

Blue Jean Nation "A league of their own"

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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Many Americans distrust both of the country's major political parties this year, especially young voters, but is there another option?

ALTOONA, WI - Here we sit, with most Americans [deeply dissatisfied](#) with and [alienated](#) from both of the country's major political parties. This condition is likely to worsen before it gets better, as young Americans are [especially disgusted](#) with the two major parties.

For the time being, the clear majority of Americans are feeling doomed to either sit out elections and surrender their vote or engage in the distasteful exercise of Lesser Evil Voting. The only alternative to LEV they can see is voting for a minor party like the Greens or Libertarians, and visions of [spoiler candidates](#) and wasted votes dance in their heads at the thought.

There is another option, but it is one scarcely remembered because it hasn't been tried in a very long time despite proving successful in the past.

In the early 1900s, farmers in North Dakota were at the mercy of powerful cartels and couldn't get fair prices for their grain or credit at a reasonable interest rate. They were at the mercy of powerful cartels. In hopes of getting out from under the thumb of the out-of-state tycoons who were gouging them, they banded together to form a political organization called the Nonpartisan League (NPL).

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Some say the NPL was the idea of a former Socialist Party organizer named Albert Bowen. Others figure it was the brainchild of flax farmer-turned-political agitator A.C. Townley. One way or the other, Townley and Bowen teamed up and Townley was soon driving across the state in a Model T Ford spreading the word about the NPL. Bowen and Townley enlisted tens of thousands of followers.

The NPL gained power by making use of a creation of the late-19th Century Progressives: the primary election. The primary system adopted in North Dakota and other states like Wisconsin not only gave voters the power to nominate major-party candidates, but most importantly allowed voters to participate in a party's primary even if they did not belong to that party. By putting NPL-endorsed candidates up against those favored by the state's political machine, the NPL took over North Dakota's dominant Republican Party in 1916. A wheat farmer and NPL member named Lynn Frazier was [elected governor](#) with almost 80% of the vote and NPL-backed candidates won every other statewide office except one as well as a majority in the state assembly.

Upon gaining power, the NPL acted, giving farmers credit at significantly lower interest rates through the establishment of the state-run Bank of North Dakota opened in 1919. A state mill and grain elevator was completed in 1922, providing a fair market for grain and a source of feed and seed. Insurance was provided against fire, tornado and hail damage.

The NPL's [enduring legacy](#) in North Dakota stands as an inspiring example of what is possible when people declare themselves free of unresponsive major parties while simultaneously using elements of the two-party framework to force change. The NPL stands as proof that the dismal choice between Lesser Evil Voting and wasted votes cast for spoiler candidates from minor parties is a false choice. There is another way.

— *Mike McCabe*

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