

Why I Missed The Ottawa Conference

By Ewart P. Reid

Last summer at Vancouver you caught your eastbound freight at pretty close to twenty minutes after ten any night, after lurking for from two minutes to two or three hours at almost any point along the C. P. R. track up to a mile from the station. Thus you started your journey from the Coast to Kamloops or Calgary, Winnipeg or Toronto, Montreal or Halifax. And however short or long your projected trip, you were not likely to be alone at the start. By the time she passed the ferry dock, which was a couple of hundred yards from where she highballed, there was standing room only on the first dozen cars. If you actually counted one car's human burden you might get thirty men. Then if you counted the cars you might get sixty or so. However, a hasty calculation giving nearly 2000 men on the train would probably be an exaggeration. Several hundred would be nearer the truth for most days; the number was usually less if it was raining.

On more than one evening I derived vicarious excitement from observing these men as they gathered along the track with their packs and packages of all sorts. Sometimes I would edge up to a group and, if they happened to be talking English, listen in. Or I would drop into conversation with one or two of them, which was, as it turned out, not really difficult even if I was wearing a white collar. But most of the solid citizens who hurried across the track to catch their ferry or those few non-hoboes who had occasion to be on Water Street after dark hardly noticed or were noticed by the waiting men.

In the role of observer I did not find it easy to imagine their thoughts and feelings. So one night I actually swung into about the fifteenth car, and presently in order to be sheltered as much as possible from the heavy rain I scrambled back to a position between two tank cars. One or two men were there and others arrived after me. One of them said: "Just look at them bloody elevators jammed to the roof with wheat and thousands of men walking the streets hardly able to beg a crust of bread to eat. The time won't be long now until the bourgeoisie and their capitalistic system will go the way of the feudal barons." Certainly not an entirely novel point of view to me, and yet I was very much surprised. Has the average hobo — I had fatuously jumped to the conclusion that there was such a person and that I had just heard him speak — got some sort of lineup on affairs, however stereotyped,

which concerns more than his own immediate needs, or does his talk ever embrace more than an exchange of opinions as to which are the best towns to eat in? Is he even aware that there might be such a thing as Class Consciousness? I wondered.

Another man spoke about putting a little pressure on Bennett at Ottawa. "Oh, then I 'spose you fellows are going down to the Economic Conference," I piped up in what I deemed to be my most good-natured bantering manner. Again I was rather nonplussed when they answered yes in a very matter-of-fact manner, seeming neither to have taken offence at my remark nor to have detected any sprightliness in it. So I decided that I would be better off that night listening, and I sat down on the run-

way of the car alongside of the second man, who proceeded to tell me of the Workers' Economic Conference called for the same time as the Empire gathering, and the chief purpose of which was to bring working class pressure to bear on the premier during the time that Empire treaties were being negotiated.

Were these men, then, delegates from Vancouver societies? I asked. No, it seemed, they were only two of hundreds of enthusiasts who, while they had not happened to be elected delegates, were nevertheless going down on their own to swell the ranks. My companion explained that there could only be a very few officials appointed who each got just a few dollars of expenses and that therefore even they had to make their way to Ottawa as best they could — men and women — some by Edmonton and the C.N.R., some by Calgary and the C.P.R., but all converging at Ottawa as near to the time set for the opening of the conferences as possible.

My informant was very earnest about it all, and he interspersed his remarks on

(Continued on page seven)

Depression Hits The Farm

By L. G. Reynolds

Three years ago the sun shone brightly in the farmer's economic sky; wheat stood at \$1.40 per bushel and the farmer, whose production costs were variously estimated at from 50 cents to one dollar per bushel, chuckled contentedly. The memorable winter of 1929, however, brought unlooked for and bewildering events; wheat tottered down to \$1.10 and after hovering there precariously for some weeks slipped rapidly to the amazing level of 60 cents per bushel. Even then the bottom had not been reached, for only a month ago wheat touched 38 cents on the Winnipeg Exchange and it is highly possibly that the decline may continue.

The decline in price of other farm products was proportionately almost as great. Thus by the general depression, and by a complex of factors which affected agriculture with exceptional severity, the farmer's income was reduced to between one-third and one-half of its former volume. Economists are in essential agreement that, even should a revival of industry occur, there is no possibility of the farmer regaining his 1929 income level.

What did the farmer do about it? First of all, he started to retrench. His purchases from retail stores at the present time are only about half as great as during the period of prosperity; he is consuming less, and more of what he does consume is being produced on the farm itself. On many dining-tables last summer I found nothing that had not been grown at home — with the exception in some cases of

sugar, salt and tea. He does not go to so many fairs and dances now; he has reduced his subscriptions to newspapers, clubs, churches and charity. He has perhaps left his automobile in the garage because he could not afford to buy a license; or he may have transformed his light delivery truck into a "Bennett buggy" by taking out the engine and hitching horses to it. The tractor has been discarded because of the high price of gasoline and Dobbin has once more come into his own as chief propellor of farm implements.

The farmer's straitened circumstances have forced him to take a step backward both materially and culturally. He is not at the starvation level, however, nor even near it in most cases; as compared with the urban industrial worker, and particularly with the urban unemployed, he lives well. Wherein, then, does the "agricultural problem" consist? Why these groans of distress and these radical shouts from the West? The answer can be summarised in a word—"debt" is the theme song in the "farmer's chorus".

How did the farmer get in debt? In the first place, unless he obtained his farm in the early homesteading period of free land, he probably purchased it on credit from a land company, oftentimes at an inflated value which would take many years to repay. Or he may have borrowed money from a mortgage company in order to make improvements on the farm, giving the farm itself as security. Then along came

(continued on page eight)