

Guide to a Microfilm Edition of
*The National Nonpartisan
League Papers*

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Introduction

THE NATIONAL NONPARTISAN LEAGUE PAPERS are the fifth of the Minnesota Historical Society's collections to be microfilmed under a grant of funds from the National Historical Publications Commission. They document the league's meteoric rise to power in 1915-16 and its equally rapid decline as a regional political movement by 1924, although it remained a force in the state of its birth—North Dakota—for a generation thereafter and cast a long shadow in shaping and flavoring the political traditions of a number of other states.

The economic ills of the midwestern farmer provided the reason for the league's birth; the direct primary provided the mechanism which made it possible. Arthur C. Townley, a native of Browns Valley, Minnesota, gave the organization the dominant, dynamic leadership that carried it to power with the help of other forceful and articulate spokesmen of farm protest such as Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., Lynn J. Frazier, William J. Lemke, Arthur Le Sueur, and Henry G. Teigan, whose papers for 1916-23 are included in the microfilm as a supplement.

The league was an unusual experiment in American politics. It advocated public ownership and control as a solution for economic problems, and it won the opportunity to put its proposals to work on a state-wide scale with North Dakota as its chief laboratory. Operating through the primaries of established political parties rather than as a third party, its endorsement system attempted to foster a "nonpartisan" spirit that would neutralize the strength of the traditional organizations.

The success it achieved is impressive in the history of protest movements, which have often been harshly dealt with by the American political system. The league controlled the government of North Dakota; it elected executive and legislative officials in several other midwestern states; and it sent a number of representatives to Congress. It became a powerful force in Minnesota and to a lesser extent in Montana, Idaho, Wisconsin, and Colorado.

The National Nonpartisan League outlived its brief period of power in a number of sturdy offspring. Robert L. Morlan, author of *Political Prairie Fire* (1955)—the best study of the movement thus far published—succinctly evaluated the organization when he wrote: "In itself one of the most fascinating political movements in the history of the United States, the Nonpartisan League also laid much of the foundation of modern midwestern liberalism. It helped develop some of the most independently minded electorates in the country.

It built one of the first successful alliances between farmers and organized labor, and gave birth to Minnesota's Farmer-Labor party, which was to control that state through the years of the great depression and which continues powerful in a fusion as the Democratic Farmer Labor party. In the 1948 elections in the states of the Upper Midwest such divergent groups as Americans for Democratic Action and the Progressive party of Henry Wallace both claimed League paternity and drew upon its experiences and methods as a guide for their own actions." The league's principal guiding force — Arthur Townley — was in Moran's words "one of the great natural leaders of protest movements which this country has produced."

This microfilm edition was produced with the assistance of many persons. Co-operation and support in all phases of the project came from Oliver W. Holmes, director of the National Historical Publications Commission; his assistant, Fred Shelley; and Lucile M. Kane, curator of the society's manuscripts department. The project was directed by Helen M. White, associate curator of manuscripts.

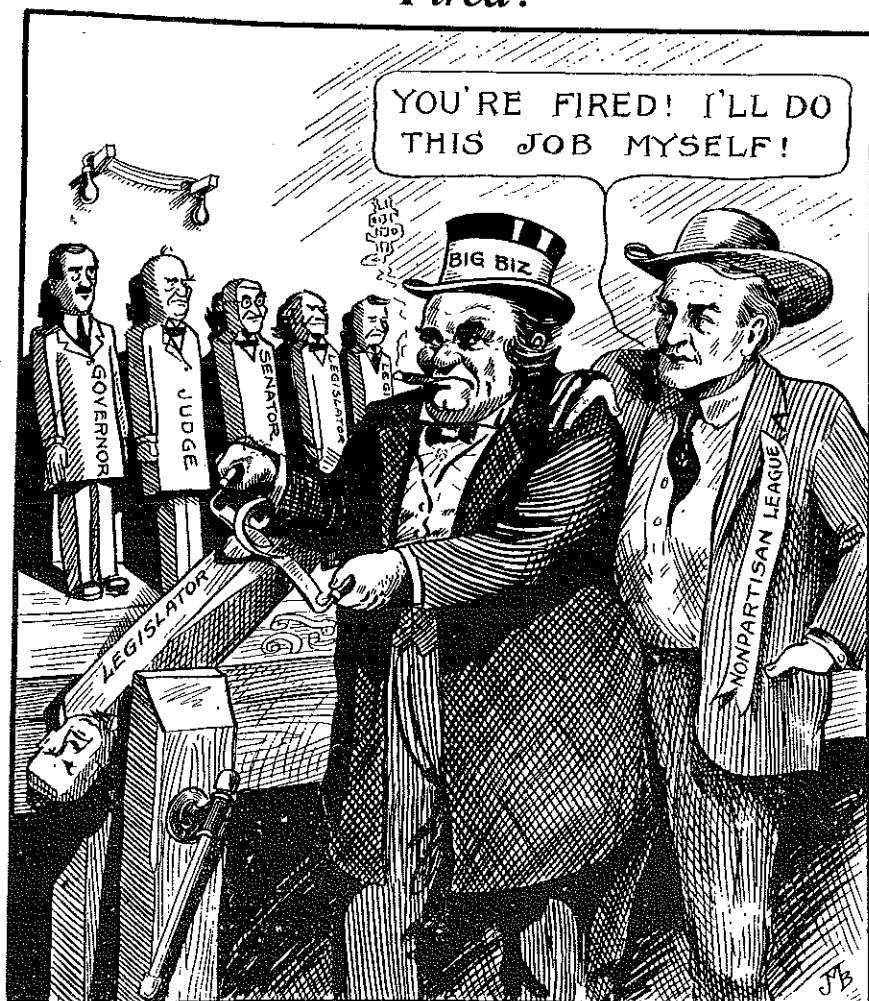
Deborah K. Neubeck prepared the papers for microfilming and wrote the roll note and this guide. Assisting her were Maureen Leverty and the staff of the society's microrecording laboratory. Editorial help in preparing this pamphlet for printing was contributed by various members of the society's publications department. David Miller and James Klein of Dakota Microfilm Service, Incorporated, filmed the papers under the direction of Bernhard T. Ringberg. The society gratefully acknowledges the assistance of these persons and organizations.

RUSSELL W. FRIDLEY, Director
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Fired!



THIS CARTOON by John M. Baer appeared on the cover of the first issue of the Nonpartisan Leader, September 23, 1915.

The National Nonpartisan League Papers

THE PAPERS OF THE NATIONAL NONPARTISAN LEAGUE in the manuscripts department of the Minnesota Historical Society include correspondence and miscellaneous papers (1910-28); special files for the Northwestern Service Bureau (1918-22), the *Minnesota Leader* (1923-27), and the *St. Paul Dispatch* (1918-19); and two volumes (1917-19 and 1924-25). These materials, which are included in this microfilm edition, measure six linear feet. In addition, the papers contain 88,000 league membership and other cards, measuring seventy-five linear feet, which were not filmed.

The bulk of the collection covers the period 1916-22 and consists of the correspondence of Henry G. Teigan, who served as the league's secretary from 1916 to 1923. The papers contain information about the league's origin, growth, and decline; educational, organizational, and reform programs; relations with members; and official publications. There is also data concerning opposition attacks, particularly in Minnesota during World War I; third-party politics, including the creation of the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota; Teigan's activities in the league and elsewhere; and the work of various reform groups of the Progressive era.

Three collections of printed pamphlets in the society's library are also included in the microfilm edition. The Usher L. Burdick pamphlets (1910-28), temporarily placed in chronological order in the league correspondence and miscellaneous papers, were filmed in their entirety. Only the title pages of the National Nonpartisan League (1916-46) and Henry G. Teigan (1917-38) pamphlet collections were copied, and they are found in a separate section of the film. The Teigan pamphlets, extracted from a larger collection of Teigan printed materials, are limited to those relating to the league. Catalog cards for other collections in the society's manuscripts department and relevant printed works in the society's library containing information about the league were filmed following the pamphlets.

Manuscripts (1916-23) selected from the Henry G. Teigan Papers form a substantial addition to the League Papers. Teigan's personal correspondence files for the years when he was secretary of the league consist almost entirely of items concerning the organization. Careful study indicated that they were undoubtedly once a part of the league records. For this reason they have been filmed as a supplement to the microfilm edition of the League Papers. The papers in the supplement measure 1½ linear feet and include correspondence

(1916-23) and a file on the Northwestern Service Bureau (1917-22). They relate largely to organizational and election campaigns conducted in 1922-23 by the league's Minnesota branch and to operations of the bureau.

While most of the materials in the League and Teigan papers are legible and in good physical condition, there are exceptions. Carbon copies of letters typed on sulphite paper have deteriorated, sometimes to the extent that legibility is impaired. Moreover, when pages of incoming letters, fastened together with glue at the upper left-hand corner, were separated for filming, the writing was occasionally obscured.

There are eighteen rolls of film in this microfilm publication. The League Papers comprise fourteen rolls. Correspondence and miscellaneous papers appear on Rolls 1-11; the Northwestern Service Bureau File on Roll 12; materials relating to the *Minnesota Leader* on Rolls 12-13; the *St. Paul Dispatch* File on Roll 13; and the volumes, title pages of the league and Teigan pamphlets, and the catalog cards on Roll 14. The four rolls (1-4) of the Teigan supplement are numbered separately. The correspondence is found on Rolls 1-3 and the Northwestern Service Bureau File on Rolls 3-4.

A brief general description of the contents of the League and Teigan papers appears on each microfilm roll. The description is followed by sample citations to items in both collections and a list of the rolls.

The 2-B film format has been used in microfilming the papers. The names of the collection and institution as well as the roll and frame numbers appear in a running title beneath each film frame. Special targets indicate reduction ratios differing from the standard 12 to 1, enclosures, and defective or incomplete manuscripts. When an item was filmed more than once at different camera settings in an effort to obtain a clearer image, a target indicates an intentional duplicate exposure. Because of filming errors, however, some of the special targets were inadvertently omitted.

A chronological order was followed whenever possible in the arrangement and filming of the papers within the separate groups. Undated items appear on the film before dated ones, and enclosures, no matter what their date, generally succeed the items in which they were enclosed. When an item found out of place was inserted into a film sequence, it was identified by frame numbers followed by a letter (as 163A).

This guide, designed to accompany the microfilm edition, provides historical background on the league, information on the society's acquisition of the collections, and an analysis of their content. It also contains an inventory of the microfilm rolls, a selected bibliography of manuscript and published sources on the league, and a list of author and subject entries used by the society in cataloging the papers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League began in 1915 as a revolt of the spring-wheat farmers of North Dakota. Spreading through the midwestern and

northwestern states with the speed and intensity of a prairie fire, it quickly became a center of national political controversy. By 1924 the fire was out, but in some states its effects were felt for many years. Neither an isolated nor a spontaneous phenomenon, the league was a product of the spirit of protest and reform prevalent in American society during the first two decades of the twentieth century. More immediately, it emerged from economic and political conditions in North Dakota, firmly rooted in the traditions of rural socialism and midwestern agrarian revolt.

The Socialist party of North Dakota was the source of most of the league's leadership. Arthur C. Townley, the organization's founder and moving spirit, became an organizer for the party in 1914 after going bankrupt as a flax farmer.* Socialists Fred B. Wood and Albert E. Bowen, the party's candidate for governor in 1912, were the league's cofounders, and Henry C. Teigan was secretary of the party (1913-16) before he became secretary of the league. In addition, socialists were recruited from across the country to serve as state managers, organizers, speakers, lawyers, and writers.

The league was also indebted to socialism for its reform program. Intended to liberate the farmers of North Dakota from economic exploitation by grain, railroad, and banking interests in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the league in its first platform called for socialistic reforms which had received widespread support among farmers for many years: "state ownership of terminal elevators, flour mills, packing houses, and cold storage plants; state inspection of grain and grain dockage; exemption of farm improvements from taxation; state hail insurance on an acreage tax basis; and rural credit banks operated at cost." As the organization expanded into other states, the platform was modified to fit local conditions.

The same forces that controlled North Dakota's economic life also controlled its political life. This dual "colonial" status convinced Townley and Bowen that the only way farmers could alleviate their economic distress was through direct, "nonpartisan" political activity. In theory, this meant that the farmers must elect candidates sincerely interested in furthering their cause, without regard to party. Keenly aware of the realities of the two-party system, however, Townley transformed this theoretical proposition into an eminently practical political strategy — league-endorsed candidates would attempt to capture control of the state's dominant political party by eliminating its official candidates in the direct primary election. Subsequent victories in the general election would enable a transformed majority party to begin serving the needs and interests of its constituency.

Townley served as the league's president from 1915 to 1922, and one of the chief reasons for its phenomenal success was his insistence on the importance of organization. He believed that if the farmers were to gain control of the state government, they must build a powerful, cohesive, and well-financed organization to conduct election campaigns with the same kind of resources that "Big Biz" provided for the "Old Gang" politicians. These objectives would be met in several ways. First, the farmers would be charged a membership fee to join the

* The bankruptcy application is found in volume I (1917-19).

league, payable in cash or with a check postdated to October when income from the harvest would be available. Townley reasoned, in typically flamboyant language: "Make the rubes pay their god-damn money to join and they'll stick — stick 'til hell freezes over."

A crude, but extremely effective, combination of applied psychology and high-pressure salesmanship was used by league organizers to sell memberships. They were once instructed by Townley to discover "the damn fool's hobby . . . and then talk it. If he likes religion, talk Jesus Christ; if he is against the government, damn the democrats; if he is afraid of whiskey, preach prohibition; if he wants to talk hogs, talk hogs — talk anything he'll listen to, but talk, talk, until you get his god-damn John Hancock to a check. . . ."

Second, to sustain the members' enthusiasm for the league between election campaigns and during periods when organizers were not active, a subscription to the *Nonpartisan Leader* was included in the membership fee. First issued in September, 1915, and renamed the *National Leader* after October, 1921, it was one of the most important factors in the league's success. Other newspapers expanded the league's network of communication with its members. Among them was the *Minnesota Leader*, the official publication of the organization's Minnesota branch, which was first issued in 1918.

Third, Townley insisted that while political candidates, platforms, legislation, and state and national committees would be selected by democratic processes, control of the organization must be vested solely in a national executive committee which he, as president, would dominate. In addition to reflecting his desire for power, this demand expressed his conviction that absolute control was the most effective method of preventing internal dissension and infiltration by those determined to destroy the organization. Although this "centralized democracy," which gave full play to Townley's magnetic leadership and talent for organization, was undoubtedly an advantage in the league's formative years, it soon gave rise to opposition charges that the group was undemocratic and to increasing internal demands for decentralization of power.

The first and most successful testing ground for Townley's ideas was North Dakota, where in 1916 the league-endorsed candidates for state office — headed by the gubernatorial nominee, Lynn J. Frazier — were victorious in the Republican primary election. As Townley had anticipated, this initial victory opened the way to control of the party's state central committee, the executive and judicial branches of government, and the House of Representatives, and by 1919 to the enactment into law of the league's entire reform program.

In 1917, encouraged by the victories in North Dakota, the league — with its name appropriately changed to the National Nonpartisan League and its national headquarters moved from Fargo to St. Paul — began expanding its activities. By 1921 it had established branches in fifteen other states: California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Although its activities in these states were not as successful as in North Dakota, the league helped to elect a number of persons to state and national office. Membership, which was 40,000

in North Dakota at the end of 1916, reached a national total of between 200,000 and 250,000 by 1920.

Despite this meteoric rise, the league was confronted with problems that would eventually prove insurmountable. Throughout its short history, it was plagued by strong, well-financed, and often very effective opposition from conservative forces which felt threatened by its success. In their attempts to destroy the organization, they preyed upon the contemporary fears and prejudices of the average American citizen. Prior to World War I, they accused league leaders of being socialists, anarchists, and members of the Industrial Workers of the World. These accusations declined in importance during the second phase of the opposition attack, which followed the nation's entry into the war in April, 1917. Gripped by a hysteria that demanded conformity to a rigidly defined brand of patriotism, the public had little tolerance for criticism of the war or reform movements designed to cure social, economic, and political ills.

The opposition fully exploited this wartime state of mind by raising the issue of the league's loyalty. A conference of producers and consumers held by the league in St. Paul in September, 1917, to promote co-operation between organized farmers and workers — an alliance the league's enemies greatly feared — presented them with strong ammunition. On the morning after the convention, they were jubilant to find the following statement attributed by the Associated Press to Robert M. La Follette, the convention's final speaker and a noted league supporter, broadcast widely in the press: "I wasn't in favor of beginning the war. We had no grievance against Germany." This statement was a blatant misquotation of La Follette's actual words: "For my own part, I was not in favor of beginning the war. I don't mean to say that we hadn't suffered grievances; we had — at the hands of Germany. Serious grievances!" However, the opposition used the statement — as well as the league's advocacy of conscripting wealth to finance the war — to launch a campaign of vilification, persecution, and terror designed to brand the organization disloyal, seditious, and pro-German.

In the postwar era, the nation was caught up in a crusade against socialism and bolshevism that possessed the fervor of a religious war. The opposition's increasingly lurid propaganda during this "Red Scare" again concentrated on its prewar themes.

Two other factors contributed significantly to the league's decline after 1920. The organization was seriously weakened by the agricultural depression, for many farmers were no longer able to pay the dues that financed league activities. The league also suffered from the debilitating effects of internal dissension. In addition to conflicts of temperament and personal ambition, disagreement centered around Townley's autocratic control and the organization's relationship to independent, third-party activities. The latter controversy over the league's political role precipitated Townley's resignation in 1922 as president, a crucial loss to the organization.

Although by 1924 the league had ceased to exist as a national organization, its influence continued to be felt in many states, notably in Minnesota and North Dakota. The Minnesota branch, which had early formed an alliance with organized labor, was the forerunner of the powerful Farmer-Labor and Democratic-

Farmer-Labor parties and served as the training ground for many of the men who emerged as their leaders. In North Dakota the league remained a strong faction within the Republican party until 1956, when it merged with the Democrats. An economic legacy of the league remains in two state-operated enterprises created by legislation passed during the Frazier administration (1917-21). The State Mill and Elevator, the only operation of its kind in the United States, has been on a profit-making basis since the 1940s; the Bank of North Dakota is one of the strongest between the Twin Cities and the West Coast.

ORIGIN OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collection now known as the National Nonpartisan League Papers was begun at the Minnesota Historical Society in October, 1924, when Carle C. Zimmerman, instructor in the College of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota, presented four maps (1920?) showing the geographical distribution of league membership in Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, and Wisconsin. He found them in the Star Building in Minneapolis, the league's last national headquarters, among rubbish left behind when the organization disbanded.

Patrick J. Gleason, in 1924 managing editor of the *Renville County Journal* and subsequently business manager of the *Minnesota Leader*, helped arrange the next presentation of league records. In December, 1924, the society secured from Ben W. Anderson of Minneapolis 80,000 league membership cards — chiefly for Minnesota but including some for Iowa and South Dakota. In November, 1928, Gleason added 8,000 cards to this file. They record subscriptions, expirations, and renewals to the *Minnesota Leader*; attitudes toward the league of newspapers in several states; Minnesota members of the National Federation of Women's Nonpartisan Clubs; league boosters in Minnesota; league meetings held in Minnesota between 1918 and 1921 and the speakers who addressed them; and Minnesota state legislators. Gleason completed his gift in December, 1928, when he donated a small file of correspondence, clippings, and other materials relating to the *Minnesota Leader* and the Minnesota branch of the league.

In September, 1934, Henry G. Teigan presented to the society a large group of correspondence and miscellaneous items. The donation had been encouraged by Robert H. Bahmer, who used the papers stored in the former secretary's home while doing research for his doctoral dissertation on the league. These manuscripts, with an addition Teigan gave in November, 1937, constitute the bulk of the League Papers. At the time of his second gift, Teigan stated that he had retained other correspondence, pamphlets, and miscellany relating to the organization. It seems clear that these were the league records found in the Teigan Papers which Mrs. Teigan gave to the society in April, 1941, after her husband's death. It is upon this supposition that the correspondence files for 1916-23 and the Teigan pamphlets relating to the league were included in the microfilm publication.

A further addition to the League Papers was made in March, 1940, by Roy W. Swanson, librarian of the *St. Paul Dispatch*, who contributed correspondence

and other items regarding an exposé of the league published in the *Dispatch* in 1918. The final group of manuscripts added to the collection was a file of correspondence and clippings found in the society's bookstacks in May, 1943. Its origin, unknown at the time, still remains a mystery.

The three pamphlet collections located in the society's library have diverse origins. The league pamphlets were collected from various sources over a long period of years; Mrs. Teigan presented the Teigan group with her husband's papers in 1941; and the society acquired the Burdick collection from Congressman Usher L. Burdick in 1944.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

Before 1916

The undated items at the beginning of the correspondence and miscellaneous papers include letters, circulars, pamphlets, leaflets, newspaper clippings, and news releases encompassing a wide variety of social, economic, and political subjects. There are also sample ballots from an unidentified state election.

Following these undated materials are a few items that predate the founding of the league. The earliest, from the Burdick pamphlet collection, is a 1910 tract opposing socialism and woman suffrage. Five newspaper clippings for March, 1913, chronicle the results of initiative, referendum, and recall legislation in the North Dakota state legislative session of that year. There are three items for 1914: a letter and reprints of two news articles which discuss German military operations in the early days of World War I. There are no items in the collection for 1911, 1912, or 1915.

1916-1917

Materials for 1916-17 document the early growth of the league. Among the first manuscripts pertaining directly to the organization is correspondence of its officials with farmers who wished to cancel their league memberships. Most of the cancellation requests were the result of anti-league publicity that appeared in two North Dakota newspapers in May, 1916. The journals asserted that since the league was not incorporated, its membership constituted a partnership; thus each member was personally liable for any debts incurred by the organization. Reminding their readers that Townley had failed as a farmer, the newspapers implied that the league was financially unsound and that members would suffer from their association with it.

Although the *Nonpartisan Leader* claimed that the story was a trick of those opposed to the league-endorsed candidates who would be contending in the June primary election, the large number of cancellation letters in the papers during the spring and summer months reveals that the attempt to reassure the membership was not altogether successful. In withdrawing from the organization, many persons returned their membership certificates and the circulars which had invited them to join or had welcomed them into the group. Some of them, however,

wished to retain their subscriptions to the *Leader*, while others promised to continue their support "for the good you are doing."

Following the league's 1916 election victories and the introduction of its reform proposals in the 1917 North Dakota legislative session, news of the organization spread rapidly. There are hundreds of letters in the collection addressed to league officials, Governor Frazier, and the *Nonpartisan Leader* from individuals and groups in every part of the country. The writers sought information on the league's history, programs, and future plans and asked for sample copies of the *Leader* or subscriptions to it. A number of correspondents, believing local conditions made immediate reform imperative, urged the league to organize in their communities. Others wanted to be hired as organizers, writers, or lecturers.

Copies of Teigan's letters as secretary indicate that he usually composed individual responses to inquiries concerning league expansion, employment opportunities, and controversial issues or events needing clarification. However, he replied to routine questions and requests for literature with form letters designed to accompany a wide variety of materials distributed by the league's educational department. Examples of these pamphlets, flyers, and reprints are scattered throughout the correspondence and miscellaneous papers. Although much of the correspondence is routine and repetitious, it contains a wealth of information about the league's origin, early development, policies, platforms, current activities, and future plans. It also furnishes an intriguing sample of contemporary public opinion.

Materials relating to the work of Ray McKaig provide other types of information. McKaig, who once characterized himself as the "John the Baptist of the farmers' movement," joined the league's staff in 1916 and rapidly became one of its most effective speakers. Late in that year he embarked on a speaking tour to arouse enthusiasm for the movement in western and northwestern states. Notable among the items documenting his activities are his reports on the trip, numerous newspaper clippings describing his speaking engagements, and several articles he wrote about the league. There is also correspondence containing names of persons who could be counted on to support the league when it began organizational work and descriptions of economic and political conditions in the states he visited. The many letters in the papers that mention McKaig and his work suggest how effectively he carried out his mission. Teigan's correspondence with other league officials in such states as Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma provides details of organizational campaigns, the obstacles encountered, and the successes achieved.

A significant number of items reflects Teigan's association with other contemporary reformers and his interest in the groups with which they were associated. His correspondence with such men as Judson King of the National Popular Government League, T. P. Quinn of Progressive Democracy of Chicago, and Carl D. Thompson of the Public Ownership League of America illuminates the work of these progressive groups, whose objectives were often very similar to those of the league. This semi-official correspondence sometimes contains personal opinions about the league and contemporary events that Teigan was not free to disclose in his official letters.

World War I looms large in the league's story. Early in 1917 a few letters appearing in the papers express fears of American involvement in the war and its potential effects on farmers and the league. After April, when the nation entered the conflict, there are requests for copies of the league's statement on its war position. Other subjects mentioned prominently in the correspondence at this time are food speculation, price fixing, censorship, curtailment of civil liberties, and the effects of the war on the league.

Mail during the months following the September, 1917, conference of producers and consumers reflects the nationwide publicity it received and the commotion it caused. Among these letters are requests for copies of the convention proceedings, the resolutions adopted, and La Follette's speech. There is also correspondence with labor organizations invited by the league to send delegates. These letters and other materials in the collection attest to the league's desire to forge an alliance with organized labor and indicate the steps taken to achieve this goal.

Miscellaneous items relating to the wartime persecution of the league in Minnesota and the organization's controversies with state and local officials begin to appear late in 1917 and comprise the bulk of the papers for January-April, 1918. There are only a few scattered letters for the early part of 1918.

The opposition in Minnesota, led by the state's Commission of Public Safety and the America First Association of Minnesota, leveled accusations of disloyalty and sedition against the league that aroused bitter hostility toward the organization among many of the state's citizens and officials. This atmosphere is reflected in the resolutions of citizens' councils and the injunctions of county sheriffs and attorneys forbidding the league to organize or conduct meetings in their communities. League representatives were the targets of many legal actions and were repeatedly the victims of mob violence and other forms of lawlessness. A Martin County indictment (February 2^d, 1918) charges Townley and Joseph Gilbert, a prominent league organizer, with discouraging enlistments in the United States Army. A broadside in the papers pictures a league supporter tarred and feathered by an angry mob. Such acts are described by victims and witnesses of the attacks in numerous affidavits and resolutions. Newspaper clippings repeat the stories and announce anti-league campaigns to "smoke out the skunks in Minnesota."

Examples of league attempts to secure protection from the state are found in the papers for February and March, 1918. A copy of a league request for the removal from office of one county attorney and three county sheriffs argues that these officials had "oppressed," "threatened," and "intimidated by force" league officials and local citizens, thereby depriving them of their constitutional liberties and rights. A letter written by Townley to Governor Joseph A. A. Burnquist demanded that he clarify the league's position with respect to the law. Townley considered Burnquist's terse reply full of meaningless "legal truisms," and in another letter he called upon the governor to respond to his request "without any innuendo, implication, evasion, or equivocation. . . ."

All of these items appear to have been part of the league's working files for publications designed to illustrate how the civil liberties and rights of its officials and members were being violated in Minnesota. A draft of a pamphlet entitled "Anarchy in Minnesota" (1918P) declares that a conspiracy existed to smash the league under the guise of patriotism and loyalty and charges the Commission of Public Safety with allowing crimes against the league to go unchallenged. After documenting the league's case, it calls upon Governor Burnquist to "denounce this conspiracy and act against it." A similar format is followed in *A Memorial to the President Concerning Conditions in Minnesota*, 1918, an incomplete draft of which is filed in the papers under the date of March 11.

Three groups of letters, copies of which are in the papers for 1918, provided the raw materials for articles that appeared in the *Nonpartisan Leader* on "plots and conspiracies to disrupt and discredit the League." The newspaper used evidence found in the first group, which dates from May 7 through August 26, in its September 16, 1918, issue to document its exposé of the financial backers of the On the Square Publishing Company. This company published *On the Square — A Magazine for Farm and Home*, which was devoted to "fighting Socialism, half-baked Socialism, and the Socialism of the Nonpartisan League." According to the *Leader*, the company received its operating funds from a group of wealthy anti-league businessmen in the Twin Cities led by Charles S. Patterson, a wholesale shoe dealer and municipal lighting contractor.

Materials in the second group, filed under the dates of March 21, 1918 — January 8, 1919, were used by the *Leader* to expose an attempt by some Omaha, Nebraska, businessmen to prove that the league was disloyal and pro-German. In March and April, 1918, they had negotiated an agreement with the Thiel Detective Service to gather evidence against the league. However, Ralph A. Moore, the Thiel operative who was directed to infiltrate the Nebraska state organization, was unable to collect any proof of the charges and was won over to the league movement. Revealing his true identity to league officials, he wrote five articles exposing the conspiracy and his role in it that were published in the *Leader* in July and August, 1919. In addition to correspondence, the file contains Moore's statements about the investigation, which apparently served as the basis for the *Leader* articles.

The third group of letters concerns the July, 1919, trial and conviction of Townley and Gilbert in the Jackson County (Minnesota) district court on charges of conspiring to discourage army enlistments in 1918. An important premise of the league's defense was that the trial was politically motivated and part of a larger conspiracy to destroy the organization in which E. H. Nicholas, the prosecuting attorney, Ferdinand A. Teigen, the prosecution's star witness, and Charles Patterson were directly involved. When the defense attorney attempted to substantiate these claims, Judge Ezra C. Dean refused to admit the evidence. In its August 4 and 11, 1919, issues, the *Leader* published this evidence — correspondence which shows that Nicholas had helped to distribute an anti-league tract written by Teigen and financed by Patterson's group. Copies of the correspondence, dated March 27–June 13, 1918, are filed together

under the title, "Data Relating to the *Nonpartisan Leader's* Exposé of Ferdinand A. Teigan and E. H. Nicholas."

Henry G. Teigan's correspondence reappears in the papers in the latter part of 1918. He responds to requests for information and literature, and by June, 1919, there is evidence that he has enlarged his functions in this area by assuming responsibility for the educational department. The bulk of his correspondence, however, is with league associates, family, friends, and acquaintances. It contains data on a variety of subjects: his assessment of the effects of the war on the league; his analysis of the 1918 election in Minnesota; his growing conviction that progressives could not capture either of the two major political parties in 1920; and his belief that liberal forces should unite under the banner of a new national third party headed by someone like Robert M. La Follette.

Other letters discuss the status of the various court cases in which the league was embroiled; the revolt against Townley's autocratic rule led by Gilbert; the split in the North Dakota ranks; the relationship between socialists and leaguers in Wisconsin; the importance of political co-operation between organized farmers and workers; the role of league leaders in the 1919 North Dakota legislative session; the implications of the reorganization plans approved at the league's national executive committee meeting in 1919; and the status of various state-supported enterprises in North Dakota, as well as the campaign against them by the Independent Voters' Association of North Dakota.

Miscellaneous items, including legal documents, pamphlets, flyers, and clippings of newspaper and magazine articles, give additional information about many of the subjects discussed in the correspondence. Of particular interest are materials relating to the league's continuing efforts to work with organized labor and their successful culmination in Minnesota, where in 1918 the two forces jointly endorsed candidates of an independent, Farmer-Labor party that was emerging. Other items testify to the "Red Scare" that gripped the country after the war and illustrate how the opposition's propaganda capitalized on this national state of mind.

1920-1922

Most of the papers for the years 1920-22 concern Teigan's activities as secretary of the league and head of its educational department. His correspondence with league associates and reformers such as John A. H. Hopkins of the Committee of 48 and Benjamin C. Marsh of the Farmers' National Council and the People's Reconstruction League also continues. These materials indicate that although the organization was beset with difficulties, it tried to strengthen and expand its work. For example, a California league was established during the winter of 1921-22, and Teigan declares as late as August 1, 1922, that the league planned to invade new states as soon as organizers could be engaged. However, problems rather than progress dominate the subject matter of the papers during this period — problems involving lack of funds, opposition attacks, and internal dissension.

Financial difficulties precipitated by the agricultural depression of the 1920s forced the league to retrench. The papers reveal that as impoverished farmers failed to join the organization or to renew old memberships staff salaries became delinquent, supplies of literature dwindled, and little money was available for campaign materials or other needs of the organization.

The "Red Scare" tactics of the opposition continued. There are numerous references to anti-socialist and anti-bolshevik crusades against the league, particularly in Kansas and North Dakota. Kansas witnessed an American Legion campaign against the league which at times approached the violence of Minnesota's "reign of terror" during the war. In North Dakota the Independent Voters' Association made deep inroads into league strength in the legislature but was not able to unseat the state's executive officials in the 1920 election. In 1921 the association renewed its attacks against the state-operated industrial and financial enterprises, especially the Bank of North Dakota, not only demanding their limitation or abolition, but also insisting on the recall of Governor Frazier and the other two members of the Industrial Commission of North Dakota. The voters in a special October election defeated the constitutional amendments pertaining to the state enterprises proposed by the association. However, they struck a devastating blow at the league when they recalled the commission by a narrow margin.

Internal dissension, which split the league ranks in both the state and national organizations, is also described in this section of the papers. For example, in Colorado controversy centered around the actions of the state manager, while in North Dakota a power struggle within the state executive committee produced damaging schisms. More widespread were ideological disputes over the league's future relationship to the established political parties. Some believed that the organization should continue the original policy of active participation within the framework of state majority parties. Townley, on the other hand, proposed a new role for the league as a "balance of power" force, but the failure of his proposal to arouse wide support prompted his resignation as president in May, 1922. A third group, which included Teigan and which was especially strong in Minnesota, advocated that the league sever its ties with the two major parties and function through a new third party composed of a coalition of farmer, labor, and other progressive forces.

Teigan's correspondence contains many references to these conflicting viewpoints and reflects his own keen interest in the meetings that culminated in the formation of a national Farmer-Labor party in 1920. The conflict at the party's convention between the delegates of the Labor party, the Committee of 48, and other factions over the nomination of a presidential ticket is revealed in newspaper clippings and other printed materials, as are the conferences held at the end of 1922 to promote future harmonious working relations among these groups.

During the fall and winter months of 1922, materials relating to the election campaigns of candidates nominated by the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota predominate. They reflect the increasing involvement of Teigan and others of the national staff in local league activities as the power of the national or-

ganization declined. Elected to the position of campaign manager on the Minnesota league's executive committee, Teigan in his correspondence deals with the organization, finances, publicity, and other aspects of the contests.

Also appearing in this section of the papers is a set of maps, probably for 1920, showing league membership in Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, and Wisconsin. In addition, there is information about the Women's Nonpartisan Clubs of Minnesota, the relations of the Minnesota league with the Democratic and Socialist parties, conditions in various other states, the organizational changes initiated at the meeting of the league's national executive committee in 1921, and the state conventions in North Dakota and Minnesota in the following year.

1923-1928

The papers for 1923-28 reflect the continuing decline of the league's national organization and the growing importance of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party in taking over the causes and activities of the older organization in that state.

The materials for 1923-24 document Teigan's activities and interests. After Magnus Johnson was elected to the United States Senate on the Minnesota Farmer-Labor ticket in July, 1923, he appointed Teigan as his secretary. Before leaving the league's national staff in November, 1923, Teigan answered the dwindling number of requests for information and literature.

Other items for 1923, as well as most of those for 1924, relate to Teigan's intimate involvement in Farmer-Labor politics on both the state and national levels. They concern a Minnesota Farmer-Labor conference called in 1923 by Teigan and William Mahoney, president of the Working People's Nonpartisan Political League of Minnesota, to make plans for improving the party's educational and organizational work; the formation of the Farmer-Labor Federation of Minnesota in 1924 as the central representative organization of the various groups in the state Farmer-Labor party; and the National Farmer-Labor-Progressive convention of 1924 denounced by La Follette on the grounds that it would be controlled by the Communists. Drafts of speeches and articles supply information on Johnson's unsuccessful 1924 campaign for re-election to the Senate.

Newspaper clippings dominate the small group of items in the papers for the years 1925-28. The articles deal with a variety of subjects, among them the national and Minnesota Farmer-Labor parties, the Farmer-Labor Federation of Minnesota, the labor movement, and the Minnesota state elections of 1926. The published minutes of the Minnesota league's convention of 1925 reveal that in confronting the important issue of whether to disband and join the Farmer-Laborites or to continue as a separate organization, the members agreed to "co-operate with all organizations within the state which are working for the same purpose for which we exist." There is also a draft of an article on the future of the Farmer-Labor party in Minnesota.

The correspondence and miscellaneous papers end as they begin with a pamphlet (1928) from the Burdick collection issued by the state of North Dakota. It contains the provisions of a North Dakota constitutional amendment

authorizing compensation to depositors in insolvent state banks and a statement by the State Taxpayers' Association urging the voters to reject the proposal.

NORTHWESTERN SERVICE BUREAU FILE

The Northwestern Service Bureau, initially a department and later an incorporated auxiliary of the league, was designed to assist in organizing and operating farmer-owned county newspapers that supported the league. The items in this section of the papers deal almost exclusively with the Stearns County (Minnesota) Farmer Publishing Company and its newspaper, the *Richmond Standard*, the name of which was subsequently changed to the *Stearns County Leader*. Dating from the company's incorporation and purchase of the paper in 1918 to the bureau's sale of the journal in 1922, the materials consist primarily of the correspondence of men representing the bureau, the paper, and the publishing company. The correspondence is supplemented by copies of the company's articles of incorporation and its application to the State Securities Commission for a permit to sell stock, as well as by financial records relating to stock sales.

The manuscripts offer insight into how the bureau encouraged farmers to form a local publishing company; supervised the organizational meetings, the purchase of a paper, and the sale of stock; made legal arrangements; provided personnel; and advised the paper's editors, managers, and officers. They reveal schemes of league attorneys for circumventing unfavorable rulings of such groups as the War Industries Board and the State Securities Commission. They also suggest the kind of personal and financial difficulties encountered by the bureau's publishing companies, which sometimes — as in the case of the Stearns County firm — precipitated changes in management and the eventual sale of the paper.

The file also includes lists of newspapers operated by the bureau in Colorado, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota; ten editorial service sheets (1918) syndicated by the bureau and sent to its papers; and the draft of a letter (1921) explaining the bureau's functions.

Minnesota Leader FILE

The materials relating to the *Minnesota Leader* for 1923-27 represent only a fragmentary sampling of the type of items that originally must have been in the paper's files and thus give only random clues to its operation. Among the large number of undated items are miscellaneous financial and membership records; correspondence; subscription records; a roster of North Dakota state legislators; and cards giving information about the name, location, publisher, size, circulation, and attitude toward the league of ten Minnesota newspapers. The paper's long mailing lists, organized by location, supply information about league support in many Minnesota communities. A few items for 1923, primarily miscellaneous financial records and membership cards, follow the undated materials.

The bulk of the file consists of 1924 materials. Included are letters, cartoons, and drafts of articles and editorials pertaining to the November general election, most of which were used in the October 25 and November 15 issues of the paper; other campaign materials; subscription and financial records; postal notices concerning the delivery of the *Leader*; and correspondence of the editor, Otto M. Thomason.

In December, 1924, the *Leader* was moved from Minneapolis to Olivia, Minnesota. Patrick J. Gleason, managing editor of the *Renville County Journal*, became business manager of the paper in 1925. Both newspapers were issued from the same office until 1926, when Gleason's association with the *Journal* ended. In the same year financial difficulties forced the *Leader* to suspend publication, and Gleason became publisher of the *Renville County Republic*. His involvement with these three journals is mirrored in the papers. There is data on the *Journal* and *Leader* for 1925-26, but the materials for 1927 relate exclusively to the *Republic*.

St. Paul Dispatch FILE

Most of the file (1918-19) pertains to an anti-league exposé published serially in the *Dispatch* in August, 1918. Written by Samuel R. Maxwell and entitled "The Nonpartisan League from the Inside," the articles were reissued as a book later that same month.

Maxwell was a former minister whom the league engaged in Colorado in 1917 as an organizer and then as a lecturer. According to the *Nonpartisan Leader*, he attempted to use the league to further his own personal ambitions. Thoroughly discredited in Colorado when his schemes were revealed, he traveled to national headquarters in St. Paul, where he requested and was granted another chance to work with the organization. He was re-employed as a lecturer in Minnesota but was subsequently assigned to organizational work. He considered the new assignment a demotion and resigned. A short time later his articles, directed primarily against Townley's autocratic rule, began to appear in the *Dispatch*. The *Leader* claimed that he had been paid to write them by the same businessmen who, through Charles Patterson, had financed the anti-league activities of the On the Square Publishing Company.

The *Dispatch* file, kept by the paper's managing editor, Herbert R. Galt, begins in July, 1918, after the agreements concerning the publication and syndication of Maxwell's writings had been made. It contains correspondence regarding the sale of publication rights to other newspapers, the publication and distribution of the book, the reactions of readers, and Maxwell's activities during this period. Of particular interest are several letters indicating that the Reliance Publicity Service, also financed by Patterson's group, assumed part of the initial costs of issuing the book and subsequently acquired publication rights to it from the *Dispatch*. There are copies of bills covering the sale of the articles to newspapers and original statements returned to the *Dispatch* by papers which had not ordered the material. The galley proofs of the articles are also included.

The manuscripts concerning the exposé end in December, 1918, with a financial

report on the venture. This report and other items in the file suggest that neither the articles nor the book achieved wide distribution and that they failed to create the wave of anti-league sentiment envisioned by the backers.

Two items for 1919 conclude the file: a letter from Maxwell to Galt inquiring about the possibility of writing an article for the *Dispatch* on protecting American principles against "foreignism of all kinds" and Galt's negative reply.

VOLUMES

Volume 1 (1917-19) is a loose-leaf notebook consisting chiefly of typewritten transcripts of shorthand notes taken during events participated in by the league. The policy of keeping verbatim notes was initiated in the spring of 1917 after North Dakota newspapers accused Townley of making pro-German statements while addressing mass meetings. Without transcripts of the speeches, the league had no evidence with which to refute the charge. Townley hired a stenographer to record his next speech, and from that time on there was one present at important public and private league functions.

The fifty-odd speeches found in this volume were delivered at public meetings, debates, conferences, and conventions in Minnesota and North Dakota. The roster of those who gave the addresses reads like a "who's who" of league officials and supporters. Among them are Albert E. Bowen, Lynn J. Frazier, Joseph Gilbert, Magnus Johnson, Robert M. La Follette, William Lemke, Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., James Manahan, Walter T. Mills, Kate Richards O'Hare, Jeannette Rankin, Otto M. Thomason, Arthur C. Townley, and Thomas Van Lear. The speeches serve as excellent examples of the verbal propaganda which aroused such impassioned support on the one hand and such bitter opposition on the other.

The volume also contains documents relating to several important Minnesota court trials that resulted from the turmoil of the war years. Among them are a record of the proceedings of the trial of Gilbert at Lakefield, Jackson County, on a charge of unlawful assembly; Arthur Le Sueur's address to the court during the trial of Townley and Gilbert at Fairmont, Martin County; and the direct and cross examinations of Ferdinand A. Teigen, as well as Judge Ezra C. Dean's address to the jury, in the Townley-Gilbert trial at Jackson, Jackson County.

Also found in the volume are affidavits by Norbert O'Leary, the league's stenographer, concerning his qualifications and the accuracy of his reports; Townley's bankruptcy application; a brief by Le Sueur arguing the right of league members to sit as jurors in cases involving the organization; letters; memoranda; drafts of pamphlets, news articles, and proposed legislation; minutes of the state managers' conferences of 1917 and 1918; and other miscellaneous items.

Volume 2 is a bank book showing funds deposited in 1924-25 by the Minnesota league and the *Minnesota Leader*.

PAMPHLETS

The forty-three items in the National Nonpartisan League pamphlet collection (1916-46) are for the most part pamphlets and flyers issued by the league

or by anti-league organizations. The collection also contains reprints of newspaper and magazine articles about the league. The sixty-three items in the Henry G. Teigan pamphlet collection (1917-38) follow a similar pattern, although they reflect more clearly Teigan's interests in socialism and the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota.

HENRY G. TEIGAN PAPERS SUPPLEMENT

CORRESPONDENCE

The correspondence (1916-23) in the Teigan Papers Supplement contains a great deal of material germane to the history of the league. The close ties of Teigan and other league officials with socialism are revealed in materials for 1916. There is correspondence between Teigan and A. W. Ricker of *Pearson's Magazine*, a socialist publication supplied to league members in the early months of the organization's existence. The letters concern Townley's decision to discontinue the subscription arrangement after the *Nonpartisan Leader* was firmly established as the league's official paper. Other items for the year indicate that Teigan was active in the North Dakota Socialist party during the 1916 general election as chairman of the state campaign committee for Allan Benson, the national party's candidate for president. There is information on his efforts to raise funds for distribution to league members of a special edition of *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist magazine, and for advertising on behalf of "Benson and Socialism" in the *Nonpartisan Leader*.

The papers contain only one item for 1917 — a letter by Teigan requesting information on the New Zealand Farmers' Union. The file for 1918 that follows includes drafts of some twenty form letters, labeled by subject and addressed to "Mr. Blank," which were used by Teigan in his official league correspondence. Also of interest are copies of reports pertaining to league activities, the progress of organizational work in Minnesota, and the results of primary elections in Minnesota and North Dakota.

Correspondence for 1919 includes letters from a Mrs. Florence Borner, who wanted the league to publish her poetry; a circular letter from the Reliance Publicity Service warning Minnesota farmers that the league was a socialist menace; and a request for the wartime publications of the league from the Bibliothèque et Musée de la Guerre in Paris, indicating that knowledge of the organization had spread to Europe.

Among the papers for 1920 are letters from W. C. Zumach of the Wisconsin league containing substantial information on the political situation in that state, and correspondence with book publishers regarding winter reading material for the league's members. There are also a report on the proceedings of the first biennial convention of the Working People's Nonpartisan Political League of Minnesota, held on March 24-25, and a draft of an article on the league which Teigan wrote for the *American Labor Yearbook*, published by the Rand School of Social Science.

There is a variety of subject matter in the papers for 1921-23. Among the

most interesting items for the years 1921-22 are circular letters sent to state managers by the national manager, De Witt C. Dorman, which reveal the organizational and financial difficulties confronting the league. Information about the Women's Nonpartisan Clubs of Minnesota is contained in correspondence, in the call to the 1923 annual convention, held on March 15, and in Mrs. Susie Stageberg's report of its proceedings.

However, most of the papers for these years concern Teigan's increasing participation in the affairs of the Minnesota league — a change that reflected the general shift in power and the migration of league officials from the national to the state level. Greater in number than similar materials in the League Papers, they provide a more comprehensive picture of how the state branches conducted organizational and election campaigns. Late in 1922 the Minnesota state executive committee scheduled a speaking tour of the state for the early months of 1923. Selected to make the tour were Albert E. Bowen and Magnus Johnson, Farmer-Labor candidate for governor in 1922. As the committee's campaign manager, Teigan was placed in charge of the project. His correspondence with local boosters and Women's Nonpartisan Clubs regarding scheduling, itineraries, publicity, and financing for the meetings dominates the papers during the months preceding and during the tour.

A circular letter dated April 27, 1923, announces the executive committee's decision to launch an intensive organizational campaign in rural Minnesota. However, the campaign was interrupted by the special election called after the death of United States Senator Knute Nelson in April. Victorious in the Farmer-Labor primary, Magnus Johnson went on to capture the office in the July election. His campaign was waged by the various elements in the Farmer-Labor party. The league was made responsible for the work in the rural areas, and Teigan again performed the duties of campaign manager. The bulk of the correspondence for the spring and summer months relates to the league campaign, which Teigan handled in essentially the same way as he had the Bowen-Johnson tour.

The papers indicate that before accompanying Johnson to Washington, D.C., in November, Teigan acted as secretary to both the senator and the league. Correspondence for December deals almost exclusively with Johnson's affairs.

NORTHWESTERN SERVICE BUREAU FILE

This file (1917-22) contains supplementary information about the purposes, policies, management, and operations of the Northwestern Service Bureau. Although the materials are similar to those found in the League Papers, they include correspondence with representatives of a larger number of newspapers and give a more complete indication of the bureau's activities.

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1955), is based on an examination of the League Papers and related collections of manuscripts, unpublished studies, and printed materials in the Minnesota Historical Society and other institutions. It contains a detailed bibliography. There is also a great deal of material about the league in Edward C. Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln, 1963), based largely upon Lemke manuscripts unavailable to Morlan.

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An invaluable research aid in studying the league are the national and some state editions of its official publication, the *National Leader*. The files (1915-23) found in the collections of the society have been photographed on six rolls of microfilm. The files of the *Minnesota Leader* (1918-26) are also available on three rolls of microfilm.

Additional manuscript and printed sources on the league in the manuscripts department and the library of the society are indicated in the card files filmed on Roll 14 of this microfilm publication. Photographs of persons and events related to the organization are among the collections of the society's audio-visual library.

THE MICROFILM

National Nonpartisan League Papers

CORRESPONDENCE AND MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Roll 1. Undated, 1910 — January, 1917 | Roll 7. May — November, 1920 |
| Roll 2. February — June, 1917 | Roll 8. December, 1920 — March, 1921 |
| Roll 3. July — December, 1917 | Roll 9. April — December, 1921 |
| Roll 4. January, 1918 — May, 1919 | Roll 10. January — October, 1922 |
| Roll 5. June, 1919 — January, 1920 | Roll 11. November, 1922-28 |
| Roll 6. February — April, 1920 | |
- Roll 12. Northwestern Service Bureau File
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- Roll 13. *Minnesota Leader* File, 1925-27
St. Paul Dispatch File
- Roll 14. Volumes; Library Pamphlets; Catalog Cards

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- Roll 1. Correspondence, undated, 1916 — February, 1923
- Roll 2. Correspondence, March — July, 1923
- Roll 3. Correspondence, August — December, 1923
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- Roll 4. Northwestern Service Bureau File, September,
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Microfilm errors, including omitted enclosure targets, unintentional duplicate exposures, and incorrectly filed papers, appear in the National Nonpartisan League Papers on Roll 2, Frame 309; Roll 4, Frames 152 and 751; Roll 7, Frame 385; Roll 8, Frame 628; and Roll 12, Frames 79, 149, 187-88, 235, 531-32, and 726-27.

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