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North Dakota Nonpartisan League

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to-156 vote. This act marked the end of the period of a Speaker's "czar rule" in the House and laid the groundwork for a new era of weak Speakers, independent committees, and a nearly inviolable seniority system.

From this point on, Norris was a national leader of the progressive movement, although he remained a nominal Republican for decades to come. He was elected vice president of the National Progressive Republican League in 1911 and was an early supporter of the nomination of Robert M. La Follette for President on the Republican ticket. In addition, Norris took advantage of the rising tide of support for Republican progressivism in Nebraska to win the Republican nomination for Senate in 1912. He then went on to take the general election by a comfortable margin.

In the Senate Norris continued his advocacy of and leadership in progressive issues, including measures both of social reform and international isolation. Because Norris entered the Senate during a time of Democratic control, however, he also found himself contesting Senate rules and practices, especially caucus government, although he supported much of the substance of Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom." On the foreign policy side Norris was one of the "little group of willful men" who opposed President Wilson's plans to arm merchant ships in war zones. Norris was one of the six Senators who voted against the entry of the United States into World War I, arguing that the war was precipitated by powerful financial and industrial interests. Similarly, he was opposed to the Treaty of Versailles that concluded the war.

During the period of Republican control of Congress in the 1920s, Norris won institutional leadership within the body. As chair of the Agriculture and Judiciary committees, Norris supported federal aid to agriculture, labor organizing, and a series of governmental reforms, among then the Twentieth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which ended the "lame duck" session of Congress by moving the presidential inaugural from March to January. At the same time Norris was instrumental in inducing the Nebraska legislature to amend the state constitution to create the only unicameral state legislature in the country, elected in nonpartisan elections.

It was during the 1930s that Norris broke formally with the Republican Party—a break generated by his experience during the 1930 primary. In 1930 conservative Republicans found another man named George W. Norris (branded "Grocer Norris" after his trade) to oppose the Senator in the Republican primary. The state was flooded with outlandish charges that Senator Norris was an immoral drunkard married to a Catholic; some evidence indicates that the source of these charges was the Republican National Committee. In the end, the "real" Norris was reelected, Grocer Norris was sentenced to jail on perjury charges, and Senator Norris dropped his party affiliation in 1936 to stand for reelection as an Independent.

Norris's formal break with the Republican Party also followed from his opposition to the renomination of Herbert Hoover in 1932 and his early support of Franklin Roosevelt. Following the 1932 election Norris was a regular supporter of the New Deal, elated that so many proposals he had long supported were now championed by the President and passed into law. Most significant was his sponsorship of the bill that created the river-taming, electricity-producing Tennessee Valley Authority. Norris was also instrumental in the enactment of the Rural Electrification Act and the Norris-Doxey Forestry Act.

Norris was defeated handily for reelection in 1942 by a more conservative and conventional Republican, Kenneth Wherry. Norris returned to Nebraska where he completed his autobiography six weeks before his death.

Norris left an indelible mark on American politics during the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike so many reformers before or since, he was a committed student of the institutions he inhabited, a keen practitioner of parliamentary practice and tactics, and a solid political success over a period of decades.

See also: Robert La Follette, National Progressive Republican League, New Deal, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt

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North Dakota Nonpartisan League

A student of the comparative politics of small, "open" economies might well be intrigued by the history of the North Dakota Nonpartisan

League. Its history can be briefly told in terms easily recognizable to such comparativists, terms that would emphasize both the political economy of economic protest movements in "open" economies and the larger political and economic constraints on the success of such protest movements.

The North Dakota Nonpartisan League was an agrarian protest movement born in 1915 in a jurisdiction whose small, homogeneous population was primarily engaged in producing an agrarian commodity (wheat) for export and sale outside the jurisdiction. The League sought to transcend commercial farmers' dependence on mainly external actors based in St. Paul and Minneapolis and, beyond the Mississippi, in Chicago and New York, who controlled such vital financial and marketing institutions as banks, railroads, grain terminal elevators, and commodity exchanges. Labeling the local politicians as tools of these outside interests, the League successfully focused farmers' attention on politics and public policy as a solution to their discontent with the political economy of wheat production. It organized an electoral coalition for gaining control of the North Dakota government, and the League developed the ingenious tactic of using a new institution—the primary election—for nominating a slate of candidates who, after securing nomination, would run under the aegis of the Republican Party, the dominant party in North Dakota.

Over the course of two primary elections and two general elections in 1916 and 1918 the League succeeded in gaining almost complete control of North Dakota's government. In very few other states has a political faction ever gained so much formal institutional control. The League legislated public housing and established financial and marketing institutions directly controlled by the state of North Dakota. It also established collective bargaining.

Yet by 1921 the League was in disarray, accused of scandal, corruption, and mismanagement; it was forced from office in a special recall election. Many of these charges were plausible. However, the League might have succeeded had it not faced a basic constraint: dependence on external finance. The fiscal basis of its reform program was bond finance. Yet North Dakota bonds sold poorly, and evidence indicates an organized boycott of these bonds in national capital markets. With the League's removal from office, a conservative faction of the North Dakota Republican Party resumed control of state government, backed by the Independent Voters Association, an organization that copied many of the League's tactics. In many ways then, the League had gone through a natural history that partly resembles, for instance, Chile's experience in the early 1970s with Unidad Popular, when a need for foreign exchange and foreign loans crippled Unidad Popular's program.

It should be noted that the North Dakota Nonpartisan League had a second, if different, incarnation after its defeat. It became a political club that functioned as the liberal wing of the North Dakota Republican Party. In the 1930s it supported a semi-Populist governor, William Langer. The League finally merged with the Democratic Party in 1956.

See also: Agrarianism, National Nonpartisan League

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Northern Farmers' Alliance

Milton George, editor of Chicago's *Western Rural*, founded the Northern Farmers' Alliance in 1880 to help farmers by supplementing the work of the Grange. Although George did not favor the formation of a new political party, he wanted farmers to work through existing parties to elect to public office men who would promote the interest of the agrarian classes. Convinced that railroads exerted too much influence in government, George called for federal regulation of interstate commerce and the abolition of "free" passes for travel on the railroad.

Heavily dependent on George for leadership and financial support, the Northern Alliance remained small in its early years. In 1886 its membership began to increase in Illinois, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The following year the Alliance revised its constitution to strengthen the power of state chapters and to make them better able to be self-supporting. George's power then waned, with the leadership shifting to men like Jay Burrows of Nebraska. Even then, the Northern Farmers' Alliance remained weakly organized and small compared to the more powerful Southern Farmers' Alliance.

The Northern Alliance's significance lies in the preparation that it gave members to become political Populists. When it met with the Southern Alliance at St. Louis in 1889, its platform called for the abolition of the national