



# Harvest of Dissent: The National Farmers Union and the Early Cold War (American Political Thought)

*Bruce E. Field*

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In the early years of the Cold War, one voice of dissent regarding United States foreign policy came from an unexpected source. The National Farmers Union criticized the Truman administration for what it saw as an advancement of American imperialism, a denial of the prerogatives of other nations in world affairs, and an inaccurate view of Soviet communism's threat to world peace.

Bruce Field here explores the people and events of a little-studied episode in American history by describing how the leadership of the Farmers Union split over the Korean War. When the organization was faced with accusations of being communist sympathizers, NFU national president Jim Patton chose to support the war while a splinter group led by Iowa Farmers Union president Fred Stover continued to protest American involvement.

*Harvest of Dissent* traces the tension that gripped America's heartland in the early 1950s as American farmers spoke their minds about their country's foreign policy. Drawing heavily on both Patton's and Stover's papers as well as on interviews with members of the NFU, Field presents an engaging study of the two men's leadership styles and personalities as he relates the infighting that tore apart this organization and the effects it had on both domestic and foreign affairs.

By examining such issues as the state of U.S. agriculture in the postwar years and the relationship between Patton and presidential candidate Henry Wallace in the 1948 election, Field establishes a context for understanding the NFU split. He argues that Patton was ultimately more concerned about the welfare of his organization than about ideological issues, acknowledging that if the NFU continued to criticize American policy it would lose influence and could even collapse.

A revealing study in political intolerance, *Harvest of Dissent* provides an insightful look at the role one group of farmers played during a crucial time in American history and the impact those times had on the union's future. It shows how even a relatively small organization can gain prominence on the national stage and offers a view of the Cold War from an unusual vantage point.

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