Neenah Convention Platform – 1886.


Preamble.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “labor is the superior of capital and deserves by far the higher consideration. Capital would not have existed, if labor had not first existed.” But capital in the form of giant corporations, has thrown its devil-fish arms around labor, and the farmer, the merchant, the workingman and even the manufacturer are being robbed and impoverished by so-called “vested rights,” obtained through fraudulent legislation.

The corporations, with no bodies to starve and no souls to damn, led on by heartless millionaires have secured control of the professional politicians, and use them as tools to accomplish their ends, not even hesitating at bloodshed, as instanced in numerous cases throughout the country. They rob the farmer, the merchant and the manufacturer, by extortionate rates and unjust discriminations, and grind down the laborer by starvation wages.

When labor demands that to which it is in justice entitled, the corrupt tools of corrupt corporations, for lack of argument, attempt to mislead the public mind, by charging that the labor movement proposes to use violence in securing the rights that belong to the producing classes. That there be no misunderstanding as to our position and our demands, we hereby issue this declaration of principles:

Platform.
1. The use of violence in any form to settle disputes is utterly unjustifiable in a civilized community, whether advocated by fanatical anarchists, or practiced by corrupt politicians in our state and none but those who have not developed out of barbarism, would result in its use.

2. Land, money, the means of communication and all public improvements, like the post office, should be owned or controlled by the people, represented in a just government.

3. Bureaus of labor statistics should be conducted in the interests of the whole people, and not serve to furnish sinecures to political hacks.

4. All laws should be simplified, so that there is but one subject, and that worded in plain language, which will enable the people to understand the law, without paying enormous fees to lawyers.

5. Arbitration should be generally introduced to take the place of strikes and other injurious means of settling labor disputes, child labor be prohibited in factories, mines and workshops; no more contractors be permitted to prevent the reformation of convicts or undersell honest manufacturers by contracting for the labor of prisoners; proper measures be provided for the safety of people working in mines, manufactures or buildings; regular weekly cash payments secured for the employees of corporations; the contract system be abolished on public work, and other measures be provided to protect those who are unable to protect themselves under a system that enables the few to luxuriate on the proceeds of the labor of the many.

6. The one man power has no place in a republic, hence all public officials, as far as practicable, should be elected by a direct vote of the people, and the votes be allowed to recall all unfaithful inefficient and dishonest officials.
7. The right to vote is inherit in all mankind, and should not be abridged, except in cases of minors, idiots, insane, and criminals.

8. A graduated income tax is the only equitable system of taxation, placing the burden of government on those who can best afford to pay, instead of laying it on the farmers and producers, and exempting millionaire bondholders and corporations.

9. To relieve the tax-burdened and mortgage-ridden people of the extortions of monopolists, the government should loan money directly to the people, at a rate of interest not to exceed 3 per cent., and should establish postal savings banks.

10. That congress be instructed to furnish money that shall be increased in volume in proportion as the industries and population of this nation increases, and shall be full legal tender for all debts, personal and national.

11. The extraordinary increase in the intervention of labor-saving machinery, requires a material reduction in the hours of labor. When the machinery does the work, some of it should be lifted from the shoulders of man. But owing to the growth of monopoly, farmers and workingmen have received no benefit from labor-saving machinery. It has cheapened production only to benefit the monopolists.

12. A revision of the patent laws giving inventors a premium for their inventions, and then giving its free use to all the people, will prevent the system of monopoly now existing and stop the robbery of both inventors and the people by heartless and greedy capitalists.

13. All land grants should be declared forfeited, and land restored to the people from whom it was practically stolen, and all alien ownership of land prohibited.
14. The importation of foreign labor under contract, practiced by capitalists and corporations who pretend to be in favor of protecting American labor against the pauper labor of Europe, is gross in consistency, and the law against this evil should be rigidly enforced.

15. We denounce the practice of the Republican and Democratic politicians in conducting campaigns on issues that should have been buried as they were settled a score of years ago, and declare that the time has come when all progressive and honest citizens should leave these parties, both of which have long ago outlived their days of usefulness and become the subservient tools of the corporate and other aggregated wealth of the country, and aid us in building up a party of the whole people, not of a class, or a clique, and we hereby constitute ourselves such a party, under the name of The People’s Party of Wisconsin.