

THE PROGRESSIVE HOLY LAND

BY BENNINGTON ORTH

MOST Americans, asked to name the most radical American State, would undoubtedly nominate Wisconsin. For years, thanks to the ideas associated with the fame of Robert M. LaFollette the elder and Victor L. Berger, both now dead, it has appeared to stand in the very forefront of the Progressive movement. To the average Babbitt, indeed, it has come to signify everything extreme and subversive in politics, and he thinks of it only to shudder. Yet the plain fact is that Wisconsin is one of the most conservative States in the Union. It may talk radicalism in loud and alarming tones, but when it comes to practise it lags behind many other States, including even some of the great Tory States of the East. But before I present the evidence let me describe briefly the local political line-up.

There are four major political parties in Wisconsin. Arranged in the order of their strength they are: first, the LaFollette Progressives; second, the Stalwart Republicans; third, the Socialists; and fourth, the Democrats. The Democrats really don't count. Were it not for their national affiliations, they would be negligible. Occasionally they land one or two assemblymen, but never a State senator. When Democrats from other States, on moving to Milwaukee, offer their services to the local organization, they get the cold shoulder, and the reason is obvious: the party bosses despair of ever rising above fourth place, and accordingly want to keep the ranks as small as possible, so that the offices will be sure to go round when the party wins nationally—without any help from Wisconsin. Even during the Smith boom, they

kept this strangle-hold on the organization. Walsh men and independent Smith men were given short shrift in the primary.

Thus we may disregard the Democracy. This leaves three real parties: the Progressives, the Republican Stalwarts, and the Socialists. By an anomaly carefully fostered by the LaFollette machine, the Progressives and the Stalwarts vote in the same primary, which is called Republican. But the Progressives are in no sense a mere faction of Republicans, for the Stalwarts are the real Republicans in the State, and the Progressives are a distinct political party. Each of these parties has its own factions, as in the case of other parties in other States. The only thing unusual in the situation is that Wisconsin is the only State in the Union, so far as I know, in which two absolutely distinct political parties habitually participate in one and the same primary.

Numerically, the rank and file membership of the Stalwart party is probably slightly larger than that of the Progressive party. Why then, you will ask, have the Progressives, up to this year, always controlled the State Assembly overwhelmingly, and the Senate safely, and why have they always elected their candidate for Governor by a wide margin? The reason lies in two things. First, there is the execrable management of Ex-Senator Lenroot, boss of the Stalwarts. To give just one example of his incompetence, consider the substitution, in the middle of the senatorial campaign of 1925, of a reputed Klansman for a Catholic! No wonder all his political enemies turned to and boosted him for a Federal judgeship last Spring,

for judges have to keep out of politics. That was the only way, short of death, that the Stalwart politicians could find to rid their organization of this Old Man of the Sea.

The second reason for the Progressive ascendancy is that the Socialist primaries are a farce. The one thing that the Socialists will absolutely not tolerate in their organization is any independence of thought or action. Their candidates are hand-picked by their machine. It is *lèse majesté* to run for office without permission. Accordingly, nearly all the Socialists vote as Progressives in the Republican primaries, and in return for their help the Progressives leave the Socialist candidates unopposed in many districts, and see that a sufficiency of Socialists is appointed to lucrative State offices, including judgeships, by Progressive Governors. But such is the magic of the Republican party name, that the Progressive minority, having stolen the primary with the aid of Socialists voting where they don't belong, is nearly always able to carry the succeeding election over the numerically stronger Stalwarts, running independently.

Three years ago, following the death of the elder LaFollette, the Progressives split into two factions, but the Stalwarts were so demoralized that even though the Progressive vote had to be divided between two candidates, one of them (Zimmerman) triumphed over the single Stalwart. The presence of a fourth candidate, running independently in the Republican primary, probably contributed to this result.

Last year, due to Lenroot's interference, Hoover wasn't a candidate in the primaries. The Progressive, Senator Norris, was thus unopposed. With no candidate to rally behind, the Stalwarts lost control of the delegation to the Republican National Convention, and thus we saw the usual quadrennial anomaly: a delegation of non-Republicans duly elected to a Republican convention.

In the gubernatorial primary there were again two Progressives, Governor Zimmer-

man and Congressman Beck. Opposed to them were a Stalwart and an independent. But this time the Stalwart, Kohler, a millionaire plumbing manufacturer and personal friend of Hoover, was nominated, largely through the sulking of a disgruntled Progressive, Attorney General Ekern, who thought that one of the factions of the Progressive machine ought to have run him as its candidate instead of Congressman Beck. In the election, one Progressive faction (the Zimmerman) supported Hoover, and the other (the Beck-Blaine-LaFollette, Jr.) supported Smith. Intelligent management by National Committeeman Vits, the Progressive disorganization, and the Democratic lack of any organization at all pulled Hoover and Kohler through.

Yet, up to the present session, the LaFollette machine had been for years in absolute and unquestioned control of the Governor's office, and of both branches of the Legislature. What was its record of accomplishment?

II

For answer, let us compare Wisconsin with that citadel of reaction, Massachusetts.

Massachusetts adopted the Australian ballot before Wisconsin had even been admitted to Statehood. Massachusetts has had a non-partisan ballot for years, with all the candidates for each office grouped together. It is impossible in that State to vote a straight ticket. But Wisconsin, no doubt to facilitate the minority control above described, is still laboring under the obsolete straight-ticket system.

Massachusetts adopted one of the first corrupt-practices acts in America, far back in 1892; Wisconsin did not follow until 1911.

Workmen's compensation? Massachusetts and Wisconsin adopted it simultaneously in 1911.

Jury trial in contempt cases? Massachusetts adopted it in 1911; Wisconsin did not follow until 1923.

Now for the trinity worshipped by all

true followers of the great LaFollette, namely, the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. Where does LaFollette's own State, held in the hollow of his hand for years, stand on these, his pet measures?

Massachusetts adopted the initiative and referendum back in 1917, as a result of the Constitutional Convention of that year. Wisconsin has been trying ever since to get the amendment, and hasn't yet succeeded. They haven't even been able to get a Constitutional Convention. The I. and R. carried the Assembly in 1919, only to be rejected in the Senate, 25 to 4. In 1921 it was killed in the Senate by 14 to 14, 17 votes being required for its adoption. (Mind you, the Progressives controlled that Senate!) In 1923 it barely passed the Senate, 17 to 13, and was concurred in by the Assembly. And now we come to the fundamental secret of Wisconsin Progressivism.

Here was a serious situation. For years the LaFollettites had been howling for the initiative and referendum, and making it the basic issue of Progressivism. And now they were about to lose that issue! It has been truly said that "hope ends in fruition." And it is no less true that a popular issue loses its vote-getting appeal as soon as it is enacted into law. Here was their pet issue going on the rocks of fruition! What was to be done about it?

The Progressives were too firmly in control of the Legislature in 1925 to be able to count on the opposition to kill the bill for them, and they didn't dare kill it themselves. So some master of political strategy drew the amendment (it had to be passed twice) slightly different from the one which had passed in 1923. Then they passed it with a whoop, by 55 to 34 in the Assembly and by 21 to 9 in the Senate. And of course the courts promptly declared it at variance with the amendment of 1923 and hence ineffective.

Thus the whole procedure—two passages through the Legislature and then submission to the electorate—had to be begun all over again. So the issue was saved for three more elections at least.

In 1927 the Progressives let the Stalwarts kill the initiative and referendum bill by the narrow margin of one vote in the Senate, and it never reached the Assembly. This year the Progressives were so disorganized that they forgot to introduce it at all. So the precious issue is safe through the election of 1934.

Thus Wisconsin, the citadel of Progressivism, hasn't yet got even one leg over the most fundamental of all the LaFollette reforms—which the rock-ribbed Republican State of Massachusetts quietly adopted 'way back in 1917.

It is true that Wisconsin has the recall, while Massachusetts has not, but I believe that the chief reason for the success of this measure was an overwhelming popular demand for some check on politicians who cared more for issues than for accomplishments.

III

Progressives, as everyone knows, are the friends of Labor. For years, in Wisconsin, unemployment insurance and the eight-hour day have been very effective vote-getting issues.

Unemployment insurance was defeated by 10 to 19 in the Senate in 1921, the year of its first appearance. It nearly passed, by 16 to 17, in 1923, with the Progressives in control. How often Progressive measures nearly pass! But always it seems to be easy for the machine to let one or two of its own men duck a vote, or even backslide and vote against it, in order that a valuable issue may be preserved.

In 1925 unemployment insurance failed in the Senate by 12 to 20. But by 1927 the Senate had begun to tire of shouldering all the odium for the defeat of the measure, so that year it was killed by an Assembly overwhelmingly controlled by the party sponsoring it! The Assembly again shouldered the blame in 1929.

Another way to kill a popular measure, and thus preserve it as an issue, is for both houses to pass it overwhelmingly, but for

one to adopt amendments which the other refuses to accept. This has the advantage of giving a large number of members of both branches the record of having voted for a popular bill, which nevertheless fails to become a law. For example, take the eight-hour law in 1919. The bill was introduced in the Senate by a rank Stalwart. Whereupon the Progressives, not to be outdone, made it much more radical by striking out all the exemptions. This made it altogether too raw to pass even the radical Assembly, which insisted on restoring the exemptions. Thus the measure failed between the two houses.

In 1921 the Senate killed it. In 1923 it overwhelmingly passed the Assembly, and the Senate, after several futile attempts to amend it to death, finally became fearful that the Assembly was so much in favor of it that it might swallow the amendments. So the Senate took the bull by the horns and killed it. In 1925 the Senate killed it again. Popular interest then began to lag, and it wasn't even introduced in 1927.

But the most remarkable bit of evidence which I have to present is the fate of the old-age pension bill of 1923. It was introduced in the Senate and received a unanimously adverse committee report. This lulled to sleep both the Stalwarts who were sincerely opposed to it, and the Progressives who wished to preserve it as an issue. But it so happened that certain members of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, finding the time hanging heavily on their hands because of the Eighteenth Amendment—for many of the Eagles were distinguished bartenders before January 16, 1920—conceived the idea of gaining a little agreeable notoriety for their order by backing old-age pensions. So they worked quietly on the Senators, and actually jammed the bill through in three days, by a vote of 14 to 13. By the time everyone woke up to what was going on, it was too late to stop it.

Then the Eagles went to sleep, and the Wisconsin Manufacturers' Association and the Milwaukee Association of Commerce

began bringing pressure to bear on the Governor, a Progressive, to veto the nefarious measure when it should reach him. But it never reached him. While the Eagles slept and the Stalwarts wrung their hands, the Progressive machine quietly killed the bill by 23 to 45 on an off day in the lower house. Thus the issue was saved for another campaign.

In this case the Progressives were not only concerned with preserving a popular issue. They also were a bit fearful that the estimates of the conservatives might be correct, and that the measure really might cost the State \$5,000,000, a year, as alleged by its opponents. This would have caused such an uprising among the tax-payers that the Progressives might have been turned completely out of power.

In the next session, 1925, the Eagles cut loose and paddled their own canoe. A test vote in the Senate showed 17 to 13 in favor of the measure, so everyone climbed on to the bandwagon and old-age pensions passed by 16 to 5, with eight pairs. Then came an attempt to kill it again in the Assembly, but this time the Eagles were not asleep. So thereupon the Progressives tried to amend the measure to death. If you don't believe it, examine the Progressive names attached to the amendments.

The attempt to kill the bill failed, but as usual the machine managed to accomplish, by indirection, precisely what it wanted. One of the amendments converted the measure from the State-wide to the county-option plan, and required a two-thirds vote of all the members of the county board to put it into operation in any county. As a result, in the four years which have followed, old-age pensions have been adopted by only five small and unimportant counties. The county board of Milwaukee county, although composed almost unanimously of Progressives and Socialists, has been able to muster enough noes and enough absentees to kill the measure every time it has come up.

Thus the pocketbooks of the voters have been spared and a popular issue has

been preserved. But unfortunately the Eagles are not politicians. They want more than mere advertising; they are looking for actual accomplishment. So, by cutting loose from all party entanglements, the order has been able this year, after a long struggle, to get the law amended to require only a *majority* vote in each county board. It now looks as if the county taxes of Milwaukee were soon to be doubled, in which event the Progressives on the county board will have a lot to explain. As one prominent Progressive assemblyman said to me, "I guess our crowd were asleep to let that get through. Our party leadership is all shot to hell since Old Bob died."

IV

The Socialists, for years in control of the city government of Milwaukee, have never put a single tenet of Socialism into effect there. The LaFollettites, after years of

strangle-hold on the State government, have yet to show any sound and solid Progressive accomplishments. They have simply gone on leading lost causes—even when in the majority. They have been picturesque. They have shouted from the housetops. They have spread Progressive principles to the four corners of the country, and alarmed all the Chambers of Commerce. They have erected a really beautiful statue of Fighting Bob in the chamber of horrors of the national Capitol. They have spread the belief that Wisconsin is Red. But all the while a scrutiny of its Compiled Statutes will show it to be one of the most conservative States in the Union.

The Wisconsin Legislature, I believe, is the cleanest and least venial in America. The State officials, in the main, are honest and capable. But Wisconsin is not, and never was, Progressive. Least of all is the LaFollette machine. The really Progressive voters of the State, I suspect, are just beginning to find it out.

MIDAS ON A GOATSKIN

BY J. FRANK DOBIE

"H^E's the second sorriest white man in Viznaga," my host said. "The sorriest white man keeps a Mexican woman without marrying her, but Dee Davis lawfully wedded his *pelada*. He's the town scavenger, works at night, and sleeps most of the day. He'll probably be awake 'long about four o'clock this evening and more than ready to tell you the kind of yarns you want to hear."

Viznaga is a hundred miles or so west of San Antonio, Texas. We found Dee Davis just awaking from his siesta. He occupied a one-room shack and sat on a goatskin in the doorway, on the shady side of the house.

"I'm a great hand for goatskins," he said. "They make good settin' and they make good pallets."

I sat in a rawhide-bottomed chair out on the hard, swept ground, shaded by an umbrella-China tree as well as by the wall. There was a wooden bench for my friend. The shack was set back in a yard fenced with palings that had never been painted. Across the yard from the shack and farther toward the front was a little frame house occupied by Dee Davis's Mexican wife and their three or four half-breed children. The yard, or patio, was gay with red and orange zinnias and blue morning-glories. Out in a ramshackle picket corral to the rear a boy was playing with a burro.

"No, Mister," went on Dee Davis, who had got strung out in no time, "I don't reckon anything ever would have come of my dad's picking up those silver bars if it hadn't of been for a surveyor in Del Rio.

"You see, Dad and my uncle Ben were frontiersmen of the old style and while

they'd had a lot of experiences—yes, Mister, a lot of experiences—they didn't know a thing about minerals. Well, along back in the eighties they took up some State land on Mud creek and begun trying to farm a little. Mud creek's east of Del Rio. The old Spanish crossing on Mud was worn deep and always washed, but it was still used a little. One day, not long after an awful rain, a reg'lar gulley-washer and fence-lifter, Dad and Uncle Ben started to town. As they were going down into the creek, by heifers, what should show up right square in the old trail but the corner of some sort of metal bar. They got down out of their buggy and pried the bar out and then three other bars. The stuff was so heavy that after they put it in the buggy they had to walk and lead the horse. Instead of going on into town with it, they went back home. Well, they turned it over to Ma and then more or less forgot all about it, I guess—just went on struggling for a living.

"At that time I was just a kid and was away from home working for the San Antonio Land and Cattle Company, the 7 D outfit, but I happened to ride in just a few days after the find. The Old Man and Uncle Ben never mentioned it, but Ma was so proud she was nearly busting, and as soon as I got inside the house she said she wanted to show me something. In one of the rooms was a bed with an old-timey covering on it that came down to the floor. She carried me to this bed, pulled up the part of the cover that draped over to the floor, and told me to look. I looked, and, by heifers, there was bars as big as hogs. Yes, Mister, as big as hogs.