

**CO-OPERATIVE STORES:
THEIR HISTORY,
ORGANIZATION, AND
MANAGEMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649500932

Co-Operative Stores: Their History, Organization, and Management by Eugen Richter

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CO-OPERATIVE STORES

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THEIR

HISTORY, ORGANIZATION, AND MANAGEMENT

Based on the recent German work of

EUGENE RICHTER

With annotations and amendments rendering the work

SPECIALLY ADAPTED FOR USE IN
THE UNITED STATES



NEW YORK
LEYPOLDT & HOLT
1867

Soc 1597,9

160th St. N. Y.
From the Daily Edition of Nov. 13, 1912

BOUND NOV 13 1912

Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1887,

By LEYPOLDT & HOLT,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

LITTLE, RENNIE & Co.,
PRINTERS AND STEREOtypERS,
430 BROOME STREET, N. Y.

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CO-OPERATIVE STORES.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORY OF CO-OPERATIVE STORES IN ENGLAND.

ON a gloomy November day, in the year 1843, under a cold rain, there assembled in the back room of a mean inn at Rochdale—one of the centres of woollen manufacture in North Lancashire, England—a dozen poor weavers, to consult together concerning ways and means for raising themselves out of their wretched poverty into a comfortable existence. As is usual in such cases, a good deal was said on one topic and another without reaching any result. One speaker was of opinion that they ought to seek through political agitation for the universal right of suffrage. If they could but have representatives of their own class in parliament, it would be easy to obtain help through them. To most of them this seemed an excellent proposition. But one man rose and said, “that little could be hoped from political agitation: even if they should succeed, by means of universal suffrage, in being represented in parliament, there was a greater question than whether parliament *would* help them—namely, whether it *could* help them. For the government was even worse in debt than they themselves. It could give nothing to the citizen except what it had received from him, either in the form of taxes or otherwise. They must not look for aid to parliament, sitting away off in London, but seek it at home, in their own employers. These men must pay them higher wages;

and if they refused, they must be forced to it by strikes." This speech pleased the younger part of the company particularly. But an old weaver answered, "that he had already gone through enough strikes; they were gotten up often, but nothing ever came of them. The matter stood this way, as it seemed to him: If, at a certain time, or in a particular district, the wages seem disproportionately low, it is seldom to be laid to ill-will on the part of the employers, but is because these employers can obtain but a low price for the products of the labor which they employ. So that, before they can agree to pay higher wages in the face of this low selling-price, they have to reckon whether there will remain sufficient proceeds to remunerate them for their own time and care, and for the capital embarked in the enterprise, estimated at the market rate of interest. If, now, the reckoning shows a loss, the employer has no alternative, instead of agreeing to pay higher wages, but to close his business and employ his capital otherwise; for instance, by a safer investment in the public funds. In which case, the quondam employer is relieved of all labor, except the snipping off of his semi-annual coupons, while the workmen, mean time, are without bread. In order to live, these latter would find themselves forced to underbid their comrades, employed elsewhere, to such an extent that wages would on all sides fall to a lower mark than they had held before the strike."

While they sat helplessly casting about for some better project, one of their number, who had gained considerable experience of the world, and had become acquainted with men whose attention had been given to this subject, spoke in this way: "If we cannot get higher wages, the only thing to be done is to make what we do get *go further*. If we cannot increase our in-come, let us manage our out-go more economically. It may be that, with what we thus save, we may commence an undertaking which shall give us an income in addition to our wages. No doubt each one by himself can do but little; yet what if we set back to back, and join hands, as to-day we have joined speech, for the improvement of our condition? 'What is impossible for one man is easy for three,' is a truth that is as old as the world. Only look around in the world to-day! Here are railroads built, canals dug, under-