

Title: Laying Aside Vanities: Neil C. Macdonald and the Nonpartisan League

Program of Study: History

Presentation Type: Powerpoint

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Category: Textual or Investigative

Abstract

The Nonpartisan League was an agrarian political movement founded in North Dakota. The Nonpartisan League was characterized by its radical rurally-minded platform and its passionate leadership. Neil C Macdonald, Nonpartisan League nominee for Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1916, was one of these leaders. Neil Macdonald was a progressive education advocate hailed as one of the leading experts in rural education in the country. However, Macdonald was voted out of office in 1918 before the Nonpartisan League's general accepted peak in roughly 1919-1920. Although Nonpartisan League scholarship is a constant in North Dakota history studies, very little work has been done on Neil Macdonald. This work intends to examine the rise and fall of the Nonpartisan League but intends to do so by focusing on the rise and fall of Neil Macdonald. Many of the problems could be seen in the rise and fall of Neil Macdonald years before they would plague the Nonpartisan League. Problems with high spending, women's suffrage, and undiplomatic leadership affected Macdonald's time in office. The same problems and more would dismantle the Nonpartisan League. Using previous scholarship as well as primary sources and primary source research from the Neil C. Macdonald Papers in the Orin G. Libby Collection, this work seeks to explore the life of one of the lesser known leaders in the movement while placing his actions and life events in the context of the Nonpartisan League as a whole. The work intends to show that Macdonald was representative of the NPL during his time in office.

Worldview Statement

The driving biblical principles for my presentation come down to three major tenets of the Christian historian. First, the Christian historian is called to be honest and objective in his or her historical investigations. While it is impossible to remove bias entirely from a historical work, Proverbs 12:17-19 tells us that the truth endures forever while a lie is but for a moment and that the truth gives honest evidence while the false witness utters deceit (ESV). Second, the Christian historian is called to construct a thoroughly investigated and well-reasoned account of events using primary sources. Luke 1:1-4 tells us that Luke set out to “compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us” (ESV). The “orderly account” is constructed so that Theophilus will “have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” The principles of Luke apply not only to the biblical account, but to all historical accounts and my presentation is no exception. Third, we are taught that all people must recognize their human limitations. The truth of this statement applies not just to my subject, but to myself. My presentation makes no claim to be the final authority on my topics nor do I claim to be faultless in my investigations. My presentation is constructed to the best of my ability through primary sources, thorough investigation, and as objective a viewpoint as I can have.