

Agriculture by Susan B. Cohen

Farm meet resolves for open convention

Today, amidst the debris of the old "farm lobby," a new breed of political organizer armed with American System economics is determined to keep American agriculture in business.

On July 12-13 at the annual leadership convention of the American Agriculture Movement, plans were discussed and steps taken that could have a major impact on this year's Presidential election. The 120 AAM delegates from every farming state of the country resolved to open the Democratic convention in August—"to allow the convention delegates to choose a candidate capable of leading our nation and worthy of our support."

AAM President Marvin Meek announced at the convention that with labor support he would convene a press conference in Washington, D.C. prior to the convention to publicize the organization's demand for an open convention, dumping Carter, and implementation of 90 percent of parity immediately. Meek said that he would proceed from Washington by tractor to Madison Square Garden in New York City to lead a demonstration at the Democratic Convention on August 10 at 4 p.m.

The AAM delegates gathered in St. Louis against the backdrop of the most serious crisis in the farm sector since the 1920s and 1930s—a financial squeeze exacerbated by the heat wave and drought now threatening the heart of the grain belt. From its first year in office, the Carter administration and the Bergland Agriculture Department have run afoul of farm producers. In 1977 Secretary Bergland toured

the country publicly blaming the serious cash-flow crisis in the farm sector on producers themselves. Producers have "overextended themselves," he said in speech after speech, in making capital investments in land and equipment to expand and modernize their operations. The AAM was founded at that time, determined to restore economic sanity to farm policy and the nation.

A high point of the convention proceedings was a slide show of the movement's history and development. The farm producer, like any other business, AAM insists, must have 100 percent of parity—that is, cost of production plus a rate of net profit adequate to make the necessary capital investments in expansion and modernization.

Parity, AAM spokesmen emphasize, is an institution for America, not just for farmers. On Sunday, in a featured presentation to the gathering, economic consultant Robert Lewis pointed to the basis for the parity concept in the American Founding Fathers. Lewis attacked "free trade" and "free market" economics, and stated that America was founded "on a parity system"—only at the time they called it "protection." It is the federal government's responsibility to enforce orderly marketing of farm commodities at parity prices. Under existing law, President Carter has the

authority to enforce 90 percent of parity, and to do so immediately.

The importance of bringing labor on board in the fight for parity was a key point of discussion. Since it was passed overwhelmingly at the Texas state Democratic convention in late June, an emergency mandate to President Carter to use his constitutional power now, before the elections, has gained the endorsement of hundreds of key trade union leaders, clergymen and others. AAM leaders, together with LaRouche campaign organizers, had set the initiative in motion in mid-June.

AAM leaders pointed to the fact that the AAM had received hundreds of telegrams for their convention, pledging support for the 90 percent parity push, and that more from across the country were arriving every hour. The convention delegates passed a resolution thanking the signatories, and President Meek announced that the AAM would send personal invitations to each of the individuals to come to the August 10 demonstration in New York.

The organizing process—how you get people to move in their own interest on a national political level—was a formal and informal topic of continuous discussion. One veteran AAM organizer provided critical insight into the source of strength and dynamism that has earned this young force the respect of farm producers across the country and in every other farm organization. "The AAM is not a grassroots organization," he told the convention. "We're more like the people who fought the American Revolution—the minority who knew how to do what they had to accomplish."