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AN EXAMINATION OF THE LA CROSSE PRESS DURING THE POLITICAL  
CAMPAIGN OF 1912

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A Seminar Research Paper  
Presented to  
Dr. George Gilkey  
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by  
Charles W. Birch  
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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LA CROSSE PRESS DURING THE POLITICAL  
CAMPAIGN OF 1912

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The year 1912 produced a presidential campaign never matched in American history. An incumbent President, a former President and a future President engaged in a spectacle that is not likely to be seen in America again. Woodrow Wilson's election to the Presidency in 1912 marked the end of the Republican phase of the progressive movement. The 1912 political campaign in the state of Wisconsin demonstrated the fierce battle within the ranks of the Republican party.

The purpose of this study is to examine the editorial opinion expressed in two La Crosse, Wisconsin newspapers during the political campaign of 1912 and, in so doing, to determine the stand taken by each paper regarding the key issues. The two newspapers were the La Crosse Tribune and the La Crosse Leader-Press.

A short overview of the 1912 campaign and election is followed by an examination of the editorial content of the two newspapers during the period from June 17, 1912 to November 9, 1912. From the examination, several tendencies clearly emerge. First, the Tribune supported progressive candidates while the Leader-Press supported conservatives. Second, both newspapers crossed party lines in endorsing candidates. For President, the Tribune supported the Democrat Wilson, and for Wisconsin Governor, the Republican, Francis E. McGovern. The Leader-Press endorsed the Republican

Taft for President and the Democrat John C. Karel for Governor. Third, the Tribune endorsed, by name, candidates for state and local offices while the Leader-Press remained silent. Fourth, the Leader-Press predicted throughout the campaign that Taft would be re-elected. On the other hand, the Tribune, although supporting Wilson, was not as adamant in predicting victory.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE STUDY AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

It is the opinion of the writer that newspaper editorials are important sources for reconstructing political thought and it is with this in mind that the present study is instituted.

#### I. THE STUDY

Statement of the purpose. It is the purpose of this study (1) to examine the editorial opinion expressed in the La Crosse Tribune and the La Crosse Leader-Press from June 17, 1912 to November 9, 1912 on the political campaign of 1912; and (2) to indicate the stand taken by each newspaper regarding the key issues.

Importance of the study. The periodical press is one of the important sources that the historian has at his command for the reconstruction of the past. What the historian wishes from the newspaper is a picture of contemporary life. The editorial serves to reconstruct current opinion.<sup>1</sup> This study examines the editorial content of two La Crosse newspapers during the political campaign of 1912 with the purpose of giving the reader insight into the political thought of La Crosse County during the 1912 campaign.

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<sup>1</sup>Lucy Maynard Salmon, The Newspaper and the Historian (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 470.

## II. MATERIALS USED

For an understanding of the importance of the newspaper to the historian the writer consulted The Newspaper and the Historian, by Lucy Maynard Salmon.

On the general atmosphere of the times the writer found Oscar T. Barck and Nelson M. Black's Since 1900, Eric Goldman's Rendezvous With Destiny and Russel B. Nye's Midwestern Progressive Politics to be most useful.

Arthur S. Link's Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era served as a general account of the presidential campaign and election of 1912. Although written for the general reader rather than the student of history, Frank K. Kelly's The Fight for the White House: The Story of 1912 proved valuable as an interesting narrative of the presidential campaign.

For an understanding of Wisconsin politics during this time, Robert S. Maxwell's La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin was the best source. Other books concerning Wisconsin progressivism that proved valuable were The La Follettes and the Wisconsin Idea, by Edward N. Doan, Robert M. La Follette and Wisconsin Progressivism, by James I. Clark, Wisconsin: A Story of Progress, by William F. Raney, and La Follette's Autobiography, by Robert M. La Follette.

In fulfilling the major purpose of the study, the writer examined microfilm copies of two La Crosse daily newspapers. The examination covered news and editorial content in the two newspapers from June 17, 1912 to November 9, 1912. The two newspapers were the La Crosse Tribune,

edited by Aaron M. Brayton, and the La Crosse Leader-Press, edited by Frank. W. Leahy.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The second chapter attempts to give an overview of the political campaign and election of 1912. Major emphasis is on the presidential contest. A brief account of the Wisconsin contest and a summation of the vote registered in La Crosse County is also given.

The third chapter presents a chronology of the major events of the political campaign of 1912 as recorded in the news and editorials of the two La Crosse newspapers. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section covers the events from June 17 to the end of the month; the second, July and August; the third, September and October; and the fourth, November 1 to November 9.

The final chapter attempts to point out in general terms the orientation of the two newspapers.

### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study does not attempt to cover all the aspects of the political campaign of 1912. With major emphasis on the presidential campaign, it is hoped that a general feeling of the campaign will result.

## CHAPTER II

### THE 1912 POLITICAL CAMPAIGN: AN OVERVIEW

The year 1912 produced a presidential campaign never matched in American history. An incumbent President, a former President, and a future President engaged in a spectacle that is not likely to be seen in America again.<sup>1</sup> America witnessed during the campaign the first serious three-cornered presidential contest since 1860.<sup>2</sup> In Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, Arthur S. Link writes:

The election of 1912 marked the culmination of more than twenty years of popular revolt against a state of affairs that seemed to guarantee perpetual political and economic control to the privileged few in city, state and nation.<sup>3</sup>

Woodrow Wilson's election to the Presidency in 1912 marked the end of the Republican phase of the progressive movement.<sup>4</sup>

In view of most observers, Wilson's victory was in part the result of the split in the Republican party. The election of 1910 exposed a wide breach in the Republican party. The major issue was insurgency versus regularity. In the elections, the insurgents took

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<sup>1</sup> Frank K. Kelly, The Fight For the White House: The Story of 1912 (New York: Crowell Company, 1961), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> George E. Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 295.

control of the Midwest and West. Taft sought compromise with the progressive leaders, but accomplished little. As a result, the insurgent element planned to capture the Republican party and to nominate a candidate of its choice in 1912.<sup>5</sup>

On January 21, 1911, the National Progressive Republican League organized and made clear its intention of opposing Taft for renomination in 1912.<sup>6</sup> Throughout 1911, a La Follette-for-President boom appeared to be making great progress. Theodore Roosevelt and not La Follette, however, dominated the progressive Republican situation. Until nearly the end of 1911, Roosevelt made no decision. Many leading progressives turned to Roosevelt and pleaded with him to come out boldly and give the movement the only leadership that could win. Finally, on February 24, 1912, he announced his candidacy.<sup>7</sup>

A bitter pre-convention campaign followed Roosevelt's announcement. During April, May, and early June, Roosevelt showed signs that his appeal was succeeding. He swept most of the states that had presidential primaries. Of the thirteen states where the Republican voters had a preference vote, La Follette won 36 delegates, Taft 48, and Roosevelt 278.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Russel B. Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics (Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 279.

<sup>6</sup>Oscar T. Barck, Jr. and Nelson M. Black, Since 1900 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

On June 18 the Republican National Convention opened in Chicago. The progressives challenged the right of seventy-two Taft delegates to their seats. The credentials committee declared the challenge motion out of order and the Taft delegates occupied their seats. The convention elected, as permanent chairman, the conservative Senator Elihu Root of New York by a vote of 552 to 502 over the progressive, Francis E. McGovern, governor of Wisconsin. With Root as chairman, the Old Guard kept control of the convention machinery. Most of the Roosevelt backers, on orders from him, refused to recognize the legitimacy of the convention and declined to vote either on the adoption of the platform or the balloting for candidates. Consequently, the delegates nominated Taft on the first ballot, and selected James Sherman as his running mate.<sup>9</sup>

The Republican platform called for reform by advocating maximum working hours for women and children and workmen's compensation. The program also included changes in legal procedure, alteration of the currency system and a simpler process for removing judges. Other planks contained provisions for addition to the antitrust laws, revision of parcel post and publicity of campaign contributions.<sup>10</sup>

Roosevelt came to Chicago sounding his battle cry, "We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord". In his mind the nomination had been stolen.<sup>11</sup> The night following the nomination of Taft, Roosevelt

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<sup>9</sup>Barck and Black, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>11</sup>Nye, op. cit., p. 287.

announced plans for the organization of a new party -- the Progressive.<sup>12</sup> The Progressive party came into existence in Chicago on August 6. The convention carried on one of the most remarkable conventions the country had ever seen.<sup>13</sup> Every shade of political opinion was represented, all drawn to Chicago by the magic of Roosevelt's personality.<sup>14</sup> In an atmosphere of a religious revival, singing "Onward Christian Soldiers", the convention drew up the most significant reform program since the Populists of 1892.<sup>15</sup> The platform called for direct primary, direct election of senators, initiative, referendum, and recall, a speedier method of amending the Constitution, women's suffrage, limitation of campaign spendings, prohibition of child labor, the eight-hour day, a Department of Labor, conservation, strong regulation of interstate commerce and the establishment of a federal industrial commission. The convention nominated Roosevelt and Governor Hiram W. Johnson to head the ticket.<sup>16</sup>

La Follette did not go to the Bull Moose convention, and neither did dozens of other progressives. La Follette believed the Republican party was best for getting control in the hands of the people. However, La Follette stated that if he believed the Democratic party a better

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<sup>12</sup>Barck and Black, loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Nye, loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Link, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>Barck and Black, loc. cit.

instrument he would join it. He further stated that if he thought a new party was better he would find it. La Follette preferred to "keep up the fight in the Republican party to make that party really progressive".<sup>17</sup>

With the Republican split assured, Democratic hopes soared. The nation watched with eager interest the Democratic National Convention that opened at Baltimore on June 25.<sup>18</sup> The Democratic party itself showed a sharp division into a liberal Bryan wing and a conservative, Eastern, anti-Bryan wing. The conservatives favored House Speaker Champ Clark of Missouri, a middle-of-the-roader, and the liberals favored Woodrow Wilson.<sup>19</sup>

Bryan, having no chance to be nominated himself, proved to be a powerful figure at the Baltimore convention.<sup>20</sup> Clark led during the opening balloting, with Wilson second. Neither could gain the necessary two-thirds vote. The key lay in the hands of Bryan, who shifted his support from Clark to Wilson.<sup>21</sup> The convention nominated Wilson on the forty-sixth ballot.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Nye, op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>18</sup>Barck and Black, loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Nye, op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>20</sup>Barck and Black, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>21</sup>Nye, loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 13.

The Democratic platform remained a distinctively Bryan document. The platform called for tariff revision, antitrust laws, a rural credits system, railroad legislation, prohibition of the injunction in labor disputes, and a bank law.<sup>23</sup>

During the campaign all three major candidates claimed to be friendly to the cause of reform. Republicans had to choose between loyalty to the historic party or alignment with the Progressive party. The bulk of the machine politicians and businessmen supported Taft, while idealists and reformers supported Roosevelt. Many progressive Republicans, such as La Follette, took an unpredictable course.<sup>24</sup> By the middle of August, Taft was out of the running. Wilson and Roosevelt carried the burden of the rest of the campaign. As the campaign progressed, Wilson's "New Freedom" and Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" became the central issue.<sup>25</sup> Roosevelt based his program on Hamiltonian principles, while Wilson considered himself a disciple of Jefferson. Confused by these conflicting brands of progressivism, the voters considered the contest one of personalities.<sup>26</sup>

The old Republican progressive group reacted in various ways. Some supported Roosevelt while others backed Wilson. La Follette

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<sup>23</sup>Nye, loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Barck and Black, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>25</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>26</sup>Barck and Black, op. cit., p. 83.

refused to endorse Taft. Unofficially, La Follette, favored Wilson, and in the election he handed in a blank ballot.<sup>27</sup>

By the middle of October there was not much doubt about the outcome of the contest. Roosevelt won the support of most of the Republican progressives, but failed to draw progressive Democrats from Wilson.<sup>28</sup> In the electoral vote Wilson received 435 ballots, Roosevelt 88 and Taft 8. Of the popular votes, Wilson received 6.3 million or 42 per cent; Roosevelt, 4 million or 27 per cent; and Taft, 3.5 million or 23 per cent.<sup>29</sup> The remaining votes went to Eugene Debs, Social Democrat, Eugene Chafin, Prohibition, and A. E. Reimer, Socialist Labor.<sup>30</sup>

The 1912 political campaign in Wisconsin demonstrated the fierce battle within the ranks of the Republican party. The Chicago convention split the Republican progressive group in Wisconsin into warring factions. La Follette denounced the efforts of Governor McGovern to unite the progressives in opposition to Taft and urged Wisconsin progressive Republicans to remain in the party. The Republican gubernatorial candidate, McGovern, leaned toward Roosevelt and announced mid-way through the campaign that he would support Roosevelt and not Taft. La Follette, admitting that he had a deep and lasting resentment against McGovern for his activities, appealed to all progressive voters to support McGovern in the general election. La Follette said that a vote for McGovern would be a vote for

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<sup>27</sup>Nye, op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>28</sup>Link, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>29</sup>Barck and Black, loc. cit.

<sup>30</sup>Wisconsin Blue Book (Madison: Democratic Printing Company, 1913), p. 171.

the progressive movement. In the race for governor, McGovern won re-election by a margin of only twelve thousand votes over the conservative Democrat, John C. Karel.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the presidential race, La Follette indicated a preference for Wilson. In an address delivered at La Crosse, Wisconsin, La Follette made his first public statement about his position, and suggested a friendly attitude toward Wilson rather than an endorsement. The election results in Wisconsin attested La Follette's strong position with the voters. Wilson received 164,000 votes, Taft 130,000 and Roosevelt 62,000.<sup>32</sup>

Voters in La Crosse County in 1912 overwhelmingly supported Wilson. For the first time since Cleveland's election in 1892, La Crosse County voted the Democratic ticket.<sup>33</sup> In the gubernatorial race, McGovern narrowly edged Karel by 60 votes. The voters returned John J. Esch to Congress and a full slate of Republicans for state offices carried the county. In the contest for county offices, with all positions held by Republicans, the voters elected all Democrats with the exception of Andrew Thompson, a Republican, for Register of Deeds.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Robert S. Maxwell, La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin (Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1956), pp. 186-189.

<sup>32</sup> Edward N. Doan, The La Follettes and the Wisconsin Idea (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1947), pp. 71-72.

<sup>33</sup> How Wisconsin Voted 1848-1954 (Wisconsin: Bureau of Government, 1956), p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> La Crosse Tribune, November 9, 1912. (Hereafter cited as Tribune with the appropriate date.)

## CHAPTER III

### THE LA CROSSE PRESS SPEAKS OUT

#### I. JUNE: THE CONVENTIONS DECIDE

The Republican National Convention opened June 18 in Chicago. The Leader-Press commented in an editorial on June 17, "The situation at Chicago is without parallel in the history of American politics. Comment upon it that involves speculation as to its outcome is futile."<sup>1</sup> The Wisconsin delegation debated over alignment at the convention. The question before the Wisconsin delegation was whether La Follette or McGovern should be the progressive leader in Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup> By having McGovern chairman, the Roosevelt supporters hoped to lure Wisconsin progressives into their camp. Seeing McGovern's actions as a defection, the La Follette leaders swore their vengeance on the Governor.<sup>3</sup> The convention named Elihu Root, a Taft supporter, permanent chairman. The Leader-Press saw this as a significant victory; but cautiously added:

... whatever their decision it may be taken for granted that their largest concern is for the result of the election. They will be slow to nominate Mr. Taft unless they believe that the history of the convention makes his election probable.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>La Crosse Leader-Press, June 17, 1912. (Hereafter cited as Leader-Press with the appropriate date.)

<sup>2</sup>Tribune, June 18, 1912.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1912.

<sup>4</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, June 19, 1912.

In the wake of the La Follette-McGovern feud, there was a boom for Lieutenant Governor Thomas Morris for Governor. Asked by a Tribune reporter whether he would accept, Morris replied, "I am not a candidate," then he added, "It takes you newspapermen to rig up a sensation."<sup>5</sup>

Both the Tribune and Leader-Press showed alarm over the controversy between the two factions of the Wisconsin delegation. The Leader-Press commented:

Most profoundly sensational of all the happenings at Chicago yesterday, so far as political activities in Wisconsin are concerned, was the open rupture of friendly political relations between Governor McGovern and Senator La Follette. . . . Whatever may be the result of the proceedings in the national republican (sic) convention, we should say that the battle in Wisconsin has just begun. Governor McGovern's "hat is in the ring" and Senator La Follette is the man challenged. There will be a season of warfare in the state which may work momentous changes in public policies and tremendously affect Wisconsin's industrial and commercial and social future.<sup>6</sup>

The Tribune said:

Our contention in relation to the incident is this: That the Governor was elected a La Follette delegate, that throughout the convention up to Friday his conduct would have been appropriate had he been there as an instructed Roosevelt delegate, and that as the two are incompatible he could not have been serving the best interests of a candidate other than T.R.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the controversy over the seating of delegates, Roosevelt deserted the Republican party and announced the formation of

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<sup>5</sup>Tribune, June 20, 1912.

<sup>6</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, June 19, 1912.

<sup>7</sup>Editorial in Tribune, June 22, 1912.

a new political organization.<sup>8</sup> Calling the Roosevelt move a "fiasco", the Leader-Press wrote:

. . . It would be difficult to imagine a candidacy more ill timed than that of Colonel Roosevelt or a campaign for nomination to the Presidency more incompetently directed. It has given the republican (sic) party some concern, but there is every prospect, at this writing, that no permanent harm has been done by the Roosevelt disturbance which is now at its end.<sup>9</sup>

The convention named Taft and Sherman to run on the G.O.P. ticket. The roll call showed 344 delegates not voting. These "silent delegates" indicated an uncertain strength of Roosevelt.<sup>10</sup> Concerning the choice of the Republicans, the Leader-Press said:

. . . Prediction at this time of the result in November can be merely guesses. We do not know who the democratic (sic) nominee will be nor what form the campaign will take. The immediate outlook admittedly is not encouraging to republican (sic) successes. The Roosevelt defection is bound to be serious. . . . Merely estimating on developments of the next four months, it may be said conservatively that while he must fight an uphill battle, the President has a chance to win.<sup>11</sup>

In Baltimore, on Tuesday June 25, the Democrats opened their convention. Progressive Republicans watched closely the events in Baltimore. The progressives felt that Roosevelt's fate would be decided by the Democratic choice. The Leader-Press wrote that if a conservative were nominated, Taft might well be re-elected.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Tribune, June 20, 1912.

<sup>9</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, June 22, 1912.

<sup>10</sup>Tribune, June 24, 1912.

<sup>11</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, June 24, 1912.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1912.

When the balloting for nomination began, Champ Clark, supported by William Jennings Bryan, commanded an early lead. Woodrow Wilson moved ahead on the thirteenth ballot and his nomination came on the forty-sixth.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting on the choice of the two major political parties, the Tribune wrote on July 4 that the campaign showed "clear cut difference", adding:

. . . one hope we may entertain for this campaign is that more than ever before the voters may study the issues and deal with the election with that intelligence which comes of understanding.<sup>14</sup>

The Leader-Press called the Democratic convention "one of the most memorable political conventions of American history".<sup>15</sup> As to the choice of Wilson the Leader-Press wrote:

An important purpose of the democratic (sic) campaign being to appeal to the republican (sic) progressives, the nomination of Woodrow Wilson is from that standpoint the wisest which could have been made. . . . Dr. Wilson is indeed, an exceptionally clean, high minded man whose appeal should bring response from the same sort of all parties. . . . Summing up, we should say at the beginning of a four month's campaign, that Dr. Wilson is going to get more republican (sic) votes than any other democrat (sic) has had since Cleveland ran in 1892, and that he is going to have difficulty in holding his own party line.<sup>16</sup>

In the same issue, the Leader-Press deemed the rejection of Clark a tragedy in the year "it is good for a democrat (sic) to run".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Leader-Press, July 2, 1912.

<sup>14</sup>Editorial in Tribune, July 4, 1912.

<sup>15</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, July 1, 1912.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1912.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

## II. JULY AND AUGUST: THE CALL OF THE BULL MOOSE

By early July, the two major political parties, having chosen their party heads, began plans for the approaching campaign. Wilson stated that his campaign would be one begun with an "open mind".<sup>18</sup> Taft announced that he would not campaign.<sup>19</sup> The adoption of a progressive platform by the Democrats and the nomination of Wilson dismayed many who had talked of supporting a new progressive party. In the early days of July, rumors began to circulate that Roosevelt would not run after all.<sup>20</sup> However, on July 7, Roosevelt sounded the call for a convention of progressives to be held in Chicago on August 5.<sup>21</sup> The day after the announcement the Leader-Press wrote:

The third party is to be a fact. . . . The movement is by no means insignificant. It promises to play a large part in the campaign. . . . It is quite possible that in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio the colonel may draw enough votes otherwise for Wilson to turn the states to Taft.

The third party movement indeed promises plenty of excitement and uncertainty. Its strength may grow much before fall, yet it is more likely to decline. The present outlook is that the republican (sic) organization may look upon it as a helpful agency.<sup>22</sup>

Political activities in the state of Wisconsin got under way early in July. The Leader-Press viewed the upcoming state and county

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<sup>18</sup>Leader-Press, July 5, 1912.

<sup>19</sup>Tribune, July 5, 1912.

<sup>20</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>21</sup>Tribune, July 8, 1912.

<sup>22</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, July 8, 1912.

elections with speculation stating:

It is possible that the state of Wisconsin may go democratic (sic) in the presidency and republican (sic) in the state ticket. . . . On the democratic (sic) state and county tickets this fall in Wisconsin will be candidates in full accord with their national leader and appealing for support on the same grounds. We do not say it cannot happen, but it does seem unlikely that they will not get the benefit of a bolt directed primarily against the head of the republican (sic) ticket.<sup>23</sup>

The Tribune claimed that Democrats in the state would have to be progressive to be elected.<sup>24</sup> Leaders of the Democratic party in La Crosse County felt confident of landslide victory. Gathering in convention of July 6, the county Democrats expressed great faith.<sup>25</sup>

Wisconsin Democrats met at Milwaukee for the state convention on July 11. The delegation saw the need for a gubernatorial candidate who could get the La Follette vote.<sup>26</sup> The Convention nominated John C. Karel and John Schmitz to be submitted to the primary voters. The Leader-Press showed a preference for Karel in an editorial saying, "Karel stands for the future, the new deal".<sup>27</sup>

As the month moved on, the phenomenon of Roosevelt concerned both papers. On July 16 the Leader-Press wrote:

. . . There is nothing uncertain about the issues that have been joined by the adoption of the republican (sic) and democratic (sic)

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., July 5, 1912.

<sup>24</sup>Editorial in Tribune, July 9, 1912.

<sup>25</sup>Leader-Press, July 6, 1912.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., July 11, 1912.

<sup>27</sup>Leader-Press, July 15, 1912.

platforms. They are so clear that the alignment of voters is progressing with a rapidity seldom witnessed in the earlier stages of a presidential campaign . . . he (Roosevelt) has got to have a clearer declaration of principles that he has ever made in the whole course of his public career. He won't get very far this year in a campaign by epithet.<sup>28</sup>

Doubting the success of the third party, the Tribune wrote on July 26:

Looking at the new party idea from every angle it does not seem that Roosevelt whose personality is offered in lieu of a definite platform, can succeed. Even for a bona fide new party, success in 1912 is not within range of possibilities.<sup>29</sup>

The Leader-Press humorously depicted the position of Roosevelt saying,

"We predict that if Colonel Roosevelt's new party fails to nominate Colonel Roosevelt for the presidency Colonel Roosevelt will bolt it."<sup>30</sup>

Robert La Follette startled the country by insisting that he would not leave the Republican party. La Follette's confusing stand on the presidential candidates left both papers uncertain about the course he would follow. La Follette attacked the record of John J. Esch, congressman from the Seventh District, in his "Roll Call" technique. Observers believed the attack showed La Follette's endorsement of A. H. Dahl, a Republican opposing Esch for primary preference.<sup>31</sup> The Leader-Press wrote concerning La Follette's attack saying, "The prevailing opinion is that this year Mr. La Follette is out after bigger game than the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., July 16, 1912.

<sup>29</sup>Editorial in Tribune, July 26, 1912.

<sup>30</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, July 24, 1912.

<sup>31</sup>Tribune, July 20, 1912.

congressman from the Seventh District."<sup>32</sup> On July 27 La Follette urged all Republicans to stay in the party. "Progressivism," said La Follette, "is a distinctly republican (sic) movement and nothing can be gained by aligning it with the democracy (sic)."<sup>33</sup>

The Democratic platform said the tariff should be lowered and should be for revenue only.<sup>34</sup> The Tribune said that the Democrats would be wise to make this the main issue.<sup>35</sup> Wilson favored a Tariff Commission. The Leader-Press called this statement by Wilson the "most important expression from Wilson since his nomination."<sup>36</sup>

Early in August the La Crosse County parties made plans for the primaries to be held early in September.<sup>37</sup> As the time for the Progressive convention drew near, the Leader-Press said, "The progressives are beginning to look like a real party . . ."<sup>38</sup> On August 1 the Wisconsin Attorney General ruled that the Progressive party must run as an independent party in Wisconsin.<sup>39</sup> The same day Taft accepted

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<sup>32</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, July 20, 1912.

<sup>33</sup>Leader-Press, July 27, 1912.

<sup>34</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>35</sup>Editorial in Tribune, July 23, 1912.

<sup>36</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, July 22, 1912.

<sup>37</sup>Tribune, August 3, 1912.

<sup>38</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, August 1, 1912.

<sup>39</sup>Tribune, August 1, 1912.

his nomination and the Leader-Press wrote:

. . . It remains to be seen how this country will receive this strong, clear-cut, conservation. It may hearken to it, and it may not, but in that the president is not so deeply concerned as he is in adhering firmly to what he believes to be the best policy for all the people.<sup>40</sup>

The National Progressive Convention opened August 5 in the same building where Roosevelt had been defeated in June.<sup>41</sup> The Leader-Press wrote:

The Progressive movement culminates today. . . . The country is watching the progressives with a sympathetic mind. It is willing to give them credit for good intention and to hope that, under the energetic leadership of Roosevelt, they may accomplish much. Their course at the convention now in session may decide whether they shall go ahead to further triumphs or whether they are to weaken henceforth as a political factor.<sup>42</sup>

During the second day's session, Roosevelt delivered his "Confession of Faith" speech. The Leader-Press commented on the speech, saying: "All the things the Colonel wants are also wanted by a great many people, so the speech should make votes . . ." <sup>43</sup> La Follette declared that the only essential demand of Roosevelt's faith is the Colonel.<sup>44</sup> The convention nominated Roosevelt and put Hiram Johnson of California in second place. The convention drew up a fully

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<sup>40</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, August 2, 1912.

<sup>41</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>42</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, August 5, 1912.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1912.

<sup>44</sup>Tribune, August 8, 1912.

progressive platform.<sup>45</sup>

On August 7 Wilson accepted his nomination. Following Wilson's acceptance speech the Leader-Press set forth a view of the forthcoming contest in an editorial titled "The Three Parties":

With the speeches of Taft and Wilson accepting their nomination and that of Roosevelt just before his nomination, the lines of the campaign may be said to be made up. It is now possible for the intelligent voter to make a study of what ought to be based on the platform, acceptance speech and personal record, ability and experience of each . . .<sup>46</sup>

In discussing Taft and the Republican party, the editorial said that the party stood for orderly, slow maybe, but sure progress. If the voter liked "the historic attitude of the republican (sic) party, he has no reason to complain." In referring to the Democratic party, the editorial said it went further than the Republican party in advocating reform, but its allegiance to state's rights and to the theory of a revenue tariff without regard to the protection of the wage earner hampered its cause. Regarding the Progressive party, the editorial said it went further than the Democratic party in the measures it offered. The editorial closed: "A wealth of principles and personnel is offered from which to choose."<sup>47</sup>

During the last weeks of August little political activity took place. On August 17 the Tribune called the Leader-Press a "flatfooted stalwart republican (sic) paper," adding that because the Leader-Press supports Karel, that is evidence that Karel is reactionary.<sup>48</sup> The Leader-

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<sup>45</sup>Leader-Press, August 8, 1912.

<sup>46</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, August 9, 1912.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Editorial in Tribune, August 7, 1912.

Press made no answer to the Tribune statement. A week before the state primary the Leader-Press said, "Only a week until the primary and the best thing about it is that most people haven't allowed themselves to get excited over it as yet."<sup>49</sup> The Tribune considered the coming primary very important. On August 26 the Tribune strongly endorsed Esch and said, "We have fixed opinions regarding three other contests in the republican (sic) primaries. They are for district attorney, county treasurer and clerk of court."<sup>50</sup>

### III. SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER: THE CANDIDATES FIGHT IT OUT

Political activities in Wisconsin, during September, began with the state primary. Both papers urged the re-election of Esch in the primary election.<sup>51</sup> Regarding the county ticket the Leader-Press clearly stated a nonpartisan position:

It has not seemed to the Leader-Press (sic) to be the province of a newspaper to pick out personal friends among the candidates for non-political county positions and to urge their nomination and election as a vindication of some great principle. It matters not at all to the public of La Crosse County whether the occupants of the county offices be republican (sic), democrat (sic) or independent . . . unless a candidate is conspicuously unfit or dishonest, it does not seem to be the province of a newspaper to interfere with those proposed. . . . The Leader-Press (sic) in refraining from entering these personal contests . . . makes no criticism of other newspapers which may

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<sup>49</sup> Editorial in Leader-Press, August 26, 1912.

<sup>50</sup> Editorial in Tribune, August 26, 1912.

<sup>51</sup> Editorials in Tribune, August 31, 1912 and Leader-Press, September 2, 1912.

look at the matter differently. If its contemporary wishes to boom its personal friends . . . that is its privilege. . . . The point is made merely that the Leader-Press (sic) is willing to leave to its contemporary a monopoly of that sort of campaigning.<sup>52</sup>

In the election, Karel defeated Schmitz in the Democratic primary.<sup>53</sup>

Because of the smallest primary vote in La Crosse County up to that time, the Leader-Press called the primary unsuccessful. The paper said:

. . . The people, it appears, are growing weary of voting . . . a large number, it is believed, do not care for the added voting privileges and may not make use of them if such are forced upon them.<sup>54</sup>

The Leader-Press expressed gratification over the renomination of Esch.<sup>55</sup>

The Tribune said the vote for Esch was proof that he was a progressive.

The nomination of Karel, according to the Tribune, made the issue of the state contest plain. The issue would be whether the state should be progressive or reactionary. A vote for Karel would be a vote for reaction.<sup>56</sup>

In the view of the Leader-Press, Karel's nomination would enliven a campaign in Wisconsin which might otherwise have been dull.<sup>57</sup>

Writing a few days after the primary, the Tribune stated there is only one issue in Wisconsin: "The issue is the endorsement or

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<sup>52</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, September 2, 1912.

<sup>53</sup>Tribune, September 4, 1912.

<sup>54</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, September 4, 1912. (Primaries began in Wisconsin in 1903.)

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Editorial in Tribune, September 6, 1912.

<sup>57</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, September 5, 1912.

rejection of McGovern's record as governor. . . . The record of McGovern entitles him to the support of all who believe in progressive legislation."<sup>58</sup>

On September 12 Governor Johnson of California, the Bull Moose vice-presidential candidate, spoke in La Crosse. The citizens of La Crosse received Johnson with enthusiasm and both the Tribune and the Leader-Press called Johnson a strong progressive.<sup>59</sup>

The platform conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties met in Madison, September 17. The Leader-Press stated that the events at Madison might determine whether the state would be Republican or Democratic in the November elections.<sup>60</sup> The platform of the Republican party failed to endorse the national ticket and the national platform. The state platform referred to La Follette as the leader in "the onward movement."<sup>61</sup> The Tribune praised the Republican platform and called it the "continuance of the Wisconsin Idea."<sup>62</sup>

During the last weeks of September, the county Republican and Democratic parties chose chairmen and made plans for the long campaigning weeks ahead. Describing the outlook in the county, the Leader-Press wrote:

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<sup>58</sup>Editorial in Tribune, September 7, 1912.

<sup>59</sup>Editorials in Tribune, September 12, 1912 and Leader-Press, September 13, 1912.

<sup>60</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, September 17, 1912.

<sup>61</sup>Leader-Press, September 18, 1912.

<sup>62</sup>Editorial in Tribune, September 21, 1912.

. . . a number of republicans (sic) and democrats (sic) may be found for Roosevelt, but in the county the bulk of the republican (sic) party, conservative and progressive, seems disposed to stand by Taft, and give him another chance and, for the sake of the demands to be made upon it in the future, prevent the wrecking of the republican (sic) party.<sup>63</sup>

The Tribune pointed out that in the county, the Democrats had the advantage in the presidential race because of the strong appeal to all progressives. On the governorship the Republicans held the edge because the Republican choice "has a progressive record calculated to appeal to the progressives of all parties." The legislative ticket also favored the Republicans, according to the Tribune.<sup>64</sup>

On Friday, September 27, Governor McGovern surprised the Republicans by declaring for Roosevelt. The Leader-Press felt that the Governor had the right to support Roosevelt, but he ought to remember that he had been elected as a Republican. Therefore he should retain the Republican ticket.<sup>65</sup> In spite of McGovern's bolt, leading Republicans, including La Follette and La Crosse Republicans, declared they would continue to support McGovern.<sup>66</sup>

The candidates for all offices, national, state, and local, began to campaign in earnest during October. The Tribune again pointed to its contention that Wisconsin had but one issue. The Tribune in an editorial

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<sup>63</sup> Editorial in Leader-Press, September 27, 1912.

<sup>64</sup> Editorial in Tribune, September 26, 1912.

<sup>65</sup> Editorial in Leader-Press, September 30, 1912.

<sup>66</sup> Leader-Press, September 30, 1912.

on October 3 stated that it believed the people want McGovern and progress. Answering an editorial by the Milwaukee Journal that asked how McGovern could honorably stay at the head of the Republican ticket while denouncing it, and giving his support to the ticket of another party, the Tribune stated that it could not see how the Journal or any progressive paper can blame the governor for repudiating a candidate for president that a great many progressives have repudiated. The Tribune went further, saying, "There is no party tie so strong as to bind a real progressive to an avowed and dangerous reactionary candidate."<sup>67</sup>

On October 11 the Tribune wrote:

. . . the American people never said less and thought more in any presidential campaign in history than they are doing at this time. They are weighing, testing, reading and thinking, but they are not talking. Their silence indicates the presence of sober thought, be it first, second or third, and their decisions will be made when the votes are cast in November.<sup>68</sup>

The next day the Tribune declared in an editorial titled "One issue that is plain as day":

Wisconsin is peculiarly unfortunate this year in the obscurity with which its multiplicity of intra-party and intra-factional quarrels tend to becloud issues that ordinarily would be clear as a church in the noon day sun.

The democrats (sic) are split over Karel, and fortunately the progressive democrats (sic) are in control, assuring that this will be a Wilson campaign primarily instead of a Karel campaign.

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<sup>67</sup> Editorials in Tribune, October 3 and 4, 1912.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., October 11, 1912.

The republicans (sic) are split over Taft, with the equally fortunate circumstance that the progressive element controls and will make state issues the paramount factor in the campaign.<sup>69</sup>

The Tribune went further explaining the added dilemma caused by the action of McGovern. The paper declared that it positively disagreed with McGovern's conviction that there is any virtue in the Roosevelt movement. Yet, because McGovern represents progress he should be elected over Karel who represents reaction. Getting to the description of the plain issue, the Tribune closed:

But upon one thing all progressives can agree with the Tribune (sic). It is this:

Not a single cloud obscures the issue surrounding the contest for assemblymen and a senator to represent this section in the state legislature. . . . Let us all remember that those splendid democrats (sic), Woodrow Wilson and W. J. Bryan, believe in the same things in which Robert M. La Follette believe, and that Adolph J. Schmitz and Joe Davies believe in the same things in which Tom Morris, Otto Bosshard, J. E. McConnell and Frank Strupp. We know what these good men, democrat (sic) and republican (sic) believe, and we can vote that way.<sup>70</sup>

In the heat of the campaign, Roosevelt escaped death prior to a speaking engagement in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The would-be assassin, John Shrank from New York, leaped from a crowd and fired at Roosevelt as he walked on a Milwaukee street. Although wounded, Roosevelt fulfilled the speaking engagement the same evening. The next day the Leader-Press, writing about the attempted assassination, pointed out that the paper had protested during its entire existence against the character assassination that naturally leads to physical assassination.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Tribune, October 12, 1912.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, October 15, 1912.

The Tribune apologized for its happening in Wisconsin. Questioning just "how far did Shrank's bullet go", the Tribune wrote:

There is a possibility that the wave of emotion may sweep many of the close states in which Wilson and Roosevelt were the principle (sic) contenders, and where Wilson had the advantage into the Roosevelt column. The effect may elect Roosevelt. That is not probable but it is not impossible that it may suffice to deadlock the college and throw the election in the house.<sup>72</sup>

Two days after the shooting Roosevelt showed signs of improvement and the campaign continued. Reflecting on the Republican campaign in Wisconsin, the Leader-Press wrote:

. . . amid all these conflicting movements the campaign and election returns to follow promise to be confusing. There may be a wide assortment of results, enough to please almost everybody on some points, on the night of November 5.<sup>73</sup>

Regarding the wonder by many as to what presidential candidate they should support, the Leader-Press in an editorial titled, "Where Do They Stand?", said:

. . . whether the republican (sic) state legislative candidates are for Wilson, Taft, or Roosevelt, or Debs, a great many would like to know in advance of marking their ballots on November 5, not necessarily because their position on the presidential question would demonstrate their fitness or unfitness for the offices to which they aspire, but to satisfy a quite natural interest in the doings of those who aim to be our state and local governors.<sup>74</sup>

Beginning on October 17 the Tribune announced and began a feature of allowing the public to send letters to be published in the Tribune

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<sup>72</sup>Editorial in Tribune, October 16, 1912.

<sup>73</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, October 17, 1912.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., October 18, 1912.

under the title "All Sides of Politics". Articles, dealing with key issues of the campaign, appeared regularly until the end of the campaign.<sup>75</sup>

On October 21 the Tribune outlined its view of the issues that confronted the voters. In national matters the difference between Taft, Roosevelt and Wilson, the paper said, concerned their views on the trusts. The paper pointed out that Taft would prosecute trusts; Roosevelt would legalize the trusts and subject them to government regulation and Wilson would abolish the trusts. "In state matters, the issue is simple. McGovern stands for progress; Karel for distinction." The editorial closed stating, "The progressive republican (sic) state ticket stands for men and women, the democratic (sic) state ticket for incorporated dollars."<sup>76</sup>

The Leader-Press indicated on October 21 that national issues ought to be "more than a sideshow of the Wisconsin campaign." The Leader-Press felt the voters ought to be given all the information our public leaders have.<sup>77</sup>

La Follette highlighted the campaign in La Crosse County in a speech before a large crowd at the La Crosse Theater on October 22. La Follette said that he would not vote for one of the three presidential candidates. La Follette told the audience, "I do not intend to vote for any one of these three men. I intend to maintain an

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<sup>75</sup>Tribune, October 17, 1912.

<sup>76</sup>Editorial in Tribune, October 21, 1912.

<sup>77</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, October 21, 1912.

independent position." La Follette indicated support for Wilson by saying, "If Wilson shows his power as a progressive I want to help him."<sup>78</sup> The Leader-Press wrote that it was clear that La Follette expected Wilson to be elected; yet it would be difficult to calculate the effect of the senator's La Crosse speech on public sentiment in Wisconsin.<sup>79</sup>

During the last week of October, all parties predicted victory in the November elections. Both papers expressed the prevailing sentiment. The Tribune, in support of Wilson said, "Let's not worry over what Wilson means. Not because he is a democrat (sic), but because he is a progressive, the people have determined to make him president."<sup>80</sup> The Leader-Press wrote in an editorial titled, "The Trend of Taft":

As election day draws nearer, the trend is unmistakably toward Taft. . . . The democratic (sic) candidate remains the favorite in the betting. On account of the republican (sic) division he is generally picked as the more likely winner. Yet the situation is fast changing, and though less than a week remains, a few days may be sufficient to turn the campaign.

The great argument for Taft is "Let well enough alone." . . . As the day of balloting approaches the solemn nature of the duty imposed on the citizen is more deeply felt. And he cannot help recognizing that, while reforms are important and experiments are interesting, no issue is comparable to the vital one of prosperity and employment. There is only one conclusion possible when that issue is given its proper place.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Tribune, October 23, 1912.

<sup>79</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, October 23, 1912.

<sup>80</sup>Editorial in Tribune, October 30, 1912.

<sup>81</sup>Leader-Press, October 30, 1912.

## IV. NOVEMBER: THE VOTERS DECIDE

As the campaign neared the finish, the Leader-Press showed concern over the direction it was taking, in particular, what it might mean for the future of Taft. In an editorial titled "The Big Things First", the following advice appeared:

It is important to the country that Taft be elected. . . . State issues ought not to be ignored -- we do not take that ground at all -- but in the presence of the great emergency, they are relatively far less important than the preservation of prosperity to businessmen, workmen and farmers.<sup>82</sup>

The Tribune continued its strong partisan support during the closing week. In the Saturday, November 2, edition strong editorial endorsement came out for Tom Morris and Republicans running for county offices.<sup>83</sup>

The Leader-Press maintained its prosperity theme in advocating the re-election of Taft. The November 2 editorial said:

If every voter will carefully figure out what he should do in this campaign to advance his own welfare, I believe the consensus of opinion of citizens by the party and administration now in power.<sup>84</sup>

In the same edition, in an editorial titled, "Wilson, Taft and Prosperity", the paper said, ". . . on the one side we have certainty,

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<sup>82</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, November 1, 1912.

<sup>83</sup>Editorial in Tribune, November 2, 1912.

<sup>84</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, November 2, 1912.

on the other speculation." The editorial further remarked, "Vote for your pocketbook. The politicians and office seekers are laboring mostly for theirs. The citizen has the right also to consider his own."<sup>85</sup>

On the eve of the election, both the Republicans and the Democrats showed optimism. The Democrats expected complete victory. At the same time, the Republican county chairman, expressed confidence that the Republicans would elect a complete national, state, and county ticket.<sup>86</sup> The day before the general election the Leader-Press, in an editorial titled, "Which Shall It Be?", expressed:

If they wish the country to go along on the lines of conservative reform, and to avoid a possible depression they will stay in the republican (sic) party, and help it to procure another commission from the people.<sup>87</sup>

The Tribune, in an editorial titled, "The Votes Are Made The Count Remains", wrote:

. . . If in the national view, many of our republican (sic) progressives can see hope only in turning to that inspired leadership of the party of Jefferson, they probably will not regard the feeble and meandering "party line" of today as a substantial obstacle.

That the selection of county officers is a purely business matter in which every taxpayer has a financial interest is a proposition which we believe is generally accepted. The Tribune (sic) has suggested its choices, based upon these considerations, and we believe that a majority of citizens

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<sup>85</sup> Editorials in Leader-Press, November 2, 1912.

<sup>86</sup> Leader-Press, November 2, 1912.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial in Leader-Press, November 4, 1912.

coincide with our opinions. At any rate, the majority of individual opinion is apt to result in safe elections, and we anticipate the election of a good working organization at the court house.<sup>88</sup>

The Leader-Press and the Tribune made a final plea for women suffrage, a referendum before the Wisconsin electors. The Leader-Press wrote saying, ". . . Let none forget the suffrage ballot next Tuesday. The amendment should not get out of La Crosse county with less than a thousand majority."<sup>89</sup> The Tribune said the voters should apply this to votes for women: "I will not vote against women's suffrage unless I can think of at least one good reason why women should not be permitted to vote if they want to do so."<sup>90</sup>

In the election Wilson received the most overwhelming electoral vote cast for a presidential candidate up to the time. Contemplating Wilson's election the Tribune commented:

The election of Woodrow Wilson to the presidency of the United States is but the consummation of a purpose long entertained by the people of this country. Before the national conventions had assembled the people had determined that there must be a progressive president. . . . The Third Party, while it made a bona fide bid for the presidency, had not the undivided following of even the republican (sic) progressives, and served but to swell the Wilson majority. . . . The country now looks for a square test, without evasion or compromise.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, November 2, 1912.

<sup>90</sup>Editorial in Tribune, November 2, 1912.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., November 7, 1912.

The Leader-Press stated:

Republican division has made democratic (sic) opportunity and that opportunity has not been neglected. . . . The Leader-Press (sic) hopes to be able to support the administration of President Wilson heartily. It has always stood for the doing of things rather than the criticism of the doer, and as it never countenanced attacks upon President Taft by smaller and less useful men, and so, too, it will join in no movement to injure the new administration, the successful conduct of which will be so vital to us all.<sup>92</sup>

The Republicans swept the executive offices in the state. As to this, the Tribune remarked saying, ". . . It is worthy of note that Wisconsin is one of but two or three states in the union where the voters had the discrimination to elect Wilson and save the progressive republican (sic) state government."<sup>93</sup> The voters returned John J. Esch to Congress and the Republicans won the two state assembly and one state senate seats.<sup>94</sup> In the county elections, the Democrats won election for all offices except the office of Register of Deeds. The Tribune stated:

The defeat of the republican (sic) county ticket, with exception of Andy Thompson, was largely the result of the Wilson landslide the momentum of which carried many "straight ticket voters" with it. . . . A contributing influence was that restless desire for change which is due once in so often, and which does not discriminate between efficiency and incapacity when it exacts its toll. . . .<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Editorial in Leader-Press, November 6, 1912.

<sup>93</sup>Editorial in Tribune, November 7, 1912.

<sup>94</sup>Tribune, November 9, 1912.

<sup>95</sup>Editorial in Tribune, November 7, 1912.

Regarding the women suffrage question, Wisconsin voted down the proposal but the number of states allowing women to vote rose to a total of ten. The Leader-Press conspicuously reserved comment during the immediate post-election days.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was undertaken to examine the editorial content of two La Crosse, Wisconsin newspapers, the La Crosse Tribune and the La Crosse Leader-Press, during the political campaign of 1912, so as to show the position taken by each newspaper concerning the main issues of the campaign. The basic material used in this study was obtained through the use of microfilm copies of the two newspapers. The examination covered the period from June 17, 1912 through November 9, 1912.

From the examination, several tendencies clearly emerge. First, the Tribune supported progressive candidates while the Leader-Press supported conservatives. Second, both newspapers crossed party lines in endorsing candidates. For President, the Tribune supported the Democrat Wilson, and for Wisconsin Governor, the Republican, Francis E. McGovern. The Leader-Press endorsed the Republican Taft for President and the Democrat John C. Karel for Governor. Third, the Tribune endorsed, by name, candidates for state and local offices while the Leader-Press remained silent. Fourth, the Leader-Press predicted throughout the campaign that Taft would be re-elected. On the other hand, the Tribune, although supporting Wilson, was not as adamant in predicting victory.

An attempt to assess the influence of the two newspapers on voter outcome would demand an investigation far greater in scope. Such an investigation would, undoubtedly, not establish the full reasons why the voters of 1912 chose as they did. It is the writer's contention that, in

a year when it was good to be a progressive, the Tribune chose to break with its traditional progressive Republican stand and support the candidacy of the crusading Democracy. On the other hand, the Leader-Press stuck hard and fast to its conservative bent. In the process, the opinions of the one looked like the mandate; the other like the rejection.

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