

the Farmer

of farming if the present scheme runs its course are sound and platitudinous. The striking farmers were discussing those very issues a year ago around their bonfires on the roads. The pressing problem is what is going to happen to the farm population affected by the changes in agriculture. In 1930 the government figures showed that 58 percent of the farmers did not have hired help. This percent has undoubtedly increased since that time, according to all reliable sources. These are the people who would become impoverished when large scale production actually succeeds. Your articles do not even touch upon this class nor hint that there is such a fellow as a middle farmer.

Difficult as it is to cover the whole field with reliable statistics, we do not need to rely upon your observations or mine when it comes to certain questions. Concerning the effects of the NRA program in the South for instance. You state—quite editorially, of course—that the Southern farmer is very well pleased with the cotton program. No one has any doubt that certain small groups of landlords have reason to be fairly well satisfied. But if you will look at a coming article of Webb Powell's in Harper's Magazine using a two year survey as a base, you will see that I was not editorializing when I listed the disadvantages to which the bulk of small cotton farmers and share croppers—and in the South they form the majority—fall heir.

Your statement about the cash income of the farmer going up 50 percent and if prices rise as they should, 100 percent, is of course, your own personal opinion but one I have not heard even one well-to-do farmer (and of course I have not talked to them all) admit. When farm prices rose in July, the prices of commodities the farmer must buy had already jumped way ahead. This has happened for the last years and there is no guarantee under the NRA that it will not continue to happen. So long as the prices for things he must buy rise faster than the price of his products, I don't see where the 50 percent increase is coming from, let alone the 100 percent.

I was hasty in assuming that Short's figures were yours, and I don't doubt the integrity of the reporters. Unfortunately that guarantees nothing. And the figures mean very little one way or the other. Your opinion that if the farmer could get back the prosperity of 1920 his radicalism would disappear is of course one of the commonest arguments. Well, why not? If the farmer or anyone could be assured of a decent living and a future free from perpetual crises, why not? It is because the farmer more and more is becoming convinced no such prosperity is in store for him, particularly under the Rooseveltian plans, that he is striking and relying on direct action. Even the concessions made by the NRA would not have been made in all probability if these militant groups had not pretty well made themselves felt all over the country during the last year. But we have only the concession made in different states to prove this, where there were militant demonstrations, such as North Dakota, more concessions were granted to the farmer. And naturally he was most militant in the more distressed areas.

If you will allow me to say so—and I am taking the liberty as you took the same liberty with me—I suggest that your articles would gain if they drew more from farm sources and less from town and newspaper opinion about the farm, more from the small farmer and less from the well-to-do farmer and small town banker. But even the well-to-do farmer is more considerate of the poor farmer than you, as I found out a year ago at the time you were writing in The New Republic that if the farmer in Iowa had been forced to strike he must be very ashamed. Nobody but the big town newspapers representing the opinions of the Cham-

bers of Commerce and business men, was ashamed. Many rich farmers who realized conditions were all for the militancy, including 9,000 acre Alvern Wendell of Bronson, Iowa. Wendell said the farmers would be justified in any means they took to better their conditions.

When it comes down to it you quite evidently sincerely believe in the efficiency of the Roosevelt program, and while fifty percent of the farmers at the conference had voted for Roosevelt and some had even voted for Hoover, time had shown they had nothing to expect from his proposed measures and much to fear. I don't doubt that some farmers still out of the red—and there are such—agree with you and those undoubtedly would feel, just as you do, the same antagonism toward the Chicago group whose facts are so against the grain that you would rather think it "editorializing" on my part than actuality.

I would like to see you take your own prognostications about the future of farming and turn them into human possibilities, not production possibilities. But perhaps that is out of the range of a liberal magazine in this particular era. I admit I was mistaken in the aims of The New Republic and I regret that I wasted my chance to give publicity to this remarkable conference.

(Signed) JOSEPHINE HERBST.

Erwinna, Pa., Dec. 16, 1933.

Mr. Bliven to Miss Herbst

DEAR MISS HERBST:

This is just to acknowledge your letter, received today. The paper is just going to press, and I haven't time to answer it adequately at the moment, but I'll try to do so within the next couple of days. I don't doubt that there is a good deal in your criticism both of The New Republic and of myself. I'll talk to George and Malcolm and see whether we can't make an immediate practicable suggestion about your piece. Cordially and sincerely,

Dec. 18, 1933

(Signed) BRUCE BLIVEN.

DEAR MISS HERBST:

I consulted George and Malcolm, and I have a suggestion to make to you which I think will at least partially solve our difference of opinion about your article. I suggest that you write us a signed, paid communication of 1,500 words for immediate publication, on radicalism among farmers. You could base it, if you like, on my recent articles, saying that you don't feel I told the whole story, or that you think I am crazy, or whatever you like, and you could then go on to assemble your evidence, partly from your manuscript about Chicago and partly the other material you have on this general subject. You could mention the Chicago meeting as supporting evidence, without building your communication around it. I assume that would make such a communication as definite and factual as possible, trying to indicate roughly what proportion of farmers in what states are supporting the radical movement.

For such a communication, we would pay 2c a word, which would come to about \$30. This is about as much as you would have received for the article, which would have been drastically cut in any case.

If you should criticize my own articles, I should probably want to append to your communication a few lines saying that I still think my observations were substantially correct, and I shall assume that you won't object to my doing so.

I do feel that we owe you an apology for not giving you a more prompt decision on your piece. This is not my fault personally, since I never saw your article until December 11 and I wrote you about it December 12. We are short handed in this office, partly because we are trying to save money, and once in a while our routine slips a cog.

As for the other points in your letter, I wish you'd come into the office and discuss them; a debate on paper takes a lot of space and it is easy for misunderstandings to arise. The only point I am concerned about is that you should have thought

I said, a year ago, that "if the farmer in Iowa had been forced to strike he must be very ashamed." I am sending you herewith a clipping of my article, so that you can see what I did say. As for "supporting" the Roosevelt program, I am not conscious of doing any such thing. It seems to me that what I said was that the Roosevelt program would pour so much money into the farm area that for the next few months, the general discontent would be greatly lessened. If you can prove that this is not true, for heaven's sake put that proof into your communication. Sincerely,

(Signed) BRUCE BLIVEN.

Dec. 19, 1933.

Miss Herbst to Mr. Bliven

DEAR MR. BLIVEN:

In your note of the 18th to me you say you don't doubt that there is a good deal in my criticism of The New Republic and of yourself. Writing on the 19th in the letter received today, you feel you are substantially correct. Now just where do you stand, I wonder.

While I would have welcomed a 1,500 word article a month ago I now believe that our controversy has brought to light our relative positions on this important subject that are more significant than the type of story you suggest. Your offer of a limited 1,500 word article is in glaring contrast to the leading articles in two issues given to your side of the question, and I think quite aptly shows your own emotion of the relative importance of the two classes under discussion.

Any statistics relating to actual representation at the farm conference may be had by referring to the Farmer's National Weekly. But the issue between you and me does not relate to the actual number of militant farmers but to the group interests those farmers represent as opposed to the group whose interests you represent.

If you did not literally say that the farmer in Iowa must be very ashamed, you said, "If the editors of The New Republic barricaded themselves in West Twenty-first Street and began throwing tear-gas bombs at the Italian organ grinder, they would feel no more *shamefaced* (italics mine) than these sons of Iowa soil must have felt." If possible, this remark seems even less understandable than the one attributed to you. The last words in that same piece, dated Aug. 31, 1932, are much more significant: "When Iowa resorts to violence, it is time to take horse and gallop through the countryside, calling 'Flee to the hills: the dam is going out!'" The dam *is* going out but you have decided that your role is that of the boy who puts his finger in the dyke.

You say you are not conscious of supporting the Roosevelt program. Well, Mr. Bliven, not to be conscious is a very grave shortcoming. If you are not supporting Roosevelt, who in hell are you supporting?

And I must point out that you did *not* say that the Roosevelt program would pour so much money into the farm area that for the next few months, the general discontent would be greatly lessened. You said that so much money would be put in within the next few months that in your judgment present protest will subside. Your time element referred to money, not discontent. The implication was that discontent would be pretty much a thing of the past.

No one denies that money is going to be poured into the middle west. But into whose hands? My entire contention has been, not that farmers are not being helped, but that the Roosevelt program means to save the wealthy farmer at the expense of the poor and middle farmer.

Your proposition to air the troubles of the farming class whose interests are served by the militant farmer in a limited 1,500 word article in your organ, comes, true to the role of the liberal, too late!

(Signed) JOSEPHINE HERBST.

Erwinna, Pa., Dec. 20, 1933.