

Cornbelt Rebellion: The Farmers' Holiday Association. By John L. Shover. (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1965. Pp. vi, 239. Notes, figures, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$5.95.)

From 1931 to 1933 cornbelt farmers from Ohio and Indiana westward to Nebraska were driven by the anguish and desperation of depression to a series of spontaneous violent outbursts. Professor Shover calls this the most aggressive agrarian uprising of the century. With rather less continuity than the author suggests, the Iowa "Cow War" in the spring of 1931 was followed in August, 1932, by the first Farmers' Holiday Association crop withholding action in that area where Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota come together. Early 1933 saw a widespread wave of anti-foreclosure demonstrations and penny auctions until martial law was declared in the critical Iowa counties. In the meantime, a Wisconsin milk strike produced further disorders. At the end of 1933 a halfhearted second Holiday Association strike terminated the agrarian violence.

All together these events make a dramatic episode in American history. Shover has provided a thoroughgoing and straightforward account of these disorders and has exploited their stirring human interest while maintaining scholarly detachment. He succeeds admirably in weaving together the several disjointed movements and sorting out the bewildering proliferation of organizations. The author was tireless in searching for the documentation, and he steeped himself in the locale and the testimony of survivors. A notable by-product is a detailed examination of the largely unsuccessful attempt of the Communist party to use the agrarian unrest for its own purposes.

The significance of these events is still an open question. They illustrate the severity of the depression better than statistics of hog prices at three and four dollars a hundredweight and milk at two cents a quart. Frantic rural folk who could see no relief ahead assembled to barricade the roads and dump milk. The active supporters of the movement, however, were only a very small proportion of the farmers, and this surely did not make a regional rebellion. The resort to ugly lawlessness created a national fright at the time. This speeded the application of price support programs but seems not to have had much influence upon national legislation and policy.

Unavoidably, perhaps, the author gives much attention to the noisy Milo Reno and his Farmers' Holiday Association. The association never had a membership as large as ten thousand, and it is not clear whether Reno was leading or following the farmers. This much is clear: the association and its leaders were more damaging than helpful to farmers. Irrational and irresponsible, the organization dwindled away to become the personal property of a few cranky officers who tried to deliver the remnants to the Huey Long and Coughlin crowd in 1935.

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