WOMEN VOTERS TO HOLD GREAT MEET

THIRD ANNUAL CONVENTION IS TO BE HELD IN BALTIMORE, OPENING APRIL 20.

ENTIRE CONTINENT INCLUDED

Their Sisters of Latin America Are Invited to Help in Discussion of Topics of Especial Importance to the Sex.

By EDWARD B. CLARK

Washington.—The National League of Women Voters, which has headquarters in Washington, desires that the public shall know about its third annual convention which is to be held in the capital's companion city, Baltimore, Md., and is to continue in session for nine days. The convention does not meet until April 20, but as all the countries of South and Central America are to be represented the arrangements for the meeting are being made early.

The blunt truth is that your correspondent personally has been asked to write about this convention and is the more willing so to do because the National League of Women Voters is composed of women of the two great political parties and of some smaller parties, and it does not seek to create a woman's party, preferring the seemingly saner course of asking its members to get interested in politics and in legislation and to exercise their influence as actual voting members of any of the political parties which they choose to join.

Both the Republican and the Democratic national committees have asked the women to enter their respective parties and to work and to vote for such legislation as they may desire as Republicans and Democrats, and not as members of a separate group. It seems, therefore, to be the aim of the National League of Women Voters to fix upon such legislation as women think it advisable to enact and then to attempt to secure it by exercising their influence as voters within one or the other of the great political parties.

Subjects to Be Discussed.

The women have borrowed the word "agenda" from the State department for use in outlining the proceedings of the coming convention which they call "The Pan-American Conference of Women." In a general way the country can tell from the subjects for discussion which have been chosen the chief things which are interesting the women of all parties of the present day. There are to be what the women call round table conferences on the following subjects, each discussion to be under the charge of a woman whose name is given as leader:

Child Welfare—In charge of Miss Grace Abbott, chief of the children's bureau, Department of Labor, U. S. A.

Education—In charge of Miss Julia Abbott, kindergarten division, bureau of education, Department of Interior, U. S. A.

Women in Industry—In charge of Miss Mary Anderson, chief of the woman's bureau, Department of Labor, U. S. A.

Prevention of Traffic in Women—In charge of Dr. Valeria Parker, executive secretary of the interdepartmental social hygiene board, U. S. A.

Civil Status of Women—In charge of Mrs. Mabel Willebrandt, assistant attorney general, Department of Justice, U. S. A.

Political Status of Women—In charge of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the International Woman Suffrage alliance.

Secretary of State Hughes, Secretary of Commerce Hoover and Dr. L. S. Rowe, director general of the Pan-American union, are co-operating with the women in efforts to make the conference a success. Invitations to the governments of South and Central American countries to send delegates to the conference have been forwarded by the State department through its diplomatic representatives in the republics of Latin America.

Agricultural Conference Called.

Invitations have been issued to a large number of American citizens to become members of the conference on agriculture which is to meet in Washington the latter part of January.

It is expected that at least 200 delegates representing agricultural and allied industries, such as packing, milling and transportation, will be present. The administration seemingly believes that the conference will produce results.

It is definitely known, of course, that the administration, with the country, has been worried about agricultural conditions and the troubles which have come to congress in its attempt to adjust legislation so that one great industry may be benefited without working damage to other industries. In brief, it can be said that one element in congress thinks agriculture is asking too much and that another thinks it is not asking half of what it deserves.

If the conference on agriculture shall have the success of the conference on unemployment its meeting probably will be held to have been in every way worth while. When the conference assembles it instantly will begin to exchange views and to give consideration to various lines of policy. It is believed a leader of each of the industrial groups which are to come here will have a policy to present in behalf of his group. This means probably that there will be eight or ten well defined policy programs and of course each one of them will be given due consideration.

Congress May Act on Result.

Out of these conferences, with a due regard for the compromising of differences, there probably will come something constructive. It is expected that the President will take the reports of the conference and after consultation with the cabinet officers will submit to congress certain recommendations for legislation.

Congress has an immense amount of work ahead of it, but as agriculture enters into much of the work, it is not likely that it will take very long for the majority party to dovetail into proposed legislation the details of new policies, or, if need be, to put these policies into the form of new and separate legislative acts.

In many articles the trouble between the so-called farmers' bloc and the representatives of other interests in congress have been dwelt upon. There are troubles and they are rather hard ones, but no legislator can be found in either senate or house to deny that agriculture is the basis of welfare and prosperity. In fact this world-old and world-known truth is the strongest base for belief that eventually agriculture will be given many of the things which it asks, but it is not to be taken for granted that it will be given those things which some leaders demand.

So far as the coming conference is concerned, it certainly will give the representatives of the various industries assembled a chance to get one another's viewpoint. It also will have a tendency to remove some of the friction which has developed recently between the various interests whose business lives are dependent one upon the other and yet which have been in some matters in a state of complete disagreement.

Bird Sanctuaries Urged.

Uncle Sam wants the farmers of the country to make bird sanctuaries of their land. This Uncle of ours believes and says that the birds which are attracted will pay their host ten times over for his trouble in providing a welcome for them.

The Department of Agriculture has just issued a bulletin intended to encourage the establishment of community bird refuges throughout the country on farms, bird preserves and in other places. Some refuges of this kind, the department reports, already have been established, and in some cases there has been great success in inducing colonies of game birds to become residents.

Concerning the value of the birds to the agricultural interests the government department in its most recent bulletin says:

"Hardly an agricultural pest escapes the attacks of birds. The alfalfa weevil has 45 different bird enemies; the army worm, 43; billbugs, 67; cotton boll weevil, 66; brown-tail moth, 31; chestnut weevil, 64; chinch bugs, 24; clover-root borers, 85; clover weevil, 25; coddling moth, 36; cotton worm, 41; cutworms, 98; forest tent caterpillar, 32; gypsy moth, 46; horseflies, 49; leafhoppers, 120; orchard tent caterpillars, 43; potato beetles, 25; rice weevil, 21; seventeen-year locust, 38; twelve-spotted cucumber beetle, 28; white grubs, 67, and wireworms, 168."

How to Attract Birds.

In order to bring the birds to the doorstep, and to the outlying acres, it is only necessary to give them protection, water, and in the case of some species of birds the housing facilities which they like. It is not necessary to provide nesting facilities for most American birds, provided there are trees and bushes in fair abundance on the acres to which they are to be made welcome. There are birds, however, which come the more quickly if houses are made ready for them. Among these house-building birds are the purple martin, the white-bellied swallow, the house wren, the blue bird, and on occasion some of the woodpeckers.

It was not known until a few years ago that woodpeckers would nest in bird houses. They will do so occasionally, but the kind of a house they prefer is one which has close resemblance to the house which they would make for themselves. White-bellied swallows will nest in any kind of a box placed on the housetop or on top of a pole. Unlike the purple martins, they do not like to build colonies, and so there should be one box for each pair. The house wrens will build in anything which offers them protection from the weather and from their natural enemies. A pair of house wrens have been known to nest within the kind of a hat impertinently but somewhat popularly known as a plug.

Birds like water to drink and water to bathe in. Shallow tin pans sunk in the turf to the level of the ground are much to their liking. These pans should be filled with fresh water each morning. Some birds stay in the North in winter, and if they are provided with food they will become familiar and will do much in the way of cheering up the dreary days of dark and storm.

Clean Your Shoes.

Always clean your shoes well before putting them away. Wipe off every particle of dust and dirt and shine them with a good blacking if necessary. If you value the length of life and good shape of your footwear, by all means use shoe trees. They may be purchased at any department store for a small sum. They are especially valuable for keeping low shoes in shape.

FARMERS' PROBLEMS

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of the service charges that are uniform, in good years and bad, with high prices and low.

While, in the main, the farmer must sell, regardless of market conditions, at the time of the maturity of crops, he cannot suspend production in toto. He must go on producing if he is to go on living, and if the world is to exist. The most he can do is to curtail production a little or alter its form, and that—because he is in the dark as to the probable demand for his goods—may be only to jump from the frying pan into the fire, taking the consumer with him.

Even the dairy farmers, whose output is not seasonal, complain that they find themselves at a disadvantage in the marketing of their productions, especially raw milk, because of the high costs of distribution, which they must ultimately bear.

III

Now that the farmers are stirring, thinking, and uniting as never before to eradicate these inequalities, they are subjected to stern economic lectures, and are met with the accusation that they are demanding, and are the recipients of, special privileges. Let us see what privileges the government has conferred on the farmers. Much has been made of Section 6 of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, which purported to permit them to combine with immunity, under certain conditions. Admitting that, nominally, this exemption was in the nature of a special privilege,—though I think it was so in appearance rather than in fact,—we find that the courts have nullified it by judicial interpretation. Why should not the farmers be permitted to accomplish by co-operative methods what other businesses are already doing by co-operation in the form of incorporation? If it be proper for men to form, by fusion of existing corporations or otherwise, a corporation that controls the entire production of a commodity, or a large part of it, why is it not proper for a group of farmers to unite for the marketing of their common products, either in one or in several selling agencies? Why should it be right for a hundred thousand corporate shareholders to direct 25 or 30 or 40 per cent of an industry, and wrong for a hundred thousand co-operative farmers to control a no larger proportion of the wheat crop, or cotton, or any other product?

The Department of Agriculture is often spoken of as a special concession to the farmers, but in its commercial results, it is of as much benefit to the buyers and consumers of agricultural products as to the producers, or even more. I do not suppose that anyone opposes the benefits that the farmers derive from the educational and research work of the department, or the help that it gives them in working out improved cultural methods and practices, in developing better yielding varieties through breeding and selection, in introducing new varieties from remote parts of the world and adapting them to our climate and economic condition, and in devising practical measures for the elimination or control of dangerous and destructive animal and plant diseases, insect pests, and the like. All these things manifestly tend to stimulate and enlarge production, and their general beneficial effects are obvious.

It is complained that, whereas the law restricts Federal Reserve banks to three months' time for commercial paper, the farmer is allowed six months on his notes. This is not a special privilege, but merely such a recognition of business conditions as makes it possible for country banks to do business with country people. The crop farmer has only one turnover a year, while the merchant and manufacturer have many. Incidentally, I note that the Federal Reserve Board has just authorized the Federal Reserve banks to discount export paper for a period of six months, to conform to the nature of the business.

The Farm Loan banks are pointed to as an instance of special government favor for farmers. Are they not rather the outcome of laudable efforts to equalize rural and urban conditions? And about all the government does there is to help set up an administrative organization and lend a little credit at the start. Eventually the farmers will provide all the capital and carry all the liabilities themselves. It is true that Farm Loan bonds are tax exempt; but so are bonds of municipal light and traction plants, and new housing is to be exempt from taxation, in New York, for ten years.

On the other hand, the farmer reads of plans for municipal housing projects that run into the billions, of hundreds of millions annually spent on the merchant marine; he reads that the railways are being favored with increased rates and virtual guaranties of earnings by the government, with the result to him of an 'ncreased toll on all that he sells and all that he buys. He hears of many manifestations of governmental concern for particular industries and interests. Rescuing the railways from insolvency is undoubtedly for the benefit of the country as a whole, but what can be of more general benefit than encouragement of ample production of the principal necessaries of life and their even flow from contented producers to satisfied consumers?

While it may be conceded that special governmental aid may be necessary in the general interest, we must all agree that it is difficult to see why agriculture and the production and distribution of farm products are not accorded the same opportunities that are provided for other businesses; especially as the enjoyment by the farmer of such opportunities would appear to be even more contributory to the general good than in the case of other industries. The spirit of American democracy is unalterably opposed, alike to enacted special privilege and to the special privilege of unequal opportunity that arises automatically from the failure to correct glaring economic inequalities. I am opposed to the injection of government into business, but I do believe that it is an essential function of democratic government to equalize opportunity so far as it is within its power to do so, whether by the repeal of archaic statutes or the enactment of modern ones. If the anti-trust laws keep the farmers from endeavoring scientifically to integrate their industry while other industries find a way to meet modern conditions without violating such statutes, then it would seem reasonable to find a way for the farmers to meet them under the same conditions. The law should operate equally in fact. Repairing the economic structure on one side is no injustice to the other side, which is in good repair.

We have traveled a long way from the old conception of government as merely a defensive and policing agency; and regulative, corrective, or equalizing legislation, which apparently is of a special nature, is often of the most general beneficial consequences. Even the First Congress passed a tariff act that was avowedly for the protection of manufacturers; but a protective tariff always has been defended as a means of promoting the general good through a particular approach; and the statute books are filled with acts for the benefit of shipping, commerce, and labor.

IV

Now, what is the farmer asking? Without trying to catalogue the remedial measures that have been suggested in his behalf, the principal proposals that bear directly on the improvement of his distributing and marketing relations may be summarized as follows:—

First: storage warehouses for cotton, wool, and tobacco, and elevators for grain, of sufficient capacity to meet the maximum demand on them at the peak of the marketing period. The farmer thinks that either private capital must furnish these facilities, or the state must erect and own the elevators and warehouses.

Second: weighing and grading of agricultural products, and certification thereof, to be done by impartial and disinterested public inspectors (this is already accomplished to some extent by the federal licensing of weighers and graders), to eliminate underpaying, overcharging, and unfair grading, and to facilitate the utilization of the stored products as the basis of credit.

Third: a certainty of credit sufficient to enable the marketing of products in an orderly manner.

Fourth: the Department of Agriculture should collect, tabulate, summarize, and regularly and frequently publish and distribute to the farmers, full information from all the markets of the world, so that they shall be as well informed of their selling position as buyers now are of their buying position.

Fifth: freedom to integrate the business of agriculture by means of consolidated selling agencies, co-ordinating and co-operating in such way as to put the farmer on an equal footing with the large buyers of his products, and with commercial relations in other industries.

When a business requires specialized talent, it has to buy it. So will the farmers; and perhaps the best way for them to get it would be to utilize some of the present machinery of the largest established agencies dealing in farm products. Of course, if he wishes, the farmer may go further and engage in flour-milling and other manufactures of food products. In my opinion, however, he would be wise to stop short of that. Public interest may be opposed to all great integrations; but, in justice, should they be forbidden to the farmer and permitted to others? The corporate form of association cannot now be wholly adapted to his objects and conditions. The looser co-operative form seems more generally suitable. Therefore, he wishes to be free, if he finds it desirable and feasible, to resort to co-operation with his fellows and neighbors, without running afoul of the law. To urge that the farmers should have the same liberty to consolidate and co-ordinate their peculiar economic functions, which other industries in their fields enjoy, is not, however, to concede that any business integration should have legislative sanction to exercise monopolistic power. The American people are as firmly opposed to industrial as to political autocracy, whether attempted by rural or by urban industry.

For lack of united effort the farmers as a whole are still marketing their crops by antiquated methods, or by no methods at all, but they are surrounded by a business world that has been modernized to the last minute and is tirelessly striving for efficiency. This efficiency is due in large measure to big business, to united business, to integrated business. The farmers now seek the benefits of such largeness, union and integration.

The American farmer is a modern of the moderns in the use of labor saving machinery, and he has made vast strides in recent years in scientific tillage and efficient farm management, but as a business in contact with other businesses agriculture is a "one horse shay" in competition with high power automobiles. The American farmer is the greatest and most intractable of individualists. While industrial production and all phases of the huge commercial mechanism and its myriad accessories have articulated and co-ordinated themselves all the way from natural raw materials to retail sales, the business of agriculture has gone on in much the one man fashion of the backwoods of the first part of the nineteenth century, when the farmer was self sufficient and did not depend upon, or care very much, what the great world was doing. The result is that the agricultural group is almost as much at a disadvantage in dealing with other economic groups as the jay farmer of the funny pages in the hands of sleek urban confidence men, who sell him acreage in Central Park or the Chicago city hall. The leaders of the farmers thoroughly understand this, and they are intelligently striving to integrate their industry so that it will be on an equal footing with other businesses.

As an example of integration, take the steel industry, in which the model is the United States Steel Corporation, with its iron mines, its coal mines, its lake and rail transportation, its ocean vessels, its by-product coke ovens, its blast furnaces, its open hearth and Bessemer furnaces, its rolling mills, its tube mills and other manufacturing processes that are carried to the highest degree of finished production compatible with the large trade it has built up. All this is generally conceded to be to the advantage of the consumer. Nor does the steel corporation inconsiderately dump its products on the market. On the contrary, it so acts that it is frequently a stabilizing influence, as is often the case with other large organizations. It is master of its distribution as well as of its production. If prices are not satisfactory the products are held back or production is reduced or suspended. It is not compelled to send a year's work to the market at one time and take whatever it can get under such circumstances. It has one selling policy and its own export department. Neither are the grades and qualities of steel determined at the caprice of the buyer, nor does the latter hold the scales. In this single integration of the steel corporation is represented about 40 per cent of the steel production of America. The rest is mostly in the hands of a few large companies. In ordinary times the steel corporation, by example, stabilizes all steel prices. If this is permissible (it is even desirable, because stable and fair prices are essential to solid and continued prosperity) why would it be wrong for the farmers to utilize central agencies that would have similar effects on agricultural products? Something like that is what they are aiming at.

Some farmers favored by regional compactness and contiguity, such as the citrus-fruit-raisers of California, already have found a way legally to merge and sell their products integrally and in accordance with seasonal and local demand, thus improving their position and rendering the consumer a reliable service of ensured quality, certain supply, and reasonable and relatively steady prices. They have not found it necessary to resort to any special privilege, or to claim any exemption under the anti-trust legislation of the state or nation. Without removing local control, they have built up a very efficient marketing agency. The grain, cotton, and tobacco farmers, and the producers of hides and wool, because of their numbers and the vastness of their regions, and for other reasons, have found integration a more difficult task; though there are now some thousands of farmer's co-operative elevators, warehouses, creameries, and other enterprises of one sort and another, with a turn-over of a billion dollers a year. They are giving the farmers business experience and training, and, so far as they go, they meet the need of honest weighing and fair grading; but they do not meet the requirements of rationally adjusted marketing in any large and fundamental way.

The next step, which will be a pattern for other groups, is now being prepared by the grain-raisers through the establishment of sales media which shall handle grain separately or collectively, as the individual farmer may elect. It is this step—the plan of the Committee of Seventeen—which has created so much opposition and is thought by some to be in conflict with the anti-trust laws. Though there is now before congress a measure designed to clear up doubt on this point, the grain-producers are not relying on any immunity from anti-trust legislation. They desire, and they are entitled, to co-ordinate their efforts just as effectively as the large business interests of the country have done. In connection with the selling organizations the United States Grain Growers Incorporated is drafting a scheme of financing instrumentalities and auxiliary agencies which are indispensable to the successful utilization of modern business methods.

It is essential that the farmers should proceed gradually with these plans, and aim to avoid the error of scrapping the existing marketing machinery, which has been so laboriously built up by long experience, before they have a tried and proved substitute or supplementary mechanism. They must be careful not to become enmeshed in their own reforms and lose the perspective of their place in the national system. They must guard against fanatical devotion to new doctrines, and should seek articulation with the general economic system rather than its reckless destruction as it relates to them.

V

To take a tolerant and sympathetic view of the farmers' strivings for better things is not to give a blanket endorsement to any specific plan, and still less to applaud the vagaries of some of their leaders and groups. Neither should we, on the other hand, allow the froth of bitter agitation, false economics, and mistaken radicalism to conceal the facts of the farmers' disadvantages, and the practicability of eliminating them by well-considered measures. It may be that the farmers will not show the business sagacity and develop the wise leadership to carry through sound plans; but that possibility does not justify the obstruction of their upward efforts. We, as city people, see in high and speculatively manipulated prices, spoilage, waste, scarcity, the results of defective distribution of farm products. Should it not occur to us that we have a common interest with the farmer in his attempts to attain a degree of efficiency in distribution corresponding to his efficiency in production? Do not the recent fluctuations in the May wheat option, apparently unrelated to normal interaction of supply and demand, offer a timely proof of the need of some such stabilizing agency as the grain growers have in contemplation?

It is contended that, if their proposed organizations be perfected and operated, the farmers will have in their hands an instrument that will be capable of dangerous abuse. We are told that it will be possible to pervert it to arbitrary and oppressive price-fixing from its legitimate use of ordering and stabilizing the flow of farm products to the market, to the mutual benefit of producer and consumer. I have no apprehensions on this point.

In the first place, a loose organization, such as any union of farmers must be at best, cannot be so arbitrarily and promptly controlled as a great corporation. The one is a lumbering democracy and the other an agile autocracy. In the second place, with all possible power of organization, the farmers cannot succeed to any great extent, or for any considerable length of time, in fixing prices. The great law of supply and demand works in various and surprising ways, to the undoing of the best laid plans that attempt to foil it. In the third place, their power will avail the farmers nothing if it be abused. In our time and country power is of value to its possessor only so long as it is not abused. It is fair to say that I have seen no signs in responsible quarters of a disposition to dictate prices. There seems, on the contrary, to be a commonly beneficial purpose to realize a stability that will give an orderly and abundant flow of farm products to the consumer and ensure reasonable and dependable returns to the producer.

In view of the supreme importance to the national well-being of a prosperous and contented agricultural population, we should be prepared to go a long way in assisting the farmers to get an equitable share of the wealth they produce, through the inauguration of reforms that will procure a continuous and increasing stream of farm products. They are far from getting a fair share now. Considering his capital and the long hours of labor put in by the average farmer and his family, he is remunerated less than any other occupational class, with the possible exception of teachers, religious and lay. Though we know that the present general distress of the farmers is exceptional and is linked with the inevitable economic readjustment following the war, it must be remembered that, although representing one-third of the industrial product and half the total population of the nation, the rural communities ordinarily enjoy but a fifth to a quarter of the net annual national gain. Notwithstanding the taste of prosperity that the farmers had during the war, there is today a lower standard of living among the cotton farmers of the South than in any other pursuit in the country.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the farmers are chiefly striving for a generally beneficial integration of their business, of the same kind and character that other business enjoys. If it should be found on examination that the attainment of this end requires methods different from those which other activities have followed for the same purpose should we not sympathetically consider the plea for the right to co-operate, if only from our own enlightened self interest, in obtaining an abundant and steady flow of farm products?

In examining the agricultural situation with a view to its improvement, we shall be most helpful if we maintain a detached and judicial viewpoint, remembering that existing wrongs may be chiefly an accident of unsymmetrical economic growth instead of a creation of malevolent design and conspiracy. We Americans are prone, as Professor David Friday well says in his admirable book, "Profits, Wages and Prices," to seek a "criminal intent behind every difficult and undesirable economic situation." I can positively assert from my contact with men of large affairs, including bankers, that, as a whole, they are endeavoring to fulfill as they see them the obligations that go with their power. Preoccupied with the grave problems and heavy tasks of their own immediate affairs, they have not turned their thoughtful personal attention or their constructive abilities to the deficiencies of agricultural business organization. Agriculture, it may be said, suffers from their preoccupation and neglect rather than from any purposeful exploitation by them. They ought now to begin to respond to the farmers' difficulties, which they must realize are their own.

On the other hand, my contacts with the farmers have filled me with respect for them—for their sanity, their patience, their balance. Within the last year, and particularly at a meeting called by the Kansas State Board of Agriculture and at another called by the Committee of Seventeen, I have met many of the leaders of the new farm movement, and I testify in all sincerity that they are endeavoring to deal with their problems, not as promoters of a narrow class interest, not as exploiters of the hapless consumer, not as merciless monopolists, but as honest men bent on the improvement of the common weal.

We can and must meet such men and such a cause half way. Their business is our business—the nation's business.