

Alberta President's Address

The following is the Address delivered by the President, Mr. W. J. Tregillus, at the Opening of the Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Alberta at Calgary on January 21

With the return of our annual convention the various reports are due and mine is the first in order.

As will appear in the various reports to follow, the Association has had a year of great encouragement, from the progress it has made; its growth in numbers, power and unity is evinced in the increased influence it is exerting upon the community and the government, besides commanding the respect and consideration of the interests. These results have not been obtained without much effort, and are due to the untiring energies of the board of management who have worked so harmoniously together to this end.

As time goes on new problems confront us and we are more and more impressed with our responsibilities and the tremendous amount of work before us, demanding our constant and immediate attention. This has by no means daunted us, nor impaired our energies, but on the contrary has quickened us and increased our determination to accomplish as far as in us lies the work of reform, to which we, as organized farmers, are pledged, and with the men we have on our board of management as well as in our ranks we have no cause to fear the ultimate outcome.

For True Democracy

We are fighting for a just cause, a true democracy and an equitable distribution of wealth, we want conditions whereby the wealth producers may be able to retain a fair proportion of the wealth they create and put a stop to the greater part of its flowing into the pockets of the few, who understand the laws governing the distribution of wealth, and who are ever on the watch to have those laws fashioned to serve their own ends.

The last century was renowned for the acquisition of enormous fortunes by a few; but if we are true to our cause this twentieth century will be noted for its equitable distribution of wealth among the many who produce it. Let our slogan be:

"More for toil and less for spoil,
More for need and less for greed."

This organization is becoming more and more alive to the unfair and unscrupulous methods which enable the few to grow rich at the expense of the many. These methods explained, answer the burning question now exercising the minds of thinking people in this and other countries, viz., "the high cost of living." To our official organ, The Guide, we are largely indebted for our education in this direction and our earnest wish is that it may continue its valuable work, till that new era for which we are working shall open before the people of this great country.

When this longed for epoch arrives, all unnatural inequalities, all artificial obstructions, all deadly grinding toil, all involuntary poverty and all unfairly acquired wealth will be eliminated, and the best opportunities will be given to every man, woman and child for their highest development, physical, mental and spiritual.

It may be to our advantage to consider briefly the conditions responsible for this unfair distribution of wealth and some methods within our reach for its removal.

Evils of Monopoly

Immense fortunes have been made by a comparatively small number, by the following monopolies:—The land monopoly is the greatest by gaining control of land so located that the public must have the use of it for trading and distributing centres in the cities and towns. For example, land in New York city has become worth from fifteen to twenty million dollars per acre; why is this? Simply because the owners of the land are enabled from the enormous rentals they charge to squeeze that amount of money out of the people who use it. As population increases in large cities, so the power of land-owners, to exact still greater sums from the public, will increase in proportion.

Then we have "The Monopoly of Natural Resources," such as coal, iron, oil, gas, water power and timber limits.

When a man or a group of men have acquired the control of any natural resources, their power to squeeze the public is limited only by the demand of the public for the products which they control. As the population and the need for these commodities grows, so the power of those controlling them, to exact increasing tribute increases.

The untold wealth of John D. Rockefeller was started by his monopoly of oil fields, and Andrew Carnegie—who has already given away over two hundred million dollars—obtained his wealth from iron mines. Now we come to the Monopoly of Transportation facilities. This is obtained by gaining control of our great public utility companies, such as our transcontinental railway systems, and express companies. The public must use the services of these companies, not only for travelling, but for the shipping of the products it uses. The men who control these services by maintaining high rates are enabled to bleed the public in a hundred different ways. They increase the cost to us of almost everything we buy.

By these means the late E. H. Harriman accumulated a fortune of one hundred and fifty million dollars in fifteen years.

Tariffs and Watered Stock

Then again, behind our so called protective tariffs are formed combines and mergers which give control of manufactured articles, such as clothes, boots, furniture, farm implements, cement and scores of other things, they advance the cost of these articles to the public and so build up for themselves great fortunes at the public's expense.

Still one more system:—The modern method of watering stock. Immense amounts of money have been taken from a confiding and investing public who have not realized when buying small pieces of paper called stocks and bonds, that they have really been buying what is known as "watered stock." In some cases all the common stock is nothing but water. This is a comparatively new method of getting rich quickly, but is now being used on a scale that is increasing rapidly.

Fortunes have, of course, been made by other means than those mentioned, but it will be found the greater majority of the enormously wealthy people of today have acquired their wealth by some one or more of the foregoing methods and more especially from the first three.

They have seized or gained control of these things which the public must use, and by means of this control they have taxed and plundered the public in all directions, but at last we are beginning to awake to the true condition of things.

Canada Awakening

This young giant "Canada" has been asleep and during that time was bound in chains and fetters of political, economic and social bondage, but is now giving unmistakable signs of awakening. We can already feel the quiver of his muscles and the movement of his limbs; we shall soon have him wide awake, and then see the bursting of the bonds and the yoke of bondage thrown aside.

The mass of people are learning their first lesson in economics, and are beginning to see that if the few who control the monopolies, combines, mergers and trusts can levy tribute on the wealth producers to the extent of some fifty per cent. of the amount produced, the remainder will have to live on one half the amount they are entitled to—or, in other words, they will have to pay double price to cover the tribute money claimed by the barons of privilege.

The above are the conditions responsible for the increased cost of living, rural depopulation, the influences that create city slums, and explains the enormous wealth of the few and the poverty of the many.

The movement toward the righting of these conditions is, however, well launched, and it is with pride we note the organized farmers of the West are leading. Some claim that any "legal"

gains are just; but I claim that no law is legal and should be abolished, where justice does not square with morality.

Enslaved by Ignorance

We are beginning to see that Henry George was right when he said "Under all forms of government the ultimate power lies with the masses." It is not kings, nor aristocracies, nor landlords, nor capitalists that really enslave the people. It is their own ignorance.

The scales are falling from our eyes, we are realizing we have the power—as soon as we care to use it—to right these conditions. They have been brought about and are being continued by only a small minority of the people.

Ex-President Roosevelt, in his first public speech in his campaign for reelection as president, said, "We are suffering today from tyranny of minorities. It is a small minority that is grabbing our coal deposits, our water powers, our harbor fronts. A small minority is fattening on the sale of adulterated foods and drugs. It is a small minority that lies behind monopolies and trusts. It is a small minority that stands behind the present law of master and servant, the sweat shops and the whole calendar of social and industrial injustice. It is a small minority that is today using our conventional (political) system, to defeat the will of a majority of the people. The only tyrannies from which men, women and children are suffering are the tyrannies of minorities."

If we have endured these tyrannies and the unjust extortions—with all their attendant evils and sufferings—which are imposed upon us by a small minority, through our ignorance, now we have the knowledge we should not let them continue; the remedy is within our reach.

The wealth producers of this province, this Dominion, this empire, can, when they will, throw off their political, their economic and their social bondage. I am glad to see a movement set on foot federating the organizations of wealth producers throughout this province, for advancing the common cause of humanity and removing the evils that exist.

Prosperity and Debt

To show that the American farmers are suffering from similar evils to those with which we are confronted, probably even more acutely, let me tell you what "The New York World" has said. Quoting from the "Census Bureau" bulletin it says:—"Out of the about six and one half millions of farms, only about one half are operated by owners." In ten years, mortgaged farms have increased nearly eighteen per cent, tenant farmers by sixteen and one half per cent. Ten years of unexampled prosperity for the protected trusts have left marks of debt and dependency upon American farmers." "It is upon the farmer," it declares, "the blight of privilege, plutocracy, jingoism and extravagance has fallen." Yet Secretary Wilson, of the department of agriculture, states that during the last sixteen years the farmer has increased his wealth production by one hundred and forty-one per cent. These statements strongly support my contention—which I also mentioned in my last year's address to you—that whatever progress we make in modern scientific farming (and there is no one more desirous than I that we should be up-to-date in this respect), that under present economic conditions little benefit will accrue to the farmers. This is our great question and if I can convince the members of this convention—gathering as they do from every part of the province—that our present economic condition is the question and that every other pales into insignificance before it, if I can enthrall the delegates present with the necessary enthusiasm to stir into activity the Unions they represent, so that we can unitedly deal with it, I shall feel that I have accomplished something worth while.

Our Own Part

Our, and similar organizations in the adjoining provinces, are the great forces for true democracy in this Dominion.

Are we doing all we might or could? Organizations, like individuals, are measured by their opportunities; with our magnificent opportunities we must produce equal results, remembering always that opportunity is a passing event, commanding immediate obedience, but, if we fail to grasp it, it may pass beyond our reach.

If we do as well as we know how, we shall not let the land now lying waste remain idle, while people flock into cities where idleness, luxury, wealth and poverty war against each other, and where the microbe of degeneracy plies its deadly work, because of our lack of effort and courage to fight the evils and establish the right.

Let us remember, the lower we sink the greater effort required to rise and reform. The lost physical and moral standing of a country, or an individual, is not recalled at will by the victim, therefore, the prevention of further degeneracy should come as a plain duty to every member of this organization, a duty which he should perform, not alone for his own or his family's sake, but for the sake of humanity, and those whom we shall leave to inherit the earth which we are so largely failing to utilize and improve.

The Remedies

Having considered conditions let us see what remedies are necessary. We have repeated that unorganized unco-operative agriculture is helpless to fight the organized forces which are exacting such heavy tribute from all productive labor. This fact being incontrovertible; organization is our only weapon. With organization we can overcome every obstacle—may I suggest a motto:—"Organized to assist, not combined to injure."

Let organization be our strength, our talisman if you will, but let it be our constant thought, our constant aim, our constant effort, let it enter into our being, because our existence as a class depends on organization. Let us imbue every member of every union with its importance and show each individual member how dependant the ultimate success of our efforts is, on his work, his interest and his loyalty. The "Interests" are not slow to note the personnel of our organization, every member should become acquainted with economic questions. He should attend and take a keen interest in his union meetings, his very presence is an inspiration, and he will be able to form a true estimate of the importance of the work to be done and the necessity for his help. The idea that a man may join a union and obtain benefits for himself without assuming and performing the active duties and responsibilities of membership, both moral and financial, is the basis of the weakness of some of our unions. Those of us who have the opportunity of visiting the unions have often found that the best suggestions do not always come from the man who is the most brilliant; the humblest worker, or youngest member, may have a thought of little value in itself, but it may suggest something to someone else who has a more constructive mind and can use it to the great advantage of the whole body.

If every individual member of the Association will be whole-hearted, earnest, unselfish and enthusiastic in the work of the United Farmers of Alberta, we can with assurance predict for 1913 greater advancement and achievement than in any previous year of our existence.

Direct Legislation

This organization stands for, and has been steadily working for Direct Legislation because it recognizes that through its operations great reforms can be accomplished.

Direct Legislation is becoming better understood and is rapidly making friends because it is absolutely non-partisan, having not the remotest relation to any party, creed or sect, nor any other political or economic question. It is merely a process of making known the will of the voters.

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