ADDRESS

"SHOE LEATHER AND PERSPIRATION": GRASSROOTS LIBERALISM AND THE BUILDING OF THE WISCONSIN DEMOCRATIC PARTY AT MID-CENTURY

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On April 19, 2002, at the fourteenth annual Thomas E. Fairchild Lecture at the University of Wisconsin Law School, Ellen Proxmire noted that her stories about organizing the modern Wisconsin Democratic Party "may seem like they are from the dark ages."1 Proxmire, a Democratic activist and the wife of Senator William Proxmire, spoke of countless evenings and weekends sacrificed on road trips to near-empty meeting halls across the state, all to promote a penniless, ineffectual political party struggling against powerful opponents, negative public perception, and the burden of its own failed history. She recalled how a handful of women and men, despite full-

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time jobs and familial obligations, revived the Wisconsin Democratic Party by the only means available: painstaking, grassroots organizing.

There is nothing glamorous about sleepless nights or poorly attended rallies. Only Proxmire, her fellow panelists—Thomas E. Fairchild, Gaylord Nelson, and Patrick Lucey—and those who worked with them decades ago should even flirt with wrapping those days in nostalgia. Those who built the party, the members of the Democratic Organizing Committee (DOC), worked hard, under circumstances unfathomable to modern politicians. They organized for over ten years before triumphing in the election of 1958. It was not an easy time to be a politician, especially a liberal politician, in Wisconsin.

And yet, it is difficult to reflect on their efforts from the perspective of our present circumstances without wondering if those “dark ages” were also golden. The beginning of the twenty-first century has not been kind to politics in Wisconsin. Recent scandals and corruption are only the coarsest, most visible manifestations of a deeper public concern that a century of bipartisan commitment to clear, responsive government is being rapidly undone. Wisconsin’s local civic traditions have eroded, partly because of a decades-long centralization of electoral politics by the national parties and large interest groups. This trend is apparent nationwide, but in Wisconsin, where relatively inexpensive, substantive campaigns were a source of pride, the loss of regional identity is particularly troubling. The Democratic activists of the 1940s and 1950s, with their straightforward commitment to liberal principles and grassroots organizing, can seem, in retrospect, like beacons of authenticity from a simpler time.

The historical perspective offered in this Article, which was presented in an adapted form at the Fairchild Lecture, is intended to bring the history of Wisconsin politics at mid-century out of the darkness and down from the heavens, to provide context and explanation for a moment that seems astonishing from afar. The development of Democratic Party liberalism in Wisconsin was rooted in a particular time and place, the politics and society of United States and Wisconsin in the 1940s. In those years, DOC activists—the “Young Turks,” as

2. In broadest terms, Democratic Party liberalism in 1945 was defined by the tenets of the New Deal, emphasizing state-directed economic strategies and government programs designed to improve social welfare. There are many works during and about the period important to the history of liberalism. See generally DANIEL BELL, THE END OF IDEOLOGY: ON THE EXHAUSTION OF POLITICAL IDEAS IN THE FIFTIES (1960); LOUIS HARTZ, THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN AMERICA: AN INTERPRETATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT SINCE THE REVOLUTION (1955); RICHARD HOFSTADTER, THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION AND THE MEN WHO MADE IT (1948); ALLEN J. MATUSOW, THE UNRAVELING OF AMERICA: A HISTORY OF LIBERALISM IN THE 1960s (1984).
they would be nicknamed—reshaped state politics at a time when traditional party and ideological lines in Wisconsin had collapsed. They used some of the oldest tools of politics to modernize the Wisconsin Democratic Party and make liberalism a credible ideology in the state, beginning with the first Democratic Organizing Committee convention in 1949. Their efforts—the efforts of the speakers at the Fairchild Lecture, including Thomas Fairchild, and many others—built the Democratic Party into a political force in the state. More importantly, they built an instrument for implementing policies on issues ranging from taxes to transportation to the environment that would become models for liberals nationwide.

What happened in Wisconsin was also important for U.S. history because it complicates the conventional narratives of post-1945 U.S. society, particularly the history of postwar liberalism. The extent of the so-called liberal consensus was not as broad or deep as scholarly or popular accounts suggest, nor was local political activism as quiet as once believed. Wisconsin's dynamic political culture in the 1940s and 1950s, filled with campaigners from across the spectrum, refutes the notion that ideology and political activism receded in the late 1930s and only reappeared in the late 1960s.

In Wisconsin, which never had a competitive Democratic Party until the 1950s, liberalism was only one of many ideologies competing for dominance in the first decades of the Cold War. Although steeped in the ideals of progressivism and the New Deal, Democrats refashioned postwar liberalism in Wisconsin by incorporating aspects of Wisconsin's Progressive and Socialist Party traditions, while also embracing New Deal liberalism and even elements of postwar conservatism. This new liberalism was far from perfect, and in later years its limitations and the differences among its adherents became more pronounced. But in the late 1940s in Wisconsin, liberalism was bursting with potential through the activists who brought it to prominence.

The Young Turks created a new, liberal movement because a major political realignment in Wisconsin in the 1940s had purged liberals from the ranks of the existing parties, even as liberalism reigned triumphant in national politics. That realignment introduces this Article. The Young Turks then took advantage of the realignment to gain power because they committed themselves to grassroots organizing. Their efforts between 1946 and 1949—how they organized, and what it meant for the future of liberalism and Democratic Party politics—is this Article's centerpiece.

3. See infra note 72, 90 and accompanying text.
The Young Turks believed in politics organized from the bottom up, a grassroots movement that allowed for open participation among its membership. In the early stages of the DOC, this belief trumped all ideological differences and regional loyalties, and offered a structure for their collective ambition. In their view, means shaped ends: only a party built upon the ideals of democratic participation would produce liberal politics. This belief appealed to thousands of political activists across the state, and would propel the Young Turks, the DOC, and postwar liberalism toward decades of success in state and national politics.

I. THE END OF PROGRESSIVE WISCONSIN

Before World War II, the Democratic Party was the laughingstock of Wisconsin politics. Democrats barely existed, and their candidates rarely won. If the party had an identity, then it was defined by serving as a last refuge for those who rejected either stalwart or progressive Republican ideals. Like other states in the Upper Midwest and Great Plains, Wisconsin was dominated by Republican ideals after the Civil War. At first, Wisconsin Democrats were a respectable opposition party. Between 1868 and 1896, Democrats always received at least forty percent of the two-party gubernatorial vote, averaged around forty-six percent, and won the governorship three times. When Robert La Follette, Sr., assumed the leadership of the Republican Party in 1900, however, any hope for the Democratic opposition was demolished. La Follette carried the energy of Wisconsin’s progressive reformers into an internal battle with stalwarts for the soul of the Republican Party. From 1900 to 1932, virtually every major statewide political battle was fought in Republican primaries. Before 1934 and after 1946, the same battles were waged between the Progressive Party and the Republicans.

As a result, the Democratic Party had a spectacular record of failure from 1900 to 1932. The Democratic candidate won the state’s presidential electoral votes only during the three-way race of 1912.

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5. Id.
6. Id.
7. Id. at 37; Richard Carlton Haney, A History of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin Since World War Two 3 (1970) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin) (on file with the University of Wisconsin Memorial Library). I am deeply indebted to Haney’s dissertation. Despite having almost no access to primary documents, Haney produced an exhaustive narrative of the Democratic Party in the early postwar years. His timeline of events has been invaluable to my project.
8. EPSTEIN, supra note 4, at 34.
9. Id. at 37.
Democrats never won the governorship, and only early in Woodrow Wilson’s presidency did they even come close. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate averaged thirty-eight percent of the popular vote. In 1922, the Democratic candidate for governor earned only twelve percent of the vote for governor—in 1926, only seventeen percent. Democrats won no statewide offices. The state legislature never had a Democratic majority. Not one Democrat sat in the state senate from 1923 to 1931. The Roosevelt era produced only incremental gains. Wisconsin gave its electoral votes to Roosevelt in three of his four presidential campaigns, but only FDR’s victory in 1932 produced Democratic gains in Wisconsin—the party won the governorship and a U.S. Senatorship—offices it promptly lost in subsequent elections.

Wisconsin was thus a state without a competitive Democratic Party. The party existed, but it served mostly as a machine for national patronage. Liberals supported the La Follettes in Wisconsin and Roosevelt in Washington. As long as the progressive movement continued, the Democratic Party would be marginalized, and the La Follettes had proven tenacious and adept at leading progressivism for over fifty years. But as the 1940s dawned, the Progressives took several disastrous turns.

The relationship between the La Follettes and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as well as between the La Follettes and the Republican Party, became strained when Roosevelt was considering direct aid to the Allies in their war against the Axis powers. The La Follettes wanted strict neutrality, as did many isolationists. German-American isolationism had fueled progressive foreign policy intermittently since the late nineteenth century, and the threat of a

11. Epstein, supra note 4, at 37.
second war with Germany—along with fears of reprisals against German-Americans at home—reignited isolationism in Wisconsin. But isolationism encouraged many liberal internationalists in Wisconsin to reconsider their loyalty to the progressive cause, including several labor unions in the industrial bastions of Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee. They shifted their support from the La Follettes to Democratic candidates. This marked the first major defection of liberal Wisconsinites to the state Democratic Party, but it was not yet considered a threat by progressives and Republicans. As a result, the La Follettes pressed ahead with their challenge to Roosevelt. In 1938, Governor Philip La Follette, son of Robert La Follette, Sr., launched the National Progressives of America (NPA), a new national political party intended to rebuke both Republicans and Democrats.

The founding of the NPA was an important moment in the evolution of Wisconsin liberalism and the Wisconsin Democratic Party. Liberals who had supported both La Follette progressivism and New Deal liberalism were now forced to choose between them. Their choice was not easy. The La Follettes were unqualified heroes, a family whose vision of social reform and economic justice successfully tempered the excesses of the Gilded Age and brought worldwide renown to the state.

Yet many liberals were unsettled by the specter of fascism hovering over the NPA. Rallies included symbolism and behavior reflecting Phil La Follette’s interest in the tactics and style of Nazi Germany. “I didn’t like what Phil was doing,” said Henry Maier, who later became a Democratic mayor of Milwaukee. Maier recalled:

It didn’t smell right to me . . . when he came back [from Germany] with that great symbol of his that so damn closely

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18. See Patrick J. Maney, "Young Bob" La Follette: A Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr. 1895-1953, at 204 (1978). Philip La Follette was so completely convinced of the need for a new party that he believed that he had received Roosevelt’s approval. Id. He recalled telling Roosevelt:

[W]e should try to get a movement started in other states as had been done in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The President was enthusiastic and said, “Go ahead!” I got the impression that Roosevelt had given up hope of liberalizing the Democratic party and was ready to go along with the realignment.

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resembled a swastika. My family comes from a line of free Germans, so our kind of thinking was a great departure from that sort of an operation. And in my puzzlement over what the hell he was doing, I began to raise questions, and I began to sense what I thought was, in him, a drift to the right. I didn't want to drift to the right at that point in my life.  

Bombarded by criticism from friend and foe, national media, and local activists, the NPA was a stillborn mishap for the progressive movement.  

After the NPA disaster, the influence of the La Follettes on Wisconsin politics continued to decline. In November 1938, Phil La Follette lost his campaign for reelection. A coalition of Republicans and Democrats—both, at that point, with largely conservative constituencies—backed Julius Heil, a Republican businessman, for governor. La Follette had not even intended to run for a fourth term but he changed his mind, fearing a complete collapse of the Progressive Party and his family’s political influence. Nevertheless, the public mood had turned against the Progressives: they lost every statewide office, the U.S. Senate race, five of the seven seats they controlled in the House of Representatives, and ground in the state legislature. Heil won fifty-five percent of the vote to La Follette’s thirty-six percent.  

The crisis peaked at the Portage convention of the Progressive Party in 1946, where the La Follette family and party members had decided the future of their cause. After secretive deliberations, which continued until the very start of the convention, Robert La Follette, Jr. announced his decision to return to the Republican Party. La Follette stated that the Democratic Party of Wisconsin was a “machine-minded organization without principle or program . . . . It is clear from the record that the Democratic Party is not our hope for a liberal instrument for political action.” The Portage convention voted to join the Republicans.  

Older Progressives had no qualms about rejoining the Republican Party, to which they felt a vestigial loyalty. There was no such loyalty among many young Progressives. In their view, the Republican Party

22. Wis. Legislative Reference Library, supra note 21.
24. Id.
had grown too conservative and too cozy with big business. Speaking a month after La Follette’s announcement, an ambitious organizer named Carl Thompson said: “I came to the conclusion that with the death of the Progressive [P]arty, the best hope for liberalism in our state lay with the new, active group of young leaders who were rebuilding the Democratic party in Wisconsin into a fighting liberal vehicle.”

25 Stalwart Republicans, by contrast, “have ruthlessly made war on all such persons.”

Indeed, Wisconsin Republicans were entering the most reactionary period in their history, courtesy of the state’s most infamous political figure: Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy’s victory over Robert La Follette, Jr., in 1946 confirmed and accelerated the transformation of Wisconsin politics. His presence ensured that liberals would never again find refuge in the Republican Party. McCarthy was also the most important outside catalyst in the development of the DOC and the modern Wisconsin Democratic Party. He provided a common threat for liberals around the state, and they would unite in the 1950s to try to defeat him.

27 “I viewed him as a potential American Hitler,” said Patrick Lucey at the Fairchild Lecture. “He was an evil man and a most appropriate target for a new, idealistic party.”

But in 1946, McCarthy’s victory hardly seemed like an opportunity for liberals. Surprised and befuddled liberal commentators immediately turned to Wisconsin to find explanations for McCarthy’s popularity. Certainly, La Follette, Jr.’s ineptitude contributed. When he returned to the Republican Party, he had few allies and a skeletal organization unable to compete with the stalwart machine headed by Thomas Coleman. Most importantly, La Follette, Jr. had lost touch with Wisconsin voters and chose to spend only a few weeks campaigning for reelection while McCarthy canvassed the state for months. La Follette, Jr. presumed that prewar coalitions would remain intact, and

25. Carl Thompson, Address on Radio Station WAUX (Apr. 17, 1946) (transcript available in the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Wisconsin Democratic Organizing Committee Papers).

26. Id


28. Id.


30. See generally Manev, supra note 18; Oshinsky, supra note 29; Haney, supra note 7.
underestimated the fluidity of the political situation, as well as the bitterness of farmers, labor, businessman, and consumers about the state of the economy after years of depression and war. The voters sought economic and social stability, but La Follette, Jr. spent his last eighteen months in office leading the reorganization of Congress—an important national issue, but certainly not one important to most Wisconsin voters.

While La Follette, Jr. dithered, Coleman was obsessed with defeating the La Follettes, and structured the Republican Party in 1946 with the sole purpose of rebuking the Progressives. Coleman reassured the Republican economic conservatives that McCarthy could be trusted to carry forward their anti-regulatory, low-tax agenda despite the candidate’s populist rhetoric, while supporting McCarthy’s populist identity politics among many white ethnic and rural voters. Coleman thus solidified the budding alliance between stalwart, economic Republicans and the socially conservative remnants of the old Democratic Party, a coalition that would ultimately define the postwar Republican Party in Wisconsin and the United States. On election night, Coleman called La Follette, Jr.’s primary defeat the greatest day of his life.

Liberals also contributed to La Follette Jr.’s demise. Democrats campaigned vigorously against La Follette and hurt him in many former strongholds, especially in urban areas. In 1940, La Follette, Jr. won Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha by a total of almost 62,000 votes. In 1946, he lost those counties by 12,000 votes. Sixty-three percent of Democratic senatorial candidate Howard McMurray’s total vote came


32. See generally O’Brien, supra note 29, at 55–81.

33. Haney, supra note 7, at 52–56.
from those three counties, mostly due to the efforts of labor unions, especially the CIO, which had abandoned the progressives. 34 Although liberal votes were not the main reason for McCarthy’s victory, they represented yet another sign that the old Progressive coalition had fallen apart.

In short, Wisconsin’s political order was in disarray when McCarthy was elected. Liberal Democrats, stalwart Republicans, Progressives, Socialists, farmers, and union members all abandoned La Follette, Jr. as pre-World War II allegiances evaporated. 35 Each constituency was redefining itself in Wisconsin’s new political landscape. Joe McCarthy was the beneficiary.

But so were liberal activists. Most had already abandoned La Follette, Jr. and voted in the Democratic primary. They wanted La Follette, Jr. to struggle, but never expected McCarthy to win or become such a formidable candidate that he would crush Howard McMurray in the general election. The public, it seemed, was more conservative than the Young Turks first thought, making the establishment of a liberal party even more pressing. With McCarthy’s victory, the Young Turks now believed that the time had arrived to devote the full force of liberal activism to first recapturing and rejuvenating the Democratic Party, then to defeating McCarthy. To them, the Republican Party was a lost cause. 36

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34. In retrospect, some Progressives blamed Communists within the CIO for the margin of victory. It is tempting to embrace the irony of such analysis, particularly because elements of the CIO did work to defeat La Follette alongside liberals. But there is no evidence that Communists were even capable of denying La Follette or that they succeeded.


II. THE DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZING COMMITTEE AND THE RISE OF WISCONSIN LIBERALISM

The DOC was the most important political organization in Wisconsin between 1945 and 1970. Its establishment marked the restoration of two-party politics to the state after nearly fifty years of Republican domination. The founding of the DOC also signaled the arrival of the Young Turks on Wisconsin's political stage. Energetic, determined, and dedicated to the democratic process, the Young Turks refashioned Wisconsin's progressive and socialist traditions to produce a unique form of liberalism that would, over the course of the next two decades, play a significant role in state, national and even global politics.\(^{37}\)

The development of the Wisconsin Democratic Party was important for another reason: it proved that grassroots organizing was still capable of producing political change in postwar party politics, even though electoral politics was becoming more centralized, nationalized and expensive across the United States. The Young Turks had come together because they shared the ideals of liberal ideology and Democratic Party policies, but they remained united because of a common commitment to collective action that led to unprecedented political success from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s.

Eventually, the Young Turks would fill many of the most powerful positions in state politics. From the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, however, they spent most of their time worrying about exams and grades. A few were in law school or studying medicine. Many were in college, mostly at the University of Wisconsin. Several had not yet finished high school. Their activism, if roused at all, was enmeshed with the concerns of early adulthood: completing their education, securing a career, starting a family. At the same time, politics was inescapable. Growing up amid depression and war, everyday decisions about their future were determined when the voters spoke and the politicians acted. Some of them only survived the 1930s by the good graces of the New Deal. Others would soon be summoned to Washington or sent to Europe, North Africa, and Asia to fight the Axis powers.

When Phil La Follette launched the National Progressives of America in 1938, he unwittingly propelled the future Young Turks on a journey of political soul-searching. Over the next eleven years, each of the Young Turks would make choices about their political allegiances, ideological beliefs, and personal ambitions, choices that would lead

\(^{37}\) See Haney, supra note 7.
them to a 1949 meeting at the Northland Hotel in Green Bay. There, they would reshape the state’s political landscape and establish, for the first time, a credible Democratic Party in Wisconsin.\(^\text{38}\)

Conservative political columnist John Wyngaard is credited with naming the Young Turks in his column in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* with an epithet intended to signal their political inexperience and stubborn ambition.\(^\text{39}\) Indeed, most of the Young Turks were new to politics, and many were barely thirty years-old when the DOC was formed in 1949. Yet they had shared an important set of experiences and met through institutions, which laid the groundwork for their political activity and, ultimately, the ideology upon which they built the Wisconsin Democratic Party.

Many Young Turks met each other through the American Veterans Committee (AVC).\(^\text{40}\) The ordeal of combat was a profound event for many individuals who founded the DOC. They returned from war, like so many GIs, filled with patriotism and a sense of public obligation. Henry Reuss, later a U.S. Congressman, called it “another important milestone on my way toward becoming a cog in our democracy.”\(^\text{41}\) Unlike Wisconsin’s previous generations of political leaders, the Young Turks also returned from war committed to U.S. involvement in foreign affairs and the struggle for freedom. Until Vietnam, the Young Turks would never waver from anti-Communism and consistently supported U.S. actions abroad.\(^\text{42}\)

Yet the veterans’ agenda was domestic.\(^\text{43}\) After the war, veterans’ organizations throughout the country became a conduit for the political energy and entitlement claims of the returned GIs. Wisconsin was no different. Liberal veterans in the state looked for an alternative to conservative groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion. They also felt that the VFW and the Legion were too preoccupied with securing benefits for veterans when the entire country needed and deserved rebuilding after the World War II. At the same time, liberal veterans also wanted to express their liberalism within the context of a veterans organization, in part to reaffirm their patriotism

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38. See id.

39. John Wyngaard, *Government and Politics*, *Green Bay Press Gazette*, July 26, 1948, at 8 (“The ground-work has been laid for a meaningful Democratic party revolution in the formation of a slate of ‘Young Turks,’ as they like to call themselves . . . .”).


43. OLSON, *supra* note 42, at 95.
and anti-Communist credentials. Thus, future Democratic activists James Doyle, Gretchen Pfankuchen, Horace Wilkie, Gaylord Nelson, and Henry Reuss were among those who formed the Wisconsin chapter of the AVC. The AVC provided a platform for liberal political participation in Wisconsin, and helped many of the Young Turks recognize that they had ideological compatriots searching for a political identity.

Many of the Young Turks became politically active at the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The university was a profound socializing experience for the Young Turks, matched only by their service in World War II. They gravitated toward political groups and public service projects, where they mingled and organized campus activities with regular students. The most popular was the University of Wisconsin Young Progressives Club. Carl Thompson was the president. Gaylord Nelson, who would become the most famous of the Young Turks, was the Young Progressives' representative to the Central Committee of the Wisconsin Progressive Party, and he later chaired the organization while in law school. Thomas Fairchild, later the first Young Turk to hold a major state office, was also president, and Wilkie, Miles McMillan, and future governor John Reynolds were members.

Other campus organizations brought liberals together. James Doyle, the most important organizer in the DOC, was senior class president and president of the Daily Cardinal Board of Control in 1937. A year later, his future wife Ruth Bachhuber took control of the Daily Cardinal. Wilkie was president of the student union. McMillan was campus treasurer of the Roosevelt for President campaign in 1940; Nelson was its secretary. Even many Milwaukee activists, like Henry Reuss and Henry Maier, were educated at the University of Wisconsin, where they met fellow liberals from Madison and around the state.

44. See id.
45. See Haney, supra note 7, at 65. James Doyle was the father of the current Wisconsin governor, who shares the same name.
46. OLSON, supra note 42, at 90–96; REUSS, supra note 41, at 25–27.
47. Haney, supra note 7, at 65.
48. See id.
49. Id.
50. Id.; Biographical Sketches of the Candidates from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (1946) (on file with Wisconsin Historical Society Archives) [hereinafter Biographical Candidate Sketches].
51. Haney, supra note 7, at 66.
52. See id. at 65.
53. Id. at 66.
54. Id. at 65; Biographical Candidate Sketches, supra note 50.
Finally, there was the influence of the professors with whom the Young Turks studied. At Wisconsin, they learned from a renowned faculty still steeped in the Wisconsin Idea—which called for the university to serve the needs of the state—including Wilbur Cohen, Edwin Witte, Arthur Altmeyer, Alexander Meiklejohn, Harold Groves, and Selig Perlman. William Rice, who ran for Congress in 1947 with Carl Thompson as his campaign manager, was a professor at the law school. Howard McMurray taught in the political science department. Many of these professors were themselves students of progressive legends like Richard Ely and John Commons, the economists who helped articulate the Wisconsin Idea’s commitment to academic involvement in public service.

The second generation of academics carried the legacy of the Wisconsin Idea into the postwar era. For example, Edwin Witte, who drafted the federal Social Security Act and taught at the University of Wisconsin from 1933 to 1957, said, “I owe to [John] Commons my entire outlook on life.” Witte taught many of the Young Turks about Commons’s theory of “Pragmatic Idealism,” the belief that “the problem of social idealism through collective action consists in bringing the ‘average’ and those below the ‘average’ up to the level of the best.” For many Young Turks, their lessons at the university sharpened their political beliefs, a process which also bound them together as a group. From backgrounds that ranged from farmer to banker, poor to rich, the Young Turks organized for the first time at the university.

As the Young Turks came to know one another, they believed that they needed a political organization that united veterans, students,
former Progressives and Socialists, and Democrats. After running across one another through school, organizations, and rallies for years, the Young Turks finally started meeting as a group in 1947, when they formed a committee to build a new Democratic organization. Doyle described the scene:

We had a bunch of meetings during those years halfway between Madison and Milwaukee. There’s . . . a restaurant out there . . . . In the space of time I’m talking about, say on the order of twelve to fourteen months or so, I must have gone to twelve or fourteen meetings. As often as once a month, I would say. Sometimes more often, there. The group that would meet would change from time to time . . . . There’d be Horace Wilkie . . . and Carl Thompson and Miles McMillan . . . . There’d be Bob Tehan, Andy Biemiller, Henry Maier . . . . Harvey Kitzman of the UAW . . . would have been there.

The meetings were focused on organization, not ideology. Said Doyle: “I really don’t think that it ever occurred to us that any differences of opinion that we might have about some specific issue that had to do with government, rather than with politics, would divide us even though we might have some variations in our views about those things.” Instead, the Young Turks would “be talking personalities, about this person, that person as potential candidates if not in 1948 then

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60. See Haney, supra note 7, at 65–66.
61. Id. at 61.
63. The motivation behind collective action is a hotly contested topic among historians as well as political scientists and sociologists. In twentieth-century political history, the focus of theoretical debate has surrounded women, minority groups, and political parties. Among the most famous and continuous debates is the controversy over the nature of populism, ranging from sympathetic leftist interpretations, like Lawrence Goodwyn’s *The Populist Moment* (1978), to more skeptical studies, like Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform* (1955). Among social scientists, the grandfather of collective action theory was Mancur Olson, whose *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (1971) remains a standard in the field. More recently, historians have applied collective action theory to historical analysis. Notable examples include Theda Skocpol’s *Protecting Mothers and Soldiers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992), and John Gaventa’s *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (1980).
later. We'd be talking about personalities in terms of who would do what within the party organization and all that kind of thing.  

The DOC was formally established at a meeting in Fond du Lac on May 19, 1948. The first goal of the meeting was to produce the DOC constitution and a DOC platform. This process resulted in the most ideological documents that the organization produced until its first campaign against Joseph McCarthy in 1952. The two central themes of the constitution were security and democracy. These two themes would dominate the next two decades of Democratic political debate in Wisconsin. Two key paragraphs from Doyle's preamble encapsulated the DOC's mission:

Peace and stability in the world; freedom, equality and security at home: these are our high aims. To achieve these aims, we seek to promote and to preserve liberal democratic government everywhere—abroad, in America, in Wisconsin. To promote and to preserve liberal democratic government, we seek to build and to develop a liberal Democratic Party.

A political party is a means to an end. Means shape ends. To be a force for democracy, a political party must be a democracy. Its members must have equal voice, one with another. Its leaders must be freely chosen by its members and must answer to them. Its program must arise from the free and full competition of ideas among its members.

Two sources heavily influenced Doyle's thinking. The first was the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), in which Doyle was active. The ADA was an interventionist liberal group started in 1947 and intended to promote an agenda that both pushed the Democratic Party

65. *Id.* Doyle continued:
We really didn't talk about the issues much at all. Eisenhower . . . later, made a remark that won some fame for a little while about the importance of program, of ideology, of purpose in politics and in political organizations and said that without it, political parties are nothing but conspiracies to gain power for no other purpose then just to have it. I would say in terms of our waking hours and the business we that transacted and the subjects that we discussed during those years, this could fairly be characterized as a conspiracy to gain power.

*Id.*


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leftward on social issues like civil rights and toward a pragmatic position against Communism. The agenda of the ADA was also noteworthy because it contrasted with the more radical direction of Henry Wallace's People's Progressive Party, a distinction between moderation and extremism, which appealed to the Young Turks in the wake of Phil La Follette's rightward drift and Joe McCarthy's emergence. Founded by liberal anti-Communist leaders from academe and politics like Reinhold Niebuhr, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, and Hubert Humphrey, the ADA charted a middle course that the Young Turks followed. Unlike the liberalism of former Milwaukee mayor Dan Hoan and other, older activists, the liberalism of the ADA and the Young Turks fully embraced the challenges of the postwar world, both domestically and abroad. Although Wisconsin remained an incubator for clean and innovative government in the eyes of the Young Turks, the great slogan of the Wisconsin Idea—"The boundaries of the University are the boundaries of the state"—now applied to the needs of the nation and world during the Cold War. If New Deal liberalism was the use of government to rebuild the economy in the face of totalitarianism, then postwar liberalism would be the use of government to promote social equality in the face of Communism.

The second source of inspiration for Doyle was Carl Bogholt, a pragmatist philosopher at the University of Wisconsin. As a student, Doyle was enamored with Bogholt's notion, borrowed heavily from pragmatist giants like William James and John Dewey, that actions, not beliefs, define each individual's identity. It was an idea embraced by the Young Turks. They sensed that the people of Wisconsin had

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69. Hoan achieved notoriety as a Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, but became a liberal and a member of the Democratic Party in the 1940s. Haney, supra note 7, at 27–28.


72. Although Doyle himself focused on U.S. political traditions, other Young Turks were also influenced by European politics much like Wisconsin's socialists and progressives at the turn of the century. According to John Reynolds, DOC policies were also heavily influenced by European social democracies:

I think that the main interest of the activists who came into the party was some belief in some form of a democratic liberal society, maybe on the Scandinavian model, maybe on the Swedish model; sometimes they were as far left as the Socialists, sometimes they were just reformers who were against corruption. But basically I think there was a common and a very
grown weary of the domineering, personality-driven politics of the La Follettes and Tom Coleman, and wanted their voices restored to the political process. Bogholt’s beliefs were also consistent with the service-oriented ethos of the Wisconsin Idea. Hence the inclusion of the phrase “means shape ends” in the preamble, which Doyle lifted from one of Bogholt’s lectures to reflect the DOC’s effort to create a truly voluntary, democratic political party.

The second goal of the 1948 DOC meeting was to devise a plan for starting local and county DOC units around the state. The Young Turks believed that the only option for creating an alternative to the existing political parties was grassroots organizing. Said Gaylord Nelson:

You’ve always got to keep in mind Wisconsin is a volunteer state. Patronage is of no consequence for all practical

important ideological commitment that we were really out to improve society.


73. Constitution Preamble, Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (Nov. 27, 1949) (on file with Wisconsin Historical Society Archives).

74. Interview with James Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 23, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 38, Side 2). In this interview, Doyle also stated:

I drafted the preamble. I really knocked myself out with that. I don’t know what’s happened to the constitution of the Democratic Party in the last twenty years . . . . In any event I want to mention this . . . that preamble contains a line like this: "Means shape ends. To be a force for democracy a political party must be a democracy." Well, Carl Bogholt . . . a philosopher and member of the faculty at the University of Wisconsin, was a pragmatist. His emphasis was heavy on means and on the importance of means and the significance of means shaping ends. The emphasis on procedure and process and the way in which things are done as distinct from the substance and the content. And an argument to the general effect . . . that all there is is means and that we live our lives adopting means. I remember that I saw him one time after the draft of the constitution was out. He was not very active but he was interested. I remember, one time, he had very, very piercing eyes and a very intense kind of a manner in conversation and so on. He confronted me and he said . . . “Julia said you drafted that damn thing.” . . . Next thing I knew he half-embraced me. He said, “When I saw that sentence—means shape ends—I just about jumped out of my skin to think that in this document that will probably stick around for quite awhile and possibly even occasionally be read by some of the politicians, that that assertion is made!”

Id.
purposes . . . That has some advantages but it also has great disadvantages because the activists in volunteer states like Wisconsin or Minnesota or Oregon . . . where patronage is an insignificant factor, volunteers are there because they believe. They philosophically share the viewpoint of the party. Therefore, they organize and work and are enthusiastic. There is no way you can buy that. So that was the most important part.\textsuperscript{75}

Because Wisconsin's political institutions had offered little patronage after Progressive-era reforms, the Young Turks recognized that they would have to organize a social movement before they could organize a political party. There was no infrastructure or patronage around which the DOC could rally. What did exist was a reasonably common ideology—liberalism tinted with shades of progressivism and democratic socialism—a historic emphasis on promoting democracy within the state, and a willing population of potential activists, mostly white, middle-class or rural, and already involved in other political groups or organized labor. If these resources could be corralled and structured, then a political party might follow.

Said Pat Lucey about the DOC plan: "There was a lot of party building to do, night after night and on weekends . . . seeking out people interested in building a new kind of political party."\textsuperscript{76}

III. ORGANIZING A DEMOCRATIC WISCONSIN

The standard procedure for organizing consisted of two trips into each county.\textsuperscript{77} The first was a preliminary trip to get acquainted and contact interested people.\textsuperscript{78} The Young Turks would visit potential allies in each town, eventually finding one to three people to serve as county leaders. Usually they were labor leaders, former progressives, postmasters, or leaders of farm organizations, especially farm

\textsuperscript{76} Patrick Lucey, Remarks at the Fourteenth Annual Thomas E. Fairchild Lecture, in Madison, Wis. (Apr. 19, 2002) (videotape available at the University of Wisconsin Law Library).
\textsuperscript{77} Memorandum from Democratic Organizing Committee, Standard Operating Procedure for Volunteer DOC Organizer (1949) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin) [hereinafter DOC Memorandum].
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Id.}
cooperatives. "It sounds so feeble—and it was—scratching around for one name," said Jim Doyle about the trips.\textsuperscript{79} Doyle recalled,

one of us would go out there and travel 200-250 miles one way to some of those places. We'd get there and sometimes find that there were only two people there: the person we called and possibly the wife—I was going to say spouse, but it would almost always be the wife.\textsuperscript{80}

To raise money, local activists sold DOC t-shirts and held bake sales. By 1949, when the DOC was largely organized across the state, the entire statewide budget was still only $4,500.\textsuperscript{81} But in the early years, money was not a priority. "The best way to campaign doesn't cost a nickel," asserted Ruth Doyle.\textsuperscript{82} "The neighborhood meeting or the gatherings of people in small groups that want to talk to you about things [are the best way to campaign]."\textsuperscript{83}

The second trip would be made when a county DOC meeting was organized, typically a gathering to install new officers.\textsuperscript{84} At these meetings, one or more of the DOC activists would give a talk in which they recommended a program of activity for the county unit in the year ahead.\textsuperscript{85} "When you attend," organizers were informed, "you will find

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Interview with James Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 23, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 39, Side 1).
\item \textsuperscript{80} Id. See generally DOC Memorandum, \textit{supra} note 77; Minutes from the Democratic Organizing Committee from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (June 19, 1949) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin).
\item \textsuperscript{81} Budget of the Democratic Organizing Committee from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (1949) (on file with Wisconsin Historical Society Archives).
\item \textsuperscript{82} Interview with Ruth Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 4, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 32, Side 2).
\item \textsuperscript{83} Budget of the Democratic Organizing Committee from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (1949) (on file with Wisconsin Historical Society Archives); Interview with James Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 23, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 38, Side 2); Interview with Ruth Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 4, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 32, Side 2).
\item \textsuperscript{84} DOC Memorandum, \textit{supra} note 77.
\item \textsuperscript{85} DOC Memorandum, \textit{supra} note 77; Interview with James Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 23, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 38, Side 2).
\end{itemize}
yourself something of a celebrity. Be at the hall early. Get acquainted with folks as they arrive. Try to create as relaxed and friendly an atmosphere as possible." 86 The second meeting anchored the county or local unit by electing leaders who would be responsible to both local members and state organizers. 87

Much of the organizing strategy emanated from Milwaukee, especially from the office of long-time Milwaukee Democratic activist Robert Tehan. Giving all of the credit to the Young Turks, according to Doyle,

would be a very bad distortion. It was Bob Tehan who was in charge. It was Bob Tehan who was not only opening the door to us but encouraging us very, very actively to move in aggressively and actively and do things like putting this slate together. But we were always reporting back in to Bob and accepting his guidance and suggestions about the whole thing. 88

Still, most of the organizing was based out of Madison. Said Nelson: "For all practical purposes, Dane County ran the organizing of the state. The whole heart and guts and leadership was all there. Except Milwaukee, where Milwaukee had a Democratic congressman or two." 89 In future years, tension would develop between the Milwaukee and Madison factions of the DOC. But in the late 1940s, the two camps coexisted peacefully. Ideological differences were put aside while the DOC was built, and neither side had yet had the resources to dominate the state anyway. 90 Milwaukee liberals provided the tactics and financing, while Madison liberals provided the organizing.

86. DOC Memorandum, supra note 77; Interview with James Doyle, Wisconsin Democratic Party Oral History Project Recordings, in Madison, Wis. (Jan. 23, 1985) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives, Audio Tape 38, Side 2).
90. Although Wisconsin liberals were united by common foes, they were divided by culture, geography, and tradition, especially after they started to win
Although men provided the public face of the DOC, it was the women of the DOC who ran the grassroots organization. Women had the opportunity to participate in party politics at levels typically reserved for men because the structure of the DOC was unsettled in its infancy. Most women in the DOC were local volunteers, as were most men. Except for the required post of Democratic National Committeewoman and a handful of successful local women candidates, women were also usually in positions away from public view and were not part of the tactical or policy decisions made by the DOC leadership, a tension which intensified in later years. Yet women were welcomed into the DOC and filled informal leadership roles. From the earliest awakening of postwar liberal activism in veterans groups and at the University of Wisconsin, women participated in the DOC's organization. They managed the DOC offices throughout the organizing drive, the very moment when the office was more important than any candidate or ideology.91

Women did most of the door-to-door work in Dane and Milwaukee Counties, organized phone banks, built the membership files for each
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county, addressed, stuffed, and distributed literature, set up meetings for candidates, circulated candidate nomination papers, set up voter registration drives, provided research on Wisconsin localities, and organized pools to take voters to the polls.92 “The women in Dane County were a vital part of it all,” said Nelson.93 “They got out the mail. They did all the nitty-gritty work. That was Janet Lee, my sister, and . . . . Esther Kaplan and Esther Lawton and . . . . Mary Ann Thompson . . . . We’d get out the mail.”94 If the DOC men were responsible for stimulating liberal activism by traversing the state, then it was the DOC women who kept that activism alive by building and maintaining the institutions of a grassroots organization.95

The organizing trips were hard work for all of the DOC volunteers. Wrote Carl Thompson in 1949:

I was away from home 28 out of 30 consecutive evenings this summer—a condition not conducive to domestic tranquility. Others have put in much more time than they should be expected to put in. Some of the women in the office have been putting in 30 to 40 hours per week without one penny’s pay for it.96

Only a handful of organizers were financially independent, and most scrambled to make money when they were not organizing. Many held full-time jobs during the day and organized in the evenings and on weekends:

92. Memorandum from Irma Fehrman from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin, The Women’s Role in the D.O.C. (1949) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives); Memorandum from the Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin, Suggestions for Women’s Activity in County DOC Organizations (1949) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives).


94. Id.


I can assure you that no 'little clique' is anxious to do all of this work. Frankly, I don't enjoy being away from home so much. This organizational job doesn't involve honor or power. It is just *shoe leather and perspiration*. But unless it is done, it is my opinion that the Democratic Party in Wisconsin will be in the same position as the Republican [P]arty in the South so far as electing people to office except in isolated instances.\(^97\)

Progress was slow across the state. In the Fox River Valley, often no one—not even the county leader—would show up for meetings. As late as 1953, John Reynolds reported that only three people showed up at the Brown County meeting, including him.\(^98\) The DOC knew that it faced particular animosity outside of Madison and, to a lesser extent, Milwaukee. Upstate Democrats, wrote Hoan, "are suspicious, skeptical, even jealous; resent 'dictation' from 'that Madison crowd'... Whether this dislike for the so-called Madison crowd is justified or not, is beside the point; it exists, must be faced and coped with realistically."\(^99\) Failures upstate meant that the Young Turks would have to make repeated trips to distant locations to start or restart local units.

Unlike the northern part of the state, Milwaukee already had a solidly liberal Democratic Party structure because national Democrats had organized during the Roosevelt years. But the city still posed special problems. Many party regulars saw no reason for a new organization: "We had a different situation," said Henry Maier. "Madison could almost start bright and glistening and new, we couldn't swing that kind of a start here."\(^100\) Many Milwaukeeans were confused about the DOC. Doyle encountered sympathy for the organization on the city's east side and north shore suburbs, where liberals were often middle class professionals and academics. Leaders in the black community were also being courted, although few in the DOC had close ties to them.\(^101\) By contrast, the city's working class south side had

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97. *Id.* (emphasis added).
99. Notes: Conference with Jim Doyle, Daniel Hoan Papers (June 8, 1948) (on file with the Milwaukee County Historical Society).
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possessed a Democratic organization for a generation as a product of labor unions, and the area had already elected Democrat Clement Zablocki to the House of Representatives. As long-time Democrats comfortable with the cultural conservatism of the old regime in the state, south siders viewed the Young Turks—even Milwaukeeans like Maier—warily. They wanted the Democratic Party "free of any possible domination by a La Follette clique." Maier countered by emphasizing the new, liberal vision of the DOC "because it was all it really had as a weapon." In time, however, the energy and persistence of the Young Turks overcame local resistance, and blue-collar Milwaukee, eventually if imperfectly, entered the fold.

Despite irregular success across the state, organizing generally succeeded most easily in urban areas and worked its way into rural areas in 1948 and 1949. Milwaukee was already organized, if not united, thanks to the efforts of Tehan, Biemiller, Maier, and the labor unions to incorporate the DOC into the existing machinery. Racine, Kenosha, and Rock Counties, also labor bases, came next. The Second Congressional District, dominated by Madison, had the new state headquarters and a large contingent of passionate activists. From there, progress was more haphazard. Things went well in La Crosse and along the Mississippi River, but the middle of the state took many months to organize. The last areas to organize were the lower Fox River Valley, a former Democratic bastion now turning toward the Republicans, and the northwestern part of the state, which was reluctant to leave its progressive roots in the Republican Party.


104. DOC Resolution, Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (Jan. 28, 1949) (on file with State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives).

105. Memorandum from the Democratic Organizing Committee, Democratic Organizing Committee Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (Mar. 16, 1949) (on file with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives); Letter from Carl Thompson, to Robert Tehan, Democratic Organizing Papers, Democratic Party of Wisconsin (Feb. 2, 1949) (on file with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives).
The work was tedious, but as the organizers pressed forward, the long hours spent together had an unexpected but important benefit: the organizers became friends. It was during road trips across the state and long hours at DOC headquarters that organizers grew closer to one another. "Some of the best friends I had were Bob Tehan and Andy Biemiller and Dan Hoan, a pretty good group to know when you were just cutting your eyeteeth in this business," said Maier.\footnote{106} John Reynolds characterized the Young Turks as "fine, honorable people . . . pretty decent" and attributed their success to the fact that "we really haven't had very many bad guys."\footnote{107} For Ruth Doyle, the DOC meant, "many old college friends became friends in the party once again."\footnote{108} For the Doyles, the Thompsons, and the Wilkies, Madison "was a great magnet" which brought back many people who had dispersed during the war. After three years of organizing, the Young Turks amassed a reservoir of trust with one another, a sense that collective goals outweighed personal ambition. "It seemed to me fairly early in the game that we had this wonderful . . . sort of a peer democracy . . . an internal democracy," said James Doyle.\footnote{109} As the DOC grew and Young Turks started winning elections—sometimes against one another—this reservoir of trust was invaluable.

Yet while the Young Turks were bonding with one another, they were still viewed suspiciously by their predecessors in the Democratic Party. The DOC struggled to overcome the entrenched and incompetent Democratic patronage organization. At first, the DOC determined that existing Democratic infrastructure, resources, and persons be used until and unless they prove themselves unfit or unwilling to work with the DOC. If not, then they should be ignored, removed or discarded.\footnote{110}
But either tack proved difficult. Hoan called the statutory membership “people with inferiority complexes who never had any other recognition in their lives, who take great pride in having the title of county chairman and having a voice in the selection of postmasters.” Such members feared any new membership joining to the local unit because new members might displace the old chairman.

Many Young Turks were equally hostile towards their predecessors. In particular, DOC leaders were so committed to instilling democracy in the party organization that they were reluctant to participate in patronage matters. Doyle thought that their disdain "reflects some irresponsibility" and, indeed, such dismissiveness meant that the power over patronage was ceded to the wiliest DOC veterans like Tehan and Doyle until well into the 1950s. The relationship between the two very different generations of Democrats never quite improved but faded in importance. The DOC eventually overran the establishment with the sheer size, youthfulness, and energy of its membership.

Despite the many obstacles, the Young Turks made progress. By August of 1949, there were DOC units in thirty-four counties. That number increased to fifty by the start of the DOC convention in November. The following summer, sixty-five counties had basic organizations. By October 1951, all seventy-one counties had some DOC structure.

After three years of patient organizing, the DOC was prepared to have its first convention during the last weekend of November 1949 at the Northland Hotel in Green Bay. A blizzard raged the entire weekend, hampering travel across the state. Nevertheless, over 700 delegates attended, representing fifty county DOC units. Senator Paul

111. Letter from Dan Hoan, to Julia Bogholt, Daniel Hoan Papers (Apr. 15, 1948) (on file with Milwaukee County Historical Society).
112. Id.
114. Id.
115. Haney, supra note 7, at 114.
116. Id.
117. Id.
118. Id.
120. DOC Convention a Smashing Success: Victory Seen in 50, supra note 119, at 2.
121. Id.; Bailey, supra note 119, at 8.
Douglas of Illinois gave the keynote address just after a congratulatory telegram from President Truman was read. Resolutions passed endorsing the Fair Deal, national health insurance, the extension of Social Security coverage, the Brannan Plan for agriculture, civil rights, and the repeal of the Taft-Hartley bill. The platform was adopted, based on the principles outlined in the DOC constitution.

Organization, not policy, remained the priority. The delegates formed new administrative committees to oversee various DOC activities, including a separate set of committees to handle Milwaukee County. Leaders held organizational workshops. After some debate, they passed a resolution to forbid the endorsement of candidates by the party during the primary.

By any measure, the Green Bay convention was a triumph for the Young Turks. The weather intensified a sense of "missionary zeal" and "a spirit of confidence and determination" already flourishing among the delegates. The DOC had achieved its first goal, to organize liberals across Wisconsin into a democratic, activist political organization. "It was great, it was really great," said Doyle. "We could see the people there that we had been searching out that preceding year, here, there and elsewhere. And damned if they didn't show up."

122. DOC Convention a Smashing Success: Victory Seen in 50, supra note 119, at 2; Bailey, supra note 119, at 8.
123. Bailey, supra note 119, at 8.
125. See DOC Convention a Smashing Success: Victory Seen in 50, supra note 119, at 2; Bailey, supra note 119, at 8; Haney, supra note 7, at 119–21.
126. Bailey, supra note 119, at 8.
The Green Bay convention culminated a challenging but successful organizational drive for Wisconsin’s liberals that revitalized the Democratic Party. The emergence of the Young Turks came about because many Wisconsinites wanted grassroots, participatory political activism after decades of politics driven by aging political leaders, machines, and dynastic families. In the 1940s, Wisconsin experienced a collapse of political leadership when the La Follette brothers became increasingly erratic and withdrawn. The Young Turks filled this void, replacing the aristocratic structure of the Progressive Party with the Democratic Organizing Committee, a voluntary political organization created to restore local, grassroots activism to Wisconsin. They achieved this despite the fact that the end of the New Deal and the start of the Cold War both represented and facilitated an increasingly conservative climate in Wisconsin and the United States. Eventually, the DOC became the Democratic Party of Wisconsin and their efforts led to electoral triumph. By 1958, they controlled the governorship, a U.S. Senate seat, and four seats in the House of Representatives, and made substantial gains in the state legislature.

Of course, the Young Turks had personal ambitions and collectively sought power. But there were more predictable routes to power through the existing Democratic and Republican organizations. The Young Turks rejected these well-worn paths in favor of grassroots activism. They were genuinely committed to regenerating democracy in Wisconsin. Most importantly, they did not differentiate between the activity of politics and governance. The Young Turks sincerely believed that their means shaped their ends, that forging a democratic political party would necessarily result in a more progressive, liberal politics. In later decades, they would recognize that this idea was fraught with unexpected pitfalls, but in the 1940s, it united them more than any common opponent or ideology.

“Maybe we look too nostalgically to the past,” said Ellen Proxmire at the Fairchild Lecture, “but lessons can be learned from how we did it.” Like any other political movement, the DOC leadership was competitive, sometimes territorial, and—as they would discover in the decades ahead—divided on important issues. Yet their shared belief in the power of democracy, in the tenets of liberalism, and in each other, gave them the courage to navigate the uncertain political waters of

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postwar Wisconsin politics, and it inspired many of the decisions they made when they finally gained political power in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Though their grassroots means of achieving success may seem like the dark ages today, their ends, indeed, marked a golden age for postwar liberalism.