
Our Agrarian Problem.

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If the Communist Party is to be a Party of action it must not neglect the struggles of the farm workers and farmers. These exploited workers represent the largest single occupational group in the country. They are skilled workers in our basic industry — *Agriculture*. To most comrades participation in farmers' commodity organizations, in their struggles for parliamentary power, or in their immediate demands, seems impossible. In fact if one speaks of the vital need for agrarian action, his subject will in all probability receive the kindly attention usually bestowed upon the pathetic aspirations of a child. This benevolent ignorance among the membership will prolong our separation from the agrarian workers. Such ignorance must be overcome. The new principles of mass leadership which we are just beginning to learn, have opened our eyes to the unlimited possibilities of a determined and united vanguard. It is appropriate therefore to ask: “How can the Communist Party function in the agrarian struggles?”

Meeting the Need.

We must frankly admit our inability to meet the present agrarian crisis. The opportunities for propaganda should be an incentive to prepare for agrarian action in the immediate future. The first step is to make a general study of the farm struggle. It will also be found necessary to provide for special rural organization and discipline for isolated members. We should have a national agrarian organizer, and a section agrarian organizer for each geographical section: East, South, Midwest, and West. Together with a Sub-Committee of the CEC, these organizers should form the center of an *Agrarian Bureau* to direct all agrarian activities

of the Party. It should be understood that the work of the agrarian organizers is different from that of regular Party organizers. The agrarian work will be among the most backward elements in farm organizations. Rural party members should therefore have their regular party connections with the nearest Party group. At the same time they carry on their most important function as nuclei in farm organizations.

But the unification of all available rural communists into a centralized agrarian machine is, by itself, hopelessly inadequate. First because they are tied to their home locality and secondly because they are too few in numbers. It is necessary for some city members to volunteer for agrarian service. We need trained agrarian workers. But to train a mobile corps of agrarian party workers we must have a farm school. There a concentrated course in actual farm practice and the theories of the new work will fit them for participation in the struggles of the rural mass. Lastly the Party should include a National Agrarian magazine among its legal press. This will complete the underground preparation. The *Agrarian Bureau* of the Party will then be the motive force of the legal agrarian activities.

In the United States there are two classes of exploited working farmers. Farm laborers and small farmers; proletarian and semi-proletarian. Agrarian action therefore divides itself accordingly. Each Section-Agrarian organizer will have a different problem. Race prejudice, national prejudice, or difference in type of farming may complicate the local policy. We should appeal directly to one or the other of these elements and win its support. Which element, Proletarian or Semi-Proletarian, should receive the greatest emphasis will vary in each section.

The West.

The Mountain and Pacific states west of the Grain Belt make up "The West." Here the typical unit is the large industrial farm. Modern farm machinery and modern methods have replaced the primitive methods of the South and the small farming of the East. The men operating these industrial farms resemble the workers in any other industry; they are in fact proletarians. Capitalist land-hogs throughout the West control great empires. The miller and Lux combine owns millions of acres. The Taft Co. has 150 square miles of land. Then come the large holdings of the Swift and Armour interests and thousands of others not so large but just as efficient in exploiting the farm proletarians. This farm practice requires large numbers of workers during the harvest season. The western farm workers are largely migratory. They travel on the freights from southern California to northern Washington and harvest the great crops; fruits, vegetables, and grain. The permanent workers on these "ranches" and on the cattle ranches have a more settled existence; but throughout the West the typical producers are industrial proletarians. Our tactics, then, must be adapted primarily to proletarian struggles.

Because the proletarian elements are most important in the west we must cooperate with the IWW in their activities among the farm workers. In spite of our general differences of policy we must recognize that the IWW alone is active in the agrarian field. Their workers carry their cards and preamble up and down the land. They actually participate in the daily struggle for better pay, better food and shelter. Our Western section agrarian organizers should plan to centralize IWW work among the farm workers. Bureaus of information for the "Stiffs" should be opened. The advice given and the direction of more general action should be based on exact conditions of crops, weather, numbers annually employed in the different areas, and the wages to ask for each type of work. We must convince the IWW that centralized control of general farm demonstrations should be our joint object. We must prove that the isolated, petty, almost personal strikes which at present occupy their energies are valueless unless we give them a cumulative effect through central direction. We must not demand that the "Stiffs" be "Red card men." We render service in our chair of

more or less permanent bureaus along the road. It is because the "Stiffs" have so few tangible interests in life we must be more fixed in our attempts to direct their activities. We must not merely talk theories; we must symbolize something concrete. Control of the fruit packers' unions will be won only by supporting their demands for joint action. Almost the entire western agrarian problem is one for industrial tactics. These will be most effective if carried on jointly with the many IWW organizers in the field.

The East.

In the West we found farms and population widely scattered. In the East the farm problem is totally different. The small farm is the typical unit. The semi-proletarian is the typical producer. The East is the most productive and important of all agrarian sections. Eighty percent of our industries and industrial workers are concentrated in this section. Here also is the greatest number of farmers and the largest area of improved acres. All of our great cities and the most important ports are here. Practically three-quarters of our population carry on these activities in the East. It will be the storm center of the proletarian revolution. The importance of the small semi-proletarian farmers interspersed throughout this teeming section is generally overlooked. Only when a transportation strike threatens does the vital necessity for food force itself upon our notice. During the revolution the city workers and their armies will be dependent upon this great mass of backward working farmers for food. We shall get food only by convincing them that they will benefit by a proletarian victory.

In the East we must emphasize the importance of the semi-proletariat. It is here that we find a general backwardness. Because of this and the fact that this type of farming tends to minimize the importance of the proletarian we must call upon our city comrades for permanent agrarian workers. Here we must establish the farm school to train these comrades. It is in the East that the agrarian magazine will be most effective. The capitalist farm press has a circulation of more than 14 million. It has no opposition, unless it be the Non-Partisan League papers. These do not answer the purpose. Our paper must rally all dissatisfied elements in the agrarian mass. It must unmask, in unmistak-

able language, the subtle hypocrisy of the capitalists exploiting the farmers. But it must go farther and show that all workers have the same class enemy.

Farmers are much more thoroughly organized than is generally supposed. There are approximately 14,000 successful farm organizations of national or interstate scope. The membership in these has never been totalled but unquestionably runs into millions. The American Farm Bureau Federation alone has a membership of 1.5 million. Most of the organizations are formed to market a single commodity. There have been, however, recent evidences of a new movement of farmers to organize as a class. This tendency must be developed. We must create slogans "for working farmers." We must make direct attacks upon the capitalist nuclei which direct most farm organizations. Today the small farmer, whether tenant or mortgaged owner, is beginning to realize that he faces bankruptcy. In 1910 his average labor income was only \$318. In 1921, after a period of supposedly high prices, the small farmer is producing at a loss. It is by discussing the flattened pocketbook that we will first gain the interest of this class of semi-proletarians.

The major tactic of the Capitalist class is to separate city and farm workers. Because of their controlling the city and farm press, this is a simple matter for

them. We must strive at all times to clear away inspired misunderstandings.

Summary.

We must realize that our failure to function in agrarian activities is due largely to general neglect of the problem. To rebuild the Party to deal with agrarian problems is our first task. When that is accomplished the centralized Agrarian Bureau will become a live force in the daily struggles of both proletarian and semi-proletarian farm workers.

Backward farmers, handicapped by the universal "land psychology" must not be driven by our neglect into the camps of the counterrevolutionary forces. Nor must we allow Famine to become an ally to the capitalist arms. We must lead the farm masses, step by step, in their struggles to a neutral attitude; later on this will become an attitude of active support.

American imperialism may cause the longest, bitterest struggle in history before admitting defeat. Military campaigns will have fertile farm sections for their objectives. The critical battles will be for *Food*. We must win the producers of food to our side or the proletarian victory will be seriously delayed if not defeated.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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