEEDS A CHANGE

29. Bouck, autobiographical sketch, 5 (quotation)—Bouck's sketch contains a second, similar, version of his apology; Crawford, 270-71; National Grange *Proceedings*, 1920, p. 162.

30. For this and the following two paragraphs, see WSG *Proceedings*, 1921, pp. 33-60 (quotation, 33).

31. *Washington Farmer*, Vol. 44 (June 16, 1921), 604.

32. H. S. Ridgley for U.S. attorney general to W. H. Illman, Sept. 8, 1921, and H. M. Daugherty to Miles Poindexter, June 27, 1921, Department of Justice Records, Mail and Files Division, File No. 192980, Record Group 60,


THE WESTERN
Progressive Farmer
Official Organ of the Western Progressive Farmers
Entered as second class matter June 27, 1923, at the post office at Sedro-Woolley, Washington, under the act of March 3, 1879
VOL. 2. NO. 2. SEDRO-WOOLLEY, WASH., FEBRUARY 20, 1924. Price 10 Cents

Concluding that a public reprimand was not enough, he and the national grange executive committee suspended Bouck as master pending a full airing of the case at the next national convention. Lowell ordered Overseer Fred Nelson to take temporary charge of the Washington grange.[33]

A clash between Bouck and Lowell was probably inevitable. Both were bluff, outspoken, and adamant men, and they held diametrically opposed political views. The national master, a grape grower from upstate New York, was a standpat Republican in the mold of Calvin Coolidge (President Coolidge, in fact, was to appoint him to the U.S. Tariff Commission in 1926). Lowell, however, represented the kind of agrarian mind that Washington grange leaders had publicly scorned for years.[34]

His westerner's contempt for the East influenced Bouck's course of action following his mid-1921 suspension. Without doubt he was gratified when Ray McKaig rallied to his side, saying that Lowell's action had "insulted the whole State Grange" and wondering if the time had come for "a new Washington State Grange of free American farmers." Bouck pondered whether he should form a new organization or wait as others urged until the national convention—meeting that year in Portland, Oregon—heard his side of the case. After several weeks he decided to break with the national organization, to end the ordeal suffered for too long by Washington's reform-minded members. Convinced that at the Boston convention the national grange "took the side of the grafters and persecuted me from that time on," he informed state grangers that he was not going to Portland

to be tried in that caucus of the reactionary Republican party called the National Grange—I am going to make no more apologies to that gang—I am not seeking nor will I accept any office under the control of the National Grange—I am not going to be a party to the despoiling of workers and children and women everywhere.

Bouck called upon his supporters to meet in Seattle in mid-October to create a reorganized state grange.[35]

The seceders met on October 13 and 14, 1921, and drew up a platform that began with this principle: "We believe that all community-made values belong to the community." The remainder of the document proposed a variety of reforms, including government ownership of the means of transportation and communication and opposition to war except to repel foreign invasion until the matter was submitted to a vote of the people. The rebels called themselves the Washington State Grange, Incorporated, but after the old grange successfully sued to prevent them from appropriating its name they became the Western Progressive Grange and later, after additional legal battles, the Western Progressive Farmers. While Bouck was busy perfecting his new organization in Washington, the national grange met in neighboring Oregon and made the secession permanent by voting unanimously to bar him and four fellow rebels from ever again belonging to the body. Bouck thus became the first state grange master expelled from the national organization.[36]

Upon learning of the convention vote, the former master declared, "The action of the national grange today in the summary expulsion of myself and four other men from the order, it is safe to say, may mean the end of the grange in the state of Washington." As usual he overstated matters. True, the old state grange was in disarray, its treasury was empty, and its future prospects were uncertain. But Bouck had troubles aplenty of his own. The secession had hardly been amicable. Washington's two granges not only waged bitter legal battles over the use of names but also over meeting halls and other property. Occasionally, they battled outside the courtroom as well. In one locality authorities had to fence off the school grounds to prevent children of the rival factions from fighting one another. Furthermore, Bouck proved unable to draw a majority of Washington grangers into the new group. Only about 25 percent of the members of the old organization, or about 5,000 people, joined the secession movement.[37]

Bouck's secession also cost him the support of some former allies. The conservative wing of the Washington labor movement, which did not approve of his action, disavowed him as a disruptionist. In the eyes of colleagues who had urged him to await vindication at the Oregon convention, he was a traitor to the grange, or worse. Most hostile was the criticism voiced by his former friend Ray McKaig, who, in pursuit of his own political and business activities in Boise, turned against Bouck after formation of the WPF. In 1923 McKaig penned him a blunt message: "You once had the world by the tail with a down hill pull. I urged you not to pull off any bone

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National Archives, Washington, D.C.; *National Grange Monthly*, Vol. 18 (August 1921), 4 (quotation).

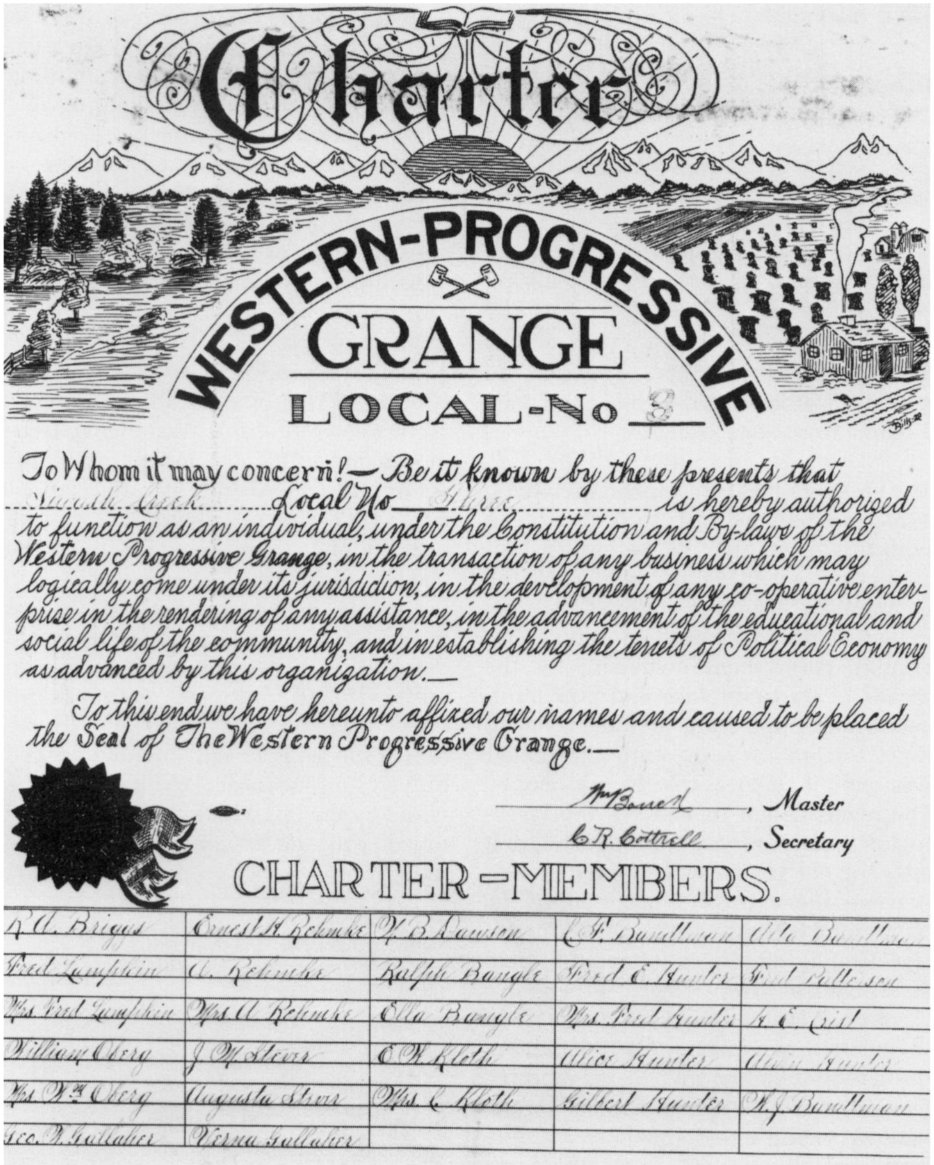
33. *Agricultural Grange News*, [Aug.] 5, 1921, Jan. 5, 1922; *National Grange Monthly*, Vol. 18 (December 1921), 20.

34. Charles M. Gardner, *The Grange, Friend of the Farmer* (Washington, D.C., 1949).

35. *Agricultural Grange News*, Aug. 20, 1921 (first quotation); Bouck, autobiographical sketch, 5 (second quotation); open letter, Bouck to grange members, Sept. 20, 1921, copy in Harry Ault Papers, Pt. 1, Box 3, University of Washington Libraries (third quotation).

36. *Western Progressive Farmer*, March 20, 1923 (quotation); *Agricultural Grange News*, Oct. 5, 1921, May 20, 1922; *Washington Farmer*, Vol. 45 (Nov. 10, 1921), 359, 363, and (Nov. 24, 1921), 403; WSG *Proceedings*, 1922, pp. 68-71; *National Grange Monthly*, Vol. 18 (December 1921), 20. Those expelled along with Bouck were M. A. Hamilton of Bellingham, C. R. Cottrell of Kent, J. E. Wrage of Arlington, and R. A. Briggs of Okanogan.

37. *Washington Farmer*, Vol. 45 (Nov. 24, 1921), 403 (quotation); WSG *Proceedings*, 1922, pp. 29-30; National Grange *Proceedings*, 1922, pp. 88-89, and 1924, p. 133.



Charter

WESTERN-PROGRESSIVE GRANGE

LOCAL-No 3

To Whom it may concern!— Be it known by these presents that Siwash Creek Local No Three is hereby authorized to function as an individual, under the Constitution and By-laws of the Western Progressive Grange, in the transaction of any business which may logically come under its jurisdiction, in the development of any co-operative enterprise in the rendering of any assistance, in the advancement of the educational and social life of the community, and in establishing the tenets of Political Economy as advanced by this organization.—

To this end we have hereunto affixed our names and caused to be placed the Seal of The Western Progressive Grange.—

Wm Bouck, Master

C.R. Cottrell, Secretary

CHARTER-MEMBERS.

R. A. Briggs	Ernest H. Rehmke	W. B. Dawson	C. F. Bundlman	[illegible]
Fred Lumpkin	A. Rehmke	Ralph Bangle	Fred E. Hunter	Fred [illegible]
Mrs. Fred Lumpkin	Mrs. A. Rehmke	Ella Bangle	Mrs. Fred Hunter	[illegible]
William Oberg	J. M. Stever	C. H. Kloth	Alice Hunter	[illegible] Hunter
Mrs. Wm Oberg	Augusta Stever	Mrs. C. Kloth	Gilbert Hunter	H. J. Bundlman
Geo. W. Gallaher	Verna Gallaher			

Though the signatures are faded, this WPG charter for Siwash Creek Local No. 3 of Leese, Washington, bears witness to the rebellion led by Bouck in 1921. (Washington State Grange)

headed play and spoil it all." The Idaho granger denounced Bouck's new reform movement, adding, "You mean well but you are not properly balanced." In a note to another Idaho agrarian, McKaig warned that "the poor fool is crazy and wants to take down all that he can with him." Equally caustic was the Oregon grange master and one-time supporter of the Nonpartisan League, C. E. Spence, who maintained that Bouck seemed to have "crucified himself."[38]

Brushing aside such criticism, Bouck and his associates canvassed Washington for the Western Progressive Farmers, recruiting new members at picnics, Chautauquas, and community sings. Typically a WPF Chautauqua would be held in a tourist park, and as many as 200 members and friends would turn out to hear speakers like the Seattle Labor College lecturer John C. Kennedy, the Farmer-Labor party legislator Homer T. Bone, and the noted Wobbly attorney Elmer Smith. West of the Cascades, the WPF often met in the halls of labor organizations.[39]

The *Western Progressive Farmer* described the WPF Chautauqua as a "virtual spiritual revival." It was an apt description, for while the politics of the WPF were anticapitalist, its culture was unabashedly evangelical. Members were a singing group, and many of their songs had the flavor of camp-meeting revivals. Typical was "The Light of Truth," a song composed by the WPF's chaplain, Lura Bouck, and sung to the tune of "Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!" Another of her compositions, "The Bolshevik Farmers They Call Us," was sung to the tune of "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean" and made light of the label that enemies had affixed to the WPF:

The Bolshevik farmers they call us,
The Bolshevik farmers may be.
The Bolshevik farmers they call us
Yet nary a little care we.[40]

The WPF was in reality a strange amalgam of Methodism and communism, big-city labor and small-time farmers. In some ways it was a throwback to populism; in others it foreshadowed the Popular Front of the 1930s. With the Communists, who treated the WPF as a successor to the Nonpartisan League, Bouck had a stormy relationship. At first he responded favorably to their overtures, becoming a sympathizer. But their tactics also angered him, as in 1924 when the Communists manipulated and destroyed the Farmer-Labor party's presidential ticket headed by the Illinois labor leader Duncan McDonald with Bouck as his running mate. "Betrayed!!" screamed the headlines in the *Western Progressive Farmer*. Bouck did not bear a grudge for long, though. Working with the Communists, he helped convert the WPF into a national organization called the Progressive Farmers of America in late 1926. But the transformation accomplished nothing. Internal problems with the Communists coupled with Bouck's increasingly erratic leadership caused the Progressive Farmers of America to lose so many members that it soon

38. *Labor World*, Oct. 14, 1921. McKaig to Bouck, May 15, 1923 (first quotation), and to W. W. Deal, May 15, 1923 (second quotation); C. E. Spence to McKaig, March 27, 1923 (third quotation), all in McKaig Papers.

39. *Western Progressive Farmer*, March 20, June 20, Aug. 26, 1923.

40. *Ibid.*, Aug. 26 (first quotation), Sept. 20 (last quotation), 1923.

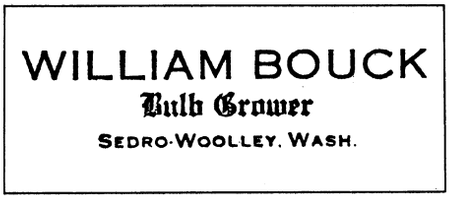
ceased to exist. Bouck retired from the national scene to his farm in Sedro Woolley, where he shepherded a few paper locals of the old WPF until the early 1930s.[41]

If Bouck and other western agrarian radicals chose to reflect on the frustrating decade of the 1920s, the withering of the once promising WPF was only one of many causes for dismay. In the fall of 1920 the future had looked bright to the political insurgents of Washington, but as in the case of the state grange, supporters of the new Farmer-Labor party split into warring factions. What some took to be the dawn of an era proved only the twilight of an agrarian protest tradition dating back to populism. For Bouck personally, the decade was one of unfulfilled expectations and blasted hopes. During the early 1930s he occasionally contributed an agricultural column to the *Vanguard*, a Seattle radical paper, and unsuccessfully promoted a noncommunist left-wing third party. Later in the decade he became active in the Washington Commonwealth Federation movement, a left-wing pressure group operating within the Democratic party, but he served only as a foot soldier. Reform leadership had passed to a new generation of young, often university-educated men and women. Bouck was a forgotten relic of the past.[42]

As state grange master after Bouck's expulsion and as national master two decades later, Albert S. Goss accomplished much of what his predecessor had attempted. (WSG)

In 1945 at the age of 77, Bouck died. He lived long enough, however, to see the national grange in 1941 select its first master from west of the Continental Divide, a man able to direct the attention of the body to the special needs and interests of western farmers. That master was Albert S. Goss, and ironically, it was Bouck's secession that did much to make his rise to prominence possible. After becoming master of the Washington State Grange in 1922, Goss proved that the progressive spirit was still alive despite the recent schism. In fact, Goss continued some of the old reform battles of Kegley and Bouck, but with far more tact and diplomacy than either of his predecessors had shown. In 1922, for example, he hammered away at a familiar point, explaining to the national convention that in the West "our necessities have forced upon us new methods, and new ideas." Goss kept the Washington grange at the forefront of reform, though in its future political involvement it functioned primarily as a nonpartisan pressure group.[43]

In many ways Bouck and Goss represented different phases of the reform tradition in the Pacific Northwest. Bouck was part of a pioneering generation of dreamers and builders, those who sought fortune by harvesting the region's seemingly limitless forests or building railroad empires or promoting new towns and subdivisions. All were men in a hurry. The same hurry-up spirit possessed reformers like Bouck, who expected great economic and political changes to occur almost overnight. In his speeches he painted with broad and hasty strokes, subtlety being a quality unknown to him. Bouck's world was clearly divided between the forces of good and evil. And in his interminable struggle with evil, he preferred to fight with the battle-ax and battering ram. Goss, by contrast, approached reform



By 1930 Bouck was once again "Just a Farmer." (Bouck Papers, UW Libraries)

with the analytical mind of an enlightened business manager. After Bouck and his generation passed from the scene, agrarian reform in Washington became less a series of ideological battles and personal ordeals and more a calm and reasoned process of solving the specific problems facing farmers. Idiosyncratic individualism yielded to organization and bureaucracy, a transition familiar to observers of the American scene during the early decades of the 20th century. □

Carlos Schwantes, associate professor of history at the University of Idaho, is the author of *Radical Heritage* (1979) and *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (forthcoming, University of Nebraska Press), and coeditor of *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History* (forthcoming, University of Washington Press).

41. *Western Progressive Farmer*, July 20, 1924, Jan. 25, Aug. 15, Dec. 22, 1926. On Bouck's participation in the national farmer-labor movement, see Robert Minor, "A Yankee Convention," *Liberator*, Vol. 3 (April 1920), 28-34; C. E. Ruthenberg, "Workers and Farmers on the Mark," *Liberator*, Vol. 7 (July 1924), 16-21; and Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln, Neb., 1982), 35-42.

42. Fred E. Haynes, "The Collapse of the Farmer-Labor Bloc," *Social Forces*, Vol. 4 (1925), 148-56; *Labor World*, March 24, May 19, June 9, 1922; *Washington State Labor News*, June 13, 1924; Albert A. Acena, "The Washington Commonwealth Federation: Reform Politics and the Popular Front," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Washington, 1975), 91. See various issues of the *Vanguard*, published from January 1930 until November 24, 1933.

43. Seattle *Times*, Oct. 25, 1945; Gardner, 317, 465; National Grange *Proceedings*, 1922, pp. 90, 97 (quotation). Lura Bouck died in 1936. At the time of her death, she was chairman of the Skagit County Commonwealth Federation; see Sedro Woolley *Courier-Times*, Feb. 6, 1936.