

The Cooperative Way.

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Our past has been dominated to a great extent by a philosophy of individualism and greed. More and more we are beginning to realize that this acquisitiveness for personal gain has to be supplanted by cooperation for mutual gain.

Technocrats tell us that with an adequate labour supply—a few hours per day per individual—using the most modern technological methods at our disposal, we can greatly increase our productive capacity. One has only to think of the tens of millions of dollars spent in war materials during the recent conflict to realize the heights which production can reach. If it can be achieved in war time, why not in peace time?

This heightened production in itself does not mean an increase in the standard of living of the average individual. That can come about only when the abundantly produced goods are justly and adequately distributed. Looking over the past few decades, we see the short-comings in the process of distribution in the capitalist countries. Wealth is becoming more concentrated in the hands of a fewer

number of persons. Even in Denmark, one of the most social-minded and progressive of capitalist countries, in 1937: "0.4 per cent of people owned one fourth of the property, 1.4 per cent owned the next fourth, 4 per cent the third fourth, leaving only the last fourth to be owned by 96 per cent of the people." A similar situation more or less exists in most capitalist countries. Such a situation cannot be said to be conducive to the well-being, happiness and increased standard of living of all the people.

In the light of these facts, let us take a look at British Guiana. Our standard of living must be necessarily low because firstly, our productive capacity is restricted either by antiquated methods of production or by the production of only raw materials; and secondly, because distribution is so constituted that the average worker-consumer has to pay large profits to a whole series of middle-men. Not until we embark on a well planned collective industrial economy can we get "out of the rut." This of course pre-supposes control of government, machinery of the people, by the people and for the people.

Let us take bauxite for example. Had British Guiana been independent and further had it been federated to Dutch Guiana, we could easily have become a productive center for finished aluminum and its products. That industry alone could have given adequate employment to Guianese and materially raised the standard of living. Instead, our government is merely content in allowing the Canadians to scratch the surface of the earth with a handful of Guianese labour.

It therefore behoves the working class people to get control of government through their constitutional ballots in our forthcoming elections, with a view towards complete independence. A free and independent Guiana can easily cooperate and eventually federate with her Latin neighbours, especially contiguous

Brazil. One finds in these days of planned industrial and agricultural economy that anachronistic boundaries made between various small countries hundreds of years ago are more a hinderance and a cause of friction.

What are we to do during this period of evolution to independence? This according to the British-view would come "in due course of time"—maybe another 50 or 100 years, if we do not tire of its gradualism. We have to adopt the philosophy of the cooperative "Middle Way". However, let it be pointed out at once that this cooperative experiment, largely tried in the Scandinavian countries, is only a palliative and has many shortcomings. Existing as it does within the framework of capitalism, it falls prey to capitalistic ills—the fundamental roots of insecurity, unemployment, suicidal competition, and war.

The formation of cooperatives, therefore, becomes imperative for this transition period of our development. Cooperative credit-banks or unions can easily be organized. Should our savings be deposited in the large banks bringing us a small 1 to 2% interest? These large banks invest our accumulated savings in large sums in other countries. Our small savings can be pooled in a cooperative bank to furnish credit for other cooperative ventures within our own community.

Producers cooperatives can greatly help to increase our productive capacity by the elimination of unnecessary duplication of labour and by the adoption of more modern methods of production. Let us take rice as an example. The average small rice producer has a few beds (1 or 2 acres). He first prepares the land by ploughing with the aid of oxen. He then soaks his seeds, prepares a small strip of land for growing the seedlings, then later transplants by hand. In due course he has to maintain proper water supply and drainage; remove parasitic plants, snails, insects, etc. until such time as he cuts by hand and "mashes" by oxen. Let us assume that ten producers having contiguous plots of land formed a cooperative. Instead of ten persons going through all the trouble of procuring and "soaking" one bag of padi each, one person can be detailed to do that one particular job. Instead of having ten children absent from school to "bail" ten individual seedling beds and keep away birds, one person can take care

of one organized plot. A group of producers thus organized will also be in a better position to buy or rent tractors, threshers, ploughs etc., thereby ridding themselves of the obsolete way of doing everything by hand and oxen. Only in this manner can there be achieved a greater productive capacity with an eventual increase in the standard of living.

Workers must also organize themselves in consumers' cooperatives. Membership in a consumer cooperative is at the same time an education in business and democracy—a member will have one vote regardless of the capital invested. Members will realise the mark-up or margin of profits, which a whole series of middle-men extract from consumers. Workers will begin to see themselves at the same time as consumers and producers, and will look upon a whole series of goods-changers as mere parasites upon society. They will not sell to themselves goods of relatively useless value—trinkets and other eye-catching gadgets—or goods of harmful value—most patent medicines, quack remedies, adulterated foods, etc. which goods-changers will sell as long as there is a profit to be gained. Consumers in fact can thus become the masters of production and thereby have produced only goods of definite utility value.

In the light of these facts, man must be re-told that he cannot live alone by a philosophy of greed and acquisitiveness. He must cooperate with his fellow-men for their mutual gain. And finally, to quote Prof. Harold Laski: Man must have revolution by consent (or co-operation) or he will have revolution by force.



A THOUGHT ON SILENCE

BY G. R. BANNERJEE

"Silence is more than what we term it.
If pursued, rises to abysmal height.
But deteriorates when avoided."