

THE CO-OPERATORS' DEPARTMENT.

By the Christian Corporation.

Collectivism, or Communism.

[Paper read before a Populist club in Omaha by Mr. Walter Brown, of that city.]

Mr. Chairman and Citizens:

What is so often termed collectivism or co-operation forms part of every system of radical socialism. Co-operation of a number of individuals is really the collection of their separate energies into one agency, and therefore collectivism, or collective effort. The state is a collection of individuals which derives its power and authority from the consent of its component parts, in other words, from the consent of the governed. This is not by any means a new idea. There are very few new ideas in this world. Father Time is a great Chemist analyzer and refiner, and as we are each year slowly evolving to a higher plane of civilization, so old ideas, and theories, and ways, and methods of life are being critically refined, and what is useless is quietly relegated to oblivion and the age keeps what is necessary or what it can make use of.

Plato, and some of the ancient Greeks, formulated some communistic principles. Primitive communes of Christians and other sects have been formed in different places in Europe and Asia, and in different periods from the first century of our era down to the present time, but it was not until the French Revolution that liberty, fraternity, and equality began to be thoroughly and generally understood and practical means to bring them about suggested themselves to any great number of human minds. The St. Simouians were the first of the moderns to attempt to get at the root of this problem. Without stopping to trace the plan of any ideal organization as Fourier—Etienne Cabet—did, and without relying on the doctrines of political economy as Marx and Lassalle have since so ingeniously done, they at once attacked the principle of hereditary succession,—upon which in point of fact our present system depends,—and aimed to show that if private property passed to the state on the death of the individual collective property would necessarily arise.

Modern socialism differs very much from ancient ideas on the subject. Formerly the ideal was to shut oneself up in a monastery, and while the life in these places was generally good it was purely a selfish life. The main and central idea was that the individual should save his soul and think of this first, last, and all the time. These communities became very wealthy through non-payment of taxes, and other favors which were allowed them by the kings, princes and states, and as they did not marry the accumulation of this world's goods kept constantly increasing, each one bringing something into the order, and, being passed along from one generation of monks to another, they finally owned about one-third of the real estate in northern Europe about the beginning of the 16th century. The reformation suppressed them, and the various states confiscated their lands and houses, and in northern Europe at least they practically ceased to exist. In these monasteries common labor, common living, and the common enjoyment of produce, quite irrespective of individual work done, took place, as in our family life. Collectivism, on the contrary, admits of the breaking up of the community into families, and by apportioning remuneration to produce obtained it seeks to preserve the incentive of private enterprise. In a collectivist state there would be as many co-operative societies, as there are principal branches of labor: agricultural societies, transport societies and manufacturing societies of all kinds. Farms, mines, railways, steamships, factories, workshops, in theory the collective property of the state, would in practice be handed over to corporations of working men who would manage them in the same way as joint stock companies do today.

Workmen would be paid in proportion to the amount and quality of their work. They would therefore have the same incentive as at present to work well and carefully. The difference would be that on the one hand they would obtain the full product of their labor, as nothing would have to be deducted for rent, interest or profits, and on the other hand, everybody would be obliged to work, as the means of production having ceased to be private property would no longer furnish private incomes, such as at present permit people to live in idleness. Under the system which Edward Bellamy has very fully outlined in his books a day's work would not be exhausting nor the hours long, nor would the years spent in working extend much beyond the ages of from twenty to forty-five. Every one working would cause three times as much to be produced as at present under our delightful cut-throat competitive system, where any amount of labor is being wasted or not even utilized. The fear of want when old age approaches which drives many to suicide at present would cease, and old age would be looked forward to with pleasure as a period of relaxation and ease, when compulsory labor would altogether cease, and the individual could pass the time in study or amusement, as he saw fit.

The motto of the Christian corporation of Lancaster county, Nebraska, is, that "If selfish corporations are wise, unselfish are still wiser." I shall have more to say later on the subject of this corporation, which, as far as I know, is the only society founded on communistic principles in Nebraska at the present time; but before giving a short history of American communes I shall quote from Dr. Schaeffer, an eminent German socialist, on the subject of management, and in his opinion this is the present all important matter: "No socialist reform," he says, "can succeed, which ignores the psychological fact on which the individualistic system at present rests, namely, that private in-

terest is the great incentive to production. It is not by formal rules and appeals to sentiments of duty or honor that we can secure the care and zeal necessary for producing as much as possible at the lowest cost without waste of time or material. The main difficulty lies in the efficient management of large industrial enterprises. It is through the want of good management that so many co-operative societies have failed. Collectivism assumes that bodies of working men are capable of carrying on collective industries with as much success as enterprises based on private property.

"Once they have given proof of this triumph of the new organization will only be a question of time, but so long as the laboring classes do not show themselves capable of doing without the guidance of masters all attempts at hastening by revolutionary means the advent of the new order of things will only end in lamentable failure."

And now I will review shortly the history of communistic societies that have succeeded in the United States.

Co-operation has been a wonderful success in France, England and Germany. The Rochdale system has been found to be generally successful in all parts of England where it has been tried, and the town of Oldham in Lancashire has grown wealthy through having learned the secret and studying the application of the co-operative principle. The wealth there is distributed, and is not concentrated in the hands of a few people. In Paris the Bon Marche, an immense department store, has three thousand persons in its employment, all participate proportionately in the profits of the establishment. When an employee is old and worn out he receives a pension. This establishment has been in existence forty years and does the largest department store business at the present time of any institution in the French capital.

This should prove that in Europe at least the experiment of co-operation has been as a rule successful. We are only awakening in this country to the fact that there is such a thing as co-operation. Many know nothing about it, and it is hard to get information together of what has been done. We are one of us concerned with the failures, except that it is necessary to study failures to learn the causes which produced the result. These failures have taught great lessons and should continue to show co-operators the pitfalls they have to avoid when engaged in co-operative or communistic enterprises. No one can play at communism.

The lamentable failure of the Brook Farm, under whose roof were at one time assembled some of the brightest minds of the age, should show that it cannot be done, and even it was not altogether a failure. An old Brook Farmer testifies as follows:

"The life which we now lead, though to a superficial observer surrounded with so many imperfections and embarrassments, is far superior to what we were ever able to attain in common society. There is a freedom from the frivolities of fashion, from arbitrary restrictions and from the frenzy of competition. There is a greater variety of employments, a more constant demand for the exertion of all the faculties, and a more exquisite pleasure in labor than the consciousness that we are laboring not for personal ends but for a holy principle, and even the external success which the pioneers in every enterprise are obliged to make are not without a certain romantic charm, which effectually prevents us from envying the luxuries of Egypt, though we should be blessed with neither the manna nor the quail which once cheered a table in the desert."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The co-operators meeting last Monday evening at the 12th and H. st. church was largely attended, the parlor being packed, and all had a delightful time. Among those present were Gov. John H. Powers, Deputy Labor Commissioner, Hon. O. Hull of the legislature, Rev. P. H. Drennan, Mr. I. N. Leonard, and a considerable number who have not before met with us. The remarks by not a few were of a most interesting and instructive kind. Remember, we meet at the same place next Monday evening and each Monday evening until further notice.

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CONTEMPORARY VOICES.

The efforts to make free silver the only issue of the Populist party is meeting with little encouragement. The Omaha platform is good enough for a large majority of the people. There is no plank in it that is not necessary, no principle of reform that is not needed. Cut it down to a single plank and the appellation "crank" would have a justifiable significance. The single plank advocates may be honest and sincere, but their judgment is sadly at fault,—Minden Courier.

Silver But a Makeshift.

One of two things is true, either those who attempt to resuscitate democracy under this banner are either fools or they think they are; and this tom-tom-tomery on the part of Bryan makes us lose faith in his honesty or judgment, and those Populists who imagine they can make the party simply one for free silver only mistake entirely the party's mission and if they occupy positions of trust as leaders or directors they had better resign, and leave their places to be filled by those who know the needs of the hour.

Of course the financial question is the most important, but 'tis vastly more than the silver question, for after that is but a makeshift, a continuance of barbarism, because the mass are yet enslaved to the metals. Free coinage would break the back of the golden contracts and to a small extent increase the volume, but the coining of the whole output would not pay one-half the interest, and would do nothing to fill the vacuum created by the increase of population.—George Lynn.

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THE MARKETS.

KANSAS CITY, Mo., March 12. Receipts of wheat 10 cars a year ago 74 cars. Sales: No. 2 hard wheat 3 cars 53 1/2c; No. 3 hard 5 1/2c; No. 4 hard 50c rejected, 48c; No. 2 red, 2 cars 52 1/2c; No. 3 red, 31 1/2c; No. 4 red, 50c rejected, 48c.

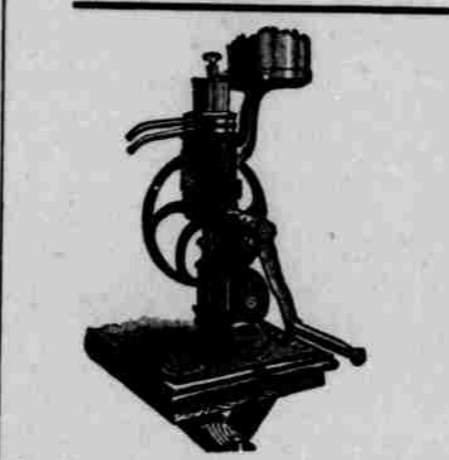
Table with columns: Date, Commodity, Price. Lists prices for wheat, corn, oats, pork, lard, etc.

Kansas City Live Stock. KANSAS CITY, Mo., March 12. Cattle—Receipts, 3,824 calves, 205, shipped Saturday, 3,174 calves, 194. The market was strong and from 10c to 15c higher on good native cattle all around.

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