The Insurgent Republicans

Insurgent Image and Republican Reality

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In the years before professional image-building, few political groups managed to acquire a more enviable image than did the Republican insurgents of the Taft period. The Congressional insurgents, who first caught the country's attention with the fight against the Payne-Aldrich tariff in the Senate and against the dictatorial rule of Speaker Joseph Cannon in the House, compensated for their failure to win control of their party by winning extravagant praise from contemporary journalists. They have had scarcely less appeal for historians. Thomas Dreier entitled his 1910 study of the rebellious Republicans, Heroes of Insurgency, and later writers have followed his spirit, and very nearly his terminology. In 1940, Kenneth W. Hechler provided a highly favorable portrait in Insurgency, and Russel Nye's Midwestern Progressive Politics (1951) offered a sympathetic portrayal in the 1950s. Only in the most recent study, James L. Holt's Congressional Insurgents and the Party System (1967), is there any critical discussion of the limitations of the insurgents' ideas and political strategies.¹

Considered individually, insurgents have done at least as well. LaFollette, noted Gabriel Kolko (1963: 212), "has been spared the sort of comprehensive challenge to his reform and liberal reputation that Roosevelt and Wilson have been exposed to." The most recent biography, by David Thelen (1976), spares him further. Richard Lowitt (1963-1979) has provided a strongly favorable study of George Norris, further advancing the reputation developed in two previous and revealingly titled biographies, Integrity (Neuberger

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and Kahn, 1939), and Democracy's Norris (Lief, 1939). Albert Beveridge (Braeman, 1971), William Borah (McKenna, 1961), Jonathan Dolliver (Ross, 1958), and Joseph L. Bristow (Sagesser, 1968) have all found generally laudatory biographers.

Even "revisionist" historians, dubious about the entire Progressive movement, have found the insurgents the best of the lot. Kolko (1963: 213), although portraying La Follette as the foe of Wisconsin Socialists and a man of dim economic comprehension, concedes that he "spoke with indignation and passion for the cause of the small farmers and businessmen." James Weinstein (1968: 6) found La Follette and the insurgents only of only two pockets of genuine radicalism in the Progressive Era, and their leader one who "consistently and courageously attacked special privileges."

The insurgents shine particularly brightly compared with the historiographical darkness enveloping their sometimes allies, the Congressional Democrats. Historians have largely accepted George Norris's dictum that "the progressive and independent members are confined almost entirely to the Republican party in the House of Representatives" (Holt, 1967: 20), and expanded it to include the Senate. Studying Senate voting during the period, Howard W. Allen (1961: 222, 226) abandoned one quantification system because it labelled all Senate Democrats as progressives and omitted such insurgents as Borah and Bristow. Allen then adopted a new system which included all Republican insurgents, but dropped such progressive Democrats and William Hughes, Thomas J. Walsh, and Atlee Pomerene. Claude Barfield (1970) has painted a chilling portrait of Democratic ineptitude and selfishness during the Payne-Aldrich struggle. In a recent article, John D. Baker (1973) even cites the insurgents' sometime alliance with the Democrats as demonstrating the limitations of their reform commitment.

Yet a close examination of insurgent attitudes and behavior in the struggles that created their image—the Payne-Aldrich tariff fight and the House rules change—raises questions not only about their progressivism but about their relations with the Democrats. The insurgents received—and required—Democratic support not only in Congress but outside it, but spurned close alliance for reasons which can hardly be described as progressive. That their independence—which condemned them to impotence within a conservative Republican party—assisted in the cultivation of their image tells
us less about relative insurgent and Democratic progressivism than about contemporary criteria used to judge it.

At the first meeting of the sixty-first Congress, in April 1909, a normally ceremonial roll call announced the advent of insurgency. Thirty Republicans joined with the Democrats to defeat the rules of the previous House which had given the Speaker, reactionary Joseph Cannon of Illinois, almost total control of the body. Because of the surprise defection of twenty-three Democrats, the victory resulted in only limited changes, and the issue would rise again. During the battle, Democrats had consistently expressed admiration for the insurgents who, in turn, seemed to treat the Democrats as political untouchables who happened to be voting the same way. “Mr. Speaker,” stated one sharply, “the alliance between the insurgents and the Democrats goes merely to changing the rules” (Clark, 1920: 268-270; Cox, 1946: 65; Hechler, 1940: 57; U.S., Congress. Congressional Record, vol. 44, part 1, p. 26. Hereafter cited as CR).

Such attitudes seemed to promise little cooperation for revising the tariff, the purpose for which Congress had been called into session. Although Roosevelt had never considered the tariff a valid reform issue, the cost of living had been rising steadily under the high-protection Dingley Tariff of 1897, and demand for a revision—especially from the Republican Midwest—had forced the party to include such a pledge in its 1908 platform. No image has done more to define the relative position of Democrats and insurgent Republicans than that of the insurgents, in the spring and summer of 1909, battling nobly for tariff reform and reduction, while the Democrats, ostensibly committed to a lower tariff, clumsily try to grab what protection they can for their own constituents.

Despite Clark’s best efforts, Democratic behavior in the House contributed to this tableau. Forty Democrats opposed an amendment to put lumber on the free list; slightly fewer voted against free hides. Such defections, along with those on the rules vote, led observers to declare the Democrats in the House “a demoralized party” (Collier’s, 15 May 1909). Nevertheless, on every roll call, the great majority of Democrats supported the lower rate, often holding firm against the interests of their constituents. In the final vote on the bill, not a single insurgent joined the Democrats in opposition (CR, 44:1: 1293-1298, 1301).
However divided and uncertain the Democrats appeared in their attempts to lower the tariff, the insurgent Republicans seemed to be aiming at something else entirely. No insurgent would begin a tariff speech without first affirming his belief in the protective system. Their complaint was simply that their states were not getting their fair share. On two of the three schedules (lumber, barley, and hides) that the insurgents forced to a record vote on the final day, they tried not to reduce the tariff rate, but increase it. Kansas Republicans, taunted a standpatter, “voted for free lumber because their state does not produce any, and for a duty on hides because that was important to their pocketbooks” (CR, 44:1:1158, 1293-1298). The defection of twenty-nine Democrats on the vote to take hides off the free list is often noted, but not a single insurgent voted the other way. With the aid of regular Republicans (and a dozen Democrats) the insurgents increased the proposed tariff on barley by 60%. Far more than the derided Democrats, the insurgents believed that tariff reduction should begin somewhere else than at home.

“The ten insurgents in the Senate,” commented Collier’s (19 July 1909) at the end of the tariff debate, “comprise the only effective opposition to the present domination of national politics by the power of organized wealth.” This indirect comparison of the performances of the Senate insurgents and Democrats has persisted. During the three-month fight on the Payne-Aldrich bill, while the Democrats appeared largely ineffectual, Senate insurgents delivered cogent, informed, and sometimes eloquent attacks on the measure. The Democrats suffered from lack of leadership, insignificant numbers (35% of the Senate and 44% of the House) and divisions on a few well-publicized issues. Next to this picture of dullness and inconsistency, the image of the insurgents, courageously and ably battling their own party leaders, with such dramatic figures as La Follette and Jonathan Dolliver, has proven irresistible. The insurgents’ single-handed—and mythical—struggle against the Payne-Aldrich Tariff has become a historiographical truism (see for example, Mowry, 1946: Ch. 2).

No one would have accepted this perspective more fully than the insurgents themselves. Democrats, to them, were unreliable and not very important adjuncts to their fight. “I have little doubt,” sneered Cummins, early on, “that many of them will stand before the country as delinquents.” Dealing with such people, insurgents wanted only their votes. “I am not in a mood,” snapped Norris
Brown of Nebraska about one amendment, "to have much opposition from that side of the aisle to my proposition." Relations with the Democrats were not important anyway, explained Moses Clapp of Minnesota; they were just a matter of "here and there a point where one on the one side and another upon the other wishing a given tariff could vote together" (CR, 44:2: 1789, 1810; 44:4: 3382).

In response, Senate Democrats praised the insurgents at every opportunity. Texas Senator Joseph W. Bailey commended their "obedience to their own convictions." The blind Thomas Gore of Oklahoma announced, "I hope the Lord will increase the tribe of progressive Republicans," and urged Democrats not to run against them. "I am prepared to go along with them along the line of reform," said Francis Newlands of Nevada, virtually enlisting under the insurgent banner, "though perhaps they may not be willing to go as far as I may" (CR, 44:3: 2332; 44:4: 4313; 44:2: 1441).

But in that last subordinate clause, Newlands provided a clue to insurgent-Democratic relations which has been generally ignored by historians. "What divided the insurgents from these potential allies (Democrats) was not ideology but party affiliation," according to James Holt (1967: 15); as Midwesterners, they had to remain at least nominally Republican for political reasons. But the insurgents, as both they and their sometimes allies realized, were not just Democrats with hayseeds in their hair. "I am just as ardent a believer in and as faithful to the principle of protection as is the Senator from Michigan," Albert Cummins of Iowa rightly told one stand-patter, and every insurgent paid homage to protection during the debate. Although the demand for tariff revision had arisen due to the already high protection levels of the Dingley tariff, insurgents were generally willing to let rates stay at that level; they fought only Majority Leader Nelson Aldrich's increases. The insurgents opposed not protection, but "excess protection," a term which they seem to have defined anew with each roll call. They certainly did not favor the Democratic plan of a nonprotective revenue tariff; before voting against the bill, Cummins took pains to make clear that however bad the bill, it was far superior to any possible revenue tariff. "Their idea is, when they strike down certain schedules, to maintain the great principle of the bill," observed Democrat Isidor Rayner of Maryland, "and I am against the principle of the bill."

In opposing "excessive protection," the insurgents fashioned a rationalization which made attacks on their consistency, such as
those which bedeviled the Democrats, nearly impossible. When La Follette voted to raise the barley duty still higher than the House-increased rate, he could explain that such protection was not excessive, but essential. In the same argument used by noninsurgent Republicans on other schedules, he swore that without it, Americans would have to stop growing barley (CR, 44: 3: 2701).

That protection which the insurgents could unanimously agree was excessive, such as on lumber, rarely involved products of the Great Plains. “Those who live on the prairies and in the states where timber is exhausted,” noted Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina, sardonically, “are crying for free lumber.” William Borah of Idaho, who would become a leading insurgent, charge Knute Nelson of Minnesota with favoring free lumber only because Minnesota’s supply was almost gone. Curiously, in both the Senate and the House, the free lumber amendments were introduced not by insurgents but by conservative Republicans from the “insurgent” North Central States (CR, 44: 3: 2316; 44: 2: 1880).

The insurgents’ slippery tariff philosophy produced, on ninety-one roll-call votes on tariff rates, a consistently higher tariff position than that taken by the “demoralized” Democrats (see Figure 1). On the average roll-call, ten insurgents produced more votes for the higher rate (2.58 to 2.24) than did thirty-two Democrats. From another perspective, 89.6% of Democratic votes cast (1774 of 1979) were for the lower rate, while only 72.1% of insurgent votes (606 of 841) were on that side. Further, the figures do not include hundreds of Democratic votes paired against higher rates; insurgents, unable to pair with fellow Republicans, had to record their votes.

The chart also underscores the attitude of the two allies toward each other. To Democratic senators, it made little difference whether an amendment to reduce a rate was introduced by a Democrat or an insurgent; they supported it 20.75-1.18 in the first case, 20.61-1.54 in the second. But insurgent senators, while voting overwhelmingly for reductions introduced by themselves (8.54-1.04), actually cast most of their votes against Democratic reduction amendments (3.39-5.36). Often, La Follette alone crossed party lines to vote for the lower rate.

The relative progressivism of Democrats and insurgents on the tariff issue is also reflected in Figure 2. Based on all 129 votes taken during the special session, it calculates how often each senator voted
Democratic Reduction Amendments (28)  Insurgent Reduction Amendments (28)  Finance Committee Increases (22)  Regular Republican Reduction Amendments (7)  Regular Republican Increase Amendments (4)  Democratic Increase Amendments (2)  All Votes Average (91)

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L = Lower rate  
H = Higher rate  
Insurgent votes are those cast by the ten Republicans voting against the Senate bill.

**Figure 1** Average Votes by Democrats and Insurgents on Tariff Roll-Calls
with or against Nelson Aldrich, Senate Majority Leader and arch-protectionist. It shows that of thirty-two Democrats, only two—the Louisianians, willing to exchange their votes on virtually anything for protection for rice and sugar—voted with Aldrich more often than did the leading insurgent, La Follette. Only four of the insurgents voted against Aldrich two-thirds of the time, and two of them voted against him less than half the time.

Such statistics led the leading tariff authority of the time, F. W. Taussig (1910: 375) of Harvard, to charge that insurgents had shown not courage and dedication in the fight, but “half-heartedness and inconsistency.” Yet popular attacks centered on the Democrats. Only five Democratic senators, charged one magazine muckraker, were “really consistent low-tariff men” who had voted for every reduction, and against every increase (Baker, 1910). He did not note that by those criteria, not a single insurgent would have qualified.

The insurgent philosophy on the tariff became even clearer during the next Congress, when a Democratic House of Representatives began passing substantial tariff reductions. Senate insurgents, holding the balance of power in that body, forced substantial increases in House-passed meat, sugar, cotton, and wool schedules (CR: 48: 7: 7378; 48: 10: 9631-9638, 9709, 9755, 9613, 9908). As a champion of protection for wool, La Follette served for the first time on a conference committee; Cummins confessed openly, “I do not want the foreign manufacturer to be able to enter our markets” (CR, 48: 7: 7312).

The second session of the Sixty-first Congress began not with insurgent vows to continue the struggle, but with an unsolicited pledge by the House insurgents to support Taft’s legislative program, an act which the New York World (2 February 1910) disgustedly charged “made their surrender to the White House complete.” (Taft pronounced himself “very much pleased” [N.Y. Times, 2 February 1910]). “I have waited for five months,” wrote William Allen White to Taft, “to find some decent opportunity to tell you that if you will just let the insurgents alone they will come home like Little Bo-peep’s sheep” (Johnson, 1947: 105). The insurgents took the action although Taft had hardly “let the insurgents alone.” In a fall tour he had identified himself closely with the regular wing of the party, and reports from both the White House and the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee warned of patron-
### INSURGENT REPUBLICANS

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<tr>
<td>Crawford (S.D.)</td>
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The 38 votes not included in Figure I concerned the income tax, the Philippine tariff, the tariff commission, and the final votes on passing the Senate and conference committee bills.

Chart from Collier's, August 29, 1909.

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**Figure 2** Votes for and Against Aldrich

...age cutoffs and primary opponents for the rebels (N.Y. World, 5 January 1910; St. Louis Republic 11 January 1910).

What had impelled the House insurgents to make this gratuitous pledge of fealty, to feed the mouth that had been biting them? It could hardly have been fear: the insurgents knew they were far stronger in the Midwest than Taft. Rather, what motivated the insurgents to attest so consistently the orthodoxy of their Republicanism was a distaste for the alternative. The insurgents, a Demo-
ocratic Senator once complained, were "imbued with an inherent and traditional hostility to the Democratic party." Mostly small town Midwesterners, they reflected the biases of their region. William Allen White, watching the 1912 Democratic convention after the Republican chaos at Chicago, found it "a sinister exhibition...more unrestrained, more savage. ... It was all Irish, and the rebel yell ripped through the applause like a knife" (1946: 478).

The Midwest, as much as the South, still fought the Civil War in the Progressive Era. Speculating on why insurgents had such difficulty allying with Democrats, one magazine noted, "In most of these states the name 'Democrat' still suggests 'rebel'" (World's Work, Dec. 1909). When the Midwestern states turned insurgent, their anti-Southern feelings evolved into an attack on the largely Bryanite South for its "conservatism." Donald Richberg, an Illinois Bull Mooser, recalled, "It was the prevailing Progressive theory that the Democratic party would not be permanently progressive because of what we regarded as the ultra conservatism of the South" (1954: 81). La Follette, who had worked closely with Southern Democrats in the Senate, and had based his Wisconsin railroad rate law on an earlier Texas model, announced during his 1912 Presidential campaign, "I don't know of any progressive sentiment or any progressive legislation in the South" (Link, 1946: 173; Thelen, 1976: 45).

The insurgents felt no more comfortable with the other center of Democratic power, the city and its immigrants. "Things will only be better," prescribed Borah, "when the face of the American citizen turns from the crowded and congested conditions of the city to a more intensive life on the farm" (McKenna, 1961: 98). One House insurgent compared "homes of cleanliness and comfort, peace and plenty" with "the smoking, steaming piles of city masonry," (CR, 47: 1: 368) and Coe Crawford of South Dakota decried "the tendency to smother the life of our race in these congested centers" (CR, 47: 2: 1272). In stronger terms than Bryan would ever use, Norris charged bluntly, "The city has always been the breeding place of crime and immorality" (Holt, 1967: 9).

Social attitudes, therefore, combined with farm state political realities to make the insurgents reluctant to identify too closely with the Democrats; yet only an insurgent-Democratic coalition could hope to achieve the Midwesterners' aim of a blow at Joseph Cannon. When insurgent George Norris obtained the floor on March 17,
1910, to introduce a motion removing the Speaker from the Rules Committee, he found immediate Democratic support in votes and speeches (CR, 45: 3: 3293-3294, 3392). Yet after early procedural votes showed the insurgents and the now unanimous Democrats in control of the House, regular and insurgent Republicans twice combined to force recesses to try to find a compromise (Clark, 1921: II: 276). Nor did the insurgents’ statements on the floor suggest intransigence; they complained of their treatment on committee appointments, something which could be easily adjusted, and avowed their dedication to the Republican party. Edmund Madison of Kansas called the House to witness that the insurgents were voting for a Republican resolution, not one introduced by Democrats, and Henry Cooper of Wisconsin spoke movingly of his family’s involvement in the antislavery movement (CR 45: 3: 3304, 3318-3323, 3415-3416). But when the regulars would not agree to remove the Speaker from the Rules Committee, negotiations collapsed (Clark, 1921: II: 276).

Despite complaints in the Democratic caucus about the insurgents’ attitude (Timmons, 1948: 61; Clark, 1921: II: 277), Democrats unanimously voted with the insurgents to create a new, ten-man, speakerless Rules Committee (CR, 45: 4: 3437). Victory, however, posed only another problem. “Whether anything is gained,” William Jennings Bryan’s Commoner (25 March 1910) warned, “will depend on the character of the men chosen for the new committee.” If the insurgents now entered the Republican caucus to select the six Republican members, warned Oscar Underwood of Alabama, “the Speaker will dominate legislation and control the situation just as he did before the changes in the rules.” Only by keeping the selection on the House floor, and maintaining their alliance with the Democrats (who offered two seats on the new Rules Committee as a reward for cooperation) could the insurgents have any influence (Louisville Courier-Journal, 21 March 1910).

Horrified, the insurgents spurned such a course. “We are Republicans,” explained the normally fiery Victor Murdock of Kansas. “If the majority of the Republicans in Congress wish to appoint again a lot of high-handed rulers to the Rules Committee that is their problem” (New York World, 22 March 1910). In caucus, Norris himself nominated the arch-Cannonite, Sereno Payne, Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, to the new committee. Unsurprisingly, the caucus named six regulars (Louisville Courier-
Journal, 22 March 1910). Thirty years later, one insurgent told historian Kenneth Hechler that taking the Speaker off the Rules Committee had not meant much (Hechler, 1940: 81).

In his autobiography, Norris (1945: 301) explained that the alliance with the Democrats had limited the possibility of reform. The Democrats, he charged, did not wish to weaken the Speaker seriously, since they expected Clark to hold the office in the next Congress, and historians (Baker, 1973: 683) have accepted Norris's version. Yet when Clark did become Speaker, one year later, he led the Democrats in stripping the Speaker of all power to appoint committees. The Norris rules resolution was only the first step in what one political scientist has called "the most significant changes in this century—perhaps in the history of Congress" (Jones 1968: 634; 1970: 15).

Despite their stigmatizing the Democrats as unclean, the insurgents owed them not only their Congressional accomplishments, but often their seats. In many states, a Democratic nomination meant little, and Bryanites invaded the Republican primary to support insurgents. La Follette admitted that his early candidacies for governor of Wisconsin were aided by Democratic votes (La Follette, 1913: 347), and ten thousand Democrats provided Coe Crawford's margin of victory in the 1908 South Dakota Senate primary (New York World, 10 August 1908). The same year, a worried standpat Congressman tried to keep Democrats out of the Iowa Republican primaries (Briggs, 1919: 238). In Wisconsin, the Democrats demonstrated their importance when they returned to the Democratic primaries with the coming of Wilson. "With that defection," notes one historian of Wisconsin Progressivism, "the makeup of the Republican party became more apparent," and La Follette's control diminished (Margulies, 1968: 126).

Democratic votes would play a key role in the 1910 Republican primaries, when the insurgents resisted Taft's purge attempts and increased their numbers. "At the Wisconsin and Washington primaries," a radical Democrat (Louis F. Post Papers, 20 September 1910) wrote Charles Bryan, "our kind of Democrat went over almost bodily... to La Follette in the former and [Miles] Poindexter in the latter." In the insurgents' two most dramatic victories, Democratic votes helped Hiram Johnson win the nomination for governor of California (Rogin, 1968: 303), and defeated James Tawney,
Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, in Minnesota (Wyman, 1967: 327-328). Even Democratic leaders supported the GOP insurgents; Bryan endorsed Norris in Nebraska (N.Y. World, 30 July 1910), and the leading Democrat in Minnesota came out for Senator Moses Clapp. "It appears whenever there was a contest of insurgents against regulars, Democrats left their own primaries and voted the insurgent ticket," wrote the political expert of the World (Pulitzer Papers, 20 October 1910). "It was so in Wisconsin, Kansas, Iowa, California, and Minnesota."

The insurgents also benefited from a friendly Democratic press. "Urge Democrats to vote for insurgent candidates in districts where Democrats cannot be elected." Joseph Pulitzer (Papers, 8 August 1910) instructed his editor. "Support Bristow, Cummins, and Dolliver especially. They ought to be in the Democratic party. I wish to God they were." When Taft attempted to coerce the insurgents by cutting off patronage, they received warm endorsements from such Democratic papers as the Baltimore Sun (1 March 1911) and the St. Louis Republic (23 October 1910), which editorialized, "The progressives did not insurge over differences in patronage or details of party management. Their stand, involving great sacrifices, was based on principle." Even so conservative a Democratic newspaper as the New York Times (8 April 1910) praised the insurgents as "that wing of the Republicans who have the sympathy and support of the people."

Insurgents, however, liked Democrats no better on the hustings than in Congress. Campaigning for the reactionary Republican House floor leader in 1910, Cummins proclaimed, "Anyone who reaches the conclusion that we ought to substitute for any Republican the best Democrat on earth badly needs an intellectual stimulant" (Public, 28 October 1910). Few insurgents ever needed such stimulation.

Constant insurgent attacks on Democrats in and out of Congress stemmed partly from home-state politics, partly from distaste, and partly from the open ambition of at least five insurgents (La Follette, Borah, Beveridge, Cummins, Dolliver) for a Republican presidential nomination. Not only did the attacks needlessly hamper the prospects of reform legislation, they helped from an inaccurate—but persistent—view of Progressive Era political realities.
Slowly, as historians examine the political history of the Progressive Era more intensely, the longtime image of the Democrats as a bumbling and divided band following after the insurgents is changing. Howard Allen, who fifteen years ago abandoned a quantification model that depicted Democrats as too progressive, has recently concluded that “the issues of the Progressive Era were fought out within the framework of traditional partisan alignment” (Allen and Clubb, 1975). His quantitative study (in collaboration with Jerome M. Clubb) of Senate Democrats in the Sixty-first Congress, long derided for their divided stance on the Payne-Aldrich tariff, revealed the highest level of cohesion of fifteen selected Congresses, including the first Congresses of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. “Almost all Democrats,” they stated of that maligned contingent, “voted consistently in support of progressive reform measures” (Allen and Clubb, 1975: 133).

Why did contemporary observers fail, or decline, to note this situation? To some extent, the Democrats’ public relations problems derived from their obvious problems with organization, which led some observers to confuse lack of harmony with lack of progressivism. But another idea emerges from a look at the contemporary arbiters of progressivism.

Middle-class reform magazines wielded great influence in the Progressive Era. Journals such as Collier’s, the American Magazine, the Outlook, and World’s Work composed the national media of the time. Their best-known writers, such as William Allen White, Lincoln Steffens, and Ray Stannard Baker became national celebrities. The magazine praised La Follette and the insurgents, and did much to arouse national interest in reforms. They also closely reflected the middle-class outlook of their readers (Goldman, 1952: 171-176).

This meant, in part, unflinching opposition to Bryanism. When Ray Stannard Baker (1910) wrote in the American Magazine that Democratic House leader Champ Clark was “a traditional radical rather than a constructive radical,” he reflected this attitude. None of the magazines had supported Bryan in 1908 (Hard, 1907; Chamberlain, 1908; Child, 1907; Cheney, 1908). In support of Taft,
Collier’s had featured William Allen White (1908) explaining “He who errs on the side of the weak errs just as totally... as he who errs for the strong.” Norman Mack, Democratic National Chairman, founded his own magazine in 1909, goaded “by the contemptible treatment our party received at the hands of nearly every magazine in the country during the campaign of 1908...” (Newlands Papers, 1 June 1910).

The uplift magazines cared no more for the Democrats’ Northern constituents, immigrants and labor. In the Northeast, as Richard Abrams (1964) has pointed out, these groups, rather than disgruntled middle-class Republicans, were the true insurgents. The magazines were not overly nativist, but when Mark Sullivan said of the insurgents in Collier’s, “Wisconsin and Minnesota contain some of the best alien strains that have come to the American blood” (Collier’s 21 July 1908), the identity of other less desirable (and more Democratic) types was clear. Although the magazines often sympathized with labor, they were horrified at its new electoral activities. The World’s Work (Sept. 1908) headlined “LABOR’S DANGEROUS PART IN POLITICS,” and the Outlook (5 Dec. 1908) warned that the resolutions of the AFL convention that year showed a “distinctly Socialistic character.” When the AFL entered the Congressional campaign in 1906, Collier’s (24 Sept. 1906) had condemned its effort “to ruin some of our most high-minded office-holders because of honest differences in opinion.”

With such a world-view, the influential magazines found the insurgents highly congenial. They were reformers, but reasonable, responsible, and from the American heartland. Several of the writers and editors became friends of the Midwesterners. The magazines gave the insurgents valuable publicity, enviable reputations, and a leg up on history.

Closer examination of voting patterns, social attitudes, and individual biographies, however, gives us a more accurate and useful conception of progressivism than do the impressions held by contemporary, sympathetic observers. As we develop a new idea of reformism, it may lead us to new ideas of the identity of the most advanced reformers.
NOTES

1. The phrase "insurgent" is used here to mean the ten Republican Senators who voted against the Payne-Aldrich Tariff (see Figure 2 for their names) and the forty-two in the House, led by George Norris of Nebraska, who voted to reform the Rules Committee.

2. For a detailed account of the bolters' motives see Claude Barfield, (1969: 35-46).

3. La Follette ran for the Republican nomination in 1908, 1912, and 1916; Cummins in 1912 and 1916; Borah in 1916. Dolliver died in 1910, and Beveridge lost his Senate seat before they could strike for higher office.

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