

NEWS OF INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATION

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There is no movement in any country more encouraging, nothing fraught with greater possibilities for the future to those of us whose faith is in the common people, whose religion is the religion of democracy, than the co-operative movement among our Western farmers—those great, hearty, whole-souled men who are the chief factors in the production of the people's bread, to whose labor is due, almost wholly the grain supply of the world. And these men, these real "captains of industry" are learning from every day's experience that in union alone there is strength, that only by combining with each other can they hope to live and labor under the decent economic conditions which are the right of every human being. Of these, a large percentage comes from Northern Europe; from Norway and Sweden, from Denmark and Holland, and from Germany, and they bring with them the experience gained from years of co-operative organization in their own country, and the great hope of finding in America the realization of their ideals of democracy.

Our American farmers, while they have not had the actual experience of their foreign-born neighbors, have had over forty years of education along co-operative lines. The Patrons of Husbandry, which twenty-five years ago had more than 1,500,000 members, the Grange which later merged itself with the Patrons, the Farmers' Alliance which exerted such a powerful influence on behalf of better legislation for the farmers and cleaner politics, have done the pioneer work and prepared the way for the powerful farmers' organizations which are now coming into existence in all the Western states, but more especially in the great grain-producing states of Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota and the Dakotas. In all the states west of the Mississippi there are organizations of farmers' societies, such as elevator and shipping companies, creameries, etc., but in each of the above-mentioned states these societies have united in the formation of a central state organization which plays a large part in the industrial life of the state, and in many instances is able to materially influence the political outlook in the interests of better government.

Illinois was the first of the states to form a central organization, and it was largely due to the activity of the farmers of Mason County that this was done. The farmers of the little town of Manito, in Mason County, were among the first of the state to realize the need of organization in order to combat successfully the Line Elevator Companies, the trust interests, who, of course, were discriminated in favor of by the railroad whenever possible. The farmers of Illinois had seen little individual companies ~~swent out of existence by the powerful trust~~ interests; some of these men had been forced to the wall themselves by methods every whit as underhanded and cruel as those of the Standard Oil, that huge preceptress whose teachings have crept into all corners of the world and promoted our whole system of commercial dishonesty, and they have been forced to the acknowledgement that salvation lay in organization. Consequently in February, 1896, the farmers of Manito organized the Granger Elevator Company. Petitions were started for the organization of a company with \$3,000 capital, shares being \$25, ten shares the limit to one person. By the end of March the stock was all sold and in November of that year the company started in active business. This new company did not meet the opposition which the later organizations encountered, the line companies believing, no doubt, that its life would be short, did not consider it formidable enough to fight. Still they had their troubles. In the first place the railroads refused their application for a site, so they were forced to purchase one, and after referring the matter to the railroad and warehouse com-

mission, a switch was secured by the payment of \$75. There was a shortage in cars and the Line Elevator people did advance grain prices, hoping thereby to force the failure of the new company, but by the end of three months car troubles were adjusted and in six months satisfactory freight rates were secured.

The second farmers' elevator company came into existence at Easton in July, 1897, and in 1899 a company was organized at Mason City which is now one of the largest in the state. These later companies undertook also to handle coal. From this time on the number of elevators increased very rapidly and by 1902 there were thirty in successful operation. About this time the Line Elevator Company began to realize the immense possibilities in the farmers' elevators, and they instituted a boycott against them. An agent of the regular dealers canvassed the state advising the commission men and track bidders to refuse consignments from co-operative grain companies and regular dealers to refuse to carry on business with receivers who handled co-operative business. Though the boycott was not successful it caused the farmers a great deal of trouble; some of the companies were completely shut out of their markets and others had their markets so restricted that they were unable to hold their own against their competitors.

It was during this trying time, when unswerving loyalty to their cause was the farmers' only hope, that the farmers united under the name of the "Farmers' Grain Dealers' Association of Illinois." Their first president was John Collins of Tuscola; John A. McCreery of Mason City was elected secretary, and still holds that position. Mr. McCreery is one of the guiding spirits of the state organization and has been manager of the Mason City Elevator Company ever since its formation.

The State Association has proven a powerful force for honorable business and clean politics in Illinois, and because of its influence has been able to promote and foster farmers' organizations, not only in Illinois, where there are at present over 160 companies, but also in other states. The membership of these companies runs from 40 to over 400; the capital stock from \$3,500 to \$35,000. Some of these have extended their business to lumber, farm implements, etc., a few companies now have two or more stations, and several require two elevators to handle the grain of their stockholders. New companies are constantly being formed, and the old ones are finding it necessary to enlarge their plants in order to handle the grain brought to them.

The Farmers' Elevator at Illiopolis, Illinois, is a fair example of the growth of the movement in the state. The company was organized on the twelfth of January, 1904, with a capital stock of \$10,000 divided into shares of \$50 each, no person being allowed to own more than five shares. The building, a modern, up-to-date elevator with a capacity of 50,000 bushels, was completed about the first of August, and the grain came in so rapidly that everything was filled before the railroad had the switch completed. The plant has been enlarged and improved by a considerable extent; a 25,000-bushel oat bin, costing \$1,200, has been built, an ear corn-crib and also another elevator section is to be added in the near future. During the last year 284,186 bushels of grain were shipped, and several thousand were turned away for lack of room. The company consists of 120 stockholders, either actively engaged or connected with farming. It has paid two six-per-cent. dividends and spent about \$3,000 in enlarging the plant in the past year. In addition to the grain, they handled 12,000 pounds of twine and some coal. This measure of success is duplicated in nearly all of the elevators of that state. In Champlin, for instance, their