

Maine History

Volume 42
Number 2 *Digging Into the Past: Ordinary Lives
in Maine*

Article 4

2-1-2005

Norman Wallace Lermond and His Quest for the Cooperative Commonwealth

Charles Scontras
University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [Economic Theory Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), [Labor History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Scontras, Charles. "Norman Wallace Lermond and His Quest for the Cooperative Commonwealth." *Maine History* 42, 2 (2005): 47-65. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol42/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

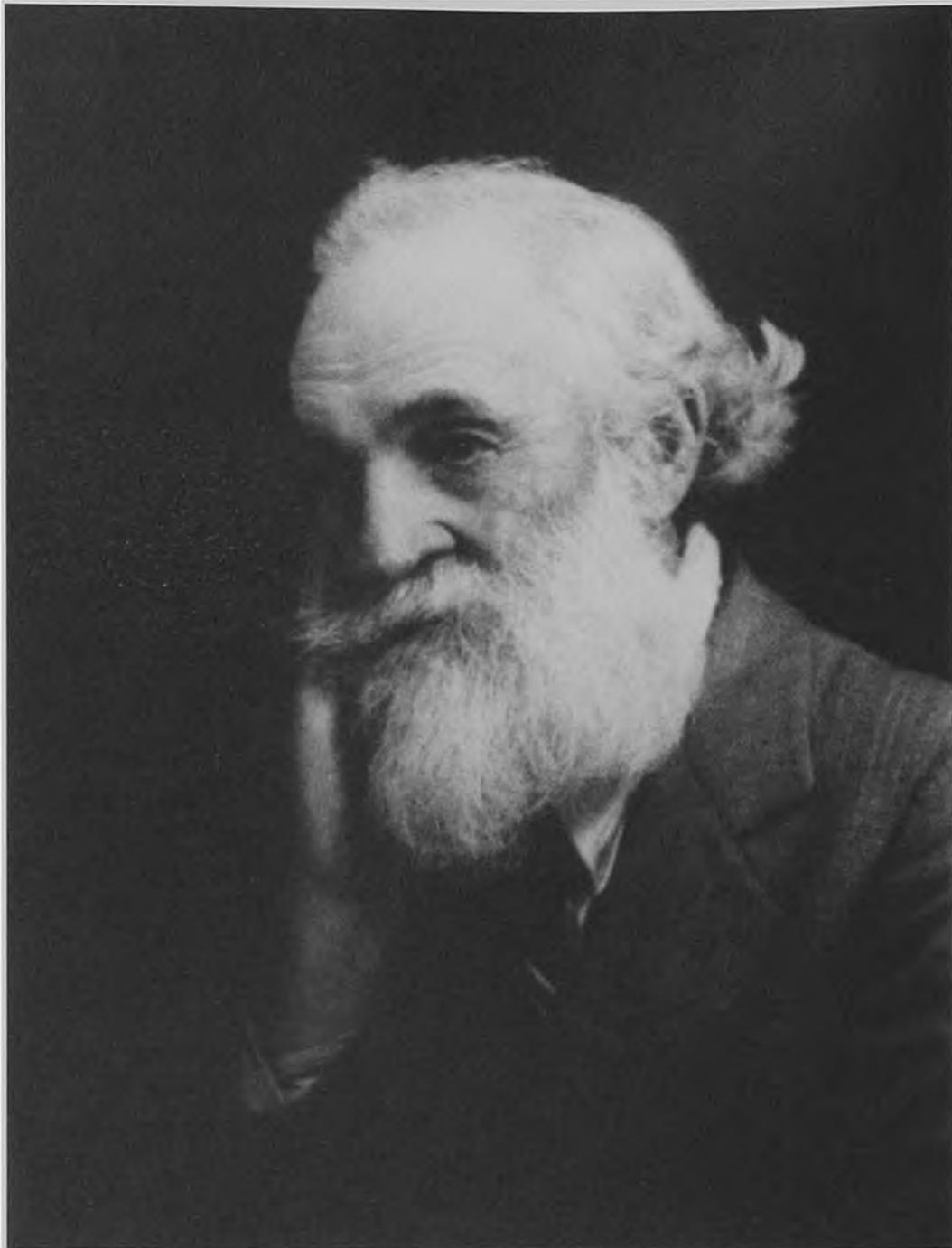
NORMAN WALLACE LERMOND AND HIS QUEST FOR THE COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH

BY CHARLES SCONTRAS

“I am still a Socialist, a stronger Socialist than ever.”¹

Norman Wallace Lermond was Maine's premier socialist leader from 1900, when he first appeared on the state party ticket, until his death in 1944. As such, he represents both the persistence and the frustration of radical politics in a state renowned for its individualism and political conservatism. Lermond's career entailed a series of compromises and contradictions as the socialist leader navigated the shoals of reform and revolution—endorsing political action but eschewing its practical “step-at-a-time” agenda. Through all this, Lermond remained committed to his utopian vision of a classless and harmonious society, in which the failings of capitalism would be swept away and a new society built on foundations inspired by novelist Edward Bellamy's imagined cooperative commonwealth. Charles A. Scontras is a retired professor from the University of Maine and has written widely on Maine's labor, reform, and socialist history. Among his many works is THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE: UTOPIAN EXPERIMENTS AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF MAINE, 1895-1914, published in 1985.

BEGINNING WITH its founding in 1900, the Socialist party of America maintained a political presence in Maine for more than a decade. It declined in the years before World War I, then regained its vigor during the Depression years. In Maine, the party's political fortunes were boosted by a parade of nationally recognized socialist speakers who visited the state on a regular basis to endorse its socialist aspirants to office. In addition to this galaxy of out-of-state orators, Maine's party was sustained by a group of local socialists not easily discouraged by a political climate inhospitable to radical notions of social change. Norman Wallace Lermond, who helped found the Maine Socialist party, was such a figure. A tireless promoter, organizer, and advo-



Norman Wallace Lermond was not only a naturalist of some repute, but also Maine's most prominent socialist thinker. During his long career as a political activist, Lermond held to a vision of Maine and America as a society of equals. Despite decades of frustration, he remained a committed utopian, hoping to launch the socialist revolution from his arboretum on the central coast of Maine. All illustrations courtesy of the author.

cate for socialism, Lemond became, in 1900, the party's first candidate for governor. Although he garnered only 653 votes out of a total of 117,878, his unshakable ideological commitment to the so-called cooperative commonwealth is an important, albeit aberrant development in a state renowned in the mid-twentieth century for its conservatism and individualism.²

Lemond was born in Warren, Maine, on July 27, 1861. His family traced its Scottish ancestry to the year 1200, and to the Picts, as early inhabitants of Scotland were called. In the Lemond home, reported to be the oldest in Knox County (1776), could be seen the McLemond coat of arms, along with the Malcolm crest representing Lemond's grandmother. Lemond counted among his ancestors Captain David Lemond, captured during the War of 1812 and imprisoned for a time in Dartmoor Prison. The family moved to Boston in 1872, and from there Lemond was sent to a religious boarding school in Hartford, Connecticut. His education continued at Dudley's Grammar School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and at the English High School in Boston, where he excelled in nature studies. From 1880 to 1882 Lemond was employed in the old Bartlett second-hand book store on Cornhill Street in Boston, where he met many notables who made the shop their headquarters for reading materials. Lemond next took a job in New York soliciting advertisements for a trade journal called *The Boston Telegram*, then became a car accountant and later auditor for the New York and New England Railroad in Boston. He worked in the auditor's office from 1884 to 1885 and then returned to the family homestead in Warren, where he took up farming.

Lemond's return home coincided with the rapid rise of the Knights of Labor in Maine, a movement that reached his native Warren when Local Assembly No. 4997 was organized in 1886. Although Lemond was only twenty-four, he probably helped establish the local, since the Knights were known to recruit farmers, and they stressed the cooperative principle, which Lemond articulated throughout the rest of his life. Nearby Rockland, one of the Knights' strongholds, was home to Alexander Beaton, Master Workman of the Knights in Maine, whom Lemond knew personally.

Around this time Lemond became imbued with the writings of utopian novelist Edward Bellamy and with the Nationalist movement, inspired by Bellamy's widely read utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, first published in 1888. Bellamy's novel, the most widely read of some sixty-eight utopian books published in the United States between 1865 and 1915, conveyed its message of social cooperation and harmony through

the experiences of a hero who fell asleep in Boston in the 1880s and was awakened a century later in a more enlightened society. In 1891 Lermond, Beaton, and several others founded the Populist party of Maine, and in 1892 Lermond was nominated as the party's candidate for Congress from the Second District. He remained active in the party, serving in various capacities, because he believed it was the only organization to offer an adequate remedy for the social and economic evils he was beginning to associate with the capitalist system. Between 1891 and 1904 Lermond edited papers for the party, and when the Socialist party was organized in Maine in 1900 he took on similar responsibilities for this young organization. That year Lermond became the party's candidate for governor, and throughout the decade he held various positions in the organization.

In 1903 Lermond founded "Utopia Park" in Warren as a gathering place for people of socialist persuasion. Reflecting his other life passion—natural history—he transformed the park into the Knox Arboretum in 1905 and directed the grounds as a wildflower and bird sanctuary. In 1913 he organized the Knox Academy of Arts and Sciences, which became the beneficiary of the sixty-acre park and arboretum. Under the auspices of the Academy, in 1921 Lermond launched the *Maine Naturalist*, a scholarly and richly illustrated journal devoted to the flora and fauna of Maine.

It was as an architect and promoter of socialist utopian schemes that Lermond gained a measure of national attention, helping to shape the debate over socialism in America in the decades between 1900 and World War II. Inspired by Bellamy's compelling futuristic view of America, Lermond drew up his own blueprints for social reconstruction, imagining a coming society in which the present chaotic and oppressive competitive system would be banished forever. The most widely publicized of Lermond's utopian ideas was the Brotherhood of the Co-operative Commonwealth, which he founded in 1895. It was proposed as a way of uniting all socialists in America into one large association based on cooperative colonies and industries. Lermond hoped to concentrate these efforts in one state. When a sufficient number of supporters had been recruited, they would vote to transform the state into a socialist polity.

In 1898 Lermond launched a second utopian venture called the Industrial Brotherhood, accompanied by a newspaper titled *Humanity*. It was following this experiment that he helped organize the Socialist party in Maine in 1900. Lermond's odyssey from utopian schemer to socialist

Mr. Lermont

Board of Trustees:
 President, Rev. Myron W. Reed,
 Secretary, N. W. Lermont,
 Treasurer, James Haworth,
 Organizer, Eugene V. Debs,
 Dean, Prof. Frank Parsons,
 Editor, A. S. Edwards,
 Master Workmen, W. J. Smith.

**Brotherhood of The
 Co-operative Commonwealth.**

Office of the National Secretary

August 31, 1897.
 Thomaston, Me.

COPIED FROM ORIGINAL IN
 DIV. OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES
 NOT TO BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE
 PERMISSION OF THE LIBRARY.

Dear Mr. Lloyd:

Our three local unions in Skagit County, Washington, who
 are prepared to furnish a good colony site, have an opportunity to buy a
 mill that is estimated to be worth \$4000.00, for \$1500 cash, with time
 payment. The machinery in it would cost, new, \$6000.00, and has been
 well preserved.

We have not the money on hand, and we would like to know if you are
 in a position to purchase this property and hold it in trust until such
 time as the B.C.C. is prepared to receive the title.

We are sending out an agent this week who will investigate the mat-
 ter, and if he finds everything satisfactory and we hear from you favor-
 ably, he will transact the business according to your instructions.

If you send money, send it to this office.

Yours fraternally,
N. W. Lermont
 National Secretary.



In 1895 Lermont founded the Brotherhood of the Co-Operative Commonwealth and became its national secretary. The organization, with its "Industrial Freedom" standard, laid a foundation for the Socialist Party of America, which flourished between 1901 and 1919.

THE SOCIALIST PRESS.		
Dangerous Monopolies must be taken by the People at once.	Let the People own the Trusts.	
Vol. 1. - No. 1. PORTLAND, ME., FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1902. <small>ISSUED ON ENGLISHES / ON EVERY LITTLE WHOLE</small>		
<p>THE SOCIALIST CANDIDATES For The Coming City Election.</p> <p>Mayor-Charles L. Fox. School Committee at Large-Elizabeth A. Reid.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WARD ONE.</p>	<p>MUNICIPAL Coal & Woodyard</p> <p>TO THE WAGE AND SALARY</p>	<p>A WATER DISTRICT For Portland</p>

By 1902 Maine's Socialist party was thriving; its members published their own newspaper and sponsored regular state-wide speaking tours by nationally known radicals.

<p>HEAVEN OR HELL</p> <p>Which Shall It Be!</p> <p>By NORMAN WALLACE LERMOND</p> <p>We now have Hell—full blast—hot and cold—here on this little planet of ours. This Hell is man-made, and not God-made. That's a very important fact to keep in mind as we proceed.</p> <p>40,000,000 people—men, women and children starving, or on the verge of starvation, means hell if there is any meaning to the word.</p> <p>The suffering of one man, woman or child, slowly starving, shivering with cold, no fire, no adequate clothing, no shelter to call "home"—is certainly hell for such person. Now multiply the suffering, agony and despair of this one individual by 40 million and you can sense, if you have the least bit of sensibility, the total of suffering in this wonderfully rich Country of ours.</p> <p>Not only physical suffering, but mental suffering—the agony of mind when a man, with a family to provide for, is unable to obtain employment is something terrible, agonizing, hellish.</p>
--

Lermond's pamphlet, "Heaven or Hell," outlined in florid phrases the reasons for the Great Depression and the effect these economic woes had on the lives of the American people. As a solution, Lermond offered a planned industrial cooperative system, reminiscent of utopian novelist Edward Bellamy's futuristic Boston.

connected to continue for these purposes: 1. issue proposals

**A most vitally important booklet
relating to our needless depression**

❁ ❁ ❁

Don't fail to thoroughly read the relief remedy, here explained, in this provisional platform of the newly organized

**United People's Party
Of Maine**

Which is preliminary to the new party being organized
for the United States Nation

❁ ❁ ❁

Most important, we aim to bend every energy to bring about **NATIONAL MONEY REFORM** by obliging Congress to return to the U. S. constitutional duty to issue our own money or currency, free of cost, and quit the illegal borrowing of billions of dollars that require the paying of needless interest to the money scheming capitalists of Wall Street, New York.

❁ ❁ ❁

Issued for educational purposes by
The Provisional State Executive Committee

B. Lake Noyes, M. D., Stonington, State Chairman
Ethan Allen Rowell, ex-Supt. of Schools of South Thomaston, Secretary-Treasurer
Prof. Norman W. Lermont, Knox Arboretum, Thomaston, Counsellor

❁ ❁ ❁

March 1940

ill
 ic
 or
 or
 at
 re:
 to
 be
 an
 i
 U
 an
 ce
 is
 a
 ac
 fia
 i
 sh
 th
 ai
 rco

 Pre
 be
 Dir

In 1939 Lermont helped found the United People's Party of Maine, with yet another revolutionary agenda.

campaigner is typical of the movement in America, which began as a series of Bellamy-inspired utopian experiments in the mid-1890s and gradually shifted into politics, where socialists competed as a third-party alternative to Democrats and Republicans. Like the national party, the party in Maine grew steadily in the years after 1900. In 1912, at its peak, the Maine organization reported a membership of 500, distributed among forty-one branches. The party faltered in 1913 when the national organization suffered a debilitating split between reformist and revolutionary factions, and in Maine, membership dropped to 407 in 1914 and 399 in 1916, when it offered its last list of local candidates for state office.

Maine party membership tumbled to 108 in 1917, climbed to 194 in 1919, then dropped to 52 in 1922.³ Lost to the Maine political scene were the speeches and rallies in socialist halls and on street corners throughout the larger industrial cities, but its crusading spirit was kept alive by a few committed locals, mainly Finnish branches, and by the scattered appearances and speeches of visiting socialists.⁴ In 1922, Maine socialists backed another ticket, but it did not appear on the primary ballot, and thus the party was required to nominate its candidates by petition. This effort failed, and in 1924 the remnants of the socialist movement cast their lot for the Progressive party ticket, except for a few individuals who supported the ideologically narrow and sectarian Socialist Labor party.

Following the stock market crash in 1929, radicals in Maine shared the expectation of those throughout the nation that economic chaos would renew class consciousness and spark a political revolution. The Maine Socialist party resurfaced with a new state-wide organization and offered a ticket in 1932. Communist organizers also made an appearance in Maine during the early 1930s and were sufficiently organized to form locals by 1933.⁵ The Depression not only sparked a revival of the Socialist party in Maine, but it rekindled Lermond's revolutionary enthusiasm. In February 1933, seven European left-wing socialist parties assembled in Paris to issue a call for a "United Front Against Fascism and War," and as a spokesperson for the National Committee of the United Brotherhood of Labor (UBL), a wing of the Socialist party, Lermond echoed this summons with a "Call for a Revolt of Left-Wing Socialists Now in the S.P." Lermond implored his fellow American radicals to set up an independent organization and join with European organizers to construct a new Marxist international, to replace the Third or Communist International organized a decade earlier in 1921. Lermond was optimistic about the United Front, since radicals everywhere seemed anxious to

unite against fascism. Would American labor heed the lesson, Lermond wondered: "Will farm and labor unions, unemployed organizations, Communist and Socialist parties meet on neutral ground, provided by the U.B. of L., and thus build a United Front, in time to ward off Fascism, to prevent this nation being plunged into another world war, and to end unemployment?"⁶

Lermond's plea for unity ran counter to the divisive strains that periodically ruptured the American radical movement. Friction surfaced anew in the thirties when factions in the Socialist party criticized its leaders for failing to take advantage of chaotic economic conditions and aggressively proselytize the masses. Lermond himself expressed frustration when socialist leaders tried to expel fellow UBL national committee member Morton Alexander of Colorado for advocating a united socialist-communist federation of farmers and workers.⁷ The attempt to expell Alexander, Lermond thought, was "short-sighted," particularly in view of the "crying need for Unity of all labor forces against the common foe—Capitalism."⁸ In fact, Lermond was as intolerant as any American radical: "Thus far," he wrote to a party member, "the most active enemies of this move for a Union of farm, labor, socialist, and communist forces... have been several of your S.P. members." In angry tones, he condemned these "Capitalist agents (conscious or unconscious), who label themselves 'Socialists.'"⁹

Undeterred by these frustrations, Lermond used the Depression as an opportunity to express his views of the capitalist economy. In an open letter he lectured President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "you should, by this time—after a year of experimentation—see the impossibility of saving the capitalist social and economic system." Barring a temporary reprieve through dictatorship or war, capitalism was doomed, he informed Roosevelt. Nor was a system that bred so much "suffering, misery, corruption, and crime" worth saving. Instead, Roosevelt should opt for the "plain Common people" by initiating a new system of "collective public ownership and scientific technological planned operation." Roosevelt's first move, Lermond wrote, should be to establish a national bank with branches in every city and town in the nation. Instead of issuing interest-bearing bonds, the government could issue legal-tender notes to pay for various services and materials supplied by the nation's industry. Next, Lermond thought, the president should take over the railroads, coal mines, lands, forests, power plants, and other productive forces. This, Lermond assured, would guarantee Roosevelt a place in history. The president referred Lermond's social prescription to the Treasury Depart-

ment where, according to the assistant to the Secretary of Treasury, it was “read... with interest.”¹⁰

Apparently not satisfied with an official expression of interest, Lermond published his solution in a pamphlet titled “Heaven or Hell, Which Shall It Be?” As a socialist, Lermond saw America’s economic situation as hell, but he reminded his readers that this Hell was man-made, not God-made. The experience of “slowly starving, shivering with cold, [with] . . . no shelter to call ‘home’” was certainly a form of hell, and to multiply this pain and suffering by forty million described the total amount of suffering in the nation.

The conditions in all our larger cities, of vice, crime, slums, crowded dwellings, skyscrapers overlooking hovels and shacks, crowded streets... the rush and scramble for the almighty dirty dollar, sacrificing every higher, nobler aspiration to grab it,—such conditions certainly make a fair sized, functioning Hell. Then we have the hell of . . . selling for profit, of waste, of useless advertising, of destruction of our forests to be wasted in newspapers that mislead and misinform the public . . . exploitation of labor by capitalist employers, strikes, the rich growing richer and the poor poorer. . . . And the dirty, corrupt, grafting office-seeking politicians! They certainly contribute their full share of combustible material for feeding the fires of Hell on Earth!

Having dismissed the system as beyond redemption, Lermond called upon the working class to create a heaven on earth. Never without an alternative plan, Lermond offered a model of this new world. In place of a political system based on diverse and antagonistic interests, he proposed “a planned industrial cooperative system and government,” predicated on public ownership of all natural resources and industrial machinery. Since private ownership was the primary source of political and economic inequality, it was necessary to eliminate this system. Lermond also proposed replacing the office of president, the Congress, and the federal courts with an industrial council or planning board composed of the heads of the nation’s major industries, who in turn were elected by workers in their respective industries. The industrial council would recruit experts and authorities in all branches of knowledge—an elite corps of engineers, architects, chemists, manufacturers, agriculturalists, horticulturists, entomologists, botanists, electricians, educators, and managers. These experts would divide the country into industrial, mining, and agricultural regions based on their productive specialties—cotton, grain, vegetables, horticulture, forestry, or manufacturing, for example. All existing governments, both state and national, would be

abolished, and the state capitols transformed into “schools, libraries, and museums.” The nation’s deteriorating cities would be rebuilt, with free public libraries, theaters, opera houses, museums, schools, gymnasia, swimming pools, labor temples, and club houses, along with “beautifully landscaped parks.” Lermond’s expansive utopian vision included

reforestation; irrigation; great national concrete highways, north and south, east and west; water power . . . ; transportation, passengers and freight by air craft will be greatly developed, relieving congested surface travel; war on insect pests, especially mosquitoes, will be prosecuted; . . . trees will be planted along all highways; great recreational parks and play-grounds will be laid out. All these and many planned constructive developments . . . will give employment to every able-bodied man between the age of 21 and 60. All under 21 will go to school—receiving mental, physical, and industrial education and training.

In Lermond’s new society, American workers would receive the full equivalent of the wealth they produced. They would enjoy economic security and increased leisure. The machines that previously enslaved them would “become their slaves.” Once American technology was released from the grip of the capitalist, the “machine slaves”—unskilled or semiskilled workers—could labor only a few hours a day or a few months of the year.

Reminiscent of Bellamy’s futuristic Boston, the new “Heaven on Earth” would substitute publicly owned department stores for private shops. Any goods produced by the new “Industrial Republic” could be purchased at labor-cost, “the purchaser simply presenting his or her labor-check, and have the amount of purchase punched out on same.” There would be no taxes, direct or indirect. People would enjoy leisure “to pursue art, science, travel, research, and recreation”; they would live in modern sanitary dwellings equipped with modern conveniences, and they would retire at age sixty with an old-age pension. This utopian environment would free them from “most, if not all, bodily and mental ailments,” as a consequence of “simple, sanitary, hygienic living, with plenty of pure, unadulterated food.” This would be a society where individuals would relate as equals and comrades, or “as one larger national family of brothers and sisters.” Was this not, Lermond asked, “a veritable Heaven on Earth?”

The question remained, how to abolish “the Hell on Earth system.” For Lermond, the path to revolution was “legal, peaceful, [and] bloodless,” and to this end he proposed a new political party: “The workers on

GOVERNING COUNCIL

OF EDW. H. PERKINS—President, Waterville
 GPF. WM. H. SAWYER—First Vice President
 Lewiston
 JESSE A. TOLMAN—Second Vice President, Rockland
 MISS ADA C. BURPEE, Recording Secretary, Rockland
 ENIGH OTIS—Treasurer, Rockland
 N. W. LERMOND, Financial Secretary, Censor, Thomaston
 DR. H. V. TWEDDIE, Rockland
 PROF. ALFRED O. GROSS, Bowdoin College, Brunswick
 MR. WILBUR F. STRONG, Thomaston
 PROF. CHARLES E. PACKARD, Univ. of Maine, Orono
 MRS. L. WILBUR MESSER, Ashburn
 DR. H. B. PERKSON, State Dept. of Forestry, Augusta
 EDWIN L. BRDWIN, Art Studio, Rockland

REGENTS

MR. C. W. BABB, Camden
 REV. H. B. DUNNACK, State Librarian, Augusta
 MR. W. O. FULLER, Editor Courier-Gazette, Rockland
 HON. OBADIAH GARDNER, Augusta
 HON. J. H. MORTONMERY, Camden
 MR. WILLIAM D. TALBOT, Portland
 DR. BERTRAM B. PACKARD, Com. of Education, Augusta
 HON. GEORGE WALKER, Warren

Knox Academy of Arts and Sciences
 THOMASTON AND ROCKLAND, MAINE

The Knox Arboretum (A State Park)
 N. W. LERMOND, Director

Bird Sanctuary, Botanic and Wild-Flower Garden
 One mile beyond State Prison, west road to Watrec

THOMASTON, MAINE

*Here at 20 Albans St. Portland
 Near Comrade Debs; Boston for next 10 days
 Following the
 35th Annual Dinner of the League
 for Industrial Democracy - on Nov. 24-25*

*a table reserved for a New Party to 22A
 10. More sales.*

Yours for the Revolution

Norman W. Lermund,

In a letter written in 1940 to Theodore Debs, brother of Socialist Party standard-bearer Eugene Victor Debs, Lermund announced the formation of another new political party. As always, he signed the letter "Yours for the Revolution."

farms, in shops and mills and mines... must unite in a political party of their own, a Labor or Farmer-Labor party. With unity in purpose and solidarity in ranks, the workers vote the capitalist congress out of existence and inaugurate an Industrial Socialist Republic—a government of, by, and for the workers (the whole people).” A new constitution would replace the existing “out-of-date” document.¹¹

In 1933, Lermond’s enthusiasm for an independent party was echoed locally when Maine’s reemerging Socialist party contacted farmer and labor organizations across the state seeking their views on a third-party movement. Despite his interest in politics, Lermond dismissed this approach as “step-at-a-time” socialism—inadequate to the task at hand. Given his utopian aspirations, he was impatient with attempts to patch up “the rotten corpse of Capitalism,” and he attacked every new proposal to modify the system—Huey Long’s “Share the Wealth” project, Francis Townsend’s National Recovery Plan, Father Coughlin’s populist “Union of Social Justice,” L. W. Allen’s “Ham and Eggs” scheme. Lermond’s frustration burst forth: “Why dilly dally longer with such a broken down, out of date economy of scarcity system? Why not act boldly for the abolition of Capitalism and the inauguration of a scientifically planned Collective Socialist system, or to use Bellamy’s name, The Cooperative Commonwealth?” Reform, and revolution, Lermond declared, “will no more mix than oil and water.”¹² Yet despite his aversion for reformist socialism, in 1936, when no revolutionary party appeared in the making, Lermond supported Socialist party candidate Norman Thomas for president. Thomas, a right-wing socialist, was not Lermond’s first choice, but he was impressed by the candidate’s powerful oratory and thought that Thomas was “safe for us radicals and socialists to follow and vote for.” In the approaching national election, Lermond once again issued a call for unity, imploring Marxists, Bellamyites, and socialists to vote for Thomas and his campaign program of relief, reform, and recovery.¹³

Although Thomas was a personable and popular socialist candidate, the New Deal and its catalog of reforms undercut his reform socialist agenda, and the party performed poorly in the 1936 elections. Despite his endorsement of Thomas, Lermond never yielded his socialist principles. In 1938 he offered yet another pamphlet pointing the way out of the Depression. In a work entitled “A New Form of Government Based on a New Economic and Industrial System,” Lermond maintained that capitalism would be its own grave-digger. As a last resort, capitalism “turns to war, fascism and military dictatorship to keep open markets at

home and abroad, and to get rid of the millions of workers whom it has no further use for except as . . . 'cannon-fodder.'" In reality, Lermond's new plan was the one he had proposed earlier—"an industrial, scientific, technocratic form of government." He simply offered a few particulars regarding the supreme industrial council which was to replace Congress, the executive, and judicial branches of government, and predicted that the newly elected 1940 Congress would carry out the "mandate of the people" by drafting a new constitution and launching a "new industrial government." Americans would vote on the new constitution, and to ensure that truth would prevail, Congress would issue a "daily people's bulletin . . . to counteract the lying daily capitalist press."¹⁴

Although Lermond continued to draw up plans based on Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and to call for revitalization of the Bellamy Clubs that had sprouted up after these books were published, he began to grow skeptical about the power of an idea to transform society. Bellamy, he thought, "overestimated the intelligence of the American voters" and failed to see how completely the "plutocracy of our educational institutions and of the daily capitalist press" could affect public opinion.¹⁵

In other ways Lermond showed signs of conflict between his political inclinations and his utopian ideas. Even voting he came to see as a kind of ritualistic act, distracting workers from the goal of revolutionary change. To those radicals who continued to advocate the ballot box as means of resolving social problems, he offered his vintage solution—"ending the poverty-breeding capitalist economic system" altogether. Reformers, Lermond maintained, believed that incremental steps could address the most visible evils of unbridled capitalism, but the system itself would only generate new inequalities. Lermond was unshakable in his belief that the capitalist mode of production was the root of the country's social problems, and that people would be emancipated only when the system itself was uprooted.¹⁶

In September 1939, on the eve of World War II and shortly before his death, Lermond generated yet another call for change. With the assistance of others, he spearheaded a drive to create the United People's party of Maine, "preliminary to a new party being organized for the United States Nation." Again he called for revolution and targeted the "needless, shameful depression and exorbitant taxation" of recent years. As counselor in the party's Provisional State Executive Committee, Lermond attacked President Roosevelt for lobbying against the Patman bonus bill, which would have paid off World War I veterans. While targeting Wall Street financiers for destruction, Lermond and his political

allies advocated a cheap money policy to redeem the nation from its economic woes. The people should reclaim their constitutional right to print their own money, he thought, rather than fall victim to interest-bearing bonds for profit-hungry speculators. This demand for modern “greenbacks” was central to the United People’s Party of Maine.

While Lermond and the others viewed the United People’s party as a national movement, they also addressed state issues in their 1940 campaign. Taking note of the state’s debt burden and its administrative waste and extravagance, Lermond proposed a reevaluation of state budget priorities to include better poor relief and pay for teachers. To address matters of concern to tax-payers, Lermond and his colleagues urged replacing the governor’s council with a governor’s cabinet, composed of the heads of the various state departments. This would save the state at least \$20,000 annually. They also recommended holding state elections in November, instead of September, which would save another \$40,000, and called for a return to the party convention system for selecting candidates, since the primary system violated the secret ballot provision and reversed the principle “that the office should seek the man, not the man (politician) the office.”

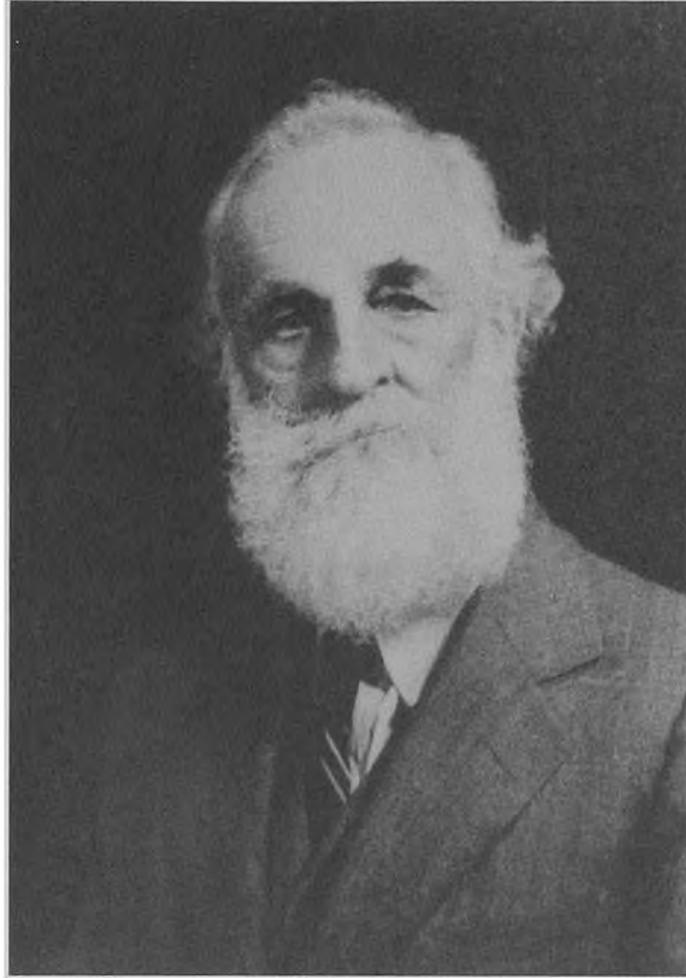
For farmers, the new party called for state aid to agricultural cooperatives and price supports for produce to peg farm income to store and mercantile commodities. It also insisted that rural schools be placed on an equal footing with urban schools. In support of workers, the party opposed the use of the state militia in to protect pickets in labor disputes, called for state recognition of the right to picket, and demanded better compensation for injury on the job. The party opposed the sales tax in favor of an income tax and advocated the recall of elected officials who broke their pre-election pledges. It would abolish the state senate as a “superfluous body.”¹⁷ The party also called for “socialized medical treatment” for the poor through federal aid, for municipal ownership of public utilities, and for a better old-age pension system.¹⁸

Lermond further advocated improvements in the road system to prevent the auto accidents that occurred with monotonous regularity on Maine’s narrow, two-lane highways—a carnage greater “than any army of savages ever were guilty of.” He and his followers proposed a massive program to enlarge the highways to four-lane roads. The highway department would first investigate its needs, and once these were determined, the state would receive federal money to “operate a highway construction unit in every town and city to the extent of giving road work to every laborer out of a job.” With the nation still in the grip of the De-

pression, Lermond and his party argued that idle factory employees be given work in “road gangs” until they were recalled to their regular employment. Workers thus employed would continue to be “steady consumers,” insuring a strong market for manufactured goods. That in turn would encourage mills and factories to “hustle and produce . . . millions of dollars worth of products [for] . . . progressive workers who will be rapidly expanding the Government’s dangerous highways to such an extent as to enhance the valuation of the Nation . . . [and] preserve . . . countless lives.”¹⁹ Combining government-issued “greenbacks” with demand-side economics, Lermond, long-time advocate of social engineering, continued his search for antidotes for social ills. The United People’s party of Maine left no doubt that the money question was central to its prescription for reform. The largest plank in its platform called for abolition of the Federal Reserve banking system, which was “only or mainly functioning for . . . private capitalists’ selfish profits,” and for restitution of the people’s “constitutional rights” to print money. Those who wished to help in the reformation of society were advised to write to Professor Norman Lermond, Knox Arboretum, Thomaston, for more information.²⁰ The new political offensive failed to appeal to Maine voters, however, and the United People’s party, like its predecessors, disappeared from view.

The failure to attract a political following did not dampen Lermond’s enthusiasm. He quickly sought to recruit Socialist party standard-bearer Eugene Debs’s brother, Theodore, to yet another new movement to reconstruct the social order. On November 10, 1840, Lermond informed Debs of a new call for a gathering of pacifists, anti-Fascists, labor organizers, and political leftists of all persuasions, in order “to set up a United Front and lay the foundations of a New National political party.” Lermond, who served as treasurer of the new organization, implored Debs to represent Indiana on the Provisional National Committee, and declared the principles of the new party to include public ownership, production for use rather than for profit, peace maintained by an international court of arbitration, and the cooperative brotherhood of man. As a measure of his continuing commitment to the socialist order, Lermond ended his correspondence with “Yours for the Revolution and not the ballot-box.”²¹ Once again, however, his passion for reform outpaced the readiness of others to abandon the existing order. This latest effort to topple capitalism was added to his inventory of shattered dreams.

With Lermond’s death in 1944, Maine lost one of its leading social



As he grew older, Lemond grew no less radical. Despite years of frustration, he held out hope for the Co-operative Commonwealth, the idea that had launched his political career back in the 1890s.

critics. Lemond had witnessed the myriad of problems generated by two world wars and the industrial collapse of the 1930s. In the face of these economic and social disasters, the cardinal principles of nineteenth-century liberalism—individualism, private property, the free market, equality of contract—appeared to be little more than playthings for economic theorists. For Lemond, individuals could never be free or secure as long as society was cleaved into classes, and the abolition of classes required the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. Maine's leading socialist crusader believed that the forces of technology and the wealth of America's natural resources should be used for the benefit of the many, not the few. Moreover, as long as private

power was held by the few, public decisions would be made on the same principle. Over a lifetime of disappointments, Lermond sustained his vision of a conflict-free society, free of divisions and distinctions between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, exploiter and exploited. Lermond never accepted such divisions as part of the natural order. He envisioned a planned society in which cooperation and community transcended competition and individualism.

Like Bellamy's futuristic Boston, Lermond's image of the cooperative commonwealth was a sweeping promise for a tomorrow in which no one would feel disconnected or exploited. Lermond's writings reveal his ideological odyssey from utopian planner to militant socialist. While dismayed that the opponents of capitalism were forever mired in ideological controversy, he never lost faith in his own vision of the future. Maine's leading utopian architect was always armed with a blueprint for the transformation of society, and he was never without an answer to his own question: "Heaven or Hell: Which Shall It Be!"²¹

NOTES

1. Norman Wallace Lermond, *Autobiography of Norman Wallace Lermond, Maine's Naturalist/Socialist*, edited by Scott M. Martin, n.d., original in Department of Mollusks, Harvard University Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
2. *Maine Register*, 1904-1905, p. 121.
3. *The Party Builder* (Socialist party U.S.A.), January 11, 1913, April 11, 1914, February 1914; *Maine Register*, 1937-1938.
4. Harry Edward Fitzgerald, Secretary-Organizer, Socialist Party, New England District, to Bertha Hale White, Boston, December 3, 1924, Socialist Party of America Papers, Tamiment Institute, New York.
5. D.C. Harper, Communist Party of Portland, to editors of the *Portland Evening Express*, Portland Central Labor Union Records, Portland, Maine.
6. Norman Wallace Lermond, *A Call for a Revolt of Left-Wing Socialists, Now in the S.P.* (Gulfport, Florida, April 7, 1933), p. 1, Norman Wallace Lermond Papers, Special Collections Department, Fogler Library, University of Maine, Orono, Maine (hereafter, Lermond Papers).
7. *Humanity* (Avada, Colorado), copies available in the Lermond Papers.
8. Lermond, *Call for a Revolt*, p. 1.
9. Norman Wallace Lermond to unknown correspondent, n.d., Lermond Papers.

10. "Lermond Advises the President," clipping, ca. 1934, Warren Public Library, Warren, Maine.
11. Norman Wallace Lermond, *Heaven or Hell, Which Shall It Be!* (Pamphlet, Warren Public Library, ca. 1935), pp. 1-5.
12. F.H. Maxfield, "Open Letter to Prominent Individuals Representing Labor and Farmer Groups," December 5, 1933, Maine State Federation of Labor Collection, Orono, Maine; *Common Sense*, May, July 1935; Lermond to editors of *Common Sense*, n.d., ca. June 1935, Special Collections, Fogler Library; Lermond, *Heaven or Hell*.
13. *Common Sense*, October 1936.
14. Norman Wallace Lermond, *A New Form of Government Based on a New Economic and Industrial System* (Thomaston, Maine, June 27, 1938; pamphlet, Warren Public Library), pp. 1-3.
15. Norman Wallace Lermond, *The Way Out: The Bellamy Plan*, pp. 3-6; Lermond, *The Bellamy Plan and the Movement*, pp. 13-18, Lermond Papers.
16. Lermond, *Reform or Revolution*, pp. 2-3.
17. *United People's Party of Maine* (Provisional State Executive Committee, March 1940; pamphlet, Deer Isle-Stonington Historical Society, Deer Isle, Maine).
18. *Courier-Gazette* (Rockland), September 12, 1939.
19. *United People's Party of Maine*, p. 2.
20. *United People's Party of Maine*, p. 2.
21. *The Way Out: The Bellamy Plan*, p. 6; Norman Wallace Lermond to Theodore Debs, Boston, November 10, 1940, in Eugene V. Debs Collection, Indiana State University Library, Terre Haute, Indiana.