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Ford Hall Forum

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Ford Hall Folks

A MAGAZINE OF NEIGHBORLINESS

VOLUME II

OCTOBER 26, 1913

NUMBER 1

BEFORE SOCIALISM—WHAT?

BY JOHN GRAHAM BROOKS

AFTER a prayer of thanks for the re-assembly of Ford Hall, and of supplication for still greater mutual tolerance and understanding, Mr. Coleman read a resolution, drawn up by Mr. Samuel Sagerman, in protest against the trial in Kiev, Russia, of a Jewish workingman for ritual murder. This was unanimously passed, and will be forwarded to the Secretary of State. Mr. Coleman then announced the opening of meetings similar to Ford Hall in Buffalo, N. Y., Manchester, N. H., and West Roxbury (the last being that evening addressed by Mrs. Coleman); asked for the formation of a chorus from the Ford Hall audience; and told of the unanimous consent of the two committees of the Baptist Social Union to the continuance of the meetings. He then introduced the speaker of the evening, Mr. John Graham Brooks, whose topic was "Before Socialism—What?"

Financial panics, said Mr. Brooks, come in a rhythm, once every ten years. It is my belief that Utopian fervors come also in a rhythm, but four or five times farther apart—say once in a long generation.

Mr. Brooks then traced the history of co-operation, first in Europe, where it started in England about 1830, and is reflected in Israel's "Sibyl." Co-operative stores were first established, then co-operative wholesale houses, then co-operative manufacturing (established first at Crumpsall), and finally co-operative banks. At present there are 16,000 co-operative banks and over 30,000 successful co-operative associations in Europe, doing a large international business.

In America, co-operation did not succeed at first in spite of Tocqueville's "capacity

chew," and the consequence was that they died. Another reason for failure was that while our natural resources still seemed inexhaustible, the country was like a young fellow who has inherited money; we had careless habits, and it was not important that we should save. Any working man could escape from unpleasant economic conditions by going to the frontier. But now, beginning roughly with this century, the frontier has vanished; population has reached the Pacific and has turned back. Add immigration, and the need of capital and efficient farming and we see the reason for the rise in the price of land.

The result is that co-operation is going to grow and the gods can't stop it now! In California the fruit growers had grown tired of cut-throat competition and now have formed co-operative organizations, which are spreading eastward. They have produced an economic superiority over competition, and are beating competition at its own game. (Applause.) There are 2000 co-operative insurance companies in this country. Minnesota farmers have saved, by co-operative fire insurance, \$15,000,000. One co-operative store in Michigan gave back last year to the working men \$101,000 in dividends, 9 per cent. on everything they bought. (Applause.) This store, with 1900 stockholders, has given back since it started over \$1,100,000 in dividends. I could tell you of even more successful stores in Kansas and Minnesota. Here is evidence to show that this movement is not a failure in the United States. With the new conditions, the compulsion of saving, and the experience we have gained, there is new hope for co-operation.

Now, what do we want before socialism,

most it is going to do only a part of the world's work. Let me state my own faith: One enormous part of power and business is going to the State (or the municipality); first of all, the key to the whole business—the railroads are going, before the middle of the century, to the State. (Applause.) The United States and England among forty nations are alone in keeping railroads in private hands, and it may not be five years before they are publicly owned in England. Then with the railroads will go the express companies, telegraph, telephone, etc. (Applause.) The passing of the great machinery of production from private to public hands will so far prevent private speculation and the private receipt of interest and profits, just as is now done in the post office.

Let me draw an imaginary circle and in it place that great group of powers, together with water powers and the electric sources of power. These will be, not necessarily managed, but controlled absolutely in the interests of the public. (Applause.) Now, you socialists, there is a lot outside that circle, and what is going to come there in the future I am trying to describe. It is not going to be all socialized by any manner of means; we shall have too much horse-sense for that. We shall preserve individualism, and we shall find in that great surrounding area that it will pay us socially to allow interest on money, and to allow men to make things privately for the market and get a profit on them. This is against orthodox socialist theories, but many able socialists are agreeing to it. In that outer area co-operation is going to grow, as it does in Denmark and Belgium, and as it grows it will apply democracy to the weak link in the chain, where it is most difficult. We

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In America, co-operation did not succeed at first, in spite of Toqueville's "capacity and passion of America for association," because these were turned to business and not to co-operation, and because the Civil War turned men's attention to other things. But before the war 100 co-operative stores were started, of which two or three are still in existence. After the war, a few clerks in Washington, headed by a man named Kelly, started the granger movement. Although this was ridiculed everywhere, it carried the idea of organization to the farming class. These "patrons of husbandry" educated the people to regulate the great industries, beginning with the railroads, teaching them that these great economic powers were unsafe in private hands without supervision; they started the ideas of the parcels post and the income tax; and they popularized among the farmers the idea of co-operation. Their co-operative creameries are still existent and growing. Then why did granger co-operation as a whole fail? Because the leaders did not wait, like the English, until their stores were on a solid, democratic basis. They "bit off more than they could

*This lecture and the questions and answers were reported by Miriam Allen deFord.

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Now, what do we want before socialism, or any ism? I have no illusions that co-operation is going to "sweep the world." At

The Prayer

WITH glad hearts we unite in giving thanks for the joy of being together again after months of separation. We rejoice not only in our established right of freedom of assemblage, but we are also very happy in the common fellowship of a wide variety of folks who are ordinarily separated from each other by mutual prejudice pray Thee, Father of us all, during the coming weeks, a still greater love for each other, an even better understanding. Give us, we standing of our common lot, and an ever stronger determination to keep faith with ourselves and to lose no opportunity of joining hands in earnest endeavor for the welfare of all. Amen.

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There are the following economic ideals: individualism, with its variations of individualistic and philosophic anarchy, and communistic anarchism; the various forms of socialism; and communism, including syndicalism. These ideals are all embedded in human nature, below the economic order. We are not going to get rid of them and we don't want to, because we need them all. The outer circle is going to put the inner socialistic circle on its good behavior. Since it will have to compete with freer competition on the outside, all monopolies being inside the circle, we need not fear socialism. If we

(Continued on Page 3.)

QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY MR. BROOKS

Q: If co-operation is so strong in Europe, why do so many European working men come here?

A: Co-operation raises the standard everywhere, but, even raised, the standard of wages of European working men is much lower than ours here.

Q: What is the social and co-operative benefit of the interest system to the individual?

A: It is that, stripped of abuses, the borrower gets as much benefit as the lender, and it thus has a social as well as individual value.

Q: How can there be any real foundation for co-operation when the exploitation of man by man is legalized?

A: Co-operation now does a very stupendous business. That is a fact, and your question implies that the fact doesn't exist. I don't understand you.

Q: If the State were to abolish competitive adjustment of railway rates, would it not cause a geographical redistribution that would wipe New England off the map industrially? I say yes.

A: Well, I'll let it go at that. (Laughter.)

Q: If we started the parcels post co-operatively without the government, would it be as successful as it is now?

A: It has monopolistic powers that should keep it in the hands of the government.

Q: In co-operation there is no competition. Therefore, how can they arrange one scale of prices?

A: There is competition remaining in co-operation, but it is fair competition. These co-operative

A: I doubt that statement. Socialism is increasing fastest in Austria. Co-operation will not stop socialism; it educates the socialist and makes him safe.

Q: When I have brain hunger I can go to the library and get books. If I could go and get a hat for head hunger or shoes for foot hunger would that be co-operation? (Laughter.)

A: No, it would be almost pure communism. (Laughter and applause.)

Q: What is your attitude toward the single tax idea?

A: I am always asked that. The single taxer brings us a solid and valuable economic idea that we shall more and more use.

Q: Will you name some of those orthodox Socialists who agree with you about profits?

A: Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells and Dr. Sudekum, the German Socialist representative here from the Reichstag.

Q: Is not the lack of success in this country largely due to the inefficiency of the agents who control them?

A: Partly so, but one of the greatest reasons is that the more successful classes in this country have so high a standard of convenience and service, with which co-operation finds it hard to compete.

Q: Is not the success of the Belgian co-operation different from that of the English? Did it not start before capitalism was as strong as it is now? (Applause.)

A: That has something to do with it, but what has most to do is that socialism has such religious fervor in Belgium.

Q (Dr. Nichols): Do you make any distinction in principle between co-operation

A: Not in the least. In co-operation there is one vote for each man, not for each share, and no proxies.

Q: Aren't the laborers in the co-operative mills in England as badly or worse off than in the capitalistic mills?

A: I don't think it is true. The difference cannot be great, but the laborer in the co-operative area is a little better off.

Q (same): Then why do they strike?

A: There is not one strike in twenty as compared with competitive business.

Q: Can public utilities not publicly owned be well operated for public convenience?

A: I should doubt it. Anything strictly a monopoly at some time must go to the State. But we shall allow a great deal of private management under very strict control.

Q: What sort of co-operation is there in the "mutual" insurance companies in this country?

A: They are not co-operative in the sense we are now using the word.

Q: How can you control anything you don't own? (Applause.)

A: Do you own the postoffice? Yet it is controlled.

Q: Wasn't it Joseph Warren, the first American anarchist, who tried co-operation in the United States?

A: Yes.

Q: The essentials of our civilization seem to be property, defences and exclusiveness. Would co-operation destroy them?

A: It would go far toward it if widely developed.

Q: Does the Harvard Co-operative Society line up with co-operation?

A: I never got less than 8 per cent. on anything I bought there.

Q: Of what advantage is co-operation to the California tenant farmers and the floating population of farmers who go from Mexico to Canada in the haying season?

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A: There is competition remaining in co-operation, but it is fair competition. These co-operative stores give their services at regular market prices, and all that they make they call profit. This automatically goes back to the stockholders, and is not arousing too much animosity in the regular market by selling at cost.

Q: How can you have successful co-operation where all the means of life are controlled by the capitalists?

A: That is one reason why it has come slowly here. But it is increasing. In many instances in Europe the co-operative movement has beaten the trust. I believe we shall do it here when monopoly power is socially controlled.

Q (Mr. Sagerman): Is an empty stomach the life of a nation? I say no.

A: I agree with you. (Laughter and applause.)

Q: Can you conceive of any method whereby the human race would be better off than not to allow one man to exploit another? Would not this be the co-operative commonwealth, and would co-operation then be of any use?

A: If you have a substitute better than state control and co-operation I should be glad to hear it.

Q: Where will the genius of our capitalists of industry find expression under co-operation?

A: By working for it precisely as they do in Europe and even here.

Q: Why is it that the co-operative movement is strongest in Belgium and Denmark, where the socialist movement is progressing by leaps and bounds farther than in any other country? (Applause.)

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Q (Dr. Nichols): Do you make any distinction in principle between co-operation for production and for consumption?

A: Not the slightest.

Q (Mr. Gallup): Is not the sale of municipal bonds to the public through the newspapers, as in Baltimore, more democratic and more of a step toward co-operation than the sale through bankers, as in Boston?

A: Yes. In Germany the smallest farmer can get money at 4½ per cent. through his co-operative credit association.

Q: Isn't it true that if the stronger has always oppressed the weaker, socialism proposes to make the working class the stronger so that they can wipe out the parasites?

A: That is the object of socialism, and, as far as it can do it, heaven bless it. It will also need the habits established by co-operation. Socialism alone cannot do the world's work.

Q: How can you establish co-operation in this country, where the population is so mobile?

A: That is one thing that makes it harder here than anywhere else, but not impossible.

Q: The state already controls the army and navy, the lunatic asylums, the penitentiaries and the postoffice. Is this socialism?

A: Idiot asylums are not business. There is a profound difference between a lunatic asylum and a railway run for profit. (Laughter.)

Q: Doesn't co-operation eventually mean corporatism, and thus take us around in a circle?

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Q: Of what advantage is co-operation to the California tenant farmers and the floating population of farmers who go from Mexico to Canada in the haying season?

A: Of none at all, because they have nothing to do with it.

Q: Will the co-operative societies be able to fight the trusts as they exist today?

A: As I said, there are four instances in Europe where they did. They are not strong enough yet in this country.

Q: What sort of organizations are ripe enough now to realize the co-operative idea? Are the unions?

A: In Europe the unions are ultimately mixed up with co-operation. In the thirties they were involved in the granger movement here.

Q (Miss Todd): Would the abolition of private ownership of land be essential to the working of co-operation?

A: There are several co-operative villages, and every one has turned the economic rent of the land over to the people.

Q: What progress has co-operation made in Boston, and where can we begin with it?

A: There are several co-operative banks, and there is a co-operative store on Charles street, also a co-operative building society.

Q: Would the complex racial condition of our city handicap co-operation?

A: Yes, but it will also help. But I never would start a co-operative store in a large city.

Q: What chance would the penniless working man or woman have to become a member of a co-operative association, when they all charge entrance fees?

A: None, if literally penniless, but in England the fee is sometimes as low as a shilling.

ance or enthusiasm.
* * *
In a recent Saturday issue the Transcript had a remarkably disc and generously appreciative editorial mending the Ford Hall meetings. It pointed out the absolutely unsectarian character of the enterprise and yet recognized the deeply religious tone underlying them. It regards the educative force of the meetings as incalculable, and says: Ford Hall has evolved a new kind of church-going which has no difficulty in finding pews, but rather in finding pews for those who wish to fill them.

* * *
It takes power to run anything, even a little magazine such as this. Is there enough in the Ford Hall people (they are controlled on this task) to make the way our Sunday evening meeting? This magazine belongs to you both, collectively and literally. It can be made a great power on its own account, but the meetings themselves are. But they can only be accomplished by each one doing something. What will you do?
* * *

It is interesting to watch the development in other places of the idea that underlies the Ford Hall Meetings—the idea of bringing together in a friendly spirit all kinds of people to discuss frankly and earnestly all manner of vital questions concerning the welfare of the individual and of society.

Within my own knowledge there are ready meetings very much after the Ford Hall stamp, though differing in a good many ways. In Lowell, Melrose, Westbury and Newton, in Massachusetts; in New York City, Buffalo and Rochester, in New York State; in Montclair, N. J.; in Rapids, Michigan; in Manchester, New Hampshire; in Richmond, Va., and Chicago, Ill. I would be very glad to receive part of the program concerning any others.

Perhaps the most remarkable development of the Cooper Union and the Ford Hall idea is seen in a most unusual afternoon meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. Here, again, it is a meeting of all kinds of people (though limited to only one hundred), with chronic church-goers greatly in the majority. They met at first in the Council Chamber of the City Hall, but the immediate popularity of the gatherings drew such large numbers that a bigger meeting place was necessary. And so firmly established

JUST BETWEEN US NEIGHBORS

By GEORGE W. COLEMAN

Director of the Ford Hall Meetings

It was good to see so many familiar faces on an opening night.

Miss Helen Todd, the noted leader of the woman suffrage movement in California, and Mr. Ormiston Chant of England were among the distinguished strangers who were present last Sunday night. Both of them were very deeply impressed by the whole character of the meeting.

The opening of the seventh season at Ford Hall gave no indication of any abatement in the intense interest that has prevailed almost from the beginning. In spite of unfavorable weather and a six months' intermission the work began just where it stopped last April, without loss of attendance or enthusiasm.

In a recent Saturday issue the Boston Transcript had a remarkably discerning and generously appreciative editorial commending the Ford Hall meetings. It pointed out the absolutely unsectarian character of the enterprise and yet recognized the deeply religious tone underlying the work. It regards the educative force of these meetings as incalculable, and says that Ford Hall has evolved a new kind of church-going which has no difficulty in filling pews, but rather in finding pews enough for those who wish to fill them.

It takes power to run anything, even a little magazine such as this. Is there steam enough in the Ford Hall people (that can be controlled on this task) to make it go the way our Sunday evening meetings go? This magazine belongs to you both figuratively and literally. It can be made as great a power on its own account as the meetings themselves are. But that can only be accomplished by each one doing

they feel themselves to be in their democratic inclusiveness and non-sectarian character that they hesitated not to accept the second ecclesiastical edifice in importance in Lausanne, the Church of St. Francis, as their auditorium. This is the more surprising in that their meetings are devoid of hymns, scripture reading and prayer.

Such a movement reflects credit on the church that is so reasonable and tolerant as well as upon the non-church-goers who are so dead in earnest in their search for truth. This new enterprise is called the Fraternity of Men, and while they declare themselves independent of churches and Christian associations, they desire to work in harmony with them, and they appeal to all good men to help.

Parodies on scripture are sometimes in very bad taste, to say the least. But the neighborly version of the Ten Commandments as put out by the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities breathes a wholesome spirit and emphasizes some very valuable truths in a new and striking way. Here it is:

I. Thou shalt honor thy neighborhood and keep it clean.

II. Remember thy cleaning day and keep it wholly.

III. Thou shalt take care of thy rubbish heap, else thy neighbor will bear witness against thee.

IV. Thou shalt keep in order thy alley, thy back yard, thy hall and thy stairway.

V. Thou shalt not let the wicked fly breed.

VI. Thou shalt not kill thy neighbor by ignoring fire menaces or by poisoning the air with rubbish and garbage.

VII. Thou shalt not keep thy windows closed day and night.

VIII. Thou shall covet all the air and sunshine thou canst obtain.

IX. Because of the love thou bearest thy children thou shalt provide clean homes for them.

X. Thou shalt not steal thy children's right to health and happiness.

LET US TRUST OUR NEIGHBORS.

It is rather amusing to listen to people who are so cocksure in giving their definitions of good and bad. Sometimes they are offensive in their self-righteousness, but generally they do little more than provoke laughter. Barney Bill, in one of William J. Locke's stories, speaks much wisdom when he says, speaking of his teetotaler host, "He thinks good drink's bad because bad has come of it to him—not that he ever took a drop too much, mind yer—but bad has come of it to him, and I think good drink's good because nothing but good has come of it to me. And we've agreed to differ. Ain't we, Silas?" And that is all we can do, if we would have harmony and neighborliness. We have no right to impose our beliefs and our definitions upon others. Let us content ourselves with stating our beliefs frankly and trust our neighbors to use their own judgment as to what is good and what is bad for them.

BEFORE SOCIALISM—WHAT?

(Continued from Page 1.)

could have in this country as much co-operation as there is in Denmark I should no more fear socialism, anarchy, or communism than I should fear the Boston Public Library, a prayer meeting, or Ford Hall. If they can beat us on the inside, God bless them, but they have got to produce and prove an economic superiority. That is what co-operation does.

Take away with you this: co-operation carries democracy all the way through. In a larger and richer human system, we will learn the value of the person who preserves things as well as that of the person who changes things. It is not necessarily

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III. Thou shalt take care of thy rubbish heap, else thy neighbor will bear witness against thee.

IV. Thou shalt keep in order thy alley, thy back yard, thy hall and thy stairway.

V. Thou shalt not let the wicked fly breed.

VI. Thou shalt not kill thy neighbor by ignoring fire menaces or by poisoning the air with rubbish and garbage.

VII. Thou shalt not keep thy windows closed day and night.

Tomorrow!

TOMORROW the brunts and bruises of Today will have become Yesterday's mere missteps, changing into the Wisdom that has its source in suffering.

Every sharp stone in the pathway of our Todays is but a test that tells whether, on the morrow, we shall be cringing or fighting men and women.

For he who gives up the struggle Today shall not taste of the sweets of arrival Tomorrow.

Let us, then, be thankful for the trials that are ours Today. Let us welcome them as Experience—the fulcrum that steadies the lever of Accomplishment.

Tomorrow, Today's dregs of Circumstance may turn into the wine of Success.

Tomorrow the thread that connects us with wanted Happiness may have grown, through efforts delayed in fruition, into a great cable.

Tomorrow the dead hopes of Today shall spring into life anew, and with the renewal shall come Faith and the Dare to do.

Thank God for our Tomorrows!

Jerome P. Fleishman.

others. Let us content ourselves with stating our beliefs frankly and trust our neighbors to use their own judgment as to what is good and what is bad for them.

BEFORE SOCIALISM—WHAT?

(Continued from Page 1.)

could have in this country as much co-operation as there is in Denmark I should no more fear socialism, anarchy, or communism than I should fear the Boston Public Library, a prayer meeting, or Ford Hall. If they can beat us on the inside, God bless them, but they have got to produce and prove an economic superiority. That is what co-operation does.

Take away with you this: co-operation carries democracy all the way through. In a larger and richer human system, we will learn the value of the person who preserves things as well as that of the person who changes things. It is not necessarily a virtue to be more radical than anyone else. The conservative is as valuable a man as the radical; order and stability are as valuable as progress; and we are going to keep them all. Two miners were caught by some falling coal and for two days struggled desperately to dig themselves out. Finally they escaped. Then one looked around and said, "Bill it is all up with us; the sun is going down, and we can't stand another night." But Bill answered, "Thank God, Jim, the sun isn't going down, it's coming up, and it is morning." Of co-operation, too, I say, let us hope that it may be morning.

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