

Co-operatives and the Soviet Government

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DURING the Tzarist regime the development of the co-operatives in Russia was very slow. The Tzarist government was afraid of any kind of Socialist movement, however moderate. It did everything in its power to hinder every kind of manifestation of social independence, the development of every kind of social organization. It therefore could begin its work only upon confirmation of its code, which in its turn depends upon the reliability, from the point of view of the Government of the men who are the initiators of the concern. It took months and at times even a whole year to obtain this confirmation. The police, the gendarmery and every official kept a strict watch on the activity of the co-operative members. A special permit had to be obtained from the chief of the local police upon every occasion that a general meeting was to be called. This official was authorized to confirm the agenda, he was present at the meeting and controlled the discussions. Most particularly of all was hindered the educational and cultural work of the co-operatives.

It is easy to understand that the development of the co-operative movement during the Tzarist regime was exceedingly slow.

On January 1st, 1914, there were only about 10 or 11 thousand of Co-operative Societies, consisting of no more than about one and a half million members. This shows that on the average each society counted only about 150 members. But even this number may be said to be an exaggeration, as many members of the Co-operative Societies were such only on paper, in reality, they were buying elsewhere, did not attend meetings, and generally did not in any way show their interest in the work.

The war has immensely influenced the development of the Russian Co-operative movement. A few months after its outbreak the war was felt by a rise of prices and the disappearance of goods from the open market, as the result of their hoarding by merchant speculators.

A time came when certain goods became quite unobtainable. This speculation of the merchants excited a strong indignation among the poorer classes.

Neither the Tzar's Government nor the Municipalities actually disposed of these merchants, and did practically nothing to stop these speculations.

The discontent of the population grew and it led to the wrecking of shops. This popular excitement over the Tzar's Government sought to adopt some measures for pacifying the population.

The Government decided to sacrifice the interests of the small traders in order to protect the interests of large capitalists.

Leaving intact the speculation "on top," the government took measures to prevent the speculation of small traders.

The task of distribution of products of primary necessity (sugar, flour, etc.) was given over to co-operative organizations. On the other hand the government began to lessen the obstacles, which it had previously placed in the way of organization of new Co-operatives, or of the work of such already existing.

The result was a perceptible growth of the number of co-operative societies even before the advent of the revolution.

The February revolution destroyed all external obstacles to the development of the co-operation. New societies could be founded without hindrance, just as freely could all co-operatives develop their work.

The number of co-operative societies and members grew quickly. On January 1st, 1918, there existed about 25,000 co-operative societies with a membership of about nine millions.

The business turnover of the co-operative societies in 1913 amounted to only 250 thousand roubles, whilst in 1917 they reached six to seven billion roubles.

The Provisional Government continued to hand over to the co-operative societies the work of distributing products to the population. In the summer of 1917 it made use of the co-operatives in the distribution of textile goods. But the government

acted rather irresolutely and took only half-measures, for it still protected the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Until the February revolution the Russian co-operative declared as one of its principles—non-partisanship, but this was only done out of fear of police repressions.

But in fact the Russian co-operative movement was always a moderately opposition movement, being a mixture of a liberal Social reform movement, and the weakest milk-and-water Socialism.

It was a petty-bourgeois movement, and the Inteligentzia played in it the leading part.

The fall of the Tzar's Government gave to the co-operative movement the possibility of throwing off the veil of political non-partisanship.

After the February revolution the co-operative movement stepped openly on the arena of political life. The so-called "Central Unions" of co-operative societies, begins to edit its political newspaper, the well known co-operator Prokopovich taking the editorial chair. This newspaper defended an "extreme-right" policy of an agreement and co-operation with the bourgeoisie.

The whole power of its cultural, educational and instructional apparatus the Russian Co-operative gave to the defense and propagation of the tendency, at the head of which was Kerensky.

On the first Congress of workers co-operatives, which took place in Moscow, in August, 1917, this role of the co-operation was quite openly acknowledged in the numerous local reports.

Even the standpoint of the "Compromisers-Socialists" seemed too radical to the Co-operators. "I would rather chop my hand off, before I give in an election bulletin for the Menshevik party!" said Mr. Kouskova, then well known as a co-operator and joining by his opinions to the right wing of the Mensheviks, for the Constituent Assembly just before the elections.

The Co-operators tried to inaugurate their own political party, still more moderate than the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries.

At the election for the Constituent Assembly they came forward with their own lists, but did not succeed in getting in any of their candidates.

The October Revolution, which has given the power to the proletariat, did not touch the co-operative movement at the beginning.

Although knowing the openly hostile attitude of the leaders of the co-operative movement to the Soviet government the latter decided the question in a way favorable to the co-operation, i.e., in the sense of preferring the co-operative apparatus to private-trading. This is proved by the report of the Provisional Committee of South Russia to Denikin, where it was clearly stated, that the Bolsheviks "tried during two years to attract the co-operative movement to their work, but did not succeed in it."

The leaders of the co-operatives did not want to acknowledge the actual advent of the Workers' Revolution. They hoped that the triumph of the Bolsheviks would be of a short duration, and expected daily their downfall.

Under these circumstances the Soviet Government had no other alternative than the establishment, alongside of the co-operative trade, of its own distributing apparatus in the form of the Soviet (State) Supply Shops.

But such a duplication in the work of two organizations has a bad effect on the work.

Instead of one apparatus, two had to be constructed. There were frequent conflicts between the two organizations.

Therefore the Soviet Government has resolved to make the Co-operative Societies serve the needs of the entire population.

The Decree of the 12th April, 1918, is the first step in this direction, by ordering, that the Co-operative Societies, although still keeping their old regulation of accepting voluntary members, must, all the same, serve the whole population in the way of a general distribution of products.

This Decree also lowers the subscription-fee for those who want to enter as members into a co-operative society.

Private trade had to pay 5 per cent. on the gross

turnover, whilst the co-operative societies were freed from this tax.

The Decree allows them to elect into the Boards of Management of Co-operative Societies private traders and generally persons connected with the private trade.

Thus the Decree of the 12th of April leaves the co-operative movement independent as before, but it tries only to make use of its apparatus in order to make it serve the whole population.

HANNA'S ORDER.

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of the masters to shear the slave of some of his power of resistance. Capitalism is in such a position today that it can stand only a moderate amount of resistance. This is especially true of such industries as that represented by Hanna. They are in the transitional stage to a new form. Not having fully adapted themselves to the conditions of their new form, they are very sensitive to any obstacle which hinders their adaptation. The demands which the working class are continuously making on the capitalist class is the greatest of these obstacles. It is really the insistency and, at the same time, the continuously increasing forcefulness of these demands that have prompted certain capitalists to entrench themselves behind the protecting wing of government power in the form of state ownership. So as to make their new position all the more secure they want to deny the workers all voice in the government that protects them. This is logical enough, as no one wants his enemy harbored in the same fort as he himself takes refuge in.

C. M. CHRISTIANSEN.

PLATFORM

Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada, affirm our allegiance to, and support of, the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government, all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor. The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-increasing stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this, necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrepressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore, we call all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political power, for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

1. The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
2. The organization and management of industry by the working class.
3. The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.

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