

Guide to the Arnold Gilberts Papers, 1930-1934

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Summary Information

Title: Arnold Gilberts Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1930-1934

Creator: Gilberts, Alberts, 1895-

Call Number: Eau Claire Mss C

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Repository: Housed at the Area Research Center, William D. McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society, Library-Archives Division

Archival Locations: UW-Eau Claire McIntyre Library / Eau Claire Area Research Ctr.

Abstract: Papers of Gilberts, president of the Wisconsin chapter of the Farmers' Holiday Association, which was started in Iowa during the Depression by Milo Reno as an "organized refusal to deliver the products of the farm at less than production costs." Correspondence and minutes of meetings and conferences, 1932-1933, are mainly concerned with the farmers' strike in October and November of 1933 and with Gilberts' 1932 primary campaign on the Progressive ticket as candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives from Wisconsin's 9th District.

Language: English

Search Terms/Subject Terms

- Wisconsin Farmers' Holiday Association
- Agriculture—Wisconsin
- Depressions—1929—Wisconsin
- Elections—Wisconsin
- Farmers—Wisconsin—Societies, etc.

Biography/History

Arnold Gilberts was born in Sand Creek, Wisconsin, February 27, 1895. He received his education in

the rural schools, and afterwards attended a mechanic's school in the city of Milwaukee.

Gilberts grew up on a farm and operated it after he was eighteen years old. In 1916, he began selling and servicing automobiles, and in 1917, he entered the army, serving ten months and emerging as a sergeant.

From 1919 to 1929, he resumed his business, and from 1929 to 1931, he operated a 160 acre farm. Then he became manager of a Co-operative Oil and Warehouse Corporation at Ridgeland, Wisconsin.

In 1932, Gilberts became president of the Wisconsin Division of the National Farmers' Holiday Association, and, in September, 1934, entered the primary election for Congressman from the Wisconsin Ninth District, running as a Progressive.

The Farmers' Holiday Association came into being in 1931 in Iowa under the leadership of Milo Reno, who had been agitating the farmer's cause as early as 1927. Reno set forth the aim of the Holiday Association as an "organized refusal to deliver the products of the farm at less than production costs." The word "holiday" in the title of the organization was a sardonic reference to the "bank holiday" proposed for the business community.

A farmer's strike (withholding of farm products) was called in Iowa in 1932, with dairy farmers cooperating by withholding milk products. Violence soon broke out and Reno called off the strike. Communist agitators who had moved in on the strike tried to keep it going. Finally, a minority of farmers decided that it made little economic sense to withhold products to keep prices up and then flood the market, driving prices lower than ever.

Early in 1933, the Holiday Association put forth a more detailed program and had it presented to Congress in the form of the Frazier Bill. First, the farmers wanted inflation and proposed to get it by having the U.S. Government issue paper money in order to buy farm mortgages from the mortgage holders. The 10 billion dollars needed for this would, the farmers said, allow the present mortgage holders to pay their debts, make future foreclosures impossible, raise prices, and lower the value of the total outstanding debt. Second, the farmers wanted guaranteed cost of production for their products. They expected to get this through price fixing which would, of course, necessitate fixing of the wage level at a height corresponding to the increased price level. Third, they wanted reduction of interest rates. They proposed a system of retiring debts by paying 1.5 per cent interest and retiring 1.5 per cent of the principal yearly. Fourth, they wanted cessation of all foreclosures. This last provision led to renewed violence, especially in Iowa, where a judge was nearly lynched and martial law was declared for a time.

In May, 1933, they presented their demands to President Roosevelt who agreed to try to effect them if the farmers would not strike. The Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed May 12, 1933, and the farmers developed a "wait and see" attitude.

They waited only until September, and then committees began to meet to agree on a date for a strike. Cooler heads proposed a strike of only two days, a move which would awaken but not antagonize the public. Then the President would be pressured into calling a special session of Congress, during which farmers and laborers would hold another short strike as a demonstration. Then, if no relief was forthcoming, they would institute recall elections for Congressmen and Senators.

The strike was called for October 30, with no definite limit on its duration. In Wisconsin, the force of the strike was broken by its own leaders who called it off prematurely and then tried to get it started again in an atmosphere which had turned largely apathetic or hostile.

By 1935, the Association had lost much of its influence after becoming involved with Huey Long and Gerald L. K. Smith.

Scope and Content Note

The correspondence in the Arnold Gilberts Papers is concerned with the October-November 1933, strike end Gilberts' 1932 campaign for Congress. The minutes of meetings and conferences have to do with setting up a Holiday Association program. Miscellaneous materials include items concerning rural electrification, mortgages, farm strike agreements, and Gilberts' campaign.

Contents List

- Box 1 Correspondence, 1933, Jan. 30-1934, Sept.
- Box 1 Meetings and conferences, 1932, Sept. 9-1933, Dec. 15
- Box 1 Miscellaneous, 1930-1934, Sept. 18 and undated
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