

A Hindrance to Cooperative Fruit Growing*

A. McNeill, Chief, Fruit Division, Ottawa

A FORMIDABLE but insidious hindrance to co-operation in fruit growing is the want of proper legislation to enable farmers to get together easily, safely and effectively as an incorporated body. It so happens that nearly all the improvements which we are trying to impose upon the rural population have been planned and elaborated by city people, those who have not had, for years at least, any practical association with rural affairs and who know the problems only as they see them from a city office window. The legislation which works most effectively in the financial combinations of commercial life, where capital is the chief feature, is very gravely defective when applied to a rural affair, which is a combination of men and industries, and where capital, though absolutely necessary, is yet incidental. This particular defect in our legislation is fundamental, and we must look for many failures and grave difficulties unless we can secure proper co-operative legislation.

CO-OPERATIVE OR JOINT STOCK

There is a marked difference between legislation quite suitable to our great commercial and financial undertakings where capital dominates, and the legislation required for rural organization where men and their occupations are the chief factor and where capital is subordinate. The ordinary joint stock company is a mechanism whereby a number of men can unite to act as a unit. Through their officers, they lose

contact from an address on cooperation derived at the Dominion Fruit Conference in Ottawa.

their individual identity and speak as a single unit, but in determining what that voice shall be, it is the number of shares that constitutes the voting power, that is, it is the amount of capital invested that gives weight to the members composing the corporation. We may speak of it, then, and in no derogatory sense, as being capitalistic, and almost of necessity autocratic. On the other hand, an apple selling association or a co-operative evaporator, or in fact any other rural organization, requiring incorporation whereby the individuals composing it may speak as a single individual, find that capital is only incidental, the chief thing being the industry. It is the value of the product handled by the association that determines each man's interest in this rural body.

Roughly speaking, the capitalistic organization such as the ordinary joint stock company is a combination of capital simply. A rural organization must, of necessity, be a combination of men. This principle is so well established by the experience of all countries that it is somewhat remarkable that it has not permeated Canadian legislation. Those who have read the history of co-operation will have remarked that, while there are individual societies composed of men of exceptional ability and public spirit that have succeeded with a joint stock organization, yet speaking generally co-operation has been a dismal failure until suitable legislation was provided or at least until antagonistic laws have been repealed. I would scarcely care to be so positive upon this point if I were not sure that I have with me the history, not of one country

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