

**Co-operative Parliamentary Representation
Committee.**

THE VOTE AT LAST !

More Power to Co-operation.

POLITICAL PAMPHLET No. 2.

Prepared for the Committee by

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MORE POWER TO CO-OPERATION.

"It is to the women of the Co-operative Movement, with their on-coming power, that we must look to send the ball we have started rolling to its political goal."¹

—T. W. ALLEN (C.W.S.).

Co-operative women are at last to receive the vote—both Parliamentary and Municipal. This is a tremendous new fact, and Guildswomen must seize hold of it and consider what it means. They will find that they have suddenly become much more important, and that their views and actions will receive far greater consideration. A new responsibility is, therefore, placed on us, and we must respond to it whole-heartedly. We shall have in our hands a most valuable new tool for building our Co-operative Commonwealth. At first some won't see the use of the tool because it is new to them, and will find it difficult to handle. But a little thought and practice will soon show how immensely useful it will be. We have first to make up our minds how we want our Commonwealth built, and then to put in power, by means of our votes, the party which will best carry out our wishes.

And another exciting change has taken place at the same time. The political world, that is the world in which we act as citizens, is not only to be reinforced by that half of humanity which has hitherto been left outside it, but it is going to be stirred by the

entrance of co-operators as an organised and united force, in order to see that our movement is given fair play, and that co-operative principles are enforced in national life.

These two events coinciding in this fortunate way, each giving the other special significance, might create a revolution in society, if only we are full of co-operative faith and united and far-seeing in our action. The Co-operative Movement will hold within it 5 or 6 million voters, men and women. What a power they might be! We are all longing for a different world—one in which the workers may come to their own. If our Co-operative Party were to throw its great weight on the workers' side, we might—think of it!—secure a Parliament and a Government which would place the lives of the people before the interests of wealth and class.

WHAT CO-OPERATION STANDS FOR.

A Co-operative Party has a special appeal for married working women. They are the typical co-operators, and the movement rests on their basket power. It stands for things of vital interest to their family life, and is the movement through which they can most naturally and easily take their part in labour reforms.

(a) THE ABOLITION OF PROFIT.—Women know best the value of the "divi." It is the way in which wives can raise their husbands' wages, and its help in paying for necessaries, rent, education, etc., comes home forcibly to the housewife and mother. But "divi" is doing much more than helping the individual housewife. It cuts at the root of profiteering and profit-making. During the war we have seen in a specially glaring manner how individuals have been

lining their pockets with profits made at the expense of the people. This profit-making goes on also in times of peace, and is the mark of all non-co-operative trade. For example: If we buy a pair of boots at an ordinary shop we pay for the profit of the shopman, the profit of the wholesale merchant, the profit of the manufacturer, the profit of the leather merchant, the profit of the tanner, the profit of the farmer, and the rent of the landlord (who let his land to the farmer), not to speak of the profit of the railway company which carried the hides and leather and boots.

In our present co-operative trade we have already got rid of some of these profits. When we wear a pair of C.W.S. boots the money that would have gone in profits to the manufacturer, wholesale dealer, and shopman is returned to co-operators as "surplus." In co-operative trade no profit at all is made out of anyone. Under Co-operation we carry on trade with the people's own money, for the good of the people, the "surplus" on our trading transactions being returned as "divi" to us as buyers or consumers.

Co-operation has been the people's friend in these bad times, as far as it could. But we see how in the case of a pair of boots we still have to pay the profit of the tanner, the profit of the farmer, the profit of the railway companies, and the rent of the landlord. In order to absorb all these profits and rent we need many more people to become co-operators; we need much larger trade, and much more capital, so that we may get control of raw material. And we need the national control of land and railways. When we secure our own sources of supply and national control of the great monopolies, we shall have prevented profit-makers stepping in, and food and clothing will be brought straight without profit to the people, who will be their

own manufacturers and distributors, using capital as the servant and not the master of industry.

Even as it is, Co-operation has shown the value of its system of industry for use and not for profit.

Mr. Allen said, in his address at the National Co-operative Emergency Conference, "Man has to be freed from the intolerable burden of being a producer of profits for others, and for this tremendous effort every democratic force must march side by side in mutual understanding."

The following instances are given as examples of widespread action:—

During the war a number of societies have reduced prices and dividends so much that no so-called "excess profit" has been shown. The average price of bread sold at co-operative stores in the first half of 1917 was $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to $\frac{3}{4}$ d. below the price in private shops. During the winter of 1917 several societies, notably two in Lancashire, have been selling bread at $8\frac{1}{2}$ d. the quartern loaf instead of 9d.

In 1916 milk was sold at 5d. a quart by two large London societies for months after it had been raised to 6d. elsewhere. A Midland society started a milk department when attempts were made to raise the price of milk, and succeeded in keeping it down. In the winter of 1917 two Lancashire societies were selling milk 1d. cheaper than the controlled price charged by other retailers.

There are also many cases of lower prices for other articles, of which the two following are examples. A Lancashire society made a special point of keeping down the price of coal. A Staffordshire society sold its tea at 2s. 4d. a pound, when none at that price could be obtained elsewhere; and it sold bacon at 2d. to 5d. below the price at outside shops.

(b) DEMOCRATIC CONTROL.—Co-operation also stands for the control of industry by the people. Co-operative women realise the value of the control they have through quarterly meetings over the management of their stores and factories. In this way Trade Union wages and good conditions can be secured. If all industries and monopolies were controlled by co-operators and the State great reforms in the position of workers could be carried out on the lines of joint management by consumers and workers, and a fine industrial democracy be created. But, to quote Mr. Allen again: "Democracy is a thing to be created. It will be revealed ultimately only to those to whom it is a living principle—to those who consciously strive to realise it—who rest in a common faith, work through common action to a common goal."

WHAT LED CO-OPERATORS TO ENTER THE POLITICAL WORLD?

Now, if our co-operative knowledge and methods of trade had been made use of by the Government, and the necessaries of life had been distributed, without profit-making, through co-operative stores and municipalities it would have largely prevented profiteering. The Government has talked loudly against profiteers, but has scouted Co-operation, and the forces of capitalism have won during the war. The Government has not only neglected to use the help of Co-operation to prevent suffering and want, but it has even handicapped its activities, which are so beneficial to the nation. The Government has told us to save. What finer way of saving is there than our automatic method of dividing our "surplus" and leaving it to accumulate in the store, so that in the bad times coming it could be used to employ the people? Instead

of encouraging such savings, the Government has taxed our wrongly called "excess profits," which are really our housewives' "surplus" savings. It might with equal fairness have taxed the savings in the Post Office. Further, the Government has treated co-operative stores unfairly as regards supplies. It has unfairly conscripted our employés. It has not given the movement its proper place on Food Committees. And the Premier, while receiving deputations from all and sundry, was too busy for many months to receive co-operators.

All this treatment shows how the Government is dominated by the power of the vested interests of capitalists. At last co-operators have been roused to what is going on, and they realise that if the people's interests are not to be trodden under foot, they must become active citizens, enter the political world and make themselves felt in Parliament. They must no longer allow the interests of sections of the community to control politics and influence Governments. "If justice under the law," said Mr. Allen, "is a question of privilege, or influence, or social status, then for society's sake we must take a hand with all democratic forces, that vested interests, powerful as they are, shall not over-rule the common good." And co-operators must act *at once*. The effect of war has been greatly to increase the power of anti-co-operative forces, which have found their way through this "business" Government into nearly every State Department, and are astutely and rapidly "consolidating their position."

GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE.

How are co-operators to get round the dangers that are threatening their movement? If the cause of the people is to triumph, men and women must come out from their stores and committee rooms and their homes, just as the Trade Unionists have come out from their workshops, and *use their votes*, both Municipal and Parliamentary.

Trade Unionists have received much more attention and have much more influence in national affairs than co-operators. They have spokesmen in Parliament, and through the Labour Party their organised vote is a force to be reckoned with. The great friendly Alliance now formed between Co-operators and Trade Unionists may have widespread results. Such questions as the following are receiving consideration: All co-operative employés being Trade Unionists and all Trade Unionists Co-operators; the use of surplus funds of both movements; the banking and insurance of Trade Unions with the Co-operative Movement; the distribution of food supplies and C.W.S. loans in trade disputes. Such financial and trading relations will almost certainly lead to joint political action, and so the partnership will be cemented by the pooling of their votes.

In some localities the co-operative societies are first uniting in a Co-operative Party which will enter into friendly relations with whichever other party is most in sympathy with co-operative as against capitalistic ideals. In other places co-operative societies are at once joining hands with Trade Union and Labour bodies. It has to be realised that no co-operator standing as a co-operator solely would have a chance of getting into Parliament. The only way will be for

the Co-operative Party to join one of the other parties, and it will be left for co-operators locally to decide to which party they can look with most hope to carry out our co-operative policy. However friendly any individual candidate may be, the views and actions and composition of the party as a whole, and where its money comes from, must be considered, because the Government would be based on the interests of the particular party which secures most votes.

Can it be doubted that what all the workers should try and secure is a *People's Government*. It is Government which has the power, and if we wish the well-being of the great mass of the nation to prevail, we must use our votes so as to call into existence a People's Ministry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN.

At the beginning of the paper it was pointed out that at the same moment that co-operators are entering political life, another epoch-making event, and one which will intimately affect the success of our political adventure, has taken place. Women are at last to receive the Parliamentary and municipal vote. Not all women yet. Only those who are over 30 and who are householders or wives of householders.* But this form of enfranchisement will give the vote to nearly every co-operative woman. The woman's basket gives her great power in Co-operation, and now that she will carry a vote in her basket she will have great power in politics. How will she use that vote? This is a matter of vital importance for the whole country. Will she give it to the candidate who stands for the workers?—for Co-operation, for Trade Unionism, for no taxes on food, for the taxation of land values and large incomes,

*Women who are themselves householders will receive the municipal vote if 21 or over.

for high wages, for the national care of maternity and infancy, for the children of the workers to receive as good an education as the children of the rich, for the abolition of slums and overcrowding regardless of vested interests, for the people's control of our relation with other countries, so that there may be no more wars.

If we could win all these reforms, what a different world it would be for our children to live in! But if women want them, they must work and vote for them. Our co-operative political campaign is just beginning, and from the first women must take their full share in the local Councils which are being formed. Volunteers will be wanted everywhere to carry out the work planned by the Councils. In places where no Councils have yet been formed, Guild branches should take action.

Guildswomen have been educating themselves for years in all these matters. Now they must go out into the highways and byways and show all married women voters that the Co-operative Party is THE Party for housewives and mothers. The Co-operative Movement and the Guild will give them the opportunity they need to make their vote a power. Through them they can act as part of a vast housewives and mothers' organisation, whose programme touches their everyday material needs. For co-operative politics begin in "basket" politics, but end in establishing a Co-operative Commonwealth, where the needs of the spirit—justice, freedom, and brotherhood—are satisfied.

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