

# Iowa Farm Price Revolt

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## FARMERS' RESISTANCE EMBRACED VIOLENCE

The Milk Strike and the Farm Holiday were essentially contemporary movements in Iowa in 1932 and 1933. Although it began later, the Milk Price Strike ended earlier than the Farm Holiday. The Milk Strike may be considered as the most enigmatic of the farm revolts. It differed from the pattern of the "Cow War" or Farm Holiday in that there was little disturbance and, although of short duration, it successfully achieved the end sought by the participants. . . . The Milk Strike quickly reached its solution by direct action and was the only one of the farm movements to do so.

It is difficult to treat the Milk Strike as an individual unit, for many of the persons who picketed the roads were members of the Farm Holiday movement. Both groups were attempting to gain the same end, but the milk strikers were not members of the Farm Holiday movement. There is no positive proof that they did not participate in the Holiday after the Milk Strike had reached a solution, but nominally they were not members of the organization.

The actions of the Milk strikers and the Farm Holiday adherents were at times indistinguishable and the members of each organization often picketed side by side on the same highways. Nevertheless, the movements were distinct and separate. The Farm Holiday, led by Milo Reno, had as its purpose the increase of all farm produce prices. The Milk Strike, with J. W. Reck of

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Sioux City as president of the organization, was designed solely to bring about a rise in the price of milk in the Sioux City area. It did not attempt to organize other areas, nor was it meant to portray a general state-wide reaction. It attacked Sioux City and Sioux City alone. However, this fact did not stand out in sharp relief to many observers. One was unable to tell at a glance which of the men picketing the highways into Sioux City were members of the Farm Holiday and those who represented the Milk Producers Association.

Milk prices, as all farm prices, dropped steadily in the years following World War I, and in the early thirties the drop was staggering. "In the early fall of 1927 corn sold for 97.7 cents a bushel with butter at 40.3 cents a pound. Compared with this the latest prices from Chicago at the time of this writing are 33 cents for corn and 19.5 cents for butter."<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing statement very succinctly explains the plight of the milk producer with butter at 19.5 cents per pound. The difficulty of the dairymen was further explained by a report in the *Sioux City Journal* of August 11, 1932, which stated ". . . leaders of the strike movement said they had been delivering milk at a cost of two cents a quart and they could no longer afford to do so."

The price of one cent per pound<sup>2</sup> which the farmer received for his milk placed him in the position of getting a smaller return for his product than the cost of producing that product. Obviously, this state of affairs could not long continue, as the milk producers would soon become insolvent. The farmer was then left with several choices:

1. He could attempt to cut the cost of production.
2. He could attempt to raise the price received by him for his product.
3. Or finally, he might declare a state of bankruptcy and go out of business.

The latter choice was out of the question, since farm-

<sup>1</sup> G. Bohstedt, "A Cow Worth Keeping Is Worth Feeding," *Successful Farming*, Vol. 30, November 1932, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 15, 1932, p. 1.

ing is not only a business but a way of life. Of the two remaining choices, the lowering of the cost of production was to the farmer an utter impossibility. Thus he was left with only one alternative, to raise the price received for his product. As soon as the farmer arrived at this decision, through whatever logic he used, the milk strike became an actuality, needing only a specific form.

By the logic of his position, the Sioux City distributor was unwilling to agree to an increase in price without an acceptable reason. The low price paid to the farmer was to him an acceptable reason, but to the milk distributor that price was a normal process of business. From this divergence, the strike followed methodically and inexorably.

#### DEMANDS OF THE PRODUCERS

August 10, 1932, marks the beginning of the Milk Strike, for on that date a committee representing the producers of the Sioux City area called on the distributors of that area and demanded an increase in price.<sup>3</sup> The distributors were given until six p.m. to meet the demands of the committee.<sup>4</sup> Arrangements had been previously made for a meeting in Continental hall in Sioux City for the purpose of reading the answer from the distributors.<sup>5</sup> At the meeting held at eight that evening, the reply as expected was a negative one and the five hundred farmers assembled felt forced to take direct action in the form of a strike.<sup>6</sup> The Sioux City Milk Producers Association then became a functioning body with a vital cause. The organization immediately issued the following statement:

Owing to the fact that milk distributors at the present time are not giving the producers a just and equitable share of the consumer's money, we, the undersigned milk producers, hereby agree to be guided by the Sioux City Milk Producers Association in the disposal of our milk and in the event that

<sup>3</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 10, 1932, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 11, 1932, p. 18.

any drastic action must be taken and we are forced to sustain loss, we agree not to hold the association responsible. We also agree to donate a fee of 50 cents membership.<sup>7</sup>

To this point, the Milk Strike was a separate movement. Soon, however, the action of the strikers merged with and became indistinguishable from that of the Farm Holiday movement and in the violence that followed it was impossible to determine which group was responsible.

The roads to Sioux City were immediately picketed by the milk producers and it took only a very short time for the farmers to realize that not all dairymen supported the picketing. Almost immediately trucks attempted to crash the blockade set up by the strikers and at a point where desperate men met desperate men, each believing that his livelihood depended upon his actions, it was inevitable that persons would be injured and property would be damaged.

The first violence came only four days after the beginning of the strike. A group of four hundred farmers dumped a load of milk on the highway near Kingsley, just across the border of Woodbury county.<sup>8</sup> A youth named Jack Shot, age 19, showed a bullet hole in the windshield of his car which he claimed was received while attempting to run the blockade near Sergeant Bluffs.<sup>9</sup> At LeMars, pickets surrounded the Wells dairy and at least one truck had its windows smashed.<sup>10</sup>

The sheriff of Plymouth county offered the Wells dairy truckers passage through the blockade, but only a few accepted the offer.<sup>11</sup> Many were either in sympathy with the strike or valued their property and bodily health far too highly to jeopardize their safety. In any case most of the employed truck drivers were unwilling to run serious risks, although some of the farmers attempted to break the blockade.

<sup>7</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 11, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 15, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, August 16, 1932, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## SHERIFF TRIED TO UPHOLD LAW

The sheriff's office of Woodbury county soon realized the urgency of the situation and was firmly determined that law and order were to be preserved. The office authorized the immediate hiring of one hundred unemployed men to act as peace officers.<sup>12</sup> This group was divided into patrol units and sent out on the roads. Orders were issued for them to allow peaceful picketing, but barricades could not be erected to stop the trucks. Unless the trucks could be prevented from entering Sioux City, little would be gained by the strike. One hundred deputies were not enough to cope with the combination of the Farm Holiday and the Milk Strike and, therefore, the strike could not be broken at this point. Truckers hauling milk from Hull found that fact to be true, much to their sorrow, for two of them were cut and bruised in an attempt to run the blockade.<sup>13</sup>

Normally six hundred trucks entered Sioux City in the course of a day, but the combination of the two striking groups caused that number to decline to the total of twelve daily.<sup>14</sup> Though this was a tremendous drop in receipts, the milk shortage in the first few days of the strike never approached the acute stage. The distributors, in their attempt to circumvent the strikers, turned to the railroads as a solution and milk was then brought into the city by rail, from Nebraska.<sup>15</sup> This prevented the city from feeling the effects of the strike for a short period of time, but railroad transportation was too expensive and too difficult. The distributors discovered this and found that they would no longer be able to use the railroads due to the tremendous cost. Many distributors claimed that they would be forced to shut down their plants if the strike continued. This placed the strikers in a much more favorable position

<sup>12</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 16, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 17, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

and by the 17th of August arbitration was in progress. The officers of the Milk Producers Association declared that they would soon make an announcement.<sup>16</sup> It was expected that an agreement had been reached ending the strike. For a time it seemed that a satisfactory settlement was imminent, but the pickets were told to remain on the roads until definite action had been taken.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime there were many expressions of opinion concerning the situation. J. R. Roberts, of Roberts' dairy, explained the strike in this manner: "This so-called strike has been fomented by a group of radicals and is not supported by the conservative farmers of the territory. In fact most of the farmers know nothing about it."<sup>18</sup>

The outcry of "radical" was to be expected. It had been used in the "Cow War" and was being used in the Farm Holiday. But the suggestion that the conservative farmer knew nothing of the strike was to say that the farmer did not read the newspapers, or that the five hundred men who signed the original producers' agreement were not all farmers, but all radicals. Fred Lazell of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune* staff had this to say concerning the matter of radicalism:

You cannot call these striking farmers radicals. Everyone of them is as determined that there shall be no violence as is Governor Dan Turner sitting far away on Capitol Hill, or the business man in Sioux City anxiously scanning the headlines.<sup>19</sup>

In explaining his views, Mr. Lazell called the strikers "a new type of embattled farmer." Though he made inaccurate distinctions, his analysis aptly grasped the causative issues of the strike.

There is a new type of embattled farmer on the highways here. He differs in attitude from the farmer who fought the Cow War in Southeastern Iowa last year. That farmer was

<sup>16</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 17, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 12, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 21, 1932, p. 4.

fighting what he believed, rightly or wrongly, to be an invasion of his rights. He consequently was indignant.

The Sioux City farmer is fighting a condition. It is no personal battle, nor one against an intangible enemy. It is a battle against low prices.<sup>20</sup>

Though the "Cow War" had as its instigating factor the testing of cattle, it was really the reaction towards an economic condition felt to be no longer bearable. The same economic condition which was a base for the "Cow War" was also a base for the Milk Strike and the Farm Holiday. Such distinctions as Mr. Lazell was able to draw were superficial compared to the deep economic distress that pressed down upon all the protesting farmers.

#### POLICY OF THE STRIKERS

Headquarters for the strikers was officially established on August 12, 1932, in the Union Labor building of Sioux City, where all business was transacted. E. T. Connors, secretary of the Milk Producers' Association was credited with the following statement concerning the opening of the offices:

Our purpose in opening an office here, Mr. Connors said, is two-fold. All official business of the association will be transacted here. It will serve as a medium for bringing our members into direct contact with representatives of authorized relief agencies, hospitals and orphanages for the purpose of furnishing milk to them free of charge.<sup>21</sup>

The provision for charitable service served to show the frame of mind of the strikers. They did not intend to have the needy suffer due to the strike. In addition to supplying orphanages and hospitals with milk deemed necessary for operation, they also established free milk depots in various parts of Sioux City. No established fee was set up, but donations were gratefully accepted. The depots were located at Peter's park, Fairmont park, Coles addition, the Wall Street Mission, Crescent park, Fourteenth and Jackson streets, Ninth and Court streets, and Twenty-second and Jennings streets.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 12, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 12, 1932, p. 1.

This was in keeping with the policy of the strikers. The strike was designed to force the distributors to raise prices. It was not intended to cut off all available milk for the needy consumer.

The arbitration which had been inaugurated almost at the beginning of the strike failed to arrive at a conclusion. The authorities of the city were soon pressed to prevent any further picketing of the roads.<sup>23</sup> The Chamber of Commerce offered its facilities to the governor to aid in halting the blockade of the city.<sup>24</sup> Though their facilities naturally would be limited, this offer placed the Chamber of Commerce in the enemy camp, from the point of view of the farmer.

Not all persons in official places were against the principle of the strike, nor against its actual operation. Mayor W. O. Hayes of Sioux City defended the strikers in their attempt to raise prices. He gave as his point of view the following statement:

Neither the forces of law, nor the farmers themselves consider they are in any way challenging the sovereignty of the state. Instead they look upon the movement as an organized protest against an economic situation that to the farmer has become unbearable.<sup>25</sup>

The twentieth day of the month, just nine days after the beginning of the strike, saw a truce called. A compromise agreement between the producers and distributors was reached at the level of \$1.80 per hundred-weight of milk.<sup>26</sup> This seemed to be an equitable solution; the Milk Producers' Association was expected to accept officially the terms of the agreement and the end of the strike seemed at hand. Though the association was willing, some non-association pickets were not of the same frame of mind. About midnight of the twentieth, fifteen farmers came into Sioux City to declare that they would not abide by the agreement.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 17, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, August 19, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, August 19, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 20, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



## FARM HOLIDAY INFLUENCE

This would at first glance, seem to be a violation of the Milk Producers' Association's original membership agreement, but in reality it was the voice of the Farm Holiday being raised above the general hubbub and accenting the fact that not all the farmers engaged in picketing the roads were members of the producers association. The fifteen declared that they would continue to block the highways until the expiration of the Farm Holiday. The claim was also made that those persons who negotiated the agreement did not have the authority to do so.<sup>28</sup> Presumably those farmers felt that the only person to whom they owed allegiance was Milo Reno, president of the Farm Holiday. It was this type of action which caused the difficulty in distinguishing the Farm Holiday from the Milk Strike.

At the time of the compromise agreement, the ban on milk hauling was not revoked. Picketing was to be maintained until such time as a final draft of the contract could be presented to the members of the association. It was expected that this situation would last for only a day or two since there seemed to be no great objection to the terms of the compromise. Hence the truce should have ended the strike for all practical purposes. The agreements seemed fair and the farmers were inclined to accept them. The problems as to how the distributors were to offset the cost of the increase was the only true sore spot in the agreement and this was a sore spot only for the city dweller. As usual the consumer was to bear the brunt of the raise. The price of bottled milk was to be raised from the standard of 8 cents per quart to 9 cents per quart.<sup>29</sup> The distributors also agreed to pay an additional 3 cents per point of percentage over the accepted standard of butterfat content, which had been set at 3.5 per cent.<sup>30</sup> Under these provisions the farmers could now return to their homes. For all intent and purpose this

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

<sup>29</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 20, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

phase of the agrarian revolt had come to an end. However the fate of the agreement was in the hands of others than the farmers.

It could have been expected that the farmers might find some points in the agreement which would prevent their acceptance of it, but in this case it was the distributors who did not accept the original agreement. In rejecting the contract, presented by the producers, the distributors maintained that many items which had been agreed upon as a "gentleman's agreement" were not contained in the written contract.<sup>31</sup>

The shock of this news had little time in which to affect the frame of mind of the picketing farmers, for no sooner were the officers of the organization informed of the discrepancies than machinery was put into operation to rectify the errors. The objections of the distributors were in most cases protective as well as logical. The contract did have discrepancies and to circumvent these the distributors asked that they be revised. Among those things needing attention was the fact that the contract in no way guaranteed the quality of the milk that would be shipped, nor its time of delivery.<sup>32</sup> This, of course, from the distributors' point of view, was an important item, since their business depended upon meeting the state standards for bottled milk and meeting delivery schedules in the city. Another important item not mentioned in the contract was the amount of milk to be delivered.<sup>33</sup> The distributors felt that there should be some guarantee as to supply, for without it there was doubt of the farmers' ability to supply the daily needs. Those two items were ironed out to the mutual satisfaction of both parties concerned.

#### BASIS FOR REJECTION OF CONTRACT

Other items seemed easily taken care of, but the fly in the ointment seemed to be the lack of sufficient guar-

<sup>31</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

antee that the association was empowered to open the highways.<sup>34</sup> Previous statements have shown that the followers of Milo Reno and his Farm Holiday did not intend to discontinue the picketing of the approaches to Sioux City. Many of these men, independent producers for the most part, were inclined to continue striking until the original asking price of \$2.17 per hundredweight had been reached.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the uncompromising attitude of the Farm Holiday movement was transferred to some of the Milk strikers, who consequently rejected the contract in the belief that an acute shortage would bring complete victory.

As had been mentioned, some of the distributors could no longer operate in the face of the cost of shipping milk into the city by train. As time passed it was felt that this situation would force them into the agreement sought by the independent producers, that is, those producers not associated with the Sioux City organization. The weakness of this argument lay in the already negotiated contract of the Sioux City group, for with the members of that group under contract the Holiday adherents would lose part of their supporters in the picketing and would be confronted with the added burden of preventing the association men from marketing their product.

Regardless of these difficulties, many independent producers did not accept the contract, but rejection was not solely limited to the producers, for at least two dairies, the Hanford Produce Company and the Fairmont Creamery, refused to accept the price of \$1.80<sup>36</sup>. Their objection rested with the price of starter milk. This is skim milk used in starting the butter churning process. The price of \$1.80 seemed exorbitant for this type milk. The objection put forth by the two rebels was weak and seemed designed to delay proceedings. The contract specifically designated the amount of butterfat content to be expected in the milk. Skim milk

<sup>34</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 23, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 25, 1932, p. 1.

would not approach the 3.5 per cent content by any stretch of the imagination; therefore, the price could not be expected to apply to that type of milk.

J. E. Vogel, manager of the Hanford Produce Company, said he could not afford to pay that price so long as butter was 19.5 cents a pound on the New York market.<sup>37</sup> This would have represented a fair point of view had the milk specified in the contract been intended for butter. Actually the distributors were primarily engaged in the sale of whole milk and not of butter.

At last the strike ended, in spite of the fact that various persons involved did not accept the contract. A total of seventeen days had elapsed from its first action to its conclusion. The distributors met with the producers on the twenty-seventh day of August, in the offices of the Chamber of Commerce, at one p.m., to sign the final agreement.<sup>38</sup> The signing of the contract did not end the obligations of the strikers, for the farmers had to agree to allow only 70 per cent of the milk produced by the association members to be shipped into the city.<sup>39</sup> This was done to give the distributors an opportunity to diminish the supply that had accumulated.

The Sioux City Milk Strike was over. It was the only farm revolt which achieved a successful settlement, but so far as the majority of farmers were concerned the strikes were just in their infancy. As has already been shown, many did not accept the terms of the Sioux City agreement. It, therefore, became doubtful that the picketing would stop and indeed those fears were well-founded, for the picketing continued.<sup>40</sup>

The independent producers were adamant in their demands for a higher price. They refused to recognize the contract made by the association established in Sioux City. Their leader was still Milo Reno and until

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 27, 1932, p. 4.

he declared an end to the strike, they would continue to picket the roads.

Within the limits of the Sioux City area, that part of the revolt that was called the Farm Holiday continued in different parts of the state included disputes over the price of milk. The distinction between the two movements was not understood by many at that time.

#### MILK STRIKES AT OTHER POINTS

The Sioux City area was not the only one which attempted a milk strike, but those other revolts were either short and inconclusive or were not primarily Iowa movements, at Council Bluffs producers attempted and succeeded in a strike, but victory was due to the efforts of the suppliers of the city of Omaha, for the strike's largest phases were in Nebraska. At Des Moines producers also attempted a milk strike, but rain halted most of the picketing and the sheriff by arresting many of the picketers successfully put a stop to the abortive attempt to repeat the Sioux City action.<sup>41</sup>

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#### CORN SURPLUS DEPRESSED PRICE

In the late summer of 1932, the Iowa farmer anticipated a record production. "1932 corn crop to be largest in Iowa history. It will reach a total of 498,710,000, an average of 42.5 bushels per acre."<sup>42</sup>

The above statement would seem to be the type which would bring joy to the heart of any farmer, that is, any farmer who raised corn for a livelihood; but to the corn-raising farmer of Iowa in 1932, the above statement was perhaps the most dismal news which could have been brought to his attention. The largest corn crop, and the largest surplus of unsold corn, in Iowa history—this is what high production meant to the farmer. He was not wishing for a large corn crop; even the harsh nature of drought would have been preferable.

Why was a large crop undesirable? Why didn't the

<sup>41</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 31, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 10, 1932, p. 1.

farmer feel pride in raising such a crop? The answer is, of course, that there was no market. Corn which could not be sold was as undesirable as corn which could not be grown. The already unendurable plight of the farmer was worsened by the vast corn surplus. It was not hailed as a boon, but looked upon as a plague, and in the vanguard of this plague the Farm Holiday erupted, flourished and died.

The feeling concerning the surplus of corn may well be illustrated by this letter printed in the "Open Forum" of the *Des Moines Register* of January 1, 1933. The writer, a Mr. Charles Tapley of Sac City, said:

I noticed in a recent issue of the Open Forum that Mr. Runyon of Seymour thought it unfair to the coal industry of the state to burn corn. While I appreciate the importance of the same, I think the farm situation is so acute that we must not lose sight of that in our efforts to reduce the *unwieldy supply of corn*. Whether it pays or not, does not matter so much as getting rid of the corn for which there is no demand. If the people of the corn belt would use 100,000 bushels for fuel, it would raise the price at least 10 cents a bushel.

The farmer felt that he was forced to take action toward diminishing the supply of corn and other commodities and his course of action took life in the form of the Farm Holiday. The economic situation of the time provided the stage setting for the Holiday. In 1932, 6400 farm mortgages were foreclosed in Iowa, with 3700 to follow in 1933.<sup>43</sup> A state moratorium law did not prevent insurance companies from foreclosing two-thirds of the mortgaged farm land in the state by 1934.<sup>44</sup> The amount of tenancy increased 2.3 per cent from 1932 to 1933, due for the most part to foreclosures.<sup>45</sup>

On January 15, 1933, corn sold for 12 cents per bushel, wheat sold for 34 cents per bushel, and barley for 17 cents per bushel. Oats fared no better for they were 10 cents per bushel. On the same date, hogs sold for \$2.40 per hundredweight; beef sold for \$3.90 per

<sup>43</sup> *Plain Talk*, April 18, 1934.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Des Moines Sunday Register*, June 25, 1933, p. 4-L.

hundredweight; and butterfat for 21 cents a pound.<sup>46</sup> These figures meant only one thing to the farmer and that was bankruptcy. It was hardly possible for him to make a profit and in many cases he did not even realize the cost of production.

According to Milo Reno, president of the Farm Holiday, the value of agriculture depreciated thirty billion dollars in eighteen months, while the cost of farming did not decrease. It in fact increased.<sup>47</sup>

In 1927 an average of 6.60 pigs per sow were raised to weaning age . . . at an average cost of \$4.56 per weaned pig. In 1928 the average number of pigs weaned per sow was 6.49 at an average cost per pig of \$5.64. In 1929 the average number weaned per sow was 6.48 at an average cost per pig of \$6.11, the large increase in cost in each succeeding year being largely due to advances in the price of feed in many sections of the country.<sup>48</sup>

The cost of raising pigs had increased due to increased cost of feed; yet the farmer was receiving a lower price for his product. This seems and is contradictory. The farmer was forced to do something drastic to alleviate this situation. The action taken was the farm strike, or as it is commonly called, the Farm Holiday.

#### FARM STRIKE IDEA BORN

The idea of a farm strike did not come suddenly to the farmer. It had begun to germinate as early as 1927.<sup>49</sup>

If we cannot obtain justice by legislation, the time will have arrived when no other course remains than the organized refusal to deliver the products of the farm at less than production costs.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the refusal to deliver the produce of a farm is not a strike in the accepted sense of the word, but it is the only term which effectively describes the course of action followed by the farmer.

<sup>46</sup> *Des Moines Register*, January 23, 1934.

<sup>47</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 25, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous, "For Profits Every Pig Counts," *Successful Farming*, Vol. 30, (March 1932), p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> Jay N. Darling, "The Farmers' Holiday," *New Outlook*, CXLI (October 1932), p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

From 1922 to 1929, the farmer had endured economic hardships which were not felt in the rest of the country until 1930. He had experienced eight years of this prior to the general depression and was now at the end of his resources. As the "Cow War" of Tipton came to an abrupt end and the forces of government had made no attempt to alleviate the economic situation, the farmer decided that his only hope lay in direct action.

The use of the term Holiday as a description of the farmers' strike, was made as early as February of 1932. Fifteen hundred Boone county farmers, members of the Farmers' Union, pledged their support for preliminary steps toward calling a "farmers' holiday."<sup>51</sup>

February was, of course, much too early in the year to speak of holding produce from the market, but the seed of revolt was planted and the movement soon began to develop. By May of that year, the idea of the movement had spread to all parts of the state and on the third day of May, twelve hundred farmers gathered at the fairgrounds in Des Moines, for the purpose of hearing Glenn B. Miller, president of the Farmers' Union. Miller had invited the Union and its friends to a mass meeting for a discussion of Hoover's program and the possibility of a farm holiday. Milo Reno was elected chairman of that meeting.<sup>52</sup>

Until this time Milo Reno had made his appearance on the farm scene on several occasions. Because of his prominence in the Farm Holiday Movement, more should be known about this man who eventually became leader of the last farm revolt. He was born on a farm in Wapello county, Iowa, on the fifth day of January, 1866. He was the seventh son and twelfth child of John Reno. The family name is believed to be a corruption of the French name, Renault. Reno was trained as a minister, though he never served in that capacity. For many years he had been active in

<sup>51</sup> Milo Reno: *Farmers' Union Pioneer* (Iowa City, Iowa: Athens Press, 1942) p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, May 3, 1932, p. 1.



the Farmers' Union and other organizations designed to aid the farmer. At the outbreak of the Farm Holiday, Milo Reno was sixty-six years of age.<sup>53</sup> He was not a young hotblood or a novice, for he had been in the public eye most of his adult life. To embark upon the career of strike organizer at his age was a feat which required vigor and a belief in ideals. Reno's acceptance of the leadership of the Holiday Movement was made with unqualified fervor. All his energies were directed towards the success of the venture and the failure of it may have been due to many factors, but not to lack of enthusiasm on the part of Reno.

#### BANKS TOOK A HOLIDAY

The depression years were filled with strikes of printers, shipyard workers, bricklayers, and workers of all other types of occupations. Even some of the banks took a holiday. In Henry county the banks stated that they were undergoing an emergency period. They therefore:

1. Prohibited the withdrawals of funds on time certificates of deposit and savings accounts deposited before February 1, 1932.
2. Limited withdrawals from checking accounts or demand certificates of deposits to 1 per cent of the amount as of January 30, 1932.
3. Refused payment on checks drawn in violation of these resolutions.<sup>54</sup>

These Henry county banks demanded obedience to the resolutions for the purpose of weathering the emergency period. It did not occur to the bankers that the farmers' plight was not less serious than theirs and had been such for a longer period of time. "Why," the farmers asked, "should we not strike?"

The Rev. Stoddard Lane, of the Congregational church of Des Moines, toured the farm areas and quoted statistics to emphasize his deep concern for the farmer:

In 1932 . . . the farmer constituted 22 per cent of the national population and received 7 per cent of the national in-

<sup>53</sup> *Milo Reno, op. cit.*, p. 19ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

come. In 1932 farm buying power was 50 per cent of pre-war buying power.<sup>55</sup>

The farmer and some of his friends were aware that something had to be done and quickly, if he were to salvage anything from his economic wreckage. Milo Reno also gave his views concerning the farmers' position, shortly after calling the first Holiday:

For 12 long weary years we had petitioned congress for legislation that would correct the situation, only to be refused. Promises were made, only to be broken until the farmer, discouraged, broken-hearted and bankrupt, has come to realize that he is at the parting of the ways and that if his rights as an American citizen and an independent owner and operator of a farm are restored, it will be by his own efforts.<sup>56</sup>

It was determined at the Farmers' Union meeting of May third that a committee of resolutions would be formed to investigate the Farm Holiday idea and enlist the aid of other farmers. In the succeeding months, organizations were formed in most counties and by August Reno felt that he could call a strike, since he was chairman of the organization by virtue of the May appointment.

The first farm strike was scheduled to begin on August 8, 1932, and to continue for thirty days. The object of the strike was to secure an increase of farm prices and the method to be employed was to withhold all farm products from market until prices equalled the cost of production.<sup>57</sup> The strikers were to be members of the newly organized Farm Holiday Association of Iowa. Not all members of the Farmers' Union took part in the strike and not all members were in agreement concerning the method to be used, but those persons who believed in direct action were the ones who joined the organization which eventually became known as the National Farmers' Holiday Association.

#### RENO BECAME NATIONAL LEADER

Reno, who was chairman of the Iowa group, was

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>56</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 25, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Darling, op. cit.*, p. 18.

elected president of the national organization at a meeting held in Des Moines on August 15, 1932.<sup>58</sup> Reno probably was elected president because of his previous record as a supporter of the farmer in his distress. After his election, the directors of the organization issued the following statement concerning their position:

The farmer has been bankrupted by present ruinous low prices and by uncontrolled marketing methods and in self preservation has been forced to withhold his products so as to secure his just demand, the cost of production.

The Holiday Association through its officers opposed the use of violence but stands back of its program to withhold products until the farmer secures cost of production.<sup>59</sup>

Meetings were held in various communities of Iowa to explain the Farm Holiday Association. In Harlan, one thousand farmers listened to Jesse B. Sickler, of Ogden, explain the movement. Committees were appointed in each township to solicit farmers and urge them to withhold their produce and appoint pickets. Meetings were held with businessmen and elevator operators for the purpose of enlisting their aid.<sup>60</sup> Produce was to be kept from the market by all contracting farmers except those who were in dire need.

The organization also drew up a program to be presented to the governor. Its main provisions called for:

1. A moratorium of three years of payments of Federal seed and feed loans.
2. A moratorium of two years on all real estate loans and an extension of the same length of time for the redemption period on mortgages already foreclosed.
3. A demand on the part of the governor that congress take immediate action to increase the amount of money in circulation to such an extent that the price level would be raised to that of 1926.<sup>61</sup>

The significance of this action was not lost on all members of congress, for Senator Smith W. Brookhart of Iowa urged a special session of congress for the pur-

<sup>58</sup> *Des Moines Tribune*, August 15, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 16, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 8, 1932, p. 1.

pose of enacting farm legislation. He maintained that the farm strike showed need of it.

#### SIMPSON'S DICTATORIAL TENDENCIES

The impact of the worsening situation may well be shown by a statement of John A Simpson, national president of the Farmers' Union. As the presidential campaign of 1932 reached its peak, he directed this comment toward the candidates for office:

Unless the president elected November 8, gives farmers relief, he will be the last president of the United States. Failure to provide such relief will leave one of two results; a dictator will be established or a revolution to ameliorate the situation will sweep the country.<sup>62</sup>

Simpson claimed that President Hoover had discriminated against the farmer when he stood in opposition to the Frazier bill, which was designed to make loans available to farmers at an interest rate of 1.5 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

J. N. Darling maintained: "At no time were the cities seriously inconvenienced due to the strike. It never disturbed or interrupted urban life,"<sup>64</sup> but there were many who were inconvenienced. There were many who were disturbed, and others who were physically injured. To those citizens who took part in the activities of the Holiday, it was no small reaction. It was a strongly voiced protest which was heard in all parts of the country.

The farmer took a holiday in the years 1932 and 1933, but the holiday meant longer hours, harder conditions, and a disruption of life's ordinary proceedings. The farmers' holiday was much more strenuous than the mere tilling of the soil. It was a holiday from conservatism, from inaction, from comfort and from security.

#### EARLY VIOLENCE DEVELOPED

Following the calling of the strike, picketing was started almost immediately on the roads into Sioux

<sup>62</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 9, 1932, p. 1.

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

<sup>64</sup> Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

City and Council Bluffs. Unlike the Milk Strike, however, this picketing was designed to cover the entire state and eventually the entire midwest. The history of the violence is in the record of many small incidents scattered over the entire state. Some of the incidents were more disastrous than others; some were so minute as to merit no mention.

Some semblance of steady picketing had been established by the middle of August, and, in the following days as tempers grew more ragged, violence increased throughout the state. Sioux City was a hotbed of activity. The Milk Strike had paved the way, perhaps. The farmers were out in force on the sixteenth of August. Six truckloads of livestock, destined for Sioux City, had managed to evade the pickets and in their attempts to keep produce from the markets the pickets followed the trucks and raided the stock pens in the city.<sup>65</sup> Twenty-five police officers and twenty deputy sheriffs were necessary to prevent any serious damage.<sup>66</sup>

Deputy Sheriff Fred L. Yock knocked down three farmers with his fists as they attempted to prevent a truckload of cattle on the highway from reaching Sioux City.<sup>67</sup>

In northwestern Black Hawk county, the manager of the Benson Creamery refused to close the plant during the strike and subsequently had his cream dumped upon the ground. The men responsible for the action wore masks.<sup>68</sup>

As the strike proceeded, the hog market at Sioux City dropped 25 cents<sup>69</sup> and for a time it seemed that the idea of a strike was having a reverse effect upon the price of farm produce. As the strike continued, the farmers appeared to realize that spiked logs and thrasher belts across the roads were bound to cause

<sup>65</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 17, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 24, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 18, 1932, p. 1.

damage and in some cases they substituted flags in an effort to stop the trucks,<sup>70</sup> but flags proved a poor substitute for a barricade. Barricades did stop at least one person. A man named Harvey Harrison had his leg broken when his truck struck a barricade of timber and woven wire near Washta.<sup>71</sup> This was the first serious physical injury of the campaign, but injury and property damage were to become an integral part of the strike and it was not expected that a mere broken leg would halt the pickets or their opponents.

The results of the picketing around Sioux City soon became apparent. The hog receipts began to decline tremendously. On Friday, August 19, the receipts were 874 head as compared to 3497 head for the Friday of the previous week.<sup>72</sup> The receipts on Saturday were 500 head as compared to the previous Saturday's 1200 head.<sup>73</sup> The blockade was beginning to affect the hog receipts, but the possibility of maintaining such a blockade was still a question.

The forces of law and order were hard pressed to maintain peace on the highways. Sheriff Percy Lainsen of Pottawattamie county, after attempting to rescue five trucks held by picketers, stated, "I am going to keep the highways open if I have to deputize a regiment."<sup>74</sup> At this point in the strike, a regiment would indeed have been required.

#### TRAINS ALSO HALTED

Highways were not the only means of travel which felt the force of the strike. Railroads received their fair share of the violence, as no means of access to the cities was to be slighted. Two trains were halted in this early phase of the strike. The first was a Milwaukee line passenger train, which was halted eighteen

<sup>70</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 21, 1932, p. 4.

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

<sup>72</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

miles from Sioux City on August 22.<sup>76</sup> The other train was a Northwestern Railroad freight train, which was halted at Moville, on the same date.<sup>76</sup> There was no other violence connected with the halting of trains, but the very act itself constituted a federal crime. United States Attorney A. C. Epperson of Omaha declared that the stopping of trains was in restraint of commerce and he warned that federal action might ensue.<sup>77</sup> . . .

In the Council Bluffs area, three of the main roads into the city were blocked by 10:00 p.m. on the twenty-second of August. The sheriff's office had asked the picketers to give their oath that no violence would be committed and he warned the strikers that they would be arrested for obstructing the highways if they did anything more than wave at trucks in their efforts to halt them.<sup>78</sup> At least one hundred pickets halted a number of trucks, but allowed them to pass after issuing a warning that they should not carry produce.<sup>79</sup>

Sheriff C. F. Cross of Harrison county warned Clifton Savery, county chairman of the Holiday movement, that he would be held responsible for any violence the pickets engaged in.<sup>80</sup> Savery, realizing the responsibility this placed upon him, immediately asked the farmers to go home. He said that it was too much responsibility for one man.<sup>81</sup>

The farmers, of course, accused him of "selling out" their cause. Savery then denied that he was the leader of the movement in that area and, when accused of being the leader, he said, "I wash my hands of the entire mess. The strikers are beyond my control."<sup>82</sup>

Legal authorities of the stricken areas soon authorized reprisal action. Three special deputies clashed

<sup>76</sup> *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 23, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 25, 1932, p. 9.

with a group of Holiday adherents on Highway 34, one mile south of Council Bluffs.<sup>83</sup> The claims and counter-claims concerning what actually took place were as varied as the number of men participating in the action. The strikers claimed that the deputies had used tear gas in an effort to disperse the picket group. They also claimed that the deputies had fired without provocation,<sup>84</sup> while the deputies claimed the reverse. The harshness of the action would not have been so great had it not been for the fact that in the group of pickets fired upon were a number of women and children.<sup>85</sup> They were part of the group which was gassed and could easily have been injured by a flying bullet. The only actual damage done to either side was the breaking of a window in the car of one of the deputies. Some of the pickets had managed to throw a railroad tie through the window.<sup>86</sup>

#### SHERIFF UPHOLDS STATE LAW

Sheriff Lainson immediately ordered more deputies onto the roads. Fifty of the deputies arrested thirteen strikers who refused to leave their stations. The arrests had little effect since more pickets arrived to reinforce the depleted group.<sup>87</sup> The reinforcements were not long in joining their brothers and the following morning found forty-three pickets resting in the county jail.<sup>88</sup> Reprisals beget reprisals and the Farm Holiday men were not long in challenging the authority of the sheriff. Sheriff Lainson received a report that several hundred pickets were on their way to his jail in Council Bluffs. The report held that twenty-eight trucks and twenty automobiles were in a caravan enroute to the city, and in a short space of time the report was varified as overalled men arrived in the city. Some of the

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, August 25, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 25, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, August 26, 1932, p. 1.



automobiles they drove bore Woodbury county license plates on them.<sup>89</sup> The mob crowded around the jail, hooting and jeering the sheriff, shouting for the release of the prisoners.<sup>90</sup>

Lainson increased his force of deputies to almost two hundred men. This number included a carload of detectives from Omaha. Machine guns were set up around the jail and as the shouting and noisemaking continued the mob grew to nearly two thousand persons.<sup>91</sup> One farmer broke through the police guard and told the sheriff that the men arrested had to be released or the mob would march on the jail.<sup>92</sup> The fact that this statement was made in the face of two hundred armed deputies and a number of machine guns showed the temper of the crowd, or at least a part of the crowd. The moment was filled with explosive tension and slightest wrong move might have caused bloodshed and violence far surpassing anything which had happened or was to happen during the Farm Holiday.

The outcome of the situation rested upon the shoulders of an officer of the law. He arranged bail for the farmers in jail and released them.<sup>93</sup> Speculation concerning the outcome of the situation, had not Lainson chosen the course which he followed, cannot be indulged in here, but it was obvious that a disaster had been averted.

The release of the forty-three men signalled the dispersal of the crowd which quietly drifted away from the scene. The complete action seemed to have a negligible effect on the attitude of the pickets, for the roads to Council Bluffs were not relieved of picketing. The sheriff decreased the size of his force after the jail-house scene.<sup>94</sup> The labor unions also warned their

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

members that if they acted as special deputies they would forfeit their union cards. This order caused four men to turn their cards in to Lainson.<sup>95</sup> The sheriff then recalled all patrols from the roads.<sup>96</sup>

The Pottawattamie county grand jury decided to conduct an investigation of the picketing for the purpose of obtaining indictments on charges of robbery and larceny in connection with the confiscation of produce.<sup>97</sup> Nothing came of this investigation.

#### VIOLENCE PREVAILED A MONTH

Violence and lawlessness continued unabated across the state during the month the strike was in progress. Spencer had a jail delivery. One hundred farmers surrounded the town jail where a man named L. E. Norman was being held. He had been arrested on a charge of obstructing a public highway and had refused to accept bond on the grounds that he wished to be a martyr. Upon his release the picket lines tightened around the town, turning back all trucks. The Holiday members announced they would end the picketing when the Spencer buyers agreed to close for the duration of the Holiday.<sup>98</sup>

The sheriff of Woodbury county, John A. Davenport, arrested a group of pickets in the Sioux City area and found to his chagrin that the law did not support his arrests. One of the picketers demanded a writ of habeas corpus, which states that charges must be filed against a person or he must be released. The court ordered Sheriff Davenport to file charges in two hours. He was unable to do so because he had intended charging the men with unlawful assembly and he found that the Iowa code did not allow for such a misdemeanor outside of the corporate limits of a town or city.<sup>99</sup> So long as the strikers did not congregate within the

<sup>95</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 27, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 28, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 24, 1932, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 26, 1932, p. 1.

city limits they could not be arrested for unlawful assembly.

Close on the heels of Davenport's action, eleven Woodbury county officers were injured by strikers. The deputies were convoying six loads of hogs from the farm of William Turner, near Merville, in an attempt to reach an unblockaded market. At Cushing, the deputies were attacked by several hundred Holiday members, who used clubs and pipes to cause damage and injury.<sup>100</sup>

The headlines of the newspapers on the thirty-first of August told of the wounding of fourteen farmers near Cherokee. The farmers were wounded by shotgun fire from two automobiles, bearing nine men. The automobiles had driven to the picket group on Highway 21. Gas bombs were hurled from the cars and the pickets told to "beat it." Without warning the men in the vehicles then opened fire with shotguns and rifle. The group in the automobiles then drove to Highway 31 and repeated the process.<sup>101</sup>

The farmers were in a poor position to condemn the use of violence, since they had been the prime exponents of it to this point, but the abrupt attack upon the unsuspecting men shocked many persons. The consensus seemed to be that the men who took part in the attack were hired hoodlums or irate farmers who resented the Holiday idea. Neither case proved to be correct, though this fact was not known until the following year. Three men were indicted for the crime. One, Sheriff A. N. Tilton, of Cherokee, was placed on trial for conspiracy in connection with the attack. Two other men, Harrison Steele and Ralph White, were indicted for assault with intent to murder Paul Roepke, who was a member of the picket group.<sup>102</sup> Steele was an officer of Steele's Bank of Cherokee and White was a former police officer.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, August 30, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Cherokee Daily Times*, August 31, 1932.

<sup>102</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 12, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

## COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR LAW

The fact that police officers, sheriffs, and supposedly law-abiding citizens engaged in such activities did not excuse the farmers for their use of the same methods, but it did highlight the great emotional tension which existed during the era of farm revolts.

Though the three men were brought to trial for the crime and though the state provided fifty-three witnesses, they did not serve a jail sentence. On a directed verdict, the judge declared that the jury should find Tilton not guilty due to insufficient evidence.<sup>104</sup> The other two fought the grand jury indictment and eventually the cases were dropped.<sup>105</sup>

Anger, hatred, and disregard for law were all a part of the farm revolts, and Steele, White, and Tilton could no more be condemned for their action than could the many farmers whose actions were equally as violent. Nor could the actions of either group be condoned.

The picketing at Shenandoah won a minor victory. Fifty pickets blockaded the roads into the city and their demands were met without violence. The specific item asked for by the pickets was the use of the two radio stations, KMA and KFNF, in the town. The pickets asked the stations for three daily, five minute programs to announce their positions.<sup>106</sup> The stations agreed and the picketing ceased.

The roads leading into the city of Des Moines received a group of pickets as the idea spread over the state. Though Polk county picketing never amounted to a great deal, due to the extensive network of roads leading into the city, it did bring out the organization known as the Khaki Shirts. These ragged looking men who supposedly were the remnants of the "Bonus Army" had agreed to aid the farmers in their picketing in return for food.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *Cherokee Daily Times*, September 15, 1933.

<sup>105</sup> *Cherokee Daily Times*, September 27, 1933.

<sup>106</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 27, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> *Des Moines Sunday Register*, August 28, 1932, p. 1.

The north-south highways into Des Moines were the first picketed and also the first that reported violence. G. C. Vrooms of the Valley View farms and a group of nearly two hundred pickets clashed when the strikers attempted to halt one of his trucks. An attempt was made to force one of the trucks from the road. Vroom, who was following close behind in his automobile, rammed the pickets' cars which blocked the road, then leaped out and pulled the pickets from his truck. He later claimed to know the names of the men involved in the fracas.<sup>108</sup>

At least four trucks managed to run the blockade on Highway 65 and the sheriff's force arrested at least thirteen men in the blockading party. Sheriff Keeling deputized more men in a determined effort to keep the roads into the city clear.<sup>109</sup> The city police raided the headquarters of the Khaki Shirts at 213 East Walnut street and arrested five men as undesirables.<sup>110</sup> They had no means of support and it was doubtful that they could have remained an organization had not the farmers fed them.

Governor Turner received plea after plea for aid in the highway cleanup and though he repeated his previous stand that the law would be upheld, he also maintained that the county authorities should be allowed to deal with the situation without interference from the state.<sup>111</sup>

#### VIOLENCE NOT ENDED BY TRUCE

Milo Reno officially called off the strike on September 1, 1932. Technically this ended the picketing and violence, but in actuality disturbances continued unabated, which also pointed up the temper of the followers of Reno. The reason for the truce was the forthcoming governor's conference, which was to be held in Sioux City on September 9, 1932.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 29, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 30, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Des Moines Sunday Register*, August 28, 1932.

<sup>111</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 30, 1932.

<sup>112</sup> *Des Moines Register*, August 30, 1932.

The declaration of truce seemed to become a signal for more disorder, for at the Clinton county jail, five hundred farmers surrounded the building and demanded the release of pickets who had previously been arrested. The sheriff was forced to place men with riot guns around the jail to protect the property and hold his prisoners.<sup>113</sup>

Governor Turner, reiterated his former statement: "The highways will be kept open and mob rule will not be tolerated."<sup>114</sup> But mob rule continued and in many cases the highways were not kept open. In Pottawattamie county, one of the hotbeds of the revolt, the picketing continued in spite of Reno's orders. The Holiday men refused to obey the demand made by Reno on ground that the gains already made would be destroyed.<sup>115</sup> The county heads of the Holiday Movement were resolved to seek action through Governor Turner. Failing that they were expected to order another strike. The rank and file of the organization did not wish to wait for Turner. They felt they had waited too long — the time for action had come and now action must continue, and continue it did.

Pickets and deputies clashed on Highway 75, near Sioux City. Approximately one hundred armed Plymouth county deputies, convoying a fleet of twenty-seven livestock trucks, engaged in a skirmish with a group of pickets,<sup>116</sup> who refused to obey Reno's order. A group of sixty deputies attacked approximately thirty-five pickets on the highway near Sioux City, in another action following the truce. Clubs were used freely and several pickets were severely beaten.<sup>117</sup> The following morning four carloads of deputies answered a call supposedly from a group of truckers who were awaiting escort into the city. The deputies traveled through the picket lines to escort the trucks to

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 8, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, September 15, 1932, p. 1.

market and were unmolested, but upon their return the cars were stoned and clubbed, windows were broken and a number of the deputies were injured.<sup>118</sup> It was believed that the call from the truckers had been a ruse to lure the deputies into a trap. The whole action seemed to be retribution for the action of the deputies on the previous day.<sup>119</sup>

#### MIDWEST GOVERNORS CONFERENCE

The governors of the Midwest met in Sioux City on the ninth day of September, 1932. The group included the governors of Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Illinois, Wyoming, Montana, and personal representatives of the governors of Kansas and Texas.<sup>120</sup>

The farmers in the Sioux City area converged on the city. They hoped that by a show of numbers they would be able to impress the governors of the seriousness of their predicament. A farm embargo was their hope. If the governors accepted this proposition, it would destroy the need for the Holiday Movement, but would be much more effective. The hope soon was shattered as Governor Green of South Dakota stated the stand of the group:

We most emphatically do not favor any embargo on farm products, but we do hope that the conference can work out a plan whereby a voluntary holding movement can be made effective in an effort to boost the price of farm products.<sup>121</sup>

The farmers were not in agreement with this sentiment for they had previously experienced the lack of cooperation in a voluntary movement. In response to Governor Green's statement, five thousand farmers staged a parade through the streets of Sioux City asking for a legal boycott.<sup>122</sup> . . .

The final action was a list of proposals which were sent to President Hoover. The list included: tariff revisions, a sound money expansion, a reduced rate of

<sup>118</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 16, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>120</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 9, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 10, 1932, p. 1.

interest on farm credits, and an immediate moratorium on foreclosures.<sup>123</sup> Suggestions of what was needed to aid the farmers were many, but the details of how such a program was to be put into effect were not worked out.

The significance of the tariff proposal was not to be overlooked, for high tariffs had been consistently supported by the agricultural element in American politics . . . Only a time of great trouble could have caused a change in the attitude of farmers concerning the tariff, and the era of the farm revolts was such a time. The idea of monetary expansion and controlled inflation was an old one with the farmers, but it was obvious to many observers that inflation was a two-edged sword and could very easily get out of control.

After the meeting Gov. Dan Turner refused to declare a statewide embargo on farm products and also refused to employ martial law to aid the farmers in maintaining such an embargo.<sup>124</sup>

The action of the governors did nothing to halt the Farm Holiday. It left the door open for a continuation of the program and Milo Reno announced a general cessation of deliveries of milk, livestock, and grain.<sup>125</sup> There was to be no organized picketing, but observers were to be maintained on the highways to report any violation of the principle.

It was announced that President Hoover would make a pre-election speech in Des Moines and Reno used the opportunity to urge all farmers to join a parade upon the president's arrival. He felt that this was the only method by which to reveal to Hoover the truth concerning conditions in Iowa. Reno concluded his order by making the statement that the farmers had only one power left, the power "to fill their bellies."<sup>126</sup>

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(Later phases of the Farm Holiday movement, as portrayed by Mr. DiLeva, will appear in a future issue of the ANNALS.)

<sup>123</sup> *Sioux City Journal*, September 12, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 11, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 19, 1932, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Des Moines Register*, September 22, 1932, p. 7.



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