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Comment

John Ely Briggs

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Comment by the Editor

THE TEMPER OF THE WEST

“The voice of the West”, said Woodrow Wilson in 1911, “is a voice of protest.” It was ever thus. From the time of the Whiskey Rebellion to the days of the Non-Partisan League, the West has again and again expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of public affairs. The feeling has always prevailed, except perhaps for a few years during the period of the Civil War, that the East — opinionated, intolerant, and domineering — has not been fair to the West. Socially, economically, and politically the two sections have been constantly at odds, and neither has quite understood the other, though the East has seldom tried.

The temper of the West has been preëminently one of restiveness under restraint — not the restraint of law and order self-imposed, but the repression of native inclinations by outside control. It is inherent in the very nature of the people. Descended from the most enterprising, adventurous, and versatile stock and reared in an atmosphere of opportunity and self-reliance, they have developed what James Bryce called “the most American part of America”. Independence in politics, distrust of big business, and a willingness to experiment are the

natural manifestations of this temper of the West — as natural as the champing and shying of a spirited horse that is restive to the rein.

In America the element of democracy has always been prominent, and the tendency of the people in the West to determine their own policies and select their own leaders has had a decisive effect upon politics. While the impatient disposition of the West has often been expressed in eager support of reform movements, those movements have invariably developed democratically from below upward. It is almost a truism to say that nothing, either good or bad, can be forced upon the West from above or without, and that is as true of leaders as of ideas or institutions. What chance has a political scientist to be elected mayor of Chicago or the immigration policy to be an issue in Iowa? The secret of successful leadership in the West is the espousal of a popular cause. To be sure the cause may sometimes be unworthy, and wise leaders are often deposed; but the political ways of the West have the merit of being spontaneous and sincere — valuable traits of democracy — and are apt to accomplish more than well-intentioned paternalism.

THE CRADLE OF NEW PARTIES

Most of the important political reforms of the last century have come out of the West. Born of the pressure of hard times and nurtured by wide-spread discontent, new parties have arisen in the Missis-

ssippi Valley to protest against the prevailing characteristics of social and industrial development. Situated in the heart of the region from which these protests have emanated, Iowa has been the cradle of new parties and has furnished their most capable leadership. From the organization of the Republican party to the decline of the Progressives, there has been scarcely a movement in the name of democracy and human welfare which Iowans have not endorsed. Even Kelly's army received its heartiest encouragement in this State.

And yet, in spite of such a history, Iowa has no reputation for radicalism. Perhaps it is because the opposition to the "malefactors of great wealth" has been essentially sound, though specific remedies have often been visionary. More likely it is due to a fundamental difference in the object of the proposed reforms. Eastern radicalism is individualistic, almost anarchistic; while western radicalism is collective and social in character. It is comparatively unselfish — the wholehearted endeavor of coherent communities for the common good. That is the reason why Iowa — and the West — is the seat of social politics.

J. E. B.