Consumers' Co-operation; the New Mass Movement

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The many and the varying remedies suggested for "the high cost of living" serve to remind us how acute that problem has become. The cost of living has been familiar as "low wages." It is only since the evil has begun to invade and affect the salaried classes that the more genteel phrase has been adopted. But from bitter experience they all know that both terms are synonymous: that the cost of living is only high or low in its relation to the standard of wages or salaries. The humblest navvy knows that a loaf of bread would be cheap to him at twenty-five cents if he were earning six dollars a day, while five cents a loaf is dear at his present dollar-a-day wage.

For over a century the wage workers have been trying the remedy that seemed to them the most obviously effective — trade unionism. But while trade unionism has taught them the power of association, while it has brought about better conditions, especially among the skilled toilers, there is no doubt that a widespread suspicion is growing among the working people themselves that trade
unionism has its limitations. The resort to terrorism by the steel structural workers' unions, some years ago, the violent outbursts of syndicalism, with its program of "sabotage," and the increase of the Socialist vote are only a few of the chief symptoms of this awakening sense of disillusionment. Not that there is any inclination to abandon industrial action, but there is a growing feeling that it must be supplemented by other and more effective measures.

**PRICES ADVANCE WITH WAGES.**

What has deceived trade unionists so long has been their supposition that a dollar was always a dollar; that its purchasing value was always the same. And in dollars the standard of wages has risen, especially in the organized trades.

When the coal strike, fourteen years ago, ended in the triumph of the striking coal miners, all organized labor rejoiced. Then the price of coal rose quietly and has remained high ever since. That was one big object lesson. Another was the Lawrence strike; the strikers gained their 10-per cent. increase. Simultaneously wholesale dealers in cotton goods in New York began announcing 10, 15, and even 20 per cent. increases in their prices. So the disillusioning goes on; intelligent working-men are beginning to perceive that whether they win or lose their strikes all costs and losses and a slight margin over are charged up to the consuming public, and they belong to that part of the consuming public which can least afford to pay higher prices.

Then comes the Socialist and gathers in his converts. But however logical the arguments of the Socialist may seem, he himself states that that part of his program which really means something cannot be put into effect until a majority of the nation's electorate has been won over to Socialism as a theory. Unfortunately the vast majority either cannot grasp an abstract theory or they are too full of their own troubles to worry about posterity. Socialism can promise neither immediate action nor immediate relief.

I have, of course, presented only the situation in this country. Abroad, where the evils of our present industrial system have developed further than here, the masses have progressed further in their search for remedies. They have gone through all our experiences and are now entering a new field of experiment — new at least in its recent development, but so infinite in its scope and its future possibilities that what is now being accomplished reads almost like one of H. G. Wells' earlier romances. We have so far followed in the footsteps of the older countries; that we shall follow them into this new field is inevitable.

**SELF-GOVERNING WORKSHOPS.**

There are many who still remember the self-governing workshops of twenty-five and thirty years ago — small factories that were owned and controlled by the men employed within them, sharing with one another in the profits as well as in the responsibilities. Among the best illustrations of this peculiar system of industrial organization were the co-operative cooperage shops in Minneapolis and St. Paul, supplying barrels to the flour mills. At that time many of the advocates of the system believed that here was the germ from which would spring a new social order, that the industries of the future would be based on this plan.

But very few of these self-governing workshops now exist, except in industries where hand labor is still a large part of the process of manufacture, as in cigar-making. New inventions in machinery, leading to the centralization of industries and the reduction of skilled labor have made such shops impossible. From the failure of these enterprises arose the general impression that cooperative production had failed and was not adapted to conditions in this country.

The appearance of these shops in America was only the result of a much earlier movement in Europe of a similar nature. The theory on which it had been founded in England had been expounded since the early part of the century by a group of brilliant professional men, calling themselves Christian Socialists, among whom were Charles Kingsley, Vansittart Neale, Thomas Hughes and G. J. Holyoake, all disciples of Robert Owen.

At that time England was troubled with very much the same problems that are worrying us now; the chartist agitation that resulted in the repeal of the Corn Laws was only one manifestation.
From above came the same flood of suggested remedies. But, just as here, the workers put their faith in trade unionism and, later, took up political action.

ENGLAND'S CO-OPERATIVE STORES.

But there was a third line of action that developed to unusual strength there. All over the country the working people organized co-operative societies which hoped to cheapen the cost of living by combining the purchasing power of their members.

But, like the trade-union method, Co-operation showed one inherent weakness—the same weakness, in fact, though from the other end of the workingman's purse. The co-operative stores did eliminate the profits of the small retailers and so cheapen the cost of living, but simultaneously there appeared a tendency among the big middlemen to raise prices, the theory, often voiced openly, being that "Co-operators could stand the increase." The dealers and the manufacturers supplying the co-operative stores calmly appropriated the benefits and divided them among themselves, leaving the consumers where they stood before.

It was this obvious tendency which raised within the Co-operative movement the cry for "a co-operative source of supply." And in response to that demand the Christian Socialists offered their idea of co-operative production—the self-governing workshops, suggested to them by the communist theories of Robert Owen and the Fourierist experiments in France.

At that time the tendency toward industrial centralization was not so marked and the new scheme appeared feasible. Among the Christian Socialists were rich men who financed the first experiments. Among them were also some brilliant writers and they began creating a literature on Co-operation in which the self-governing workshop idea shone forth predominant. The movement spread, even to this country.

CO-OPERATIVE PRODUCTION.

But even before it was an undoubted failure the leaders of the Co-operative store movement began realizing the fallacy of the fundamental principles underlying the self-governing workshops. At the national Co-operative congresses the members of the workshop societies raised the cry of "loyalty;" it was the duty of the store societies to buy from them. In actual practice the self-governing workshops proved just as greedy after profits as the private dealers. Between the two—the small, exclusive producers' societies and the great body of the co-operating consumers—was a sharp line dividing their separate, conflicting interests. One bought, the other sold; each was on the other side of the counter. The productive societies were no less capitalistic than private corporations. The consumers' movement swept away from this form of co-operative production and passed onward.

Long before it was clear how a "co-operative source of supply" could be established, the stores found a way to eliminate the big middlemen from the field. They carried their principle of joint purchase a step further, federated into a national wholesale society, and began to deal directly with the big manufacturers. To oppose this new step the middlemen organized a traders' protective association whose purpose was to force the manufacturers to boycott the wholesale society. To their own great misfortune they were in a measure successful.

With the financial strength of the whole movement behind it and an organized market of a million consumers before it, the Co-operators' central purchasing society, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, could afford to be independent of any single manufacturer. So it was from necessity that the Wholesale began manufacturing biscuits at Crumpsall, to supply the needs of its own constituents, the local stores. And incidentally they discovered a "co-operative source of supply." To-day the many industrial plants of the Wholesale Society cover nearly every one of the prime necessities.

The difference between the two systems—the self-governing workshops on the one hand and the big consumers' plants on the other—must be strikingly obvious. The one, adapted to petty competition, must die with the competitive system. The other was closely adapted to the modern tendency toward centralization. Under the first system small,
exclusive groups of workers with restricted interests manufacture to sell, demanding as much as the market will give them. Under the second system the people, as consumers, manufacture to supply their own needs, for use only. To the one profit is a vital necessity; the other abolishes the profit system.

THE GREAT WHOLESALE ORGANIZATIONS

To-day the English Co-operative Wholesale Society’s gigantic factories, including the biggest flour mills and the biggest boot and shoe factory in Great Britain, with a turnover of $215,000,000 and 23,000 employees on their payroll, fully indicate the progress made in England alone. The big industrial center at Shieldhall, owned and controlled by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale, employing another 9,000 workers, proves that Scotland was not far behind England in adopting the new system.

For nearly thirty years these two countries were the only fields of experiment; the continental Co-operators apparently wanted to see federal co-operative production thoroughly tried out before taking it up themselves. It was not until thirteen years ago, when a general international congress of the movement convened at Manchester, the headquarters of the English Wholesale, that the continental Co-operators realized that the “co-operative source of supply” was an established fact.

This long period between the initial experiment in the early ’70’s and the universal adoption of the principle involved is a silent testimony to the many difficulties that taxed the patience and endurance of the English Co-operators. First and foremost was the one that has killed off so many workingmen’s enterprises in their infancy—ineptitude. One incident illustrates the low level of moral responsibility from which Co-operation has since raised its participants. The first conference of delegates from the Scottish societies that met to consider the organization of a wholesale society elected a committee to prepare plans. For months no report was forthcoming; inquiry revealed that all the members of this important committee had emigrated to America, absolutely forgetting the duties to their comrades which they had undertaken.

The grade of business ability required to organize and conduct such enterprises as the present English and Scottish wholesale industries is of the type that demands million-dollar salaries in the capitalist world. Naturally the Co-operators could not afford to hire such men. They must train their own people. And that they have done so and also retained them is perhaps the most astounding result of the Co-operative movement; it upsets the theories of most economists. One by one these captains of democratic industry arose from the little store committees and made good. Nor does the lure of capitalist gold seem to tempt them. William Maxwell, for thirty years the president of the Scottish Wholesale, conducting a fifty-million-dollar-a-year business, never demanded a higher salary than $38 a week. And he is only one of many.

Before the Manchester congress, in 1902, there were only half a dozen wholesale societies outside of Great Britain, of which only Germany had as yet ventured into production. The rest were mere purchasing agencies. To-day there are over twenty national wholesale societies in as many countries, the last being established in Spain last year. Before gauging the significance of these federations and their activities, it is necessary to explain a few of the principles on which they are organized.

The unit of organization is the head of the family, man or woman, who may be an unskilled laborer, a clerk, a doctor, a novelist, or the governor-general of Canada. Earl Grey is in fact an ardent member and honorary president of the International Co-operative Alliance. These units form the local society, which conducts anything from a small grocery store to a chain of big department stores. The capital of this local society has in the beginning been subscribed by the members, but later has been augmented by a percentage from the profits, gradually becoming collective capital. In some older societies new members pay only a small initiation fee. The fundamental principles of the local societies are: One man, one vote; the lowest market rate of interest to invested capital, which must never share in the profits; the distribution of the profits among the members in proportion to their purchases, unless devoted to collective enterprises, and membership open to all comers.

The local societies again form the

(The above chart is drawn from the official figures of the British Registrar of Friendly Societies and therefore includes an outer fringe of societies that have not yet affiliated with the Co-operative Union. The figures are therefore slightly higher than those compiled by the Co-operative Union, as quoted in the text. Many of the societies in this outer fringe are, probably, like the Army and Navy Stores in London, co-operative only in form and not in spirit, and have nothing in common with the general movement)

units of organization in the wholesale societies, to whose quarterly meetings they send their delegates on a per capita basis. At these meetings the delegates choose the boards of directors which direct the enterprises of the wholesales. The profits of the wholesale are subject to the same treatment as the profits of the local enterprises. They must manufacture for and sell to only their constituent members, the local store societies. From this it will be seen that the profit system is abolished; the surplus from trade is returned to whence it came, or is applied to further collective enterprise.

I shall not give here the astounding figures of the growth of the movement since the war began; that is being reserved for a separate article. My purpose, at present, is to treat of the Co-operative movement under normal conditions.

In 1913, sixteen wholesale societies reporting did a business of sixty million pounds sterling, which is well over a quarter of a billion dollars. This was an increase over the previous year of $22,700,000. No society showed a decrease; no wholesale society, once established, ever has shown a decrease. In Germany, third in importance, the increase was over 13 per cent; German Switzerland, 29 per cent; Bohemia, 45 per cent; Norway, 25 per cent; Russia, 35 per cent, and Denmark, 13 per cent. These figures do not cover the many local productive enterprises, not adapted by their nature to centralization, yet carried on under the same system. Obviously bread cannot be baked far from the consumer; the same is true of market gardening. Such enterprises are undertaken by local societies, either singly or through district federation. The biggest bakery in the world, in Glasgow, comes under this head: it supplies the Co-operators in Glasgow and its suburbs with their morning loaves. The second biggest bakery in the world supplies the Co-operators of Vienna. The biggest bakeries in Belgium belong to the Co-operators in Brussels and Ghent. The same societies also conduct farms, dairies, slaughter-houses, etc.

But, however big and important these infant democratic industries may be, behind them stands a far more significant fact,—the organized consumers. Over all the world spreads this vast body, bound together by a single purpose: to India, to Japan, to Bulgaria and Servia; to Spain, to Cape Town, to Argentina...
and to Canada, its units each the head of a family numbering ten millions, representing fifty million consumers.

In Great Britain the membership is now over three millions; counting them as heads of families,—one-fourth of the total population. Germany follows with 1,800,000; France, with 900,000; Austria, with 500,000; Russia, with 300,000, and Italy and Switzerland with a quarter of a million each. The rest are distributed among the smaller countries, especially Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Holland and Finland, where, though their actual numbers are smaller, they form even a higher percentage of the population than in some of the bigger countries.

Just what the rate of increase of this vast, world-wide organization has been within the last few years can only be estimated accurately in those countries where the movement has long been self-conscious. In most of the continental countries there was no general movement ten years ago and the importance of gathering statistics was not thought of. The International Co-operative Alliance has only just established a system of comparative statistics and henceforth the growth will be accurately recorded. In 1884 British Co-operators numbered 717,000. In 1894 they numbered 1,200,000. In 1904, they numbered 2,180,000. The average rate of increase during this period has been 70,000 a year,—about 300,000 consumers. Each year this Co-operative state, within the British state, has added to its domain a city the size of San Francisco. One would naturally expect to see this rate of increase diminish as the movement itself expanded, but in 1913, the added membership amounted to 128,000. Judging from this record of growth in Great Britain, where progress has been more gradual, it is a conservative statement to say that the international movement has doubled within the last ten years.

INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS.

And is not this rapid expansion an answer to the question, What has Co-operation done for the masses? If you take the point of view that the majority are moved only by material advantages, which is undoubtedly true, the answer is complete. Yet this question may be answered with something more definite than a sweeping conclusion.

In December, of 1911, to quote figures conveniently at hand, the English Wholesale Society returned to its constituent societies $1,100,000 as their share of the $1,600,000 net profits, made during the previous six months; half a million dollars was retained for extending the enterprises. Under the capitalist system that money would have gone into the pockets of private capitalists. The local stores return about $70,000,000 a year in rebates, representing profits the retailers do not get. It is not uncommon practice for the local societies to build their members' houses which are paid for by their rebates, thus enabling them to "eat themselves into house and home," as Mr. Maxwell expressed it. I once asked a Glasgow woman to give me, in round figures, an idea of what her family had got out of dealing with their local co-operative stores. She said: "During all the years I lived with my sister, her husband and their child, a small family, as you see, we never paid one shilling rent. At the end of each quarter we handed over the rebate check from the store to the landlord and sometimes there was change coming to us." As a general rule a well-conducted society, dealing in a full line of merchandise, should return to its purchasing members about three shillings on the pound. That, of course, is only possible in a country where the movement has already begun to attack the profits of the manufacturer.

But even the material benefits cannot all be reckoned in hard cash. There is the elimination of that constant and insidious drain on small family purses,—adulteration, short weight, overcharging, and the other varying forms of commercial dishonesty common to private trade all along the line from the small retailer up to the big trust magnate. The Co-operative shopkeeper has no possible motive for cheating his customers, because the results of his deceptions would be theirs anyhow. The same holds good of the board of directors of the wholesale; the directors derive no other income from the enterprises except their fixed salaries. If they do not constantly keep their goods up to the highest standard of quality, they soon hear about it from the local delegates at the quarterly meetings,—those representatives of the consumers who can put them out of office if their services are not satisfactory. One has only to read the reports of these
meetings to realize that. Within its own domain Co-operation has completely sterilized trade of all fraud.

BELGIUM'S SYSTEM OF CLUB HOUSES.

If you were to attempt to measure the benefits of Co-operation by dollars in Belgium, there would not be much to show. There, as well as in other countries where the Socialists dominate the movement, the return of the profits to the purchasing members in the form of cash rebates is much deprecated. Instead they are devoted almost entirely to collective purposes—sick and death benefits, free medical aid, old-age pensions, maternity subsidies, day nurseries and general club-houses. These latter are especially famous: the Belgium maison du peuple is known to all tourists through Belgium, though few know of the movement behind it. It has been called the Belgian form of settlement house, which it is, except that it is supported from below and not subsidized from above. In every town or city local Co-operative social activity centers about the maison du peuple. Here the members meet for social intercourse and are afforded free libraries, reading rooms, lectures, concerts, dances and moving-picture shows. In Ghent the local maison du peuple includes a theater where the audiences elect the actors and choose the plays. The building cost the local society a half million dollars. It was decorated by the famous Flemish sculptor, Van Beersbroeck, who has his studio on the upper floor, where he is permanently subsidized by the society to decorate their buildings and to create a working-class art. Outside the building is a park, where the band plays in summer and the people promenade the walks or drink beer under the trees.

In the Borinage, the coal-mining regions, the Co-operators had a more special reason for this method of organizing the people socially as well as economically. Thirty years ago, as one may know by reading Zola's novel, "Germinal," the people of this region were unusually degraded. To attract them the first Co-operators had to present something more lively than economic theories or even the prospect of saving a few pennies. The maison du peuple did the work. Another handicap was the gin shops; the miners spent their time as well as their wages there and starved till next pay-day. The Co-operators established co-operative breweries, whose cheap, wholesome beer was sold in the maison du peuple beer gardens. It seems almost incredible that a temperance crusade should employ beer as one of its weapons, but it was the co-operative beer gardens that drove the low gin shops out of existence. On the barrels are pasted labels, bearing such mottoes as "A bas l'alcoholicisme," or "L'alcoholism est le plus puissant propagator de la tuberculose."

Another feature of Belgian Co-operation is the organized exchange of children between members' families in the Flemish provinces and the French, or Walloon, provinces, enabling the children to spend long periods in households where the other language of the nation is spoken. Thus they learn to read and write and speak both fluently, besides having their mental horizons broadened. It was the Franco-Belge Co-operative Society in Lawrence, founded by Belgian immigrants, that suggested to the strikers the employment of this method to save their children the privations of the strike.

A NON-POLITICAL MOVEMENT.

I have said that the Socialists are prominent in the movement in some of the continental countries. But outside Belgium the movement, as a whole, stands neutral so far as political parties are concerned. Even the International Socialist Congress, held in 1910, in endorsing Co-operation and urging all Socialists to support it, recommended them to respect this independence of political parties.

Until recently the Co-operative movement as a whole pretended to no social theories or philosophy; all it promised its converts was immediate and an increasing degree of relief from economic pressure and it saw no further than the next turning. But the rapid development of federal production has placed in the hands of the organization a power in the exercise of which it has awakened to a consciousness of a great purpose.

Nine years ago, at an international congress in Cremona, Dr. Hans Muller, a Swiss delegate, presented a resolution by which an international wholesale society should be created. Luigi Luzzatti, Italian Minister of State and an ardent member of the movement, was in the chair. Those who were present say Luz-
zatti paused, his eyes lighted up, then, dramatically raising his hand, he said: "Dr. Muller proposes to the assembly a great idea; that of opposing to the great trusts, the Rockefeller of the world, a world-wide Co-operative Alliance which shall become so powerful as to crush the trusts."

That end, voiced by an Italian statesman and not by a Socialist, is definite enough; it is something even more than the cheapening of the cost of living. But the means to that end are even more definite.

Here is an illustration of the awakening power of Co-operation, as yet only an outpost skirmish when compared to the struggle that is bound to come within a few years, if the movement advances any further in the carrying out of its new program:

In February, 1911, the Swedish Wholesale began a determined attack on the sugar trust. The trust controlled the Swedish sugar market and, owing to a highly developed organization of districts, dictated prices all over the country. It had fixed the price of sugar at two and one-fourth oren (about three-fifths of a cent) above the prices of all the other sugar markets of the world, in addition to the import duty. If an individual trader tried to import sugar on his own account, the trust would immediately lower the price in his neighborhood and drive him out of business.

The Swedish Wholesale had obtained permission from the trust to supply sugar to its societies in the neighborhood of Stockholm, but not to others. All the other societies were obliged to buy from private merchants in their own particular districts, as specified by the trust. Suddenly the directors of the Wholesale decided to import sugar themselves, in spite of the high duty, and so liberate the whole movement from the dictation of the sugar trust. The trust at once lowered its prices until they were less than the prices in other countries, regardless of the duty. But the Wholesale had acted in a favorable moment and could easily undersell the trust, whose control over the co-operative societies was completely broken. Another result of this fight was that the Swedish Parliament was obliged to take up legislative action against the sugar trust and break its power over the private dealers as well.

At the same time, the Wholesale also engaged in a similar struggle with the margerine combine, with even more decisive results, for after suffering a loss of 2,300,000 crowns the margerine combine was obliged to dissolve.

But even a more picturesque event of this nature took place in Switzerland, only a few months before the war broke out. There a firm by the name of Bell & Son dominated the whole meat supply: through its extensive system of chain stores and packing houses it dictated prices of all kinds of meat, to private dealers and co-operative societies alike.

One day the Wholesale Society suddenly declared war on Bell & Son; it was determined to end at least the subjection of its own constituency to the rule of the meat trust.

The terms offered by the Wholesale were that Bell & Son sell out to the Wholesale. And that was done. The Wholesale bought first a block of shares which gave it control, then gradually ended this peculiar partnership by buying out the private stockholders, and so the organized consumers of Switzerland gained democratic control of their own meat supply.

There are numerous such examples on record. In Denmark the Co-operators are even now smashing the cement trust by erecting works of their own. The Swiss are again fighting, this time the chocolate trust. Such triumphs are permanent, for the result of each is the establishment of an independent source of supply outside the private monopolies.

The declared aim of the Co-operative movement does not differ from that of the Socialist parties, but their means of attaining that end are radically different.

The Socialists base their program on political action and, to some extent, industrial action—the general strike.

The Co-operators base all their hopes on economic action.

The Socialists exercise their power as voters and workers.
The Co-operators exercise their power as consumers. To them, political action is incidental; it may be employed to defend the movement against restrictive legislation; to force the capitalist to fight fair.

The Co-operator believes that it is as consumers that the people hold supreme power. The capitalist unconsciously demonstrates this fact in his attitude toward the people in these two positions; as workers he spurns them, as consumers he prostrates himself before them.

The Co-operative movement's program is purely constructive. It does not really set out to destroy capitalism, but the fact must be recognized that, as Cooperation becomes established, so capitalism must wither. The life of capitalist trade is absolutely dependent on the support of the people as consumers. If the people gradually build up a new source of supply outside of capitalism, superior to it, then capitalism must decay, die of starvation. Necessarily it will be the capitalist who will attack and the Co-operator who will be in a defensive position. The Co-operator neither seeks nor avoids this struggle; he goes on building. If Co-operation is superior to capitalism it needs no revolutionary upheaval to establish itself; it will be established through its own inherent power, its fitness to survive the struggle. And that struggle must, as much as possible, be confined to the field in which the people have the advantage—the economic field. As voters we may be counted out, as workers we may be locked out, but as consumers the capitalist fears the power of every one of us.

This is the Co-operators' main argument. But incidentally, he adds:

The Socialist depends on majority action. The Co-operator would not oblige an intelligent minority to wait for an ignorant majority.

The Socialist cannot begin reconstruction until he has captured the political machinery of the state.

The Co-operator has already begun reconstruction. What are those big industries of the wholesale societies but the nucleus of the national industries of the great industrial democracy of the future?

Both movements must educate the ignorant majority, but beside the abstract arguments of the Socialists the Co-operator presents the concrete facts of what he has already accomplished. The So-
cialist can only promise. The Co-operator makes good at once. One talks, the other acts.

The Socialist program, especially in so far as it is based on industrial action, demands heavy sacrifices from its units. The economic action of the Co-operators has never yet caused more misery to the already suffering people; on the contrary, it has given nothing but benefits; a fuller life to millions. Its biggest conflicts with capitalism have left, and will leave in the future, nothing but bounties in their trail. Co-operation promises all that Socialism promises for the distant future, yet it also gives immediate relief.

For the Co-operative program is closely adapted to the laws of normal evolution, natural growth. It will destroy nothing that it cannot immediately replace with something better.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that it has been the late infusion of young blood from the Socialist parties that has given the Co-operative movement its higher idealism. Twelve years ago it stood, irresolute, contemplating impossible alliances with natural enemies, toying with propagandas of profit-sharing among private corporations, afraid to declare itself for a logical carrying out of its own principle because such a course might injure the high lords of finance. Today, it stands boldly facing the future, its path sharply defined, leading straight ahead.

PROGRESS IN AMERICA.

And how does all this affect our country? The standpatters, hardly aware of the existence of this movement abroad, have not yet declared that a "foreign movement will not thrive on American soil." They did say that about Socialism, which nevertheless continues increasing its votes at every general election.

It is a striking peculiarity of the Co-operative movement that it advances with a silent tread. Had some guiding genius planned its tactics, its methods could not have been more effective. Its progress is masked by its own initial failures, as if to deceive those of its enemies who might really check it during the early stages of its growth. And yet, where its failures seem to have been most abject, its development has been most tremendous.

It is true that this country has been the last to develop a Co-operative movement. But already it is here. For twelve or thirteen years there was a very conspicuous movement on the Pacific Slope. It collapsed. Yet now, out of the debris, emerges the embryo of something that will not fail. In the Northwest there is a store movement comprising several hundred local societies. Wisconsin had to pass special incorporation laws for its co-operative societies. Few Co-operators even are aware that fully half the states in the Union have had to do likewise. Eighteen months ago a convention of co-operative societies in the immediate vicinity of New York City was held, at which seventeen were represented, doing a business of over a million dollars a year. Last year these societies organized a Wholesale, a mere central purchasing agency, as yet, but growing. Now appears the Co-operative League of America, devoted to a sowing of the seeds of knowledge of Co-operation; an organization that will guide where formerly isolated societies were obliged to experiment for themselves.

But perhaps most remarkable has been the development of the movement among the mine workers of Illinois, at the head of which are John H. Walker and Duncan McDonald, the prominent labor leaders. There are now over forty flourishing store societies in the state, doing a business of over two millions a year. These again have federated into the State of Illinois Co-operative Society, whose purpose is spreading knowledge of theory and practice among the people of the state. And now steps are being taken to establish a wholesale society with its own warehouses.

The friends of Co-operation in this country have no reason to be discouraged. To become a Socialist is a mere matter of inner conviction. But to become a Co-operator, years of gruelling experience are needed. In all countries, the early stages have been the most difficult. The fact that we are already emerging from this difficult period is proof that the American people are not going to remain isolated from the rest of the world in this one matter. And with the energy that is inherent in American character put behind a movement so promising for the future, so bountiful in its immediate benefits as Co-operation, who knows what may not develop here within the next twenty years?