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Article Summary: The *Loup City People’s Standard* championed the far left’s short-lived attempt to organize Nebraska farmers and workers in the 1930s through the Midwest Farm Holiday movement (Madison County Plan). Locally administered justice and a vigilante committee prevailed against outside agitators.

#### Cataloging Information:

Names: Ella Reeve Bloor, Milo Reno, Harry Lux, Lem Harris, Charles Beushausen, John J Schefcik, Carl Wicklund, A E Brundson, William Pritschau, Maggie Pritschau, Bruno O Hostetler, Harry Smith, Burt Sell, Floyd Booth, Loretta Booth, Ernest Moehnert

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Photographs / Images: partial front page of the *Sherman County Times* with an article describing the jury’s verdict in the Loup City riot case (July 6, 1934), partial front page of The *Loup City People’s Standard* with an article describing the strike at the Ravenna Fairmont Creamery, New Deal soil conservation work in Sherman County, Mother Bloor in action

## THE LOUP CITY RIOT OF 1934: MAIN STREET VS. THE "FAR-OUT" LEFT

BY WILLIAM D. ROWLEY

FLAG day, June 14, 1934, saw a gathering of three hundred people on the courthouse grounds of Loup City, a small central Nebraska farm town. Suddenly a loud shout, "Hey Rube," came from somewhere in the crowd. Instantly homemade blackjacks and fists swung into action bruising several heads. The riot ended as quickly as it had begun. The "outside agitators" addressing the crowd hastily fled from the scene pursued by a so-called local "citizen's committee." Among those fleeing from the ruckus was the notorious Communist agitator and "grand old lady" of the American Communist party, seventy-two-year-old "Mother" Ella Reeve Bloor.

The Loup City riot in the summer of 1934 marked the end to activities of a radical group of farm agitators in Nebraska. This group was born in the late months of 1932 with the rise of the Midwest Farm Holiday movement. Led by Iowa's latter-day agrarian radical, Milo Reno, the Holiday urged farmers to withhold their products from

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the market until prices rose to a fair level. This effort involved the picketing of highways to major marketing centers in Sioux City, Des Moines and Omaha. The picketing inevitably led to widespread violence outside these cities and created a general uproar in the cornbelt.<sup>1</sup>

These semblances of a farm rebellion drew the attention of the American Communist party which sent organizers into the agricultural region to agitate among farmers. Within a short time after the initial outburst of Farm Holiday demonstrations, a Nebraska branch of the movement arose which shunned the leadership of Reno and the National Farm Holiday Association. This group, led mainly by farmers of Madison County, Nebraska, called itself the Farm Holiday movement (Madison County Plan). In addition, the Madison County organization showed clear signs of outside infiltration and direction by people other than Nebraska farmers. Two of these outsiders commented on their Nebraska work in national publications. One saw the farmers throughout the Midwest abandoning their traditional individualism for a new spirit of cooperation and solidarity that was best expressed as a "Spirit of Revolt."<sup>2</sup> Another asserted that the small farmer of Nebraska was gripped in a life or death struggle with the large *Kulak* farmers and small town businessmen.<sup>3</sup>

By spring of 1933, the center for Madison County Plan activities moved from the rich lands of northeastern Nebraska to the comparatively poorer area of Sherman County in central Nebraska. In Loup City, the county seat, the movement became an issue in a feud between the two local newspapers. One, the *Loup City Peoples Standard*, campaigned heatedly for the Madison County group. The other, the *Sherman County Times*, branded the outfit

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<sup>1</sup> See John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers Holiday Association* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Lement Harris, "Spirit of Revolt," *Current History*, 38 (July, 1933), 429.

<sup>3</sup> Lief Dahl, "Nebraska Farmers in Action," *New Republic*, 73 (January 18, 1933), 266; *Kulak* is the term used to identify large farmers in the Russian countryside who were eliminated by the Soviet government.

as "Red and UnAmerican." Amid the name calling the Madison County organization fell increasingly under the influence of outsiders. Mother Bloor's frequent appearance in the county as a Holiday speaker with "a real Holiday message" underlined the ever widening gap between the two newspapers and their representative viewpoints in the community. The *Peoples Standard* praised Mother Bloor and voiced Madison County ridicule of New Deal farm relief measures.

By the fall of 1933 the Madison County Plan sent a delegation to a "historic fighting conference" of farmers in Chicago. The *Daily Worker* in New York announced that Nebraskans attended with "flags flying."<sup>4</sup> The agenda listed Mother Bloor, Harry Lux, a native Nebraskan, and Lem Harris, an agricultural expert working in Nebraska, as featured speakers.<sup>5</sup> Chief among the resolutions of the conference was a call for "complete unity of the Negro and white in the struggle against the white ruling class, monopolies, and landlords." The complete set of resolutions as adopted by the conference appeared shortly after the meeting in the *Standard* at Loup City.<sup>6</sup>

Frequent appearance of this literature in a small Nebraska town as well as various gatherings in the community addressed by Mother Bloor and others through the winter of 1933-1934 alarmed the conservative main street of Loup City. By summer it formed a vigilante group to deal with so-called "red agitators." The *Standard* termed these efforts "stirrings of small town fascists." Finally this vigilante committee broke out in force at a protest gathering on Flag Day 1934. The riot and ensuing court decisions against Mother Bloor and her cohorts essentially signaled the end of this brand of rural and imported unrest in Nebraska during the depression.

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily Worker*, November 17, 1933.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, 1933.

<sup>6</sup> *Loup City Peoples Standard*, November 23, 1933 [Hereafter referred to as *Standard*.]

The months prior to the riot witnessed the growth of several factions in Loup City and Sherman County. The local banker, merchants, officials of the Burlington Railroad and of the Western Public Service Company, the managers of the town creamery and of the poultry processing plant composed a main street faction. The other faction that worried this segment on main street was a group whose make-up roughly included idle farmers, tenants, owners, and dispossessed, farm workers, some employees of the Ravenna Fairmont Creamery plant, and the editor of one of the local newspapers who supported Farm Holiday activities and publicized the visits and speeches of outsiders in the county. The growing number and the discontent of the "village radicals" were augmented by the continued presence of outsiders with Communist affiliations in the East. They hoped to spread disillusionment about the effectiveness of Roosevelt's New Deal and recovery measures for farmers and workers and to turn sentiment in the countryside against the national Administration and toward more radical solutions for the depression that called for an end to the American capitalist system. The impact of these revolutionary ideas on the community and the presence of outsiders who gained some degree of local support created a threat to the traditional small-town power structure which rested on the businessmen of main street. Their reaction to the threat, at least in this instance, demonstrated that they were prepared to resort to extreme measures and violence to keep their positions secure in the community while they awaited recovery of the economy either from the New Deal experiments or from what many businessmen termed, "natural economic forces."

In January, 1933 before the farmers' march on Lincoln, Holiday elements appeared in Sherman County.<sup>7</sup> The *Standard* announced on January 19, 1933 that Holiday crowds had stopped foreclosure proceedings on two Sher-

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<sup>7</sup> For a description of the February, 1933 farmers' march on Lincoln see John L. Shover, "The Farm Holiday Movement in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, 43 (March, 1962), 53-78.

man County farms the previous week. The same issue told of the appearance of Madison County Holiday organizer, C. J. Christensen, at a Litchfield meeting south of Loup City. The *Standard* said that he "brought home the Holiday Association message with exceptional force and vigor and soon won the farmers over to his side." Even the *Times*, which took a dim view of Holiday activities, acknowledged a local Holiday Association had been formed in Loup City.<sup>8</sup> The editor of the *Times*, Charles Beushausen, was also a Representative in the state legislature. From his post in Lincoln, he wrote in mid-January, "Sherman County is getting the reputation of considerable unrest and my attention is called to it by members every day."<sup>9</sup> Another letter by Beushausen promised harassed Sherman County farmers that "the bill to prevent deficiency judgments on real estate will have my vote."<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of thousands of foreclosure threats and the presence of grim farmers in the state capital, the Nebraska legislature produced quick results. A moratorium bill, which provided for a two-year stay on all mortgages, received approval March 2, 1933. Governor Charles Bryan called for the bill under the police powers of the State of Nebraska "to promote the public convenience as well as the general welfare and prosperity. . . ." District judges, however, had the power to determine the length of the mortgage stay or if one was justified. The bill was not a blanket abrogation of foreclosure proceedings.<sup>11</sup>

Both the *Loup City Peoples Standard* and the *Sherman County Times* praised the moratorium action. But the *Times* suggested the measure was unnecessary when it said large investment companies and district judges had already taken the same position, "except in the unusual cases."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Sherman County Times*, January 13, 1933 [Hereafter referred to as *Times*.]

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, January 20, 1933.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, January 13, 1933.

<sup>11</sup> *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, 49th Session (Lincoln: Cornhusker-Commercial Printing Co., 1933), 301-303.

<sup>12</sup> *Times*, February 17, 1933.

The *Standard* proudly emphasized, "This was one of the demands of the Farm Holiday Group and the Farmers Relief Conference held in Lincoln in February."<sup>13</sup> This rare note of harmony between the two newspapers soon broke on the moratorium question. The issue provided the beginnings of a dispute that was to upset Sherman County for the next year and a half.

The legislature's moratorium bill soon came to a test at the local level. Under a provision of the act the district judge was the key man in deciding whether a mortgagee should be foreclosed or granted a stay. In one of the first test cases, a farmer near Wilber, Nebraska applied to District Judge Robert M. Proudfit for a stay on a mortgage. The judge let it be known that he considered the new moratorium bill unconstitutional and would not permit it to interfere with the foreclosure. On March 14, only two weeks after the legislature had passed the moratorium law, Harry Lux of Lincoln under Holiday auspices and a group from the Unemployed Council in Lincoln travelled to Wilber to stop the foreclosure proceedings.<sup>14</sup> To prevent the sheriff from holding the sale at the designated time of 2 P.M., Lux and followers tried to keep the sheriff from leaving his office in town. The local newspaper reported that tear gas finally broke up the "crowd of outsiders and hoodlums." In spite of the opposition, the sale was completed. In addition the sheriff arrested Lux and arraigned him before a very unsympathetic Judge Proudfit for inciting riot. This day marked the first of forty-two days in jail for Lux in Saline County.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime Madison County supporters sent leaflets throughout the state calling for contributions to support Lux's legal defense. A pamphlet issued by the "Defense Committee Holiday Association of Nebraska (Madi-

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<sup>13</sup> *Standard*, March 9, 1933.

<sup>14</sup> Taped interview with Harry Lux in Seattle, Washington by John L. Shover in 1961 and now on file in the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln. [Hereafter referred to as Lux Interview, 1961.]

<sup>15</sup> *Wilber Republican*, March 17, 1933; Lux cannot recall the use of tear gas, Lux interview, 1961.

son County Plan)” said Lux and others imprisoned in Saline County were “in danger of being sent over the road.” It pledged the Madison County organization’s efforts “to stop this vicious railroading of innocent farmers and workers.” It concluded, “Our answer is SOLID ORGANIZATION AND MILITANT FIGHT AGAINST EVICTION AND FORECLOSURE.”<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after Lux’s arrest, the *Standard* also appealed for contributions for his defense. More important, however, this case seemed to demonstrate to Holiday-minded farmers the ineffectiveness of the legislature’s much-promised moratorium law. On April 20 the *Standard* declared that the moratorium law “is worse than a fake.” With obvious reference to the Lux affair it said, “This law puts all the power of ‘dictator’ into the hands of judges who apparently are only too willing to favor the mortgage holding insurance companies.” The next issue featured a “Letter from Harry Lux in Saline County Jail,” attacking half-hearted efforts by state and national governments to aid the farmer.<sup>17</sup>

After Lux’s release from jail on bond April 29, the Madison County group launched a new campaign to raise money for his legal defense in the higher courts of Nebraska. Lux’s bid for support brought him and others to Loup City on May 23. In the county courthouse that evening Lux, Robert F. Hall and Charles Taylor spoke to a crowd. The *Standard* identified Hall as editor of the *Farmers’ National Weekly* published in Washington, D. C., but neglected to mention that it was a Communist propaganda sheet aimed at the farmer. The *Times* could only speak of Taylor as a lawyer. The *Standard* said that the purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the Holiday organization and to raise funds for Lux’s trial in the fall. The *Times* took notice that Lux was charged with “unlawful assembly” and a second offense “contempt of court” and said

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<sup>16</sup> Pamphlet in the files of Judge Ernest Moehnert, Loup City, Nebraska.

<sup>17</sup> *Standard*, April 27, 1933.

the speakers "denounced everyone who was not a member of their organization and labeled them as Wall Street gangsters."<sup>18</sup>

In its next issue the *Times* explained its policy toward the attempt to establish a farm organization in Sherman County. It endorsed organization among farmers but maintained farmers "make a mistake when they import law breakers, and allow ex-convicts to lead them." The *Times* denounced Lux and his crowd for attacking Loup City businessmen and officials of the state and county. Editorially it concluded:

The percentage of farmers who follow the Lux stripe in Sherman County is a mighty small per cent. The farmers in Sherman county are as intelligent and honorable as any in the nation. They have had hardships, but they are sticking to their guns and if given a fair chance are going to come out of it.<sup>19</sup>

The letter that the *Standard* featured on June 1, 1933 certainly did not express these sentiments. It came from an Albion, Nebraska farmer who wrote bitterly of his experiences during and after World War I as a Nebraska farmer and condemned the economic system that permitted these injustices. His letter is also evidence that the *Standard* as an organ for the radical wing of the Holiday movement was reaching interested parties outside of Sherman County.

In the middle of June the *Standard* revealed that the Madison County Plan Holiday leaders had chosen Loup City for their first state-wide organizational meeting. "The Sherman County Holiday Association should feel very proud of the honor that has been bestowed upon them, in giving the convention to our city," it boasted. The same issue contained a long letter from Lux outlining the purpose and spirit of the coming convention. In this letter Lux claimed that more than thirty thousand Nebraska farmers carried membership cards of the Nebraska Holiday Association, Madison County Plan. He called for a centralized leadership to coordinate and direct this large

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<sup>18</sup> *Standard*, May 25, 1933; *Times*, May 26, 1933.

<sup>19</sup> *Times*, June 2, 1933.

following in the various counties. Lux saw the convention as a call to action and said "Sunshine patriots who crawl away behind the bed in fear when the bankers mobilize their agents to attack us will, no doubt, be too busy to take active part in calling and holding this convention." The remainder of the letter showed the group's open opposition to the new Roosevelt Administration. Lux, who twenty-five years later said he supported Roosevelt,<sup>20</sup> was credited with writing these words:

The present administration is tarred with the same brush as Republican administrations. The Democratic administration was put into power to serve Wall Street and it is performing its duty to the money barons. The Roosevelt government is flooding the country with optimistic ballyhoo. Bankers' newspapers are bringing us daily and weekly, songs of faith and hope. Their poison has lulled some farmers to sleep and done exactly what it was designed to do—stop us from organizing.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the *Standard's* publicity campaign for the convention, the *Times* in the lower left-hand corner of page one simply announced, "A state meeting of the Farmers Holiday association belonging to the Harry Lux branch is billed to be held here for three days, June 29 and 30, and July 1."<sup>22</sup> In its final June issue the *Standard* told of "real epoch making history . . . to be enacted in Loup City, Sherman County, Nebraska." It was certain that the convention would mark the turning point "in betterment of living conditions for the most important people in the world—the farmers—tillers of the soil and hence those who feed the people of the world." The lead news article listed several names of those who were to attend the convention. Mother Ella Reeve Bloor's name headed the list followed by Roy Miller, South Dakota Committee for Action; Otto Fredrickson, Farmers Protective Association, Mena, Arkansas; Ed Richmond, Farmers Protective Association, Arkansas Negro cotton farmer; Otto E. Austrom, North Dakota Committee for Action; Lem Harris, representing the National Committee for Action in Washington, D. C.; Rob-

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<sup>20</sup> Lux Interview, 1961.

<sup>21</sup> *Standard*, June 15, 1933.

<sup>22</sup> *Times*, June 23, 1933.

ert Hall, editor of *Farmers' National Weekly*; and Charles Taylor, National Chairman of the United Farmers League from Plentywood, Montana. Not one of these people was a Nebraskan.<sup>23</sup>

The *Standard's* coverage of the events in the convention was elaborate, but the *Times* failed to notice the meeting which took place in a recreation park outside of Loup City. It was reported that there were one hundred and forty-nine delegates, representing sixty-two Nebraska counties and seven states. Elected officers were President J. J. Schefcik of Alliance; Vice-president Carl Wicklund of Loup City; and Secretary-Treasurer Andrew Dahlsten of Newman Grove in Madison County. The *Standard* briefly reported the speech of Mother Bloor. On the speaker's stand she talked of her part in organizing the farmers in Iowa and the needs of a stronger organization in Nebraska. In relating the history of her career, the article said, "Mother Bloor has spent 40 years in helping organize the farmers and the laborers, four years of which were spent in Russia and is proud of the fact that she has been in jail 32 times for her activities for the cause." The story rather awkwardly concluded that "Mother Bloor has a way of saying things so you will like it."<sup>24</sup>

Similar to the results of earlier farmer gatherings in the state, this meeting also set forth a series of demands. Robert Hall headed the resolutions committee and produced the first clearly defined program of the Holiday Association of Nebraska (Madison County Plan). Its stated purpose was "to organize the militant farmers of Nebraska in their fight to hold their land and homes and to lead farmers struggling for a decent standard of living against the moneyed interests and their local agents who threaten us with immediate ruin." Demands calling for cost of produc-

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<sup>23</sup> *Standard*, June 29, 1933; for further discussion of Charles Taylor and the activities of the United Farmers League on the Northern Great Plains see Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion*, 69 and 177-178, also Shover, "The Communist Party and the Midwest Farm Crisis of 1933," *The Journal of American History*, 51 (September, 1964), 257.

<sup>24</sup> *Standard*, July 6, 1933.

tion, cancellation of payments on feed and seed loans, moratorium on farm mortgages, and reduced taxes were similar to the demands made at Fremont and Lincoln. The statement also repeated the extreme demand for "the abolition of the state militia which is used by the moneyed class against farmers and workers."<sup>25</sup>

As in earlier resolutions the middlemen were a special target for criticism. "We are resolved that increased prices to the farmers must come, not from increased prices to city consumers, but from the profits of the middlemen and moneyed interests," declared one statement. In the next demand Hall's influence as editor of the *National Farmers' Weekly* was clearly indicated:

Realizing that the action we have started against the moneyed interests and middlemen cannot bring us permanent results unless all workers and farmers unite organizationally with us, we therefore affiliate with the FARMERS NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR ACTION AND ADOPT THE NATIONAL FARMERS WEEKLY AS OUR NATIONAL PAPER.

Another resolution referred to Lux's experience in Saline County and unknowingly foretold Mother Bloor's eventual difficulties in Sherman County. It read:

We demand for every farmer the full measure of civil rights, freedom of speech, freedom of press, and the right of assembly guaranteed by the constitution of the United States and the State of Nebraska. We demand that the courts of this state uphold these several rights rather than infringe upon and violate them as they have in several recent instances in their zeal to serve Wall Street in its drive against the farmers and workers.

The last resolution made an open bid for unity between farmers and city workers.<sup>26</sup>

After the convention, Holiday and radical activities in Loup City seemed to subside, but in late August the *Times* brought the subject to the fore again. The occasion was a speech by outsider Roy Miller of the South Dakota Com-

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; see the demands of the Fremont gathering on September 16, 1933 in Shover, "The Farm Holiday Movement in Nebraska," 64; and the demands of the Lincoln march in *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, 49th Session, 449-451.

<sup>26</sup> *Standard*, July 6, 1933.

mittee for Action in the Sherman County courthouse. The *Times* asserted that Miller was sponsored by A. E. Brundson, editor of the *Standard*, and his remarks were "anti and unAmerican." The *Times* continued, "Although we believe in free speech, we do not approve of anarchy." It accused the speaker of being a "bolshivist and destructionist" and said he was brought to Sherman County solely for the purpose of inciting the people and to spread propaganda for those who "wave the red flag." The pro-Roosevelt editor of the *Times* denounced those who followed the leadership of such un-Americans, "who are antagonistic to every effort made by the present administration toward recovery from the chaos of the past, not only in the obstruction of the wheat program, but also the NRA and unemployment and federal emergency relief."<sup>27</sup>

In support of New Deal measures the editor of the *Times* went so far as to write: "We are expecting every loyal business man to sign the NRA pledge, and his failure to sign it is proof that he defies his government." In the same issue the *Times* tried to rouse the local American Legion against the appearance of "Communist" speakers in Loup City. In provocative language it said:

We wonder if the American Legion boys of Sherman County are going to sit idly by and allow a communist to come to Loup City, speak from a platform in the district court room, openly insult every Legion boy by calling them 'cowards' because they dared fight for their country's flag. We are going to watch with interest the reaction of our own boys and see if they are going to sit idly by and allow their country's flag to be denounced.<sup>28</sup>

Such pleas to the Legion by the small town businessman were condemned in an article in the *New Masses*, a Communist publication. In a general comment on the farm movement in the small town, the writer asserted, "The farmer often says that the small-town businessman is the tail to his kite, but it is a heavy tail." Somewhat discouraged the writer contended that the militant farm movement had been retarded by the small-town businessman

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<sup>27</sup> *Times*, August 25, 1933.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

# SHERMAN COUNTY TIMES

LOUP CITY, NEBRASKA, FRIDAY, JULY 6, 1934

## 16 BLISS BREAKS PAR ON GOLF COURSE

**Shoots 69; Exhibition Match Ends Even Up After 18 Holes.**

Rodney Bliss cracked par on the Loup City golf course Sunday during the dedication day exhibition match by shooting a 35 and a 34. Bliss, paired with Raymond Russel of Omaha, failed, however, to defeat Richard Shofstall of Kearney and William Manasil of Burwell, the match coming out even up, playing low ball on each hole. Russell carded a 76, Manasil a 73 and Shofstall a 74.

In the first nine, the first two holes were halved. On number three Manasil took a three to win the hole. Bliss and Russell took a four on the next one to even up again. Number five was halved. Bliss took number six with a par four to make them one up and then Manasil shot a birdie on number seven to even it up again. Number eight and nine were halved. In the second round, the first five

## BIBLE SCHOOL COMMENCEMENT SUNDAY EVENING

The commencement and demonstration service of the Vacation Bible School will be held in the Baptist church, Sunday evening, July 8, beginning at eight p. m.

The program will include demonstrations of the work done in each department; and it will offer three dramatic presentations of Bible stories. The Life of Joseph, a portion of the Exodus, and the story of the Good Samaritan will be presented by the various departments.

Every one is invited to attend this service and enjoy with the parents and the children some of the results of the splendid work which this competent corps of local teachers has done during these three weeks.

## SHOWER BRINGS COOLER WEATHER

**Quarter Of An Inch of Rain Falls In Loup City Wednesday.**

## DEFENDANTS APPEAL TO DISTRICT COURT

**Jury Finds All Seven Guilty And Judge Passes Sentence.**

The jury in the riot case in County Court last week brought in a verdict of "guilty" for all seven defendants, the fixing of the penalties being up to the judge. The case, which started Tuesday forenoon, was one of the most stubbornly fought cases ever tried in Sherman County. Judge Moehnert insisted on the court taking as few recesses as possible, so as to wind it up with as little expense as necessary and even insisted on night sessions.

The case was finally given to the jury late Thursday afternoon, after three strenuous days. After deliberating about four hours they agreed on a verdict. This was about midnight and they had instructions to seal their verdict and bring it into court the next morning. The verdict of the jury met with the approval of at least 95

## FAIR BOARD WILL MEET NEXT WEEK

The Sherman County fair board is expecting to meet next week, and definitely decide the fate of the 1934 fair. With weather conditions existing as they are and the lack of moisture, sentiment is pretty general against holding a fair this year.

The county board recently held a meeting to look into the matter of the 1934 levy and to eliminate every thing possible so as to raise as much as possible to take care of needy folks. Members of the fair board were called in and asked to pass a resolution not to make a levy for the fair this year. Every member of the fair board present was willing to cooperate with the county board, and no doubt, at their meeting next week, will take such action.

## SCHOOL LAND HEARING HELD

**State Land Commissioner Here For Re-appraisal**

The Sherman County Times reports the conviction of those accused of riot.

# The People's Standard

Not only the Largest Circulation but nearly as large as the combined circulation of all the other Sherman County Papers

1916

LOUP CITY, SHERMAN COUNTY, NEBRASKA, THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 1916

NUMBER

## SERVICES FOR

### W. H. HAWK FRIDAY

Funeral services for W. H. Hawk, who died at his home in Loup City, Nebraska, on Wednesday, June 7, 1916, at the age of 78 years, will be held at 10 o'clock A. M. on Friday, June 10, at the Methodist church in Loup City.

The deceased was born at Loup City, Nebraska, on June 21, 1838, and was 78 years of age at the time of his death. He was a member of the Methodist church and was a well-known citizen of Loup City.

Funeral services for Mrs. M. J. Jones, who died at her home in Loup City, Nebraska, on Wednesday, June 7, 1916, at the age of 78 years, will be held at 10 o'clock A. M. on Friday, June 10, at the Methodist church in Loup City. The deceased was born at Loup City, Nebraska, on June 21, 1838, and was 78 years of age at the time of her death. She was a member of the Methodist church and was a well-known citizen of Loup City.

Funeral services for Mrs. M. J. Jones, who died at her home in Loup City, Nebraska, on Wednesday, June 7, 1916, at the age of 78 years, will be held at 10 o'clock A. M. on Friday, June 10, at the Methodist church in Loup City. The deceased was born at Loup City, Nebraska, on June 21, 1838, and was 78 years of age at the time of her death. She was a member of the Methodist church and was a well-known citizen of Loup City.

## FOOD CHECK STORE BOLDED BY NEW FRESH PAINT

During the past few days the business at the counter in the Food Check store has been treated in a most unusual manner, with a narrow strip of brush. It has been put a task on the part of the manager and clerks, but the general effect is well worth the effort.

Mr. Dew Ballard of Burwell is the new clerk in the Food Check store. He began his duties last week.

## HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES OF WEEK

### REGULAR MEETING SATURDAY, JUNE 10

There will be the regular meeting Saturday, June 10, and all members are urged to be present to help make final arrangements for the picnic which is to be held June 23 and 24.

The meeting was extra well attended last Saturday and there was hardly room for the crowd.

"Mother Bloor" gave a fine talk on her trip to the east where she led the May Day parade of 110,000 workers in New York City and how the farmers and workers are working together at Philadelphia. She told about school

## Ravenna Creamery Girls Strike For Better Conditions

"Chickens that are sold from 2000 disease free ones of two days are picked and sold on the market," says girl striker.

This creamery is working under the N. L. Slave code.

The girls pick for 8 hours, work every day, but the girls are forced to work 12 and run 2 1/2 cents for each chicken they pick.

"A good picker can pick from 20 to 30 old hens per day and around forty springs," says girl strike leader.

The girls' rest room is filthy and the lights are poor.

### TORN CHICKENS

If a girl totes a chicken she does not get paid for picking it. A girl will bear an average of two or three chickens every day because the stabling water is not hot enough.

Girls do not make enough to pay for room and board and buy their clothes. They also get skin disease from the chickens and are compelled to pay their own doctor bills.

They are fired for picking too slow. A girl named Rosa Lease was fired about two weeks ago for not having her chickens picked good enough, regardless of the fact that there are inspectors to see to that.

They are paid 20 cents for each chicken they pick. The only sickness was on the part of Sam Jones, who is one of the pickers, while the shot of the creamery the day he presented himself to work.

John J. O'Connell, Fred Bowman and other town men told him that if he did not get out of town in thirty minutes that "the gang" would get him. They suppose the health officer "Flax" and the sheriff is suppressing.

Farmers and workers of Sherman County are organizing to aid the girls in their strike for the following demands:

1. Payment of 10 cents per hour for chickens.
2. Payment for room, soap and water, coal and hot water.
3. Better stabling system.
4. We refuse to pick diseased chickens.
5. No discrimination against girls who do not pick as fast as a male.
6. No firing without adequate reasons.
7. Recognition of our union. No interfering.
8. Free medical service for influenza sickness that is caused directly or

## PERSONAL MANAGEMENT AT LEOP CITY THEATRE

A. H. Sorenson, who has been in charge of the Liberty Theatre for the past two years, came over the morning and afternoon today (Thursday) and closed down when he had leased the theatre, which will again be a possession.

Personally, we have enjoyed knowing both Mr. and Mrs. Sorenson and value their friendship very much. We shall regret to see them leave Loup City, if they decide to move away. It has always been a pleasure to work with Mr. Sorenson and our business relations have always been of the very best sort.

M. Diamond and his family live in Loup at the present time having moved there during the later part of April. Mr. Diamond has a beautiful new pleasure house in Ord and plans to go back and forth between the two towns in Loup after both shows.

## FUNERAL SERVICES FOR W. HAWK FRIDAY, JUNE 8

Respected Resident of Sherman County for Past Forty-One Years

Last Friday afternoon at two o'clock in the Methodist church in Loup City were held the funeral services for

## P. E. O. LUN THURSDAY

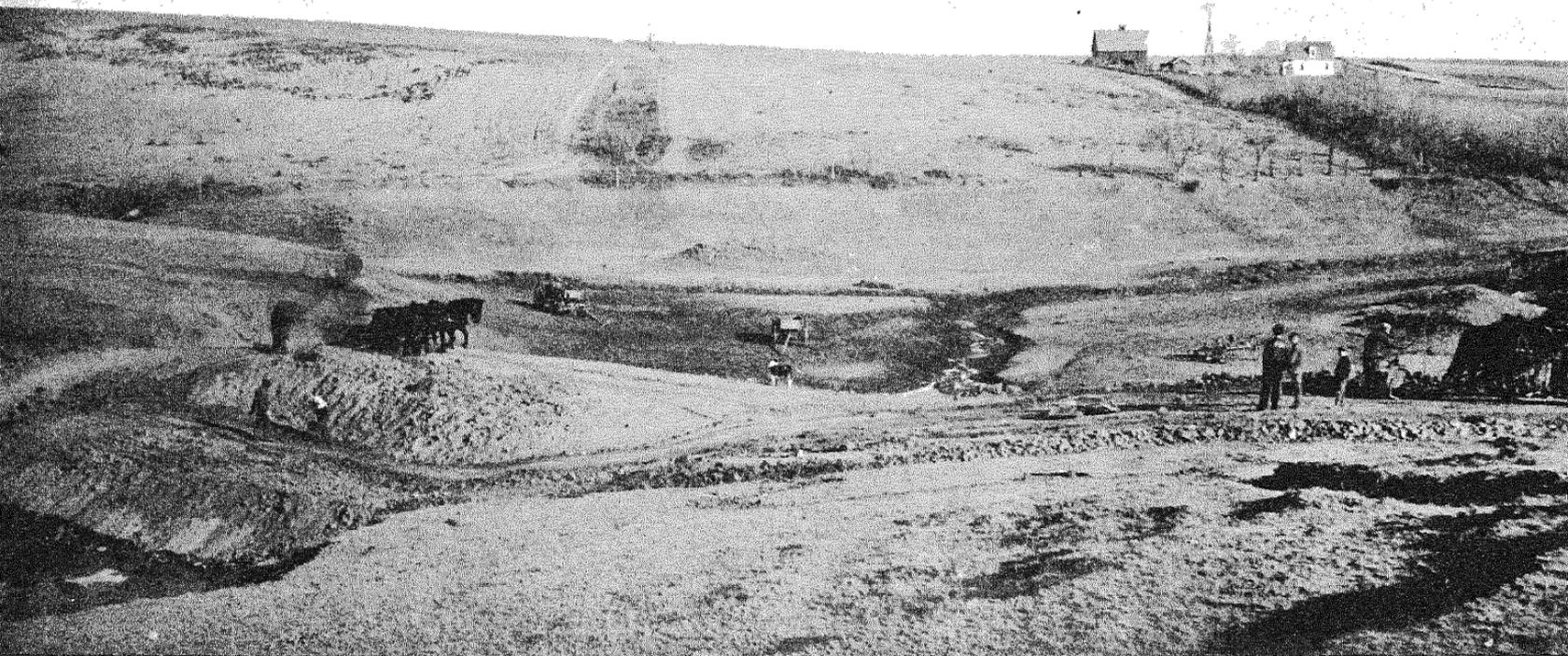
66 Ladies from Ord, Burwell, Hosper

The P. E. O. U. is at a one o'clock luncheon, June 8, in Presbyterian church guests 2:30, ladies Ord and Burwell, six in all, twenty two, twenty one from Burwell.

The theme of the occasion is "Friendship of the Womenhood" represented a beautiful vase the fly post in rocks all around, 100 roses, cages with painted plates and flowers, articles arranged with great order things to give and atmosphere to them. The general appearance and administration ladies.

Yellow and white on the luncheon cards were unique were made only a card. ~~Misses~~

The People's Standard gives its account of the Loup City strike.



The New Deal combatting drought and depression in Sherman County. Soil Conservation work on the J. Gembala farm.



Mother Bloor in action.

who assured the farmer that he stood arm-in-arm with him, but "behind his back winks at the Legion."<sup>29</sup>

In the pages of the *Standard* appeared a completely new topic of discussion. The August 17, 1933 headlines announced the "Call to the U. S. Congress Against War: Labor Day Weekend [sic.] September 29 to October 1, 1933 in New York." The following article declared, "the Roosevelt administration is using the National Recovery Act as a disguise for building the biggest war machinery in the history of the country." In general the story adhered to the Communist line of the Thirties that the capitalist system could save itself from depression and destruction only by giving itself over to national wars. The *Standard* proclaimed:

The Capitalist system is breaking to pieces. The Capitalist governments whether Roosevelt or Hoover seem to have no other program to save the system, but the program of war and destruction. The workers and farmers of the world MUST ORGANIZE against this coming Imperialist war. We are the only ones that can prevent this crime by organizing Anti-War committees and fight against the coming war.<sup>30</sup>

Within a year it would be charged that the development of fascist tendencies was the first step toward war in capitalist countries. The antiwar issue and the second annual farmers' conference at Chicago in November 1933 plus an open controversy with the editor of the *Times* filled the columns of the *Standard* that fall. The *Times* said it had no quarrel with the Farmers Holiday Association or any other farm organization, but condemned the recent meetings in Sherman County as inspired by Communists under the guise of antiwar meetings. Beuschausen of the *Times* accused the *Standard's* editor of being against everything in general, of breaking up farm wheat allotment meetings, and of openly opposing the NRA. Brundson shot back in his next issue that Beuschausen, "tries to tell the farmers that he is for them by publishing a bunch of lies."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Latham, "Will the Farmer Go Red?" *New Masses*, 12 (December 4, 1934), 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Standard*, August 17, 1933.

<sup>31</sup> *Times*, September 1, 1933; *Standard*, September 7, 1933.

In reply the *Times* made a bitter personal attack on editor Brundson, who had begun publishing the *Loup City People's Standard* in 1921.<sup>32</sup> Referring to Brundson, the *Times* said, "His latest ambition is communism which is nothing less than legalized rape, common love, and everything else in common." This, said the *Times*, was the kind of competition facing it and continued, "His pet hobby now is to try and make the farmers believe that we are against them, which he knows is not the truth." The *Times* admitted that Brundson had succeeded in leading a few astray, but concluded that it was the real champion of the hardworking farmer.<sup>33</sup>

The next issue of controversy in Sherman County was the arrival of a travelling farm school, which was to hold sessions in October. "The school has been organized by the Farmers National Committee for Action to help the different farm organizations to train their own leaders," announced the *Standard*. The farm school was described in the *Farmers' National Weekly* and had held sessions in Michigan and Minnesota. The *Standard* reported, "The object is to teach farmers and workers to go out and organize and conduct meetings." Young students from the various Holiday groups in Nebraska supposedly were to attend the school. Course work would cover social economics, how the business system affects the farmer, how corporations work, causes of war, programs of political parties, and the New Deal. One course concentrated on the history of farm

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<sup>32</sup> Meroe Owens, *A Brief History of Sherman County Nebraska* (Norfolk: Norfolk Daily News Press, 1952), 203.

<sup>33</sup> Included in this personal attack on Brundson was the disclosure by the *Times* that Brundson had been convicted in 1914 of a major crime in Omaha. This prompted no direct denial by Brundson, *Times*, September 15, 1933; Judge Ernest Moehnert of Loup City feels the *Times* overstepped the rules of fair play on this charge, especially since Brundson had served time for his crime and paid his debt to society. Interview by writer with Judge Moehnert July, 1962. No doubt the unearthing of Brundson's past crime by the *Times* editor pushed Brundson farther into his radical position and away from the disapproving main street community. See also Anan Raymond, "Prairie Fire: A Footnote to Contemporary History," *American Bar Association Journal*, 28 (November, 1952), 911-912+ for a similar observation.

organizations, "studying the successes and mistakes of past organizations to help us in our present work."<sup>34</sup>

Events of the antiwar meeting in New York from September 28 to October 1 were not ignored by the *Standard*. Sherman County had sent two delegates, Carl Kron and Louis W. Larsen, and now the events of their trip were to be publicized in the county. For this purpose the *Standard* announced for October 8 an "ANTI-WAR MASS MEETING AT WILLIAM PRITSCHAU'S FARM to welcome Nebraska delegates returned from New York meet." The article proudly said, "This is the first time the Nebraska farmers and workers ever took a determined stand against Imperialistic War. Nebraska has sent her boys to fight against the capitalist war and will not fight it for them again."<sup>35</sup>

Antiwar news in the columns of the *Standard* was only a diversion in comparison with the main topic of discussion which focused on the Second National Farm Relief Conference to be held in Chicago November 15 to 18. In Washington, Lem Harris announced that the sponsoring group, the Farmers National Committee for Action, expected the conference to draw two thousand farmers. The *Standard* claimed that twenty-five delegates would journey from Loup City and Sherman County to Chicago. Both editor Brundson and the travelling farm school would accompany the delegation.<sup>36</sup> The *Daily Worker* showed special interest in the farm conference. It urged Unemployment Councils throughout the nation to give support and send letters of "solidarity," and said "while the Reno crowd sabotages the struggle, this brave group will be meeting in Chicago to discuss fighting plans."<sup>37</sup> The *Worker* spotlighted the scheduled appearance of its editor, Clarence Hathaway, at the conference.<sup>38</sup> Others billed for the conference were Mother Bloor, "known to hundreds of thou-

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<sup>34</sup> *Standard*, September 28, 1933.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, October 5, 1933.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, November 2, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Worker*, November 11, 1933.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, November 15, 1933.

sands of farmers all over the country as a militant organizer of farm struggles," Harry Lux of Nebraska, and Lem Harris, who was to open the meeting. The *Worker* listed the Farm Holiday Association of Nebraska (Madison County Plan) as a chief participant in the "historic fighting conference."<sup>39</sup>

On the first day of the conference the *Worker* noted "Nebraska is here with flags flying. There are already 160 Nebraska farmers here." Lux described them as a hundred and sixty "two-fisted Nebraskans," said the report.<sup>40</sup> On the next day a sketch of a Loup City farmer appeared in the *Worker* along with five other sketches of typical farmer delegates to the conference.<sup>41</sup> In his opening speech Harris blasted the Milo Reno wing of the Farm Holiday movement and told assembled delegates:

The hidden enemies are the so-called 'friends of the farmers' like Milo Reno, who as head of the National Farmers' Holiday Association betrayed three farm strikes in succession. Strikes are the trumpet calls for mass action of farmers, not only for the immediate demands, but also to cement a unity which cannot be broken.<sup>42</sup>

The conference ended with a call for unity among farmers, Negro and white workers, and "mass action to reply to Roosevelt robbery."<sup>43</sup> In the coming months Reno became a central target of Communist publications. The general tirade against Reno in the *New Masses* charged him and others with "conspiring in a Fascist plot to overthrow the government and touch off a pogrom against Jews."<sup>44</sup>

Reports on the farmers' conference provided much copy for the pages of the *Standard*. Headlines on November 23 read, "Farmers Second National Relief Conference a Historic Fighting Event; 619 Delegates from 36 States Attend." The statements coming from the conference clearly spoke for the very far left on the political spectrum

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, 1933.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, November 17, 1933.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, November 18, 1933.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, November 17, 1933.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, November 21, 1933.

<sup>44</sup> John L. Spivak, "Selling Anti-Semitism to the Farmer," *New Masses*, 12 (November 27, 1934), 10.

during the Thirties. They pictured the New Deal as a crude attempt to save the capitalist system. For the Communist party in this period of development, "The New Deal was a capitalist ruse to snare the workers. The party even called Roosevelt a Fascist."<sup>45</sup> A statement following this line appeared in the *Standard* a few days after the conference:

The New Deal and other schemes of Wall Street offer no way out of the crisis. The false leaders and their 'solution' make our conditions more intolerable. We working people must find our own way out. The only way the farmers can save themselves from ruin and starvation is by carrying on their own united fight together with the farm and city workers, by wielding a solid unity with the Negro masses, under our own leadership, elected by the rank and file, in united mass action against the forces that rob, exploit and oppress all of us.<sup>46</sup>

Three statements stand out in the conference's lengthy series of demands: (1) open opposition to the New Deal (2) call for farmer-worker unity (3) and support of the Negro masses.<sup>47</sup>

The Holiday organization of Sherman County presented these demands to District Judge Bruno O. Hostetler, who was holding court in Loup City. The *Times* featured the confrontation with the judge and his reply to the Holiday Association. His reply counseled moderation. In effect the judge told Holiday people "the thing for you to do is to just plug along here. Don't be discouraged and don't disobey the laws of your country." The judge lauded the efforts of the Roosevelt Administration to help the farmers and asked the Holiday Association to give the President a chance. "But for Heaven's sake," the judge pleaded, "Don't let some redhanded anarchist from some outside district who has an ax to grind come in here and poison you against your government and against the laws of your country."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Bell, *Socialism and American Life*, 2 vols., ed. Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952) I, 353.

<sup>46</sup> *Standard*, November 23, 1933.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Times*, December 1, 1933.

With the new year the *Times* tried to convince its readers that the need for Holiday organizations was now passed. In its opinion the associations had succeeded in drawing attention to the farmer's plight, but now the Administration was making every effort "to get things back to normal." It concluded that those who remained with these organizations were only discontented radicals—"those who have communistic leanings, and in this county the leaders of that organization openly espouse communism and import communist speakers."<sup>49</sup> In February the *Times* took satisfaction in noting Lux's \$250 fine for contempt of court in Saline County had been upheld by the Nebraska Supreme Court. To this, it remarked sarcastically, "Somehow, we have a few in this county who get inspiration from following ex-convicts."<sup>50</sup>

The *Standard*, however, refused to believe that interest was declining in the Holiday movement. It boastfully announced a second annual Holiday convention for organizational elections at Grand Island for March 22 and 23.<sup>51</sup> The election reinstated President Schefcick, who did not attend. Harry MacDonald of Loup City replaced Wicklund as Vice-president, and Andrew Dahlsten remained Secretary-Treasurer. The convention condemned Governor Bryan for refusing to meet a delegation of twenty-five Holiday farmers who were asking a pardon for Harry Lux.<sup>52</sup> This gathering made plans for a May Day celebration in Grand Island, but officials of the city refused permission to hold the affair within the city limits. Instead, a picnic was held in the Loup City Park on April 29, 1934. Two hundred persons were reported to have heard speakers on "Farm Conditions," "Struggle of City Workers," "History of May Day," "Need of Unity of Farmers and Workers," "Women and the Crisis," "Youth and the NRA," and "The United States and the War Danger."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, January 26, 1934.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, February 23, 1934.

<sup>51</sup> *Standard*, February 8, 1934.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1934.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, April 26 and May 3, 1934.

Possibly the number attending the May Day rally was far smaller than the *Standard* cared to admit because it expressed disappointment at the turn out and hoped for better response from farmers and workers in the future.<sup>54</sup> But it stoutly asserted that the Madison County Plan of the Nebraska Farm Holiday Association was holding meetings every night in small schoolhouses all over the state. These meetings denounced the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the crop reduction program, the processing tax, and protested "Nazis torture of Ernest Thaelman and all other German working class political prisoners."<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile in the Grand Island Unemployment Council Mother Bloor and others, who were to become involved in the Loup City riot in mid-June, actively pushed their plans. Mother Bloor spoke frequently to the Unemployment Council, accompanied by Harry Smith from Omaha, and Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Booth, a young Negro couple from Grand Island. Mother Bloor at this time was in the midst of a crusade against war and Fascism. After the antiwar conference in New York in the fall of 1933, the French pacifist writer Henri Barbusse wrote Mother Bloor asking her to organize a delegation of women from America to attend an International Women's Congress Against War and Fascism in Paris. Nebraska was the area she chose "to arouse the farm people against Fascism and the approaching war."<sup>56</sup>

Mother Bloor told a meeting in Grand Island that "not caring for the wishes of the farmers and workers is the first step toward Fascism." She explained there were no capitalists in Grand Island, for people in this class spent

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1934.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, May 17, 1934.

<sup>56</sup> Ella Reeve Bloor, *We Are Many* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 250; The antiwar movement began in Germany under the leadership of Willi Munzenberg in 1932. The movement attracted the loyalty of the French writers, Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland. They sent out a call for the first world congress against war held in Amsterdam August, 1932. After this, similar congresses met in each country, and leagues against war and Fascism were organized throughout the world. Bell, *Socialism in American Life*, I, 359.

their summers in the mountains or at the seaside, "but some of us may be the tools of capitalists," she warned. Opponents of the Unemployment Council and the Farmers' Holiday Association, said Mother Bloor, charge that the organizations oppose religion. To this, she answered with the query, "What can be more religious than to love thy neighbor as thyself?" Farmers and workers, she told the audience, must present a united front against the capitalist system, which has been the cause of all wars. At the same meeting Harry Smith spoke on the failures of the Roosevelt Administration. Attacking the Civilian Conservation Corps, he saw its camps as a menace to health and morals and as mobilization centers for war.<sup>57</sup>

These various activities in the Unemployment Council of Grand Island set the stage for the Loup City riot in mid-June. The disturbance on the courthouse lawn took place amidst mounting tensions of depression and drought aggravated by a newspaper controversy and the presence of "outsiders." In June, 1934 the federal government designated Sherman County as one of the worst drought areas from Nebraska northward on the plains.<sup>58</sup> The accumulated tension of several months exploded in the community on June 14 when a crowd from the Grand Island Unemployment Council arrived in Loup City to support a rumored strike of girl poultry workers at the Fairmont Ravenna Creamery plant. Mother Bloor related that one evening while at an Unemployment Council meeting in Grand Island, Carl Wicklund, from Loup City, requested support for a "spontaneous strike" at the poultry processing plant. To this request Mother Bloor responded by agreeing to speak in behalf of the strikers at a meeting in Loup City the next day. She, Mr. and Mrs. Booth, and a large crowd from the Unemployment Council travelled to Loup City June 14.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Grand Island Daily Independent*, June 1, 1934.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1, 1934.

<sup>59</sup> Bloor, *We Are Many*, 250.

Although no significant walkout had occurred, headlines in the *Standard* on the day of the riot read "Ravenna Creamery Girls Strike For Better Conditions." The story declared "Farmers and workers of Sherman County are mobilizing to aid the girls in their strike. The sheriff and a Fascist gang are against them."<sup>60</sup> On the previous day, June 13, a committee led by editor Brundson and Farm Holiday leader Wicklund had met with the plant manager to present workers' demands for more pay and better working conditions.<sup>61</sup> Sherman County Sheriff John Thrailkill appeared and ordered the visitors off the company's property.<sup>62</sup> The sheriff alleged that Wicklund said on leaving, "That's all right, we'll have five thousand men in here and we'll block every road into Loup City. We'll stop every wheel of this creamery."<sup>63</sup> That evening plans went forward in Grand Island fifty miles to the south for a gathering of unemployed in Loup City the next day. The *Times* said they planned a demonstration for Thursday June 14 at 1 P.M. Afterwards they intended to march on the processing plant and force either concessions or a walkout.<sup>64</sup>

In the afternoon of June 14 two truckloads of people arrived in Loup City and assembled on the courthouse lawn. Among them was Mother Bloor who later said that the gathering was "spontaneous" and they only wished "to show their solidarity with these workers here."<sup>65</sup> That morning Western Union records show that Wicklund had sent the following telegram at 9:30 A.M. to groups in South Dakota and Iowa: BE PREPARED TO BRING AS MANY TRUCKLOADS OF WORKERS AND FARMERS TO LOUP CITY AS POSSIBLE. WE HAVE PLEDGED OUR SOLIDARITY WITH GIRL CHICKEN PICKERS ON STRIKE.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Standard*, June 14, 1934.

<sup>61</sup> District Court Record (Loup City, 1934), 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Times*, June 22, 1934.

<sup>65</sup> District Court Record, 701.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Exhibit "7", 289.

The first event was a round of speech making on the town square. The *Times* charged the speakers made "the most vile, indecent and unpatriotic speeches."<sup>67</sup> Mother Bloor denied the violent nature of these speeches and said, "The theme of my speech was mostly the constitution, which my forefathers helped to make."<sup>68</sup> Clearly the crowd was preparing to march on the creamery. In the meantime the sheriff persuaded the group to send instead a delegation of twenty-five. Still a large crowd accompanied the committee to the plant. Farmer and farm implement dealer Burt Sell of Arcadia, Nebraska and a leader in the group of twenty-five testified that as the committee arrived at the creamery they noticed another gang going in the backdoor. The creamery management had no doubt taken precautions against any violence that might occur by enlisting a number of guards. When the group returned to the courthouse grounds, it was reported that some of the demands were granted, but union recognition was rejected.<sup>69</sup>

As the Omaha man, Harry Smith, spoke to the crowd a new group of observers moved closer to the gathering. Evidently the guards at the creamery had followed the delegation of twenty-five back to the square. At this point a note on a brown paper sack was handed to Smith. It read:

Notice all out county Agitators  
Grand Island Due to Leave Loup City at 5 pm  
Signed by Respectable Loup City Citizens  
We are for Locals But Don't Need outside help.<sup>70</sup>

Now the two crowds were standing menacingly close together. After Smith read the threatening note to the strike sympathizers, the "Hey Rube" signal came from somewhere and a ten-minute flurry of fists and blackjacks followed. Afterwards each group tried to blame the other for the call "Hey Rube" or denied ever hearing it. The fighting broke up with another shout and this time it was

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<sup>67</sup> *Times*, June 22, 1934.

<sup>68</sup> District Court Record, 691.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 671.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

"They have killed Burt Sell." The Arcadia man was knocked unconscious and had to be carried to the hospital. Others fled to their cars and trucks. Mother Bloor emphasized in the trial that she distinctly heard cries, "Kill the nigger."<sup>71</sup> The *Standard* charged that the sheriff knew of the "planned attack" and stayed away from the scene until the farmers and workers were dispersed.<sup>72</sup>

This could have ended the affair, but a warrant for the arrest of nine of the strike supporters and Holiday group on "complaint of riot" was issued June 16. Ten days later the Criminal Docket of Sherman County showed that Ella Bloor, Harry MacDonald, Carl Wicklund, Portius Sell, John Squires, Floyd Booth and Loretta Booth "now have their bodies before the court, Burt Sell unable to attend court on account of sickness and Harry W. Smith not found in Sherman County."<sup>73</sup> Farmer F. W. Pritschau of south-east Sherman County provided the five hundred dollar bail bond for Mother Bloor. He also put up bail money at Mother Bloor's insistence for Mrs. Booth.<sup>74</sup> MacDonald, Wicklund, and Squires were Loup City farmers. Portius Sell was the son of Burt Sell from Arcadia, and Mr. and Mrs. Booth were the Negro couple from the Grand Island Unemployment Council.

After over a year of complaining about Farm Holiday and Communist activity in Sherman County, the *Times* finally had something to rejoice in. It did not fail the moment of triumph. "Red blooded citizens in Sherman county," it declared, "displayed their loyalty [sic.] to the Stars and Stripes last Thursday when they drove 'Red' invaders who came here looking for trouble out of Loup City." The *Times* had no doubt about the Communist threat to the community when it said, "The alleged Red communistic leaders in Sherman County wanted to start something, and decided to stir up trouble at the Ravenna Creamery plant. It might fit into their plan of 'Comm-

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 696.

<sup>72</sup> *Standard*, June 28, 1934.

<sup>73</sup> Criminal Docket of Sherman County, Docket 3, 231-236.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*; *Times*, July 6, 1934.

nism'!" In the next sentence the article followed another line of attack that appealed to racial prejudice in the community. "There are not over a dozen farmers in Sherman County who are in favor of importing a colored man from Grand Island or anywhere else to stir up trouble for them." It asked rhetorically, "Could a greater insult be heaped on a community than to resort to such means?"<sup>75</sup>

The trial began June 26 in Judge Ernest Moehnert's court and ended three days later. Lawyer David J. Bentall of International Labor Defense rushed to Loup City from Chicago to handle the defense of the prisoners when Mother Bloor wired for his aid.<sup>76</sup> Sherman County Attorney William H. Line and the Assistant Attorney General of Nebraska, William H. Wright, from Lincoln, stood for the prosecution. Near the end of the trial the *Times* admitted the case had created much excitement. "The city has had the appearance of a holiday all week. The streets are crowded and parking space has been scarce. The court room has been crowded at every session, despite the sweltering heat."<sup>77</sup>

In New York the attention of the *Daily Worker* fixed on the Loup City trial. The *Worker* reported on June 29, "73-year-old Mother Bloor Collapses at Nebraska Trial." At the outset of the case the *Worker* said, "Local authorities are determined to railroad this most loved leader of the farmers, and her Negro comrades." The reason for this the *Worker* believed was, "The growing unity of farmer and worker, Negro and white, has caused the local

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<sup>75</sup> *Times*, June 22, 1934.

<sup>76</sup> Bloor, *We Are Many*, 252; Report 2290, United States House of Representatives, 71st Congress, 3rd Session, reveals that International Labor Defense was formed in 1925 to defend class war prisoners. Article II of its constitution states the aims of the organization: "The International Labor Defense is a broad nonparty organization based on the class struggle which aims to defend all workers who are being persecuted by the capitalist government and various other agencies of the employing class, for their participation in the class struggle, by rendering legal aid, moral and financial support to these workers and their dependents, by publicity, organizing mass demonstrations of support and protest, both here and abroad." 85.

<sup>77</sup> *Times*, June 29, 1934.

capitalists to tremble for their profits.”<sup>78</sup> Two days later the *Worker* attacked Governor Bryan for backing the Fairmont Creamery trust against “defendants who supported chicken pickers in their strike.” It noted that farmer defendants had been released on their own recognizance and the prosecution was centered on the “outsiders.”<sup>79</sup> An earlier article urged workers to send protests to Governor Bryan and Loup City. It asserted:

Our beloved comrade and leader cannot be allowed to stay in jail. Her arrest is an obvious move on the part of the New Deal administration to cripple the militant actions of the farmers' struggles in which Mother Bloor is actively engaged.<sup>80</sup>

Indignantly the *Times* commented on July 6 that letters and telegrams are pouring in “from the red centers of the country, not asking for the release of ‘Old Lady Agitator’ Bloor, but *demanding* her release.” By this time, however, the six man trial court jury had made its judgment against the defendants. In the June 28 issue of the *Standard*, which had been delayed two days for the verdict, headlines read, “Sheriff’s Hand Picked Jury Convicts Holiday Farmers: Sentences are Political.” The *Times* reported soberly that Judge Moehnert gave Mother Bloor the maximum sentence of ninety days in jail and a hundred dollar fine.<sup>81</sup>

The *Standard* felt that this heavy sentence disclosed that it was Mother Bloor “who the corporation hirelings were after.” The judge sentenced Booth and Wicklund to sixty days and fifty dollars fine; P. Sell, MacDonald, and Squires to twenty days and twenty-five dollars fine; Mrs. Booth to ten days and ten dollars fine. “The variation of the terms and fines discloses the political complexions of the sentences,” declared the *Standard*, and con-

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<sup>78</sup> *Daily Worker*, June 25, 1934.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, June 27, 1934.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, June 19, 1934; see William D. Rowley, “Grass Roots and Imported Radicalism in Nebraska, 1932-1934,” (unpublished M.A. Thesis University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1963) for samples of these protest letters taken from the files of Judge Moehnert in Loup City, 104-106.

<sup>81</sup> *Times*, July 6, 1934.

tinued, "It was capitalist justice and is an example of what the workers and farmers can expect in their struggle for their right to live."<sup>82</sup> In an interview twenty-eight years later, Judge Moehnert asserted that he gave the severest sentence to Mother Bloor because she was the principal agent in promoting the disturbance through her fiery speeches.<sup>83</sup>

The *Times*, of course, gloated over the outcome of the trial. Such phrases as "restored the good name of Sherman County . . . gave notice to the world that red blooded Americans still rule the destinies of this county . . . a few communists and outside agitators are out of luck here," were sprinkled through its editorial column. Having scored a victory, the *Times* was in a magnanimous mood when it offered pardon to the offenders within the county. "The community is of a forgiving spirit," said the *Times*, "and will overlook the incident of June 14 on the court house lawn, providing the local reds turn American and the agitators from other towns are kept out of this county." The article reminded readers that Judge Hostetler had once told a Sherman County audience, "if they listened to some of those outside agitators they would get into trouble and had his advice been heeded, all of this turmoil would have been avoided." The concluding sentence took brief notice that an appeal had been filed which would bring the case up for rehearing in district court in September.<sup>84</sup>

Although the peak of excitement in the riot and trial had passed in June, terrific heat, drought, and depression lingered on in Sherman County. For the week July 12 to 18 temperatures in Loup City averaged over 103 degrees. "This is excellent weather for communists to get busy and do their undermining," commented the *Times* uneasily in mid-July. "When people are in distress they get restless and do and say things that they otherwise would not if

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<sup>82</sup> *Standard*, June 28, 1934.

<sup>83</sup> From a tape recorded interview with Judge Moehnert by the writer in July, 1962 now on file in the Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>84</sup> *Times*, July 6, 1934.

crops were abundant and the outlook were [sic.] not as it is at the present time," it said.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps this was one of the clearest insights that occurred to this paper throughout that memorable summer.

Meanwhile the *Standard* pursued its attack on the New Deal farm relief program. In headlines that read "Wanton Destruction of Edible Cattle Raises Furore [sic.] in State: Holiday Farmers and Unemployed Protest," it struck at the apparent absurdity of destroying foodstuffs in the face of national want.<sup>86</sup> The *Times* attitude was that "The president's heart is with the farmers in every move he makes." It admitted some of the programs were experimental and may not have worked well, "but the president's intentions were good."<sup>87</sup>

Veiled Communist charges by the *Standard's* rival prompted editor Brundson to publish a denial that he was a Communist:

I, A. E. Brundson, editor of the *People's Standard*, am NOT a communist. If I were one, I wouldn't need to beat about the bush and lie about it for the organization is not illegal in the United States, at least, that is my understanding of the case.<sup>88</sup>

On July 19, however, the *Standard* announced an addition to its staff. Charles E. Taylor, former state senator from Montana, was appointed political editor. The *Daily Worker* of August 11, 1934 revealed that this same Charles E. Taylor of Plentywood, Montana was elected chairman of the Montana Communist state convention in Great Falls on August 10. Interestingly the *Standard* had never referred to Mother Bloor as a member of the Communist party in any of its articles. She was only described as "a friend of the farmers and the workers."

In Grand Island on July 8, Mother Bloor, now free on bond pending appeal to district court in September, opened a Midwest Conference Against War and Fascism. The

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, July 20, 1934.

<sup>86</sup> *Standard*, July 26, 1934.

<sup>87</sup> *Times*, July 6, 1934.

<sup>88</sup> *Standard*, July 5, 1934.

local newspaper reported that nearly three hundred attended the meeting at a farm near Grand Island. Here Maggie Pritchau, daughter-in-law of W. F. Pritchau who had posted bail for Mother Bloor in Loup City, was chosen to represent American farm women at the First Women's Congress Against War and Fascism to be held in Paris August 4, 5, and 6, 1934. "On her return she will organize the women of Nebraska against war and Fascism," said the *Standard*. The *Standard* later published this letter from Mrs. Pritchau, written on her stopover in New York:

A banquet was held in the New York Coliseum where 16,000 workers greeted Mother Bloor by standing, cheering, singing The International when she stepped on the stage to speak.

Several New York cars were loaded on this ship as the owners are going to tour France in them when they get there. That is the way we should all have it instead of just a few who rob the workers of their labor.<sup>89</sup>

Obviously, Mother Bloor spoke the truth when she told the court at Loup City her purpose in the Midwest at this time was to enlist delegates for the Paris Congress Against War and Fascism.

Another report from Grand Island on July 11 told of shots fired into the home of Negro Communist worker, Floyd Booth. When asked if he had any personal enemies, Booth replied that his only enemies were the opponents of his "cause."<sup>90</sup> The *Standard* denounced the incident as a vigilante attack by a law and order outfit and declared the police were privy to the affair.<sup>91</sup> The *Times* on the other hand took a more favorable view of vigilance committees. On July 27 it proudly announced that two hundred businessmen, farmers, and workers had formed a Loup City Vigilance Club "to deal with any red or communistic propaganda and especially with outside agitators." By early August the Loup City Vigilance Club was entertaining speakers, identified as prominent businessmen, from the

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, August 16, 1934; an interview by the writer with Mrs. Pritchau on a farm near Rockville, Nebraska during July, 1962 also confirmed that she made the trip with Mother Bloor.

<sup>90</sup> *Grand Island Independent*, July 12, 1934.

<sup>91</sup> *Standard*, July 12, 1934.

Vigilance Committee and the American Legion of Grand Island.<sup>92</sup>

Another surprising development occurred in Grand Island when John J. Schefcik, Harry Lux, Burt Sell, and Floyd Booth were nominated on a newly created United Front Ticket to run for offices in the August primaries. Schefcik was nominated for Governor, Lux for Senator, Sell for Congress, and Booth for Secretary of State. "The United Front Campaign will draw the support of workers and farmers," said the *Standard*. The *Times* called it the "ex-convict ticket." Sardonicly, the *Times* added, "Mr. Booth was no doubt selected to lend color to the occasion." The election bid by this party was on a write-in basis and made no showing in the primary.<sup>93</sup>

September brought the decision of the District Court in the Bloor case and also found the *Standard* still on the job protesting the trial and its interruption of Mother Bloor's antiwar lectures.<sup>94</sup> Presiding Judge Hostetler gave out equal sentences of one hundred dollar fines and thirty days in jail to all the defendants except Loretta Booth, who was fined one dollar and eleven days in jail<sup>95</sup> The uniformity of the sentences could no longer verify the *Standard's* charge that the punishment was aimed mainly at Mother Bloor for political reasons. Although the District Court had passed its judgment, the *Standard* left no doubt that the case would be appealed to the Nebraska Supreme Court.<sup>96</sup> The *Times*, however, had confidence that the Supreme Court would hold to the precedent of justice set in the lower courts. It drew a parallel between this case and the one in which Harry Lux was convicted at Wilber, Nebraska the previous year:

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<sup>92</sup> *Times*, August 10, 1934.

<sup>93</sup> *Standard*, August 2, 1934; *Times*, August 3, 1934; In an interview with the writer July 1, 1966, Burt Sell wished it to be clearly understood that he is not a member of the communist party. He always objected to its persistent attempts "to tell local people what to do."

<sup>94</sup> *Standard*, September 13, 1934.

<sup>95</sup> *Times*, September 28, 1934.

<sup>96</sup> *Standard*, September 27, 1934.

The case is taking the same course as the Saline County case in which Harry Lux and others were sentenced on a similar charge. They appealed the case to the Supreme Court and the court upheld the lower courts and the defendants were compelled to pay their fine and serve their sentences.<sup>97</sup>

Lux, whom the *Times* called the "chief red mixer in the state," carried the ideas of the Madison County Plan into the labor circles of Omaha as well as into the rural areas.<sup>98</sup> In late August or early September, 1934, Lux made an appeal to the Central Labor Council of Omaha to form a united front with farmers to protest for drought relief and participate in a Labor Day parade in Omaha. The *Standard* reported that after first consenting, "The reactionary bureaucrats [sic.] of the American Federation of Labor backed down and declared to the press that they 'didn't want to mix up with that red outfit'."<sup>99</sup>

By late September editor Brundson's days were clearly numbered in Loup City. Headlines in the *Standard* on September 13, 1934 said, "Brundson Arrested for Libeling Otto Dudschus; Editor out on Bond." On July 19, 1934 the *Standard* had noted in its usual brazen language that one Otto Dudschus, Deputy State Sheriff, had come to Loup City at the bidding of the Fairmont Creamery "to help plan, organize and direct the attack upon the outsiders." It called Dudschus an "insider" who was "right at home with many of the fascist politicians and petty businessmen in Loup City." The next charge was to backfire against Brundson. He described Dudschus as "a reputed paroled horse thief from Garfield County." In addition the story accused Dudschus of smothering horses by pulling inner tubes over their noses in order to collect lightning insurance.<sup>100</sup> Brundson failed to appear for trial and disappeared from Loup City in November, 1934. To this day he remains a "fugitive from justice" in Sherman County.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Times*, September 28, 1934.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Standard*, September 6, 1934.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19, 1934.

<sup>101</sup> Owens, *History of Sherman County*, 204.

The last piece of Farm Holiday propaganda appeared in the *Standard* on October 11, 1934. It was a long article by "outsider" Lem Harris ridiculing the New Deal corn-hog relief program. "There are some who see," wrote Harris, "that the corn-hog plan and all the apparatus of the AAA is aimed first of all to serve the needs of big business, and against the interests of the majority of farmers." In October Mrs. Brundson sold the presses of the *Standard* to J. H. Sexty of St. Paul, Nebraska ending its "far out" left political crusade. The newspaper, published under the title of *Loup City Leader*, was bought by the *Sherman County Times* in 1938.<sup>102</sup>

Confirming the prediction of the *Times*, the Nebraska Supreme Court rejected the appeal of Bloor *et al* against the State of Nebraska in a decision rendered in February, 1935. The court asserted that the utterances against the sheriff and the community showed "There was violent interference with the sheriff and his deputies in their duty to preserve order."<sup>103</sup>

On November 2, 1934 the *Times* took satisfaction in reporting Floyd Booth's repentance for his Communist associations. His statement as published in the *Times* admitted that he was tired of receiving abuse for his political views, especially since the Communists did not fulfill their promises of future schooling and foreign travel.

Withstanding the efforts of the International Labor Defense lawyers, the state of Nebraska carried out its promise of punishment for Mother Bloor and the five others convicted in the Loup City riot. The male prisoners served their sentences in the Loup City jail. Mother Bloor was sent to the women's section of the Omaha city jail for thirty days. Mrs. Booth did not appeal her conviction. Before leaving the East to serve her sentence, Mother Bloor

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 56; Interview with Judge Moehnert July, 1962.

<sup>103</sup> *Reports of Cases in the Supreme Court of Nebraska, January and September Terms, 1935* (Lincoln: Claflin Printing Company, 1936), vol. 129, 411.

defiantly told a farewell gathering that no Nebraska jail could dampen her spirits.<sup>104</sup>

In Nebraska the attempt by the far left to organize farmers and workers in the countryside met little success. Behind the organizational efforts of eastern radicals who came West stood the vision of a united farmer movement cemented to an urban labor power. They hoped this combination would be a decisive force in the political reform picture of the Thirties. But their work in Nebraska met the stone wall of small-town polity. In Loup City, however, a crack in the power structure occurred when a local newspaper, the *Standard*, converted to the cause of the radical group and created a stir in the community with inflammatory articles. Clearly the presence of outsiders, their fiery speeches, and a local following of "village radicals" seemed to threaten the community's status quo in these uneasy times. Those who saw their positions attacked in revival type political meetings took steps to rid the community of agitators. Locally administered justice and a vigilante committee were the instruments of expulsion. The wrath of local justice presents a formidable obstacle to outsiders in rural communities who attempt to import revolutionary new ideas whether it be in depression farm struggles in Nebraska during the Thirties or in Mississippi civil rights campaigns in the Sixties.

For success the outsiders needed a broader base of support on the local level. Lacking this base, they had to content themselves with extravagant claims of popular support and bitter diatribes against New Deal relief measures. Triple-A programs, much to their chagrin, seemed to rescue an important segment of the countryside and convince it that the crisis could be overcome within a reformed capitalist system. It was painfully evident that the New Deal undercut the extreme position of the far left. This belies frequent charges from the far right that the New Deal

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<sup>104</sup> Bloor, *We Are Many*, 257.

was in league with the left.<sup>105</sup> If the incidents in Loup City have any national political implications, they show that Franklin D. Roosevelt's experimental New Deal stood close to the coveted center in American politics with enemies on both the left and the right of the political spectrum.

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<sup>105</sup> For a sample of this right wing literature see Elizabeth Dilling, *The Red Network: A "Who's Who" and Hand Book of Radicalism for Patriots* (Chicago, published by the author, 1935); and the more recent John A. Stormer, *None Dare Call It Treason* (Florissant, Missouri: Liberty Bell Press, 1964) especially chapter 12 "Economics and Government," 182-199.