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Doan: THE LA FOLLETTES AND THE WISCONSIN IDEA

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THE LA FOLLETES AND THE WISCONSIN IDEA. By *Edward N. Doan*. New York: Rinehart and Company. 1947. Pp. 311. \$4.

Since the turn of the century, Wisconsin has been perhaps the foremost of the "insulated chambers" for social experiments. Cause and effect of much of the progressive sentiment are the La Follettes. Nationally, the influence of the senior La Follette on specific reform legislation antedating the New Deal was very great; more important, perhaps, was the movement and ideal which he typified and crystallized. Until his abortive presidential campaign in 1924, "Fighting Bob" remained a Republican. His was one of the strongest beliefs that an articulate minority can secure change in regular party philosophy. The recent return of the Wisconsin Progressive party to the Republican fold, described in this book, indicates a reaffirmance of this credo by "Young Bob." The progressive idea is an important and fascinating American development; the La Follettes were and are important and fascinating figures; both men and idea deserve careful appraisal. The present volume, by an officer in the Progressive Republican Association, is a disappointment in its blind devotion to every La Follette act and gesture and in its failure to probe the character and apparent contradictions of the "Wisconsin Idea." Why, for example, was the elder La Follette far ahead of his time in domestic legislation, yet an "irreconcilable" in international affairs? Perhaps it is unfair to ask an historian to undertake detailed evaluation of a contemporary—yet an associate of "Old Bob," Teddy Roosevelt, received such treatment in Pringle's hands. Facts on the lives and records of the senior and junior La Follette may be found here, and any description of a curiously successful underdog movement has a certain fascination. But a penetrating analysis is still to be written.