

331
T365p

Thomas, Norman Mattoon
The plight of the share-cropper.

The Plight of the Share-Cropper

By

N O R M A N T H O M A S

INCLUDES

Report of Survey

made by Memphis Chapter L. I. D.
and the Tyronza Socialist Party
under the direction of

WILLIAM R. AMBERSON

T E N C E N T S

THE LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY
112 EAST 19TH STREET • NEW YORK CITY

JOIN NOW

The League for Industrial Democracy

THINKS

WORKS

WRITES

for A NEW SOCIAL ORDER
BASED ON PRODUCTION FOR
USE AND NOT FOR PROFIT

Chapters and Lecture Series in Leading Cities ¶ *Student Groups in 150 Colleges* ¶ *Radiocasts Over NBC Network* ¶ *Books, Pamphlets and Monthly Magazine* ¶ *Research Services* ¶ *Conferences and Seminars*

ITS OFFICERS FOR 1935-36 ARE:

President, ROBERT MORSE LOVETT

Vice-Presidents

JOHN DEWEY

ALEXANDER MEIKLEJOHN

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

MARY R. SANFORD

JAMES H. MAURER

VIDA D. SCUDDER

HELEN PHELPS STORES

Treasurer, STUART CHASE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

NORMAN THOMAS

HARRY W. LAIDLER

MARY FOX, *Executive Secretary*

DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARIES

ANNA CAPLES

BERNARD C. KIRBY

L.I.D. Lecture Series

Chicago Office

MARY W. HILLYER

DAVID LASSER

*Executive Secretary,
New York Chapter*

*Workers' Committee on
Unemployment*

JOHN HERLING, *Executive Secretary*

Emergency Committee for Strikers' Relief

THE LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

112 East 19th Street
New York City

1936

20 W. Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Ill.

The Plight of the Share-Cropper

By

NORMAN THOMAS



INCLUDES

Report of Survey

*made by the Memphis Chapter L.I.D.
and the Tyronza Socialist Party
under the direction of*

WILLIAM R. AMBERSON

The League for Industrial Democracy

112 East 19th Street, New York City

FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION OF
"PLIGHT OF THE SHARE-CROPPER"

It is a satisfaction to learn that the interest in the pamphlet, "The Plight of the Share-cropper," grows and continues to an extent to warrant its publication in a second edition. The facts as stated in the pamphlet stand, but time most emphatically has marched on since the pamphlet was written, and time has been crowded with events.

Today there is an interest in America in the problems of the share-cropper which scarcely existed at the time the pamphlet was written. There is a gallant and exceedingly hopeful organization of agricultural workers, the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, with locals in Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma and, to a less extent, in three other states. It numbers some 23,000 members. Alabama also has a share-croppers' union with an heroic record of struggle against persecution and actual murder. This union is on friendly terms although not in organic union with the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Its story and a summary of events up to February 1, 1936 are told in a postscript to the pamphlet.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

COPYRIGHT, 1934

by the

LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

112 East 19th Street, New York City

Manufactured in the U.S.A. by the Marstin Press, New York

The Plight of the Share-Cropper

By NORMAN THOMAS

17537 Comp 152
S
SOONER OR LATER any search among the millions of exploited Americans for those most truly forgotten, to whom the advance of a machine age has meant the least, will bring you to the country where cotton is still king, a king who rewards his humblest subjects and his most loyal workers with poverty, pellagra, and illiteracy. I have seen much of the misery of city slums and something of the poverty of mountain farmers and the dreary little towns which coal barons or textile manufacturers own. In none of them is life on the average so completely without comfort for the present or hope for the future as among the share-croppers of the South. Schools, hospitals, and labor unions, in varying degrees and in their own ways, have meant something in these other communities, but almost nothing to the plantation workers in the cotton country. The New Deal did at least give the order to take the children out of Southern textile mills. It has done nothing for the children of the share-croppers. It is a question whether even the migratory fruit, vegetable, and cotton pickers of the Western coast or the beet sugar workers are worse off in respect to diet and educational opportunity for the children. I have seen a California tent school set up on the borders of a camp of striking cotton pickers in the San Joachim Valley, and I have seen a great area in Arkansas where the schools were first consolidated and then busses for collecting the children were dropped in the interest of economy!

But comparisons in degrees of exploitation and misery are unprofitable. The important thing for our purpose is that workers in the cities, and the American public generally, should know something of the plight of the share-cropper, the effect of the New Deal upon him, and in general what tenant-farming means at its worst.

Tenant farming is, of course, not peculiar to the cotton country. It is an outstanding problem of American agriculture, though one would never guess it by any measures yet taken by the Govern-

ment for the relief of farmers, or indeed from the proceedings of such national farm organizations as the Grange, the Farm Federation or even the Farmers' Union. Today more than half the fertile lands of Iowa are tenant-farmed. Even the practice of paying rent in shares of the crop is by no means confined to the cotton country. But share-cropping as the prevailing method of land tenure and cultivation is peculiarly characteristic of the cotton states of the South including Texas and Oklahoma. It is to be found in tobacco and sugar-cane country, but it presents itself most impressively as a social phenomenon on the cotton plantations.

Who is the share-cropper and what is the system under which he works? He is a man who owns, on the average, as near to nothing as any man in the United States. He has no mule, no farm tools, no land. He may possibly possess a dog or a cow or more often a few scrawny chickens. He has nothing but the labor of himself and his family. Usually he farms a twenty to thirty acre tract, part of a plantation which may run from a couple of hundred to thousands of acres in size. The landlord stakes him, or, in local parlance, "furnishes" him. That is to say, he supplies seeds, a mule, tools, and food, directly through his own commissary or by arrangement with some merchant. Of course the landlord also furnishes the house, usually a shack of the meanest possible description. The share-cropper with his family then do all the work of planting, raising, and picking cotton. For this he gets at the end of the year half the price which the landlord receives for the ginned cotton. The tenant has nothing to say about the time or the place of the sale of the cotton he has grown. Out of his half he must repay all the advances that the landlord has made him through the company or plantation owned store. Moreover the landlord or the store keeper does the figuring, often times, as the tenant will tell you, with a "crooked pencil." If the tenant is illiterate it is hard for him to check up on this reckoning and often, especially if he is a Negro, he dare not protest.

A share-cropper may live on the same plantation all his life and acquire no rights outside the terms of his contract. He has no such

rights as peasants had acquired, even in the middle ages under feudalism. In England, notoriously a country of landlordism, the tenant farmer has, by law and by custom, rights and dignities unheard of in the cotton states. If a share-cropper makes any improvements in the house he lives in or on the place they are the landlord's without compensation the minute the share-cropper moves. No wonder, then, that the average tenant makes no improvements and that he is frequently on the move in the hope of bettering himself. As a partial check on this continual turn-over of labor, landlords make it a rule not to take a share-cropper who has not paid up his debts on the last plantation where he lived. This, of course, means peonage, even for the white tenant, a peonage made deeper and more inescapable if the tenant is further disadvantaged by being a Negro and therefore, in the dominant opinion, a member of an "inferior" race.

What this means to the individual and the community is fairly apparent even to the superficial observer if he will use his eyes at all. Cotton country is not all of one pattern in climate or physical conditions but its villages wear a common mark of poverty. In the rolling country of Georgia or Alabama the soil has long since been mined out. What cotton has not taken out of the soil the rains have washed away. There are few drearier sights in the world than the old cotton fields in January or February. On gentle slopes corrugated by the rain the land cries aloud to be restored again to the white pine forests which once it bore, but instead, along in March, broken down mules, yes, and broken down men, must prepare the land again without the benefit of fertilizer or at any rate of enough fertilizer, for another crop so small as to mock the labor of citizens of "the richest country in the world." But then these share-croppers aren't really citizens. Many of the white ones are disfranchised as effectively as the Negroes by the poll tax. Except in years of unusual good fortune they subsist on food that nourishes not men, but pellagra. Even on the rich Mississippi bottom lands or the fertile plains of Texas conditions are but little better. The telephone poles in Eastern Arkansas carry advertise-

ments of a malaria cure. Men, women, and children bear on them the marks of insufficient food or an unbalanced ration. To see a share-cropper moving with all his goods—no more than a few rickety chairs and a bed and his children piled into a rickety wagon—is to make one wonder whether he is still in the land of the airplane and the skyscraper.

How many are there of these share-croppers? In the ten principal cotton growing states of the South there were, in 1930, about a million and a half. The following table shows the different classes of farm operators.

CLASSES OF FARM OPERATORS IN TEN PRINCIPAL COTTON GROWING STATES IN 1930—WHITE AND COLORED COMBINED

State	Full	Part	Tenants		All	
	Owners	Owners	Managers	Cash	Others	Kinds
North Carolina	115,765	25,680	648	9,237	128,378	279,768
South Carolina	45,515	8,955	693	18,270	84,498	157,031
Georgia	70,596	9,206	1,400	27,533	146,857	255,598
Tennessee	109,853	21,673	611	12,216	161,304	245,657
Alabama	75,144	15,228	603	48,707	117,713	257,395
Mississippi	77,382	8,665	999	27,103	198,514	312,663
Arkansas	72,597	16,412	684	14,981	137,730	242,334
Louisiana	46,893	6,260	755	12,886	94,665	161,445
Oklahoma	53,647	24,067	823	17,598	107,731	203,866
Texas	152,852	37,663	3,314	16,874	284,786	495,489
Total 10 States	820,244	173,815	10,466	205,385	1,402,176	2,612,086

Source: Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Vol. II, Part 2, the Southern States

It must be remembered that this table applies to all types of farming and that the tenant farmers who do not pay in cash are well over 50% of the total for all types of farming. It has been estimated that over 60% of cotton farmers are share-croppers. The individual or corporation owning a great plantation may lease some land for cash to a tenant who will himself farm part of it and sublet another part of it to a share-cropper. Sometimes the tenant will be a man who has his own mules and tools and pays the landlord, not in cash, but with a quarter of the crop. If he "furnishes" the share-cropper he collects 50% from him, passing on, of course, 25% to the landlord.

Now let us see in a little more detail how the share-cropper lives.

His year begins in March at which time he signs or accepts a contract, the general nature of which I have already outlined. I have seen a contract in use near Tyronza, Arkansas, which contains provisions making conditions even more stringent and unfavorable to the share-cropper. Curtis A. Betts, a staff correspondent of the *St. Louis Post Despatch*, in an article published in that paper on March 11th succinctly summarizes some of these additional features.

"The owner reserves the right to employ any extra labor he deems necessary and charge its cost to the cropper's account.

"The cropper agrees to furnish the necessary labor to keep ditches open, to pay ten cents per acre for maintaining roads and ditches on the plantation, and to pay a supervision and management fee, which custom has fixed at ten cents on the dollar of advances at the store. The latter is not a ten percent interest charge, as none of the advances is for a period of as much as a year. Some may be for only a few weeks." The Amberson Committee's Survey (see Part II) actually discovered a case where an advance of 25 cents on the dollar was charged although settlement was made the next day. In this case the charge was at the rate of over 9,000% interest!

On this basis what does a share-cropper get in November or December when his crop is sold? Around Tyronza, in the rich bottom lands, the crop runs, as many farmers told me, about one bale or 500 pounds to the acre. But this, they said, was exceptional. Mr. Betts reports the average in Arkansas as 188 pounds to the acre. The average price at the end of the 1933 season was nine and four-tenths cents per pound. Mr. Betts works this out in terms of the income to a farmer working twenty-five acres. He would produce, on the average 4700 pounds of cotton, the sales price for which would be \$441.80 of which the share-cropper's half would be \$220.90.

But theoretically the share-cropper, under the terms of a contract which the Government made with his landlord, was obliged to plow under 40% of this land or eight acres. He made a crop then, only on 17 acres which means that for his share of the crop he got only

\$150.00. Theoretically, however, he got, in addition to this, half of the money paid to the landlord for cotton plowed under. This half would amount to another \$60.00 which would make the total annual income of our average share-cropper for 1933 \$210.00. (Please note that I emphasize the word *theoretically*. For reasons which will later appear we are not justified in assuming that the reduction of acreage was 40% or that it was evenly divided, or its benefits equally shared among tenants by landlords.) Assuming that in Arkansas the average share-cropper got \$210.00 for his work in 1933, he was somewhat better off than in 1932, when the price of cotton got down to five cents a pound. *This \$210 is for a whole year's work not of the man alone but of the entire family.* Even children six years old help with the picking, if not with the chopping or hoeing of the cotton.

Against this \$210.00 that the average farmer got along in December had to be charged all his advances at the company store and the other extras already referred to. On the remainder, the farmer and his family had to live until late February or early March when the new contracts were signed and new advances begun. A share-cropper near Tyronza, whose yield was far above the average in the state, and whose cash income was therefore between \$375.00 and \$400.00 instead of \$210.00, reported that after settling his bills he had less than \$100.00 to support his family of six through the entire winter.

This matter of income is well brought out in the Amberson report published in this pamphlet. There it will be seen that there was not a uniform reduction of acreage and nothing like a uniform enforcement of contracts, themselves loosely drawn, which the Government made with the landlord and presumably with the tenant and share-cropper. Hence there were variations in income. The Amberson report fixes the average income, on the basis of a study of some 300 cases, at \$262.00 for the entire year. To reach this sum it estimates the rental value of a shack, usually unfit for human habitation, at \$50.00.

In cases where the contract provisions were honestly carried out

in favor of the share-croppers they were probably a little better off than the year before. At least this is the opinion of Professor Calvin B. Hoover of Duke University who, following the charges which I, among others, made concerning the plight of the share-croppers under AAA, was asked by the Agricultural Department to make an independent study of the problem. He writes: "While the percentage of increase in cash income which a share-cropper receives is thus far less than that of the land-owner, it is nevertheless true that the cash income of the share-cropper has not been reduced if the provisions of the contract are actually followed, but is instead increased somewhat." This, be it noted, is the best that can be said for the attempt to restore prosperity by the return to scarcity, in so far as the man who does the real work of cotton farming is concerned.

The share-cropper then, is a man who raises cotton but cannot possibly afford proper underclothes for his children or sheets and towels for the family. He lives in the country but rarely has what most farmers would regard as a decent garden. A St. Louis social worker, at the time of the great migration of Negro workers from the plantations to the cities, told me that it was a common thing to find Negro women who did not know what so ubiquitous a vegetable as the carrot was or how to cook them. In his admirable book, *Human Factors in Cotton Culture*, Dr. Rupert Vance gives various tables showing the consumption of food. The range in different parts of the South and in different years is considerable. Recently some valuable educational work has been done on the diversification of crops and the use of vegetables. Nevertheless, Dr. Vance writes: "In tenant areas during hard times the cotton farmers' diet tends to be restricted to the 'three Ms', meal, molasses, and white meat." White meat means an inferior order of pork or bacon. Medical studies show that this diet is pellagra producing.

The houses match the diet. A "reasonably good" shack has two rooms and a lean-to. It is unpainted and often the roof leaks. There is the most primitive sort of out-house and a dug well. It goes without saying that windows are unscreened and the yard around

the house is a hot little patch of dirt. The amusements, the religion, and the culture, which go with this economic condition are about what one would expect. The conditions under which cotton is cultivated mean long hours of monotonous labor from plowing time to picking time or about eight to nine months a year, with nothing much to do or any money to do it with during the months of leisure.

This system of land tenure and cultivation and the way of life which goes with it have a long history behind them. As Dr. Vance points out, the Colonies, particularly the Southern Colonies, were founded on the plantation system. The King granted the land originally to some proprietor or great scale landlord. The idea was contagious. Before the Civil War cotton was a crop cultivated on plantations by Negro slaves. The war freed the slaves without giving them a foot of land on which to make a living. The United States did far less for her freed men than at about the same time Russia did for her serfs. After the war the land owners had the land but no money to hire labor with cash. Negroes and poor whites had no money to buy land. Hence the transition from slavery to share-cropping was natural as it involved little outlay in cash. There was a time in the 'seventies when a break in the price of cotton, and hence of land, encouraged the growth of small farms tilled by their owners, but that period passed, and from around 1880 on, the percentage of tenantry steadily increased. So, too, did absentee landlordism.

All single crop farming country is relatively poor and cotton has been subject to many vicissitudes of weather, price, and boll-weevil. Along with the rest of American agriculture it has suffered from a high tariff policy, primarily in the interest of manufacturers—a policy which became popular in the South itself as the South got its own textile mills. This is an historical explanation for the abominable share-cropping system, nor is that system easily to be changed on any satisfactory basis into one of peasant proprietorship.

Ever since my speech in Memphis in which I criticized the system, I have been reminded in editorials and in letters that some landlords are decent and take a benevolent interest in

their tenants, that many landlords, especially since cotton, after the war boom fell to such low prices, have been harrassed men with troubles of their own and that the money they have advanced to share-croppers they also have had to borrow. But what some of the editors and my personal correspondents forget is that it does not justify a system to explain it historically, and that the landlord-tenant relation is not made right because some landlords are honest and conscientious and many landlords in recent years have been on the verge of bankruptcy. Obviously not all landlords are suffering or some of them would not be adding to their holdings as fast as are certain landlords in Eastern Arkansas.

With a curious uniformity newspaper editorials and letters from landlords speak of the share-cropper system as "the best and fairest" that can be devised in the cotton country. It is a type of defense similar in tone to the old defense of slavery. One of the men who has used it in writing to me is none other than Mr. Oscar Johnston, manager of the Delta and Pine Mine Company plantation at Scott, Miss., and a high official in the enforcement machinery of AAA. The Amberson committee gives Mr. Johnston credit for administering the contracts on his own plantation better than in other cases studied although even here they found a reduction in the number of families employed. Yet, however conscientious an official Mr. Johnston may be, his enthusiastic support of the old system does not argue much of a New Deal in cotton growing.

A typical defense of this indefensible system is voiced by *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*; it would appear from its editorial argument that share-croppers are "shiftless," otherwise they would buy the land and fix up their homes. An extreme form of the argument runs to the effect that what the Negro gets is plenty good enough for him and probably also for the white share-cropper. Here again, the whole tone of this argument is reminiscent of old arguments in support of slavery. A Government investigator who white-washed conditions near Tyronza called upon the most active Socialist in town and requested that there be "no more complaints or disturbances," adding this word of advice to the Socialist who runs

a small dry-cleaning establishment: "The landlords are all your friends and these share-croppers are a shiftless lot. There is no use of being concerned about them as they really don't count. They are here today and gone tomorrow." No wonder then, that in most of the cotton country to try to organize these share-croppers, especially if they are Negroes, is regarded by the dominant class much as the same class would regard a servile insurrection in a slave society. Yet as a matter of fact the share-cropper is a human being, neither more nor less shiftless than the system makes him, and conceivably his very lack of landed property may make it easier to organize him, despite his present individualism, in support of the cooperative commonwealth.

Unquestionably the share-cropper is waking up and the Roosevelt Administration's agricultural policy is partly responsible for it. It is manifestly impossible for any long period, by any device to reduce cotton production and to retire 40% of the cotton acreage from use for cotton without driving an immense number of share-croppers off the land or changing their status on it. Already under the voluntary agreement the tenant got the little end of the deal. The government's contracts gave him inadequate protection and the contracts were enforced, if at all by county committees, recruited from the owning class or their sympathizers from which of course Negroes who are almost entirely share-croppers were excluded. The same situation is bound to prevail and may indeed be intensified under the Bankhead Bill for the compulsory reduction of the crop. This is the way the matter has worked out and will work out.

In this statement I am not dealing in generalities however logical. It is supported by the careful inquiry of the Amberson committee and also in substance by Dr. Hoover's report, to both of which documents I have previously referred. The Amberson committee was set up by the Memphis chapter of the League for Industrial Democracy and a local of the Socialist Party in Tyronza, Arkansas. It was headed by Professor William R. Amberson of the Medical School of the University of Tennessee. The report is so valuable a document that it is published in full in this pamphlet.

It entirely bears out the contention that there will not be a 40% reduction in acreage without driving a large number of families off the land or reducing them to the status of day laborers at 50 to 75 cents a day without any right even to such miserable "advances" as the share-cropper gets. The Amberson report illustrates the dubious honesty with which acreage reduction was carried out and the still more dubious honesty and the inequality with which its alleged benefits were passed on to share-croppers. You who read it will certainly find no reason to think that compulsory reduction, under the Bankhead Law, a reduction still sweetened by government subsidy, will be more honestly carried out. What, however, is immediately to the point is the conclusion of the Amberson committee that "at least 15%, and probably 20%, of all share-cropper families have lost their opportunity to make a living on the land by the only labor which they know." It is precisely this that Mr. C. A. Cobb, chief of the cotton production of AAA, and his associate Mr. Oscar Johnston, denied when I first made the charge that there were wholesale evictions and reductions of share-croppers to the even more precarious plight of day laborers.

The matter could be temporarily helped a little if the Government contracts were more strictly drawn with fewer loop-holes, such a loop-hole, for example, as the provision that the landlord shall "*in so far as possible, maintain on this farm the number of tenants and other employees.*" (italics mine.) Still further help would come if the enforcement committees were not of the landlord class or if the share-croppers had organization or money enough to invoke the help of the courts even on the basis of an unsatisfactory contract. But, in the long run, important as is action by the Government for the better protection of share-croppers and organization of share-croppers to help themselves, the compulsory reduction of cotton production will mean the removal of literally hundreds of thousands of families from their normal employment without as yet any other work remotely in sight.

What I have been saying about the effect of the law is born out by certain conclusions which Dr. Calvin B. Hoover reached in

his independent study made at the request of the Agricultural Department. I quote:

"1. There have been a considerable number of cases in which tenant farmers have not received the full amount specified by the 1933 cotton contract.

"2. The operation of the acreage reduction program creates a motive for reducing the number of tenants on farms. The acreage reduction contracts have within them provisions designed to prevent this motive having effect but the system of enforcement of these provisions has been inadequate.

"3. The percentage of the rental payments paid to share tenants and share-croppers for land withdrawn from cultivation in accordance with the 1934 cotton contracts is less than in other contracts.

"4. The way in which the 1934 cotton contracts have been drawn has produced considerable confusion in the classification of types of tenantry. Upon this classification the division of benefit payments by Government between landowner and tenant depends."

Assuming that the Department of Agriculture will want to do what it can to remedy concrete evils how far can it go and how far will it go especially when one remembers that the supporters of the share crop system are historically members of the party now in power. I shall not attempt to answer all the question in detail but some things are clear:

It is quite obvious that so desperate a situation of poverty and exploitation admits of no easy cure, indeed I cannot see that it admits of any cure at all, under the price and profit system of capitalism.

There are certain immediate things of importance that can and should be done. The Secretary of Agriculture should not only make the most stringent possible regulations to see to it that at least the half of the benefits of not cultivating the land, to which half the share-cropper would have been entitled had he cultivated the land, should go to him. If the present status quo is to be frozen into

law for a year's experiment that status quo should also include a definite provision for the experimental period to keep all the present share-croppers on the land and to restore to the land those who have been driven out by the policy of eviction which we have reported.

In enforcing the Bankhead Law and any other pertinent legislation and regulations under it, the Secretary of Agriculture should do three things: (1) He should himself take the initiative before the courts to enforce by law all contracts and provisions for the protection of the share cropper. (2) He should see to it that representatives of the share-croppers, Negro as well as white, are on whatever local boards are set up. In the past all local enforcement authorities have been recruited from the landlord class and its sympathizers. (3) He should definitely encourage organization of the share-croppers in their own interest. This is far and away the most important protection the share-croppers can have now or in the future. The most friendly official cannot present organization to these forgotten men on a silver platter; it can be achieved only by their own struggle in the face of bitter opposition. But conceivably the Secretary of Agriculture can do much to smooth the way for organization. This organization to be effective must be of white and Negro share-croppers together.

Beyond this the share-croppers are bound up with the fate of agriculture in general and cotton culture in particular. They are now the principal victims both of an abominable system of land tenure and the lack of effective demand for cotton in a world which needs far more than it can afford to buy. Tomorrow they may be the victims of the mechanization of agriculture which has been long delayed in the cotton country. One trembles to think of the immediate effect of the sudden introduction of a successful and economical mechanical cotton-picker. It would effect the lives of millions of workers as could no political revolution. Yet this final application of machinery to cotton culture cannot and should not be indefinitely delayed. There is no virtue in compelling whole families, down to five year old children, to indulge in such arduous and monotonous toil as cotton picking, if and when, machinery can

do it better. There are enough other and better things for human beings to do in a properly organized society. These other and better things will be in the field of industry rather than in agriculture because there is more room for expansion in the field of manufactured articles which men need and desire than in the provision of food stuffs and cotton. The profit system can never manage this shift in occupations without enormous suffering nor can it indefinitely stabilize a backward and inefficient method of cotton culture for the sake of those engaged in it.

With the problem of mechanization, Tomorrow can deal. The problems of landlordism and limited markets Today must face. Bad as landlordism in the cotton country is, it would not be a satisfactory solution simply to divide up the plantations among the working farmers. The peasant culture of Europe has shown itself far more responsive to Fascism and nationalism than to the ideal of a federation of cooperative commonwealths. Superior as a genuine peasant culture is to the plight of the share-cropper it is not good enough for today's needs and it is too late to try to apply it in the dominion of King Cotton. Ideally, share-croppers should be assured security of tenure of their homes and the lands they cultivate, but the ultimate title to land should be vested in government as the agent of society. The cotton cultivator should belong to a cooperative which would get the benefit of expert guidance and a comprehensive plan. The exact degree of collectivism in agriculture which may be wise is likely to vary with different crops, and possibly with different soils, climate, and social backgrounds. It is not necessary to envisage a ruthless application of the factory system to farm lands in order to assert the necessary social control. This control may be brought about, among other ways, by the principle of expropriating the rental value of the land by a land value tax; it can be carried on through the encouragement of cooperatives. Under it those who love farming as a way of life may, if they desire it, dwell all their days in their own homes. Indeed the amount of functional control necessary in agriculture, planned for use and not profit, will be less rather than more than will be re-

quired under the Bankhead Law which can only be enforced for any considerable length of time by turning the army of unemployed into an army of snoopers.

It will be clear from what I have been saying that the case against the Bankhead Law is not a case for returning to the bad old days under which a system grew up which seemed to honest men to justify so extraordinary a measure for an enforced return to scarcity as the Bankhead brothers persuaded Congress and the Administration to accept. It is, as we have seen, not likely to be any more successful than the so-called voluntary reduction of acreage in controlling the size of the cotton crop, or if it is successful it will be at a terrific social price. Yet the fault lies less in this extraordinary piece of legislation than in the dilemma in which agriculture and especially cotton production finds itself under the price and profit system of capitalism, and a nationalistic capitalism at that. It is true enough that there is not, today, a market for all the cotton that America can produce in terms of any reasonable reward to workers. Yet this lack of market is not due as yet to the fact that the world does not need more cotton. Clearly if it were not for the poverty of immense sections of mankind plus the further handicap of well nigh prohibitive tariff barriers against trade, there would be an immense demand for cotton, and the United States would not have to fear the competition of cotton culture in the Soudan or certain provinces of Russia and of India. Cotton growers must be particularly interested in that choice between economic nationalism and internationalism or some reasonable compromise between them, which Secretary Wallace has rightly insisted America must make.

What Secretary Wallace has not explained with equal clarity and vigor is the tragedy of an American domestic market, supposedly glutted with cotton at a time when the average use of cotton in the homes of America works out at a little over eleven pounds per capita each year. This means a little over nine pounds in finished goods.

Suppose you try an experiment. Count up how many articles

of common household use and wearing apparel are made of cotton. The list would include underclothes, shirts, overalls, many kinds of dresses, some cloth suits in which cotton is mixed with wool, towels, sheets, pillow slips, curtains and many kinds of rugs. Now weigh up these articles and see how few of them make nine pounds per capita. Then consider the growing industrial uses for cotton and answer for yourself how true or how false is the statement that America has an over-production of cotton. It has over-production only in terms of effective demand, not of need.

Capitalism and its price system were both born of scarcity. We shall never overcome the economy of scarcity and truly accept the economy of abundance until we think not in terms of what people can now pay, but of what collectively we might have in terms of our needs and our resources. This is a principle which we have begun to apply to a greater or less extent in supplying ourselves with roads and water and our children with schools. It is the principle which must be applied to economic production and distribution. A degree of social control which is dangerous, hurtful, and of doubtful success in guaranteeing private profits to individual owners or producers may logically become a blessing and an emancipation when applied by experts under a system of social ownership in order to produce for use and not for private profit.

It is to this conclusion that we are compelled to come when we face the impossibility of finding any cure for any of our great economic ills under capitalism. It is certainly a conclusion which provides the only real answer or condition of answer to the wretched conditions of those forgotten men, the share-croppers, who are probably worse pinched and starved in all that ministers to life than any large class of American workers, except, perhaps, those who are chronically unemployed. For these men Socialism is the answer and the specific remedies suggested in the Amberson survey or in this pamphlet are at best but steps along the road.

PART II

REPORT OF SURVEY

*made by Memphis Chapter L.I.D. and
the Tyronza Socialist Party under
direction of Wm. R. Amberson*

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE COTTON ACREAGE REDUCTION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The authors of the 1934 Cotton Acreage Reduction Contract, foreseeing the possibility of economic and social disorder in connection with the operation of their program wrote into the document a section which was presumed to be a sufficient charter for the defense and protection of the rights of agricultural laborers. This section states that the producer shall "endeavor in good faith to bring about the reduction of acreage contemplated in the contract in such a manner as to cause the least possible amount of labor, economic and social disturbance, and to this end, insofar as possible he shall effect the acreage reduction as nearly ratably as practicable among tenants on this farm; shall, insofar as possible, maintain on this farm, the normal number of tenants and other employees; shall permit all tenants to continue in the occupancy of their houses on this farm, rent free, for the years 1934 and 1935, respectively . . ."

In spite of several ambiguities, and two loopholes, the general intention of the government is clear. It is proposed to maintain the status quo on the cotton farms for the years 1934 and 1935. Insofar as the number of employees and the conditions of their labor are concerned. All persons previously engaged in cotton culture, down to the humblest share-cropper, are to be retained, and are to share in the benefits which it is presumed will flow from the expected increase in price. Less labor on the part of all is to lead to an increased economic security for all.

We are not at present concerned with the validity of the basic assumption that by such an economy of scarcity the ills of our depressed agricultural populations can be rectified. Suffice it to say that the members of this committee entirely and absolutely dissent from any such proposition, and believe that the whole program is unsound. We are here concerned, however, in the study of the actual operation of the program in the field, and with an analysis, however rough and preliminary, of some of the major social effects as seen particularly in the lives of the tenant farmers

and share-croppers, who constitute at least 90% of those affected by the program.

Our conclusions are based upon a survey of about 500 tenant and share-cropper families in the states of Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi. Further data has been secured in a study of transient farm families now resident in the city of Memphis as a result of eviction or dispossession from the land which they formerly cultivated.

A study of this type must obviously encounter very great difficulties. Essential records, such as the base acreage figures for the 1928-1932 period, chosen for the purposes of calculation of 1934 acreage, and so specified in the contract, have not been available to us. Few share-cropping families have held the same land continuously over this period, and it seemed useless to attempt to assemble data by personal interviews with them. We have determined, therefore, the acreage planted in 1933, before the plow-up, and are able to compare the acreage for this year with that held last year. For the whole United States the original 1933 planting, 40,929,000 acres, is only about 3% less than the 1928-32 average of 42,174,000 acres. For the states involved in the present survey about the same percentage holds. These figures are from the reports of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The share-cropping population is constantly shifting about from one plantation to another, and its tenure of land has been short and uncertain. These people are probably the most depressed body of workers in America, exhibiting grave cultural, moral and intellectual deficiencies. This report will indicate that a considerable section of them, contrary to the intent of the government, are now reduced to an even lower plane than before, and, in many cases are being denied access to the land, and to the only labor that they know, and are capable of doing. In the midst of much uncertainty this fact stands out clearly, and will constitute the major thesis of this report.

In the sections which follow we will first of all assemble all of our data in a general survey. We will then consider portions of the data, and in particular will attempt to analyze the situation on a group of plantations, each one separately. Violations of the letter and spirit of the contracts assume so many different aspects that each plantation presents a separate problem.

THE PLANTATION SYSTEM

No evaluation of the present situation is complete without a description of the arrangements by which, since the Civil War, the share-cropper, the tenant, and the plantation owner have proceeded to work together.

The plantation system antedated the war, and that great conflict was responsible for the elimination of chattel slavery but the economic system which superceded it is not so very different from, and in many respects distinctly worse than, the pre-war slave society. Emancipation immediately severed most of the cultural ties which bound the slave to his white master, without conferring upon him any economic independence to match his new political enfranchisement. As a result vast sections of the colored race have never risen above the cultural level of the slave, and the lower classes of white labor, forced to compete with the ex-slave for economic opportunity, have been forced to remain on his level of existence. With the onset of the depression both groups of these agricultural laborers have been forced down and down, into an even lower existence.

The psychology of the slave-owner has survived on many a plantation, and the modern riding-boss does not differ very much from his prototype of ante-bellum days. On some plantations a vicious system of fraud and intimidation has replaced the older system of direct ownership of human workers.

The outlines of this system may be briefly sketched. With the beginning of each new season the share-cropper, having nothing to offer but his own manual labor, and that of his family, arranges to "make a crop" with some plantation owner, or, frequently, with some other person, a tenant or renter, who has contracted for a portion of the plantation. In either case the share-cropper, having usually exhausted his meagre returns from the last crop, must depend upon "furnishings" supplied by his renter or plantation owner. In better years these advances, made against the growing crop, were sometimes in cash, but all too frequently they were made only in kind, and consisted in credit at a store, usually one owned by the plantation owner. At the present time cash furnishing has practically disappeared.

Such a scheme might conceivably work out fairly well, were it not for the fact that human greed, unrestrained by social controls, has all too often used these arrangements to enrich the plantation owner and his agents at the expense of the workers in the fields. It has become the almost universal custom in the commissary stores to charge an extra profit on credit business, often resulting in prices which are up to 50% above cash prices in the same community. In addition to this original mark-up, a flat 10 cents on the dollar interest is charged upon all furnishings when final settlement is made. This interest charge, when calculated on a yearly basis, amounts to at least 25% more. Some plantation owners, not content with this tremendous margin, charge 15, 20, or even 25 cents on the dollar. We have the settlement papers on one case in which the last "furnish"

was given on the 28th of August and 25 cents on the dollar interest was charged at settlement on the next day, August 29th. This figures out to be the incredible sum of over 9000% a year interest, on this particular transaction.

As a typical instance of the overcharging which is almost universal on credit business in commissary stores we submit the following comparative figures on groceries purchased in the second week of April in an Eastern Arkansas town, the commissary list having been secured by a cropper on credit at his supply house, the cash list at an independent store:

	<i>Commissary Price</i>	<i>Cash Store Price</i>
24 lb. Flour	\$1.05	\$0.95
Salt meat, per lb. ....	.14	.11
4 lb. lard .....	.45	.40
Corn, per can .....	.12½	.10
Salmon, per can .....	.15	.12½
5 lb. sugar .....	.34	.25

Exorbitant commissary charges are only the beginning of the game of relieving the cropper of his money. These people will tell you, half humorously, half bitterly, "the deducts got me." It is well understood that the cropper furnishes nothing but his manual labor, and that of his family. All else that he needs is to be furnished, tools, mules, seed, picking sacks, etc. Concerning fertilizer and poison there is considerable variability in agreement, but in no case is the cropper supposed to pay more than half. At settlement time, however, many of these items have a way of appearing on the sheets, charged against the cropper. The whole fertilizer bill sometimes appears, and high rents for lands used for corn or garden may be charged.

Finally, in the most unscrupulous cases share-croppers are denied any settlement whatsoever, at the season's end. Out of 338 families upon whom the figures are reasonably clear our records contain 86 cases who report that no settlement was ever made. In such a case the cropper ends the season as he began, without cash resources. Even when settlement is made cash is frequently not paid. The cropper is furnished with a supply of "dodolum" books, containing credit coupons. Such books are widely used at all seasons to facilitate the credit business of the commissary stores.

We are well aware that in justification of all these practices the plantation owner or his agents will contend that he is dealing with dishonest and unreliable people who will desert their crops at the slightest excuse, leaving him to bear the expense of finishing the harvest. There is no

doubt that many share-croppers will behave in this manner. Dishonesty begets dishonesty, and economic insecurity degrades the morals of many of these people. A vicious atmosphere has been built up through the years by long habits of double-dealing on both sides. In these last terrible seasons the class conflict has reached new depths of bitterness and distrust.

THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STATUS OF THE SHARE-CROPPER IN 1933

In Tables 1 and 2 we submit an analysis of educational data reported by some 375 families. Table 1 gives the highest grade attained by men and women in both white and colored racial groups. Table 2 gives the educational status of 665 share-cropper children now of school age.

The educational preparation of the white families is decidedly superior to that of the colored group. Colored illiteracy is nearly double that for the whites. But neither group has succeeded in reaching that level of education which is found among urban populations.

The outstanding fact about the educational data for the new generation is the high percentage of children who are not now attending school. 475 children out of the 665 are reported to be out of school. Lack of school books, clothing and shoes, failure of bus service, and closing of schools are given as reasons for this situation, which is particularly serious in Eastern Arkansas. Unless conditions are rapidly changed the new generation will be decidedly less well educated than its parents, poorly prepared though they are.

Reports of sickness appear frequently on our cards, although medical data was not particularly sought. Tuberculosis, malaria, pellagra and venereal diseases are wide-spread.

Information as to the net income of share-cropper families for the 1933 season has been collected. Our data are undoubtedly rough, but serve to establish the approximate level of economic life upon which these people exist. They usually receive, of course, a cabin or shanty to live in, rent free. Its rental value, at the most liberal estimate, is never more than \$50 a year. Many of these buildings are literally falling to pieces, having had no repairs for years. They also received their "furnish" and a cash or credit settlement at the season's end, provided, of course, that settlement is ever made.

The average "furnish" reported by 302 families is \$70.70 and the average payment at settlement comes out at \$62.30. In addition an amount must be added in for cotton picking. We can here give only approximate figures, calculating from the known productivity and average acreage, to be later discussed. Our average family raised about 10 bales, the whites

somewhat more, the colored somewhat less, than the average, and received about \$8.00 a bale for picking (50 cents a hundred for 1600 pounds of seed cotton to make one bale lint cotton). Small amounts were also received in some cases as "rebate" on the value of the cotton seed after ginning. These items add together as follows:

"Furnish"	\$70.00
Cotton picking	80.00
Settlement	62.00
Value of cabin	50.00
	\$262.00
Total value of cotton crop	\$262.00

In addition to this money there is also occasionally some income from the sale of milk and eggs. Chickens constitute the only live-stock owned by most of these families; many of them report good flocks. Very few cows and pigs are owned, and practically no mules or horses. Furniture, stoves and the like are of the flimsiest description and the value assigned is rarely as much as \$50.00. Life and fire insurance are almost never held. Out of 331 families 6 report life insurance policies, 1 reports a sick and accident policy, none have fire insurance, while 83 hold burial insurance, with policies ranging from between \$50 and \$1000, average about \$250.

Occasional odd jobs and day labor also swell the family income in some cases, but such work has recently been very difficult to get except insofar as day labor is now replacing share-cropping, in a manner later to be discussed. Occasionally government pensions are reported.

Our best share-cropper family, white, and consisting of man, wife, and six children able to work in the fields, reports a furnish and settlement total of \$950.00. Its net income may have been as much as \$1200.00.

Our average family from all sources must have received somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300. We thus see these people, representatives of a class of workers who constitute more than 50% of the population of some Southern states, existing in 1933 on an economic plane so low that its buying power was completely exhausted in obtaining the most basic necessities of life, food and shelter. But even so it must be recognized that their present predicament is no worse than that confronting thousands of industrial workers in the Southern cities, where low code wages, and part time employment are widely prevalent.

THE EFFECTS OF THE ACREAGE REDUCTION PROGRAM

A. THE "PLOW-UP" IN 1933

In making our survey we have asked each family, not only how many acres they had in cotton at the beginning of the 1933 season, but how many acres they plowed up, in fulfillment of the 1933 contract. In Chart I we give a summary of the data supplied by 378 families.

In this graph it will be observed that the plow-up affected individual families in radically different ways, from those who plowed up none to those who plowed up all. 140 families or 37% plowed up no land at all, and 18 families or 5% plowed up all their land. 98 families or 26% plowed up some land, but less than the 25% specified by the contract, 103 families or 27% plowed up more than 25%, only 37 families or 10% plowed up the agreed 25%. The total plow-up acres were reported as 1647 out of an original total of 7859 acres; the plow-up percentage is therefore 20.9%.

The sample is small, but there is the distinct suggestion that less land was actually plowed-up than was specified in the contract. Practically all of the families who plowed up no cotton at all worked on plantations which are known to have signed the 1933 contract. Graphs of individual plantations are essentially similar to the composite picture given in Chart I. There was undoubtedly a high degree of selection of land to be plowed up. We have had frequent testimony that where a whole crop was plowed under it was so handled because it was poor, and we have even had one well attested case where corn was plowed under in lieu of cotton. In some cases the "no-crop" families of the 1934 season really lost their crop in 1933, being at that time persuaded or forced into plowing up all of their cotton, where the stand was poor. In many cases the families report that no settlement for the plow-up was ever made. In a few cases families were evicted from their homes and denied all compensation.

We are aware that some selection in the land to be plowed-up was allowed by some county committees. The high degree of selection indicated by our data suggests that in all probability a worse than average sample of cotton land was plowed under in 1933.

The question may well be asked as to whether the testimony of the share-croppers is reliable on such matters as original and plow-up acreages. In a number of cases we have been able to compare the figures giving us orally by share-croppers with the written settlement sheets showing the credit allowed them for the plow-up; in all cases where we have so checked there has been a complete, or very close, correspondence on the acreage figures.

One final factor affecting our figures may be mentioned. On some plantations part of the 1933 acreage was cultivated on a day labor basis, and a large part of this land was plowed-up, instead of plowing the acres worked by share-croppers. We cannot estimate this factor quantitatively but it will appreciably raise the plow-up percentage. It was sometimes thought to be to the advantage of the plantation owner to plow-up in this manner since he could thus retain all of the plow-up payments.

B. ACREAGE REDUCTION IN 1934

In Chart II we present a graphical analysis of the data for 257 families; both white and colored, who are farming land upon the same plantation this year as last. In most cases these families occupy the same land as before; in a few cases they have been moved to another plot on the same plantation. In every case the 1934 acreage is definitely known, or has at least been definitely named by the plantation owner, or his agent.

The land held by these 257 families in 1933 comprised 4754 acres. For 1934 these families report a total allotment of 3585 acres, a reduction of 1169 acres, or 24.6% from last year. It must be emphasized that a part of this reduction is due to a change in the type of labor, from share-cropping to day labor. In spite of the inclusion of a number of such cases, the total reduction is very much less than the contract specifies. It has become very clear that the "no-crop" cases described in the next section are in good part due to violations of contract, and that the acreage reduction has not been made "as nearly ratably as possible." The families retained have not been reduced as the contract specifies, hence other families have been thrown out of employment.

We must recognize that in some cases there has appeared the phenomenon of "big acres," and that the same land, rated at 14 acres last year, and actually 14 acres, has now shrunk to 10 for the 1934 season (an actual case in which the land in question was measured by a member of this committee). Insofar as this subterfuge is entering into the problem some of our data must be in error, but the error is in such a direction as to make the real acreage reduction per family less than that which we calculate.

An inspection of Chart II will show that, out of 257 families involved only 32 or 12.4% have had their acreage reduced to within the 55-65% limits specified by the contract. 31 families, or 12.1%, have actually received more land than in 1933; 49 families, or 19.1% have the same land this year as last; 87 families, or 33.8%, have received reductions to between 95 and 65% of last year, while 58, or 22.6%, have been given less than the amount specified in the contract.

In these latter cases it must be emphasized that there is no such reduction in the total acreage on the whole plantation, as the individual family is being made to suffer. In most instances these reductions beyond the limits specified in the 1934 contract are associated with a partial elimination of the share-cropping system, and the substitution of tractor cultivation and day-labor on a large part of the plantation. This trend is very marked and will be discussed in a separate section below.

C. "NO-CROP" FAMILIES

Our records cover 103 white families and 13 colored families, who, having had crops in 1933, have been unable to keep, or get any land whatsoever in 1934. It has been one of the main objectives of this committee to determine, beyond any possibility of doubt, whether the acreage reduction program has created a new agricultural unemployment, contrary to the plain intent of the government, and both spirit and letter of the 1934 contract. We can state with authority that it has so operated, and can assert that, at a conservative estimate, at least 15%, and probably 20%, of all share-cropper families have lost their opportunity to make a living on the land by the only labor which they know. White share-croppers have had to bear the brunt of the reduction program, as we shall see.

When we first discussed this problem with the AAA officials at Washington we were assured by Mr. C. A. Cobb, Chief of the Cotton Production Section, in a letter as follows:

"No case of eviction has come to our attention that in any way involved our contract, or has been caused because of the contract, and we have no evidence of wholesale evictions for any cause anywhere."

Since that time we have interviewed dozens of families who have been evicted, or in whose hands there are eviction notices. (See special sections below for details). Many other families have been forced to move by pressure and intimidation, without service of papers. Most of these people are still living in the country, some in tents, some in abandoned houses, a few in such miserable shelters as corn-cribs and cotton houses. Many of them have drifted into the cities and towns, where they are dependent upon direct federal relief. We know of dozens of such cases in Memphis, and we have information that a similar movement is underway even to the smaller towns. Violations of contracts drawn by AAA, one branch of government, are throwing new burdens upon FERA, another branch of government, and until recently, neither branch appears to have been informed as to how its work was being affected by the other.

Practically all of the "no-crop" families on our records are white. Indeed more than half of all white families covered in this survey are

found in this group. They have lost their crops for various reasons. In most cases the acreage reduction program is basically responsible, but the high percentage of whites who have lost out is mainly due to a shift from white to colored labor, and in part to a simultaneous shift from share-cropping to day-labor. These two trends will be discussed in the following sections.

D. CHANGES IN THE CONDITIONS OF LABOR

The acreage reduction program has operated in several ways to make a radical change in the condition of agricultural labor. The chief factors in this change appear to be as follows:

1. By restricting production the program has practically guaranteed a higher and approximately predictable price for cotton raised in 1934. The risks of the new season need no longer be shared with share-tenants and croppers.

2. By throwing agricultural laborers out of employment the program has created such competition for the work which remains that many laborers are now forced to accept working conditions which are appreciably worse than they have ever heretofore endured.

As a consequence of the operation of these and other factors there is at present a strong movement toward the abolition of the share-cropping system. Such a trend has been detectable in previous years but the movement has been greatly accelerated by the acreage reduction program. From all directions we have received reports of large plantations entirely abandoning share-tenants or share-cropping, with the substitution of day-labor in their stead. (See case reports for details).

Day-labor represents a lower stage of economic existence for a number of reasons as follows:

- (1) No "furnish" is allowed at regular intervals throughout the growing season. Cash is rarely paid, but the laborer must take his pay in credit at a commissary store, at prices which are frequently exorbitant. He is given credit only when he works, and there are many periods of idleness as the crop matures. He is paid from 50 cents to 75 cents a day in Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas, for labor from sun-up to sun-down; in Missouri the usual rate is \$1.00 a day.

- (2) He has no equity in the crop when grown, and can hope to receive no benefit from the expected increase in price.

- (3) He cannot claim any part of either rental or parity payments under the 1934 contract. Indeed he is not protected in any way by that contract.

In part because of unwillingness of white families to accept farm work

on such a basis, in part because of a definite preference by plantation owners and managers for colored day laborers, many white families have been squeezed out of employment, to join the "no-crop" group. The shift from white to colored labor has often been accomplished by methods of brutality and deceit. In some instances white families have been moved out by the sheriff, on eviction writs, and replaced by colored families who are brought in on the promise of a share-crop. Once installed the latter are denied a crop, but are forced to accept day labor instead.

Our cards contain cases of white families with long records of productive labor on the same plantation, who have suddenly been cut off from all continuation of their usual farming arrangements, and either served with eviction notices, or offered day labor only. Even managing share tenants are not immune. We hold contracts so drawn that the share-tenant is forced to admit that he is not a managing tenant, and to give up his rights to rent and parity payment under the 1934 contract; he is denied all land unless he agrees thus to sign away his rights.

We have made a study of the productivity of the "no-crop" families, as compared with that of the families which have remained. In some local districts there is evidence that families have been denied a crop because the land which they held yielded poorly in 1933, and has not been rented to the government; but when a large enough group is considered we do not detect any significant difference between the productivity of "no-crop" families, and of those who have held their lands. Thus 67 Arkansas families, without a crop in 1934, produced 772 bales on 1168 acres, an average of .66 bales to the acre, whereas 111 families in the same state, who remain for 1934, produced 1183 bales on 1966 acres, an average of .60 bales to the acre. No justification for the dismissal of the "no-crop" families appears in these figures.

When we compare the performance of the two racial groups we find that 102 white families raised 1291 bales on 1846 acres, or an average of .70 bales per acre, whereas 76 colored families raised 664 bales on 1288 acres or an average of .52 bales per acre. These figures show a distinctly superior productivity for the white share-cropper, and give no justification whatsoever for his elimination from the scene.

These production indications as to the quality of the dispossessed families have been confirmed in other ways. Our investigators have frequently reported that the "no-crop" case is well recommended by his neighbors, or former plantation head. These families are frequently of obvious character and ability above the average.

We have attempted to confirm these indications of superior quality in "no-crop" cases by asking various landlords for testimonials as to the

character of the displaced workers. We have received a group of replies in which the testimony has been favorable in the great majority of cases.

All in all we are confident that the white families which have been displaced, are distinctly of superior quality in comparison with the rest of their group. In many cases they are losing out because of this very fact, either because they refuse to accept degrading conditions of labor, or because their former plantation heads do not wish to suffer the embarrassment of forcing white people into those conditions. In most cases the dispossessed white families have been given no option in the matter, and have not even been offered day labor. Undoubtedly some of our "no-crop" cases will ultimately secure day labor on the plantations, but this expectation cannot make amends for the loss of that higher economic status which, as share-croppers, they have previously held.

We consider that this whole change in the conditions of labor is in flagrant defiance of both spirit and letter of the 1934 contract. It remains to be seen whether the AAA will recognize this type of abuse. Six weeks ago members of this committee called the attention of Mr. E. A. Miller, sent by the AAA to investigate conditions in Eastern Arkansas, to the existence of the shift from white to colored share-croppers, and were prepared to lay before him a number of cases of white families evicted or dispossessed by this change. He refused to consider such a change as coming within his field of interest, and was concerned only with the total number of families on each plantation, without regard to their previous history or conditions of labor. Such an interpretation of the labor clause of the 1934 contract robs the agricultural laborer of what little defense he might originally have hoped to secure in that document.

On some plantations the shift to day labor is partial only. Thus one large farm in Eastern Arkansas has reduced the share-cropping acreage to $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres per adult worker, irrespective of the amount held last year. The rest of the farm is being operated on a day labor basis. This type of situation is responsible for most of those cases, in Chart II, where reductions in acreage of more than 40% are observed. In some cases the withdrawal from cultivation of land handled on a day-labor basis in 1933 has permitted a plantation to effect the reduction without reducing its cropper families by 40%.

E. ATTITUDE OF LOCAL OFFICIALS

We have frequently interviewed local representatives of state and federal governments. Many of these officials, including several sheriffs and deputies, have been sympathetic toward an attempt to analyze the present dilemma, and they have frequently aided us; such aid has often been given in confidence, with manifest fear of social or political reprisals if

the assistance should be publicly known. Relief administrators have been uniformly sympathetic and helpful. From some officials, and particularly from the county agents, we have had opposition and criticism, with an unwillingness even to discuss the problem. Plantation owners, with several notable exceptions, have been almost universally hostile. Many of them, long accustomed to feudal practices on their farms, take the position that no outsider is free to enter the homes of their tenants and croppers. In many cases county committees and county agents have given no aid whatsoever when appealed to by evicted or defrauded families. These agencies, are, in our experience, absolutely dominated by the larger plantation owners, and refuse even to recognize the problem. Action must come from Washington.

Members of our own group have not escaped entirely unscathed. One investigator has been jailed. Several others have suffered severe loss of business as a result of their interest; one has been forced to sell out.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

In brief recapitulation of the information contained in the preceding sections we may state that:

The acreage reduction program has operated to reduce the number of families in employment on cotton farms. In good part this is due to a failure, on the part of plantation owners, to reduce the acreage ratably among all tenants, thus forcing some tenants into the "no-crop" class. The number of these latter cases, according to our survey indications is at least 15% and probably 20%, of all share-cropping families. The keen competition for places, plus the assurance of a stabilized price, has permitted many plantation owners to eliminate the share-cropping system, in whole or in part, forcing the former share-croppers to accept day labor instead, a lower economic status. Associated with this change in the condition of labor there has been widespread replacement of white by colored labor, so that the white families constitute the great majority of the "no-crop" cases.

It is our opinion that these trends are in violation of both spirit and letter of the government's contract and program. It is seen that the labor clause of the 1934 contract has in many cases failed to protect the humbler laborers from dismissal or exploitation on a lower scale of labor. These abuses are so wide-spread that a rectification of the situation through legal action is impossible. It must now be recognized that the adoption of an economy of scarcity, through reduction in acreage and production, must inevitably lead to agricultural unemployment, particularly

when the products of the rented acres may not be sold upon the open market.

It appears to us that no contract can be drawn which will prevent this contraction in employment under such circumstances, and that the framers of the 1934 contract were exceedingly naïve in assuming that they could prevent such consequences by the insertion of such provisions as those of Section 7.

Accepting the commitment of the Administration to this program as irrevocable, at least for 1934 and 1935, we must search for ways and means to mitigate, as far as possible, the blow which is falling upon the lower classes of agricultural labor. We advance the following recommendations:

(1) That, through its representatives and county agents the Department of Agriculture examine the working conditions of all cotton farm laborers, and insist that, wherever a former share-cropper has been forced to accept day labor against his will, he be given the option of returning to his former arrangement. If immediate action is taken this trend may be reversed.

(2) That the Department assume direct control of enough of its rented acres to accommodate the "no-crop" families who should be returned to the soil as quickly as possible. Subsistence farming as a very minimum, and the development of new agricultural pursuits as a possible maximum program should be immediately considered.

(3) That in such a program it be recognized that most of the laborers under consideration are poorly prepared to work individually and independently. "Forty acres and a mule," is not the slogan to adopt. Particularly if new forms of agricultural production are to be attempted expert guidance will be necessary in a broad program of education and technical direction, preferably, we believe, in co-operative efforts involving groups of workers.

(4) For their own protection and economic education we consider that the right of these and all other agricultural laborers to organize and bargain collectively should be proclaimed by the Administration, in a manner entirely similar to the policy already adopted for industrial workers.

In conclusion we may state that our findings are in agreement with the predictions made by Powell and Cutler. ("Tightening the Cotton Belt," Harpers, February, 1934). They clearly saw most of the consequences which we have here discerned on the basis of case studies. The present report is admittedly an emergency study, designed to outline a situation

and call attention to certain major abuses. Our sample is small, but we believe it to be representative. However we can only assert that we have secured an approximately true picture for the regions covered, according to the testimony of the families which we have interviewed.

This study has been carried through by committees of the Memphis members of the League for Industrial Democracy, and of Local Tyronza, Socialist Party of Arkansas, working in collaboration with Norman Thomas, Executive Director of the League for Industrial Democracy.

Signed:

WILLIAM R. AMBERSON

CLAY EAST

HARRY L. MITCHELL

ROBERT W. O'BRIEN

JAMES McQUIRTER

BLAINE TREADWAY

CLARK WALDRON

TABLE 1
EDUCATION OF ADULT SHARE-CROPPERS

<i>Highest Grade Completed</i>	<i>White</i>				<i>Colored</i>			
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
0	14	18	32	11.6	53	40	93	19.0
1	4	1	5	1.8	9	4	13	2.8
2	8	7	15	5.5	28	14	42	9.0
3	12	13	25	9.1	45	37	82	17.5
4	23	19	42	15.2	85	38	123	26.6
5	10	14	24	11.9	25	34	59	12.6
6	17	14	31	11.3	19	28	47	10.0
7	13	15	28	10.1	9	13	22	4.7
8	21	23	44	10.0	7	9	16	3.4
1st Yr. H.S.	5	9	14	5.1	5	4	9	1.9
2nd Yr. H.S.	3	0	3	1.1	1	2	3	.7
3rd Yr. H.S.	1	1	2	.7	2	2	4	.8
4th Yr. H.S.	1	0	1	.4	2	0	2	.4
College	1	0	1	.4	1	1	2	.4
Total	142	134	276		241	226	467	

TABLE 2
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF CHILDREN OF SHARE-CROPPER FAMILIES
Children between five and eighteen years of age, of both sexes

<i>Highest Grade Completed</i>	<i>White Children</i>	<i>Colored Children</i>
0	52	56
1	65	105
2	45	59
3	49	42
4	34	39
5	30	20
6	20	20
7	18	3
8	8	1
1st Yr. H.S.	4	0
2nd Yr. H.S.	2	0
3rd Yr. H.S.	0	1
4th Yr. H.S.	1	0
Total	319	346

Of 319 white children of school age 100 or 31.3% are in school.
219 or 68.7% are not going to school.
Of 346 colored children of school age 90 or 26% are in school.
256 or 74% are not going to school.

POSTSCRIPT

The most important development since this pamphlet was first written far exceeding in significance any law, passed or proposed, has been the rise and growth of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. So much intelligent heroism has gone into the building of that union that one mentions particular individuals with hesitancy. The story of the union is told in some detail in Howard Kester's little book "Revolt Among the Sharecroppers" soon to be published. Mr. Kester does not say that he himself along with men whom he does mention like H. L. Mitchell, J. R. Butler, E. A. McKinney, and others deserve an everlasting place in labor's honor role for their leadership in this cause.

The union was begun in Eastern Arkansas in the summer of 1934. It took in white and colored share-croppers and agricultural workers on a basis of equality of fraternity. It developed moderate demands for the immediate improvement of the lot of the casual day laborers in the cotton fields and for contracts more favorable to the share-croppers. Its growth was met by a first wave of terrorism in the winter of 1934-'35. Its organizers were arrested, beaten, thrown into jail. Ward Rogers, a young Methodist preacher, who at the time was a teacher in workers' education classes under F.E.R.A. was arrested and convicted for anarchy because of a speech he made in defense of the right of these people to organize. He had previously incurred the hostility of the dominant elements of the planting class because in his adult education work he had insisted on treating Negroes like human beings. Mr. Rodgers case was defended by a brave Southern lawyer, Mr. Carpenter of Marked Tree, Arkansas, who also was able to obtain the release of some of the people who had been wrongfully imprisoned. The Rodgers case as I write is still under appeal and he is out on bail. One result of his conviction was the great increase of public knowledge of, and interest in, the plight of the share-croppers. For a time there was an abatement of the terror. The government sent an investigator, Mrs. Mary O'Connor Myer, to investigate conditions on particular plantations. It was generally understood in Eastern Arkansas that her report was a severe condemnation of

the tactics of the planters. Secretary Wallace, however, successfully resisted every demand for its publication.

The abatement of the terror was short lived. In the spring of 1935, E. A. McKinney, Negro Vice President of the Union who had gone North to plead its cause, was prevented on pain of death from returning to his little farm in Arkansas. His family fled for safety across the Mississippi to Memphis. Two young relatives whom he left in charge of the farm were shot by night riders who surrounded the little cabin while they slept and opened fire upon the house. Another Negro, a local preacher prominent in the affairs of the union, Mr. Brookins, had a narrow escape. His cabin also was surrounded by these gallant white men who show the "supremacy" of their race by riding at night. They, after the manner of night riders, without warning opened up fire on the house. The next morning 32 bullet holes were counted. Fortunately he escaped.

The small town of Birdsong, Ark., saw two meetings broken up by armed mobs of planters. I was a speaker at the second of those meetings. I was finally warned by a man who identified himself as a representative of the sheriff but who had previously acted as a member of the mob, that he could not protect me against superior force nor could he protect the innocent people in the audience. Therefore he urged me to yield to force. He admitted that nothing we were doing or saying was in any way illegal but still he advised us to yield. We got into our car and were followed by armed men all the way to the county line.

In spite of terror the union grew. It extended its activities to Oklahoma and Texas where there has been less persecution. In the late summer and early fall of 1935 it conducted a partially successful strike on some great plantations in Arkansas where it raised wages for cotton picking from 20 cents a hundred pounds to 75 cents.

By the first week-end of the new year, 1936, the union was able to hold a convention in Little Rock, Arkansas and to report 23,000 members. Its work had won the endorsement of the American Federation of Labor Convention in Atlantic City and its white and colored delegates were therefore addressed by prominent repre-

representatives of the labor movement. The convention endorsed in principle a plan for socialization of cotton lands and the cultivation of cotton by cooperatives with the advice and direction of government experts.

It was, perhaps, the very success of this convention which again intensified terrorism. The trouble began this time on the Dibble plantation. This planter stilled owed many of his tenants on account of the cotton settlement and also for their miserable share of parity payments from the government. Before these claims were adjusted he threatened to evict members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Suddenly he carried out his threat. On a cold winter's day more than a hundred human beings were put out on the road, 28 of them children under six years of age. They were given no extra clothing, no food at all, no shelter. They were even denied the right to gather firewood. They were treated as decent men do not treat dogs.

That they stood it at all is perhaps due to a long training in slavery. I have myself seen a family put out beside the road at a time when there was no particular terror. This family, a white family, told a well substantiated story which ran about as follows: Their thirteen year old daughter had been abducted by a riding boss. After about two weeks the father had recovered her and had begun legal proceedings. When he went to the local court on the day set for trial the local justice sent him home with the assurance that the planter had been in and settled matters! On arrival at the miserable cabin he called home he was beaten up by some riding bosses on the allegation that he had stolen a couple of eggs. A few days later his family was put out by the side of the road. The whole proceedings were too usual to arouse much indignation. There isn't much difference in the treatment of white and colored share-croppers except that the whites can be called Mister and perhaps that the whites are a little less likely to be shot by some planter in cold blood with complete impunity. It is this sort of background which explains how men and women and children can be put out on the road without creating something close to open rebellion.

There were, however, protest meetings held under the auspices

of the union which was determined to preserve order. Again planters broke up those meetings. At one of them two men were shot in the back. At another Howard Kester was almost lynched. No legal action was taken except that four union men were sent to jail for rioting after a trial which their lawyer was prevented from attending by threat of death. Once more the union saw that the publicity which had somewhat helped in times gone by. It is certain that not forever can these things go on without creating a condition of massacre or guerilla warfare. The responsibility for that tragedy will rest first of all upon the planters and, second, public officials from county sheriffs up to President Roosevelt in Washington, who find no way to protect the legitimate rights of Americans. Finally it will rest upon a public apathetic to such enormous wrongs. How can we expect to prevent Fascism in America when these things happen under nominal democracy and when they are justified even by preachers! It is worthy to note in passing that the pastor of the leading Methodist Church in Marked Tree, a certain J. Abner Sage, has made himself the spokesman for the planters.

The course of events which I have just described has been little affected by further developments of A.A.A. Neither A.A.A. nor the compulsory cotton reduction law, to which Senator Bankhead's name was attached, bring blessings to the share-croppers. They live on credit and get little money. Those who still had land usually found their credit was reduced because the credit goes along with the number of acres cultivated, and the number of acres was reduced. They were cheated much as before and the Federal government did little or nothing to help them. It should be made plain that this Administration is as devoted to states' rights as the strictest constructionist on the Supreme Court bench as we have discovered whenever the Administration is asked to help the share-croppers under a cotton economy which has been so profoundly affected by Federal action.

Of course the plight of the share-croppers goes deeper than the question of A.A.A. It will not be materially affected for better by the death of A.A.A. and compulsory cotton reduction. Certainly it

will not be affected for the better under the states' rights dogma to which the majority of the Supreme Court delivered over the farmers of America. The unnumbered families driven out by the cotton reduction program will scarcely be put back to work under any substitute. No substitute the government will devise can alter the relentless march of the cotton picking machine. The Rust Brothers who have perfected a machine which is bound to replace hand picking on the rich flatlands of the Mississippi Valley, Oklahoma, Texas and the irrigated country of Arizona, New Mexico and California, are by no means unsocial. They made the surprising offer to trustee their profits for the benefit of workers displaced by the machines if a labor union or cooperative would advance working capital on which it would get a limited return. They argue with force that if we know no other way to deliver men from unemployment than to make work for them why not abolish the cotton gin and let hand labor take out the seeds. That can be done all through the winter whereas cotton can only be picked in a short season. It is not the abolition of the machine but the control of the machine for human good that is required.

No such social control of the machine or of the land is envisaged in a second bill to which Senator Bankhead's name is attached. This is the bill which sets up a government fund of one billion dollars to be used to acquire land, which land is to be sold in small farms to tenants and agricultural workers. They will make repayment at the rate of interest at which the government gets this money plus a small charge for administration through a period not to exceed sixty years. The argument for such a bill is largely based on experience in Denmark and Ireland where conditions are very difficult than they are in the cotton country with the coming of the machine age. It will provide at best a subsidized peasantry which is not the way to deal with agriculture at this stage of our development. Despite the kind of unthinking liberal support which the bill has got it will be positively dangerous unless at the very least it is amended in certain particulars. These are:

1. The expenditure of government funds must be regulated so that the real purpose of the bill will not prove to be, as it probably

is today, a desire to bail out banks, mortgage companies, landlords with surplus lands by taking inferior land off their hands at a high price. The protections even in the second writing of the bill are grossly inadequate.

2. A great deal more protection must be given to the man who sets up farming under this bill. At present the only advantage he gets is the difference between the rate at which he could get money from the government and from private companies. There is also some vague promise of government help by supervision. This does not spell the difference between success and failure for the small landowner in the cotton country where small land holdings have progressively declined in the last decade.

3. There is no provision against race discrimination which is openly practiced by local committees.

4. There is no adequate provision to build cooperatives for the solution of the cotton problem rather than to try to throw it into the lap of the hard pressed small farmer.

The reader will recognize that in this running narrative of developments since the original pamphlet was written I am writing a continuing story. Even before this edition of the pamphlet is published some new crisis or new emergency may develop. But the basic facts of the plight of the share-cropper will not suddenly be changed. The history that has been written since the first appearance of the pamphlet, a history briefly summarized in this post-script, emphasizes the need of action to protect and encourage the organization of share-croppers and to end the plantation system. There is no development on the horizon that can do more than underscore and reiterate this emphasis. The average American citizen who is interested can do no single thing better than to give help and support to the Southern 'Tenant Farmers' Union its struggle. It cannot finance itself owing to the desperate poverty of the members. Funds for organization, relief, and legal action have in some measure been raised by the Emergency Committee for Strikers Relief, 112 East 19th Street, New York City, which will be glad to see that any gifts sent it are properly used for this tremendously vital and encouraging work.

NORMAN THOMAS

Publications of the League for Industrial Democracy

NORMAN THOMAS

Why I Am A Socialist (L.I.D.)	\$.03
The Plight of the Sharecropper (L.I.D.) .....	.10

HARRY W. LAIDLER

How America Lives (L.I.D.) .....	.13
America in the Depression, Supplement to How America Lives .....	.10
Incentives Under Capitalism and Socialism (L.I.D.) .....	.15
Public Ownership Here and Abroad (L.I.D.) .....	.15
Unemployment and Its Remedies (L.I.D.) .....	.25
Socialist Planning and a Socialist Program—Edited by Dr. Laidler .....	.35
The Constitution in a Changing America (L.I.D.) .....	.15

STUART CHASE

Waste and the Machine Age (L.I.D.) .....	.13
Poor Old Competition (L.I.D.) .....	.10

JOHN DEWEY

Education and a New Social Order (L.I.D.)05
---	-----

HAROLD J. LASKI—Karl Marx (L.I.D.)

Fascism, A Diagnosis of the Causes of Fascism10
---	-----

MAURICE GOLDBLOOM, JOHN HERLING, JOEL SEIDMAN and

ELIZABETH YARD—Strikes Under the New Deal (L.I.D.)

.....	.15
-------	-----

HOWARD KESTER—Revolt Among the Sharecroppers

.....	.50
-------	-----

JOSEPH P. LASH—Campus Strikes Against War (L.I.D.)

.....	.10
-------	-----

JOHN BAUER—America's Struggle for Electric Power (L.I.D.)

.....	.10
-------	-----

HELEN ALFRED—Municipal Housing

.....	.10
-------	-----

Looking Forward, Discussion Outlines, 1934, 1935, 1936

.....	.10
-------	-----

HERBERT SOLOW—Union Smashing in Sacramento

.....	.05
-------	-----

Wisdom, Justice and Moderation—The Case of Angelo Herndon

.....	.02
-------	-----

\$1.50 per 100 or

.....	.02
-------	-----

Tampa—Tar and Terror—\$1.50 per 100 or

.....	.02
-------	-----

The Scottsboro Case—The Scottsboro Defense Committee

.....	.05
-------	-----

The Truth About the Waterfront—International Longshoremen's Ass'n

.....	.05
-------	-----

WALTER WILSON—Militia—Friend or Foe of Liberty

.....	.10
-------	-----

BOOKS

NORMAN THOMAS

War—No Profit, No Glory, No Need (Stokes, 1935)	1.50
Human Exploitations (Stokes)	2.75
The Choice Before Us (Macmillan, 1934)	2.50
As I See It (Macmillan)	2.00
America's Way Out (Macmillan)	2.50

HARRY W. LAIDLER

A Program for America	2.50
Socializing our Democracy (Harpers, 1935)	5.00
Concentration of Control in American Industry (Crowell)	3.75
The Road Ahead (Crowell)	1.05
History of Socialist Thought (Crowell)	3.50

(Lower Prices for Quantity Orders)

LEAGUE FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

112 East 19th Street, New York City