

# THE FARMERS' MOVEMENT IN CANADA

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**I**N attempting to deal with the Farmers' Movement within the space limits of this article I must necessarily confine myself to some special phase of the subject, or else present the whole matter comprehensively but in briefest outline. The latter course will, I think, be preferable.

The Movement has a fairly definite history. It has also a *raison d'être* in the industrial development of the last hundred years. Let the reader attempt a mental review of the tremendous changes which the so-called "industrial revolution" has brought about,—changes such as the advent of steam power, the development of applied science, the consolidation of industry in the hands of the few, the growth and centralization of the credit system and the money power. It is significant to note that the centralization of industrial and financial power offers a golden opportunity for exploiting the masses, and there seems little doubt that the overstimulation of city industries throughout the world—with its consequent depression of the industries that are rural—shows how advantage has been taken of this chance. Thus the normal balance of the industrial structure has been destroyed. Coupled with all this one should note too the rapid growth of literary and printed matter, the perfecting of the various means of communication the world over, and the extraordinary development of trade, resulting in a rapidly growing *interdependence* between individuals and peoples.

Groups of all kinds have multiplied, and organization still goes on apace. Prominent among the industrial groups to be thus organized have been the capitalists on the one hand and the wage-earners on the other. Between them there is intermittent warfare, but together they control what may be called the *centralized* industries with urban location, and they divide between them—as best they may—what these industries earn. In striking contrast we have the great decentralized industry of agriculture, the most important of all our primary industries, important not only indirectly in so far as it ministers to the primary needs of man and supplies the raw material for numerous secondary enterprises, but

important also indirectly in so far as rural life furnishes men and women of strength and character, and is thus the *seedbed* of the nation

Now, from the standpoint of production, agriculture scarcely permits of being centralized. Operating therefore hitherto without much organization in an otherwise organized world, it has slowly realized how great is the danger of its decadence and how serious the consequent weakening of the whole fibre of national life. Farmers therefore everywhere have lately responded to the need, and have begun to organize for the protection and advancement of their industry. Their organization has taken many forms, but the underlying purpose of all is to see that agriculture gets its just due, takes its rightful place in the great industrial structure, and is enabled to minister to the life of society as it alone can do. This, I think, is the *raison d'être* of the Farmers' Movement.

Its history is fairly definite. Perhaps I cannot do better than to quote from an address I gave before the U. F. O. convention in December, 1919:—

The Farmers' Movement in Canada, both eastern and western, is closely connected with "The Grange", which was incepted in the United States in 1867 and migrated to Canada about 1874. Between 1880 and 1890 the Grange in this country attained very large proportions, and it declined as rapidly, so that by the latter year it had well nigh disappeared. . . . Its decadence however only heralded the beginning of another farmers' organization, the "Patrons of Industry", which had a rise and fall even more rapid than that of the Grange, and in contrast with the latter suffered complete extinction as an organized society. But it too was closely followed by a third, the "Farmers' Association", which may I think lay claim to having stimulated the Canadian Grange into renewed activity. At all events these two organizations amalgamated in 1907 under the Dominion Grange Charter, and the amalgamated society affiliated with the western farmers' organizations in 1909. Four years later, in 1913, it took the initiative in an effort to consolidate the local farmers' clubs, which had been rapidly developing as an outgrowth of the Farmers' Institute system, the success of which is here apparent.

Now, during the early years of the present century there grew up in the prairie provinces a very strong farmers' movement operating along two lines, commercial and educational. Thus it was not unnatural for the Grange to design the U. F. O. after the pattern of the western organizations with which it had been affiliated, rather than after the pattern of the old Grange. I feel confident, however, that the western movement found its inspiration in the Grange and its immediate successor. But local conditions determined its form, and its unusual success was perhaps the greatest factor in determining the special form of the present farmers' movement in Ontario.

Now, in appraising rightly the Farmers' Movement in Canada, a study of the parent society in the United States is of immense service. I cannot here trace its history, but must refer the reader to an excellent book by the Rev. A. B. Grosh, first chaplain of the United States National Grange, entitled *Mentor in the Granges and Homes of Patrons of Husbandry*. I quote however the following extracts from the "Declaration of Principles" as first adopted by the U. S. National Grange in 1874:—

..... We mutually resolve to labour for the good of our order, our country, and mankind. We endorse the motto "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

To develop a better and higher manhood and womanhood among ourselves. To enhance the comforts and attractions of our homes, and strengthen our attachment to our pursuits. To foster mutual understanding and co-operation.....

We propose meeting together, working together, selling together, and in general acting together for our mutual protection and advancement as occasion may require..... We shall earnestly endeavour to suppress personal, local, sectional and national prejudices, all unhealthy rivalry, all selfish ambition..... We desire to bring producers and consumers, farmers and manufacturers, into the most direct and friendly relations possible..... The principles we teach underlie all true politics, all true statesmanship..... We desire a proper equality, equity and fairness; protection for the weak, restraint upon the strong; in short, justly distributed burdens and justly distributed power..... We appeal to all good citizens for their cordial co-operation to assist in our efforts towards reform.

One finds also in this "Declaration" a distinct disclaimer of any purpose to "go into politics". The spirit and aim and method are well stated in the following resolution passed by the National Grange in 1875:—

That the moral, social and intellectual features, being the great leading features of the order, should be most sacredly cherished, and that it is the duty of the several States Granges to adopt such measures as will most tend to the cultivation and promotion of these features. That all other features are subordinate to these, and should be kept for ever so by this order.

I quote also, for purposes of comparison, and also because it is intrinsically valuable and suggestive, the statement of *objects* of the U. F. O. as officially adopted at the inaugural meeting in 1914:—

The objects of this Association shall be to further the interest of farmers in all branches of Agriculture

(a) By fostering mutual understanding.

(b) By encouraging the study of farm and household questions, so as to increase the efficiency and comfort of the farmer and his family.

(c) By promoting social intercourse and the study of economic and social questions through the holding of debates and lectures, the dissemination of literature, the establishment of libraries and so forth; and by otherwise extending the knowledge of members and their families, with the view of elevating the standard of living in rural communities.

(d) By watching legislation relating to the farmer's interests, and by urging from time to time, through duly appointed delegates or otherwise, the passing of legislation required to promote the best interests of Agriculture.

(e) By studying and teaching the principles of co-operation, and by promoting the establishment of co-operative organizations.

(f) By encouraging members to provide suitable halls or meeting places, and properly furnish and equip the same for the social and educational benefit of the members.

(g) By endeavoring to suppress personal, local, sectional, national and class prejudices, and thereby promote the best interests of Canada as a whole.

To the commercial and educational efforts of the Movement definite political activities have of late been added. Its commercial side I defined as follows in my address to the U. F. O. Convention in 1919:—

.....To buy wholesale, to sell wholesale, and to eliminate all unnecessary middlemen. To reduce waste and prevent profiteering. To establish the principle of business for service and not for profit. Such were the aims. Similar aims were those of the strong commercial farmers' organizations of western Canada, which have handled a large proportion of the farmers' grain and have more recently gone into the handling of supplies. Conceived as part of the co-operative movement as a whole, the ultimate aim is the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth, where industry will be for public service and use, not for private gain or profit,—the democratization of industry, so that we may truly say our industrial life is "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Some idea of what may be accomplished in this direction can be got from what has been accomplished. For example, in Great Britain co-operative industry and commerce has grown steadily for seventy-five years, until its aggregate business in 1917 amounted to 1,124 dollars' worth, with a net surplus of over 90 millions. It has factories which produce almost every commodity in domestic demand, besides plantations and farming lands for the production of raw material in several different countries. . . . . It has also immense banking and insurance institutions. Co-operation has been applied under somewhat different conditions but with equally marked success in agricultural Denmark, where

the great bulk of farm produce and farm supplies is handled co-operatively. Valuable testimony can be obtained also from Ireland, and from a number of European countries. There seems therefore to be no vital or permanent difficulty in the way of applying the same principle to Canadian industry, with the most salutary results in the elimination of waste and profiteering.

Educationally, the purpose of the Farmers' Movement is most definite and vital. One can see this in the extracts previously quoted from the Grange "Declaration of Principles", and from the avowed "Objects" of the U. F. O. In this connection I refer the reader to a scholarly and suggestive book entitled *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*, by M. P. Follett, wherein the function of group activities in democratic development is exhaustively dealt with. The perfection of the individual life is, indeed, the purpose of all our institutions, and there is an essential reciprocity between the development of the individual and the growth of social institutions.

Speaking broadly, we may describe education as bringing the individual into harmony with his environment,—physical, mental, and spiritual. I have elsewhere put the matter thus:—

In the first place, then, we must consider our relation to the world of nature about us, and on this basis we have built up our education in science and its technical applications. Hence all our agricultural colleges, schools of engineering and the like, through which we are enabled to work in harmony with nature's great forces and to reap the rich rewards which lie waiting for us. Hence, also, the telephone, the airship, and those thousands of things which have placed magic powers within man's reach. . . . .

In the second place, we have to consider our relation to the world of human nature, within us and about us. . . . . It is therefore not only necessary that our education acquaint us with the laws of the physical universe; we must also learn the moral laws, for without knowledge of, and obedience to, these all co-operation with external nature may be turned to dust and ashes. We need only look to Europe during the last five years to behold how terrible have been the results of a one-sided education,—all the science which mankind has learned, all his wit and ingenuity turned to destruction, so that the infernal triumvirate of war, pestilence and famine has held sway over a bleeding and stricken people.

And, finally, we must not forget our relationship to the Unseen, for without harmony with the Spirit of all Truth nothing else will count. For, as the great apostle so eloquently said, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have faith so as to move mountains, if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned, and have not Love, it profiteth me nothing." Education which ignores the greatest

and most vital part of man's environment is wholly inadequate and cannot but produce results wholly disappointing.

Huxley's famous definition of a liberal education is eloquent and concise:—

That man, I think, has a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will and does with ease and pleasure all the work that—as a mechanism—it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of nature and the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

The recent *political* activities of the organized farmers of Canada have, perhaps, attracted more attention than those of a commercial or educational character, and there is great interest in the probable development of these. This definite entrance into politics was unpremeditated, and in opposition to traditional policy, though the "Patrons of Industry" broke the tradition in one Ontario election. The rapid and somewhat spectacular political successes of the last four years have therefore attracted widespread notice. Moreover, interest in the matter is being deepened by the incipient controversy between those who advocate some new form of "group government" and those who lean towards the old time party system.

There is little doubt that the success which has attended the farmers' political efforts has been due to the growing conviction that under the two-party régime the farmer vote was split into Grit and Tory, with the result that the sum total of its influence was zero. How was the farmer to protect himself against exploitation by those who had no party, if he himself was to be bound by party ties? For years, of course, the policy of working from within the two parties, of bombarding governments and legislatures with deputations and petitions, was followed. But the results seem to have been unsatisfactory, and with little warning a very large percentage of farmers severed their connection with the old parties to concentrate their votes upon "Farmer Candidates", pledged to see that agriculture got "a square deal" and that the principles advocated by the organized farmers were advanced.

Special interest at present is focussed upon this political side of the Movement. There are those on the one hand who fear that

class-consciousness will mean class-selfishness and result in class-legislation. They think that all industrial classes should be united in one "party" advocating what it believes to be for the general good. On the other hand, there are those who believe that economic class-organization is a necessity of the times, that a national policy would be better arrived at by open discussion between class representatives than by secret concessions made to various "interests" in party councils, that party platforms are necessarily nebulous and susceptible of varying interpretations, and finally that class-legislation has been rampant under cover of the eloquent and patriotic professions of political parties. The matter is further complicated by the fact that our electoral and governmental methods have grown up under conditions very different from those existing at present, and thus constitute a serious obstacle in the way of constitutional change. There seems to be an anomaly in the control of government by a class-group, but no method has yet been worked out by which the co-operative idea can be adopted in governing. As with nations, so with "parties". We have competition leading to the domination of one by the other. Co-operation between parties as between nations has yet to be made effective. Complications result too, from the fact that no individual is adequately represented by any one or two groups. The richer his life, the more manifold his relations with groups of various kinds. Occupational representation is, then, but a makeshift,—better, perhaps, than our present territorial method, but sadly inadequate. Political reform, indeed, has lagged behind the need for it, and we are yet scarcely aware of the obsolescence of our political methods. Mankind is naturally conservative, prone to endure the ills it has rather than fly to others that it knows not of.

At the moment interest is centred in the proposal to form a Dominion-wide Progressive Party. There is, of course, no dispute as to the desirability of those likeminded in city and country getting together to advance their common ideas by political action. But under our present electoral and governmental systems such co-operation is made difficult without Dominion-wide party organization. And, if this takes place, what will be the result? How long will the Liberal and Progressive parties retain their separate identities? If they cannot do so, then by absorption or amalgamation we shall shortly have again the two-party system, with a changed personnel and a new alignment; provided—of course—there are no dissentients and no new "group" representatives. Do we want this? Doubtless a real gain would thus be secured. But at what cost? Mr. H. W. Wood, President of the U. F. A., in a

recent article takes strong ground against a return to the party system. He writes:—

.....The vital question we are called on to decide is whether we want to continue to exercise our citizenship rights, and to try to fulfil our citizenship obligations through the medium of citizenship organization or through the medium of the political party system. Our first decision must be in regard to the formation of the political group; whether we want to move together through organization, or break up our citizenship organization and act as individuals, each individual being thus forced to attach himself to one or other of the contending, unorganized, political parties. This fixes the discussion on the relative merits of the organized political "group" and the political "party". What advantage has either of these formations over the other?

Let us begin with the organized formation, or the so-called group system. Through this system the citizens are enabled to initiate and carry on every step of their own political activities. In other words, they operate their own political machinery. They select their own delegates to attend nominating conventions, each delegate representing a definite number of citizens. These delegates, who are answerable to and influenced by no one except the people who selected them, carry on the work of the convention, including the nomination of the candidate.

When the candidate is thus nominated, it is the duty of the citizens who initiated his nomination to finance and carry on his campaign. This is a purely democratic process, and such a process cannot be carried on politically except through the systematic organization of the people. At least, no other way has yet been made manifest.

The political party is not an organization. If the farmers should inaugurate a straight farmers' party, and adopt a straight farmers' platform, they could not carry on democratically, because the political party structure cannot implement democratic political action. To turn from organized political action, in which the people move systematically from the bottom up, is to turn from democracy. To turn to the political party, which is to be guided by an executive committee—guided from the top down—is to turn back to individualism and political autocracy.....

Mr. Wood may be rather severe in his strictures, but his point of view must be considered.

The whole problem is, of course, the fundamental one of human society. People must come together in groups to reconcile and unify their differences and evolve common thought. Groups must similarly come together to reconcile and unify differences, and so with nations. Co-operation is the law of life, which must be learned by individuals, by groups, by States, and in so doing liberty is not lost but preserved. How can this reconciling, unifying, harmonizing



process be best carried on? The Farmers' Movement, I think, has offered a real—if a partial—solution, and all citizens should welcome what it has contributed to the growth of a true social consciousness.

But, however attractive may be the immediate political problems, the commercial and educational activities of the Movement must not be lost sight of. On the commercial side is involved the whole co-operative idea, so far as this can be applied to agriculture and to the relation of agriculture with other industries. Co-operative marketing is being recognized as a prime necessity, helpful alike to farmer and to nation. But *consumers'* co-operation is also of great importance, because it affords a basis for the unifying of different interests better, perhaps, than can be found elsewhere. Educationally, too, the neighbourhood group, together with church and school, is of vital significance not only for the development of true democracy, but for the enrichment of the individual life. Life, indeed, consists in relations; it is rich in proportion to the variety and harmony of these relations. Education should therefore be directed more and more to the development of these, and of the capacity for co-operating. In fact there is no necessary conflict of interests anywhere. There is perfect harmony possible among all classes of useful workers, whether they work by hand or by brain. It is possible among all groups and all nations. We can harmonize the liberty of the individual with the sovereignty of the State. But discord is still frequent. The ideal harmony is still in the making. What contribution the Farmers' Movement can make towards perfecting it, is the underlying thought of this article.