FARMERS WANT SQUARE DEAL DECLARES THEIR DELEGATE TO INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE

Charles S. Barrett Asserts That Agricultural Portion of Population Has Been Neglected and Abused by Both Labor and Capital and Insists That Tillers of Soil Are Clamoring for Recognition They Deserve.

Statement of Charles S. Barrett at the recent industrial conference, Pan-American Building, Washington, D. C.

If we are to make any real progress in this effort to arrive at an understanding beneficial to our restless population we must be perfectly frank with each other. The time has come when plain speaking must accompany intelligent action and when all interests must, if the peril to this nation is to be removed, deal candidly with each other.

I am among those who believe that the farmers have not been dealt with in a fair, open manner. They have not been treated as an integral, important and necessary part of industry. The fact that agriculture is basic, fundamental and essential to the life of the world has either been ignored or given scant notice. The attitude of government toward agriculture is that of an irate parent toward a naughty, irresponsible boy.

Agriculture has been treated by the government as something that ought to be governed rigidly, but should never have any part in government. Other groups have behaved as though agriculture were a side issue, having no rights that should be fully regarded and not entitled to be consulted on the mighty issues of the day. Government has urged it to produce food and cotton and other essentials, but it has never apparently given thought, or at least serious thought to the reward that it should receive for its investment of money and manual energy.

Farmers Most Important.

When will the other two great members of what ought to be a government triumvirate recognize the fact that agriculture is the most important of all, that nothing can be setled without the assent of agriculture, that nothing can be made permanent for the permanent good of humanity without the active cooperation of agriculture. To attempt to settle the grave questions now agitating us without the assistance of the farmer is like trying to put Hamlet on the stage with the hero left out.

It is not my desire to be hypocritical or cry wolf until I at least see the tracks of the animal in the snow. But I would like to ask why has agriculture been given such scant notice in connection with a conference fundamentally so important? Why were only three men as representatives of the greatest industry in the world invited to participate in these momentous deliberations? What is responsible for the fact that agriculture is not given a place commensurate with its importance and on a footing of equality with the other two members of the mighty triumvirate?

Is it because we have been comparatively quiescent? Is it because we have not gone into the highways and byways campaigning for them? Is it because there is a suspicion in certain responsible minds that we are not organized and consequently are incapable of exerting the influence which can be exercised only when we march as a solid phalanx?

Need Farmers' Aid.

It cannot be that anybody is so blissfully innocent as to believe that the immense questions before this conference can be settled without the aid of the farmer. And can anybody honestly suppose that if an agreement between capital and labor is reached in which agriculture has no effective voice, that agreement will be permitted to stand?

Don't, gentlemen, allow yourselves to be deluded into the false idea that agriculture cannot kick, that it will be forever quiescent, that it will continue to be exploited and made the football of other great national interests. Uncle Rueben is waking up. He realizes that he has not had a square deal. He is by nature conservative. He hates bolshevism. He dispises all means that aim at the subversion of the American constitution and would fight to the last ditch to save the country from red infamy and I. W. W. diabolism.

But do you think that the man who would fight I. W. W.ism, who has a holy contempt for bolshevism, would not also fight for his own rights? He is conservative, but that doesn't mean that he is ready to be walked over, to be trampled upon, to be made the catspaw of the scheming politician on the one hand and the victim of the profiteer on the other.

Has Been Neglected.

I said the time for plain speaking had arrived and I am talking plainly. The neglect of the farmer in connection with this conference has aroused a suspicion, I fear, in many minds that organized labor and organized capital might get together on some plan for reducing the high cost of living and allaying unrest and that the tiller of the soil would be made to pay the bill. If any member of this conference holds to such a view let him understand now and forever afterwards that the farmer will not make up the deficit; he will not be the goat. He will work with you on any constructive plan which promises adjustment of the tragic difficulties which now confront our beloved land, but you can't pass the buck to him nor make him the goat.

Personally I believe in organized labor. I have always contended that the man in the workshop, the man in the factory, the man in the steel mill or he who works for a living in any legitimate way has a right to organize. Organized labor has not always reciprocated these sentiments as far as the farmer is concerned, but that has nothing to do with the principle. It is righteous. It is proper and I think the director of great affairs who refuses to confer with his workmen, or delegates chosen by them has either misread the signs of the times or is totally without that vision necessary for the adjustment of differences between capital and labor.

Held Falsely Responsible.

I say I believe in organized labor and organized industry, but I want to warn organized labor that it cannot successfully alone conduct the mighty affairs of this nation. I want to warn organized capital that it cannot by itself bring order out of chaos. Both must bring Uncle Rueben in and each must concede to him a square deal.

The farmer has been falsely held responsible for the high cost of living. Superficial thinkers have attributed to him a desire for heartless and shameless profiteering. They have said that it is because he has asked certain prices for his hogs, his cattle, his wheat, his corn and his vegetables that the people in urban communities have suffered actual hunger. They have accused him of hoarding, when he has simply laid by certain supplies to be used when the harvesting season has passed.

Then organized labor says, "let's reduce the price paid to the original producer for his wheat, his corn, his cotton and his beef, mutton and pork, then we will be able to get cheaper bread, cheaper meat and cheaper clothing." Organized capital says "fine." But neither recognizes the fact that the farmer in all these years of high costs has had to bear the burden and heat of the day. He has had to make up deficits.

He has been obliged to pay excessive wages, immensely increased prices for his equipment and enormously augmented prices for his clothing.

During the past few weeks pork has declined in price, beef has gone down and corn receded. Has any manufacturer suggested that in exchange for these favors to the people forced by economic conditions over which the farmer has no control, he should buy his farm machinery at reduced rates? No there is no suggestion of reciprocal advantage. I congratulate the beef eaters of Washington on the fact that they no longer pay 60 cents a pound for sirloin steak or 70 cents per pound for lamb chops. But has any man or collection of men suggested that the men who raise these articles of food receive liberal discounts on their purchases of farm machinery?

Given No Voice.

Now, gentlemen, permit me to mention a matter which I approach with great reluctance. The farmer has been given practically no voice in the direction of governmental affairs. As I said a little while ago, he has been urged to produce food and to sell it at a price allowing him the very smallest margin of profit, but has he been consulted regarding the agricultural policy of the nation? Has he been placed on government commissions, having to do with agriculture? Has he been asked to assist any department of government in its efforts to arrive at the truth concerning agriculture? To all these questions I can only return an emphatic negative and this is supported by the records.

Habitual disregard of the farmer and the practice of discounting him in the popular mind as an intellectual and constructive force is responsible for the fact that during the war he received practically no consideration. Capital and labor were given passports which admitted them to the peace conference in Paris. Labor is to be congratulated on the fact that she obtained recognition in that great document known as the peace treaty and it is in no spirit of envy that I compare her accomplishment in that regard with the lack of achievement by agriculture. It was impossible for farmers to get the necessary passports enabling them to get to Paris, much less realizing their ambition to obtain a place for agriculture in the document now under consideration by the United States senate.

Made Great Sacrifices.

The war had been won and few made greater sacrifices than the farmer in the interests of that immense achievement, and yet when he asked for recognition he was unable to get it. Why did union labor win some signal victory? It was probably because of its effective organization which speaks with one voice on all questions concerning the interest of the toiler. Further, union labor is not averse to making a noise and it was heard around the world. The farmer sticking to his plow, accepted patriotically the dictum of bureaucracy and having accepted it the government naturally concluded that he really didn't want anything and if he did he shouldn't get it.

During the war the farmers accepted a price for wheat fixed by the government. They accepted it without protest, though the very day the price was fixed they could have obtained on the primary markets from 80 cents to a dollar a bushel more. They were urged to raise food and they responded with patriotic fervor.

Wives Work in Field.

Their young men had gone to the front, or into camp. At least 50 per cent of the youthful muscular energy ordinarily available for farm work was lacking. So their wives worked in the fields, their daughters worked in the fields and the aged men handled the plows, all working overtime. The result was a crop of huge production; a crop which heartened the allies and sent cold shivers through the spinal marrow of Ludendorff, Hindenburg, the kaiser, and all the crowd that had taken part in the enactment of the greatest tragedy of all ages.

Labor has asked for the right of collective bargaining and through a clarification of the Clayton law has been specifically granted this right. Agriculture has asked that its rights be so defined as to affirmatively and unmistakably permit it to engage in business co-operatively and now goes up an awlful howl from the wholesale grocers association and other interests who blame us for the high cost of living.

No union man, if he can avoid it, or if hunger does not drive him to it, will continue to work if he cannot sell his labor at a fair and reasonable price. Can you expect that the farmer will remain docile and continue to put a maximum effort into production when he knows that he is not getting the cost of placing his products on the market? In many localities and with many products he does not receive actual cost of production, and it is the unpaid labor of his wife and children that makes it possible to continue in the farming business. It is not natural that he will one day, under such circumstances, refuse to produce, or at least only grow enough for his usual needs?

Farmer Will Revolt.

If the farmer is continually neglected and exploited it is inevitable that he will revolt. The pity of it is, however, that society through its foolish policy toward agriculture, may cause many farmers to rush into organizations which are not 100 per cent American. In their desperation they will seek relief in bad company and thousands of them may depart from that narow path which is laid down by the constitution and only by strict adherence to which any great or small question can be settled right."

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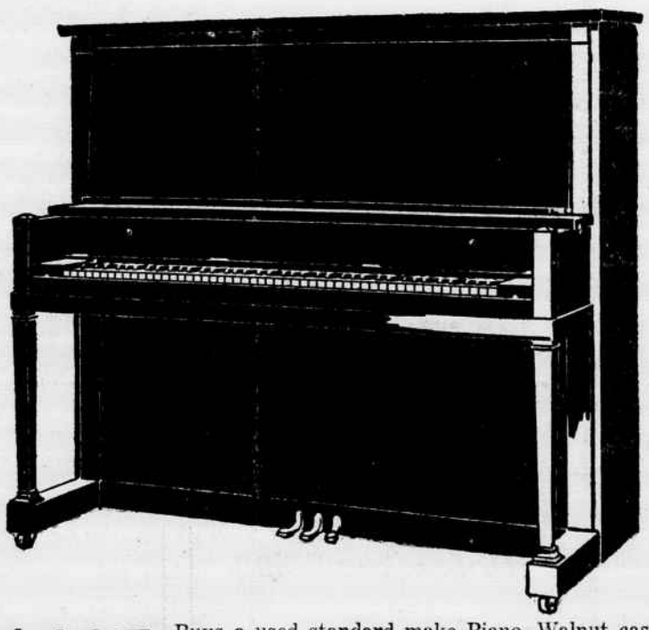

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