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JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

By
HARVEY WISH

The rise of the movement for social democracy in the United States during the final decades of the nineteenth century coincided with similar trends in Europe, but owed its peculiar form to indigenous factors. Behind the political blare of the Civil War and the reconstruction era which accompanied the abdication of the southern planter from the seat of power, new industrial and financial leaders quietly assumed the authority relinquished. The ensuing quest for governmental assistance to specially favored industries occupies a considerable portion of our post-bellum history in the form of the perennial tariff issue. The growing scarcity of cheap arable lands in the west, the insistent efforts of the industrialist to obtain new immigrants, preferably contract-laborers, and the social problems inevitably resulting from urbanization led to the growth of a militant labor movement. Imported philosophies of radicalism lent color rather than content or direction to the struggle of the American workman for some measure of economic security. The battles of Haymarket, Homestead, and Pullman among others marked this development.

For the debtor-farmer, fighting a lost cause against the growing hegemony of industry, the campaign of 1896 took the symbolic form of a free silver crusade. Men who knew next to nothing about economics found their panacea in a complex monetary theory and the cryptic slogan of

“sixteen to one.” Labor rallied to this banner, not because of any illusions regarding the effect of inflation upon the wage earner, but largely because the broader social aspects of their cause appeared to be involved. Realists might deprecate the qualifications of the Democratic standard-bearer, William Jennings Bryan, but they recognized him as the “Knight of the Disinherited.”

The key to much of the situation in 1896 can be found in the events occurring in Illinois during the preceding decade. A new industrial regime in that state, resting largely on absentee ownership and monopolistic control fed by the legislative largess, had created favorable soil for labor crises like those at the Haymarket in 1886; in Spring Valley in 1890; in the major coal areas of Illinois during 1893-94; and in the “model village” of Pullman during the summer of 1894. The effects of the worldwide depression of 1893 were intensified in Illinois as elsewhere by the temporary destruction of the workman’s power to bargain collectively for his labor. When the legislature outlawed such industrial mercenaries as the Pinkertons, native sons were found to act as “deputies” for private establishments. The Governor, John Peter Altgeld, fought valiantly against the tide of corruption which obstructed democratic channels of protest, and finally succeeded in enacting several notable reforms despite the scant support given him by the legislature, then dominated by a bipartisan ring. In 1893, Altgeld had not only freed the three surviving prisoners accused of participation in the bomb-throwing at the Haymarket, but had used the pardon message as a bludgeon upon those in high places who had smothered the eight-hour movement beneath the anarchist bogie; henceforth, he was Altgeld, the Anarchist of Illinois, to the conservative press of the country. A year later, during the early part of the Pullman strike, the Governor

HARVEY WISH

issued a sharp protest to President Cleveland against the sending of federal troops to Chicago, implying that they were used in reality as strike-breakers and that the President had acted as despotically as any autocrat. This defiance of the titular head of his party in the interests of labor was Altgeld's first step in reorganizing the national Democratic party free of the conservative Cleveland influence. His record of social reform in Illinois, his championship of the common man, and his influence in capturing the Democratic rank and file for progressive measures had won him party leadership. Together with other western leaders, he engineered the popular movement of protest, accentuated by the depression, from third party channels to the newly liberalized Democratic party.¹

During the days immediately preceding the Chicago Convention of 1896, Democratic silver leaders prepared to reap the fruits of their earlier strategy that had made the monetary issue paramount, and to demand the control of the national committee which contained a majority of gold men. The Democratic Bimetallic League, representing the silver sentiment of the party, sent a strong sub-committee to obtain the selection of a silver man as temporary chairman of the convention: Governor John P. Altgeld of Illinois, Senator Jones of Arkansas, Senator Daniel of Virginia, Governor Stone of Missouri, and Senator Turpie of Indiana.² It was commonly supposed that Altgeld himself would be given the "keynote" position or else the permanent chairmanship. These convention offices, however, did not attract the Illinois statesman, who refused to permit his name being used for either position, desiring instead an active role on the floor of the convention where his leadership would count for most.³

¹For detailed evidence underlying the above generalizations, see the writer's doctoral dissertation, "The Administration of Governor John Peter Altgeld of Illinois, 1893-1897." (Unpublished, Northwestern University, 1936), *passim*.

²*Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1896.

³*Ibid.*, July 2, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

At noon on July 6, the national committee assembled in the parlor of the Palmer House. Soon the representatives of the League appeared, to deliver their warning to the gold majority. Senator Jones, acting as spokesman, declared that they were authorized by the silver delegates to the Convention, who represented a majority of its members, to request that the position of Temporary Chairman be given to "some gentleman of well-known silver views; whose name would be presented by a member of the national committee in sympathy with the free silver movement."⁴ This defiance of its authority was keenly resented by the committee. In the ensuing vote, David B. Hill, a gold man of New York, was chosen over John W. Daniel of Virginia, the silver candidate, by a vote of twenty-seven to twenty-three.⁵ The gold forces having won the first skirmish, the contest was carried to the Convention.

The next day, July 7, when the Convention was formally opened at the Coliseum, the silver members of the national committee presented a minority report demanding the replacement of Hill by Senator Daniel. A motion for a roll call by states was made. Altgeld's policy of "no-compromise" required that the keynote speech, as well as all subsequent proceedings, be entirely in the interests of free silver. Any other course, he thought, would be fatal. Marston of Louisiana expressed the prevailing determination on this matter:⁶

It is not that we love David B. Hill less, but we love Democracy more. We would not cast any aspersion upon our eastern friends We state to the Democracy of the United States that we are on top and mean to assert our rights.

The vote upon the substitution of Daniel for Hill was decisively in favor of the silver leader by 556 to 349. An

⁴ *Official Proceedings of the Democratic Convention* (at Chicago), 1896, p. 68a.

⁵ *Ibid*, 70.

⁶ *Ibid*, 86.

HARVEY WISH

overwhelming coalition of western and southern states defeated the eastern bloc. Nebraska was kept in line by the gold forces who were still in control.

Before the Convention met, Altgeld had made it clear to the Illinois delegation that the state could exercise a strong influence upon the outcome of the battle for silver:⁷

The least concession, in my judgment, means defeat for us We are so situated that Illinois will wield a great influence in the convention. The individual delegates from Illinois will wield a great influence on delegates from the West and South. Ours is a pivotal State.

He desired that the two-thirds rule be abolished as a relic of slavery days and that the Illinois delegation act if the opportunity offered. When the Bland element in the delegation attempted to obtain a vote upon the presidential preference of the group, an Altgeld leader moved that the meeting adjourn. The Governor was opposed to an advance commitment to Bland in the hope that a stronger candidate might develop during the campaign. Hinrichsen, however, polled the delegation while Altgeld was absent, and found thirty-three of the forty-eight for Bland: only one, Dr. Felix Rignier of Monmouth, was for Bryan; the remainder were largely for Adlai Stevenson and Boies.⁸ The Governor agreed to vote with the majority and Illinois was declared as a unit for Bland.

A friendly journalist, Francis F. Browne, telegraphed this account of Altgeld's role in the Convention to the *National Review* of London:⁹

From the very opening of the . . . Convention, . . . its leader and dominating spirit was John P. Altgeld, Governor of Illinois. He was the brain and will of the Convention, as Bryan was—very literally—its voice. Bryan's nomination was in the nature of an accident; Altgeld's leadership was inevitable from his position and his personal

⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1896.

⁸ *Ibid.*, July 5, 1896.

⁹ Francis F. Browne, "The Presidential Contest—Altgeld of Illinois," *National Review* (London), December, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

qualities—from his abilities, his courage, and his practical political sagacity. Even before the Convention assembled, he had done more than any other man to forecast its character, to create the situation and shape the issues which were there developed.

This appraisal was later echoed by William H. Hinrichsen, who was close to Altgeld throughout the Convention.¹⁰ Darrow, also an active participant, complained at times that the Governor's methods of exercising pressure upon the delegates were too high-handed. Altgeld regarded his goal as justification of his course in this matter.¹¹

In the battle over the report of the committee on credentials, he took a leading part particularly in challenging the vote of Michigan. The struggle of the silver men against the gold majority, led by Don Dickinson of that state, was closely watched by Altgeld through confidential reports of his friends. Allegations were made to him that the gold majority was the result of fraudulent voting.¹² The controversy was carried to the floor of the Convention when Stevenson of Michigan cast the state's vote in favor of seating the gold men. A great demonstration was made by the gold delegates.¹³

Suddenly Governor Altgeld got upon his chair and faced the convention. His pale face was silhouetted against the royal purple standard of the Illinois delegation and his long, lean arm was extended . . . appealing for recognition . . . Cockrell Martin and Stone gathered around him. He secured recognition by the medium of a messenger . . . "I rise to a point of order. I desire to challenge the vote of Michigan."

There was a terrific uproar, but Altgeld continued:

"We are proceeding here under the rules of the House of Representatives. Under the rules of the House . . . no member can vote upon any matter in which he is personally interested. Consequently, no member of this convention can vote upon a question in which he is personally interested."

¹⁰ *Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), March 16, 1902.

¹¹ Interview with Darrow, August 14, 1935.

¹² Letter of L. A. Smith to Altgeld, June 9, 1896, Governor's Executive Files (MS in the Archives Division, Illinois State Library).

¹³ *Illinois State Journal*, July 9, 1896; *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1896.

HARVEY WISH

A roll call was ordered and the silver men won the Michigan delegation by a vote of 558 to 368.¹⁴ Senator Stephen M. White of California was selected by the committee as Permanent Chairman, and was presented with a solid silver gavel. As the silver forces won successive victories, an appreciative demand for a speech from Altgeld came up repeatedly. The Governor desired that David B. Hill speak first, evidently hoping to attack the arguments of the gold men, but upon the insistence of the delegates, he rose to address the Convention.

His speech was similar to that given in Peoria at the state Convention, with more emphasis on the currency issue. Some of his remarks betrayed the marked anti-English bias that developed after the Venezuela crisis; thus he spoke of English greed, English cunning, and the gold standard as a product of an English conspiracy. These comments were enthusiastically received, but his description of the plight of the unemployed and the farmers made a sensational appeal.¹⁵ As he continued to speak, his face grew flushed and his gestures more rapid. Soon the Convention fell entirely beneath the sway of his oratory. His appeal for free silver as a relief to the hungry men and women of the nation evoked a great demonstration. When he descended from the platform, crowds of delegates from many states surrounded him as he attempted to make his way along the aisles. From the serried lines of spectators in the galleries, enthusiastic shouts arose to fill the Coliseum.¹⁶ The keynote of his speech—no compromise on the currency issue—was the major note of the Chicago Convention.

¹⁴ *Official Proceedings*, p. 135.

¹⁵ Speech of July 8, 1896, in John Peter Altgeld, *Live Questions* (Chicago, 1899), pp. 585-90; *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1896; *Illinois State Journal*, July 9, 1896; *Official Proceedings*, 124.

¹⁶ *Illinois State Journal*, July 9, 1896; F. F. Browne, *National Review* (London), December, 1896, pp. 470-73.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

Most important of his contributions to the Convention was his role in dictating the platform of the party. Although he could have been on the platform committee if he had desired it, he chose the active leadership on the floor of the Convention and left the actual presentation of his viewpoint before the committee to Worthington of Peoria, a close friend of the Governor's, whom the latter desired as a vice-presidential candidate.¹⁷ Besides, the platform committee, after the withdrawal of its gold members, was organized with Senator Jones, an associate of Altgeld's, as chairman. Altgeld frequently consulted with Jones as to the details of the platform.¹⁸ Darrow later remarked:¹⁹

Without him [Altgeld] the Democratic Party would never have placed in its platform its warning to the country against federal courts or its strictures upon government by injunction.

Hinrichsen stated in 1902 that Altgeld "laid out the program of the convention, dictated the platform and impressed his personality upon the policy adopted."²⁰ After the adjournment of the Convention, according to Hinrichsen's account, he complimented the Governor upon his influence on the deliberations. Altgeld replied that he did everything but nominate himself and that was prevented by an accident of birth and a clause in the Constitution.²¹

¹⁷ "Recollections of Charles S. Thomas, Ex-Governor of Colorado and Senator," Waldo R. Browne Collection (in the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield); also letter of George H. Sibley to W. R. Browne, January 16, 1923, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Interview with Clarence Darrow, April 14, 1935.

¹⁹ Clarence Darrow, "Memorial Petition on John P. Altgeld, April 20 (1912?)" (MS in Mr. Darrow's possession).

²⁰ *Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), March 16, 1902.

²¹ Carter H. Harrison, a Convention delegate, later wrote, "Altgeld, rather than Bryan or any other, was responsible for the clarion Chicago utterance. . . . [Bryan] was little more than the silver-tongued mouthpiece of the thinker." *Stormy Years, the Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison* (Indianapolis, 1935), p. 70. Another observer, who evidently knew Altgeld exceptionally well, wrote: "On the Coliseum floor and in secret caucuses outside Altgeld was cajolled, threatened, challenged, and browbeaten by leaders of different factions, but in spite of it all he stood firm, and to him more than to any other one man was attributed by leaders of the free silver element the power which finally secured the 16 to 1 platform." *Chicago Chronicle*, March 13, 1902.

HARVEY WISH

Conclusive evidence of the extent of Altgeld's influence upon the Democratic platform of 1896 is afforded by a comparison of the Illinois platform, written the preceding month at Peoria, and the product of the national platform committee. A summary of the latter with the exception of several minor points is almost a reproduction of the Peoria document:²²

1. The free coinage of silver at a ratio of sixteen to one.
2. Tariff for revenue only; denunciation of the McKinley law.
3. Endorsement of the federal income tax. Suggestion of an amendment to the Constitution.
4. Abolition of pauper immigration.
5. An anti-trust plank; enlargement of powers of the Interstate Commerce Commission.
6. Industrial arbitration in labor disputes between employers engaged in interstate commerce and their employees.
7. Economy in government.
8. (Most elaborate of all, except free silver.) Denunciation of "arbitrary interference by Federal authorities in local affairs as . . . a crime against free institutions."
9. Denunciation of "government by injunction as a new and highly dangerous form of oppression. . . ."
10. Recommendations extending the merit system of the civil service, sympathy for Cuba, improvement of national waterways, and no third term for presidents.

The Republican platform²³ of 1896 which emphasized protection and a vigorous foreign policy is in sharp con-

²² Official copy of platform, *Official Proceedings*, 250. Several of the minor planks are omitted.

²³ *Chicago Tribune*, July 9, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

trast with the novel Democratic program. A comparison of the Democratic platform of 1892, upon which Cleveland had been elected, with the Bryan platform, reveals a change in philosophy which, in its expression, must be attributed largely to the influence of John Peter Altgeld. To some opponents, the Chicago platform of 1896 was an "anarchist manifesto"—the creed of the Illinois bomb thrower in office, Altgeld. The *New York Tribune*, which devoted considerable editorial space to a denunciation of the Governor's anarchism, scored the platform:²⁴

The makers of the platform have indeed carried candor to the point of hardihood, and laid bare in glaring distinctness their whole program of political and financial revolution . . . The new Western and Southern leaders, who have grasped the reins of party power have at least the courage of fanaticism, and all the levelling features of their creed.

Meanwhile Bryan was preparing his trusty metaphors of the "cross of gold" and the "crown of thorns," which had worked successfully upon the emotions of political gatherings on several previous occasions.²⁵ A portion of his famous speech, delivered on July 9, is of interest because of the emphasis on the platform:²⁶

They tell us that this platform was made to catch votes. We reply to them that changing conditions make new issues; that the principles upon which rest Democracy are as everlasting as the hills; but that they must be applied to new conditions as they arise . . . They tell us that the income tax ought not to be brought in here; that is not a new idea. They criticise us for our criticism of the Supreme Court of the United States . . . If you want criticism read the dissenting opinions of the court. That will give you criticisms.

The tremendous demonstration of enthusiasm, lasting fifteen minutes, which followed the cross of gold climax, brought Bryan forward as a leading opponent of Bland.

²⁴ *New York Tribune*, July 9, 1896.

²⁵ William J. Bryan and Mary Bryan, *Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 103. Bryan tells how he laid the treasured metaphors aside for "a proper occasion."

²⁶ *Official Proceedings*, 229.

HARVEY WISH

The Illinois delegation, which was restless as thirty-one standards joined the Nebraska delegation, was held in check by Altgeld. The first four ballots showed that Bryan was gaining at the expense of the Missourian:²⁷

	Bryan	Bland	Boies	Pattison
1.	137	235	67	99
2.	197	281	37	100
3.	219	291	36	97
4.	276	241	35	97

At this point, Altgeld signaled for the retirement of the Illinois delegation. Bland had lost fifty votes and Bryan had gained fifty-seven. Altgeld's leadership might turn the tide. The *Chicago Tribune* reporter wrote:²⁸

When Illinois went out for consultation it seemed as if the whole convention knew what was going on, and a terrific shout went up, one that would shake the rafters out of a country barn.

Altgeld was not predisposed in Bryan's favor. According to Darrow's recollection, he sat abstractedly during the famous speech of Bryan and remarked next day to the former, "I have been thinking over Bryan's speech. What did he say, anyhow?"²⁹ At the time of Bryan's death in 1925, a reporter for the *New York Times* told the story which would indicate that Altgeld had prepared the way for Bryan's nomination. Shortly before the cross of gold speech, James A. Campbell of the *Philadelphia Times* was taking a drink with Altgeld's "chief lieutenant" and asked for a "round tip." The latter replied after some hesitation: "Keep your eye on William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska." Thinking that Bryan was to be chairman of some important committee, Campbell telegraphed his paper to get a picture of Congressman Bryan.³⁰ It is possible

²⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, July 10, 11, 1896; *Illinois State Journal*, July 9, 10, 1896.

²⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1896.

²⁹ Clarence Darrow, *The Story of My Life* (New York, 1932), p. 92.

³⁰ Charles W. Thompson, "How Bryan Picked His Issues," *New York Times*, August 2, 1925.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

that the position referred to was Permanent Chairman of the Convention which Bryan could have had rather than Senator White who was chosen.³¹ Altgeld, in his correspondence with Bryan, had left the latter no illusions on the subject of Illinois' support for the presidency. All available evidence confirms the fact that Bland of Missouri was the actual as well as the avowed choice of the Governor.³² Bryan himself seems to have been unaware of any direct influence in his behalf exerted by Governor Altgeld. He wrote to Waldo R. Browne in 1922:³³

As you doubtless know, he [Altgeld] was opposed to my nomination, being a supporter of Mr. Bland. He was influential in holding the Illinois delegation to Mr. Bland after my convention speech but was an active supporter of my candidacy after the nomination.

Behind closed doors the delegation deliberated in an excited atmosphere. Bland and Bryan men were active in gaining pledges for their respective candidates. An early roll call was smothered in confusion. Finally, a delegate proposed that since Governor Altgeld had more at stake than any other person in the room, he should be allowed to name the man the delegation would vote for. This offer was emphatically refused by Altgeld, who stated that he would not vote but would abide by the action of the majority. Only when the roll call was almost over and Bryan led with four votes, did Altgeld cast his vote with the majority.³⁴ Under the unit rule, the delegation was pledged for Bryan.

³¹ *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 8, 9, 1896.

³² Harvey Wish, "The Administration of Governor John Peter Altgeld of Illinois," 365 *et passim*.

³³ Letter of William J. Bryan to W. R. Browne, June 9, 1922, Browne Collection (Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield). Bryan also wrote that previous to the Convention, he had received but one letter from Altgeld. This seems to be an error, since the writer has seen at least two letters from Altgeld to Bryan.

³⁴ William Prentiss, *Prominent Democrats of Illinois* (Chicago, 1899), p. 104; a similar account appears in Walter A. Townsend, *Illinois Democracy; a History of the Party and its Representative Members—Past and Present* (Springfield, 1935), I:194; and the *Chicago Tribune*, July 11, 1896.

HARVEY WISH

Returning to the Convention, Hinrichsen announced that Illinois' forty-eight votes were now cast for Bryan. Thereupon, Ohio announced a switch from McLean to Bryan. Ex-Governor Stone of Missouri read a letter from Richard Bland in which he instructed the Convention to withdraw his name whenever any other acceptable free coinage candidate had a majority. Missouri's vote then went to Bryan. A stampede in typical convention manner followed, and the vote for Bryan was made unanimous.³⁵

Carl Snyder, writing in *Leslie's Weekly*, declared:³⁶

Governor Altgeld indeed comes very near to taking the President's place in the regard of the Democratic masses. From perhaps the most unpopular man in the United States, the Governor of Illinois . . . is now very near to the recognized master of the Democratic party.

This judgment is supported by the important position which Altgeld occupied in the campaign. Next to Bryan himself, Altgeld attracted more national attention than any other Democrat. He was singled out as a special object for attack by such prominent men as Benjamin Harrison, Carl Schurz, Albert Beveridge, and Theodore Roosevelt, and by the leading periodicals of the day. Altgeld himself stressed national issues and largely ignored the local campaign in Illinois. The Republicans recognized his ability and chose prominent speakers in many instances to counteract the influence of Altgeld's arguments. Labor, particularly trade-unionist sentiment, strongly endorsed the acts of the Governor.³⁷ H. H. Kohlsaas, the new owner of the *Times-Herald*, complained to Horace White of the *New York Evening Post* that Altgeld was "extremely strong with the labor people."³⁸ Free silver might not appeal

³⁵ *Official Proceedings*, 265.

³⁶ Carl Snyder, "The New Masters of the Democratic Party," *Leslie's Weekly*, July 16, 1896. This journal like many others, characterized the platform as "anarchy."

³⁷ E. g., the thirteenth annual convention of the Illinois Federation of Labor passed a resolution praising Altgeld for his attitude toward labor problems. *Chicago Tribune*, October 12, 1895.

³⁸ H. H. Kohlsaas, *From McKinley to Harding* (New York, 1923), p. 48.

to the wage-earner, but Altgeld's program had embraced far more than a currency idea. The Socialist-Labor party, however, then under the leadership of the fiery, though erudite, Daniel DeLeon, refused to compromise with the free silver issue; but this attitude was restricted to the radical wing of the labor movement.³⁹

The state Populist party met at Springfield on August 12, and endorsed the administration of Governor Altgeld. Their program consisted largely of reform in taxation, abolition of convict labor, and a system of direct legislation within the state.⁴⁰ The national Populist leader, Marion Butler, whose organization supported Bryan, declared that the Populists had not become Democrats, but that the Democrats had become Populists.⁴¹ The Chicago platform of 1896 gave credence to this statement. A section of the Populists—Middle-of-the-Road Populists—met at Chicago to nominate a complete state ticket, except for Governor which was left blank. Henry D. Lloyd was nominated as Lieutenant Governor.⁴²

The strategic importance of Illinois among the middle western states in revolt against the old political leadership was readily appreciated by the Republican leaders as well as by their opponents. While it might be satisfactory for a personality of McKinley's type to make front porch campaigns, realistic politicians like Marcus Alonzo Hanna recognized that the war must be carried into the enemy's country. Chicago, therefore, rather than New York City, became the center of the contest. During the campaign, over 100,000,000 political pamphlets were shipped from the Chicago office of the Republican party, while only one-fifth

³⁹ *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1896, p. 349.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; *Chicago Daily News Almanac*, 1897, pp. 249-50.

⁴¹ *Chicago Chronicle*, October 31, 1896.

⁴² *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1896, p. 350.

HARVEY WISH

as many were issued from New York.⁴³ Charles G. Dawes of Chicago took the leading role in the campaign of "education." Hanna and James J. Hill went on their famous collection tour of Wall Street and other financial centers to raise an unprecedented war chest. If the populous state of Illinois could be won, the effect upon the neighboring doubtful states would be beneficial to McKinley's cause. Francis F. Browne, who studied the campaign closely, wrote that the Republicans adopted the tactical policy of emphasizing Altgeldism by a concentrated effort and of bearing "down" with him the presidential candidate."⁴⁴ There is considerable evidence for this hypothesis, judging by the type of opponents selected to attack the Illinois Governor.

While Bryan was ridiculed, Altgeld was vilified. The cartoonist, W. A. Rogers, of *Harper's Weekly*, pictured Altgeld with the torch of anarchy in front of the shade of Guiteau, the assassin of Garfield, and underneath was the caption, "Guiteau was a Power in Washington for One Day. Shall Altgeld be a Power There for Four Years?"⁴⁵ A week earlier, the editor had written that, if elected, Bryan would be as clay "under the astute control of the ambitious and unscrupulous Illinois communist, who had become the leader of all the disturbing forces in the country by reason of his defence and pardon of the Chicago anarchists."⁴⁶ Lyman Abbott denounced Altgeld from his pulpit as "the crowned hero and worshipped deity of the anarchists of the Northwest." Henry Cabot Lodge declared him "one who would connive at wholesale murder"

⁴³Herbert Croly, *Marcus Alonzo Hanna; His Life and Work* (New York, 1912), p. 214.

⁴⁴F. F. Browne, *National Review* (London), December, 1896, p. 470. He remarks: "So prevalent was this antipathy that it was usually taken for granted that any respectable citizen was against him; for anyone to avow himself a friend of Mr. Altgeld in any Chicago or New York Club, for example, would have been to risk at least a very disagreeable reception."

⁴⁵*Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1896.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, October 17, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

and "substitute for the government of Washington and Lincoln a red welter of lawlessness and dishonesty as fantastic and vicious as the Paris Commune."⁴⁷ The *New York Daily Tribune* editor thought that the deathly pallor of the Illinois Governor was a lean and hungry look suggesting the conspirator of the Cassius type.⁴⁸ The Reverend Cortland Myers of New York chose as a text a subject relating to "Anarchy in the Chicago Platform." He attacked the plank denouncing federal interference in strikes and riots:⁴⁹

That platform, if it means anything, means the privilege of another Altgeld to promote pillage and turbulence without any interference of a higher authority. It is the plank laid by traitorous hands.

Unfortunately for Altgeld, the *Chicago Times-Herald*, which in the hands of James W. Scott had been a source of kindly encouragement amidst the willful misrepresentations of his enemies, now passed into the hands of the Republicans. H. H. Kohlsaat, who took a leading part in the campaign against free silver, now became the proprietor of the paper. Thus the Democrats of Chicago were left without a newspaper.⁵⁰

Despite the failing health which marked his tenuous grasp upon life, Altgeld plunged himself into the hardest campaign of his career. His unique oratorical abilities were comparable to Bryan's in effectiveness, although wholly unlike the latter in presentation and delivery. Carter Harrison describes Altgeld on the platform as "a homely clumsy man possessed of a voice of neither strength nor beauty."⁵¹ Nevertheless his clear enunciation, vigorous language, and a sincerity that was convincing gave him a measure of popular appeal that totally eclipsed his more

⁴⁷ F. F. Browne, *op. cit.*, 459.

⁴⁸ *New York Tribune*, October 18, 1896.

⁴⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1896.

⁵⁰ C. R. Tuttle, *Illinois Currency Convention* (Chicago, 1895), pp. 50-51.

⁵¹ C. H. Harrison, *Stormy Years*, 66.

HARVEY WISH

polished rivals. He had the knack of identifying his cause with the deepest aspirations of the masses who were his audience. The heartfelt response which followed his speeches, described even by hostile journals, indicates how well he could capture the imagination of his listeners. More than one observer has remarked that Altgeld could embody a trite remark with a significant connotation.

On August 29, he opened his platform tour with a speech at Girard, Illinois. The issues he dealt with were almost entirely national in character—the currency question, the tariff, and hard times. Only in his concluding statements did he briefly summarize the situation in the state. Believing firmly, with most silverites, that depressions such as those of 1873 and 1893 were directly produced by the demonetization of silver, he drew a dark picture of the “crime of '73” and its results. It is more than probable that his humanitarian tendencies were a conditioning factor upon his economics. The anomaly of want and natural abundance puzzled him as it did others several decade later. Hence he reasoned, “the causes of our distress are not natural but are artificial. It is governmental policy that is the mother of our sorrow.” The gold standard in his eyes marked the American people as slaves of English bondholders. His speech closed with the plea:⁵²

If there are Republicans here who feel that they must in part support their ticket, then I say to you with all the earnestness of my soul, go into the booth, vote for Mr. Tanner for Governor, and then think of your families; think of the future of your children . . . and cast a vote for Bryan and for humanity.

He was cheered enthusiastically by the crowd. The appeal had not been primarily on the complex plans of economics, but a popular presentation of the antagonistic interests of a “money power” and the common man.

⁵² Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 591-604; *Chicago Tribune*, August 30, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

Altgeld, like Bryan and other leaders of 1896, was fully aware of the historical significance of Jackson's war on the bank in 1832, and occasionally quoted the precedent.

Two days previously, at Carnegie Hall in New York City, Benjamin Harrison had delivered a strong attack upon Altgeld and the Chicago platform. He declared that no issue of the campaign was so important as that raised concerning the powers and duties of the national courts and the chief executive. The atmosphere of the Chicago convention seemed to him "surcharged with the spirit of revolution." Government by the mob was given preference over government by the law, enforced by court decrees and by executive orders. He emphasized this note:⁵³

My friends, whenever our people elect a president who believes that he must ask of Governor Altgeld or any other governor of any state, permission to enforce the laws of the United States, we have surrendered the victory the boys won in 1861.

More formidable than Harrison's attack upon Altgeld was the lengthy gold speech delivered by Carl Schurz at Chicago on September 5. As a respected representative of reform and a German-American, Schurz might be expected to act as the necessary neutralizing agent for Altgeld's appeal among the latter's strong supporters. The former was far from being an admirer of McKinley, but felt that Bryan's free silver ideas were much more dangerous than McKinley's protectionism. Powell Clayton, former senator, brought Schurz to Chicago as a guest of the Honest Money League.⁵⁴ His long speech, which filled almost twelve columns of the newspaper, in small print, attacked all the assumptions of the free silver advocates. The Bryan panacea seemed to him like "jumping out of the frying pan into the fire," although he admitted the seri-

⁵³ Benjamin Harrison, *Views of an Ex-President* (Indianapolis, 1901), p. 188.

⁵⁴ Claude M. Fuess, *Carl Schurz Reformer (1829-1906)*, (New York, 1932), pp. 336-37.

HARVEY WISH

ousness of the depression. The fall in the price of silver, he declared, was due to overproduction, not governmental intervention. The gold standard was desirable because it was relatively stable. Other arguments, frequently reiterated during the campaign, were adduced for gold.⁵⁵ On the whole, his speech was considered one of the best presentations of the gold cause.

Altgeld could not ignore such a challenge and prepared a strong refutation of Schurz's arguments. Two weeks later, at the Central Music Hall, Chicago, he delivered his reply before an audience which filled the galleries to overflowing. It is unnecessary to follow the lengthy arguments that he presented. If his interminable statistics did not establish his own case, they did at least indicate that Schurz's arguments were poorly supported. In one instance, Altgeld demonstrated that Schurz had relied upon a treasury report which had been subsequently declared wrong by the director of the mint. He attacked the cost of production theory of the other as inadequate. His concluding remarks were devoted to a refutation of Cochran, who had delivered a gold speech the week previously.⁵⁶

Edgar Lee Masters, who listened to Altgeld's reply to Schurz and Cochran, declared that the speech was the masterpiece of that campaign. During its delivery, a wit in the gallery interrupted to shout, "Oh, you old anarchist!" To this Altgeld retorted with a smile, "Our friend up yonder has had sixteen and one." This sally was greeted by wild applause.⁵⁷ In late October, Schurz replied to Altgeld and, as the former's biographer, Claude Fues, has it, "completely demolished Altgeld's soph-

⁵⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, September 6, 1896.

⁵⁶ Answer to Schurz and Cochran, September 19, 1896, Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 612-47; *Chicago Tribune*, September 20, 1896.

⁵⁷ Edgar Lee Masters, "John Peter Altgeld," *American Mercury*, February, 1925, p. 170.

istry."⁵⁸ Modesty would forbid a judgment upon this point.

To carry the fight to the east and to refute the increasing charges that he was an anarchist, Altgeld prepared to go to New York and present the Chicago platform apart from the currency issue. A German Democratic organization invited him to speak on October 17 at Cooper Union. Tammany Hall appeared somewhat disturbed by the invasion of the dangerous Governor of Illinois. John C. Sheehan, a Tammany leader, disavowed responsibility for bringing Altgeld to New York City. The latter had "drastic, vigorous opinions" which Tammany could not endorse without antagonizing various elements.⁵⁹ When Sheehan asked Altgeld about the Democratic possibilities of carrying Illinois, implying that the latter was reckless in coming to New York, Altgeld replied that they would not only carry Illinois but obtain a majority far exceeding the one given to Cleveland in 1892.⁶⁰

On the platform of Cooper Union Hall, Henry George paid a high tribute to Altgeld, declaring that he had come nearly halfway across the continent to hear the famous Governor. Pictures of Altgeld decorated the hall and the band played "Hail to the Chief" in his honor. William Randolph Hearst and the *New York Journal* gave him generous publicity, and crowds of people pressed forward to catch a glimpse of the much discussed statesman of the middle west. William Sulzer introduced Altgeld to the audience as "the most abused man in America, but armored in a righteous cause he bids defiance to the hosts of error." The crowds cheered "as if mad" as he came into view.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Fuess, *op. cit.*, 338.

⁵⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1896.

⁶⁰ *New York Journal*, October 18, 1896.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, October 19, 1896. Some of the material for the Cooper Union speech was obtained by Willis J. Abbot. Letter of Abbot to H. D. Lloyd, October 12, 1896, Lloyd Papers (in the Wisconsin State Historical Library, Madison).

HARVEY WISH

The Cooper Union speech was the most ambitious statement of his position so far made in the campaign. Instead of dwelling upon the currency issue, he spent most of his time upon the question of government by injunction and federal interference. He cited telegrams, official reports, and other documentary proof as to the wisdom of his course during the coal and Pullman strikes of 1894, and the justifiability of his famous protest to President Cleveland against the use of federal troops in Chicago. His review of the Supreme Court was an excellent historical presentation of the attitude of such men as Jefferson and Lincoln to that tribunal. He declared that the people must not surrender the right of self-government to the Supreme Court, nor concede to the President the right to send federal troops into any neighborhood at his pleasure. These Cleveland policies, he said, had been taken over by a group of men who nominated McKinley and used him as a tool. "Mr. McKinley is scarcely a factor in this campaign. Mr. Mark Hanna and the agents of syndicates and trusts constitute the power that is subverting free institutions." He concluded with an appeal for a new Declaration of Independence to free the nation of dependence upon other countries in currency affairs.⁶²

The eastern newspapers professed to see in this speech a manifesto of revolution. The *New York Sun* remarked: "Governor Altgeld . . . is the real leader of the revolution and it would be foolish to underestimate the qualities which make him dangerous."⁶³ The *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote: "He believes that there is a great social revolution in progress and that he is its leader, or at any rate, that fate has made him one of the instruments to relieve many of the ills from which his countrymen are suffering."⁶⁴ Other

⁶² Speech at Cooper Union, October 17, 1896, Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 647-90; *New York Journal*, October 18, 1896.

⁶³ *New York Sun*, October 19, 1896.

⁶⁴ *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 19, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

papers spoke of Altgeld's venomous political methods, his "conspicuous charlatanry" and "his curious effort of rehabilitating his own character."⁶⁵ Mark Hanna was shaken from his customary complacency to complain: "Why doesn't he attack Mr. McKinley? I am not running for office."⁶⁶ Benjamin Harrison stressed the Altgeld phase of the campaign in Indiana. He declared that Bryan was merely a puppet of the Illinois Governor.⁶⁷ Democratic silverite papers expressed satisfaction. Henry George praised Altgeld highly in the *New York Journal* "for the speech in which he set forth . . . the most important of the issues of the campaign."⁶⁸

The Republican managers evidently were alarmed by the deep impression Altgeld had made. Theodore Roosevelt, who was originally scheduled to cover the West Virginia and Maryland territory, was shifted to Chicago and other middle western points. In a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge, Roosevelt predicted: "Altgeld will run way ahead of Bryan in Illinois, but the land-slide will be so great that we shall probably down him too."⁶⁹ To Albert Beveridge was entrusted the chief task of replying to Altgeld's Cooper Union speech.⁷⁰ The thirty-four year old orator, whose star was definitely in the ascendant, championed the doctrine of Hamiltonian centralism as firmly as Altgeld accepted Jeffersonian democracy. On October 29 at Chicago, Beveridge delivered a powerful attack on the principles of the Cooper Union speech.⁷¹

Were the American people, Beveridge asked, a nation or an aggregation of localities? Was it necessary for the

⁶⁵ *New York Press*, *New York Advertiser*, *Chicago Chronicle*, October 19, 1896.

⁶⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1896.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*; speech at Ligonier, Indiana, October 31, 1896.

⁶⁸ *New York Journal*, October 19, 1896.

⁶⁹ Letter of Theodore Roosevelt to H. C. Lodge, October 21, 1896, *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918* (New York, 1925), Vol. I:238.

⁷⁰ Claude G. Bowers, *Beveridge and the Progressive Era* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 60.

⁷¹ *Chicago Chronicle*, October 30, 1896.

HARVEY WISH

national government in enforcing its laws, first to get the permission "of local satraps called governors?" He continued:

The destiny determining issue [is] whether American institutions as Hamilton destined them, as Marshall defined them, as Lincoln consecrated them, shall continue in their clear and single course or whether they shall be changed, corrupted and dissipated into the channels that John C. Calhoun marked out and John P. Altgeld has resurveyed.

He compared Altgeld with Jefferson Davis and demanded:

What excuse have you Governor Altgeld, for calling from Appomattox this ghost of treason? Do you answer as you did in New York that the workingmen, the masses who toil demand it? I deny it. It was the producing millions who made us a nation . . . Law is labor's only friend and when law is dead, labor becomes slavery.

He accused Altgeld of desiring to defile the Supreme Court by choosing judges not on a consideration of learning and impartiality, but for definite promises before appointment to decide cases in a prearranged manner. His speech reverberated with the concepts of Hamilton:

We want government strong enough to obey its own Constitution, strong enough to execute its own laws, strong enough to be supreme within its own dominions. We want a government so strong that it does not have to await the command of some cowardly, or treasonable, or mistaken governor to act.

The speech fired the imagination of his audience. Much of Beveridge's appeal was due to his identification of himself with the new rising trend. A friend congratulated him: "You have made a fine impression upon Senator Quay and other men of power in the eastern part of the country."⁷² Beveridge attributed his entrance to the Senate two years later to the effectiveness of his reply to Altgeld.⁷³ For the Illinois Governor there was no such recognition by the "men of power." His path to the Senate was easily

⁷² Bowers, *op. cit.*, 62.

⁷³ *Ibid.* The biographer remarks, "It stamped him as a militant champion of centralization—as a Hamiltonian without compromise—as a protector of property rights against the mob."

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

blocked by a time-serving politician of Illinois who had not attempted to articulate the unexpressed desires of the masses. The secret of political success, Altgeld found, lay in reducing oneself to an intellectual and moral zero, and thus increasing one's "availability" to those who held the reins of power. This theme is frequently reiterated in his speeches and writings.

Meanwhile Altgeld was not giving adequate attention to his enemies in Illinois. Occasionally he attacked Tanner, the Republican candidate for Governor, as being responsible for the premature adjournment of the preceding legislative session in time to prevent much-needed tax reform. Tanner did this, he claimed, in behalf of those who were depriving the state of millions in taxation.⁷⁴ Kohlsaas, although a Republican himself, wrote to a friend: "Tanner . . . is so thoroughly unfit for the position that decent, God-fearing people are almost in open revolt against him."⁷⁵ Some of Tanner's enemies circulated posters portraying him as a murderer with a noose about his neck. This had reference to a sensational murder with which he was popularly connected. This attack was attributed by the Republican papers to Altgeld although the latter firmly denied responsibility.⁷⁶

Strongly undermining the Governor's position, the gold Democrats persisted in "revelations" concerning Altgeld's dishonesty. The National Gold Democrats had met at Indianapolis and nominated John Palmer of Illinois for President. Many of the gold leaders were Illinoisans whose attacks were primarily directed at the Governor for his "apostasy" in delivering the Democratic party into the ranks of the Populists and Silverites. The Indianapolis

⁷⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, October 2, 1896.

⁷⁵ Kohlsaas, *From McKinley to Harding*, 48.

⁷⁶ *Chicago Chronicle*, October 30, 1896.

HARVEY WISH

platform denounced Altgeld's protest against Cleveland's use of troops in Chicago.⁷⁷ Senator Vilas, gold leader in Wisconsin, investigated gold sentiment throughout the country and found that many opposed the Chicago platform not so much because of the silver plank but because of the "Altgeld planks." The idea of reforming the Supreme Court was considered revolutionary and the product of cranks. One gold man wrote to Vilas: "I most respectfully decline to act with a lot of anarchists who have usurped the name of democrat."⁷⁸ The Chicago resolution concerning federal intervention seemed a "defiance of law and endangering of human lives, just because the Governor of a state happens to be in sympathy with [the rioters]."⁷⁹

Towards the end of August, William S. Forman, the gold Democratic nominee for Governor, released a sensational interview to the newspapers in which he charged that Altgeld had borrowed state funds for the purpose of paying his personal bills, and had removed the treasurers of several state institutions who had refused to let him have the money. Besides, he said, Altgeld made a practice of depositing state funds in pet banks.⁸⁰ These charges were vehemently denied by the Governor as malicious lies deliberately brought up at this time to influence the election. In an open letter to Forman, Altgeld attributed the motives of the other to the fact that Forman had recently been discredited by the party and refused an interview by the Governor.⁸¹

Altgeld's policy of removing the custodians of state funds who refused to account for the interest now demanded

⁷⁷ *Campaign Textbook of the National Democratic Party* (Indianapolis, 1896).

⁷⁸ Letter of G. Stevens to Vilas, August 17, 1896, Vilas Papers (in the Wisconsin State Historical Library, Madison).

⁷⁹ Various letters in the Vilas Papers, July-August, 1896.

⁸⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 1896; also in the *New York Tribune*, October 17, 1896.

⁸¹ Letter of August 27, 1896, Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 604-8.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

by law made him particularly susceptible to such charges. The Forman accusations were now taken up by William R. Morrison of Waterloo, Illinois, whose presidential aspirations had been seriously damaged through the Governor's influence. During the latter part of September, his friend, George R. Wendling, wrote to Morrison:⁸²

I want to see Illinois defeat Altgeld. I like Bryan, . . . but being honest, he will pay his debts to Altgeld, Tillman, Stone, Peffer, Cyclone Davis, and that crowd, and that will bankrupt him and the Country, therefore I shall not vote for him.

He suggested that a ringing denunciation of Bryan and Altgeld some time in October would be "a glorious thing for Morrison." This idea with the exception of that concerning Bryan, whom he favored, was in accord with the latter's hope of making a "literary contribution to the campaign."⁸³ On October 19, he wrote a letter to Judge B. R. Burroughs of Edwardsville, which was given to the press. He attempted to substantiate Forman's charges that Altgeld "sanctioned, approved, and encouraged the use of the money in the hands of the state treasurer and other officers for safekeeping by way of loans and deposits at interest for their own use." This, he claimed, was an "open secret." Altgeld had unlawfully opened the safe of the state treasurer to remove the funds and had discharged two state officers who had refused to permit the Governor to withdraw such money. Morrison declared Altgeld's record as a reformer was hypocritical and that the state was under his domination.⁸⁴ Such attacks were eagerly taken up by the partisan press. Forman sent a letter expressing his gratitude to the "idol of Egypt."⁸⁵

⁸² Letter of September 19, 1896, Notes of Prof. Franklin D. Scott of Northwestern University; also in James A. Barnes, "Illinois and the Gold-Silver Controversy, 1890-1896," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 1931, p. 55.

⁸³ Letter of Morrison to Wendling, October 28, 1896, Scott Notes.

⁸⁴ Letter of Morrison to Burroughs, October 19, 1896, *Chicago Chronicle*, October 22, 1896.

⁸⁵ Letter of Forman to Morrison, October 23, 1896, Scott Notes.

HARVEY WISH

Ben R. Cable, another gold leader remarked that the Morrison letter was worth about 20,000 votes and that "the Governor's goose is cooked."⁸⁶ The *Jacksonville Journal* wrote:⁸⁷

The "Idol of Egypt" whose word is regarded by many around here as the law of the Medes and Persians makes his letter a knockout for Altgeld in this part of the state where Altgeld thought himself strong.

The local Republicans in the southern part of the state took advantage of this opportunity by circulating copies of the Morrison letter.⁸⁸

Altgeld replied with a stinging interview, rebuking Morrison's motives.⁸⁹

The fact is he wanted me to swing the Illinois delegation for him in the Chicago Convention and thought I ought to secure his nomination at the head of the ticket. But the people of this state would not have it and he had no chance whatever.

Morrison's charges did not include a statement of his sources of information. At all times, as is evident in his correspondence with Judge Wall,⁹⁰ he was ready to malign Altgeld's intentions and knew that his prestige, rather than additional facts, would tell against the Governor. An analysis of the election returns reveals the fact that the Morrison letter did no more than lose a handful of votes for Altgeld.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the gold orators accepted the "revelations" upon faith and attempted to weaken the hold of the Governor upon the workman. James Eckels, particularly, led in the abuse.⁹²

⁸⁶ *New York Tribune*, October 23, 1896.

⁸⁷ *Jacksonville Journal*, October 24, 1896.

⁸⁸ Letter of George Leverett of Edwardsville to Morrison, October 30, 1896, Scott Notes.

⁸⁹ *New York Tribune*, October 23, 1896.

⁹⁰ Wall Correspondence (in Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield).

⁹¹ Altgeld and Bryan both carried Morrison's county, Monroe, despite the attempt to "knife" the ticket. Perry and Randolph counties, nearby, gave Bryan advantages of thirty-six and sixty-three votes, respectively, ahead of Altgeld. Madison County was lost to both. *Official Directory of the Fortieth General Assembly of Illinois, Session of 1897* (Springfield, 1897), Appendix B, pp. 4, 8, 9.

⁹² *Chicago Chronicle*, October 31, 1896.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

This great man, this immaculate Governor . . . stripped of the robes of his hypocrisy . . . is not a village Hampden . . . but instead is a lawless, reckless, swashbuckling Cain, marching at the head of a motley marauding band upon a capital city for purposes of plunder and private gain.

A similar attack was made by Senator Palmer who accused Altgeld of organizing all the lawless elements of the community into a party to advance his own political interests.⁹³ "Altgeldism" was the central issue among the "gold bugs."

The defection of Henry Lloyd from the Altgeld supporters was a serious one, since he carried many with him. Lloyd, while not opposing the Governor directly, was lukewarm in his support due to the insertion of the silver issue. In thought, he was sympathetic to the Fabian socialism then enjoying a strong growth in England, but was antagonized by the German Socialists who laid emphasis upon the doctrine of the class struggle. He therefore joined the Populist party.⁹⁴ Soon he became the nominee of the Middle-of-the-Road element for Lieutenant Governor. His attitude can be seen in the following letter to A. B. Adair:⁹⁵

The Free Silver movement is a fake. Free Silver is the cow-bird of the Reform movement . . . I for one decline to sit on the nest to help any such game . . . I may vote for Bryan as the knight of the Disinherited like Ivanhoe, but he will not be the next President, and I am content. But Altgeld's defeat I should regard as a great misfortune.

Lloyd eventually voted for the Socialist candidate for President. His action reveals the success of some of the radical organizations in convincing many of the futility of free silver as a panacea for the prevailing ills. Florence Kelley, who was closely attached to the Altgeld cause during the campaign, wrote to Lloyd:⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*, October 29, 1896.

⁹⁴ Letter of Lloyd to George A. Gates, May 23, 1895, Lloyd Papers.

⁹⁵ Letter of Lloyd to A. B. Adair, October 10, 1896, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Letter of Florence Kelley to Lloyd, October 1, 1896, *ibid.*

HARVEY WISH

We miss you very much in the campaign. Things are badly muddled and Governor Altgeld's friends seem few indeed in this time of need. The Socialists and the labor skates are knifing him alike. The Silver populists and the straight trades-union vote seem to be his main hope besides the farmers. And if the working people allow him to be defeated now, in the face of his record, surely they deserve to have no other friend. So long as you do not come out for Governor Altgeld or do not at least formally declare yourself out of the race, your name will continue to be used to fool workingmen

This appeal was effective. Lloyd withdrew his name from the Middle-of-the-Road Populist ticket. Other factors however, were more seriously against the election of Altgeld. Mrs. Kelley again wrote to Lloyd, several weeks before election day:⁹⁷

The coercion is so wholesale and the Forman charges so damaging, that I think the State is lost. Hence my conviction is strong that Tanner's election means the turning back of the labor movement in Illinois even more than the bomb did.

Altgeld later declared that there were arrayed against the people all of the financial interests, most of the great papers and every influence that money could buy. Laborers were coerced by employers to vote for McKinley and Tanner in Illinois, and similar scenes took place elsewhere.⁹⁸ During the weeks preceding election, leading business men marched in gold standard processions followed by their employees. Banks declined to make loans as a new business paralysis developed. Fear took possession of the community.⁹⁹ Hanna's war chest, representing the greatest campaign fund accumulation in the history of the United States up to that time, told heavily in favor of McKinley.

The election returns gave the Republicans the victory, although the margin was not great. McKinley obtained 271 electoral votes to Bryan's 176 votes, but the popular vote gave the former 7,035,638 and the other 6,467,946, or

⁹⁷ October 15, 1896, *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Speech of July 5, 1898, in Kings County, New York, *Athena Debate*, July 6, 1898.

⁹⁹ Kohlsaat, *From McKinley to Harding*, 53.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

respective percentages of 50.88 and 46.77. In Illinois, Bryan polled 464,523 votes and McKinley 607,130. Altgeld exceeded Bryan's state total by obtaining 474,256 votes, but his opponent, Tanner, received 587,637. The other tickets were relatively insignificant.¹⁰⁰

In Chicago, the news of McKinley's victory gave cause for excited hilarity among the great merchants. Kohlsaas noticed that "one of the world's greatest merchants" started the game of "Follow the Leader" in a fashionable Chicago club with prominent financiers crawling over sofas, chairs, tables, and finally dancing in each other's arms.¹⁰¹ Willis J. Abbot, an Altgeld man, reported that the far western silver leaders were blaming the "injection of Altgeldism" into the platform for the defeat of Bryan.¹⁰² Altgeld, however, expressed continued optimism and wrote to Bryan:¹⁰³

You have done a work for humanity which time will not efface and while we were not able to batter down all the fortified strongholds of plutocracy and corruption in our fight I am convinced that another assault will drive them from the land.

Several eastern newspapers were particularly jubilant over the defeat of Altgeld. The *New York Tribune* editorialized:¹⁰⁴

. . . The overthrow of Altgeld the Anarchist is cause for National rejoicing It is a sorry day for burglars and bomb-throwers and mail-robbers—and all criminals in general, in Illinois and elsewhere.

One of the newspaper's contributors thought that the sentiment required rhyme:¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *Official Directory of Fortieth General Assembly of Illinois, 1897*, Appendix B, pp. 4, 9.

¹⁰¹ Kohlsaas, *op. cit.*, 53.

¹⁰² Letter of Abbot to Lloyd, November 10, 1896, Lloyd Papers.

¹⁰³ Letter of Altgeld to Bryan, November 9, 1896, reprinted in James A. Barnes, *John G. Carlisle, Financial Statesman* (New York, 1931), p. 488.

¹⁰⁴ *New York Tribune*, November 5, 1896.

¹⁰⁵ This parody on Burns's poem appeared in the *New York Tribune*, November 12, 1896.

HARVEY WISH

Altgeld to Debs:

Eugene V. Debs, my jo, 'Gene,
When we were first acquent
You ran the Railway Union strike
And dared the Government,
While I released the Anarchists
And freely bade them go,
Ah! What a high old time we had,
Eugene V. Debs, my jo!

Accusations of wholesale fraud in the election of 1896 were frequently made by the Democrats. Carter H. Harrison later wrote that in the spring of 1897, in Chicago, over 60,000 names of phantom citizens were found on the election registry and used to deliver the huge Illinois majority to McKinley and Tanner.¹⁰⁶ Altgeld estimated 100,000 fraudulent votes had been counted in Illinois alone, and that fraud had been so great in other states that Bryan was actually the winner.¹⁰⁷

Altgeld was glad to retire, as far as he was personally concerned. His health had long before demanded it. He now prepared to leave the Governor's mansion with a gracious farewell speech to his successor, and sent a letter to the new Governor offering the escort to the inauguration ceremonies of himself and Mrs. Altgeld.¹⁰⁸ This courtesy was rudely ignored. Tanner instructed the House managers to refuse Altgeld permission to speak at the ceremonies, although a senator had proposed that the customary privilege be granted.¹⁰⁹ The new Governor proceeded to remove the taint of reform from his administration. Yerkes was given the desired bills, the factory

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, *Views of an Ex-President*, 73.

¹⁰⁷ Address at Tremont House, January 8, 1897, Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 693-97. For the other statements on this subject, see *ibid.*, 706-22.

¹⁰⁸ Letter of Altgeld to Tanner, January 10, 1897 (in the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield).

¹⁰⁹ For the retiring speech of January 11, 1897, never delivered but given to the press, see Altgeld, *Live Questions*, 697-700.

JOHN PETER ALTGELD AND THE ELECTION OF 1896

owners were extended freedom from the demands of the zealous Mrs. Kelley, and the old political machine was returned to its former supremacy.

Louis F. Post has left a suggestive conclusion to Altgeld's career:¹¹⁰

While he lived it was necessary to discredit him in order to keep open the channels for respectable and legal plunder; and a hint was taken from the method of housebreakers who poison the watch dog in the yard before venturing to climb into the dwelling at the window.

¹¹⁰ Louis F. Post, "John Peter Altgeld," *The Public*, March 22, 1902.