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Women's Co-operative Guild

FANCETT COLLECTION

*A National  
Co-operative  
Plan*

FIVE STEPPING  
STONES TO THE  
CO-OPERATIVE  
COMMONWEALTH

By ELEANOR BARTON, J.P.

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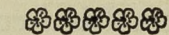
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# A NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE PLAN

Five Stepping Stones to the  
Co-operative Commonwealth

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## I The Power of the Consumer

CO-OPERATION is Democracy in business and its success depends on the intelligence of Co-operators themselves. It is necessary therefore to be on the alert to arouse interest and enthusiasm among ordinary members. We need a company of live members who will approach the uninterested people who are simply members in a half-hearted way, and stimulate them to utilise their purchasing power through the movement and then to teach them the far-reaching effects of that power. Great changes are going on in almost every department of life whether we like it or not and we are all affected by them. If Co-operators only understood those changes, they could make them really effective in building up a finer social system and making life better for everyone. But mere wishing will not do it; we must plan the structure we wish to build and work strenuously until the edifice is completed. The ordinary householder does



not realise the importance of her buying power ; she cannot see that her individual purchases make any great difference and feels helpless in the matter. Yet it is these small purchases which build up huge businesses with colossal power, which, through their ramifications, affect every department of life.

Here is a striking illustration. The "Daily Express" has been denouncing the "octopus" of Co-operation. Here is the sort of octopus which exists in private trade.

Home and Colonial Stores Limited are united with Liptons Limited and Van den Berghs Limited. These again are united with Allied Suppliers Limited from whom we get the Meadow Dairy Company Limited, Sherry's Dairy Company Limited, Peark's Dairies Limited, Neale's Tea Stores Limited, and Brough's Tea Limited. They are all connected with Lever Brothers Limited, and the whole are combined in a huge European amalgamation called Unilevers Limited, who again are large controllers of the Midland Bank. No less than 3,500 retail shops and many scores of other concerns are combined with a capital of £8,250,000 and in 1930 they made a profit of over £2,000,000. And the Chairman of the Home and Colonial Stores Limited is a director of the London Express Newspapers Limited, which denounces Co-operation !

One could give other striking illustrations : the Prudential Insurance Company, made up of the pennies of the workers, which has power in hundreds of other big concerns, and the recent death of the millionaire, Mr. Kreuger, has shown up the tremendous variety and number of interests in which his firm had control ; all built up out of the pennies for boxes of matches which the housewife and her husband buy.

On the other hand, side by side with these private monopolies, there is another form of big business which has been built up by the workers themselves and is run by the workers in the interest of all. The Co-operative Movement is one of the largest single businesses in the country ; it deals with an immense variety of goods ; the whole of the profits come back to the consumer in goods, dividends and social services, and it works for the well-being of all.

The local stores are the roots of the Co-operative tree and each one can do something to help their life and growth.

## 2 Political Action

THE need for political action on the part of Co-operators is now becoming generally accepted throughout the Movement, though there are still some people who look at politics through the eyes of their grandmothers instead of facing present-day facts. Thinking Co-operators have realised that Co-operative principles must be applied to all phases of life if we are to reach the Co-operative Commonwealth, and the Co-operative Party has been formed to apply politically those principles which are applied in Co-operative Trade.

The General Election last Autumn demonstrated once again how urgent the need for political action is, and in order to regain lost ground the great triangle of the Co-operative, Labour and Trade Union Movements must stand solidly together and rebuild their political strength. The absence



of a Co-operative Party in the House of Commons gives a great advantage to the enemies of the Movement, for at the present time it is impossible to separate business and trade from politics, and if the Co-operative Movement is to make the progress it should, it will need its representatives in the House watching the interests of the Consumer.

For the spirit of Co-operation needs to pervade not only our Stores but all our municipal and national life. It is because our rulers are controlled by great financial and other private interests that the interests of the workers are neglected and we have poverty and unemployment.

The Co-operative Party are working out a constructive scheme of democratic social organisation in such matters as Power and Fuel, Agriculture, Transport, Money and Finance, and municipal activity, which are a model of their kind. Co-operative principles, first through the Store and then through our governing bodies is the soundest and most effective way of saving the world.

### 3 A Co-operative Press

**A**NOTHER lesson the General Election taught us was that the power of the Press was as great as ever, if not greater. Everybody takes a paper of some sort to-day, and what they read is bound to play an important part of their life. It is essential that such a power should be owned and controlled by the people themselves instead of a few individuals who consider profits and their own influence

before the welfare of the people, and who are bitter enemies of all that Co-operation stands for. These people are quite unscrupulous in their use of the Press for their own ends, but the furious and unjust attacks that have been recently made against the Co-operative Movement show their fear of the growth of Co-operation.

It is quite as necessary for Co-operators to own newspapers as to own factories and workshops, and just as Co-operators would turn down an inferior article like shoes or soap, so they should not be content with inferior newspapers. It is not enough to pass by the well-known newspaper lies with a laugh as if they could not be avoided, for what is needed is good newspapers that can be relied upon to tell the truth and to give useful and dependable information.

The Co-operative Movement does already own its own Press, and in addition to other newspapers has its own Sunday paper, "Reynolds," which is the only real workers' Sunday paper. What is needed is a Co-operative daily paper as well, on which we could depend, but the Press depends upon the people who buy it, and it is for Co-operators to see that they build up a strong Press of their own that can be used on behalf of the workers in their struggle instead of against them.

### 4 Fair Taxation

**T**HE enemies of Co-operation are never backward in devising means of attacking Co-operation, and when they are in a strong position, as is the case at the present time with the National Government in power, they lose no opportunity of benefiting their strength.



The whole policy of the present Government has been to tax the workers in order to relieve their own friends. In fact, they are only going back to the time when the workers paid almost the whole of the taxes in paying for the goods which they bought. If you bought your tea for 6d. a pound, they would find it very difficult to collect a tax of 2s. for every pound bought, but by calling the price 2s. 6d., the purchaser does not know how much she is taxed. A great statesman once said: "Indirect Taxation is the art of plucking the goose without making it squeal." The fairest tax is the Income Tax because it is paid out of a person's revenue and naturally and justly the larger incomes should pay a larger percentage than the smaller. The present Government, however, while it taxes the things the people buy, are reducing the Income Tax, and at the same time they have made it harder for the small Income Tax payer.

There is an assertion that the Co-operators do not pay their share of Income Tax. This is not true. Every Co-operator pays tax if he is due to pay it. The administration is a little different than in an ordinary company because such a large number of Co-operators have not the necessary income to entitle them to pay. What our opponents want is for the Co-operators who are not learned in tax law to pay their Income Tax twice over. This again shows the need of Co-operative representatives in Parliament and of a campaign of instruction among Co-operators themselves.

## 5 Development of Co-operative Trade

**I**N the last resort, of course, one comes back to the basic principle of building up Co-operative Trade as the surest foundation for the Workers' Movement at the present time. There is still a big field that we do not cover, and we have not only to see that no ground is taken from us in the present onslaught but also to extend further afield.

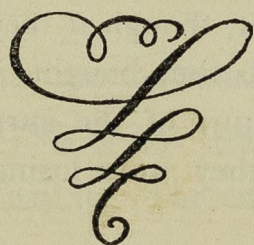
The very basis of all private trade is profit-making, and vast amounts of money are spent by private firms in trying to persuade the public to buy their particular articles. Enormous sums are spent on advertisements, house-to-house canvassing, providing free samples, giving coupons for gifts, etc. All this is very wasteful and in the end the consumer has to pay for it all. Many people too, attracted by free gifts or specially low prices for a particular article are side-tracked from the Co-operative Movement, though if they took the prices of the whole quantity of goods they bought, and also estimated their quality, besides the return of the surplus in dividends, etc., they would soon see they were losing by the transaction.

Another advantage of Co-operative Trade is that so many of the goods are produced in Co-operative works and factories, where the workers get the best conditions and quality is the first consideration, for the simple reason they are working for the whole body of Co-operators and not for private individuals. The most important thing is, however, that they are building up the foundations of a great workers' Commonwealth.



“The Co-operative Wholesale Society,” say the Webbs, “is no longer comparable with any capitalistic firm, company or even trust; it has pushed out its tentacles into so many parts of industry, commerce and finance, that it is now comparable only with a whole industrial system. It is in fact a Socialist, non-profit-making industrial system growing in and at the expense of the ordinary capitalistic system of the country.”

That is why its enemies are so keen and why Co-operators should be equally keen to make Co-operation the vivifying spirit of the country and the world.







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