

Mississippi State University Libraries
Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division

Citizen's Council Radio Forums
Acc. No. 597
Stephanie Rolph Transcripts Addition

Audiotape ID number: 597-6139

Date: 1961

Guest (s): Boswell Stevens

Title: Trend Toward Centralization of Government, Effect on Farmers and American People

Note: Questions were paraphrased and/or shortened by the transcriber. For the exact question, please consult the audiotapes.

Morphew: Introduction...probably one of the most prominent men in agriculture in the United States...since 1950 he's been president, been on the board of directors for the American Farm Bureau since 1953, currently on the executive committee, Cotton Council...would you describe the Farm Bureau as a conservative organization?

Stevens: Dick, yes I would. I think it is very conservative and extremely conservative under the present standards. We are a conservative organization. I'm real proud of it. I think we are one of the most conservative organizations in the United States today and I'm real proud that we are.

Morphew: Are farmers generally more conservative in their political thinking than people who live in cities?

Stevens: Yes, I think we are and I think that's traditional. I know it's true in the South. I think it's true all over the country. I have given some thought to our conservatism. I think we are, farmers are, really closer to nature than any other people we have, any other segment of the society and we have to be patient. We are a God-loving people, generally speaking, and we get people who are dealing with nature and seeing the handiwork of God and I think we are a little closer to it. I don't think we go off on a tangent and go to the extremes that some of the other segments of society go to but it's a personal opinion of course.

Morphew: The present trend toward centralization...has it affected farmers more than other groups of Americans?

Stevens: I think every citizen in America should be very much concerned with centralization of government. Whether it has affected farmers more than it has any other segment of our society, I'm not sure of that, but it has affected farmers. I think every one of us as Americans should read a little history. It'll do us good sometimes to go back a

read a little American history and see the philosophies that we had then and why we became one of the greatest nations in the world in such a relatively short time. I think it does affect farmers but it affects the future destiny of every American citizen if he believes in America and what's made it great.

Morphew: Has big government succeeded in destroying the self-reliance that for long characterized agriculture?

Stevens: No, Dick, but it's really had its inroads, I can tell you that. It's getting to the point that if something isn't happening pretty quick, with the trend in government today to take care of everybody from the cradle to the grave, I'm mighty afraid it's going to destroy some of that self reliance we had. Present moment, it has not. Farmers traditionally and this great organization that I happen to be a part of, the philosophy of that organization that we are still, would like to be independent. We don't want too much government interference. And we would like to think we can run our own affairs. I don't want to be misunderstood, there is so many things that have happened that we cannot, somebody could question me and say, now do you want to do away with all price supports and all programs of every kind, the answer's 'no.' We can't. We've gotten so involved in international trade and international treaties and alliances and so forth, we can't do it. We'd like to, but it can't be done, in my opinion.

Morphew: One way that people who support the welfare state divide the people is by putting them into separate groups and using them against each other...for example if the Farm Bureau objects to certain welfare programs, you are told, well, the city folks are getting it, why shouldn't the farm people...those of us who live in the cities hear it the other way...do you believe the majority of farmers in this country actually do want government handouts or do they want more independence?

Stevens: No, they don't, Dick, and I just want to point out that that is one of the first strategies of war, divide and conquer, and it's just as good strategy today as it was in the beginning. If you read your ancient history you'll find that that is one of the greatest strategies of war we had, divide and conquer, and it's still good strategy and it's being worked at today by some groups.

Morphew: So the farmer is being painted falsely when the city people are being told that the farmers want handouts?

Stevens: Oh, absolutely. We don't want it. I personally know that there are literally thousands of people who have the greatest desire in the world to get away, they don't want any government, they're smart enough, they know enough that we can't all be wiped out and go back to the freedom that we had 75 or a hundred years ago. We know that, so we're not kidding ourselves about it, but we don't want a direct government check. We would like to work away from government controls rather than working towards more government control.

Morphew: Do you think there is a lesson to be learned from the gradual intrusion of the federal government regulations into virtually every phase of agriculture...would the result be the same, for example, with federal aid to education?

Stevens: Yes, I think it's just terrible. I'm so bitterly opposed to federal aid to education, and thank the Lord, this organization I represent, very much opposed to federal aid to education. We have worked as a national body, as a state body, using all the influence we could possible muster to defeat legislation that's been proposed to have federal aid to education. Now, we could go into that and spend a long time on federal aid to education but I guess we don't have time to do it, but it's, to me, that's one of the most crucial things that we're facing today, is to let the people recognize our responsibility of education in their own communities and control those communities for their schools in their communities and not have to depend on some brass in Washington to tell us how we are going to run our schools.

Morphew: You and other leaders in the FB, then, have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as federal aid without federal control?

Stevens: Dick, the Supreme Court was recognized by laymen as you and I as being the last word and we had the greatest respect in the world for the Supreme Court. Some 25 years ago, they ruled that that which the federal government subsidizes, that can it control. And I think that ruling of the Supreme Court many years ago is as true today and more true than it was at that time. So to say we're going to have federal aid to education without controls I think is the most ridiculous thing that they could talk about. We could go into the transcontinental highways that we're, in our states, we're building them all over the country, and you know who controls them, who says where they're going to be built, the standards we're going to use. Though we have elected officials in most states who are highway commissioners and supposed to call some of the shots on the roads that we are building and the standards and locations and all, in this particular case, I'm sure that they have very little to do with the locations or standards. I think this would be readily true with education if it came to pass.

Morphew: You do a good bit of traveling throughout the country, in your meetings with agricultural leaders in other parts of the nation, if you believe that the average farmer is aware of the basic interconnection of assaults on local sovereignty...do you believe farmers are beginning to realize that these things are connected?

Stevens: I think we have a very good example of that in the state of New York where some people have become sure that they would like to run their business and it's doubtful at this time whether they can or not. I want to say here that farmers generally...our eastern, Midwest, and western farm friends, they are not of the type that think they know all the answers and they try to tell us what we should or should not do. They recognize that most of us have been in this country a great while and they say that, you fellows have made a pretty good job, done a pretty good job down there. Now we're gonna sit up here and tell you how you ought to run your business down there, so most of us take the position that the farmer in the Midwest or the West or East, he's better qualified to know

how to operate in his state or his section than we from the Deep South, so we don't try to tell him how he should operate his business. I think that's mutually agreeable with all of us, so we don't try to infringe on the other fellow's right of his section.

Morphew: Do you foresee any prospects in the near future for the emergence of a new political force, perhaps gaining support from farmers, conservatives, various elements in the south, and similar groups who believe in constitutional government and Americanism?

Stevens: Dick, that's one of the hardest questions you've asked me yet. I might say that I would be hopeful. Now, how long it'll take, I think that some day this country will have two parties and it will not be the Democratic Party nor the Republican Party. I think you will have the radical group and the conservative group. Now, when it's gonna be, I don't know. You're too hard for me now. I just can't answer that question, but I think ultimately we're gonna have a division. I think the conservatives will be on one side and the radicals on the other. It may be ten years, it may be fifteen, it may be quicker than that. I don't know.