

Towards The Co-operative Commonwealth

Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth is the title of the final chapter of Arnold Bonnar's book 'British Co-operation' published by the Co-operative Union and printed by the CWS in 1961.

[\(available from the Principle 5 lending library\).](#)

He writes: "Squalor and misery certainly played a part in stimulating an opposition to capitalism, but there were more positive and permanent elements involved in the generation of the Co-operative Movement. Its opposition to capitalism, for instance, was an opposition to the very spirit of capitalism, to the profit making motive as well as to its consequences.

This motive and its consequences remain, and so does the co-operative opposition.

Among these consequences are the inequitable distribution of wealth and income, inequitable because it corresponds to neither need or merit. Much income is unearned by the recipients, and wealth and incomes may appreciate or depreciate as a result of changes in demand, social developments, inventions and discoveries, wars or political changes, for which the recipients are not responsible. Differences in wealth are important factors in every phase of life; they result in differences in power and influence in economic, social and political life. These differences are seldom socially beneficial in their effects, for the ability or good fortune to accumulate wealth is not by any means necessarily accompanied by the will or ability to use it well."

If the development of a co-operative commonwealth can bring about a more equitable and socially just society to replace or minimise the private profit motive of capitalism, then it is easy to see why co-operators have put so much effort and dedication into building the co-operative alternative.

It is also easy to see why there has been such a concerted effort by the upholders of the status quo to denigrate it.

Bonnar writes a chapter subsection “Exploitation of Labour” His point here is a fairly obvious one. If private profit is the motive, and the businesses and economy are owned by the profiteers, the people who do not own, – the employees – become the victims of exploitation. The consequences of profit maximisation is poor wages and working conditions. The aspiration of a co-operative commonwealth is a society where the vast majority of people are no longer victims.

This chapter also considers the way that the private profit motive leads to the exploitation of the consumer. Bonnar also makes clear that the desire for a co-operative commonwealth is not only opposition to capitalism, it’s about building a better life for all.

The Co-operative Movement gives hope that this can happen, but only if the vision and purpose is held, and co-operatives are able to relate to each other in a supportive and affirming way. Solidarity is so important for the Movement.

British Co-operation by Arnold Bonnar (pub. 1961 by the Co-operative Union) can be borrowed from the Principle 5 lending library).