

When in the course of human events... (*what this article was written for is unknown but it was written by R. J. Ackley on November 28, 1948.*)



When in the course of human events the ruling forces of a nation, either by dictatorship or otherwise, see fit to bear down upon and exploit the rank and file of its citizenship to the point of exasperation and misery, an undercurrent of dissatisfaction will develop in the form of some kind of collectivism. As a matter of self-protection people do this.

In a democracy with the best kind of constitution and laws, there can develop through international cartels and combinations in restraint of trade, an economical dictatorship that will have the same effect as in a governmental absolute-dictatorship. But the peoples of a true democracy have the right to rise in their dignity and by their votes and by forming their own buying and selling organization, may at least try to throw off the economical yoke that binds them.

Competition in business seems to be the best form of economy the world has yet devised. But today, now, right here in the good old U.S.A., competition in business, especially big business, seems to be a lost art, an unknown quantity.

Hence, in self-defense, the Co-op movement was born.

As I see the picture, we have in this world today two trends of economical thought. One that reaches back as far as time records, but seems to grow gradually if not rapidly worse. A system so thoroughly defended by profiteers and their money that it is quite hard to break down. Another plan, comparatively new, The Cooperative Plan.

Under the first plan, commonly called the capitalistic system (which name I do not like but use it for want of a better name), under this system the driving motive seems to be to extract (by means fair or foul) from the patrons of industry all that is possible at the present time and in the very near future even more.

Now what about the Cooperative Plan?

This plan seeks to save and give to its patrons all that is humanly possible. I could cite you to millions saved and invested in facilities, other millions saved by maintaining farm markets, and still other millions returned to patrons. All these investments and savings belong to the membership but never the manager or Board of Directors. A strictly democratic organization. One man, one vote, regardless of investment. No fifty-one percent control with forty-nine percent ordinarily worthless. Time for just one example of cooperation right here at home.

A group of farmers right here in Garden City, tired of paying a shipping margin of from 15 to 18 cents per bushel margin on their wheat and other things in proportion, on a margin of from 5 to 7 cents have been able to build the largest local elevator in the U.S.A., dedicated to the use of the Future Farmers of America. They have helped to build terminals at Hutchinson and Wichita, besides returning several millions to the members.

To the businessmen of Garden City.

Your patrons and the Co-op membership are largely the same people. If we save \$200,000 per year, you businessmen of Garden City get it. If a foreign corporation got it, they might not even buy a new hat in your town. Which is better? I leave it to you.

Speaking of combinations in restraint of trade, in the case of mergers, no law from the original Clayton Act through the Sherman Act, down to the present has been capable of restoring competitive free enterprise. Monopolies and international cartels are nurtured within the framework of the law while our economy cried for emancipation which can be brought about only by true competition. So, in the absence of control of big business by law, here comes the Co-ops to fill an imperative need. The people organize their buying and selling organizations for self-protection.

As a cooperator, I have no desire to put any businessman, large or small, out of business. But I do want to see the Co-ops handle enough of the business of our country to make competition function. Believe it or not, the whole world is veering to the left. Go that way and you will have company. Go to the right, and you walk alone.

The Co-ops are not moving to the left, or seeking to establish any kind of ism as some would have you believe. I am not alone in believing that the cooperative movement is the greatest bulwark the human mind has conceived to ward off communism. On the other hand, I am sorely afraid that unless we stop inflation, black markets and business methods that are a little short of highway robbery, we will make Communists here at home faster than we could shoot them in Russia. What the Co-op's hope to do is not to establish a new order of business, but to re-establish the old and tried competitive system and make it function.

Who is for and who is against the Co-ops?

The movement has the endorsement of most, if not all church denominations, both Catholic and Protestant. A little over a year ago during the Italian Co-op's congress being unable to attend, Pope Pius sent his papal blessing to that congress. Monsignor M.M. Coady, a high official in the Catholic Church of Nova Scotia, a prominent lecturer and worker for the Co-op movement said only recently at the Co-op congress at Minneapolis, "People cooperate in their family, civic, and spiritual life, but when it comes to economic life, then the smart boys take over." Jerry Coorhees, ex-congressman from California, said at the congress, "It's up to the cooperative movement to save democracy." The late Franklin D. Roosevelt and President Truman gave the Co-ops their endorsement in no uncertain language. Both major parties gave the Co-op recognition in their platforms. Arthur Capper, Clifford Hope, and thousands of others are friends of the Co-ops. Ask the millions of families now being served and hoping to be served by R.E.A. what they think. Ask the patrons of our U.S. mail service, the greatest cooperative in history. Would anybody want to change it? People cooperate and don't realize it. The Supreme Court of the State of Kansas, in a suit not so long ago to oust the Consumer's Co-op Association from doing business in Kansas, reversed the Attorney General and corporation commission in no uncertain terms, and gave the Co-ops a clean slate in the state of Kansas.

I wonder if we could take a vote of the people of Finney County, if they would vote to change the U.S. mails and place it in the hands of a monopoly. Do away with the Rural Electrification program, or change it into a private monopoly, or tear down the farmer's elevator and turn it over to private millionaires. There might be a few votes in favor. If any, they would be by private, selfish interests.

Those who are fighting Co-ops as far as I have been able to learn, are those with selfish interests. Let me repeat by way of emphasis: The Co-ops are seeking to ward off isms by re-establishing the good old democratic competitive system which the laws of the land seem to be unable to do. The Co-ops can do this job if they move fast enough. - R.J. Ackley