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# The Farmers in the New Party.

by Hal M. Ware

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The whole system of American agriculture and land tenure is bankrupt. During the last census period the farm mortgage debt increased more than it had in 130 years before 1910. It jumped from a little more than \$1.5 billion in 1910, to nearly \$8 billion in 1920, and has increased more rapidly since. To this figure add chattel mortgages, taxes, interest, promissory notes, and store debts, and you get a staggering total, with about the same chance of being paid as had the German war debt.

Throughout the country these cold statistics are reflected in the tragic human dramas of foreclosures, tax sales, child slavery, increasing tenantry, and suicides. This is the story of the farmers brought to the July 3rd Convention. For the farmer there is nothing left but a new deal. He has reached the primitive necessity to fight for his land.

The usual farm mis-leaders were noticeably absent. But the militants were there. William Bouck, for instance; anyone who has followed the National Grange movement knows of his courageous struggle out in Washington. Appreciation of his type of leadership was shown when he was elected permanent chairman of the Convention. And these farmers had come to cement an alliance with the industrial workers, through a Federated Party. Every time a pussyfooter spoke for "postponement," a militant farmer rose up and demanded the immediate formation of the Party they came to create.

"Dad" Walker, a vigorous, white-haired pioneer member of the North Dakota legislature, voiced the imperative demands from the soil. He had left his farm work piling up, and come 1,000 miles in a Ford with four other delegates, in order to get something done. He wanted no pussyfooting, and said so. He demanded the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party.

Another militant farmer was Brother Bowles, a cherry farmer from Washington, who represented the Farmer-Labor Party. He stated his determination to go with the rest of the farmers in insisting upon the formation of the new party. The Non-Partisan League delegate from California came late, but he soon dispelled all doubt of his position. "I don't know what you've done," he said, "but I do know that a group of farmers back in California will skin me alive if I go back without a Labor Party. Those fellows dug up \$10 apiece to send me here to get it. Our motto is 'We'll stick,' and you can count on it."

W.H. Green, another farmer from Nebraska, and Brother Fedje, member of the North Dakota legislature, were active. A committee of nine was elected by the farmer caucus to draw up the agrarian demands of the Party. It represented a cross-section of the farmers present. Besides Bouck and Bowles from Washington, Walker of North Dakota, Mrs. Hanson of Wisconsin, a dirt farmer's wife, and just plain farmers, there was also Lieutenant-Governor of Wisconsin Comings, and H. Samuels, who ran for Governor of Idaho on a farm mortgage moratorium plank. The latter is also on the National Committee of the Non-Partisan League.

The demands of the farmers were drawn up in five points, as follows:

1. The land was created for all people and we demand a system of land tenure that will eliminate landlordism and tenantry and will secure the land to the users of the land.
2. Public ownership of all means of transportation, communication, natural resources, and public utilities, to be operated by and for the people.
3. The issue and control of all money and credit by the Government, for use instead of profit.
4. All war debts to be paid by a tax on excess profits.
5. A moratorium for all working farmers on their farm mortgages for a period of five years.

Here is the voice of the farmers who have their feet on the soil. Significant above all is the fact that these demands were made in a convention dominated by the industrial workers, and passed unanimously. The alliance between workshop and farm has been cemented. Unlike other political revolts of the farmers, this one has its roots in their economic organizations. It was delegates from farm organizations that joined hands with the rank and file of Labor.

The farmers have no illusions about the new Party. They know it will not have the mushroom growth of the Non-Partisan League, nor will it be a Party dominated by the agricultural elements, as was the Populist revolt. They have learned the futility of “farmer friends” and “farm bloc,” with their miserable patchwork legislation. They have joined the Federated Farmer-Labor Party knowing that it is but the beginning of a long, hard struggle by the workers and working farmers for control of the Government. They know that only through such a coalition, and such a struggle, can they achieve their end — *the land*.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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