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Between 1920 and 1930 the gross annual farm income dropped from $15,400,000,000 to $9,000,000,000 and there was an additional decline of $2,600,000,000 since 1930.

The agricultural population during that decade was not suffering alone.

The farmers' purchasing power at one time $16,000,000,000 became less than $5,000,000,000 a year. A market for $11,000,000,000 worth of the products of mine and factory disappeared during that momentous decade — more than twice our total exports at their peak.

In 1930, more than one-half the industrial workers of the nation depended for employment on materials supplied by the farms, according to reliable estimate published in the New York Times. When the farmers had a purchasing power of $16,000,000,000, it was conservatively estimated, they paid, indirectly, $2,500,000,000 in wages to city workers.

I shall not trouble my readers with additional statistics. The people in the Red River Valley knew these facts from experience. John Perry living on one of the best farms in the Valley gave me first hand information regarding his farm. His farm operations were in the red. He owned a debt-free section of land, every acre tillable, substantial buildings, a large house, and all the necessary equipment. He practised mixed farming. He was acknowledged as being one of the best farmers in the Valley. And his farm operations were in the red!

What about all the rest of the farmers? What was happening in our happy Valley? This shouldn't have been allowed to happen. Where were our economists, farm marketing experts, governmental policy planners, anyway? I could not sit idly by during this crisis. The Valley was justifiably in revolt. Any red-blooded citizen would have been, too.

Farm marketing problems were scheduled for the last day of 1924 Valley Farm Week's meetings. The Minnesota Red River Valley Development Association and the recently organized Minnesota Export Commission League met at the same time. I had been elected president of the latter. It had been organized to gain support for the McNary-Haugen bill as the best means for meeting the immediate need for farm relief.
Virgil MacGregor, Crookston, had suggested a similar plan and A. D. Stephens, had presented it to the Federal Reserve Board. In turn, it attracted the attention of Henry C. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture with whom Mr. MacGregor had been exchanging letters.

A reporter for the Minneapolis Journal told the story of the meeting held in Crookston, February 8, 1924. It is brief and covers the proceedings better than I can now recall them:

"It is well enough to advocate farm diversification in the Northwest, but that is not all," Conrad G. Selvig, president of the Minnesota Export league and superintendent of the Northwest School of Agriculture here said today in a plea for support of the McNary-Haugen bill as the best means for meeting the immediate need for relief.

He presided at a meeting of the league which wound up the many meetings of a variety of organizations which have been a part of the program of the annual Winter Shows this week at Crookston.

"Diversification represents a desirable kind of farming, but it is a long time affair and not designed to meet the present emergency," he said. "It will take years to effect the complete transformation. If nothing is done to help for a few years of emergency, half of our farmers may be lost."

"The situation won't be solved by co-operative marketing. That will help in the long run. The Coulter bill will yield benefit to some farmers in the future. Something should be done to meet the present emergency, and the best plan that has appeared on the legislative horizon is the McNary-Haugen bill."

"This is not a measure to fix prices but a measure to give the farmer the advantage of a domestic market for his products, the advantage the manufacturer enjoys protected by a tariff. It proposes to take the surpluses that are bearing down farm prices to world levels out of the domestic market so that domestic supply and demand can operate to give American prices."

"Moreover, it has within it a counteracting force against expansion of acreage, the bugaboo of the artificially made high price. If production is increased the surpluses will be increased and the cost of taking them out of the market will tend to wipe out the profit gained from the high domestic prices."

"Everybody, realizing the need of help, ought to consider this bill in an open mind. We ask business men to study it carefully, not to condemn it before they read it over."

As president of the Minnesota Export Commission league I was closely associated with its efficient and energetic secretary, C. H. Zealand, Crookston. It was necessary to secure funds and in this the Development association of which also he was secretary gave strong support. Contacts were established with other groups in the state. Also with groups in other states which led to mutual understanding and more effective work.

Bernard M. Baruch donated $500.00 to our organization. I wrote him, not long ago (in 1947) on another matter and mentioned incidentally he had aided the Minnesota Export Commission League back in 1924. In his reply he wrote, "You are evidently one of the very few who remember my fight for agriculture." Then in his handwriting under the letter, "I never fear fighting for what is right, B. M. B."
My views on the problem were stated in "Agriculture at the Crossroads"*. This became the text of several nation-wide radio addresses and was printed in the Congressional Record.

During this period there was a spirited campaign promoting diversified farming in the Dakotas and in the Red River Valley. The Coulter bill providing for federal loans to farmers for the purchase of livestock to be placed on farms was publicized.

There was strong opposition to the McNary-Haugen bill by certain interests and groups but the citizens in general in addition to the farmers realized something had to be done. The republican Congressmen from the Seventh and the Ninth districts, no less persons than Hon. A. J. Volstead, chairman of the House's powerful Judiciary Committee and Hon. Halvor Steenerson, chairman of the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, had gone down to defeat in the current revolt of the farmers.

5.

The Valley farmers proposed sending me to Washington to urge substantial farm relief either through the McNary-Haugen bill or some effective modification thereof. I referred the request to my Chief, Dean W. C. Coffey. He discussed it with President L. D. Coffman who at a fraternity dinner we both attended on March 8, 1924 informed me I was the servant of my people. If they wished me to go to Washington at their expense, it was my duty to go. That settled it.

6.

My wife accompanied me to Washington where we remained three months that spring. I had made a brief trip there previously with credentials from the Minnesota Export League. During that visit I conferred with numerous senators and representatives as well as with various leaders of farm groups.

A mass meeting was held in one of Washington's churches on a Sunday afternoon, with Senator Borah as the principal speaker. Charles J. Brand, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, was very active in providing facts and figures to support the farmers' contentions. Senator Borah called a conference which I attended. At its close a committee on agricultural legislation was appointed. I ran across a copy of the list of members given me by the chairman. It is worthy of inclusion in this book.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL LEGISLATION

Senator William E. Borah, Chairman.
Fred Cummings
Milo Reno
John A. Simpson
J. S. Wanamaker
Senator Henrick Shipstead, Minnesota
Senator Elmer Thomas, Oklahoma
Senator Lynn Frazier, North Dakota
Senator Smith Brookhart, Iowa
Congressman Conrad G. Selvig, Minnesota
Congressman Victor Christgau, Minnesota

* "Agriculture at the Crossroads", Conrad G. Selvig, 1924.
When we arrived in Washington, I found there had been much activity since the previous visit already mentioned. There was a nation-wide movement which found expression in organizing Export Corporation Leagues in addition to rallying in support of the State Farm Bureau Federations, the National Grange, Grain Growers' Marketing associations and bankers' groups.

Many farm economists and members of both branches of Congress gave invaluable support. A new committee was formed which held frequent meetings to plan the strategy of the campaign. I was a member and teamed with former Governor Carl Gunderson, South Dakota, in our three months' campaign to gain support for real "farm relief".

History was in the making. We were not a "bunch of radicals." Our listeners learned we represented the "grass-roots" farmers. If they were not convinced, at least, they became uneasy in their minds. "Equality for Agriculture" soon became the slogan of rural and many urban groups.

It is impossible to present the details of the fight for "Equality for Agriculture" in this book. The subject has been adequately handled by others.

7.

The work continued during 1925 and 1926. As will be stated anon the battle front changed in 1926. My views became more and more definite as will be seen in the following newspaper article which was published in the Fergus Falls Tribune, Democratic. It gives succinctly my views at the time which was mid-summer, 1926:

Mr. Selvig declared himself in detail for the export corporation idea as embodied in the Haugen bill. "Carry a big stick but don't talk your head off, is my notion of how the legislation demanded by farmers is going to be secured," he wrote. "It is a fundamental conviction with me that something must be done."

It is not only the Haugen bill that is at issue. The farmers' purchasing power is much below what it was in 1914. His farm debt has increased and he is unable, under present conditions, to reduce it. He buys in an artificially created market and is compelled to sell nearly all his products on a world market. Either the protective system must be extended to the farmer or it must be modified.

Transportation, taxation, credit problems, land tenure and honesty in labeling food products, are other problems that cry for amendment and change in the interests of agriculture. It's going to be a long hard fight, but loyalty and persistence on the part of agriculture's representatives and the spokesmen for farmers will win out in the end. All realize that agricultural well-being is of fundamental importance to the cities, to the industrial east, if you please, as well as to us out here in the producing regions.
The lines are forming for a real fight. Lines have formed before and victories for the people have been won. “Equality for Agriculture” is the battle-cry. United action is the weapon. An enlightened public opinion is the court. We shall win because we must win!

After it was all over the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch published the following editorial:

AN APPRECIATION

Whatever happens to the McNary-Haugen bill from this point on, the victory which has been won in Congress furnished a proper occasion for calling attention to the heavy debt of gratitude which the West owes the men who have been responsible for it. It has been a long and stubborn fight. It has involved an industry in which more than thirty million persons are directly concerned. The men who have contributed to this victory naturally number by the hundreds. All are deserving of appreciation for the unselfish devotion with which they have applied themselves to the cause of agriculture.

But a few names may be singled out as worthy of particular notice. If among the comparatively small group of men who have carried the chief burden through the four years of the campaign, two may be selected for special credit for the triumph, they are Frank W. Murphy of Wheaton, Minnesota, who was in active charge of the campaign at Washington for the last three sessions, and George N. Peek of Moline, Illinois. These men have labored incessantly and with a persistence and determination which calls for the highest praise. They have been the chief inspirers of the movement.

Among the many others outside of Congress who have contributed greatly, either in their own communities or at Washington, should be mentioned such men as William Hirth of Columbia, Missouri; Thomas Cashman of Owatonna, Minnesota; J. F. Reed of the Minnesota, and Charles E. Hearst and William Settle of the Iowa and Indiana Farm Bureaus; James Manahan of St. Paul; Chester Davis, Frank D. Barton and Robert Cowles of the Illinois Agricultural association; C. G. Selvig of Crookston; H. G. Keeny of Omaha and a large number of other men who have been active in leadership. To them should also be added the Southern leaders, without whom the victory would have been impossible, and also such businessmen as C. Reinold Noyes, Bernard Baruch, Charles G. Dawes and Frank O. Lowden, who have made the fight for agriculture their fight.

During the four years the Pioneer Press and Dispatch have been taking an editorial leadership in this movement, we have come to have the highest admiration and regard for the men with whom we have found ourselves working shoulder to shoulder. The gracious expressions of congratulations which we have received from many of them, and which we print elsewhere in this issue are deeply gratifying.
MINNESOTA'S DELEGATION, 72ND CONGRESS. UPPER, L. TO R., CHRISTGAU, NOLAN, KVALE, MAAS, PITTENGER. LOWER L. TO R., GOODWIN, CLAGUE, KNUTSON, SELVIG, ANDRESEN.