

GENTLEMEN REFORMERS A STUDY OF POLITICAL ACTIVISTS  
IN CHICAGO 1893-1907

BY

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Chicago's system of government. Yet added to the problem of rapid growth was the demand for totally new services that only the municipal government could provide. The 1890's and early 1900's were the years of expansion of streetcars, electric and gas lines, and it was the responsibility of the City Council of Chicago to distribute the franchises for these services.<sup>1</sup> Also, to the demand for adequate public

<sup>1</sup>United States Census Bureau, *Chicago: Census of the United States, 1910*, Population, I, 37.

<sup>2</sup>United States Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, Population, I, 87-88.

<sup>3</sup>Carver H. Harrison, *Stoney Years: The Autobiography of Carver H. Harrison* (Indianapolis: The John-Henry Co., 1937), pp. 127-128.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1890's and early 1900's, Chicago was a city in transition. The population doubled from 1,099,859 people in 1890 to over 2,185,283 in 1910.<sup>1</sup> Not only did the city grow rapidly, but the population became more and more heterogeneous. By 1900 over three-fourths of the population were foreign-born or the children of foreign-born. Among the newcomers were large numbers of Irish, Germans, Polish, Bohemians, and Scandinavians.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it was inevitable that rapid growth and the assimilation of large numbers of people unused to American political institutions would put unusual strains upon Chicago's system of government. Yet added to the problem of rapid growth was the demand for totally new services that only the municipal government could provide. The 1890's and early 1900's were the years of expansion of streetcar, electric, and gas lines, and it was the responsibility of the City Council of Chicago to distribute the franchises for these services.<sup>3</sup> Added to the demands for adequate public

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<sup>1</sup>United States Census Bureau, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. Population, I, 89.

<sup>2</sup>United States Census Bureau, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Population, I, 874-875.

<sup>3</sup>Carter H. Harrison, Stormy Years. The Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1935), pp. 136-137.

utilities were pressures for more traditional services such as schools, police, and street cleaning.<sup>4</sup>

In this period of rapid change and its resulting political turmoil, there were various groups which wanted to mold Chicago politics and government in their own image. There were the "radical reformers" who were concerned with such broad based reforms as municipal ownership of public utilities, control of monopolistic corporations, and improved working and living conditions for the laboring classes. Among their ranks were men such as John Peter Altgeld, Clarence Darrow, and Henry Demarest Lloyd.<sup>5</sup> Except for some influence in the administration of Mayor Edward F. Dunne, who served from 1905 to 1907, the radicals were neither very influential nor well organized in Chicago municipal politics. This was not the case with a more conservative reform movement that was tightly organized into three groups, the Citizens' Association, the Civic Federation, and the Municipal Voters' League. The study of these three groups will form the basis of this thesis.

The first of these organizations, the Citizens' Association, was the oldest, having been founded in 1874. In the period between 1893 and 1907, it was mainly concerned with

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<sup>4</sup>Hugo S. Grosser, Chicago: A Review of its Governmental History from 1837 to 1906 (Chicago, 1906).

<sup>5</sup>Ray Ginger, Altgeld's America (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1958), pp. 169, 171, 176; Walter Freeman Cooling, The Chicago Democracy: A History of Recent Municipal Politics (Chicago: Platform Publishing Co., 1899), pp. 90-93.

lobbying for measures that would bring more "efficient" government such as civil service, economy in municipal operations, and tax reform. The group was also interested, especially after 1900, in prosecuting and eliminating corruption in city government and suppressing gambling and other "vices."<sup>6</sup>

The reform movement in Chicago really started in 1893 with the founding of the Civic Federation. The organization of this group was largely the outgrowth of a famous speech the Reverend William T. Stead delivered at the Central Music Hall on November 12, 1893. Stead, a well known British minister and evangelist, lamented the vice and corruption found in the burgeoning city and called upon the "better citizens" to act.<sup>7</sup> He later wrote his great expose, If Christ Came to Chicago, but his speech had set off the sparks of reform.<sup>8</sup>

Almost immediately, the newly organized Civic Federation became involved in a wide range of reform activities. The unemployed were put to work cleaning the streets in the dark days of the Depression of 1893. Grafting garbage contractors were exposed and agents of the Civic Federation

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<sup>6</sup>Citizens' Association of Chicago, Annual Reports 1893-1901 (Chicago: Press of Hollister Brothers, 1893-1901); Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association of Chicago, 1902-1907.

<sup>7</sup>Chicago Tribune, November 13, 1893.

<sup>8</sup>William T. Stead, If Christ Came to Chicago (London: Review of Reviews, 1894).

violently tried to smash up two gambling houses, but were marched off to court for their efforts.<sup>9</sup>

After the successful passage of a civil service law in 1895, the Civic Federation narrowed its scope, moving toward the "efficiency and economy in government" position of the Citizens' Association. Between 1896 and 1907, the Federation was mainly concerned with tax reform, traction problems, and a new charter for the city. Its charitable programs were passed on to an offshoot, the Bureau of Associated Charities, and political corruption was given to another offshoot, the Municipal Voters' League.<sup>10</sup>

When the Civic Federation organized the Municipal Voters' League in 1896, it gave to Chicago its most effective and politically important reform unit. Organized in response to the passage of a series of fraudulent streetcar franchises, the League was established to elect favorable candidates to the City Council. In 1896, the M.V.L. disapproved of fifty-eight of the sixty-eight incumbent aldermen. By 1900, a majority of the councilmen had been elected with the support of the Municipal Voters' League, and in 1906 there were but

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<sup>9</sup>Lloyd Lewis and Henry J. Smith, Chicago: The History of its Reputation (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1929), p. 43; Civic Federation of Chicago: What it has Accomplished (Chicago: Press of Hollister Brothers, 1899), p. 4; Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, Lords of the Levee (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas Sutherland, Fifty Years on the Civic Front; A History of the Civic Federation (Chicago: The Civic Federation, 1943), pp. 13-18.

a handful of the unapproved left in the Council.<sup>11</sup> The reformers had met success.

Although the members of the preceding three organizations did not represent the only groups striving for political change in Chicago, they are referred to as the reformers throughout this thesis. The reason for concentrating on these groups and labeling them reformers is not a belief in the superiority of their program of change. Rather they are the reformers because they were the strongest and most powerful coalition working for change, and the men of these organizations were called reformers by themselves and their contemporaries.

The nation-wide movement for municipal reform at the turn of the century, of which the Chicago movement was a part, has not been overlooked by historians. Traditionally, historians have followed the precedent set by muckrakers such as Lincoln Steffens in viewing the movement as a conflict between indignant public spirited citizens on the one hand and a corrupt coalition of politicians and businessmen on the other.<sup>12</sup> Although in recent years some attempts have

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<sup>11</sup>Edwin Burritt Smith, "Council Reform in Chicago. What the Municipal Voter's [sic] League has Accomplished," Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 356-357.

<sup>12</sup>Lincoln Steffens, Shame of the Cities (New York: Peter Smith, 1904); Frank Mann Stewart, A Half Century of Municipal Reform (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950); Clifford W. Patton, The Battle for Municipal Reform; Mobilization and Attack, 1875-1900 (Washington: American Council on Public Affairs, 1940). Recently in connection with Chicago this traditional approach has been taken by Sidney I. Roberts,

been made to reinterpret the phenomenon of reform, particularly by Richard Hofstadter, there have been few undertakings of systematic studies of the motivation of municipal reformers that go beyond the limits of the reformers' own rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> Neither has the variety of reform among various cities been given adequate consideration. Only after systematic local studies are completed of the social and economic interests and backgrounds of reformers, as well as their ideology and actions, will a clearer picture of the municipal reform movement evolve. The following thesis is an attempt at such a study of the relationship of interests and backgrounds to political action and ideology among the reformers in the city of Chicago.

There are several important reasons for studying municipal reform other than the rather obvious one of examining a crucial chapter in the adaption of American society to urbanization. Twentieth century Americans, especially those of the middle class, have accepted the reform ethos as the norm of "good government." Civil service, destruction of political machines, non-partisan municipal elections, and efficiency in

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"Businessmen in Revolt: Chicago, 1874-1900" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Northwestern University, 1960).

<sup>13</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform; from Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955), Chapter IV; One study that has gone beyond the rhetoric of the reformers is Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, LV, No. 4 (October, 1964), 157-169. Hays, however, generalizes from his own study in Pittsburgh to include the municipal reform movement throughout the country.

government, have become political ideals for many Americans.<sup>14</sup>

Also important is belief of historians such as George Mowry that the roots of the Progressive movement may be found in the struggle for municipal reform.<sup>15</sup> Finally in connection with Chicago and some other cities, there is the dilemma of the temporary success of reform, but its long range failure.

Although the extent to which reformers shared common backgrounds and interests remains to be demonstrated, there can be little doubt that the reformers shared a common social sociologists have found characteristic of political groups. This is the tendency of such groups to organize along ideological issues.

The Citizens' Association only met weekly and the work of the organization throughout the rest of the year was carried on by the executive committee. This committee selected its own members and elected the officers of the association. The Civic Federation also met only annually; and after 1902 it met biennially. The organization's work in the interim was also performed by the executive committee.

The Municipal Voters' League was most successful and

Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Disorganizing Tendencies of Modern Democracy, translated by Eden and Eden Paul (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915), p. 14; David S. Truman, The Governmental Process (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951), p. 175-177. Michels' theory has

<sup>14</sup>Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, City Politics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 139-142.

<sup>15</sup>George E. Mowry, The Progressive Movement, 1900-1920; Recent Ideas and New Literature (Washington: Service Center for Teachers of History, 1958), p. 6.

## CHAPTER I

### REFORMERS AND THE UNREFORMED: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

#### The Reformers

Although the extent to which reformers shared common backgrounds and interests remains to be demonstrated, there can be little doubt that the reformers shared another trait which sociologists have found characteristic of political groups. This is the tendency for such groups to organize along oligarchical lines.<sup>1</sup>

The Citizens' Association only met annually and the work of the organization throughout the rest of the year was carried on by the executive committee. This committee selected its own members and elected the officers of the association.<sup>2</sup> The Civic Federation also met only annually; and after 1903, it met biennially. The organization's work in the interim was also performed by the executive committee.<sup>3</sup>

The Municipal Voters' League, the most successful and

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, translated by Eden and Eden Paul (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1915), p. 14; David B. Truman, The Governmental Process (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951), pp. 137-139. Michels found this oligarchical tendency among the revolutionary socialist parties in Europe.

<sup>2</sup>Chicago Record-Herald, October 27, 1904; Annual Report of the Citizens Association, 1899, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Chicago Record-Herald, May 29, 1907; Annual Report of the Civic Federation, 1903, pp. 11-12; Sutherland, p. 27.

powerful of the three groups, was the most tightly organized. The terms of one-third of the executive committee members expired each year and vacancies were filled by the unanimous vote of the remaining executive committee. No general meetings of the organization were ever held. Membership consisted of signing a pledge card, promising to support the program of the League. One executive committee member stated that "The executive committee alone controls the use of its name [Municipal Voters' League]. It is known by all that the League speaks only through letters and bulletins signed by its president or secretary 'by order of the executive committee.'"<sup>4</sup>

As the full membership of these organizations rarely or never met, policy decisions were made by the executive committees. For practical purposes, the executive committees were the reform organizations. Because of this concentration of power, the study of these reform groups must focus on the role of the individuals who comprised the leadership.<sup>5</sup> In order to examine the backgrounds and interests of these reform leaders, a study has been made of one hundred and twenty-two such activists. The study included the thirty-nine officers and executive committee members of the Citizens' Association who served from 1893 to 1907 and the forty-two

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<sup>4</sup>Edwin Burritt Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 349-350.

<sup>5</sup>I was limited to studying the leadership of the reform groups also by the inavailability of membership lists for the three organizations. The absence of these lists was probably due, however, to the relative unimportance of the total membership in the functioning of the organizations.

officers and executive committee members of the Civic Federation in 1895, 1899, and 1906.<sup>6</sup> The study of the Municipal Voters' League included the executive committee members and officers in the years from 1896 to 1907 as well as a number of other reformers known to be influential in the M.V.L. Forty-one men were included in this group.<sup>7</sup>

The first factor considered in the reformers' backgrounds was their place of birth. Information on place of birth was established for one hundred and ten of the one hundred and twenty-two reformers (see Table 1).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The choice of years studied was determined by the availability of complete executive committee lists for the given years. Annual Report of the Civic Federation, 1895, 1905; Civic Federation, What it has Accomplished, 1899, p. 1; Annual Report of the Citizens' Association, 1893-1902; Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association, 1902-1907.

<sup>7</sup>Municipal Voters' League, Miscellaneous Pamphlets Collection, Chicago Historical Society; Elizabeth Kent, William Kent; Independent (Kentfield, California: mimeographed copy, 1950), passim; Hoyt King, Citizen Cole of Chicago (Chicago: Horder's Inc., 1931), passim.

<sup>8</sup>Biographical information came from a variety of sources including The Book of Chicagoans (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1905); Edward F. Dunne, Illinois, The Heart of the Nation, 5 vols. (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1933); Henry Hall, America's Successful Men of Business (New York: New York Tribune Co., 1896); Industrial Chicago, 6 vols. (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1896); Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago (A. N. Marquis Co., 1893-1907); Edward R. Prichard, Illinois of Today and its Progressive Cities (Chicago: Illinois of Today Inc., 1897); A. N. Waterman, Historical Review of Chicago and Cook County (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1908); Chicago and its Makers (Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, 1929); Green Berry Raum, History of Illinois Republicanism (Chicago: Rollins Publishing Co., 1900); Weston A. Goodspeed and Daniel Healy, History of Cook County (Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1909); City Manual of Chicago (Bureau of Statistics and

The largest number of reformers, thirty-one altogether, came from the Midwest, excluding Chicago. The Midwest was closely followed by New England and New York with thirty natives of this area active in the movement. Only thirteen of the reformers were natives of Chicago, demonstrating that the reform participants or their parents were geographically mobile.

There was almost a complete absence of Southerners in the movement.<sup>9</sup> Only two of the reformers were born in the South, and they were not of Southern backgrounds. One was Bryan Lathrop, a prominent real estate broker, whose father had moved to Virginia from New Hampshire.<sup>10</sup> The other was Shelby M. Singleton, the secretary and attorney for the Citizens' Association, whose father had moved to Virginia from Kentucky.<sup>11</sup>

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Municipal Library, 1913); John J. Flinn, The Handbook of Chicago Biography (Chicago: Standard Guide Co., 1893); Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Representative Men of Chicago, Minnesota Cities and World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1892); History of Chicago, Its Men and Institutions (Chicago: Interocean, 1900); Charles French, Biographical History of the American Irish in Chicago (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1897); Chicago Tribune, 1894-1963; Chicago Record, 1899-1901; Record Herald, 1901-1914; Herald, 1914-1918; Herald Examiner, 1918-1938; Lloyd Shaw, Prominent Democrats of Illinois (Chicago: Democratic Publishing Co., 1899); Notable Men of Chicago and Their City (Chicago: Daily Journal, 1910).

<sup>9</sup>William T. Stead, using the birth places of registered voters in the Chicago election of 1893, found that 9,667 of the 131,335 native-born voters were born in the South. This was a larger number than the 7522 born in New England. Stead, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>Dunne, IV, 43.

<sup>11</sup>Book of Chicagoans, p. 530.

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**TABLE 1**  
**REFORM LEADERS' PLACE OF BIRTH**

Place of Birth	Number
<b>Native-born</b>	<b>87</b>
Midwest except Chicago	31
New England and New York	30
Chicago	13
Border States (Kentucky and West Virginia)	4
The South	2
Other (Washington, D.C., New Jersey, Pennsylvania)	7
<b>Foreign-born</b>	<b>24</b>
Germany	10
Ireland	3
Scotland	2
Norway	2
Austria	2
England	1
Canada	1
Switzerland	1
Wales	1
Belgium	1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Unknown</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>

... of the ...

United States Census Bureau, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Philadelphia, Vol. I, Ch. 1, p. 106. 84.0% of the population of Chicago was foreign born.

... 874.

While the largest number of reformers were native-born Americans from the Northeast and Midwest, there were a considerable number of foreign-born in the ranks of reform leadership. Twenty-four (19.6%) of the reformers were foreign-born, a percentage somewhat less than that of the foreign-born in Chicago as a whole.<sup>12</sup> The immigrant activists were of a distinct type. They were all northern Europeans, mainly from Germany and the British Isles. Such groups as the Irish, Polish, and Bohemians did not participate in proportion to their percentage of the total Chicago population.<sup>13</sup>

Age was ascertained for one hundred and five of the reformers (see Table 2).

Occupations were found for one hundred and twenty-two of the one hundred and twenty-two reformers (see Table 1). As the places of birth of the reformers were similar,

TABLE 2  
AGE AT FIRST PARTICIPATION  
IN THE REFORM MOVEMENT

Reform Group	Average Age in Years
Municipal Voters' League	42.62*
Civic Federation	51.47
Citizens' Association	51.77

\*The first year of participation was not known for ten of the M.V.L. activists. Thus 1901 was used as the base year for these men. Subtracting these ten, the average age of the M.V.L. was younger, 41.14 years.

<sup>12</sup>United States Census Bureau, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Population, Vol. I. cix. In 1900, 34.6% of the population of Chicago was foreign born.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 874.

The large majority of the reformers were middle-aged; only eight were less than thirty-five, and only nine were over sixty-five. The younger age of the Municipal Voters' League participants was perhaps due to the fact that this organization was the most active and powerful of the three groups and thus attracted younger men.

Few of the middle-aged reformers used the reform movement as a spring board into political careers. Some of the younger M.V.L. reformers later did go into partisan politics such as William Kent, a Progressive Congressman and candidate for Senator from California, and John M. Harlan, twice a candidate for mayor of Chicago.<sup>14</sup>

Occupations were found for one hundred and nineteen of the one hundred and twenty-two reformers (see Table 3). As the places of birth and ages of the reformers were similar, so were their occupations. The large majority of reformers were involved in the older, more established occupational areas such as commerce and banking or traditional professions such as the law. Only ten men were in any type of manufacturing. Practically all of those studied were self-employed or the partial owners of their own businesses. Discounting the six full-time employees of the reform organizations, only six of the reformers were employees, even of a managerial nature. Labor, another group that was asserting its place

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<sup>14</sup>Harold L. Ickes, Autobiography of a Curmudgeon (New York: Regnal and Hitchcock, 1943), pp. 82-88; Elizabeth T. Kent, William Kent: Independent (Kentfield, Calif., mimeographed copy, 1950).

in American life in this period, was meagerly represented by M. J. Carroll, an ex-labor leader. Carroll was, however, a trade journal writer at the time of his participation in the reform movement.<sup>15</sup>

COLLEGE EDUCATION OF REFORM LEADERS

TABLE 3

OCCUPATIONS OF REFORM LEADERS

Occupation	Number
Banking and Commerce	
Wholesale Merchants	20
Retail Merchants	6
Bankers	13
Investment and Insurance Brokers	6
Lawyers	28
Other Professionals	
Clergymen	2
Educators	1
Architects	2
Physicians	5
Journalists and Publishers	5
Engineers	2
Civic Workers	2
Real Estate Brokers	9
Manufacturers	10
Reform Organization Employees	6
Not Employed	3*
Unknown	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>

\*The three unemployed were society women, Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mrs. Charles Henrotin, and Mrs. Lucy Flower. All three were leaders of the Civic Federation, the first reform group in the United States to recruit women. Patton, p. 40.

The reformers as a group were well educated with at least sixty-two of the one hundred and twenty-two having a college education (see Table 4). Although no one college

<sup>15</sup>Inland Printer, XXXIII (1904), 112.

claimed a large number of the leaders, fifteen had attended the "Ivy League" schools.

TABLE 4

## COLLEGE EDUCATION OF REFORM LEADERS

Organization	Number Having A College Education
Citizens' Association	12 of 39 members
Civic Federation	22 of 42 members
Municipal Voters' League	28 of 41 members
Total	62 of 122 members

Religion was ascertained for sixty-one of the reformers (see Table 5). As might be expected, the majority of those identified were members of the "respectable" Protestant churches. Quite revealing was the marked absence of Catholics in a city with a very substantial Catholic population.<sup>16</sup> Of the one hundred and twenty-two reformers, only three were Catholics. These were William Onahan, Vice-President of the Home Savings Bank, M. J. Carroll, an ex-labor leader, and Joseph Donnersberger, a prominent real estate dealer.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>United States Census Bureau, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890. Religious Bodies, I, 370-373. William T. Stead estimated that forty percent of the population of Chicago was Catholic in 1893. Stead, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup>Book of Chicagoans, p. 439; Biographical Dictionary, Columbian Exposition, p. 532. Inland Printers XXXIII (1904), 112.

TABLE 5  
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF REFORMERS

Religion	Number
Episcopalian	14
Congregationalist	11
Presbyterian	9
Jewish	4
Unitarian	3
Catholic	3
Other Protestant	11
Stated Non-Members	6
Subtotal	<u>61</u>
Unknown or No Religious Affiliation	61
Total	<u>122</u>

Ethnic background was found for fifty-six of the reformers (see Table 6). The largest group were the twenty-eight descendents of pre-Revolutionary American families of English or Scottish descent. Of these, twenty-one were of seventeenth century New England heritage. In addition, eight others were born in New England towns and had Anglo-Saxon names. Newer ethnic groups such as the Irish and the eastern Europeans were noticeably absent.

There has been considerable controversy among historians concerning the class affiliation of reformers.<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly this problem has been complicated by the lack of agreement on what constitutes class lines in the United States. In

<sup>18</sup>Samuel Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, LV, No. 4 (October, 1964), 157-169; J. Joseph Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 231-241.

TABLE 6

## ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF REFORM LEADERS

Ethnic Group	Number
Native American	
Pre-Revolutionary War English or Scottish	28
Scotch-Irish	2
Norwegian	1
German Jewish	1
Foreign-Born	
German-Austrian	12
Irish	3
Scottish	2
Norwegian	2
Welsh	1
English	1
Swiss	1
Canadian	1
Belgium	1
Subtotal	56
Unknown	66*
Total	122

\*A large number of the unknowns had Anglo-Saxon names and were probably of old American stock, but this cannot be proved.

many ways this problem of social stratification was even more blurred in the rapidly growing Chicago of the late nineteenth century than in the more stable and established cities of the East. As has already been shown, only thirteen of the one hundred and twenty-two reformers were even native to Chicago. Still, there is evidence that sharp class distinctions were made. A prominent arbiter of social status in Chicago was the Elite Directory and Club List. This guide contained the

"names and addresses of prominent residents on the most exclusive of the Chicago list. Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1887. 71 Elite Club List and Directory.

fashionable streets of the city."<sup>19</sup> Although this directory contained the names of less than one percent of the total population of Chicago, seventy-three percent of the reformers were listed in the elite guide.

Another judge of high social status was the Social Register of Chicago.<sup>20</sup> Inclusion in this book was more selective than the elite guide, yet the names of fifty-eight reformers appeared in the Social Directory, including five not listed in the elite list. Thus ninety-three of the reformers or seventy-six percent were listed in one of the two social directories.

The elite guide also listed the socially prominent clubs of the city. Eighty-one reformers (67%) belonged to at least one of three of these clubs, the Union League, the Chicago Literary, or the Chicago Club. All three clubs were considered exclusive upper-class organizations.<sup>21</sup>

The Chicago Club included forty-two reformers and was the oldest of the three clubs. Founded in 1869, it was for many years the only men's social club in the city. The group had slightly less than a thousand members in the years from 1893-1907.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Elite Directory and Club List of Chicago (Chicago: Elite Directory Co., 1892), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Social Register of Chicago (New York: Social Register Association, 1898).

<sup>21</sup>Ginger, pp. 19-20; Emmett Dedmon, Fabulous Chicago (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 117; Edward T. Blair, A History of the Chicago Club (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1898), p. 7; Elite Club List and Directory.

<sup>22</sup>Blair, pp. 59, 83.

The Chicago Literary Club, with twenty-four reformers among its membership of two hundred and fifty, was the smallest of the three clubs. This group had been founded shortly after the Chicago Fire to further the intellectual interests of the men of Chicago Society.<sup>23</sup>

The Union League Club, with fifty-eight reformers, was originally founded to promote patriotism. Over the years the organization evolved as a social club, but unlike the Chicago Club, it took an active interest in politics. The Union League Club, with over a thousand members, often gave support to the reform movement.<sup>24</sup>

Although the reform leaders were members of the upper-class, at the time of their participation in the reform movement, there is also evidence that not all of them had been born into that class. As has already been shown, the huge majority of reformers were not born in Chicago. Many seem to have moved to Chicago to advance their status. Twenty-three reform activists started their careers in menial jobs such as store clerk, bookkeeper, or farmhand. Eighteen of the reformers, however, began their careers from a promising standpoint. These men were either the sons of successful professional men or entered businesses already founded by their fathers or relatives.

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<sup>23</sup>Dedmon, p. 117.

<sup>24</sup>Henry B. Fuller, "Upward Movement in Chicago," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXV (October, 1897), 543; Bruce Grant, Fight for a City. The Story of the Union League Club (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1955), p. 5; History of Chicago, Its Men and Institutions, pp. 86-87.

The men who started at the bottom of the occupational group included William Fuller, a manufacturer, who had begun his career as a railroad station agent and farm worker. Others were John McLaren, a banker, who had started as a carpenter's apprentice, and Otho S. A. Sprague, owner of the largest wholesale grocery company in the United States, who had begun his career as a country general store clerk in Vermont.<sup>25</sup> A few men were one generation away from hardships such as John V. Farwell, Jr., a Yale graduate and prosperous merchant, whose father had established a successful business only after coming to Chicago with three dollars in his pocket.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the reformers came from prosperous backgrounds and entered their occupations with decided advantages. Included in this group were men such as Chauncy J. Blair, who became president of the bank his father had founded.<sup>27</sup> Another was John Barton Payne, a prominent lawyer whose father had been a well to do physician.<sup>28</sup>

The preceding evidence indicates the the reformers came from a variety of early economic backgrounds, suggesting

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<sup>25</sup>Industrial Chicago, III, 289; Book of Chicagoans, pp. 384, 543.

<sup>26</sup>Dunne, V, 19.

<sup>27</sup>Waterman, II, p. 485.

<sup>28</sup>Book of Chicagoans, p. 451. There was no significant difference in the social standing of the upwardly mobile reformers from that of the reformers born into the upper class. Both groups belong to the "right" clubs and were listed in the social directories.

that this factor was negligible in motivating a man to become a reformer.

The final consideration in the leaders' backgrounds was their political affiliation. The reform groups claimed they were non-partisan and promoted non-partisanship at least in municipal affairs. Yet, the reformers showed a definite preference for the Republican party. Forty-six of the reform activists were Republicans; eighteen were Democrats, and two were Independents.

TABLE 7

## POLITICAL AFFILIATION OF REFORM LEADERS

Party	Number
Republican	46
Democratic	18
Independent	2
Unknown or Unaffiliated	56
Total	122

As might be expected of groups opposing the political establishment, few reformers took an active part in partisan politics. Only four reformers held an elected office other than membership on a public board. Three of these office holders were aldermen and the other was a former speaker of the state House of Representatives.

The reformers were, however, relatively active in the leadership of public boards and charitable organizations. At least forty-five had records of such activities. Popular were directorships of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, and

ten reformers were either members of the Board of Education or directors of the Public Library.

### The Unreformed

The study of the reform leaders would be rather meaningless if something was not known of their opponents, the regular party leaders. Thus, a comparative study was made of the men who held the power in the regular party organizations. Included among the "regulars" were the thirty-three officers and executive committee members of the Cook County Republican Central Committee for the years 1895, 1901, and 1907.<sup>29</sup> This committee was considered the locus of power in the Republican party of Chicago.<sup>30</sup> The regular organization among the Democrats was the Cook County Democracy. The officers and executive committee of the group in 1902, the only year a complete list was available, as well as prominent leaders throughout the 1893 to 1907 period, were studied.<sup>31</sup> There were thirty-four men in this group.

### The Democrats

Among the thirty-four leaders of the Cook County Democracy, the place of birth was ascertained for twenty-four of the men. There was a high percentage of native-born

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<sup>29</sup>Chicago Daily News Almanac (Chicago: Daily News Publishing Co., 1896, 1902, 1907), 1896, p. 392; 1902, p. 357; 1907, p. 238.

<sup>30</sup>Joel A. Tarr, "William Lorimer of Illinois: A Study in Boss Politics" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Northwestern University, 1963), p. 55.

<sup>31</sup>Blue Book of the Cook County Democracy, and History and Record of Organization (Chicago, 1902), pp. 83-216.

Chicagoans and immigrants from Ireland. Politicians born in Chicago apparently had a political advantage over men born elsewhere. An example of this was an incident between the First Ward boss and alderman, "Bathhouse John" Coughlin, and the Municipal Voters' League. After the M.V.L. had bitterly criticized Bathhouse John in its campaign literature, Coughlin made a personal visit to the reform group's headquarters. The First Ward alderman did not attempt to contradict the reformers' accusations, but he was infuriated by their erroneous statement that he had been born in Waukegan and not Chicago.<sup>32</sup>

TABLE 8

PLACE OF BIRTH  
DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Place of Birth	Number
Chicago	9
Ireland	6
New York	3
Bohemia	2
Ohio	1
Illinois	1
Kentucky	1
Germany	1
Subtotal	24
Unknown	10
Total	34

Ethnically, the Democratic leadership was dominated by the Irish (see Table 9). Germans, Bohemians, and a few

<sup>32</sup>King, pp. 46-47.

Anglo-Americans were also included. A striking number of Irish and a significant number of eastern European names appeared on the membership lists of the Cook County Democracy, backing up the evidence presented on the leaders.<sup>33</sup>

TABLE 9

## ETHNIC BACKGROUND DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Ethnic Group	Number
Irish	14
German	3
Bohemian	2
Old Anglo-American	2
Subtotal	<u>21</u>
Unknown	<u>13</u>
Total	<u>34</u>

The occupations of the Democrats were markedly different from those of the reformers. The "regular" leaders' jobs were far less socially prestigious. Especially noteworthy was the number of saloonkeepers and contractors among the Democrats.

TABLE 10

## OCCUPATIONS DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Saloon Keepers	5	Wholesale Meat Dealer	1	Meat Packer	1
Contractors	5	Liquor Dealer	1	Plumber	1
Lawyers	4	Salesman	1	Printer	1
Real Estate Brokers	2	Bailiff	1	Subtotal	<u>26</u>
Public Utility Executives	2	Caterer	1	Unknown	<u>8</u>
				Total	<u>34</u>

<sup>33</sup> Bluebook of the Cook County Democracy, pp. 183-216. More than fourteen of the Democratic leaders had distinctly Irish names, but only fourteen were of confirmed Irish descent (see Appendix).

The two public utility executives listed above were John Hopkins, a former mayor, and Roger Sullivan, a political boss. They were officers of the Ogden Gas Company and the Cosmopolitan Electric Company, two public utilities corporations given franchises during the Hopkins administration.<sup>34</sup>

The religious composition of the regular Democratic organization was not unusual in light of the ethnic grouping (see Table 11). By far, the largest number of Democrats were Catholic.

TABLE 11

## RELIGION

## DEMOCRATIC LEADERS

Religion	Number
Catholic	16
Jewish	1
Episcopalian	1
Evangelical	1
Presbyterian	1
Subtotal	20
Unknown or Unaffiliated	14
Total	34

The disparity between reformers and the Democratic politicians was most striking in the matter of social status. Only two of the thirty-four Democratic political leaders were listed in the Elite Directory. One was Carter H. Harrison, Jr., the Democratic mayor and the other was Fred

<sup>34</sup>Wendt and Kogan, p. 119.

S. Winston, a lawyer. These two men comprised half of the four college graduates in the Democratic leadership and they were also the two Cook County Democratic leaders of known Anglo-Saxon ethnic background.

Winston would have been at home in the reform ranks. He was of old American stock, of the Presbyterian faith, and educated at Yale and Columbia Law School. He was listed in the Elite Directory and was a member of the Chicago Club. The reason he was more comfortable with the ward bosses than with the reformers could be seen in his economic interests. Not only had he served as corporation counsel for the City of Chicago, but he was also a director or counsel for five streetcar companies and three breweries, interests more intimately connected with the Cook County Democrats than the reformers.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, the average age of the Democratic leaders for whom information was available was 47.3 years.

#### The Republicans

The thirty-three executive committee leaders of the Cook County Republican Central Committee presented yet another group profile. The Republicans were more likely to have been born in Chicago than the reformers. The large number of Northeasterners found among the reformers and the large number of Irish found among the Democrats were missing from the Republican ranks.

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<sup>35</sup>Waterman, II, p. 640; Book of Chicagoans, p. 623.

TABLE 12

PLACE OF BIRTH  
REPUBLICAN LEADERS

Place	Number
Midwest other than Chicago	8
Chicago	6
Canada	3
Germany	2
Denmark	1
England	1
Sweden	1
Pennsylvania	1
Texas	1
Subtotal	24
Unknown	9
Total	33

Ethnically, the Republican leadership was lacking in the old Anglo-American stock of the reformers and the Irish of the Democratic party.

TABLE 13

ETHNIC COMPOSITION  
REPUBLICAN LEADERS

Ethnic Group	Number
German	4
Canadian	3
Old American	2
English	2
Danish	1
Irish	1
Subtotal	13
Unknown	20
Total	33

Ministry of Chicago, Its Men and Institutions, p. 407.  
 Chicago, p. 383; Bureau of Census, Chicago, Illinois, July 21, 1920.

The largest occupational group among the Republicans were those on the public payroll. This was made possible by the Republican control of the county government.

The absence of merchants and professional men among the Republican and Democratic ranks was notable with the exception of lawyers. The members of the bar who were "regular" political activists usually had an obvious reason for such participation. One of the Republican leaders who was a lawyer was Perry Hull, the attorney for the General Electric Streetcar Company in its long battle with the city over franchise rights.<sup>36</sup> Political contacts were undoubtedly quite helpful for both Hull and the General Electric Company. The other two lawyers in the Republican ranks were Charles S. Deneen, who was on the road to the governorship, and Roy O. West, one of the most powerful ward leaders in Chicago, who was later to become Secretary of the Interior.<sup>37</sup>

The Republicans were closer socially to the regular Democratic leaders than to the reformers. Only two were listed in the Elite Directory and none in the Social Register. While ten of the thirty-three regular Republicans had some education beyond high school, most for whom information was available had come from lower class backgrounds. Fifteen had begun their careers in such lower-class occupations as postal clerk, water boy, or sign painter's apprentice. None were known to have come from wealthy families.

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<sup>36</sup>History of Chicago, Its Men and Institutions, p. 407.

<sup>37</sup>Notable Men of Chicago, p. 385; Dunne, V., p. 456; Chicago Tribune, July 21, 1928.

The average age of the **TABLE 14** reform leaders was 43.8

The majority of the **OCCUPATIONS** of leaders were in the **REPUBLICAN LEADERS** and the process was reflected the presence of

Occupation	Number
Public Officials (county clerks, court clerks, inspectors, etc.)	13
Manufacturers	5
Real Estate and Insurance Brokers	3
Lawyers	3
Contractor	1
Undertaker	1
Accountant	1
Factory Worker	1
Painter	1
Druggist	1
Banker	1
Stock Broker	1
Subtotal	32
Unknown	1
Total	33

The majority of the Republican leaders for whom there was information were Protestants. They were well-educated

**TABLE 15**  
**RELIGION**  
**REPUBLICAN LEADERS**

Religion	Number
Protestant (Denomination unknown)	6
Catholic	3
Methodist	3
Episcopalian	1
Presbyterian	1
Congregationalist	1
Subtotal	15
Unknown	18
Total	33

The average age of the Republican leaders was 43.8 years. The majority of the Republican leaders were middle-aged, although the average age reflected the presence of several younger aspiring political leaders.

Quite clearly, the leadership of the reform movement in Chicago at the turn of the century differed from that of the regular party organizations.

The reformers were almost overwhelmingly middle-aged and well-established in their own professional practices or businesses. There were practically no employees even of a managerial nature, and labor was hardly represented in the movement. Furthermore, the reformers were most likely involved in the older, traditional businesses such as banking and commerce. There was a noticeable absence of industrialists in the movement. The reformers were Protestant, and most likely, of old American stock. They were well-educated for their day, most having attended college. While their early economic backgrounds were mixed, they were all of highly "acceptable" social and economic status at the time of their participation in the reform movement.

Two final points should be made about the reform leaders. There was a sizeable percentage of immigrants in the reform movement, but in all respects, these immigrants shared the educational, occupational, and social standing of their fellow reformers. Also, many reformers were mobile people, as were much of the Chicago population; only thirteen had been born in that city.

The regular political leaders were of a different breed. The Democrats were most often immigrants or Chicago-born members of "newer" ethnic groups such as the Irish or Bohemians. The Republicans lacked the old Anglo-American stock predominant among the reformers. Unlike the reform activists, the regular leaders were not listed in the social directories and did not belong to the acceptable clubs. With a few exceptions already mentioned, they came from lower-class backgrounds. Their non-political occupations were at best, middle-class. The Democrats were most likely to be in construction, saloon-keeping, brewing, and meat processing, industries not represented among the reformers. The largest number of Republicans were local public officials.

An understanding of the differences between the backgrounds and interests of the reformers and the men who controlled the regular political organizations is crucial to an understanding of the Chicago reform movement, for the reform program was largely the outgrowth of the gentlemen reformers' backgrounds and interests.

due to the system in general.

Because of the belief that the political and economic structure of Chicago and Illinois worked against their economic interests, the Civic Federation and the Citizens' Association

John William Tebbel, *The Marshall Field: A Study in Wealth* (New York: B. W. Scribner and Co., Inc., 1924), pp. 11-12.

*Civic Regulations of Chicago: What It Has Accomplished*, by the Board of Public Works, pp. 12-13. *Annual Report of the Board of Public Works*, 1903, pp. 17-18.

## CHAPTER II

### ISSUES, INTERESTS, AND IDEOLOGY

Economically, the reformers came from a narrow segment of society. By and large, they were successful members of the older, more established occupational groups such as merchants and bankers or established professional men, especially lawyers. They did not share in the new wealth that was being created by those with political connections, such as the public utility magnates, contractors, and liquor dealers. The reformers' fellows such as the merchant Marshall Field, who had streetcar interests, were notably absent from the front ranks of reform.<sup>1</sup>

The reformers' economic group had to pay taxes just as the traction magnate or the politically appointed city worker without sharing the spoils of the political system. Added to this disadvantage was the problem of what the reformers thought was the inequity of the Illinois property tax and the taxing system in general.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the belief that the political and tax structure of Chicago and Illinois worked against their economic interest, the Civic Federation and the Citizens' Association,

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<sup>1</sup>John William Tebbel, The Marshall Fields, A Study in Wealth (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1947), pp. 91-92.

<sup>2</sup>Civic Federation of Chicago, What it has Accomplished, p. 22; Sutherland, pp. 18-19; Annual Report of the Citizens' Association, 1899, pp. 12-13.

devoted a major part of their efforts in the 1893-1907 period to changes in taxation policy and the implementation of economy in municipal operations. The third reform group, the Municipal Voters' League, was concerned with electing favorable candidates to the City Council and was far less oriented to changes in legislation and public administration.

The first report of the central council of the Civic Federation in 1895 stated as its purpose: "It seeks especially to promote honesty, efficiency, and economy in the administration of the public business and to serve the public by helping to enforce the law."<sup>3</sup> Earlier, in 1893, at an organizational meeting of the Civic Federation, a tract written by Charles Richardson of the Municipal League of Pennsylvania was read. In terms that the Chicago reformers could well understand and appreciate, the pamphlet stated, "You are a shareholder in the cooperative corporation, the business company known as the city." But unlike a business, Richardson warned, "It is only by emigration or suicide that you can avoid paying a portion of its expenses and becoming responsible for liabilities which it incurs."<sup>4</sup>

The reformers leaned toward neither suicide nor emigration so they decided simply to change the system to their favor. The Civic Federation in its early years became

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<sup>3</sup>Civic Federation of Chicago, First Annual Report of the Central Council (Chicago: R. R. Donnelly and Sons, 1895), p.7.

<sup>4</sup>Albion W. Small, "The Civic Federation of Chicago," American Journal of Sociology, I (July, 1895), 94.

involved in a wide variety of reforms. In the depression years of 1893 and 1894, the unemployed were put to work cleaning streets (in the business district), gambling houses were raided in 1894, and attempts were made at arbitration of the Pullman strike.<sup>5</sup> By 1896, however, the Civic Federation had narrowed its scope, leaving reform of City Hall to an offshoot, the Municipal Voters' League, and charity to another offshoot, the Central Relief Organization.<sup>6</sup>

In 1896, the Civic Federation joined the Citizens' Association and several smaller reform groups in an attempt to gain a new revenue law. The Citizens' Association had been organized in 1874. Essentially it drew its members from the same group as the Civic Federation, but its interests had always been narrower than the other newer group.<sup>7</sup>

The reformers were unified, however, in their opposition to the means of taxation employed in this period, which was a personal property tax. While there was obviously much injustice and evasion in a tax of this type, the preoccupation of the Civic Federation and the Citizens' Association with revenue reform grew to a large extent from a concern for their own economic group. The Citizens' Association complained that, "Double taxation is very apparent as in the case of mortgages and some classes of investment bonds," and

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<sup>5</sup>Civic Federation of Chicago, First Annual Report, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Sutherland, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>Annual Report of the Citizens' Association, 1893, p. 3.

that, "The danger of injuring the trade and commerce of our city is imminent from undue taxation of merchandise and credits."<sup>8</sup> The Citizens' Association reformers wanted a "properly regulated income tax" which "would bring out untold means from all classes of the community, including those salaries men who have no taxable property."<sup>9</sup>

In 1898, the reformers succeeded in pushing a new revenue law through the state legislature. The new law did not completely satisfy the reformers for it failed to abolish the property tax, only providing for a fairer and more efficient means of assessment. Before the passage of the reformers' bill, assessing had been the responsibility of a large number of township assessors. The old system of assessing was a holdover from the townships that had long before been consolidated into the city of Chicago. Under the new law, the assessing power was concentrated in a new five man Board of Assessors and a three man Board of Review.<sup>10</sup> A later executive secretary of the Civic Federation wrote concerning these Boards: "Adequate salaries (large for public officials of that era) were provided in order to attract able businessmen."<sup>11</sup> The law also provided for the publication

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<sup>8</sup>Annual Report of the Citizens' Association, 1899, p.10. (Italics mine).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Samuel Sparling, Municipal History and Present Organization of Chicago (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1898), p. 187.

<sup>11</sup>Sutherland, p. 18. -

of the assessment roles to avoid favored treatment by those with political connections and placed a limit on the tax rate at five percent of the assessed value of private property.<sup>12</sup>

Not satisfied with the law of 1898, the reformers wanted to go further in rationalizing and bringing efficiency to the tax structure of Chicago. After the turn of the century, the reformers began to work on a new city charter. Although the reform activists were joined by such diverse groups as the Chicago Federation of Labor and the City Council, the main participant in the fight for a new charter was the Civic Federation.<sup>13</sup> The main reforms sought by the Federation in the new charter were consolidation of taxing bodies within the city limits, of which there were sixteen, a "prudent" extension of the debt limit, and the replacement of the justice of the peace system with municipal courts.<sup>14</sup>

In 1905 when a new charter was approved by the City Council and sent to the state legislature, the Civic Federation withdrew support. The City Council had included in its proposal for the new charter a bond limit of forty-five million dollars. The Civic Federation reformers not only thought this extravagant but feared that the money would be used for the extension of municipally owned public utilities,

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<sup>12</sup>Sparling, p. 187.

<sup>13</sup>Sutherland, p. 23. D. E. Sunny to Raymond Robbins, June 20, Raymond Robbins MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1904.

<sup>14</sup>Annual Report of the Civic Federation, 1903, p. 7.

which the conservative reformers opposed. Not only did they oppose the principle of public ownership, but they claimed that the salaries in the already existing municipal electric and gas works were higher than their counterparts in private industry.<sup>15</sup>

By 1907, the Civic Federation had succeeded in having a new charter passed by the Legislature. The controversy over the public ownership of utilities had temporarily passed and the reformers felt more assured that a moderate increase in the debt limit would not be used for such radical schemes. The reform activists favored an increase in the debt limit solely because this was the only way the various taxing bodies in Chicago could be consolidated.<sup>16</sup> The reformers hoped, of course, that consolidation of taxing bodies would bring a more efficient taxing system.

When the new charter was put to the voters in a referendum, however, the measure was defeated. "Wets" and the liquor interests opposed the charter because they believed it gave too much power over liquor questions to the state government and Democrats feared a gerrymander by the Republican controlled City Council. The Civic Federation lamented that "factional interests and prejudices" had defeated the charter movement, apparently unaware that their interests were also factional.<sup>17</sup>

In 1907 there was also a revival of interest in revenue

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<sup>15</sup>Biennial Report of the Civic Federation, 1905, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Biennial Report of the Civic Federation, 1909, p. 3.

law reform by the Civic Federation. Still hoping to see an end to the dependence on the property tax, the reformers suggested that all state revenue be raised by a tax on public service franchises with the city retaining its dependence on a property tax. Again it must be noted that the leaders of public utility corporations were noticeably absent from reform organization leadership, and the reformers seemed to have had little connection with the public utilities.<sup>18</sup>

The Citizens' Association between 1900 and 1907 spent considerable time on the exposure of petty corruption. For many of the reformers, corruption was the major obstacle to efficient and economical government. The police department was investigated in 1904 at a cost of several thousand dollars, and the "bridgetenders racket" was abolished in which political favorites would be appointed and then sublet their jobs to other men.<sup>19</sup> In 1904 the Association reported that the West Park District had been reformed. "Loafing on the part of employees, free flowers and plants for Commissioners and their friends and free boat rides for nearly everyone" were now a thing of the past. The association also noted that "three hundred men not needed in the economical and efficient management of the work" had been discharged

and also to have three friends and three letters to three

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<sup>18</sup>Chicago Record Herald, January 2, 1907.

<sup>19</sup>Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association of Chicago, 1902-1907. 1903, 1905, 1907.

Chicago, 1905, p. 10.

Chicago Tribune, June 15, July 8, 1904; January 15,

from the park district.<sup>20</sup> No mention was made of what happened to these three hundred men.

Two of the main political issues of this period were civil service legislation and the traction question. The reformers' interest in both issues was in part motivated by their concern for economical and efficient government.

The Civic Federation joined with the Citizens' Association and several other less important reform groups in 1894 to form a joint Civil Service Reform League that was comprised of such reform leaders as Lyman Gage, Franklin MacVeagh, Victor Lawson, and John H. Hamline. In January of 1895, the Civic Federation, in cooperation with the Civil Service Reform League, submitted a bill that provided for a three man civil service commission, appointed by the mayor. The commission would be charged with examining all prospective city employees.<sup>21</sup>

Not content with just introducing the civil service law, the reformers undertook an intensive program to have the bill passed. Spokesmen of the Civic Federation went to Springfield to lobby for the bill, and every member sent three letters supporting the bill to members of the state House of Representatives. Each reform organization member was also to have three friends send three letters to three different members of the House. The trinitarian reformers

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<sup>20</sup>Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association of Chicago, 1905, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup>Chicago Tribune, June 26, July 8, 1894, January 13, 1895.

repeated this procedure when the bill reached the Senate.<sup>22</sup> The Civic Federation then sent its agents to three hundred leading business houses in Chicago. The businessmen were asked to write to their customers in the country districts, urging the customers to induce their senators to vote for the bill. More than seventeen thousand letters of this type were sent out to rural Illinois.<sup>23</sup>

After the bill passed the Senate and was signed by Governor Altgeld, who "was never conspicuous as a civil service reformer," the law was placed before the voters of Chicago in a referendum.<sup>24</sup> The Civic Federation sent five-hundred speakers into the factories at the noon hour in the weeks preceding the vote to convince the workers of the need for reform. Apparently the workers were convinced for the law was approved by a fifty thousand vote majority.<sup>25</sup>

While the reformers undoubtedly believed the patronage system in Chicago to be unjust and harmful to the city as a whole, there were also economic considerations involved in their stand on civil service. John H. Hamline, chairman of the Civil Service Reform League, in speaking of the city government stated, "They have on the payroll 50% more men

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<sup>22</sup>Edward J. Phelps, "How Chicago Hustled for Reform," Good Government, XIV (April 15, 1895), 137.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>25</sup>First Annual Report of the Central Committee of the Civic Federation, 1895, pp. 20-21.

than are needed and they pay them 50% more than they ought to."<sup>26</sup> With civil service as with a new charter, the reformers were concerned with efficiency and economy in government.

The success of civil service depended on the cooperation of the mayor, and the reformers ran into some trouble with Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr., who was elected in 1897. Harrison generally cooperated with the reformers, but unlike them he had to face the realities of big city government. "Refusing to give it blind acceptance, the Civil Service Reform League cast me into outer darkness," stated Harrison.<sup>27</sup> Complaining that he had to face the thousands of destitutes and unemployed who came to his office for help, Harrison thought it was quite easy for the reformers to sit in their comfortable homes and refuse to compromise.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, however, the reformers and Harrison reached a modus vivendi on civil service.<sup>29</sup>

The controversies that developed over civil service were mild compared to those that developed over the traction question. In the 1890's and early 1900's, the question of who would build and control the streetcar lines in Chicago

<sup>26</sup>Chicago Tribune, February 8, 1895.

<sup>27</sup>Harrison, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 129, 176-177.

<sup>29</sup>For the estimate of Mayor Harrison by a leading reformer, see William Kent, "Eight Years of Carter Harrison," Collier's, XXXIV (March 18, 1905), 27.

was the main local political issue. The Municipal Voters' League had in fact been founded by the Civic Federation in early 1896 in reaction to the passage of the notorious General Electric Streetcar franchise. This particular franchise was the result of an attempt by a group of aldermen to gain an exclusive right to the streets on the west side of the city and then to sell the franchise to a legitimate traction company.<sup>30</sup>

The Municipal Voters' League captured a considerable number of city council seats in the election of 1896 and soon found that the enemy was not only the acquisitive aldermen but the traction magnate, Charles Tyson Yerkes, who controlled the streetcar lines on the north and the west sides of the city.<sup>31</sup> Franchises for the majority of existing lines were coming up for renewal in a few years, and Yerkes hoped for fifty-year grants. The reformers, however, demanded shorter term franchises and more compensation for the city than Yerkes was willing to give. Also the reformers saw Yerkes, who was known for his political payoffs, as the prop behind the ward bosses, whom the reformers held responsible for the inefficiency and corruption of the municipal government.<sup>32</sup> Warfare broke out between the streetcar financier

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<sup>30</sup>Chicago Tribune, January 11, 1896; Wendt and Kogan, pp. 138-147.

<sup>31</sup>Hoyt King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, pp. 57, 72.

<sup>32</sup>Forest McDonald, Insull (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 85. McDonald has challenged the reformers' interpretation by claiming that Yerkes was more the victim of the gray wolve aldermen's extortion than their master. Neither the aldermen nor Yerkes left any papers or writings, so that matter is basically conjecture.

and the reformers. The Yerkes' owned Chicago Interocean accused the Municipal Voters' League of only supporting candidates who promised to crush the street railway companies.<sup>33</sup> A city council investigating committee chaired by the reformer John M. Harlan retaliated by exposing the enormous profits and watered stock of the traction companies.<sup>34</sup>

In 1898, the conflict reached a climax when Yerkes tried to gain fifty-year franchises for his lines under the Allen law. This law, passed the previous year at Yerkes' urging, gave the final decision on franchises to the City Council. Before 1898, the traction magnate had been remarkably successful in winning favors from the City Council. This time, despite Yerkes' plea that fifty-year franchises were necessary to gain credit to modernize and expand the lines, the traction financier was defeated.<sup>35</sup> Soon after, Yerkes left Chicago to go to London to build the subway there.<sup>40</sup>

The triumph over Yerkes was considered the great victory of the reformers.<sup>36</sup> Yet there were other factors

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<sup>33</sup>Chicago Interocean, April 2, 1898.

<sup>34</sup>Report of the Special Committee of the City Council of Chicago on the Street Railway Franchises and Operations.... (Chicago: John F. Higgins, 1898).

<sup>35</sup>King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, pp. 75-77; Harrison, pp. 174-175.

<sup>36</sup>McDonald, pp. 86-89; McDonald has also claimed that Yerkes was the true reformer as his fifty year franchises would have given him credit to improve his lines, cut fares, compensate the city and free himself from the leacherous aldermen. The financial investigation of the Harlan committee and the later Civic Federation report (see page 45 of this thesis) into the huge profits and watered stock of Yerkes' companies as well as his actions prior to 1898, make this a questionable conclusion, however.

involved. Although Yerkes had made significant improvements in the streetcar system, he was extremely unpopular. He did not allow transfers between his various lines and service was generally poor.<sup>37</sup> Yerkes' bluntness won him few friends. When some of his own stockholders complained about overcrowding on the streetcars, Yerkes is reported to have answered, "It is the people who hang to the straps who pay you your dividends."<sup>38</sup>

Aside from the streetcar riding public, Yerkes was opposed by specific interest groups. Labor opposed him because of his unfair practices towards his workers.<sup>39</sup> He antagonized the newspapers by his practice of barring newsboys from his cars, refusing to see reporters, and instituting numerous libel suits. The "radical reformers" such as Altgeld and Lloyd saw in his defeat the advancement of their program for public ownership of the traction lines.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the political skill of Mayor Carter Harrison and his political associates was crucial to Yerkes' defeat.<sup>41</sup> Although the reform element was important in Yerkes' downfall,

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<sup>37</sup>Report of the Special Committee of the City Council, passim.

<sup>38</sup>Chicago Tribune, January 15, 1895; February 21, 1896.

<sup>39</sup>Report of the Special Committee of the City Council, p. 79.

<sup>40</sup>Chester McArthur Destler, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Empire of Reform (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1963), p. 429.

<sup>41</sup>William Kent, Collier's, XXXIV (March 18, 1905), 27.

the traction magnate's defeat was the result of a strong coalition of forces against him.

The streetcar problem, however, was not solved with the defeat of Yerkes, and the question of what to do with the franchises that would expire by 1903 remained. In 1901, the Civic Federation published a report on the finances of the streetcar companies for which the Federation's auditor had been allowed to examine the companies' books. While stating that in all the report's estimates, "It is better to give the companies the benefit of all reasonable doubt than to retard private enterprise by harsh treatment," the Civic Federation report was almost as critical of the streetcar companies as had been the Harlan committee report in the City Council.<sup>42</sup> The Civic Federation report found, as had the City Council committee report, that the streetcar companies had made enormous profits and that their stock was watered. The report concluded that the traction companies could compensate the city or reduce fares and still renovate their properties without fifty-year franchises.<sup>43</sup>

Spurred by reports such as that of the Civic Federation and well aware of the poor service they received on the streetcars, much of the public turned toward the idea of municipal ownership of the traction lines. In three successive referenda, municipal ownership was approved, and in

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<sup>42</sup>Milo Roy Maltbie (ed.), "The Street Railways of Chicago: Report of the Civic Federation of Chicago," Municipal Affairs, V (1901), 448.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 454-457.

1905, Judge Edward F. Dunne, an "immediate municipal ownership" advocate, was elected mayor.<sup>44</sup> Municipal ownership was not, however, a part of most of the conservative reformers' plans. They wanted compensation for the city and distrusted the traction corporations, but definitely wanted to keep the streetcar lines under private ownership. In 1901, all three reform organizations put pressure upon Mayor Harrison and the City Council to come to some agreement with the traction companies.<sup>45</sup> By 1905, when public ownership of the lines seemed imminent, the executive committee of the Civic Federation stated that it was "unanimously opposed to municipal operation of public utilities, and it regards municipal ownership of any of them under present conditions as impractical."<sup>46</sup> The executive committee also noted that employees of the already existing (and profitable) municipal electric and gas works were better paid than the Civic Federation believed necessary.<sup>47</sup>

The forces supporting immediate municipal ownership were a diverse group. They included the "radical" wing of the Democratic party under Mayor Dunne and by 1905, some of

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<sup>44</sup>Ginger, pp. 275, 282, 258; Hugo S. Grosser, "The Movement for Municipal Ownership in Chicago," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, XXVII (January, 1906), 86-87.

<sup>45</sup>Harrison, p. 218.

<sup>46</sup>Annual Report of the Civic Federation, 1905, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 13; Grosser, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, XXVII (January, 1906), 83.

the bitter enemies of the reformers, the "machine" politicians or "grey wolves" as the reformers referred to them.<sup>48</sup> The "grey wolves" had two main reasons for supporting municipal ownership. First, public ownership was popular, and secondly, it would open a whole new area of patronage. Even some of the reformers supported public ownership such as Edwin B. Smith, Harold L. Ickes, William Kent, and Lyman Gage. The historian Ray Ginger has suggested that Gage saw possibilities for his First National Bank in the "contract" plan of Mayor Dunne, which would have had a semi-public corporation buy the streetcar lines.<sup>49</sup>

The fight over municipal ownership dragged on until 1907 when many people began to believe that the fight for public ownership was becoming hopeless. In that year, Walter Fisher, an officer of the Municipal Voters' League and Mayor Dunne's traction advisor, negotiated a settlement with the traction companies that did not receive the approval of the mayor. Much of the public and the City Council, however, were tired of the fight and the new settlement passed.<sup>50</sup> The conflict was ended for the time being, although it would continue to plague the city until public ownership became a reality in 1945.

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<sup>48</sup>Wendt and Kogan, p. 245.

<sup>49</sup>Ickes, pp. 107-108; Chester McArthur Destler, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Empire of Reform (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 516; Ginger, p. 297.

<sup>50</sup>Ickes, p. 108; Ginger, p. 301.

The reformers had fought Yerkes and the power of the streetcar corporations demanding adequate compensation for the city, in part hoping this would bring reduced taxes. The reformers also wanted to weaken their arch-enemies, the ward bosses, whom they believed to be in coalition with the traction companies. Yet the reform activists shied away from the more radical solution of public ownership, desired by the majority of the voters.

The reformers not only drew the opposition of the traction corporations and their allied political bosses, but they also came in conflict with another economic interest group, organized labor. The reform organizations liked to claim that they had the support of all segments of the community, but the evidence does not warrant this assertion.<sup>51</sup> The Civic Federation claimed that almost one-sixth of its original members were connected with labor, and the Federation did have a representative of organized labor on their first two executive committees.<sup>52</sup> Yet this was the last mention of a labor leader in connection with the Civic Federation. There was also one labor leader on the first executive committee of the Municipal Voters' League, but he was replaced by Graham Taylor after participation in one election.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Albion W. Small, "The Civic Federation of Chicago," American Journal of Sociology, I (July, 1895), 97.

<sup>52</sup>First Annual Report of the Central Council of the Civic Federation, 1895, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup>Graham Taylor, Pioneering on Social Frontiers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), p. 75.

The Chicago Federation of Labor criticized the Civic Federation for paying substandard wages to the unemployed who were hired to clean the streets in the depression of 1893-1894.<sup>54</sup> Jane Addams wrote that "I resigned from the street cleaning committee in despair of making the rest of the committee understand that, as our real object was not street cleaning but the help of the unemployed, we must treat the situation in such ways that the men would not be worse off when they returned to their normal occupations."<sup>55</sup>

In February 1905, the Chicago Federation of Labor appointed a committee to investigate the Municipal Voters' League.<sup>56</sup> The final report of the committee read in part:

Your committee finds that the Municipal Voters' League is not an organization as its name would imply. It is simply a coterie of very nice, respectable people, numbering just nine, who assume to relieve the voters of the necessity of considering the merits of the candidates for office. The matter is all fixed by the nine very nice gentlemen. These nine very nice gentlemen have the patronage of a large number of very respectable citizens, who furnish the finances and exercise the pressure on the voters. Your committee does not think that the recommendations of the Municipal Voters' League should have any weight with organized labor. . . .<sup>57</sup>

Although the preceding report was accepted by the ward membership of the Federation by a close vote, it demonstrates

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<sup>54</sup>Chicago Tribune, January 23, 1894.

<sup>55</sup>Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (New York: Macmillan Co., 1910), p. 161.

<sup>56</sup>Chicago Record Herald, February 6, 1905.

<sup>57</sup>Chicago Record Herald, March 20, 1905.

that support for the reform movement was not as solidified as the reform leaders indicated. The unions realized that the goals of the patrician reformers were not necessarily those of the working men.

The desire for economy and efficiency in government and a favorable tax system were important factors in the reform leaders' adherence to the reform program. Yet the Chicago reform movement cannot be explained in economic terms alone. Another influence upon the reformers were their Protestant religion and its ethical system.

The reformers had the support of what Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr. called the "politically militant" Protestant clergy.<sup>58</sup> On the Sunday before elections, it was common for the Protestant clergy to give sermons supporting the reform position.<sup>59</sup> Two of the leaders of the movement, Graham Taylor and Jenkin Lloyd Jones, were Protestant ministers.

Only three of the ninety-five reformers were Catholic and there was little evidence of Catholic priests supporting the Chicago reform movement in their Sunday sermons. In fact, there is evidence that the Catholic clergy sometimes sympathized with the arch rivals of the reformers, the ward bosses. In the nineteenth ward, Jane Addams and the Municipal Voters' League found many of the Catholic clergy in sympathy

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<sup>58</sup>Harrison, p. 272.

<sup>59</sup>Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1895, April 4, 1898, March 25, 1901. and Wilson, p. 139. The identification of the clergy with municipal reform and the failure of Catholics to take a more active role in reform was probably more racial than theological. As the comparative church of

with the "grey wolf" alderman, John Powers.<sup>60</sup> At the funeral of Mike McDonald, a prominent gambler and ward boss, a eulogy, rarely given in the Catholic church, was said by a Father Dorney. After commending McDonald for putting excellent men in office, Father Dorney concluded, "While it is true that 'Mike' McDonald has been the associate of gamblers, men whose operations are not approved by the Church, yet I have found in this complex character many qualities really commendable."<sup>61</sup> Roger Sullivan, probably the leading political boss in Chicago, was known for his close ties with the Catholic clergy.<sup>62</sup>

While some of this clerical sympathy may have been due to a feeling of identity with members of one's own religious group, the political scientists, Edward F. Banfield and James Q. Wilson have suggested another reason for the identity of Protestants with municipal reform. Banfield and Wilson see the existence among reformers of what they call the Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle-class ethos which is "a view of the world which sees politics as a means of moralizing life and which attaches great importance to the individual's obligation to 'serve' the public."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Jane Addams to Mary Smith, March 28, 1898, Addams MSS. The Peace Collection, Swarthmore College. Cited in Allen F. Davis, "Jane Addams vs. the Ward Boss," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, III (Autumn, 1960), 261.

<sup>61</sup>Chicago Record Herald, August 13, 1907.

<sup>62</sup>Howard Zink, City Bosses in the United States (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), pp. 297, 301.

<sup>63</sup>Banfield and Wilson, p. 139. The identification of Protestants with municipal reform and the failure of Catholics to take a more active role in reform was probably more social in nature than theological. As the struggling church of

The Chicago reformers showed a definite inclination for attempting to moralize society. The Civic Federation in its first year sent agents into two gambling houses and smashed them up. They also attacked obscene literature, opium dens, mortgage sharks, filthy bakeries, and payroll stuffing. In 1895, the Federation proposed a fair campaign practices act.<sup>64</sup> The Civic Federation gave up this type of reform after a few years and left it to the Citizens' Association, which after 1903 became the moral watchdog of Chicago. In July, 1903, the Citizens' Association brought twenty-six policy writers before a grand jury. In December of that year, one hundred and fifty more indictments were made for policy making. In 1904, eighty-two indictments were made against bookmakers and in 1905, more bookmakers were brought into court. In that year the Citizens' Association stated that "Chicago is cleaner morally today than it has been in years."<sup>65</sup> Leaving the gamblers and bookmakers, the Citizens' Association in 1907 gathered evidence against a large number of saloon keepers whose places were "notorious as breeding places of crime."<sup>66</sup>

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immigrants, the Catholic clergy and laity could not attempt to "moralize" society nor were they well enough established to be able to attach "great importance to the individual's obligation to 'serve' the public."

<sup>64</sup>Civic Federation, What it has Accomplished, p. 4; Report of the Central Committee of the Civic Federation, 1895; Wendt and Kogan, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup>Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association of Chicago, 1902-1907, pp. 37-39; Chicago Record Herald, October 28, 1904.

<sup>66</sup>Bulletins and Annual Reports of the Citizens' Association of Chicago, 1902-1907, p. 174.

Just as the reformers took a moralistic attitude toward such "vices" as gambling, they also tended to view politics as an uncompromisable conflict between the forces of good and evil. George Cole, the founder and first president of the Municipal Voters' League and later president of the Citizens' Association criticized Mayor Swift for bargaining with the streetcar owners. Neither did Cole nor the Voters' League have sympathy for an alderman named Stanwood who claimed he voted for a questionable bill in order to gain the passage of meritorious measures.<sup>67</sup> William Kent, one of the most progressive of the reformers, could still refer to the "wickedness" of a particular ward boss's minor finagling and The Outlook, a reform-oriented magazine, criticized Mayor Harrison for using patronage to defeat a particularly offensive franchise bill.<sup>68</sup> Kent also wrote to his fellow reformer, Graham Taylor, that his participation in the Municipal Voters' League had "gone to benefit and create worthy ideals of Christian living."<sup>69</sup> Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a reform minister wrote of the reform movement, "Those who were confident that selfish motives were the only adequate ones to inspire coherent and persistent political organization are beginning

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<sup>67</sup>King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, pp. 45, 48.

<sup>68</sup>Elizabeth Kent, William Kent: Independent (Kentfield, Calif., mimeographed copy, 1950), p. 113; The Outlook, LVI (July 24, 1897), 722-723.

<sup>69</sup>William Kent to Graham Taylor, February 24, 1926, MSS Graham Taylor Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

to take note of the fact that honor, integrity, municipal pride, and the ethical motives are capable of inspiring hard work, enthusiasm and a determination to win, which is more than a match to the inspiration of selfishness. . . ."70

In their attempt to apply their ethical system to the political order, the reformers occasionally bordered on political naivete. One leading reformer wrote of the type of man the reform activists hoped to see elected mayor in 1897: "He should put behind him all ulterior ambitions and enter office with the high resolve to do his whole duty here and now as he is given to see that duty, without thought of the effect of his official acts upon his future career. He should be absolutely free from every obligation to any party or personal machine."<sup>71</sup>

As with any political group, the motives of the Chicago reformers were complex and can probably never be fully understood. Still, two dominant strains ran through the Chicago reform program in the years from 1893-1907. One was the attempt to protect the economic interests of the prosperous reformers through a favorable tax system and also through economy and efficiency in municipal government. Whether the reformers were fighting for civil service, a new charter, or compensation for the city from the traction companies, the

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<sup>70</sup>Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Chicago Problems from the Standpoint of a Pulpit (Chicago: Unity Publishing Co., 1901), p. 5.

<sup>71</sup>Edward Burritt Smith, Municipal Outlook pamphlet MSS Graham Taylor Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, p. 14.

concept of economical and efficient government was foremost.

The fact that this program did not appeal to all economic groups was seen in the opposition of organized labor to the reform groups.

The other strain was the attempt of the reform activists to impose their ethical system upon the community. With their attacks on gambling and other "vices," the reformers hoped to moralize society. The reform activists also firmly desired that their ethical standards of honesty and "service to the public" be applied to the political system.

Neither motive can be ignored in any study of the movement.

of the League.

Organized by the Civic Federation on February 12, 1906, the M.V.L. was founded because of the failure of the parent group in the preceding two years to elect a more favorable candidate to lead the new group was a stationer and printer, George W. Fair, whose political references described as being "a strong, vigorous, unflinching, persistent, and energetic" leader. Fair stated, "I will accept the appointment of the leader of a foreign party or revolution that I can have

Edwin Barrett Smith, *Essays and Addresses* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1909), p. 22. The M.V.L. was of course, deeply involved in the traction question discussed in Chapter IV.

King, *Citizen Cole of Chicago*, p. 30.

Genl. William Key, *Independent*, p. 148.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MUNICIPAL VOTERS' LEAGUE AND THE CANDIDATES

The Municipal Voters' League, unlike the Citizens' Association and the Civic Federation, was not primarily concerned with specific issues such as the passage of favorable legislation or the suppression of corruption and vice. The main purpose of the M.V.L. was the election of "aggressively honest" candidates to the Board of Aldermen.<sup>1</sup> A study of this group must include an examination of the candidates and the methods of the League.

Organized by the Civic Federation on February 12, 1896, the M.V.L. was founded because of the failure of the parent group in the preceding two years to elect a more favorable City Council.<sup>2</sup> Chosen to lead the new group was a stationer and printer, George E. Cole, whom a fellow reformer described as having "a strong, vigorous, egotistic, personality."<sup>3</sup> On accepting the leadership from the officers of the Civic Federation, Cole stated, "I will accept the appointment, as the leader of a forlorn hope, on condition that I am to name

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin Burritt Smith, Essays and Addresses (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1909), p. 22. The M.V.L. was of course, deeply involved in the traction question discussed in Chapter II.

<sup>2</sup>King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Kent, William Kent; Independent, p. 148.

the secretary and the executive committee, and am given full authority to run things to suit myself."<sup>4</sup> Cole received the authority he wanted, and in the election of the following April, twenty candidates having the endorsement of the M.V.L. were elected. By 1900, under Cole and his successor, William Kent, the League was established as a political force with over two-thirds of the Council approved by the M.V.L.<sup>5</sup> The success of the Voters' League was so pronounced that Lincoln Steffens considered the Chicago reform movement, led by the M.V.L., to be the most powerful in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The Municipal Voters' League's method of attempting to change the composition of the City Council differentiated that group from reform movements in other parts of the country. In other cities, the reformers, despairing of "uplifting" the city councils, sought to centralize and concentrate political control in the executive branch and diminish the power of the municipal legislative bodies.<sup>7</sup> The M.V.L. reformers were aware of this trend, but rejected it. Speaking of the policy of concentration of power in the executive, used by other reform groups, Edwin B. Smith, Vice President of the League wrote:

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<sup>4</sup>King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 356.

<sup>6</sup>Lincoln Steffens, Autobiography (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1931), p. 423.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel P. Hays, Pacific Northwest Quarterly, LV, No. 4 (October, 1964), 160, 168; Banfield and Wilson, p. 139.

We have too long sought relief from municipal misrule by way of increased reliance on executive authority. There has been a tendency to rely less on the council, seek a temporary refuge in the executive, and make the final stand in the courts. The retreat has been marked by various efforts to cripple the legislative authority before leaving it to the control of special interests. This policy has but whetted the insatiable appetite of the forces to which the council has been abandoned.<sup>8</sup>

The M.V.L. did support some reforms that were characteristic of the municipal reform movement in other cities. One of these was non-partisan municipal elections. The M.V.L. leaders wanted the candidates nominated by petition because they believed that party labels infused national politics onto the municipal level. The reformers also wanted to take the nominating power from the party machines, which they considered the agents of special interest.<sup>9</sup> The M.V.L. activists failed to mention that the dropping of party labels in aldermanic campaigns would leave only one established group, the Municipal Voters' League, to endorse or oppose candidates.

Although the Municipal Voters' League supported reforms such as the nomination by petition and the referendum, and it sought to make municipal government more representative, the organization itself was highly undemocratic.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup>Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 347.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 362; Chicago Record Herald, April 7, 1904; Chicago Commons, IX (November, 1904), 559.

<sup>10</sup>Platform of the Municipal Voters' League, 1905. The referendum was denounced by another reform group, the Civic Federation, in its 1911 report.

decisions were made entirely by a self-perpetuating executive committee and Vice-President Smith stated, "No attempt is made, thus far, to keep up the usual farce of pretended representation by the controlling body of power coming up from the rank and file."<sup>11</sup> Reform leaders claimed that the placement of power in the small executive committee freed this group from the influence of various "interests."<sup>12</sup>

The reform organizations received their financial support from the same upperclass sources according to Hoyt King, a secretary of both the Citizens' Association and the Municipal Voters' League.<sup>13</sup> Harold Ickes wrote that Victor Lawson, the publisher of the Daily News, was the chief backer of the M.V.L. with an annual contribution of \$10,000.<sup>14</sup> Although this figure was an exaggeration, Lawson was probably the largest single backer of the League.<sup>15</sup>

The methods of the M.V.L. were those of a tightly organized political group. The Municipal Voters' League did not

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<sup>11</sup>Edwin Burritt Smith, "The Voters' League of Chicago," Outlook, LX (September 10, 1898), 131.

<sup>12</sup>Lincoln Steffens, Shame of the Cities, pp. 248-249.

<sup>13</sup>Hoyt King, "The Reform Movement in Chicago," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, XXV (March, 1905), 238.

<sup>14</sup>Ickes, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup>Victor Lawson to William Kent, June 5, 1903; Victor Lawson to E. A. Potter, May 20, 1900, December 9, 1901; Victor Lawson to Walter Fisher, November 26, 1901; Victor Lawson to Hoyt King, January 31, 1901. These letters show the large part Lawson played in the financial support of the League. Victor Lawson MSS Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

run its own candidates but asked all candidates to sign the League's pledge, which was usually a promise to uphold the standards of honest and efficient government.<sup>16</sup> Rarely did the M.V.L. ask the candidates to take stands on specific issues. In fact, the Voters' League in 1906 instructed the electorate to vote on the candidates' honesty and not their "declared opinions."<sup>17</sup>

The signing of the pledge by a candidate did not necessarily bring League support. The executive committee hired agents to scrutinize the candidate's background. If the information uncovered was too private for publication, the executive committee was capable of sending for the candidate and telling him to withdraw his candidacy.<sup>18</sup> The League also sent speakers into the wards and made deals with conflicting ward factions.<sup>19</sup> William Kent, an M.V.L. president, even admitted having mobilized the transient rooming house vote at elections, a favorite method of the ward bosses.<sup>20</sup> The League also gave some financial assistance to candidates it supported.<sup>21</sup>

The final step in the campaign program of the League

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<sup>16</sup>Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 361.

<sup>17</sup>Chicago Record Herald, March 30, 1906.

<sup>18</sup>Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 354-355; Steffens, Shame of the Cities, p. 244.

<sup>19</sup>Steffens, Autobiography, p. 428.

<sup>20</sup>Kent, William Kent, Independent, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup>Walter L. Fisher to Raymond Robbins, March 24, 1903, Raymond Robbins MSS Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

was the publication of the group's recommendations and condemnations in the newspapers a few days before each election.

As has already been noted, the methods of the Voters' League proved highly successful. The crucial part of the M.V.L. program, however, was the selection of the candidates that were supported. The League said that candidates were chosen simply on the basis of honesty and ability, but a closer inspection reveals significant differences between the backgrounds of the candidates supported by the M.V.L. and those opposed by the League.

A study was made of one hundred and seventeen candidates the Municipal Voters' League actively supported or opposed. Included were the seventy-four candidates strongly recommended and the forty-three candidates strongly opposed in the selected years of 1896, 1901, and 1906.<sup>22</sup>

Such a study of League candidates presented several problems. First, information on the type of men who were aldermanic candidates was minimal, for they were usually not prominent individuals. Secondly, there was no way of knowing how much support the League gave to individual candidates.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Sources for the candidates' names were the Chicago Tribune, April 4, 8, 1896; March 29, 1901; Chicago Record Herald, March 30, 1906. Each ward had two aldermen, elected in alternating years for two year terms. There were thirty-four wards, thus sixty-eight aldermen.

<sup>23</sup>The records of the M.V.L. were unfortunately not available for my use. Some of the early records were destroyed, and those that remained have been sent into permanent storage. Edward F. Martin to author, March 16, 1965; Evelyn F. Young to author, February 23, 1965.

Also in some wards, the League had to support men of social and economic backgrounds characteristic of the particular wards; to do otherwise would have meant sure defeat.

Despite the preceding limitations, the M.V.L., wherever possible, favored candidates with backgrounds similar to those of the reformers. This pattern was clearest in the area of occupations (see Table 16). Although the reform candidates were of lower social standing than the reform leadership (only six League candidates were listed in the Elite Directory) the reformers tended to favor men from occupations similar to theirs. The support for nineteen lawyers and the opposition to only one was an example. On the other hand, the reformers had an inbred distrust of saloonkeepers. Thirteen saloonkeepers were opposed by the League with only two recommended. One saloonkeeper was supported because he opposed another one particularly obnoxious to the League.<sup>24</sup> Generally, the opposition candidates were more likely to hold lower-class occupations than were the supported candidates.

Municipal Voters' League officials such as Graham Taylor considered the substitution among the voters of "racial loyalty" with "civic loyalty" one of the chief goals of the League.<sup>25</sup> By and large, the reformers followed their own preaching and tried to ignore ethnic considerations in the

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<sup>24</sup>The supported saloonkeeper was Frank Doubek, a Republican from the Fourth Ward. Chicago Tribune, March 28, 1901.

<sup>25</sup>Graham Taylor, p. 72.

TABLE 16

## OCCUPATIONS OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported	M.V.L. Opposed	
Lawyers	Saloonkeepers	
19	13	
Real Estate and Insurance Brokers	Tailors	
13	3	
Wholesale Merchants	Undertakers	
9	2	
Retail Merchants	Real Estate Brokers	
6	2	
Manufacturers	Brewery Agent or	
5	2	
Salesmen	Liquor Dealer	
3	Physicians	
Superintendents and Managers	3	2
Physicians	2	1
2	Blacksmith	
Bricklayers	2	1
2	Contractor	
Saloonkeepers	2	1
2	Auctioneer	
Teaming Business Operators	2	1
2	Retail Merchant	
Plumber	1	1
1	Tax Adjuster	
Contractor	1	1
1	Lawyer	
Painter and Decorator	1	1
1	Foreman	
Editor	1	1
1	Patent Medicine	
Court Clerk	1	1
1	Dealer	
Teacher	1	1
1	Teaming Business	
Unknown	2	Operator
2	Bankrupt	
Total of the Irish by the List	74	Printer
		1
		Manager
		1
		Union Officer
		1
		Plumbing Business
		1
		Operator
		1
		Manufacturer
		1
		Bondsman
		1
		Horsetrader
		1
		Unemployed
		1
		Unknown
		1
		Total
		43

choice of candidates (see Table 17). One possible exception was their opposition to Irish politicians. Five of the seventy-four candidates supported by the M.V.L. were of known Irish ancestry, but seventeen of the forty-three men opposed by the League were known members of that ethnic group. The anti-reform Chicago Interocean in 1898 questioned why the League only backed one Irishman that year when the Irish had

always been known to be extremely active in Chicago politics.<sup>26</sup> The probable answer lay in the stereotype the reformers had of the Irish politician as a ward boss. Of course, this stereotype was not a complete fabrication, but the reformers appear to have looked upon the words "Irish politician" and "ward boss" as interchangeable. Harold Ickes, a young reform sympathizer, years later referred to the ward leaders of Chicago as the "Irish political chieftains."<sup>27</sup> Jane Addams, who on several occasions dabbled in municipal political reform, not only identified the ward bosses as Irish but ethnically sought the reason for their corruption. Miss Addams felt that the bosses' dishonesty was a holdover from the years of oppression of the Irish by the British government. According to the social reformer, the Irish had become so used to cheating and taking advantage of an oppressive British government that, out of habit, they did the same thing in Chicago.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that the Municipal Voters' League leadership was aware of the ethnic background of candidates was demonstrated in a statement of Walter L. Fisher, a president and secretary of the League. Fisher wrote privately to Victor Lawson of one candidate, "Very-Irish-all the faults and all

<sup>26</sup> Interocean (Chicago) April 3, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Ickes, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> Jane Addams, "Ethical Survivals in Municipal Corruption," International Journal of Ethics, VIII (April, 1898), 275.

the virtues of that race."<sup>29</sup> The stereotype of the ward boss as an Irishman, however, failed to take into consideration the many non-Irish ward bosses, especially Republicans such as William Lorimer, Henry Hertz and Thomas Jamieson.

Despite the reformers' distrust of Irish politicians, the ethnic consideration of the reformers should not be over-emphasized as there is little evidence that this was the crucial factor in the reformers' decisions. The M.V.L. gave strong support to some Irishmen such as William E. Dever, a lawyer, who later became mayor.<sup>30</sup> More important than ethnic bias was the Irish leadership of lower-class economic groups that sought different ends from the city government than did the reformers. These groups' ethical system was also more likely to attach importance to a quality such as loyalty than to honesty, the paramount consideration of the reformers.<sup>31</sup>

Religious affiliation was ascertained for thirty-six of the candidates. Of the candidates known, the M.V.L. supported and opposed about the same number of Catholics, but approved fifteen Protestants and only opposed one man of that faith. (See Table 18.)

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<sup>29</sup>See the undated statement in the Victor Lawson Letter-book, January 8, 1903 - June 2, 1904, no date, p. 493. Victor Lawson MSS, Newberry Library, Chicago.

<sup>30</sup>William E. Dever Scrapbooks, Chicago Historical Society, p. 4, Vol. I.

<sup>31</sup>Addams, International Journal of Ethics, VIII (April, 1898), 290. The frequency with which the word loyalty appears in describing a member in the Bluebook of the Cook County Democracy is indicative of this ethical priority.

TABLE 17

ETHNIC COMPOSITION  
OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported		M.V.L. Opposed	
German	10	Irish	17
Irish	5	German	2
Bohemian	3	English	2
Scottish	3	Norwegian	1
Polish	2	Italian	1
Old American	2	Austrian	1
English	1	Polish	1
Canadian	1	Canadian	1
Subtotal	27	Subtotal	26
Unknown	47	Unknown	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

PARTY AFFILIATION OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported		M.V.L. Opposed	
Democrats	7	Democrats	7
Republicans	14	Republicans	3
Independents	4		
Legislator's			

TABLE 18

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION  
OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported		M.V.L. Opposed	
Catholic	9	Catholic	12
Protestant	14	Protestant	1
Subtotal	23	Subtotal	13
Unknown	51	Unknown	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

The Municipal Voters' League, unlike the Civic Federation, did not oppose Municipal Ownership, neither did any

Eighteen of the supported candidates were known to be college graduates while only three of the opposed candidates had received a higher education.

One of the goals of the League was non-partisanship in municipal politics; yet the League clearly favored Republican candidates and actively opposed Democrats. (see Table 19). This pattern of a strong preference for Republican candidates was maintained in all three elections studied. This was not surprising for the majority of the reformers were Republicans (see Table 7).

TABLE 19

## PARTY AFFILIATION OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported		1896	M.V.L. Opposed	
Democrats	7		Democrats	7
Republicans	14		Republicans	3
Independents	4			
People's				
		16		
		1901		
Democrats	6		Democrats	15
Republicans	21		Republicans	4
		27		
		1906		
Democrats	7		Democrats	11
Republicans	12		Republicans	3
Municipal	2*			
Ownership and				
Referendum				
		19		
Total		74		
Republicans	47		Democrats	33
Democrats	20		Republicans	10
Other	7			
		74		

\*The Municipal Voters' League, unlike the Civic Federation, did not oppose Municipal Ownership; neither did they support it.

Two final factors in the candidates' backgrounds, age and place of birth, seem to have been inconsequential in gaining support or opposition from the League. Research revealed the ages of seventy of the one hundred and seventeen candidates. The average age of the M.V.L. candidates was slightly younger (40.7 years) than the opposed candidates (45.2 years).

Place of birth was found for eighty of the candidates. The only significance of this factor was that the reform candidates were more likely to have been born in Chicago than the reform organization leaders.

TABLE 20

PLACE OF BIRTH  
OF CANDIDATES

M.V.L. Supported		M.V.L. Opposed	
Chicago	16	Ireland	5
Midwest other than Chicago	10	Midwest	4
Eastern U.S.	10	Chicago	3
Germany	5	England	2
Border States (Mo., Kent., W. Va.)	4	Canada	1
Scotland	4	Poland	1
Bohemia	3	Norway	1
Poland	2	New York	1
England	1	New Jersey	1
Austria	1	Vermont	1
Canada	1	Austria	1
Holland	1	Subtotal	21
Ireland	1	Unknown	22
Subtotal	59	Total	43
Unknown	15		
Total	74		

The candidates supported by the League, whenever possible, clearly reflected the backgrounds and interests of the M.V.L. leadership. There is little evidence, however, that there was a deliberate attempt to put men with certain backgrounds in office and keep others out. More likely the Chicago reformers, like other municipal reformers, hoped to replace the "private interests" in government with what they called the "public interest."<sup>32</sup> Yet when closely examined, the "public interest" represented what the reformers desired from the city government, mainly economy, efficiency, and honesty. It was not unnatural that the candidates who came from the same religious, political, and educational backgrounds, as well as similar occupations, would share the same political ethos. And these were the men the reformers supported.

The M.V.L. leaders, and to a lesser extent their candidates, represented a narrow segment of Chicago's population. Yet they succeeded between 1896 and 1907 in exerting a powerful and at times controlling influence upon the City Council. They were able to do this for a number of reasons. For one thing, most of the pre-reform aldermen were an unsavory group. Even Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr., a highly skilled politician,

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<sup>32</sup>For the concept of replacing special interests with the public interest in other reform movements see Banfield and Wilson, p. 139; George Mowry, The California Progressives, (Berkeley: University of California) p. 101. For the Chicago movement see Smith, Essays and Addresses, p. 45; Jones, p. 5; King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, p. 12.

often at odds with the reformers, called the aldermen of the early nineties, "a low-browed, dull-witted, base-minded gang of pug-uglies, with no outstanding characteristic beyond an unquenchable lust for money."<sup>33</sup> The more radical reformers such as Clarence Darrow and Henry Demarest Lloyd were even sympathetic with the League's attempt to purge these aldermen.<sup>34</sup>

The weak party organization in Chicago also helped the League. The Democrats were split into the Harrison, the Altgeld, and the Sullivan-Hopkins-Brennen factions, along with smaller clusters of power.<sup>35</sup> The Republicans were split into a reform faction led by John M. Harlan and Victor Lawson, and various "regular" elements led by Charles Deneen, William Lorimer, and Fred Busse, among others.<sup>36</sup> This splintering turned Chicago politics into a system of "petty feudal chieftains."<sup>37</sup>

The League's emphasis upon honesty and efficiency had appeal for large numbers of middle-class voters. Hoyt King, a reform organization official wrote that, "Not only are a

<sup>33</sup>Harrison, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup>King, Citizen Cole of Chicago, p. 49; Henry Demarest Lloyd, The Chicago Traction Question (Chicago: George W. Pickett, 1902), pp. 37-38.

<sup>35</sup>Cooling, p. 19; Alex Gottfried, Boss Cermak of Chicago (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 70.

<sup>36</sup>Tarr, pp. 316-317.

<sup>37</sup>Charles E. Merriam, Chicago: A More Intimate View of Urban Politics (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 18.

majority of our successful representative citizens in Chicago honest and patriotic, but they are reinforced by the great majority comprising the middle class."<sup>38</sup>

With a few exceptions, the League was consistently successful only in middle and upper-class wards. A study of seventeen continuously elected aldermen in the late 1890's showed that the M.V.L. supported aldermen came (largely) from the middle and upper-class wards and the "grey wolf" aldermen, without exception, came from the poorer wards. The politicians opposed by the M.V.L. were also most likely to come from wards containing large numbers of immigrants.<sup>39</sup>

Not to be overlooked in the success of the League was the support of Chicago's newspapers, with the exception of one or two papers such as the Interocean.<sup>40</sup> The willingness of the reformers to use the methods of the political machines was also helpful as were the financial resources available to the upperclass reformers.

Finally, the two mayors in office from 1897 to 1907, Carter Harrison, Jr. and Edward F. Dunne, did not necessarily

<sup>38</sup>King, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, XXV (March, 1905), 239.

<sup>39</sup>A social and economic breakdown of each Chicago ward can be found in the Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890. Vital Statistics, IV, Part 2, 161-181. The seventeen "entrenched" aldermen and their wards were: Kenna (1), Coughlin (1) Fitch (3), Martin (6), Fick (7), Cullerton (9), Maypole (13), Beilfuss (14), Kuntz (16), Brennan (18), Powers (19), Harlan (22), Walker (24), Schlake (26), Badenock (31), Kent (32), and Mavor (32). A more detailed study of voting patterns was unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, Municipal Affairs, IV, No. 2 (June, 1900), 350.

follow the reformers' lead, but were willing to cooperate with the M.V.L. Harrison worked with the League aldermen to defeat Yerkes' fifty-year franchise bill and Dunne appointed Walter Fisher, president of the Voters' League, as his traction advisor.<sup>41</sup>

By the early 1900's, the reformers had succeeded and they were confident. Hugo Grosser, the city statistician of Chicago and a reform sympathizer wrote in 1906, "Political 'pull' has disappeared from the municipal government."<sup>42</sup> The Commons, the magazine of M.V.L. leader Graham Taylor stated, "A few more years of struggle will see the extermination of the race of aldermanic boodlers."<sup>43</sup>

The reform utopia was not as near at hand as many of the reformers thought. The aldermanic ward bosses were not exterminated; entrenched aldermen such as "Bathhouse John" Coughlin, Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna, Edward F. "Foxy Ed" Cullerton, and "Johnny the Pow" Powers, had been in power in 1896 and they were there in 1907. Powers, defiantly taunted the reformers, "I may not be the sort of man the reformers like, but I am what my people like, and neither Hull House nor all the reformers in town can turn them against me."<sup>44</sup> The reformers might have listened to Powers and learned, but they did not. In the political expertise of men like Powers, the reformers would meet defeat.

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<sup>41</sup>Kent, Collier's, XXXIV (March 18, 1905), 28.

<sup>42</sup>Hugo Grosser, "Municipal Problems of Chicago," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, XXIII (March, 1904), 285.

<sup>43</sup>The Commons, VII (April, 1902), 18.

<sup>44</sup>Allen F. Davis, "Jane Addams vs. the Ward Boss," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, LIII (Autumn, 1960), 264.

outright sale of public utilities franchises without consid-  
eration for the ridings or compensation for the city. It is

CONCLUSION:

quite possible that Charles E. Merriam, a political scientist  
and Chicago reformer himself, was correct when he said that

THE FAILURE OF REFORM

In the 1890's in Chicago, upper class merchants, bankers,  
and professional men looked with horror at City Hall. In  
political control were men who shared neither the economic  
interests nor the ethical standards of the gentlemen re-  
formers. Highly successful in their own businesses or pro-  
fessions, the reform activists realized they were politically  
impotent. The men of the Civic Federation, Citizens'  
Association, and the Municipal Voters' League wanted to  
redress this political imbalance, through favorable legis-  
lation, abolition of the corruption that favored other  
economic groups, and finally through changes in the personnel  
of government.

If the reform movement largely grew out of the socio-  
economic interests and backgrounds of the reformers, this is  
not to imply that the movement did not do much to benefit  
Chicago as a whole. The reformers fought for better schools,  
cleaner bakeries and food handling, and investigated condi-  
tions of child labor and sweat shops, although these were  
never their primary concerns.<sup>1</sup> They did bring an end to the

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<sup>1</sup>Albion W. Small, "The Civic Federation of Chicago,"  
American Journal of Sociology, I (July, 1895), 85; Sutherland,  
p. 29; Annual Report of the Civic Federation, 1903, p. 60.

outright sale of public utilities franchises without consideration for the riders or compensation for the city. It is quite possible that Charles E. Merriam, a political scientist and Chicago reformer himself, was correct when he said that the M.V.L. gave Chicago for twenty years the best local legislative body in the country.<sup>2</sup> The reform rhetoric of serving the public interest cannot be ignored.

Yet despite these improvements, the reformers failed. In 1907, Fred Busse, a rather notorious Republican ward boss, was elected mayor with the help of some reformers who feared the public ownership advocate, Mayor Dunne.<sup>3</sup> Busse's administration was marked by corruption and the road was away from what the reformers had desired.

While the reformers had fought a number of petty ward bosses in the 1893-1907 period, by 1907, the Sullivan-Brennan Democratic city-wide "machine" had begun to consolidate its power. This organization was further strengthened over the years by such astute politicians as Anton Cermack, Patrick Nash, Edward Kelly, and most recently Richard Daley.<sup>4</sup> Not only did the Sullivan-Brennan "machine" become more powerful, but the most highly entrenched of the old "grey wolf" aldermen ward bosses such as "Bathhouse John" Coughlin, Michael Kenna, and John Powers remained in control of their fiefdoms.

<sup>2</sup>Merriam, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Ickes, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup>Gottfried, p. 333.

<sup>5</sup>Ginger, p. 371; Dunne, II, 490-492.

By 1915, William Hale Thompson, an anathema to the reformers, was elected mayor. Ironically, the M.V.L. had supported Thompson in his several campaigns for election to the Board of Aldermen. "Standing good, has time and ability to devote to public service" was the way the M.V.L. described Thompson in 1900.<sup>5</sup> At the end of "Big Bill" Thompson's first term in 1923, the Municipal Voters' League sadly announced that, "The City Council, from the standpoint of honesty, character, and capacity is today on a low level. . . . The Council is now suffering from the effects of years of undermining by political freebooters."<sup>6</sup> George Sikes, a former M.V.L. secretary wrote in 1922, "The Municipal Voters' League today is almost a negligible factor. It still goes through the motions but exercises little if any net influence upon the political situation."<sup>7</sup>

Even such structural changes as a new city charter had not become a reality, and others such as non-partisan organization of the council committees were a failure.<sup>8</sup> Civil service was not the success the reformers had expected, and the granting of streetcar franchises remained a problem.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Chicago Tribune, March 30, 1900, William E. Dever Scrapbooks, Chicago Historical Society, Vol. II, no pagination.

<sup>6</sup>Municipal Voters' League pamphlet, 1923, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>George E. Sikes, "What's the Matter with Chicago" pamphlet in the Graham Taylor MSS Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

<sup>8</sup>Taylor, p. 61.

<sup>9</sup>Ginger, p. 171; Dunne, II, 490-492.

The question arises as to why the reformers failed. A main reason was that they represented one particular group in a city of many interests. The reform activists made little or no attempt to include representatives of other segments of the community in their leadership. The reformers ignored the desires of other groups concerning municipal government; thus their own interests became the "public interest."

The reform movement contained contradictions. On the one hand, the M.V.L. claimed to be fighting for representative government, but on the other, it was an oligarchic political machine that instructed people how to vote.<sup>10</sup> The League was proud that after its early success, the party organizations began to consult the M.V.L.'s executive committee in advance about proposed nominations.<sup>11</sup> Why nine or ten self-appointed men were any more representative than the party organizations is hard to understand. The Civic Federation and the Citizens' Association claimed to represent the public interest, but consistently their program expressed a dominant concern for their economic self-interest through tax reform, efficiency, and economy in government. Yet for many people in Chicago there were far more pressing and immediate needs than honesty, efficiency, and

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<sup>10</sup>Steffens, Autobiography, p. 428.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, Essays and Addresses, p. 39.

economy in government. One man who knew this was the ward boss. Although the M.V.L. defeated a good number of the less effective ward bosses, the more skilled were impregnable.

Jane Addams, one of the most perceptive observers of Chicago at this time, learned the reality of city politics in her encounter with the boss of the nineteenth ward, John Powers. When the Hull House social workers tried to dislodge Powers, they found that a large percentage of the voters owed their jobs to him. They realized why so many of their neighbors were streetcar employees and why one of their young women's club was comprised almost entirely of telephone girls. All these people were the employees of companies that needed franchises from the city council.<sup>12</sup>

The Hull House workers discovered that the alderman could be found at every funeral in the ward; his saloon was a social gathering place, and he gave out free turkeys at Christmas. While firmly believing that the people would be better off without bosses, Miss Addams concluded, "The alderman is really elected because he is a good neighbor and friend."<sup>13</sup>

The same phenomenon was observed separately by two

<sup>12</sup>Addams, Twenty Years, p. 316; Addams, International Journal of Ethics, VIII (April, 1898), 279.

<sup>13</sup>Addams, International Journal of Ethics, VIII (April, 1898), 281-288.

British reformers who visited Chicago. H. G. Wells, when he arrived in Chicago, was determined to meet the lord of the first ward, Michael Kenna. Wells wrote that "Hinky Dink" Kenna, "is very kind to all his crowd. He helps them when they are in trouble, even if it is with the police; he helps them find employment when they are down on their luck; he stands between them and the impact of an unsympathetic and altogether too-careless social structure in a sturdy and almost parental way."<sup>14</sup> William T. Stead, the British preacher whose critical speech in 1893 led to the organization of the Civic Federation, saw a value in the Democratic ward organizations that was oblivious to the local reformers. Stead, a social as well as political reformer, wrote that the ward organizations, "are stimulating a certain number of citizens to render service and discharge obligations to their fellow citizens, and so are setting in motion an agency for molding into one the heterogeneous elements of various races, nationalities, and religions which are gathered together in Chicago."<sup>15</sup>

The services of the ward boss were varied. Stead noted that the boss got the people into hospitals, buried them privately and bailed out men who were drunk.<sup>16</sup> When Alderman Kenna fed as many as 8,000 destitutes a week in his

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<sup>14</sup>H. G. Wells, Future in America: A Search After Realities (New York: Harper and Bros., 1906), p. 131.

<sup>15</sup>Stead, pp. 54-55.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51.

saloon during the Depression of 1893, he probably accomplished more good than the Civic Federation's streetcleaning employment program.<sup>17</sup>

The skilled ward bosses and the political system they represented did not hold their constituents by material compensations alone. The reform activists learned this in their fight in 1896 against Alderman Powers. The reformers supported an Irish bricklayer and placed pictures in the ward of the bricklayer eating lunch at his humble workplace and Powers dining with the utility magnates that he served in the council.<sup>18</sup> Powers was easily re-elected, partially because the voters saw in the alderman one of their own, but one who had beaten the system and could dine with the powerful. If Powers, an immigrant could do this, so could their own sons.<sup>19</sup> Thus for many, the alderman was a symbol of success and the political organization a means of economic advancement from the lower classes.

The political bosses that forged the city-wide machines such as George Brennan and Roger Sullivan added methods of political expertise of their own. Sullivan was credited in his earlier years with developing the concept of the "ethics some reform legislation in the years from 1910 to 1916."

<sup>17</sup>Ginger, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup>Chicago Tribune, April 4, 1896.

<sup>19</sup>Jane Addams alluded to this reason for Powers' success when she said, "The District wanted its representative to stand up to the best of them." Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1902), p. 257.

gressive reform, see J. Joseph Mathias, "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, LXIX (September, 1962), 231-241.

of graft" in Chicago.<sup>20</sup> Under the "ethics of graft," the politicians did not steal from the public treasury or even necessarily sell their votes. Instead, they used their political influence to help favored parties. Their leading method was the "dummy corporation" in which the political insiders gained a franchise and then sold it to a legitimate public utility. Although this method was thinly disguised extortion, and some of the boodler politicians made huge fortunes, much of the public soon forgot the excesses of the franchise racket as they believed that the utility corporations would charge maximum rates in any case.

In the famous Ogden Gas franchise, Sullivan and his cohorts not only gave themselves the franchise, but started a bonafide gas company. The Ogden Company cut rates ten cents per unit below that of the monopolistic People's Gas Company and established the precedent of paying 3½% of its gross receipts into the public treasury.<sup>21</sup>

In later years, Sullivan developed another technique, that of capitalizing upon the sentiment for reform. Not only did the machine, when necessary, support candidates acceptable to the reform elements, but Sullivan supported some reform legislation in the years from 1910 to 1916.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>McDonald, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup>Howard Zink, City Bosses in the United States (Durham, Duke University Press, 1930), p. 293.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 299; Townsend, I, 31; Dunne, V, 275. For the role of working class political leaders in later Progressive reform, see J. Joseph Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 231-241.

Even in the years from 1893-1907, many of the improvements in Chicago government came at the hands of "regular" politicians such as Mayor Carter Harrison, Jr., and to a lesser extent Mayor Edward F. Dunne.<sup>23</sup>

The reformers could not or would not understand the ways of the political bosses or their relationship with large segments of the population. To the gentlemen reformers the problem was simply the coalition between self-seeking politicians and avaricious big business utility magnates.<sup>24</sup> The reformers thought that once this coalition was broken, the government would come under the control of honest men of the "best type." Then the government would be run as efficiently and economically as the reformer bankers, merchants and lawyers ran their own businesses and practices.

The reformers were not only limited in their understanding of urban politics, but their personalities were often not as well adapted to political persuasion as were those of the regular politicians. Joel Tarr, a biographer of William Lorimer, found that the "blond boss" of Republican Chicago shared many personal characteristics with his fellow bosses. Lorimer, with all the weaknesses of the other bosses, had the similar virtues of fidelity to his word, personal warmth,

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<sup>23</sup>Grosser, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, XXIII (1904), 288-292; Kent, Collier's, XXXIV (March 18, 1905), 27.

<sup>24</sup>Smith, Essays and Speeches, p. 45.

and accessibility to his constituents.<sup>25</sup> These were characteristics valued by large segments of the electorate, especially the three fourths of Chicago's population consisting of first and second generation Americans. William Jennings Bryan, a bitter enemy of Roger Sullivan, could still refer to him as "personally a genial fellow."<sup>26</sup>

The reformers were markedly different. Jane Addams wrote that, "The reformers give themselves over largely to criticism of the present state of affairs, to writing and talking of what the future must be, but their goodness is not dramatic; it is not even concrete and human."<sup>27</sup> Harold Ickes, who as a young man had been active in Chicago reform politics wrote that:

The reformers were aloof and austere. They had a veneer that was like the polish on the slab of granite, and contrasted unfavorably with the joviality of the Irish political chieftains. I am grateful that I was never in a position where I felt that I had to go either to the politicians or to the reformers for help. But had I needed help, I am sure that I would have been more certain of getting it from the politicians.<sup>28</sup>

Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna agreed with Ickes. "Whenever I see a reformer, I hold my hat and keep my hands in my pockets. I'd lose my ward if they supported me," and as late as 1941 Kenna could still be found in the City Council.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Tarr, p. 367

<sup>26</sup>Zink, p. 299.

<sup>27</sup>Addams, International Journal of Ethics, VIII (April, 1898), 276.

<sup>28</sup>Ickes, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup>Wendt and Kogan, p. 203.

The reform organizations did not give up, however. The Civic Federation and the combined Citizens' Association and Municipal Voters' League are in operation today. But by 1907, the reformers greatest period of activity had passed, and the end results were questionable. William Stead returned to Chicago in 1907, fifteen years after his famous speech that had ignited the reform movement. After touring the city, Stead told reporters, "When I first visited Chicago, I thought there was one in a thousand chances of reform succeeding here. Now I think the chances are one in two thousand."<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Joseph  
 Bernard Albert  
 Fuller, William Alden  
 Glasser, John J.  
 Hall, William H.  
 Riginbotham, Harlow H.  
 Hots, Christoph  
 Hots, Robert S.  
 Ingalls, E. Fletcher  
 Jackson, Willis G.  
 Jenkins, Robert Edwin  
 Kohn, David A.  
 Lathrop, Bryan  
 Lombard, Joshua L.  
 McLaren, John  
 Merryweather, George  
 Mulliken, Charles Henry  
 Nelson, Murry  
 Palmer, Honore  
 Peabody, Francis, B.  
 Prussing, Eugene B.  
 Schneider, George  
 Seaburger, Louis A.  
 Shortall, John G.  
 Singleton, Shelby M.  
 Smith, Robert J.  
 Sprague, Otho S. A.  
 Stern, Julius  
 Stone, Melville Edwin  
 White, Hugh A.

Wade, A. Keller  
 Dreyer, E. S.  
 Basley, Ralph M.  
 Els, John W.  
 Flower, Lucy  
 Frost, E. Allen  
 Gage, Frank A.  
 Giles, William A.  
 Greeley, Frederick  
 Greeley, Samuel S.  
 Hall, E. J.  
 Harper, William R.  
 Head, Franklin R.  
 Henriotin, Charles  
 Henriotin, Ellen M.  
 Keith, Edson G.  
 MacMillan, Thomas C.  
 MacVeagh, Franklin  
 Morrison, James W.  
 Moses, Adolph  
 Nathan, Adolph  
 Oshahan, William James  
 Otis, Joseph Edward  
 Palmer, Mrs. Potter  
 Partridge, Newton A.  
 Revell, Alexander H.  
 Rogers, Henry W.  
 Scott, John William  
 Sprague, Howard G.  
 Stensland, Paul G.  
 Stenversen, Sarah Mackett  
 Sway, Edward S.  
 Sweet, Ann C.  
 Zalizer, Sigmond

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 252.

APPENDIX

LIST OF INDIVIDUALS STUDIED

Citizens' Association

Ambler, John C.  
 Beidler, Francis  
 Black, John Clarke  
 Blair, Watson Franklin  
 Boyesen, Ingolf K.  
 Bradley, Joseph Harley  
 Burlington, Fred W.  
 Butler, Hermon B.  
 Chalmers, William J.  
 Donnersberger, Joseph  
 Eckhart, Bernard Albert  
 Fuller, William Alden  
 Glessner, John J.  
 Hall, William F.  
 Higinbotham, Harlow N.  
 Hotz, Christoph  
 Hotz, Robert S.  
 Ingalls, E. Fletcher  
 Jackson, Willis G.  
 Jenkins, Robert Edwin  
 Kohn, David A.  
 Lathrop, Bryan  
 Lombard, Joshia L.  
 McLaren, John  
 Merryweather, George  
 Mulliken, Charles Henry  
 Nelson, Murry  
 Palmer, Honore  
 Peabody, Francis, B.  
 Prussing, Eugene E.  
 Schneider, George  
 Seeberger, Louis A.  
 Shortall, John G.  
 Singleton, Shelby M.  
 Smith, Robert J.  
 Sprague, Otho S. A.  
 Stern, Julius  
 Stone, Melvill Edwin  
 White, Hugh A.

Civic Federation

American, Sadie  
 Baker, William T.  
 Beeks, Gertrude  
 Bennett, Robert J.  
 Brown, William  
 Butler, Edward Burgess  
 Byrne, John P.  
 Collins, Lorin C. Jr.  
 Crane, R. Teller  
 Dreyer, E. S.  
 Easley, Ralph M.  
 Ela, John W.  
 Flower, Lucy  
 Frost, E. Allen  
 Gage, Lyman J.  
 Giles, William A.  
 Greeley, Frederick  
 Greeley, Samuel S.  
 Halle, E. G.  
 Harper, William R.  
 Head, Franklin H.  
 Henrotin, Charles  
 Henrotin, Ellen M.  
 Keith, Edson G.  
 MacMillan, Thomas C.  
 MacVeagh, Franklin  
 Morrison, James W.  
 Moses, Adolph  
 Nathan, Adolph  
 Onahan, William James  
 Otis, Joseph Edward  
 Palmer, Mrs. Potter  
 Partridge, Newton A.  
 Revell, Alexander H.  
 Rogers, Henry W.  
 Scott, John William  
 Sprogle, Howard O.  
 Stensland, Paul O.  
 Stenvenson, Sarah Hackett  
 Sunny, Bernard E.  
 Sweet, Ada C.  
 Zeisler, Sigmund

## M.V.L. Supported Candidates

Municipal Voters' League

Baker, Alfred  
 Baldwin, Robert R.  
 Bartlett, Charles L.  
 Billings, Dr. Frank  
 Blair Chauncey J.  
 Boyden, William C.  
 Carroll, M.J.  
 Chamberlin, Henry Barrett  
 Cole, George E.  
 Colvin, William H.  
 Crane, Charles R.  
 Davis, Brodie B.  
 Donnelley, R.R.  
 Eastman, Sidney Corning  
 Farr, Marvin A.  
 Farwell, John V. Jr.  
 Favill, Dr. Henry Baird  
 Fisher, Walter L.  
 Harlan, John Maynard  
 Hinkley Charles Watson  
 Hirsch, Rabbi Emil G.  
 Houghteling, James L.  
 Jones, Jenkin Lloyd  
 Kent, William  
 King, Hoyt  
 Kohlsaas, Herman Henry  
 Lackner, Francis  
 Lawson, Victor  
 Matz, Otto H.  
 Payne, John Barton  
 Pond, Allen Bartlett  
 Robbins, Raymond  
 Rosenthal, Lessing  
 Rubbens, Harry  
 Scott, Frank Hamline  
 Selfridge, Harry G.  
 Senn, Dr. Nicholas  
 Sikes, George C.  
 Smith, Edwin Burritt  
 Taylor Graham  
 Wells, Frank

Kenna, Michael  
 Kuna, Stanley  
 Leininger, Dr. George  
 Little, Thomas  
 Mahoney, William  
 Mathison, Andrew  
 Mc Cormick, James J.

## M.V.L. Opposed Candidates

Democratic Leaders

Brennan, George E.  
 Brennan, William F.  
 Brennen, John J.  
 Brunjes, J. H.  
 Burke Robert E.  
 Coughlin, John  
 Cullerton, Edward F.  
 Cuneo, John S.  
 Devine, Miles, J.  
 Dooley, James C.  
 Farrell, James H.  
 Fick, Henry L.  
 Fitzgerald, Thomas  
 Gahan, Thomas  
 Gray, James J.  
 Harrison, Carter H.  
 Hopkins, John P.  
 Kenna, Michael  
 Loeffler, William  
 McCathy, J.T.  
 McDonald, Michael C.  
 Magnus, Walter V.  
 Mangler, William  
 Mayer, Oscar F.  
 McGillen, John  
 O'Brian, William J.  
 Powers, John  
 Powers, Thomas J.  
 Ryan, Timothy E.  
 Sabath, Adolph Joseph  
 Solon, Frank W.  
 Sullivan, John H.  
 Sullivan, Roger C.  
 Winston, Fred S.



Republican Leaders

Andrews, Charles W.  
 Bidwell, Joseph E.  
 Blount, Fred M.  
 Braden, Joe  
 Busse, Fred  
 Campbell, Donald A.  
 Conway, Edwin S.  
 Cooke, John A.  
 Deneen, Charles S.  
 Dewey, Chauncey  
 Garrett, Myron A.  
 Giffert, William  
 Haas, Joseph F.  
 Hanberg, John J.  
 Hertz, Henry Lamartine  
 Hull, Perry A.  
 Jamieson, Thomas N.  
 Knopf, Philip  
 Linn, John A.  
 Lorimer, William  
 Madden, Martin B.  
 Magerstadt, E. J.  
 Mamer, Christopher  
 Moxley, William J.  
 Pease, James  
 Pfister, William  
 Reddick, James  
 Rogers, George  
 Simon, Robert M.  
 Vail, Charles W.  
 Van Cleave, James R. B.  
 Weber, William H.  
 West, Roy O.

M.V.L. Supported Candidates

Alling, Charles  
 Altpeter, Louis  
 Badenock, J. J.  
 Bagley, Francis R.  
 Beilifuss, A. W.  
 Bell, John A.  
 Bennett, Frank  
 Bihl, Ernest R.  
 Blake, Freeman K.  
 Bos, John J.  
 Butler, Hubert  
 Butterworth, William J.  
 Connery, Francis D.  
 Connor, Edward D.  
 Considine, J. R.  
 Dever, William  
 Dixon, Thomas J.  
 Doubeck, Frank  
 Eidmann, Henry F.  
 Ernst, John  
 Finn, Nick  
 Fitch, Henry S.  
 Fisher, Albert J.  
 Foreman, Milton J.  
 Fowler, Frank T.  
 Gallagher, Thomas  
 Gleason, William J.  
 Gunther, Charles F.  
 Harlan, John M.  
 Helm, S. H.  
 Heppelman, F.  
 Hunter, T. M.  
 Jackson, William S.  
 Kenney, Albert F.  
 Kiolbassa, Peter  
 Knudson, Magnus  
 Krueger, William  
 Koch, Franz  
 Litzinger, Edward  
 Math, John B.  
 Mavor, William  
 McManaman, John J.  
 Maypole, William T.  
 Miller, August W.  
 Miller, John J.  
 Mowrer, Ethan  
 Northrop, Clark F.  
 Norton, Frank

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