

The Omaha Platform of the Populist Party, July 4, 1892

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The Populist Party, or the People's Party, was a U.S. political party established in 1891 and was influential in American politics until 1896 after which it rapidly faded away. Comprised of poor, white cotton farmers primarily from North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas, as well as wheat farmers in the plains states, particularly Kansas and Nebraska, the Populist Party represented a radical crusading form of agrarianism and hostility to banks, cities, railroads, gold, and elites generally. Adopted by the founding convention of the party on July 4, 1892, the Omaha Platform laid out the basic tenants of the Populist movement. The preamble was written by Minnesota farmer, lawyer, and politician, and novelist Ignatius Donnelly. The Populist Party saw itself as a representative for the common worker against the entrenched interests of growing capitalist industry. Their platform was centered around the idea that people should have more control over the government, the nation's natural resources, land, railroads, and telephone and telegraph lines.

Our National Platform

The People's Party Platform Adopted at Omaha July 4, 1892

Assembled upon the 116th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the People's party of America, in their first national convention, invoking upon their action the blessings of Almighty God, puts forth in the name and on behalf of the people of this country the following preamble and declaration of principles:

Preamble

The conditions which surround us best justify our co-operation. We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the states have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places to prevent universal [sic] intimidation or bribery. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced; business prostrated; our homes covered with mortgages; labor impoverished and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down; and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history [sic] of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes - tramps and millionaires. The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders. A vast public debt, payable in legal tender currency, has been funded into gold-bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.

Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor, and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise and enslave industries. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once, it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon a suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop, without serious efforts to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore, in the coming campaign, every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries [sic] of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonetization of silver and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation and filled with the spirit of the grand generation which established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the republic to the hands of "the plain people," with whom it originated.

We assert our purposes to be identical with the purposes of the national constitution: "To form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure [sic] domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence [sic], promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

We declare that this republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; that it cannot be pinned together by bayonets; that the civil war is over and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it, and that we must be in fact as we are in name, the united brotherhood of free men.

Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must within a few weeks or months be exchanged for billions of dollars of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings and the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves that, if given power, we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation in accordance with the terms of our platform. We believe that the powers of government - in other words, of the people - should be expanded (as in the case of the postal services) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.

While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions, important as they are, as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity, but the very existence of free institutions depend; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer, before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered. Believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward until every wrong is

remedied, and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all men and women of the country, therefore:

We Declare

First - That the union of the labor forces of the United States, this day consummated, shall be permanent and perpetual. May its spirit enter into all hearts for the salvation of the republic and the uplifting of mankind.

Second - Wealth belongs to him who creates it, and every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery. "If any will not work, neither shall he eat." The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies identical.

Third - We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads, and should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing any or all railroads, we should favor an amendment to the constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil service regulation of the most rigid character; so as to prevent the increase of the power of the national administration by the use of such additional government employees.

Platform

We demand a national currency, safe, sound and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations; that a just, equitable and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed two per cent. per annum [sic], to be provided, as set forth in the subtreasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or some better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

We demand the free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ration of 16 to 1.

We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than \$50 per capita.

We demand a graduated income tax.

We believe that the moneys of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all state and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government, for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people, and to facilitate exchange.

Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people.

The telegraph and telephone, like the post office system being a necessity for transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

The land, including all the natural resources of wealth, is the heritage of all the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All lands now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens, should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.