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## PROGRESSIVE REFORM AND THE GOVERNORS

The Populist and Progressive movements in the United States, starting in the last decade of the nineteenth century and running through the first two of the twentieth century, though differing in their base of support, had some common themes. Among the most central of these were the need to purify and democratize the governmental system through political and structural reforms, the need to rein in the political and economic power of giant corporations, and, more broadly, the need to bring to power an energetic and positive government that would serve the interests of the many rather than a privileged few.<sup>1</sup>

Though reform activity first took root on the local level in many states, much of the critical action from 1890 to 1920 took place at the state level.<sup>2</sup> The states had the authority—they could act in a variety of areas, and their willingness to do so was of extreme importance to a flood of reformers, organizations, and interest groups. The initial problem was getting the states to respond. Throughout the country reformers on the state level strove to democratize and purify state political systems. Once the choke hold of the corrupting special interests on government was broken and power was turned over to the people, reformers felt they could move on to address matters of basic economic and social justice.

In a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, reform meant more spending on such matters as public education, roads, health protection, and to help out those who needed help, even though this meant departing from the norm of individualism, increasing the functions of government, and raising

taxes. Reform also meant not only harnessing the power of large corporations but distributing economic benefits more widely and shifting more of the tax burden to the wealthy through personal income, inheritance, and corporate taxes. On the labor front it involved hour and wage regulations, factory and mine inspection, worker's compensation, and ending injunctions against organizing unions. Reformers too thought in terms of improving morality by curbing or banning drinking and gambling, and many went off in the direction of perfecting the population through eugenics legislation. Many focused on prison reform and the abolition of the death penalty, protecting the rights of workers on industrial battlegrounds, and coping with violent vigilante actions and riots in minority areas.

### INTERESTS, MACHINES, LEGISLATORS, DIVISIONS AMONG REFORMERS

Much of the initial and continuing focus of reformers was on destroying the network of special interest politics and corruption formed by leading business interests, political machines associated with the major parties, and officeholders, especially state legislators. They saw corrupt governing systems throughout the country.

Reformers targeted a variety of large businesses, including those engaged in railroading, telephone and telegraph services, the provision of gas and electricity, transit, insurance, banking, mining, and timber. Railroads were an early and special target just about everywhere. Charges against them included not paying their fair share of the taxes, setting excessive and discriminatory passenger and freight rates, being partial to particular shippers, hoarding land allocated to them by the federal or state governments needed for development, mistreatment of their employees, and through means ranging from giving free railroad passes to direct cash bribes to politicians and lavishly entertaining them, corrupting the political system. Meanwhile, on the local level public utilities, especially local street railway (aka traction) companies got unlimited franchises and everything else they wanted through the bribery of city officials.

During the 1890s and early 1900s reformers put a great deal of emphasis on the corrupting effects of the railroad pass. A leading Populist, for example, argued that "the power for evil of the Free Pass Bribery System is far greater than bribery with money. Few men can be bribed with money, but many men can be bribed with a free railroad pass."<sup>3</sup> All this led to a situation in which "Instead of public officials compelling railroads to obey the law, the railroads compel the public officials to serve them and betray the people."<sup>4</sup>

Railroad officials and other spokespeople for large corporations saw the problem differently. To many a business person, paying off legislators was simply a routine cost of doing business and businesspeople were not the only ones to be

blamed. As mining entrepreneur William A. Clark, who routinely bribed state legislators, said in his own defense: "I never bought a man who wasn't for sale."<sup>5</sup> Often legislators took the initiative and "sandbagged" businesspeople by threatening to push for laws detrimental to them if no bribe was forthcoming. In 1904 an observer in Missouri compared the sandbagger to the "corrupt and unscrupulous" highwayman who "places not a revolver" but a "legislative bill to the head of his victim and demands money."<sup>6</sup>

In the period 1890–1920, as now, people used the term "political machine" as a pejorative to put a bad label on a political organization they did not like. Still, in many parts of the country those who used the term had a clear vision of a particular type of political organization associated with either the Republican or Democratic Party headed by a boss who was able to deliver enough votes to heavily influence, if not control, the actions of elected state and local officials. As boss Tom Pendergast of Kansas City, Missouri, put it: "The delivery of the votes is what counts . . . Politics is a business, just like anything else."<sup>7</sup>

Bosses were in the business of controlling party nominations and winning elections. They thrived by rewarding those who worked for them with governmental jobs and by selling their ability to control legislation and administrative decisions to those willing to pay for their services.

Party bosses did not always oppose Progressive reform—some were "easy bosses" willing to go along, especially when championing change looked like it would facilitate getting their candidates elected, but they could be expected to draw the line when it came to proposals directly affecting the welfare of their organization, such as ending patronage, or those deemed harmful to clients they represented.

While power in some states rested in highly organized political organizations controlled by a party boss or a few bosses, in others one found less formal networks of party officeholders and workers aligned with prominent officeholders. Often considerable control was in the hands of a clique headed by a US senator who led the dominant faction within one of the major parties. Conflict in these cases took the form of a struggle between two factions of the same party, one side trying to bring change, while the other, being tied to the status quo and being close to the dominant economic interests, opposed change. The story in much of the western part of the country, a region where party organizations were relatively weak, was not so much one of reformers attacking party bosses or highly structured and disciplined political party machines as it was one of reformers directly attacking the corporate interests, often the railroads and the mines, and their allies or stooges in office.

Throughout the country reformers of the late 1890s and early 1900s strove to clean up corruption and combat special interest influence through direct primaries, which gave ordinary party members or registered voters at large an

opportunity to choose the nominees of political parties for various offices, including state legislative seats, taking that power away from party bosses meeting with corporate representatives in the proverbial “smoke-filled rooms” at party conventions. They also sought an end to patronage appointments through civil service laws and corrupt-practices acts that put limitations on campaign contributions and required disclosure of where the money came from and how it was spent.

Many saw malfunctioning state legislators to be at the heart of the problem of governance. In addition to the safeguards regarding campaigns and elections, reformers called for laws putting limits on lobbying and requiring disclosure of who was lobbying for what. Some reformers also proposed to improve the legislative process by increasing research and bill drafting services, reducing the number of legislators, or creating smaller, more efficient, and transparent one-house legislative bodies. Another and broader thrust of the reform effort was to shift more of the responsibility for governing from state legislatures to the people directly, the governor, or neutral, nonpolitical, competent experts in administrative agencies, though there was little agreement on which of the three directions was most preferable. As a consequence, the movement was filled with contradictory ideas. For example, while promoting the idea of popular control of government, some Progressives also wanted to do away with several elective offices and also called for a greater shift of responsibility to nonelected expert administrators under civil service protection.

As far as the legislators were concerned, high among the most objectionable proposed reforms were those allowing citizens to completely bypass the legislature and make their own laws through the initiative process, challenge what the legislature had done through a referendum procedure that subjected these decisions to a vote of the people, and, if necessary, to recall legislators, as well as other elected officials, from office prior to the expirations of their terms if they were not meeting citizen expectations as to performance and conduct.

Progressives drew upon widespread feelings that government responded to the interests of a privileged few rather than to those of ordinary people and that there was a need for an activist government at the state level that would protect the many from the few and the weak from the strong. They saw a need for a crusade against injustice, corruption, the special influence of big business, and the invisible government of special interests that ran things.

They faced the opposition of reactionary stand-pat politicians, defenders of the party machines and the corporate interests, and others who benefited from the status quo or believed in only limited reform. Within the Republican Party the conflict was commonly defined as between the Progressive “insurgents” who were out to wrest control of the party from the leading corporate interests in their states and the conservative “Standpatters” who liked things the way they were. Opponents of reform on the Republican side were also commonly called “Stalwart Republicans.”

One group of limited reformers—known by a variety of titles, including Cleveland or Bourbon Democrats, Mugwump Republicans, Independents, good government people (goo-goos), and structural reformers—believed in honesty and efficiency in government but did not seek far-ranging political, economic, or social change and, indeed, often opposed those who did.<sup>8</sup> Populists and Progressives also favored honesty and efficiency but had a far broader focus. They believed in fundamental reform and considered the honesty and efficiency types to be narrow-minded conservatives and as much of an enemy to meaningful reform as the reactionaries in both parties. For their part, the honesty and efficiency types, as defenders of individualism and laissez-faire, were frightened by what they saw as the extreme radicalism of the Populists and the Progressive reformers who followed in their footsteps. Many of these underlying issues were found in the division between Bryan and Cleveland Democrats (see chapter 2).

### RISE OF THE GOVERNORS

This office of governor had been a strong one in the colonial period. Usually appointed by the Crown, the governor had virtually complete control over legislative matters, enjoyed full appointive powers when filling governmental positions, and in some places even headed the highest court in the colony. Over time, however, governors became the central target of the colonists' hostility toward the Crown. This history contributed to the willingness of the framers of most of the first state constitutions to limit the power of the office. As a result, governors were usually appointed by the legislature, served only one-year terms, and lacked the power to veto legislation. New York and Massachusetts were exceptions when it came to the strength of the office. In these states governors were elected by the voters and had the veto power.

During the first half of the nineteenth century poor performance on the part of state legislatures prompted state constitutional changes improving the legal status of the governor: the office became popularly elective everywhere, and governors were given longer terms, veto authority, and more power to appoint. With the liberalization of suffrage restrictions for white males, governors also gained the opportunity to strengthen their status as political leaders by developing a large statewide constituency.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, however, the movement toward greater democracy stimulated by Andrew Jackson also reduced the ability of the governor to act as chief administrator. Jacksonian democracy brought the election not only of the governor but a large number of other state administrators. Proponents argued that democracy depended not only on how many could vote but on how many officials they could vote for, even though the people who were elected, such as the state treasurer, had little discretionary authority. The result was to seriously fragment

executive authority, making it virtually impossible for the governor or any other single executive to control the executive branch as a whole. The problem of control worsened as the states responded to each problem they had to address with the creation of a new administrative agency headed by a board whose members had terms that put them beyond the control of any single governor serving one or two short terms.

While more independent of the legislature, the office of governor continued throughout the nineteenth century to be a weak and relatively unattractive one. Writing in the late 1880s, the best thing British observer James Bryce felt could be said was that the state governor was “not yet a nonentity” but close to it because of the dominance of the state legislature.<sup>10</sup> Many of those who served as governor during the nineteenth century did so in the Whig tradition of a dignified but generally passive, low-key chief executive who was willing to let the legislature do most of the governing. To some, the governor was, at best, “a great office manager.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1891, John Altgeld, a future governor of Illinois, expressed his skepticism over the value of the office of governor as a position to lead the cause of reform. He claimed no governor in the last decade had done anything “of an enduring character for their country or for the progress of civilization . . . anything that can be regarded as raising the standard of public morals, creating a healthy public sentiment, or solving in a proper manner any of the great questions, both economic and social, that are calling for solution.”<sup>12</sup> Altgeld suggested that the problem was largely due to a lack of leadership—the simple failure of the people who held the office to stand up and do the right thing—rather than the weakness of the office itself. They could and should do more. Other critics around this time supplied a different reason for the failure of governors to do much of anything worthwhile: they were simply the stooges of political bosses and the special interests that were ripping off the public.

To some, matters had not improved by the turn of the century. Writing in 1904, muckraker Lincoln Steffens concluded that Robert La Follette of Wisconsin was one of the few governors who actually qualified as “head of the State.” To Steffens “most governors are simply ‘safe men’ set up as figureheads by the System, which is the actual government that is growing up in the United States in place of the ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people.’” Steffens viewed the “System” as one in which “the leading politicians of both parties conduct the government in the interest of those leading businesses which seek special privileges and pay for them with bribes and the ‘moral’ support of graft.”<sup>13</sup>

Scholars were to add their own negative assessments of the office during the Progressive period. While noting that some governors like Robert La Follette, Hiram Johnson, and Woodrow Wilson had succeeded as legislative leaders, political scientist Austin Macdonald saw these few leaders as exceptions who “were



endowed with unusual powers of leadership that captivated the public.”<sup>14</sup> “Most governors,” Macdonald concluded in 1927, “have not possessed to such a high degree the rare quality of leadership, and so have been rewarded with nothing but popular disapproval. The governorship may sometimes be a stepping-stone to fame; usually it is a toboggan to political oblivion.”<sup>15</sup> He saw the office as essentially a weak one that offered little in terms of compensation or an opportunity for accomplishment. It fell far short of offering anything “to make the job sufficiently attractive to draw the type of men we need.”<sup>16</sup>

Joining in, political scientist W. Brooke Graves concluded in regard to those who served in the Progressive period: “While there were instances in which conspicuously able men came to the governorship, they were the exception rather than the rule. There was little about the office, save the honor attached to it, to challenge the interest and creative ability of able men.”<sup>17</sup> In one of the pioneering studies on the American governor, written in 1939, Leslie Lipson came to a similar conclusion: “The La Follettes and Johnsons, the Hughes’ [*sic*] or the Wilsons, were not of the ordinary stamp of governors. They were exceptional men. One needs, therefore, to qualify the statement that there was a renaissance of the governor in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the forty-six states that then composed the Union only a few were of this mold.” Lipson saw only the possibility of executive leadership at the state level during the Progressive period.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to the generally negative assessment of the office and the people who served as governor from 1900 to 1920, this work provides numerous examples of reform-minded and effective governors during this time span—demonstrating that when it comes to executive leadership we are not talking about simply a few individuals with exceptional talents or something that happened only in Wisconsin, California, New Jersey, and a few other states.<sup>19</sup> Governors throughout the nation encouraged and rode the wave of public demand for reform. Governors played a special role in bringing about reform in most states. They deserve far more attention than they have received. And more of them deserve attention. We can still say, as Nicholas Burckel wrote more than forty years ago, that scholars have given insufficient attention to Progressive governors outside those few who established national reputations, such as Robert La Follette of Wisconsin, Hiram Johnson of California, and Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey.<sup>20</sup>

Reform-minded and assertive governors did not just suddenly emerge in the early 1900s. One can, for example, look back to the 1870s during the Granger revolt and find governors stirred into action by banking failures, the inability of farmers to get credit, and the abuses of large corporations, especially railroads. One example was Horace Austin, Republican governor of Minnesota, 1870–74, who robustly declared: “It is time to take those robber corporations by the scuff of their neck and shake them over hell!”<sup>21</sup> In the late 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century, several observers pick up on the movement toward more independent

and assertive governors. An evaluation of twenty-five governors elected in 1896, by a prominent national political magazine, drawing upon the observations of private correspondents in the various states, concluded that only three of the victors were tied to political machines while the rest, including a half-dozen Populists, were graded good if not outstanding in terms of character and their likely performance.<sup>22</sup> In 1905, contrary to the assessment of Steffens a year earlier, William Allen White, Progressive journalist and author, noted the emergence of several governors, especially in the Middle West in addition to Ls Follette, who were already making a difference and that “the type is multiplying rapidly.”<sup>23</sup>

Five years later, an overview of the national scene concluded that matters had developed to the point where “the old-fashioned and perfunctory governor is no longer attractive to the intelligent citizen voters. The voters are wanting business results and moral influence from the state government. They understand that the governor, as the head of the state administration, gives the trend to public affairs.” They were looking for “a positive, courageous and progressive governor” who “sets the pace and stirs the public conscience into action” and “turns the searchlight into dark corners that would otherwise be overlooked.”<sup>24</sup> More and more governors appeared to be playing that role.

During the 1890s Populist governors enjoyed some success at the state level, but as much of the literature on the subject suggests, they had considerable difficulty in getting anything through the legislature. They were often inexperienced in governing and frequently in a weak position because their opponents controlled one or both legislative houses. They also had a difficult time holding together the coalition that had been formed to get them elected because of disagreements over patronage and policy matters. Yet, while they made few legislative gains, they set the stage for meaningful reform.<sup>25</sup>

The new governors coming to power in the late 1890s and early 1900s throughout the country as Democrats or Republicans picked up on the basic Populist-Progressive themes and programs and enjoyed considerable success, culminating in the years 1910–15. They helped usher in an era in politics in the states where political party organizations played a reduced role, a larger number of groups made demands for governmental action, the states assumed a greater number of functions, and much of the work of the states shifted from the legislative branch to the executive branch and administrative agencies. They helped the states play a major role as innovators, acting in advance of federal action in regard to labor protection, bank deposit guaranties, securities regulation, woman suffrage, prohibition, and other areas. In 1911 one observer, who was particularly impressed by Wilson’s accomplishments, saw the movement led by strong governors ushering in a new era in state government in which it would be evident that the states could do much of the job of governing and, because of this, there was less need to shift functions and powers to the federal government.<sup>26</sup>

Although there were aggressive, reform-minded governors during the Granger and Populist eras, there were more numerous and more successful ones in terms of accomplishment starting in the early 1900s and not just in a handful of states. Separating themselves as best they could from the existing power structure in their own political party, they pushed ahead, drawing on their own popularity and personal political machines and the powers of their office. Rather than playing a largely passive role of approving or rejecting what the legislature did, they recommended legislation and lobbied for its adoption, sometimes taking their case to the people directly. In justifying such actions, governors could and did claim that compared to legislators they spoke for the people of the state rather than some area within the state. They also used their executive powers to get involved in other areas where they could act relatively free from the legislature. Especially attractive to many was the field of prison reform.

Governors always had the potential to lead in terms of legislation, and from 1900 to 1920 many did so, one might argue, because of public support for executive action. To many, the political system had failed. State legislatures were part of a corrupt system and were not responding to pressing public problems. Politics as usual had to go. Governors were less touched than legislators by charges of corruption. A swelling of public sentiment for reform put governors in the driver's seat should they choose to try to push their states in a Progressive direction.

The "new governor" was a product of this reform sentiment. To some extent, the emergence of executive leadership at the state level was also stimulated by the demonstration of the importance of executive leadership to the cause of reform at the local level. Governors, in turn, provided examples of executive leadership for future presidents. Two Populist-Progressive-era governors, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, carried their experiences directly into the White House.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1890–1920 period governors were deeply involved in the dissemination of reform ideas. They were in contact with other governors, muckrakers, legislators, academics, citizen reformers, national and state reform organizations, and a growing list of interest groups, all seeking reform of one type or another. Contact among governors came through the mails, campaign events, and various meetings. Going through the papers of governors in various state archives, one often finds a host of letters from one governor to another, involving such matters as an upcoming conference, past or pending legislation, or gubernatorial speeches on various topics or for various events. Some governors looked for all the help they could get. For example, in 1912, L. B. Hanna wrote the governor of Idaho: "I have recently been elected Governor of North Dakota and would appreciate it if you would kindly [send] me copies of the messages that have been sent by you or former Governors to your legislature for the past two or three sessions."<sup>28</sup> Not all requests had to do with monumental matters. For example, a secretary to Washington governor Ernest Lister wrote to W. E. Lindsey, governor of New

Mexico, in 1917: "Governor Lister has received the copy of your Arbor and Bird Day Proclamation which you were kind enough to send to him, and desires to thank you very much for the same."<sup>29</sup>

Governors during the Progressive era seem genuinely excited about the opportunity to gather with their colleagues from around the country and to promote greater interstate cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

They had a variety of organizations to facilitate their interaction. Some were general discussion conclaves for governors while others were dedicated to specific reform causes or regional or national political objectives. One formal means of interaction was the Conference of Governors, known early on as the "House of Governors." This organization grew out of a meeting of governors from around the country in 1908, called by President Theodore Roosevelt in an effort to line up the support for his stand on conservation matters. From 1910 onward, governors initiated the conference themselves.

At the organization's first meeting Governor Joseph W. Folk of Missouri noted: "It would not have been possible for so many Governors to have come together in any other period of history. Prior to the Civil War the transportation facilities were not sufficient. After the Civil War the feeling between the sections was not such as would make such a meeting very harmonious or very happy. But we have met here now as one large family."<sup>31</sup> At the same meeting Kentucky governor Augustus E. Willson expressed his appreciation of having the opportunity to get together with other governors: "There are many matters in which a new Governor at least, like myself, feels he needs counsel and help about from other Governors—matters like extradition, matters of general public policy, matters to decide what one should do in certain emergencies that come to all of us. I have four years ahead of me, and I feel that I needed this Conference; and I feel glad that I am here, and am glad that I have had the opportunity of meeting the Governors."<sup>32</sup> The main function of the organization was to facilitate interstate cooperation and the dissemination of information on such matters as the reorganization of state government, prison administration, and political reform measures such as the direct primary.<sup>33</sup> Along with exchanging views on policy issues and talking shop, governors got together in little groups and talked politics, not simply their own personal situations or in their state, but what was happening elsewhere and on the presidential level.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the governors' conference there were several regional bodies that facilitated communication and cooperation among governors on a regular basis and many more in which governors got together to consider common problems. Here too one could find good advice. At a meeting of western governors Governor Joseph Carey of Wyoming humorously cautioned: "Now, if you open your doors to everybody, you will have speeches from worse cranks than any of us (laughter), and it will take you days to arrive at a conclusion."<sup>35</sup> The "House

of Southern Governors” brought chief executives in the region together to consider such problems as those affecting commerce, public health, and, usually in executive session, racial relations.<sup>36</sup> A regional approach was often imperative in New England, given the small size of the states and the geographical scope of the problems they faced. As one paper noted in regard to a meeting of New England governors in 1913 to study railroad problems: “The fundamental reason for this conference is that there are five states too many in New England for the satisfactory handling of the transportation problem created by the railroad monopoly.”<sup>37</sup>

### BACKGROUNDS, LABELS, AND MOTIVES

Studies, though done some time ago, give us a general picture of the backgrounds and careers of those who served as governor during the first two decades of the twentieth century. One by political scientist Austin Macdonald of the 187 governors, all of whom were male, who served from 1900 to 1910 found that about half of them were college graduates and lawyers and that more than 80 percent of them had held some political office prior to becoming governor—of the 187, 132 had served in the state legislature, 27 had been judges of state courts, 25 had been in the US House, and one had been in the US Senate. The study found that 70 percent of the governors who served in this period never went on to serve in another office after serving as governor. Among the 57 who continued to serve, 30 went to Congress (23 to the Senate and 7 to the House), 6 entered the diplomatic service, 2 became vice-presidents, and one became president.<sup>38</sup>

Another study indicates that during the period 1900–1920, two trends regarding the political careers of governors that began in the 1870s continued to be felt. One, likely reflecting the loss of confidence in state legislatures, was a continuing decline in the percentage of governors who had served as legislators or who had jumped directly from a position in the legislature to the office of governor. In the same period there was a rise in the percentage of governors who had some law enforcement experience (a public attorney or a judge at the state or local level) and who had such positions immediately prior to becoming governor and used that service as a springboard.<sup>39</sup> Sensational cases relating to governmental corruption and illegal business activities appear to have given public prosecutors and judges exceptional opportunities for political advancement. Using their obligation to enforce the law gave them “a political shield” of nonpartisan neutrality free from self-aggrandizement and created an image, often associated with Governor Joseph Folk of Missouri, of a “lone warrior for righteousness.”<sup>40</sup>

Deciding what ideological labels to put on governors and other political figures active during this period is no easy task. Scholars are not certain, for example, whether Governors Teddy Roosevelt and Charles Evans Hughes of New York should be considered dynamic conservatives or positive liberals.<sup>41</sup> Roosevelt

himself seemed to have been confused about whether he was a conservative radical or a radical conservative.<sup>42</sup> Looking back at the results of the 1912 Republican presidential primaries, Roosevelt noted: "The amusing thing is that in the Dakotas I am being opposed on the ground that I am a conservative and in the East on the ground that I am a radical."<sup>43</sup> Seeking to move in a more Progressive direction during his 1910 campaign for governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson probably confused everyone by announcing he was "a conservative with a move on."<sup>44</sup> While running for president in 1912, he declared that being a Progressive meant "not getting caught standing still when everything else is moving."<sup>45</sup>

Scholars, as a whole, have been little help in sorting out Progressives from non-Progressives. As political scientist Howard Reiter once noted, "it is almost impossible to find a significant party leader [during the 1900–1920 period] who has *not* been considered Progressive by at least one historian."<sup>46</sup> Given the popularity of reform, most every governor who served from 1890 to 1920 took some positions that most people would consider Progressive. Sometimes the reputation apparently rests on the governor's association with one or two pieces of legislation or simply their general opposition to "machine rule." In this work, as a working definition, a truly Progressive governor is viewed, rather loosely, as a person who, as indicated by a conscientious examination of relevant materials, called for a broad package of fundamental political, economic, and social reforms going beyond honesty and efficiency.

A somewhat related matter involves disputes over the underlying motivations of those who sought to be identified as Progressives. Was a particular governor a true believer or simply posing as a Progressive because there was political gain in doing so? The question was frequently asked during the period under review. This was a time when it was useful to be known as a Progressive, and many of those politicians who emerged sounding like true believers suffered in terms of credibility because their conversion to the creed came suddenly and was in stark contrast to what they had been saying or how they had been voting or by what might be inferred by their association with party bosses and machines.

There is no sure-fire test to determine the sincerity of those who advocated various reforms in this period or any other period. Passing the test of sincerity is easier if a researcher has reason to know that a politician realizes that what he or she is proposing is not likely to be popular. On the other hand, one cannot simply write off a politician who proposes reforms that he or she thinks is popular as an opportunist—politicians can sincerely believe that something that is likely to be well received by the public is worth doing.

This is not to deny that Progressivism had its bandwagon effect; many hopped on, hoping to use the "Progressive stands" they took to help them win office. With reform sentiment in full swing, more than one ambitious politician saw becoming at least a "rhetorical Progressive" as key to winning election. Like businesspeople,

they offered popular programs in exchange for votes. But politics, then as now, had as much to do with religion and conviction as it did with economics and self-interest. Progressive governors often seemed highly motivated crusaders out on a holy mission.

While one cannot come to any firm conclusions about the underlying motivations of those governors who championed (or, for that matter, opposed) reform, it seems reasonable to assume that when it comes to finding determined and uncompromising true believers during this period, one is more likely to find them among academics and citizen groups than among governors. Compared with the others, governors were in a highly practical business in which it paid to be concerned about strategic considerations regarding elections and the political and economic feasibility of pursuing various objectives, a business in which a positive outcome often required compromise and the balancing of competing interests.

All in all, it also seemed reasonable to proceed on the assumption that the policy stands of governors in this period reflected their own values as well as their ties to various groups, perceptions of public opinion, and what was best for their political parties or their individual political fortunes. Picking and choosing out of the broad and far-ranging set of ideas that were floating around, governors are viewed as putting together their own particular package of reforms that satisfied their values and practical concerns. I also anticipated that their general outlook and assessment of the value of specific reforms affiliated would often differ considerably from that of the Progressive outsiders, the intellectuals, ideologues, muckrakers, and other true believers.

The discussion of individual governors in the following pages is necessarily abbreviated because of their large number and because of limitations on information and space. Far more attention is given to some governors than others. Some are of interest primarily in tracing the course of reform in their states. Special attention is given, though, to the backgrounds, personalities, and governing styles of several governors, especially the most productive. Research indicates that personality and experience have a great deal to do with the success of presidents and governors.<sup>47</sup> We look into these qualities and the importance of the economic, social, and political conditions in which the governors functioned. As the following chapters indicate, this environment differed, often on a regional or subregional basis, in regard to such matters as labor and racial tensions, gubernatorial powers, party competition, and the strength of political party organizations. We first look at the general historical context in which reform took place.

## NOTES

1. Valuable reviews of the vast amount of literature on the Progressive movement are found in Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*; and Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism." More recent



works that also provide literature reviews are McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*; and Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People."*

2. While Progressivism was often first manifested on the local level, there were exceptions, such as in Kansas and New Hampshire, where the state level was initially more important when it came to meaningful action. See Wright, *Progressive Yankees*, xix, and La Forte, *Leaders of Reform*, 5.

3. Berge, *Free Pass Bribery System*, xi.

4. *Ibid.*, vii.

5. Malone, *Battle for Butte*, 113.

6. "Hon. Harry B. Hawes," *Iron County Register*, January 21, 1904, 10.

7. Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.*, 590.

8. On Mugwumps see generally Tucker, *Mugwumps*. On structural versus social reformers, especially in regard to local politics, see Holli, *Reform in Detroit*; Morton, *Justice and Humanity*; and Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*. A discussion of the rise of honesty and efficiency "independents" and more broad-scale reformers in New York City is found in McCormick, *Realignment to Reform*, 106–8. For a history and analysis of the struggles between the Cleveland and Bryan wings of the Democratic Party see Hollingsworth, *Whirligig of Politics*.

9. Lambert, "The Executive Article," 186–87. In 1906 James Bryce reported that the term of office for governors was four years in twenty-one states, three years in one state, two years in twenty-one states, and one year in two states (Massachusetts and Rhode Island). Some states limited the number of terms a governor could serve, "but in those which do not there seems to exist no tradition forbidding a third term of office similar to that which has prevailed in the Federal government since the days of Washington." Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, 199.

10. Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, 532.

11. "What Is a Governor?" *The Outlook*, December 24, 1910, 893–94.

12. Barnard, *Eagle Forgotten*, 173, citing *Chicago Evening Post*, July 31, 1891.

13. Steffens, *Struggle for Self-Government*, 79.

14. Macdonald, "American Governors," 718.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Graves, *American State Government*, 317.

18. Lipson, *American Governor*, 61.

19. This theme was advanced in the pioneering study by Nicholas Burckel, "Progressive Governors in the Border States." Though only partially concerned with the Progressive era, some useful essays, relating to the leading role played by governors generally in this period and referred to in later notes, are found in Sribnick, *A Legacy of Innovation*.

20. Burckel, "Progressive Governors in the Border States."

21. Quoted by Barnard, *Eagle Forgotten*, 33.

22. See "The New Governors."

23. White, "Political Signs of Promise," 668–69.

24. "The Difference in Governors," *Evening Times-Republican*, August 4, 1910, 4, taken from *Sioux City Tribune*.

25. See generally Argersinger, *Limits of Agrarian Radicalism*; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*; and Griffiths, *Populism in the Western United States*.

26. Mathews "The New Stateism."

27. See Ambar, *How Governors Built the Modern American Presidency*.

28. L. B. Hanna to James H. Hawley, November 29, 1912, James Hawley Papers, Idaho State Historical Society.

29. [Illegible name] to W. E. Lindsey, March 27, 1917, Governor Washington E. Lindsey Collection, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.

30. Brooks, *A Legacy of Leadership*, 9.



31. McGee, *Proceedings of a Conference of Governors*, 157.
32. *Ibid.*, 218.
33. Brooks, *When Governors Convene*, 21–22.
34. See, for example, “Poll of Governors on 1912,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1911, 1.
35. *Proceedings of the Conference of Western Governors, Held at Denver*, 102.
36. “House of Southern Governors,” *Public Ledger*, October 7, 1915, 4; “Governors Invited,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 13, 1915, 1; and “Race Questions Up by Governors,” *Pensacola Journal*, December 10, 1919, 2.
37. “Interstate Control of Interstate Commerce,” *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, January 30, 1913, 8.
38. Macdonald, “American Governors.”
39. Schlesinger, *How They Became Governor*.
40. *Ibid.*, 51, 81; Nolette, “Litigating the ‘Public Interest’ in the Gilded Age”; and Geiger, *Joseph W. Folk of Missouri*, 64.
41. Roper, “The Governorship in History.”
42. White, *Roosevelt the Reformer*, 1. White cites a letter from Roosevelt to John Strachey, March 9, 1901.
43. Roosevelt to Hadley, quoted in Martin, *Ballots and Bandwagons*, 46.
44. “Woodrow Wilson Talks on Big Public Questions,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1911, SM1.
45. Baker, *Woodrow Wilson*, 274.
46. Reiter, “The Bases of Progressivism,” 84.
47. See, example, Barber, *Presidential Character*; Crew, “Gubernatorial Leadership”; and Gross, “Governors and Policymaking.”