Farmer’s Revolt Essay, Research Paper

DBQ 13: The Farmer’s Revolt

Farmers were once known for being able to do everything themselves. They grew their own food and sewed their own clothes. People often yearn for the old days and complain about so many people living in cities. Many farmers had to give up their farms and move to the cities, because of something that happened in the late nineteenth century.

High prices forced farmers to concentrate on one crop. The large-scale farmers bought expensive machines, increasing their crop yield. This caused the smaller farmers to be left behind. The small farmers could no longer compete and were forced give up their farms and look for jobs in the cities. The smaller farmers who stayed blamed their troubles on banks and railroads. In the 1890’s western and southern farmers came together to make up the political party called the Populist Party. Their plan was to take control of the White House; then they could solve all their problems.

The increase in crop yield caused a change in the economy, which the party set out to straighten out in 1892. On their party platform they demanded that the government take control of the railroad. The railroad was charging extremely high prices to transport grain. They asked the government to use the railroads for the benefit of the people. They also wished to set the economy straight and asked for an unlimited coinage of gold and silver at a ratio of sixteen to one and a graduated income tax. Since the increase in crop yield, this caused overproduction, which resulted in farmers having to lower their prices greatly. In 1890 clergyman Washington Gladden wrote an article called “The Embattled Farmers”. In it he blamed the ruin of the farmers on “protective tariffs, trusts…speculation in farm products, over-greedy middlemen, and exorbitant transportation rates.”

James Laurence Laughlin wrote an article “Causes of Agricultural Unrest” that was published in the Atlantic Monthly. He wrote, “the farmers, in all honesty, have attributed their misfortunes to the “constriction” in prices”, caused by lack of gold, not overproduction of their crops. He then went on to explain how that could not be possible, and we simply have produced too much wheat. Poet Vachel Lindsay wrote a poem concerning the subject, entitled, “BRYAN, BRYAN, BRYAN, BRYAN: The campaign of 1896 as viewed at the Time by a Sixteen Year Old, etc.” In it he mentioned the “Election at midnight; Boy Bryan’s defeat” which was when the Populists lost the election. He then wrote “Defeat of the wheat; victory of the letterfiles” and “Defeat…[of] the blue bells of the Rockies, and the blue bonnets of Texas, by the Pittsburgh alleys” He was simply saying that the city people had defeated them and would therefore get their way.

As the amount of crops produced increased, the prices paid for them decreased. This is shown by the graphs, “Production and Prices, 1860-1895” In 1860, only 1000 million bushels of corn was produced, and the price per bushel was about $.65. By 1895 over 2500 million bushels were produced at less than $.25 per bushel. It was the same story for cotton and wheat. A farmer wrote a letter to the editor of a Populist newspaper that read, “We will get permanent relief only when the government owns the railroad and when we have government banks where we can get money at a small rate of interest.”

All the problems and troubles of the farmers were caused by the invention of new farming machines. These machines were expensive and small farmers could not afford them. This forced them to be left behind when the lager farmers bought machines and increased crop yield. The overproduction caused a decrease in price, which in turn raised interest rates. The railroads were being greedy and had huge transportation fees. This led to the creation of the Populist Party, whose goal was to take control of the government so they could fix all these problems. They would have taken control of the railroad and used it for the people, lowered the interest rate, established the legal coinage ratio, and established a fair income tax. All of these documents mentioned simply aid as to show what exactly the party wanted, and how the economy changed, and what they would do. In conclusion, this is the plight of the farmers, and what they proposed to do about it.

Bibliography

I’m in all AP and honors courses, I have a 4.03, i play soccer and volleyball