

# U.F.A. Secretary's Report

*P. P. Woodbridge, secretary of the United Farmers of Alberta, presented his annual report to the Calgary convention as follows:*

To the Delegates to the Eighth Annual Convention, United Farmers of Alberta.

Ladies and Gentlemen:—In presenting this, my third annual report, to you as your general secretary, I regret that I cannot again report as large an increase in our membership, as has taken place on each of the two years previous. It is true that during the year some sixty-five new unions, exclusive of the Women's Auxiliaries, have been organized, but an equal or even greater number of unions who reported last year have failed to remit any membership dues this year. One is almost ashamed to draw attention to the fact, but a casual study of the figures of the unions by constituencies will show that practically the whole of this falling-off has taken place in districts where the greatest work of our association has been done, and where the settlers have undoubtedly benefitted by that work to a greater extent than has any other portion of the province. In these districts the falling off in the number of unions reporting averages around 40 per cent. It is almost entirely due to these districts that we are compelled this year to show an actual falling off in membership of nearly 400 men, and while it is true that since the first of the year at least \$500 in arrears of membership dues have been received at the Central Office, which really has to be credited to last year's statement, the north is responsible for a considerable portion of this amount, and the south is still a long way off its standing of twelve months ago, when financial conditions were nothing like as favorable so far as the settler was concerned as they are now. Ugly as the fact may be, it might as well be faced now as at any other time, and I would suggest to this convention that they might use a portion of their time far less profitably than in discussing why such a condition of affairs should exist. We hear a good deal at times to the effect that the north is securing more representation than the south, and not infrequently the complaint is not borne out by facts. Certainly the south has received greater direct benefit during the past two years than has the north, and so far as representation is concerned, if the south really feels that it suffers in this respect, a more practical way of bringing about a change would be to maintain the unions already organized, which if done would give them preponderance in actual membership.

## Many New Members This Year

I have perhaps emphasized somewhat strongly so far as the darker side of things is concerned, and now by way of a change will try and deal with the brighter prospects. I have already stated that since the first of the month more than \$500 in arrears have come to hand, and they are still coming from day to day, so that had conditions permitted of these dues being sent in earlier we would really have shown an addition of six or seven hundred members, which may well be increased to 1,000 in the near future, and this in spite of the fact that some sixty of our 1914 unions are still in suspension. Then, too, we have a very welcome addition to our membership as a result of the organization of our Women's Auxiliaries. The total receipts from this quarter, including juniors, amounts to \$226, as against \$38 for last year. The total number of auxiliaries organized in this the first year of their existence is twenty-three, with a total membership of 326, while 256 women have taken advantage of Section 14 of our constitution and become members of our regular unions throughout the province. In view of the very limited financial resources of our auxiliaries, I feel that we should be proud of their success and of the practical assistance they have given to our association, not only financially but in keeping up the interest in our local unions, some of whom are quite ready to admit that without this help their work would have suffered very materially.

## Progress on the Frontier

One of the most interesting features of this year's organization has been the large increase among our unions in the Grande Prairie and Peace River district during the last few months of the year. This increase can be traced partly to the advent of railway facilities into that country, but I am also pleased to think that much of it can be traced to the fact that many of the settlers going into that country are old members, who carry a good word for our association with them. I do not think that we have any delegates this year from that far-off north land, but probably for the first time in the history of the association we have one or more with us from the Athabasca Landing district. If our unions in that part of the province have carried out their original intentions. We have several requests from Grande Prairie and Peace River to put an

organizer in there this spring, and I think that this question also, not only in that district but perhaps also in a general way, might very profitably be discussed by this convention, or at least referred to the incoming board of directors for their careful consideration, with particular reference to the newer settled districts in the far north.

## Work of Central Office

Dealing with the general work of the Central Office, you remember that in the early spring our association had arranged with the railway companies for special rates on seed grain, where a special certificate had been secured from the association by the local secretary, and signed by him as well as the provincial secretary. It may be of interest to our members to know that I was called upon to sign nearly 800 certificates under these regulations, and that we have records at the Central Office showing that the amount of grain moved on these certificates was in excess of 120,000 bushels.

The year has been a very full one in many ways, and it would be quite impossible to begin to cover the many incidents which have occurred from time to time and which I feel would be of interest to most of you. There is one, however, which has a particular bearing on the work of nearly all of our local unions. Early in the summer I received a hurried call to take a trip to a point not so very far from Calgary, where one of our unions in the course of their co-operative purchasing operations had secured a considerable quantity of gopher poison for



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Secretary-Treasurer U.F.A.

distribution among the members. It would appear that in doing this the union had voted a certain sum of money to be set aside to cover the expenses of the secretary in making a trip to Calgary in order to purchase the poison, and it would further appear that this sum had, as a matter of fact, actually exceeded his expenses by a dollar and some odd cents. The price fixed on the poison was sufficient to cover the whole amount voted by the union. Some local trouble occurred about that time, and information was laid with the mounted police, as a result of which the secretary who undertook the distribution of this poison found himself charged with a contravention of the Alberta Pharmacists' Act, and at the trial, so far as I could judge, the main point on which the prosecution based their case was that the poison had been sold by the local secretary at a profit, namely the difference between his actual expenses in purchasing the poison and the actual amount realized by the fractional addition to the price. To make a long story short, the prosecution was sustained, and on advice no appeal was taken. Our secretary was ordered to pay a considerable fine with the costs of the case. This incident led to some considerable investigation in regard to the laws governing the sale and distribution of gopher poison, and two resolutions will come before you at this convention as a result. As the law stands at present, poison can only be sold under a license. This does not mean that our unions can not handle gopher poison thru the local, but that pending any amendments we may secure making

provision for the work, they will have to be very careful how they do it. The main points to remember are that no profit must be made in handling the poison, and that only the amount actually ordered and paid for in advance can be purchased by the union.

## Justice Secured for Members

There is one feature of our work at the Central Office which we have not hitherto been in the habit of emphasizing to any extent, but in which we are engaged more or less all our time with considerable success, and which helps perhaps to show the great value of an organization such as ours and the good work which it is possible for us to do if our unions will only handle their local work more efficiently and in that way assist us in doing our part. In July, 1914, a case was brought to our attention where a farmer had purchased a steam threshing outfit from a certain implement company which failed to give satisfaction, and in fact was unfit for use, and after prolonged negotiations the machine was eventually removed by the company who, however, failed to return the mortgage papers and notes with which, as usual, the purchaser of the outfit had burdened his land. There were complications in connection with this case which rendered it a difficult one to handle right from the start, and I was somewhat pessimistic as to whether anything could be done. Negotiations with the machine company went on for some time without any very great success beyond the fact that the farmer himself was not further bothered by the company. In July of this year, however, we submitted the facts of the case to the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, as the machine had been sold from that province, and asked their assistance, with the result that the case was finally closed in October by the return of all the different notes given by the farmer and the mortgage which had been duly discharged. In another case we heard indirectly of one of our members who had the misfortune of being totally incapacitated shortly after having secured life insurance. The company with whom the policy was taken out was endeavoring to take advantage of a technical flaw in his statement to escape liability. The matter had been under way for a year or more and the farmer himself had given up hope of getting anything, but on our office taking it up, in less than a month the company had acknowledged its liability and the claim will be paid in full.

We have numerous other cases on record where farmers have been the victims of an injustice on the part of someone, and in each case we have been able to bring influence to bear that has resulted in the righting of the wrong done. It must be borne in mind, however, that this association stands for equity and justice, and that we cannot use our influence to secure for our members anything more than equity and justice. Unless the case is obviously one where the strong are bullying the weak, it would merely hurt us in the long run to take the matter up. For this work we have up to the present in no case made any charge. It stands to reason that this work takes up considerable time, and sooner or later the question of providing finances in connection with work of this kind will have to be considered.

## Assistance Appreciated

While we have not received any financial recompense for this work, we have, nevertheless, in our possession a few letters that make one feel that with all our faults and imperfections, we are still able occasionally to do something really worth while. I quote herewith a few sentences from two of them: "Now I want to thank you very much for your efforts in my behalf, for I know I should not have obtained satisfactory settlement if it had not been for your assistance or influence. This shows that what we need is United Farmers." Another reads: "I may say that from the bottom of my heart I do not know how to thank you enough on behalf of ..... and myself for the interest you have taken in this case, for without your help he would have been a ruined man. Altho the case has been a drawn-out one, it has ended thoroughly satisfactorily for our side, and will give us some leverage in this district to extend our membership. I am taking steps to tell everybody who is connected with farming, both in our own district and neighboring unions, of this triumph over—at any rate—one machine company who tried to beat one of our members."

With these few words I would like to close my report, but before doing so I take this opportunity of thanking all those whose friendly suggestions and kindly consideration have helped over many difficult situations. During the year I have received

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