

FURTHER READINGS ON **The Nonpartisan League**

“The history of the League is a compelling chapter in the struggle by farmers throughout our country’s history. The dramatic story of the NPL’s rapid rise to power and equally rapid decline has long been of interest to historians and other scholars ... The League appeals to nonacademic readers as an exciting story of political and social confrontation played out by seemingly larger-than-life characters.”¹

The standard work on the Nonpartisan League remains Robert Loren Morlan’s *Political Prairie Fire: The National Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); reprinted by Greenwood Press (1974) and Minnesota Historical Society Press (1985). Morlan’s well-written, evocative account depends largely on League sources and offers an interpretation favorable to the organization.

Morlan’s work includes an extensive bibliography of books, government documents, pamphlets, articles, theses and archival documents regarding the history of the League. In 1985 the Minnesota Historical Society Press published an updated bibliography of works about the League, *The Nonpartisan League 1915-22: An Annotated Bibliography*, by Patrick K. Coleman and Charles R. Lamb. Their bibliography includes works that have become available since Morlan’s book was published.

Another major work is NPL journalist Herber Gaston’s *The Nonpartisan League* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920); it is totally undocumented, but is the most often cited of the “first generation histories.” Other early works include Charles Edward Russell’s *The Non-Partisan League* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), and Andrew A. Bruce’s *Non-Partisan League* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921). Less reliable accounts appear in Bruce Nelson’s *Land of the Dakotahs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1946), and Dale Kramer’s *The Wild Jackasses: The American Farmer in Revolt* (New York: Hastings House, 1956).

An excellent synthesis of the League’s place in North Dakota’s history constitutes part of Elwyn B. Robinson’s indispensable *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966); and a worthwhile, chapter-length interpretation is found in Michael Paul Rogin’s *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 104-136; and Larry Remele’s “Power to the People: The Nonpartisan League” in *The North Dakota Political Tradition* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 66-92.

The only full-length, scholarly biography of any NPL leader is Edward C. Blackorby’s excellent *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963).

Articles about the League cover a wide range of specific subjects. Background information can be found in Robert Bahmer, “The American Society of Equity,” *Agricultural History* 14 (January 1940): 33-65; Jackson K. Putnam, “The Role of the NDSP in North Dakota History,” *North Dakota Quarterly* 24 (Fall 1956): 115-122; and Larry Remele, “North Dakota’s Forgotten Farmers Union, 1913-1920,” *North Dakota History* 45 (Spring 1978): 4-21. Theodore Saloutos has two articles: “The Rise of the

¹ Coleman, Patrick K. and Charles R. Lamb. *The Nonpartisan League, 1915-22: An Annotated Bibliography*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985: vii.

Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, 1915-1917," *Agricultural History* 20 (January 1946): 43-61; and "The Expansion and Decline of the Nonpartisan League in the Western Middle West, 1917-1921," *Agricultural History* 20 (October 1946): 235-252. Bill G. Reid delved into the role of NPL cartooning with "John Miller Baer: Nonpartisan League Cartoonist and Congressman," *North Dakota History* 44 (Winter 1977): 4-13.

A negative interpretation of the League's motives and impact is Dale Baum's "The New Day in North Dakota: The Nonpartisan League and the Politics of Negative Revolution," *North Dakota History* 40 (Spring 1973): 4-19. Elements of the NPL's career are examined in the following articles by Larry Remele: "The Tragedy of Idealism: The National Nonpartisan League and American Foreign Policy, 1917-1919," *North Dakota Quarterly* 42 (Autumn 1974): 78-95; "The North Dakota State Library Scandal of 1919," *North Dakota History* 44 (Winter 1977): 21-29; "The North Dakota Farmers Union and the Nonpartisan League: Breakdown of a Coalition," *North Dakota Quarterly* 46 (Autumn 1978): 40-80; "The Nonpartisan League and the North Dakota Press: Organizational Period, 1915-1916," *North Dakota Quarterly* 44 (Autumn 1976): 30-46; and "The Immaculate Conception at Deering," *North Dakota History* 47 (Winter 1980): 28-31.

Another excellent primary source in documenting the League are North Dakota newspapers, including the *Nonpartisan Leader*, the *Fargo Daily Courier-News* and virtually every other paper that existed in the state during the time period. To get a flavor for the anti-League sentiment in North Dakota read issues of *The Red Flame*, published from November 1919 to October 1920 under the primary sponsorship of Carl Kositzky. It has been described as crude, overkill and visceral; used to feed fear and arouse the passions of the credulous, yet did influence the public perception and support of the League. It too employs extensive use of political cartooning.

Acknowledgement is given to Larry Remele's bibliographical essay in *The North Dakota Political Tradition* that forms the basis for this Further Readings essay.