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The Cooperative League of the United States of America, 1916-1961: A Study of Social Theory and Social Action

CLARKE A. CHAMBERS

The movement for consumers cooperation in the United States has never been able to win more than a very small percentage of the total national market; it has never enjoyed the power to make a major impact upon American politics nor upon social attitudes. A careful analysis of its history, certainly not unimportant in itself, may illuminate many main themes in American life—the abiding fear of institutional bigness, for example, the persistent distrust of massive governmental intervention in the private affairs of citizens, and particularly the American faith in the efficacy and virtue of voluntary action, self-help, and fraternalism.[1]

The modern story of consumers cooperation dates from the Rochdale experiments in England in the mid-nineteenth century. There were laid down the principles for cooperative combination from which the later American movement rarely departed: open membership and the equality of men and women; one vote per member, regardless of the number of shares held; limited interest on capital invested; the distribution of earnings according to patronage; full democratic participation of all members in all the affairs of the enterprise; neutrality in all matters religious and political; growth through education and propaganda, as well as through trade expansion. From the beginning the distribution of material goods along cooperative lines was not only a way to do business, it was a way of life.

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Although consumers cooperation on the Rochdale principles was introduced in the United States during the nineteenth century, particularly in the Granger movement and in some labor unions during the latter third of the nineteenth century, the cooperative purchase and distribution of goods was often confused with the cooperative producing and marketing of commodities and, in any case, the ventures were highly unstable, given to

[1] Economists and sociologists have more often studied consumers cooperation than historians. The best single account is by a specialist on cooperatives in the United States Department of Labor: Florence E. Parker, *The First 125 Years: A History of Distributive and Service Cooperation in the United States, 1829–1954* (Superior, Wisconsin, 1956). Miss Parker's studies on the subject appeared regularly as articles in the *Monthly Labor Review*, 1918-1951, and as special bulletins of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. I am indebted to her research at many points in my narrative and analysis.

A penetrating sociological analysis, from whose central hypothesis I have drawn, is Joel Torstensen, "The Development of an Institution: A Case History of Midland Cooperatives Incorporated" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1958). Other unpublished studies include Norman Eugene Taylor, "The Midland Cooperative Wholesale, Inc.: Its History and Analysis" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1955); Charles W. Merrifield, "The Cooperative Corporation: An Institutional Case-Study of the Consumers Cooperative Association of Kansas City, 1929–1951" (Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1952). Other scholarly accounts include: Martin A. Abrahamsen and Claud L. Scroggs (editors), *Agricultural Cooperation* (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 1957); Orin E. Burley, *The Consumers' Cooperative as a Distributing Agency* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939); Hilden R. Gibson, "Consumers' and Producers' Cooperatives," in Seba Eldridge and Associates, *Development of Collective Enterprise: Dynamics of an Emergent Economy* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1943); Julia E. Johnsen, *et al., Consumers' Cooperatives* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1936); Joseph G. Knapp and John H. Lister, *Cooperative Purchasing of Farm Supplies* (Farm Credit Administration, Bulletin No. 1, 1935); Harlan J. Randall and Clay J. Daggett, *Consumers' Cooperative Adventures, Case Studies* (Whitewater, Wisconsin: Whitewater Press, 1936); Carl N. Schmalz, *Operating Results of Consumer Co-operatives in the United States in 1937* (Harvard University Business Research Studies, Bulletin No. 108, 1939); H. Haines Turner, *Case Studies of Consumers' Cooperatives: Successful Cooperatives Started by Finnish Groups in the United States Studied in Relation to Their Social and Economic Environment* (New York, Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, No. 481, 1941); Roland S. Vaile (editor), *Consumers' Cooperatives in the North Central States* (Minneapolis, 1941);

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extreme fluctuations of momentary success and utter failure, while the movement itself remained undirected, uncoordinated, and haphazard. Impartial experts and cooperative leaders are generally agreed upon those factors in the American environment which militated against the steady and sturdy growth of consumers cooperation. The producer orientation of American business, labor, and agriculture is most often cited, and with large validity, as a primary force keeping citizens from recognizing their role as consumers. The very abundance that the American economy generally had to offer made the savings available through cooperation seem very marginal indeed. The mobility, and social and ethnic heterogeneity of the American population combined to make concerted cooperative effort difficult to sustain; workers constantly on the move and on the rise rarely identified themselves with local agencies of this sort; and it is noteworthy that consumers cooperation was most vital in America where ethnic homogeneity prevailed —among the Finns of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, for example, or among the Czechs of central Ohio.

The openness of American life, the relative flexibility of class lines, the speculative hopes of even the most humbly placed, the force of what some cooperative leaders referred to as the "unsocial individualism" of American life, the impatience of most Americans with modest gains, and of course, the spectacular efficiency of private capitalism in distributing the goods of a highly productive society—all these and many other forces, it is agreed, retarded the development of an indigenous consumers cooperative movement in the United States. As for the reformation and transformation of society, most Americans preferred other apparently quicker and more effective and more thorough means. Added to all these were the internal troubles from which most cooperative enterprises suffered—insufficient capital, incompetent and untrained management, the disloyalty of patrons who were always bargain-hunting, the lack of coordinated regional and national leadership in both the educational and commercial promotional fields.

It was to remedy this last shortcoming that the Cooperative League of the United States of America (CLUSA) was organized in 1916 on the eve of America's entrance into the Great War, when Dr. James Peter Warbasse, a distinguished New York surgeon and patron of many reform causes, together with his wife, Agnes Dyer Warbasse, a generous

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C. Maurice Wieting, *The Progress of Cooperatives: With Aids for Teachers* (New York, 1952). Popular surveys include: Joshua K. Bolles, *The People's Business: The Progress of Consumer Cooperatives in America* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1942); Paul H. Casselmen, *The Cooperative Movement and Some of Its Problems* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952); Ellis Cowling, *Co-operatives in America: Their Past, Present and Future* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1938); John Daniels, *Cooperation: An American Way* (New York: Covici, Frude, 1938); Bertram B. Fowler, *Consumer Cooperation in America: Democracy's Way Out* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1936), and *The Co-operative Challenge* (Boston, 1947); Mrs. Ryllis Alexander Goslin, *Cooperatives* (New York: The Foreign Policy Association, 1937); Horace Kallen, *The Decline and Rise of the Consumer* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1936); Maxwell S. Stewart, *Cooperatives in the United States—A Balance Sheet* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1939); Leo R. Ward, *Ourselves, Inc.; The Story of Consumer Free Enterprise* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945). These works sometimes lean toward the polemic, but the list does not include strictly promotional literature. Of the many articles touching upon one aspect or another of consumers cooperation, the greatest number of them written by agricultural economists, the following are most useful: "Consumer Cooperatives," *Fortune,* XV (March, 1937), 133–40; "Big Business without Profit," *Fortune,* XXXII (August, 1945), 152–7; Milton Conover, "The Rochdale Principles in American Co-operative Associations," *Western Political Quarterly,* XII (March, 1959), 111–22; Paul H. Douglas, "The Real Advantages of Consumer Co-operation," *Journal of Home Economics,* XXVIII (September, 1936), 431–5; J. C. Drury, "Consumers' Cooperation," *Journal of Marketing,* I (April, 1937), 385–9; William M. Evan, "Social Structure, Trade Unionism, and Consumer Cooperation," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review,* X (April, 1957), 440–7; Leland J. Gordon, "An Economist Looks at the Consumers' Cooperative Movement," *Social Science,* XIII (July, 1938), 181–201; *Journal of Educational Sociology,* XVI (April, 1943), 465–532; E. Fred Koller, "Cooperatives in a Capitalistic Economy," *Journal of Farm Economics,* XXIX (November, 1947), 1133–44; E. G. Nourse, "The Economic Philosophy of Cooperation," *American Economic Review,* XII (December, 1922), 577–97; Albert Rees, "Labor and the Co-operatives: What's Wrong?" *Antioch Review,* VI (September, 1946), 327–40; Agnes H. Campbell, "Consumers' Cooperation; a Selected List of References," Russell Sage Foundation Bulletin Number 134 (December, 1935); Consumers' Counsel Division, AAA, *Cooperative Bookshelf: A Bibliography of Government Publications on Consumers' Cooperation* (Publication Number 3, May, 1937); "Consumers' Cooperation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 191 (May, 1937). Also see annual volumes, 1925 to the present, of the American Institute of Cooperation, *American Cooperation;* these conference papers deal primarily with marketing and producers cooperatives in agriculture, but there are occasional papers dealing with consumers cooperation.

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woman of independent wealth, called together a group of their friends and associates to launch a crusade whose ultimate objective was the establishment of a Cooperative Commonwealth.[2]

Their movement could draw support from several areas in which consumers cooperatives were already active. Of most immediate importance was a small but lively group of eastern European Jewish immigrants led by Hyman Cohn, tradesman and socialist. Out of this small group had come a cooperative educational league in 1909 and soon thereafter a cooperative hat store. The hat store marked an abortive attempt to introduce cooperative ways into a highly competitive enterprise. Opening day found recorded fixtures worth $187.50 and an inventory of "straws, caps, [and] derbys worth $705." By 1914 the hat cooperative on Delancey Street had been abandoned for what Hyman Cohn attributed to "lack of financial and patronage support of its members" (a pathetic complaint that would often be repeated by myriad little cooperatives). The small band was but little daunted, however; the world regularly conspired against noble ventures and there was time enough; but first must come a great educational effort to convert the consumer to the cause of cooperation.[3]

With the failure of the store, the dedicated core group, including Cohn, Albert Sonnichsen, and William A. Kraus, began publication in May, 1914 of *The Co-operative Consumer*. Kraus, business manager for this new periodical, summarizes in its first issue the ultimate hopes of consumers cooperation: "Most of us were socialists," he wrote, "and we imagined ourselves extending the one store to a chain of stores, which would eventually be supplied by factories and farms, also owned and controlled by the organized consumer, until the system became universal and merged into a co-operative commonwealth."[4] Capitalism had made its contribution, so the argument ran, particularly in unleashing the productive power of a technologically progressive society; but it could not distribute equitably the potential blessings it provided. Only consumers cooperation could accomplish that end. Cooperation in no way set out "to destroy capitalism," proclaimed Albert Sonnichsen but, he continued, "as Co-operation becomes established, so capitalism must wither." No violent revolution was required; cooperation's methods were entirely peaceful; the cooperative commonwealth would be established by evolu-

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[2] For a brief time the association was known as the Cooperative League of America, but I prefer to use the name by which it is known now and almost from the beginning. There is no history of CLUSA save Florence Parker's *The First 125 Years,* which contains a good deal of historical material on the League as well as on consumers cooperation generally; the original copy of her manuscript, which was microfilmed by CLUSA, contains material, particularly in extensive footnotes, that does not appear in the published work. An official account of the directors of the Cooperative League since its founding in 1916 is available in Erma Angevine, *In League with the Future* (Chicago, 1959), 1–90. Mrs. Angevine made her typescript summary of the early history of the League available to me; she probably knows more about the League's history than any other person, and I have benefited from her advice at many points, I have also gained insights from interviews, 1959–1961, with David Angevine, Erma Angevine, Eugene R. Bowen, Wallace Campbell, George Cerny, William A. Selden, Glenn Thompson, James Myers, Leslie Woodcock, Arthur J. Smaby, Hugh Bogardus, Hayes Beall, Mary Long Woodcock and John Carson—all of whom have been or are currently active in the consumers cooperative movement and in League activities. The archives of the League in both the Chicago and Washington offices were made available to me without restriction. These files include official minutes and proceedings, memoranda, correspondence, news releases, and tons of promotional literature. Official materials in the office and library of Midland Cooperatives in Minneapolis were also opened to me. They include a large collection of annual reports and miscellaneous publications not only of the League itself but of many of its constituent members. Two file boxes of League correspondence for 1925 and 1926 were uncovered in the New York Public Library. A thirty-nine page official history of the League was written by James Peter Warbasse, after his retirement as its president, in pamphlet form: *A Short History of the Cooperative League of the United States of America* (The Cooperative League: New York, 1946). The official (usually monthly) publication of the League and of its forerunner appeared under several different titles, 1914–1948, *The Co-operative Consumer, Co-operation, Cooperation, Consumers' Cooperation, Co-op Magazine.* There was no publicaion during the year 1944; publication was discontinued after February, 1948. To my knowledge there is no single complete file of the publication available anywhere, but the Library of the University of Minnesota has a file beginning with volume IX, 1923; earlier volumes may be found in the Chicago office of CLUSA and in the New York Public Library.

[3] Cooperative League, Business Meetings Journal, 1909–1914, quotations from entries for July 26, 1911, August 24, 1914. League meetings must frequently have tried the patience of its members; the secretary, on one occasion, was driven to record the plaintive comment that on a resolution to extend a token sum of money to a strike fund the members had "talked indefinatly." Entry for August 23, 1909.

[4] *The Co-operative Consumer,* I (May 1, 1914), unpaged.

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tionary procedures, "through its own inherent power, its fitness to survive the struggle." Consumers cooperation offered a better way out of the dilemmas and contradictions of capitalism than socialism, so it was believed, because cooperation could begin at once, without waiting for a seizure of power or the mustering of a majority, it was a more subtle and flexible weapon than political action, it provided immediate benefits while the fraternal commonwealth was being established.[5]

These early cooperators drew their analysis from democratic socialism, from reform social Darwinism, from the progressive reform urge which informed so much in American life in the early twentieth century. It drew also, implicitly at first, from the English and European consumers cooperative concept of the original and ultimate primacy of the consumer not only in economic matters but in the whole of life. Producer relations were invariably divisive; the world of production pitted employee against employer, manufacturer against distributor, supplier of fertilizer or seed or machinery against the farmer, farmer against housewife. But all men were consumers, and in this fact lay the economic foundation for a unified and fraternal society if only it were recognized that in consumption all men were equal, and in consumers cooperation all men could be made one in a "universal, industrial democracy."[6] The profit system had to go; production for use under consumer control had to come. Through cooperation, all the needs of man—for health and sustenance, for education, for recreation—could be met. As one anonymous cooperative poet phrased it:

> Hail, wondrous get-together land!
> Where mutualities expand
> To feed, to clothe, insure, give health.
> Hail Co-operative Commonwealth![7]

Against this background and in this spirit, out of the earlier movement in New York City and its collapse, Dr. and Mrs. James Peter Warbasse called together—upon the urging of Cohn, Sonnichsen, and Ernst A. Rosenthal (a silk manufacturer and patron of the earlier movement)—meetings of like-minded friends in the spring of 1916. Out of these meetings was formed the Cooperative League, not at first as a federation of member associations, but merely as a society of individuals devoted to consumers cooperation. Financially underwritten by its angel, Dr. Warbasse, the league had the faithful adherence of such pioneers as Cohn, Sonnichsen, Kraus, Harris, Rosenthal, and won the interest and sympathy of such diverse figures as John Graham Brooks, Emily Balch, John Haynes Holmes, John Dewey, Frederic C. Howe, Florence Kelley, Margaret Dreier Robins, and Walter Lippmann.

The immediate impulse for the organization of the Cooperative League had come from these events in New York City. It drew support at once, and increasing support with every passing year, from other consumers cooperation movements elsewhere in the nation. Many immigrants from Finland who had settled early in the century around Maynard and Fitchberg in Massachusetts, Waukegan, Illinois, and in scattered communities throughout the lumbering and mining regions of the Great Lakes area had brought along with their sauna and love of sports a granitic commitment to political radicalism and a new interest in consumers cooperation. Strong particularly in the Lake Superior region—Cloquet, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin were early capitals of cooperative enterprise—these pioneer cooperatives expanded rapidly in response to the very pressing need of marginal labor groups to make ends meet, and in response to both the theory and practice of Rochdale principles back home in Finland, where in the early twentieth century consumers cooperatives were enjoying a forward surge as they were throughout northern Europe generally. A further incentive making for steady growth was the need of this ethnic group to maintain its cultural identity in an alien land; Finnish cooperatives for many years (and with weakened force still) offered educational, social, recreational, and political as well as economic services. Among social democratic Finns, particularly, the local cooperative was fre-

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[5] Quotations and paraphrase from untitled pamphlet by Albert Sonnichsen, c. 1916, in CLUSA Office Archives, "Early Pamphlets, 1916–1919," Folder I.

[6] *The Co-operative Consumer,* I (July, 1914), 19.

[7] *Ibid.,* III (September, 1917), unpaged. For an early endorsement of this commonwealth ideology see also John A. Ryan in *The Catholic World,* CI (May, 1915), 157–65, and CI (June, 1915), 343–51.

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quently the kind of community center that the immigrant Church was elsewhere. Of an estimated 2,600 general retail cooperatives in 1920, approximately 60 per cent were located in the North Central States; and among these the Finnish-controlled Central Cooperative Exchange enjoyed a dominant position.[8]

Another potential source of membership for the infant Cooperative League were the agricultural cooperative purchasing associations, some of which had been founded during the war years. These associations had enjoyed a rather spectacular growth as long as farm prosperity had been sustained; the agricultural depression of the early 1920's sent many of them into bankruptcy; but by the end of the decade many of them had formed into regional cooperative wholesales and were thriving and moving ahead as never before, so that when the great depression of 1929 hit they were prepared to roll with the punch and then actually enjoyed expansion even as the depression deepened. These cooperative purchasing associations (to be distinguished always from agricultural marketing groups) dealt mostly in producers rather than consumer goods—fertilizer, feed, seed, petroleum and other supplies—but some of them at least, particularly those which subsequently became members of the Cooperative League, adhered to a consumers rather than a producers philosophy of cooperation. These farm cooperative regionals would not play a major role in League history until the decade of the 1930's, but indirectly and sometimes directly their story impinged upon that of the League.[9]

After several years, 1916-1920, in which membership in the League was on an individual basis, its constitution was revised to require membership by associated district educational leagues—the Northern States Cooperative League, the educational arm of the Finnish movement, being the largest and most vigorous with district leagues of lesser strength located in the Eastern States and the Central States. Local consumer cooperatives, both urban and agricultural, could directly affiliate with CLUSA where no district league was available.

The League in the 1920's reflected the interests and needs of 1) the three district leagues, among which the Finnish group was the largest and strongest, 2) the democratic socialist cooperators, particularly strong in urban centers in the East, 3) scattered farm purchasing associations, whose major impact was reserved for a later decade, and 4) an odd producers cooperative, here and there, as for example the Franklin Cooperative Creamery in Minneapolis whose ideology, curiously, was that of the consumer movement.

Save for the biennial congresses, responsibility for League policy rested primarily with the executive staff which, in turn, was dominated by the austere and aristocratic figure of James Peter Warbasse, whose steel will and ample purse were not easily resisted. Of the early executive secretaries, probably only the gentle and intelligent Cedric Long, who had been educated for the ministry but had left theology for a secular mission in social reform (much like his friend Norman Thomas), was able to exert significant influence on the League's program, policy, and philosophy.[10] But Dr. Warbasse chaired CLUSA meetings with a ready gavel, wrote its books and pamphlets, and picked up its bills.[11] A convert to cooperation at middle

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[8] Parker, *First 125 Years,* p. 67.

[9] In addition to the studies cited in the first footnote, see also: Perry L. Green, "History of the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation" (Mimeographed, First Draft, 1955); I. Harvey Hull, *Built of Men: The Story of Indiana Cooperatives* (New York: Harper, 1952); Paul Turner, *They Did It in Indiana: The Story of the Indiana Farm Bureau Co-operatives* (New York: Dryden Press, 1947); Ward W. Fetrow and R. H. Elsworth, *Agricultural Cooperation in the United States,* U. S. Department of Agriculture, FCA, Bulletin No. 54 (Washington, April, 1947) pp. 141–154; Alfred W. Jones, "Fortune Report: Cooperatives" (Carbon copy of typescript, January 9, 1945), pp. 1–123, in files of Midland Cooperatives. This last document bears the typewritten notation: "This is not an article or draft of an article. It is a basic summary and analysis of the subject above in advance of an article in mind for publication at a later date." Apparently the author had in mind an article for *Fortune* magazine which was never published. This study is an astute analysis of the origins and evolution of farm purchasing associations.

[10] Executive Secretaries of CLUSA are: Scott H. Perky, 1916–1918; Albert Sonnichsen, 1919–1920; John F. McNamee, 1921–1923; Cedric Long 1924–1931; A. J. Hayes, 1931; Oscar Cooley, 1932–1933; Eugene R. Bowen, 1934–1946; Jerry Voorhis, 1947– .

[11] Upon retirement as President of CLUSA in 1941 after twenty-five years in that position, Warbasse estimated that he had contributed over $150,000 to the cooperative movement. Minutes, Board of Directors (July 14–15, 1941). League staff members suggest that the Doctor's estimate was undoubtedly on the conservative side.

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age, he had earlier toyed with eugenics, the single tax, syndicalism, anarchism, and pacifism, while establishing himself as a distinguished surgeon. For many years a bachelor, he waited for a woman of full proper qualifications which, later in his life, he recalled as including: good health, comeliness, "a more than average degree of intelligence," "sexuality or a desire of motherhood," love of beauty, education, creativeness, industry, good heredity, and "the possession of some property." The latter virtue was prerequisite for he knew that without the leisure that property afforded he could never accomplish that service to humanity to which he was dedicated. "This policy cannot be recommended," he wrote in later years, "unless the individual has definite ideals, for otherwise profligacy or indolence is the common result. I knew I was not capable of indolence, and profligacy had no allurements. So I stood firm."[12]

At age thirty-five he courted and won Agnes Dyer, who fit the specifics with virtues to spare. A wealthy and handsome woman, younger than her husband by some ten years, she bore him four sons and two daughters. She presided with grace over the informal seminars, which ranged over every conceivable subject, at their summer estate at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Donating money and energy to such causes as woman suffrage and the New School for Social Research, she supported her husband's new crusade with generosity and zeal. She suffered his moods and tempers with forbearance and love and was rewarded by a fierce and passionate loyalty and devotion such as few women can command. Often arbitrary in manner, Warbasse found it difficult to credit the efforts of all others, save those of his beloved wife.[13] Given to dietary fads and strenuous physical exercise—hiking, mountain climbing, chopping wood, sailing, skiing, were among his favored activities—he regularly reserved hotel rooms on the fourth floor (so legend assures us) so that he could walk up for his heart and down for his liver. At the age of sixty-three he rode down a small avalanche while skiing in the Canadian Rockies, and died, still a vigorous man, at the age of ninety-two.

For all his crotchets, Warbasse kept the Cooperative League on its feet and on its way by generous infusions of mind and spirit, and good hard cash. Other cooperative leaders somehow found it possible to tolerate his idiosyncracies, wink at his caprices, and work with him for that ultimate fraternal goal of the cooperative commonwealth where, hopefully, a larger measure of compassion and democracy would prevail.[14]

Warbasse took pride in tracing his ancestry back to pre-revolutionary days of colonial America. Many of his personal characteristics were exaggerations, sometimes parodies, of typically American qualities. His views on cooperation, too, while rarely shared by his contemporaries, rested upon typically American premises, partook of that peculiar enthusiasm which has so often marked social reform in the United States, and sought ideals not inconsistent with American forms of Utopian effort.

Cooperative ways, Warbasse believed, were rooted in the nature of human nature. "The forces which promote co-operation," he wrote about the time of CLUSA's founding, "are the natural human instincts, the in-

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[12] James Peter Warbasse, *North Star: A Contribution to Autobiography* (Falmouth, Massachusetts, 1958), 49–50. For other biographical details see his *Three Voyages: The Story of an Inquiring Soul Exploring His Way Through Life and Living It As He Goes Being Fragments of an Autobiography* (Chicago: Cooperative League of the U.S.A., 1956). The "three voyages" he described as "I. A Notable and Adventurous Career in Medicine and Surgery. II. Participation in the Radical Movements to Discover Ways to Heal the Ills of Society. III. Constructive Work in Consumer Cooperation—a great and quiet Social Revolution." For further insights into Warbasse's private life see his collected *Poems of the Family Circle* (New York, 1945), most of which revolve around his wife and children and his love of nature; and are dedicated to the idea that "Not labor, but leisure must be the aim of civilization." The poems run to sentimentality, but there is at least one remarkably unsentimental and moving poem written on the death of his son Eric.

[13] At age ninety he confessed: "Not all people are cooperative. I am by nature a non-cooperative person. . . . I was happy when alone, and my surgical experience tended to breed the autocrat in my nature. . . . My directors sometimes asked me why I had taken action on some matter without consulting them. The answer was not difficult, but the choice of words was often arduous. The fact was I was afraid the Board might not agree with me, and the thing I was for was so important that I did not care to take chances." Warbasse, *North Star,* p. 66.

[14] A number of interviews with old associates of the Doctor's gave added insight into his personality and character. Warbasse is remembered by cooperators who knew him intimately with mingled affection, admiration, amusement, and sometimes still with irritation as memories of his patrician ways press in.

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herent animal tendency toward mutual aid, which has existed as a biological necessity since animals began, and without which the race would perish." [15] Warbasse's view of the human animal, like that of most of his associates, preferred Kropotkin's Darwinism to Sumner's. The instinct for mutual aid was fortified by other inherent tendencies or ingrained racial habits—"natural good-heartedness, the inherent sense of justice, the fairness, and the good-will of human beings." [16] Another impulse, or "primitive instinct," as Warbasse preferred to call it, was that of service. He reminded his audience that "a great Teacher" had shown the way "and if any man would be first among you, let him be the servant of all." [17] If love would not suffice to compel service, then self-interest would do almost as well, for in the cooperative movement self-interest was purified and turned to the mutual advantage of all. "This movement teaches how we may all help ourselves by helping others." [18] The common neighborliness which had marked the simpler American society of the past could now be restored, he believed, only if the cooperative way won sway in society as in men's hearts. The present wickedness of a competitive society would persist so long as men put up with an environment that pitted fellow against fellow. "Superstitions, laws, and coercions have created the antagonisms" which turned man from his natural ways.[19] Force arose out of the injustices of present society, and coercion and exploitation could not be rooted out until consumers cooperation triumphed. Then the natural goodness of man could be released, and with it freedom and peace and opportunity and progress and brotherhood. Cooperation promised neither parasitism nor philanthropy, but self-reliance and mutual aid.

Not only the inherent quality of man worked for this end, but the structure of capitalistic society which had failed to balance production with consumption. "The profit system in industry has given rise to production beyond the capacity of the people to purchase; the people who perform service have not purchasing power to absorb the commodities produced." [20] The lust after private profit was the root of class antagonisms, imperialism, and war.[21] Capitalism was doomed; but its declared alternative, the socialist state, was equally to be feared. Cooperation offered the only valid way to win a new world. The need was for the application of "constructive social engineering" to usher in, by evolutionary steps, a cooperative society.[22] Both capitalism and socialism tended toward statism. The state, even where forms of political democracy prevailed, offered class justice. Consolidation of political power to meet modern crises did nothing but substitute coercion for voluntary association. The paternal state, welfare capitalist or socialist, corroded the self-reliance of the people, destroyed their initiative, usurped their liberties. The paternal state led to insolence and arrogance on the one hand, and indifference and submission on the other.

Cooperation offered a viable way to reconstruct society upon a "voluntary, non-political basis." It offered a way by which a "voluntary association of neighbors" could gradually take over as the state withered.[23] Furthermore, cooperation worked, as England and Northern Europe had already proved. It was the only form of social action that used means entirely consistent with its ends: it worked for a cooperative society not through politics, but through the establish-

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[15] James Peter Warbasse, *The Destiny of the Co-operative Movement,* (undated, unpaged), CLUSA files, Early Pamphlets, 1916–1919, Folder I.

[16] James Peter Warbasse, *Co-operative Democracy* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1923), 369; the indebtednes to Kropotkin is noted briefly and grudgingly, pp. 367 and 373. *Cooperative Democracy* went through five different editions, 1923, 1927, 1936, 1942, and 1947. The second edition represents a major revision of material; changes in the other editions were on minor points. The 1923 edition is cited below unless otherwise indicated.

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

[18] Warbasse in *Proceedings* of the National Conference of Social Work, 1919, p. 429.

[19] Warbasse, *Co-operative Democracy,* p. 369.

[20] *Ibid.,* p. 479.

[21] In the November, 1917 issue of the *Cooperative Consumer,* p. 131, Warbasse had lashed out against the "cataclysm of death." "The war was created by the interests of privilege; and it is these same forces that are keeping it going for profit during its progress, for hope of gain and its victories, and for the purpose of creating great national debts and imperialistic expansion in the interests of high finance." This kind of impassioned anti-war sentiment persisted in marking not only the attitudes of Warbasse but those of the Consumers Cooperative movement generally throughout the inter-war era of the 1920's and 1930's.

[22] Warbasse, *Co-operative Democracy,* p. 78.

[23] *Ibid.,* p. vii.

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ment of cooperatives. By practicing cooperation, men were educated to cooperation. Cooperation would conquer not by force of arms or ballots or logic, but as it demonstrated in practice its economic and moral superiority. It would win because "The consumers are no class. They are all." [24] Cooperation would triumph because it substituted "mutual aid and brotherhood for economic competition and antagonism." [25]

It is clear that Warbasse's theory of consumers cooperation was in the finest tradition of eclecticism, although he did not consistently acknowledge the varied sources of his views. The experience of cooperatives in England and Northern Europe was constantly at hand. His theory of consumers cooperation, however, was drawn primarily from two French theorists, Charles Gide and Ernest Poisson.[26] He borrowed both from Marxian socialism and Kropotkin's mutual associationalism. Good nineteenth century secular and religious humanitarianism obviously infused his whole approach to life. He may not have been a careful student of either William James or John Dewey, but pragmatism came naturally to influence his beliefs. For all this eclecticism his system was surprisingly logical, coherent, and persuasive.

Like all ideologues, he was not easily swayed from positions of heart and mind by the actual course of events. As cooperation stumbled along in the '20's, he rarely lost faith. He took heart from history, as he read it, which proved that all great movements began with a handful of committed and courageous men. "The seeds of the flower and fruition of humanity are in the little minorities," he reassured his fellow cooperators in 1929. It was good to be a pioneer, he exhorted them, "The great satisfaction is to be in the lead upward." [27] And what a glorious future there lay before them: the restoration of craftsmanship and the joy of creative work, which the machine, under capitalism, had weakened; the flowering of all the arts, both fine and practical; social security and an end to anxiety, in co-operation there need be no thought for the morrow; the triumph of beauty everywhere in life. Even the race itself would progress under cooperation for only then could the science of eugenics be applied; children would be born to the "intelligent and responsible," not to the "socially irresponsible and lecherous." [28] As for the legal system, it could be set free to determine whether an act of crime was determined by mental defectiveness or social injustice; there were but two possibilities, either the individual or society was sick. Punishment would be alien to cooperative justice; special Boards of Delinquents would propose either social reform, or diagnosis, treatment, "forgiveness," and "restitution." [29]

Cooperation proposed no assault on private property, but its wide distribution and elevation. All vested monopolies would vanish in the dawn of cooperation; the monopoly of the state, to be dreaded above all others, would never come. And to the question, what will happen to the private merchant when cooperative enterprises dominate distribution, Warbasse offered another rhetorical question in reply, "What will become of the doctors if we make the community healthy?" [30]

Cooperation, finally, offered a way to overcome the debasing influence of city life as it existed under private capitalism. "The town-dweller," he wrote, "has become mechanized. He thinks and acts in herds. His opinions are ready made for him." [31] "The family decays and disappears in the city. . . . The country is characterized by wives and mothers, the city by prostitutes and kept women called wives." [32] A cooperative society would introduce agrarian virtues into urban centers. The new civilization would not be centered around the factory, but around the free farm and around "the home, the school, the theater, the studio, the laboratory, the social centre, and the free society—the places where things are absorbed, and

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[24] J. P. Warbasse, Introduction to Charles Gide, *Consumers' Co-operative Societies* (New York, 1922), p. xiii.

[25] James Peter and Agnes D. Warbasse in *Our World,* IV (February, 1924), 27.

[26] Warbasse was indebted to Gide and to Ernest Poisson, *The Cooperative Republic* (Manchester: T. F. Unwin, 1925), and to Albert Sonnichsen, *Consumers' Cooperation* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1919).

[27] *Cooperation,* XV (December, 1929), 231–2.

[28] *Co-operation,* X (July, 1925), 125–6.

[29] Warbasse, *Co-operative Democracy,* p. 210.

[30] *Our World,* V (July, 1924), 74

[31] *Cooperation,* XV (February, 1929), 33.

[32] *Ibid.,* XVI (March, 1930), 54.

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where people do the things they like to do." [33] The primacy of consumption over production would at last be recognized, and upon that acknowledgment would arise the Cooperative Commonwealth.

Other cooperators shared most of Warbasse's beliefs and enthusiasms, if they did not articulate their ideas with such brilliance and at such length. Together they faced the disappointments and frustrations of proclaiming a gospel which pitifully few seemed to hear. "Perhaps it is this wild dance of life through which we have been passing . . . which has made it difficult for the Co-operative movement to advance," lamented one official editorial. "Cooperation does not flourish in a jazz age." [34] The slow advance of consumers cooperation in the 1920's led to debates, within the League, on the advisability of stressing practical over theoretical arguments. Together, Warbasse and Cedric Long seem to have held the line for educational over commercial motives.

More sensitive, if less incisive, in mentality than Warbasse, Long had frequent need to use his not inconsiderable political talents to moderate disputes within the League. Of these, none was more serious than the division over the application of the Rochdale principle of political neutrality. In the Great Lakes area, an aggressive (and for a time a majority) faction of the Finnish cooperative movement sought to ally the League with Communism. Nothing, of course, was more abhorrent to Warbasse, who sometimes entertained the wild hope that the Soviet Union might turn to cooperation, but more often saw Bolshevism as the chief enemy. But without the Finns, radical or not, there was little base of membership from which the League could operate.

The issue came to a head at the 1928 Congress, when the left wing faction entered resolutions criticizing the League's leadership, calling for recognition of the U.S.S.R. by the United States, and requesting that delegates to the next international congress be elected by this congress rather than be appointed by the President. Warbasse again stood his ground and, with the support of those Finns who feared to split the movement, carried the day. The real showdown came in 1930, when the Congress was held in the home of Finnish radicalism, Superior, Wisconsin. By that time, emboldened by the panic which had shocked Western capitalism, the Communist faction secured permission to open the Congress with greetings. The welcoming remarks soon turned into a tirade against Warbasse who sat silently in the chair as the attack mounted. In a burst of good humor, Warbasse replied by noting: "The Congress has listened to the greetings from the Communist Party. We may console ourselves that we have not been attacked for if these are greetings what would an attack have been?" [35] The initiative was now with the anti-Communists; and when Eskel Ronn, manager of the Cooperative Central Exchange, himself once sympathetic to the Communist cause, arose to defend cooperation as a preferred alternative to revolution, his remarks were greeted with howls and catcalls. Then, in what the radicals hoped would be a decisive gesture, the Communist faction walked out of the convention hall. When a significant majority of the local delegates chose to stay with Ronn and the League, the crisis was passed. The divisive faction had abdicated, leaving the League completely in control of the political neutralists. Had the Communists been able to secure just a bit larger showing on this occasion, the League would assuredly have been destroyed or turned to the purposes of the Communist Party. A basis for the later expansion of the League had been provided. When the depression came, the League entered a new era in its history, and this without the burden of carrying a divisive and subversive faction in its ranks.[36]

The progress of consumers cooperatives had not been spectacular down to the 1930's. Many of the new cooperatives organized during the war years were unsound in finance and management and without a clientele educated to the ideals and techniques of

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[33] Warbasse, *Co-operative Democracy,* p. 271.

[34] *Co-operation,* XIV (June, 1928), 118.

[35] *Proceedings* of 1930 Congress in CLUSA, *Yearbook* (1932); See also *Proceedings* of 1926 and 1928 Congresses which were printed separately.

[36] On the Communist problem see particularly folder of correspondence in New York Public Library; Minutes of Executive Staff, 1924–1933; *Cooperation,* XVI (November, 1930), 216; Angevine, unpublished essay on early history of the Cooperative League, pp. 17–23; and Parker, *First 125 Years,* pp. 117–121.

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cooperation. A large number of them fell apart in the depression of 1921. Toward the end of the decade, however, particularly in the Midwest, the cooperative purchasing of farm supplies enjoyed substantial advance. In Ohio, the otherwise conservative Farm Bureau took the lead in establishing not only cooperatives for the purchase of fertilizer, feed and fuel, but cooperatives in the field of insurance and credit as well. Murray Lincoln, who served as chief organizer of these varied enterprises, (and who became president of CLUSA when Warbasse retired in 1941), proved to be one of the most dynamic and imaginative of cooperative leaders, an intensely pragmatic man, and a bold innovator (who recommended that every business have a "vice president in charge of revolution").[37] Next door, in Indiana, under Isaac Harvey Hull, a more earthy and less bombastic sort, the Farm Bureau moved in much the same direction. In Kansas City, Howard Cowden was busy putting together a cooperative enterprise dealing chiefly with petroleum products. Long years of struggling had made of Cowden an administrator who expected the same intense devotion to commercial detail and social ideals from his subordinates that he daily exhibited. He demanded and he got results; his Consumers Cooperative Association enjoyed dramatic gains in the late 1920's and all throughout the depressed decade that followed. Operating on narrow margins against intense competition of private companies, he saved every dollar and every penny and invested them in commercial expansion and in the production of petroleum products as well. E. G. Cort, another free-wheeling zealot, never happier than when engaged in a knock-down battle for consumers cooperation, was proving that the cooperative production and distribution of petroleum products could be as successful in the upper Mississippi Valley as on the Great Plains. More erratic than Cowden, and less the careful executive, Cort was also more open-hearted; his enthusiasm was less disciplined but just as effective in winning converts to dollar savings through cooperative purchase and to the vision of the happy land of the Cooperative Commonwealth. Under his inspired but uneven direction, Midland Cooperative, based in Minnesota, soon enjoyed a substantial share of the rural petroleum products market in a seven-state region. The cantankerous Cort was ably assisted in the realm of education and propaganda by Joe Gilbert, a former socialist and one-time worker for the Non-Partisan League, who brought to cooperation that same crusading spirit that had characterized his entire career. A fiery orator, a lively teller of stories, both salty and earthy, a man of rare independence and humor, he did as much to win friends for Midland and cooperation as anyone.[38]

From these and like sources came a vigorous advance of cooperative enterprise, beginning slowly in the mid-1920's and soaring upward in the early years of the depression when hard times provided an inducement to the consumer to seek every saving possible, however small, and a stimulus to social reform at the same time. From panic to war, 1929-1941, farm purchasing cooperatives enjoyed approximately a four-fold increase in business throughout the nation. The growth of urban retail cooperatives, while substantial enough, particularly in the area served by the Eastern Cooperative Wholesale from Maine to Maryland, could not match the more dramatic advance of the farm purchasing associations. Attempts on the part of the farm cooperatives, on the other hand, to go into grocery and allied retailing fields proved for the most part abortive. Stronger in some areas than others, all consumers cooperatives, whether urban or rural, were never able to gain much more than a half of one percent of the total trade of the nation during the 1930's, a pathetic figure when placed against Fnland's 30 percent, Britain's 12 percent, and

[37] Murray D. Lincoln, As Told to David Karp, *Vice President in Charge of Revolution* (New York, 1960) is a rollicking, informal memoir, filled with anecdotes of the League.

[38] Davis Douthit, *Nobody Owns Us: The Story of Joe Gilbert, Midwestern Rebel* (Chicago: Cooperative League of the U. S. A., 1948). Jerry Voorhis, executive director of CLUSA since 1947, recalls that these "pioneer" cooperative leaders were "by their very nature individual 'stars' rather than team players." They commanded devotion and loyalty; but not until "the second generation of general managers and board chairmen" came into power—leaders who were "trustees rather than original architects, administrators rather than creators, and team players rather than individual 'stars' "—did the art of "group decisions" take over. Jerry Voorhis, *American Cooperatives* (New York: Harper Bros., 1961), pp. 179–80.

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Sweden's 10 percent. It was understandable that cooperative leaders tended to measure progress against the very modest and recent beginnings of the movement and not against the tiny share of the total market controlled.[39]

In the context of economic crises for the economy generally together with the advance of consumers cooperatives, the Cooperative League, recently liberated from the Communist incubus, was prepared to enter a new phase of frenzied activity. Problems of organization and leadership, however, had first to be resolved. Warbasse was still undisputed champion, but the untimely death of Cedric Long, who had seen the League through so many internal troubles, left it without the regular week-to-week direction it required. The post of executive secretary was filled temporarily and ineffectively by A. J. Hayes of Superior and then by Oscar Cooley, 1932-1933; but they were never happy in the job.

A bolder man, E. R. Bowen, was selected the following year, largely by chance and by default for no one else could be found who would take the job. It was a happy choice for the League, because Bowen's qualities matched the cooperatives' challenges. By his own description not a "religious" but a "spiritual" person, his social conscience was moved by Quaker and Methodist experiences. Formally educated at Cornell College in Iowa, he never gave up the habit of self-learning. An inherent radicalism had very early been informed by the reading of Henry George and Walter Rauschenbusch. His experience in business proved, in several ways, to be good preparation for League leadership. Immediately upon graduation he had gone to work for the Avery farm machinery company of Peoria, Illinois. By 1920 he was in charge of sales. The agricultural depression of the early 1920's brought the company to bankruptcy, but he and another officer were permitted by the receivers to reorganize the business, which they accomplished just in time to go under following the crash in 1929. Economic failure provided both the leisure and the incentive for Bowen's search for a way out. Someone pointed out to him the growth of consumers cooperatives, even during depression; which sent him off to visit Midland in Minneapolis and the Finnish cooperatives in Superior, Wisconsin. He visited with Henry A. Wallace and with E. G. Nourse, and George Warren at Cornell. Returning home he asked for guidance at Northwestern and the University of Chicago, but it was not till Professor Paul H. Douglas gave him a list of readings on cooperation that his conversion was accomplished. Visiting with his new mentor in December of 1933, he learned that Warbasse was to be in town for a meeting of the Board of Directors; he presented himself as a candidate for executive secretary and there being none other, he was hired on the spot.[40]

By 1934, when he took over, Bowen was wholly committed to consumers cooperation. Long experience in private business had trained him to routine administrative detail and to the notion that even cooperatives must regularly show a profit (or "earnings" as cooperators preferred). He was as patient and long suffering as the farmers he knew so well; and, best of all, he was as stubborn on first principles as Warbasse, but far more flexible in their application. One long hard look at the consumers cooperative movement convinced Brown that there was but one way for the League to move and that was to win the friendship and then the membership of the influential cooperative farm purchasing associations which were at that moment making such dramatic advances. When Warbasse dug in his heels, saying that these cooperatives were producers' not consumers', Bowen began referring to the "consumers' cooperative purchasing movement," in which urban cooperatives and farm purchasing associations alike would be united. For four years—until Bowen finally won an unconditional victory in the League Congress of 1938—the battle was fought. Warbasse fought for the "purity" of consumers cooperation, Bowen for the general advance of all save marketing cooperatives. Warbasse clung to representation on the League Board through the district educational leagues; Bowen sought to transform the League into

[39] *Business Week*, (April 27, 1946), p. 74; Florence Parker, *Bulletin 843 on Cooperation* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1944), pp. 2–5.

[40] Interview with E. R. Bowen, December 31, 1959. Autobiographical notes appear in many of Bowen's writings.

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a federation of regional cooperatives, including both the urban and farm wholesale co-ops. Warbasse insisted upon the continued separation of business and educational phases of the movement into separate compartments, fearing that commercial motives would corrupt Rochdale axioms; Bowen preferred that business and education proceed as a unit in order that the ideology of cooperation would infuse commerce with its reform enthusiasm. Warbasse saw the Commonwealth coming alone through cooperation, and continued to express his cooperatively-anarchistic views; Bowen thought that a little political action might be expedient and might hasten the nation along the road to that Commonwealth, of which he also dreamed.[41]

A second-rate playwright could not more neatly have invented such opposite characters. On the stage, the production might easily have slipped into unintended farce; in reality the conflict was in earnest, in deadly earnest. One by one Bowen won over the farm purchasing cooperatives; those that chose not to affiliate directly (the Indiana Farm Bureau Cooperative Association, for example), Bowen got on the Board through National Cooperatives, Inc., a cooperative wholesale which served both urban and rural cooperatives. As Midland came in, and CCA in Missouri, and the all-powerful Ohio Farm Bureau operation, the nature of the League began subtly to change. In a knock-down battle at the 1938 Congress, with Warbasse drawing his strength largely from the Finnish groups and from the old district leagues and Bowen his from Midland, Consumers Cooperative Association, the Eastern Cooperative Wholesale, and the Farm Bureau groups from Ohio, a reorganization of the League's structure was effected which gave to the regional associations, particularly those in farm purchasing, the dominant position of control. Several years later, when Warbasse stepped out as President his successor, Murray Lincoln, was selected from the largest of the farm associations and the one contributing most heavily to the League's budget.[42]

The mid-years of the depression decade were a time of ideological transition for CLUSA.[43] The abstract purity of Warbasse's theories faded rapidly, but his ideal of a Cooperative Commonwealth continued to power the movement. Bowen and others engaged in heroic efforts not only to bring in the farm purchasing associations, but also to encourage labor unions to organize cooperatives and to work through the churches in order to broaden its popular base. Consumers cooperation was tailor-fit for middle-class America in the depressed years. It provided modest savings for hard-pressed consumers; it offered social change without revolution; it promised a wider distribution of private property; it proclaimed the means of democratic self-help as opposed to government action; it held forth a viable alterna-

[41] Issues of *Cooperation,* 1934, and of *Consumers' Cooperation,* 1935–1941, give glimpses of the long, running dispute between Warbasse and Bowen; so, too, do the official *Proceedings* of League Congresses for 1934, 1936, 1938, and 1940 and the Minutes of the Executive Staff and Board of Directors for these years; from interviews with some of the principals one can catch a sense of how crucial the conflict was held to be to the future of CLUSA. See also Colston E. Warne, "Consumers on the March," *Nation,* 144 (June 5, 1937), 645–6; Burley, *The Consumers' Cooperative as a Distributing Agency* p. 202. Bowen's own account of the struggle, set down upon his retirement in 1946, can be found in "Problems of Democracy in Cooperatives (Consider the Past: The Past is Prologue)" (sixteen typewritten pages, carbon copy, initialled "ERB", in CLUSA Archives, Chicago Offices), and in "Historical Information and Documents Relating to the Twelve Year Discussion from 1934 to 1946 of Consumer Ideology, of a Unit Structure and of Financing the Education-Organization Program out of Gross National Savings of the Consumer-Purchasing Cooperative Movement in the United States which Finally Ended with Their Adoption at a Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Cooperative League, Cooperative Finance Association, and National Cooperatives" (nine typewritten pages, carbon copy, initialed "ERB", in CLUSA Archives, Chicago Office).

[42] Following reorganization, CLUSA offices were moved from New York to Chicago. CLUSA operated without a subsidy from Warbasse for the first time in 1939. The bitterness of the struggle is attested by the absence of the Minutes of the Board of Directors meeting preceding the October Congress from the Minute Book. A pencilled notation at that spot, probably in Bowen's handwriting, records their withdrawal. See, however, letter of E. R. Bowen to Joe Gilbert, September 23, 1953, in "Words of Appreciation to Joe Gilbert" (Scrapbook in Midland Cooperative's library assembled on the occasion of Gilbert's retirement). Parker, *The First 125 Years,* Chapter 23; and Angevine, unpublished history, pp. 27–8, touch upon these events.

[43] Florence Parker has concluded that "This influx [of farm purchasing cooperatives] increased the size and influence of the League, but it also resulted in some dilution of the orthodox Rochdale viewpoint that had characterized the League." *First 125 Years,* p. 161. The shift of ideology evolved slowly, however, and in response not only to the organizational change in 1938 but to other events and forces as noted below.

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tive to monopoly capitalism, fascism, and socialism; its neutralist and pacifist inclinations were fully consistent with the popular mood of the inter-war era.

The Warbasse influence on League ideology continued long after his practical control of League affairs had been loosened, but it was from Bowen that the tone for cooperative philosophy was set in the years of his tenure, 1934-1946. Where Warbasse had borrowed heavily from English and French experience and writing, Bowen drew from domestic reformers (Edward Bellamy, Henry George, Walter Rauschenbusch, H. D. Lloyd, Horace Kallen, Louis Brandeis, E. Stanley Jones) and from the Swedish example, known from Marquis Childs' account, as "the middle way." [44] Bowen and other cooperators were absolutely convinced that the crisis that shook western capitalism beginning in 1929 marked the end of an era. Capitalism, which had evolved in Bowen's mind out of slavery and serfdom, was doomed. To the rhetorical question, "what about capitalism?" Bowen advised that cooperators reply with matter-of-fact simplicity: "Like slavery and feudalism, which capitalism superseded, it will not work any more." [45] "Why equivocate?" Bowen queried. In the place of private enterprise the nation now had "monopolism." America was at a crossroads: it could swing down the right hand path to dictatorial fascism, down the left hand road to totalitarian socialism, or toil down the straight and narrow path toward a consumers cooperative society. "Monopolism" could not distribute the ever increasing power of a technologically progressive society to produce abundantly for all human needs; consumers cooperatives could. New Deal measures might soften grievances, but provided no "permanent cure." Cooperation was the peaceful way out, depending on neither "bullets nor ballots," and was the means by which Americans would come to own America.[46] Bowen knew in his heart that he was dealing with the fundamentals of economic analysis. Only cooperation could conquer "poverty and war which are inherent in capitalism by distributing what we produce widely among the people and preventing piled up unconsumed surpluses," he said on a nation-wide radio program in 1936. "Capitalism doesn't simply produce evils—it is evil itself," he continued. Carried away by the opportunity of reaching many listeners—for the Town Meeting of the Air had a large and loyal following in the '30's—Bowen went on to invite every listener "to join the hundred million meek who are out to inherit the earth. . . . Everyone can and should help to clear his or her own little corner of creation by reorganizing his neighborhood into a co-operative community beautiful." [47]

Cooperatives, insisted Bowen, must cultivate the "Beauty side, as well as the Brotherhood and Bread sides." [48] On this he and Warbasse were agreed—the natural unfolding of the arts would come only with cooperation. Under the League's direction—as well as by the initiative of regional and local cooperatives—elaborate programs of education, arts, and recreation were stimulated. Carl R. Hutchinson, a theological student attracted to the gospel of cooperation, set the pace for cooperative education in the Ohio Farm Bureau's study discussion group movement, which borrowed directly from adult education methods pioneered by the Antigonish cooperators in Nova Scotia. Neighborhood groups, labeled Advisory Councils,

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[44] E. R. Bowen (ed.), "Readings That Have Moved Me Most—Toward Co-operative Economic Thought and Action" (Mimeographed, Glenview, Illinois, 1953), pp. 1–92. Included in this anthology also are John Ruskin, George W. Russell, Beatrice Webb, Anders Hedberg, A. Johannson, Ragnor Lund, and M. M. Coady. In January, 1960, Bowen forwarded to the author a copy of Beatrice Webb, *The Discovery of the Consumer* (New York, 1947), together with a note crediting Beatrice Webb's writings as being the cooperative "Bible" for Murray Lincoln and himself.

[45] *Consumers' Cooperation,* XXVI (September, 1940), 131–2. Not insensitive to charges of wild radicalism leveled against cooperators, the editorial ends on a prudential note: "Of course, the selection of words to persuade others requires judgment—according to circumstances which each one must determine for himself."

[46] E. R. Bowen, *America's Answer* (CLUSA pamphlet Number 341, undated, c. 1935), pp. 5–10. The imagery of the crossroads—hardly a novel one—Bowen credits to A. J. Hayes; it recurred again and again in Bowen's writings and speeches and in cartoon form in official publications.

[47] E. R. Bowen in *Town Meeting of the Air* (Number 11, January 9, 1936), pp. 16–17.

[48] Minute Book, 1934–1938, Entry for December 28, 1935, p. 6. Bowen was a most unusually prolific writer during this period, turning out hundreds of editorials, leaflets, pamphlets, mimeographed releases, and articles. Much of this ephemera was collected and preserved in the library of Midland Cooperatives in Minneapolis and in the Chicago offices of CLUSA; it would be fruitless to catalogue this material in a footnote.

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were organized for the discussion of pressing issues of the day; out of study came proposals for social action, for learning was always to be related to doing, and the cooperative way was learned through "group thinking." [49] Ideally, serious discussion was preceded by a cooperative recreation period, consisting of folk singing or dancing, the playing of games, or participation in creative dramatics. The hope was that "people who sing together or play together will be inspired to work together." [50] Cooperators quoted with approval the dictum of Harry A. Overstreet (identified as a loyal cooperator) that recreation was needed "to call out the noncompetitive, non self-centered impulses; to induce people to experience their pleasures together instead of too exclusively in private." [51] Other cooperators warned against the tragic implications of traditional education which stressed scholarship and fostered competition and thus stimulated "the leadership which emerges to seek wealth and power as ends in themselves." [52] Through playing and singing and dancing together, participants learned to "express their social natures in the freedom of joyous and wholesome activity. . . . In this way each member shares fully in the activity of the group. The attitude of mutual helpfulness is carried over from the play floor to the study circle." [53] Members of these Advisory Councils, or Neighborhood Circles, or Fireside Forums—as they were variously called—were not to be taught cooperative ends and means but were to learn them by participating in group activities. The need to promote togetherness through group dynamics, was seen most clearly by Carl Hutchinson who noted the "chilling sense of isolation and despair" that many cooperators felt while trying to hold to a "vision of a cooperative brotherhood in the face of a topsy turvy world gone mad. . . . We as a minority group may easily lose our identity in a time of sweeping social change," he warned, "unless we have cultural roots deep enough to unite us and reinforce the cooperative pattern of life." [54] This sense of being enlisted in a beleaguered cause most certainly required the promotion of an enthusiasm passionate enough to keep the faithful from doubt. Thus many cooperative meetings in the 1930's closed with the singing of the "Battle Hymn of Cooperation":

Oh, we are a mighty army, though we bear no sword and gun.
We're enlisted 'til the struggle for cooperation's won. . . .
Oh, we know our plan is righteous and we know our cause is just;
For upon the brotherhood of man we firmly base our trust.
Let us strive to win the victory, for win we can and must.
Consumers marching on! [55]

Given the Commonwealth ideology, which persisted throughout the 1930's and on into the war years, it is understandable that consumers cooperation was infused with the old spirit of the social gospel in these years. Bowen's outreach was regularly extended to the churches in the hope that they might become centers out of which the cooperative gospel might spread. Warbasse, who was as skeptical of the practicality of religious lead-

[49] Carl R. Hutchinson, *Cooperative Discussion Circles* (Ohio Farm Bureau, Education Department, Columbus, 1936), p. 4. See also his *Seeking a New World Through Co-Operatives* (New York, 1935). For other commentaries on the cooperative group discussion and recreation movement see David Crosby, "Social Values in Co-operative Recreation," *Sociology and Social Research,* XXVI (November–December, 1941), 139–45; *The Journal of Educational Sociology,* XVI (April, 1943), pp. 465–532 (the entire issue is devoted to this subject); Extension Program in Cooperation, Department of Education, State of Minnesota, "Lesson Materials for Discussion Groups" (State Emergency Relief Administration Project, mimeographed, 1936), pp. 1–109; folders of mimeographed educational material in files of Washington office of CLUSA.

[50] Durward G. De Witt, foreword in *Co-op Song Book* (Consumers Cooperative Association, c. 1936). Some former members of CCA recall that this Song Book was used long after community singing had gone out of style as an inspirational device.

[51] *Co-op Magazine,* I (July-August, 1945), 11.

[52] *Consumers' Cooperation,* XXII (September, 1936), 135.

[53] Quoted from a publication of the Ohio Farm Bureau, 1939, in Crosby, "Social Values in Co-operative Recreation," pp. 140–1.

[54] Carl Hutchinson in *Proceedings* of Cooperative Congress, 1940, unpaged, and in his remarks in *Annals of the American Academy,* Vol. 191 (May, 1937), 149–154.

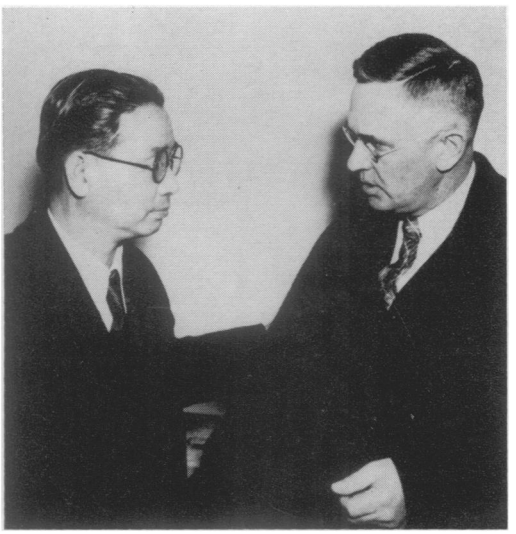
[55] *Co-op Song Book* (CCA, c. 1936).

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Mrs. Agnes D. Warbasse registering at Co-op Congress

Courtesy of the Cooperative League of U.S.A., Chicago



Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa and E. R. Bowen (1936)

Courtesy of the Cooperative League of U.S.A., Chicago

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ers as he was of the apparent lack of ideological commitment among farm cooperators, did not oppose Bowen's moves, although he did not very heartily endorse them, either. From religious reform movements came such cooperative leaders as Carl Hutchinson, Ellis J. Cowling, Benson Y. Landis, J. Henry Carpenter, E. Stanley Jones, James Myers, Father Virgil G. Michel, Father Edgar Schmiedeler, and Father Luigi Ligutti, to name only the most prominent.[56]

When Toyohiko Kagawa, the celebrated Japanese Christian radical, visited the country in the mid-1930's, meetings were organized not only by church groups but by local cooperatives, where he fervently witnessed for cooperation as the Christian way of life. Cooperation was Christian, so it was believed, because its means were non-violent and voluntary; it provided the opportunity to practice love of neighbor; it offered self-fulfillment through service, and because it restored a sense of personal worth to those who had suffered "a sense of defeat." In cooperation the individual need not "suffer the degrading sense of being exploited, or the equally demoralizing experience of having to share in the plundering of others' lives."[57] Cooperation promised brotherhood, justice, and eternal peace. Like Christianity, cooperation was the leaven in the lump; a small band of the faithful, witnessing daily to their faith, could set in motion a sweeping transformation of the whole of society. The Cooperative Commonwealth was surely a province of God's Kingdom on Earth; and like the Kingdom of God it lived as a vital force in the hearts of men even before the final day of triumph.

The appeal of cooperation to church liberals was rarely stated more candidly than by an article in *Common Sense* in 1936 in which it was concluded: "Non-radical, idealistic, dignified by acceptance by leaders of the church, and offering immediate cash benefits as well as future social gains, the cooperative principle appears as an almost heaven-sent solution to the present economic dilemma—safe, sane, and authorized by the Holy Bible."[58] The arguments were both utopian and prudential and the cooperative movement enjoyed a substantial broadening of popular support from church-sponsored meetings and cooperatives. But signs of the imminence of the Kingdom of God were difficult to find. At least one cooperative-minded clergyman felt obliged to remind some of his more enthusiastic brethren that successful cooperatives had more often been built by "free thinking Bohemians and Finns," and by "hard-bitten farmers," working "without benefit of clergy."[59] Others warned that cooperation was no panacea, it offered modest margins of savings, it was unlikely to become a major factor in the total economy, that more fundamental measures were called

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[56] Ellis Cowling, *Christians and the Co-operatives* (Central States Co-operative League, Chicago, 1936), *Co-operatives in America: Their Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1943), and *Facing the Sunrise: Youth and the Co-operative Movement;* Benson Y. Landis, *Bethlehem and Rochdale: The Churches and Consumer Cooperation* (New York: CLUSA, 1944), *A Cooperative Economy: A Study of Democratic Economic Movements* (New York, 1943), *Manual on the Church and Cooperatives* (Federal Council of Churches, New York, 1947), and with James Myers, *Christianity and Work: A Study Course in the Ethics of Occupations* (Federal Council of Churches, January, 1946); E. Stanley Jones, *The Choice Before Us* (New York, 1937), and *Christ's Alternative to Communism* (New York, 1935); James Myers, "Consumers' Cooperation and World Peace," (CLUSA, 1938, mimeographed), *Cooperative Funeral Associations* (CLUSA, Chicago, 1946), and *In Business for Service: Religious Implications of Consumers' Cooperation* (no place, no date, c. 1938); Virgil G. Michel, *Christian Social Reconstruction* (Milwaukee, 1937), pp. 122–4; Edgar Schmiedeler, *Consumers' Co-operatives* (New York: The Paulist Press, 1937), and *Cooperation: A Christian Mode of Industry,* New York, 1941); Luigi G. Ligutti and John C. Rowe, *Rural Roads to Security: America's Third Struggle for Freedom* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1940), Chapters 16 and 17. Also see: Courtney B. Cleland, "Cooperatives and the Churches" (unpublished study, 1948, in files of Midland Cooperatives); E. R. Bowen "Social Implications of the Cooperative Movement," *The American Catholic Sociological Review,* II (August, 1942), 195–203; John W. Dietrich, *The Cooperative Movement* (address to First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis, 1933), in Midland Cooperatives Library; Leo R. Ward (ed.), *United for Freedom: Co-operatives and Christian Democracy* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1945).

[57] Hutchinson, *Seeking a New World,* pp. 27, 52. See the writings of Toyohiko Kagawa on cooperation; and, for his influence in the United States, see Victor E. Marriott (editor), *Kagawa and Cooperatives* (Kingdom of God Fellowship, Chicago, 1935); Paul Hutchinson, "Kagawa: Proletarian Saint," *Atlantic Monthly* (May, 1936), 594–600.

[58] Ruth Brindze, "Religion and Radicalism: The Church and the Cooperative Movement," *Common Sense,* V (May, 1936), 10.

[59] Cowling, *Christians and the Co-operatives,* p. 6. Also see Cowling, "Churchmen and the Co-ops," *Christian Century,* LIII (December 9, 1936), 1651–2.

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for.[60] And Joe Gilbert, Midland's cooperative evangelist, after years of crusading had reason to question the effectiveness of ministers in sparking the formation of cooperatives; if one were looking for men of influence in the community, he once suggested, it might be better to work through barbers than through ministers.[61]

It may safely be concluded that Kagawa's "brotherhood economics" and all the church activity and outpouring of religious enthusiasm had larger impact upon the ideology of cooperation in the 1930's than it did upon the advance of cooperative enterprises. When the war ushered in a new era in the nation's history, the vision of cooperation as the means to win the Kingdom of God on Earth was reduced to a fitful shimmer.

The 1930's saw Warbasse's cooperative commonwealth ideal at its most vigorous, even while the good Doctor was gradually losing control over his beloved League; but running parallel with this ideal was another which, by the end of the decade, was in the ascendency; and by 1947, when Bowen retired to make way for Jerry Voorhis as executive secretary, the central direction of the League had been substantially changed. Several rather obvious factors made for change. The farm purchasing associations gained new importance on the League Board. The general climate of economic and social reform that marked the New Deal led the League to reassess its traditional "neutralist" stand toward political action. Cooperatives, even while expanding spectacularly as business generally slumped, failed to win any significant proportion of the total national market; and the coming of war, more terrible than the last, shattered the cooperative dream of peace and brotherhood.

Bowen was a born crusader, and his enthusiasm for cooperation never wavered.[62] But for him the possibilities latent in cooperation were blended with the hope of achieving reforms through political legislation. From the beginning of his administration he opposed Warbasse's strict insistence upon absolute neutralism and suggested that governmental reforms not inconsistent with cooperation should be endorsed. Thus Bowen and other cooperators labored in the 1930's for work relief for the unemployed, minimum wage and maximum hours legislation, social security including health insurance, sharp increases in the rates of progressive income and inheritance taxes, public ownership of utilities and monopolies; the organization of producers into labor unions, agricultural marketing associations, and professional guilds; and increased government aid in the fields of housing and education.[63]

Wallace J. Campbell, Bowen's assistant in the 1930's and later director of CLUSA's Washington office, also exerted his influence toward these ends. Closely associated with the democratic socialist movement at that time, Campbell viewed Warbasse's neutralist and anarchistic tendencies as hopelessly irrelevant to the crisis of western capitalism. While warning that cooperatives themselves should not engage directly in political action, Campbell urged cooperative leaders vigorously to join all movements for reform that showed promise of blocking reaction and totalitarianism. Cooperative leaders, wrote Campbell in 1940, should support political action "directed toward the creation of a non-profit economic order based on production and distribution for use."[64] Other cooperative leaders supported this attack. Colston E. Warne, for example, warned that to ignore political reform was to strengthen reaction and to jeopardize the very existence

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[60] See, for example, Goodwin Watson, "Have the Co-ops been Oversold?" *Christian Century,* LIV (June 16, 1937), 770–3; A. V. Montier, "No Cooperatives for Us!" *Christian Century,* LIII (April 8, 1936), 537–8.

[61] Joe Gilbert's remark was recalled by Lynn Matteson it a letter dated September 24, 1953, in Words of Appreciation to Joe Gilbert (Scrapbook on Retirement of Joe Gilbert, in Midland Cooperative files). For other commentaries on religion and cooperation see: C. B. Aziere, "The Cooperative Movement in Rural Parishes," *The Ecclesiastical Review,* C (April, 1939), 360–6; Philip Burnham, "What Is Cooperation?" *Commonweal,* XXIII (March 20, 1936), 569–72; Benson Y. Landis, "Christianity and the Cooperatives," *Social Action,* II (March 15, 1936), 1–31; James Myers, "The Churches and the Cooperatives," *Christian Century,* LIII (March 11, 1936), 395–6; Edgar Schmiedeler, "A Silent Revolution," *Catholic World,* CXLIII (June, 1936), 279–284.

[62] E. R. Brown in *Proceedings* of the 21st Congress, 1958, no page.

[63] *Consumers' Cooperation,* XXI (October, 1935), 172; and XXV (June, 1939), 99. E. R. Bowen, Letter to Editor, *Chrisian Century,* LI (May 16, 1934), 666–7.

[64] Wallace J. Campbell in Harry Laidler and Campbell, *The Consumers' Cooperative Movement: A Factual Survey* (League for Industrial Democracy, 1940), p. 60. See also letters and clippings in folder in CLUSA Washington Office archives marked "Socialism."

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of cooperation. Capitalism was not about to give up without a struggle, he believed; all weapons to promote cooperation would have to be employed.[65] Neither could Joe Gilbert of Midland, accept his boss's [E. G. Cort's] neutralism, but pursued a many-sided attack upon the evils of contemporary society. Gilbert was a militant promoter of cooperatives, yet advocated public ownership of monopolies and natural resources, and other reforms.[66] When a special subcommittee of the National Education Association was established to investigate consumers cooperation as a way out of social crisis, its report stressed the need for a mixed economy composed of "the profit type [of industrial organization], the cooperative type, and the governmental type to supplement the first two." Cooperatives, it was suggested, would never supplant capitalism; the best they could do would be to aid it to reform itself by example. Let the cooperatives aim at controlling a sector of the economy, but drop the ideal of the cooperative commonwealth.[67]

The model for this latter strategy was, of course, Sweden where the "middle way" of a mixed economy had been established. Kagawa had stirred up nationwide enthusiasm for the commonwealth ideal in his 1935 visit; the following year Anders Hedburg from Sweden covered much the same circuit. The results of his visit were not as spectacular but were probably more substantial in the long run, for the Swedish experience very quickly came to dominate cooperative thinking in the later years of the 1930's. Bowen had been attracted to the success of the Swedish cooperatives very early in his career when he read the *St. Louis Post Dispatch's* series on that subject and conferred with its author, Marquis Childs. When the series was expanded into a book in 1936, it sold over twenty-two thousand copies in a single year.[68] Here was an illustration of what a dynamic cooperative movement could accomplish. It aimed not at some ultimate or ambiguous ideal society, but merely at the control of a significant sector of the economy —a quarter or a third. It aimed not at bringing down the profit system but at setting reasonable limits to competition. It sought to establish a cooperative economic "yardstick" against which the efficiency and social efficacy of both private and public enterprise could be measured. Swedish cooperatives, CLUSA publicly pointed out, had played a major role in the breaking of great private cartels; could not American cooperatives similarly help "bust" the trusts? The Swedish consumer cooperatives had gone into production, should not American cooperatives do the same? In Sweden, the commercial and educational phases of cooperative activity were carried on by a single organization, should not the Cooperative League encourage this unit system of organization? [69]

An additional impetus to the redirection of cooperative ideology was the rise of a business managerial leadership within the cooperative movement. As cooperative enterprise expanded, efficient management was demanded; cooperative pioneers were not always the most shrewd businessmen, although men like Cowden and Lincoln combined a passion for cooperation as a way of life with a ruthless instinct for commercial advantage. To meet the competition of private manufacturers and distributors, the cooperatives were forced to find managers of comparable executive ability. Find them they did. These managers, as a class, tended to be concerned with promoting the hard business side of the enterprise although they were not unsympathetic with educational programs, particularly those that tended to deepen the loyalty of cooperative patrons. Survival in a highly competitive market during the war years and the immediate post

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[65] Warne in *Cooperation,* XVIII (February, 1932), 22–4.

[66] Douthit, *Nobody Owns Us,* pp. 217–22.

[67] H. G. Lull, *Consumer Cooperatives* (National Education Association, Washington, D. C., 1940), pp. 17–19. This publication was a thirty-nine page report of the NEA's Committee on Cooperatives, of which Lull was the chairman.

[68] Marquis W. Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936). An enlarged and revised edition was published in 1938. Childs described a mixed economy of three major sectors—private, cooperative, and socialized.

[69] Cecil Crews, *Why Cooperation?* (Northern States Cooperative League, c. 1937); CLUSA, *How Swedish Cooperatives Break Monopoly* (Pamphlet Number 389, New York, c. 1939); E. R. Bowen, Report to Board of Directors, "Growth of Cooperative Movement to handle a sufficient percentage of total national business to be able to lower price levels and raise pay levels enough to eliminate unemployment, poverty and tenancy," (Minute Book, typewritten report, dated June 17, 1940).

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war years required that practical considerations regularly take precedence over ideology. Education often subtly gave way to advertising, and the drive to transform society was often replaced by market orientation. "Bureaucracy," wrote one critical scholar, "triumphed over brotherhood." [70]

Shifts of relative emphasis, long under way, became obvious in the immediate post-war era. These years constituted a period of crisis for the cooperative movement and for the League. The increased size of cooperative enterprises made it difficult to preserve democratic control. Severe competition forced the cooperatives to reorganize the business side of their operations or go under.

As for the League, the time for Bowen's retirement had come. When Congressman Jerry Voorhis was defeated by the Republican candidate, Richard M. Nixon, the League found in the New Deal Democrat from Southern California an able successor. Before Bowen retired, however, he was able to persuade the League to become one body with National Cooperatives, Incorporated. It was a marriage as brief as it was stormy and the alliance was quickly dissolved for reasons of gross incompatibility, but not before the abortive effort had all but destroyed both National Cooperatives and the League itself. Only by heroic efforts of the old League Board together with the reconciling patient leadership of Voorhis, was it possible to bring order out of chaos.[71]

Meanwhile, the League's increasing attention to the business side of cooperative enterprise was reflected in the official journal. In December, 1943, its new editor, Gilman Calkins, called for a new emphasis upon "building membership, personnel, patronage, finance, service facilities, understanding. . . . It is not so important to explain the relationship of cooperative food store service to the parable of Jesus and the loaves and fishes as it is to describe proper ways of buying and stocking and displaying loaves and fishes in the co-op store, and then get every possible Mrs. Consumer to buy and buy—and become an owner, too." [72]

In 1946 the League established a special subcommittee to recommend changes in policy and publicity. Out of this committee, chaired by Merlin Miller (then an employee of CCA), came a "Terminology Manual." The Committee recommended that there be no more "indiscriminate" criticism of capitalism, for that merely aroused hostility and misunderstanding. "Indiscriminate attacks on 'capitalism' may cause the speaker to be classified as a communist or fascist." A better tactic was to demonstrate that an unregulated profit drive led to monopoly. "Many who are alienated by an attack on 'capitalism' will heartily support opposition to monopoly." Avoid use of the old term "Cooperative Commonwealth," the committee urged, for it suggests that all enterprise should be taken over by cooperatives "which is neither true nor possible." Where rural patrons still suspected use of the term "consumer cooperative," it was advisable to use the phrase "purchasing cooperative." Cooperative publicity should stress the positive elements of the enterprises—that they "are owned and controlled by the member-patrons themselves, for non-profit self-service," and promise eventually an economy of abundance. [73] It was in this context that the League Congress in September 1946 declared its hope of doubling its membership in two years and its intent

[70] This is the central thesis in Joel Torstensen's "The Development of an Institution." The newer managerial group in CLUSA was ably represented by Arthur J. Smaby, who took over direction of Midland Cooperatives from E. G. Cort in 1939. Smaby has been a loyal supporter of the League, and a director since 1943; he served as chairman of the Board during 1953 and 1954. An innovator of new managerial techniques in cooperatives, he has also been a persistent supporter of political and social reform movements.

[71] Some of these troubles were anticipated as early as 1939 by Maxwell S. Stewart, *Cooperatives in the United States—A Balance Sheet* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1939). A copy of the thirty-two page pamphlet in Midland's Office files has underlined in pencil (the only passage, page 30, thus singled out) the following warning: "When a consumer's organization reaches the point where democratic control ceases to function, it becomes almost indistinguishable from any other large corporation. Educational activities are constantly necessary to keep the democratic ideal alive." *Proceedings* of the CLUSA Congresses for 1940, 1942, 1944, 1946, show a growing concern with the business side of cooperation. Parker, *First 125 Years,* Chapter 41, comments on these problems. Parallel troubles within the British cooperative movement may be found in the *Economist,* January 11, 1958, p. 106; October 11, 1958, p. 131; and January 31, 1959, p. 439.

[72] *Consumers Cooperation,* XXIX (December, 1943), 140–1. CLUSA was without an official publication during 1944, but when *Co-op Magazine* was started in January, 1945, its editorial policy was exactly as called for by Gilman Calkins.

[73] Committee Report published in *Co-op Magazine,* II (August, 1946), 17–24.

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of gaining an ultimate ten to fifteen percent of the national market. A mixed economy in which cooperative control of this segment would help "to check monopolies, [and] distribute purchasing more equitably" was now to be the goal, for "the best interests of the whole of society could be served better were a balanced relationship to prevail between public, private profit, and cooperative forms of business enterprise," with changing proportions of the market to be set by the "relative efficiency of each" sector.[74]

If a shift from the old British ideal of a Cooperative Commonwealth to the Swedish ideal of cooperative control of a significant sector of the economy had taken place, and if a new and urgent sense of the importance of the business side of cooperative activity were clearly evidenced, there was no slackening of the reform motive within the cooperative movement or within the League. During the war years CLUSA endorsed and lobbied for price controls; stiff taxation on incomes, inheritances, and war profits; expansion of social security; freedom of speech, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms were heartily endorsed, and League study groups were urged to seek ways to implement these goals through social action.[75] The League's concern for post-war reconstruction was evidenced by the initiative taken by League leaders in establishing CARE, Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe. The League's own Freedom Fund, which had been set up to lend funds to cooperatives in war-torn countries, made an initial advance of $30,000 to CARE. Murray Lincoln served as CARE's first President, and Wallace Campbell as chairman of its executive committee. Of the twenty-two relief agencies which joined to establish CARE, the League continued to be one of its most active and generous members.[76]

In other areas of public policy the League continued to play a militant reform role in the post-war period. In the field of housing the League pressed for an expansion of cooperative housing, particularly in New York City where the Amalgamated Housing Corporation pioneered in this enterprise; but the League also supported increased appropriations for federal aid for slum clearance and public housing and for the inclusion of cooperatives as eligible associations within the law. Similarly, the League pressed, in 1946, for an expression of cooperative health associations and clinics, but also recommended government grants to states for public health and endorsed the principle of "nation-wide health insurance under public auspices," if the status of cooperative associations were adequately protected. So also, at various times, did the League endorse the enforcement of anti-trust laws, government low-rent public housing for low-income families, government development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, federal government development of water power energy, federal aid to education for both construction and operation, and increased government appropriations for aid to developing nations.[77]

In the most recent era of the League's history, program, policy, and theory tended to reflect the ideas and personalities of Murray D. Lincoln, president since 1941, and Jerry Voorhis, executive secretary since 1947. Lincoln, as we have seen, was the speculative, imaginative, intensely pragmatic promoter of cooperation through the numerous associations he formed and directed in Ohio.[78] Voorhis was quite another type, intense and reflective, sensitive to the needs and moods of others, moved equally by a secular humanitarianism which grew out of his New Deal political experience and by a deep religious commitment in his private life.[79] Where

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[74] *Co-op Magazine,* II (November, 1946), 47.

[75] *Ibid.,* I (September, 1945), 6. See also CLUSA, nine, six-page leaflets in "For Study and Action" series, distributed to member cooperatives in 1944–1945.

[76] Cooperative News Service, Press Release, June 12, 1959; Wallace J. Campbell, Report to CLUSA Congress, in *Proceedings* of 1948 Congress; Parker, *First 125 Years,* p. 371.

[77] *Co-op Magazine,* II (November, 1946), 49–51; *Proceedings* of Congresses for 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958. In Voorhis, *American Cooperatives, passim,* can be found expression of the postwar emphasis on consumer cooperative activity in areas other than farm purchasing associations, although these agricultural cooperatives maintained their dominant position within the movement. A great deal of stress was placed, however, on the promotion of cooperative-oriented group health, housing, credit unions, and insurance.

[78] For a quick survey of Lincoln's financial empire see *Time,* LXII (August 17, 1953), 84–6.

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Lincoln impulsively advanced new promotional schemes nearly every week and sometimes unwittingly ruffled the feelings of his fellows, Voorhis was more disciplined and more diplomatic and stepped in to smooth over an awkward situation.

Despite their differences they stood united on the objectives of the cooperative movement. Lincoln was early persuaded of the efficacy of the Swedish sector ideal, and Voorhis entered the League's executive office at the very moment that that objective had been explicitly endorsed. Lincoln, more inclined toward action than reflection, was willing to select ideas from many sources, most notably his own personal experience. At various times and before various audiences he explained his ideal of cooperation as the practice of "Christian teaching every day in the week," or "service first and profit second." He saw it drawing its principle of "equal freedom" from Henry James, of "brotherhood economics" from Kagawa, its function as a "non-profit yardstick" from the Swedes. He praised cooperation as a way to promote self-help, to distribute purchasing power more widely and more justly, and to alleviate conflicts of class, nation, and race. Once persuaded that "we can make this world over through Cooperation"—he later expressed impatience with cooperators who continued to resort to the rhetoric and argument of the 1930's.[80] The American people, he declaimed before the 1958 League Congress, were no longer interested in the modest savings that consumers cooperation offered, and appeals to "righteous indignation against economic injustice" fall on deaf ears because most Americans no longer saw "economic injustices to get indignant about." [81] Nevertheless cooperatives had much to offer —a way to by-pass the need for government subsidies, a way to broaden the base of ownership; cooperation, at best, could be a moral force in the community, giving to people a sense of belonging through participation. Cooperation, he said many times over, was right because it offered an "evolutionary, American, Christian way" to promote social progress.[82]

Voorhis' philosophy was a bit more thoughtful and coherent, more tempered by intellectual self-discipline, less eclectic and haphazard if just as old-fashioned. He, too, found in the Swedish sector analysis the primary economic rationale for cooperation. On taking over his post as secretary in 1947 he knew that cooperatives were neither "weak nor futile," but neither were they about to transform society; their central purpose should be, by patient and sound expansion, to become the "balance wheels of a free society." If cooperatives in America could but gain fifteen to twenty-five percent of the market that goal would be won.[83] Cooperation had other virtues, however. It offered a constructive alternative to government action and a way to avoid the dangers inherent in consolidated political power. It offered an alternative way to private monopoly and a way to avoid the dangers inherent in concentrated economic power. Cooperation was rooted in human nature—in the dependence of survival upon cooperation and mutual aid. Cooperation put the "love principle" into practice. "Cooperatives are inherently built on spiritual motives—they are the most Christian of business institutions. They cannot be selfish and succeed." [84] Cooperation was consistent with the moral law and with God's purpose for man. Cooperation strengthened those qualities of character essential to the triumph of democracy — "self-reliance,

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[79] Born in 1901, Voorhis was graduated from Yale University and in the 1920's and 1930's worked at many different jobs. A supporter of LaFollette in 1924, he joined Upton Sinclair's EPIC movement in California and went to Congress as a New Deal Democrat from Southern California in 1936 where he stayed until his defeat by Richard M. Nixon in 1946. Jerry Voorhis, *Confessions of a Congressman* (New York, 1947); Earl Mazo, *Richard Nixon* (New York, 1959), pp. 42–3.

[80] Report of speech by Murray Lincoln before Eastern States Cooperative League in *Consumers' Cooperation,* XXI (July, 1935), 127.

[81] *Proceedings* of 1958 Congress, p. 2.

[82] Murray Lincoln in *Annals of the American Academy,* Vol. 191 (May, 1937), 136. Other views of Lincoln may be found in: *Objectives of Consumers' Cooperation* (CLUSA, 1946), 1–15; "Co-operative Directions," *Antioch Review,* IV (December, 1944), 607–16; "Co-operatives, Governments and World Trade," *Free World,* XII (December, 1946), 37–40; "Co-ops: How Big Can They Get?" *Reporter,* XI (December 2, 1954), 24–7; American Institute of Cooperation, *American Cooperation,* (1936), 25–36, and (1941), 38–48; *Christian Century,* LXI (February 9, 1944), 186.

[83] Jerry Voorhis, "A Cooperative America," *Christian Century,* LXIV (September 3, 1947), 1043–5.

[84] Jerry Voorhis, *The Morale of Democracy* (New York, 1941), pp. 69–85.

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mutual voluntary aid, the readiness to attack difficulties without complaint. . . ." [85]

Writing at mid-century, Murray Lincoln totalled up the impact of cooperation upon the nation's economy: Twelve million families owned shares in cooperative enterprises of one kind or another; two-thirds of all farm families belonged to one or more cooperatives; twenty-five percent of all farm crops were marketed cooperatively; twenty percent of all farm supplies (petroleum, fertilizer, feed, and seed) were purchased through cooperative associations; electrical cooperatives served over four million members; credit unions enrolled over eight million members and counted assets of over two billion dollars. All this cooperative activity added up to no more than two or three percent of all business transacted in the nation.[86] Cooperatives had come a long way since Hyman Cohn persuaded his friends, forty years earlier, to start a little cooperative hat store; they still had a long way to go if they were to control the fifteen-to-twenty-percent sector that Voorhis was willing to settle for. The Cooperative Commonwealth was still a bit further off.

Nevertheless the story of the Cooperative League is not without significance. Its ideology, at every point, mirrored beautifully many deeply held American values; its rationale responded sensitively to changing conditions of society in the twentieth century. Its ultimate (and simplistic) belief in the primacy of consumption as an economic activity anticipated some of the cultural concerns that would come by mid-century in an age of affluence. "The intrinsic or natural end of life is not labor but leisure," declared Horace Kallen, a cooperative philosopher.[87] "We begin our life as consumers," said Murray Lincoln. "We become producers in order to live or consume. Consumption is a natural process. Production is an artificial or forced one." [88] The uses of consumption, when cooperatively organized, always include the enrichment of life in leisure and art, and the realization of the creative principle that lies inherent (and too often inert) in every individual.

What could be more typically American than to believe that through voluntary association, through plain neighborliness and mutual assistance, the individual could be set free to realize his best inner potentiality for the greater good of society and the progress of the race? What social principle was more central to the traditional American ethos than the notion that a wide distribution of property would make unnecessary the enlargement of state activity to regulate concentrated private economic power? What values were preached more passionately than self-reliance, equality of opportunity, social harmony, brotherhood, love of neighbor, service? The means of consumers cooperation were non-violent and evolutionary; by joining a cooperative association one could always vote for brotherhood without launching a frontal assault upon the competitive system; cooperation offered a fully prudent way of social criticism. If Americans were also a bargain-hunting people, cooperation apparently offered a good deal.

The rationale for cooperation shifted readily with changing circumstances. The Cooperative League grew out of Jewish democratic socialism and fraternalism and out of Finnish radicalism. Under Warbasse's leadership the League's official theory was close to a benevolent form of anarchism that predicted the withering away of the state as the cooperative commonwealth was gradually established. With Bowen the great agricultural purchasing associations were brought into the League, which they soon dominated. With this development, during the terrible crisis of the depression decade, the League

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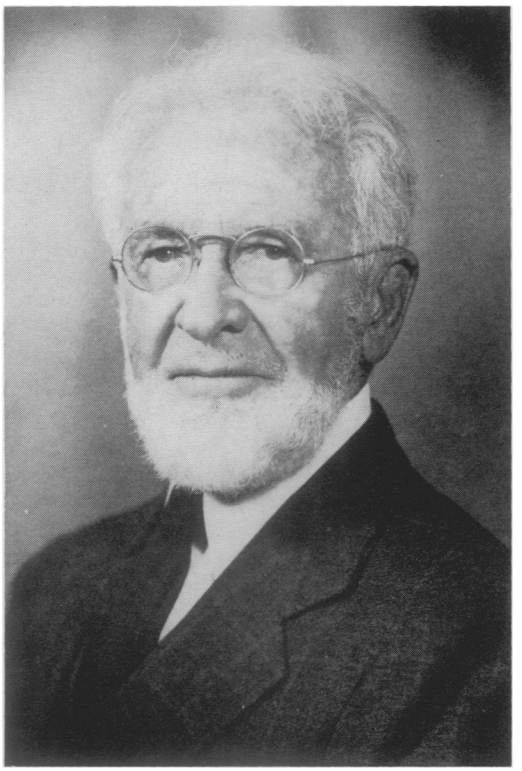
[85] Voorhis, *Confessions,* 351. See also Voorhis in Ward (ed.), *United for Freedom,* pp. 218–25; Reports in *Proceedings of Congresses* in 1948, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958; *American Cooperation* (1949), 74–8; "Are Cooperatives a Threat to Private Enterprise?" *Bulletin* of America's Town Meeting of the Air (April 17, 1947), 7–9; *American Federationist,* 62 (November, 1955), 31; "People Helping Themselves," *American Teacher,* 35 (February, 1951), 7–9; "Teachers and Cooperatives," *American Teacher,* 35 (March, 1951) 8–11. Voorhis, *American Cooperation,* is filled with statements of his commitment to moral vision and purpose, the inherent dignity of every person, mutual aid, voluntary self-help, and cooperation as a way of peace. Its concluding pages, 217–19, constitute a restatement of the religious dimension of his faith.

[86] Lincoln, "Co-ops: How Big Can They Get?" p. 24. See also CLUSA, *Co-operatives* (Chicago, 1957); Jean A. Flexner, *Consumer Cooperatives in the United States: Recent Developments* (Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 1158, 1954), pp. 1–31.

[87] Kallen, *Decline and Rise of the Consumer,* p. ix.

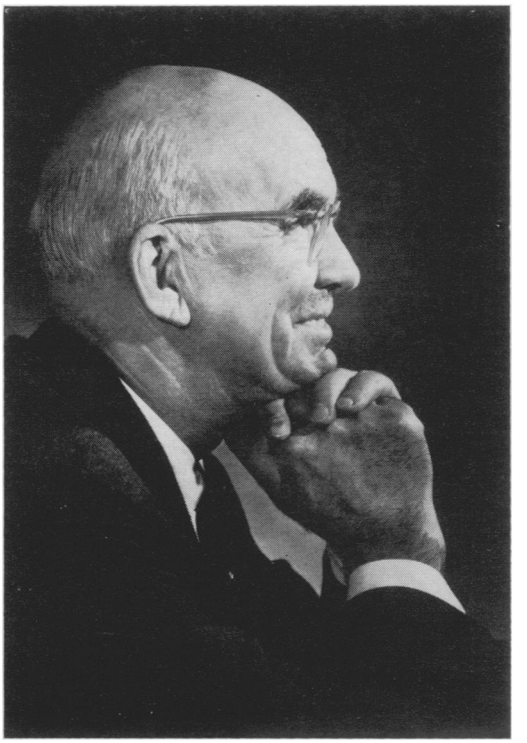
[88] Lincoln in *American Cooperation* (1936), p. 25.

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James Peter Warbasse, President of the Cooperative League for 25 years

Courtesy of the Cooperative League of U.S.A., Chicago



Murray D. Lincoln, President of the Cooperative League since 1941

Courtesy of the Cooperative League of U.S.A., Chicago

moved gently away from rigid neutralism toward social reform through political action, and tempered its earlier utopianism by more practical programs. With Lincoln and Voorhis, the League fully accepted the sector ideal of the Swedish cooperative movement without for a moment surrendering its reform urge. The League can be found today campaigning for every good cause of political and social liberalism.

The distinguished British cooperative leader, W. P. Watkins, recently pointed to the dilemma that modern cooperation faces everywhere in the western world. The driving force of the Cooperative Commonwealth had dwindled to an occasional nostalgic sigh. Well and good. But from where now was the dynamic for advance to come? "Not, apparently, in the doctrine of the Co-operative Sector, for though that may be a good guide to direction it scarcely stirs the imagination. . . . The present generation of Co-operators has not merely to think clearly but also to relearn to dream creatively. . . . Perhaps it is from the ethical and personal aspect of Co-operation, rather than its economic and social aspect, that fresh inspiration must be sought today." [89] If Watkin's analysis is correct, as it would appear to be, the Cooperative League of the United States of America had the human resources to provide imaginative answers consistent with the League's historical experience and consonant with traditional American values.

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[89] W. P. Watkins, *Co-operation, Economic Planning and Personal Freedom—the Doctrine Re-stated* (London Co-operative Societies' Joint Education Committee, no date, probably early in decade of 1950's), p. 15.

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