

WHY INDIVIDUALISM IS AS DEAD AS A SMELT

George W. Perkins, Chairman of the New York City Committee on Food Supply, Finds That Science and Invention Are Forcing Revolutionary Changes in the World's Industrial Relations, Whether We Like It or Not.

AT A RECENT public hearing on certain proposed food legislation which Mr. Perkins favored and which recognized the necessity of co-operation some one remarked that the legislation was a violation of the principle of individualism.

Mr. Perkins retorted, "Individualism is as dead as a smelt." Mr. Perkins' reasons for his belief are outlined in the following article:—

By **GEORGE W. PERKINS**, Chairman of Mayor Mitchell's Food Supply Committee.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to progress is the human inclination to follow precedent and old methods too



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close. We find it difficult to strike out along entirely new lines.

Thomas Jefferson, in his old age, wrote a letter in which he said:—

Some men ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment. I knew that age [of the Revolution] well. I belonged to it and labored with it. It deserved well of its country. It was very like the present, but without the experience of the present; and forty years of experience is worth a century of book reading; and this they would say themselves were they to arise from the dead.

Great Changes Taking Place Rapidly.

The changes that occurred from the close of the Revolutionary War to Jefferson's old age made a deep impression on his mind; yet as we look back at them from this distance they seem infinitesimal when compared with the changes that have taken place in the world the last quarter of a century and the tremendous changes taking place now.

George Washington was a representative of the best type of American a century and a half ago. He was a scholar, a soldier and a statesman, yet



he did not know as much about science as a young schoolboy of to-day.

Thomas A. Edison typifies the scientist of our time, but the gap between the man of the Edison type and Washington is probably greater than the gap between Washington and the man whose bones were recently discovered near Trenton, N. J., said to have lived 125,000 years ago.

The advances in science, intercommunication and in universal educa-



tion—these three great factors account for the stupendous progress this country has made in the last twenty-five years.

They have swept away old precedents, old customs, and they will eventually sweep away many of the laws now on our statute books.

The man of to-day who does not fully comprehend all this is doomed to be somewhat of a failure, while the man who does comprehend it will have taken a long stride toward success.

It is not many years since I was a lad, and yet at that time there was no such thing as a telephone. The telegraph was in very meagre use; fast express trains did not exist. It took several weeks to cross the ocean, and the only flying machine we knew about was the much derided one possessed by Darius Green.

Entering a New World.

When Abraham Lincoln was President it took four days or more for a letter to travel from his home in Illinois to New York. It took him several days to go from his home to Washington to be inaugurated. And yet only a few weeks ago a young woman, unaided and alone, travelled in a flying machine from Chicago to New York in eight hours and fifty minutes.

We are just entering a new electrical world, where everything is done, as it were, on the instant.

Our fathers had none of the modern machinery with which social and business intercourse is now carried on. Their sons are wrestling with the problem of how to use these new methods of intercommunication and still adhere to the laws, the precedents and the book learning of their fathers.

This is OUR great problem. It is a difficult, complicated problem and is causing a struggle of titanic proportions—a struggle to throw off in a night, as it were, the precedents of an old world for the realities of a new.

Precedent makes cowards of us all. But the educator, the scientist and the inventor have left us no choice. We must adjust our thought and action to new conditions.

The Day of Individualism Gone.

The changes of the last twenty-five years socially, industrially and economically have been great, yet I believe they are infinitesimal compared to the changes that are coming.

I believe these changes are going to deal most largely with the relationship of man to man.

In this country we have been living in an age of the utmost freedom to the individual. It has been the individualistic period, when the order of the day has seemed to be "every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

We have gloried in the freedom of the individual and have practised this

freedom to a point where, in many phases of our life, it has amounted to license to do almost anything that we pleased or that brought profit or fancied renown, regardless of its effect on one's fellowmen.

In the early days, when instantaneous intercommunication did not exist, when education was meagre and science undeveloped, what the individual did was of comparatively small consequence, for his deeds did not reach very far and did not affect many people.



"I DO AS I LIKE."
—Individualism.

With intercommunication drawing the world together in one centralized community, the act of the individual can affect a large number of people; therefore, that form of freedom which is simply another expression for license to do as one pleases can no longer exist.

When Manhattan was sparsely settled and most of the people lived on its southern end it would not have mattered much had there been a case of smallpox at the north end. The patient could have done pretty much as he pleased without endangering any one else.

But a case of smallpox in the northern end of Manhattan to-day must be quarantined immediately to protect other people.

When I was a boy there was no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and had any one suggested that a man could not whip his horse as much as he pleased he would have been ridiculed. Indeed, in those days the idea that a man had not the right to beat his own child as he pleased was given little attention.

When we were all driving horses and buggies there was no speed limit and a man did not have to procure a license to drive a horse. With the advent of the automobile a license has become a necessity. The public must know that the man who operates an automobile knows first how to operate it and, second, to control it.

Society is finding it necessary to take away much of what has hitherto been called "freedom of the individual." In my judgment this process is only in its infancy.

Relation of Capital and Labor.

The freedom of the business man to do as he pleases is now being seriously challenged, and I most heartily agree with what Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., said recently at Cornell University to the effect that one of the chief qualifications for a manager of a large business concern is rapidly coming to be the human quality and ability to adjust differences between capitalist and laborer and to understand their relationship.

Until recent years little broad thinking was given to this problem and differences were settled on the basis of "might makes right." All this is rapidly changing and we are entering a period of new industrial relationships.

In the long ago the relationship between capital and labor was that of owner and slave, then came the period of master and man, then the period of employer and employe, each period being a decided step forward.

In my judgment we are just now entering a period of copartnership, where the tool user will be part tool owner and where capital and labor will share more equitably in the profits of



the business in which they are jointly engaged.

This advance is inevitable because of our educational system, which teaches the workman to think for himself.

It is inevitable because intercommunication has told the workman in one community what the workman in other communities are striving for and achieving.

It is inevitable, because strikes and lockouts can never be settled satisfac-



torily or permanently by merely raising a man's wages.

It is inevitable because it gives stability to business and because it is as advantageous to capital as to labor.

As a matter of fact, when a workman strikes it is not merely to obtain an increase in his wage; that is what the papers tell us the trouble is all about and that is what he asks for; but way down underneath what he is really striking for is a larger percentage of the profits of the business.

He may not realize this, but, subconsciously, this is precisely what he is doing.

No mere increase in wages can ever satisfactorily solve this problem. It can be solved only on the basis of profit sharing.

By profit sharing I do not mean bonus giving. I mean actual profit sharing plans based on the earnings of the business, with a fair percentage to capital and a fair percentage to labor after ordinary wages and interest have been earned.

Profit sharing can be done satisfactorily only when the business concern makes public its transactions, so that the laborer and the stockholder can know as much about the business as does the manager himself.

In the adjustment of difficulties between capital and labor I am confident that open books will accomplish much more than open shops.

These changes are far-reaching and fundamental. What are we going to do about it? What is to be our mental attitude? How are we going to handle these problems?

Can we approach them from the same point of view as did our fathers, who lived in a strictly individualistic age? Can we approach them from the knowledge we have gained from law books which were written in the individualistic age? If we do we will be combatting the mighty onward rush of new thought and new conditions, provided in large measure by the scientist, the educator, the inventor.

What the Future Holds Forth.

What is the outlook? Is it a sad, pessimistic future that unfolds? Does life hardly seem worth living under the new conditions or does it hold out an optimistic future, with finer opportunities and more worth while goals?

Let me see if I can picture it as I see it. First, just a glance into the past.

About the only goal we have had has been the almighty dollar. The first question asked when a man dies is, "How much was he worth?" with scarcely a thought as to how much he did for his community or his country.

But what has it all amounted to?

Have the men who have lived and worked simply to acquire great fortunes obtained peace of mind, happiness and honor? How many of them could answer "Yes"?

Has the country been benefited by the course they have taken? A very large majority of our countrymen would answer "No."

On the whole, the individualistic age has not been a success, either for the individual, or the community in which he has lived, or the nation.

We are, beyond question, entering on a period where the welfare of the community takes precedence over the interests of the individual and where the liberty of the individual will be more and more circumscribed for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Man's activities will hereafter be required to be not only for himself but for his fellowmen.

To my mind there is nothing in the signs of the times so certain as this.

How the Rewards Will Come.

Our only decoration—the almighty dollar—is receding into the background.

The man of exceptional ability, of more than ordinary talent, will hereafter look for his rewards, for his honors, not in one direction but in two:—First—and foremost—in some public work accomplished, and, secondarily, in wealth acquired.

In place of having it said of him at his death that he left so many hundred thousand dollars it will be said that he rendered a certain amount of public service and, incidentally, left a certain amount of money.

Such a goal will prove a far greater satisfaction to him, he will live a more rational, worth while life and he will be doing his share to provide a better country in which to live.

I have two reasons for believing that future conditions will be as I have briefly sketched them:

First, because the world is being drawn together in one centralized community through the wonderful development in science and the marvelous work of the inventor.

Second, because in our country especially we are entering upon a new stage of development, which calls loudly for men who will render disinterested public service.

We face new conditions, and in order to survive and succeed we will require a different spirit of public service.

One reason why I am strongly for universal military training is that it develops in the youth a sense of all around responsibility to his country, not only in time of war but in time of

Why a New Era Co-operation Must Succeed Pure Individualism.

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peace. He is much more apt to be a faithful, conscientious servant than he had not had military training. He enters public service in time of peace in more nearly the same spirit that he would enter military service in time of war—namely, from a sense of patriotic duty and a desire to serve his country and his fellowmen.

In recent years we have been hearing a great deal about government ownership of our railroads. We are told that in Germany the railroads are owned by the government and that their operation is most successful. This is true but in Germany conditions are vastly different.

The military training of the youth, in fact, the entire trend of education in Germany is to impress upon the young men of that land that they owe service to their country. When a man enters

the government's employ in the railroad business he is as conscientious as he would be were he entering the government's service in time of war.

If our railroads were to be taken over and operated by our government at this time, how many of you think we would duplicate Germany's success?

Government ownership of railroads may be as desirable in this country as it is in Germany, but we must first have public servants who will at least come somewhere near the standard of Germany's public servants in efficiency and honesty.

Look at the spectacle we are presenting to the world at this very mo-

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ment in our pork barrel legislation. Could we afford to have our railroads operated by the same type of public servants?

If our government is to endure, if we are to take our proper place among the nations of the world in the new civilization, the man of the future must live not for himself alone but for others.

Consideration for one another is speedily becoming a social, industrial and economic necessity.

Centralization is the order of the day. The telegraph, the telephone, the automobile and the airship are the causes. They have wiped out not only old precedents and customs but State and national lines as well.

A man living in Boston who wishes to talk to a man living in San Francisco simply rings a bell, puts a little instrument to his ear and proceeds to talk. There is hardly a miracle in the Bible more wonderful than this.

The doctrine of "State rights" is being rapidly demolished. The nation is being obliged to assume many of the functions of government heretofore performed by the State, and this tendency is growing.

The State, viewed as an individual with the right to do as it pleases within itself, without regard for other States, can no longer be tolerated.

Only the nation can act in matters that affect interstate relations, and with intercommunication and transportation developed to their present stage a considerable percentage of a State's activities are interstate in their effects and consequences.

The World Is Drawing Together.

We must therefore take on a new nationalism. The world has been drawn very closely together by the cable and the transatlantic liner, but it is on the verge of being drawn infinitely more closely together by the wireless, the airship and the submarine telephone.

When these are practical, everyday instruments of intercommunication and transportation the social practices and the industrial methods of one nation will quickly and seriously affect all other nations. This will require the yielding by nations of certain of their individualistic rights and prerogatives in order to safeguard and benefit the world as a whole.

This opens up a great, new vista—it presents problems that are intensely interesting and of far-reaching importance.

The period that is upon us offers large opportunities for individual thought, initiative and action, for constructive work and for constructive statesmanship.

The mighty changes taking place in Europe tell us with unmistakable voice that the reconstruction period is at hand. The man of the future must realize it. He must be ready to adjust himself to the new conditions. He must have sufficient vision, intelligence and courage to cast aside the methods and precedents of a bygone age. He must let the dead past bury its dead. He must not look back to the setting but forward to the rising sun.