

**DENMARK; A  
COOPERATIVE  
COMMONWEALTH**

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Denmark; a cooperative commonwealth by Frederic C. Howe

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**FREDERIC C. HOWE**

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UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

# DENMARK

*A Cooperative Commonwealth*

BY

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"THE LAND AND THE SOLDIER," "THE HIGH  
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"PRIVILEGE AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA,"  
"THE CITY: THE HOPE OF DEMOCRACY," ETC.



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## PREFACE

As I reread the proof-sheets of this study of Denmark and the Danish people, I felt that I should have some confirmation of my observations as to the conditions in that country. A visitor is likely to see what he goes prepared to see or what over-zealous friends want him to see. To guard against this danger, I took the proofs to well-informed Danes resident in this country for criticism. They kindly checked up the historical and social data. They verified the statistical statements from official manuals. They confirmed the interpretation of the cultural life of the people, of the essential democracy of the country, and of the industrial and social conditions that prevail.

Denmark seems to me to be quite the most valuable political exhibit in the modern world. It should be studied by statesmen. It should be visited by commissions, especially by commissions from the agricultural states of the American West. Denmark is one of the few countries in the world that is using its political

agencies in an intelligent, conscious way for the promotion of the economic well being, the comfort and the cultural life of the people.

This is the first lesson that this little country teaches. It is a very important lesson. For whether we go to England, to France, to Germany, or to the United States, we find the same conditions prevailing. The political state is in a bad way. It commands little confidence. It does not function well. It is an imperialistic thing. It is an agency of classes and groups. It does not represent or aim to represent the great mass of the people. And it does very little to serve them.

Second, Denmark shows that the state can control the distribution of wealth and increase its production as well. It can destroy monopoly and privileges of all kinds. It can put an end to poverty. It can make it possible for all people to live easily and comfortably. That in itself is of great value. One cannot study the many laws that have been enacted during the last generation without being impressed by the ease with which the state can serve its people if it has a mind to do so. For Denmark has raised the standard of intelligence to a high point. It has abolished illiteracy. Most im-



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portant of all, it has ushered in a society in which equality of opportunity is not far from an accomplished fact.

Denmark also demonstrates that agriculture can be made an alluring as well as a profitable profession. The wealth that can be taken from the ground is measured by the intelligence of the farmer and the laws that determine the distribution of the produce. The latter is by far the more important. For if the farmer gives up a great part of his produce to the landlord, or if it is taken by speculators, by middlemen or others, agriculture is bound to decay. It cannot be otherwise. For over a generation Denmark has been working out plans for converting the tenant into a home owner. This probably explains the other achievements of the country. This lies back of the educational program as well as the universal spirit of co-operation that prevails.

The culture of Denmark is also unique. It is a culture not of a few people but of the whole nation. The state has decreed that education should be the possession of all of the people. Knowledge has been taken out of cold storage. It has been made a practical thing. It increases the production of wealth. And culture

has lost none of its finer qualities in the process. Rather it has gained.

Denmark demonstrates, too, that democracy levels up. It selects men of talent and entrusts them with power. No country in Europe spends so large a part of its budget on education, on social agencies, on cultural things. No city in Europe is more generous in its appreciation of literature, the opera, the drama, and an intelligent press than is Copenhagen. And no people as a whole are so eager for lectures, for purely intellectual enjoyments, as are the Danes. This is true of the farmer. It is true of the agricultural worker. It is true of the artisan in the town.

Cooperation is the thing for which Denmark is most widely known. And cooperation pervades everything. It is universal among the farmers, and is fast becoming universal in the towns as well. The movement partakes more of industrial democracy than it does of consumers' cooperation. The farmers own their own dairies, slaughterhouses, egg-collecting societies, banks, and all kinds of breeding and developing agencies. Every second family in Denmark is connected with one or more of the cooperative societies, while the average farmer

is a member of from three to ten such organizations. His life centers in the cooperative. He acquires a knowledge of chemical, mechanical and industrial processes from the cooperative. He gets a very practical education in this way. Cooperation, however, is far more than a profit-making thing. It far more than an agency for protecting the farmer from exploitation. Cooperation is of the very texture of the everyday life of Denmark. Through the thousands of cooperative societies the economic life of the people moves, just as their political life moves through the political state. And the men who have been trained in the cooperative movement are the men who have risen to political power. This cooperative movement of the farmers has ended the duality that prevails in other countries. It has put an end to the artificiality of a political state governed by lawyers, landowners, or a privileged class, and an economic state separate and detached from the political state. In Denmark men work and govern as a single undertaking. The economic and political state are merged. They reflect one another. The state is a farmers' state. And the political state mirrors the needs of the farmer.