

### THE ASSOCIATION'S TRADING ACTIVITIES

Since the annual convention at Moose Jaw a great many letters have come to the Central office and to the head office of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company anxiously inquiring what will be the future policy of these bodies in regard to the distribution of supplies. It is evident that much difference of opinion exists as to what was the intention of the convention when it dealt with this matter by resolution, and the general uncertainty in the minds of the members throughout the province has been increased by many inaccurate and ill-advised press reports and editorials. Even the editor of the Grain Growers' Guide, usually in such close touch with all the spirit of "Grain-Growerism," in his leading editorial of February 21 predicts that the Saskatchewan G.G.A. will have gone entirely out of business as a co-operative trading body by the next annual convention.

Nothing is farther from the minds of the members of this association than that it should abandon its co-operative activities. Such a step has never even been seriously considered by it, and certainly would not be acceptable to the rank and file. With 325 incorporated co-operative local bodies permanently in business and with others of its locals in large numbers actively in business and, at the rate of several per week taking out incorporation, it would be palpably impossible for the association to abandon these activities and continue to be the association. What really is in contemplation is that the capital and machinery of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company, which is so very closely related to the S.G.G.A., shall be made available to assist this movement so successfully inaugurated by the association for co-operative distribution of supplies thru the locals.

The locals engaged in business, whether as yet incorporated or not, may rest absolutely assured that whatever is done by the Elevator Company will be done in agreement and in conjunction with the association, and that nothing will be done either by the company or the Central to supplant the activities of the trading locals themselves. While no definite policy has as yet been decided upon, there will certainly be no attempt made to do away with the activities of the locals in co-operative trading. What is done will be done with a view to supplementing their activities and assisting them wherever possible.

#### Where the Elevator Company Can Help

There are a few commodities such, for instance, as flour and coal, which can be distributed to the best advantage from local warehouses and which require considerable capital to handle in that manner at a sufficient number of shipping points to serve all the farmers of Saskatchewan. In handling these commodities, as well as some others, the Elevator Company can render valuable service, and it is hoped that it may see its way clear to establish warehouses for the handling of these commodities at practically every shipping point in the province except where locals prefer to own and operate their own warehouses, and in such cases the company will merely lend such assistance to them as it can. The project in hand is one for the closer co-ordination of the forces and activities of the two bodies as was recommended in the resolution passed by the convention and does not contemplate the association, and particularly not the locals, going out of business and reverting wholly to mere academic discussions of political and economic questions.

It would certainly be a sad backsliding for the association in general and even for the Central to entirely abandon the practical application to everyday business of the true spirit of co-operation which it preaches. The world has had a surfeit of preaching. What it wants is the application in actual practice of the ideals which are preached. The Grain Growers' Association was created for the express purpose of securing for the farmer a greater return for his labor and the closer it has held to the very practical working out of this purpose the more

successful it has been, both in organization and in educational and propagandist work.

The editor of The Guide in the same article states that "It is an impossibility to carry on trading and educational work thru the same organization and do justice to both." Again he appears to be at variance with the great mass of the organized farmers of the western provinces.

#### Business and Education Succeed Together

In all three provinces the associations are actively engaged in "trade," as the editor calls it. That is, the locals—and they are the association—carry on both business and education "thru one organization." True, they are not as highly organized in the other provinces as are our incorporated locals in Saskatchewan, but they are in business, nevertheless. The principal thing that they have lacked is a Central service of their own, but they do business in their own way, and, according to reports of local secretaries at the Brandon convention, they spend a good deal of time discussing their material needs just as do the locals in Saskatchewan. It may safely be concluded that what the associations in the three provinces are doing and doing more and more extensively each month, namely, carrying on collective purchasing of supplies and educational work "thru the same organization" is considered by them fully practicable, the editor's opinion to the contrary notwithstanding.

If it is argued that the three branches of endeavor can be successfully handled together by the locals as separate units, failure must follow if their collective business is done thru their own Central office and for their own benefit, then a review of what the Saskatchewan association has accomplished during the three years it has been in the field of practical co-operation will quickly dispel this error also.

#### Obstacles and Achievements

It is certainly not the wish of the writer to make any odious comparisons, but success or failure can be judged fairly only by comparison. And comparison with the activities of other farmer institutions both in the field of education and propaganda and of distribution of supplies is freely invited and will fully justify our claim that co-operative purchasing of supplies, which is not "trade" in the ordinary use of the term, and education and propagandist work can be and are carried on successfully "thru the same organization." Further, if such are handled as they have been in Saskatchewan, either must prove a great help to the success of the other.

Beginning three years ago without proper legislation, without capital, without organization for such activity, without business connection, without any trained staff and, indeed, without any clear conception of what should or what could be undertaken, the association has built up a business and rendered a service to the farmers of this province in the field of distribution of supplies beside which the achievements of any other body doing similar business in the West serve only to make its success the more outstanding. Almost immediately this work had been undertaken war in Europe broke out. This seriously disturbed and disarranged trade the world over, and added enormously to the difficulties of securing supplies, especially for a new method of distribution. If a friendly comparison may be permitted with the business of The Grain Growers' Grain Company, it must be remembered that this company had immense capital, had no occasion to fear expenditure, could hire expert help in any number required, that it had the prestige and position of an old and fully established business and that it was widely known in the commercial world, yet it has never at

any time succeeded in securing better values or in giving better service than has the association. Aside from machinery—a commodity which the association has not handled on its own account—the association did as much business in Saskatchewan alone as the company did in the three provinces combined, using the last fiscal year of each as the basis of comparison.

The Central of the association has invaded many fields of service which the company has not touched at all, and thereby it saved the farmers of this province hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Aside from actual business done the association has done also an important work of organization and education in connection with and as a result of its co-operative undertakings. Adequate legislation was secured both for the Central and for the locals. Considerable capital has been built up from wholesale profits while doing business on a very low gross margin. It has established, also, an enviable reputation in trade and a sound credit standing. That its service has been popular is attested by the fact that while the business of the company outside of machinery increased only three-quarters of one per cent. during the last year, that of the association increased nineteen per cent., again exclusive of machinery. No less than 330 locals have been brought under incorporation, practically all of these have received instructions and information and other assistance from the Central, and the educational value of all the work which has been done in this connection can scarcely be too highly estimated.

#### The Other Association Work Has Prospered

While the co-operative purchasing activities of the association have been handled with success in spite of the great difficulties which have had to be encountered, its other activities such as organization, education, legislation and provident will stand comparison with the work carried on in these fields before trading was undertaken and also with the work carried on in the other provinces where the locals "trade" but not thru their own Central. A few items in this connection may reasonably be reviewed.

#### Organization

1. After four years of an absolute standstill as to number of members the membership has increased to nearly three times its former maximum. 2. Hundreds of new locals have been organized and old ones revived. 3. Saskatchewan was the first to organize a Women's Section, and this has now become a very important part of the association in this province. 4. The entire province was systematically re-organized into organization districts. 5. Some forty-five district conventions have been held during three years, whereas none were held before. 6. More meetings have been attended by Central officers than before trading was undertaken. 7. An emblem was adopted which has since secured very wide publicity. 8. Over a million sheets of association letterheads have been sold. 9. Many times the number of membership buttons have been sold as compared with previous years. 10. There are pillows and pennants bearing the association's emblem and life membership certificates adorning thousands of homes in this province. 11. An interesting, instructive and permanent banner competition amongst the locals has been instituted. 12. The greatest seed grain exhibit ever known in Canada has been permanently established. 13. More life memberships were written during 1916 than in any other year.

#### Educational

1. The constitution was completely revised two years ago and made a sound legal document. 2. A large amount of work has been done for educational reform in our schools. 3. Many thou-

sands of letters have been written and thousands of pamphlets distributed relating to co-operative legislation and organization. 4. Vastly more educational literature has been distributed than before trading was undertaken. 5. The farmers of this province have been taught the value of cash and the waste of credit buying. 6. The Central has exposed the Retail Dealers' Association and the organized wholesalers in their campaign of oppression. 7. By the wide publication of wholesale prices our people generally have been informed of values as never before. 8. More members have sought and received advice from the Central than in former years. 9. Many times the number of members visit the head office. 10. Each week something on association matters goes into thirty thousand homes in Saskatchewan. 11. A vast amount of good has been accomplished by the fostering of a strong, healthy provincial consciousness and self respect. 12. It has organized a Special Study Branch and instituted a campaign which purposes to win our people to the study of economics and social problems in earnest. 13. It has faithfully carried on all the old work of the association in diffusing information and in pointing attention to errors and abuses and to the means for permanent remedying thereof. 14. It has done more to win into good, Canadian citizenship our large foreign born population than ever before.

#### Legislative

In the field of legislation there has been no lagging in the work of the association because it had broadened its field of service to its members. 1. The hotel bars of Saskatchewan were closed. 2. The dispensaries were finally abolished. 3. Very valuable legislation dealing with implement sales was secured. 4. The women have secured a dower law and the right to vote. 5. A valuable charter was secured for the association. 6. Important amendments to the Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's Act were secured and a stiff fight put up against the attack of the organized retailers on it. 7. A practical rural long term credit scheme is about to come into operation. 8. A number of important legal cases were fought thru the Court of Appeal and very valuable decisions were won. It has now several important cases pending. 9. It secured important amendments to the Exemption Laws and to the Chattel Mortgage Act. 10. It has fought as faithfully as ever for good grain legislation, etc.

#### Provident

1. The association has raised for patriotic purposes, thru its Central office alone, the sum of two hundred thousands dollars. 2. By its Patriotic Acre project and the manner in which it was handled it gained world-wide publicity for the farmers of Saskatchewan and fostered a spirit of true patriotism and devotion to the British Empire. 3. It has spent much time and money, as have the associations in the other provinces, in securing for the farmers reduced seed grain and cattle rates. 4. The Central secured reductions in freight rates of immense value on commodities required following the crop failure of 1914. 5. Thru its Legal Department, legal advice has been given, mostly free of charge, to thousands of farmers thruout this province.

The writer has thought wise to give this little review of a few of the association's activities in order that misconceptions which somehow or other have got abroad may be dispelled before they have done any serious harm to the cause. In conclusion, let the members and the locals thruout Saskatchewan be fully assured that the association will continue in co-operative distribution of supplies for the benefit of its members, and that the directors may make arrangements with the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company to do for the association much of the work which was formerly done in the Central office and to assist local institutions by distribution from local warehouses where the locals so desire, whatever is done will be along lines of the closer co-ordination of the forces and activities of these two bodies in

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