

## Lend Lease 15 - Oklahoma Green Corn Rebellion and Oregon Senator Harry Lane

### - Oklahoma Green Corn Rebellion of 1917:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green\\_Corn\\_Rebellion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Corn_Rebellion)
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/socialist-revolution-oklahoma-crushed-green-corn-rebellion-180973073/>
  - describe the situation of farmers: *In addition to being rack-rented, with the lease payable in cotton and corn, they were charged outrageous rates of interest by banks and merchants for the credit they needed to put another crop in the ground. Twenty percent interest was the baseline, 200 percent was not uncommon, and the highest compounded rates reached 2,000 percent. Buyers offered rock-bottom prices for cotton, and tenant farmers had no choice but to sell, and mortgage the next year's crop, to keep going. Adding to these burdens were the poor soil and periodic ravages of the pestilential boll weevil. No matter how hard they worked, or how thrifty they were, tenant farmers were trapped in perpetual debt and abject poverty.*
  - *In early August 1917, several hundred rebels gathered here by the farm of John Spears, who had hoisted the red flag of socialist revolution. [...] Most of the men on Spears Mountain, and at other rebel gathering places, were members of the Working Class Union (WCU), a secret socialist organization that vowed to destroy capitalism as well as resist the military draft for World War I. **The rebels planned to rout the forces of law and order in Oklahoma, and then march to Washington, D.C., where they would stop the war, overthrow the government and implement a socialist commonwealth. The rebel leaders had assured their followers that two million working men would rise up with them, forming an unstoppable army. On the long march east, they would feed themselves with green (yet to ripen) corn taken from the fields. Hence the rebellion's name.***
  - *In 1915, there were more registered Socialist Party members in Oklahoma than in New York, which had seven times the population and a much stronger tradition of left-wing politics. Oklahoma socialists built a statewide movement, but won the most converts in the southeastern counties, where a small elite of predominantly white landowners had established a cotton fiefdom in the old Indian Territory. They rented out most of their land to tenant farmers, black and white, who had migrated to Oklahoma from Texas, Arkansas and the Deep South, dreaming of opportunity on a new frontier.*
  - *In 1907, the German-born socialist organizer and editor Oscar Ameringer met these ragged, emaciated men and women. He had been organizing dockworkers in New Orleans when he agreed to come to Oklahoma and spread the budding socialist movement. What he found in the southeastern cotton counties was "humanity at its lowest possible level of*

*degradation.” Tenant farmers were living in crude shacks infested with bedbugs and other parasites. They were suffering the diseases of malnutrition, and toiling in the fields for up to 18 hours a day. Though the American Socialist Party, following Marxist orthodoxy, disdained farmers as petty capitalists and argued that agriculture should be collectivized, Ameringer and other socialist leaders in Oklahoma viewed “agricultural laborers” as members of the working class, and argued that anyone who works the soil has the right to own land. That was Marxist heresy—but it won over tens of thousands of debt-ridden small farmers.*

- *In 1914, the Sooner State elected 175 Socialist candidates to county and township positions, including six to the state legislature, alarming the political establishment. Between 1915 and 1917, the recently founded Working Class Union recruited thousands of angry, frustrated men in southeast Oklahoma, perhaps as many as 20,000. Their activities ranged from legal strikes, boycotts and lawsuits, to night-riding, bank robberies, barn-burning and dynamiting farm equipment.*
- *When the plot was set in motion: They cut telephone and telegraph lines, and set fire to railroad bridges and trestles. One group attempted—but failed—to dynamite an oil pipeline. On the morning of August 3, they mustered on Spears Mountain (also known as Spears Ridge), some 400-strong. They roasted a large quantity of corn and a stolen heifer. Then they waited for Uncle Sam’s troops to come, or a signal to begin marching to Washington. [This was about all that happened. Once the posse arrived, see below, they dispersed almost immediately.]*
- *The Smithsonian journalist reviewed Bureau of Investigation “Old German Files” (on anti-Great War activities) at the National Archives branch in College Park Maryland and found that the WCU was filled with federal informants who knew all their plans*
- *The article also includes an August 1917 front page from the Daily Oklahoman where the biggest headline under the one about the government calling out a posse to strike back at the draft-dodger rebellion was one about the Kerensky government teetering. Matching rhetoric on the rebellion in Oklahoma describes a “Reign of Terror.” The posse strategy, as opposed to immediately deploying federal troops, was apparently effective at countering the rebellion because anti-Great War radicals were still reluctant to fire on or murder their own neighbors instead of the army. Most participants refused to talk about it even to their own family members and so it faded quickly from the local memory.*
- *In January 1920, about two and a half years after the failed uprising, a county draft board member, was ambushed and murdered by radicals who left a message “never again would he send men to war”*
- *Many totally unconnected Socialist Party of America and IWW members in Oklahoma and nationwide were arrested for purported but non-existent*

involvement in the uprising, to get them in jail long enough to disrupt their other activities. Most were released fairly easily due to total lack of evidence. Some actual participants did some prison time including some in military prison in Kansas.

- <https://libcom.org/library/us-green-corn-rebellion-1917>
- <http://monthlyreview.org/2010/11/01/dreams-of-revolution-oklahoma-1917/>
  - But there are many more questions. The most loaded is, Why focus on August 3, the hill, the rout, as if the entire rebellion came to a head and ended there? Cunningham and all the histories so far note WCU force and violence elsewhere, before and after August 3, but always in individual actions, as isolated and futile as the action on the hill. Why not look deeper into these, for connections among them: the dynamiting of the Dewar water tower on June 4, the day before the draft took effect; the anti-draft protests over the next ten days in Seminole, Holdenville, and way south in the old Chickasaw capital of Tishomingo; the intimidation of neutrals in Pottawatomie County in mid-July; the secret rendezvous of reds at El Reno on July 17 and 24; the wildcat strike at a Wilburton mine on August 2, an ambush of the Seminole County sheriff and a deputy outside Wewoka that afternoon, and the cutting of telephone and telegraph wires in the area, the attempts to burn the M-K-T bridge below Konawa, the Frisco bridge below Sasakwa, and the MO&G bridge downriver east of Calvin, all the night before the rebellion; the big concentration at Lone Dove, north of Sasakwa, and the ambush at Stonewall, in Pontotoc County, the day after; another concentration southwest of Holdenville, at Spaulding, and the Battle of Four Corners, near the Rock Island and MO&G junction at Calvin, on August 5; the arson at a grain elevator in McAlester and a threat in mid-August “to burn the town,” to release WCU prisoners in the state pen there; the arson at cotton gins in Pontotoc County in October? All this suggests not umpteen different acts of ignorant, angry loners, but a serious conspiracy and extensive, though poorly coordinated and badly disrupted organization.<sup>15</sup> In this light, we might understand the Green Corn Rebellion better if we called it the Working Class Union rebellion.
- **Oregon Senator Harry Lane** (1913-1917)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\\_Lane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Lane) (I think this Wikipedia page is heavily sourced to “The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon” by Robert Johnston, 2003,

which is where I got the idea for this segment even though I really didn't like the book overall)

- a pro-communist Democrat who was kind of anti-immigrant worker but otherwise one of the most progressive US elected officials at a high level.
- Anti war, anti imperialist, pro indigenous sovereignty (his grandfather was the polar opposite as territorial governor).
  - Opposed US control of the Philippines
  - Opposed US involvement in World War One (voted against it and participated in filibuster efforts by Robert LaFollette Sr)
  - Opposed US involvement in the Mexican Revolution civil wars
  - Opposed Wilson's unilateral executive actions on the war before the official Declaration of War by Congress
  - From a speech while serving on the Committee on Indian Affairs, where he championed an end to the "civilizing" policies and pushed for anti-poverty efforts on the reservations etc: "the white man is astride them and is at work taking everything they have" (he similarly clashed publicly with Dixiecrats for their horrid statements on Black residents of the South)
- Elected in November 1912 in a six-way split election, after a campaign that cost him \$75 total (lol).
- Lane's de facto chief-of-staff was his daughter's husband Isaac McBride, an active member of the Socialist Party of America and an unofficial liaison to the IWW on behalf of the Senator
- Lane believed that anti-trust efforts were totally useless and only the nationalization of natural monopolies like telephones/telegraphs and mining concerns could fix the problems of monopoly corporations (he referred to them as "big business and crooks") and he had advocated for municipal ownership of electric utilities in places like Portland Oregon
- He was also vocally pro women's suffrage
- Died in office in May 1917, less than 2 months after voting against entering World War One.
- Before his Senate tenure he had been Mayor of Portland for 2 terms although he struggled to have much of an effect against City Council and is mostly remembered today for founding the Rose Festival. (His other smaller successes were in promoting women and setting up a statue honoring Sacagawea, at which he gave a speech denouncing white violence against the natives. He also tended to have better luck sending things to ballot questions instead of trying to win Council votes.)