

FIELD AND PURPOSE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR AGRICULTURAL LEGISLATION.

Presidential address before the A. A. A. L., at Chicago,
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The past generation has been known by the domination of the financial and corporate interests. The present generation is known by the emergence of labor organization. The coming generation will see the rise of the farmer.

The land and the tillage thereof are at the bottom of our civilization, and they condition governments and institutions. This is both because sustenance is derived from the earth and because the keepers of the earth are the most numerous people. It is also because every keeper has a stake in the earth and is necessarily devoted to a program in life.

The farmer holds to the personal ownership of property. He is never out of employment. He is a solitary man rather than gregarious. He is primarily a producer and his income is a consequence of his own application. He follows a natural day. He is conservative because nature is conservative. He is responsible for his materials from seed-time unto harvest. He is not a wage-earner: he works for himself. He is not a managed man.

A farm is a family enterprise, whether on a basis of ownership or of stabilized tenantry. Farming is not a syndicate business. Its existence does not depend on the so-called "farm-laborer" problem, if by that term we mean the hiring of permanent help outside the family. Not all the farms, by any means, have outside "hired help" by the year. Moreover, the labor is of many sources. Some of it is the sons of farmers and neighbors who have a certain amount of time to sell either in the country or the city. Some of it is persons saving money to buy land. The gregarious labor of the industries is practically unknown on farms, except in certain limited seasons in a few agricultural industries, and this is a different element from the real farm labor of the open country and is subject to a different set of economic conditions. If farm labor were to make too heavy demands, the farmer would simply reduce his operations, use more machinery, change his plans, and get along without it. Production would decrease. In the end, the land itself would be the sufferer.

The consumer as well as the farmer is vitally affected by these situations. It follows that the character or nature of the agricultural program will vastly color the public polity. We have here a set of conditions reaching to the last elements of society, and a

fundamental field for the broadest kind of coöperation. This program will crystallize into legislation. What shall be the nature of this legislation?

To be of service in this foregathering situation, the American Association for Agricultural Legislation is founded. It has good precedent in the American Association for Labor Legislation, which for a series of years has accomplished much progress for the protection, insurance and welfare of the industrial workers. Yet the field of the new Association is distinct, its methods are to be determined, and its purposes are still to be presented to the public. In many lines of agricultural legislation, we have not yet developed a consistent polity nor have we sufficient knowledge to enable us to assume a positive program. The basic principles are yet largely to be established. Under such conditions, partisan and prejudiced legislation, founded largely on discontent, is likely to sweep over the country.

The Association was organized two years ago. I trust it is auspicious that its nativity was in the city of brotherly love. I was not one of its founders, not even a godfather: therefore may I speak impartially and with personal rather than organizational conviction. The official aims of the Association have been published in an excellent statement by the Secretary. With this statement I am in full accord, but I can not make a President's address merely by repeating the explanation of the Secretary, who, by the way, is the executive officer of the Association. Therefore I appealed to the members, asking each one what is his conception of the field and what is the work the Association should undertake. In the inquiry, I stated that in my presidential address, "I shall outline the purposes of the Association, in the endeavor to crystallize the expectations of the membership and to inform the public."

About one-third of the members replied, many of them at considerable length. This I consider to be a liberal proportion of responses to a circular letter, indicating that large numbers of the members are conscious of their membership. After reading these many letters I am happy to disagree with a few of them, and to my purposes to crystallize the expectations of the membership and to inform the public I shall add another,—to inform the membership.

It is to be understood, as I have indicated, that I make a personal statement for which the Association is in no way responsible. The statement represents a point of view on the rural situation: certainly there should be a point of view before there is legislation. I shall repeat some of the suggestions under different captions, in order that we may see the subjects from several sides.

THE BASIS OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Secretary's pronouncement says of the Association: "Its purpose is to be the farmer's research organization." Its aim is to afford a "scientific preparation for sound agricultural legislation," "to work out problems of legislation and to help lay a sound