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Why Farmers Should Organize and Stay Organized

VII—To Stay Organized and Educate.

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In all the foregoing discussion I have tried to steer clear of any extended reference to the general interests of the country as a whole, for any solution of problems that affect us as a whole must of necessity leave the *business problems* that directly affect the interests of farmers, as a class, untouched and unsolved, because nobody can deal with these special class interests effectively and satisfactorily *except the farmers themselves through their own class organization, in a business way.*

We should organize to stay organized! It is discreditable to any set of men to start to do something that must be done for the protection of their own interests and then shirk back and refuse to do it. It is dishonorable to start a business fight for a square deal and then indifferently and cowardly quit the fight. When the balance of the world declares that "farmers won't stick," we ought to have the intelligence and firmness of purpose to prove the statement false. In full view of the wreck and ruin of former splendid organizations, we ought to be ashamed to leave behind us another wrecked farmers' organization. Confronted with an organized system of commercialism that is gradually taking the ownership of farm lands from those who till the soil, it will be a crime against our posterity to quit the Farmers' Union and let this heritage continue to leave the men and women whose labor gives it all its value. If we continue to let other classes *fix the prices of our products* it is only a question of time before they will be able to take possession of all our lands. *They are financially able to do it now!*

To shrink back and surrender because the task is a big one is an exhibition of cowardice and ignorance that is as disgusting as it is disastrous. To relax efforts and give up an organization which it has taken years of sacrifice to build up, only makes the task bigger and more difficult. The responsibility rests with each individual member, and when he quits he acknowledges personal defeat and failure as one of the units of the organization, for he can not shift his personal responsibility to anybody else. If he has been disappointed with the results, it isn't the first

time in his life that he has been disappointed. Men who have the elements in them that go to make a successful life do not sulk at defeat or quit when disappointment comes. If in our individual efforts it is a good policy to make a more determined effort after each failure, that policy is even more desirable in our relationship to the Farmers' Union and its mission.

We should stay organized to educate! The withering, blighting curse of ignorance is behind all forms of human slavery. "Success and power are born of knowledge, but lack of knowledge renders the people helpless in the struggle for existence." The educational feature of the Farmers' Union is most important, because it is fundamental. The class problems which the Farmers' Union must deal with can be handled successfully *only through intelligent business leadership and intelligent patronage.* It can not be done through appeals to sentiment and passion. Ignorance can be organized but it can't be kept organized. It is only through the process of education that a farmers' organization can be perpetuated. "Farmers won't stick" unless they know why they *must stick.* They will not meet changing conditions successfully unless they *know what the conditions are.*

The farmer is the pack horse of American civilization. "Theoretically he has no enemies; practically he has no friends." He enters into competition with his own class to produce bumper crops and under the law of supply and demand *the other fellows get the products at smaller prices.* He sells in competition with his neighbors, on congested markets, regardless of present or future demand, and prices tumble again, and *somebody else gets the benefit!* A few years ago an eminent Southern writer and historian made this reference to the coming of the Farmers' Union: "It is a subject for national rejoicing that the farmers are coming together again in a class organization of their own. Heaven knows, it is time. A flock of sheep, girdled by ravenous wolves, would not be in much worse fix than are the farmers of our land, surrounded by the predatory trusts. A naked swimmer, trying to make shore through a swarm of man-eating sharks, would have just about as good chance for his life as a Southern cotton

grower has to prosper under present conditions. It appalls me when I think of the indifference of the farmer; it enrages me when I contemplate the deviltry of the system which robs him."

But there is no good reason for the farmer to be enraged with a business system that robs him of all his profits, when it lies within his power to prevent it, by combination and cooperation with those who belong to his class and whose interests are identical with his. The classes who are taking his profits are doing it by his consent. When we surrender to theirs, whether they belong to trusts or not, the right and privilege to price the products which we peddle upon the streets, they would be foolish not to do it, and we should have no class fight against them for doing what we tamely permit them to do.

In concluding this series of articles on "Why Farmers Should Organize and Stay Organized," it may not be amiss for me to say that I have not attempted any political "play to the grand stand" or to court general public applause. If all the conflicting interests of this country should heartily endorse the contentions made by me under this subject, in dealing exclusively with the direct interests of farmers, as a class, I would be sadly disappointed. I might win hearty applause from the consumers of farm products if I should follow the example of technical agricultural journals and political "helpers" of the farmers, and should stress the importance of straining every muscle to produce bumper crops for the market, regardless of *demand or distribution,* but this general applause should not come when I make argument in favor of *limiting production of crops for the market,* so as to keep up a strong demand for them, and then *control the supply to meet actual demand,* just as all intelligent folks do business. A co-operative system of marketing by farmers that would secure the endorsement and support of *all classes* wouldn't be worth much to the farmers.

Boldly, fearlessly and manfully we must fight our own battles. All other classes and subdivisions of conflicting interests have all they can do to look after and protect their

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