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William Spry: Man of Firmness, Governor of Utah
William L. Roper and Leonard J. Arrington

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WILLIAM L. ROPER AND LEONARD J. ARRINGTON. *William Spry: Man of Firmness, Governor of Utah*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah State Historical Society, 1971. 236 pp. \$6.50.

(Reviewed by J. Keith Melville, professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University. Active in Utah politics, Dr. Melville has researched and published in that field.)

William Spry came onto the political scene in Utah at the time the Progressive Movement was spreading across the nation. These winds of change were also blowing over Utah in the first years of the twentieth century. The period was one of significant economic, political, and social transformation as the new state of Utah emerged from its conflict-riddled, territorial cocoon.

The economic and social issues which were crying for attention also demanded a political rapprochement between the non-Mormons (many of whom were anti-Mormon) and the Mormon residents of the area. An effort at political accommodation had taken place when the People's party of the Mormon Church was abolished and the people instructed to join one of the two national parties. The majority inclined to the Democratic party, but President Joseph F. Smith and the First Presidency of the Church, as well as the Church members who were "called" to be Republicans, usually supported the Republican party—the party of Reed Smoot, Apostle and Senator.

A majority of the non-Mormons also moved into the Republican party—even those who had been Democrats in other parts of the country. The responsibility of holding this coalition of Mormon and non-Mormon Republicans together fell to William Spry when he was selected as the chairman of the Republican State Committee in 1904. Spry worked quickly and effectively to unite the Republicans solidly behind the party's candidates in the 1904 election. His efforts were seriously threatened, however, when Senator Thomas Kearns split from the Republican party and organized the anti-Mormon faction into the American party. Kearns was peeved because the LDS Church support he had previously enjoyed had been withdrawn, and he felt the Republican nominees were too closely identified with the Church.

The success of the American party in the 1905 election in Salt Lake City clearly threatened Senator Smoot's chances for reelection in 1908. William Spry was brought into the Smoot machine, known as "The Federal Bunch," because of his popularity and his political abilities. In 1908 the supporters of Smoot shifted their backing from incumbent Governor Cutler to Spry. They believed they needed to have the best "vote-getter" on the ticket and that "Cutler would have to be shoved aside, rudely if necessary, for the good of the party.

Spry won the nomination of the Republican party and went on to win the governorship, which he held for two four-year terms. He tried for a third term, but was refused the nomination of the party. Two years later he ran for Congress and was defeated. His political career ended in an appointive position as United States Commissioner of Public Lands—an appointment arranged by Senator Smoot.

William Spry: Man of Firmness, Governor of Utah, tells this political story in a delightful, readable way. It puts Utah into national perspective as a leader in the social legislation of the Progressive Era. It follows the conflicts over prohibition and the joys of completing the state capitol and commissioning the battleship *Utah*. It recounts the labor violence which troubled Utah, the role of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in Utah labor troubles, and the exciting "Joe Hill" murder case.

The book lacks balance, however, as much more attention is paid to the Joe Hill case than it deserves (almost a third of the book), and too little coverage is given of the progressive social legislation of Spry's first term (a bare outline of only four pages). There are some episodes that do not fit at all, such as chapter 28, "Dynamiters Attack the West," and some anecdotes which are not relevant.

Throughout the book, the authors seem to be somewhat politically naive, such as the use of Frank Kent's quote from *The Great Game of Politics* that control the State Committee is "the key to the political machine." This was inserted to support the notion that Spry, as state chairman of the Republican party, held the political power in the state, when it is obvious from the book itself that Senator Smoot controlled the political machine and the Republican party. But this may

be the inherent weakness in most biographies, which present favorable, if inaccurate, images of the subject. This biography has the added problem of being written for its patrons, the children of Governor Spry.

These problems are more than offset, however, in the contribution the biography makes in bringing into print some knowledge about a little-known period of Utah's political history. Most of the scholarly studies about the period are still in manuscript form as theses, with the exception of a few journal articles, which are not readily available to the reading public.