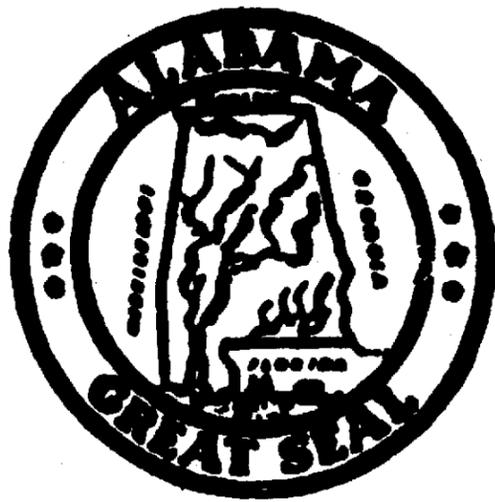


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AGRARIAN DISTRESS IN THE SEVENTIES: THE MULBERRY AGRICULTURAL CLUB VERSUS GOVERNOR DAVID P. LEWIS

by

William Warren Rogers

As Alabamians struggled through the bitter years of Reconstruction, they contended with a political and social revolution. The Republican party was in power, and the newly freed and newly enfranchised black man forced fundamental changes in society's makeup and direction.¹ But political tensions and relations between races could, in time, be adjusted. The settlement or accommodations might not be wise or even fair (as many times they were not), but these difficulties were not so pressing as economic concerns. Regardless of age, race, sex, or color, the individual in Reconstruction Alabama faced the not always easy demand of survival.

The life of the state in ante-bellum times had come from the soil, and the survival of the state became no less dependent upon the products of the earth. Destruction by war and recovery from its effects was difficult enough, but the situation was compounded by the dislocations of Reconstruction and then, in the 1870's, by a severe economic depression that, while nationwide, lingered much longer in the South. Hoping to achieve relief by collective action, farmers in several counties formed agricultural clubs. Cooperative interchange of ideas and farming practices might not offer salvation, but the agrarians proceeded on the correct theory that they had nothing to lose²

The Mulberry Agricultural Club of Autauga County was one farm organization that not only operated locally but attempted to secure action at the state level. In the fall of 1873 a committee from the club, headed by Charles M. Howard, engaged in

¹Although a modern study of Reconstruction in Alabama is needed, of continued importance is the pioneering work by Walter Lynwood Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York, 1905).

²For the general picture of Southern agriculture in this period see Theodore Saloutos, "Southern Agriculture and the Problems of Readjustment: 1865-1877," *Agricultural History*, XXX (1956), 58-70. For conditions in Alabama see William Warren Rogers, *The One-Gallused Rebellion: Agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge, 1970), 1-30.

an exchange of letters with Republican Governor David P. Lewis.³ The communications, which contained no hint of partisan politics, are important in that they reveal the relentless difficulties faced by farmers. Beyond this, the two letters composed by the committee are brilliantly written. In style—graceful yet trenchant, philosophical yet incisive—they owe less to the Victorian age and more to that of Thomas Jefferson. The reply of Governor Lewis (deliberate and somewhat pedantic) shows concern but no real awareness of what direct participation by the state could accomplish in alleviating the plight of agriculture. After its mild proposals were rejected by the chief executive, the committee had the last word in a classical reply. With extreme courtesy the Autauga County farmers informed the governor, that, in effect, he was wrong, but held out hope that he might at some time understand their needs.

No immediate state laws were passed to aid the farmers; there was not even a State Department of Agriculture until 1883. Yet the letters remain as painful reminders of harsh economic conditions and as eloquent testimonials to the enlightened concepts of the Mulberry Agricultural Club.

Mulberry P. O. Autauga Co. Ala.
Sept 20th 1873

To His Excellency
D. P. Lewis
Gov. of Ala.
Dr. Sir:

At a late meeting of the "Mulberry Agricultural Club," we were appointed a committee to communicate with you upon the subject of our agricultural necessities and invoke your cooperation in measures of relief. If apology be necessary, let the circumstances by which we are embarrassed and our anxiety to improve them, plead our excuse.

It is difficult to appreciate the prostrate condition of our farming interests without contact with our rural districts or

³These letters are on deposit in the Governor's Correspondence files in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

familiarity with the avenues through which our farmers obtain assistance. While our population possesses in a large degree the two most important elements constituting wealth — industry and frugality, never have they received so little encouragement from their own efforts or from legislation as within the last few years. The failure of two crops in succession have nearly bankrupted a majority of our merchants and planters, and despondency is gaining the ascendancy over all remaining energy. Domestic capital is seeking investment beyond the State, that from abroad, recoils at the prospect offered for entry, while labor — crushed by want of adequate returns — seeks foreign fields where well-directed activity finds ampler remuneration.

Of the appropriations made by Congress for all purposes during its last session, one dollar only in the thousand, it is said, was directed to the interests of agricultural pursuits, while in our State comparatively little attention has been given by legislation to the growth of those pursuits engaging the time of a majority of our people. Local wants have been met, individual claims satisfied, partisan ends promoted and latent resources sought to be unearthed, while it is feared that the tendency of some legislation has been to antagonize pursuits and conditions that should be in harmony. As a result of this policy may be referred the present want of both private and public credit.

While persuaded that we share your sympathy, we claim your assistance. Is it not humiliating to feel that the productive industry of our state has suffered a loss of 15 millions of dollars in the last 60 days and yet the unwelcome reality compels the confession. The desolation that advertises itself in every cotton field is a repetition of that of last year and today we are deprived of the reward delusive hope offered us but two months ago. And must this continue from year to year? Is there no hope of relief — no appearance of a brighter tomorrow? If none, then is the basis of all our business pursuits shaken, the hope of reward blasted, and Alabama—no longer symbolized by the cheering words, "*here we rest,*" must yield to the logic of events and witness the exodus of a *restless* population to more inviting fields of labor and enterprise. But should we indulge in so gloomy a view?

In the older states, evils of less magnitude inflicted upon their industrial pursuits, have arrested legislative attention and made to yield to well-digested measures of relief, and surely our losses under the embarrassments that otherwise surround us, warrant a like course. Individual activity reports some progress in the direction of arresting the ravages of the cotton-worm, and if sustained by legislative cooperation, we will not deny ourselves the hope that before another crop is matured, a large measure of relief will be in reach. To this end, allow us to suggest that some recommendation be made by you to our next Genl Assembly, looking to the appointment of some suitable agent whose duties shall be limited to the collection of information in reference to the active enemies of the cotton plant and the means necessary to their destruction. The general dissemination of such information before another crop is planted would be a valuable contribution to the security of the agricultural interests of our State and section and have the tendency to dispel the gloomy apprehensions which now so heartily weigh down our people.

The resolutions of the club authorizing our appointment justify us in a more comprehensive view of our material necessities, but we forbear. The influence with which official position invests your Excellency induces us to present these considerations direct to you, believing that you are ready to inaugurate any measure or means calculated to subserve our interests. A careful survey of their magnitude and the dangers that now threaten them, can but result in an increased desire to protect and enlarge them, and hence we appeal with confidence to you to aid us, not only in the measures of relief suggested by this communication but in all others, to the end that lost confidence be restored, renewed animation infused into our agricultural circles and thrift and contentment pervade all classes of our commonwealth.

Respectfully
Chas. M. Howard
T. D. Cory
Thos. Underwood
O. C. G. LaMan
Leonidas Howard
J. A. Wilkinson

Montgomery Sept 25th 1873

Messers Charles Howard, and others, Committee of Mulberry Agricultural Club;

Mulberry, Autauga Co, Alabama:

Gentlemen;

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your interesting communication of the 20th Inst, on the condition of the agricultural interests of Alabama.

I thank you for the confidence you have in my sympathy not only with the general suffering of our population, but also with the great embarrassments of this branch of industry that cultivates the soil. My investments and interests are entirely agricultural. And it would be strange indeed if I should be insensible to causes which embarrass, and depress the planting interest.

I beg to assure you, that I will cheerfully co-operate, in any well devised legislative plan, that may afford relief to our suffering population.

But while I shall be ready so to act, your communication shows you to be too intelligent, to suppose that legislation can pay debts, or supply the deficiencies of a bad system, or defective management. There is no more suitable occasion that in the present pangs of our suffering community, to inculcate the truth, that the people must work out their own relief by good management, economy, thrift, & industry. Your "Club" can render no greater boon to the people of the State, than to teach them, that every plantation which does not raise its own supplies, is on the road to ruin. The exhaustion of the soil by the production of more cotton, the proceeds of which purchases supplies to sustain the labor that produces it must in the end lead to absolute indigence.

To accomplish this variety of crops, the owners of land should reside on their plantations, and participate themselves in the labor, care, and supervision of this branch of industry. The landed proprietor has ceased to be worthy to own the soil,

which, from indolence, or morbid sentiments, he esteems an unfit place for his residence. A wise and necessary adaptation to the fundamental changes in our system of labor by the landowner, alone will prevent him from being superseded, as proprietor, by the operation of the laws of nature, which nothing earthly can contravene. The great law of nature teaches us, that the most energetic, and thrifty of the population will own the best lands in any community. Nor is any exempt from the operation of this law.

I am sure that your club will appreciate these truths, and by percept, and example, demonstrate their wisdom & utility.

I have the honor to be,

Your Obedient Servant

David P. Lewis

Mulberry P. O. Autauga Co. Ala.

Oct. 4th 1873

His Excellency

D. P. Lewis

Gov. of Ala.

Dear Sir:

It is our pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 25th ult. responsive to ours of the 20th and while thanking you for your prompt attention, the Club directs us to reply.

The lessons we have learned in the school of experience have cost us too much to be insensible to the force of your Excellency's remarks respecting the policy pursued by the agricultural interests of the state. The high price of cotton persuaded too many of us that its culture offered us the surest means to aid us in meeting our obligations, while both labor and capital, in their changed relation, feared the experiment of a departure from accustomed channels. These truths, so generally accepted as such, serve to mitigate a policy which we now regard as truly unfortunate.

Conceding however all you suggest as necessary to place us again on the road to success [yet] there is, as we conceive, still much force in the subject of our late letter. Any change in our industrial pursuits that would pretermit the cultivation of cotton, or assign to it, an unimportant place in the roll of farm products would doubtless inflict upon us a misfortune second only to that we now realize. We concede that we should, by all-means, raise our own supplies, but cannot so readily yield assent to the idea that we can compete with the North and West in distant markets in the sale of those products common to both sections. To be prosperous, we must have a surplus. We claim that the surplus should be cotton and its importance therefore suggests that its culture should be studied and such public as well as private means used to cheapen production as will not militate against other public pursuits. Alabama has been remarkably unfortunate for two years and hence our concern should predominate over that of those whose afflictions have been less. It was in this view of the subject that our letter was addressed to you and the reply of your Excellency has not impaired our confidence in its wisdom.

We have therefore to regret that you fail to discover importance sufficient in our application to induce you to *initiate* a measure calculated to encourage a more hopeful prospect. We asked for no appropriation to pay debts nor sought assistance to supplement mismanagement. Our petition was prospective, involved no pecuniary consideration but simply asked the collation by Legislative action, of all the facts bearing upon a subject, the nature of which is such that our agricultural public cannot otherwise reap the benefits of individual effort. With this point secured, we have confidence to believe that we can vindicate our ability to relieve ourselves.

For a people, whose material interests have so severely suffered, and from whose industry the government derives so much to sustain it, we can but hope, that upon a review of the subject, your Excellency will recognize in it, a greater importance and sustain us to the extent indicated. Especially so, as our application is in striking contrast with those so often made by other interests, whose relation to the government is not so

vital, while their growth has been so largely encouraged by its aid.

Respectfully,
Chas. M. Howard
Thos. Underwood
J. A. Wilkinson
Leonidas Howard
T. D. Cory
O. C. G. LaMan

STANLEY HUBERT DENT AND AMERICAN MILITARY POLICY, 1916-1920

by Robert D. Ward

The United States' declaration of war on Germany in April, 1917 brought an immediate emphasis and importance to military affairs, and gave new prominence to the men who helped shape American military policy. One of these men was Representative Stanley H. Dent, Democrat of Alabama, the chairman of the House military affairs committee. From the pre-war agitation over preparedness, through the issues and organizational problems of the war, and on to the final post-war debate on military policy, Dent played a major role. His career, and the policies he espoused, make it clear that there are no simple explanations of the Southern mind. The easy demarcations of "liberal" and "conservative" lose validity in the complexities of human thought, and are utterly demolished by the shifting references of even a few decades.

Stanley H. Dent was born a member of what Theodore Roosevelt liked to call "the governing class." His father was an honored Confederate veteran, a successful lawyer in Eufaula, Alabama, and a respected and influential member of the Democratic hierarchy. There was no question of the "Bourbon" allegiance of the Dents. In 1896 father and son supported the Gold Democrats against the challenge of the Jeffersonian Democrats and their Populist allies. In 1901, Dent's father was a member of the constitutional convention that, through Negro disfranchisement, ended the threat that common economic and political interests might transcend even race in Alabama politics.¹

The younger Dent graduated in law from the University of Virginia, practiced his profession for ten years in his native Eufaula, and served his political apprenticeship speaking for Democratic candidates.² He might thus have set the pattern

¹See Joel C. DuBose, ed., *Notable Men of Alabama*, 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1904), I, 64, and General Clement A. Evans, *Confederate Military History*, 12 vols. (Atlanta, 1899), VII, 417-420. The Dents' early political positions are mentioned in A. B. Moore, *History of Alabama* (University, 1934), 644, and in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 7, 1938.

²DuBose, *Notable Men*, I, 65; *Eufaula Daily News*, July 22, September 20, 1898.

of a lifetime: county politics, a comfortable legal income, and perhaps a judgeship for the future. But the pattern, if formed at all, was not followed. In 1899 Dent moved to Montgomery and joined the law firm of General William C. Oates, a friend of his father's, and the conservative victor over Reuben Kolb in the heated gubernatorial election of 1894. In 1902 Governor William D. Jelks, a fellow Eufaulian, appointed Dent as solicitor of Montgomery County to fill an unexpired term, and in 1904 Dent won election to the position for a full six year term. The influence and prestige of his father marked Dent's road to preferment, but he proved himself a competent attorney, and one of the more scholarly members of the Alabama Bar Association.³

With pledges of support from Democratic leaders, Dent entered the contest in 1908 for representative from the Second Congressional District. Dent's major opponent was William H. Samford, an experienced politician and campaigner. Samford won the endorsement of the powerful Anti-Saloon League, and seemed a sure winner in the election. After an inauspicious beginning, Dent centered his attack on the Alabama superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, the Reverend Brooks Lawrence of Ohio, and ignored Samford for the rest of the campaign. Demagoguery paid handsomely, and Dent, with a huge vote from his own Montgomery County, narrowly defeated Samford.⁴

The new congressman was thirty-nine years old, a conservative in the states rights fashion of Southern politicians, and apparently opposed to prohibition. Beyond this a discernible ideology was difficult to find. It remained for time and issues to produce specific views and hard convictions.

On his entry to Congress, Dent was assigned to the House

³Montgomery *Advertiser*, November 22, 26, 27, 1902; Montgomery *Journal*, April 14, 1904; *Biennial Report of the Attorney-General of Alabama to the Governor* (Montgomery, 1906), 33. And see S. H. Dent, Jr., "Common Law System of Pleading," *Proceedings, Alabama State Bar Association* (1903), 70-75.

⁴The election may be followed in some detail in the Montgomery *Advertiser* and the Montgomery *Journal*, April-September, 1908. Dent played endlessly on Rev. Lawrence's Ohio background and his intervention in Alabama politics. As Dent put it, "The league is drawing whatever money it can from the women and children in this land and putting into its treasury, and he [Lawrence] has his hand there ready to dig into that treasury, and he digs and digs into it in order to support himself and to take care of his family, if he has any, in Birmingham." See Montgomery *Advertiser*, September 7, 1908.

military affairs committee, and it was here that his basic predilections found supplement and reinforcement from his chairman, James Hay of Virginia. Hay had consistently opposed both army personnel increases and army reforms after the Spanish-American War. He had clashed repeatedly with Chief of Staff Leonard Wood, and only the intervention of President Taft had stopped Hay's effort to have Wood removed. Hay demanded a small, volunteer professional army; he opposed any increase in the power of the General Staff, and he was adamantly opposed to conscription. A National Guard and a reservoir of citizens who would come forward in emergency was an adequate system for the defense of the nation. To pursue another course could only result in militarism — a term for Hay that included any enhancement of the army's role in policy decisions.⁵

There seems little doubt that Dent found these views congenial. The Jeffersonian tradition had been the catechism of Dent's early political views. If it too often had been the refuge of the reactionary against change and reform, its libertarian emphasis on the individual, and its fears and distrust of military power, became touchstones for Dent's congressional career. These views were soon to be tested against the growing pressure of events.

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, with its implied threat to American security, brought forth growing demands for military preparedness in this country. Through the medium of many organizations the plea was made, and the political pressure applied, for a strengthening of the army and navy, and the enactment of military training for all young men. While the movement laid claim to national support, its financial base and its leadership were predominantly Northern, its political orientation strongly Republican, and its broader ideas best characterized as a blend of Big Business *laissez-faire* and Rooseveltian Nationalism.⁶

⁵For Hay's views see George C. Herring, Jr., "James Hay and the Preparedness Controversy, 1915-1916," *Journal of Southern History*, XXX (November, 1964), 383-404.

⁶The most vocal, influential, and best financed of the preparedness groups was the National Security League, organized in 1914. See Robert D. Ward, "The Origin and Activities of the National Security League, 1914-1919," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (June, 1960), 51-65.

Although the initial movement for greater military preparedness was almost a monopoly of the Republican Party, Democrats, including President Wilson, could not long ignore the political threat inherent in the issue. With some reluctance, Wilson adopted preparedness for his own, and ordered his Secretaries of War and Navy to produce a program to strengthen the armed forces. On December 7, 1915 the President presented to Congress the "Continental Army Plan" of Secretary of War Lindley K. Garrison. This called for the creation of an entirely new army reserve of 400,000 men to be raised through volunteering, and for an increase in the size of the Regular Army.⁷ These plans made it clear that the National Guard would no longer be considered as the Nation's second line of defense. Garrison's ideas on the role of the Guard were in full agreement with nationalist abhorrence of state troops, and thus exactly in opposition to the views of Chairman Hay, Dent, and a majority of the House military affairs committee. In their resistance to a Continental Army, and in their basic distrust of military power, the Southerners were in actual, if unacknowledged, agreement with the liberals of the day. If this constituted a most incoherent alliance it was nevertheless a powerful one — and one that the President himself could hardly overlook.⁸

Confronted by a revolt in the ranks, Wilson repudiated Garrison's Continental Army and accepted a Hay compromise. Garrison resigned as Secretary of War in anger and disgust, an instant martyr for the preparedness crusade. The Hay bill was adopted by the House military affairs committee, and submitted to the House for debate. Speaking for the bill, Dent demonstrated that his conversion was complete. "I believe," he said, "that the sentiment of this nation is in favor of building a second line of defense from the citizen soldiery of the country who mix and mingle daily in the business and social life of the people among whom they live."⁹ On this premise, an enlarged National Guard with more direct Federal training, plus an increase of the Regular Army to 220,000 men should

⁷*Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 223.

⁸See Herring, "Hay," and Martha Derthick, "Militia Lobby in the Missile Age—The Politics of the National Guard," in Samuel P. Huntington, ed., *Changing Patterns of Military Politics* (New York, 1962), 203.

⁹*Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 4350.

answer the needs of the Nation. Beating down Republican efforts for a still larger Regular Army, the House passed the Hay bill by an overwhelming vote. Hay and Dent, representing the House in conference committee, stood firm against the Senate's acceptance of the Continental Army, and maintained the essential terms of the Hay bill. The National Defense Act of 1916 was a defeat for extreme preparedness advocates, and a clear manifestation that Southerners not only controlled military policy, but controlled it in a most unmilitant direction.

With the National Defense Act completed, and with military matters supposedly settled for the immediate future, Chairman Hay accepted an appointment to the Federal judiciary. While preparedness advocates might cheer Hay's retirement from the House, they had little grounds for optimism. Continuity of viewpoint was not broken as Dent was named the new chairman of the military affairs committee on September 5, 1916.¹⁰

For almost eight months Dent presided over his committee without the intrusion of major problems. Republican militants continued their agitation for preparedness and inundated the nation with propaganda for universal military training.¹¹ Despite these cries for action the Wilson administration was not inclined to go further down the road of preparedness. This stalemate was broken with the severance of diplomatic relations with Germany in February, 1917, and Wilson's later request for a declaration of war on April 2. With war a reality, the basis of military debate was dramatically altered. It was now agreed that the chief task of the nation was to raise an army for immediate action. How was that army to be raised?

When Wilson asked his Congress for a declaration of war, he also called for an "army of at least 500,000 men based on the principle of universal liability to service . . .," with additional increments to be added as they were needed.¹² This was the first

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 13,879.

¹¹Chase C. Mooney and Martha E. Layman, "Some Phases of the Compulsory Military Training Movement, 1914-1920," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVIII (March, 1952), 633. And see the interesting "Itinerary of Henry L. Stimson and Frederic R. Coudert through the West and South, April 1, 1917 to April 14, 1917, in Henry L. Stimson Papers, Yale University Library.

¹²*Birmingham Age-Herald*, April 3, 1917.

public intimation that Wilson had decided to use conscription to raise his army, and the point was almost lost in the initial immensity of being in the war. On April 4, Dent announced that his committee stood ready to hear specific recommendations from Secretary of War Newton D. Baker.¹³ At this point Dent's committee was composed of twelve Democrats and eight Republicans. Seven of the twelve Democrats were from the South, and most, like Dent, were "little army" men.¹⁴ The legend of Southern militarism found little representation here.

With great events in the offing, the *Montgomery Advertiser* pointed with pride to Dent's crucial role of leadership and observed that "it is expected that Mr. Dent will widen his reputation as a statesman."¹⁵ But what now ensued was not quite what the *Advertiser* had in mind.

On April 6, Secretary Baker testified before the House committee and spelled out the administration's desire for a conscriptive system. When Baker concluded his presentation it was clear that the wartime pressures of "supporting the president" would not be enough to guarantee smooth sailing for a draft bill. As a result of the first meeting with Baker, the Southern Democrats voiced their opposition to conscription. Some candidly stated their fear that conscription would undermine white supremacy. Dent announced that his opposition was based on a matter of conscience, but if convinced there was no other way to raise an army he would yield on his convictions.¹⁶

On April 9, Secretary Baker met once again with the military committee, and by now the battle lines were hardening. The Southerners argued for the traditional use of volunteering, and Baker, equally adamant, insisted that only conscription could raise the necessary troops.¹⁷ Again, as in 1916, the House military affairs committee had rebelled against presidential

¹³*Ibid.*, April 5, 1917.

¹⁴Besides Dent, the committee included Quin of Mississippi, Wise of Georgia, Nichols of South Carolina, Harrison of Virginia, and Garrett of Texas.

¹⁵*Montgomery Advertiser*, April 3, 1917.

¹⁶*New York Times*, April 7, 1917.

¹⁷*Mobile Register*, April 10, 1917.

policy. Once again the Southerners constituted the core of the rebellion. In 1916 Wilson had compromised to keep peace in the party; but in 1917 Wilson spoke for the nation as a wartime president, reinforced by the tides of patriotic ardor. It was unlikely that history would repeat itself.

With his selective service bill running into difficulties, Wilson summoned Dent to the White House on April 9. The President argued that the safety of the nation demanded a policy of conscription. Dent replied that a volunteer system could raise the required number of men, and that it was unlikely that his committee or the House would pass selective service.¹⁸ Although Dent later sought to minimize his differences with the President as simply a debate on the means to be used, the nation was awakening to the fact that all was not well in Washington. The press rallied to the side of Wilson, and even the *Montgomery Advertiser* was moved to observe that "this is no time for worn-out formulas" ¹⁹

On April 11, Wilson met with Champ Clark, Speaker of the House, and Claude Kitchin, Democratic majority leader, for further discussion of the draft issue. Clark and Kitchin, both of whom shared Dent's repugnance to conscription, reiterated that there was strong opposition in the House, and counseled that volunteering should be tried first.²⁰ On the following day, as if in answer to the suggestion, Secretary Baker announced that he stood "firmly and unalterably" in support of selective service.²¹ On April 17, Dent made a final effort to heal the growing rift. Once again he emphasized to Wilson the strength of House opposition and the possibilities of a compromise. But when Dent left the White House, the President called in the Republican leaders of the House for consultation. As a result, the ranking Republican on the House military affairs committee, Julius Kahn of California, became the administration's spokesman for the selective service bill.²² The Democratic

¹⁸New York *Times*, April 10, 1917.

¹⁹*Ibid.*; Birmingham *Age-Herald*, April 10, 1917; *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 11, 1917.

²⁰Birmingham *Age-Herald*, April 13, 1917.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Birmingham *News*, April 19, 1917.

majority on the committee now opposed their own Democratic president who was represented in the House by the Republicans. It was a singular beginning for a supposedly united effort at war.

Under Dent's leadership the House committee, unswayed by the application of Wilsonian pressure, amended the administration's draft bill. The President was authorized to call for 500,000 volunteers, and an additional 500,000 if required. But at the same time the President was empowered to register all young men nineteen to twenty-five, and if he found that sufficient forces has not been raised by volunteering, he could draft additional increments of 500,000 men.²³ The amendment was adroit, for the Southerners could correctly claim that they had not turned the President down on his draft proposals, and that in fact their plan would bring in men while the mechanics of the draft were still at work in registration. "As a whole," said Dent, "the committee gave the administration everything it asked for."²⁴ But no sophistries could hide the fundamental point of disagreement. The Southerners were determined to avoid conscription; the administration was determined not to allow volunteering and to proceed on the modern "scientific" method of manpower procurement. The core of that modern method was centralization and a subordination of the individual. It decried and denied the free-will response of volunteering, even if volunteering could raise the requisite numbers of men.

On April 23, debate opened in the House on the military bill. While the speeches and questions threw light on individual positions and attitudes, they added nothing to the basic terms of the controversy. But on this same day, Secretary of War Baker was moved to action. The Secretary "took it for granted that the bill . . . would eventually pass," and wired all governors to explain their duties and to request that they begin preparations for registration.²⁵ Colonel Hugh S. Johnson of the War Department, with the cooperation of the Government

²³*Congressional Record*, 65th Cong., Special Sess., 667; *House Reports*, 65th Cong., I, Report 17, 2.

²⁴*Birmingham Age-Herald*, April 23, 1917.

²⁵Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker; America at War*, 2 vols. (New York, 1931), I, 207.

Printing Office, had the masses of forms necessary for draft registration printed and packaged in plain wrappers. Baker then mailed out the forms to every mayor and sheriff who would supervise registration. In this fashion the War Department proved its point that drafting would not take longer than volunteering to raise troops.²⁶

While the War Department carried on its clandestine activities, President Wilson again threw his personal influence into the balance. During the second day of debate in the House, Wilson visited the Capitol and turned the screws of pressure on recalcitrant Democrats.²⁷ The effect of the presidential visit was illustrated in the Alabama delegation. While George Huddleston stood firm against conscription, William B. Bankhead, admitting his prior opposition, announced that he now intended to support the President.²⁸ By the third day of debate Dent's forces were dwindling, although the cause received at least dramatic reinforcement as Champ Clark left the Speaker's chair to castigate conscription.²⁹

On April 28, Representative Kahn introduced an amendment to strike the use of volunteering and proceed with the use of selective service. By a vote of 313 to 109 the Kahn amendment was accepted and the proponents of volunteering were defeated.³⁰ With slightly conflicting bills passed by House and Senate, Dent performed yeoman service in gaining acceptance of administration desires. At least temporarily his war with Wilson came to an end.³¹

As the war came to a close, and as the issues of postwar military policy began to be discussed, Dent's continued presence on the military affairs committee remained an obstacle to those desiring the retention of a large army and a program of

²⁶*Ibid.*, I, 212.

²⁷Alex Matthews Arnett, *Claude Kitchin and the Wilson War Policies* (Boston, 1937), 247.

²⁸*Congressional Record*, 65th Cong., Special Sess., 1,092, 1,096.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 1,119-22.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 1,555.

³¹Wilson praised Dent's services in driving the bill to a successful conclusion. *Ibid.*, 2,215.

compulsory military training. Prior to the congressional elections of 1918, the National Security League actively entered politics in an effort to purge Congress of its "un-American" personnel.³² Dent ranked high on the purge list along with the Socialist Victor Berger and Senator Robert LaFollette.³³ On August 22, 1918, the *Boston Transcript* printed a long and bitter editorial entitled "Down with Dent." As that newspaper phrased it, "from the day he went to the head of the committee as a successor of his prototype, Hay of Virginia, Dent has done as much as he dared, and probably more than any other member of the House to prevent the upbuilding of our land forces."³⁴ Then, citing the propaganda handouts of the National Security League, the newspaper reported Dent's "wrong" votes on major issues. He voted for the McLemore Resolution of 1916 denying American citizens the right to travel on the high seas, he voted against the Kahn amendment for selective service, and, in a list of culminating sins, he voted against the declaration of war on Germany. In view of Dent's obstruction "it is the downfall of Dent which is important and which the people have a right to demand."³⁵

While Dent's Alabama constituents were unlikely to be influenced by Boston newspapers, Dent replied to the charges of the *Transcript*. Gaining the floor of the House on September 6, he made a restrained rebuttal to his detractors. "That there can be a difference of opinion," said Dent, "as to the best method of raising an army . . . no honest man can deny."³⁶ But the *Transcript* had blatantly falsified his record. He had voted to table the McLemore Resolution, not to pass it. He had voted for the declaration of war. So much for the political propaganda of the National Security League.

While Dent handily won reelection in 1918, Republican militants won a point as well.³⁷ The new Congress was organized

³²Ward, "National Security League," 61.

³³According to the National Security League, "Dent had shown his "absolute unfitness to occupy the position that he held." *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁴The author expresses his appreciation to the Boston Public Library for making this edition available.

³⁵*Boston Transcript*, August 22, 1918.

³⁶*Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., 10,087.

³⁷Dent did not face strong opposition in his home district until the election of 1920.

by a Republican majority, and Dent's old foe Julius Kahn became the new chairman of the military affairs committee. While the change assured a more favorable hearing for army proponents, it signally failed to mark the end of Dent's influence on military policy.

In August of 1919 a War Department bill providing for a peacetime army of 500,000 men and a program of universal military training was introduced in the Senate. The bill had been prepared under the strict supervision of General Peyton C. March, Army Chief of Staff, and although its preparation had been rushed and Pershing's headquarters in France not even consulted, it supposedly was based on the lessons of the war.³⁸ The bill was approved by Secretary Baker and by President Wilson. On its introduction the bill aroused the immediate opposition of the National Guard Association, and, predictably, of the "little army" men in House and Senate.³⁹ The House military affairs committee tentatively cut March's 500,000 man army to 250,000, and stalled entirely on the volatile issue of peacetime military training.⁴⁰

The Senate military affairs committee, under the strong leadership of James W. Wadsworth, adopted a committee bill providing for universal military training and readied the measure for Senate debate and action.⁴¹ Once again, as in 1917, military questions split party lines. President Wilson supported the Wadsworth bill, a Republican sponsored measure, although a probable majority of Democrats opposed the bill. But both parties were testing their positions against their fears and hopes for the election of 1920.

In this atmosphere the House Democrats seized the initiative and their action caused a reverberation of shocks in both parties. Planned by Dent and Kitchin, a House Democratic

³⁸Frederick W. Brogdon, "The War Department's Role in the Army Reorganization of 1920" (Unpublished masters thesis, Georgia Southern College, 1968).

³⁹See Derthick, "Militia Lobby."

⁴⁰New York Times, June 12, 1919; *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., 8,572.

⁴¹General John McAuley Palmer, *America in Arms; The Experience of the United States with Military Organization* (New Haven, 1941), 168-169.

caucus was called for February 9, 1920.⁴² When the caucus convened both men argued strongly for the party advantage to be gained in repudiating compulsory training, and forcing the Republicans to go before the voters as the party of peacetime conscription. If any member of the caucus initially missed the point that he was being asked to repudiate his own President his eyes were quickly opened. The opposition to the move by Kitchin and Dent was led by Representative Charles P. Caldwell of New York. Caldwell read a letter from Wilson advising the caucus that it would be "unfortunate to make a party issue" on compulsory training, and that such a policy "may have the highest possible advantages."⁴³ The issue was squarely joined, and the answer of the caucus was definitive: by a vote of 106 to 17 a resolution was adopted against compulsory training or service. In the problematical task of opposing presidents Dent had now evened the score.⁴⁴

The action of the Democratic caucus was a decisive blow on military policy. In the House, the Republican steering committee decided to kill the issue of compulsory training by consigning it to further investigation. In the Senate even the redoubtable Wadsworth finally dropped the training provisions from his bill.⁴⁵ The "little army" men had triumphed, their fears of an all-powerful army were banished, the traditional values had been upheld.

But at this moment of victory for the "little army" men, Dent was defeated for reelection. His opponents charged that he had done nothing to protect white soldiers from the indignity and humiliation of having to recognize Negroes as superior officers, that he had allowed sick white soldiers to be bedded near Negroes in hospitals, and that he had been responsible for the appointment of Emmett Scott of Tuskegee as Third Assist-

⁴²New York *Times*, January 30, February 6, 1920.

⁴³*Ibid.*, February 10, 1920. The complete text of Wilson's letter, dated February 7, 1920, is given here.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*; Washington *Post*, February 10, 1920.

⁴⁵New York *Times*, February 11, 1920; *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2,837; Palmer, *America in Arms*, 179.