



Co-operation A Hunch

In any period of the ever prevailing industrial conflict, the one most damnable single influence, here and elsewhere, is the co-operative movement. It is foreign to the aspirations of the American workers (material and Ideal) and serves to divide the workers into two parts—those who believe labor is robbed at the point of production, and those who believe he is robbed at the point of consumption. Then there is a third faction that believes labor is robbed both ways (and many other ways) until he becomes one of the most thoroughly robbed dignitaries in the world. Creating this condition of division in labors' ranks, the co-operative movement serves to shield the real thieves—at the source of corruption—at the point of production.

Given the full product of his toil labor would be immune from exploitation, insofar as this would eliminate the parasites altogether, aristocratic or otherwise. Business men receiving only the full product of their toil could in no way be classed as parasites.

Before we proceed we must note that it has been said, "craft unionism is the sole evil that tends to divide the working class." This is not strictly true since the co-operative movements do this very thing more effectively. And, in the sense that the co-operative is subtle, creating a division of thought, while craft unionism "openly" divides labor into antagonistic camps of sympathizers.

So we find that, in these times of industrial unrest, the most valuable ally of craft unionism is the co-operative movement. They are inseparably linked together, supported by the same people, and seek to bring about the same deplorable result—a division.

Ostensibly they both seek a decent standard of living for the workers; "co-operation" by enabling the workers to supply themselves with the necessities of life at cost; craft unionism by raising the workers' wages to the point where they will purchase a better living." The theory behind the co-ops is that a decrease in the cost of living is an increase in wages. I 'spose, too, according to them, an increase in wages is the equivalent of a reduction in the cost of living.

Thus, if a worker receives an increase in wages and a decrease in cost of living, he has really received two increases in pay—one at the point of production and one at the point of consumption—a pay day on each battlefield. Isn't that nice.

But if the boss gives him a "cut," and the merchants one big union of business raises the cost of living, he experiences two wage cuts.

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Thus, also, if he has the power to raise his wages on the job, the increased pay will take care of the cost of living; but if he is only able to reduce the cost of living, then his lack of economic power on the job is an invitation to the boss to slash the wages, so that they will conform with the decreased cost of living he has obtained.

It is a question of economic power on the job. The best you can hope to do by a co-operative business venture is to pull a producer off the job, set him up in the business of buying and selling in opposition to those already in the business, thus increasing the numerical strength of the business fraternity.

The retail merchants are organized in the Merchants Union and are doing business with the entire support and direction of the wholesalers; they can underbuy the co-operative and thereby perpetuate themselves in their chosen field. (I know of no "independent" store driven to the wall by any co-operative. There they blossom, side by side, in any country village).

But maybe our craft unionist reasons that two storekeepers are as easy to support as one. No, brother, we do not need more storekeepers; what we need is an industrial union on the job strong enough to take care of every increase in the cost of living—right at the point of production.

Craft unionism tends to establish an aristocracy of labor, and the co-operative movement cinches it, but, at the same time, it establishes a condition in the labor world that can result only in the loss of support with labor at large. Ostensibly both movements aim to establish industrial democracy, according to their spokesmen, by fighting a part of the time at the point of consumption (so as to give the boss a chance to get his wind) and a part of the time at the point of production, which indicates: They do not know what they doeth. They don't know where the trouble is. Like the doctor treating a woman for typhoid fever when she had diphtheria. (Oh, if the doctor had only thought to treat her for both diseases).

So labor is being robbed at both the point of consumption and the point of production. Well, I swan!

He must be getting pretty poor by this time—and thin—considering the co-operative movement has been in the field only a short time, plugging the leaks peculiar to the point of collection as understood apart from production. How about a one big union of all labor, to gather the tokens unto those who produced them? A "co-operative move" in a "competitive" system, is like a religious revival in a beer garden.

While it is true that business men reap "gains," out of all proportion to the service they render; and while it is true that the entrance of co-operatives has a tendency to make their services still less frequent, it does not mean that labor will be called upon to make special efforts to support the co-operatives. Rather, the extraordinary support, given (previously) to the business men, will be stretched to blanket the entire business fraternity, including co-operatives. Thus, in each case, labors is only one producer (turned business man) and business men's gain is the footsteps saved in the course of waiting on fewer customers.

But it happens that already the business men find almost nothing to do (proof of which lies in the fact that many of them rush out on the street to capture customers) in return for the living they get.

Labor has noticed that many business men find it difficult to find eight hours work per day in their establishments, hence, it is thought, the business fraternity is too numerous, or their supporters too few. In fact, there is a movement to boycott those places that appear to be nearer bankruptcy and initiate them into the working class.

(To Be Continued)