THE PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

I present my compliments to those who replied to my request. They will see that I have profited by their suggestions.

In all the replies, there is not one suggestion that the farmers should exercise their power by organizing for class ascendency. Not one has suggested combination with commercial and capitalistic groups, industrial coalitions, labor organizations, or political bodies. This is in line with the attitude of the great agricultural organizations, that now have so much latent and potential power. For example, the recently organized American Farm Bureau Federation, representing the powerful farm bureau organizations of the United States, adopts its first resolution as follows: "We declare our independence of affiliation with any commercial, labor or industrial organization, but maintain a cooperative attitude toward all movements promoting the welfare of American institutions." These national organizations are not combinations.

It is significant that the farmer takes first the ground of citizenship. He wants to be a better farmer in order that he may be a better citizen. He asks for no group perferment. He wants only fair treatment, not mass-action. The American farmer is neither capitalst or proletarian.

The Association for Agricultural Legislation should exercise its influence to withhold the farmer from becoming a partisan, a separatist, and a particularist. We must have no agrarian party. We must have no political combinations and manoeuvring for class aggrandizement, in which the farmer seeks to dominate. There must be a spirit of co-operation and accommodation, and no clash between producer and consumer.

This Association must safeguard the individual responsibility and self-action of the man on the land.

At this point we are confronted by two theories of the development of society. One theory assumes that progress is made by war between factions or sides, one part making drives on another part and seeking for victory. The other theory assumes that progress should be, on the whole, an orderly process and proceed in a more or less consistent evolution. In the former theory, advancement depends on strife; in the latter it depends on co-operation and public service. It may be true that partisanship has effected much of our progression, but we are now ready to ask whether henceforth we should not transfer to the other basis. It is never true that there are only two parties to a class conflict: the actual sufferer in the end is likely to be the innocent third party, the general unclassified public. Partisanship has been well expressed in the past between races, the rich and the poor, church bodies, tribal chiefs, sovereignties, political clans. It continues to be represented in political methods, and it is now evident in the antagonisms between magnates and the populace, anarchists and constructionists, capital and
labor. Is this Association prepared to face these theories in the prosecution of its work?

I have little fear of political class solidarity of farmers for the reason that what we call "farming" is not one thing. It is of many occupations. The raisers of roses and beef cattle have little in common in respect of occupational legislation. The cotton-grower and the wool-grower have few points of fraternal contact. Where is the class-unionism between market-gardeners and the wheat-raisers of the Northwest, between orange-growers and tobacco-planters, nurserymen and stock-breeders, dairymen and beekeepers, sheep-rangers and cattle-rangers? Farming represents a series of occupations, agreeing in the contact with the earth but differing in methods, products, markets, mental aptitudes. Some of the ranges are competitors, even commercial antagonists. The very diversity and separateness of these multitudes of interests make for safety in public policy.

We are to expect strong drives from certain occupations or classes or regions of farmers, but it is difficult to project a faction or party of all farmers, the country over. We are to dispose of our fears that there may be a "farmers' trust." The occupational drives may even be necessary and unavoidable, as society now functions, to gain opportunity and justice, as it has been necessary in order to obtain justice for the workingman. We commend united action; members of cooperative and other associations are bound by the rules to which they subscribe; but the principle at stake in the general organizations of farmers is this,—to reserve to every person his freedom of action, the man to be his own master, attainment above the basic wage or income to be on merit, and the organization not to vote the membership as a body; and the public-service relationships are to be stimulated. All this will express itself directly or indirectly in many kinds of legislation.

It is true, of course, that farmers of similar occupation may restrict or expand their production simultaneously over a large area as the movement of prices and supply of labor may dictate, but this is a very different action from an organized drive, strike or lockout of all men who till the soil. There will come to be a common sentiment among farmers on leading question in politics and trade: this sentiment should be carefully considered by legislators and publicists.

Again, we must forget the traditional notion that the farmer is only a producer, and therefore is in a class or range by himself. No longer is the farmer a little feudal master, raising his own living and serving himself in his community to all his necessities. He now raises a line of produce, or is even confined to a speciality; this produce he sells, and with the proceeds he buys food, groceries, clothing, apparatus, machinery, books; the day of homespun is gone, of the home-tanning of hides, the kitchen manufacture of cheese and largely even of butter. He is a heavy purchaser of standard supplies; the advertising pages of the agricultural journals attest to this. His outlook is as broad as his practices.
The type of educational training that has been provided for the rural people in the United States works directly against class factionism. It develops the pride of the individual in his and her own work. This education is founded on the teaching of natural science, which always reaches first for discoveries and facts, which tests every action against the verities of nature, which puts the man in his background to work out his problem. No other man can work out his problem for him. He is making a personal preparation. His education is based on the idea that he must fit himself to be a more effective producer; this is the development of personal merit and is therefore a form of public service. His actions formerly were based largely on tradition; even this is better than to base them on the opinions of organizations because it at least allows for individual variation; now they must be based on ascertained facts.

This education by means of agriculture on a vast scale (expressed primarily in the Land Grant Act) is the greatest educational movement yet known to us. By another generation it will have re-made the mind of the agricultural people. Just now it is the fashion amongst us to think in terms of organizations, movements, corporations, drives, projects, groups, society, averages, percentages. It is coming to be the fashion, also, to regret the over-development of class consciousness: this consciousness is the child of its parent.

Some of the people must think in terms of natural facts, experience, personal contact with the earth, phenomena, the weather, seed-time and harvest that faileth not, the simple natural order of things as they are. In another fifty years, the rural people will have a directer and safer preparation for its work than any other non-professional range of our population, barring not one.

It is to be specially noted that this training provides the subject-matter for discussions before all kinds of farmer organizations. The technical scientific and commercial subjects give character to the meetings. Thereby are the programs along constructive lines, and the meetings do not propagate the habit of misfortune and disaffection and antagonism. The debates and discussions of this character exert a positive wholesome influence on the partakers and color their attitudes towards affairs. They breed the spirit of self-help. Unfortunately, the philosophy of grievance, discontent and complaint is abroad amongst us, and it propagates itself and grows big by habitual discussion. It breeds the spirit of dependence, and sows the seeds of strife.

These numerous people, standing on the earth, owned by nobody, impossible to stampede, each man responsible for his program, cautious of novelty, moving separately rather than in crowds, temperate in hero-worship, will absorb the shock in the conflicts of the classes. They should be a stabilizing influence.

It is just because the farmer stands between and behind the classes that he may render inestimable service to society by helping to umpire the disputes. If he joins with either or any faction,
his power for good is lost. He then becomes merely another bel-
ligerent.

The one outstanding problem before the world today, as men
and women assuming some measure of social sanity and looking to
the future, is to see that justice is assured before the situations be-
come so bad that we are called on to remedy injustice. Any sys-
tem of ex post facto remedies, of locking the stable after the horse is
stolen, is a pitiful exhibition of inefficiency and impotency. What
is the purpose of government in this latter time if it is not to set
the house in order, to anticipate conflicts of the classes, to establish
a form of oversight that will maintain continuous investigations
into the relations of opposed interests and to remove the injustices
and dangers? Shall we nurture the seeds of selfishness and not ex-
pect to reap the harvest? Must the contestants make war on so-
ciety that grievances may be heard? Is the old Anglo-Saxon
remedy by petition dead amongst us? Are there no prophylactics
in politics? Are we still children playing with public affairs?
After twenty centuries, have we not yet learned the lesson of the
foolish virgins?

I trust that the American Association for Agricultural Legisla-
tion will have a long and fruitful history.

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