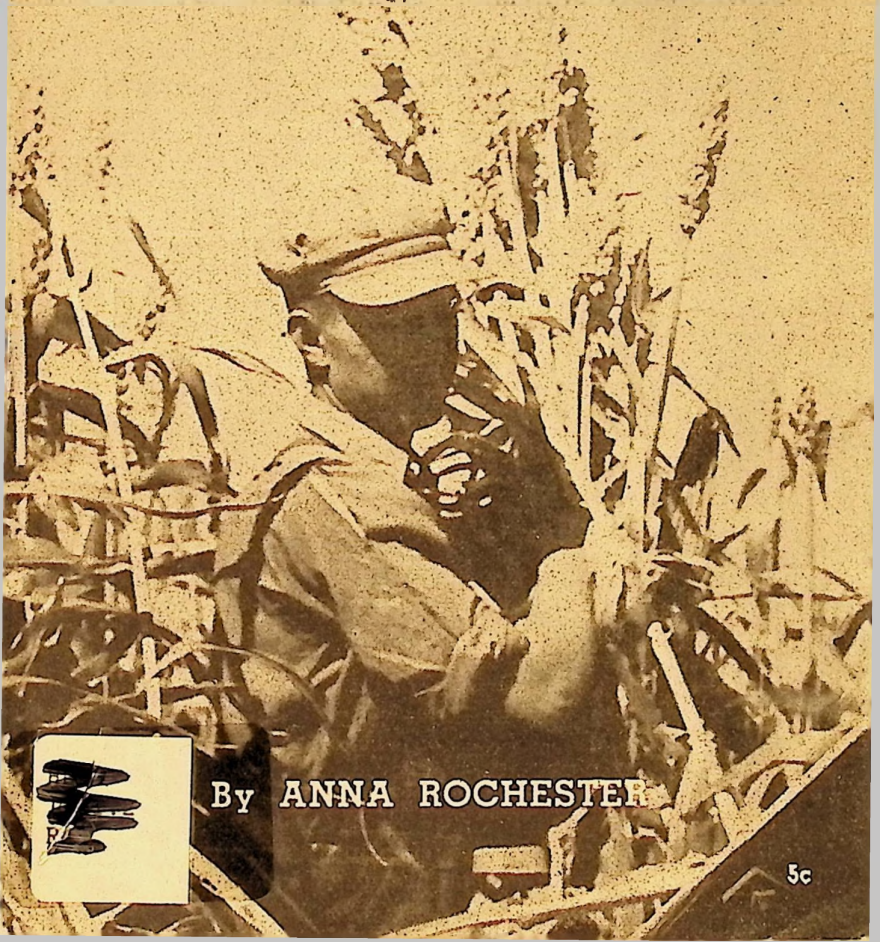


43

FARMERS and the WAR



By ANNA ROCHESTER

5c

Published by WORKERS LIBRARY PUBLISHERS, Inc., P.O. Box 148, Sta. D
(832 Broadway), New York City March, 1943 209 ~~209~~ Printed in the U.S.A.

Farmers and the War

By ANNA ROCHESTER

AS PETER, with his round white cap and his flapping Navy pants, stepped onto the bus and waved a final goodbye, his father's grim smile brought back memories of that terrible drought year when the boy was only ten years old. Peter felt suddenly that his father and mother were missing him far more than they would admit. But he also knew that they would keep on working here at home for victory over the Nazis. He remembered how fiercely and ingeniously they had fought the grasshoppers swarming in during the drought.

Peter's father, chugging back to the farm in his old car, was proud that Peter was starting off for active duty at sea. He himself had dashed off to fight for democracy in 1917, and he still believed that there are peoples' wars which must be fought to the end, even though the First World War had turned out differently.

Just what happened in Germany to make possible such a brutal regime as Hitler's had never been quite clear to either Peter or his parents. But they did know that ruthless fascism endangers America's national existence, and the whole family was ready to work and fight and die to defend America against Hitler and his Axis.

Peter's father knew that while he himself was too old, now, for the fighting front, his farm could play its part in the defeat of fascism. For while the front-line fighters carry on the bloodiest struggle of all time, they would be powerless without the men and women who make the guns and munitions, the airplanes and tanks and ships. And neither soldiers

nor war workers could carry on without the farmers who provide them all with food.

Yes, in this intricate pattern of total war, into which life has woven all our thoughts and our activities, no one thread can be weakened without damage to the entire fabric. As a farm family in the United States, Peter's parents have a very real part in the world-wide struggle against Hitlerism/

What Is This Struggle About?

Suppose the most reactionary of the big capitalists, working with the toughest gangsters had wiped out all representative government and set up a brutal dictatorship with no elections, no more Congress, no more opportunity for everyday working citizens to express their opinions, no more freedom to organize, no more farmers' cooperatives, no more freedom of the press.

Take Congress, for example. It does lots of things that the people back home are opposed to. Great numbers of farmers know they are not fairly represented by the "farm bloc," which speaks in their name.

But most of the American farmers have the remedy in their own hands. Power does lie with the voters at home. If those who object to policies put forward in their name fail to organize and make their wishes known, they themselves are responsible for the results.

It is true that one-fourth of our farmers live in the seven poll-tax states where poverty deprives a citizen of his voting rights. But even here the people can speak. They can discuss and organize. And those in every state who have a genuine concern for the people's rights can support more strongly the Congressmen in both parties who are working to eradicate this poll-tax blot on our democracy.

We can make our will known and use it as a political force. Even Congressmen who have just been elected are thinking of the next election and give heed to the voice of voters who are aroused and organized.

Not so in a fascist country, like Nazi Germany, Italy or

12-
127529

Japan, where the people are held down by hands of steel. There they have no part in government. And in their working life they endure a completely oppressive slavery.

The fascist countries started this war because they seek to rule the entire world. Franco Spain and Mannerheim's Finland are helping them, although not yet formally at war with the United States. We are in a world-wide conflict between the forces of reaction and the democratic rights of the common man. Fascism is set upon destroying the America of the Bill of Rights and bringing the entire nation into subjection to Hitlerism.

Fighting this Peoples' War against fascism involves a gigantic international struggle in which our United States, other capitalist democracies, China and the socialist Soviet Union stand as United Nations against the Axis powers. The Peoples' War demands also watchfulness against the fascist forces here at home.

Our native reactionaries do not admit that they oppose the war, but they undermine the war effort by playing on every possible source of friction among the various groups of the American people. They pit the whites against the Negroes; Protestants against Catholics; Christians against Jews; native-born against foreign-born. They start red scares against all who defend the masses, and stir up strife between working farmers and organized wage workers.

Peter's father, and other farmers who stop to think, know that the big business enemies of labor unions are the very groups which have borne down most heavily upon the farmers. Both farmers and workers have organized to defend themselves against the monopolies in the United States: farmers through cooperatives; wage workers through labor unions. In the great struggle today against the fascist nations there is no room for conflict between the working farmers and the organized wage workers. They need each other in the common struggle against our country's enemies.

No less do the United Nations need one another. Actually we have been spared immediate Nazi attack only because our Allies had fought so well long before our forces could be

mobilized. When a Nazi Army was destroyed at Stalingrad, our chief enemy, Nazi Germany, was seriously drained of its fighting strength. And when the Red Army took the offensive and began driving the Nazis from their fortified key points in the Caucasus and the Ukraine, the United Nations were brought nearer to victory in 1943.

We have been protected by thousands and millions of men in other countries who have been killed or mutilated in the bloody struggle against the Axis. And now our own fighters are dying and suffering in this Peoples' War.

Our Army and Navy and the workers in our war industries must be well fed. And no less do we have a deep obligation toward the United Nations. Especially Britain, the Soviet Union, and China need, for their fighting and for sustaining their people without serious hunger, arms and medicines and foods which only our country can supply.

Food for Our Allies

Very precious to our British and Soviet Allies has been the stream of lend-lease supplies, transported at a heavy cost in ships and human lives, and now needed more than ever as the struggle continues. The United States is the greatest reservoir of agricultural production remaining within their reach.

Britain, before the war, depended largely on eggs, dairy products and bacon from Denmark and the Low Countries, wheat from distant lands including the United States, vegetables from France, and fruits from the Mediterranean countries and from across the seas. In the last three years British farmers, together with young people and women who had never farmed before, have worked valiantly to increase production at home. Much of the idle greensward of the great estates has been brought under wheat. Even in the midst of war, reclamation projects have been carried out. And while wheat acreage has been increased by one-third we learn from a *New York Times* correspondent (January 12, 1943) that the average yield was pushed up from 33 bushels per acre to 40

bushels per acre. Practically everyone with a patch of land is growing vegetables.

But still Great Britain is far from self-sufficient in food production. Many fruits cannot be grown there. Cows and beef cattle are very few. Growing feeds for livestock to supply the British people with meat and milk and eggs is out of the question. It would be equally impossible to import seven million tons of fodder, as was "normal" when Atlantic shipping was safe and abundant.

Many basic foods are rationed in Great Britain, and the allowances are much smaller than any limits in prospect for us in the United States. *Punch*, the London comic weekly, can picture a woman writing in her diary and asking her husband, "What else happened today besides our having an egg for breakfast?"

Unlike England, the Soviet Union had been almost self-sustaining as to food. When the Nazi flood rolled in to engulf the richest farming areas of European Russia, the Soviet Government did its best to evacuate the invaded areas. Thousands of farm families, together with their tractors and their livestock, were moved to Soviet Asia—far from the battle line.

Before Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, new wheat and cattle regions in Soviet Asia were being developed. Even under the stress of unprecedented war their production has been greatly expanded. But the Nazi invaders, before they were driven back, had seized nearly half of the nation's pre-war farming acreage. Most of the wheat land of European Russia and all of the land in sugar beets were temporarily lost. These tremendous cuts in food acreage are only partly made up for by the new areas brought under cultivation in Siberia beyond the Urals.

Women and old men, and youths too young for the Army, have done their utmost. They have fought on the home front the battle for food with the same intensity and complete devotion that have made the Red Army dear to every true American. They have had training courses and thousands of new tractors. Soldiers disabled for front-line fighting are doing what they can on the land.

But that great country, which has held the Nazis at bay and is still taking the lead in destroying the Nazi power, has needed more and more food from other countries. Even some wheat must be imported. Of home-grown sugar they have none. Meats, vegetable oils, animal fats and butter are also very short.

To feed these Allies is our own patriotic duty. Our future is bound up with the stalwartness of the Red Army and the fighting strength of China, England and the other United Nations. We are gaining strength and Hitler's power is declining. But Axis forces are still far from collapse and complete surrender. We Americans will have a much tougher war on our hands if we fail to do our utmost to strengthen our Allies.

Much has already been done. Under lend-lease, which started in April, 1941, a swelling stream of tanks, airplanes, guns and munitions from American plants has crossed the oceans. And in the first twenty-one months of lend-lease nearly eight billion pounds of foodstuffs went to our Allies. These included all sorts of food from the greatly increased farm output of 1941 and the record production of 1942.

What They Need Most

In World War I, American wheat played an important role—and it still does. But in the present war grains and cereal products have made up only about one-tenth of the total food shipments. More than 80 per cent have consisted of dairy products and eggs, meat and fish, and fats and oils. For all foodstuffs the need is still increasing. And with the new technique for drying out foods—which reduces the shipping space required—the quantities of meats, dairy products, eggs and fruits sent to our Allies can be pushed up closer to the amounts which they certainly need.

Goals for total food production, set by the Department of Agriculture, have not yet clearly stated the full responsibility which rests upon American farmers. That the total should be increased even up to 20 per cent beyond the record production of 1942 was stated by H. W. Parisius last December, be-

fore he resigned as Director of the Department's new Division of Food Production. But official goals, as they stand, are only 4 per cent higher than the 1942 output.

Farm Mobilization Day, January 12, 1943, brought official recognition of the importance of all-out production. Lend-lease and military requirements were stressed and the tremendous need of food for our armed forces and our fighting Allies is becoming increasingly clear. But the percentage of total production required for these war purposes has been variously stated as one-fifth, one-fourth, or even one-third of the total 1943 output.

For patriotic farmers who realize the crucial importance of winning the war against Hitlerism, and winning it quickly, these varying figures do not blur the one basic fact: farmers in the United States are challenged to produce more than they have ever produced before. They are urged to shift from the less essential to the most necessary crops. All farmers have a part to play in this total war.

Problems of Increased Production

Some will say, "How can we produce more? What with the draft, and the lure of high wages in industry, and the rationing of farm machinery, and the shortage of nitrogen fertilizers, we can't even come up to 1942 production, let alone surpass it!" And other farmers tell us, "Do you think we have forgotten what happened after the First World War? If we do somehow manage to increase our production, we'll just be creating new problems for ourselves in the future." These are real difficulties. Let us look at them one by one.

Take, first, the fear of a post-war crisis. This must be cleared up so that all farmers can give themselves wholeheartedly to the measures and the effort required for increased production.

The government is already aware of this problem of post-war collapse. One of the laws passed by Congress in the autumn of 1942 guaranteed support of prices for basic crops during two full calendar years after the end of the war. Farmers have a right to demand more adequate post-war price

support, lasting three or four years instead of two, and covering a broader list of farm products.

More than that. Farmers have a basic interest in such post-war international cooperation as is promised in the Anglo-Soviet-American agreements. For the first time in history, we can glimpse the possibility of a stable interchange of products based on genuine concern for the welfare of the common man. Such a future can be realized if we ourselves—working farmers, wage workers, teachers, doctors, all kinds of hard-working professional men and women—face our full responsibility as citizens of a democracy.

Post-war policies will grow out of the struggle and hopes of the present. Only the darkest future lies before us if we lose the war.

Both farmers and wage workers have the strongest possible interest in a policy of long-range cooperation with all non-fascist countries throughout the world. They hold in their hands the political power to make such a policy effective. The more seriously the farmers join in common effort for all-out war production, the more effectively will they be prepared for constructive common action after the war.

But even farmers like Peter's father, who are ready to take chances on the future in order to win the war, face certain real difficulties in achieving all-out production. They know that last year's record crop was largely due to exceptional growing weather in '41 and '42. An average season will pull down the yield unless the Government steps up its production-planning program and unless the farmers make special efforts to increase output by careful community planning, by full use of farm machinery, and by more attention to the details of scientific agriculture.

Farming in the War Economy

Even then, farmers alone cannot solve the new problems thrust upon them by the mobilizing of industry for war production and the mobilizing of manpower for the armed forces. These wartime problems can be solved only as the needs of farm producers are fitted in with the needs of the armed forces,

of the war industries, and of the minimum industrial production essential for civilian life.

Effects of unplanned war production have already been apparent to the farm population. Some men, needed on the farm, have been called into the Army. Some farmers responding, last year, to the plea for increased production found that they had produced soybeans for which no crushing facilities were available. Some have had difficulties over equipment repairs because the local mechanic had been drafted or his small supply of metals had been exhausted.

Such confusion and uncertainty are disturbing. But they have been distorted and magnified by reactionary appeasers who are looking for arguments against the Roosevelt Administration. The half-planned war production has opened the door to rampant profiteering and maneuvering by certain of the monopolies. And many spokesmen for big business-as-usual have been only too eager to divert attention from their own profit-seeking by smearing all of the Administration's efforts at honest and efficient regulation.

Roosevelt forces in the 77th Congress put through three investigations of production and manpower problems which did real public service through their hearings and reports. The Tolan Committee made far-reaching and constructive suggestions for centralized economic planning. These were embodied in identical bills introduced last December by Representative Tolan in the House and Senators Pepper and Kilgore in the Senate. They propose to create an Office of War Mobilization which would assemble all the now scattered information on raw materials, farm production, industrial capacity and total manpower and would plan for their most effective distribution and use.

Opposed by defeatists, by many big business men, by certain Army officers, by the reactionary appeasers of the misnamed "farm bloc," the bills are supported by the organized working farmers, the organized wage workers, and progressive elements in Congress and in our business life. When the bills were re-introduced in the 78th Congress, they were sponsored in the Senate not only by Senators Pepper and

Kilgore, but by Senators Murray (Montana) and Truman (Missouri), who had carried on investigations of war industry, and by Senators Ball (Minnesota), Capper (Kansas), Green (Rhode Island), Johnson (Colorado), La Follette (Wisconsin) and Thomas (Utah).

Reactionary, anti-war forces are strong in the 78th Congress and they will put up a stiff opposition. To get the bills through will require active support from every man and every woman in this country who earnestly desires to speed up the struggle against the Axis powers. All farmers who really want to do their part in producing food for our own fighters, for our Allies, and for our workers and children here at home, have a direct personal interest in pushing the enactment of the Toland-Pepper bills.

Only such an Office of War Mobilization as they propose will make possible the centralized over-all planning for the most effective use of every machine, every farm, and every able-bodied man and woman in the country.

But meantime every farmer and every farming community has its own local responsibilities for war production. For the most essential products are already known and the importance of maximum output is clear beyond question.

“Pulling Together to the Last Man”

Ed Keller, chairman of the Delaware County War Board in Indiana, in his speech on the Farm Mobilization broadcast of January 12, raised the slogan of “Pulling together to the last man.” This will be one of the means to success for the farmer in surpassing the production of 1942.

A few farming communities have shown what can be done by getting together and seeing to it that every item of farm machinery on any farm in the community is working full time throughout the season for which it is adapted. No idle tractor sitting in a tool shed while a nearby farmer is walking back and forth across his fields! With production of new farm equipment cut to about 30 per cent of the average figures for 1940 and 1941, it is absolutely necessary that every machine now available be kept at work the greatest possible number

of hours. Exchange of labor by the farmer with a tractor (which he uses only part of the time) and his neighbors (who are less well equipped) might increase the crop acreage of the smaller farms and could improve the cultivation of all the farms concerned.

Also, if farmers got together before spring planting was begun, they could work out a community plan, staggering their sowings within the seasonal limits. Then the busiest days would not come all in a rush at one time on all the farms in the district.

But, even without such preliminary planning, much can be done. From Iowa there comes the story of a farmer who was so eager to aid with last year's bountiful corn crop that he and his automatic corn-picker covered 700 acres of corn for neighboring farmers who owned no such machine—before he tackled his own fields.

Such mutual assistance is important not only because the output of new machines has been sharply reduced but because there are still so many farms which have never been mechanized. Even in the relatively well-equipped farm states of the Northwest, barely two farms out of three own a tractor. And in Iowa, the greatest corn state in the Union, less than half of the corn crop has been picked by machine.

War production requires that all the small number of new machines shall be put to work in those communities where they are most needed for increasing the output of basic crops. The farm questionnaire recently circulated by the Department of Agriculture should give the basis for a carefully planned distribution. The need may be greatest where farmers are too poor to buy the machines.

The Government should take responsibility for placing thousands of tractors and other farm machines—as Government property, with well-paid, competent operators—where they will be available for low rental on the less well-equipped farms. In Great Britain, according to the *New York Times* (January 12, 1943), the Government now has some 7,000 publicly owned farm tractors for farmers who need tractor service. These public tractors supplement a very much larger number

owned by the most prosperous upper third of the farmers themselves.

Keeping farm machinery in good repair is also a matter of nation-wide concern. Here the community leaders, the County War Boards, and the Farm Security Administration share special responsibility. They must see to it that the local mechanic is adequately supplied with spare parts and metals. If he has gone into the Army or to some war industry, the F.S.A. should be able to set up a government-owned repair center. The F.S.A. has made a beginning of such service, and should have funds for expanding it wherever the need appears.

Another side of farmers' community effort is illustrated by the story of Peter's family. Ever since Peter had gone into the Navy, his father and mother had been doing a lot of thinking about how farmers could pull together. As neighbors' sons, one by one, left the farms "for the duration," there was much sober talk whenever three or four farmers happened to meet. After the crops were in last fall, they had begun to figure out in some detail just how they could help in 1943 on one another's farms with the many farm jobs that two pairs of hands can do more than twice as quickly as one. So they worked out plans that some would plant earlier than others, and they agreed to work together as far as possible when the heaviest loads of work had to be carried.

Peter's mother had always looked after the chickens and as soon as Peter went away she had begun to take a hand with the cows. She had seen women riding the mower and the hay rake and was bent on proving that she was equally ready to ride the mower, load the wagon, or spread the hay around the hot and dusty mow. Other women, too, both young and middle-aged, were doing more of the field work than ever before.

But the really new thing that was developing was a sense of common responsibility for the production of the community as a whole.

There were in the county five really big farms where all the work was done by hired labor. These big farmers tried to dicker with some of the others to cut down on their own farms

and come and work full time on one of the big farms. Two or three of the poorer neighbors jumped at the chance, but most of them took their own wartime responsibility too seriously for that. They argued that every crop acre was needed this year. The big farms had always had outside help, and if now they could not find it among the men who had no farms, the thing to do was to put their problem before the Department of Agriculture and the War Manpower Commission in Washington.

For Higher Yields

One question every patriotic farmer will be asking himself today is: Am I only doing things the way my father did them, or the way my neighbors do them? Or have I really kept up with the times in the care of livestock and the routine of crop production?

This crucial war for human liberty challenges every farmer in the country to get the largest possible output from every acre, from every animal, from every fruit tree on his farm. Now is the time to study as never before, to consult the County Agent, to get laboratory analyses of soils and the latest scientific methods for controlling pests.

Traditional methods of fighting have been discarded in this war. Industrial sciences are moving on to new horizons, with the findings of chemists and engineers, and the technical ingenuity of workers in the factories. Farming also requires not merely more hard manual labor, more persistence and mutual aid among farmers, but new methods of working together, and much more general application of the rich body of agricultural science which has been so greatly expanded in the past twenty years.

At every stage, from the preparation of the soil to the final handling of the product, work can be done in a wrong way, or a right way, or an extra good way. Wartime needs challenge farmers to cut out all the wrong ways of doing things and to try for the extra good, the very best way. In some things this may involve new equipment or materials

that cannot be available until after the war. But such questions are being studied by the Department of Agriculture, with its Extension Service, and the State Agricultural Colleges. Farmers will find it well worth while to seek their expert guidance. Letters and popular bulletins on all sorts of technical problems have a new role to play this year when production must be increased with fewer experienced workers and very slight addition to mechanical equipment.

It is also important that every acre under cultivation be utilized for the most essential crops. The government production goals propose cutting down on some products, and substituting others of which the largest possible output is desired. Some of these changes have had wide publicity. Most of us know, for example, that in the South part of the acreage formerly in short-staple cotton should be given to peanuts or soybeans, or to corn for additional hogs. We know that on a nation-wide scale the corn goals have twice been raised to make possible the maximum production of livestock and livestock products.

But such general facts are not enough. The County War Boards and County Agents are responsible for making clear the local share in the nationwide goals. Wherever the board and the County Agent have not started things moving within the county, they should be prodded by the farmers who realize that food is a vital weapon in this war, and farmers should see that they are properly represented on these boards.

On Smaller Farms

Family farms which do not depend on hired labor have a very special part to play in this war. Here the possibilities for increased output of many farm products could be most promising. The largest farms have, on the whole, kept up with modern farming technique better than the working farmers who put in full time themselves in their barns and their fields.

But if all the "average" farms and small farms—which greatly outnumber the large farm employers—can increase even a little the yield of each acre, the numbers of their hogs

and cattle and chickens, and the quality of their feeding, the needed production would be assured.

Of the increase in milk production already achieved, 50 per cent has come from herds of ten cows or less, according to the Farm Security Administration. All farmers know that they can obtain more milk per cow by extra feeding with a well-balanced ration and milking the cows three times a day. Of course, for the farmer working entirely alone this means a difficult readjustment of his day. But where two people share the work, they have found it possible to put their heavy milkers on a three-a-day schedule.

Or take the question of little pigs. Most of the smaller farmers assume that they cannot raise the entire litter. At least one or two will die. But large farms have proved that this loss can be prevented and all the pigs in a litter can be brought to maturity. Greater care in protecting the little pigs would help to meet the tremendous need for more lard and more pork.

For corn, also, the secret of a larger crop for the whole country lies chiefly in a higher output on the smaller farms. Of course, a shift from less essential products to basic food and feed crops is important. "Pulling together to the last man" will help in planning expansion of corn acreage and solving such problems as fertilizer, adequate cultivation and efficient harvesting.

The Roosevelt Administration has long been committed to the policy of giving positive assistance to those farmers whose set-up is so limited that they can barely make a living on the land. But less than half a million of the three million small farmers have actually been enabled to step up their production with Federal aid. The importance of small under-employed farmers has been more and more widely recognized. Expansion of their farms, with Federal aid, is now a wartime necessity. And, in many places, this aid might well involve public provision for transporting the farmers' product to the nearest outlet. Further action by Congress is needed if working farmers are to serve most productively on the food front of our struggle against fascism. For, obviously, these production

problems of small farms are tied in with all other wartime production problems and cannot be solved without over-all centralized planning of the war economy.

Aid to small farms and centralizing of war economy are opposed by reactionary defeatists among the big-farm and monopoly interests. The small-farm question has been a major point of conflict between the Roosevelt Administration and the so-called "farm bloc" in Congress. So it is important that the course of this conflict shall be clearly understood by the working farmers themselves, by organized labor, and by all progressive Americans.

In the spring of 1942, the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of the Budget proposed raising the appropriation to the Farm Security Administration. This was intended for expanding production on another 1,500,000 of the small farms which lack livestock and equipment. It was offered as a war measure and was supported by the National Farmers Union, three state organizations of the Farm Bureau (Ohio, Vermont and New Hampshire), the state Grange of Washington and of Oregon, and the Farmers Union of the New York Milkshed (unaffiliated). It was also endorsed by the heads of the A. F. of L., the C.I.O., and the Railroad Brotherhoods, and by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and the Committee on Town and Country of the Federal Council of Churches. But it was opposed by the national officials of the Farm Bureau and the heads of other organizations of big farmers which follow their leadership.

Tens of thousands of working farmers within the Farm Bureau and the Grange share, especially in wartime, many of the difficulties which hold back production on the smallest farms. Their needs and desires are not fairly represented by their officials. For example, Edward A. O'Neal and Earl C. Smith, president and vice-president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, have shown that while they are primarily concerned with providing cheap labor for large employers, they pay little or no attention to the production problems of the working farmers. They oppose the over-all planning of centralized economy by the Government, without which none

of the farmers' production problems can be solved. They frankly want to see the poorest third of the farm population driven off the land. This would please industrial employers also. And, as a matter of fact, the most reactionary business elements have found in O'Neal and Earl Smith and their "farm" lobby associates a convenient front for their own anti-Administration, anti-war wire-pulling in Washington.

The battle in Congress over the F.S.A. went on for several weeks. In July, 1942, the friends of the working farmers succeeded in saving the F.S.A. from annihilation, but they were beaten in the effort to obtain funds for expanding its work. Later, in January, 1943, certain sections of the F.S.A. were merged with other sections in the Department of Agriculture which, in the past, have had little concern with small farmers' problems or working standards for farm labor. It is to be hoped that all phases of work previously carried on by the F.S.A. will be continued in the reorganization.

Closely related to this battle over the F.S.A. is the recent action by a Congressional sub-committee in killing the \$100,000,000 appropriation proposed by the Administration for incentive payments to farmers who increase their basic crops.

"Essential Farms"

In December, 1942, the War Manpower Commission (Selective Service Division), in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, recommended a definition of "essential farms." It authorized local boards to exempt from the draft any farmer, farmer's son, or hired worker who was responsible for a certain volume of farm output. The standard of "essential" size can be altered by local draft boards. But the whole procedure tends to rule out uncounted numbers of small farms as unimportant to the war effort.

According to the original ruling, a working farmer might be exempt from military duty if he was producing sixteen "war units." But a farmer's son or a hired man was not also exempt unless he was one of two men who, *together*, were responsible for thirty-two "war units." What this meant for

smaller farms is clear when we realize that a "war unit" means one milk cow, or five acres of corn, or twenty hogs, or fifteen acres of wheat, or two acres of sugar beets, peanuts or potatoes. (These are merely a few items from the long table of war unit equivalents.)

The ruling pleased large-farm interests which consistently oppose any wartime expansion of small-farm output. But it aroused a storm of protest from the National Farmers Union and other groups of working farmers in all parts of the country, and in January the standard was cut to eight "war units" per worker—whether farmer, farmer's son, or hired man.

This change in the "essential" standard marked a partial victory of the working farmers over the big-farm lobbyists, but it leaves unsolved the problem of Federal aid for expansion of small-farm production. Also, of course, this recommended standard remains subject to alteration by local draft boards, which are free to reject this Federal guidance.

Whether the importance of small farmers' contribution to the war is now officially recognized is by no means clear. This uncertainty is tied up with the broader question of 1943 production goals. And here, we repeat, any drop below the 1942 output would be disastrous. Secretary Wickard has referred to increases of 1 per cent or "3 or 4 per cent" above last year. Others well informed on the total needs for this crucial war year have insisted that another 20 per cent increase should be added to the official goals.

To reach any considerable increase requires all-out production of essential products on every farm unit in the country. And this can be achieved only if the patriotic readiness of individual farmers to do their best is backed up with guidance as to products most urgently needed, full expert information as to methods of work, and generous credit or even subsidies for the small producers. The Government has long been subsidizing large producers for restricting output. It is now time to consider wartime subsidies for increasing output on small farms.

All this places fresh responsibility on the working farmers themselves and upon the organized labor movement to prove to Congress and the Administration that the masses of people

on the land and in industry are sharply opposed to the policies of the defeatists clustered about the "farm bloc" and dangerously threatening the war program. The new "legislative front" set up recently by the C.I.O., the A. F. of L., the Railroad Brotherhoods and the Farmers Union can be extremely important in this connection. But for maximum usefulness in the war effort and the solution of farm production problems, this front should be broadened to include all farm organizations, national and regional.

Manpower on the Land

While it is important for working farmers to stay on the land and to have assistance in increasing their production, large farms also have an important wartime role. For large farms, depending wholly on wage labor, produce much more than their proportionate share of the total farm output. For example, the smallest one-third of the farms have contributed only 5 per cent of the product. The largest 5 per cent of the farms contribute over one-third of the product. (Census figures on this point are given in *Labor Fact Book 6*.)

For all-out war production, large farms must be assured an adequate supply of wage labor. They should, however, be compelled to give up the practice (not uncommon in the past) of hoarding large pools of low-paid "surplus" workers.

Wage labor is also important on many medium-sized farms which depend upon a hired man all the year round or need help for a short time in the harvesting. To some extent a shortage of wage labor on medium-sized farms can be met by cooperative effort—if the farmers "pull together to the last man." And great numbers of farm women, sons too young for military service, and older men in farm families have begun to fill places left vacant by the loss of a hired man. But in any broad plan for providing farm wage labor the needs of medium-sized farms should be considered.

In general, the problem of labor supply for farm employers

* International Publishers, New York, 1943

involves two somewhat different questions both of which bring us back to the important Tolan-Pepper bills. How can they find (and hold) workers with some understanding of farm technique for steady employment, year in and year out? How can they count on adequate numbers of seasonal workers whose chief qualification must be strong backs and quick fingers?

Short training courses can be immensely valuable, especially if farmers are willing to draw upon the reservoirs of manpower which have been largely shut off by racial prejudice. The Roosevelt Administration is committed to wiping out discrimination against Negro workers in war jobs. But tens of thousands of Negroes are still unemployed while employers in industry and on Northern farms face a shortage of labor. Great numbers of foreign-born are already working on the land, but in each region some groups are preferred over others. Now is the time for farmers needing help to reach into groups which they have not yet learned to know and trust. If old barriers were broken down on the farm, much of the manpower shortage would disappear.

Also, able-bodied young women are now doing many jobs that, in this country, they have never done before. If they can be shipyard welders, and machinists, and operators of a turret lathe, surely they can be trained to master the work of the hired man!

Wage levels are, of course, of basic importance. Farm wage rates have been recognized as substandard by President Roosevelt and by Director James F. Byrnes, of the Office of Economic Stabilization. In November, 1942, Director Byrnes stated definitely that farm workers are entitled to further wage increases now, during the war, in spite of ceilings that have been placed on industrial wage rates.

Actually, in spite of a sharp rise in farm wages during 1942, the average farm wage worker, steadily employed, still earns in an entire month less than the average factory worker earns in two forty hour weeks. Substitution of Negro and women workers and youths would be a poor excuse for holding down the farm wage standard. "Equal pay for equal work" is now a recognized principle.

The whole question of farm labor is of vital concern to the entire labor movement. It can be solved only by the closest cooperation between organized labor, the Government, and farmers themselves.

Mobilizing Workers

For seasonal workers, definite Government measures could be of great assistance both to the farmers and to the workers themselves. A start has been made by the Farm Security Administration, with its few hundred labor camps for migrant workers and the beginnings of supervision over interstate migration of farm labor. Last year, the F.S.A. arranged through the State Department for bringing Mexican workers across the border and placing them in the Southwest for seasonal labor under standardized conditions.

Now the F.S.A. should have an increased appropriation for more extensive mobilizing of farm workers within the United States. It should work in cooperation with the War Manpower Commission and the U. S. Employment Service. But even these agencies cannot do a truly effective job until they are coordinated with production agencies in such a centralized war administration as is proposed by the Tolan-Pepper bills.

Labor leaders are also deeply concerned with the mobilizing of farm workers. They recognize the importance of fair standards of housing, rates of pay and hours of labor, and remind us that workers recruited for any group service must be fully informed of their right to fair working conditions.

Seasonal labor squads, mobilized by Government agencies in cooperation with the labor movement, could also be of great assistance in communities of working farmers as well as on the factory farms.

Any such move will, of course, meet opposition from reactionary farm employers. In Arizona last year, for example, a few large cotton growers let their American-Egyptian cotton rot in the fields—although every boll of long-staple cotton was urgently needed for the war. They did this rather than obey the Government order to pay Mexicans at least 30 cents an

hour! Such opposition reveals fascist trends, right on the land, which violate the basic principles at stake in this war.

Reactionaries who would welcome Government aid in holding the worker "in his place" will, of course, continue to oppose any democratically managed labor battalions. Such forces have gained ground in Congress precisely in this critical year.

What About Prices?

Farm prices are not the central question in wartime production of food, but they are closely intertwined with the more basic problems of manpower, equipment, acreage, etc. At the moment, the broad general index of farm prices is running in favor of the farm producer. Meat animals are bringing a good return. And where farm prices are still relatively low for basic crops (wheat and corn), the farmers are receiving benefits from the Agricultural Adjustment Agency. (Since these benefits are related to acreage, most of the payment goes to large farms and very little to small farms.)

Taking all farmers together, their gross cash income (estimated at over fifteen billion dollars in 1942) has risen above earlier years far more than have their expenses of operation.

But this does not mean that every farmer is getting a fair return for his work. Two examples illustrate special difficulties which may be involved in any shift of production. A milk producer in Minnesota who had been selling butterfat (and feeding the skim milk to hogs) shifted to fluid milk in response to the wartime program. He writes to a friend that while his monthly milk check is \$23 larger than it was before, his costs for trucking and for hog feed to replace the skim milk have increased by \$25 a month.

In response to the Government's demand for increased production of peanuts, many Southern farmers sought to plant them in 1942 for the first time. They had no A.A.A. allotments, since they had not grown peanuts in recent years, and they found that their return for peanuts would be only half as much as that coming to old growers under the A.A.A. Instead of encouraging the production of peanuts, the whole

effect of this set-up was to discourage farmers from shifting from less essential to more essential crops.

Much more needs to be done in helping farmers to make these costly shifts and changes.

The farm price index as a whole, both by itself and in relation to prices paid by farmers, is higher than it has been at any time since the First World War.

In the city, where food prices are rising, it is too easy for the unthinking to place the blame upon high prices at the farm and to hold the farmers responsible for the rising cost of living. And there are plenty of reactionary forces at work in the press and on the air to divert us from the real profiteers: those monopoly middlemen who channel the food from the farmers to the city workers, and who are in many instances creating artificial shortages in order to make exorbitant profits.

President Roosevelt's Program

President Roosevelt, last April, in his seven-point anti-inflation program, correctly tied together the interrelated problems of prices, profits and wages. He proposed to stabilize prices received by farmers, to fix ceilings on prices to be paid for food, and to tax all profits and personal income above a "reasonable rate." Wages would be stabilized in relation to the cost of living, but with due consideration for "elimination of substandards of living." And all essential commodities should be rationed. This program could not be made fully effective without such centralized planning of the war economy as is proposed in the Tolan-Pepper bill.

Certain steps have been taken. The A. F. of L., the C.I.O. and the Railroad Brotherhoods have agreed that "for the duration" wages for any given skill and productivity should not be pushed above the existing union wage rates, except where necessary to keep pace with a rise in living costs.

Farm prices are also now subject to ceilings, which may be imposed on any product when it reaches a certain standard. The President's program last spring called for a ceiling at parity, or the current price of a product, whichever was higher.

He indicated that the price should be such as to yield maximum output of essential products while allowing a balance with the rest of the economy. He further stressed the importance of providing incentive payments to promote a shift from less essential to more essential crops, of giving post-war price guarantees, and of helping farmers to meet their production problems.

Those, like Peter's father, whose first concern is the winning of the war are interested only in increasing production with assurance of a price that fairly covers their cash expenses and a modest standard of living. They would welcome definite market outlets at fixed prices, with floors as well as ceilings, and a sharp limiting of the profits drawn off by middlemen who stand between themselves and the city consumers.

But reactionaries of the farm lobby and their "farm bloc" associates have tried to make it appear that they are attempting to win high prices for the farmers while the Government is standing in the way. Actually, they have blocked passage in Congress of any of the proposals for aiding the farmers which the President agreed to. Instead of providing floors under farm prices, they concerned themselves only with "ceilings" which had no meaning for more than half of the farm crops, whose prices are still low. All their talk about parity, and the revision of parity, and minimum standards pushed way above parity has served as a smokescreen to conceal from the farmers and the farmers' friends the collaboration of the "farm bloc" with reactionary industrial interests in opposition to the war effort.

Actually farm prices have been rising and the minimum standard for farm price ceilings is higher than that proposed by President Roosevelt in his anti-inflation program. But the primary responsibility for rising food prices rests with a small, selfish group of processors and monopoly middlemen, who instead of fighting the war against Hitler are still thinking only of fleecing the farmers and consumers. Their profits have increased in the past two years, but they want even higher rates of profit.

Limitation of profits was a basic point in President Roose-

velt's anti-inflation program, but big-farm interests joined with the monopolists in blocking the necessary legislation. Together they succeeded in throwing the heaviest tax burdens on the lower income groups. They broke down the measures for taxing excess profits. And they resisted the President's proposal that all personal income beyond \$25,000 a year should be taxed into the Federal treasury. On this point, they finally put it that salaries *after taxes, insurance premiums and various fixed obligations* would not exceed \$25,000 a year. But even this generous limit—which in practice allows a gross salary of about \$67,200—was not applied to personal income from investments. They are trying to knock out even the salary limitation, while they fight its extension to all income.

A More Effective O.P.A.

Prices charged for food products by processors, wholesalers, jobbers and retailers have been subject to regulation since May, 1942, but the apparatus for price control has not yet functioned as it should. This was frankly admitted by Leon Henderson, in his final report as Price Administrator when he resigned in January, 1943. Profits of corporations, as a whole, had been nearly twice as high in 1941 as they were in 1939. Henderson predicted that even after allowing for increased taxation in 1942, the net profits of that year would remain at the high 1941 level. He passed on to his successor in the O.P.A. the responsibility for surveying price schedules so as to cut out the possibility of excess profits all along the line:

"To permit prices to increase so as to cover income and excess profits taxes levied upon corporations, and thus to permit such taxes to be passed on by the corporation to the consumer, would defeat the intention of the Congress." But the question remains whether the new Price Administrator, Prentiss Brown, will continue "to err in the direction of laxity rather than in the direction of rigor," as Henderson phrased the summing up of his own policies.

The answer will depend in part upon the active participation of wage workers and working farmers in following at

each stage the operations of the O.P.A. These two large groups are equally concerned in demanding from O.P.A. a strict current accounting of the profits allowed in the fixing of prices. This is especially important in relation to the big food corporations which stand between them and which, hitherto, have preyed upon them both.

All this does not imply that O.P.A. has completely failed in its job. Actually it has greatly slowed down the rise in the retail price of food. But no further increases should be permitted. The most obvious error in O.P.A. policy has been the failure to ration promptly and effectively, with shortages in city food shops and "black markets" as the result.

The Challenge to Farmers and Wage Workers

Food prices and food production are two basic problems of our war economy which directly affect the course of the war and in which the masses of working farmers and organized wage workers have the most immediate and personal interest. These problems cannot be completely solved without the centralized planning of production and manpower proposed in the Tolan-Pepper bills. Such planning and control of industry, agriculture and productive labor would not only give the material basis for the most efficient prosecution of the war. It would also give every farmer and every worker confidence that his own productive labor is serving with a minimum of waste in the world struggle to defend our nation and our Allies against Hitlerism.

Support necessary to obtain this legislation means action—letters, resolutions, lobbying delegations, the kind of action that shows Congressmen and Senators that the voters are really aroused. Lacking such vigorous support for the Tolan-Pepper bills, the Administration will be limited to making gestures toward centralized planning. And unless these bills are passed, the effectiveness of our war effort will lag in this decisive year when we could destroy Hitler and the Nazi power.

Farmers and wage workers have a great responsibility as citizens of our democracy. Not only are their collective eco-

conomic efforts indispensable to our country's victory, but also they are the special guardians of our best democratic traditions. Their systematic cooperation with one another and with the Government is urgently needed for obtaining maximum production at home and winning the war on the battlefronts of the world. Their cooperation is equally necessary for defense of their economic and political welfare against reaction within our own country. Right here at home, the people's rights are under attack from enemies of democracy wearing many different labels.

The Peoples' War against fascism will not be won until we learn, each one of us, to test our political spokesmen and our national leaders by the sincerity of their devotion to the rights of the common man. For this, time does not wait. The 78th Congress will move rapidly toward reaction unless the people at home check its mad drive against the measures most essential for the winning of the war.

In our conflict between defeatists and the far greater number who, like President Roosevelt, are determined to win the war against Hitlerism, the Administration itself is challenged to make our war effort more effective on the farm front.

Higher food goals should be set clearly before the people, to challenge our utmost effort at farm production. Definite measures are needed to make it easy instead of difficult for a farmer to shift to the more essential products. To increase production on small farms, the Federal Government should develop a more comprehensive program for making available to them seed, feed, heifers, poultry, brood sows, supplies, technical assistance and generous credit.

County War Boards should be reorganized to assure genuine representation of small farmers and to develop more generally the boards' possibilities of active leadership.

Full-time use of all tractors and farm machinery and adequate repair facilities are absolutely essential for increased production. The Government should undertake, as a war measure, responsibility for promoting custom work and community pooling of farm machines, and for the most effective placing of new equipment. In many communities where equipment is

lacking, it might well set up Government-owned machines with competent operators, as Great Britain has already done.

The Government should also take responsibility for assuring adequate transportation and market outlets, at fixed prices, especially for the output of smaller farms. In general, much more effective control of farm prices is needed, with floors as well as ceilings and more adequate assurance of price support after the war is ended.

To meet the shortage of manpower, the F.S.A. in collaboration with the War Manpower Commission, might well develop far more extensively the providing of labor battalions. These should be democratically recruited and organized, to work under fair conditions, especially in communities where seasonal farm labor is not available.

Our whole war policy must be strengthened and supported by the people themselves, aroused and active in the war effort. On this depends not only the conduct of the war and quick victory in the field, but the adjustment of our problems, national and international, in the post-war world.

FOR VICTORY



**BUY
UNITED
STATES
WAR
BONDS
AND
STAMPS**

Why Farmers Are Poor

By ANNA ROCHESTER

318 Pages. Price \$1.25

A fundamental study of the farm problem in the United States, with special chapters on the problem of land and rent; farm wage workers; the different phases of crisis among the very small farms and the larger "family-sized" commercial farms; questions of prices and markets for wheat, cotton, livestock and milk; farm legislation; and various aspects of agrarian economic development.

"This volume will take a deserved place on the shelf of books well-nigh indispensable to agricultural economists." *American Economic Review*

"Her writing wins respect by its studiousness and the general care of its documentation; her proposals provoke thought."

Land Policy Review, U. S. Department of Agriculture

"The agrarian question has never been handled with more realism and wisdom." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"It is the most realistic and basic study of the agricultural crisis in this country that I have read."

Carey McWilliams, author of "Factories in the Field"

"A comprehensive survey of farming and farm problems, the book distinctly is worth reading." *Davenport (Iowa) Democrat and Leader*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Rulers of America: A Study of Finance Capital

The first comprehensive study of the financial monarchs of the United States, showing how their financial empires developed with the growth of industry and banking in this country and illustrating how control operates in banking, insurance and in the functioning of certain basic industries.

Price \$2.50

WORKERS LIBRARY PUBLISHERS

P. O. Box 148, Station D (832 Broadway), New York, N. Y.