

SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONSTRUCTION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Political Visions, Economic Models and New Institutions

Unique and remarkable history of farm and labor unity

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My argument is the Knights of Labor and the Farmers Alliance “met” in Washington State. They shared a political vision of a commonwealth with the public ownership of essential resources controlled locally and directly by an electorate.

This social movement was a common understanding by how society should be organized. It periodically expressed itself through organizational and political formations that succeeded in creating long-lasting institutions and practices in this state.

This social movement had many of the elements of a successful social movement. (Lawrence Goodwyn, Populist Moment) : Autonomous Space for interpretation, Tactical Means of Recruitment, Achievement of a Social Analysis and a Means to Express New Ideas, i.e., a Political Party.

A. Eastern Capital in a Colonial Territory

Washington remained a territory for 36 years (1853-1889)
Native American Removal – Treaties and Wars and Land Donation Act

Commerce: Railroads, Northern Pacific. (40m). Jim Hill’s Great Northern (1893)
Land: Weyerhaeuser – 900,000 acres for \$6/acre from Jim Hill
Utilities: Boston’s Stone and Webster – Puget Sound Traction, Power.

B. Political Visions

Omaha Platform: national ownership, income tax, finance, elections, etc
200 Farmer Alliance, Sub-Alliances in Washington by 1890. (Farm/Labor)
Confederation of Industrial Organizations in 1891 (Spokane) – KOL/Alliance
Socialist led Grange. Washington chosen as site for socialist utopias.
Peoples Party Convention. Ellensburg 1892 (Bridges/Rogers, Legislative Victory)
Fusion Ticket Victory. John Rogers is Governor and Robert Bridges, Land Com.
Farmer Labor Party of 1920s. Governors Race with Bridges. Public Ownership

C. Early Infrastructure Victories: Finance and Education

Constitution of 1889. No Credit. Paramount Duty. State Funding (Barefoot)
Seattle and Tacoma – Municipal Ownership Leagues and Victories.

D. Defeating the Railroads, Owning the Ports

Great Northern (James J. Hill) reached Seattle in 1893
Controlled the land, waterfront, prices for storage and service
Labor, Local Business, Eastern Washington farmers united.
1911 legislative victory creating Port District Law. Populist Institution
Local Option to create District. Direct election of Commissioners
Seattle first municipal corporation in nation to run port terminal.
Robert Bridges a Port Commissioner. Policy Initiatives by public vote

Now approximately 60 in State. Airports (1941). Industrial development
(1955). Trade centers (1967). Economic Development/tourism (1980)

E. Replacing the Electric Monopolies with a Three Stage Public System: Federal Infrastructure, Regional Network and Local Ownership and Control

1. Federal Ownership of Hydroelectric Plants on the Columbia

1918 Billy Clapp and destitute farmers said Ice Dam (Pumpers)
Washington Water Power said canals on their rivers (Ditchers)
James Sullivan, Bellingham engineer, farmer, technician of feasibility
Rufus Woods – Inland Empire on River. Wenatchee World
FDR elected in 1932 – promoted Grand Coulee
8000 working on project in 1937. Bonneville on line 1939.
Model: Bureau or Corps own dams on Columbia. (308 report)

2. Regional Network – Transmission and Promotion

FDR promoted federal control via regional institutions, TVA
Columbia Valley Authority proposed to control power of hydros.
Grange didn't like federal control. Farmers didn't like land planning
Temporary Agency established: Bonneville Power Administration (1937)

JD Ross, First administrator. Transmission grid, Postage stamp, preference,
Public power promotion. Woody Guthrie songs (26/30 days, \$266, 1941)

3. Local Ownership and Control of electrical energy.

Homer T. Bone -- Bill in 1924 -- Municipals send power to rural areas
Grange/AFL. District Power Bill -- Initiative Number One of 1930
Public Utility Districts. Municipalities with Country Boundary
Purpose: Conserve water and power resources for benefit of residents
Campaign Slogan and Flag: "Progress Under Democracy"
During 1930s counties voted to create PUDs. Skamania first from BPA.
Threat of expropriation to get lower rates from monopolies
Post WW II, PUDs condemned, negotiated takeovers of private systems.
Alliances of farmers, labor and local business succeeded
Washington has 28 PUDS: 21 electric. 4 water only. 3 non-operational
Red Scare under Ike. No new Dams. PUDs built 5 dams on mid-Columbia

F. Replacing Private Capital (On Strike), Production for Use

Washington Commonwealth Federation -- creating the New Deal
Continued vision of People's Party and Farm-Labor Party
Proposed Production for Use Not for Profit Initiative (1936)
State Divided into Regions with Economy authority to invest
Initiative defeated. Grange (Farmers) not in line

Evaluation of Social Movement Infrastructure

Autonomous Space for Interpretation that counters Prevailing Wisdom (forming)

Tactical Means to Recruit (Movement Recruiting)

Achievement of new Social Analysis (movement educating)

Means to Express New Ideas (movement politicized)

The Reemergence of the Populist Tradition in Washington State A Social Movement to stop WPPSS (1980-1986)

Background to Revolt

By the 1960s, Public/Private fight merges into electric consumption
14 Dams on Columbia, rates only fall, experts in charge.
PNUCC – headed by John Ellis (Puget) says 20 nuclear plants needed.
HTPP – program to build nukes via WPPSS and dump costs into BPA hydro
WPPSS is Washington Public Power Supply System, a joint agency of PUDs.
Five 1000 megawatt plants under construction by WPPSS in late 1970s
Three WPPSS plants into BPA and two (#s 4&5) outside BPA
Rate Increases to PUDs for first time in history. "Inflation" is reason.

Notice of Insufficiency – June, 1976 - squeeze play – false energy crisis
Regional Power Bill. Carter signed it December 5, 1980. A wash in power.

Movement Elements

1. **Don't Bankrupt Washington.**
Initiative in 1981 to bring 250MW decision to voter. Passes.
Phone Bank technology. Steve Zemke and Ed Zuckerman. (students)
Opposition exposes interests behind nuclear construction
Initiative overturned in court by Seafirst Bank (Trustee)
2. **NW Conservation Action Coalition**
Seattle Based policy activists – monitor BPA compliance with Act
Enforce hierarchy: conservation first, then renewables, then fossil, etc.
3. **Ratepayers and Owners.** Two groups focused on PUD rate increases.
One more concerned about rates; other wants to assert ownership for
renewables. Outraged by rate increases and nuclear plant cost overruns.
Mobilizes rate payer forums in 15 counties.
4. **Progress Under Democracy.** Wants to create statewide political party
by electing people to Ports in odd years and PUDs in even years, creating
track record for shift into partisan politics against Ds and Rs. Creates list
of all PUD commissioners up for election in 1980, 1982, 1984. Offers
training in how to run for PUD commissioner.

5. **National Public Power Institute.** Based in Wenatchee, Washington. Foundation funded project to build nationwide coordination of groups Attempting take over of private utilities. Develops plans to attack all privately held energy resources and franchises in Washington State.

Crisis and Convergence

January 1981, WPPSS cancels plants 4 & 5. \$2.5 billion owned by PUDs, Cooperatives and municipalities. Wall Street brokers say pay up.

Massive ratepayer rallies at the high school auditoriums in 15 counties, mostly On the Westside of the state.

Movement summits in March and April in Olympia. Preserve local ownership, Draw Day campaign Against Seafirst Bank, Attack private utilities, etc.

Progress Under Democracy promotes candidates in 1982 elections of 26 Commissioners. Only 6 remain: Fourteen elected. 1984 elections, majority Control of major PUDs, Snohomish, Mason, Cowlitz and Clark.

PUD position: Refusal to pay \$2.8 billion unless ordered by US Supreme Court.

Accomplishments

Preserved PUDs as a public institution subject to electorate and debt free.
Four of the Five WPPSS nuclear plants stopped. Only WPPSS 2 operates
New community oriented commissioners elected from labor, environment.
Seafirst Bank almost goes bankrupt. Taken over by Bank of America.
Conservation Action Coalition still acts as watchdog on BPA planning.
\$2.8 billion dollar debt avoided, although some portion of it eventually paid.
Largest Security Fraud trial in history due to Municipal Bond default.

Difficulties

Progress Under Democracy unable to maintain coordination of newly elected.
Press characterized movement as "anti-nuclear"; political party idea fades.
No ideological agreement. Commonality was opposition to nuclear plants.