

The New Republic vs.

belief in the rights of farmers rather than merely needs.

The wording of their demands give the temper and expectation of the farmers. Demand 1 reads:

We Demand Adequate Immediate Cash Relief for All Needy Farmers in Order to Live and Continue Production:

For all other toiling farmers we demand production credit without collateral and without interest. We demand the distribution of surplus food and crops in storage, in warehouses and on the farms, at the expense of the government, to the destitute farmers and unemployed workers through committees elected by these farmers and workers themselves. We demand free medical aid and dental care for farmers and workers.

We demand that the government guarantee a nine months' term in all public schools, the reopening of closed schools, no further closing of schools, free textbooks, free transportation, no overcrowding in schools, the building of new schools, no discrimination because of race or nationality, and free hot lunches not at the expense of the teacher.

Where local funds are insufficient these demands are to be met at the expense of the government.

We demand further free education with all expenses paid, through grade school, high school, and any college desired.

There are six other demands for cancellation of debts, against foreclosures and evictions, for higher purchasing power, tax relief, reduction in rents, and a complete cancellation of all Negro share cropper debts and abolition of terror against him. Higher prices are not to be gained by raising prices to the consumer but by cutting the profits of the middleman. They know they need buyers and that the workers need work but they are not so sure this system of society can give either. But it would be a mistake to imply that their eyes are not on the immediate future. Their program may sound ambitious but these farmers are not going to accept a bare subsistence without a struggle.

Forty-two women delegates met in a separate session backing up the men and coming out with a program for birth control and education. Youth groups and the Negro delegation added fire to a convention astonishing to anyone who knew this same class of farmer a few years ago. The migratory worker, forgotten since the I. W. W. was present with 31 delegates and a program of action. If ever a group gave the impression of knowing what it wants and how it means to get it, the Second Farmers National Conference is that group.

(In submitting to the New Masses her article on the Chicago Farmers Conference, which appears in this issue, Miss Herbst also gave us, for publication, her correspondence with the New Republic regarding the article. "Under dates of Nov. 3 and 10," Miss Herbst informs us, "arrangements were made to have me write a report of the farm conference at Chicago, dates Nov. 15 and 18. The report was sent Nov. 25. Three notes respecting the article were sent to the New Republic office with no response. One of the notes criticized Mr. Bliven's position in his New Republic articles then appearing and quoted from Mr. Short's Sioux City The Unionist concerning the doubtful nature of some of his statistics. The article was returned under date of Dec. 12." The Bliven-Herbst correspondence follows.—THE EDITORS.)

Mr. Bliven to Miss Herbst

DEAR MISS HERBST:

Your article about the convention of radical farmers only reached my desk on Monday of this week. I am terribly sorry about the delay; it was partly because I was away in New England, and partly because Malcolm got temporarily buried in work.

We should have been delighted to have an article about the convention, if it could have been published promptly. We now feel however that it is pretty late. This sounds as though it were the fault of the office that we have not used your article, but this is not the case. What you wrote should have had to be rewritten, by yourself, in any case.

What I suggest therefore is that you keep this material at hand, and wait for the next time that developments in the news make the subject opportune. The farm strike might flare up again, or there might be another meeting, or the President or Wallace might make a speech. What we should then like you to do would be to send us a 1000 word article, not about the Chicago convention, but about radicalism among the farmers and about the desperate conditions of "the lower crust." In the course of it, you should summarize all the important resolutions adopted at Chicago, not just the ones mentioned in your piece. You could do this as illustrating the attitude of the radical farmer, and mention the convention and give the date.

I might mention one weakness of your present article, which you ought to guard against in revising the material. It is that you don't distinguish between reporting and editorializing. If you're going to describe conditions you ought to do so by citing the facts about them and not by making editorial assertions of your own about deplorable conditions. This is not to say that we disagree with you, but is merely a point about effective writing.

I was much interested in your letter of December 4, and should like to discuss the matter sometime when you are in New York. I am too hard pressed to write you at length about it as I should like to do. In the meantime, I will just note one or two things:

1. Short had already sent me the material from his paper supporting the argument that the Des Moines Register and Tribune is unreliable in reporting the situation of the farmers. However, the questionnaire which he referred to was not one of those which I quoted, and had nothing to do with them. I talked with the men who did the work on this questionnaire, and they certainly seemed to me as honest, intelligent, and progressive as one could reasonably expect. Remember, they printed the names and address of every farmer they quoted. If these men were misquoted, it would be an easy matter for Short or anyone else, to find this out.

If they skipped the radical farmers, that also could easily be checked up. I feel that Short ought to bring forth some concrete evidence to support his view. Why doesn't he make a similar investigation, even on a smaller scale, and report the results?

It may be, as you say, that the Des Moines Register and Tribune is pretty discredited among the farmers, but if that is the case, why do they go on reading it? Have you compared their rural circulation with the total farm population of Iowa?

All this, of course, is comparatively a minor matter. I said in my article that I had no means of proving whether their questionnaire was correct or not. However, it checks so closely with everything else I hear (including reports from the farm town near Sioux City where I myself lived for seventeen years) that I shall continue to believe that it represents a very thick "upper crust" until I see some proof to the contrary. Faithfully,

(Signed) BRUCE BLIVEN.

Dec. 12, 1933.

Miss Herbst to Mr. Bliven

DEAR MR. BLIVEN:

I can understand your returning my article on the farm conference because after all it is perfectly permissible for The New Republic to have a definite policy, but I cannot understand why, when you yourself admit it was a timely article, you took over two weeks to return it, unless you wanted to make it impossible for me to use it elsewhere. This article reached you in the same time that it took Mary Vorse's report on the Washington Conference a year ago, which you printed. And it was an article about which I had had correspondence with the New Republic staff before I ever went to Chicago. When a magazine definitely asks for such an article it seems to me in all fairness to the writer and to his material that he should be given a prompt reply.

But I am even more astonished at your paragraph of advice to me on the subject of effective writing. I have very carefully looked over the article and can find nowhere an expression of personal opinion about the "deplorable" conditions of the farmer. On the contrary, this was a distinctly direct report—too direct as it now appears for The New Republic—of a very remarkable convention. Any ideas in that article were not mine—but almost the literal ideas of the convention. The article is packed with figures, the farmers' figures, not mine, as these figures were the basis of the conclusions of the convention and of the demands. This is not the first time by a long shot that I have reported in this manner. Over a year ago I wrote up the Iowa farm strike for Scribner's Magazine and used exactly this method and brought out exactly the same definite point of view. I am not responsible for the point of view and its distinctness. That can be blamed only upon the farmers themselves. I want to say, also, that had I editorialized, it seems to me only appropriate for The New Republic and surely you set an excellent example in your own farm articles. What is your entire section entitled *The Bourgeois, Bourgeois Farmer* but that? I see no reason why a "journal of opinion" should not express opinions and I am all for your editorializing. I would have editorialized and thought myself well within my rights as I was doing a signed article, not the work of a novice reporter, but I just happen not to work that way. In fact I have so much a reputation for the contrary method that a sentence in my last novel expressing an editorialized opinion was widely commented upon as being an extraordinary deviation from my regular manner. I go to this length in commenting upon your advice to me because whichever way you look at it, it was an unusual thing to have said.

There is no doubt about it that you very ably represent the point of view of the upper strata of farmers and it was my mistake to imagine that a liberal magazine would care to discuss the fate of those lower down in the scale, particularly when that discussion is from the point of view of the class discussed. Your conclusions concerning the future