

Women's Co-operative Guild.

Co-operation's Great Opportunity.

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317

THE DANGER.

THE American Meat Trust recently secured control of rice, and one of the first results was that the price was raised 65 per cent. The rice which had before cost 1s. was raised to about 1s. 8d. This brings home to every woman the power and danger of Capitalist Combines. They have many names—trusts, monopolies, etc. Sometimes the separate capitalist firms in an industry join together in one great firm, as in the Soap Trade. A similar process is beginning in the supply of preserved foods, in which three large firms—Crosse and Blackwell, Lazenby, and Keiller—have amalgamated. Sometimes there is a sort of federation, which decides on the selling price, and in some cases rations out orders, and pools the whole or part of the profits. Since the war the movement towards Combines has grown apace, and there is now no important trade in England which is free from them. The metal industry, the electrical industry, the soap industry, the armaments industry, and many other industries are controlled by combines of one kind or another. From the production of raw material to the distribution of finished goods to the customer Combines are gradually gaining control. When a Combine gets powerful, it can force all the independent firms to come in by underselling them for a period. When a Combine is supreme, it constantly *restricts production* in order to keep up prices. We are told a great deal about Trade

Union rules standing in the way of increased production, but Capitalist Combines are more dangerous in this direction.

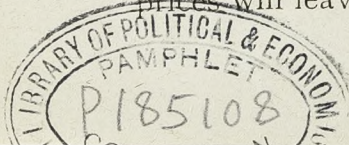
A Government Committee, consisting of capitalist employers, issued a striking report some months ago, urging that the formation of Combines should be encouraged, that they should deal not only with production, but should form *selling agencies* which would organise distribution, and that the policy of regulating prices should be considered legitimate.

But a definite trade Combine is only one form of capitalist consolidation. The war has shown capitalists how they can use the Government for their own profit, and great federations of capitalists and employers in different trades are being formed, to influence the Government and Parliament. The Federation of British Industries is the most important of these. It represents capital of 4,000 million pounds, and 121 M.P.'s belong to it.

Again, the Newspaper Press is more and more dominated by great capitalists, and is being used not to give the people real news, but to suppress the truth. Now Governments are joining in supplying one-sided news, and suppressing the other side, so that the people's minds are being poisoned.

Capitalists, again, have been piling up great reserves during the war in many different ways, so that, if bad times come, they will not suffer, though the workers will be unemployed.

The war has taught us very clearly what this capitalist consolidation means to the woman in the home. It is not something far away, but touches her every week as she lays out the family income. Prices have gone up and up, and profiteering is everywhere. And if we leave the control of industry to the profit makers, wages may be nominally raised, but the rise in prices will leave us poorer than before.



We see now more clearly than ever that Co-operation is the hope of the workers, and we want to turn all our efforts to getting rid of the capitalist and profit-making system of industry, and building up Co-operation until all industry is carried on on the co-operative system.

Co-operation makes no profits, so it would get rid of profiteering and constantly rising prices. The people themselves control trade and industry, so that the power of the capitalist employer over the lives of the workers is destroyed. If all industry were conducted on the co-operative system, production would be carried on for use and not for profit, the wealth provided would be divided in such a way that everyone should have enough and no one should have too much—a contrast to our present system, in which one-tenth of the people own two-thirds of the wealth—and unemployment could be done away with altogether.

These are great changes, changes which will benefit consumers and wage-earners alike. What is necessary to bring them about?

CAPTURE THE DISTRIBUTIVE TRADE OF THE COUNTRY.

Our object must be to make every person in the country into a co-operator and to see that all their needs are supplied by co-operative stores. This would open the door to a tremendous increase of co-operative manufacture, so as to make all the goods sold in the stores. At the same time great developments of international co-operative trade would be necessary to procure the raw materials we manufacture and the foreign products we sell. This again would increase our co-operative manufactures at home, for we should want to export these in order to pay for the goods we import. We should thus gradually bring the whole industry of our country under the co-operative system; co-operators in foreign countries would be doing the same. And by forming an International Co-operative Wholesale Society the whole world's industry would be linked up and carried on, not for the profit of the few,

but, in the words of the co-operative manifesto issued by the recent Co-operative Congress at Paris, so as "to organise world production as economically as possible, and to utilise the resources of the globe and the aptitudes of each nation in the best interests of all."

OUR OPPORTUNITY.

The Co-operative Movement has been growing slowly for 70 years; it caters for about one-third of the people, and has formed a safe and well-provided "base." Now has come a moment when it can make an advance undreamt of in the past. The workers the world over are in revolt against working to make profit for others, against the insecurity of their lives, against autocratic control in the workshop. These are the real causes of the industrial unrest. If we take advantage of them and have sufficient energy, enthusiasm, and faith in our cause we might well conquer all industry for Co-operation in less time than it has taken to end the war.

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT.

To do this, we must both develop our own movement, and combine all the forces of the workers in support of it.

Inside our movement, there must be combined action amongst all Co-operative Societies. A number of our large societies are prepared to go ahead in their own districts. But the majority of societies are too small to secure the expert management and the trade necessary for big developments. We want to unite and co-ordinate our societies in the same way that competitive trade is doing. The Co-operative Union is already considering the matter, and planning out methods of placing expert business advice within the reach of every society requiring it. Every Guild Branch should urge their society to support this move, and to agree to such increase in subscriptions to the Co-operative Union as may be necessary to enable this new side of the work of the Co-operative Union to

be effectively carried out. A central expert business department would also help small societies to work out schemes of joint work for special objects, such as the establishment of central drapery establishments.

What concerns us most to-day is the development of our own societies and the part women can play in it.

STORES EVERYWHERE.

First of all co-operation must be brought to the door of the home. **At present there are 66,000 private grocery shops and only 6,000 co-operative grocery shops.** It must be made as easy to shop at a co-operative store as at a private shop. Nothing brings in new members and increased trade so effectively as an up-to-date, well stocked, attractive shop near at hand. We must not wait to get customers before we start a branch shop. The shop, if organised on right lines, will bring the customers, as the great multiple shops have proved over and over again.

Every woman knows how much trade is lost if the store is half-a-mile or more away. We need good branches in every shopping centre, where groceries and ordinary household requisites can be obtained, with skilled assistants who can intelligently take orders for goods only stocked at the central stores. In addition, we need a great extension of the bread shops, started by a number of societies during the war. Besides bread, some of the groceries needed most commonly could be supplied, and these shops would take the place of the little "corner shops."

Good delivery services and "travelling shops" are also essential, and must play a large part in the rural areas.

SUPPLY ALL NEEDS.

It must be possible to spend the whole family income at the store. In a few societies this can be done, but large numbers still leave milk, fish, greengrocery, meat, the barber's shop, the chemist's shop, books and

stationery, etc., to the private trader. Even where a beginning has been made great developments are needed. This is specially the case in drapery, where combined action in establishing a first-rate central drapery store in every district is necessary. The smaller every-day drapery requirements must be brought at the same time nearer the homes.

TRADE BEFORE DIVIDEND.

If we want to enable every single article we use to be sold and produced co-operatively we must continue the policy forced on us by the war of keeping down prices and dividends. Many departments, butchery, for instance, can never be started if they are expected to make a big dividend. And if we can spend £1 at the store owing to many departments and reasonable prices, and receive only a shilling dividend, we shall have just as much total money to our credit at the end of the quarter as we should have if we were only able to spend 10s. because prices were high and we could only get grocery and a few other things which make a 2s. dividend.

SAVE! SAVE! SAVE!

All these developments will need far more capital than in the past. Co-operators have been afraid of having too much capital, and have actually refused to accept it from their members, because they did not know how to use it. But now this is all changed. The great extensions of manufacture and control of raw materials begun by the C.W.S. can advantageously use all the capital the movement can raise. And the developments we have suggested to-day will require tenfold our existing capital. The C.W.S. has issued bonds for £2,500,000, but they will need, not millions, but hundreds of millions of pounds. We must look on the movement as a whole, and the resources of the rich societies which do not need more capital can, through the C.W.S., be made available for the use of societies needing capital for extensions.

Therefore, every Guild Branch should urge its members to leave their dividends in the store, and to put in every penny they can save. Branches should also urge their society to make it as easy as possible for every penny saved to be put into the store. The action to be taken should include the following points:—

1. If the society limits share capital to less than £200, the limit should be removed.
2. If there is restricted membership, the restrictions should be removed, and every adult should be encouraged to join and put in as much share capital as possible.
3. Management Committees should be asked to arrange that, when members have paid up their £200 share capital, they should be able to put more money into the society in the form of loans or deposits. This plan is now adopted in a number of societies.
4. Penny Banks should be started, to draw in all the small savings of children and others, week by week.
5. Payments to penny banks, share capital, and clubs should be taken always at all grocery branches. To enable this to be done and to set free the managers of branches for their proper managerial work, some societies have found it valuable to put a woman cashier in each store.
6. Guild Branches should start share capital savings clubs, and follow the example of one of our branches which resolved to raise £50 in this way in 1918, and did it successfully.

INSURE WITH THE C.W.S.

One of the commonest forms of saving is that of life insurance, and this also ought all to go into the Co-operative Movement. At present most insurance premiums go to the great capitalist industrial life insurance companies, and Co-operators and Trade Unionists alike are thus supporting one of the most dangerous and powerful capitalist enterprises. The Co-operative Insurance Society gives much better terms than these

industrial life insurance societies, whose heavy managerial expenses and large profits must come out of the workers' premiums before their insurance money is calculated.

Branches should ask their management committees to take up this question. Expert canvassers are essential to bring in insurance business, but there is no need for weekly payments to be collected, as arrangements can be easily made for paying premiums quarterly out of dividend. If societies became agents for the C.I.S., and worked up the life insurance business, it could be combined with much valuable advertising and propaganda work for the whole trade of the society.

Methods of extending the schemes for collective life insurance already adopted by many societies should be considered.

DO NOT HIDE YOUR LIGHT UNDER A BUSHEL.

Co-operation has a great message for the present time of unrest, and we must make it known in every possible way. We must no longer look askance at advertisement. It is a great power, but at present it is chiefly used against the people. It is for us to take this weapon, and turn it against our opponents. At Long Eaton an advertising campaign on the town hoardings brought in 183 new members in two months, almost as many as the number who joined in the whole previous twelve months. Advertising in the Press is also very useful, and incidentally does a little to check the capitalist control of newspapers. Advertising is equally necessary to popularise co-operative productions. New members fight shy of them because they are quite unknown to them. But buying at the store is no use unless all we sell is made co-operatively, and advertisement will help to destroy ignorant prejudice. One store instructs its employes to ask their customers to try co-operative productions, and, if not found satisfactory, to say they will supply others; but, once tried, their success is almost invariable. Advertisements must

not be on purely business lines, but must also make known what the movement stands for, and what it can do for the workers.

Advertisement alone is not sufficient. Definite educational propaganda is needed too. Here we have an advantage over our capitalist opponents, for in every co-operative society there is a fund of enthusiasm and faith, which will lead many members to give voluntary service to the cause. This service needs organising to be fully effective.

HOW TO MOBILISE OUR MEMBERS.

Every society should have a definite plan by which such service could be used. A member might be made responsible for ten, 50, or 100 families, and should undertake to distribute to them co-operative periodicals, notices of meetings, balance sheets as required. Information can be given about all the store activities, and the advantages of trading with it to the fullest possible extent can be pressed. If co-operation is to be extended on a large scale some organisation of this kind must be adopted, and the women's and men's Guilds would form an admirable nucleus for finding the necessary workers.

COMBINE THE WORKERS' FORCES.

So far we have dealt with developments inside the Co-operative Movement. But it is essential that we should secure also the full support of all the workers' organisations. Co-operation and Trade Unionism are two halves of one circle, and neither alone can bring about the change in the whole industrial system which is our object. Therefore every Guild Branch must take its share in the great campaign for uniting the forces of both movements which was inaugurated by the National Advisory Council of Trade Unionists and Co-operators at the great joint conference held in London on March 6th, 1918.

LOCAL JOINT COUNCILS.

Local Joint Councils are to be formed in every part of the country, and we look to our women to take an active part in the work. For women are the actual people who lay out the family incomes of the workers, and purchases, insurance, savings, all depend on them. To extend our trade and capital, we must convince, not only the men Trade Unionists, but their wives also. Whenever a local Joint Council is being formed the local Guild Branches should press for representation on it, and there are certain sides of the work of these Councils which women are specially fitted to carry out.

Very briefly, the work of these Councils should be:—

1. **To make the advantages of Co-operation fully known to Trade Unionists.** Trade Unionists do not yet realise enough that it is little use getting higher wages so long as the capitalist profit-makers can raise the prices of the goods on which these wages are spent. Although considerable increases in wages have been secured during the war, hardly any trade has been able to raise its rate of wages sufficiently to keep pace with the increased prices. Trade Unionists also do not realise that whenever they spend their money at a private shop, or put their funds into capitalistic banks, or insure in industrial life insurance companies, they are bolstering up the very system which keeps down their wages.

The best way to get these facts brought home to individual Trade Unionists is to send deputations to their branch meetings. And the practical experience of Guildswomen makes them most effective speakers on such deputations.

Every deputation should invite the wives of the Trade Unionists to a special women's meeting, to be organised by the co-operative society through the Guild Branch, so that the women may be directly interested.

2. **Detailed information about the advantages of banking with the C.W.S. and insuring with the C.I.S. should be given.** Simple leaflets giving practical particulars of how to bank at the C.W.S. and how to insure in the C.I.S. should be circulated, and conferences should be held at which agents of the C.W.S. and C.I.S. should attend.

3. **Mutual help in time of strikes.** Arrangements should be made for co-operative societies to be ready to supply food during strikes to those concerned and for enabling co-operative societies to obtain supplies during strikes, so that the workers may suffer as little as possible.

4. **Provision of rooms for Trade Union branch meetings.** This would bring Trade Unionists into direct touch with Co-operation, and would be of great value to both movements.

5. **Joint demonstrations and meetings.** Large joint demonstrations should be held on all questions concerning both movements, and meetings at workshop gates should be organised to advertise co-operation.

Never was there a time when the Guild could be of greater service to the movement and to the country. And in throwing themselves into all the work which lies before them, branches should (1) keep in the closest touch with their management and educational committees, thinking out together the special schemes applicable to their local circumstances, and (2) remember *to be always building up their Guild membership.* We want thousands of new members, and the whole country covered by a net-work of loyal and enthusiastic Guildswomen.

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