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COOPERATION VS. COMMUNISM

XXXI—COOPERATION VS. COMMUNISM IN DENMARK

On an August evening in 1923 I had a chance to study at close range the humor and attitudes of the Copenhageners. I stood with a great crowd in the city hall square, a four-acre space in the heart of the city, and listened to the speeches of welcome to the Soviet International Trade Delegation from Moscow. By my side stood an English-speaking Dane who passed on to me the pith of the addresses and responses. Communism apparently gets a hearty welcome in Denmark, I said as I listened to the eulogies of Trotsky and Lenin by the Russian communists. Meanwhile we were moving into cafe seats on the sidewalk of the Palace hotel fronting the square.

A Dane Discourses on Denmark

Oh well, said he, Denmark is an open forum for every variety of opinion. Any speaker may say anywhere in Denmark anything he pleases as freely as the soap-box orator on Tower Hill or around the Marble Arch in London. The Danes like the English, he went on to say, are assertive, argumentative chaps, but they expect to settle issues with ballots and not with bullets. They do not believe in revolution, they believe in orderly progress—in evolution, if you please to use that term. Of course, the Soviet orators can get a hearing in Copenhagen or almost anywhere else in Denmark. They may orate and organize all they please without let or hindrance. There is a communist element in Copenhagen, a communist party, and communist newspapers, but they probably signify less in Denmark than anywhere else in Europe. And don't forget as you look at this crowd that the Copenhageners are newsmongers drawn together by curiosity like the Athenians of old to hear any news or to consider any strange thing whatsoever. This crowd isn't communist, it is mainly curious. In the very nature of things the communists are a small party in Copenhagen and communism is an even smaller matter in Denmark. Our discussion of Danish racial traits, institutions, and agencies went far into the small hours of the morning.

I came over on an English boat in a ship's company of Americans, said I. What on earth are you going to Little Denmark for? was a question frequently speired at me. I am going, was my response, for the sole purpose of studying a cooperative commonwealth at the closest possible range. Whereupon the usual inquiry was, But cooperation is socialism, isn't it? or communism or some other ism that we ought to hate and fight and suppress if possible in America? At least that is the way we feel about it in big-business circles at home. Upon this provocation my Danish friend squared himself for the first monologue of the evening.

The Antidote for Communism

Cooperation in Denmark is not socialism, said he, nor communism nor anything else of the sort. Cooperation is precisely the opposite of communism—not only the opposite but the antidote. Danish cooperators hold fast to the sacred rights of private property ownership. They would fight to the last ditch for the right to do what they please with themselves and their own, but the Danish farmers have sense enough to know with your Ben Franklin that if they do not all hang together they will all hang separate. No argument is needed to convince a Dane that a bundle of twigs is stronger than any single twig, or that a rope is many times stronger than any single fiber of it. They believe in massing their little sums of private capital, in pooling their chances, in taking charge of their own enterprises, in learning to the last syllable the devices of business and the intricate details of trade practice. They have learned to choose the best man in the group for the business-end of their enterprises and they watch him, trust him, and back him to the limit. But every farm cooperation no matter what its nature is firmly based upon home and farm ownership, on the private ownership of property in general, on private initiative and private enter-

prise. Our cooperative groups demand and receive legal sanctions and legal protection on the basis of equal rights for all businesses and special privileges for none. Corporations and cooperations enjoy equal rights to live and thrive in Denmark. These two forms of business organization have learned to work in collusion, and they are rarely ever betrayed into collision. The Danish farmers are as fundamentally individual as the Americans, but their individualism has been tempered and disciplined by the life-and-death necessity for cooperation. You must remember that it was in the dark days of our country that the individualistic Danes began to develop the temper, the virtues, and the practices of group effort.

In contrast, the Russian communist does not believe in the rights of private property ownership or in private merchandizing, mining, manufacturing, transportation, or banking. Natural resources, capital wealth and producing enterprises are the property of the state alone or so the Soviets say. They believe in the nationalization of land, in leasehold rights and not in fee simple deeds to homes and farms. The Danes are firmly convinced that leasehold rights will not forever satisfy the peasants, and that the next revolution in Russia will be fought for the freehold possession of the homes and farms they now occupy but do not own. Farm cooperation, as you doubtless know, had made spectacular progress in Russia before the revolution. The Russian cooperators still preserve their organizations but they are everywhere taxed, robbed and harassed beyond endurance, and not even the Russian peasants will forever suffer persecution without revolt. It may be long delayed but in the end it is as certain as death. The doom of communism lies in the passion of human nature for home and farm ownership and in the right of property owners to use their own in freedom.

State Socialism in Denmark

The Danes believe in the pooling of private capital, and in the private management of producing businesses, corporate or cooperative as the groups may choose. They emphatically do not believe any more than you believe in America in the state ownership and operation of business enterprises. Denmark is however a little country and we are undoubtedly moving faster than America into state ownership and operation of businesses that fundamentally concern the common weal—that affect the public interest, as the phrase goes on your side of the Atlantic. We believe with Edmund Burke that the state can and ought to do whatever it can do better than local groups or private organizations. For instance, your federal government operates the postal service and even the parcels post. So do the Danes. The American states believe in taking over almost the entire burden of public education. So do the Danes. But we do not go as far in this matter as the people of any state in America. For instance, you have state high school systems practically everywhere, but we have no state high school system in Denmark. We have high schools, probably as many as you have and probably they are just as good, but our high school education of every type is left to community pride and local tax willingness—to the free self-determination of local communities. They pay the high-school bills and they must have Latin schools, farm schools, folk high schools, trade schools, what not, just as they choose.

Cooperative Democracy

State-operated postal service and state-supported public schools are forms of state socialism but they frighten us as little as they frighten the people of America. The state of Denmark takes over and operates its own railroads, telephone and telegraph lines, but it leaves public highways to local pride, local effort, and local support. The Danes believe in supporting civic and social enterprises, as far as it is humanly possible, by volunteer contributions, by friendly societies or

N. C. CLUB YEAR-BOOK

The Year-Book of the North Carolina Club for the year 1922-23 is off the press. The title of the book is What Next in North Carolina. The subjects treated are as follows:

1. The Boll Weevil and a Re-Organized Agriculture.
2. Country Community Life and Cooperative Farm Enterprise.
3. Cooperative Marketing.
4. State Aid to Home Ownership.
5. State Aid to Farm Ownership in North Carolina.
6. Farm Ownership in North Carolina.
7. County-Wide Library Service.
8. The Taxation of Corporation Stocks in North Carolina.
9. Taxation of Stock in North Carolina Corporations.
10. Labor, Capital, and the Public in North Carolina.
11. Preventing Labor Troubles.
12. Primary Reforms in North Carolina.
13. The Retention and Accumulation of Wealth by Farmers.
14. A Four-Year Medical School and Teaching Hospital for North Carolina.
15. School Consolidation and the County Unit System.

The edition of the Year-Book is small. Copies will be sent free of charge to North Carolinians applying in time. The cost to others will be \$1.00 postpaid. If you want a copy please send your request to the Department of Rural Social Economics, Chapel Hill, N. C.

fraternal orders as you call them, by dinner-plate clubs, and by local tax rates. We believe in laying the smallest possible burden upon the state treasury. Nursing personal pride, community pride, community activity, and community purse-willingness to the last possible degree is a state-wide feature of Danish life. We deliberately adopt a state attitude and policy of this sort, and every municipality relieves its own treasury in exactly the same way. For instance, any man or woman who has honorably reached the age of seventy years receives an annual old-age pension of seventy dollars from the state treasury; but the old-age homes are a local matter. These homes are all over Denmark and there are no better institutions of their sort anywhere in the world. But the state pensions are small, therefore the municipalities increase it a little out of their own treasuries. Before the old-age alumni of any community are settled down for the rest of their lives in lovely comfortable surroundings the private social organizations of the various communities have voluntarily taxed themselves more heavily than the state and municipalities have done. In England old-age pensions are entirely a state expense; they are on a contributory basis in Denmark. And the same thing is true of the various forms of social insurance. Part of the fund comes out of the state treasury, part out of the profits of employers, and part out of the weekly wages of the workers. On the other hand the state of Denmark establishes and supports all sorts of institutions for liberal learning, technical training and research. The state trains executives and leaders for every type of economic and social organization, but the salaries and expenses of these public servants are paid in the main out of local public treasuries re-enforced by the private contributions of generous individuals and groups devoted to this or that particular social purpose. It recognizes the efficiency of this or that private agency and makes it a semi-official body in the state system, but whatever it does, it lays the least possible burden on the state treasury. The burden of support and activity falls upon the generosity of individuals, local agencies and local tax treasuries.

We understand perfectly well that when a state undertakes to be something more than a big policeman busy with the problems of law and order and begins to move over into the field of civic services, the supporting funds must be enormously increased. We believe that these burdens of support ought to fall least of all on the state treasury and most of all upon local treasuries,

local organizations, and private beneficence. Denmark has gone far in social-civic services to its people—in the state ownership and operation of transportation and communication facilities, in public education and public health, in old-age pensions, workingmen's compensation, mothers' aid, maternity pensions, social insurance and the like. But wherever it is possible, these enterprises are based on cooperation between the state and local governments, on cooperation between local governments and private organizations—churches, fraternal societies, and social-work organizations; and on cooperation between private organizations and their individual members. And more, every member is encouraged to give himself with his gift to the particular purpose of his organization. In other words, Denmark is a commonwealth based on cooperation, economic, social, and civic, with the result that greater attention is given to the social ills of Denmark and given in more detail than in any other country of the world. So because the sense of local responsibility and private initiative is preserved and developed to the limit. Each community believes that its own social problems are first of all its own problems and that each community is charged most of all with solving these problems without calling upon the state treasury for anything the community can do for itself.

Bureaucracy and Bankruptcy

If you do not adopt some such principle as this in America you will at last find two perplexities confronting you: (1) bankruptcy in your public treasuries, and (2) the immense multiplication of state and federal officials doing in home communities what the home communities could very much better do for themselves. I understand, said he, that already one of every twelve voters in the United States is a federal, state, county, or city official of some sort. Denmark isn't rich enough to pay such a bill, and not even your own rich country will be able to pay it in a few years. The multiplication of public officials—what the French call fonctionnaires—is a tremendous problem in France today. It is government by bureaucrats, and bureaucracy in Spain and Italy haunts these two countries like a ghost day and night. In Denmark we are trying to side-step these two menacing ills of modern civilization. And we believe we are doing so without neglecting any of the essential social problems of a wholesome civilization. We think we are developing a civilization based on private property ownership, on self-regulated individualism, on the comradeships of cooperation, on personal and community responsibility, and on local community pride. We do not believe in a centralization of authority. We believe in the universal diffusion of social responsibilities, opportunities, and rewards.

I am faithfully reporting what perhaps was the longest speech this diffident Dane ever delivered and I am reporting it in some detail because it throws light on Denmark as a cooperative commonwealth. These sanely balanced Danes are safely threading a maze in which almost every other country of the world is bewildered or lost. They are not falling into heartless individualism on the one hand or into destructive socialism on the other.

As we bade each other good night I felt sure that Denmark would side-step communism and most of the other isms that perplex and affright the world today, and that the fundamental good sense of the Danes would preserve their civilization long after other countries in Europe had disappeared in political conflagrations.

I moved along to my pensionnat under the eaves of the State University wondering if we would ever solve our public welfare problems in North Carolina without county welfare boards and community councils busy in their own bailiwicks helping the state officials in the myriad details of social service. And also, whether a cotton or a tobacco growers central in Raleigh could weather the inevitable storms of farm business without local groups bent on learning the principles and intricate details of cooperative effort, busy teaching cooperation to their neighbors, and good humoredly but grimly screwing their courage to the sticking place. Work of this sort is not com-

munist, it is cooperation, and the two are as far apart as the poles.

In all my wanderings about Denmark, I never once chanced upon a Dane whose mind was overly busy with church dogmas and religious theories. Apparently the chapter of The Book that has most impressed the Danes is Matthew twenty-five. At all events he would be a stupid observer who missed the fact that the Danes are bent on making "this dirty little spot in space that men call earth" a cleaner place for children to be born into, a safer place for boys and girls to grow up in, a happier place for men and women to work in, and a happier place for departing saints to look back upon.

Religion in Denmark is cooperation, and cooperation is religion. It is not a periodic phrenzy but a placid work-a-day faith and practice. The Danes believe—really believe—with Saint Paul that they are members one of another and all members of one body. Baseword's doctrine of All for each and each for all, meant little in Holland but it means everything in Denmark. Such are the fruits of cooperation in business effort, social life, and civic service.

Cooperation as the Danes have realized it is the farthest possible remove from sovietism, for the soviet is the last word in occupational organization for class advantage. We have no end of occupational organizations in America for group advantage alone, and such organizations, no matter what we call them, are soviet. The Russians have merely given us a new name for a very old fact in American history. We shudder at the name but we tolerate the fact. To make democracy safe in a harassed world means to give to every citizen freedom to do his best for the common welfare and the will to use that freedom with energy, says Charles W. Eliot. The Danes are doing this very thing, and we need to get busier at this task in my own state and country.—E. C. Branson, Copenhagen.

THE BEST THING

A Cherryville school teacher, some time ago, asked her pupils what they regarded as the best and most valuable thing in this community. The children wrinkled their brows, looked perplexed, and some of them answered the question. But they were all wide of the mark.

The teacher indicated the answers were wrong as each pupil made his or her supreme effort to find the correct answer to the knotty problem. Finally the teacher, when they were all expectant and very much excited over what really was the best thing in this community, told them that they themselves were the best and most valuable.

It was somewhat of a jolt for little folks, especially those with a keen imagination, who had conjured up many wonderful things. The teacher's answer brought them back to earth, but it gave them a sense of their importance in the world.

It should also give every person living in the community, regardless of whether they have children in the public schools, something to think about, when we think along lines of community development.

For we cannot build for the future any better than by making better boys and girls who will become better men and women and make this a better community in the next generation.

We can build for the future, not alone by teaching children at home how to live right, but by supporting the teacher, the school authorities, and the whole public school system to the best of our ability and to the limit of our means.

We cannot hope for our community to rise any higher in the future than our public school system.—Cherryville Eagle.

ONE OF THE BEST

The report of Dr. L. R. Wilson of the University Library reveals that this library has become one of the leading university libraries of the country. It is included for the first time in the list of the leading 32 libraries of the country whose statistics are annually made the subject of special consideration in library and educational periodicals.