

Communityism

IF the country town merchant is continually worried by both the fear and the actual competition of city mail-order houses, the city small merchants themselves have also their own troubles to contend with, as shown by the following quotation from a recent issue of the Winnipeg "Retail Merchants' Weekly": "Competition in the retail business in Canada is getting more pronounced every year, and the retailer, if he would not be left in the lurch, must keep constantly on the alert. Chain store competition in this country has not reached the stage of development it has in the United States, but there are many who believe in a few years it will be the most difficult source of competition that the average one-store merchant will be called to face."

This competition, coupled with the bankruptcies and bad trade that the present capitalist collapse has brought in its train, has resulted in an outburst of small traders' and small industries' unity schemes of various kinds, and has given employment to those who make a business of forming and directing such enterprises. A British statesman, many years ago, said that we are all Socialists now; and he seemingly based his assertion on the sort of co-operation that obtains amongst the petty bourgeois class, as illustrated by this actual example which, upon analysis, is at once seen to be comprised of humbug, hot air and hypocrisy. It is taken from a fair-sized town newspaper and the "copy" originated from a central source in the States; the Canadian paper substituting its town's name for the original indefinite "Blankville." Down one side is a cut of a genially grinning, white-collared business man with right hand outstretched; along the top, a big two-line heading, "The Hand of Fellowship," and at the bottom, a list of local business men, etc., who thereby indicate that they extend to prospective benefactors the aforesaid "hand" which, they say, "is extended to you by the business and professional interests of —. Grasp it! Feel the strength of its sincerity and eagerness to satisfy; learn of its actions in moulding this—our town—into a greater and more enterprising community. It's that hand of Fellowship, of Welcome, of Ambition and Determination, which has done so much to contribute to the welfare of our fair town. Think back a few years. Note the many public and private improvements that have been made since then as a direct result of local enterprise. What motive prompted them? Certainly, not selfishness. Those who contributed, did it for the purpose of adding to your convenience or pleasure. Yes, to create good-fellowship and good-will. Of course, these improvements were not made without considerable sacrifice on the part of our business and professional interests. Quite often they came forward with financial aid when they could least afford it. And yet, they did it with a generous heart and a cheerful smile. That's the spirit that has made — so progressive. All that those interests ask in return (note the pathetically beautiful 'sob' touch) is your co-operation in building an even brighter future for this community." Then followed the list of business men's, etc., names.

Another newspaper "community" slogan was bounded, top and bottom, by large cuts of silver dollars rolling all over the page—which, of course, revealed, though used in Canada, their Yankee origin. This philanthropic effusion was headed, "Your Dollars Do 'Double Duty' When Spent at Home"; and then, as before, came another list of those hungerers and thirsters after the Good (or the goods!) with this simple confession of faith: "We, the undersigned business and professional interests, always have (sic) and always will be strong for anything good for the community; but, remember—we need YOUR CO-OPERATION." Other sermons along "community" welfare lines, and each one similarly illustration-emphasized are, "Do Unto Others—Pay Your Bills Promptly," "Keep Smiling," "Be Contented," etc., etc., etc.

Still another stunt, which is also worked in connivance with local philanthropists, has as its real object a bigger financial return for the town and district and ever-struggling paper, alias "rag." Its ostensible purpose is to increase the paper's sphere of influence for beneficent community education and development. There is always a pitiable charity element in connection with small papers, but by other means it is sought to play upon and tempt the grasping side of its supporters' characters. So, various prizes, some of them drawn for on the lottery principle, are offered to some fortunate one of the purchasers at the local dealers' stores which advertise in the paper. At other times large cash prizes, etc., for a subscription contest are the incentive, and, with this last form, the paper lures on its victims by assuring them one and all that "Everybody Wins," because, should the sub. hunter fail of getting a big cash prize or an automobile, there is always a 10 per cent. commission offered on all moneys turned in. Of course, the scheme is to work the workers and make them provide their own prize money or object to be "given away free." But, in at least one case the writer knows of, it did not take the Yankee organizer of the contest long to find out that blood cannot be drawn from a stone. In other words, that, amongst hopelessly bankrupt or hard-up Canadian farmers and their parasites, the potentially obtainable cash was too utterly negligible a quantity to make the game in any way nearly worth the candle. So, suddenly becoming aware of a pressing business appointment that drew him back 'way down South, and having collected from the editor a share of the loot, the American folded his tent like the Arab and silently stole away; and that, too, so effectively that even his own boss, who came up himself to Canada to find out what the trouble was, didn't know where his employee had "beat it" to! Thereafter, the big prize bait and contest was dropped, but, by increasing the sub. hunters' share from the original 10 per cent. up to 25 per cent., several of them were sufficiently interested to keep at the job.

But what, after all, can this "community development" amount to so far as the average worker is concerned, seeing that municipal voting is based upon a property-owning qualification which comparatively few wage-earners possess? There is even a vast mass of unskilled tramp proletarians who, because they never fulfil the residential qualifications, cannot even exercise the political vote. Yet the community movement exists and receives such a measure of support as to afford good livings to both Canadian and American organizers.

Well, the famous Hegelian dictum has it that "everything which is real is reasonable, and everything which is reasonable is real." To that, Engels (in "Feuerbach") thoroughly agrees; but with the proviso that what is thrown up into existence and made real by prevailing conditions, will in course of time become "negated" and unreal when those temporary conditions that necessarily produced the phenomenon have passed away.

As things are, there is a decided advantage in town life, for, as Marx says, it rescues us from the idioecy of rural life; though, be it said, the town must be of a certain size, otherwise, as experience teaches, we are liable to be caught in the whirlpool of spite, gossip, ignorance, small-mindedness and quarrelsomeness that is the curse of small communities. So, in view of town social and material benefits, it is necessary, within reason, to bear what practically amounts to a tax upon each resident. But, that the "support your home merchant" slogan is too often abused, is a lamentable and inevitable result of capitalist conditions with which each victim must reckon on the lines of "once bitten twice shy."

For the rest, the best of town environments means nothing to the workers when unemployed or agonizing from any of the other ills to which the wage-

slave is heir. In fact, under such conditions they are apt to suffer the same aggravating torture that a hungry street arab endures as he hopelessly gazes at the temptingly displayed eatables behind the barricade of delicatessen store window—"so near and yet so far!!"

In the Socialist movement it has always been a regular practice to make purchases or remit funds on the "support your home merchant" basis, and the tax so involved is rather delighted in rather than objected to, in the spirit of—as the Bard of Avon puts it—"the labor one delights in physics pain." But were it not that we know we are working for a system of society that will render absurd the present class-limited, hypocritical and death-tainted "Communityism"; were it not that we are aiming at the universal, lasting and sure foundationed advantages of COMMUNISM, even we would fail to see the fun of spending ourselves and our slender means for the cause. But, believing, as we do, in the Co-operative Commonwealth, we do not hesitate to call upon our fellows outside the movement, in the words of an English comrade:

"Failure on failure may seem to defeat us;
ultimate failure is impossible.
Seeing what is to be done then, seeing what
the reward is,
Seeing what the terms are,—are you willing to
join us?
Will you lend us the aid of your voice, your
money, your sympathy?
May we take you by the hand and call you
'Comrade'?"

PROGRESS.

INCENTIVE

(Continued from page 4)

toil not the enforcement of the capitalist economic? Is not the skill of labor but the engine of greater exploitation? Are inventions not purloined to further the power of profit? Then wherefore incentive?

To the capitalist class, it is the exploitation of social energy. It is the subjugation of man to the machine; of ambition to privilege; of culture to profit; of life to property. It is the sanction of might created right to dominate the life and ethic and substance of socially created experience. It is the power to make humanity the servitor of man, and social munificence the minister of class.

To the toiling masses, to the harried children of wages, there is but one incentive—economic freedom; one aim—the substitution of social order for class law; the abolition of political domination for social administration. Political dominion—in whatever form it is cast, from conservative law to social reform—means the law of property; and within the ambit of its cycle of development, it cannot be frustrated. It is the right of might and the providence of its "divinity," to control the resources of the earth, and the agencies of labor and progress, for the prime benefit of profit and privilege.

Social administration means the right of society itself to control and order the means of its life, and the magnificence of progress, exclusively for the common welfare of the total society. Not for one group or one class, but for all living, in one class—the producers and creators of social abundance. It means that machinery shall be the servant of man and not his master, that its wondrous productivity shall be transformed into the culture of socialized man. It means that class law and its struggle for power shall disappear, and social understanding undertake the destinies of further progress. It means that the blight of ignorance and its petrel brood of furies shall vanish in the freedom of social equality. Then the incentive of man will be inevitably the gain of society. And the gain of society, in turn, will be reflected as inevitably in the triumph of a mightier individuality, spontaneous, self-expressing, sparkling like the mounted diamond, with the multiplied grandeur of its limitless creativeness.

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