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# **The AMERICAN FARMER**

**by  
George Anstrom**

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# PUBLISHERS' NOTE



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# THE AMERICAN FARMER

BY GEORGE ANSTROM

## CAPITALISM CRUSHES THE AMERICAN FARM

THOUSANDS of tons of California's fruits dumped into the Pacific Ocean. Grain used as fuel in Indiana and cabbages plowed under in Louisiana. Two hundred million bushels of "surplus" wheat in government granaries. The Farm Board recommends plowing down every third row of cotton. The California Fruit Growers Exchange plans the destruction of a large proportion of its 1932 orange crop. At the same time, in every city, millions of unemployed workers! Bread lines! And in obscure country towns, foodless farmers riot for bread. Everywhere Big Business—the capitalists and their obedient government—has produced the ultimate absurdity: "*surplus*" and "*starvation*."

The agricultural crisis which burdened the farmers for more than a decade reached a graver stage with the general world crisis. Both city industrial workers and farmers were reduced to starvation levels and those agents of Big Business, the small town bankers and business men who had posed as "the farmer's friend," were swallowed up by financial masters. The crisis revealed to the farmers—more clearly than ever before—their direct servitude to the great financial powers.

The sharpening of the agricultural crisis during the last two years is hastening the deterioration and ruin of the economically small and middle farm units, which make up the majority of farms. On the other hand, the policy of the capitalist government which shifts the burden of the crisis upon the exploited farmers, as well as upon the city workers, promotes the development of large capitalist farm units with more and more technical improvements.

Both processes are shown even by the incomplete measure of "size of farms" as given in the census of 1930. The census lumps rich and poor farms of the same size together, but we can nevertheless dig out the fact that in every state there is a decrease



in the number of middle-sized farms, and an increase in both the large capitalistic farms and the small ruined farms. On the middle—and especially on the small units, the progress of power-farming is stopped or abandoned for horses. The press and agents of capitalism make a virtue of the degradation by praising it with “back to horses” or “back to sanity” slogans. Corporation farms, chain farms or rich farmer units, on the other hand, are constantly improving their technique of production.

But even on capitalist farms the technical advances are pitifully below the possibilities of scientific agricultural technique, stunted by the decay of the whole structure of capitalism. This is especially true during this period of crisis which, by lowering the standards of living of the masses, affects the market demand of all farm products. It is only in the Soviet Union that living standards are swiftly rising and scientific technique is liberated for further growth and application.

Under the influence of the crisis, the constantly growing dominance in American agriculture of rich farms over the great mass of impoverished small farms is expressed by the ever-increasing proportion of acreage and volume of production of the larger farms over the smaller farms.

The impoverished and middle farmers of the United States have no resources but their farms, which combine their means of living and their homes. A review of the factors bearing upon farming makes it evident that millions of these homes are doomed. Farm prices have fallen to 60% of pre-war levels, yet farmers are paying taxes which are 266% of pre-war. The burden of debts and mortgages, fixed on the basis of the high valuations of the pre-war period, does not diminish with the fall of prices during the crisis. Thus debts and taxes constitute an ever greater load on every farmer—until today they are roughly three-quarters of the cost of production on the small and medium farms. Added to this, freight rates have risen 153% since 1914.

### *Mortgages and Debts*

As a result, when the farmer gets his crops to market he discovers that their value has dropped faster and farther than consumer-goods which he must buy. Crops for which he received



\$1.00 in 1914 were worth only half as much in purchasing power in January 1932. This drastic falling off of income due to the growing burden of debts and taxation, etc., has forced farmers steadily to increase their mortgage load to keep alive and operating. The debt has risen from \$7,857,700,000 in 1920 to \$9,241,390,000 in 1930. But farm mortgages only postpone the day of reckoning. More and more farmers are pushed down "the ladder of farm ownership" as growing debts and the crash in land values wipe out their equity.

The banker's mortgage always remains at the same level although land values have decreased 38% since 1920. During the five-year period between 1925 and 1930, forced sales and voluntary bankruptcy of these victims of finance capital amounted to 24% of all farms. But due to the fact that evictions usually take place two years after foreclosure proceedings, the full devastation and distress of dispossession that is taking place now is not the whole story. These recent evictions are just a small sample of what the bankers and the government are preparing for the great majority of the farmers in the near future.

This process forced many of the owners into tenancy, which increased from 38.7% in 1925 to 42.4% in 1930. Now the process is accelerating. In April 1932 the press carried headlines announcing that 40,000 farm homes in the state of Mississippi had gone under the hammer for taxes in a single day. This represented a total of seven million acres, an empire covering one-quarter of the farm land of the state, so bankrupt that owners could not raise the cash to save their homes—even when it ran as low as one dollar an acre. The swiftly rising tide of farm bankruptcy is engulfing whole regions. In a public hearing of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi, in defending the 40,000 farm sales for delinquent taxes in his state, said:—"Other states are in exactly the same position. The difference is that what Mississippi did in one day other states are doing piece-meal."

Despite the lie of demagogues that the farm is a beautiful, changeless place, it is in reality the scene of sordid poverty and struggle for life. The long period of agricultural crisis has stirred the farm population into the greatest mass migrations of modern

history. Thirty millions of this country's population including millions of bankrupt or debt-ridden farmers, shifted between city and country during the past ten years in a fruitless effort to solve their economic troubles. There was also the movement of more than ten millions driven by debts from farm to farm, and that of unrecorded millions of migratory workers and their families, who, during the same period, followed the crop harvests in their search for jobs.

Natural catastrophes, floods and droughts, have heightened the general depression and accelerated the ruin of the poor farmer. Drought and flood relief has been shamefully inadequate and has always been distributed and administered so as to benefit the local business men.

Still worse is the situation of the agricultural workers for whom unemployment has increased while wages have decreased—from \$2.84 per day with board in 1920 to \$1.33 per day in 1931. In Louisiana, plantation managers are hiring for 50 cents a day all the hands they want. Even this condition is growing worse. The official statement of the Department of Agriculture in its *Outlook for 1932* (page 103) admits that, "reports indicate that there has been an accentuated movement from cities to the country in search of cheap food and shelter. This movement has augmented the supply of available farm labor that may be obtained in some places *with little or no payment other than subsistence.*"

### *Farm "Relief" Plans*

The ruin of the farmers brings forth a rank crop of demagogues with misleading "relief plans," and the usual shop-worn myth of the "independent farmer."

Secretary of Agriculture Hyde leads the attempt to gloss over the general bankruptcy, peonage, hunger and misery of the farm population. His departmental figures present misleading farm income figures by leaving out important items of overhead, and lumps a few rich with many impoverished farmers into a statistical average farmer which does not exist.

There is also Simpson of the Farmers Union, Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party, Olson of the Farmer-Labor Party and many others. Their remedies are typically demagogic. Some of



them support Senator Wheeler's bill for the monetization of silver as the solution to the farmers' problem. To the farmer, they speak of so increasing the "money crop" that Wall Street will be unable to control it. They fail to explain why Wall Street, which controls the national financial structure, cannot hold the same death grip on monetized silver. These demagogues attack the notoriously high salaries of Farm Board officials, especially the \$75,000-salary of Creekmore, as if these salaries, shameful as they are, were the real root of farm ruin. The farming class they paint in terms of one complete, harmonious and happy family, which, as every farmer knows, is far from the truth. By ignoring the class differences in the farm population and by covering up the fact that there are rich farmers and poor farmers, each with different interests and different needs, they are able to propose measures which they claim will help *all* farmers but which in reality help only the rich farmers, the bankers, and the speculators.

There are specific instances of this trickery in the "farm relief" proposals of the "Farm Bloc" in Congress, which includes Senators Frazier of North Dakota, McNary of Oregon, and others. A study of every program which they have drafted reveals relief not for the mass of farmers, but relief which can aid only the banks and insurance companies which hold farm mortgages and the few rich farmers who have acceptable collateral. This is why the local bankers and the big farmers vote for Frazier, McNary and their kind, and support them with campaign contributions.

Such programs not only attempt to deceive destitute and middle class farmers with false hopes of getting relief under capitalism, but they have an even more important job to do for the big capitalists, that is, to divert the farm masses from the real program of the class struggle.

The fiasco of the Farm Board exposed the attempt of Big Business to centralize control of agricultural marketing under the guise of providing "farm relief." Instead of "stabilizing" farm prices at promised high levels, the Board has helped to drive prices down to the lowest ebb in history. They even dumped wheat into speculative channels, deliberately lowering prices at a time when speculators were buying from farmers. The high-salaried bankers and industrialists on the Farm Board then proposed the



criminal "solution" of destroying crops. While pretending to help bankrupt cooperatives, the Farm Board actually pays over large sums to the bankers who hold notes of the cooperatives, and has silenced critics of the Board by giving them high-paid jobs.

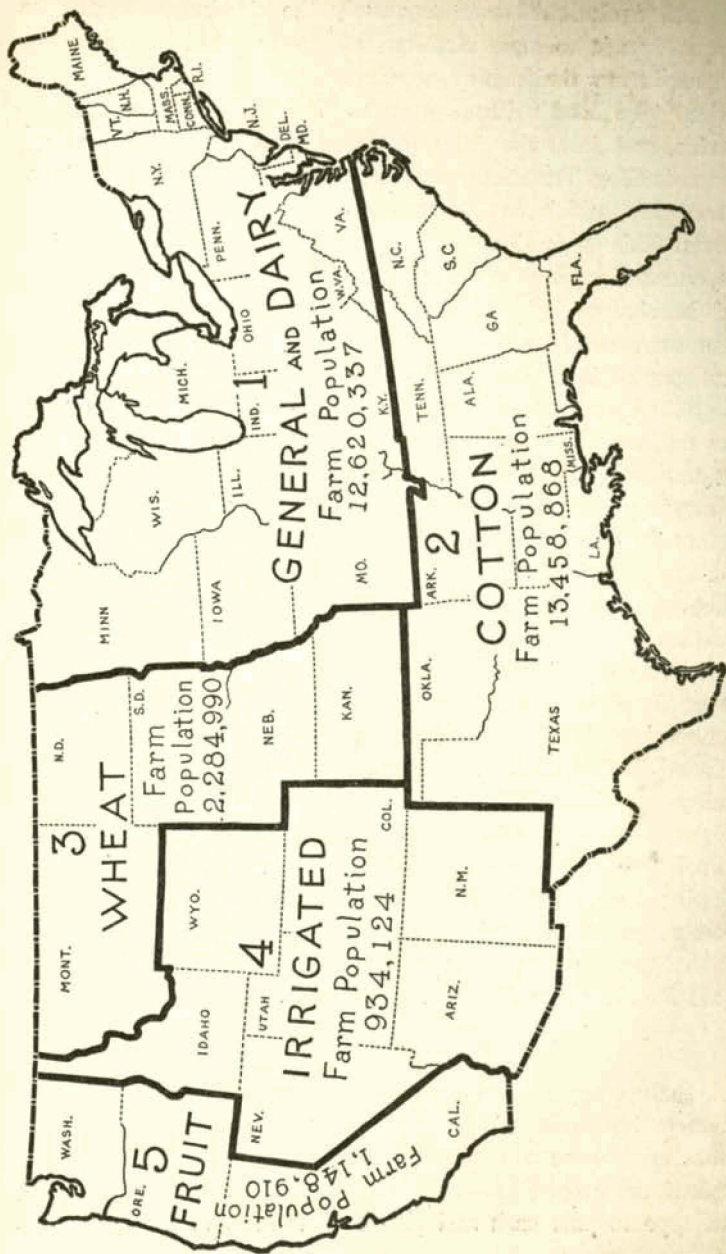
As the agricultural crisis deepens and the chances for high prices dwindle, the Rotarians and local boosters from coast to coast have hit upon the "plan" of turning American farming into the hopeless poverty of European strip farming. Some call it "live-at-home," others "diversification" or "suburbanization"—but they all mean pushing the economically small and middle class farmers down the "ladder of farm ownership" into *peasantry*. And now the more ruthless capitalists are openly reviving the old "back to the farm" slogans in the fight against unemployment insurance for the workers and emergency relief for the farmers. A clear example of the country-wide propaganda for degrading the American farmer to starvation levels appeared in Utah's oldest farm paper:

The farmer who will save rural America will be the one who will not expect to be a rich man. He will have but average acreage, but he will be proud of his life's work. . . . Nothing that can be raised on the farm for food for his family will be bought from the store. He will raise a minor cash crop, something that he can sell. . . . If he has land and energy surplus, he will raise a major cash crop which he can throw onto the open market and compete with the large scale type of farming.

This is the plan of the capitalists. They are hoping to climb out of the crisis by crushing the masses of the farm population into misery and hunger.

## THE SOUTH—AMERICA'S COTTON KINGDOM

The forms of exploitation of the farm producers are determined by the system of production of each of the major crops. Different soils, climate and topography contribute the natural settings that form the five great "crop belts" of American agriculture. The limits of these areas blend, one into the other, but are sufficiently clear to divide this continent into five type-of-farming areas in each of which a specific form of farming dominates. By study-



THE FIVE MAIN "CROP BELTS" OF AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

ing each agricultural area separately the city-bound worker or distant farmer will get close-ups of the life and conditions of millions of our varied farm population.

From the North Carolina state line south to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the New Mexico line, Cotton is King. Ten states combine to produce 98% of the national cotton crop, which has an annual farm value of over a billion dollars. This is 60% of the entire world crop. These states of the cotton kingdom are predominantly rural. Texas has 59% and Mississippi 83% rural population; the rest vary between these extremes. The South is characterized by having a larger farm population than any of the other agricultural areas; 13,458,868, or 44% of the total United States farm population, live and work here at the lowest economic and cultural levels.

The South has, of course, minor crop interests and is rapidly developing industrial and manufacturing areas. Tobacco is important in parts of North Carolina; rice and sugar are limited to a few counties in the "sugar bowl" of Louisiana. Birmingham, Alabama, with its coal and iron mines and steel mills, claims to be another Pittsburgh. New Orleans hopes to rival New York as a seaport. Florida, withdrawn from the slower tempo of cotton farming, produces citrus fruits, winter resorts and real estate booms. However, everyone throughout the Southern states included in this agricultural area is cotton-conscious. This commodity constitutes 15% of the total national exports, 30% of the agricultural exports.

Profits from this annual billion-dollar crop support Southern shipping, banks and landed interests. And these profits are based upon a system of semi-serfdom which actually exists in these United States in the year 1932, comparable to the serfdom existing in old Russia under the Tsar.

### *The Croppers and Farm Laborers*

A share cropper has only the labor of himself and his family to offer the landlord who supplies an average of 30 acres of land, cabin, tools and mule, and "furnishing" (credit) in exchange for half the crop. Southern tenancy varies from this most common type to part cash and part crop rentals, to all cash rents.



In some cases the Negro share cropper owns his mule and gets more of the crop. But in most cases the straight share cropper relation exists. This is the system of economic exploitation which is the basis of the national oppression of the Negro.

The Old South also uprooted the "poor white trash" elements and set them to the semi-serfdom of the cropper system. White croppers are also "furnished" and cheated. The credits advanced for their food and supplies bear interest rates that would make Shylock blush, but can, nevertheless, be found and analyzed in present-day bulletins. The North Carolina Experiment Station, for instance, shows that interest on cropper loans runs at times over 60%.

Capitalist elements try to hold their power by provoking race prejudice against the Negro masses, and fostering a lynch terror. This myth of "white superiority" is further cultivated by certain preferences for the "poor whites." White cropper patches are generally larger and better than Negro patches, and whites have a better school system. For instance, in Georgia, school investment per white child in one year was \$58.72 and per black child, only \$10.02.

Even the nominal political and social rights granted the "poor whites" are denied Negroes. They are stripped of the citizenship rights won as a result of the Civil War. Lynch Law is used as an outright weapon of oppression against the Negroes; Jim Crow laws and Jim Crow institutions have formed an iron ring of social discrimination about the Negro people. The majority still live upon the soil and work in the shadow of the rope as their grandfathers did for generations. Rural Negroes not attached by their debts to some particular landlord are exposed to a system of peonage, worse than chattel slavery. When a landlord needs "hands," or a lumber company is recruiting men for a turpentine camp, or some county commissioner needs laborers on a road job, it is a common practice for the political friend of these agents, the sheriff, obligingly to go out and arrest "unattached" Negroes in the town on a charge of vagrancy. The "squire" sentences them to jail or imposes a large fine. The agents pay the fine and the Negroes "work it out" on their jobs, and keep right on working it out. (See *The American Negro*, by J. S. Allen;

*Lynching*, by H. Haywood and M. Howard, International Pamphlets, Nos. 18 and 25.)

For sixty years, the cropper's cabin in the cotton patch has been and still is, the dominant note of every southern countryside. Thus an illusion of immovable permanence has grown up about this semi-feudal system. Nevertheless, the cotton cropper system in the Old South is beginning to crumble in relation to volume of cotton production. Prices have declined so that they are now too low for profitable exploitation of cropper labor even when kept at coolie levels of living. Cotton is a world crop. Its price depends upon world competition and demand. The demand for cotton dwindles as the world crisis depresses the workers' and farmers' standards of living in all capitalist countries and their colonies. Everywhere workers and farmers must do without clothing which they have no money to buy. Each year 55% of the American crop is exported. The 7,800,000 bales from America come into direct competition with higher grade cotton being produced in ever increasing amounts by 56 other countries. As foreign cotton prices decline, United States exports shrink and the carry-over increases. The total American supply for the 1931-1932 season is 25,700,000 bales, enough to satisfy the domestic and export demand for two and one-half years without the planting of a single row.

But the desperate one-crop farmer with no other means of livelihood open to him in the crisis, will plant, despite the decline of prices, which are being driven downward by the growing carry-over. In 1927, the average annual price paid to farmers was 19.6¢ per pound; in 1928, 18¢; in 1929 (the year in which the Farm Board tried to "stabilize" prices) it was 16.5¢; in 1930, 9.5¢; in 1931, 6.5¢; and in March, 1932, is 5.57¢. The U. S. Department of Agriculture gives 16¢ as *the average cost of producing a pound of "cropper" cotton*—a cost three times the price! Speculative market advances on war rumors or purchases, benefit only the market gamblers as was shown in the fall of 1931 following Japan's war purchases.

During the 1931 crop season, the southern gentry tried to close this gap between *price* and *cropper costs* by still further exploiting the croppers. The croppers were given only the barest



necessities for crop production. For instance 40% less fertilizer was used in 1931 with a still sharper cut of 50% in 1932. But a still more cynical form of "economy" was the sudden stoppage of all store credit and the command that croppers grow their own food. A big seed man of Atlanta, who has sold more garden seeds than ever before, said: "Allowing croppers to plant gardens is a sort of death-bed repentance of landlords and if war comes or some miracle brings cotton prices above 12 cents, the planters (landlords) will go back to their old system of forcing the tenant to produce nothing but cotton and to buy his food and supplies at the landlord's commissary."

These local exploiters, the landlords, local bankers and time merchants, have fattened on the cropper system, as middlemen to finance capital. Their indebtedness to big business is growing and they cannot finance the reorganization of cotton farming into cheaper large-scale production. These elements are waging ruthless terror against Negroes and exploit all farmers and workers in their attempt to maintain the semi-slavery of the cropper system. Unable to get further credits from the central banks for two years, they have utilized the Federal Intermediate Credit Bank system, the Federal Seed and Feed loans, and in some cases, such as the drought areas, the Red Cross, in an effort to secure production capital and to prevent their own ruin. But all the credit sources are drying up. In spite of ruthless robbery, they have found it increasingly difficult during the past two years to continue squeezing profits from their croppers. One can already see, particularly in South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, many stores of bankrupt merchants and small banks closed, some plantations foreclosed and even abandoned, while their croppers sit hungry in the derelict cabins.

Soil erosion in the Old South is further contributing to the undermining of the production of cotton under the cropper system. Pine trees are creeping back up the gullies of deep washes and have taken possession of many plantations. Cotton yields have dropped during a ten-year period from 190 to 150 pounds per acre. To fight this erosion a laborious system of building terraces has become a necessary cost of production in the Old South. In



the attempt to maintain yields, costly commercial fertilizers must be used on the thinning soil, further increasing costs.

### *Displacing Labor*

There is an increasing migration of cotton production away from the South Atlantic States to Texas and Oklahoma. There the possibilities for lowering costs, through introducing cotton power machinery, challenge the economic rôle of the cropper system in the cotton production of the Old South. This trek of cotton acreage south-westward is leaving the traditional cropper stranded. (The present average cost of Texas cotton is half that of the Old South.) Texas alone has 17 million acres in cotton and 10 million more of potential cotton lands in reserve. Up to the present, it has been the rule that, as the new lands were opened up, local white farmers became cotton tenants, or cheaper migratory Mexican labor was used on the great plantation on a cheap, seasonal wage-labor basis. Cotton's migration is stimulated in part because the new lands are drier and do not need fertilization, while much of the Southwest is entirely free from the boll-weevil.

Experience has shown that power farming equipment on large land units reduces the cost of production even in the Old South and the mechanical picker can reduce these costs even further. The number of tractors in the Southern states is increasing, and in spite of the fact that the crisis discourages the flow of big capital into agriculture, Mississippi showed an increase of tractors of 195% from 1925 to 1930. At the Mississippi Experiment Station at Stoneville, costs of cultivating an acre of cotton by the one-mule cropper system were \$13.09 while by the system of tractor farming the costs were \$5.24. In its bulletin No. 290 (1931) this station says: "Mechanical pickers and strippers will make possible a reduction of 75% in operating labor, reduce housing and overhead expenses, and bring profitable cotton production back to the South. Mechanical pickers can and will be made. *In order to be ready for machine production when it comes, the planters should accelerate the present evolution in that direction.*" This "innocent" expression conceals the fact that millions

of share croppers, both Negro and white, are to be brutally uprooted from their homes and their livelihood.

The decay of capitalism and the chronic agricultural crisis are not conditions to make for a great extension of power farming, although a great extension of machine production is technically possible. American agriculture lags behind American industry, now even as in the past. Such advance in farming as is taking place is scattered and uneven. In the South, the development is to be found here and there, on the good lands, on level stretches, and on those farms where the landlords are able to finance the rather large immediate expenditure involved in changing from cropping to machine production. Further development of agricultural machinery will emphasize this unevenness and will mean a high state of technological advance on a few rich farms and increased evictions and degraded levels of production for increasing numbers of impoverished small farms.

Agricultural editors, politicians, university professors and chamber of commerce boosters have pictured in glowing terms how mechanization will solve the problems of the agricultural crisis and "put American farming on a sound and prosperous basis."

That the ruling class is proceeding to "accelerate the evolution" and to prepare for the "peaceful" millennium of agriculture is borne out by their own words. When the writer asked one of the white ruling class of the South what would be done with the millions of Negro croppers displaced by the machine picker, he received the reply, "Let the croppers go back to Africa and teach the other niggers to wear pants."

### *Striking Back*

In this tense situation, any sign of protest from the Negroes, especially any steps towards organization, is met with a ruthless reign of terror, an intensification of race oppression, and an increasing resort to "Nigger hunts," lynching, or long sentences to brutalizing chain gangs and convict camps. The recent wave of lynchings, and the death sentence for the eight Negro boys at Scottsboro, Alabama, on obviously fake charges, are a direct result of the intensification of this situation.

As might be expected, the share croppers, especially the Negroes who bear the first brunt of the attack, are not accepting starvation calmly and quietly. In spite of the campaigns of terror led against them by town business men—who formed the backbone of the Ku Klux Klan—the croppers are organizing and resisting. The efforts of the failing time-merchants and landlords to reduce the cropper's share in the harvest is met in many localities by first steps in the organization of tenants leagues, croppers unions, etc. At Camp Hill, Alabama, in the summer of 1931, the Negro croppers revolted and under Communist leadership organized a croppers union. One Negro was killed, and several "disappeared"; ("They went to cut wood," a deputy sheriff told the newspapers). In spite of this reign of terror, the croppers won their demands.

This resistance, although it is just beginning, suggests the great revolutionary possibilities of the demand and struggle for the confiscation of the land of the big white landowners for the oppressed Negro peasantry. The immediate steps for share-croppers is to organize to wring concessions from the hands of their landlords. They must insist on a larger share of the crop and the right to sell their crop when and where they wish, without interference from the landlord. This is the only way they can fight the slow starvation to which the ruling landlords have condemned them.

## THE WHEAT STATES

Commercial wheat farming on dry land areas of the plains as a small family farm is one of the worst forms of soil-slavery. It leaves farmers in harsh climates, at the mercy of the railroads, agricultural machinery trusts, and distant market manipulators. Millions of acres in the wheat belt are unfit for family farming. Here only large-scale dry land farming or large-scale permanent grazing of cattle or sheep is practical. Yet forty years ago, our chaotic capitalist system opened these zones to homesteaders.

In contrast to this unplanned agriculture and the ruthless disregard for farmers in the United States, the recent settlement of the Siberian and North Caucasus *steppes* in the Soviet Union under its National Agricultural Plan shows the possibilities of



planned agriculture under a workers' and farmers' government. The Soviet Republic scientifically determines the limits of grazing and wheat lands. In no case are peasants enticed into building isolated homes in the trap of certain steppe-misery and failure. Instead, great state grain farms or peasant collectives are organized; modern town facilities for health and recreation are built as well as elevators, machine shops, stores and modern apartments with water and electricity. The unfavorable *steppe* climate is recognized and a month's vacation is required by the unions as imperative to the farmers who in the Soviet Union now enjoy all the advantages of workers. The Soviets recognize the necessity for systematic, continued machine experimentation under engineers employed by the government and not at the expense of the peasants. Moreover, wheat farming is recognized as a seasonal job that requires only 85 days to complete a crop. To avoid the anti-social American plan of migratory work, and long dreary periods of unemployment that afflict the American farm population, inter-seasonal industries such as manufacturing of spare parts are introduced into the shops of the state farms. This type of work becomes part of the production schedule of the state farm in order that farmers may have all-year work at home with their families in the center of hundreds of thousands of acres of wheat. (The steppes are made habitable by socialized planning.) And nowhere in the Soviet Union is there a single farm mortgage because there is no private property in land, or in any of the means of production, which are owned by the people of the nation.

But, of course, a complete and rational solution of the American wheat farmers' problem is completely out of the question under the capitalist system. Diverse groups of capitalist interests, each fighting for a share of the profits from farm labor, force the farmers back to the wall and preclude any possibility of national planning in the interests of the workers and farmers.

### *Mechanization*

For years the binder and migratory workers were inseparable parts of the prairie harvest. Suddenly the *combine* crossed the Rockies from the Washington and Oregon wheat lands. It broke

through the traditional fiction that grain could not be harvested by the combine in the more humid harvest weather of the plains. In one season, mass production of all-steel prairie combines began. The International Harvester Co. and its subsidiaries sold combines for crop liens or whatever the farmer had left to mortgage. By 1930, mortgages in all five of the grain states had increased from 52 to 67% of owner-operated farms.

The combine eliminated most of the binders from the wheat belt and doomed the displaced migratory workers to unemployment and breadlines. Then the true effects of mechanized farming under the profit system appeared. Montana is a striking example. No one in the community bothered about the fate of migratory workers who had "no social roots in the community." But in the past decade, Montana's 35,000 wheat farmers dwindled to 14,000 who now operate more land and produce more wheat than did the 35,000. However, even the majority of those who remain are bankrupt. They really hold "jobs" rather than farms, for their mortgage is even greater than the farm value. The poor farmers are allowed to "own" a farm only because they are still willing to work for their creditors without pay under hopeless prairie conditions. For just as the machine picker does not solve the problem for the southern farmers, combines, tractors and machinery cannot overcome the handicaps of impoverished wheat farmers under the capitalist system. The costs of production on average tractor farms are 80 cents per bushel while the general average given by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture Year Book is \$1.25 per bushel. The average price of 43 cents, received last year, is officially proclaimed as the probable median of future prices. Such gaps between costs and prices indicate the speed and certainty of bankruptcy.

### *The "Squeeze"*

From the panhandle of Texas to Montana the wheat farmers who escape drought are familiar with a shell game arranged by the local bankers and business men at the weekly luncheon of the Lions, Rotary or Kiwanis club. The local banker holds a crop lien on the wheat. The agricultural machinery company has a



note and a second mortgage on the land as a security for the tractors and the combine. A big Eastern insurance company has a first mortgage on the farm real estate. The local agents are Jim, John and Charlie to each other, and have often discussed the price situation. They know that the farmer, who is not a member of the club, will not be able to make payments on current credit charges, rents, farm mortgages, or support his family at present prices. The banker with his crop lien can take all the money but the machinery company's agent threatens to foreclose on tractor and combine before the crop is harvested unless his friend, the banker, agrees to share with him on the pickings. In order to insure collection they arrange with their mutual pal, the local elevator man, to issue a check made jointly to the banker and farmer. With this stage all set, the farmer rolls into town with his crop and dumps it in the elevator, for which he gets this little piece of paper, a check which only the banker can cash. After the banker and the machine company have deducted their share, there is nothing left for the farmer and his family.

While he is begging for relief the insurance company, realizing that it has been outmaneuvered by the local Rotarians, forecloses on the property and transforms "owner" into a tenant. Local capital is eliminated and the big eastern company consolidates the land and all the liens into its own hands.

### *The Fakers*

The typical incident related above is only a new version of the old process of expropriating the farmer. The panic of 1873 stimulated the Old Farmers Alliance, the Grange and the Farmers Wheel. These organizations were really the soil out of which the agrarian movements of Greenbackism and Populism came during the period of 1870-95. The People's Party, for instance, in 1890, demanded: "Free Silver, Anti-Trust Legislation, Make Future Trading Illegal, Government Ownership of Railroads, and Tax Reform." All of the proposed Populist reforms have budded into today's panaceas for "farm relief" and will continue to be just as futile in preventing farm bankruptcies.



The last of these organizations was the Non-Partisan League which held the center of the stage in North Dakota from 1916 to 1920. Because it was a mass movement, it succeeded in winning control over the entire state government with a program of state ownership of banking and elevator facilities. The Non-Partisan League victory failed to provide any permanent relief for the farmer, just as the earlier reformist movements had failed. Wall Street declared a financial boycott against the North Dakota State Bank which the League had set up, and the leaders, who were representatives of the big farmers rather than friends of the poor farmers, sold out to finance capital. This was inevitable because the leaders had no program against capitalism, but sought, on the other hand, to divert the farmers' struggles away from real conflict and into futile reform channels. It was of course impossible that this farmer's oasis, one state against the great power of the Wall Street bankers, should survive. The Non-Partisan League, like the Farmers' Union is now only a tool of the Republican Party and Big Business. The defeat of the farmers and the sell-out of their leaders have emphasized the futility of reform programs as a solution to the farmers' misery and have shown the farmers the need of national and local struggle, in alliance with the workers.

Today, an even more conscious and vicious type of demagogue is attempting to divert the farmers' bitter struggle of today into old reformist channels by merely changing to new labels. Behind a screen of high-salaried denunciation and the Utopian demand for \$2.20 wheat, the president of the Farmers' Union hides the bitter class struggle itself. In the name of "cooperation" he joins the Farm Bureau Federation and the Grange which propose the debenture and equalization fee and the monetization of silver as a solution for all farmer ills. Except for reluctant show of opposition, they permit the game of the Farm Board to strip the farmer of the last shreds of his cooperative elevator equipment, in order that the capitalists, through their government agencies, may control the marketing of all farm products. In this way, the Farm Board has become the financial director of farm cooperatives throughout the country. It elects officers and dictates policies

under the threat of withholding or recalling its loans to farm organizations.

But at last there is a new element of battle in the wheat belt. Destitution and disillusionment resulting from a long history of farm fakers have cleared the way for the *United Farmers' League*. This organization is fighting for cancellation of all impoverished farmers' debts, liens, rents, mortgages, federal relief for poor farm families distributed under the direction of farmers' local committees, mass resistance led by local committees of action against all evictions or tax sales and foreclosures. It has already become a force in resisting evictions and foreclosure sales and has built a revolutionary front of farmers allied with workers in the fight against capitalism.

### IRRIGATED MOUNTAIN AND DESERT REGIONS

Economically, this is the least important farming area. Although it covers 23.5% of the total land surface of the United States, only 3% of the farm population, working 4.6% of the total United States crop land, are able to find a foothold in this parched and mountainous country. Even this small portion of farming is possible only because 400 million dollars of capital has been invested in giant irrigation projects in the seven states of this area. Irrigation water is the foundation of mountain and desert farming. Pioneers who stumbled upon the first water holes in the deserts grabbed them and sat pretty on the water rents from those who followed. Today great companies have taken control over vast water leases and pumping rights for land in irrigated zones. The control of water is the primary means for squeezing profits from the small farmers.

Here as elsewhere the pattern of life of the farm population is stamped with bankruptcies, foreclosures, mortgages, increasing tenantry, and miserable conditions for agricultural wage workers. Even in the fertile Mormon valleys of Utah—the only instance in America where the farmers live in towns separated from their farm land and where diversification has been practiced for generations—the banks and business men are trying to reconcile their small farmers to permanent deflation of the standard of living and to a status of peasantry.



## *Migratory Labor*

Most of the products of the area, however, come from large farms with the characteristic capitalist form of production. This is best shown by the large proportion of 37.2% of hired hands among all those working on the farms. A large part of these are migratory workers. Only the Pacific area has a larger proportion of hired hands. A part of the hired labor is to be found on the extensive live stock farms. Ten per cent of the cattle and 30% of the sheep raised in the United States are shipped out annually from the ranches in the drier range country.

But the mass of the migratory labor of the region centers in the sugar beet industry, of which the most important center is the Platte River counties of Colorado, where 24,000 wage workers cultivate 194,000 acres of sugar beets. Because the workers are mostly Mexican and therefore subject to racial discrimination, the beet farm operators led by the Great Western Sugar Co., force the Mexicans down to the level of Chinese coolies. The beet picker is paid at a rate of about 20 cents a day for each member of his family. The maximum which the beet worker and his family receive from the sugar company does not exceed \$250 a year. By odd jobs the family may swell its income to \$375. Women and children work in the fields, twelve hours a day on their hands and knees in the dirt, to swell the family income to this miserable total. During the period of 1909-1927, the price of beets rose 60% but wages increased only 25%. But when beet prices fell 18% in 1931, the company immediately ordered a general wage cut of 22%. In the Spring of 1932, it ordered a 40% further cut. The general strike of beet workers against such brutal wage cuts, for unemployment insurance and for recognition of the Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union was called during the critical thinning period in May, 1932.

## DAIRY AND GENERAL FARM AREA

Farm and factory are closely woven together in the northeast quarter of the United States. Our largest cities, ports, industrial and manufacturing centers, rub shoulders with 2,658,000 farms scattered evenly through this area.



It is the oldest of the farm regions—and still has 41% of the farm population—but the importance of the 12,500,000 persons who live on farms is lost sight of in the great industrial activities of the 65,000,000 who live near by in towns or great cities. Farm and urban population in this section together make up 63% of the total continental population and are concentrated in 24.5% of the total land area. Thus 106 persons per square mile in the east may be contrasted with 4.6 per mile in the equal area of the mountain and desert region.

The crowding together of farm and factory, good roads, Fords, radios and movies, have combined to blast away old farm traditions. The old "family farm" is no longer—in the family. Besides the millions migrating to and from the city there is an incessant turnover within the farm population. Eastern farmers are no longer isolated. Agricultural writers sadly note that "by constant comparison with higher city standards, the farmer no longer feels the equality of poverty on the farm." In spite of hard work and through no fault of their own, the exploited farmers and their families have failed to stem the tides of bankruptcy and poverty.

They are forced to move often, searching for cheaper rents or an escape from debt.

Seventy-five per cent of the 2,500,000 farms in this area have cows which contribute to the rivers of milk required by town and city population. Glass-lined tanks on railroads and auto trucks drain the countryside of its daily milk flow.

The dairy farms are based on general-crop type of agriculture which is unable to supply all the foods for the cows. Large bills must be met for "concentrates" to fill out the cows' rations. Low prices and high costs have built a wall of mortgages, notes and liens that effectively bar the farmers from decent living standards. An example of the small dairymen's hopeless conditions is expressed by official Massachusetts figures: the average cost of producing a quart of "market milk" is six cents—and the farm price is about half the cost, 3.8 cents. Distributors charge city workers 14 cents a quart, which because of unemployment and low wages, many of the city workers cannot pay and thousands of children in the cities go without the milk which is so

necessary for them. Meanwhile the farmers, finding the prices for their "surplus" milk below shipping costs, are compelled to pour thousands of gallons to the hogs. In the Pennsylvania mining sections, farmers gave this milk to the children of striking miners, but for the greater part of the country, the connection is not made, and "surplus" milk and starving children are symbols of capitalism.

That bankruptcy of small farms is inherent in the period of decaying capitalism, regardless of the type of crop production, is best shown by analyzing the contrasting systems of cotton, wheat and dairy farming. The cotton farmer works approximately 100 days to make his crop, the wheat farmer 85 days. Their total dependence upon a single crop market with long inter-seasonal periods of unemployment spells their ruin. But here in the northeast the dairyman works 365 days to ship his milk at a daily loss of two cents per quart. He exploits his wife and children and generally one "hired hand" who lives with him all year round. At harvest time they all meet the extra labor requirements with longer hours and less sleep.

While dairy and general farming dominate the programs of most of the eastern farmers, there are other major interests. These states include the "Corn Belt," the "Hog Belt," the "Eastern Fruit Belt," the greatest vegetable and greenhouse projects, organized on a large capitalist basis hiring migratory family labor near the large cities; mushroom growing, cattle feeding, bee keeping, and poultry. Even wheat has an important part in the field rotations. No other equal agricultural area in the world can approach the variety, value or volume of crops of this northeastern quarter of the United States. It produces 47.5% of the total income from farm products. The northeast is the basis of the American farm tradition. The family farmer is still the typical producer. But the blight of bankruptcy is spreading. Nearly half of them are impoverished, already on the border lines of complete ruin.

The mortgages or liens on nearly 91% of exploited small and middle farmers have sifted into the hands of big bankers and insurance companies. More and more farmers are being foreclosed as the general and agricultural crisis widen the gap be-

tween low prices and high costs. With billions at stake, finance capital is groping for ways of squeezing profit from farm assets after the exploited farm family gives up in despair. Foreclosures have been multiplying. For instance, in the single state of Iowa, foreclosures by insurance companies alone have mounted from 142 in 1921-1925 to 1,614 in 1926-1930. This total involves 353,388 acres valued at \$26,388,800 in 97 counties of the richest farm state in the United States.

### *Impoverishing the Farmer*

One of the developments resulting from the inevitable ruin of the small family units is "chain-farming." In several states, great insurance companies are experimenting and organizing subsidiary operating companies to work foreclosed lands which they have taken from farmers. These farms are managed as a unit by the operating company. The "family" character of the farm is lost. Fences are uprooted, swamps drained and entire farms thrown into one or two large fields. The house and barn may be abandoned or used only for seasonal barracks for a crew of hired labor who live there only at planting and harvest time. Machinery is transplanted from farm to farm within the "chain" thus reducing some overhead on the investment.

The 500,000 tractors operating in this area do not bring the farmers prosperity because they cannot work efficiently within the line fences of 125 acres of general farm crop. These tractors average only 370 hours operation per year. Tractors should work 2,000 hours as they do on state farms in Soviet Russia. Thus mechanical progress inevitably trips over the contradictions of capitalism, a system which has developed the machinery of farm production but has provided no solution for its rational operation by small farmers. For instance, in dairying, it has developed a "Rotolactor," a machine that milks 1,500 cows three times daily with the labor of only 22 men, to produce certified milk from a great industrial dairy. Yet there is no possibility of eliminating the daily 365-day year slavery to the milk pail for countless sleepy farmers who must warm numb fingers on the cow's flank in the dark winter mornings before they can pull teats at all.

The processes constantly lowering the economic status of the



farmers are measured by a rapid disappearance of their equity in the farms. For many of them production per acre and per milch cow will eventually drop below the vanishing point of existence. It is a degrading process which we must not allow the farm fakers and politicians to camouflage with their slogans of "thrift," "Back to the Old Traditions," and "Live at Home." The increase of large-scale mechanized farming is not rapid. With nowhere else to go, the farmer tenaciously clings to soil slavery. He reduces his standard of living, substituting long hours of muscular work for the machinery which should bring him a decent livelihood, but which under capitalism can be profitably employed only by the rich farmers.

Although it is a humid area of rich soils next door to markets, with a mixture of crop and all forms of livestock to employ the farmers throughout the year—89% of the farmers are in debt and close to bankruptcy. Even in the conservative environments of the northeast, militancy among the farmers is appearing in revolts against high taxes in Minnesota. And in Pennsylvania farmers help to feed striking miners. All these are signs which indicate the first stages of united action of farmers and workers in future struggles against capital.

## PACIFIC FRUIT REGIONS

The capitalist form of exploiting labor in agriculture has reached a more advanced stage on the west coast than in any other area in the United States. Some 48% of all those working on farms, according to the census of 1930, were hired hands—an army of 250,000 men who depend upon seasonal work for their living. Mexicans picking lettuce and cantaloupe in the stifling Imperial Valley, Filipinos on the commercial truck farms, Japanese robbed of their small plots of land by discriminatory legislation, native whites following the crops in a great annual circuit up and down the broad coast valleys—all these together with 30,000 workers in the packing plants and canneries make up the agricultural proletariat.

Actually less numerous than hired farm workers in this region of capitalist agriculture are the 200,000 small farmers on second rate land. High rentals, water rates and taxes have always been

the means of passing the profits of the labor of the whole farm family to capitalist exploiters. Now during the general crisis, when there are no profits for such farmers, the interest charges and debts which cannot possibly be paid, pile up on his neck and end in foreclosure.

On the best irrigated lands are the farmers who once could have been called rich. They number 50,000 and have the finest orchards valued at several thousand dollars an acre. Besides individual farmers there are many companies which operate in an intensive way often in the areas where living is very disagreeable, such as the Imperial Valley or the fertile bogs near Stockton. Managers and agents direct the Mexican and oriental workers, and practice all the abuses which go with absentee ownership.

Capital was attracted to the west coast valleys because of their natural advantages: a short and mild winter, which permits the raising of out-of-season specialties, favorable irrigation possibilities, etc. Due to the inflow of capital, the area has become the most intensive in America—it produces 40% more value per acre than any other farm area. In 1930, Yakima and the Hood River Valleys of Washington and Oregon were producing one-third of the nation's commercial apple crop. California produced all of the nation's lemons and apricots, 99% of the canning peaches, 89% of the prunes, 67% of the oranges, etc. But other favored areas have been breaking into the monopoly. Florida has been steadily increasing her citrus production at the rate of 5% a year. In the Valley of the Rio Grande River at the southern tip of Texas, fine grapefruit can be produced—the boosters call it "Magic Valley." 5,000,000 grapefruit trees are now growing there, a sufficient number of trees to double the American production when they come into bearing. But at the very moment of greatly increasing production all over the country, the buying power of the nation's workers collapses. A falling market is driving prices of grapefruit and all the Pacific coast products down below average cost of production. Land values also fall and with them the security of great banks. The whole financial structure of the west coast is tottering.

The fruit growers of California have developed their own trade associations, called "cooperatives," such as the California Fruit



Growers' Exchange, the Sun Maid Raisin Cooperative, etc. These now market 22% of the total commercial crop of the state, amounting to \$153,000,000 a year. The "cooperatives" are run by a small group of directors and dominated by the banks which have loaned large sums of money.

Now during the general crisis when small marketing efficiencies are insufficient to keep the producers out of the red, some of the cooperatives have tried to use their monopoly position to raise the price of their particular product. For example, in 1930 the directors of the Canning Peach Growers' Cooperative decided that the crop of thousands of growers should be reduced 44%. As a result in that year 5,000,000 cases of good peaches were destroyed. This ruthless decision by the big canners to destroy food while workers were starving, brought no relief to the growers, who received a price below the cost of production. Competition of other fruits and the shrunk demand made their efforts futile. Nevertheless the cooperative employed the same methods in 1931 when growers were ordered to leave 49% of the crop unharvested. And to this waste was added the provision of a bonus for each acre of bearing trees which was uprooted. In response to this last offer, roughly 600,000 trees were torn out of the ground. But as the general crisis sharpened, the price continued to fall. And now in 1932, an official California estimate forecasts the destruction of 60% of the peach crop, or 5,800,000 cases.

### *Mass Starvation*

The years 1930 and 1931 were bitter ones for the workers and farmers, their wives and children, millions of whom were hungry. Those same years hold the world's record for the destruction of food. The sum of all fruits of shipping grade left unharvested for California alone, as reported by the State Agricultural College in 1930, totals 1,391,200,000 pounds—if distributed it would have meant 139 pounds of good fruit per person for ten million unemployed. The year 1931 was a poorer crop so only 492,000,000 pounds were destroyed—49 pounds for each of ten million people. In the 1931 season, Florida began to destroy citrus fruits. The official estimate of the destruction of fruits which "we normally would have been handling" was in this state



112,500,000 pounds. During the winters of both these years, big business men, while fighting adequate government relief or unemployment insurance, tried to wheedle the workers of every American city into sharing their small wages with the hungry unemployed through "I Have Shared" campaigns, and the "Block Aid." At the same time these business men refused to permit hungry workers to help themselves to condemned fruit for fear that a few sales might be spoiled. However, special barbed wire fences and "No Trespassing" signs did not stop hundreds from marching out to the orchards and filling their baby carriages and sacks with fruit.

Those cannery and field workers who still have jobs are hardly better off than jobless workers—both groups are hungry. The former wage of 40 to 45 cents an hour in the canneries is now cut to 30 cents and less, with no extra for overtime. Similarly fruit pickers in the orchards have been reduced from 35-50 cents to 15-30 cents. Twice in Imperial Valley and again in peach canneries, the workers called a strike against wage cuts. The operators always resisted the workers' demands, appealed to race prejudice against the Mexicans, and invoked the criminal syndicalism law to throw the leaders in jail. The operators' ruthlessness betrays their fear. But the terror couldn't break the influence of the Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union which goes on organizing and fighting against wage cuts and for unemployment insurance.

Every town has its "jungle" where dispossessed farmers and jobless workers try to live. Stockton, California, has a large one out on the city dump, where there are parts of old cars and packing cases which can be fashioned into huts. Then there is the yellow drainage canal alongside which is the only drinking water available. Right within sight is a grain elevator, a sugar warehouse, and some vegetables storage plants, all of them stuffed full of "surplus" food. Outside of one warehouse is a great mound of beans, dumped there because they had begun to rot. Old cylinder oil has been sprayed over the mound to reduce the smell. Against a fresco of scrawly "Keep Out" signs, one can find jobless food workers picking over the rotting, oily mass for some beans which can be eaten. At the very moment they are sorting

this garbage, they are within ten feet of an abundance of excellent food, separated only by a thin wooden wall.

## THE FARMERS AWAKEN

The general crisis and decay of capitalism in the United States has left its trail of lowered standards of living, increased unemployment and farm bankruptcies, which threaten the farm population with permanent poverty and a system of peasantry. This prospect becomes more than a threat as capitalism attempts to pass the full burden of the crisis on to the workers and farmers. Slogans of "Back to the Land" for workers, and "Back to the Farm" for farmers are dusted off. Meanwhile the real program of the bankers is camouflaged as "relief" and "reform." And the Farm Bloc politicians, the so-called Socialists and Farmer-Laborites, and the misleaders of the reformist farm organizations try to make the farmers pull the capitalist chestnuts from the fire. They direct the "dangerous" growing farm revolt into safe channels, appealing to the exploited farmer to support measures designed for his own ruin, diverting him from the class struggle.

The plans for agricultural "reform" (such as the Export Debenture, the Domestic Allotment, and the Equalization Fee), which propose to "make the tariff effective," all boil down to centralizing the export surplus in the hands of finance capital for dumping abroad. And while small and middle farmers are squeezed out of commercial production, into a self-sufficing peasant form of farming, corporations, "chain farms" and rich farms are developed and bolstered up for the benefit of the bankers who own or mortgage them. The tariff-subsidized prices for export crops are simply passed on to the American consumer. As the final murderous plan the government prepares for war, especially against the Soviet Union. Business men expect to create in this way a market for their products while the millions of the "surplus" farmers and workers can be used as cannon fodder.

But these plans will not succeed because the farmers are waking up. They know from the example of the Soviet Union that agriculture and industry can be organized, under a workers' and farmers' government, to provide peace and plenty for all. Committees of action are being set up under the leadership of the

United Farmers' League—which publishes a weekly farm paper, *Producers News*, at Plentywood, Montana—to follow the example of the city workers in organizing demonstrations, hunger marches, and struggle for emergency relief. In this struggle the impoverished farmers suffering from the crisis are supported by the Communist Party which in its presidential election platform of 1932 has as one of its central demands: "Emergency relief for the poor farmers without restrictions by the government and banks; exemption of poor farmers from taxes, and no forced collection of rents or debts." The struggle for these demands is the only way out of the crisis and toward victory over the bankers and landowners.



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