

News Article, Smith Blasts At New Deal

By The News-Telegram

"Sell-outs" and "Mickey Mouse hypocrites," were only a few of the scathing remarks directed at Oregon Townsend Club members during an October 1936 speech by Louisiana native, and radical minister of the Disciples of Christ church, Rev. Gerald L.K. Smith at Portland's Benson Technical School. Smith arrived in Oregon as speaker for the newly established Union Party and an advocate of the "Share the Wealth" movement that spread across the nation in the earliest years of the Great Depression.

Whether or not Oregon's Townsend Club members were hypocrites was, in many regards, beside the point. Thousands of Oregonians, especially those in rural areas like Lane, Jackson, and Josephine Counties, and elderly residents across the state, supported the populist "Share the Wealth" and Townsend Plan movements even if they did not support Smith's radical political stances. "Share the Wealth," originally coined by Louisiana Senator Huey Long, called on the federal government to guarantee every American family \$5,000 annual income to help relieve economic distress during the Great Depression (1935-1945). The Townsend Plan, proposed by Dr. Francis Townsend in 1934, called for a \$200 monthly pension for each person over the age of 60. Although internal fighting would divide the Populist party in the mid-1930s, the Depression-era Townsend Plan, especially, held wide-spread support in Oregon through the early 1940s. In Jackson County, Townsend Club members attended rallies and built meeting halls. And in 1935, Lane County voters recalled Legislator Howard Merriam after he failed to support the Townsend Plan for relief aid during an Oregon House committee meeting. World War II changed the nature of populist party politics forever as thousands of previously unemployed men and women entered the military and labor force.

Written by Sarah Griffith, © Oregon Historical Society, 2003

Oregon History Project

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/news-article-smith-blasts-at-new-deal/>