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When Idaho became a state in 1890, with voting members of congress and a chance to participate in Congressional elections, national issues became more important in local politics. Anti-Mormon complaints were resolved on a national level, and sectional clashes over what to do with North Idaho no longer were appropriate. North Idaho's aspirations for congressional representation created problems in 1890, but Idaho's boundaries no longer could be changed by congressional legislation.

A number of prominent Idaho leaders--still divided into political factions that had developed years before--had ambitions to become United States senators, and Idaho's legislature complied by electing four of them (one to a term about to expire) to fill only three positions. That action created more Republican factional resentment in a situation already complicated by North Idaho's disaffection. Farm discontent, associated with issues that produced a national Populist Party with an interest in silver coinage affected Idaho in 1892. An abrupt decline in silver prices, which led to mine closures and a Coeur d'Alene mine labor war complete with martial law, had a particularly severe effect in Idaho. Dissident Republicans provided unexpectedly strong Populist leadership, and in 1896 Idaho's Republican Party nominated William Jennings Bryan for president. An ineffective Idaho Republican minority insisted upon supporting William McKinley, but they managed to elect only one member in Idaho's entire legislature in 1896. An unstable combine of Democrats, Silver Republicans, and Populists controlled Idaho until after 1900, when new concerns finally replaced silver coinage as a dominant Idaho political issue.

Competition among livestock interests for grazing lands (in short supply after 1890) led to strife on Idaho's public domain in 1896 and to a bitterly contested court battle that substituted for more violent sheep and cattle wars experienced in Wyoming and New Mexico. Before that battle was over, Coeur d'Alene mine labor hostilities resumed, with a major dynamiting incident in 1899 and another siege of martial law. As a new western state, Idaho started off with far more turbulent politics and more dramatic economic struggles than might have been expected.

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