

JOHN E. RICKARDS: MONTANA'S SECOND GOVERNOR,
A REPUBLICAN IN A TIME OF CRISIS

by

HELEN M. WANKEN

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Thomas A. Clinch

(Signature of Reader)

Dr. Ann J. Breytak

(Signature of Reader)

Francis J. Kegenstein

(Signature of Reader)

March 25, 1970

(Date)

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CHAPTER I
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICAL CAREER
OF JOHN E. RICKARDS

John E. Rickards was born and raised in Delaware City, Delaware. At the age of nineteen he left his hometown to find employment in Philadelphia in a mercantile establishment. By 1870 John Rickards felt the stirring of a young man's roving spirit. Rather than seek employment elsewhere in the East, he went West to Pueblo, Colorado. Here he settled for a few years working as a bookkeeper and clerk. While in Colorado, he married the descendant of one of the oldest colonial families in the East, Miss Lizzie M. Wilson. Their marriage was blessed with three sons. At the close of the seventies, Rickards once more found himself yielding to wanderlust. This time he followed the frontier still farther west to take residence in the coastal city of San Francisco. In 1881 Lizzie died, and by 1882 John Rickards once again pulled up stakes. He moved to Montana, the state whose early political life he was destined to help form. In 1883 he remarried -- a widow from Pembroke, Ontario named Eliza A. Boucher. They had five children, two of whom died in infancy. While in Montana, Rickards began operations in the oil trade in Butte. He was obviously a popular citizen of the community for he was elected as

alderman, given a seat in the upper house of the territorial legislature, and in 1889 was chosen as a member of the state constitutional convention.

Montana had been making overtures for statehood for a long while. As early as 1866 a constitutional convention was held in Helena under the direction of Thomas Francis Meagher, the state's territorial governor. A constitution was written and subsequently taken to St. Louis, Missouri for printing. The delegate in charge of the copy of the constitution lost it either on the journey to St. Louis or while he was there. In any event, further efforts for statehood were not forthcoming from this meeting. In 1884 a second constitutional convention was organized through the guidance of Joseph K. Toole, a prominent Montana Democrat. Again a constitution was drafted and this time was presented to Congress. However, Montana was not given statehood because the Congress was Republican, and Montana had strong Democratic leanings at this time.¹ By 1889 Montana was finally admitted to the Union in a bill giving statehood to Washington and the Dakotas as well.

In 1889 a state convention was held in Helena from the fourth of July through the seventeenth of August for the specific purpose of adopting a state constitution. A noted Montanan, William A. Clark, presided at this meeting. The

¹Thomas A. Clinch, "Populism and Bimetallism in Montana," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1964), 28.

convention consisted of seventy-five delegates from twenty-five districts into which the sixteen counties had been divided. The more populous counties of Lewis and Clark, Silver Bow, Missoula and Deer Lodge were represented by about the same number of representatives as all the other counties combined. Rickards was a member of the influential Silver Bow delegation. The resolution which raised the most discussion was the one that proposed to constitutionally exempt the mines from taxation.² Another major issue was the permanent location of the state capital. Many of labor's bids were also defeated at the convention such as the eight hour day and Chinese exclusion. The future composition of the Senate and the House was also agreed upon. By the first of October the state constitution was ratified, and the first state officers were chosen -- each to begin his term on November 8, 1889. Joseph K. Toole, a Democrat, became Montana's first governor while a Republican, John E. Rickards, was given the position of second in command as lieutenant governor.

Montana's First Legislature convened on November 23, 1889. The most important issue confronting the new legislative body was the election of two United States senators. The lawmaking task to which this body was assigned was hindered due to a developing problem concerning five

²Tom Stout, Montana, Its Story and Biography, (Chicago, 1921), Vol. I, 441.

disputed seats from Precinct Thirty-four in Butte. Both parties claimed the seats, and thus a dual House resulted. Under the auspices of Governor Toole, the Democratic House met in the court house; while E. A. Kenny, the state auditor, issued a proclamation for the Republican House to meet in Iron Hall. The Senate had no disputed seats and conveniently consisted of eight Democrats and eight Republicans with Rickards holding the deciding vote. However, the Democratic senators refused to meet with their Republican peers, and when they did meet together, the Democrats refused to vote. The proceedings for a good part of the session consisted merely of roll calls and adjournments. This impasse caused Rickards to issue his famous ruling that those senators present but not voting would not be considered absent, but together with the Republican members would be considered to constitute a quorum. Acting on this basis, he was able to effect an organization of the Senate. Rickards' ruling gained great infamy among the Democrats and subsequently led them to term Rickards the "great mathematician" who thinks "seven is a majority of sixteen." When it came to the election of senators, the Republican House met with the Republican Senate and selected Wilbur F. Sanders and Thomas C. Power, both of Helena. The joint session of the Democratic houses opted for William A. Clark of Butte and Martin Maginnis of Helena. Because the national Senate was dominated by Republicans, Sanders and Power were seated. The deadlock in the Montana legislature

was not broken until January 28, 1891 when a compromise settlement was reached. Due to the unfortunate circumstances of this first legislative session, little productive legislation was effected.

CHAPTER II
MAJOR PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE STATE

INTRODUCTION

During the tenure of office of John E. Rickards, two problems dominated the Montana political scene. One of these, strictly of local nature, was the attempt by the Northern Pacific Railroad to claim many of the state's rich mineral lands -- this attempt later known as the Northern Pacific Land Grabs controversy. The other issue (perhaps of even greater importance) was the silver question, which affected not only Montana but all of the Western mining states. These two problems were major political concerns of all Montanans in the 1890's, and thus need to be more fully discussed in order that a treatment of the political years of John E. Rickards can be seen in the right perspective.

THE NORTHERN PACIFIC MINERAL LANDS CONTROVERSY

Transportation proved to be one of the most important questions facing the state in her early development. Because of the rich gold fields, wagon roads were developed in the early years of Montana's history. These roads, such as the Bozeman and Bridger Roads, the Mullen Road, and the

Niobrara Road, while providing only limited transportation facilities, nonetheless proved to be adequate in the placer mining period. However, when Montana entered the era of quartz mining, the necessity of a much more sophisticated system of transportation quickly became evident. No longer was mining simply an individual enterprise. Out-of-state and foreign capital were needed to finance operations, to sink the mine shafts, and to extract the ores. Once the ores were removed from the ground, there still existed problems of sending the ores to the East or to Europe for smelting and for market. Montana was not totally devoid of railroad transport. The Utah and Northern had served part of the state since 1881. However, this railroad was neither state-wide, nor did it have a standard gage which made connections with other roads difficult. Montana saw her only hope for adequate transportation in a transcontinental system -- in this case the Northern Pacific Railroad.

After several unsuccessful financial starts, the Northern Pacific was finally bought by Henry Villard, who directed the railway to completion in September, 1883. Montana was now part of the transcontinental system, which to the casual observer, would seem to fulfill all her hopes. However, for those concerned about Montana's wealth, particularly her rich mineral lands, the problems had just begun.

The Northern Pacific was a land grant railroad, which in Montana alone authorized the company to receive fourteen million acres of land. The terms of the land grant entitled

the railroad to ten alternate sections of land on either side of the track for every mile constructed in the states. In the territories, the amount of land was raised to twenty acres. These lands could be chosen within fifty miles on either side of the track with the exclusion of mineral lands, except those containing coal or iron.¹

The Northern Pacific was given a charter which stipulated that the railroad must be completed by July 4, 1876. In 1866 this date was extended by Congress to July 4, 1878.² Encountering serious financial difficulties during construction, the Northern Pacific attempted to win from Congress a further extension of the completion date. Failing to obtain its demand, the company felt that it had only to complete the railroad under the original specifications of the charter. In 1879 the Attorney General, Charles Devens, declared an extended completion date for the railroad, and it finished under these circumstances.³

However, the technicality that the company had not complied with the letter of the charter and its amendments was to provide ammunition for its opponents in Montana, once it attempted to acquire mineral lands within its grant in terms of a tortured interpretation of what the charter meant in originally excluding them.⁴

¹Thomas A. Clinch, "The Northern Pacific Railroad and Montana's Mineral Lands," Pacific Historical Review, XXXIV (August, 1965), 325.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 326.

⁴Ibid.

The Northern Pacific began choosing its lands in 1884, working on the supposition that the mineral lands were "fair play" if they were not known to be mineral in character when the company was given its charter in 1864.⁵ Consequently, the Northern Pacific chose many lands which contained valuable minerals. The citizens of Montana became indignant that the railroad was being allowed to rob the state of her mineral wealth. Conventions were held in Helena to discuss ways of effectively dealing with the railroad for if the assumption of the Northern Pacific were correct, many mines might become company property if the railroad so desired to choose those sections of land on which existing mines were located.

The dispute eventually came before the courts in 1890, and unfortunately for Montana, the decision was in favor of the railroad.⁶ The defendants refused to give up, and in the case entitled Barden et al. v. Northern Pacific Railway Company further appealed their case to the United States Supreme Court with the help of funds from the state of Montana. In May of 1894, a decision was made in favor of Barden. Conclusions drawn by the high court were:

1. The Northern Pacific Railroad Company cannot recover under the grant to it by the Act of Congress of July 2, 1864, mineral lands, from persons in possession thereof who have made

⁵Ibid., 327.

⁶Ibid., 329.

locations, although the mineral character of the land was not discovered until the year of 1888, no patent having been issued to the Company therefor.

2. It was the intention of Congress to exclude from the grant of lands to the Northern Pacific Railway, of July 2, 1864, actual mineral lands, whether known or unknown, and not merely such as were at the time known to be mineral.
3. Nothing will pass by a government to the grantee by implication or inference, unless essential to the enjoyment of the thing granted, and exceptions intended for the benefit of the public are to be liberally construed.⁷

Further to protect the state's mineral lands, Montana Representative, Charles S. Hartman, introduced House Resolution 3476 which asked for the classification of mineral lands in Montana and Idaho.⁸ Both the Barden case and the House Resolution, which did become a bill, were instrumental in preserving Montana's mineral lands.

THE SILVER ISSUE

The silver question was an important issue for the whole nation in the latter years of the nineteenth century, but most particularly for the Western mining states. An understanding of this question is intimately linked to a comprehension of the bimetallic system. In brief summary, advocates of bimetallism reasoned in this fashion: for the greater part of the period we know as modern history, man

⁷Ibid., 331.

⁸Ibid., 334.

has used both gold and silver as the basis of his monetary system. The supply of gold and silver increased as man's need for an expanded money system increased. The use of the double standard acted as a stabilizer, for if one of the metals rose in value, the metal of lower value temporarily became the standard, thus tending once again to equalize the ratio.⁹ Proponents of bimetallism saw the system as nearly perfect, for they were inclined to feel that it worked to the advantage of neither the creditor nor the debtor class.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, certain classes of people began to seriously question the reasoning behind the double standard. In 1867, an international monetary conference had suggested the abolition of the bimetallic system and the adoption of a single monetary unit.¹⁰ The creditor classes seized on this opportunity to convince the nations of the world to opt for the gold standard. England had already replaced her bimetallic standard with the gold standard, and shortly after the conference, Germany did likewise. In 1873, the United States followed suit by passing the Coinage Act which removed silver from the official coinage list. Silver producers later evidenced their displeasure over this action by referring to it as the "Crime

⁹ Elmer Ellis, Henry Moore Teller, Defender of the West, (Caldwell, 1941), 185.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of 1873."¹¹ With many of the smaller European nations also switching to the gold standard, there became less of a demand for silver, and it rapidly fell in value. To add fuel to the fire, gold production decreased while silver production increased, thus creating an even greater gap between the values of the two metals.

The crux of the problem did not rest with the metals themselves, but extended far beyond to the creditor-debtor struggle. Debtors felt that the replacement of bimetallism with monometallism was wholesale discrimination against the debtor class. Deflation occurred and extant debts consequently rose in value. Debtors had to pay back obligations with dollars worth far more than those they had originally borrowed. The West was the section most adversely affected by the trends to monometallism. Mine operators became concerned about the possibilities of shut-downs; the mine workers became anxious about their jobs. Agrarian debtors were understandably opposed to the single standard because of the foreboding reality of deflation.

In 1878, the Bland-Allison Act was passed, and long remained a compromise on the silver issue.¹² However, the bill was not acceptable to any convinced bimetallist, nor was the general public willing to keep the bulky silver

¹¹Thomas A. Clinch, "Populism and Bimetallism in Montana," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1964), 5.

¹²Ellis, Henry Moore Teller, 187.

dollars in circulation. Bimetallists continued to work for the restoration of their system, and the continual dropping in the price of silver only served to renew their enthusiasm. By 1889, the pro-silver forces began to organize in earnest. November of the year saw the initial meeting of the First National Silver Convention.¹³ Montana sent her share of delegates as did most of the Western silver-producing states. Important to note is the fact that no one party in the far Western states had a corner on the silver issue as is aptly shown by this comment:

During the convention, the Montana Legislature wired a series of resolutions demanding free coinage, which it stressed as vital in maintaining Montana's economic welfare and full employment for thousands of her workers and miners. During the proceedings, Lieutenant Governor John E. Rickards, former territorial delegate Martin Maginnis, and Congressman Thomas H. Carter congratulated the convention for its work, thereby indicating strong bipartisan support for silver among Montana's politicians. Rickards and Carter were Republicans; Maginnis was a Democratic stalwart.¹⁴

When the Fifty-first Congress opened in Washington in December of 1889, the Republicans had control of both houses of Congress and the Presidency. With the exception of Western mining states and the Democrats from the rural areas of the South, silver had very few friends. The majority of Republicans in Congress were only concerned with the passage of the highly protective McKinley Tariff. The only concession

¹³Clinch, "Populism," 54.

¹⁴Ibid., 55.

made to the silver forces in this session of Congress was the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which was merely a compromise measure to retain a semblance of harmony in the party and to assure the passage of the tariff.

Congressional elections in 1890 saw Republicans suffer an overwhelming defeat at the polls. In the East many Republican congressmen lost to low-tariff Democrats, and in the West and South they were replaced by friends of both the low-tariff and free-silver. Though many Republicans failed to win succeeding terms of office, they still maintained control of Congress until March 4 through their majorities elected in 1888.¹⁵ Hoping to force Congress to take a stand on the silver issue, Congressman "Silver Dick" Bland introduced a free silver measure which, unfortunately for the silver forces, was tabled. The defeat of Bland's bill on March 25, 1892 was subsequently termed the "night free silver was killed."¹⁶ The silver forces gave up any hope of passage of a free-coinage measure in the session of the Fifty-Second Congress.

With the impending Presidential elections of 1892, political issues took on new fervor. No political party in Montana was foolish enough to oppose free-coinage. However, the established parties, both Republican and Democrat, had rather equivocal backgrounds when it came to silver.

¹⁵Ellis, Henry Moore Teller, 197.

¹⁶Ibid., 206.

Cleveland's overt opposition to silver in 1888 badly hurt the Democrats. And as far as the Republican Party's stand on the issue went, their famous Sherman Bill was seen by Western silverites as nothing more than a shabby appeasement for their support of the tariff. At this time a new political force was coming into play in Montana -- the Populists -- who made the most out of the popular silver issue. They were able to offer a fresh approach to the problem of free-coinage, and furthermore they did not have to worry about skeletons in their closet concerning past party action on the silver question.

When Grover Cleveland, an outspoken critic of bimetallism, won the presidential election of 1892, bankers and other creditor forces in the East began almost immediately urging repeal of the Sherman bill. Assisting this move for repeal was the unsteady financial condition of the United States, brought about in large measure by the failure of the Baring Brothers Bank in England in 1890, the heavy drainage of gold to Europe, and the tense financial situation many of the country's banks and railroads found themselves in. At the same time, one critic says, "the steady increase in Populist and free silver sentiment aroused fears of Western dominance and the destruction of the gold standard."¹⁷ Then on May 4, with the failure of the highly speculative National

¹⁷Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland, A Study in Courage, (New York, 1962), 525.

Cordage Company, a nation-wide panic began.¹⁸ The bankers, the Eastern press, and in fact most business interests outside the mining West blamed the Sherman Act for all the country's troubles. Insistently they urged Cleveland to call a special session of Congress to repeal this act. The closure by the British government of its mints in India to the coinage of silver further intensified Eastern demands. On June 30, President Cleveland yielded by calling a special session of Congress to meet on August 7 for the specific purpose of repealing the Sherman bill.¹⁹ All this had far reaching effects on the mining states in the West. As mines began to close, unemployment and the dangers of starvation set in. Public opinion in the West was further heightened against the East by the "ill-concealed rejoicing" of Eastern newspapers and bankers over her plight.²⁰

The Congress that assembled in August was in no way characterized by harmony or good-feeling. The East was blaming the panic on the Sherman Act and that alone. An Eastern sympathizer wrote:

All men of virtue and intelligence know that all the ills of life -- the scarcity of money, baldness, the common bacillus, Home Rule, J the Potato Bug -- are due to the Sherman bill. If it is repealed, sin and death will vanish from the world -- the skies will fall, and we

¹⁸ Ibid., 525-526.

¹⁹ Clinch, "Populism," 102.

²⁰ Ellis, Henry Moore Teller, 216.

shall all catch larks.²¹

In spite of the tremendous opposition to repeal by the West, and despite the excellent leadership of men like Senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado, the Sherman bill was repealed on October 30, 1893.²² What Oscar Underwood called the "greatest debate since the days when the political division began on the slavery question" was over.²³

The repeal of the Sherman bill did not end the silver question. Politicians of both camps were forcing their parties to take a stand on silver. From the time of the repeal in 1893 until after the election of 1896, silver sentiment in Montana remained strong. Silver forces organized in Montana, such as the Free Coinage Association under the direction of Dr. C. P. Hough. When the American Bi-Metallic League requested that Governor Rickards send delegates to the convention in St. Louis, he more than gladly appointed a large delegation.²⁴

The year 1896 saw the coming of age of the silver question for in this year it became the major campaign issue on the national as well as the local scene. Although 1896 takes us beyond the term as governor of Rickards and therefore beyond the immediate concern of this thesis, it is neverthe-

²¹Ibid., 218.

²²Nevins, Grover Cleveland, 547.

²³Ellis, Henry Moore Teller, 219.

²⁴Clinch, "Populism," 126.

less important to note the consequences of the silver movement for Montana. The campaigns of 1896 saw the hopes for fusion among the Democrats and the Populists. It also saw a major rift in the Republican Party with H. M. Teller's creation of the Silver Republicans. Silver so dominated the Montana scene that Thomas A. Clinch writing on the subject of bimetallism states:

. . . that there was practically nothing that the fusionists and Silver Republicans could do that was wrong. They rode the crest of a long wave of resentment, anger, frustration, and economic misery caused by Eastern hostility to the white metal.²⁵

Although the silver forces ultimately won the immediate area of Montana in 1896, the election of McKinley on the national level negated the victory. Soon after 1896, prosperity began to reappear. This, added to the new gold discoveries which increased the amount of money in circulation, and the advent of the Spanish-American War, replaced the silver question with imperialism as the burning issue. By 1900, the issue of bimetallism was nearly dead.²⁶ Montana now turned her attention to copper production rather than silver.

²⁵Ibid., 187.

²⁶Ibid., 197-198.

CHAPTER III

THE ELECTION OF 1892

THE CAMPAIGN

The summer and early fall of 1892 saw an outburst of political conventions on the national as well as the state scene, for it was a presidential election year. On the national level, Grover Cleveland had been nominated by the Democrats as their presidential choice, while the Republicans had chosen Benjamin Harrison at their national convention in Minneapolis. The first political action that Montana saw was the nominating convention of the Populists held in Butte on the fourteenth of June.¹ A party platform was formulated which was essentially dedicated to reform. Some of the demands that the Populists made were direct elections for the president, the vice president, and senators; socialization of the railroads, and the telephone and telegraph lines; the eight-hour day; free and unlimited coinage of silver; and complete forfeiture of Montana lands by the Northern Pacific for failure to comply to the letter with the terms of their grant.² Delegates were elected for the

¹Thomas A. Clinch, "Populism and Bimetallism in Montana," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1964), 73.

²Ibid., 74-75.

national convention to be held in Omaha, and nominations for state offices were held. Will Kennedy of Boulder won the gubernatorial nomination. Other important state nominations were Harvey Cullom for lieutenant governor, Ella Knowles for attorney general, William Pemberton for chief justice, and Caldwell Edwards for Congress.³ The organization and emergence of this Populist Party in the election of 1892 is important in Montana politics in that it came to the fore as a strong political force and posed a real threat to the existing traditional two parties.

It was not until September that the Republican and Democratic conventions were held. The Republican convention opened first, meeting in Great Falls on September 6. The Democratic gathering was held in that same city just six days later. As with all state conventions, nomination of state officers and a proposed party platform were the important issues.

At the Republican convention Rickards was a delegate-at-large for the influential Silver Bow delegation. As lieutenant governor, he had been mentioned many times during the summer by the Republican press as a possible nominee for the governorship. As the actual voting time at the convention drew near, and with the solidification of the Silver Bow delegation behind him, Rickards' nomination seemed assured. When calls were made for the gubernatorial nomina-

³Ibid., 75-76.

tions, the Lieutenant Governor's name was put forth by George W. Irvin of Butte who reviewed Rickards' career as the second lieutenant governor and praised his decisions regarding the senate. He then referred to Rickards as an "honored neighbor, leading citizen, and a statesman of the highest order."⁴ The nomination was seconded by Allan R. Joy. Unfortunately for Rickards, a rumor developed from an unknown source to the effect that the Silver Bow delegation was not earnestly supporting his candidacy, but actually desired someone else for governor. This rumor was denied in a speech made by convention chairman Lee Mantle of Butte who informed the convention that Rickards was the logical choice for governor and that the Silver Bow delegation was supporting him all the way.⁵ Other contenders for the governor's chair were United States District Attorney E. D. Weed and R. O. Hickman. The final vote stood: Rickards 147, Weed 73, and Hickman 40.⁶ Weed moved that the nomination of Rickards be made unanimous; the motion carried.⁷ Rickards then made a brief acceptance speech. There was no contest for the position of lieutenant governor. Alexander C. Botkin of Lewis and Clark County was chosen as the nominee by acclamation. In these two men, Republicans felt they had

⁴Anaconda Standard, September 7, 1892.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Butte Weekly Miner, September 6, 1892.

⁷Helena Daily Herald, September 7, 1892.

strong candidates heading their ticket for the state race.

Other important Republican nominees were Louis Rotwitt for secretary of state, Fred W. Wright for treasurer, Henry J. Haskell for attorney general, Henry N. Blake for chief justice, and Charles S. Hartman for congress.⁸ State Central Committee headquarters were located at Butte with Lee Mantle receiving the important job as chairman, and George Irvin being placed second in command as vice-chairman.⁹ The platform drawn up by the delegation expressed sympathy for James G. Blaine and his failure to achieve the national presidential nomination. Blaine had been the choice of the Montana delegation in Minneapolis. However, the convention did endorse the nomination of Harrison. The platform also emphatically affirmed the McKinley Tariff, and the principle and practice of reciprocity, demanded the maintenance of the duty on wool, and asked for the free and unlimited coinage of silver.¹⁰ The platform further suggested arbitration boards to settle labor disputes, condemned the use of Pinkerton detectives, advocated restriction of Chinese immigration, and endorsed the establishment of postal savings banks, a Populist objective.¹¹

The Republican orientated newspapers of the state

⁸Butte Weekly Miner, September 8, 1892.

⁹Helena Daily Herald, September 7, 1892.

¹⁰Ibid., September 10, 1892.

¹¹Clinch, "Populism," 87-88.

understandably used only superlatives when referring to the convention. They described it as the most intelligent, the most representative, the most harmonious body to ever meet in the state. While they dwelt on harmony, the Democratic press exaggerated the discord. Illustrative of this frame of thought is a statement made by the Anaconda Standard:

With a Republican state convention at Great Falls and the Sullivan-Corbett prize fight in New Orleans, Montanans who take an interest in sports are congratulating themselves on the extraordinary feast in store for them next week. There will be some tall scrapping and vigorous knocking out at both places, but on the whole, the New Orleans fight will be rather more interesting.¹²

The candidates also came in for criticism, especially Rickards for his famed senate rulings as lieutenant governor, and Hartman for his past position as legal counsel for the Northern Pacific. Disregarding the bias of the press on both sides, the Republican convention had no more discord nor harmony than most political gatherings.

When the Democrats met, they were hard pressed for a gubernatorial candidate due to the decision of incumbent Governor Joseph K. Toole not to file for re-election.¹³ The nomination was eventually won by Timothy E. Collins of Great Falls. A Chicago paper, the Intermountain Ocean, got Montana politics a little confused when it proudly proclaimed, "T. E. Collins will probably be the next governor of Montana

¹²Anaconda Standard, August 30, 1892.

¹³Clinch, "Populism," 89.

as he is the candidate of the Republican party."¹⁴ Therefore, we can see that the Montana press was not alone in its bias in this era of journalism. Two other nominees that need mentioning on the Democratic ticket are W. W. Dixon for congress, a renomination, and W. Y. Pemberton for chief justice, who incidentally was also the Populist nominee for that position. The Democratic platform contained a denouncement of the Republican sponsored McKinley Tariff and the Sherman bill. It praised the Bland-Allison Act which had been a Democratic measure, and called for the free coinage of silver. In keeping with the thinking of the times, it favored the exclusion of Chinese labor and the restriction of Chinese immigration.¹⁵

A meeting at Maguire's Opera House in Butte on September 21, 1892, marked the official opening of the Republican campaign in Montana. Rather than the grand conciliatory meeting that had been planned, the gathering proved to be an unfortunate beginning for the Republicans. As the first three speakers, George Woodson, A. C. Botkin, and Wilbur F. Sanders, attempted to present their thoughts on the important silver question, they were interrupted by hisses and jeers from what the Helena Herald termed a "gang of hoodlums in the gallery, who were intent on bringing about a row if possible." The meeting eventually turned into a

¹⁴Helena Daily Herald, September 13, 1892.

¹⁵Clinch, "Populism," 90.

donnybrook which necessitated the calling of the police to restore order.¹⁶ The news media blamed the Populists for the whole matter. Republican pride was further hurt by a statement attributed to Will Kennedy, the Populist candidate for governor, who said that if the Republican speakers had the "wit and the spirit" of old time campaigners, they would have been able to control the "questioners" and would not have needed to call for their arrest.¹⁷ Republican indignation over the incident is evident in their retaliatory statement which branded the Populists as the "forces of discord, ignorance, demagogism, and corruption."¹⁸ Rickards spoke at this ill-fated meeting but not until order had once again been restored. His speech was an attempt to explain his rulings in the senate during his term as lieutenant governor.

The majority of the Democratic campaign against Rickards was directed at his ruling that senators present but not voting would be used to constitute a quorum. The Republicans claimed that Rickards had a legal basis for his decision, and cited a judgment made by Thomas B. Reed, Speaker of the House of Representatives, in a similar set of circumstances to support their case. Reed's judgment was upheld by the Supreme Court in the case of the United States

¹⁶Helena Daily Herald, September 22, 1892.

¹⁷Ibid., September 27, 1892.

¹⁸Ibid., September 24, 1892.

v. Ballin, which concluded that a member of a legislative body could not constitutionally absent himself by refusing to answer to his name.¹⁹ Therefore, if a quorum of members are present, which was the case in the Montana senate, and if only seven of the sixteen members decide to vote, then only a majority of those seven would be necessary for an election of officers. Consequently, Rickards claimed that he ruled that seven was a majority of seven, not that seven was a majority of sixteen. In so ruling, an organization of the Senate was effected in spite of the existing legislative deadlock. The Democrats on the other hand charged Rickards with participating in one of the greatest political frauds that Montana had ever known. To them his ruling was no more than a "disgraceful and inexcusable" means adopted for the specific purpose of electing two Republicans, Wilbur F. Sanders and Thomas C. Power, to the United States Senate.²⁰ The legality of Rickards' ruling has never been proven nor disproven. It is unfortunate that so much of the gubernatorial race was based on a thorny issue when so many other problems that were affecting the state needed attention.

Other charges leveled against Rickards centered mainly on accusations of opposition to labor and tendencies favoring prohibition. The anti-labor charge was based on some of Rickards' speeches in the constitutional convention from

¹⁹Ibid., November 7, 1892.

²⁰Helena Weekly Independent, October 13, 1892.

which the Democrats inferred an anti-labor bias.²¹ Rickards, of course, claimed the charges to be untrue, but considering the silence of the Republican platform regarding labor's demands, the implications may have had some foundation. The allegation that Rickards was a prohibitionist stemmed from his attendance as a delegate at the national Methodist convention in Omaha which adopted a platform favoring prohibition. The fear that a gubernatorial candidate of Montana might favor a "dry" state caused so much consternation that there were even rumors of a plot by the saloon owners to knife him.²² Again Rickards denied the validity of the charges made against him.

About the worst thing the Republicans could uncover about Rickards' Democratic opponent, Tim Collins, was again an anti-labor charge. The Helena Herald maintained that during the construction of the First National Bank in Great Falls, Collins had imported labor from St. Paul because they were willing to work for lower wages.²³ The Republican party used this charge to the fullest to discredit Collins in the eyes of labor. Important issues were perhaps most noticeable by their absence in the gubernatorial campaign.

Actually, the Republicans and the Democrats differed very little on most significant issues with the exception of

²¹Butte Weekly Miner, November 3, 1892.

²²Butte Semi-Weekly Intermountain, October 12, 1892.

²³Helena Daily Herald, September 15, 1892.

the rift between their ideas on the tariff. Both claimed to be friends of silver and labor. Both parties also tried to discredit the Populists by claiming that the People's Party in reality was not a friend of silver. If that were not damaging enough in a silver state, they also claimed that the Populists willingly harbored anarchists and socialists within their ranks.²⁴

A period of relative calm characterized the last few weeks of the campaign.²⁵ Rickards himself had survived seven weeks of campaigning and forty-five speaking engagements.²⁶ Voter registration was heavy and the turnout good on election day, November 8. As soon as returns started coming in, it was easy to see that the Republicans would be the victors. The Populist Party had split the Democratic vote, thus assuring the Republicans of winning the majority of the positions in the election. The Helena Weekly Independent, which had strong Democratic leanings, in its November 10 issue stated, "There would have been a big majority for the Democrats not only in the county, but also in the state, but for the advent of the People's Party, the effect of which has been to turn everything over to the Republicans." The Republicans were in fact rejoicing for their entire ticket with the exception of Blake won the election. Blake

²⁴Clinch, "Populism," 90-91.

²⁵Ibid., 93.

²⁶Helena Daily Herald, November 9, 1892.

lost to Judge Pemberton who was both the Populist and Democratic nominee for the position of chief justice.²⁷

Rickards won by the slim majority of only 537 votes.²⁸

However, though victory for the Republicans was a reality on the state scene, the election of Grover Cleveland to the presidency proved disconcerting not only to the Republicans, but also to the Democrats and Populists who feared for the ultimate decision on the silver question.

THE THIRD LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The third legislative assembly of the state of Montana convened on January 2, 1893. Democrats held the balance of power in the senate with nine seats compared to the Republicans' seven. In the house the situation was somewhat different with neither the Republicans nor the Democrats in control. Both parties held twenty-seven seats with the Populists claiming the decisive remaining three seats. Thus a Populist alliance with either party would result in that party's winning control.²⁹ The Populists did ally with the Democrats to effect an organization of the house. As a result, two Populists, Thomas F. Matthews and Absalom F. Bray, were elected to the position of Speaker and Speaker

²⁷Anaconda Standard, November 10, 1892.

²⁸Clinch, "Populism," 93.

²⁹Tom Stout, Montana, Its Story and Biography, (Chicago, 1921), Vol. I, 449.

Protem respectively.³⁰ Had this coalition continued, the Democrats might have been able to elect the successor of their choice to fill the position to be vacated by Senator Wilbur F. Sanders on March 3. However, attempts at fusion failed, and the senatorial fight became the major issue of the third legislative session.

Governor Rickards was administered the oath of office by Associate Justice William H. DeWitt at the initial meeting of the legislative assembly. The affair was very informal; consequently the new governor delivered no speech.³¹ Prospects for the legislature were far from bright. "That anything productive would emerge from a situation involving a Republican governor and a Democratic legislature was extremely doubtful."³²

On the third day of the session, Governor Rickards appeared before a joint assembly of the house and senate to present his rather lengthy "state of the state" address.³³ First on the agenda was a comprehensive statement of the state's finances. The failure of Congress to pass any pro-silver legislation had hurt the mining industry of Montana. Rickards urged the legislature to memorialize Congress "praying for the early consideration of a free coinage bill

³⁰Clinch, "Populism," 94.

³¹Helena Daily Herald, January 3, 1893.

³²Clinch, "Populism," 96.

³³Helena Daily Herald, January 5, 1893.

and further recommended the creation of a joint committee to prepare arguments and compile facts to sustain the position." Commenting on another important issue, the Northern Pacific Mineral Land controversy, Rickards asked that the legislature take such action as would protect the state's lands, further saying that past action was more "fruitful of earnest efforts than practical results." A considerable amount of time was spent discussing the question of irrigation. The governor felt that the federal government should help with state irrigation projects, and that Montana's congressmen should work to bring such legislation about.³⁴

Concern was further evidenced over the establishment of state institutions and the creation of new counties. In the educational field, Rickards requested the founding of a state normal school, an agricultural college, and a university. Impressed with the necessity of originating other state institutions as well -- such as a reform school and an orphan's home -- the governor recommended immediate legislative consideration of such projects. The creation of new counties was also suggested on the grounds that extremely large counties overburdened the taxpayer, and made it difficult for the jurors and witnesses to travel the long distances to the county seat in court cases. Rickards reminded the legislature of the forthcoming senatorial election,

³⁴Message of Governor John E. Rickards to the Third Legislative Assembly of the State of Montana, (Helena, 1893).

and expressed the feeling that the choice of a United States Senator would be one of the most important duties of the session.³⁵ The governor made no mention of reform issues such as the eight-hour day or mine safety. This evasion of labor's demands prompted one critic to note that Rickards' inaugural message was as notable for its omissions as its inclusions.³⁶

The greater part of the third session was spent in an attempt to elect a successor to Senator Sanders whose term expired on the third of March. Party caucuses were held to determine nominees. The Republicans chose Senator Sanders; the Democrats, William A. Clark; and the Populists, Samuel Mulville. January 11 saw the first ballot cast with the votes scattered between a variety of candidates, none of whom received a majority. From that day until the end of the session, the house and senate met in joint assemblage, voted, and adjourned. On March 2, after forty-seven ballots, no choice had yet been made.³⁷ The Helena Herald, as early as January 14, had feared an impasse. They cited Montana's situation as a case in point for the direct election of senators. Viewing the crisis, the Herald predicted that even if a senatorial choice were eventually made, resulting animosities would provide serious obstacles to the passage

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Clinch, "Populism," 96-97.

³⁷ Helena Daily Herald, March 2, 1893.

of needed legislation.³⁸

As the days passed, interesting phases of the struggle developed. The Populists realized early in the contest that Mulville could never win. They decided, therefore, to switch their allegiance to a Democrat. Rather than backing the caucus choice, who was Clark, they threw their support to W. W. Dixon.³⁹ By February the battle had definitely gained momentum. Montanans became very nervous over the atrophic situation, and began speculating about the legality of a senatorial appointment by the governor if the legislature should fail to elect. Mid-February witnessed a change in alliances. Representative W. E. Tierney of Meagher was the first to cross party lines. He left the Democratic camp to vote for Sanders. The next day, three Republicans, who had been loyal up to that point to Sanders, defected to vote for other candidates. Shortly thereafter, the Republicans met to choose a new caucus nominee. Lee Mantle of Butte became the Republican aspirant to office. The party hoped that in addition to Republican votes, Mantle would attract enough Democrats to his side to win the election. Republican expectations were not realized. The most that can be said for Republican strategy is that it solidified party division between Sanders and Mantle. Two days later, five Republicans defected from the ranks to vote for Clark,

³⁸ Ibid., January 14, 1893.

³⁹ Ibid., January 17, 1893.

placing him within three votes of victory.⁴⁰ Calls for party unity came from both sides but to no avail. Men stood solidly behind their candidates with the result that after sixty long days, there still was no successor to Senator Sanders.

When the legislature adjourned, Rickards appointed Lee Mantle to fill the vacant senatorial seat. There had been rumors to the effect that Rickards himself wanted the position and would resign the governorship to attain it. The proposed plan was that Botkin as the new governor, in gratitude for his promotion, would appoint the ex-governor to the senatorship. The rumors were never verified, but they did tend to cast a rather bad light on the governor.⁴¹

Mantle's appointment was received with far from unanimous pleasure from the Republicans. Many felt that Sanders was his own logical successor, and should have been given the position. To make matters worse, when Mantle arrived in Washington, he was refused his seat by the Senate. An entire session of the Montana legislature had been devoted to a factional fight over the senatorship which resulted not only in the loss of a voice in the Senate, but also in a failure on the state scene to inaugurate much judicious legislation. Pressure was put on Rickards to convene a special session of the legislature to attempt once more to

⁴⁰ Helena Weekly Independent, February 16, 1893.

⁴¹ Ibid., March 9, 1893.

elect a senator. Rickards, however, refused to call the special meeting. The governor felt the only possible excuse for reopening the legislature would be to act on the new codes, and even this he did not consider of enough importance to warrant the expense.⁴²

The third legislative session came in for harsh criticism from both Republican and Democratic sources. The transcending feature, of course, had been the unsuccessful effort to elect a successor to Senator Sanders. However, some useful work was done by the legislature; and a few of Rickards' suggestions were enacted into law. Several memorials from both the senate and the house were sent to the national congress "praying" for the consideration of a free coinage measure. Five new counties were created: Flathead, Ravalli, Valley, Granite, and Teton were added to the Montana map. Attempts were also made to sub-portion existing counties to form the new counties of Blaine, Broadwater, and Sweetgrass; but these efforts failed passage in either the senate or the house. The prevailing sentiment seemed to favor the new divisions.⁴³

The establishment and location of Montana's state institutions also occupied a good deal of the legislature's time. A state university was founded in Missoula County, an agricultural college in Gallatin, a School of Mines in Silver

⁴²Ibid., March 16, 1893.

⁴³Helena Daily Herald, March 4, 1893.

Bow, and a normal school in Beaverhead. A reform school, an orphan's home, and a school for the deaf and blind were also confirmed for construction in various parts of the state. Many felt the creation of so many institutions far out-distanced the needs of Montana, and that the treasury was "unequal to their cost." Charges of vote buying and fraud were also leveled against the legislators in their efforts to secure the location of state institutions in their counties.⁴⁴

Neither the Democratic nor the Republican press had much in the line of praise for the session. Less than one-fourth of the bills introduced succeeded in attaining the status of law, concerning which the Helena Independent said, "may be either a subject for congratulations or a cause for regret, according to the standpoint from which it is looked at."⁴⁵ Rickards employed the use of his veto power only three times which caused the Herald to wish that the governor had "exercised his prerogative more liberally."⁴⁶ The Independent sarcastically congratulated the legislators for making it through the session without breaking too much of the furniture. The paper further alleged, "If the fact that lavish appropriations and the passage of many bills constitutes a successful session, then the third legislative

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Helena Weekly Independent, March 9, 1893.

⁴⁶Helena Daily Herald, March 3, 1893.

assembly was a success."⁴⁷ In reviewing the session, a contemporary editorial commented:

It (the legislature) will probably be found to average with the output of its predecessors. Doubtless there were some good laws passed, and perhaps a few as usual that will prove actually mischievous; but, on the whole, the membership was hardly such as to justify the expectation of great results. It cannot be denied that the legislative assembly was most unwarrantably extravagant in dealing with the people's money, and that the state would probably be quite as well off if it had never convened.⁴⁸

A prevailing attitude of disgust more than anything else seemed to characterize Montanan's feeling toward their legislature.

THE PANIC OF 1893

By the spring of 1893, Montana was immersed in a depression. The passage of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, though only guaranteeing silver at the market price, had nonetheless buoyed the hopes of investors who encouraged an excessive amount of highly speculative mining. Most of this exploratory activity was without strong financial backing or sound reasoning. The citizenry as a whole had developed a "devil-may-care" attitude toward bimetallism. Soon prices of silver began to decline precipitously, and unemployment became a problem even in the well-established mining

⁴⁷Helena Weekly Independent, March 9, 1893.

⁴⁸Helena Daily Herald, March 4, 1893.

centers.⁴⁹

On the national scene, conditions were not much better. Eastern bankers and businessmen blamed the whole unfortunate situation on unwise financial policies, namely, the Sherman Act. Relentlessly, they urged Cleveland to call a special session of Congress for its repeal. By May, banks in the East were unable to rediscount notes from Western and Southern banks, thus forcing many to close.⁵⁰ On June 30, Cleveland issued a summons for the special session to meet in August.⁵¹ The grim "battle of the standards" had begun with repeal a reality by October 30.⁵²

Montana had definitely felt the effects of the panic. Mines began to shut down, and by the end of the summer 20,000 men, fully one-third of the state's labor force, were unemployed. Mining towns, such as Maiden, became ghost towns almost overnight. Even the big well-established mining areas such as Butte, Philipsburg, and Granite were hard hit.⁵³ Mines and miners were not the only ones who endured hardships. With the closing of many banks, even clothing

⁴⁹Clinch, "Populism," 103.

⁵⁰Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland, A Study in Courage, (New York, 1932), 526.

⁵¹Ibid., 527.

⁵²Ibid., 547.

⁵³Clinch, "Populism," 122.

and grocery stores underwent financial failures.⁵⁴ It was impossible to find jobs elsewhere for the entire Northwest was suffering the same economic standstill.

Labor, the group most severely affected by the panic, began to exhibit feelings of discontent. The Industrial Legion, a nation-wide organization, easily found sympathizers in Montana. As the price of silver continued to fall, and the number of unemployed continued to rise, sympathizers became active members. Local branches of the Legion were composed of radical Populists, the majority of whom were laborers.⁵⁵ This group looked with interest to a fellow Legion member, Jacob Coxey of Ohio.

General Jacob Coxey, a Populist reformer and a staunch supporter of the Industrial Legion, organized an army of workers to march on Washington. This "petition in boots" was to be a living expression of the needs of the laboring classes. It was meant to force the government to listen to their demands for a relief program. The "army," numbering about 500 by the time it reached Washington in early May, failed in its attempt to compel the government to inaugurate the much needed relief plan. Coxey and his chief lieutenants were arrested for walking on the Capital lawn, and soon thereafter the army disbanded.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., 124.

⁵⁵Ibid., 104.

⁵⁶Ibid., 128-129.

Coxeyite reform tactics had an interested audience in the West. Numerous "armies" formed in California, Oregon, Colorado, Washington, and Montana. The Montana forces were led by General William Hogan of Butte.⁵⁷ Hogan, the leader of the Butte Industrial Legion, by April of 1894 had finalized plans to join Coxey in Washington. Public sentiment favored Hogan to the point that local merchants generously supplied food for the trip. Transportation, however, was not so easy to attain. The Northern Pacific had agreed to transport the men, then withdrew its offer. A federal injunction was subsequently issued which forbade the railroad's transport of the army.

Hogan's forces, which had set up camp on the outskirts of Butte, decided the only way they would be able to reach Washington would be to steal a train and transport themselves. On the twenty-fourth of April, they "borrowed" an engine, one box car, and six coal cars and headed east.⁵⁸ The Federal Marshal in Butte, William McDermott, tried to deputize citizens to prevent Hogan from stealing the train. However, the feelings of the people had risen to the point that McDermott was unsuccessful in his recruitment program. Consequently, he had to satisfy himself with a mere pursuit of Hogan and the Northern Pacific train.

The army received excited welcomes in all the towns that

⁵⁷Ibid., 130.

⁵⁸Ibid., 132.

the train passed through. Hogan's forces were able to reach Columbus, Montana before being intercepted by McDermott's deputies. McDermott ordered Hogan to surrender; Hogan refused. The next day the deputies followed the army into Billings where a skirmish occurred resulting in the death of one Billings resident and injuries to several of McDermott's and Hogan's men. The melee did not deter Hogan, but rather renewed his fervor to continue east.⁵⁹

At this point, Governor Rickards became concerned about the situation, and asked President Cleveland for federal troops to restore order. Troops were ordered out of Fort Keogh which is near Miles City. These troops were able to stop the army at Forsyth, where all of Hogan's men, with the exception of a few who escaped into nearby hills, were arrested. The men were taken to Helena for trial.⁶⁰

The sentences dealt out to Hogan and his men were far from stiff. Hogan was sentenced to six months in prison; his engineer, fireman, and forty of his officers were given thirty day sentences; the rest of the men were set free. Feelings in Helena toward Hogan were favorable. Evidence of this is shown through the generosity of the Helena citizens in providing the freed men with transportation to Fort Benton so they could proceed to Washington. Whether any

⁵⁹ Ibid., 133-134.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 135.

were able to reach the capital still remains a mystery.⁶¹
The determination shown in the Coxeyite movement in Montana is proof of the serious financial condition the Treasure State was in.

The panic was intensely felt in the state and had many adverse effects, not only on her economy, but also on her people. However, one positive aspect of the panic did result. For the first time in her history, Montana was forced to realize she could not base her whole economy on silver production. Copper was the metal of the future, but it took the depression to convince Montanans of this fact.⁶²

⁶¹Ibid., 136.

⁶²Ibid., 125.

CHAPTER IV

THE ELECTION OF 1894

As early as January of 1894, the Populists began planning campaign techniques for the upcoming election. A state convention was held on June 25 in Deer Lodge at which time a platform almost identical to that of 1892 was adopted. One important addition was the favoring of arbitration boards rather than strikes to settle labor disputes. Also, it is important to note that the Populists rejected the notion of fusion with the Democrats at this time. Robert Burns Smith, a recent convert from the Democrats, was chosen to lead the fight for the congressional seat. For the position of associate justice, the Populists chose George Reeves of Missoula.¹

On September 6, the Republicans met in convention in Helena.² Their platform was short with major emphasis on the free coinage of silver and a harsh condemnation of the Wilson-Gorman tariff. The platform advocated free education, reclamation of arid lands, and restriction of all foreign immigration with total exclusion of Chinese immigration. It further endorsed Governor Rickards' refusal to call a

¹Thomas A. Clinch, "Populism and Bimetallism in Montana," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1964), 140-141.

²Helena Daily Herald, September 4, 1894.

special session of the legislature. Charles S. Hartman was nominated for the congressional seat and William Hunt for associate justice. Hartman said in endorsing the plank that he would have needed but two words in writing it -- silver and protection.³

Later that same month, Helena hosted the Democratic convention. Hopes for a Democratic victory in Montana were almost nil due to Cleveland's action toward silver. Rather than condemn Cleveland, however, the Democrats blamed the nation's troubles, particularly the panic, on thirty years of Republican misrule. The party came out strong for free coinage, was vocal in its praise for the Wilson-Gorman tariff, advocated the direct election of senators, and urged the foundation of arbitration boards to settle labor disputes. For congress and the associate justiceship, they chose the rather obscure candidates of Hal S. Corbett and L. A. Luce.⁴

The Democrats played a very minor role in the campaign which developed largely into a contest between the Republicans and the Populists. Silver held a prominent position in the campaign as did the fight for the permanent location of the capital. The capital location developed into a struggle between the old adversaries William A. Clark and Marcus Daly. Clark opted for Helena while Daly supported the cause of Anaconda with both openly buying votes for their choices.

³Ibid., September 7, 1894.

⁴Helena Daily Independent, September 26, 1894.

The American Protective Association, an anti-Catholic society, also was a factor in the campaign. Election day, November 6, 1894, heralded large Republican victories throughout the state. Both Hartman and Hunt were able to win their offices, and the forthcoming legislature promised to be predominantly Republican.

For the first time since Montana had achieved statehood, her legislature met under conditions favorable to legislation. The first legislature had ended in a deadlock; the second suffered adverse side-effects of the animosities that had developed during the first; the third could not seem to get beyond the senatorial fight. With the advent of the fourth session, for the first time in the state's history, a party had a majority significant enough to erase the possibility of factional differences hindering forthcoming legislation. Even the Democratic oriented Helena Independent looked with promise to the fourth session.

Although the extra duty devolves upon it (the legislature) to elect two United States senators, there is every reason to believe that it will perform that task without delay. We shall look to see the senatorial contest out of the way in a few days. That will leave fifty days of the session for the discussion of the needs of the state and the enactment of proper laws.⁵

THE FOURTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Monday, January 7, marked the opening of the new

⁵Helena Daily Independent, January 6, 1895.

session. Both the senate and the house met in the Merchants Hotel Building in Helena, the new state capital.⁶ The Republicans dominated the legislature with a strong majority of thirty-two over all opposition on a joint ballot.⁷ Their unmitigated strength assured the election of Republican choices for the two vacant senatorial seats.

According to tradition, the governor delivered his "state of the state" address. Major concern was evidenced over conditions in the state resulting from the Panic of 1893. Montana's economy was intimately linked with her mining interests. Therefore, the demonetization of silver had adversely affected the state, and Rickards once again, in a rather eloquent plea, urged the legislature to memorialize Congress praying for an "honest treatment" of the white metal. Also of significant import was a bill before Congress concerning Montana's mineral lands and her controversy with the Northern Pacific. The governor felt the Department of the Interior to be ignorant of the needs and well-being of the state. Its decision to allow the corporation itself, in this case the Northern Pacific, to classify the granted lands as to their mineral or non-mineral character could only be interpreted as hostility toward the Western states. Reminding the legislators of the thousands of acres of land already selected by the railroad in

⁶Ibid., January 3, 1895.

⁷Ibid.

Montana's mineral belt, Rickards expressed the view that miners independently could not afford to fight a corporation as large or as wealthy as the Northern Pacific. Therefore, only through the local land offices and the state legislatures could effective action be hoped for. He impressed upon the legislature the importance of memorializing Congress to take favorable action on bills regarding Montana's mineral lands. Further proposals in the speech centered on electoral reform, action on the Montana codes, appointment of a fish and game warden, a bounty law to protect the livestock industry, creation of a state board of health, and an increase in the number of associate justices on the supreme court.⁸

On January 9, the Republicans held a party caucus to determine their candidates for the senatorship.⁹ Two vacancies existed -- one because of Congress's failure to seat Lee Mantle in 1893, the other through the legitimate expiration of the term of Thomas C. Power in March of 1895.¹⁰ It was decided by the caucus to choose one man from eastern Montana, and one man from the west. E. S. Booth of Silver Bow proposed that the west side man receive the short term.¹¹

⁸Message of Governor John E. Rickards to the Fourth Legislative Assembly of the State of Montana, (Helena, 1895).

⁹Helena Daily Independent, January 10, 1895.

¹⁰Clinch, "Populism," 139.

¹¹Helena Daily Independent, January 10, 1895.

Voting on the western candidates first, two leading contenders, Lee Mantle of Butte and Governor John E. Rickards, emerged. The final vote stood: Mantle 37, Rickards 16, and B. F. White polling a mere 3.¹² Mantle was declared the caucus nominee for the term expiring on the third of March, 1899. Two days later, Thomas Carter was chosen as the candidate from the east securing the term which lasted until the third of March in 1901.¹³ The Democrats and Populists also chose candidates, but there was never any doubt that the Republican caucus nominees would win considering the large Republican majorities in both houses.

Carter experienced some difficulty with the American Protective Association over his nomination. Carter was a Catholic, a fact which seemed to cause some consternation to the A.P.A. which was overtly opposed to Catholicism. After the caucus nomination of Carter, the A.P.A. sent a threatening letter to the Silver Bow delegation which had A.P.A. members in its midst. The letter read:

You traitors: Understand we an oath bound band of thirteen, will with pleasure await your arrival in Butte, either during or after your legislative duties have expired. You despised bribe-takers. Traitors to your country and Traitors to your religion. You Rome-bought abortions, dare you call yourselves Americans or confront those to whom you owe offices. Sincerely, we thirteen await your arrival in the "greatest

¹²Helena Daily Herald, January 10, 1895.

¹³Ibid., January 17, 1895.

mining camp on earth."¹⁴

Those in the Silver Bow delegation who held a membership in the A.P.A. quickly resigned it. In spite of the A.P.A. threats, Carter was elected to the Senate.

With the senatorial contest out of the way, Montana's legislature was able to devote its time more profitably to legislation that had been neglected by the preceding three sessions. Despite this fact, no outstanding accomplishments can be accredited to the fourth legislature. It did memorialize Congress both for free silver and the protection of Montana's mineral lands. The most important work of the session perhaps was the passage of the much needed codes of Montana law.¹⁵ According to the Independent, the single most important bill of the session was the corrupt practices act which provided for the publication of election expenses.¹⁶ It was the hope of those who initiated the act that some of the corruption, which had been so prominent in Montana politics, would now come to an end. It was during this session that Montana's gambling law went into effect -- all forms of gambling other than horse racing were declared unlawful. The general sentiment seemed to be that the law would simply mean a considerable loss of revenue for the counties and the state, and would be generally ineffective in dealing with

¹⁴Ibid., January 18, 1895.

¹⁵Helena Daily Independent, March 9, 1895.

¹⁶Ibid.

gambling regulation. Other laws of importance passed during the session were: the establishment of the Bitter Root as the state flower, provisions for safeguards in the coal mines, abolition of the office of general land commissioner, prevention of alteration of marks and brands, provisions for the establishment of circulation libraries for the state, reduction of the sentence for robbery from five to one year, reduction of the sentence for life to twenty years, prohibition of the sale of cigarettes to minors, and the appointment of a fish and game commission.¹⁷

Considering the overwhelmingly Republican composition of the legislature, it is understandable that the Republican press had nothing short of high praise for the session. The Democratic sources, logically, were less favorable in their evaluation. Corruption and fraud charges were common. The Independent assessed the legislature with a statement to the effect that whereas one could find only about twelve men in the third assembly who could be bought, one would be lucky to find twelve men in the fourth assembly who were not bought. Whether these allegations are true or not can only remain a matter of speculation. The Independent was also unhappy about the appropriations made, feeling they were much too high. Its conclusion was that the legislature was frugal when it talked of economics, but rather the reverse

¹⁷ Ibid.

when it came to the practice of that virtue.¹⁸ From a more objective point of view, I think one can fairly state that the fourth legislative assembly, though far from a shining star, was a notable improvement over its Montana ancestors.

¹⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE CONCLUSION OF RICKARDS' GUBERNATORIAL TERM

The year 1896 witnessed the fusion of the Populists and the Democrats to obtain a strong ticket to oppose the Republicans. Rickards did not seek re-election which is probably fortunate considering the split that occurred in the Republican ranks. When the state convention met in Helena in September of 1896, factional differences were readily evident.¹ A full convention nominated the lieutenant governor Alexander C. Botkin, as the gubernatorial candidate. Then the convention divided into two groups: the Silver Republicans and the Gold Republicans.² Silver was the predominant issue in this campaign resulting in the election of the majority of the fusionist ticket and a few Silver Republicans. The resulting Montana house was largely composed of fusionists; the senate remained Republican because of holdovers from the election of 1894.³ Although silver had triumphed on the state scene, it lost through the election of McKinley nation-wide. The succeeding years of Montana history were to see a decline of interest in the

¹Thomas A. Clinch, "Populism and Bimetallism in Montana," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1964), 181.

²Ibid., 182.

³Ibid., 196.

silver issue due to the increasing prosperity and the successful efforts to mine other ores.

As for Rickards himself, one can hardly characterize him as a charismatic figure. And yet he did maintain strength throughout his term as lieutenant governor and governor in the party. He was twice urged to run for the senate, and though he was never his Party's caucus nominee, he did show considerable strength. Little is known of Rickards' later life. After the close of his political career in 1896, he returned to California where he lived until his death in 1927.⁴

⁴Helena Daily Independent, December 27, 1927.

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