

**HISTORY OF
WORK COOPERATION
IN AMERICA**

John Curl



**Cooperatives,
Cooperative Movements,
Collectivity and Communalism from
Early America to the Present**

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Preface

I first conceived of this book ten years ago, in 1970. I had only recently left Drop City, the rural commune in Colorado that touched off the communal movement of those years, where I'd lived since 1966. Drop City meant a lot to me, as it did to large numbers of others at the time; it had changed my life. But there was so much misinformation around about it, that I decided to write something to set the record straighter. Its basic significance, it seemed to me, was as a touchstone of the mass movement, so I decided to write its history with that as the basic focus. I wanted to present it in a larger historical context; I knew of a few previous communal things in American history, but not many. As I began researching the subject, I saw that no true line could be drawn between communalism and other forms of cooperation and collectivity. Meanwhile I became involved with cooperatives and work collectives, and felt that my experiences in them were fully as important as those at Drop City. Although I was (and am) not a professional historian, I was determined to research the subject thoroughly, not only for the book, but to learn from the past to better shape my own present. I found an enormous amount of information scattered in numerous books; the subject was much vaster than I'd dreamed; yet there was not one book surveying the field as a whole. As I began to see the sweep of events, and how different they were from most of what I'd learned in school, I realized that my original concept of a small historical survey prefacing a longer account of Drop City was being inverted by the sheer weight of importance of the information. Now, ten years later, most of the book is from my research, with a brief section on Drop City (as well as Bay Warehouse Collective and other collective experiences of mine) in the final chapter on the '60s and '70s. I have much more information on Drop City, enough for my original concept of the book, which I may publish someday, as well as enough information on communalism, collectivity and cooperation around the world to fill another volume.

I became involved with the movement basically because I was dissatisfied with the choices offered me by American society. I was raised in a working family, mostly in New York City; all the adult men were employees (the women housewives, and employees too when younger). Being an employee was the only way they knew how to survive. To be successful in the world, they told me, get an education and get a "good" job. But seeing what an oppression "employment" was to them, made me feel it was not

something I wanted. At school too, despite all the talk of American "democracy," democracy did not extend to the classrooms, which were run on a boss-system similar to the workplaces. My first paying jobs were during summers, and then after school; the need of money drove me to seek out employers time and again, in a wide variety of jobs, both blue collar and white. I had some better jobs and some worse, some "good" bosses and some bad. I got a broad look at the boss-system and didn't like it: I decided at an early age that I wasn't going to be a wage-earner all my life, no matter what. But I also didn't want to become a boss.

None of my friends liked being bossed either, and the help and support we gave each other in shared oppressive situations, were some of my first experiences in survival cooperation. In organizing games among ourselves, we naturally used the system of direct collective democracy, at least when we weren't letting ourselves be bullied. As a young adult I was part of a loose circle who helped each other survive in numerous ways. But it was not until I moved to Drop City and began working communally, collectively, and cooperatively, that I learned that hard physical work could be joyous and liberating as well as a drudge and a bondage.

* * * * *

In my research I was deeply struck by the extent to which historians differ, not only in perspective, but in the very facts. With this in mind, I beg forgiveness for whatever errors have slipped into my work, and for whatever truths have been left out. I've tried to keep my opinions out of the way of the information, and tried to let the groups and individuals speak for themselves. But I did not try to pretend to be a "neutral" observer of these movements; I readily admit a favorable opinion of many of the groups described in this book, and an unfavorable disposition toward their enemies.

* * * * *

For the purposes of this history, work will be called "cooperative" when it is organized democratically and it and its fruits are divided equally and fairly among the working individuals. Work will be called "collective" when it is done by and for the group as a whole, and not necessarily divided up at all. When the group shares a common household, the term

“communal” will be used synonymously with “collective.” For example, if a group were digging a ditch cooperatively, they might decide that each would spend two hours at it or that each was responsible for finishing six feet. If they were digging the ditch collectively (or communally, if they lived together), they would just do it and not worry if one did more than another as long as it felt okay.

All three terms imply free voluntary democratic equalitarian situations; the only exception is in the category of “religious” communalism, where theocratic organizations will be discussed in this work as well as truly democratic ones.

In contemporary usage, a “collective” (or a “work collective”) is a group of equals making decisions by consensus; in distinction, a “cooperative” uses majority rule (and can sometimes be hierarchically managerial). There are also hybrid structures such as the “collective-cooperative”; these are discussed further in the text.

The concept of “class” in this book will be close to the perspective of most American workers of earlier centuries. Rather than considering class a simple division into upper-middle-lower according to income and wealth, the determining factor in classification will be the individual’s (or family’s) legal relationship to their means of survival and mode of work. Thus earlier Americans saw their main working classes as free self-employed (and cooperatively employed), indentured servants, slaves, wage-earners and prisoners. Some of these classes were clearly in bondage: the servants, slaves and prisoners at least; while the self-employed (including the cooperatively, collectively and communally self-employed, a notable

sector of the early population) were clearly free. In between was the class of wage-earners. Wage-earners “voluntarily” submitted to a form of work bondage: they were neither obviously bond nor truly free. But the wage-earners knew of course that it was “voluntary” only in a technical sense, since almost all were forced into it by economic need. Wage-earners were commonly considered “wage-slaves,” meant in the most literal sense when they were forced to work long hours under oppressive conditions for almost no pay. Although usually not thought of as a separate class, “free” housewives in working families were commonly doomed, then as now, to the bondage of chores; but “woman’s work” was not limited to “free” people, and woman servants, slaves and wage-earners usually had to come home at night to this second bond. Abolitionism was not limited to slavery and servantry, but extended to wage-slavery and women’s rights.

A large number of these cooperative, collective and communal organizations deserve a deeper examination than is possible in a brief survey such as this. The history of worker cooperation in America is full of colorful figures and high drama; I hope my book will give enough of a taste of these to stimulate the reader to further explorations.

* * * * *

I would like to give special thanks to Sue Crane for her generosity in typesetting and for her very valuable advice and encouragement; to Libby Frost for setting the corrections; and to the Cheeseboard Collective for making this edition possible.

Shaker songs (c. 1795)

We love to dance, we love to sing,
We love to taste the living spring,
We love to feel our union flow,
Which round, and round, and round we go.
(Millennial Praises)

Whoever wants to be the highest
Must first come down to be the lowest;
And then ascend to be the highest
By keeping down to be the lowest.

Owenite Socialist song (c. 1825)

Brothers, arise! behold the dawn appear
of Truth's bright day, and Love's Millennial Year!
...
Mankind shall turn from Competition's strife,
To share the blessings of Communal life.
Justice shall triumph—leagued oppression fail—
And Universal happiness prevail.

Oneida Perfectionist hymn (c. 1855)

We have built us a dome
On our beautiful plantation,
And now we all have one home,
And one family relation...

Grange song (c. 1870)

Oh, the farmer comes to town
With his wagon broken down,
But the farmer is the man who feeds them all.

It would put them to the test
If the farmer took a rest;
Then they'd know that it's the farmer feeds them all.
...
The farmer is the man, the farmer is the man,
Lives on credit till the fall;
Then they take him by the hand
And they lead him from the land,
And the merchant is the man who gets it all.

Knights of Labor songs (c. 1875)

One sure way to make a cure
And solve this labor question;
With heads and hands to tie the bands
In steps of Co-operation.

Toiling millions now are waking
See them marching on.
All the tyrants now are shaking
Ere their power's gone.

Storm the fort, ye Knights of Labor
Battle for your cause:
Equal rights for every neighbor,
Down with tyrant laws!

Farmers Alliance song (c. 1890)

I was once a tool of oppression,
And as green as a sucker could be
And monopolies banded together
To beat a poor hayseed like me.

But now I've roused up a little
And their greed and corruption I see,
And the ticket we vote next November
Will be made up of hayseeds like me.
(Arthur L. Kellogg)

Socialist Party song (c. 1900)

I'll vote for Debs, for the Faith I have
That we'll reach the promised land;
A joyous vote and a splendid vote,
And a clasp of a comrade's hand.

IWW songs (c. 1905)

Then up with the masses and down with the classes,
Death to the traitor who money can buy.
Cooperation's the hope of the nation,
Strike for it now or your liberties die.

In the gloom of mighty cities,
Mid the roar of whirling wheels,
We are toiling on like chattel slaves of old,
And our masters hope to keep us
Ever thus beneath their heels,
And to coin our very life blood into gold.

But we have a glowing dream
Of how fair the world will seem
When each man can live his life secure and free;
When the earth is owned by labor
And there's joy and peace for all
In the Commonwealth of Toil that is to be.
(Ralph Chaplin)

1. Early American Cooperation

THE NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITION

The first Americans to practice collectivity, cooperation, and communalism were of course Indian. Families typically included a number of related adults in the same household, sharing a common store of provisions and tools; groups of families were organized into larger cooperative units, and the collection of these made up the tribe. The concept of individual private property in land was unknown, and tools were commonly shared within the communal group.

Hunting and food-gathering peoples followed their food sources around with the seasons; food availability and the methods of gathering determined the size of the living group. At certain times of year, usually scattered groups would join into larger units for cooperative production, using methods not possible in smaller units. These gatherings were not only for mutual aid and cooperative work, but for social connection and celebration, and formed an integral part of societal structure. Typical examples of this are Shoshone rabbit hunts using long nets, only possible when scattered families gathered into a large enough band, and Dakota buffalo hunts, only possible when scattered bands gathered into the tribe.

Collectivity and cooperation also formed the backbone of the way of life of sedentary peoples such as the agriculture-based southwestern Pueblos and the fishing-based northwest coast tribes. The latter, such as the Chinook, channeled their entire catch to an elder whose responsibility it was to assure equitable distribution according to need.

Some form of collective democracy was part of almost every native social system north of Mexico. The most highly developed on a large scale was perhaps the Iroquois confederacy, whose central Council of Sachems (male elders from the various tribes appointed by female elders) made decisions only by unanimous collective consensus. Variations of the council-consensus system are the most typical form of native political organization.

Today, despite the ravages of European invasion, collectivity, communalism, and cooperation remain the dominant texture of Indian life, particularly of those tribes able to hold onto their land; many tribes have production cooperatives, organized on partly traditional, partly "modern" lines.

Collectivity and communalism can be said to be as integral a part of native American culture and religion as the tribe and the land.



Rice Harvesting

THE COLONIAL TRADITION and RELIGIOUS COMMUNALISM

For their first three years in America, 1620-'23, the Pilgrims farmed and worked communally, putting all the products of their work into a common warehouse and taking their needs from a common store. Plymouth was a commune.

The "Separationist" Puritan sect, of which most were members, had financed the voyage with backing of a corporation in Britain. The corporation claimed the wolf's share of all the fruits of their labor for seven years. It proved to be a tremendous drain, worse so because the corporation was keeping false books and cheating the settlers blind. Plymouth was at first set up as a plantation. While the settlers came in search of freedom, their corporate backers' plan was to use the Separationist sect as a ruling elite over British indentured servants and Indian slaves. More than half the group of about 100 aboard the Mayflower were indentured. But the day before landing, the servants staged an insurrection and declared they were seizing their freedom. The bulk of the Pilgrims, "free" workers, had no interest in siding with the few masters on board. The masters had no choice but to agree. All adult males signed the Mayflower Compact, affirming all were now free, and establishing a government among them where all had equal voice and vote. While the Pilgrim's political

system was sexist, it was still a great democratic advance over the military dictatorships of the earlier colonies to the south. Thus the first American colony with even limited democracy was set up at gunpoint of revolutionary servants.

But Plymouth's semi-democratic commune lasted only three years. The corporation and the sect back in England (which was falling more and more under control of certain merchants), reasserted their power over the colony. The corporation became ever more a burden than a help, and many colonists wanted to get out from under it. Land was "plentiful," relations with the local tribes were still friendly and cooperative, and a growing number saw greater freedom and economic success in setting up separately on their own. Masters gained the right to import new shiploads of servants, who would not be declared "free." Finally Plymouth bought out the corporation and dissolved the communal economic system. Soon a theocratic oligarchy was in full control and there were property qualifications for voting.

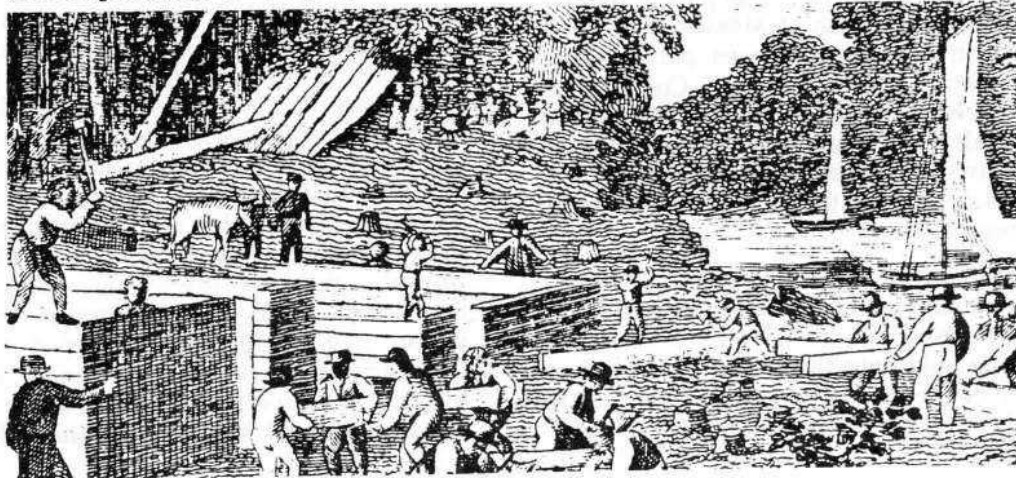
Still mutual-aid and cooperation remained a basic substance of their way of life. The first major industry in the colony was a fishing cooperative.

The Pilgrims were soon joined by other Puritans who founded the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Under their system, much of New England was communal property. Each village had a large commons like a medieval estate. This land belonged to the community as a whole and was assigned to landless individuals and families to use. The early Puritan system saw it as society's duty to assure that no one was alienated from this most basic means of survival.

Britain was a brutal place at the time, with hundreds of minor offenses punishable by death. Revolutionary sentiment and anger were everywhere among the working population. Just as the monarchical church-state was an integrated religious, economic and political organization, the workers' organizations combined religion, economics and politics, and became cells of organized resistance. The Puritan "non-conformist" sects were based on an ideology of struggle for liberty and equality, with an end of making life on earth "as it is in heaven," which they saw as sharing and cooperating. A "commonwealth"

and not an autocracy. They were millenarian, and looked forward to an imminent Second Coming, when the money-changers would be driven from the temple for good, the meek would inherit the earth, the first would be last. They saw the actual Coming only as the final act of the victory over the forces of evil; in the meantime the faithful should model their lives and society on the future "kingdom" as much as possible, even though this meant conflict with the established order. Basically they were part of the "anabaptist" movement.

Anabaptism imitates early "Apostolic" Christianity. "All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common" (Acts 3:43). The entire Jerusalem Church, of which Jesus' brother James was bishop, lived communally, both clergy and laity, until they were wiped out by the Romans. In this communalism they were following the tradition of Jesus' band, in turn in the tradition of the Essenes and of Israel in the Wilderness. Rome was a slave empire and Christianity took hold as a slave religion; they turned to millennial religion only after decades of great revolutionary activity had ultimately failed. But when Rome fell a new empire was erected on its skeleton, the Catholic Church becoming state religion in the fourth century, with bishops part of the government. The Church of Rome was not communalist. Although the commune was still recognized as "the holy life," it was made the privilege of monks and nuns, and denied to society until the Second Coming, which was no longer imminent but put off to a remote future, the year 1000, which would issue in the "millennium." Until then all were to accept their lots in life: slaves should happily slave. Christianity had been turned around from a slave to a master religion. As the year 1000 approached, much of Christianity awaited the Coming, and when it didn't happen on schedule, they went through a period of shock. The working people were mostly serfs by then, no longer total slaves but tied to a master and a plot of land for life; in most areas there were also "free" small farming peasantries, "free" but still poverty-stricken and oppressed. Among the serfs and peasants "heresies" began to sprout and grow. Almost all the heresies attempted to get back to Apostolic Christianity and saw the Church as the oppressor, the Anti-Christ disguised as the pope. All were met with violence by





aristocratic state Catholicism, and most groups organized resistance, some leading extensive armed revolutionary struggles. When these failed, many groups of survivors went off to form separatist communal groups. Thus the Albigenes in the 11th century, renewed by the Waldenses in the 12th, both begun in Southern France; the Moravian (Czech) Brethren, founded on the ashes of the Bohemian peasant revolution of 1414; the Brethren proceeded to assimilate the Waldenses, hiding from persecution in mountain colonies for over two hundred years. Later the Reformation loosed anabaptism in opposition both to Rome and to Luther; from the defeat of the German peasantry in the revolutionary war of 1515, arose the Mennonites, Hutterites, Schwenkfelders and Anabaptists (Dunkards). A couple decades later the Russian Dukbors arose, also meeting persecution. All of these communal groups would follow the Pilgrims and Puritans to America.

The Puritans began in secret and practiced economic mutual-aid among members, were met with bloody repression but took deep root and spread. While the Separationist Pilgrims chose to emigrate and set up their "commonwealth" in America, the vast majority of Puritans chose to stay in Britain and try to set up their commonwealth right there.

That is why the British rulers opened up America to the sects, as a safety valve against revolution. It didn't work. Twenty-nine years after the Pilgrims landed, the Puritan sects organized a revolutionary army and overthrew the British monarchy, abolishing the office of king and the House of Lords, and declaring the Commonwealth of Britain.

But there was an internal struggle in the revolutionary movement. The "Levellers," fighting for a fair re-distribution of the land, were crushed by the merchant-capitalist Cromwellians; Cromwell's version

of a "commonwealth" turned out to be rule by a religious-military-capitalist oligarchy. It lasted only a decade, until 1659; then the new money-rich merchants and the old land-rich nobles inter-married and joined fists to bring back the monarchy and the House of Lords.

In New England, land speculators eventually destroyed the Puritan common-land system, using control of the government, which had become in effect a church-state dictatorship, although less than 20% of the population were church members. The Puritan Congregationalist church would not be disestablished in Massachusetts until 1833.

Cooperation permeated the entire way of life in rural colonial America among the "free" population, mostly small and subsistence farmers. Houses and barns were raised, fields were plowed and fences built cooperatively and collectively. Mutual-aid events like corn husking bees, log rolling bees (to clear land), sewing bees, apple paring bees, grain rings (threshing), bull rings (slaughtering) and ship launchings were also social structures and gatherings that served to weld together the fabric of the working community in the same way that similar gatherings did among the Indians. Barter and labor exchange were widely practiced. Money was scarce and often used sporadically. Early country stores were mostly barter centers.

From the beginning worker cooperation in America had two faces, economic and political. The same workers not only joined in labor to survive, but also joined together to defend themselves from the ruling moneyed classes. Small farmers commonly organized "squatters' associations" to fight off the land speculators who were reeking havoc in their rural communities.

In the Southwest, at this time ruled by Spain, the *ejido*

system was in use. Large tracts not being actively used by Indians, were granted to groups of immigrant families, usually twenty or more, mostly in what is now northern New Mexico. These groups held about 90% of their granted land in common, including pasture and forest, for collective use. The common land could not be sold. Beyond that, each owned a house and a farmable plot. The ejidos were self-governing and all males had a vote in biennial elections. Much work was done cooperatively and on occasions the whole village joined in projects for the common good, such as annual repair of irrigation systems and roads. Tools were often collectively owned and used. The ejido system had once been in use in large parts of Spain, and was fully developed in America by 1700.

All the southeastern British colonies had been set up as plantations by the monarchy, earlier than Plymouth, under the dictatorial rule of big corporations untempered by any religious sect. At first they planned to exploit the wealth of America with the labor of Indian slaves and British servants. Indentured servants made up between one-half and two-thirds of the workforce in British America throughout the 17th century. Many thousands signed themselves into servantry in exchange for passage, in ultimate hope of a better life; many other thousands were sentenced to it for "crimes" such as unemployment or debt, or kidnapped into it by labor contractors, "souldrivers," including many children. Only when it became clear that the Indians could not be made into profitable slaves on their ancestral soil, did the corporations switch over to a policy of genocide and begin replacing them with blacks. The first black slaves in British America were dragged to the corporate military plantation of Virginia in 1610, a year before the Mayflower landed.

Mutual-aid and survival cooperation both among slaves and among servants were almost universal. Their cooperative networks, invisible to the masters, eventually became used as channels for organized resistance. There were over 250 recorded slave insurgencies until emancipation, many of the early ones involving servants too.

Escaped slaves set up communal settlements and villages in forests and swamps throughout the colonies. Many were used as bases for guerrilla raids on the slavers. These "maroon" outlaw communes, many with both black and Indian members, appeared wherever slavery spread.

Meanwhile Christianity became for much of the slave population what it had been for the slaves in Roman times and the Puritans in England. At "hush-hush" meetings at night in swamps or forests, elected ministers preached a religion of liberation. These were also mutual-aid gatherings where people attended to each other's survival. Many revolts and escapes were planned at these meetings, and the ministers were often leaders.

So up until the American and French Revolutions, the

main western tradition of social revolution was anabaptist, and the tactics vacillated between holy war and separationism. But the failures of the movement, especially of the Puritans during their decade of power in Britain, drove large segments of the people to distrust political movements in religious clothes. When revolution next flared it was a secular movement, based on concepts of the natural rights of all people and no longer on the anabaptist millenium.

In Puritan New England, separationism became a dominant tradition. The discontented in a community would band together and "hive" (like bees) into a new spot deeper in the wilderness. New settlements tended to be collective or communal at first, like Plymouth. When each family staked a separate plot, they still retained their cooperative way of life. Most of these people were former servants who had worked off their indentures, descendents of serfs. Both North and South they filled the mountains and created a culture that was based on community cooperation. They were fierce defenders of liberty and freedom; in the South their descendents eventually formed many of the tracks of the Underground Railway that secreted escaped slaves from the lowland plantations to the North; there were very few slaves anywhere in the mountains.

The Labadists, a commune of Protestant separationists, arrived in New York from Holland in 1683, and set themselves up at Bohemia Manor, where about one hundred lived for fifteen years.

The restored British monarchy opened America to other "non-conformist" sects. In 1683 they put Pennsylvania in the hands of Quakers. The Quakers too had begun in secret, practicing mutual-aid among members, and were mostly from the working classes. They were adamantly anti-slavery and later played an important role in the Abolitionist movement. Like the other sects though, merchants tended to acquire power in their organizations.

The Quakers invited all the various German anabaptist communalists to immigrate. The Mennonites (which include the Amish) started coming in 1684. Then the Moravian Brethren. The Schwenkfelders. A group of millennial Pietists formed the Women in the Wilderness Community in 1694. Two groups of Anabaptists united in America to form the Dunkards. Later a group broke away to found Ephrata colony. Soon there were religious communalists throughout the colonies, involving a sizable portion of the population.

A millennial spirit blazed through the "New Light" Baptist "Great Awakening" that overtook America's frontier communities between 1730 and '40. Recognizing no authority between an individual or congregation and God, the Awakening was a major force leading to the Revolution. Many "independent" ministers were agitators for liberty, equality and independence.

2. The Movements Begin (1775-1840)

At the time of the Revolution in 1776 independent self-employed workers formed the backbone of the "free" American population. The vast majority of these were small and subsistence farmers. Benjamin Franklin estimated one hundred small farmers to every artisan, mechanic or laborer. But not all Americans were "free." Slaves formed a fourth of the workforce. The largest number by this time were black, but in some areas Indian slavery could still be found. White indentured servants, slaves with a time limit on their bondage, usually four to seven years, had been the main form of labor through most of the colonial period and still made up a large portion of the newer immigrants. Wage-workers — employees — were only a tiny sector of the population. Most were former indentured servants. As long as hand tool production predominated and land was readily available, independence was within the grasp of almost all "free" workers. Wave after wave of immigrant servants worked off their bondage, winding up penniless; the vast majority then took jobs as wage-earners for a few years, just long enough to raise a stake or learn a trade, then either disappeared into the wilderness to become small farmers or remained in more settled areas to become self-employed in some productive way. Working for a boss was viewed as a form of bondage—"voluntary" but still bondage; only due to absolute necessity would anyone submit to it for long.

Close community survival cooperation was the settler way of life in "free" areas, as it was among the Indians. Only through cooperation and sharing were the incessant waves of displaced humanity able to find warmth and shelter on these troubled shores; mutual-aid for survival, not competition, was the dominant chord resounding across the continent among the working population.

The decade before the Revolution was one of hard times for all American workers. The British rulers were trying to place the burden of their first capitalist depression on the colonies as much as possible. Our local rulers passed the burden down onto the backs of the workers.

In 1768 twenty journeymen tailors in New York City walked out because of a reduction in pay. This was the first recorded wage-earners' strike against a boss in America. They had no strike fund. Their impromptu organization was their only union. It would be another 26 years before the first on-going union in America would be formed; these would grow out of mutual-aid

societies being organized in almost every trade in the coastal cities, and at first usually specializing in sickness and death benefits. To help support themselves during the strike, the tailors set up their own cooperative "house of call" in opposition to their masters. Finding themselves locked out, their jobs filled by scabs, they tried to make a go of their cooperative.

The action of these tailors would be repeated time and again in the following century. Striking workers forming cooperatives was a common pattern in the early labor movement. It was repeated over and over in many places because it was a natural and logical reaction to conditions. Soon workers would no longer wait until striking to form cooperatives, but would organize them in preparation for strikes and ultimately with an eye to never having to strike again.

The wage-earner cooperative, in its turning away from boss-domination and work-bondage, can be seen as separationist, stemming from the same thrust toward freedom that impelled so many colonists to separate from Europe and create cooperative communities throughout America. When this turning-away was blocked ever more thoroughly as the 19th century progressed, increasing numbers of American workers turned back, to social revolution. The strike-to-cooperative transformation of the New York journeymen tailors of 1768 can be seen as a microcosm of the strategy of the national general strike to cooperative commonwealth of one wing of the mass movement that followed.

Wage-earners had few rights. "Free" meant that one was not forced to submit to work-bondage, unless forced by need. The bondage was technically voluntary. "Free" workers could choose their bosses and quit their jobs. Their bondage was only between specified hours and for agreed-upon pay.

In the trades the boss-system was not yet fully developed. Journeymen and apprentices worked for and with masters, not "bosses." The master was a worker too. As long as tools were simple it was within almost any worker's grasp to become a master. Not until the 19th century did most masters take a step more removed and become "bosses," no longer workers but simply businessmen exploiting workers' labor.

For the entire decade before the Revolution, revolt was growing everywhere, among all productive

workers: "free" small and subsistence farmers, artisans, mechanics and laborers, wage-earners as well as servants and slaves, men and women. In both cities and frontier communities the working people were being pressed hard by a social system ruled by and favoring the rich. Even where "free" people had won some degree of local self-government as in New England, the vast majority were still excluded from voting and holding office due to property and sex qualifications. The general uprising that culminated in the war was not only against British domination, but against domination by the local landed and merchant-capitalist ruling cliques who were everywhere in control. Large numbers of these wound up fleeing to Canada. It was the rank-and-file laborers, artisans, mechanics, small farmers and traders, members of the Sons of Liberty and other groups, who formed the main support of the Revolutionary movement and insisted on the more radical demands. They could not be kept down, and their constant demonstrations, boycotts, riots and sabotage led to the eventual break.

The Declaration of Independence, drafted by Jefferson, provided a rallying point that unified many struggles already going on against Britain and the ruling Tories. Its ideas were the grandchildren of those behind the Puritan revolution. While Locke, the Puritan ideologist, had proposed that all "men" had the natural right to life, liberty and property, Jefferson struck out "property" and added the brash claim of a natural equality among all at birth. Nor did he think that equality should stop the minute after birth or be limited to legal formalities. He advocated society adopting whatever "devices for subdividing property" as were necessary to "prevent the accumulation and perpetuation of wealth in select families." "Whenever there are in a country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate the natural right. The earth is given as a common stock for man to labor and live on." "I sincerely believe, with you," he wrote to a friend, "that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies." He advocated a constitutional convention every twenty years when each new generation could agree to a new social contract. His original draft of the Declaration condemned the slave trade, but this was stricken out by representatives of the slavocracy.

Thomas Paine, journeyman printer whose **Common Sense** rallied the working people to the revolutionary cause and was the clearest voice to call for a democratic republic to replace the old tyranny, called for equalization of the wealth in **Agrarian Justice**, suggesting how this could be done through inheritance taxes.

"In what does real power consist?" Noah Webster wrote, examining the newly-proposed Constitution. "The answer is plain and short—in property. A general and tolerably equal distribution of landed property is the whole basis of national freedom. ... An equality of property, with a necessity of alienation constantly operating to destroy combinations of

powerful families, is the very soul of a republic. While this continues, the people will inevitably possess both power and freedom; when this is lost, power departs, liberty expires, and a commonwealth will inevitably assume some other form."



Thomas Paine

The Revolutionary victory brought the working people few immediate advantages. In the place of ruling Tory merchant-capitalists, land speculators and plantation owners, were ruling "patriot" merchant-capitalists, land speculators and plantation owners. The propertyless were still totally disenfranchised; there were enormous gulfs between wealth and poverty; workers still labored under the various forms of bondage. Servantry was still widespread among the immigrant population, now mostly Irish and German. Democratic gains soldiers thought they had won in battle were being whittled away. Alarmed at the situation, the Boston Committee became active again and flooded their area with leaflets urging "all believers in natural law" to form committees guarding against further encroachments on their liberties. Strikes, riots and revolts began to flare again. In western Massachusetts small farmers rose to halt foreclosures and oppression of debtors; with the leadership of Daniel Shays they staged an armed insurrection, seizing the centers of merchant power on the eastern seaboard for a short time. It was these revolts that finally won the Bill of Rights. Nonetheless slavery was written into the Constitution and permitted to spread to the Southwest Territory. Speculators and slavers were permitted to seize almost all the western lands. Unions were still persecuted as "conspiracies in constraint of trade." There were still property qualifications for voting.

All the participants at the Continental Congress were white men of property: slave owners, land speculators, creditors, manufacturers, merchants and lawyers. There were no small farmers, artisans or laborers, and no women. They wrote a constitution with the working people considered only to the minimum degree necessary to gain their acceptance of it. The Revolution had not fulfilled its promises of equality, democracy, or even liberty for all.

Both Jefferson and Paine were out of the country during the Congress and upon return were both shocked at how deeply the forces of money were in control, with the Southern plantation owners on top.

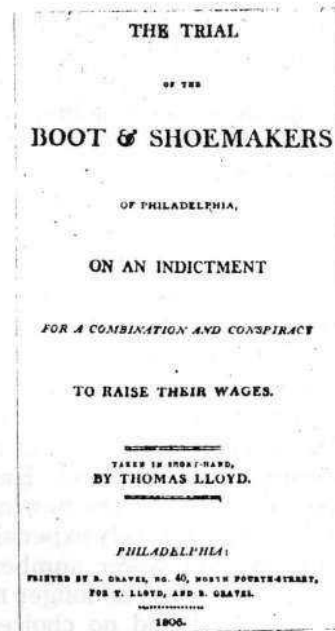
In 1791, two years after the U.S. Constitution was ratified, a year before the first full-fledged trade union in America was organized, a group of journeymen carpenters in Philadelphia walked out. To help support themselves during their strike, they formed a cooperative and tried to undercut their boss by charging 25% less, announcing that they were eliminating his profit. They were striking for the ten hour day and gave it to themselves, a great advance over the prevailing sun-to-sun system, the 75 hour week. But the cooperative was planned to last only as long as the strike.

Then in '94 journeymen shoemakers in Baltimore organized the first cooperative factory in the U.S.

The French revolution see-sawed from "left" to "right," and waves of refugees poured onto American shores, setting up cooperative structures among them. In 1798 the United Irishmen rose and met defeat, many also seeking refuge in America. They joined the French in the seaboard cities and similarly gained a toehold through mutual-aid and cooperation, as would all the waves of immigrants who followed.

Soon "Democratic societies" modeled after the Sons of Liberty began forming in all the major centers. These came together in a movement to put Jefferson in the presidency, an uprising of small farmers and urban workers. But the aristocratic Federalists met them by staging America's first "red scare." They charged that the Democratic societies were part of a vast secret international conspiracy called "The Illuminati," financed by "Paris gold" with the aim of "subverting the government and wiping out religion."

Nevertheless in 1800 Jefferson's Democratic-Republican (later just Democratic) Party swept into power. During his presidency democracy was extended, the African slave trade outlawed, and the Louisiana territory partly opened to homesteaders. Still the plantation slavocracy retained basic control of the federal government. Although a slave-owner himself, Jefferson advocated emancipation on a social scale; he led the fight to stop the spread of slavery into the west; his aim and vision was to create a true democratic republic with a general equality in land through free homesteads.



In 1806 Philadelphia journeymen shoemakers, with the leadership of Peter Polin and Undriel Backes, unionized and struck for higher wages. The boss had them arrested for conspiracy. The judge instructed the jury to find them guilty, which they proceeded to do. Beaten but unbowed, the shoemakers refused to slink back to a boss and organized a cooperative boot and shoe factory instead.

In the early 19th century productive work was still done almost entirely with hand tools. During this period workers ordinarily collectivized skills, shop space, resources (including credit to obtain raw materials), and distribution facilities. It was not until the 1840s that the factory system and expensive machinery made hand tool production almost universally obsolete; it was only then that cooperative workers collectivized most of their major tools.

Wage-earners were not the only ones forming cooperatives. Individual self-employed producers were caught between the banks and the merchants, and were being squeezed dry. Artisans could not get raw materials at prices they could pay, and the banks would not give them credit. On the other end, the wholesalers and store owners took the biggest bites of the selling prices.

These individual producers, facing impoverishment, organized cooperative "warehouses" to get raw materials at reasonable cost and to distribute their products without middlemen. There was a thriving cooperative warehouse in Baltimore as early as 1809. The Pittsburgh and Vicinity Manufacturing Association opened a warehouse in 1818, doing much barter of industrial products for farm produce. The New England Society for the Promotion of Manufactures and the Mechanic Arts organized several in Massachusetts beginning in 1825.

Thus the two classes of wage-earners and independent workers both formed cooperatives. One class

was struggling to raise themselves out of wage-bondage, the other to keep from falling down into it. These two classes met in the cooperatives and became one. Worker cooperatives were ladders across a class boundary, between dependence and independence, bondage and real freedom.

AN OVERVIEW

The nineteenth century brought industrialization. While the vast productive power unleashed by these technological advances promised real freedom and plenty for all, industrialization under the capitalist system forced an ever-growing number of workers to become wage-earners permanently. Hand tool production was soon obsolete and the new machines and processes were both prohibitively expensive and could be operated only by ever-larger numbers of coordinated workers. Workers could no longer make a living using the old tools, and had no choice but to find bosses and "voluntarily" submit to wage-slavery. Meanwhile land costs skyrocketed; the road to independence as small farmers was quickly being closed. Vast new areas were continually annexed to the U.S. (by "purchase," genocide and imperialist war), but instead of that enormous wealth going for the equal enrichment of all the people, it went mostly for the further enrichment of a small number of land speculators, ultimately the same financiers who were behind the factories in the North and the plantations in the South.

While good land was plentiful and tools simple, individual ownership of these means of production meant a real freedom for the "free" American working people; this was of course the greatest attraction of America to European workers. As hand tools gave way to machinery and all farmable land was fenced off, individual ownership of these means of production effectually came to mean virtual slavery for ever-greater numbers. Control of all means of survival was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands while the population expanded many times over. America was being transformed from a land where almost all "free" workers had control of their basic means of survival, to one where the great majority was alienated from and denied these means, and exploited and controlled by those who had them. Meanwhile the money-power, in control of the government, proceeded to transform the wealth of the American continent into private profits, permitting only a bare minimum to flow back into the pockets of the workers who were indispensable in creating it, for the capitalist bosses needed a labor pool, a sufficient number of people who were scarcely making it and who therefore would "voluntarily" submit to wage-slavery.

The cycles of depression and boom were very high and low all through the nineteenth century. The first major depression began in 1819; others followed in 1837, '57, '73, and '93; besides these there were smaller

breakdowns in between. Fully half the years between the Civil War and the turn of the century were depression, interspersed with years of recovery. There were five breakdowns between 1902 and '21, and then of course the big one in '29. The economy bottomed out in '33 when the New Deal took over, but collapsed again four years later and only really pulled out of its slump when the country geared for World War II. Every war brought on a boom followed in peacetime by recession and depression. Unionization and radical worker and farmer movements, usually involving cooperatives, followed these cycles. Some cooperative movements would be destroyed by the collapses, driven to bankruptcy, others by the booms, no longer utterly essential to their members.

As the classes of servant and slave became legally abolished in 1832 and 1865, due mainly to the continual uprisings and abolitionist movements of the bonded workers and their "free" compatriots, the former enslaved classes rose a notch to "free" status, mostly becoming "free" wage-slaves or unemployed in the cities and "free" tenant farmers in the countryside. Only the very smallest number made it up to independence and self-employment.

In 1800 just a few percent of the workforce were employees. By 1860, 30%. The turn of the century had 52% employees. This figure rose slowly but steadily until in 1940 it reached 60%. Then it escalated sharply until by 1970 over 85% of all American workers were employees. Today this figure is probably well over 90%. Correspondingly, the percentage of workers in control of their means of production—of their jobs—diminished.

The class of wage-earners, like those of chattel slaves and indentured servants, did not accept their bondage docilely. To carry out their struggle they created a variety of organizations, most of which can be categorized as unions, parties and cooperatives. Many were all three. Cooperatives were established along with the first unions, as a way for workers to cross the class boundary between employee and self-employed. The greatest labor associations of almost the entire 19th century—the National Trades' Union, the National Labor Union, the Knights of Labor—strove not only to better their members' income and working conditions, but were also abolitionist organizations, and strove to raise their members out of wage-slavery entirely and to abolish the wage-slave class. To achieve this, each of these in turn organized and supported movements of worker cooperatives of their members. These cooperatives would grow and spread in every industry across America, they hoped, eventually exerting workers' democratic control over the entire economic system, destroying the capitalist money-power and transforming our country into what they called a "cooperative commonwealth," in which the promises of our founding documents could at last become living reality: equality, liberty, freedom, democracy.



Time and again the money-power attacked the cooperators with economic and physical violence. But the union cooperators were not alone. Small farmers had become captives to the railroads, middlemen and bankers, with most of the land in mortgage. To fight back they too organized into cooperatives, through the National Grange and then the Farmers' Alliance, but they too were wrecked.

Beginning in the late 1860's the farmer and union cooperators began to unite into "farmer-labor" parties to try to take state power and clear the way for their embattled cooperative movements.

IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS

The intense suffering of the depression that began in 1819 led to America's first visionary radical movements. The ground was laid by four thinkers: Cornelius Blatchly, Langdon Byllesby, Thomas Skidmore, and George Henry Evans.

Blatchly, a New York physician, published *An Essay on Common Wealth* in 1822, in which he asserted society's right to withdraw its "gift" of private property and restore to people their "natural equality." To bring this about he advocated "pure communities" where collective good and cooperation would replace selfishness and competition; these could be formed from small beginnings, eventually spread and take in the whole population; while the repressive and obsolete old society faded away, out of these communities a new America would rise. The *Essay* and Society for Propagating Communities, which he founded two years earlier, laid the foundations for the Socialist communal movement that followed beginning with Robert Owen's New Harmony in '25.

Byllesby, a Philadelphian printer, criticized the Blatchly-Owen idea as unrealistic in application, and advocated instead, in *Observations on the Sources and Effects of Unequal Wealth* (1826), that wage-earners withdraw their labor from the capitalist system and join into cooperatives in every industry and trade, which could then federate, grow large enough to draw in the entire working population, and so create a new economic system in America free of poverty and inequality. This laid the base for the National Trades' Union's cooperative movement of the mid-1830s, and for the union cooperative movements that were to follow.

Skidmore and Evans both advocated political action, and their ideas led to America's first independent Workers' Parties in the late '20s, which were instrumental in helping win the Jacksonian extension of democracy. Skidmore, a machinist, in *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829) called for a new constitutional convention to decree that all property belonged to the nation, to abolish inheritance and cancel all debts; the state would assign each citizen a fair and equal share upon maturity. Evans published the *Working Man's Advocate*, a New York newspaper, beginning in the mid-'20s, in which he advocated free homesteads, "abolition of chattel slavery and wages slavery," and "equal rights for women and men in all respects."

These movements were all connected, as were the later movements they spawned, which would carry on through the entire century. All considered themselves Jeffersonians, and considered that their ideas simply represented the fulfillment of the promise of America; they formed the roots of the native socialistic and semi-socialistic movements that loomed increasingly large as the century progressed, all intimately connected with cooperatives and worker cooperation.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNALISM 1

After the United States won independence, offshoots of Quakerism renewed the movement, now among the American-born.

First came Jerusalem Community, begun in 1788 in upper New York State, organized after a vision of Jemima Williamson, a Quaker. They had 250 members a decade later and lasted over thirty years.

In 1793 the first Shaker commune was formed, by the New Light followers of Ann Lee, an immigrant English factory worker and a Quaker. At their height 50 years later there would be eighteen Shaker communes dotting the north-east and mid-west, with around 8,000 members. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, as they called themselves, attained almost complete self-sufficiency and practiced decision-making equality between the sexes. While most anabaptist groups based themselves in the biological family, the Shakers were celibate and had to constantly take in new members, which was a factor in their eventual decline.

The German separationists kept coming: the Rappites in 1805, founding Harmony, Indiana; the Separatists from Wurtemberg forming the village of Zoar, Ohio, in 1817; the Hutterites; the True Inspirationists. Each set up a colony or colonies mostly scattered across the northern states. In the early '40s a communal colony of German Catholics, St. Naziaz Community, was founded in Wisconsin; German protestants formed Amana in upper New York in '42 (later moving to six connected villages in Iowa), Bethel in Missouri, and Aurora in Oregon in '44; Bishop's Hill was organized by Swedish anabaptists in Illinois in '46. Even though they all generally kept to themselves and made no attempt to recruit new members from outside, they still had tremendous influence on the areas they lived in. Most eventually dispersed or gave up communalism, becoming cooperative; the Amana Inspirationists and the Hutterites are still flourishing. Some centered around charismatic leaders who tended to run their groups autocratically, like "Father" Rapp; others, like the Hutterites, have been at least semi-democratic. There are about fifty Hutterite communal colonies in the U.S. today, mostly in South Dakota and Montana, organized on a patriarchal consensus system.

SOCIALIST COMMUNALISM

Between 1825 and '30 was the first concerted attempt of urban workers to escape deteriorating city conditions and wage-slavery through acquiring land cooperatively and setting up cooperative communities and communes, primarily based in agriculture. Skyrocketing land prices were putting the traditional transition from wage-worker to small farmer out of the reach of ever-growing numbers. Since land is the basic means of production for farmers, this development mirrored the skyrocketing cost of means of production in manufacturing, which made the transition from wage-earner to independent worker

out of reach of ever-growing numbers too. Workers turned to both production cooperatives and rural cooperative communities for the same reasons. The transition to community was the more difficult one, as it also necessitated a change in locale, usually from city to country, and usually also a change of jobs. Even then many city workers knew little about farming; they tried to make it by pooling their knowledge, skills and resources.



Robert Owen

The movement was sparked by America's first full homegrown depression, which ravaged the working class communities in the eastern cities. Its ideological base was laid by Blatchly's Society for Propagating Communities and his *Essay*, which contained long excerpts from a work by Robert Owen, a Britisher, *A New View of Society*, in which Owen originated the idea that the capitalist system of worker poverty and wage-slavery could be destroyed by the creation of cooperative communities everywhere, part agricultural and part industrial, on which all the unemployed could settle along with all wage-slaves who wanted their freedom, all producing for each others' needs and for exchange with the outside world. These cooperative villages would grow, spread and federate "in circles of tens, hundreds and thousands," eventually transforming the whole of society around the world. From inside the shell of "the old immoral world" a "new moral world" would arise, where all were free and equal and true democracy ruled. He called this "Socialism," adding a new word to the

languages of the world, and founded the Association of All Classes of All Nations to try to bring it about through peaceful means.

Blatchly and his group began preparations to found their first communities, meanwhile getting in touch with Owen. Owen had been a wage-earner starting at the age of nine, a shop assistant at a draper's. Keeping his eye on the boss, he figured out the capitalist system, becoming a mill manager then part owner. Meanwhile New Lanark became famous as the only mill in England where a large portion of the income was plowed back into high salaries, good working conditions and fringe benefits for workers. In 1817 Owen went to the House of Commons, unveiling his plan to replace capitalism and requesting government assistance to set up the first of these Villages of Cooperation or Home Colonies, as he called them. They would not only solve the problems of poverty and inequality, he claimed, but would rejuvenate all of society. He estimated the best size as about 1200 people on 1000 to 1500 acres. The government, after helping set them up, would get out, leaving them autonomous and self-supporting. The capitalists in control of Commons rejected him out of hand. Scarcely five years had passed since their former colonies in America had whipped them in a second war; now this former wage-earner wanted to set up "home" colonies right in Britain. Owen turned to wealthy individuals, appealing to their "moral sensibilities," but got the same response. He decided that a self-supporting movement could be created, without any further outside help, once the first few got off the ground. He and his friends began gathering resources to start one in Scotland. But Blatchly caught his ear and he was soon convinced that America was the most fertile ground for Socialism to develop first. At that moment it happened that George Rapp and his group of a thousand immigrant communalists decided to sell their home, Harmony, in Indiana, and move to a new site in Pennsylvania. Owen put his money on the line and set sail for America. And so the first movement in the world to call itself Socialist was about to take place, in the U.S.A., while the generation of Karl Marx was going to kindergarten.

In the Spring of 1825 New Harmony was opened to any and all. Within a short time over 900 had crowded in, mostly urban working people. For a year the community thrived. They had 20,000 acres, large tracts under cultivation, a cooperative silk factory, woolen mill, brick yard, distillery, oil mill and die works. They functioned under a cooperative system, each being responsible for balancing debits from the community store with work-credits on an annual basis. This plan was to be in effect two years, under direction of a committee, at the end of which the community would work out a permanent constitution.

Between 1825 and '26 New Harmony was thriving, and received nationwide publicity, along with Owen's theories, which inspired the founding of a good number of other cooperative communities across the northern states into the mid-west. Fragmentary



New Harmony

histories of at least nine are recorded, the most successful being Kendal and Yellow Springs in Ohio, Valley Forge in Pennsylvania, Blue Springs in Indiana, and Franklin and Coxsackie in New York.

During most of the first nine months Owen himself was not there, touring the country speaking about Socialism, leaving the people at New Harmony space to work out their own destiny. When he returned, the community was functioning so well that he decided to spring early what he had expected to present at the end of the two year period. He offered a plan for a "community of equals." All would be resolved into a democratic family of equals, holding means of survival in common and working all for each others' needs. They would switch from a cooperative community to a commune, from each receiving material benefits according to work performed, to each receiving them according to need.

The community, excited at the prospect, decided to dive in head first. They met with disaster. The community was barely on its feet as a cooperative, a great achievement for 900 people who mostly did not know each other to begin with. There was a wide range of people from the most varied backgrounds: working families, middle-class "intellectuals" and lumpen vagrants. The transition to commune was premature at the least, and resulted in factions and feuds, open struggle among people of differing class backgrounds and outlooks, splitting the community beyond repair. Even after they retreated back into a cooperative system, the personal wounds could not be healed. New Harmony split into several different cooperative communities and some separate families, dividing the land. Owen, undefeated, decided to try his plan again in Mexico, where he soon bumped into the Catholic Church.

One of the participants during the successful first period was Frances Wright, one of America's early women's suffragists. A few months after she left New Harmony, she founded Nashoba Community in

Tennessee. While Owen's concept strove toward the liberation of all from wage-slavery, Wright tried to apply the concept to chattel-slavery. She considered it one last hope for the liberation of black people short of violent insurrection. Communes of blacks and whites producing for their common needs and raising funds to found new communes and liberate more blacks. She wrote to Thomas Jefferson, trying to get him involved. He answered with encouragement and support but said this was a job for young people, while he was near his end. Nashoba survived for three years, despite harassment from local racists. But the 1828 depression hit them hard, and the next year they could not meet their land payments. The now-free blacks shipped off to "liberated" Haiti, while Wright, together with Owen's son Robert Dale Owen, became active in the New York Workingmen's Party, giving up the socialist community strategy as impracticable at the time.



Frances Wright

Just as anabaptism had two wings, one separationist and one social-revolutionary, with the same ultimate goal but with different roads toward it, one going off cooperatively and communally to live among themselves, the other trying to take over state power and transform the whole of society directly, so the socialist movement could be viewed as the secularization of anabaptism, mirroring the secularization of the whole of Western society, the separation of church and state. While the church-state used religious authority to back up arbitrary power, the mass socialist movement grew out of the democratic tradition and attempted to

extend democracy and equality to the economic life of society, instead of its remaining formalistically limited to politics and law. This vacillation between socialist communities and socialist parties would be later followed by other socialist leaders in America, including Weitling, Haskell and Debs. The union-based worker cooperative movement stood with one foot firmly planted in each of these wings, and was a bridge between them.

Many expected New Harmony to act as both a seed-pod and a bank for the movement, gathering capital that could be used to start numerous other communes. Its failure meant that only by individual workers combining resources could many small ones get started. This worked well for several years, but without a center, the movement lost direction. Almost all the communities were absorbed into the larger surrounding farm communities after a number of years. Apart from common land ownership, the new arrivals were mostly repeating in microcosm the already-existing cooperative work networks in much of rural America. They found many of the same problems in the countryside that they'd hoped to leave behind them in the cities. Becoming part of a land cooperative or commune meant changing classes for most, as they'd usually been tenants and wage earners in the cities and now they were joint land-owners and collectively self-employed.

But the banks, middlemen and land speculators were squeezing small farmers dry. It was becoming increasingly difficult for people who'd known farming all their lives to make a living; so much more so for these former city people. Besides, for the most part the banks still owned the land, and the communalists remained slaves to large mortgage payments for many years. The worsening of the depression and the disheartenment of New Harmony's collapse brought a temporary end to socialist communalism as a movement. While money was scarce and getting scarcer, not even the top layers of the working population could afford land, even with collectivizing resources. It would be another decade before economic conditions would permit the movement to burst forth again. By 1830 all of these early communities had faded into the rural landscape and were gone.

Josiah Warren, who had been a participant during New Harmony's first year, went on to become America's major exponent of mutualism. He organized the Cincinnati Labor for Labor Store in 1827, better known as the "Time Store." It attempted to undercut the market and money systems by basing the value of a product to be bartered at the store on the labor-time contained in it. The member-worker would get time-credit for each product deposited, which could be used toward the barter of other products. An hour's work was considered worth an hour's work; no adjustment was made to account for the different hourly values of every different type of work on the capitalist market. Warren's store inspired the Producers' Exchange Association in Philadelphia, which opened three similar stores beginning the

following year. Soon however, all these warehouses began accepting money also, as the producers preferred this flexibility, and were opened to non-member cash buyers, retaining barter among members. They all lasted into the '30s. Warren went on to found mutualist cooperative communities in Ohio (Equity in '34 and then Utopia in '46) and New York (Modern Times in '50), with no government from above but simple mutual-aid structures from below. The first was soon struck with malaria, but the latter two each lasted over twenty years, never disbanding but simply merging with the surrounding communities that had grown about them.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNALISM 2

American-born groups kept forming. The Mormons, who grew the largest of all, eventually joining the U.S. as essentially a separate state, were first organized in 1831 in upper New York. They lived communally at first, as a "United Order," but this system was abandoned after less than two years, in favor of separate cooperative households. In 1874, by then long-entrenched in Utah, a new attempt was made to create a United Order, on a larger scale than the first. Twenty-five families joined together, founding Orderville, which soon had a population of over 500. All members drew necessities from a common fund; all surpluses and debts were cancelled once a year. Within the next decade several other semi-communal settlements were organized. But the patriarchal theocratic Church, by then committed to capitalism, disclaimed them, leading to great internal strife and to eventual dissolving of the communes and division of property after twenty-five years.

Between 1864 and '82 the Mormon Church organized a chain of cooperative stores, extending to almost every community, 146 branches in 126 towns at its peak. But the wholesale, like the Church, was organized theocratically and the stores were set up under a stock system with votes not limited to one per person, so eventually control shifted to an ever-smaller number of members. The church hierarchy decided in 1882 to abandon the goal of a cooperative distribution system, and opened the area to "regular" capitalist stores for the first time.

Hopedale was begun in '41 by Christian Socialists in Massachusetts, as an expression of their belief that the struggle for social justice was "the true means of salvation." They lasted fifteen years, with 235 members at their height. With Christian Socialism the religious and secular movements dovetailed once again.

The Perfectionists established their first commune in Vermont in '46, later moving to New York then branching out into Connecticut; at their height their main commune, Oneida, had over eight hundred members. Unlike almost any other 19th century group they practiced group marriage. After four decades Oneida crumbled on personality clashes and wound up transformed into a capitalist corporation.



Josiah Warren

The Perfectionists, the Mormons and the Shakers were all strong at the same time. Besides being attempts to gain a constructive sense of community by separating from the capitalist wage system, and to lead a "spiritual" life, all were expressions of a widespread dissatisfaction with the bounds and constraints, both economic and social, that accompanied the isolated nuclear family. In capitalist-dominated communities, each family was pitted against each other for survival. In reaction, communalism attempted to restructure society as a cooperating family. Oneida's group marriage, the Mormons' polygamy and the Shakers' celibacy were all attempts to create "improved" internal structures in these new extended families.



Shaker Dance

At mid-19th century, there were at least fifty religious communal groups in the US, averaging about 200 members.

WORKERS' PARTIES

It was during the intense depression years of the late '20s that wage-earners first organized their own separate parties. In Philadelphia the first Workers' Party won twenty local offices in its first election in '28; in New York the next year the Workingmen's Party's first candidate, a carpenter, was elected assemblyman. The New York party was split between supporters of Skidmore's equalitarianism, and Evans' free land and abolitionism. R. D. Owen and Frances Wright, the former communalists, were among the leaders of the Evans group, and raised the first call for free public education, on which they pinned much hope. Josiah Warren was active in the Philadelphia party.

<p>Working Man's Advocate.</p> <p>NEW YORK: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1829.</p> <hr/> <p>WORKING MEN'S TICKET.</p> <p>ASSEMBLY.</p> <p>ALEXANDER MING, Editor, Printer. FREDERICK FRIEND, Brass Founder. THOMAS SKIDMORE, Machinist. CORNELIUS C. BLATCHLEY, Physician. ROBERT M. KERRISON, Whitesmith. ALDEN POTTER, Machinist. AMOS WILLIAMSON, Carpenter. EBENEZER WHITING, Cooper. SIMON CLANNON, Painter. EBENEZER FORD, Carpenter.</p>
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These early workers' parties and others like them in other eastern cities were swept into the upsurge of urban workers and western small farmers behind Andrew Jackson, "the foe of monopoly," in the next few years, and disappeared inside the Democratic Party. This would be a recurring pattern for independent worker parties in the U.S.: politics quickly became conducted by professional politicians, who would attempt to enter every new party and entangle it with one of the "major" parties, with the promise of short-term gains; the developing "two

party system" was making it very difficult for new parties to get off the ground. During Jackson's presidency, restrictions on voting for male wage-earners and small farmers were almost entirely removed, and servantry outlawed; still the federal government remained basically controlled by the planters. Wage-earners' problems were not at all solved, and in the following years they would be turning to unions and cooperatives to deal with them.

EARLY STORES

The first recorded cooperative store in the U.S. opened in Philadelphia in 1829. It sold just to members at cost, charging 20 cents per month dues. Later that year another was started in New York City. The separation of producers and consumers by ever-larger distances was resulting in the domination by middlemen; workingpeople turned to buying-cooperatives to eliminate middleman profits as much as possible, reducing their cost of living.

In '31 the Massachusetts Workingmen's Party, based in Boston, disbanded and many of its leading members regrouped into the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and Other Workers, and organized America's first "consumer" cooperative movement of stores and buying clubs. In '32 there were a half dozen stores around Utica, N.Y. and a newspaper, *The Cooperator*, the first of a long line of American papers with that name. A very successful cooperative food store was run in the same period by the journeymen shoemakers of Lynn, Mass. Until the 1837 depression hit hard, stores were springing up all throughout the northeast.

The disappearance of the stores during the depression did not mean the disappearance of cooperative buying. Groups of neighbors would often do wholesale buying together, and some of the early stores developed out of these buying cooperatives. At first there would usually be a labor requirement for each member. But some members would prefer the alternative of a surcharge. This made for two types of members, working and non-working. It was a small step from there to the workers being put on salary, membership open to the general community, and a store open to members and non-members alike, but with members receiving special discounts or refunds on items purchased.

From the other direction, other early stores began as worker cooperatives, with worker-members employing themselves at modest salaries to run the operation, and passing the rest on in lower prices much like today's collective stores. Some members were probably former grocery clerks. But the need for capital was a major stumbling block. To get it, they would open up membership to the community and sell shares.

Other areas of "consumer" cooperation were appearing at this time also. The '30s saw the first cooperative building, banking and credit associations. The earliest "building and loan" cooperative on record was opened in Philadelphia in 1831. Some of these made it through the depression of the late '30s and '40's, only to be wiped out, along with almost every cooperative in the U.S., by the Civil War.

NATIONAL TRADES' UNION

During the early 1830s was the first great rise of unions in the US. Workers' wages were lagging behind prices and cost of living, due to runaway paper-money inflation, and employers hit them with wage-cuts and layoffs. They formed trade unions to fight back; many struck and lost, then turned to worker cooperatives.

American wage-earners' experience had long taught them that small strikes, guerrilla battles, were not getting them the larger things they wanted even when they won. Offensive strikes, waged when the bosses needed workers (often when the economy was on an upswing), sometimes did win. But even then their gains were usually soon whittled away, by speedup, inflation, by any of a hundred tricks. As soon as recession hit, lay-offs and wage-cuts were shoved down workers' throats. Defensive strikes, against these, almost invariably lost. The bosses simply didn't need them any more; unemployment created a large labor pool so workers had to compete furiously to survive and bosses could call all the shots. It was during and after these defensive strikes, that wage-earners first formed cooperatives. Many soon realized that this was a bit late, and unions later formed cooperatives in expectation of hard times. The cooperatives would take in unemployed union members. Less unemployment meant less competition in the labor market and therefore higher wages.

In 1834 the Philadelphia cabinetmakers union opened a cooperative warehouse; by '36 it was one of the largest in the city. Soon much of the Philadelphia trade union movement swung to cooperation: the handloom weavers opened five shops in '36, soon followed by the tailors, hatters and saddlers. That same year shoemakers unions opened cooperatives in New Brunswick, N.J., Cincinnati, St. Louis and Louisville; in the last three cities, tailors unions followed suit. Painters' unions in New York City and Brooklyn lost strikes in '37, then formed cooperatives.

In the early '30s unions began coming together into city-wide federations, "trades' unions," the first organizations of American wage-earners that cut across trade lines and looked to the interests of wage-earners as a class. Very soon these trades' unions joined into the National Trades' Union, the first national labor organization. The third annual convention of the NTU in 1836 appointed a committee on cooperation, which recommended that all unions investigate setting up cooperatives, because "until a system of Cooperation is adopted by which the producers of wealth may also be its possessors... the great burden of the evils of which we so justly complain, will never be removed."

Later that year, the Philadelphia Trades' Union adopted a resolution "to place in the Constitution a clause allowing the funds of the Union to be loaned to the Societies (individual unions) for the purpose of Cooperation." Its official newspaper urged each union to raise a fund through regular member contributions to get capital to begin. At the same time each union was to contribute monthly to the Trades' Union fund to help start cooperatives. A conference of nearly two hundred union delegates in '37 resolved that each union work out an estimate for setting up a cooperative to support ten members. But in the middle of this conference, the capitalist financiers panicked, beginning a new depression that temporarily wiped out not only the cooperatives but almost the entire union movement. This depressed state, relieved only slightly during the California gold rush of the early '50s after the U.S. seized a large part of Mexico, continued until the Civil War was well under way in 1862.

Thus from the very beginning unions were emancipationist, abolitionist, and revolutionary organizations, trying to raise their members from wage-slavery, and looking to its abolition in a new cooperative economic system.

While hardening times can cause a cooperative movement to blossom, the hardest of times can destroy it, at least in its more visible forms, as the experience of 1837 shows. But the depths of capitalist depression, when cooperatives can no longer pay their rent to landlords and are forced to close shop, does not mean the end of the cooperative movement. It merely forces it to flower on a different level. During the hardest depressions cooperative movements go underground. In almost every community, neighbor cooperation, barter, labor exchange, mutual survival aid of every sort grows. When times are ripe again, the movement re-surfaces.

3. The Movements Renewed (1840-'65)

ASSOCIATIONISM

Associationism in America started in 1840 with the publication of *The Social Destiny of Man*, by Albert Brisbane, editor of the *New York Tribune*, the most widely circulated newspaper of the time, radical and Abolitionist. This book introduced the ideas of Charles Fourier, the Frenchman, to this country, in a manner similar to the way Owen had been introduced. Brisbane and Horace Greeley, publisher of the paper, felt that the earlier Socialist community movement had not succeeded partly because a successful formula had not been developed for workers to use to collectivize their resources, gather capital, buy land and start their cooperative communities. They did not see the cooperative community as a short transitional step to the full commune, as did Owen before New Harmony's disaster. Rather, the cooperative community was the end in itself. Fourier and the Associationists felt that all could be emancipated and the inequalities and injustices of capitalist society cured by a vast network of these cooperative villages, "phalanxes" or "associations" as they were variously called in Fourier's plan. Once the restraints imposed by capitalism were removed, people would naturally work together in a spirit of cooperation. The phalanxes would spring up all over the country, they hoped, and gradually federate like cells into a growing organism that would eventually transform America and the world. While the movement of the '20s had been, in practice, more oriented toward agriculture and handicrafts, the Associationists, keeping up with the times, stressed industry more. They felt that collective production for trade or sale was necessary for a phalanx to survive.

Greeley developed a formula for gathering resources to get phalanxes started and for operating them. They would be incorporated; each member would have one vote no matter how many shares owned; surplus income from their industries would be distributed as dividends. Members received survival needs plus money income varying with the amount of work performed. Outsiders could also buy stock.

But while the *Tribune* supported them, other papers denounced them, as did legislators and various church leaders, as a threat to the social system.

Between 1843 and '50 at least thirty-four phalanxes averaging well over a hundred members apiece, sprouted across the northern states from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. The most successful perhaps was



Albert Brisbane

the North American Phalanx in New Jersey, which lasted until '55. The most famous was Brook Farm, in Massachusetts, which had begun as a spiritual commune in 1841, founded by "transcendentalists" coming out of the Unitarian tradition; they became Associationist two years later. By 1844 the movement was progressing so rapidly a National Convention of Associations was held.

But the same problems that had stopped the movement in the 1820s stopped it again. Most poor and working people simply could not afford to form phalanxes, even with combining resources. The phalanxes that were started usually remained poor, often strangled by debts they had undertaken, so most workers were not convinced they were the answer to raising the quality of their lives. Rather than move out of their communities like separationists, most saw a more solid road to progress in staying and transforming them. Furthermore, the Greeley system stressed profit sharing at the expense of simple communal sharing. Outside investors had as much say as community members, and the enormous amounts of work members put into the place itself were owned as much by these outsiders too. Some found themselves being strangled by their investors, in much the same way the Pilgrim commune had been 200 years earlier. Associationism was more of a middle-class movement than Socialism, as shown by its focus on the contract form.

The Associationist movement had risen in response to the depression that had begun with the panic of '37. When the economy picked up due to the imperialist war against Mexico, the movement was shaken. The rush for gold in newly-annexed California deflected much of the pent-up social energy that had been behind Associationism. Meanwhile the new flood of immigrants onto the east coast helped a new worker cooperative movement to rise, also publicized and supported by the **Tribune**. Most phalanxes died by 1850, although the North American held on till '55.

After the collapse of Associationism, communalism lost its credibility among the American-born as a method of social change, and did not become a mass movement again until the 1890's. While the Socialists could point to New Harmony's failure as disheartening the movement, the Associationists did not really have one particular community as their focus, so their failure was clearly the failure of some basic assumptions of the entire movement. Communities had shown that they were fragile and dependent for success on a large variety of difficult factors; communal survival had proved no utopia or panacea to most participants. The movement never grew large enough to become an imminent threat to the established order, and most people were satisfied that it never could. It lost heart in thinking of itself as a mass movement, and so lost its center: the movement was to the communities what a shared millennial spirituality was to the religious communalists.

In this same period there were several non-Fourierist communities.

Skaneateles, in upper New York, was a community of socialists involved with the Abolitionist movement. Northampton was secular and cooperative. Both had well over a hundred members, but both disintegrated after four years.

The mutualist communities started by groups centered around Josiah Warren in this period, Utopia and Modern Times, both contained many former Associationists, and both made it through these hard years. The bare simplicity of their social structure, just a basic agreement to mutual-aid and cooperation whenever possible, provided a flexibility that helped pull them through.

In 1849, 260 French political refugees from the failed revolution of the previous year, led by Etienne Cabet (who'd been a member of the Insurrection Committee during the earlier 1830 uprising), formed a commune in Illinois, taking over the old Mormon community of Nauvoo, eventually rising to about 500. They called it Icaria, after a socialist utopian novel Cabet had written between the two insurgencies. Cabet, like others before him, envisioned a federation of socialist colonies in America involving millions. But he himself grew authoritarian, and the commune expelled him in '56. A large group followed him to St. Louis, where he soon died, but the others ran several cooperative houses for many years. The original group was forced to leave Illinois due to debt, and moved to Iowa. More French refugees poured into these communities after the defeat of the Paris Commune of 1871. Clashes

between older and newer residents caused further splits, resulting in Icaria Esperanza in southern California in 1884, which lasted only a few years. Icaria itself finally folded in 1895.

There had also been an attempted revolution in Germany in '48, and refugees from this, led by William Weitling, moved to Iowa to found a commune, Communia, which disbanded after several poverty-stricken years on impossible land.

UNION COOPERATIVES

After 1840 independence was impossible for ever-growing numbers. Technological advances in machinery were making many skills useless, creating unskilled laborers out of formerly skilled workers. These new machines and their expense brought ownership of means of production out of the reach of most "free" workers, and drove them under the domination of the machine-owners. Native-born Americans found themselves competing for factory jobs with the massive influx of new immigrants, mostly unskilled and very poor, predominantly from Germany in the wake of their failed revolution of 1848, and then from Ireland as the potato famine deepened. Immigration had been helping explode the population almost double every twenty years since the Revolution, when it had been only about 2½ million, up to 23 million in 1850. With complex machines came the necessity of worker coordination on an ever-larger scale. But the capitalist system decreed that this coordination would take place under the centralized autocratic control of a boss, single or corporate, and not through democratic worker cooperation. The work process was being rationalized with crude efficiency, with little thought to the cost in human life. The bosses were incorporating, floating faceless pieces of paper between themselves and the factories. Besides giving them more capital without really having to relinquish control, incorporation provided limited liability and all variety of tax benefits; the bosses themselves wrote the laws making these advantages possible. Meanwhile down at the factory they heated things up with the newly instituted assembly-line. Individual workers were at a tremendous disadvantage against this yoked team.

But a group of cooperating workers, pooling their resources to get machinery and combining their skills to become an efficient team themselves, might be able to make it, and avoid having to sell themselves into slavery.

When 1847 brought depression, layoffs, wagecuts and failing strikes, workers turned to cooperation again. Unions had grown fast since 1842, when a judicial decision finally declared they had a right to exist at all.

In '47, a year after the South was hit with a wave of slave insurrections, the Iron Moulders of Cincinnati struck. The strike, like the insurrections, eventually lost. But wage-earners were "free," and one group chose not to sulk back at lower pay but instead stalked off to organize their own cooperative foundry. They met with immediate success. A group of Pittsburgh foundry workers, inspired by the Cincinnati cooperative, followed their example later in the year.

This was also a time when the women's rights movement was gathering steam, with the first Women's Rights Convention, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, who were both also leaders in the Abolitionist movement, which was growing to enormous proportions.

By '49 whole unions began forming cooperatives again, on an unprecedented scale. First iron moulders locals in West Virginia, Ohio and several parts of Pennsylvania, followed by the Boston tailors. The next year the Buffalo, N.Y., tailors formed a cooperative for eighty of their members in the wake of a losing strike. In that same city the seamstresses union formed a cooperative too, as did the seamstresses of Philadelphia and Providence. In New York City there were union cooperatives of barrel-makers, hat-finishers, shade-painters, cabinetmakers and tailors. In Pittsburgh glass-blowers, silver-platers, puddlers and boilers, as well as iron-moulders. Many of these were connected with unsuccessful strikes.

A new flood of immigrant workers hit American shores, German and French, refugees from their failed revolutions of '48, where a major demand had been large-scale worker cooperatives "social workshops," financed by the state. These refugees were soon followed by Hungarians and Italians. There was a strong worker cooperative movement among these new Americans, particularly those from Germany, centered around New York City.

Soon the German immigrants had functioning cooperatives in seven American cities. In New York they attempted to organize a large scale labor-exchange and barter system centered around a "bank of exchange," aimed primarily at serving individual producers. But capitalist industrialization had made individual production obsolete in most industries. Experience soon proved that exchange and distribution cooperation would not suffice to keep city workers self-employed, and most were forced into the factories. The bank of exchange never got off the ground, despite the efforts of William Weitling, who had been a leader of the revolutionary workers in Germany, along with Marx and Engels. He and others soon joined into a communal group that took off to Iowa to found Communia.

Many of the worker cooperatives started in the late 1840s and early '50s lasted only a few years. Besides scarcely having the resources to get off the ground, they met with cutthroat capitalist competition. Businessmen's associations did everything they could to wreck them. They were attacked in legislatures and churches. Some states, including Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, refused to charter them. As one legislator said, "It will not do to encourage the journeymen in such movements; it would ruin the employers." Many Protestant ministers and Catholic priests attacked them openly and violently. A common accusation reported in the newspapers was that they were "the first step to Socialism."

This attack was not confined to worker cooperatives,

but also was directed at the Associationist movement; both movements were closely connected. Brisbane, Greeley, and the group centered around the Tribune realized that cooperatives had great potential as agencies for social change, and advocated that workers, particularly strikers, form them. Greeley came up with a formula for their organization that he thought would meet all the needs of the movement. The cooperatives could variously be either ends in themselves, cell-units in larger industrial organisms, or steps toward gathering resources to eventually form phalanxes. The Tribune did not start or invent the movement of the late '40s but gave great aid in publicizing its successes.

The Greeley formula was essentially the same for worker cooperatives or phalanxes. It was a profit-sharing system, oriented toward capitalist conditions, with the first goal of gathering enough resources to get started. They would be incorporated and float stock, which not only worker-members but anyone could buy. Each stockholder got only one vote, no matter how many stocks were owned. Cooperatives would pay workers normal market wages or, rather, a living wage. Over that, investor-members would be paid low interest and dividends. The rest of any surplus income would be divided among the worker-members.

What the Greeley formula boiled down to was structuring the movement to fit inside capitalist corporate law. Until this time, worker cooperatives had been predominantly (technically speaking) unincorporated associations of individual producers. With the coordination of the work-process around machinery, the group as a whole became the predominant entity, and the incorporated cooperative was inevitable under capitalist law. Besides the usual corporate advantages of capital-gathering and limited liability, it was a legal way to separate ownership of the cooperative means of production from changing membership.

But the corporate structure also brought great disadvantages with it. Non-worker share-owners were given a say in management. Most beginning cooperatives put tremendous amounts of labor into their shops, which were accumulated as capital and owned as much by the outside investors as by the workers. The cooperative spirit was stifled by being too much counted in dollars and cents. A capitalist foothold was inside the cooperatives, and was wedged further open by some groups hiring non-members as extra help, and paying them at lower wages than they paid themselves.

The hopes of the cooperators were dashed when many failed as the country sank back into severe depression in the mid-'50s, with the Civil War delivering the final blow.

Greeley would go on to form a political party of his own, the Liberal Republicans, challenge the corrupted Grant in the election of 1872, and garner 44% of the popular vote.

PROTECTIVE UNION

Between 1845 and '60, the first major American "consumer" cooperative movement rose and fell.

The Working Men's (New England) Protective Union was begun by John Kaulback, a journeyman tailor and a former member of the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and Other Workers, which had organized cooperative buying in the '30s. 1845 was a time of fast-rising prices. In '47 the economy slipped badly again, but by that time there were over 3000 Protective Union members and soon there would be a chain of stores across the north-east. The Union's principles were similar to those of the British Rochdale movement, and were developed separately at about the same time. The first Rochdale store was organized less than a year before the first Protective Union. Union membership was open to the whole community; anyone could buy a share. No matter how many shares owned, each member had only one vote in electing the board that managed each store. Stores were locally controlled but federated for wholesale buying and other mutual-aid. Unlike Rochdale, they sold at near cost instead of giving refunds. Many Unions set up production and service cooperatives for their members. The New York P.U., for example, ran a smithy, a wheelright shop and a bakery. By 1852 there were 403 divisions in New England, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Canada; five years later there were almost twice that number. But in 1853 a schism developed in the organization. Kaulback and his supporters withdrew and started a new organization, which also grew strong, with 350 units in ten states in 1857.

But the financiers panicked again in '57. As the economy plunged, their capitalist competitors hit the Protective Unions with a ferocious attack in many areas at once. They used every weapon in their arsenal: pricewars, blacklisting by merchants, employers and suppliers, etc. Soon the Unions were no longer able to meet members' needs, and the membership simply could not afford to support them. By 1860 the Central Divisions of both rival Unions were gone. The Civil War devastated them. Nevertheless a few locals hung on, and one observer in 1886 was able to unearth four still-functioning Union stores.

It was the Protective Unions' policy of passing on savings directly to consumers by selling at almost cost that brought the greatest wrath of the capitalist merchants down on their heads. It shook up and threatened the market, which the businessmen would not long permit. It was to their long-run advantage to hit the Unions with unlimited price wars; as soon as the Unions were broken in a locale and out of the way, the merchants were free to raise their prices again. Eventually most of the American "consumer" cooperative movement would turn to the Rochdale system of selling at about market price and refunding savings periodically to members. The capitalist merchants could live with this a little better. That was the only really original contribution of Rochdale. The "consumer" cooperative movement was not im-

ported, but was a native American plant.

With the coming of the Protective Union, cooperatives in America took two distinct forms. One, typical of industrial production cooperatives, had all or almost all members working in the cooperative; the other, typical of purchasing and service cooperatives, had only a small number actually working in the cooperative out of a much larger membership. In the production cooperative, the workers were their own boss; in the "consumer" cooperative, the membership usually elected a board who hired managers who in turn hired and fired workers almost as in a capitalist enterprise. The worker, by this twist, again became a hired laborer.

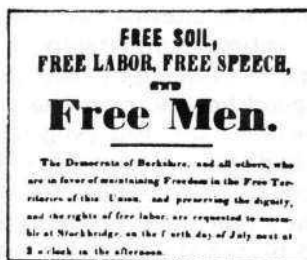
(It was not long before workers in consumer cooperatives saw that their interests were not identical with those of the entire membership, and began organizing labor unions. Although consumer cooperatives tended to be good bosses, over the years there have been instances of strikes. But even labor unions themselves have had to confront this seemingly paradoxical situation, as they too have been struck by their employees. The "new wave" cooperatives of the 1970s have tried to bridge this paradox by having a worker collective run the cooperative in its daily functioning. A "collective" is a work group in which all members have equal power and decisions are made by consensus.)

ABOLITIONISM

The Abolitionist movement, based among wage-earners, artisans, small farmers and homemakers among the "free" population, and of course primarily based among the slaves, demanded immediate and uncompensated emancipation. It was a great revolutionary movement that sought to change property relationships by overthrowing an oppressor ruling class. Throughout colonial times "free" blacks and whites commonly aided and helped organize slave insurrections, and began to set up open Emancipation Societies as early as 1775. Both Paine and Franklin as well as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were among the earliest members and leaders. By '92 there were societies in eight states, but as slavery rose to enormous proportions in the early 19th century, they lost heart and disappeared for a couple decades.

During the entire first half of the century the plantation owners and the Northern factory owners became locked in a death struggle over whether the vast western lands should be slave or "free." The slavers needed the land because they had worn out much of the South with agricultural abuse; the factory owners needed the land to constantly dangle before workers as a possibility of escape, a safety valve to retard the labor movement and keep organized discontent down. The stakes became higher and higher. Propertyless workers were piling up in the eastern cities in ever-greater numbers, becoming correspondingly angrier and more insistent in their demands for decent conditions and control of their own means of survival. Strikes and slave insurrection broke out constantly. Organized Abolitionism surged

forth again in the early 1830s, stirred by the revolt in Virginia led by Nat Turner, minister. The unions were solidly Abolitionist; experience had shown that the slave system in an area created near-slave conditions for wage-earners and small farmers. By 1850 it had become a true mass movement in the north and west, involving large numbers of people, with many newspapers and organizations, huge meetings and conventions. Their meetings were attacked; halls burnt down; leaders and members jailed, beaten, and murdered; papers harassed and denied use of the mail. They were vilified as "foreign agents." Many women were in the Abolitionist front lines and made good use of what they learned in this struggle when they turned again to fight for their own equal rights.



Abolitionist Poster

As the country hurtled into a great depression, the Abolitionist movement surged to a climax. In 1860 Buchanan vetoed the Homestead Act, calling it "communistic"; Lincoln's election a few months later on the newly-formed Republican Party, financed by Northern industrialists but with grassroot support of all the "free-soil" and anti-slavery forces, meant that for the first time since the country's founding the slavers had control of the federal government wrenched totally from their grasp, and they responded with secession. In '61 hundreds of thousands of Northern workers and western farmers poured voluntarily into the Union army; the union and cooperative movements were almost entirely disbanded because the workers were gone. Down South the slaver army had to fight with only one hand, as it had to use the other to keep its own workers, the slaves and their allies (centered in the "hillbilly" mountain communities, where there had almost never been slaves, and which were a haven for runaways and draft resisters), off its throat.

Ironically, even as "free" workers and slaves struggled against the army of the slavocracy, about ten thousand oriental workers, mostly Chinese, and about three thousand Irish, slaved for Northern employers as contract laborers on the first trans-continental railroad to the west.

The Abolitionist movement had deep anabaptist undertones. This can be seen most clearly perhaps in the poem-song **Battle Hymn of the Republic**, written as the poet watched the Union army marching south singing the Abolitionist anthem, **John Brown's Body**, and to the same melody: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.../His Truth is marching on." (Almost half a century later, an IWW poet would take one step further with this tradition, in

Solidarity Forever: "We can bring to birth the new world from the ashes of the old,/For the Union makes us strong.") Meanwhile a religious group turned away from the Civil War to communalism: the Use, first formed in 1861 in upper New York, later moving to California where they called their group Fountain-grove, which did not finally disband until around 1900.

Shortly after the South conceded defeat in 1865, days before his assassination, Lincoln said, "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... Corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed." The Union army, returning home thinking itself victorious, found mostly poverty and wage-slavery waiting for them. Their response culminated in the "Great Upheaval," the national uprising centered around the railroad strike of 1877.

The outcome of the war expropriated the slavers of "their private property," and threw four million "freed" blacks onto the labor market, almost all totally impoverished. Few found jobs; most remained destitute and unemployed. Demands to break up the old plantations and distribute "ten acres and a mule" to each "freed" slave, by Thaddeus Stevens and the Radical Republicans in Congress, were quickly shelved by the rightists who consolidated power as soon as a bullet disposed of Lincoln. The majority of blacks soon wound up as tenant farmers, almost serfs, only slightly better off than before.

Although the Homestead Act of 1862 threw open millions of acres for "free" workers to settle on, railroad grants ate up gigantic tracts. The speculators rushed in, reaping immense profits and winding up with most of the land in the end. Only one out of ten families who went west ever actually wound up with a free homestead. This was the ultimate failure of Jeffersonian democracy.

Northern capitalists were now firmly in the saddle of government. Under their control an all-enveloping national market quickly developed for the first time. This broke up many regional economies, to the disadvantage of small individual producers, who could not compete with goods made in distant factories. Producers and consumers were separated ever farther, to the advantage of the middlemen. Small farmers had to ship their produce hundreds of miles to market, at freight rates that were often higher than the prices their produce brought.

Right after the war, in 1866, recession hit. Amidst the first great wave of American imperialist armed interventions abroad, the country slid slowly down into the disastrous depression of '73, one of the worst ever. This long slide spawned radical movements among both farmers and wage-earners: the National Grange, the National Labor Union, the Sovereigns of Industry, the Knights of Labor, the International: all intimately connected with cooperatives.

4. Aftermath of the War (1865-'80)

NATIONAL LABOR UNION

By 1866 the union movement was recovering and reforming. The industrial sector of the labor force was almost as large as the agricultural, and by 1870 would surpass it. There were over five and a half million wage-earners, approaching half the work force, with over two million in factories. Following nationalization of the market and nationalization of employers' associations, truly coast-to-coast unions sprung up in the various trades for the first time. The largest was the Iron Moulders, with the leadership of William Sylvis, considered by many to be the first truly great labor leader in the U.S. The Moulders set up a cooperative stove foundry in Troy, N.Y., in 1866. It was a fast success. Soon the Moulders were embroiled in a bitter nine month strike in Cincinnati. It wound up a disaster for the Moulders. But they picked themselves up and the whole organization turned to cooperatives "for relief from the wages system."

In the fall of '66, representatives from local unions, city federations, Eight-Hour Leagues and national unions met in Baltimore to form the first American union federation on a coast-to-coast scale, the National Labor Union. It was a loose federation, like its predecessor the National Trades' Union; at its peak it would have 200,000 members. The NLU fought for the eight hour day, for land for settlers, for black and white labor solidarity, for the rights of women, against the contract and convict labor systems, and threw all of its weight behind the cooperative movement.

The first Congress of the NLU resolved, "that in cooperation we recognize a sure and lasting remedy for the abuses of the present industrial system, and hail with delight the organization of cooperative stores and workshops in this country, and would urge their promotion in every sector of the country and in every branch of business."

At the second Congress, Sylvis was elected president, and called on all workers to form cooperatives "and drive the non-producers to honorable toil or starvation." "Single-handed we can accomplish nothing, but united there is no power of wrong that we cannot openly defy." Worker cooperatives, they hoped, would become labor's biggest weapon, a "substitute for strikes." Strikes were not winning bread-and-butter demands, much less liberation.

By the end of '67, NLU newspapers were filled with optimism. "Cooperation is taking hold upon the

minds of our members," Sylvis wrote, "and in many places very little else is talked about." Locals of bakers, coachmakers, shipwrights, printers, barrel-makers, mechanics, blacksmiths, hatters, carpenters and other trades formed cooperatives across the country. Many of these were after lockouts by their former bosses, the result of defensive strikes that failed. Sylvis' Iron Moulders Union set up eleven cooperative foundries in 1868.



Sylvis and Myers

The NLU was soon joined by the National Colored Labor Union, with leaders such as Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers. Its platform backed worker cooperatives for black people. Besides the usual advantages, cooperatives would help remedy racist exclusion from the skilled trades. Cooperation was taking hold in black communities across the country, rural and urban. One center was in Baltimore, where there were cooperatives of all sorts, including stores, coal yards and small industries run by black people.

But all throughout the 19th century, employers were organizing their own associations to preserve the capitalist system and fight the workers. They saw the threat the NLU and NCLU were posing, and moved in combination to destroy the workers' movement, both the cooperatives and the unions themselves.

Soon Sylvis was speaking with alarm. Many of the cooperatives were in trouble and were failing. The capitalists were pulling financial strings and this was having a telling effect. Sylvis accused "Wall Street's control of money and credit," and urged all workers to

get behind the Greenback program of more and cheaper money, and break Wall Street's control. Under the Greenback plan, government-issued paper money, backed with silver, would replace the then-current system of bank-issued notes backed with gold. The government would offer long-term negligible-interest loans to all citizens in need. This would provide the cheap capital that workers and unions needed to set up the vast system of cooperatives that would lead to liberation. Greenbackism was a direct attack on bank control and private ownership.

Through the NLU, Greenbackers organized the first nationwide workers' political party, the National Labor Reform Party, and set their sights on taking national power. Although this party was a still-birth, it set the stage for the great Greenback parties that would follow in a few years.

Sylvis was the first American labor leader to actively try to establish relations with the European and international worker movements. He attempted to steer the NLU into the International Workingmen's Association, the "First International," to which many NLU members belonged as individuals. The IWA, formed in London in '64, marked the first time wage-earner movements of different countries interpenetrated and coordinated their ideas and actions, creating a supra-national character to the movement. The first IWA American sections were formed in '68; their program called for "The adoption of the principle of associative production, with a view to complete supercession of the present system of capitalist production." It was an open organization, basically for educational and support activities, but geared also to give direct leadership in times of mass struggle. The IWA looked to the unions as the centers of the struggle. Its greatest strength lay in the cities, among the unskilled, the unemployed, and the newer immigrants, mainly German at first but soon also Irish, Bohemian, Scandinavian, and French.

Suddenly Sylvis died in '69 at age 42. Shortly afterward, the NLU, inspired to carry on the work he had begun, voted its "adherence to the principles of the International Workingmen's Association," adding it would "join in a short time."

But without Sylvis' visionary leadership, the NLU was splitting apart, one wing trade union, the other wing political party. The unions took great losses in the strike wave of 1871 and '72. The National Labor Reform Party collapsed after the election of '72 and the NLU collapsed on the eve of the great depression of '73, never having joined the International, which had just moved its central headquarters from London to New York.

During the worst depression years most of the cooperatives started under the National Labor Union were wiped out. But not all. In Minnesota barrel-makers organized at least eight cooperative factories after '74, some lasting till '86. In the same period there were cooperative carpentry shops in New York City. The 60,000 member Knights of St. Crispin, the largest individual union in the world, ran shoemaking

cooperatives scattered throughout the northern states, not only factories but almost forty stores and many buying clubs for members; the Crispins began to fade in the late '70s after a rash of losing strikes.



NLU Boot and Shoe Cooperative

The NLU cooperatives were mostly organized under a system similar to the one Greeley had devised two decades earlier. Outsiders could usually buy stock and departing members retain theirs. Although each member could have only one vote no matter how much stock was owned, this still created unbalanced situations over a long period of time, and caused many cooperatives to deteriorate. Thus internal disorders added to the disheartenment the movement felt over its inability to ward off capitalist attacks. For example, Cooperative Stove Works, founded as the result of a strike led by Sylvis in Troy, New York, in 1866, was disbanded twenty-five years later with six people owning more than half the stock. The Cooperative Foundry in Rochester became a capitalist business in 1887 after twenty years, owned by 35 stockholders. Others failed of course for reasons of every sort: the Cooperative Barrel Works, formed in 1874 in Philadelphia, for example, eventually failed because bags replaced barrels in the nearby mill industry; internal personality clashes of course wrecked a share.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL

The International was organized in 1864 through the initiative of British and French unionists and cooperators to serve as a central medium of communication and cooperation between workers and worker organizations of different countries. Within a few years it became an umbrella for worker movements in almost every country in the industrializing world. These had all followed a pattern similar to the movement in the U.S.: as industry, capitalism and wage-slavery grew, so grew the resistance organizations of the workers—unions, cooperatives and parties. All the union movements were connected to cooperative movements.

All schools of thought were represented within the International. Its yearly congresses attempted to hammer out a common program for worker movements everywhere. The concepts of socialism were

rooted in the aspirations of every worker movement. With the IWA, these movements inter-penetrated. The largest divisions were between the "scientific," "anarchist" and "cooperative" schools of thought. Despite their many disagreements about strategy and organization, all agreed that in the end production should be run through a system of coordinated worker cooperatives, and not by an all-powerful bureaucratic "state." The IWA advocated workers forming cooperatives, particularly producer cooperatives over stores (because the mode of production is more basic to the system than the mode of distribution, which flows from it); recommended that all cooperatives devote part of their income to supporting and spreading the movement; suggested that workers, whether members or not, should receive equal salaries; and that excess income should be plowed back into the cooperative instead of divided as

saw the economic system of "communism" to be "united (production) cooperative societies . . . regulating the national production on a common plan, thus taking it under their own control . . ." (1871)

By '71 there were over 5000 American members, with sections in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, Newark, Springfield, Washington, and Williamsburg.

After its role in the defeated revolutionary Paris Commune of '71, when the working people took and held the city for two months, the IWA was outlawed and persecuted in almost every European country. On top of this, it had become racked by internal struggles over the methods and program of social revolution, particularly between factions led by Marx and the anarchist Bakunin, which came to a head over the question of how centralized the IWA and how independent each national section should be. Most national branches pulled out in '72 and formed a new decentralist International, while the old General Council moved to New York. The American Section became very active, organizing large mass meetings and demonstrations of the unemployed, but was itself split between those looking to the unions as centers of struggle and those looking to electoral politics.

A group that included Victoria Woodhull left the New York Section to found the Equal Rights Party, fielding the Woodhull-Frederick Douglass ticket in the presidential election of 1872, while scientific socialists centered around F.A. Sorge assumed leadership in the IWA.

The Commune of Paris had particular significance in the history of the socialist movement worldwide, as it was viewed as the prototype of the future society by all schools of socialists until after the Russian Revolution. With International members among the leadership, it established the most complete and direct democracy the industrialized world had ever known. All public workers were elected, could be recalled at any time, and received the same pay as the average productive worker. Most of the factories were taken over by their workers as cooperatives (the employers had abandoned them and fled the city), and the workers were organizing themselves into a vast cooperative union. The Commune decreed the right of all workers "to their instruments of labor and to credit." Marx called its ultra-democracy "the form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." In 1917 Lenin would hold up the Commune as the vision of the Bolsheviks; yet history would prove that the reality of Bolshevik rule was far removed from what the Commune had offered.

NATIONAL GRANGE

The first American dairy cooperatives were founded in Goshen, Connecticut and South Trenton, New York, both in 1810. A decade later a group of Ohio farmers formed America's first agricultural marketing cooperative on record. In 1822 Pennsylvania barley farmers set up the first cooperative brewery. The first cooperative wheat elevator was opened in Dane City, Illinois, in 1847; in '50 the first mutual irrigation



IWA Membership Card

"profit." It proposed that the land and resources belong to society; that mines, public transport and agriculture be operated by worker cooperatives with assistance from "a new kind of state subject to the law of justice"; and that it was the fundamental task of workers to destroy the wage system and develop a new social order. But it also warned that the past thirty years experience had demonstrated in many countries that cooperative movements by themselves could not defeat the domination of "private" capital, and that they could not succeed without an allied political movement to change basic property relationships and the general conditions of society. Therefore, the IWA concluded, the ultimate value of producer cooperatives in the present society lay in their conclusive demonstration that wage-slaves and a class of employers were unnecessary to large-scale "modern" production.

Scientific socialists, led by Marx, had mainly praise and encouragement for cooperatives, criticizing the movement's earlier Owenite and Prudhonian ideologists for not seriously reckoning with the capitalists' use of state power to squelch the movement, for not sufficiently allowing for the needs of increasingly complex machinery in their plans, and for not accurately analyzing the laws of money. Marx

cooperatives both in California and by the Mormons in Utah.

Before 1860 small farmers were mostly self-sufficient. They produced for their families and for nearby markets. But the end of the war saw a great expansion in farmed land and in mechanization. Extension of the western railroads connected once-isolated communities into a national market. Farm output skyrocketed, pressing prices down. The small farmer became a tiny link in a great chain, dominated and impoverished by bankers, merchants and middlemen, "fleeced coming and going," overpriced purchasing seed, supplies and equipment, and overcharged marketing produce.

Oliver Kelly, once a farmer but by the mid-'60s a clerk in the U.S. Bureau of Agriculture, founded the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry in 1866, as a secret fraternal order of farmers. (A grange is a farm homestead.) Their Declaration of Principles stated "cooperation in all things," and they soon began organizing cooperatives to meet the needs of their hard-pressed members, coming into the open.

With the Grange, farmer cooperation changed from mostly informal and local, to a wide spread and well organized movement. The Grange never organized farmworkers, "hired hands." Until the end of the century almost all farm work was still done by members of farm families, which were usually big. Farmworkers did not become a large and important group until decades later, and were first successfully organized by the Industrial Workers of the World in the early 20th century.

In their third year the Grange began purchasing and marketing cooperatives in Minnesota. The local Granges were mutual-aid centers, where information about work and survival were shared, and members helped educate each other. In a few years there were Granges throughout the mid-west and south-west. When the economy faltered in '72 and fell the next year, membership soared.

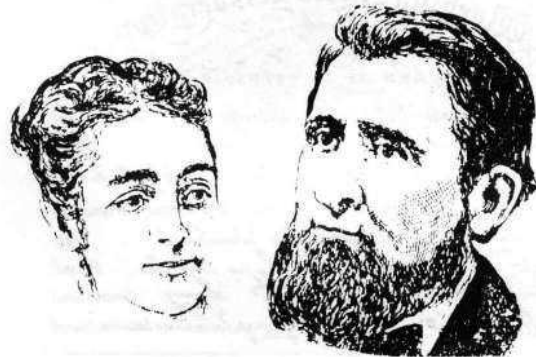
The Grange organized cooperative grain elevators, warehouses, shipping stations, processing plants, grist mills, bag factories, brick yards, blacksmith shops, cotton gins, rail and ship transport, mutual insurance, irrigation, machine and implement works, and at least four banks. By 1875 they had 250 grain elevators just in Illinois. Together the Grangers of the west fought a grasshopper plague; in the South they fought floods. The Grange spread to the west coast.

The monopolists of the machine industry refused to give them wholesale rates, so beginning in '72 they tried to have their own line of farm machinery manufactured. But their first attempt, a harvester, proved to have a faulty design and was a financial disaster.

In '73 they opened their first store, carrying both farm supplies and consumer goods. Until then they'd just organized cooperative wholesale buying. In the beginning the stores sold only to members, but soon they opened to their communities. The stores were organized with member share-holders restricted to

Grangers. At first they sold nearly at cost. But capitalists hit them with law suits and price wars. Under great pressure, the stores switched to the Rochdale system of selling to the general community at about market rates and giving members rebates and special discounts, threatening the market less and getting the businessmen somewhat off their backs. Throughout the next decade there were over 500 Grange stores. This was the first Rochdale movement in America.

The railroad barons, not satisfied with having taken fully half the western lands, used their control of the government to levy enormous taxes to make the people pay the cost of building the roads. They milked their transportation monopoly for all it was worth, charging huge freight rates. Farmers got little or nothing for their crops, while city people starved because of high food prices. Nine hundred New Yorkers alone died of starvation in the winter of '73, while 40% of the labor force was unemployed.



"Ceres" Adams Oliver Kelly
National Grange

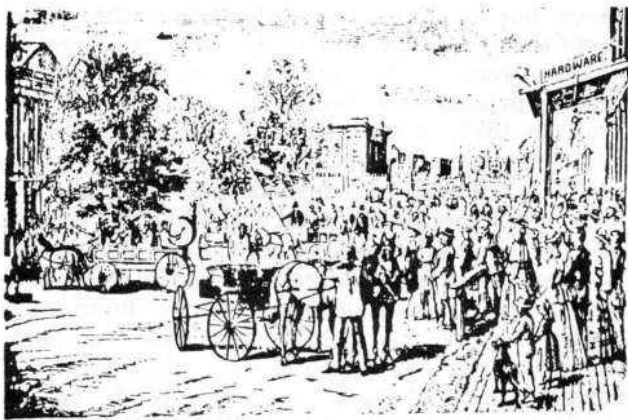
The Grange struck back. "We hold, declare and resolve that this despotism, which defies our laws, plunders our shippers, impoverishes our people, and corrupts our government, shall be subdued and made to subserve the public interest at whatever cost," the Illinois Grange declared in '73, in a typical resolution.

But the Grange was in deep financial trouble and many locals were going bankrupt.

With the crash of the economy "Independent" farmer parties sprung up throughout the west, with Grangers in the leadership, reviving the Greenback movement.

Membership rocketed. By '77 there were almost 30,000 local Granges, with two and a half million members. Behind slogans like "Down with monopolies!" and "Cooperation!" they allied in '78 with the Knights of Labor into the Greenback-Labor Party. With more and cheaper money, the farmer co-operators, like their industrial counterparts, felt they could get on an equal footing with the capitalists. This same alliance of urban and rural workers into an independent electoral party would grow and gather strength in the decades to follow; in all successful instances they would have a base in cooperatives. The

Greenback-Labor Party elected 15 congressmen in '78, and numerous candidates to state office, particularly in Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin, tallying over a million votes. But in many places, especially throughout the South, members were met with violence, some beaten, some murdered, and on election day they were confronted with stuffed ballot boxes. Their elected candidates were usually ineffectual in making really meaningful changes; although they passed laws regulating freight rates, they found themselves unable to enforce them. The barons struck back: railroads refused to carry Grange shipments, banks refused credit, many gains were overturned by the courts, which remained firmly in conservative hands and over which voters had little control: it became clear the basic Grange program could be instituted only on a national scale.



Grange Rally

But the early 1880s saw the depression temporarily lessen, the Greenback-Labor Party fade without ever becoming strong enough nationally to enact its program, and the Grange grow conservative. By '83, when the economy slipped again, its leadership was business-oriented and unable to rise to the challenge: within the year it was in fast decline, as it was no longer meeting small farmers' needs.

But a new farmers cooperative movement was roaring out of the frontier communities of the west, the Farmers' Alliance, which would eclipse the Grange for a decade.



SOVEREIGNS OF INDUSTRY

William Earle, an organizer from the Grange, founded the Sovereigns of Industry in 1874, to serve north-eastern industrial workers. Like the Grange, it began as a secret society. Its plan was to "unite all people engaged in industrial pursuits," both wage-earners and individual producers, into local councils

which would set up cooperative stores, ultimately to promote "mutual fellowship and cooperative action among the producers and consumers of wealth throughout the earth."

Begun in Massachusetts, by the end of its first year there were 46 Sovereign stores mostly throughout New England, with 40,000 members. By the end of '75 they were spread through 14 states. Some stores used the Rochdale system; others sold at cost only to members. This as depression deepened and unemployment swelled.

But the SI grew too large too fast. Merchants hit them with price wars, and wholesalers and bankers cut off credit. Employers turned a part of the labor movement against them: capitalist stores cut their clerks' wages, claiming that competition with the cooperatives forced them to do it, and some unionists joined in the attack, partly in anger because several locals in their unions had dropped out and joined the Sovereigns as lodges. The Sovereigns' only objective, the attacking unionists claimed, was "to buy cheap, if they have to help reduce wages to a dollar a day to do it." The Sovereigns defended themselves, declaring, "we mean to substitute cooperation, production and exchange, for the present competitive system . . . we war with the whole wage system and demand for labor the entire result of its beneficial toil."

Ultimately it was the depression that killed the Sovereigns. Hard times brought them to life and harder times killed them. Few working people had cash at all, so sales volume in most stores plummeted to next to nothing. Some stores tried a credit system, with disastrous results. At the end of 1878, after only four years, the Sovereigns went down.

Still individual cooperative stores could be found in communities all over the U.S. throughout the 1880s.

ROCHDALE

The Rochdale system went on to become the dominant form of cooperative organization in twentieth century America. Begun in England in 1844, the movement was founded by a group of flannel-weavers who had struck and lost; their aim was close to the Owenite Socialist movement. Besides their original store, they planned common housing, production cooperatives, common land for collective agriculture, and "as soon as practicable this Society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education and government; or in other words, to establish a self-supporting Home colony of united interests or assist other Societies in establishing such colonies." They soon held up a banner of the Cooperative Commonwealth. It was their store system that survived best, although a number of their production cooperatives did quite well, and the movement grew large, focused on distribution. Production cooperatives were consumer-member owned and run managerially, like the stores, and as adjuncts to them. Over a quarter of the British people are now members, and they still plan to issue in the Commonwealth, which is to come about by the movement literally buying everything.

5. Confrontations (1880-1900)

KNIGHTS OF LABOR

The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was organized in 1869 in sworn secrecy by members of a Philadelphia tailoring cutters local who were being blacklisted after striking. They aimed "to secure to workers the full enjoyment of the wealth they create, ... to harmonize the interests of labor and capital." One of their First Principles was Cooperation. When they were forced out into the open nine years later, they made their goals public: "to establish cooperative institutions such as will tend to supersede the wage-system, by the introduction of a cooperative industrial system." They called for public ownership of railroads and other commercial transport, of telegraph and telephones, water systems, utilities, the eight-hour day, equal pay for equal work, abolition of contract, convict, and child labor, and "that the public lands, the heritage of the people, be reserved for actual settlers; not another acre for railroad speculators."



Uriah Stephens

Under the early leadership of Uriah Stephens and James Wright, the Order grew rapidly. They were not a trade union. Their divisions were territorial, not occupational. Whole trade unions that joined, however, did retain their identity. The Knights were the first attempt to organize all American productive workers into "One Big Union" regardless of skill, trade, industry, race or sex. They were divided into Local, District and National Assemblies, with a centralized structure. Three-quarters of each new local had to be wage-earners; their membership also included individual and cooperative workers.

The K of L was among the first to organize white and black into the same union. At their peak they had over 50,000 women members, including many "housewives," who were recognized by them as workers.

During the depression that began in '73, the capitalist bosses busted almost every union in the country except those underground. Blacklisting was rampant; workers were forced to sign "iron-clad oaths," agreeing to immediate firing if they should ever join a union. In 1877, at the height of the depression, the country exploded in America's first great railroad strike, which quickly turned into a nationwide confrontation between capital and labor, between the government and the working population. Beginning as a wildcat, the strike quickly spread across the country, involving tens of thousands. Large numbers of workers from every trade and the unemployed helped out. Farmers, many Grangers, disgusted with enormous freight rates, poured out of the hills bringing large amounts of food. State militia in many places refused to obey orders to break the strike and instead fraternized with the strikers. The workers took Pittsburgh, Chicago and St. Louis, in the latter shutting down communication between east and west coasts for a week. For five days the working people of Pittsburgh held the city and organized survival by neighbor helping neighbor; this has been called the Pittsburgh Commune. President Hayes called out federal troops "to prevent national insurrection." A Republican, he had been elected through fraudulent vote counts in the South, done under Northern troops' protection, to compensate for having lost the support of Northern workers. To appease the Southerners' anger, he made a deal: they recognized his presidency and he withdrew the occupying army and gave them a free hand to deal with blacks. Under his order, the army broke the strike all across the country. All told, over 1000 strikers were jailed, over 500 wounded, over 100 killed. This was the first peacetime use of federal troops to suppress a strike. Congress, frightened by an angry population, quickly voted funds to construct large armories in all the major cities, to be used for domestic control; these still exist today. Many states quickly passed anti-union conspiracy laws.

Knights had been a major force in the strike, along with the Workingmen's Party, formed from the defunct IWA the previous year; both had been in leadership positions across much of the country, although neither had instigated the strike, which had

been a spontaneous eruption of long-seething anger. But now both were being blamed for it in the capitalist press and from the pulpit. The Knights were charged with being a center for sedition and communism. They could no longer continue as a secret organization and decided to come into the open. They also felt that secrecy had hurt and hampered their organizing abilities over the years, perhaps more than it had helped. Until then their very name had been so secret that members were sworn to never publicly utter it, and even their existence was only speculated on by outsiders.

They quickly went into electoral politics, joining the Grangers' Greenback Party in 1878 to form the Greenback-Labor Party, electing six congressmen from the north-east, six from the mid-west, and three from the South. But during the comparative prosperity between '79 and '82, the party faded.

Soon after the International had moved its General Council to New York, it became clear that it was dead internationally, although it was on the rise in the U.S. In July, 1876, a brutal depression year, almost all socialistic groups in America met in a conference in Philadelphia soon after the Centennial. There they officially laid to rest the "First" International and formed the Workingmen's Party of the US, re-uniting the movement in America a few days before the Oglala Sioux, with the leadership of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, met George Custer's soldiers at the Little Big Horn.

The program of the Workingmen's Party included the eight hour day; abolition of prison and child labor; free public education; workers' compensation; public ownership of telegraph, railroads and all transportation; and "all industrial enterprises to be placed under control of the Government as fast as practicable, and operated by free, cooperative trade unions for the good of the whole people." Within a year there were 10,000 members in 25 states, with very large numbers attending their mass meetings and demonstrations. Like the IWA before them, they were not electorally oriented, and looked to the unions as the main centers of struggle for social change. But following their success in the Great Upheaval of '77, they decided to go electoral under a new name, the Socialist Labor Party, fielding candidates in '78 and receiving thousands of votes in many cities, electing several in Milwaukee. But in the following elections they joined with the Greenback-Labor Party and faded with them. The left wing had its fill of electoral politics by 1880, broke away, and formed the Revolutionary Socialist Labor Party. The RSLP stated that its aim was to establish a "free society based on cooperative production," with cooperative associations federating to take care of public affairs in place of a state-type government. They planned to bring it about through "direct action."

The differences between the SLP and the RSLP were typical of those in socialist movements in many countries at this time, reflecting the ideological struggle between "social-democrats" and "anarcho-communists." The anarchists would attack the



Burning of the Round-house, Pittsburgh, 1877

capitalist state directly and do away with it immediately; the social-democrats would take over the capitalist state electorally and use that power to socialize the economy, retaining the structure of a centralized government to take care of public affairs until society advanced to where this structure was unnecessary.

The RSLP saw the trade unions and the Knight assemblies as the basic cells of the new order. These would transform themselves into "autonomous communes" once capitalist ownership of the means of production and the capitalist-controlled state machinery of repression were swept away by a revolutionary uprising of workers.

American "anarchist" thought, in the Jeffersonian tradition, demanded the abolition of laws in conflict with "natural rights," that is, laws enforcing privilege and private property. With these laws eliminated, individuals and society would be left "free" to exercise their natural rights, returning to their state of natural equality. This same line of thought also lay behind Associationism.

The early '80s were a time of industrial expansion, with machinery introduced on an unprecedented scale. The factory system became general and led to an increase in unskilled and semiskilled workers. The market expanded over an ever-wider area. Domination of the wholesalers over the smaller manufacturers produced cutthroat competition and pressed wages down. Over five million immigrants, mostly unskilled, arrived in the '80s, the peak of the flood from northern Europe and the beginning of the tide from southern and eastern Europe. The frontier line disappeared: from Atlantic to Pacific all was at least partially settled. American labor was "permanently" shut up in an all-pervading wage system.

It was during this period that the Knights began opening cooperative stores. In '83 there were between 50 and 60 of them, run by locals. It was not unusual for a Knight hall to have a store on the first floor and

meeting rooms upstairs. Members got special discounts. Surplus income went for swelling strike war-chests and, in the following years, for starting production cooperatives.

During the early '80s unskilled workers were almost totally unorganized. Each trade was coping separately with its own bosses; solidarity of labor was hardly practiced. When the economy slipped again and fell in 1883, this situation changed. The Knights had 50,000 members then. Wages were being lowered by 15% to 40%.



Frank J. Ferrell

Susan B. Anthony

K of L

In '83 the Knights organized their first major production cooperative, a coal mine in Illinois, to be run directly by their central organization. The mine was to be the first link in the economic backbone of the new society. But the railroads refused to lay tracks up to it or to haul the coal.

The Knights quickly switched over to a decentralized plan, urging member initiative. Some were formed and managed by local assemblies, and some by groups of individual members. They thought these would be easier to start and be safer from attacks. By '85 enthusiasm was high. "It is to cooperation that the eyes of the workmen and workingwomen of the world should be directed, upon cooperation their hopes should be centered..." Terence Powderly, successor to Stephens as Grand Master Workman, urged, "By cooperation alone can a system of colonization be established in which men may band together for the purpose of securing the greatest good for the greatest number, and place the man who is willing to toil upon his own homestead."

Knight cooperatives were springing up across the US, mostly in the east and midwest. By 1885 Powderly was complaining that "many of our members grow impatient and disorderly because every avenue of the Order does not lead to cooperation." By the middle of the next year there were between 185 and 200 Knight cooperatives. Most were on a comparatively small scale. More than half were mines, foundries, mills and factories making barrels, clothes, shoes and soap. There were cooperative printers, laundries and furniture-makers; factories making boxes, nails, underwear, brooms, pipe, stoves; cooperative potters and lumberjacks; almost every industry and numerous products.

But from the first the money-power hit the cooperatives hard, making it difficult or impossible for them to obtain credit, supplies and markets. But still most persisted. They tried unsuccessfully to drive a wedge between the wage-earner Knights and the cooperator Knights, blaming the cooperatives every time they laid speedup, wage cuts and layoffs on their employees, claiming this was the only way they could compete. But it wasn't until '86 that they let them have it with both barrels.

Two years earlier, in 1884, the Knights won the greatest union victory in American history up to that time, striking and defeating the Union Pacific Railroad.

Incredible numbers of workers began joining, mostly unskilled and semi-skilled, many immigrants, many formerly skilled workers now reduced to apprentices by new machine techniques. By 1886 between 750,000 and a million Americans were Knights, making them the largest labor organization not only in the US but in the world. They had to call a temporary halt to accepting new members, due to the organizational chaos this was creating.

At the same time, the newly formed Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (soon to become the American Federation of Labor), had only 150,000 members, less than a fifth of the Knights. There was a bitter rivalry between the two organizations and their conflicting structures. The Federation, under the domination of Samuel Gompers, was white-only, skilled-worker-only. They espoused a philosophy of "trade-unionism, pure and simple," and limited themselves to bread-and-butter issues. They were against worker cooperatives because of past failures; because obscuring the line between employee and employer confused their role as bargaining agent, which they saw as the unions' basic identity, with the contract the eternal goal; and because cooperatives were associated with radicalism and radical movements, of which they wanted no part. They harbored no ideas of a Cooperative Commonwealth, and were the first important labor association in America to accept and support the wage system as permanent, and not fight for its abolition. The Federation was organized with each trade fighting separately against its own employers for its own advantage, while the Knights felt they could not accomplish their goals unless they brought all workers, skilled and unskilled, into the same organization, and used the tactical strength of the skilled for the benefit of all. So the Knights, although the older organization, were the aggressors, periodically trying to separate whole unions from the Federation and bring them into the K of L.

Worker solidarity and the embryonic network of cooperatives were great threats to the employers, their labor market, and to the whole capitalist system. Across the nation the employers formed associations on an unprecedented scale, consolidated their strength, and set their sights upon destroying the Knights.

The Eight-Hour movement was sweeping the country. Twelve-, fourteen- and even sixteen-hour workdays were still prevalent in many industries and areas. The Eight-Hour Leagues had originated in Boston with the leadership of Ira Stewart, a common laborer. They resolved "that cooperation in labor is the final result to be obtained..." The eight-hour day was to be a first step. They organized nationally and called for a national general strike set for May first, 1886, to last until all had won the eight-hour day and the 48-hour week with no loss in pay. This act marked the origin of what later became the international workers' holiday.

While the Federation officially endorsed the strike, the Knight national organization decided to take no official stand; each local and regional was left to decide on its own. Across the country Knights were in the leadership of the movement, and did much more of the local organizing than Federation members.

The Revolutionary Socialist Labor Party was also very active. By '86 they had 6000 members, with branches in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. The largest was in Chicago, where they won control of the Central Labor Council. Many Knights were members. The RSLP became a leading force in organizing the national strike. The RSLP was secret, and based in cells of nine members, each a partly autonomous collective. In '81 they'd affiliated with the International Working People's Association, a loose federation of worker movements from different countries that many sections of the old "First" International formed when they split off a decade earlier. The Icarian communities were also associated with the IWPA as were the core group of San Francisco labor leaders and radicals who would form Kaweah Cooperative Colony a few years later.

On May Day almost 200,000 struck, with almost twice that number participating in marches and demonstrations across America. But on the fourth day of the strike, violence exploded in Chicago when police shot six workers in the back at the McCormick Harvester plant. That evening the police tried to break up a protest meeting in Haymarket Square, were met with a bomb and fired wildly into the crowd, killing and wounding a large number. Police terror swept Chicago and spread across the country, breaking the strike. In New York, Pittsburgh and St. Louis, Knight leaders were charged with conspiracy. In Chicago, Albert Parsons, a Knight, leader of the Eight-Hour League and member of the RSLP, together with six other RSLP members, were sentenced to death for the bombing, with no evidence against them except their ideas. Only after five were hanged, did a new governor clear them all and release the survivors; still, the party was wiped out.

The employers took the opportunity of Haymarket to hit the Knights with everything they had. They did not touch the Federation though; they saw their advantage in separating skilled from unskilled workers and race from race.

They came down hard on the cooperatives: railroads

refused to haul their products; manufacturers refused to sell them needed machinery; wholesalers refused them raw materials; banks wouldn't lend; police, goon and vigilante violence was everywhere; customers were afraid to patronize them. Their entire operations were sabotaged and paralyzed. Within two years of Haymarket, almost all of the larger cooperatives were forced to close shop.



Seal of the Knights

Many rank-and-file members were angry at the national leadership for not endorsing the national strike and then not supporting the "Haymarket martyrs." This and the violence caused workers to pour out of the Knights as quickly as they'd poured in. A year later the K of L was down to 200,000 members.

After 1889 the Knights gave up attempting to organize the great mass of unskilled workers, and fell back on their base of small independent producers, mostly in medium-size and small towns. These artisans had been comparatively immune from the violence. The organization picked itself up and became mainly concerned with organizing supply-purchasing and marketing cooperatives among them.

The Knights' defeat by the AFL marked the ascendancy of business-unionism in the US. This was the only stand that the ruling capitalists were willing to live with now. Thereafter control of the AFL national bureaucracy fell into increasingly conservative hands, despite periodic uprisings of its membership, and the AFL became a Loyal Opposition to monopoly. The destruction of the industrial cooperatives marks the end of the era when wage-earners and labor leaders looked to these as a strategy for liberating the wage-class from bondage. Experience had demonstrated to the satisfaction of most that industrial worker cooperatives on a national scale could come only after the movement controlled state power, not as the road to it. Besides the cooperatives' vulnerability to attack, the cooperative strategy proved impractical because the dominant means of production had become so costly that they were out of reach of even a large group of workers. Never again would the businessmen permit worker cooperatives to get a broad foothold in heavy industry, the stronghold of American capitalism.

Still, the Knights were not quite dead yet. In 1892, down to about 75,000 members, they joined the farmer cooperators of the Farmers' Alliance to form the Populist Party, to try to take control of the government and clear the way for the movement, as the Greenback-Labor Party had tried a decade earlier. They nearly succeeded, almost electing a president in collaboration with radical Democrats in '96, but then collapsing and slowly fading to nothing.

The eight-hour day was finally won with the New Deal.

Apart from the Knights, there were production cooperatives in immigrant enclaves throughout this period, as throughout American history, and they were touched less by these events. An observer in 1888 noted their particular prevalence in San Francisco's Chinatown.

COMMUNALISM IN THE 80s

The fall of Associationism did not mark the end of secular communalism.

Groups of immigrants still commonly formed cooperative colonies. In California alone in the early 1870s there were new colonies of Swedes (Kingbury), Danes (Selma) and English (Rosedale). Usually they sent an advance party to buy the land and make all the arrangements; they would be very collective and cooperative at first, but almost invariably divided up the land into individual lots when they became well settled, and chose to assimilate into the surrounding society rather than remain permanently set apart.



Kaweahns by the "Karl Marx" Tree

Communities continued to be formed by radicals, but in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they redefined their ideological meaning. Most socialists (from social-democrats to anarchists) began to see them as attempts to demonstrate the viability of the principles of cooperation and socialism, adjuncts to the mass movement rather than the basic strategem of it. Many communities in the late '80s were formed by participants in failed mass political movements, in separationist fashion; but rather than aiming for personal escapes, the communalists were trying to create living visions that they hoped would stimulate new political movements. They invariably found their communities harrassed and attacked by the same forces that wrecked their political organizations.

Between 1882 and '86 an autonomous group of socialists affiliated with the International Working People's Association was very active in the San Francisco area. After Haymarket, they disbanded, and many members and leaders, including Burnette Haskell and J.J. Martin (founder of the local seamen's union), organized Kaweah Cooperative Colony in Tulare County, California. Their idea was "to illustrate and validate the premises on which the labor movement was based." Their concept of the aim of socialist communalism was very influenced by Lawrence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth* (1884), generally considered the first book to put many of the ideas of scientific socialism into a true American idiom; he called colonization "one way to bring a State to the threshold of Socialism." The Kaweahns, varying between 50 and 300 in number, homesteaded a tract of 600 acres. By 1890 they'd constructed an eighteen mile road and a ferry, published a weekly magazine, and operated a sawmill, besides building homes, orchards and gardens. They functioned under a system of labor-checks based on the amount of time worked; the checks were convertible for any item at the community-run store. But reactionary forces in the state took note and, at their initiative, Congress quickly passed a bill creating Sequoia National Park out of Kaweah, with the unfounded justification that the original filings for homesteads had been technically deficient. Two years later the Kaweahns were driven from the land by US cavalry and arrested.

The Puget Sound Cooperative Colony was founded in '86 at about the same time as Kaweah, by a similar group. Almost all were working people from Seattle and neighboring cities, many previously involved with labor struggles, the Knights of Labor, and the International. After martial law was declared in Seattle over the issue of the importation of Chinese contract laborers to break strikes, many of the leading agitators led a large group into communalism. By the end of the first year there were 400 colonists, and 500 at its peak. Like all the colonies in the area that were to follow, their main industry was lumber, and they soon had an operating sawmill; they built and operated their own steamship as well. They were set up on a system they called Integral Cooperation (also in use in Topolobampo, a short-lived colony formed on the west coast of Mexico by North Americans); the colony was incorporated and managerial; officers had wide powers; there was only limited worker control; meals were in common but each family had separate sleeping and living quarters. They had immediate problems from growing too large too fast; this was made worse by differences between workers and managers. The colony created a boom in the nearby town of Port Angeles, and many members, disillusioned by too much bureaucracy, moved over there, with the ultimate result that the town dominated the colony, which became insolvent and dispirited, changed into a joint-stock company, and finally dissolved in '94, swallowed by the town as a community of homesteaders. Many members went on to participate in the populist and socialist movements.

In 1886 Henry George ran for mayor of New York on a coalition party formed by the Socialist Labor Party and several trade unions. George was the author of **Progress and Poverty**, which had appeared a number of years earlier. In it he advocated that the government impose a single tax on the land equal to its real use-value. This would make speculation and landlordism unprofitable, and result in the eventual socialization of the land, which the government would make available to all. The tax, he claimed, would be all that would be needed to run the federal government, and all other taxation could be dispensed with. The George campaign, pretty hot itself, took place in the heat of the Eight-Hour movement. George probably got the most votes, but Tammany Hall was counting. After his narrow defeat and after Haymarket, many of his supporters went off into communalism. "Singletaxer" colonies were formed at Arden, Pennsylvania, and Fairhope, Alabama, in the '90s. Fairhope, a large town today, is still strongly influenced by its origins.

FARMERS' ALLIANCE POPULISM

The Farmers' Alliance flooded across rural America between 1887 and '90. It originally grew out of farmers' clubs that were organized spontaneously in many frontier communities of the west and southwest between 1840 and '70, for mutual protection from "land sharks" (speculators) and cattle barons. It began as a coordinated movement in '74, organizing cooperative purchasing and marketing, like the Grange. While the Grange was strong, many were swept into it and disappeared. But some retained their independence and, when the Grange began to fall apart and hard times were upon them, the Alliance stepped into the vacuum with enormous energy. By 1890 there were three large separate but connected organizations, one in the north and west, two in the South due to racial segregation. The Northern Alliance (actually mostly in the west), with Milton George in the leadership, had more than a million members; the Southern Alliance, with C. W. Macune, had almost three million; the Colored Farmers' Alliance, with H.S. Doyle leading, had one and a quarter million members, the largest organization of American blacks ever, mainly share-croppers and tenant-farmers.

At first they did mostly cooperative buying of supplies and machinery, and marketing of cotton and grain. Like the Grange before them, they soon added groceries and all sorts of dry goods. Farmers were able to purchase supplies on security of their crops. Getting credit from the Alliance freed them from the banks and capitalist suppliers, who would give them crop-liens at huge interest rates, meaning strangulation by ever-increasing debts, virtual serfdom. Each local Alliance unit usually had a cooperative store, grain elevator, cheese factory or cotton gin, depending on their area. By the '90s they'd reached California, where they also operated flour mills and in one location a tannery.

In 1887 the Southern Alliance organized its first big marketing cooperative, the Texas Farmers' Exchange, based in Dallas, dealing mostly in cotton. But it hardly got off the ground. They desperately needed credit but the banks wouldn't advance it, and refused to accept Alliance security notes except at impossibly large discounts. Alliacemen were soon charging there was a conspiracy of bankers, wholesalers, implement dealers and manufacturers set on destroying them.

Although it did a million-dollar volume in its second year, the Exchange could not stand up to the constant economic blows it was being hit with, and folded in 1890, charges of internal corruption in management driving in the last nail.

But exchanges were soon set up in eighteen other states, trying out several variations of structure. They were all unlike the Grange cooperatives in that they did not issue shares. They rejected the Rochdale systems and preferred to pass on savings directly to members. They were regional in scope, while the Granges were local. In every case the Exchanges were attacked by the banking and business people, and destroyed.



At an Alliance Rally

Everywhere farmers were losing their land to the banks, merchants and speculators, and being driven down into tenancy. Half the farmers in the South were tenants after 1890, and so were a quarter of the farmers in the mid-west and much of the east.

Spurred by the destruction of the Exchanges in the midst of the worsening depression, Alliacemen began to run for office to change the laws that permitted the banks to rule.

"What is life and so-called liberty if the means of subsistence are monopolized?" **The Farmers' Alliance**, the newspaper coming out of Lincoln, Nebraska, asked. "The corporation has absorbed the community. The community must now absorb the corporation. . . . A stage must be reached in which each will be for all and all for each. The welfare of the individual must be the object and the end of all effort."

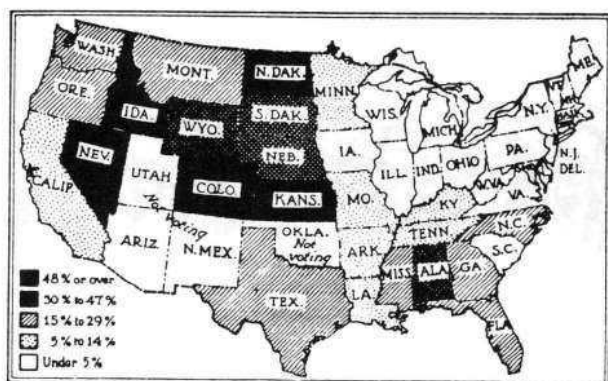
Alliacemen and candidates supported by the Alliance won four governorships, took the state legislature in nine states and sent three senators and 43 congressmen to Washington in 1890. The Knights of Labor had helped the Alliance write their platform.

But bringing about real change was harder than electing candidates, as the Greenbackers had found out earlier. Although bills were passed in Nebraska and North Carolina regulating the railroads, they didn't make a dent in the actual freight rates. Bank control remained untouched. It had to be done on a national scale.

Soon Tom Watson, new representative from Georgia, presented a plan to Congress prepared by the Alliance by which the government would become responsible for food distribution, paying farmers 80% of its market value. The government would issue new greenbacks to pay for it, whose value would be based on the food itself, not on gold. When this "subtreasury" plan was laughed down as "potato banks" and its advocates as "hayseed socialists," the Alliance turned from both "major" parties and organized a new national party.

In 1892 the Farmers' Alliance, the Knights of Labor and several smaller cooperative movements, including the Agricultural Wheel, the Patrons of Industry and the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Society, united to form the People's Party, known as Populist.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULAR VOTE FOR WEAVER IN 1892



"Wealth belongs to him who creates it," the Populist program stated, "and every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery... The interests of rural and civil labor are the same, their enemies are identical." The program called for public ownership of the railroads, telephone and telegraph; for abolition of the private banking system; for public control of the money system on a silver standard; for adoption of their "subtreasury" food distribution plan; for reclaiming all corporate-owned land "in excess of their actual needs" and for turning over this land to settlers since "the land, including all natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes"; the adoption of initiative, referendum and recall; and an effective graduated income tax.

"We expect to be confronted with a vast and splendidly equipped army of extortionists, usurers and oppressors..." James Weaver of Iowa, their presidential candidate, cried, initiating the campaign with \$50 in the party treasury. "Corporate feudality has taken the place of chattel slavery and vaunts its

power in every state... We have challenged the adversary to battle and our bugles have sounded the march..."

They forged an alliance between white and black. "The white tenant lives adjoining the colored tenant," said Tom Watson. "Their houses are almost equally destitute of comforts. Their living is confined to bare necessities... Now the People's Party says to these two men, 'You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism that enslaves you both.'"

But like the Greenbackers they were met with terror and fraud in many areas, particularly in the South; in Georgia fifteen were killed. Still Weaver won in Colorado, Idaho and Kansas, and got over a million counted votes.

The strength of the party continued to grow as the depression of '93 hit rock bottom. In '94, a few months after America's second great railroad strike, one and a half million Populist votes were counted, and they won governorships in Kansas and Colorado. But as they prepared for a major assault on the presidency in the next election, the left-wing of the Democrats staged a coup against re-nominating the corrupt incumbent Cleveland, and nominated instead the upstart William Jennings Bryan on a platform of free silver, part of the Populist program. Though terribly split, the People's Party decided to back Bryan, but with their own Tom Watson as running-mate. This move possibly saved the Democratic Party from extinction, as it had already been virtually eliminated in the west and northwest. Meanwhile the old Democratic machine bolted the party, leaving Bryan without financial support and dependent in many areas on the energy of the Populists. Even though Bryan got almost 47%, the election turned out to be a catastrophe for populism, as the People's Party was now beyond repair as an independent force.

With the collapse of the party, the Alliance fell too, as did the other farmer cooperative associations. The party had drained off most of their energy; they had run out of strategies. The Knights continued to fade to nothing.

The Democratic Party soon flopped back under control of its right wing. Most local and state-wide Populist legislation was overturned in the courts under the guise of "upholding precedent" and of the fourteenth amendment. The latter, which forbade states to "deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law," had been set up to protect former slaves, but was turned around by the court ruling that corporations were "legal people."

When the Alliance collapsed, the Grange revived in the mid-west, far west and north. By 1908 it would approach the half million mark again, and would remain strong until the Great Depression, when it was again unable to meet its members needs and declined, but again the Grange came back and continues today.

6. The "Bloody '90s" to the Great Depression (1890-1930)

Throughout the '90s there was tremendous labor strife. The coal fields of Tennessee were constantly exploding with open warfare. 1892 saw the strike at Carnegie's Homestead steel plant near Pittsburgh, where strikers defeated Pinkertons in a gun battle but then met defeat by state militia. In New Orleans was a general strike. In Idaho martial law was declared against silver mine workers.

By this time the trustification of the US was almost complete. The enormous spoils in the wake of the Civil War had long been dished out, and financiers and industrialists settled down to ruling different sections of the country like medieval barons from behind various corporate facades, sometimes feuding with each other, sometimes collaborating. The largest contributed heavily to both "major" parties, the Republicans and Democrats, who had made their peace as twin pillars of the capitalist system. The so-called Sherman "Anti-Trust" Act of 1890 was used to break strikes twelve times in the decade, but never once to break a trust. As a political observer said, "What looks like a stone wall to a layman, is a triumphal arch to a corporation lawyer."

In '93 the economy collapsed again, a financial panic throwing the country deeper than ever into depression. Morgan, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Harriman, Mellon and other millionaires added immense new holdings to their gigantic fortunes, while farmers got thrown off their land and the unemployed starved.

Meanwhile unions of a new type were being organized, by industry instead of by trade, and therefore including a broad spectrum of skilled and unskilled workers in their organizations. Eugene Debs was instrumental in getting the railroad workers well organized for the first time, into the American Railway Union; "Big" Bill Haywood, at the same time, was helping organize the Western Federation of Miners. In June 1894 America's second great railroad strike erupted, in support of the workers at the company town of Pullman, where they built cars. When the railroads stopped, America stopped. There was tremendous support of the strike among the general working population; again small farmers helped in many areas, bringing food. This strike quickly became like the first, a nationwide confrontation between workers and capitalists. In Chicago, the hub of the action, the Central Labor Council voted for a general sympathetic strike, but before it was to take effect, the corporations called in the army to take charge. There was general warfare between strikers and troops in Chicago. Confronted with over-

whelming odds, Debs called for a national general strike, which Gompers and the AFL leadership refused. Debs wound up in jail for six months and the Railway Union was destroyed.

* * * * *

Although after the demise of the Knights of Labor, industrial cooperatives were no longer a major factor in America, they could still be found scattered around the country. An observer in 1896, for example, noted that several barrel factories organized by the coopers' union decades earlier in the mid-west were still thriving.

Among small producers the labor exchange system made recurrent come-backs. Between 1889 and about 1906 there was a chain of Labor Exchanges mostly in small towns, extending to 32 states at its peak, with 135 locals. Members received "labor-checks" for the estimated wholesale value of the products they contributed; they could use these checks to trade for any other product.

The newly organized Afro-American League, with radical leadership at first, was promoting cooperatives of all sorts in black communities throughout the country through the 1890 s.

In the early '90s there was a movement of Southern blacks to emigrate to Oklahoma and create a black state. By '92 seven towns had been established, eventually 25, based on "close communal life and cooperation," as one resident put it. But the area was poor; they were largely surrounded by Indian land, and there was inescapable competition between the two groups. Still many hung on and their descendents are there today.

COOPERATIVE UNION OF AMERICA AFL

Between 1895 and '99 the Cooperative Union of America, based in Massachusetts, made the first attempt to create a national federation of consumer cooperatives. At its peak there were 14 member stores from Maine to New Jersey. A few were old Protective Unions. The CUA joined the International Cooperative Alliance, marking the first time American consumer cooperation was tied to the international movement. But '99, a year of ferocious depression, destroyed many stores and the Union with them.

In 1896 the AFL came out in support of Rochdale-style consumers co-ops, while retaining their opposition to production cooperatives: "trade-unionism and co-

operation are twin sisters... where one exists the other is almost compelled by nature's inexorable laws to follow... therefore be it Resolved, That (the AFL) recommend to all affiliated bodies... the Rochdale System... and wherever favorable conditions exist to give their aid to such cooperative efforts." Over the next decades, unions around the country began forming them, most notably miners; between 1916 and the depression of '21 it would happen on a large scale.

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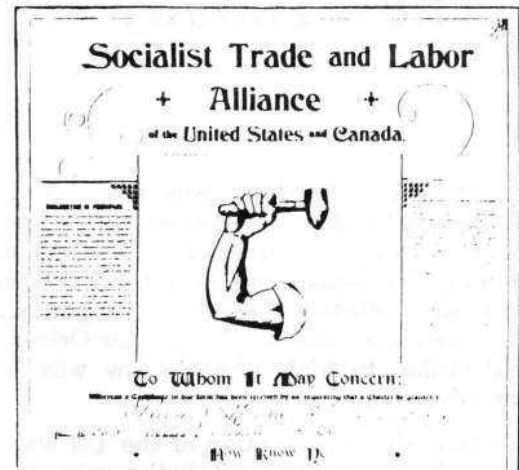
The mid-90s saw a revival of socialist communalism as a true mass social movement on a national scale, tied directly to another renewal of the mass political movement. Both were stimulated by the ideas of Edward Bellemly and Julius A. Wayland, as well as Gronlund. Bellemly's novel **Looking Backward** ('87) predicted a benevolent managerial state socialism in America, brought about peacefully; there were soon over 160 Bellemlyite Nationalist Clubs around the country, with thousands of members; they were basically educational groups aimed at helping the new Nation to be born. Daniel DeLeon, Debs, and Helena Blavatsky were all early members. Wayland published **The Coming Nation** beginning in '93, a socialist weekly which soon had unprecedented circulation, 760,000, never equaled to this day. The paper was instrumental in uniting forces for social change into a new national organization in '97 with a communalist program, the Social Democracy of America.

Meanwhile the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance would carry on in the tradition of the K of L.

SOCIALIST LABOR ALLIANCE

After Haymarket and the fall of American anarchism, the Socialist Labor Party came back, and in the '90s was no longer dominated by German and other immigrants, but became fully Americanized; until then the majority of their publications were in other languages. With the leadership of Daniel DeLeon, the SLP soared from 21,000 votes in 1892 to 82,000 in '98, with candidates winning local offices around the country. Their plan at first was to forge an alliance with both the Knights and the AFL: there were strong socialist sectors in both, and DeLeon led the largest Knight local in New York. But by '94 both labor organizations decisively rejected them, and the Knights expelled DeLeon's whole local for its conflicting loyalties. The SLP turned away and formed a new organization it hoped would take in the entire labor movement, the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. The STLA was structured on industrial lines (not trade), and was modeled after the Knights. The STLA was to assimilate the old unions while the SLP won control of the government through the ballot; together they would bring forth the cooperative commonwealth as a republic of industrial unions. At their height in '98, the STLA had 30,000 members and 228 affiliated organizations; some had seceded from the AFL and K of L to join them. But the older unions, especially the AFL, effectively attacked them for

"dual-unionism," causing fratricidal warfare from which all workers wound up the losers.



Membership Certificate

Ironically, while the SLP was finally getting a quickly growing mass following among the native-born, the inner party was growing increasingly rigid, overly centralized and authoritarian, with DeLeon turning to a doctrinaire "Marxism" that was making the SLP increasingly a sect. In '98 there was a great internal revolt, resulting in a split from which the SLP and STLA never recovered.

The STLA marks a basic change in the radical labor movement's relationship to cooperatives: while they saw cooperativization as the solution to their problems, they put off instituting their plan until after their sister party had gained state power; and then they would not form new alternative industries, but laid claim to the already existing ones. Not long after their fall, many former members would help organize a new, stronger, more independent organization with a similar perspective, the Industrial Workers of the World.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY OF AMERICA BROTHERHOOD OF THE CC

In '94 J.A. Wayland helped gather a group to form Ruskin Cooperative Colony near Cave Mills, Tennessee, where they opened the world's first socialist college, and published **The Coming Nation**. Ruskin crumbled after five years on personality clashes, but not before **The Coming Nation** was used to organize communist radicals across the country into the Social Democracy of America.

The Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth was first conceived of by two Maine Populists, Norman Lermund and Ed Pelton. Their plan was to colonize a western state, introduce socialism there, and use it as a base for a national movement. They compared themselves to the freesoilers who colonized Kansas prior to the Civil War.

Soon after their founding they connected with a small group centered around Gene Debs which was all that was left of the once-great American Railway Union in the wake of their crushing defeat in the Pullman strike of '94. Through *The Coming Nation*, the two groups



Equality

jointly organized a convention in Chicago aimed at founding a new organization to house the scattered American workers' movement. In June 1897 unionists, socialists, communitarians, Nationalists and radicals of every sort attended and set up the Social Democracy of America, with a program essentially the Brotherhood's. In the following months Debs worked to raise money for the land, but eventually joined a growing group inside the organization that felt that the colonization project was quixotic and wanted to form a new electoral party instead. The next year, when the Brotherhood-Social Democracy went off to Washington to found two cooperative communities, the Debs group stayed behind and gave birth to the Social Democratic Party and ultimately to the Socialist Party of America.

The Brotherhood and the Social Democracy were closely connected but retained separate identities; the BCC created Equality Colony in '97 and the SDA close-by Burley Colony a year later.

The BCC was the larger organization, with 130 local "unions" of supporters around the country, and about 3500 dues-paying members by '98.

Puget Sound, where they chose to settle, was already a radical communalist area. Besides the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony, there was the Glennis Cooperative Industrial Company, both however by then dissolving, and soon Home anarchist colony.

There were quickly over 300 colonists at Equality. They lived in large communal houses, with success in farming, milling, fishing, dairying, and other small industries, on 600 acres. But there was soon dissention between the colonists and the national organization, which saw Equality as just the first of many colonies to be organized, but soon realized that the whole project's survival meant a focus of forces on

this first one. The colony soon gained complete autonomy; it was structured democratically, through general assemblies; one major debate was whether "Voluntary Cooperation or Business Methods" should prevail. The national program remained the sphere of the BCC, but, depleted of resources to start further colonies, it soon ceased to exist as a national organization.

Meanwhile the Social Democracy of America changed its name to the Cooperative Brotherhood, purchased 260 acres nearby, and founded Burley. By 1900 it had 145 residents, and 1200 member-supporters around the country. But they were having problems similar to the BCC: there was strife between local and national organizations, and differences between directors and workers, which included a large group of anarcho-communist miners from Colorado, who saw things differently from the social-democratic oriented organizers, one of whom left to join the Theosophist colony at Point Loma. Like the other groups in the area, Burley centered around logging.

The movement was shaken by the Spanish-American war of 1898, but still held on. Equality's population declined to about 120 by 1900, and continued to fall, due mainly to poor economic conditions in the colony and greatly improved ones outside, with promises of higher income elsewhere luring workers away. They were not close enough to their markets to create any thriving industry, and so produced insufficient money income; there were too many unproductive members.

A spin-off from Equality was Freeland Island, begun in 1900 as a group of homesteaders committed to mutual aid and free community cooperation. They soon had 60 members and a Rochdale store, and developed into a permanent community that continues today.

In 1905 an anarchist group took over Equality, quickly transforming it from a centralized colony to a community of voluntaristic small groups, and changed the name to Freeland. But this caused strife that was never resolved and led to the dissolving of Equality-Freeland in 1907. One legacy of Equality was its very successful newspaper *Industrial Freedom*, edited by Harry Ault, who would go on to edit the *Seattle Union Record* and play an important role in the 1919 General Strike.

In 1904 Burley Community, losing its spirit, reorganized partly as a joint-stock company, with a Rochdale store. Stagnation continued and in 1913 the community dissolved.

The Glennis Cooperative Industrial Company was a highly structured cooperative community in the same area in Washington between 1894-96. When it fell on discord due in part to its being overly organized, several former members, Oliver Verity among them, formed the anarchist community of Home in '98, with an association for landholding and mutual aid, and a single-tax plan. By 1905 there were 120 residents, and five years later almost double that. But when McKinley was assassinated by an immigrant who

considered himself an anarchist, a wave of persecution hit the colony, both from local vigilantes and the US government; one leader, Jay Fox, was jailed for two months for mailing "obscene" literature advocating "free love." Many important activists in the mass movement, Wobblies and communists as well as anarchists, visited and stayed at Home, including Wm. Z. Foster, Emma Goldman, Elizabeth G. Flynn, and Bill Haywood. Foster was a frequent visitor, worked regularly on their newspaper *The Agitator*, and finally married a resident (he was soon to lead the Great Steel Strike and become leader of the new Communist party). In 1919 the Mutual Home Association was ordered dissolved by a judge for financial insolvency, but the community, about 300 strong, remained to become a more conventional community, which continues today.

In '98 the Christian Commonwealth Colony was opened to any and all in Georgia, by a group of Christian Socialists on a former slave plantation, as a cell in "the visible Kingdom of God on earth." The Society of Christian Socialists had been started seven years earlier in Boston, by a group of clergymen, to help bring about a cooperative commonwealth in America; many had been members of Nationalist Clubs. At first the Society did educational and support activities, working with the Populists and other insurgent groups including the strikers at both Homestead and Pullman. But class struggle in "the bloody 90's" was being played for keeps, and as the workers were met with increasingly violent defeats, one group of Christian Socialists drew back and went separationist. Near Columbus, mostly hill and swamp, 150 struggled to survive in harsh and hostile conditions until in the middle of their fourth year their crops failed and they were hit with a terrible malaria epidemic.

Other communities of the period: Washington Colony (1883: 25 Kansan families go west and are skinned by a land developer), Union Colony (Greeleyites in Colorado), Altruria (1895: in Oakland, Ca., inspired by the W.D. Howells novel), Christian Cooperative Colony (1898: mid-westerners emigrate to form Sunnyvale in Washington; mutual-aid), Roycroft Community (Elbert Hubbard in upper New York).

SOCIALIST PARTY OF AMERICA

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

A large group broke from the old dying SLP, and joined with Debs' Social Democratic Party to found a new party that was to unite most political radicals in the country behind its program within a few years, the Socialist Party of America.

"The earth for all the people. That is the demand," wrote Debs. "The machinery of production and distribution for all the people. That is the demand. The collective ownership and control of industry and its democratic management in the interests of all the people. That is the demand. The elimination of rent, interest, profit, and the production of wealth to satisfy the wants of all the people. That is the demand. Cooperative industry in which all shall work together

in harmony as a basis of a new social order, a higher civilization, a real republic. That is the demand."

The Socialist Party made it clear they were not simply advocating government ownership and control of the economic system; Debs for one distrusted centralized power, and the SP called for a reshaping of government so that it was no longer "above" the people. "Government ownership..." said Debs, "means practically nothing for labor under capitalist ownership of government."

In 1900, the first year the SP ran national candidates, Debs received almost 100,000 votes for president; by 1904 it was up to over 400,000.

The SP established a Cooperative Information Bureau and over the next two decades were instrumental in organizing cooperatives—mostly stores—all over the country.

In the AFL there were two camps: the Gompers right-wing was still predominant, but the socialist left was continually gaining strength, supported by about a third of the unions. The SP's position was to turn the AFL to a socialist direction as soon as they had a majority, which they expected to win soon.

But some SP members, Debs included, felt a new organization was needed, one that would organize the unorganized and unskilled militantly and on an industrial basis. The labor aristocracy would never get behind the movement, they thought, and the AFL leadership would sink ever deeper into collusion with the employers.

In 1905 a group of 200 labor leaders and socialists including Debs, DeLeon, Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, Bill Haywood and Charles Moyer met in Chicago. Haywood called it "the Continental Congress of the Working Class." There they formed the Industrial Workers of the World, "one great industrial union embracing all industries..." which would "...develop the embryonic structure of the cooperative commonwealth... build up within itself the structure of an Industrial Democracy... which must finally burst the shell of capitalist government, and be the agency by which the workers will operate the industries, and appropriate the products to themselves."

They adopted the old nickname of the Knights of Labor, the OBU, One Big Union: but unlike the Knights (and unlike DeLeon's Labor Alliance) the IWW had a decentralized structure.

Much of the Socialist Party did not support the IWW. They feared their party would be the victim in the inevitable war between the IWW and AFL. The SP officially dissociated itself.

Within a short time the IWW was splitting apart internally, over questions of the value of electoral politics and of the role of violence and sabotage. In 1907 an uprising of the western left-wing, led by Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners, took over the organization. Under this group the IWW denounced elections entirely, relying only on "direct action" in the streets and in the factories, and

ultimately on a national general strike. "A strike is an incipient revolution. Many large revolutions have grown out of a small strike." Thus the strike-to-cooperative transition of early American workers became a microcosm of the national strike to bring about the cooperative commonwealth, which was threatened by the very structure of the IWW. They denounced contracts with employers and declared they would never sign one, reserving the right to walk out at any time.

State ("government") ownership was not part of their program; this was a basic difference with the Socialist Party. The Wobblies would do away with the political "state" (that is, power structures above and separated from the whole actual people) immediately and entirely; the administration of society's survival would be organized from below, by the workers themselves through their own coordinated organizations. In this way they were in the Associationist and anarchist tradition (the French would call a similar movement "syndicalist"). They thought that by turning workplaces into political organizations, organizing all workers industrially and socializing all industry, the people could gain direct political power and "abolish the state" immediately.



Eugene Debs

Bill Haywood

At this time many major industries were still totally unorganized, and the AFL was doing little to change that. With great energy the IWW leaped in and began to Organize the Unorganized. In the east they became strongest in the ghettos, among immigrant groups. In the west they were strongest among mine, lumber and migrant workers, and in port towns. They waged "free-speech" struggles up and down the west coast, flooding the jails of many towns with great numbers of migrant workers, to win the right to speak and organize. Many immigrants, blacks, chicanos and women belonged. They led strikes of miners in the west, lumberjacks in the northwest and south, construction workers on the west coast and in Canada, dock workers on both coasts and the Great Lakes, steel and textile workers in the northeast, farmworkers in the west and mid-west. Wherever Wobbly migrants went they set up large camps with cooperative survival networks.

Local organizations were very independent and loose, making an accurate count of membership impossible. At their height in 1917 the government estimated that about 200,000 Americans were Wobs, although others have estimated half that. Membership tended to soar

after a victory then slip away, partly due to this lack of a strong organizational structure.

But from the first the IWW met with goon, vigilante and government violence. As the Wobs grew, so grew the violence.

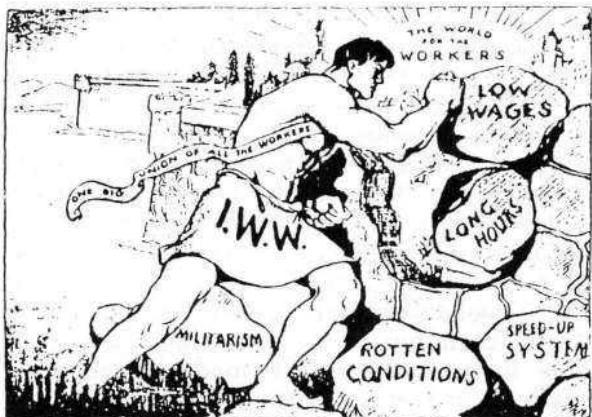
Meanwhile, the Socialist Party was growing in strength. In 1912 Debs received over 900,000 votes, the SP had about 120,000 members, elected the mayor of Milwaukee and of 80 other cities and towns around the country, 12,000 local and state representatives, and sent its first congressman to Washington. Republicans and Democrats merged in many areas to fight them. The largest single block of votes came from populist country, small farmers west of the Mississippi; the Oklahoma party had about a third of the state's votes. But in 1914 the national leadership, afraid that too strong a flood of farmers into the party would dilute their wage-earner orientation, chose to delay mass recruitment in rural areas until after they'd consolidated their urban base. Thus they weakened their forces, while a group of impatient farmers broke away and formed the enormously successful Non-Partisan League in North Dakota.

Woodrow Wilson, elected as a peace candidate, was leading the country into World War I, an enormous clash over world markets. The war was tremendously unpopular among workers and there were great outcries against the US jumping in. The IWW resolved, "We as members of the industrial army, will refuse to fight for any purpose except the realization of industrial freedom." After Congress declared war, the IWW took the moderate course of advising members to register for the draft as "IWW opposed to war."

The Socialist Party was by then affiliated with the "Second" International, founded in 1889, made up of autonomous workers' parties around the world. They had all agreed to try to prevent another imperialist war, and to not support it should one break out. Yet when it did, all the workers' parties lined up behind their governments, all except the Italians, the Russian Bolsheviks and the Socialist Party of America. The American party was split and many "social-patriots" resigned. But the majority stayed firm and the SP chose to "advise" workers everywhere to resist their governments by "mass action," because the war could only bring "wealth and power to the ruling class, and suffering, death and demoralization to the workers."

But the AFL supported the war, and Gompers joined the government, using his position to try to wipe out all opposition to his dominance over the labor movement. The Espionage Act was quickly passed and used to jail almost all IWW and SP leaders and many members for long sentences. At least 2000 were imprisoned in the worst conditions, many for as long as two years without trial. Free speech was almost totally suppressed. The entire radical press was shut down, including *The Masses*, probably the best cultural magazine in the country, published cooperatively for eleven years.

In the fall of 1917 nationwide local elections took place, while suppression of dissenters was coming down all over the country, just after the "Green Corn Rebellion" (when poor farmers of the South Canadian Valley, Oklahoma, mostly members of the Socialist Party, rose in arms to try to stop the war). Despite persecution and accusations of treason, the Socialist Party made great gains, with hundreds being elected around the nation.



After the war, government repression of radicals did not cease but expanded. On January 2, 1920, simultaneous raids were made in 30 cities, and over 10,000 were arrested, most released without charge but still receiving severe beatings. J. Edgar Hoover cut his eyeteeth in these raids. The newly-formed Communist Party was violently attacked along with the IWW and SP. Still, ten months later Gene Debs got almost a million votes running from a jail cell for president. In '24 the SP joined forces with almost all the non-Communist left behind La Follette and the Progressive Party, polling nearly five million votes; but the coalition quickly collapsed.

By the mid-1920s both the IWW and the Socialist Party were beyond repair, crippled not only by the government, by goon squads and by the AFL right-wing bureaucracy, but by internal feuds, by feuds with each other and with the Communists.

COOPERATIVE LEAGUE

The Cooperative League of the USA was founded in 1916 in Boston, as an umbrella organization to unite and develop the movement, with the Rochdale version of the cooperative commonwealth as their goal. With the leadership of James Warbasse, they set their first step to try to unite the then-thriving store systems with the farmer cooperative federations. "Cooperative (farm supply) purchasing and consumers' cooperation are one and the same thing." But the farmer cooperators rejected the League's program of socialization of the land (through purchase by gigantic cooperative corporations), which would inevitably lead to the farmers' eventual transformation into employees. It was not until 1934, the height of the depression, that the merger would be accomplished, at the ideological price of the "cooperative commonwealth."

In 1916 AFL affiliates in several industries began organizing Rochdale co-ops on a large scale. Miners (coal, copper, and iron) from Minnesota to West Virginia; textile workers in New England; railroad workers across half the country. Most were organized separate from the unions themselves; the United Mine Workers, however, ran them directly. By '21 there were 70 UMW branches, run by miner committees. But two years later they were destroyed by financial maneuvers and arson. In the depression of '21-'23, almost all the union coops went down, and the AFL became much more guarded in support.

The Farmer-Labor Exchange, based in Chicago, was organized in '22 just as many stores were going down. Over the next decade they marketed produce, coal, and other products through unions and coops.

In the early 20th century there were hundreds of cooperative stores in the US. In the far west the Pacific Coast Cooperative Union, the California Rochdale Company, and the Pacific Cooperators League operated wholesales with many affiliated stores. In the northeast was the Right Relationship League. Many immigrant groups ran cooperatives in the east and mid-west, including Finnish, Swedish, Czech, German, Lithuanian, Jewish, Polish, French and Belgian. In the northwest was the Cooperative Wholesale of America. The National Cooperative Association was the first attempt to create a nationwide wholesale operation.

SEATTLE GENERAL STRIKE

Around Seattle between 1917 and '19 there was a great mushrooming of cooperatives. Many were connected with unions. The Consumer Cooperative Association, the largest group, ran eight groceries, a coal yard, and two tailor shops. Less than two weeks after the armistice ending World War One, 35,000 AFL shipyard workers in Seattle struck to raise wages for the lower-paid unskilled. The government sent a secret telegram to the yard owners telling them to resist any raise. But the messenger carrying it delivered it to the union "by mistake." In response all the city's unions voted sympathetic strike. The cooperatives provided much help during the general strike. For a week the workers ran the city through the Central Labor Council, providing all the necessities of survival. This was one of America's great worker cooperations. Besides the existing cooperatives adding their forces, workers in each trade and industry organized themselves and made contributions. Twenty-one eating places were set up around town and 30,000 meals a day served to whomever needed one. Milkwagon drivers obtained milk from small farmers and distributed it. Garbage, hospitals, even barbers and steamfitters re-opened under worker control. The Labor War Veteran's Guard patrolled the streets keeping order without using force. "...95 percent of us agree that the workers should control the industries," the *Seattle Union Record*, a union-owned paper, stated. "Some of us think we can get control through the Cooperative movement, some of us think through political action, and others think through industrial action...If the

strike continues, Labor may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities, UNDER ITS OWN MANAGEMENT. And that is why we say we are starting on a road that leads—NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!" But faced with a military confrontation and tremendous pressure from the AFL International headquarters, the General Strike Committee finally voted to go back. Almost immediately the union press, the Socialist Party and IWW were raided and many arrested, although the IWW and the SP had not even led the strike. In 1920 the Seattle Consumer Cooperative Association, under tremendous pressure, collapsed, followed by most of the cooperatives in the area.

Depression hit the country hard, and by the end of 1921 almost every chain and federation went bankrupt; by the mid-'20s there were few cooperative stores anywhere in the US.

FARM BUREAU FARMERS' UNION

After defeating the People's Party and wrecking the Alliance, big business moved to prevent a new populist uprising and to break the traditional small farmer—wage-earner alliance. One way they tried to do this was by co-opting the farmer cooperative movement. They moved to reorganize the movement on a "business" basis, getting small and larger farmers into the same cooperatives, while numerically depleting the small farmer class.

Between 1900 and 1914 "farmer institutes," part of the new Department of Agriculture "extension" program of "education," organized many farmer cooperatives. In 1911 the earliest Farm Bureau was set up in Broome County, New York, by the local Chamber of Commerce, a railroad, and the federal government, as simply part of the Chamber of Commerce, to "educate" the farmers on capitalist business methods. They hired a "county agent" to do the work. This system quickly spread, funded by a Rockefeller endowment, by railroads and businessmen's associations. In 1914 it was recognized by federal law and put into nationwide practice. Organizing a Farm Bureau was made a prerequisite for the government installing a county agent in most states. The Bureaus included all farmers, rich and poor. They were given member control, but under supervision.

The Farm Bureau, by allying small and larger farmers, served to prevent the former from uniting with wage-earners for independent political action. The larger farmers, employers themselves, had no basic class interests different from employers in the production industries. These led the Bureau to become the bitter foe to farm labor it is today. Meanwhile farms had to be ever more mechanized to survive. Small farmers of one decade often found themselves to be wage-earners in the next.

Although the government and chambers of commerce tried to restrict the Farm Bureaus to education, locals had member-control, and in many poorer areas began

to take a head of their own, and organized cooperatives directly. Soon locals formed state federations and in 1919 they created a national structure "as an instrument to solve marketing problems on a nationwide cooperative plan." For several years a somewhat radical group gained control of the new Federation, and joined with the Farmers' Union in the depression of the early '20s to try to create a national centralized marketing system of various commodities, with the goal of gaining market control; but after three years their system collapsed. The federal government quickly stepped in with "assistance" in setting up a nationwide system under a board chaired by a big manufacturer, dropping the goal of market control, while conservatives took over the Farm Bureau Federation.

The Society of Equity, begun in 1902, had over 40,000 members in 400 locals by 1920, mostly in the northwest; but like the Farm Bureau it included larger as well as small farmers, giving it a different character from the earlier cooperative movements.

The Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union was first organized at the same 1902 harvest, and also grew strong through the mid-'20s. But the Farmers' Union was patterned after the old Alliance and renewed the militant small farmer tradition. By 1920 it covered the cotton belt, the mid-west and the west coast, organizing purchasing, marketing, credit, grain elevators and stores. Together with the Grange and a few newer organization, they are among the most progressive small farmer organizations today.

The number of independent farmer cooperatives was growing enormously. In 1890 there were about a thousand of these, most patterned after the Alliance "state agencies" (about 700 dairy, 100 each of grain, vegetables, and fruit); by 1915 there were over 12,000 mostly in regional federations. But in the early '20s a large number went down.

The 1900s brought enormous changes to rural America. The last years of the 19th century brought telephones—many cooperative—and free mail delivery. By 1910 autos were widespread; by '20 there would be a good highway network across most of the country. The first rural electrical cooperative was formed in 1914; within a decade these had brought electricity to numerous areas of the US. In the same period the full effects of mechanized farming were first felt. Meanwhile the percentage of workers in farming declined drastically. While in 1875 agricultural workers made up half the workforce, by 1900 they were down to one-third; by 1920 they would be one-fourth, by '30, one-fifth. Small farmers were continually losing their land and becoming proletarianized. In the South three out of four labored under the yoke of tenant-farming, share-cropping or cash-lien. Farm labor was replacing the farm family as the basic mode of agricultural production.

NON-PARTISAN LEAGUE

In 1911 North Dakota farmers set up Equity Cooperative Exchange, for marketing. But when big

business refused them trading rights on the Grain Exchange, they decided to go into politics like their predecessors to try to clear the way. At first many were members of the Socialist Party, but when the SP decided against mass recruitment of farmers in 1914 (ironically because it had been too successful too quickly, and threatened to alter the nature of their party), a group led by A.C. Townley broke away and formed the Non-Partisan League. By 1918 they'd won the governorship and control of both state legislative houses, and began to enact their program of state-run elevators, packing plants, flour mills, a state bank. But in the depression of 1921 the bank and a number of their industries failed financially. Private banks refused help. In '22 the League almost entirely collapsed; but during the '30s it revived and returned to power during the worst depression years. The League also had strength in adjoining states, but never became dominant. In power it found that it could never really achieve its goals as long as it was an island in a national capitalist market economy, and its projects remained subject to the fluctuations and coercions of the market. (A similar progression was followed by these grain-growers' cousins just over the border in Canada: the struggles of cooperators led to the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which took over the government of Saskatchewan in '44 and united with the Canadian Labour Congress in 1961 to form the New Democratic Party, today still vying for national power.)

LLANO DEL RIO

During this period a number of cooperative communities were formed.

In 1906 Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, founded a commune in New Jersey, Helicon House, which was destroyed by fire after only two years. Sinclair would go on to lead the EPIC movement in California in '33.

Llano del Rio Co-operative Colony was organized in 1914 on a large plot of land about 45 miles north of Los Angeles. One of its main founders was Job Harriman, who had been Debs' running mate in the 1900 national election and in 1911 narrowly missed being elected as LA's first Socialist mayor. A year after its founding Llano had 150 members and by 1917, about a thousand. It operated a print shop, a shoemaking shop, cannery, laundry, machine shop, blacksmith, rug factory, soap factory, fish hatchery, as well as cattle, hogs, rabbits, a bakery, a cabinet shop, brick makers and many other shops, crops and industries. But they were continually harassed by authorities, had constant organizational and managerial problems, let themselves grow too large too fast, found they had over-extended themselves and did not have the water to support themselves in this location. In 1917 they found new land in Louisiana and the next year, while the Socialist Party was being torn apart for its opposition to World War I, left California and founded New Llano. There they had their ups and downs, finally disbanding in 1936. Llano sold shares, like the old Greeley system, and this, along with its

managerial structure and internal factionalism, was part of its undoing; even more, its failure simply reflected that of the mass movement.

Another socialist community similarly structured, Fellon, was begun in 1916 in Nevada, but quickly collapsed with the war.

Japanese immigrants formed the cooperative colony of Livingston in California in 1910. They did so well that they both scared and inspired state planners, who began proposing that the state set up colonies of non-Japanese nearby.

Returning veterans from World War I were militantly demanding a share of America's wealth and land. This led, in California, to two cooperative land settlements in 1919, Durham and Delhi, under the auspices of the state government and with the planning of the state university. But the land was very poor, and turned out to be not capable of supporting the colonists. The sites had been chosen with the racist side motivation of using colonies to limit the expansion of Japanese immigrant farmers in the area. The economic planning of the "experts" was equally poor, and the post-war deflation brought the colonies to ruin. They finally disbanded in '31, as the country was sinking toward the bottom of depression.

In the mid-20s there were at least two urban cooperative complexes set up in New York City: Hudson View Gardens and the United Workers Cooperative Colony. The Gardens were founded by an immigrant German doctor in '24; besides 354 apartments, the cooperative operated a commissary, laundry, restaurant, barber and tailor shops, and other services; they continue today, by local standards "middle class." The Workers Colony was organized in '27 in the Bronx by a group connected with the Communist Party; they were the largest co-op housing project in the country, with 743 apartments and many service and buying cooperatives; with the depression came foreclosure, but the residents retained management control until '43.

The Theosophist movement ran three communal schools in California between 1897 and the mid-1930s. Helena Blavatsky, co-founder, had belonged for a while to a Bellemite Nationalist Club. Two of the communal schools were organized theocratically, but the third, Halycon, was run on democratic principles; there were clashes among them. Theosophists were active in the EPIC movement.

The Come-Outers were a religious congregation who separated from the rest of society onto Lopez Island in Puget Sound in 1912 as a communal sect of 175 members.

Pisgah Grande was an evangelical pentecostal commune in California between 1914 and '21. Among their many undertakings was a "freestore," similar in essence to those of the mid-1960s.

COMMUNIST PARTY

The Russian Revolution turned the socialist movement around in the US, as it did throughout the world. For

the first time a radical socialist group gained real state power. Widespread cooperatives played an important role in the revolutionary process, and for a while were almost the only economic sector functioning; but a new type of organization was serving as the primary cell of revolution, the workers' council. The Socialist Party of America welcomed the Bolsheviks' triumph, and when the Communist ("Third") International was organized in 1919, asked to be admitted as the US member party. But the Bolsheviks demanded that all parties: re-organize on their system of "democratic-centralism," with semi-military discipline; subordinate to their own International Central Committee; give up all participation in elections; and lead their working classes to take power "at once" through "mass action" and establish "proletarian dictatorships." When the SP leadership refused, still committed to democratic socialism through elections, the Comintern rejected them and called on the left-wing of the party to either take over or destroy them and form a new party. The left-wing of the SP, young and idealistic, jumped in with great energy and began winning control of locals all over the country. There were about 110,000 members at this time. The old guard struck back, expelled 40,000 members, suspended 30,000 more, and invalidated the elections. Angered at this undemocratic procedure, many additional members quit, and by 1921 the SP was down to 25,000 members and slipping fast.

Many of these former members and former Wobblies quickly organized themselves into two parties: the Communist Labor Party, an open mass party of mostly American-born, and the Communist Party, a cadre organization of mostly Russian immigrants, each with about 35,000 members. Both participated in the great post-war strike wave, and organized workers' councils in many cities, with most success in Portland, Butte and Seattle. But the government raids of 1919 destroyed the councils, drove both parties underground, and decimated their membership. The parties joined forces, down to about 10,000, reorganized on the Bolshevik system and affiliated with the Comintern. Ironically, by that time the Bolsheviks had given up the call for immediate revolution, in favor of the old Second International strategy of working in the unions and participating in elections; the new American CP found themselves quickly doing these very things they had violently denounced. Still, unlike the SP (or the SLP), the CP worked secretly in the unions; it was this, together with their domination by the Comintern (until it was dissolved in '43), that made them so susceptible to conspiracy charges. They quickly fell into the role of apologists for almost any act of the Bolsheviks. Meanwhile the Soviet Union was hardening into a highly centralized state run by the Party; with militarized compulsory labor, the "proletariat" was enormously broadened instead of abolished, no longer employees to private bosses but to the all-enveloping state, with "workers' control" relegated to mean indirect control over managers instead of direct collective democracy in the workplace. This is what the American Communist Party wound up pointing to

as the prototype of "socialism" in place of the ultra-democracy of the Paris Commune and a free democratic cooperative commonwealth.

While Wm. Z. Foster, former Wobbly and leader of the organization of Great Steel, was running for president on the Communist Party, assisted by his wife Esther, whom he'd met at Home Colony, another comrade from the old IWW and from Home, Bill Haywood, was going off into separationist communalism to escape persecution. He joined with 200 other American citizens to found Kuzbas Colony in 1924 in revolutionary Russia, only to clash almost immediately with the new "workers' state," resulting in "Big" Bill's expulsion and in many other colonists choosing to leave. Meanwhile another American separationist group was forming Seyatel (Seattle) Commune in the Caucasus, with 87 members; in the 1930s they were reorganized into a collective farm and today are a farming community of about 1500.

THE CP AND THE CL

Throughout the '20s the CP was deeply involved in the consumer cooperative movement, organized and led many co-ops, and became a strong force in the Cooperative League. Under its influence, the CL congress of '24 proclaimed the co-op movement to be part of the general labor movement, with the goal of "cooperation of all workers' movements for the benefit of the exploited toilers," over objections of the conservative board. The CP's greatest strength in consumer co-ops was in the East, in Jewish enclaves, and in the Lake Superior region, among immigrant Finns. The Finnish groups formed for a while a dominant section in the regional Cooperative Central Exchange; twenty of their member co-ops were aligned with the CP: five in Michigan, eleven in Minnesota, and four in Wisconsin. But the Cooperative League conservative wing moved to purge the Communists from their organization. In the League congress of '28 they were able to make pass a resolution affirming the Rochdale movement's "traditional neutrality in politics," and banning and further discussion of "Communist, Socialist, and other political and economic theories." Two years later the Cooperative Central Exchange conservatives forced the Communist co-ops out of the wholesale, causing the latter's economic strangulation; at the League congress later that year, the CP co-ops were stonewalled out, leaving the League dominated by "pure and simple" cooperators. This purge paved the way for the 1934 alliance between farmer and store systems. The League dropped its original goal of socialization of the land and changed its policy to support of individual ownership, replacing "the cooperative commonwealth" in its program with "the cooperative sector of the economy," and redefining the basic aim of the movement "not to supercede other forms of business but to see that they are kept truly competitive." Thus they bought a truce with big business. With the alliance, National Cooperatives, the farmers' nation-wide wholesaling, distributing and manufacturing organization, set up five years previously, was opened to urban stores. Today the League remains the major umbrella organization of Rochdale-structured cooperatives.

7. From the Bottom (1930-'60)

In the '30s there were large numbers of small semi-visible cooperatives. "Self-help" cooperatives, mutual-aid and barter became widespread. Exchanges between laborers and farmers, work for produce, became part of daily life in many areas across the country.

In Seattle the Unemployed Citizen's League organized larger scale mutual-aid. Through them the fishermen's union found boats for the unemployed to use cooperatively; local farmers gave unmarketable fruit and vegetables over to their members to pick; they gained the right to cut firewood on scrub timberland. The League had 22 local commissaries around the city, where this food and firewood was used to exchange for every type of service and commodity, from home repairs to doctor bills.

The Unemployed Exchange Association (UXA), in northern California, brought together 1500 into a self-help producer-consumer cooperative, providing members with farm produce, medical and dental benefits, auto repair, housing and other services. For exchange it used its own scrip. It ran a foundry, a machine shop, and lumber mills in Oroville and the Santa Cruz mountains.

By the end of 1932 there were similar "self-help" organizations in 37 states with over 300,000 members. But the limitations of trying to subsist from the scraps of a collapsing society were too great, and most soon shut down.

In Pennsylvania unemployed coal miners formed cooperative teams to seize their means of survival. They dug coal on company property, trucked it out and sold it. It has been estimated that at least 20,000 miners were involved. Company police trying to stop them were met with force; not a jury in the state was willing to convict them.

In the Pacific Northwest, several cooperative plywood factories were started. They made it through very difficult times and today there are eighteen of them, producing about 12% of the plywood in the US. They are structured with workers electing managers to oversee the operation but leaving the workers much control. They have given themselves salaries 35% higher than workers in capitalist factories, better safety conditions, health and dental care, lunches, insurance paid by the cooperative, gasoline at wholesale rates, and other side benefits.

NEW DEAL

In 1932 small farmers and wage-earners joined once again into their traditional alliance, and together won the New Deal. There was a resurgence of the left parties too, with Thomas getting almost 900,000 on the Socialist ticket and Foster 100,000 on the Communist; this election marked the end of serious national electoral threats from the left until Wallace got a million votes on the Progressive ticket in '48.

One of the New Deal's first acts set up a Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, providing technical assistance and grants to cooperatives and barter associations. In some, the cooperators were able to receive pay for producing articles for their own use. Their rural program of "community projects" included setting up cooperative industries such as a wood mill, a tractor assembly plant, a paint factory and hosiery mills. But the program was underfinanced and the industries usually met with antagonism and often sabotage from their local business "communities."

Within a year three subsistence homestead colonies were in partial operation in the southwest. Casa Grande, Arizona was the largest. The land was farmed through a centralized cooperative, while each family had its own subsistence plot. There were cooperative handicrafts, food processing and other forms of mutual-aid. This project, like most other New Deal cooperative projects, was burdened by bureaucratic paternalism and under-capitalization, while being attacked as "socialistic," and was soon discarded.

The New Deal's Farm Security Administration helped organize around 25,000 cooperatives among about 4 million low-income farmers, usually providing loans to get the co-ops started. Besides supply purchasing and product marketing, the FSA backed cooperatives for farm machinery, breeding stock, veterinary services, insurance, water and medical care. The Tennessee Valley Authority organized electricity and fertilizer cooperatives, as well as canneries, mills, dairies and craft cooperatives. In the South were many "lend-leasing" cooperatives, where small farmers leased whole plantations together.

The most significant effect of the New Deal on the farmer cooperative movement was created by Banks for Cooperatives. This became a member-controlled system of financing farmer cooperatives, as well as

telephone and electric cooperatives. After having been set up with government seed-money, the Farm Credit Administration became self-supporting. It is a dominant organization today, and includes twelve banks solely for funding farmer cooperatives.

By '39 half the farmers in the US belonged to cooperatives, and most were large and incorporated. But the movement, along with the number of small farms, was shrinking.

In '37 the New Deal "greenbelt town" project was begun: cooperative villages surrounded by wide belts of common land to be left permanently undeveloped. Sixty were planned, but only three completed by '39, when the project was abruptly shut down and much of it sold off to speculators. The cooperative traditions in the towns remained however, and Greenbelt, Maryland, is today the largest concentration of consumer co-ops in the US.

The Tennessee Valley Authority planned a total regional cooperativization of the area beginning in '37. One of their first projects was to build the town of Norris for employees at the dam. Norris was to become totally cooperative, a demonstration project to train people in cooperative principles to provide leadership for a vast cooperative movement the New Deal projected for the mountain people. But Norris never got past being a government project and a company town.

EPIC

In '33 Upton Sinclair outlined a plan for ending the depression in California, in a widely-distributed pamphlet. His plan, EPIC (End Poverty In California), was to create "land colonies whereby the unemployed may become self-sustaining" in the countryside, while in the cities EPIC would procure "production plants whereby the unemployed may produce the basic necessities required for themselves and for the land colonies, and to operate these factories and house and feed and care for the workers." These two groups, in the cities and countryside, would "maintain a distribution system for the exchange of each others' products. The industries will (constitute) a complete industrial system, a new and self-sustaining world for those our present system cannot employ." It would incorporate the widespread "self-help" cooperatives into the program. The plan's supporters began forming EPIC clubs; in less than a year Sinclair won the Democratic Party nomination for governor, dumping out the "regular" machine. With the slogan Production for Use, Sinclair and EPIC waged an uphill campaign against both the Republicans and the Democratic machine, who joined to defeat him, spending twenty to thirty times as much and controlling virtually every major newspaper and radio station in the state. Still, Sinclair got 38% of the votes while the Progressive candidate received another 13%. But the old machine politics were soon back in the driver's seat.

With the collapse of the campaign, numerous EPIC clubs turned their energies to organizing co-operatives, mostly stores and buying clubs, reviving

the consumer movement. Consumers Cooperative of Berkeley, the largest in the continental US today, with 100,000 members, stemmed from the joining of groups of EPIC and of Finnish immigrant cooperators.

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During the depression many small farmers, particularly Farmers' Union members, turned to radical actions. In '34 blacks and whites in the Arkansas cotton belt, dominated by huge plantations, formed the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union in semi-secrecy. The Union championed cooperatives, organized buying clubs and ran a large cooperative farm. As growers began switching over to wage-labor and evicted tenants land in large numbers, the Union responded with strike, which the growers in turn answered with a reign of terror assisted by the National Guard.



Southern Tenant Farmers' Union

The Catholic Worker Movement organized numerous collective and communal projects beginning in the '30s, including a collective farm in upper New York, which continues today, Tivoli.

Sunrise Community, organized by a Jewish group in 1933 in Michigan, grew to over 300 quickly but collapsed on ideological struggle after three years.

Celo Community, founded in the mountains of North Carolina in '37 by a group of cooperative-socialists, continues today.

Bayard Land Community was begun in 1936 in Pennsylvania, with 17 families homesteading on community-owned land, practicing cooperation and mutual-aid, and trying to be ecologically sound. Connected with the community was the School of Living, organized by Ralph Borsodi. Out of the School and Bayard came a number of cooperative communities in the early 1940s: Van Houten Fields and Skyview Acres in New York State, Bryn Gweled and Tanguy Homesteads in Pennsylvania, May Valley Cooperative Community in Washington State, Melbourne Village in Florida. All of these are still functioning successfully, ranging in size from about ten to fifteen families apiece. In the late 1960s a new generation of School of Living communities would be born.

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The '30s were a time of great workers' struggles. In 1934, the San Francisco general strike; '36 the sit-down strike—factory occupation—to organize General Motors and the wave of sit-downs that followed across the country; '37 was the organization of Little Steel. Socialists, Communists and former Wobblies were among the leadership of all of them, helping win social security, unemployment insurance, accident compensation, aid to the needy, employees' right to organize, and helping lead the organization of the giant industrial unions of the CIO, probably American labor's greatest triumph.

Nevertheless, the socialist movement in the US was falling apart. This can be attributed partly to the repression, partly to the continued splits, and partly to the failures of the Soviets. The movement fell into a state of great confusion, and lost much of its sense of direction and vision.

Many people had hoped the New Deal would lead ultimately to a form of democratic socialism, but Roosevelt's programs served to strengthen monopoly capitalism in the end. "Bread and butter" demands were acceded to, heading off any mass independent movement of wage-earners and small farmers, while radicals were assimilated and coopted.

Roosevelt's programs were not able to pull the economy out of its depressed state; this happened only when the country geared for war. As in World War I, the government took charge of the economy and it became in effect planned (but for corporate benefit, not for citizens' equal needs).

As soon as the US entered World War II, almost the entire American left enlisted, the opposite of their action in the First World War. The Communists went so far as to disband for the duration, supporting Roosevelt. Ironically, while the American people were fighting for democracy and freedom, American big business was fighting for power and markets. While small farmers and their sons were dying overseas, agribusiness was rising back home: it staged a major attack against the Farm Security Administration, by '44 had it crippled and two years later managed to shut it down. The number of small farms continued to drop. And while unionists and their sons and daughters were dying overseas, rightists stayed behind and took control of the unions. As soon as the war was over, big business launched the "cold war," purging the few remaining militants out of the unions entirely, instituting anti-communist oaths, kicking thousands out of jobs and blacklisting many thousands more. Federal troops brought the great post-war strike wave to a cold stop. The Taft-Hartley Act, written by the National Association of Manufacturers, virtually repealed the New Deal's Wagner Act, went far towards destroying internal union democracy, and paralyzed the movement.

Like Northern veterans returning home after the Civil War, veterans returning home after World War II

often didn't know what hit them: after bleeding for freedom and democracy, they often found wage-slavery waiting for them. The unions they'd fought so hard to win were now often being used against them.

The Attorney General declared hundreds of organizations "subversive"; a million members were kicked out of the CIO as the right wing took control and merged with the AFL; Eisenhower gave away huge amounts of public land, resources, plants and power installations to corporations, while discharging 7,000 government workers as "security risks." Under the Internal Security Act freedom of speech was restricted and the FBI authorized to compile lists of "risks" to be rounded up "in event of a national emergency."

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There was a boom in stores during World War II, and many farm-supply regionals began handling groceries too. The United Auto Workers in Detroit and the United Rubber Workers in Akron organized store systems. But with the war's end consumer-goods prices dropped, and there were widespread failures, including several mid-western regional wholesales and the UAW group. This rise and fall followed a pattern similar to that around World War I.

By 1950 there were very few consumer or industrial cooperatives anywhere in the US.

Religious communalists continued however to turn away from mass society and form communities, many of which survive today.

The Vale, in Ohio, was founded in 1940 by a group of fifteen families, mostly Quaker, committed to co-operation on common land.

Koinonia Farm was begun in '42 not far from Plains, Georgia, practicing "partnership" cooperative farming on communal land, surplus income from each member's crops going into a communal fund. When they took in their first black members in '57, they were met with physical and economic violence. About 60 strong, they still hang on.

Zion's Order, in Missouri, begun in '52 by a group of Hutterite background, is now an interracial community of about 40.

The Bruderhof, a Christian group in the Hutterite tradition, formed in 1920 in Germany, fled Hitler, and immigrated to the US in 1954; today they have large communes in upper New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut; unlike most earlier immigrant anabaptist groups, they take in outsiders, and are today made up of people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Reba Place Fellowship was founded in '57 by a group of Mennonites, and is today a community of about 250 living as an extended family neighborhood in Evanston, Illinois.

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It may have looked to an observer in the late '50s that American capitalism would remain without serious challenge for a long time to come. But the 1960s were just around the corner.

8. The Cycle Turns Again (1960-'80)

(Note: This chapter will differ from the previous ones in that the author was a participant in some of the movements of these years, so the following will be partly an eyewitness account, rather than strictly scholarship, and for that reason I ask the reader's indulgence; future historians invariably view a period differently than did those who lived it; events that go almost unnoticed at the time are often seen decades and centuries later as of world-shaking importance, while the same day's headlines commonly become scarcely footnotes.)

Farm workers were still almost totally unorganized when the National Farm Workers Association (soon to become the UFW) was formed in 1962. Among its first acts was to set up community mutual-aid associations, among which were a cooperative store and a credit union in Delano, California. Full-time boycott workers usually lived in union-run communal houses.

The Poor People's Corporation was organized in Jackson, Miss., by a former field worker of the then-active SNCC in '65. Within four years they were running thirteen producer cooperatives and a marketing co-op, producing sewing, leather- and wood-crafts and candles, with over 800 members, mostly former sharecroppers.

The 1964-'65 black voter registration drives and the Selma to Montgomery "march for Freedom" led by M.L. King had one result in the formation of the South West Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association. Within a few years it included 1800 families, making it the largest agricultural co-op in the South. Originally eight of the families were white. But harassment by racist politicians and businessmen followed, and banks and suppliers refused to deal with them until the whites withdrew.

The "inter-communalist" Black Panther Party organized a host of "survival programs pending political revolution." In Oakland, these included distribution of free shoes (from their own factory), clothing, food, health care, plumbing repair, pest control, and transportation for the aged. Communal houses provided survival for party workers; they promoted cooperative housing for the community.

La Cooperativa Agricola del Pueblo de Tierra Amarilla was formed in 1967 by twenty families in northwestern New Mexico, in the wake of the armed raid on the local courthouse by the Alianza de Mercedes, in an attempt to secure the return of stolen ejidos

(guaranteed by US treaty to traditional groups of cooperative settlers). They pooled over 600 acres of land for collective farming and grazing, for self-consumption. They soon had a clinic, law office, job service and shoe store.

"DROPCITY: To sponsor and create the avant garde of civilization, utilizing all the remnants, at least of art, science, technology, etc."

The Drop City Newsletter, 1966

The Community for Non-Violent Action, deeply connected with the Committee of the same name (developed in the late '50s in opposition to the spread of nuclear weapons and plants), organized a communal farm of their 40 acres in Connecticut during the '60s and took in many draft opponents and resisters during the war; in '68 they were attacked by a squad of armed "Minutemen," but held their own during a pitched battle.

"We create the seeds of the new society in the struggle for the destruction of the empire. For our generation that has meant the birth of communalism and collective work in the most individualist, competitive society in the world. Revolution is the midwife bringing the new society into being from the old."

Weather Underground, 1974

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COLLECTIVES

Today we are in the midst of a great upsurge in cooperatives and cooperation in America. Beginning in the mid-'60s, many thousands moved out of the cities into rural cooperative communities and communes; many tens of thousands stayed in their own communities and worked to create a survival network outside of and against the capitalist system, with a common ideological base of working to build a new social system based on cooperation and sharing "within the shell of the old." At first the mass media called it the "counterculture" or "alternative." Although most of its participants, the author included, did not know it at the time, it was stemming from one of America's oldest and deepest traditions, while we thought we'd come upon something new.

The earliest rumblings probably came with the "left's" re-discovery of the collective form of organization during the early Civil Rights and student movements. A collective is a work group in which all members have equal power and decision is by

consensus (that is, with unanimous consent). A collective can be formed for almost any purpose, short or long term. Many American Indian tribes have traditionally used the collective form in their councils. Kids all over the world naturally form collectives to play games. Groups such as the Quakers and Mennonites have used the collective form for hundreds of years. It is the traditional form of the anarchist **affinity group**. A collective is unbureaucratic, anti-hierarchical, based on the most direct participatory democracy and genuine equality. It gained great popularity and stimulated the movement so much because it helped break through the type of formalistic "democracy" that too often turned out to be a sham, both in its capitalist form and in its "democratic-centralist" form. The collective system can create a stronger closer work group than either the majority rule system or the boss-system, and helps prevent factions from forming. In conjunction with councils and committees, collectives have been used as large group organizations, such as the Iroquois Confederacy and some of the "new wave" Food Systems.

From the Civil Rights and student movements, the collective form found its way to the anti-war movement, the New Left, the counterculture, the women's movement, the ecology and anti-nuclear movements. Almost all the early countercultural forms such as freestores, communes, "underground" newspapers "free" schools and universities, collective gardens, cooperative houses and food conspiracies, chose the collective form instinctively. From these developed the organizational technology that laid the base for the industrial worker collectives and collective-cooperatives that have appeared in many areas of America today. Collectives are used to organize almost every activity: from education, childcare, art, communications and counseling, to legal services and recycling.

Collectives doing community service work are often "open," and almost anyone can join or participate. Like the open commune, the open collective has limitations but is irreplaceable for projects that attempt to draw in as much community energy and input as possible.

Most of the participants in these are unpaid volunteers. Worker production collectives, on the other hand, are generally "closed," with membership by invitation.

Some of the early counterculture organizations, such as free clinics, still continue in a number of cities. Free universities gave way to a large variety of "alternative" educational organizations.

The pacific northwest saw a rebirth of its traditional barter fair.

At the same time the older cooperative movements have gone through changes: the consumer cooperative store movement greatly expanded while the farmer movement continued shrinking with cooperatives

merging.

From the first there was inter-connection between the old and new cooperatives and cooperators, and this has been increasing.

COUNTERCULTURE

The roots of the counterculture go back to the late 50s, when young people in cities around the country began moving into inexpensive neighborhoods, creating at first simply loose networks of scattered friends and acquaintances helping each other survive as best they could, joined together by their alienation from the dominant society. Most were also underground cultural centers. Among the earliest were in New York and San Francisco; by 1960 their centers began to move from the "bohemian" and "beat" Greenwich Village and North Beach, over to the lower East Side and the Haight-Ashbury, which became the early nuclei of the "hippie" movement and the counterculture.

Between '65 and '66 cooperative and collective apartments and houses became common, the first underground newspapers appeared, the first rural "open" commune formed. Then the enormous explosion of '67-'68 centered around the Haight: the freestores, free clinics, schools and universities, the Diggers' free food projects, the legal collectives; then the food conspiracies, collective stores, worker collectives and cooperatives. By 1970 there were countercultural organizations around the country.

The basic idea was to withdraw energy from the system of competition and exploitation, and use it to create a new system based on cooperation, which could expand to embrace all of society when the old system collapsed, as many expected imminently.

COMMUNES

The commune movement of the '60s had elements of both separationism and social revolution, both secular and "spiritual." Although there have been communes and cooperative communities in the US throughout its entire history, this was the first time in this century communalism became a mass social movement. This fact reflects a deep rejection of what America had become, an equally deep faith that something better was possible, something more in harmony with the planet and with the best in human nature; and a conviction that if enough of us decided it should happen, we could make it happen. In its separationist aspect it embraced the philosophy of "dropping out," having as little to do with or dependence on capitalism as possible. In its social revolutionary aspect it saw large numbers abandoning the dying cities and moving out onto "liberated" land; this land could serve as a chain of revolutionary bases, where the energy withdrawn from the old system could be used to build a whole new world. There was a millennial atmosphere about the movement at first.

The first "open commune" of the '60s was Drop City, begun in the spring of 1965. One of its founders was from a Kansas Mennonite background and the other

two, New York socialist Russian Jewish. Eugene Debs "Curly" Bensen, Jann Bensen, and Clard Svenson bought a small plot of former goat pasture in southern Colorado, moved onto it and declared it open to anyone to live there with them as a communal family, leaderless in structure, with no preconceived or permanent rules, sharing resources, work, survival. They began building domes to live in; this was the first use of them for community housing. The next year, when the commune had between fifteen and twenty members, myself among them, and several domes completed, we began receiving national attention, first in the underground press, then in the mass media. This publicity touched off the explosion of communes and communities in the following years. Because the domes were a technological innovation arguably better for housing than traditional construction, in a very visible way they came to symbolize a new and better society, of which Drop City's communal social system and collective democracy were the microcosm. The domes also referred back to the ideas of Buckminster Fuller, inventor of the geodesic dome and advocate of the rational use of technology for the common good of the whole people and planet. Drop City was utopian in that its declaration of openness to all people was in direct contradiction to its small physical size, which could not possibly hold very many. But we also advocated the practical course of others starting similar communes and communities, which could be done on a comparative shoestring, as we were doing, on inexpensive land, using scavenged and recycled materials, and connecting with the good will and survival cooperation of the people in the surrounding community.

We made decisions collectively: nothing was considered decided until everyone was satisfied enough to go along with it. This system took into account depths of feeling as well as numbers, unlike the majority-rule system. It worked pretty well, even when the group grew larger (our height was about fifty); there were frustrating times, usually when two individuals had an ego problem, but over all, most things (a couple notable exceptions jump immediately to mind) got straightened out. We treated all except very personal possessions as common property, and had a common clothing room where any traveler in need could be supplied. In the fall of '66 we formed a non-profit corporation to hold the land, with outside friends as officers to look after the long-run preservation of the community, and with the directors changing with the current membership.

From the first, we saw ourselves as part of the growing mass movement that was arising spontaneously all around us, created by the same forces for social change that were forming the other movements of the '60s. There was talk of Drop City as the first of many inter-connected communes around the country, where people could go who wanted out of the old culture and into something better; communes could be decompression chambers from the old into the new society, where the best in people could be freed and permitted to blossom into a truly revolutionary



Drop City

force; they could be test-tube societies of the future and cells of the new society, bases for the spread of these revolutionary ideas as well as bases for the people practicing them. The old oppressive system could die of its own dead weight if a new generation chose not to join.

Communes began quickly sprouting in the southwest and around the country. In New Mexico, Drop South, its spin-off the Lower Farm, and New Buffalo were all begun the following year. They were "open communes" like Drop City, and also very influenced by the Indian Pueblos and the Chicano ejidos.

Tolstoy Farm, in Washington State, had begun earlier in 1963 as a cooperative community based on the principles of Gandhi and Tolstoy. As Brook Farm had been swept up into the Associationist movement, Tolstoy Farm was swept up. It was declared "open land" in '66, and soon had one large communal group and many smaller ones and individuals scattered on the land.

The "open land" concept was different from that of the "open commune." Anyone could move onto the land but there was no communal commitment. Residents could share and cooperate as they chose. The next year Morningstar in Sonoma County, California, was "opened"; nearby Wheeler Ranch followed.

Soon all of these were enormously over-crowded.

Almost all the early communes and open land used the collective consensus system for decision-making (to the degree they had any identifiable system at all). Most tried to retain what was useful and humane from modern technology, while returning as much as possible to basics and to the soil. While most had gardens or farms and small craft industries, probably all maintained outside incomes by members working or by other means. None evidently developed an adequate and reliable source of income.

Many of the communities connected with older cooperative structures in the larger communities in which they were situated. Drop City got its water and electricity from the local cooperatives that had been serving the area for decades. Without the help and mutual-aid of neighbors and friends throughout the local population, we never would have survived as well as we did. Most nearby communities established cooperative relations with each other. Drop City helped New Buffalo with planting and harvesting, for example, and New Buffalo gave us use of their tractor; we shared wholesale buying and members crossed over regularly between groups.

The concept of "openness" started out as a strength in the movement but eventually turned into a weakness. Open communes proved to be generally unlivable in the long run because they were too unstable. Since people did not choose each other, they were often not committed to each other. Not every two people can share the same bathroom and kitchen in peace. The communes attracted not only people willing to work for their survival, but also people looking for free trips.

Within a couple years all the open communes decided to set population limits, declare the land "closed" and begin taking in new members by invitation only.

But the momentum was not lost and by 1968 a new wave appeared. These were mostly closed from the beginning. A similar progression had taken place 140 years earlier: New Harmony had been "open" at first and had attempted to go to the extreme sharing of a commune; when this proved an unworkable combination they retreated to "closed" cooperation. The second wave of communities in both the earlier and the present movement ranged from full communes to land cooperatives.

Among these "second wave" communities were Libre in Colorado, Twin Oaks in Virginia (with an elected managerial system), Reality Construction Company, Morningstar East and Lorien in New Mexico, Mullein Hill in Vermont, Wooden Shoe Farm in New Hampshire, The Farm in Tennessee, Cerro Gordo in Oregon. A new generation of communities inspired by the School of Living sprang up, including Heathcote Center in Maryland and Deep Run Farm in Pennsylvania, both of which helped to develop the land-holding system of the "community land trust," probably the most developed system today, designed to give the community true permanence apart from the individuals participating in it at any given time while retaining member-control.

After the flood of publicity Drop City received in the summer of '67 (the so-called "Summer of Love"), we set a population limit and became in effect a "closed" community. But this did not stop us from being overwhelmed by the unending stream of visitors the publicity brought. While in the early days the main spirit of Drop City had been hard work for collective survival, a carnival atmosphere began to smother us; notoriety brought an easy cash flow, hindering us from developing some self-supporting industry and

becoming a stable extended-family type community, as almost all of the early group had wanted. We had made an early decision never to throw anyone out: this created an impossible situation when an impossible person refused to go; the rest of the group chose to be true to that non-violent commitment when push came to shove. This disharmony over an extended period of time took its toll, and we never recovered the unity of spirit we once had. Curly and Jann left after two years, seeing it had become unlivable for them, and one by one the other early Droppers followed. I left in the summer of '69, after three years. Drop City continued as a commune until 1973, after going through a continual turnover of residents, then was finally abandoned, having never overcome the instability that the "open" concept fostered.

The movement reached a numerical peak around '70 according to one estimate, with about 3500 land cooperatives and communities, but by '78 had declined to about 1000. Still, there are today tens of thousands living in cooperative communities, communes and land cooperatives. The Farm is the largest, with over a thousand members. Twin Oaks, Libre, Mullein Hill, Tolstoy Farm, U and I (Missouri) and Renaissance (Mass.) all continue strong. Twin Oaks together with East Wind and a few smaller communities have formed the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. Drop South, Morningstar, Wheeler and the Lower Farm each lasted only two to four years. Buffalo went through several turnovers, but now seems to have stabilized and is developing a steady income as a dairy farm.

There were deep connections between the early communes and the other movements of the social upheaval of the '60s. They were a haven for draft resisters and formed part of the underground railroad to Canada, a refuge for "criminals" such as under-age runaways. The FBI made regular rounds of them; many were harassed by their local authorities, business establishments and vigilantes; some were bulldozed, some raided.

Many got flack from their surrounding regions because they were seen as a sort of advance-guard for a wave of newcomers squeezing in where there was hardly room already, depressing conditions either because they were willing to work too cheap, or because they didn't seem to work at all and drew foodstamps, welfare, or had no visible means of support. But in general, those communities that made friends and connections in their areas thrived, while those that didn't became isolated in a new type of alienation perhaps as bad as what they were trying to escape.

Drop City and most of the other early communities were pretty spiritual places, although they were basically secular in structure. The same forces that created them, created others outwardly religious and spiritual. Some began to appear that were communal in form but the opposite in spirit. A commune or cooperative community is democratic and equalitarian; these were run autocratically by charismatic "spiritual" leaders. A few of the most bizarre figures

and their "communal" dictatorship-cults hit the headlines in deadly ways. Although the mass media often equated them with the communes, they could not be farther apart; tragically many people were drawn to them in search of community, only to find themselves caught in miniature fascist states. The mixture of mysticism and communalism, like that of mysticism and nationalism, has often led to unfortunate results. Truer spiritual communities however are fortunately much more common; among those coming out of the late '60s are Lama, Renaissance, and The Farm.

Besides these, there are other religious communal traditions in America today, including Hindu (Kripalu Yoga Ashram in Pennsylvania, New Vrindaban Community in California), Buddhist (Karme-Choling Meditation Center, Vermont, Karma Dzong, Colorado), and Sufi (Abode of the Message, in the old Shaker village at New Lebanon, New York).

There is an Islamic tradition paralleling the Christian anabaptist one, hitting the headlines today with the millennial Shiite sect. There is no recognition of a separation of church and state here, as in the modern European tradition; Islam claims to be all-encompassing. The Black Muslims are in this communal tradition and, at one point at least, set their sights on taking over a southwestern state.

Millenarianism is still strong in America, and perhaps on the rise again; a born-again Christian Socialist movement is not unthinkable.

URBAN COLLECTIVES

The counterculture in the cities and towns paralleled that in the countryside.

Many of the early collectives tried to provide basic social services that were not being supplied by capitalist society. The free clinics, law collectives and free schools were mostly formed by young professionals. Others were connected to political movements, like the Young Patriots' clinic in Chicago and the Black Panthers' in Oakland. Most clinics functioned through the collective of physicians, para-professionals and volunteers. Almost all had some combination of control by the worker collective and the community. Most survived through donations and grants.

Freestores were run entirely on collective energy. The idea was simple: people could bring and take what they wanted and needed. The result in many places however turned out to be that most were soon being destroyed by small business people, who would come at favorable hours and clean out anything sellable. Most freestore collectives burned out this way, and the system usually gave way to free boxes scattered around the community, a more efficient method.

The Diggers' system of gathering necessities from where they were bottled up in the community (mostly in stores, often by coercion), and giving them away, also burned out: the need was endless and the strategy limited. Across the Bay, the Panthers in a

more organized way (partly by long boycotts) convinced community businesses to recycle some of their profits back into the community through the Panthers' social projects.

"Alternative" news media grew to mass proportions around the country by the late '60s, filled with information that was impossible to come by in the capitalist media. Besides newspapers, radio collectives were formed in some areas. The organizing force was almost always people with connections to sources of money; but the projects themselves were staffed by people coming from all social classes.

The class problem ran through all countercultural organizations, including rural communities: since it was only people with access to money who could gather the resources, often expensive, to get the projects started, they usually wound up in control at the beginning. In those that succeeded, the founders relinquished control; but many ultimately didn't, and drew in people with comparable backgrounds, giving part of the movement a middle-class orientation.

Communal and cooperative living became an urban as well as rural movement. The main motivations behind it were both to live a more collective life-style and to have affordable housing. Very few communal houses have so far developed into long-term extended families, as some of the early ideologists had hoped; there has usually been continual turnover in collective houses; coupling has not been seriously undermined, but has continued, although sometimes in a looser form than the strictly monogamous couple. (Coupling continued in the rural communes and communities too). Cooperative living became almost the rule among young single people in certain areas by 1970, but the vast majority of the participants have thus far chosen to eventually become part of a couple or biological family household. This pattern did not undercut the collective living movement, which continues, but is now generally recognized as limited to certain periods of peoples' lives, at least at present. However, the structure of a non-sexist cooperating family household, carried over into mainstream society, and today the biological family household is being commonly reorganized on its principles, with partners equal, and work no longer divided by sex-roles. Urban collective living has been limited by the lack of available housing facilities, and the unwillingness of landlords to rent to groups, just as the rural movement has been limited by access to land. The movement was, and continues, deeply motivated by the insight that "the personal is political": in order to change society we must change the ways we relate to each other in our daily lives, many of which changes need not be delayed until **after** a political revolution; on the contrary, "the revolution" has to be waged in daily life today.

A group combining personal and political struggle today is the Movement for a New Society, a network of small autonomous living collectives in seven cities, working for non-violent radical social change. They came out of the anti-war movement in '71 and are

active in the anti-nuclear movement. Their largest center is Philadelphia, with about a hundred members in twenty communal houses in '79.

WORKER COLLECTIVES

The earliest work collectives were mostly connected with radical communication media: presses, bookstores and film; this reflected the movement they were coming out of. They were followed by artisan and industrial collectives and cooperatives beginning around 1970, both in urban and rural areas. These differed from earlier American industrial cooperatives mainly in that they chose worker control through the collective consensus decision-making system over the majority-rule managerial system predominant since the early 19th century; they were not profit-sharing schemes to the degree that they were generally committed to doing good work at fair prices, not whatever the market would bear. Most, although often isolated from other groups, still felt part of a larger movement that would connect further down the road. They differed from communes of course in that the members worked but did not all live together. Like the communes they could be seen as both microcosms and cells of a new potential system, at the same time that they retained an identity as part of the old.

The worker collective is centralized both in terms of the work-process and economically, with each worker paid through the enterprise; the collective-cooperative is decentralized, and simply maintains the means of production which the workers use individually or in sub-groups. The worker collective is adaptable to almost any field, while the collective-cooperative is usable mainly by skilled artisans and craftworkers.

Let me clarify this by personal example. The woodshop I work in was originally organized as a centralized collective. The shop as a whole took in all work and was responsible for it, and we paid ourselves salaries. Later, because it better suited our changed situation, we decided to switch over to a system whereby we are each responsible for a fair share of shop maintenance and expenses, while the economics of any particular job is handled individually by the actual worker or workers. Thus we became a cooperative economically while we retained the collective structure of group organization. The centralized work collective and the collective-cooperative are probably about equally common in the US today.

There are uncountable thousands of these cooperative and collective work groups around the country. Almost all are small. Most were formed with few resources, by the workers involved, in fields that require no great outlay of capital for machinery and raw materials. The workers in many started out semi-skilled. By pooling energy, resources and skill they found they could do together what few could have done alone, gain at least partial independence and freedom from capitalist work-bondage. There are collective and cooperative bakers, teachers, truckers, mechanics, farmers, carpenters, printers, food-handlers, cabinet-makers, taxi-drivers, medical workers, sellers, artists, technicians, machine-opera-

tors, cooks, editors, etc: almost everywhere in production, distribution and services except heavy industries.

They exist under a variety of legal forms: incorporated cooperatives, joint-partnerships, non-profit corporations, unincorporated associations. Many have no legal existence at all, and operate in the fringe areas of the economy. Since capitalist law requires all group "enterprises" to conform to a corporate or partnership structure, the collective structure is forced into an underground existence; most collectives are forced to use an "acceptable" structure as a front.

Cities where the largest concentrations of worker collectives and cooperatives can be found include the San Francisco Bay Area, the Boston area, Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis, New Haven, Austin and Madison.

Not surprisingly, many find that the price of freedom is often very hard work for low pay, at least until a collective or cooperative have got their skills and organization together, since the presence of wage slavery in an area depresses working conditions for cooperative, collective and individual workers too.

Among the earlier work collectives in the Boston area were the New England Free Press, Red Book (store), and Newsreel (films). these were followed by New Hamburger Cabinetworks, Walrus Woodworking and Cambridge Auto Co-op, around 1970. Today there are over fifty worker collectives in and around Boston.

Besides real worker collectives and cooperatives, phony ones cropped up too: these were often formed by young businesspeople with a small amount of idealism and not quite enough capital to get their businesses off the ground. To compensate, they would try to exploit the efficiency of collective labor, and attempt to convince workers to accept low salaries in exchange for a certain amount of collective control of their job situations. The owners would likewise accept a low salary, but also retain the growing capital of the enterprise, which would eventually accrue into a large amount if it were a success. Almost all of these have wound up with the workers rebelling and the enterprise quickly dropping any collective pretense.

In Berkeley-Oakland, one of the earliest collectives was Taxi Unlimited, collectivized in 1965, in time to play a role in the Free Speech Movement; others included Build (carpentry), Uncle Ho's Mechanix Rainbow, Movement Motors, Alternative Food Store, and the Cheeseboard, all formed between '70 and '72. Today there are over 150 collectives and collective-cooperatives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Bay Warehouse Collective, where I worked, was founded in Berkeley, California in 1972. As a centralized collective we ran an auto repair shop, a print shop, and a woodshop out of a large warehouse. All shop income went to the central collective, which paid workers a salary based partly on need. At its height Bay had about 35-40 members, and also operated a pottery shop, a food conspiracy, a theater, an electronics shop, a collective garden, and let space



Bay Warehouse Collective

to a legal collective. Bay was formed out of the wreckage of an "alternative" trade high school (Bay High) formed in 1970. The school was nominally structured as a democratic collective, but a sharp struggle soon developed between shop workers and academic workers (who were also the legal administrators) over real control and over the academic workers' refusal to do manual maintenance work. The shop workers took over, disbanded the school and, shortly after I joined, we organized the Collective.

Each shop made internal decisions that affected its separate functioning, as a smaller collective inside the larger one; new members were taken in by each separate shop. We were about equally divided between women and men, with men in the majority in auto and wood, women in the majority in print. There was a lot of struggle revolving around sexism; the women were very supportive of each other, and only the men who were seriously trying to struggle with the problems were around for very long. Our average skill level was not high: far too many were scarcely beyond an apprentice level; but together we combined our knowledge, corrected each other's mistakes, and turned out reasonably professional work.

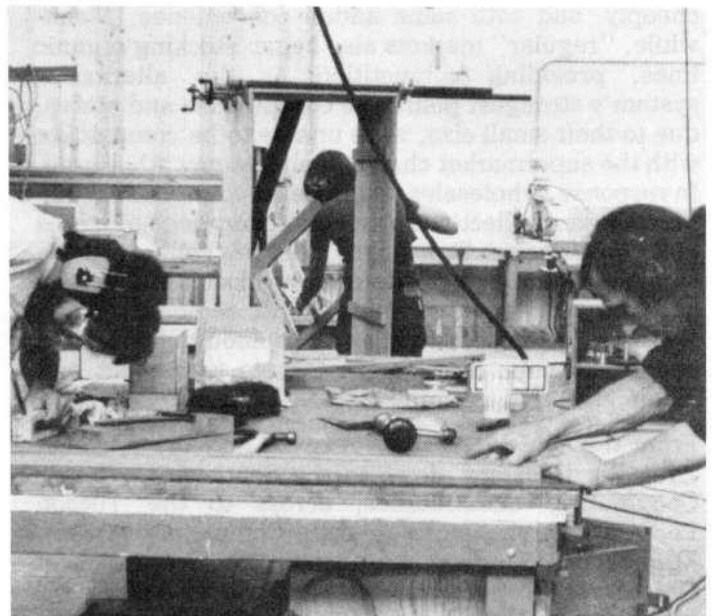
The print shop did a lot of work for many progressive groups in our area, some free, some almost free; all three shops contributed our skills to the community at times, and gave many people supervised access to tools.

Like most countercultural organizations, there was no one ideology, at least in words: the organization itself contained most of the ideas. For some it was enough to work in a non-bossist non-sexist shop, although salaries were pathetically low; others saw us

becoming more communal and buying large houses to live in, eventually branching out into the country; others saw us growing large and strong enough to become—in federation with other collectives and cooperatives—a challenge to the capitalist order, with the final goal to be able to do our work for where it was most needed by society, not for those who could afford it.

We did not have a share system; the ongoing collective and not individuals "owned" the capital: members who left had no claim to a share, and new members did not have to "buy in." This was in effect a machine and tool "trust," and functioned to stabilize the Collective in the same way a land trust stabilizes a community, giving it a life of its own.

But the warehouse we inherited from the school was too costly for our needs and abilities; we simply did not find ways to make our energy outflow flow back to us transformed into enough dollars to provide for our needs and pay our exorbitant rent, so we folded after a year and a half. Yet we did not really fail. We disbanded the larger Collective into three autonomous worker collectives, each of which found a smaller space. The printshop retained its centralized collective structure. The autoshop became a joint-partnership. The woodshop became a collective-cooperative. Inkworks, CarWorld and Heartwood all continue today.



Three other industrial collectives started in part by former Bay people are Nexus, Seven Sisters and Coastfork Artisans Guild (in Cottage Grove, Oregon), all doing woodworking and construction. There are probably others.

Worker collectives and cooperatives have become an accepted part of the American scene in many places. They keep a vision of a different and feasible system alive in daily practice, while providing survival for their members free of wage-slavery (but not however free of landlords and the market), and offer part of a

strategy for deep social change. They represent the embedding of the counterculture in the working population; their ultimate revolutionary meaning is workers' control and self-management.

FOOD SYSTEMS

Collectives and cooperatives connected with food cut across rural-urban lines, became the most interconnected, the most developed ideologically, and had the most far-reaching effects of all the countercultural organizations. In the late '60s buying clubs—"food conspiracies," as they were called in many places—were formed in cities and towns across the country. Most were based on member energy and labor requirements, and run through democratic and collective systems. Many were connected with small local and regional organic farms, and made "natural" foods available in their areas for the first time, while providing the farms needed outlets. Between five and ten thousand were formed across the country by '75. In the early '70s "new wave" co-op stores began appearing, run by worker collectives, many stemming from conspiracies. They differed from the earlier stores in that they were non-managerial; in some the worker collective comprised the entire membership, while in others workers and member-customers shared control. When stores began appearing in an area, the conspiracies generally took a dive, as most of the same products were being provided almost as cheaply, and with some added convenience. Meanwhile, "regular" markets also began stocking organic lines, providing competition at the alternative system's strongest point; the conspiracies and stores, due to their small size, were unable to be competitive with the supermarket chains in almost any other area. In response, wholesales began being formed, some by independent collectives, some by federations of stores and conspiracies. Trucking collectives connected the whole into broad interlocking networks on both coasts and the mid-west. City-wide and regional "Food Systems" attempted to grow large enough to create a stable economic base for the whole movement and viable alternatives to the capitalist chains.

From the Seattle Workers' Brigade and the Portland Area Food System, down to the Southern California Cooperating Communities, across to the Tucson Peoples' Warehouse, the Austin Community Project, Minneapolis Peoples' Warehouse, the Federation of Ohio River Cooperatives (extending over a six state area), and the New England People's Cooperatives, the Food System soon stretched coast to coast.

The Food System movement, based in "new wave" wholesales and regional federations around the country, became central to the entire counterculture movement, and as such was the center of ideological struggle over the aims and strategy of the movement by the mid-70s. Some saw the movement as primarily part of an overall struggle against the capitalist system, thought that it should be focused to serve the working population basically, should be anti-profit,

and that the movement's capital should not be "privately" owned, neither by groups of workers or consumers. Others saw the movement as primarily economic and serving all classes, with "ownership" remaining decentralized in worker and consumer groups, which could decide questions of "profit" or "non-profit" as they saw fit. There were not two clear-cut camps, as each organization had its own variation of worker vs. consumer control, federation vs. centralization, etc., and there were often different viewpoints within the same organization.

The mid-70s were a time of crisis for Food Systems around the country; when many small collectives and cooperatives attempted to federate into larger organizations, they came up against the problem of how to grow large enough to be economically viable without becoming managerial bureaucracies like many of the co-ops started in the 30s; this together with the economic recession and runaway inflation, caused most to remain on shaky foundations.

The Austin Community Project was begun in '72 to develop alternative distribution of natural foods. In three years it expanded to include two co-op stores, two buying clubs, four organic farms, and collectives doing distribution, baking, canning, recycling, a restaurant, etc., with 1,000 to 1,500 members. But in '76 the Project collapsed from over-extension and disbanded, many of the member groups along with it; but others carry on.

In Seattle the Workers' Brigade, formed in '74, brought together a group of collectives including ones doing baking, food distribution, bookkeeping and a maintenance and trucking collective into a joint organization; it nearly collapsed a year later but stayed alive and continues today too.

Some, like the Federation of Ohio River Cooperatives and the Arcata (Ca.) Co-op, became consumer-owned and collectively operated, combining worker control and social responsibility in a democratic manner.

A few, such as the San Francisco Common-Operating Warehouse, took a democratic-centralist structure. Democratic-centralism means elected and recallable representatives forming a central directing committee with a wide latitude of power, its majority decisions binding on all members.

Democratic-centralism, when it is true, combines (hierarchical) democracy with efficiency; all too often however groups have called themselves this when in reality they were merely centralist, with no structure making leadership truly responsible to membership, and real power residing in a self-perpetuating clique atop a helpless bureaucratic pyramid. Small groups describing themselves as "democratic-centralist" attempted to take control of Food Systems in several cities, to turn them into part of their programs.

By mid-'75 the movement had reached an ideological crisis in many areas, and exploded first in the Minneapolis People's Warehouse; the shock waves have not yet subsided.

Unfortunately, as is common in factional struggles, the ideological issues were quickly buried in a fog of conflicting personalities and rhetoric. It involved a "collective" which probably wasn't really very collective, and a "democratic-centralist" group which demanded worker control, used force to get it, then took on three new workers but soon fired them when they demanded that worker control include them too. While the "democratic-centralist" group occupied the Warehouse, many of the member co-ops and collectives left and formed a new competing warehouse. Food Systems and warehouses around the country took sides, with each or both Minneapolis warehouses being boycotted by various other groups in different cities. The store movement in the area was not big enough to support both, and both tottered on the verge of financial extinction until a court ordered legal violence to reinstate the former group after about six months. The movement in the area and around the country was badly shaken.

The Haight-Ashbury Food Conspiracy was begun in 1968, reaching 150 member houses in '73; across the Bay, the Berkeley-Oakland Organic Food Association had some 21 affiliated neighborhood conspiracies. But by '76 both had lost most of their membership and were in a state of near collapse. Meanwhile however the San Francisco People's Food System was being formed, by some of the most active people leaving the Conspiracy. By '76 the System was growing large and strong, with member collectives and co-ops on both sides of the Bay. But again factional strife erupted, partly a spillover from struggles in the prison movement, and perhaps instigated by forces trying to wreck the System, in the end destroying one of the most successful stores, Ma Revolution, in '77, and taking the System down with it. The following year the old Food Conspiracy was reorganized by the communal-socialist White Panther Party, and revived as a communal enterprise, with all member-customer energy requirements removed; under this system it has grown to sizable proportions again in the Bay Area.

All together there are about two dozen "new wave" warehouses around the country and about a thousand stores, doing a half billion dollars annual volume, with state-wide federations in many areas, and interstate cooperation. A network of connection and federation among food collectives, co-ops and small organic farms extends nationwide today. Still the movement remains on a shaky financial basis, and is kept alive more by people's energy and visions, than by accumulated capital.

INDUSTRIAL COOPERATIVES

Contemporary labor unions have organized and supported food co-ops, housing complexes, credit unions and various service co-ops, but virtually no worker industrial cooperatives. Their attitude is mainly the long-standing AFL-CIO policy of opposing any clouding of the line between employer and employee, accepting basic employer-control of the workplace in exchange for contracts (and, for many bureaucrats, safe jobs in union hierarchies). They hold

that any clouding of employee-management lines confuses their own role as bargaining agent and weakens the union, and they point to the many profit-sharing schemes that employers have offered their workers over the past century, which were geared to accomplish exactly that confusion and weakening of the unions. Also there are numerous examples of how risky large industrial cooperatives are in a capitalist market economy, and of ones that failed. Lastly, some experiments in partial democratization of the workplace, which have been acceded to by companies from time to time, have ironically resulted in layoffs because they increased production.

The United Auto Workers is one of the few unions that has raised any of the issues of worker control in the last decades, notably in the Lordstown assembly plant strike of '72; and they support several experiments in workplace reorganization. Chrysler workers at one point attempted to take over the company. One of the few recent American corporate experiments in limited self-management was tried at a General Foods plant in Kansas, with great success for the workers, but was shut down because it was too threatening to management.

Most large industrial cooperatives in the 20th century have been the result of workers taking over bankrupt or near-bankrupt companies; this is of course a shaky situation to begin with. The hope is that the industry can continue to support its workers when there is no longer any necessity to provide bosses with profit on top of that. Historically many have proven to be in dying industries which continued to go down, with bankers winding up the only real winners.

There are very few true worker cooperatives in larger industry, but many more "Employee-Owned" firms. A recent Senate report listed 150 of these. Employee-Ownership describes a share-holding system, differing from a standard corporation only in that it includes a method through which most of the stock is transferred to employees' hands over a period of time. Outsiders may buy shares and individuals have as many votes as shares. The most common system of Employee-Ownership is the Employee Stock Ownership Plan. A typical firm recently set up on this scheme is McKeesport Steel Casting, in Pennsylvania. To provide employees with enough capital to buy the stock, 25 percent of salaries goes into a trust, which borrowed money to buy the stock; the stock is transferred to a retirement fund in the name of each employee; workers cannot draw proceeds for at least ten years, and not then unless all debts of the company are paid. Other recent examples are Yellow Cab in San Francisco; South Bend Lathe, in Indiana; Sarasota Knitting Mills and Herkimer Woodworking in New York; and the Vermont Asbestos Group. Under Employee Ownership, workers usually have considerable power both in electing managers, and in creating good salaries, job security, safe working conditions, and side benefits; still they are half-way houses, with banks holding all the trump cards, and power accumulating in individuals holding the most stock. Not all the workers are necessarily stockholders; in the case of Yellow Cab, for example, less than half.

Most of these mentioned were taken over by their workers after shut-downs, many after long strikes.

It is usually not easy to get banks to finance even this moderate system. The community of Youngstown, Ohio, for example, recently tried to take over the shut-down Youngstown Sheet and Tube, a steel company, the largest enterprise in the city, as a worker-community joint enterprise, but the bankers refused adequate funding.

The Industrial Cooperative Association was formed in 1978 in Boston to develop worker-owned-and-controlled cooperatives. It has developed a much truer model of self-management organization than Employee Ownership. The ICA plan defines an industrial worker cooperative as self-governing, with one vote per member-worker, and based on the principle that all workers should receive the fruits of their labor within the framework of social and community responsibility for the resources used. They make an exception to all-worker-ownership with retail stores, for which they support the decision-making structure to possibly extend to community representation. With their guidance, the workers took over the shut-down Colonial Press in Clinton, Massachusetts, in 1978, and transformed it into the first true large industrial cooperative formed in the US in twenty years. The following year, the ICA helped the workers of International Poultry in Willimantic, Connecticut, to become the next. In cooperation with a neighborhood Community Development Corporation in Dorchester, they are transforming a shut-down supermarket into a community-worker cooperative, with each group having 50% control.

ROCHDALE TODAY

The Cooperative League remains the main educational, coordinating, and lobbying organization of the Rochdale movement today. Its members include consumer stores, farm supply, housing and insurance cooperatives, and it is supported by credit unions, health and rural electric cooperatives. The League represents the US in the International Cooperative Alliance, which has a membership of cooperatives from most countries in the world and is attached to the United Nations.

In 1979 one out of four Americans belonged to a cooperative, according to League statistics. About six million were members of farmer cooperatives, one million were members of farmer goods cooperatives (mostly stores), 40,000 handicraft, 5.6 million health care, nine million rural electric, one million rural telephone, 1.5 million housing, 40 million credit, and many more belonging to service cooperatives such as childcare, auto repair, insurance, cable tv, legal services, funeral, optical care and student services.

There are over 900 consumer co-op stores in the US, but only 300 more than a few years old. The 1970s were a time of both advance and retreat. Areas of concentration today include northern California (particularly the Bay Area), Baltimore-Washington,

Puerto Rico, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Chicago, and Greater New York. Uni-Co-op in Puerto Rico is the largest, followed by Berkeley, with Greenbelt Cooperative in the District of Columbia third. Co-op City in the Bronx, New York is the largest cooperative housing development, with 60,000 residents and many cooperative services, and also the scene of prolonged struggle between tenant groups and management.

In my own area, Consumer Cooperatives of Berkeley, of which I have long been a member, almost collapsed a few years ago due in part to reckless expansion undertaken in closed-door sessions by a conservative board, without membership input or approval; but stabilized and is recovering today.

A bill has recently passed Congress setting up a National Consumer Cooperative Bank, which will provide technical and financial assistance to consumer cooperatives. It is being started with government seed money, with plans to eventually become independent, following the pattern set by the agricultural Banks for Cooperatives. Through the bank, capital will be far more easily available to help consumer cooperatives get started and to help existing ones get through difficult times. There are provisions in the bill that 35% of the loans must go to groups with a majority of low-income people.

The bill will also set up an Office of Self-Help Development and Technical Assistance to provide information and technical help. Included are producer (artisan and craft) marketing co-ops. The major force behind the bill has been the Cooperative League.

The great upsurge of Rochdale-structured cooperatives that this new banking system may create is important; by getting goods and services to people at an honest cost and of good quality, and giving people democratic control over part of their distribution system, the consumer cooperative movement will be performing a much-needed service and bring about significant progress. But the movement's larger social goals have often been set aside by conservative management groups; in this circumstance, the co-ops' primary value boils right back down to neighbor buying clubs — cutting costs for members, which however they have often been unable to do, due to their capitalist competitors' greater resources (sometimes in control from seed to supermarket). Co-ops depend largely on community spirit to sustain them in hard times; this spirit arises primarily from their aspect as part of a progressive social movement; but when they have no vision beyond themselves and deteriorate into small group enterprises, the community commonly deserts them. In my own area I have seen a good number of co-ops with tendencies toward this deterioration, most exemplified by a "co-op" book store chain run by a small group, dealing almost entirely with the mass distributors, and refusing to stock all but a few of the publications coming from its own community. The Berkeley Co-op's strong conservative wing expresses this philosophy too, and

sees no reason why the stores should not stock scab products, to "give shoppers more of a choice."

However, even when a co-op's prices are not noticeably lower than capitalist competitors (even if rebates, if any, are taken into account), this does not mean that the cooperative has not cut costs for its members. A consumer cooperative in an area ordinarily has the effect of making capitalist stores honest and profit margins low; in this almost-invisible way consumer cooperatives serve to keep middleman costs to a minimum for their entire communities.

FARMER CO-OPS TODAY

Cooperatives do about a third of the total farm production and marketing in the US today. In '79 there were 7500 farmer co-ops with almost six million members. But these numbers have been shrinking continually through the century. Twenty-five years ago there were 1600 more farmer co-ops with 1.6 million more members. There are less freeholding farmers today than there were a hundred years ago, although our population has multiplied almost six times. Most rural people today are no longer independent farmers as they once were, but wage-earners, part of a fast-growing "rural proletariat." The agricultural banks for cooperatives, set up with government seed money from the New Deal but then becoming independent cooperatives themselves, have been helpful but still the smallest farmers have been continually expropriated and proletarianized, driven off their land and forced into wage-slavery and unemployment, while agribusiness has been reorganizing American farming on a monopoly basis.

Most of today's major farm organizations are connected in some way with cooperatives. Besides the National Farmers' Union and the Grange, are the National Farmers' Organization (formed in the '50s, handling collection, dispatch, and delivery services nationwide for grain, livestock, milk and other products), the US Farmers Association and the American Agricultural Movement, all usually fairly progressive organizations. Aligned against them is still the Farm Bureau Federation, still a major enemy of farm labor and tenant farmers, still serving to coopt the cooperative movement from the hands of small farmers and to pave the way for agribusiness. Much larger than the other organizations, due mostly to the side benefits they can offer through their support by bankers and industrialists, they are the agricultural equivalent of the AFL-CIO, acceptable to corporate America because they are run similar to a big corporation, by a giant managerial bureaucracy far above their average members. The same could be said of large agricultural cooperatives such as Sunkist and Farmland: seven of these are listed among the "top 500" corporations today; huge mid-western dairy co-ops were exposed giving enormous bribes to the Nixon "administration." Business cooperativism and business-unionism ultimately serve corporate interest.

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LAST WORDS

While there is an official government of the US, there is also a backroom government, consisting of all the biggest financiers and manufacturers; they plan America's economy with the aim of maximizing corporate profits, and they plan industrial worker cooperatives out of it. Under their rule, advanced technology has enriched only those who have controlled it, while impoverishing and virtually enslaving most of those who don't. There are few fields where many independent workers can still survive, and there are still only a comparative handful of collectives and cooperatives, leaving the vast majority of workers with a choice between wage-slavery and unemployment. Meanwhile unionization has shrunk from over one in three in the late '30s, to less than a fourth today.

Involuntary bondage is supposed to be abolished in America, yet how many would remain wage-slaves if they felt they had any choice? The corporations still fear industrial cooperatives, for the same reasons they have feared them and used their power to put them down throughout American history. The corporations know that they must prevent the average worker from having the right to choose between working as an employee or as a cooperator, for they know that few would choose bossism and bondage over freedom, democracy, and equality. Yet if America is ever to become what it should be, truly free, with wage-slavery finally abolished, the organized power of the people must be used to ensure that everyone has at least that choice.

The policy of the corporations seems to be changing toward consumer co-ops, which may at last in the 1980s be permitted to become a permanent sizable sector of the economy. But even though employees and tenants may own part of the distribution system cooperatively, they still remain in bondage. That they may have lightened their burden somewhat is a gain; but the fortress of capitalist power is in production, not distribution, and even a widespread co-op distribution network is by itself no real threat: as long as capital rules production, all gains can be taken away in a different form.

The Small Business Administration has been forbidden to lend assistance to worker cooperatives, banks are very rarely helpful, and worker cooperatives no banks of their own, as farmer and consumer cooperatives now have. However, government policy seems to be beginning to change: there are presently several bills before Congress to establish methods of funding for employee-owned firms at least. The Small Business Employee Ownership Act passed the Senate last spring. Machinery will most likely be established through which the Small Business Administration will be able to give loans to groups in small industry, and the Economic Development Administration in the Department of Commerce to larger industries.

Government loans through other agencies such as the

Farmers Home Administration and the Urban Development Grant Program, have recently been instrumental in setting up Employee-Owned Bates Fabric in Maine, and Rath Packing in Iowa. Still, the scale of this backing will surely be so small and slow that it will make little impact unless expanded many many times over. Besides, Employee-Owned firms are not true worker cooperatives.

We need banks not only for farmer and consumer cooperatives, but for real industrial cooperatives and collectives: cooperativization on a national scale is a question of the most basic freedom for our whole population.

* * * * *

It is my hope that this history will have helped to clarify our national tradition for the reader. So much of American history still lies buried like treasure deep in our country's marrow. As a result, many participants in today's collective, cooperative, union, communal, and socialist movements in America often know little of their own or each other's history, and often look across the oceans for guidance, instead of where we would probably learn the most. It is unfortunate, because the movements are inextricably entwined with each other and with America's past, and one cannot really succeed without the others. They can be seen as aspects of the same movement for democracy, equality, freedom, justice and community that has run throughout our history.

A large cooperative movement is worthwhile for its own sake, as it gives people more control over their lives and serves to partially democratize both the products and the process of work. A large movement has proved to be a strong base for movements for progressive social change, since by its very nature it demands changes in the general conditions of society, and empowers and emboldens its worker-members. A large movement can also render invaluable service at revolutionary moments, as when the Grangers helped the railroad strikers in 1877, the co-ops joined arms with the unions in the Seattle General Strike in 1919, or when the Farmers' Union brought truckloads of food to striking coal miners whose foodstamps had been cut off in 1977.

Whoever controls the basic means of survival controls society. There is no such thing as democracy or equality without the people having collective control of these means, both on a large scale, nation-wide, and on a small scale, in the neighborhood and the workshop.

Personally I have to agree with Jefferson's opinion that "the earth is given as a common stock..." and suggest that a fair and equal share in it is and should be the birthright of us all, as well as democratic control over it and freedom from work-bondage in any form.

The 1776 Revolution can be said to have started the American tradition that natural rights take precedence over property rights wherever they conflict. Thus the British king was expropriated of "his" property (all of

America). Following that tradition, the Southern slavocracy was expropriated of "their property" (four million people). Both times the American people expropriated them without any compensation, because their claims to ownership were but a legal cover-up of tyranny, and contrary to the people's inalienable rights. The Declaration of Independence establishes our right to claim our rights by revolutionary means if "legal" means have failed. But if the movement is to succeed, its own methods and organization must reflect its goal.

Although on the surface of our country today capitalism, competition, and wage-slavery seem to run rampant still, history may someday show that beneath the surface the working population was quietly gathering strength for its next challenge. And it may be that good old fashioned traditional American worker cooperation may still prove stronger and deeper here than capitalism, and will be the force to ultimately abolish it along with its unique system of work bondage. For without cooperation replacing competition the US will not survive, except in a form of our nightmares. The way of competition offers only increasingly severe bondage, while the way of collectivity and cooperation offers real freedom.

"The poverty of the country is such that all the power and sway has got into the hands of the rich, who by extortious advantages, having the common people in their debt, have always curbed and oppressed them in all manner of ways."

Nathaniel Bacon 1676

"Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself, in all cases, as the ages and generations which preceded it."

Thomas Paine

"Where wealth is hereditary, power is hereditary; for wealth is power. Titles are of very little or no consequence. The rich are nobility, and poor plebians in all countries. And on this distinction alone the true definition of aristocracy depends. An aristocracy is that influence or power which property may have in government; a democracy is the power or influence of the people or members, as contradistinguished from property. Between these two powers - the aristocracy and democracy - that is, the rich and the poor, there is constant warfare."

A Farmer in the *Maryland Gazette* 1783

"I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country."

Thomas Jefferson

"The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people of all nations, tongues and kindreds."

Abraham Lincoln

"If you and I must fight each other to exist, we will not love each other very hard."

Eugene Debs

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