

# When Democracy Triumphed

How the People of Oregon got the Initiative and Referendum

By BURTON J. HENDRICK in McClure's Magazine

This story tells of the beginning of the great popular movement that is now spreading over the American continent. The powers of Special Privilege were opposed to the people in Oregon as in Canada. The people of Western Canada have declared in favor of the Initiative and Referendum. They can get it if they are determined.

Nothing is more significant of the popular attitude toward political organizations than the movement, now rapidly spreading all over the United States, for the Initiative, the Referendum and the Recall. Six Western state legislatures, in the last few months, have adopted constitutional amendments providing for these measures. The more conservative East, which a few years ago was ridiculing them as wild populist vagaries, is now beginning to give them respectful attention. How marked is the change in public opinion was evidenced only the other day, when Woodrow Wilson, for several years president of Princeton University, now governor of New Jersey, and one of our leading academic authorities on politics and government, announced his conversion.

"For twenty years," said Governor Wilson, "I preached to the students of Princeton that the Referendum and Recall was bosh. I have since investigated and I want to apologize to those students. It is the safeguard of politics. It takes power from the boss and places it in the hands of the people. I want to say with all my power that I favor it."

For the origin of this popular movement in the United States we must go back nearly twenty years, to a series of meetings held in an unpretentious farmhouse in Milwaukie, Clackamas County, Oregon. The first inspiration had been given by a Reverend M. V. Rork, an ex-Unitarian clergyman, who came roaring through rural Oregon in the early '90's as the representative of the Farmers' Alliance. Rork was one of those populist agitators whom the Eastern newspapers so dearly loved to caricature; his lectures were directed against the railroads, Wall Street, and the existing political parties, and his favorite remedy was the combination of the farmers and the working classes against exploiting "capitalism." He made a business of organizing branches of the Farmers' Alliance, and with great success. In western Oregon, in particular, his progress was the heralding of a new political age.

## Farmers Were Students

Milwaukie, a village of perhaps a thousand people, located in one of the most fruitful sections of the beautiful Willamette Valley, about seven miles south of Portland, was the gathering place of an energetic and intelligent yeomanry. Here the farmers thought and read and closely followed political movements and all important public questions. There was one family, in particular, which for many years had acted as an intellectual stimulus upon the town. Seth and Alfred Luelling were especially favorable specimens of rural Americanism—of the sturdy and honest pioneers who had crossed the plains in ox teams and laid, in Oregon, the foundations of one of America's greatest commonwealths. They were prosperous nurserymen; they owned and cultivated several hundred acres; and, in their own profession, they are known as the creators of the famous "Bing" and "Luelling" cherries. But they were more than fruit-growers; they were natural philosophers. Though academically uneducated, they had definite ideas on most religious, political and economic questions. Almost inevitably their ideas were revolutionary. In religion they were spiritualists; Seth Luelling's house, indeed, was the local headquarters of spiritualism long before it became the meeting place of political malcontents. The very room where the agitation for popular government in Oregon started had been for many years previously the scene of spiritualistic séances. Many of America's leading spiritualists were the Luellings' intimate friends. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had also visited the Luellings' home and had written from there on questions concerning women.

The Luellings organized the Farmers' Alliance Lodge in Milwaukie, and the Luelling farmhouse became its official headquarters. Here Seth and Alfred gradually drew about them a philosophic group and held weekly meetings for the discussion of current events. All their associates belonged to the class known, in those days, as "advanced thinkers." An "advanced thinker" was usually a man who declaimed vigorously against the extortions of the railroads, who considered that both political parties existed only to serve the interests of corporate wealth, who believed in the free coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one, and in the single tax. His chief idol among public men was usually Henry George; his greatest aversion,

Women participated in the proceedings almost as generally as men; and one of the strongest articles of the Luelling faith—as it afterward became of the Populist party—was woman suffrage. The company frequently interrupted the political arguments with incursions into polite literature; they read and discussed good books; and one of the most entertaining members was a well-known Shakespearean "reciter," John D. Stevens.

## William S. U'Ren

Cranky, irresponsible, half baked—all these things, in conservative eyes, the little assemblage certainly was; yet it was alive and stimulating. Out of this, and out of thousands of similar groups then scattered through the West, devel-

had lived in many states and had acquired at first hand much political information. Radicalism he had breathed in as a child. His mother was a hardy Cornish woman; his father—still living and a Socialist at seventy-six—was an Englishman who, as a young man, had become dissatisfied with the political and social system of England and had sought new ideals in this country. Here, as a blacksmith, he had prospered, but he had failed to find the equality and political morality of which he had dreamed. U'Ren's earliest recollections, as a child, were of fireside discussions of the land system in England; his father is still helping a brother in England to pay rent upon a house which their own grandfather built in the eighteenth century. There seemed something wrong in all this, but U'Ren could not quite understand where the fault lay.

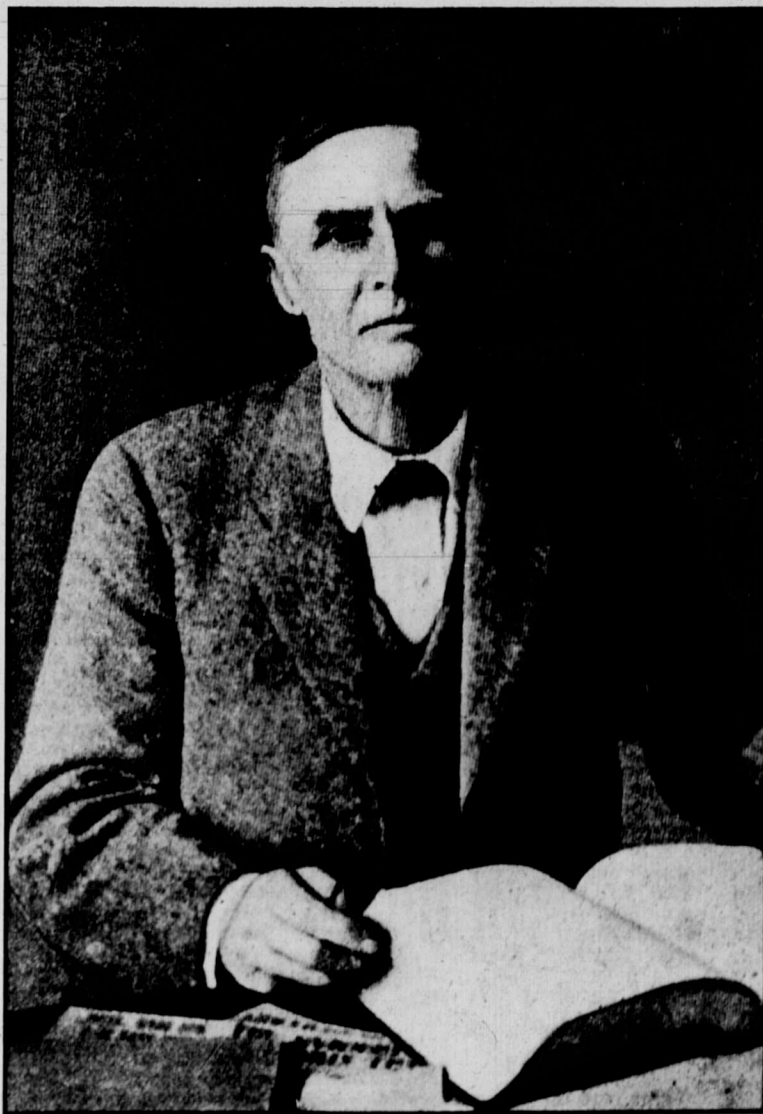
## Fundamental Injustice

The elder U'Ren had something of a library, in which William read as a boy; but his mother's reading of the Bible gave him his real education. "I was especially fond of the Old Testament leaders," he says, "Moses and the rest; I suppose it's because they were never satisfied with things as they were, but were always kicking." This training he supplemented by the usual course in the public schools of Colorado. Born in Wisconsin in 1859, he "vibrated," to use his own expression, for several years around the West, engaging in several occupations. He was, at various times, a blacksmith in the railroad yards at Denver, a bookkeeper, a shorthand writer and a lawyer. He frequently took a hand in politics; he knew Colorado intimately, and here he first came into personal contact with political corruption. Going from one state to another—Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, California among others—he saw everywhere the same conditions, the same clear and simple system—the assumption of governmental powers by the forces of wealth. All these apparent facts, however, confused his mind. He saw no way out, no remedy. One day, in the mining camp of Tincup, Colorado, a friend handed U'Ren a book that had been recently written by a Californian. It was "Progress and Poverty." U'Ren's mind had already proved a receptive field for many revolutionary ideas; he was already a paper-money man; and in Henry George's work he found, or thought he found, a genuine political purpose in life. U'Ren has never been an agitator of the type frequently met with in the West—never a ranter, never ill-tempered, unreasonable, or dogmatic, but always soft-voiced, insinuating, persuasive, as good at listening as at talking. And now he brought all these gifts to bear in his missionary labors for the single tax. "Now I began to see why we were paying rent on a house our own grandfather had built in England a hundred years ago," he says; and it was this enthusiasm that he brought to the weekly gatherings at the Luelling household.

## Oregon Hears of the Swiss System

He was a valuable acquisition. The reformers had been to a great degree inarticulate and purposeless, and in U'Ren they found their leader. He became a member of the Luelling household, and a partner with Seth Luelling in the nursery business. Hard times soon fell upon U'Ren, the Luellings and all the rest of their associates. The panic of 1893 virtually ruined the orchard and nursery business, and financial gloom settled upon Clackamas County. Farm products could not be sold; debts began to accumulate, farms to be mortgaged and foreclosed. U'Ren, who was at the time unmarried, lived in a little cabin on the

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WILLIAM S. U'REN, THE LEADER OF THE MOVEMENT FOR POPULAR GOVERNMENT IN OREGON

Grover Cleveland—Mr. Cleveland was then well launched in his second term. The Luelling group represented certainly all the forces of unrest that were soon to blossom into the Populist party—farmers' alliances, granges, knights of labor, labor unions, greenbackers, Socialists, and the rest. At one of these Thursday evening meetings one could usually hear irreverently discussed nearly all the most sacred American institutions—the Supreme Court, the United States Senate, the representative system of government, even the Constitution itself. Many tenets then regarded as Socialistic—such as governmental ownership of railroads—likewise found hearty indorsement here.

oped many of the ideas that have now reached the full dignity of practical politics. In the fall of the year 1892 the Luelling lodge admitted an important new member. This was a wanderer with a strange name—William Simon U'Ren (accent on the last syllable). Mr. U'Ren, like the Luellings, was a spiritualist and, like most other spiritualists in that part of the country, he naturally gravitated toward the Luelling headquarters. He was then about thirty-two years old—tall, slender, blue-eyed, yellow-haired, not in the best of health, but with an engaging manner, a ready tongue and a quiet and deliberate interest in public questions. Although a young man, U'Ren