

Confusion in the Barnyard

SPEECH

OF

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OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. BENNETT of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, there is confusion in the barnyard today. There has been confusion in the barnyard and market place since the war started. I would like to talk for a few minutes about some of the causes of this situation as it relates to the farmer and to offer some constructive suggestions on what we can do about it.

To reduce the farm problem to its simplest equation, I would say that the source of our trouble is in failure to heed the warning of that great Democrat, Thomas Jefferson, who said, "If we wait on the Government in Washington to tell us when to sow and reap we shall soon want for bread." Yes, for several years our farmers, instead of being left free to collect their profits at the stock scale and the elevator, have been encouraged to get their checks from some Federal employee with offices in the county seat.

WHAT IS THE FARM POLICY?

Let me make it clear that I believe the Government has an important educational function to perform for agriculture. That function has been performed efficiently and well through county agents. But, departing from the educational ideals of soil conservation and good farm management, a new idea has grown up in the minds of some of the bright boys who make their living by farming the farmers. This idea was most frankly and eloquently stated by one of the officials of the Department of Agriculture in the present administration. Mr. Franklin Carter, who served as an official in the Resettlement Administration in the Department of Agriculture under the New Deal, voiced his attitude toward the farmer in these shocking words, which I quote:

The problem of farm relief will become not how shall we relieve the farmer, but who shall relieve us of the farmer? The farmer has abrogated to himself all virtue and all knowledge, he has voted against progress, against civilization, against the city, against science, against art. He has made and unmade Presidents in the image of Main Street. He has exhausted our soil as he will exhaust our Treasury if given half a chance. He is the great obstacle to human progress, the great threat to political stability. Sooner or later we shall discover, as England discovered, as Soviet Russia has discovered, that the pagan, the landed proprietor, the kulak, is simply so much mud on the path of progress and must be swept aside if society is to advance.

What do you think of one of our public servants, a high official in the present

administration, a policy maker for the Department of Agriculture, making such a statement as that? Some might suggest we just dismiss that statement as another of the crazy and irresponsible rantings of one of the "brain trust" bureaucrats appointed by the President. But we cannot do that. We cannot lightly dismiss the statement. The reason we cannot dismiss it is that we have seen under cloak of various so-called emergencies the policy described by Mr. Carter being followed in the United States.

Let me call another witness. This witness is also an employee of the Department of Agriculture in the present administration. This witness is Dr. F. F. Elliott, in the office of the Chief Agricultural Economist of the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Elliott has recently been quoted as saying that part of the Government's plan for agriculture in post-war America is to move 20 percent of the farmers to the city whether they like it or not. Now, why should we reduce our farm population? Dr. Elliott answers that question by pointing to the administration plans to create a hugely industrialized United States with Latin America and other sections of the world supplying the food. The market will be controlled by the Government with fixed prices for the farmer, the market man, and the consumer.

CREATING FOREIGN COMPETITION

Already we see the outlines of this plan going into effect. American agriculture is being destroyed and foreign agriculture is being built up with American tax dollars. Food, including butter, meat, and grain, was being imported in competition with that produced by our own farmers even before the artificially created grain shortage here which has made us dependent on foreign grain for our livestock and poultry. The so-called Atlantic Charter calls for free trade in the post-war era. I could cite scores of examples. A few more will suffice, however. There is no serious farm machinery shortage in Mexico. We are providing Mexico with almost all of her farm machinery. We are, indeed, building factories at our own expense in South American countries to manufacture farm machinery for use by these foreign peoples. The gentleman from Illinois [Mr. JOHNSON] established here, to the dismay of Congress, just recently that about half a million items of our farm machinery badly needed by American farmers have been set aside for distribution abroad through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

At the same time, production in this country is curtailed by excessive draft of farm labor, high wages in the war factories which have siphoned off much

farm labor, and severe restrictions on distribution of farm machinery in this country. Our farmers have been paid not to grow things. Even with a sugar shortage the Federal Government paid beet-sugar farmers in Colorado not to plant sugar beets. We paid \$1,067,665 to a corporation in Florida and \$961,064 to our island possession, Puerto Rico, not to raise sugar. The total amount expended by the Federal Government to persuade persons and corporations not to raise sugar exceeds \$41,000,000. I do not want to talk about too much water over the dam, but in passing I want to point out that when some of us were insisting that we did not have over production but rather underconsumption, that the answer to depression was more production, that those in power in Washington were plowing under and burning and knocking in the head food we now sadly need, food which is now rationed. Some of the good citizens of my congressional district were indicted in Federal court because they grew too much wheat, which ever since we have had to import. But enough of that.

COLLECTIVIST REGIMENTATION

We have seen, also, in the Sixth Missouri Congressional District, the effects of this policy against the farmer in establishment of the \$1,078,150 Communist farm project in Bates County, which project I exposed in 1943 as a failure and requested Congress to halt before any more public funds were spent on it. Other projects of this kind cover the Nation. They are part of the new plan for a socialized and regimented agriculture. A plan to take the farmer's freedom and make him a ward of the Government. A plan to make him the scapegoat for Government failures and a whipping post for labor racketeers who have had the gravy while the farmer has been deplored and discriminated against in Washington. Speaking of regimentation, the House of Representatives on March 24, 1944, actually had to pass legislation prohibiting bureaucrats from continuing their policy, in certain areas of the country, in forcing farmers to join the triple A to get gasoline, machinery, fertilizer, and deferment as essential farm labor.

THE BUREAUCRATIC MERRY-GO-ROUND

The farmer is now confronted with conflicting policies which can only result in chaos for the nation. The farmer is told he must increase his production. He has to make several gasoline, time, and rubber-tire consuming trips to the county seat to struggle with bureaucracy to get sufficient equipment. He finds that the bureaucrats have hamstrung him with rules and regulations and have even added to his woes by monkeying with the clock so that his labor quits in the middle

of the afternoon and stores and ration boards are all closed up when the day's chores are done and he can finally go to town for supplies and official permissions. But, over these and other obstacles he gets out a big crop, goes in debt, raises more livestock and poultry, and works his daylight hours out at the request of his Government and on the assurance of his Government that he will be contributing to the war effort by so doing.

Then he picks up the morning newspaper and sees that the Administration overnight has abolished the unit plan, that all farmers under a certain age will be inducted into the Army regardless of the importance of their contribution to agriculture, that he has done too well and must bear the loss of a reduction in his poultry flocks and livestock, and that corn and other feeds will not be available because of price ceiling differences and other artificial, Washington-generated, New Deal blunders. Thousands of acres of land in my district will produce nothing but weeds, insects, and erosion this year because of that kind of inconsistent farm policy. And, the farm auctioneers will continue to profit.

What some bureaucrats in the executive department of this Government do not seem to understand is that farming is the largest business enterprise in America. Farming is a complicated, technical business. Many risks are involved. There is the weather risk, the price risk, the health risk, the insect risk, and the risk of insufficient manpower. On top of all this the farmer now has the risk of unwarranted Government meddling and controls. This is the greatest risk ever to confront the American farmer. It is the risk of losing his independence and the self-control of his affairs which has heretofore left him free to create the highest level of agricultural productivity and the highest rural standards of living in the world.

The farmer is not unpatriotic. He does not want to avoid military service if he is needed. But he simply wants, and is entitled to, fair play from his Government. He wants his Government to make up its mind about where he can serve the best and then to stick to that policy. The present treatment leaves only the conclusion that the administration farm policy was correctly stated by the Agriculture Department official, Franklin Carter, whom I have already quoted.

EXECUTIVE INCOMPETENCE

During this war, Mr. Speaker, the Government has dealt in peace-meal fashion with the various sides of our food question. Farm production has been within the province of the scores of bureaus and agencies of the Department of Agriculture. Farm equipment and machines for the processing of food is controlled by the War Production Board. Farm labor has been a joint headache of the War Manpower Commission and Selective Service. Transportation is in the hands of the Office of Defense Transportation. Price fixing has been in the hands of the O. P. A. and the rationing of food has also been directed and controlled by the O. P. A., but by conflicting

agencies within O. P. A. Congress has insisted that the President appoint a single responsible Food Administrator, but he has not done so. Several able men who tried to bring order out of the food muddle and conflicting agencies resigned in disgust.

As a result, we have seen food wasted; food spoiling in Government storage; spoiled food released for civilian consumption; spoiled food, rationed food, put on the public dump. We have seen Government officials issuing crazy orders, such as the one by Edward R. Gay, Chief of Civilian Supply in the War Production Board, who told farmers to take off their horses' shoes each night to rest their horses' feet and save metal. We have seen unsound, expensive, and inflationary programs, such as consumer subsidies advanced, even though repeatedly rejected by Congress, and by each and every economist, except those on the Federal pay roll. It is a wonder that food production has not collapsed completely. The reason it has not is because of the patriotism of the farmer, the independent American farmer, who has, with his wife and children, worked from before daybreak until after dark, through rain and cold and heat, to feed our armies and our people. If the farmer could be given freedom from red tape, freedom from governmental restrictions, freedom from artificially generated forces which make it impossible for him to forecast from one day to another whether he will produce at a loss or a profit, then the farmer would be happy and prosperous and could multiply his production much easier.

WHAT DOES THE FARMER WANT?

I have had some people say to me lately, "You can never satisfy the farmer. He is always howling and dissatisfied." It is true that the farmer is never satisfied. We should thank our lucky stars for that. It is this spirit of always demanding something sounder and better that has made America the greatest nation in the world. If the American farmer had been satisfied, we would still be living in the days of the oxcart, the squirrel rifle, the ax, and the hoe. I might add that only the rugged, independent spirit of the farmer could have survived all that has been done to him by those who have professed to be doing for him in the past several years. But there is one thing our American farmer is very well satisfied with, indeed. That is our American Constitution and our republican form of government. He knows that under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights he has a chance to fight back at those who would seek to make him a political puppet, to be moved back and forth to satisfy the whims and ambitions of bureaucratic would-be dictators in seats of the mighty. The American farmer makes reasonable demands of his Government. He is asking simply for a guaranty of the cost of production, some machinery and fertilizer and protein feeds to produce with, some of his sons who understand farm work to help him, some common sense in rationing, freedom from confusing questionnaires and forms, and then he just

wants to be left alone to do the day's work. Since he has often to work at night, he appreciates the rural electrification we have provided him, and some of us in Congress hope to extend after the war when materials are available to those who have not yet received its benefits.

I am grateful to the farmers of the Sixth Congressional District for loyally standing by me while I have represented them in Washington. I am grateful for the loyal support of all the farm organizations. I am grateful that my folks are farmers and my wife a farm girl for that brings me even closer to rural problems and helps explain why I can talk the farmers' language.

FARM INCOME

I know that the farmer does not have an easy time. Although he has made some small profit lately he has had many lean years through which it has been hard to hang on. His average monthly income of \$62.43 still compares unfavorably to that of his city cousin's monthly average of \$209.40. His worst enemy has been his best friend—the weather. Dame nature, who was lavish in her gifts in 1942, quickly turned her back on men of the soil. She sent rains and floods which destroyed land, crops, poultry, livestock, and barns. But the farmer came back, as he always comes back. He devised short cuts to make his meager labor supply go around. With baling wire he kept his groaning machinery rolling and with a watchful eye cocked on Washington he made his own rules until the official ones came along. He saw the importance of his task, cooperated when cooperation speeded its completion, and fought back when others tried to impede its progress.

He talked and suggested. Yes, he disputed, too. But he worked while he talked. How well he worked is evident in bulging granaries, in the bawling animals that overflow the stockyards, in the milk and cream splashing through separators across the land. The Nation is short of food. We have rationing. Yes. But it is not the farmer's fault. And remember, the farmer has made American boys the best-fed fighting men in the world. He has sent nourishment to the fighting fronts of Russia and the bomb shelters of Britain. He furnished the first full meal in years to the liberated people along the Mediterranean shores. He gives substance to the belief of some that America must feed the world until it gets on its feet. Whether you subscribe to that theory or not, you must take your hat off to the man who, by his energy, skill, and ingenuity, has proved that he is big enough for the job. No other nation in the world could make such a boast based on the productive capacity of its farmers. As a contributor to the war effort, the farmer, despite Government handicaps, did well in 1942 and 1943. He says he will do still better in 1944. He deserves the cooperation of the public and of the Congress. I believe he knows from past experience that he can count on the understanding cooperation of his Representative in Congress from the Sixth Missouri Congressional District.

*I like the whole speech
by Hon. Bennett*