

SPEECH OF L. M. RHODES

At Colorado Farmers' Union State Convention, Denver, February 14, 1912.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: The average American citizen who boasts of his country's greatness seldom realizes that the basis of our prosperity is agriculture and that the true promoter of our progress is the farmer.

The entire area of the United States is, approximately, 2,000,000,000 acres. One-half of this, or 1,000,000,000 acres, is in farms, 500,000,000 acres in cultivation. Therefore, each year the plows of the sons of Uncle Sam gashes a splendid principality, equal in area to Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. One-third of our population lives on our 6,340,120 farms, and annually produces about \$9,000,000,000 worth of farm products. (Three times as many dollars as there have been minutes since Adam was created.) If they were silver dollars, lying edges touching, they would make a glittering silver ribbon eight and one-half times around the earth; or, if turned, sides touching, would make a silver rope that would reach across the Atlantic Ocean nine times. The price of one crop of the American farmer would cover 2,000 acres with a silver coverlid and all the gold coin on earth would not equal it in value.

Yet, only 4 per cent of the American farmers are prosperous and 50 per cent of them are homeless,—renters, croppers, and hirelings,—and have not a tax title to a grain of sand on earth.

We produce about 22,000,000 carloads of products. That would load a train of cars reaching six times around the earth. The selling value of these products amount to \$30,000,000 for every work day in the year. Each year Mother Earth sends up from her bosom a magnificent harvest that should make her tillers the most independent people in the world. Within ten years the products of our soil has doubled; in a dozen years it has rolled up the incomprehensible yield of \$80,000,000,000.

But the patient toilers, who, through summer's heat and winter's cold, work on from season to season, constantly increasing the national wealth, producing the raw material from which humanity is clothed and pouring into the marts of earth the sustenance of life itself, are working for their board and clothes.

Think of it. A century ago the farmers of this country owned nine-tenths of the wealth of the country. Now they own one-fifth. The American farmer began a lonely wayfarer among forests, mountains and prairies. He has changed them into fruitful fields and converted marshes into beautiful meadows. His trusty rifle and gleaming ax cleared a pathway for the oncoming hosts of civilization. Where once was heard the howl of the wolf and the scream of the panther, where the wild horse grazed and the buffalo roamed, we now hear the scream of the locomotive, the hum of busy machinery and the songs of millions of industrious farmers.

Not only has the American farmer shown his strength, courage and patriotism in his battles with forests and wild beasts, but he has been ever ready to fight or to die under the folds of the flag of his country. The farmer has helped to fight the country's battles; his blood bought our liberty; he is the corner stone of our wealth, the mainspring of our progress, the bulwark of our defense, and the future greatness of our country rests on his shoulders. He produces the

prime necessities of life. Let the farmer take a long vacation, and his crops stop laughing with the delicate green of spring and the mellow glow of autumn, and earth will no longer yield us a regal ransom from starvation. Stop the plow, eliminate the crop, and there would be no "tallest buildings," "queen cities," or "fastest trains in the world." The incomes of our great railroads would dwindle; our great ocean steamers would float around empty; the strong arm of labor would fall helpless at its side; our corn, cotton and wheat fields would become Sahara deserts; a nugget of gold would not buy a loaf of bread; hunger and want would knock at the door of all men; civilization would cease and humanity perish. Yet, this class of producers who hold in their hands the comfort, happiness and destiny of mankind, and the key to human life itself, have so neglected the business part of their calling that they are making no profits, declaring no dividends, and have actually lost one-third of their proportional holdings in sixty years. The farmer has produced enough wealth in a quarter of a century to buy all the property in the United States. Yet they are not holding their own; for, twelve years ago they owned one-fourth of the wealth of the country and now they own only one-fifth. They have produced and failed to manage until the land which once belonged to them is owned by a few.

When capital increases it seeks investment for its surplus. Already owning practically all other wealth, it is now being invested in land. One man owns 30,000,000 acres of land. Another owns 14,500,000 acres. Another owns 14,080,000 acres. Another 7,000,000 acres. Seven foreigners own 15,000,000 acres. American and European spinners own one-fifth of our cotton lands. In five years \$9,000,000,000 has been invested in land in the United States by home and foreign land companies. Sixty-three large land companies and rich individuals own 175,000,000 acres in this country. This equals over one-third of our land in cultivation, or one-eleventh of all our land. We have let a few men get possession of our wealth. One per cent of the families own 90 per cent of the wealth of 92,000,000 people. Twelve men control one-third of the wealth and a quarter of a million men own three-fourths of the wealth of this, the richest country in the world. One man controls \$12,000,000,000 worth of wealth,—nearly one-tenth of the nation's wealth. If Adam had begun when the Lord made him and worked until now at \$5,000 a day and had saved every cent of it he would not have as much money as this money king of America controls. Think of it. Ninety-two million people, supposed to be free, under the domination of a mere handful of men who can levy tribute at will upon the richest nation under the sun.

In the struggle for the comforts, conveniences and luxuries of life, if the American farmer has fallen behind, has not kept pace with other vocations, he has no one to blame but himself. Nature put into his hands the commodities that succor the world. The only reason he is not king of creation is he has been out-generaled in the battle of wits. Farmers of America, should we go on without a protest while trusts and corporations are constantly knocking at the door of Congress asking for special privileges to rob and oppress us, and men are making more net gains speculating and gambling in our products than we are making producing them? Can we stand idly by without a protest while our children are ground into dividends and

our wives working as field hands? Being a patriot to the manner born, looking back over the records of the past, taking a historic view of the graves of dead nations that have wobbled out of the orb of righteousness and died with an overdose of graft and concentration of wealth, and knowing that the United States is loitering in the primrose path of dalliance, so to speak, and knowing that the prosperity that comes by accumulation instead of production, the prosperity of graft, the prosperity of injustice, the prosperity of extortion, the prosperity of tribute, the prosperity that thrives by oppression, the prosperity that depends on mastery and servitude, can not maintain a republic or foster our liberties, (Egypt, Rome, Assyria, Greece, all tried this gilded pathway and they perished), will the American farmer willingly see himself chained to the rock while the vultures of depotism prey upon his vitals? Knowing that a republic once fallen has never risen, that the ruins of freedom have never regained their youth, will we not change our course? Are we willing to continue to be nailed by the nail trust, doped by the drug trust, skinned by the doctor trust, plugged by the dentist trust, sacked by the flour trust, salted by the salt trust, sweetened by the sugar trust, stitched by the machine trust, roasted by the coal trust, scratched by the match trust, chilled by the ice trust, lathered by the soap trust, canned by the tin trust, and skipped by no trust, all because we have no farmers' trust?

Surely, if the farmers of the United States could understand, could fully realize, keenly and quickly, the perils to country life that lieth in the rapidly increasing rates in tenantry; the rapidly rising value of farm lands; the feverish anxiety of capital to buy farm land in large tracts; the rapidity with which large holders are monopolizing the land areas of America; the appalling increase of a homeless class in this country; the lure of the city and the deadly threat of illiteracy and servitude, they would all come together and make the greatest effort known to history to check the cause and find a cure for the ills that are so deadly in their menace to American farm life.

Do Not Be Deceived.

For years, with clock-work regularity, the partisan politician has come round with his lovely heart-searching, vote-lifting smile that would melt the horns off a goat, electioneering and button-holing us farmers and holding our hands like a lemon squeezer; looking so wise you would think his brains would sink a ship; acting like a love-sick gander at a poultry show; with tears in his voice and sugar on his lips, inquiring about "Madam and the children." For half a century we have been electing this class of men to make laws for us and as a result we have 16,000 laws on our government statutes, forty-nine-fiftieths of them in the interest of the classes instead of the masses.

As evidence that our lawmakers have represented the trusts and corporations and misrepresented the people, I beg you to consider the following figures:

The combined industries of 92,000,000 people in the United States added, in 1911, \$4,800,000,000 to our national wealth. According to the sworn statements of the 270,000 corporations, their net profits were, for the year 1911, \$3,300,000,000. The cost of running the national, State, county, town and city governments is estimated at \$2,500,000,000. Total tribute to corporations and running expenses of the government, States, etc., \$5,800,000,000. When the toll we pay to the various governments and corporations is \$5,800,000,000,

and the annual increase in national wealth is only \$4,800,000,000, it is plain that we are losing \$1,000,000,000 every year. When statistics, the mute and unassailable signposts of progress or failure, tell us that one-half of our annual increase in wealth is absorbed by less than a dozen trusts, and that the accumulations of the trusts are greater than the growth in national wealth, we can see clearly that doom awaits around the corner for somebody. Already we have men so wealthy that they could buy all the property in one of our States, and landlords whose acres equal the areas of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Rhode Island all rolled into one vast estate. The very life of this republic depends on the people watching these gigantic corporations and combinations and checking them. Most of the men sent to make laws for us are pliant tools of plutocracy and are under the domination of wealth. Instead of discussing vital questions and principles and working for measures beneficial to the masses, they make puppet shows to amuse and lull the people while the trusts pick the public pocket.

Knowing that "righteousness exalteth a nation" and "sin is a reproach to any people," and seeing the sixty-first Congress appropriate \$2,050,000,000, one-half of which goes to the War Department, and only a measly \$30,000,000 for agriculture; thirty times as much to dig graves as to dig ditches; thirty times as much to build battleships as to build homes; producing billions every year but getting poorer all the time, is it any wonder that the farmer turns away from the politician in disgust?

What are you going to do about it? If you refuse to take action it means that you have already surrendered and are willing to continue to have your hide taken off. The bugle call to duty is loud and clear. Do you answer?

The inevitable result of this trend under the present system is a reduction in numbers and an increase in size of the agencies of manufacture and distribution. Great industrial monopolies will devour the small manufacturer and the force of distribution will be vested in fewer hands. When manufacture and distribution are entirely controlled by the few, with power to exact tribute from all, this concentration of control will necessarily make slaves of the unorganized and unprotected masses. It may be that the powers that be will be benevolent masters and will allow food and raiment in abundance, but American manhood and citizenship will have been destroyed. Old Glory will cease to float in the breezes o'er a land of freedom and another republic will be sleeping in the graveyard of the dead nations of the earth.

We read, that in olden times the cruel tyrant contracted cells with sliding walls which slowly moved to the center, eventually crushing the life out of the occupant. Under our present economic system we have an analogous condition. The longer we stand idle the more power will concentrate into a few hands and the masses will become more and more the chattels of a few owners. More power will be placed in the hands of a small oligarchy to levy upon the helpless masses any tax they may wish to impose.

If men like Morgan, Rogers and Belmont think that there is no act of spoliation to which the people will not submit, if they think the American people will stand idly by without a protest while they gobble up all the nation's wealth, they are playing with fire and building for themselves a fool's paradise. Liberty! Civil liberty! Did not happen