

## THE PATH TO OWNERSHIP

THE hundredth birthday of the Co-Operative Movement passed almost unnoticed among Catholics in this country. The only commemoration was a supplement to the *Catholic Worker*. This is in keeping with the strange aloofness of Catholics in Great Britain from the movement. Yet it contrasts with the interest displayed by Catholics in many other lands.<sup>(1)</sup>

In the United States the well-known Queen's Work and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference set up a joint committee to celebrate the Rochdale Centennial. The celebrations were a great success and included a letter from the Papal Secretary of State, two nation-wide rallies, leaflets and folders, special sermons and talks to school children and the publication of a pamphlet.<sup>(2)</sup> In Quebec, where a Dominican edits an official co-operative journal, in Nova Scotia, where the movement owes much to a Catholic university, and in many other areas the celebrations were on as vast a scale and were supported by leading members of the hierarchy.

What is the reason for the difference? Perhaps old age makes us accept without thought the existence of this vast movement. Elsewhere it is still young enough to arouse enthusiasm. Outside of Great Britain there is a general recognition that there is a connection between Christianity and co-operatives that we, perhaps, find strange. In his story of the Nova Scotia movement Fr Coady has a chapter headed, 'Co-Operatives and Religion' in which he argues that 'Properly considered co-operation postulates more, not less, religion . . . if co-operation needs religion, religion also needs co-operation. It is the expression of religion in the economic order. It is an aid to salvation that religious leaders cannot ignore. It is a naturally good thing that must be employed in perfecting the imperfect creature, man'.<sup>(3)</sup> To Dr Coady the modern application of the Sermon on the Mount is co-operation.

In a letter to Dorothy Day, of the New York *Catholic Worker*, he once argued that today there are thousands hungry, thousands with bad homes, with few clothes. Individual charity may help individuals among these thousands, but is not the solution to the root causes of their poverty. In co-operation they can learn to help themselves, to pull themselves out of their misery. They can feed themselves, clothe themselves and provide themselves with good houses.

(1) cf. *Consumer Co-Operation*, Fr. E. Schiedeler, O.S.B., Paulist Press, N.Y.

(2) *Catholic Churchmen and Co-Operative*, Queens Work, St. Louis, 1944.

(3) *Masters of their Destiny*, Rev. Dr. Coady, Harpers Bros., New York.

Co-operation is the medium and that means that those who work for the co-operative movement in the right spirit are carrying out the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount.

For similar reasons Fr Bernard Huss and Bishop Hannish have worked to establish co-operatives among the native Bantu in South Africa. Because he was a priest and was eager for the souls of men Fr Tom Finlay, S.J., gave many years of his life to the co-operative movement in Ireland. It was as a priest that Abbé Szarmarzewski set about founding the United Co-Operative Society in Poland. Fr Tompkins and the other priests who founded and built up the Nova Scotia co-operative movement did so because they were anxious for the souls of their parishoners.

It has not been only among Catholics that there has been this tendency to link Christianity and Co-operation. It is to be found among many bodies. Today in Nova Scotia all forms of Christianity are united in helping the movement. In Denmark the movement owes a great deal to Bishop Grundtvig.<sup>(4)</sup> In Japan there is a strong Christian co-operative movement founded by a protestant missionary, Toyohiko Kagawa.<sup>(5)</sup> In China many protestants work with the Catholic Bishop, Yu Pin, in helping the Industrial Co-Operative Movement. It is interesting to note that Kagawa has always called his co-operatives 'the great offensive of love' and it has been remarked by Japanese that the combination of the church and the co-operative movement has made a great impression on very many Japs.

All these movements in the east and the west look to the British movement as their mother. The young virile movements in other lands, the Christian movements, the movements blessed by the Pope, all claim with eager voice that they are children of the Rochdale pioneers. As elsewhere a Christian influence can be traced in the British movement. The present movement owes much to the Christian Socialists (Rev. J. F. Maurice, Rev. Charles Kingsley, Neale, etc.). In those early years many non-conformists played their part in building up the movement's stability. But Catholics have, on the whole, been noted for remaining outside the movement. This refers to those capable of becoming leaders, for vast numbers of Catholics are members of the many local societies. Few have been leaders, notable exceptions being J. Flanagan, who was for many years editor-in-chief of the Co-Operative Press, and W. Gallagher, who was in a recent year President of the Co-Operative Congress.

It is to be regretted that more Catholics have not played their part. The movement is a vast organisation through which contact

(4) cf. *Denmark—A Social Laboratory*. (O.U.P.).

(5) cf. *Christian Approach to Co-Operatives*. (C.C.F., Melbourne).

might be made with millions of men and women who could be influenced by Christian thought. The more the Christians leave this opportunity alone the more does the vacuum there call to the marxists to come and fill it. It might be remembered that it is a movement that believes in ownership and in these days one would expect Catholics, above all, to welcome anything that encourages any form of ownership. It is a movement that believes in the dignity of man, that subordinates profit to the common good and that does, in theory at least, insist on high standards in the products it makes and sells. .

In common with other human beings it is not every member of the co-operative movement who lives up to his ideals. Yet these ideals are lived up to in a higher degree than one would expect.

The British movement is much more than the shops you see, sometimes bright and attractive and perhaps more often dingy, dull and uninviting. It is more than the services you contact, bread, milk and sometimes the funeral department. The British movement is among the farmers, (though agricultural co-operation has not been an unqualified success in this country), among factory workers as well as among consumers.

All the many forms that co-operation takes in this country depend on certain fundamental principles. A co-operative body is a voluntary one and is open to all, without any discrimination of race, religion or colour. Goods are sold at the market price; this to avoid those who would join merely to get cheaper goods. Any surplus over cost that is provided by selling at the market price is partially used for education, propaganda and charitable purposes and the remainder is returned to the members in proportion to the amount spent, or to the work they have put in. Credit, that modern curse, is avoided as far as possible. Voting is on the basis of membership and not of wealth. Thus the movement aims at being a democratic one with a minimum of restrictions with the purpose of providing high quality goods as cheaply as is possible consistent with paying just wages.

In Great Britain the movement can be divided into two main sections, the consumer and the productive movements. The consumer movement is made up of hundreds of local societies and the two large wholesales owned by these independent local societies. The productive side is some forty societies linked in the Co-Operative Productive Federation.<sup>(6)</sup>

The famed Rochdale Pioneers started their movement to establish a store 'for the sale of provisions . . . the building purchasing or

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(6) 138 Charles St., Leicester.

erecting of a number of houses in which members desiring to assist each other in improving their domestic or social conditions, may reside . . . to commence the manufacture of such articles as the society may determine . . . and the society shall purchase or rent an estate which shall be cultivated by the members who may be out of employment or whose labour may be badly remunerated . . . ' and ' . . . as soon as practicable to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education and government . . . '.<sup>(7)</sup> Ambitious? These pioneers began to prepare to take over the country by collecting twopence a week from each other. That was in 1844. Today the co-operative movement has in Great Britain over nine and a quarter million members whose collective savings (share capital) totals over £222 millions.

The winter of 1843 was spent by these men planning their work and operations started in 1844. They came to this great experiment out of unemployment, low wages and economic insecurity. This fact is paralleled by modern movements.<sup>(8)</sup> They wanted a new world and as they saw it such a world would be made up of self-supporting communities, with their basis in agriculture and with the necessary craftsmen. The opening of a shop was merely a means to that end as was also the second phase, the entering into productive activity.

They failed in their manufacturing activities because of human nature. Other members working in the capitalistic mills did not see why fellow members of the society should have better wages and a share in the profits because they worked in the Society's mill.

Even before the Pioneers there had been efforts towards giving the workers ownership. The Christian Socialists had stimulated and helped what were known as Working Men's Associations. These Associations began in 1850 (the Rochdale manufacturing dates from 1851). The first was the Castle Street Tailors (London) followed in the same year by the North London Needlewomen, then by a society of shoemakers, one of bakers, and several others. In the following year came the Salford Hatters, the Southampton Tailors, the City of London Tailors, the London Pianoforte Makers and a society of smiths. The peak of the movement came in 1852, when as a result of a large engineers' lock-out, the trade unions lent money to establish societies of engineers, one in Mile End and the other the Atlas Works, near Southwark Bridge.

Unfortunately all these societies died or became ordinary capitalist firms. The last one was the Salford Hatters, which lasted until 1873, but few of the others survived later than 1853. The selection of

(7) *Co-Operative Movement*, A. Douglas Millard, Hogarth Press.

(8) cf. *The Lord Helps Those . . .* By B. Fowler (New York) and *Paddy The Cope* (Cape).

workers to start this experiment had been too haphazard and they were not capable of managing their own business. The greatest obstacle was the period in which they started. This was a period of inventions and industry saw many changes, all of which demanded technical skill and capital.

For many years after the failures recorded above little was heard of the idea of workers owning their own factories. It is true that the foundation of the wholesale society was opposed on the grounds that such an idea was contrary to the true one of encouraging workers to own their own works. This opposition was too weak to halt the rise of the Co-Operative Wholesale Society.

Our next period is between 1865 and 1870 when there was another wave of workers eager to be their own masters. Many societies started in that period and many failed. This was a sad page in co-operative history. The C.W.S. lost a large amount of money trying to help two colliery societies, the Bugle Horn and the Eccleshill, set up by miners anxious to be their own masters. Another society was the Ouseburn Engine Works, which also failed and dragged down with it an Industrial Bank that had been founded to finance it.

But all the societies of that period were not failures. Especially in the newer industries there was some success. There is one society founded in that period that is still in being and is still successful; this is the Walsall Lock and Cart Gear Society.

By 1880 there were only 15 productive societies left and they continued to dwindle. Yet the idea did not die out and we still have it and have over 40 productive societies, linked in a Co-operative Productive Federation. These societies correspond in many ways to the teaching set out in *Quadragesimo Anno*. In them the workers become owners and share in the profits and management of the industry. These societies should have great interest for those who hate combines and super-centralization.<sup>(9)</sup>

The fundamental principles upon which the productive societies are built and which they hope to see adopted throughout industry were stated by the late Mr. J. J. Worley in the following words:

- a) That the workers should regain possession of the implements of production which the industrial revolution lost to them.
- b) That the root conception of democracy, namely government by the consent of the governed, should be established in industry.
- c) That the greatest common measure of liberty and freedom in industry would be secured by this industrial self-determination.
- d) That the status of the worker be raised from wage-earner to conscious co-partner.

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(9) *The Case Against Centralisation.* By J. J. Worley.

- e) That the pride of craft, destroyed by machine production, would be to some extent restored by developing an esprit de corps in the workshop which would create a pride in the corporate product and in the reputation of the organisation as a whole.
- f) That the workers should participate in the surplus arising from their associated endeavour.
- g) That the consciousness of personal responsibility should be developed by the workers being called upon to assist in financing and directing the undertaking.<sup>(10)</sup>

Mr. Worley saw a 'New Moral World' growing on these fundamentals and the present writer thinks that few Catholics would disagree with the principles set out.

There might be some scepticism of them, doubts of their practicality, yet it must be admitted that they do point to a path by which we could gradually grow out of our present world. Today we have a system in which the masses are propertyless; under this New Moral Order the workers would be owners. Today the workers are irresponsible; under this New Moral Order they would be given responsibility. Today they work for bare wages and the profits go to capital; tomorrow the workers will be largely the suppliers of capital and as workers will share in the surplus they create.

Mr. Harold Taylor, in a pamphlet on 'Producers Co-Operation'<sup>(11)</sup> writes, 'Our claim in the Productive Societies is that we have tried out this ideal of partnership with successful results'. As this bears a close correspondence with the ideal in *Quadragesimo Anno*, surely we should examine these claims.<sup>(12)</sup>

Further quotations from Mr. Taylor will give some idea of the structure of the productive societies.

'Their financial foundations are composed of share capital invested by a number of distributive societies, shares held by the workers as the result of accumulated bonus, and also shares held by a number of sympathetic co-operators. It will be observed, therefore, that the employee becomes part owner of the Society with a sense of stewardship developed and contributing in some measure towards that greater ideal of self-employment outlined by the Rochdale Pioneers. The management of the Society is by a Manager appointed by the Committee and endorsed by the members, a secretary and president with a committee . . . (of) one member representing shareholding societies, two members representing individual co-operative shareholders and four representing employees.'

(10) Quoted in *Producers Co-Operation*. By A. Hemstock. (C.P.F.).

(11) Published by Co-Operative Productive Federation.

(12) cf. paragraph 65, C.T.S. edition.

The wages paid are the recognised trade union rates plus a share in the surplus produced each year.

The desire to own shown in these various historical periods is not yet dead. Many workers are eager to try to own their own business in these post war years. There will be a rush into one-man shops and as history shows the vast majority of these newcomers will fail. There will be a trickle into smallholding. But no one who could give a lead is offering any encouragement to skilled workers to become owners. But attempts will be made. Start has already been made in Glasgow where several groups of war time factory workers are planning future activities. In that area the lead has been given by a group, calling itself the 50 Group. These men, who all worked in the vast Hillingdon factory during the war, have pooled their war time savings. As a start towards ownership they have bought a toy factory and are operating it on a part-time basis. When the problem of supplies become easier they will launch into a sphere where their engineering abilities will stand them in good stead. Reports of their activities, which have appeared from time to time in the *Catholic Worker*, have roused considerable interest and other workers are beginning to plan what they can do to realise the ideal set out in *Quadragesimo Anno* that:

' We deem it advisable that the wage contract should, when possible, be modified somewhat by a contract of partnership . . . in this way wage-earners and other employees participate in the ownership, or in the management, or in some way share in the profits. '

R. P. WALSH.

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## THE ANTIGONISH MOVEMENT

ADDRESSING a petition to the Legislature of Nova Scotia in 1866, Bishop MacKinnon described St. Francis Xavier College of Antigonish as having "spacious and commodious buildings" and an enrolment which had "reached the high number of fifty-eight." He pointed out that "the said College is the only institution in Eastern Nova Scotia, inclusive of Cape Breton, in which the sciences of Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Moral and Dogmatic Theology are now taught," and he asked that it "be empowered by charter to confer degrees on such of its pupils as after due examination shall have been proved worthy of the honour." The power was granted, and eighty years have passed since the Bishop signed his petition. The two wooden houses which seemed "spacious and commodious" to him have become a campus in brick and stone, and the student body has grown from fifty-eight to over seven hundred.