

Farmers' Co-operative Stores

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wealth and population in the large cities by reason of the fact that the rural districts are uninviting, farm work hard and laborious, and the remuneration for the labor performed and the capital invested the most meager of any vocation in the world.

What is the Remedy?

It is my opinion, after having given some years of study to these questions, that Voluntary Co-operation is the only alternative between dominant capitalism and revolutionary anarchism.

What is Co-operation in its modern-day sense and how may its principles be applied in practice?

In the words of Thomas Hughes: "Its aim is to change fundamentally the present social and commercial system." He further says: "While it seeks in the first instance, to make the material business of men's lives—production, buying and selling—wholesome and honest, it does not stop here. Its object is to work out in practice the true relations between man and man, which can only be done by frank acknowledgment of the ground upon which human society is based—that we must be fellow-workers and not rivals, brethren of one family, to whom indeed the great inheritance of this earth has been given, but only on the condition that it shall be used and enjoyed in the spirit and according to the will of Him who created it."

Brotherhood

The principles of co-operation were formulated by poor cotton weavers some sixty years ago in England, as follows:

1. "That human society is a brotherhood, not a collection of warring atoms.
2. "That true workers should be fellow-workers, not rivals.
3. "That a principle of justice and not of selfishness should regulate exchanges."

How it is attempted to carry out these principles may be seen in this declaration of the English Co-operative union, which embraces some fifteen hundred societies:

"This union is formed to promote the practice of truthfulness, justice and economy in production and exchange:

1. "By the abolition of all false dealing, either (a) direct, by representing any article produced or sold to be other than what it is known to be, or (b) indirect, by concealing from the purchaser any fact known to the vendor, material to be known by the purchaser, to enable him to judge of the value of the article purchased.
2. "By conciliating the conflicting interests of the capitalist, the worker and the purchaser through an equitable division amongst them of the fund commonly known as profit.
3. "By preventing the waste of labor now caused by unregulated competition."

Fundamental Principles

In organizing a co-operative society or company under the laws of this country in order to put the above principles into practice, it becomes necessary to adopt a few essential fundamental principles with which it is expected that all persons who wish to voluntarily co-operate will be willing to comply. They are:

1. Manhood vote. One man, one vote, regardless of number of shares held. No proxy voting.
2. Dividends on capital stock to be limited to the local current rate of interest on money.
3. A division of all surplus profits, after paying for depreciation, reserve and educational funds, in proportion to patronage.
4. Unlimited membership without class distinction, inviting all persons, high or low, rich or poor, to unite on terms of equality.

In order to apply these essentials, it becomes necessary to define other features which are almost as vital. These subsidiary features are defined as follows:

1. Allowing one-half as great dividends to non-members as to members on their patronage.
2. Division of profits among employees pro rata to the business done

by them with the society, counting salary paid the same as patronage.

If these six principles are applied and practiced by society generally, it will be conceded that the result would be the abolishment of the war between capital and labor, that the wealth created by labor would be redistributed justly, in proportion as it is created by each worker and participant, and that the evils which follow in the wake of the power which concentrated wealth gives would be abolished. In making a beginning, however, on the American continent, it may be advisable to start with the adoption of the first four essentials mentioned. If this is done it is a half-way house, a halting place only, and without the last two subsidiary essentials in practice a complete and permanent fundamental change in the present social and commercial system can never take place.

In Europe

In Europe, and notably in Great Britain, these principles have been widely applied and practiced. In England and Scotland alone there are more than two and one-half million stockholders in the more than fifteen hundred retail co-operative societies, which together own the Co-operative Wholesale Society, of Manchester, England, and the Scottish Co-operative Society, of Glasgow, Scotland, and that, with the families and friends affiliated with these stockholders, practically one-fourth of the

entire population of Great Britain is thus directly benefited in materially reducing the cost of living, to say nothing of the improvement of the character of the participants. And the best authorities claim that co-operation is for the purpose of improving the character of men so that they will be enabled to improve their own condition.

In America

But, you ask, has anything been accomplished along these lines in America? Conditions in this country, considered from a co-operative standpoint, are considerably mixed, and yet the movement has a firm footing and is making extremely rapid progress.

All are more or less familiar with the fact that there are many hundred co-operative creameries, elevators, fruit associations, etc., scattered throughout the United States and Canada. A very great percentage of these, while called co-operative and desiring to operate as such, do not include or practice the essential principles of co-operation as defined above and conceded to be correct by international authorities on the subject. This is occasioned principally by lack of proper knowledge at their inception.

Right Relationship League

There is a little suite of offices in Minneapolis where three men work together—co-operate, to be precise—in the interest of the most promising business in America.

This business is not as big as that of the steel trust or the beef combine, and it is far from being well oiled and organized as they, thus far, but it is immeasurably more promising than they—to you and to me and to the rest of us outside the pale of "Big Business."

For this is the one kind of business that bids fair some day to bring "Big Business" down to lower case type—perhaps to put it out of the running altogether and to become itself—business.

This office is that of the "Right Relationship League," and the three men who work there are E. J. Van Horn, W. F. Vedder and E. M. Tousley, respectively president, vice-president and secretary of the league. Six years ago, when this Minneapolis office was opened, these men began organizing co-operative stores, starting with three companies operating seven stores, as a basis.

Now the league can boast of 141 stores, operated by 100 co-operative companies in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Illinois and Missouri.

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They have a paid-up capital stock (no water) of about \$1,500,000.

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