

Interviewer

Mr. Miller: Right - the cow testing seemed to be more of a public health issue than a . . .

Interview w/ <sup>Sen.</sup> H.R. Gross, April 23, 1979

Mr. Gross: It was also an economic issue with the farmer because if a cow that was tested reacted - the farmer was paid for a condemned animal. Many farmers did not feel that they were being properly compensated for this contribution to the health of the public. An undue burden was being put upon them ~~in cleaning up dairy herds~~. Moreover, many farmers did not believe in the efficacy of <sup>the</sup> tests. They wanted their own veterinarians in whom they had confidence but the federal government refused. And the state also refused to let them select their veterinarians. I don't believe there would have been ~~any~~ serious trouble had the farmers been given the right to select their local veterinarians.

Mr. Miller: Was Reno attempting to organize the farmers on this issue?

Mr. Gross: No. He ~~wasn't~~ <sup>was not</sup> attempting to organize ~~the~~ farmers on that issue but farmers who were not members of the ~~Iowa~~ Farmers Union became members as a result of the help that was given by ~~Mr.~~ Reno, his state officers, and the state organization to ~~the farmers~~ <sup>those</sup> involved in the "cow war".

Mr. Miller: I've seen photographs of people dumping milk, was this a part of that?

Mr. Gross: No, they didn't dump milk as a result of the testing of dairy herds. The milk was dumped for economic and financial reasons at a later time. The dumping of milk came in the Farm Holiday movement; the Reno led strike against delivery of farm products to the market places.

Recollections of the Cow War (as part of the Iowa Farmers Union)

Transcript discusses: ① Cow Wars ② Farmers' Holiday ③ Politics in Iowa ④ Politics in 1932 & New Deal

Mr. Miller: This would have been. . .

Mr. Gross: It was not a part and parcel of the. . .

Mr. Miller: This would have been 1932 or later than that even?

Mr. Gross: It's hard for me to recall precisely.

Mr. Miller: There was a great amount of difficulty around Tipton (Iowa). You were saying that there were some brothers, the Moore brothers?

Mr. Gross: Yes, ~~there was~~ two Moore brothers, their first names - I can't recall at the moment. The older of the two eventually served a very short sentence in the state penitentiary at Fort Madison, ~~It was not a long sentence,~~ perhaps a month or two. I've forgotten the amount of time. Yes, the trouble was centered near Tipton, Cedar County which was <sup>the first</sup> ~~the~~ hotbed of the so-called "cow war".

Mr. Miller: And you were covering this - on the scene?

Mr. Gross: I was with the Farmers Union at that time, but I did not cover it on a day to day basis. As I recall it, I made one or two trips with Reno to Cedar County during the outbreak of trouble. I was kept busy in Des Moines providing copy for the Farmers Union newspaper.

Mrs. Gross: I can remember the <sup>title</sup> ~~name~~ of your column, "Mustard Seeds, Thistles and Quackgrass."

Mr. Gross: The paper was published at Columbus Junction. B.H. Shearer was the

nominal editor of the paper <sup>much of</sup> I put the material together in Des Moines <sup>and</sup> shipped the copy ~~down~~ to Columbus Junction. Shearer also published the holiday movement paper and I provided much of the copy for that.

Mr. Miller: About the organization of the protest when Hoover came to Des Moines in 1932 to make a campaign address. I have read accounts from the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune not necessarily favorable to the Farmers Union. They presented the idea that the rank and file were treated much differently than those who were in leadership roles. The farmers were out shivering on the corners while the leadership were in the cafeteria at the capital getting a good meal. There seemed to be a division - the picture they were painting was that perhaps there was some political opportunism on the part of the leadership of the Farmers Union. Would you like to respond to that?

Mr. Gross: I don't recall anything of that kind, and I was at the capital the day <sup>the farmers</sup> they staged their parade through the streets of Des Moines. The farmers came in trucks and busses as well as cars. There were a few trucks with displays. For instance, they had a <sup>700</sup> ~~400~~ pound <sup>boar</sup> ~~boar~~ in a crate in the bed of a pick-up truck, and a sign on the crate <sup>I think</sup> ~~the~~ boar was worth at market prices then about 2¢ a pound. There were also trucks displaying sacks of wheat, oats, soy beans and the bankrupt prices paid for them. But I don't recall any such thing as the farm leaders sequestering themselves in the state capital while the farmers were protesting outside. I don't recall that at all. I certainly wasn't in on anything of that kind. I was out where the farmers were and in the parade.

Mr. Miller: Was the thrust of the demonstration more against Hoover than for Roosevelt? Was there a feeling that Roosevelt would some how or another be a savior to the agricultural movement in Iowa and everywhere else?

Mr. Gross: No, it was not a pro-Roosevelt demonstration as much as it was anti-conditions-as-they were. Of course Hoover was the president and they felt he had done all too little to stop the bankruptcy that was bearing down on them. This was some distance in time from the worst of the depression that was to come. In '32 it was there but the worst was yet to come.

Mr. Miller: What are your personal recollections of Milo Reno as an individual.

Mr. Gross: I admired his ability and tenacity. He was a man who could ~~speak~~ and did speak out. I'm sure that politics motivated him to some extent, but not to the extent that he would support a Democrat or a Republican simply because of party affiliation. The record of Milo Reno through the years in his support or opposition to presidents, governors, senators, members of the legislature and Congress was nonpartisan.

Mr. Miller: I am curious to know more about Reno's political feelings. I think that the fact that he was against Hoover on that issue at least has led people to believe that he was a dyed in the wool Democrat.

Mr. Gross: No, that is not true. In the land-slide national election in 1932 that swept Franklin D. Roosevelt into the presidency it also swept Clyde Herring, of Des Moines, a Democrat, into office as Governor of Iowa. And the Iowa legislature was. . .for all practical purposes. . .dominated by the Democrats.

Reno had no choice but to support both Roosevelt and ~~Herring~~, for Hoover had vetoed the farmer's cost of production legislation and Dan Turner, the Republican governor, seeking re-election, had used the Iowa National Guard to put down the "cow war" in Southeastern Iowa. I am confident that had Hoover signed the cost of product farm legislation Milo Reno and most, if not all, the militant farm leaders of that

day would have supported Mr. Hoover.

An anecdote concerning Mr. Reno and Governor Herring will shed more light on the political department of the old farm leader.

On the first day of the convening of the Iowa Legislature in early January, 1933, Governor Herring whipped through legislation providing for a bank moratorium in an effort to stop the scourge of bank failures that was taking place. It was meritorious legislation but what about the farmers, hundreds of whom were facing foreclosure or sheriff's sales of their chattels?

Within a matter of hours, the moratorium for banks and bankers, effective immediately, was approved by the legislature and signed by Herring. It was weeks later that legislation dealing with farm mortgage foreclosures was approved, and Reno was furious at Herring and the Democrats for refusing to deal with an even hand.

Then came Governor Herring's use of the Iowa National Guard in northwest Iowa to put down the rebellious farmers who were making a shambles of sheriff's sales and staging other demonstrations. Reno asked for an appointment with Governor Herring and got it. He <sup>asked</sup> ~~invited~~ me to accompany him and on the appointed day, we arrived a few minutes before the appointed hour in the reception room at the Governor's office. Then we waited for some 20 or 30 minutes.

Suddenly Mr. Reno arose, turned to Herring's secretary and told her she could tell her governor how long he had waited; that he was leaving and under no circumstances would he return. There were a few other pointed remarks, none of them complimentary. With that we walked out of the reception room only to meet outside the door, Lieutenant-Governor <sup>l</sup> ~~Nes~~ Krachel, the newly elected Democrat. Krachel begged Reno to return but the old warrior would have none of it. I left the Farmers Union about a year ~~l~~ later to become the radio news broadcaster at WHO in Des Moines, but not to my knowledge was there ever again any serious dealings between Reno and Herring. He wanted no part of the Democrat governor.

Mr. Miller: That's interesting.

Mr. Gross: He was a man of strong convictions and fearless.

Mr. Miller: What were Reno's feelings toward Henry Wallace's agricultural policies.

Mr. Gross: I don't know that I can help you too much with that. Wallace was a Democrat although he came from a Republican family. I am sure that when Wallace supported the <sup>Democrat</sup> party program for farmers he lost any support he might have had from Reno.

Mr. Miller: When Reno died in 1936 did the farmers union pretty much dissolve or was ther leadership enough to carry it on as a significant body after that.

Mr. Gross: No, it lost it's virility.

Mr. Miller: Reno pretty much was the Farmer's Union?

Mr. Gross: Yes. They believed, and I still believe, that the farmer's <sup>economic</sup> problems <sup>can</sup> only be solved through <sup>(a program of)</sup> cost of production plus a reasonable profit. There <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ no other way, and I ~~still~~ insist ~~that~~ ~~that's~~ the only way ~~that you're going~~ to maintain the family farm in this country is through ~~#~~ cost of production plus a reasonable profit. There's nothing mysterious about it, it was twice approved by Congress and twice vetoed, once by Coolidge and once by Hoover.

Mr. Miller: Yes. Were you then following the career of Gilbert Haugen?

Mr. Gross: Yes, it was the old McNary-Haugen bill that provided for cost of production. ~~There~~ <sup>There</sup> Haugen was a resident of Northwood, Iowa. *He was co-author of the legislation with Senator McNary of Oregon.*

Mr. Miller: I am under the impression that Hoover vacillated on McNary-Haugen; he was at one time for it and then turned against it, but I'm not really certain that I can elaborate on that in any measure.

Mr. Gross: It was twice passed in different years, and I feel sure that Coolidge gave it the first veto and Hoover the second.

Mr. Miller: I think in a very general sense, his reason for vetoing it were that this would have led to the necessity of dumping American grain on the foreign market which would have had an ill effect on international trade.

Mr. Gross: What have we been doing but dumping? What did we do before that but dump?

Mr. Miller: True. Well, I'm not sure that I want to get into the merits of the question.

Mr. Gross: I don't mean to elicit an argument let's say that was a rhetorical question...

Mr. Miller: I don't have that detailed a knowledge of the McNary-Haugen legislation I know that it was certainly a burning issue of the time and continued to be for some years.