

How Poor the Farmer?

HERBERT L. SCHALLER

AGRICULTURAL income may be down — but it is not on the verge of disaster. Farmers may be feeling the pinch — but they are not on the edge of bankruptcy.

Some farmers have gone broke; others will. But can you name any industry where people go into business for themselves that some of them don't fall by the wayside?

Amid all this din and noise over the farm problem by those who would act the role of savior, one pitiful fact remains: It is a sad commentary on our intelligence and our great agricultural industry that we have allowed the farmer to become a mere political pawn in a game played primarily by those who have a selfish interest in the outcome.

First of all, who is the farmer? Primarily, he is a businessman. He is not much different from his friends and neighbors who run the local grocery, furniture, clothing, or other community store.

Let's compare them for a moment.

Perhaps one basic difference is the fact that these other businessmen compete directly with others in their field on a product basis. They buy and sell essentially the same items in many instances, and make their profit by better merchandising, greater efficiency, and volume.

The farmer, on the other hand, competes almost entirely in his field on an efficiency basis. He stakes his profit on the fact that he can produce better than others at a lower cost per unit, and thereby profit at the market.

The end result is that both must rely on efficiency of operation to give them the profit they need.

But what happens in farming? In this business every effort is made to keep the inefficient producer still operating. And whom do we penalize? The good, efficient, progressive farmer.

Mr. Schaller is Editor of Better Farming Methods. This article is from an editorial in the April 1956 issue.



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These "friends" and "wise counselors" offer the farmer everything from high supports, to cheap money, to government aid, and what have you.

And his counterpart, the small businessman? When he fails, he passes from the scene with hardly a ripple. He becomes a victim of his own inefficiency and seeks a living elsewhere.

I can't recall a subsidy for an inefficient groceryman. I can't recall frequent and periodic outbursts of oratorical fire echoing in the halls of Congress over the plight of such a man.

Isn't it about time we recognized the fact that one of the basic problems facing agriculture is that of too many farmers?

Such a statement inhuman? Not at all! Many of them would be

happier and better off financially in other occupations. Would anyone argue the fact that we should have as many other small businesses, such as grocery stores, as we once had?

Isn't it about time that we recognize that we may have been doing the farmer an injustice through our efforts to be concerned about his every welfare?

Let's be leaders enough to recognize the fact that the farm problem today has become more political than agricultural. It has its roots, not in the over-all welfare of the farmer, but in the pot of politics.

Then let's be leaders enough to admit this fact and concern ourselves with correcting it.

The end result will be greater benefits to the farmer and the industry of agriculture. . . .

Freedom in Trade

THE LONG RUN ANSWER for Canada may be to reduce tariffs and to work towards a greater measure of freedom in trade which will permit our potential customers abroad to earn the necessary dollars for the purchase of our wheat and other grains, through the sale of their own goods to this country . . . It is not enough to have a high quality product and to assume that buyers will eventually have to come seeking it. It must be to their buying advantage to do so. If we can provide that advantage we shall have less to fear from the somewhat unorthodox methods which others are now employing and about which we are so critical.

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The Morality of Capitalism

ECONOMIC INDIVIDUALISM = FREEDOM = ALL MORAL VALUES

WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

THERE is a widespread belief that capitalism, or economic individualism, while it may be necessary, is morally somewhat disreputable. This has found reflection in the pronouncements of religious bodies and of individual religious leaders. There are fortunately not many ministers of religion who disgrace themselves and their professed faith as Christians by endorsing the bloodstained record of the atheistic Soviet Union.

But socialism under such beguiling disguises as "social action," "the social Gospel," "humanitarianism," and the like has made considerable inroads in church thinking on both sides of the Atlantic. The conviction that capitalism is contrary to religion and ethics was a strong factor in the rise of the British Labor party and its postwar implementation of a far-reaching socialist program, which has been only slightly diluted by the conservatives.

Influential publicists like R. H. Tawney and Harold Laski tried to dispose of economic freedom with pejorative epithets. Tawney spoke of "the acquisitive society." Laski characterized historic liberalism—diametrically opposed to what has passed for liberalism under the New Deal in its economic assumptions—as "the philosophy of a business civilization." The true inspiration for historic liberalism came from faith in human freedom and in Locke's great trinity of natural rights: life, liberty, and property.

Whereas continental socialists were generally indifferent or actively hostile to religion, the British Labor party has always included a considerable number of professing believers, especially in the nonconformist churches. They, like some of their sympathizers in the United States, tried to infuse some religious and ethical content into the materialistic dogmas of Karl Marx.

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