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THE NATIONAL FARMERS' ALLIANCE  
CONVENTION OF 1890 AND ITS  
"OCALA DEMANDS"

by SAMUEL PROCTOR

Probably there were none as surprised or as pleased as were Florida's four delegates <sup>1</sup> to the National Farmers' Alliance Convention when it was decided that the 1890 meeting of the National Alliance Supreme Council would be held in Jacksonville. Politically a part of the "solid South", and with a population of only a few thousand, it seemed scarcely possible that frontier Florida would be chosen, nor could it well play host to any national organization, even one as politically adolescent as was the National Farmers' Alliance in 1889. However, Florida's invitation was accepted by the convention which met in St. Louis in December of that year. <sup>2</sup>

This decision to hold the convention in Florida may be viewed from two angles. First, it would prove an excellent opportunity to advertise the state. Secondly, it might formulate once and for all the crucial struggle which had been brewing between conservative and radical wings of the Alliance. The first of these views was particularly prominent in the minds of the Florida delegation when they extended their hospitable invitation. Such a convention, with its resultant publicity, would not only bring hundreds of delegates and visitors to Florida but it would also tend to attract settlers to the state. <sup>3</sup> The State Alliance might even be successful in luring luke-warm South Floridians into the organization. <sup>4</sup>

Jacksonville, because of its size, its location and because it had adequate hotel and restaurant facilities to accommodate a large throng, was chosen as the place

1. The delegates were Robert F. Rogers, Live Oak, President of the Florida Alliance; A. S. Mann, Jacksonville; Oswald Wilson, originally from New York; and H. C. Randall, Purcell.
2. N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*. (Washington, 1891) p. 131.
3. *The Weekly Floridian*, Tallahassee, Florida, June 11, 1890.
4. James O. Knauss, "The Farmers' Alliance In Florida," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXV, 300-315, (July, 1926).

for the meeting. However, Jacksonville's citizens seemed disinterested. When the time came to appropriate funds to help defray expenses which the Alliance would necessarily incur, the people were not overly-generous.<sup>5</sup> The Board of Trade and the Sub-Tropical Exposition officials agreed to allow free use of the Sub-Tropical building, and to release half of the gate receipts, after expenses were deducted, to help with costs. They insisted that the building's management be kept in the Board of Director's hands. Robert F. Rogers, president of Florida's Alliance group, valued this offer at approximately \$1,500.<sup>6</sup>

Rogers knew that the Alliance might very well cancel its plans to meet in Florida when it received the offer from Jacksonville. He approached John F. Dunn, President of the Merchants' National Bank of Ocala, with his problem and asked him if Ocala would play host to the farm group. Dunn, realizing what this would mean to the merchants of Ocala and consequently to his bank, enthusiastically agreed. He immediately pledged \$5,000 of his own money and promised that Ocala would provide an equal amount. On the basis of this new proposal, President Rogers journeyed to Washington and recommended that the Executive Committee change the meeting place to Ocala. On June 20, 1890, Rogers's recommendation was approved by unanimous vote of the committee.

Ocala offered many inducements to secure the Alliance plum. They allowed free use of their Semi-Tropical Exposition building and grounds, with the Alliance managing the building. All gate receipts were to be given to the Alliance, members were to be entertained at half-price and the National Alliance officers were to be housed, fed and entertained free of charge. Ocala hoped that railroad rates to and from the city would be reduced. In addition, \$7,000 was appropriated to aid Florida's

5. Telegram from Rogers to John F. Dunn, Ocala, Florida, dated June 21, 1890. Reprinted in *Ocala Banner*, June 27, 1890.

6. *Ocala Banner*, July 4, 1890.

Alliance in setting up its exhibitions. Ocala's offer was worth about \$15,000. Her citizens were excited about the publicity they knew they would receive. The *Ocala Banner* joyously proclaimed: "All eyes are turned on Ocala. Ocala's supreme moment has come and we must be equal to the occasion."<sup>7</sup>

While plans for the "Ocala Convention" were being formulated on both national and state levels during the months of 1890, portentous events were taking place in the South and throughout the nation. 1890 was an election year and the Alliance worked earnestly along political lines. Drawing inspiration from the platform adopted by the St. Louis delegates, the Southern Alliance leaders generally agreed that every effort should be made to capture the existing state machinery of the Democratic Party.<sup>8</sup> Third party action was scarcely thought of. To lead this fight, the Southern Alliance chose as president, Colonel L. I. Polk of Raleigh, North Carolina. He had been actively engaged in the work of lining up the farmer vote of his state solidly against the old Bourbon machine and in favor of Alliance principles and candidates.

The Southern Alliance was not interested in organizing a third party that would divide the white vote of the South.<sup>9</sup> The *National Economist*, which reflected accurately the official position "promised positively that a third party will not be formed." South Carolina progressives, under the leadership of Ben Tillman, made steady progress in securing control of the state's Democratic Party machinery.

Colonel Polk furnished in North Carolina the leadership for the farmers' movement that Tillman provided in South Carolina. Under the influence of Alliancemen, the North Carolina State convention adopted a platform that expressed sympathy with "the efforts of the farmers to throw off the yoke of Bourbonism."<sup>10</sup> The spirit of revolt was equally strong in Georgia. The Alliance was

7. *Idem.*

8. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Party*, (Minneapolis, 1931), 153.

9. *Ibid.*, 170.

10. *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1890. 625.

determined to overthrow the ruling Bourbon aristocracy and take over the party. All the gubernatorial candidates in Georgia in 1890 were Alliancemen and many of the candidates for the State legislature were named by the Alliance. One of the Georgia Alliance nominees for Congress in this election was the spectacular Tom Watson of the 10th District. Watson, a fiery country lawyer who battled the industrial capitalists in Georgia, was one of the youngest Alliance leaders.<sup>11</sup> In Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas Alliance candidates were successful.<sup>12</sup>

When the Alliance met in Ocala in December the election results had been tallied and they were extremely gratifying. Alliance candidates for governor in South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, and the Alliance supported candidate in Texas had all been successful. The legislatures of eight southern states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—were counted as safely within the Alliance grasp. Several Alliancemen won seats in Congress. Forty-four in the House professed Alliance views and two or three in the Senate.<sup>13</sup>

In the states where the more notable Alliance victories were scored much was expected of the newly elected legislatures. Curiously enough, however, not a great deal was accomplished by them. The South Carolina legislature reapportioned seats in the House which was favorable to the back-country whites, but it drastically cut Tillman's state educational proposals. The railway commission bill that finally was passed was so unsatisfactory that the governor vetoed it.<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere in the South, results were much the same. The railway bill that became law in North Carolina was not unlike the measure that Governor Tillman wrathfully

11. C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1937), 160-161.

12. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 177-178.

13. *Ibid.*, 178.

14. Francis B. Simkins, *The Tillman Movement in South Carolina*, Duke Univ. Press, 1926. 147-149.

vetoed in South Carolina. In Georgia, the right of the railroad commission to fix railway rates was asserted; banking corporations were more closely circumscribed in their operations; blacklists were forbidden and a twelve-hour day for railroad employees was established. But here, as elsewhere in the South, the pressing problem of crop mortgages was left untouched and in general hard times were not alleviated.<sup>15</sup>

It was painfully apparent from these failures that the formula of working through the Democratic party had proved entirely inadequate. Signs pointed unmistakably in the direction of a national third-party organization and it was upon this new note that the Ocala Convention met. This meeting was to become the mecca of all the leading advocates of the third-party idea.

There were many other problems facing the convention when it was called to order by President Polk at noon on December 2, 1890. The sub-treasury plan was of prime importance and it was hoped that some decision could be reached on this program introduced at the St. Louis meeting the year before by Dr. C. W. Macune.<sup>16</sup> That meeting had endorsed the plan by an overwhelming majority; only seven votes were cast against its adoption. In the months before the Ocala meeting the sub-treasury measure became a rallying cry of the order and by common consent it was accepted as one of the great Alliance principles. However, there were conservative elements within the Alliance who were not sure that the sub-treasury plan would prove the cure-all for the American farmers' troubles. So the conservatives tried to rally forces to delay and oppose action on it.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Florida Alliancemen had worked arduously since September planning and preparing for the December meeting. At a conclave in the Ocala Opera

15. Alex M. Arnett, *The Populist Movement in Georgia*. (New York, 1922), 120-122.

16. The sub-treasury report was received from the "Committee of the Monetary System." C. W. Macune, past president of the Southern Alliance and past editor of its official journal, *National Economist*, was an important member of this committee.

17. Dunning, *op. cit.*, 137.

House in September, the organizing and planning committees formulated plans for a state agricultural exhibition to be held while the convention was meeting in the city. It was decided that each county would have individual exhibits which would show the "growing of corn, cotton, oats, rye, rice, field peas, ground peas, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, sugar, syrup, hay, tobacco, citrus fruits, peas, peaches, plums, bananas and all vegetables." The women of Florida would display "wines, jellies, handiwork, needle and fine art."<sup>18</sup> Exhibits of yellow pine, hard woods, naval stores, native and blooded horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and poultry were planned.

Prizes were announced for the best products in each field. Prizes included \$3.00 for the "best and largest number of homemade vinegars;" \$3.00 for the "best and largest number of varieties of Florida pickles;" \$15.00 for the "best bull, any age;" \$20.00 for the "best stallion, any age" and \$5.00 for the "best samples of home-made smoked bacon, consisting of a ham shoulder and side."<sup>19</sup>

The agricultural exposition was to be held in the Semi-Tropical building, which was divided into several sections. The north side was reserved for South Florida, south and west wings for East and West Florida, and the east wing was reserved for the ladies department. The building was filled with display stands and tables, which were built from Florida woods. These were elegantly decorated with "corn stalks, tobacco stems, oats and other products of the farm."<sup>20</sup> A fountain and pool decorated the center of the building. Over the bandstand hung a large handpainted banner with the legend, THE NATIONAL FARMERS ALLIANCE EXPOSITION. The auditorium was decorated with red, white and blue bunting and American flags.

It was planned to house delegates in private homes and in the Ocala House, the sumptuous hotel built by

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18. *Ocala Banner*, Sept. 19, 1890.

19. *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1890.

20. *The Florida Dispatch, Farmer and Fruit-Grower*, Nov. 25, 1890.

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Henry B. Plant. Seventy-five cottages were built for an expected overflow crowd. A race track and tournament grounds were constructed behind the Exposition building and an amusement area for children was arranged in the vicinity. In addition, a band was engaged for the whole season for the "appreciation of all those with music in their soul."<sup>21</sup>

Ocala looked forward to a throng of delegates and visitors and they were not disappointed. Accredited delegations were registered from all the Southern states and Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, North and South Dakota, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Two delegates represented the Indian Territory. In all, there were eighty-eight delegates registered, and additional delegations were expected from Oklahoma, California, Michigan and New Mexico.<sup>22</sup> There were hundreds of visitors.

Delegates began arriving Saturday afternoon, November 29. The Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad brought in many delegates early in the day. A large crowd arrived on a special train that evening. Early guests included Governor-elect Buchanan of Tennessee, National Alliance President L. I. Polk, Congressman Ben H. Clover of Kansas, President McDowell of the Tennessee Alliance, McGrath of the Kansas State Alliance and Colonel Livingston of Georgia.

Ocala's churches were crowded on Sunday morning. Many attended services at the Baptist Church; others heard the Methodist sermon "Prohibition in Prophecy." Crowds poured in to Ocala all day Sunday. New arrivals included W. S. Morgan, the author of "History of the Alliance" and editor of the *Agricultural Wheel*; T. S. Adams, President of the Louisiana Alliance; U. S. Hall, President of the Missouri Alliance; H. C. Deming, General Manager of the Agricultural Manufacturer's Association of the United States; N. A. Dunning, editor

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21. *Ibid.*

22. *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1890.



of the *National Economist*; W. C. McCune, chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Alliance; and Colonel Rice, head of Georgia's state penitentiary. Florida's Governor and Mrs. Francis P. Fleming and their party arrived Sunday. In this group was Mrs. C. E. Dyke, lady commissioner from Leon county.<sup>23</sup>

The Ocala meeting was to prove a most important gathering. Following as it did immediately after the close of a political campaign of remarkable surprises, it was compelled to bear a burden of pressure from both the old parties—one being driven by disaster to the verge of despair, and the other elated by success to the point of dictatorial assumption. The Republican party hoped that the meeting would result in certain indiscretions which would break the power of the Alliance, and permit that party to regain its waning strength. The Democratic party was anxious to have the Alliance recede from its advanced position on economic questions, in order to make cooperation more probable. Again there was a strong element from the West, demanding independent action, and at the same time showing, as the result of such a movement, the fruits of the recent election. This faction was opposed by a conservative force which considered it unwise and untimely.

Under these disruptive conditions the delegates began their work. For weeks and months certain newspapers and individuals had criticised the Alliance and most of its leaders. Their attacks were bold and brutal, causing discomfort and embarrassment.<sup>24</sup> To the Ocala meeting came those who slandered the Alliance and those who praised it - politicians, statesmen, writers, labor representatives and sightseers. Many of the nation's newspapers were represented. W. S. McAllister reported for the Associated Press and wrote special stories for the *Times Democrat* of New Orleans and the *Age-Herald* of Birmingham. W. G. F. Price wrote for the *New York Herald*. Henry R. Chamberlain reported for Charles

23. *Ocala Banner*, Dec. 5, 1890.

24. Dunning, *op. cit.*, 178.

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Dana's paper, the *New York Sun*, and Henry George represented the *New York Standard*, the mouthpiece of the single tax doctrine.

Issues facing the delegates in Ocala were of great importance to the whole country. The delegates hoped to begin work immediately, but ceremonies and formalities were scheduled first. On assembling, R. F. Rogers, the Florida representative, proposed that the afternoon meeting be opened to the general public and that Governor Fleming be invited to speak.

The description of the gala parade in the *Ocala Banner* indicates the lively interest taken by all classes in the convention. Major C. W. Campbell was chief marshal. Leading the procession were the *Ocala Rifles*, followed by carriages with the distinguished guests. Interspersed between the carriages were the vehicles of the Ocala fire department. It was reported that the "hose carriage of Protective Hose Company No. 2, drawn by their magnificent bay charger, Hercules, attracted general attention."

The crowd filled the Exposition building. The program was opened by the song "Pull for the Farmer," the official Kansas campaign number. Governor Fleming's welcome speech was uproariously applauded. Rogers spoke and the newspapers reported that he depicted "the beauties, attractions and fascinations of the glorious State of Florida . . . the loveliness and bewitching graces of our noble women, and congratulated the delegates that they had come with their wives and sweethearts, or else the superior virtue and charms of our ladies would have so bewitched the men that they never would have got home again."<sup>25</sup>

The *Ocala Banner* was more eloquent than the speakers when it wrote: "The Day was a poem of sunshine and gentle breezes, the procession imposing, and the opening services of the Exposition the most successful and finest that it has ever had in its history."<sup>26</sup>

25. *Ocala Banner*, Dec. 5, 1890.

26. *Idem*.

The Convention's main work began with the annual message read by President Polk. Polk was a native of North Carolina. Entering politics in 1860, he advocated the establishment of a state department of agriculture and became its first commissioner in 1877. In 1886 he founded a weekly newspaper, the *Progressive Farmer*, in which, from its first issue, he urged a union of North Carolina farmers to support such political measures as would best serve their interests.<sup>27</sup> When the Southern Alliance entered North Carolina, he merged his organization with that of the national order without hesitation, and became secretary of the North Carolina State Alliance. His pungent editorials in the *Progressive Farmer* and his facility as an orator were well known. Apparently he was in perfect accord with Macune, but he was not the type of individual to be dominated by the ideas of another, and he was quite as ambitious as Macune himself.

At the time of the Ocala meeting Polk was described as "a man of medium height and build, good form, weighs about 160 pounds, hair, mustache and goatee once as black as the raven's wing, is now slightly frosted with the blasts of forty-five winters. An eye from which darts the spark of intelligence, knowledge of the world and of men, and withal a glint of genial good nature and hospitable intent toward all, and by his gracious manners and frank, open speech captivated all whom he met. . ." <sup>28</sup>

At the St. Louis meeting, when prospects of union between the Northern and Southern Alliance failed, each of the organizations issued a list of "Demands." These platforms enunciated in clear and convincing statements the mutual political aims of the Alliance groups. Grist for the campaign mills of 1890 was furnished by these resolutions. By 1890 the full effects of the deflation in real estate values, following the collapse of the speculation of 1887, were being felt. High taxes had become an intolerable burden to much of the popu-

27. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

28. *Ocala Banner*, Dec. 5, 1890.

lation, especially that large proportion, farmers and laborers, that lived constantly in the shadow of impending bankruptcy. Crop failures came with disheartening frequency. When a bumper crop appeared it gave small relief, for the price declined as the yield increased. Corn sold for fifty cents a bushel on the Chicago market, but the Kansas or Nebraska farmer was lucky to get as much as fifteen or twenty cents a bushel. The railroads and commission men pocketed the rest.<sup>29</sup> Stories of ten-cent corn and corn-to-burn were common. It is little wonder that the Alliancemen were determined to vote their adherents into office, hoping to alleviate these tragic economic circumstances.

The St. Louis Demands, announced by the Southern Alliance and Knights of Labor in December, 1889,<sup>30</sup> provided the keynote for the Ocala meeting in 1890. Polk, in his opening talk, declared: "Let us stand unitedly and unflinchingly by the great principles enunciated at our meeting at St. Louis. In the light of our recent experience, the important work of discussing and elucidating these principles must devolve upon us."<sup>31</sup>

An important plank in the St. Louis platform concerned financial reform. According to President Polk, it was ". . . ignored by Congress, and even the discussion of this plan was suppressed, notwithstanding the petitions of hundreds of thousands of our members for financial relief in this direction."<sup>32</sup>

The financial reform plan, designed for the relief of agriculture, was termed the "sub-treasury plan." On the last day of the St. Louis meeting, after the regular demands of the Alliance were read and approved, a report was received from the "Committee of the Monetary System." This report urged "the free and unlimited coinage of silver or the issue of silver certificates against an unlimited deposit of bullion." The report suggested:

29. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 154.

30. *National Economist*, Dec. 21, 1889.

31. Dunning, *op. cit.*, 148.

32. *Idem*.

The system of using certain banks as United States depositories be abolished, and in place of said system, establish in every county in each of the States that offers for sale during the one year \$500,000 worth of farm products . . . a sub-treasury office, and it should be the duty of such sub-treasury department to receive such agricultural products as are offered for storage and make a careful examination of such products and class same as to quality and give a certificate of the deposit . . . and that United States legal-tender paper money equal to eighty per cent of the local current value of the products deposited has been advanced on same on interest at the rate of one per cent per annum . . . With this method in vogue the farmer, when his produce was harvested . . . would secure four-fifths of its value to supply his pressing necessity for money.<sup>33</sup>

Warmly debated in St. Louis the plan was finally adopted. In the months that followed, Alliance newspapers and lecturers endorsed the plan in terms of glowing commendation.<sup>34</sup> Immediately after adjournment of the St. Louis convention, bills embodying the sub-treasury idea were drawn by Alliance leaders and were presented to Congress.<sup>35</sup> Petitions and memorials, literally by the hundreds, demanded that Congress enact the bill. However, the Congressional committees to which the bills were referred, refused to report out a sub-treasury measure of any kind, either favorably or unfavorably.<sup>36</sup> Obviously the severe defeat suffered by the majority party in the election of 1890 failed to arouse Congress to action.

The delegates to the Ocala meeting were determined that immediate action should be taken. On the first day of the convention, President Polk announced that "A

33. *National Economist*, Dec. 21, 1889.

34. Hicks, *op cit.*, 189-190.

35. *Congressional Record*, 51st Cong., 1st Sess.

36. *National Economist*, May 3, 24 and June 7, 1890.

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system of finance which recognizes and secures to every citizen of this country an equitable, fair, and just right to share its benefits, and which will furnish a volume of circulating medium adequate to the legitimate demands of the country, at a low rate of interest, is the greatest and most urgent need of the times." <sup>37</sup>

The Ocala Convention backed these sentiments wholeheartedly. Congressman Pickler, who had introduced the bill into the House of Representatives, spoke to the group during the afternoon session of the third day and declared that the ". . . subtreasury plan was the best for the distribution of money yet proposed." <sup>38</sup> Again, on the sixth day, the Committee on Demands reported on Section 1:

We demand the abolition of national banks, and that the government shall establish sub-treasuries, or depositories, in the several States, which sub-treasuries shall loan money to the people on approved security at a low rate of interest, not to exceed two per cent per annum. <sup>39</sup>

In the debate which followed, an attempt was made to satisfy Northern critics who agreed that the sub-treasury plan fitted the needs of the Southern cotton grower, but who argued that it hardly was satisfactory to their section of the country. To secure reluctant Northern support of the plan, the Ocala delegates suggested that the government lend money on real estate. The final measures voted upon demanded:

- A. Abolition of national banks.
- B. The government shall establish sub-treasuries or depositories in the several States, which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest not to exceed two per cent per annum on non-perishable farm products, and also upon

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37. Dunning, *op. cit.*, 149.

38. *Ibid.*, 155.

39. *Ibid.*, 163.

real estate, *with proper limitations upon the quantity and amount of money.*

- C. The amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50.00 per capita.<sup>40</sup>

These demands were carried by a vote of 79 to 10. Illinois voted against the measures; Pennsylvania and Colorado did not vote; and a split vote was recorded for Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. Davis of Kentucky introduced a resolution asking that the Ways and Means Committee of the House report the sub-treasury bill speedily and that it “. . . be enacted into law as soon as possible, or some other measure that will carry out these principles and meet the necessities of the toiling masses.” This resolution was carried by a rising vote.<sup>41</sup>

Before it languished into death this sub-treasury plan was to create fiery dissension throughout the nation. Even the South, where it drew its main support, was to finally divide on its merits. The sub-treasury was denounced by the *New York Times* as “one of the wildest and most fantastic projects ever seriously proposed by sober man.”<sup>42</sup> Its opponents easily picked flaws in the plans and many questioned its constitutionality. Formidable opposition existed in the Southern Alliance. Wade Hampton of South Carolina branded the measure as “so palpably wrong on its face as to make it absurd to all who have the prosperity and welfare of the country at heart.”<sup>43</sup> By January, 1893, the sub-treasury idea had lost its appeal, and a few months later it could be said that “The cry of the subtreasury cannot now be heard even in the silence of the night.”<sup>44</sup>

A great and pressing problem facing the Ocala Convention was that of a Third Party. Successes scored by

40. *Ibid.*, 164.

41. *Ibid.*, 165.

42. *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1890.

43. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 201.

44. *Ibid.*, 206.

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the farmers in the election of 1890 greatly stimulated the agitation already under way for the organization of a third party along national lines. The opportunity to air the views of those favoring a new political organization was presented at the Ocala meeting. The *New York Times* reported that the chief work of many at the convention was to press for action looking in the direction of a new party.<sup>45</sup>

The Kansas delegates were the most active in formulating a party program. The Kansas State Alliance had joined with the Southern group the year before and now they made it their chief concern to pledge the whole Alliance organization to the support of the new party movement. However, the Southern Alliance in 1891 was not prone to accept anything that would threaten their one-party system, and were content to try and capture control of the Democratic Party.

Macune, realizing the tenor of feeling in the South, and hoping to promote harmony within the Alliance, proposed a compromise. Although the North demanded a new party, the Southerners in the Alliance would not support such a proposal and Macune suggested that action be postponed until 1892 - the time of the next national convention. He proposed that delegates representing farm-labor organizations meet and draw up a set of demands and suggest a plan of enforcing them. Then Macune declared, "If the people by delegates coming direct from them agree that a third party move is necessary, it need not be feared."<sup>46</sup> The Ocala convention, realizing that Macune's plan offered a way out of an embarrassing situation, adopted it. Thus, decision was postponed until February, 1892.<sup>47</sup>

Extremists among the third-party faction were not satisfied with the action taken by the Ocala delegates. As convention debate proceeded they argued vehemently that the need for a new political party was immediate;

45. *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1890.

46. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 207.

47. Anna Rochester, *The Populist Movement in the United States*, (New York, 1943), 61.



organization could not be indefinitely postponed. Under the leadership of the Kansas and Indiana delegations, a call was issued for an organizing convention to meet in Cincinnati the following February. Representatives were invited from the Independent Party, People's Party, Union Labor Party, Union and Confederate soldiers' organizations, the Northern and Southern Farmers' Alliance, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the Citizens' Alliance, Knights of Labor, the Colored Farmers' Alliance, and all others who agreed to the St. Louis demands of 1889.<sup>48</sup> A minority of Southern Alliance members present in Ocala signed the call.<sup>49</sup>

Of the many things discussed, argued, and debated in Ocala, the sub-treasury plan and the action taken on the proposed third party were the most important and had the most far-reaching effects. However, there were other problems suggested and debated. Reports of various Alliance activities were delivered. For several years there had been sporadic efforts at cooperative buying and selling. Cooperative stores, elevators, and gins were frequently undertaken by local Alliances. The Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association in Illinois attempted to pool grain for shipment directly to the central markets. Cooperative fire, hail, and life insurance was tried out by the Dakota Alliance; and in 1890 a National Alliance Aid Association, operating on the Dakota plan, was opened in Washington, D. C.

The progress of these, and the even more important business agencies, was reported at Ocala. Under the vigorous leadership of Macune, the Southern Alliance planned to "organize the agriculturists of the cotton belt for business purposes." Macune argued that it was necessary for all cotton growers to come into a "strong, solid, secret, and binding organization," welded together for the express purpose of "breaking the power of monopoly."<sup>50</sup> Obviously, Southern Alliance leaders had

48. *New York Times*, Dec. 5, 1890.

49. Hicks. *op. cit.*, 209.

50. *Ibid.*, 133.

no scruples about creating a farmers' monopoly, which would force buyers to pay the farmers a fair price. Similarly, farmers, operating through an "agency," might refuse to purchase needed commodities except at what they considered a fair price.

The first of the agencies was organized in Texas and by August 1889 the *National Economist* reported that a majority of the states had business agencies.<sup>51</sup> A State Business Agents Association was organized at the St. Louis Convention to supervise and coordinate the activities of the many agencies and exchanges. At the Ocala meeting eighteen state agencies and exchanges were represented.

The Ocala delegates directed their attention toward organizing one large national agency to head state agencies and exchanges. The secretary of the State Business Agents Association attempted to arouse enthusiasm for the idea. Addressing the Ocala meeting, he announced:

Our enemy cannot meet us successfully if we stand united, but if every agent attempts to work out his problem single handed and alone, each will fall an easy prey to the powers of monopoly. I am convinced that we have gone as far as we can as individual agents.<sup>52</sup>

Macune offered encouragement for the project; other Alliance leaders definitely opposed it. They felt that there was no point in establishing a national exchange, until fuller cooperation between the various states exchanges should be attempted. The project was referred to a committee for study and wider investigation. No further steps were taken by the Southern Alliance toward establishing such a national agency.<sup>53</sup>

The Alliance delegates in Ocala were not as undecided on the transportation problem as they had been

51. *National Economist*, Aug. 10, 1889.

52. *Proceedings of the Supreme Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, 1890, 34-35.

53. *Ibid.*, 49.

in St. Louis.<sup>54</sup> The Ocala delegates went on record demanding government control and supervision over not only transportation, but also communication facilities; and government ownership if control did not remove existing abuses.<sup>55</sup>

There was a minimum of argument among the delegates when national banks were denounced and a demand was made for their abolition. One of the prime grievances of the American farmer stemmed from the banking law of 1864. As a result, the total bank-note circulation tended to decline. With this shrinkage came deflation, declining prices for agricultural products, piling farm mortgages, increasing property foreclosures, unemployment, insecurity, poverty. It was a matter of vital concern to the American farmer and to the representatives at the Ocala meeting. An inflexible currency boded no good for their interests and they were determined that the source of this condition should be abolished.

The famous Ocala Demands were adopted on the last day of the Florida meeting. Later, when the Populist Party evolved on America's political horizon, the platform of this people's party was based, to a large degree, on these demands:<sup>56</sup>

#### OCALA DEMANDS

1. A. We demand the abolition of national banks.
- B. We demand that the government shall establish sub-treasuries or depositories in the several states, which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest, not to exceed two percent per annum, on non-perishable farm products, and also upon real estate, with proper limitations upon the quantity of land and amount of money.
- C. We demand that the amount of the circulating

54. Arnett, *op. cit.*, 99.

55. Hicks, *op. cit.*, 431. Roscoe C. Martin, *The People's Party in Texas, A Study in Third Party Politics*, (Austin, Texas, 1933), 43.

56. Hicks. *op. cit.*, 430-431.

- medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.
2. We demand that Congress shall pass such laws as will effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions; providing a stringent system of procedure in trials that will secure the prompt conviction, and imposing such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.
  3. We condemn the silver bill recently passed by Congress, and demand in lieu thereof the free and unlimited coinage of silver.
  4. We demand the passage of laws prohibiting alien ownership of land, and that Congress take prompt action to devise some plan to obtain all lands now owned by aliens and foreign syndicates; and that all lands now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of such as is actually used and needed by them be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.
  5. Believing in the doctrine of equal rights to all and special privileges to none, we demand:
    - A. That our national legislation shall be so framed in the future as not to build up one industry at the expense of another.
    - B. We further demand a removal of the existing heavy tariff tax from the necessities of life, that the poor of our land must have.
    - C. We further demand a just and equitable system of graduated tax on incomes.
    - D. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all national and state revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.

6. We demand the most, rigid, honest and just state and national control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation, and if this control and supervision does not remove the abuse now existing, we demand the government ownership of such means of communication and transportation.
7. We demand that the Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each State.

After electing officers for the new year,<sup>57</sup> President Polk adjourned the Ocala meeting. Enthusiastic cheers and applause endorsed his expressions of gratitude to Ocala's city officials and citizens for their generous hospitality. One delegate announced that as far as he was concerned Ocala was the "Chicago of Florida."<sup>58</sup>

Florida's hospitality had not been completed. Before leaving Ocala, delegates and their families were given boxes of oranges and lemons. A tour of the state began on December 6 and for two weeks the delegates sailed up the Ocklawaha river, ate barbecue at Homosassa, Bartow and St. Cloud, fished in the Gulf and were entertained with dinners and receptions in Tampa, Orlando, Titusville, St. Augustine, Tallahassee and Jacksonville.<sup>59</sup>

Many historians point to the Ocala meeting as an integral step in the growth of the Populist Party movement. Certainly the Ocala Demands helped to form the structure of the party's political philosophy. The Ocala convention debated economic and political problems

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57. Polk was reelected president; Ben H. Clover, Kansas, was elected vice-president; J. H. Turner, Georgia, secretary; J. F. Willetts, Kansas, national lecturer; J. F. Tillman, Tennessee, member of executive board; five delegates were elected to confer with labor organizations. Reported in *Ocala Banner*, Dec. 12, 1890.

58. *Weekly Floridian*, Dec. 17, 1890.

59. An itinerary of the trip was published in the *Ocala Banner*, Dec. 5, 1890.

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which were not particularly new to the country. The grievances of the farmers were many. Their complaints for years had been directed against the railroads, trusts, the middlemen, bankers and the government's muddled currency. In the Ocala meeting hall, they had raised their restless and discontented voices. The echoes would resound for many years, affecting and stimulating political, economic and social thought and activity in the United States.