

The United Farmers of Ontario Hold Their Fourth Convention

The fourth annual convention of the United Farmers of Ontario was held in the Labor Temple, Toronto, December 19 to 21 inclusive. It was by far the largest convention since the organization of the central body three years ago. Upwards of five hundred delegates were in attendance and the increasing interest in the farmer's movement was apparent at every session. The United Farmers as an organization seems to be steadily growing. An increase of one-third in membership numbers was announced and the organization now has some twelve thousand members scattered in every county in the province. Through the trading company with which the U. F. O. is affiliated nearly \$1,000,000 worth of business has been done during the last ten months. The United Farmers have a big work ahead of them and will do well to keep in mind the importance of having strong executives and building up an organization of big men who are capable of handling a gigantic enterprise to the advantage of all those engaged in the business of farming.

Political Helplessness of Farmers.

In presenting his third annual address, R. H. Halbert, of Melancthon, President of the U. F. O., said in part:

"While the year has been a very laborious and trying one owing to the scarcity of farm help, yet we are thankful for the bountiful harvest that we may be able to assist in keeping the food basket of the Empire replenished that the boys who are so nobly fighting our battles in this terrible war may have enough and to spare. While we feel that we have been handicapped in a great many ways in our struggle to do our best for the Empire in this her time of need and while things look dark at present, still we know that the darkest hour is just before the dawn. For untold generations, we have followed sublimely in the ways marked out for us. Such privileges as we have received have been ours by courtesy and not as our right.

"I misjudge the intelligence and motive power of this audience if the dawn of a brighter day is not in sight for the agriculturist, the day when agriculture will not only be the backbone of the Empire at election times, but when agriculturists representing not only the backbone but also the brains of the Empire will sit in greater numbers in our Legislative halls, and we, through them will have a say in getting British fair play in the making of the laws that are placed upon the statute books.

"The farmers of Canada possess, though I am sorry to say they do not control the biggest business asset of the Dominion, yet we have sat in the back seats until we have become isolated, while transportation, finance, manufacture and food distribution have become so thoroughly organized that they now represent one of the most powerful commercial factors in present day commerce. Against such an organization how may the individual farmer expect to successfully compete? It is not generally understood that our agricultural export trade exceeds in value that of all other industries combined. Agriculture is the hope of the nations. It is the hope of warring Europe. It is the hope of humanity, of civilization, of all that we as Anglo-Saxons have learned to cherish. It is the hope of human liberty. Farmers are the peace-makers of humanity—they are the great peace-makers who will heal the scars of war. The very existence of mankind is in their keeping. They began the art of civilization when they gathered the seeds of the earth, guarded them through the long winter season, cleared the fields for the planting and harvesting again. Future civilization is also in their hands. The knowledge of the art of agriculture is not only the most valuable possession for the future as it has been in the past, but it is undoubtedly so for the present.

"The day is not far distant when the men who command the earth will receive the recognition which they deserve. In this monstrous war, greater than any the world has ever witnessed, more disastrous in its waste of human life and wealth and more loathsome in its disregard of truth, virtue and the cherished monuments of Christianity, in this ungodly sacrifice of struggling humanity, towards which nations from the four quarters of the globe have been drawn with irresistible force, the ultimate decision, the final blow that will make this world safe for democracy rests with the farmers, the producers of the world's food.

"For three long years, millions of men have been engaged with guns and ammunition, fighting in this war. Thousands of men from the farms of Canada have heard the call from Europe and have gone with the gun and bayonet. Other thousands have remained at home and worked as they have never done before that the Allies may have something with which to pursue the ghost of famine. One day we are exhorted to produce for the sake of the starving women and children of Belgium and the next we are told that we will have to give our sons to fight in the trenches in France. We are between the devil and the deep sea. There is no business that calls for such varied knowledge and skill as the work on the farm, and while it may be true that a man owes everything to his country, it is very discouraging and well nigh criminal to see the farm depleted day by day of its experienced workmen with no compensating returns to the land where we are told the war is to be fought out. If ever there was a time for the farmers to put forth strong action, it is now. The farmers will not get fair play from any Government until they unite at the polls. United we can control, divided we are helpless.

"Our organization has, during the past year, been most outrageously ignored by the powers that be. As your President, I have felt very keenly, and no doubt you all have, some of the slaps in the face which our

In Union is Strength.

United we stand—divided we fall.

The industry that gives you bread deserves your loyal support.

The farmer who does not respect his industry is a traitor to it.

Co-operation, not competition, is the life of trade.

Equal opportunity to all, special privilege to none.

A Club is the first stage of co-operation.

Your Club is just what you make it.

The farmers feed them all.

Co-operation is a merger of individual efforts.

organization has received, especially when we are told by some of the men who are enjoying a fat living on our money that we, 12,000 members of our organization, are too small and insignificant to be recognized. Still a few millionaires in Toronto can name the men and have them appointed to the Cabinet. Government by the people has become a myth. The real rulers of Canada and the Canadian parliaments are the Lords and the Knights members of combines, manufacturers' associations, and transportation companies. Through their system of ruling, there has grown up a band of autocrats who bend Parliaments and legislation to their own despotic will and in their own selfish interests. The result is that to-day we are loaded down with a whole menagerie of white elephants causing a loss of millions annually in the operation of our basic industry of agriculture for the benefit of the combines. Farmers are the only class that will not break the chains of party bondage for their own benefit and they compose the only class whose industry is taxed for the benefit of the special privileged interests. So long as we remain so, the interests will control.

"The making of Governments is a serious business, specially for the farmer and should be taken seriously by every farmer. The tremendous burden of additional taxation which will be required to carry our war debt should compel every farmer to vote in his own interests. But just as soon as the farmers make a move to escape from the party slave-pens, the politicians get busy and wave the party flag and shout patriotism. As long as they can keep us from thinking and acting for ourselves, it does not make much difference which pen we are kept in.

"Suppose the Government of Canada made an appeal to the manufacturers in the following terms: 'The fate of the Empire depends on the supply of munitions, we want you to make an abundant supply, work longer hours and harder, get your women and children to help you, put forth every effort to make the output as large as possible. We do not know what prices you will get, that will depend on the demand and the whims of speculators. We cannot say what freight rates will be charged you. We cannot guarantee you against losses. You will still be charged the highest rate of duty and war tax on your machinery and tools, also on your raw material. You will get no Government aid of any kind. We will, however, have a lot of Government Officials (who know less about the business than you do), to give you lectures, send you bulletins and other kinds of instruction, the cost of which will be charged to you. This is a Patriotic duty. Go to it!'

"How do you think the manufacturers would take to it? Yet that is just the kind of dope that is handed out to farmers to-day and has been for years, and we have to pay for it. A little gravity is all right if you have some mashed potatoes to put it over but we don't relish it when it is the sole dish in a one-course dinner.

"No Government has ever concerned itself seriously with a close study of the economic conditions of Canada's basic industry. They have been satisfied with giving us advice until has become obnoxious. They tell us to raise more hogs that they may create a few more hog barons while we may not get paid for the feed they eat. In order to lessen the cost of the production of the bacon, we are told to get our wives and daughters to feed them and then they brand our wives who have no sons to go to the front 'Pro-Germans'.

"I often think of that old patriotic song that we so often sing, 'Rule Britannia.' How long will we go to the polls carrying in our hands the hammer that would break down the tariff walls? The gunpowder that would explode the mergers, that would burst the combines? The key that would unlock the shackles that have been heaped upon our industry? That would put the torch to the base of Agriocracy and end in our own progress? Again I say, how long? Or will we continue to use our franchise as a lever to hold our own on, spring upon the bait of patriotism? Will we sacrifice our industry to the god of partyism and like the sow that has been washed clean to wallowing in mud and mire of political corruption? God forbid. God has given

us a soil, climate and natural advantages unequalled anywhere. Increase the opportunities of the farmer by scouring the money changers from their markets and they will save the world that is now being crucified by greed and the lust for power.

"What agriculture needs to-day is not hot air and advice from a lot of armchair agricultural experts, but emancipation from a Kaiserism which is almost as tyrannical as the Kaiserism of Germany, a slavery almost as exacting as the Prussianism of Europe. The soil of France is being dyed red with the blood of Canadian boys, that autocracy may be overthrown. Will the seeds of autocracy be sown in Ontario?"

Membership Fees.

As is understood by readers who are in touch with the movement, the United Farmers of Ontario is not the business organization but is an organization to carry on propaganda and educational work in the rural communities, but it works in very close connection with the United Farmers' Co-operative Company, Limited, which is the real business or financial branch of the great work. Accordingly, the financial statement of the U. F. O. does not show figures representing any great amount of money. However, the organization according to the auditor, William McCrae, of Guelph, is in a strong financial condition comparatively speaking, and has a balance on hand of \$2,022.90.

Following the President's address, a somewhat lengthy discussion took place regarding increasing the amount of the fees which members should pay to the central association. In the past the central organization has received fifty cents as the membership fee from each member of the Clubs affiliated with the central. Some members thought that this fee should be higher in order that the organization have more funds with which to carry on the work. Others believed that it would be rather difficult to go back to their local Clubs and persuade farmers that the fee should be raised. After considerable discussion in which the ridiculousness of a farmer anxious to promote organization work in his own business objecting to a fee of \$1.00 or \$2.00 or even \$5.00 was brought out it was decided to take the matter home to the Clubs and lay over any change in membership fees until another year. Some speakers, and we believe they were entirely correct, stated that the farmer who balked at paying more than fifty cents for the promotion of his own organization was of very little use to that organization. Other delegates thought that the U. F. O. was of less value just now and it would be difficult to go back to their home Counties and Clubs and get extra fees from the men on the back concessions, and the fee remains the same for another year, and, by the way, is altogether too small. We entirely agree with John Kennedy, Second Vice-President of the United Grain Growers, Limited, who said later in the Convention that farmers ought to be ashamed to raise any objection to a membership fee of one dollar, two dollars, or even five dollars or more, if such fee were necessary to properly carry on the organization to fight the battles of the man on the land.

Progress During the Year.

The report of the Secretary, J. J. Morrison, drew attention to the development of class consciousness and agricultural individuality. Farmers have reached the limit of docile subservience and while the present report of the work accomplished in the period from March 1, 1917 to December 19, covers only the inactive period of the year progress was shown. The increasing burdens of the war have affected the agricultural industry to such an extent that the rural population are working to the limit of endurance; 1917 has been a strenuous year for farmers but many lessons have been learned. In times of stress co-operation makes progress. During the summer seventy-eight public meetings were held in thirty different counties of Ontario; of these twenty-five were local conventions addressed by John Kennedy, Second Vice-President of the United Grain Growers, Limited. R. McKenzie, Secretary of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, C. N. Baker, Vice-President, and P. P. Woolbridge, Secretary-Treasurer of the United Farmers of Alberta, J. A. Orchard, a Director of the Grain Growers Association of Saskatchewan, and by local men. This work will mean progress and will be continued next year. At the time of the last annual meeting the Secretary's report showed 211 organizations and 8,900 members; now there are 315 organizations, a gain of 115, and 12,000 members, a gain of 4,000. Forty-three counties have been tapped in the work but the fringe is scarcely touched as there are approximately 250,000 farmers in Ontario, so that only one-twentieth have been reached. Mr. Morrison urged that rural women join the organization as the women of the Western Provinces have lent their efforts to the work of the Grain Growers Association. One Club in Victoria County has been promoted and operated by women and is doing well. The glad hand of fellowship was extended to the Junior Farmers' Improvement Association, a Provincial organization which has taken shape through the efforts of the District Representatives of the Ontario Department of Agriculture in the various counties. Mr. Morrison drew attention to the work which was accomplished in successfully opposing the attempt of the railway corporations to increase freight rates fifteen per cent, and took the credit to the United Farmers for saving nearly \$10,000,000 annually to the public. The United Farmers also opposed price fixing on farm products while prices of all that farmers had to buy remained unfixed. An effort was put forth also to secure free exchange between telephone lines. The

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