

Principle FIVE

P5

July 2020



Thanks to a gift from The Co-operative Group, Principle 5 now holds most of the editions of Co-operative News from the very first edition in September 1871 to the present day. Our catalogue lists the editions which we have in the Centre:

see 'Reference Shelves'

<https://www.principle5.coop/archives>

Co-operative News (published by Co-operative Press, an independent registered co-operative society) is now a monthly magazine but was a weekly, then more recently became fortnightly for a while. It is an independent voice for the Co-operative sector and has been since 1871.

The Co-operative News mission statement is to

- Connect
- Champion
- Challenge

the global co-operative movement, through fair and objective journalism and open and honest comment and debate.

<http://www.thenews.coop/>

Co-operative Journalism

Good, objective co-operative journalism is the most essential thing for co-operatives, if they are to be aware of each other, of up to date thinking, and practice and if they are to develop a Movement that can change the world for the better.

Wherever there have been co-operatives there have been publications to inform, support and encourage. In 1828 Dr William King of Brighton wrote and published The Co-operator, it came out every month until 1830.

All the editions are included in a book 'William King and the Co-operator 1828 – 1830' edited by T. W. Mercer which is now available to read as a PDF:

<http://www.diktio-kapa.dos.gr/keimena/WilliamKing.pdf>

The decision to publish this book was taken by the General Publications Committee of the Co-operative Union and supported by the 54th Co-operative Congress in 1922. It includes chapters about the life and times of Dr. King and his letters about co-operation

THE CO-OPERATOR.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNION ARE POWER :

POWER, DIRECTED BY KNOWLEDGE, IS HAPPINESS :

HAPPINESS IS THE END OF CREATION.

No. 1.

MAY 1, 1828.

1d.

A Co-operative Society, like all other Societies, such as benefit Clubs, Trade Societies, Savings' Banks, is for the purpose of avoiding some evils, which men are exposed to when they act singly, and of obtaining some advantages which they must otherwise be deprived of.

The evils which CO-OPERATION is intended to combat, are some of the greatest to which men are liable, viz. the great and increasing difficulties of providing for our families, and the proportionate danger of our falling into PAUPERISM and CRIME.

Let us consider these more at length.

The rate of wages has been gradually diminishing for some hundred years, so that now it is not above one-third of what it used to be—but this is not all, for the same causes continuing to act, the wages must go on diminishing till a workman will not be able to maintain a family; and by the same rule, he will at last not be able to maintain himself. This conclusion it is frightful to think of, but whether we think of it or not, it will march on in its own silent way, till it unexpectedly overwhelms us like a flood.

But are we certain that this is true?—are we really approaching any thing like starvation, in spite of any labor and industry we may exert? I am afraid that this is certainly true; and I will give you other reasons for thinking so.

PAUPERISM.

Why do people become paupers?—because they must either go to the parish, or starve. And this necessity has operated so widely, that the independent day laborer has almost ceased to exist. The country laborer who can, in many respects, live cheaper than we can in a town; who can have his garden, and raise his own potatoes, &c. can now very seldom live without the parish aid: and it is a common rule to make an allowance for each child, above a certain number. The same situation has begun to beset the mechanic. He is frequently obliged to go without work a day or two in the week, or to have his wages lowered. If this goes on, he must also come to the parish.

THE Co-operative News:

A Record of Industrial, Political, Humanitarian, and Educational Progress.

TERMS PER ANNUM BY POST, 6s. 6d.

REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.

VOL. I.—No. 1.

SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1871.

PRICE 1d.

WHAT IS CO-OPERATION?

THE question which heads this article is to appearance so simple that many persons will be almost inclined to call it foolish, and yet a very little thought will show that it is much more easy to put the question than to find a proper reply to it.

Thousands of men who are members of Friendly Societies or of Trades Unions, and who are used to march in procession to the annual dinner under the silken banner inscribed in golden letters "Each for all, and all for each," and to listen to the after dinner eloquence which sets forth the amount of good which their particular society is accomplishing; and how much more could be done if all the workers at the trade would join the union and co-operate for its ends; or if all men were prudent enough to be members of Friendly Benefit Societies will think that they need no instruction on this subject, for that they are already practical Co-operators.

And certainly the tens of thousands of men whose purchases constitute the millions sterling which pass through the various retail stores every year, and who, when listening at the annual tea parties, know practically the truth of the advocacy which shows that men have, by joining Co-operative Stores, learned prudent habits, have secured to themselves profits which formerly they gave to the grocer, the draper, and the huckster; have thereby learned to save, and have become, or are in a fair way to become, their own landlords, will think that they, at any rate, can answer the question, What is Co-operation? And yet let us ask what is the practical difference between any one of these members of a Store and the steady-going working-man who goes on his own account with cash in hand and buys from the wholesale dealer a month's supply of provisions for his family, and who invests his savings in a Building Society, and becomes his own landlord, without consulting any of his neighbours or shopmates? And yet such a man is not called a Co-operator!

And probably the man who has invested a portion of his savings as a shareholder in a weaving shed or a spinning mill, along with a hundred others, who now gets dividends on his capital in addition to his weekly wages, will feel that whilst effectually serving himself by adding to his own wealth he is, in some mysterious way, serving society also by his devotion to the cause of Co-operation. But if we ask in what sense does such a man differ from the working member of a private partnership who has invested his savings with the firm in which he is now a junior partner, and who, in addition to his regular salary for work also receives a definite share in the profits of the concern, the reply must show that the practical difference is very little, if any. All these persons are, in a certain sense, Co-operators, for they are all workers together for a common object, that object being to increase the production or to economise the cost of the distribution of wealth to a greater extent than could be done by separate individual effort.

And, in the same sense, the individual capitalist who prepares a large building and fills it with first-class machinery, and finds raw material for manipulation, and wages to pay a thousand workmen, is also co-operating to increase the production of wealth to a greater extent than could be done without the combination of his capital and his superintending and organising care, together with the labour of the workmen.

And all these appliances for increased production lead naturally to increased facilities for distribution also, and thus tend directly to cheapen commodities for the common benefit of all consumers.

Then, is there no difference in principle between competition and Co-operation, and is there no

merit in all the efforts now being made by working men throughout the country beyond the mere money profit realised by the men.

Verily, there is much difference in principle, but the reply to the second part of this question depends very much upon the ultimate object at which men aim in their efforts at Co-operation.

We can easily conceive the existence of society in any one of three conditions, viz.,—Competition, Communism, and Co-operation.

The first or competitive state now exists, and except as controlled by municipal law, may be aptly described as, "Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost!" And, really, the devil's share is very large in society, as is proved by our prisons and workhouses, and by the hosts of casuals who throng our streets by day, and fester in our attics and cellars at night in every direction. One of our sweetest poets says,

"Man's real wants are few,
Health and a quiet mind include them all!"

but how difficult it is for a considerable proportion of our fellows to secure these simple elements. A quiet mind without health is next to impossible; and health without a sufficiency of food, clothing, and shelter, is also impossible; and yet the arrangements to secure these bare necessities of life, are of the clumsiest possible character. Primarily we all depend upon the land for our food and our clothing, and the land of this country is owned by a very small proportion of the people, and is left waste or is cultivated just at the will and pleasure of the owners; so that legally it would be possible for the few owners of land to keep the masses without food, except for the fact that their own interest lies in general cultivation, and that the poor-law makes them liable to their last shilling for the support of the destitute. The value of land in any given neighbourhood depends very much upon the density of population, so that if any circumstance leads to the concentration of people on any spot, the value of land immediately rises, it may be, from £50 to £1000 an acre. And all this increase of value, which means simply a fine upon the increase of population (since it makes living more difficult), goes to the landowners, who literally do nothing for the increase of value which they entirely monopolise.

Thus land for purposes of pasturage in the vicinity of a large town is worth 30s. or 40s. an acre per annum; by and bye population increases, and the land becomes market gardens at £6 an acre; population still increases and the land is needed for building, and the landowner demands from £25 to £100 per acre per annum. Thus men all live and work directly or indirectly for the benefit of the landlords. Again, in order to provide for the many wants which accompany civilisation, the combination of intricate machinery with human labour is necessary, but the bulk of the buildings and machinery belong to a small portion of the people, by whose leave and on whose terms it must be worked, if worked at all. Truly, here again it is to the interest of the owners that their machinery should be worked; true, also, that they would be liable for the maintenance of the destitute if work was not found for them. Truly, also, whilst the land is everlasting, buildings and machinery wear out and rust out, and the owners are therefore in a much worse position than the landowners; nevertheless the fact remains that men work for the owners of buildings and machinery, and that the more men there are looking for work, the more they will work for the owners of buildings and machinery, because wages will be less by reason of their competition with each other.

In another respect, also, the owners of buildings and machinery differ essentially from landowners. Of raw material we can hardly have too much, and

a good harvest is generally good for all; but when material comes to be worked up, then labour invested in buildings, machinery, and wages are all more or less on speculation; the employer invests in the hope and belief that he will secure a profit; but his capital may never come back again; he may lose all which he has invested, and the work-people whom he has employed may have to grope for other employers just as employers grope about for markets for their goods. This speculation for, and blindness with regard to, the future, is the peculiar characteristic of competitive society. It develops immense powers of production, produces intense excitement, makes brilliant successes and disastrous failures. It gives us motive power equal to the strength of a hundred millions of men, and leaves us with a million of paupers amongst twenty-one millions of population. It produces clothing for the world, whilst our streets are thronged with beggars in rags. Under it we see common workmen become merchant princes, and men who have been lapped in luxury become slouching beggars. It is a lottery with a few splendid prizes, a large number of which barely pay for the tickets, and a considerable proportion of blanks.

The second condition of society to which we have referred is Communism. Under this system land, buildings, machinery, implements and stock would all be the property of the nation, the wants of the community would be gauged and known beforehand, and would be provided for by requiring everyone to work according to his capacity, whilst his wants would be supplied according to his necessities.

Education, work, marriage, distribution of commodities, would all be according to rule, in no case neglected and in none overdone; no riches, no poverty, no overwork, and no idleness. This state has been aimed at in ancient and in modern times, but so far as we are aware has never been accomplished, except under religious enthusiasm, and religious enthusiasm is seldom perpetuated, even in a family, and it is much less likely to endure in a community. That communism is the perfect state of society there is no doubt; and when the moral sentiment of the nation has reached such a state as to fit it for the long-expected millennium, that delightful state of existence will find its realisation in communism. But in the meanwhile the grossly selfish, the inherently idle and luxurious, and the whole host of aspirants for power, in addition to the enormous inertia of existing institutions, all render its accomplishment impossible.

Between these two extremes of society, retaining the individualism and the vital force of the first, whilst rendering possible some of the advantages of the second, stands the new phase introduced by Co-operation. At present, it simply enables working men to save money, by economising the distribution of wealth, and dispensing with many of the middlemen, who have been used to live by taking articles from the producer, or wholesale dealer, and handing them at an advanced price to the consumer.

The economy produced by Co-operative stores (say 5 per cent on capital and 7½ per cent on purchases) has enabled hundreds, if not thousands, of working men to dispense with the landlord as well as with the grocer and draper; so that the man who has been used to pay 4s. per week for rent, and who spends 20s. per week at a store, finds his position improved by the saving of rent £10, 8s., and the dividends on purchases £3, 18s., together, £14, 6s. per annum as the result of a simple change of shop. Many store members have preferred to leave their dividends to accumulate, instead of investing in cottages, or otherwise, and the consequence is that many stores are overgrown with capital, which they find it difficult to invest advantageously.

The discussion about establishing a newspaper for the whole co-operative movement began at the Co-operative Congress of 1870. At the Congress of the following year it was settled that the name of the paper would be 'The Co-operative News' and published in Manchester and printed by 'The Co-operative Printing Society'. CPS provided the first editors, William Nuttall, J. C. Fearn and Bailey Walker with Dr. John Watts writing the leading articles. Samuel Bamford was editor from 1875 to 1898. By the end of the century it had reached a circulation of 50,000 copies a week.

Co-operative Press (formally the National Co-operative Publishing Society) also published other titles including Reynolds News (a Sunday newspaper), Millgate Monthly and Women's Outlook.

Students of social history and people who want to further the ideal of the Co-operative Commonwealth have always found historic editions of Co-operative News an invaluable source of information and historical context. And the story goes on. Co-operative News reports monthly in a quality journal everything of interest to co-operators. Membership of Co-operative Press is open to everyone and it includes a copy delivered to you home every month. The articles can also be read on the website: <http://www.thenews.coop/>

Steve Thompson

Co-operatives News Digital Index

The Co-operative News index is progressing well with more editions being indexed and added to the on-line resource. So far 90 editions have been indexed and can be searched on:

<https://www.coopnews.principle5.coop/>

Any article can be scanned and sent as an email attachment, just contact steve@sheffield.coop with the date, page number and article title.

Co-operative AGMs

Principle 5 is a member of Co-operative Press (publisher of Co-operative News), The Co-operative College, and Co-operatives UK. All three had their (virtual) AGMs on Friday 19th June 2020.

Co-operative Press

<https://www.thenews.coop/agm-2020/>

The Co-operative College

<https://www.co-op.ac.uk/Event/co-operative-college-agm-2020>

Co-operatives UK

<https://www.uk.coop/AGM>

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June 2020

The June 2020 edition of the Sheffield Co-operator is ready to go to press. Unfortunately, due to the current restrictions, there has been a delay in getting it printed. We will keep you informed of progress.

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The answers to the second co-operative quiz are shown below.

Co-operative Quiz May 2020 Answers

1. On the 1st January 2006 the Co-operative Party became an independent co-operative society. Until then, it had been a department of the Co-operative Union/Co-operatives UK.
2. SUMA, Lembas, Essential Trading, Greencity Wholefoods
Infinity Foods
3. 1998
4. The Co-op Bank was wholly owned by the Co-op Group
5. Association of British Credit Unions
6. 2001
7. 1,400
8. 15
9. In October 2019 the management agreement with the Co-operative College expired and was not renewed. The College no longer provides management services and staff for the CHT. The Co-operative Heritage Trust now has its own constitution and governance as an independent Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).
10. The Co-operative Union bought the building in 1925 and it opened in 1931.

Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre
Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield, S3 8GG
Tel: 0114 282 3132

steve@sheffield.coop

<https://www.principle5.coop/>

