

The Farmer in Politics

Read before a Meeting of the Two Creeks Grain Growers' Association by
JAMES MORTON, Secretary

This may seem a ticklish question to bring before a gathering of this kind, but it is the question that my own experience of the past few years, as a legislative and political reporter, best enable me to discuss. What should be the attitude of the farmer towards the politics of his country? To this there are different answers. First, there are those who advocate adherence to old party lines. They say the farmer should attend the meetings of his party, go to its conventions and so try to influence it to legislate in his interests. This sounds very well, but it does not always work out in practice, for the simple reason that the farmer, accustomed to make his living with his hands comes into conflict with men who make their living by their tongue, in the very arena where tongue predominates. The farmer's thinking power may be as good as that of anyone else, but where readiness in debate and repartee count for most, it is not surprising that he should fail to hold his own with the lawyer, the merchant or the professional man, who is daily in contact with other men and so keeps his power of expression well oiled. This, probably, is the main reason why, even in an agricultural country like Canada, farmers have so little part in the actual government of the Dominion.

Independent Party Ill-Advised

There are others who think that the farmers should organize an independent party of their own, something like the Labor Party in Great Britain. A little thought, however, will show that this, at best, could be only a temporary move, for the simple reason that it would be unjust for the farmers to have absolute control over a society that includes many other useful professions, which also have rights; and if the farmers only had partial control they would soon become fused with other interests, and in the end their identity might be as completely lost as it is at present. Nevertheless, as a temporary move it might be useful in asserting the farmer's right and power. At the same time, I think it would be destructive to a body such as the Grain Growers, composed of all classes and sections of farmers, to attempt such a movement. If the effort is to be made it should spring up outside the present organizations, which were formed for other purposes.

Indifference Dangerous

There are others who say, "Politics are rotten, have nothing to do with them at all." Well, if these people have their way, politics will remain rotten, for it is just this contemptuous indifference on the part of honest citizens that makes them the prey of rogues in office. If the political life of the country is corrupt it is the very best reason why every public spirited voter should bestir himself to do what he can to cleanse it. There are those who tell you that every man in politics is a rogue. If that is so, I claim that the fault lies with the people who elect them; but I do not believe this to be true. I have known politicians that I believed to be thoroughly honest and inspired with high ideals. Unfortunately they were seldom in control, or if they were, when elections came along their voices were drowned by the grinding of the cranks and wheels of the party machine, which at such times is none too scrupulous in its operations. In fact in our elections there is altogether too much of the cry that "All's fair in love and war." In reality some things are not fair in anything, and I claim it is not fair to the honest voter that his ballot should be swamped by men brought in on free railway tickets, by loafers treated by party heelers in bars, and by the greater number who are influenced by promises of public works or private jobs.

Vote For Principles

There is another, and I believe a very large class, who hold that while the farmer should not be neutral in politics, he should be quite independent, but need not necessarily take a personal part. They say: "Vote for the man

who you think will serve your interest best, no matter whether he be Tory or Grit, and judge of measures as they arise, caring not which party gives them birth. If you think a bill to be in the farmers' interests support it; if not condemn it, and don't stop to ask before doing so, whether it came from the Liberals or the Conservatives." With this attitude I confess that I have a great deal of sympathy. I can never see any sense in the position of the average Conservative or Liberal who declares that every measure passed by his own party is a message direct from heaven, whilst everything that emanates from his opponents is smirched with the slime of the pit. These men would vote for a totem pole if it had the party label on its nose, and they would deride as a "turncoat" the man who would vote Conservative at one election and Liberal at the next, or vice versa. For my part I rather admire the turncoat when he turns from honest conviction. In fact, in the world's history all great reformers have been regarded as turncoats in their own time. If the one side of the garment has become shabby, it is a sensible thing to turn the other side to the world and wear it boldly. I see no shame, either, in commending the same party for one act and condemning it for another. It is what we all do in our daily judgment of the actions of our fellow men, and I do not see why what is right for the individual should be wrong for the party.

Party Buncombe

It seems to me foolish that a man coming here from the old country should feel himself bound in honor to follow the party bearing the name of that with which he has been affiliated in the old land. In the old world, where so much has been fixed by tradition, there will always be those who cling to the old, and those who clamor for the new, hence the Conservatives and Liberals are sharply divided; but in a new country like Canada the conditions are all so changed that differences are chiefly in name only, and you will see the same tariff policy created by one party still carried on by the opponents who denounced it, when those opponents get into office. In olden times they used to settle differences about government with steel and gunpowder, and possibly it is some hereditary touch of this love of battle which still causes men to range themselves on different sides in a war of ballots instead of bullets. The party leaders sense this human weakness and take advantage of it, and by a great deal of stage-play and noisy declamation they work the people into a state of excitement in which they too readily forget their own interests. You would think to hear some of these party orators that their souls were burning with indignation against their wicked opponents (with whom, by the way, they have for weeks been chaffing in the lobbies and hobnobbing in sessional banquets served at the expense of the taxpayers); or at other times they would lead you to believe that their hearts are regular Niagara Falls of sympathy for the poor, oppressed toilers and farmers. Inwardly they would have to admit that they do not mean all this, but then it is "good politics," a strategic manoeuvre in the fight for office.

Lack Sympathy With Farmers

Most of our cabinet ministers are lawyers, and how can it be expected that these men can fully appreciate the difficulties under which the farmer labors. Some poet has said, "None but the poor feel for the poor," and I think that is true of the poor farmers as of others. How can a man coming down to his office in collars and cuffs at ten in the morning, enjoying long vacations and short vacations, and often receiving more for one day's work than a farmer averages in a month—how, I ask, can this man know what it is to rise at four or five in the morning, and work till six or seven thru hot summer

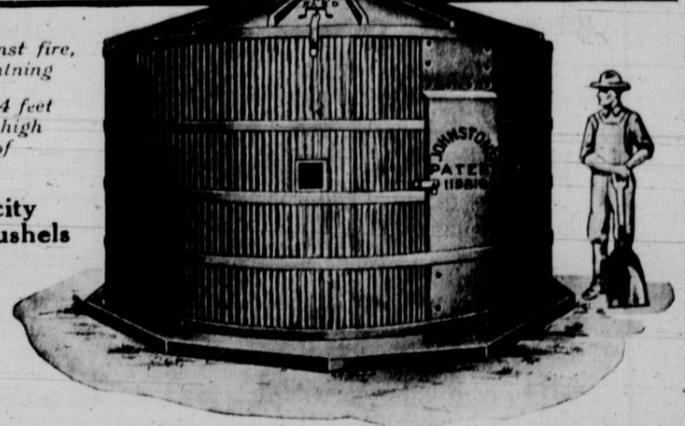
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Proof against fire, vermin, lightning

Diameter 14 feet
Wall 8 feet high
Raise of roof
3 1-2 feet

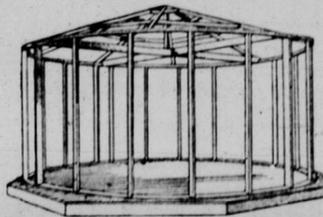
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Johnston's Granary

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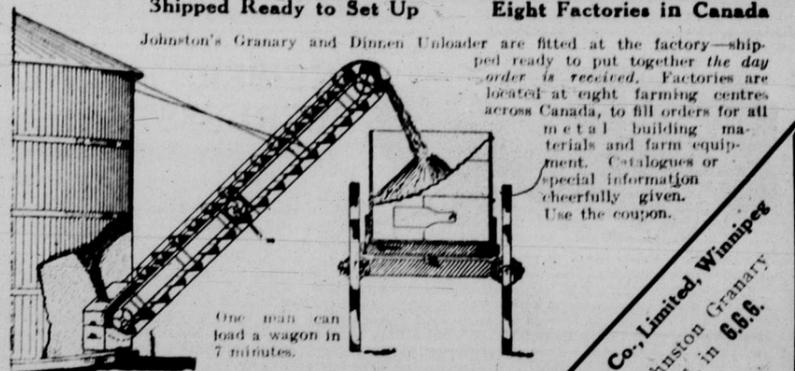
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